

community, not observant Jews. That has a significant impact on their answers to her questions. Where are the more observant informants, and how might they have changed the picture Habib paints? And what about European Jews, whose experience of integration and relationship to matters of nation and territory are often quite different from those of North Americans? I am not suggesting that Habib ought to have studied the entire Diaspora, but simply that her sample of informants has influenced her findings in ways she may not realize.

Third, I wonder if it is really appropriate to label as “post-Zionist” the nuanced attitudes that Habib describes. Ought “sympathy for the Palestinians,” which has been loudly voiced by a number of prominent figures in the Zionist movement (Martin Buber and Ahad HaAm, for example) from its earliest years, to be read as “post-Zionism?” Moreover, Habib herself notes that only a few of her informants with whom she spoke were knowledgeable enough to “discuss in depth the debates about the alternative or new history, or the Palestinian and non-Zionist counter-narratives of the founding of the state of Israel” (p. 262). But these issues are at the core of post-Zionism. Not being able to discuss them indicates that her informants were more ill-informed than post-Zionist.

In the final analysis, Habib’s work is important—not flawless, but important—because it raises some painfully complex issues of nation and land. It is an interesting first step in refining the discussion of diaspora identity vis-à-vis Israel in the Canadian context. It should, however, be read carefully and critically.

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Kolber, Leo, with Ian H. Macdonald. *Leo: a Life*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003. 314 pp.

Everyone loves a good story, and retired Senator Leo Kolber has plenty of stories to tell. That’s not surprising. He had ample opportunity to observe the “rich and famous”. In his various

roles as Charles Bronfman's best friend, manager of the Bronfmans' Cemp Investments for more than 3 decades, chairman of Cadillac Fairview, and "Quebec bagman" for the federal Liberal Party, he met many famous people and he made many important decisions. Thus his anecdotes are useful additions to our knowledge of a myriad cast of important characters in Canadian and American business, politics, and the arts, and the role of Canadian Jewish entrepreneurs.

Much of this autobiography reads like a triumphal procession from "rags to riches" by a man clearly delighted with his good fortune. Rightly so. Leo's father, a dentist of modest means, died when his son was a freshman at McGill. His family had to relocate themselves to an unfamiliar neighbourhood and new lifestyle. But their mother proved a businesswoman of considerable acumen, and both Leo and his brother learned from her. Leo was making real estate deals and considerable profits even before he graduated from McGill Law School. His skill at selecting properties that could be quickly developed and sold for profit caught the eye of his best friend Charles Bronfman. By 1953, Charles and his brother Edgar were paying Leo \$500 a month just to bring in real estate deals. At the tender age of 28, the newly married Kolber became managing director of Cemp at \$12,000 per year and 10% of every deal he brought in. Just 3 years later, the Bronfmans compensated Kolber with \$500,000 for reducing his profit share to 5%. He quickly and astutely invested the windfall—and never looked back.

This marked the beginning of Kolber's mercurial ascent. With the support of patriarch Sam Bronfman, who was thrilled that Leo, unlike Charles or Edgar, did not have a Westmount upbringing and was good "at pinching pennies", Kolber became a key advisor to the Bronfmans. Throughout his twenty-three-year relationship with "Mr. Sam", Kolber was only verbally chastised once—quite a record considering Mr. Bronfman's well-known and carefully honed reputation for dispensing both sound advice and invective simultaneously. Kolber consistently proved his worth to the Bronfman family.

He had a prodigious memory, considerable skills at decoding accounting statements, and was famously punctual and well organized. Certainly Kolber's greatest asset was his ability to retain his "outsider's perspective" and counsel the often fractious Bronfman siblings effectively in their business dealings.

Kolber would use these skills repeatedly through his career. He continued as an astute deal maker in commercial real estate, first in Montreal, and later throughout North America. As chairman of Fairview Corporation he pioneered the building and leasing of shopping malls in Canada. He later sold the concept of building the TD Centre to bank chairman Allen Lambert—though the choice of architect Mies van der Rohe came from Bronfman's daughter, Phyllis Lambert. The success of the TD Centre led to the building of the Eaton Centre in Toronto, the Pacific Centre in Vancouver, and a host of other important commercial real estate developments.

Kolber's association with the Bronfmans and his real estate activities soon drew him into the world of Liberal Party fundraising. He became a close friend of Prime Minister Trudeau—who appointed him to the Senate in 1983, because "there is a tradition that the party bagman is appointed to the Senate." (131). Kolber had certainly been an effective "bagman". He had raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for the cause through private parties at his residence at which Trudeau, "who had an enormous appetite and was anything but indifferent about food," (126) posed for pictures but didn't have to speak. He was also a supporter of Chretien's bid for the Liberal leadership and remained close to him for years. But, like all good businessmen, Kolber had friends in high places irrespective of party lines. He was on good terms with René Levesque (who was thrilled to have made money on a real estate deal) and very close to Brian Mulroney, whom he sided with on the free trade issue. These disparate personalities were drawn to Kolber's interest in life, his abilities as a businessman, political organizer, and *raconteur*, and his interest (shared with his wife) in developing the arts. The fact that the Bronfmans

placed Kolber on the MGM board certainly gave him a chance to hob nob with the famous and become good friends with Danny Kaye.

Leo: a Life thus covers a lot of ground. Most of it is good reading, and many of the anecdotes on people as diverse as Frank Sinatra, Alan Greenspan, and Danny Kaye, give us a glimpse of Leo's progress through his tightly scheduled but fun-filled world. His discussion of the collapse of the Seagram empire at the hands of Edgar Bronfman, Jr. provides a first-hand, and understandably acerbic point of view of how the best-run family businesses can unravel. One of the merits of *Leo* is that Kolber, with the able assistance of MacDonald, has mainly accomplished the goal of not producing "a vanity biography" (though many of the cast can be found in *Vanity Fair*). MacDonald has done effective research to anchor Leo's observations of key characters with their treatment by historians or biographers, but for the most part the story is told "in his [Leo's] own words and very much in his own voice." (280) At times, this means a good deal of repetition and some narrative meandering. But Leo's passion, intelligent observations, and considerable accomplishments make his Alger-like tale palatable. Indeed, his numerous narratives will provide historians from fields as Canadian Zionism and Quebec business with some new insights, or at least some narratives to underscore their theses.

In sum, this book illustrates how far Canadian Jews have come since Porter wrote *The Vertical Mosaic*. It also documents the important role that some "Establishment" figures, such as TD's Lambert and Simpson's Edgar Burton, played in breaking down corporate resistance to Jews' entering the upper ranks of Canadian business. There are relatively few errors in this handsomely produced book, whose fine index helps one keep track of the characters and makes up for the aforementioned textual repetitiveness. The only error is that Fluor Corporation, not "Flour Corporation" bought out St. Joseph's Lead. (68) I also wonder if it was worth it for Leo to mention that his wife had an affair, especially since they resolved their

differences in less than a year, and after that “she was the best wife and mother you could ask for.” (115). These are strange words from a man proud of always moving on. But these are minor caveats. *Leo: a Life* offers a fine explanation of how Canadian Jews have become so comfortable in Canadian society that they are, as Morton Weinfeld rightly observed, “like everyone else but different.”

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Laxer, James. *Red Diaper Baby: A Boyhood in the Age of McCarthyism*. Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004. 184 pp.

In his latest book, *Red Diaper Baby: A Boyhood in the Age of McCarthyism*, James Laxer takes the reader on a journey into his own past as he examines and re-visits his youth—a child growing up in Canada in a communist household. A prolific writer and professor of political science at York University, Laxer’s work is a highly readable, compelling, personal account. He immediately draws in his readers; from the first anecdote on the first page, *Red Diaper Baby* proves a truly accessible memoir. Laxer offers a well-developed portrait of a young boy growing up in a communist family in Ontario and Quebec, demonstrating the challenges of this somewhat anomalous background, delving into the struggles of navigating a double identity. Through his vivid recollections, the reader is invited along on the journey as young James grows up and begins to question the communist party line and his family’s connection to it. The book ultimately succeeds as a powerful exploration of this chapter in the boy’s life and in Canadian history.

The book details many of Laxer’s personal struggles with his identity. He articulates his feelings about being half-Jewish, his life in both Toronto and Montreal (a reminiscence of Baron Byng High school immediately conjures up the work of Mordecai Richler), his work handing out Communist Party fliers, his stint at Camp Naivelt (a haven for Toronto’s left-wing