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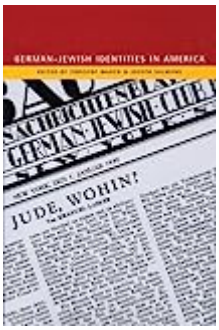

Christof Mauch, Joseph Salmons, eds. *German-Jewish Identities in America.* Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003. xii + 171 pp. $29.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-924119-07-1.

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This collection of essays is based on conference papers given in October 2000 at the Max Kade Institute for German-American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. What holds these essays together is a common understanding of identity as both a cultural and a social construct, as something that depends on both historical conditions and the imagination of individuals and groups. By covering a wide range of topics and time periods, the book attempts to convey the complex intersections of German, Jewish and American identities from the Civil War to the present. The essays provide an introduction into various approaches and topics in the field ranging from the effects of National Socialist persecution on first language attrition of German Jews to refuting the commonly held notion that Eastern European Jews dominated American show business in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. The essays are not, however, in-depth, thorough explorations but rather, as to be expected of conference papers, preliminary and developing ideas and theories.

In "German Jews and the American-Jewish Synthesis" Henry L. Feingold states that the distinction between German Jews and Eastern European Jews has been exaggerated in both literary and historical texts. He begins by showing continuity between the German Jewish immigrants and the subsequent wave of Eastern European Jewish immigrants. He then, however, moves on to focus on German Jews and their assimilation into the United States. The basic thrust of his argument is that America offered German Jewish immigrants in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century the possibility of full acceptance, thus encouraging a move towards assimilation, as can be seen by the popularity of the Reform movement. Feingold has concerns that the legacy of this assimilation is the erasing of a distinctive German Jewish identity in America and is concerned that this erasure is also the fate for the American Jewish identity as a whole.

Three of the essays focus on Jewish charity organizations and their role in shaping Jewish identity in the United States. Anke Ortlepp explores the Milwaukee Jewish community and its charity organizations from 1850-1914. She focuses on the organizations that became the Federated Jewish Charities, an organized umbrella group. These charity groups cooperated with each other and with non-Jewish charity groups, and also provided services for both Jews and non-Jews. Yet they insisted on being distinctly Jewish and saw as part of their mission providing structure and stability for the Jewish community, through such projects (for example) as offering classes on Jewish religion and culture. Ortlepp convincingly demonstrates that these charity groups had an impact on the Milwaukee community as a whole while play-

ing a large role in creating and maintaining the Jewish community.

Organized Jewish communities in Chicago in the years 1840-80 are the focus of Tobias Brinkmann's essay. Unlike Feingold, Brinkmann argues that assimilation did not lead to a loss of Jewish identity and community, but rather to their transformation. The essay traces the various congregations, paying close attention to the impact of religious reforms as a divisive element that led to the splintering off and formation of new groups. At the heart of many of these debates was a struggle to define the "German-ness" of American Judaism. As a way of bringing Jews together, the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith was founded in New York and quickly caught on in Chicago. Although not anti-religious, the group's focus on charity and the public good appealed to a wider segment of the Jewish population than did the congregations. It also sought to downplay the question of German-ness and instead focused on America and American patriotism. Like Ortlepp, Brinkmann maintains that philanthropic organizations were essential in creating a sense of Jewish identity and community. Unlike Ortlepp, however, Brinkmann argues that what emerged out of these groups was an ethnic Jewish identity closely linked to Americanization and acculturation.

Cornelia Wilhelm's essay about B'nai B'rith in the period 1843-1914 touches and expands upon many of the themes found in both of the previous essays. She discusses the group's role in the development of an ethnic Jewish identity in the face of growing indifference to religious aspects of Jewishness. B'nai B'rith, like other organizations with a focus on charity, also allowed for what Wilhelm calls a "modern active religiosity" (p. 69), which allowed them to discover a personal religiosity strongly tied to society and civic duty, a "civil religion" (p. 82). Like other organizations of its kind, B'nai B'rith put the needs of its members first but also served the larger community. Wilhelm also discusses the difficulties the organization faced in the late 1800s because it did not actively try to recruit Eastern European immigrants, nor did it allow women into its ranks. Nevertheless, B'nai B'rith gradually adapted and in the twentieth century continued to help define a public Jewish identity.

Mitchell B. Hart takes a close look at Franz Boas's life and work to explore the interactions between the anthropologist's personal biography and his work. He argues that previous work in this direction has placed too much importance on Boas' public writings. What is gained from also looking at his private writings is the understanding of a much more complicated relationship between the German, Jewish, and American aspects of Boas's identity and work. Furthermore, a look at his private writings demonstrates that Boas's public distancing from his Jewishness was not as much an indication of self-hatred as it was a "strategy of self-representation" within the context of race, immigration and assimilation (p. 94). Boas was central to American anthropology's cultural turn, which played an important role in refuting scientific rationales for racism. In order to be perceived as an objective scientist and have his work taken seriously, however, Boas had to distance himself from his Jewish identity. Hart points the way to a more complex understanding of self-representation and the intersections of personal, public and political in the public identity and work of individuals.

Harley Erdman refutes the widespread conception that Jewish presence in American show business stems largely from Eastern European Jews during the mass immigration between 1881 and 1917. His preliminary findings indicate that German Jews had already established themselves in American show business by the turn of the last century. Furthermore, show business did not happen solely in New York, but was "a mediation between New York and the rest of the nation–with German Jews uniquely positioned to serve as mediators" (p. 109). Erdman shows that contributions of German Jews to show business do not fit into an easy narrative and that looking at them is a way to rethink German Jewish contributions to the American Jewish past.

Thomas Kovach uses Alfred Uhry's play "Last Night of Ballyhoo" (1997) to examine German Jewish and Eastern European Jewish identities in the American South. The play takes place in Atlanta in 1939. Kovach makes interesting observations about Southern Jewish identity and these insights enrich our understanding of the play. He argues that the play expresses a "wish-fantasy." According to Kovach, Uhry "tries to alter in retrospect the painful reality that at this darkest hour, the German Jews of Europe and the German Jews of America were profoundly and tragically divided, both from their Eastern coreligionists and within themselves" (p. 132).

Monika S. Schmid looks at the impact of persecution in Nazi Germany on the native language skills of German Jews. Schmid points out that assimilated German Jews who survived the Nazi regime were in an unusual situation since normally persecuted minorities do not speak the same language as the persecuting majority. She examines language samples from three groups: German

Jews who left Germany in the years 1933-5, those who left in the period 1935-8 and those who left after November 9, 1938. Only those in the third group suffered from "language attrition" in terms of grammatical complexity and were identified by native German speakers as not sounding like native speakers. Schmid makes a convincing argument that attitude and will play a large role in forgetting a language, since this last group was the one most directly and severely impacted by the Nazi regime.

Manfred Kirchheimer writes about his childhood in New York City's Washington Heights. As the title "German Jew or Jewish German?: Post-Immigration Questions" indicates, the essay focuses on the intersections of German and Jewish identity in terms of ethnicity, religion and history in the neighborhood and within Kirchheimer's own family.

As with most collections of conference papers, after reading this text one is left with some knowledge about quite a few topics and one may be able to catch glimpses of how these ideas could be developed or apply to one's own work. The particular advantage that this collection has is that the conference's goal was to provide as wide a range of approaches and topics as possible, so that reading the book provides the opportunity to draw new connections between diverse fields.