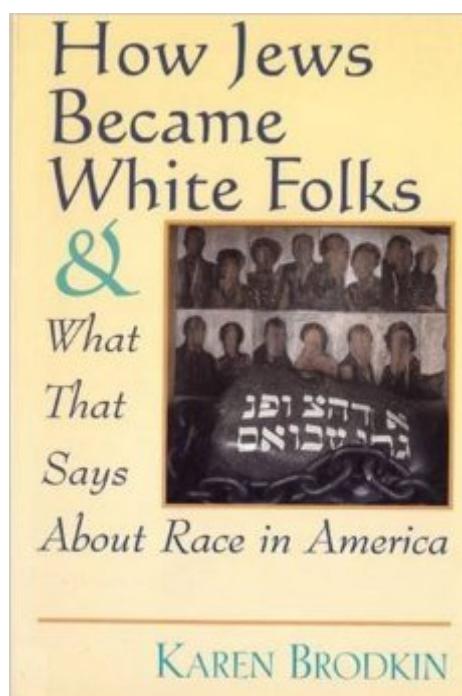


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How Jews Became White Folks And What That Says About Race In America



Synopsis

The fashion identities in the context of a wider conversation about American nationhood, to whom it belongs and what belonging means. Race and ethnicity, class, gender, and sexuality are all staple ingredients in this conversation. They are salient aspects of social being from which economic practices, political policies, and popular discourses create "Americans." Because all of these facets of social being have such significant meaning on a national scale, they also have major consequences for both individuals and groups in terms of their success and well-being, as well as how they perceive themselves socially and politically. The history of Jews in the United States is one of racial change that provides useful insights on race in America. Prevailing classifications have sometimes assigned Jews to the white race and at other times have created an off-white racial designation for them. Those changes in racial assignment have shaped the ways American Jews of different eras have constructed their ethnoracial identities. Brodkin illustrates these changes through an analysis of her own family's multi-generational experience. She shows how Jews experience a kind of double vision that comes from racial middleness: on the one hand, marginality with regard to whiteness; on the other, whiteness and belonging with regard to blackness. Class and gender are key elements of race-making in American history. Brodkin suggests that this country's racial assignment of individuals and groups constitutes an institutionalized system of occupational and residential segregation, is a key element in misguided public policy, and serves as a pernicious foundational principle in the construction of nationhood. Alternatives available to non-white and alien "others" have been either to whiten or to be consigned to an inferior underclass unworthy of full citizenship. The American ethnoracial map—who is assigned to each of these poles—is continually changing, although the binary of black and white is not. As a result, the structure within which Americans form their ethnoracial, gender, and class identities is distressingly stable. Brodkin questions the means by which Americans construct their political identities and what is required to weaken the hold of this governing myth.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Resubmitted on 2/5/3Dr. Brodkins' book is a fair synthesis of post -War racial scholarship and theorizing. Her personal approach is entertaining and seductive but far from being a compelling story -even though there are many aspects of the book for one to like. As well, one can hardly disagree with her main theme that racism and racial identity is the single most important basis of a healthy self-concept in the contemporary American way of life. Moreover, one must take careful note of what she has to say about Jewish industriousness as being a critical parameter in the route to group success against all forms of chauvinism--including anti-Semitism, sexism and racism--although it was difficult to avoid the fact that she did jump over rather quickly the issues of race and anti-Semitism to get to her main menu item, gender. All that said however, it was painful watching her finesse the issue of Jewish racism against blacks, both before and after the events directed against European Jews; and both before and after the "gender revolution." One reason the war against racism (and sexism) cannot be won in the way the author suggests is that once a group is admitted to the club of "being white," or being allowed, in the case of sexism, to use "the flawed white male model," it already has learned all too well how to play the role of being superior to those still remaining outside those exclusive clubs. The real problem is that the illicit rewards, both tangible and intangible, in a racist and/or sexist society are so enormous that there is hardly any incentive to do otherwise. That passive-aggressive racism and passive-aggressive sexism are at least as dangerous as their more overt and active counterparts is hardly a secret anymore.

Despite my low rating, I found this book to be very interesting and an important statement on the dual-identity that exists among Jewish-Americans. This book could also serve as an important resource to anyone who holds an interest in the changing social definitions of race & class during late 19th century/20th century America, and how the Jewish community fared amongst those changes. Dr. Brodkin did an excellent job at finding published examples to show this changing opinion of Jews. She also made a wise choice in choosing to zero in on one of the main factors of

American mobility which is family economics. In this aspect, this book should find it's way to any reading list pertaining to Jewish-American social/class identity studies. On the other hand, I am disappointed in the writing style and tone of this book; although she did seem to "warn" the reader of this beforehand in the Acknowledgments section when she admitted that when she began her research, she did not intend to write specifically about Jewishness. That statement sort of set the stage for a pretty incoherent collection of information that is loosely worked into the book's intended purpose. For example, in Chapter 1., she devotes pages to statistics and descriptions of racist policies the FHA used to keep Black people out of suburbia. Although this information is interesting, how does it relate to Jewish people? In a much smaller span, Dr. Brodkin could have demonstrated the FHA's discrimination and then move on to how that affected Jewish migration into suburbia. She does a similar thing again in when she goes into detail about inequality in skilled labor in reference to Mexicans and Black people. Again, interesting, but there is too much information about a subject the book is not supposed to address.

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