Few subjects in American Jewish history have received so much attention as the relationship between Germans and East Europeans, the proverbial tension between "uptown" and "downtown." As early as 1881, the very year that mass immigration of East European Jews to America began, Henry Gersoni, editor of the Jewish Advance, lamented that "even in America, the Russian emigrants
are thrown out of the society of their own brethren.” He pointed out that “sectional prejudices” among Jews had long prevailed in Europe with unfortunate consequences. In America, he hoped Jews could unite.

In subsequent years a whole range of opinions on this subject were expressed. Rabbi Moses Weinberger, writing in 1887, praised the German Jews for their charity, which he considered superior to that of his own fellow Eastern Europeans. Dr. George Price, writing in 1893, shared some of Weinberger’s sentiments toward the German-American Yahudim, and offered an analysis of “uptown” “downtown” relations that remains one of the most insightful and fairminded ever to have been produced:

[The American Jew, who enjoys political freedom, tries to avoid anything which might provoke enmity against him and might supply fuel to the dying flame of intolerance. That is why Russian-Jewish immigration brought the American Jew face to face with a special problem. The American Jew is afraid that the mass influx will delay the process of assimilation — the process of Americanization of the Jews of the United States.... On the one hand, here are his true relatives who are dear to him and whom he wants to help; on the other hand, what a blemish! All his aristocratic neighbors, and he, himself, will again become aware of his descent, of his past and of his poverty. But he cannot help himself. The relatives are in need. They require help. Our friend spends a great deal of money and tries to rehabilitate his relatives. But, after this first party of relatives, there arrives a second, third and fourth and there seems to be no end to the influx.... This is the position the American Jew finds himself in. (Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society, 48, 109.)

Unfortunately, Price’s evenhanded psychological perspective on the conflict was not developed. Instead, most subsequent historians have painted a somber picture of aloof, prejudiced and cold-hearted Yahudim who worried more about status and Americanism than about tsedakah and Judaism. Thus Ezekiel Lifschutz, writing in Yivo Bieter (1932), lambasted America’s German Jews mercilessly. To his mind, they “did not take the condition of the Russian-Polish Jews strongly to heart, for they considered them culturally and even more so economically inferior.” Lifschutz went so far as to imply that early East European immigrants found more sympathy in Christian circles than among Jews.

While Zosa Szajkowski, Irving Mandel, and particularly Moses Rischin strove to be more evenhanded, the picture that emerged from their work was still a damming indictment of America’s German-Jewish elite. When translated into popular terms—books like Our Crowd and Poor Cousins—the German Jews came out looking suspiciously like nativist American patricians. That image lingers.

Readers of this journal, however, know better, for in 1973 they were treated to Zosa Szajkowski’s revisionist article, “The Yahudi and the Immigrant: A Reappraisal.” Based on his own research and two decades of reflection, Szajkowski in this essay advanced more forcefully than anyone had before him the German Jew’s rebuttal. Recanting his earlier view, Szajkowski concluded that German Jews’ “very positive and meaningful action” on behalf of East Europeans deserves respect. Their successes, he pointed out, were notable, and even their failures usually stemmed from highminded ideals. This view of Yahudi-immigrant relations, which distinguishes attitudes from actions and substitutes ambivalence for animosity, finds eloquent expression in Irving Howe’s World of Our Fathers:

The east European Jews felt free to release their bile because they knew that finally the German Jews would not abandon them, and the German Jews kept on with their good works even while reflecting on the boorishness of their “coreligionists.” Out of such friction came a modest portion of progress (p. 235).

The two volumes under review were both completed before Szajkowski’s revisionist essay appeared in print. Both were originally written as doctoral dissertations, and neither has been updated (although Berman has added a brief preface placing his 1963 work in perspective). Arno Press has now published both volumes straight from typescript without benefit of even so much as an index.

Notwithstanding these deficiencies, Myron Berman’s The Attitude of American Jewry Towards East European Jewish Immigration, 1881-1914 merits a place on any university bookshelf. For years it has stood as the most complete work available on East European Jewish immigration to the United States, and though now partly superceded, it still possesses immense value for its voluminous citations and its exhaustively detailed treatment of institutional responses to mass immigration. Berman understood, as many of his predecessors in the field did not, that attitudes display themselves in actions no less than in words. He therefore went beyond newspaper studies and selective quotations from private correspondence to show what Jews did, and—most importantly—how their actions changed over time. His work begins with a survey of the “immigration crisis” and the organizational response to it, moves on to consider the battle to keep America’s gates open, and ends with a general survey of social, economic and cultural developments through World War One. Berman’s conclusions—(1) that American Jews gradually improved their opinion of the East Europeans and by 1914 considered them welcome additions to the population, (2) that up to 1914 the overwhelming majority of Jews seek-
ing American shores were granted admission, and (3) that in compari-
on to other immigrant groups Jews were not received badly -
all remain rather convincing.

Some of Berman's material, notably his statistics and his sec-
tions on Zionism, require revision based on more recent research
and Yiddish sources. Moreover, Berman commits the usual falla-
cies, grouping all East Europeans together, and confusing the New
York experience with that of American Jewry as a whole. Still, his
remains a valuable counterpart to World of Our Fathers, whose
vantage point is that of the

His work is in some senses a more antiquated work. It focuses narrowly on publicly ex-
pressed attitudes toward proposed immigration policies, ignores
German Jews' efforts to have laws liberally interpreted and loosely
enforced, and instead endeavors to prove that American Jews dis-
played far more sympathy toward immigration restriction legisla-
tion than is generally assumed. During the period 1893-1896, Neu-
ringer finds that "anti-immigrant sentiment among the American
Jews had been so powerful that for the first time since the restric-
tionist agitation had begun in the late 1880's, the approving aspect
of American Jewry's dual attitude toward restrictive legislation
clearly predominated over the opposing one" (p. 46). Later he as-
serts that "there most likely existed a considerable amount of pro-
literacy test sentiment in the American Jewish community in 1901-
02" (p. 65). Still later, he finds German Jews insufficiently active in
opposing the 1921 quota legislation, "precisely from the desire to
avoid a loophole in the law that could have admitted large numbers
of co-religionists to America" (p. 167). Neuringer does discuss Jew-
ish opposition to restriction, and he concedes that between 1905
and 1921 anti-restrictionist views prevailed. Yet he consistently em-
phasizes the seamier side of the picture. His conclusions about Jew-
ish attitudes toward 1950's restrictionist legislation stand as typical:
"The liberalism of the Jewish groups on immigration during the
ey early 1950's was not quite as strong and certain nor the motives
behind it quite as pure and lacking in self-interest as some spokesmen
had made it out to be" (p. 382).

Had Neuringer been content to show that some Jews, particu-
larly German Jews, supported restriction and that most showed
some degree of ambivalence toward the mass influx of newcomers,