Book Reviews

Ayelet Brinn, *A Revolution in Type: Gender and the Making of the American Yiddish Press* (New York: New York University Press, 2023), 328pp.

Ayelet Brinn's well-researched book traces the history of the nationally circulated American Yiddish press from its beginnings in 1880s through its waning years in the 1930s and 1940s. Brinn argues that, regardless of ideology, Yiddish newspapers grappled with issues of circulation, readership, writers, and editorial control, all of which had gendered components at their base. Women readers were key to the newspapers' mass readership and, hence, to commercial success. Whatever their political or religious bent, the Yiddish press had to confront questions of gender in their content, marketing, and in editorial structures—notably the status of women writers and of men who wrote under female pseudonyms. Indeed, Brinn says, "questions about women and gender were central to the emergence of the Yiddish press as a powerful, influential force in American Jewish culture" (7).

Focusing primarily on three New York Yiddish daily newspapers, the religiously Orthodox *Dos yiddishes tageblat* (*Tag*), the socialist *Forverts* (*Forward*), and, later, the communist *Frayht* (*Freiheit*). During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, *Tag* and *Forverts* dominated the immigrant reading market. Like the American popular press in this period, Yiddish newspapers competed for readers, albeit with vastly different messages. Both featured women writers, developed women's pages, and made concerted efforts to attract women readers via content and advertising. While the two papers had different views of assimilation and Americanization, they appealed to women readers who were key to their commercial success.

General human interest, advice columns, and women's pages were central features of all Yiddish newspapers. Abraham Cahan, for example, longtime editor of the *Forverts* and an important figure in American Yiddish literature and politics, offered "Advice to the Lovelorn" and the

famous "Bintl Briefs." The *Forverts* carried specifically political messages for women, while *Tag* "infused its women's page with quotations from the Bible…as well as jokes…that could be read aloud at holiday celebrations" (153). Interestingly, both papers supported woman suffrage but framed the issue in different terms. Entertainment, news, and practical advice appeared inflected by each paper's political outlook and reflected different "understandings of the ideal future trajectory of American Jewish life and the roles women should play in shaping this trajectory." Human interest, Brinn argues, "ran concurrently with other advice and write-in columns" that, while "drastically different in content and tone," nonetheless were key to each newspaper's efforts to attract large audiences (77).

In the book's most original chapter, Brinn grapples with the difficulties of interpretation as many Yiddish journalists—male and female—wrote under assumed names. On the one hand, this provided important career paths for women. The well-known activist Rose Pastor Stokes, for example, wrote a column called "Just Between Ourselves, Girls," in *Tag*'s English edition in her own name, but she also wrote under the name "Zelda" for the *Forverts*. Women's columns also revealed male assumptions about women's roles and interests, particularly when men wrote under female names. Getsel Zelikovits, for example, was the long-term writer for *Tag*'s "Lithuanian Wisewoman" (120). Male journalists, Brinn argues, by and large brought "elements gleaned from broader American cultural spheres into Yiddish newspapers." Women journalists, on the other hand, "often strove to break down the boundaries that newspaper editors imposed on women's writing—often with very little success (221). This contrast, Brinn says, reveals "ambivalent feelings about modernity and change in the American Jewish world" (221). "When read this way," she argues, "women's content becomes not peripheral to the Yiddish press but key to understanding" how it functioned and offers "critical insights into the power, priorities, and complications" in the Yiddish publishing sphere (139).

Circulation of Yiddish dailies declined during the interwar years even as Yiddish publishers "became spaces in which the boundaries of American Jewish culture were actively contested and stretched" (223). For those familiar with the history of the American Yiddish press, Brinn's

well-researched book will pose important new questions about gender and interpretation. For those less familiar with the topic, her book will not only present a sweeping historical overview of the Yiddish press but also provide an important gendered lens through which to understand not only the Yiddish press but also the larger history of journalism in America.

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***Jewish Historical Societies: Navigating the Professional-Amateur Divide*, edited by Joel Gereboff and Jonathan L. Friedmann (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 2023), 288 pp.**

Since the establishment of the Rhode Island Jewish Historical Association in 1951, there are now more than forty historical societies dedicated to the study and preservation of American Jewish history in specific cities, states, and regions across the country. Existing alongside the American Jewish Archives and the American Jewish Historical Society, these societies have contributed significantly to our understanding of the American Jewish experience in a variety of ways. They produce and support archives, journals, newsletters, conferences, lectures, museum exhibits, documentary films, travel programs, and, more recently, podcasts and digital mapping projects. The field of American Jewish history is far broader and more diverse as a result.

While many of these organizations have existed for decades, there have been few efforts to date to document the growth and analyze the

contributions of American Jewish historical societies, to evaluate them in comparative perspective, and to explore the challenges they face in navigating between the standards of professional historical scholarship and the needs and desires of the lay audiences they serve and depend on for funding. Joel Gereboff (Arizona State) and Jonathan Friedmann (Academy for Jewish Religion, California) have edited a volume on American Jewish historical societies that expertly fills this void by exploring the critical issues that these institutions face while charting possible futures and new agendas for them to pursue moving forward.

At a time when we still do not have a national association of American Jewish historical societies or regular conferences devoted to discussing their work, this book creates an important opportunity for the similarities and differences between many of these organizations to emerge. An introductory chapter by Gereboff examines the "goals and roles" of American Jewish historical societies and establishes the structural and ideological issues at stake. Each chapter that follows is devoted to a specific organization and written either by its director or a significant contributor, such that we gain deep insight into what makes each historical society unique along with the many common features they share. Some of them have paid staff; others are run by dedicated volunteers. Some emphasize research and scholarship, while others focus primarily on public programming and outreach. Some are affiliated with universities, museums, or heritage centers, while others are completely freestanding. While some historical societies own or rent physical space, others have no brick-and-mortar address. Each of these variables influences how historical societies approach their work, particularly with respect to identifying core constituencies and articulating financial priorities.

At the heart of the work of American Jewish historical societies is a fundamental tension "between objective, dispassionate scholarship, which seeks to better understand the history of Jews in the United States" as a subject of academic inquiry, and "the use of history to ground or bolster Jewish identity" through exhibits and articles that celebrate the accomplishments and contributions of Jews to their communities (12). Do historical societies exist to advance the field of American Jewish history, or to strengthen Jewish pride and promote greater acceptance of Jews in society? Are these two goals necessarily in conflict with one another?

As Gereboff's review of the scholarship on American Jewish historical societies demonstrates, identitarian goals have been part and parcel of the work of these organizations since the founding of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS) in the 1890s. The impulse to use history to promote positive attitudes toward Jews and Jewish identity arguably reached its peak in 1954, during the tercentenary celebration marking three hundred years of Jewish communal life in the United States. Against the backdrop of the Cold War and the era of McCarthyism, at a fraught political moment when Jews' loyalties and ideological commitments were under question, the Tercentenary Committee created lectures, exhibits, slideshows, and other educational materials that highlighted the contributions of outstanding Jewish Americans and affirmed the harmonious compatibility of Jewish and American values.

Critics of this approach assert that, in its emphasis on touting accomplishments and nurturing ethnic pride, the work of American Jewish historical societies can lean too far into filiopietistic and parochial narratives that elide sensitive and uncomfortable topics, such as Jewish involvement in organized crime and the complicated nature of Black-Jewish relations. Insisting upon a self-congratulatory framing of American Jewish history diminishes the ability of historical societies to operate according to academic standards, discourages other historians from treating the subject as a serious endeavor, and dissuades scholars who do not identify as Jewish from pursuing research in the field.

Across the country, as the contributors to this volume demonstrate, historical societies are responding to these concerns in thoughtful and constructive ways. Jeanne Abrams, my predecessor at the Rocky Mountain Jewish Historical Society and the University of Denver, wrote and directed a series of documentary films on themes in local history that celebrate the accomplishments of Jewish Coloradans while drawing upon archival sources, oral histories, and scholarly research. According to Abrams, the films handle difficult subjects such as relationships between Jews and Native Americans "sensitively but honestly," enabling audiences to begin to grapple with historical complexity (217). Similarly, as Catherine Cangany, executive director of the Jewish Historical Society of Michigan, notes, engaging with local history on a sophisticated level "necessarily means facing hard historical truths" about racism and

intergroup relations in their programs and exhibits and challenging the "persistent local belief that Michigan's Jews have always been allied with the Black community" (197). Finally, Mark Bauman, in describing the work of the Southern Jewish Historical Society with which he has been involved for several decades, notes with pride that the organization has had non-Jewish "members, presenters, board members, and presidents," since its goal is to produce knowledge about the Southern Jewish experience in the United States, not to strengthen Jewish identity in the region (185).

American Jewish historical societies face additional critical challenges in the twenty-first century that are raised but not fully explored in these pages. They must be able to reach younger audiences, including those who receive most of their information from websites and social media outlets. To connect with transplanted American Jews of every age and stage, they must find ways to articulate the relevance of local and regional history to constituents who are not native to those places. The Jewish Museum of the American West, which is an online resource and not a building, represents one effort to address these issues, as does the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities created by the Institute for Southern Jewish Life. More needs to be said about the use of podcasts, digital mapping projects, and social media channels as tools to present historical research in contemporary formats and to engage a more diverse community.

With this book, Gereboff and Friedmann have sparked a timely and important dialogue about the past, present, and future of Jewish historical societies in the United States. Hopefully their efforts will serve as a catalyst to inspire more conversations and collaboration among those of us who are engaged in this work and invested in addressing the issues at stake.

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Adam D. Mendelsohn, *Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War: The Union Army* (New York: New York University Press, 2022), 336pp., 60 color illust.

For the past 124 years or so the study of Jews during the Civil War has been largely dominated by attempts to prove that Jews were patriotic and discussions of antisemitism (usually focused on Ulysses S. Grant's familiar and infamous order). Attempts to celebrate the devotion and courage of Jews and counter antisemitism have meant that the field has in many ways stagnated. From Simon Wolf's 1895 *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen* to Bertram Korn's 1949 *American Jewry and the Civil War*, the focus was on collecting accounts of Jewish military contributions and celebrating them. Compiling statistics to show that Jews were patriotic dominated since Wolf's work. Even recent works like Robert N. Rosen's *Jewish Confederates* (2000) have often ended up being celebrations of Jewish "heroes." Jonathan D. Sarna rightly called Rosen's book "something of an apologia, a pious bow to the 'religion of the lost cause.'" The subfield of Jewish Civil War history is in desperate need of new approaches and new questions, as well as nuanced treatments of human beings living in the past.

In the past twenty years a new crop of scholars, including Sarna, Shari Rabin, and Adam Mendelsohn, has begun providing this needed nuanced scholarship. The fields of Jewish American history and Civil War history will benefit from this study. In seeking to expand the questions scholars of Jews in the Civil War seek to answer, Mendelsohn's new book, *Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War: The Union Army*, is a welcome corrective to a subfield that has stagnated. It is a groundbreaking work that moves beyond questions of "how many" served and into "more-nuanced questions" (xi). The book utilizes the Shapell Manuscript Foundation's database of Jewish Civil War soldiers and sources. The Shapell list of Jewish soldiers allows statistical analysis of Jewish service, yet this book shows brilliantly that "aggregates conceal considerable variation" (43) and instead turns to questions of "Who were these men?" The six body chapters cover a range of topics including the enlistment process and why men enlisted, who the enlisted men were, how Jews interacted with gentiles, how they practiced their faith within the military, the

communities they created, and the postwar lives of veterans. In asking new questions, this book promises to revolutionize the study of Jews in the Civil War. In addition to being a groundbreaking piece of scholarship, the book is also beautifully written and researched. Accompanied by sixty color illustrations, it tells previously overlooked stories in compelling prose and is enjoyable to read for both scholars and lay readers.

At the end of the day, this book contains arguments with which future scholars might disagree, but they answer previously ignored questions. Mendelsohn has opened up the field of Jewish Civil War history. Perhaps the most important takeaway is his conclusion that Jews during the Civil War "were not the modern Maccabees of the mythmakers, but instead moral men in momentous times, grappling with the complexities of being Jews in the Union army" (224). Like so many elements of the Civil War, the memory makers have simplified reality. Jews in the conflict were complex. Some were brave, and some were not. Some joined the army for money, and others joined for national pride. Others did not join at all. Some hid their Judaism, while others were public about it. The study of Jews in the Civil War requires critical analysis. This book will be a foundational work for future scholars. No work on Jews in the Civil War will be able to ignore this book.

Scholars love to nitpick in book reviews, often complaining about the author not writing the book they wanted to read. I will not do that here. The book is an excellent study of Jews in the US Army. It accomplishes exactly what Mendelsohn set out to do: write the definitive study of Jews in the US Army during the Civil War. But the success in Mendelsohn's book also makes me realize how much is left to study about Civil War Jewish history and how much has been overlooked. This is not a so much a criticism as a compliment. We need studies of Jews who avoided military service, of Jews on the home front, of the families of Jewish soldiers (like Holly Pinheiro's *The Families' Civil War* does for African American soldiers), and of Jews in the South. The fact that *Jewish Soldiers in the Civil War* have covered so much new terrain yet so much remains to be written is a testament to the future potential of the field. The scholars who write those future studies will have to start with Mendelsohn's work. Hopefully the book will inspire the next generation of scholars.

The book also demonstrates how to approach Civil War soldiers more generally. One decision Mendelsohn made was to focus on soldiers in the US Army. Part of a planned two-volume series with one book on each side of the conflict, Mendelsohn chose to not conflate Confederates and US Army soldiers, something studies of Civil War soldiers so often do, frequently to their detriment. This was a smart choice that allows for more nuanced analysis. But it also means I cannot yet read Mendelsohn's next volume on Confederate soldiers. I eagerly await it.

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Françoise S. Ouzan, *True to My God and Country: How Jewish Americans Fought in World War II* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2024), xix + 256 pp.

True to My God and Country is part of the series Studies in Antisemitism edited by Alvin H. Rosenfeld, Director of the Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism at Indiana University. World War II was the most formative event of the twentieth century for America's Jews, not least because it resulted in a marked decline in American antisemitism.[1] This was due to the public's revulsion of the racist ideology of America's enemies, the efforts of the federal government to limit racial and religious prejudice that threatened the unity vital to military victory, and a recognition by the general public that Jews were not draft dodgers and cowards but had done their part in the war effort. The release in 1947 by Twentieth Century Fox of *Gentleman's Agreement* reflected this change in public opinion. It was the first serious Hollywood movie

1 I have argued for the importance of the war in my essay "The Impact of War: America's Jews and World War II," which is reprinted in my collection *A Unique People in a Unique Land: Essays on American Jewish History* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2022), ch. 4.

on American antisemitism and a recognition by the Hollywood moguls that antisemitism was now considered to be un-American and thus a fit topic for filmmaking. The film won the Academy Award for Best Picture.

At least five hundred and fifty thousand American Jews, including ten thousand women, served in the military during the war, and thirty-six thousand were awarded medals for valor and merit. Among these Jewish servicemen were four who would write the most famous American novels of the war: Joseph Heller (*Catch-22*), Norman Mailer (*The Naked and the Dead*), Leon Uris (*Battle Cry*), and Herman Wouk (*The Caine Mutiny*). Jews also composed the three most important musical compositions of the war: Aaron Copland's "Fanfare for the Common Man," Morton Gould's "American Salute," and Marc Blitzstein's "The Airborne Symphony." Although written during World War I, Irving Berlin's "God Bless America" became America's unofficial national anthem during World War II. And it was a Jew, Reform rabbi Roland Gittelsohn, who delivered the most famous American eulogy of the war.

Nineteen American Jewish families contributed six members to the military, and four families contributed eight. Over half of America's rabbis volunteered for military service, and three hundred and eleven were accepted. Françoise S. Ouzan also notes that 60 percent of Jewish doctors in America under the age of forty-five served in the military during the war. Nearly twenty-five thousand Jews in the American military were wounded, and eight thousand were killed in action. Over fifty Jewish families lost two sons, and one family lost three. In addition to the Jews in the military, hundreds of thousands of Jewish civilians contributed to paper and scrap iron drives, worked as air raid wardens, bought war bonds, cared for victory gardens, and were employed in armament factories, shipyards, and government agencies involved in war work.

The war affected Jews in the military in numerous ways, particularly by diminishing their insularity and insecurity. For many Jewish servicemen and women, the war was the first time they had close contact with gentiles, and, conversely, the first time that many gentiles came to know Jews on a first-name basis. And, as indicated in the plays of Neil Simon, military training in the boot camps in the South and West expanded knowledge of Jews of America beyond the large cities of the East and Midwest, where most had resided. Entering the military thus accelerated

the movement of Jews into the American mainstream. The military draft "was the greatest educational institution in the world," said Harold U. Ribalow, a Jewish airman from the Bronx and future sportswriter. He served in North Africa, India, and Ceylon (102).

America's Jews viewed Nazi Germany as a modern Haman, and military service as a religious and ethnic as well as a national imperative. This merging of ethnic-religious and national objectives heightened their love of country, and at no other time in their history were they so patriotic. The historian-rabbi Arthur Hertzberg recalled in his autobiography, *A Jew in America: My Life and a People's Struggle for Identity*, that the country's Jews took justifiable "pride not only in the tens of thousands of their young who had served with valor as ordinary soldiers, but especially in the strikingly large numbers of Jewish scientists and managers among those who had produced the munitions that made victory possible." Jews now wished "to be thought of as part of the brave, undaunted, victorious America … we wanted our neighbors to think of as wrapped, together with them, in an American flag, preferably with the slogan Don't Tread on Me written over it" (148–149).

Ouzan is a senior research associate at the Goldstein-Goren Diaspora Research Center of Tel Aviv University and has a particular interest in American Jewish history and World War II. Her book does not discuss the more general impact of the war on American Jewry. Rather, it focuses on "the uniqueness of GI war experiences, expressions of patriotism, and sense of self-sacrifice" and argues that the war accelerated the transformation of American Jews into Jewish Americans (xi). Note, for example, the use of "Jewish Americans," not "American Jews," in its subtitle. Participation in the military, Ouzan writes, shaped how American Jewish servicemen and women understood "what it means to be an American, at home and abroad; to safeguard freedom and democracy and fight discrimination wherever it rears its ugly head" (5).

The volume is interesting, well written, and based on extensive reading in primary sources, particularly the hundred or so reminiscences of Jewish veterans housed in the archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research (New York), the Museum of Jewish Heritage (New York), the National Museum of American Jewish Military History (Washington), the Library of Congress (Washington), the United States Holocaust

Memorial Museum (Washington), and the National World War II Museum (New Orleans). The only other volume covering the same ground is Deborah Dash Moore's more impressionistic and personal *GI Jews: How World War II Changed a Generation* (2004).

Ouzan's PhD is from the Sorbonne, and she taught at universities in France before relocating to Israel. This explains her book's extended examination of the British and American invasion of the French-speaking colonies of Algeria and Morocco in November 1942 (Operation Torch), culminating in the surrender of German forces in Tunisia in May 1943. She devotes far less space to assessing the more significant British-American-Canadian invasion of France in June 1944 (Operation Overlord), the advance of Allied armies across France and then into Germany, and the liberation of German concentration camps such as Dachau and Buchenwald. Only when they entered Germany did Jewish soldiers fully comprehend the tragedy of European Jewry and what the defeat of Germany meant for them as both Jews and Americans.

True to My God and Country resembles a smorgasbord. Its diverse chapters discuss the varied motives that encouraged Jews to enlist in the military; their diverse responses to the antisemitism they experienced while in the military; their encounter with Jewish communities in North Africa, India, and the Philippines; the experiences of Jewish women who served in the military (primarily in the Air Force); the imprisonment of Jewish servicemen by the Japanese; the bonds formed by Jews during the war with other Jews, gentiles, and even with Japanese prison guards; and the efforts of Jewish service personnel to display or disguise their Jewishness. Ouzan's central concern throughout is the impact of the war on the religious-ethnic identity of Jews in the military, many of whom were second-generation Americans who had grown up in homes with attenuated connections to Judaism and Jewish culture.

The issue of identity came to the fore for Jews when it came time to decide whether to choose or reject wearing dog tags stamped with an "H" for "Hebrew," where to be buried if killed in action, whether to attend Jewish religious services, and how to respond to the antisemitism of gentile servicemen and women. The war particularly impacted the American Zionist movement by convincing most American Jews of the need for a Jewish state. This was especially true for Jewish

servicemen and women, Ouzan notes, who were now empowered "both as Americans and as Jews," and led some Jewish veterans, most notably Col. David Marcus, to join Israel's military after the war (76). Identity has been the great theme of American Jewish history, and *True to My God and Country* is an important contribution to understanding the impact of the war in defining Jewish-American identity and how Jews perceived their place within American society.

This is not to say that *True to My God and Country* is without fault. Ouzan is so eager to overturn the image of the Jew as weak and craven that she has replaced one stereotype with another. All of her Jews were heroic, conscientious, tolerant, and patriotic; devoted family members; and embodiments of the best in American and Jewish culture. "The examples of brotherhood, helpfulness, and patriotism in this book," Ouzan concludes, "make the case for the symbiosis between Jewish and American values, which have common aspiration to improve the world. …Their accomplishments and sacrifices, both as American service members and as Jews, will remain a source of inspiration for generations to come. War experiences left in their wake the seeds of a brighter new era" (193–195). One wonders whether this special pleading stems in part from Ouzan's residence in Israel where the military is revered, where films and comic strips mocking the military are not to be found, and where those exempted from military service are abhorred.

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Derek Penslar, *Zionism: An Emotional State* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2023), 284pp.

Readers familiar with the many virtues of Derek Penslar's vast scholarly oeuvre will no doubt appreciate *Zionism: An Emotional State*. Clocking in at under 250 pages, Penslar's sleek new book recasts the movement's

history in Palestine/Israel as well as in the diaspora with emotions—fears, anxieties, romantic desires, gratitude, and hatred, among other throbbing affective states—at its center. The very undertaking is a critical contribution to the subfield, which, as Penslar points out, has been dominated until now by intellectual, political, and social histories. Penslar's trademark clarity of prose and breadth of historical analysis is an added bonus.

Penslar begins by reviewing conceptions of Zionism both among the movement's historical actors and its latter-day critics. He challenges in chapter one the categories typically bandied about in the movement's historiography. In place of forerunners, political Zionists, cultural Zionists, and other familiar typological fare, Penslar offers eight new ideal types. Of the many advantages of Penslar's novel taxonomy, one is that it abandons vestigial categories that may have had meaning long ago but now fail to account for key changes in Israeli politics over the last three decades, like the collapse of the political left and the concomitant rise of a "Judaic Zionism" that has eclipsed the Zionist movement's secularist past. He then, in chapter two, explores the ways in which a settler-colonial critique can elucidate but also tends to miss major features of the history of Zionism. Both chapters in isolation offer more invaluable insights than can be listed in a short review such as this, but their purpose in the book's overarching project is not entirely clear given that they, in Penslar's words, focus on "thought and action" rather than emotion (96).

Zionism then takes up the movement's emotional history. Penslar argues that European Zionism prior to 1948 distinguished itself from other streams of modern Jewish politics in the passionate love its adherents expressed for the land of Palestine. The Zionist pioneers hoped to overcome the bodily shame and psychic inadequacy they believed was endemic to diaspora via amorous embrace of the territory they hoped to settle. This was in marked contrast to the pre-1948 Zionism that obtained among American Jews who harbored, to quote Penslar, a "confidence in a robust future for Jews at home in America" (130). American Jews evinced a Zionism not of transformative romance with the land upon which pioneers toiled but one of philanthropic solidarity for the plight of those striving to go to the land.

In striking this dichotomy, however, Penslar misses an opportunity to probe threadbare historiographical narratives about the differences between American and other Zionisms. While it is indeed true that few American Jews migrated to Palestine in these years or adopted the language of amorous desire, American Zionists in the early twentieth century engaged in a wide swath of cultural as much as philanthropic endeavors, produced their own battery of ideological theorists who rivaled European Zionists, and displayed a diverse emotional palette that included pessimism about the sustainability of Jewishness anywhere outside Palestine, including even the United States.

Versions of love for Israel, according to Penslar, ultimately did come to define American Zionism after 1948. Examining familiar cultural material such as Leon Uris's *Exodus* but also lesser-known artifacts like the comedic collaborations of Bob Booker and George Foster, Penslar maintains that what fueled American Jews' attachments to Israel in these years was less any commitment to American-style liberalism than immediate emotional needs, insecurities, and desires. This is another in the book's many contributions given that the historiography of American Zionism has been overly preoccupied until now with studying the synthesis of putative American and Zionist values.

Yet the book's tight focus on the emotional underpinnings of American Zionism rather than on the material history that has animated it leaves something to, well, be desired. Penslar avers, for instance, that young American Jews who visited Israel after the heady victory of the 1967 war often spoke of "falling in love" with the place because life there was "challenging, but precisely for that reason it was idealized as more authentic, altruistic, and meaningful" (153). But can we really understand the contrasting images American Jews so easily adopted between a bloodless suburban existence and the invigorating drama of the kibbutz without examining the economic, social, and cultural contours of middle-class American life in which Jews by the 1960s were so deeply ensconced?

Following an insightful chapter on the history of Zionists' fluctuating emotions qua great power support for Israel, Penslar trains his attention on an emotion firmly rooted in the present: the hatred of Zionism and the ways Zionists hate in turn. Here again Penslar serves up a bevy

of piercing observations about the variations of anti-Zionist hatred in Western and Arab countries, on the one hand, and the origins of a hatred for Arabs in the writing and activism of Meir Kahane that has achieved increasing popularity among Israeli Jews, on the other. Along the way, Penslar suggests that we may evaluate whether anti-Zionism is anti-Semitic by exposing the former's emotional underpinnings. An anti-Zionism spurred by disappointment with or anger over Israeli policies, in other words, may be distinguished from an anti-Zionism spurred by hatred of Jews. Penslar deserves credit for venturing out from the safe redoubt of clinical detachment in order to examine a topic of contemporary import that has become mired in controversy. It is not clear from his analysis, however, why anti-Zionism should be judged primarily by its proponent's emotional intent rather than by the real-world consequences that flow from the positions and policies its proponents advocate.

Regardless, *Zionism: An Emotional State* succeeds in shedding fascinating new light on a topic overburdened with attention both within and beyond the academy. Anyone with an interest in Zionism's many permutations in Israel and the diaspora, with the varieties of nationalism in modern times more broadly, or with the emotional turn in historiography would benefit from reading it.

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Laura Yares, *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2023), 250 pp.

Historians study the past for a wide variety of reasons. One of the main reasons for learning about the past is to understand the present, especially when there is a crisis at hand that begs for explication. According to *A Census of Jewish Supplementary Schools in North America 2019–2020*, published in 2023 by the Jewish Education Project, part-time Jewish

education in the United States and Canada is experiencing a precipitous decline in enrollment. In the "Concluding Thoughts" to the *Census*, the survey team reports that "one could compare the 230,000 students in 2006–2007 to 135,087 in 2019–2020" (50). More subjectively, others have regularly described supplemental formal Jewish education as consisting of programs that "students love to hate." Given such dire reports and characterizations, new historical research on Jewish Sunday schools and Hebrew schools is urgently needed by anyone concerned about the future of Judaism in America. *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*, a 2023 study by Laura Yares, an assistant professor in the department of religious studies at Michigan State University, fills this need. It provides "an in-depth portrait of a massively understudied movement that acted as a vital means by which American Jews explored and reconciled their religious and national identities" from 1838, when the first Hebrew school opened its doors in Philadelphia during America's Second Great Awakening, until 1910, when the Bureau of Jewish Education was founded in New York City.

Although *Jewish Sunday Schools* is Yares's first academic trade book, she already has an impressive publication record in the areas of Jewish education, museum studies, and British Judaism. She earned both her bachelor's and master's degrees from Oxford University and her doctorate from Georgetown University and is clearly an important emerging figure in the study of American Judaism. *Jewish Sunday Schools* is particularly well informed by Yares's training in religious studies and feminist historiography. Several chapters of the book, including her discussion of catechisms and floral culture, were anticipated in previously published scholarly articles. Most importantly, *Jewish Sunday Schools* is the first full-length critical study of the Hebrew Sunday school movement from its origin in the 1830s to the Progressive Age in America.

Informed by an impressive array of new primary materials as well as foundational secondary sources and current historiographical arguments, *Jewish Sunday School* is often at its best when framing questions. Surprisingly, the book does not report either on the initial rise of the Christian Sunday school in Europe, especially England, or on its structural relationship with the rise of public schools in the United States. Its introduction, titled "Making Jewish Education Religious," is based in

part on the work of Leora Faye Batnitzky's 1994 *How Judaism Became a Religion: An Introduction to Modern Jewish Thought* and includes a conclusion that carefully reconsiders the book's central typological question: "Is Judaism a Religion?" However, Yares explores neither the religious consequences of the denationalization of Judaism as a function of political emancipation in America and Western Europe nor the earlier development of the academic concept of religion in the eighteenth century by French encyclopedists.

The structure of the book is both logical and chronological. Chapter One "explores associations between the Sunday school and so-called women's religion" (17) but later correctly challenges that assertion based on a thesis argued by Zev Eleff in his 2016 book, *Who Rules the Synagogue? Religious Authority and the Formation of American Judaism*, which argued that male rabbis ultimately took control of American Judaism late in the nineteenth century. Curiously, Yares does not mention the establishment of Gratz College in 1895 as the first nondenominational Jewish normal school in the United States with its all-male staff and mixed gender student population.

Chapter Two focuses on catechisms, an educational genre previously explored by Yares, as the main textbooks of the American Jewish Sunday school and the problem of aligning texts written by males with the spirituality of the women teachers in the first day schools, a problem immediately recognized by Rebecca Gratz, the founder of the first Hebrew Sunday school. Chapter Three takes up the question of confirmation as the capstone ceremony of the Jewish Sunday school movement but does not share the ceremony's origins as a rebellion against the practice of Bar Mitzvah in early nineteenth-century Germany, as well as the radical innovation that admitted girls to formal Jewish education as early as 1811 in Central Europe. Chapter Three examines the linkage of confirmation with the holiday of Shavuot and the development of its floral culture, again a topic previously explored by Yares. It should be noted that the earliest confirmation services in Europe were not linked to Shavuot and its celebration of "the giving of the Torah."

"The focus on the material dimensions of the American Jewish Sunday school," perhaps the most original contribution of *Jewish Sunday School*, "continues in Chapter Four, which analyzes the emergence of

pedagogies designed to blend the didactic and the cerebral with material goods that engaged the senses and sentiments" (19). Chapter Five reflects Jonathan D. Sarna's "Awakening Thesis," which asserts that the established American Jewish community of the late nineteenth century—in this case mostly its women's organizations—formulated the means for inculcating Judaism in the newly arriving immigrants from Eastern Europe and not vice-versa. The final chapter, typical of Yares's work, focuses on the Sunday school in Reform Judaism, which she regularly references as the dominant form of nineteenth-century American Judaism. However, there were only six Reform synagogues out of two hundred Jewish congregations in the whole country in 1860, and only seventy-five Reform temples in the Union of American Hebrew Congregations when it was established in 1873.

Along these lines, Yares does not reference the so-called Sunday Sabbath movement in American Reform Judaism and the ultimate failure of a more complete realignment of Judaism's most accommodationist approach to religion with Protestant Christianity. The book also does not explore the spread of Jewish Sunday schools and confirmation to the emergent Conservative movement early in the twentieth century. Strangely, Yares's book ends prior to the creation of the Bat Mitzvah service in the 1920s, which ultimately leads to the devaluation both of confirmation and one-day-a-week schools in the American Jewish experience.

Jewish Sunday Schools is at its best when it exposes the problematic intersection of gender and faith in nineteenth-century American Judaism. To a certain extent, the ambiguities and deficiencies of Jewish Sunday schools doomed them to limited success from their beginning in 1838. Perhaps the author has it right when she opens her discussion with a paradoxical report by Isaac Mayer Wise, the principal builder of American Reform Judaism, who already lamented in 1847 that "they [American Jews] have introduced a phantom affair called a Sunday School…what fruits these few hours can bring forth hardly necessitates further description" (1). Yares provides us not only with that description but with much more to ponder.

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