

Readers will find a variety of informational tools to illustrate South Africa's history. At the beginning of the book, a chronology offers a quick reference. Also useful are the numerous photos and maps provided alongside a number of tables containing statistical data. These tools coupled with the breadth of Thompson's historical content provide a great starting point into South African studies. The book creates a framework that opens up research into more specific areas. By telling the story of South Africa as South African history and not as an extension of European history, Thompson distinguishes the region as independent from its colonial past.

—*Kelly Rios*

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Yuri Slezkine. *The Jewish Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004. Pp. 344. Cloth \$45.00, paper \$18.95.

The qualities that best describe a successful Modern individual—mobility, literacy, occupational flexibility—are equally appropriate in describing the Jewish experience from ancient times to the present; it follows that while Jews have a long tradition of being quintessentially “Modern,” the rest of the Western world has, metaphorically speaking, become increasingly “Jewish.” So argues University of California Berkeley professor Yuri Slezkine in *The Jewish Century*, a work that is as antagonistic as it is compelling.

Though focused on the Diaspora of twentieth century Russian Jews, the book's broad scope is evident in Slezkine's comparison of the “Mercurial Jew” (read: adaptive and enterprising survivor) to various counterparts, from sixteenth-century Parsi moneylenders to nineteenth-century Chinese merchants. Such comparisons help identify and analyze a set of traits and practices that characterize the entrepreneurial “professional strangers” found throughout history. Echoing previous scholarship on Jewish “otherhood,” Slezkine asserts that as occupants of religious and social margins, Jews have often been uniquely positioned to play key roles in the commercial, academic, and artistic development of their “host” nations. This paradoxical symbiosis reached its apex in the nineteenth century, when several nationalistic movements assumed traditionally “Jewish” attitudes in matters of commerce, law, and education while simultaneously restricting Jewish participation in these same fields.

Nineteenth-century restrictions developed into twentieth-century anti-Semitism, and Russian Jews in particular were eventually confronted with three choices: internal migration within Russia, settlement in Israel, or flight to America. Each of these choices, in turn, affected the development of Marxism, Zionism, and Psychoanalysis; Slezkine accounts for these relationships to further illustrate “Jewish” solutions to some of Modernity’s most challenging problems.

Reference to Jews’ “unparalleled success” within the Soviet system during the 1920s and 1930s is one of the book’s central evidentiary motifs. In fact, were it not for the National Jewish Book Award *The Jewish Century* earned in 2005, this controversial philo-semitic work might well be taken as “Jewish Conspiracy” propaganda. An unapologetic bravado accents Slezkine’s interdisciplinary approach, resulting in a well-crafted text that is difficult to ignore, one the reader will likely either love or hate.

This evocative narrative concludes by suggesting that with Modernity’s continued production of “a society without acknowledged natives,” Jews may finally shake the envy their economic success and status as a “punished nation” has earned them. Stimulating to the end, Slezkine’s unrelenting argument—“exemplary ancients...become model moderns”—contributes provocatively to our understanding of Jewish, Russian, European, and U.S. histories.

—*Dustin Black*