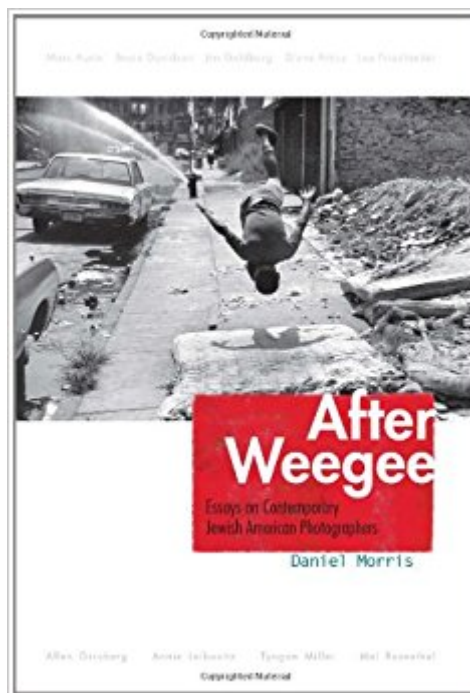




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# After Weegee: Essays On Contemporary Jewish American Photographers (Judaic Traditions In Literature, Music, And Art)



## Synopsis

Examining a range of styles from the gritty vernacular sensibility of Weegee (Arthur Fellig) to the glitzy theatricality of Annie Leibovitz, Morris takes a thoughtful look at ten American photographers, exploring the artists' often ambivalent relationships to their Jewish backgrounds. Going against the grain of most criticism on the subject, Morris argues that it is difficult to label Jewish American photographers as unequivocal "outsiders" or "insiders" with respect to mainstream American culture. He shows it is equally difficult to assign a characteristic style to such a varied group whose backgrounds range from self-taught photographers to those trained in art school. In eclectic ways, however, the contemporary photographers highlighted in *After Weegee* carry on the social justice and documentary tradition associated with Sid Grossman, Aaron Siskind, and the primarily Jewish Photo League of the 1930s by chronicling the downside of the Reagan revolution of the 1980s. Rather than record movements or trends in current Jewish American photography, Morris focuses in-depth on the work of Bruce Davidson, Jim Goldberg, Mel Rosenthal, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Allen Ginsberg, Annie Leibovitz, Tyagan Miller, Aaron Siskind, and Marc Asnin. These photographers share a tendency toward socially informed expression and an interest in self-expression via the operations of photography, inevitably shaped by histories of socially conscious or documentary imaging. Moving between photo history, cultural history, and close readings of the images, Morris traces a common thread among contemporary secular Jewish American photographers, artists who link the construction of personal identity to the representation of history. *After Weegee* broadens our understanding of the relationship between Jewishness and contemporary photography, challenging us to take a fresh look at much of what has come to be canonized as modern, postwar, and art photography. "Lucid, readable commentary on individual images-some familiar but refreshed by his reading; others less known and happily brought to light-and more particularly on the meaning of images as arrayed in photo-textual form."-Sara Blair, author of *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century*

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In his latest book, Morris explores the works of 10 Jewish photographers and how their work relates to their Jewish heritage, as well as why and how Jewish photographers have distinguished themselves in their field. Morris begins with Weegee (Arthur Fellig), a chronicler of death and heartbreak, and moves on to the photographs of Bruce Davidson, Jim Goldberg, Mel Rosenthal, Diane Arbus, Lee Friedlander, Allen Ginsberg, Annie Leibovitz, Tyagan Miller, and Marc Asnin. The subjects studied by the photographers are interesting in their own right, but Morris's text provides additional insights, such as Tyagan Miller's observations about youth and the relationship between family, church life, and future success. From Asnin's three-decade study of his uncle to Friedlander's photographs of historical American landmarks in the context of modern times to Goldberg's *Rich and Poor*, with poignant comments penned by the photo subjects, Morris concludes that photography is one means of witnessing as a form of social responsibility related to the biblical imperative, the injunction to Remember (Zakhor). With small reproductions of some of the compositions cited, this book of essays could serve as a companion to collections of the photographers' works for those seeking context, biographical information, and analysis. - Publishers Weekly --Publishers Weekly

Morris's collection of ten essays focuses on the work of Diane Arbus, Marc Asnin, Bruce Davidson, Lee Friedlander, Allen Ginsberg, Jim Goldberg, Annie Leibovitz, Tyagan Miller, Mel Rosenthal, Aaron Siskind, and Weegee (Arthur Fellig). Morris begins with the work of Weegee and considers each photographer's work in terms of his or her relationship to Judaism rather than Weegee's influence on Jewish photography. Using copious interviews, articles, photographs, and critical theory, Morris analyzes individual images with a close eye for detail and a clear discussion of how each individual Jewish photographer fits into the broader context of contemporary photography. Morris sees the Jewish identity of these photographers as something that is rarely blatant, often ambivalent, and always complex. What distinguishes Morris's book is his accessible but scholarly style; as a poet, writer, and literary critic, he adds much to the conversation

about Judaism and modern art. VERDICT This intellectually engaging volume is highly recommended for graduate collections of photography and Judaic studies. -Library Journal --Library Journal

An abandoned mattress reflects the shadow of a boy suspended in midair. Dozens of faces poke out of windows, trying to catch a glimpse of a body on the street below. Two elderly women embrace, one gazing straight ahead while the other, numbers etched on her forearm, looks lost in her memories. These three images capture ordinary New Yorkers at extraordinary, if usually grim, moments: The young boy briefly achieves flight amidst a landscape of urban decay in the Burning Bronx of the 1970s. The witnesses are craning their necks to get a better look at a gunned-down gangster in 1930s Little Italy. The two women are sisters and survivors, moored in New York half a century after the horror of the camps. Their stark eloquence is only half the story; who took these photos? In his fascinating new book, *After Weegee: Essays on Contemporary Jewish American Photographers* (2011, Syracuse University Press), Daniel Morris considers the creators of these images Mel Rosenthal, Weegee, and Bruce Davidson, respectively along with the likes of Diane Arbus and Annie Leibovitz, as he investigates the complex legacy of Jewish photography in America. - Habitus: A Diaspora Journal --Habitus: A Diaspora Journal

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