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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

MarkKBauman@aol.com

Bryan Edward Stone, *Managing Editor*

bstone@delmar.edu

Scott M. Langston, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

sclangston@charter.net

Stephen J. Whitfield, *Book Review Editor*

swhitfie@brandeis.edu

Jeremy Katz, *Exhibit and Film Review Editor*

jrkatz@thebreman.org

Adam Mendelsohn, *Website Review Editor*

adam.mendelsohn@uct.ac.za

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Founding Managing Editor*

rheimovics@cfl.rr.com

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Book Reviews

Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way. By Hasia Diner. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015. 247 pages.

A number of recently published works have capaciously contributed to the understanding of American Jewish life by placing it into its global context. In this recent phase of historiography, scholars rightfully transgress the confinement of single-nation horizons to draw conclusions from findings elsewhere. Thus they consider the essence of the American Jewish experience: they explore in their work what is genuinely American and what may be expressions or results of transnational crosscurrents. This trend pays tribute to the fact that history, and thus by implication historiography as well, has to be relieved of national confinement by considering the foreign perspective. Few myths feature as prominently in the overlapping American popular and historiographical perception as the iconic Jewish peddler. Peddlers' stories and the conceptions evolving from them have marked our discussion of the American Jewish experience.

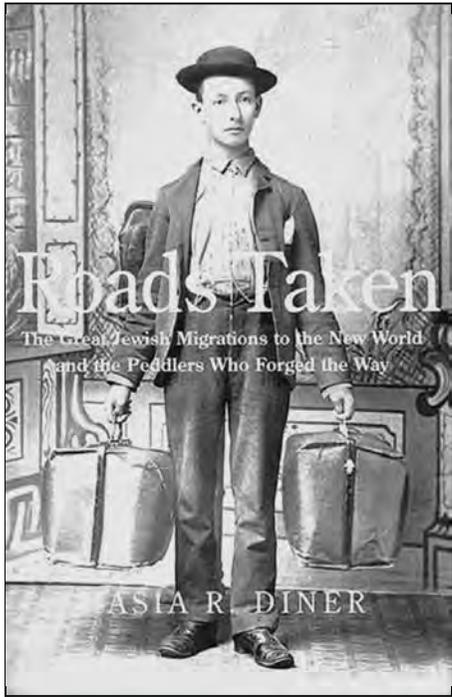
With *Roads Taken: The Great Jewish Migrations to the New World and the Peddlers Who Forged the Way*, Hasia Diner places this particular historical contact between merchant and customer within the global context of "this very long nineteenth century, from the 1780s through the 1920s" (13). Her title is programmatic. The "roads" are to be taken in Robert Frost's poetic sense, but more so in the literal sense of channels of mobility. It is to Diner's credit that she moves the discussion away from this as an American concept during this crucial period of business history. The monograph is structured in five chapters (plus introduction and conclusion), which follow the careers and challenges of a peddler's generic

biography: migration, taking to the road in the adopted land, interaction with customers, the lurking dangers, and life after peddling.

Diner intends her book to be an introduction to a fascinating topic—"the small tip of a veritable mountain range of what could be mined" (xiii). This "small tip" (an undeserved diminution of the approach) suggests that the opportunities of peddling pulled migrants to new territory; they were not just pushed there by horrible conditions at home (ix). The migration of peddlers was grounded in "Jewish population growth, urbanization and industrialization [in their old homes]," coupled with new homes offering the "Jews' long-standing economic niche in petty trade" (25, 30). Such themes have been discussed in the historiography of several societies. The author brings together these stories and thus creates a comprehensive narrative. She sees petty trade at the story's root (the old home), the stem (migration and acculturation), and the crown (the new life). In this reading, peddling remains the one stable constant for migrants as it "stretched across national borders, oceans, and continents" (50). Diner follows the emigrants from Europe, the Ottoman Empire, and Northern Africa across the waters.

The challenge of looking beyond one's own nation is the essence of the global perspective, as "each place had its own history, and its history marked the Jewish peddlers" (49). For Diner's approach, those local histories are to be found especially in the New World: the Dominions and other parts of the British Empire, but also Britain itself, as well as the Americas. Her "bird's eye view," however, centers on the United States, as "more than 80 percent [of Jewish immigrants worldwide] came to America" (xi). The peddling profession offered stability in times of the migrants' personal upheaval. For them, it seems, only the landscape, language, and customs changed. The business remained the same.

Some assertions of *Roads Taken* are thought-provoking. "Peddling does not . . . provide the only way to understand Jewish modernity," as Diner explains, "but it surely contributed to it" through experiences, contacts, and interactions, but also the necessary adaptations based on the profession (3). "To sell their wares, the peddlers had no choice but to acquire literally and figuratively new languages, to learn the details of the cultural systems in which they found themselves" (4). It was indeed their willingness to be mobile in every sense that shaped the business.



The constant supply of immigrants brought with them such mobility and therefore made the business in the first place. Producers and wholesalers in the cities of production recruited immigrants from the ships in order to peddle in the hinterland, whether the green counties of Ireland, the Amazon region of Brazil, or the American South. In the United States, the main port of entry, New York, handily offered products either made in or shipped to the city as it supplied the immigrants carrying them away. The peddler was just one participant “in a single integrated economy” (47, 48).

Roads Taken places the American South neatly into the broad context of a global comparison by implicitly emphasizing the lack of southern distinctiveness in this chapter of Jewish history. Many immigrants chose the same occupation, the same business, through the same strategy of cultural adaptation as elsewhere. Not even the interaction with slaves differed markedly. In the antebellum South “peddlers who came onto plantations sold to both planters and slaves” (102). Peddlers did not foster abolitionism, as the planters feared, but, as Diner convincingly claims, fostered the slaves’ individualism and personal agency as conscious customers—as they did in Cuba and likely also in Brazil. Peddlers did not contribute to bringing down slavery by connecting slaves to the world in any of the few regions where slavery had survived past the 1830s. They did, however, individualize black customers after abolition in the American South.

Immigrants in the South, such as the Wallaces in North Carolina and the Pearlstines in South Carolina, did indeed climb the social and business ladders with peddling as the first rung. Others eventually ran

stores in “Brazil . . . Mexico, Cuba, Jamaica, Rhodesia, Pennsylvania, Georgia, Dublin . . . Australia” (172-74). The stories were comparable all over the world. Yet a region left a mark when, for instance, a former peddler opened a “combined optical and jewelry store in Glasgow” (176), became a cotton broker in South Carolina, or ran a movie theater in Dublin (181). Diner makes clear that peddling was not the last resort for immigrants but rather a well-calculated choice offering the greatest prospects. Peddlers were doing it willingly and skillfully. Moreover, the demands and means of taking the same occupation call into question historians’ familiar emphasis on the conflicts that divided Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews, German and east European. Peddling was the great equalizer among Jews wherever they went.

Roads Taken argues equally convincingly that this occupation did not constitute a Jewish monopoly. Peddling also attracted Irish, Arabs, and Germans, as well as Yankees in the American South and Chinese in Cuba. It might be asked, then, why Jewish history especially is so crucial for the development of those countries, as Diner claims? Peddlers belonged to a “mass of ordinary people who in their ordinariness made history,” according to the author, and “transformed the Jewish people and the countries to which they immigrated” (ix). For a time, peddlers undoubtedly filled a gap between industrial production and lagging infrastructure in an essential way. In remote places they fed a hunger for glimpses of the wider world, as they “educated farmers and miners in the lifestyles of the better-off class” (4). Peddlers thus enhanced the demand for goods. In that way, they did indeed transform societies and accelerated the process of modernization.

Diner’s fifth chapter, “Road Rage: Jewish Peddlers and the Perils of the Road,” demonstrates persuasively that resentment against peddlers for their rootlessness heightened hostility to Jews. She mentions the most prominent incidents, such as General Ulysses S. Grant’s Order No. 11, which expelled Jews from parts of the Upper South in 1862, and the eviction resolution passed in Thomasville, Georgia, the same year. The United States is nevertheless generally presented as a haven amid tides of resentment. She may well be right, but the case that Diner makes is not airtight. *Roads Taken* also claims that “much anti-Jewish peddler talk and action took place in Catholic countries” (120), but it does not convincingly explain why peddlers fared decisively better in the United

States. Diner repeatedly emphasizes that Jewish peddlers often adopted the patriotism of their new land. In this fashion, the United States served as the focus of longing throughout the period that this book covers. But Diner's argument can be overstated. Forming "robust Jewish communities" in South America apparently made them "attractive enough to stay in rather than going north to the United States" (34). Were such peddlers not making a home there just as much as their coreligionists were doing in the United States? Had they really simply failed to reach America?

Peddling in developing regions of the world was also alluring, because opportunities beckoned where middlemen were needed to close the gap between producers and remote customers. The United States could boast of "the world's most dynamic economy," which "made the road to integration smoother and swifter for immigrant Jewish peddlers than elsewhere" (205). But the transcontinental republic also probably had the weakest infrastructure among the large and advanced economies of the second half of the nineteenth century. As a consequence of the vast distances between communities, the United States presented itself as the most attractive region for an outdated business model of peddling that western Europe was already rendering obsolete. The second most dynamic economy in the world was Germany's. A thorough consideration of peddling and its aftermath in Germany or in any non-English-speaking industrialized country in Europe, might have perfected Diner's study. Yet a striking feature of *Roads Taken*, which addresses a global phenomenon, is the limited number of foreign language sources. Delving further into available nonanglophone material would have completed this scholarly endeavor. Despite its frequent references to other territories, *Roads Taken* is primarily the story of peddling in the United States and the British Empire.

Hasia Diner's extensive analysis offers a mesmerizing glimpse of the complexity and common patterns of an immigrant's occupation in new worlds. The author manages to share her fascination with a seemingly familiar subject and endows it with a fresh perspective. Her emphasis on American exceptionalism is debatable, as the book itself refutes the notion completely. Because *Roads Taken* offers a global perspective beyond artificial boundaries of historiography, this study is much needed and will undoubtedly spark debate. In the end, readers whom *Road Taken* has enlightened will likely agree wholeheartedly with

Diner: "A description from South Africa could just as easily be applied to South Carolina" (48).

Anton Hieke, Bobbau in Anhalt, Germany

The reviewer may be contacted at an.hieke@googlemail.com.

Wednesdays in Mississippi: Proper Ladies Working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964. By Debbie Z. Harwell. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2014. 257 pages.

On November 24, 2014, President Barack Obama conferred the Presidential Medal of Freedom posthumously upon James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner. In 1964 this martyred trio were working on the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project, which was organized under the auspices of the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO). They were slain by members of the Ku Klux Klan as they helped African Americans register to vote. For the dedication of their lives to the cause of freedom and justice, these rank-and-file workers of the civil rights movement, neither charismatic leaders nor members of high-profile organizations, received the nation's highest honor after half a century.

Recently, the idea that the civil rights movement was a movement by Martin Luther King, Jr., or of blacks for blacks, has felt the pressure of revision. Much attention has been dedicated to unsung, unknown, and ordinary people involved in the movement. In academic circles, along with works that specifically describe local people who were committed to civil rights causes, women's roles are among the most studied. Relevant texts include Lynn Olson's *Freedom's Daughters: The Unsung Heroines of the Civil Rights Movement from 1830 to 1970* (2002), Debra L. Schultz's *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (2001), and Gail S. Murray's edited *Throwing Off the Cloak of Privilege: White Southern Women Activists in the Civil Rights Era* (2004).

In *Wednesdays in Mississippi: Proper Ladies Working for Radical Change, Freedom Summer 1964*, Debbie A. Harwell presents another, lesser-known group of unsung heroines of the civil rights movement in Mississippi's summer of 1964 and shortly thereafter. The effort called

Wednesdays in Mississippi (WIMS) may have constituted the only civil rights program that was created by women for women. WIMS was founded under the auspices of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW) and became the only program dedicated to helping black women in Mississippi during Freedom Summer. WIMS functioned entirely outside the power structures of male-led civil rights organizations.

Dorothy I. Height, the president of NCNW, and her Jewish friend and a NCNW volunteer, Polly Spiegel Cowan, conceived and started the program, which consisted of sending teams of women to Mississippi weekly. On Tuesdays (despite the name of the program), teams of women known as "Wednesdays women" arrived in Jackson, Mississippi, from various northern cities for a total of seven weeks in July and August 1964. On Wednesdays, they brought supplies and much needed support to small rural communities such as Hattiesburg, Meridian, and Canton. Meetings were conducted often in secret with local civil rights activists and with African American professional women. The WIMS women also visited Freedom Schools established by the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project for the purpose of providing free education to local African American children deprived of adequate schooling opportunities. COFO community centers were also included on the itinerary of these visitors, who returned home on Thursdays.

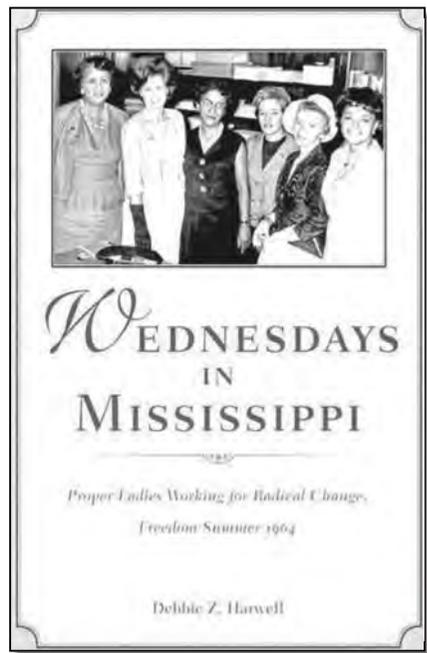
Forty-eight women comprised these seven interracial, interfaith, and middle-aged teams. They ranged from middle class to upper class. Of them, thirty-two were white and sixteen black; thirty-two were Protestant, eight Jewish, six Catholic, and two undesignated. Each team included at least two African Americans and a Jew (63). Most came from Chicago, Boston, Minneapolis, New York, and other northern cities. One woman came from as far away as California and joined Team 3, most of whose members were from the Washington, D.C., area (61). WIMS women's backgrounds varied, but many were experienced at community work and had sought to improve education and housing in the North. Some had already been active in the civil rights struggle. Four were mothers of Freedom Summer volunteers (63).

The approach that WIMS adopted to the racism of Mississippi was unique—quiet and "ladylike." No one would have guessed that the WIMS women were civil rights activists because they arrived in Jackson on commercial airline flights wearing pearls and white gloves and carry-

ing purses. Instead of testing the Civil Rights Act that came into effect on July 2, 1964 (five days before the first team arrived), they adhered to the state's racial customs and seemed to separate themselves by race. The young student radicals of Freedom Summer behaved quite differently. Instead the WIMS teams sought to open lines of communication with local people and presented themselves as proper ladies and by conversation over coffee. They did not adopt this policy, however, because they were lukewarm or insufficiently enthusiastic about racial equality. Rather they acted cautiously to avoid offending southern mores, and thus acknowledged the fear that then engulfed Mississippi.

In 1966, after dispatching seven teams in 1964 and eight teams in 1965, WIMS became Workshops in Mississippi, an organization that more specifically addressed the needs of southern black women. While WIMS promoted the specific goal of opening lines of communication among women to challenge white supremacy, Workshops aided the women who were the primary victims of racism by addressing basic human needs such as housing, food, clothing, and employment. Projects that grew from these efforts continue to operate.

The Jewish component of the civil rights era deserves to be noted. Jewish activists represented a disproportionate number of whites involved in the struggle against Jim Crow. Freedom Summer attracted about eight hundred white volunteers, of whom Jews constituted about half. Most southern Jews, however, were insufficiently brave to take a forthrightly favorable position toward civil rights because of their minority status and their fear of repercussions, although the region's Jews were generally sympathetic to blacks. Their "frightened friends" might have constituted as many as 75 percent of southern Jews, according to the



estimate of P. Allen Krause in "Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South, 1954-1967," *American Jewish Archives* 21 (1969): 23. Only forty Jewish families lived in Jackson in the early 1960s, a number that nevertheless constituted half of the Jewish population in the state. For their economic and social survival, their tiny number and marginalized status drove them to accept local white hegemony.

To account for the disproportionate Jewish participation in WIMS, Harwell uses the phrase "Prophetic Judaism," to which, she believes, women like Cowan subscribed. "Prophetic Judaism" was exemplified in the teachings of Isaiah: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow" (34). Yet Harwell notes that the Jewish WIMS women and their families did not practice their faith actively. They were members of their local Jewish communities, but they were not pious. Rather than deciding to join WIMS after listening to rabbinical sermons, they participated in the struggle for racial justice because of their own experiences of discrimination as Jews. Jews like Schwerner, Goodman, and others engaged in Freedom Summer tended to be secular, and they seldom attended synagogue, yet upon reflection they often claimed *tikun olam* to explain their commitment to political transformation.

Harwell's book complements the history of the civil rights movement by adding this story of unsung heroines. Using rare primary sources and oral interviews, she challenges the conventional view of Freedom Summer activists as predominantly young student radicals. Instead she demonstrates the effectiveness of the quiet approach that middle-aged women took by presenting themselves as proper ladies. By sending these women into the Deep South, WIMS served as a catalyst for change by opening lines of communication across race, region, and religion. The publication of *Wednesdays in Mississippi* thus reinforces the gratitude that the Presidential Medal of Freedom expressed when President Obama honored the three murdered Freedom Summer workers. Harwell's book can be read as another fiftieth anniversary present to the WIMS women, whose vision and selfless determination have made the world a better place to live.

Miyuki Kita, The University of Kitakyushu

The reviewer may be contacted at miyukik@kitakyu-u.ac.jp.

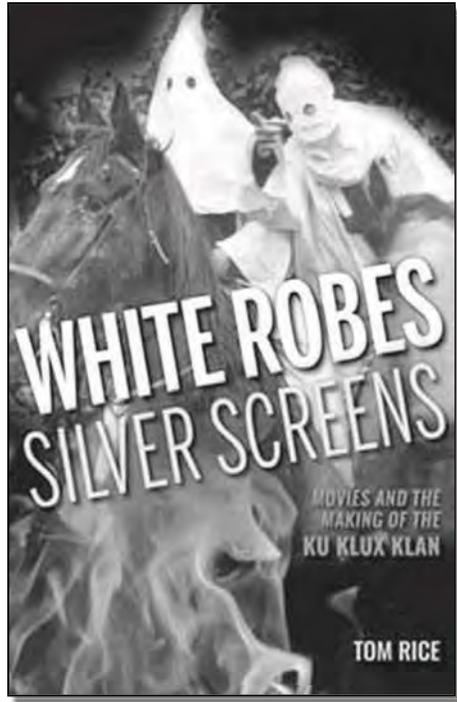
White Robes, Silver Screens: Movies and the Making of the Ku Klux Klan. By Tom Rice. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2015. 302 pages.

Most historians of the American South know of the two “births” in Atlanta, Georgia, in December 1915—the premiere of D. W. Griffith’s *The Birth of a Nation* and the inauguration of the twentieth-century Ku Klux Klan (KKK) just weeks before. In this instance, and throughout its existence, the Klan used the film as a recruiting tool. In this clearly and smartly written volume, Tom Rice gives us an exhaustive account of these 1915 events but much, much more.

White Robes, Silver Screens is a revelation. As the author notes, the Atlanta premiere of *The Birth of a Nation* was just the beginning of the Klan’s engagement with the movies. To prove his point, he has pored through major and local newspapers, white and black, from the *Altoona Mirror* in Pennsylvania to the *Youngstown Citizen* in Ohio, and Hollywood trade papers such as *Variety*, *Moving Picture World*, and *Screen Daily* as well as fan magazines. Rice has also, by my count, examined more than one hundred Klan newspapers and newsletters to chart in exhaustive detail the surprisingly extensive and complex ways in which various chapters and members of the Invisible Empire engaged with the movies to promote their cause.

Each chapter of this monograph explores a different facet of this phenomenon. The first explores Griffith’s *Birth*, the rebirth of the Klan on Stone Mountain, and the ways in which the organization continued to “exploit” and “appropriate” that film, as well as a few more obscure titles, well into the 1930s. Chapter 2 looks at the ways in which the Klan talked to itself and the public about Hollywood, joining in censorship movements and posing as a group dedicated to a kind of social reform. (After all, the Klan supported prohibition.) According to Rice, the KKK even had a surprisingly unabashed presence within the below-the-line ranks of a major studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. Chapter 3 explores the Klan’s unsuccessful but fascinating efforts at filmmaking (both feature films and newsreels) and film exhibition (renting theaters and meeting halls and, in a few isolated cases, owning such venues). Rice’s

final chapter explores Hollywood's treatment of the KKK. For example, Mary Pickford, America's sweetheart, donned the emblematic white robe in 1919 for *Heart o' the Hills*. Studio films through the 1920s depicted the Klan neutrally or at times heroically as a story element in genre films such as the western. On a few occasions, studio advertising and publicity press books encouraged local theaters to stage exploitation stunts featuring people dressed in regalia indelibly associated with the KKK. Yet by the late 1930s, social-problem films that the studios released, such as and most



famously *Black Legion* (1937) starring Humphrey Bogart, condemned this vigilante organization in no uncertain terms. In each chapter, Rice brings his authoritative understanding of the social history of American film to bear on this dazzling array of evidence.

Predictably, a key animating motive for the Klan's attacks on Hollywood was the prevalence of Jewish studio executives and foreign stars, whose presence in popular culture clashed with the Klan's constant espousal of "all-American" (i.e., Protestant) values. Chapter 2 explores the Klan's hostility in the most depth. The KKK took enormous offense at Charlie Chaplin's tramp comically impersonating a Protestant minister in *The Pilgrim* (1923), an animus also based on the widespread but mistaken view that the comedian was Jewish. Also in 1923, the Klan protested against a now-forgotten Paramount film, *Bella Donna*, in which the surprisingly independent British title character, played by Polish actress Pola Negri, falls in love with—and nearly kills her husband for—an Egyptian. In one of the more telling, if less vitriolic, quotations that Rice finds in Klan publications, the *Chicago Dawn*

complained that the Jewish producers lacked “that inborn feeling of supremacy toward the black races that is peculiar to the better born Americans” (71).

In denouncing an industry that Jews seemed to dominate, the Klan tapped into national discourses that censors and reformers were also generating. They, too, mounted attacks on the studios for producing decadent, corrupt, and corrupting films. Antisemitism thus joined with anti-Catholicism, even before the advent of the Catholic-inspired Production Code and the ways that Joseph Breen administered it. Because the Klan championed the prohibitionist Eighteenth Amendment so fervently, it could burnish its claims to advance social reform, and it could thus align itself with patriotic organizations like the American Legion. Yet the Klan’s invocation of “all-American values” constituted a decisively more virulent, unrestrained version of Protestant efforts to reform the movies. Moreover, Rice is alive to the irony of the Klan’s simultaneous antimodernist response to film and the embrace of this influential new medium when it suited the organization—either making its own movies or promoting studio films seen as favorable to the cause. The Klan even praised a title or two from Adolph Zukor’s much-condemned Paramount during the 1930s.

Rice’s volume is a masterful, definitive account of this underexplored phenomenon, and it is written with a confident grasp of the complex and often contradictory forces that shape films and their place in American social history. His chronicle ends in 1944, when the Ku Klux Klan experienced a very brief demise, only to revive itself in 1946, just in time for the emerging struggle over civil rights that would shape the next decade in the South in particular. Some day in the future, I hope to read a history of the Klan’s rebirth and its relationship to the movies in the postwar period. If we are fortunate, Tom Rice will write that history as well.

Matthew H. Bernstein, Emory University

Fair Labor Lawyer: The Remarkable Life of New Deal Attorney and Supreme Court Advocate Bessie Margolin. By Marlene Trestman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2016. 242 pages.

This intriguing book is primarily a “thank you, and I love you” note from the author to Bessie Margolin. Both women came out of difficult family situations, resided at the New Orleans Jewish Orphans Home, and attended the Isidore Newman School. Margolin never forgot where she came from, and, whenever possible, helped young women like herself, encouraging them to aim high, and, in Trestman’s case, to become a lawyer. Trestman never forgot the kindness or the encouragement, and this book is in many ways a repayment of that kindness.

Bessie Margolin had an amazingly interesting life. She entered the law profession at a time when few women dared to follow that path, but it also proved a time when the New Deal needed as many lawyers as it could get, and she was fortunate to have bosses who recognized that a supersmart legal mind lay behind her pretty face. She successfully defended the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in the courts, and after the passage of the Fair Labor Standards Act in 1938, she became the chief lawyer at the Labor Department defending its provisions.

She met and knew just about everybody worth knowing in Washington, D.C., from 1933 until her retirement in 1972. (Trestman includes a partial guest list of those who attended Margolin’s retirement dinner in 1972, and it is literally a Who’s Who of Washington.) When Robert H. Jackson went to Germany to lead the American team at the Nazi war crimes trial in Nuremberg, Margolin wangled a position on the American staff. She described the eight months she spent there, and in touring around Europe, as an “interesting adventure.”

Margolin understood that being pretty by itself would get her nowhere, but, at the same time, she took great care in her hair, makeup, and clothes to be attractive. As Trestman notes, Margolin early on decided not to marry and that her vocation would be her lifelong love. This made a great deal of sense, for in middle-class America at the time, married women did not work. They stayed home, had babies, and cooked dinner for their husbands.

But Margolin always had enjoyed the opposite sex, and over her life had several intense and semisecret affairs. In 1981 Margolin and Robert Ginnane, the general counsel of the Interstate Commerce Commission from 1955 to 1970, surprised their friends by announcing they would wed. The two had been having a clandestine romance for more than two decades and now felt free to go out in public as a couple. Unfortunately, Ginnane died before the two could marry.

Margolin argued twenty-four cases before the U.S. Supreme Court, winning twenty-one of them, making her one of the most successful practitioners before that tribunal, male or female. She also argued and won dozens of cases in lower courts, first representing the TVA and later the Labor Department. Her record should have entitled her not only to a supervisory position but to be head of the Labor Department's solicitor's office, and the fact that she did not get the job convinced her that she would have to fight sexism. She presented evidence to Secretary of Labor Frances Perkins of what Margolin called "unconscious discrimination" against her as a woman that prevented her promotion. Perkins agreed, and in 1942 she named Margolin Assistant Solicitor of Labor. Margolin later received the Department's Distinguished Service Award, and Chief Justice Earl Warren praised her for developing "the flesh and sinews" around the "bare bones" of the Fair Labor Standards Act.

As one might have expected, in the postwar Red Scare someone as obviously prolabor as Margolin would be investigated by the FBI, and although the Bureau found no traces of communism, it did uncover her romantic involvements. She would be investigated and her loyalty questioned again later in the 1950s.

It is very probable that the FBI reports kept Margolin from achieving the one goal that eluded her—an appointment as a federal judge. She apparently was considered for the position several times during the Kennedy and Johnson years, but although as well qualified—better qualified, in fact—than some of the men chosen, the presidents decided not to name her and never really explained why. In 1966, during the Johnson years, Margolin, who described herself as a "reluctant feminist," joined the National Organization for Women as a founding member.

In her last years in the Labor Department, Margolin did not slow down, and in 1969 she argued the first Equal Pay Act appeal, *Shultz v. Wheaton Glass Co.* The law required that men and women be paid the

same for “substantially equal” work, which the employer argued meant identical work. If not identical, the company claimed, it did not have to pay women as much. Margolin convinced the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit that the phrase “substantially equal” meant just that, and not “identical,” a decision the Supreme Court declined to review.

Although Margolin came from a Jewish family, and certainly benefited from the care she received at the Jewish Orphans Home and her education at the Isidore Newman School, Judaism apparently played a very minor role in her life. A nonobservant Jew as an adult, she always considered herself Jewish, and as Trestman points out “she was identified as a Jew by others, and not always to her advantage” (9). She certainly opposed antisemitism, which led her to want to take part in the Nuremberg trials and to travel to Israel in 1962. Trestman believes that Reform Judaism’s emphasis on social justice, regularly invoked at the Jewish Orphans Home in speech and practice, played an important role in shaping her professional life.

Bessie Margolin certainly deserves a biography, and Marlene Trestman has covered her career quite well. She skirts around some of



the private relations she had, and there is little that one might call “critical” here. Margolin had an amazing life, especially for a woman of her era, and perhaps there was little to be critical of. Margolin did not preserve all of her papers with the sort of care that would help a biographer, and much of what Trestman found related to her professional life. She left practically nothing about her private life except a few bundles of photographs and some private letters, for most of which the recipient could not be identified. Margolin’s remaining family

members helped out with reminiscences, pictures, and stories, and, given the paucity of information, Trestman did yeoman work filling in the gaps of her professional life, and even a good part of her private one as well. It is doubtful anyone else will tackle Margolin as a subject, and we should be grateful for what Trestman has achieved. It is an absorbing story told well.

Melvin I. Urofsky, Virginia Commonwealth University