

Emancipation: how Liberating Europe's Jews from the Ghetto Led to Revolution and Renaissance
by Michael Goldfarb
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The Enlightenment, known in Hebrew as *Haskalah*, is seen by the vast majority of modern Jews as being the key movement in transitioning European Jews from the margins of pre-modern society to the mainstream. It is therefore a given that it was 'good for the Jews', an assumption usually made without qualification. This over-simplification of a lengthy and many layered process is bound to be inadequate, and by reading Michael Goldfarb's excellent new book, *Emancipation*, a reader desiring the truth rather than the fantasy will understand why.

Goldfarb divides his book into five sections, each with several sub-headings: Emancipation, Reformation, Revolution, Consolidation, Renaissance, and his wide arc starts with Spinoza and ends with Wittgenstein.

In the course of this historical odyssey Goldfarb makes it clear that the passage of Jews from the ghetto to broader society, which itself unleashed forces of Jewish Reform and a recidivistic backlash that irrevocably changed the Jewish world, nevertheless served as a touchstone for the creation of civil rights for everyone in countries that had previously been dominated by Monarch and/or Church.

This truth is exemplified by the history of the French Revolution and its desire to enfranchise Jews – a process later taken much further by Napoleon – which engaged some of the brightest and best in the revolution and was the cause of some of the bitterest arguments. For those who nurtured their anti-Semitism and desire for Jews to be marginalised – or worse, the rights granted to Jews were an outrage that needed to be reversed, and both in France and Germany, two pivotal enlightenment countries as well as the locus of the worst anti-Semitic outrages of the 20th century, the rights and freedoms that were granted to Jews meant that all resented rights and freedoms in general society, and their accompanying libertarianism, were associated with Jews, and it was Jews who were blamed for them.

Michael Goldfarb is a journalist rather than an historian, and like many who venture from the press to books his writing makes a detailed and immense subject readable, pacy and enjoyable.

Jews often see the *Haskalah* and Emancipation as the source of intellectual and physical freedom, what Goldfarb does is present a nuanced narrative that demonstrates that these momentous events in modern Jewish history also sowed the seeds for the implosion and destruction of Jewish life in Nazi occupied Europe.

This is a powerful and superb book that deserves to be widely read.

Rabbi Dr Charles H Middleburgh