

**The Jews' Indian: Colonialism, Pluralism, and Belonging in America.**  
**By David S Koffman. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019.**  
**ISBN. 9781978800885**

Shimon de Valencia

'The Jews' Indian: Colonialism, Pluralism, and Belonging in America' is an important contribution to both the study of encounter, perception and transformation by Jewish Americans as they participated in the westward expansion of the United States. A study that covers a period spanning the mid-nineteenth to mid-twentieth century. As the title indicates, this is most definitely a Jewish narrative, with Native American voices being notable by their absence. This is also a narrative told from the experience of the waves of immigration from Central and Eastern Europe, with the perspectives of the Sephardi history of Anglo-Colonial America, and the Hispanic Southwest being absent from this work. Koffman is also very careful in his definition of 'Jewishness'. Rather than taking a denominational approach (other than when his sources so identify), Koffman prefers to maintain a more generalist approach to identity. Allowing his sources to self-identify. An approach that fits with the tone and direction of his study.

'The Jews' Indian' is structured in two clear parts. The first, is the waves of immigration that occurred in the nineteenth century. As Jewish immigrants moved out to the American 'West', they were not just seeking out new opportunities. They were escaping the claustrophobia and racism of the larger eastern cities at this time. In doing so, they found themselves transitioning from being the 'other', into becoming part of the American Identity being forged in the American West. As they became more 'American', they also became more 'white'. A common trope of immigrant communities, in the highly racially charged environment of nineteenth century America. This transition is essential in understanding how both Jewish communities, and individual Jews navigated the immigrant experience in a land outside of their historical, and cultural experience. In so doing, they began to define their own new found whiteness in relation to the Native Americans they found themselves living alongside. They also found themselves enmeshed in their participation in the perpetration "of colonialism in the new world" against these very same peoples (19).

This theme of 'whiteness' is not just some random concept, but is embedded in the title of Koffman's work. Being more than just a casual nod to the 1978 book "The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present", by Robert F. Berkhofer. Berkhofer's central thesis, is that the critiques and prejudices, as well as the not inconsiderable body of idealisation of the 'Noble Savage' thesis, is far more informative of the 'white' cultures that produced them, than the very peoples that they objectified;. An objectification that alternately idolised, and discriminated

against Native American peoples. By clearly basing his study in the thesis of Berkhofer, Koffman ignores the Borderlands discourse rooted in the works of Anzaldua et,al concerning the encounter of Mexican-American, Mestizo, Native and Anglo cultures in the Southwest. An inclusion which would have added nuance, and depth to this work, as it seeks to move beyond mere cultural apologetics, into true historical analysis and discourse. Whilst this does not detract from the work, it does seem to be an opportunity lost in understanding the process of Jewish assimilation, adaptation and survival into the westward expansion of the United States. An expansion that further led to the transformation by these encounters of the many Jewish communities that sprung up, into new, and unsought for identities. In short, this lies at the very core of the immigrant experience, and its effects upon the communities born from this experience. Communities that are filled with new found freedoms, unsought for dangers, but also stained by the ongoing colonial agenda that was nineteenth century America.

The structure, and organisation of this work is largely chronological, and thematic. Creating a narrative that skilfully counterpoints Jewish attitudes, and behaviours. Not just in their interactions with, but also their reactions to 'Native Americans', over a century and half of shared history. A history that in this telling, begins with the onset of the 'Indian Wars', and subsequent Removals begun with President Andrew Jackson's 'Indian Removal Act' of 1830, and the 'Treaty of Dancing Rabbit Creek'. Reaching its crescendo in the 'Trail of Tears' in 1836 and 1839; and ending with the 'Treaty of the Tonawanda Senecas' in 1857. Koffman gives his reader little respite before going on to examine the 'Dawes' Allotment Act' of 1887, and concluding this part of his narrative, with the transformation of the United States that starts with the coming of the trans-Continental Railway, and heralds the end of the iconic, but short lived 'Wild West' in 1880 . Koffman goes on to examine, the tragedy that was the 'Allotment and Assimilation Era' which reached its conclusion in 1920. A process that was closed with the passage of the 'Indian Citizenship Act' of 1924. The passage of which was a covert attempt to erase Native American culture under the banner of making them 'good Americans' The conclusion Koffman reaches, is that rather than attempt to understand, identify with, and advocate for the First Nations' of the Americas; many Jews, whether individually, or collectively either stood by, or worse, collaborated in the oppressions the native people's of the West endured during this period. To his credit, Koffman does not shy away from this reality. Instead, he lays out his argument clearly, and with fulsome use of records and archives to support and enrich both his thesis, and his narrative. That being, that the Jewish social activism of the mid-twentieth century can be understood as a means of addressing the injustices of the past. This activism was also rooted in the reality that by creating a more tolerant and inclusive America, peoples of all ethnicities and cultures would ultimately benefit.

In approaching the material in the first half of 'The Jews' Indian', it is important to note, that Koffman is very clear that many of these encounters were undertaken as the new immigrants sought to navigate the minefield of their own Jewish-American identity formation. And, that the Jewish press of the time, was highly critical of US American 'imperialism', whilst also benefiting from the material rewards of the same 'imperialism. All done against the backdrop, of having found a sense of newly found safety in the recent granting of 'whiteness', as they passed through the gates of Ellis Island. But in the end, much as many other immigrant communities moving into the 'Wild West', Jews participated in, and benefited from, the expansion of an "immigrants empire" (15). This at times manifested itself in the conflicting views, and justifications found in the Jewish Press across the continental United States. As the differing voices of the Jewish community criticised, supported, and lamented the manner in which this 'empire' expanded. They also generally, took the side of the settlers (81). A process in which, as the immigrants became entrenched in the reality, and the identity of being 'American', they found themselves also becoming the coloniser. An experience that necessitated them to separate their experiences of oppression and exclusion in the lands of their parents, and grandparents births, from the realities of their new lives. Contributing to a past, that later generations would seek to correct.

The next part of this study is a tale of reconciliation and redemption. All framed against the growing tide of xenophobia prevalent in the 1920s. This struggle becomes empowered with the inauguration of the 'Indian New Deal' born of the 'Indian Reorganization Act of 1934'. Headed by John Collier, the reinvigorated, and reformed Bureau of Indian Affairs would go beyond mere revitalisation of Native American culture. Aided by Jewish lawyers, bureaucrats and philanthropists, the groundwork for the 'Red Power Movement' was laid. a movement that would flourish after World War II, as Native American leadership took the helm, and forged a new era of activism, empowerment, and renewal. This led to the growing Jewish activism in the political, social and cultural rights of minorities that gave birth to the Civil Rights Movement of the late 1950s and 1960s. This also contributed to the transformation of scholarship in race, and cultural pluralism seen in the work of scholars such as Franz Boas, Paul Radin, Ruth Runzel, and Edward Sapir. Scholarship that led ultimately to the activism and promotion of rights for the disenfranchised. And through this search for the rights of minorities, to the issue of Jewish enfranchisement in the mid-twentieth century United States. Unfortunately, as Koffman notes, this commitment to American pluralism "recapitulated some of the fundamental structures of colonialism" (220). Despite this recognition, Koffman shies away from a call to a renewed dialogue, leaving it to the reader to take up this banner. Despite this, Koffman leaves his reader armed with a wealth of information, and a more profound

sense of the place of Jewish-Native American relations in the wider arena of not just the history of the United States, but also the history of the 'Old West'.

Certainly, this work would have benefited from the inclusion of Native American voices, as well as those of older Jewish communities whose history of encounter with Native American cultures precede the great migrations of the nineteenth century. Such inclusions would however have necessitated a two volume edition. And most certainly would have denied Koffman the opportunity to publish this important contribution to American Jewish history. What remains is an important contribution to the fields of American Jewish history, and the 'New Western History' movement, despite the protestations of Koffman to the counter. Whether this leads to a deepening of scholarship in this area, is yet to be seen. For there are questions aplenty arising from a reading of this work. In this, Koffman has succeeded in his contribution to the ongoing story of not just Jewish-American identity, but to the questions we all need to ask as we explore the formation, and exploration of Jewish identities in a post-colonial framework: whether that be in the United States, Canada, Africa, or even Australia.