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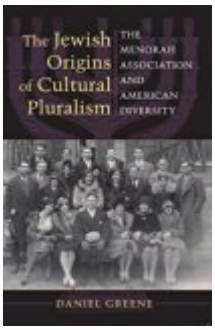
Daniel Greene. *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism: The Menorah Association and American Diversity.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. xi + 261 pp. $24.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-253-22334-0.



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Daniel Greene's monograph, *The Jewish Origins of Cultural Pluralism*, represents an important contribution to American Jewish historiography. Greene's volume traces the evolution of cultural pluralism in its appropriate social and cultural context, anchoring a discussion of ideas within the precise historical milieu from which they emerged.

Greene asserts that the concept of cultural pluralism largely originated on America's elite college campuses in the first decade of the twentieth century. The Menorah Society--founded at Harvard University in 1906 by sixteen Jewish undergraduates--expanded to almost eighty college campuses by the close of World War I. In 1913, the Intercollegiate Menorah Association (IMA) became the umbrella organization loosely linking individual chapters. In the pages of the IMA's magazine, *The Menorah Journal* (first published in 1915), young Jewish intellectuals put forth a vision for the renaissance of Jewish life in America. They insisted that American Jews should affirm their Jewish identity and distinctiveness, and that doing so would make them better Americans at the same time. Their pluralist vision depended on an America that was inclusive of its minorities, and a Jewish audience that was receptive to a particular definition of Jewishness.

Significantly, critics deemed the college campus to be a most unlikely setting for an affirmation of Jewish identity at that time. "Attending college," they feared, "provided students with both the enticement and the possibility to cast off Jewish identity" (p. 36). Competing models of Americanization, namely, the Melting Pot and Anglo Conformity, sought to minimize or erase ethnic distinction. But Greene's Jewish students embraced the possibility of Jewish difference, taking their lead from philosopher Horace Kallen.

Menorah Society members defined Jewish identity quite broadly. Members "used the term Hebraism to articulate a concept of Jewish identity based primarily on inquiry into the humanities, including history, language, literature, and the visual arts" (p. 29). The scholarly study of Jewish his-

tory formed the core of Hebraism. Though not completely eschewing the merits of religious observance, society members clearly deemphasized it in their publications. But in doing so--and in refusing to adapt its original goals to meet the shifting social and cultural needs of Jewish students on college campuses into the 1920s--the Menorah Society eventually lost ground to B'nai B'rith's Hillel Foundations (founded in 1923). The IMA also alienated Jewish communal leaders (particularly Reform rabbis), who viewed the organization as too narrow in its focus. Impervious to this criticism, however, the IMA stood firm in advocating its original mission.

After introducing readers to the campuses on which the Menorah Societies first started, Greene's narrative ventures into the musings of Kallen and his intellectual peers, who debated the merits of cultural pluralism on the pages of the *Menorah Journal*. Greene does not shy away from pointing out the flaws and limitations in Kallen's reasoning, not the least of which was his failure to put forth a plan by which his vision of cultural pluralism could become a reality.

A later chapter traces the efforts of the IMA to introduce Jewish studies into university curricula. In so doing, IMA members saw themselves as advancing the mission of the ***Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden***, the cadre of Jewish intellectuals in Germany who introduced the scientific study of Jewish culture and history. IMA intellectuals gave little credence to Jewish studies courses taught within rabbinical seminaries: "scholarship based in the academy, they argued, allowed for questioning of truths and openness to new knowledge that seminary-based learning denied" (p. 101). Here, Greene notes the powerful influence of American pragmatism in shaping these intellectuals' concept of Jewish studies.

The last two chapters of Greene's book follow debates over cultural pluralism in two other domains, namely, the burgeoning field of Jewish history, as well as American Jewish fiction. Again drawing form the ***Menorah Journal***, this time largely from issues published in the 1920s, Greene highlights points of agreement and conflict between the essayists (be they historians, philosophers, or novelists). Just as important, he describes the increasingly tense relationship between the ***Menorah Journal***'s editors and Jewish communal leaders, who resented the journal's scathing criticism of the contemporary American Jewish community, its leaders, and established institutions.

In an epilogue, Greene discusses the ways in which Kallen slightly revised his views on cultural pluralism much later in life, including his denial that cultural difference was ultimately rooted in one's biology. Greene also clearly articulates the differences between cultural pluralism of Kallen's period, which left out nonwhite Americans, and multiculturalism of the late twentieth century.

Greene's monograph is a fascinating read, clearly written and highly accessible. He tackles quite abstract concepts with an engaging narrative style, making historical actors come to life. A reader without prior knowledge of this subject would easily come away with a foundational understanding of the intellectual currents that he studies.

Significantly, Greene acknowledges that these intellectuals were not representative of larger portions of the Jewish community. Few American Jews even had the issue of cultural pluralism on their radar screen. But he does convincingly make the case for their relevance to American Jewish historians, precisely because they observed American Jews from an unusual vantage point (the college campus), and defined their Jewish identity differently from most (as a commitment to intellectual engagement). Their status as outsiders, in other words, makes them fascinating historical subjects.

Greene's book is a wonderful addition to the growing historiography on Jewish self-definition in the early years of the twentieth century, in

which Jews struggled to fit themselves into the rapidly shifting categories of race and ethnicity. It offers non-rabbinic perspectives on American Jewish communal life, and also incorporates the influence of non-Jewish intellectuals (such as John Dewey, William James, and others) on Jewish thinkers.