

South Africa

The study of the Jews of English-speaking countries has achieved a new prominence in the aftermath of the destruction of European Jewry in the Holocaust. Although the Jewish community in the United States is clearly the most studied English-speaking community, Jews in Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, Zimbabwe, and South Africa have also merited the attention of historians and sociologists. The number of Jews in South Africa peaked at 118,000; since the 1970s, many South African Jews have immigrated to Australia, the United States, and Israel, and the Jewish population in that nation is currently around 85,000. Because of the historical context of apartheid, the history of the Jews of South Africa has a character that is unique in modern Jewish history. In order to understand the full picture of how Jews have interacted with modernity in different social and political contexts, it is critical for the scholar to take into account the South African Jewish experience.

One of the classic books on the Jewish experience in South Africa is SHIMONI, a detailed account of the Jewish community in South Africa up to 1967 that places that community's history in the context of Zionism. The author covers most of the important political issues and particularly emphasizes the relationship between the Jews and the ruling groups in the country.

One of the best overviews for those seeking information about the Jewish community in South Africa in the 1990s is HELLIG, which was published as part of a collection of articles on all of the major religions in the country. Hellig adeptly gives a brief outline of the historical background of South African Jewry and presents a vivid picture of the different aspects of Jewish life in contemporary South Africa. Particularly interesting is her account of the unobservant Orthodox Jews who constitute the majority of the South African Jewish community. Nevertheless, Hellig correctly points out that there has been a tremendous revival of Torah study, worship, and observance, particularly in Johannesburg. She describes the development of small, informal prayer groups evoking the Eastern European *shtetl* that have gained popularity at the expense of large institutionalized synagogues.

One of the most interesting historical documents of South African Jewry is a memoir by HOFFMANN that was written in Yiddish and originally published in 1916. The author describes the origins of the community and evaluates relations between Jews and Afrikaners. He also presents a great deal of information about the lives of South African blacks, although he displays a prejudiced perspective characteristic of his time. This document can be read in conjunction with ABRAHAM'S history of the Jews in the Western Cape Province until the end of the Anglo-Boer War in 1902. Other classics of South African Jewish history include Louis Herrman's *A History of the Jews in South Africa* (1930), and Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz's *The Jews in South Africa: A History* (1955).

SHAIN is a masterpiece describing the history of antisemitism in South Africa up to 1930. His work is particularly important because, although the history of racism in South Africa has long been recognized, historians before Shain typically suggested that antisemitism was a foreign phenomenon that was introduced into South Africa in the 1930s through Nazi propaganda. Shain shows, however, that antisemitism had deep roots in South African society that dated back to the late 19th century. Using not only the expected political sources but also plays, novels, caricatures, and jokes, Shain's

book serves as a central source for the history of Jewish-Christian relations in South Africa.

Since the end of apartheid, there has been an increasing interest in the role that Jews did or did not play in the struggle to end institutionalized racism. SUTTNER presents a collection of interviews with South African Jewish activists; the book is named for a statement in the Talmud that insists “let justice cut through the mountain.” The collection includes interviews with many of the most important antiapartheid activists, including Joe Slovo and Ronnie Kasrils, both of whom were important figures in the armed struggle of the African National Congress against the apartheid government. Also included are interviews with the Nobel Prize-winning author Nadine Gordimer, musician Johnny Clegg, politician Helen Suzman, and Rabbi Ben Isaacson. The book is a very rich source of material on Jewish activists and can form the basis for a great deal of future analysis.

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