Book Reviews

Out of Left Field: Jews and Black Baseball. By Rebecca T. Alpert. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011. 215 pages.

The use of sports as a device for understanding the status of Jews and their place economically and socially within American society is a relatively new approach to American Jewish historical writing. So Rebecca Alpert's bold assertions (3) that an examination of the Jewish role in the "segregated institution" of black baseball leagues "sheds light on the development of American Jewish racial, ethnic and religious identity," reveals the complexity of cooperative and competitive dimensions of Jewish-black economic and social relationships, while addressing issues of Jewish commitment to social justice in the twentieth century, is worthy of serious consideration. Additional depth and nuance to these critical aspects of Jewish minority group life is always welcome. Unfortunately, Alpert's book all too often goes far afield from this warranted rationale for investigation. Through abundant research of previously untapped sources, she surely tells previously untold stories. But *Out of Left Field* frequently loses focus as a work of American Jewish history. Those interested in knowing more about the so-called Negro Leagues and their idiosyncratic players will benefit more than readers curious about the Jewish role therein.

For example, one of Alpert's prime concerns that leads her away from her central theme is her attempt to integrate the Belleville Greys into the normative American Jewish historical narrative. Impressed that this club, formed in the 1920s as an outgrowth of a Temple Beth El Community in Virginia, did not play games on Saturday, she legitimizes them as a Jewish team without delving into the full nature and texture of their religious faith commitments. Content with their sketchy religious bona fides, Alpert proceeds to devote inordinate space chronicling their baseball exploits. But as she tells the tales of stars like Buster

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Haywood, as a sports saga would, she also reveals that he had just the most tenuous connection to the community. Moreover, "like other players, and even some community members, he used common Christian language to describe the group to outsiders." This was a way, Alpert avers, that would help the community's unusual nature make sense to those who could not connect "black" and "Jewish" (61). However, though the tales are interesting and the accounts well-written, I am unconvinced that she is actually writing about a Jewish team, but rather of a club representing a syncretistic sect, no matter how fascinating their achievements.

Eventually, however, Jewish entrepreneurs, like Ed Gottlieb, Abe Saperstein, Syd Pollock, and others—introduced briefly early in the book—become the focus of her concern and the central rationale for this study, as the complicated questions of black-Jewish relations enter the fray. The prime time for black baseball leagues was the Second World War when fans of all races—starving for entertainment with the major leagues stripped of many of the great white players in the service—flocked to alternative games. (This was also the era of the now renowned Girls Professional Baseball League, immortalized in the film *A League of Their Own*.) At this point with profits to be made, Jewish and black lords of Negro baseball "vied for economic power" and acrimony between minority competitors emerged. Alpert is at her best when she notes the use of antisemitic rhetoric by black owners—depicting Jews as greedy interlopers into their game as surely some of them were. African Americans emulated the canards that what she calls "the white power structure" used to denigrate Jews. Meanwhile, Jews in the business saw ownership of teams as a way of making a quick buck in a high risk industry. Not unlike their incursions into Hollywood and other mass media at the time, they viewed themselves as innovative and creative at a time when other avenues of economic advancement were closed to them. But, in so doing, they were not beyond exploiting stereotypes of blacks, through using "comedy baseball," an on-the-field, in-the-game form of minstrel show. Jews played the clowns in these acts, which had their inglorious history within "white" baseball, albeit outside of the foul lines. But such routines helped put fans in the stands at Negro

League games, though many blacks were understandably offended. Alpert wisely also points out that African American outrage had its own economic motive. It was part of their "struggle for control of their leagues" (112). For her, such stereotyping and competitions revealed and anticipated "fault lines" within a once supposed "special relationship" between Jews and African Americans long before the era of the civil rights movement (77).

For Alpert, some Jews deserve praise for their selfless contributions to breaking the color line. But, there were those who were politically "out of left field." Although there were Jewish business-types who saw profit motives in bringing in skilled blacks to upgrade faltering teams' performances that presumably would attract fans, Alpert is enamored of the Jewish writers for the Communist *Daily Worker* who, from the 1930s on, drummed up support for integration of professional baseball. It was they, she writes, with their unsullied commitment to social justice—along with the determined men of the black press—who kept the issue alive and worked to arrange major league tryouts for individual players. Beyond their journalism, they used their contacts with their powerful labor forces, lobbied politicians, sent petitions, picketed stadiums, and organized rallies. Unquestionably, Alpert is on a mission to have their story told. For her, it is a triumphant saga that was lost "in the context of the virulent anti-communism that began to take hold in America in the 1950s" that for decades read them out of historical writing (136–137). She even goes so far as to credit them with deeply influencing the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Branch Rickey, to conduct "the great experiment" with Jackie Robinson. Alpert laments the effort of Rickey, a staunch ant-Communist, to minimize the Communist newspaper's and its party's role (180). Perhaps, it just made strategic sense to keep groups like the End Jim Crow in Baseball Committee "far away from the spotlight" as he made his controversial move (160).

Meanwhile, as this transformative moment in American history took place, the entrepreneurial Jewish black sports moguls—like Saperstein and Gottlieb—are ostensibly the villains of her piece. They benefited from rounding up subsequent black stars for the white bosses who ran the Big Show, while on another sports

front kept professional basketball segregated. Saperstein had a particular interest in not undermining the talent base of his Harlem Globetrotters—a challenge he faced immediately after the National Basketball Association was integrated. The "Globies" would then abandon all signs of playing legitimate basketball and become a comedy act—albeit a very popular one—for future generations of fans.

For readers of *Southern Jewish History*, the most salient aspects of Alpert's often all-too-wide ranging labors is a reminder that black-Jewish relations in the twentieth century on and off the field were fraught with potential for misunderstandings, exploitations, and aggressive rivalry. Yet there were also moments and incidents of sympathy and comradeship, all derived from the marginality both of these minority groups felt—albeit to different degrees—in the early decades of the past century. Moreover, these tensions were real and apparent everywhere in this nation, both in the South and North wherever, in this case, the games were played.

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Des berges du Rhin aux rives de Mississippi: Histoire et récits de migrants juifs [From the Banks of the Rhine to the Shores of the Mississippi: History and Narratives of Immigrant Jews]. By Anny Bloch-Raymond. Paris: Michel Houdiard, 2009. 217 pages.

In September 1991 sociologist Anny Bloch-Raymond was in New York City visiting La Société israélite des Français de New York when one of its members showed her a *New York Times* article entitled "Small-Town South Clings to Jewish History." The article noted that Jewish villagers were disappearing but that their cemeteries and synagogues were being preserved. Some German and Alsatian families who had settled in southern villages were named. As a researcher with France's National Center of Scientific Research, and as the author of several works on immigration to

the United States, Bloch-Raymond was intrigued. She wanted to learn more about these German and Alsatian Jews, so she contacted the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience in Jackson, Mississippi, which circulated her request for material. The twenty responses she received led to an exchange of information and to several trips to the United States, starting with a first visit to New Orleans in June 1992. In the course of these visits, Bloch-Raymond visited temples, cemeteries, and archives, and she interviewed numerous descendants of the original immigrants. They sought her help in learning about their family histories; and, in turn, they supplied her with letters, memoirs, and journals. Supplemented by state censuses, French departmental registries, passports, and references to numerous articles and books, *Des berges du Rhin aux rives de Mississippi* constitutes a rich portrait of this immigrant population from its arrival until recent times.

These Jews came from the French and German provinces bordering the Rhine, and they landed in two main waves, from 1830 to 1860 and again from 1880 to 1930. From 1830 to 1914 only about 10,000 Jews came from France and about 200,000 from Germany. Two-thirds of them chose to settle in New York, but about 10 to 12 percent chose the South (mainly Louisiana). Family connections, business prospects, land prices, and language all influenced choices. Most of the newcomers were fairly young and regarded immigration as an adventure. They saw this nation as a place where they could make their fortune and escape the poverty and prejudice they experienced at home.

Most were shopkeepers and artisans with some education. A majority of the new arrivals in the South settled first along the Mississippi and its tributaries. Only a minority of these Jews claimed in the departure registries to be peddlers, but many began their new lives that way. Some sold to the riverboats, others to the plantations along the river and the small settlements in the interior. Gradually, as the immigrants amassed capital, they settled down, opened small stores, and, as they prospered, moved to larger towns. Some of the more successful became factors and brokers, serving as lenders and intermediaries between growers

and purchasers, and thus promoted the economic and commercial development of the South.

Bloch-Raymond's main objective is to show how the immigrants and their descendants adapted and how they forged a new life in the South. She examines several aspects of acculturation in cuisine, décor, and language. An especially significant topic is the role of religion in the lives of these families. Dispersed among small communities, Bloch-Raymond's Jews believed that their best chance for acceptance lay in minimizing their differences with their neighbors. Conversion was rare. These families' form of Judaism was largely devoid of ritual and observance and stressed ethics and charity instead, plus engagement in civic and synagogue activities. Coupled with an emphasis on the values they shared with their neighbors, rather than on theological differences, this orientation also served to demonstrate their loyalty to community, region, and country.

Such choices are unsurprising. Having emigrated to escape discrimination, these Jews did not want to replicate the problems that visibility provoked. In both France and Germany, antisemitism had encouraged Jews to assimilate. Post-revolutionary France granted the Jews citizenship but urged them to practice their religion in private and act like Frenchmen in public. German Jews did not gain full civic equality until 1870, and even then found that citizenship was not enough to breach the barriers to mobility. Some had converted, but many turned to Reform Judaism in the hope that modernizing their faith would facilitate acceptance. Thus it was understandable that the immigrants from Germany would be Jewish in a way congruent with a need to win inclusion. Even if they had wanted to be observant, circumstances made it difficult to keep kosher, and Saturday was the main business day. Bloch-Raymond's interviewees generally felt that social integration was successful and that relations with their neighbors were cordial. Jews were nevertheless excluded from some social clubs and New Orleans Mardi Gras krewes. But interviewees were more likely to mention the Dreyfus affair than the lynching of Leo Frank, a phenomenon consistent with positive feelings about the New World.

Bloch-Raymond's interviewees were more ambivalent about the black-Jewish encounter. The interviewees stressed the respectful treatment given to black customers in their stores as well as the warm personal bonds formed with household servants. The immigrants and their progeny do not appear to have questioned the institutions of slavery or segregation, and they accepted the southern way of life. Despite sympathy for the victims of racial supremacy, most of these families stayed silent and neutral during the civil rights battles. Some Jews did not want to imperil their relationships with the white majority; some feared attacks on their homes or businesses from the Ku Klux Klan or the White Citizens Council. One interviewee put it succinctly: "The Jew of the South does not seek to be a martyr but to be accepted" (165).

Des berges du Rhin aux rives de Mississippi is to be commended for balancing theoretical discussions of assimilation, acculturation, and ethnicity with personal histories and anecdotes. A few errors should be noted, however. Ex-Klansman David Duke never became governor of Louisiana, though he did get 39 percent of the vote in the 1991 election. The author cites the non-existent Article 14 of the Constitution as the source of religious freedom. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights guarantees religious liberty; the Fourteenth Amendment "incorporates" that guarantee and makes it applicable to the states via the due process clause. Finally, as in any research involving interviews with subjects who have not been randomly selected, one has to wonder if these responses are representative of the larger group or reflect only the views of the people willing enough to respond. One might call this the "reunion phenomenon"; those who attend reunions feel positively about their school experience and their subsequent careers and lives. Aside from these minor problems, Bloch-Raymond has performed a worthwhile service in applying sociology to this segment of American Jewry. In presenting her findings in highly accessible French, *Des berges du Rhin aux rives de Mississippi* has also rendered easy the task of translation that this volume merits.

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Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture. By Karen L. Cox. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011. 210 pages.

"What's playing at the Roxy?", a Times Square tout asks in *Guys and Dolls* (1950). He proceeds to answer his own question with a plot summary: "A picture about a Minnesota man/So in love with a Mississippi girl/That he sacrifices everything/And moves all the way to Biloxi." These scintillating lines of Frank Loesser's can be considered the encapsulation of the argument that Karen L. Cox advances in her study of how the South was packaged in popular culture, starting in the late nineteenth century and ending in the 1950s. Framing roughly the half-century between, say, *Plessy v. Ferguson* and its invalidation in *Brown v. Board of Education*, *Dreaming of Dixie* shows how Tin Pan Alley, Broadway, Hollywood, Madison Avenue, the radio networks, and the tourist industry all coalesced around a benign and sentimental depiction of the region. Thus they helped to heal the scars of the Civil War, even as they envisioned a national reunification suffused in a romantic glow. The marriage of a Confederate army veteran and a northern lass at the end of *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), after the threat of black assertiveness has been crushed, should therefore be regarded as the sinister earlier version of what's playing at the Roxy. Cox calls it "the culture of reconciliation" (2). But the point of her book is insistent: the various institutions of mass culture were united in accentuating the most reassuring (and often misleading) features of the region. It was admired for having managed to resist the discontents of an urban and industrial civilization and for having achieved such bucolic tranquility that not even the black populace could be restive. The realities of racial injustice could be evaded, Cox suggests, because the myth of moonlight and magnolias was so beguiling.

Dreaming of Dixie therefore updates, however implicitly, what was once labeled consensus history. The author demonstrates that those who were primarily responsible for the amplification and perpetuation of this myth hailed mostly from the North and the Midwest (or lived in southern California). Even those who

reinforced such nostalgia, like Atlanta's Margaret Mitchell, needed a publisher in New York, as well as a Hollywood studio to adapt *Gone with the Wind* (1936) three years later. White southerners hardly objected to what they saw other Americans swallowing, along with their pancakes endorsed by "Aunt Jemima" and their rice recommended by "Uncle Ben." A whole nation seemed to be singing "Swanee" and "I Want to Be in Dixie," or buying tickets to *Show Boat*, or getting some sense of plantation life by watching Shirley Temple and Bill "Bojangles" Robinson in *The Little Colonel* and *The Littlest Rebel*. After all, even Amos and Andy were recent migrants from Atlanta, and their comedy show, at the peak of its popularity early in the Depression, reached about half of all the homes that had radios.

The chapter on popular music notes the curious inauthenticity of Tin Pan Alley. The intense longing for a bandana-clad black "Mammy" came from songwriters who never had one. The "Jewish immigrants who were pounding out a living," the author observes, "with few exceptions had never been to the places that were the subjects of their songs" (16). (Of course Stephen Foster, a Pennsylvanian who was Irving Berlin's hero, had never seen the Suwannee River either.) But otherwise her book is inattentive to the way her subject connects not only with southern history but with Jewish history as well. The hyperlink is popular culture itself. Opportunity in mass entertainment drew Jews eager to lift themselves up from destitution, and some succeeded because they figured out how to gratify the taste of gentile America. Cox notes the ethnic origins of Berlin, George Gershwin, and lyricist Jack Yellen, as well as performers Al Jolson and Eddie Cantor. But what about independent producer David O. Selznick, who ensured that the "Scarlett fever" the nation contracted would not abate? He made *Gone with the Wind* the highest grossing film (adjusted for inflation) ever. *Show Boat* was not only a timeless (and ahead-of-its-time) Broadway musical; it also went through three screen incarnations (the last in 1951), thanks in no small part to the storytelling of Edna Ferber, the lyrics of Oscar Hammerstein II and the score by Jerome Kern. *Amos 'n' Andy* could extend its impact across a continent because of NBC, which was the creation of

David Sarnoff. Cox fails to mention *Li'l Abner*, which, more than any other comic strip, injected hillbillies into the national folklore. Al Capp's achievement was anomalous, however. The yeomanry or the poor whites very rarely inhabited the South that Jewish purveyors of the popular arts imagined. An elegant upper class, consisting of cavaliers and their belles and their devoted black servants, were presented instead.

It is highly unlikely that the Jewish artists and entrepreneurs conjured up the charming images of a leisurely pre-modern world *because* it was southern. But in their effort to ascertain popular moods and needs, such Jews found nothing about their idealized South that inhibited or dismayed them. Indeed it might be even argued that they were more progressive on the race question than their predecessors in minstrelsy had been. The ballads Jolson performed in blackface were not remotely as repugnant as the "coon songs" of an earlier generation; and a song that Berlin wrote (for Ethel Waters) even conveys what a black woman has to tell her children—their father won't be coming home because he has been lynched ("Supper Time"). *The Birth of a Nation* is the most disturbingly racist film Hollywood ever made; the vexing black stereotypes offered up in *Gone with the Wind* are mild by comparison. That Disney, the most *goyish* of the studios, found *Song of the South* (1946) too embarrassing to re-release on video reinforces this claim. Cox nevertheless sees no real change over time in the six or seven decades of mythmaking that her book otherwise so convincingly treats; a greater interest in ethnicity might have enabled her to notice some improvement, however modest.

Dreaming of Dixie opens with a report entitled "A Northerner Views the South," by Ruth Landes, an anthropologist whom Franz Boas, an ardent foe of racism, trained at Columbia University. (Both were Jews.) Landes noted in 1945 that the region was so thoroughly "gilded in sentimentality" that outsiders could barely fathom the realities of the region (1). Nor did its tiny Jewish minority do much to complicate that picture. Only two Jews from below the Mason-Dixon Line are mentioned in Cox's book. One is Moses Ezekiel of Richmond, the sculptor of the Confederate monument at Arlington National Cemetery. The other is David Cohn,

an apologist for the white supremacy he knew from birth in the Mississippi Delta. Both thus helped to forge a distinctive southern identity. Its vestiges can be discerned even now, during the commemoration of the Civil War, a century and a half later. What was that conflict about? Diverging from other Americans, and even more sharply from professional historians, two out of every three southern whites told Harris Interactive pollsters that the central issue was "states' rights," not slavery.

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Jews and the Civil War: A Reader. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn, editors. New York: New York University Press, 2010. 448 pages.

With *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn present an introduction to the Jewish perspective of the conflict in time for the sesquicentennial of the attack on Fort Sumter. Their reader consists of seven parts, linked by short introductory remarks that deal with various aspects of the war in respect to American Jewry: "Jews and Slavery," "Jews and Abolition," "Rabbis and the March to War," "Jewish Soldiers during the Civil War," "The Home Front," "Jews as a Class," and "Aftermath." In their introduction the editors quote Bertram W. Korn—*the* scholar of the subject until now: "We need to know much more than we do now before we can feel that we are fully aware of the experiences of Jews during the Civil War" (ix). Indeed, Mendelsohn and Sarna offer as leitmotif for their book the aim to "rescue, organize, and assemble choice examples of this literature [on the subject]" (x). The articles cover more than sixty years of historiography on the subject, including Jacob Rader Marcus's "From Peddler to Regimental Commander in Two Years: The Civil War Career of Major Louis A. Gratz" (1949), Korn's "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865"

(1961), Thomas D. Clark's "The Post-Civil War Economy in the South" (1966), and Robert Rosen's "Jewish Confederates" (2006). Most of the articles date from the 1960s to the 1990s.

In his introductory "Overview: The War between Jewish Brothers in America," Eli N. Evans describes the Civil War as a war that affected all of American Jewry. The conflict demanded of every American a choice of loyalties, to be either Unionist or Confederate. Jews shared the tendency to act according to their regional patriotic creed—to strive to maintain the Union or to help achieve the independence of the Confederacy. The general portrait of Jews during the war, as shown by Evans, therefore indeed invites "comparison of broader development within Civil War historiography," as Sarna and Mendelsohn advocate in their preface (x). In his own introductory essay, "Before Korn: A Century of Jewish Historical Writing about the American Civil War," Mendelsohn dates the historiography from the 1880s/1890s, when the topic of Jews in the Civil War became of interest (for instance in Simon Wolf's programmatic *The Jew as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen* [1895]), and ends the account with Korn's more complex observations in *American Jewry and the Civil War* (1951). Korn's remains the decisive work in the field, but his book is not excerpted in this reader—which makes sense if *Jews and the Civil War* is appreciated as a supplement to Korn.

Rooted in the nature of any compilation is the challenge of choosing the appropriate texts. The articles chosen for Parts 1 through 3 ("Jews and Slavery," "Jews and Abolition," and "Rabbis and the March to War"), for example, are standard. Bringing them together for this reader connects their fields very well. But while Rosen offers a general view on "Jewish Confederates" in Part 4 ("Jewish Soldiers during the Civil War") and the excerpt stirs the reader's appetite for Rosen's book of the same title, a general account of Jewish Unionists is missing except for the exemplary biography of Major Gratz. Still, Stanley Falk's "Divided Loyalties in 1861: The Decision of Major Alfred Mordecai" presents a great—and well-known—portrait of a soldier who was caught between Union and Confederacy, consequentially suffering the difficulties in loyalty to which not only Jews were subjected dur-

ing the conflict. On the other hand, whereas three articles (in Part 6: "Jews as a Class," and Part 7: "Aftermath") deal directly or indirectly with General Ulysses S. Grant's famously infamous General Order No. 11 that expelled Jews from his military district, a comparable examination for the southern side is noticeably absent. Louis Schmier's or Mark Greenberg's excellent observations on the antisemitic resolutions of Thomasville, Georgia, in 1862 could have balanced the picture. (To be sure, both articles are mentioned in the rather extensive "For Further Reading" section.)

In Part 5 ("The Home Front"), both essays deal exclusively with the experience of women: David Morgan's "Eugenia Philips: The Civil War Experiences of a Southern Jewish Woman," and Dianne Ashton's "Shifting Veils: Religion, Politics, and Womanhood in the Civil War Writings of American Jewish Women." Morgan profiles the wartime career of one of the best known and most undiplomatically outspoken female Confederate patriots, including the difficulties that Philips met in Union-occupied New Orleans. Ashton complements Morgan with her evaluation of the wartime diaries of Confederate patriots Phoebe Pember (who was Eugenia Philips's sister) and the Virginian Emma Mordecai, as well as the writings of Rebecca Gratz, the Unionist teacher from Philadelphia. These Jewish women expressed the firm religious and intellectual convictions of the sides they selected and faced consequences. Fascinating though these two articles are, a balanced set of readings might have addressed the home front beyond the experiences of women. Among other possibilities, William Warren Rogers' "In Defense for our Sacred Cause: Rabbi James K. Guthman in Confederate Montgomery" (which is also mentioned in the "Further Readings") might have supplemented Morgan and Ashton. Their articles present the stories of four women, three of them Confederates, thus leaving "The Home Front" a little heavy on the southern side.

The seventeen articles that found their way into this book (or nineteen counting the two introductions) constitute essential reading for anyone who is interested in the subject. *Jews and the Civil War* will make for especially fascinating reading for laypeople, even though professional historians will have most of the pieces

reprinted in this volume already on their shelves. Unfortunately, most of the articles are reprints of a rather ripe age, some in an abridged version. The question therefore arises whether *Jews and the Civil War* successfully meets Korn's hope to know more now than we did when the articles first appeared. The articles are certainly among the most noteworthy, but they are also the most familiar to specialists. Without doubt, the greatest achievement of *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader* is to have brought these pieces together in one handy volume. If the editors had also decided to include primary sources, such as diaries and firsthand accounts, however, this compilation could have enriched even further our knowledge of *Jews and the Civil War*. For the historian, it is a call to delve deeper into the Civil War experience for Jews.

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