

BOOK REVIEWS

Pamela S. Nadell, *Women Who Would Be Rabbis: A History of Women's Ordination, 1889–1985* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 300 pp.

New directions in historical research usually signal changes in historians' search for usable pasts. Before the 1960s, when the number of American Jews trained as historians began a steep climb, many of the books in American Jewish history reflected the interests and needs of the many rabbis who, understandably, often focused their research on writings by rabbis, documenting in effect a loose history of the American rabbinate. The late Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus trained several generations of dedicated graduates of Hebrew Union College in preserving and using the records of American Jewish life. Their works form a core body of works that provided a foundation on which others continue to build.

Twenty-five years ago a new group of historians began contributing to the field of American Jewish history and their various new interests took the field into new areas of research. Two volumes, *The Jewish Woman in America* (1975) and *The Jewish Woman* (1976), marked the emergence of women historians. As they began to seek an understanding of Jewish women's lives, new questions emerged, such as: What makes a Jewish woman's life Jewish? What does religious life look like if synagogue activity, often not central to Jewish women's lives, is omitted? By exploring seldom-studied letters by women, several scholars found clear expressions of faith and commitments to Jewish communities and causes. The recently established Jewish Women's Archive created a vehicle by which historians could more easily locate materials on and by Jewish women. By the end of the twentieth century, we could count on several new books on Jewish women's history to appear each year.

The increase in history books parallels the more active role Jewish women have taken in religious life during these past twenty-five years. While historians worked to uncover women's past, other Jewish women worked to change the present and began to see women ordained as rabbis. In the early 1990s *Four Centuries of Jewish Women's Spirituality* (1992) proved women indeed had a religious past on which to build. The following year sociologist Sylvia Barak Fishman concluded that "feminism is the new American immigration," so

dramatically had Jewish women enhanced their role in communal life, both in the synagogue and in community organizations. Thus, educated Jewish women fought on two fronts, providing the usable past to support the effort to change Jewish women's role in American Jewish life.

Pamela S. Nadell's important new book brings these two streams together by providing a history of the ongoing effort to obtain ordination for Jewish women. She dashes many long-held myths and assumptions. Far from being a recent, feminist-inspired movement, Nadell proves that women have been agitating for the right to be both trained and ordained rabbis since 1889, when Philadelphia journalist, Mary M. Cohen, raised the issue in a short story published in the *Jewish Exponent*. By putting the arguments in favor of women rabbis into the mouths of fictional characters, Cohen brought the debate into the homes of Philadelphia's Jews only five years after her synagogue, Mikveh Israel, voted to allow women to vote as full synagogue members. Mikveh Israel may have been the first synagogue in America to so include its many female members. We might assume that these attitudes and actions would have signaled a Reform congregation, but, on the contrary, Mikveh Israel was, and is, a Sephardic synagogue, one of the oldest in the nation. My own research discovered that Cohen considered her own worship orthodox to the degree that in her will she stipulated that her bequest to her synagogue should be given to some "other orthodox" congregation if Mikveh Israel ever abandoned the Sephardi rite. Nadell points out that Mikveh Israel was influenced to women's rights not by religious reform, which it abhorred, but by its American context.

But Reform rabbis *did* raise the idea of women's ordination before other rabbis. Isaac M. Wise wrote about it in his German-language magazine directed at women, *Die Deborah*, in 1867. He might have been the first to offer a proof text for the change, Genesis 1:27. He blamed Jewish women's inequality in the synagogue on outside influence, especially from Islam. Little action was taken on his suggestion until almost thirty years later. By the 1890s, Jewish women had become a force in synagogue and Jewish communal life, founding national organizations like the National Council of Jewish Women and numerous synagogue sisterhoods. The NCJW, which focused on women's education in both Judaism and Jewish history along with practical service to the Jewish community, gave women the intellectual

and financial means to affect their congregations. Mostly Reform women, they revered motherhood as did other Victorians of that era. More interestingly, perhaps, Nadell notes that their study groups "deliberately reread biblical and rabbinic texts, much the way modernizing rabbis did, so that the weight of the past would sanction the rights they now claimed" (37). Exemplifying those rights, and providing practical illustration of them, was Ray Frank, a journalist who offered sermons and led services in pulpits along the Pacific Coast in the years before her marriage in 1901, creating a reputation as the "girl rabbi."

The book's early mood of hopeful optimism becomes a story of repeated frustrations by the third chapter. By the 1920s, "a small number of women tried to push the question of women's ordination from 'the bottom up.'" Nadell's engaging, lively writing captures the disappointments of women students as their petitions for ordination are refused by faculties and boards at both Hebrew Union College and the Jewish Theological Seminary. Like Martha Neumark, who assumed she would be ordained upon completing her course of studies in 1921, these women often faced a faculty who could not find precedent in Jewish texts for such an action. Frequently, faculty refused to grant ordination to female graduates because they did not want to set the precedent. While they might agree that the particular female student petitioning for ordination had completed her studies well, they asked that women offer "special proof of [their] capacity to lead a congregation" (63). Neumark was not ordained.

Faculties at the rabbinical schools discouraged women by refusing to ordain them, by severely limiting the number of women whom they allowed to enroll in their classes, and by keeping silent about the history of women like Neumark who earned the degree but were denied ordination. In the 1950s, Rebbetzin Rebecca Brickner urged the National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods to raise the issue with the CCAR, where some rabbis were sympathetic. That decade's "explosion" in number of synagogues meant that male rabbis did not fear competing with women for positions. Yet, through the 1960s, women who served as rabbis did so under unusual circumstances, such as filling in for husbands who became ill.

After the passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, it became more difficult to defend denying ordination to women who could succeed in rabbinic training. Perhaps more significantly, women who enrolled in

HUC in the 1960s planned to fight for ordination, and they shared their experience with other female students who lent support and credibility. The first female rabbi, Sally Preisand, came from this group. The Conservative movement, which relies more on halakic support than does the Reform movement, concluded in 1978 that "there is no direct halakhic objection to the acts of training and ordaining a woman to be a rabbi, preacher, and teacher in Israel" (194). Yet there, too, the question was shelved until 1983 and there, too, the question was forced into the open by the rabbinical association against the mood of the faculty. It was not until 1985 that Amy Eilberg was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary.

Nadell concludes that three things had to converge to enable women's ordination. Women had to enroll and train for it, women had to form a support base to withstand and disprove discouragements and insults, and women had to know the history of women's efforts for ordination. She muses that Orthodoxy might not be far behind. Although officially it shows no regard for the developments within liberal branches of Judaism, within Orthodoxy women's talmudic classes and study and prayer groups have blossomed in a variety of settings. In some venues, Conservative and Orthodox women study together. Nadell notes that the Jewish press has raised the question of Orthodox congregations hiring a trained female to "help the rabbi" and who "could teach, preach, counsel and visit the sick" (219). Whether or not true parity between men and women will ever exist in Orthodox congregations, it seems undeniable that in some arenas Orthodox women's education is taken very seriously and that new roles in which women can use that training to benefit their community and themselves may be forthcoming. Nadell has given us an important and hopeful book that provides a very usable past.

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V. P. Franklin, Nancy L. Grant, Harold M. Kletnick, and Genna Rae McNeil, eds., *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), 366 pp.

Most of the critics and observers who have examined black-Jewish relations, especially Jewish writers, have worked within the framework of the "special relationship" narrative. According to this view, Jews sympathized with the plight of African Americans and became close allies with them in their fight for civil rights. This narrative became reified as historical fact by a spate of books and articles that emerged in the early 1970s, a time of growing tension between the two communities. The basic assumption of much of this work was that a break had occurred in the historical alliance between African Americans and Jews. Recently, historians like Murray Friedman and Leonard Dinnerstein have written about a growing anti-Semitism within the black community, and many Jewish organizations have denounced the anti-Semitic statements of Louis Farrakahn and many of his Nation of Islam followers. To borrow from the title of Friedman's book, *What Went Wrong?*, these accounts assume that for a long time things were going right but that recently the historic alliance between Jews and blacks has come apart.

Lately, historians have begun to examine many of the assumptions that guide this narrative. In particular, was there a "grand alliance" between blacks and Jews during this century? Do the recent tensions between the two groups reflect a break from the past or merely the continuation of long-running tensions? To shed light on these questions, scholars from several different disciplines participated in a 1993 conference at Washington University entitled "Blacks and Jews: An American Historical Perspective." The essays from this conference have been compiled in the new book *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict*. The subtitle of the book captures the central theme of the essays. Did Jews and blacks enjoy a convergence of interests that enabled them to work together in the fight against oppression and discrimination, or did these two groups have conflicting interests that precluded a true alliance? The book offers no clear answer to this question, choosing instead to offer evidence on both sides. In fact, the book is divided into two parts: one to address instances of convergence and the other to argue for conflict. Taken as a whole the essays offer no final conclusion, but individually they do reveal certain inescapable facts

about the complex relationship between African Americans and Jews, and they point toward a new direction for future studies of the issue.

In the first essay Hasia Diner makes the case for this special alliance between Jews and blacks. She suggests that Jews and blacks were drawn together in the early twentieth century by both true friendship and self-interest. She argues that because of their experience with anti-Semitism, Jews had a special understanding of racial oppression against blacks and thus were outspoken supporters of civil rights causes. Yet Diner's argument is rather unpersuasive. She bases her conclusions solely on close readings of editorials in the Yiddish press. While clearly these Yiddish editors supported black efforts to combat racism, do their editorials tell us anything about most Jews in America? Her reliance on discourse analysis overlooks the actual social and economic relations between blacks and Jews in northern cities as southern blacks moved northward in the first trickles of the "great migration" during World War I. Murray Friedman also argues for a convergence of interests between blacks and Jews in his essay, "The Civil Rights Movement and the Reemergence of the Left." Friedman examines the alliance between African American Bayard Rustin and Stanley Levison and their role as advisers to Martin Luther King Jr. Yet, ultimately, Levison is one Jew. Can he represent the great majority of Jewish Americans?

Drawing on a wide array of organization records, Cheryl Greenberg does a much better job in making her case for a black-Jewish alliance by showing how national Jewish groups supported the civil rights movement. Yet Greenberg offers a nuanced view of this support, showing how some members of the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, and the American Jewish Committee disagreed with this position. For example, Greenberg explores in detail how many southern Jews opposed this organizational support for the civil rights movement due to their fears of anti-Semitic reprisals. Clearly, the narrative of a grand alliance between blacks and Jews does not hold true for all regions in the country.

The biggest missing piece of this narrative is the role of social and economic relationships between blacks and Jews. The second section of the book contains essays about conflict that do a much better job of outlining this crucial part of black-Jewish relations. In his essay,

"African-Americans, Jews and the City," Joe W. Trotter Jr. points out that few studies of the relationship between blacks and Jews examine their socioeconomic relations during the first half of the twentieth century. One economic relation that Trotter mentions is African American women who worked as domestics in Jewish households. He also mentions the interesting fact that Jewish-owned stores were especially targeted during the 1943 race riot in Detroit. Marshall Stevenson Jr. shows how most Jewish rank-and-file members of the United Auto Workers during the 1940s opposed an affirmative action plan that would reserve a spot on the Union's Board for a Black Member.

Herbert Hill, former national labor secretary for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, offers the most critical view of the grand alliance narrative in his essay, "Black-Jewish Conflict in the Labor Context." He shows how the Jewish Labor Committee supported the racist practices of many AFL-CIO locals during the 1950s and 1960s. He also presents the remarkable case of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which was formed by socialist Jewish needle trade workers in 1900. After World War II the vast majority of its membership was black and Puerto Rican while its leadership remained Jewish. This leadership became cut off from its rank and file and refused to share power with them. Black workers were stuck in the lowest-paying job classifications in the garment industry, while the Jewish leadership did little to improve their status. Despite membership protests, the leadership even donated substantial union funds for an ILGWU wing at the Workman's Circle Retirement Home and ILGWU Co-Operative Housing Village, both of which refused to accept black or Puerto Rican residents. Hill's essay offers a sobering reappraisal of the "special relationship" between blacks and Jews.

As recent scholars like Karen Brodtkin and Matthew Frye Jacobson have begun to flesh out, Jewish racial identity evolved during the twentieth century. At some point these racially alien East European Jews became "white." The story of black-Jewish relations is a crucial part of the answer to "how the Jews became white." In his essay, "Black Sacrifice, Jewish Redemption," Michael Rogin examines this issue of whiteness from the perspective of Jewish minstrelsy, or blackface performers. Yet Rogin relies exclusively on discourse, in this case his interpretation of the 1947 film *Body and Soul*. The film depicts a

seemingly mutual friendship between a Jewish boxer and his African American trainer, but Rogin finds hidden minstrel themes that undercut the film's intended message of black-Jewish harmony. Nevertheless, Rogin's analysis says very little about how blacks and Jews interacted in real life.

As some of the other essays in the book show, discourse analysis alone cannot adequately explain Jewish whiteness. As outlined by Trotter, Stevenson, and Hill, understanding how blacks and Jews interacted in U.S. cities during the twentieth century will bring us much closer to understanding how Jews became white and will offer a much more complete picture of the story of black-Jewish relations. As the best essays in *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century* reveal, the great narrative of the black-Jewish alliance is in need of some revision.

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Ralph Melnick, *The Life and Work of Ludwig Lewisohn*, vol. 1 (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998), 754 pp.

In 1934, having been given a temporary passport by the American government, Ludwig Lewisohn ended his exile in Paris. With Thelma Spear and their child he boarded a ship headed for the United States. His life, at this point, had been a series of accomplishments countered by mishaps—some of them attributable to messy personal relations, others caused by his Jewishness. He had been known, by turns, as a brilliant young student whose career was almost throttled because he was Jewish, a novelist, a poet, a memoirist, an important man of letters in a burgeoning American-Jewish culture, a scholar and translator who helped introduce America to German writing, an individual whose progressive views about personal freedom were part of a reevaluation of American social mores, and a thinker concerned with reevaluating the American literary heritage. He was also known as an adulterer, enmeshed in a bitter scandal involving a vengeful, older wife and a considerably younger woman. He had left the United States making an expedient exile but with a devastating consequence. He found himself stranded, for all practical purposes, in France without an American passport.

Lewisohn's birth in Berlin in 1882, his subsequent life in the United States, and his return to America in 1934 triangulate the first volume of Melnick's extraordinarily capacious biography. Melnick offers us not simply a reading of Lewisohn and his times but an interpretation of what Lewisohn thought was the significance of them. *The Life and Work of Ludwig Lewisohn* is a study, therefore, of the *uses* Lewisohn believed he was making of his social and psychological experience. Here, Melnick is at his closest with his subject. As I read this first volume, Melnick's strength, beyond his rich detail, is his close sympathy with Lewisohn's presentation of self. In fact, Melnick is open about Lewisohn's appeal. "But few biographers," Melnick reflects, "choose subjects who have not in some way touched their lives. There is a resonance. Something compels, if only the questions that echo in ourselves" (12).

The chapter headings quickly convey Melnick's organizing categories: Lewisohn's life understood as a series of trials of self-consciousness. Lewisohn's autonomy and maturity become acts of creative resistance, if not aggression against *alienations*. A quick, albeit selective, listing of twenty-seven chapter headings makes the point:

"Homeless in a New World"; "A Suspect Race"; "Bitter Fate"; "World of His Ancestors"; "First Blood"; "Fear of Death"; "Against the Tide"; "Suffering Unjustified"; "Teshuvah"; "Exiled to Paris"; "To That Island Within"; "In Self-Defense"; "Dissident Voice"; "Private Furies, Public Washing"; "Pagan Revolt"; "Out of Prison." In short, Melnick gives us a life with a thesis, and it is to his resounding credit that in Lewisohn's case the charting of pathos makes eminent good sense. Judging from this massive first volume, this map agrees with Lewisohn's own understanding of self.

In fact, Lewisohn's signature was a turning of *his* personal quandaries into the substance of his fiction and reflections. His problems, at least his comprehension of them, dominated his critical imagination: the puritanism of American life, the seductive aridness of American mass culture, and a notion of Judaism as social and psychological therapy for those Jews frustrated by a spurious assimilation that could not make existence authentic *and* unitary .

Lewisohn was also dogged by a vanity that, I think, was the effect of his struggles. It was also the reflex of his prodigal genius. At times, he would confuse being one of a company of new, progressive writers with *his* being a pioneer of modern sentiment or thought; he liked to believe that his romanticization of Zionism was the reality of a complex movement; he presented his interpretation of what can be called "Jewishness" as a normative Judaism, or at least a Judaism for the times.

Yet as Melnick presents *his* case for Lewisohn, there is strength in his subject's arguments as well: Lewisohn was a man of letters with a cosmopolitan's grasp of a literary situation. He brought a widening sense of European writing to a country justifiably fascinated by its own satisfaction in its accomplishments. He was no fool when it came to assessing the dangers of a complacent American temper. He clearly understood that the notion of a self-critical culture was indispensable for American democracy yet crushed by popular mores. Importantly, he understood, and early, the dangers and the targets of the fascist imagination.

Above all, he was practical—and this term should not be used lightly—when he proposed a return to a lived Judaism and affirmable Zionism as legitimate pathways in modernity. His words are eloquent about the deep satisfaction with this philosophy. Wandering the Lower East Side, he recovered a self and its history. Speaking about

the joy of this apprehension, he wrote that he "had come upon a world that was, in all its profounder and more luminous aspects, my world, the world of my people and of my own instincts and perceptions" (630). Unlike those writers who had fled the poverty and culture of "Jewtown," as Jacob Riis popularized it, Lewisohn understood that the Jewish past, as both Jewish and past, was a river yet flowing into the present. For Lewisohn, the vantage point of writing could only be this confluence in this sense; he both shared and widened the Jewish renaissance that began in the early 1900s (the founding of the Menorah Society at Harvard in 1906 seems like a convenient date).

Reading Melnick's volume, how can we not be struck by our understanding of Lewisohn today? In our time, he seems to be a representative figure of the alienated Jew, known best through his autobiographies, rather than a commanding literary—and this term should be used in its widest sense—figure who demonstrated the moral uses of a humanist imagination, or rather, the Jewish dimension of humanist thought. I doubt if many people read today *Israel*, *Stephen Escott*, *This People*, *An Altar in the Fields*, *The Case of Mr. Crump*, or for that matter his still interesting *Expression in America*. Few readers would go back to Lewisohn's pieces in the *Nation* that make a good brief for what Alfred Kazin called "a force for progress." Melnick makes an important and exceptionally readable case for our seeing Lewisohn in a greater light than before. Certainly, Melnick has given us a more nuanced portrait of Lewisohn than we have had before. Who would not await the completion of this labor?

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David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999), 329 pp.

The antecedents of the Jewish center movement are many. The classical Reform temple of the late nineteenth century, for example, gradually expanded its commitments to include education, social action, and literary undertakings, all activities of the "open temple" that were widespread by the turn of the century. Because of this philosophy, school buildings and social annexes were added to temples. Israel Abrahams argued that this work was an outgrowth of the medieval model of the synagogue as a house of prayer, study, and gathering.

The gradual development of the Young Men's Hebrew Association and Young Women's Hebrew Association movements resulted in the 1913 formation of the Council of Young Men's Hebrew and Kindred Associations. Where the Reform congregations had moved from worship to education, social life, and social action, the YMHAs, inspired in part by the YMCAs that combined "hymn" and "gym," attempted to bridge the gap between "shul" and "pool." Rabbis ranging from Max Lilienthal in Cincinnati to Sabato Morais in Philadelphia and Judah Magnes in New York supported this phenomenon. It became apparent over time, however, that religious activities would not have primacy in this setting even though a few Ys host worship to this day. The Ys lack of religious pungency in part reflects the pandenominational ideology and funding of the Ys. That ideology in turn led to a desire to avoid head-on competition with the synagogues. Nonetheless, the Ys served as an important integrating mode on the way to the Jewish center.

The Jewish settlement house movement linked education for acculturation, training for work, and Jewish education in new ways. New York's Educational Alliance soon hosted a People's Synagogue with services starting in 1899. Its leaders attempted spirited yet decorous services in a modern American mode aimed at appealing to the young. Here, too, the melding of the religious, the educational, and efforts at social welfare found a home. This phenomenon also spread across the country, occasionally affected by the spread of modern Jewish education as championed by Samson Benderly.

Small Orthodox shuls came to be replaced by larger community synagogues with auditoriums and classrooms inside them, representing a major shift in which the synagogues took responsibility

for Jewish education. Efforts at modernization led to the founding of the Young Israel movement in 1912.

The graduates of the Jewish Theological Seminary blazed the way toward synagogue Americanization with their commitment to revitalized worship, extensive Jewish education, and an engaging synagogue social life. This effort matched the ambitions of more and more lay leaders for congregations that would anchor Jewish communities in new neighborhoods and bespeak the Jewish presence in America. This new development is reflected in Herbert Goldstein's 1916 description of "The Institutional Synagogue," which was then developed on 110th Street in Harlem. Almost simultaneously, Mordecai Kaplan and another group of lay leaders created the Jewish Center on 86th Street. It opened in January 1918. Now the term "Jewish center" developed currency to describe buildings that had religious, educational, social, and athletic facilities so that they could provide for all aspects of Jewish life.

The rapid spread of the Jewish center model was accelerated by the proliferation of congregations in response to rapid population growth, Jewish economic success, and the speedy spread into new neighborhoods. The Brooklyn Jewish Center was a particularly influential model built in the early 1920s. Jewish centers became the dominant model for the emerging Conservative movement and a common model for new Reform and Orthodox congregations as well. Kaufman fails to note that many congregations called "Jewish center" had no athletics among their commitments, settling for religious, social, and educational activities like those found earlier in the Reform movement rather than the full center model suggested by the term "shul with a pool" and embodied in Kaplan's Jewish Center and Herbert Levinthal's Brooklyn Jewish Center.

The evolution of the synagogue center followed a fascinating course carefully charted by Kaufman in this volume, which in an earlier version was his doctoral dissertation at Brandeis. In the tradition of Marshall Sklare and Kaufman's thesis adviser Jonathan Sarna, Kaufman has examined the records of dozens of institutions, newspaper stories about them, and previous works on the development of the synagogue. While occasionally too eager to tell us everything he has found out (e.g., his discussion of architects on p.269) and sometimes repetitive, he has nonetheless produced a rich social history that fills an important gap in our knowledge about the

unique development of the American synagogue.

Kaufman's detailed knowledge of his chosen subject is obvious throughout. The reader should be careful about his reliability, however, when he strays from that subject. For example, his suggestion that contemporary *havurot* move from the social to the religious (75) is a misleading overgeneralization. The equation of philanthropy with *tsedakah* (93–94) confuses a broad and complex realm of activity that includes fulfillment of many mitzvot, such as *pidyon shvuyim* and *gemilut hasadim*, with the narrow mitzvah of giving money.

In *Shul with a Pool* David Kaufman provides a thorough social history of the emergence of the Jewish center in American Jewish life, an emergence, he writes, that is about "the tension between the social and religious spheres of Jewish life" (1)—a thesis that misframes Kaufman's important research about the evolving nature of the American synagogue. Also problematic is his claim that the Jewish center's "descendent today is the suburban Jewish Community Center" (3). It is more easily shown that the JCC descended from the settlement house and YMHA. Kaufman's misunderstanding is a result of his failure to explore sufficiently the intellectual underpinnings of the Jewish center movement.

This failure explains the relatively small amount of attention Kaufman gives to Mordecai Kaplan. Kaufman rightly comments that Kaplan's contributions to the physical development of the center are no more important than those of many others. Kaufman does not go further in exploring why so many see Kaplan as having been seminal in creating the Jewish center movement. I would suggest that it is because of his role in providing an ideology for the movement.

In Kaplan's thinking about Jewish peoplehood, the social and religious spheres depend upon each other. The religious and moral aspects of Jewish life require a social context to have meaning, but without the religious and moral aspects, Jewish life would lose its value and distinctiveness. Thus for him—and his many supporters in the Jewish center movement—the tendency to treat the social and athletic facilities as little more than a lure to attract the young meant that the purpose of the enterprise—integrating the spheres—was lost.

For Kaplan and his disciples, this integration was meant to reestablish a living Jewish community. Kaufman is correct in pointing out the decline of the Jewish center but wrong to blame it on the

nonsectarian JCC. It is true that the JCC is a most cost-efficient social service provider because of its nonsectarian pancommunal approach and its financial advantage because of access to federation funding. But the real decline of the Jewish center grows out of the fact that it was not designed to obtain sufficient commitment from its members to constitute itself as a covenantal community. Rather, it provided an array of activities and involvements from which to pick and choose, creating what Robert Bellah in *Habits of the Heart* calls a "lifestyle enclave," a relatively homogeneous grouping more like a country club in program design than most of us would like to admit. If one cares little for tennis or worship, one simply uses the other facilities of the club or center. Thus, among the major competitors for the JCCs are for-profit gyms and exercise facilities, forcing the JCCs to keep upgrading their equipment to remain competitive. It seems obvious that Jews approach these facilities largely as consumers.

Kaplan's hope of creating authentic communities based on shared commitments and values could not be realized by the Jewish center movement precisely because its array of activities promoted American atomization instead of reinvigorating Jewish citizenship. That, I believe, is the real reason for the decline of the Jewish center. Many of its functions have been taken over by more specialized and sophisticated institutions. The search for authentic Jewish community has continued not only in *havurot* as Kaufman indicates (281) but in a variety of efforts to redesign the synagogue. The search for community continues to animate congregational redesign.

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Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), 339 pp.

Michael Rogin's *Blackface, White Noise* is precisely what "Jewish film studies" needs most and precisely what it needs least. This relatively new subfield of film studies—itsself a young discipline—has remained mired in the "images of 'the other' in film" analytic model, as Lester Friedman pointed out back in his 1991 work, *Unspeakable Images: Ethnicity and the American Cinema* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press). Yet few books have emerged to replace that early, necessary step in the emergence of Jewish film studies, a field that might be said to include the study of any or all of the following: Jews in motion picture history; film's place in the shaping of Jewish identity; cinematic images of Jews; Jewish stars; Jewish filmmakers; Jewish audiences, their film-going habits, and their reactions to films; and the Jewish community's influence over both film content and the development of the film industry.

With *Blackface, White Noise*, Rogin offers a glimpse of what this much-needed, sophisticated, and rigorous analysis might look like: his brilliant analysis of a number of significant films (especially *The Jazz Singer* [1927], to which he devotes more than fifty pages) is unparalleled in Jewish film studies. But his work is also, unfortunately, an extraordinarily difficult read: its prose is dense and unwieldy, and its immersion within the world of theory—postmodern, film, feminist, queer, cultural, psychoanalytic, or other—limits its readership to a select group of academics instead of giving the book the broad currency it might otherwise have had. Rogin's difficult prose and his reliance on theory and its accompanying jargon obscures what is essentially a simple and, I think, mainly credible argument.

Rogin asserts, using a handful of films that include either actual blackface performances or symbolic ones (such as films about "passing"), that these films tell a story of successful (male) Jewish Americanization and, for lack of a better term, "whiteningization," accomplished at the expense of African Americans. By "blacking up" on screen, Jewish performers such as Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor demonstrated both their whiteness (in a time when Jews were not universally considered white) and their Americanness, by adopting a form of popular culture that was unique to the United States. Rogin takes issue with those who focus on the lost "golden days" of black-

Jewish cooperation, maintaining that positive assessments of that era ignore the ways Jews who supported black causes effectively silenced those on whose behalf they were speaking. Several of the films Rogin discusses do seem to have performed the cultural work of making their Jewish actors into "whites" and "Americans"—particularly *The Jazz Singer*, Rogin's best and most discussed example. But Rogin errs when he tries to apply this model to black-Jewish relations outside the cinematic universe, such as when he draws a straight line from *The Jazz Singer* to *Body and Soul* (1947) to *Home of the Brave* (1949) to Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement (which, oddly, seems from this book to have occurred only in the pages of *Commentary* and the NAACP's *Crisis*). The leap from *The Jazz Singer* to the behavior and attitudes of actual American Jews is a large one, whatever one thinks about the motivation behind the preponderance of Jewish-black cooperation in politics, labor, and elsewhere.

This is not to say, however, that Rogin's critique of the romanticization of Jewish-black relations is not useful and well-placed—nor that it does not seem logical that the Jewish figures in these films became white and American by differentiating themselves from (and yes, raising themselves above) blacks. Not everyone agrees: Stephen J. Whitfield (*In Search of American Culture*, [Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999], 150) labels as "counterintuitive" the notion that Jews "black[ed] up [as] the vehicle for becoming white"; the purpose blackface served, he asserts, was only to make Jews *American*.

Rogin's arguments and his methods do give rise to a few problems. The first problem concerns Rogin's evidence. He discusses only about twenty to twenty-five films at any length, and of these several are films about race or jazz in general and have little or nothing to do with Jews (though his comparison of *Gentleman's Agreement* [1947] and *Pinky* [1949] is truly enlightening—no pun intended). Then there are films that barely seem to fit within Rogin's analytical framework—does Claude Rains (non-Jew) as Job Skeffington (Jew) in *Mr. Skeffington* (1944) constitute an instance of passing (210) or even of the "Jewface" Rogin asserts Gregory Peck wears in *Gentleman's Agreement* (225)? Or is a non-Jew playing a Jew simply the essence of acting—of pretending on stage or on screen to be something one is not? Nevertheless, Rogin does draw attention to several films—*Skeffington*, *Body and Soul*, *Whoopie!*, and biopics of Jewish stars, to name a few—that have not received enough attention in Jewish film

studies. His close readings of several of the films are quite brilliant, though again, they are almost impenetrable from a writing perspective and are deeply enmeshed in the world of theory.

This reliance upon theory leads to another problem with Rogin's evidence: theory is, after all, just that—theory. Rogin utilizes almost no material evidence to support his arguments. For example, he rarely refers to actual audiences, making little effort to analyze how the films were understood by the people who watched them when they were first released. What were the lessons Jews, blacks, or other viewers drew from these films? Did they actually have an impact on the Americanization or "whitening" of the Jews? Did Jews even like or patronize these films? Did blacks? I wonder how Rogin's arguments might have changed, or at least been enriched, by a consideration of contemporary audiences' views of these films.

Nor does Rogin provide much information about the Jews who were supposedly responsible for many of these films, except what he has gleaned from Neal Gabler's *Empire of Their Own* (New York: Anchor Books, 1988), which, while groundbreaking, is nevertheless based almost entirely on oral history and popular works on those individuals and Hollywood. For that matter, Rogin gives little discussion about who exactly *was* responsible for these images—was it the studio heads, producers, directors, stars, or the musical directors? And what role, after 1934, did Joseph Breen, Will Hays, and the Production Code play in the determination of these films' content? Rogin does not actually tell us where the "Jewish immigrants" of his subtitle are located—behind the scenes, on the screen, in the audience, or simply in the United States as a whole—and thus raises more questions than he answers.

Finally, I wonder if it is possible that *all* of the theories of blackface and the relationship between Jews and blacks—Rogin's, Whitfield's, Irving Howe's, Hasia Diner's, and others—might all be true at the same time: that blackface mocked African Americans, that it demonstrated Jewish sympathy for them, and that it allowed Jews to exhibit—or to perform—whiteness and Americanness. After all, "Hollywood" was neither a monolithic nor a particularly introspective entity: the many people responsible for these films differed with each other on their feelings toward blacks and, moreover, were no doubt motivated by unconscious, unresolved, contradictory, and inconsistent impulses and attitudes.

The value of Rogin's book, then, lies both in the academic legitimacy it confers upon Jewish film studies—though in this particular instance the sacrifice of the larger audience that might have benefited from the book had it been more accessible seems a rather steep price to pay—and in raising the possibility that the relationship between blacks and Jews exhibited both the negative and the positive attributes that tend to characterize all human relationships.

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Jack Glazier, *Dispersing the Ghetto: The Relocation of Jewish Immigrants Across America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 245 pp.

Jack Glazier has written a very thoughtful and engaging study of one of the most ambitious experiments in the history of American immigration. Between 1901 and 1917, the Industrial Removal Office of the Jewish Agricultural and Industrial Aid Society resettled 80,000 unemployed Jewish immigrants in towns and cities across America. The IRO was deeply concerned about the economic and moral plight of Jews in New York City and developed an impressive program to get many out of the ghetto. Employing modern bureaucratic methods and a network of more than 1,000 host communities nationwide, it placed most of its applicants in the central and western states. Though this work affected only a fraction of the Jews who migrated during the period, the agency believed its clients created migration chains that diverted as many as 250,000 immigrants to the American heartland.

Dispersing the Ghetto is not an institutional history; Glazier spends little time discussing the evolution of the Industrial Removal Office, its leadership, funding, or internal politics. He is more interested in what the agency's experience can tell us about the politics of immigration, both past and present. The book's first two chapters place the IRO in this larger context, focusing on how American Jewry and the country as a whole responded to the "new immigration" from southern and eastern Europe. Assimilated Jews of German descent were at first ambivalent. Most feared that the arrival of millions of poor, mainly Orthodox Jews would ignite a wave of anti-Semitism affecting both established and immigrant Jews alike. They agreed with their non-Jewish peers that the immigrants' crowded enclaves were breeding grounds of vice, poverty, and radicalism. As important, they viewed the ghetto as a major obstacle to assimilation, limiting the newcomers' contact with American values and institutions. Resettlement appeared to be the solution to these problems, and through the 1880s and 1890s a number of Jewish agencies implemented their own programs, though with little success.

But by 1901, when a mass exodus of Rumanian Jews reached America, advocates of dispersal possessed the resources and the confidence to launch a nationwide effort. Two decades of suffering in the Old World and immigrant settlement in the New convinced American Jewry of the need for liberal immigration. IRO leaders Cyrus Sulzberger and David Bressler were adamant that the East European

Jews could not only adapt to but flourish in their adopted country .

Testifying before a series of congressional commissions, they also believed public awareness of their work would defeat the movement for immigrant exclusion and the scientific racism that supported it. Though perhaps naive, this faith in the strength of American pluralism (and rationality) was central to the agency's efforts. The IRO was determined to prove, by the example of thousands of resettled Jews, that the cultural aim of assimilation and the economic goal of self-reliance were well within reach.

But as Glazier documents in his third and fourth chapters, these best-laid plans often went awry. The IRO had to tangle with much more than the threat of nativism. The population it sought to assimilate and the host communities it depended on to find jobs were constant sources of criticism and frustration. The East European Jews were not nearly as preoccupied with gentile opinion as their German Jewish peers. They resented the condescension and self-serving character of the *yahudim's* aid and saw no need to abandon age-old traditions so quickly. Meanwhile, the IRO's contacts across the country often complained of scheming applicants and impossible demands. However inspiring, the agency's calls for collective responsibility and a national Jewish community regularly fell victim to local needs and reputations.

To its credit, the IRO worked patiently through these conflicts. Though its pursuit of Americanization was as industrious as any other effort of the period, the agency was never coercive in its treatment of immigrants. Resettlement was a voluntary choice and the placement of a client in a good, self-sustaining job was the ultimate goal. The degree to which the immigrants embraced the customs of their adopted country was purely up to themselves.

Glazier's interest in this story is not in the details of IRO activity, and the main criticism students of American Jewish history will have of the book is that it is too concise. Except for the chapter on host communities, Glazier offers the field very little new material. German Jewish fears and the tensions between "uptown" and "downtown" Jewry are very familiar subjects, which the author does not attempt to redefine. He makes no reference to other scholarly discussions of the IRO, in particular the articles of Peter Romanofsky, Marc Lee Raphael, and John Livingston. The important information provided in the appendix, both in the tables and the text, would have been much more

effective if incorporated into the main body of the discussion, and it is regrettable Glazier did not consult other archives, such as the papers of the B'nai B'rith, for an outsider's viewpoint. Apparently the author left much of the IRO's internal workings to be addressed by Robert Rockaway's *Words of the Uprooted: Jewish Immigrants in Early Twentieth-Century America*, also published in 1998 by Cornell University Press. Still, more attention to the agency's history might have yielded insights for Glazier's own project. There is no discussion, for example, of why the IRO did not resume its work after World War I, precisely when its greatest fears—widespread anti-Semitism and immigration restriction—became reality.

The author's overriding concerns are in the end much more valuable than the sum of these details. Glazier's study evokes both the dramatic transformations and the sobering continuity of American attitudes toward immigration. Assimilation is no longer the universal goal it once was, and eugenics has no backing among serious policymakers. At the same time, fears of the loss of an American standard of living and way of life, as seen in the bitter debates over multiculturalism, illegal immigration, and bilingual schools, remain volatile. The Industrial Removal Office shared many of these prejudices and its success and legacy were limited. But its main impulse, to serve as a noncoercive resource for immigrants in need of aid, is a goal well worth reviving.

Christopher M. Sterba's book, The Melting Pot Goes to War: Italians and Jews in America's "Great Crusade," 1917-1919, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.

Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1998), 243 pp.

To the growing literature on the social construction of race, add anthropologist Karen Brodtkin's provocative *How Jews Became White Folks*. In this short but dense work, the author artfully weaves together the identities of her immigrant grandmother, parents, and herself with an array of recent scholarship on race, ethnicity, class, and gender. The result is a book that is at times well grounded in the American Jewish experience and at others incomplete, ideologically charged, and less than convincing.

Brodtkin's neo-Marxist arguments about race and racial assignment in America are central to how Jews became white. According to the author, institutionalized practices fixed to class and gender distinctions make groups "not-white" or white, bad or good. The differences matter. She states, for example, that the "black-and-white dichotomous structure of capitalist America" (70) equates nonwhites with menial and unskilled work and controls labor through segregation and oppression. For women, racial and class distinctions are particularly cruel. They entitle white women to motherhood and public virtue but black women to daily hardship and government policies antithetical to their needs.

Connections between race, class, and gender have affected Jews' status in America, according to the author. Between 1880 and the 1920s, scientific racism coupled with fear of working-class radicalism made Jews and other southern and eastern European immigrants not-white in the eyes of America's Protestant political elites. These groups consequently suffered exclusion from many occupations, trade unions, and higher education. Their nonwhite status forced them into the least desirable jobs.

Having received nonwhite, working-class assignment, American Jews shaped their group identities accordingly. Brodtkin argues that through the 1930s Jewish socialism formed a "hegemonic Jewishness" in New York and other industrial cities. In the Lower East Side, Jews filtered anti-Semitism, class conflict, and dreams for a better life through the strongly anticapitalist Yiddishkeit they brought over in their cultural baggage. Morality, communalism, and leftist politics gave men and women an antibourgeois view of the world—an outlook evident in their union activism, benevolent societies, work and family life, and leisure time. Though Jewish socialism did not

extend full equality to working-class women, they still enjoyed an economic and political voice far greater than that offered in white, middle-class culture.

Jews' reassignment to "fully white," middle-class status by the 1950s coincided with economic expansion after World War II, the G.I. Bill of Rights, and other federal entitlement programs that removed powerful social and economic barriers to Euroethnic males' upward mobility. From their recently acquired position of white privilege, Jews fashioned a new hegemonic Jewishness as a model minority. Expressed publicly by writers such as Herman Wouk and Philip Roth and by intellectuals that included Betty Friedan and Nathan Glazer, this version of Jewishness addressed Jews' discomfort with white, middle-class status at the same time that it helped to define the privileged rank for the nation at large. Glazer's work at definition receives Brodtkin's sharp criticism. According to the author, he rooted Jewish whiteness in values of hard work, education, deferred gratification, and strong two-parent families with mothers at home. But in her view he also struck a chord endemic to capitalism by contrasting white, middle-class status with a "mythic," "monstrous" African American culture (149, 152). "Model minorities and deficit cultures are like two hands clapping—they are complementary parts of a single discourse on race as a cultural phenomenon," writes Brodtkin (150).

If Jews and other "fully whites" claimed their whiteness at the expense of African Americans, they expressed ambivalence to the new status in explicitly misogynist terms. As "ordinary" adult Jews began to look inward in the 1950s and 1960s and wondered whether Jewishness and whiteness were compatible, they turned women into objects of derision. Drawing on literary works such as Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* and Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar*, Brodtkin asserts that the smothering, emasculating Jewish mother image and the aggressively materialistic Jewish American Princess stereotype, both of which gained broad-based appeal, stemmed from Jewish men's concern about merging material success with loyalty to Jewishness. How did middle-class Jewish women respond? Some obsessed about their noses and bodies. Others, like "homophobic" Betty Friedan, "still prescribed nuclear, heterosexual coupling as the only way to live, and in the process underlined whiteness, masculinity, and Jewishness as explicitly heterosexual" (168).

If Brodkin's assessment of how Jews became white is cynical and bleak, her hope for the future embraces a misdirected return to the past. She believes that Yiddishkeit offers an alternative to whiteness as a system of privilege. "Yiddishkeit did not rest upon invidious comparisons," she naively contends. "It held out a different and more optimistic vision than that of modernity. . . . Instead of having to choose between individual fulfillment and communal belonging, it expected Jews to find individual fulfillment *through* responsibility to the Jewish community" (186).

Readers unconverted to Brodkin's analysis of American capitalism and its implications for racial and gender assignment may also question her analysis of Jewish culture. The "hegemonic" Yiddishkeit she defines almost exclusively in economic terms contains essential religious and national components she ignores. Local and regional affiliations from the Old World plus ambivalence toward gentiles played a fundamental role in structuring Jewish residential patterns as well as social, benevolent, and religious organizations in America's industrial cities. If Yiddishkeit's morality, communalism, and antibourgeois view of the world united Jews as Brodkin suggests, religion, nationality, and disdain for "goyim" and "schwartzes" often fractured them into hostile and competing camps. Issues of human agency further undermine her analysis. Though she briefly mentions Jews' actions in attaining white, middle-class status prior to World War II, her theoretical framework neglects the acquisitiveness common in many immigrant families. Whether for material possessions or college savings, most immigrant Jewish families took their upward mobility seriously and embraced a capitalist America. When economic and public policy changes opened the floodgates to Jews' economic success, they charged headlong across the threshold and into the ranks of the "privileged" class.

Once middle class and white, most Jews faced far less difficulty reconciling their whiteness and Jewishness than Brodkin suggests. Her deconstruction of Glazer's efforts to address real problems within the African American community and of Philip Roth's fictional characters offers poor insight into the mind-set of 1950s and 1960s American Jewry. The Jewishness she sees in nose jobs and JAPs is more accurately conveyed in Zionism and youth groups, synagogue brotherhoods and sisterhoods, Jewish Federations, and the many other organizational impulses that characterized American Jews'

growing affluence, interest in their heritage, and concern for social justice.

Although thought-provoking, *How Jews Became White Folks* ultimately fails to offer convincing arguments about either Jews' whitening or about race in America. It does, however, offer interesting avenues for inquiry and discussion and thus will advance an understanding of race, class, and gender in America.

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