H-France Review Vol. 25 (April 2025), No. 23.

Laura Hobson Faure, *A "Jewish Marshall Plan": The American Jewish Presence in Post-Holocaust France*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022. 370 pp. $85.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 9-78-0253059666; $30.00 U.S. (pb). 9-78-0253059680; ISBN $29.99 U.S. (eb). ISBN 9-78-0253059697.

Review by Ludivine Broch, University of Westminster.

In the autumn of 1944, after the Allied landings in Normandy and the Free French landings in Provence, the population of France had to reckon with the new realities of de-occupation: a combination of extensive material destruction, total economic collapse, and human loss. For the Jewish community in France, this was particularly difficult. Of the 330,000 Jews who had been in France in 1939, 76,000 had been deported to Germany, whilst thousands more had been interned in camps, been imprisoned, or executed, or been in hiding. Entire families and communities were decimated: they had lost businesses, homes, possessions, places of worship, and the antisemitism of the Vichy government and of certain elements of French society had broken down networks of trust and security. Not only that, but the post-war governments were so overwhelmed that they prioritised aid to French, rather than foreign, civilians; since so many Jews were foreigners, they were unable to get the assistance they so desperately needed. How could Jewish life ever pick up again?

In her compelling book originally published in French, Laura Hobson Faure shows that American Jews were central to the reconstruction of Jewish life in France after the Holocaust. Historians have long been interested in the involvement of Americans in post-war Europe, and recent scholarship has also focused on humanitarian aid in Europe after 1945. Faure's book is a welcome addition to this literature as she highlights the role of Jews in supplying aid whilst simultaneously nuancing narratives of American imperialism after 1945. Faure's study is also important because it explores the complicated relations between donors and recipients of aid in the post-war world, revealing the reality of political and cultural divisions across national lines but also within the Jewish community. The book focusses on the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), which was the largest Jewish aid organisation of this period and was already established in the interwar years, but Faure also looks beyond it and successfully captures the multi-layered interactions and encounters necessary to rebuild Jewish life in France.

Faure's chapters are shaped by an overarching chronological framework and American Jewish chaplains and soldiers were the first witnesses of Jewish life after the Holocaust. Shocked by the tragic material conditions of the surviving French Jews, they often offered material aid as well as

revival of religious life. But far from being passive recipients of aid, Faure explains that French Jews could also be suspicious of the generosity of American benefactors, not least when it came to protecting their Jewish daughters. At other times, it was French Holocaust survivors who aided American Jewish servicemen in their turn, providing comfort and a sense of family as the latter wept in their homes. Faure's powerful insight into those complicated relationships is a theme which runs throughout her book. The new transatlantic power dynamics in 1945 were especially difficult to navigate and affected Franco-American relations at all levels. In fact, the tension between American and French Jews went back to American and French philanthropists: French Jewish international philanthropy had been a model for the world since the creation of the Alliance Israélite Universelle in 1860, but by 1944-45, the world had radically shifted. By then, France was in desperate need of American money and aid. The new position of total dependence of French Jews on American Jews after the Holocaust was not easy to accept, and from their very first encounter in 1944 French Jews positioned themselves not as recipients of aid themselves, but as partners equal to the Americans in helping Jews in need. This, unsurprisingly, would be a problem in the efficient distribution of aid after 1945.

The following chapters explore the implementation of American Jewish aid organisations after 1945, which was a difficult process for several reasons. First, the aims of the JDC were not the same as those of the French: the JDC wanted to help needy Jews in France and stimulate government aid for them, but French organisations saw it as an opportunity to lighten their own extraordinary burdens; in short, if the JDC supplied aid to Jews, then they did not need to. Second, there was real tension between American and French Jewish aid organisations themselves. French Jewish aid was made up of a mosaic of organisations, a network inherited from the resistance and Jewish networks they had had to build during the war. This mosaic, however, went against the grain of American aid instincts, which was about centralisation and accountability. American Jews thus saw French Jews as highly disorganised and inefficient, and communication problems and breakdowns eroded relations between them. And, of course, politics are never far from humanitarian aid. The JDC was not apolitical, but it did aim to prioritise aid over political matters. Other organisations had clearer political agendas: the anti-Zionist American Jewish Committee (AJC) had little in common with the World Jewish Congress (WJC) who had an ethnic definition of Jews and a pro-Zionist agenda, and other Jewish organisations such as the Bundist Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), the orthodox Vaad Hatzala, or HIAS, actively supported departures from Europe. The definition of Judaism, the politics of immigration, and the creation of a Jewish state were key issues which shaped American Jewish aid, whilst political currents of socialism and communism also created numerous problems.

Ultimately, Faure skilfully shows that the implementation of American Jewish aid was not imposed on France, but rather was constantly being negotiated and adapted. Some scholars have described American aid to France and Europe as yet another form of post- war American imperialism, but Faure argues that French Jews looked to adapt, rather than simply import, the American model. Funding schemes, for example, were created *with* French Jews, and not merely imposed by Americans. It was in fact French Jewish leaders who asked for a Jewish Marshall Plan for Europe when they looked to the American Jewish Congress (AJC) to provide the bulk of the funding to fight antisemitism. Beyond providing the author with a title for her book, this specific request showed French Jewish agency in shaping post-war Jewish life and Franco-

American philanthropic relations. French Jews were therefore not passive recipients of American philanthropy but looked to shape and adapt it to their humanitarian but also political needs. "French actions did not reverse the hierarchy between giver and receiver," Faure argues, "but they do show that French Jews refused the role of silent partner in the reconstruction process" (p. 177). In her final chapter, Faure points to the long-term impact of American Jewish aid. The JDC established the Paul Baerwald School (PBS) to train social workers from America, France, and even Israel. Although the school's lasting impact should not be overestimated, the individuals and organisations who emerged from PBS went on to make fruitful contributions to French social work in the post-war decades.

By introducing us to the idea of a Jewish Marshall Plan, Faure invites us to consider post-war humanitarian aid as a dynamic process between Americans and Europeans, rather than a simplistic imposition of American values and finances. She also tells a more grassroots story which reveals how forms of Jewish solidarity co-existed alongside state-led projects of economic revival and reconstruction in the late 1940s and early 1950s. This is an important book which makes a real contribution to our understanding of post-war transatlantic relations, expands our understanding of humanitarian aid at a granular level, and highlights a lesser-known part of American involvement in Europe in the dawn of the American century.

Ludivine Broch
University of Westminster
L.Broch@westminster.ac.uk

Copyright © 2024 by the Society for French Historical Studies, all rights reserved. The Society for French Historical Studies permits the electronic distribution of individual reviews for nonprofit educational purposes, provided that full and accurate credit is given to the author, the date of publication, and the location of the review on the H-France website. The Society for French Historical Studies reserves the right to withdraw the license for edistribution/republication of individual reviews at any time and for any specific case. Neither bulk redistribution/republication in electronic form of more than five percent of the contents of H-France Review nor republication of any amount in print form will be permitted without permission. For any other proposed uses, contact the Editor-in-Chief of H-France. The views posted on H-France Review are not necessarily the views of the Society for French Historical Studies.

ISSN 1553-9172