

## BOOK REVIEWS/COMPTES RENDUS

Weinfeld, Morton. *Like Everyone Else . . . But Different: The Paradoxical Success of Canadian Jews*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2001. 446 pp.

In contrast to anthologies that assemble the work of various authors, this study is unique as the only current, book-length, single-authored sociological assessment of Canada's Jews. As such, it is a remarkable work of synthesis in which a consistent theme develops over its 11 chapters and epilogue. Weinfeld writes of the pessimism commonly expressed by community leaders and counters with an optimistic assessment of Jewish success in Canada. He argues that Canadian Jews have wanted to be accepted by the larger community, but they have wanted to remain a distinct people, and he concludes that Canada has allowed them to do so.

Weinfeld begins with the question "Who are the Jews?" He examines Jewish ethnic and biological diversity, their links with Israel, and the many ways people identify as Jews. This is a good place to start for a sociologist. "Jewish" is a social label which individuals adopt (and sometimes reluctantly accept when it is imposed on them by others). By starting with the diversity of people who share this label, Weinfeld avoids a normative stance about "good" or "bad" Jews. He makes room for debates conducted in normative language about the Jewish future. This book, however, considers the Jewish future through sociological rather than normative questions. Does a minority group, for example, have the resources to maintain a distinctive identity in creative tension with the surrounding society?

Weinfeld turns to issues of demography, immigration and the building of community, occupational patterns, family life, community organization, cultural life, education, political behaviour, religious life, and anti-Semitism in order to answer this question. Evidently, there is much to indicate Jewish

success. As measured by self-identification on the census, the Jewish population in Canada has been growing. The communities founded by successive waves of immigration and concentrated in the largest cities were transformed culturally by later generations, but remained united socially. Jews have had exceptional patterns of upward economic mobility. Jewish family life has been more stable and child-centered than that of most Canadians, but it also has accommodated itself to transformations in the role of women, and is in the process of addressing the inclusion of gays and lesbians. The dense network of Canadian Jewish organizations would be the envy of every ethnic entrepreneur. The local Jewish federations bring some order into this diversity and successfully cultivate continuing Jewish philanthropy. Canadian Jews have been producers – as well as transmitters – of Jewish culture and they have made significant contributions to the cultural life of Canada. Jewish education, both for children and adults, has never been so well established in Canada as it is today. Jews have been accepted in Canadian politics, and the organized community has developed strong lobbying skills. The various branches of Judaism have prospered in Canada, with an intense Orthodox constituency balanced by vitality and creativity in the liberal branches. While anti-Semitism in Canada is still a cause for concern, previously it was much worse.

Weinfeld knows that this optimistic assessment may be challenged by other data, and his treatment of the topics listed above is more nuanced than the preceding summary would suggest. Intermarriage is common, for example. Jewish charity may be shifting to non-Jewish causes. Standards of Jewish education are still far from what they could be. Most Jews remain only peripherally attached to a synagogue community and many young people seek spirituality elsewhere. The new anti-Semitism has questioned Jewish legitimacy in ways that were once thought obsolete. On balance, however, Weinfeld acknowledges that Jews have prospered in Canada.

Weinfeld's writing is well informed, judicious, and thoughtful. Much of the charm of the book resides in a careful balancing of complex data. Weinfeld brings out the meaning embedded in his data through stories and jokes. The use of jokes is not methodologically trivial. Weinfeld reads Jewish humour, and he knows that one important way of knowing a group is to know the subject and substance of its jokes.

The book has many virtues, in fact. It integrates considerable literature – there are more than 50 pages of endnotes – in an accessible way. It deliberately works its way through many topics as it assesses the evidence for its argument. It will appeal to a wide range of readers and should be a standard volume in the libraries of Canadian Jews. Critics may question whether the assessment is overly optimistic, however. In fact, Weinfeld's book does not invite self-satisfaction; rather, it openly discusses the quality of Canadian Jewish life.

Thematically, *Like Everyone Else ... But Different* begins and ends with an appreciation of diversity. As Weinfeld comments in the epilogue, "fractious pluralism has . . . always been and remains, a source of strength, innovation and vitality" (248). A major contribution to Canadian Jewish studies, Weinfeld's book is also a triumph of sociology – it succeeds in stimulating readers to think, talk, and get involved in the social arenas of their lives.

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Greenstein, Michael, ed. *Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada: An Anthology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004. 232 pp.

*Contemporary Jewish Writing in Canada* is the latest in a series of anthologies of Jewish writing from Austria, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Hungary, Poland, South Africa, and Switzerland published by the University of Nebraska Press. The series, which appears to be far from complete, makes the point, once