

REVIEW ESSAY:

Jewish Wars, American Style

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Samuel G. Freedman, *Jew vs. Jew: The Struggle for the Soul of American Jewry* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000). 384 pp.

Having traveled across the United States during the 1990s, impelled by the “mission of bearing witness” to a tragic reality, Samuel G. Freedman, award-winning professor of journalism at Columbia University, shares with us his alarming view of the contemporary American Jewish community. That entity, he declares, is deeply fractured, “cracking apart” because of “bitter internal struggles.” Indeed, he offers six case studies as evidence of an ongoing fight “for the soul of American Jewry,” a veritable “civil war” between Jews, reminiscent of the horrific internecine *sinat hinam* (baseless hatred) among first-century Palestinian Jews that is said to have contributed to the destruction of the Second Temple and the loss of Jewish sovereignty. Ultimately, Freedman contends, that civil war is being fought over three issues: “What is the definition of Jewish identity? Who decides what is authentic and legitimate Judaism? And what is the Jewish compact with America?” And the intense battle over these questions

is a struggle that pits the secularist against the believer, denomination against denomination, gender against gender, liberal against conservative, traditionalist against modernist even within each branch. It is a struggle being waged on issues ranging from conversion standards to the peace process, from land use to the role of women in worship. It is a struggle that has torn asunder families, communities, and congregations.
(23)

On the surface these heady words imply a kind of Jewish communal free-for-all in which identifying Jews of all persuasions stand ready to lash out at other Jews across the full spectrum of religious, ethnic, and cultural identification. Ostensibly, that is what the core journalistic chapters of Freedman’s book purport to

demonstrate, while its extensive, more historical prologue offers an interpretive perspective by which to understand these internal Jewish battles and their underlying causes. To be sure, the book is deeply thoughtful, extremely engaging, and replete with penetrating insights. Its riveting narratives, which constitute the heart of the work, sparkle with passion and poignancy and clearly articulate the clashes and their consequences. Nevertheless, *Jew vs. Jew* falls short of making its case. Building on a dubious conceptual model of American Jewish history, focusing in the main on Orthodox Jews and Judaism—hence inappropriately magnifying their role in the civil strife—ultimately it presents an unbalanced portrait and misleading explanation of Jewish communal division. Ironically, the book is hyperbolic on the one hand and too narrow on the other. Hyperbolic, because in some respects it claims too much; too narrow, because in other respects it does not say enough.

To demonstrate the fracture lines sundering Jews from each other, Freedman presents six accounts of contemporary Jews in conflict. Set in different American cities or regions, all six serve as archetype paradigms for the critical contentious hatreds engulfing American Jewry, or so Freedman would have us believe. Hence each must be read on at least two levels: as information, conveying its own slice of local reality, and as historical warning, intimating profoundly far-reaching dangers besetting the national American Jewish community.

To underscore the glories and ultimate demise of the secular American Jewish identity that flourished until the mid-1950s, Freedman recreates the ethos of Camp Kinderwelt in New York's Catskill region and the flavor of secular *Yiddishkeit* that it promoted. He explores the impact of this Labor Zionist summer camp on Sharon Levine and some of her friends, who seemed to find in it a viable Jewish identity fully consonant with American culture: a little Yiddish feeling, a little Zionist fervor, and a few utterly superficial ritual activities. By 1963, however, Sharon's last year at camp, it was clear that Kinderwelt was experiencing a slide and losing clientele. This problem had become so severe that the camp hired a religious Yemenite Jew as camp director to introduce more religious observances into the rhythm of camp life. Alas, that too did not save the camp; not only did it eventually succumb to a changing American Jewish social reality, but some of the principal protagonists in Freedman's chapter succumbed as well—to intermarriage and

assimilation. With great irony Freedman then records some of these very same folk, decades later, griping about the successful Satmar Hassidic enclave, Kiryas Joel, that in the meantime had taken successful root not two miles from where Kinderwelt once proudly stood: “Theirs [i.e., their religious lifestyle] is blossoming, ours is dead.” (67) By juxtaposing the emergence of Satmar Judaism and the fading away of secular Jewishness on the same geographical landscape, Freedman boldly highlights one of the principal messages of his book: in the struggle over Jewish identity, secular Jews and Judaism have lost; the Orthodox definition, that a Jew is a Jew by religion, has won out. (71, 339)

Chapter two segues into the next hot-button issue dividing Jews—the dispute over the religious definition of who is a Jew. Freedman relates the story of a happily intermarried couple in Denver, one of whose partners was converted by an innovative interdenominational conversion committee consisting of Orthodox, Reform, and Conservative rabbis that was established in the city quietly and without much fanfare between 1977 and 1983. Initially enlivened by the ideal of saving Jewish unity in a community in which the intermarriage rate reached over 70 percent, the *bet din* (legal committee), which constituted a hopeful, path-breaking sign of interreligious cooperation, eventually unraveled. Freedman well illustrates how the religious compromises first agreed to by its three Orthodox rabbis could not be sustained and how the three men were pilloried by national Orthodox rabbinic bodies once news of this conversion process got out. No amount of lip service to the ideal concept of *klal yisrael* (Jewish unity), Freedman shows, could overcome the weight of the committee’s ideological and religious differences. The Denver experiment failed, and the acrimonious debates over the religious standards of Jewish self-definition continue to haunt the American Jewish polity. Periodic Israeli political and legislative actions that impact on this question only reinforce the lines of difference separating American Jews from each other.

Jewish feminism, correcting what many believed to be theological, ethical, and ritual injustices directed at 50 percent of the Jewish population for over two millennia, did not enter the precincts of Judaism fully formed or all at once, nor did it enter without a struggle. In his third chapter Freedman traces the profound tensions precipitated by a gender equality issue set in the “Library Minyan,” a

“traditional egalitarian” minyan of highly educated and Jewish-educated intellectuals and professionals in Los Angeles from 1987 to 1989. With meticulous care Freedman details the personally wrenching debates over liturgical change spawned by the actions of feminist scholar and a future leader of the Jewish feminist movement, Rachel Adler. Acting as a *shaliach tzibbur*, one day on her own and without prior ritual committee approval, she added a prayer for the matriarchs in the public recitation of the *Amidah* prayer to supplement the traditional Orthodox patriarchal passage that heretofore had been the norm for this service. The minyan of clearly committed, identifying Jews confronted the fundamental question: Can one and ought one change the traditional liturgy that had united Jews for centuries? For months the question threatened to rupture the otherwise harmonious minyan, whose members publicly wrestled with the issue. Ultimately, after much deliberation and soul-searching, the prayer was voted permissible on a voluntary basis, according to the will of the prayer leader; only one couple defected from the synagogue because of it—and joined an Orthodox synagogue.

Israel has become a terribly polarizing rather than unifying force in American Jewish life and separates Jews politically and religiously. To focus on this issue Freedman in chapter four tells the story of Orthodox Harry Shapiro of Jacksonville, Fla., during the period 1993-97. Shapiro was a kindly yet idiosyncratic, unfocused, and ultimately unsuccessful young man, whose love of Israel and of Judaism led him to a failed attempt at *aliyah* and subsequently to a not very auspicious experience as a student at Yeshiva University. Deeply impressed by a Meir Kahane speech on that campus, Shapiro found himself gravitating to the ardent right wing political ideals of Kahane and Baruch Goldstein. Suffused with anger over Arab actions against Jews and upset at the lack of appropriate Israeli responses to them, Shapiro came to revile the Israeli left and all those associated with the peace option with the Arabs, especially Israeli leaders. Freedman chillingly portrays the fount of ideas to which Shapiro and like-minded Orthodox Jewish extremists were exposed, such as those of Brooklyn’s Rabbi Avraham Hecht, president of the Rabbinical Alliance of America who declared that anyone giving back Israeli land was a traitor, whose actions, if harming the Jewish people, warrant the death penalty. The denouement: Shapiro planted a bomb in the Jacksonville synagogue at which Shimon Peres was to speak—a bomb, which by Shapiro’s own

design, was meant not to go off but merely to be discovered. Freedman's point: look at how misguided passion for Israel can lead to irrational hatred of one's fellow Jews.

In chapter five Freedman records events that transpired in New Haven in the late 1990s, when a group of Orthodox students at Yale University, "the Yale 5," sued the school over a policy that they claimed violated their "religious freedom and constitutional rights." The students declared that the university rule that all freshmen and sophomores live in Yale dorms—all of which were coed—forced them into compromising situations prohibited by their religious tradition. The unfolding story of the Yale 5 is set against the background of the religious evolution of Rabbi Daniel Greer, father of one of the five students and a central Orthodox rabbinic and educational leader in New Haven who over the years had changed from being a liberal modern Orthodox politico to a more right-wing observant Jew seeking a life totally absorbed by Torah for himself and his kids. Freedman utilizes this story to underline the *haredization* of Orthodoxy in America and the divisive impact this has had on Orthodox Judaism itself: many within the camp of modern Orthodox Judaism at Yale who had made peace with the Yale policy, as well as others not studying at the university, were furious at the lawsuit, interpreting it as a not-so-veiled critique of their own form of Orthodox Judaism. Freedman, moreover, uses this story as well to emphasize the remarkable potency of a more right-wing brand of Orthodoxy, secure in itself and in its values, which demands an involvement with American culture on its own terms even as it exhibits muscular disdain for that culture by fearlessly challenging the standards of one of its elite cultural institutions.

The last chapter focuses on the bitter and ugly communal struggle in the Cleveland suburb of Beachwood, Ohio, 1997–99, an area 83 percent Jewish, in which a coalition of modern Orthodox Jews and Lubavitch Hassidim sought to build an Orthodox campus in the area housing a new Young Israel synagogue, a Chabad center and *mikveh*, and a girls' school. The proposed campus polarized Jews severely: the Cleveland Jewish Federation favored the plan, as did a Beachwood Reform rabbi, publicly asserting on moral grounds the Orthodox right to build and splitting from many of his own constituents on the matter. Arguments against the Orthodox were either couched in religious terms—their religious lifestyle would change the ambience

of the neighborhood; or, in secular terms—by not sending their children to public schools, those institutions would decline in quality and impact negatively on property values. Eventually, this local communal issue had to be adjudicated by the Cleveland City Council, where the Orthodox were defeated. To Freedman, this case study poses a fundamental question: Can Jews of different religious orientations live together harmoniously or not? The battle lines drawn in Beachwood, Ohio, and replicated, but with far less intensity, in suburban communities such as New Rochelle, N.Y., Lawrence, Long Island, Teaneck, N.J., and more recently in Tenafly, N.J., suggest they cannot.

Each of these six stories stands on its own merit. With the exception of the first, each portrays a concrete flashpoint in a particular place, over a particular issue, at a particular point in time. Clearly, each demonstrates at the least Jewish group debate and division, at worst polarization and hostility. But considered collectively, do these chapters really point to a larger “struggle for the soul” of American Jewry, as Freedman avers? Is there a national civil war? And if so, is the phenomenon of Jewish disunity new? Indeed, must it be considered uniformly ominous and a grave danger to Jewish life in America? Finally, are these stories, which give disproportionate weight to the involvement of the Orthodox as contenders, truly representative of the major fault lines within American Jewry?

No one can gainsay the serious divisions within American Jewry on a whole host of issues, but many Jews are entirely oblivious to the battles Freedman brings to our attention. In fact, Jewish indifference and apathy are major characteristics typifying whole sectors of American Jewry; over 50 percent of Jews are not affiliated with a single Jewish institution. This scarcely adds up to a struggle for the Jewish soul embracing a majority of American Jews. Indeed, in the concluding sentences of his book, the author acknowledges as much, noting that while it is tragic that American Jews “have battled so bitterly, so viciously over the very meaning of being Jewish,” it is perhaps even more tragic “that the only ones fighting are the only ones left who care.” (359)

From the above, then, we learn that only those who care about the Jewish future and the shape it will take are those who fight over it. That is as it should be, but it is not all bad. On many levels, especially

if disagreements are “for the sake of heaven,” Jews fighting with one another over basic principles, however painful and uncomfortable, may well reflect Jewish vigor, not pathology. Hence I differ with Freedman’s judgment that conflicts over a gender-based liturgical insertion, failure of the Denver *bet din*, and the legal challenge of the Yale 5 constitute worrisome signs of Jewish civil war. In each instance, committed Jews acted in what they considered to be in the best interest of Judaism and Jewish life. On the other hand, it seems to me that the kinds of Jewish enmity evinced in Jacksonville and in Beachwood, which have less justification and truly smack of *sinat hinam*, ought rightly to evoke anguish and sadness. Although one ought not to delegitimize all expressions of Jewish disunity, it is equally true that one ought not to mindlessly embrace them all and their deleterious impact either.

Disunity can therefore be either healthy or unhealthy. One thing for sure, however, is that in Jewish history disunity is a persistent condition, as Freedman himself acknowledges. Indeed, he asserts that the Jewish religious-secular tension in the “golden eras” of Jews in the Hellenistic Diaspora, in Moorish Spain, and in Enlightenment Europe led to internal Jewish battles similar to those in contemporary America. (30) Why then the special *cri de coeur* over contemporary American Jewish disunity? Because unlike the above three historical examples, all of which ended with physical persecution and death to Jews imposed by hostile external forces, America, with no state church and no medieval animus against Jews to overcome, seemed to offer the grand opportunity for freely chosen Jewish self-expression and survival. And, American Jewry, especially since the massive influx of East European Jewish immigration from the 1880s on, appeared to take advantage of that opportunity by molding a secular culture, *Yiddishkeit*, steeped in an ethnic language and ethos that seemed to promise Jewish continuity, transcend Jewish divisions, yet still mesh with universal ideals. Since World War II, however, lured by American affluence and acceptance, secular Jewish identity that held the community together began to erode and helped pave the way for intra-Jewish struggles over Jewish identity and authenticity. The grand promise of America has been undermined; hence the sense of pathos that pervades this book and the author’s *cri de coeur*.

I would suggest, however, that Freedman’s historical model of an all-embracing *Yiddishkeit* or sense of Jewishness uniting American

Jews, or at least containing their internal communal fissures, is a limited and romanticized one. Certainly, it does not apply to nineteenth-century American Jewry, riven by Reform Jewish triumphalism, intrareligious squabbles and competing institutions, and the beginnings of “uptown” and “downtown” institutional and values wars between newly arriving immigrants and native Jews. No culture of *Yiddishkeit* mitigated early-twentieth-century ideological polemics pitting socialists, Zionists, and communists against each other, nor prevented the appearance of new competing ethnic agencies, nor stopped the vitriolic diatribes between those with differing religious understandings of Judaism, as the new seminaries of JTS and Yeshiva University emerged, together with a whole network of denominationally oriented programs and institutions. No culture of *Yiddishkeit* helped unite Jews to common policies during the eventful 1930s and 1940s, nor provided a consensus about how to approach and seek assistance from the American government while Jews were dying in Europe. Contrary to the impression left by this book, American Jews in the first half of the twentieth century were a deeply divided group—socially, economically, culturally, religiously, institutionally, and ideologically.

Freedman’s conception of American Jewish reality is nevertheless necessary to fully grasp the interpretive framework within which he structures his text and selects the contents for his book. The breakup of this putative secular Jewish culture that helped keep American Jews together until recently is, in Freedman’s account, one of two essential preconditions that have led to the current Jewish civil war. The other is the unexpected revival of a triumphal, self-sufficient, and increasingly separatist Orthodox Judaism from the 1960s on. Buffeted first by American acceptance and material advancement and then confronted by the challenge of a vibrant, antithetical value system of Orthodoxy, secular Jewishness as an identity collapsed. (39) The battle lines over Jewish identity changed; being Jewish and how to be Jewish became the subject of religious controversy among religious denominations. Orthodoxy, with its zealous uncompromising attitude to modernity, claimed sole religious authenticity and consequently, Freedman asserts, put the other denominations on the defensive. (71)

This interpretive perspective explains much. First, it helps makes sense of the author’s startling and historically tendentious claim—otherwise completely incomprehensible to the student of American

Jewish history—that “if one had to date the beginning of the current struggle over American Jewish identity, then it might well be Passover eve in 1941,” when East European separatist Rabbi Aaron Kotler arrived. Soon thereafter he founded the Lakewood Yeshiva, and he and his institution became the spiritual progenitors of an uncompromising Orthodoxy that reasserted Torah supremacy over all contemporary culture. (37ff) Rabbi Kotler’s upbuilding of Orthodox Judaism on American shores concretely, symbolically, and proleptically both stimulated and signaled the ultimate demise of secular *Yiddishkeit*, Freedman declares. At the same time, insisting on Orthodox Judaism’s religious supremacy, he, his supporters, and his colleagues stirred the abiding resentment of other religious expressions of Judaism whose adoption of American cultural values and behavior seemed to make them less authentic.

Second, it helps us understand Freedman’s selection of the six stories that embody examples of Jewish discord. True, each is intrinsically dramatic and serves as excellent fodder for presentation and evaluation. But do these stories truly reflect the full range of the splits within American Jewry? Orthodoxy, to put it mildly, is greatly over-represented. One can imagine equally compelling tales of conflict emerging from within other sectors of Jewry and Judaism on some of the very same issues covered by Freedman. One can also point to other highly important confrontational issues not dealt with by this text that do not involve the Orthodox as prime participants. Therefore one must query: Is the contemporary American Jewish division over Israel and its policies, for example, truly revealed by focusing on a troubled Orthodox Jewish extremist? (chapter 4) True, Orthodox Jews tend to be more hawkish on Israel, but should an account of the American Jewish rifts on Israel not also include other non-Orthodox Jews who similarly demur from the peace proposals? Should not a discussion of the Zionist Organization of America and its president’s views, which have agitated many in public polemics in the press, be noted? What about the innumerable antagonistic debates on American Jewish responses to Israel within the umbrella coalition of the Conference of Presidents of Major Organizations? What about the decidedly non-Orthodox Jewish Institute of National Security Affairs and its repudiation of current Israeli peace overtures? Or what about Reform Jews who have left Reform Judaism because they judged their erstwhile religious movement to be but synonymous with liberal

Democratic politics, on Israel and other issues?

Then, too, is the question of who is a Jew, which most assuredly divides Jews who care about the Jewish future, best served only by looking at the failed Denver conversion committee. (chapter 2) Or should not a chapter also have been devoted to the internal Reform clashes over redefining Jews in accordance with patrilineal descent, or to a discussion of the reason for this whole initiative, a spiraling intermarriage rate? Could not an informed chapter have been written outlining the vitriolic Conservative—not only Orthodox—response to that Reform move? Further, is serious internal debate within a religious denomination (chapter 5 on the Yale 5) restricted to Orthodoxy? Ought we not also to learn about the terribly fractious, bitter, and as yet unresolved debates within Conservative Judaism over homosexuality and its possible place in Judaism? And finally, is it really true that secular Jewishness, allegedly supplanted by religious identity, is dead? (Prologue; chapter 1) What of the vast numbers of Jews who are not religiously affiliated? What of the widespread expressions of secular Jewishness that still endure and, for some, thrive? What of the vast network of Jewish federations and the like, whether defined as civil Judaism or not, which offer so many contemporary American Jews an ethnic, rather than religious identity?

No matter how Freedman might argue that he is merely dispassionately reporting what he sees, it is hard to avoid the impression from the tone and selected content of the text that “no Orthodox Judaism, no civil war.” Indeed, one can plausibly ask why he repeatedly declares that the “Orthodox” stress on religious identity for Jews has won out—have Reform and Conservative Judaism not equally insisted on Judaism as the core of Jewish identity? Despite his disclaimer in a recent Jewish periodical interview that “one of the most important things I’ve learned is that you can’t reduce these disputes to simple Orthodox vs. non-Orthodox,” (*The Jewish Week*, September 8, 2000, 64), which is most assuredly true, the thrust of much of his book, perhaps unwittingly, does not quite live up to this pronouncement.

Let me offer an alternative explanatory model in which to frame a discussion of contemporary American Jewish struggles. American Jews have negotiated the existential dilemma of synthesizing an American Jewish identity from the earliest days of their arrival on this continent. Their many solutions to the question can be placed on a spectrum of behavioral patterns, from conversion at one extreme to

religious isolation and social separation on the other, with many differentiated American Jewish symbioses along the lines of the spectrum in between. In the course of American Jewish history Jews have fought vigorously with each other—from the pulpit, in the press, and from the organizational mantle—over whose version of American Jewish identity is the most authentic and the most traditional, whose is the most modern and most viable. They have also battled each other over whether the fundamental pole of Jewish identity is and ought to be religion or ethnicity. Denominational Jews have argued vociferously with one another and with secularists, while denominational and secular Jews have quarreled bitterly with each other from within their respective religious and secular camps.

The novelty therefore lies not in the fractious struggle over Jewish identity, which has a long history in the American Jewish context, and which cannot be said to begin with 1941. Instead, it lies in the perception of who is currently winning the debate: the Orthodox. That is what is so unique about the current situation when contrasted to the last one hundred fifty years and what has led the Orthodox to be perceived as having more authority than they actually do. Orthodox Jews and Judaism may lay claim to whatever they like about Jewish identity and proper Jewish living. But if they were not perceived as strong and hegemonic by the non-Orthodox—more importantly, if the non-Orthodox were more fully self-confident in their own versions of Jewish identity and lifestyle—then Orthodox affirmations would be less threatening and their impact on American Jewish life would seem less disruptive than it appears in Freedman's book. Why indeed should the vast majority of American Jews care about the thoughts and opinions of a group that comprises at best 6 to 12 percent of American Jewry? Little attention was paid to them for most of the century, even though Orthodox Jewish leaders did not refrain from enunciating their triumphal claim to sole religious legitimacy; few were concerned when pundits and prognosticators in the 1950s predicted Orthodoxy's dissolution. The fact is that Orthodox Judaism has put other forms of Jewish identification on the defensive not merely because of its air of authenticity due to its uncompromising stance vis-à-vis modernity (71), but rather because on every and any index measuring strength of Jewish identity, the Orthodox win hands down: Jewish education, ritual behavior, synagogue participation, percentage of charity given, ties to Israel, diminished rates of

intermarriage, and fertility. These factors explain and reflect the much-vaunted Orthodox institutional revival and cultural elan. Hence the inferiority complex many non-Orthodox feel; hence the feeling of being victimized by Orthodox demands for certain standards of Jewish living. Freedman cites Rabbi Joshua Aaronson, the Reform rabbi in Beachwood, Ohio, who allowed as much in a Yom Kippur sermon:

The ignorance of progressive Jews impedes our efforts to work with Orthodox Jews as true partners. Progressive Jews suffer from a self-fulfilling inferiority complex that could be erased through the most fundamental of Jewish enterprises: Talmud Torah....Orthodox Jews do not take us seriously because of our ignorance. Our ignorance does not justify the animus of the Orthodox nor our second-class status. However, we must acknowledge the validity of the Orthodox claim that we are in the main illiterate Jews. (342)

So, even if one were to grant the existence of an unprecedented struggle for the soul of American Jewry, as Freedman proposes, and even if one acknowledges—as one must—that Orthodox demands do precipitate communal friction and discomfort at times, it is nevertheless incorrect for the author to insinuate that Orthodox Jews and Judaism are the primary combatants in a current Jewish civil war. The more apt historical appraisal and paradigm is that the Orthodox are doing precisely what all Jews have done in American Jewish life: pursuing their own version of being Jewish and American, and competing with contrary visions. At this point in time—and there are no guarantees for the future (the Orthodox, even the more right-wing branches, confront a host of their own social, religious, cultural, and economic difficulties)—they are riding a crest of self-confidence and realizing their goals more successfully than other forms of American Jewish syntheses are realizing theirs.

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BOOK REVIEWS:

Lawrence N. Powell, *Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, the Holocaust, and David Duke's Louisiana* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2000), 578 pp., illus.

The "Americanization" of the Holocaust, the attempt to infuse the Holocaust with significance for American culture and politics, has provoked public controversy, particularly since the opening the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. Quite often this controversy has pitted Jews against African Americans in a competition for status as victims of racism. Peter Novick's latest book, *The Holocaust in American Life*, even suggests that commemoration of the Holocaust pushes American Jewish politics in a reactionary direction. Rather than address the relationship between racism in Germany and America through general comparisons, Powell focuses his book on the life of one Holocaust survivor and her family.

Anne Skorecki Levy hid from the Nazis as a child in Poland and survived to speak out against David Duke as a grandmother in Louisiana. Her life bridges two eras of racial strife: Polish and German antisemitism during World War II and the resurgence of American racism manifest in David Duke's 1991 gubernatorial campaign. For Powell, this is a redemptive story. It shows that in the hands of an active citizenry, memory of the Holocaust can help to forge an ethical alliance against racism. If Powell had subordinated Anne Levy's experiences to this moral, *Troubled Memory* would be didactic and flat. *Troubled Memory* presents life in the round. This complexity is the book's greatest achievement. On one level, *Troubled Memory* is fundamentally a family saga. It recounts the Skorecki family's rise in prewar Poland, its suffering during the Holocaust, and its successful reestablishment in the United States. Like any family saga, the story of the Skoreckis is about the interplay of heritage, personality, and circumstance in the creation of identity. Because the Skoreckis were Polish Jews caught in the Holocaust, the need for concealment and calculation in dealing with the outside world shapes the identity of all the family members. Powell is particularly sensitive in exploring the relationship between the Skoreckis' strategies for surviving the war and strategies for achieving their prewar social aspirations.

The Skoreckis were an educated bourgeois family. Even their name was Polish rather than Jewish, a fact that would help the family pass as Aryans. Mark Skolecki was the son of a family that had been in the wood trade for generations. His wife, Ruth, hoped to raise their children, Anne and Lila, with a cultivated appreciation of theater and the arts. The family lived in Lodz at the outbreak of World War II. In the course of the war they traveled to Warsaw, where they were perhaps the only family to survive the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto with all its members. After smuggling themselves out of the ghetto the family lived "on the surface." Ruth and the children even attended mass and hosted a Christmas party in their efforts to pass as Christian Poles. Powell suggests that Ruth's heightened awareness of appearances, which made fur coats and other status symbols so important to her before the war, came to her aid as she hid herself and her family.

Ruth hid Anne and Lila sometimes in trunks or wardrobes, sometimes in plain sight, as the family tried to blend into its Christian surroundings. When the family lived "on the surface," the darker Anne hid in the home of a friendly Christian. The fairer Lila accompanied her mother to church. Comforted by the ritual of the mass, she developed a real attachment to the Catholic religion. After the war her parents literally reimposed a Jewish identity on her. Her father even snatched a Catholic missal from her hands and threw it into the fire. The reestablishment of a clear Jewishness seemed as painful and wrenching as maintaining a dual identity.

Once the family relocated to the United States, Ruth's talent for social adaptation helped them acculturate in the conformist 1950s. Meanwhile, according to Powell, the habit of obedience remained deeply ingrained in the children's personalities. Even as adolescents in America they conformed to their parents' wishes. Only David Duke's denial of the Holocaust impelled Anne to overcome years of self-repression and make her experiences public. The child who had crouched silently in a trunk for hours became a woman who dared to confront a seasoned politician publicly. Anne relentlessly challenged Duke to explain his Holocaust denial. Her questions helped make Duke's racist past the defining issue of the campaign.

Powell brings a historian's training to these events. At every turn in the story he contextualizes the family's experiences in the broader social circumstances of the period. This approach makes for a very

long book, but it also takes *Troubled Memory* beyond the confines of family saga or personal memoir. Powell draws on material outside the Skoreckis' experience. His chapters on the Warsaw Ghetto, for example, include a detailed and lucid account of conditions there and of the uprising.

In these sections Powell explores his second theme: the relationship between extraordinary heroism, such as the uprising, and the more ordinary heroism of caring for family and, where possible, neighbors. It was one of the tragedies of the choices Hitler's regime imposed on Jews that these virtues might conflict. The resources spent on arms, Powell notes, might have been spent saving individual lives. But probably not for long. In the end, either kind of heroism was likely to prove futile. Powell presents these moral choices in all their complexity without looking for pure heroes or villains.

Troubled Memory is that rare work, a history intended for both a professional and a popular audience. Evidence of Powell's considerable research is relegated to unobtrusive footnotes. He adopts the voice of an omniscient narrator, telling us what each individual in his story thought or felt. Although some academics will find this style annoying, it makes the book easily accessible. *Troubled Memory* synthesizes a great body of information on the Holocaust and on the experience of survivors in America. If you must choose only one book on the Holocaust for a course on ethics, identity, immigration, or American politics, *Troubled Memory* has the depth and complexity to provoke a great class discussion.

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Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999), 302 pp., illus.

Southern Jewish History has enjoyed numerous histories of Jewish communities in specific states and cities. Such works offer social and institutional narratives that are not only of local interest, but also representative of broader issues of the place of Judaism in the South.

Hollace Ava Weiner's *Jewish Stars in Texas* continues this tradition. Weiner, a former journalist with the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, examines the lives and achievements of eleven rabbis from various regions in Texas. Each chapter centers on one of the selected rabbis and is arranged chronologically, from Rabbi Heinrich Schwarz in the 1870s to Rabbi Levi Olan, who served in Dallas from the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement to 1984. The chapters deal with different locations in Texas as well, ranging from Galveston to El Paso to Dallas.

Drawing on personal papers, newspaper accounts, and congregational histories, as well as interviews with more recent rabbis, Weiner begins with the biographical background of each rabbi and quickly delves into his position in the larger community and his relations with the Jewish congregation. The biographical information not only provides a more personal context, it also illustrates the immigration patterns of Jews to America and Texas. Beginning with the early wave of German Jews expanding from the South and Midwest in the 1870s, immigration to Texas was both representative of Jewish immigration to America, in the influx of East Europeans in the 1880s, and unique in the ten thousand immigrant refugees who entered Texas from 1907 to 1914 through Henry Cohen's Galveston movement. All of the selected rabbis were born outside of the United States, and their own migration stories reflect these patterns.

Weiner's examination of the role of Texas rabbis in the larger community reveals several themes significant to the study of southern Judaism. Texas rabbis were, as Weiner phrases it, "mixers, mavericks, and motivators." This description indicates their emphasis on integrating with the southern community, working for social justice, and cultivating the strength and growth of the Texas Jewish community. Patterns of accommodation along with opportunities for social critique characterize much of Judaism in the South and are reflected in Texas rabbis as well.

It is important to emphasize here what Weiner points out in the introduction: Jewish leaders in Texas were prominent in their society, largely due to the small numbers of Jews in the South. Rabbis were “objects of curiosity and respect who brought erudition and an exotic element.” (xiii) Their Old Testament roots and sense of social justice marked them as significant members of the intellectual and moral leadership of the community. This prominence enabled Texas rabbis to actively and influentially participate in communal affairs and social organizations.

Rabbis often played the role of “ethnic broker,” serving as cultural liaisons to the gentile community. For example, Rabbi Samuel Rosinger worked to develop the Community Chest and the Red Cross in Beaumont, and a number of the selected rabbis joined groups such as the Rotary Club, the Elks, and the Legion. They integrated with the larger community in both religious and secular forums, such as Rabbi G. George Fox’s organization of interfaith “revivals” with an intent to “re-Judaize” Jews and Rabbi Maurice Faber’s participation in the University of Texas Board of Regents. As “mixers,” Texas rabbis solidified their Jewish communities with strong leadership and served as a bridge between that community and the city’s social sphere.

This role was not without its shortcomings. As integrated members of their community, many rabbis were reluctant to criticize the racial order in Texas, particularly the 1920s resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. Yet others reflected Judaism’s strong emphasis on social justice. Maurice Faber of Tyler filed a complaint petition with the Masonic headquarters after his local charter began requiring for new members simultaneous membership with the Klan’s. Henry Cohen worked with Catholic leader James Kirwin to build a strong moral front against the encroachment of the Klan. During the Civil Rights Movement, Rabbi Levi Olan of Dallas worked closely with the African American community in lobbying for integration and adequate housing. Other movements for social justice were also led and supported by rabbis, such as Henry Cohen’s participation on the state prison reform board and Rabbi Ephraim Frisch’s support of unions and the labor movement in San Antonio.

The rabbis of Texas were also faced with the task of serving their own religious communities. They did so in a variety of ways. Henry Cohen’s Galveston movement was perhaps the most visible effort to strengthen and cultivate the Jewish community in Texas, as three

thousand of the ten thousand Jewish immigrants entering through Galveston remained in Texas. Rabbi Martin Zielonka of El Paso mirrored this endeavor, working to bring eight thousand Jews from Eastern Europe to Mexico in the 1920s. Rabbi Alex Kline offered his congregants a more artistic cultivation in his popular series of lectures and guest sermons based on his knowledge of art. Rabbi Hyman Judah Schachtel demonstrated his commitment to international Jewish issues through his support for Zionism.

Weiner thus addresses a wide range of themes that touch on issues relevant to southern Jewish history. The potential of the book to serve as a bridge between local history and regional patterns is not quite fulfilled, as it lacks any extended analysis connecting these rabbis and their cities to one another, as well as to other areas of the South. Yet *Jewish Stars in Texas* also reminds the scholar that the story of southern Judaism is often best revealed through the particularities and distinct histories of its members. The book should appeal to a popular and local audience as well as those interested in southern Jewish history.

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Rose Laub Coser, Laura S. Anker, and Andrew J. Perrin, *Women of Courage: Jewish and Italian Immigrant Women in New York* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 162 pp.

Irving Howe's 1976 magnum opus *World of Our Fathers* certainly had a significant impact on scholarly and popular thought about East European Jewish immigrants in America. Perhaps because in its title it made transparent the gender bias in modern Jewish historiography, which feminist scholars had begun to critique, Howe's study got under the skin of more than one woman scholar. Thus, Sydney Stahl Weinberg produced her study *World of Our Mothers: The Lives of Jewish Immigrant Women* (1988) as, in part, a specific rejoinder to Howe.

Howe's book similarly moved sociologist Rose Laub Coser to conceptualize her own "World of Our Mothers" project, in which she would also focus on female Jewish immigrants and, like Weinberg, utilize oral interviews in order to highlight women's voices. Interrupted by career changes and then Coser's illness and death, *Women of Courage* is, in expanded and slightly reconceptualized form, the realization of Rose Coser's plans. With half of the chapters written by Coser and edited by sociology student Andrew Perrin and the remaining half by historian and American studies scholar Laura Anker, *Women of Courage* is a fascinating collaborative study of work and family in the lives of Italian and East European Jewish women who immigrated to New York in the 1920s.

Coser and Anker make the seemingly simple argument that attention to women's experiences re-centers our understanding of immigrant adaptation. In fact, the implications of the focus on women are far from simple. Comparison between Jewish and Italian immigrants has been a prominent subject in American immigration history. Focusing on women and their experiences in negotiating multiple roles in work, family, and voluntary organizations teaches us something new. It illuminates what the authors call "families' assimilation strategies." (3) In part, "strategies" refer to the family economy in which multiple family members worked, pooling funds to promote financial security and mobility. Broader than economics, though, what Coser and Anker refer to as Jews' and Italians' differing family structures—derived from their migration experiences and social and economic conditions in Eastern Europe and Italy—shaped the ways that members of the two groups oriented themselves and

adapted to mainstream America. Jews tended to have “centrifugal” family structures, with members oriented out of the family toward society, while Italian families tended to be “centripetal,” with members oriented inward. This focus on family structures and strategies makes gender analysis crucial to a full understanding of immigrants’ American experiences and makes women central actors in their and their families’ struggles to adapt.

Coser and Anker analyze Jewish and Italian women’s multiple roles, and the social constraints that structured them, by dividing the book into two sections. In the first Coser discusses family and home life, including the role of family considerations and constraints in women’s decisions to migrate, marriage, fertility, birth control, child rearing, and the gendered division of labor between husband and wife. In the second section Anker explores the role of work in women’s migration decisions, their experiences in homework, factories, and small family businesses, and their participation in unions and voluntary organizations. Though this division leads to some repetition, both authors stress that in the lives of Italian and Jewish women, work and family were rarely separate issues.

Sharing many experiences, the differences between Jewish and Italian women appeared in very specific ways. Because of the long history of Jewish participation and ownership in the garment industry, Jewish women who immigrated in the 1920s had more “weak ties” (neighbors, landsmen, more distant relations) to rely upon when looking for work, especially their first jobs. Italian women more often relied on the intervention of close family members. As a group, the Jewish women in the study tended to be slightly better off than the Italian women, with a larger number married to men who owned their own businesses. They were, thus, often more able to dispense with paid work when raising young children than were Italian women, who often turned to house work or caring for boarders and lodgers when their children were young. Though both Italian and Jewish women participated in female networks, Jewish women participated more in unions and voluntary organizations as actors independent of their husbands than did Italian women. Even while drawing these distinctions between the two groups of women, however, Coser and Anker point out that a range of behaviors appeared among both the Jewish and Italian women.

Coser and Anker skillfully draw upon the one hundred oral history

interviews that constitute the book's evidentiary base. Conducting oral interviews enabled them to question their informants on a variety of subjects, including language use, family size and sexuality, work outside the home, education, and popular culture. The authors are, thus, able to analyze both women's actions and the ways they understood their world and their actions. Making these interviews central to the study has the salutary effect of making Jewish and Italian women's voices central in their own stories. They sometimes, however, also feel solitary. Certainly no scholar can utilize every source of historical evidence, but these voices might seem less isolated if they were heard in dialogue with other kinds of sources about immigrant women's lives, such as the magazines and advice literature they read, the ethnic radio programs they listened to, or the records and publications of the unions and women's organizations they participated in. Nevertheless, the oral documentation of these women's lives is a significant achievement and a boon both to readers and to future scholars.

Disappointingly, the authors make little of one of the study's innovations. Most studies of Jewish and Italian immigrants focus on the forty years preceding the restrictive immigration legislation passed in 1921 and 1924. *Women of Courage* specifically focuses on women who immigrated between 1920 and 1927. Coser and Anker do ground their analysis in the historical specificity of their subjects' lives (e.g., the impact of World War I on migration, the economic impact of the Great Depression, and job connections through previous immigrants). They do not, however, comment on the implications of studying those who immigrated in the 1920s for explaining the broader chronology of Jewish and Italian immigration. How does this modify our understanding, for example, of the American Jewish community during the decade that we otherwise associate with the "second generation" being, to quote the title of Deborah Dash Moore's landmark study, "at home in America"? To be fair to the authors, this is not their primary concern. Their work does pose a challenge to future historians, however, to better account for the thousands of Jewish and Italian immigrants who continued to come to the U.S. even after the date we typically give as the endpoint for East and South European immigration.

Finally, one copyediting mistake is worth mentioning for its

potential to confuse readers about one of the book's central points. In the introduction, the terms "centripetal" and "centrifugal" used to describe immigrant family structures are reversed. Ample discussion later in the book rectifies this error.

The notable merits of this book far outweigh these critiques. Scholars will find *Women of Courage* a significant addition to the literature on American Jewish history and on immigrant women, Jewish, Italian, and otherwise. General readers may find some of the sociological terminology distracting, but will delight in the authors' deft analysis of immigrant women's complex family and work experiences and in the thoughtful words of the courageous women themselves.

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Louise London, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 312 pp.

At a time when much of the scholarly publication about the Holocaust and its antecedents is either postmodern speculation, such as Peter Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) or mindless revisionism, such as Norman G. Finkelstein's *The Holocaust Industry: Reflections on the Exploitation of Jewish Suffering* (New York: Verso, 2000), it is gratifying to find that traditional historical scholarship about this topic is still being pursued. Louise London, using documents unavailable to previous scholars, gives us the most detailed picture of British governmental responses to the tragedy of European Jewry in the National Socialist era yet painted. Readers who know the standard works on the topic—A. J. Sherman's *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich* (London: Elek, 1973) and Bernard Wasserstein's *Britain and the Jews of Europe, 1939-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979)—will not have a new narrative. The shameful story they told still stands. In the prewar years Britain admitted some Jewish refugees, but kept out more. When the war went badly in 1940, Britain interned enemy-alien Jews and put them into relatively comfortable camps on the Isle of Man—along with ardently pro-Nazi aliens. And later in the war, even after British officialdom knew about the systematic killings that we now call the Holocaust, the British still resisted admitting even those few Jews in a position to reach Britain or its mandate in Palestine.

London's contribution is threefold. For the prewar and wartime periods she throws new light on the actions of personnel at the middle levels of both the government and pro-refugee organizations to show how policies made at the top were executed in practice. She stresses throughout that British policies can best be understood as an aspect of its overall negative immigration policy. What Jews it was willing to accept, it wanted to take on a temporary basis only. Second, she devotes a brief but illuminating chapter to policy in the three years after the war. And, finally, she points out certain consistencies between British arguments for not taking refugees in the war years with those used by government officials today. In addition, her opening pages provide not only a cogent summary of the book's argument, but also an up-to-date evaluation of the most recent

scholarship. Although this book is an outgrowth of a 1992 University of London doctoral dissertation, it is clearly influenced by the author's personal and professional experiences: a daughter of wartime refugees, she is a solicitor with a practice specializing in immigration law.

Despite the depressing story that she relates, London shows that, throughout the government, there were individual officials who sought to do more. And, without entering such speculative areas as the proposals to bomb Auschwitz, she demonstrates conclusively that there were "a number of situations when the government chose to do less than it had the power to do." (15)

This is an important addition to the literature, illustrating once again the accuracy of Vice President Walter Mondale's 1979 judgment that in this tragedy, the nations of the West "failed the test of civilization."

Roger Daniels is Charles Phelps Taft Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati. His most recent book is, Debating American Immigration, published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2001.

SHORT BOOK REVIEWS:

Compiled by Frederic Krome

People of the City: Jews and the Urban Challenge (Studies in Contemporary Jewry, XV), Ezra Mendelsohn, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 268 pp.

A collection of seven essays focusing on the significance of the urban experience to Jewish history, primarily in the modern era. Of interest to the American Jewish experience are essays by Samuel C. Heilman, "Orthodox Jews, the City and the Suburb," and Eli Lederhendler, "New York City, the Jews, and 'The Urban Experience.'" Both essays are précis of longer monographs and provide a good introduction to the wider issues they raise. A review essay by Moses Rischin, which analyzes recent work on Jews in New York, will also interest readers.

Coping with Life and Death: Jewish Families in the Twentieth Century (Studies in Contemporary Jewry, XIV), Peter Y. Medding, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 361 pp.

A diverse set of essays on the travails of modern Jewish families in the twentieth century. The essays approach the subject from a diverse set of perspectives: Riv-Ellen Prell uses an ethnographical methodology in her essay "Marriage, Americanization and American Jewish Culture, 1900–1920," while Stephen Whitfield's "Making Fragmentation Familiar: Barry Levinson's *Avalon*" is a fascinating case study of the depiction of American Jewish life through film. In addition to the articles in the symposium, Yaakov Ariel's essay "Evangelists in a Strange Land: American Missionaries in Israel, 1948–1967" introduces readers to a relatively unknown subject. Of particular interest is Ariel's revelation that in the 1950s and 1960s Israel contained more missionaries per person than the U.S. Several of the reviews also cover American topics.

***Zionism and Religion*, Shmuel Almog, Jehuda Reinharz, and Anita Shapira, eds. (Hanover and London: Brandeis University Press, 1998), 352 pp.**

Twenty essays examine the relationship between religion and Zionism. The essays are divided into sections: "Tradition and Modernity in Eastern Europe," "Orthodoxy, Liberalism, and Zionism in Western Europe," "Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Judaism: Zionism in the United States," and "Tradition and Zionism in the Yishuv." The section on the United States contains four essays: Evyatar Friesel, "The Meaning of Zionism and Its Influence among the American Jewish Religious Movements"; Jonathan D. Sarna, "Converts to Zionism in the American Reform Movement"; Lloyd P. Gartner, "Conservative Judaism and Zionism: Scholars, Preachers, and Philanthropists"; and Jeffrey S. Gurock, "American Orthodox Organizations in Support of Zionism, 1880–1930." The essays are of high quality and, read together, give a well-rounded view of the influence and impact of Zionism among American Jewry's religious denominations in the early part of the twentieth century.

***The Selected Writings of Mordecai Noah*, Michael Schuldiner and Daniel J. Kleinfeld, eds. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1999), 171 pp.**

Mordecai Noah (1785–1852) was the first American Jew to serve as an American consul, as well as the first Jew to serve as sheriff of New York City. Primarily remembered today as the founder of the "Ararat" plan—which envisioned a Jewish homeland in upstate New York—Noah was also known for his prolific literary skills. This volume contains the text of his play "She Would Be a Soldier" (1819), as well as selections of social commentary, his proclamation on the Ararat plan, and the little-known "Address Delivered at the Hebrew Synagogue, in Cosby Street, New York...to Aid in the Erection of the Temple at Jerusalem" (1849). The editors' annotation and commentary help place Noah's writings into perspective.

Compiled by Debra Kassoff

Steven Cassedy, *Building the Future: Jewish Immigrant Intellectuals and the Making of Tsukunft* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1999), 316 pp.

An anthology of articles culled from the New York Yiddish journal *Di Tsukunft* between its founding in 1892 and 1918, Cassedy's book is distinguished by lucid translations and sophisticated scholarship. Helpful editorial notes and historical and biographical introductions provide context for the events and figures contributing to and featured in the collected essays. Articles are arranged chronologically within thematically organized chapters, allowing readers to delve into some of the prominent issues of the time, while simultaneously observing the evolution of a community coming into its own. Cassedy presents the original mission of this still-published "granddaddy" of Yiddish periodicals as both political and pedagogical. From the beginning the founders and editors combined their radical socialist ideologies with an intellectual's aesthetic in order to accomplish their goal of creating a "highbrow Yiddish language journal" with a readership and a literature worthy of each other. Cassedy's work demonstrates that despite internal conflicts, unstable editorial leadership, lack of funds, and interruptions in publication, *Di Tsukunft* finally achieved its goals through a sensitivity to the ever shifting demographic of its readership as it evolved from an impoverished, inwardly focused immigrant class to an influential force in the American and world Jewish community.

Edgar E. Siskin, *American Jews: What Next?* (Jerusalem: Jerusalem Publishing House, 1998), 188 pp.

Rabbi and scholar Siskin does not feel hopeful about the future of American Jewry. Beginning with a brief examination of the phenomenon of acculturation as it has unfolded for a variety of peoples throughout history, this book proceeds to "contraven[e] a widespread assumption—the indestructibility of the Jew" (12). Siskin's survey of disappearing Jews sweeps from the lost community of ancient Alexandria to the descendents of New Spain's crypto-Jews living along the Texas-Mexico border before settling on the Jews of mid-to-late-twentieth-century America. Observing through his

anthropologist's lens the encroachment of American culture into every major stream of American Jewry—from Reform and Reconstructionist to Orthodox—Siskin reflects on its possible causes and apparent effects. American materialism and permissiveness, the increasing ease and attraction of intermarriage, and the “incurable virus” (112) of antisemitism, all are fingered as sources of the increasing breakdown of the Jewish family, dropping fertility rates, rising rates of crime and drug use, involvement in cults, and a spiritual ennui that has emptied synagogues and robbed the Jewish community of great numbers. Concluding his remarks a hair short of predicting the community's total and permanent demise, Siskin finally leaves unanswered the question posed in his title. A legitimate expression of personal pain at the current condition of Jewish life in America, Siskin's book might be more useful to students and researchers had it relied less on generalized observations and more heavily on recent documented studies of Jewish life.