

*The Jews of the United States, 1654 to 2000.* By Hasia R. Diner. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004. x, 437 pp. \$29.95, ISBN 0-520-22773-5.)

The 350th anniversary of the American Jewish community (1654–2004), like the 300th before it, has occasioned a small boom in scholarship concerning American Jewish history and life. In addition to monographs, articles, and museum exhibitions, we now have this full-scale history of the American Jewish community by Hasia R. Diner, one of the field's most senior and prolific scholars.

Diner's wide-ranging synthesis attempts to cover social, political, economic, cultural, and religious history from the colonial era to the present—a tall order. She knows the secondary history well, carefully incorporates the experiences of women into her text, and displays little patience with filiopietism or apologetics. She does not shrink, for example, from discussing Jewish slaveholding. She also observes, repeatedly, that Jews benefited in America on account of their skin color, in stark contrast to African Americans. While her insistence that “Jews did not have to ‘become white’” (p. 165) is an oversimplification, as is her claim that Jews “no longer bore the burden of being the stigmatized group, whom others reviled and oppressed” (p. 25), the fact that Jews found their white skin to be an asset in America is clearly beyond question. Indeed, she might have gone further, as David Brion Davis did, to show how modernity actually advantaged Jews while disadvantaging African Americans.

Diner's most striking innovation is to discard the traditional periodization of American Jewish history, which focuses on different immigrant waves, and to focus instead on what she calls the pivotal century, the era from 1820 to 1924 when the bulk of Jewish immigrants to the United States arrived and when the community's major institutions, divisions, and characteristics took form. She has elsewhere criticized the traditional periodization, which focused on 1881 as a crucial turning point, but her alternative presentation here is far from fully persuasive. It obscures sharp differences that distinguished different eras of American Jewish life from one another, posits a history that is often decontextualized from the history

of America generally, and results in alarming violations of chronology. In Diner's recording of events, mass east European immigration precedes the Civil War, the Jewish Theological Seminary precedes B'nai B'rith, and the Holocaust precedes the Great Depression!

An unhappy number of errors mar this volume. On two occasions, for example, Diner confuses the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations with the Union of Orthodox Rabbis (pp. 127, 295). She also quite wrongly describes the *Shema* (Deuteronomy 6:4-9) as a prayer “in which Jewish men [*sic!*] thanked God for not having ‘made me a non-Jew’” (p. 300). On the other hand, the volume also abounds with fresh insights. She shows, for example, that in supporting Japan during the Russo-Japanese war American Jews distinguished themselves from most American whites, who supported Russia from fear of a growing “yellow peril” (p. 179).

This is not the place for a full-scale comparison between Diner's history and my own *American Judaism: A History* (2004), likewise published to coincide with American Jewry's 350th anniversary. Suffice it to say that my history focuses on the religious experience of American Jews, while Diner's seeks to cover *all* aspects of their history. Perhaps by the 400th anniversary of American Jewish life we shall know which approach succeeds better and which is more productive of future scholarship.

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*The Idea of Democracy in the Modern Era.* By Ralph Ketcham. (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004. viii, 302 pp. \$35.00, ISBN 0-7006-1334-X.)

Ralph Ketcham ranges widely and synoptically over ideas of democracy, reaching from the insights of Aristotle and Confucius to the ideas of Jacques Derrida and other contemporary social theorists. The focus, however, is on modernity, or the period since 1600, which he divides into four principal “episodes” or “configurations” with their respective theories and rationales: the first, grounded in the empiricism and individualism of Francis Ba-