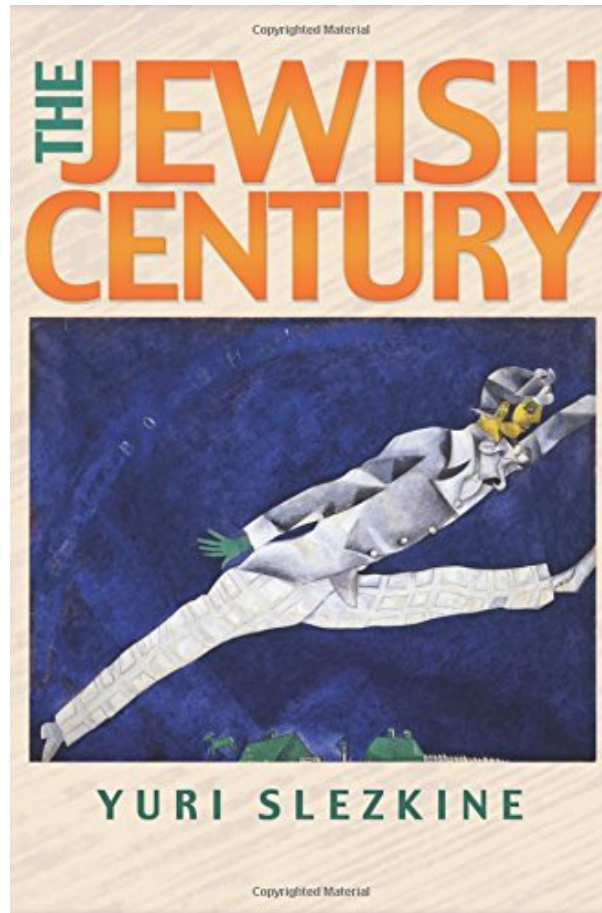


THE JEWISH CENTURY BY YURI SLEZKINE



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THE JEWISH CENTURY BY YURI SLEZKINE PDF

This masterwork of interpretative history begins with a bold declaration: The Modern Age is the Jewish Age--and we are all, to varying degrees, Jews.

The assertion is, of course, metaphorical. But it underscores Yuri Slezkine's provocative thesis. Not only have Jews adapted better than many other groups to living in the modern world, they have become the premiere symbol and standard of modern life everywhere.

Slezkine argues that the Jews were, in effect, among the world's first free agents. They traditionally belonged to a social and anthropological category known as "service nomads," an outsider group specializing in the delivery of goods and services. Their role, Slezkine argues, was part of a broader division of human labor between what he calls Mercurians--entrepreneurial minorities--and Apollonians--food-producing majorities.

Since the dawning of the Modern Age, Mercurians have taken center stage. In fact, Slezkine argues, modernity is all about Apollonians becoming Mercurians--urban, mobile, literate, articulate, intellectually intricate, physically fastidious, and occupationally flexible. Since no group has been more adept at Mercurianism than the Jews, he contends, these exemplary ancients are now model moderns.

The book concentrates on the drama of the Russian Jews, including émigrés and their offspring in America, Palestine, and the Soviet Union. But Slezkine has as much to say about the many faces of modernity--nationalism, socialism, capitalism, and liberalism--as he does about Jewry. Marxism and Freudianism, for example, sprang largely from the Jewish predicament, Slezkine notes, and both Soviet Bolshevism and American liberalism were affected in fundamental ways by the Jewish exodus from the Pale of Settlement.

Rich in its insight, sweeping in its chronology, and fearless in its analysis, this sure-to-be-controversial work is an important contribution not only to Jewish and Russian history but to the history of Europe and America as well.

- Sales Rank: #630143 in Books
- Published on: 2006-08-27
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.68" h x 1.07" w x 6.28" l, 1.49 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 456 pages

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Most helpful customer reviews

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You can't understand 20th Century w/out reading this book

By Amazon Customer

Slezkine, a professor of history at Berkeley who came to America from the Soviet Union in 1982, restores the dignity of Jews, after decades of being portrayed solely as passive victims of history, by showing how Jews, qua Jews, were among the most dynamic actors in the central events of the 20th Century. You simply cannot understand the main events of European history of the last century without reading Slezkine' brilliant book.

Slezkine's interest is in the tragic ironies of history and he empathetically allows us to enter into the mindsets of hundreds of individuals as they made decisions that, well, seemed like a good idea at the time.

We've all read enormous amounts about two Jewish migrations -- one to America and one to the Holy Land - - but Slezkine vividly documents the forgotten third Jewish great migration, the one his grandmother made, from the towns of the Pale of Settlement in the Polish and Ukrainian lands to Moscow and the other great cities of Russia/Soviet Union. For at least two decades after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution, this migration appeared to the more worldly Jews around the globe as the most successful of the three migrations. Jews, untainted by any association with the Czarist regime and showing the most enthusiasm for the new Bolshevik regime of any ethnic group, flourished in the Soviet Union even more than in America, where anti-Semitism channeled most of the Jewish immigrants' genius into meritocratic fields like entrepreneurial business and science, rather than into politics, the military, or the more comfortable parts of the corporate world.

In 19th Century Europe, secularizing Jews believed they were hated because of nationalism and capitalism. Nationalism proposed that every nation should have a territorial state, an idea the small minority of Jews who were active Zionists embraced. But most of the new Jewish intelligentsia of Eastern Europe felt that the solution to the Jews' lack of a nation-state in a world obsessed with nationalism was the elimination of nationalism and its replacement by internationalism, which communism promised. Moreover, Jewish intellectuals also believed they were hated because of the Jews' tremendous talent for capitalism, which communism likewise promised to abolish. Finally, many young secular Jews were in rebellion against their capitalist, religious, and particularist parents or grandparents, and communism promised them a final victory over their ancestors and all they stood for.

By no means was the Bolshevik Revolution a Jewish plot, but under the new anti-anti-Semitic Bolshevik regime, Jews rapidly became important military leaders, commissars, factory managers, propagandists, secret policemen, and Gulag wardens. Jews did better under the Bolsheviks than the members of any other ethnic group. This success helps explain the otherwise inexplicable loyalty of so many American Jews to Stalin's regime even through the Stalin-Hitler pact and Stalin's anti-Semitic purges after WWII. And, as Slezkine documents, their children retained their faith in radicalism, coming to dominate the student radical movements of the Sixties.

It all turned out badly, of course. The Soviet side of this embarrassing story has largely been shoved down the memory hole, but the ramifications of these huge events are still with us.

For example, after a couple of decades of haphazard anti-Semitism under the decaying post-Stalin regimes, eventually Jews in the Soviet Union came to the forefront of the anti-regime dissident movement, which helped inspire the development of neoconservatism in the U.S., especially in Sen. Henry Jackson's campaign

to free Soviet Jews (spearheaded by his chief of staff Richard Perle), which is still having ramifications today in Iraq. But I can't begin to describe all the historical threads that Dr. Slezkine pulls together. When you are done reading this book, you will understand far more about the 20th Century.

55 of 60 people found the following review helpful.

Interesting perspectives

By Ralph Blumenau

Of the daughters of Tevye the Milkman (the Fiddler on the Roof), Hodl married a revolutionary who would come into his own when the Bolsheviks came to power; Beilke and her husband emigrated to America; and, for symmetry's sake, Slezkine imagines that Chava emigrated to Israel. As Slezkine admits, Sholem Aleichem's book says no such thing about Chava; but then Slezkine loves this conceit, since he wants to deal in his book with their "descendants", the three strands of Jewish emigration from the Pale into the three areas whose histories they subsequently play such a disproportionate role to shape.

To this conceit he adds another one, as irritating, repetitive, and forced. It is to divide the world into Mercurians and Apollonians. Mercurians are "service nomads" like the Jews: outsiders, originally mostly traders and then professionals, who service the needs of the resident Apollonians, mostly landed folk. The Mercurians are important enough when they are serving a landed society, but they become even more important when, in the course of modernity, Apollonian societies are forced to transform themselves into Mercurian ones: experience, talents and education then give the Jews a headstart in such societies.

To these "clever" conceits, Slezkine adds a brilliant capacity to coin striking phrases of a kind of which the following, on page 366, is just one example:

"From being the Jewish God's Chosen People, the Jews had become the Nazis' chosen people, and by becoming the Nazis' chosen people, they became the Chosen People of the postwar Western world."

Leaving these characteristics of the book aside, it is full of illuminating and sometimes controversial reflections. Some of these are devoted to the descendants of Beilke and Chava, but the bulk of the book refers to Hodl's descendants, the Jews in the Soviet Union; and I want to confine my comments to the new perspectives on Soviet Jews which this book has opened up to me.

First there is the emphasis on the emigration from the Pale into the interior of Russia and in particular into the great cities: by 1939 1.3 million Jews were living in areas that had been closed to them in Tsarist times. I had not realized that even after the Tsarist pogroms and the vicious discrimination of the May Laws, the Jews were still hugely over-represented in the professions. In 1910, for example, in Odessa the Jews still administered 70% of its banks, provided 70% of its doctors, and 56% of its lawyers. With such educational advantages they would have done extremely well anyway once the Soviets had given them civil equality, and their natural advantage was further boosted by the Soviets getting rid as fast as they could of "bourgeois experts" in the administration, by the exclusion of their children from universities, and by filling the resulting vacuum with the only people capable of filling it: the educated Jews. So the enthusiasm of secular Jews for the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s is very comprehensible.

Slezkine argues that the large number of Jews who suffered in the Great Terror suffered not because they were Jews, but because Stalin was purging the upper echelons for his own political and paranoid reasons, and since so many of the upper echelons were Jews, they naturally made up a high proportion of his victims. In fact, Slezkine shows that when you move away from the élites, Jews were under-represented among those arrested for political crimes: 1% of Jews, compared with 16% of Poles and 30% of Latvians; and in the Gulags the proportion of Jews was 15.7% below the proportion of Jews in the Soviet Union. Slezkine

therefore takes seriously Stalin's condemnation of antisemitism in his speech to the 15th Party Congress in 1927, and shows that between 1927 and 1932 articles against antisemitism "appeared in the Moscow and Leningrad newspapers almost daily." Slezkine therefore differs from Arkady Vaksberg's thesis in *Stalin Against the Jews* (1994) that Stalin cunningly disguised his antisemitism by occasionally bringing antisemites to trial and by promoting or favouring individual Jews.

Of course Slezkine does not disguise the overt antisemitism which Stalin did display after the war. He explains it by Stalin's realization that even the most ardent Jewish communists, who used in the early days to separate themselves from all things Jewish, had had their "Jewish blood" stirred first by the antisemitism of the Nazis and then by identification with Israel. He now suspected especially the "passport Jews" - that is those Jews who, when compulsory passports were introduced for the whole population in 1930, had chosen to describe their nationality as *Evrei* rather than as Russian, Ukrainian etc.

After Stalin's death, the most vicious antisemitism eased off; but the government continued to exclude Jews from the government and from the upper echelons of the Party. It also imposed quotas on Jews at the universities, though Slezkine argued that these were also applied to Georgians and Armenians who, like the Jews, were disproportionately represented at universities. The quotas were at least in part due to "positive discrimination" being applied to Uzbeks, Tatars and Azerbaijanis. Besides, by then the Soviet educational system had produced 2.4 million college students against whom Jews now had to compete, compared with only 177,000 in 1928.

Even now, however, Jews continued to be over-represented in the professions and remained "light years ahead" of Uzbeks, Tatars etc.; but discrimination against them, for whatever reason, had now thoroughly disenchanting them with the Soviet system which they had helped so much to create. As in the time of the Tsars, many of them now figured among the most prominent dissidents, and many others wanted to emigrate. So when Gorbachev at last opened the gates, the exodus was massive. Yet those who remained continued to be over-represented in the market economy in Russia that was introduced when the Soviet Union collapsed: of the seven wealthiest 'oligarchs', six were Jews. And when the bar excluding them from government positions was raised, they swiftly produced two of Yeltsin's prime ministers: Sergei Kiriyenko and Yevgeni Primakov.

Soviet Jews had for long backed and actively participated in a regime which, though progressive in some respects, had committed terrible crimes against real or supposed opponents. Historians like Vaksberg focus on the Jews as victims of Stalin's antisemitism; but Solzhenitsyn raises the question: should not the notion of collective guilt be as applicable to those Soviet Jews as it is to the Germans? Slezkine writes that both these approaches are "quite marginal" - an odd evasion, it seems to me, in an otherwise brave book.

47 of 54 people found the following review helpful.

Gold mine of hard-to-find data

By Luther

This is a remarkable book in many ways and difficult to summarize. If the author wasn't a Russian, a professor at Berkeley, half Jewish, and the book wasn't published by a major university press, I think somebody would be yelling "anti-Semitism." It is loaded with hard-to-obtain data (about one-third of his sources are in Russian) on the very active but less well known Jewish participation in all aspects of Russian life, especially from the time of the revolutions to the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, including their roles in the gulag, the NKVD and spying on the US. He even refers to Communist Jews as "Stalin's willing executioners" (p. 103).

His purpose in the book is to show the role of Jews in shaping the modern world, and especially 20th

Century Russian and East European history. As he says, "The Modern Age is the Jewish Age . . ." To the extent that we are urban, mobile, literate, and occupationally flexible, we are all Jewish. "Modernization, in other words, is about everyone becoming Jewish."

(See other customer reviews for more on this and on the Jewish role in Bolshevism.)

My quarrel with this book is that I think he exaggerates the Jewish role in the life of everyday America. Furthermore, he ignores Kevin MacDonald's magnificent analysis of the role of Jews in modern American life. There's not one mention of Kevin MacDonald's three volumes.

He is very convincing on what he knows well: the Jewish experience and influence on Russian and Eastern European history. But when he gets to Jewish influence on American life, he is much less convincing. He writes as though everyone lived in New York City. Freud most definitely did not have the influence on American life that he claims.

There is an Anglo-Saxon, Christian substratum to American life which Slezkine seems to know little about. Broadly, the "red" states in the recent election continue with their way of living that originated with the original settlers from England. See Fischer's *Albion's Seed* for the history of how England's folkways and mores were transported to America. By the way, the word "Jew" does not occur once in this 800-page book. So much for deep-seated Jewish influence.

Americans still live by these folkways and beliefs that were brought over by the early settlers. If, like Slezkine, you think the United States ends at the Hudson River, then maybe we are all Jews. But the truth, in my opinion, is a lot more complicated, and his thesis needs a lot of qualifications.

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From Publishers Weekly

The provocative argument that underlies this idiosyncratic, fascinating and at times marvelously infuriating study of the evolution of Jewish cultural and political sensibility is that the 20th century is the Jewish Age because "modernization is about everyone becoming urban, mobile, literate, articulate, intellectually intricate.... Modernization, in other words, is about everyone becoming Jewish." A professor of history at UC-Berkeley, Slezkine plays a delicate game here. Knowing that his grand statements are more metaphorical than supportable with historical fact, he maps out a new history of Jewish culture over the past 100 years in four radically diverse but cohesive chapters. In a history of Jewish group identity and function, Slezkine depicts Jews as a nomadic tribe that functions as a promoter of urban cultural and economic change. The book's last chapter ("Hodel's Choice") uses the image of the daughters of Sholem Aleichem's famous milkman Tevye to discuss the three great recent Jewish immigrations—to America in the 1890s, from the Pale of Settlement to the Russian cities after the revolution and to Palestine after the birth of Zionism. Through these migrations, Slezkine argues, the modernism of Jewish culture spread throughout the world. Nearly every page of Slezkine's exegesis presents fascinating arguments or facts—e.g., that "secular American Jewish intellectuals felt compelled" to become more Jewish when they were allowed into traditional American institutions. While not strictly a traditional history, Slezkine's work is one of the most innovative and intellectually stimulating books in Jewish studies in years.

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Review

Winner of the 2005 National Jewish Book Award, Ronald S. Lauder Award in Eastern European Studies, Jewish Book Council

Winner of the 2005 Wayne S. Vucinich Book Prize, American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies

Winner of the 2004 Award for Best Professional/Scholarly Book in Religion, Association of American Publishers

"One of the most innovative and intellectually stimulating books in Jewish studies in years. . . . [An] idiosyncratic, fascinating and at times marvelously infuriating study of the evolution of Jewish cultural and political sensibility in the 20th century. . . . Nearly every page of Slezkine's exegesis presents fascinating arguments or facts."--Publishers Weekly

"Jews are not unique, [Yuri Slezkine] maintains in his fascinating new study, and it is only European provincialism that makes them seem that way. . . . Slezkine's interpretation of Jewish history . . . is wonderfully antiparochial not only vis-à-vis the Jews but vis-à-vis America, which, he reminds us, not everyone saw as a promised land and which large portions of the huddled masses struggled to avoid."--

Daniel Lazare, *The Nation*

"To come across a daring, original, sweeping work of history in this age of narrow specialization is not just a welcome event; it is almost a sensation."--Walter Laqueur, *Los Angeles Times*

"If Osama Bin Laden ever reads this book, he will be spinning in his cave."--Gene Sosin, *The New Leader*

"For Slezkine, Jews, urban, mobile, literate, flexible, have been role models of adaptability in a changing modern landscape."--Joel Yanofsky, *National Post*

"Brilliant. . . . The Jewish Century is history on a majestic scale. . . . [It] is fresh, compelling and frequently startling. . . . The clarity of analysis is extraordinary, and the relatively simple conceptual tools Slezkine provides are unexpectedly powerful."--Noah Efron, *Jerusalem Report*

"This book is witty, sardonic and clever, written with zest and brilliant imagination and presents us with remarkable images of our recent past."--John Levi, *Australian Jewish News*

Yuri Slezkine's *The Jewish Century* defies standard categorization, and this makes it a masterly work of history."--Marc Dollinger, *Journal of American History*

"[T]his is a brilliant book--it is extremely well written. . . . Slezkine's book joins a very small number of first-rate studies of the modernization of the "Jews" seen through the lens of eastern rather than western history. . . . Buy the book; read the book; use the book in Russian history and Jewish culture classes."--Sander L. Gilman, *Slavic Review*

"The Jewish Century revives, with intellectual sophistication and stylistic verve, an old perception of the Jew's centrality to modernity."--Hillel Halkin, *Commentary*

"Reading Yuri Slezkine's scholarly arguments . . . may make for difficult reading but it also provides intriguing ventures into highly original thinking."--*Jewish Book World*

"Yuri Slezkine's work. . . . is a serious scholarly study of East European Jewry in the modern age, but dressed up in an eccentric and nonconventional style. . . . [An] immensely entertaining and diputious book. . . . It is a work which will simultaneously inform, irritate, and entertain any reader with an interest in Russian, the Soviet, or modern Jewish history."--John D. Klier, *Russian Review*

"This brilliant essay may significantly alter how we think about twentieth-century history. . . . The part that the Jews played in Soviet Russia, or, perhaps better, the part that Soviet Russia played in the cultural imagination of the Jews, lies at the heart of the book."--Angus Walker, *Central Europe*

From the Inside Flap

"Yuri Slezkine has written an extraordinary book with continual surprises. A landmark work."--Ronald Suny, *University of Chicago*

"I can think of few works that match the conceptual range, polemical sharpness, and sheer élan of *The Jewish Century*. An extraordinary book: analytically acute, lyrical, witty, and disturbing all at once."--Benjamin Nathans, author of *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia*

"Yuri Slezkine's book is at the same time very personal and very erudite. A blend of political and cultural

history at its best, it is a splendid work, beautifully written. A true accomplishment by a master historian."--
Jan T. Gross, author of *Neighbors*

"Once every few decades, a book forces a reevaluation of basic assumptions in a field. Yuri Slezkine's passionate and brilliant tour de force not only challenges received wisdom about Russian and Soviet Jews, but just as provocatively overturns the uniqueness that many ascribe to Jewish history altogether. *The Jewish Century* is a work sure to spark heated debate not only about the Jews, but also about what it means to be modern."--David Biale, editor, *Cultures of the Jews: A New History*

"*The Jewish Century* is an extraordinarily stimulating and ambitious piece of work that invites debate and controversy. Slezkine's account is subtle, beautifully written, and very moving; it combines humor, irony, and understated passion."--Tim McDaniel, author of *The Agony of the Russian Idea* (Princeton)

"This is a strong, well-documented, passionately argued, original, and bold essay on history, or the ideology of history, in what I called "a Jewish century" (see my *Language in Time of Revolution*). One wants to argue with the author on many pages of the manuscript, but it is such a powerful, sweeping statement that it must be left whole and intact, as a central position in future arguments on modernity, the twentieth century, and the history of the Jews."--Benjamin Harshav, Yale University

Why ought to be this on-line e-book **The Jewish Century By Yuri Slezkine** You could not need to go someplace to read the books. You could review this publication *The Jewish Century* By Yuri Slezkine each time and every where you really want. Also it remains in our extra time or sensation bored of the jobs in the workplace, this corrects for you. Obtain this *The Jewish Century* By Yuri Slezkine today and also be the quickest individual which completes reading this e-book *The Jewish Century* By Yuri Slezkine