

Hasia Diner, Shira Kohn, and Rachel Kranson, eds., *A Jewish Feminine Mystique: Jewish Women in Postwar America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 272 pp.

My rather biased prediction is that scholarship on the postwar American suburb is on the brink of a revolution. In 1987, Kenneth T. Jackson asserted that the suburbs were worthy of historical investigation. His *Crabgrass Frontier* initiated the historiographic turn toward a topic that had heretofore solely been the domain of sociologists. Historians came to believe that the suburbs explained much of what went awry in the postwar period—that is, how an era of such prosperity produced such high levels of violence, intolerance, inequality, and reactionary politics. In this amazingly coherent yet topically broad study of Jewish women in the postwar era, Hasia Diner, Shira Kohn, and Rachel Kranson offer a very different picture of the suburbs and the postwar era more generally. They are part of the historiographic revolution to understand the suburbs as far more multidimensional than their predecessors have.

Many of the essays in *A Jewish Feminine Mystique* capture the liberalism and progressive activism that characterized postwar, mainly suburban, mainly middle-class Jewish women. Unflinchingly, the authors point to the gap that often existed between idealistic rhetoric and ideals, but they also show that while some postwar suburbanites voted for Richard Nixon, others organized rallies for George McGovern; and while some postwar suburbanites were shackled to kitchens and baby carriages, others brought their babies to civil rights demonstrations and cooked for consciousness-raising meetings. This is not triumphant history; rather, it is corrective.

In their valuable introduction, the editors stake out a central claim: “Jewish women of the postwar years did not retreat obediently into their trim suburban homes” (3). Essays about socialist and communist activists, bawdy comedians and a film actress, the National Council of Jewish Women, and Jennie Grossinger (owner of the eponymous Catskill resort) all prove the validity of this claim. Most strikingly, the anthology reveals the long legs of Jewish urban radicalism that stretched well into the Cold War era.

Other essays also show how removed many Jewish women were from the luxuries and opportunities of the “trim suburban home.” A handful of the authors draw attention to the theme of downward social mobility, a theme that has suffered from neglect in American Jewish history. Rebecca Kobrin, for example, argues that female medical professionals from Europe who entered the United States as refugees after World War II experienced painful status demotion. American-born Jewish women social workers saw little reason to support refugee women’s efforts to pursue education or certification to practice in the

United States and refused to accommodate professional women who wanted to cross domestic norms to pursue careers. In a similar vein, Audrey Nasar's study of Egyptian Jewish women who came to the United States between 1956 and 1967 documents these women's sense of status loss. Generally, Jewish mobility is discussed as a signal of Jewish upward mobility, yet these two essays (alongside the comments of some of the radical Jewish feminists whom Joyce Antler mentions in her piece) suggest a very different model. Thus, readers learn that neither Jews' postwar migration to suburbs nor their broader migratory patterns can be read as consonant with prevailing historiographic narratives that correlate Jewish migration and Jewish success.

Although the editors of the collection are relatively silent about methodology, the prevalence of biography and oral history is notable. Nancy Sinkoff's portrait of Lucy Dawidowicz's journey toward neoconservatism or Rachel Kranson's fascinating study of Jennie Grossinger rely on person-centered narratives to gesture toward broader themes in postwar political and cultural history. And three of the authors rest their analyses on oral histories, the most methodologically innovative of which creates a longitudinal literary ethnography of readers' responses to Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar*. The editors might have included a brief discussion in their introduction about which modes of historical inquiry lend themselves to feminist or gendered questions.

Were the rest of the essays mediocre (which they are not—they are excellent), Daniel Horowitz's provocative final essay alone would make this collection worth paying attention to. Horowitz, who wrote the most important historical biography of Betty Friedan to date, unabashedly argues that Jewish American women uniquely experienced and rendered the feminist mystique because they were never entirely mystified by it. (Friedan is a case in point.) He takes historians to task for creating a false break between feminists who happen to be Jewish and Jewish feminists. Similarly, he is skeptical of the oft-made claim that secular feminists only found their Jewishness in the post-1970s world of the white ethnic revival. Much as David Hollinger has recently called for a "dispersionist" turn in American Jewish history such that Jewish demographic concentration in various fields is more seriously analyzed, Horowitz charges historians to explore the "disproportionate participation of Jewish women in social movements in the 1960s" (247). Scholars such as Dina Pinsky (in her 2010 sociological study *Jewish Feminists*) and Joyce Antler, among others, have started this task. *A Jewish Feminist Mystique* proves that the rewards of such an approach are many.

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*Lila Corwin Berman is associate professor of history at Temple University, where she holds the Murray Friedman Chair of American Jewish History and directs the Feinstein Center for American Jewish History.*

Daniel Greene, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 278 pp.

On 25 October 1906, sixteen students met in Harvard's Grays Hall to form "some kind of Jewish cultural society"—so *The Menorah Movement* (1914), the foundational document of the Intercollegiate Menorah Association (IMA), recorded. The motivation for establishing the IMA in 1913 was compelling: the desire to valorize the Jewish humanities, promulgate Jewish ideals, and explore the comportment of Jews with America. By 1919, there were some eighty chapters participating in the IMA. A movement to be reckoned with, the IMA propelled an understanding of cultural pluralism that the group and its publication, the *Menorah Journal*, articulated and popularized.

Daniel Greene's magisterial *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity* speaks directly to the broad as well as nuanced themes generated by this idea. As he puts it, the book examines "the specific social and cultural milieu from which pluralism emerged," and by "restoring specificity to the history of cultural pluralism [the book] returns Jewishness to a narrative in which it too often has become invisible" (2). The book also rescues for attention many of the figures of the IMA, some of them now lost from sight. No less significantly, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism* studies a disputed history of thought that argues that "ethnic identity is 'unmeltable'" (13).

Influenced by the *Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden* (Society for the Culture and Science of the Jews) and reacting, for example, to Heinrich Graetz's presentation of Jewish history, the *Journal* and the IMA developed a historiography focusing on a usable Jewish past for modernity and a concept of the humanities that made way for Jewish studies as an integral part of Western civilization. Hebraism, owing much to these origins, addressed what we can call the totality of Jewish historical and cultural life. Its scholars would be emancipated from the seminary's offerings and its public, from "dry-as-dust" monographs. Hebraism—enabled by the rise of Semitic studies; modernized by what Horace Kallen saw as cultural pluralism and by a Hebraic culture and metaphysic (experience-in-process); influenced by Reform Judaism's commitments to modernity; and enlarged by Mordecai Kaplan's Reconstructionism—became a shorthand for Judaism as an evolving civilization, with theology but one part of it.

Kallen was at this thematic core of the decades-long discussion (the IMA ended in 1957; the *Journal*, save for a valedictory issue, ceased publication in 1961) and helped the term and concept of cultural pluralism find places in our cultural lexicon. Pluralism demanded a discussion of the boundaries between group and State and between assimilation and acculturation, and later, of the American Jew's role in a multicultural society. By taking on such labors, the

IMA helped define the shape of an American identity. For example, were the concepts of the “melting pot” and the “orchestra” merely poetic, restrictive metaphors, or did they speak to a racial or cultural essentialism? Pluralism necessitated practical questions: What was a Jew? How could the Jewish community maintain itself, and how could multiple Jewish identities be described and lived? Moreover, could Jewish comportment with American life, as roiling and abrasive as it might be, provide a model for yet other groups?

Intriguingly, at a time when Jewish acculturation was seen as a model for other groups, African-Americans were asserting their neglected role in American culture. However, Kallen’s pieces in the *Journal*, and the *Journal* itself, faltered. They ignored this group’s (and others’ as well) salient contributions to American life. As Greene explains the situation, Kallen’s seeming shortcoming “mattered more to critics than to Kallen, in large part because Kallen remained preoccupied with promoting Jewish culture as he conceived of pluralism” (181). And, Kallen believed that there was a different sociological dynamic to African-American life. Nevertheless, pluralism for Kallen had significant strengths: “In a society that valued cultural difference, promoting Jewish culture would not marginalize Jews but would create opportunities for them to exist within a diverse ethnic landscape” (185). Moreover, true to his notion of experience, Jewish culture, to remain significant, had to be in process itself.

Greene’s book also attends to the fiction and experimental prose that allowed the IMA to reflect its own self-consciousness—the quandaries of assimilation and the integrity of American-Jewish culture. Greene had earlier written about Elliot Cohen’s modern stylistic achievements (he was managing editor of the *Journal* during the mid-twenties; later, the editor of *Commentary*) and on the Jewish coming-of-age stories that appeared in the publication, but now we can comprehend Cohen’s successes in a larger context and get a fuller understanding of the *Journal*’s commitment to literature about the then-modern American Jew.

*The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism* illuminates our understanding of American-Jewish culture and what we call the American experience. It is a grand study of the IMA’s enduring achievements.

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*Lewis Fried is a professor of English at Kent State University and is working on a book about the Menorah Journal. He was “United States Literature” editor for the 2007 edition of the Encyclopaedia Judaica.*

Lori Harrison-Kahan, *The White Negress: Literature, Minstrelsy, and the Black-Jewish Imaginary* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2010), 248 pp.

As the story goes, when Sophie Tucker first began to perform onstage in the early 1900s, managers deemed her too big and ugly to attract a big crowd, so they put her in blackface. Her physical deviance from the norms of white femininity and sexuality became tied to her career as a “coon-shouter” and a singer of blues-influenced music. What was this tangle of cultural representations of Jewishness, blackness, gender, and sexuality? By foregrounding women, *The White Negress* differentiates itself from—and simultaneously provides a critique of—the growing literature on black-Jewish relations in twentieth-century America. Harrison-Kahan argues that “Jewish women’s appropriations of blackness issue challenges to the Jew-as-white-person model by complicating white identity” (6). Her careful readings do not, however, claim a wholesale adoption of a model of sisterly alliance, as she is careful to note that these appropriations also helped to construct the whiteness of Jewish women even while they complicated it. *The White Negress* explores both literary and staged performances of racial and cultural identity.

The volume traces the art and lives of four twentieth-century American women: Jewish vaudeville performer and singer Sophie Tucker, Jewish middle-brow novelist Edna Ferber, the “sentimental” Jewish novelist Fannie Hurst, and canonical black writer Zora Neale Hurston. Harrison-Kahan demonstrates how each wrestled with whiteness, blackness, and the relationship between the two. Tucker performed in blackface during the beginning of her career, but she also formed a lifelong friendship with black performer Mollie Elkins, which, according to Harrison-Kahan, had the effect of “both reifying and unsettling racial categories” (36). Ferber and Hurst, both best known for their popular interwar novels and serialized fiction, neither denied nor publicly emphasized their Jewishness. Both also politically espoused racial liberalism while exploring themes of light-skinned blacks “passing.” The novels *Showboat* (Ferber) with its musical adaptation and *Imitation of Life* (Hurst) with its film adaptation captured immense popular attention. Harrison-Kahan demonstrates how each of these forms simultaneously participated in and resisted the construction of black/white difference. Hurston likewise commodified black culture for consumption and was criticized for exploiting blackness for her own gain. Harrison-Kahan analyzes Hurston’s complex relationships with Hurst, Jewish philanthropist Annie Nathan Meyer, and anthropologist Franz Boas to illuminate Hurston’s novel *Moses, Man of the Mountain*. She claims that Hurston uses themes of Jewishness, minstrelsy, and the malleability of cultural identity to create a “multilayered critique of racial appropriations and interminority identifications” (145).

Harrison-Kahan’s employment of the term “Black-Jewish imaginary” at first seems to flirt with imprecision. It variously describes how Jews or

blacks imagined themselves and their relationship to their own Jewishness or blackness; how Jews or blacks imagined each other's communities and cultures; how others in American culture imagined black-Jewish interactions or similarities; and how Jews and blacks constructed a sense of reciprocal or shared culture through symbiosis, sharing, borrowing, or outright theft. The lack of precise differentiation stems not from some shortcoming of Harrison-Kahan's scholarship, but rather her attunement to a cultural context in which those different parts of the "Black-Jewish imaginary" are inextricably linked. If her terminology seems slippery or her interpretations seem to give with one hand and take with the other, it is because of the complexity of the American racial landscape. For instance, should we understand Jewish performance in blackface as shoring up whiteness, or identifying with the otherness of blackness? Harrison-Kahan shows that the literary sources suggest it must be both. Could interracial personal relationships properly be called friendships? Yes and no, as her analysis of Hurst and Hurston demonstrates. Moreover, despite her insistence on incorporating the contradictory impulses in American literature and culture, Harrison-Kahan does not fall victim to a fragmented narrative of her own. Rather, she elegantly presents the literary desires and ambivalence of Tucker, Ferber, Hurst, and Hurston.

*The White Negress* focuses on women and the construction of womanhood without falling into the facile assumption that "women" and "gender" are synonyms. Masculinity, although not her focus, neither disappears from view nor appears as a static or granted entity, as evidenced by her title's simultaneous evocation of Sarah Bernhardt's 1907 memoir and linguistic play on Norman Mailer's "The White Negro," an essay steeped in racialized visions of masculinity. Ultimately, by sustaining attention to women and fidelity to the complex and even contradictory texts, *The White Negress* constitutes both a convincing critique of scholarship on minstrelsy and a fascinating literary study in its own right.

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*Sarah Imhoff is a visiting assistant professor in religious studies and the Borns Jewish Studies Program at Indiana University-Bloomington, where she teaches American Judaism and rabbinics. She is currently working on a manuscript about the construction of American Jewish gender in the early twentieth century.*

**Ken Koltun-Fromm, *Material Culture and Jewish Thought in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), xi + 342 pp.**

For the Jewish immigrant landing on the shores of America in the years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century, the wealth of material objects assaulting the eye defined what was to be gained, but also what was lost, left behind in the attempt to start anew. From the Statue of Liberty to goods in storefront windows, the design of buildings, the shapes and textures of fruits and vegetables, and even to the cluttered sounds of words—all were the stuff

of currency to be negotiated. Such material items of exchange were more than symbolic objects of permanence and loss, although they were surely that. Such objects were the tangible stuff of America, a material culture that could be held and seen and thus weighted to this world.

The material culture of Jews in America, from the immigrant beginnings of the twentieth century to the present, is the topic of Ken Koltun-Fromm's book, *Material Culture and Jewish Thought in America*. Koltun-Fromm suggests that material culture for American Jews defines both self and place, and through it we see the rise of the urban cityscape, the social and economic ascension of a Jewish middle class, and the making and markings of American life and thought for Jews. Since immigration, Jewish identity in America locates and fashions itself through objects of expression and meaning, such as dress, domestic furnishings, religious icons, books, photographs, films—all tangible items through which American Jews, according to Koltun-Fromm, “fashioned . . . an identity steeped in the magnetic and alluring quality of things” (2). He hopes to show the “cultural patterns that inform Jewish thinking about things, and the visual and literary paradigms that ground Jewish identity in objects,” a “wedding,” as he puts it, “between cultural studies and Jewish thought” (3). He succeeds in delineating the ways in which material objects, such as journals, books, and furnishings, locate American Jews in terms of place and history and, ultimately, define identity. However, there is some slippery terrain in his project when he attempts to distinguish between symbolic identity and material identity and being.

Koltun-Fromm's definition of his guiding term, “material Jewish identity,” is inevitably circular: “Jewish thought is a cultural practice, and that practice generates compelling accounts of an identity steeped in material culture. This is what I mean by material Jewish identity in America” (2–3). Thought defines cultural practice and so, too, do cultural practices define the ways in which one thinks about and lives in the world. And, to be sure, Jewish identity is a product of material culture as much as material culture in America has been and continues to be produced by Jews. As a guiding principle, this definition seems to work, even if one immediately wants to ask if the allure of material objects isn't true of other immigrant groups as well. What is distinctive of Jews in the making of material culture? In some ways, Koltun-Fromm handles this question by not handling it. It is enough to examine the rich and evolving history of Jews in America, Koltun-Fromm seems to imply, without bringing in other groups for whom one might make similar claims. Implicit in his argument, too, is that the unique diasporic history of the Jews and, as a “people of the book,” the text-based heritage from which they emerge deepen our appreciation for the ways in which Jews have, over the course of history, embraced and fashioned the artifacts of material culture in America.

Later in the book, Koltun-Fromm will complicate his definition of material culture by attempting to distinguish between the material and symbolic identity of things, and here is where I think the analysis unnecessarily, but not irretrievably, falters. After a clear introduction setting out the ways in which his study will demonstrate the “subtle features of identity formation in America” and chapters that categorize the production of Jewish material identity and culture through “self, past, place, presence, narrative, and gaze” (10), Koltun-Fromm moves into an engaging analysis of Mordecai Kaplan, autobiographical writing, and the journal as tangible object of refashioning the self. These are accompanied by images of pages from Kaplan’s journals. This framing chapter is followed by a study of “the material past” in chapter two, an analysis of that period in American history spanning the end of World War I through the aftermath of World War II. In doing so, Koltun-Fromm examines the ways in which Freud’s “theories of the self and society permeated cultural discourse” and came to inform the ideas of three influential Jewish thinkers—Edward Bernays, Joshua Liebman, and Erich Fromm—whose thinking reflects the performance of a material past and the “kind of self” created by such performances, selves “scarred by inheritance” (53, 107). The next chapter addresses “material place,” suggesting the ways in which urban, “physical space . . . informs Jewish identity, and Jewish thinking about it shapes the very nature of that place,” as seen in the work of Joseph Soloveitchik (108). Next, “material presence” is addressed through a reading of Abraham Joshua Heschel and the experience of “holiness in and through things.” Here, the claim is how things “do not just enrich our lives: they constitute essential features of personal identity” (179). These chapters speak clearly to Koltun-Fromm’s carefully documented and richly researched work.

However, in the following chapter on “material narrative”—an analysis of selected literary texts by Anzia Yezierska, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick, and Bernard Malamud—the insisted-upon distinction between the symbolic and the real becomes thorny. Koltun-Fromm argues, and rightly so, that these writers create narratives in which material objects—garments, physical places, the accoutrements of life—expose the “inescapable allure and presence of material objects for personal identity” but also “the limits of belonging and acceptance in America” (181–182). Here he argues against what he sees as a “temptation to read [materiality] as a symbol or representation for something else” (184). Koltun-Fromm wants to “resist this kind of symbolic reading, and not merely because it covers over the tactile qualities” but also because it “fails as a meaningful signifier . . . its meaning . . . forever inscrutable” (191). On the contrary, a reading that brings together the symbolic and the literal—that, in fact, insists upon the necessary and complex interplay between material and symbolic identity—illustrates most strongly the complicated ways in which material culture is an expression of identity, place, and class and of the ways in

which Jews in America attempt to negotiate Jewish history and inheritance. In an otherwise lively chapter on Jewish novelists, Koltun-Fromm unnecessarily argues that “leaping to signification and symbolic meaning too often trivializes the power of the material thing itself” (223). But it need not. “Things” may not, as Koltun-Fromm suggests, “require linguistic meanings to be constitutive of personal identity,” but if you articulate the process, you do so linguistically (223).

This chapter is followed by an excellent final chapter, preceding the conclusion, on “the material gaze,” which convincingly shows how the fascination with consumer products, as created and viewed by Jews, parallels the preoccupations of twentieth-century America and shows how the “stuff” of life bridges “American” and “Jewish” as well the past and present of American Jews.

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*Victoria Aarons is O.R. and Eva Mitchell Distinguished Professor of Literature and English department chair at Trinity University. She is the author of A Measure of Memory and What Happened to Abraham?: Reinventing the Covenant in American Jewish Fiction, as well as numerous articles and book chapters on American Jewish and Holocaust literatures.*

**John L. Loeb, Jr., Kathy L. Plotkin, Margaret Loeb Kempner, and Judith E. Endelman, with an Introduction by Eli N. Evans, *An American Experience: Adeline Moses Loeb (1876–1953) and Her Early American Jewish Ancestors* (New York: Sons of the Revolution in the State of New York, 2009), xxx + 350pp.**

The work reviewed here is a miscellany of materials written and compiled by no fewer than five authors, as well as a sixth participant who designed the volume’s genealogical charts and maps. Among other items, it includes a memoir, an extensive genealogical section that comprises the largest part of the volume, and reflections by Ambassador John L. Loeb, Jr., under whose aegis the book was prepared. It is an affectionate tribute to both the family of Adeline Moses Loeb and her ancestors as well as to the American nation. And while genealogists will find useful material here, the volume also stands as a model because of the organization and lavish layout of the genealogical content.

Historians will also find information here that will prove of value, not so much as historical analysis but, instead, for its potential as primary-source material. This is most apparent in the biographical account of Carl M. Loeb by Kathy L. Plotkin and in the memoir describing Adeline Moses Loeb prepared by her daughter, Margaret Loeb Kempner. The Loeb, grandparents of Ambassador Loeb, were of German Jewish origin (Carl) and colonial American ancestry (Adeline). The accounts here of their lives describe their ascent in the South, Midwest, and New York—from Carl’s immigrant status and Adeline’s financially

ruined family to membership in the German Jewish “Our Crowd” crowd in New York City. Taken together, the two essays provide extensive information not only about the patriarch’s business trajectory but also, of greater novelty, about the family’s internal life, gender roles, the relationship between husband and wife, child-rearing, class consciousness, lifestyle, religious outlook, and philanthropic activities. While similar patterns might well be found in other German Jewish families during the first half of the twentieth century, the opportunities that these accounts provide for comparisons and contrasts with other families that belonged to the “Uptown” German Jewish elite are what make this section of the book of particular value to students of American Jewish history. Kempner’s account of her mother is important in this context because she was both a participant in and an observer of the family.

Ambassador Loeb has also contributed an essay of reflections and reminiscences to the volume, and it, too, will likely serve as a primary source for future historians and other writers. In his memoir, Loeb illuminates why he is fascinated by the history and genealogies of early America’s Jewish settlers and their descendants, explaining that what he had “set out to do . . . was to make known more universally the very important part that Jewish people played in early America.” This explanation appeared in a discussion of the exhibitions devoted to seventeenth- and eighteenth-century American Jewry that he sponsored between 1979 and 2005, but it is applicable as well to the book in its entirety, because of the extensive genealogical discussion of Adeline’s ancestors, which by far comprises the largest part of the volume.

The genealogical lists and accompanying biographies by Judith E. Endelman document Ms. Loeb’s ancestry for seven generations in America, beginning with Sampson Mears (ca. 1670–ca. 1711) and his wife, Joy (dates unknown), and culminating with her parents, Alfred Huger Moses (1840–1918) and Jeanette Nathan Moses (1849–1919). Endelman’s lucidly written biographies of the individuals she has selected for in-depth treatment propel the family’s story over the generations, though one may contest her assertion that “each generation is uncannily representative of the American Jewish experience of its respective period.” Not all eighteenth-century Jews in America, for example, were successful merchants who traded across the expanse of the Atlantic world; many were artisans and small shopkeepers who may have aspired to become international traders but never made it. For the most part, the biographies rely upon well-known secondary sources written by historians and genealogists. This, however, is emphatically not the case with Adeline’s nineteenth-century predecessors, whose biographies are based to a large extent upon original sources and therefore comprise new scholarly material. Indeed, the later biographies are of great value for adding to our knowledge of nineteenth-century Jews, ranging from matters such as career paths to family patterns, especially in the South. Although we have known a great deal about the lives and histories of

early American Jewry for quite some time, we have far less comparable data and information for nineteenth-century Jews in the United States, making Endelman's work about them a genuine contribution to the corpus of material that we have for American Jewish history.

But it is the presentation of the extensive genealogical material that makes this volume a triumphant model for how to do genealogy. Works of genealogy—which can be of great value to historians and ought not be dismissed as interesting only to the families that compile them—are usually no more than turgid lists of hundreds, yea thousands, of individuals that read like phone directories, and, equally often, supremely difficult to follow when there is more than one son or daughter born to a set of parents in a given generation. In this volume, in contrast, a small number of individuals have been selected, as already indicated, for in-depth biographical discussion, and they are also accompanied by easily read lists of their children as well as by color-coded genealogical tables. Photographs of individuals, cityscapes, and buildings, relevant portraits, and even artifacts that belonged to family members enliven the presentation. The multicolored maps of cities associated with various members of the family line, and detailing the locations of pertinent buildings, are worthy of special mention. Finally, a large, multicolored insert in a pocket on the volume's back cover presents a full-scale genealogical table of Adeline's family, past and present. Cumulatively, the visual effects are dazzling, and, of greater importance, render it feasible to follow the genealogical flow with ease and instant comprehension.

One notes, too, that in addition to serving as a tribute to Adeline Moses Loeb and to the larger context of earlier American Jewry, this work implicitly celebrates America's capacity over the course of its history to welcome and to incorporate people of varied heritages, backgrounds, and religions. This is evident from Eli Evans's introduction to the volume, in which he recounts how Ambassador Loeb directly, and elegantly, challenged antisemitism—with a positive outcome later ensuing—among the social and political elite of Montgomery, Alabama, where Ms. Loeb was born and where her uncle served as mayor in the late nineteenth century. It is evident in an appendix in which Ambassador Loeb writes about patriotism and dedication to country. And it is evident throughout this work, in the sense that the entire success story of this one family over the course of three centuries bears witness to the nation's commitment to equality and pluralism.

N.B.: *The reviewer contributed an endorsement of the book, which has been published, among others, at its beginning.*

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*Eli Faber is professor emeritus of history, John Jay College of Criminal Justice (City University of New York).*

Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn, *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 435 pp.

Jonathan Sarna of Brandeis University and Adam Mendelsohn of the College of Charleston have collaborated to produce an exceptionally useful anthology of scholarship addressing the Jewish experience in the American Civil War. They bring together nineteen essays written over the past fifty years (including some by luminaries such as Bertram Korn and Jacob Rader Marcus and other pieces that have undeservedly “languished in obscurity” [ix]) that explore various important aspects of the topic in one well-organized and accessible volume.

The editors begin the work with a preface that provides a summary of the book’s content and structure and a brief description of the directions in which Civil War scholarship has gone over the past half century. *Jews and the Civil War* then proceeds with a historiographic overview that investigates Jewish Civil War scholarship before Bertram Korn’s seminal mid-twentieth-century work, followed by an essay surveying the Jewish experience in the war. The remainder of the book is divided into seven sections, each of which examines a facet of the topic; these include investigations of Jews and slavery, the Jewish relationship to abolition, the role of rabbis in the war, the experience of Jewish soldiers, the lives of Jews on the home front, antisemitism during the war years, and the Jewish experience immediately after the war. In each case, two or more essays are provided to facilitate understanding “by presenting multiple scholarly voices, rather than just one expert” (x). In addition, each section opens with a genuinely helpful editorial overview that sets the following works in their historical and/or historiographic context and provides a brief summary of the contributions of the essays. When pertinent, these introductions also highlight questions and topics requiring further research (48, 198, 265–266, 386). At the conclusion of this anthology, Sarna and Mendelsohn provide a bibliographical essay surveying important or useful works not included in this collection. This essay follows the same format as the rest of the book, beginning with a discussion of general works and proceeding to survey books and articles addressing the same seven facets of the Jewish experience outlined above. As before, the authors indicate avenues suitable for future research (416–417).

In *Jews and the Civil War*, Sarna and Mendelsohn have produced a useful anthology of scholarship on the Jewish experience during this most tumultuous period of American history. Their introductions to each section provide important historical details and historiographic context, allowing one to gain the most from the individual essays. Well-organized and thorough, this volume doubtless belongs next to Bertram Korn’s *American Jewry and the Civil War* on the shelf of any student of the Jewish experience in America.

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Matthew Semler graduated from Oral Roberts University in 2006 with a bachelor's in history. He received his master's in biblical archaeology from Wheaton College in 2007. He is currently a doctoral student in modern Jewish history at the Cincinnati campus of the Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion.

**M.M. Silver, *Our Exodus: Leon Uris and the Americanization of Israel's Founding Story* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010), 288 pp.**

Jewish studies is a field that has long given pride of place to the discipline of history. M.M. Silver's *Our Exodus*, a historical contextualization of the work of popular Jewish American novelist Leon Uris, marks a powerful marriage of history and literature that points the way to the possibilities of truly interdisciplinary work in the field. Although *Our Exodus* has its limitations, it also fills a gap in the field of both literary and historical studies of Jewish culture by focusing on "the way Israel's founding story was packaged and popularized for the world at large" during the years after 1948 (1). Rather than probing at the verisimilitude (or lack thereof) of Uris's narrative of Israel's founding myth, as many other scholars have done, Silver provides a lucid and elegantly written account of the story's power in the global popular imagination.

Silver argues that many scholarly works about Israel cannot resist "framing analyses of its history upon mechanical oppositions between 'truths' and 'myths' about the Jewish state and founding" (11). *Our Exodus* does a masterful job of avoiding this sort of binary thinking, focusing instead "upon why particular characterizations and plot twists involving the socialist kibbutz, Holocaust survivor ma'apalim, Palmach commanders, or Palestinian fighters emerged. . . [and] whose identity needs were served by these characterizations" (11). Silver looks at the complex identifications and instrumentalizations at the heart of Uris's work alongside his ingenious marriage of Israeli and American history and symbolism. *Our Exodus's* unique approach to a long-neglected figure provides a welcome contribution to the literature on postwar Jewish culture.

Silver begins by "contextualizing *Exodus*," locating the novel in a time period when American Jews had a somewhat vexed relationship with Israel—in part because America itself was unsure of how to view the newly-minted Middle Eastern country and in part because many Jewish Americans feared that support for Israel would manifest the sort of dual loyalties frowned upon in the Cold-War-haunted United States. In this chapter, Silver also provides a fascinating overview of the mostly unsuccessful attempts at disseminating Zionist messages in America prior to Uris—from a commercially and critically ignored novel by Zelda Popkin to Ben Hecht's one-act play narrating Israel's independence struggle, *A Flag Is Born*.

After this brief contextualization of the novel, Silver moves to trace Uris's work as a self-conscious intervention in world Jewish history. Here, he points out that the novelist was one of the first authors to effectively suture together the narratives of the Holocaust and the foundation of Israel—contributing to a rhetorical stance that continues in Israeli public relations to this day. In this lengthy section of *Our Exodus*, Silver also provides background on Uris's earlier literary works and their sometimes-tenuous connection to Jewish identity, as well as a detailed account of Uris's own background and complex identification with Jewishness throughout his life.

In the third section of the book, Silver narrates the many ways in which *Exodus* contributed to “the Americanization of Israel.” He makes a powerful case for reading *Exodus* as a particularly *American* Jewish document, catalyzed by the unique ambiguity of Jewish ethnic and religious identity in the United States. To support this argument, he looks closely at the interfaith relationship at the heart of *Exodus* and the way it marks American Jewish anxieties about diasporic intermarriage, as well as the many ways in which the film version of *Exodus* Americanized Uris's tale in order to meld the foundation of Israel with American viewers' own national imagination and narratives of revolution and independence.

In his final chapter, Silver looks at the contemporary response to *Exodus*, a novel that once captured American hearts and participated in the sympathetic dissemination of Israel's story around the world. From an overview of the novel's influence and popularity, he moves to look at the many ways in which the novelist's work has subsequently been challenged and problematized by readers uncomfortable with his depiction of the Arab populace and the narrative of Palestine. In this portion of *Our Exodus*, Silver is critical of Uris's wholesale mythologizing of Israel's history, but he nonetheless fails to probe at some of the central assumptions that undergird the writer's work and his pejorative descriptions of the Arab populace in Palestine. In many ways, *Our Exodus* celebrates the triumphalist narrative of Israel's foundation (as well as this narrative's point of origin in the horrors of the Holocaust), even as it nods to some of the debates between Zionist and post-Zionist historiographers. At times, the reader wishes for a more stringent analysis of Uris's work.

Although Silver's close engagement as a historian with Uris's fiction provides a welcome addition to the literature on the novelist, there are moments when his methodology illuminates some of the pitfalls of this sort of interdisciplinary project. Silver's impressive archival work allows him to trace Uris's history from birth as both an individual and a writer. This archival work can sometimes overshadow Silver's analysis, pushing him to engage in a problematically simplistic form of psychobiographical criticism that conflates Uris's motivations with those of his characters, relying less on the author's work and more on speculation about his psyche and tortured Oedipal relationships. Silver's position as a historian looking

at a piece of literature comes through in other ways throughout *Our Exodus*, as well. While he manifests a keen awareness that *Exodus* indexes an important moment in both Jewish and American history, he neglects to acknowledge that the novel also exists within the trajectory of Jewish and American *literary* history and should be analyzed and evaluated more closely at the level of language and form. Silver rarely interacts with Uris's writing, focusing instead on the general narrative of the text and its place in the larger history of Israel's founding story. This focus proves interesting and provocative, but it fails to uncover the many ways in which language, like narrative, contains and disseminates ideology. His preoccupation with Uris's work as a repository of history also neglects to note the many ways in which literary history is often tied up with national history, a particularly potent concern for Jewish scholars since at least the time of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* and one that would take on even more prominence after Israel's independence.

In his chapter on "Exodus and Jewish History," Silver suggests that Uris's work is distinct from that of other Jewish American authors because he was unconcerned with the immigrant sagas and familial angst that preoccupied many Jewish American writers of his time. However, as Werner Sollors and other critics have made clear, many of the preoccupations at the heart of immigrant fiction—most prominently the clash between descent relations and chosen affiliation—find their way into American writing that is not explicitly engaged with narrating immigrant existence. It would have been useful to see Silver place Uris in conversation with other Jewish American writers, despite his disavowal of this link.

Despite these lacunae, *Our Exodus* provides an insightful account of Uris's role in the formation of global Jewish consciousness—a story that has largely been forgotten. Silver poses provocative questions about the links between history and narrative, popular culture and public relations, and America and Israel in the years after 1948. In its grappling with the complex legacy of Uris and his immensely popular *Exodus*, this work makes a much-needed contribution to the fields of postwar American and Jewish cultural studies.

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*Jennifer Glaser is an assistant professor of English and comparative literature and an affiliate faculty member in Judaic studies at the University of Cincinnati. She is currently at work on a manuscript titled Exceptional Differences: Race and the Postwar Jewish American Literary Imagination.*

Henry Srebrnik, *Dreams of Nationhood: American Jewish Communists and the Soviet Birobidzhan Project, 1924–1951* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2010), 312 pp.

Henry Srebrnik's book is a richly detailed study of a fascinating, often neglected chapter in the history of the Jewish communist movement in the United States. This meticulously researched book thoroughly chronicles the world of the Jewish communist and pro-Soviet subculture from its beginnings in the United States in the 1920s until its demise in the early 1950s. Srebrnik draws from an array of primary and archival sources to provide the reader with a sense of the lived experience of the adherents and participants of the Jewish communist movement. His in-depth account conveys a sense of the utopian ideals that drove many Jews, communist and non-communist, as well as many non-Jewish supporters, to look to the Soviet Union and its Siberian province of Birobidzhan as a territorial solution to the Jewish national problem. His main accomplishment, perhaps, is the extent to which he shows just how active and persistent this movement was in its support for the creation of a Jewish national home in Birobidzhan. Srebrnik's scholarship sheds new light on our understanding of the Jewish communist movement in North America and the larger network of supporters of the Soviet Union in the years before the Cold War.

Before launching into his exhaustive study of the central Jewish American institutions and organizations created to support Jewish settlement in Birobidzhan, Srebrnik provides a brief but illuminating overview of the Jewish communist subculture that existed on the American left from the early 1920s to the 1950s and beyond. Although this is not the primary subject of his book, Srebrnik's insightful examination of the movement is an important contribution to scholarship on the field of Jewish communists. His comprehensive account of their cultural life and political institutions helps to flesh out what the Jewish communist movement looked like and why people were attracted to it without resorting to trite ideological affirmations or condemnations of the movement.

Once he introduces the readers to the contours of this Jewish communist culture, Srebrnik turns his attention to the campaign in support of Birobidzhan. He focuses in particular on two of the main Jewish organizations created to support Jewish colonization in the Soviet Union: the ICOR (Association for Jewish Colonization in the Soviet Union), founded in 1924, and Ambijan (the American Committee for the Settlement of Jews in Birobidjan), founded in 1934. The ICOR was closely associated with the Communist Party and over the years constituted a major part of the Jewish communist subculture mentioned above. Beginning in 1928 when the Soviet Union first proposed Birobidzhan as a center for Jewish agricultural settlement, and in 1934 when it officially became a Jewish autonomous region, the ICOR turned all of its efforts to the campaign to settle Jews in Birobidzhan. One of the strengths of Srebrnik's

book is the detail in which he reproduces key elements of this campaign; he uses many archival sources to take the reader on a journey through the myriad meetings, public speeches, journal articles, pamphlets, and the like that the ICOR organized and produced. He introduces the reader to the plethora of ICOR activists, writers, and speakers — some communist, some not — and recounts many of their speeches and articles in support of Birobidzhan.

Perhaps even more central to the revelations of *Dreams of Nationhood* is the author's focus on Ambijan and the extent to which the Birobidzhan campaign extended beyond the relatively narrow communist niche of which ICOR was a part. Created in the mid-1930s and enduring until 1950, Ambijan promoted the idea of Birobidzhan in wide segments of the American Jewish community and had tremendous support from a number of American non-Jewish politicians. As he did in his chapters on ICOR, Srebrnik uses a trove of archival sources to help recreate the many speeches, concerts, publications, and campaigns that Ambijan undertook in support of Birobidzhan specifically and, more broadly, Jewish life in the Soviet Union. He shows how it was especially active and successful in the years immediately following World War II in its efforts to settle Jewish war refugees in Birobidzhan.

Maintaining a thoroughly objective and scholarly tone throughout the book, Srebrnik's concluding chapter, "From Hope to Hoax," chronicles the process of the dissolution of the pro-Birobidzhan movement among its many former supporters in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Srebrnik traces the disillusionment and despair that many felt as they realized their dreams of nationhood for Jews in Birobidzhan had not materialized. Toward the end of the book, the author observes, "given how important the pro-Birobidzhan movement had been in American Jewish life, it is surprising to realize how quickly it was forgotten" (241). With this painstakingly researched and scrupulously documented book, Henry Srebrnik has helped his readers to remember and, in a sense, to relive the essential features of the pro-Birobidzhan movement in American Jewish life.

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*Matthew Hoffman is an associate professor of Judaic Studies and History at Franklin & Marshall College, where he teaches courses on Jewish history and culture. Hoffman's book, From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture, was published by Stanford University Press in 2007. He is currently working on a study of Yiddish-speaking communists in America in the years before World War II.*

Michael Weingrad, *American Hebrew Literature: Writing Jewish National Identity in the United States* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2011), 275 pp.

Described as a “counterhistory,” Michael Weingrad’s new book recovers for contemporary readers an insight into the oeuvre, the anxieties, and the lives of a handful of Hebrew writers active on American soil for much of the twentieth century—mainly until the 1950s, but some of them down to the last decades of the century, and even today. They are rarely acknowledged protagonists in the narrative of American Jewish culture.

Sometimes referred to as “Hebraists,” given that the invention of modern Hebrew was as much an ideological posture as it was a medium for creative self-expression, no more than a few dozen exponents and practitioners were active in the United States. Weingrad selects from among them a cadre of those whom he considers significant to the intellectual historian: Hillel Bavli, Israel Efros, Shimon Ginzburg, Shimon Halkin, Ephraim Lisitzky, Gabriel Preil, Harry Sackler, Benjamin Silkiner, and Reuven Wallenrod. Others appear throughout the book as part of the contextualization of his wider portrait. Their prose and poetry straddled three literatures: modern Hebrew letters (a global phenomenon, conceived mainly as an East-European-incubated literature that was transplanted to the Land—later State—of Israel); Jewish migrant literature (again, a global bookshelf—a multilingual one, in fact, including works in Yiddish, English, Spanish, French, and a variety of other tongues); and American literature (whose definition has been broadened recently to include works written *in America* but in languages other than English). Indeed, quite a few of them wrote in Yiddish and English, as well as in Hebrew, and thus a case for a strictly “Hebraist,” monolingualistic definition is not part of Weingrad’s declared aims in relating their stories.

Weingrad is sensitive to the fact that the American Hebraists were always a minor voice within each of these overlapping artistic and discursive territories. Theirs are not household names, though within the Jewish cultural milieu, a few of them were better known in their own day. Weingrad’s purpose is not to restore lost luster to forgotten “masters,” but rather to recover the substance and explore the meanings—aesthetic, social, psychological—conveyed by their writings. His close textual readings and artful English renderings of passages from numerous works perform an essential literary and scholarly service for the English reader and, indeed, fully justify the attention he lavishes on his select group of writers.

One of Weingrad’s intriguing interpretive emphases is the aesthetic conservatism that, for the most part, this group characterized. Although, as he points out, some of them were not entirely unsusceptible to the temper and the blandishments of modernism, for the most part they played the role of keepers of a romantic tradition. It was from that perspective, he argues, that one must

engage with their portrayals of such disparate themes as American Indians, the life of the New York metropolis, and the counter-urban depictions of the American countryside. Similarly, the literary forms that they mostly drew upon came from a palette of late-nineteenth-century sensibilities.

Weingrad takes one detour along this literary tour to include a less-well-executed chapter dealing with the literary afterlife of Mordecai Noah, as a symbolic figure of Jewish writing spanning the late nineteenth to late twentieth century. Here Weingrad is forced to depart from American-based writers (dealing, for example, with the Anglo-Jewish writer Israel Zangwill and Israeli novelist Nava Semel) and from Hebrew literary sources (Ben Katchor's graphic novel, *The Jew of New York*, 1998) and even from Jewish literary production (Alfred Henry Lewis's 1902 novel *Peggy O'Neal*, for instance). The chapter, though keeping a toehold on some of the book's major themes, is not well integrated into the overall discussion and probably would have worked better as a separately published essay.

Weingrad is on much more solid ground when capturing the essential ambivalence and poignant human moments in the lives of his main protagonists. His portrayals of Silkiner and Halkin, in particular, are memorable. His foray into latter-day Hebrew poets in America—American-born writers who appear to belie the overall assessment that American Hebrew literature was a one-generational phase—is also an important contribution. For example, we meet the likes of Chana (Anne) Kleiman, a daughter of Jewish immigrants from Russia, raised in St. Joseph, Missouri; Chana (Annabelle) Farmelant, a post-World-War-II poet; and the remarkable instance of Robert Whitehill from Lubbock, Texas, a Hebrew autodidact with no genealogical connection to the earlier age of American Hebraism.

Weingrad's book is a very welcome addition to scholarship on the permutations of Jewish culture in modernity, to the cultural history of the United States, and, not least, to the development of a self-critical school of thought in American Jewish studies: a subtle but nonetheless edgy assessment of what may be missing in American Jewry's sense of itself as the heir to a larger Jewish heritage.

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*Eli Lederhendler is the Stephen S. Wise Professor of American Jewish History and Institutions at the Avraham Harman Institute of Contemporary Jewry at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.*

Beth S. Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 282 pp., Illus.

In 1975, the Jewish Publication Society marked America's bicentennial by publishing a Revolutionary-War-era biography by Shirley Milgrim titled *Haym Salomon: Liberty's Son*. Milgrim's book reaches a climax in the fall of 1780. The Continental army under the command of General George Washington is in dire straits: The soldiers have not been paid in more than five months, and food rations are dangerously low. "The situation is desperate. The army is threatening mutiny," Washington writes to Robert Morris, whose role as chief financier of the American Revolution would shortly be formalized when Congress would vote to confer upon him the title of superintendent of finance. "Please see Mr. Salomon!"<sup>1</sup>

According to Milgrim, when Morris finally sends for Salomon, it is Yom Kippur. Salomon is praying at Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel congregation when Morris's messenger finds him. Initially irritated about being disturbed on the most solemn day on the Jewish calendar, Salomon's demeanor changes quickly when he reads the note. Salomon strides to the front of the bimah and entreats the congregants to join him in contributing to the rebels' cause. "We're known for aiding the suffering both inside and outside our own circle. But now we must show that above all we are true patriots." In less than fifteen minutes, Salomon manages to raise twenty thousand dollars. As Morris's aide departed the synagogue, Salomon calls to him: "Tell me young man, did you ever see such evidence of patriotism before?" "No sir, and I know I never shall again."<sup>2</sup>

Milgrim's story was apocryphal but hardly novel. As Beth Wenger explains in her engaging new book, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage*, the myth surrounding Salomon was progressively inflated and widely circulated since the 1840s by a relentless assortment of relatives and ethnic boosters. For them, as for Milgrim, Salomon, a loyal Jew and a selfless supporter of the Revolution, became the exemplar of American Jewish patriotism and the embodiment of American Jewish synthesis. Wenger devotes an entire chapter to the "sculpting" of the Salomon myth, demonstrating how "successive generations of Jews used history to create and recreate a shared ethnic heritage."

Wenger, associate professor of history and director of the Jewish studies program at the University of Pennsylvania, made her academic reputation with an insightful portrait of Jewish life in Depression-era New York. Many of the strengths of that judicious work—its breadth of scholarship, tightly constructed argument, and attention to a previously overlooked subject—are once again on display in *History Lessons*. This new book is a must-read for Jewish history scholars and teachers, and it promises to be thought provoking for Jewish communal leaders and image-makers.

Wenger's subject here is heritage construction, specifically the stories that American Jews told themselves and their children, which "fused the Jewish past with the American future and shaped paradigms of Jewish religious and ethnic culture in the United States" (3). Proceeding from the proposition, articulated by Jerold Auerbach, that "the synthesis of Judaism and Americanism is a historical fiction," Wenger adroitly demonstrates how American Jews "reinterpreted their own culture and history to fit the circumstances of American Jewish life." In successive chapters, Wenger analyzes the narratives Jews fashioned when they celebrated national holidays, commemorated their wartime service, instructed their children, and narrated the lives of their heroes. Undergirding virtually all of their stories was the conviction that the American Jewish experience represented a radical departure in Diaspora Jewish history. American exceptionalism, Wenger asserts, is "perhaps the most fundamental axiom of American Jewish life" (10).

The chapter on Haym Salomon is arguably the most interesting, in large part because the efforts to memorialize him did not go unchallenged, even within the Jewish community. For example, efforts to erect a monument to Salomon in New York's Madison Square Park pitted eastern European Jewish immigrants against more established Jews of central European extraction. The latter were concerned that the Jewish community might be publicly embarrassed if the claims about Salomon's life were to be disproved. Moreover, they questioned the wisdom of raising up a moneylender, however patriotic, as an American Jewish hero. To the then-recent immigrants, however, the Polish-born Salomon served as an inspiration and, in the xenophobic atmosphere of the 1920s, a powerful rejoinder to those who questioned their American authenticity.

If the other chapters lack the same dramatic tension, Wenger compensates by showering her readers with abundant and varied sources. Her argument is considerably strengthened by her fluency in the cultural output of a wide range of Jewish subcommunities. She is equally at ease citing examples from the *Yidishes Tageblatt* and the *Forverts* as she is from rabbinical sermons and the files of the Jewish Welfare Board. Wenger's integration of sources from the Jewish left, in particular, enriches her narrative considerably. This reader was also especially gratified to see the wealth of materials that Wenger culled from educational sources, including my unpublished dissertation on Jewish textbooks.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Wenger's book should be understood as a work of educational history in the widest sense, as articulated by Bernard Bailyn, who invited academics and lay people to conceptualize education "not only as formal pedagogy but as the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations."<sup>4</sup>

Of course, there is a darker side to the fabrication of heritage. If heritage, as David Lowenthal reminds us, "addresses common needs and embodies common traits the world over," these "needs are defined and the traits cherished by chauvinist jealousy." All too often, as Lowenthal cautions, heritage is marshaled

as a weapon to delegitimize the other. “We confront one another armored in identities whose likenesses we ignore or disown and whose differences we distort or invent to emphasize our own superior worth.”<sup>5</sup> Wenger only begins to explore this less solicitous use of heritage in her epilogue, where she considers the contest between mainstream Jewish organizations and an embattled Jewish left to make meaning out of the American Jewish tercentenary. One hopes that others will follow Wenger’s trailblazing path and expand our appreciation for how American Jews engaged in a continual project of self-fashioning, defining and redefining the contours of American Jewish identity. In the meantime, there is much to learn and ponder in this inspired volume.

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*Jonathan B. Krasner is associate professor of the American Jewish Experience at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion in New York. His new book, The Benderly Boys and American Jewish Education, was published by Brandeis University Press in May 2011.*

### *Notes*

<sup>1</sup>Shirley Milgrim, *Haym Salomon: Liberty’s Son* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1975), 65–66.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 73–74.

<sup>3</sup>Jonathan Krasner, “Representations of Self and Other in American Jewish History and Social Studies Schoolbooks: An Exploration of the Changing Shape of American Jewish Identity,” doctoral dissertation (Brandeis University, 2002).

<sup>4</sup>Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 14.

<sup>5</sup>David Lowenthal, “Identity, Heritage, and History,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 41.