

Man has been here 32,000 (200,000) years(correct numbers in brackets). That it took a hundred million (four billion) years to prepare the world for him is proof that that is what it was done for. I suppose it is. I dunno. If the Eiffel tower were now representing the world's age, the skin of paint on the pinnacle-knob at its summit would represent man's share of that age; & anybody would perceive that that skin was what the tower was built for. (Twain 1903)

A more scientific argument is that if man was predictable, so was the elephant with its nasal limb, and so was every other species when it evolved, vertebrate and invertebrate, and there have been some very odd creatures that have come and gone among the million or more species that we know about. Either everything was predictable under the loose reign and reins of God, or there was no loose rein and nothing was predictable. Given that most small animals reproduce at least annually, the evolution of the major changes from a small marine organism to a land reptile took more than 250,000 generations, while the further relatively minor changes to achieve man took more than 300,000 generations of extinctions and radiations, with never an indication that we were on our way. Any God waiting for man would have needed more than the patience of Job.

Suggesting that there is any inevitability about or purpose to evolution is to stretch the data beyond snapping point, while the hypothesis of loose reins to generate the why of life really does not stand up to the biological evidence: the idea can be used to justify anything and deny nothing. In my view, Section 1 is just another version of creationism, albeit much more sophisticated than most. A better solution to the doctor's dilemma is schizophrenia: accept the evidence from the rocks in our minds and love the religion of our forefathers in our hearts.

Reference

Twain, Mark. 1903. Was the world made for man?. In *Letters from Earth*, (Ed. Bernard deVoto. Publ. 1962), 211–215. Evanston: Harper Row.

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Muslims and Jews in France: History of a Conflict

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It is often forgotten that France has the third largest Jewish community in the world after Israel and the USA. Of the 500,000 or so Jews living in France—a ban on ethnic statistics means we do not have exact figures—the overwhelming majority are highly

integrated and as diverse as French society itself. Nevertheless, the question of Jewish distinctiveness has played a prominent part in French political culture for more than two centuries. From the fierce debates over Jewish “allegiances” during the French Revolution, to present-day concerns about Jewish identity and French citizenship, the tension between Jewishness and Frenchness has run as a continuous thread through modern French history.

In itself, this would be a story worth telling—and there are many excellent books on the subject. But Mandel has gone one step further. Rather than discuss the Jewish community in isolation, she has written a book that looks at the relationship between Jews and Muslims in post-war France. This opens a plethora of exciting new perspectives that transcend a narrowly communitarian history. By juxtaposing the experience of French Jews—many of whom lived in French North Africa until the early 1960s—and those of French Muslims, Mandel sheds new light on the colonial legacy, identity formation amongst religious minorities, and the complex tapestry of religious politics that has emerged in France since the Second World War.

One of the key arguments of the book is that Jewish and Muslim political engagement in France has been profoundly shaped by the colonial encounter and decolonization. The racial, economic and social inequalities of French colonialism—in which a minority of fully naturalized North African Jews and other Europeans lived alongside and subsequently migrated with a much larger number of disenfranchised North African Muslims—set in motion an unstable and asymmetrical relationship between the two communities. While Jews and Muslims mostly interacted peacefully with each other in multi-ethnic cities like Marseille, attempts at political reconciliation in the 1960s and 1980s were unsuccessful. Ultimately, the contrast between Jewish integration and Muslim social exclusion in metropolitan France, as well as the increasingly polarized geopolitics of the Arab–Israeli conflict, made it almost impossible to create common ground.

Mandel’s keen sense of the French context offers a powerful rebuttal to those who argue that conflicts between Muslims and Jews in post-war France are an inevitable and timeless clash of religions. On the contrary, they have been formed by specific contexts. The most important of these was the collapse of the French Empire in North Africa, which created unusual kinds of resentment, bitterness, loss and nostalgia on both sides of the Mediterranean. Fortunately, Mandel herself remains scrupulously balanced in her presentation of the Muslim–Jewish relationship in France, despite the emotional charge of subjects such as Holocaust memory, the Algerian War and the Six-Day War. Her local archival work, sensitivity to the voices of different actors, and very wide reading (including a welcome number of recent doctoral dissertations) give her analysis weight and authority. Indeed, I would expect this slim yet authoritative tome to become a reference on its subject. It is easily one of the best books on post-war French Judaism in English since Judith Friedlander’s *Vilna on the Seine: Jewish Intellectuals in France since 1968* (1990) and, in a renewed climate of intercommunal hostility, deserves a wide readership in France and beyond.

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