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Book Review: Raising Racists: The Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South

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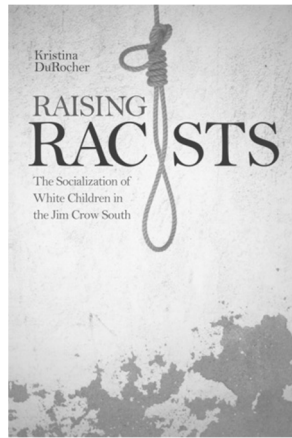
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Kristina Durocher. *Raising Racists: the Socialization of White Children in the Jim Crow South*. Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2011. 237 pages. ISBN 978-0-8131-3001-9, \$40.

The author, an assistant professor of history at Morehead State University, describes the various ways white southern parents taught their children to maintain the system of racial segregation during the years from 1890 to 1939, the classic period of the “Jim Crow” South. The book is divided into four sections: lessons at home; lessons at school; the impact of consumer culture and community groups; and violence, especially lynching. It is the subject of lynching which is particularly disturbing in its portrayal of children’s attendance and participation in lynching.

Drawing on the autobiographical writings of such authors as Katherine Dupre Lumpkin and H. L. Mitchell, Durocher describes how white children were taught to think of themselves as superior to African Americans. Parents stressed that children should treat African Americans in a kindly way but should never become too close to them. Forms of etiquette emphasizing rank and separation were to be followed.

In school children received books which emphasized these same values and portrayed

the slavery system as benign. African Americans were presented as docile, simple-minded, and lazy. Books which portrayed blacks outside the South, such as *Little Black Sambo*, presented much the same picture.

Consumer culture became a pervasive part of the Southern way of life and with it came advertising that depicted African Americans in negative ways. Illustrations and slogans portrayed them in comic ways. The “Mammy” figure became a standard character of advertising. Southerners also wrote plays and games which reinforced their conceptions of white and black roles. The Ku Klux Klan developed youth groups for males and females.

The most disturbing part of the book deals with the attendance and participation of children in lynching. Parents felt that children needed to be present so that they would perpetuate the system of segregation when they became adults. Post card photographs of lynchings which were sold as souvenirs sometimes showed children near the corpses of the victims. Young females sometimes served as accusers of those who were charged with rape.

This was not an easy book to read because of the disturbing nature of its subject matter, but it tells a story which needs to be remembered. This reviewer, having grown up in the 1950s and 1960s, remembers times when his parents made statements which reinforced traditional southern white views on race. For many younger people, this account may come as a surprise. It is for these readers that this book is most important.

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