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## Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany

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## Passing Illusions: Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany

### Description

Weimar Germany (1919–33) was an era of equal rights for women and minorities, but also of growing antisemitism and hostility toward the Jewish population. This led some Jews to want to pass or be perceived as non-Jews; yet there were still occasions when it was beneficial to be openly Jewish. Being visible as a Jew often involved appearing simultaneously non-Jewish and Jewish. *Passing Illusions* examines the constructs of German-Jewish visibility during the Weimar Republic and explores the controversial aspects of this identity—and the complex reasons many decided to conceal or reveal themselves as Jewish. Focusing on racial stereotypes, Kerry Wallach outlines the key elements of visibility, invisibility, and the ways Jewishness was detected and presented through a broad selection of historical sources including periodicals, personal memoirs, and archival documents, as well as cultural texts including works of fiction, anecdotes, images, advertisements, performances, and films. Twenty black-and-white illustrations (photographs, works of art, cartoons, advertisements, film stills) complement the book's analysis of visual culture.

### Keywords

German-Jewish culture, Jewish history, Weimar Republic, film, gender, performance, race and ethnicity, minorities, African American passing, queer passing

### Disciplines

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# Passing Illusions

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*Jewish Visibility in Weimar Germany*

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## Introduction: Passing, Covering, Revealing

There was a widespread notion among Jews in Weimar Germany (1919–33) that, at any given moment, one could appear Jewish or non-Jewish, or “more Jewish” or “less Jewish.” Jews and non-Jews alike often sized up other people to assess whether they were Jewish. Although many conceded that it was not always possible to observe Jewishness, those who tried to find it continually emphasized the idea of Jewish visibility. In other words, the belief that Jewishness could be seen reinforced the idea that it was visible.<sup>1</sup> Some Jews wanted to “pass,” to remain invisible, hidden, or incognito as Jews; yet there were also times when it was advantageous to be recognizable. However, the acts of choosing to remain hidden and to be seen were not mutually exclusive, and they operated both in tension and in intersection with one another. Many Jews cultivated a complex identity in order to pass for non-Jewish in some contexts (such as with non-Jews or in unknown company) and yet still be perceivably Jewish in others (for example, when around other Jews).

Although some Jews proudly proclaimed their ability to pass for non-Jews, others were skeptical about invisibility and considered it deliberately deceptive. One 1925 article titled “Not at All Jewish” in the nonpartisan best-selling German-Jewish newspaper, *Israelitisches Familienblatt* (Israelite Family Pages), sheds light on these opposing perspectives:

Everyone probably knows members of the Jewish faith who, in Jewish circles and even among non-Jewish acquaintances, relay with a certain amount of pride that in many cases non-Jews *don't take them for Jewish at all*, and that other parties were supposedly terribly surprised to learn that before them stood a confessor (*Bekenner*) of Judaism. These confessors then usually add the following addendum to this confession (*Bekennntnis*), with a hint of personality: In our family, we generally all look non-Jewish.

The article's author, identified only as W. S., goes on to chastise those who desire and are able to pass, insinuating that anyone who takes pride in being perceived as "not at all Jewish" on the basis of external appearance in fact has "nothing at all" for inner character.<sup>2</sup> With this criticism, the author calls attention to the phenomenon of Jewish passing and also underscores the surprise others experience upon learning that someone who doesn't "look Jewish" is actually Jewish.

Implicit here is the complex process of recognizing and revealing Jewishness, which might include an acknowledgement, admission, or confession. The key terms *confession* and *to confess* (*Bekennntnis, sich bekennen*), which appear in the above quote and in numerous other texts examined in this study, often denote an open acknowledgment akin to "coming out."<sup>3</sup> In other instances, they refer specifically to expressing religious affiliation. It is only when a person comes out or is "outed" as Jewish in public that Jewishness is firmly established. Without this act of identification, Jewishness, at least in select cases, could theoretically remain hidden indefinitely. Articles such as this one that criticized Jewish invisibility suggest there was strong pushback against passing. Investigating the motivations behind staying hidden, becoming visible, and giving the illusion of passing opens up a new understanding of Weimar Jewish culture.

Whereas many scholars have foregrounded the impulses for invisibility—de-Judaization, secularization, radical assimilation, self-abnegation—this book argues that there was also a pronounced desire for Jewish visibility among Jews in Weimar Germany.<sup>4</sup> Exploring both sides of this dialectic helps illuminate the circumstances surrounding these seemingly contradictory inclinations. Being safely visible as a Jew in the Weimar Republic entailed coming out only under certain circumstances, and staying at least partially hidden in other situations, a tendency integral to interpreting Jewish self-identification. Scholars including Michael Brenner, Michael Berkowitz, Abigail Gillman, Lisa Silverman, and Darcy Buerkle have written about the ways German and Central European Jews grappled with knowing when to foreground Jewishness and when to conceal it.<sup>5</sup> Revealing one's Jewishness often involved fostering "dual legibility"—that is, appearing non-Jewish and Jewish at once—and managing dual coding in order to be openly Jewish at the right time and in the right place, and in ways that were deemed fitting for a population under scrutiny.<sup>6</sup> As we will see, gender also was a constitutive part of the process of deciding when to engage and display Jewishness. Instead of either passing as non-Jews or overtly displaying Jewishness at all times, many Jews inhabited a state of ambiguity but adopted signifiers of Jewishness such as badges or hairstyles that

were perceptible to certain observers, and especially to other Jews.<sup>7</sup> It became possible, even desirable, to perform Jewishness without effacing it, and to be recognizably Jewish without standing out from the crowd.

The four chapters in *Passing Illusions* examine constructions of German-Jewish visibility, as well as instances in the 1920s and early 1930s when it was concealed, revealed, or contested. Different key aspects of visibility, invisibility, and moments of encounter inform each chapter's approach. These include the ways Jewishness was detected, with a focus on racial stereotypes (chapter 1); occasions when coming out was encouraged (chapter 2); confrontational instances in which Jews were outed or silenced (chapter 3); and episodes in which misidentifications played a pivotal role (chapter 4). The concluding chapter continues the introduction's discussion of Jewish passing in comparative contexts with a focus on African American racial passing and queer passing; its final pages point to ongoing conversations about Jewish and minority visibility in the twenty-first century.

Drawing on the intersections of German and Jewish studies within a framework of cultural studies, this book aims to bridge the work of historians and literary scholars in order to probe deeper into modes of Weimar Jewish self-presentation. This study draws on many sources typically used by historians, such as periodicals, personal memoirs, and archival documents, but it also examines cultural texts including works of fiction, anecdotes, images, advertisements, and films. Through close readings, at times at the level of the precise language used, I analyze texts for nuanced clues about Jewish visibility and invisibility and their gendered layers. The texts as well as the historical circumstances of their production and reception offer valuable insights into constructions of visibility. The book's four chapters focus mainly on texts that grant access to inner-Jewish discourses about the decision to pass or to be visible, or both. This includes an examination of Jewish responses to mainstream and antisemitic stereotypes, which inform but are not at the center of my project.

Antisemitism and its manifestations in discrimination and exclusion greatly impacted Jewish identity and self-presentation but did not lead only to hiddenness or invisibility. Indeed, *Passing Illusions* calls into question scholarship that understands antisemitism mainly as a cause of self-hatred and a reason to try to hide or shed one's Jewishness (for example, through passing or conversion). By framing my discussion of antisemitism as part of a larger conversation about both invisibility and visibility, I underscore the ways in which profiling contributed to impulses to hide and to display Jewishness. The proliferation of antisemitic sentiments and stereotypes during and after the First World War produced a need for public models of Jewishness that were not

considered objectionable. Parallel to the pressure to evade antisemitism by being inconspicuous was the desire to overcome such pressures by displaying Jewishness, a right that many Weimar Jews proudly exercised.

The 14 years of the Weimar Republic serve as the basis for this study partly because Jews were legally and socially positioned as fully equal German citizens. In Imperial Germany, public visibility was overly constrained by bourgeois concerns about respectability and gender roles. Even though German Jews achieved emancipation for the most part in 1871, some forms of exclusion persisted; for example, only non-Jews could attain the highest positions in the military and at universities. Many Jews converted to Christianity to gain access to such positions, though the popular view of Jewishness as increasingly racialized made conversion less useful. During the First World War, the antisemitic Jewish census (*Juden-zählung*) of October 11, 1916, which implied that Jews were shirking their military duty and aimed to ascertain what percentage of Jews were fighting on the front lines, had a particularly demoralizing effect on Jews serving in the German military, and on German Jews more broadly.<sup>8</sup> Not until the constitution of the democratic Weimar Republic granted women and minorities equal rights in 1919 did Jews have full access to the privileges afforded other German citizens. Personal conviction was thus a driving factor in the decision to be visibly Jewish.

Precisely because German Jews were aware of potential forms of exclusion, they created and sought out spaces of refuge in which being openly Jewish was standard. Although a sense of renewed Jewish consciousness and interest in preserving Jewish distinctiveness began already in the late nineteenth century—what Shulamit Volkov has termed a “complex dialectical process of dissimulation”—Jews were able to become even more visible in part due to changing social roles after the First World War.<sup>9</sup> The “caesura of 1918,” as Anson Rabinbach has noted, continued the process of artistically disrupting modernity and also brought about a newly politicized aesthetic.<sup>10</sup> Jewish subcultures emerged and immediately confronted questions of visibility that were inherently political.<sup>11</sup> Weimar Berlin, a thriving cultural center that attracted residents and visitors from all over the world, as well as the largest Jewish community in Germany, was particularly conducive to the production, exchange, and display of new forms of Jewish culture.<sup>12</sup> Writer Elias Canetti (1905–94) noted in 1928 while reminiscing about visits to Berlin’s Romanisches Café: “They resulted from a need to be seen that nobody was immune to. Anyone who did not want to be forgotten had to be seen. This applied to each rank and all stations of society.”<sup>13</sup> Weimar Jews, too, were among those



who sought to be visible, though most permitted themselves to be seen publicly as Jews only under certain circumstances.<sup>14</sup>

The act of concealing Jewishness or another identity was not known by any specific term in early twentieth-century Germany. By invoking the term *passing* as part of the larger discourse of Jewish visibility and recognizability, this book opens up a broader set of questions about self-identification, coding/signifying identity, and ways of interpreting codes. The concept of *passing* connects the German-Jewish experience to other widely known histories of concealing, including racial passing (Black passing for White) and sexual or queer passing (nonheterosexual for heterosexual).<sup>15</sup> For our purposes, Jewish passing is defined as an act in which a self-identified Jew: (1) deliberately presents as non-Jewish; (2) omits information or avoids offering a corrective when taken for non-Jewish; or (3) takes advantage of privileges that result from being perceived as a member of the dominant culture.<sup>16</sup> As a phenomenon, passing is sometimes ephemeral and can come to an abrupt end. It does not necessarily indicate a lasting desire to abandon Jewishness completely or to become a non-Jew.<sup>17</sup> For passing to be successful, a socially favored identity (non-Jewish) must eclipse a disfavored one (Jewish), at least temporarily, in the eyes of the beholder. Passing prompts questions about the very existence of identifiable categories.<sup>18</sup> As Werner Sollors has suggested about racial passing, it “highlights an illusory sense of certainty in what is actually an area of social ambiguity and insecurity.”<sup>19</sup> By definition, passing requires at least a short-term act of radical assimilation that is closely linked to deception. At the same time, it sometimes can be understood as an act of resistance or an attempt to control the process of signification.<sup>20</sup>

Passing differs to some extent from *covering*, a less extreme but no less consequential way of negotiating public displays and perception. Legal scholar Kenji Yoshino builds on sociologist Erving Goffman’s book *Stigma* (1963) to define covering as downplaying but not effacing a disfavored identity to fit into the mainstream, often at the expense of one’s civil rights.<sup>21</sup> Whereas passing pertains to the visibility of a trait, covering relates to its obtrusiveness. For example, Franklin Delano Roosevelt covered his known disability by stationing himself behind a table during meetings. In the same vein, Yoshino writes that in the legal world he felt accepted after coming out as gay, but still was instructed not to write about it, a sentiment he summarizes as “[f]ine, be gay, but don’t shove it in our faces.”<sup>22</sup> This line by Yoshino recalls an ironic quip by satirist Kurt Tucholsky (1890–1935) penned in response to the assassination of

politician Walther Rathenau in 1922: "Besides: a Jew shouldn't cause such a fuss over himself. That just exacerbates antisemitism."<sup>23</sup> Tucholsky underscores the fact that Rathenau was killed not only because he was Jewish but also because he inhabited a prominent official position despite encouraging others to be more inconspicuous as Jews. *Covering* is an appropriate term for many precautionary behaviors of Jews in Weimar Germany who sought—or were instructed—to be unobtrusively Jewish, or to "tone down" their Jewishness. *Passing*, on the other hand, is a more apt descriptor for the acts of those who aspired to look non-Jewish.

Encounters during which conspicuous displays of Jewishness, or absences thereof, became relevant are at the heart of this book. Representations of how Jewishness became perceptible during such encounters—of how, when, and why different figures engaged with visibility by coming out as Jewish, being outed by others, passing for non-Jewish, or covering certain elements of Jewishness—drive my inquiry into a culture of perception, embodiment, performance, spectacle, and consequent judgment and repercussions.<sup>24</sup> I demonstrate that, under the relatively emancipated conditions of the Weimar Republic, both performances of Jewishness and textual representations of perceived Jewishness rendered Jewish difference explicitly visible and desirable under certain circumstances. At times, individuals or communities chose to acknowledge their Jewishness openly through acts of solidarity or community building, rather than concealing it in order to conform. Many Zionist circles encouraged Jews to take pride in standing out. Liberal Jews, in contrast, were more likely to seek to blend in; some considered acculturation an accomplishment that propelled them toward the goal of being "more German." Others believed Jews were incapable of passing, or that Jewish difference existed on an indelible or biological level. The recurring treatment and criticism of passing and related notions suggests that this topic warrants further exploration.

Gender played an essential role in the visual assessment of Jewishness and contributed significantly to a person's ability to pass. Bold public displays of Jewishness were still somewhat risky in Weimar Germany, where antisemitic acts of violence repeatedly targeted readily identifiable Jews. Jewish men (especially religious East Europeans) who wore distinctive garments or long beards or who carried prayer books or Jewish newspapers remained easy targets. These and other distinguishing markers made some men more recognizable as Jews than their female counterparts. Even the circumcised male body, on full display in only select public places such as bathhouses or bathing resorts, factored into visible difference on a theoretical level due to Freudian theories.<sup>25</sup> In fact, circumcision plays a central role in the arguments of such

scholars as Sander Gilman, Jay Geller, Daniel Boyarin, and Jonathan Boyarin, who write of an indelible or ineradicable “double mark” of Jewish male difference that, though not generally displayed, nevertheless contributed to constructions of gendered Jewish visibility.<sup>26</sup> Not surprisingly, most discussions by these scholars of gender and Jewishness primarily consider men. For many, “the Jew” is almost always gendered male.<sup>27</sup>

There was even more at stake in becoming discernibly Jewish for women, whose supposedly less visible status often enabled them to integrate into the majority population to a greater extent. Sander Gilman has claimed that Jewish women have always been only ambiguously identifiable due to a lack of permanent bodily markers of difference.<sup>28</sup> But this point, too, evades the matter of when and how women became visible on their own terms. In contrast to their male counterparts, Jewish women were considered to be more adaptable and less recognizable. In some cases they were rendered invisible or absent, or were written out of the picture entirely.<sup>29</sup> It is my contention that sexist stereotypes, allegations of excess, and openly discriminatory practices compelled Weimar Jewish women to find new strategies for being subtly visible. Yet choosing to be subtly or barely visible is different from choosing invisibility; the appreciation for Jewishness shown by many Jewish observers demonstrates that understated forms of visibility were critical to the construction of Jewish self-images during this period.

In the early twentieth century, Jewishness emerged as a known quality that one could display and perceive, and which was desirable at certain times, often in Jewish-friendly spaces. Circumstances that fostered the need to pass were often temporary and fluctuated with a shift from public to private, from mainstream to designated Jewish spaces, from indeterminate to more welcoming utterances, or when new details entered a given conversation. Passing provided a provisional haven, but not one that was needed at all times; in some instances, covering unwelcome aspects of Jewish identity in public provided adequate protection. In Weimar Germany, it became less urgent to appear non-Jewish and increasingly worthwhile to be recognizable as a Jew in certain situations. It was not always the case that Jews could control their level of visibility, however. Historically, visibility was not always a choice.

## **Jewish Recognizability in Western European History**

Visible demarcations of Jewishness have changed significantly in the modern era. Medieval and early modern European sumptuary laws, though not always

enforced, required Jews to make themselves distinguishable by wearing material signifiers including yellow pointed hats or circular insignias, large white ruff collars, or badges or distinctive garments of another color that represented Jewish otherness.<sup>30</sup> One historian has termed these “vestimentary stigma symbols.”<sup>31</sup> Ordinances stating that Jews were obligated to display a badge or head covering of sorts were part of Western European legal codes for more than 500 years, from 1215 until the late eighteenth century.<sup>32</sup> Yellow objects remained a marker imposed upon Jews in a variety of twentieth-century contexts, from the yellow passport issued to Jewish women seeking residence as sex workers in St. Petersburg, to the Star of David paired with the word *Jew* (*Jude*, *Jood*, *Juif*, and so forth) in Nazi-occupied lands during the Holocaust and the Second World War.<sup>33</sup>

With the exception of the Nazi era, markers of Jewishness generally became much more subtle and more difficult to detect after the Enlightenment.<sup>34</sup> Significantly, most modern visual signifiers of Jewishness from the late eighteenth century until 1933 were not imposed by governmental sanctions but rather were adopted voluntarily by Jews. Poet Judah Leib Gordon’s 1862 entreaty, “Be a man in the streets and a Jew at home,” has been taken as a summation of the Haskalah or Jewish Enlightenment, and more broadly for the voluntary relegation of religious practice and distinctive dress to the private sphere.<sup>35</sup> Having acquired modern connotations, this phrase remained well known in Weimar Germany.<sup>36</sup> Free choice and self-identification were intimately linked with Jewish modernity: only in recent centuries were Jews at liberty to choose whether to stand out or blend in, to make themselves either distinct or indistinguishable from the majority population. Adopting modern dress and modifying or foregoing other practices made it possible for many acculturated Jews in Western Europe to render themselves ambiguously Jewish.

In the late eighteenth century, a significant number of Jews in German-speaking lands took steps to change their appearance as part of a general process of acculturation. Many adherents of the Haskalah strove to maintain a separation of public and private, relegating Jewish observance to the home or to spaces designated for prayer. Beginning with the generation of philosopher Moses Mendelssohn (1729–86), this meant using the German language in lieu of (or in addition to) Yiddish or *Judendeutsch*; it also entailed adopting contemporary clothing and hairstyles. Acculturation continued throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when baptism, conversion, intermarriages, and withdrawals from the Jewish community were common steps toward gaining entrance to mainstream German society.<sup>37</sup> Many converts stayed

connected to Jewish family members and traditions even after entry into the German mainstream. In the eyes of zealous antisemites, however, Jewish conversion represented nothing more than an extreme form of passing that posed a threat to the German population at large, and both converts and Jews were prohibited from joining certain German organizations.

Antisemitism was both a major cause of, and a response to, instances of Jewish passing. The awareness that some Jews had begun to elect to become less recognizable, along with new perceptions of race as something that was not only skin deep, prompted a virulent wave of antisemitic sentiment in the early nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> Jews passing for non-Jews were perceived as dangerous, and those who wished to avoid them elaborated at length on how to spot a Jew. Performances known as Jew Farces, which portrayed Jews as unsuccessful imitators of non-Jews, taught audiences to read codes that supposedly betrayed Jewishness.<sup>39</sup> Prominent cultural figures, too, took up the cause of rallying against passing Jews. In one especially vicious case in 1811, German Romantic writer Achim von Arnim gave a speech titled “On the Distinguishing Signs of Jewishness” to the eating club known as the *Christlich-deutsche Tischgesellschaft* (Christian-German Table Society) in which he condemned “secret Jews” and warned of the unseen dangers of hidden Jewish traits. Arnim contended that Jews proudly boasted of the ability to hide their true identities, noting that he would welcome the chance to get women to uncover their “bushy moorish (*mohrenartig*) hair.”<sup>40</sup> He further purported that Jewish men removed their beards and wore blond wigs and new clothes to appear less Jewish, and that one could always spot a Jewish woman in disguise based on her tendency to wear jewelry.<sup>41</sup> Even as Arnim and others sought to prevent the participation of Jews in German culture, it was becoming increasingly difficult to identify those they sought to exclude, and to distinguish between Jewish and non-Jewish Germans.<sup>42</sup>

For men who maintained ties to Jewish religious observance, outward symbols of Jewishness assumed a number of visible forms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It’s worth noting that this was a relatively small group. In the Weimar era, Jews in Germany numbered 550,000 to 600,000, or just under 1 percent of the total German population. Of these, only about 15 percent, or 80,000 to 90,000 Jews, identified as Orthodox or maintained a high level of religious observance.<sup>43</sup> Depending on place of origin, as well as denominational, prayer group, and family affiliations, a religious Jewish man might have at times worn and displayed a skullcap (*yarmulke*); beard; sidelocks (*peyes*); or parts of a prayer shawl worn below other clothing, specifically the shawl’s tassels or *tzitzit*. He also might have worn such traditional

garb as a distinctive coat or caftan, or any of a number of hats.<sup>44</sup> Whereas some markers rendered the wearer discernibly Jewish even from a distance, others were much more difficult to see. A skullcap could disappear under a commonly worn, mainstream style of hat; the fringes of a shawl could remain hidden underneath other layers, though some believed they should be displayed visibly. In both cases, the wearer might have chosen to suspend ambiguity by revealing these items in a private setting.

As a general rule, the more modern Jewish women in Germany became, the less overtly Jewish they appeared.<sup>45</sup> The beginning of the nineteenth century marked a departure from the past as women gradually adopted more modern clothing and religious practices, and married women such as Berlin salon hostess Henriette Herz (1764–1847) switched from covering their hair with cloth head coverings to wearing wigs (*sheitels*).<sup>46</sup> Like other symbols of modernity, wigs have been controversial from the outset, for, as one rabbi noted, “to beautify oneself with a wig . . . was as if one went uncovered, since, to the naked eye, there appeared no difference between hair and wig.”<sup>47</sup> The majority of German-Jewish women eventually became less religious and abandoned hair covering altogether, much to the chagrin of Orthodox rabbis.<sup>48</sup> Among the women who continued to wear wigs, many opted to wear updated, modern wigs that were manufactured for mass consumption and were designed to be nearly invisible. In chapter 1, I investigate some of the ways that Jews were identified and became visible to each other, including both racialized and embodied characteristics, as well as material signifiers such as wigs that were worn to signal Jewish observance.

The 1920s saw the emergence of a tension between a newly discovered sense of Jewish identity and pride, on the one hand, and a deep-seated fear of antisemitic attacks, on the other. A number of incidents that took place in Berlin illustrate this point. With a population of roughly four million, approximately 173,000 or 4 percent of whom were Jewish, central Berlin generally provided a significant degree of anonymity for all of its residents.<sup>49</sup> Even so, the highly visible presence of the East European Jewish minority—so-called *Ostjuden*—called attention to Jewish difference. Jews from Eastern Europe made up almost 20 percent of Germany’s Jewish population by 1925 and had a strong presence both in Weimar Jewish culture (as in one photomontage by Abraham Pisarek; see figure 1) and as targets of antisemitism.<sup>50</sup> In 1923, violent riots against Jews and “Jewish-looking” persons broke out in the Scheunenviertel district near Berlin’s Alexanderplatz, which was home to many East European Jews.<sup>51</sup> Such large-scale acts of violence were comparable to major pogroms in Eastern Europe, the memory of which still incited fear in many



Fig. 1. View of Berlin's Grenadierstraße in the Scheunenviertel, photo-montage by Abraham Pisarek in *Israelitisches Familienblatt*, 1930. (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.)

Jews. Even attending services or other events at synagogues was at times considered risky behavior. Especially in Berlin, liberal Jewish organizations including the Centralverein deutscher Staatsbürger jüdischen Glaubens (Central Union of German Citizens of the Jewish Faith; Centralverein or CV) and the Reichsbund jüdischer Frontsoldaten (National Union of Jewish War Veterans; RjF) advocated for Jewish self-defense.<sup>52</sup> These groups advised their members to take precautions when in proximity to a synagogue, though members of the RjF also publicly wore subtle badges to signify their status as Jewish veterans. Chapter 3 contains a longer discussion of different forms of self-defense and self-policing.

At the same time, the rise of Jewish nationalism in the form of Zionism brought with it a desire to resist certain assimilatory trends. Instead of restricting Jewishness to private spaces, some members of the Zionist pioneer movement longed to overwrite the old Enlightenment mentality with a new motto: "Be a Jew at home and a Jew out there."<sup>53</sup> Yet many Zionists believed that the desire to embrace Jewishness outside of one's home could be realized only in the Jewish homeland of Eretz Israel, the Land of Israel, both for safety reasons and out of conviction. Organizations that nurtured this belief grew in popularity throughout the 1920s, though Zionists remained in the minority. The Zionistische Vereinigung für Deutschland (Zionist Federation for Germany or ZVfD), for one, increased its size from fewer than 10,000 members in 1914 to an average of 20,000 in the 1920s, which notably was still less than 4 percent of German Jewry.<sup>54</sup> Already in the early decades of the twentieth century, some highly visible members of student and youth organizations proudly displayed Jewishness by wearing caps and badges that co-opted the medieval yellow badge. Zionists sometimes paired the color yellow with blue and white. These symbols are explored further in chapter 1.

The First World War also marked a turning point in the relationship of German Jews to Jewish culture. In response to the war and other factors including the political and economic instability of the early Weimar Republic, many Jews embraced Jewishness with newfound intensity. They participated widely in Jewish organizations, education programs, and the creation and circulation of Jewish cultural products.<sup>55</sup> Michael Brenner has termed this the "Jewish Renaissance," a movement that was first envisioned in 1901 by philosopher Martin Buber (1878–1965).<sup>56</sup> Chapter 2 considers a range of voluntary (rather than projected) public displays of certain Jewish practices, including reading Jewish publications; urban spaces of consumption that appealed to Jewish consumers; performers who embraced Jewishness on stage; and cinematic encounters with Jewishness. Close analysis of the reception of films that address Jewish topics—including the American film *The Jazz Singer* (Crosland, 1927),



as well as *Leichte Kavallerie* (Light Cavalry; Randolf, 1927) and *Dreyfus* (Oswald, 1930)—offers insight into how Jewish audiences in Germany responded to such public displays.<sup>57</sup>

On the other hand, many Jews remained involved in the production of mainstream and avant-garde German culture and media—including literature, journalism, photography, art, music, theater, film, radio, advertisements, and design—that did not deal overtly with Jewish subjects. *Passing Illusions* responds to historian Peter Gay’s argument that the contributions of Jewish Germans to German culture were indistinguishable from those of other Germans. It elucidates the social conditions and inner-Jewish discourses that influenced the creation of these cultural products.<sup>58</sup> By focusing mainly on texts that explicitly reference Jewishness, I demonstrate that many Jews in Weimar Germany constantly confronted issues pertaining to passing, covering, and displaying Jewish difference, which on some level amplified their experiences of difference. Though perhaps indistinguishable on most levels, Jewish cultural production originated under different circumstances, and we can interpret it in light of both German and German-Jewish histories.

The swiftly changing stakes for Jews in Germany after January 30, 1933, dramatically exacerbated the need to become less recognizable for Jews living under the Nazi regime. Already on March 1, 1933, Rabbi Max Eschelbacher wrote that many German Jews had become the “new marranos of our time,” insofar as they were increasingly reluctant to acknowledge their Jewishness in public, particularly in the workplace.<sup>59</sup> By the late 1930s and into the 1940s, passing could grant access to rights withheld from known Jews. In some cases, passing accompanied the act of going into hiding to avoid arrest or deportation, which often meant the difference between life and death.<sup>60</sup> Attempts at passing under such circumstances took a range of forms, from dying one’s hair blond to appear more “Aryan,” to attempting to undo a circumcision.<sup>61</sup> But passing did not take on this magnitude of gravity until after the Nazis took power and Jewishness became a life-threatening liability on an everyday basis. In Weimar Germany, representing oneself as non-Jewish or concealing Jewishness generally served as a means to obtain privileges, rights, luxuries, power, or a stronger sense of personal safety and security. This was not always the case for other minorities who passed under vastly different circumstances.

### Passing in Comparative Contexts

Passing is by no means unique to Jews or to Germany. Members of many minority populations—both other minority groups and in other locations—pass

or cover as a part of everyday life. For some, passing is difficult to live with and conveys an inauthentic sense of self. For others, it serves as a ticket to a world that they could not enter otherwise. In the interest of brevity, I discuss Jewish passing in locations outside of Germany only briefly and instead focus my comparison on other minority groups, especially racial passing among African Americans, and forms of passing associated with gender and sexuality, particularly in Weimar Germany. Whereas many acts of passing in African American or queer communities were practices sustained over time, sometimes while living as a person of a different race within a new community, or for multiple decades or a lifetime “in the closet,” this was generally not the case for German Jews passing in the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>62</sup> The continued potential for hostility in public settings made it advantageous for Jews in Germany to pass at times, but at other times Jewishness came with its own benefits: Jews developed networks of cultural events, social welfare programs, and commercial support for Jewish-owned businesses. Acts of Jewish passing and covering were common practice, and Jews who selectively passed as part of the integration process generally were not compelled to leave their Jewish communities. As historian Todd Endelman has pointed out, the relatively high degree of “Jew consciousness” among both Jews and non-Jews in Germany and Central Europe resulted in increased attention to how Jews presented themselves.<sup>63</sup>

Whereas little attention has been given to Jewish passing in Germany prior to 1933, Jewish passing elsewhere in Central Europe and beyond has been studied in more depth. Interwar Austria offers an important point of comparison given the extensive cultural transfer that occurred between Austria and Germany; there were noteworthy differences in terms of visibility. The Jewish population of interwar Vienna was roughly 10 percent (with 80 percent born outside Vienna), more than double the proportion of Jews in Berlin.<sup>64</sup> Due to their prominent representation in public life and culture despite Vienna’s overtly antisemitic climate, Viennese Jews were even more visible and thus bore a greater burden to downplay Jewishness. As Abigail Gillman and Lisa Silverman have demonstrated, this resulted in articulations of Jewishness that were not always visible or explicit.<sup>65</sup> Klaus Hödl has suggested that Viennese Jewish identity was often expressed through performances and interpersonal interactions.<sup>66</sup> The absence of Jews and Jewishness despite a large Jewish population was even more remarkable in Hungary. In 1920, Budapest had the second-highest percentage of Jews among European cities (after Warsaw), or roughly 23 percent. In *The Invisible Jewish Budapest* (2016), Mary Gluck suggests that a type of “critical cross-dressing” or cultural masquerade served as a means for the Hungarian Jewish bourgeoisie to find its voice.<sup>67</sup> In Prague and

Czechoslovakia, as Scott Spector and others have shown, Jews operated between identities and many were visible primarily due to their German-language cultural contributions.<sup>68</sup>

Questions of passing and visibility have been treated to some extent with respect to French-Jewish and Anglo-Jewish contexts, and more scholarship on these topics has begun to emerge. Western Europe lacked the same systematic legal discrimination present in Central Europe, and, while passing was not as necessary, there was still a strong desire among Jews to be perceived as sufficiently French or English. French Jews, who have long grappled with issues of particularity and universalism, were able to achieve prominent positions in early twentieth-century France while living openly as Jews, though many favored the “public suppression of ethnicity.”<sup>69</sup> Leora Auslander’s work examines how Jews in Paris and Berlin used material culture and cultural practices to express likeness and difference from non-Jews and other Jews.<sup>70</sup> As was the case in Berlin and Vienna, immigrant Jews were particularly visible in Paris in the interwar period, which led to tensions between French-born Jews and those whose Jewishness was more readily apparent.<sup>71</sup> Endelman has suggested that Britain’s “genteel intolerance” similarly caused Jews “to mute their Jewishness” in order to be perceived as English.<sup>72</sup> A recent volume edited by Nathan Abrams deals with the absence of visible Jews in British film and popular culture.<sup>73</sup>

Jewish passing in the United States has been studied most comprehensively and offers insight into how Jewishness was performed and framed in religious, cultural, and ethnic terms.<sup>74</sup> Some Jews passed unintentionally: for example, many Sephardic Jewish immigrants who looked and acted unlike the Ashkenazic Jewish majority were mistaken for non-Jewish Hispanics or Turks, especially by other Jews.<sup>75</sup> Daniel Itzkovitz has highlighted the paradoxical nature of the fluid status attributed to most American Jews, who were perceived as both White and racially other; American and foreign; and unstable in terms of gender difference.<sup>76</sup> For Itzkovitz, Jewish difference is “caught in the double bind of the ‘chameleonic race’ marked at once by indistinguishable sameness and irreducible difference.”<sup>77</sup> Warren Hoffman’s *The Passing Game* (2009) similarly links Jewishness and sexual difference. Hoffman examines texts in which Jewishness is mediated through the lens of queer sexuality, suggesting that “the beginnings of queer Jewish identity and culture in America were all about passing.”<sup>78</sup> This also applies to German Jews on several levels.

Studying German-Jewish passing together with other forms of passing leads us to this book’s claim that seeing Jewishness entails parsing a form of minority visibility that is at once gendered, queer, and racialized. Scholars

have begun to examine Jewish difference as a category akin to gender difference, and several have argued that Jewish difference intersects with sexual difference, homosexuality, and the performance of queerness (which can be understood as an often politicized identification with sexual or gender difference).<sup>79</sup> Eve Sedgwick, too, has suggested that parallels between homophobia and antisemitism have yielded commonalities between coming out as gay and coming out as Jewish, particularly in urban environments.<sup>80</sup> Jewish passing in Weimar Germany indeed had much in common with queer or LGBT passing, and negotiating the process of coming out as Jewish bore distinct similarities to coming out as a sexual minority during that time. For these and other groups, spatial boundaries were critical to the containment and liberation of knowledge about concealed identities.<sup>81</sup> Of course, coming out as Jewish differed from coming out as a sexual minority in significant ways. In most cases, one did not need to come out as Jewish to one's own family, although some who passed as non-Jews also attempted to conceal their Jewish past from their children. This book's conclusion explores how commonalities between Jewish and queer passing and coming out narratives—for example, coded and ambiguous signifiers, and protective spaces and subcultures—point to the significance of Jewish passing for queer studies.

Racial passing, particularly in African American contexts, provides an important basis of comparison for thinking through Jewish passing in the early twentieth century, though this approach also has notable limitations. This comparison is limited because of significant differences in the experiences of those who either self-identified or were identified as Black or Jewish, or both. Visual markers such as skin color have played a far greater role in the construction of racial difference among Blacks.<sup>82</sup> Despite the problematic aspects of these parallels, African American and Jewish identities have been constructed according to similar racial models at different points in history. In 1924, Virginia passed the Act to Preserve Racial Integrity, which prohibited interracial marriage and defined a White person as one with “no trace of other blood” (the “one-drop rule”) for U.S. racial and segregation policies. Nazi racial policies including the Nuremberg Laws of 1935 took the American “one-drop rule” as a model.<sup>83</sup> In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, much of African American identity was built around an idea of Blackness as a fixed construct. Cultural theorist Sara Ahmed, writing about Blacks who pass for White, points out that the very notion of being able to pass destabilizes and calls into question the presumption of Black visibility.<sup>84</sup> Passing confounds widespread notions about the visible properties of racialized difference and lends urgency to the questions of whether and how such difference can be noticed.

This is also the case for Jewish visibility: it is possible to identify only some Jews by relying on visual information, and disrupting preconceptions of what Jews look like can lead to confusion, anger, shame, or tragedy. The unreliable or incomplete visual coding of difference necessitates the use of nonvisual categories, including explicit coming out statements and other forms of naming. Weimar Jews who had the ability to pass or cover controlled the flow of information and thus empowered themselves to fit in among less friendly or unknown publics. Chapter 4 examines the consequences of several instances of passing as well as unsuccessful attempts to pass. One of the best examples of a passing narrative by a German-Jewish author, Jakob Loewenberg's cautionary drama, *Der gelbe Fleck* (The Yellow Badge, 1899; first published 1924), tells how one mother's revelation that she passed for non-Jewish caused her antisemitic son to take his own life.

Points of intersection between literary expressions of Black and Jewish identities are likely not coincidental, as several scholars have shown. Indeed, many early twentieth-century passing narratives were produced during a period that some consider the heyday of passing in American Jewish history.<sup>85</sup> American authors Fannie Hurst and Edna Ferber, both of German-Jewish descent, wrote stories that number among the most popular representations of African American passing, in part because of the success of films based on these novels. Lori Harrison-Kahan's work, which analyzes Hurst's *Imitation of Life* (1933) and Ferber's *Show Boat* (1926), among others, demonstrates that Black-Jewish relations and narratives of racial and ethnic passing served as a site for a feminist critique of Whiteness.<sup>86</sup> Whereas *Imitation of Life* deals mainly with African American passing, it also references the inability of some Jews to integrate into mainstream culture.<sup>87</sup> In these novels by Hurst and Ferber, as in many passing novels by African American authors, women constitute the passing subjects. In each case, a racially ambiguous character passes for White and faces the consequences of falling in love with a White man. American Jewish authors such as Philip Roth who explore racial passing often hint at the flexibility of Jewishness and Blackness to be interpreted in multiple ways.<sup>88</sup> Literary scholar Jennifer Glaser has suggested that the decades following the Second World War saw many American Jewish writers speaking through other minorities in acts of racial ventriloquism that enabled them to articulate their position as Jews.<sup>89</sup>

Theories of Jewish passing are in fact indebted to African American history. This usage of the verb *to pass* originated in the United States with the emergence of a Black population that could pass, first for free and then for White.<sup>90</sup> Werner Sollors has surmised that the term *passing* entered nineteenth-

century American literature via citations of notices concerning runaway slaves.<sup>91</sup> Such notices stated, for instance, that a runaway might “endeavor to pass for a free man.”<sup>92</sup> Written passes that could be duplicated were issued to slaves by their masters, and these papers also assisted runaway slaves hoping to pass for free men and women.<sup>93</sup> Current usage of *passing* became standard in the 1920s, an era of both newly restrictive laws and the Harlem Renaissance.<sup>94</sup> The 1920s also saw “a veritable explosion of literary work on racial passing,” which historian Allyson Hobbs argues occurred “precisely at a moment when black artists celebrated blackness and racial pride.”<sup>95</sup> The best known passing novels associated with the Harlem Renaissance include Walter White’s *Flight* (1926); the rerelease of James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912/1927); Jessie Redmon Fauset’s *Plum Bun* (1928); and Nella Larsen’s *Passing* (1929), which is the most often cited work on this phenomenon.<sup>96</sup> Like the popular novels by Ferber and Hurst, the majority of these works deal with racially indeterminate female protagonists who pass for White. Several scholars argue that the appearance of Jewish “chameleonic” figures in these passing narratives suggested that Jews were better able to move between roles or served as mediators.<sup>97</sup>

Ambiguous or unidentifiable bodies—especially women who are not easily classifiable—appear as a threat in Larsen’s novel, as in Loewenberg’s drama and other texts produced in Weimar Germany. Larsen’s novel culminates with the death of Clare Kendry, who either falls from or is pushed out of a window, conceivably as a punishment for passing for White. Judith Butler’s critical reading of Larsen’s novel highlights the necessity of juxtaposing supposedly “marked bodies” with the “unmarked bodies” that establish a norm in both racialized and queer contexts.<sup>98</sup> Scholars such as Catherine Rottenberg have built on Butler’s work to make a case for the role of passing in the performance of Jewishness.<sup>99</sup> Further, other scholars have argued that female protagonists who pass move beyond binaries to inhabit a position of hybridity.<sup>100</sup> Cultural texts from the Weimar period suggest that representations of German-Jewish passing reflect patterns of negotiating subject positions similar to those of other minority groups. In Weimar Germany, the creation of ambiguous or dually coded Jewish identities similarly figured as a means of challenging established cultural norms.

### **Weimar Jewish Passing: Language, Difference, and Gender**

The concept of *passing* goes by many names and at times goes unnamed. Although assimilation, acculturation, and other forms of integration have been

explicitly referenced in German-speaking contexts for centuries, the German language contains no exact translation for *passing*. Several verbs allow for the possibility that a person could be taken for something else (*für etwas gehalten werden; durchgehen als; gelten als*), and at least one verb/noun pair renders into German the concept of adapting or conforming, potentially to the point of becoming indistinguishable (*sich anpassen; Anpassung*).<sup>101</sup> Another verb describes the act of fitting in (*hineinpassen*). Still, the act of maintaining the outward presentation of a different identity for a brief or sustained period of time has no direct equivalent in German. Even when a person passes for several decades, there is no adequate name for this long-term performance or transformation. One scholar has proposed that the verb *passieren* (to happen, occur, pass through) offers an appropriate translation because it implies that something must take place for passing to be effective.<sup>102</sup> For the most part, however, the English word *passing* is left untranslated in German-language scholarly discourse and compensates for a conspicuous linguistic lacuna.<sup>103</sup>

Within Jewish contexts, the decision to conceal Jewishness in public, whether voluntary or forced, indicates a controversial break with tradition that is described using a variety of contentious terms. Perhaps the best-known example, the marranos (also known as conversos, crypto-Jews, or secret Jews) with origins in fifteenth-century Spain have come to represent both transgression and proud defiance. East European Jews provide some scholars with a more recent example of a subgroup whose “ethnic anxiety” led them to forgo traits linked to Jewishness.<sup>104</sup> Modern movements including Zionism have at times rejected any disavowal of Jewishness outright; many Zionists believed that the liberal Jews they called “assimilationists” were passing or covering on some level.<sup>105</sup> Further, Jewish languages have evolved different words to characterize acts of crossing over into another realm. In Hebrew, the word for sin or transgression, *aveira*, has the same root as the verb *la'avor*, which means to pass or cross over. Yiddish, on the other hand, contains a particularly apt term for Westernized Jews who resembled non-Jews: *daytsh*, which simply means German.<sup>106</sup> For Yiddish speakers, to be Jewish and Western European was to be associated with Germanness, and to want to be recognized among Jews as a different, “non-Jewish looking” type of Jew.

The notion of passing for a non-Jew hinges on the presumption that there is such a thing as someone who “looks Jewish” or possesses Jewish difference. Attempts to pass destabilized fixed or precise notions of Jewishness while also reinforcing and codifying some of these same ideas about what Jews looked like. Passing in Weimar Germany also occurred in an era when, as historian Maria Makela has suggested, the blurring of identity challenged the reliability

of vision as a means of assessing ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, and other categories.<sup>107</sup> Like other categories of difference, the visual parameters of Jewishness—as well as its ability to be hidden or eradicated—are often blurred or contested. Many believe that Jewish difference is always visible, that Jewish bodies stand in contrast to so-called “unmarked” non-Jewish bodies. Yet the boundaries between Jewish and non-Jewish, Jewish and Christian, and so forth, are subject to constant interrogation and renegotiation. Jewish acts of crossing and transgressing these borders serve purposes of personal, familial, or professional advancement. Sustained in the long term, passing is a disavowal or transformation of identity to overcome circumstances that prevent Jews from rising to the top of a given field or group. Jews who pass temporarily occupy the space between the tenuous binaries of Jew and non-Jew, presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, known and unknown.<sup>108</sup>

Although the act of passing for non-Jewish can be sustained for extended periods of time, it often is restricted to a limited period that is terminated by either the passer or someone this person encounters. This book, like the texts and discourses it examines, focuses primarily on instances of Jewish passing that come to an end, as well as specific moments when an observer realizes or is informed that the other person is a Jewish “other.” The process of detecting Jewishness during such encounters may involve an exchange of insider codes, or an “aha moment” that corrects for a nonrecognition or misrecognition. As Sara Ahmed has argued, an encounter with an unknown other suggests not only a meeting, but especially “a meeting which involves surprise and conflict.”<sup>109</sup> The “not at all Jewish” example at the beginning of this introduction demonstrates that this also applies to Jewish passing. Coming out or marking the self as Jewish, and thereby ending an act of passing, causes surprise and subverts notions about what the other should look like—not only in the eyes of non-Jews but also for other Jews. Moreover, there was an ongoing struggle for power between those who would profit from exposing hidden Jewishness, and those who desired to remain unseen or to construct identity themselves. Chapter 3 examines some of the power dynamics at play in fictional surprise encounters that out female protagonists as Jews, including in Clementine Krämer’s *Esther* (1920) and Ruth Landshoff-Yorck’s *Roman einer Tänzerin* (Novel of a Dancer, 1933).

Both non-Jews and Jews have participated in the social construction of Jewish racial difference, as well as attempts to detect and contest it. The idea that the Jews constituted a distinct and also visibly perceptible race took root in the late eighteenth century.<sup>110</sup> Notions of fixed identity—the sense that a person was biologically either Jewish or not Jewish, and would remain so re-



ardless of religious conversion, intermarriage, or other attempts to move away from Jewishness—gained traction in the German cultural landscape in the nineteenth century.<sup>111</sup> Once the images of different, diseased, and dangerous Jews became an accepted part of racial antisemitism, Jews responded by approaching the data in a variety of systematic and scientific ways.<sup>112</sup> In the early twentieth century, such Zionist scholars as Arthur Ruppin (1876–1943) and Felix Theilhaber (1884–1956) wrote extensively about the composition and decline of the Jewish population while advocating for its renewal.<sup>113</sup> In addition to printing pieces by Ruppin, Theilhaber, and others, the Weimar Jewish press included numerous discussions of the “race question,” which is treated at length in chapter 1.

Jews who attempted to pass for non-Jews defied the medical and sociological discourses that suggested this would be impossible. The liberal Jewish position that Jews were able to fully adapt and fit in among other Germans was compromised to some extent by a widespread acknowledgment, if not acceptance, of allegations of Jewish physical difference. That Weimar Jews participated in the construction of a potentially visible form of Eastern Jewish difference reveals an implicit recognition of racialized Jewish difference, as well as a tension between identifying with this difference and desiring to distance oneself from it. For Jewish audiences, dark skin, hair, and eye coloring all rendered the body more Eastern, and thus more “authentically” Jewish. Lithographs and other popular artworks by artist Rahel Szalit-Marcus, also discussed in chapter 1, offer potent examples of how stereotypical coloring and exaggerated features coded their subjects as Jewish.

For Weimar Jews, passing figured as a means toward achieving a type of dual legibility, of appearing simultaneously non-Jewish and Jewish, depending on the viewer. Yet passing and recognizability were not always intentional or able to be controlled, and they sometimes resulted in confusion or mistaken identifications.<sup>114</sup> On occasion, non-Jews intentionally passed for Jews in a form of reverse passing, which further complicated matters.<sup>115</sup> Chapter 4 explores how names contributed to Jewish coding, including their role in the reception of the film *Überflüssige Menschen* (Superfluous People; Rasumny, 1926). It also offers a reading of the multivalent nature of passing, invisibility, and deception in the film *Mensch ohne Namen* (*The Man Without a Name*; Ucicky, 1932) to facilitate a comparison of the abilities of men and women to pass for both non-Jewish and Jewish.

Like some Jewish men, a great number of Jewish women in Weimar Germany had the ability to pass and were treated as if they were non-Jews, whether they gave this impression wittingly or unwittingly. Displaying conspicuous,



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1932

# Ihre Erscheinung bestimmt Ihr Leben

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kommen Sie zu uns,

wir beraten Sie,  
wir helfen Ihnen!

Verjüngung des Gesichts. Beseitigung jeglicher Falten, Ohren-, Lippen- und Nasenfehler. Hebung gesunkener Wangen, Brüsteberichtigung usw. schmerzlos und narbenunsichtbar. Ärztliche Leitung. • Zahlungserleichterung. • Drucksache frei. • Briefanfragen Rückporto. Broschüre mit etwa 60 Doppelbildern gegen 50 Pfennig in Marken.

**BIHLMAIER'S INSTITUT  
FÜR KÜNSTLERISCHE CHIRURGIE  
BERLIN W 15, KURFÜRSTENDAMM 38/39  
ECKE KNESEBECKSTRASSE  
SPRECHZEIT 17 18 UHR / FERNSPRECHER J 1, BISMARCK 060**

Fig. 2. Advertisement for Bihlmaier's Institute for Cosmetic Surgery in *C.V.-Zeitung*, 1932: "Your appearance determines your life." (Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, New York.)

visible markers linked to biological or physical traits, especially dark hair, dark eyes, and prominent noses, made it more likely that one would be identified as a Jew. But in an age when hair dye and plastic surgery were becoming ever more popular, even supposedly innate markers included few factors that remained unchangeable. Advertisements for women's wigs and hair dye were ubiquitous in the Weimar Jewish press, and by the late 1920s ads for plastic surgery that appeared in mainstream German publications had also made their way into select Jewish publications. One series of ads for Bihlmaier's Institute for Cosmetic Surgery highlighted the significance of procedures such as "nose corrections" for personal and professional success by way of slogans such as "A woman's face is her calling card!" and "Your appearance determines your life" (see figure 2).<sup>116</sup> Despite the growing acceptance of racialized models of Jewishness, being recognizably Jewish in public to some extent became more of a choice and less a predetermined destiny.<sup>117</sup>

For some women who may have passed unintentionally, it was important to announce Jewishness on their own terms. As Liz Conor has pointed out, this was the era of the "appearing woman"; it was a time at which "modern women understood self-display to be part of the quest for mobility, self-determination, and sexual identity."<sup>118</sup> Jewish women, like other modern women, put themselves on display, yet also found ways to modulate what could be seen. Female protagonists in Jewish-themed literature and film began to reflect some modern impulses of the New Woman, who in Weimar Germany was both consumer and consumed commodity, herself both spectator and object of the spectator's gaze.<sup>119</sup> She was free to travel and walk alone, to inhabit urban public spaces such as cafés, boulevards, and department stores, and to pursue the career and lifestyle she desired (see figure 3).<sup>120</sup> Whereas many New Women tended toward "excessive exhibitionism," particularly with respect to the body and sexuality, Jewish women enhanced their visibility by choosing not to pass, or by covering Jewish-coded traits only in certain situations.<sup>121</sup> The "New Jewish Woman" established herself through public acts, for example: working for Jewish organizations, or advocating for women's rights as Jews in Jewish and non-Jewish circles.<sup>122</sup> Many women came out via simple declarations ("yes, I am Jewish") or made themselves subtly recognizable through performative behaviors, such as purchasing kosher products in department stores or openly reading Jewish periodicals.

Fashion, too, played a significant role in the gendered engagement with Jewish visibility; both modesty and opulence were contested signifiers of Jewishness. Chapter 3 examines how negative stereotypes regarding Jewish women's excessive or ostentatious displays led various Jewish groups to take steps



**Fig. 3. Luzie Hatch with her stepmother in Berlin. (Courtesy of Ralph Hatch.)**

toward policing and disciplining such behaviors. Women were instructed to adopt a simple, plain aesthetic that ostensibly would uphold traditional Jewish values. An examination of public encounters at travel destinations including bathing resorts, exemplified in Max Brod's novel, *Jüdinnen* (Jewesses, 1911), offers insight into how Jewish women were typecast according to their adherence with such instructions. Arthur Schnitzler's novella *Fräulein Else* (1924) similarly sheds light on how physical appearance and socioeconomic status

impacted Jewish visibility. Negotiating, circumventing, or overturning societal expectations was essential for managing perceptions of Jewish difference as it intersected with the gendered female body.

Jewish visibility and its gendered dimensions provide an essential and previously overlooked model for understanding the complex reasons behind hiding, covering, and displaying controversial aspects of identity. *Passing Illusions* demonstrates that Jewish recognizability, similar to racial and queer visibility in many ways, is contingent on a variety of common factors: familial and social contexts; internalization and public performances of stereotypical and symbolic behaviors; and the desire for self-expression without shame, as well as the ability to be identified by others. What some observers believed they saw was not always the whole picture. Although many Jews could pass for non-Jews, a good number only gave the illusion of passing, but in fact remained visible on some level. Through its analysis of circumstances that led to instances of Jewish passing and coming out in Weimar Germany, this book offers insight into the historical quest for recognition and acceptance that remains relevant for discussions of different types of minority visibility today.