

# Chrismukkah: Millennial Multiculturalism

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The first few years of the new millennium witnessed the birth of a new holiday: Chrismukkuh. While Christian and Jewish interfaith families have long negotiated their respective traditions, this holiday marked a departure from older models of interfaith family practice. Rather than emphasizing religious community and potential conflict, it reflected a new era of comfort with a consumer model of religious and multicultural identity. Fittingly, Chrismukkah was born on Fox's hit show *The OC*. Seth Cohen, one of the main characters, claims to have come up with the idea for the holiday at the age of six: eight days of presents and one day of "many, many" presents. After lighting the menorah and exchanging gifts for the eight days of Hanukkah, the family, with its Jewish father and Protestant mother, celebrates a home-based Christmas with stockings, gifts, and tree but combines it with elements of "Jewish Christmas" by ordering take-out Chinese food and watching a family movie. After *The OC's* first Chrismukkah episode aired in 2003, Ron and Michelle Gompertz, an interfaith couple from Bozeman, Montana, launched [www.chrismukkah.com](http://www.chrismukkah.com), followed by a Chrismukkah cookbook. Chrismukkah immediately attracted notice. In 2004, it was listed on *Time* magazine's list of buzzwords for the year.<sup>1</sup> *USA Today* referred to it as a revenue-generating "faux holiday," suggesting that it had garnered enough cultural recognition to be making money.<sup>2</sup>

Chrismukkah and its increased public presence marked a shift in the public discourse around Christian-Jewish interfaith families in the United States in the years surrounding the turn of the millennium. In children's literature, greeting cards, humor books, blogs, and on television, interfaith families who practiced elements of both Christianity and Judaism worked within a public discourse that depicted a multicultural, interfaith identity constructed through the strategic use and reframing of practices from both backgrounds. Rather than understanding this identity as based in a failure to choose

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one religious practice over another, multicultural interfaith families argued that their blended practices both reflected an unavoidable reality and offered distinct advantages and moral formation to their families. "Religion," as used by these multicultural families, becomes the domain of religious institutions, with membership lists and competing truth claims. "Culture," their preferred term, suggests practices that are equivalent and can exist simultaneously in the lives of families and individuals. While scholars such as Henry Goldschmidt describe the space between religious and cultural definitions of practice as creating an unbridgeable gap for the communities that he studies, my research demonstrates that, by framing practices as "cultural," proponents of interfaith families practicing both traditions create a space for such choices to be framed as morally cohesive through the language of multiculturalism.<sup>3</sup>

In the second half of the twentieth century, two trends allowed interfaith families to draw selectively from their Christian and Jewish backgrounds in order to create a mosaic of household practices that formed new, hybrid identities: first, the development of a "seeker" mode of religion, and, second, the rise of multiculturalism as a theoretical and lived concept, intersected with a consumer-based mode of identity formation to create new possibilities for interfaith families. Specifically, the seeker religion model enabled a shift between religious traditions that combined practices from multiple religious traditions, a religious reality that was deeply shaped by consumption. Multiculturalism thus allowed individuals and families to participate in practices that shaped their connections to select ethnicities and placed them over and above any single belief system. Some interfaith families created and advocated for blended Christian–Jewish multicultural identities through consuming both Christian and Jewish practices and objects while creating new, hybrid practices and objects to consume. Indeed, these families participated in a positive form of consumption that added new elements of meaning, even while reshaping more traditional practices. Scholars Leigh Eric Schmidt and Andrew Heinze point to the myriad ways in which this form of consumption reformulates religious ritual, practice, and identity. Schmidt underscores the role of consumption in family Christmas celebrations, a central piece of the logic of Chrismukkah. Similarly, Heinz points to the rise in importance of American Hanukkah celebrations and underscores their parallels with child-focused Christmas celebrations. Chrismukkah itself, then, serves as a (sometimes minimally) reconfigured holiday that points to "cultural" heritages rather than "religious" truths, allowing interfaith families to shape a family-based, multicultural practice.

At the turn of the millennium, these new multicultural interfaith families made sharp distinctions between Christianity and Judaism's "religious" traditions linked to "official" theologies and what they termed "culture" or "traditions" (i.e., food, storytelling, and home-based ritual). This rhetorical distinction between religion and culture allowed proponents of dual-practice households to move the conversation away from competing truth claims and religious affiliations and toward a multicultural approach to identity that had become increasingly popular in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> This article will, thus, historicize the emergence of a distinctly "multicultural" interfaith holiday celebration, grounded largely in practices of consumption, and illuminate its implications for the meanings of "religion" and "culture" in American popular culture. It draws parallels between the use of consumption by interfaith families and an emphasis on multiculturalism through consumption in American society.

By the time the invented holiday of Chrismukkah emerged, multicultural interfaith families already had a decade of cultural material—which emphasized maintaining both traditions by distancing them from "religion"—from which they could draw. Chrismukkah, then, represents one of the most popular depictions of Christian and Jewish "cultural" practices that could be combined in interfaith family life. At the same time, interfaith families both built upon and reconstructed a moral system that was connected to other dominant trends in late-twentieth-century America and that carried emotionally evocative meaning.<sup>5</sup>

### **Interfaith Marriage and Millennial Multiculturalism: Historical and Theoretical Contexts**

The development of an interfaith holiday like Chrismukkah must be understood in the context of several important trends. The decades on either side of the millennium were characterized by high rates of intermarriage and an increased flexibility around both ethnic identity and certain kinds of religious practice. Together, these cultural shifts afforded spaces for blended families whose family practice drew from both Christianity and Judaism. Interfaith marriage can be defined in any number of ways, including viewing marriages between members of similar Protestant denominations as "interfaith" because of real differences in class, theology, or polity, or because of strong historical tensions between the traditions. Polling organizations such as the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life and scholars such as Robert Putnam and David Campbell, however, have recently

defined interfaith marriage as marriages occurring across large “family groupings,” so marriages between Catholics and Hindus are interfaith, but so are marriages between mainline and evangelical Protestants. Using these definitions of interfaith marriage in the early years of the new millennium, 50 percent of all American marriages began as interfaith marriages, with 30 percent of the marriages remaining mixed and 20 percent becoming religiously homogenous through conversion or the selection of a third religion.<sup>6</sup> American Catholics married at a rate of between 40 and 50 percent. Fifty percent of American Jews entered into interfaith marriages, about half of which remained interfaith throughout the duration of the relationship.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps because these marriages remained a controversial issue, particularly in the Jewish community, a disproportionate selection of the resources for interfaith families focused on Christian–Jewish marriages and families. These resources emphasized the importance of a single-religion home and, because they were produced largely by Jewish communal organizations, advocated that such a home be Jewish.

In the early 2000s, however, advocates for blending Christian and Jewish elements in interfaith family life began to articulate a new version of interfaith family life. Using a consumption-inflected definition of multiculturalism, they framed Christianity and Judaism as cultures from which a family could draw to create their own pastiche of traditions. In this approach to interfaith family life, a dual-religion home stemmed not from an inability to choose an identity but from a distinct set of values, including the refusal to privilege one parent’s identity over the other’s. This popular form of multiculturalism celebrated diversity as a rich array of cultural resources while downplaying the possibility of conflict or power imbalance resulting from difference. Instead, this form of multiculturalism called individuals to strive to “break down barriers” and “build mutual understanding across our differences.”<sup>8</sup> Interfaith families, proponents argued, were an excellent place for children to be fundamentally shaped as multicultural citizens who would be able to reach across difference because their very familial relationships would equip them to act as cultural brokers. For example, in her blog, “On Being Both,” Susan Katz-Miller argues that the “interfaith identity label, the label more and more of us have chosen for our children, has unique benefits and positive associations.”<sup>9</sup> She also suggests that a dual-religious heritage gives her daughter the ability to “ponder the mystery of the universe in two languages. She is primed for deep empathy, building bridges, resisting intolerance.”<sup>10</sup> Raising children to be interfaith is modeled here as raising them to have a particular, beneficial, set of skills for life.

Multicultural interfaith families result, in part, from movements that came to exist earlier in the twentieth century, specifically, multiculturalism and seeker religion. The rhetoric of multiculturalism first arose in the 1960s and 1970s in a conversation that placed the category of “culture” in the center of American civic life. In 1967, *Loving v. Virginia* struck down anti-miscegenation laws on the federal level, both bringing the already existing racially and ethnically blended American families into the public eye and laying the groundwork for an increasing acceptance of diversity within families. In 1965, the Johnson administration repealed restrictions on Asian immigration, creating a new group of immigrants who could not be fully integrated into the black and white racial binary of American society. This change, combined with the rise of political movements such as Black Pride and the American Indian Movement (AIM), created a new interest in understanding one’s ethnic and racial history and context. Though, at first, this genealogical and cultural interest was the territory of people of color, it also reshaped the ways in which white Americans connected with their ethnic heritages, creating space for their cultural backgrounds to be performed in public settings.<sup>11</sup> Jews and “ethnic” Catholics had given up much of their ethnic distinctiveness in the process of becoming socially understood as white, and this multicultural turn allowed for a reclamation of a range of discarded practices. The values of multiculturalism shaped particular strands of the social sciences, which influenced public policy and best practices in fields such as education.<sup>12</sup> The trend toward multiculturalism became so strong that, by 1990, most white Americans identified themselves with an ethnic group on the U.S. census rather than as simply “American,” a notable change from just twenty years before.<sup>13</sup>

This multicultural understanding of “culture” sharply differs from the anthropological definition of culture and cultural constructs. Many anthropologists understand culture as “a fluid and contentious process that transgresses the boundaries of clearly defined communities.”<sup>14</sup> For multiculturalists, “culture” is a stable force that can be distilled into “static objects,” including holidays, foods, and specific items that can be made or purchased.<sup>15</sup> In a cultural framework, objects that might have theological significance in another system of meaning—a menorah or a crèche—become, instead, “self-evident signs of membership in homogenous ‘cultural’ groups.” This trend in multicultural logic as applied to religion appeared, for instance, in the Supreme Court case of *Lynch v. Donnelly*, in which the Court defined the crèche displayed in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, as part of a holiday display, not as a religious symbol, one “sponsored by the city to celebrate the Holiday and to depict the origins of that Holiday.” When

previously religious objects—like a menorah or a crèche—become cultural, they then become equivalent, within and across groups. Eating gefilte fish becomes as much a marker of Jewishness as lighting Shabbat candles, and each holds the same weight, though from a Jewish legal standpoint one is a food resulting from economic necessity and the other fulfills a commandment from God. Within the economy of multiculturalism, these practices are now equivalent to Christian practices of dyeing Easter eggs or singing Christmas carols referencing the Christ child. The process of remaking these practices as cultural did not mean that they necessarily mattered less; rather, they were conceptualized differently and divorced from a meaning that referred back to commandments from God or signifiers of faith and piety. In a multicultural understanding, one is Jewish because one eats matzo ball soup; one is Italian Catholic because one abstains from meat until after midnight on Christmas Eve, a process that blurs the lines between “religious” and “ethnic” identity. This means that various units within one tradition become translatable through the logic of equivalence; they are separated from their particular cultural and religious traditions in order to be understood through the abstracting and universalizing language of multiculturalism, which irons out historical/cultural difference and translates it into equivalence.

If, in a multicultural system of identity formation, identity becomes tied to certain practices, those practices are inherently tied to consumption. European-Americans in particular tend to express ethnic identity through the consumption of material and nonmaterial commodities such as “Kiss Me, I’m Irish” aprons, klezmer music, and vacation packages to visit the homeland, the old country, or—in the case of American Jews—Israel. This market exploded in the late-twentieth and early-twenty-first centuries and resulted in what Marilyn Halter describes as an “occasional” or “optional” ethnicity. As long as they were white, consumers could play up or play down their ethnic identities by increasing or decreasing culturally marked consumption. One could also combine ethnicities, either participating in multiple forms of consumption or in forms that, themselves, merged heritages.<sup>16</sup> The identities remain “optional” precisely because, at least for white Americans, they could be combined, put on, or taken off largely at will. Halter notes, “Offspring of parents with different ethnic backgrounds are particularly receptive to the possibilities of this more occasional ethnicity, focusing on the wealth and multiplicity of cultural resources on which they can draw.”<sup>17</sup> If institutions and other sources of authority define a religion by affiliation, truth claims, and strict understandings of peoplehood, the language of ethnicity allowed more flexibility for combining traditions than a language of

religious choice; it creates space for a pastiche of practices to be viewed as yet another form of multiculturalism.

At the same time, multicultural interfaith families have grounded their choices in the moral framework and religious practices of seeker culture. Though the dominant mode of postwar religion involved “dwelling” in one’s religious community for the bulk of one’s lifetime, in the 1960s, many baby boomers became seekers, moving from one religious tradition to another or borrowing from a variety of religions. If many boomers turned away from religious institutions, they “grappled hard in search of a holistic, all-encompassing vision of life.”<sup>18</sup> In doing so, they saw religion as “whatever one chose as one’s own.” For some, then, religion became an intensely personal journey rather than a shared, communal activity. For others, fidelity to a religious tradition remained important, though they added practices such as meditation or yoga. Focusing on what best served the individual’s needs, boomers drew their practices from a variety of traditions, combining multiple traditions in a “pastiche-style of spirituality.”<sup>19</sup>

Despite the rootless quality of boomer religious life, they often valued deep spiritual engagement whether or not they connected such engagement to institutions. They, therefore, passed to their children a belief that religious practice and tradition exist to enhance the individual’s spiritual life over and above any communal obligation.<sup>20</sup> In the 1990s, boomer religion set the dominant cultural tone outside of religious institutions, opening up space for religious patterns to operate in the same paradigm of choice as ethnic models. Individuals selected religious practices and material culture pragmatically rather than as dictated by religious communities.<sup>21</sup>

The possibility of combining religious practices did not immediately increase the options for Christian–Jewish interfaith families, however, because seekers tended either to leave their religion of origin altogether or to add practices derived from Hinduism and Buddhism (e.g., yoga and/or meditation) to their Christian or Jewish practices and identity. Seeker models of religion did not, in most cases, allow for the combination of dominant forms of Christianity with dominant forms of Judaism. The context of multiculturalism allowed Christian and Jewish practices to be cast as ethnic practices rather than as historically competing and sometimes antagonistic religious traditions. As the salience of theological difference declined, engaging in both religions’ practices became not only possible but also desirable. This combination of multiculturalism and institutionally unbounded spiritual seeking present in the 1990s and early 2000s offered interfaith families new freedom to create hybrid identities for themselves. These blended identities sat

easily in an emerging popular culture that accepted and often celebrated blended identities.

Early twenty-first century multicultural interfaith families understood the traditions in which the parents were raised—in this case Christianity and Judaism—as constellations of practices and identity rather than as manifestations of belief or affiliation. Advocates of such families emphasized “tradition” and “culture” in contrast to a definition of “religion,” which, for them, implied affiliation with organized communities or dedication to a specific theology. According to their understanding, religions were under the control of religious institutions and authorities, who could police boundaries as they saw fit. While the Jewish movements each used different criteria to establish “who is a Jew,” they tended to require either matrilineal descent or Jewish education provided by a Jewish institution. Although various forms of Christianity policed their boundaries differently, baptism or faith commitments often served as a yardstick. Multicultural interfaith families used cultural identification to sidestep formal institutional requirements. In doing so, these blended interfaith families drew a distinction that Goldschmidt argues is essential to a multicultural project. When practices were tied to truth claims or genetics, viewed as either reflections of piety or holy commandments, they ceased to be equivalent and could not be blended.<sup>22</sup> As a result, advocates of multicultural interfaith families tend to co-opt “tradition” and “culture” to describe (predominantly home-based) practices maintained outside of the context of affiliation with a single tradition. They demonstrate a blending of traditions precisely by eliding difference.

Just as the multicultural understanding of culture does not match the definition held by anthropologists, the term “religion” in this context does not match definitions of the term used in religious studies. From a religious studies standpoint, the range of practices employed by multicultural interfaith families carries many of the characteristics of the religious in that they are often “tied together emotionally and cognitively, but also spiritually and materially by vital rituals, living myths, indescribable experiences, moral values, shared memories, and other commonly recognized features of religious life.”<sup>23</sup> Around the turn of the millennium, however, more evidence arose of a “culture and community” of interfaith families in American society more broadly. These formal and informal networks came to embrace complex identities, cultivate an ability to move between religious cultures, and explore hybrid practices.

In addition to a more fluid definition of Jewishness or Christianness, the sources here reflect a relational understanding of practice that



roots meaning in family heritage. Robert Orsi articulates an understanding of "religion as a network of relationships between heaven and earth involving humans of all ages and many sacred figures together."<sup>24</sup> The Christian and Jewish practices reflected in children's literature and in adult resources for an explicitly blended culture demonstrate that they provided powerful ways of expressing these relationships across culture, heritage, and practice. For interfaith families, drawing from a range of practices such as the cooking of family recipes or the displaying of heirlooms offered ways to maintain sacred relationships with relatives and communities from both sides of the family and to shape a unique individual and familial moral universe.

### Popular Depictions of Culturally Christian and Jewish Families

Multiculturalism, optional ethnicity, and boomer-style religious sensibilities created a new approach to articulating interfaith religious identity in the 1990s and 2000s. In conversations surrounding interfaith families (one-faith family versus blended family), the terms religion and culture garnered specific definitions. "Religion" became the territory of established communities. "Culture" became a place where syncretism could occur. Sources as diverse as children's literature and adult novelty books connected religiously blended households to the traits of cultural flexibility and respect for difference. These traits functioned as moral virtues in the value system of multicultural America. In addition to depicting a set of values, these sources depicted a set of practices gaining in meaning because of their association with family and heritage. Through the connections to family and heritage, the very practices that the sources sought to describe as cultural took on a deep and pervasive meaning that scholars often see as religious, even though participants carefully eschewed the term.

Proponents of multicultural interfaith families addressed the fears about interfaith family identity with a simple message for children: it is normal for children to have two religions in one home, a normalcy that they often underscored through their depictions of parallel celebrations of Christmas and Hanukkah. In this light, in 1999, Scholastic published Margaret Moorman's *Light the Lights*, a beautifully illustrated celebration of the holiday season centered on the lights of the menorah and the Christmas tree.<sup>25</sup> With her parents and her family, the main character prepares for the many days of Hanukkah. When Hanukkah ends, they put away the menorah and decorate for Christmas. Both parents are involved in both celebrations, the holidays flowing into each other to create a holiday season

emphasizing the parallel practices of holiday lights, family, and food; no religious practice is mentioned, and the practice is in no way problematic. *Light the Lights* was typical of many books supporting both Christian and Jewish practices. They could make these claims because they avoided questions of theologically structured belief and affiliation, places where the religious identities come into conflict.

While these books tended to downplay theological and institutional particularity, they emphasized close familial bonds. Children shared in the religious celebrations of their family members and drew meaning from the relationships they had with the adults in their families. The traditions depicted in loving detail in books such as *Light the Lights* were tied to family and friends—gelt in an uncle's pocket, an annual tree-decorating party. The family traditions depicted in these stories were, in fact, shared practices that connected the main characters of the children's books to their parents, grandparents, and family history.<sup>26</sup> These familial practices connected the main characters to the relational networks coming from their Christian and Jewish contexts, locating the children in both matrices of meaning.

While proponents of multicultural interfaith families gave small children messages that it was acceptable to celebrate dual holidays and share traditions with family members, older children tackled more complex themes of identity. They therefore delved into existential topics about the meaning of "halfness," that is, the meaning of a blended Christian-Jewish self. In 2000, Virginia Euwer Wolff published *The Mozart Season*, a young adult novel about Allegra, an adolescent violinist with a Jewish father and a "not Jewish at all" mother from Kansas.<sup>27</sup> At the end of the book, Allegra reaffirms an understanding of her identity that has been threaded through the text: "You can be half Jewish. Maybe whole Jews or whole Gentiles wouldn't understand. But you can be. I am."<sup>28</sup> "Halfness," here, does not equate with erasure.<sup>29</sup>

Allegra's closing words stand in sharp contrast to Margaret's closing thoughts on her dual religious heritage in *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret*, by Judy Blume, published in 1970. Thirty years before Wolff created Allegra, Blume's Margaret connects Christianity and Judaism to churches and synagogues. Despite an absence of institutional belonging, however, Margaret has a personal relationship with God. She feels His presence and confides in Him frequently.<sup>30</sup> When she fails to find Him in any religious institution, she feels betrayed and angry, believing that, if she had been raised within a tradition, she would have been able to find God within religious structures. Margaret's social setting makes her lack of religious identity a problem: while Margaret tells her readers that not being any

religion is fine in New York, in her New Jersey suburb, every child has a religious home, be it Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish.

Allegra, by contrast, lives in a community in which church or synagogue is rarely (if ever) mentioned. Her blended heritage does not trouble the people in her daily life. Though presumably Jewish himself, her violin teacher and confidante, Mr. Kaplan, is unconcerned with Allegra's halfness. Her older brother, Bro David, tells her that she cannot be made all Jewish, supporting her in understanding herself as half and half. Only her grandmother, Bubbe Raisa, in far-away (and Jewishly coded) New York, is concerned about Allegra's Jewishness. Though Allegra feels sympathy for Bubbe Raisa, her concerns do not shake Allegra's sense of herself.

The difference between Allegra and Margaret's experiences of their blended backgrounds demonstrates the changing impact of multiculturalism over time. Margaret is troubled by her blended heritage, believing that, because she is both, she is nothing; she is surrounded by people who are depicted as fitting neatly into religious categories: Jew, Presbyterian, Methodist, Catholic. Allegra acknowledges that not everyone believes that she can be half Jewish but maintains that, despite those opinions, she is both halves and proud to be so:

One, if you are half and half, you're lucky because each kind has some really good things about it. Gentiles are good at building things, cathedrals and huge barns and things. Jews have courage to wander all around the world getting abused and killed and still go on having the Torah. . . . Two, if you're half and half, you're the thing that can't be. You can't be half Jewish. So you go through your life being something that can't be.<sup>31</sup>

Though Allegra suggests that it is a disadvantage to be "something that can't be," she uses the framework of multiculturalism to compare herself to her friend Jessica, who is half African-American and half Chinese, to point out that blending is possible. Just as Jessica both identifies with her black family's role in American history and attends Chinese school, both halves of Allegra's heritage are fully present in her life as well. Her mother, she reflects, can cook both Kansas food—corn cakes and eggplant pudding—and Jewish food—latkes and pecan haroset. On her bed is a patchwork quilt under which the quilt-maker, her Kansas great-grandmother, had died. On the wall in her dining room is a picture of her Jewish great-grandmother, Elter Bubbe Leah, for whom she was named and who died at Treblinka. As Allegra moves through the main dramatic arc of the story, their lives and deaths lend gravitas to the moral questions that she faces.

The difference between Margaret's experience in the late 1960s and Allegra's in the 1990s suggests a shift not in attitudes toward interfaith families but, rather, in the social worlds that those families entered. *The Mozart Season* simply paints a girl growing up in a fairly cosmopolitan, secular segment of America. Though secular, her society uses the arts to access both moral meaning and community. Religious and ethnic identity, by contrast, define neither social and family life nor identity. Judy Blume based Margaret's religiously segregated social world on her own memories of New Jersey in the 1950s, the decade with the highest religious affiliation of the twentieth century. For Blume's Margaret, her family's lack of institutional membership puts her outside of the cultural mainstream and differentiates her from her peer group.

By contrast, religion is not a dominant feature of the 1990s Portland, Oregon, in which Wolff locates *The Mozart Season*. Neither Allegra's friends nor her parents nor their friends discuss religious community; the discussions of morality and empathy that recur throughout the book do not take place in markedly Christian or Jewish language. Instead, they form their communities and morality in other contexts, namely, in the arts and in the compassionate consideration of the lives of others. In the novel, Allegra and her family wrestle not only with the stories of her great-grandmothers but also with the histories and humanities of a homeless family friend and other young musicians in her concerto competition. The text leaves no doubt that the members of Allegra's community struggle with large questions and experience transcendence through the arts. They do so without the presence of traditionally defined Christianity and Judaism.

The differences between the worlds of *The Mozart Season* and *Are You There, God? It's Me, Margaret* reflect broader social patterns: the twentieth century saw fewer Americans affiliating with organized religion. Indeed, a large part of Margaret's discomfort with her lack of religious identity comes from community expectations of religious belonging. In Margaret's suburban world of the late 1960s, belonging requires a concrete religious identity. In Allegra's fictional Portland, Oregon, in the 1990s, a religious identity is simply not necessary. These societal shifts created more room for interfaith families to build lives and communities outside of the confines of organized religion.

While proponents of multicultural interfaith families addressed children in the earnest language of support, their outreach to adults assumed a much sharper tone. In 2000, interfaith couple Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst produced *The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration*, which advocates for interfaith and intentionally blended

family cultures.<sup>32</sup> They argue, first, that half-Jews provide a normative Jewish experience in the late twentieth century and celebrate a set of characteristics nurtured in an intentionally interfaith home, including tolerance and an ability to act as cultural brokers. These traits, presented as valuable moral goods, echo the values of a multicultural, millennial society.

The western Massachusetts couple opens their book by announcing that “we are living in the era of the half-Jew,” as the majority of American Jews marry non-Jews and “the number of American half-Jews under the age of eleven now exceeds the number of American full Jews under eleven.”<sup>33</sup> In short, they call for an acknowledgment that the half-Jewish experience has come to dominate the American Jewish landscape and for the celebration of that reality. The book reflects interviews and surveys of more than one hundred “half-Jews” and includes data on half-Jewish celebrities, historical figures, and artists, in addition to resources for half-Jews. On the basis of their research, they claim that, rather than being a “fractional” identity, being half-Jewish could be a “double” identity. In other words, they oppose the denigration of half-Jewish identity by suggesting it as a “cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic mix that is . . . greater than the sum of its parts.”<sup>34</sup>

Belying any sense of religious connection or practice, Klein and Vuijst take a broad definition of what makes one half-Jewish: “a person is half-Jewish if half of her genetic or cultural makeup is Jewish and half is not. That is it.”<sup>35</sup> As a result, they suggest that, because the home could, and inevitably would, contain elements of both cultures, raising a child to acknowledge that bicultural reality is the most honest approach. Thus, even in a single religion household, Klein and Vuijst maintain a multicultural approach. Children in such a home might be religiously Catholic, Methodist, or Jewish, but culturally they are unequivocally half-Jewish. Again, their rhetoric of blending is maintained, in part, by separating Christian and Jewish beliefs or formal affiliation from what they refer to as their “cultural, intellectual, and aesthetic” elements.

Klein and Vuijst frame the formation that occurs in interfaith families as a moral good by arguing that children of interfaith marriages are more successful than average in multicultural, millennial America. They, therefore, spend much of their book using famous half-Jews to tease out the traits created by the double perspective that they believe blended homes foster. They suggest that, though Gloria Steinem “insists that her talent for fitting in with any group is simply the outgrowth of being a woman. . . . Steinem’s excelling at this talent may also be accounted for by her insider/outsider status

as a half-Jew."<sup>36</sup> Klein and Vuijst then tie Steinem's success to a flexibility bred of hybridity.

While Klein and Vuijst work hard to sell the positive traits that they associate with the half-Jewish identity, the celebratory aspect of their work depends on their assertion that the newly fused whole is actually better than the sum of its parts. This assertion rests on a new set of assumptions. First, the authors consider individuals more important than religious communities. No mention is made of the impact of intermarriage on the Jewish people in *Half-Jewish*. Rather, the authors critique organized Judaism (writ large) for its failure to support patrilineal Jews, whose last names expose them to anti-Semitism but whose patrilineal status excludes them from communal belonging. Second, Klein and Vuijst do not understand growing up outside of institutional religious life to be of inherently less worth than a religiously shaped childhood. They express no concern about salvation, nor do they assume a lack of moral formation or tradition in those with a dual heritage and a secular life. Rather, they believe that interacting with two cultures fosters versatility and cross-cultural understanding. The valuing of these traits, like the repeated use of the word multicultural, demonstrates a shift in attitude directly tied to the late 1990s enthusiasm for a deeply syncretic popular multiculturalism. The message contrasts sharply with the assumption that raising children without a single religious tradition will confuse them; indeed, Christianity and Judaism are not even framed as religious identities. Framing these traditions as cultural, Klein and Vuijst insist that combining them creates new, valuable multicultural identities.

While Klein and Vuijst differentiate Jewish and Christian cultural identities, it is important to note that they see a distinct moral advantage to the traits that they associate with an expanded set of cultural dispositions. They also point to the ability of half-Jewish children to find comfort in the religious practices of both traditions, despite the competing truth claims. In Klein and Vuijst's worldview, then, minimal, if any, tension (comic or otherwise) exists for the child of two traditions in the ways outlined in the children's books just discussed. Instead, this new "half" identity supersedes all traditions that came before it.

### **Chrismukkah: A Multicultural Romp**

Two years later, Ron Gompertz published *Chrismukkah: Everything You Need to Know to Celebrate the Hybrid Holiday*.<sup>37</sup> The blurbs on the back of Gompertz's book came from such elevated

sources as the *New York Times*, which raved, "The double barreled holiday offers an excuse to eat mashed potatoes and potato latkes in the same sitting, with candy canes and chocolate gelt for dessert." The *Wall Street Journal* observed, "Chrismukkah puts a name to something millions of families are already celebrating." The reviews of *Chrismukkah* signal a sharp break with the cultural environment of the 1970s and 1980s, when the mainstream media reacted to rising rates of interfaith marriage with stories about Jewish groups' concerns.

Gompertz frames the celebration of Chrismukkah as a multi-cultural romp, suggesting that the holiday celebrations could be unmoored from the story of the Christ child or the miracle of long-lasting oil (or, perhaps more importantly, from the story of Jewish resistance against oppression and assimilation). People who loved their heritage but did not believe in the truth claims of their traditions could enjoy Chrismukkah. Gompertz presents the practices of Chrismukkah in an ironic tone, using retro images with kitschy titles as well as the occasional snatch of sarcasm or insult. Gompertz's use of irony and humor allows him to defuse tensions associated with blending Christian and Jewish practice in order to articulate strongly held convictions about interfaith life. Indeed, for most interfaith families, he insists, truth claims and institutional religion are not relevant to their lives in the first place.

Gompertz argues that Chrismukkah already existed in many interfaith homes, but he also clearly feels the need to introduce it on a more popular scale. "I need to admit something up front. Chrismukkah is pretend. It doesn't exist. It's made up. Wishful thinking. A holiday hoax." He points out that it would not "get you in good with God" or "bring you spiritual enlightenment." It is, however, a way to have fun during the holiday season by letting go of the "December Dilemma" of Hanukkah or Christmas in favor of enjoying both. With this perspective, he argues, Chrismukkah could be a "'merry mish-mash' season as real as Santa Claus, Hanukkah Harry and the notion of 'peace on earth and good will toward men.'"<sup>38</sup> Chrismukkah, Gompertz argues, provides a chance for couples to create their own American melting pot traditions out of whatever aspects of their plural heritages they wish to preserve. These traditions are selected in a form of millennial capitalism in which the act of consumption becomes part of a "discourse of possibility," in this case, possibilities for claiming and shaping complicated constellations of practices.<sup>39</sup> While Chrismukkah itself is a celebration for American families containing Christians and Jews, Gompertz told NPR that he hopes it will inspire other kinds of interfaith families to create their own holiday fusions.<sup>40</sup>

Chrismukkah solves what Gompertz sees as a distinctly modern American problem. He explains that, "like most interfaith couples," he and his wife are not religious but remain proud of their cultural heritages and curious about their spouse's tradition. While aware of the notion that celebrating both religions confuses children, they want to "respect and honor" both sets of traditions and raise their daughter to be "informed, tolerant, and balanced." Gompertz also argues that, "as a multicultural family, we are part of a growing demographic trend in America that is a by-product of our country's melting pot history. From this perspective, Chrismukkah is more than just a pretend holiday about two incompatible religions." Indeed, seen with the long view of history, Chrismukkah becomes part of "an evolutionary continuum as old as Judaism and Christianity." Gompertz's use of the word evolutionary suggests that his secular and blended holiday is part of the inevitable forward march of progress in American society. He thus makes a case for normative multiculturalism as the overarching, unifying value system for a certain type of self-identifyingly nonreligious interfaith families.

Despite this momentary earnestness, the rest of the text is tongue-in-cheek, a joyously ironic celebration of all things kitsch, written in a tone that is a persuasive cultural marker meant to imply both savvy and sophistication. The book contains goofy recipes for combining traditions, such as the matzo bread house, which is unconcerned that matzo is a Passover food, not a Hanukkah food. Similarly, a Long Island Iced Tea recipe is called the "Passion of the Iced." This reference to the Passion of Christ skirts the fact that the Passion story is associated with Holy Week and Easter rather than Christmas. It also disregards that Passion plays have, historically, increased tensions between Christians and Jews, often resulting in anti-Semitic violence during Holy Week. Gompertz then employs satiric irony in order to sidestep some of the historic and theological tensions between Christians and Jews.

Gompertz's book describes customs that fuse elements of Christian and Jewish traditions in a lighthearted, kitschy style that offers the interfaith family a smorgasbord of new potential practices. In 2010, his (no longer extant) web site sold such accoutrements of the holiday as a kit for the matzo house, blue and white Christmas tree ornaments decorated with menorahs, and Chrismukkah cards. The site, with its soundtrack of Christmas carols played by a klezmer band, remained live for more than seven years. Gompertz explains that Chrismukkah is "about throwing everything up. As garish, as busy, as multicultural as we could make it." He does so in response to a perceived need of interfaith families and is rewarded with media attention and popularity.



Christmakkuh, therefore, exploits a largely unspoken fact: many interfaith families celebrate holidays from both sides of the family. "It is a bit of a spoof, a bit of a satire, but it's something that is very, very real for those of us who are in mixed marriages and have to battle the feelings of our spouses, the feelings of our in-laws," Gompertz said in a 2006 NPR interview. "And when things get too heavy, it's a good time to make light." "Making light" involves sidestepping theology, focusing instead on nostalgia and fun, a move that Gompertz repeatedly asserts is typical of what most interfaith families do and want.

Though he embraces a move away from theologically oriented holidays, Gompertz allows that his spoof could go too far. For instance, in his NPR interview, he noted that he created the new holiday food of "gefilte goose" because "gefilte ham" seemed fundamentally disrespectful to Jewish tradition. This distinction is interesting in part because so much of Gompertz's celebration had already thoroughly offended both the Catholic hierarchy and the Jewish Board of Rabbis. Together, in 2004, the groups argued, "We . . . want to see the spiritual integrity of all faiths fully protected. Chanukah and Christmas celebrated during the same period should not be fused into some cultural combination that does not recognize the spiritual identity of our respective faiths. Copying the tradition of another faith and calling it by another name is a form of shameful plagiarism we cannot condone."<sup>41</sup> As shying away from the gefilte ham indicates, Gompertz indeed means no offense. He does not, however, share the perspective that Christmas and Hanukkah are the "traditions of another faith." Rather, he contends that he and his wife could maintain the traditional Christian and Jewish practices in their own families while remaining "not religious."<sup>42</sup> Gompertz presents both his cultural Judaism and his intermarriage as a natural cultural progression—one that can, with a healthy touch of irony, be celebrated.

Gompertz claims that he enthusiastically supports other holiday combinations, both with other religions and other Christian and Jewish celebrations, although he celebrates Chrismukkah, not "East-over." As both Christian and Jewish cultural critics have long pointed out, there is a largely secular and very materialistic component to both Christmas and Hanukkah, hence the cries of "Put the Christ back in Christmas" on the part of some Christian clergy and objections to lavish Hanukkah celebrations as inherently part of Jewish assimilation to American culture (since Hanukkah is traditionally a minor holiday in the Jewish liturgical year). Because many Americans locate Christmas and Hanukkah primarily in the cultural terrain of holiday parties and holiday shopping, they lend themselves to fusion and, at times, confusion with each other.

Christmas and Hanukkah are both holidays with complex historical relationships to the market. As Leigh Eric Schmidt points out, the early-twentieth-century Christmas was so “enmeshed in consumer culture” that, “amid the shopping, the cards, the Toyland Santa Clauses, the packages, and the lights, the festival of winter seemed once again to allow only marginal room for Christ.”<sup>43</sup> When Gompertz draws on Christmas apart from Christ to create Chrimukkah, he is pulling from an array of traditions that are tied to the market and already enjoyed by Americans—including many whose families, though historically Catholic or Protestant, no longer consider themselves Christian. Similarly, by the turn of the millennium, American Hanukkah came with an array of traditions tied to market trends. Andrew Heinze names consumption as the common denominator of Christmas and Hanukkah, a way for “American practice and attitude” to infuse the traditional form of Hanukkah. That said, he also maintains that it ceased to be a holiday about the rededication of the Temple.<sup>44</sup> American society, then, has long had celebrations of Christmas and Hanukkah that play down the theological import of the holidays in favor of their consumer and festive elements. Chrimukkah largely draws from these established and overlapping trends.

### December Holidays in Practice

Chrimukkah, as Gompertz and *The OC* pitch it, is a source of media frenzy but not necessarily an indication of how interfaith families, attuned to the questions of identity posed in the young adult novels, might celebrate it. Material culture and ethnography, however, offer insight into those familial practices. While Gompertz marketed Chrimukkah cards on his web site, the early twenty-first century also saw such cards available in mainstream grocery stores not only in New York City but also in places such as Atlanta, Chicago, Seattle, and their suburbs. The cards served a niche (primarily urban) market and were more likely to appear in grocery stores in Jewish neighborhoods. They tended to be grouped on the border between the Christmas cards and the Hanukkah cards. Made by two of the major greeting card companies in the United States, American Greetings and Hallmark, the cards were sold individually rather than in packages of eight or ten. They ranged in tone from the sentimental to the comic, but all of them created common ground by denuding the holidays of one kind of religious content—references to Christ or Judah Maccabee—and replacing it with a new set of religious values: family, tolerance, friendship, joy, and unspecified wonder.

The sentimental cards mentioned the “miracles of the season” or stressed other kinds of themes, such as what all people share: “We celebrate two different stories with different traditions, but one hope we all have in common—a world filled with comfort and care.” Some of the cards made specific reference to the practices of Judaism and Christianity: “A menorah in the window and an evergreen wreath on the door show that holiday feelings are filling our homes and loving good times are in store. The joy and beauty of this time of year remind us of the wonderful people in our lives. People like you.” If the more sedate cards leaned toward neutral colors, ornaments, evergreens, and menorahs, the humorous cards often featured brightly colored homages to Santa humor. One card pictured Santa sitting on a snowy rooftop, sharing a drink with his friend the Fiddler on the Roof. The caption inside read, “Tis the season, whatever the reason!” Another Santa card depicted a yarmulked elf calling out to his team of reindeer, “On Isaac! On Izzy! On Eli! On Abe! On Levi!” Inside, it read, “Merry Hanukkah!”

While these cards targeted interfaith friends as much as interfaith families, they indicated a shift in attitudes toward both the winter holidays and the relationship between Christians and Jews. The early twenty-first-century American culture that produced these cards saw Christians and Jews as friends and neighbors, people who would acknowledge and participate in one another’s celebrations. The cards downplayed particular holidays’ distinctiveness with phrases like “tis the season, whatever the reason” and suggested that trees and menorahs are simply accessories to the same themes of peace on earth, friendship, gifts, and merrymaking.

In several ways, this broader merging of specific holidays into the holiday season lent cultural support to the merging of the holidays in interfaith homes. First, it ritualized and formalized the social world that gave rise to interfaith families, one in which holiday greetings were sent across religious lines. Also, they made it possible to buy one set of cards to send to both sides of interfaith families. Last, Christmas and Hanukkah were depicted side by side, their juxtaposition underscoring the holidays’ shared messages of festivity, cheer, friendship, and family. “Is it Chanumas or Chrismakkah?” asked one of many cards marketed to interfaith families. “What word would best describe bringing together two different traditions to enjoy food, lights, and laughter all under one roof?”

If only a small percentage of the cards directly referenced a dual celebration in one family, all of them participated in a syncretic multiculturalism that blended Christmas and Hanukkah and posited that the essential meaning of both holidays was neither the birth of

a savior nor the miracle of oil but, rather, peace, friendship, and merriment. The fusing of the holidays appeared perfectly normal and fun, not a cause for concern. While not all religious communities approved of Chrimukkah, Hallmark and American Greetings were happy to sell it, suggesting they expected the cards to be profitable in at least some markets.

The families that provided those markets, interfaith families themselves, celebrated dual holidays according to a range of practices, largely depending on how the family conceptualized its relationship to Judaism and Christianity as traditions. While many families chose one religious tradition, solutions more in the vein of “Chrimukkah,” that is, the celebration of both holidays, merit consideration. It is important to note, however, that none of the families I interviewed participated in the deliberate fusions with which Gompertz plays.

First, among the interfaith families I interviewed, there were families who had chosen to affiliate with Jewish communities. Their children attended Jewish religious school and celebrated Jewish life cycle events. These families had decided that because they have a robust Jewish life, participating in the Christmas season would not detract from their children’s Jewish identity. They argued that the Christian parent had generously agreed to raise the children in a “religion not his or her own” and should be able to share family traditions with those children. Jesus was often absent from these celebrations—the holiday was an American cultural Christmas, sometimes with whimsical juxtapositions. Some families’ front doors sported a mezuzah year round, but they added a wreath or a stocking for the month of December. These families framed their decisions to include both holidays in a number of ways. Sometimes, the message conveyed was that the celebration was important to non-Jewish family members. One Jewish mother, whose husband had Catholic children from a previous marriage, asked how her family would have benefited if her now adult stepchildren could not share Christmas with their father. She pointed out that if it helped her stepchildren to connect to their much younger half-siblings to share Christmas, then Christmas was good for the family. Another Jewish mother, referring to her Baptist mother-in-law, said, “If you love Grandma, you need to at least know what Grandma loves.” A Jewish husband pointed out that his wife had agreed to Jewish children. They had initially agreed not to have Christmas in their home, but she got depressed every December. So, they decided to celebrate Christmas after all.

Despite agreeing to celebrate Christmas, it did not always please the Jewish spouse and parent. One woman, after preserving her son’s Christmas tree topper for a decade, found herself “feeling

sad [when] Hanukkah is over and now it is all Christmas all the time. [I] just need to keep reminding myself: trees are pretty, trees make people happy, trees are not meant to exclude." She and some of the others raising Jewish children with the support of Christian spouses and co-parents pointed out that marriage is compromise and felt that the concession of the tree was small when compared to the religious education and community.

A second group of families celebrated both holidays as part of a small but growing trend of intentionally dual-religion homes. In Susan Katz-Miller's family, and the families in their community, the intention was to raise children who were educated and conversant in the narratives and practices of both Christianity and Judaism. As a result, they celebrated both Hanukkah and Christmas, Easter and Passover. Individual families made different choices about Christmas consumption and volunteering, but, in general, these families made a point of including the stories of both traditions in their celebrations. Katz-Miller's children knew the story of Hanukkah and its relatively minor status in the panoply of Jewish holidays. They knew the blessings over the Hanukkah candles and enjoyed *sufganiyot* (jelly doughnuts) just as the exclusively Jewish children do. Whereas many of the families who had chosen to affiliate exclusively Jewishly kept Christ out of Christmas intentionally, Katz-Miller's children knew the story from the Gospel of Luke. They could talk about Jesus as someone who some in their community considered a savior. For Katz-Miller and her family, celebrating Christmas was part of a larger effort to practice both Judaism and Christianity "religiously," outside of the now secularized and commercialized holiday season. While Katz-Miller's family celebrated in the context of a community of interfaith families (which has both a formal interfaith school and Christian and Jewish clergy), other families who "do both" participated in two separate religious communities and maintained the dual religious holidays, their children learning about the holidays either in religious education programs or from their families.

A third approach comes from families that had chosen a single affiliation for the household that is neither of the parent's natal traditions. One such family, the Goffs, became Unitarian Universalist (UU) and reframed Christmas and Hanukkah (and Easter and Passover) in terms of core UU values.<sup>45</sup> Christmas became a celebration of peace on earth and goodwill toward all, but also of the miraculous potential of each human birth. (A key UU Christmas reading opens with the line "every night a child is born is a holy night.") Similarly, Hanukkah became a holiday about fighting for freedom and valuing tradition. These reinterpretations were not necessarily very different

from liberal Christian and Jewish understandings of the holidays (though the language of Jesus as Savior was largely absent), yet they reinscribed central messages of the Goff family's community.<sup>46</sup> Additionally, because the Goffs attended a large, urban Unitarian Universalist congregation with a notable Jewish presence (largely organized by their family's volunteer efforts), they attended both Christmas and Hanukkah celebrations with their congregation. Audrey Goff stressed the importance of community in their celebrations: "We do all of our holidays with our community. The UU congregation structures our dual celebrations." Perhaps most important, she articulated that the Goffs were not, in her view, an interfaith family. They were, she explained, an interreligious family, drawing from two religious traditions, Christianity and Judaism, to inform their one faith, Unitarian Universalism.

Despite all the cultural fuss about the blended (and invented) "holiday" of Chrimukkah, all of these families were careful to keep their holidays separate. In some years, they intersected. The families then might have lit a menorah in the shadow of a Christmas tree. That intersection, however, was incidental. The holidays were not blended into a third set of practices. In fact, the explicit blending of traditions in the Chrimukkah spoofs were not part of the practices of any of the families with whom I conducted interviews, even the Unitarian Universalist family who were the most committed to drawing the holiday narratives together. Each of the families kept the practices distinct—it was their framing that changed as they adapted to the different affiliative goals and ideals of the household.

## Conclusion

This new millennial discourse around interfaith family life was carried out, in part, in the American marketplace in children's and young adult books, novelty books, and mass-market greeting cards. These popular depictions of the interfaith family advocated combining holiday practices. Observing a rhetorical hesitancy to combine Christian and Jewish religious practices and using the ethnic inflections of multiculturalism, however, they drew a distinction between "religion" and "culture." By locating the resulting mosaic of practices firmly in the "cultural" terrain (a terrain marked by an absence of affiliations, truth claims, or life passages), these sources supported the possibility of creating a multicultural Christian-Jewish home, just as one might create an Indian-Irish home.

While the conversation around the intentionally blended interfaith family carefully drew distinctions between the practices

that they combined and “religion” (or practices that might conventionally be seen as religious), it also had an overarching moral message. Multicultural interfaith families were, these sources suggested, a moral good because they embodied values that the authors suggest were key to a diverse society, namely, tolerance and respect. In addition, they created children who, because of the blended settings in which they were raised, were better able to move between cultures and act as mediators across social difference, traits that the authors equated with success. As we have seen, then, multiculturalism provided a lens through which to understand a moral logic for shaping the selection of practice and for the framing of blended identity at the turn of the millennium.

## Notes

Samira K. Mehta is an American Council of Learned Societies Public Fellow at the Museum of Jewish Heritage—A Living Memorial to the Holocaust. All views expressed in this article are those of the author and are not necessarily those of MJH. A number of people have helped to bring this article to fruition: first, the editors at *Religion and American Culture* and their anonymous reviewers, whose feedback has immeasurably improved the piece. In addition, at various points in this project’s development, Benjamin Brazil, Jodi Eichler-Levine, Eric Goldstein, Rachel Gross, David King, Gary Laderman, Katie Lofton, Anthony Petro, and Tisa Wenger have all offered helpful feedback on text and thought process.

1. “The Year in Buzzwords,” *Time*, December 20, 2004.

2. Michael McCarthy, “Have a Merry Little Chrismukkah,” *USA Today*, December 16, 2004.

3. Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen People of Crown Heights* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006).

4. Richard Hecht, “Active versus Passive Pluralism: A Changing Style of Civil Religion?” in *Religious Pluralism and Civil Society*, vol. 612, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2007), 133–51; Marilyn Halter, *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity* (New York: Schocken Books, 2000).

5. This article intersects with a number of bodies of literature in religious studies. The bulk of the work on interfaith marriage in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries considers the impact of marriage between Jews and non-Jews on the Jewish community. Books such as Sylvia Barack Fishman’s *Double or Nothing: Jewish Families and Mixed*

*Marriage* (Waltham, Mass.: Brandeis University Press, 2004) explore dynamics of interfaith households and the role of Jewish education in the decision of children of interfaith marriage to affiliate with Judaism as adults. Keren McGinity's *Still Jewish: A History of Women and Intermarriage in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2009) counters narratives that Jewish women who marry non-Jews lose their connection to Jewish identity with examples of the ways in which these women maintain a connection to their heritage in a variety of forms. Jennifer Thompson's *Jewish on Their Own Terms* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2013) explores the role of non-Jewish women in creating Jewish homes after an interfaith marriage, examining the ways in which these women (and their husbands) are reshaping what it means to be Jewish in early-twenty-first-century America. This article shifts the focus of scholarship on interfaith families away from their impact on American Judaism, reading them instead in the broader context of American society at the turn of the millennium and exploring the material culture produced outside of the context of an affiliation with institutional Judaism.

Methodologically, I engage primarily with two bodies of literature in the study of American religion. Specifically, considering the role of material culture and American holidays, I draw from Leigh Eric Schmidt's *Consumer Rites: The Buying and Selling of American Holidays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997) and Andrew Heinz's *Adapting to Abundance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), both of which explore the role of material and consumer culture in shaping American holidays and rituals. Marilyn Halter's work bridges ethnicity studies and consumerism studies, demonstrating that, in the late twentieth century, patterns of consumption were central in enacting ethnic identity and particularly in fusing disparate identities. Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Roots, Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008) explores the creation of white ethnic identity in the late twentieth century, providing safe space for assimilation. Both Halter and Jacobson flesh out an understanding of ethnic identity that illuminates the conditions and privileges of white engagement with multiculturalism.

6. Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "Many Americans Mix Multiple Faiths: Easter, New Age Beliefs Widespread" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, December 2009); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey: Religious Affiliation Diverse and Dynamic" (Washington, D.C.: Pew Research Center, February 2008); Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2012); Erica B. Seamon, *A Leap of Faith: Interreligious Marriage in the United States*



(An Undergraduate Report) (Washington, D.C.: Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs at Georgetown University, 2008).

The Pew Foundation puts this number closer to 37 percent, though the Pew Foundation is asking what percentage of marriages are currently interfaith and Putnam and Campbell are asking about the number of marriages that are interfaith at the moment that they were contracted.

7. Putnam and Campbell, *American Grace*, 156.

8. Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen People of Crown Heights*, 117.

9. Susan Katz-Miller, "Ask Interfaith Mom: Is It OK for Interfaith Parents to Adopt Interfaith Identity?" *On Being Both: Interfaith Parent, Interfaith Child: Life with Two Religions*, June 27, 2013, <http://onbeingboth.wordpress.com/tag/interfaith-identity/>.

10. Susan Katz-Miller, "An Interfaith Child in the World: Rise Up Joyful," *On Being Both: Interfaith Parent, Interfaith Child: Life with Two Religions*, August 24, 2012, <http://onbeingboth.wordpress.com/tag/interfaith-identity/>.

11. Khyati Joshi, *New Roots in America's Sacred Ground* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2006); Jacobson, *Roots, Too*; Halter, *Shopping for Identity*; Hecht, "Active Versus Passive Pluralism," 133–51.

12. For examples of how multiculturalism has been applied in educational settings, see James A. Banks, *An Introduction to Multicultural Education*, 5th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2013); and Sonia Nieto, *Finding Joy in Teaching Students of Diverse Backgrounds: Culturally Responsive and Socially Just Practices in U.S. Classrooms* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 2013).

13. Halter, *Shopping for Identity*, 11.

14. Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen People of Crown Heights*, 131.

15. Ibid.

16. Halter, *Shopping for Identity*.

17. Ibid., 189.

18. Wade Clark Roof, Bruce Greer, and Mary Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1994), 250.

19. Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 3d ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

20. Roof, Greer, and Johnson, *A Generation of Seekers*, 250.

21. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart*, 219–49.

22. In Goldschmidt's own work, he points out that if one sees Jewish food as a set of cultural markers, such that one is Jewish because one eats kugel just as one is Jamaican because one eats jerk chicken, simply exchanging food and recipes is a mode of creating cultural diversity and getting along. If, instead, one sees food not as Jewish but as kosher, which is to say adhering to a strict set of laws that must be followed because they were given by no less an authority than God, the entire playing field shifts. The food ways may or may not become more important, but they certainly cease to be simply ethnic markers. In his work, these different viewpoints on the function of food, cultural versus religious, is the point of miscommunication between the black community and the Lubavitch community. It is important to note that, while interfaith families in my work understand and, in fact, use the distinction that Goldschmidt depicts as existing within Crown Heights, both Jewish and Christian members of multicultural interfaith families adhere closely to the cultural model.

23. Gary Laderman, *Sacred Matters: Celebrity Worship, Sexual Ecstasies, the Living Dead and Other Signs of Religious Life in the United States* (New York: New Press, 2009), xlv.

24. Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006), 3.

25. Margaret Moorman, *Light the Lights! A Story about Celebrating Hanukkah and Christmas* (New York: Cartwheel, 1999).

26. This is particularly true of Effin Older's *My Two Grandmothers* (New York: Harcourt Children's Books, 2000).

27. Virginia Euwer Wolff, *The Mozart Season* (New York: Square Fish, 2007).

28. *Ibid.*, 247.

29. In this case, sources addressing Christian-Jewish heritage and interfaith family life diverge sharply from much of the literature on biracial identity. Scholarship on biracial identity argues that language of "halfness" essentializes race, negatively impacting biracial people by

excluding them from full participation in racial groups. Rather than seeing halfness as negative, many sources on interfaith families explicitly use the term to counter the idea of a belief-focused, in-or-out institutionally based definition of religion. While arguing that a child of interfaith marriage is in an inherently liminal position, these sources often also claim that, through that very status, the “half-Jew” gains a valuable skill set. Among my interview subjects, some embraced the term “half-Jewish,” as presented in the stories here. Others rejected the term, either on the grounds of Jewish law (which states that, if your mother is Jewish, you are Jewish, and, if your mother is not Jewish, neither are you, and which does not allow for partial Jewish identities) or on the grounds that naming someone “half-Jewish” erases the non-Jewish half of the identity, be it framed in religious terms (Catholic, Episcopalian, Mormon, Hindu, Jain) or ethnic terms (Irish, Italian, Lebanese, WASP). The particular sources above, however, claim “half-Jewish” as a term, and I, in respecting the categories deployed by my sources, have chosen to replicate the term in my own work.

30. Margaret gives God male pronouns.

31. Wolff, *The Mozart Season*, 29.

32. Daniel Klein and Freke Vuijst, *The Half-Jewish Book: A Celebration* (New York: Villard, 2000), x.

33. *Ibid.*, xv.

34. *Ibid.*, xvii.

35. *Ibid.*, xix.

36. *Ibid.*, 97.

37. Ron Gompertz, *Chrimukkah: Everything You Need to Know to Celebrate the Hybrid Holiday* (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 2006).

38. *Ibid.*, 10.

39. Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 22. While Lofton points out that not all consumption offers the promise of shaping who you are, some does. The implication is that consumer choice is presented as holding potential for spiritual growth and formation.

40. “Mixed Families Set to Celebrate ‘Chrimukkah?’” NPR.org, December 15, 2006, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=6630803>.

41. William Donohue and Joseph Potasnik, "Joint Statement on Chrismukkah: Catholic League and New York Board of Rabbis," December 6, 2004, <http://www.catholicleague.org/joint-statement-on-chrismukkah-catholic-league-and-new-york-board-of-rabbis/>.

42. Gompertz, *Chrismukkah*, 16.

43. Schmidt, *Consumer Rites*, 188.

44. Heinze, *Adapting to Abundance*, 79.

45. There are not many of these families (though there have been moments when the fear that interfaith families would become Unitarian Universalists prompted the Reform movement of American Judaism to increase its outreach attempts.)

46. Jodi Eichler-Levine, *Suffer the Little Children: Uses of the Past in Jewish and African American Children's Literature* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 5–16.

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**ABSTRACT** Chrismukkah and its increased public presence marked a shift in the public discourse around Christian–Jewish interfaith families in the United States in the years surrounding the turn of the millennium. In children's literature, greeting cards, humor books, on television and in blogs, interfaith families who practiced elements of both Christianity and Judaism constructed a multicultural identity by the strategic reframing of practices from both backgrounds. Rather than understanding this identity as based in a failure to choose one religious practice over another, multicultural interfaith families argued that their blended practices both reflected an unavoidable reality and offered distinct advantages and moral formation to their families. "Religion," as used by these multicultural families, becomes the domain of religious institutions, with membership lists and competing truth claims. "Culture," their preferred term, denotes practices that are equivalent and can exist simultaneously in the lives of families and individuals. The article argues that interfaith families who practice both traditions use language of multiculturalism to create a space for such choices to be framed as morally cohesive. This multicultural framing then re-casts these practices, re-inscribing them with values of tolerance and minimization of difference rather than the theological and historical content ascribed by many of the religious institutions that these families avoid.

*Keywords:* Chrismukkah, interfaith families, Jewish, multicultural, practices