
The books under review provide two models for the writing of state Jewish histories.1 Leonard Rogoff provides a comprehensive, analytically nuanced account of Jewish life in North Carolina. Bryan Edward Stone concentrates on the frontier framework to tease out the uses and transformations of diverse identities among Jews in selected episodes of Texas history. Jonathan D. Sarna does not exaggerate when he notes in a book cover blurb, “*Down Home* is the best and most comprehensive history of Jews in any one of the fifty states.” For its part, *The Chosen Folks* stands with Stephen J. Whitfield’s pivotal essay and two previous works by Rogoff2 as one of the most in-depth and outstanding studies concerning regional identity. Similarities and differences between Rogoff’s and Stone’s volumes abound.

Two illustrated chronicles and a more analytic anthology, besides a plethora of other studies, have previously appeared on Texas history.3 In his publication, Stone, an associate professor at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, has dramatically revised his dissertation from the University of Texas at Austin. Rogoff is historian of the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina. His book is part of a larger project documenting and disseminating information on North Carolina Jewish history through a traveling exhibit, video, and school curriculum. As such, it joins Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten’s *A Portion of a People*4 as exemplars of what state historical associations are capable of producing.5 Solid historical accounts of North Carolina Jewry are sparse and only one article—also by Rogoff—is statewide in scope.6

Both authors succeed as iconoclasts. Stone questions converso and crypto-Jewish settlement in the colonial origins of the Lone Star State and argues against the Jewish connections of nineteenth-century pioneers that previous historians have claimed. Yet his more sweeping challenge is to those historians who place New York City as the model and only truly legitimate center of the American Jewish experience. His frontier approach suggests instead the legitimacy and significance of Jewish life in all forms and environs as well as the necessity of studying these for the lessons they offer beyond New York’s hegemony. Stone adds depth to our knowledge and understanding of the roles of Jews during the Civil Rights era, which are reinforced in Rogoff’s book.

Rogoff also attacks myths of early Jewish settlement as a prelude, in his case, to opposing the distinctiveness school of Southern Jewish historiography. Cosmopolitanism rather than provincialism characterized even those North Carolina Jews who resided in small towns. These Jews, although living in a rural state, are urban in their perceptions, contacts, and experiences. Rather than conforming and “not calling attention to themselves,” (188) they actively

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challenge prevailing norms and institutions. Although he pays homage to Jewish roots in *passim*, Rogoff’s North Carolina Jewish history reflects constant and repeated incoming and outgoing migrations. Jews start businesses in small towns to accumulate capital to move to cities with larger Jewish communities and to educate their children to become professionals and move away. Their roots are to family, business, and religion rather than to region. New Jewish migrants rejuvenate and replenish Jewish communities and institutions regularly. Some Jewish communities die out, while others are reborn or born anew. In each of these themes, Rogoff replaces the nostalgic view with messages of vibrancy and realism. Finally, following the wave of research of the last fifteen years to which he has contributed—along with Wendy Besmann, Deborah R. Weiner, and Lee Shai Weissbach, among others—Rogoff brings the history of East European Jews to the forefront of Southern Jewish history. (Stone provides evidence of Zionism and vibrant East European Jewish communities, institutions, and culture as well but not as a primary theme.)

Although the authors do not always draw the same conclusions, the histories of North Carolina and Texas Jewry are remarkably—although not surprisingly—similar. Rogoff clearly could have used Stone’s frontier framework to guide his work. Individual Jews could claim pioneer status in each, but substantial congregation- and institution-building did not thrive until the post-Civil-War era. Both states attracted Jews from the German states and other parts of Europe who had first lived elsewhere in the United States. Jews were few and far between, although Texas had more urban enclaves. Following the familiar patterns of nineteenth-century chain migrations, movement from town to town along transportation corridors, and from peddler to dry goods storekeeper to department store owner, these Jews adapted and compromised their Jewish practices.

Stone touches upon other themes upon which Rogoff elaborates. In both locations, Jewish acceptance was predicated on Jews’ behavior and contributions to society. Yet Stone draws a picture almost devoid of antisemitism until after World War I, while Rogoff’s North Carolinian Jews are more tolerated than accepted. Jews in Texas and North Carolina strive for urban, middle-class respectability and generally align with business-progressive politics and politicians. Challenging prevailing historiography, apparently few Jews in either place owned slaves. In hub-and-spoke or center-and-periphery fashion, Jews in both states maintained close ties with major Jewish centers—Baltimore, Charleston, New Orleans, and Richmond—outside of their states. This served as one of many mechanisms in which these Jews retained ties to national and international Jewry and overcame their relative physical isolation. Isaac Leeser and Isaac M. Wise sparked the formation of congregations, but the actions of a key local leader proved essential. The small Jewish population also led to other survival mechanisms. Reform scions of earlier immigrants and traditional
East European Jews tended to cooperate and compromise out of necessity. The North Carolina Association of Jewish Women, which fostered men’s, youth, and rabbinic counterparts, and the Kallah of Texas Rabbis represented the need for statewide organizations that would have been established in cities with larger Jewish populations. Bringing the parallels forward, World War II and, more recently, the Sunbelt phenomenon brought tremendous growth and change to both.

My qualms with Down Home are minor. Although the case can and should be made for Southern Jewish distinctiveness in several areas, the celebration of Christmas by Classical Reform Jews (143–144), Americanizing names (141), and holding social events and using organizations beyond local communities to bring Jewish youth together (272–273) were national phenomena and not manifestations of “southern blending.” (272–273) Compromises between East European Orthodox and “German” Reform Jews and lesser division between the two was not the result of “a blended southern Jewish ethnicity” (271) but rather behaviors that typified intragroup relations in small towns everywhere, as Rogoff acknowledges on the following page. But these are isolated statements. Most of this book attacks exaggerated claims of regional distinctiveness.

I will note a few of the difficulties with Stone’s volume that are more extensive and substantive. First, although his use of the frontier framework is appealing on many levels, the definition and application of it become somewhat nebulous and problematic. Drawing on the theories of Sander Gilman, Kerwin Lee Klein, and Gloria Anzaldúa, among others, Stone’s “frontier” appears as “an imagined space of cultural interaction where differences collide, groups encounter one another, and cultural boundaries must be devised and continually revised.” (237) Since Jews interact with others and are defined by and define themselves in relation to those others (including Jews elsewhere), Jews throughout the world and throughout history can thus all be categorized as frontier people. (14–15) Yet Texas Jews also defined themselves as frontier people with their imagery of participation in the beginnings of Texas history, when it was a frontier in the more traditional sense. Sometimes “frontier” seems to equate with living in isolation in relation to larger Jewish communities. Defining Jews in contemporary Sunbelt cities as frontier people further strains the credibility of the term. (234) Stone does the latter by juxtaposing Sunbelt Texas with Los Angeles and Miami as the appropriate comparisons and continuing the imagery of the Texas Jewish frontier by asking why more Jews have not been attracted to the state. Yet the comparison to North Carolina, where Rogoff draws a more complete picture of Sunbelt effect, and other Sunbelt states may be equally appropriate; and the issue may not be the negatives Stone associates with the Lone Star State but rather the unique attractions of Los Angeles and Miami. Further questions arise over interpretation. Stone views the rise of the modern Ku Klux Klan as a turning point where Texas Jews confront bigotry.
and outsider status seemingly for the first time. (136–146) Was there virtually no antisemitism earlier, especially during the late nineteenth century? Stone notes only briefly exclusion from country clubs, and he puts it during a much later era. (203) For a final example, Stone discusses the relatively small number of East European Orthodox Jews in Texas and implies the population dominance of the “German” Reform element until the 1920s at the earliest. Yet the approximately 3,300 Jews in Texas in 1880 had multiplied to 16,000 by 1905, and the numbers double between 1910 and 1920. (64, 95, 154) It would be unusual and unlikely if these increases were not largely the result of a major East European influx relative to the earlier settlers. Indeed, Stone provides evidence of vibrant East European Jewish communities dating from the 1880s. This goes beyond demographic quibbling. Earlier demographic dominance of East European traditionalists raises questions concerning some of the broader generalizations relating to late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century identity. Were the newcomers accepted as Anglos, and did they accept their position as such so quickly and easily? Last, Rogoff emphasizes nineteenth-century ties with Germany, German culture, and Lutheran Germans in North Carolina. (89, 142) One wonders why the study of Jewish, Texas, Southern, Western, and American identities failed to extend to German identity and interaction with the large and important gentile German population in Texas as well.

Regardless of these issues, Stone and especially Rogoff are to be commended for outstanding, thought-provoking books based on extensive archival research. They take historiography to the next level of debate, and their interpretive insights lay the groundwork for future studies. The illustrations in both enhance the stories as do, in *Down Home*, insightful sidebars. Anyone interested in regional and national history should read these books.

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**Notes**

1 For the sake of transparency, I served as a press peer reviewer for *The Chosen Folks* and have worked as editor with both authors in other publications.


This book is a ghost story, told about a structure that never existed. Susan G. Solomon argues that Louis I. Kahn’s designs for Philadelphia’s Congregation Mikveh Israel (1961–1972) represented a zenith in postwar synagogue architecture. Regrettably, however, none of Kahn’s six schemes for a complex of structures facing Independence Mall was ever built, so their quality and influence cannot be properly measured. Although the book’s subject is Kahn’s “Jewish architecture,” the author says almost nothing about his design of Temple Beth-El (1966–1972) in Chappaqua, New York, which was erected.

As one of America’s most distinguished postwar architects, Kahn (1901–1974) has enjoyed enduring renown for masterworks such as the Yale University Art Gallery (1951–1953), the Salk Institute for Biological Sciences (1959–1965) in La Jolla, the Indian Institute of Management (1962–1974) in Ahmedabad, and the Kimbell Art Museum (1966–1972) in Fort Worth. Solomon’s previous studies include an insightful monograph on his bathhouse for a Jewish Community Center (1954–1959) near Trenton, which, she claims, was a turning point in his later career.

As the author indicates, Kahn’s Unitarian Church (1959–1969) in Rochester, New York, was highly evocative, but many of his best secular buildings also achieved a spiritual depth and majesty. The book leaves some lingering questions about its subject. Kahn was nearly a lifelong resident of Philadelphia who had only a meager knowledge of Judaism and did not affiliate with Jewish institutions (though he did visit Israel on many occasions). Thus, it is extremely difficult to understand what Judaism may have meant to Kahn. Additionally, Solomon too easily dismisses the fact that, while married, he fathered two children with two other women.

As a seeker of architectural truth, Kahn continually searched for essential meanings of space, form, light, materials, and sequential movement. Ironically, his lengthy struggles with Mikveh Israel’s insensitive and ineffective leadership produced a succession of challenging (and misinformed) interpretations of Jewish