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New Jews: The End Of The Jewish Diaspora



Synopsis

For many contemporary Jews, Israel no longer serves as the Promised Land, the center of the Jewish universe and the place of final destination. In *New Jews*, Caryn Aviv and David Shneer provocatively argue that there is a new generation of Jews who don't consider themselves to be eternally wandering, forever outsiders within their communities and seeking to one day find their homeland. Instead, these New Jews are at home, whether it be in Buenos Aires, San Francisco or Berlin, and are rooted within communities of their own choosing. Aviv and Shneer argue that Jews have come to the end of their diaspora; wandering no more, today's Jews are settled. In this wide-ranging book, the authors take us around the world, to Moscow, Jerusalem, New York and Los Angeles, among other places, and find vibrant, dynamic Jewish communities where Jewish identity is increasingly flexible and inclusive. *New Jews* offers a compelling portrait of Jewish life today.

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Customer Reviews

“New Jews is a thoughtful, persuasive case for why the Diaspora matters. Secular Culture” “New Jews makes the provocative argument that the Israel-Diaspora dichotomy no longer exists. In a series of engaging ethnographies of Jewish communities in America, Russia and Israel, Aviv and Shneer reveal a new generation of Jews embarked on a renaissance liberated from old ideologies and committed to creating homes where they live. A celebration of pluralism, this sure-to-be controversial book finds Jewish unity not in slogans but in the common search for new identities.” —David Biale, author of *Cultures of the Jews: A New History* “This is a wide-ranging work . . . there is a definite shift afoot in thinking about matters of Jewish identity, and

this is a worthwhile and useful effort toward articulating new directions. **Central Conference of American Rabbis Newsletter** “Examining locations as diverse as New York, San Francisco and Moscow, Aviv and > probe what makes Jews feel “at home.” **Lilith** “Offers a new way to look at contemporary Jewry, not just its present complicated realities, but the history behind the recent departures. Well researched, deeply contextualized, and written in a sprightly manner, *New Jews* demonstrates that Jews at the beginning of the twenty-first century have created new spaces, new places, and new faces in which to live and by which to present themselves.” **Hasia R. Diner**, author of *The Jews of the United States, 1654-2000*

Caryn Aviv is a Marsico lecturer and an affiliated faculty with the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver. David Shneer is Director of the Program in Jewish Studies and Associate Professor of History at the University of Colorado at Boulder.

Helped me a lot with my project in Jewish studies.

Caryn Aviv and David Shneer’s book, *New Jews: The End of the Jewish Diaspora*, is probably more provocative in its sub-title than in its main title. The cozy and snug dichotomy between Israel and the Diaspora has been a fixture in modern Jewish life since the creation of Israel in 1948, and in religious Judaism, it is the cornerstone of most, if not all, messianic strains in the religion. The book is an attempt, in the post-modern style, to topple the simple hierarchical binaries of us and them, male and female, Jew and Gentile, the chosen and the unchosen. It takes a slice of Jewish life usually marginalized in other studies, the Jews of Moscow (aren’t they all gone?), Jewish tourism in Europe and Israel, the new movement toward Jewish museums as growing centerpieces of American Jewish identity (with an emphasis on Los Angeles, the third largest Jewish city), Queer Jews, and finally New York as the premier Jewish city in the world. What this book does is little more than try to peel back some of the Zionist ideological assumptions that the Diaspora is a dead end; that galut is only a temporary state; that eventually, assimilation or antisemitism awaits Jews everywhere outside of Israel. It stresses that Jews are making contributions to Jewish life even outside the Jewish state, and in some ways, ones that are more radical and groundbreaking.

These are the authors who wrote *Queer Jews*, if you’ve read or heard of that. It’s basically a series of articles about how Jews have put down roots all over the world, that those roots are centers of

Jewish life, and that we should stop thinking of Israel as THE center. There are articles about queer Jews in New York and what it means to be gay in Israel versus the U.S., Russian Jews in Moscow and which Jewish organizations there are funded by international donors and how those differ from homegrown ones, an article about remembrance trips and trips to Israel for high school and college-aged Jewish students, an article about Holocaust museums and how the Holocaust gets portrayed as this special awful case where Jews are victims of the Worst Crime Ever, but everyone should pay attention because evil can be anywhere, and more. Anyway, I like the book a lot.

It is true that the Jews have lived outside of Israel for over three- thousand years. It is also true that many Jews who live outside of Israel feel at home where they live, and have no intention or dream of living in Israel. But it is also true that the central religious vision of Israel centers on a people living in the land of Israel. For those who live by Mitzvot living in Israel is mandated by the fact that only here can one do a maximum of Mitzvot. For those who connect deeply to the Promise and Covenant which are at the heart of the Biblical vision of the world it is clear that living in Israel and helping build a special society is the commandment of God. There are other reasons for living in Israel including the fact that it is the only place in the world where one can live in a society that follows and breathes to the rhythm of the Hebrew Calendar. While this book speaks about the variety of Diaspora communities and their pulsing life it minimizes the fact that assimilation, and intermarriage are constantly depleting the Jewish people in the Diaspora. The Jewish community in Israel is the most rapidly growing large Jewish community in the world and it is expected that in less than two decades it will contain the majority of Jews in the world. In Israel intermarriage, and total assimilation are minimal. In fact Jews who come here from all over the world with minimal Jewish knowledge, deepen in Jewish knowledge and connection here. It is however only fair to point out that Israel is today threatened by many forces, including those of radical Islam. There is no 'guarantee' that it is the safest place for a Jew to be. There is I believe only a guarantee that it is the place where one can take one's communal responsibility as a Jew in the deepest and most serious way.

Just one century ago, some Jews in central Europe thought that it was "the end of the Jewish diaspora". Well, you know what happened, some other people thought that it should be the end of Jewish diaspora. In Israel, even if they are not THE center of Judaism, they still can protect themselves, and offer a shelter to some people, like Russian, Argentinian or Ethiopian Jews, when needed. Let us hope that it won't be needed anymore, but if it does, you'll be welcomed in Israel.

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