



Jews of Brooklyn (Brandeis Series in American Jewish History, Culture, and Life)

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Flatbush Avenue, Borough Park, Coney Island and Brighton Beach, Brooklyn Bridge, Loehman's and Lundy's, Mrs. Stahl's potato knishes, the Dodgers, Barbra Streisand and Woody Allen, front stoops and back porches, Hasids and Socialists, a place, a feeling, a state of mind -- Brooklyn and American Jewry grew up together in the 20th century. From the first documented settlement of Jews in Brooklyn in the 1830s to the present day, Jewish presence -- always between a quarter to a third of Brooklyn's entire population -- has been key to the development of the borough. Jewish families and foodways, businesses, schools, and synagogues, simchas and celebrations, have been an essential component of Brooklyn life. In *Jews of Brooklyn*, over forty historians, folklorists, museum curators, musicians, and ordinary Brooklyn Jews with something to say about egg creams and Brooklyn accents, present a vivid, living record of this astonishing cultural heritage. Essays in the first section, "Coming to Brooklyn" explore the creative and often bewildering foundations of immigrant life. Juxtaposed are arrival experiences of eastern European Jews, Syrian Jews, Jews from Israel, and Holocaust survivors, and the kinds of shops, factories, synagogues, and schools they established there. "Living in Brooklyn," looks at neighborhoods, culture, and institutions from the 1930s to the present. Evocative portraits of Bensonhurst, Borough Park, Brighton Beach, Brownsville, Canarsie, Crown Heights, Flatbush, and Williamsburg describe street life and local characters, offering an intimate look at Jewish family life, even as they convey a sense of evolving neighborhoods and changing times. "Leaving Brooklyn / Returning to Brooklyn" features essays on famous Brooklynites such as Barbra Streisand and Danny Kaye as well as numerous personal reminiscences and family portraits of ordinary folk, making it clear that Brooklyn, for better and for worse, maintains a lasting presence in the lives of Jews born and raised there. Ilana Abramovitch's Introduction provides general historical context. The book also features a detailed timeline of Jewish immigration to and settlement in borough's neighborhoods, and of key events and turning points in the history of Jewish Brooklyn, as well as a Selected Bibliography.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Say "Brooklyn" and whatever images first come to mind are due in part to the Jews who shaped the borough, as this large, complex collection definitively demonstrates. Offering historical examinations of population shifts, synagogues and egg creams alongside personal experiences of community, this encyclopedia the variations are a metaphor for the broad spectrum of experiences of a people in a place. Major themes in traditional Brooklyn-Jewish life food, tolerance, politics, pride, poverty, family pull together the shifting perspectives of this wonderful reference. The neighborhoods, shops, institutions and characters examined here are imbued with a tangible identity: Brighton Beach, for example, where hot knishes were sold to weary bathers spending the day playing handball, or Williamsburg, where Hasidim still parade righteously drunk through the streets on Purim. Many entries, such as PW publisher Fred Ciporen's intimate portrait of a family's thoughts "On Wisconsin," present Brooklyn as a self-contained realm that sees the rest of the world as another universe. From the deep happiness displayed in Eve Jochnowitz's essay on the making of shumra matzo for Passover to the deep passion of a seltzer man for his authentic product in Zachary Levin's contribution, Brooklyn Jewry's commitment to the details of its traditions is shown. Discussions of Danny Kaye, Murder Inc., Sam Ash and integrated clubs in the time of "separate but equal" foster an understanding of the borough's impact beyond its borders. Readers will be pulled in by an intoxicating nostalgia for this multifaceted locale's personality, even if they've never been there.

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From Library Journal

Abramovitch (Museum of Jewish Heritage) and Galvin (La Guardia Community Coll., CUNY) have edited a nostalgic yet clear-eyed account of the Jewish experience in Brooklyn, NY, over the course of the 20th century. Historians, scholars, and journalists explore the foundation of immigrant life in Brooklyn as overlapping waves of Eastern European Jews, Syrian Jews, Jews from Israel, and Holocaust survivors established colorful ethnic enclaves with shops and factories, synagogues, and schools. Brooklyn was the ideal of the American melting pot, but perhaps the Jews had the greatest impact on the borough's character. In turn, Brooklyn exerted a powerful influence on the Jews who lived in its neighborhoods, as made clear in short essays on everything from the similar accents heard in Bensonhurst and Borough Park to locally produced Jewish athletes and comedians.

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Review

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Alice Christensen:

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