

Jewish Immigrant Entrepreneurship in New York and London, 1880–1914: Enterprise and Culture. *By Andrew Godley*. New York: Palgrave, 2001. xii + 187 pp. Tables, bibliography, notes, index. Cloth, \$60. ISBN 0-333-96045-9.

Reviewed by Michael French

This concise study considers whether British culture was less conducive to entrepreneurship than that of the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Godley's imaginative approach to this debate is to take Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe to London and New York as a control population. On the assumption that migrants from the Pale of Settlement to both cities were a uniform social group in terms of background, skills, and potential for entrepreneurship, any subsequent variations in the extent of their entrepreneurial activities would be the result of cultural differences between Britain and the United States. The book, originally a Ph.D. thesis, establishes, tests, and reports on this hypothesis, devoting a good deal of attention to the validity of the underlying assumptions, the reliability of data, and the applicability of economic theory and aspects of the literature to entrepreneurship. In the process, the book links a diverse literature on immigration, aspects of the clothing trades, and economic perspectives on culture.

At the heart of the study is a new data set on Jewish marriages in Britain, created by combining samples from the chief rabbi's authorization certificates and the civil marriage registers. The former identified birthplace after 1880, allowing immigrant and nonimmigrant bridegrooms to be differentiated, and the civil registers listed occupations for men. From these data, Godley estimates that 14.2 percent of male European Jewish immigrants in London were entrepreneurs in the 1880s, and 18 percent by 1907–14. In comparison, levels of entrepreneurship in New York were slightly higher initially, at 18 percent, but then increased far more rapidly, reaching 35 percent in 1914. Overall it appears that Jewish immigrants were highly entrepreneurial, with the clothing trades providing their main locus. An initial tendency to be engaged in low-income, "sweating," occupations provided a route to independent business careers or shifts into retailing and other entrepreneurial activities. This analysis is supported by some deft descriptions of the development of the clothing trades.

In both cities, Godley argues that immigrants who succeeded in becoming entrepreneurs generally came from more privileged social backgrounds and were more assimilated, in terms of language skills and social connections, than other immigrants. After dismissing alternative explanations, Godley concludes that the general culture in New York was more conducive to

entrepreneurship, whereas in London cultural pressures led immigrants to identify themselves as journeymen as a route to higher status. Culture thus did matter, and the old stereotypes of British anti-entrepreneurial values are confirmed.

Overall the book is a nicely executed comparative study based on a secure foundation of theory and evidence. The full implications of culture might have been more thoroughly explored if there had been more discussion of the actual business careers and activities of immigrants in London and New York. Godley suggests that Jewish journeymen in London worked in ways that bore little relation to earlier or indigenous definitions of a journeyman, in that the nature of the work performed had changed and the prospects of becoming a master were now limited, and this idea raises the possibility that entrepreneurship cannot be easily identified with specific occupations. The discussion of the potential relations between wages, profits, and the demand and supply of entrepreneurs also supports this notion. This section offers at least a hint that the large percentage gap between levels of entrepreneurship in the two cities might be misleading, as some proportion might constitute different forms of cultural labeling. Even if New York's lead in entrepreneurship was as substantial as the numbers imply, there would still be advantages in exploring the influence of cultural factors in greater detail. It would give room to discuss cultural aspects of networking; relations between cultures of recent immigrants, earlier arrivals, and other migrants; and possible variations in family structures and the extent to which women fulfilled entrepreneurial roles. In this sense the new data highlight interesting avenues for further exploration.

Michael French is reader in economic and social history at the University of Glasgow. He has written widely on U.S. and British economic and business history, with publications including The U.S. Tire Industry: A History (1990), U.S. Economic History since 1945 (1997) and, with Jim Phillips, Cheated not Poisoned: Food Regulation in the United Kingdom, 1875–1938 (2000). He is currently conducting research on retailing cultures and on the National Negro Business League.