

Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 490 pp. Illus.

Around 1700, when members of the first American Jewish congregation began public worship in New York, they were a microscopic presence in world Jewry, but they already had a sense of their special destiny. Naming their synagogue Shearith Israel, “remnant of Israel,” they echoed the prophet Micah’s teachings that the scattering of fragments of the chosen people was a portent of redemption. Over the centuries, sacred prediction in many ways became secular fact. The devastation of European Jewry in the Holocaust tragically left the America community as nearly the sole Jewish hope, and the ensuing success of the nation of Israel has not eclipsed the crucial role of American Jewry. Yet unusual responsibility may, in and of itself, have stirred proportionate anxiety about failure, and the peculiarities of American culture heightened fears of a Jewish disaster, not now caused by bigotry but tolerance. Economic opportunity, personal freedom, and a Christian majority often willing to absorb outsiders posed unanticipated dangers. Whether American Judaism fulfills or, with equal drama, disappoints the biblical mission of the people of Israel, generations have believed that the American Jewish experience would be different. In his masterful book, Jonathan Sarna chronicles this story, making the enduring tension between historical optimism and pessimism its centerpiece.

Whereas doomsayers identify American Jewish practices such as intermarriage as inevitable corrosives, Sarna pictures decline as part of a regenerative mechanism. What seem fatal flaws, in other words, become part of communal psychology. American Jewish history “is in many ways a response to this haunting fear that Judaism in the New World will wither away” (xiii–xiv). In a historical narrative more wavelike than linear, Sarna shows how committed Jews reached out repeatedly to renew tradition in the face of threat. Young people were often catalysts: for example, the men in their twenties who began the journal the *American Hebrew* (1879), a forerunner of Conservatism, or pioneers of spiritual renewal who formed small *havurot* in the 1960s.

This use of a model of religious revitalization, where change begins at the margins, self-consciously links American Jewish and Christian history, particularly the history of Protestant revivalism. Sarna sees the imprint that radical Protestantism left on American culture and, by transmission, on religious minorities, without forgetting the communities' distinctiveness. His alignment of American Judaism with its Christian counterpart, arguably the study's greatest achievement, makes two marks on the book's design: its religious focus and eclectic coverage.

Although any history of American Jewry will blend the development of Judaism as a religion with the accomplishments of Jews as a people, Sarna's title, *American Judaism*, identifies his main interest as a system of worship. Much like revivalism, the Judaism of this study consists of patterns of public religious behavior. Coherence is the advantage of this approach; but the initial choice of direction leads to further decisions: emphasis on communal ritual over individual ideas, rabbis instead of lay people, public space versus private, and institutions more than social life. The brilliant offbeat philosopher Moses Elias Levy does not appear, nor does Albert Einstein, Walter Lippmann, or Jennie Grossinger, whose *Art of Jewish Cooking* (1958) must have exerted at least as much influence as did rabbinic thought. Recent American Catholic history, surprisingly uninterested in "churchy" subjects, has perhaps set a standard for revisionism among religious historians, as practitioners like Robert Orsi, Paula Kane, James T. Fisher, and Patrick Allitt search unlikely corners, from ethnic households to converts' psyches, for "American Catholicism." Granted, it was easier to be innovative in their monographs than in a broad history such as this. Yet Sarna opts for restraint when he locates American Judaism in cycles of communal organization.

Within this world of synagogues, charities, and schools, Sarna covers a range of sometimes dissonant developments that show the pluralism of American Judaism. "Renewal," for example, the chapter on events since World War II, reports the new Orthodox presence, Jewish civil rights commitment, Holocaust remembrance, support for Israel, gender politics, and more. It is exciting to see these heterogeneous passions analytically linked. Yet as seasoned

revivalists know, it is easy to be seduced by numbers and fervency and just as hard to predict whose commitment will last. Sarna's ambitious inclusiveness at times produces emphasis on obvious traits. For intellectuals, we learn more about their activities than ideas: that Abraham Joshua Heschel marched for civil rights and Joseph Soloveitchik received secular schooling, but not that Heschel wrote *God in Search of Man* (1955) or that Soloveitchik's main concern was metaphysics, rather than historical transition, in *The Lonely Man of Faith* (1965). Sarna's dialectical model of declension and renewal succeeds mainly by finding evidence of effort. Whether initiatives sustain individual faith and communal well-being is not at the heart of his analysis.

With expressed hope and quieter fear for their future, Shearith Israel's founders resembled their Christian neighbors. The Puritans, too, imagined themselves a remnant of God's people, "a City upon a Hill" heralding redemption, in John Winthrop's words of 1630, unless "our hearts shall turn away so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship ... other Gods, our pleasures, and proffits."¹ Jonathan Sarna writes not only with an awareness of this likeness but its irony. Common cultural roots in the Hebrew Bible did not make Jews and Christians equal in America, and even if freedom proved religiously problematic for both, Jews faced the challenge at a disadvantage. Sarna's phrase "American Judaism" signifies the product of this struggle in a special sense: rather than a simple historical outcome, the American idiom of the traditional faith has been deliberately articulated by the Jewish community and repeatedly revised. Probing, analytical, and committed, *American Judaism* is a magnificent scholarly achievement and invaluable common possession.

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Notes

¹ "A Model of Christian Charity," in *God's New Israel: Religious Interpretations of American Destiny*, Conrad Cherry, ed., rev. ed (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 41.

Monty Noam Penkower, *Decision on Palestine Deferred: America, Britain and Wartime Diplomacy 1939-1945* (London: Frank Cass, 2002). xvi + 384 pp.

England's best course in Palestine, remarked Lord Moyne, the top British official in the Middle East in 1944, was to "carry on as we are and stall our Palestine policy for all we are worth." (362) He articulated this view in the midst of the raging Holocaust, when "stalling" on Palestine's future meant denying Jewish refugees a haven from their persecutors.

In *Decision on Palestine Deferred*, Monty Penkower expertly chronicles the process by which "stalling" came to define both British and American policy toward Palestine and Zionism in the 1940s. Some parts of this story have been told before in Penkower's other important books including *The Jews Were Expendable* and *From Catastrophe to Sovereignty*. But as Penkower notes in his preface, the intertwined subjects of the Holocaust and the Palestine conflict have not been fully or adequately explored in previous studies of Allied wartime diplomacy.

Moreover, no one has told the story in Penkower's masterful, comprehensive style. Every information-packed paragraph bristles with references to the constantly interacting forces shaping this vast and complex topic. This is one of Penkower's greatest strengths as a historian, and it is on full display in *Decision on Palestine Deferred*. Utilizing a vast range of archival sources, he offers the reader a fascinating, panoramic view of events, each development explained with reference to the multiplicity of factors influencing its outcome. The result is a literary tour de force, in which the reader is able to gain a full appreciation of the interlocking nature of the Arab-Jewish struggle over Palestine, the Nazi Holocaust, the conflicts within the American Jewish community, and the diplomacy waged by London and Washington during 1939-1945.

The book opens in 1939, not long after the promulgation of the British White Paper severely limiting Jewish immigration to Palestine. These restrictions would loom large in subsequent years. Despite American Jewish anger over this harsh new British policy, the Roosevelt administration declined to intervene. Although privately dismayed by the British move, FDR "refused to air his thoughts

publicly,” Penkower notes. He preferred to delegate the matter to the State Department, which regarded the future of Palestine as being of no more concern to the U.S. than Tagoland, the Cameroons, or other mandated territories. (19) In fact, as Penkower observes, the State Department was not merely indifferent, but often unabashedly hostile to Zionism, going so far as to press the American Red Cross, in 1940, to reject the United Palestine Appeal’s offer of twenty-five thousand dollars to aid victims of the Italian bombing of Tel Aviv and Haifa. State Department officials feared funds from a Zionist body would anger the Arabs. (60-61)

The U.S. stance in effect freed London’s hand to strictly enforce the new immigration limits and to crack down on attempts by refugees to enter Palestine in defiance of the restrictions (known as *aliyah bet*), a phenomenon the Foreign Office believed was “not primarily a refugee movement” but rather “an organized political invasion” advanced by the Gestapo to undermine England’s position in the Middle East. (41) Colonial Secretary John Shuckburgh, who was convinced that Jews “hate all gentiles,” expressed his hope that in the wake of the Nazi invasion of Poland, “some of the sources of supply [of unauthorized Jewish immigrants] may dry up.” (38) Indeed they did.

Penkower describes how the escalating tension between the Zionist movement and the British split the American Zionist leadership. An activist-minded segment, encouraged by visiting Labor Zionist leader David Ben-Gurion, favored pressing Jewish demands, while Stephen Wise, following the lead of World Zionist Organization president Chaim Weizmann, preferred a more cautious approach on the grounds that anything “that might add a featherweight to Britain’s burden must be avoided.” (59) Tensions between the two camps would intensify in the years to follow, eventually culminating in Ben-Gurion supplanting Weizmann and the activist Abba Hillel Silver replacing Wise at the helm of the American Zionist movement.

The Weizmann-Wise approach was grounded, in part, in their conviction that Prime Minister Winston Churchill was a sincere supporter of Zionist aspirations. The problem, as Penkower makes clear, is that Churchill’s words were seldom matched by his deeds. Weizmann often found himself taking solace in the assumption

that “we are in his thoughts.” (69) Whatever Churchill’s private thoughts, his actions spoke for themselves. A British embassy official in Washington, writing to an American Jewish leader in late 1941, acknowledged that “the Prime Minister never has mentioned the Jews when he speaks of the yoke on Hitler’s victims”; that was an accident, he theorized, caused by the fact that “he looked over the map and could think only of specific countries seized by Hitler,” and “the Jews, of course, were not on that map and were overlooked.” (98) Nothing better epitomizes the spirit of what Penkower calls “the bi-millennial disability of Jewish powerlessness.” (97)

The intransigence of Anglo-American policy and the reluctance of many American Jewish leaders to challenge it created a vacuum that dissidents sought to fill. Penkower appropriately weaves in the Bergson group, which in late 1941 began placing full-page advertisements in major U.S. newspapers, calling for the establishment of a Jewish army to fight alongside the Allies against the Nazis (later the ads would focus on the need for allied action to rescue Europe’s Jews). Bergson “shattered the prevailing American consensus regarding Jewish affairs” — that is, the consensus that Jewish concerns could be deferred until war’s end — and brought militant Zionist demands “via newspaper and radio to the nation’s breakfast tables.” (106) Some American Zionist leaders expressed interest in trying to bring Bergson under the establishment’s umbrella, but party politics intervened: Ben-Gurion insisted on severing all contact with the Bergsonites because some of its leaders had been followers of his archrival, Vladimir Ze’ev Jabotinsky, founder of Revisionist Zionism. (106)

London’s rejection of the Jewish army proposal, like its restrictions on Palestine immigration and other positions unfriendly to Jewish interests, was backed up with piles of memoranda warning that a pro-Zionist policy would provoke the Arabs to embrace the Axis. The irony, as Penkower shows, is that there was widespread Arab sympathy for the Nazis anyway. “The White Paper did not, in fact, dissuade the Mufti [of Jerusalem, Haj Amin el-Husseini] and conspiratorial movements in four Arab countries from supporting the Nazi cause” (361). As the German armies marched across North Africa in 1942, Palestinian Arabs were reportedly storing up cattle “for a feast to

welcome the German victors” and marking up Jewish homes in Tel Aviv that they expected to seize. (131) The Office of Strategic Services reported to Washington that Arabs involved in the short-lived pro-Nazi coup in Iraq in 1941 had begun agitating in Syria and Lebanon. “Throughout the Muslim world,” Penkower writes, “a popular German song continued to reverberate: ‘*Bissama Allah oua alard Hitler*’ [In Heaven Allah, on earth Hitler].” (126)

The confirmation, in late 1942, that the Nazis had embarked upon the systematic mass murder of Europe’s Jews did not soften many hearts among the Allied leadership. Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden remarked in 1943, with regard to the possibility of taking the Jews out of Bulgaria: “If we do that, then the Jews of the world will be wanting us to make similar offers in Poland and Germany. Hitler may well take us up on any such offer and there simply are not enough ships and means of transportation in the world to handle them.” (186) The White Paper stayed in force; Palestine remained off-limits to all but a relative handful of Jewish refugees.

Oil, too, was a factor in all of this, Penkower points out. Roosevelt, already reluctant to quarrel with his ally England over the Palestine issue, grew increasingly sensitive to Arab opinion during the early 1940s as the oil issue gained prominence in U.S. strategic thinking. Wartime petroleum needs, estimates of postwar consumption, and fear of Soviet encroachment in the Middle East made Saudi Arabia an ever more influential factor in Washington’s considerations. FDR personally assured the Saudi ruler, Ibn Saud, in early 1945 that no allied decision would be made regarding Palestine without consulting both the Arab and Jewish sides.

Speaking to Congress shortly afterwards, Roosevelt remarked, to the dismay of American Jews, that he had learned more about the Palestine problem by talking with Ibn Saud for five minutes than he would have learned from “the exchange of two or three dozen letters.” (332) Penkower concludes: “The need for Saudi oil, and worry over Soviet intrusion into the entire region, commanded far more attention in [State Department] circles than Jewry’s unique plight under the swastika.” (363)

To be sure, the British and the Americans did not always see eye to eye on Palestine. Penkower describes, for example, how, much to London's dismay, a proposed Anglo-American declaration banning public discussion of the Palestine problem for the duration of the war was vetoed by the White House after vigorous lobbying by FDR's Jewish advisers. But "when deferring decision on Palestine," Penkower concludes, "there was a meeting of minds in London and Washington." (363) And so the Palestine issue was deferred, again and again, regardless of the consequences for the Jews trapped in Hitler's Europe.

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Robert Philipson, *The Identity Question: Blacks and Jews in Europe and America* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), xxi, 254 pp.

From the Enlightenment radiated the ideals of rationalism and universalism. These were the standards that would erase the superstitions and prejudices that had poisoned human relations, the values that would eliminate the friction that had divided our species and caused it to suffer so dearly. In their struggle against obscurantism and tyranny, the philosophes could not conceive of diversity as a claim to be asserted, as a need to be cultivated and expressed; they tended to see difference as a source of trouble. Rights were universal and inalienable; laws emanated from nature and from nature's God. Then what happens to minorities under the sovereignty of reason? What happens when a historic entity like Jewry invokes the vision of a collective destiny of its own, when its religious traditions and its corporate memories diverge from the agenda of the party of humanity? And what happens when a race is reduced to mere property, degraded and stripped of human status, robbed of its past and its culture, and forced to abide in an alien land that denies the descendants of slaves the most elemental rights, so that a condition of equality with whites can scarcely be imagined? How such paradoxes were addressed even if they could not be resolved is the problem presented in Robert Philipson's learned and thoughtful disquisition. His book is a comparative study of diasporas — Jewish and black — through key autobiographies, by members of the minorities in question. And though the emphasis is on the United States, the ideological dilemma of *The Identity Question* is rooted in the cosmopolitan claims advanced in eighteenth-century France.

Philipson's method is to juxtapose these memoirs — or at least works so classified — to reveal how black and Jewish writers themselves presented their negotiations with the larger society, how they filtered their experiences through the double consciousness of feeling both a part of common humanity and yet apart from it. *The Identity Question* thus begins with *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, published in the year that the French Revolution erupted and as the U. S. Constitution

was being ratified. It is paired with Solomon Maimon's memoir, published in German five years later. Both Equiano and Maimon were exemplars of difference. But what, for example, was their nationality, in an era when the nation-state was emerging to challenge the very cosmopolitanism that the philosophes fancied themselves to embody? Equiano's *Narrative* (which may be fictionalized) has been classified under "African-American literature, Afro-British literature, and African literature," Philipson writes, just as Maimon has been considered "a Polish Jew, a Lithuanian Jew, and even a Russian Jew." (232n)

The mother tongue of one was Ibo, of the other Yiddish; and both writers were driven "to master the languages that would allow them to participate in the Enlightenment West." (41-42) Yet the success of their effort was hardly complete; and Philipson emphasizes the difficulty of these gifted memoirists in conveying the interior life of the Other in a white civilization, in a Christendom making a virtue of toleration yet assuming a superiority to everyone else. For all of their struggle to partake of the dominant society and spirit of western Europe, Equiano and Maimon hinted at a subjectivity that could not be communicated, at grievances and fears to which only they and blacks in captivity and Jews in the ghetto were privy. And even though the Enlightenment made revealed religion suspect, so that Maimon became a skeptic or a deist (who refused, for example, to say the blessing over wine), not even the appeal of reason could stifle the yearnings of the heart. Opposition to slavery emerged most forcefully among the dissenting sects like the Quakers, and Equiano's Protestantism was to be shared by countless slaves who dared to believe that the exodus from Egypt anticipated their own emancipation from bondage.

The failure of the Enlightenment to resolve its own inner tensions, or to accommodate itself satisfactorily to nationalist impulses, inspires the next section of *The Identity Question*, which shifts fully to American culture in the late nineteenth century and thereafter. In an epoch marked by racialist thinking, were Jews a separate race? Were they bound by something deeper than acceptance of the Pittsburgh Platform, something as primordial as the Celts or the Teutons or the Slavs could feel in themselves as well? In an era scarred by antisemitism and racism, how could Jews find relief except by bringing the two

millennia of exile to an end, and how could black Americans hope to achieve the security and dignity of full citizenship except by appealing to the common, normative standards of equal justice under law? These were the anxieties that dogged liberals forced to confront the challenge of Zionism, and the sorts of questions that animated the NAACP in its assault upon the discrimination that collided with the ideals of the Constitution.

As late as midcentury, the legatees of universalism lacked neither literary resources nor moral authority. Philipson pays special attention to Alfred Kazin (1915-1998) and Richard Wright (1908-1960). They were members of “the last generation of American writers who adhered, on a conscious level, to the ideology of ethnic transcendence.” (112) *A Walker in the City* (1951) recounts the passion to escape from the confines of the Williamsburg section of Brooklyn, to make it all the way to Manhattan, and thus join a wider intellectual community, while looking back with tenderness at the cohesiveness and love attached to the family and neighborhood that ineluctably had to be left behind. *Black Boy* (1945) is a far more harrowing account of a Mississippian suspended between the terrors of a dysfunctional family and the menace posed to his very existence by the malice of white supremacy. In *On Native Grounds* (1942), his first book of literary history, Kazin wished to celebrate as well as diagnose the fiction of non-Jews whose villages and towns he could not have known directly. Wright propelled himself so furiously from the black South that he eventually expatriated himself to Paris and saw little in the subculture from which he had distanced himself to exalt or to explore. Yet their victory over provincialism was only partial. Haunted by the Holocaust, Kazin would invest characteristic passion in the appreciation of the key works of Jewish literature. In 2001 the National Yiddish Book Center named *A Walker in the City* one of the hundred canonical Jewish books. Far from disappearing from black American culture, Wright would be responsible for enlarging it, deepening it, playing an incalculable role in defining it — even if he did not live to see the success of the American political and legal system in eradicating the legacies of slavery and segregation.

Such are some of the positions taken and assessed in *The Identity Question*. It defies easy summation, however, since the author does not advance a thesis that is articulated, developed, and sustained. But as a close reader of particular texts, Philipson does offer convincing interpretations; the local perceptions that punctuate his book endow it with considerable interest. The author wisely makes no attempt to portray the social experiences of blacks and Jews as mirrors of each other, nor does he insist on literary parallels. Without forcing his texts into the same mold, he is adroit in finding points of comparison and certain structural and thematic similarities. This book is an instance of literary scholarship, historically informed, that cannot be enlisted in the political controversies swirling out of the relations between Jews and African Americans. But Philipson's work can be savored for its intelligence, its scrupulousness, and its exactitude.

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Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 386 pp. Illus.

Recent surveys of American Jews' political leanings have suggested that it finally might be time to retire Milton Himmelfarb's often-cited quip, "Jews earn like Episcopalians but vote like Puerto Ricans." A poll of American Jews reported in the *Forward* in January 2003, for example, noted that "American Jews may be poised on the edge of a historic shift to the right in their political views."¹ Two-thirds of Jews still lined up in the Democratic ranks, noted the survey's author Steven M. Cohen, but among younger Jews, Jewish men, and Jews in the highest income brackets, Republican sentiments and loyalties were increasing. The age gap, more than the other demographic factors cited, suggested to observers that more Jews might lean to the Right politically over time. A *Forward* editorialist lamented the development, portraying the turn to the Right as unprecedented: "It's harder for them [younger Jews] to see liberal struggles for minority rights as their own business."² The implication, of course, was that their parents' generation, now approaching retirement age or beyond, all had championed liberal causes in one unified voice.

Michael E. Staub attacks this commonly held assumption about Jews as a liberal and unified American ethnic group, even in the immediate post-World War II period, in *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America*. Staub's convincing reinterpretation of American Jewish liberalism provides historical perspective for some important episodes of ideological conflict within American Jewish communities. He successfully calls into question the conventional wisdom that, even as they enjoyed unprecedented prosperity as compared to other American ethnic groups, nearly all Jews continued to retain strong liberal ties politically. He makes this case very well by shifting our focus of inquiry—where many existing studies of Jews' political tendencies have compared Jews to other American religious or ethnic groups (as does Himmelfarb's quip), Staub highlights "intra-Jewish conflict" in order to reexamine the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and politics in postwar America. By focusing on intragroup relations, Staub is able to assert

that his “is a book about the importance of ideology and the necessity of taking into account splits within ethnic communities rather than assuming that there is any self-evident link between someone’s ethnic position and their political views.” (18) Focusing on the years from 1945 to 1975, Staub demonstrates that American Jews passionately, continually, and without unity debated issues related to American anti-communism, civil rights, Middle Eastern politics, the Vietnam War, religious observance, feminism, and gay rights.

Staub explores intra-Jewish conflict for this catalogue of controversial topics in successive chapters of *Torn at the Roots*. In the first chapter Staub investigates the relationship between Jews and the civil rights movement, with a specific focus on the relationship between American Jewish liberalism and the consolidation of anti-communism. As Staub explains, “As leftists were increasingly demonized, their ability to speak for, or even consider themselves as belonging to, the Jewish and black communities was called into sharp question.” (22) The second chapter continues to question Black-Jewish relations in the United States, with some added components, including debates about prophetic Judaism and anti-racist Zionists. Staub here disputes the common claim that the Six-Day War of 1967 marked a rupture in American Jewry’s political leanings. Instead, for Staub, 1967 represents “a boiling over of circumstances that had been in the making for several years.” (75) This contribution to American Jewish history is one of Staub’s most insightful; he has aptly demonstrated that Jewish liberalism was being challenged and redefined well before the 1967 war.

Staub’s third chapter examines anxieties from within the Jewish community that Jewish liberalism would presage the demise of Jewish particularity. The next five chapters are either issue-oriented or case studies that serve to reinforce Staub’s argument, which, by this point in the book, has been clearly developed and rearticulated a number of times. He tackles intra-Jewish conflict over the war in Vietnam, radical Zionism, and the sexual revolution. Two case study chapters — one about the Jews for Urban Justice and one about Breira, an organization that supported a two-state solution and eventually experienced a painful backlash when it was labeled as a “PLO front working for Israel’s ultimate destruction” (304) — reinforce the book’s main

themes. Staub notes that these groups have been written out of almost all existing narratives of American Jewish history, which has helped to perpetuate the myth of unified Jewish liberalism. His recovery work is impressive, in terms both of research and of arguing for the importance of these previously ignored or forgotten episodes in American Jewish history.

One of the most insightful threads running throughout Staub's narrative is his analysis of the way that the Nazi genocide of European Jewry was invoked by those on the Right and the Left for a wide array of political purposes and often was used in ways to support conflicting opinions on a single issue. Staub also challenges previous assumptions, put forward by Peter Novick among others, that the Holocaust was not often discussed in the years immediately following the atrocities associated with WWII. Even before the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann and long before the Six-Day War, Staub demonstrates, it became common in debates about a variety of issues concerning American Jewry to refer to the purported "lessons" of the Holocaust. Despite disagreeing with Novick about when the Holocaust began to occupy such a central place in American Jews' collective consciousness, Staub's book does fit well with other ideas central to Novick's *The Holocaust in American Life*, specifically that the purported "lessons" of the Holocaust are a matter of much debate and that the Holocaust became a "moral reference point" (Novick, 13) on a variety of issues of concern to Jews, including civil rights, Middle Eastern politics, and Jewish continuity.³ In this regard, Staub also has made an important contribution to the growing historiography on Holocaust memory in the United States.

One of the strengths of this book, the diversity of topics covered in its individual chapters, is perhaps also its weakness. Many of the chapters—especially the case studies—could easily stand alone. The book might have been made more seamless had Staub included either a conclusion or short epilogue to tie these many stories together and reinforce his important argument. Although his study ends in the mid-1970s, perhaps an epilogue about the growing pervasiveness of Jewish conservatism, or even of the important phenomenon of Jewish Reagan Democrats, for example, would have provided an illuminating cap to this fine book.

As it stands, though, Staub's book is an entertaining, well-argued, and important corrective that would prove useful reading for scholars in many fields, including American Jewish history, American ethnic history, and American political history.

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Notes

1. Steven M. Cohen, "Survey Sees Historic Shift to the Right," *Forward* (January 17, 2003).
2. "Moving Right," *Forward* (January 17, 2003).
3. Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1999).

Ava F. Kahn, ed., *Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush: A Documentary History, 1849-1880* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2002), 549 pp.

This rich documentary history of Jews during the California Gold Rush evokes the excitement of that helter-skelter era while illustrating regional differences between Jewish settlement in the Far West and elsewhere in the United States. Using settlers' and sojourners' own words, historian Ava F. Kahn shows that amid the pluralism and diversity of the Gold Rush, Judaism flourished. So too did new patterns of socialization, for California's mercurial settlement led to life cycle events celebrated in public and to business partnerships sealed across ethnic lines.

The great migration to the American El Dorado, too often neglected in Jewish histories of North America, found immigrants with Polish, Prussian, and German accents fleeing failed revolutions in Europe and mingling with westward-bound American-born Jews. All arrived during the first wave of gold rush fever and of Anglo settlement, helping define the thirty-first state and Jewish institutions within it.

Partly because California lacked the "deep-rooted Protestant hegemony" (41) of the East, Kahn contends that new, regional patterns emerged. Moreover, the great distance from established Jewish religious authorities led to innovations, such as reciting *Kaddish* for esteemed non-Jews. Calling pioneer California's "reputation for religious apathy unfounded," (38) Kahn presents documents that describe the highly visible spires of San Francisco's Temple Emanu-El and the bylaws of multiple Hebrew institutions. She also highlights, through first-person accounts, contentious splits over *shochets*, liturgy, and rabbis — indications of religious rivalry rather than apathy.

Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush is divided into six segments, each with a summary introduction outlining the purpose and themes of the annotated selections that follow. The first segment, "Looking West," includes travel diaries by pioneers en route to California through the "very dirty" Isthmus of Panama. (132) Another account describes Fanny Brooks, a Jewish bride from Breslau who spent her honeymoon traveling by mule train across the Great Plains.

To survive, she learned to shoot a gun, build a fire with sagebrush and buffalo chips, and bake bread in a cast-iron skillet. A more comfortable journey was experienced by Rabbi Max Lilienthal who traveled by train from Cincinnati to officiate at the 1876 marriage of a California nephew. The rabbi's favorite stop was Salt Lake City, "the land of the Mormons ... in which we Jews were at once turned into Gentiles! ... Think what you may of Brigham Young and his queer doctrines ... he is a mighty organizer." (142–43)

San Francisco is the subject of the book's second section. From the first High Holy Day sermon delivered under a tent-roofed store to matzo advertisements and marriage *ketuboth*, the city illuminates the diversity and the disputes inherent in West Coast Judaism. Among the treats in this segment are selections by and about Rabbi Julius Eckman, the opinionated pioneer who moved to California without being "called," who contentiously served one congregation, then ultimately left his mark by founding Jewish schools and a weekly newspaper, the *Gleaner*.

"Personal Struggles," the book's third part, celebrates life cycle events such as the circumcision of an infant, reported in the *Nevada City Journal* as a "nipping in the bud." (294) At the "elegant" wedding of Carrie Goldwater to P. N. Aronson in 1876, the couple's gifts included "200 cases of silver" and a one hundred dollar donation in their name to the Jewish Orphan Asylum. (302–3) Also in this section is an entry from Rebekah Bettelheim, who later married New York Rabbi Alexander Kohut. Her father was a California rabbi. In her autobiography she concludes that "San Francisco had too many congregations, and [therefore] none of them thrived. This ... had a bad spiritual effect." (307)

Beyond San Francisco this documentary history takes a deep foray into "Gold Rush Country," meaning the mining towns and the river supply towns (such as Sacramento and Stockton) where metal-riveted, denim work pants sold by Levi Strauss and his partner tailor, Jacob Davis, were in constant demand. Life was hard in these remote towns, and Kahn documents the sad details of a suicide in Sonora and the burial procession of a man to the cemetery at Kokelumne Hill. There were also celebrations: the double bar mitzvah of Jacob Kohn

and Henry Louis at Placerville in 1867, as well as the circumcision of triplets whose middle names were Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, and John Connes (a California U.S. senator).

Subsequent sections of the book discuss “Group Relations,” with outsiders giving opinions of Jewish “slop shops,” (385) legislators commenting on Sunday blue laws, and “some of our best citizens” (390) being the subject of views from the wider community. As news of the phenomenal riches in California spread worldwide, emissaries from Jerusalem, then under Turkish rule, flocked to California to raise alms for the Jews of Palestine. These *schmorrers* nurtured a “close relationship between the golden land and the promised land.” (462) The *nouveau riche* of California gave generously to the Jews of Morocco, according to excerpts from the *London Jewish Chronicle* and *Hebrew Observer*. They also protested, in larger numbers than elsewhere, the Mortara affair, the 1858 papal abduction of a Jewish boy baptized by a Catholic servant.

Jewish Voices of the California Gold Rush includes a California chronology, a detailed index, and more than fifty illustrations, from a portrait of Adolph Sutro wielding a pickaxe to maps of routes to California.

Assessing the larger picture, Kahn’s bibliographical essay demonstrates the wealth of West Coast archival collections that await examination. This book, a treasury of primary source materials, should whet the appetite for further research and more thoughtful inclusion of the Far West in future surveys of American Jewish history.

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Penny Schine Gold, *Making the Bible Modern: Children's Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), xv + 269 pp.

Historian David Ruderman recently suggested that Jewish life in America be viewed through the prism of translation. Extrapolating from his study of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Jewish thought in England, he writes, "The process of translations of Jewish classical texts into the English language not only continued on American soil, it flourished in a way unimaginable to the first compilers of Jewish works in English."¹ Simply put, Jewish culture rendered in the English language emerged as strikingly different from other Jewish cultures. In many ways, Penny Schine Gold's study of children's Bibles in the United States brings rich historical material to Ruderman's proposition. *Making the Bible Modern: Children's Bibles and Jewish Education in Twentieth-Century America* is a book about acts of cultural translation. Its strength rests on Gold's ability to understand translation as a creative and multidirectional endeavor. She argues that children's Bibles published from 1915 to 1936, mainly through the Reform movement, translated Judaism into American modernity and translated American values into Jewish terms.

The heart of Gold's argument is a close analysis of children's Bibles' retelling of a handful of biblical stories, including Cain's murder of Abel, God's commandment that Abraham uproot himself and move to a new land, the binding of Isaac, and Jacob's stealing of the birthright from Esau. In each of these cases, Gold shows that children's Bibles deleted, revised, and simplified the biblical text according to American norms. In general, the editors were wary of telling stories that drew attention to moral inconsistency, supernaturalism, and sexuality. For example, many children's Bibles resolved the sticky Genesis passage about Isaac's blessings for his sons by explaining that Jacob was more deserving of the blessing than Esau. Mendel Silber, who wrote a two-volume children's Bible in 1916, instructed his young readers: "When the two boys grew up, one could tell just by looking at them what sort of fellow each was. Esau was covered with hair all over and looked rough, just like one who hunts all the time and leads a wild life.

Jacob always looked neat and genteel.” (149) Children, then, instead of learning about duplicity or questioning the motive of personal gain, were assured that good people are rewarded with good things. Other biblical passages that could not as easily be finessed into moral consistency were often skipped, and those that focused too much on God and miracle working tended to be rewritten to focus on human heroics. I wonder what Gold would have found had she extended her analysis beyond the 1930s; did the anti-communism and so-called religious revival of 1950s America, for example, encourage a new focus on God in children’s Bibles?

Three overlapping concerns drive Gold’s inquiry into children’s Bibles. First, she is interested in the problem of modernity in Jewish life. Delving into the scholarship about Jewish responses to European Enlightenment and emancipation, Gold concludes that the Bible became the crucial sacred text that Jews brought with them into conversations about modernity. This conclusion, although not original, enables Gold to assert that Jews who were invested in being modern would have shunned an earlier Jewish fixation on the Talmud in favor of the more universal (at least in a Western context) messages of the Bible. She points out the irony in the fact that even with the rise of historical criticism, which called into question single and divine authorship of the Bible, Jews favored the Bible as proof of their modern and universal values. Of course, the fact that the Bible provided a literary common ground between Judaism and Christianity made it an attractive symbol for Jews wishing for acceptance in mainstream European society.

Closely tied to Gold’s inquiry into the place of the Bible in Jewish modernity is her concern with the changing role of Jewish education in the modern period. Gold chronicles the ways in which the theory and practice of Jewish education shifted between the pre-modern and modern eras. Whereas Jews who lived in insular communities focused on memorizing sacred materials (particularly rabbinical texts) in their original languages, those Jews who came into greater contact with non-Jews were intent upon drawing parallels between Jewish values and modern ideals and used sacred text more as a vehicle for mainstream correspondence than differentiation. In the United States, the

professionalization of Jewish education grew apace with the expansion of American pedagogical theory and public education. Thinkers like John Dewey, who argued for an experience-based, functional approach to education, influenced Jewish educators to rethink the traditional Talmud-Torah and *heder* style of Jewish education. Not only was the meaning of childhood re-envisioned in twentieth-century America, scientific understandings of how people learned and how moral values were created also underwent transformation. Children's Bibles, then, reflected the desire to expose children to ethical teachings without resorting to authoritarian methods or rote memorization. The experience of reading about the heroes of the Bible and identifying with them, educators hoped, would naturally instill in children a moral sensibility and a love of their tradition.

Finally, and most personally, Gold is concerned with the story of Jewish assimilation in the United States, a story illuminated, she believes, by her inquiry into children's Jewish education. Here, her voice of judgment is audible. Although one could argue that the authors of children's Bibles were spinning modern-day midrash, the genre of biblical commentary codified in the Talmud in the centuries after the destruction of the Second Temple, Gold is not so inclined. She explains that while the "originating impulse" of midrash is "to *explain* the difficulties in the text," the aim of children's Bibles was to efface the difficulties and replace them with more palatable stories. (189) Her disappointment with the content of children's Bibles may drive her toward a restrictive definition of midrash. For Gold, however, mid-century children's Bibles are just one measure of how neglectful American Jews have been of the "deep and complex Jewish way of life," favoring instead simple explanations of the parity between American values and Jewish ones. (206)

A reader may notice that Gold's analysis of actual children's Bibles, while the most fascinating and novel element of the book, is rather short. Her admirable impulse to contextualize — her inquiries into modernity, education, and questions of assimilation — in certain ways occludes her story. For a newcomer to Jewish history, these long context sections may be useful; for a specialist they are less so and also introduce a few questionable generalizations.

Still, there is much to admire in this book. Gold insists that Jews in the United States participated in acts of cultural translation. She ably illustrates one way that Jews translated America — and modernity — into Jewish terms and metaphors. The “Englishing of Jewish culture,” to use Ruderman’s phrase, was not simply a matter of turning Hebrew words into English ones, it was also, as Gold shows, a process of reflecting anew American culture and values.²

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Notes

¹ David Ruderman, “Reflecting on American Jewish History,” *American Jewish History* 9, no. 3-4 (2003): 376.

² Ibid, 374.