

The Fate of the Jews: A People Torn Between Israeli Power and Jewish Ethics

By Roberta Strauss Feuerlicht. New York: New York Times Books, 1983. 324 pp. \$18.65

Reviewed by Mark A. Bruzonsky

"Written with courage and clarity, Feuerlicht's detailed analysis of what she sees as American Jewry's embrace of a false god in the state of Israel is certain to place her book in the heart of a raging controversy." -**Publisher's Weekly**

"It is a preposterous book. easily the worst I've looked at in years..." -**Leonard Fein, editor, Moment Magazine**

"Powerful and fascinating ... provocative..." -**Shipler, NY Times chief correspondent in Israel**

OK, what's going on here? A book by an accomplished writer published by a major publishing house on an explosive, timely subject—yet few have even heard of it half a year after publication, even among those who specialize in Middle East matters. And such a range of comments!

There's a conspiracy to kill this book—it's dangerous, subversive, revolutionary.

Now it would be difficult to prove this newest addition to the conspiratorial vision of Zionist power in a court of law, or maybe even to the satisfaction of a newspaper editor. And yet the circumstantial evidence is considerable. The author herself—much praised for her last volume, *Justice Crucified: The Story of Sacco and Vanzetti*, including a front-page review in *The Washington Post's Book World*—is outraged and embittered by her experience and herself convinced about "the conspiracy."

The "evidence":

The publisher—New York Times Books—has not run a single advertisement or arranged any important media appearances for Ms. Feuerlicht.

The author has received private information that the new editor of Times Books—Jonathan Siegel—has ordered everyone to do nothing to promote the book ... to just forget it. She says Times Books is quietly planning to take the book silently out of print after the initial run of just 7,000.

No major newspaper other than the Los Angeles Times has reviewed this insightful book—not even the one with the motto "All the News That's Fit to Print," which is affiliated with the publisher and which has such a large Jewish readership. In the case of *The Washington*

Post, the controversy, and the pressure, apparently made it to editor Ben Bradlee's desk—for that's where a copy of *Fate of the Jews* was last seen some months ago.

Jewish publications and groups are attempting to kill *Fate* through a combination of slander and neglect—Fein at *Moment*, an example of the first case; Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg of the World Jewish Congress, the second.

Now what's this great fuss all about? Most important, it's the old Zionist/anti-Zionist debate reborn in contemporary guise.

Only after World War II, the Holocaust, and the transformation of Jewish organizational efforts away from progressive, secular causes to Jewish nationalism, has a minimal Zionist outlook become predominant in American Jewry. Before that, various shades of opinion about Judaism and Zionism were all considered kosher.

The *Fate of the Jews* is about the "true" meaning of Judaism and the predicament of Jews true to their ethical heritage who face the contradictions of contemporary Zionism.

Feuerlicht's book is nothing less than an attempt to resurrect the old controversies at a time when there is tremendous apprehension and alienation within American Jewry, especially among the new generation under 30. Hence the obvious dangers in a major publication which lays out many forgotten truths while stripping naked many Zionist myths. And hence the perceived need to quash the effort and discredit the source.

The *Fate of the Jews* is meant to be an angry, biting corrective to the various forms of Israeli and Zionist brainwashing that have gone on for so long largely unchallenged—especially since 1967 when Israeli macho began swallowing Jewish heritage and ethics.

Neutering A Community

By 1977 the American Jewish community had been sufficiently neutered so that those formerly rebuffed in Israel as terrorists and neo-fascists not only could take power there, but Revisionist Zionist ideology could gradually seep inside the institutions of American Jewry as well. By 1982, Israel's brutal sacking of the PLO in Beirut had few opponents within the organized American Jewish community.

Roberta Feuerlicht's aim with *Fate of the Jews* is to turn things around—to confront American Jews with some painful truths of both their past and their present and in this way to attempt to have a remedial effect on the future.

Fate has its flaws. Though a lower-East Side New Yorker brought up in the Jewish, socialist, radical traditions inherited from eastern Europe, Feuerlicht is understandably an outsider to American Jewish organization life. Her anecdotes and comments about the community are sketchy, often overly simplified, and at times incomplete.

But most important for those who can manage to find this volume in a book store (and hurry!), it must always be remembered when reading this savage indictment of the contemporary state of Jewish affairs that this is a corrective polemic. Non-Jews especially

need be cautioned that this literary effort is not designed to be balanced or even fair; rather it is an anguished attempt to confront Jews with the worst aspects of their history and make them face—rather than hide from—their current moral and political predicaments.

Mark A. Bruzonsky is a journalist and consultant and the former Washington Associate of the World Jewish Congress.

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