

together with small numbers of European missionaries and colonists, promoted use of the Malagasy language. In so doing, he raises substantial questions about the dominant paradigm in creolization studies, noting that previous work which views *créolité* as essentially a unilinear process of linguistic and cultural mixing does not allow for the fact that multiple languages and cultural traditions could and did co-exist and interact over extended periods in European slave colonies. Developments in the southwestern Indian Ocean and especially in the Mascarenes, he argues persuasively, demonstrate that conceptualizing creolization as a process of learned versatility, by which individuals negotiated the everyday challenges posed by linguistic and cultural diversity, can provide us with a deeper understanding of the nature and dynamics of life in European colonies both before and after slave emancipation.

Larson's argument is based on meticulous research in archival collections in Madagascar, Mauritius, France, the United Kingdom, and New Zealand, and he also draws on relevant scholarship on colonial slave societies in the Americas. His proficiency in Malagasy gives this study additional depth. His examination of letters written by literate Malagasy exiles in Mauritius, for example, deepens our understanding of how and why the modern sense of Malagasy national identity developed and underscores the important role such exiles could play in the development of proto-nationalism elsewhere in the colonial world. An equally careful reading of European sources, especially the correspondence of French and British missionaries, sheds significant new light on various aspects of Mascarene history in general and early-nineteenth-century Mauritian history in particular. Larson's willingness to incorporate the limited information available on Malagasy populations in the Cape Colony and the Comoros into his discussion speaks to a refreshing willingness to take a broader regional and comparative approach to the topics and issues under consideration. The net result is a study of decided interest and value not only to Malagasy and Mascarene specialists, but also to historians, anthropologists, and other scholars striving to better understand colonial slave systems and the Creole societies they engendered.

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Eli Lederhendler, *Jewish Immigrants and American Capitalism, 1880–1920: From Caste to Class*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

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This book challenges the idea that culture, agency, and identity are primary factors in explaining immigrant experiences in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America. Focusing on Jewish immigrants from Russia and Eastern Europe, the author argues instead that the existing economic

structure into which the immigrants entered is the most significant factor in understanding and explaining the development of Jewish-American culture and ethnicity. This is a clear challenge to the “cultural studies” approach that has come to dominate the field of immigration and ethnic studies but it is neither polemical nor Marxian (the two forms criticism of cultural studies have typically taken). Rather, it is a serious, nuanced attempt to understand the particularity of the Jewish-American experience without reducing it to cultural essentialism.

In contrast to work that emphasizes the strength of Old World cultural traditions, Lederhendler reminds us of how culturally and materially bereft the Jews of Eastern Europe and Russia actually were, which of course was why they were emigrating in the first place. What cultural strength they had once had was weakened by decades of economic deprivation, chronic unemployment, pogroms, and internal conflicts within the Jewish communities. They were a destitute people with no social or class standing, that is, a caste. There was nothing from the Old World that would help them adapt and prosper in the new. They arrived in America with no skills, no class, and no culture. In America, they took advantage of new economic opportunities and acquired new skills, a new class (working), and a whole new culture. It was their work—peddling, sewing, clerking, odd jobs—that both defined who they were and gave them the material wherewithal to build the networks and social capital that would make them a successful ethnic group. Whereas social scientists have typically seen ethnic ties as a preexisting source of social capital for immigrant groups, Lederhendler writes, “Social capital built up within the ethnic network was not the cause but the *result* of successful economic adaptation on the part of individuals (p. 102). The famous Jewish-American commitment to middle-class values of work and success was not carried over from Russia but made in the United States as Jewish immigrants struggled to find a place in the new social structure. Similarly, Jewish-Americans’ embrace of the labor movement was born not in Europe but in the economic struggles wrought by American capitalism between 1880 and 1920.

My summary of the argument is necessarily simplified in the interests of space; the author himself is careful to draw distinctions, qualify claims, and engage the existing literature. Along the way, he provides thoughtful and detailed discussions of the Jewish immigrant economy, the labor movement, the controversy between established German Jews and the new immigrants, assimilation, immigration restriction, and a number of important scholarly debates. This is a very smart book and a much-needed reminder that cultural values are not always the primary shapers of group identity.

———Jennifer Delton, Skidmore College