

Naomi W. Cohen, *What the Rabbis Said: The Public Discourse of Nineteenth-Century American Rabbis* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2008), x + 261 pp.

In Naomi Cohen's distinguished scholarly career, she has contributed amply to our understanding of the social, political, religious, and intellectual life of the American Jewish community. She has concentrated on the crucial period between the 1880s and 1940, when that community emerged as the most important Jewish community in the world. In particular, she has specialized in "the Germans"—that part of the American Jewish community that had emigrated from central Europe by the mid-nineteenth century and had constituted itself, by the beginning of the twentieth century, as a sort of American Jewish "establishment." Though its hegemony would be challenged in the twentieth century by American Jews of eastern European origin, the "German" Jews maintained a significant hold on communal power well past midcentury.

In the nineteenth-century American Jewish community, dominated by the "Germans," the rabbinate was largely subordinated to the congregational lay leadership, regardless of whether the congregation was traditionalist or Reform. Rabbis typically did not have the freedom to speak from their own pulpit without prior authorization. Only fairly prominent rabbis in this era, such as Stephen S. Wise, could demand and receive their "freedom of the pulpit." Thus, one of the major trends Cohen tracks in her informative book is the way in which rabbis attempted, despite these constraints, to get their message to their congregants and to a wider public—Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

Sermons constitute an important and hitherto largely underused source for understanding the history of American Judaism. That they have been underused is attributable to the many methodological problems connected with the study of sermons, of which Cohen is keenly aware. Just to begin the relation of these problems, Cohen states (11): "Many sermons were lost or survived in fragmentary form. And, very likely the edited or published version of the sermon differed substantially from the one actually delivered." That she was able to overcome the limitations of her sources and give her readers important insights into the history of American Judaism in this era, and of the American rabbinate in particular, is a tribute to the care with which she handles her primary sources.

The personalities of prominent nineteenth-century American rabbis such as traditionalist Sabato Morais and reformers David Einhorn and Kaufmann Kohler come to life, as do the challenges facing them. However, perhaps the most interesting parts of the book do not concern rabbis directly, though rabbis are heavily implicated in both. I refer to the chapters "Rabbis Under Attack," which chronicles the attack on the character of the American rabbinate by a

prominent layman, Leo N. Levi of Texas ( 131ff.), and “The World’s Parliament of Religions” (177ff.), which speaks of Jewish participation in the interfaith Parliament held in conjunction with the World’s Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

Naomi Cohen’s book brings important new evidence to our attention and thus helps us better understand a crucial era in the history of American Judaism and of the American rabbinate.

---

*Ira Robinson is professor of Judaic studies in the department of religion, Concordia University, Montreal, Canada. He is president of the Canadian Society for Jewish Studies. His most recent book is Translating a Tradition: Studies in American Jewish History.*

### **John Cooper, *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), vii + 338 pp.**

What immediately strikes one with the publication of John Cooper’s biographical study of Raphael Lemkin—the legal scholar who coined the term “genocide” and fought tirelessly for the genocide convention—is the startling awareness that there is no prior scholarly study of this man. *Raphael Lemkin and the Struggle for the Genocide Convention* fills this lacuna as a meticulously researched historical narrative that methodically examines Lemkin’s lobbying efforts on behalf of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Cooper recounts Lemkin’s relationship with notable public figures, such as Eleanor Roosevelt, Pearl Buck, Henry Wallace, John Foster Dulles, Allen Dulles, and Aldous Huxley, among others, in his lobbying efforts for the genocide convention. He reflects upon Lemkin’s pioneering role in the identity of genocide as a criminal violation of international law.

To Cooper’s credit, he provides a microanalysis of the complexities of the negotiations and positions of state delegations that were often contextualized and framed through their political, historical, ideological, and philosophical lenses. Cooper helpfully illuminates for the reader all the technical nuances—as legally complex as they were—in the language of disputed particular proposals, including amendments that articulated different points of contention. We learn from Cooper that Lemkin used his skills of persuasion and negotiation, including compromising on certain issues—most notably on the criterion of “cultural genocide.” Given the Holocaust, inclusion of “cultural genocide” was a high priority for Lemkin, yet he agreed, reluctantly, to its deletion.

Cooper analyzes Lemkin’s passionate lobbying for the genocide convention in the context of an exceptionally fluid and politically charged, contentious global environment, including, for example, the onset of an intense Cold War. He chronicles with great detail the political maneuvers Lemkin deployed as he attempted to mobilize support for the ratification of the genocide convention.

As Cooper demonstrates, it is striking that Lemkin's relentless attempts to shape global public opinion, recruit support, and lobby for the adoption of the genocide convention mobilized a broad global coalition of diverse nation-states (including many Latin American countries), Central and Eastern European refugee associations, women's organizations, global Jewish organizations (e.g., World Jewish Congress), Christian associations, and eventually much of organized American labor. Lemkin almost single-handedly orchestrated a vigorous, systematic public relations campaign to adopt and ratify the convention.

Cooper's discussion of the powerful obstructionist force of southern segregationist Democrats in the U.S. Senate is especially revealing. These senators were concerned about the potential identification of racist segregation policies (i.e., Jim Crow) with genocide and human rights violations and, secondly, that the genocide convention would be a catalyst for the promotion of African-Americans' civil rights. In addition, Cooper documents the surprising fact of Britain's initial reservations and opposition to the adoption of any proposed genocide convention. Furthermore, some opponents of the convention claimed that, given other human rights projects pursued by the United Nations, it was unnecessary to implement a convention on genocide. In particular, what struck me was Cooper's revelation that Lemkin viewed the genocide convention and the global human rights movement as not collaborative, but as mutually exclusive endeavors.

We discover in this work that Lemkin's passionate love of and natural ability for learning languages served his creation of the new word *genocide* well. Lemkin's intellectual comprehension of and emotional sensitivity to genocide should be framed and integrated to a great extent—as Cooper systematically and successfully does—within the context of his own personal background and identity as a Polish Jew. Cooper's study reveals that in drafting the genocide convention, Lemkin was particularly sensitive to the survivability of global ethnic, national, racial, and religious minorities. This was especially true in the context of potential or real threats of the destruction of their cultural identities in conjunction with their quest for national identity and independence.

Lemkin's understanding of the ethical content or implicit moral principles and moral arguments underpinning the genocide convention is not fully explored. The reader would have greatly benefited if Cooper had commented on Lemkin's critique of genocide not only as a global legal subject, but also as a rejection of various moral and ethical standards. It would also have been fruitful for Cooper to have focused on the range of political philosophical and ethical sources that possibly had an intellectual impact on Lemkin's conceptualization of genocide and the UN Convention on Genocide. Furthermore, it would have been helpful if Cooper had expanded upon Lemkin's understanding of the reasoning for a global collective moral responsibility for humanitarian interventions in cases of genocide.

Thanks to the author, we learn that Lemkin took very seriously his role as researcher, which was realized with his magnum opus—*Axis Rule in Occupied Europe: Laws of Occupation, Analysis of Government, Proposals for Redress*, published in 1944. It is in this work that Lemkin created the powerful, compelling, and provocative word *genocide*—replacing the linguistic precedent that he created of “crimes of barbarity and vandalism.” What is profoundly insightful and greatly contributes to the scholarly literature both on Lemkin and the Nuremberg Tribunal are Cooper’s revelations of Lemkin’s decisive role in, and influence upon, the proceedings of the Nuremberg prosecutions—including the impact of his aforementioned book.

Without hyperbole, Cooper richly captures Lemkin the human—a true Renaissance man and a brilliant intellectual. However, he does not present Lemkin without any weaknesses. The author depicts the life of a man focused almost exclusively on his life’s calling and preoccupation—his public role as the relentless architect and lobbyist of a genocide convention—to the point of sacrificing his health and most private relationships. It is sad that although Lemkin was nominated several times, he was never awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. Readers—both scholars and the nonacademic audience—will be equally impressed with the meticulous detail and comprehensive scope of Cooper’s study.

---

*Mitchel Gerber is professor at Southeast Missouri State University. He is the author of “Reconstituting Political Philosophy after the Holocaust: Toward the Prevention of Genocide,” a chapter in The Double Binds of Ethics after the Holocaust. He is the author of “July 6–15, 1938: Evian Conference,” an article published in Great Events from History: The Twentieth Century, 1901–1940 as well as the editor of Classic Edition Sources: American Government, third edition. He is currently working on the subject of the reconstruction of political philosophy and political ethics in the post-Holocaust years.*

**Carole S. Kessner, *Marie Syrkin: Values Beyond the Self* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 416 pp., illus.**

Carole S. Kessner’s biography of Marie Syrkin (1899–1989) is a welcome addition to the small but growing body of work on this brilliant, mercurial woman, whose career as journalist, poet, educator, and Zionist activist is paradigmatic of her time, place, and cultural milieu. The daughter of Nachman Syrkin, the founder of Labor Zionism, Marie Syrkin was born in Switzerland and spent her early years moving with her parents from one European city to another, as Nachman became increasingly active in Zionist politics. Immigrating with her parents to New York City in 1908, Marie, who already spoke four languages, adjusted to American life with relative ease. Her mother’s death from tuberculosis in 1915 and her increasing estrangement from the charismatic, strong-willed, and decidedly patriarchal Nachman (who left for Russia to court

and marry his wife's younger sister!) led the beautiful Marie to a tempestuous young adulthood. At sixteen she eloped with writer Maurice Samuel, and when Nachman intervened to have the marriage annulled, she soon after married Aaron Bodansky, a chemistry instructor at Cornell, where Marie studied English. This marriage, too, lasted only a short time; the couple lost their first child, had a second, and divorced soon after. Syrkin found herself back in New York City, a single mother making her way as a high school teacher, though she always aspired to an academic career. In 1930, after a stay in Reno to obtain the divorce from Bodansky, she married Charles Reznikoff, arguably the greatest Jewish American poet of the twentieth century but a failure as a breadwinner. Charles and Marie often lived apart: he mostly in New York City (except for a stint in Hollywood as the factotum of his childhood friend, the producer Albert Lewin), she traveling to Europe and Palestine (including the occasional rendezvous with Maurice Samuel) in her increasingly engaged career as a journalist and Zionist organizer. In 1950, she was hired by the English department of Brandeis University, where she taught for seventeen years. (Charles stayed in Manhattan.)

Kessner subtitles her biography "Values Beyond the Self," a phrase Irving Howe, Syrkin's sometimes condescending but ultimately admiring colleague at Brandeis, applied to the life she lived. Kessner leads us to see in this biography how much Syrkin grew beyond herself and into those values. What emerges is a figure of unusual integrity. The headstrong, romantic young woman, whose dedication to the Zionist cause was the true inheritance of her headstrong, romantic father, responded gradually but with increasing passion and insight to the events that shaped the fate of world Jewry from the 1930s on. Syrkin's varied accomplishments—her work on educational reform, her reports on Palestine prior to the establishment of Israel, her visits to and writing about the displaced persons camps, her biography of her close friend Golda Meir, and her book on Jewish resistance, *Blessed Is the Match*—are all described in detailed counterpoint to these crucial events. One sees much of twentieth-century Jewish history through the lens of this unique life, a life of both an observer of and actor in this extraordinary drama. Brought back from relative obscurity through careful research and obvious devotion, Marie Syrkin deserves the attention of a new generation of readers and scholars.

---

*Norman Finkelstein is a poet, critic, and professor of English at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH. His new book, On Mt. Vision: Forms of the Sacred in Contemporary American Poetry, is forthcoming from the University of Iowa Press.*

Julian Levinson, *Exiles on Main Street: Jewish American Writers and American Literary Culture* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), vii + 239 pp.

*Exiles on Main Street* addresses the development of Jewish-American identity and literature in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, providing a vital model for analyzing Jewish literary production in America, and Jews' own representations of Jewishness. Levinson positions his analysis as a corrective to critics who tend to interpret nineteenth and twentieth-century Jewish-American life primarily as a story of the "drive to assimilate" and who correlate such assimilation with a loss of "Jewish distinctiveness" (8). He shows how Jewish writers from Emma Lazarus to Alfred Kazin combine Jewish traditions with American literary movements, particularly Transcendentalism, to create a distinctly modern Jewish identity that is at once subversive, visionary, and essentially redemptive—the necessary foundation for rethinking American idealism. Writers he covers include Mary Antin, Waldo Frank, Irving Howe, Anzia Yezierska, and Yiddishists such as Joseph Bovshover and I. J. Schwartz, an expansive list that enables him to demonstrate how, over the course of the "long twentieth century," Jewish writers have productively transformed non-Jewish culture in multiple and complex ways.

Levinson opens the book by analyzing the influence of Emersonian notions of inspiration on Emma Lazarus, notions that she combines with Jewish prophetic tradition to proclaim a "rising of the Jew" and a "spiritual rebirth in ... America" (31). In Lazarus's work, Levinson explains, the "Eastern Jew redeems the American Jew by reconnecting her to the Jewish past," albeit a past in which "[t]hemes such as Israel's abominations and ... God's punishments, which are central to the discourse of biblical prophesy, are absent" (34, 32). He then turns to Mary Antin, emphasizing her interest in "interiority and revelation," and what he characterizes as a "pure doctrine of ancient Judaism": the belief that "rituals [are] secondary to the underlying relationship between the individual Jew and God" (41, 47). To observe Antin's engagement with such views, he concludes, is to recognize how fully committed Antin is to the idea of "a spiritual core beneath the accretions of rabbinic Judaism," but also how she transforms this core into a trope for "spiritual power" and perseverance in "modern American Jewish culture" (47, 52). In short, Levinson argues that Lazarus and Antin "imagine an enduring Judaism" by replacing "the institutions of rabbinic culture" with "a rhetoric of spirituality whose providence is largely Romantic and Victorian" (15). Thus Levinson sets the stage for his rich analysis of Jewish-American writers' engagement with a "spiritualized" Judaism, a Judaism reliant on both Jewish and seemingly non-Jewish "visionary literary tradition[s]" (39, 3). For instance, we learn how Lewis Lewisohn evokes both Jewish "biblical vocabularies" and Whitman to "castigate Americans for their failure to live up to their alleged ideals" (64, 63). For Lewisohn, Levinson argues, "Whitman's 'great idea' [is]

betrayed by a belligerent ... America; yet, since America's 'great idea' is ... originally Jewish, it can be retrieved by the Jew who 'returns' to Judaism" (73). Similarly, the modernist Waldo Frank discovers a Jewish "spiritual language for elucidating ... and augmenting the project of the avant-garde" and, in the process, demonstrates how "the Jew *as Jew* could be woven into the narrative of America's coming-into-fulfillment" (77, 90; italics Levinson).

Such thoughtful reassessments of both popular and lesser known Jewish-American writers illustrate the dynamic ways in which Jewish writers reinvigorate their traditions to create a new version of Jewish identity in America. In this sense, the book is eminently optimistic, articulating a narrative in which Jewishness is reformulated as Jews assimilate, but never disappears. There is also a political story at the heart of Levinson's work: providing a useful primer on Jews' adaptation of Romantic and transcendentalist ideas, he demonstrates how transcendentalist vocabularies are employed by Jewish writers for utopian ends. "More than 'identity,'" he tells us, these writers "offer an ideal; more than ethnicity, ethos; more than a set of rituals or group behavior, a mandate and a mission" (107). This sense of mission is informed by historical events, and more significantly, by images of Jews and other immigrants, both positive and negative, circulating in the culture at large. Indeed, in Levinson's history, Jews respond to the narratives of cultural pluralism advocated by such thinkers as Randolph Bourne as productively as they do to the anti-immigrant diatribes of Henry Ford.

---

*Lara Trubowitz is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Iowa. She is co-editor of two collections of essays, Antisemitism and Philosemitism in the Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries and Contemporary Italian Women Poets: A Bilingual Anthology, and writes on Anglo-American Modernism, British cultural and political history, and Jewish cultural studies. She is currently completing a manuscript entitled Conspiring to be Civil: The Hidden History of Antisemitism and Modernism.*

**John P. Marschall, *Jews in Nevada: A History* (Reno and Las Vegas, NV: University of Nevada Press, 2008), 390 pp.**

In *Jews in Nevada*, University of Nevada, Reno, professor emeritus John P. Marschall offers an outstanding local history of a dynamic Jewish population in the West. Casting a wide net encompassing mid-nineteenth-century Jewish immigrants to a sparsely populated desert, the development of business and commerce in the generations that followed, the growth of Las Vegas as a gambling and tourist mecca, and, eventually, contemporary concerns over the nature and limits of Nevadan Jewish identity, Marschall brings his training as a scholar of American religion as well as his knowledge of Nevada history to bear in this work. His is a meticulous research effort, animated by details of Nevada's Jews as well as a sense of how their stories fit into the larger historiographic questions for both religionists and local historians.

*Jews in Nevada* is divided into sixteen chapters, chronologically arranged from 1850 until 2005. In the final chapters, Marschall abandons a straight chronology in favor of thematic chapters covering antisemitism, civil rights, religious observance, and Yiddishkeit, as well as a last chapter that details Jewish life in twenty-first century Nevada. Most of his scholarly attention is focused on the mid- and late nineteenth centuries, with detailed descriptions of daily economic life in the 1850s and 1860s, political developments during the years of the American Civil War, and the growth of population and business with the growth of railroads in the 1870s.

Marschall presents a work that is classic social history, telling the stories of ordinary local people. Some emerged to significance in Nevada social life, while others are detailed for their ability to communicate day-to-day living on what was then the western frontier. Of particular interest is Marschall's treatment of the rise of Las Vegas. The subject of other studies, as well as a major motion picture, Jewish associations with organized crime and with the development of the gambling industry are well documented. Instead of following the traditional historiographic line, Marschall devotes a chapter to the religious lives of Nevada Jews, charting synagogue development in both the northern and southern parts of the state in the post-war years.

The history of Nevada's Jews, as Marschall explains, offers an important challenge to conventional, northeastern-centered analyses. In what was largely an extension of San Francisco, Nevada's first Jewish settlers often identified more as Californians, shuttling back and forth and eventually returning "home" to San Francisco when the Nevada economy faltered. The existence of a transient population challenges historians, and especially local historians, to assess the nature and influence of regionalism as a causal agent in our analyses.

Nevada also offers a highly assimilated Jewish population. This is true both in the early years of settlement, when few Jews resided in desert outposts, and in the twentieth century, when the sprawling metropolis of Las Vegas attracted a large population of Jews who expressed far less interest in Jewish identity than did Jews in similarly sized communities elsewhere in the country.

*Jews in Nevada* is most important because it brings American Jewish history, and local American Jewish history at that, into larger historiographic folds. Marschall's primary scholarly interests in American religion and in the history of Nevada set an important, and broader, context for the study of Jews. In this book, the nexus between Jewish history, Nevada history, and religious history creates a powerful and important synthesis.

---

*Marc Dollinger is the Richard and Rhoda Goldman Chair in Jewish Studies and Social Responsibility at San Francisco State University. He is author of Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America, and co-editor, with Ava Kahn, of California Jews. He is at work on American Jewish History: A Primary Source Reader, with Gary P. Zola, to be published by Brandeis University Press.*

Michael A. Meyer, ed., *Joachim Prinz, Rebellious Rabbi: An Autobiography—The German and Early American Years* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2008), 320 pp.

The memoir of Joachim Prinz (1902–1988) is a remarkable document. It is a rare, intimate reflection of a Jewish theologian and leading Zionist who experienced some of the most decisive and trying moments of the twentieth century, notably the early years of the Nazi dictatorship and the American Civil Rights Movement, up close. The well-written and absorbing autobiography surpasses many scholarly monographs in providing an insightful portrayal of Jewish life in Germany between World War I and the early years of Nazi rule. What makes this personal account so valuable is the far-sighted decision by editor Michael A. Meyer to present the autobiography in its original form. Had Prinz published the memoir during his lifetime, some of the most interesting passages would have almost certainly been sacrificed. But its posthumous publication enables the reader to look over the shoulders of a man who was certainly vain when it came to enumerating his own achievements—but also strikingly honest and frank, even in regard to his own weaknesses.

Who was Joachim Prinz, and why does his story matter? In 1926, when he was just twenty-four years old, Prinz became a rabbi in Berlin. He quickly made himself a name as an uncompromising Zionist, a charismatic speaker, and a prolific author. Prinz redefined the role of the rabbinate in almost revolutionary terms. He openly preached a Zionist message and revived his congregation by launching numerous social activities for younger people. After 1933 Prinz emerged as one of the most outspoken opponents of the Nazi regime, frequently putting his life at risk. In 1937, he immigrated to the United States and served Temple B'nai Abraham in Newark until his retirement in the 1970s. After the war Prinz played a prominent role in American Jewish life. In the 1950s and 1960s he worked closely with Martin Luther King Jr. Indeed, minutes before King gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech during the March on Washington on 28 August 1963, Prinz spoke to the crowd of 200,000, reflecting on his own experiences as a persecuted Jew under the Nazi regime (his address is reprinted in the volume).

In Philip Roth’s counterfactual novel, *The Plot Against America*, Prinz makes a brief appearance as a Newark rabbi fiercely critical of a pro-Nazi American presidency. But astonishingly, no author has examined the record of this outstanding personality in any detail. Meyer has invested his expertise to explain in a concise and insightful introduction both sides of Prinz: his upbringing and first career in Germany, and the difficult transition to and ultimate success in America. Throughout the memoir Meyer has added a number of short comments, background information, and corrections.

The memoir ends with the death of Prinz’s American mentor, Stephen S. Wise, in 1949. But even so, the description of Prinz’s childhood and youth offers

rare glimpses on the everyday life of German Jews in the countryside; so do his personal observations of the sexual revolution after 1918. His frank comments on America and American Jewish life in the 1930s and 1940s are remarkable, as are the countless personal encounters recorded here, ranging from famous Yiddish writers in Berlin to notorious Nazis, and even an infamous American Jewish gangster.

---

*Tobias Brinkmann is the Malvin and Lea Bank Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Penn State University. Between 2004 and 2008 he taught at the department of history and the Parkes Institute for the Study of Jewish/non-Jewish Relations at the University of Southampton, UK. He is a member of the Academic Council of the American Jewish Historical Society and of the board of the Leo Baeck Institute, London.*

**Andrew Muchin, “Chosen Towns: The Story of Jews in Wisconsin’s Small Communities” (DVD) (Milwaukee, WI: docUWM and the Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning, 2008)**

The small Jewish communities of Wisconsin are now on the decline, as are similar communities elsewhere, but they will certainly go out with a bang and not a whimper. Since 2001, the Wisconsin Society for Jewish Learning (WSJL), which has supported Jewish scholarship and cultural programming in the state for more than fifty years, has sponsored the Wisconsin Small Jewish Communities Project. This project, directed by journalist and lecturer Andrew Muchin, documents the history of Jews in an estimated three hundred localities throughout the state. For “Chosen Towns,” Muchin and the WSJL teamed with graduate filmmaking students from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee to feature the experiences of Jews in eight representative towns around the state.

The film provides a fine introduction to the small-town Jewish experience. Blending contemporary interviews with archival photographs and film, it offers brisk pacing and visual variety. The student filmmakers did a fine job technically, but they also managed to create a narrative that encapsulates both the positives and negatives of small-town Jewish life. (That said, there is some imprecision in the adjective “small.” Only two of the featured towns have a current population of less than 10,000, and four have populations of more than 50,000. On the other hand, the Jewish communities of these towns are indeed small; only half ever had more than one hundred Jewish residents. The combination of large total population and small Jewish population—as in Kenosha, with figures of 95,000 and 300, respectively—reflects that Jews are only one-half of 1 percent of the state’s population overall.)

The backbone of these communities was families operating retail establishments founded by an immigrant forebear, though the film also includes a segment on a short-lived experimental Jewish agricultural project. The communities’ populations generally peaked soon after World War II; then economic success led Jewish children to university and to professions elsewhere, though two of the

interviewees are forty-somethings who remained in their hometowns. The film portrays honestly the plusses and minuses of small-town community life. It does not ignore the cultural conflicts within communities as early twentieth-century east European immigrants, largely Orthodox, joined veteran central Europeans with Reform affiliation. Nor does it idealize small-town life by ignoring anti-semitism or the logistical difficulties of providing Jewish education and seeking potential marriage partners. Most interviewees, not surprisingly, were people who loved their small-town life, but there was one who found it limiting, even stifling. They discuss the pressures of—and the resultant increase in Jewish consciousness created by—the necessity to be “ambassadors to Christians.” A regional Jewish historian provides important historical context and explanations of concepts such as chain migration throughout the film.

“Chosen Towns” does not keep the small Jewish community experience in a box; it uses it to reflect on issues of American Jewish identity generally that are made more acute in a small setting. Through thoughtful interviews, the film gives personal insights on questions of generational change and religious faith. It is a useful viewing experience, then, not only for those with either a local or an academic interest in small Jewish communities, but for anyone interested in the breadth of the American Jewish experience.

---

*Amy Hill Shevitz teaches at California State University, Northridge. Her book, Jewish Communities on the Ohio River, was published in 2007.*

**Marc Lee Raphael, ed., *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 490 pp.**

This collection of articles is a welcome addition to the growing literature on American Jews and Judaism. Edited by the former long-time editor of *American Jewish History*, the book includes eighteen articles broken into two sections. This review will focus on the structure of the collection rather than the individual essays. Suffice it to say that many of the articles are fascinating, covering a wide spectrum of material: from the definition of American Jewish culture, to rites of citizenship exploring how American Jews celebrated national holidays, to “fun and games”—a study of the American Jewish social club.

Editor Marc Lee Raphael points out that there had been relatively little written on many specific topics in American Jewish history. Much of what had been published focused on either important communal leaders such as Jacob Schiff, or major Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee, or aspects of urban Jewish history in the major cities such as New York or Chicago. He writes that this lacuna “has been remedied, to some extent” by work published over the past twenty years. Despite the progress made, Raphael writes, there is still much to do. This work is an attempt to help address this need.

The title of the book, *The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America*, would seem to suggest that attention will be paid to both Jews as an ethnic group and Judaism as a religion. However, in his introduction, the editor makes the argument that such a distinction is artificial and counterproductive. He believes that Jewish religion can be written about as an integral part of broader cultural and societal trends and does not need to be picked out and analyzed in isolation. This reviewer is not convinced, however, finding that the mixing of Jews and Judaism tends to favor the former at the expense of the latter.

Raphael begins with a partial listing of previous writings on Jews and/or Judaism in the United States. He points out that most of the single-volume histories written over the past two generations focused on Jews rather than Judaism (1). The editor argues that most writers see “cultural Jews” as being completely secular and having almost nothing to do with anything Judaic. From Woody Allen to Jon Stewart, it is easy to think of many examples of American Jews who express an overt Jewishness that has virtually no discernable religious component.

The phrase “Jewish culture” usually refers to expressions of secular Jewishness in art, music, literature, and television, rather than anything that might occur in synagogues. American Jews “divide into those who are involved in the religious community (for Judaism *is* community)” versus “those who define themselves as Jewish in secular or cultural ways” (14–15). Raphael argues strongly against this simplistic distinction, pointing out that Mordecai Kaplan warned against this conceptual error many decades ago. Jewishness and Judaism are “complimentary” [*sic*] rather than, as one of Raphael’s contributors phrases it, “inherently conflicted” (14–15).

This is of particular interest to me because I recently edited *The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism*, in which I encouraged the contributors to focus as much as possible on Judaism rather than Jews. While it is obviously impossible to completely separate Jews from Judaism, or Judaism from Jews, a collection of essays can certainly emphasize one over the other. Raphael writes that he intends to include both Jews and Judaism—“[T]his is a history of American Jews and American Judaism” (8)—but in my view, the essays heavily emphasize the former. Nevertheless, the volume includes far more on Judaism than many of the earlier single-volume works on American Jews.

*The Columbia History of Jews and Judaism in America* is divided into two sections: “Chronological Essays” and “Topical Essays.” The first section consists of six chronological essays covering the years 1654 to 2000. These essays cover 145 pages, which is sufficient to describe the many changing trends that developed over that time period. This allows Raphael to bring a nuanced view of American Jewish history, something that would not have been possible in, say, thirty or forty pages. The authors present a number of different perspectives, and are—with one unfortunate exception—well versed in their subjects.

This makes it lively reading even for those who have read numerous books on the subject.

The second section, “Topical Essays,” includes twelve articles covering a number of subgenres. I was surprised that Raphael does not attempt to further break the topical essays into cohesive and logical subsections. There are a number of ways that he could have split them up, any of which would have made it easier for the reader to understand the interrelationships among the essays. Nevertheless, there is a tremendous wealth of information and commentary that will reward the diligent reader.

It was difficult to understand why Raphael makes the choices that he does. For example, the editor does not include commissioned articles on each of the religious movements, with the single exception of an essay on Orthodoxy from 1824 to 1965. It sticks out even more because it is the first essay of the topical section. Raphael needed to either include overviews on the other major denominations or leave this essay out, because the reader is left wondering why Orthodoxy merits individual treatment but the other movements do not. Also, the author should have added a few more pages to bring the story up to the present, instead of stopping in 1965.

A few articles do attempt to give comprehensive overviews, including one on the history of Jewish education, but—while I enjoyed reading many of the topical essays—I could not figure out what was the purpose of publishing these articles together. The essays do not share a particular viewpoint nor do they analyze their topics using a specific approach. For example, there are two essays on American Jews in specific regions, one covering 1880–1930 in the Northwest and the other presenting a multithematic approach to southern Jewish history. This could have formed an interesting subsection, but the authors start from such different points of view that they really do not “match.” It would have been preferable to have a subsection with four or five articles exploring the different geographical regions, covering roughly the same time periods, and approaching the subject with certain common methodologies.

In his introduction, Raphael mentions that many of the authors were able to meet in Williamsburg, Virginia, and numerous contributors read the essays of other authors. He writes that “this resulted in considerable intertextuality—authors in conversation with one another.” He adds that “in imitation of the final editor of the Torah, where there were different interpretations of the same phenomenon, they have not been reconciled.” Having multiple interpretations makes a collection more interesting. So too does a variety of methodologies, perspectives, and approaches. All of this is good. What I personally would like to see in Raphael’s next edited book is a more structured collection of articles that focuses on one particular subject or, alternatively, a comprehensive work that truly gives a broad overview of the entire field.

---

*Dana Evan Kaplan is the rabbi of Temple B'nai Israel in Albany, Georgia, and an adjunct associate professor at Gratz College. His books include The Cambridge Companion to American Judaism; American Reform Judaism: An Introduction; Platforms and Prayer Books: Theological and Liturgical Perspectives on Reform Judaism; Contemporary Debates on Reform Judaism: Conflicting Visions; and the forthcoming Contemporary American Judaism: Transformation and Renewal. Many of his publications can be found at DanaKaplan.com.*

**Walter Roth, *Avengers and Defenders: Glimpses of Chicago's Jewish Past* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 2008), 235 pp.**

The history of Chicago is jam-packed with outsized characters; and even its Jews have often seemed a little more vivid, a little more cynical, a little more colorful, and a little more dangerous than the rest of us. From Studs Terkel to David Mamet, from Jake Arvey to Rahm Emanuel, from Nelson Algren to Judy Chicago, the city's Jewry has not lacked for pungency—or for influence. Consider the two leading contenders in the 2008 Democratic presidential primaries: the former Hillary Rodham had written her senior honors thesis at Wellesley College on the tactics of community organizer Saul Alinsky, the Chicago-bred agitator who invented the very vocation that Barack Obama mastered on his way to the White House. The Jewish heritage of the “Second City” has sometimes been hideous, as when Nathan Leopold and Richard Loeb committed “the crime of the century” by murdering Bobby Franks. Often, this history has been so juicy that it remains a mystery as to why there has not been a truly satisfactory scholarly account of the community. No first-rate overview exists.

Into that breach has stepped Walter Roth, an attorney who has long served as the president of the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. For his essays in the society's newsletter, Roth has made a habit of retrieving episodes, profiling important and sometimes merely curious figures, and evoking a sense of the richness of the city's Jewish past. Roth's 2002 book, *Looking Backward: True Stories from Chicago's Jewish Past*, constituted a first installment, ranging from the Jewish role in the 1893 World's Fair to the emergence of Zionism. *Avengers and Defenders* is a worthy successor, offering more than three dozen short pieces on the murderers and the *machers*, the butchers and other businessmen, the philanthropists and the storytellers who have enlivened the Jewish community of Chicago (and beyond). There is no scholarly apparatus; Roth's intended audience is popular, not academic, and his touch is light. In making the city's Jewish legacy interesting, however, *Avengers and Defenders* is successful.

The title reflects something of the range of characters resurrected in this book. The “avenger” is Sholom Schwartzbart, the Russian-born French radical who in 1926 assassinated a Ukrainian national hero, Simon Petliura, a pogromist whose hordes engaged in the mass murders of Jews (including nearly twenty

of Schwartzbart's own relatives). He shot Petliura dead in Paris, where a jury acquitted him. Fearing Ukrainian retaliation, Schwartzbart fled to the United States, where he wrote poetry in Yiddish and tried in vain to reach Palestine under the Mandate. Communal organizations sponsored his visits to Chicago, though Roth could find no evidence of permanent residence.

The "defenders" the title refers to are usually attorneys, like Moses Salomon and Sigmund Zeisler, who represented the anarchists framed for the deaths of Chicago policemen in Haymarket Square on May Day, 1886. A more problematic kind of defense occurred in *Terminello v. Chicago* (1949), in which a rabble-rousing antisemite was charged with breach of the peace when stones were thrown and windows broken, though not by Arthur Terminello himself. Prosecuted by a couple of Jewish attorneys representing the city of Chicago, he charged that his freedom of speech had been violated. The American Jewish Congress filed an *amicus curiae* brief arguing that the conviction of this defrocked priest should be upheld. Splitting five to four, the Supreme Court disagreed, however, and insisted that the First Amendment protected even hate-mongers.

A perhaps surprising feature of this sprightly volume is its attention to members of the city's intelligentsia, such as the philosopher Leo Strauss, the novelist and critic Isaac Rosenfeld, the economist Aaron Director, the legal scholar Edward H. Levi, and the biochemist Martin D. Kamen. Three separate chapters of *Avengers and Defenders* are devoted to novelist Meyer Levin. Except for Saul Bellow, no Jewish novelist has produced a body of fiction that is more closely associated with the untamed energies of Chicago than Levin, the author of *The Old Bunch*. And no novelist was more luckless in getting drawn into controversies that required legal resolution. To get the dramatic rights to Anne Frank's diary, Levin was even foolish enough to try to sue her father, who was, of course, a Holocaust survivor. Writing *Compulsion*, Levin somehow managed to get sued for libel by Nathan Leopold, who was serving a sentence of life plus ninety-nine years. Though the novelist eventually won his case, which is recounted in Roth's *Looking Backward*, such raw and weird conflicts seem downright indigenous to Chicago.

---

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

Leonard Saxe and Barry Chazan, *Ten Days of Birthright Israel: A Journey in Young Adult Identity* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2008), 256 pp.

Whether you are convinced by the recent argument that young Jews are "beyond distancing"<sup>1</sup> in terms of their connection to Israel, one thing is clear to the authors of *Ten Days of Birthright Israel*: Over the last fifteen years,

informal Jewish educational travel to Israel has been one of the most effective and profound ways to stimulate a deep sense of connection to Judaism and Jewish life. Saxe and Chazan demonstrate that persuasively in this text.

Through rich ethnographic description and longitudinal evaluation, the authors describe and analyze the ways Birthright uses informal education to fully engage (and sometimes overwhelm) all of the participants' senses. As two of the key architects of the program, their overarching goal, in the program's development and their analysis, is to stimulate a sense of shared connection among Diaspora and Israeli Jews to deeper questions of history, land, and peoplehood. Birthright Israel, as described in *Ten Days*, is a distinctly *modernist* project of cultivating emotional, ethnic, nationalist, and cultural ties in a postmodern era of increasing individualism, secularism, nondenominationalism, and the privatization of religious experience.

The authors provide a deep insider account about the historical context that led to the creation of the program. The book's early chapters analyze how and why Birthright emerged as a radically different and innovative approach. Its mission was, and remains, to engage young Jews with Israel, with the organized Jewish community, with themselves, and with each other Jewishly. Saxe and Chazan offer an in-depth ethnography of the programmatic structure, participant experiences, and complexities involved in the selection and interpretation of key sites. Further chapters describe the concept and interactions of *mifgashim* (encounters between Americans and Israelis), the extensive evaluation conducted since the program's inception, and the voices of participants themselves.

The book's strength is also, paradoxically, its greatest weakness. It has been a long time since I read a Jewish studies monograph so richly "thick" with ethnographic description and thoughtful analysis. Similarly, the book's longitudinal perspective and insider knowledge are immeasurably valuable. However, because the authors are *so inside* the enterprise, the narrative sometimes suffers from a lack of critical distance and a somewhat congratulatory, if occasionally triumphant, tone about its impact on individuals and the wider Jewish community. For example, early in the book, when describing the incentive for signing up to participate, they write of "accepting the gift." A more critical outsider (indeed, perhaps an observer with a more detached or neutral stance toward Israeli politics and society) might have eschewed such celebratory language. No doubt Birthright has changed the landscape of global Jewish relationships and informal educational travel to Israel. But had the book been written by a more independent author with fewer professional and emotional commitments to the program, the analysis (and perhaps, critique) might have been more pointed.

Surely, a range of scholars, educators, communal professionals, and philanthropists would benefit from reading Saxe and Chazan's work. Israel studies scholars and lay readers might also want to learn more about how

American Jews engage with Israelis and Israeli culture. *Ten Days of Birthright Israel* provides an important glimpse into one of the most recent and innovative chapters in the overlapping histories of American and Israeli Jews, and global Jewish cultures.

---

*Caryn Aviv is the Posen Lecturer in Secular Jewish Culture and academic director of the certificate in Jewish communal service at the University of Denver. She is the author of three books, including New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora. She also cofounded and is director of research with Jewish Mosaic: The National Center for Sexual and Gender Diversity. Her research areas include contemporary Jewish cultures, Israel studies, and gender and sexuality. She is currently working on a book project about American Jewish involvement in Israeli-Palestinian reconciliation efforts.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Steven M. Cohen and Ari Y. Kelman, "Beyond Distancing: Young Adult American Jews and Their Alienation from Israel" (New York: The Jewish Identity Project of Reboot, 2007).

Edward S. Shapiro, ed., *Yiddish in America: Essays on Yiddish Culture in the Golden Land* (Scranton, PA and London: University of Scranton Press, 2008), 206 pp.

During the early days of Yiddish radio, broadcasters tried just about anything to attract an audience, including broadcasting bar mitzvahs and weddings. Rubin Goldberg, an early star of Yiddish radio, broadcast his own wedding and even got a sausage company to sponsor it (117). Ari Y. Kelman's brilliant article, "The Worldly Sounds of Yiddish Radio," is full of such anecdotes that frame the fascinating, in-depth account of the heyday of Yiddish radio in America in the 1920s and 1930s. Kelman situates the Yiddish radio industry as an entity that mediated religion and secularism, reflecting the newly created American-Jewish identity. It is articles such as Kelman's, along with Joel Berkowitz's analysis of the counter-Maskilic impulse of American Yiddish drama; and Daniel Soyer's study of language, YIVO, and the autobiography contest of 1942, that make the reading of *Yiddish in America: Essays on Yiddish Culture in the Golden Land* such a pleasurable and rewarding experience.

*Yiddish in America* is edited by Edward S. Shapiro, a professor emeritus of history at Seton Hall University and the author of *A Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II* (1992) and *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot* (2006). It aims at tracing secular Yiddish culture in the United States in the first half of the twentieth century. The volume examines a specific moment in American-Jewish life, a few decades in which Yiddish was a vernacular, a living language, spoken by the first and second generations of eastern European immigrants, outside of Borough Park or Kiryas Joel. During this time, to borrow Ruth Wisse's wording in the opening article of the volume,

“[Yiddish] language was not merely a vehicle of expression, but a determinant of identity.” (9)

The cultural umbrella forms a productive platform for an interdisciplinary assessment of various Yiddish productions. In that respect, a collection of essays—a somewhat endangered genre in American publishing of recent years—is arguably the best outlet for such an endeavor. Indeed, *Yiddish in America* brings together eight articles on Yiddish theatre, film, poetry, language and autobiography, popular music, political cartoons, radio, and Yiddish writing in the United States. The volume, however, makes no claim to be exhaustive. Rather, Shapiro’s goal is to offer a step toward a more complete view of the cultural world of the new Americans.

Twenty scholars, Shapiro tells us, initially agreed to contribute an article to the volume. The extensive list of worthy topics that are not included in the book contains, among other themes, Yiddish politics, labor unions, schools and schools’ curricula, food, Yiddish summer camps, publishing houses and book stores, and Yiddish-American slang. The book’s main problem, however, is not the absence of these topics but rather the uneven quality of the articles that are included. This problem is exacerbated by the collection’s failure to target a specific audience. While some articles offer deep and thoughtful scholarly analysis, others have a more journalistic bent and seem better suited for a textbook or a popular reader. Scholars and students of Yiddish will also find it hard to navigate the volume with the absence of an index. Finally, it is difficult to overlook the lacuna of gender as a conceptual category. The role of women as agents of education and language preservation in both domestic and public spheres is crucial for understanding the cultural phenomenon the book describes.

Despite these reservations, *Yiddish in America* is a valuable contribution to the increasingly growing bookshelf on real and imagined Yiddishlands. The paperback edition, which suggests an attempt to appeal to the general public, makes the book accessible and easy to use. The volume will certainly spur interesting discussions in graduate and advanced undergraduate seminars on the history and culture of American Jewry.

---

*Shiri Goren is a Lecturer in Modern Hebrew at Yale University, where she teaches courses on Israeli literature and culture. She is also a doctoral candidate at New York University. Her dissertation, “The Home Front: Literary Engagement with Political Crises in Israel,” explores how terror affects private spaces in Israel of the 1990s. She is the co-editor of a forthcoming collection of contemporary interdisciplinary scholarship in Yiddish studies.*

Shlomit Steinberg, *Orphaned Art: Looted Art from the Holocaust in the Israel Museum* (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2008), 72 pp. (English and Hebrew)

From February 2008 to August 2008, the Israel Museum stepped forward and made its contribution to the growing movement within museums internationally to focus on the issue of Nazi-era looted art. Although it was neither the first nor the last museum to host such an exhibition, this show would be distinct because the objects showcased were from the museum's own collection. The impact would be that much more powerful because it was the first museum in Israel to mount such an exhibition. On display were more than two dozen ceremonial objects and more than forty paintings, drawings, prints, and books that were brought to Israel during the 1950s by the New York-based Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, Inc. (JCR), the cultural arm of the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO). The JRSO was an umbrella organization established to serve as trustee of heirless Jewish property found in the American zone of Germany after World War II.

The development of this exhibition was not without context. On 3 December 1998, forty-four governments participating in the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets endorsed the Washington Conference Principles on Nazi-Confiscated Art. Support for these principles brought a new focus and change in attitudes throughout the world toward governmental responsibility in restitution and return, involving banks, insurance, and other property. The proceedings of this conference drew attention to the collections of all major museums as well; none were exempt. As Philippe de Montebello of the Metropolitan Museum quipped, "The genie is out of the bottle."<sup>1</sup>

The Vilnius International Forum on Holocaust-Era Looted Assets, held in 2000, continued the process by which governments and museums were encouraged to implement the Washington Principles and other European legislation. For various and complicated reasons, Jewish museums were slower to respond to the call to examine their collections, though Judaica had been specifically identified as a top priority by President Clinton's Presidential Advisory Commission on Holocaust-Era Assets in 1998.

In November 2006, the Association of European Jewish Museums passed a resolution that required its member institutions to follow the Washington Principles in regard to their own collections.<sup>2</sup> The Council of American Jewish Museums followed suit at its annual meeting in January 2007, unanimously adopting a similar resolution on Nazi-era looted art that charged Jewish museums to "make currently available object and provenance information on those objects (potentially looted) accessible."<sup>3</sup>

Only in the past few years have exhibitions been devoted specifically to the issue of looted art and the return of Jewish property. In the fall of 2007, art

owned by museums in the Netherlands that was known to have been looted from Jewish collections but whose heirs had not yet been identified was arranged by the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam in an exhibition titled, “Looted, but from Whom?” Exhibitions that seek to tell the history of looted art and its consequences have been mounted in New York (Leo Baeck Institute and the Jewish Museum), London (Ben Uri Gallery), Berlin (Jewish Museum), Munich (Jewish Museum), and Vienna (Jewish Museum).

In the context of this larger history, *Orphaned Art: Looted Art from the Holocaust in the Israel Museum*, together with the museum’s website identifying objects from its collections that heirs may still claim, is an important contribution by a Jewish museum—an Israeli museum—to transparency. The catalogue has two sections: The first is an essay, in both Hebrew and English, describing the organized process of looting in Europe and postwar efforts for collection and redistribution; the second is an illustrated catalogue of selected works from the collection, including paintings by Max Liebermann, Mark Chagall, and Egon Schiele, as well as ceremonial objects such as Torah shields, Torah finials, and spice boxes.

The topic of Holocaust-era looted art and Judaica is woven into the larger history of the period, and the identification and restitution of these objects is a chapter in progress. Though it may not be possible to determine with clarity the importance of this catalog in the scope of restitution issues, any museum’s attempt for transparency that may open the possibility of return of objects is welcome, particularly at a time when museums and the world look to Jewish institutions and Israeli museums for ethical guidance.

---

*Karen S. Franklin, a guest curator at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, New York, is a past president of the Council of American Jewish Museums. She is a coauthor of the Council of American Jewish Museums Resolution on Nazi-era Looted Art. Franklin consults frequently on cases of looted art and Judaica.*

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Stuart E. Eizenstat, concluding statement, Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, Washington, DC, 3 December 1998, quoting Philippe de Montebello. Accessed on 22 April 2009 at <http://fcit.usf.edu/HOLOCAUST/RESOURCE/Assets/concl2.htm>.

<sup>2</sup>Resolution on Looted Art, Association of European Jewish Museums, passed 20 November 2006, Venice. Accessed on 22 April 2009 at <http://www.claimscon.org/forms/AEJM.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup>Council of American Jewish Museums Resolution on Nazi-era Looted Art. Accessed on 22 April 2009 at <http://www.claimscon.org/index.asp?url=artworks/cajm>.

Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish "Junior League": The Rise and Demise of the Fort Worth Council of Jewish Women* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2008), 188 pp.

Drawing on archival materials and interviews, Hollace Ava Weiner's extensive notes and insightful commentary provide an excellent historical resource about the Fort Worth section of the National Council of Jewish Women (hereafter Fort Worth Council) from its inception in 1901 to its closure in 2002. Contrary to Weiner's statement that the book "explores the journey of Jewish women in Fort Worth, Texas" (xiv), the journey presented is of Fort Worth's well-to-do Jewish women "blending in and passing" in order to participate in the civic life of Fort Worth. According to Weiner, the Council's success in helping its members participate in non-Jewish communal life contributed to its demise. At the end of the nineteenth century, Jewish women had limited access to the public sphere; the entrée into non-Jewish society made available by membership in Fort Worth's Council was significant. "Acculturation was the unstated goal" in the work of the Fort Worth Council (37). An issue not fully addressed is the group's decision to offer programs and engage in activities that lacked any identifiable Jewish content. As many of its members belonged to the Reform synagogue, perhaps there was less inclination to emphasize the Council's Jewish component.

In her introduction, Weiner outlines the role of women in the nineteenth century. She describes how club work, viewed as an extension of the domestic role, became the venue where women could pursue their interests within a socially acceptable framework. Her discussion of the Jewish women's participation in the 1893 Chicago exposition is vividly drawn, recreating for the reader the excitement these women experienced at being able to gather to discuss matters beyond home and family.

Chapter two details how Fort Worth's Council positioned itself to be the tool through which Jewish women could demonstrate their acculturation. Members did not gather out of religious need but to socialize with like-minded women (31). While they were happy to raise funds and purchase goods for the arriving eastern Europeans, they avoided personal interactions with these newcomers (35).

Chapters three and four demonstrate how Fort Worth's Council was instrumental in the development of the Americanization school that assisted immigrants in their integration, and in hosting an annual book fair that raised funds to build and then maintain a residence for troubled young boys. Weiner reveals throughout her narrative that Fort Worth's Council focused on issues that were nonsectarian and of universal concern.

Chapter five addresses the group's inability to adapt to the professional and social changes Jewish women were experiencing. By the 1970s, the Council had ceased to be the "bridge" Fort Worth's Jewish women once needed to enter

into the non-Jewish world. Weiner notes that the Council had become “an anachronism” (106). Over the years, its image as “affluent and elitist,” its emphasis on universal concerns as opposed to Jewish and feminist concerns, had reduced the Council to irrelevance for Fort Worth’s Jewish women.

While there are still unanswered questions, this richly detailed history is a valuable contribution to the literature on women’s voluntary groups.

---

*Susan Landau-Chark recently received her doctorate in religion from Concordia University in Montreal, Canada. Her thesis, “Community, Identity, and Religious Leadership as Expressed through the Role of the Rabbi’s Wife,” examines the place of the contemporary Canadian congregational rabbinical wife.*

Jack Wertheimer, ed., *Imagining the American Jewish Community* (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life), (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2007), xiii + 346 pp.

The Olympus of American Jewish historians (missing only a handful of heralded scholars) assembled first by Jack Wertheimer at a conference at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America in March 2004 and now in this volume, impressively demonstrate the breadth and strength of our relatively young field. The eclectic essays collected here offer a future historian wishing to trace the burgeoning of American Jewish history a useful snapshot of its present historiographic fecundity. Indeed, fecundity is the subject of this collection: the myriad creative ways that American Jews have created, structured, sustained, and remade their communities over 350 years in a challenging voluntaristic environment. The sixteen contributors broach a wide array of topics, including commemoration and memory, schooling and education, sports and pastimes, material culture, memoirs and immigrant narratives, museology, technological innovation, commerce, domestic life, womanhood, and feminism, revealing the roles that each played as engines and agents of community formation.

As would be expected in such an eclectic collection, the central thread only loosely binds the essays together. In part, this reflects the internal diversity of American Jewish communal life over its history and the difficulty of representing this polymorphism in a single volume. Nonetheless, some sections cohere better than others. Some of the more successful essays are those by Karla Goldman, Joyce Antler, and Paula Hyman on the role of women in defining the boundaries of Jewish life. In another successful section, several argue for a reappraisal and expansion of our existing notions of community. Holly Snyder identifies the limitations of the synagogue-community as a descriptive tool for understanding Jewish life during the colonial period; Daniel Soyer highlights the compatibility and coexistence of Americanizing and transnational impulses within *lansmanschaftn*; Hasia Diner points to the community-creating daily interactions and interdependences of commerce and consumption in the Jewish

street; Riv-Ellen Prell warns that historians who echo the tone and rhetoric of the original debates about postwar suburbanization risk overlooking evidence of dynamism and ferment in the decade following the end of World War II.

In another section, contributors examine how public behavior and self-representations reflect the values and aspirations of subsections of the community. Beth Wenger, for example, argues that conspicuous displays of patriotism and valorization of war service have simultaneously acted as self-serving posturing and as a reflection of a genuine conviction that Jewish military service from the Revolution onward has made Jews part of the fabric of the nation. Marianne Sanua and Jeffrey Gurock interpret the shifting values of the Orthodox communities respectively through a close reading of a pastime for girls and sporting culture. Jeffrey Shandler contextualizes the emergence of virtual subcommunities in the Internet age within a lively discussion of Jewish adaptation and embrace of “new media” (radio, film, and video) as tools of community earlier in the twentieth century. Jenna Weissman Joselit offers a fascinating insider’s view of the role of museum exhibitions in cultivating community and collective memory.

In all, this volume offers a challenging and often entertaining collection of contributions. Although together these essays do not comprise a systematic reexamination of Jewish communal life, like the American Jewish community itself, this collection’s strength is in its diversity and creativity.

---

*Adam Mendelsohn is assistant professor of Jewish studies at the College of Charleston and, in 2008–2009, a fellow at the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania.*