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Book Reviews

Politics, Faith, and the Making of American Judaism. By Peter Adams. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2014. 207 pp., $79.99 Cloth, $29.95 Paper

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Politics, Faith, and the Making of American Judaism is an interestingly-crafted summary of the interaction of (mostly) Judaic (i.e., religious) Jews and the American government, beginning with blood libel charges in Syria in 1840 and ending with Theodore Roosevelt's administration. It covers well-trod territory, but adds some information from manuscript collections and newspaper citations to the standard narrative, providing a few examples from places not generally considered (e.g., Louisville). It has a thesis, present throughout; namely, that Jewish "disunity" and "disharmony" were bad, whereas a "unified and politically robust American Jewry" was good (4). Bad, because when Jews were "disorganized and quarrelsome" they were ineffective lobbying the President and Secretary of State and Congress; good, because unity made Jews "more assertive in demanding equal rights" and hence more effective (25, 95). Of course, this thesis is oversimplified; throughout American Jewish history examples abound of Jewish unity and lack of political success, for American leaders repeatedly did what was in American, not Jewish interests.

Readers, especially those who are learning about this period of American Jewish history for the first time, will be pleased with the discussion of American leaders such as Grant and Lincoln, foreign events affecting Jews (the papal kidnapping of a Jewish boy in 1858, pogroms in eastern Europe and Russia), anti-Semitic incidents in America (General Orders 11, the Grand Union Hotel's rejection of Jewish guests), various aspects of the Civil War, and presidential elections. With all, Adams

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has Reform and Orthodox Jews interacting with government appointees and elected officials: Simon Wolf with the President and Secretary of State at the White House in 1869 about Russia, Simon Wolf with Secretary Fish in 1872 about Romania, Oscar Straus and Jacob Schiff with Roosevelt in 1902 about Russian pogroms, and much more. Early on, states Adams, Jewish leaders understood the "consequences of their disunity in the event of a crisis" (17).

Yet the book is filled with anachronisms, many of which make Adams appear an unreliable narrator. He assumes an American Reform and Orthodox Judaism ("the Reform movement," "The Orthodox," "the Orthodox establishment," "most Reform congregations") as early as the 1840s, and begins speaking regularly about "Orthodox congregants" in 1849 and the "Orthodox-Reform debate" that "preceded the Civil War" by 1850. There was no Reform Judaism movement until well after the Civil War, however, and no Orthodox establishment until the 20th century. In fact, there is no way to make reliable statements such as "the increased number of Reform congregations" by 1868, or to talk about "Reform congregations" in 1850, or to use terms such as "younger Reform congregations" and "a leading Reform congregation," as it is not possible to speak clearly about Reform congregations until the 1880s (116, 20, 24). Until that time, no single characteristic identified a Reform congregation; even the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, established in 1873 and called Reform by Adams, included numerous congregations that practiced many customs and rituals commonly identified as Orthodox. These labels are not of any meaning in American Jewish life during most of the period under discussion.

Furthermore, such statements as "the Jews of the postwar years … assimilate[d] into the greater American culture," or calling Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise and Simon Wolf (the latter an active member of a Washington, District of Columbia synagogue) "members of the assimilated elite," misuse the term "assimilation" and thus miss the essence of post-Civil War American Jewry (75, 7). "Assimilate" means to lose one's identity, not to become a rabbi or join congregations. American Jews of this period were acculturated; they participated in Judaic life because they wanted to remain Jews, but they wrapped their Judaism in every possible form of Americanism they could find. And, further, Moses Mendelssohn, the great German Jewish thinker of the 18th century, was not "the spiritual and intellectual force behind religious reform in Europe" (111). There was no religious reform anywhere in Europe for a generation after Mendelssohn died, and he was a strictly observant ("Orthodox," in our

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terms today) Jew who followed all of the biblical commandments and would have been horrified at being called a supporter of Reform Judaism.

To speak of "Otherness" and "the Other" in this period is to use a term that has no meaning in the mid-nineteenth century; to call these Jews "hopelessly German" (and to praise American Jews for "freeing themselves from the ghetto mentality") is to reveal one's prejudices; to describe these Jews as "learning the mechanical trades" is to ignore the many pages about them as peddlers and merchants; to describe some of the discussions of this period as "anticipat[ing] modern debates on political correctness" is to introduce anachronism; and to claim that "by the 1870s, Jews found themselves locked out of the social clubs that had previously accepted their membership" is to focus on a miniscule slice of American Jewry, as "most" did not belong to a social club and "most" (best we can tell without surveys) of those who did joined a Jewish club (4, 33, 7, 14, 81, 4, 27, 101).

A most confusing statement is that "the Civil War years … produc[ed] an antisemitism that appeared suddenly with the stresses of a bloody war and disappeared thereafter" (44). Much attention is given to the anti-Semitism of the post-Civil War period (maybe too much, as it seems to have been largely against the richest Jews), so it certainly did not "disappear." Equally baffling is the use of the word "most," as in "most American Jews" (6). How can we possibly know what "most" American Jews in 1850 or 1880 did?

***Ambivalent Miracles: Evangelicals and the Politics of Racial Healing*. By Nancy D. Wadsworth. Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2014. viii+ 311pp. $39.50 Cloth, $39.50 Ebook**

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When we meet people from a background different from ours, to what extent does that encounter become political? To what extent can we avoid political conversation in community? These are the overarching

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