

Jewish identity book review examples

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Shaul Magid's (2013) idea of Jewish identity is very different from the views of the past. Instead of looking at the people who make up the community as a whole, he took the elements outside Judaism and helped those factors shape the overall identity of Jews or what it means to be a Jew. Unlike the stereotypical images of the past, Magid (2013) fuses these different elements and separates Jewishness in a way that it makes sense in a post-modern world. His post-ethnic idea of Judaism is groundbreaking because he defines culture in such a multifaceted way. Instead of taking a look at Jews as a whole, they are made individual and are given more color and character.

In the past, when a person would image a Jew, the same image would probably come to mind. Racial stereotypes would probably mention something offensive about a facial feature or family orientation. Jewish people were always seen as Polish or Eastern European, or people of some Caucasian descent. When movies would portray Jews, they all spoke in the same accent, and had all of these rituals or beliefs. They would have catch phrases, and would always mention instances that were recorded in the Torah, which other people would not understand. Jews would always be seen throwing lavish bat mitzvahs and other celebrations. The media had its own idea of what it meant to be a Jew and how you could tell if someone were a Jew. However, in the multi-cultural America that we live in, this is no longer relevant. You cannot generalize Jews according to one ethnic group because they can come from all over the world. Not all Jews are the same, and that is the idea that Magid (2013) is trying to get across.

A post-ethnic society is one that does not generalize according to race and

culture. Since America is a multi-cultural country, there are always racial stereotypes which limit a lot of people. This post-ethnic society looks at individuals as themselves, and not as defined by their ethnic background. Jews were always part of this generalization since people had no idea of how Jews really were outside the media.

This means that people, no matter what ethnic background, are not just defined by their traditions or these certain generalizations. In the case of Jews, they are not limited to their traditions and their beliefs. Post-Judaism is about really being a Jew and incorporating your own identity and your own personal preferences. This is caused by inter-marriage, globalization, second, third or fourth generation Jews, and other factors. There is no one way to define Judaism and Jews who still consider themselves Jews.

Many people think that Jews live by strict rules, and all their parents are the same. Magid (2013) puts a hippie twist to this sort of thinking and applies outside factors that can help shape the individuality of Jews to help them break free from this stereotype. This post-ethnic type of Judaism opens up people's eyes to different types of Jews. These are no longer people who come from Poland or the Ukraine, Jews are not necessarily descendants of Holocaust survivors. There are Jews from Israel and Palestine in the United States now. These Jews are no longer only Caucasian, there are those that are black, Asian and of mixed descent. This means that in order to see the true Jewish identity, you need to look beyond race and beyond everything that you think you know about Jews. This kind of post-ethnic society or way of thinking can also apply to different types of people, and it is not only limited to Jews. Magid (2013) clearly shows us that the ethnicity of being

Jewish is no longer considered in the new America or even the new world that we live in.

Although this idea of post-ethnic Judaism is great, and it is considered groundbreaking, there still are problems with this type of thinking. Judaism is always something more than just about religion, faith, beliefs or anything else that people might think it is. Judaism, digging back to the older roots, is a community and a group of “chosen” people who have this rich, beautiful yet tragic history. This post-ethnic type of Judaism can be taken the wrong way and the meaning or personal value of Judaism might be lost in the context.

Magid (2013) offers examples and explanations of what it really means to be a Jew, however from an outsider’s perspective the true Jewishness might get lost. This is something that cannot happen, especially in a multi-cultural environment. By looking too much at individuality or other factors that can also define Jewishness or Jewish identity, people might start forgetting about what it really means to be a Jew.

Although this thought contradicts the initial idea of Magid (2013), to take away any stereotypical ideas of Jewish identity, the meaning and identity of the culture might somehow morph into something that it wasn’t before. This could totally distort how other people view Jews, not in a good way. The nice thing about the article is that it presents post-ethnic Judaism in a positive light where everyone can see why it is a good idea to get over the ethnicity of a person in terms of pre-judging or defining them. However, being such a diverse and different type of group, the initial meaning of Judaism might not be preserved. Although, this might also be what Magid (2013) wants to

achieve, a different type of Jewishness which strays away from the norm and achieves greater things. Instead of sticking to traditions, rituals and other types of beliefs, Jews will be able to shape their own identity and only choose what they themselves want to keep in terms of tradition and disregard those things that they don't think are important.

In theory individuality sounds liberating and positive. However, if people of that certain group are free to see their roots in a different light, won't it change the vision of Jews according to their ancestors or elders? However, this might not necessarily be a problem among all Jews. There are only those who want to preserve their "people" and stick to their traditions. Those Jews are ones that are considered conservative.

Magid (2013) states that the Holocaust and even Zionism is what kept the Jewish community glued together throughout the years after the Second World War. However, he does not believe that the future generations who did not feel the impact of these events will not be moved by them.

Therefore, the Jewish community needs to look at the new meaning of being a Jew in America. People who belong to this group are not limited by the stereotypes that they once were pigeon-holed into.

Being a Jew in America means so much more than what people might conceive. Magid (2013) uses different theories to weave this idea together. It is no longer something that people can collectively claim because of shared events, like the Holocaust. Jewish identity is a lot more complicated than that, and it is also a matter of individualism. Values, faith and beliefs also play a big role in determining Jewish identity.

Magid (2013) is seen as a futurist here said to help historians, sociologists

and anthropologists see the future ahead of Jews. He believes that there will be trouble when it comes to determining what it really means to be a Jew and what the identity of people who are Jewish will be. This is because they do not have a shared or collective kind of event that can hold the fabric of their “identity”. The great grandchildren of those who were part of the Holocaust won’t be able to feel the emotions that particular time in history brought.

Although, that kind of thinking is also limiting and stereotypical because it assumes that there is only one type of event that can define Jewishness, which is not what Magid (2013) wanted to say at all. As we understand in the book, Jews are not only from Europe. There are a great number of Jews who have migrated from Israel and Palestine, too. Magid (2013) also states that there are people from other ethnic backgrounds who are Jews. Not all Jews are conservative and traditional. There are left-wing Jews, radicals, Orthodox Jews and even Atheist Jews.

The ethnic origins of a Jewish person is not what defines or animates them. The American Jew can be as diverse as anyone from any other group. Jewish people no longer have to be straight, they can be gay or lesbian. Jewish Americans no longer have to only marry other Jews, they can have relationships with anyone else, too. Jews who live in America also do not necessarily have to honor the Sabbath day or celebrate Hanukkah. Jews to free to celebrate Christmas, and they can work a double-shift on a Sunday in order to get extra money if they choose to do so.

The possibilities are endless with this new post-ethnic type of view of Jewish identity. This is a nice view on Judaism because not a lot of people know

much about what it means to be Jewish. All regular people know about Jews is that they, as a people, went through a lot during the Second World War, and they have a long history. Magid's (2013) view on Jewish identity brings to light the inner cultural battles that Jews are going through in terms of finding themselves. There are some people who know they are Jewish and are in touch with their heritage, yet because they do not fall under the ethnic or cultural expectations of an outsider, they will not be considered "Jewish enough". Many younger Jews would be able to relate to what Magid (2013) is trying to say about identity and the picture he is trying to paint.

As the chapters of the book develop, they tackle Jewish identities from different angles. However, it always comes down to the central thesis of Jewish renewal and how it can be promoted. The larger terrain of the argument is also pieced together as the chapters progress. Magid even probes the theology of "postmonotheism" which is something that a lot of people did not think was part of some Jews' beliefs. The idea of what it means to be Jewish to the "self" or the individual is magnified on different levels and Magid (2013) presents this in a way that someone who is Jewish will be able to relate to.

This interesting view on identity is something that can be applied to all cultures, not just Jews. However, it is relevant for this group of people because they have received much scrutiny and criticism throughout the years. People have expectations of what it really means to be a Jew, and they overlook the individual who also has personal choices and freedom. Looking into different themes that can be fused together to create one kind of identity is impossible. Magid's (2013) book shows that it is not possible for

people to know the exact idea of what it truly means to be Jewish because those who are not Jews themselves won't be able to incorporate all of their personal preferences, beliefs, traditions or anything into this kind of thinking.

An outsider, looking in to what it means to be a Jew would overlook a lot of different factors that could define individuality. Looking at this book without any innate knowledge about Judaism can bring about a different light. No longer will people have that one image of what it means to be a Jew, but different types of people or characters can even enter their mind. There is no stereotypical Jew and those who are not considered the “regular” Jew do not have to worry about what other people might think about them.

Magid's (2013) writing is very persuasive, and although each chapter brings a different angle to what it really means to be Jew, he seamlessly weaves the thesis together to provide a very compelling and earnest debate. There is no one picture of Jewish identity, especially for Jews who live in America. A post-ethnic Jew can be absolutely anyone, and there are no limits or boundaries seen in what it really means to be Jewish.

I used to always think that being a Jew was about spirituality and the lineage of your family. However, it goes a lot deeper than that, especially in the time that we live in. People from this community are no longer just one face or one persona. There are a lot of people who are Jews, yet they are not the stereotypical Jews you would expect to see on television or in the movie theaters. Since Jews can come from all corners of the world, there is no ethnic constriction that defines what Jews are or who they are collectively. The idea of being a Jew in today's society is shaped by different factors.

Although faith, spirituality and even family background can play a role in helping shape the identity, they are not the only things that will shape the Jewish identity. Jews can be liberal and they can be conservative. However, they can also be something else all together. The book even discusses what Jewis means to Jews and re-aligning the idea of Jesus with Jewish people. All these views put together can be overwhelming, however Magid (2013) does it in an organized and structured way. It provides a different view of what it means to be a Jew, especially in America.

Works Cited

Magid, Shaul. American Post-Judaism: Identity and Renewal in a Postethnic Society. Indiana University Press, 2013.