



# Recovering a Voice: West European Jewish Communities after the Holocaust (Littman Library of Jewish Civilization)

*David Weinberg*

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This multi-national study focuses on the efforts by the Jews of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands to reconstruct their lives after World War II. These efforts have largely been ignored, perhaps because the emphasis on assisting survivors in displaced persons camps and on developing Israel as the center of Jewish life after the Holocaust diverted attention from the struggle by Jews in Western Europe to recover their voice and sense of purpose. The book sets the record straight, presenting the challenges that the Jews in the three communities faced, both in the national context and in the world Jewish arena, and examining how they dealt with them. The book begins by reviewing the actions taken by international Jewish agencies and local leaders to revive Jewish communities in the three countries materially and institutionally, remodeling them as efficient, self-sustaining, and assertive bodies that could meet new challenges. With the creation of the State of Israel, Jews who stayed in Western Europe had to defend their decision to do so while nevertheless showing public support for the new nation. There was also a felt need to respond quickly and effectively to any sign of anti-semitism. In addition, tensions arose between Jews and non-Jews concerning wartime collaboration in deportations, and the need to memorialize Jewish victims of Nazism. The Cold War offered challenges of its own: the perceived need to exclude communist elements from communal affairs was countered by a resistance to pressures from American Jewish leaders to sever links with Jews in Eastern Europe. Yet, beneath the show of assertiveness, Jewish life was fragile, not only because of the physical depletion of the population and of its leadership, but because the Holocaust had shaken religious beliefs and affiliations and had raised questions about the value of preserving a collective identity. In response, community leaders developed new educational, religious, and cultural approaches to allow a diverse population to express its Jewish consciousness. The comprehensive approach offered here is a valuable addition to existing studies on the regeneration of Jewish life in individual European countries. Underscoring the similar political, cultural, social, and economic issues facing Jewish survivors, the book demonstrates how - with the aid of international Jewish organizations - France, Belgium, and the Netherlands used unprecedented means to meet unprecedented challenges. It is a story worth telling that adds much to our understanding of post-war European Jewish life. [Subject: History, Jewish Studies, Holocaust Studies, European Studies] \*\*\* "This meticulously researched book explains why Jews stayed in Europe after the Holocaust and the challenges they faced...indispensable reading for the understanding of the situation of Jews in today's Europe." -- Michael Brenner, Chair of Jewish History and Culture, Ludwig Maximilian U., Munich, and Director, Center for Israel Studies, American U., Washington DC \*\*\* "This deeply researched, nuanced, and illuminating analysis of the reconstruction of Jewish life in western and central Europe (chiefly France, Belgium, and the Netherlands) in the several decades after 1945 fills a real scholarly need. Among other things it demonstrates that despite the views of many contemporaries, Jewish and non-Jewish, the Holocaust did not put an end to meaningful Jewish life on the continent. Nor did the triumphant establishment of the State of Israel, despite its claims on the allegiance of all Jews. In fact, well-organized and culturally significant Jewish communities albeit highly diverse and contentious) eventually re-emerged and played a significant role within world Jewry in the second half of the twentieth century. Weinberg shows how the foundations were laid for this remarkable development. This is also a most timely study. Although it deals mainly with the 1940s and 1950s, it appears at a moment when once again, although under very different circumstances, the question of the future of European Jewry is the subject of a great debate. For all these reasons Weinberg's landmark study deserves a wide readership." -- Ezra Mendelsohn, Professor

Emeritus, Inst. of Contemporary Jewry, Hebrew U. of Jerusalem \*\*\* "In 1945 the Jewish communities of France, Belgium, and the Netherlands seemed to have been left with little more than a catastrophic past; the future seemed almost too bleak to contemplate. Within two decades, however, new foundations had been laid and new organizational structures set up, and each community was evolving in its own way and with its own new dynamic. Some would call this a miracle, but David Weinberg shows that it was actually the result of a historical process achieved through far-reaching vision and purposeful human action. Combining detailed information with overview and analysis, he reconstructs the interplay between individuals and institutions that determined this historical process. Carefully researched and clearly written, it is an important contribution to our understanding of this period." -- J.C.H. Blom, Professor Emeritus of Dutch History, U. of Amsterdam; former Director of the Netherlands Inst. of War Documentation \*\*\* "David Weinberg's *Recovering A Voice* provides a clear and comprehensive overview of the institutional rebirth of the French, Belgian, and Dutch Jewish communities in post-Holocaust Europe. His well researched study offers an indispensable and impartial account, warts and all, of the complex political, cultural and ideological interactions and tensions among American, British, and continental Jewish actors as they charted postwar Jewish life both before and after the birth of the State of Israel in a setting dominated by the Cold War. The significance of Weinberg's book transcends the postwar time period he set out to study. For the tensions he analyzes reappear, virtually unchanged, in the post-1989 European Jewish setting, leading one to wonder about the actual weight of these recovered Jewish voices in an ever more torn Jewish world." -- Diana Pinto, author of 'A New Jewish Identity for Post-1989 Europe' [Subject: History, Jewish Studies, Holocaust Studies, European Studies]

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