



CONCEALED REVEALED

“Minority Status”

Back in New York, I look like a Jew, which is to say, I look like everyone else. Here, tucked below the Sangre de Cristos mountain range, in the remnants of a Colorado mining town where German names are never Jewish, I forget that my hair and eyes and stature fail to announce “Jew” to the world, as they do elsewhere. Every December, my neighbors greet me with “Merry Christmas,” though I’ve handed out *Khanike gelt* each year for a decade. My biracial son, named for an Old Testament prophet, is assumed a priori to be Christian and adopted, for in this hamlet thrives a tradition of evangelicals fostering African-American children, usually the offspring of the incarcerated. (Prisons dot the landscape in all directions.) Sometimes I am asked, “So, what country is your son from?”

I want to say, “The country of my womb,” but instead, I smile. “He’s not adopted; Elijah’s my natural child.”

Ten years into our rural lives, most people already know this, but even in sixth grade, some of my son’s classmates still assumed I “got” him from somewhere. His looks are indeed exotic, manifesting his father’s Caribbean, West African and Cambodian roots while also resembling my forebears — German, Russian,

“[A] minority is constantly compelled to think; that is the blessing of their fate.” —Leo Baeck, 1936

English, Polish, and Jewish as far back as we go.

What is Jewish sensibility in a town with maybe a dozen of us among three thousand Christians, many of them fundamentalists? They don’t know from Jews! My looks, my name, my nose, they signal nothing to the majority. The invisibility of my Jewishness never ceases to surprise me.

Elijah complains that his classmates are too optimistic, too smiley-hopeful about everything in the world. “Babe,” I say ruefully, “you’re Jewish.”


Nodding together, we agree. “And they’re not.”

Anne Dawid
Westcliffe, Colorado



What does it mean to be the child of communists? It means attending my kid’s Little League games and always thinking, *Wow, this is what America is really like*. It means stepping into a bar or barbershop and feeling like *they* know I’m an alien. It means sometimes wondering how rich I might be if I hadn’t been raised thinking that business and the stock market are where moral midgets dwell.

It means feeling grateful to Black people for making me proud of American culture. It means wondering, to this day, what it would be like if half-time at the Super Bowl brought creative advertising to television from all of the departments, commissions, and committees of a socialist government, what their messages might

 **Next Topic and Deadline
for “Concealed/Revealed”**
“Minority Status”. December 10th
Submit to: lawrencebush@earthlink.net

be, and what the people in that bar or barbershop would think of them.

It means being shocked, utterly shocked by the fact that Julius Rosenberg *was* an atomic spy. It means wishing that Stalin, and Mao, and the Khmer Rouge, and the Stasi, and all the other dictators of the proletariat had never made it out of the proletariat. *Then*, maybe, I could talk about how idealistic, and dedicated, and open-minded, and optimistic my parents were.

Dana Cantor

Asheville, North Carolina



Jewish, socialist,
atheist, vegetarian
“big” minority

so aromatic
just a bit of herbs or spice
makes all the difference

Dan Brook

San Francisco, California



He: “I’m getting really tired of these movies that show all men to be violent, insensitive jerks, emotionally weak, unable to communicate with women or with each other, and all the rest.”

She: “I’m really tired of not being able to take long walks through the countryside alone.”

Helene Selkowitz

Ithaca, New York



Some years ago, at a family therapy conference focused on gender, race, and sexual orientation, a sharp conflict broke out between a disfigured woman and an African-American woman as to who was the greater victim of prejudice and discrimination in our society. Although I was a member of the faculty of the sponsoring institute, I had already had conflicts of my own regarding the issue of whether as a Hebrew, as I defined myself, I “had the privilege of a white skin,” which was how the majority of my fellow faculty would put it, or whether I could claim minority status.

My colleagues included African-Americans and other persons of color of primarily middle-and upper-middle class backgrounds. One was an Asian Indian-American who had been expelled from Uganda as a colonial.

The director was what is called “lace curtain Irish,” her father a member of the LaGuardia administration. My father, by contrast, spent his life in a state hospital after strokes, just before and after I was born, which left him hemiplegic and demented; I visited him, my bipolar mother and my disordered sister in the various mental hospitals where they received treatment throughout my childhood, adolescence and young adulthood. I grew up on “welfare” in the Bronx; the only one amongst my crowd with that situation. You might be able to imagine the conflict that came up regarding who, on that faculty, was entitled to “minority status.” It didn’t get resolved, and I left the institute.

Now I’m just back from Israel. My taxi driver was an Arab and, as usual, we were stopped at the airport entrance, ordered to a side spot and out of the taxi by a soldier carrying a machine gun, interrogated, and had our luggage inspected. Although our driver had the proper papers, we were put through this because, as he murmured to me, he is “Arabic.” There you go! As I often say: “there’s always room at the bottom.” Talk about “minority status.”

Meyer Rothberg

Saugerties, New York



Minority status: being a secular Jew in synagogue for the *bat mitsve* of the daughter of a friend and wondering why anyone in her right mind, let alone well-educated and well-to-do American Jews, would want to spend hours on a beautiful late Spring day singing songs in Hebrew that praise a God who hardly any of them really believe exists. Scolding myself for being so judgmental and narrow-minded. Scolding my parents for not giving me some training in this stuff, though honestly, I would’ve kicked and screamed my way through all of it and I’d much rather have had the modern dance training they gave me than know how to dance around all of this Jewish ambivalence. Wondering how long it’ll be, at least, before my dear friend and her beautiful daughter take their place up there so I have something fun to watch, at least. And wishing, in the meantime, that I at least had a copy of JEWISH CURRENTS to read instead of these pages and pages of God, God, God.

Jacqueline Gross

New York, New York



In the summer of 1970, I went to Provincetown, Mass.

to visit a high school buddy who was working there as a letter carrier after dropping out of college. Still pretty naive about homosexuality, I nevertheless noticed that there seemed to be a large contingent of gay men in this summer resort. One afternoon on the main street of P'town, I ran into a fellow student from college in Worcester. We decided to hang out over a snack at a sidewalk cafe. Finding a seat wasn't easy, but we were allowed to share a table with a bunch of strangers. We thanked them but didn't mingle, engaging in our own conversation. Apparently the man just to my left had been listening, because all of a sudden we heard, "Oh, wow, you guys are straight? What a drag!"

Bob Jacobson
Baltimore, Maryland



Senryu on "Minority Status"

Social Work program . . .
male applicants claiming
they're minorities

Voc Tech program . . .
Jewish applicants claiming
they're minorities

the old Southerner
noting why he hates the term
person of color

white Princeton prof
insisting Clarence Thomas
is not black enough

white Berkeley prof
claiming Barack Obama
is not black enough

Robert Deluty
Ellicott City, Maryland



My seventh grade English teacher, Mrs. Wehye, stood in front of the class and blithely instructed us, "Write a paper, 'What Christmas Means to Me.'"

The first word that came to mind was "nothing." But that wasn't true. Christmas meant that I didn't matter. It was something everyone except me got to have. I hated Christmas.

It felt a knife going through my heart. I tried, but

couldn't stop the tears. I wanted to fall into a hole and disappear. Mrs. Wehye offhandedly said, "Oh, you can write about Hanukah."

I hated Hanukah too. It was a consolation prize for second-rate person.

Sniffing, I picked up my pencil. I don't remember what I wrote, but it was not what I really wanted to say: *You idiot! Don't you know...? About my mother, whose constant complaints about the incessantly blaring Christmas songs are worse than the music itself? About how it feels to not belong? About the toddler next door throwing stones and yelling "dirty Jew"? About being the one student in class noticed for her absence on the High Holidays? About my parents whispering the real names of former Jews who now go to church?*

Of course Mrs. Wehye didn't know. It was 1955, a year after *Brown v. Board of Education*, but teacher training in cultural sensitivity was non-existent.

For years I thought the Mrs. Weyhes of the world were anti-Semitic. I wanted them barred from classrooms. Now I understand that my Mrs. Weyhe was young, ignorant. Still, I can't forget her words and manner, my humiliation and helplessness. There was no pride or joy in being Jewish, only shame. I wish I'd been able to speak up, to ask, "How dare you?"

Perri Ardman
Kingston, New York