Dolley, returned to Montpelier. Madison finished the mansion, once more farmed, and received guests. He gave much time to plans offering a solution to the problem of slavery. He was a delegate from Orange County to a Virginia convention for a new state constitution. He furnished "ammunition" for opponents of nullification and secession and wrote articles for newspapers. After years of work with Jefferson and Monroe on behalf of the University of Virginia, at seventy-five, he took the lead in this work. Then there were his papers to arrange, collect, and edit, practically a working history of the American Revolution, the Constitutional Convention, and four administrations.

This fine American died on June 28, 1836, at the age of eighty-five.

Dr. Ketcham closes with these words: "Madison's life reveals that he cherished the Union because only the cooperative power it released could bring the social justice necessary to fulfill the legal and moral equality of man. He furthermore cherished liberty because only it could open to man the opportunities due his limitless potential . . . ."


In writing the history of America’s minorities, historians are frequently forced to employ a variety of research techniques. Thus, quantitative analysis and psychological and sociological perspectives have enriched much of our recent social history. Among the devices currently used to reconstruct our past, few offer a richer reward than oral history. The makers and participants of historical events certainly constitute a crucial source.

The study of the Jewish immigrant experience in Pittsburgh through oral interviews in By Myself I'm a Book! illustrates the effectiveness of one form of historical methodology. Interpreting the data collected from over two hundred interviews with Jewish immigrants who came to Pittsburgh between 1890 and 1924, the study offers a fascinating look at the complexity of immigrant adaptation in America. Indeed, the compilers, the Pittsburgh Section, National Council of
Jewish Women under the direction of Ailon Shiloh, claim that their approach, "not statistical and not third person narrative, could provide an invaluable dynamic dimension often missing from traditional histories."

The account, brought together entirely by volunteer workers, provides glimpses of Jewish immigrant life not only in Pittsburgh but in Europe as well. Descriptions of activities in Jewish shtetls in Russian Poland and Roumania, for instance, capture the intensity of hostilities displayed toward Jews—a hostility, the study argues, which prompted the majority of late nineteenth-century Jewish emigration from eastern Europe.

Episodes, such as the pursuit of education by immigrants in Pittsburgh and the growth of the cigar industry among Pittsburgh's Jews, offer additional pictures of their early years in America. Moreover, controversial matters, to the credit of the compilers, were not avoided. Jews frequently were active in the socialist currents of the early twentieth century and supported strike efforts. Jewish congregations, as did most immigrant congregations, suffered from internecine strife. Synagogues often split along nationality lines. Even the initial reaction of Jews towards blacks was recounted: "The first American I saw was black and I thought that perhaps in America people became black."

Ultimately, however, the book's most important contribution, in addition to providing a rich source of material for the study of America's ethnic minorities, is its powerful implication that immigrants to America did not readily lose their identity. In fact, ethnic identity seemed to reach new proportions in America. Among Pittsburgh's Jews, for instance, during the 1920s, Yiddish cultural organizations opened numerous schools which taught the Yiddish language and Jewish literature, history, songs, and dances. "If I had to choose between buying medicine and buying a Yiddish newspaper, and I didn't have money for both," one immigrant recalled, "I would buy a newspaper."

Oral history, as witnessed by this study of Pittsburgh's Jews, can provide an absorbing kind of history. Only a gentle reminder need be given that history is ultimately a synthesis of numerous inquiries and methodologies and that no one approach can ever be the sole basis for valid historical conclusions.

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission  John E. Bodnar Harrisburg, Pennsylvania