Review Essays

Remembering the Lower East Side

Hasia R. Diner, *Lower East Side Memories: A Jewish Place in America* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000), 219 pp.

Hasia R. Diner, Joseph Shandler, and Beth S. Wenger, eds., *Remembering the Lower East Side: American Jewish Reflections* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), 291 pp.

Roger Daniels

In April 2001, a few months after these books were published, the Lower East Side was added to the National Register of Historic Places. Such a designation does not forbid alteration or even demolition, but does provide tax credits for owners who make approved restorations. The district is an L-shaped area extending from Allen to Essex Streets and from East Houston to Division, only a small portion of what the scholars in these books and most New Yorkers have thought of as the Lower East Side. Anyone who wonders why this has happened—and why now—would do well to consult the two books under review here.

They are united by their common topic and by Hasia Diner, author of one and co-editor of the other. Diner tells us that the anthology grew out of a conference, "Remembering the Lower East Side," held at New York University in May 1998, and it was while involved in the conference that she decided to expand an unpublished essay into a book. These two books are thus complementary but not congruent; each is a significant contribution to our knowledge, and Diner's *Lower East Side Memories* is the most important work on the area since Moses Rischin's *The Promised City*,[1] which will solidify her position as one of the premier historians of American immigration and ethnicity. Rischin, the doyen of American Jewish historians, also has a connection with each of the books under review: he contributed an essay to the anthology and read Diner's manuscript for the Princeton press.

After my first reading of Diner's book, I reacquainted myself with the classic *The Promised City*, thinking that it might be instructive to

compare the two. The latter shows the influence of his mentor Oscar Handlin. But where Handlin's Boston was "a city where no promise dwelled," Rischin's immigrants— and their children—speak with "the voice of stubborn hope." His book is crammed with history, statistics, sociology, and insight. His mission was to "tell the story of New York's first great meeting with the social problems of the modern city as told through the experience of East European Jews." (vii)

Diner, appropriately for a *fin de siècle* historian, is concerned as much with memory as with history. Her book is not a history of the Lower East Side: as she points out, no such history has yet been written. (n. 47, 186) She writes as "a historian interested in furthering our understanding of how American Jews made sense of their past as they contended with a particular kind of present." (14) And although as the author of, among other things, the second volume in a five-volume *History of the Jewish People in America*,[2] she knows very well that American Jewish history did not start on the Lower East Side, she can still call it not only "the sacred place of the American Jewish Past" (x), but also "the American Jewish Plymouth Rock." (8; see also p. 130)

Raised in Milwaukee and without familial background in New York, she describes a personal epiphany "when for the first time I, with my husband and children, took a walking tour of the Lower East Side sometime in the 1980s. I felt that I had 'come home,'" (12) It would have been unthinkable for a scholar of Rischin's and my generation to write something like that and, I must confess, there were moments in my first reading of the early pages that I was a bit uneasy about what was to come and what I would have to say about it. I need not have concerned myself; her post-modern sensibilities embellish this book, but the mature scholar almost always remains in charge.

In addition to the traditional literature and her personal experience, Diner relies on a wide variety of sources, many of them from popular culture. These include a 1951 children's book "that located the Lower East Side as the site of American Jewish memory" (11); the comic Mickey Katz's "Ballad of Duvid Crockett"; two animated cartoons by Stephen Spielberg about a family of mice, the Mousekewitzes, who immigrate to America; an acute comparative analysis of the three film versions of *The Jazz Singer* (1927, 1953, and 1980), as well as an episode of the television cartoon series, *The Simpsons*, that does a takeoff on it; and, of course, more traditional texts by such authors as Abraham Cahan and Anzia Yezierska, as well

as some appropriate photographs.

Her well-argued and persuasive thesis is that the sanctification of the Lower East Side was a product of the last half-century:

> the "discovery" of the Lower East Side as a powerful theme in American Jewish memory culture and the "discovery" of the Holocaust as a cornerstone of American Jewish identity happened together. In the 1960s the Lower East Side, as a shrine of memory, became universalized and firmly established. After that *all* American Jews referred to it; *all* public presentations of Jewishness emanated from the image of the Lower East Side. (175–76)

I am much more comfortable with the first part of that defining quotation than the second, with "a powerful theme" rather than "*all* American Jews...*all* public presentations." In the city where I have lived for a quarter of a century—I was born on the corner of Second Avenue and Eleventh Street—many public presentations of Jewishness have been totally independent of the Lower East Side or its image. In fact, Cincinnati, the home of Isaac Mayer Wise and Jacob Rader Marcus, appears in this volume only to note that Stephen Spielberg was born there. But the book is so rich that one can almost—but not quite—ignore the occasional hyperbole.

Remembering the Lower East Side, an anthology of thirteen essays preceded by excerpts from online "conversations" among the three editors, is wonderfully and profusely illustrated with photographs, maps, cartoons and other images. Because I cannot do justice to all the essays in a review, I will list them in order of appearance and then comment briefly on several: Moses Rischin, "Toward the Onomastics of the Great New York Ghetto: How the Lower East Side Got Its Name"; Deborah Dash Moore and David Lobenstine, "Photographing the Lower East Side: A Century's Work" Paula Hyman; "Beyond Place and Ethnicity: The Uses of the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire"; Riv-Ellen Prell, "The Ghetto Girl and the Erasure of Memory"; David Kaufman, "Constructions of Memory: The Synagogues of the Lower East Side"; Stephan F. Brumberg, "The One-Way Window: Public Schools on the Lower East Side in the Early Twentieth Century"; Suzanne Wasserman, "Re-Creating Recreations on the Lower East Side: Restaurants, Cabarets, Cafes and Coffeehouses in the 1930s"; Jack

Kugelmass, "Turfing the Slum: New York City's Tenement Museum and the Politics of Heritage"; Eve Jochnowitz, "Send a Salami to Your Boy in the Army: Sites of Jewish Memory and Identity at Lower East Side Restaurants"; Seth Kamil, "Tripping Down Memory Lane: Walking Tours on the Jewish Lower East Side;" Joseph Dorman, "The Lower East Side in the Memory of New York Jewish Intellectuals: A Filmmaker's Experience"; Aviva Weintraub, "Performing Memory: 'The Matzoh Factory' on the Lower East Side;" and Mario Maffi, "Translating Abraham Cahan, Teaching the Lower East Side: A View from Italy."

In view of the rich menu of essays it may seem churlish to complain about omissions, but it does strike me that, not surprisingly, the focus is on places and not on intangible institutions. For example, *landsmanschaften* are ignored except for brief references to *landsmanschaft shuls*, and there is no real discussion of ethnic variety among Jews on the Lower East Side. At least one essay might have been devoted to the numerous non-Jewish neighbors among whom the Jews lived.

When he published *The Promised City* Rischin was not concerned with how the Lower East Side got its name; in his essay here, while unable to pinpoint "exactly in what year or month or on what day or hour" the name giving occurred, it is clear to him that it was done in the first five years of the new century. He prints a 1905 map which is the earliest such "to come to my attention." For two-plus decades before that, he argues, the prevailing term, popularized by Israel Zangwill and Abraham Cahan, was "New York Ghetto," although Jacob Riis, who never used the current name, often called it simply "Jewtown."

While I neither prayed nor went to school on the Lower East Side—I never really lived there until the mid-1940s—I did eat there, so I can relate to and salivate because of the essays by Wasserman and Jochnowitz. Both even mention Ratner's where, when one was a little short—which for me was most of the time— you could fill up on the baskets of rolls that were always on the tables while paying for a bowl of soup. I was pleased to learn that it survives, but disappointed though not surprised to learn that it now has a back-room martini bar called Lansky's Lounge and that it is no longer cheap. And although no one ever sent *me* a salami, there were two guys from Cleveland in my outfit in Korea who got them regularly and sometimes would give

me a hunk.

Finally, I want to comment on the one exotic essay in the book, the "outsider's view" by the Italian Mario Maffi, a professor of American literature at the University of Milan. The author of a cultural history of the Lower East Side,[3] he gives a fascinating account of his personal discovery in 1975 of America, the Lower East Side, and the novels of Abraham Cahan whose translator he has become. And, although he does not refer to it here, he has organized a wonderful slide show of what the contemporary Lower East Side looked like in the early 1990s and which he presented to a fascinated audience at the *Institut für Amerikastudien* in the University of Innsbruck when I taught there in 1996.

In history, of course, there is no such thing as a last word. But together these books give us an end-of-century, state-of-the-art look at perceptions of the Lower East Side. It seems to me that we need not only the detailed history of the territory whose lack Diner points out, but also some comparative studies of the similarities and differences between the Lower East Side and other Jewish American neighborhoods. Only when those tasks have been completed can we test the validity of many of the claims made in the works under review here.

Roger Daniels is Charles Phelps Taft Professor of History at the University of Cincinnati. His most recent book is American Immigration: A Student Companion, *published by Oxford University Press in 2001.*

NOTES:

1. *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870–1914* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1962). It was based on his 1957 Harvard dissertation.

2. *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820–1880* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962).

3. *Nel mosaico della città Differenze ethiche e nuove culture in un quartiere di New York* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992); American edition, *Gateway to the Promised Land: Ethnic Cultures on New York's Lower East Side* (New York: New York University Press, 1995).

The Sociological Study of Conservative Judaism in America

Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and their Members, **edited by Jack Wertheimer (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 407 pp.**

Dana Evan Kaplan

Jews in the Center is the culmination of a project funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts to study the Conservative movement and its members. The project was organized in 1994 by the Ratner Center for the Study of Conservative Judaism at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. Jack Wertheimer, the director of the Ratner Center, recruited a number of sociologists to work together on the project. This is the main feature that distinguishes this collection from most other such volumes, where numerous contributors each send in a chapter and a single editor works them into a cohesive volume. The result is a uniformly impressive series of studies that helps us to understand the dynamics taking place within the Conservative congregation today. Although there are no "bombshell" conclusions similar to the 1990 National Jewish Population Survey (NJPS) finding of a 52 percent intermarriage rate, the research is superb and the final articles are illuminating.

In this case, a group of sociologists worked together for several years with approximately six thousand Conservative Jews who provided data in one form or another. The Ratner Center undertook a number of original studies that were intended to complement the information available in the 1990 NJPS. These included a congregational survey conducted by Ariela Keysar and Wertheimer in which the rabbis of three hundred and seventy-eight out of the seven hundred and sixty United Synagogue congregations participated. Also, Steven M. Cohen and Paul Ritterband conducted a membership survey that studied the responses of seventeen hundred individuals from twenty-seven randomly selected congregations in North America. In addition, Barry A. Kosmin conducted a survey of nearly fifteen hundred recent Bar and Bat Mitzvah celebrants, along with one parent for each youth. Finally, Samuel C. Heilman and Riv-Ellen Prell undertook two separate ethnographic studies. Heilman studied two

Conservative congregations in New York while Prell studied two in Minnesota.

The research team met regularly over the course of about two years in order to discuss the findings and to coordinate the various research activities. Although some of the information gathered has already been reported upon, this volume is the first in which that data is presented in a comprehensive manner. As Wertheimer explains in his introduction, "The goal throughout was a coherent and unified study rather than a series of loosely connected projects."[1]

The Centrism of the Conservative Movement

All of the authors stress the "centrism" of Conservative Jews and Judaism. Although many of its leaders do not particularly like this designation, the Conservative movement is usually considered to be the "middle-of-the-road" Jewish denomination. Despite the fact that this may not please the ideologues in the movement, it may very well be precisely because of this centrism that the movement has been able to appeal to such a wide spectrum of people. Sidney and Alice Goldstein write that they expected that individuals who identified themselves as Conservative Jews would show levels of religious identification lower than that of the Orthodox and higher than that of the Reform, and indeed the data from the 1990 NJPS confirmed this presumption. It also indicated that Conservative Jewry have sociodemographic characteristics that in many cases are also between those of the Orthodox and those of the Reform. As an example, it appears that Conservative Jews have higher levels of general education than the Orthodox, but lower levels than the Reform. In terms of mobility, Reform Jews are the most likely to move and the Orthodox the least. Conservative Jews fall somewhere in the middle.

The Goldsteins point out the obvious but important fact that just because someone identifies as a Conservative Jew, it does not mean that he or she necessarily follows a certain line of belief or a certain approach to ritual practice. Rather, "Jews identifying themselves as Conservative cover a broad spectrum of behavior, from the very observant to those who are only marginally connected to Judaism."[2] The authors then try to differentiate between members and nonmembers, finding that nonmembers tend to be younger people who never marry or who have been divorced, while members tend to

be older, married, and with children age fifteen and older, living at home.

A Smaller But Stronger Movement

Steven M. Cohen argues that despite the fact that many Conservative Jewish leaders have expressed an almost constant sense of disappointment with their movement over the course of many decades, the movement remains relatively "strong," "healthy," and "vital." While the Conservative movement is in the process of shrinking in terms of its relative percentage of the American Jewish community and perhaps even numerically, the Jewish "quality" has been increasing. Cohen writes that the "quality" of the younger generation "generally surpasses that of the older members."[3] The author argues that "they are more observant, more active in the synagogue, more Jewishly educated, and more committed to Conservative Judaism."[4]

Cohen attempts to explain why it is that the Conservative movement will experience a decline in its numbers at the same time as its younger generation appears to be more committed than the previous generation. His explanation is that very few Conservative-raised adults now in their twenties, thirties, and forties who have intermarried have joined Conservative synagogues. Since the intermarrieds come disproportionately from homes that were less active in their synagogues, their departure means that a higher percentage of those left come from much stronger backgrounds. Cohen explains that "[t]he selective impact of intermarriage...is part of the explanation for the changes in the character of Conservative Jews now underway."[5] The author argues that the Conservative movement is better off stressing that it remains committed to retaining high formal and informal demands and that any effort to slow numerical decline by lowering standards will fail in the long run. Cohen argues that the Conservative movement should sharpen and exploit its qualitative edge rather than attempt to compete with the Reform movement for the less committed.

Regional Differences In Affiliation Patterns

Sidney and Alice Goldstein, the authors of *Jews On The Move,*[11] not surprisingly stress that one of the key factors in the growth of the Conservative movement in the 1950s and 1960s was the dramatic

population movement from cities to suburbs. Though this resulted in a massive synagogue building boom, a lack of congruence between the official ideology of the Conservative movement and the beliefs and ritual behavior of the congregants created an anomalous situation. The Goldsteins believe that since only about 41 percent of American Jews affiliate with a synagogue, the many American Jews who are unaffiliated with a synagogue, but nevertheless identify themselves as adherents of a particular denomination, are ignored. Therefore, they argue that any sociological study should include not only those formally affiliated, but also those who are unaffiliated but still identify themselves with the movement.

The American Jewish population has been extensively redistributed throughout the United States, and this has had a dramatic impact on the Conservative movement. Many Jews who had lived in the Northeast and the Midwest have moved to the South and the West. Large numbers of new residents have arrived in cities such as Phoenix, San Diego, Denver, Las Vegas, and Atlanta. As a consequence of this demographic shift there has been a dramatic growth in the number of Conservative Jews living in the South and the West. As an example, nine out of ten Conservative Jews living in the Northeast in 1990 were born in that region, whereas only one out of four Conservative Jews in the South were born there and one out of three of those in the West. But the Goldsteins state that during the period of 1985-1990 the pace of change slowed down, and this may give the communities in the various cities in the South and West time to reorganize. Also, migration has been multidirectional. Nevertheless, the migration patterns suggest that Conservative synagogues in the Northeast and Midwest will have a very different type of social profile than their counterparts in the South and West. Although the Goldsteins do not explore this question in great depth—such a task could take a book in itself—the data that they do bring indicates that it is becoming increasingly difficult to speak of a uniform Conservative movement nationwide.

There were also significant regional differences in affiliation patterns. A high percentage of members are concentrated in the Northeast, whereas nonmembers are most likely to live in the South and Midwest. Members are more likely to have higher levels of education—both general and Jewish—while nonmembers are more likely to have less. Since affiliated Conservative Jews are the most

visible to the leadership of the movement, their characteristics have been assumed to be representative. But this is not the case, since nonmembers are far less active than are members. The Goldsteins argue that these individuals therefore "...represent a population in need of outreach through special programming geared specifically to younger persons, to those not in traditional families, to those who may be financially constrained, and to those alienated from the formal structure of the Jewish community."[12] Reaching these unaffiliated individuals who nevertheless identify themselves as Conservative Jews is critical for the future of the Conservative movement. This is particularly true because other potential sources of new members such as the non-observant Orthodox have been depleted or because, as in the case of the intermarried, the Conservative movement is unlikely to successfully attract large numbers.

Dramatic Socioreligious Changes

What becomes apparent throughout the book is just how many socioreligious changes have occurred in the Conservative synagogue. One of the most noticeable and important has been the acceptance of egalitarianism. Whereas a generation ago virtually every congregation restricted the ritual roles that women could assume, today the situation has changed dramatically.[13] The Jewish Theological Seminary has been ordaining women as rabbis for more than fifteen years[14] and women can also become Conservative cantors, ritual directors, educators, and administrators. Seventy-nine percent of Conservative synagogues have had a woman president.[15]

There has been much discussion in recent years over how the baby boomers approach religion and how that has changed the American religious landscape.[16] In terms of the Conservative movement, the shift in leadership from an older generation to the baby boomers has had a dramatic impact on how lay leaders and synagogue professionals interact. As a result of their high educational and occupational achievements, younger leaders tend to be much less deferential to rabbis and other synagogue professionals. They also expect to play a much more central role in shaping congregational policies and programs, and exhibit a much greater willingness to innovate than did their elders.

The baby boomers have been strongly influenced by a new

approach to culture and society. Americans today are much more informal than they were a generation ago and they expect to actively participate at a far higher level than did their elders. They like being spontaneous and are far more willing to "seize the moment." When applied to the Conservative synagogue, these sensibilities have had a dramatic impact on the religious and social atmosphere.

The younger generation of Conservative Jews has on the whole been exposed to a much broader range of Jewish educational experiences than have their elders. In addition to a Hebrew afternoon school or even a day school, many participated in a youth movement, a Jewish summer camp experience, one or more visits to Israel with their family or a group of teenagers, and so forth. Whereas for many of their parents being Jewish was a "Phillip Roth" type of experience, the baby boomers see it as a logical manifestation of a multiplicity of formal and informal educational experiences.

Conservative Judaism as a Postmodern Phenomenon

One of the most interesting essays in the collection is the conclusion by Nancy Ammerman of Hartford Seminary's Center for Social and Religious Research. She suggests that there are "deviant cases" or "outliers" that do not seem to fit into the modernist paradigms that have created two major alternatives for those who would continue to be religious. Either one develops a creative synthesis that takes modern sensibilities into account along with traditional faith or one retreats into a cloistered community which actively works to keep out any modern influences that are felt likely to be corrupting. A third group is of course those who choose to reject or ignore religion entirely.[6] Ammerman sees the case of Conservative Judaism as not fitting in with any of the above three options. She finds this particularly fascinating because by spotting nonconformist trends, the astute sociologist of religion is perhaps able to see how patterns are changing and developing. Ammerman sees the survival of the Conservative movement as part of an emerging new paradigm that she calls postmodernist. This is not the postmodernism of radical deconstructionism, but rather

> [T]he postmodernism I mean is one that has a "yes, but" character. It begins with the realities of modern reason, individualism, and pluralism and looks for the ways in which

> those modes of explanation are no longer sufficient. To invoke a postmodernist paradigm is to suggest that the realities of the modern situation are still with us, but their limits are recognized and overcome. Reason, specialization, and pluralism are not likely to go away, but we are beginning to recognize that what looked solidly modern has all sorts of cracks and crevices in which new forms of life are emerging, and old, unnoticed ones have been thriving all along.[7]

Ammerman reaches conclusions similar to that of Cohen. "While losing adherents is never good news, it has had a kind of winnowing effect, shedding those least involved in belief and practice and leaving the more devoted core."[8] This core will seek out higher levels of Jewish education alongside a new-found commitment to the centrality of God in a manner that exemplifies the "postmodern acceptance of multiple modes of knowing."[9]

Ammerman writes that the fact that Conservative Jews are building a distinctive denominational culture while at the same time increasingly interacting with the broader culture is typical of urban religious communal identities of all types. It doesn't surprise her that under these circumstances you have a new paradigm emerging. Young committed Conservative Jews are increasing their levels of observance by modern (or postmodern) choice rather than premodern necessity.[10]

Recent Controversy

Orthodox Rabbi Avi Shafran recently attacked the Conservative movement in *Moment* magazine. In an article titled "The Conservative Lie," Shafran argues that while the leaders of the Conservative movement proclaimed loyalty to Halacha, they have actually "trampled" it.[17] This essay has generated a great deal of discussion and anger. *Jews in the Center* does not provide any clear-cut answer to Shafran's charge, in large measure because there is no simple sociological answer to what is a complex ideological and theological debate. But the book will certainly provide a great deal of information that can be useful, not only by scholars but for partisans arguing with each other through the pages of the *Forward* or from the dais of the 92nd Street YMHA. This controversy is only one aspect of a broader

debate over the future of Judaism in the United States. The Conservative movement will play an important role in reconnecting with the many alienated Jews who constitute a hefty percentage of the American Jewish population.

One can expect that as the debate over how to stimulate a "Jewish Renaissance" heats up, the question of how the Conservative movement can best market itself will attract more and more attention. Already one can see a heightened interest in the Conservative movement. The Wertheimer volume is one indication of renewed scholarly interest. The late Daniel J. Elazar and Rela Mintz Geffen published another work just a few months later. Their effort is titled *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities.*[18] This second work is a very different type of manuscript. Although Elazar and Geffen touched on the same issues, they write on a much more popular level and are not hesitant to confront difficult realities. Already on page 5, they bluntly state that the Conservative movement faces a major problem because of its "lack of clarity of ideology, mission, and purpose." The authors outline this and other problems and make detailed suggestions for confronting and overcoming them. For the serious reader interested in the subject, the Elazar/Geffen book is a highly suitable complement to the Wertheimer volume.

Jews in the Center is a masterful collection that shows how scholars, religious leaders, and members of congregations can work together to produce a manuscript of the highest caliber. Although not an easy book to read for the casual browser, the book is a source of a great deal of valuable information and insightful analysis. I recommend it highly.

Dana Evan Kaplan is the Oppenstein Brothers Assistant Professor of Judaic and Religious Studies at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and is a research associate at the University of Miami.

NOTES:

1. Jack Wertheimer, "Introduction," in *Jews in the Center: Conservative Synagogues and their Members*, edited by Jack Wertheimer (New Brunswick, N.J., and London: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 6. Unless otherwise stated, all essays come from the Wertheimer volume.

2. Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein, "Conservative Jewry: A Sociodemographic Overview," 78.

3. Steven M. Cohen, "Assessing the Vitality of Conservative Judaism in North America: Evidence from a Survey of Synagogue Members," 46.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid. 47.

6. Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, *American Mainline Religion* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 286. Roof has recently charted the emergence of five distinct subcultures: dogmatists, born-again Christians, mainstream believers, metaphysical seekers, and secularists. Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999).

7. Nancy T. Ammerman, "Conservative Jews within the Landscape of American Religion," 366.

8. Ibid. 375.

9. Ibid. 385.

10. Ibid.

11. Sidney Goldstein and Alice Goldstein, *Jews on the Move: Implications for Jewish Identity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996).

12. Ibid. 80.

13. For an overview on Jewish women in twentieth-century America, see Joyce Antler, *The Journey Home: Jewish Women and the American Century* (New York: The Free Press, 1997). For a slightly dated but still useful introduction to American Jewish feminism, see Sylvia Barack Fishman, *A Breath Of Life: Feminism in the American Jewish Community* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

14. On women in clergical positions, see Paula Nesbitt, *The Feminization of the Clergy in America: Occupational And Organizational Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997). For an overview of the impact of feminism on religion, see Rita M. Gross, *Feminism & Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

15. Jack Wertheimer, "Introduction," 7.

16. See for example Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys Of The Baby Boom Generation* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1994).

17. Avi Shafran, "The Conservative Lie," *Moment*, February 2001, 52–55. Shafran stood by his article but did note that the title was chosen by the *Moment* editors.

18. Daniel J. Elazar and Rela Mintz Geffen, *The Conservative Movement in Judaism: Dilemmas and Opportunities* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000).

Book Reviews

Jeffrey Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson, Miss.: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 165 pp.

The murder trial, dubious conviction, and lynching of Leo Frank remains one of the most sensational episodes in American Jewish history, and many scholars have examined its importance. Leonard Dinnerstein's *The Leo Frank Case* (Columbia University Press, 1968), written more than thirty years ago, is still cited often in survey histories of American Jewish life, anti-Semitism, and nativism. Some historians of American Jewish life even have used the affair to mark a dividing point between the golden era of Jewish immigration and the rise of nativist sentiments after 1915.[1] International comparisons also have been recognized; Albert S. Lindemann (like some observers in 1915) compared the Frank trial and its aftermath to France's Dreyfus affair and the Beilis affair in Russia.[2] And Nancy MacLean has offered a strong interpretation of the Frank affair based on gender and power relations.[3]

With the subject given its due in the historiography, one might ask why another book on the Frank affair is necessary. In *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial,* Jeffrey Melnick, assistant professor of American Studies at Babson College, claims that the Frank affair provides a lens through which to examine some of the intricacies of black-Jewish relations in the United States. He reads portrayals of Frank, the Jewish boss at Atlanta's National Pencil Company, alongside those of Jim Conley, a black sweeper at the factory where Mary Phagan, a thirteen-year-old employee, was murdered in 1913. Most recent works profess Frank's innocence despite his conviction and some argue that Conley is the more likely perpetrator; Melnick does not enter into this debate. Melnick aims instead "to suggest the myriad ways we might explore anew the relationship of African Americans and Jews." (133) And Melnick convincingly argues that these relations cannot be understood without context; thus, in the Frank affair, Melnick rightly argues, black-Jewish relations must be considered in conjunction with gender, labor relations in the new South, and whiteness. In his effort to provide rich, textured readings of the gender, regional, and racial

components of the Frank affair, Melnick is successful. At the same time, the book lacks narrative flow; the individual chapters all read as self-contained articles on various aspects of the Frank case, with the chapters on perversion and "narrating villainy" reading much more convincingly than the others.

In one of his strongest chapters, Melnick argues that the perversion charge against Frank so central to the trial allows readers "to explore the often uncomfortable and certainly unacknowledged differences in the ways Jews and African Americans have been objectified." (47) Relying on primary sources including the trial transcript and newspaper accounts of the trial, as well as a broad reading of secondary literature, Melnick deliberately examines the multiple meanings of the rumor that Frank performed oral sex on Phagan before her murder. He convincingly demonstrates that, in contrast to the stereotypes surrounding black male sexuality, Frank was vilified in part "because his sexuality seemed unhealthy: it is partial, unwhole, nongenital." (73) Melnick shows that, despite the feminization of Frank and stripping of his male power, Frank could still be portrayed as a sexual predator, guilty of abusing and killing a thirteen-year-old girl. Melnick successfully weaves class and sex together as he argues that Frank's power in the capitalist system (as the employer of the victim) was central to the ability of his opponents to label him a predator.

Melnick does not address the portrayal of Jim Conley with the same level of depth as he does Frank, but that may be because the sources are not available to do so. Nevertheless, one salient point Melnick makes about Conley is that, in an interesting reversal of contemporaneous African American experiences, Conley's illiteracy effectively allowed him to be set free. During the trial, Conley took and failed a literacy test; his failure supposedly proved that he was incapable of writing the notes found near Phagan's body after her murder. This evidence was instrumental in exonerating Conley. Melnick rightly points out the irony here: literacy has so often been a key to liberty throughout African American history, whether it be for a slave able to write an autobiographical narrative or for African Americans denied the right to vote based on literacy requirements. In Conley's instance, that relationship between literacy and liberty was upended.

Melnick also provides insight into the relationship of Jewishness

and whiteness through his close readings of the many portrayals of Leo Frank. Frank's whiteness was uncertain and contested during the trial and its aftermath; Melnick clearly explains his own aim in this study: "What I want to stress most of all is that differing economies of racialness competed with each other throughout the case; that is, we do not have to decide whether Frank was *always* considered white, but rather *when* he was assigned that position." (140, n. 14, emphasis in original) This important insight about the relationship between a Jew and whiteness, unfortunately relegated to a footnote rather than underscored within the text, reveals the importance of the instability of whiteness for Jews during the early twentieth century. Melnick's demonstration of whiteness as a shifting and contested characteristic deserves to be developed beyond the one instance of Leo Frank, and future considerations should take note of Melnick's deft analysis of Frank's relationship to whiteness.

Melnick has also made an important contribution by putting black-Jewish relations on trial in an instance during which there was relatively infrequent direct interaction between blacks and Jews. He shows that relationships to a variety of other identities—including those of labor and capital, blacks and whites, whites and Jews—are always central to black-Jewish relations. Black-Jewish relations are thus not a fixed thing, but a process "made up of the constant shifting of gears" (132), continually refigured based on a variety of identities including (but not limited to) blackness and Jewishness. Melnick hopes that his work will bring black-Jewish relations out of the current "comforts of the linear 'rise and fall' narratives that have heretofore defined this subject." (133) He has taken a very good step in this direction, albeit with only one, admittedly influential and crisis-ridden, episode in American history.

Daniel Greene, a Ph.D. candidate in history at The University of Chicago, is writing a dissertation on the Intercollegiate Menorah Association and The Menorah Journal.

NOTES:

1. In his survey, *A History of the Jews in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), Howard M. Sachar begins his chapter, "The Golden Door Closes," with the Frank Affair. See also, to name just two of many examples, Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks 1915–1935* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977, 1995); and John Higham, *Strangers in the Land* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1955).

2. Albert Lindemann, *The Jew Accused: Three Anti-Semitic Affairs Dreyfus, Beilis,*

Frank 1894–1915 (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

3. Nancy MacLean, "The Leo Frank Case Reconsidered: Gender and Sexual Politics in the Making of Reactionary Populism," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991).

Yaakov Ariel, *Evangelizing the Chosen People: Missions to the Jews in America, 1880–2000* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 366 pp.

In recent years there has been a renaissance in the field of American Jewish history. In view of the Jews' success as a group and their influence on cultural, political, economic, and social life in America during the twentieth century, many studies have emerged attempting to explain this historical phenomenon unprecedented in other western countries. Recent examples are Stephen Whitfield's impressive study *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (1999) and Sylvia B. Fishman's *Jewish Life and American Culture* (2000). Very few scholars, however, have attempted to explore how the history of the Jews in modern America was influenced by the host Christian society, especially its Protestant culture. This is indeed the unique historical perspective offered by Professor Yaakov Ariel's excellent book.

Ariel's study shows for the first time the full extent of the rich history of Protestant missionary efforts directed toward the Jews in America, examining it in the broader context of the Christian-Jewish relationship. Based on an impressive array of primary sources, and placed within a wide historical and theological context, Ariel's study is a model of scholarship. Despite its title, the book in fact deals with both the history of Protestantism and the history of the Jews in modern America, thus greatly contributing to a better understanding of the important role assigned to religion in American society during the twentieth century. It will undoubtedly serve for many years as the authoritative study on the issue of the Christian-Jewish relationship in the United States.

During the 1960s and 1970s many Jews and Christians were surprised to see the rise of a large and vigorous movement of Jewish converts to Christianity. The ideological and social roots of this movement can be traced back, as Ariel skillfully describes, to powerful nineteenth-century pietist and evangelical impulses among Protestants in Europe, England, and America. Based on a premillennialist messianic view that "considered the Jews to be the chosen people, heir to the covenant between God and Israel" (220), Christian missionary efforts accorded the Jews a singular role in the events leading to Christ's second coming and the transformation of the world into the Kingdom of God, thus emphasizing the "central role of the Jews in the divine program for the End of time." (9) Such

an eschatological and apocalyptic approach is indeed one of the great merits of Ariel's study; he looks at Protestant Christian missionary efforts toward the Jews in the wider context of the Protestant philosophy of salvation history. The book is thus an important continuation of the author's previous pioneering study, *On Behalf of Israel: American Fundamentalist Attitudes toward Jews, Judaism, and Zionism, 1865-1945* (1991). In the present work he shows how essential this apocalyptic and eschatological attitude is for the understanding of the content and form of Protestant missions to the Jews in America.

Within this broad ideological and theological context, the author traces the inception of the movement to evangelize the Jews in America through three distinct and well-defined stages. If in the 1870s there was only one mission laboring among the Jews in America, by the 1910s dozens had sprung up, employing hundreds of missionaries. During this first period, premillennialist missions were directed at the thousands of Jewish emigrants from Eastern Europe, concentrating especially on young people and offering a variety of social services in order to win them to the Christian faith. (9–78) The second stage, between 1920 and 1965, saw the adjusting of Christian missions to the changing face of Jewish society in America, focusing more and more on the second generation and increasingly moving to middle-class Jewish neighborhoods. With the great transformation that took place in American society in the 1960s and 1970s, during the third stage, 1965 to 2000, missions became part of Jewish life. Jews are now accustomed to encountering missionaries on the streets and to be invited to visit their centers. With the information revolution of the last decades of the century, Jews faced missions through advertisements in newspapers and magazines as well as on the Internet.

Professor Ariel's study takes the reader on an extraordinary journey to learn about a variety of people, institutions, and movements, all aiming at evangelizing the Jews. He describes the host Christian religious culture that nourished these missions and the changing attitudes toward Jews among Protestants, as well as the various ways in which Jews reacted to them. This broad survey of the Christian-Jewish relationship exposes an important and generally unknown terrain in American religious history. In contrast to Christian states in Europe, where there is an established church, in America the lack of a formal religious structure offers the opportunity for a

dialogue and negotiation among different groups. The book, therefore, deals not only with the Christian mission to the Jews, but also with the unique religious space that made it possible due to the separation of church and state. Thus, unlike Europe where Jews formed separate cultural groups, in America "the social and cultural separateness of the Jews has been seriously eroded" during the twentieth century, resulting also in the expansion of "the number of converts to evangelical Christianity." After a hundred years, as Ariel's study shows, "the movement to evangelize the Jews is as energetic as ever" and "the missionaries are more than optimistic about their future stature and growth." (291) Such a prognosis says much about the Jews, as well as about the Protestant movement in America.

With this impressive book, Professor Ariel has established himself as a leading scholar of the Christian-Jewish relationship in America. It will surely serve as a model for future analysis of the rich negotiations taking place among other religious denominations in America. Further, the valuable insights provided by this study will enhance understanding of the important role of religion in American history.

Avihu Zakai is Chair of the Department of American Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He is the author of Jonathan Edwards's Philosophy of History: The Re-Enchantment of the World in the Age of Enlightenment, *Princeton University Press, forthcoming.*

Michael A. Meyer and W. Gunther Plaut, *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* (New York: UAHC Press, 2001), 228 pp.

This compilation of documents related to the development of Reform Judaism in North America will make a concise and useful companion for any student of Jewish denominational history. The editors have divided their texts into twelve topical chapters, tracing historical patterns of practice and belief under each heading. For example, in examining Reform perspectives on "Zionism and Israel" (Chapter 8), the selected texts bring the reader from the official anti-Zionism of the Central Conference of American Rabbis in 1897 to the same organization's "Zionist Platform" a century later.

The intended audience for this book, as noted in its preface, is "individuals and... study groups in universities and synagogues." (vi) One can imagine different academic and social settings for which this text would be appropriate. Its most apparent use would be for congregational adult education programs seeking English-language text study. (Though some of the earliest documents cited in the book were in German, they have been translated by the editors.) A twelve-week course might be built around the different chapter headings. A synagogue ritual committee might find it interesting and beneficial to study the chapters that discuss the changes in liturgy and practice. This book might also be appropriate as a confirmation class text, providing high school students with access to original documents.

The structure of the book is nicely organized and easily followed. The editors selected texts that represent both mainstream and peripheral ideas, and their introductions to each chapter put the selections into their appropriate contexts. Some of the selections are available in other works (such as Plaut's *Growth of Reform Judaism: American and European Sources Until 1948* or Meyer's *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism*). The uniqueness here is that in this new volume one can easily find texts that are of immediate relevance to the contemporary Reform Jewish community. *The Reform Judaism Reader: North American Documents* would be a valuable addition to any home or synagogue library.

Rabbi David Komerofsky is Associate Dean of Students and Director of the Rabbinical School at Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion.

Kurt Stone, *The Congressional Minyan: the Jews of Capitol Hill* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, 2000), 582 pp.

In Congress there are numerous groups and caucuses that represent any number of ethnic backgrounds and special causes. There is no official "Jewish Caucus." But that is not to say that Jews have not been represented in Congress. Nor does it indicate that Jews have not been influential in Congress. Instead, it shows that they have taken a different path. This book is an invaluable reference aid to those interested in the history of Jews in the American government. It contains over five hundred and sixty-eight pages of biographical sketches, followed by sources used. It is arranged alphabetically, from Gary Ackerman, a New York Democratic representative (1983–) to Edward Zorinksy, a Nebraska Democratic senator (1976–87). Each sketch details the personal life and the political careers of the individuals. One such individual, the Whig Judah P. Benjamin (also a noted Confederate and the last southern senator to resign his seat prior to the Civil War) never denied his Jewish heritage. However, when a Swiss-American treaty restricted the presence of Jews in Switzerland, Benjamin chose not to speak on the issue. Benjamin later became the Confederate secretary of state, and still later a lawyer while living in exile in Paris. For the purposes of this work, a Jew has been defined as one with a Jewish parent, though they might practice another religion. An added bonus to this book is the appendix, which gives numerous statistics about Jewish representation in Congress. If you need to know the number of Jews from Iowa, or their political parties and dates, this is the place to look.

Robert Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Charleston: University of South Carolina, 2000), 518 pp.

The Jewish Confederates adds greatly to the knowledge about the Jewish Confederate—not only the David Yulees, but also the Rosanna Ostermans of Galveston, Tex., who gave comfort to Southern soldiers. (226) Thoroughly researched, this book details hundreds of Jews who participated in the Confederate dream at all levels. The bibliography itself is a valuable research tool. It begins with Jewish views prior to the start of the Civil War. It then examines the subject topically, rather than chronologically, with chapters on Jewish gentleman officers, the Jewish Johnny Rebs, and the occupied home front. The final chapter comments on the post-Civil War era and how the Jewish Confederates

came to be forgotten. At times, Rosen reintroduces individuals who appear earlier in the narrative, which can be confusing. However, despite the immensely detailed nature of this work, it remains extremely readable. Extensive use of photographs and direct quotations enliven the individuals' stories.

Melinda McMartin earned an M.A. in American history and an M.L.S. with a concentration in archival studies from the University at Albany in Albany, N.Y. She received her B.A. cum laude *from Kenyon College, Gambier, Ohio.*