

Book Reviews

Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South: Ambivalence and Adaptation. By Anton Hieke. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013. 396 pages.

Compiling a database of every Jewish resident of North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia at key points during the Reconstruction Era that followed the Civil War is a labor-intensive task. It involves not only the arduous work of combing through census documents, cemetery lists, local histories, and the like, but also wrestling with problems such as variant spellings, missing data, and conflicting information. Nonetheless, Anton Hieke has undertaken this task in order to lay the groundwork for his impressively researched study, *Jewish Identity in the Reconstruction South*. As the foundation for his demographic research, Hieke wisely chose to use the census returns of 1860 and 1880 rather than those of 1870 (the one census taken in the midst of the Reconstruction Era). He thus can provide a sense of the composition of the Jewish population of the three states on which he focuses as well as reveal something about the geographic and social mobility of that population.

Hieke contends that the Reconstruction Era was an important one because it was “a formative period for many Jewish communities and congregations” in the South and also the period of “the beginning of a transition for so many Jewish congregations from Orthodox to Reform Judaism” (1). Nonetheless, according to Hieke, so little research has been done on southern Jews in the years just after the Civil War that much of what has been said about them is based largely on assumptions rather than on evidence. Therein lies the rationale for the research project that resulted in this volume.

The core of Hieke’s book is composed of three sections, each about a hundred pages in length, exploring three different but interrelated topics: the nature of the Jewish populations of Georgia

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For authors' guidelines, queries, and all editorial matters, write to the Editor, *Southern Jewish History*, 6856 Flagstone Way, Flowery Branch, GA 30542; e-mail: MarkKBauman@aol.com. For journal subscriptions and advertising, write Rachel Heimovics Braun, 954 Stonewood Lane, Maitland, FL 32751; e-mail: journal@jewishsouth.org; or visit www.jewishsouth.org. For membership and general information about the Southern Jewish Historical Society, write to PO Box 71601, Marietta, GA 30007-1601 or visit www.jewishsouth.org.

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and the Carolinas during the Reconstruction Era; the place of Jews within southern society at the time; and the development of Jewish institutions and Jewish identity in the states under consideration. In probing these topics, Hieke has been able to shed new light on some important aspects of southern and American Jewish history. In the first section of his book, for example, the author provides an insightful discussion of the various forms of chain migration that helped populate Georgia and the Carolinas with Jews. In this section, he also demonstrates conclusively that the frequent reference to the middle decades of the nineteenth century as the "German period" of southern Jewish history (and of American Jewish history generally) is misleading, since his detailed demographic research reveals that only a minority of the Jews in the region actually emigrated from Germany. In 1860 South Carolina, to take but one example, most Jews were American-born, and Jews from Prussian Poland constituted the second largest group.

In order to evaluate the "southernness" of post-Civil War Jews in Georgia and the Carolinas, a key issue addressed in the second section of his study, the author examines how they measured up in relation to what he considers three crucial markers of southern identity: acceptance of the "racial fabric of society and politics" in the South; "Confederate patriotism"; and residence in the region (164). In connection with the question of southern Jewish identity, Hieke also examines philosemitism in the South, expressed mainly in public, and antisemitism in the region, mainly covert. He concludes that the Jews whom he has studied did largely accept the racial basis of southern society but that, nonetheless, Jews were viewed only as "integrated outsiders" (122). The majority population "included them in southern society – but not as equals," Hieke writes. "A thin line separated Jews from the core of southern collective identity, which was Christian" (132). As far as loyalty to the Confederacy is concerned, Hieke shows that some Jews fought in the Confederate army and that some served the South as blockade-runners. Here, however, as in several other instances, the author can offer only tentative conclusions. Noting that service to the Confederacy did not necessarily signify

loyalty to the South, he asserts that the question of southern Jewish patriotism must remain open.

One of the most interesting and important concepts introduced in Hieke's book is that of transregional migration, for the author's exhaustive compilation of demographic data has revealed the great extent to which individual Jews moved about. Not only did they come to the South from many different places outside of the United States, but they also migrated constantly into and out of various regions of the country. This had implications not only for the character of the Jewish population of Georgia and the Carolinas but also for the ability of Jews in these states to form firm attachments to the South. In effect, Hieke argues, the "continuous residential mobility" of the Jews he studied indicates that "their Southern identity was but one facet of their trans-regional—American—identity" (205).

In the third section of his book, Hieke sets out to show that southern congregations and communities moved toward Reform Judaism in the period after the Civil War because they were relatively isolated in "rural America," and so "they adapted accordingly" (206). In order to illustrate the adjustments that Jews made and the role of Reform, he discusses how various aspects of Jewish practice—keeping the Sabbath and observing *kashrut*, for example—were altered in the nineteenth-century southern environment. Most of Hieke's observations here ring true, although his point about the personal influence that American Jewish luminaries such as Isaac Leeser and Isaac Mayer Wise had on individual southern congregations is perhaps overstated.

Hieke's book includes a number of ancillary features that help the author tell his story. Pie charts illustrating the places of origin of various samples of the Jewish population are a nice touch, for example, as are the maps included in the book, although some of these can be confusing, especially to those less familiar with the geographic complexities of nineteenth-century central Europe.

While there is a great deal about this study to commend, in certain respects it is still somewhat unpolished. One gets the sense that Hieke has felt compelled to include in his book nearly every

item of evidence and every example he has uncovered, and too often the reader can get lost in long recitations of facts. So, too, the text tends to be repetitious; variations of the phrase “as mentioned above” appear all too frequently. Finally, the volume contains many more editing problems than it should. There are not only multiple errors of grammar and punctuation, but also instances of incorrect word choice (e.g., “endemics” instead of “epidemics” [72] and “consequential” instead of “consequent” [84]); examples of proofreading oversights (e.g., “had grown eightfold to 80,000 eighty thousand” [94]), and cases of awkward construction (e.g., “The cornerstone was lowered under accompanying ceremonies” [268]).

Still, despite some shortcomings in terms of the presentation of its findings, this book performs a true service to the fields of southern and American Jewish history. Hieke has mustered a great deal of evidence to establish that, contrary to some common assumptions, Jewish life in the Reconstruction South was not necessarily “German” in character, that southern Jews did not adopt a southern identity wholesale, that they did not achieve full acceptance as equals by their white Christian neighbors, and that Reform Judaism in Georgia and the Carolinas was not copied directly from German models but rather developed on the basis of local conditions. All in all, this prodigiously researched book constitutes a very valuable addition to the literature.

Lee Shai Weissbach, University of Louisville

The reviewer may be contacted at weissbach@louisville.edu.

In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama’s Jews, the Second World War, and the Holocaust. By Dan J. Puckett. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014. 326 pages.

Dan J. Puckett’s *In the Shadow of Hitler* is a meticulously researched exploration of Alabama Jews’ responses to the Holocaust during World War II. Looking closely at the Jewish communities of Birmingham, Montgomery, Mobile, and Selma

throughout the 1930s and 1940s, as well as outlying rural communities when possible, Puckett offers a valuable consideration of the ways that these southern Jews responded to the mass murder of European Jews. Finding both similarities and differences between Alabamian responses and northern and national responses, he reminds us that there is still much research to be done on American Jewish life during these crucial years in the middle of the twentieth century.

Puckett's argument is grounded well in his research. He argues that the war, refugee crisis, intensification of antisemitism, and growth of Zionism ultimately unified Alabama's Jews. Despite the persistence of conflict between anti-Zionist Jews in the American Council for Judaism and Jewish Zionists, by the end of the war these groups had largely transcended their political, cultural, and class differences to create a more unified community, even if they were unable to do much to save their European kin. However, that unity was forged within a southern Jewish identity that still insisted upon Jews as southern whites and ignored any comparison between the Nazi segregation and persecution of Jews and the Jim Crow system and lynching in the American South. If the war did not reshape attitudes towards civil rights or race, however, it did reshape the Jewish self-image of GIs who returned from the war more committed to their Jewish identities and communities.

Puckett first explores the impact of antisemitism on Alabama Jewish communities in the 1930s, looking at the ways that the Scottsboro Boys and *Kristallnacht*—and Nazism more broadly—affected Jews in the state as well as their gentile neighbors. He then shows Alabama Jews making valiant efforts to rescue European Jewish refugees and highlights their gentile neighbors' sympathies for Jewish refugees—even if these same gentile neighbors refused to support any extension of the American quota for immigration. In the third chapter, Puckett describes the debates over Zionism throughout the 1930s, discussions that generally wound up vindicating the position of Zionists and isolating the anti-Zionists in the American Council for Judaism. The fourth chapter looks in more depth at the treatment in the Alabama press

of Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust, finding that the state press, like the national press, adequately covered the rise of Nazi antisemitism and the Final Solution, making it possible for Alabamians to know about the Holocaust. At the same time, however, Puckett notes that the specifically Jewish identity of Nazi victims was frequently evaded in the press, thus eliding the larger story of the Holocaust for Alabama newspaper readers (again, as with readers of the mainstream press).

In his fifth chapter, Puckett looks at the powerful impact of the war upon Jewish GIs, noting their emotional connection to Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe, their zeal to vanquish the Nazis, and their renewed commitment to Jewish communal life after the war. In the sixth chapter, however, Puckett offers important balance to the triumphant portrait of Alabama Jewish GIs by describing the antisemitism and racism that emerged in Alabama during and immediately after the war, including the propaganda of far-right antisemitic groups and more mainstream discrimination against Jews in public accommodations and legal proceedings. In his description of the postwar situation in the seventh chapter, Puckett describes the complicated and problematic efforts of Alabama Jews to host Holocaust refugees. Finally, in the epilogue, he describes Alabama Jews responding to the Holocaust primarily with silence in the years immediately following the war. Given recent literature on American Jews' responses to the Holocaust, Puckett's portrait suggests that Alabama Jews are like northern American Jews in some ways and very different in others. In all of these chapters, Puckett's meticulous research and careful findings are evident.

Throughout most of this book, Puckett is careful to note the important scholars with whom he is engaging, such as Hasia Diner, Deborah Dash Moore, Deborah Lipstadt, and Laurel Leff. The reader might be aided, however, by a broader historiographical argument that situates Puckett's work more clearly within the literature. In each chapter, he engages one or two historians, but his broader argument could be made more central to the entire book.

Moreover, Puckett's argument is undone a bit by his organizational structure, one that privileges each community narrative

rather than the overarching story he is telling. Readers can get a little bogged down in the different politics of Selma, Montgomery, or Birmingham without a clear roadmap to help them understand how these cities' stories matter to the overarching narrative. Then, too, it is never really clear how Alabama's story relates to the rest of the South. Why Alabama and not Mississippi or North Carolina? Were there differences or similarities within the region itself?

Despite these caveats, Puckett's carefully and extensively researched work adds an important building block to our research on American Jewish responses to the Holocaust. More research into different regions and different angles of this question can only deepen our knowledge and understanding of the impact of the Holocaust in American life.

Kirsten Fermaglich, Michigan State University

The reviewer may be contacted at fermagli@msu.edu.