

# Secular Jewish culture



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**Secular Jewish culture** embraces several related phenomena; above all, it is the [culture](#) of [secular](#) communities of [Jewish](#) people, but it can also include the cultural contributions of individuals who identify as secular Jews, or even those of religious Jews working in cultural areas not generally considered to be connected to [religion](#).

The word *secular* in **secular Jewish culture**, therefore, refers *not* to the type of Jew but rather to the type of culture. For example, religiously observant [Orthodox](#)

[Jews](#) who write literature and music or produce films with non-religious themes are participating in secular Jewish culture, even if they are not secular themselves.

However, the [Jewish people](#) is an [ethnoreligious](#) community rather than solely a religious grouping, while religiously, [Judaism](#) guides its adherents in both practice and belief so that it has been called not only a religion, but also a "way of life". This makes it difficult to draw a clear distinction between the cultural production of members of the Jewish people, and culture that is specifically Jewish. Furthermore, not all individuals or all cultural phenomena can be easily classified as either "secular" or "religious", a distinction native to European Enlightenment thinking and foreign to most of the history of non-European Jews.

Throughout history, in eras and places as diverse as the ancient [Hellenic](#) world, in [Europe](#) before and after the [Age of Enlightenment](#), in [Islamic Spain and Portugal](#), in [North Africa](#) and the [Middle East](#), in [India](#) and [China](#), and in the contemporary [United States](#) and [Israel](#), Jewish communities have seen the development of cultural phenomena that are in some sense characteristically Jewish without being at all specifically religious. Some factors in this come from within Judaism, others from the interaction of Jews with others around them, and others from the inner social and cultural dynamics of the community, as opposed to religion itself. This phenomenon has led to considerably different Jewish cultures unique to their own communities, each as authentically Jewish as the next.

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## **[\[edit\]](#) Origins of secular Jewish culture**

For at least 2,000 years, there has not been a unity of Jewish culture. Jews during this period were always geographically dispersed (see [Jewish diaspora](#)), so that by the 19th century the [Ashkenazi Jews](#) were mainly in Europe, especially [Eastern Europe](#); the [Sephardi Jews](#) were largely spread among various communities in North Africa, Turkey, and various smaller communities in a diverse range of other locations; [Mizrahi Jews](#) were primarily spread around the [Arab world](#); and other populations of Jews were scattered in such places as [Ethiopia](#) the [Caucasus](#), and [India](#). (See [Jewish ethnic divisions](#).)

Although there was a high degree of communication and traffic between these communities — many Sephardic exiles blended into the Central European Ashkenazi community following the [Spanish Inquisition](#); many Ashkenazim migrated to the Middle East, giving rise to the characteristic Syrian-Jewish family name "Ashkenazi"; Iraqi-Jewish traders formed a distinct Jewish community in India; and so forth — many of these populations were cut off to some degree from the surrounding cultures by [ghettoization](#), by [Muslim](#) laws of *dhimma*, and other circumstances.

By 1931, shortly before the [Holocaust](#), 92% of the world's Jewish population was Ashkenazi in origin, including the vast majority of European and of English-speaking Jews. Moreover, secularism as a concept was largely a European idea, and a series of movements in Europe militated for a new, heretofore unheard-of concept called "secular Judaism". For these reasons, much of what is thought of by English-speakers and, to a lesser extent, by non-English-speaking Europeans as "secular Jewish culture" is, in essence, the Jewish culture of Central and Eastern Europe, and its subsequent development in [North America](#).

[Medieval](#) Jewish communities in Eastern Europe continued to display distinct cultural traits over the centuries. Despite the universalist leanings of the [Enlightenment](#) (and its echo within Judaism in the [Haskalah](#) movement), many

[Yiddish](#)-speaking Jews in Eastern Europe continued to see themselves as forming a distinct national group — "*'am yehudi*", from the Biblical Hebrew — but, adapting this idea to European Enlightenment values, they assimilated the concept as that of an ethnic group whose identity did not depend on religion, which under Enlightenment thinking fell under a separate category.

Constanin Măciucă writes of "a differentiated but not isolated Jewish spirit" permeating the culture of Yiddish-speaking Jews. This was only intensified as the rise of [Romanticism](#) amplified the sense of [national identity](#) across Europe generally. Thus, for example, *Bund* members — that is, members of the [General Jewish Labor Union](#) in the late [19th](#) and early [20th](#) centuries — were generally non-religious, and one of the historical leaders of the *Bund* was the child of converts to [Christianity](#), though not a practising or believing Christian himself.

The [Haskalah](#) combined with the [Jewish Emancipation](#) movement under way in Central and Western Europe to create an opportunity for Jews to enter secular society. At the same time, [pogroms](#) in Eastern Europe provoked a surge of migration, in large part to the [United States](#), where some 2 million Jewish immigrants resettled between 1880 and 1920. During the [1940s](#), the Holocaust uprooted and destroyed most of the European Jewish population. This, in combination with the [creation of the State of Israel](#) and the consequent [Jewish exodus from Arab lands](#), resulted in a further geographic shift.

Defining secular culture among those who practice traditional Judaism is difficult, because the entire culture is, by definition, entwined with religious traditions: the idea of separate ethnic and religious identity is foreign to the Hebrew tradition of an "*'am yisrael*". (This is particularly true for [Orthodox Judaism](#).) [Gary Tobin](#), head of the [Institute for Jewish and Community Research](#), said of traditional Jewish culture:

The dichotomy between religion and culture doesn't really exist. Every religious attribute is filled with culture; every cultural act filled with religiosity. [Synagogues](#) themselves are great centers of Jewish culture. After all, what is life really about? Food, relationships, enrichment hellip; So is Jewish life. So many of our traditions inherently contain aspects of culture. Look at the [Passover Seder](#) — it's essentially great theater. Jewish education and religiosity bereft of culture is not as interesting.<sup>[1]</sup>

[Yaakov Malkin](#), Professor of Aesthetics and Rhetoric at [Tel Aviv University](#) and the founder and academic director of [Meitar College for Judaism as Culture](#)<sup>[2]</sup> in Jerusalem, writes:

Today very many [secular](#) Jews take part in Jewish cultural activities, such as celebrating Jewish holidays as historical and nature festivals, imbued with new content and form, or marking life-cycle events such as birth, bar/bat mitzvah, marriage, and mourning in a secular fashion. They come together to study topics pertaining to Jewish culture and its relation to other cultures, in *havurot*, cultural associations, and secular synagogues, and

they participate in public and political action co-ordinated by secular Jewish movements, such as the former movement to free Soviet Jews, and movements to combat pogroms, discrimination, and religious coercion. Jewish secular [humanistic](#) education inculcates universal moral values through classic Jewish and world literature and through organizations for social change that aspire to ideals of justice and charity.<sup>[2]</sup>

Today, in North America, the secular and cultural Jewish movements are divided into three umbrella organizations: the [Society for Humanistic Judaism](#) (SHJ), the [Congress of Secular Jewish Organizations](#) (CSJO), and [Workmen's Circle](#).

## [\[edit\]](#) Languages

*Main article:*  
[Jewish languages](#)

Literary and theatrical expressions of secular Jewish culture may be in specifically Jewish languages such as [Hebrew](#), [Yiddish](#) or [Ladino](#), or it may be in the language of the surrounding cultures, such as [English](#) or [German](#). Secular literature and theater in Yiddish largely began in the 19th century and was in decline by the middle of the 20th century. The revival of Hebrew beyond its use in the liturgy is largely an early 20th-century phenomenon, and is closely associated with [Zionism](#). Generally, whether a Jewish community will speak a Jewish or non-Jewish language as its main vehicle of [discourse](#) is dependent on how isolated or assimilated that community is. For example, the Jews in the [shtetls](#) of [Poland](#) and the [Lower East Side](#) of [New York](#) (during the early [20th century](#)) spoke [Yiddish](#) at most times, while assimilated Jews in [Germany](#) during the [19th century](#) or the [United States](#) today would or do speak [German](#) or [English](#).

## [\[edit\]](#) Politics and morals



A [Bundist](#) demonstration, 1917

*See main  
article [Jewish  
political  
movements](#).*

Even in religious Judaism there is much room for a range of political or moral views; this is only more so for secular Jews. However, even Jewish secular culture is often strongly influenced by moral beliefs deriving from Jewish scripture and tradition. In recent centuries, Jews in Europe and the Americas have traditionally tended towards the [political left](#), and played key roles in the birth of the [labor movement](#) as well as [socialism](#). While Diaspora Jews have also been represented in the [conservative](#) side of the political spectrum, even politically conservative Jews have tended to support [pluralism](#) more consistently than many other elements of the [political right](#). Some scholars<sup>[3]</sup> attribute this to the fact that Jews are not expected to [proselytize](#), and as a result do not expect a single world-state, which differs from the beliefs of many religions, such as the [Roman Catholic](#) and [Islamic](#) traditions; rather, since in Jewish theology the religions of most [nations](#) are respected, there was never any perceived reason to convert others. This lack of a universalizing religion is combined with the fact that most Jews live as minorities in their countries, and that no central Jewish religious authority has existed for over 2,000 years. *(See also [list of Jews in politics](#), which illustrates the diversity of Jewish political thought and of the roles Jews have played in politics.)*

## **[\[edit\]](#) "Jewish" professions**

Typically, Jews were an agricultural people, comprising mostly farmers.<sup>[\[citation needed\]](#)</sup> In fact, farming provides the source of much Jewish culture today,<sup>[\[citation needed\]](#)</sup> and was revived during the restoration of [Zionism](#) at the beginning of the nineteenth century. However, in the [Middle Ages](#), European laws prevented Jews from owning land and gave them powerful incentive to go into other professions that Europeans were not willing to do. A major aspect of this was the strong social stigma against lending money and charging interest among the Christian majority, commonly decried as "usury". As a modern system of capital was developing, loans became necessary. As lending money (and more broadly, the modern systems of finance) began to develop, Jews (as non-Catholics, not being bound by the "usury" stigma) were able to gain a foothold by providing these services. As a result, in the modern world, some professions have traditionally been considered



particularly "Jewish." These include banking and finance, law, medicine, science, and academia. *See also* [Court Jew](#).

## [\[edit\]](#) Banking and finance

*See also* [List of Jewish American businesspeople](#)

In most of Europe up until the late 18th century, and in some places to an even later date, Jews were prohibited by Roman Catholic governments (and others) from owning land. On the other hand, the Church, because of a number of Bible verses forbidding [usury](#), declared that charging any [interest](#) was against the divine law, and this prevented any mercantile use of [capital](#) by pious Christians. As the [Canon law](#) did not apply to Jews, they were not liable to the ecclesiastical punishments which were placed upon [usurers](#) by the [popes](#). Christian rulers gradually saw the advantage of having a class of men like the Jews who could supply capital for their use without being liable to [excommunication](#), and the money trade of western Europe by this means fell into the hands of the Jews. However, in almost every instance where large amounts were acquired by Jews through banking transactions the property thus acquired fell either during their life or upon their death into the hands of the king. This happened to [Aaron of Lincoln](#) in [England](#), [Ezmel de Ablitas](#) in [Navarre](#), [Heliot de Vesoul](#) in [Provence](#), [Benveniste de Porta](#) in [Aragon](#), etc. It was for this reason indeed that the kings supported the Jews, and even objected to their becoming Christians, because in that case they could not have forced from them money won by usury. Thus both in England and in [France](#) the kings demanded to be compensated for every Jew converted. The result was the stereotypical Jewish role as bankers and merchants.

## [\[edit\]](#) Medicine, science, and academia

Also, the strong Jewish tradition of religious scholarship often left Jews well prepared for secular scholarship, although in some times and places this was countered by Jews being banned from studying at [universities](#), or admitted only in limited numbers (see [Jewish quota](#)). In medieval and early modern times, Jews were disproportionately represented among court physicians. Even into recent times Jews were little represented in the land-holding classes, but far better represented in academia, the learned professions, finance and commerce. The strong representation of Jews in science and academia is represented in the fact that at least 167 Jews and persons of [half-Jewish](#) ancestry have been awarded the [Nobel Prize](#), accounting for 22% of all individual recipients worldwide between 1901 and 2004. In addition, of [TIME](#) magazine's 100 most influential people of

the 20th century, fourteen persons listed are either of Jewish ancestry or have converted to Judaism.

## **[\[edit\]](#) Literary and artistic culture**

In some places where there have been relatively high concentrations of Jews, distinct secular Jewish subcultures have arisen. For example, ethnic Jews formed an enormous proportion of the literary and artistic life of [Vienna, Austria](#) at the end of the 19th century, or of [New York City](#) 50 years later (and [Los Angeles](#) in the mid-late 20th century), and for the most part these were not particularly religious people. In general, however, Jewish artistic culture in various periods reflected the culture in which they lived.

## **[\[edit\]](#) Literature**

*See main articles [Yiddish literature](#), [Ladino literature](#), [Hebrew literature](#), [Jewish American literature](#), [English Jewish literature](#). Also see [Jews in literature](#) and [journalism](#).*

Jewish authors have both created a unique Jewish literature and contributed to the national literatures of many of the countries in which they live. Though not strictly secular, the Yiddish works of authors like [Sholem Aleichem](#) (whose collected works amounted to 28 volumes) and [Isaac Bashevis Singer](#) (winner of the 1978 Nobel Prize), form their own canon, focusing on the Jewish experience in both Eastern Europe, and in America. In the United States, Jewish writers like [Philip Roth](#), [Saul Bellow](#), and many others are considered among the greatest American authors, and incorporate a distinctly secular Jewish view into many of their works. The poetry of [Allen Ginsberg](#) often touches on Jewish themes (notably the early autobiographical works such as [Howl](#) and [Kaddish](#)). Other

famous Jewish authors that made contributions to world literature include [Heinrich Heine](#), German poet, [Isaac Babel](#), Russian author, and [Franz Kafka](#), of Prague.

In "Modern Judaism An Oxford Guide," [Yaakov Malkin](#), Professor of Aesthetics and Rhetoric at [Tel Aviv University](#) and the founder and academic director of [Meitar College for Judaism as Culture](#) in Jerusalem, writes:

Secular Jewish culture embraces literary works that have stood the test of time as sources of aesthetic pleasure and ideas shared by Jews and non-Jews, works that live on beyond the immediate socio-cultural context within which they were created. They include the writings of such Jewish authors as [Sholem Aleichem](#), [Itzik Manger](#), [Isaac Bashevis Singer](#), [Philip Roth](#), [Saul Bellow](#), [S.Y. Agnon](#), [Isaac Babel](#), [Martin Buber](#), [Isaiah Berlin](#), [Haim Nahman Bialik](#), [Yehuda Amichai](#), [Amos Oz](#), [A.B. Yehoshua](#), and [David Grossman](#). It boasts masterpieces that have had a considerable influence on all of western culture, Jewish culture included - works such as those of [Heinrich Heine](#), [Gustav Mahler](#), [Leonard Bernstein](#), [Marc Chagall](#), [Jacob Epstein](#), [Ben Shahn](#), [Amedeo Modigliani](#), [Franz Kafka](#), [Max Reinhardt \(Goldman\)](#), [Ernst Lubitsch](#), and [Woody Allen](#).<sup>[4]</sup>

## [\[edit\]](#) Theatre

### [\[edit\]](#) Yiddish theatre

*Main article:*  
[Yiddish theatre](#)

The [Ukrainian](#) Jew [Abraham Goldfaden](#) founded the first professional [Yiddish-language](#) theatre troupe in [Iasi](#), [Romania](#) in 1876. The next year, his troupe achieved enormous success in [Bucharest](#). Within a decade, Goldfaden and others brought Yiddish theater to [Ukraine](#), [Russia](#), [Poland](#), [Germany](#), [New York City](#), and other cities with significant [Ashkenazic](#) populations. Between 1890 and 1940, over a dozen Yiddish theatre groups existed in New York City alone, performing original [plays](#), [musicals](#), and Yiddish translations of theatrical works and [opera](#). Perhaps the most famous of Yiddish-language plays is *[The Dybbuk](#)* (1919) by [S. Ansky](#).

Yiddish theater in New York in the early 20th Century rivalled English-language theater in quantity and often surpassed it in quality. A 1925 *[New York Times](#)* article remarks, "...Yiddish theater... is now a stable American institution and no longer dependent on immigration from Eastern Europe. People who can neither speak nor write Yiddish attend Yiddish stage performances and pay [Broadway](#) prices on [Second Avenue](#)." This article also mentions other aspects of a New York Jewish cultural life "in full flower" at that time, among them the fact that the extensive New York Yiddish-language press of the time included seven daily newspapers.<sup>[5]</sup>

In fact, however, the next generation of American Jews spoke mainly English to the exclusion of Yiddish; they brought the artistic energy of Yiddish theater into the American theatrical mainstream, but usually in a less specifically Jewish form.

Yiddish theater, most notably [Moscow State Jewish Theater](#) directed by [Solomon Mikhoels](#), also played a prominent role in the arts scene of the [Soviet Union](#) until Stalin's 1948 reversal in government policy toward the Jews. (See [Rootless cosmopolitan](#), [Night of the Murdered Poets](#))

### **[edit]** Mentorship

Yiddish theatre fed into the mainstream of American stage and film acting: the [method acting](#) of [Konstantin Stanislavski](#) found its way to America through [Jacob Adler](#); Adler's daughter [Stella](#) and son [Luther](#) were instrumental in the [Group Theatre](#), two of whose three founders were also Jews. The list of Stella Adler's and Group Theatre founder [Lee Strasberg](#)'s students, mostly Gentiles, reads like a *Who's Who* of American acting: [Marlon Brando](#), [Jill Clayburgh](#), [James Dean](#), [Robert DeNiro](#), [Paul Newman](#), [Jack Nicholson](#), [Al Pacino](#), and [Eva Marie Saint](#), to name just a few. Similarly, what Jewish composer [John Kander](#) calls an "interesting phenomenon that [Broadway musical](#) composers like [Jerome Kern](#), [George Gershwin](#) and [Marc Blitzstein](#) are [predominantly Jewish](#)" comes from "the tradition established from New York's Yiddish theater."<sup>[6]</sup>

### **[edit]** American English-language theatre

*See also [List of Jewish American musicals writers](#), [List of Jewish Americans in theatre](#), [List of Jewish American playwrights](#).*



Poster for the [film adaptation](#) of *West Side Story* by the team of Jewish writers consisting of [Leonard Bernstein](#) (music), [Stephen Sondheim](#) (lyrics), [Arthur Laurents](#) (book) and [Jerome Robbins](#) (direction and choreography)

Not only have "[Jewish](#) composers and lyricists always dominated [Broadway musicals](#)"<sup>[7]</sup> in [New York City](#), but they were instrumental in the creation and development of [genre](#) of [musical theatre](#) and earlier forms of theatrical entertainment, as well as contributing to non-musical theatre in the United States. According to [University of Toronto English](#) professor Andrea Most,

Almost all the American musicals in the 20th century were written by Jews and... the most compelling reason for this is that the musical offers a lot of strategies for exploring and performing new identities theatrically... the musical theater exists because of the unique historical situation of the Jews who created it"<sup>[8][9]</sup>

[Brandeis University](#) Professor Stephen J. Whitfield has commented that "More so than behind the screen, the talent behind the stage was for over half a century virtually the monopoly of one ethnic group. That is... [a] feature which locates Broadway at the center of Jewish culture".<sup>[10]</sup> [New York University](#) Professor Laurence Maslon says that "There would be no American musical without Jews... Their influence is corollary to the influence of black musicians on jazz; there were as many Jews involved in the form".<sup>[11]</sup> Other writers, such as Jerome Caryn, have noted that musical theatre and other forms of American entertainment are uniquely indebted to the contributions of Jewish-Americans, since "there might not have been a modern Broadway without the "Asiatic horde" of [comedians](#), gossip columnists, [songwriters](#), and singers that grew out of the [ghetto](#), whether it was on the [Lower East Side](#), [Harlem](#) (a Jewish ghetto before it was a black one), [Newark](#), or [Washington, DC](#)".<sup>[12]</sup> Likewise, in the analysis of Aaron Kula, director of The Klezmer Company,

"...the Jewish experience has always been best expressed by music, and Broadway has always been an integral part of the Jewish-American experience... The difference is that one can expand the definition of "Jewish Broadway" to include an interdisciplinary roadway with a wide range of artistic activities packed onto one avenue--theatre, opera, symphony, ballet, publishing companies, choirs, synagogues and more. This vibrant landscape reflects the life, times and creative output of the Jewish-American artist".<sup>[13]</sup>

In the 19th and early 20th centuries the European [operetta](#), a precursor the musical, often featured the work of Jewish composers such as [Paul Abraham](#), [Leo Ascher](#), [Edmund Eysler](#), [Leo Fall](#), [Bruno Granichstaedten](#), [Jacques Offenbach](#), [Emmerich Kalman](#), [Sigmund Romberg](#), [Oscar Straus](#) and [Rudolf Friml](#); the latter four eventually moved to the United States and produced their works on the New York stage. One of the [librettists](#) for [Bizet's \*Carmen\*](#) (not an operetta proper but rather a work of the earlier [opera comique](#) form) was the Jewish [Ludovic Halévy](#), niece of composer [Fromental Halévy](#) (Bizet himself was not Jewish but he married the elder Halevy's daughter, many have suspected that he was the descendant of Jewish converts to Christianity, and others have noticed Jewish-sounding intervals in his music.<sup>[14]</sup>) The Viennese librettist Victor Leon summarized the connection of Jewish composers and writers with the form of operetta: "The audience for operetta wants to laugh beneath tears—and that is exactly what Jews have been doing for the last two thousand years since the destruction of Jerusalem".<sup>[15]</sup> Another factor in the evolution of musical theatre was [vaudeville](#), and during the early 20th century the form was explored and expanded by Jewish comedians and actors such as [Jack Benny](#), [Fanny Brice](#), [Eddie Cantor](#), [The Marx Brothers](#), [Anna Held](#), [Al Jolson](#), [Molly Picon](#), [Sophie Tucker](#) and [Ed Wynn](#). During the period when Broadway was monopolized by [revues](#) and similar entertainments, Jewish producer [Florenz Ziegfeld](#) dominated the theatrical scene with his [Follies](#).

By 1910 Jews (the vast majority of them immigrants from [Eastern Europe](#)) already composed a quarter of the population of [New York City](#), and almost immediately Jewish artists and intellectuals began to show their influence on the cultural life of that city, and through time, the country as a whole. Likewise, while the modern musical can best be described as a fusion of operetta, earlier American entertainment and [African-American](#) culture and music, as well as Jewish culture and music, the actual authors of the first "book musicals" were the Jewish [Jerome Kern](#), [Oscar Hammerstein II](#), [George](#) and [Ira Gershwin](#), [George S. Kaufman](#) and [Morrie Ryskind](#). From that time until the 1980s a vast majority of successful musical theatre composers, lyricists, and book-writers were Jewish (a notable exception is the Protestant [Cole Porter](#), who acknowledged that the reason he was so successful on Broadway was that he wrote what he called "Jewish music").<sup>[16]</sup> [Rodgers and Hammerstein](#), [Frank Loesser](#), [Lerner and Loewe](#), [Stephen Sondheim](#), [Leonard Bernstein](#), [Stephen Schwartz](#), [Kander and Ebb](#) and dozens of others during the "[Golden Age](#)" of musical theatre were Jewish. Since the [Tony Award for Best Original Score](#) was instituted in 1947, approximately 70% of nominated

scores and 60% of winning scores were by Jewish composers. Of successful British and French musical writers both in the [West End](#) and Broadway, [Claude-Michel Schönberg](#) and [Lionel Bart](#) are Jewish, among others.

One explanation of the affinity of Jewish composers and playwrights to the musical is that "traditional [Jewish religious music](#) was most often led by a single singer, a [cantor](#) while [Christians](#) emphasize choral singing."<sup>[17]</sup> Many of these writers used the musical to explore issues relating to assimilation, the acceptance of the outsider in society, the racial situation in the United States, the overcoming of obstacles through perseverance, and other topics pertinent to Jewish Americans and Western Jews in general, often using subtle and disguised stories to get this point across.<sup>[18]</sup> For example, Kern, Rodgers, Hammerstein, the Gershwins, [Harold Arlen](#) and [Yip Harburg](#) wrote musicals and operas aiming to normalize societal toleration of minorities and urging racial harmony; these works included [Show Boat](#), [Porgy and Bess](#), [Finian's Rainbow](#), [South Pacific](#) and the [The King and I](#). Towards the end of Golden Age, writers also began to openly and overtly tackle Jewish subjects and issues, such as [Fiddler on the Roof](#) and [Rags](#); Bart's [Blitz!](#) also tackles relations between Jews and Gentiles. [Jason Robert Brown](#) and [Alfred Uhry](#)'s [Parade](#) is a sensitive exploration of both [anti-Semitism](#) and historical American [racism](#). The original concept that became [West Side Story](#) was set in the [Lower East Side](#) during Easter-Passover celebrations; the rival gangs were to be Jewish and [Italian Catholic](#).<sup>[19]</sup>

The ranks of prominent Jewish producers, directors, designers and performers include [Boris Aronson](#), [David Belasco](#), [Joel Grey](#), the Minskoff family, [Zero Mostel](#), [Joseph Papp](#), [Mandy Patinkin](#), the Nederlander family, [Harold Prince](#), [Max Reinhardt](#), [Jerome Robbins](#), the [Shubert family](#) and [Julie Taymor](#). Jewish playwrights have also contributed to non-musical drama and theatre, both Broadway and regional. [Edna Ferber](#), [Moss Hart](#), [Lillian Hellman](#), [Arthur Miller](#) and [Neil Simon](#) are only some of the prominent Jewish playwrights in American theatrical history. Approximately 21% of the plays and musicals that have won the [Pulitzer Prize for Drama](#) were written and composed by Jewish Americans.

### **[edit] European theatre**

From their [Emancipation](#) to [World War II](#), Jews were very active and sometimes even dominant in certain forms of [European](#) theatre, and after the [Holocaust](#) many Jews continued to that cultural form. For example, in pre-Nazi Germany, where [Nietzsche](#) asked "What good actor of today is not Jewish?", acting, directing and writing positions were often filled by Jews; controversial psychologist [Kevin B. MacDonald](#) has reported that in [Berlin](#) 80% of [theatrical directors](#) were Jewish and 75% of plays produced were by Jewish playwrights.<sup>[20]</sup> "In Imperial Berlin, Jewish artists could be found in the forefront of the performing arts, from high drama to more popular forms like [cabaret](#) and [revue](#), and eventually [film](#). Jewish audiences patronized innovative theater, regardless of whether they approved of