

BACKGROUND

If the statistics are right, the Jews constitute but one percent of the human race ... His contributions to the world's lists of great names in literature, science, art, music, finance, medicine, and abstruse learning are also way out of proportion to the weakness of his numbers.¹ (Twain, 1899, Vol. 99:535)

In 1907, one Isadore Sarnatzky emigrated from Russia to the U.S. He was one of the millions of Jewish emigrants to arrive in New York during the decades from 1881 until the beginning of World War I. What possible factors could have motivated him to immigrate to the New World?

In an attempt to understand the reasons that led some of the Sarnatzky family members, and so many others, to emigrate eventually to the United States, one must turn to the social, economic and political events that shaped the history of Europe in general, and Russia in particular, for the 19th and 20th centuries. Without an understanding and appreciation of that history, it is difficult to comprehend why: (1) so many Jews left the Old World; (2) so many became highly successful in their newly adopted homelands; and (3) so many bore the brunt of anti-Semitism^{2,3} or more properly anti-Jewishness, in spite of the fact that their numbers were and remain comparatively few.

In an attempt to try to answer some of these questions, this biography begins with a look at the historical background. It will

be, of necessity, only a brief sketch, intended to simply introduce the reader to the environment out of which the Sarnatzky family came. It is not intended as a detailed analysis of the economic and social conditions that prevailed at that time. Space precludes such an extended discussion and the reader is directed to the bibliography and elsewhere for the voluminous historical literature on the subject.

What then was the social milieu, which spawned such a large number of notable individuals^{4,5} of Jewish descent? One only has to mention internationally known names such as Albert Einstein (1879–1955) and Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). It is noteworthy to add that this pattern of Jewish achievement, especially in the United States, continues to the present day (Table 1). Moreover, given that the total Jewish population is only around 12–14 million or less than 1/24 of 1% of the world's population, it is astonishing that of the 700 individuals who have been Nobel Prize recipients, 127 or about 18% have been Jewish.⁶ This is a remarkable accomplishment for such a small population that had to endure the worst persecution of any minority in the 20th century.

These individuals, who were to make significant contributions to business, literature, science, medicine, and countless other fields of endeavor, did so mostly *after* they immigrated out of Europe. The lack of any *in-situ* development in Eastern Europe was a consequence of an oppressive Tsarist regime that prohibited most Jews from attending institutions of higher learning and did not permit them to freely practice their professions.

It is to be admitted that social and political conditions, in general, did improve at the end of the 19th into the 20th century, although such improvements were considerably more noticeable in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe. Nevertheless, the fact that they emigrated was an incalculable loss to the countries in which they had initially worked and resided.

This pattern was particularly pronounced in Germany with the rise of Nazism. Jews who had played a significant part in German science and medicine⁴ at the turn of the 20th century saw their pre-eminent role in German science dramatically collapse with the rise

Table 1. Selected List of Individuals of Jewish Descent. Recipients of the Nobel Prize are shown with asterisks.

Name	Birth and Location	Death and Location	Profession
Albert Michelson*	1852, Strelno, Prussia	1931, Pasadena, California	Physics
Albert Einstein*	1879, Ulm, Germany	1955, Princeton, New Jersey	Physics
Niels Bohr*	1885, Copenhagen, Denmark	1962, Copenhagen, Denmark	Physics
Leo Szilard	1898, Budapest, Hungary	1964, La Jolla, California	Physics
Georg Cantor	1845, St. Petersburg, Russia	1918, Halle, Germany	Mathematics
Norbert Weiner	1894, Columbia, Missouri, USA	1964, Stockholm, Sweden	Mathematics
John Von Neumann	1903, Budapest, Hungary	1957, Washington DC	Mathematics
Sigmund Freud	1856, Freiberg, Moravia	1939, London, England	Psychology
Paul Ehrlich*	1854, Strehlen, Silesia, Prussia	1915, Bad Homburg, Germany	Biology
Fritz Haber*	1868, Breslau, Silesia, Prussia	1934, Basel, Switzerland	Biology
Otto Warburg*	1883, Freiburg, Germany	1970, West Berlin, Germany	Biology
Otto Meyerhof*	1884, Hanover, Germany	1951, Philadelphia, Pa.	Biology
Hans Krebs*	1900, Hildesheim, Germany	1981, Oxford, England	Biology
Karl Landsteiner*	1868, Vienna, Austria	1943, New York, New York	Medicine
Albert Sabin	1906, Bialystok, Russia	1993, Washington DC	Medicine
Jonas Salk	1914, New York, New York, USA	1995, La Jolla, California	Medicine
Émile Durkheim	1858, Épinal, France	1917, Paris, France	Sociology
Franz Boaz	1858, Minden, Germany	1942, New York, New York	Anthropology
Ernst Cassirer	1845, Breslau, Silesia, Prussia	1945, New York, New York	Philosophy
Edmund Husserl	1859, Prossnitz, Moravia	1938, Freiburg, Germany	Philosophy
Henri Bergson	1859, Paris, France	1941, Paris, France	Philosophy

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued)

Name	Birth and Location	Death and Location	Profession
Franz Kafka	1883, Prague, Bohemia	1924, Kierling, Austria	Philosophy
Ludwig Wittgenstein	1889, Vienna, Austria	1951, Cambridge, England	Philosophy
Arthur Schnitzler	1862, Vienna, Austria	1931, Vienna, Austria	Playwright
Boris Pasternak*	1890, Moscow, Russia	1960, Peredelkino, Russia	Novelist
Felix Mendelssohn	1809, Hamburg, Germany	1847, Leipzig, Germany	Composer
Jacques Offenbach	1819, Cologne, Germany	1880, Paris, France	Composer
Georges Bizet	1838, Paris, France	1875, Bougival, France	Composer
Gustav Mahler	1860, Kaliste, Bohemia	1911, Vienna, Austria	Composer
Arnold Schoenberg	1874, Vienna, Austria	1951, Los Angeles, California	Composer
Leonard Bernstein	1918, Lawrence, Massachusetts,	1990, New York, New York	Composer
Irving Berlin	1888, Mogilyov, Russia	1989, New York, New York	Musician
Ira Gershwin	1896, New York, New York	1983, Beverly Hills, California	Musician
George Gershwin	1898, Brooklyn, New York	1937, Hollywood, California	Musician
Jascha Heifetz	1901, Vilna, Lithuania, Russia	1987, Los Angeles, California	Musician
Nathan Milstein	1903, Odessa, Ukraine, Russia	1990, London, England	Musician
Benny Goodman	1909, Chicago, Illinois	1986, New York, New York	Musician
Camille Pissaro	1830, St. Thomas, Danish West Indies	1903, Paris, France	Artist
Amadeo Modigliani	1884, Livorno, Italy	1920, Paris, France	Artist
Marc Chagall	1887, Vitebsk, Russia	1985, Saint-Paul, France	Artist
Benjamin Disraeli	1804, London, England	1881, London, England	Politician
Georges Clemenceau	1841, Mouilleron-en-Pareds, France	1929, Paris, France	Politician

of Hitler and his anti-Jewish policies to the detriment of Germany as a whole.^{7,8,9} Almost six decades have passed since the end of World War II and Germany has yet to approach her former prominence in science and related fields. However, there was at least one significant difference between the experience of the German Jews in contrast to their Polish and Russian cousins. This was that in Germany, prior to Hitler, Jews were generally permitted to feel at home allowing them to assimilate easily into the German cultural environment in contrast to that of Eastern Europe.¹⁰

In Eastern Europe, Jews were subjected to a pattern of continuous ill treatment by government officials and government policy. It was this state of affairs that influenced the subsequent history of Jewish emigration patterns in Eastern Europe.¹¹⁻¹³ Thus, to understand the immigration of the Sarnatzky family to the United States and eventually to Chicago, one needs to look back at the social and political milieu that formed 19th century Tsarist Russia. This issue is taken up in the next six chapters.