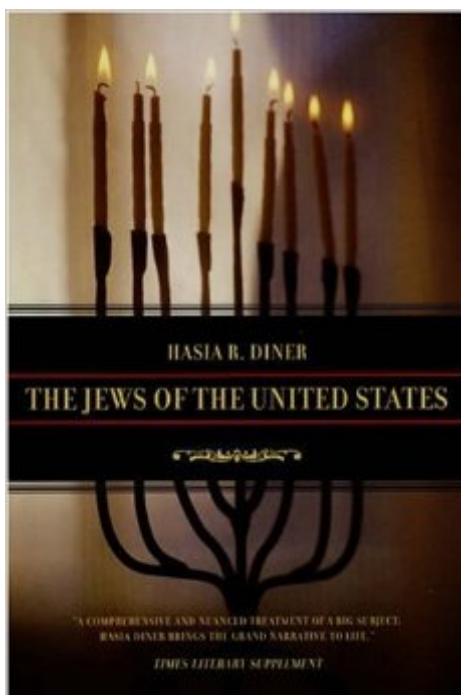


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The Jews Of The United States, 1654 To 2000



Synopsis

Since Peter Stuyvesant greeted with enmity the first group of Jews to arrive on the docks of New Amsterdam in 1654, Jews have entwined their fate and fortunes with that of the United States—a project marked by great struggle and great promise. What this interconnected destiny has meant for American Jews and how it has defined their experience among the world's Jews is fully chronicled in this work, a comprehensive and finely nuanced history of Jews in the United States from 1654 through the end of the past century. Hasia R. Diner traces Jewish participation in American history—from the communities that sent formal letters of greeting to George Washington; to the three thousand Jewish men who fought for the Confederacy and the ten thousand who fought in the Union army; to the Jewish activists who devoted themselves to the labor movement and the civil rights movement. Diner portrays this history as a constant process of negotiation, undertaken by ordinary Jews who wanted at one and the same time to be Jews and full Americans. Accordingly, Diner draws on both American and Jewish sources to explain the chronology of American Jewish history, the structure of its communal institutions, and the inner dynamism that propelled it. Her work documents the major developments of American Judaism—the economic, social, cultural, and political activities of the Jews who immigrated to and settled in America, as well as their descendants—and shows how these grew out of both a Jewish and an American context. She also demonstrates how the equally compelling urges to maintain Jewishness and to assimilate gave American Jewry the particular character that it retains to this day in all its subtlety and complexity.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Jews have long tried to entwine their fate and fortunes with the U.S. and this history of the Jews in this country begins in 1654 with the first wave of Jewish immigrants and continues to modern times. In *The Jews Of The United States, 1654 To 2000* (the newest title in the outstanding "Jewish Communities in the Modern World" series from the University of California Press) Hasia Diner focuses on Jewish participation in and contributions to American history and politics, considers the blends of Jewish and American culture which have resulted from centuries of assimilation, and analyzes the structure of modern Jewish communities and institutions. An excellent, comprehensive history for any college-level Jewish studies collection.

It seems clear that much research went into this book, unfortunately with very little visible editing. There is much tedious repetition of the same point. Extraneous information peeks out at us without elaboration. It is true that New York emerged as the center of American publishing, but why tantalize the reader with this fact by means of a single sentence in the midst of several pages about the garment industry. The treatment of the 1911 Triangle fire is far too minimal, and suggests, erroneously, that this was a solely Jewish experience. This is most emphatically not the case, either in terms of the victims or the long term political consequences both for Jews and the Democratic party.

Hasia Diner does a great job at depicting what Jewish life was like in the USA through the years. She describes how many came over in the 17th century, and how Governor Oglethorpe of Georgia felt that they could contribute to the well being of the colonies. We read of the early antipathy some colonists had toward the Jewish people, but also how early Jewish activists secured basic rights for the Jews in places like Maryland (Pennsylvania was a spot where Jewish people were not always welcome). We learn of how early Jewish synagogue communities survived without rabbis. We see Jewish people congregating in the larger cities, opening fruit and vegetable stands, and (especially) garment shops. These garment shops thrived during the Civil War when union army uniforms needed to be provided. We also read of the origins of groups like the American Jewish Congress and Bnai Brith and the Anti-Defamation League. You will also learn about the early 20th century distrust of Jewish people, how businessmen such as Henry Ford feared that educated and wise Jewish people would take over the country. Many Jewish people took Gentile names at this time so that they would not be denied opportunities for work. You also read of how American Jewry was shocked and appalled at the Holocaust and how they called on FDR to intervene. You will also

discover the origins of the three major streams of American Judaism (Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox). Hasia Diner also considers the year 2000 to be particularly significant in that a practicing Jewish person nearly became the Vice-President of the United States. I thought the book was great. It was easy to read, and it held my attention. I also was surprised about how many entertainers and musicians and songwriters and producers are Jewish (George Gershwin, Irving Berlin, the Warner brothers, etc). Rev. Marc Axelrod

Would be of most interest to Jews living in the United States. Very interesting and very readable, so that it doesn't read like a text book. I had first read another history of Jews in the United States that I found much too detailed and tedious (American Judaism, by Jonathan Sarna). This history by Hasia Diner was much more interesting and readable than the other book. Reads almost like a novel.

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