

American Judaism: A History. By JONATHAN D. SARNA. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004. xx, 490p. Illustrations, notes, glossary, chronology, selected bibliography, index. \$35.)

In 1997, attorney Alan Dershowitz published *The Vanishing American Jew*, in which he argued that the survival of Judaism in America was threatened by its very success: the lack of antisemitism and integration of Jews into mainstream society decreased the percentage of Jews in America from nearly 4 percent in the 1930s to less than 2 percent today. To keep Judaism viable, Dershowitz made several suggestions that appeal to different audiences: retain and strengthen traditional religious practices, develop new ones to accommodate social change, stress the Jews' cultural and historical heritage outside the synagogue, and participate as Jews to support domestic reform and religious freedom at home and Israel abroad.

Jonathan Sarna's superb history of the Jews is written in part to refute Dershowitz and Arthur Hertzberg, whose history *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (1989; 2nd ed. 1997) presents a less sanguine history, one that should be read in tandem with Sarna's. Sarna shows that Dershowitz is preaching to the converted. From the first, Jews in America have stood up for their rights; from the American Revolution to the civil rights movements have participated in social change; have exhibited solidarity with oppressed Jews in other countries, beginning in the colonial era with their support for Jews in Iberian countries through the Holocaust; and have produced a variety of Judaisms (Reform, Orthodox, Conservative) to cater to different Jews.

Sarna identifies four main adjustments: retention by a handful of Jews (some three to four hundred families in the whole United States in 1790) of their faith and culture despite a large number of conversions and little antisemitism during the colonial period; the emergence of Reform Jewry in the 1820s, which eliminated much traditional ritual in order to attract the secularized Jews of the early republic; the hostility toward but eventual accommodation by this group of Jews to the Orthodox great migration at the turn of the twentieth century; and the revival of American Judaism in response to the Holocaust and the precarious position of Israel in our own times. Sarna is especially astute at showing how these Jewish adaptations paralleled trends in Protestant America: the maintenance of traditional religion in the colonial era; the religious and reform revivals of the early republic; antipathy toward yet ultimate acceptance of immigrants from eastern and southern Europe; and the religious revival of the late twentieth century.

Pennsylvania figures most prominently in Sarna's story in his discussion of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as is appropriate. Members of Philadelphia's Mikveh Israel were instrumental in obtaining equal rights for Jews in Pennsylvania, largely through their vehement support of the American

Revolution. That congregation's rabbi, Isaac Leeser (1806–68), was a national leader in strengthening traditional Judaism through education and organizational efforts. The Pittsburgh Platform of 1885 was able to unite most branches of a Reform Judaism whose congregations disagreed with each other as well as with more traditional Jews.

Primarily a history of Judaism as an institutionalized religion—there is not much, for instance, on the cultural and political ferment of the Lower East Side at the turn of the century—Sarna's well-written, comprehensive work should be read by American Jews and those who seek to understand them.

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