

Jeanne E. Abrams, *Jewish Denver, 1859–1940* (Chicago: Arcadia Press, 2007), 128pp., illus.

Jewish Denver: 1859–1940 provides a rich photographic history of the Denver Jewish community from its founding in the wake of the Colorado gold rush in 1859 through the beginnings of World War II. Jeanne E. Abrams, professor of history at Penrose Library at the University of Denver and longtime director of the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society, draws on the rich source materials available at the Beck Memorial Archives and her extensive knowledge of Western Jewish history in assembling this accessible and visually appealing volume.

The book is strongest in its exploration of the early Jewish migration to Colorado, from the first pioneer “1859ers,” many of whom became successful businessmen and prominent politicians, to the influx of eastern European Jews who trekked west at the turn of the century in search of treatment for tuberculosis. A debilitating and potentially fatal disease, tuberculosis often afflicted the working classes confined to the congested and poorly sanitized neighborhoods of the urban North. As Abrams has written elsewhere, Colorado earned a reputation as the “World’s Sanatorium” due to its dry climate, enviable sunshine, and clear mountain air.

Unlike other Western cities, the influx of eastern European Jews in the 1880s considerably augmented Denver’s Jewish community. These newcomers sought solace at its two sanatorium facilities, the National Jewish Hospital for Consumptives (NJH), which opened in 1899, and the Jewish Consumptives’ Relief Hospital (JCRS), which followed in 1904. As in many communities in the Northeast and Midwest, tensions flared between the established and more Americanized Reform Jews of German descent and the eastern European newcomers who were often more religious and politically radical. One wishes that Abrams provided more information about how these two communities eventually overcame their differences.

Jewish Denver also sheds light on the founding of the first Jewish organizations and synagogues and the important role Jewish women played in the public sphere. Abrams’s focus on women contributes to a growing literature about gender roles within the Jewish community and to a larger scholarship that challenges the private/public divide of the nineteenth century cult of true womanhood.

Less developed, however, is the later history of the Denver Jewish community. Did the labor movement and socialism play a role in the Jewish community? While the “relative absence of antisemitism and fluid social

structure” in the nineteenth century made Colorado an appealing locale for migrating Jews, how did the growth of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920s affect the community?

Jewish Denver contributes to a growing history of the Western Jewish experience but also opens up fertile questions for future scholars to explore. The archival photos and clear prose make the book an especially useful teaching tool, and it will also no doubt appeal to the Denver Jewish community. As someone who grew up in Denver, I recognized many of the landmarks and notable families that still play a role in that vibrant community.

Ronnie Grinberg is a doctoral candidate in American history at Northwestern University. Her dissertation is titled, “Jewish Intellectuals, Masculinity, and the Making of Modern American Conservatism, 1930–1980.”

Joyce Antler, *You Never Call! You Never Write! A History of the Jewish Mother* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 321 pp.

Whether positive or negative, images of the Jewish mother abound in American popular culture. Some depict saintly women ladling hot chicken soup, while others show nagging, guilt-inducing crones responsible for sending their children to years of therapy. In this volume, Joyce Antler offers an engaging foray into the history of the Jewish mother through examining both the evolution of the stereotypes and the lives of actual Jewish mothers, past and present, who often complicated and challenged the dominant societal images.

Antler divides her study into two sections. The first details the rise of Jewish mother stereotypes from the 1920s through the postwar decades, while the second offers original research into how real Jewish women, from those involved in second-wave feminism to present-day Jewish mothers and daughters, understand the image of the Jewish mother and its prevalence in their own lives. The chapters, arranged chronologically, introduce the dominant conceptions of Jewish mothers in each era. The sweeping volume traces wide-ranging images of the Jewish mother: from the “Yiddishe Mamas” of the 1920s, found in the films of Al Jolson and the popular songs of Sophie Tucker; to the iconic radio and television persona of Molly Goldberg during the Depression and the immediate postwar decades; to the 1960s’ literary constructions of what Antler terms the “monster mothers,” represented most starkly by Sophie Portnoy in Philip Roth’s *Portnoy’s Complaint*.

Throughout the volume, Antler carefully highlights the complex, even contradictory ways in which American popular culture characterized Jewish mothers. For instance, in the *Jazz Singer*, Al Jolson sang heartily of his supportive “mammy,” but Anzia Yezierska offered a more ambivalent portrait of her own mother in several of her literary works of the same period. While America embraced the loving mother in the form of Molly Goldberg, anthropologists

such as Margaret Mead and Ruth Benedict produced studies that characterized the behavior and mothering tactics of Jewish mothers as negative and bordering on unhealthy. Antler's extensive, multigenre investigation uncovers not a monolithic figure, but a multivalent and often surprising set of images depicting the Jewish mother.

In addition to her adept synthesis of both historical models of the Jewish mother and much of the current literature existing on the topic, Antler offers an innovative section that highlights how the connections that Jewish leaders of the women's liberation movement had with their mothers influenced their ideologies. These chapters carefully trace the ways in which the Jewish leaders of second-wave feminism conceptualized maternal roles and obligations, from Shulamith Firestone's rejection of motherhood to Alix Kates Shulman's grappling with motherhood and feminism after becoming a mother herself. Their relationships with their mothers and motherhood pivotally shaped how they understood feminism, the manner in which they articulated the larger precepts and goals of the women's liberation movement, and the place of Jewish identity in their own lives.

Antler concludes the volume by offering a glimpse into recent popular representations of Jewish mothers and the experiences of real women growing up during the early twentieth century through oral histories by the Jewish Women's Archive and studies she herself undertook. She traces how the Holocaust, feminism, and popular culture impacted the women's understanding of their mothers and their relationship to them as well as how they characterized themselves as mothers. Many admitted exhibiting some behavior associated with Jewish mother stereotypes, such as overprotecting their children, but all demonstrated much richer, positive, and complicated relationships than the depictions allowed. Though simplistic images of the Jewish mother continue to circulate in contemporary society, Antler's insightful and compelling analysis offers depth and perspective to this ubiquitous presence in American popular culture.

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Emily Bingham, *Mordecai: An Early American Family* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2003), 346 pp.

Emily Bingham offers us both a literary and historical gem in this meticulous account of the Mordecai family, allowing us rare entry into an early Southern Jewish family. Though neither Jewish nor a descendent of the Mordecais, Bingham adopted the family as the cherished focus of her doctoral dissertation. She was enticed to do so by the abundance of available archival

material in the form of thousands of letters and papers, as well as her developed attachment (she calls it “obsession”) to that family’s impressive ethos of mutually supportive and loyal bonds over three drama-filled generations.

The Mordecais ceaselessly labored to find their place and identity as a tiny and pioneering minority without the nourishing support of today’s established Jewish communal and religious institutions. Consequently, they were left to their own survival devices in an environment refusing to fully accept them. The Revolutionary era, with its religious openness and liberal spirit, gave hope to minority group members such as the Mordecais. However, a renewed focus on religiosity during the nineteenth century—the Second Great Awakening, with its sweeping spirit of evangelical zeal, as well as the pervasive Protestant influence on American culture—was threatening. In a young country trying to heal from the Revolution and the Civil War, the Mordecais’s struggle to establish roots as Americans was formidable. The author regards their journey as indicative of the formation of the American middle class.

The Mordecais were pressured to abandon their Jewish ways, which were weak to begin with, though the family patriarch, Jacob (1762–1838), became the president of his Beth Shalome synagogue in Richmond, Virginia. He was a staunch defender of Orthodox Judaism who stood up to antisemitism. In time, members of his family embraced nascent Reform Judaism on the new continent. Bingham regards the Mordecai family covenant, in which the women played a dominant role with the men’s assistance—placing its overall welfare above individual success, with its members ever mindful of their good name—as central to its enduring legacy of unity despite corrosive influences. Throughout, the family was guided by the Enlightenment’s focus on the paramount value of education for one’s essential self-improvement. In 1808, the family established a girls’ academy in Warrenton, North Carolina. The author explains the family’s high assimilation as a function of desired transformation and free choice rather than ignorance and limited choice in a society that often challenged their authenticity while promoting their blending in. I beg to differ. It was, I suggest, a combination of the above, but tilting toward the Mordecais’s Jewish and societal handicaps, which they sought to overcome.

Though some of the Mordecai clan’s underlying issues and concerns in the framework of its era are still operative today, there is a new challenge, as well as opportunity, to Jewish continuity given the highly hospitable context. Since World War II, there has been a radically changed national terrain as well as an emerging reality of a New South. There is also now a varied and viable Jewish community offering far more to those who freely choose to be proud American Jews.

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Beth B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press in association with the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2007), 224 pp.

Beth B. Cohen's *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* investigates the experiences of the 140,000 Holocaust survivors who settled in the United States between 1946 and 1954. While the social service agencies charged with helping these immigrants publicized the rapid success with which they adapted to their new lives in America, Cohen's study offers a more complicated, less celebratory view of their immigration process. Her thorough investigation of the case files, agency reports, and oral testimonies related to these immigrants reveals that Holocaust survivors had great difficulty adjusting to life in the United States. Cohen argues that the aid offered by social service agencies, which focused on vocational placement but did not include emotional support, failed to address their clients' particular needs as survivors of genocide.

In addition to complicating the triumphant narrative of the survivors' migration to the United States, Cohen also reminds us that important differences existed among the immigrants themselves. Factors such as age and religious background affected the way that Holocaust survivors adapted to life in America and determined the type of help they received from social service workers. Cohen devotes a chapter to the needs and desires of religiously Orthodox Jews, a group that the secular social service agencies classified as "hard-core" cases because of their non-Western appearance and commitment to religious law. Another chapter tells the story of the orphans who required the care of foster families and halfway houses until they reached the age of maturity.

Considering Cohen's close attention to the individual needs of the immigrants, it comes as a disappointment that she did not investigate gender as another crucial factor affecting the survivors' adjustment to America. Instead of a systematic analysis of how gender shaped the expectations of these immigrants and governed the type of support that they could expect to receive, Cohen offers us tantalizing anecdotes. She provides, for instance, the story of one Mrs. G, an engineer by trade, who asked the New York Association for New Americans (NYANA) to support her until she learned enough English to secure employment in her field. NYANA refused, insisting instead that she work as a stock clerk in a factory while her husband, a trained physician, prepared for his New York State licensing exam (57–58). Is this instance exceptional? Or did the social service organizations routinely adopt a policy of encouraging married women to sacrifice their careers in order to further their husbands' prospects? How did these gender dynamics play out among the many migrants who had less education than Dr. and Mrs. G? Cohen's otherwise excellent and nuanced study leaves this important question unexplored.

Case Closed offers an important re-examination of the ways in which Holocaust survivors adapted to life in America. Cohen reminds us not only that

these immigrants' traumatic pasts made their adjustment to America particularly challenging, but also that each one of these immigrants had unique needs and expectations. Perhaps the most important contribution of this sympathetic, well-researched study is that it manages to regard its subjects not only as members of a distinct group, but also as individual human beings.

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Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006), vi + 480 pp.

Marci Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006), xvi + 368 pp.

Published in the same year, these two edited volumes of essays on topics in southern Jewish history complement each other in surveying the field, both past and present. While highlighting many of the most salient topics and scholars working on this subject, the books also engage in conversation with each other, weighing in on the question of the distinctiveness of southern Jewish history. Mark Bauman frames the essays in *Dixie Diaspora* to expound upon his thesis, originally expressed in *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style*, that Jews in the South are not distinct, that they share more in common with Jews the world over than they do with other southerners.¹ Conversely, the authors of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, Marci Cohen Ferris and Mark Greenberg, compile their anthology as a direct response to this argument, flatly denying Bauman's thesis in the introduction to their own book. For Ferris and Greenberg, "[t]o dismiss the impact of region on Jewish identity is to underestimate the power of place" (18). Of course, the challenge of an edited anthology is to fit such varied essays into one distinct frame, a task in which neither book completely succeeds. However, read together, the books point to a new direction in southern Jewish scholarship.

Dixie Diaspora is an anthology of sixteen essays previously published in journals from the early 1980s until the present day. Bauman chooses to organize the articles into five topical areas "to provide a clearer understanding of contemporary debates and questions" (2). A short introduction precedes each of these sections, placing the essays and the topic within a larger historical framework. Some of the essays tackle large and broad-based issues, such as Howard Rabinowitz's "Nativism, Bigotry and Anti-Semitism in the South" and Leonard Rogoff's "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," both of which are argument-driven. Other essays uncover little-known people or events and

therefore add a depth of knowledge to the field. Gary Zola's "Southern Rabbis and the Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis" and Deborah Weiner's "Jewish Women in the Central Appalachian Coal Fields, 1890–1960" are two such essays that bring new institutions and characters to light. Most helpful is the concluding bibliographical essay, which can point the reader to resources on each of the book's five thematic topics.

Unfortunately, the book's topical organization obfuscates the editor's goal "to encourage the integration of southern Jewish history into American, southern, religious, ethnic, and Jewish history" (2), as it does not account for change over time. The chapters skip around chronologically, making it difficult to keep track of what happened when and where. Filiopietism creeps into the narrative both when it is consciously denied (8) and when it is the general organizing principle of a chapter, as it is in both Hollace Ava Weiner's "The Mixers: the Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas" and in Cantor Brown Jr.'s "Philip and Morris Dzialynski: Jewish Contributions to the Rebuilding of the South." Weiner's article is a meandering list of the accomplishments of various rabbis and Jews in Texas, and Brown lauds the accomplishments of his two subjects without examining what makes any of their actions "Jewish," aside from an accident of birth. In the end, Bauman's argument that "few Jews fit the profile of the stereotypical southerner" (355) assumes an undefined, monolithic southern character that ignores differences in race, class, and gender.

Quite literally, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* picks up where *Dixie Diaspora* ends, with the only article included in both anthologies: Greenberg's own essay "One Religion, Different Worlds: Sephardic and Ashkenazic Immigrants in 18th Century Savannah." The book opens with a thorough introduction that reviews the historical context and the historiographical issues at stake in the study of southern Jewish history. Drawing on the most recent scholarly work in the field, the editors organized the first half of the book chronologically and the second half thematically so as to benefit more fully from both approaches. The essays flow easily from one to the other and build toward a comprehensive understanding of the field. Among the thirteen included essays, Hasia Diner writes about the role of the South in Jewish peddling, Eric Goldstein proves a Jewish ambivalence toward racial "whiteness," and Clive Webb traces southern Jews through the developing civil rights struggles. Absent is the filiopietism found in many of *Dixie Diaspora's* essays. Instead, the chapters engage in scholarly conversation with the larger southern and American historical literature. The book ends with a selected bibliography compiled by Eric Goldstein and Marni Davis, an extremely useful tool for students of southern Jewish history.

Despite the editorial debate on southern distinctiveness, the vast majority of the essays in both books treat this topic as largely irrelevant. The South has never been monolithic in its people or culture, and the Jews living within its boundaries likewise are not. Both books bring together the various issues,

themes, and scholars that contribute to the vibrancy and the multidimensional aspects of the field. Most important, both will no doubt inspire further research on Jews in the South.

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Notes

¹Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati: The American Jewish Archives, 1996).

Henry Feingold, *'Silent No More': Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2006), xv + 400 pp.

In *'Silent No More': Saving the Jews of Russia, the American Jewish Effort, 1967–1989*, Henry Feingold asks how persecuted Soviet Jews gained the freedom to emigrate. Without discounting the question's relevance to Israeli immigration history as well as to the history of Soviet Jewry, Feingold chooses to answer this transnational question from the perspective of American Jewish history. He argues that despite the advocacy efforts by American Jews, as well as legislation from Congress, the ultimate success of the movement was tied to the larger forces of the Cold War. It was only when the Cold War's balance of power shifted in favor of the West that Soviet Jews gained their freedom.

While many historians might begin a study of the Soviet Jewry movement with the mass exodus in 1989, Feingold argues that this watershed date marks the *culmination* of "a long and sometimes frustrating voyage" to freedom (292). Throughout that voyage, which began in the late nineteenth century and included the Kishinev pogrom of 1903, American Jewish leaders experimented with different patterns of advocacy that would most effectively improve the lot of their Eastern brethren. Already by World War I, Feingold argues, their work had paid off, and American Jewish leaders had produced the techniques that the future Soviet Jewry movement would utilize "to generate pressure through public relations and protest" (33).

While Feingold argues that the path to freedom began in the late nineteenth century, he believes that the Soviet Jewry movement per se did not begin in earnest until 1967. Initially the movement was small, and in the years after the Holocaust, both Soviet Jews and a small number of Israelis came to realize the tenuous position of Soviet Jewry. At this time, the idea to emigrate "was largely confined to that minority in the Soviet Union and Israel" (37). By the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, Feingold maintains that the movement had grown to include student protesters in Boston, individuals who circulated petitions, those who wrote letters to the United Nations' Commission on Human Rights, and

a large number of Moscow Jews who were willing to demonstrate in support of their cause. In Feingold's words, "the movement had arrived" (69).

Though they were now armed with a broader base of support, advocates for Soviet Jewry were never able to push the issue into the American consciousness on their own. While "the drumbeat of attention-getting activity generated by the organizations that called attention to the problem" succeeded in informing the American public about the issue, Feingold concludes that "the critical lever that brought the Soviet Jewry issue to the fore in the international arena originated not with the formally organized Soviet Jewry movement but in the halls of Congress" (308). With its passage of the Jackson-Vanik Amendment, which threatened the Soviet Union economically if it did not allow Jews to emigrate, Congress transformed the Soviet Jewry movement into a mainstream human rights issue of paramount concern to Americans.

Despite these efforts by activists and lawmakers, Feingold maintains that the Soviet Jewry movement ultimately succeeded only because of larger forces in the Cold War. "Nothing that the Jackson-Vanik Amendment promised came to pass" (147), Feingold notes, but "only when the fortunes of that war tilted decidedly toward the West during Reagan's second administration did the prospects for gaining the release of Soviet Jewry become fully realizable" (227). He argues that because of Reagan's tougher stance toward the Soviets, which was buttressed by the neo-conservatives' "intellectual muscle to counteract the détente policy" (228), the Soviet system began to weaken under Gorbachev. It was this weakened system that led to the collapse of the Berlin Wall, which set the wheels of emigration in motion, initially allowing "thousands of East Germans to exercise precisely that freedom of movement that lay behind the efforts of the activists" (291). It was this new Cold War reality, Feingold believes, that brought the Soviet Jewry movement to a successful conclusion.

Silent No More makes an important contribution to American Jewish historiography by placing the Soviet Jewry movement in the context of a broader American history. By observing that "the Cold War produced a confluence of interest between the movement's objectives and American policy" (293), Feingold demonstrates that "its full meaning does not become clear until we understand the Cold War context in which it developed" (227).

Not only does Feingold suggest that a broader understanding of American history will help to illuminate the Soviet Jewry movement, but he also believes that integrating the Soviet Jewish issue into the broader American history would lead to a more complete understanding of the Cold War. Soviet Jews "helped bring a tyrannical power to its knees," he maintains, because they could "vote with their feet" and "remove themselves from [Soviet] control" (292). While he concedes that many Cold War historians would question the emphasis he gives the movement in bringing down the Soviet system, he nevertheless maintains

that “the emigration of Soviet Jewry and the movement devoted to making it happen became not only a harbinger of the crisis in the Soviet system but in a sense also a factor in it” (294).

In addition to Feingold’s attempt to integrate American history and American Jewish history, his work is also an important contribution to the historiography of postwar American Jewry—an underrepresented focus of historical analysis. Feingold suggests that the postwar American Jewish community’s “preoccupation with the Holocaust had become near obsessive” (306), and its involvement in the Soviet Jewry movement was inspired in large measure by the opportunity to obtain “some kind of redemption from the guilt felt regarding its imagined failure” during the Holocaust (306). The dangers that Soviet Jews faced in the 1970s and 1980s, he notes, were nowhere near the level of danger during the Holocaust, and as a result, Feingold concludes that “the urgency attached to the ‘rescue’ of Soviet Jewry, as heartfelt as it was, was not based on an accurate gauge of reality, especially after 1985” (307). Instead, he believes that the movement speaks to American Jewry’s need for redemption in this period.

Finally, Feingold’s work speaks to the vitality of postwar American Jewish life, dispelling “doubts about the American Jewish future, at least for the moment” (316). The Soviet Jewry movement demonstrates American Jewry’s ability to mobilize itself, and “it broke through the curtain of silence as Jewish leaders were unable to do during the years of the Holocaust” (316). For those who believe “that we are in the final chapter of Jewish experience in America,” Feingold points to the Soviet Jewry movement and demonstrates that “it was not the performance of a moribund community” (316).

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David Grubin, *The Jewish Americans* DVD (PBS, 2008);
Beth Wenger, *The Jewish Americans: Three Centuries of Jewish Voices in America* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 376 pp.

When future historians look back on the commemoration of the 350th anniversary of the establishment of the Jewish community in North America, David Grubin’s public television documentary series, *The Jewish Americans*, and the companion volume by Beth Wenger will stand out as a signal achievement and a fascinating primary source. The narrative frames that they employ and the stories that they tell illuminate much about the millennial Jewish *zeitgeist*. It is a spirit that is at once confident and celebratory. Grubin and Wenger’s recounting by no means ignores the adversity that early generations of American Jews faced; it only serves to emphasize the distance traveled in a relatively short period of time.

Of course, *The Jewish Americans* would not be true to its genre if it struck anything less than a triumphant note. Ethnic group boosterism has become the stock-in-trade of the Public Broadcasting System around pledge time, and *The Jewish Americans* earns its place alongside similar programs devoted to Irish Americans, Polish Americans, and African Americans, among other groups. Nevertheless, the optimism and self-assuredness is noteworthy in an era punctuated by anxieties, provoked by conditions and events both global and parochial. Nor is this tone discordant. Scholarly historical syntheses published by leading American Jewish historians in the past few years adopt a similarly hopeful air. The contrast with the gloom-and-doom tomes of the early 1990s is palpable. For all the hand-wringing about declining birth rates and soaring intermarriage rates, for all the alarm about Israel's security and alleged rampant antisemitism on college campuses, American Jews are sanguine about their place within the American polity. On those occasions when they gaze backward, they remain cognizant of an insecure past but exultant in their personal and collective triumphs.

An equally important PBS staple is the Ken Burns documentary. Grubin is a noted filmmaker in his own right, an Emmy- and Peabody-award-winning producer of some of the best episodes of the *American Experience*, including "FDR," "LBJ," "TR," and "Truman." Yet, when *The Jewish Americans* was first broadcast in January 2008, most television reviewers took note of Grubin's debt to Burns's distinctive style. The comparison was meant to be complimentary. "Like the best of Ken Burns' films, *Jewish Americans* uses haunting photos and archival film, along with wonderful music, a few well-placed sound effects and a healthy dose of new interviews," observed one reviewer.¹ Another noted that Grubin "has learned from Mr. Burns when the series needs to linger a little longer on an emblematic biography, and he chooses wisely."²

Those profiles, from frontierswoman Anna Solomon to Miss America winner Bess Meyerson, and from Tin Pan Alley legend Irving Berlin to Hasidic reggae star Matisyahu, unmistakably attest that Grubin's abiding interest was to chronicle the mainstreaming of American Jewry. "I don't look at this as a 'Jewish story,'" he explained in an interview. "I look at this as the quintessential American story.... It's the story of the American dream."³ As one of the more insightful reviewers observed: "The documentary is the story of a hyphen—the hyphen in Jewish-American—and the balance between being a Jewish-American or an American Jew. Which is the noun, which the adjective?"⁴ Grubin answers this question definitively when he chooses to have the adjective "Jewish" modify the noun "American" in his hyphen-free series title. Wenger, however, offers an implicit dissent in the conclusion of her narrative. "From the outset, Jews in America had the choice of whether and how to be Jewish. Three hundred and fifty years later, it is that freedom to invent, innovate, and create new expressions of Judaism and Jewish culture that best characterizes Jewish experience

in America” (304). It seems likely that, had Wenger chosen the series title, the adjective and noun would have been reversed.

Wenger’s volume is both more and less than a handsome coffee table book. Many of its striking photographs and document facsimiles are too small for careful examination or for effective use in the classroom. Sadly, color images disappear abruptly after the first twenty pages. On the other hand, Wenger’s introductory essays in each of the book’s four sections are superb syntheses, concise yet conceptual, popular yet firmly grounded in current scholarship. The first-person accounts, which comprise the heart of the volume, were carefully culled from various archives and published sources, as well as interviews Grubin conducted. Introductions to each document provide useful context, and while Wenger keeps informational footnotes to a minimum, she aids the reader by defining key terms and providing brief biographical notes about referenced individuals. Wenger provides a service by bringing to light the voices of women, who were often given short shrift in earlier documentary histories. Fully one-third of the accounts come from women.

The strongest section of the book is arguably the first, which corresponds to the first hour of the documentary. Wenger succeeds in showcasing first-person accounts that exemplify the tension Jews felt between their twin desires to become fully American and remain religiously and culturally distinct. Iconic documents such as Jonas Phillips’s plea to the Constitutional Convention and George Washington’s letter to the Jews of Newport, Rhode Island, make a strong case for American Jewish exceptionalism, at least in the political sphere, while letters by Abigail Franks and Rebecca Samuel capture the religious and familial challenges that Jews faced in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when their fledgling port communities were far-flung outposts of the Sephardic Atlantic community. The section also includes documents from the nineteenth century, including three focusing on various aspects of the Jewish experience during the Civil War. One of the most fascinating previously unpublished accounts comes from the autobiography of Anna Solomon, the immigrant-cum-frontier businesswoman whose story is detailed in Grubin’s documentary.

Subsequent sections of the book include similarly illuminating accounts from the 1880s through the present, although one wishes that Wenger had provided a little more balance in her selections. Perusing this book, one could be forgiven for concluding that the majority of eastern European immigrants were either socialists and labor organizers or entertainers. While it is gratifying to see both groups accorded their due, the overemphasis comes at the expense of documents that could have shed more light on social, religious, and cultural life. This lacuna is especially pronounced in the section on the postwar period, which explores neither Jewish ritual innovation beyond the ordination of women nor political activism on behalf of Soviet Jewry, Israel,

and other “particularistic” causes. Likewise, little or no attention is devoted to the impact of demographic trends such as geographic mobility, intermarriage, and embourgeoisement. Where are the twentieth century analogues to Abigail Franks and Rebecca Samuel? The lack of attention to the latter phenomenon is particularly problematic given the emphasis in earlier sections on proletarianization. Upward socioeconomic mobility was an essential facet of twentieth century American Jewish life. Moreover, most immigrant Jews harbored middle class aspirations and cultivated middle class values. Few internalized a working class consciousness.

If the final section of the book suffers from a heavy reliance on anecdotes from Grubin’s interview subjects, the concluding episode of the documentary, titled “Home,” approaches its subject with a laudable degree of sophistication and nuance. Particularly praiseworthy is the extended focus on Jews and the Civil Rights Movement. Grubin duly notes the disproportionate Jewish involvement in the freedom rides, protest marches, and Mississippi Freedom Summer voter registration project, and he probes for evidence that young volunteers were motivated in part by internalized Jewish values. But he does not gloss over the complex response of Southern Jews, nor does he downplay the eventual unraveling of the black-Jewish alliance. His in-depth treatment of the Ocean Hill–Brownsville teachers’ strike was certainly motivated in part by a desire to tell the poignant and deliciously ironic story of Julius Lester, the incendiary WBAI radio jockey who later converted to Judaism. But the human-interest story does not obscure Grubin’s use of the 1968 strike to epitomize the socioeconomic and political tensions that poisoned relations between African-Americans and Jews. To Grubin’s credit, he does not allow the film to degenerate into a simplistic harangue about black antisemitism. Instead, the documentary adroitly conveys how the crisis forced both groups to face up to the one-dimensional constructions that they harbored of “the Other.”

It is only in the final minutes of the episode, when Grubin explores the contemporary hybridization of Jewish identity through the music of Matisyahu and the Jew-Bu subculture, that some may perceive a descent into inanity. But the failure of the segment is less a function of Grubin’s examples than a lack of clarity about the phenomenon of postmodern identity construction. Still, this is a rare misstep.

To be sure, time constraints and the demands of the medium inevitably required Grubin to resort to superficial treatment of important events and subjects. Other topics were likely ignored because they did not easily fit into his master narrative. Nevertheless, throughout the documentary, one can detect the influence of its academic advisors. Grubin effectively harnesses contemporary scholarship into the service of effective storytelling, whether the subject is the Americanizing influence of Jewish military service during World War II or the

legacy of Molly Goldberg. This virtue not only makes for engaging entertainment, but also renders *The Jewish Americans* an effective classroom tool if video clips from the PBS website are used in conjunction with primary sources.

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Notes

¹Diane Holloway, "Jewish Americans Shines on PBS," *Austin America-Statesman* (8 January 2008), accessed on 8 November 2008 at www.Austin360.com.

²Ned Martel, "Making Way in America: Jewish Identities and Personal Allegiances," *New York Times* (9 January 2008), accessed on 8 November 2008 at nytimes.com.

³Quoted in Steve Lipman, "The Power of a Hyphen," *Jewish Week* (2 January 2008), accessed on 8 November 2008 at thejewishweek.com.

⁴*Ibid.*

Victoria Hattam, *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 273 pp.

Increasingly, it seems, scholars and lay people striving to transcend the black-white racial binary that dominates the history of American group relations favor the term "ethnicity" as a more politically correct means of ascribing any kind of difference between people.

Not so, Victoria Hattam. As Hattam, an associate professor of Political Science at the New School, explains in the preface to *In the Shadow of Race: Jews, Latinos, and Immigrant Politics in the United States*, she undertook this study because she saw "dangers lurking in the current embrace of ethnicity as the preferred language of difference to that of race" (xi). Her reasoning: The language of ethnicity elides crucial questions of power laid bare in discussions of race. While race and ethnicity both address the issue of difference, each invokes its own set of linguistic associations; the language of race ("blood," "heredity") most often connotes issues of power and inequality while that of ethnicity ("language," "culture") tends to signify notions of inclusion and pluralism. Moreover, the "malleability" of ethnicity bolsters the "fixity" of race. Replacing the term "race" with "ethnicity" without altering their implicit linguistic associations or without a concomitant increase in group equality could, Hattam believes, severely limit our ability to address persistent inequalities.

Having established the pernicious nature of the race-ethnicity distinction (and thus the relevance of her work), Hattam traces its history. She locates its origins in the writings of a group of American Zionists published in the *Menorah Journal* in the 1910s and 1920s. Challenging the widely held belief that Jews

(and other immigrant groups) secured their Americanness and assimilated into mainstream society by asserting their whiteness, Hattam argues that they were, in fact, unwilling to completely abandon their particularity. In her understanding, ethnicity offered immigrant groups a way to preserve their difference as distinct from race—in their culture, not in their blood.

But category formation is a process, not an act. As Hattam shows, the race-ethnicity distinction developed slowly and involved many actors in different locales. Moving from a bottom-up to a top-down analysis, she also considers the role of the state in the invention of ethnicity. By classifying Latinos as an ethnic—not a racial—group, the federal government formally codified the race-ethnicity distinction.

Despite her claim that the race-ethnicity distinction “continues to beset federal policy and racial politics to this day” (78), Hattam finds hopeful signs that it is beginning to weaken. She points to recent mayoralty elections in New York and Los Angeles, where Latino candidates sought to align with, rather than against, African-Americans, and to the 2006 “Day Without Immigrants,” when immigrant protesters addressed issues of inequality and power without reference to race, as indicative of a burgeoning reconfiguration of the ethno-racial taxonomy.

Whether Hattam’s dream of a progressive politics based on a broad conception of race that does not discount longstanding—and persistent—inequality will be realized remains to be seen. But her trenchant critique of whiteness scholarship goes far in correcting the historical record regarding immigrant assimilation.

Amaryah Orenstein, a fourth-year doctoral candidate in the Department of American History at Brandeis University, is writing her dissertation about the influence of the Civil Rights and Black Power movements on the Soviet Jewry movement in the United States.

Iuliu “Julius” Herscovici, *The Jews of Vicksburg, Mississippi* (Self-published, Xlibris Corporation, 2008), 613 pp., Illus.

Iuliu Herscovici’s exhaustive history of Jewish life in Vicksburg, Mississippi, is neither the work of a professional scholar nor the product of an academic press. Instead, the book is a labor of love and a testament to the outstanding efforts of one man; and to understand and appreciate the book for what it is, one must know a few things about the author. Herscovici was born in Romania and received a degree in chemistry from the University of Iasi in 1954. He immigrated to the United States in 1974 and became a citizen in 1979. As an expert in technology related to concrete, Herscovici worked on the construction of the Grand Gulf Nuclear Station in Port Gibson, Mississippi. Since that time, he has been a member of the Jewish community of Vicksburg, Mississippi,

located on the river just north of the power plant. Herscovici, an immigrant from Communist-ruled Romania, makes minor omissions and simplifications that will strike American-born readers as odd, and he occasionally editorializes in a decidedly conservative manner. Additionally, the self-published book includes grammatical mistakes and awkward passages.

Despite the book's eccentricities, it provides thorough documentation of various archival sources relating to Jewish life in and around Vicksburg. In chapters one and two, Herscovici offers an early history of the area, including its physical geography, from the arrival of Europeans until the establishment of a Jewish congregation. The next three chapters concern the founding of Vicksburg's Anshe Chesed Congregation, the construction of the first "Jewish Temple," and the dedication ceremony for the building. Chapters six through eleven focus on and chronologically describe particular aspects of Jewish life—confirmation, cemeteries, the sisterhood, rabbis—while the founding and construction of subsequent Jewish institutions receive separate treatments in each of the next four chapters. Finally, Herscovici gives an account of the personalities that belonged to the congregation with chapters that discuss local Jewish veterans, describe the rabbis who served the congregation, list temple members for a number of years between 1964 and 2003, and offer brief narratives about prominent members and assorted events from the last 120 years. An addendum at the conclusion of the book contains technical details of the temple organ and texts of several services found in archives.

Though Herscovici's tome is not a light read, it will serve as an important resource for anyone with a personal or academic interest in Jewish life in Vicksburg and as a window into the personality of the author himself. Herscovici completed his research without financial support, and he managed to have it printed with contributions from the Southern Jewish Historical Society and several private donors. In the preface, he acknowledges that his task is not to "claim the role of a historian or scholar" but "to be the scribe who retrieved lost data and rediscovered forgotten names." With this thorough recounting of an array of findings, Julius Herscovici clearly achieved his goal.

Josh Parshall is a graduate student in the Folklore Program at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His academic interests include Jewish culture in the United States and Canada and the dynamics of personal and group identity, especially in regard to the cases of small-community life in the Jewish South and contemporary klezmer performance. In June, Josh will begin work as the oral historian for the Institute of Southern Jewish Life in Jackson, Mississippi. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree in American Studies from the University of Kansas in May 2006.

Edward K. Kaplan, *Spiritual Radical: Abraham Joshua Heschel in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 544 pp.

Given the many hagiographic volumes passed off as biographies of contemporary rabbinic figures, Edward Kaplan deserves praise for writing a well-documented account of Heschel's life and activities between 1940 and his death in 1972. Kaplan, a loyal Heschel student, for the most part presents Heschel in the image of the biblical prophets whom he studied and emulated: one who carried a divine message even while remaining profoundly human.

In 1940, Julian Morgenstern, then-president of Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati, secured Heschel's rescue from Europe and brought him to the United States. Heschel spent the next five years at HUC. From there he moved to the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) in New York, although he had also negotiated with Yeshiva University. While JTS was Heschel's professional home for three decades, Kaplan suggests that he was never really at home there. His teaching, both at HUC and JTS, was not particularly effective; and the focus of his writing—about the world of ideas rather than close philological study of classical texts—kept him from earning the respect of JTS professor of Talmud, Saul Lieberman, and JTS president Louis Finkelstein.

The volume focuses on Heschel's role as social activist. His first moves toward social action came while he was revising his doctoral dissertation on the biblical prophets for English publication. His active support for the rights of African-Americans grew out of his commitment that Judaism, and religious life generally, demanded such action. Kaplan treats in detail Heschel's participation in the Civil Rights Movement; his protest of the Vietnam war; his early activism for Soviet Jewry; his role in the negotiations with the Roman Catholic Church leading up to the declaration on Jews and Judaism of Vatican II; and his promotion of interfaith dialogue (which to a lesser degree included Muslim representatives as well). Heschel, who had witnessed the failure of German religious leaders to confront Nazi atrocities, was likewise troubled in his first years in the United States by what seemed to him the very limited actions of the Jewish community on behalf of European Jewry. This further inspired his challenge to all religious people to take up social and political causes, because they were religious causes.

In Kaplan's account, Heschel the public personality comes clearly to the fore. Only glimpses of his family life are provided: a short comment on his wife's transition from concert pianist to music teacher, his daughter's bat mitzvah, an anecdote about his wife exchanging the magazine next to his death bed for "more appropriate" books to help maintain his public image. His family life must have influenced his public role, but this issue is not explored. That the daughter of a "Hassidic Prince" had a bat mitzvah is also significant. Kaplan notes that Heschel encouraged his daughter Susannah's feminism (he even suggested that she apply to JTS's all-male rabbinical school). Given his activities

on behalf of the Civil Rights Movement, his engagement with feminism and gender equality might have been explored further. Similarly, although Kaplan repeatedly points out that Heschel maintained his commitment to Orthodoxy, a number of his positions and choices—his rabbinical degree from the Hochschule, his daughter's bat mitzvah, his various compromises on dietary and ritual law for the sake of social causes—opened the door for discussion of his halakhic engagement. This, however, is not explored either. In this light, it seems somewhat strange that Susannah Heschel does not appear in the list of interviewees for the volume; only conversations and email communications with her are listed. Although Kaplan suggests that Heschel was alienated at JTS, Susannah Heschel's writings document frequent visits by faculty and students to their home on Sabbath and other occasions.

Methodologically, the volume raises some questions. Kaplan suggests that Heschel's behavior during a meeting with the Pope ahead of Vatican II temporarily derailed the process. For this, Kaplan relies on the account of a single witness. In discussing Heschel's experience at HUC in the 1940s, Kaplan relies heavily on an interview with Jacob Rader Marcus in which Heschel was presented, according to Kaplan's interpretation, as a "fraud." How an interview with a nonagenarian about events more than half a century before is weighed as evidence deserves somewhat more consideration than Kaplan gives it.

However, these criticisms do not detract from a useful account of the transformation of a Jewish refugee from Europe into a religious voice heeded by Jews and Christians in the United States and around the world.

Jason Kalman is assistant professor of Classical Hebrew Literature and Interpretation at the Cincinnati School of HUC-JIR. He received his doctorate from the Department of Jewish Studies at McGill University and is a research fellow affiliated with the University of the Free State, South Africa. He specializes in the history of Jewish biblical exegesis, and his specific research interests include rabbinic anti-Christian polemic, medieval intellectual history as reflected in biblical commentary, and biblical interpretation after the Holocaust.

Ruth Klüger, *unterwegs verloren. Erinnerungen* (Vienna: Paul Zsolnay Verlag, 2008), 238pp.

A special case for the preservation and study of the American Jewish experience is Ruth Klüger, as evidenced in her memoirs published under the German title *unterwegs verloren. Erinnerungen*. The author of a much-acclaimed autobiography now offers a follow-up volume reflecting on her life in the United States and her return to Germany, as well as to her native city of Vienna. The previous heart-wrenching account of her childhood in Nazi-occupied Vienna, then in Theresienstadt (Terezin), Auschwitz-Birkenau, Christianstadt (Groß-Rosen), postwar Germany, and finally New York City, was first published in German under the title *weiter leben. Eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag,

1992). It was the German language and German poetry that helped her survive Nazi death camps.

In both her earlier and recent volume, Klüger combines description with reflection, factual rendition with philosophical or political commentary—a refreshing narrative often with witty or provocative results reminiscent of eighteenth-century women’s literature in the form of letters. Her childhood, marred by discrimination and persecution, made her painfully aware of established forms of antisemitism and of exploitation of women, particularly in academe—both in the United States and in Europe. Needless to say, a woman who as a child barely escaped the gas chambers of Auschwitz is sensitive toward generally accepted forms of discrimination and abuse. Obviously, this survivor is more sensitized and less willing to accept dubious compromises. This attitude brought her both friends and admirers but also failed friendships, such as the one with German author Martin Walser. Many observers considered his controversial novel *Tod eines Kritikers* (2002) to be a nasty attack using antisemitic clichés against Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Holocaust survivor from Poland and leading literary critic in contemporary Germany.

In her new memoir, Klüger, born in 1931, reflects on her experience in American academe, her often difficult family life, her strained relationship with her mother, her longtime friends in America, and her new friends in Germany, especially in Göttingen, whose university honored her with a doctorate. She has received numerous prizes and awards, the first one in Austria. She earned a master’s degree in both English and Library Science and received a doctorate in German from the University of California at Berkeley. She taught German language and literature at many American universities, including Princeton, as well as in Germany and Austria. Although the contact with administration and colleagues was not always pleasant, the professor emerita confesses that the teaching profession is one of the best things that life has offered her.

Gert Niers wrote his doctoral thesis at Rutgers University on German-Jewish women authors in exile and worked as an editor for the German-Jewish newspaper, Aufbau (1978–1989). He recently retired from the Humanities Department of Ocean County College, New Jersey.

Laura Levitt, *American Jewish Loss After the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 312 pp.

In *American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust*, Laura Levitt encourages American Jews to break contemporary taboos by examining their own ordinary losses alongside the devastation of the Holocaust. Given the overwhelming trauma of the Holocaust, as well as the importance of the Shoah in American culture for the past twenty-five years, this sort of suggestion is anathema to most American Jews today.

Levitt is, of course, aware of proscriptions against considering ordinary American experiences alongside the extraordinary catastrophe of the Holocaust. Indeed, she is anxious and even initially ashamed by her impulses: At one point, early in her study, she refers to the “obscenity of my desires” to see the families represented in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum’s Tower of Faces as somehow part of her own family (30). But because Levitt is so aware of the cultural prohibitions against comparing ordinary American loss with extraordinary European destruction, she has made careful efforts not to collapse the two together, but instead to call for a better understanding of their differences. By appreciating the boundaries between the two different types of loss, Levitt argues, they can illuminate one another.

Levitt uses her family’s own losses to illustrate her argument. Her paternal grandmother died when her father was ten years old, and that trauma was hidden from Levitt herself for many years. Alongside artists’ evocations of the Holocaust, such as Abraham Ravett’s 1985 film *Half-Sister* and Ann Weiss’s collection of images, *The Last Album: Eyes from the Ashes of Auschwitz-Birkenau*, Levitt examines photographs and memories of both her biological grandmother and the grandmother she grew up loving. Her goal in bringing these materials together is not to make comparisons of suffering, but instead to recognize the contingencies that govern all of our lives. Rejecting grand narratives of tragedy or redemption, Levitt insists on viewing all lives—our own as well as the victims of the Holocaust—as individually precious and at the same time as unpredictable and ordinary. Ordinary photographs of our own family members, just like those of Holocaust victims, “hold out the promise of a yet unknown future. It is the loss of that unknown future and its promises that we mourn” (84).

American Jewish Loss after the Holocaust might have been stronger with more attention to American Jewish historical work. Levitt’s assumption that American Jews never find their own stories worth telling (14) is belied by the historical work of scholars who have in fact found many valuable stories to tell about ordinary Jewish lives in the United States, even when those lives were lived in the shadow of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, Levitt’s work is a powerful and moving rejection of historical inevitability. Her decision to put Americans’ ordinary losses side by side with the destructiveness of Nazi genocide is brave and fruitful. She compels viewers to confront taboos regarding Holocaust representation and to consider the ways in which the devastation of the Holocaust might shed new light on the study of American Jewish history.

Kirsten Fermaglich is associate professor of History and Jewish Studies at Michigan State University. In 2006, she published her first book, American Dreams and Nazi Nightmares: Early Holocaust Consciousness and Liberal America, 1957–1965. She is currently working on a new book-length project on name-changing.

Stefano Luconi, *La faglia dell'antisemitismo. Italiani ed Ebrei negli Stati Uniti, 1920–1941* (Viterbo: Sette Città, 2007), 169 pp.

Stefano Luconi's work dismantles a myth upon which Italian immigrants have based their image as good-hearted people all over the world: "*Italiani, brava gente.*" Luconi's research on the relationship between Italian-Americans and Jews in the United States between World Wars I and II reveals not only forms of mutual support based on similar social and economic conditions within these minorities, but also the sharp competition between them in the labor market, in the search for appropriate accommodation, as well as in competition over trade unions. The tensions that emerged from these conflicts worsened in the 1930s when, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, most Italian communities fiercely supported Benito Mussolini who was seen as the brilliant political leader capable of redeeming the embarrassing image of Italians abroad.

After the publication of the *Manifesto degli scienziati razzisti* ("Manifesto of the Racist Scientists") and the promulgation of Italy's Racial Laws in 1938, antisemitism developed in Italian communities in the United States; yet it was also supported by prejudices against Jews in many American institutions, both private and public. Luconi investigates in detail these endogenous and exogenous factors that made Italian communities—obviously with some remarkable exceptions—proud supporters of Mussolini's racial policy.

Luconi's work also demonstrates the alleged renunciation of fascism by the Italian immigrants soon after the War, to the point that some of its local leaders tried to destroy any trace of fascist reviews and newspapers published by the Italian communities in the United States between the two World Wars.

Luconi has based his investigation both on these facts as well as on several propaganda sources (radio interviews included) that were put at his disposal by American institutions, including The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, and European institutions such as the John F. Kennedy Institut für Nordamerikastudien at the Freie Universität in Berlin. The author's work opens a new chapter in the history of Italian immigrants as well as their relationship to Italy immediately before and during World War II.

Francesca Yardenit Albertini is professor of History of Jewish Religion at the University of Potsdam. Her research concentrates on Jewish philosophy of the Middle Ages; Jewish bioethics; and Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages.

Anita Norich, *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and American Culture During the Holocaust* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007), 208 pp., Illus.

In *Discovering Exile: Yiddish and Jewish American Culture During the Holocaust*, Anita Norich juxtaposes Yiddish and Jewish American literature during the Holocaust to achieve a synergic whole (13). Interested in controversies inspired by literary texts, Norich attempts to demythologize the view of Yiddish as a domestic culture by breaking loose from the American assimilation narrative and adopting a narrative where Yiddish and English coexist. Her book highlights the paradoxical condition of Yiddish in America—an intensely rich Jewish culture transcending cultural boundaries that lacked substantial influence on American Jews.

In the opening chapter, “Cultural Questions, Jewish Answers,” Norich reveals that when Yiddish writers were engaged in an alert discussion on the limitations of literature in a time of war, their English colleagues were indifferent to their own Jewish identity. American Jewish journals did pay attention to what was written in Yiddish, but they did not readjust their literary sensibilities. The more universal Yiddish literature became, the more Jewish it was. Jewish journals in English were less universal because they needed to justify their existence as Jewish journals, while not providing any unique Jewish content.

The subsequent chapters present three cultural debates: the argument over Jacob Glatstein’s poem “A gute nakht velt” (“A Good Night World”), the dispute over Sholem Asch’s “Christian Novels,” and the discussion of the thirtieth anniversary of Y.L. Peretz’s death. When Glatstein published his poem in April 1938 it was read as a return to Jewish parochialism. Norich proves that Glatstein did not renounce western culture but rather responded in a modernist fashion to a specific historical moment (46). Glatstein addressed the polemics of modern Jewish life, refusing to participate in the dialectic of modernity versus tradition. Examining the reactions to the poem in both Yiddish and English show how critics misread the poem, ignoring its paradoxical undertone, siding with or objecting to its parochialism. Norich discovers a similar tendency in the reactions to Sholem Asch’s popular “Christian Novels.” Yiddish critics attacked Asch not because he was converting to Christianity, but because his novels were published beforehand in English translation (76). This debate was about the erasure of Yiddish from American culture. Yiddish critics regarded Asch as a traitor. In an American democratic context, Asch was hailed for mediating Judeo-Christian values.

In the final chapter, Norich explores the numerous responses to the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Y.L. Peretz in April 1945. At the end of the war his legacy was transformed from a symbol of national modernity to a symbol of mourning and continuity (112). Peretz’s stories were not read anymore as a

political call for change but as an ethical praise for the vanishing Jewish masses, as a bridge between past and present. This is also the goal of Norich's book.

All literary polemics discussed in this book expose misinterpretations of literary texts. Norich investigates the cultural dynamics of these misreadings and the way they shaped the future of Yiddish in postwar America. Norich's book is an important contribution to the study of Jewish responses to the Holocaust in a multicultural context.

Itay B. Zutra is a doctoral candidate in Yiddish Literature at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. His dissertation is titled "Yiddish Modernism in Search of Jewish Self Consciousness—the Case of Inzikh (1920–1940)." He is also an adjunct instructor of Yiddish, teaching beginning and intermediate Yiddish at Yeshiva College, Yeshiva University in New York.

William Pencak, *Jews and Gentiles in Early America, 1654–1800* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005), xiv + 321 pp.

Colonial and early American Jewry has long attracted rich scholarly work. While Jewish settlers ranged from microscopic to miniscule in number, their political and communal experiences shaped the colonies and young nation and set the stage for the far greater numbers who followed them to American shores. Jacob Rader Marcus's spirit hovers pleasantly over this volume in which Pennsylvania State University's William Pencak has compared early Jewish communities in New York, Newport, Charleston, Savannah, and Philadelphia.

Pencak's title (one may smile—who else was there but Jews and gentiles?) conveys his approach: to examine Jews embedded in the broader party, class, and ethnic politics of their communities, interacting with and adjusting to an overwhelmingly non-Jewish population. "When were Jews welcomed, and despised, and by whom," are the book's central, and highly nuanced, questions (v).

Pencak trained his lens on the political role Jews played, the political debates surrounding Jewish citizenship, and the political uses of antisemitism. A persuasive argument emerges that across these colonies and early states Jews were a potent signifier to which political parties resorted to arouse the electorate when it suited their purposes. American antisemitism becomes more tool than weapon. In the larger context of how colonial and early state authorities managed religious and ethnic outsiders, Jews fared reasonably well.

Colonial Jews aligned politically with their gentile class cohorts, according to Pencak. In 1770s Newport, where most merchants sided with the crown, the violent persecution of Loyalists fell upon a number of Jews. The elite colonial proprietors in South Carolina and Georgia generally tolerated and sometimes encouraged better-off Jewish settlers, while in New Amsterdam, the negative response to a group of captive Brazilian Jews who arrived in 1654 had more to

do with their poverty and legal infighting (actual and potential burdens to the colonial government) than a particular anti-Jewish animus.

The turning point came in 1793, when Jews won full political rights under France's revolutionary government—a government repudiated by the Federalists and welcomed by Jeffersonian Republicans. Pencak found Federalist Jews flocking to Jefferson's party, and in subsequent campaigns Federalist politicians such as Alexander Hamilton dropped rhetorical bombs about Jews as bloody radicals. Thus Jefferson's victory in 1800 was a landmark not least because it "repudiated an anti-Semitic strain that otherwise might have become far more prominent in American life" (17).

A subordinate thread in *Jews and Gentiles in Early America* involves divisions within the Jewish community. "[I]n a country where their small numbers and the failure of antisemites to cause serious harm left them susceptible to conversion," community persistence was extremely difficult (266). No surprise, then, that gentiles quoted here are often clergy whose interest lay in subverting the Jewish faith. Inter-marriage infiltrated the early American Jewish family; interestingly, this volume suggests that even assimilated or converted Jews persisted as "ethnic" Jews in the public mind.

Jews and Gentiles in Early America will take its place among the most useful of works on Jews in this period. Pencak's solid research, sharp political analysis, and broad reach across varying colonies through the prerevolutionary period to the dawn of the nineteenth century goes far in explaining a place that has offered Jewish citizens unparalleled opportunity alongside enormous complexities.

Emily Bingham is the author of Mordecai: An Early American Family (2003).

Marc Lee Raphael, *Diary of a Los Angeles Jew, 1947–1972: Autobiography as Autofiction* (Williamsburg, VA: The College of William & Mary, 2008), 82 pp.

Having served as editor of the quarterly journal *American Jewish History* for two decades (1982–2002), Marc Lee Raphael would have played a decisive role in enhancing the understanding of American Jewish history even had he not also bequeathed an enormously varied body of scholarship on his own. Restless in his choice of genres, Raphael has written a full-scale communal history (Columbus, Ohio), a biography (Rabbi Abba Hillel Silver), synoptic studies of Jewish religion (*Profiles in American Judaism, Judaism in America*), and an institutional history (United Jewish Appeal). Raphael is a published poet as well as the co-anthologist, with his wife, Linda S. Raphael, of *When Night Fell*, a book of Holocaust fiction. An indefatigable editor with a knack for soliciting original essays from a wide constituency of scholars, even in fields outside of American Jewish history, Raphael also manages to find the time to serve as a pulpit rabbi and to chair the Department of Religious Studies at the College of William and Mary.

Such virtuosity now includes the invention of what he calls “autofiction,” which is an effort to blend memory and imagination, a quest to discover the truth in the past that cannot be disentangled from the realization that the result is a kind of lie. *Diary of a Los Angeles Jew, 1947–1972: Autobiography as Autofiction* draws upon diary excerpts, from childhood through the author’s promotion to a tenured professorship at Ohio State University, to which he has added “much later commentary on these entries” (3). A term such as “autofiction” seems designed to deny teleology, however. He does not want the reader to believe that a fully formed self wrote those entries, which at best record a process rather than a goal, an emerging self that did not at the time “have a clue” (3).

When one hears the phrase “postwar Los Angeles,” the images likely to be conjured are associated with sun-baked comfort, pleasure, security, and perhaps wealth. The Jews who moved there rarely did so to implant an austere religion to adhere to; they were more likely driven by the desire to emancipate themselves from the authority of *mitzvot* than to reproduce the rigors of the Old World or even of the East Coast. In the early years of his childhood, Raphael remembers the Christmas celebrations of his parents and their extended family and friends but no Judaic observance other than a seder and the High Holy Days. Joel and Florence Raphael did not join a synagogue until 1948, when the oldest of their three children, Marc, entered the first grade.

Diary of a Los Angeles Jew then becomes the intriguing and indeed mysterious record of the formation of a religious consciousness, under conditions that might have seemed too barren for such yearnings to flourish. The atmospheric pressure that the adolescent author experienced was assimilationist; no other ideology could have gained traction in postwar Los Angeles. Yet somehow, perhaps beginning with ontological questions about God with which Raphael bombarded his mother (to whose memory this volume is dedicated), a calling, however inchoate, was beckoning. *Diary of a Los Angeles Jew* is almost freakish in its self-portrait of a teenager who loves Hebrew school, who is absorbed not merely in sports and games and socialization but also in the dilemmas of faith, in the allure of peoplehood, and in the curiosities of ritual and liturgy. Raphael even claims to remember clearly the wisdom that Rabbi Albert M. Lewis of Temple Isaiah imparted during his bar mitzvah ceremony in 1955.

Perhaps every religious autobiography has an epiphany, a moment when a *Beruf* or vocation is suddenly grasped or injected and a new identity snaps shut. What makes this book not just Jewish but supremely American occurred, according to the diary, on 16 August 1957, at a softball game between campers and the staff of overnight Camp Saratoga in the Santa Cruz Mountains. The author was on the mound. The batter was a twenty-seven-year-old German-born rabbi (and a wonderful teacher), Alfred Gottschalk, who blasted the home run that won the game. “I knew for sure,” Raphael writes, “that one could be a rabbi and a normal person at the same time” (28). The author had not yet

entered the tenth grade, but a path to adulthood had been found. Life is quirky. If Gottschalk had hit, say, a scratch single instead, would Raphael have become something else, like an astrophysicist or a car mechanic? Such speculation is beyond the boundaries of this charming little book. But the enduring enigmas of the religious life are not thereby solved.

Stephen J. Whitfield is professor of American Studies at Brandeis University and the author, most recently, of In Search of American Jewish Culture (1999, paperback 2001).

Marianne R. Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1945–2006* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), 516 pp.

Marianne Sanua's *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1945–1955* is a comprehensive overview of the activities of the American Jewish Committee in the second half of the twentieth century. As such, it is a valuable new addition to scholarship on American Jewish history, politics, and organizational life. The book was commissioned by the American Jewish Committee (AJC) in honor of the organization's one hundredth anniversary and is based primarily on the author's unrestricted access to the AJC's archival sources located at its New York headquarters, as well as various publications and interviews. A complement to Naomi W. Cohen's 1972 book, *Not Free to Desist: The American Jewish Committee, 1906–1966*, Sanua updates and continues the story of the AJC into the current millennium.

Let Us Prove Strong covers an extensive amount of material and provides both a detailed description of the AJC's myriad activities as well as an overview of American Jewish history in general. Sanua provides extensive background information and places the work of the AJC in the context of broader historical trends. In this regard, it will serve both the specialist and the general reader well. The book begins with the founding of the AJC in 1906 as a small, elitist organization of prominent Jewish men with the goal of "preventing the infraction of the civil, political, and religious rights of Jews" worldwide (xii). Originally non-Zionist and deeply ambivalent over issues of Jewish identity and peoplehood, one of the astounding stories of the AJC is its growth throughout the twentieth century into a major nongovernmental organization deeply committed to Jewish identity and community as well as to the State of Israel.

The AJC was involved in almost every major event to touch American Jews in the second half of the twentieth century. Sanua highlights interfaith work, Zionism, civil rights activism, and ongoing research and publications as some of the areas in which the AJC was particularly influential. While the author is careful to include less savory dimensions of the AJC's past, overall the book leans toward the positive. In part due to the comprehensive, survey character of the book and its detailed background information, the author does not always

thoroughly analyze the nature of AJC influence and interaction with other Jewish and non-Jewish groups. She hints that the organization's size and its extensive political and social connections, particularly among non-Jews, were major factors in its ability to influence policy and bring about change. While a more detailed discussion and analysis of these themes would have contributed to the overall narrative, *Let Us Prove Strong* is nonetheless an impressive testament to the history of the American Jewish Committee.

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Deborah R. Weiner, Anita Kassof, and Avi Y. Decter, eds., *Voices of Lombard Street: A Century of Change in East Baltimore* (Baltimore: The Jewish Museum of Maryland, 2007), 170 pp., illus.

Popular portraits of “the old neighborhood” are often exercises in rosy-hued nostalgia. The editors of this volume, which complements the Jewish Museum of Maryland’s exhibit of the same name, are to be congratulated on generally avoiding that trap. Their goal is a multifaceted portrait of a neighborhood whose shifting boundaries and character are reflected in its multiplicity of names, including “East Baltimore,” “Jewtown,” “the projects,” and, lately, “Jonestown.” The several blocks of East Lombard Street in East Baltimore—the commercial heart of the city’s East European Jewish immigrant ghetto—and their surrounding neighborhood are the geographical focus. Although the individual essays are diverse in focus and uneven in character, the reader does take away an overall sense of the area’s evolution.

Hasia Diner’s opening essay offers a generic description of the life and institutions of East European Jewish immigrant communities, not of Baltimore’s community specifically. Eric Goldstein’s meticulously researched study of the residential patterns of nineteenth-century Baltimore Jews explains how the Lombard Street area became the immigrant Jewish neighborhood. The central Europeans built their synagogues there because it was equally accessible from all the neighborhoods where they lived; this attracted Jewish residents and businesses. Although the neighborhood was too upscale for the first East Europeans, the familiar pattern took hold: The “Germans” moved out to fancier neighborhoods and the “Russians” moved in.

Anita Kassof’s essay describing the lives of Jewish children in the immigrant neighborhood draws extensively on oral histories and memoirs and asks, “If the written record indicates poverty, overcrowding, and crime, why are former residents’ memories, by and large, so positive?” (43) Her answer: This densely Jewish, mixed-use neighborhood was an environment in which children could get everything they needed and people knew and interacted with each other;

the result was “a safe and familiar community for East Baltimore’s children.” (43) As may be expected in a volume intended to appeal to the descendants of those children, however, there is no serious discussion of issues such as crime, juvenile delinquency, or abandoned families.

As the only essay focused on a Jewish communal institution, Melanie Shell-Weiss’s history of the Jewish Court of Arbitration is interesting, but it does not quite belong. Melissa Martens’s contribution on Little Italy is too brief and too broad to do justice to the history of that community, and its discussion of relations between Jews and Italians is largely anecdotal. While the editors deserve credit for wanting to show that the neighborhood was not exclusively Jewish, the inclusion of this essay feels like tokenism. By contrast, editor Deborah Weiner’s concluding essay ably traces the neighborhood’s sad fate in the era of urban renewal and race riots, as both social networks and physical buildings were devastated. A fine photo essay by Dean Krimmel, as well as detailed maps on the book’s inside covers, allow the reader to see the East Baltimore area under discussion.

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