

The New Criterion

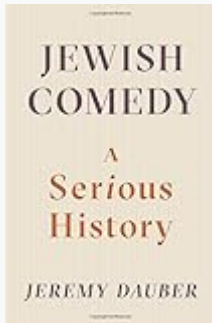
Books March 2018

Jewish for the jokes

by Harry Stein

A review of *Jewish Comedy: A Serious History* by Jeremy Dauber

BOOKS IN THIS ARTICLE



Jeremy Dauber

Jewish Comedy: A Serious History

W. W. Norton & Company, 384 pages, \$28.95

As an habitu   of Ford's Theater, John Wilkes Booth knew the line in *Our American Cousin*'s third act sure to get a laugh so huge it would drown out the crack of a Derringer in the presidential box. "Well," the play's plain-spoken protagonist sneers at a shameless social climber, "I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal—you sockdologizing old man-trap."

How much has American humor changed from that time to this? The kind of joke that once made a theater full of sophisticates roar is found today, if anywhere, on reruns of *Hee Haw*.

So what happened? Simple—with the rise of mass culture, Jews took over the humor business. As noted Steve Allen, who many would be surprised to learn was *not* Jewish, in today's...

The rest of this article is locked. Please make sure you are logged in to view the full article.

Harry Stein is currently working on a sequel to his comic novel *Will Tripp: Pissed Off Attorney at Law*.

This article originally appeared in The New Criterion, Volume 36 Number 7 , on page 67

Copyright © 2024 The New Criterion | www.newcriterion.com

<https://newcriterion.com/issues/2018/3/jewish-for-the-jokes-9618>