



Caroline E. Light. *That Pride of Race and Character: The Roots of Jewish Benevolence in the Jim Crow South.* New York: New York University Press, 2014. 304 S. ISBN 978-1-4798-5954-2.

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C. Light: *That Pride of Race and Character*

After the "Redeemers" crushed the Reconstruction governments and the Democratic Party gained political power and control in the former Confederate States, white supremacy was brutally reinforced in the South of the United States. Civil rights, conferred to African Americans after the Civil War, were annihilated, a strictly racialized segregation was established and the subordination of African Americans reconstituted. To secure the restored regime of white supremacy, white people covered the South with an immense wave of terror directed against African Americans. According to historian W. Fitzhugh Brundage, more than 3.320 African Americans were lynched by white mobs in the period from 1880 to 1930. W. Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South. Georgia and Virginia, 1890-1930*, Urbana 1993, p. 8. Directed against African Americans to an overwhelming amount, the obsession of white Southerners to draw and strictly monitor the Color Line also threatened other ethnic groups, for example Italian immigrants whose whiteness was doubted by white southerners. Clive Webb, *The Lynching of Sicilian Immigrants in the American South, 1886-1910*, in: *American Nineteenth Century History* 3 (Spring 2002), p. 45-76, here p. 50. Jews constituted another group whose place in southern society was precarious. Kristoff Kerl, "To Restore Home Rule: Angloamerikanische Männlichkeit und Antisemitismus im US-Süd zwischen den 1860er und 1920er Jahren, forthcoming.

The ambivalent and fragile status of Jews in the social matrix of the former Confederate states is the start-

ing point of Caroline E. Light's fascinating book "That Pride of Race and Character: The Roots of Jewish Benevolence in the Jim Crow South". To date, historians like Eric Goldstein and Leonard Rogoff have researched perceptions and constructions of the Jews' racial status in the South during the last decades of the 19th and the early 20th century on the one hand, and the strategies and techniques developed by Jews to pass as white on the other. Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness. Jews, Race, and American Identity*, Princeton 2006; Leonard Rogoff, *Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew*, in: Mark K. Bauman (ed.), *Dixie Diaspora. An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, Tuscaloosa 2006, p. 390-426. Whereas both Goldstein and Rogoff put their focus of research on biologically defined discourses of race, Light focuses on "race as a metaphor for culture and shared history" (p. 39). By researching the institutionalized performance of "gemilut hasadim" – the Hebrew term for "giving loving kindness" (p. 3) – Light examines one of the strategies applied by Jews to navigate through the threatening racial landscape. In her understanding, "charity served as an essential defense against the cultural, social, and political uncertainties of Jewish belonging" (p. 5). In times of a strictly racialized and gendered southern society which punished the alleged transgression of the Color Line with brutal violence, Jews were increasingly afraid of not fulfilling the requirements of southern cultural citizenship. In this social and cultural context, for relatively established Jews, benevolence and charity served as a means of training and educating poor

and very often foreign-born coreligionists to acculturate to the gendered and racialized order in the South. This way, they tried to sustain the majority's fragile perception of Jews as worthy of citizenship. In consequence, the specific way *âgemilut hasadimâ* was perceived, organized and practiced by Jewish benevolent institutions was deeply entangled with dominant social and cultural ideas in the Jim Crow South. Honor, virtue, racial distinction from people categorized as non-white as well as the ability for economic self-containment were central aspects in the politics of social uplift performed by the different Jewish charity organizations.

That Pride of Race and Character is a well-structured book that makes it easy to follow the historiographic narrative and arguments developed by Light. The first chapter introduces the reader into the world of institutionalized Jewish benevolence by delivering a short history of Jewish charity institutions in the United States and by describing the South as its origin. From the early years of *âgemilut hasadimâ* the first Hebrew Benevolent Society was founded in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1784 altruism was not the only driving force behind Jewish charity. Simultaneously, benevolence was also used as a means to *âprove Jewish entitlement to the benefits of U.S. citizenshipâ* (p. 30). In the second chapter, Light embeds the politics of Jewish benevolence in the context of contemporary discourses of race and immigration. At the turn of the century, established Jews looked for strategies to deal with the rising number of non-accultured, often poor Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe. In this context, Jewish orphan homes in different ways served as a proof for the *âworthinessâ* of Jews to be regarded as a respectable part of the citizenry. After locating Jewish benevolence in a broader social and cultural background, in chapters three and the following, Light investigates the ways charity was organized and practiced by benevolent organizations as well as by social workers. Chapter three highlights

the methods used to implement *âthe gender, race, and class ideals that comprised the essence of southern citizenshipâ* into these Jewish children, categorized simultaneously as needy and worthy of charitable support (p. 83). In chapter four, Light shifts her focus from orphans to deserted Jewish mothers (*âagunotâ*) who asked Jewish charity organizations for material support. Reflecting the widespread notion of deserted mothers as women unwilling to oblige to their supposed female function as *âguardians of home and familyâ*, charity institutions made distinctions between *ânon-worthyâ* and *âworthy agunotâ*. The way social workers interacted with their clients is the subject of the fifth chapter. Sometimes, the efforts of social workers to shape the supported families' daily life in a way that was perceived as a *conditio sine qua non* for the social uplift of the subsidized children encountered resistance from their clients. In the final chapter, Light investigates the impact of ethnic differences within the Jewish community on the activities of Jewish benevolence institutions. Whereas Ashkenazi leaders and social workers met their Sephardic clients with suspicion, some Sephardim challenged these pejorative perceptions and *âstruggled to self-defineâ* (p. 208).

That Pride of Race and Character primarily relies on sources, records, and case files of Jewish benevolent organizations, especially the New Orleans Jewish Orphans Home and the Hebrew Orphans Home of Atlanta. Additionally, Light also uses newspapers and (scientific) monographs in order to develop her narrative. By reading these underexamined sources through an intersectional lens, Light convincingly reveals the importance of interdependent categories like race, class, gender, and sexuality for the understanding of Jewish charity and, therefore, of Jewish struggles of belonging in the Jim Crow South. Thus, the book constitutes an important contribution to the current state of research on the history of southern Jewry in the United States of America, which still is an underexplored field of historiography.

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