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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Irving Cutler. *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996. xii + 316 pp. \$29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-252-02185-5.

Hilton Hindus, ed. *The Jewish East Side, 1881-1924*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 1996. xxxii + 301 pp. \$24.95 (paper), ISBN 978-1-56000-842-2.

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Published on H-Urban (December, 1997)



The Streets of Jewish America

Jewish immigration to the United States was prolonged and massive originating from all parts of Europe and beyond. America's Jewish communities have been portrayed in prose, poetry, song, on the stage and in film, and extensively in the academic literature. Few with any knowledge of American history would fail to list New York and Chicago as the two largest recipients of Jewish immigration in the 19th and early twentieth centuries. The immigrant slums and the better neighborhoods of these cities all knew the impact of Jewish immigration. Yiddish words, even today years after the migration and the holocaust, make up much of the common language of both Chicago and New York—so do the ever present bagel stores, delicatessens, and synagogues that dot the cityscape. Today's descendants of this great immigration are among the most successful of Americans, and in turn the Jewish community faces the perilous problems brought about by the successful assimilation of the children and grandchildren of immigrants into American society. Today the question of who is a Jew is posed repeatedly in the *New York Times* and other media outlets.

Irving Cutler's *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* is a fascinating look at the city's Jewish community. Cutler, professor emeritus of geography at Chicago State University, is a well known geographer and author. He has done a fine job in compiling a huge encyclopedic compendium of information regarding Jewish Chicago. This very well illustrated book details Jewish emigration

from multiple European homelands and their arrival in Chicago. Cutler addresses the various waves of migration that shaped the community, especially the German Jewish and East European Jewish immigrations. The subtitle "From Shtetl to Suburb" betrays Cutler's primary interest which is the migration of Jews from Eastern Europe and their progress in American society. The author displays an extensive knowledge of East European history. For example, he points to the historical fact that "... the Jews did not come to Russia; rather Russia had come to them through a series of annexations." The partitions of Poland brought the Jewish "problem" to the Russian Empire. Cutler goes on to give a both sympathetic and realistic portrayal of shtetl life and to detail the diversity in those communities and the reasons for emigration. This has been done before, but Cutler's retelling is both genuine and informative.

When Cutler's Jews reach Chicago the author breaks into a fascinating recital of Jewish accomplishments in the city. He traces the community from the early days of the city and corrects various mistakes in the usual telling of the story. For example Cutler points to the Orthodox roots of Chicago's first temple, Kehilath Anshe Maariv (K.A.M.). Just recently I visited K.A.M. where I was told that the temple was never Orthodox, but had always been a Reformed congregation. Cutler does a service in detailing the early years of Chicago's Jewish community with a tremendous amount of detail. *The Jews of Chicago*

contains a number of fascinating photographs that speak to the material life as well as to the social life of Jewish Chicago. It includes an interesting glossary of common Yiddish and Hebrew terms as well as a detailed chronology that will prove helpful to scholars.

The major drawback of *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* is that, while it performs a wonderful service in detailing the Jewish experience, it does not adequately interpret that information. Cutler goes on and on with lists of famous Jewish Chicagoans, institutions, and events such as the "Ritual Murder Riot" in South Chicago in 1913, but does not adequately put them in their historical contexts. Cutler does little with the historiography of the Jewish diaspora in America. Jewish Chicago still awaits its interpreter who can build on Cutler's work and on the recent exhaustive work of Sidney Sorkin's *Bridges to an American City: A Guide to Chicago's Landsmanshaften*, an invaluable guide to Jewish immigrant fraternal organizations in the Windy City.

Hilton Hindus's *The Jewish East Side, 1881-1924*, deals with the New York experience and is a reprint of an earlier version, *The Old East Side*, compiled in 1969. The book is a collection of contemporary accounts that bring the history of New York's Jewish community to life in a series of vivid portrayals. Included are selections from Abraham Cohen's "Yekl," Anzia Yezierska's, "Red Ribbon on a White Horse," and Henry Roth's *Call It Sleep*, and several selections from the work of Jacob Riis among others. Each selection is preceded by a short account of the author's life. It could be a helpful resource in the classroom, allowing students to get a feel for the immigrant experience in New York through popular primary sources.

For the historian, *The Jewish East Side, 1881-1924* is valuable as a look at the Lower East Side, but here too there is little interpretation. The book does a good job as a collection of primary sources just as Cutler's book is a fascinating collection of data. For New York's Jewish community the work of Moses Rischin, *The Promised City* remains central to the historiographical argument. Ronald Sander's *The Downtown Jews: Portrait of an Immigrant Generation* also provides compelling insights into the East Side community. In turn the recent book by Eva Hoffman, *Shtetl* provides a constructive and balanced account of the Polish Jewish experience in Europe.

Finally a visit to the Lower East Side Tenement Museum on Orchard Street in the heart of the Old Jewish East Side is both an interesting and essential tool in understanding the Jewish experience in New York. Located in what is still a teeming immigrant ghetto, the Tenement Museum is one of the fastest growing public history museums in the country. A visit to the museum should include a tour of its immediate neighborhood. The walking tour, which lasts about an hour and focuses on the old Jewish Lower East Side, includes the Norfolk Street Synagogue, the site of the Khazzer-Mark (Pig Market), Essex Street, Seward Park, the Jewish Daily Forward Building, and the Kletzker Landsmanshaft as well as many other important sites. The physical city combined with the insights provided by Hindus in *The Jewish East Side, 1881-1924* can combine to present a vivid portrait to student and scholar alike.

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Citation: Dominic Pacyga. Review of Cutler, Irving, *The Jews of Chicago: From Shtetl to Suburb* and Hindus, Hilton, ed., *The Jewish East Side, 1881-1924*. H-Urban, H-Net Reviews. December, 1997.

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