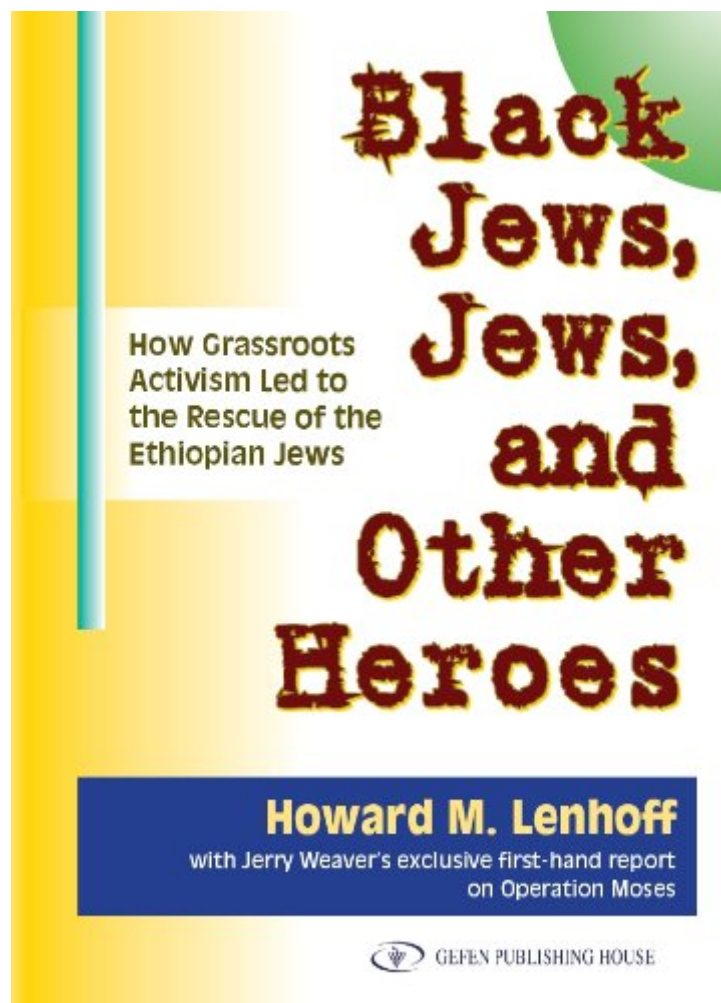




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# Black Jews, Jews, And Other Heroes: How Grassroots Activism Led To The Rescue Of The Ethiopian Jews



## Synopsis

Seldom has a small grassroots organization polarized American Jewry as did the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) and seldom has a grassroots organization been so successful. How were five governments persuaded that it was to their interest to allow the threatened Jews of Ethiopia to fulfill their dream of rejoining their brethren in Israel? From 1974 through 1991, active AAEJ members demonstrated that it was possible to rescue black Jews from Africa. They enlisted the support of college students, American Rabbis, editors of the Jewish press and other Zionists. Lenhoff's memoir provides many untold stories behind this historic drama: How Israeli Ethiopian Jews and American Jews worked secretly to rescue over 1,000 Ethiopian Jews. How Jerry Weaver masterminded Operation Moses – the first mass exodus of black Africans as free people – not as slaves. How two gutsy American women set up a situation allowing Israel to rescue 14,000 Ethiopian Jews in one day of Operation Solomon. There is more: the intrigues in Israel between the politics of religion and the Law of Return; the daring heroic adventures of courageous Ethiopian Jews as they trekked from Ethiopia to Sudan. These are the stories of activists who challenged the establishment and won! *Black Jews, Jews, and Other Heroes* is written from the first-hand experiences of one of the AAEJ's three Presidents, scholar-activist Howard Lenhoff. Lenhoff and Gefen Publishing House are especially pleased to present also as part of this book, the untold story of – "righteous gentile," – Jerry Weaver.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Inside story of a monumental achievement--rescuing Ethiopian Jews and getting them to Israel. Written by a trailblazer-- Howard Lenhoff-- whose grassroots organization helped awake American Jews to the need to help rescue their forgotten black sisters and brothers and bring them home to Israel. This historical achievement is a modern day miracle. Today there are two Ethiopian-born Israelis in the Israeli Knesset (Parliament).

This Book is a must read for every Christian. My life has been changed by reading it. The truth about The Jews. The Black Jews and those who love for them and their Passion to rescue them and get them home to Israel!!

Early in this book Howard Lenhoff interrupts his narrative with a discussion of what constitutes history. It is a particularly apt discussion because, as is said of journalists, in this book Howard Lenhoff is writing a first draft of history. As he also makes clear, this is not the story of how the Jewish population of Ethiopia, the Falasha, was rescued, although it is an important part of that story. The struggle to accomplish this rescue, carried out over decades through the work of many individuals in many places, was as complex an effort as any battle, military campaign, or war - so it is perhaps appropriate that as I read Howard's account I remembered the words of the Duke of Wellington, "The history of a battle is not unlike the history of a ball. Some individuals may recollect all the little events of which the great result is the battle won or lost; but no individual can recollect the order in which, or the exact moment at which they occurred, which makes all the difference...But if a true history is written, what will become of the reputation of half of those who have acquired reputations, and who deserve it for their gallantry, but who, if their mistakes and casual misconduct were made public would not be so well thought of?" It is to the author's credit that he states simply he is telling the story of "how grassroots activism led to the rescue of the Ethiopian Jews," in the form of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ), which he helped found in 1974. This book delivers that story while also citing many other works that address other aspects and elements of the story as seen and experienced by others - from individuals to government agencies. As I read

the book I had the feeling that I was actually sitting at a kitchen table as Howard Lenhoff - aided by former U.S. Refugee Coordinator officer Jerry Weaver - recounted the tale, complete with digressions, interruptions, some meandering, but always with a determination that the whole truth be told. In a similar interest of full disclosure, I should point out that during my own U.S. Foreign Service career I served as the Embassy Refugee Officer in Kinshasa dealing with the refugees in then-Zaire (again the Congo today) as they sought to escape an ongoing civil war in neighboring Angola. I was also familiar with Ambassadors Lyman and Horan, actually serving as one of the latter's intelligence briefers during his time as Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs before his posting as Ambassador to Cameroon, and these contacts left me with very positive assessments of both. I am also happy to say that nothing in Howard Lenhoff's account of the role played by these two men in this effort on behalf of the Falashas has caused me to alter those opinions. The author suggests that the efforts of the AAEJ as told in this book could present the reader with a model for activism. However, while it captures the required enthusiasm and persistence demonstrated by Howard Lenhoff and his many collaborators, it is not as written a "how-to" book. The discerning reader may even find in its pages a revelation that may have escaped several of our current presidential candidates - the often-hard reality that the politicians, officials, and bureaucrats in government are locked in a symbiotic relationship with the activists, agitators, and general political troublemakers outside of government. The former frequently need the latter to keep them focused on issues that really are of importance to society at large - and the latter need the former because for all of their energy and commitment, they lack both the legislative authority to make new laws and the executive power to make the government act. This book also makes clear the importance of one other essential ingredient for making anything happen in the world at large - money. Ultimately, individuals, corporations, governments, and all organizations have one sure way of identifying and demonstrating what is important to them and that is to spend money to obtain it or to accomplish it. All of the good intentions and wishes in the world were not enough to help rescue Ethiopia's Jews until the AEJJ and people like Howard Lenhoff, Jerry Weaver, and others demonstrated that it was important enough to them to spend money on actually achieving that goal. As Howard Lenhoff noted early in this work, "Black Jews, Jews, and Other Heroes" is not the story of the rescue of the Falasha. Nevertheless, the story told here is an important contribution to the telling of that story. Anyone wanting to know the whole story of that rescue, whether scholar or general reader, will need to read this book along with the many other works generously cited in its pages in order to come close to knowing this story.

Lenhoff relates, in clear and riveting style, the compassion, courage, ingenuity and tenacity required to achieve an epic humanitarian goal in the face of inscrutable and overwhelming odds. Thus the rescue of ancient tribes of enslaved black Jews from Ethiopia (Falashas or Beta Yisrael) and their immigration to Israel (aliyah) during operations Elijah, Moses, Sheba, Pidyon Shevuyim and Solomon required catalytic activism of a host of heroes from, among others, the American Association of Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ; 1974-1993). Lenhoff was President of AAEJ from 1978 to 1982, a fledgling group that first irritated, then involved established organizations in American and Israel Jewry. He reveals the oscillating evolution of an intricate tapestry of motivation, information, recruitment and insertion during the growth of AAEJ, including conflicts and compromises, in religious and political arenas, with bureaucracy of the government of Israel. The exodus began slowly by trailblazing efforts to smuggle single or small groups of Falashas, eventually totaling about 1000, to the squalor of refugee camps in Sudan, then at war with Israel, and to Kenya, and then onward to Europe and Israel. Mass exodus of more than 10,000 Beta Israel from Sudan, orchestrated by Jerry Weaver during Operation Moses, occurred late in 1984, followed by Operation Sheba during which 500 remaining refugees were liberated. Still, some 25,000 black Jews remained in Ethiopia. In the next five years, more than 1,000 of them were transported to a refugee camp in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, then on to Israel. In the first few months of 1991, about 5,000 Falashas made the trip to the Promised Land. Amazingly, an additional 14,000 were airlifted from Addis Ababa to Israel during Operation Solomon on May 24 and 25, 1991, under the direction of LaDena Schnapper. A few thousand Ethiopian Jews in outlying communities missed the Airbus and were rescued over the next seven years. For this non-activist Christian scientist, heroics behind the monumental triumph of liberating Ethiopian Jews merit award of a Nobel Peace Prize!

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