Literacy Among the Jews of Russia in 1897: A Reanalysis of Census Data

by

Joel Perlmann*

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*Senior Scholar, The Jerome Levy Economics Institute

One part of this paper is methodological, or bibliographical in nature; I argue that a body of evidence that scholars have dismissed for a century as useless may in fact be very valuable. The evidence to which I refer is data on Jewish literacy found in the 1897 Census of the Russian Empire. A second part of this paper is substantive in nature; in it I offer an interpretation of a crucial social pattern observed in the literacy data.[1]

The 1897 Census of the Russian Empire was the only modern enumeration undertaken by the Empire, and no comparable effort followed for thirty years -- a full generation during a time of dramatic change. The reports of the Russian Census have been an important source, and often the most important source, for studying the socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of the Russian Jewish population at the end of the nineteenth century. Successive generations of scholars have relied on the Census since that time.[2]

Among the characteristics about which the Russian Census tables report in depth is literacy. And indeed the reports on literacy in the Russian language were studied carefully when they first appeared. However, the Census also reported on literacy in languages other than Russian, literacy that among Jews was typically Yiddish. As such, the Census provides a survey of Russian Jewish literacy that is unique -- indeed a survey that is unique for the study of Jewish literacy anywhere. The Census covers a time in which the great majority of Jewish adults had acquired their literacy through traditional Jewish institutions, rather than through more modernized school systems. The most notable of these institutions was the heder (the Jewish

primary school for boys). The Census data offer the most extensive, detailed and systematic look we will ever have of the results of these traditional processes of instruction. Census publications include tables covering Jewish literacy by age and sex for rural and urban areas -- not just for each province but for several hundred small administrative areas ('uezds') in the Pale of Settlement (the area in which nearly all Russian Jews lived); and equally detailed tables were published for each of some 130 cities and towns of the Pale.[3]

Yet the evidence on Jewish literacy in the Russian Census was routinely dismissed when it appeared -- except the evidence on Jewish literacy in the Russian language. Among those who dismissed the material were the major authorities on Jewish demographic patterns at the time -- for example Arthur Ruppin, Jacob Lestchinsky, B. D. Brutskus, and the author of the article on "literacy" in the Jewish Encyclopedia published in St. Petersburg.[4] Brutskus's judgement, even in this impressive company, is especially noteworthy, since he wrote the most detailed and comprehensive studies of Jewish social patterns reflected in the 1897 Russian Census. Brutskus argued:

> "The non-Jewish enumerators were unable to evaluate reports of literacy in Yiddish. And we must suppose that the great mass of the Jewish population considered their own Jewish literacy something quite commonplace, self-evident and something of no interest to the enumerators who acted on behalf of the State. This is the only way we can explain that according to the Census only 38.9% of the Jewish population (by religion) were enumerated as literate; even among males the literate Jews only reached 49.4%. Considering that almost all Jewish boys went through the heder, the census data about general literacy [i.e.: literacy

in any language] among Jews is utterly unreliable, and therefore not worth elaboration.[5]

The arguments of the other observers were the same. Nor has any alternative view surfaced since their time.[6]

It is this judgement that I want to reconsider. It is worth noting in passing at this point that the judgement was not based on extensive marshalling of evidence; rather, like Brutskus, the other observers devoted only a few sentences to the matter. A brief argument, of course, does not invalidate a conclusion; still, the brevity of these treatments encouraged me to probe further.

One must begin by appreciating how the Census classified literacy data (see Table 1). The census tells us first whether or not an individual could read the Russian language. If an individual could read Russian, no further literacy information was reported; but if an individual was illiterate in Russian, the census also tells us whether an individual could read any other language. The Census does not tell us the name of the "other" language. However, in the case of the Jews, the "other" language was typically Yiddish and the Hebrew alphabet. And finally, the great majority of Jews who could read Russian could probably also read Yiddish. In other words, we can safely assume that the sum of the rate for Russian literacy and the rate for "other" literacy together give us a very close proxy for Yiddish literacy.

This assumption that the sum of Russian literacy and other literacy closely approximates Yiddish literacy is supported by two considerations. First, in the relevant Census tables, Jews were defined as those whose mother tongue was Yiddish; and we know from other census tables that 97% of those who gave their religion as Jewish also gave their mother tongue as Yiddish. So in essence, when we assume that Jews who could read Russian could also read Yiddish, we

are assuming that Jews would be literate in their mother tongue if they were literate in Russian.[7]

Second we have evidence in other turn-of-the-century sources tending to confirm the assumption that the great majority of those Jews who could read Russian could also read Yiddish. One example of such evidence in Table 2, showing the tiny proportions that were literate only in Russian.[8]

In any case, for present purposes, we need not even accept the hypothesis that Jews literate in Russian were literate in Yiddish. It is enough to accept a weaker (and indeed tautological) hypothesis: that the general literacy rate (which captures literacy in all languages) can serve as an upper bound for the Yiddish literacy rate. This self-evident point is enough for present purposes, because the issue before us is whether Yiddish literacy was grossly underreported; Brutskus and the other observers concluded that Yiddish literacy must have been grossly underreported because rates for the general literacy of Jews (which includes their Yiddish literacy) seemed absurdly low. Thus if the general literacy rates reported for Jews are really too low, we too can assume that the reason is that Yiddish literacy went underreported. However, if general literacy rates for Jews are not too low, the basis for believing that Yiddish literacy rates were too low disappears.

The key Russian Census literacy figures on Jews are summarized in Table 1. The first three columns the table presents the Russian, other, and general literacy rates for Jews in the Empire as a whole. The fourth column presents the general literacy figures for the Empire excluding Poland. For some reason (which we need not resolve for this study), the Census reported notably lower Jewish literacy in Poland, so it is useful to note the figures for the rest of the Empire separately.[9]

Now two points should be appreciated in connection with these literacy rates before proceeding. The first point is that the crucial expectation -- apparently contradicted by the Russian Census data -- is the expectation regarding near universal male literacy. As Brutskus stressed, it is the near-universal enrollment of Jewish boys in the heder that drives our skepticism concerning such high levels of Jewish male illiteracy. We have no such expectation with regard to women's literacy, because relatively few girls attended the heder (or other schools). Of course, we know that many women learned to read without benefit of schooling; however, we cannot claim to know just how many. Consequently, in all of what follows I will be focussing on the evidence about male literacy. I do so not because the evidence on female literacy is uninteresting; it is very interesting. However, it is the evidence on male literacy which is crucial to an assessment of whether Yiddish literacy was underreported in the census.

The second point to note concerns the evidence Brutskus cites in his brief comment dismissing the value of the Russian Census reports of general literacy rates for Jews (cited earlier): "Even among males [he noted] the literate Jews only reached 49.4%." That statement is accurate as far as it goes, but to appreciate its meaning, we must add that the 49.4% figure includes everyone, including infants. However, literacy rates that include young children are not terribly meaningful: the census did not even ask the literacy question of children under five years of age, and nontrivial numbers in fact acquired literacy past the age of ten.[10] Moreover, restricting the analysis to older individuals has a staggering impact on the rates because no less than 28% of Russian Jews were under the age of ten, and another 24% were between 10 and 19 years of age. If we focus on the adult literacy rates for Jewish males -- the rates for the cohorts over the age of twenty -- we find that roughly two-thirds of the males could read, and if Jews in

Poland are excluded, as many as three fourths of the other Jewish adult males could read. It is far from obvious that this higher figure reflects the drastic underreporting of Yiddish literacy that Brutskus suggested on the basis of a 49% literacy rate. We can now ask whether or not these adult literacy rates do indeed reflect drastic underreporting.

In order to resolve the issue, we need other evidence of Russian Jewish literacy to which we can compare the Census figures. Some observers at the turn of the century cited the Annual Reports of the United States Commissioner of Immigration for such evidence (the material these observers had in mind may be seen in Table 3).[11] These reports tell us how many of the Jewish immigrants coming to the United States were literate. And of course a sizeable majority of these Jewish immigrants had come from Russia. However, in the final analysis, any effort to test the quality of the Russian Census data with American Immigration data is inconclusive. The most important reason the effort is inconclusive is that the process of immigration involves self-selection: those that left Russia differed from those who remained behind. Consequently, we cannot know whether observed differences between immigrant Jewish literacy and Russian Jewish literacy are due to underreporting in the Russian census or whether the differences are due to selectivity in the immigration process. In order to meaningfully compare the Russian Census to the U. S. Immigration figures we must focus on younger adult males in Russia (since most immigrants were under 40). If the comparison is made in this way, the problem with the comparison quickly becomes clear. The literacy rate found in the American immigration figures is indeed higher than the rate found in the Russian Census; but it is not drastically higher. The American figure differs from the Russian figure by roughly 10 percentage points, depending on just how the comparison is constructed. All or part of a difference in this range could well be

due to selectivity inherent in the migration process.[12]

Accordingly, I suggest a new approach to the problem of the 1897 literacy data, an approach that was not available to turn-of-the century scholars. We can compare the 1897 Census data to evidence on Russian Jewish literacy in a later census. Specifically, we can compare the literacy rate reported for particular birth cohorts in the 1897 Census to the literacy rate reported for the same birth cohorts in the Soviet Census of 1926. Some twentieth-century censuses in Eastern Europe have been criticized for the same reason that the 1897 Census was criticized: that they were insensitive to Yiddish literacy and hence underreported Jewish literacy. However, Shaul Stampfer, who has made that argument, and whose work guided me to these other censuses, exempts the Soviet Censuses from this condemnation. In the Soviet Censuses, he says, "Yiddish was considered as a recognized national language." And the Soviet Census of 1926 presented wonderfully detailed literacy data on the Jews. Despite the three-decade interval between the two enumerations, some meaningful comparisons are possible.[13]

The question on literacy asked in both 1897 and 1926 was, fortunately, remarkably similar. In each case, the tabulations refer only to the ability to read. The definition of a Jew in the 1926 tables was somewhat more inclusive than in 1897. In 1897, as explained earlier, Jews were defined in terms of Yiddish mother tongue; in 1926, anyone of Jewish national origin was included in the relevant tables. However, the effect that the difference in definitions had upon the literacy rates is small (as will be shown shortly).[14]

It was also important to construct the comparisons in such a way that they cover the same areas. The relevant considerations are explained in the Note 1 to Table 4; the most important of these considerations is that the lands of the Soviet Union of 1926 were less extensive than those

of the Russian Empire of 1897, and the lands lost by the Union included large numbers of Jews.

In Table 4, each row pertains to one birth cohort, showing the age of the cohort at the time of the 1897 Census and at the time of the 1926 Census; for example the men 20-29 in 1897 were 50-59 in 1926. Then the table presents the literacy rates for Jewish males of that birth cohort found in the 1897 Census and in the 1926 Census; for example, for the cohort just discussed (20-29 in 1897), the 1897 Census reported a literacy rate of 76% and the 1926 Census reported a literacy rate of 85%.

Now obviously not all cohorts found in the two censuses can be compared in this way: the youngest adults of 1926 had not even been born in 1897, and the oldest adults of 1897 had surely died by 1926. The cohorts that could not be meaningfully compared are indicated by the initials na (not applicable). Even in the cohorts for which I have offered comparisons, the size of the cohort was of course much smaller by 1926 then it had been in 1897; indeed, among those who had been 50-59 years of age in 1897, only a very small proportion of the cohort had survived to 1926, reducing the confidence we can have in that comparison (Note 2 to Table 4 presents the number of individuals on which the figures are based).

On the other hand, there also is some reason for mistrusting the comparison of literacy rates in the youngest cohort for which evidence is presented, those 20-29 in 1897. It is very likely that part of the difference between the two literacy rates for this male cohort (76% vs. 85%) was due to learning received by men in their twenties that occurred after 1897.[15]

For these reasons, the two most important comparisons are for those cohorts 30-39 and 40-49 years of age in 1897. In the 30-39 cohort, literacy rates were somewhat higher in 1926, but only four percentage points higher. And in the 40-49 year old cohort, there was no

difference in favor of 1926.

Women's literacy rates are not central to our inquiry (as explained earlier); however we should consider whether or not the comparisons of female literacy rates between the two censuses confirm the pattern found for men. With some modest differences in outcomes, they do, (Table 5). Differences in rates across the two enumerations were higher among women, typically about 7 percentage points, and consistently in favor of the 1926 Census. However the crucial point is that the differences in rates across the two enumerations were not drastic among women, just as they were not among men.

Still, we should also ask whether the somewhat larger differences found among women bears directly on our concerns; and the answer is that it does not. The crucial question is whether or not the differences in rates across the censuses represents underreporting of Yiddish literacy in the 1897 Census -- and especially underreporting of male literacy. Let us assume for a moment that underreporting of Yiddish literacy was indeed the source of the difference in rates between the censuses. Then for every 100 people who reported themselves literate only in Yiddish we would expect that some additional number failed to report themselves as such. And then we could also assume that the percentage of Jews who reported themselves literate in "some other language only [other than Russian]" would be a basis for assessing the percentage of Jews for whom Yiddish literacy had been underreported.

Now Table 1 shows that the percentage literate in some other language in fact was only larger for men than for women in every adult cohort. Consequently, if underreporting of Yiddish were the major reason for the differences between the literacy rates found in the two Censuses, we would expect to find that those intercensual differences would be greater for men

than for women; in fact, we find that they are greater for women than for men. Thus, I strongly suspect that the reason for the larger intercensual differences among women than among men is not in fact due to some systematic underreporting of Yiddish literacy among all Jews. Perhaps the differences in rates across censuses were greater for women than for men because women were more likely than men to have acquired literacy in later life. Or perhaps the 1897 Census did underreport Yiddish literacy to some modest extent, and was more likely to do so for women than for men. Even if this last possibility were true, we would still be left with the fact that the Census underreported Yiddish male literacy but little, with the result that the reported levels for men would be about right.

Note too that, as mentioned earlier, the 1897 Census defined Jews by Yiddish mother tongue and the 1926 Census defined them by membership in an ethnic group. Since the small number of Jews whose mother tongue was not Yiddish were more likely than Yiddish-mother-tongue Jews to be literate, this difference in definition biases all comparisons against the 1897 Census. While the effect of the bias is not large, its effect is nonetheless large enough to be seen consistently in special tabulations for the Ukraine, presented in Table 6.

Now there are obviously many biases that could enter into a comparison of the same cohorts across 30 years. I have already mentioned acquisition of literacy after 1897. Other biases would be caused by different outmigration or mortality rates for the literate and the non-literate. Nevertheless, it seems very improbable that such factors were large enough, and in the necessary direction, to invalidate the comparison between the two censuses. It is unclear that the biases were even in the direction necessary to bias the census comparisons in favor of the 1897 Census. They would be biasing the comparisons in the wrong direction, against the 1897

Census, if the literate were less likely to emigrate than the illiterate (because, for example, manual workers rather than those in commerce were more likely to emigrate, and because the former were less literate than the latter), or if the literate were more likely to live longer than the illiterate. If the literate were more likely to migrate, the effect of the bias would still have been small, since the proportion of migrants was, after all a relatively modest part of the entire age cohort -- especially for the cohorts over 40 years of age in 1897 (since nearly all emigrants were under 40, as the U.S. Immigration data show). If the literate died sooner than the illiterate -- notably because the former were in rural areas and the latter were concentrated in less healthy urban areas -- that would bias the results in favor of the 1897 Census. However, such a mortality difference would have had to be large to matter. Moreover, a mortality differential in favor of the illiterate is unlikely to have existed for Jews: among the Russian population, perhaps, the illiterate rural population might have lived longer than the literate urban population, but few Jews were in the rural areas in 1897 and fewer still in 1926.[16]

Another source of bias may be hinted at by the fact that the oldest cohort of males shows lower literacy rates in 1926 than in 1897; this pattern was not unique to Jews but rather was found in the population as a whole (Table 7). The most likely explanation is that a small proportion of the elderly had lost an ability in later life that they had had earlier -- either through the effects of physical and mental decline associated with aging, or simply because of disuse over the years.[17] In any case, such factors seems to have had a small net effect, as judged by the rates for the Russian population: an effect of 1 to 3 percentage points, in the older cohorts. Even if a bias of such magnitude in favor of the 1897 Census were present in the oldest cohorts, it would not effect our conclusions.

All in all, the comparison to the 1926 census results in a sharp challenge to the notion that the 1897 Census drastically underreported Jewish male literacy. This conclusion, of course, does not refute the possibility that there may have been some modest underreporting of Yiddish literacy in 1897. There is no way to be sure about such a thing. However, the drastic underreporting of the sort Brutskus and the others envisioned is another matter: the hypothesis of drastic underreporting in 1897 cannot be sustained if we accept the literacy rates reported in 1926.

By way of summing up the evidence, and turning to interpretation, consider Table 4 again, this time in a new way. Look for a moment only at the righthand column, the column that shows the literacy rates reported in the 1926 Census. Now suppose we had no 1897 Census; suppose all we had were these cohort data from 1926. From these 1926 figures we could learn a lot about the situation prevalent among younger adults circa 1890 to 1900 -- by looking at the literacy rates for those who were 50 and over in 1926, that is at literacy rates of 85%, 79%, 72%, and 62%. No one would reasonably conclude, from these 1926 rates, that literacy had in fact been universal among Russian Jewish men circa 1890 to 1900.

In this sense, we don't even need the 1897 Census to have some feel for literacy rates in those years -- and to confront the perplexity that Brutskus and his contemporaries dismissed by appealing to the hypothesis of underreporting. However, the 1897 Census data permit us to probe farther back in time (by looking at the older cohorts of that year). And above all, the 1897 data permit us to study in detail the local situation in 1897, by using the literacy tabulations published for hundreds of local areas.

Well then, what are we to make of all this in substantive terms? I now leave the review

of the evidence and offer a tentative interpretation. I stress explicitly this distinction between evidence and interpretation, because I do not want readers to ignore the evidence even if they reject the interpretation. The evidence, to repeat suggests that the accuracy of the 1897 literacy data cannot be judged low if the accuracy of the 1926 data is judged high.

If we were not told that the census figures in Table 4 applied to Jews, a reasonable interpretation would be that these censuses portray a population confronting modernity in the late-nineteenth century with a solid 20% - 30% of its male population claiming that they could not read -- could not read by whatever vague criteria respondents always use when they answered censustakers. Over the period in which these cohorts were growing up, that population moved quickly toward universal literacy.

However, we do know that the population in question was Russian Jewry. The substantive interpretation I offer is meant to get around the basic problem of accepting these data, namely (as Brutskus stressed) that nearly every male was thought to have gone to the heder. And I hope that others, much closer than I to the traditional historical sources on East European Jewry, will try to assess the interpretation.

I suggest that the data in Table 4 do not imply that 20% - 30% of the Jewish men had failed to attend a heder, or that such a proportion were unable to make out the prayers in the Sidur (the Jewish prayerbook). On the contrary: nearly all men may have attended heder at least briefly in their childhood. So too, nearly all men may have been able to sound out the Hebrew letters, and since they knew the prayers so well, they could link the Hebrew letters to the words of the prayers. However, the census figures may be telling us that -- after any reasonable allowance is made for underreporting of Yiddish literacy in 1897 -- substantial minorities of

Jewish men apparently fell into a peculiar category with regard to literacy. These men could not move from their ability to follow the Sidur to literacy in another medium.

Such men, who could read only the Sidur, are discussed explicitly in two studies published on the eve of World War I. A study of Jewish male tailors in four cities found that while virtually none were totally illiterate, more than a quarter could only read and only in the Hebrew alphabet; and of these a substantial proportion stated that they could only read the prayers. In Vilna and Warsaw such men were only a tiny percentage of the tailors (1% and 6% respectively), but in Berdichev they constituted a quarter of the sample and in Busin (in Poland) nearly half. Moreover, it appears that the men had not been asked explicitly whether they could only read the prayers; rather, the men had volunteered that information when asked about their literacy. Had they been asked explicitly, perhaps even more would have acknowledged this restricted reading ability.[18]

A second study was undertaken by a committee of Jews in the United States who were interested in testing the quality of the U.S. Immigration authorities' judgements on Jewish illiteracy. The members of this committee were all authorities on the Jewish immigration, including, for example, I.M. Rubinow, Isaac A. Hourwich, Samuel Joseph, Max J. Kohler. As part of their work, they engaged a "qualified statistician" to reinterview some 130 male immigrants who reached Ellis Island in November, 1913. "The investigator questioned these immigrants with the aid of publications in various languages and also utilized the Hebrew prayerbook." On the basis of this and other tests, the committee concluded that the American immigration authorities' judgements on Jewish immigrant illiteracy were accurate. However, the crucial point for our purposes is a comment the committee members made concerning the

ability to read. For some reason, they noted, their particular sample of immigrants was much more literate than most Jewish immigrants were. Nevertheless, among the 130 male immigrants in their sample, were 11 men (8.5%) who could read only from the prayerbook, and these the statistician classified as illiterate. He did so, the committee explained, because "reading the Hebrew prayerbook partakes of the nature of a mechanical operation."[19]

Such men, who could read only from the Sidur, would of course have been aware of other written materials in their cultural milieu. These materials were becoming ever more prevalent in the last half of the nineteenth century; there were more modern materials such as pamphlets or newspapers in their native Yiddish, and there were also both modern and traditional materials in Hebrew. These materials such men could not get through, and accordingly, when asked by the censustaker, these men judged themselves illiterate. And their judgement fits the usual meaning of the term -- they were not involved in a culture that involves communication with other minds through reading.

We cannot determine whether such men, who could read only from the Sidur, can account for the entire discrepancy between the expectation of near-universal male literacy (based on heder attendance) and the reports of the 1897 and 1926 Censuses. The two surveys just discussed are based on sub-populations too limited in scope (and probably on samples of those subpopulations that are too far from truly random) for us to hazard an estimate of the true prevalence of this minimal form of literacy. However, such literacy (or illiteracy) may well account for much of the discrepancy.

In this interpretation, Russian Jewry was more literate than most groups before the transformations of industrialization, urbanization, and new forms of schooling fully affected

them. And in this interpretation nearly all Russian Jewish males were characterized by the peculiarity of being able to read the Sidur. But that peculiarity is different from being literate in the usual meanings of the term, the meanings which are reflected in census enumerations.

TABLE 1. LITERACY DATA ON JEWS FROM THE 1897 RUSSIAN CENSUS

Sex	Age	Russian Empire: Literacy in Russian	Russian Empire: Literacy in another language only	Russian Empire: General literacy	Empire without Poland (General literacy)
		a	b	a + b	
		%	%	%	%
Males					
	10-19	42	18	60	64
	20-29	53	18	72	75
	30-39	48	21	70	74
	40-49	41	27	67	71
	50-59	31	30	62	66
	60 +	22	32	54	59
Females					
	10-19	32	12	44	47
	20-29	30	16	46	49
	30-39	18	16	34	37
	40-49	10	16	26	27
	50-59	6	4	20	21
	60 +	4	11	15	16

NOTES

1) Source: Table XV of the 1897 Census.

2) In the Russian Census "Literacy" was defined as the ability to read (as opposed to the ability to read and to write).

3) The Census compilers limited this tabulation to Jews defined by Yiddish mother tongue. Of Jews defined by "faith," 97% also had given Yiddish as their mother tongue (in Table XIV of the 1897 Census; summarized in Rubinow, "Economic Conditions," 488).

4) Differences between cols. a + b and col. c are due to rounding.

TABLE 2. EVIDENCE FROM ANOTHER SOURCE:
LITERACY AMONG JEWISH ARTISANS, PROVINCE OF MINSK

Artisan's Class of worker	% Literate in: Russian only	Russian + Yiddish	Yiddish only	% Illiterate	Total	(N=)
Employer	1	47	27	25	100	(1,727)
Worker	2	52	21	26	100	(2,629)
Apprentice	3	49	17	32	100	(986)

Jewish Colonization Association, Recueil de Materiaux sur la Situation Economique des Israelites de Russie (Paris, 1906), I, 302.

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TABLE 3. LITERACY AMONG HEBREW IMMIGRANTS
TO THE UNITED STATES, 1899-1910

year	rate	year	rate	rate for males	rate for females
1899	80	1905	78		
1900	78	1906	73		
1901	77	1907	71		
1902	72	1908	70	78	60
1903	74	1909	71	79	61
1904	77	1910	71	78	62

NOTES

1) Includes immigrants 14 years of age and over. The small number who could read but not write were classified as illiterate (these account for less than 1 percent of the group in all years).
2) The number of illiterates of each sex was not published before 1908.
3) Source: Samuel Joseph, Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910 (New York, 1914), 174, 192 and the United States Commissioner of Immigration, Annual Reports.

TABLE 4. LITERACY AMONG ADULT JEWISH MALES
IN THE 1897 RUSSIAN AND 1926 SOVIET CENSUSES

Age cohort		Percentage of men able to read	
age in			
1897	1926	1897	1926
		%	%
na	20-29	na	95
na	30-39	na	93
na	40-49	na	89
20-29	50-59	76	85
30-39	60-69	75	79
40-49	70-79	72	72
50-59	80-89	67	62
60 +	na	60	na

NOTES TO TABLE 4.

1) The 1897 figures cover as precisely as possible the boundaries covered by the 1926 figures. The latter were limited to the 1926 boundaries of the Ukraine, Belorussia, the Crimean ASR, the gubernias of Smolensk and Briansk (RSSFR) and the cities of Moscow, Leningrad and Rostov. These areas included 90% of the Jews in the Soviet Union. (Recensement de la Population de L'U.R.S.S., 1926 (Moscow, 1929 [Russian and French), Vol. XVII, 76, 93, 105.

The 1897 figures are based on Table XV of that year's Census for i) the gubernias of the Pale less those of Congress Poland, Grodno, Vilna, Kovno, Bessarabia and half of Volhynia; ii) the gubernias of Smolensk and Orel and the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Rostov.

2) Size of the age cohorts being compared:

Age		Size in thousands (both sexes)		Ratio:
1897	1926	1897	1926	1926/1897
20-29	50-59	489	172	.35
30-39	60-69	323	128	.40
40-49	70-79	230	41	.18
50-59	80-89	147	7	.05

TABLE 5. LITERACY AMONG ADULT JEWISH FEMALES IN THE 1897 RUSSIAN AND 1926 SOVIET CENSUSES

Age cohort age in 1897	Age cohort age in 1926	Percentage of women able to read 1897 %	1926 %
20-29	50-59	48	57
30-39	60-69	36	42
40-49	70-79	25	32
50-59	80-89	20	27

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TABLE 6. PERCENTAGE OF JEWS ABLE TO READ, UKRAINE ONLY

	Male			Female		
age in 1897	1897	1926: Yiddish mother tongue	1926: all Jews	1897	1926 Yiddish mother tongue	1926 all Jews
20-29	75	81	83	45	49	52
30-39	75	76	78	33	36	38
40-49	71	70	71	23	27	29
50-59	66	60	61	18	25	26

Source: Recensement, Vol. XI, 41-43.

TABLE 7. LITERACY OF THE POPULATION IN THE EMPIRE AND IN THE SOVIET UNION, 1897 AND 1926, BY AGE COHORTS

age in 1897	age in 1926	percentage literate males '97	'26	females '97	'26	age in 1897	age in 1926	percentage literate males '97	'26	females '97	'26
20-24	50-54	45	55	16	16	35-39	65-69	36	36	10	10
25-29	55-59	42	48	13	14	40-44	70-74	32	29	9	7
30-34	64-69	40	39	12	10	45-49	75-79	30	27	9	8

Source: Recensement, Vol. XVII, 73.

NOTES

1. This paper is part of a wider research project which examines a wide range of quantitative sources on the East European Jews at the turn of the century, and on the immigration of so many of these Jews to America. None of my own prior research has been on eastern Europe, and I do not know the Russian language. I would not have undertaken this research were it not for my father, Moshe Perlmann, who has worked through the arrangement of the various census and survey tables with me, translated a good deal of other material as well, and to offered general advice. I am very grateful for his help. Of course, any errors in the paper are my own responsibility.

2. See for example, Boris D. Brutskus, Statistics of the Jewish Population [Russian] St. Petersburg, 1909; Brutskus, Occupations of the Jewish Population... [Russian], St. Petersburg, 1908; Isaac M. Rubinow, Economic Condition of the Jews in Russia (Bulletin #15, United States Bureau of Labor), Washington, 1907 [reprint: New York, 1905]; Simon Kuznets, "Immigration of Russian Jews to the United States: Background and Structure," Perspectives in American History, 9 (1975), 35-126; Arcadius Kahan, Essays in Jewish Social and Economic History, Chicago, 1986; and Yoav Peled, Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia, London, 1989;

3. On the 1897 Russian Census see Ralph S. Clem (ed.) Research Guide to the Russian and Soviet Censuses, Ithaca, 1986; and Henning Bauer, Andreas Kappeler, Brigitte Roth (eds.), Die Nationalitaten des Russischen Reiches in der Volkszahlung von 1897, 2 vols., Stuttgart, 1991.

4. Arthur Ruppin, "Die Russischen Juden nach der Volkszahlung von 1897," Zeitschrift fur Demographie und Statistik der Juden, II, 1 (Jan., 1906), 5; [J. Lestchinsky], Die Socialen Verhaltnisse der Juden in Russland, Berlin, 1906, 42; Brutskus, Statistics of the Jewish Population, 47, Y. Shabad, "Jewish Literacy in Russia," Jewish Encyclopedia [Russian], St. Petersburg, 1908-12, VI, 756-9.

5.Brutskus, Ibid.

6. The only recent review of quantitative material bearing on Jewish literacy with which I am familiar is the helpful piece by Shaul Stampfer, "Literacy among the Jews of eastern Europe in the Modern Era," [Hebrew] in S. Almog et al (eds.), Historical Contributions in Modern Jewish History in Honor of Shmuel Ettinger (2 volumes), Jerusalem, 1987, II, 459-83. On the 1897 data, See especially 466-7.

7.Rubinow summarizes the language and religion figures in Economic Conditions, 488.

8.A second example appears in Sara Rabinovitsch-Margolin, "Zur Bildungsstatistik der Judishen Arbeiter in Rusland," Zeitschrift fur Demographie und Statistik der Juden, IX:11 (Nov., 1913), 153-60, p. 154.

9.The Polish data may reflect in some way the linguistic complexity there, involving tension between Russian and Polish, or it may reflect actually lower levels of literacy among Jews there compared to elsewhere in the Pale. Table 2 also incorporates one adjustment to the published figures: there is a typographical error in connection with Jewish male literacy among those 20-29 years of age in the city of Vilna. It is obvious that an error is involved: in the published figure, male literacy for that cohort is lower than female literacy and drastically lower than male literacy in a) the same cohort in Kovna or b) the same cohort in smaller cities and towns in the Province of Vilna or c) the cohort of males 30-39 years of age in the city of Vilna. With the help of these comparisons, the adjustment can be made with confidence.

10. We know that literacy was still being acquired by some in the teen years, since literacy rates climb progressively for those 1-9, 10-19, and 20-29 years of age. See for example, Rubinow, "Economic Conditions," 577 for these figures as well as for the size of each age cohort.

11. Of the authorities cited in note 4, only Brutskus did not mention the U. S. Immigration reports.

12. Other sources of difference between the U. S. Immigration figures and those of the Census are numerous too: 1) the years for which we have sex-specific American figures on male illiteracy begin a decade after 1897; 2) the American figures are not specific to narrow age ranges (including all over 13) 3) nor, finally, are the American figures limited to Jewish immigrants from Russia only. On the ages of immigrants, see for example Samuel Joseph, Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1910, New York, 1914, 177. These U. S. Immigration Reports were based on lists of passengers collected by the Commissioner of Immigration. Paul Ritterband and Ira Glaser have collected samples from these passenger lists, as have I. These samples should allow us to refine

comparisons between the literacy of Jewish immigrants and the literacy of Jews in Russia. Nevertheless, the ambiguity related to the issue of immigrant selectivity will persist even with the better data.

13. Stampfer, "Literacy among the Jews," 476, 473. There is an earlier Soviet Census from 1920, but that Census was conducted under much more unsettled conditions, and in any case it did not present detailed tabulations of literacy by age, sex and ethnicity.

14.See, for example, Premier Recensement General de l'Empire de Russie, "Liste de Recensement" [Russian and French], St. Petersburg, 1897 [?] and Recensement de la Population de L'U.R.S.S., 1926 (Moscow, 1929 [Russian and French), Vol. XVII, 99-100.

15. Among non-Jews too the youngest adult male cohort showed the biggest change between 1897 and 1926; see Note 5 to Table 4.

16. On the self-selection of industrial workers for emigration, see, for example, Rubinow, "Economic Conditions," 497-506; on the differential mortality of the literate and illiterate, see the brief speculation of N.S. Timasheff, "Overcoming Illiteracy: Public Education in Russia, 1880-1940," Russian Review, II (1941), 83, n11.

17.Timasheff, Ibid.

18. Calculated from the figures in Rabinovitsch-Margolin, "Zur Bildungsstatistik der Judishen Arbeiter in Rusland," 153-6. The figures cited from the study pertain to male tailors only, women and apprentices excluded.

19.National Jewish Immigration Council, "Jewish Immigrants: Report of a Special Committee of the National Jewish Immigration Council appointed to examine into the Question of Illiteracy among Jewish Immigrants and its Causes," [published as Senate Document 611, 63rd Congress 2nd Session, Washington, 1914], 5-7; quote from p. 5.