

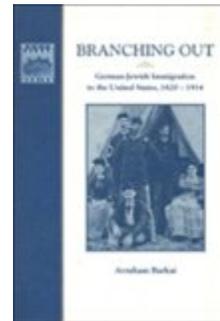
H-Net Reviews

in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Avraham Barkai. *Branching Out: German-Jewish Immigration to the United States, 1820-1914*. New York and London: Holmes & Meier, 1994. xiii + 269 pp. \$40.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8419-1152-9.

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In this highly readable book, Avraham Barkai investigates the role of one of the most dominant groups in the formation of the American Jewry—the German Jews. Initially, these immigrants dominated the Jewish community in the United States, but after the Civil War they were outnumbered by the Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. Barkai focuses on the complicated relationship between both Jewish immigrant groups and also on the relationship between the German Jews and the German gentiles. Moreover, the author tries to include the little men as well as the prominent. Because Barkai depends mainly on biographies, contemporary studies, and newspapers, the story of the little men does not live up to its promise. Barkai argues that more local studies are needed with different methods and sources in order to get a complete picture of the Jewish immigrant. Jewish women will then also get more attention than they received in Barkai's work.

After briefly reviewing the distinct Jewish groups in Germany in the nineteenth century—who differed by class, religion, and geographic origin—Barkai describes the first German Jewish emigrants to the United States, along with the push and the pull factors in the migration process. Barkai portrays the saga of the peddler, the arrival of Jewish immigrants at the east coast, and their dispersion westward. Jewish immigrants were important in the socio-economic development of the United States. The peddler functioned as the provider to pioneers and was the backbone of the Jewish middle class. Barkai then deals with Jewish settlement reflected by the establishment of synagogues. The phenomenon started mostly with cemeteries since Jewish immigrants wanted to be buried in holy ground; in this way, the migration of rabbis and the building of synagogues was initiated. Around

these Jewish communities rose.

The middle chapters deal with the development of the Jewish community, in which the Jewish congregation had an important role. It was a bridge between the old and new world as well as a source of education, charity, and religion. Barkai argues that the Civil War was a turning point in the migration of the German Jews, with its attendant decline in immigration and change in overall conditions. In the Civil War years, Jewish merchants were viewed as war profiteers and Jews were also blamed for shortages and high prices. That many Jews fought in both armies while most merchants did not profit from the war had little impact on the above arguments. This resulted in the “coming of age” of American Jewry and increasing political consciousness. The arrival of the second wave of Jewish immigrants after the war brought migrants from the Polish areas of Germany. Differences between the first and the second Jewish migrant groups resulted in a social stratification of the American Jewry, and the differences between immigrant groups meant a delay of Jewish Americanization as well as an increase in anti-Semitism. Meanwhile, relations between Jews and gentile Germans were complicated. Overall, the relationship was defined by mutual interest and necessity (p. 181). But when the German Jews Americanized or created their own organizations, ties with the other Germans loosened. Anti-Semitism increased in pace with political developments in Germany as well.

Barkai's latter chapters deal with the complicated relationship between German and East European Jews. The latter came mainly from Russia, fleeing the pogroms in 1881, and most German Jews rejected them. Increasingly, German Jews became a minority and withdrew into their

own communities and institutions, where they cultivated their German identity. Only slowly did the distinction between the German and Eastern European Jews disappear. Barkai argues that American Jewry is presently a synthesis of both groups. The book's conclusion does not summarize the author's findings, but discusses the impact of the German Jewish emigration on the ones who stayed behind.

This study is very descriptive with an abundance of illustrative quotes which aim to give a complete picture of German Jewry. But Barkai is also careful to contextualize Jewish voices. Lazarus Straus of Otterberg, for in-

stance, raved about how respected the peddlers were (p. 63); Barkai rightly questions this comment and compares it with the experiences of other Jewish migrants. This well-documented, well-written book will be a great help for anyone who studies the migration of German Jewish immigrants to the United States as well as for scholars examining the formation of American Jewry.

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