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June 7, 2006

COVER STORY

## The Jewswweek Sizzlin' 60

It took six days to create the world, and it takes sixty people, places, trends, web sites, and kitschy concepts to define what makes Judaism hot today. Of course, we couldn't come up with sixty. We came up with 52.5 instead. Sorry.

by Staff reports



NICE ELBOW: From Batgirl to the Jewswweek smokin' cover girl, Alicia Silverstone tops this year's list.

As it turns out, we at Jewswweek are simply smitten with words like hot, trendy, hip, and a myriad of synonyms. Thus we decided to do something that would give us ample opportunity to use said words, over and over. What we came up with was the Smokin' 60 List, a survey and sampling of all that's hot in the Jewish world today.

We measured every actress, inspected every icon, made lists of people, and even thought of checking it twice. Then we realized we're Jewish and decided a first draft would be fine, and when we were done with the people we moved on to the books, ideas, Web sites, and cool concepts that make Judaism sizzle like Sinai.

Then it hit us. We didn't actually have sixty items on our list. We could only manage fifty-two and a half, even after considering Madonna for special mention. We could honestly admit we're just lazy, but we're not that honest. The truth is (insert winks and elbow nudges here) the dog-days of summer induced a heat stroke epidemic in our Hotlanta-based headquarters and we resorted to our natural states -- feeble-minded, horny men. Just kidding.

So here it is, for you our dear readers, the official smokin' not-quite-60 hottest people and things in the Jewish universe this year in absolutely no particular order. Any decidedly attractive celebrities or pseudo-celebrities who made this list, feel free to shower us with your appreciation in whatever illicit manner you desire.

**1. Alicia Silverstone:** "Judaism turned me into who I am today, and I definitely feel I live a very spiritual life. I got that from my parents," says the 26-year-old actress. How nice is this blonde bombshell who's got the upcoming TV show, *Miss Match*, and has been wooing many a young man since she cropped up in those Aerosmith videos way back when. A brief dip off the celebrity radar following some ill-advised career moves (Batgirl anyone?) is a thing of the past as Ms. Alicia touts her "chosen" credentials onto the small screen this fall. We couldn't be more pleased.

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**2. Las Vegas:** Sin City is turning into a virtual Sinai for American Jews. Believe it or not, the city of many casinos is the fastest growing Jewish community in the United States, which may or may not say something about how hot we Jews really are. Biased as we may be, we'll err on the side of assuming Jews are taking on a Rat Pack cool and moving to the desert accordingly. Temperature or trendy, it's hot any way you roll those dice.

**3. Bangitout.com:** This popular site is the brainchild of Isaac and Seth Galena, twins who live on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Originally a site that featured writing from and catered to the Galenas' circle of friends, the site now boasts a large worldwide audience, a revenue stream, and covers big events like the recent Tribeca Film Festival. Not bad for a satire site with a patched-together design.

**4. Academic Talmud Study:** It's no longer social death to be a dork. In fact, being a nerd can get you serious sex appeal in this odd post-modern world. That's why the trendiest trend in Talmudic study is using accepted methods of textual criticism so scholars can find layers of editing and redaction that provide a better understanding of the text. Ergo by getting all literary on the Torah's *tuchus*, we can learn more about what Torah is really saying. The model found its major roots in America in the work of scholar Saul Lieberman, but now it's heading full throttle into the mainstream.

**5. Post-modern Jewish thought (Yeah, that's right):** Speaking of odd post-modern, such ideas have been around for a while, but they're becoming a litmus test for intellectual chic. The popularization of post-modern thought among a younger class of Jewish scholars and its permeation into communal life is popping up everywhere. One exemplar of how this is making it to the general Jewish population: Eliyahu Stern, a mid-twenties recently-ordained theology scholar who's heading to Berkeley in September, who delivered a lecture this year at the Park East Synagogue in Manhattan on approaching a post-modern ethics of responsibility towards the Holocaust. Sounds hot doesn't it?

**6. Joshua Micah Marshall:** The creator of TalkingPointsMemo.com and regular columnist for *The Hill* and *The Washington Monthly* is the leading political blogger on the Net these days. From breaking open the Trent Lott story to being the strongest voice of reason in the bold new journalist frontier of deciphering whether the President, ummm ... lied, Marshall has been everywhere that's anywhere in the news -- all while finishing up his doctoral dissertation in Colonial American history.



Joshua Marshall

**7. The 'burbs:** Jews are moving away from cities and settling in for the family life of the suburbs. Various theories abound as to why this is the case, from the lower cost of living to the larger amount of space to the possibility that typical Jewish resources -- kosher food, community meeting places, synagogues -- are no easier to find in Manhattan than at your local Albertson's, JCC, and Young Israel, respectively. New York City's Jewish population dipped under one million for the first time in a century. Go figure.

**8. Havi Mond:** Israel's first religious model at age 19, she's already graced the pages of *Vogue*, and *Marie Claire*. She's also a big hit in Britain, home of her grandparents, though she herself hails from Safed in the Galilee. Did we mention she's observantly Jewish? How hot is it to not only look sizzling but also refrain from sizzling anything on Shabbat and keep kosher wherever she may be photographed? And speaking of those pics, she refuses to pose too provocatively. We lament, but only a little.

**9. Diasporic Diasporas:** Jews are connecting with ideas of their lost culture in diasporic places like South Africa and Iraq. Whereas nostalgia for the Jewish homeland of Israel has always been present in Jewish culture, it's not just as hip to make other stops along the way. Following the recent removal of Saddam Hussein, many Iraqi Jews in America and elsewhere can't wait to head back to their place of birth. Similarly, many South African Jews are developing a meta-diasporic culture of their own. Go Baghdad!

**10. Shia LaBeouf:** Born in the middle of Ronald Reagan's term in the White House, LeBeouf has yet to head to college, but the charismatic actor is picking up steam with parts in recent flicks *Holes*, *Charlie's Angels: Full Throttle*, and *Dumb and Dumberer* as well as the lead the Project Grrrenlight's *Battle of Shaker Heights*. Oh yeah, and he stars in his own Disney Channel series *Even Stevens*. But what makes this kid really hot is how he started his career. Before he could drive, he was doing stand-up comedy.

**11. Onlysimchas.com:** In short, it's your one-stop shop for all your gossip needs. Who got engaged? Who got married? Who had a kid? You get the drift. The site, run by bunch of 20-somethings and their wives (aw, how sweet), boasts an impressive five million hits a month and allows users to post their "mazel tovs" and well wishes online in a virtual guestbook, which is next to virtual photo albums -- the true gem of the site. (What was

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she thinking wearing that wedding dress?) From Brooklyn to Brazil, Jerusalem to Johannesburg, this site gives Jewish geography an entirely new meaning.

**12. Esther Jungreis:** She may look like your grandmother, but she's got the spunk -- and spirit -- of a Gen Xer. Her latest book, *The Committed Marriage*, is the follow-up to her wildly successful *The Committed Life* and she's using the current book tour to reiterate her Dr. Phil-esque message: Get off your couch and start looking for your *besheret*. As well, her weekly lectures draw hundreds of Manhattan singles and has become the *di rigueur* place to pick up a quality soul mate. Now that's what we call sex in the city.

**13. Avi Zenilman:** The sexy mystique of a writer's life is hot enough, but it's that much hotter to get your start writing about Israeli prostitution for the notable *Slate* magazine. As *Slate's* first intern, Mr. Zenilman is well on his way to becoming a star journalist, even before beginning his undergraduate career. We have no doubt he'll be fully able to pick up some Jewish girls with those kinds of credentials.

**14. Hungary:** A major stop for Israelis doing business, the country has seen significant growth in investment from the Holy Land. Considered one of the closest places outside of Israel in which Israelis can safely do business, many road warriors find themselves commuting twice weekly to Budapest and beyond. Think of it as a new form of Jewish jet setting.

**15. Liev Schreiber:** Graduating from a role in the *Scream* trilogy to more serious fare has made Schreiber one of the better character actors in Hollywood, but the metrosexually cool Jew isn't getting a big head. He's choosing to take on some outdoor Shakespeare in order to stick to his theatrical as well as Jewish roots.

**16. Settler mansions:** In what may well be a comedy of tragedies, at least it'll be a hot comedy. What are we talking about? Settler mansions, the stylish new digs of Israelis interested in avoiding Israeli zoning laws. Simply enough, they just head for the Judean hills and take up very posh digs in the disputed territories. Palestinians are, as you'd expect, not amused, but we figure if you're going to live in a war zone you might as well do it in style.

**17. Jerry Springer:** Thirteen could be Jerry Springer's lucky number. After his 13th season as the king of all things wet, wild, and wacky, the uber trash-talk show host is considering heading to an even trashier haven of all things wet, wild and wacky -- the U.S. Senate. He may have a less-than-*tzniut* career track record, but he'll add his name to the growing list of Jewish credentialed politicians if he wins. Jerry! Jerry! Jerry!



**Jerry Springer**

**18. Lisa Loeb:** Her saucy Jewish girl with glasses look won't come in quite as handy when Loeb takes up residence as the voice of Mary Jane on MTV's new animated series, *Spiderman*. You may have heard of the web-slinging character, and you probably heard of Loeb. Her crooning songs first surfaced courtesy of fellow tribe-member Ben Stiller's 1994 *Reality Bites* flick. She never looked back and three albums later she's going into cartoon territory. Personally we'd rather see her in live action, but we'll take what we can get.

**19. Rabbi Benjamin Blech:** If you were to purchase stock in Blech, you'd be a rich person. The 60-something 10th-generation rabbi, a professor at New York's Yeshiva University by day and super rabbi by night, travels the planet (literally) giving lectures about the mysteries and intricacies of Judaism. His *Complete Idiot's Guide to Judaism* is among the series' most popular seller and his forthcoming tome called "If God is Good Why is the World so Bad?" is bound for best-seller status. We've gotten a sneak peek of it and it's nothing short of revolutionary.

**20. Kosher by Design cookbook:** Nothing is hipper in Jewish circles than food. That's timeless, which is why best-selling author Suzie Fishbein has managed to sell more than 24,000 copies a week of her recipe book. With the little book that could, Fishbein has become a publishing phenom and a staple in kosher kitchens worldwide. Think of it as a very trendy cottage industry with a dash of cottage cheese.

**21. Sharon Osbourne:** She redefines what it means to be a bleeping Jewish mother, and we mean that in a good way. Executive producing her hit MTV show, running Ozzy's career, nursing her son out of rehab, and guiding her daughter's burgeoning celebrity -- all while conquering cancer -- is a pretty impressive feat. Then, just for kicks she'll be doing a new daytime talk show this fall, and you know we'll be watching. All we can say is where was this hipster mom when our parents were planning our Bar Mitzvah? Now *that* would've been one hot party.

**22. Jonah Goldberg:** One of very few columnists to have an entire fan site dedicated to analyzing his every conservative word, Goldberg has gained even more influence since stepping down as editor of the *National Review Online*. With all the additional time he's had to spend on his writing, he's become something of a Jewish media wunderkind.

**23. Holocaust restitution:** With the decade-long fight for restitution funds pretty much over, it's now time to dole out all the moolah, and the Jewish community is presently figuring out just how to do that. The Claims Conference is hoping to have a wide-open discussion on the topic, reaching out to all Jews to have their input included, and when you're talking about serious sums of money that kind of a free-for-all could get hotter than a Jerry Springer house party.

**24. Rena Sofer:** Whom, you ask? Why the tart little brunette who's bounced through a number of TV roles and featured in *Keeping the Faith*, but will finally be landing on the American version of BBC hit "Coupling" this fall on NBC. The role could be her ticket to *Friend*-esque stardom, where Sofer could join the ranks of uber-Jewish starlet Debra Messing, or it could be a cliché flop. Either way, Sofer's a Jewess with a buzz.



Rena Sofer

**25. Protocols blog:** Who knew blogging could be so cool, and who knew that a bunch of boys from Yeshiva U. would make it to the top of that hip heap? Mainstays Avraham Bronstein and Steven I. Weiss are complimented by a bevy of sidekicks and regular comments from other orbiting tribe-members, making Protocols the most oft-updated site shop for Jewish kitsch and personal commentary in the blogosphere. Of course, we'd recommend they start their own magazine, but they already contribute to our pub. Heat stroke or not, we're not *that* stupid.

**26. Jon Stewart:** The king of Comedy Central has much going for him, not the least of which are high ratings and a spot on the cultural map that's beginning to rival Letterman and Leno, and he's not even going head-to-head with them. Nonetheless, Stewart is getting very good at injecting middle-left political savvy with a dollop of laughs and plenty of Jewish cultural swerves that makes for a most delightful TV show. And we hear Jewish girls think he's dreamy, but we don't. Really. We just think he's hot. Moving on.

**27. Carl Reiner:** He may be 81, but the all-around funny man is experiencing a second career with his much-anticipated autobiography now in stores and no less than a dozen new projects in the works including appearing at the Montreal Comedy Festival this week, hosting this month's Jews from the 'hood Cinemax documentary *Bronx Boys*, and putting the finishing touches on a hip cartoon version of his most famous creation, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. Oh yeah, he'll start filming the sequel to the Rat Pack remake *Ocean's 11*, aptly titled *Ocean's 12*, early next year in Rome. He may be old, but he's the funniest hip this side of Seinfeld.

**28. JDate:** Really, who isn't on JDate these days? The online dating site for the tribe has become a cultural phenomenon, becoming a ubiquitous brand all its own. Think Xerox, Kleenex and Coke. Of course, this isn't terribly surprising. It's a bunch of Jews trying to date. Besides eating and listening to our mothers, what else do we do?

**29. NextBook.org:** While we're on the subject of good ideas for a Jewish Web site, Nextbook.org is a brilliant merger of Jews' surfing and reading proclivity. The "gateway to Jewish literature, culture, and ideas" is a hot and high-brow little destination for those looking to fix themselves up with some Jewish books instead of Jewish boys (or girls). As Judaism goes, this is the height of intellectual cool.

**30. Rachel Weisz:** Teeming with temptation-inducing sex appeal and the eminently batting eye-lashes, the United Kingdom has given us yet another Jewish starlet to woo us into theaters. After making a name for herself in those dreadfully uncool *Mummy* films she's making it in leading lady roles with *Confidence* and *The Shape of Things*. Not to mention that she's the ultimate sexy Jewess. What else need be said about this sizzlin' sweetheart?

**31. The Hampton Synagogue:** Perhaps the hottest shul east of the Mississippi, the posh place is the destination for Jewish Hampton vacationers. And, when you think about, isn't that most of them? The synagogue's members include founding member Steven Spielberg who's pictures litter the social hall wall. With a helipad in the parking lot (yes, some people actually *fly* to this shul) the Westhampton beach holy place has some pretty hefty donors. Its spiritual leader, Rabbi Marc Schneier, raised \$50,000 during a recent kiddush.

**32. Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf:** Founded back in the 1960s by Herbert Hyman, the Los Angeles cult favorite was bought by former rock promoter and Jewish moneybags Victor Sassoon in the late 1990s and is quickly charging ahead to become the alternative to Starbucks and the allegedly terrorist-supporting Caribou Coffee. Currently centered in the southwest, they've got stores from Israel to Singapore and are quickly moving to become a national standard.

**33. New Jewish high schools:** A "cool" Jewish high school? Over the past couple of years several "new" Jewish high schools have opened up around the country. Their goal? To provide high quality Judaic and secular educations to Modern Orthodox, Conservative, or Conservadox students. These schools are a hybrid of the community high schools that developed in the 60's and an Orthodox-oriented Yeshiva high school. Like a Yeshiva, they teach Talmud and Bible, not Holocaust and Zionism. But their teachers are young, energetic Ivy League grads who are likely to quote Tolstoi as Tosfos.

**34. Selma Blair:** Starring in recent sleepers, *The Sweetest Thing*, and *A Guy Thing*, more than a few young men are getting a thing for this 31-year-old actress. The rail-thin Blair, otherwise known as Selma Beitner or just plain Batsheva, has become an expert at playing sex-addled nymphets, but she's branching out. One of her five upcoming flicks includes the comic adaptation of *Hellboy*, which should bring Blair into a leading lady role in one of the hottest genres to come out of Tinseltown these days.



Selma Blair

**35. Jewish poetry:** Jews were doing it with rhythm and rhyme before Homer was hip, but as of late there's an increasing number of Yiddish yappers of the poetic verse. A couple of them have been featured in gold-standard venues such as the HBO series *Def Poetry* and the famous Nuyorican Poet's Cafe. These might be mistaken for bastions of hip-hop culture, but today nothing's hotter than Heeb's with hip-hop appeal.

**36. Harel Levy:** He's no Pete Sampras, but he's beaten him, and if Anna Kournikova can parlay her assets into celebrity status without ever winning anything, then the wonder kid of Israeli tennis is an easy bet. He hasn't had the best couple of years but that doesn't mean he's not a top-tier Jewish athlete who's represented Israel in international circles all before the age of 25. And he has a nice *punim*, which helps his hot rankings as if not his tennis ones.

**37. Linkin Park:** Believe it or not, this band's Jewish. At least, Brad Delson and Rob Bourdon are, and they're part of said band. The group has helped define the growing sub-genre of NuMetal, or so MTV says. Either way, these are two Jewish boys making even more musical waves than worn out Chanukah stylings of Adam Sandler's, which was so two Rosh Hashanah's ago.

**38. Rachel Stevens:** The 25-year-old, formerly of British pop group SClub7, turns out to be quite Jewish and committedly so. She's reportedly quite devoted to Jewish causes in ye olde United Kingdom as well as abroad. Of course, she was also named *FHM* magazine's "Sexiest Woman in the U.K." and finished at numero quatro for "World's Most Sexiest Women."

**39. Jew.Lo:** As the embodiment of what is good, cool, and Heeb-huggingly hip about the Jewish femmes, the Jew.Lo manifesto is unquestionably hot. It joins with the less hot *Heeb* magazine's spread celebrating the Jewess stereotypes in foisting the "chosen" feminine form on the altar of all things worshipful. Jewish men rejoice.

**40. Michael Bloomberg:** He's worth five billion smackers and he runs New York City, the Jewish Medina to Jerusalem's Mecca. He's not the least bit cool, or deck, or whatever hipster term you prefer, but that kind of cash and cache is hot. Or as one nice Jewish boy (Kissing) once said, power is the ultimate aphrodisiac. Grrr, baby. Grrr...

**41. Bacon Bits** -- They're kosher! Well, some of them anyways, but that's not the point. Something involving bacon, or at least bacon-esque flavoring, is kosher. It's not terribly new, but it never gets old being able to hold up your observance while still partaking of oink-style condiments.

**42. Yossi Klein Halevi:** He's the hippest Jewish commentator on all things cultural and political vis-a-vis the Middle East. His writings in the *New Republic* and other publications have made him beloved by center-liberal Jews the world over. Then he went and wrote *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, and became the uber-mensch of interfaith exploration. Think of ol' Yossi as the intellectual hottie of our day.

**43. Feminism:** From Orthodox women's groups to the mysterious Jewish Women

Watching group, feminism in its Jewish form is a blazing wildfire of women -- and men. Leonard Nimoy got controversially in on the act with a book of photographs of nude women wearing *tefillin*. OK, so it's possible that one may have been motivated by something other than women's liberation, but you get the point.

**44. Euro-bashing:** Lefties and intellectual elitists like to lament America and love the French. Woody Allen, bucking the Jewish trend, managed to make an entirely sub-par film about a psychosomatically blind director just to sneak in a loving French joke at the end. The rest of the Jewish world, however, is quite smitten with less-loving forms of expression when it comes to the French and other European countries. Of course, it's possible the boycott of French goods, including wine, is just a cleverly orchestrated plot by the Manishevitz company. Now wouldn't that be a hot story?

**45. Christians:** No, really. Christians are the Jews' new best friends. They back us on Israel, mostly, but they've been kind enough to stop blaming us for killing their head honcho a while back and, for the most part, relations have been quite cozy. They still probably want to convert us, and that's kind of a sore point, but what's something like that between new friends?

**46. Etan G. (aka Etan Goldman):** Best known as the "Jewish Rapper," he is a permanent member of the Jewish rock parody group Shlock Rock, as well as a solo artist who gets annual invites to the BET Awards and Grammys. His popularity has grown thanks to appearances on the *Howard Stern Show*, the nationally-televised Chabad telethon, and the recent release of a solo album, "South Side of the Synagogue". Plus, if you ever need a Jewish hook-up in L.A., he's your go-to guy.



**Etan G**

**47. The Blue Fringe Band:** This group of Orthodox Gen-X'ers is selling loads of albums and playing to packed houses all across the United States. Formed two years ago, Blue Fringe has quickly graduated from the occasional campus gig to playing in large venues all over New York City and elsewhere, tantalizing audiences with their rock/pop approach that goes into uncharted Jewish musical territory and reaches into a deeper repertory than you thought Jewish musicians had.

**48. Torah:** The ultimate in Jewish gadgetry, the holy book has stood the test of time and remained oh-so-trendy amongst the younger set *and* their bubbes. With a new, more literary translation coming out of London and a resurgence in textual study sessions is there any doubt that the Torah is climbing back to the pinnacle of the cool crowd? After all, it has steamy sex, incestuous twists, multiple violent ends for less-than-loved characters and, of course, war. This was the first Hollywood blockbuster baby, and we love it still.

**49. Dr. Judith Steinberg Dean:** The wife of Democratic presidential candidate Howard Dean doesn't like the limelight, but she could end up as the first Jewish First Lady if her hubby (who graduated from Yeshiva U.'s Einstein Medical School) takes the White House. Though she intermarried, she insisted the kids be raised Jewish, which means she could also be the matriarch of the first Jewish first family come November 2004. Move over Mrs. Lieberman.

**50. The GE Shabbat Oven:** General Electric's slick new oven was designed with the Shabbat-conscious consumer in mind. Certified by the Star-K organization of Baltimore, the ovens allow cooks to leave their oven on for more than 12 hours at a time with no flickering lights and no waiting for the buzzer to go off. If you're having Friday night dinner, this is the only way to go. A new apartment complex in Brooklyn is so excited they're installing it every unit. Now that makes it one hot gadget.

**51. David Suissa:** The editor of *Olam Magazine* and *Olam.org* is generating a refreshing spirit of unity amongst Jews with *Olam4israel.com*'s daily action minute for Israel. That makes Suissa the sort of activist hip usually reserved for the rebellious among us without giving up the core issue that guides Jewry today. No small feat.

**52. Krispy Kreme:** The once forbidden fruit which we all salivated after is now becoming kosher. Across the nation, like SARS spreading across a crowded Toronto rock concert audience, Kosher Krispy Kreme (KKK) locations are sprouting up. And the Jewish community couldn't be happier. Pass the coffee.

**52.5 God:** Classically cool Hashem, otherwise known as the Lord, the Almighty, and the original Miracle Maker is still around and styling. World leaders, including one grammatically challenged cowboy from Texas, are enamored with citing Him for authority, which reminds us of those good



ol' days of divinely anointed kings. Obviously God transcends all cultural cliques. Even Osama is a big fan, and while we would like very much to quibble with Mr. Bin Laden, we'll toast God with a He'Brew anytime.



Hashem

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