

SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

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Website Review

L'dor V'dor/From Generation to Generation: Jewish Women and their Impact on New Orleans. Curated by Rosalind Hinton, Susan Tucker, Bobbie Malone, and Lenora Costa. NOLA Jewish Women. <https://nolajewish-women.tulane.edu>. Reviewed May 2021.

Back in the late 1990s, the founders of the Jewish Women's Archive sought to document the lives and experiences of Jewish women in a way that would not only benefit scholars, but also bring these rich histories to the general public. Although the Internet had yet to reach a mainstream audience, the architects of the archive nonetheless opted to draw on the possibilities of a medium that had the potential, according to founder Gail Twersky Reimer in her remarks at the 2014 Biennial Scholar's Conference of the American Jewish Historical Society, to make it "impossible for anyone to justify leaving women out of the story because there was no place to go to find out about Jewish women." In the process, they developed a resource that transformed how the general public would come to conceptualize the Jewish past on a national, transnational, and global scale.

Over a quarter of a century later, the virtual exhibit *L'dor V'dor/From Generation to Generation: Jewish Women and their Impact on New Orleans* does an excellent job of harnessing the strategies developed by the Jewish Women's Archive for audiences interested in the local and regional history of the Crescent City. The project introduces visitors to fifty-two Jewish women who shaped the artistic, civic, educational, and activist dimensions of the New Orleans region. In spite of the transformative impact

(<https://nolajewishwomen.tulane.edu>)

these women had on their local context, most of them are not highlighted in other online histories of Jews in New Orleans, which tend to focus on institutions and the contributions of great men. Much as the Jewish Women's Archive made it impossible for Internet researchers to write women out of the national or global Jewish past based on the excuse that the information was just too difficult to access, *L'dor V'dor* does the same for the Jewish history of New Orleans as it provides ample and easily accessible documentation of the Jewish women who shaped the city.

L'dor V'dor is quite forthcoming about the debt it owes to the Jewish Women's Archive as it continues and expands the mission of bringing Jewish women's history to the masses. Oral historian Rosalind Hinton, one of the curators of this exhibit, served as the lead historian for *Katrina's Jewish Voices*, an exhibit sponsored by the Jewish Women's Archive that documented Jewish women's responses to the devastating 2005 hurricane. Indeed, in some ways this exhibit feels like a companion piece to *Katrina's Jewish Voices*, offering a sense of the long-standing activities of the Jewish women of New Orleans that enabled their resilience in the wake of Katrina's destruction.

Visitors to the site have the option of exploring four overlapping areas in which Jewish women influenced New Orleans: the arts, education, social justice, and civic enrichment. They will have the pleasure of

(<https://nolajewishwomen.tulane.edu/arts/ida-rittenberg-kohlmeyer>)

learning about extraordinary Jewish women like painter and sculptor Ida Rittenberg Kohlmeyer, whose abstract expressionist paintings and colorful, pictographic sculptures made her Louisiana's most renowned artist. They will encounter social worker Clara Marx Schwarz, longtime head of the Port and Dock program of the National Council of Jewish Women that helped settle Holocaust survivors in New Orleans in the years just after World War II. They will also discover women like Nora Navra, who was not famous during her lifetime but who nonetheless contributed posthumously to her still-segregated city by sponsoring a library for African Americans in 1954.

Not only is this virtual exhibit a crucial resource for those interested in the Jewish history of New Orleans, but it also has the potential to be a valuable teaching tool for scholars of Jewish history, public history, and memory studies. Because of the accessible structure and manageable size of this site, I can see this website engendering important discussions about how public-facing, digital exhibits are constructed and the ways in which curators make their choices as they decide what to emphasize. For instance, I could see creating a classroom activity asking students to talk about what they noticed about the group of women the curators chose to commemorate. What deliberate choices or inadvertent assumptions may have led the curators to choose this particular subset of accomplished,

politically left or left-of-center, middle-class, white/Ashkenazic women who gained prominence for the most part in the twentieth century? Why might it include profiles of Jewish women leaders in the arts, education, social justice, and civic enrichment but not include a category honoring women rabbis and other religious leaders? Recognizing that no exhibit can include every story, whose stories might be missing?

The exhibit's interactive component may well be able to increase its scope, even as it provides another opportunity for education and engagement. The "Tell a Story" feature encourages visitors to share information about impactful mentors, colleagues, and experiences, with the understanding that this information may at some point be incorporated into the exhibit. This, too, provides a valuable tool through which instructors at all levels—higher education, K-12, and continuing/community education—might encourage students not only to share their personal stories, but also to think about what goes into the creation and expansion of a historical narrative.

As a final note, I would like to reflect on the exhibit's title, *L'dor V'dor: From Generation to Generation*—a title certainly more poetic than "NOLA Jewish Women," the descriptive URL. I will admit that the name initially gave me pause, since its generational rhetoric hints at the pronatalist discourse of Jewish continuity that has long implied that birthing and raising Jewish progeny was the most important contribution that Jewish women could hope to offer their communities. I was pleased to notice that the content of this exhibit does not reinforce this discourse. On the contrary, the website turns this rhetoric on its head, utilizing the generational framework not to emphasize Jewish women's capacity for biological reproduction, but rather to underscore the ways that Jewish women offered their younger counterparts the skills, training, and connections they needed to make the largest possible impact on their city.

In the end, scholars and the general public will be able to learn from, and think with, this exhibit. It will most certainly transform the way that Internet researchers will conceptualize New Orleans Jewish history. It is an exhibit that upholds the original spirit of the Jewish Women's Archive and surely makes its founders proud.

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