This study demonstrates the centrality of economic rationales to debates on Jews’ status in Italy, Britain, France, and Germany during the course of two centuries. It delineates the common motifs that informed these discussions: the ideal republic and the ancient constitution, the conflict between virtue and commerce, and the notion of useful and productive labor. It thus provides the first overview of the political-economic dimensions of the Jewish emancipation literature of this period, viewed against the backdrop of broader controversies within European society over the effects of commerce on inherited political values and institutions.

By focusing on economic attitudes toward Jews, this book illuminates European intellectual approaches toward economic modernity, measured against traditional political and constitutional ideals. By elucidating these general debates, it renders contemporary Jewish economic self-conceptions, and the enormous impetus that Jewish reformist movements placed on the Jews’ economic and occupational transformation, fully explicable for the first time.

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The Politics of Jewish Commerce

Economic Thought and Emancipation in Europe, 1638–1848

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To my mother and father, Naomi and Martin Karp, with love, gratitude, and admiration.
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