

Book Reviews

Catherine Collomp, *Rescue, Relief and Resistance: The Jewish Labor Committee's Anti-Nazi Operations, 1934–1945*, Translated by Susan Emanuel (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 364 pp.

Catherine Collomp, emerita professor of American history at Université de Paris, has written an award-winning history of the New York-based Jewish Labor Committee (JLC) and its limited but successful effort to coordinate its networks to rescue Jewish and European labor activists, support anti-fascist resistance movements, settle refugees in the United States, and publicly protest Nazism. Her transnational history challenges the claim that Jews in the United States ignored the plight of European Jewry under fascist violence and makes a compelling case for the significance of the JLC in its rescue and relief work.

The JLC, formally formed in 1934 in response to German and Austrian attacks on social democrats and labor leaders, had its origins in the pre-World War I immigration of Yiddish-speaking, Central European Jews into the United States—immigration that was in response to state-supported violence. Most JLC leaders had been active in the Jewish Labor Bund, a socialist workers' movement active in the Pale of Settlement in the Russian Empire, before immigrating to the United States. Their membership in the United States drew from the largely Jewish and socialist membership active in the garment trade unions and from noncommunist and non-Zionist mutual aid and political organizations. Collomp argues that JLC leaders' transnational relationships and identities predisposed them to view Nazism as a threat to more than Jews and trade unionists; Nazism threatened democracy for all. The focus of JLC's activism changed over time in response to the unfolding crisis in Europe, but its commitment to fighting Nazism abroad and antisemitism in the United States remained constant.

In three chronological and three thematic chapters, Collomp identifies

two main phases to the JLC's efforts. The first, from its founding in 1934 through the early war years, focused on rescuing leading activists in socialist and socialist democratic political parties, trade union movements, anti-fascist militants, and Russian Mensheviks. Because most socialist leaders in Weimar Germany were Jewish, JLC activism demonstrates a uniquely Jewish expression of transnational anti-fascism committed to the survival of Jewish socialism and its institutions.

In a chapter full of revelations, "Trajectories of Exile, Rescue Operations," Collomp uncovers the connection between the JLC and American Frank Bohn and rescue work in France. Bohn worked closely with the Emergency Rescue Committee and Varian Fry in Marseille, France, to rescue anti-Nazi refugees. Collomp also documents the work of the JLC in rescue operations in France once Bohn left. This chapter of the JLC's story had been erased in Fry's account of his rescue activities and in later histories that drew upon Fry's perspective. Collomp's research is significant because it uncovers a key period between July 1940 and December 1941, when the JLC worked through the American Federation of Labor, the U.S. State Department, and European diplomats to get visitor visas processed for labor and socialist leaders and their families so they would be able to escape totalitarian regimes without needing individual financial affidavits. By 1942, the JLC took responsibility for rescuing 1,500 "labor leaders and men of letters" (123). A few of the JLC's lists are reprinted in the book's appendix.

The second main phase of JLC's activity emerged as World War II raged and fascism spread across Europe. Adding to its attempt to save European socialists and their institutions, JLC leaders worked to save Europe's Jewish people. Through their European contacts and connections, the JLC offered humanitarian assistance to Polish Jews who were forced to flee to the Soviet Union. They also sent money to underground organizations in Poland. Some of these resources found their way to the Warsaw Ghetto, allowing its resistance fighters to pay for weapons used in the uprising. The JLC also raised funds to support underground noncommunist French labor and socialist parties and movements and French Jewish organizations more generally. The JLC dealt in information, as well, transmitting underground information to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), teaching that agency the "value of union

networks in the subversion of political regimes” (238). After the war, the JLC committed its funds and efforts to rebuilding Jewish life in Europe, with a special focus on orphaned children.

Collomp’s study is an important contribution to our understanding of how this American organization used its Jewish, socialist, and labor ties to intervene on behalf of those who shared its political worldview throughout Nazi Europe. And while many of the acronyms, organizations, and politics of European socialist movements will be at times confusing to scholars of the United States, Collomp’s findings about the role of the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and, later, the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO) in support of the JLC are compelling. The JLC maintained a strong relationship with the AFL and CIO through its ties to the leadership of the International Ladies’ Garment Workers Union and the American Clothing Workers of America. Collomp challenges traditional labor narratives by documenting AFL leaders’ support for JLC efforts to rescue European socialist and social democratic leaders under Nazi assault when the United States was officially neutral. That the JLC did not support communists—and downplayed the Jewish identity of the socialist and trade unionists it sought to save—helped. As the war raged, the AFL and CIO Joint Committee coordinated with the JLC to find resources to support underground European labor movements. During the Cold War, some American JLC activists continued to work with the AFL against communism, but for Collomp, the postwar imperialist agenda of the AFL was quite different than the civic and political commitments of the JLC to reconstruct Jewish life in Europe and Palestine and to fight against all forms of totalitarianism.

Collomp’s multilingual skills allow her to follow Jewish and socialist networks across the United States and Europe’s many labor and socialist movements, political parties, and organizations. Her ability to trace activism as widely as she does reinforces the significance of the JLC as a rescue organization and is one of the book’s strengths. The dizzying number of organizations and individuals that move in and out of the story is a testament to the broad international network that formed to fight fascism and save lives, institutions, and cultures. The study, most useful to graduate students and scholars of Jewish and labor movements,

provides an excellent foundation and guide for future scholars to further develop the individuals, politics, and contexts in which this tragic crisis unfolded.

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Shirley Idelson, *We Shall Build Anew: Stephen S. Wise, the Jewish Institute of Religion, and the Reinvention of American Liberal Judaism* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2022), 280 pp.

In little over two hundred pages, Shirley Idelson has turned biography, institutional history, and social and religious history into a fast-paced, exhilarating, and suspenseful story. And not just that—for her story doubles as a compelling argument that the subject of the biography, Stephen S. Wise, and the institution he founded, the Jewish Institute of Religion (JIR), played a decisive role in “reinventing” American liberal Judaism.

Like all good history, Idelson’s story sharpens our awareness that things weren’t always as they are. Once upon a time, American Judaism of all stripes opposed Zionism. Once upon a time, Jewish studies was absent from universities in Europe and America. Once upon a time, “*tikkun olam*,” in name and substance, was remote from the agenda of Reform Judaism. Once upon a time, the population of Jews in America was growing rapidly, synagogue numbers were expanding, and Jewish religious movements were flourishing. Once upon a time, there were no women or LGBTQ+ rabbis. And once upon a time, rabbinical giants roamed the land.

Wise was unquestionably a rabbinical giant. While a competent scholar with *šmicha* from Adolf Jellinek in Vienna and a doctoral degree from Richard Gottheil at Columbia, what truly set him apart were his gargantuan passion for social justice, his profound fellow-feeling for Jews no matter their credal or halakhic inclinations (and for non-Jews who shared his commitment to the “social gospel”),

his outsized oratorical gifts, and a combination of immense self-confidence and courage (evident when, as a young man, he refused the offer to become rabbi of New York's Temple Emanu-El because its board chair, Louis Marshall, rejected his condition that the pulpit be "free," i.e., one in which the rabbi had total control of the substance of his preaching). Unsurprisingly, these traits, along with his indefatigable energy, brought Wise to the forefront of virtually every major progressive social and political cause of the Progressive Era. They also led him to Zionism, founded on the preeminence of Jewish peoplehood, and to suspicion of Jewish denominationalism, whose pillars—halakhah for Conservative and Orthodox, and theological rationalism for Reform—he found spiritually constraining and at odds with the fundamental importance of Jewish peoplehood (*klal Yisrael*). Social justice, Zionism, and *klal Yisrael* became, according to Idelson, the cornerstones of Wise's liberal Judaism and, along with open scientific inquiry into Judaism, the cornerstones of JIR, through which Wise intended to "reinvent" liberal Judaism in America.

Idelson recounts in detail the huge, and highly uncertain, undertaking that creating a new rabbinical school represented. Among the highlights are her vivid accounts of Wise's tour of European rabbinical schools to recruit faculty, the repeated efforts of Cincinnati's Hebrew Union College (HUC) to undermine Wise's enterprise, the challenges of creating a curriculum that could meet the diverse academic needs of students and faculty while nurturing their religious passion for Judaism, and the unsuccessful efforts to put the school on a secure financial footing and to find a president who could, unlike Wise, devote himself fully to the job. (Mordecai Kaplan accepted the position more than once.) Despite all the ups and downs Idelson depicts, that JIR played a critical role in reinventing liberal Judaism—the CCAR adoption of the Columbus Platform in 1937 was a turning point—emerges as little short of a miracle, though a miracle we can understand thanks to Idelson's expert narrating.

For all its success, Wise and the JIR failed miserably when it came to ordaining women. Idelson has done a great service by focusing attention on this issue, revealing its history from the beginnings of the school (the faculty voted to admit women in 1923!), identifying the

women who attended the school but were repeatedly denied ordination, and locating Wise's reluctance to ordain women in part in his chauvinistic attitudes, which sadly persisted at HUC-JIR long after women were admitted to the rabbinate.

Idelson's account of Wise's reinvention of liberal Judaism highlights, as noted earlier, how different American liberal Judaism once was. It provides, as well, a useful historical perspective for contemplating and creating a liberal Judaism for the future, as Jewish institutions weaken and rabbinical school applications dwindle. And of course, it enables us to recognize history's ironies, not least that HUC-JIR's New York residential rabbinical campus is poised to outlive Cincinnati's, and that Wise's liberalism no longer sits comfortably with the regnant forms of Zionism in the State of Israel. Lastly, and reflecting a personal note, Idelson's book is a gift to those of us whose fathers were among Wise's "men." Thanks to her, we now understand our fathers even better.

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Sarah Imhoff, *The Lives of Jesse Sampter: Queer, Disabled, Zionist* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2022), 288 pp.

Although Sarah Imhoff's *The Lives of Jesse Sampter: Queer, Disabled, Zionist* is not a first-person accounting of a life, it nonetheless brings to mind the distinction critics often make between memoir and autobiography. While the term *autobiography* generally is attached to the personal narratives of the famous few (and usually male) protagonists of history—the Ben Franklins, the Malcolm Xs—we often associate *memoir* with the more personal and partial stories of the many. In *The Lives of Jesse Sampter*, Imhoff engages in an act of life-writing that exists at the intersection of the many and the few, the public and the provisional, the historical and the personal, biography and memory.

Imhoff describes *The Lives of Jesse Sampter* as “belonging to a slightly off-kilter genre: weird biography” (3). Sampter is resoundingly not a

representative figure. Despite being a respected early-twentieth-century writer and proponent of Zionism, she is neither famous within the annals of Zionism nor does her life mirror that of the majority of women born during the same period. Instead, Sampter's life is ideal for a "weird biography" because it becomes "a way for [Imhoff] to think about the relationship between an embodied life and a body of thought—and a way for [her] to quietly theorize how those two things are entwined in wonderful and complex ways" (2).

That Imhoff's title invokes the multiplicity of Sampter's "lives" is not accidental. Sampter was a study in contradictions. Born in 1883 to an upper-middle-class, secular humanist Jewish family, she became a committed Zionist and Jew during her adulthood. Disabled by polio during her adolescence and in a long-term relationship with a woman with whom she lived for years at a kibbutz, Sampter embraced Zionism even as she pushed back against some of its central assumptions surrounding the body and heteronormative reproduction. *The Lives of Jesse Sampter* is a deeply feminist act of life-writing that reconstructs Sampter's lives without paving over the discontinuities between her experiences and the ideas with which she framed them. Imhoff writes:

Sampter's story is a story about disability and embodiment. It's a story about the particular: as a "cripple," Sampter saw the world differently; she experienced the world differently; and these differences matter. It's also a story about the universal: it does not allow its audience to avert their eyes from Sampter's embodied experiences, which should remind us that we all have bodies and that they structure all our experiences (105).

The Lives of Jesse Sampter is an ode to embodiment, undergirded by Imhoff's assertion that "historians and other scholars should think more and better about embodiment, and one of the best ways to do this is through a single person. A single body" (3). Despite this emphasis on Sampter's "single"—and singular—body, Imhoff makes it clear that "even a single body implicates other bodies: familial bodies, social bodies, and the body politic all make significant appearances here" (3).

One of the most important interventions Imhoff makes in *The Lives of Jesse Sampter* is her insistence on life-writing as an embodied practice that needs to take account the emotions and sensory experiences of the

subject, as well as their ideas and the “facts” of their lives. This insistence on embodiment connects Imhoff’s work—and, by extension, Jewish studies—to a larger genealogy of feminist and disability studies. Jewish studies has long been divided between those who see textuality as central to Jewish life and those who place embodiment at the center of the Jewish experience. Imhoff offers a radical reinterpretation of this debate in which the mind-body split does not, and cannot, exist.

Imhoff organizes her chapters via the broad theoretical categories through which she understands Sampter’s identity and experiences. Her first chapter looks at Sampter via her complicated religious identifications. Imhoff argues that Sampter’s varied spiritual interests—from secular humanism to Hinduism, from Christianity to the occult—are part and parcel of what she terms “religious recombination” (28), a practice of drawing upon diverse religious sources and traditions to comprise one’s identity. Although we often associate this sort of dipping between and among religious traditions with post-1960s America, according to Imhoff, it was common during Sampter’s lifetime and suggests that the category of religious pluralism is too narrow to explain how religion—much less Judaism—works in the United States and elsewhere.

Readers are treated to a thorough analysis of disability in Sampter’s life in Chapter 2. Sampter contracted polio as an adolescent and presumably, later, post-polio syndrome. Throughout her life, she had difficulty moving her arms and was plagued with chronic pain related to her condition. In this chapter, Imhoff effectively shows both how Sampter’s experience of disability mediated her Zionism and queerness even as her commitment to Judaism affected her sense of her disability. After Sampter moved to Palestine, she quickly experienced a collision between her own embodiment and the Zionist commitment to a healthy and muscular Judaism that framed her life and led to her helping to build a convalescent home on the grounds of the kibbutz in which she lived.

In the third chapter of *The Lives of Jesse Sampter*, Imhoff deftly explores Sampter’s queerness. As she acknowledges, queerness as we know it did not exist as a category during Sampter’s lifetime. Women’s friendships during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were often characterized by physical touch and expressions of romantic sentiment. Nonetheless, it is clear that Sampter experienced strong romantic and

sexual feelings for various women and lived for many years in a committed relationship with another Zionist and kibbutznik, Leah Berlin. She also adopted and raised a child on her own. Most interesting in this chapter is Imhoff's exploration of how disability acted to delimit the horizons of Sampter's own romantic and affective attachments in a way that had both painful and generative consequences, as well as consequences for her form of Zionism. Reading Sampter's life through the lens of her "queer desire" and her commitment to "queer kinship," Imhoff suggests that Sampter "queers" Zionism in provocative and useful ways" (108).

The fourth chapter explores what Imhoff terms the "theological-political" implications of Sampter's life—largely in terms of her experience of Zionism. Sampter's embodied experience both challenged and undergirded her commitment to Zionism and acted as a prod to challenge some of the movement's central precepts. Imhoff asks: Is it possible to "queer" or "crip" Zionism or any nationalist project, or do the contradictions inherent in the Zionist movement make this impossible? Is there a way that Zionism can co-exist with democracy? The answers to these questions are not entirely clear.

Nonetheless, Imhoff never shies away from bucking accepted wisdom—whether it comes in the form of grappling with the absence of work on religion in disability studies or on embodiment in history. She is similarly nuanced in her appraisal of Sampter herself—particularly in Chapter 4. As Imhoff notes, Sampter was often ahead of her time, even as she embodied deeply problematic, if common, attitudes, such as racism or Orientalism. Sampter was fascinated by Sephardic and Yemenite Jews (the child that she adopted and raised was a Yemenite orphan named Tamar), as well as non-Jewish Arabs, even as she viewed these groups as culturally inferior to European and American Jews such as herself.

Along with her introduction, Chapter 5, Imhoff's coda on Sampter's "afterlives," is one of the most useful portions of the book for scholars looking for an entryway into doing the sort of boundary-pushing work Imhoff does. Here, Imhoff looks at the various ways in which Sampter was received and, sometimes, erased after her death. She relates:

Yet it is not my goal to find Jessie Sampter the national writer and make her into an icon. It is not my quest to have her memorialized like

Herzl, with a town named after him and a giant sketch of his head on its water tower. It is to tell a messier story of a complex human being—a human being whose life seems so particular and unusual and yet has lessons for a broader understanding of humans. It is also to suggest that a messier story, including attention to embodiment as a central part of that story, might be a new way to tell the stories of iconic thinkers and writers (221).

Like the work of brilliant writer and theorist Saidiya Hartman, whose concept of critical fabulation has revolutionized how African American history is written, Imhoff's work on Jesse Sampter offers a radical methodology for writing an embodied Jewish history that is attendant to the messier story of Jewish lives, iconic or not.

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Rafael Medoff, *America and the Holocaust: A Documentary History* (Lincoln: Jewish Publication Society, University of Nebraska Press, 2022), 352pp, 41 figures, 2 tables; Daniel Greene and Edward Phillips, eds., *Americans and the Holocaust: A Reader* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2022), 265pp., 48 color images.

For the past year, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) exhibition “Americans and the Holocaust,” which opened in Washington, DC, in April 2018, has been shown in towns and cities across the United States.¹ In September 2022, Ken Burns's latest

1 The USHMM exhibition “Americans and the Holocaust” is also freely accessible as an online exhibition: <https://exhibitions.ushmm.org/americans-and-the-holocaust/main>

documentary, *The U.S. and the Holocaust*, with a runtime of over six hours, was broadcast on PBS to widespread acclaim. Given these recent projects, one might assume that the topic of U.S. responses to the Holocaust and a more critical view of the United States' attitude in the face of this catastrophe is a novelty connected to our political moment. Amid geopolitical instability, economic and democratic crises, and the global climate emergency, it is tempting to turn to history for insight: How did America's and Americans' national narratives, proclaimed values, and self-image fare when confronted with such an extreme event as the mass murder of millions of innocent people by the Nazis? What did Americans know and do? What lessons can be learned?

In academia, however, and particularly among historians of Jewish history, this topic has been the source of a "historical storm" that has been "going on for half a century."² What we are now seeing, then, is merely the latest attempt to explore this topic's contested political implications for the present and the playing out of this debate for a wider audience. The two books under review here—two primary-source collections, both published in 2022—naturally contribute to the current public discussion. But they first and foremost constitute addenda to existing voices and interventions in the academic field and, interestingly, reflect two quite different scholarly stances and institutions. Rafael Medoff is a long-standing participant in the debate, a prolific writer on American responses to the Holocaust, and the founding director of the David Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies in Washington, which has made this topic its focus. Much of the material in his *America and the Holocaust*, therefore, are sources and copies of sources held by the Wyman Institute and used in previous research and publications. The other book, *Americans and the Holocaust*, includes a preface by USHMM's director Sara Bloomfield and was published by Rutgers University Press together with the museum. It was assembled and edited by Daniel Greene, curator of the abovementioned USHMM exhibition, and Edward Phillips, who directed exhibitions programs for

2 Miriam Sanua Dalin. Review of Medoff's *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust in American Jewish History* 105, no. 4 (2021): 582–584.

USHMM from 1994 to 2018. Subtitled *A Reader*, this book constitutes a scientific supplement to the exhibition, presenting the information in a less processed form.

At first glance, the two books appear to have much in common. Aside from some superficial differences such as the format and use (or non-use) of color, they have almost the same title, as well as similar content, length, and explicit aim. They each present approximately one hundred primary sources, contextualized and introduced as educational resources to be used in combination with existing respective institutional platforms and materials.³ They both have a chronological structure, emphasizing the importance of temporality in tracing reactions. Indeed, the question is not just *what* people knew, but what they knew *at different times*. Both books also highlight how various actors and groups responded, emphasizing the diversity of American responses and American society as a whole. They therefore tackle many of the same themes: responses to the rise of Nazism, refugees, and immigration; reactions to the 1936 Olympics, the *Anschluss*, and *Kristallnacht*; the noninterventionism of the U.S. government and President Roosevelt's and his administration's changing attitudes toward Jewish persecution as the war went on; and, finally, the consequences of emerging knowledge—or lack of knowledge—about the Holocaust. For this, the authors draw extensively on the media, published and archival documents, Gallup polls, and images. Inevitably, many of the documents are the same.

However, upon closer observation, it becomes clear that the two books showcase quite different approaches to the material. Medoff has selected exactly one hundred documents from the archives and allocated them across twenty thematic chapters, providing exactly five sources for every theme, each of which is accompanied by a short introduction. The book concludes with a historiographical essay titled “State of the Field,” which weaves the themes together. This structure makes it easy to see what the book covers and to find information on specific topics, such as “American Christian Responses,” “American Jewish Responses,” or “The

3 Rafael Medoff's book comes with a twenty-eight-page study guide for teachers with questions relating to each source: <https://jps.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/Study-GuideAmerica-and-the-HolocaustMedoff.pdf>

War Refugee Board.” Moreover, each document is not only briefly introduced but also commented upon at some length afterward. Each chapter also includes suggestions for further reading. These sections add useful information and context and give the content more substance, especially when it comes to somewhat complex official documentation. But this does come at the expense of the documents themselves: Many official statements, presented as facsimiles and not transcribed, are truncated and difficult to decipher. In general, the primary sources are significantly edited and shortened, and the more independent-minded reader may yearn for more “source” and less “explanation.”

Greene and Phillips’s book offers less supporting text. The volume opens with a short preface, providing the rationale and a timeline; the balance includes just four main chapters as well as a prologue and postscript, each with a short introduction. Small clusters of documents (twenty-nine of them) have a few lines of introduction, but the documents—sometimes spreading over three or more pages—are largely allowed to speak for themselves. Roosevelt’s radio broadcasts, for example, are reproduced almost in full (102–104, 123–125); also included is a long passage from Jan Karski’s account of what he saw in Auschwitz, which draws the reader in with raw emotion (189–192). This collection includes a range of images, posters, and references to popular culture. Extracts from the media greatly outnumber other kinds of material, which gives more of a sense of what the average American might have known and, more generally, of how diverse the American population was. Relevant groups are not only (primarily) Jews, Christians, and public figures and officials, but also women, rural Americans, African Americans, and Japanese Americans; and the book investigates how the concerns of these groups diverged and perhaps even competed. For example, the U.S. Army remained segregated until 1948, and this was a—if not *the*—major issue for conscripted Black Americans.

The two books’ messages also differ. In Medoff’s volume, the argument is all too clear: The U.S. government and establishment did not do enough. Jewish actors and organizations were ignored, Medoff asserts, but many, such as Rabbi Stephen Wise, were also too afraid of antisemitism, of looking unpatriotic, and of jeopardizing their position (e.g., 171). Roosevelt is portrayed as a highly ambivalent figure—evasive and

lacking commitment. Many influential Americans displayed “eloquent pity,” but according to Medoff this was “accompanied by professed helplessness and resignation” and betrayed a deep fear of philosemitism (96). Medoff also highlights two political scandals: the obstruction of the State Department, especially Assistant Secretary of State Breckinridge Long, on immigration and rescue (64–67, 221–229) and the refusal to bomb Auschwitz (264–278). He emphasizes that the administration established a connection between saving Jews and winning the war (“rescue through victory”) that implied that “rescue and victory” were incompatible (207). According to him, the shift of knowledge between 1943 and 1944 did not radically change the war’s trajectory. Roosevelt continued to avoid mentioning Jews explicitly in his statements and only showed real determination to organize rescue when it became politically expedient (250–257).

Greene and Phillips offer a much less severe assessment of the U.S. government. They repeatedly stress the difficulty of Roosevelt’s position. When describing the rise of Nazism, they emphasize that Roosevelt and Americans in general could not have known Hitler would later turn to murdering the Jews of Europe (8). They also underscore that Roosevelt followed closely opinion polls on immigration, isolationism, and neutrality, and openly explained his choices to the American public. In addition, they suggest that while he might have supported neutrality, he was not morally neutral (102). This book takes a more “panoramic look” and “foreground[s] context” (xvii), focusing less on the Holocaust as such and rather on American concerns during this period. In other words, the editors place the persecution of German and European Jews against the backdrop of many other issues of the time, however problematic or questionable these might seem in hindsight. Thus, they begin in 1918 and describe the various forms of nativism and racism in the United States, as well as long-standing fears of immigration and the importance given to national security, especially after the start of war.

The contrast between the two books is perhaps best captured by the cover images, which both show the Statue of Liberty. While Medoff’s is a caricature in which the statue holds up a sign telling refugees to keep out (an image also included in *Americans and the Holocaust*, 85), the Greene and Phillips cover is a hopeful photograph of children arriving

on a ship in New York City. The two books stand for two very different perspectives: While Medoff seeks to explain why Americans who had seen the threat were ignored, Greene and Phillips seek to explain why most Americans failed to perceive the extent of threat at all.

Well written and well argued, Medoff's indictment makes for a compelling read. In contrast, the cautiousness of Greene and Phillips can, at times, seem excessive. For example, on Breckinridge Long, they write: "Critics of Long accused him of intentionally blocking refugees, and many believed he held antisemitic views that influenced his decision making" (112). This leaves the reader wondering what the editors themselves might think. Concerning information about the Holocaust, they write, "from time to time, shocking facts about the cruel maltreatment and killing of Europe's Jews reached the American public—even though the Holocaust occurred well inside German-occupied territory, hidden from nearly all outside view" (142). Like Medoff, they note the lack of coverage of the Holocaust in the American media, but while Medoff intimates this was a deliberate decision, Greene and Phillips make it sound as though obtaining this information was quasi-impossible. As is often the case, the truth probably lies somewhere in the middle, and, in this sense, the complexity and messiness presented in Greene and Phillips's book is probably more realistic. But this is also why reading the two books together is an interesting exercise. It reminds us that even with a source collection, readers are called on to be critical and reflect on the fact that beneath the veneer of authenticity, source selections are always very much that—a selection.

Both books can be read with great benefit, whether for teaching, out of curiosity, or to glean ideas for what to investigate further. Last, but by no means least, discussing the Holocaust with primary sources in English brings this period in history and all the questions it raises closer to American readers in an unmediated and unprecedented manner. Mentions of the slogan "America First" and debates about whose suffering matters most resonate strongly in the present. Yet so do the stories of particularly selfless people who acted bravely or spoke out. Some of the journalistic insights constitute veritable highlights. A case in point is Dorothy Thompson, a reporter and commentator mentioned in both books, who as early as 1938 described "the invention of the Jew" in the

Nazi imagination, denounced the construction of race, and called for an international political—not merely philanthropic—response to the “refugee problem.” Her conclusion on the liberal democratic system quoted in Greene and Phillips’s book is worth citing: “We have got to face the reality that liberal democracy is the most demanding of all political faiths, and in the world today the most aristocratic. It is a political philosophy that makes painful demands. That is its price. That is also its glory” (60).

In the end, neither book leaves any doubt as to what and how much could be known well before meaningful action was undertaken. This is why Greene and Phillips warn in their preface of “the relatively wide gap between information and understanding” (xv). But the gap Medoff implicitly emphasizes between knowledge and action is also important. So, what can we learn? If nothing else, that our media and state systems are not best suited to addressing, tackling, and solving problems on a global scale. Unfortunately, this still rings very true today.

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Stanley Mirvis, *The Jews of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: A Testamentary History of a Diaspora in Transition* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2020), xv + 285 pp.

Until the last decade, scholarly works on Caribbean Jewish history have been sadly sparse. However, a recent renewal of interest by scholars such as Jane S. Gerber, Aviva Ben-Ur, and Stanley Mirvis have illuminated this corner of the Jewish Diaspora in revealing ways. Mirvis’s most recent contribution, *The Jews of Eighteenth-Century Jamaica: A Testamentary*

History of a Diaspora in Transition, focuses on the Portuguese Sephardim of the island nation and their influential connections around the Atlantic Jewish network. Mirvis, the Harold and Jean Grossman Chair in Jewish Studies at Arizona State University, is brave to tackle this topic because, by his own admission, nearly every Jewish document from this period has been destroyed by storms, earthquakes, or fires. However, Mirvis has found an exception safely stored in the Island Record Office: a cache of about 450 wills dating from 1673 to 1815. Using this collection, he presents a picture of Jamaican Jewish life that challenges old assumptions about this community and reasserts the importance of studying the periphery to understand a wider empire—in this case, imperial Britain.

Besides the introduction of new documentary evidence, perhaps the most important intervention Mirvis makes in the field is to reimagine Jamaica as the center of the Jewish Atlantic. Like Daniel K. Richter did for North America in *Facing East from Indian Country* (2003), Mirvis de-centers the imperial metropolises in favor of subalterns on the geographic and cultural periphery. In this case, Mirvis shifts focus away from Europe and toward Kingston and Port Royal. This simple shift changes the narrative about the Portuguese Sephardim as a community in “slow eclipse,” as Jonathan I. Israel previously claimed, to demonstrate how religiously, culturally, and financially influential the Jamaican branch of this community remained into the nineteenth century. This simple shift in perspective also allows Mirvis to write a localized story of the island nation, which in turn draws attention to significant “nodes” in the Jewish Atlantic network other than Amsterdam and London. For example, Mirvis convincingly illustrates these communities’ ongoing personal, financial, and religious connections to southern France, particularly Bayonne.

Mirvis’s challenge is to use these wills and testaments, notably formulaic documents in the eighteenth century, to reveal new insights about Portuguese Jews in the Caribbean. Mirvis acknowledges their limits, especially to disclose information about individual beliefs and experiences; however, by interrogating them as a group, he teases out statistics about charitable giving, the survival of traditional Iberian-style godparents, and even concubinage for the communities they represent. Scholars in fields other than Jewish studies—such as race, gender, and broader subaltern studies—will also find useful data and analysis in this

monograph. One of the advantages of these sources is that they are one of the few places where women, children, and people of color appear in the written record. Although testaments were left almost exclusively by men in the social elite, they also contained information about dependents and others often silenced in the historical record.

For example, while Sephardic Jews were already an ethnoreligious minority within the white minority of the industrial slave system, women comprised an even smaller segment of Jamaican society, outnumbered three to one by white men alone. Their small numbers, combined with the patriarchal Iberian culture, has led many scholars to believe Sephardic Jewish women were inactive in public life. Yet, Mirvis argues that they played more than a domestic role. “Wills in Jamaica show neither a liberated Jewish woman nor a silenced one,” he writes. Instead, they demonstrate possibilities for the public lives of women, although they almost always acted in the shadow of a male family member. A segment of the wills reveals husbands empowering their wives to take over their businesses after their deaths. Dr. Isaac Dacosta Alvarenga’s will, for example, empowered his wife Rebecca to continue his medical practice after he died in 1810. Likewise in 1709, merchant Jacob Brandon bequeathed his family business to his wife Rachel and left instructions in his will that his son would be “in all respects obedient and dutiful to her commands.” When it came time to make their own wills, Jewish women of means also proved to be important contributors to religious and public causes. Judith Baruh Alvares left money and religious objects in her 1723 will to the Port Royal Synagogue, the poor of her town, and the men who escorted her body to Hunt’s Bay Cemetery for burial.

Just as fascinating is Mirvis’s contribution to stories of mixed-race Jews and other people of color who comprised Sephardic households. Mirvis has written in other places about the phenomenon of concubinage and the challenges it posed for rabbinic authorities trying to maintain the boundaries of the Jewish nation.¹ By examining patterns

1 See, for example, his chapter “Sexuality and Sentiment: Concubinage and the Sephardi Family in Late Eighteenth-Century Jamaica,” in *Jews in the Caribbean*, ed. Jane S. Gerber (Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, 2014), 222–240, specifically pages 224 and 239.

of patrimony, he sheds new light on the phenomenon of surrogacy, conversion, and (“imperfectly”) familial attachment between white Jewish men and their mixed-race families. Without these wills, it would be very unlikely to find documentary evidence of the lives and names of many of these people and is, therefore, one of the great strengths of Mirvis’s work.

Ultimately, Mirvis frames his new data by situating it inside the existing historical narrative for Jewish Jamaica. He uses the wills to put pressure on various points of accepted knowledge and to ask the reader to reimagine an Atlantic Diaspora with Jamaica at the center. While the narrative of the Sephardic community comes off with satisfying continuity and clarity, sometimes the wills themselves disappear inside the larger story. Nevertheless, the monograph works beautifully as a text to introduce the story of Jewish Jamaica to a new audience, or to reimagine a story a scholar thought she already knew.

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Brian Ogren, *Kabbalah and the Founding of America: The Early Influence of Jewish Thought in the New World* (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 313 pp.

How many Jews does it take before something becomes *Jewish*? This isn’t a borscht belt routine; it’s a real question for historians of colonial America. Everyone knows the number of Jews in the British colonies was vanishingly small, and that smallness has bred a corresponding disinterest among historians and Judaic scholars. There just weren’t enough Jews, so there couldn’t have been Jewish influence. Nothing to see here, move on to the nineteenth century!

Brian Ogren says no: a number of Puritan thinkers were keenly interested in Jewish thought—specifically kabbalistic thought and ideas about the end of history. His new book undertakes the first sustained study of this strain in American religious thought, and has determined that “Jewish ideas as kabbalistically framed were profoundly taken up by certain diverse sectors of the American Protestant world.” Jewish

mystical thought was “integral” to the New England Puritan outlook. Jews were not welcome in colonial Boston, but *Judaism* was present in this earliest expression of Anglo-American religious thought (191).

The evidence is mostly not hard to find. The kabbalistic debates between George Keith and Cotton Mather, the writings of Increase Mather on Jewish messianism and Sabbatai Tzevi, and the kabbalistic reading of Ezra Stiles have long been known. Ogren takes this evidence (once regarded as mere curiosity) and has examined it as a whole—Keith’s extended commentary on the mystical names of God, Cotton Mather’s counterpoints, Increase Mathers’s kabbalistically-tinged eschatology.

Of particular note is Judah Monis, the Jewish convert to Congregationalism who became Harvard’s first professor of Hebrew. Monis penned the first kabbalistic text in the New World in 1722, wherein he pointed to Jewish kabbalistic writings as evidence of the messianic status of Jesus Christ.

Monis’s conclusions are entirely Christian, and Ogren is careful in his analysis to remind readers that these kabbalistic flavors did not point the Puritans towards any kind of religious pluralism; Jewish kabbalah was important to these men because it explained Christian history and theology. But the point is not that Puritans saw Jews as equals (they didn’t) but that Jewish thought shaped Puritan belief and practice. “The influence may not have been widespread,” Ogren writes, “but given the stature of the individuals...who took up the topic,” it was significant (187). That in turn should bury the old canard in American Jewish studies—traceable to Jacob Rader Marcus himself—that Jews in America were “a people apart.” The notion that Jews could not have influenced American Protestantism in these formative years because Jews were too few is demonstrably false. By extension: scholars of American Judaism ought to pay less attention to Jewish numbers among the American public and more attention to Jewish thought in American writings. Ogren’s contribution is significant for this insight alone.

Ogren also warns readers not too overgeneralize his thesis; the Mathers weren’t blowing the shofar or attending bat mitzvahs (although Stiles apparently went to Purim services). The point is not that Puritans loved Jews, but that Jewish ideas were present from the very beginnings of Anglo-American Protestantism.

Indeed, the book's only serious drawback occurs when Ogren circumvents his own warning and tries to connect Jewish kabbalistic thought to various twenty-first century debates on "American exceptionalism." If kabbalah influenced how Puritans thought of history, then perhaps Judaism contributed to the forging of a "a prerevolutionary national narrative" (198)? Ogren notes that such concepts, as read in the present day, are "fraught," but "tacked on" feels more accurate (2). The Puritans were not forerunners of the American rebellion of 1776, nor did New England Congregationalism somehow comprise "the nation." What about enslaved Africans? Anglican colonies? The vast stretches of the continent beyond the reach of any *farkakteh* European power? There is a similarly tacked-on (and unconvincing) section in the introduction attempting to tie this colonial kabbalism to the American revolution. I get the feeling that somewhere an editor demanded that Ogren's smart, closely-argued thesis about Puritanism 1680–1760 had to be made "relevant" to the Trump era, and so various gestures to modern politics were grafted on to the introduction and conclusion.

That is a risk all scholars face, and it should not deter readers from enjoying the rich lessons of this book. Ogren takes no shortcuts when it comes to scholarly analysis of his texts and the endless complexities of kabbalistic thought. In the end, his book is about finding Judaism and Jewish thought precisely where it was not supposed to be, and then rethinking both Judaism and Protestantism in response.

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G. Kurt Piehler, *A Religious History of the American GI in World War II* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), 393 pp.

In his study of religion and the American soldier in World War I, scholar Jonathan Ebel noted that "studies of America's wars tend to ignore

religion. Studies of American religion tend to ignore war.”¹ In his new book, *A Religious History of the American GI in World War II*, military historian G. Kurt Piehler joins Ebel (and others) in attempting to fill this lacuna in existing scholarship, and to bridge the gap between histories of war and our understanding of American religion.

Piehler has edited and published a number of works on the social and cultural history of World War II, including *Remembering the War the American Way*. In this, his most recent book, he builds on the central claims made by historian Deborah Dash Moore in *GI Jews: How World War II Reshaped a Generation*, a pathbreaking study of how shared military service transformed American ideas about tri-faith religious pluralism. Following Dash Moore, Piehler argues that both official policy and the lived experiences of soldiers combined to promote tri-faith religious pluralism as an American value and bolster claims about the equality of Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism within American religious life. In keeping with studies such as Thomas Bruscino’s *How World War II Taught Americans to Get Along* and Ronit Stahl’s *Enlisting Faith: How the Military Chaplaincy Shaped Religion and State in Modern America*, Piehler focuses his attention on the experiences of soldiers, sailors, chaplains, and medical personnel from different backgrounds, and examines the many ways that religion shaped their understanding of the war and how the war, in turn, reshaped their engagement with religion.

Perhaps the greatest strength of Piehler’s volume lies in the impressive array of archival sources he brings together in order to explore the religious life of American service members. In chapters that examine everything from how religion structured American perceptions of the stakes of the war, to ideas about ethical combat, care of the wounded, burial of the dead, views of the enemy, and the experiences of prisoners of war, Piehler musters a wealth of evidence drawn from both official sources and the memoirs, letters, and oral histories of soldiers, sailors, and military chaplains. Readers will appreciate this book for its nuanced investigation of the many ways that service members expressed their religious

1 Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 3.

convictions and engaged in both formal and informal religious practices. Piehler describes the prayers offered by service members as they headed into battle, as well as the religious objects they carried as talismans against danger. He considers the ways that racism and segregation circumscribed the religious lives of soldiers, sailors, and chaplains of color. He also traces the impact of religious belief on official policies governing everything from medical and psychiatric care to the regulations shaping the lives of women serving in the Women's Army Corps (WACs), Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAACs), or Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service (WAVES). In each of his chapters, and in the many anecdotes and accounts he presents, Piehler makes it abundantly clear that religion deserves a central position in military history.

Piehler's work also points to opportunities for future research on the ways that American ideas about what constituted "religion" developed and were buttressed or dismantled through military service. Chapter 8, "Patriarchy and the Religious Life of Military Women," for example, details the many ways that the military "reinforced patriarchal values that emphasized sexual chastity and limited occupational roles for women" (207). Piehler presents compelling evidence to back up this claim, citing, in particular, policies that made contraception available to male service members but not to female ones. It would be valuable, however, to dig deeper into issues like this one: Did experiences in the military service change male or female service members' attitudes toward "virtue," sex, and access to contraception? To what extent should we understand policies such as these as being about "religion" per se, as compared to their connection with economic and social concerns over the new roles that developed for women during wartime? Future studies might consider these as mutually constituted arenas of discourse, in which values labeled as "religious" determined military policies but were themselves defined, or redefined, by government propaganda and the pragmatic needs of intuitions such as the military.

How, moreover, were twentieth-century American religious practices affected by the experiences of World War II? Piehler's study chronicles the broad diversity of American GIs' engagement with religion—some found courage in prayer, others did not; some grew more committed to the rituals and beliefs that had defined their religious lives at home,

others grew disenchanted with them; some felt a sense of kinship with co-religionists abroad, even in enemy Japan, while for others, racism and nationality enmity proved to be unbridgeable divisions. Piehler's history gives readers an engaging sense of the multiplicity of ways that service members expressed their religious commitments. Future studies might explore how these wartime expressions impacted American religious traditions in the decades following World War II.

Piehler's book adds meaningfully to the growing field of scholarship seeking to dismantle the divide between military history and the study of American religion. For readers interested in the experiences of the men and women who served, *A Religious History of the American GI in World War II* offers a tremendous collection of revealing anecdotes, accounts, and analyses of how religion was lived and felt during the war; and for those interested in the many ways that war and religion have intersected throughout American history, Piehler's study will prove a valuable resource and a useful point of departure for future studies.

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Jonathan D. Sarna, *Coming to Terms with America: Essays on Jewish History, Religion, and Culture* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2021), xiv + 399 pp.

Coming to Terms with America: Essays on Jewish History, Religion, and Culture is the latest volume in the highly respected Distinguished Scholars Series of the Jewish Publication Society. As Jonathan D. Sarna has enjoyed what can only be described as an eminent career, it is fitting that his work be included in this series. Sarna himself is cognizant of the respect these works have commanded and, at the outset of his "Acknowledgements," he writes, "I am deeply proud to have been

included in the JPS Scholar of Distinction Series. I have had the privilege of knowing every single scholar [including his father, Nahum Sarna, the famed Brandeis University biblical scholar, which makes Jonathan Sarna, as he himself observes, “the first-ever ‘second generation’ scholar in this series”] previously selected for this prestigious series. What an honor to have been selected myself!”

Citing his father, Jonathan comments that most scholars in this series produced volumes of their “greatest hits.” As Nahum Sarna had written, “It is in the nature of the enterprise that a scholar’s life-work is mostly dispersed in learned journals and is, in the main, not accessible to the intelligent and interested non-scholar.” This series corrects this by disseminating these essays to scholar and learned lay reader alike.

Sarna confesses that he “expected to follow my father’s lead and bring the best of my articles together between the covers of [this] book.” However, he ultimately elected to go in a different and somewhat unique thematic direction. As he reread his articles, Sarna “discerned a connecting thread among them that provided the possibility of a more thematically interconnected volume.” *Coming to Terms with America* displays this theme by exploring how Judaism unevenly and complicatedly “came to terms” with the United States of America politically, culturally, socially, and religiously.

As with all his work, Sarna, in these essays, displays both a wide topical breadth and an extraordinary analytical depth. His mastery of Hebrew language and the classical sources of Jewish tradition, his complete control of every era of Jewish history, his skill and training as an American historian, and his attention to theory make these articles unparalleled in originality, richness, and insights. No wonder that his work is eagerly and routinely cited in the fields of Jewish history, sociology, religious thought, and rabbinical literature; by students in American history and religion; and in the popular press. His reach and influence in the academic and larger worlds are exceptional, and this book will only enhance and extend that reach and influence.

In assessing the significance of Sarna and the character and sources of *Coming to Terms with America*, it is worthwhile to first consider the trajectory of his career as illustrated in several of his more than three dozen books. Sarna first catapulted onto the academic scene with the revision

and publication of his Yale doctoral dissertation on Mordecai M. Noah. This book, *Jacksonian Jew*, displayed many of the scholarly hallmarks that would come to characterize his work—the meticulous mastery of primary sources written by Noah himself, the use of newspapers from the general American press to illuminate the writings and life of Noah, and the fascinating placement of Noah within the context of American as well as Jewish history, so that the larger theoretical concerns illuminated by Noah's life (e.g., the Jewish search for a homeland, the “double consciousness” that marks all minority groups as they seek to affirm and express their group identity against the backdrop of a larger world) were all present in this work. The book revealed his promise, and his subsequent career is testimony that he has fulfilled that promise and more.

The range of his scholarship and what marks Sarna as unusual among American Jewish historians was evidenced shortly thereafter in his work *People Walk on Their Heads*, his annotated translation and introduction to a Hebrew work written in 1888 by Eastern European Orthodox émigré Rabbi Moses Weinberger. This book not only provided a broader vantage point from which to understand the immigrant Jewish experience, it also garnered the attention of scholars who were interested in using modern Hebrew sources for the writing of American Jewish history. The control Sarna had over Hebrew as displayed in his skillful translation in conjunction with his ability to place this writing in the vast vista of Jewish and American history marked him as a rare figure in the academic world. Students in the fields of Jewish history, American history, American religion, immigration studies, rabbinical literature, and Hebrew all began to pay close attention to him. Sarna had begun garnering widespread attention and notice.

It was therefore small wonder that the Jewish Publication Society asked Sarna to write its centennial history (1888–1988), and his publication of *JPS: The Americanization of Jewish Culture* became a landmark study in American Jewish cultural history and scholarship. He also was asked to write and edit a book (with Nancy H. Klein) on the history of the Jews of Cincinnati, and soon *Ethnic Diversity and Civic Identity: Patterns of Conflict and Cohesion in Cincinnati Since 1820*, co-edited with Henry D. Shapiro, appeared. In authoring this book, Sarna provided a model for how communal history could be written. Rather than a simple apologetic

work celebrating the glory of a given community, this book indicated that a serious historian could comb the archives and records of a community to provide more than a coherent and compelling account of the community—no matter how interesting the story. Instead, as the title of this book suggests, Sarna demonstrated that the history of a community could be illuminated, and the greater import of that history could be revealed by placing it within larger theoretical and intellectual frameworks. In his hands, the history of the Jews of Cincinnati became a compelling tale of larger intellectual significance—a story of the uneven process whereby minority groups (in this case, Central European Jews) acculturate and adapt to a larger culture. He pointed out how these German-speaking Jews were among the elite of the city and emphasized the role they played in helping to establish the cultural and economic contours of this Midwestern metropolis of the mid-nineteenth century. His later work on the Boston Jewish community showed how a demographically and culturally different group of American Jews—in this case, poorer Eastern European immigrants and their children—caught between their immigrant origins and Boston Protestant Brahmin culture displayed a similar sophistication in a radically dissimilar sociological context. Indeed, two of the essays in *Coming to Terms with America*, “The Lofty Visions of Cincinnati Jews” and “Reconciling Athens and Jerusalem: The Jews of Boston in Historical Perspective,” capture the disparate responses a heterogeneous Jewish polity composed in reacting to the reality of a diverse American nation. Such attention to specificity and the sophisticated tracing of the dialectics between fidelity to Jewish tradition and broader cultural adaptation in explicit American venues have been constant leitmotifs of his work, and his sensitivity to details and attention to broader themes allows him to capture consistently the multilayered responses American Jews have offered as they have labored to adapt Judaism to the United States.

In addition to these pathbreaking books, Sarna also authored countless books and articles on Jews and the Civil War, most notably *When General Grant Expelled the Jews*, *Jews and the Civil War*, and *Lincoln and the Jews: A History*. He also directed his attention to Jewish-Christian relations and the history of antisemitism in America. (At the moment, Sarna is turning his attention to a book on Mark Twain and the Jews.) His magisterial *American Judaism* justifiably won numerous awards, and

the National Jewish Book Council selected it for its prestigious Everett Prize as “Jewish Book of the Year” for 2004. There is simply no single volume comparable to this book. In it, Sarna displays his command of the primary sources of and secondary literature on every century of the American Jewish story, and he places them within the framework of American religious history. In so doing, he authored a work of compelling detail and interest to students of Judaism and American religion alike, and he managed to write for a scholarly as well as an intellectual lay audience. The book remains the “gold standard” in the field for a one-volume work on the subject. If this book alone were all that Sarna had written, it would have earned him a place among the leading scholars of American religious history; it has certainly marked him as the leading scholar of American Jewish history. *Coming to Terms with America* draws on this vast repertoire of scholarship to create a volume whose essays are indeed “thematically interconnected.”

The book’s structure is composed of fifteen essays, or chapters, divided into three sections. The first section, “Straddling Two Civilizations,” contains six chapters describing how American Jews created a distinctly American synthesis between Jewish tradition and American culture. The first two chapters, “The Cult of Synthesis in American Jewish Culture” and “The Democratization of American Judaism,” indicate how American Jews from the colonial and early Federalist eras sought to argue for the compatibility of American democratic values and the values of Judaism. Sarna surveys figures and iconography from Mordecai Noah to modern *ketubot* and *haggadot* to bolster this case, and he points to how Gershom Seixas had by 1805 worked out an American Jewish theology that was able to express American values of freedom, liberty, and democracy in Jewish form. In Chapter Three, “Jewish Prayers for the United States Government,” Sarna displays his deep Hebraic knowledge of rabbinics and his absolute familiarity with Jewish liturgical traditions. He demonstrates how classical Jewish prayers for kings and queens that celebrated the monarchy were transformed on American shores to prayers for a democratic republic and its leaders. In so doing, Sarna highlights the adaptations and consciousness that came to inform Jews as they acculturated to America. In the next two chapters, Sarna devotes his attention, as mentioned above, to the Jews of Cincinnati

and Boston. In the chapter on Cincinnati Jews, he indicates that these German American Jews not only strove for civic integration and equality but forged a new type of Judaism designed to harmonize with the larger American and Midwestern environment. The next chapter shows how Cincinnati's Eastern European brothers and sisters in Boston sought synthesis between the ethos of Jeffersonian democracy—as articulated by a Boston Protestant aristocracy—and the teachings and values of Judaism so as to make themselves feel welcome in New England. Chapter Six, "Subversive Jews and Early American Culture," stands in contrast to the other five chapters in this section. Rather than attempting to recast Jewish values to conform with American ones, Sarna here argues that a disproportionate percentage of a then-tiny Jewish population employed Judaism and its teachings as a vantage point to critique the American public square. Sarna examines largely unknown nineteenth-century figures and works—including Samuel Benjamin Herbert Judah in his *Gotham and the Gothamites* (1823), Isaac Gomez in his *God is One and His Name One*, Samuel Henry Jackson, Admiral Uriah Levy, Charles Cohen, and Ernestine Rose—to show how they issued sharp criticisms of slavery, Christian Trinitarianism and the New Testament, the failure of America to affirm genuine equality for women and Jews, and the hypocrisy of any number of public officials and cultural arrangements. These figures courageously and, one could argue, perhaps recklessly violated the cultural conventions of their days and stood in opposition to communal leaders such as Isaac Leeser, Mordecai Noah, and Isaac Mayer Wise, who respected the bounds of propriety America exacted as the price for full participation into the nation. By concluding this section of the book with this essay, Sarna highlights the range of responses American Jews forged in responding to the American scene.

The themes and tropes present in "Straddling Two Civilizations" are continued and approached in an overlapping yet distinct way in the second section, titled "The Shaping of American Jewish Culture." Here Sarna selects three essays illustrating how Jewish culture was shaped in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America in literary, academic, artistic, and religious venues. As the Jewish population in the United States expanded rapidly during the nineteenth century, Jewish women and men began to express a considerable degree of self-confidence as they

formulated their own Jewish cultural expressions. As Sarna argues, new historical conditions created new Jewish paradigms, and the chapters in this portion of the book demonstrate once again that there was no single formula for resolving the issue of being Jewish in an open society. However, the quests for spiritual renewal, the calls for Jewish education, the appearance of a Zionist national consciousness, and the demands for the advancement of Jewish women all appeared in different precincts of the American Jewish community. Sarna contends that together they revitalized the Jewish community in pluralistic Jewish forms, and he indicates that ideas to strengthen the community often flowed “from the bottom up” and were not the results of initiatives originated by communal elite.

Chapter Seven, “The Late Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Awakening,” questions the thesis put forth by scholars such as Nathan Glazer and Henry Feingold, who asserted that it was the arrival of Eastern European immigrants that was responsible for invigorating Jewish life at the turn of the twentieth century. Sarna counters this by arguing that efforts to promote the United States as an educational and cultural center of Jewish life were the products of American Jews who were here prior to the 1880s and 1890s. He names *The American Hebrew*, the YMHA, Gratz College, the Jewish Publication Society, the American Jewish Historical Society, and Chautauqua among the organizations that precipitated a “Jewish awakening” at the end of the nineteenth century. He also employs the writings of historians such as William McGloughlin, Timothy Smith, and Jon Butler to place Jewish events in the larger context of American religious history. Sarna pays careful attention to the role that a burgeoning social and cultural antisemitism played in stimulating the Jewish cultural renaissance of this period and notes that even Wise acknowledged the anti-Jewish expressions then present in America. Interestingly, Sarna observes that Philadelphia, with figures such as Mayer Sulzberger and Cyrus Adler, witnessed a significant Jewish cultural effervescence, and the birth of Dropsie College and Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS), as well as the compilation of *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, emerged during these years. The place of women in this renaissance is particularly notable; Sarna touches on Rebecca Gratz; Emma Lazarus in her *Epistle to the Hebrews*; Ray Frank, the “girl rabbi” of Spokane; and the emergence of the National

Council of Jewish Women in 1893. He also emphasizes that Reform Judaism began to place a greater emphasis on Jewish peoplehood and traditional forms than it had previously. While the Eastern European immigration of those decades undoubtedly contributed to this direction, Sarna, in contrast to Feingold and Glazer, does not want to overemphasize its import; instead, he looks to other factors to explain these vectors in American Jewish life. Chapter Eight, "Jewish Publishing in the United States," identifies the vital role that the Jewish Publication Society, the Hebrew Publishing Company, and Bloch Publishing played in making academic, popular, and semi-popular Jewish books and publications available to Jews and non-Jews alike. The creation of major library holdings at both Hebrew Union College (HUC) and JTS were also marks of the cultural maturation of the American Jewish community, and the appearance of the *American Jewish Year Book* proffered evidence of the growing homogeneity and unity of the American Jewish community as the twentieth century evolved. Indeed, this unity was prominently displayed in the prayer book created by all three major streams of American Judaism and published by the National Jewish Welfare Board for Jewish soldiers during and after World War II. All of this heralded the greater integration of Jews into the mainstream of American life. Chapter Nine, "Timeless Texts or Timely Issues: Comparing Visions of Seminary Scholarship," examines how this integration took place by analyzing the scholarship produced by eminent professors at JTS. One school of scholarship, represented by the great student of rabbinic and Hellenistic literature, Saul Lieberman, leaned toward works that were esoteric and erudite. This group of scholars also followed in the path that Solomon Schechter pioneered by producing critical editions of classical rabbinic texts, proudly and self-consciously published in Hebrew. These publications earned JTS recognition as a center of Jewish academics in both the United States and Israel. At the same time, professors such as Chancellor Louis Finkelstein, Mordecai Kaplan, and Abraham Joshua Heschel, all experts in rabbinic literature, were of a more activist bent and were anxious to apply Jewish teachings to matters of practical concern and import to the community. Theirs, as Sarna points out, was an "applied" scholarship, as opposed to a scholarship that might be labelled "theoretical." These two traditions of study each had their champions at

JTS, and Sarna notes that Chancellor Gerson Cohen was a practitioner of both. Indeed, as a personal aside, I would note that it was Cohen and his writings, in which he used his textual and historical studies to shed light on issues and challenges that confronted the Jewish community both in Israel and the United States, that served as a model I sought to emulate when I served as president of HUC-JIR from 2001–2013.

In the third section of *Coming to Terms with America*, Sarna presents six chapters that explore how Jews and the American nation have responded to Jewish-Christian and church-state relations over more than two hundred years. In this section, titled “When Faiths Collide,” Sarna carefully traces how these relations and attitudes have evolved over the course of American history. In his introduction, Sarna frames this section by citing the foreword of *Sefer Nimukei Ridvaz*, the 1904 work of Rabbi Jacob David Willowski of Chicago. In it, Willowski expressed fear that successful Jewish acculturation and integration into the United States would be the solvent in which Jewish religious observance and identity would dissipate. Indeed, Willowski, borrowing a strategy he observed from his Catholic neighbors, urged Jews to create a system of “parochial” day schools, as Jewish education alone could provide a bulwark against collective dissolution. Yet, as Sarna shows in the following six chapters, while the communal and religious cohesion of the community were surely challenged by the blandishments of America, Judaism did not atrophy and die there. On the contrary, he outlines once more how Jews adapted to these tests and forged texts and organizations to ensure the vitality of the Jewish people in this changed setting.

In Chapter Ten, “The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions,” Sarna indicates that conversion efforts directed toward Jews were not only unsuccessful, they actually had the opposite effect, for they strengthened Jewish resolve to maintain Jewish attachments in an overwhelmingly Christian milieu. Chapter Eleven, “The ‘Mythical Jew’ and the ‘Jew Next Door’ in Nineteenth-Century America,” points out that Christian America evidenced a two-pronged approach to Jews. On the one hand, Jews were seen as mythical “Christ-killers”; on the other, they were seen as “upstanding next-door neighbors.” Sarna indicates that American Jews, like German Jews in Europe, responded to this binary by placing an emphasis upon “prophetic Judaism,” a Judaism

that affirmed that one could be both “Jewish and moral.” Chapter Twelve, “Cultural Borrowing and Cultural Resistance in Two Nineteenth-Century American Jewish Sunday School Texts,” then discusses how Jews created educational materials that championed this position. Just as nineteenth-century German Jews had created pamphlets and catechisms based on Christian educational models to express a Judaism that was compatible with a culturally integrated German Jewish community, Sarna argues that American Jews followed the same pattern in Sunday school textbooks. These works both borrowed in form, and resisted in substance and content, the dominant Protestant culture. Chapters Thirteen and Fourteen, “Jewish-Christian Hostility in the United States” and “Christians and Non-Christians in the Marketplace of American Religion,” speak once more to Christian hopes that Jews would ultimately embrace Christianity. They indicate how Christians employed state power to gain advantages over Jewish and other non-Christian expressions of religion—even in an America where the Constitution seemingly granted Jews and other minorities protection of their rights. Sarna shows that while this was often true, such protections were not always the case; he indicates how Jews learned to use the courts for protection and to cultivate interfaith relationships and coalitions to reinforce American commitments to religious freedom and pluralism. However, he also emphasizes how attempts to balance majority rule and minority rights often proved problematic. The final chapter, “Church-State Dilemmas of American Jews,” is particularly topical and sheds light on the difference between how Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews approach church-state relations in America. Sarna describes how liberal Jews have consistently argued for total church-state separation, while Orthodox and other Jews have increasingly supported what Sarna terms “equal footing”—e.g., government vouchers for Jewish educational institutions and funding to provide the Jewish community with protection against antisemitism. Jewish responses regarding how to be Jewish and American thus remain multivocal and unresolved in an American Jewish community that Sarna demonstrates is multilayered and pluralistic.

As I conclude this review-essay and offer my assessment of this book in the context of Jonathan Sarna’s body of scholarship, I would be remiss if I did not confess that we are friends and that my career has overlapped with his in significant ways. In 1979, Sarna and I were both appointed to

the faculty of Hebrew Union College–Jewish Institute of Religion—he in Cincinnati, I in Los Angeles. While he went on a dozen years later to a career at Brandeis and I remained at HUC-JIR, I completed my academic career as his colleague at Brandeis. Indeed, I served there from 2015 to 2018 as director of the Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, and it was Sarna who succeeded me in that position. Our careers have overlapped and been entwined for more than four decades. It could perhaps be said that my assessment of his scholarship and *Coming to Terms with America* reflects a bias on my part. To such a charge, I would only say that Aristotle observed in his *Nicomachean Ethics* that there are reasons for friendship. The virtues I have praised in his academic corpus as well as in this particular book surely reflect those reasons. His vast knowledge, his judiciousness, his careful analysis of the sources, his mastery of Hebrew and classical Jewish textual traditions, and his knowledge of American and Jewish history and sociology combine to make him a premier scholar worthy of praise. As Sarna moves on through his eighth decade, I am confident that his ongoing creativity, wide-ranging interests, and love of scholarship will continue for years to come.

While I have spoken effusively of Sarna and his scholarship, I have not exaggerated his accomplishments or the quality and influence of his work. Colleagues hold him in unsurpassed esteem, demonstrated by his service as president of the Association for Jewish Studies and by the recent publication of *New Perspectives in American Jewish History: A Documentary Tribute to Jonathan D. Sarna*, a collection of fifty-five essays written by his doctoral students and co-edited by Mark A. Raider and Gary Phillip Zola. That he has achieved such distinction represents a staggering academic accomplishment, especially considering the demands placed upon him as a teacher and guide to so many; his numerous communal and professional activities, service, and commitments; and his devotion to his family. Jonathan Sarna stands at the pinnacle of Jewish studies, and *Coming to Terms with America* is a more than worthy volume to stand in this JPS Scholars of Distinction series. Readers will be immeasurably enriched by its contents.

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Julian E. Zelizer, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Life of Radical Amazement* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2021), 328 pp.

Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Life of Radical Amazement is a well-rounded and illuminating biography of the life and thought of iconic—though controversial—Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel (1907–1972) in the context of his tumultuous times. Heschel was, as described by his close student and friend Rabbi Samuel Dresner, “a *nasi*, a prince of his people and *shalem*, a whole person. He was, finally, a *zaddik*” (229). We are beholden to author Julian E. Zelizer, professor of history and public affairs at Princeton University, for tackling a challenging wealth of information and providing us with a book that does its heroic subject justice.

Heschel’s complex journey yielded, among other things, a fruitful harvest of literary outpouring that inspired and uplifted generations of both Jews and non-Jews, myself included. Among them are *The Earth Is the Lord’s* (1949), *The Sabbath and Man is Not Alone* (1951), *The Insecurity of Freedom* and *Man’s Quest for God* (1954), *God in Search of Man* (1955), *The Prophets* and *Torah Min HaShamayim* (1962), and *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (1969). Heschel ultimately did not fit into a mold of a particular Jewish denominational stream, embracing elements from them all while transcending their boundaries and emerging as his own encompassing and quintessential Jewish presence.

This introduction to Heschel’s legacy proves timely, as we painfully face the confluence of events casting a shadow on the American enterprise, with its ever-vulnerable and -problematic Jewish component. Zelizer asserts that the lessons Heschel taught during the civil rights era can and should serve us well once again: “As people in the United States struggle to survive one of the worst public health disasters ever¹ and respond to the effects of institutional racism, all the while witnessing the growing strength of right-wing extremism in national politics, Heschel’s battles for social justice became more inspiring to this author than ever before. My hope is that this book

1 In a penned poem, addressing God and relevant to our own pandemic times, Heschel challenged, “You must tell every virus: ‘Thou shalt not kill’” (31). Heschel’s poetry impressed no other than poet laureate Hayim Nachman Bialik.

can play a small role in promoting his ideas in the public conversation as we attempt to rebuild our broken society” (xiv).

The haunting question—with the author’s navigated responses—is, how did Heschel transform himself from his hasidic Polish roots to a modern theology scholar and international interfaith leader? His journey was one few could imagine: After barely escaping Nazi-threatened Europe, he moved from the Reform Hebrew Union College (HUC) in Cincinnati to New York’s Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS); and while JTS proved a better fit for a traditionally minded Jew, he still faced some estrangement as a result of his poetic pathos. Eschewing dry scholarship, Heschel transitioned himself into an American civil rights and anti-Vietnam War activist, a fighter for Soviet Jewry, a defender of Israel, and a voice of faith and justice on the world stage. “Father Abraham,” as he became known in the civil rights movement of the 1960s—the same name bestowed on Abraham Lincoln by the Jews who successfully sought his intervention concerning the noxious Order #11—was born into hasidic dynasties that did not shelter him from the secular world. Indeed, in Warsaw’s lively and creative pre-Holocaust environment, he was encouraged to be involved with the Jewish Enlightenment of Haskalah and the growing Zionist movement. Yet, while Warsaw was a city teeming with rich Jewish life and culture, Heschel was exposed to the ugly reality of antisemitism at a young age, when he was called a “Christ killer.”

His remarkable acumen led Rabbi Menachem Zemba to ordain him at age sixteen, but he also embraced secular subjects in the arts and sciences. “His mother [Rivka] understood that her son’s passions rested in both worlds, remembering once seeing him kiss a history book after dropping it on the floor, the same way that a Jew would treat a sacred religious text” (18). Against his mother’s wishes he moved from the hasidic culture of Warsaw to the more secular one of Vilna, graduating from its Gymnasium in 1927, before moving on to Berlin, where he earned his doctorate in philosophy from the University of Berlin in 1935 after defending his dissertation, titled “The Prophetic Conscience.” Heschel also received a second ordination at the Liberal Academy for the Science of Judaism, where famed Rabbi Leo Baeck taught, and spent some time studying at Berlin’s Orthodox seminary.

Despite theological differences, Heschel and philosopher Martin Buber befriended each other, and at Buber's invitation, Heschel moved to Frankfurt in March 1937 to lead the renowned Adult Education Center that Franz Rosenzweig had led. The school's mission changed from supporting Jews surrounded by German culture to surviving under the Nazis. At Buber's urging, Julian Morgenstern, then-president of HUC, invited Heschel to be a research fellow at the college in 1939. Heschel was unable to obtain a visa, but with his family's help he went to London to teach Jewish refugees in the Institute for Jewish Learning, within the Zionist Theodore Herzl Society. At the opening ceremony Heschel reflected, "The vital sources of Jewish education are not the books but the people, the bearers of memory. The essence of Judaism is not in the letters but in those who engage with the Spirit and bear witness to it" (39).

Finally Heschel obtained a visa, arriving in New York on 21 March 1940, and was greeted by his cousin, hasidic Rabbi Mordechai Shlomo Friedman from the Lower East Side. On 10 April Heschel got off the train in Cincinnati, "clean shaven, short hair, black rimless glasses, and a plain black suit" (44). Soon enough he discovered that, although HUC saved his life, he felt alienated there: "I was an immigrant, refugee, no one listened to me" (51). The anti-Zionism of the Reform movement at the time and lack of traditional ritual were not to Heschel's sentiment, and he was frustrated with Rabbi Stephen Wise's—and Franklin D. Roosevelt's—stance on refugees. He did develop a close bond with the controversial Professor Abraham Cronbach of German descent, who was both a social justice idealist and a pacifist—traits with which Heschel was aligned in the former but not the latter, although he did oppose the Vietnam War.

Having lost four immediate family members in the Holocaust, Heschel participated in the 20,000-strong protest on 21 July 1942 at Madison Square Garden, and on 6 October 1943 joined the "rabbi's march" in Washington, DC, with FDR refusing to see the anguished traditional rabbis. Under the title "The Meaning of This War," Heschel wrote in the February 1943 *HUC Bulletin*, "Let fascism not serve as an alibi for our conscience. We have failed to fight for right, for justice, for goodness; as a result, we must fight against wrong, against injustice,

against evil. We have failed to offer sacrifices on the altar of peace; now we must offer sacrifices on the altar of war” (57–58).

Despite receiving a full-time position at HUC in 1943, Heschel moved in 1945 to New York’s JTS, having been recommended by faculty member Rabbi Mordecai Kaplan. With the end of World War II and in the wake of the Holocaust, Heschel expressed anger at the inaction of Jewish Americans and the U.S. government. In addition, “Germany, which was seen as a beacon of scientific inquiry and modern cosmopolitan culture, turned into a center of moral depravity and brutality. Heschel spent the rest of his life trying to make sense of this, wrestling with the question of whether and how Judaism—and all religion—could offer the key toward preventing this kind of mass injustice from rearing its head again” (64).

Heschel enshrined the pre-Holocaust Jewish world he had left behind in his 1949 book *The Earth Is the Lord’s: The Inner World of the Jew in Eastern Europe*—a significant literary endeavor, albeit one that encountered some criticism. He praised the impact of Jewish spirituality—with tradition and Yiddishkeit culture—on materially impoverished lives, believing it to bring light to the challenging circumstances of Eastern European Jews: “I feel justified in saying that it was the golden period in Jewish history, in the history of the Jewish soul,” he wrote (72). Heschel’s detractors, however, felt that he over-romanticized the effect of Jewish spirituality. David Hartman poignantly asserts, “Heschel was willing to sacrifice the intellectual rigor of formal theology for the intensity of religious narrative and he was less concerned with conceptual consistency than with making God a living reality for modern Jews embarrassed by religious language and culture” (73). It can be argued that Heschel’s attachment to his pre-Holocaust spiritual frame of reference did not match his transition away from that world. However, *The Earth Is the Lord’s* was written shortly after that world mostly vanished, bringing into focus Heschel’s grievous loss. When asked why he and his wife, Sylvia, chose not to relocate to hasidic Williamsburg, Heschel responded, “When I left my home in Poland, I became a modern Western man. I cannot reverse this” (86).

Israel’s birth following the Holocaust affected Heschel deeply: “We stand at a climax of Jewish history.... Like a branch plucked from the

fire, this generation has gone through the experience of disaster and has tasted the mystery of deliverance. Dark and dreadful would be our life today without the comfort and joy that radiate out of the land of Israel” (106–107). Zionism was embedded in Heschel’s Jewish identity; he regarded Israel as inseparable from the Jewish saga, a vital element that commanded a front seat in the story of Judaism. He also emphasized the biblical view that for the land itself to fulfill its inner meaning, it was essential that it go hand-in-hand with the spiritual dimension. His first visit to Israel with Sylvia and daughter Susannah—by then a scholar in her own right—was in 1957, and it was a celebratory experience. Heschel (who felt compelled to grow a beard for the occasion) and his family were warmly welcomed as dignitaries. President Zalman Shazar, Heschel’s childhood friend, received him, as did Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. However, Heschel was disappointed with the widespread lack of Jewish practice in Israel, and in 1959 he opposed a United Synagogue’s proposal—supported by Mordecai Kaplan—to join the World Zionist Organization, on the grounds that the synagogue as an institution should not be politicized. This was, without a doubt, a disappointment to Zionist leaders. However, Heschel vigorously stood behind Israel’s Six-Day War in 1967. In *Israel: An Echo of Eternity* (1969), he spoke of Israel’s serving an indispensable lifeline for the Diaspora: “The Jews go to Israel not only for physical security for themselves and their children; they go to Israel for renewal, for the experience of resurrection” (198). While many Christian peace activists rejected Heschel based on his support of Israel’s preemptive strikes and territorial gains, Martin Luther King Jr., with whom Heschel had a special bond, joined him on behalf of Soviet Jewry.

For Heschel, social and political activism were indelibly linked to the transforming influence of Israel’s prophets. His 1962 *The Prophets*, based on his doctoral dissertation and described by Zelizer as “Heschel’s most influential and enduring work,” shows this link clearly, and his own dedication to the prophetic voice must have made an impression on King, who, on the occasion of Heschel’s sixtieth birthday and only ten days before King was killed, referred to Heschel as “a truly great prophet” (206). Heschel viewed civil rights advocacy as a prophetic mandate, and in his 1955 *God in Search of Man* he addressed the modern

spiritual crisis, writing that it would be resolved when humanity joins God to restore human dignity and remove human oppression—and that this would free the oppressors as well. “Engagement in civil rights would not only rescue African Americans from their oppressors but also give its supporters a way out of their contemporary moral slumber” (126). In fall 1964 he attended a twenty-four-hour vigil at the Lincoln Memorial in support of the Civil Rights Act, and on 21 March 1965 he marched with King from Selma to Montgomery, the moment made iconic not only by the photo of the two men walking together but by Heschel’s often-quoted words from that day: “I felt my legs were praying.” Heschel became co-chair of the interfaith Operation Connection, part of the Poor People’s Campaign for economic equality, before King’s death.

In late 1965, Heschel became one of the organizers of Clergy and Laity Concerned About Vietnam (CALCAV). Speaking at the National Convention of Religious Education Association, he evoked the Holocaust’s long shadow hovering over the Vietnam War, “ecumenical nightmare, Christians, Jews, Buddhists, dying together, killing one another. So soon after Auschwitz, so soon after Hitler” (175). He confronted Henry Kissinger, Richard Nixon’s National Security Advisor: “How could you as a good Jew prosecute a war like this?” (210). King and Heschel’s friend Elie Wiesel² were powerful figures joining him in the antiwar movement, but they faced Jews who opposed their activism. Abraham Sachar, president of Brandeis University, feared that Heschel was turning it into a Jewish antiwar movement. Reform Jewish rabbinic leaders Jacob Weinstein, Maurice Eisendrath, and Balfour Brickner agreed with Heschel’s activism, with Brickner lamenting, “When a church starts to do its job, people dislike it” (181).

Heschel’s involvement in causes he deemed to be holy struggles was extended full force in the cause of Soviet Jewry, which he detailed in his 1966 *The Jews of Silence*. His disappointment at the inaction of his

2 The friendship between Wiesel and Heschel was close. Every Shabbat at 4:00 PM Wiesel visited Heschel’s New York home, and they went out together for a stroll. It was Heschel’s influence that led Wiesel to travel to Moscow and advocate for Soviet Jewry.

fellow Jews on behalf of Soviet Jewry was evident; he directed arrows at the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, demanding greater work on behalf of their Soviet brethren who faced a spiritual Holocaust; and at the May 1966 gathering of the Rabbinical Assembly, he castigated five hundred Conservative rabbis for their lackluster reaction to Soviet Jewry's plight. "Over and above the noise of our banquets and testimonial dinners I hear the cry of Russian Jews: 'The Jewish people forsakes us. The Jewish people has forgotten us'" (176).

Heschel also played a key role promoting Jewish-Catholic rapprochement. He met with Cardinal Augustin Bea—who represented Pope John XXIII in the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council, which continued under Pope Paul VI—in Boston on 27 March 1963, at which time he presented to the cardinal a copy of his 1951 classic *The Sabbath*. Six months later, on Yom Kippur eve, September 1964, Heschel met with the pope. Once again, Heschel's work in the name of justice encountered criticism, this time for his taking it upon himself to represent the Jewish people to the Vatican. But on 25 October 1965, the historic "Nostra Aetate," with Heschel's contributions, was adopted.

Heschel's life serves as a beacon for us all, and *Abraham Joshua Heschel: A Life of Radical Amazement* does it justice. The book is learned and riveting, a work of love and faith befitting and celebrating a spiritual giant who taught us, albeit with prophetic extremes, all that it means to be a rabbi, a Jew, a human being.

Like the Hebrew prophets, Heschel tried to answer the spiritual crisis facing the modern world. He saw politics in moral terms. The emptiness of our souls was directly connected to the violence all around us. Jews needed to open themselves up to the radical amazement of accepting the reality of the divine and living a life where every action was informed by religious values (236).

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