Regionalism

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I have written and edited works about southern Jewish history for forty-five years. I supported the southern distinctiveness school of historiography until two editors questioned whether what I had submitted to them was unique. This forced me to read Jewish histories of cities outside of the region to compare their experiences with those I was describing for Atlanta. I found far more similarities than differences in communities of similar size and nature.

One might ask, then, why concentrate on the South or, for that matter, the West or any section? I suggest at least three answers. First, so many important people lived and actions occurred in the South that, arguably, one cannot truly understand American Jewish history without integrating the study of Jews and Judaism in the region. This holds true of other regions as well. Historians of western and New England Jewry, for example, put those experiences forward as models for the future. Second, exaggerating regional idiosyncrasies marginalizes the importance of their Jewish history. Recognizing commonalities accentuates the powerful impact of cultural baggage on Jewish adaptation. It also highlights the significance of family, religion, business, and Jewish organizational life linkages. Jews were—and are—highly mobile. Individuals moved from place to place, and family members thereby dispersed, blurring regional boundaries. National Jewish newspapers edited by Isaac Leeser, Isaac Mayer Wise, and others during the nineteenth century and beyond routinely included articles by local people from throughout the country. National organizations like the B'nai B'rith had regional divisions, but local members remained abreast of national and international events, attended national conferences, and held important national leadership positions. Third, to write a truly national history, one cannot assume that New York Jewry represented the national model. The historian learns, for one, that, outside of industrial cities like New York and Chicago, Eastern European Jews did not work in the sweatshops of the garment industry, unionize, or strike, nor did they view socialism as any more than a subject of intellectual debate.

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How different American Jewish economic history looks when the historian notes that—whether in association with the cash crop farms, plantations, and later textile mills in the South; the cattle and oil industries in Texas and Oklahoma; the gold strikes in California and Alaska; or any other location outside of the industrial cities—virtually no Jews worked as laborers extracting the raw materials. Rather, they provided the goods and services required by the workers and businesses.[1] How different the history of organizational Jewish life appears when one recognizes that Jewish Sunday schools; Hebrew benevolent societies; every male, female, and youth order and agency; federations of Jewish charities and welfare funds; Jewish education alliances and community centers; Zionist organizations; synagogues affiliated with Reform, Orthodox, Conservative, Reconstructionist, and Chabad movements; and defense agencies spread throughout the country very quickly. These organizations expanded their webs because of personal ties and organizational actions that then further linked people and communities together.

How boundaries disappear when tracing family and business movements back and forth across and between regions, as well as to Europe and the Caribbean. When British occupation disrupted American and specifically Jewish lives during the American Revolution, Jews transplanted from New York and Charleston were instrumental in the liturgical development at Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel. Take, for example, the first two major Jewish philanthropists. Judah Touro started in Newport, where his father served as minister, then moved to New Orleans, where he made his fortune. Gershom Kursheedt started from New York before settling in New Orleans and later ventured to the Holy Land, and then England. Kursheedt's travels influenced Touro's will, which

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1 Michael Hoberman, *How Strange it Seems: Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 21 identifies these same trends in rural New England.

bequeathed money to Jewish organizations up and down the East Coast and in Palestine. Rosanna Dyer Osterman started in Baltimore before moving to Galveston, where she and her brother established the city's Jewish institutions. Her Dutch-born husband, Joseph, used his contacts in Baltimore and Holland for his import-export business. When she died, her bequests mirrored those of Touro. Jews from Baltimore and Charleston like the Dyers and Ostermans fanned out across the country for economic opportunity and founded congregations along the way to Los Angeles, San Francisco, and into the Northwest. Certainly, local and regional differences appear. Tracing commonalities, linkages, and mobility can nonetheless provide a sweeping panorama of a truly national (and transatlantic) American Jewish history.

In the following pages I will discuss the difficulties of defining regions and then summarize and finally challenge regional distinctive historiography in the South and the West, the two most fully developed regions. I will then discuss two recent works on New England Jewry. Rather than belying the importance of the Jewish experiences in the various regions, I call for historians to overcome a provincial perspective—whether it be of New York, the West, the South, New England, or anywhere else—to learn about and integrate all American Jewry.

Attempting to Define Regions

Natural and human environments influence individuals and groups to varying degrees. People bring with them cultural baggage—factors in their prior experiences, beliefs, and habits—that impact how much or how little and in what ways they adapt to these environments. In terms of American Jewish history, these environments may be local, regional, national, and even international. This article analyzes the definition, concept, and use of region as a theme in American Jewish history. In so doing, it raises major questions concerning the use and limitations of this approach.

Regions and Regionalism

American historians recognize the concept of region: the South, Midwest, Southwest, West, North, New England, and the Middle

Atlantic states.[2] (Note the substantial overlap in these categories.) The concept is almost as old as the historical profession within the country, as Frederick Jackson Turner stressed democracy and individualism along the western frontier and the William A. Dunning school and Ulrich B. Phillips glorified the plantation South and slavery while vilifying Reconstruction. Although these interpretations have been discredited, others have taken their place.[3]

In contrast, the first historians of American Jewry tended to eschew region as a category of analysis. Mostly amateurs, these individuals often associated with the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) from its founding in 1892. The second generation was more taken by Jacob Rader Marcus's hypothesis emphasizing waves of immigration. Only during the 1970s did historians identify the South and West as distinct places of Jewish life worthy of serious—and separate—study.[4]

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2 American historians, however, only point to substantial region divisions following the late 1820s and early 1830s. By about 1832 or 1833, the impact of the cotton gin introduced during the 1790s and better quality cotton in the South and the growing industrial revolution in the North contributed to regionally diverse economic systems. This, in turn, contributed to major policy differences—for example, overprotective tariffs. Gradual emancipation, the growing militancy of abolitionists in the northern states, Nat Turner's Rebellion, and the last debates over gradual emancipation in Maryland and Virginia (with the southern position concerning slavery shifting from a necessary evil to a positive good) reflected and hardened the divide.

3 Ray Allen Billington, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Historian, Scholar, Teacher* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973); Allan G. Bogue, *Frederick Jackson Turner: Strange Roads Going Down* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988); Richard Hofstadter, *The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard, Parrington* (New York: Vantage, 1968); Wilbur R. Jacobs, *On Turner's Trail: 100 Years of Writing Western History* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1994); Michael C. Steiner, "From Frontier to Region: Frederick Jackson Turner and the New Western History," *Pacific Historical Review* 64 (November 1995): 479–501; John David Smith, ed., *The Dunning School: Historians, Race and the Meaning of Reconstruction* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2013); Merton L. Dillon, *Ulrich Bonnell Phillips: Historian of the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985); John Herbert Roper, *U.B. Phillips: A Southern Mind* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984).

4 Jacob Rader Marcus, "The Periodization of American Jewish History," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 47, no. 3 (1958): 1–9; Marcus, *United States Jewry, 1776–1985*, 4 vols. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989–1993). Historians

The earliest historians of Jewish regionalism tried to explain why their area was worth studying and to introduce to readers elsewhere that there actually were Jews present from an early period in the development of their respective sections of the country. They asked what made their section distinctive rather than evaluating it on its own merits. This led inexorably to comparisons with the North, but as defined by metropolitan New York and not as a diverse region.[5]

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have since come to realize far more overlap and complexity than Marcus envisioned. See, e.g., Hasia R. Diner, *The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004). For changes in historiography, see Mark K. Bauman, "A Century of Southern Jewish Historiography," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 59 (2007): 3–78, republished in Bauman, *A New Vision of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019), 312–360; Moses Rischin and John Livingston, eds., *Jews of the American West* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), 18. The Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), launched in 1976, emphasized southern Jewish distinctiveness during its first two decades. Since then, the biggest conflict in the field relates to this issue. The Western States Jewish History Society (later changed from Society to Association), established in 1983 in the wake of a schism with the original Southern California Jewish Historical Society, published a quarterly journal, *Western States Jewish History*, from 1968 to 2018 (formerly *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly*). The journal was subsequently reestablished as a biannual, peer-reviewed publication, *Western Jewish History*, under the editorship of Jonathan Friedmann. The WSJHS was preceded in 1967 by the Western Jewish History Center, sponsored by the Judah L. Magnes Museum, which is now associated with the University of California, Berkeley. The first conference on western Jewish history took place in Berkeley in 1977 and resulted in the publication of Moses Rischin, ed, *The Jews of the West: The Metropolitan Years* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). The Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society was founded in 1976. An earlier, short-lived SJHS published three journal issues (1958, 1959, 1963). The more recent society launched *Southern Jewish History* in 1988, which remains an annual, peer-reviewed publication. The Pearlstine/Lipov Center for Southern Jewish Culture at the College of Charleston was created in 2014. The Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest was established in 1984, and its journal first appeared in 2002. The Jewish Historical Society of Memphis and Mid-South began in 1986 as a child of the SJHS after that society held a conference in Memphis. Joel Gereboff and Jonathan L. Friedman, eds, *Jewish Historical Societies: Navigating the Professional-Amateur Divide* (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2023).

5 See, e.g., Harry Golden, *Our Southern Landsman* (New York: Putnam, 1974); Eli N. Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York: Atheneum, 1973); Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "Shalom Y'All: The Folklore and Culture of Southern

In American Jewish history arguments are made for distinctive southern, western, Midwestern, southwestern, and New England regions.[6] Yet regions are often ill-defined and amorphous, with little consistency in categorization. The West is fragmented by Rocky Mountain history centered in Denver and Pacific coast history that stresses coastal cities with large Jewish enclaves. Both constructs leave Idaho, Nevada, Utah, the Dakotas, and Alaska somewhat as orphans.[7] The journal *Western Jewish History* overcomes this obstacle by including all states west of the Mississippi River—over half the country. Yet this circumscribes the scope of its predecessor, *Western States Jewish History*, which added western Canada, sections of Mexico, and the Pacific Rim.[8] When discussing a northern region, one does not necessarily associate it with the states that supported the Union during the Civil War so much as

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Jews" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1986). In each of these, the authors tend to compare southern Reform Jews of central European origin with Eastern European Orthodox Jews in New York. For a critique of New York as the paradigm of American Jewish history, see Marc Lee Raphael, "Beyond New York," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 52–65. Raphael emphasizes the use of local histories to obtain a more accurate picture of the whole.

6 On the Southwest, see Floyd S. Fierman, *Guts and Ruts: The Jewish Pioneer on the Trail in the American Southwest* (New York: KTAV, 1984); Fierman, *Roots and Boots: From Crypto-Jew in New Spain to Community Leader in the American Southwest* (Hoboken: KTAV, 1987). The University of Arizona houses the Southwest Jewish Archives; its website includes "Suggested Readings," https://swja.library.arizona.edu/content/suggested-readings. The designated states—Arizona, California, New Mexico, and Texas—further muddle regional definitions and identifications.

7 The Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society hosted the second Western Jewish History Conference. The resulting anthology, Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, included an article on Tucson, Arizona, by Leonard Dinnerstein, thereby conflating the West, Rocky Mountains, and Southwest. States like Texas create even more problems in that they are considered southern and western, and Jewish residents identify with both. On this issue in general, see Ty Cashion, *Lone Star Mind: Reimagining Texas History* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2018). Historians of Texas Jewry discuss southern, western, Texan, and Jewish identity. See Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010); Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman, eds., *Lone Stars of David: The Jews of Texas* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2007).

8 Jonathan Freidmann, e-mail to author, 11 July 2021.

imagine New York City as the North. Whereas a three-volume history of New York Jewish history has been published, no one has compiled an anthology on northern Jewish history.[9] In contrast, two anthologies have appeared on the western Jewish experience,[10] and five have focused on the Jewish South.[11] Consequently, historians compare and contrast experiences of other regions with that of an atypical metropolis and often ignore those who lived in the small towns and small cities of the North.

9 Deborah Dash Moore, ed., *City of Promises: A History of the Jews of New York* (New York: New York University Press, 2012). Howard B. Rock, Annie Pollard and Daniel Soyer, and Jeffrey S. Gurock wrote the three individual volumes in the *City of Promise* series.

10 Books on the Jewish West include Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*; Rischin, *Jews of the West*; Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and William Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2009); Ava Kahn, ed., *Jewish Life in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2002); Kahn and Marc Dollinger, eds., *California Jews* (Hanover: University Press of New England and Brandeis University Press, 2003); Harriet Rochlin and Fred Rochlin, *Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984); I. Harold Sharfman, *Jews on the Frontier: An Account of Jewish Pioneers and Settlers in Early America* (Chicago: H. Regnery, 1977). All of these emphasize western Jewish regional distinctiveness. However, Robert A. Goldberg, "Zion in Utah: The Clarion Colony and Jewish Agrarianism," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, finds little difference between such utopian communities throughout the country. His conclusions parallel those of Arnold Shankman, "Happyville, the Forgotten Colony," *American Jewish Archives* (April 1978): 3–19, which discusses a similar agricultural experiment in South Carolina.

11 Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, eds., *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds., *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1979); Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier with Malcolm Stern, eds., *Jews of the South* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984); Mark K. Bauman, ed., *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006); Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2006). With the exception of my anthology, all of these emphasize southern Jewish regional distinctiveness. A sixth anthology, Abraham D. Lavender, ed., *A Coat of Many Colors: Jewish Subcommunities in the United States* (Westport: Greenwood, 1977) includes a section on the South but does not emphasize distinctiveness.

Little had been made of New England Jewish regional history until relatively recently. The New England Jewish Historical Society, begun in 2013, published *Bar Harbor Babylon* in 2019 and *New England's Hidden Past* in 2002, both through Rowman and Littlefield's Downeast Books division. Several city and state Jewish historical organizations launched the New England Jewish Historical Collaboration in 2019. It, like the historical society, falls under the auspices of the Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center (formerly the AJHS-New England Archive) at the New England Jewish Historic Genealogical Center.[12]

The problem of defining a region also applies to the South. Is the Jewish South defined by the census, the states that formed the Confederacy, or the prevalence of slavery after emancipation in the North and de jure segregation? If the latter, Delaware, Oklahoma, and Missouri become part of the Jewish South, as does the US military, since it was not desegregated until the Korean War.

Whereas variations appear between regions, they also surface within them. The Jewish histories of Atlanta, Charleston, Charlottesville, Knoxville, Memphis, New Orleans, Raleigh-Durham, and the small towns of Louisiana and North Carolina exhibit similarities but also explicit differences. The same holds true for Los Angeles and San Francisco, the two major cities within one Pacific Coast state.[13]

Since the western and southern Jewish experiences have been most defined as regions, focus on those stories appears appropriate. A shorter section on the less developed historiography of New England Jewry will follow. The case for each will appear in broad brushstrokes, then compared along with suggestions concerning the weaknesses of each. By doing so, I raise questions and concerns about the use of regionalism as

12 "Our Mission," Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center, https://jewishheritagecenter.org/mission; "About Us," New England Historical Society, https://www.newenglandhistoricalsociety.com/about-us/; New England Jewish History Collaborative, https://www.nejhc.org.

13 Ellen Eisenberg, *The First to Cry Down Injustice? Western Jews and Japanese Removal during WWII* (Lanham, MD: Lexington, 2008) depicts the similarities and many differences between how Jews in Los Angeles and San Francisco responded to Japanese removal and internment during World War II.

an analytical tool. However, I do not argue that regional environments were inconsequential. Rather, I suggest that similarities with similar types of communities are too often marginalized, as are variations within regions associated with local factors.

The Western Jewish Distinctiveness School

William Toll establishes a case for regional distinctiveness in an essay on Jews of the Pacific Coast. He emphasizes that, "along the Pacific Coast, Jewish newcomers understood that they were travelling through vast landscapes far removed from the rest of the nation and facing unprecedented civic challenges as regional pioneers." Although their business activities reflected those of Jews throughout the United States, here, unlike elsewhere, they viewed themselves as pioneers. From the gold rush of 1849 into World War I, San Francisco served as the Jewish hub. Jews throughout the region participated in a variety of entrepreneurial pursuits that benefited from chain migration and the provision of credit from earlier settlers to newcomers. By 1880, "Jewish families had become mercantile anchors of the region's new commercial towns," and their stores lined main business streets. Jews like I. Hellman emerged as major bankers, while others led cultural development.

Jews developed mutual aid societies and B'nai B'rith lodges, and erected synagogue structures reflecting their high status. Excluded from elite social clubs, they formed Concordia societies that were nonetheless listed on social registers. Scions of earlier settlers viewed their status as superior to that of Jews in the East. With the influx of Eastern European Orthodox Jews and Sephardim, federations were formed that included these groups. Reform rabbis became ambassadors to secular society.

Each immigrant wave established small businesses rather than seeking employment as factory or manual labor. The specialty stores of earlier settler families morphed into department stores and chains. When an earthquake and firestorm devastated San Francisco, area Jews cared for the needs of their brethren. The new immigrants lived in poorer sections of the cities that also housed other immigrant/minority groups. The immigrants from the 1880s and 1890s gradually acculturated only to be augmented by more recent—and Orthodox—immigrants, who in later decades created traditional institutions, including those stressing Orthodox education.

By the 1920s, over half the Jewish population on the coast lived in Los Angeles amidst the growth of the movie, oil, sportswear, and other industries. This included clothing manufacturing, although, unlike New York, most workers were Mexican rather than Jewish. Numerous conventions of national Jewish organizations took place there as Jewish civic leaders stressed brotherhood and civic service to cement the Jewish role in secular society. The receptions they received "made Jews of the West believe that their status in this newest region of the new land remained unique." Second generation immigrants acted in a fashion that "reinforced their image as pillars of civic stability." Regardless of powerful Republican politicians like Abe Ruef in San Francisco and Joseph Simon in Portland, Jews tended to participate in political and civic affairs in a nonpartisan fashion.[14]

Jewish businesses, homes, synagogues, and other institutions often located in clusters within easy walking distance, much like New York, although Jews never formed the majority in a neighborhood as they did in the latter city. Instead, their lives were intertwined with those of other immigrant minorities. Gradually, during the interwar years, they moved to the suburbs, although they continued the pattern of residential clustering.

Jewish women created organizations that gradually shifted names and missions in accordance with changing community needs. Many moved from volunteer activities into professional social work often associated with social settlement houses. Professionals gradually, yet inexorably assumed leadership within Jewish social service organizations. By the mid-1920s Jews ranked second only to Catholics in terms of religious groups in several cities in the region. By 1960 the Jewish population of Los Angeles ranked second to New York. World War II and postwar prosperity, business opportunities, and retirement communities spurred the growth of Jewish urban populations and communal institutions.[15]

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14 Ruef controlled San Francisco politics from 1901 until his conviction for corruption in 1908. Simon served on the Portland City Council, then the Oregon Senate where he often sat as president before becoming a U.S. Senator (1989–1903), and finally as mayor of Portland (1909–1911). Both men worked as attorneys.

15 William Toll, "A Regional Context for Pacific Jewry, 1880–1930," in *The Columbia*

A groundbreaking anthology treating the subject, *Jews of the American West*, edited by Moses Rischin and John Livingston, posits three distinctive departures from the New York paradigm of American Jewish history. The first departed from the traditional periodization associated with immigration waves to suggest 1848–1890 as the time of initial, pioneering settlement; 1890–1941 as reflecting a decline in immigration and relatively small influx of Jews from Eastern Europe; and 1941–present as symbolizing renewed Jewish migration westward. In essence, internal migration replaced the movement of immigrants into the country as the defining characteristic. The tide (1849–1890), ebb (1890–1941), and renewed tide (1941–present) of migration westward responded to eras of greater and lesser economic opportunity. As Rischin avers, the Jewish West went from cosmopolitan to provincial and then returned to cosmopolitan. The second differentiating feature contrasts the small number of Eastern European Jewish immigrants in the region and their lesser influence relative to their counterparts in the Northeast. Nonetheless, those who did travel west behaved in many ways much like their counterparts in the northeastern cities. The third area of regional distinctiveness is the relative absence of antisemitism in the West. Livingston documents the latter with the welcome received by pioneering Jewish merchants, widespread election to public office, and acceptance of San Francisco Jews into elite social circles after Jews in New York had been excluded. With major Jewish populations concentrating in San Francisco and then Los Angeles, where Jews provided major national and international leadership, western states Jewry should clearly be defined as cosmopolitan and urban according to these editors.[16]

History of Jews and Judaism in America, ed. Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), 217–245, 218 (quotations one and two), 220 (quotation 3), 221 (quotation 4).

16 John Livingston, "Introduction," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 20–22. For the cosmopolitan and urban nature of western Jewish history, see 27–29; Rischin, 'The Jewish Experience in America," Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 30–47; Fred Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009). Raphael, "Beyond New York" expands on the second defining factor by arguing that, unlike cities in the East, the few Orthodox Jewish immigrants and their third- and

In many respects, *Jews of the Pacific Coast: Reinventing Community on America's Edge* by Ellen Eisenberg, Ava F. Kahn, and Toll mirrors the themes in the two earlier volumes. As they write in the preface, "we uncovered the distinctive roles that Jews have always played in the region, how they created for themselves a series of regional networks, financial, religious, and philanthropic, and how they interacted with non-Jews to create a unique status" (xi).

The authors of this work stress the need to recognize the importance of western Jewish history as an alternate to the American Jewish experience—yet an integral component of that experience—in contrast to an eastern and specifically New York–centered narrative. Pioneering status and early settlement; regional geography (especially separation from the rest of the nation and particularly the eastern cities, as well as the prevalence of cities); disproportionate contributions; integration into society; interaction of Jews and their communities within the relatively isolated region; western identity; regional religious and ethnic diversity (albeit with a relative small Black population until after World War II); early and rapid acculturation (including lows rates of affiliation, as well as high rates of intermarriage and religious innovation); and a frontier environment and mindset stand out as distinctive factors in western states Jewish history. To these authors, "starting with the Gold Rush, Jews of the Pacific West were to persist in the creation of a distinctive regional way of life." Their argument continues: "the timing of settlement and the social, political, religious, ethnic, and economic climate of the cities and towns in which communities developed profoundly influenced regional identities for Jews as for other westerners." Furthermore, the West, compared to other regions of the United States, developed a civic culture—founded in part by Jews—that proved to be particularly welcoming and attractive to new Jewish arrivals. Self-selected Jews, more daring and with greater religious flexibility, used family connections and geographical mobility to rise economically in a relatively open society, and they disproportionally contributed to civic development and

fourth-generation descendants moved to the West to acculturate rather than to retain tradition. However, Jeanne Abrams, "Chasing the Cure in Colorado," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 95–115 questions Raphael's conclusion.

improvement. Jews viewed the West as their Promised Land. The Jewish West was marked by diversity, economic and geographical mobility, institution-building, interconnectivity, and center/satellite (or periphery) community relationships.[17]

The Southern Jewish Distinctiveness School

The distinctiveness school of southern Jewish historiography largely began as the subfield gained renewed momentum during the 1970s. The first works included popular histories by Harry Golden and Eli Evans, as well as three anthologies.[18] Additional research has expanded on the early themes even as the concept of southern Jewish distinctiveness confronted challengers.[19]

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17 Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast*, 3, 4, 5, (for quotations in order).
18 Golden, *Our Southern Landsman*; Evans, *Provincials*; Dinnerstein and Palsson, eds., *Jews*; Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn*; Proctor, Schmier, and Stern, *Jews*. See also Lipson-Walker, "Shalom"; Carolyn Lipson-Walker, "It's All Relative: The Study of Southern Jewish Culture and Identity," *Shofar* 8, no. 1 (Fall 1989): 3–29; Lipson-Walker, "Weddings among Jews in the Post-World War II American South," in *Creative Ethnicity*, ed. Stephen Stern and Allan Cicala (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1991), 171–185; Morris N. Kertzer, "Magnolia Judaism," *Today's American Jews*, ed. Morris Kertzer (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1967), 265–280. For a full discussion of the South as a region, see Mark K. Bauman, "A Multithematic Approach to the Study of Southern Jewish History," in *Columbia History of American Jewry*, ed. by Marc Lee Raphael (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), reprinted in Bauman, *New Vision*.
19 See, e.g., Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots*; Caroline Light, *The Pride of Race and Character: The Roots of Jewish Benevolence in the Jim Crow South* (New York: New York University Press, 2014); Eliza R. L. McGraw, *Two Covenants: Representations of Southern Jewishness* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 2005); Jennifer R. Stollman, *Daughters of Israel; Daughters of the South* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013); Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). Examples of dissertations highlighting regional distinctiveness include Leah E. Hagedorn, "Jews and the American South, 1858–1905," (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999); Mark I. Greenberg, "Creating Ethnic, Class, and Southern Identity in Nineteenth Century America: The Jews of Savannah, 1830–1880," (PhD diss., University of Florida, 1997); Stuart Rockoff, "Jewish Racial Identity in Pittsburgh and Atlanta," (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2000). Much of the following description can be found in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots*.

Several of the key proponents of the distinctiveness school maintain that Jews came early to a South that was more welcoming to them than the North. They gained substantial rights not obtained elsewhere and found unprecedented acceptance, both of which were reflected in economic mobility, widespread political office holding, and extensive intermarriage. They paid the price with substantial acculturation and absorption of southern mores. Southern Jews owned enslaved workers and supported slavery, participated in duels as upper-class gentlemen, became ardent Confederates, advocated for the Lost Cause ideology, and became southern in identity and foodways.[20] Rooted in the South, they avoided controversial positions that might compromise their status and standing.[21] Thus, for example, few spoke out on behalf of Black civil rights, and many questioned national Jewish organizations and Jews who came from the North to demonstrate in their advocacy. Rejection of Zionism and Reform affiliation—especially in the Classical mode—marked the Jewish South to the degree that by the last decades of the nineteenth century Jewish religious observance in the region diverged markedly from the national norm.[22] Whereas western Jews demonstrated cosmopolitanism, southern Jews illustrated provincialism.

20 On support for the Confederacy, see Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2001). On dueling, see Mark I. Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia," *American Jewish History* 86 (March 1998): 55–75.

21 Abraham J. Peck, "'That Other Peculiar Institution': Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century South," *Modern Judaism* 7 (February 1987): 99–114; Abraham J. Peck, "Between Myth and Reality: Jews and Judaism in the Nineteenth Century American South," *Proceedings of the Ninth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, division b, 3 (Jerusalem, 1986): 119–26. Other pivotal articles include Stephen J. Whitfield, "Commercial Passions: The Southern Jew as Businessman," *American Jewish History* 71 (March 1982): 342–357; Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau* (Hamden: Archon, 1984).

22 Gary P. Zola, "The Ascendency of Reform Judaism in the American South during the Nineteenth Century," in Ferris and Greenberg, *Jewish Roots*, 156–191.

Comparative Analysis and Criticism

In contrast to western states Jewish historiography, the small-town experience dominates historiography of the Jewish South. Whereas literature of the West suggests that small-town Jewish life all but died by the early twentieth century and that first San Francisco and then Los Angeles came to dominate, the southern distinctiveness school imagines substantial continuity until the last half of the twentieth century. Yet the latter school fails to take into consideration two factors, among others. First, as Leonard Rogoff and others have demonstrated, Jews living in small towns identified with and had the value systems of urbanites. Second, the numerous cities in the South boasted important Jewish presence virtually from the onset. These urban Jewish communities served as centers for peripheral small-town Jews. Movement from small town to larger city and between larger cities served as constants of southern Jewish history. The seeming persistence of small-town Jewish life masks mobility. Although some families of central European ancestry remained from generation to generation, many departed seeking greater economic opportunity and larger Jewish community involvement. Jews from Eastern Europe often took their place but followed the same pattern, only to be largely replaced in turn by fellow Eastern Europeans. Military camps bringing Jewish soldiers during and after World War II; later the opening of universities to Jewish faculty, including doctors to medical schools; and, finally, during recent decades the growth of retirement and tourist communities have repeatedly drawn Jews and their congregations to renew and create small town Jewish life.[23]

Further complicating the seeming juxtaposition between the West and South, one wonders if historians of western Jewry have neglected small-town life in Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, Wyoming, Utah, Alaska, and other locations that would reflect the same phenomenon as in the South.[24] As

23 Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

24 Leonard Rogoff, "Harry Golden, New Yorker," *Southern Jewish History* 11 (2008): 41–64. In *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), Rogoff argues that Philadelphia served as a critical center of the peripheral Jewish communities in North Carolina. Historians who stress southern Jewish distinctiveness point to opposition to Zionism, something also emphasized by Fred

of 1877, California led the nation with Jewish communities numbering eighty-nine. Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Oregon, Nevada, Washington, and Wyoming added over thirty additional such sites, and this fails to account for New Mexico. Ten percent of all Jewish communities in the country were located in the West, comprising eight percent of the country's Jews. Whereas Jews in San Francisco first constituted the majority in the region, small-town and small-city life for Jews also loomed large.[25]

In some ways, the picture western Jewish historians draw of big-city hegemony is reminiscent of northern historiography, in which metropolitan New York Jewish history looms large. San Francisco and then Los Angeles, on the one hand, and metropolitan New York, on the other, eclipse Seattle, Portland, and Philadelphia, as well as cities with smaller Jewish populations. In like ways to the western stress on large cities, emphasis on small-town life in the South belittles the numerous important urban centers in that region.

Rosenbaum, "Zionism versus anti-Zionism: The State of Israel Comes to San Francisco," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 119–135. Leonard Dinnerstein, "From Desert Oasis to Caucus: The Jews of Tucson," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 139–163 is essentially the story of small city southern Jewry with minor variations based on local natural resources. See also Juanita Brooks, *The History of the Jews in Utah and Idaho, 1853–1950* (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1973); Rochelle Kaplan, "Utah's Jewish History," Mormons and Jews.org, bit.ly/3THNIyj; Ralph M. Tannenbaum, "The Jewish Community in Utah," *Utah History Encyclopedia*, https://www.uen.org/utah_history_encyclopedia/j/JEWISH_COMMUNITY.shtml; John P. Marschall, *Jews in Nevada: A History* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 2011); Bernard Reisman and Joel I. Reisman, *Life on the Frontier: The Jews of Alaska* (Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 1995); Rudolph Glanz, *The Jews in American Alaska, 1867–1880* (New York: H. H. Glanz, 1953). In like manner to Dinnerstein, Earl Pomeroy, "On Becoming a Westerner," in Rischin and Livingston, *Jews of the American West*, 194–212 posits the acceptance of Jews in the region mostly from German-speaking countries during the nineteenth century and the relative lack of antisemitism as functions of the needed skills they brought with them as merchants to western society and their contributions to their adopted homes. Although Dun and Company reports could smack of antisemitism, these to Pomeroy were not as representative of local public opinion as the uniquely high number of Jewish political officeholders. His findings mirror those of the distinctiveness school of southern Jewish historiography.

25 Rischin, "Jewish Experience," 33–34.

The southern and western distinctiveness schools each claim that the early arrival of Jews, Jewish contributions, and extensive acculturation, as well as the relative openness of society bred unprecedented acceptance as represented by wide-scale office holding and economic success. Both regions, therefore, were the least antisemitic in the country. How can these factors be unique if both schools of historiography make the same claims? If office holding and upward economic mobility serve as major evidence, would not these factors have to be compared, for example, with the Midwest?[26]

Historians argue that people of color bore the brunt of oppression in the South, and that Asian and Latino/a immigrants and Indians bore that burden in the West, thus providing another reason for the relatively low levels of antisemitism in each region. However, I agree with Earl Pomeroy's contention that no evidence exists supporting this position, yet I go a step further.[27] The times of heightened racism against other groups—most notably against people of color in the South—coincided with periods of intensified antisemitism. Prejudice

26 Jonathan D. Sarna, "Comments," "Roundtable of Anti-Semitism in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 19, no. 3 (2020): 473–505 raises similar questions concerning the region as a critical variable in relation to antisemitism. Following the western school, he suggests that, when Jews could claim pioneering status, discrimination against them tended to be lessened. Yet, rather than singling out the West or South, he stresses local examples in Charleston, Cincinnati, and San Francisco. Conversely, Boston, Minneapolis, and San Diego, he argues, illustrated more antisemitism in correlation to the post–founding settlement of Jews. See also Hasia Diner's response, in which she also rejects the importance of region in favor of "borderlands, hinterlands, cities, the edges of cities, commercial agricultural zones, places of hardscrabble farming, logging, mining, and mill towns." Both stress mobility within and across regions as another mitigating force against using region as a determining factor.

27 Pomeroy, "On Becoming," 194–212 rejects the theory that hatred of the Chinese in the West and Black people in the South shielded Jews from more virulent antisemitism. For contrast with the latter, see, e.g., Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2006), 270–284. Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast*, 7 questions Pomeroy's assertion and suggest that the presence of Chinese, Japanese, and Native Americans who bore the brunt of greater prejudice did contribute to the acceptance of Jews as White.

against one did little if anything to lessen prejudice against another. In fact, heightened tensions against other minorities tended to exacerbate prejudice toward Jews. This held true in the South during the Jim Crow and civil rights eras and in the West, while Japanese Americans were interned during World War II. Individuals who resort to hatred of one group often attack other groups as well. The modern Klan demonized Blacks, Jews, Catholics, and labor union organizers. The Silver Shirts, Columbians, and similar organizations spewed hatred against Black and Jewish Americans. Into the twenty-first century, anti-immigrant, anti-Black, and anti-Jewish sentiments unify the same elements of hate. Furthermore, whereas Jews served throughout European history as the major victims of prejudice, throughout American history and throughout the country other groups—Indian, Asian, Irish, Italian, Polish, and Latin American immigrants, as well as Catholic, Mormon, and other religious minorities—became far more the objects of prejudice and persecution than Jews, partly because Jews remained a small percentage of the population and were typically not perceived to pose the same threats.

Still, some variations appeared. While Jews were being excluded from Mardi Gras in New Orleans and Mobile and from the Piedmont Driving Club in Atlanta during the late nineteenth century, Jewish clubs remained listed on San Francisco's social register. When racist antisemites accused Jews as a group of communism for their support of the civil rights movement in the South, the House Un-American Activities Committee and Senator Joseph McCarthy chastised individual Jews in Los Angeles's movie industry as communist. During the 1930s, the Silver Shirts brewed fascism from Asheville, North Carolina, and fascism flourished elsewhere in the South and North, whereas Nazis in the West concentrated especially on Jews in the movie industry because of their influence on public opinion.[28]

28 Raymond Mohl, *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945–1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Movement* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010); Steven J. Ross, *Hitler in Los Angeles: How Jews Foiled Nazi Plots against Hollywood and America* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2017).

Another contentious issue relates to how Jews responded to the persecution of other groups. Jews in the South have been castigated by some historians for largely acquiescing to, if not supporting racism within their midst. Fearful of their position and physical safety, many implored national Jewish organizations to desist from issuing statements advocating Black civil rights and opposed northern Jews who travelled to the region to march and demonstrate without concern for the precarious position of Jews in the local communities.[29] Other historians argue that numerous Jews in the region openly supported desegregation and Black civil rights, albeit usually not by marching and demonstrating.[30]

Yet, even if one were to accept the distinctiveness interpretation, the real litmus test would not be contrasts between southern Jews and northern Jews dealing with racism in the South; rather, it would be how Jews in other sections reacted to discrimination against other minority groups in their region. Eisenberg's study of Jewish reactions in San Francisco and Los Angeles to anti-Japanese feelings and actions illustrates worse responses than those associated with Jews in the South toward desegregation.[31] As desegregation moved to the North, Jews in that region arguably behaved worse than Jews in the South. Busing to achieve integration in Chicago and Boston and the move toward neighborhood schools in New York provoked wide-scale Jewish opposition and open protest. Violent encounters took place between Orthodox and Hasidim and people of color in areas of New York, including Crown Heights. Nothing like this took place in the South. Urban riots/insurrections in northern and western cities often targeted Jewish stores and

29 See, e.g., Goldstein, *Price*; Cheryl Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006); Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001).

30 See, e.g., Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1997); P. Allen Krause, *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2017), and the numerous works cited in these books as well as articles in *Southern Jewish History*.

31 Eisenberg, *First*. For Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger's anti-Chinese position, see Fred Rosenbaum, *Visions of Reform: Congregation Emanu-El and the Jews of San Francisco, 1848–1999* (Berkeley: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000), 89.

resulted in very negative reactions. Whereas Jewish stores in the South were targeted for civil rights demonstrations and sit-ins because civil rights leaders viewed them as more sympathetic than non-Jewish business owners, they were not destroyed. Jewish department store owners typically reacted with surprise and resentment for being singled out but desegregated relatively quickly.

Differences can also be read more as divergences. The discovery of minerals in many areas of the West seemingly contrasts with the dominance of cash crop agriculture in the South. Nonetheless, Jews prospered by concentrating as middlemen and merchants in both situations. Some Jews attempted to cement their place in southern White society through advocacy of Lost Cause ideology. But Jews in the West joined and led Native Sons organizations, "notoriously nativist organizations dedicated to honoring white history in the west."[32]

Experiences with the modern Ku Klux Klan in both sections reflected a mixture of antisemitism and acceptance. In both sections, Klansmen, in Jonathan D. Sarna's famous depiction, found difficulty coming to grips with the conflicting image of the international Jew versus the Jew next door.

In *The Provincials*, Evans argues that living in a region dominated by a regional White culture—fundamentalist/evangelical in religion, anti-intellectual, and antiscientific—must have influenced Jews. In fact, in the Bible Belt, Jews affiliated at a higher rate than elsewhere to demonstrate that they, too, were churchgoers.[33] In the religiously more relaxed West (as in New Orleans), synagogue affiliation suffered. Historians also argue that Reform dominated the South by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, since Jews tended to assimilate southern White mores.

But these factors placed together reflect an enigma. Would not Jews have espoused an emotional, spiritual form of Judaism instead of Classical Reform if they were following the conservative Protestant lead? Jews of central European origin in the region took their religion rationally. They tended to reject anti-intellectual currents and support,

32 Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast*, 101.

33 Hoberman, *How Strange* finds this tendency in New England small towns as well.

for example, the theory and teaching of evolution, a far cry from the typical depiction of the fundamentalist South. Protestantism in the region did influence Jews, but through the urban, middle, and upper class high-church model commonly impacting Jews and Judaism virtually throughout the country, and not of that of the majority of southern White Protestants.

Reading the work of historians of western Jewry, one is struck by similarities concerning Jews as local pioneers, Jewish social services and institutional development, religious trends, chain migration, Jewish economic networks, and so many other areas not only with the Jewish South but also with almost every other similar place in the United States. Conflicts over the powers of rabbis; differences based on country of origin, ritual observance, and Zionism; the emergence and significance of Reform and Reform leadership; Reform rabbis serving as "ambassadors to the gentiles" and advocates of social reform; and the difficulties of practicing Judaism in relative isolation were more ubiquitous than unique.

Classical Reform and anti-Zionism thrived in both regions as they did in other places throughout America.[34] East European enclaves with Yiddish culture, traditional institutions, and Zionism flourished in cities across regions. Atlanta's south side, the Pinch section of Memphis, the Dryades area of New Orleans, and similar Eastern European Jewish enclaves in Baltimore differed from their counterparts in the West and elsewhere only marginally in time and size. Baron de Hirsch and Anshei S'fard congregations appeared in numerous areas.[35] Sephardic

34 Rosenbaum, *Visions* (especially for Rabbi Voorsanger). On Rabbi Emil Hirsch, see also Tobias Brinkman, *Sundays at Sinai: A Jewish Congregation in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

35 Born in the German states, Baron de Hirsch (1831–1896) was a financier and internationally renowned philanthropist. He founded the Baron de Hirsch Fund to assist immigrants in Canada and the United States and the Jewish Colonization Society. Congregations named in his honor were established in Memphis, Tennessee; Seattle, Washington; and Dawson City, Alaska, besides Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Cornwall, Ontario. Jews from Eastern Europe and especially Romania established Anshei S'fard (spellings varied) congregations to follow the teaching of Rabbi Isaac Luria Ashkenazi (Ha'Ari, or the Lion), a sixteenth-century Jewish mystic and a father of modern kabbalah,

communities in Atlanta and Montgomery, Seattle, Portland, and Los Angeles diverged more because of size than any regionally based characteristics. Jeffrey S. Gurock, a foremost historian of Orthodoxy especially in the North, relished writing the history of an Orthodox congregation in Charleston because it highlighted major national themes and patterns.[36]

Support for the Confederacy offers a logical example of southern Jewish distinctiveness. Yet some historians question even this. Their work records how many Jews in the South delayed or avoided military service.[37] Adam Mendelsohn has found that Jews in the North were equally reticent to serve. Those who could afford to, as in the South, tended to eschew military service. Moreover, abolition and especially the Emancipation Proclamation dramatically curtailed Jewish enlistment in the North regardless of economic class. Robert Rosen identifies the typical Jewish Confederate as a recent immigrant from the German states who worked as a peddler or clerk in New Orleans.[38] Mendelsohn suggests that lower-class Jews in the North tended to enlist for economic reasons. If that were also the case in the South, then wide-scale allegiance to the Confederacy would be brought further into question.[39]

Contrary to distinctiveness school claims, Jews in the South did speak out on controversial issues from Reconstruction to prohibition, women's rights, and the long civil rights movement. They opposed prayer in

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in Safed. Congregations existed with this name in Atlanta, Georgia; Louisville, Kentucky; New Orleans, Louisiana; Bethlehem, Pennsylvania; Glendale, Wisconsin; Boro Park, Monsey, and Wesley Hills, New York; Lynn, Massachusetts; Lakewood, New Jersey; and Waterbury, Connecticut among other places, although many ultimately merged with other Orthodox synagogues or disappeared.

36 Jeffrey S. Gurock, *Orthodoxy in Charleston: Brith Shalom Beth Israel and American Jewish History* (Charleston: College of Charleston Library and Brith Shalom Beth Israel, 2004).

37 Anton Hieke, *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013); Daniel R. Weinfeld, "A Certain Ambivalence: Florida's Jews and the Civil War," *Southern Jewish History* 17 (2014): 91–129.

38 Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*.

39 Adam Mendelsohn, *Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War: The Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2022).

the public schools, the use of the *Merchant of Venice* as required school reading, and the building of a statue of Jesus in Corpus Christi harbor. Thus, in these and other cases, southern Jews did support unpopular causes and opposed antisemitism.[40]

What of local versus regional distinctiveness? Various examples suggest that local phenomenon can be equally if not more significant than regional factors: the movie industry in Los Angeles, gambling and nightclubs in Reno and Las Vegas, and life in Phoenix versus Portland, Seattle, or San Francisco. Residing in commercial cities like Atlanta or Charlotte, technology hubs including Austin, North Carolina's Research Triangle, or California's Silicon Valley, historic cities like Savannah and Charleston, and small towns where Jewish populations and congregations are either dying or coming into their own as retirement communities, university centers, or resorts all reflect varieties of historical experiences. Historians discuss the concept of "the culture of place." Boston, Philadelphia, New Orleans, and other locations display distinctive cultural traits that affect the individuals from different groups that settle there far more than regional differences.[41]

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40 Leonard Rogoff, "A Tale of Two Cities: Race, Riots, and Religion in New Bern and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1898," *Southern Jewish History* 14 (2011): 37–75; Daniel R. Weinfeld, "Samuel Fleishman: Tragedy in Reconstruction-Era Florida," *Southern Jewish History* (2005): 31–76; Stuart Rockoff, "Carpetbaggers, Jacklegs, and Bolting Republicans: Jews in Reconstruction Politics in Ascension Parish, Louisiana," *American Jewish History* 97 (2013): 39–64; Jacob Morrow-Spitzer, "'Free from Proscription and Prejudice,': Politics and Race in the Election of One Jewish Mayor in Late Reconstruction Louisiana," *Southern Jewish History* 22 (2219): 5-41; Marni Davis, *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (New York: New York University Press, 2012); Leonard Rogoff, "Southern Jews, Woman Suffrage," *Southern Jewish History* 23 (2020): 1–42. Besides references concerning Jews and civil rights above, see Bobbie S. Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860–1929* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013); Charles L. Chavis, Jr., "Rabbi Edward L. Israel: The Making of a Progressive Interracialist, 1923–1941," *Southern Jewish History* 22 (2019): 43–87; James L. Moses, *Righteous and Just Cause: Rabbi Ira Sanders and the Fight for Racial and Social Justice in Arkansas, 1923–1963* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2018); Mary Jo O'Rear, "The Constitution, Corpus Christi, and the Statue on the Bay," *Southern Jewish History* 27 (2024).

41 Jonathan D. Sarna kindly brought this concept of "the culture of place" to my

The same holds true of the somewhat ephemeral concept of identity. People identify with their region but also with their state and city. Jews who live in Texas identify as Texans, southerners, and westerners and as people from Dallas, Fort Worth, or Galveston. Identification with Atlanta, Charlotte, Charleston, San Diego, Salt Lake City, Denver or any other location can easily surpass identifying with the entire state or region. Identities change over time and in relation to circumstances. Their impact also varies from individual to individual.

Foodways reflect the same characteristics, with adaptation to local culinary styles being equally if not more important than region.[42] Low country Charleston fare differs dramatically from New Orleans Creole and Tex-Mex cooking. Jews living in Alaska, Arizona, Idaho, and Napa, California avail themselves of different ingredients and recipes. I was born in Brooklyn and raised on Long Island, so I like ice coffee. Yet I have lived most of my life in the Atlanta area, so I also order sweet tea. This may reflect a braided identity, borrowing from Stephen J. Whitfield's insightful phrase, but my identity as a Jew—in the variety of its many and changing meanings—overcomes local and regional allegiances.[43]

The few comparative studies spanning the South and West emphasize similarities. Deborah Dash Moore draws parallels after World War II in *To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and L.A.*, and Toll identifies few regional differences in Jewish women's club activities during the last decades of the nineteenth and first decades

attention in an e-mail dated 1 June 2021. He also noted that, as argued by David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), individuals from different places and cultures settled in specific areas, and their differences shaped local cultures. For example, early Jews in Cincinnati hailed largely from Bavaria; those from Columbus, from Poland. In turn, their neighbors influence Jews. See Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Boston, Athens, and Jerusalem (A Tribute to Samuel Heilman Upon His Retirement)," *Society* 57 (2020): 485–486.

42 Whereas Marcie Cohen Ferris, *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) attempts to make the case for regionalism, much of her evidence documents local variations.

43 Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry," *American Jewish History* 78 (March 1988): 363–387.

of the twentieth century.[44] Lee Shai Weissbach's study of Jewish life in small towns finds only minor, if any, variations across the country during the twentieth century, as does Shari Rabin's history of Jews and Judaism along the frontier and Zev Eleff's study of synagogue control, both during the nineteenth century.[45] These studies make it clear that historians should not compare apples and oranges but look to similar local environments for their analysis to make sense.

The New, New England Jewish History

Two recent books cover the six-state area of New England: Michael Hoberman's *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* and his *How Strange it Seems: Cultural Life of Jews in Small-Town New England*.[46] *New Israel/New England* is almost dismissive of New England Jewish history before the mid-nineteenth century. Hoberman contends that Newport claimed most Jews in the region before that era, with approximately two hundred residents. New England, he observes, "had far fewer Jews than any of the other areas of the thirteen colonies." His book concentrates instead on the influence of Jews and Judaism on the Puritans. Nonetheless, he chronicles the history of colonial New England Jewry and finds that they largely fit within the model of highly transient Jews in port cities across the Atlantic world. When Nephuse Israel members requested and received donations from congregations across

44 Deborah Dash Moore, *To the Golden Cities* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994); William Toll, "A Quiet Revolution: Jewish Women's Clubs and the Widening Female Sphere, 1870–1920," *American Jewish Archives* 41 (Spring–Summer 1989): 7–26.
45 Weissbach, *Jewish Life*; Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017); Zev Eleff, *Who Rules the Synagogue?: Religious Authority and the Formation of American Judaism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016). See also Lee Shai Weissbach, "East European Immigrants and the Image of Jews in the Small-Town South," *American Jewish History* 85 (September 1997): 231–262; Weissbach, "Stability and Mobility in the Small Jewish Community: Examples from Kentucky History," *American Jewish History* 79 (Spring 1990): 355–375; Weissbach, "Kentucky's Jewish History in National Perspective: The Era of Mass Migration," *Filson Club Historical Quarterly* 69 (1995): 255–274.
46 Michael Hoberman, *New Israel/New England: Jews and Puritans in Early America* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011); Hoberman, *How Strange*.

the Atlantic to build its sanctuary, it responded to New York's Shearith Israel "in an atmosphere of extraregional commerce and cooperation." Finding mixed acceptance in Roger Williams's Rhode Island, Jews largely lacked acceptance in the other colonies. New England Jewry basically died out after the American Revolution until Jews from central Europe re-created it during the middle of the nineteenth century.[47]

What can one make of New England Jewish history before this influx? Newport, Rhode Island gains importance as home to one of the five mainland British colonial synagogues. The few Jews present in the region acted financially and in terms of mobility like Jews across the colonies and Atlantic. Conversely, the lack of acceptance, the virtual demise of the Jewish population, and the paucity of numbers reflects somewhat the history of Jews in North Carolina and Maryland but otherwise stands out as distinctive.

Only with the later renewal of Jewish life does New England again reflect national trends. Boston then stands out as a city with major Jewish presence and Connecticut as partly a suburb of New York but nonetheless with important urban centers. This fits metropolitan and suburban trends. But if historians look at Rhode Island, Vermont, New Hampshire, Maine, Connecticut, and Massachusetts as a region, with few exceptions they would find Jews in small towns and small cities much like the image of southern Jewish communities. Hoberman's *How Strange It Seems* stresses this small-town experience. As was the case almost universally, he pictures his protagonists as cosmopolitans. Cities served as centers for peripheral Jewish communities. Finding fundamental similarities for Jews in small towns throughout the country, he nevertheless argues, "that the particularities of local experiences do matter." The mixture of "past and future prospects, of tradition and innovation…has influenced Jews and non-Jews alike in their fashioning of a place-based mentality." Using interviews and stressing folk history, Hoberman observes: "Like all newcomers, the Jews of rural New

47 Hoberman, *New Israel/New England*, 3–4, 134, respectively. Parallels exist for the interest that New England Puritans demonstrated in Jews and Judaism with that shown by Lutheran Reverend Johann Martin Boltzius, revivalist George Whitfield, and Methodist John Wesley in colonial Georgia.

England have adopted local cultural templates." Yet Jews arriving during the late nineteenth and especially the early twentieth century differed from their non-Jewish neighbors in that they did not look back with nostalgia but rather forward to economic opportunity and civic engagement. As was the case for small-town Jewry throughout the country, most started as peddlers until they amassed sufficient capital to become merchants. Many, too, started as scrap metal dealers. Some built factories, just like Jews in the South Carolina up country and in North Carolina. They used family networks for support and to expand their businesses. Stories of contingent acceptance with memories of incidental antisemitism are recorded in similar environments throughout the country. The arrival of Eastern European Jews overwhelmed the earlier central European presence only to be augmented and supplanted by new arrivals during the 1960s and thereafter, another typical phenomenon of small-town Jewish life. Like Jews elsewhere, they valued education, joined civic clubs, contributed to the well-being of their communities, and ultimately held political offices.[48]

Reading Hoberman, I am struck by the similarities of small-town life across regions. Almost every story he uncovers could be told about the South. However, some differences stand out. He hardly mentions Jews of central European origin or African Americans and their struggle for civil rights. Because he chooses to concentrate on small towns, Jews in New England cities are virtually invisible.

48 Hoberman, *How Strange*, 11, 17 (first and second quotations, respectively), 19–20, 28–35, 103–133. Two differences between small-town Jewish communities in the South and New England appear to be that Jews in the latter have tended to comprise a higher percentage of these rural populations (14–15). In both regions, agricultural programs drew Russian Jews, but more seem to have remained in farming, including cattle ranching, in New England than in the South. This may relate to a subject discussed in this article: the place of origin and occupation in the old world of the immigrants (25–28 and chapter 2). Yet Jewish cattle and horse dealers in rural New England served as middlemen much as did Jewish cotton brokers in the South. Both followed economic roles imported from Europe. Hoberman's discussion of chain migration patterns (26–27) was largely universal. The back-to-the-land counterculture movement and rise of *havurah* groups during the 1960s, 1970s, and beyond (36–38) clearly parallels happenings in sections of the far West and elsewhere.

It is possible that few central European Jews chose to move to these towns. Yet their absence may equally be a function of choices made by the historian. Hoberman essentially starts with the twentieth century with the result that the reader is not informed if Jews from central Europe first inhabited these towns and then most moved away, as happened in so many southern towns. His research also centers on interviews with descendants of East European Jews. Presumably few African Americans lived in these towns, and issues like busing did not impact this community as much as it did Boston for example. Jews did experience antisemitism. Was this lessened by the presence of a group or groups who, like African Americans in the South, Hispanic Americans in the southwest, and Asians in the Pacific, bore the greater brunt of prejudice? Although Hoberman points to a variety of other immigrant minorities, he does not address this issue.

Small-town versus urban concentration highlights a fundamental issue of historiography. By choosing options historians create constructs that can obscure broader patterns. As has been demonstrated, historians of western Jewish distinctiveness emphasize the big city experience and marginalize small town life. Historians of the southern Jewish distinctiveness school concentrate on the small towns and downplay the cities, as Hoberman does for twentieth-century New England.

Time and circumstance play their parts in this. The last fifty years witnessed the revitalization and flourishing of small-town Jewish life in New England. However, when Stanley Broches published *Jews in New England: Six Monographs* in 1942, the small towns possibly looked like dead ends. He ignored them to emphasize metropolitan Jewish life.[49] A more holistic view of regional and national American Jewish history would integrate rural and urban experiences. Although population figures make a difference, they should not be used to ignore the variety of locations where Jews settled.

49 Stanley Broches, *Jews in New England: Six Monographs* (New York: Bloch, 1942).

Final Observations

Emphasizing region clearly tends to mask similarities with similar local environments. The histories of Jewish social services; even the names of Jewish clubs; general economic mobility and the preponderance of businesses and the professions; chain migration; the roles of community builders, ethnic brokers, and ambassadors to the gentiles; changes in power structures from rabbis and laypeople to federation executives; and shifts from volunteerism to professionalism are only some of the subjects that, with truly comparative study, demonstrate national patterns. The description of the free and open society of the West and weakness of western religious practices, to give another example, parallels depictions of New Orleans Jewish history.

Far from being isolated, numerous factors connected regions. These include family and business ties; affiliation with national and international Jewish organizations; conventions associated with national Jewish organizations; Jewish causes including opposition to antisemitism, support for immigration, and Israel; and the movement of people. As Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll recognize, the pioneer rabbi of the West, Julius Eckman, received preparation for his role from his experiences in southern congregations. Abraham Labatt from Charleston won election as one of San Francisco's first alderman. In San Francisco and Los Angeles, Labatt family members "helped create Jewish community life." Wandering Jews, the Labatts moved from Charleston to New Orleans to the West, creating Jewish community institutions along the way. The same held true for members of the Dyer family of Baltimore, who moved freely to Galveston and back and forth to California. Born in Charleston, Solomon Heydenfeldt became a California Supreme Court justice, having practiced law in Alabama and Georgia and secured a judgeship in the South. Adolph Sutro, a mining engineer in the West and Jewish mayor of San Francisco, had a cousin, Max Sutro, who served as the first reader of Har Sinai in Baltimore. As transplants from elsewhere in the United States, Jewish community founders in the West represented diverse cultures and business experiences, as well as varying

degrees of English proficiency.[50] Yet those same individuals often maintained business, family, and religious ties to their prior homes. The same flow of people across regions occurred from the South to the North. Bernard Baruch, Louis Brandeis, Lillian Hellman, Ludwig Lewisohn, Adolph Ochs, and Nathan Straus, among many others, had southern roots and northern careers.

During a generation in which historians question southern, American, and American Jewish historical exceptionalism with research emphasizing global and transnational perspectives, regional distinctiveness can strike one as parochial.[51] Nonetheless, as long as the New York metropolitan area dominates as the normative paradigm of American Jewish history, regional studies remain essential. Only from them can we learn, for example, that work in the garment industry, unionization and strikes, and socialism were templates for Eastern European Jewish immigrants in New York and a few other industrial cities, but in the vast majority of places in the country these people opened small businesses, did not unionize or strike, and adhered to socialism more as an intellectual pursuit and ideal than as a necessary corrective to their economic positions.[52] One can only hope for the greater inclusion of the history

50 Eisenberg, Kahn, and Toll, *Jews of the Pacific Coast*, 17, 21 (quotation), 41, 44, 18; Robert E. Stewart and Mary Frances Stewart, *Adolph Sutro: A Biography* (Berkeley: Howell-North, 1962); William R. Huber, *Adolph Sutro: King of the Comstock Load and Mayor of San Francisco* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2020); William M. Kramer, "Solomon Heydenfeldt (1816–1890): Supreme Court Judge," *Western States Jewish History* 8, no. 3 (1996): 129–144; Kramer, "Solomon Heydenfeldt: Earliest Important Jewish Attorney in California" *Western States Jewish History* 23, no. 2 (January 1991): 149–161; Bauman, *New Vision*, 181–185, 193, 227–229. After his judgeship, Heydenfeldt became a renowned member of the San Francisco and California bar but was forced to leave legal practice because of his refusal to take the test oath during the Civil War since he remained a stalwart advocate for the South.

51 David Sorkin, "Is American Jewry Exceptional?: Comparing Jewish Emancipation in Europe and America," *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (September 2010): 175–200; Tony Michel, "Is America 'Different'? A Critique of American Jewish Exceptionalism," *American Jewish History* 96, no. 3 (September 2010): 201–224; Natalie L. Ring, "Is Southern History on Life Support?: A Review Essay," *Journal of Southern History* 90/1 (February 2024): 119–136.

52 Stephen J. Whitfield, review of *New Vision of Southern Jewish History* by Mark

of Jews and Judaism throughout the country as integral components of a broader and more complex story.

Stressing the uniqueness of a location's history runs the danger of marginalizing it. Peculiarities too easily transform into cute stories that are relatively unimportant for understanding the whole picture. Certainly, local and regional variations should not be minimized, but neither should they be overemphasized to the neglect of similarities. Only by tracing both in realistic terms can we achieve a truer and fuller understanding of the scope of American Jewish history.

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Bauman, *American Jewish Archives Journal* 61, no. 2 (2019): 121 criticizes the volume by comparing the small-town Jewish South with "the sweatshops and trade-union struggles depicted in, say, Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers* (1976)." Whitfield fails to realize that Howe's depiction held true for Jews in a very few cities and certainly not for the vast majority of small-town Jewish communities nationally. Again, Whitfield falls into the danger of equating New York City Jewish history with American Jewish history writ large.