

**Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2001), 398 pp.**

In *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina*, Leonard Rogoff examines Jewish life in Durham and Chapel Hill from the colonial period to the present. Acknowledging that “Southern,” “Jew,” and “small town” are unstable terms, this work shows that small-town southern Jews fashioned a cultural identity as Jews and as southerners through constant negotiation and reinvention. While kinship ties and institutions allowed them to maintain their Jewish identity, for example, the “Jewish church” helped them fit into a predominantly Christian southern society that valued religious institutions.

The Jewish community in Durham and Chapel Hill developed slowly, with a more permanent community forming in Durham between the 1880s and 1920. Rogoff begins his study with a brief overview of Jewish colonial settlement in North Carolina, where the Jewish population was relatively small and transient, compared to states such as Virginia, South Carolina, and Georgia that offered more inviting commercial prospects. Residents maintained their Jewish identity primarily through family, mercantile, and religious links to Savannah, Charleston, Newport, and New York. Eighteenth-century German Jewish immigrants to the area participated in civil society as merchants, primarily as sellers of dry goods, because they lacked an agrarian heritage.

Although early settlements in North Carolina were modest and transitory, Rogoff views Durham-Chapel Hill as “a prototype of the east European settlements that emerged throughout the region with the rise of the industrial New South” (3). In the 1880s hundreds of east European immigrants were drawn to the area by industrial cigarette production. Eventually, however, these immigrants could not compete with the Bonsack machines that tobacco king James Buchanan Duke bought to roll and cut cigarettes; the machines produced in one day what hand rollers produced in a month. Although many rollers returned to New York when they were forced out of the factories, the story of the brief sojourn of these tobacco workers aligned Durham Jews with the city’s main industry and minimized their difference from other Durhamites. Despite assertions, however, that “a century later

academic historians, the popular media, and local citizens, both Jewish and Gentile, pointed to [the Jewish tobacco workers] as the founders of the Durham Jewish community” and “the story [as a dramatic narrative] appealed to both Jews and southerners,” Rogoff cites little evidence that non-Jews also viewed this tale as one of Jewish inclusion in the community (50–51). Evidence from both sides of the story would enhance the argument.

As the area’s Jewish community became more settled in the first two decades of the twentieth century, residents established institutions to unify and sustain themselves. The primary community institution was the synagogue. Even east European Jews, who were initially ghettoized in an ethnic enclave (seeking the comfort of Yiddish-speaking landsmen and having limited options because of poverty) on the margins of Durham and thus participated in few civic associations, maintained synagogue membership. In time Jews also created local societies (such as a *Chevra Kadisha* or burial society) and affiliates of national Jewish organizations (such as B’nai B’rith). The community likewise supported an Orthodox congregation, Zionist and philanthropic organizations, and secular sports and social clubs. Such varied associations allowed Jews to sustain multiple forms of Jewish identity while maintaining a cohesive community. Durham Jews also participated in the town’s economic life, a first step in integration. Rogoff points out that in comparison to urban Jews and to their non-Jewish neighbors, Durham Jews were atypical in their degree of self-employment in trade and commerce.

In part because of these religious and cultural organizations, southerners respected their Jewish neighbors. Rogoff writes: “Durhamites saw southern virtues in the Jews: they were a religious, family-oriented, hardworking, law-abiding people” (70). Jews and Christians alike sent their children to Sunday school, and “Jewish institutions took culturally blended forms that minimized differences” (312). Jewish immigrant upward mobility was also consistent with the ethic of progress and uplift in the New South. To succeed, Jewish businessmen cultivated goodwill, and by custom southerners extended hospitality. In addition, Durham’s Jews were too few and too accommodating to be a threat to the existing social or political order, as compared to the turmoil that large immigrant populations triggered in locales such as Boston or New York.

Rogoff points out that small-town German and east European Jews differed from their counterparts in large urban centers. Small-town Jews mixed more readily and managed to overcome religious and ideological differences. For example, ideologically opposed Zionist-groups *Mizrachi* and *Hadassah* cooperated in Durham, where female members of both groups traveled together throughout the city selling trees for Palestine. Durham Jews did not experience the social and religious tensions between Germans and east Europeans that tore apart urban communities. Family ties and a common heritage of *Yiddishkeit* (ethnic Jewishness) united the small town.

Citing probate documents, real estate deeds, citizenship records, tax rolls, newspaper accounts, and oral interviews, Rogoff provides a rich portrayal of the Jewish community in Durham and Chapel Hill. The work would be further enhanced, however, from a more extensive discussion of the particularity of this location. As adjoining towns with two significant universities, Durham and Chapel Hill were somewhat unusual in composition because of the diverse faculty drawn to the area and the relatively large numbers (compared to the overall city population) of students during the academic year. Such factors perhaps contributed to the area's Jewish growth, which differed from that of eastern North Carolina towns such as Goldsboro, Wilson, Jacksonville, and Lumberton. As Rogoff points out, some of these latter towns closed their synagogues as Jewish populations declined after a century of communal life. In addition, city maps would enhance the reader's perception of spatial relationships between and within each city (for example, locating the east European enclave with respect to downtown Durham). Despite these minor issues, Rogoff's thoughtful examination of the tensions involved in maintaining religious and ethnic tradition while acculturating to America augments our understanding of the southern Jewish experience.

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