

Ottawa's political program continued to dovetail with that of the Alliance. The nationalist xenophobia with which proponents of the Act were allied continued to flourish between the world wars, and the emergence of bolshevism, which sowed political disorder and atheism, strengthened the desire to protect religious practice and any laws that had been enacted for that purpose.

The political desirability of the Lord's Day Act, however, could not last forever. The necessity of waging war, particularly the Second World War, superseded any Sunday Sabbath laws on the books. When the Alliance protested the transportation, training, and entertaining of troops on Sundays, they were accused of pro-German sympathies. After World War II, the Sabbath laws were ignored and then shed gradually, as the government worried more about finding jobs for returning soldiers and preventing the onset of another depression. Ottawa's political agenda had changed, as had the mood of the general population. The Lord's Day Act was repealed in 1950, its crusading advocates having died out without anyone stepping forward to take their place.

Paul Laverdure brings a certain measure of quiet poignancy to his description of the slow death of the movement, its leaders, and their ideals. His book, however, is suffused with quiet triumph at the move from state-mandated religious practice to state secularization. Given the forces that ultimately propelled the Lord's Day Act into being, secularization in *Sunday in Canada* becomes the triumph, not of irreligion, but of religious and cultural tolerance in Canada.

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Pomson, Alex and Randal F. Schnoor, *Back to School: Jewish Day School in the Lives of Adult Jews*. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2008. 184 pp.

Research indicates that increasing numbers of American Jews no longer turn to the synagogue to explore and express their

Jewish identities. Alex Pomson of the Hebrew University and Randal Schnoor of York University believe that day schools have become a viable alternative community for some liberal Jews.

To explore this hypothesis, the authors engaged in an ethnographic study of the Paul Penna Downtown Jewish Day School (DJDS) in Toronto. Founded in 1998, DJDS is a small, K-8 school housed in the building of the downtown JCC. The authors chose it as the focus of their research, because the majority of the school's parents live on the margins of Jewish communal life. Indeed, an essential piece of the book's working hypothesis—and ultimate conclusion—is that day schools “possess greatest significance” for “parents who come to [the] schools with limited prior Jewish social and cultural capital.” (147) To illustrate, however, that Jewish day schools have a measure of impact on *all* adults, Pomson and Schnoor interviewed parents at six other schools (both Orthodox and non-Orthodox) in Toronto and in an unidentified city in the midwest of the United States. The inclusion of these other schools helps prove that the book's findings point to an effect of Jewish day schools that is not confined to a single school and is also not particular to the Canadian context.

DJDS parents forge a personal relationship to their children's schooling early on. They seek a framework in which *they*—not only their children—can feel comfortable. This is not easy for them to achieve. DJDS parents consciously seek to “disengage from organized and denominational [Jewish] life.” (24) They perceive their downtown lifestyles as being inherently different from the suburban culture that they associate with mainstream Jewish life. Twenty-five percent are either intermarried, in a same-sex relationship, or single—constituencies that do not always find a comfortable home in the Jewish community. Most are ideologically committed to public schools (a commitment that Pomson and Schnoor did not find in the other parent bodies studied). They would not enroll their children in DJDS if it was not a downtown school that shares their ideological commitments and accepts their Jewish and general lifestyle choices.

In describing what makes DJDS a good fit for *them*, some parents voice a disturbing lack of connection to other Jews. One parent states that part of what attracted her to the school is that “[parents] were dressed similar to us...I mean there were definitely done up people at this school, which I was *shocked* to see [emphasis added], but for the most part...It was more like the downtown schlumpy intellectual Jews as opposed to like the Forest Hill crowd, you know like the nanny, cell phone, minivan crowd” (50) It is ironic that parents who are drawn to DJDS for its non-judgmental embrace of its parental body hold such stereotypical views of others. Yet this ‘us’ and ‘them’ dynamic is found within DJDS itself. Because the majority of the school’s teachers live uptown, parents believe that it is their input that insures that the school remains a “progressive” institution (a conclusion that Pomson and Schnoor do not share). The authors’ concern that “what started out as an alternative and counter-cultural project for the (less than) moderately affiliated will remain just that, with little lasting benefit for the community” (163) seems justified.

Once parents choose a Jewish school, this decision impacts on their Jewish lives in a multiplicity of ways. While a minority of DJDS families report that having a child in a Jewish school has not impacted their level of religious observance—either because it was already fairly high or due to a lack of interest in religion—most find themselves embracing some of the rituals that their children bring into their homes, albeit in very idiosyncratic and often non-halakhic ways. Theological questions that arise as children process the curriculum at home lead to family discussions that would not have occurred otherwise. School events and committee work become additional venues of adult Jewish learning. For many parents, DJDS becomes their primary Jewish community. They seek religious guidance from the school’s principal and celebrate Jewish festivals largely within the school’s walls. Indeed, for some parents, DJDS may be their only community. “I got a lot out of the school as a community...My family is small. There’s Joanne and the dog, myself

and the hamsters” (130). The impact of the school on parents is apparent in their personal statements. “Leaving last year [when my child graduated] was the hardest thing *I* ever did” (95) or, “I’m not sure if it’s about what my child gets or what I get” (60).

Pomson and Schnoor reference research on American Jewish identity to interpret what they uncover at DJDS. They present the founding of the school as part of a growing trend among liberal Jews to send their children to Jewish schools. While much is gained by placing the school in this context, it leads to pronouncements that do not always reflect the Canadian reality. Current enrollment data indicates that Montreal’s liberal Jews may be less interested in Jewish day schools today than they were twenty years ago. Montreal’s Sephardi and North African Jews—many of whom are not Orthodox in a conventional sense—do not exhibit the highly personalist Jewish understandings that the authors present (following Cohen and Eisen) as the dominant characteristic of non-Orthodox Jewish identity in North America (153 and elsewhere).

Pomson and Schnoor are sensitive ethnographers who avoid the temptation to dismiss or ridicule the occasionally outlandish statements of their interview subjects. Each of their findings is clearly and succinctly situated in a rich theoretical framework. They show that Jewish day schools are places of Jewish learning, personal growth, and communal affiliation for marginally affiliated Jews and, to a lesser but still significant extent, for all Jews. They counter the assumption of many previous studies that liberal Jews send their children to day schools primarily because they are an affordable form of high quality secular education. They make a passionate plea for an expansion of the day school’s mandate to include adult education. *Back to School* is full of suggestions—albeit preliminary ones—on how school administrators and Jewish communal leaders can do so. The book is of interest to Jewish educators, communal leaders, and students of contemporary Jewry.

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