

text is thus a poignant act of accountability to Whittlesey's haunting call.³

Scholars have explained how thoroughly archival work can reproduce dominant interpretations through processes deemed "neutral," a pattern that highlights the value of Mountz and Williams' queer reading practices. Researchers adopting default assumptions of heteronormativity in archival readings can overlook contextual details or coded language that others reading with more expansive gendered and sexuality frames can interpret otherwise. Scholars' skeptical question to the authors, "Were Whittlesey and Kemp *really* a couple?" after living, working, and traveling together across four decades, demonstrates the exact heteronormative readings that can suppress such histories. The archive's power to both enable and foreclose LGBTQ+ educational histories is also evidenced in Harvard's only recent release of the sealed archival resources that enabled analysis.⁴ The authors' related conceptualizing of the archive as affective, agential, spatial, personal, and political is a strength of the book.

The book's layered and circular style, woven with social theory, photographs, and personal processing, challenges readers to engage slowly to track diverse threads. As a work of epistemic justice and tribute, *Let Geography Die* refuses the charge to do so, narratively sustaining the program's history and rendering visible the lives of geographers who cultivated meaningful queer networks within institutions often ignorant of or outright hostile to their existence. The book intervenes in accounts that blamed Bowman or Whittlesey for insufficient advocacy to keep the program open, which the authors argued prompted closures nationwide because of Harvard's prestige. It exposes consequential institutional politics that shaped fields and faculty lives. It also leaves readers with the haunting awareness of the gendered and sexualized forces affecting all educational institutions, both then and now.

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Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America

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As detailed in Laura Yares' book *Jewish Sunday Schools: Teaching Religion in Nineteenth-Century America*, the first Jewish Sunday school in the United States was

3 For a generative account of the concept of slow scholarship relevant to my reading of this book, see Alison Mountz, Anne Bonds, Becky Mansfield, Jenna Loyd, Jennifer Hyndman, Margaret Walton-Roberts, Ranu Basu, et al., "For Slow Scholarship: A Feminist Politics of Resistance through Collective Action in the Neoliberal University," *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies* 14, no. 4 (2015):1235–59. <https://doi.org/10.14288/acme.v14i4.1058>.

4 Harvard's policy is to seal their faculty archives for fifty years after death, and to seal presidential archives for seventy years after death, making some historical details out of reach for previous scholars.

founded by Rebecca Gratz in 1838. In the decades that followed, Jewish schools that largely followed her model were established across the United States, Canada, and the Caribbean. Though often thought of today as a creation of Reform Judaism, Gratz herself was not a proponent of that movement, and Sunday schools were opened by both liberal and more traditional synagogues. Indeed, by the 1880s, these schools dominated the landscape of American Jewish education. Their ubiquity would, on its own, justify the serious academic treatment that they receive in Yares' capable hands. But, as she skillfully shows, Sunday schools are particularly worthy of study because their curriculum responded — oftentimes creatively — to dominant trends in American religion and culture.

Gratz modeled her school after Protestant Sunday schools and, like in that branch of Christianity, the curriculum emphasized individual belief “as the core animating principle of religious life” (25). Students learned that Judaism required of its followers the same commitments demanded of good Protestants: reverence for the Bible, moral conduct, and faith in God. The historical mainstays of a Jewish education, Hebrew, Talmud, liturgy and Jewish law, were not taught. Instead, students learned the core principles of the Jewish faith by reciting and memorizing catechisms, and summaries of religious doctrine in the form of questions and answers. This, too, was borrowed from Protestantism, which had relied heavily on catechisms in its religious education since the sixteenth century. Indeed, the first Jewish catechisms were adaptations of the Protestant Sunday School Union's *Scripture Question Book*, first published in 1836. In the decades that followed, multiple catechisms were written for use in American Jewish Sunday schools, with more traditional congregations using texts that included information on Jewish holidays and liturgy. Catechisms, like the Sunday schools that used them, proved attractive to Jews across the denominational spectrum because they conveyed the essentials of Judaism in a condensed format at a time where Jews attended public schools and the learning of Jewish subjects was confined to a few hours each week.

Women were the founders, administrators, and teachers of the early Jewish Sunday schools, even though they had little formal training in Judaism. This was possible because in mid-nineteenth century America, women were understood to have a natural “disposition to matters of religion” (26) and were expected to bear primary responsibility for nurturing the spiritual development of children. Moreover, devotional study of the Bible was a key component of the curriculum of the Jewish Sunday school and both Protestant and traditional Jewish religious education historically emphasized the Bible in the education of women.

Women played an essential role in raising the funds that supported Jewish Sunday schools and their willingness to work without pay, understanding their involvement in these schools as philanthropy, helped keep tuitions low and in reach of most Jews. Women, however, were rarely the administrators of synagogue Sunday schools which, by the 1860s, constituted the majority of Jewish supplementary schools. In those schools, women mostly worked as teachers for the younger grades, while the congregation's rabbi generally taught the older grades and ran the school in partnership with the all-male education committee or synagogue board. Women might assist or

advise them but could not lead. This mirrored the gender hierarchy that was common in America's public schools and reflected the broader exclusion of women from leadership of communal institutions after the Civil War. Essentialist views of gender were so strong that when the American Jewish press recounted the achievements of women who had founded Sunday schools, their successes were presented as "extensions of their inherently spiritual natures rather than evidence of their administrative prowess" (31).

Indeed, tensions surrounding gender and power appear throughout Yares' book. For example, the first popular Jewish Sunday school catechisms were written by Simha and Rachel Peixotto and emphasized, in rhyming verse, the personal and emotional sides of religion that were associated with women's spirituality ("What should you feel towards God above? Honour and fear and grateful love") (50). By mid-century, these were largely replaced by catechisms written by American rabbis that, following the earlier German model, highlighted the philosophical aspects of faith ("What is religion?" was the central question explored) (18). Since reason and rationalism were "male-coded categories" at the time, the proliferation of these catechisms had the effect of "assert[ing] a continuing role for male-gendered expertise in the education of American Jews" (51). Moreover, women were often blamed for declining levels of home observance and participation in synagogue life within American Jewry, with some male critics faulting the Sunday schools—which they saw as a female domain, though in key aspects that was no longer true—while others argued that in working for Sunday schools, women were neglecting their essential gender role: the nurturing of Jewish home life.

As Yares shows, Jewish schools reflected and helped impart American materialism and consumerism. Like their Christian counterparts, Jewish school confirmation ceremonies grew increasingly ostentatious throughout the nineteenth century. Lavish gifts were given to confirmands and to their rabbi teachers. The synagogue bimah was decorated with elaborate flower arrangements representing both the vitality/growth of the youth being celebrated and a milieu in which the display of luxury goods was a sign of success. Jewish children's magazines—like the Christian Sunday school periodicals that preceded them—featured advertisements for pianos, safes, life insurance, silk threads, and other goods. Through these, children were shown "aspirational images of domestic affluence" (106) and "inducted into capitalist consumption as a mode of Jewish American citizenship" (107).

Yares draws on a wealth of archival sources—including congregational records, first-person narratives, Jewish newspapers, textbooks, catechisms, pamphlets, and pedagogical literature—to paint a vivid picture of how Jewish Sunday schools reflected and helped shape the religious identity and cultural norms of American Jews. Women played an essential, but often forgotten or misunderstood, role in this educational project. *Jewish Sunday Schools* thus contributes significantly to our understanding of Jewish life in the nineteenth century.