

# MIT'S OPENNESS TO JEWISH ECONOMISTS

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## **Abstract**

MIT emerged from “nowhere” in the 1930s to its place as one of the three or four most important sites for economic research by the mid-1950s. A conference held at Duke University in April 2013 examined how this occurred. In this paper the author argues that the immediate postwar period saw a collapse – in some places slower, in some places faster – of the barriers to the hiring of Jewish faculty in American colleges and universities. And more than any other elite private or public university, particularly Ivy League universities, MIT welcomed Jewish economists.

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## MIT's Openness to Jewish Economists

E. Roy Weintraub<sup>1</sup>

MIT emerged from “nowhere” in the 1930s to its place as one of the three or four most important sites for economic research by the mid-1950s. Other papers in this volume provide a variety of narratives of how this occurred. Here I point out that the immediate postwar period saw a collapse – in some places slower, in some places faster – of the barriers to the hiring of Jewish faculty in American colleges and universities. And more than any other elite private or public university, particularly Ivy League universities, MIT welcomed Jewish economists.<sup>2</sup>

### Another Narrative

Through 2012, 29 of the first 68 Nobel Laureates in economics (43%) were Jewish, as were 63% of the John Bates Clark Medal winners. One might suppose that historians of economics had interrogated this startling fact. Feminist historians of economics have long written about the underrepresentation of women economists.

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<sup>1</sup> Earlier versions of this paper were presented in 2012 at Berlin's Humboldt University and Duke University, and in 2013 at HES/AEA in San Diego. In addition to the HOPE 2013 conferees, particularly Roger Backhouse, the author received very helpful comments from Lorraine Daston, Paul Davidson, Till D ppe, David Hollinger, Evelyn Forget, Tiago Mata, Robert and Bobbie Solow, and Glen Weyl.

<sup>2</sup> There is no substantial article or monograph length discussion of anti-Semitism and the economics profession. For the most part this necessitates reliance not only on secondary sources beyond those familiar to historians of economics, but also sketchy primary sources. A more detailed study than this one would examine a number of different US economics faculties and their histories, and the histories of their institutions with respect to the anti-Semitism issue. Thus the present discussion, although it will in passing contrast the MIT experience with that of other economics departments, is by no means systematic in scope.

Afro-American historians of economics have written freely and effectively about the underrepresentation of Afro-American economists. One might reasonably expect, by symmetry, that historians would be as interested in the *overrepresentation* of a particular identifiable group. This however has not occurred.

The difficulty is real and reflects a strange sensibility. The first economist to write about these matters was Thorstein Veblen (1919) in a paper called “The Intellectual Pre-Eminence Jews in Modern Europe” in the *Political Science Quarterly*. Veblen sought to explain what he regarded as the overrepresentation of “the chosen people” in the sciences and in fields of scholarship and intellectual inquiry. His own argument was that habits of scholarship and learning within the community set the stage for young Jews, breaking free of the ties of their established Diaspora communities, and living among the gentiles, to bring a skeptical and inquiring mindset to the intellectual problems on which they worked, and that mindset was particularly suited to the kinds of scientific explanations that the modern age seemed to need.

Since Veblen, 20<sup>th</sup> century discussion of the place of Jews in the learned professions has proceeded without any contributions from historians of economics. In contrast, intellectual historians, like the preeminent David Hollinger, have examined questions about the role of Jews, and anti-Semitism, in the academic community in the United States. Hollinger’s discussions about the anti-Semitism in the pre-World War II period and the secularization of the universities from the war onward, which permitted the rapid influx of Jewish scholars after World War II, are well known. Intellectual historians, and historians of the university, have seen fit to raise these questions and to seek both data and insight. Social scientists, writing in primarily Jewish publications, have written about the role of Jews in the American universities. The works by Seymour Lipset (1971) and Lewis Feuer (1982) are typical. These studies are apparently unknown to historians of economics. Historians of physics like Daniel Kevles (1995 [1971]) have for many years written about the place of Jews in their own histories of scientific communities.

If one examines the work of economists and historians of economics, I am aware of exactly one article written by a sometime historian of economics, Mark Perlman, that addresses this subject, and that article appeared not in an economics journal or a history of economics journal but in the journal *Judaism*. Titled “Jews and Contributions to Economics: A Bicentennial Review”, Perlman’s (1996) article was surely a study both from the personal and the historical dimension as his father, Wisconsin’s Selig Perlman, was an extremely important figure in the history of the American economics profession. Perlman takes up a number of issues including the anti-Semitism that characterized the American economics community through World War II. He has tales of this kind of prejudice as representing the exclusionary nature of the economics profession. Often he recounts anecdotes told by the subjects of the exclusion themselves.

Roger Backhouse, in this volume, deconstructs the famous story of how Paul Samuelson, a newly appointed Harvard Instructor with a Assistant Professor offer from MIT, was not encouraged about his chances to secure a similar position at Harvard in the next year or two (Backhouse 2014). Harvard’s departing Chairman Burbank’s dislike

of Jews was well known – he also disliked mathematical economics and Keynesian economics<sup>3</sup>, a Samuelson trifecta.

Or consider a personal story. My father Sidney Weintraub, who had been teaching at St. Johns University (then) in Brooklyn, was recruited in late 1949 both by Indiana University and the University of Pennsylvania. At that time Penn had half of one Jew, Simon Kuznets, on its tenured economics faculty (his appointment was shared with statistics). As my father was given the permanent appointment at Pennsylvania in Fall 1951 after one year as a visiting professor, Kuznets was already negotiating with The Johns Hopkins University to join its faculty. It was in this period that Irving Kravis, a student of Kuznets', was considered for a tenured appointment to the economics department *anticipating Kuznets' departure*.<sup>4</sup> The department had gone from one half to one and a half tenured Jews with my father, but adding another was seen as moving too quickly by some, even though Kravis' appointment was finally approved<sup>5</sup>.

This episode appears, like many other episodes, as a curiosity when it surfaces in one or another account. But there has been no systematic collection of such accounts, no systematic examination of the exclusionary habits of the economics profession through the end of the interwar period. The mathematics community has not been shy in welcoming historians of mathematics who explore these topics (Reingold 1988). Why have historians of economics walked away from such matters? One would have expected this to be well known and taught in almost all histories of economics and lectures in history of economics courses. It of course has not been so treated.

### **Anti-Semitism and the Universities in the 1930s**

Before the Second World War, Jews were hardly to be found on the faculties of American colleges and universities. In a comprehensive study of Jewish academics in the United States, which appeared in 1971 in *The American Jewish Yearbook*, Seymour Martin Lipset and Everett Carl Ladd, Jr. wrote:

Overt anti-Jewish prejudice within academia seemingly was at a high point in the 1920s and 1930s, when large numbers of the children of immigrants began to enter college. This pressure led many schools to impose quotas on the admission of Jews to both undergraduate and professional schools. A. Lawrence Lowell, as president of Harvard, and Nicholas Murray Butler, then president of Columbia, openly defended Jewish quotas. And as late as 1945 Ernest M.

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<sup>3</sup> Robert Solow pointed out that this meant that Samuelson's, and his, future at Harvard was dim. (Personal communication, October 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Kuznets as is well known left Johns Hopkins for Harvard very quickly because The Johns Hopkins president, a notorious anti-Semite, did not want Kuznets on his faculty.

<sup>5</sup> There were a few Jewish faculty members in other departments of the Wharton School at that time, one of whom was Joseph Rose of the Transportation Department.

Hopkins, then president of Dartmouth, justified the use of a [Jewish] quota at his institution on the grounds that 'Dartmouth is a Christian college founded for the Christianization of its students.' (Lipset and Ladd, 90-91)

Quotas for Jewish students emerged in the 1920s as applications of Jews to Ivy League schools exploded. Immigrant children competed for access to the elite schools. The College Board examination, and high school transcript, had been the tools by which applications were accepted or rejected. Thus the schools changed the rules. As is well known (Karabel 2005), Harvard, Yale, and Princeton began using "a good character" and "leadership ability" as admissions requirements. How to assess these attributes? Interview the student applicants and determine just how Jewish they looked and sounded. German Jews good, Sephardim good, Ashkenazi not so good. Nothing needed to be written down in explanation of the rejection to the applicant, although as Karabel found the admissions records from that period revealed exactly what was happening.

These restrictions carried over even more intensely to faculty appointments. Ludwig Lewisohn reported in his *Memoirs* how he was prevented from teaching English; Edward Sapir was told by his graduate-school professors that as a Jew he could not expect an appointment and would have to go to Canada. Lionel Trilling recalled in an article in *Commentary* that he was the first to be appointed to the English Department in Columbia; the Harvard Law School did not appoint another Jew after Felix Frankfurter until 1939... The City College of New York became one of the first schools to open its doors to Jews, but even CCNY was charged with discrimination at the beginning of the 1930s." (Lipset and Ladd, 90-91).

Even accounting for the historical connection of many colleges and universities, particularly the elite schools, to religious denominations, the low number of Jewish faculty is startling. In his article on the social history of Jewish academics in the U.S., Lewis S. Feuer (1982, 455) pointed out that "by the mid-twenties there were still probably less than 100 Jews among the college and university professors in the liberal arts and science faculties in the United States." He went on to quote from an article that had appeared in a Yale undergraduate publication:

With very few exceptions, the Jewish university professor in America is non-existent. Of course, every major American university will point out that it has one or two Jewish professors. For instance, Yale, Princeton, Chicago University, the University of Wisconsin, Johns Hopkins, Michigan University, and the Universities of Texas and Georgia each have one: Harvard has 3; Berkeley 2;

Columbia 2; St. Louis, 5; New York University, none; College of the City of New York, 4 and so forth' (S. M. Melamed Volume 1, number 6 *The Reflex* December 1927, page 3).

Feuer's article is a long and detailed examination of interwar anti-Semitism. He argued (455-456) that even in New York City, home to the largest concentration of Jews in the U.S.:

As late as April, 1930, the institution which had the largest Jewish student body in the world had not a single Jewish professor. That institution was not the City College of New York which had in monumental sentimentality been called the internal "proletarian Harvard." Rather it was the downtown Washington Square College of New York University, where 93% of the seven thousand students were Jews, 8% more than the City College. If all the departments were included in the enumeration, there were estimated to be more than fifteen thousand Jews at the downtown N.Y.U. – the world's largest undergraduate body of Jews. Yet in the entire college, the writer for the *Menorah Journal* could find only 8 Jewish teachers of whom 7 were assistants not destined for promotion. The one exception owed his job to his chairman who with remarkable tactical skill had managed to prevent a meeting between the instructor and the chancellor.

Hiring economics faculty required vigilance about "Jewishness". Chicago was not immune to such practices. In a letter (February 8, 1927: University of Chicago Economics Department Archive, Box 38, Folder 1) from Harvard's Allyn Young to Chicago's Chairman, L. G. Marshall, he recommended a man who had been first in his Harvard class, who was "tops in erudition and cleverness", and who wrote a brilliant Ph.D thesis. He was said to be "loyal and a good and well-liked teacher of undergraduates". But "Now you will ask, what's wrong? His name is A. W. Marget and he is one of the chosen people. More than that he looks it ... You might do worse than take him on a year's trial." Marget went to Minnesota.

For the most important economics faculty in New York, matters were no different. Eli Ginzberg recalled that in the mid-1920s, the Columbia Economics Department "decided to add a theorist and the choice narrowed down to Jacob Viner or John M. Clark, both at the time of the University of Chicago. [Though Clark was hired it was claimed on his merits]... one [cannot] discount the University's ambivalence about Jews (Viner was a Jew)" (Ginsberg 1990, 15). Yet after around 1930, Columbia began to change, if only slowly at the beginning of that decade. The economics department hired Joseph Dorfman in 1931. It replaced R. A. Seligman in 1930 with Leo Wolman, who was an official with the Amalgamated Clothing Workers' Union and the NBER. It also had graduate students in the late 1930s like Moses Abramowitz and students of Hotelling like Milton Friedman and Kenneth Arrow. Columbia was not unique: "Jewish



professors on university campuses in all subjects were estimated in 1935 as under 500.” (Feuer, 462 from footnote 116 by Shapiro, 1967, 380) And then the European émigrés arrived.

## **Jewish Émigré Scholars**

Albert Einstein and John von Neumann were more pulled than pushed to the United States by huge salaries and no teaching offered them by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton in the early 1930s. In the period from Hitler’s accession to the German Chancellorship in 1933 and the first wave of restrictions on Jews, through the passage of the Nuremburg Laws in 1935 which deprived Jews of citizenship, and ending with the Kristallnacht Pogrom of November 1938, the stream of Jewish scholars seeking to emigrate increased continuously. Adding to the flow was the Anschluss in Austria in March of 1938 and the resulting elimination of Jews from public life and Viennese educational institutions.

The story of the effect of the émigrés on American science is well-known. The later role of physicists like Fermi, Ulam, Szilard, Teller et. al. on the Manhattan project made the refugee story vivid: “Between 1933 and 1941, more than a hundred of these [émigrés] joined the ranks of American physicists” (Weiner 1969, 190-191). Certainly the fact that physics was an international discipline, like mathematics, meant that the refugees were familiar with many American physicists before they arrived. Unlike economics, the natural and mathematical sciences were not shaped by national boundaries. One could more comfortably welcome those whose work was similar to one’s own. There was more acceptance in the 1930s of hiring émigré Jews in the science and technology fields than there was in the social sciences and humanities. The story of the émigré economists was first addressed in the Austrian case by Earlene Craver and Axel Leijonhufvud (1987) and Harold Hagemann and Claus-Dieter Krohn (1999) for German-speaking economist more generally, as well as by Fred Scherer (2000), although stories of particular individuals in biographies and memoirs (e.g. Modigliani, Menger, Morgenstern) comprise a distinct genre. Following the lead of England, where Robbins and Beveridge were actively seeking to bring refugee scholars to universities, in the U.S. such efforts were loosely coordinated. Of special importance in this rescue operation was the Rockefeller Foundation which had, in economics, been supporting a number of centers in Europe doing research on business cycles. Its close connection with these more “scientific” economists, bringing them to the U.S. on travelling fellowships for instance, provided the foundation’s officers with good intelligence on the deteriorating situation in Germany and Austria and other countries for especially Jewish scholars. It also accounts for the greater than usual mathematical training of many of the émigré economists (Marschak, Koopmans, Wald, Menger, Morgenstern, Tintner, Fellner, etc.).

Since some of the victims of the Nazi purges had worked under fellowships and grants from the Rockefeller Foundation, a certain moral pressure for action was inescapable. Joseph Schumpeter of Harvard made an appeal on behalf of Jacob Marschak, the ‘most brilliant’ scholar on his list of displaced economics professors, but he added that ‘all of them have on the one hand had strong claims to human sympathy

and would on the other be very useful acquisitions to any university.’ (Lamberti 2006, 162; letter from Schumpeter to Rockefeller Foundation dated April 19, 1933)

These efforts led, over the 1930s, to the movement of some Jewish scholars into irregular and short term positions in schools that had been closed to Jewish faculty for decades. For instance, at Harvard the astronomer Harlow Shapley (father of the game theorist Lloyd Shapley) worked tirelessly to gather names on petitions to the Harvard administration, and Corporation, to provide refugee scholars with some kind, any kind, of appointment to permit them to establish their scholarly careers in the United States, and thus after a few years to be able to gain regular academic positions at Harvard or elsewhere. By the fall of 1939, Harvard had appointed 16 émigré professors to permanent faculty positions and 7 in other regular faculty positions. Shapley was successful in convincing the administration to allow 14 jobless refugee scholars, who were in transit or close to the age of retirement, the use of the university’s facilities without faculty status. The Harvard Corporation agreed to their appointment as ‘research associates’ on the condition that their stipends would come from outside funds. Shapley raised the money through appeals to the wealthy Petschek and Warberg families and other Jews.” (Lamberti 2006, 174)

Thus over the 1930s, more and more Jewish refugees were assisted in relocating their scholarly activities to the U.S.

The test for the success of the programs of the Rockefeller Foundation and emergency committee was the progress made by their grantees in obtaining tenured professorships... Between 1933 and 1945, the [separate and separately run] Emergency Committee gave grants to 145 colleges and universities, which subsidized in part the faculty salaries of 277 exiled scholars, of whom 207 came from Germany and 31 from Austria. (Lamberti 2006, 177)

An unintended consequence of these assistance programs for Jewish scholars fleeing Nazi rule was the softening of objections to having American born Jews on the faculties of those U.S. colleges and universities that had been so clearly anti-Semitic up through WWII. As faculties were more open to Jews, Jewish undergraduates began to see that academic careers, closed to them earlier, were possible in the U.S.. Paul Samuelson, Robert Solow, Milton Friedman, Martin Bronfenbrenner, Arthur Bloomfield, Lawrence Klein, Sidney Weintraub, Kenneth Arrow, and others who had entered graduate school before 1945 had many more opportunities than did those of the preceding generation. In 1941 Alvin Johnson, President of the New School and Director of the Emergency Committee overoptimistically reported “that his ‘extensive communication by word and by letter with American scholars’ had convinced him that ‘academic anti-Semitism is decidedly on the decline.’ There was ‘hardly a single respectable university that has not welcomed to its faculty Jewish émigré scholars.’” (Lamberti 2006, 181)

A ‘fourth generation’ of Jewish scholarship and science in the United States, rising with the advent of the Second World War, grew to flourish during the years of

post-war crises. The conflict with the Soviet Union – political, ideological, and military – required the aid of scientists ranging from physics to political science and from mathematics to sociology and on a scale that the United States had never known; ‘experts’ in foreign languages and areas hitherto deemed too recondite for Americans, were summoned to conduct an ideological debate in several continents. The barriers against Jews in the university world were dismantled almost completely. (Feuer 1982, 464)

These changes were well-recognized both at the time, and later. Although the period appears to be one of continuous progress to a more open, less discriminatory, environment for faculty hiring, it certainly was not so in fact. Liberal arts college faculties did not rush to recruit Jews and Catholics. Discriminatory barriers to hiring women and Afro-Americans were to persist for many decades, and in some measure persist today. Even though Jews and Catholics saw more openness in the universities, their success was not to be any beacon of hope for women or Afro-Americans.

### **MIT’s Unique Openness to Jewish Economics Faculty**

Paul Samuelson, in an interview with MIT’s “Soundings” program, recalled how the economic program took shape after his arrival in 1940:

Ralph Freeman, Rhodes Scholar and Canadian World War I artillery officer in the British Army, had absolute powers then as Head. By courtesy he deferred to our professional votes on new appointments and one by one we added stars to our team: Robert Bishop, E. Cary Brown, Charles Kindleberger, Morris Adelman, Max Millikan, Walter Rostow, Paul Rosenstein-Rodan, Robert Solow, Evsey Domar, Franco Modigliani and other early tenured acquisitions, as if led by an Invisible Hand. Statistician Harold Freeman [who was Jewish] in the background guided our recruitment judgments.

If one takes into account the fact that Samuelson was not encouraged to remain at Harvard, his account of MIT’s hiring is startling. Adelman, Milliken, Rostow, Rosenstein-Rodan, Solow, Domar, and Modigliani were all, like him, Jewish. Freeman’s department was able to recruit so well, and so quickly, not only because of Samuelson’s growing renown (he was the first Clark Medalist, in 1947) but because the department and university were remarkably open to the hiring of Jewish faculty at a time when such hiring was just beginning to be possible at Ivy League universities.

With respect to other schools, as a comparison points to MIT, consider the University of Wisconsin. This progressive liberal bastion was, as noted above, the home institution of Selig Perlman. In Mark Perlman’s article there was a discussion of his father’s struggles as the only Jew in that department. He briefly alludes to the so called “Milton Friedman affair” in 1940-41. In Leonard Silk’s book, *The Economists* (1976) he writes “an ugly note of anti-Semitism crept into the controversy. Selig Perlman, a distinguished labor historian, was the only Jew on the Wisconsin faculty and

some members of the department felt that one was enough. Further, Friedman was “from New York” “from the East” “from Chicago” and was thus regarded as kind of an interloper...” (58-59)

Robert Lampman, who edited the book *Economists at Wisconsin*, reports with respect to this that Friedman wrote to him “on December 5, 1990, to share his reflections on his Wisconsin year... ‘I did not at the time regard anti-Semitism as the major factor involved in the affair and I do not now...however, a minor subtheme was indeed anti-Semitism....’” (120) In fact it was not until 1947 that Martin Bronfenbrenner and Eugene Rotwein were hired into the Economics Department. As two Jewish Ph.Ds from Chicago, they made Perlman less of an outlier.

In contrast to the University of Wisconsin, the University of Michigan appeared to have no similar issues appointing Jews. This was, in some respects, related to the fact that the chair of its department of Economics from 1927 to 1954 was Isaiah Leo Sharfman, who came to the United States in 1894 from the Ukraine and became a citizen with his father’s naturalization in 1903. He had gone to Boston Latin School and took an undergraduate degree and a law degree from Harvard. Arriving at the University of Michigan in 1912 he remained there until retirement. With such an obvious, and apparently well loved, Jewish presence at the University of Michigan’s department, there appeared to be no serious issues of recruiting Jewish faculty in the 1940s. With Harold Levinson and Wolfgang Stolper arriving in the late 1940s and Lawrence Klein arriving in 1950, the department bore no resemblance to Ivy League departments.

Lest this judgment appear overstated, consider Yale University. Eugene V. Rostow (1931, 45) wrote in an undergraduate publication there that

...the bold fact remains, in spite of all official disclaimers, that there’s not one Jew on the faculty of Yale college, and only a few, of great repute, scattered through the scientific graduate and professional schools. The younger men on the faculty recognize the situation, and confess themselves powerless. Apparently, nothing can be done, and even the most liberal dare not be sanguine. Yale College is closed to the Jewish teacher, the graduate school only recently and hesitantly opened.

An historian (Oren 2000, 128-129) recently noted that

The most insular of all the Yale faculties was that of Yale College proper. As of 1929, neither a Jew nor a known Catholic had ever achieved a full professorship in the college. Not until after the end of the Second World War would a Jew be granted tenure. Jewish students were occasionally warned by their professors not to waste their time in graduate school, since academic careers were not open to them.

As mentioned earlier, the University of Pennsylvania did not hire a Jew into a full time position in economics until 1950. Dartmouth hired its first Jewish economics professor, Daniel Marx, in 1941 and its second, Martin Segal, in 1958. As late as 1964 they remained the two Jews among the twenty-one economics teachers there<sup>6</sup>.

### **Why MIT Was Different**

Several papers in this volume have stressed the particular nature of the Institute in identifying the difference between the MIT economics department and say the Harvard and Yale economics departments. The fact that MIT was an institute of technology, training (in the 1940s) engineers, architects, and scientists exclusively, had real consequences. As some other papers in this volume pointed out, the mission and identity of the school shaped the instruction that was provided to students studying economics. Those papers did not though explore the nature of the differences between this kind of science and engineering faculty and faculties in liberal arts institutions. Engineers and scientists are socialized differently from philosophers, literary scholars, and historians. This difference has been the subject of endless discussion and, in the American context, was a central theme in *The Education of Henry Adams*. The role of humanities faculty in the elite American universities, the Ivy League (Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, Cornell, Columbian, and Pennsylvania), the Little Ivies (Williams, Wesleyan, and Amherst) and the Seven Sisters (Radcliffe, Mount Holyoke, Vassar, Smith, Pembroke, Barnard, and Wellesley) was to educate the children of the American upper and upper middle (professional) class. They were implicitly charged to educate the elite for leadership, not the masses for employment. Teaching their students the best works of the “Western Tradition”, familiarizing them with a traditional education to uphold their unique place in American life, required (they believed) that they represent those traditions themselves. The schools “knew” that there was no possibility that an immigrant Jew whose parents had fled the Pale of Settlement could have an ear for the poetry of Emily Dickinson, a thrill in the novels of James Fenimore Cooper, or a pride in the biographies of Washington and Jefferson. What did the Ashkenazy know of Teddy Roosevelt’s Rough Riders? Calling attention to such matters in public, as C.P. Snow did in England in his Rede Lectures, almost always agitates “humanists”. Nevertheless, the universalist notions that pervade the sciences, the idea that there is one physics community, one mathematics community, one electrical engineering community, etc. does not transfer to the field of history: the presuppositions that shape the intellectual life of a historian in Japan are not those that shape the intellectual boundaries of the civil war historian in the United States, even as cohomology theorists in Japan and in the United States are similarly trained and socialized.

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<sup>6</sup> I thank Tom Velk who provided the documentation for this statement about 1964, his first year on the Dartmouth economics faculty:

<http://www.e->

[yearbook.com/yearbooks/Dartmouth\\_College\\_Aegis\\_Yearbook/1965/Page\\_371.html](http://www.e-yearbook.com/yearbooks/Dartmouth_College_Aegis_Yearbook/1965/Page_371.html)

It was long recognized that the occasional presence of Jewish faculty in a university's professional schools did not bear on their absence in that same university's liberal arts college. Yale had Jewish faculty in its medical school while it did not in its college of liberal arts before the late 1940s. This was true for most other Ivy League institutions as well. Great professional schools (and many science departments) were not in the business of passing on the dominant culture of American elites to the students they trained. When Columbia worried whether Lionel Trilling could possibly teach Shakespeare given that Shakespeare was not part of his cultural heritage, no such issue was raised in the appointment of Isidor Isaac Rabi to the Columbia physics department. Replicating the elites, the implicit mission of the humanities faculties of the Ivy League colleges like Harvard, Yale, Princeton, and Dartmouth, was not the mission of the Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth Schools of Medicine. The Johns Hopkins president might rail against having Simon Kuznets on his economics faculty, but he was not about to purge Jews from his own School of Medicine. At MIT, where the science and engineering faculty defined the institution, and shaped the instructional mission of the Economics Department, the issue of Jewish faculty and their lack of "culture" could not arise because there was in fact no college of arts and sciences.

Explaining MIT's rise to prominence in economics is thus a matter of balancing a number of factors, some internal to the evolving intellectual norms of the community of economists, some connected to the evolving nature of MIT as a university, and some connected to the larger institutions and concerns of postwar America. People matter too. Any account of MIT's growing importance in the 1940s that fails to discuss the brilliance and energy of Paul Samuelson and Robert Solow would be an impoverished one indeed. But if to write history is to engage with the local and contingent contexts of the subject examined, any history of MIT's emergence among economics departments that left out any mention of its unique openness to hiring Jewish faculty in the first postwar decade would be likewise impoverished.

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