

Title - *Kentucky*: An Epic of Jewish Assimilation in America

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Abstract: This paper examines evolution of Jewish identity through the process of assimilation in *Kentucky* by I. J. Schwartz. *Kentucky* is a collection of nine poems with the longest being an epic poem titled “New Earth” that follows the assimilation of a Jewish family into white culture. For the purpose of this paper, ‘whiteness’ will be thought of in terms of physical appearance and cultural practices. People highest on the spectrum of whiteness would be light-skinned and practice the dominant religion of the time: Christianity. By close reading, I will demonstrate that the Jewish family rises in prosperity with each step toward assimilation into whiteness. I will reference research that treats whiteness as a specifically American concept that was closely tied to Christianity at the time of *Kentucky*. The post-Civil War, pre-Civil Rights era that *Kentucky* is written in, presents a unique racial landscape for Jews to confront because there is no middle ground between black and white, then Jews add another dimension.