

Franklin Bialystok, *Faces in the Crowd: The Jews of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2022), 436 pp., ISBN: 978-1442604414.

Faces in the Crowd, the latest effort to recount the history of Canadian Jewry in a single, sweeping volume, marks a significant contribution to the field of Canadian Jewish history. Franklin Bialystok's confident storytelling reflects his ability to distill and curate a staggering array of historiography and literary output created over the past forty years—work by a range of writers, journalists, artists, musicians, and scholars, including recent studies by historians David S. Koffman and Pierre Anctil. Propelled by its narrative dexterity, considerable interpretative depth, thematic clarity, and novel historiographical approach, *Faces in the Crowd* confirms the scholarly vitality of Canadian Jewish Studies. Bialystok, to his credit, is no hagiographer, and he underscores communal fault lines both past and present.

Bialystok delineates his approach clearly from the outset. *Faces in the Crowd* divides Canadian Jewish history into four distinct phases. It argues that the foundations for the Jewish community were built from 1760 to 1900 and community building took place from 1900 to 1945, followed by a period of communal maturation until 2000. The last section traces developments in the twenty-first century. Each of the first three sections is further divided into a number of chapters that serve to support Bialystok's thesis that the story of Canadian Jewish life proceeds through the successive stages of settlement, adaptation, and diversity with each stage unfolding in accordance with regional particularities. These become the prisms of his subsequent analysis.

To better understand some of the novelties of Bialystok's interpretation, it is instructive to compare how *Faces in the Crowd* and Gerald Tulchinsky's *Canada's Jews: A People's History* (2008), the last major single-volume study of Canadian Jewish history, address the timeline of community building in the first half of the twentieth century. The narratives differ subtly yet significantly. Tulchinsky argues that the basic apparatus of pan-Canadian Jewish communal identity had emerged by the end of World War I; Bialystok locates this accomplishment at the end of World War II. This is a sensible approach that takes into account the fact that most of the national Jewish organizations that sprang up during or immediately after World War I quickly disintegrated until Hitler's rise in the 1930s catalyzed their rebirth. Bialystok's approach affirms the latest scholarly consensus, which locates the foundations of present-day Jewish institutional completeness in communal infrastructure established by 1945.

Bialystok's examination of 1900 to 1945 as a period of communal development also emphasizes that the immigrants of the interwar years were essentially similar in terms of geographical origin to their predecessors who came before 1914. Both

groups of immigrants shared Yiddish as a mother tongue and cultural vehicle. Indeed, as *Faces in the Crowd* points out, the vast majority of Jewish immigrants to Canada between 1881 and 1939 remained closely linked to their European relatives through regular correspondence, remittances, and attempts at familiar reunification despite Canada's immigration barriers. As a result, these were the most vibrant years of Yiddish culture in Canada. These immigrants, as Bialystok conveys in considerable detail, sought to transplant their European milieu in Canada, creating an interwoven story of cultural efflorescence and immigrant adaptation that defined the fabric of Jewish neighbourhoods in Montreal and other cities.

Faces in the Crowd provides the reader with a veritable “beginners’ dictionary” of key Yiddish phrases to further evoke this immigrant experience. Bialystok’s love of the language, the era, its people, and its institutions is abundantly evident as he explains and contextualizes such phrases as *es a bisl* (“eat a bit”) to discuss Jewish food and restaurants in this period and *machen a leben* (“making a living”) to describe Jewish occupations. These phrases, among others, are deployed not as mere nostalgia (though I confess to missing the sound of Yiddish at Daiter’s Creamery in Toronto when I grew up), but as a portal to a rich description of Jewish life in this era. Bialystok makes excellent use of contemporary Yiddish poetry—a bountiful resource rarely mined as a source—to weave a clear account of the daily lives of Jewish immigrants and their institutions.

In his treatment of communal development in the first half of the twentieth century, Bialystok captures the diversity of institutional expansion as the Canadian Jewish population increased tenfold between 1901 and 1931. As Bialystok explains, rapid communal growth demanded that Canadian Jews “adapt, whether as descendants of first settlers or recent immigrants” (128). He concludes that “the plethora of organizations reflected the diversity of the community in all its religious and political and cultural and national elements” (128–29). He likewise pays attention to groups and individuals—boxers and thugs, bootleggers and gamblers—outside the “mainstream” between 1900 and 1945. While much of the book explores immigrant milieus in Canada’s three largest Jewish communities of Montreal, Toronto, and Winnipeg, Bialystok devotes considerable space to small Jewish communities, in all provinces, and often provides surprising detail about their unique characteristics. The Jews of Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, established a Yiddish theatre, while the Hebrew school of Saint John, New Brunswick, taught 100 students in the 1920s. Many readers will be pleasantly surprised by the vitality and diversity of these communities.

Bialystok’s emphasis on communal diversity, his book’s most novel theme, carries into the postwar period, and he traces its development amid both old and new sources of Jewish immigration. He argues that Jewish participation on both the home and battlefronts in World War II and the rise of the Canadianized interwar generation help

account for the changes in mother tongue, occupational categories, attitudes, and sense of Canadian belonging that accompanied the rush to suburbia. The narrative captures these trends by focusing on representative individuals (“faces”) from across the Canadian Jewish landscape. Bialystok ranges far in these portraits, surveying the diversity of Canada’s postwar Jewish community with important attention paid to Holocaust survivors and Sephardi immigrants. He does not shy away from delineating the difficulties Russian-speaking Jews experienced in Toronto, due in part to unrealistic communal expectations of the “ease” with which they would “fit in.” Indeed, like Holocaust survivors and the Sephardic Jews who settled in Toronto in the postwar years, Russian-speaking emigres of the 1970s and beyond encountered a Jewish community that had preconceived notions about immigrant acculturation and found little initial acceptance from their fellow Jews at both the institutional and individual levels.

In keeping with its theme of diversity, *Faces in the Crowd* uses self-definition or personal affirmation of Jewishness as its definition of who is Jewish. I was delighted to discover that composer Percy Faith, opera singer Maureen Forrester, and Rush front man Geddy Lee (I should have known this) were Jewish. Bialystok’s love of the performing arts and literature is evident in the list of Jews who have left their mark. His account also attends to a more familiar list of Jewish “VIPs,” including politicians, scientists, and rabbis. At times, Bialystok’s biographical approach, in this section and others, displaces the main narrative, diverting the reader from the larger themes of his story.

Faces in the Crowd offers a thoughtful discussion of the history of antisemitism in Canada and how Jewish organizations responded. Its analysis of the various “shades” of antisemitism that coalesced into anti-Jewish immigration policy before World War II is carefully nuanced to reflect both regional differences and major antisemitic tropes in Canada. Bialystok’s balanced account acknowledges the reality of Quebec antisemitism but he is careful to avoid the trap of citing the often bombastic rhetoric of both nationalists such as Henri Bourassa and ultramontanists like Abbe Groulx as normative and to claim that Quebec antisemitism was more virulent than other varieties. It certainly was different, but no worse than other “shades” of Jewish hatred. Unfortunately, *Faces* confirms the rootedness of Canadian antisemitism.

The final section of *Faces in the Crowd* breaks new ground by extending the narrative of Canadian Jewish history to the first two decades of our century. The book is among the first academic studies to provide a clear narrative of the collapse of the Canadian Jewish Congress—a process finalized in 2011—and its replacement by the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs (CIJA). Bialystok rightly notes the secrecy of this process and the fact that it was driven by a “coterie of major donors” (313). One senses the author’s regret at this process—he played an important role in Congress’ Holocaust

commemoration work—but, at the same time, he underscores the donors' concerns about Congress spending too much time on non-Jewish advocacy, a perception that the organization was too linked to the Liberal Party, and its increasingly outdated style of advocacy. Bialystok carefully delineates the ascension of CIJA at Congress' expense, showing sympathy for Congress and its staff and members while acknowledging the legitimacy of its critics' perceptions. This is precisely what helps make the narrative important: it tells the story, provides the historical background, and presents a critical apparatus for those wishing to investigate more deeply.

The book's final section also focuses on the far-reaching effects of intra-ethnic diversity by providing demographic overviews culled from census statistics of the changing face of the Jewish community. He describes a community that has come of age in terms of its position in Canadian life. But there is tension present as well. In Bialystok's telling, Jewish sub-ethnic diversity and increasingly dissonant community sentiments about Israeli politics and Diaspora relations characterizes the twenty-first century. On a more positive note, he observes that Jews now feel secure enough as Canadians to focus on various and often innovative ways of discovering or building connections to their Jewish heritage. He ably summarizes how this has played out in different denominational streams of Judaism and in the expanding role of women in communal and religious life. Most importantly, Bialystok writes about "Jewish minorities" and the challenges many have faced because they don't fit pre-conceived communal notions of "being Jewish," which in turn has driven communal change at many levels as the realization that a commitment to communal inclusivity goes hand in hand with diversity.

Bialystok's style of research, narrative, and analysis makes *Faces in the Crowd* suitable for several major audiences. The book, with its well-organized structure, numerous chapter subheadings, and wealth of background historical information, deserves to be the primary text in introductory courses on Canadian Jewish life at the university level. Years of classroom experience have taught Bialystok not to assume a reader's general knowledge of key Canadian and world history events. Acknowledging that Canadian Jewish history cannot be understood in a vacuum, Bialystok's narrative supplies the requisite background in a pithily efficient manner. Indeed, the book's wide-ranging scope will make it easier for instructors to quickly acquire a knowledge base that may well encourage more academics to add a Canadian Jewish Studies course to their class roster, facilitating a much-needed expansion of the field and increasing awareness of Canadian Jewish history and culture among Canadians in a diverse country that officially prizes diversity. Ethnic Studies scholars, moreover, should mine Bialystok's book, and its excellent bibliography, for comparative analyses of Jews and other ethnic minorities in Canada. General readers interested in Canadian Jewish history will find this book a satisfying and accessible account that resonates on many levels because of its far-ranging scope and engagement with

both academic analysis and popular culture. Bialystok should be commended for authoring a book that will add much knowledge about Canada's Jews to what will hopefully be a wide audience.

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