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Acceptance Remarks (AJL Reference Book Award, 1992)

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Association of Jewish Libraries Reference Book Award, 1992*

Jewish-American History and Culture.

Editors: Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker. New York: Garland Publishing, 1992.

Presentation by:

Ann Masnik

University of Maryland
College Park, MD

1992 was a year of commemorations, not least of all for the Jewish people, as we marked the anniversary of the 1492 expulsion of the Jews from Spain and Portugal. We could reflect on our heritage, the immigration of our ancestors to the United States, or of the Jews from so many parts of the world to this country. It is therefore appropriate that we present the 1992 AJL Reference Book Award to *Jewish-American History and Culture*, which speaks to the unique impact that we, as Jews, have had on the life and culture of the United States. This award is generously sponsored by Eric Chaim Kline of Santa Monica, CA. Jack Fischel and Sanford Pinsker have gathered contributions from many scholars and experts on such subjects as immigration, the Sephardim, Black-Jewish relations, and even an article on Jewish-Americans in Rock and Roll!

This volume can be used as a complement to the *Encyclopaedia Judaica* and will help anyone who wishes to begin research on Jewish life in the contemporary U.S.A. It is the first of its kind, and will do much to show the "rich, multifaceted tapestry of Jewish America."

*Presented at the Banquet of the 28th Annual Convention of the Association of Jewish Libraries, New York, June 22, 1993.

Remarks by Sanford Pinsker

Because some of my best friends are Jewish librarians, I am particularly honored to receive this award. Jack and I began our work on *Jewish-American History and Culture: An Encyclopedia* knowing full well that collaborative efforts can turn former friends into bitter enemies. What we didn't realize is that collaborative efforts can also turn good friends into better ones. During the many hours that we debated about which categories were essential, which expendable, and, of course, which personalities should, or should not, be included, each of us added a few nuggets to the store of what we know, but perhaps more important, each of us ended up with a clearer idea of what we do not know.

Our encyclopedia was designed to reflect the fact that the Jewish culture which American democracy made possible comes to more than posh temples and garish bar mitzvahs, more than stand-up comics and a litany of film stars.

On some matters, however, we were unambiguous: our encyclopedia was designed to reflect the fact that the Jewish culture which American democracy made possible comes to more than posh temples and garish bar mitzvahs, more than stand-up comics and a litany of film stars. For one thing, this is a culture whose deep commitment to social justice radically changed the landscape of American

labor and the very fabric of American society; for another, it would be hard to imagine America without the enormous contributions that Jewish-Americans have made—in science and medicine, in law and government, in the arts, in academia, in the media, in everything from what Americans wear to what they eat. Our country would be a poorer, infinitely less interesting place without blue jeans and the Salk vaccine, without George Gershwin's music or Hollywood films.

In short, "celebration" cannot be avoided, nor should it be. At the same time, however, scholarship rightly insists on sober judgment and critical detachment. Among the various threads that make up the Jewish-American experience are occasions giving justifiable cause for pride, as well as occasions for continuing disagreement and debate. That is part of the story; perhaps it *is* the story.

Remarks by Jack Fischel

Thank you for this honor. Your award validates five years of work which had as its objective a reference work that would contribute to our knowledge of the American-Jewish experience. As a historian, I am aware that the Nazi regime attempted to convince the German population that Jews had not played a significant role in the forging of German life. In particular, the regime convinced a great many Germans that Jews had not participated in the first World War.

In making the choices of what entries should be included in the encyclopedia, both editors kept in mind the lessons of history. The result is a reference work that raises an interesting question: What would American life be without the Jewish contribution to our politics, culture, and yes, our participation in all of our nation's wars since the Revolution?

Thank you for giving us the acknowledgment that we succeeded in our task.