

American Jewry

Understanding the history of Jews in America requires a synthesis of over 350 years of documents, social data, literature and journalism, architecture, oratory, and debate, and each time that history is observed, new questions are raised and new perspectives found. This book presents a readable account of that history, with an emphasis on migration patterns, social and religious life, and political and economic affairs. It explains the long-range development of American Jewry as the product of “many new beginnings” more than a direct evolution leading from early colonial experiments to latter-day social patterns.

This book also shows that not all of American Jewish history has occurred on American soil, arguing that Jews, more than most other Americans, persist in assigning crucial importance to international issues. This approach provides a fresh perspective that can open up the practice of minority-history writing, so that the very concepts of minority and majority should not be taken for granted.

ELI LEDERHENDLER is Stephen S. Wise Professor of American Jewish History and Institutions at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

American Jewry

A New History

ELI LEDERHENDLER

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521196086

© Eli Lederhendler 2017

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2017

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Names: Lederhendler, Eli, author.

Title: American Jewry : a new history / Eli Lederhendler.

Description: New York : Cambridge University Press, [2016]

Identifiers: LCCN 2016025954 | ISBN 9780521196086 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Jews — United States — History.

Classification: LCC E184.J5 L567 2016 | DDC 973/.04924—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2016025954>

ISBN 978-0-521-19608-6 Hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-19608-6 — American Jewry
Eli Lederhendler
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

To Henry L. Feingold, esteemed teacher and friend

Contents

<i>List of Figures</i>	<i>page</i> viii
<i>List of Tables</i>	ix
<i>Preface</i>	xi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xxii
1 First Encounters, New Beginnings: From Colonial Times to the Civil War	I
2 Changing Places: Migration and Americanization, 1860s–1920s	56
3 Finding Space in America, 1920s–1950s	132
4 The European Nexus: Spain, Germany, and Russia	190
5 Recapitulations and More Beginnings, 1950s to the Twenty-first Century	248
<i>Epilogue</i>	306
<i>Index</i>	313

Figures

2.1	US residents in urban and metropolitan areas, 1910: native-born, foreign-born, and Jewish	<i>page</i> 58
2.2	Dohany Synagogue, Budapest, 1859	73
2.3	Central Synagogue (Ahavath Chesed), New York City, 1872	74
2.4	Immigrants lined up for entry to the United States at Ellis Island	93
2.5	Hanukah greeting card, JWB, 1918	124
3.1	US union membership (millions), 1904–29	137
3.2	Estimated US emigration, 1915–39 (citizens and non-citizens)	159
4.1	AJDC expenditures in Germany and Poland, 1933–7 (US dollars)	225
5.1	Postwar growth in higher education and veteran enrollment	250

Tables

1.1	Earliest Jewish presence in selected American cities founded 1730s–1790s	<i>page</i> 9
1.2	Jewish households in selected cities in 1820	22
2.1	Jews and foreign-born residents as percent of city population	59
2.2	Rates of marriage across group boundaries, New York City, 1908–12, per hundred marriages	87
3.1	Jewish refugee immigrants to Britain, Palestine, and the United States	173
4.1	Central European rabbis in America	213

Preface

Histories of particular ethnic groups frequently highlight their strengths and accomplishments. Often, such histories have a reassuring “Whiggish” tone, in the sense that the past always seems to confirm the present. This book aims to be a little different in that it seeks primarily to describe, to annotate, and to understand, but it is less invested in confirmation. It is ethnocentric, to be sure: my interest lies in describing social, cultural, economic, political, and religious life in America from one group’s point of view. As a Jewish historian, I find this of intrinsic interest; but while the narrative strives to orient the reader to one group’s history, it does not set out to *justify* that history. I have sought to write a fair book that is content to offer partial answers to large questions.

It is, however, a book that does not lack a point of view. I regard the Jews in America as part of America’s past (and present), but I also see America as part of the Jews’ historical experience – within a longer, larger, non-American canvas. That implies, in essence, that there is a “gap” between the two histories that has never been bridged and that Jews, *qua* Jews, present challenges to the historian in the context of American society.

Perhaps for that reason, Jews continue to be rather marginal in the writings of most American historians. This makes sense, in numerical terms, since Jews represent a very small segment of the American population. What is interesting, however, is that the Jews’ relative obscurity in standard academic histories contrasts with the prominence of Jewish individuals who enjoy cachet or notoriety in American public life and popular culture. That asymmetry between academic and popular perceptions has something to do with my underlying agenda. The issue is not

how to give the Jews “due credit,” in some compensatory fashion. The question is, rather, why notability is readily granted while an entire sectoral history finds only intermittent, shadowy reflection. Beyond the mere fact that celebrity is easily earned in a culture based on mass communication, I wanted to discover what might explain the Jews’ paradoxical position in America.

I found that Jews have straddled the boundary between minority history and majority history, between the exotic and the pedestrian. On the one hand, their small numbers have made it unessential for general historians to consider them when tracing the course of the national American experience. It is really only since the multicultural turn of American scholarship in the final quarter of the twentieth century that so-called minor voices have merited a closer inspection, or that the purported “mainstream” has been turned inside-out in order to discover just how it came to be thus construed.

On the other hand, because many Jewish people were able to overcome the stigmas and burdens of marginality – those born in America were likeliest to do so – the same multicultural turn that eagerly sought to take the measure of minor voices found fewer compelling reasons to do so with regard to Jews. The more successful that Jews appeared to be in pursuing social, economic, cultural, and political integration, the more nondescript they seemed to the multicultural investigator.¹

Either way, by holding up a mirror to the Jewish paradox, I have sought to drive a theoretical wedge between majority and minority histories. This undefined conceptual space may prove to be useful beyond the Jewish case, bearing in mind the growing number of Americans who consider themselves multi-racial. In the not-too-distant future, sociologists and historians may be hard pressed to draw strict boundaries, such as we have known until recently, between majority and minority perspectives. This is not at all to imply that minorities (as such) will no longer exist. It is also not simply that each minority’s history is inevitably embedded and reflected in the history of the “majority” – as a multiculturalist scholar might say – and vice versa. Rather, it is that we may not be able to reduce all such social differences to a simple majority–minority paradigm.

The bi- or multi-racial population is just one instance waiting to be addressed. Similar questions could be raised about other groups with

¹ Ira Katznelson, “Two Exceptionalisms: Points of Departure for Studies of Capitalism and Jews in the United States,” in *Chosen Capital: The Jewish Encounter with American Capitalism*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New Brunswick, NJ and London: Rutgers University Press, 2012), p. 19.

an in-between status. Spanish-speaking Americans, for instance, are so large a “minority” in the United States today (or, rather, a grouped set of minorities) that they appear to challenge classic definitions. As an aggregate, they transcend older “racial” distinctions, they mix elements of indigenous and migrant histories, and their culture(s) pose(s) a unique challenge to the narrative of Anglo-American hemispheric dominance. The Jewish case, I suggest, is no less apt to illuminate the conceptual issues that are at stake when we think beyond majority–minority models.

Comparability with other groups is important but it is still the background, not the foreground, in this portrayal of American Jewish history. However, as noted, there is another sense in which I have made an effort to look “outward” from the subject at hand. Not all that is pertinent to American Jewish history has occurred within American geographical space. A focus on the Jewish historical experience *in* the United States does not mean limiting the discussion *to* the United States. This approach is one that I learned long ago from my teacher, Henry L. Feingold, who used to remark that American Jewish historians must be aware of several histories: American history in general, the annals of the Jews in the United States, and European Jewish history. His history of American Jewry, *Zion in America*, was the first professional historian’s study of the subject that I read as an undergraduate.²

I have tried to remain true to his critical spirit. In my turn, I have set out to add new perspectives based upon my own work and a mass of research by other Jewish historians, written over the forty-odd years that have elapsed since *Zion in America* first appeared in print. I have sought to bridge some gaps: just as I try to strike a new balance between the domestic and foreign dimensions of American Jewish history, I also seek to grapple with the economic side of Jewish history, to reintegrate religious history with social and political history, and to suggest a revised chronology of events.

In each chapter, I try to break some new ground. In the first chapter, I ask whether a pattern of urban Jewish settlement in the British colonies and in early America can be discerned. I believe that it can, and that it is linked to the grid of urban development itself. The earliest Jewish inhabitants chose mostly to live in established towns that exhibited substantial potential as market centers. Moreover, they rarely stayed in one place for very long. This leads me to raise, in turn, the issue of “founding myths” (local Jewish communities’ claims of historical antiquity) and

² Henry L. Feingold, *Zion in America* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1974).

their relationship to the actual, more gradual processes by which communities eventually took shape. When transiency is factored in, nearly all communities appear dependent on new arrivals, as much as on the older resident veterans. Thus, “founders” are not the exclusive claimants to the “origins” of the community. Each new arrival is also a new beginning; history is re-made (and not just re-told) by successive generations.

Further on, I attempt to arrive at a more satisfactory explanation of Jewish economic integration, trying to settle some lingering questions about what helped immigrant Jews to promote their economic welfare, despite discrimination and despite their heavy concentration in particular occupations. I argue that no single factor (including the oft-cited educational advantage) can explain Jewish occupational achievement levels, but that an unusual array of circumstances, including demographic and social conditions, interacted to produce distinctive patterns.

I have sought to re-integrate into this narrative certain themes such as labor history and radical history that have fallen out of the limelight in recent years. I have also endeavored to give an adequate account of Orthodox Jewry as a religious culture with its own history and value system. Another distinctive feature of this book is the attention that it pays to the manner in which Jews, mainly an urban people, nevertheless developed a rural or “pastoral” imagination as part of their foray into American life.

For the purposes of chronology – the “phrasing” that lends composition to the narrative – I have collapsed the Colonial, Early National, and Antebellum periods of American history into one, long, opening phrase (1650s to 1860), and divided the rest into three periods: the 1860s to 1920; the 1920s to the 1950s; and the 1950s to the turn of the twenty-first century. The underlying logic here is to link the major transitions of American Jewish history to America’s national history. Thus, the entire first period represents an intermittent but formative history that parallels in some respects the piecemeal expansion of the American republic. The second period (1860–1920) links the Jewish narrative to industrialization, urbanization, America’s first major overseas wars, and the political ferment of the Progressive Era. The third segment (the shortest, chronologically) covers the virtual cessation of large-scale Jewish immigration, the Great Depression, and the immediate aftermath of World War II.

After these three chronological chapters and before the final, fifth chapter, I have inserted an “intermezzo” that is thematic in nature, in order to introduce the foreign dimension of American Jewish history as a distinguishing feature with a coherence of its own.

Preface

xv

The last and most contemporary chapter is the most tentative, in that its very definition as a historical phase remains open-ended. In it, I follow the course of domestic developments from the redistribution of the metropolitan population and the crisis of the inner cities to the renewal of large-scale immigration to America. I also engage international issues linked to the Cold War, the establishment of the state of Israel, and the final years of the Soviet Union.

I lay no claim to comprehensiveness. This book is only a selective version of the recorded past. At the same time, the scope of the narrative is wide enough so that anyone familiar with it will be equipped to wade without confusion into the more specialized scholarship available in this field. In any case, the selection of subject matter is by no means random: four cornerstones or thematic schemes seem to me to be essential – the setting, the human variable, culture, and worldwide connections.

The Setting

The characteristic geo-historical feature of America is its large land area and the relatively low ratio of population to territory, by world standards. The inhabitants live in sections of the whole, rather than spread evenly throughout its expanse. All of that applies in even more pronounced ways to American Jewish history. For instance, although Jews have historically lived in various sections of the country, they were (and still are) far less evenly distributed than the American population at large. A select handful of places have been the sites of the most concentrated groups of Jewish inhabitants, while in other places the Jewish presence has been peripheral, at best. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the major sites of Jewish settlement included Philadelphia, New York, and Charleston. In later periods, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, and Miami joined New York and Philadelphia near the top of the list. Other regional centers like Pittsburgh, St. Louis, New Orleans, Atlanta, and Boston have similarly served as centers of Jewish communal life, far afield from the historical Middle Atlantic communities.

Cities are transit points where a constant turnover of population takes place, where intermittent inflows of domestic and foreign immigration alter the social landscape, and where continual residential expansion spreads across county lines. These protean features also pervade the urban history of the Jews. Usually, two generations of any given family are the most that remain in any one city for all or most of a lifetime. Concrete expression of this transience may be seen in the persistent

migration of synagogues from one site to another within cities, and – at a later stage – from city neighborhoods to suburban communities. This institutional movement mirrors the drift of Jewish residents across social boundaries and across district lines. Landmark synagogues that have persisted at one permanent site since their foundation are rare in the extreme, in contrast to some of the nation’s well-known historical churches. Even the landmark synagogues, indeed, have not served a constantly renewed community of worshippers, but have tended rather to become museums.

The Human Variable

The second commonplace or unifying theme consists of the Jews themselves – both the Jews *in* society and the Jews *as* a society. The key proposition concerning the Jews in American society is their religious distinctiveness and this, in essence, lends them their minority status. Distinctiveness can stimulate self-awareness and motivate adaptive strategies. It may also be a cultural disadvantage, which people may feel that they must finesse. Typically, four ways of doing so may be observed historically among American Jews:

Turning disadvantage to advantage: by cultivating an ethno-religious niche of their own, insiders belonging to a small group may resolve certain problems of status (by keeping outsider perspectives at bay), and can reinforce a sense of co-responsibility. In some periods this pattern has a “racializing” effect (that is, Jews are mostly related to one another by “blood”) and group identity markers are sufficiently strong as to appear virtually “ineradicable,” at least over the short term.

Turning difference into a compromise: live-and-let-live tolerance – by forging alliances (including marital alliances) across the religious divide. This may have a “de-racializing” effect: that is, a blurring of separate group markers.

Turning difference into a “contribution” via civic “boosterism,” including the sponsorship of enterprise, politics, and philanthropy. A small, nearly marginal group like the Jews might thereby seek to magnify its visibility and, in turn, trade its marginality for “influence.”

Addressing the religious issue at its source by de-exoticizing Judaism, by bringing its practices closer into line with those of mainline Protestant ideas. A great deal of energy has been invested over generations to domesticate American Judaism. One goal of this book’s discussion of Jewish religion is to unpack the cumulative layers of that ideological project.

Religious distinctiveness vis-à-vis the majority of other Americans is, however, only one aspect of the Jews’ social world. As noted, American Jewish history also involves examining the Jews *as a society*, characterized

by internal diversification, conflict, and debate – indeed, just the sort of divisions one encounters in American society at large, or indeed in any social system.

Among the salient aspects of the Jewish social system that we will discuss are the following:

Sub-ethnicities: the formation of sub-communities based on such factors as countries of origin, variations in religious rites, and linguistic heritage. In turn, these subdivisions have reinforced the proliferation of individual synagogues, social clubs, newspapers, political movements, and welfare networks.

Sub-classes: occupational and class diversity has always been a feature of Jewish social life, even in those eras when it might seem, stereotypically, that Jews are economically homogeneous. Divisions between status groups produce class tensions, which in turn challenge notions of the Jews' mutual solidarity. By the same token, these divisions prompt some Jews to initiate civic, political, or social work across racial and ethnic boundaries by reaching out to non-Jews.

Migration: essential to any understanding of American Jewish history is an analysis of Jewish migration. In this book, migration is treated as an ongoing series of “new beginnings” – multiple, contiguous singularities – rather than as a conflated, collective genealogy. Indeed, the importance of migration history for American Jewry (as for the United States in general) establishes a way of talking about “natives” and “strangers” within the overall Jewish population. Finally, I also discuss Jewish re-emigration *from* America – re-emigration being a standard feature of virtually all instances of migration, in every land, and of some relevance (albeit minor) to the American Jewish case.

Spatial dimensions: in comparison with other populations, in Jewish history the movement from rural to urban spaces appears to be less significant. That is due to the mainly urban background of Jewish social life. This does not absolve the historian from grappling with the urban–rural distinction, however. As we will see, agriculture and rural life in general exercised a certain fascination for and among Jews. Moreover, it was through this rural (or as I refer to it, “pastoral”) dimension that Jews in America first began to come to terms with “native” American sub-cultures.

Culture

A historical panorama of this sort would be incomplete without an aesthetic and intellectual component. In discussing Jews as creators and consumers of ideas and culture, more is at stake than the popularly rehearsed catalogue of individual Jews' “contributions” to the arts, sports, science, the media, or academia. What I have in mind is, rather, an analysis of Jewish self-representation. Evidence for this is as likely to emerge in their religious discourse as it is in forms like poetry, novels, songs, and drama.

The quest to discover a cultural dimension of Jewish experience often leads to a debate between *essentialist* and *constructionist* approaches. When (if at all) is a popular American song, written by an artist of Jewish birth, worth considering in the context of “Jewish” history, and why? The essentialist point of view places a great deal of weight on what may be construed as a thread of inner consistency or “authenticity,” however thinly drawn the thread might be. The constructionist approach insists, rather, on the plastic, dynamic quality of all cultural products.

The essentialist mode of representing Jews and Jewish culture generally reduces Jewish civilization to a single, overriding principle, transcending time and space. Such essentialism crops up, for example, in claims (promoted mainly by Jewish liberals, which is not surprising) that liberalism represents an “essence” of Judaic principles – indeed, that Judaism is fundamentally identical with liberalism, if not its primordial source.

Actually, that quest for a definitive, intrinsic, Jewish–liberal nexus is most common in the United States and is latent or nearly absent in other Jewish communities around the world. That marks the idea as an artifact of the Jewish experience in America, rather than as a “Jewish” characteristic, *per se*. It is, to be precise, a cultural construction, and that leads us to consider the constructionist point of view.

Constructionists see all things that any Jews might do as equally “Jewish,” without reference to core values or claims of authenticity. Such approaches are useful in certain discussions, such as some American Jews’ engagements with hybrid affinities: nineteenth-century Jews who engaged with German culture, early twentieth-century Jews who engaged with Russian radicalism, and so forth. None of these affinities may be said to transcend the context in which they were bred; they are not “timeless” or efficient proxies for “Judaism” writ large.

A peculiarly American Jewish version of the constructionist approach involves an adaptation of the notion of American “exceptionalism.” This approach posits that (for the Jews) America *is different*: it is the antithesis of all previous eras and contexts in the Jewish historical experience. By extension, all Jewish behaviors in America (and their cultural representations) are always partly or wholly re-invented and must be seen as self-sufficient, rather than dependent upon historical precedent. The hypothetical “otherness” of American Jewish history, namely the notion that it constitutes a separate, unique, open-ended journey of self-discovery and self-invention invites critical scrutiny. The foreign dimension of US Jewish life, which complicates the claims for domestic self-sufficiency, presents one opportunity to test such notions. Jews’ experiences in America may

have a qualitatively different aspect, in the world Jewish context, but how, when, or why they are different points toward comparability, not isolation.

Worldwide Connections

Ethnic subgroups have their source in migrations and they often retain an engagement with their countries of origin. That is clearly relevant to the American Jews, as well; but the Jewish case presents aspects that one encounters less often, if at all, in other ethnic groups. Jews in America have extended their overseas involvements and concerns to countries other than their particular countries of origin. Further, their overseas engagements surpass co-ethnic family networks of the type we see among other dispersed populations (as in the case of South Asians, for example), insofar as Jewish involvements are formalized, institutionalized, and persist even in the absence of common language or extended family connections.

For all these reasons we will have occasion to discuss the domestic reception of foreign events, including wars and revolutions; American foreign policy; “mission”-like projects undertaken abroad by Jewish agencies based in the United States; and even the intervention of American Jewish volunteers in armed conflicts not involving the United States.

Beyond Diversity and Adversity

Two alliterative signposts – “diversity” and “adversity” – have, between them, marked out some of the most popularly accepted approaches to the study of American Jewish history. In an earlier generation, Columbia University’s foremost historian of European Jewry, Salo Wittmayer Baron (1895–1989), entitled his collection of lectures and essays about American Jewry *Steeled by Adversity*. The theme of adversity is, indeed, an important keynote throughout the realm of Jewish letters: namely, that the Jewish historical experience might be read as a long-running series of crisis, affliction, and anxieties about survival. However, one of Baron’s important critical interventions was his insistence that during the long periods that interrupt the various episodes of adversity, Jews’ lives have been far more “normal” than one might think – and that this was interesting and worth researching.³ In the present volume, “adversity”

³ Salo W. Baron, *Steeled by Adversity: Essays and Addresses on American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia, PA: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1971), p. 33; Jonathan

remains relevant, but is not the structuring pillar of my discussion. I do not see adversity as a metaphorical anvil upon which a sense of positive purpose has been forged. I have tried, rather, to integrate the better and the worse within the larger context.

The second motif, “diversity,” has frequently been deployed as a pathway for inserting Jewish topics into discussions about multiculturalism. Diversity, as construed in today’s environment, is not a bothersome “itch” on the skin of social discourse. It is, rather, considered a positive quality, rendering America more universal, more tolerant, and more democratic: in a word, more “American.” In the political economy of contemporary America, diversity seems to have only benefits, no costs. Scholars in the field of American Jewish history have paid homage to the opening-up of American culture to diverse and distinctive voices. (Others, however, have taken the opposite tack, and have pointed rather to the involvement of Jews in the entrenchment of majoritarian cultural norms, particularly racialized norms, as practiced by white Americans.)⁴

Here, once again, I believe that some new approach needs to be suggested. Sacvan Bercovitch, one of the foremost interpreters of American political culture, has done much to clarify the mechanisms by which all supposedly diverse and dissident strands somehow end up by confirming “American” ideology.⁵ I, too, explore the field of diversity in order to re-examine its ingrown ideological premises. So often, the discourse about diversity turns out mostly to be about self-esteem. One might wonder, however, how far-removed are Americans’ habits of positive self-regard from Judaism’s teachings of self-criticism? In turn, we might ask how Jews deal with such dissonances.

Woocher, *Sacred Survival: The Civic Religion of American Jews* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1986), p. 137.

⁴ Many works promote the idea that Jews in America fostered cultural diversity. See, e.g. Susanne Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900–1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1991) and David A. Hollinger, *Science, Jews, and Secular Culture: Studies in Mid-Twentieth Century American Intellectual History* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996). Works that reflect the contrasting view, that Jews in America mainly fell into line with white America’s cultural hegemony, include Michael P. Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), and Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What that Says about Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1998).

⁵ Sacvan Bercovitch, *The Rites of Assent: Transformations in the Symbolic Construction of America* (New York and London: Routledge, 1993).

Preface

xxi

In short, this version of American Jewish history responds to a need, as I see it, for a history that absorbs and exhibits the ironies, the paradoxes, and the anxieties of life in America and is less fixated upon the successes and achievements of notable Jews. I ask that we observe American Jewry not just as providing evidence for the nation's diversity, but also as a product of a ramified, world-embracing history of Jewish existence.

Acknowledgments

I have incurred numerous debts along the way and it is now my pleasure to acknowledge them.

During the years spent writing this book I had the good fortune to be involved with several research groups at my home institution, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. One was a two-year cycle of workshops in the field of migration studies, along with an able and amiable team of scholars based in Europe, Israel, and the United States. The group focused on the twentieth-century experiences of Jewish migrants from Russia and Eastern Europe.¹ Gleanings from these conversations are evident throughout this book. I would like to thank the Leonid Nevzlin Research Center for Russian and East European Jewry, and its head, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, for initiating and supporting this worthwhile endeavor, and to express my thanks to my fellow group-members: Anna Lipphardt, Kenneth Moss, Rafi Tsirkin-Sadan, Jeffrey Veidlinger, and Frank Wolff.

I also collaborated for three consecutive years in a research seminar on “Jews and Cities” at “Scholion,” the Interdisciplinary Research Center for Humanities and Jewish Studies at the Hebrew University. Again, the experience was very rewarding and this book reflects some of what I gleaned. I am grateful for the generous grant afforded by the Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Foundation, the sponsor of “Scholion,” which enabled me to reduce my teaching load and to pursue my work with the greatest efficiency. I also take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my

¹ See a few of the published papers, which appeared in *East European Jewish Affairs* 44(2–3) (2014).

Acknowledgments

xxiii

colleagues, among whom I was able to test out various ideas and theories: Sidra Dekoven Ezrahi, Aziza Khazzoom, Michael L. Miller, Dimitry Shumsky, Michael Silber, and Scott Ury. I thank, with special affection, my Scholion “kids,” the doctoral students who were an integral part of our research group: Gali Drucker Bar-Am, Yakir Englander, Na’amah Meishar, Dvir Tzur, and Sara Yanovsky. Gali, in particular, delighted me on several occasions with treasures from the world of Yiddish letters that were particularly pertinent to my work. All of them have since earned their degrees.

יישר כחכם – נעמתם לי מאוד!

In the early stages of my research, I was fortunate to have the assistance of Daniel Gross, one of my doctoral students, whom I thank warmly for his efforts. During that time, I was also able to rethink my understanding of ethnicity theory when I edited a volume of essays on the subject of Jewish ethnicity for the annual journal, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*. I have been associated with *Studies* for most of my professional career, and this is but one of many occasions on which I have been grateful for this constantly refreshing encounter with thought-provoking new research. I thank my friends at the editorial staff, Laurie Fialkoff and Hannah Levinsky Koevary, and my co-editors, Uzi Rebhun, Anat Helman, and Richard Cohen.

I should also like to convey special thanks to friends who took the trouble to read preliminary versions of this book or draft chapters: Jack Wertheimer, Steven Zipperstein, Jonathan Dekel-Chen, and the anonymous reader for Cambridge University Press who offered valuable and constructive suggestions. Of course, I take full responsibility for any errors or other remaining drawbacks in the text.

I have the pleasure, as well, of acknowledging here (as well as in the footnotes) my indebtedness to graduate and doctoral students whose research I supervised over the years, who augmented my knowledge and afforded me much satisfaction from our collaborations, and whose work figures in this book in several places. Thank you, Nir Barkin, Hagit Cohen, Ze’ev Deutsch, Moshe Fox, Carmel Frenkel, Ari Katorza, Linda Maizels, Amos Morris-Reich, Yael Ohad-Karny, and Matthew Silver.

As noted at the outset, the person most responsible for shaping my thinking about American Jewish history is Henry Feingold, with whom I studied years ago at the Jewish Theological Seminary in New York. At the time, my chief interest lay in Eastern Europe, but studying with Henry opened my intellectual horizons and, as things turned out, became a lasting influence in my life. Our friendship has only deepened since then. Henry, this book is dedicated to you, in admiration and gratitude.

As always, the ones who share the author's intimate life are the ones who have to live with the gestation of the book and make room for it in their lives. I recall such occasions as when Lisa, my wife, handed me a flashlight from her bedside table, so that I would not need to keep on hopping out of bed to jot down suddenly inspired notes under the bathroom light. Thanks, Lisa, for shining light into my life in unexpected and marvelous ways.

My grown and still growing children – Adina, Aryeh, Sivan, and Yoav – have been the mainstay of the domestic part of my life. A previous book of mine that dealt with New York in the 1960s was dedicated to them, as it contained much that was relevant to our long family trek from Poland to America (via stopovers in Japan and China), and from America to Israel. With this book, I am happy to bequeath to them a much more comprehensive account. The completion of the manuscript coincided with Aryeh's return from a two-year period of graduate studies in the States, accompanied by his wife, Michal, who is herself the daughter of American ex-pats. Their "return to the scene" for yet another "new beginning" makes this book all the more timely. תודה יקירי על כל האהבה והפרגון.