
“Emancipation from every kind of bondage is my principle. I go for the recognition of human rights, without distinction of sect, party, sex, or color” — Ernestine Rose (1853, p.22)

“[In the United States] it is almost a settled fact that woman is a human being” — Ernestine Rose (1870, p. 143)

In *The Rabbi’s Atheist Daughter*, Bonnie S. Anderson provides fresh insight into the life and activism of Ernestine L. Rose, a brilliant radical reformer who braved ridicule, condemnation, and threats of violence as she advocated free thought, abolition, and women’s rights throughout nineteenth century United States and Europe. As author of two prior works of international feminist history—*Joyous Greetings: The First International Women’s Movement, 1830–1860* and *Women in Early Modern and Modern Europe*—Anderson is well positioned to overcome the critical challenge of her subject: writing about an international figure for whom few official records exist and who left behind no private collection of letters and papers. Committed to including “every scrap of personal history” (10) she could find, Anderson has pieced together a lively and engaging volume about a feminist pioneer whose words and deeds are every bit as compelling and relevant today as they were when Ernestine Rose first stepped upon the world stage.

Anderson introduces Rose at the peak of her career, at the Second National Women’s Rights Convention in 1851. By this time, Rose was a seasoned public speaker, having engaged in debates and addressed audiences on free thought and abolition for more than a decade. We learn how Rose, despite having been “born into three oppressive situations” (11) as a Polish female Jew, came to this moment an acknowledged
leader and star of the women’s rights campaign and the only foreigner, atheist, and international traveler among nineteenth-century abolitionists and women’s rights activists. Both allies and enemies respected Rose for her incisive wit and brilliant oratory, yet they reviled her as an atheist and Jew. Rose, ever uncompromising in her insistence on human rights, became increasingly isolated with the outbreak of the Civil War. “It is … all free or all slave,” Anderson quotes Rose, “and as we are not all free, we are all slaves and all slaveholders … unless we raise our voice against it” (116). The object of increasing intolerance, antisemitism, and nativism, exhausted by her travels and dismayed by dissension within the women’s movement as the United States enfranchised freedmen and excluded women with the Fifteenth Amendment, Rose, the “heroine of a hundred battles,” (141) left the United States with her husband to spend most of the rest of her life in England and continental Europe.

Ernestine Rose’s story is one that, more than other portraits of famous figures, reflects the constructed nature of history. “I have nothing to refer to. I have never spoken from notes … [and] I made no memorandum of places, dates or names,” Rose responded when Susan B. Anthony asked her for a contribution to *The History of Woman Suffrage* (Vol. 1, p. 98).

If sources for Rose’s story are so few, of what value is a new biography? The very absence of primary material creates the need for different scholarly points of view. Tapping international research and literature, drawing on her expertise in international women’s history and emphasizing the transatlantic nature of Rose’s life and work, Anderson creates new context for understanding Ernestine Rose’s life, work, and words. The timing could not be more appropriate: More than ever, we need to learn from Rose’s example how to welcome civil debate with our opponents, to disarm hatred with reason and humor, and to persist despite decades of intractable opposition. Rose’s voice is needed as much today as it was when, inspired by the Declaration of Independence, she dedicated her life to arguing fearlessly for free thought, racial equality, and women’s rights.

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researching and sharing stories about woman suffrage since 2015, when she launched her Suffrage In Stitches project, for which she creates original crochet designs inspired by the women, events, and artifacts of the U.S. woman suffrage movement.


Eric Goldstein and Deborah Weiner’s *On Middle Ground* provides a fresh approach to capturing the history of the Jewish community of Baltimore. Building on Issac Fein’s *The Making of an American Jewish Community: The History of Baltimore Jewry from 1773 to 1920*, *On Middle Ground* explores Baltimore’s unique location at a “geographical crossroads” in Maryland, America’s oldest border state. From the outset, Goldstein and Weiner acknowledge the challenges that have precluded historians from producing a comprehensive history of Baltimore Jewry. Scholars who have endeavored to produce any kind of social history of Maryland have had to come to the task with not only the state’s geographical positioning but also its unique demographics, which have embodied characteristics that aligned with, as well as diverged from the culture and social practices of the Deep South.

Goldstein and Weiner frame their work the same way that Barbara Jean Fields’s *Slavery and Freedom on the Middle Ground: Maryland During the Nineteenth Century* (1985) contextualizes black freedom in Maryland during the nineteenth century. Their analysis also is similar to Robert Brugger’s *Maryland, A Middle Temperament: 1634–1980* (1996), especially his examination of Maryland’s history of political and social heritage. *On Middle Ground* examines how Baltimore’s “geographical settings, economic conditions, and ethnic and racial landscapes have influenced American Jewish life” (3); and it does so through the lenses of border state geography and urban demographics, especially the large African American population that has done much to characterize Baltimore’s history.
Taking this framework into consideration, Goldstein and Weiner chronicle the advent, evolution, and upward mobility of Jewish life throughout the various phases of Baltimore City, as well as Maryland’s history from the 1760s to the present. Each chapter centers around the experiences of Jews from every socioeconomic status—from immigrants to successful capitalists. It is in this vein that the authors chronicle Jewish economic and religious life, examining both ideals and practices in five distinct timeframes.

The first two chapters focus on early Jewish life in Baltimore during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Here, the focus is on the lives of the first Jews to arrive in Baltimore, particularly those who came as convict laborers when Baltimore was in its infancy and who were key in slowly developing the tobacco economy of colonial Maryland. Those knowledgeable about Reform Judaism would likely be familiar with Rabbi David Einhorn, whose vocal antislavery stance foreshadowed the relationship between blacks and Jews nationally. What may be less known is that Einhorn first took that stance in Baltimore and that the unique culture of the city presumably factored into his worldview. Goldstein and Weiner shed light not only on what Einhorn’s position meant to his relationship with his congregation but on the opposition that would come from rabbis of other Baltimore congregations: “Although these Jewish liberals were also animated by an aversion to the hateful legacy of the Know-Nothings, they differed from the vast majority of their coreligionists in viewing anti-black racism as an evil equal to anti-immigrant prejudice” (89). This dissent in Baltimore would foreshadow the dissent that would emerge in the Deep South.

Moreover, Goldstein and Weiner trace this dueling relationship—Jews who deplored Southern racism and Jews who were apologists for it—into the post-1880s. “Baltimore’s ongoing transition to an industrial economy,” the authors write, “offered opportunities to new immigrants, but it also produced many social and economic hardships that had not afflicted Jewish settlers of previous generations” (104). As the massive wave of Jewish immigrants continued to flood Baltimore, the “Golden Door to the South,” the city’s acculturated Jews doubled down, closing ranks in their community, hoping to maintain their social standing and community resources. Baltimore’s economic shift toward the industrial
sector, however—specifically manufacturing—created a niche for Jewish immigrants in the garment trades, one that would evolve into a booming industry. *On Middle Ground* points to the human side of this shift, highlighting figures such as Israel Denaburg and his brother-in-law Harry Feldman, who encapsulated such experiences. Natives of Russia, they eventually made their way to Baltimore and by 1905 had set up a shop as tailors and pressers.

Although Baltimore Jews attained some measure of economic success, a vast majority of Baltimore’s Jewish community found themselves at the bottom of Baltimore’s capitalist and industrial enterprise. Poor Jewish immigrants worked in the sweatshops of the Jewish-owned factories. It may seem that African Americans would have identified with the suffering of Jewish immigrants who worked in these inhumane conditions. However, as Goldstein and Weiner point out,

> compared with the discourse of middle-class whites, articles and editorials in the Afro-American were more likely to portray Jews as economic competitors and to express anger at how they exercised white privilege, edged African Americans out of business opportunities, and adopted the racist outlook of the majority culture (122).

The last two chapters chronicle the establishment of distinct Jewish communities, which emerged throughout the twentieth century, as Jews began to settle in northwest Baltimore. In examining this movement, the authors provide insight into the workings and utility of such neighborhoods, which “offered a safe space for the children of immigrants to experiment with becoming American” (180). Nonetheless, Goldstein and Weiner argue that these new neighborhoods served as a springboard for entrepreneurs who capitalized on the consumerism of the 1920s. In spite of the social and economic success that Jews began seeing, however, they still became more and more segregated, just as it had been during the interwar era. This segregation would continue into the twenty-first century and is still present today.

*On Middle Ground* provides a holistic approach to chronicling Baltimore’s Jewish community. Drawing upon rich sources spanning over 250 years—including manuscript collections, oral histories, and newspaper accounts—this history is told in concert with the history of
Baltimore’s Jewish institutions, and its diverse ethnic community bringing them to life in a way that is unique to Baltimore. *On Middle Ground* is a foundational work that uses Baltimore as a historical case study to analyze some of the influential culminations of American Jewish life.

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Toward the end of *Toward Nationalism’s End*, Adi Gordon’s new intellectual biography of the pioneering scholar of nationalism, Hans Kohn (1891–1971), Gordon muses about how different Kohn’s legacy can look in the light of different historical circumstances. Had this book been released in the early- to mid-1990s, Kohn might have been seen as a prophet of the triumph of the liberal-democratic West. He would also have been a seer of the inevitability of the accommodation of Zionism and the State of Israel to Palestinian human rights and national claims, an early champion of European economic and political unity, and a forerunner of the then-contemporary boom in “nationalism studies,” taking for granted the historically constructed nature of all national identities. Fast forward one generation, however, and the picture looks quite different. Liberal democracies have again lost confidence, threatened from within and without by renewed attempts to redefine the rights of citizenship as privileges of ethno-national majorities. Israeli-Palestinian peace talks have repeatedly broken down, with maximalists...
feeling emboldened. Europe is in danger of fragmenting in the wake of Brexit, as right-wing populist campaigns capitalize on the migrant crisis and on the failures of free-trade regimes to deliver shared prosperity. And scholars of nationalism are skeptical of the power and even the validity of Kohn’s World War II-era category of “civic nationalism,” intended to name a rational, Enlightenment-oriented tendency to root national identity in a galvanizing political idea of liberty and equality, rather than in blood and soil.

This brief, compelling thought experiment is very much in the spirit of the biography as a whole, throughout which Gordon deftly explicates Kohn’s changing political views against the background of his tumultuous times. Gordon has written a true intellectual biography: This is the story of Kohn’s ideas, far more than of his personal life. Gordon traces those ideas closely and carefully throughout Kohn’s many publications, showing how some are dropped while others are newly embraced; some are transformed into their opposites, while others remain a steady through-line in Kohn’s long career. Yet the real value of Gordon’s work lies not just in its contribution to Kohn scholarship but in its ability to maintain focus on the fluid interaction of ideas, personality, and circumstances. As such, it should be of interest to any intellectual historians, and not only to those with special interests in interwar Habsburg thought, Zionism, or U.S. Cold War ideology.

Of course, Toward Nationalism’s End is first and foremost a contribution to Kohn scholarship, and in that regard it tells a clear and powerful story. Gordon divides Kohn’s life and work into three major parts: youth in Prague, interrupted by service in the Great War and imprisonment in Siberia; interwar adulthood, which Kohn largely spent in Palestine in conflicted service to the Zionist movement; and later adulthood, when Kohn moved to the United States and developed his reputation as a foremost scholar of nationalism. Each of these is interesting in its own way, as Gordon places Kohn into conversation with friends, colleagues, and critics of various kinds.

In Part One, young Kohn becomes a Zionist, and Gordon vividly evokes the late-imperial Habsburg context (a pleasant surprise given the intellectual focus: In keeping with its biographical format, Toward Nationalism’s End offers no shortage of photographic documentation of
its protagonist, including some dapper shots of young Kohn in sailor getup and Central European finery). The constellation of influences that produced the unique spiritual Zionist orientation of the Prague Bar Kochba Society is given clear expression here, from its rejection of “Westernness” to its ambivalence about land to its valorization of the ethical and communal potential of national unity; all are accounted for as emerging from the Austrian, Czech-German-Jewish context in a logical manner that makes this now most distant of perspectives seem reasonable and powerful.

In Part Two, Kohn puts to the test his thesis that “Messianism and anarchist socialism will turn Palestine into Zion” (82) and finds that the Zionist movement (rather than his thesis) fails the test. The spiritual Zionism of the prewar period now had to contend with the British Mandate and the Balfour Declaration, as well as with a professionally and politically savvy Zionist leadership cadre invigorated by the new circumstances. This meant placing renewed emphasis on opposition to the nation-state, which Kohn saw as a principle on the wane. *Cuius regio, eius nato* (whose realm, his nationality) was a mere doomed echo of its post-Westphalian forebear, *cuius regio, eius religio* (whose realm, his religion), and Zionism had an opportunity to be the first national movement to build its common life on a different principle entirely. For Kohn, this was not only a good idea but also expressed the real essence of Judaism itself, of what he called “the political idea of Judaism” (120).

Of course, this dream was not to come true, and Kohn came to see his participation in the Zionist movement as a decades-long mistake. Nationalism could never be spiritual, there was no way around the state, and ethno-nationalisms in particular could only lead to barbarity and crime. Part Three tells the story, beginning in the early 1930s with Kohn’s move to the United States and continuing over the next four decades, of Kohn’s transition from leftist Zionist rebel to liberal American Cold Warrior. Only America, Kohn now believed, could represent civic nationalism against the dangers of fascist and communist totalitarianism. Kohn regarded fascism as a horribly exaggerated nationalism gone wrong, evidence of the folly of basing citizenship on nationality. He had a more ambivalent relationship to the Soviet regime, whose nationality policy he initially supported as cutting edge; eventually, however, he
came to see Russian imperialism as continuous from the czarist era to the communist one. From his time among bi-nationalist socialist Zionists like Martin Buber, Hugo Bergmann, and Robert Weltsch, Kohn now rubbed shoulders with men like George Kennan, Walter Lippmann, and Henry Kissinger. Gordon also highlights Kohn’s ambivalent relationship to the American Jewish community. On the one hand, Kohn considered the relative social mobility and cultural acceptance of American Jews to be a clear sign of the superiority of the U.S. model of civic nationalism. On the other hand, he was frustrated by the seeming disinterest among American Jews in actually stepping up to assume leadership of the world Jewish community, as well as by what he dismissively referred to as their “Zionist fellow-travelling” (an epithet he applied specifically to the leadership of the American Jewish Committee). Like many Yekkes, he never truly felt comfortable with American social norms and mores.

What Gordon conveys throughout this epic narrative is the consistent importance of Kohn’s concerns and his willingness to learn from anyone who would think with him at the level of global order (including conservative German geopolitical thinkers and Austrian economists). “What is fascism? What does it want? What brought it about? What explains its survival, global spread, and success? How can it be stopped and ultimately eradicated” (180)? Kohn answered his questions differently as his circumstances changed, but anyone interested in them will benefit from Gordon’s incisive, sympathetic, yet critical presentation of his trajectory. Especially since, as Gordon trenchantly concludes, “His Sisyphean struggle with nationalism is now ours” (256).

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Arlo Haskell, the executive director of the Key West Literary Seminar, has written a rich narrative of America’s southernmost Jewish community. His mission is to bring the Jewish presence of Key West into the American experience. “In all the tales of pirates, wreckers, spongers, and cigar makers collected … by folk historians, Jews were left out. This book strives to recover this lost history and reach a fuller understanding of the island’s past” (169).

Born and raised in the Florida Keys, Haskell’s DNA has been primed for the task. Filling our mind’s eye with images of weathered peddlers, robust merchants, and enterprising shopkeepers plying their wares and hustling travelers and tourists, we meet the folks who were instrumental in developing the culture and infrastructure of the city. Through family anecdotes and personal memoirs, archival photos and historical research, the Jewish evolution of Key West is revealed from the ground up, from the colonial era and the founding of the twenty-seventh state (1845) through to the end of the 1960s.

For the most part, Haskell has provided a historical context to his narrative that adds a perspective of Southern attitudes and brings a fresh understanding to the matter at hand. For example, the new licensing fees of 1860, which taxed every peddler, itinerant trader, and nonresident transient trader, were, in part, a reaction to the increasing conspicuousness of Jews as well as their accommodation to blacks in an environment where a racist mentality prevailed. Similarly, the reader gains insight into the 1892 invitation by leaders of the Cuban Revolutionary Party for Key West Jews to establish a cell of the party (Club Abrabanel): More than just raising funds to support José Martí’s efforts for Cuban independence from Spain, it also featured prominently in the nurturing of future community Zionist leaders such as Louis Fine, who, in 1898, together with R.L. Meyerson and S. Landes, launched Cheïvere Zion, a branch of the Federation of American Zionists.

These textured accounts of individuals and events would have even more bounce if a number of other themes would have been discussed in the narrative. The Sephardim, for example, are only mentioned in passing although they were present in Key West, especially after their expulsion
from the Ottoman Empire and migration to Cuba before moving on to Miami. Also missing are discussions about the links between Jews building Jewish infrastructure and economic networks in other cities in Florida (e.g., Pensacola and Jacksonville) in the nineteenth century and Miami in the early twentieth; or how industrialism shaped Jewish growth with the coming of Flagler’s East Coast Railroad (1912) and the introduction of the car and the opening of U.S. Highway 1 in 1938.

Haskell tends toward generalizations without strong evidence-based data to make arguments and draw conclusions. Jews never made up large numbers, and by 1930, Haskell reports, “oral histories say [that] there were only twelve Jewish families remaining” (131). Thus, like many microhistories of a place, Haskell has given visibility and shape to the contribution of Jews but has overstated their influence and understated global and regional ripples that have played an intrinsic role. It is not that Jews were not present during Prohibition, in smuggling activities, in coming to Key West as illegal immigrants, and in assisting others to come as illegal immigrants; it is rather how much weight one gives to them in these various activities. Do a few individuals represent a communal effort? Scholars such as Paul George, who have plowed some of the field before Haskell, have come to a different conclusion.

The strength of the book are the verbatim accounts by Jewish witnesses, the illustrative images accompanying the text, the treatment of how Jewish institutions developed and by whom, and how Judaism and Jewish life grew and thrived in spite of natural disasters (hurricanes), economic downturns (government policies and the Depression), and antisemitism (KKK). Arlo Haskell’s chronicling of the story of Key West Jews has opened new doors for researchers and for those who visit Key West. It is a valuable template for all who seek to learn about local Jewish history and mine the materials around them with a forensic eye to bring to life the experiences and stories of those who forged American Jewish life.

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Most of America’s foundational texts—the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights—are readily accessible in original form, housed in archives and digitally reproduced so Americans can study both form and content. That is, with at least one glaring omission: the Ten Commandments. Theories and speculation about their existence and fate abound, but Jenna Weisman Joselit argues compellingly that, for Americans, their physical absence has largely been irrelevant. In *Set in Stone: America’s Embrace of the Ten Commandments*, Joselit sets out to explain how the commandments came to be “an expansive American phenomenon rather than a strictly denominational one” (6). The Ten Commandments, Joselit suggests, “furnished America with a pedigree. The Old World had its castles and coats of arms. The New World had the Ten Commandments.” The commandments, and the biblical covenant they signified, bestowed on the nation a “sense of election, buttressing its claim to be a latter-day Promised Land” (159).

To make this argument, Joselit chronicles how Americans have fashioned their own versions of the Ten Commandments just about everywhere, and in a dazzling array of mediums. Americans literalized the commandments, and thus Joselit organizes her chapters around the physical elements they used: stone, paper, stained glass, and film. Rather than focusing on the well-tread ground of theological, philosophical, and judicial dimensions of the ancient text, Joselit seeks to explain how and why “tangible, visual expressions of the biblical prescriptions opened a can of worms—over and over again” (6). Thus, the reader encounters seemingly endless iterations of the Decalogue: bookends, bookmarks, illustrated versions, cake toppers, bumper stickers, bracelets, and more.

The first three chapters of *Set in Stone* explore “how Americans imagined the Ten Commandments into being, positioned them above and below the earth’s surface, translated them into the vernacular, and rendered them common ground” (8). Joselit begins in the summer of 1860 in Newark, Ohio, where a local resident claimed to have excavated two ancient stone versions of the Ten Commandments from a
Native American burial mound. Controversy ensued not only as to their authenticity but also their origins; the resident claimed that they must have been brought to North America by members of one of the ancient tribes of Israel. Joselit plumbs the controversy to demonstrate the extent to which Americans throughout the country had embraced the commandments, “rooting them as much in the American psyche as in its landscape” (23). Such excavations to recover versions of the Ten Commandments have continued into the twenty-first century. Amateur archeologists have turned their attention to recovering another version of the commandments buried in the sand dunes just north of Santa Barbara, California: the set of Cecil B. DeMille’s 1923 film The Ten Commandments. More easily accessible than DeMille’s buried set, however, are the more than one hundred stone monolithic monuments erected by Paramount Pictures and the Fraternal Order of Eagles around the country to mark the release of DeMille’s second version of The Ten Commandments in 1956. Again, controversy abounded. The American Jewish Congress (AJC) found fault with the Eagles’ monument text, written by a representative from each of the Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish communities of Minnesota (where the Eagles were headquartered). The text combined elements of each religion’s slightly different versions of the commandments. As Joselit argues, the AJC believed that the reworked text was “less a demonstration of goodwill and brotherhood or an expression of fidelity to a common set of biblical values than a sleight of hand, a strategic move to render the biblical commandments nonsectarian and hence noncontroversial,” thus smoothing their placement on public land (37–39). Opposition to the monuments was understood to be a Jewish issue, one that neither Protestants nor Catholics took up. Ultimately, neither did the AJC. Not only were they unable to muster external support, but Joselit suggests that the AJC did not want to inhibit efforts of Jews to fit in. In doing so, they contributed to the construction of the Ten Commandments as the “stuff of common ground and consensus, or what would increasingly become known as the ‘Judeo-Christian tradition’” (43). Joselit reminds scholars that beneath the discourse of midcentury religious pluralism lurked nuanced disagreements and dissent.

In Chapter Two, Joselit recounts a series of readjustments—a
“collective change of heart”—toward the Decalogue beginning in the late-nineteenth century. Joselit argues that the commandments underwent a “subtle dethroning that would generate increasingly insistent questions about their role in modern society” (55). Growing fields of biblical criticism and archeology raised questions about truth that did not entirely displace the commandments, but Joselit sees a “chipping away of the commandments’ moral suasion, a weakening of their hold on the American body politic” (62). Instead, Joselit argues that the Ten Commandments were reframed “as a series of gentle cautions and helpful hints. Brought down from on high and thrust into the center of daily life, where compliance was encouraged rather than mandated,” the Ten Commandments were reworked into advice and self-help books (64). The structure, language, and sensibility of the commandments were applied to arenas as diverse as love, gardening, citizenship, and beauty in an increasingly messy and unpredictable modern world. Thus, the Ten Commandments became more commonplace and colloquial. Joselit avoids a narrative of declension, however, by arguing that the “vernacular embrace of the divine commandments” represented an expansion of their reach into the crevices of modern American life (76).

In the second half of the book, Joselit turns her attention to the ways American Jews embraced the Ten Commandments as visual markers of the compatibility of their dual identities. In San Francisco in 1905, Shearith Israel installed a stained-glass window that depicted Moses descending from El Capitan in Yosemite National Park, surrounded by the flora and fauna indigenous to California. As Joselit describes it, by situating the Ten Commandments in the American landscape, the stained-glass window became a “visual declaration of American Jewry’s commitment to the New World” (92). By the post-World War II era, the commandments “functioned much like an oversized mezuzah, or better yet, as a giant explanation point – we belong!” and signaled to Protestants, Catholics, and Jews their shared values. The commandments, now recognized as an American symbol, acted as the “visual companion” to Will Herberg’s tri-faith civil religion of Protestants, Catholics, and Jews (99).

Both of DeMille’s iterations of The Ten Commandments contributed to the transformation of the Decalogue from Jewish to American,
“reclassifying the covenant between God and the Israelites as a covenant between God and the American people” (124–125). This reclassification, in turn, reframed American Jews as the “latter-day descendants” of the Israelites to “feel at home in America, to see themselves as progenitors of the national narrative rather than as interlopers or johnny-come-latelies” (124–125). The annual showing of *The Ten Commandments* on ABC on the Sunday between Passover and Easter has carried this legacy forward, ritually marking ecumenical understanding and underscoring the relationship between faith and freedom.

Joselit’s style and prose are accessible and engaging, especially for popular audiences and undergraduate classrooms. Yet her analytical argument is almost buried, obscuring the links between her work and the voluminous literature on American Jewish identity negotiations and, especially, post–World War II interfaith efforts. Joselit is also notably silent on the larger American and global contexts for the transformation of the commandments into American symbols, most notably the emergence of the Cold War and the establishment of the State of Israel. This is, at least in part, a casualty of Joselit’s decision to organize her material thematically, which forces her to jump around in time and obscures the nuanced historical context for all the iterations she so deftly describes. Joselit’s tour of the Ten Commandments is, nevertheless, notable for bridging the wide gap between academic and general audiences, and it is exemplary in its attempt to tell a series of “tautly told tales” in which physical manifestations of the Ten Commandments provoked immense discussion and controversy.

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Rachel Kranson’s *Ambivalent Embrace: Jewish Upward Mobility in Postwar America* tells an often-surprising story of American Jewish life in the 1950s. Typically understood as a time of Jewish accommodation to larger trends in American social, cultural, and political life, the early postwar years, as chronicled by Kranson, offer instead a deep, rich, and sometimes counterintuitive narrative of Jewish America. In both their engagements in predominately non-Jewish communities as well as their understandings of what it meant to be Jewish, postwar Jews followed pathways at odds with our historical and historiographical understandings of the era. In a volume full of wonderful surprises that make perfect sense, Kranson succeeds in redefining the American Jewish 1950s and its impact on later decades.

Kranson argues a number of provocative theses. While the 1950s marked a rapid Jewish climb up the social mobility ladder, *Ambivalent Embrace* documents the ways that Jews “continued to identify with the Jewish history of poverty, even as their fortunes grew” (3). As Kranson explains, postwar Jews grew anxious as a result of “dissonance between the financial and social successes of midcentury American Jews and their deeply felt histories of exclusion and want” (3). With this, the volume explores an area of thin historiographic interest: the ways in which post-war Jews flinched in the face of seemingly unqualified American success. As Kranson concludes, her “intention is neither to celebrate Jewish financial success nor to echo the critics of the era who condemned post-war Jewish culture as shallow, inauthentic, or destined for decline” (16).

*Ambivalent Embrace* offers six chapters as well as a conclusion. It opens with “Materially Poor, Spiritually Rich: Poverty in the Postwar Jewish Imagination,” which adds to recent historical work on the nostalgic power of the shtetl and the Lower East Side. Kranson describes the search for a Jewish authenticity, informed as well by the creation of the State of Israel and its impact on American Jews. Chapter Two, an exploration of Jewish liberalism and postwar politics, chronicles Jewish concern that material prosperity would pressure a political move to the
right. Kranson finds that Jewish voting “showed that instead of ‘converting’ to the Republican party, new suburbanites tended to retain the political affiliations that they had known in the city” (48). The religious impact of suburbanization, the subject of Chapter Three, applies Kranson’s dialectic to Judaism and specifically to the ways postwar Jews sought to maintain a sense of faith. She focuses on synagogue models, telling the story of rabbis who navigated their desire to bring congregants closer to Judaism even as suburban life offered challenges to their work.

This book gifts its readers with deeper insights into a variety of important historiographic themes. Chapters Four and Five, covering masculinity in postwar Jewish America as well as middle-class Jewish femininity, apply research and approaches from gender studies to men and women in 1950s Jewish America. Kranson tells the stories of (male) rabbis and the ways in which the rapid economic mobility of their congregants threatened to undermine their own sense of masculinity. In a chapter focused on the impact of Hadassah, the author describes how “the gender patterns of suburbia … offered unprecedented opportunities for women to become leaders in religious and civic life” (116–117). The last chapter sets up the Jewish 1950s as the antecedent to the countercultural protests of the 1960s and beyond.

*Ambivalent Embrace* undermines much that scholars have accepted as fact about the early postwar years. It forces a re-evaluation of many academic assumptions just as it, with great deft, weaves the field’s latest historiographic insights into this era. Kudos to Kranson for taking a subject that seemed, on the surface, flat, and injecting it with complexity and deeper meaning.

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Over the past decade, the historiography on Zionism has undergone something of a renaissance. Where older studies focused mostly on organizational histories, regional developments, and individual biographies, the latest works have attempted to situate Zionism within international political, cultural, and intellectual contexts. These new histories have jettisoned the assumption that, from its inception, Zionists sought an independent state, illustrating instead how Zionist political thought on the question of sovereignty evolved considerably. Recent works have transcended ubiquitous Zionist rhetoric about the pitfalls of living in dispersion by illuminating how Zionists advocated not just for a Jewish center in Palestine but also embraced visions of a Jewish collective that would span the Middle East, Europe, and America. They have added contingency, finally, to the unlikely history of Israel’s founding by showing how Zionism in the early twentieth century operated within a larger universe of Jewish nationalism and internationalism populated by non- or anti-Zionists, such as socialists, autonomists, and territorialists, who competed with Zionist visions of Jewish politics.

James Loeffler’s remarkable new book, *Rooted Cosmopolitans: Jews and Human Rights in the Twentieth Century*, deepens these interpretive tracks, offering new insight into the interface between Zionism and Jewish internationalism. Written in stimulating prose and bringing to light exciting archival research, this prosopography tells the story of how five Zionist and non-Zionist Jewish-rights defenders pursued varying understandings of human rights before and following World War II.

The book begins by exploring the legal scholarship and political activism of three men, Herschel Lauterpacht, Jacob Robinson, and Maurice Perlzweig, all of whom made the case for a Zionist internationalism that merged support for a Jewish national home in Palestine with collective rights. These collective rights for Jews and the many other minorities of interwar Europe would be guaranteed, the three men hoped, by the force of international law vested in the League of Nations. The book then turns to the conceptual world and political lobbying of Jacob Blaustein
and his confreres in the American Jewish Committee (AJC) who, during and after World War II, sought an “anti-nationalist gospel of human rights” via the United Nations (UN) that would ensure individual—not collective—liberties for all, much to the consternation of the Zionist internationalists. The final section of the book chronicles how a third iteration of human rights, one that privileged anticolonial self-determination over collective minority as well as individual human rights, gained credence in the halls of the UN, marking the defeat of Zionist internationalism and leading to the ostracizing of Jewish NGOs and Israel at the UN through the 1960s and 1970s. The book pays particular attention to how the conflict between old and new understandings of human rights played out in Amnesty International, a human rights NGO founded by one-time Zionist and Perlzweig pupil Peter Benenson.

Loeffler succeeds at telling a fascinating story of how the biographies of his protagonists intersected, all while advancing compelling arguments and recovering untold episodes concerning the overlapping histories of Zionism, internationalism, and human rights. One of the book’s chief contentions is that the origins of the human rights movement lay not in the horrors of the Holocaust, nor in the universalist imperatives of a putative Judeo-Christian tradition, but rather in the interwar Zionist goal of securing collective rights for Jews and other minorities living in the newly founded states of Central and Eastern Europe even as Zionists had been granted a national home as part of the British Mandate over Palestine. The distinctly European political and intellectual conditions that fostered Robinson’s, Lauterpacht’s, and Perlzweig’s merging of a particular minority’s collective rights within a universalist program of international law sets the stage for Loeffler to juxtapose the Zionists’ views with those of Jacob Blaustein. Loeffler explains how Blaustein’s individualist conception of human rights that so befuddled the Zionist internationalists drew from American iterations of liberalism, idiosyncratic American Jewish political needs, and larger American Cold War foreign policy imperatives. Rooted Cosmopolitans’s incorporation of the AJC’s human rights vision within a wider story of Jewish internationalism will therefore be of special interest to American Jewish historians committed to comprehending familiar historical narratives within a broader transnational optic.
The centering of interwar Zionism in the history of Jewish internationalism, minority rights, and human rights, however, can sometimes obscure as much as it reveals. *Rooted Cosmopolitans* gives the impression that Zionists were the leading theorizers and proponents of Jewish internationalism in the interwar years. This elides the rich history of the fusion between Yiddish socialism and nationalist autonomy that percolated in the early twentieth century. Such was manifested, for instance, in the career of the peripatetic intellectual Chaim Zhitlowsky, a transnational figure in his own right whom Loeffler mentions in passing but whose views on Yiddish culture, nationalist autonomy, and geopolitics do not receive the airing they deserve. The book neglects to probe, moreover, how the stalwarts of interwar Zionist internationalism grappled with the challenges of statehood—and the existence of a substantial Arab minority within the state of Israel—after 1948. As one example, it is not at all clear how someone like Robinson, who served as an esteemed Israeli diplomat following the state’s founding, reconciled his longstanding commitment to collective minority rights during the interwar period with the state’s unwillingness to extend the same to Arabs.

Nevertheless, these are minor quibbles with a first-rate history of Jewish internationalism in the twentieth century that, in its claim that Zionism and human rights at one time complemented rather than contradicted one another, will be sure to challenge contemporary partisans on the left and the right alike. It should command the serious attention of generalists and specialists in the fields of modern Jewish history, American Jewish history, the history of Israel, international legal history, and twentieth-century geopolitics.

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Rafael Medoff’s edited book incisively shares a number of stories and thoughts about the War Refugee Board (WRB) and, more generally, the U.S. government response to the plight of Jews trapped in Europe during the Holocaust. Some of the material is not new, as the articles borrow substantively from previously published works. What is new, however, are many questions that are both implicitly and explicitly raised about the Roosevelt administration’s—and America’s—conflicted response to European Jewish refugees. The book also looks at various organizations that strove valiantly but futilely to help those caught in Hitler’s desires to destroy Europe’s Jews. Sadly, Medoff’s work is particularly timely today, given the many questions and critical thoughts offered about current American policies toward immigrants at its southern borders.

This collection of articles makes little effort to allow the main actors of U.S. government policy to escape withering judgments about their failures to help European Jews survive the Holocaust. For example, Sharon Lowenstein’s “A New Deal for Refugees,” first offered in 1982, is reprinted to offer a history of some of the efforts of the War Refugee Board, which was created in 1944 by the ever politically sensitive Franklin Roosevelt to counteract “Zionist” outrage at his failures to do little to bomb Auschwitz, to follow through on directives to support partisan efforts to help Jews, and most important, to view Jewish needs as valuable or important beyond “winning the war.”

Throughout this volume, other writers—Medoff, Laurel Leff, and Karen Sutton, in particular—mete out written wrath toward Breckinridge Long and fellow workers in the State Department, including Carlton J.H. Hayes, for “slowing down” and “refusing” directives to save Jews; toward various American newspapers, such as The New York Times, for not taking seriously reports of mass murders forwarded to them by Jewish agencies and European partisans; toward the British government for its cold and calculated unconcern with European Jewish lives in Nazi-dominated countries as well as Palestine; and even toward...
Jewish leaders in the United States, such as Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, who put their own narcissistic needs for stature against other Jewish leaders who had hoped to save European Jews.

But primary source interviews with Josiah DuBois and John Pehle, heads of the WRB, and articles about the WRB and U.S. institutional policies are terribly important to address issues from the past as well as issues today. Searing questions such as, “Why did Roosevelt respond so politically to the Nazi atrocities?” or, “What prompted certain agencies and leaders to help spearhead efforts to move beyond antisemitic or tepid responses to the fate of European Jewish refugees?” also force students to think about, “What does this say about American response to immigration crises that are so prevalent today?” The answers carefully parse a series of factors: white Anglo-Saxon American and British refusal to respond empathetically to “other” refugee needs outside the United States; potential class concerns among haves and have-nots in America that promote xenophobic responses to new immigration; the sacrifice of ethical concerns to political prerogatives of sitting presidents; as well as internecine warfare within government branches and agencies that prevent thoughtful but necessary efforts to solve refugee problems that plague wealthier societies throughout the world.

This is an important and well-researched book for many reasons—but most of all for its insistence that students of Holocaust, American immigration policy, and American military and social history grapple with questions and answers that are intensely complex and sometimes very unsatisfying. It is, particularly, a must-read today to provide some historical perspective on present-day heated discussions over American values.

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Scholars of immigration have toiled for years on the question of how mobility affects nationalities and group identities alike. In *Jews on the Frontier*, Shari Rabin gives this framework an interesting twist by investigating mobility’s influence on religion. By relying on personal letters, published articles, and other first-hand testimonies, Rabin argues that the expanding United States created a uniquely American religion.

Whereas travel throughout Europe for Jews in the late eighteenth century was impeded by bureaucratic states (e.g., Russia, [19–20]), Jews in the United States traveled relatively freely. Such unencumbered mobility caused a strain for the Jewish faith (and for other organizations, as well), which sought to standardize practices of its believers. As Rabin notes, “the mobility that inspired them also challenged their cohesion and consistency” (32).

Opportunities for personal renewal or adventure lured many European Jews to distant locations in today’s West or Midwest. In response to the scarcity of formalized traditions there, Jewishness sometimes adapted local circumstances, constituting itself through civic organizations and bending to economic demands like working on the Sabbath, for example. Culture also shifted, and here the study is especially intriguing. “Seeking stability and identity in the face of logistical challenges,” Rabin writes, “Jews embraced ideals like romantic love, the nurture of children, and sentimentalized death, which could serve the fulfillment of traditional Jewish strictures but could also hinder, redirect, or expand them.” Often, they were without “the materials of traditional Judaism,” such as kosher meat or Torah scrolls (59, 78).

The evidence illuminates this study’s arguments, but the author might have presented a table of all informants and sources to give the reader a sense of how representative, or exhaustive, the study claims to be. Without it, we are left with intriguing but sometimes frustrating passages, like, “Indeed, American Jews belonged—and sort of belonged, and didn’t belong—to a range of social groupings, of which congregations seem to have been one of the less popular options,” or, “Amidst this
chaos, some Jews would join congregations and others would not; some would marry Jews and others would not; some would keep kosher and others would not; and some would perceive God as mandating halakhic observance, while others would see divine will as requiring only good behavior” (53, 98). We see the points on the graph here, but what is the overall trend? This frustration is, perhaps, a critique applicable to most studies reliant upon cultural history, a frustration impossible to resolve definitively, but an important issue nevertheless. Despite this, one does come away from the study with a sense of the ad hoc nature of American Jewishness and how it was influenced by U.S. expansionism.

Finally, an unresolved historical dilemma suffuses the text: Is this study restricted to “the frontier,” or is it arguing for a unique Jewish tradition nationwide in scope? Some evidence presented—coming from The Occident and American Jewish Advocate, published in Philadelphia, and with passages originating in Newark, New Jersey (42) and Mobile, Alabama (43)—creates a productive tension between frontier and nation. Other evidence clearly comes from Jews on the fringes of American settlements further west and adheres to the titular framework. This push and pull might have been addressed more systematically, but the questions that arise from it (e.g., what was the relationship between frontier and nation?) make the topic all the more relevant and important, especially for the nineteenth century.

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