

The Value Of Canadian Jewish History To The American Jewish Historian And Vice Versa*

JONATHAN D. SARNA

Résumé

Dans un essai important écrit par Seymour Martin Lipset pour un public américain, l'autre de l'essai prétend que "nul ne devrait traiter de l'histoire des Etats-Unis sans traiter également de celle du Canada".

En fait, l'inverse est également vrai et nul ne peut prétendre se lancer dans l'histoire du Canada en ignorant l'histoire des Etats-Unis d'Amérique.

Nous en arrivons ainsi à une situation d'étude des données sur une base de comparaison et de rapports ayant prévalu dans le passé ou à l'heure actuelle. La question en est une d'élargissement de l'horizon que nous nous sommes imposé et il nous faut à tout prix rattraper cette forme de retard.

Dans ce texte qui nous est présenté, l'auteur nous soumet une liste de dix sujets qui se prêtent selon lui à une analyse comparative dont:

— L'exceptionnalisme — Le Leadership — La tolérance des minorités — La démographie, répartition géographique et pouvoir — Les emplois — Langue et fidélité envers l'état qui les reçoit — La structure sous-ethnique — Le Judaïsme Réformateur et le Sionisme — Les mariages mixtes et enfin: l'éducation.

En somme, la méthode comparative en est une fort remarquable. Cependant on doit d'après l'auteur de l'article en faire un usage prudent, compte tenu des nombreux abus qu'il serait facile de démultiplier.

Seymour Martin Lipset, in an important essay written for a United States audience, argued that "no one should work in United States history

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without also dealing with Canada.” Robin Winks, speaking to Canadians, insisted that the reverse also holds true: “one cannot study the history of Canada without knowing United States history.”¹ Both scholars were actually calling for comparative history.² Realizing that there are many questions which historians cannot ask, let alone answer, unless their frames of reference extend beyond the narrow confines of just one country, both urged that Canadian historians and United States historians begin to learn from one another.

Canadian and United States Jewish historians should also begin to learn from one another. We too should be interested in analyzing the unique and common features in the Jewish experience of our respective countries. We too should be determining both what shaped the Jewish communities on either side of our common border, and why they differed. We too should be broadening our horizons, asking new questions, and answering old questions based on fresh comparative data.

What follows is a list of ten subjects which seem to me to lend themselves to comparative analysis. This is a tentative agenda; once begun, the process of comparison should take off in directions of its own. Indeed, one virtue of comparative history lies in the new and fruitful lines of inquiry which, by its very nature, it helps to generate.

1. Exceptionalism. United States Jewish historians generally buttress claims of uniqueness (“America is different”) by pointing to the Revolutionary Heritage and The Bill of Rights. The one divided the United States from Europe, the other made religious liberty a matter of fundamental Constitutional law. Neither factor applies to Canada. Its development has proceeded along an evolutionary path, and it knows of no “wall of separation” between church and state, at least not in the First Amendment sense of the term.³ This opens up a host of tantalizing questions. How have different national experiences influenced United States and Canadian Jewish history? Has church-state separation affected United States Jews in a way that Canadian Jews have not been affected? What has been the impact of a revolutionary tradition upon Jews as against an evolutionary one? What factors nevertheless account for differences between the North American Jewish experience and the European one?

2. Leadership. The Canadian Jewish Congress has been far more influential and important than any United States Jewish organization. Likewise, Canadian Jewish leaders seem both to wield more power and to command

more respect than their United States counterparts.⁴ This phenomenon cries out for explanation. Perhaps Canadian politics shows greater tolerance for "elite accomodation" (compromises made behind-the-scenes at the highest level) than is found in the United States.⁵ Perhaps Canadian Jewish society, like Canadian society itself, retains remnants of hierarchical traditions left over from days past. Differences might also stem from immigration and settlement patterns. As discussed below (#7), Canadian Jewry was, until recent times, more homogeneous than its United States counterpart. The consequences of this would seem to be momentous, extending far beyond the realm of leadership. As yet, however, these consequences have scarcely been studied.

3. Tolerance of Minorities. Once, one might have said that the United States' melting pot ideology stifled Jewish culture, while Canada's social mosaic permitted it to thrive. Recently, however, John Porter has argued that these metaphors are largely hollow, and that both countries pursued similar policies on matters of assimilation.⁶ A comparison of the United States and Canadian Jewish immigrant experiences should be able to shed light on this significant question. We do not know, for example, whether immigrants and natives interacted in similar ways in both countries or not. Did differences in colonization and census policies prove important? How did United States and Canadian Jews react to other national minority groups: are French-Canadian/Jewish relations comparable to Black/Jewish ones?

4. Demography, Geographical Distribution and Power. Canada's Jews have always formed a far smaller percentage of their country's population than United States Jews have of theirs. The density ratio is now about 1:2; in the past it approached 1:5.⁷ Still to be determined is how this difference in density has affected history. Have Jews in both countries used similar strategies to overcome their numerical weakness or different ones? Have United States Jews been able to exert more power than their Canadian brethren? Has communal size had any impact on anti-Semitism? The distribution of Canada's Jewish population also differs somewhat from that found in the United States: has this made any difference? A good comparative study tracing the relationship between community size, distribution, and power in North America might answer these questions, yielding insights of far reaching significance.

5. Occupations. United States Jews entered manufacturing and the professions to a somewhat larger degree than Canadian Jews, who took more jobs, relatively speaking, in the sectors of transportation and trade.⁸

How do we account for this? What does it teach us about Jewish economic habits and values? A rigorous comparative study could teach us much about the factors which influence Jewish occupational choices, driving Jews toward some lines of work and away from others.

6. Language Loyalty. Canadian Jews have remained somewhat more attached to Yiddish and Yiddish culture than have American Jews. Does this merely reflect their later immigration, or are broader cultural factors at work? It is curious that the “ivrit b’ivrit” ideology — teaching Hebrew in Hebrew — took hold in the United States more firmly than in Canada. How can this be explained? Has Hebrew played a different symbolic role in the Jewish culture of Canada than in that of the United States.⁹

7. Subethnic Composition. Canadian Jewry never experienced a “great German period” in the sense in which this term is used in the United States. For this reason, the community is, as we have seen, both more homogeneous and more heavily East European than the United States Jewish community.¹⁰ What impact has this had? What are the benefits of homogeneity as against a more heterogeneous admixture? Did German Jewry affect United States Jewish history in a way that Canadian Jewish history has not been affected? Some believe that the absence of German-Jewish leadership explains *all* major differences between Jews in Canada and the United States. Only through detailed comparison can this theory even begin to be evaluated.

8. Reform Judaism and Zionism. In Canada, Reform Judaism has been weaker and Zionism stronger than in the United States.¹¹ This may again just reflect the absence of German-Jewish influence, but one wonders if other factors too were involved. Have Canadian Jews been more influenced by Great Britain than by the United States in these matters? Has the United States demanded a greater degree of accommodation and outward patriotism from Jews than has Canada? Have the different religious traditions of Canada and the United States affected views on these issues? Many more of these kinds of questions need to be asked. Enlarging the comparative framework to encompass other diaspora lands — particularly Australia and South Africa — would also prove valuable.

9. Inter-marriage. Morton Weinfeld has discovered that Jewish inter-marriage rates are only about half as great in Canada as in the United States.¹² Possibly this proves that the Jewish community is internally stronger than that of the United States, but might it not also suggest that Canadian Jews are less acculturated, more distant from non-Jews? Additional research is warranted. In this regard, it would be interesting to

know if Jewish and non-Jewish attitudes toward intermarriage differ on either side of the border. Is there some relationship between Jewish intermarriage rates in both countries and the intermarriage rates of Catholics and Protestants?

10. Education. Most United States Jews have obtained their elementary and high school education in non-sectarian public schools, where even before the outlawing of school prayer, displays of any form of religion were kept to a minimum. By contrast, Canadian public schools have been far more religiously oriented, particularly in Quebec. Partly for this reason, comparatively large numbers of Canadian Jews have long sent their children to Jewish day schools, something which until recent times was rarely done in the United States.¹³ Has this difference in upbringing had any impact on Jewish-Christian relations and Jewish self-identity in Canada and the United States? Does Jewish education help account for the above-mentioned differences in intermarriage rates? Do community priorities differ North and South of the border? These queries are of more than just historical significance. With the rising number of Jewish day schools in the United States, they have become important to policy makers as well.

In education, as in the other nine categories enumerated, the questions are better than the answers. Hours of research lie ahead; dozens of new hypotheses wait to be born; numerous old ones must still be tested. The phenomena discussed here are only some of the many that merit comparative study.

We need a conference on North American Jewish history: a forum where comparisons and contrasts could be discussed. Such a conference would alert people to the comparative method's enormous potential benefits. If successful, it would demonstrate both to United States Jewish historians and to Canadian ones that they have much to learn from one another. As I have tried to show in preliminary fashion, comparative North American history can yield new lines of inquiry where none previously existed. It can subject old lines of inquiry to more rigorous examination based on new data. It can generate and test theories of development. It can help scholars rid themselves of parochialism and tunnel vision.

In sum, the comparative method is a remarkable method, what Marc Bloch called "a powerful magic wand."¹⁴ It must be used cautiously, with due regard for its many potential abuses. When properly employed, however, it can work wonders. I hope we can put it to work in the service

of North American Jewish history.

NOTES

1. Seymour M. Lipset, "History and Sociology: Some Methodological Considerations," in R. Hofstadter and S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Sociology and History Methods* (New York, 1968), p. 35; Robin W. Winks, "Cliché and the Canadian-American Relationship," in Richard A. Preston (ed.) *Perspectives on Revolution and Evolution* (Durham, N.C. 1979), p. 18.
2. For recent work in comparative history, see *American Historical Review*, 85 (1980), pp. 763-857; 1055-1166; and C. Vann Woodward (ed.) *The Comparative Approach to American History* (New York, 1968). Examples in Jewish history include Moshe Davis, "Centres of Jewry in the Western Hemisphere: A Comparative Approach," *The Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 5 (June 1963), pp. 4-26; and Morton Weinfeld, "A Note on Comparing Canadian and American Jewry," *Journal of Ethnic Studies*, 5 (Spring 1977), pp. 95-103.
3. Preston, *Perspectives on Revolution and Evolution*, esp. pp. 268-87; S. M. Lipset, *Revolution and Counterrevolution* (New York, 1968).
4. Harold M. Waller, *The Governance of the Jewish Community of Montreal* (Center for Jewish Community Studies #5, Jerusalem, 1974); Davis, "Centres of Jewry," pp. 7-9.
5. Robert Presthus, *Elite Accommodation in Canadian Politics* (New York, 1973).
6. John Porter, "Melting Pot or Mosaic: Revolution or Reversion," in Preston (ed.) *Perspectives on Revolution and Evolution*, pp. 152-79; H. Palmer, "Mosaic versus Melting Pot? Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States," *International Journal* 31 (1975-6), pp. 488-528; Leo Driedger (ed.) *The Canadian Ethnic Mosaic* (Montreal, 1978).
7. Joseph Yam, "The Size and Geographic Distribution of Canada's Jewish Population: Preliminary Observations," *Canadian Jewish Population Studies*, III (January 1974); Sidney Goldstein, "American Jewry, 1970: A Demographic Profile," in M. Sklare (ed.) *The Jew in American Society* (New York, 1974), p. 101.
8. Joseph Kage, "The Dynamics of Economic Adjustment of Canadian Jewry — A Historical Review," *Studies and Documents on Immigration and Integration in Canada* (Montreal, 1970), p. 35; Goldstein, "American Jewry, 1970," p. 150.
9. Joshua A. Fishman, "Language Maintenance and Language Shift: Yiddish and Other Immigrant Languages in the United States," *YIVO Annual of Jewish Social Science*, 14 (1969), pp. 12-26; Nathan H. Winter, *Jewish Education in a Pluralist Society* (New York, 1966).
10. Jonathan D. Sarna, "Jewish Immigration to North America: The Canadian Expertise (1870-1900)," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 18 (June 1976), pp. 31-41; Lloyd P. Gartner, "North American Jewry," *Migration and Settlement; Proceedings of the Anglo-American Jewish Historical Conference* (London, 1971), pp. 114-27.
11. Albert Rose (ed.) *A People and Its Faith* (Toronto, 1959); Michael Brown, "The Beginnings of Reform Judaism in Canada," *Jewish Social Studies*, 34 (1972), pp. 322-42; Samuel B. Hurwich, "Zionism (Canada)," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, 16 (1971), pp. 109-11; Stuart Schoenfeld, "The Jewish Religion in North America: Canadian and American Comparisons," *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 3 (1978), pp. 209-31.
12. Morton Weinfeld cited by Schoenfeld, "Jewish Religion in North America," p. 224; Moshe Davis, "Mixed Marriage in Western Jewry: Historical Background to the Jewish Response," *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 10 (1968), pp. 177-220.
13. Schoenfeld, "Jewish Religion in North America," pp. 221-23.
14. Marc Bloch, "Toward a Comparative History of European Societies," in Frederick C. Lane and J. C. Riemersma, *Enterprise and Secular Change* (Homewood, Ill., 1953), pp. 494-521.