



Jews and Power (Jewish Encounters Series)

By Ruth R. Wisse

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Jews and Power (Jewish Encounters Series) By Ruth R. Wisse

Part of the Jewish Encounter series

Taking in everything from the Kingdom of David to the Oslo Accords, Ruth Wisse offers a radical new way to think about the Jewish relationship to power. Traditional Jews believed that upholding the covenant with God constituted a treaty with the most powerful force in the universe; this later transformed itself into a belief that, unburdened by a military, Jews could pursue their religious mission on a purely moral plain. Wisse, an eminent professor of comparative literature at Harvard, demonstrates how Jewish political weakness both increased Jewish vulnerability to scapegoating and violence, and unwittingly goaded power-seeking nations to cast Jews as perpetual targets.

Although she sees hope in the State of Israel, Wisse questions the way the strategies of the Diaspora continue to drive the Jewish state, echoing Abba Eban's observation that Israel was the only nation to win a war and then sue for peace. And then she draws a persuasive parallel to the United States today, as it struggles to figure out how a liberal democracy can face off against enemies who view Western morality as weakness. This deeply provocative book is sure to stir debate both inside and outside the Jewish world. Wisse's narrative offers a compelling argument that is rich with history and bristling with contemporary urgency.

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Jews and Power (Jewish Encounters Series) By Ruth R. Wisse Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #335685 in Books
- Brand: Brand: Schocken
- Published on: 2007-08-28
- Released on: 2007-08-28
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 7.15" h x .25" w x 4.66" l, .78 pounds
- Binding: Hardcover
- 256 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

This survey of Jewish history highlights the political aspect of Jewish experience, beginning with the observation that in the Hebrew Bible, Jewish power came through military heroics. By the time of the Roman conquest in A.D. 70, the Talmudic rabbis changed the narrative, blaming defeat on internal dissension, thus elevating the need for political discipline above military power. A Harvard professor of Yiddish and comparative literature, Wisse is keen to study how the politics of Jews occasions the politics of what she terms anti-Jews. For instance, she asserts that Allied leaders entered WWII not to save Europe's Jews but in order to defeat the Nazis, who were also anti-Jews. Similarly, the author says, President Bush was provoked to fight anti-Jewish terrorists by 9/11. Yet in both cases, isolationists accused the administration of caving in to Jewish demands that damaged American interests. Even the founding of Israel, she implies, has not normalized Jews' political position in the world. Palestinians, she says, have forged a national identity in obsessive opposition to Israel, and other nations have exploited Israel for their own political ends. Although her prose is sometimes opaque, Wisse is in fine form with well-reasoned, self-assured arguments bound to provoke heated debate among interested intellectuals. (Aug. 28)

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From *Booklist*

Wisse believes that Jews figure more prominently in the study of religion than they do in the study of government or political theory. To address this deficiency, she writes, this book highlights the political aspect of Jewish experience. In particular, Wisse says, she wants to "see how the politics of Jews occasions the politics of anti-Jews. The tendency of Jews to seek fault in themselves is part of the harmful pattern I hope to expose." This is a difficult thesis to examine, but Wisse gets her points across in a clear and convincing way. This is the eighth volume in the Jewish Encounters series, and 18 more titles are forthcoming. Wisse, the author of *The Sehlemiel As Modern Hero* (1984), *The Well*, and *The Shtetl and Other Modern Yiddish Novellas* (1986), is a professor of comparative literature at Harvard University.

Cohen, George

Review

Praise for Ruth Wisse's *Jews and Power*

"In an era of deepening political and moral confusion, Ruth Wisse supplies a voice that is both clarion and courageous. Hers is a vital message for anyone who cares about Israel's fate and the future of the Jewish people. *Jews and Power* is a book for our times and a cogent call for clarity."

—Michael Oren, author of *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*

"Wisse's brilliantly discerning analysis supplies insights so historically striking, and so currently indispensable, that no honest thinker can do without them."

—Cynthia Ozick, author of *Heir to the Glimmering World*

"A book . . . that celebrates the Jewish return to sovereign power, in all its promise and complexity, is as unusual as it is welcome. Wisse has written such a book . . . [*Jews and Power* is] a good, fighting book that contains much information in few pages."

—*New York Times Book Review*

"Challenging, erudite and penetrating. . . Wisse shows no fear in these pages in saying exactly what she

thinks, and you can't help but be impressed with her chutzpah, even if you totally disagree with her . . . *Jews and Power* makes no claim for objectivity, but it is an elucidating book. It will cause liberals to question their self-consciousness about Israel, since Wisse's argument about Jewish apologetics challenges liberal ideas of victimhood. For conservatives, the book offers an intellectual understanding of what otherwise might seem to be only tribalistic loyalties.

—*Los Angeles Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Patrina Eaton:

What do you with regards to book? It is not important together with you? Or just adding material when you really need something to explain what the ones you have problem? How about your free time? Or are you busy individual? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is make one feel bored faster. And you have extra time? What did you do? All people has many questions above. They must answer that question since just their can do which. It said that about book. Book is familiar on every person. Yes, it is appropriate. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need this particular *Jews and Power* (*Jewish Encounters Series*) to read.

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Jose Rosales:

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