It was some seventy years ago, in 1928, that Salo Wittmayer Baron, then a young Jewish historian, published a provocative essay, "Ghetto and Emancipation," whose echoes continue to reverberate powerfully to this day. This early essay contains in concentrated form many of the important themes that would mark Baron's thought throughout his extraordinary career. The urgent desire to abandon an excessively gloomy view of Jewish history, which Baron designated the "lachrymose conception" of Jewish history, makes its first appearance in the concluding line of "Ghetto and Emancipation." Baron was especially intent on overturning the "traditional view" alluded to in the article's subtitle—the ubiquitous distinction made by Jewish historians between "the black of the Jewish Middle Ages and the white of the post-Emancipation period . . ." According to Baron, this historiographical tendency, born in the formative generations of Jewish historiography in nineteenth-century Germany, was woefully misleading. The Jewish Middle Ages were not a source of unending misery. Not only did medieval Jews possess "more rights than the great bulk of the population," but the Jewish community "enjoyed full internal autonomy." This latter privilege issued naturally from the corporatist order of medieval feudalism. Conversely, it stood in direct conflict with modern theories of governance in which the State demanded a direct relationship with the individual subject-citizen. Ironically, Baron couples his retreat from the lachrymose conception of the Jewish Middle Ages with a decidedly lachrymose view of Jewish modernity. Indeed, he takes fierce exception to those Jewish historians who celebrate the advent of Jewish political emancipation as "the dawn of a new day after a nightmare of the deepest horror." Baron's strictures in "Ghetto and Emancipation" point to the disturbing and disabling effects of the emancipatory process: the loss of
communal autonomy, the assumption of new and onerous obligations imposed by the state, the evisceration of the national component of Jewish identity, and the recasting of Judaism into a narrow confessional mold. Hovering above Baron’s essay is the spirit of Count Clermont-Tonnere, a delegate to the French National Assembly, who declared in 1789 that “the Jews should be denied everything as a nation, but granted everything as individuals.” This statement epitomizes Baron’s sense of the deep structural flaws of Jewish modernity—specifically, the imperative to surrender all but the most meager vestiges of communal identity in return for individual political rights.

Of course, Baron was hardly the first thinker in modern times to call attention to the hazards of emancipation. Reticence about a new transformative politics surfaced in the midst of the very Enlightenment movements that agitated for it. Such diverse eighteenth-century figures as Rousseau, Burke, and Hamann shared a concern over the loss of tradition, community, and a secure sense of the past, which was seemingly mandated by the new liberal creed. For some, such as the German Counter-Enlightenment thinker Johann David Michaelis, it was the emancipation of the Jews itself that signaled the corrupting influence of liberalism on German group integrity.

Notwithstanding these conservative critiques, the tenets of political liberalism not only were validated by the French Revolution, but served more broadly as pillars for a sweeping process of embourgeoisement in nineteenth-century Europe. And yet, voices of dissent were never stifled. In fact, Carl Schorske notes the irony that in Austria in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, “the program which the liberals had devised against the upper classes occasioned the explosion of the lower.” The resulting radicalization led to a dizzying proliferation of new anti-liberal ideologies—socialism, ultra-nationalism, anti-Semitism—all of which were sounded in a shriller and “sharper key” than previous political expressions.

To the extent that no group had invested more faith and goodwill in the Enlightenment project than the Jews, the resulting “failure of liberalism left the Jew a victim.” One of the most noteworthy Jewish “victims” was Theodor Herzl, whose grandiose vision of cultural ecumenism between Jews and Europeans was shattered by the Dreyfus Affair in 1894. For Herzl, the Jewish response to the anti-Dreyfusards—and the unfortunate but inevitable response to Count Clermont-Tonnere—was to affirm precisely that which had been discarded one hundred years earlier: Jewish national identity. The Zionist program announced a blueprint for a reconstituted, self-governing Jewish national community, and while the political form of this European state, Herzl’s “Jewish homeland,” was never to materialize in Europe, and thus signified an ultimate failure of the Jews.

Salo Baron knew well, for example, Theodor Herzl’s illusory nationalist university, where he earned a Ph.D., and the city’s longstanding interest in the election of Karl Lueger, to name just a few of the ironic effects of the Jews’ emancipation. Yet, he followed in their footsteps. Nor did he forget the Jewish entry into modern society, as a “melting pot” and as communities experiencing the evisceration of Jewish autonomy, if not the Jews.

Baron’s concern, however, was a series of trenchant Anti-Semitic critiques of the “melting pot” model, in which he was like Horace M. Kallen and his efforts to surrender the potential of the American model of a “symphony of peoples” to the appeal of those against which liberal “democracy” was to create the average typical Jew. Built upon this foundation of Jewish pluralism, the cultural pluralists were to share their pluralist vision in a benevolent process of social consensus, in a brief historical essay that would be read in the years leading to the First World War.
Zionist program announced in Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* of 1896 was thus a blueprint for a reconstituted Jewish national community. Even though the political form of this community was to resemble a bourgeois Central European state, Herzl’s Zionism demanded the end of Jewish existence in Europe, and thus signaled the loss of a certain liberal innocence for the Jews.

Salo Baron knew well the formative Viennese environment in which Theodor Herzl’s illusions were fostered. Baron studied at the city’s university, where he earned three doctorates. He was well aware of the city’s longstanding infatuation with anti-Semitism, epitomized by the election of Karl Lueger as mayor in 1895. No doubt, he was also aware of the ironic effects of anti-Semitism in reversing the Jewish march to assimilation. Yet, he did not choose to follow in Herzl’s Zionist footsteps. Nor did he give voice to the negative consequences of the Jewish entry into modernity while in Vienna. Rather, he wrote “Ghetto and Emancipation” in New York, far from the highly charged environment of Central Europe. America clearly offered a more stable Jewish environment than Europe to him and many others. But it possessed its own, more subtle dangers. Indeed, it was precisely the absence of a deeply rooted anti-Semitic political culture in America that intensified the appeal of social integration for Jews. Conversely, it was the imperative of assimilation, as reflected in the pervasive metaphor of the melting pot, that threatened the strong communal, ethnic, and religious loyalties of new Americans. From this perspective, New York of the 1920s was a quite logical venue in which to confront the perils of assimilation, if not the larger triumphalist myth of Jewish modernity.

Baron’s concerns were not expressed in a conceptual vacuum. A series of trenchant American critics had expressed dissatisfaction with the “melting pot” model for at least a decade. Indeed, cultural pluralists like Horace M. Kallen, Randolph Bourne, and Judah L. Magness refused to surrender the potential benefit of group rights. They preferred the model of a “symphony” of nationalities over the “melting pot,” cognizant that liberal democracy has the tendency to level all distinctions, to create the average type, almost to demand uniformity.” Baron stood upon this foundation of criticism in “Ghetto and Emancipation.” Unlike the cultural pluralists, he offered no political prescriptions. But he did share their fears about the insidious consequences of apparently benevolent processes of social amelioration. He exhibited these fears in a brief historical essay with judgments as sweeping and reductionist as those against which he inveighed. Indeed, while challenging the sharp
and value-laden dichotomy between premodern and modern Jewish
history, Baron substituted his own, somewhat counterintuitive contrast;
his version of modernity became a sort of Dark Age for the Jews both in
terms of their communal identity and their physical well-being.

If Baron overstated his case at times, his considerable erudition also
led him to important insights in “Ghetto and Emancipation.” In
particular, he identified the emancipatory process not merely as the
beginning of Jewish modernity, but as the site of a new and tension-
filled social contract. Under this arrangement, the Jews stood to lose
much—the very core of their group identity—in receiving rights of
citizenship. This exchange prompted Baron to observe that
“emancipation was a necessity even more for the modern State than for
Jewry.”13 Lurking beneath the benign rhetoric of liberalism was a
concerted agenda of coercion.

Many have followed Baron’s direction, most without knowing or
acknowledging his contribution. A particularly intriguing line of inquiry
has linked the totalitarian manifestations of the twentieth century,
fascism and Nazism, to intellectual and social transformations in the
eighteenth century. In their famous indictment in Dialectic of
Enlightenment, Horkheimer and Adorno denounced the “repressive
equality” that had its source in the Enlightenment.14 The two German
émigrés attempted to uncover the way in which state action could be and
was justified in the name of the exalted ideal of reason—to the exclusion
of any enduring moral principles.

More recent thinkers such as the Frenchmen Emmanuel Levinas,
Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida have
further challenged the Enlightenment legacy by questioning its hyper-
rationality. They share a deep skepticism about the Enlightenment
“metanarrative” in which “the hero of knowledge works toward a good
ethico-political end—universal peace.”15 In their challenge to the core
Enlightenment precepts of progress and human reason, these thinkers
have ushered in a new moment of reflection on the project of modernity
itself. According to Lyotard, this moment, marked by a decided
“incredulity toward metanarratives,” merits the designation
postmodern.16 It is in this postmodern age (though not always of it) that
searching reconsiderations of the liberal ideal in American society have
come from a wide array of thinkers ranging from Richard Rorty to
Alasdair MacIntyre to Michael Sandel. One important outgrowth has
been a neo-communitarian ethos in American social and political
thought focused on the reinvigoration of civic virtue and responsibility.17

A related though distinctly principled approach to
order.18 These various perspectives at the end of the twentieth
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A related though distinct perspective advocates “a consistent and principled approach to minority rights” within a liberal democratic order. These various political conceptions reflect an ongoing struggle at the end of the twentieth century to address a question posed two centuries earlier: how can a group seeking to preserve a measure of collective identity survive within a liberal society that values individual rights and obligations above all else? It is this question that Salo Baron so starkly formulated regarding the Jewish community in his “Ghetto and Emancipation.” And it is this question to which the current volume offers a response, or series of fruitfully diverse responses.

**II**

The origins of this volume are perhaps more mystifying than the central problem which it engages. One would not necessarily expect that the grand issues of modern Jewish identity would win a hearing at a Jesuit university in a small American city whose Jewish community numbers between three and four thousand souls. And yet, it was at the University of Scranton that a conference entitled “From Ghetto to Emancipation: Historical and Contemporary Reconsiderations of the Jewish Community” was held in March 1995. The conference attracted a distinguished roster of scholars in various fields of Jewish studies from across the United States, as well as interested faculty from the host University of Scranton.

The impetus for a major conference in the field of Jewish studies at the University of Scranton came from Rabbi Dr. David Geffen. Since moving to Scranton to assume a pulpit there some five years ago, Rabbi Geffen has infused a new spirit and intellectual vitality into the local Jewish community. Several years ago, he seized upon the idea of an important scholarly event to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation. After a series of discussions, he entrusted the task of carrying the plan forward to me, a native of Scranton and a product of its Jewish community.

Rabbi Geffen’s idea presented me with an opportunity not only to return to my hometown, but to revisit the predicament of the Jewish community in the modern age. Growing up in the 1960s and 1970s, I remember Jewish Scranton as a community of tight-knit social and family relations, of well-established institutions, and of a clearly defined sense of group distinctiveness. In visits back over the past decade and a half, I have encountered a shadow of the community’s former self.
FROM GHETTO TO EMANCIPATION

This is particularly true for the once-dominant non-Orthodox segment—though much less so for the Orthodox segment which is currently experiencing a demographic renaissance. However, most members of the age cohort with whom I grew up have chosen to leave the embracing confines of the Scranton community for a wider world, lured by new educational and professional prospects. The result has been a “graying” of large sectors of the community, prompting its leaders to ponder the prospects for continued existence. Their concerns are hardly unique. On the contrary, they mirror the concerns of the broader American Jewish community for which assimilation appears as the chief social ill.

When thinking back upon my childhood in Scranton, I do not conjure up romantic images of a seamlessly holistic community. Instead, what I recall is the pervasive tension that defined me as a member of a group whose boundaries were both readily identifiable and yet permeable. Social relations between Jews and non-Jews, indeed, between Jews and Jesuits, were so normal as to merit no special attention. This was the norm for at least three generations, extending back to my grandparents. And yet, each of the generations possessed an unmistakable sense of belonging in the “community,” affirmed not only by the defining institutions of synagogue, community center, and charitable organization, but also by the conscious acknowledgment of the wider non-Jewish world with which we regularly interacted.

The Scranton experience suggests an important qualification to Salo Baron’s sharp dichotomy between ghetto and emancipation. Perhaps the two phenomena, ghetto and emancipation, need not be seen in opposition. Perhaps the process of political emancipation, and the very project of modernity itself, were not solely a matter of surrender to the leveling force of liberalism. Perhaps these processes had a far more ambiguous character, leading to a multiplicity of outcomes other than the inexorable demise of group identities. In this regard, one recalls Jürgen Habermas, whose defense of the project of modernity is “a plea for the maintenance of its dialectical tensions, rather than for their overcoming in a perfectly Enlightened form of life.”

The essays in this volume investigate these tensions from a variety of illuminating perspectives. David B. Ruderman commences his evocative paper on “The Cultural Significance of the Ghetto in Jewish History” by questioning whether the shift from ghetto to emancipation meant moving “from an inherently bad condition . . . to a good one . . . ?” Ruderman then proceeds with a brief history of the ghetto idea in Jewish thought and history and considers the influential work of the historian of Italian Jewish life, Giuseppe Neri. He preserves the internalist approach to the study of ghetto culture, highlighting the creative power of the surrounding culture. Ruderman points out that the ghetto afforded “a sense of belonging and a feeling of group solidarity, as well as the arena for political activism and a dialogue with the outer world.”

This important dimension of modern Jewish history, the political emancipation, is captured in the volume, “The Blessing of the Poor.” The essays in this section draw its inspiration from the seminal work of the philosopher of Emmaus, Emmanuel Levinas. In his essay, “The German Ideology,” he wrote: “We have seen the idea that a similar understanding of the modernity of the world is the key to the dynamic of the Jewish culture.”

Though not directly concerned with Jewish culture, L. Morgan focuses upon the themes of “The Myth of the Distant Central European Jew in the Theologienkongsche” in his reflections on some of the most controversial issues in Jewish Studies. He offers a wide-ranging essay, in which the themes of the ghetto, the modernity of the Jewish cultural studies discover a new level of complexity. This essay aims to induce us to question the assumptions of the multi-layered notion of the Jewish community.

William V. Rowe, in his essay on “Emmanuel Levinas,” similarly concerned with Jewish culture and identification, finds a remarkable confluence of fascinating perspectives which stimulate the reader to explore the rich tapestry of Jewish culture.
INTRODUCTION

thought and historiography, culminating with a critique of the gifted historian of Italian Jewry, Robert Bonfil. Ruderman eschews Bonfil’s internalist approach with its emphasis on the immanent allure and creative power of the ghetto environment. He does not dispute that the ghetto afforded “a sense of Jewish space where Jews retained a vital feeling of group solidarity and cultural autonomy.” But the ghetto was also the arena for “a constant and intense cultural negotiation and dialogue with the outside world.”

This important thematic thread in Ruderman’s discussion of early modern Jewish history is picked up in my own contribution to this volume, “The Blessing of Assimilation Reconsidered.” My paper draws its inspiration from a largely forgotten lecture delivered by Gerson Cohen in 1966 in which the eminent scholar called attention to the unavoidable and even salutary effects of assimilation in Jewish history. Rather than dismiss the assimilatory process as an unmitigated evil, Cohen, and I in his wake, suggest that assimilation can and must be seen as an important issue. I explore this idea in the context of modern Jewish history, mindful of the fact that a similar understanding of assimilation prevails in the current cultural studies discourse of diaspora and transnational identities. My paper aims to induce a dialogue across fields revolving around the multilayered notion of assimilation.

Though not directly interrogating the idea of assimilation, Michael L. Morgan focuses upon a group of highly influential and assimilated Central European Jewish thinkers in “Redemption and Community: Reflections on Some European Jewish Intellectuals, 1900–1940.” In this wide-ranging essay, Morgan attempts to trace a discursive tradition in which the themes of community and redemption stand in constant and productive tension. This tradition is located at the juncture of two important currents in early twentieth-century Central European history: the pervasive concern with community that followed Ferdinand Tönnies’ renowned Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft of 1887; and the bold new forms of messianic, and often apocalyptic, expressions to which leading intellectuals gave voice. While exposing the divergent perspectives of such figures as Georg Simmel, Martin Buber, Georg Lukacs, and Franz Kafka, Morgan notes their shared desire to confront the “crisis of modern culture” through the categories of community and redemption.

William V. Rowe’s “Difficult Freedom: The Basis of Community in Emmanuel Levinas” is an interesting sequel to Morgan’s presentation. Similarly concerned with the link between redemption and community,
Rowe’s inquiry into Levinas marks a passage from German to French thought, and thereby retraces Levinas’ own role in introducing important German philosophers (i.e., Husserl and Heidegger) into France. Rowe carefully excavates three layers of connotations of “ghetto” in Levinas’ thought: the first (and most traditional) signifies the largely autonomous pre-modern Jewish community; the second alludes to the modern ghetto of alienation created by the emancipatory process; and the third refers to the “reactionary and anti-semitic ghetto that is based on the failure of emancipation.” Taking a cue from Salo Baron, Rowe concentrates on the second ghetto which “represented the effective isolation not of Jews, but of their Judaism, from Western life and even from the lives of emancipated Jews themselves.” He analyzes Levinas’ diagnosis of and prescription for this ghetto predicament. Rowe suggests that for Levinas, a meaningful community, based on “true sociality,” must embody “the infinity of responsibility for the Other.” Indeed, it is in this responsibility that the possibility for a new, nontotalitarian universality—antidote to the ghetto of modernity—inheres.

Nomi M. Stolzenberg shifts the focus from post-Holocaust French intellectual discourse to contemporary American legal thought in “The Puzzling Persistence of Community: The Cases of Airmont and Kiryas Joel.” Her concern is the fate of communal aspirations within the constitutional order of the United States; the prism through which she contemplates this fate is the case of Kiryas Joel, a Satmar Hasidic Jewish community in upstate New York, whose residents appealed to the state to support the incorporation of a public school for its disabled children. While tracing the legal battle over such support all the way to the Supreme Court, Stolzenberg juxtaposes the case of Kiryas Joel to that of Airmont, another New York community which sought to prevent Orthodox Jews from establishing informal prayer assemblies in their homes. At the heart of this juxtaposition is Stolzenberg’s interest in the very nature of liberalism, whose core principles of neutrality and tolerance seem antithetical to the continued existence of insular, perhaps even intolerant, communities. Her analysis suggests that “liberalism is a rich and variegated tradition” which, contrary to conventional understanding, allows for the possibility of homogeneous communities “exercising political power for their own ends.”

Stolzenberg’s presentation of the struggle to preserve communal integrity in the face of social and legal obstacles is an excellent theoretical complement to Arthur A. Goren’s rich historical essay, “The Rites of Community, The Public Culture of American Jews.” Delivered as the 1995 Morris B. Cohen Memorial Lecture, Goren’s essay explores the way in which Jews, as the first modern Diaspora, invent new forms of community. In particular, he focuses on the case of the Satmar, which American Jewish communities developed in order to create a “ghetto of the soul.” Pervading Goren’s analysis is the idea of a group identity which persists for millions of Jews. In this way, the Satmars created distinct forms of community and nationalism. In this process, the “ghetto” was created which serves as an identity.

The final paper included in this volume on the predication of community is Brown’s “Towards a History: Patterns and Tensions in German Jewish history.” The focus is upon Scranton, Pennsylvania, a former Scrantonian—Professor Stephen Brown—a participant in the 1994 conference. Professor Brown graciously invites the reader to Scranton’s Jewish community, to look at primary research, oral history, and perhaps as an excellent model, to consider the many issues which to explore in his forthcoming work. The address in this volume of Baron’s “Ghetto and Emancipation.”
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INTRODUCTION

as the 1995 Morris B. Gelb Memorial Lecture, Goren’s paper examines
the way in which Jewish immigrants to the United States sought to
invent new forms of communal identity in their transplanted homeland.
In particular, he focuses on the rituals of mourning and celebration
which American Jews, primarily in the early twentieth century,
developed in order to foster a stronger sense of communal self-worth.
Pervading Goren’s analysis is a sense of the loss of textured bonds of
group identity which immigration to the United States entailed for
millions of Jews. In their absence, American Jews fashioned their own
distinct forms of commemoration as a way of validating their communal
existence. In the process, a Jewish public culture, “fragile and fluid,”
was created which served as “an important arena for self-definition.”

The final paper in this volume is a doubly fitting conclusion to a
volume on the predicament of the modern Jewish community. Michael
Brown’s “Towards a History of Scranton Jewry” sheds light on the
patterns and tensions shaping a small Jewish community in the
alternately alluring and threatening American environment. That the
focus is upon Scranton—and, moreover, that Professor Brown is a
former Scrantonian—seem especially appropriate. Though not a
participant in the 1995 conference at the University of Scranton,
Professor Brown graciously agreed to include his paper on the history of
Scranton’s Jewish community in this book. His paper skillfully mixes
primary research, oral history, and conceptual rigor, and thereby serves
as an excellent model for local history. Further, it provides an arena in
which to explore in concrete fashion the larger abstract problems
addressed in this volume’s diverse and illuminating meditations on
Baron’s “Ghetto and Emancipation.”

III

The final task of this introduction is to thank those who made the
conference, and especially this volume, not merely possible but an
enormously stimulating and enjoyable pursuit. As I have already
indicated, the original inspiration came from Rabbi David Geffen to
whom I remain deeply indebted. At early stages of planning, vital
assistance in conceiving and organizing the conference came from
Sondra Myers. The Scranton-Lackawanna Jewish Federation and its
executive director, Seymour Brotman, were enthusiastic proponents of
the conference throughout the entire process. In addition, the conference
and volume won the unstinting support of the University of Scranton’s
administration, particularly the President, Rev. J. A. Panuska, S. J., Provost Richard H. Passon, and Dean Paul F. Fahey. It is both a pleasure and a privilege to thank Robert J. Sylvester, Vice President for Institutional Advancement, and Alan Mazzei, Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations, for their indefatigable efforts. Alan, in particular, labored above and beyond the call of duty to assure the success of this undertaking. On the whole, the University of Scranton’s commitment to the conference idea, and to Jewish studies more generally, reflects the genuinely catholic interests of these fine individuals and the institution they serve so well.

Among the conference’s participants, it is necessary to single out Professors Elisheva Carlebach and Rela Geffen, both of whom offered important intellectual contributions to the proceedings. The conference was also graced by the presence of Shoshana Cardin, distinguished national Jewish leader, whose insights proved stimulating to all in attendance. Mention must also be made of Professor Alan Mittleman of Muhlenberg College for his trenchant critique of my and Professor Stolzenberg’s papers. I would also like to thank Professors Harold Baillie and David Friedrichs of the University of Scranton for agreeing to chair two of the conference’s sessions.


The University of Scranton Press and its director, Father Richard W. Rousseau, S. J., have provided a most hospitable and professional home for this volume. But the volume would not have seen the light of day were it not for Stephanie Chasin. With her keen editorial eye and astounding efficiency, she helped transform a series of conference papers into essays that stand on their own intellectual and stylistic merit. Penultimately, Bill Rowe has proved to be a wonderful collaborator and conversation partner.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to Scranton whose gentleness and kindness brings to life the fascinating community in modern times.

7. See Michaelis’ Ueber die bienen der Gottheit and Jehuda Reinharz, 36–38.
9. Schorske defines the liberal style as more abrasive, more assertive, and more deliberative in content.
10. Ibid., 118.
11. This is not to suggest that powerful doses of anti-Semitism were not present in America as it was in Europe, for example.
ANCIPATION

Rev. J. A. Panuska, S. J., F. Fahey. It is both a pleasure and a privilege to be here, Vice President for University Relations and Director of Corporate and Community Engagement. Alan, in particular, to assure the success of this conference and the Scranton community’s commitment to it. More generally, reflects the dedication and commitment of the institution.

It is necessary to single out two individuals, both of whom offered their time and effort. The conference planning committee, distinguished and exceptionally stimulating to all in attendance, included: Professor Alan Mittleman of Scranton University, and Professor Myer Alperin, Arley Bishop, Kathy and Seymour Epstein, Rabbi David Linder, Ann and I. Myers, Robert Saligman, Paul Weinberger Company, and director, Father Richard Wible. Among those who kindly provided support were: Myer M. Alperin, Arley Bishop, Kathy and Seymour Epstein, Rabbi David Linder, Ann and I. Myers, Robert Saligman, Paul Weinberger Company, and director, Father Richard Wible.

The conference and volume has come about through the combined efforts of two individuals and the institution.

conversation partner, even in the midst of rather mundane editorial discussions.

Finally, this volume is dedicated to the Jewish community of Scranton whose generosity far exceeds its numbers and whose history brings to life the fascinating and tension-filled predicament of the Jewish community in modern times.

NOTES

9. Schorske defines this new key as “a mode of political behaviour at once more abrasive, more creative, and more satisfying to the life of feeling than the deliberative style of the liberal.” Fin-de-Siecle Vienna, 119.
10. Ibid., 118.
11. This is not to suggest that anti-Semitism did not exist, and at times in powerful doses, in the United States. See, for instance, Leonard Dinnerstein, Antisemitism in America (New York, 1994). It is rather to suggest that anti-Semitism was not an ingrained part of the social and political landscape of America as it was in Central Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.
16. Ibid., xxiv.
17. See, for example, Amitai Etzioni, *A Spirit of Community: Rights, Responsibilities, and the Communitarian Agenda* (New York, 1993).

Surely one way of reassessing our analyses of the conference, “ghetto,” to a good trajectory follows from the experience: Jews were “emancipated” in their liberation of their liberation of their liberation from of their liberation from of their liberation from cultures—virulent and was surely a boon to the alienated existence of modern Jews, the to a throwback to an even more general members of minority Americans, who are because of socioeconomic. I would like to short essay based on the to reassess its culture. This reevaluation of ghettoization with
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THE BLESSING OF ASSIMILATION" RECONSIDERED:
AN INQUIRY INTO JEWISH CULTURAL STUDIES

David N. Myers

I: Rivers of Culture

An eighth-century midrashic source relates that “all rivers are
good and blessed and sweet and bring benefit to the world
when they flow over land; but when they enter the sea, they are
evil and cursed and bitter, and bring no benefit to the world.”1 The point
of recalling this legend is hardly to condemn the pleasures of the sea
much less to commence a discussion of Jewish oceanography. Rather,
it is to provide an historical backdrop to one of the most vexing
statements uttered by a Jew in modern times. Consistent with the
ancient sages’ charge, I have turned this statement over and over, and yet
never gained more than a fleeting grasp of its meaning. And so again I
submit for consideration the enigmatic words of Eduard Gans, a brilliant
young German-Jewish legal historian, from 1822. Commenting on the
drive of Jews in his day to break free from the shackles of insularity and
particularism, Gans observed in tones strikingly reminiscent of his
mentor, Hegel:

This is the consoling lesson of history properly understood: that
everything passes without perishing, and yet persists, although
it has long been consigned to the past. That is why neither the
Jews will perish nor Judaism dissolve; in the larger movement
of the whole they will seem to have disappeared, and yet they
will live on as the river lives on in the ocean.2
Separated by a vast temporal and conceptual expanse, the eighteenth-century midrashist and the nineteenth-century legal historian are both drawn to the metaphorical relationship between the river and the sea. For the former, the entry of the river into the ocean spells not the disappearance of its distinct properties but their dramatic transformation, an ontological sea change, if you will—from good to evil, sweet to bitter, indeed, from a blessing to a curse. By contrast, for Gans, the entry of the river into the sea—or more explicitly, the river of Jewish culture into the sea of European civilization—is both necessary and salutary.

But in summoning up all of our combined historical and marine biological prowess, we must ask: How precisely does a “river live on in the ocean”? Or to frame the question more generally, how do Jews avoid disappearance as a discrete group while becoming an inseparable part of a larger culture and society? This question, rife with internal tensions and contradictions, has intrigued and haunted Jews for centuries. Indeed, it has hovered above their encounter with new cultural milieux, from ancient Babylon to modern Berlin. For Eduard Gans and other German-Jewish intellectuals of his day, this question consumed their daily thoughts. To a great extent, it was the same question that their parents’ generation, the first generation of Maskilim, Jewish Enlightenment figures in Europe, had posed. And yet, the mood in the younger generation was more despairing and Angst-ridden over the prospect of Judaism’s survival.

As children of the Enlightenment, Gans and his friends had absorbed the aspirations for emancipation and social integration that excited the passions of Moses Mendelssohn and his circle of disciples in the late eighteenth century. Far more than their elders, the younger generation of intellectuals had benefited from admission to and study at German universities, a palpable sign of progress. At university they entered a new cultural world, one in which they quickly became mesmerized by the powerful force of Wissenschaft—a term that conveyed, in this period, both a sense of scientific rigor and of intellectual and disciplinary unity. But the expectations of this generation, bolstered by its own experience of rapid educational advance, were abruptly and rudely challenged midway through the second decade of the nineteenth century. A powerful anti-Enlightenment sentiment swept Germany after the defeat of Napoleon, accompanied by a new wave of reaction that included anti-Jewish violence. The optimistic, at times, ebullient, spirit of the previous generation began to fade. Gans and a select few in this somber atmosphere, the path of Enlightenment was a moment of self-reflection. Eduard Gans (Wissenschaft der Juden) in Berlin in 1822, a more than hopeful, could both claim a Jewish future.

In outlining the river of Jewish culture. Not surprisingly, variously. Leopold Zunz, the most important intellectual, throughout his long life, and only appropriate to the Jewish university. Consistent with his appointment in the first half of the entry into the ocean, in the latter half of the entreaties, he failed. If Zunz marks in the ocean, then Gans despaired of an appointment foreclosed to him by Germany and traced his fulfillment. After the first and cardinal mark, a generation of Jewish scholars in Judaism, Christianity, hope to a “scientific admission” to Europe. Heine, once described as the desired professional appointment at the time. Heine wrote in the field of Gans’ legacy, certain points a baptized Jew. Political zealot 1822 address to felons on as a river in a man Germany tended to
ceptual expanse, the eighteenth-century legal historian are both between the river and the sea. No the ocean spells not the but their dramatic transform—ill—from good to evil, sweet By contrast, for Gans, the explicitly, the river of Jewish tion—is both necessary and

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Gans and his friends had on and social integration that his and his circle of disciples than their elders, the younger on admission to and study at progress. At university they which they quickly became Wissenschaft—a term that e of scientific rigor and of cut the expectations of this science of rapid educational illended midway through the A powerful anti-Enlightenment of Napoleon, accompanied by anti-Jewish violence. The previous generation began to fade. Gans and a select circle of German-Jewish intellectuals convened in this somber atmosphere to reflect on their fate, to meditate not only on the path of Enlightenment but on their very future as Jews. This stark moment of self-reflection gave birth to the Verein für Cultur und Wissenschaft der Juden (Society for the Culture and Scientific Study of Jews) in Berlin in 1819. Critical historical study, members of this group hoped, could both clarify the Jewish past and illumine the course of the Jewish future.

In outlining this mission, Eduard Gans, the group’s president, offered his enigmatic prescription for Jewish survival. To survive, the river of Jewish culture would have to live on in the sea of European culture. Not surprisingly, this ambiguous charge was interpreted variously. Leopold Zunz, a founding member of the Verein, became one of the most important Jewish scholars of the nineteenth century. Throughout his long life, Zunz never surrendered his conviction that the only appropriate institutional home for Jewish studies was the German university. Consequently, he refused to accept a professorial appointment in the modern rabbinical seminaries that arose in Germany in the latter half of the century. However, Zunz was never permitted full entry into the ocean of European culture either; despite repeated entreaties, he failed to receive a position in a German university.

If Zunz marks the failure, at least in part, of Gans’ vision of the river in the ocean, then Gans himself represents an ironic success. Gans too desired an appointment in a German university, though this avenue was foreclosed to him because of his Judaism. In a desperate mood, he left Germany and traveled around Europe in search of professional fulfillment. After months of wandering, Gans decided to violate the first and cardinal requirement of members in the short-lived society of Jewish scholars in Berlin: in Paris in late 1825, he converted to Christianity, hopeful that this act would provide him with a “ticket of admission” to European society, as his fellow Society member, Heinrich Heine, once described his own conversion. Conversion did have the desired professional effect, earning Gans a full-time academic appointment at the University of Berlin in 1826, where he taught and wrote in the field of legal history (especially Roman law). And yet, Gans’ legacy, certainly to Jewish history, is that of a Taufjude, literally a baptized Jew. Perhaps Gans was prognosticating his own future in his 1822 address to fellow Jewish scholars. For if anyone continued to live on as a river in a sea, it was surely the Taufjuden. Converted Jews in Germany tended to associate with other converted Jews or with friends
and family who did not convert; moreover, despite their formal affiliation with Christianity, converted Jews often perceived themselves and were perceived by others as Jews by social and cultural affinity.\footnote{Found.
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The tale of Eduard Gans is interesting and powerful in its own right. But it is the larger predicament, indeed the treelulous tension, embodied in his river-sea metaphor, that extends our interest beyond the example of one German-Jewish intellectual. Gans' metaphor has often been read as an epitaph for German-Jewish culture, but I would suggest that we regard it here as an epigraph, an opening statement, for a renewed consideration of Jewish assimilation in the modern age. The term assimilation often conjures up frightful images for Jews and other minority groups, signaling the loss of collective identity to a hegemonic majority culture. But before accepting this image without comment, it might be worthwhile to revisit the career of this idea in Jewish history, particularly during the modern period. Time does not permit an exhaustive history of Jewish assimilation. However, I would like to point out the multivalence and historical complexity of the term by making recourse to a number of interesting sources drawn from Jewish history. This effort seems especially appropriate in light of recent intellectual and political trends in the United States that pose challenges to what we may call, in evocation of Salo Baron, the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish assimilation.\footnote{Nor is it even his idea to attend a Kol Nidre service for the "founders," that is, to whom he had confessed himself; his mother and other Jewish authorities expel him; the synagogue in Berlin burns the now legendary scroll and solemnity of the case plans to convert to a new passion. Over a century, written little on Jewish theological principles, as one of the seminaries.}

Rosenzweig did not consummate that work. Nor is it even his idea to attend a Kol Nidre service for the "founders," that is, to whom he had confessed himself; his mother and other Jewish authorities expel him; the synagogue in Berlin burns the now legendary scroll and solemnity of the case plans to convert to a new passion. Over a century, written little on Jewish theological principles, as one of the seminaries. These writings, and many others, stand as one of the seminaries.

Rosenzweig died before the consummation that would have foundered, a certain metaphor for the volume of collective identity to a hegemonic majority culture. But before accepting this image without comment, it might be worthwhile to revisit the career of this idea in Jewish history, particularly during the modern period. Time does not permit an exhaustive history of Jewish assimilation. However, I would like to point out the multivalence and historical complexity of the term by making recourse to a number of interesting sources drawn from Jewish history. This effort seems especially appropriate in light of recent intellectual and political trends in the United States that pose challenges to what we may call, in evocation of Salo Baron, the "lachrymose" conception of Jewish assimilation. New insights drawn from the ever-malleable field of cultural studies, particularly those focused on diaspora and transnational communities, offer both novel and fertile grounds for rethinking the phenomenon of assimilation. Toward the end of this paper, we shall turn our attention to some of these new insights, taking note of their relationship to the Jewish case of diaspora identity.

But to return for a final time to Eduard Gans. If we accept that Gans captured the complexity of assimilation in his own day, we should be mindful of the fact that circumstances similar to those in which he offered his enigmatic charge have accompanied Jews in the West ever since. Indeed, nearly a century after Gans' speech, another German-Jewish intellectual pondered the prospect of Judaism's survival or, more intimately, the viability of his own existence as a Jew. This German Jew saw a number of his closest friends march to the baptismal font—not so much to advance their professional interests à la Gans, as to achieve harmony between their religious beliefs and practices, on the one hand, and between their inner spiritual world and the surrounding environment, on the other. This young intellectual, Franz Rosenzweig, found the logic of his friends compelling, and he prepared to convert to

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ever, despite their formal status, often perceived themselves as socially and culturally distant. and powerful in their own right. Tremulous tension, embodied in a metaphor that has often been read as an example of a renewed social and cultural affinity. The term "interstellar" has been read as a metaphor that has often been read as a renewed social and cultural affinity.

Time does not permit an exhaustive treatment of the complex relationship between Jewish studies and the modern age. However, I would like to suggest that we consider the modern age as a period in Jewish history, especially as it relates to the formation of a diaspora identity in the modern age. These writings, and particularly his book The Star of Redemption, stand as one of the seminal achievements in modern Jewish thought.

Rosenzweig is interesting to us not only because he failed to consummate that which Eduard Gans had a century earlier: conversion. Nor is it even his iconoclastic teshuvah or return to Judaism. It is rather a certain metaphorical affinity with Gans. The title of Rosenzweig's first volume of collected essays on religious and philosophical matters, published in 1926, was Zweistromland, the land of two streams. Curiously, there is no explicit discussion of the title in the book itself, and very little in secondary sources. But again the stream or river appears as a guiding metaphor. For Rosenzweig, the two streams in Zweistromland symbolized the Tigris and Euphrates, the rivers that formed the "cradle of civilization," and more germane to our concerns, that provided a rich cultural environment for the Jewish people after the destruction of the First Temple. As one interpreter, Philip Bohm, has read Rosenzweig's title, "the Jews used the years in the Zweistromland of Mesopotamia (i.e., Babylonia) to enrich their culture, to absorb Persian, Greek, and Parthian influences and yet to assimilate these as their own." By historical analogy, the Jews used their centuries in Europe, and particularly in Germany, to enrich their culture by integrating non-Jewish cultural sources into their own. Bohm observes the prevalence of apparent opposites in Rosenzweig's thought and writing—first and foremost, Deutschum and Judentum (Germanness and Jewishness)—and yet notes correctly that for Rosenzweig, "to be German did not negate the possibility of being Jewish." What was at work was a subtle process of adaptation and reformulation not unlike the process of exegetical innovation that Christianity in 1913. Rosenzweig's last act before conversion was to attend a Kol Nidre service so that he could "enter Christianity as did its founders," that is, as a Jew and not as a pagan. Rosenzweig's parents, to whom he had confided his intentions, refused to attend services with him; his mother insisted that she would demand that synagogue authorities expel him as an apostate. Consequently, he found a small synagogue in Berlin populated by Eastern European immigrants. As the now legendary story goes, Rosenzweig was so awed by the intensity and solemnity of the Kol Nidre service that he decided to abandon his plans to convert to Christianity and committed himself to Judaism with new passion. Over the next decade and a half, Rosenzweig, who had written little on Jewish themes prior to this time, set out to develop new theological principles to sustain Jewish identity in the modern age. These writings, and particularly his book The Star of Redemption, stand as one of the seminal achievements in modern Jewish thought.
Rosenzweig’s critic, Gershom Scholem, once discussed in his famous essay, “Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism.”

In Rosenzweig’s scheme, it is not that the river of Jewish culture is absorbed into the sea of European civilization. Rather, the river of Jewish culture runs alongside the river of European (particularly German) culture. Each has its own, rather grand existence, though together their shared properties and proximity create an enormously rich cultural plain. Rosenzweig’s metaphor suggests a different understanding of assimilation than that suggested by Eduard Gans. Assimilation does not mean absorption of a small body by a larger one. It entails a dynamic process of exchange and cross-fertilization between relative equals.

From a certain perspective, Rosenzweig’s position seems short-sighted, indeed dangerously so. Was he so mired in self-delusion as to ignore the ominous signs of violence and hatred around him, even in the 1920s? Did Rosenzweig truly believe that a vibrant Judaism could take root on German soil? Did he share the deeply held view of his Jewish mentor, Hermann Cohen, that Deutschum and Judentum were compatible? Here it would be wise to stem the tide of historical inevitability, and adopt a strategy, following Michael André Bernstein, of “sideshadowing.” Rather than assume that the path Rosenzweig and other German Jews were embarked on necessarily led to Auschwitz, it seems more judicious to notice the vast spectrum of Jewish expressions in the Weimar period (1918–1933), some of which advocated total immersion in German society, but many of which advocated one form or another of Jewish cultural autonomy.

By resisting the tendency to place German-Jewish history on a straight course leading to an inevitably tragic end, new perspectives are opened on the nature and texture of assimilation. Undeniably, there was a kind of assimilation that spelled the disappearance of Jewish identity; this version, the one stressed in the classic lachrymose conception of Jewish history, has received, and merits, a negative connotation. At the same time, there was a kind of assimilation that reflected an ongoing, dynamic, and vitalizing process of exchange. It was the cultural possibilities inherent in this process that Franz Rosenzweig and many other Jews in Weimar Germany were alive to.

If the idea of two connotations for assimilation—one pejorative, the other affirmative—does not seem especially novel, it behooves me to admit that it is not. In my own reflections on the subject, I have drawn much inspiration from the late Jewish historian Gerson Cohen, who...
delivered a commencement address in 1966 (at the Hebrew Teachers College in Brookline) entitled “The Blessing of Assimilation in Jewish History.” There is something thoroughly incongruous about this title. Why was a committed Jewish scholar and rabbi, later to become the chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, extolling assimilation, no less to a group of future Jewish educators? Apart from the fact that assimilation in 1966 was a much different phenomenon than in 1996 (as evidenced by the remarkable gap in intermarriage rates in the Jewish community), Cohen sought to make the point, and quite deliberately before a group of future Jewish educators, that assimilation had an undeserved reputation in Jewish history. Too often, past cultures and communities have been judged solely by their ability to survive. As an historian, Gerson Cohen was loath to pass final judgment on figures or movements from the Jewish past which did not create in Hebrew, and hence which left few visible traces of their existence in classical Jewish sources. For instance, the fact that Philo of Alexandria was virtually unknown to medieval Jews did not mean that he was irrelevant either to Alexandrian Judaism or to the broader Hellenistic society of his own day.

Beyond this affirmation of the methodological imperative to contextualize (or perhaps sideshadow), Cohen proceeded to a more substantive point: namely that figures such as Philo, whose memory was not preserved in the annals of rabbinic Judaism in large measure because of their extensive contacts with non-Jewish society, were estimable, indeed authentic, Jews. The rabbis’ attempts to censor them out, to insist on a static, unchanging Jewish culture, conveyed exclusively in Hebrew, were misguided. The rabbis themselves preached in Greek, and their written language was permeated with Greek words. The lesson Cohen drew was that assimilation was not only a constant feature of Jewish history, but that “in a profound sense this assimilation or acculturation was even a stimulus to original thinking and expression and, consequently, a source of renewed vitality.” Toward the end of his lecture, Cohen echoed the distinction offered by Ahad Ha’am, the great Hebrew essayist and Zionist, between two forms of imitation, hikui shel hitbolelut and hikui shel hitharut. The first form represented total imitation of another culture to the extent of self-negation. However, the second category referred to a competitive imitation in which the presence of one culture inspired creativity in another. Attraction to a great, albeit foreign, culture need not be destructive. It could also lead to empowerment, to the discovery of the distinct properties of the imitating culture.
Ahad Ha'am pointed to the example of Jews in Egypt who "used their Greek knowledge to reveal the unique spirit of Judaism, to expose its riches to the whole world, and to diminish the genius of Greek wisdom." Gerson Cohen's own approach owes much to this conception of cultural mimesis. It was in this form of assimilation, Cohen argues, that "Ahad Ha'am detected the signs of health and vigor rather than of attrition and decadence." Likewise, it was in this sense of the word that Cohen concluded that "assimilation properly channelled and exploited can ... become a kind of blessing."23

**II: Jewishness as Hybridity**

What has been offered to this point is the genealogy of a resonant idea in Jewish history, an idea that strikes one simultaneously as banal and counter-intuitive. In its long and checkered career, assimilation has not merely had a deleterious effect; it has also vitalized Jewish culture through a ceaseless process of engagement with proximate cultures. While ensuring dynamism, it has prevented in turn the emergence of a "normative Judaism," a static, unchanging essence. Therefore, assertions of a pure and pristine Judaism should be taken with a grain of salt. This applies not only to the examples of ancient Alexandria or Muslim Spain, renowned for the high degree of cultural exchange between Jews and others. It applies as well to the supposedly insular bastion of medieval Ashkenaz, where Jews and Christians, despite their mutual hostility to the point of demonization, exchanged goods, ideas, and even ritual practices with one another.24 Jewish culture, even in this context, was not shaped in splendid isolation; it was manifestly permeable to non-Jewish influences.

The idea that emerges then is of Jewish identity as a hybrid creation, comprised of different strands of influence. Though evident in pre-modern times, this hybrid quality is especially visible in the modern period, as the river metaphors of Eduard Gans and Franz Rosenzweig illustrate. Perhaps the most emblematic figure of such hybridity was Moses Mendelssohn, the great eighteenth-century savant of Berlin, whose commitments to full ritual observance of Jewish law, to a non-coercive religious tradition, and to wide-ranging philosophical study inspired a generation of Jews hungry for cultural and intellectual sustenance. Mendelssohn's example seemed to demonstrate the Enlightenment's tolerance of a new Jewish type, at once observant and enlightened, Jewish and German. And yet, few in Mendelssohn's circle

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In this respect, the Enlightenment acted on the Jew in paradoxical fashion. Its terrifying “totalizing” force, so roundly condemned by a long line of thinkers from Nietzsche to Horkheimer and Adorno to Levinas to Derrida, did not produce a single, essential Jewish identity. Rather, it broke it down, fragmented it, leading at times to what Karl Marx called in his (in)famous essay “On the Jewish Question” the “decomposition of man.”26 Stated otherwise, the Enlightenment mandated the radical hybridity that marks the modern Jewish condition. Or perhaps more accurately, in a phenomenally ironic twist, we can say that it now prescribed the very fluidity that had naturally and unremarkably accompanied Jewish assimilation in previous ages.

III: Diaspora Identities

The impetus to undertake this reconsideration of the idea of assimilation in Jewish history does not come only from Gerson Cohen’s largely forgotten lecture of 1966. Nor is it merely a function of Salo Baron’s compelling argument in 1928 that political emancipation did not necessarily inaugurate a new era of resplendent progress in Jewish history.27 Rather, it emerges in the midst of similar concerns expressed by late-twentieth-century thinkers who operate within the overlapping rubrics of cultural studies, postcolonial discourse, and postmodernism. Characteristic of this new and evolving “tradition” of writers is the exploration, and at times celebration, of hybridity as an existential condition.28 The contributors to this new discourse include novelists such as Salman Rushdie and Toni Morrison, as well as a wide range of scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, bell hooks, and Homi Bhabha. Despite their diverse intellectual missions, these writers share a common interest in the interstitial, the space that exists between (and renders problematic) fixed cultural boundaries. Whether their primary
focus be on the Chinese, Indians, Africans, or Caribbeans, these writers share a common language; they speak of the process of cultural formation in terms of diaspora or transnational communities.\(^2\) Here the idea of diaspora, conveying both a sense of a native culture and of displacement from it, describes the struggle of cultural groups to stake out a position in the midst of a fast-moving current. This struggle is a political one, for dispersion invariably exposes the dispersed to the corrosive agents of hegemony and oppression. The interrelationship between dispersion and oppression, however, need not result in total submission or paralysis. In the first instance, it provides impetus to seek social and political empowerment. Moreover, it has encouraged postcolonial thinkers to examine the constructive possibilities of cultural identities that are neither native nor foreign, but dwell in “in-between” spaces,” forever resisting the stasis of a fixed identity.\(^3\)

The connection of this new thinking about diaspora identities to the earlier discussion of Jewish assimilation should be clear by now; in the Jewish diaspora experience, assimilation has produced many varieties of hybrid identity. What is less self-evident is the reason why the Jewish case has been largely excluded from this body of writing. I would like to offer a number of brief explanations for the relative neglect of the Jewish diaspora experience, and then conclude with a number of instructive counterexamples. First, the Jewish diaspora experience has not became part of this new discourse because scholars of Jewish studies and other interested parties have been reticent to venture beyond their own intellectual province. For similar reasons, Jewish studies has not been widely integrated into the confusing and energizing debate over multiculturalism and canonicity in the American university.

But there are factors other than the disinclination of Jewish studies scholars. Perhaps more determinative is the widespread impression of scholars outside of Jewish studies that the Jewish historical and cultural experience is part and parcel of a white Eurocentric majority culture. To many, the Jews neither look different nor, in most cases, speak a different language from the majority culture. Further, both in Central and Western Europe prior to World War II and in the contemporary United States, Jews achieved a level of affluence that qualified them to be counted among the most economically privileged members of society. Consequently, they are viewed as not sufficiently different from, or oppressed by, the mainstream to warrant inclusion as a diaspora or transnational group, which becomes in the postcolonial lexicon an unmistakably political designation. There may be other reasons for this
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neglect, including the equation of Zionism with Jewishness, on one hand, and with racist imperialism, on the other. It is not possible within the confines of this essay to offer a fully satisfactory analysis of these points. Nor is there sufficient time to disentangle the problematic association of Jews with the white majority culture. Even less appealing is the task of compiling a table of victimology in which the Jews, alas, would rank quite high.

It seems more important to note interesting counterexamples to the tendency to exclude or devalue the Jewish experience of diaspora. One of the most interesting sites of this countertendency, and of the new discourse of diaspora generally, is in recent black cultural criticism. Needless to say, reports of the decline of the African-American intellectual are absurdly premature. Not only have figures such as Cornell West and Henry Louis Gates reinvigorated the tradition of the public intellectual in America. They have shown uncommon sensitivity to the Jewish historical experience in its creativity and in its tragedy, as well as a sincere commitment to repair fractured relations between blacks and Jews in this country. Along with their Harvard colleague, Kwame Anthony Appiah, they have questioned the essentialist (e.g., Afrocentric) currents flowing within certain academic and social circles in this country and abroad. For instance, in his important book In My Father’s House, Appiah meticulously dissects the notion of black African racial purity, often used in support of political action and social segregation, he presents instead a detailed analysis of the dynamic cultural exchange that obtained between oppressor and oppressed on the African continent, and that yielded a dynamic and evolving African cultural identity.

The affinities between this kind of model and Jewish models of cultural formation are intriguing and, in fact, have been made quite explicit in Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness. Gilroy’s book is a sustained polemic against essentialist understandings of black racial or cultural identity. A recurrent motif throughout the book is Gilroy’s reliance on the homonym roots/routes to express his own clear-cut proclivities: “root” connotes a search for ultimate origins and fixed identity. By contrast, “route” conveys a sense of passage, of ceaseless and agitated movement, of dynamic creativity. In celebrating the latter routes of passage, Gilroy draws direct inspiration both from the Jewish experience of diaspora and from the historical movement of Zionism. He urges a more deliberate recognition of the parallels in historical experience between blacks and Jews, both in their
diaspora passages and in their respective oppressions. He also calls for acknowledgment of actual historical influences (e.g., of Zionism on early black nationalist thought).35

In an intriguing chapter on the great African-American leader, W. E. B. DuBois, Gilroy makes use of a familiar metaphor to summarize a central theme in one of DuBois’ novelistic forays. He observes that in the conclusion of DuBois’ Dark Princess, the union between a man and woman of different skin colors “is constructed so that the integrity of both its tributaries remains uncompromised by their confluence.”36 Although Gilroy does not relate this river-like metaphor to the writings of earlier Jewish thinkers, the predicament that it describes clearly has parallels. Indeed, it represents an idealized version of the phenomenon of “double consciousness”—a term which appears in the subtitle of Gilroy’s book and which he borrows from the work of earlier black thinkers, especially Dubois.37 Double consciousness, according to Gilroy, is the condition of women and men of African origin who act within and upon Western societies. Their experience does not entail the wholesale abandonment of a native tradition to modernity, but rather its constant and creative reformulation.38

What is especially commendable about Gilroy’s book is the appreciation that he was not the first to articulate such an idea. Indeed, much of his book is a study of and testimony to past African-American thinkers, especially DuBois, who presciently comprehended the complicated, hybrid nature of black identity. This recognition distinguishes Gilroy from many others in the field of cultural studies, who often give the impression that they are inventing the wheel for the first time. Gilroy pushes hard to affirm the apt remark of Jean-François Lyotard that the postmodern—whatever it may be—is “undoubtedly a part of the modern.”39

Gilroy’s example is germane to our subject in two regards. First, he calls attention to a process of black cultural formation that is analogous to the process of Jewish assimilation described throughout this paper; moreover, he makes explicit the virtues of comparing the historical experiences of Jews and blacks. Such a comparative perspective can produce, as it does in Gilroy’s book, a genuinely humanizing effect. Second, Gilroy chooses to position himself within a broad tradition of African diaspora history, and thereby adds an important measure of historical richness and depth to his meditations.40

In contemporary considerations of the Jewish community (whose leaders frequently inveigh against the evils of assimilation), it would be advisable to follow Gilroy’s lead and pursue this historical dimension. Jews have faced similar qualitative and quantitative pressures, and second, that a more measured and responsible approach to our understanding of the condition of assimilation is not only possible but also necessary. Accurate history is a first step toward a more accurate predicament of the present. As such, Gilroy’s work throughout the work of Gilroy’s book is the attempt not to overreact—to adopt with some caution.

Various efforts to account for Jewish culture that do so. The first, rather coolly described, is a writer named Philip in particular the Jewish community.22 This movement called “Boycott the Jews” from Israel, which once flourished.43 The second of these features, is the viewpoint offered by Daniel Boyarin in Inquiry.44 The Boyarin letter, with a curious evolution, that the Zionist sect begins to re-incarnate. The dynamic identity—this to a thoroughly explored—and the religious Canaanite Jewish orthodoxy.

Both the first and the second, the respective diaspora, and the historical path of modern Jewish history, a final point that the historian. The cultural hybrid identities is expressed in interesting history. For example, in France, particular particularly interesting is balance the assimilation and Jewish integrity long practiced by a group of intellectuals.
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advisable to follow Gilroy’s lead in incorporating both comparative and historical dimensions: that is, to remember first that groups other than Jews have faced similar challenges in preserving communal integrity; and second, that a measure of historical perspective can provide nuance to our understanding of assimilation. Recognizing that the problematic of assimilation is neither unique to the Jews nor unique within Jewish history is a first and important step toward comprehending the predicament of the Jewish community in the United States and throughout the world. This recognition can temper the impulse to overreact—to adopt positions that are fundamentalist, chauvinist, or in some way dismissive of the benefits of intergroup cultural exchange.

Various efforts have been made recently to articulate a vision of Jewish culture that celebrates the vitalizing potential of assimilation. The first, rather comic vision emanates from a man impersonating a writer named Philip Roth in the novel Operation Shylock by the author of the same name. The fictional faux Roth is the ideological father of a movement called “Diasporism” that “seeks to promote the dispersion of the Jews” from Israel “to those very lands (i.e., Europe) where everything once flourished.” A bit more serious, though not without its comic features, is the vision of an extraterritorial Jewish religious culture offered by Daniel and Jonathan Boyarin in a 1993 article in Critical Inquiry. The Boyarins’ call for a deterritorialized Judaism culminates with a curious evocation of Neturei Karta, the ultra-Orthodox and anti-Zionist sect based in Jerusalem. Far from illuminating the sort of dynamic identity-formation that the authors favor, Neturei Karta holds to a thoroughly essentialist view of Jewish identity, indeed, a kind of religious Canaanism severed both from Zionism and more conventional Jewish orthodoxy.

Both the fictional Philip Roth and the Boyarins present their respective diasporic visions ex nihilo, removed from the tortuous historical path of modern Jewish culture. And here, I would like to make a final point that bespeaks my own disciplinary grounding as an historian. The current cultural climate in which anxiety over group identities is expressed, be they African-American, Latino, or Jewish, has interesting historical precedents. Similar debates have occurred, for instance, in France over the course of the last thirty years, with a particularly interesting Jewish coloring. In this country, attempts to balance the assimilatory impulse and the instinct to preserve group integrity long preceded the 1990s. In the second decade of this century, a group of intellectuals sought to lay the framework for a “cultural
pluralism" that encouraged the free flow of ideas, customs, and habits in American society without entailing the loss of distinct group traits. Centered around the philosopher Horace Kallen, this largely Jewish circle quite naturally focused on the trials and tribulations of American Jews. Even the non-Jews in the circle, such as the writer Randolph Bourne, shared this emphasis. Indeed, it was Bourne who asserted that the idea of "transnationalism," of a complex of identities that did not reside only in citizenship, was "a Jewish idea." Bourne lived in an age and milieu in which the rapid currents of immigration rendered problematic "the old tight geographical groupings of nationality." Navigating these currents without disappearing was a consuming challenge. Bourne's own instinct was to embrace "the so-called hyphenate"—the very essence of a hybrid cultural identity—for it "has actually been our salvation."

It is useful to remember Bourne's discussion today, eighty years after it was published. His awareness of the tension-filled path of groups in a liberal political order anticipated both the sentiment and language of observers in our own day. At the same time, Bourne's gaze was fixed on the Jews, whose experience he believed emblematic of a much larger cultural phenomenon. Recalling Randolph Bourne can and should encourage the integration of the Jewish experience into the unfolding narrative of multicultural identity formation in the United States. In the same vein, recalling Bourne's essay, and especially the illuminating lecture by Gerson Cohen from 1966, provides the requisite historical perspective on a condition, namely assimilation, that has defined Jewish history since its inception, and will continue to vitalize and haunt Jewish communal existence well into the future.

NOTES

1. The midrash from *Pirke de-Rabbi Eliezer* is included in the monumental Bialik-Ravnitski compilation, *Sefer ha-Agadah*, revised edition (Tel Aviv, 1961), 604.


7. The irony stems from the Emancipation" that the problems into the Jewish community the dissolution of traditional desire to assimilate. One of which Baron first used, Semitism, is thus directly assimilation possesses.

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13. Ibid., xii.
14. Gershom Scholem, "Revelation and Tradition as Religious Categories in Judaism," in Idem., The Messianic Idea in Judaism (New York, 1971), 282–303. Though this process can be characterized as dialectical, in that each culture assumes part of the other in producing a new version of itself, it is important to note that Rosenzweig had abandoned his earlier prewar interest in Hegel. While studying with Friedrich Meinecke at Freiburg, Rosenzweig produced a dissertation on Hegel and the state (published only in 1920). Following the war, however, Rosenzweig had moved away from his study of German idealism to the project of "das neue Denken," a new Jewish way of thinking. See Richard A. Cohen, Elevations: The Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas (Chicago, 1994), 68.
15. Michael Andr6 Bernstein, Foregone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History (Berkeley, 1994). This method allows the historical observer to imagine a number of possible occurrences or outcomes in the past rather than submit to the probability of a single occurrence that appears consistent with the trajectory of later historical events.
16. For an excellent analysis of the range of cultural possibilities, see Michael Brenner, The Renaissance of Jewish Culture in Weimar Germany (New Haven, 1996).
17. This is not to diminish the importance of the forces of "dissimilation," as Shulamit Volkov has formulated it, in German-Jewish culture during and after the First World War. Clearly, figures such as Rosenzweig were in retreat from the ideal of assimilation as a form of self-denial. Their search to recover a meaningful Jewish tradition reflected rejection of the older ideal, as symbolized by the Taufjude. For a discussion of this quest for Jewish meaning, see Steven E. Aschheim, Brothers and Strangers: The East European Jew in German and German Jewish Consciousness, 1800–1923 (Madison, Wisc., 1982), or David N. Myers, "Distant Relatives Happening onto the Same Inn": The Meeting of East and West as Literary Theme and Cultural Ideal," Jewish Social Studies 2 (1995), 75–100. Notwithstanding this quest, Rosenzweig was—by temperament, culture, and aspirations—an unmistakable product of the German cultural world.
20. Ibid., 5. The phenomenon that is a fascinating contrast to the absorption of Hebrew into Greek, by the language of Western diaspora, is the birth of one, born of an age in which Jews were more than Jewish thought. See Barry Goldstein, "Levinas," Michael And6 Bernstein, Foresone Conclusions: Against Apocalyptic History (Berkeley, 1994), 68.
24. The entire question of Jewish identity in medieval Europe has been discussed in Michael, The Blessing of Assimilation, 2 (New York, 1992).
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_Streams Flow": Music in the Jewish Popular Imagination as Religious Categories in Judaism_ (New York, 1971), as dialectical, in that each new version of itself, it is not only an earlier prewar interest in Zionism, but also the famous Haskalah charge to be "a man in the street and a Jew at home." See Michael Stanislawski’s interpretation of this line from a poem by Y. L. Gordon in _For Whom Do I Toil? Judah Leib Gordon and the Crisis of Russian Jewry_ (New York, 1988), 31.


27. See Baron, "Ghetto and Emancipation," and the introduction to this volume.


31. Stuart Hall, for instance, explicitly rejects the notion of diaspora that refers to “those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured in relation to some sacred homeland . . . This is the old, the imperialising, the hegemonising, form of ‘ethnicity.’ We have seen the fate of the people of Palestine at the hands of this backward-looking conception of diaspora—and the complicity of the West with it.” Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” 401.


35. Ibid., 205–217.

36. According to Gilroy, the conclusion “offers an image of hybridity and intermixture that is especially valuable because it gives no ground to the suggestions that cultural fusion involves betrayal, loss, corruption, or dilution.” Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 144.

37. For Dubois, double consciousness meant that “one ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder.” This passage from Dubois’ The Souls of Black Folk is quoted in Gilroy, The Black Atlantic, 126.


40. Gilroy fails to mention in this regard the sociologist, Orlando Patterson whose 1977 book Ethnic Chauvinism offers interesting insights into the historical path and social status of the Jews. Patterson identifies them as a
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of the term "diaspora," see poras," in Idem., Diasporas x, ed., Modern Diasporas in London, 1994), 1. See also and Double Consciousness
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sociologist, Orlando Patterson i interesting insights into the Patterson identifies them as a

classic “symbiotic ethnic group,” who possess highly developed skills in adapting to and surviving in alien societies. Groups such as the Jews thus inhabit a “transsovereign” plane of existence, an idea that resembles the idea of transnationalism mentioned at the end of this paper. See Orlando Patterson, Ethnic Chaunivism: The Reactionary Impulse (New York, 1977), 63.

41. Philip Roth, Operation Shylock: A Confession (New York, 1993), 44.
43. French-Jewish thinkers from Emmanuel Levinas to his student, Alain Finkielkraut, have generated interesting insights into the formation of Jewish identity in the Diaspora over the past half-century. Especially interesting is the attempt by Richard Marienstras and the Cercle du Gaston Crémieux to gain minority rights status for French Jews, a position that harks back to the turn-of-the-century Bundists and autonomists. See Richard Marienstras, Étre un peuple en diaspora (Paris, 1975), 191–204. See also Judith Friedlander, Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France since 1968 (New Haven, 1990), 14–19.

44. The social ideal toward which this group hoped to move was that of a cultural “symphony,” which stood in direct contrast to the guiding metaphor of the “melting pot” that so colored the immigrant experience in the United States in this period. For a fine treatment of these competing metaphors, see Moses Rischin, “The Jews and Pluralism: Toward an American Freedom Symphony,” in Gladys Rosen, ed., Jewish Life in America: Historical Perspectives (New York, 1978).
47. Ibid., 278.