

women's rights, she marshals little evidence of her commitment to winning the vote. Thus it was equally likely that Noël was a New Woman as much as a suffragette, a possibility Martin ignores entirely.

Martin's unease with French feminism is further reflected in her linkage of Noël to the eighteenth-century firebrand Olympe de Gouges. By practicing medicine in the twentieth century, Noël, Martin argues, responded to de Gouges's call to "awake!" (p. 61). But did Noël ever read de Gouges? Martin not only makes an anachronistic analytical leap here but also disregards de Gouges's lasting contribution—her framing of republican feminism as a contest between formal and substantive rights. Perhaps more troubling is that Martin concludes this discussion by recounting a 1989 U.S. Supreme Court ruling regarding women's dress in the workplace. Not only does the case move beyond France and beyond Noël's lifetime; evoking it implies a teleological view of history in which feminism, universal and univocal, marches triumphantly on.

Despite these concerns, Martin successfully makes visible an important woman surgeon who has for too long been omitted from the historical record. Noël's personal and professional story will undoubtedly appeal to scholars and students interested in the history of medicine, the history of aesthetic surgery, and the social history of early twentieth-century France.

Holly Grout

Noah J. Efron. *A Chosen Calling: Jews in Science in the Twentieth Century*. (Medicine, Science, and Religion in Historical Context.) xv + 149 pp., bibl., index. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. \$26.95 (cloth).

A Chosen Calling addresses the presence of Jews in twentieth-century science in far greater numbers than their share of the population would suggest—an indisputable phenomenon that makes many individuals rather uncomfortable lest the topic drift either into anti-Semitism on the one hand or a kind of crypto-eugenic Hebraic superiority thesis on the other—and Noah Efron approaches it with precisely the needful analytic calm. This slim book emerged from a series of lectures at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, which accounts for both its tripartite structure and its pleasing readability. It serves as a helpful introduction to this rich topic that seeks more to encourage a broader area of research than to wrap it up conclusively.

As Efron's introduction articulates beautifully, even in the interwar period the "ridiculously disproportionate" (p. 1) overrepresentation in the sciences of individuals of Jewish ancestry (the definition is controversial, and delicately handled) was an active topic of discussion among social-scientific luminaries starting with Thorstein Veblen, quoted here. Efron's sharpest argumentation comes early, in debunking genetic or internally cultural explanations (e.g., claims for a kind of selective breeding for Talmudic acuity). The solution to the sociological riddle lies, he persuasively argues, in the specific cultural contexts Jews faced in the first decades of the twentieth century. (The bulge of scientific Jews did not exist earlier and to a certain extent is diminishing today.) To illustrate his thesis he necessarily has to range geographically broadly, selecting three places where it would be hard to deny that Jews have played a leading role in the scientific establishment: the United States, the Soviet Union, and the Yishuv (the Jewish settlements in Palestine before the 1948 foundation of the State of Israel). Efron points to a common result (scientific overrepresentation) despite rather varied initial conditions, balancing the stories off each other. This strength becomes a limitation when the stories pull separately.

The most convincing case comes in the first substantive chapter, on the United States. Efron argues that Jews flocked to the sciences not because of an affinity with Jewish tradition, but rather the opposite: because the sciences were *not* marked. Their perceived value-neutrality not only made them safe for Jews but made Jews safe for America. "Rather than reflecting Jewish virtuosity in irony and aptitude arising from alienation from the societies in which they found themselves," Efron writes, "the powerful appeal

that sciences held for many Jews may have resulted, in part, from the wish of these Jews to assimilate into those same societies” (p. 10). (The analogy with Jews in sports, on p. 22, is particularly illuminating.) The force of the evidence here has the strange effect of coloring the rest of the book, and the reader comes to read the Soviet and Palestinian cases as being more of the same: science was understood as neutral, and Jews flocked to it to gain respectability when opportunity arose.

While, as Efron puts it, “American Jewish history is ineluctably *American* Jewish history” (p. 96), there is also a sense in which each national context partakes of similar currents and feeds off the others. Efron’s handling of the other two cases illustrates the difficulties in balancing the national and the transnational. In the second chapter on the Soviet Union, Efron—who does not cite sources in Russian—is dependent on secondary literature and translations. The rigor of the historiography he invokes on imperial Russian and early Soviet Jewry is exceptional, emphasizing the change of opportunity with the end of Tsarist repression. He paints a contemporary change in the sciences from a Romanov emphasis on pure science to a Bolshevik mania for the applied as similarly stark. Yet the historical record seems rather more continuous (consider the technical exploitation of the Baku oil fields in the 1860s), contradicting a portrait reliant on rhetorical exaggerations by late imperial and early Soviet scientists for a variety of political ends.

The Yishuv case also sits oddly, though because of argument rather than sources. There is no question many Yishuv residents were engaged in technical work, but there is more here of architecture and agronomy than the pure sciences of the earlier chapters; the story of escape into objective respectability works less well. Another parallel historiography might be more apt. The Zionist project, which Efron describes as “vigorously colonialist,” resembles narratives often associated with the British and French Empires, yet he points to the science-and-colonialism literature only in a single footnote on page 136.

Also striking is the absence of a case that precisely parallels the American one: Germany. In the *Kaiserreich* and the Weimar Republic one can easily observe both the struggles with anti-Semitism and the ideal of scientific neutrality and universality. Jews there reached the pinnacles of the profession (Albert Einstein, Fritz Haber, Paul Ehrlich) and later contributed directly, through forced emigration after the Nazi seizure of power, to the American and Palestinian contexts. Perhaps the Germans provide a key to elucidating the striking resemblances motivating Efron’s stimulating and compact exploration.

Michael D. Gordin

George Weisz. *Chronic Disease in the Twentieth Century: A History*. xvi + 307 pp., index. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014. \$29.95 (paper).

There are histories and histories. A history of chronic disease, as in this volume, is not a history of chronic *diseases*. George Weisz is not here offering a scientific history of chronic diseases—of the afflictions themselves, and of the processes of identification, biological understanding, and medical management associated with them. Weisz’s focus is rather on the *concept* of chronic disease, the modern formulation of which took place in America in the early decades of the twentieth century. Conventional wisdom, Weisz suggests, attributes the emergence of the concept to changing patterns of disease as medicine and public health learned to control and manage the more vicious infections. In reality, contemporary American observers believed that the growing visibility of conditions such as cancer, diabetes, and heart disease in the young and middle-aged indicated that the American people were in a state of collective physical decline. For American physicians and public health reformers, “chronic disease” was an umbrella category, a present social danger that required a policy and public health response. The dynamic behind this concern came from the life insurance industry, which in the early twentieth century began to collect morbidity statistics of policy holders and to develop techniques for promoting healthy behaviors in its clientele.