

"Hebrew Academy, The Luxor, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1994."

Although many photographers have recently turned their attention to Jewish subjects, despite all good intentions, their work has tended to reinforce Jewish stereotypes and myths. In *Jews America: A Representation* (Harry N. Abrams, \$75), Frédéric Brenner has assiduously avoided such pitfalls. Even the book's title—its refusal to be "Jews in America"—serves the 37-year-old photographer's agenda. Says Brenner, for whom this is just one installment of a 17-year study of the worldwide Jewish Diaspora, "I wanted to show that there's no real answer to the question, 'What is a Jew?'"

Amassed in an amazingly lavish, gatefold-laden volume, Brenner's pictures make the point with their diversity, from Jewish Harley-Davidson owners in front of a Miami Beach synagogue (titled "Jews with Hogs") to an Alaskan Jewish fur trader to the group called Jewish Lesbian Daughters of Holocaust Survivors.

The photographs are full of visual wit. In one image, students from Las Vegas's Hebrew Academy are arrayed on pyramidal bleachers next to the city's Luxor Hotel, whose distinctive sphinx and pyramid shape are symbols of Jewish enslavement. The picture offers a whimsical comment that transplanted Jews have flourished in a desert far removed from Egypt. One of the messages is that Jews don't need a homeland to be Jewish. "In coming to America, I wanted to understand this incredible experimental laboratory where Jews have reinvented themselves," says Brenner. Twenty-nine group portraits are the heart of the book. "I worked 18 hours a day for two years with a huge number of assistants and consultants," says Brenner, who garnered sponsorship from various private groups, including Steven Spielberg's Righteous Persons Foundation. Does it all work? Correctly, Brenner says, "I think it was the right approach for *le spectacle de l'Amerique!*"

—R.H.

FREDERIC BRENNER/COURTESY HOWARD GREENBERG GALLERY (2)



FREDERIC BRENNER

jews
america
a representation

PHOTOGRAPHS BY FREDERIC BRENNER
With an essay by Simon Schama



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