

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY



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Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

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# Southern Jewish History

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*Cover Picture: The Strand Theatre, 619 Louisiana Avenue, Shreveport, Louisiana, designed by Emile Weil, shown at its opening in 1925. The dome is a characteristic of some of Weil's structures covered in the article on pages 1 through 41. In 1984 the fully restored Strand reopened as the Official State Theatre of Louisiana. (Courtesy of LSU-Shreveport Archives.)*

## *From the Editor . . .*

**T**his volume includes articles by a remarkably diverse and creative array of authors: Seth Epstein, a recently minted University of Minnesota Ph.D.; Stephen J. Whitfield, who holds an endowed chair in American studies at Brandeis University in Massachusetts and who was recently honored by his university and department for his distinguished career and just “being Steve” as he reached his seventieth birthday; Patrick L. Lucas, Associate Professor and Director of the School of Interiors at the University of Kentucky; and Eugene Normand, a retired engineer from Seattle, Washington; as well as primary source authors Dina Weinstein, a journalist and adviser at Florida’s Miami-Dade College, and rising star Dan Puckett, of the department of history at Troy State University in Alabama. The places and subjects treated are equally varied and unusual.

Serendipitously, Normand and Lucas both submitted manuscripts that explore the lives and work of Jewish architects. Hopefully their pioneering articles will encourage explorations into other neglected career paths.

By comparing and contrasting the careers of Emile Weil of New Orleans and B. Marcus Priteca of Seattle, Normand exposes a professional niche that Jews entered at the right places and at the right time. Early synagogue commissions launched these men’s careers in movie palace design for burgeoning theater chains. Ethnic contacts facilitated their rise and success in the broader theatrical realm dominated by Jewish entrepreneurs.

Lucas takes the profession into the post World War II generation and from large cities to suburban North Carolina. Edward Loewenstein provided traditional, modern, and hybrid options for his home-building clientele. In so doing, he allowed them to fit in even while standing out as distinctive. Loewenstein pioneered in mentoring and training African Americans and women, and, like



Priteca and Weil, benefited from contacts in the Jewish community.

Epstein and Whitfield provide revisions of the presentations the two made at the 2012 SJHS conference in Asheville, and both use that North Carolina city as the locus of their research. Epstein treats the reactions of Jews and non-Jews to the antisemitic, fascist tirades of William Dudley Pelley. That some supported Pelley and others rejected him because his image did not serve business interests speaks to the conditional tolerance under which Jews operated. Epstein contends that the Pelley episode impacted on Jewish identity and subsequent interaction with non-Jews.

Whitfield, who has honored the pages of this journal more times than any other author, compares and contrasts the origins and trajectories of Black Mountain College and Brandeis University. Common personnel served as but one link between the two institutions. Although started for diverse reasons, the Asheville institution welcomed refugees from Nazi persecution during the 1930s, a policy followed by the Waltham school after its establishment in the postwar era. Black Mountain faculty and staff debated limitations on African American and Jewish participation, but like Brandeis, the college proved to be far more liberal in its policies toward both groups than most other schools. Ultimately one college failed while the other succeeded. Whitfield suggests that the reasons included regional, management, and policy differences.

Puckett's primary source essay on the resettlement of Holocaust survivors to Alabama nicely complements his earlier article (2011, volume 11) on responses to Nazi policies in the same state. As in that article, he finds variations from community to community related to resources and personnel.

Much has been written about Jews and the civil rights movement. Yet almost nothing has appeared about southern Jewish students. Weinstein investigates the Jewish editor of the student newspaper at the University of Alabama awash in the conflict over integration. Although Melvin F. Meyer did not write the editorial denouncing the conflict desegregation engendered in Mississippi and endorsing peaceful integration of his university,

he and his family suffered persecution suffused with antisemitism because he supported its publication.

As always, production of this journal is a group enterprise. I wish to thank section editors Scott Langston, Phyllis Leffler, and Steve Whitfield, the editorial board, outside peer reviewers Catherine Kahn, Patrick Lucas, Leonard Rogoff, Deb Weiner, and Ellen Weiss, and proof readers Karen Franklin, Scott Langston, and Hol-lace Weiner. After an international search, Bryan Edward Stone was asked to join our team as associate managing editor. He and Rachel Heimovics Braun have worked seamlessly together in this gradual transition to Rachel's retirement in the next few years. He brings his creativity, determination, background, and skills to the diverse, almost unlimited tasks that Rachel has performed so well on her own during the last sixteen years. Bryan and Rachel buttress the journal production process as no one else.

Mark K. Bauman



A Tale of Two Cities' Jewish Architects:  
Emile Weil of New Orleans  
and B. Marcus Priteca of Seattle

by

Eugene Normand\*

**D**uring the early twentieth century, two Jewish architects—B. Marcus “Benny” Priteca of Seattle, Washington, and Emile Weil of New Orleans, Louisiana—established reputations at about the same time within the cities in which they lived and left indelible impressions in the geographical areas where their buildings were constructed. Their careers followed very similar patterns. They designed synagogues and other Jewish buildings in their home cities, although each built his reputation and financial success primarily as an architect of movie theaters and of other major buildings. Many of their buildings are still standing and functioning, some of them almost a hundred years after construction, although not all are used for their original purposes.

The phenomenon of an architect first successfully designing a synagogue and then capitalizing on that reputation to get into the design of movie theaters is relatively unusual. Numerous prominent Jewish architects designed synagogues in the United States and Europe, but few of these moved on to design movie theaters. Some world-renowned Jewish architects, from Dankmar Adler in the second half of the nineteenth century in Chicago to the mid-twentieth century Philadelphia-based architect Louis Kahn, achieved recognition for their synagogue and theater buildings.<sup>1</sup> However, they did not follow the pattern of Weil and Priteca, who

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started with establishing stellar reputations for their first synagogues, then parlayed that success into long-term careers designing movie and performance venues for theater chains. For this latter path, timing proved to be crucial. An architect had to establish a successful firm by about 1910 to be able to compete for a synagogue design project and then be ready to join with a theater owner when the explosive increase in the number of movie theaters began in the 1915–1925 era.<sup>2</sup>

### *Beginnings*

Emile Weil was born in New Orleans on January 20, 1878, to Max Weil and Mina Levy, who were descended from German Jews. He studied architecture at Tulane University, where the artist William Woodward influenced him. He began as a draftsman for several local architects and then opened his own office in 1899.<sup>3</sup> Weil married Marie Rose Newman of New Orleans in 1909, and they had one child, Isabel Minette Weil, who married Herman Stanford Kohlmeyer of New Orleans.<sup>4</sup> Weil's architectural career began in earnest when in 1907 he won a contest to design the Touro Synagogue on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans.<sup>5</sup> More than a hundred years later, Touro Synagogue still uses Weil's building for services and communal events.

*Emile Weil.*

*(Courtesy of Irwin Lachoff and Catherine C. Kahn, The Jewish Community of New Orleans and the Tulane Architectural Archives.)*

Benny Priteca was born in Glasgow, Scotland, in 1889, as Benjamin Marcus Dombrowizky but later adopted the last name of his stepfather, Charles Priteca. His parents and stepfather were Russian Jews who immigrated to Scotland, and Priteca grew up in both Glasgow and Edinburgh. In the latter city, he studied for his future profession at the Edinburgh College of Art and apprenticed under the architect Robert Macfarlane Cameron.

In 1909 Priteca arrived in Seattle attracted by the prospects of the Alaska Pacific-Yukon Exhibition (APYE).<sup>6</sup> This world's fair was held on the largely forested campus of the University of Washington, which had contained only three buildings a few years earlier. Thus, the APYE entailed substantial new construction and landscaping that must have enticed the young Priteca.

*B. Marcus Priteca, c. 1916.*

*(Courtesy of MOHAI, the Museum of History & Industry,  
Seattle, Washington – Neg. SHS 19.111.)*

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His experience in Scotland helped him secure a draftsman job in a Seattle architectural firm, although he switched to another firm the following year. In 1911, a chance meeting with theater magnate Alexander Pantages changed his life and began a professional relationship that would continue for two decades. He started working directly for Pantages as a twenty-one-year-old, first on the Pantages Theater in San Francisco and then on an Oakland theater, also called the Pantages.<sup>7</sup> Priteca returned to Seattle from the San Francisco area and opened his own architectural firm. Shortly thereafter, in 1914, he won a competition to design his first synagogue, for Seattle's Chevra Bikur Cholim, the congregation to which he belonged.<sup>8</sup>

Weil and Priteca had artistic talent, but in addition they started their architectural careers at just the right time, the first decade of the twentieth century. Their abilities enabled them to win competitions for designing synagogues at a time when urban Jewish populations were significantly increasing. This allowed them to capitalize on the favorable reputations they acquired for those synagogue buildings to obtain design commissions for movie theaters at the very time that the number of such venues was exploding across the country. Their timing provided the opportunity, and their talent and hard work led to their success. Few Jewish architects began during that era and progressed from acclaimed synagogue buildings to celebrated movie theaters. It was a rare combination of timing and opportunity.

##### *Their First Synagogues*

The Touro Synagogue in New Orleans resulted from the 1881 merger of two older, originally traditional congregations, the German-Jewish Shanarai-Chasset and the Portuguese/Sephardic Nefutzoth Yehudah, and joined the Reform movement ten years later.<sup>9</sup> Weil's Touro design was highly regarded and was illustrated and discussed in the October 1909 issue of *American Architect and Building News* that appeared shortly after Priteca's arrival in Seattle.<sup>10</sup>

Priteca probably saw this article and was greatly influenced by Weil's design features, especially the synagogue's exterior.<sup>11</sup>

Thus, when Priteca received the commission to design the new building for Chevra Bikur Cholim in Seattle a few years later, he apparently borrowed heavily from Weil's synagogue thousands of miles away, (see pictures on pages 6 and 7.) Priteca added, however, unique interior elements not found in Touro.

Bikur Cholim was organized in 1891 as the first Orthodox congregation in Seattle, and eastern European Jews comprised its membership. The congregation's first sanctuary, built in 1898 at Thirteenth Avenue and Washington Street, was of modest size and character, with a seating capacity of 120 men and 80 women. The building failed to meet the needs of a growing congregation, and larger facilities had to be rented for the High Holidays.<sup>12</sup> Within fifteen years the congregation decided to build a much larger and more imposing structure that would serve its members for generations.

The exteriors of both buildings exhibit a very clean and appealing Romanesque look, combining columns and wide stairs at the main entrance along with other neoclassical elements such as a compact silhouette and shallow dome. The exteriors of the two buildings are so strikingly similar that it is almost as if they were designed by the same architect. However, they also resemble two synagogues that were built in Germany at the same time, the Westend Synagogue in Frankfurt (1910, F. Roeckle, architect) and the Fasanenstrasse Synagogue in Berlin (1912, E. Hessel, architect), although the domes on the German buildings are less shallow.<sup>13</sup> Thus, both men were working within a transatlantic design mode.

Neither Priteca nor Weil was an observant Jew. Each celebrated his Jewish identity, but their commitment to kashrut and the recognition of Shabbat and other Jewish holy days varied according to their personal preferences. Priteca had been raised in a relatively traditional Jewish home and was familiar with the details and workings of an Orthodox shul. All of the synagogues in Scotland at the time he lived there were Orthodox. Weil, although raised as a Reform Jew, designed mostly Orthodox synagogues, so he too understood the ritual requirements that had to be incorporated into the design of such a building. Priteca knew intimately of the *Aron Kodesh* and of the bimah. He artfully developed his



*Touro Synagogue, New Orleans, designed by Emile Weil.  
(Courtesy of Special Collections,  
College of Charleston Libraries, Charleston, SC.)*

own unique design of these two main features, as well as other appurtenances such as lighting, which had to be consistent with the designs of the ark and bimah, (see page 11.)

Weil grew up in New Orleans where Reform congregations had existed for decades. He was familiar with the designs of both Orthodox and Reform synagogues and could base his interior designs on elements from the more diverse examples that he had seen in synagogue and church buildings he had experienced firsthand. His personal artistic sense guided him, but the requirements of the building and the services conducted within it also inspired his choices about which elements he wanted to incorporate into the interior design.

Touro Synagogue already owned a beautiful wooden *Aron Kodesh* that had been donated by Judah Touro in 1847 to Nefutzoth Yehudah, one of Touro Synagogue's predecessor con-

gregations. Touro, a Sephardi, had lived in New Orleans since 1801. Born in Rhode Island in 1775, he was raised in Boston by his uncle following the premature deaths of his parents, Isaac, who had been the hazan of the Sephardic congregation in Newport, and Reyna. Judah Touro was a great benefactor to many civic causes in New Orleans such as the Touro Infirmary and the Touro Home for the Aged, which he founded.<sup>14</sup> Touro had insisted that the ark be made of cedars from Lebanon, and he transported these special timbers across the Mediterranean and Atlantic on one of his own vessels.<sup>15</sup> Weil's synagogue design made elegant use of this treasured artifact.

*Chevrá Bikur Cholim synagogue, Seattle, as shown in 2007.  
The Priteca designed building now houses the  
Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute.  
(Photo by Joe Mabel, courtesy Wikimedia Commons.)*

For the Bikur Cholim synagogue, Priteca designed his ark using an intricate mosaic pattern with thousands of small brown colored tiles. He made the bimah of wood and the magnificent

chandelier hanging over the bimah of an intricate multi-colored glass that blended perfectly with the mosaic of the ark.<sup>16</sup>

In 1969, when Bikur Cholim found a site for a new synagogue in the Seward Park neighborhood, Priteca was still living. (He died in 1971). Since he had designed the first building in 1914, he was asked if he would be interested in designing the new edifice. When the synagogue president, Israel Volotin, took Priteca to see the new property, the architect was dismayed because the parcel of land was in the middle of the block. Priteca insisted that synagogues, like movie theaters, deserved a dignified location, and this could only be at the corner of a block and no other spot. Priteca told the Bikur Cholim leadership that unless they obtained such a lot, he was not interested in the job.<sup>17</sup>

Consequently the congregation hired another Jewish architect, I. Mervin "Sonny" Gorasht, a member of the congregation. Gorasht also won the job of renovating the interior of the old synagogue for the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute (LHPAI), which now manages the property as a performance space.<sup>18</sup> In a sense, Gorasht, who knew Priteca personally, took on the job of "completing" Priteca's magnificent synagogue building of fifty-five years earlier, both in renovating the old structure to serve the needs of the LHPAI and in designing the new synagogue to replace it.

When the old building was sold, the three uniquely Jewish interior structures that Priteca had designed, the *Aron Kodesh*, the bimah, and the chandelier, were transported to the new location, where Bikur Cholim was reborn. The thousands of mosaic tiles on the ark were removed and individually numbered, then methodically reassembled in the new building to replicate the original. The contractor, however, thought he was being helpful by washing the thousands of tiles before reassembling them. Unfortunately, this removed the original patina that had been painted on the tiles in 1914, so in the reassembled form, to the discerning eye, the coloring was slightly off from the original.<sup>19</sup> The wooden bimah and the large chandelier were also carefully removed from the original building, stored, and then reassembled in the new sanctuary.

*The Aron Kodesh of  
Touro Synagogue, left, and a  
wide view of the  
sanctuary, below.  
The cedarwood Aron Kodesh  
dates back to 1847 when  
Judah Touro donated it  
to the congregation.  
(Courtesy of Touro Synagogue,  
New Orleans.)*

*Later Jewish Buildings*

For Weil and Priteca, the Touro and Bikur Cholim synagogues, respectively, were the first such buildings they had designed, but later synagogue commissions followed for both. Weil would wait fifteen years, Priteca about forty-five. Congregation Beth Israel in New Orleans, Weil's next synagogue commission, was established in 1904 as a united Orthodox congregation. Two years later, it chose as its first building the mansion that previously had been owned by former New Orleans Mayor Joseph Shakespeare. In 1924 the old building was demolished and replaced with a new sanctuary designed by Weil.<sup>20</sup>

Weil's design differed dramatically from his earlier Touro synagogue. He eliminated the large dome, and his new building projected a more modern look. Its façade incorporated art deco elements, with three adjacent doorways, each surrounded by a pair of large columns. Inside, the building incorporated beautiful stained glass windows and a chandelier imported from Europe.<sup>21</sup>

In 1896, mostly Hasidic Jews from Russia, Poland, and Lithuania established Agudath Achim Anshe Sfarad as an Orthodox congregation. In 1900 they purchased a building in New Orleans on Rampart Street, which they soon outgrew. About twenty-five years later, the leaders of the congregation, now known as Anshe Sfarad Synagogue, purchased land on Carondelet Street and hired Weil to design a new building.<sup>22</sup>

Weil created an elaborate, imposing structure with a seating capacity of twelve hundred. The façade is brick and features a large set of stairs leading up to the three rounded arch-doorway entrances. The doorways are reminiscent of the Beth Israel design, although the Anshe Sfarad entranceways are more impressive. The internal design elements include a large imported chandelier, stained glass windows, and hand-carved Stars of David similar to features inside Beth Israel. The barrel-vaulted ceiling is supported by structural beams embedded with a series of light bulbs that provide a beautiful effect while illuminating the sanctuary.<sup>23</sup>

Temple Sinai, founded in 1870, was the first Reform synagogue in New Orleans. It is the congregation to which Weil

*Bikur Cholim choir before the ark that Priteca designed, shown in 1947.  
(Courtesy of the University of Washington Libraries,  
Special Collections, JEW0520.)*

*Bikur Cholim chandelier, today.  
The current chandelier is an exact  
replica of the original, which was  
destroyed in 1988 when a roof fire  
caused it to fall from the ceiling.  
(Photo by Eugene Normand.)*

belonged and in which he was married. The original building was an elaborate structure dominated by two Gothic-style domed towers. When the congregation moved to its present location on St. Charles Avenue in 1928, the membership had to decide on which architectural firm to use because there were three well-established Jewish firms in New Orleans: Weil, Moise Goldstein, and Weiss, Dreyfous, and Seiferth. All three were connected to the synagogue, so the congregation offered each firm various roles in the overall design work.<sup>24</sup> Among Weil's assignments was the front entrance, possibly because of his impressive entranceways for Beth Israel and Anshe Sfard.<sup>25</sup> The Temple Sinai entranceway also incorporates three doorways, but it appears more utilitarian and less stylized compared to the entranceways for his other two synagogue designs.

*Anshe Sfard synagogue,  
New Orleans,  
designed by Emile Weil.  
(Photo by John and Kathleen  
DeMajo, Chesterfield, Va.)*

Today there are four synagogues in New Orleans and four in suburban Metairie. Discounting two Chabad centers, which use smaller buildings, this leaves six synagogues. Of these, Weil was involved with four, although his Beth Israel structure was abandoned by the congregation when they moved to a new location in 1971. His influence and relationship with so many of these synagogues is impressive. Over the past century, as the Jewish population of New Orleans has fluctuated between approximately seven thousand and thirteen thousand, three of the buildings that Weil helped design continue to serve the needs of their congregations.<sup>26</sup>

Benny Priteca's wait for another synagogue commission was much longer than Weil's. His architectural career spanned almost six decades and so provided him later opportunities to design synagogues. Unsurprisingly, then, he employed drastically different designs than Weil.

In the late 1950s, Priteca was asked to design a new sanctuary in Seattle for the large Reform congregation, Temple De Hirsch, adjacent to its old building. About five years later, Sephardic Bikur Holim Congregation (SBH) moved almost ten miles south to a new neighborhood, and Priteca won the job of designing the new building, incorporating some very modern elements into it.

*Temple De Hirsch, Seattle,  
designed by Benny Priteca.  
(Courtesy of Vladimir  
Menkov, Wikimedia Commons.)*

Priteca's Temple De Hirsch presents a highly distinctive look: "Mount Sinai with the top cut off," as local Jews used to quip. Its shape is that of a frustum, a pyramid with the pointed top removed. The external concrete structure is divided into separate faces, each decorated with a series of vertical parallel concrete ribs. The internal design provides an impressive sanctuary with seating for a thousand, dominated by a very tall and imposing metal, modern *Aron Kodesh*. Priteca fully utilized his renowned acoustical expertise to allow temple members to enjoy the congregation's wide array of music programs, organized by musical director Samuel Goldfarb, regardless of where they were seated.

SBH serves half of the relatively large Sephardic community in the Seattle area. This congregation is completely independent of



the aforementioned Bikur Cholim, Priteca's first synagogue client, which was Ashkenazic. Both congregations take their name from the Hebrew term *bikur cholim*. The ancestors of most of the Jews of SBH came from Turkey, specifically the town of Tekirdag about ninety miles west of Istanbul. The name of their congregation in Tekirdag had been Bikur Holim, so these immigrants transported the name of their synagogue across the ocean to Seattle.

The ancestors of these Turkish Jews had been expelled from Spain four hundred years earlier. In Jewish custom, the land of Sepharad in the biblical book of Obadiah is identified with Spain. Priteca was inspired by Spanish and broadly Mediterranean themes to incorporate arches and red brick in both the interior and exterior of the building. Again distinctive from his previous designs, the *Aron Kodesh* used a large slab of white marble offset by mahogany arches.

Today there are more than twenty synagogues in the greater Seattle area. Again, discounting the smaller Chabad centers, this leaves at least fifteen congregations with major synagogue buildings. When Priteca designed the new Sephardic Bikur Holim in 1964, only seven synagogues existed, two of which were relatively small, so in reality there were five major synagogues. Priteca had been involved in the design of three of these five, two Orthodox and one Reform, all substantial buildings. He earned the respect of all segments of the Jewish community for his architectural talent. Today, no single Jewish architect could exert such a degree of influence on the city's Jewish communal buildings. The Jewish population of Seattle has almost quadrupled to nearly forty thousand in the last fifty years.<sup>27</sup> Today, one can only marvel at the kind of monopoly on synagogue architecture that Priteca had in the city.

This large impact on synagogue design within their host cities is a rare quality shared by Weil and Priteca. Other Jewish architects designed several synagogues in a single city. Leopold Eidlitz, for example, arrived in New York in 1843 to become the first Jewish architect in the United States. Even though Eidlitz designed all three of the imposing buildings Reform Temple Emanuel constructed during the nineteenth century, as well as several

smaller synagogues on New York's Lower East Side, his designs did not dominate the city's scores of synagogues.<sup>28</sup> The Lower East Side had hundreds of congregations and close to a hundred dedicated synagogue buildings designed by numerous other architects.<sup>29</sup>

In between Bikur Cholim in 1914 and Temple De Hirsch in 1959, Priteca designed several additional Jewish buildings, including the Seattle Talmud Torah and the chapel for Herzl Congregation, both during the 1930s.<sup>30</sup> More modest in size than his synagogue buildings, they incorporated features he had used in the Bikur Cholim synagogue such as rounded arches and pillars for the entranceway (Talmud Torah) and a dome (Herzl chapel).

#### *Designing Movie Theaters*

Although designing synagogues and other Jewish buildings was important to both Benny Priteca and Emile Weil for a variety of reasons including community obligation, prestige, and career enhancement, these did not provide a pathway to financial success. Few new opportunities appeared in this genre, and communal organization money was uncertain. To be financially successful and gain added renown, they had to find a different kind of building to design. For this purpose, they chose (or, more aptly, obtained the opportunity) to design movie theaters. In many respects, this was not a great departure from synagogue architecture. Theater buildings, like synagogues, had to seat a large number of people in comfort as they watched and listened to the program. Effective designs had to include good sight lines from every seat and effective acoustics to allow those seated to hear the performers or speakers.

Weil and Priteca began their architectural careers at a pivotal moment. Each found within his city an owner of an entertainment organization who wanted to build and expand his movie-theater empire. This began in the 1910s and 1920s, when silent movies were the main fare, and expanded further with the era of the "talking pictures" that began in 1927, although the Great Depression limited movie theater growth during the 1930s.

Weil found his path through the Saenger theater chain headquartered in New Orleans. In 1890, Abraham and Julian Saenger moved to Shreveport, Louisiana, with their father, Rabbi Israel Saenger. The brothers had graduated from Johns Hopkins University with degrees in pharmacology, and they opened the Saenger Drug Store at Milam and Louisiana Streets in Shreveport in 1895.<sup>31</sup>

The Saengers built their first Saenger Theater in 1911 next door to their drug store. It operated as a vaudeville house for one year, but Julian had become fascinated with moving pictures and foresaw their future. Thus, the brothers and a partner, L. Ash, formed the Saenger Amusement Company on August 14, 1913.<sup>32</sup>

The company grew rapidly, especially during the 1920s, and eventually their empire consisted of over three hundred theaters located throughout the American South, Central America, and the Caribbean. Weil was one of several individuals whom the Saengers used as theater architects. He designed nine theaters for them, as well as two more for different sponsors (*see* Table 1). Of Weil's Saenger theaters, the smallest, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, seated one thousand, and the largest, in New Orleans, had a capacity of 3,400.

The Strand Theatre in Shreveport, a magnificent building designed by Weil, was also distinguished because it was owned by two sets of Jewish brothers. Harry and Simon Ehrlich were born in St. Louis, moved to Texarkana, Texas, and then to Shreveport. In 1922 the Ehrlichs formed a partnership with the Saenger brothers in New Orleans called Saenger-Ehrlich Enterprises, Inc., which hired Weil to design the Strand.<sup>33</sup>

Weil's theater designs, especially those in the larger cities, were highly regarded for their beauty. More than half of those he designed still operate today, and most have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Some of these operated for many years, were closed down, and then were restored through major renovation projects to allow them to operate into the twenty-first century. Examples include the Jefferson Theatre in Beaumont, Texas, the Strand Theatre in Shreveport, the Perot The-

atre in Texarkana, the Temple Theatre in Meridian, Mississippi, the Saenger Theatre in New Orleans (two restorations), and the Saenger Theatre in Pensacola, Florida (two restorations).<sup>34</sup>

*Abraham and Julian Saenger's Drug Store, Shreveport, Louisiana.  
The brothers built their first theater next door where they soon  
began to show motion pictures, thus beginning  
their long association with movie theaters.  
(Courtesy of LSU-Shreveport Archives/Eric Brock Collection.)*

For his theater exteriors, Weil generally used brick, stone, cast aggregate concrete, and tile, which were combined to create the large-scale embellishments. The theaters often included a cast-concrete dome, and gold-painted ornamentation surrounded the interior. The auditorium, designed to seat between one thousand and two thousand people, consisted of the orchestra, loge, lower balcony, and upper balcony sections. The walls of the auditorium often included paintings by accomplished artists on a mural-like scale that paid homage either to the muses (inspiring artistic and literary creations) or to pathos, the most moving human emotions (life, love, passion). Ceilings were also highly stylized through painting and sculpted elements that represented plants and animals, putti (cupids), and elaborate designs, all conveying the idea of a princely European palace.

TABLE 1. Theaters designed by Emile Weil<sup>35</sup>

Date	Name	Location
1923	Hamasa Shrine Temple (Temple Theater)	Meridian, MS
1924	Saenger (Perot) Theatre	Texarkana, TX
1924	Saenger Theatre	Pine Bluff, AR
1925	Saenger Theatre	Pensacola, FL
1925	Strand Theatre	Shreveport, LA
1927	Jefferson Theatre	Beaumont, TX
1927	Saenger Theater	Mobile, AL
1927	Saenger Theatre	New Orleans, LA
1927	Arabian Theatre	Laurel, MS
1927	Tivoli Theatre	New Orleans, LA
1929	Saenger Theatre	Hattiesburg, MS

In Seattle, Benny Priteca met Pericles “Alexander” Pantages, a colorful and even notorious character. Pantages was a Greek-born vaudeville and early motion-picture producer who created a large and influential circuit of theaters across the western United States and Canada. Pantages theaters appeared as far north as Anchorage, Alaska, and as far south as San Diego, California, and Priteca designed all of them. This required the architect to move during the 1920s to southern California, since Pantages was building many theaters there. Occasionally, Pantages found opportunities in other parts of the country, mainly in the Midwest, to expand his theater empire.<sup>36</sup>

Pantages liked Priteca as a theater architect because Priteca could make a building look rich and opulent while spending less than might have been expected. Pantages reportedly said of Priteca that “any fool can make a place look like a million dollars by spending a million dollars, but it’s not everybody who can do the same thing with half a million.”<sup>37</sup>

Priteca designed more than thirty theaters, although not all for Pantages, and some were for the presentation of performing arts rather than movies. (For a selection of Priteca’s theater designs, see Table 2.) With so many commissions, Priteca became nationally known for his expertise in this specialized design that emphasized acoustics and good sightlines.

Similar to Weil's theaters, the majesty of Priteca's theater designs, especially those in the larger cities, was highly esteemed. Nearly half of those he designed remain in operation today as one type of theater or another, and many have been placed on the National Register of Historic Places. Also similar to Weil, some of Priteca's theaters operated for many years, closed, and then were restored through major renovations. Examples of these include the Tacoma Pantages Theater, three theaters in Seattle (Admiral, Paramount, and Coliseum), the Capitol Theatre in Yakima, Washington, and the Pantages Theater in Fresno, California.<sup>38</sup>

*Ceiling, Pantages Theatre,  
Hollywood, California, 2012.  
(Photo by John O'Neill,  
courtesy of Wikimedia  
Commons.)*

Priteca utilized a similar design approach in most of his theaters. The exteriors of the buildings usually were made of brick or terra cotta, the latter a building material he was fond of because it could be sculpted into various types of ornamentation. The interior details of the theaters were quite elaborate, fulfilling Pantages's desire to draw audiences out of their everyday lives and into a place of wealth and splendor. Priteca accomplished this through the use of Roman columns on the sides of the proscenium arch, incorporating ivory and gold color schemes (Pantages's favorite colors), heavy drapes, and an ornamental drop curtain, the latter textiles useful for sound absorption. The size of the theaters varied, but generally they accommodated twelve hundred to sixteen hundred seats, including side boxes and loge seating toward the front of the theater. Priteca oversaw the construction details of each new Pantages theater and often worked with the same contractors on each project. A. B. Heinsbergen of Seattle, for example,

was the interior decorator and muralist for most of the Pantages theater houses.

**TABLE 2.** Selected theaters designed by Benny Priteca<sup>39</sup>

Date	Name	Location
1911	Pantages (New Pantages) Theatre	San Francisco, CA
1913	Pantages (Strand) Theatre	Edmonton, AB, Canada
1914	Pantages Theatre (Pantages Playhouse)	Winnipeg, MB, Canada
1915	Coliseum Theater (Banana Republic Bldg.)	Seattle, WA
1918	Pantages Theater	Tacoma, WA
1920	Los Angeles Pantages Theatre #2 (Warrens)	Los Angeles, CA
1920	Mercy (Capitol) Theatre	Yakima, WA
1921	Pantages (Tower) Theater	Kansas City, MO
1924	Pantages Theatre	San Diego, CA
1924	B & M Theater	Seattle, WA
1927	Orpheum Theater	Vancouver, BC, Canada
1928	Pantages (Warnors) Theater	Fresno, CA
1929	Pantages Theatre Hollywood	Hollywood, CA
1930	Warner Theatre	Huntington Park, CA
1938	Admiral Theater, renovation	Seattle, WA
1940	Tower Theatre	Bend, OR
1948	State (Evergreen State) Theater	Olympia, WA

### *Designing Sports Venues*

Both Weil and Priteca designed a variety of other buildings in their respective cities. In particular, each man was involved with one major sports venue. Weil designed a baseball stadium and Priteca a racetrack. Although these are distinctly different facilities, they share two primary requirements with both theaters and synagogues: the buildings had to accommodate a relatively large number of spectators and provide them with a good view of the action.

In 1915 Weil designed Heinemann Park Pelican Stadium in New Orleans (renamed Pelican Stadium in 1938). The stadium served as the home of the New Orleans Pelicans minor league baseball team for the stadium's entire lifetime, until it was demolished in 1957. In addition, it served as the home baseball stadium for the St. Louis/New Orleans Stars of the Negro American League for a few years and as the site for spring training for the Cleveland Indians for about a decade.<sup>40</sup> Based on the seating capacity of comparable minor league stadiums, the capacity of Pelican Stadium was about ten thousand, which would have been five to ten times the capacity of Weil's later theaters.<sup>41</sup>

In 1933 Priteca designed the Longacres Racetrack in Renton, Washington, for his close friend, Joe Gottstein. The track provided the first home of thoroughbred racing in western Washington, and, at its closing in 1992, it was the longest continually operated racetrack on the West Coast.<sup>42</sup> The facility consisted of the racing strip, grandstand, clubhouse, several barns, a judges' stand, and pari-mutuel windows. Priteca designed all of these elements, but the grandstand, which had a capacity of approximately twenty-four thousand, is the portion which best utilized his theater design experience.

Priteca was involved with two other Seattle projects connected to sports, but they were far removed from a true sports venue for spectators like a racetrack or baseball stadium. The first project was the decorative Crystal Pool swimming facility, and the second was the remodeling of Union Stables, which had once housed horses, into a furniture store.<sup>43</sup> These projects demonstrated Priteca's versatility as an architect.

#### *Other Buildings*

Weil and Priteca also designed a variety of other buildings in their respective cities and, in the case of Priteca, occasionally in cities where he was also building theaters. (For a sampling of Weil's other commissions, *see* Table 3.)<sup>44</sup> Weil's first residences were for Jewish families, and, in fact, his first home design was executed for Fannie Kiefer Newman, widow of Charles Newman, who was an uncle of Weil's wife Marie. Weil went from mainly



designing homes, to the Touro Synagogue, to commercial buildings, to theaters, and, near the end of his career, to a college music building and the three later synagogues described earlier.

**TABLE 3.** Selected New Orleans buildings designed by Emile Weil<sup>45</sup>

Date	Name	Address	Building Type	Description/Style
1905	Home for Fannie Kiefer Newman	3804 St. Charles Ave.	House	Romanesque
1907	Canal Bank & Trust Company Bldg.	Corner of Patterson and Vallette Sts.	Branch bank	2 stories
1908	Home for Joseph Levy	1630 Palmer St.	House	Classical Revival
1911	Whitney National Bank Bldg.	229 St. Charles Ave.	Office building	14 stories
1911	Leon Fellman Bldg.	810 Canal St.	Office building	4 stories
1913	Home for Emanuel Benjamin	5531 St. Charles Ave.	House	Beaux-Arts
1920	Bohn Ford Motor Bldg.	2700 S. Broad St.	Automobile dealership	2 stories
1920	Touro Infirmary, addition	1401 Foucher St.	Hospital addition	4 stories
1923	Home for Simon Shwartz	14 Audubon Blvd.	House	Mediterranean
1927	Canal Bank & Trust Company Bldg.	210 Baronne St.	Office building	19 stories
1928	Dixon Hall	Campus of Newcomb College (Tulane University)	Academic building, Music	Neo-Georgian
1912–1913	Kress Building (Ritz-Carlton Hotel)	923 Canal St.	Office building	5 stories

Since Priteca designed many more movie and performing arts theaters than Weil, it is not surprising that Weil actually undertook more projects than Priteca involving diverse types of buildings (*see* Table 4). Nonetheless, each developed local, national, and, in Priteca's case, international reputations. They were involved with diverse building projects, often several simultaneously. Building owners wanted to utilize architects of proven ability, vision, and artistry, and they did not hesitate to interview those whom they knew would perform well for them.

**TABLE 4.** Selected buildings designed by Benny Priteca<sup>46</sup>

Date	Name	Location	Building Type
1926	Marshall Square Office Building (Orpheum Theater)	San Francisco, CA	Office complex
1927	Central Hotel	Tacoma, WA	Hotel
1931	Canadian Bank of Commerce	Los Angeles, CA	Office building
1946–1950	Seattle Public Safety Building	Seattle, WA	Municipal building

#### *Internal and External Influences*

New Orleans and Seattle were quite different cities, with New Orleans being substantially older and more established. The first Jew came to New Orleans in 1757, while the first arrived in the state of Washington almost a hundred years later. The first congregation in New Orleans was founded in 1827, while Seattle's first dates to 1889.<sup>47</sup>

There is no record of any Jewish architect in the city of Seattle when Priteca arrived, so he had none with whom to compete. In contrast, two other firms led by Jewish architects started in New Orleans at about the same time that Weil began his practice, but these two firms later undertook far larger projects than Weil. Moise Goldstein, the head of one of these firms, was about four years younger than Weil. Like Weil, he was born in New Orleans and attended Tulane University, but he also graduated from MIT.<sup>48</sup>

Goldstein was a partner in two separate firms before he opened his own architectural practice in 1914. He executed some very ambitious and highly regarded buildings, establishing a stellar reputation. These projects include several buildings on the campuses of Tulane and Dillard Universities and the luxurious Pine Hills Hotel, on the northern shore of the Bay of St. Louis north of Pass Christian, Mississippi.<sup>49</sup>

The second New Orleans Jewish architectural firm, Weiss, Dreyfous, and Seiferth, was comprised of three Jewish architects. Leon C. Weiss, the driving force, combined first with F. Julius Dreyfous in 1920, then added Solis Seiferth seven years later. Weiss, the same age as Goldstein, was politically well-connected. This enabled his firm to obtain the commissions to design most major buildings undertaken by the administration of Governor Huey Long in Baton Rouge, including the Capitol Building, the governor's mansion, and many of the buildings on the Louisiana State University campus.<sup>50</sup>

The Goldstein and Weiss firms attained national reputations for buildings on a grand scale. In contrast, Weil's reputation, as notable as it was, remained strongest within the state of Louisiana, and his building designs were admired for their artistry and technical details. Weil was able to extend his reputation throughout the Southeast through his execution of the majestic Saenger movie theaters, and his work was often featured in national architecture magazines such as *Architectural Record* and in regional magazines including *Southern Architect* and *Western Architect*. He was able to develop his own niche—movie theaters and synagogues—along with a few commercial buildings of note.

Weil and Priteca both followed a three-step career progression: a) they developed a successful design for their first synagogue; b) this served as entrée to working on the design of movie and performance theaters; and c) after a period of years, their theater reputations led to commissions to design later synagogues. Jewish connections facilitated this progression. The theater chain owners for whom Weil worked, the Saenger brothers, were Jewish and likely knew of Weil's professional reputation based on his Touro Synagogue and commercial buildings and

may have met him through Jewish acquaintances. Priteca met his theater chain operator, Alexander Pantages, through a chance meeting that gave him his opportunity to show Pantages what he could do as an architect. However, in addition, Priteca's Jewish friend, Joseph Gottstein, for whom he would build the Longacres Racetrack, was also a business associate of Pantages, so discussions between the businessmen may have reinforced the idea of giving Priteca his chance to participate in the design of theaters for Pantages. Both Weil and Priteca took advantage of artistic/engineering talent and training and opportunity.

Our focus has been on the most common aspects of these architects' design work, in particular synagogues and theaters. Although on the surface these seem to be disparate types of buildings, they actually have much in common. Both are intended to seat large numbers of people comfortably, with capacities ranging from approximately five hundred to one thousand (larger synagogues) to almost two thousand (large theaters). The audiences in each are expected to be seated for long periods of time, approximately two to three hours, so both good acoustics and good sight lines are vital for every seat in the house.

One other crucial factor is significant: the timing of when both Weil and Priteca began their independent architectural firms. Weil was eleven years older than Priteca, but they essentially began their architectural careers within a period of about five to eight years. In his book *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell examines in detail people whom he calls "outliers," those who have achieved far more than other members of their groups. Gladwell carefully analyzes the reasons for their success, elaborating, "What truly distinguishes their histories is not their extraordinary talent, but their extraordinary opportunities."<sup>51</sup>

Gladwell provides another example of the "hidden opportunities that outliers benefit from." He compiles a list of the seventy-five richest people in human history. Of those, fourteen were born in America between 1831 and 1840. They were young but sufficiently experienced to be able to take advantage of the huge opportunities that arose between 1865 and 1880 when the American economy went through a tremendous transformation and

growth spurt. Industrial manufacturing came into its own during this period, and the rules governing the way private business succeeded in America were totally redefined. As Gladwell puts it, “this list says that it really matters how old you were when that transformation happened.”<sup>52</sup>

On a smaller scale, Gladwell’s model can be applied to the success of Weil and Priteca. With respect to designing synagogues, the great influx of Jews into the United States occurred between 1881 and 1924, when more than 2.3 million, mainly from eastern Europe, immigrated to America, primarily settling in New York City but also in other urban areas. The Jewish population of all major U.S. cities and states grew significantly during this period. For example, from 1877 to 1918 the Jewish population of Louisiana grew from 7,500 to 12,700 and that of Washington State from 145 to 9,117.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, many of the Jews who had arrived earlier and their descendants had risen economically to be able to afford greater and more expensive edifices. The construction of grandiose synagogues reflected their status in society. As urban Jewish populations expanded, so too did the need for larger synagogues to accommodate the new congregants, and, as these Jews became more prosperous, they wanted their houses of worship to reflect their success.

Opportunities were available for architects who were expanding their businesses at this time and were interested in the challenge of Jewish communal buildings. Good connections within the Jewish community eased the way for commissions for new synagogue design projects. Finally, the completed synagogues served as dramatic testament to their architectural skills.

*Expansion of the Movie Industry –  
Opportunity for Theater Architects*

The timing of the great expansion of the movie industry and thus of movie theaters was similarly fortuitous. The industry began about 1905 with the advent of nickelodeons, small theaters with capacities of fifty to two hundred people. A five-cent charge bought a patron entry to watch five- to fifteen-minute films. With-

in ten years the industry was transformed as feature films much greater in length, such as the ground-breaking *Birth of a Nation*, were introduced. Theaters initially called "movie palaces" replaced nickelodeons.<sup>54</sup>

The movie business grew rapidly after the successful internal struggle to wrest control of the industry from Thomas Edison and his Motion Pictures Patent Company, popularly known as "the Trust." The Trust had collected almost all motion picture equipment patents under the ownership of a single corporation.<sup>55</sup> Opposition by suppliers of the nickelodeons, combined with a federal antitrust suit, led to the dismantling of the Trust by the federal courts. This opened the door for a large group of independent filmmakers and distributors to establish production companies. Many of the men who succeeded with these companies, including Samuel Goldwyn, William Fox, Carl Laemmle, Adolph Zukor, Louis B. Mayer, and the Warner (Wonskolaser) Brothers, were European-born Jews.<sup>56</sup> Many started out with nickelodeons but switched over to the production end of the business, creating what evolved into the movie studios. The movie business was so new that it did not have the restrictions limiting access of minority groups, such as the Jews, that prevailed in older industries during the early twentieth century.

As the movie industry expanded, opportunities were also created on the exhibition side of the business through the establishment of companies owning chains of movie theaters. The movie palace became a unique architectural genre that incorporated luxurious design, a giant screen, and a large enough interior to seat hundreds to thousands of patrons. The motion picture business expanded into a multi-million dollar industry.<sup>57</sup> "Between 1914 and 1922, 4,000 new theaters opened in the U.S.," and "the picture palaces [became an overwhelming] commercial success."<sup>58</sup>

Two elements fostered the dramatic growth of the exhibition industry: theater owners, especially of movie chains, and theater builders/designers. For the theater owners, the industry followed the lead that had been set by department and grocery stores in creating regional and even national chains. The three

largest cities provided models: New York had Loew's, Inc. (founded by Marcus Loew); Chicago had Balaban & Katz (Barney and A. J. Balaban and Samuel Katz); and Philadelphia had the Stanley Company of America (Jules and Stanley Mastbaum). All grew into large theater chains, and all were Jewish-owned.<sup>59</sup> Their success influenced other regional chains including Saenger brothers in the Southeast, Skouras brothers in St. Louis, Pantages along the Pacific Coast, the Interstate Amusement Company (Karl Hoblitzelle) in Texas, the Saxe Brothers in Milwaukee, the Fox Film Corporation in New York and later around the country, Finkelstein and Rubin in Minneapolis, and John Kunsky in Detroit.<sup>60</sup> With such notable exceptions as the Skouros brothers and Pantages, who were Greek, a substantial number of these owners were Jewish.

Many other theater chains were created around the country including in the South, where some, like the chain Louis Rosenbaum established in Alabama, were Jewish-owned.<sup>61</sup> In larger cities, the demand was so high that multiple theater companies could compete and prosper alongside one another. In New York City, William Fox and his Fox Film Corporation competed with Loew's, and in Chicago, the Lubliner & Trinz theater chain operated alongside Balaban & Katz.<sup>62</sup>

Fox Film Corporation used Samuel Lionel "Roxy" Rothafel, the most flamboyant of all the theater impresarios, as its theater manager. Roxy, a Jew born in Germany, emigrated at the age of two and grew up in Stillwater, Minnesota. Over time he molded the position of manager into one of great importance for the success of the movie palaces. After moving to New York City, some of the early theaters that he managed, including the Regent and the Strand, were designed by Charles Lamb. His eponymous Roxy Theater in New York City, designed by well-known Chicago architect Walter W. Ahlschlager in 1927, seated close to six thousand people. Only in New York, with its enormous population of potential theatergoers, could the position of managing director of a chain of theaters become so dominant.<sup>63</sup>

The Stanley Theater Company in Philadelphia used the Hoffman-Henon Company, the prominent Philadelphia architect-

tural firm, for the design of most of its theaters. W. H. Hoffman and Paul J. Henon led the company that designed forty-six theaters in that city, nearly all of them for the Stanley Company.<sup>64</sup>

To succeed, the theater owners had to provide captivating theater buildings for moviegoers, and a new breed of architect, the theater architect, accomplished the task. Similar to the architectural firms that had designed live theaters in previous decades, this specialty developed rapidly in the early twentieth century in response to the public demand to build hundreds of movie theaters per year. Three architectural firms, Thomas Lamb, John Ebersson, and Rapp and Rapp (the brothers George and Cornelius), dominated the field.

Thomas Lamb had a beginning similar to Priteca's. Lamb was born in Scotland in 1871, about twenty years earlier than Priteca, and he emigrated when he was twelve and studied architecture at Cooper Union in New York. Initially, he worked for both Fox Theaters and Loew's Theaters in New York. These assignments led him to the early development of both design and construction techniques for large and lavish movie palaces. His first theater, the City Theater in New York (for William Fox in 1909), was followed by hundreds of others. His designs and techniques influenced and were copied by many other architects.<sup>65</sup>

John Ebersson was born in 1875 into a Jewish family living in Czernowitz, Austria-Hungary. He went to high school in Germany and studied electrical engineering in Vienna. Ebersson arrived in the United States in 1901, first settling in St. Louis where he designed his first theater, the Jewel, in Hamilton, Ohio, in 1913. Gradually he moved away from the design concepts that were in vogue, and he pioneered a new style, the so-called "atmospheric" auditorium. He replaced the ornate ceiling dome with a dark blue smooth plaster shell into which he embedded hundreds of twinkling lights. By means of a hidden projector, clouds slowly drifted across the blue-sky ceiling, creating the "stars and clouds" effect he sought. In addition, the interior walls were designed to remind the audience of European gardens.<sup>66</sup>



The brothers George and Cornelius Rapp were born in Carbondale, Illinois. They started their architectural firm in Chicago in 1899 and developed their approach to theater design over the next decade. The Majestic, their first theater, opened as a vaudeville house in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, in 1908. They designed movie palaces, primarily in the Midwest but also on the East Coast, and began a long-term relationship with the Chicago-based movie theater chain Balaban & Katz, designing most of the chain's theaters.<sup>67</sup>

An appreciation for the diversity of the architects who pioneered the design of movie theaters during the boom times from 1915 to 1930 can be gleaned from a tabulation of the most prominent theaters built during that era provided by David Naylor in his book, *American Picture Palaces*. For the period 1911 to 1930, a total of 234 theaters are tabulated and, of these, about 90 percent (215) specify the architect of record. This tabulation shows that the big three architectural firms, Lamb, Ebersson, and Rapp and Rapp, account for 43 percent of all of the theaters, with Lamb and Rapp and Rapp being the leaders with about 16 percent of the total each. Priteca is the next highest with 6 percent, C. Howard Crane had 5 percent, and Weil gleaned 1 percent.<sup>68</sup>

Naylor's compilation includes at least seven architectural firms with Jewish partners: Weil, Priteca, and Ebersson, as well as Walter Ahlschlager, Gustave A. Lansburgh, Levy & Klein, and Krokyn, Browne and Rosenstein.<sup>69</sup>

Walter Ahlschlager was born in Chicago in 1887 and practiced as an architect mainly in Chicago and later in Dallas.<sup>70</sup> Gustave A. Lansburgh was born to Jewish parents in Panama in 1876 but grew up in San Francisco and studied architecture at the *École des Beaux-Arts* in Paris.<sup>71</sup> Alexander L. Levy, born in 1872, and William J. Klein, born in 1889, were two Chicago-born architects who practiced in their home city.<sup>72</sup> Jacob F. Krokyn was born in Boston in 1881 to Jewish parents and studied architecture at Harvard. His Jewish junior partner, Arthur Rosenstein, was born in Boston in 1890 and trained as an engineer at Harvard.<sup>73</sup> The other partner, Ambrose A. Browne, was also from Boston.

How do Weil's and Priteca's careers compare with the principal architects in these five firms? Of the five, the one whose career most resembles that of Weil and Priteca is Gustave Lansburgh. Lansburgh had been raised under the guardianship of Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco. He returned from Paris in 1906 as a certified architect a few months after San Francisco's catastrophic earthquake and fire, which destroyed the temple building. Lansburgh designed the plans for the new synagogue, but his design was not executed because the congregation decided to seek a new location. Lansburgh came under the patronage of Morris Meyerfield, Jr., president of the Orpheum Theater and Realty Company. Consequently, he designed numerous Orpheum theaters around the country for that chain. In 1914, Lansburgh designed the new Temple Sinai building in Oakland. This edifice bears some resemblance to the Touro and Bikur Cholim synagogue buildings of Weil and Priteca. Lansburgh also designed large auditorium-like structures in San Francisco such as the War Memorial Opera House and the War Memorial Veterans Building.<sup>74</sup>

What differentiates Lansburgh from Priteca and Weil is that the one synagogue that Lansburgh built did not help launch his career as a theater architect; that career came about through his connections with the head of the Orpheum theater chain. When Temple Emanu-El erected its new building, Lansburgh served only as an adviser. Thus, in the cases of Weil and Priteca, their synagogue and theater designs were interconnected. With Lansburgh, the architectural work on theaters and other buildings took precedence, and synagogue-related work played a lesser role. Nevertheless, the architectural careers of the three men do illustrate similarities.

The other Jewish architectural firms also displayed resemblances and differences from Weil's and Priteca's experiences. John Ebersson was a giant in the field of theater design, but he did not build synagogues or other Jewish buildings. Walter Ahlschlager designed a number of theaters, including the incomparable Roxy, but his forte was large commercial buildings such as hotels and banks. Like Ebersson, he did not design synagogues.

Alexander L. Levy and William J. Klein provide a further comparative framework. Their firm designed five movie theaters in Chicago during the 1920s, all of which were executed by the architect Edward Eichenbaum, their principal designer.<sup>75</sup> Earlier, Levy had been involved in the design of two Chicago synagogues, the classically inspired Congregation Anshe Sholom (1910) on the south side and the Beth Hamedrash Hagodol Synagogue (1916) on the west side, and the firm of Levy & Klein had designed the Washington Boulevard Temple (B'nai Abraham Zion) on the city's west side. The firm was also involved with a hotel and several commercial buildings in Chicago.<sup>76</sup>

Like Weil and Priteca, Alexander Levy designed synagogues, two in his case and one with his partner William J. Klein, and later his firm won the commissions for five movie theaters. However, Levy himself did not design the movie theaters; Eichenbaum did, whereas Weil and Priteca designed both types of buildings. Moreover, Levy and Klein's movie theater work lasted only a few years, and the firm never became the favored architects for a movie theater chain. Perhaps a critical difference is that neither Weil nor Priteca had substantial competition in their home bases for the direction they took. Levy and Klein operated in the shadows of Chicago's Rapp and Rapp, a nationally renowned firm for movie theater architecture. Again, Weil and Priteca were in the right place at the right time.

Jacob F. Krokyn and his Jewish partner, Arthur Rosenstein, received commissions for several synagogue projects in New England during the early 1920s. Krokyn's synagogue architectural work may have led to his first movie theater assignment in Boston in 1929. The firm ultimately designed two other theaters, as well as a variety of other buildings. Thus, this firm's progression from synagogues to movie theaters paralleled that of Weil and Priteca. The latter, however, developed long-term relationships with theater chain owners that enabled them to design numerous theaters for more than a decade, unlike Krokyn and Rosenstein.<sup>77</sup>

Weil and Priteca had the right experience in synagogue design to take advantage of the opportunities afforded a few years later by the boom in movie theater construction. Further reinforc-

ing the importance of timing, the ten theater architects discussed here were all born within twenty years, from 1871 to 1890. It paid to be a young and well-educated architect beginning in the early decades of the twentieth century. Weil and Priteca also benefited from their locations in burgeoning cities that, fortuitously, lacked undue competition in their niche. Key ethnic contacts with fellow Jews facilitated their rise.

#### *Later Years and Conclusions*

During the 1920s, Weil's architectural business took off. A talented architect, Albert Bendernagel, joined him as an associate in 1925. The number of projects increased to the point that Weil needed to hire additional draftsmen. Later, he appointed one of these, Hebert Benson, as office manager. By 1926, with this trend continuing, Weil incorporated his architectural firm, and Benson became the executive vice president. As the Depression set in, architectural commissions were much more difficult to obtain. Weil's firm was able to win commissions to build a number of Roman Catholic churches for rural Louisiana parishes. However, by 1933, Weil determined that it was too difficult to continue in that business environment, and he retired, closing down his firm. According to Weil's grandson, Herman Kohlmeyer, there was another reason why the architect retired at that time: "Our grandfather closed his office when Huey Long became governor, since there was no work during the depression days except with the state, and he declined that relationship." He even considered relocating "his office . . . to Germany until the Long regime blew over."<sup>78</sup> Emile Weil's career as an architect spanned about thirty-five years.

Weil had been involved with his colleagues professionally for many years. In 1910 he joined twenty other architects in establishing the Louisiana chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Besides having his work featured in prominent architecture magazines, this provided an effective way to expand his reputation and remain cognizant of his colleagues' latest work. It seems fitting that the 1909 article on Weil's Touro Synagogue design in *American Architect* was the first link between Weil and Priteca.

The majority of Weil's work documents were donated to the Southeastern Architectural Archive at the Tulane University Libraries. Early in his career he began subscribing to architectural journals, thereby beginning a solid architectural library that enabled him to carefully follow the latest trends in his chosen profession.<sup>79</sup>

Benny Priteca's architectural career, at nearly sixty years, was almost twice as long as Weil's. Priteca usually had a draftsman and an assistant architect working with him. Among his assistants were Gregory Ain, Sam Halfon, Bernie Stertzer, and Richard McCann, all of whom went on to successful careers.<sup>80</sup>

In 1938 Priteca served as president of the Washington chapter of AIA, much as Weil had done in his home state. In 1951 Priteca was inducted into the AIA College of Fellows. Eleven years later, he received an honor award from AIA Seattle for his design of the Temple de Hirsch synagogue building.<sup>81</sup>

Priteca was aware of Weil, starting with the Touro Synagogue design. Since some of Weil's work appeared in other architectural journals such as *Western Architect*, Priteca probably also saw drawings and photos of some of Weil's later work. Yet Weil and Priteca likely never met in person.

While there is a great deal of similarity between the careers of these two outstanding architects, there are also some distinct differences. The strong similarities lie in the design of synagogues (at least three each) and of numerous movie theaters. In addition, Weil designed a number of residences, impressive southern mansions, employing specialized styles for different homes. He also designed a substantial number of attractive office, bank, and commercial buildings, mostly in the heart of downtown New Orleans. He received city-wide acclaim for the beauty of his works. In contrast, Priteca did not do residences, and the number of office buildings that he worked on was minimal, some of these often being adjacent to some of his movie theaters.

However, the key element linking these two Jewish architects is the combination of synagogue and theater design work that was such a natural fit and which reinvigorated each phase of their careers. The work on their first synagogues brought prestige and

recognition and led them to the thriving theater business that brought financial success. The men lived and worked in different parts of the country, widely separated from one another, but nonetheless, they are linked historically by the odysseys on which their careers took them.

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## NOTES

I would like to thank Lisa Kranseler, Executive Director, Washington State Jewish Historical Society (WSJHS) for prompting my initial interest in the extraordinary architect, Benny Priteca. I assisted Lisa with parts of the WSJHS exhibit that she organized in May 2006, *From Synagogues to Cinemas, B. Marcus Priteca, Seattle's Renowned Architect*.

<sup>1</sup> See Charles E. Gregersen, *Dankmar Adler: His Theatres and Auditoriums* (Athens, OH, 1990) and Heinz Ronner and Sharad Jhavan, eds., *Louis I. Kahn: Complete Work 1935–1974* (Zurich, Switz., 1977).

<sup>2</sup> Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison, WI, 1992), 37.

<sup>3</sup> Karen Kingsley, "Emile Weil," KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, accessed June 25, 2013, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php?rec=795>.

<sup>4</sup> Herman Kohlmeyer and Marie K. Wolf (grandchildren of Emile Weil) e-mails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, July 20, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Before Weil received the commission for the Touro synagogue, he had served as one of the architects for the rebuilding of the new Athenaeum, the headquarters for the Young Men's Hebrew Association of New Orleans. The original Athenaeum building had burned down in 1905 and was rebuilt the following year. "Emile Weil Office Records," Southeastern Architectural Archive Collection 82 (hereafter cited as Weil Office Records), accessed July 20, 2013, [http://seaa.tulane.edu/sites/all/themes/Howard\\_Tilton/docs/finding\\_aids/Emile%20Weil.pdf](http://seaa.tulane.edu/sites/all/themes/Howard_Tilton/docs/finding_aids/Emile%20Weil.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Eric L. Flom, "Priteca, B. Marcus," HistoryLink.org: The Free Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History (hereafter cited as HistoryLink.org), accessed July 20, 2013, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=8815](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8815).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Chevra Bikur Cholim, or Bikur Cholim, merged with Congregation Machzikay Hadath in 1971 and has been known since then as Bikur Cholim Machzikay Hadath, or BCMH.

Miriam Sutermeister, "B. Marcus Priteca," in *Shaping Seattle Architecture, A Historical Guide to the Architects*, ed. J. K. Ochsner (Seattle, WA, 1994), 185. "About BCMH," Bikur Cholim Machzikay Hadath, accessed August 6, 2013, <http://bcmhseattle.org/about/about-bcmh/>.

<sup>9</sup> "Touro Synagogue History," Touro Synagogue, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.tourosynagogue.com/about/our-history/>.

<sup>10</sup> Sutermeister, "B. Marcus Priteca," 184.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.; Grant Hildebrand, Introductory Remarks, "From Synagogues to Cinemas, B. Marcus Priteca, Seattle's Renowned Architect," Washington State Jewish Historical Society Conference, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Molly Cone, Howard Droker, and Jacqueline Williams, *Family of Strangers, Building a Jewish Community in Washington State* (Seattle, 2003), 112.

<sup>13</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer, *The Architecture of the European Synagogue* (Philadelphia, 1964), 226.

<sup>14</sup> Touro also bequeathed funds to his father's former synagogue in Newport for a new sanctuary that was designed by Peter Harrison and is now a National Historic Site. "Judah Touro," Touro Synagogue, accessed June 12, 2013, <http://tourosynagogue.org/>.

<sup>15</sup> Irwin Lachoff and Catherine C. Kahn, *The Jewish Community of New Orleans* (Charleston, SC, 2005), 69–70.

<sup>16</sup> In 1969 the Model Cities Urban Renewal program purchased the synagogue building, listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The city transformed the structure into the Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute (LHPAI), a cultural arts mecca for the entire community, comprised of a diverse population including African Americans, Asians, and Latinos. Langston Hughes Performing Arts Institute, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.langstoninstitute.org/>.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Stertzler to Eugene Normand, April 29, 2006.

<sup>18</sup> I. Mervin Gorasht to Eugene Normand, February 22, 2013.

<sup>19</sup> Gorasht to Normand.

<sup>20</sup> Lachoff and Kahn, *Jewish Community of New Orleans*, 67.

<sup>21</sup> About twenty-five years later the neighborhood started to deteriorate and members began moving farther away from the synagogue. In 1964, seeking a new site, the congregation purchased property for a new synagogue on Canal Boulevard in the Lakeview neighborhood, and, in 1971, the congregation completed and dedicated its new sanctuary. On August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck, and when New Orleans's Seventeenth Street Canal was breached, the resulting surge of water demolished the Beth Israel synagogue along with other neighboring buildings. Shortly thereafter, Gates of Prayer, a Reform temple in suburban Metairie, opened its doors to Beth Israel. By 2009 Beth Israel signed a formal agreement to purchase part of Congregation Gates of Prayer's land for the site of a future Beth Israel synagogue. When completed, the playground of Gates of Prayer will stand at the center of the two synagogues, one Orthodox, the other Reform. It will be a fitting reminder that Emile Weil, a Reform Jew, had so ably assisted the Orthodox Beth

Israel synagogue in designing its 1924 spiritual home. "Our Past," Beth Israel: A Community Synagogue in New Orleans, accessed May 21, 2013, <http://bethisraelnola.com/our-past/>; "Beth Israel and Hurricane Katrina," Beth Israel: A Community Synagogue in New Orleans, accessed February 25, 2013, <http://bethisraelnola.com/beth-israel-and-hurricane-katrina/>; "Our Renewal," Beth Israel: A Community Synagogue in New Orleans, accessed February 25, 2013, <http://bethisraelnola.com/our-renewal/>.

<sup>22</sup> Lachoff and Kahn, *Jewish Community of New Orleans*, 73.

<sup>23</sup> Over time that neighborhood also deteriorated, although the congregation remained. The building was damaged during Hurricane Katrina but not destroyed. The Anshe Sfard synagogue was repaired and reopened in 2006. "Anshe Sfard," Wikipedia, accessed July 20, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anshe\\_Sfard](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anshe_Sfard). For photographs of both the exterior and interior, see Anshe Sfard Synagogue, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.anshesfard.org/>.

<sup>24</sup> For Temple Sinai Synagogue project specifications, see "Moise Goldstein Office Records," Southeastern Architectural Archive Collection 4, accessed July 20, 2013, [http://seaa.tulane.edu/sites/all/themes/Howard\\_Tilton/docs/finding\\_aids/Moise%20Goldstein.pdf](http://seaa.tulane.edu/sites/all/themes/Howard_Tilton/docs/finding_aids/Moise%20Goldstein.pdf).

<sup>25</sup> Marie K. Wolf indicates that Emile Weil also was responsible for much of Temple Sinai's interior. Marie K. Wolf, e-mail to Rachel Heimovics Braun, July 27, 2013; Lachoff and Kahn, *Jewish Community of New Orleans*, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Cone, Droker, and Williams, *Family of Strangers*, 280, 284–285.

<sup>27</sup> "Jewish Population in the United States," *American Jewish Year Book* (New York, 1964, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Rachel Wischnitzer, *Synagogue Architecture in the United States* (Philadelphia, 1955), 5, 42–43, 48–50.

<sup>29</sup> Gerald Wolfe and Jo R. Fine, *The Synagogues of New York's Lower East Side* (New York, 1978), 19–20, 31.

<sup>30</sup> Priteca also designed a Seattle building called the Settlement House, in 1916, which was renamed the Education Center, Council of Jewish Women the next year. It strongly resembles the Seattle Talmud Torah he designed almost twenty years later. Cone, Droker, and Williams, *Family of Strangers*, 94, 184–185, 284–285.

<sup>31</sup> "Strand Theatre," National Register, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.crt.state.la.us/hp/nationalregister/nhl/parish09/scans/09042001.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Bryan Krefft, "Jefferson Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/3407>; "Strand Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/73>; "Perot Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/690>; "Temple Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/3416>; "Saenger Theater, New Orleans," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinem>



atreasures.org/theaters/3184; "Saenger Theater, Pensacola," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/746>.

<sup>35</sup> All except two of the buildings in Table 1 were commissioned and managed by the Saenger Amusement Co. The exceptions were the Hamasa Shrine Temple and the Tivoli. The Hamasa Shrine Temple, which Weil designed for the Shriners as a meeting hall, included a ballroom and performance space that the Saengers later modified into a cinema. Weil designed the Tivoli Theater for the United Theatres chain; since 1969 a remodeled Tivoli has been a funeral home. Temple Theater for the Performing Arts, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.meridiantempletheater.com/>; Rhodes Funeral, a Family of Businesses, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.rhodesfuneral.com/about-us/history-and-staff>.

<sup>36</sup> Flom, "Priteca, B. Marcus," accessed July 20, 2013.

<sup>37</sup> "Priteca, B. Marcus (1889-1971)," HistoryLink.org, accessed July 20, 2013, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=8815](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=8815).

<sup>38</sup> "Tacoma Pantages," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/245>; "Paramount Theater," Seattle Theatre Group, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://stgpresents.org/paramount>; "Coliseum Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/1272>; "Capitol Theater," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/3831>; "Pantages Theater, Fresno," Cinema Treasures, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/theaters/3176>.

<sup>39</sup> The theaters in Table 2 were commissioned and managed by the Pantages Circuit with the following exceptions. The Coliseum was designed for Priteca's friend Joseph Gottstein. The Mercy was built in 1920 as a vaudeville theater for Frederick Mercy, Sr., who operated a small theatrical chain; its name was changed to the Capitol Theatre the next year. The B&M Theater was built in 1924 for E. J. Myrick, who operated a small chain of theaters in Seattle and Portland. The Orpheum was built in 1927 for the Orpheum vaudeville circuit and was used mainly for movies. The Warner Theatre was the first of three theatre designs that Priteca executed for the Warner Bros. theater chain. The Tower Theater was built by local owners. The State was operated by Evergreen Theaters. Cinema Treasures, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://cinematreasures.org/>; "Architects: Priteca, Benjamin," Pacific Coast Architecture Database (hereafter cited as PCAD), accessed June 24, 2013, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/architects/268/>; "The History of Tower Theatre," Tower Theatre, accessed June 24, 2013, <http://www.towertheatre.org/about/tower-theatre-history/>.

<sup>40</sup> "Pelican Stadium," Wikipedia, accessed July 21 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelican\\_Stadium](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pelican_Stadium).

<sup>41</sup> According to Herman Kohlmeyer, Emile Weil also designed the north stands of the Tulane football stadium and major renovations of the Fair Grounds Race Course, after the New Orleans racetrack suffered a major fire. Kohlmeyer e-mails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, July 28, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> Longacres was one of the first, if not the first, racetracks on the West Coast with pari-mutuel betting on horseraces. During World War II, the U.S. Army placed anti-aircraft guns at the track to protect the neighboring Boeing Company factory. In 1990 Longacres was sold to the Boeing Company. The track closed to racing two years later. Eventually Boeing used the site for its new headquarters for the Boeing Commercial Airplanes Division. "Longacres Racetrack," HistoryLink, accessed July 21, 2013, [http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file\\_id=7349](http://www.historylink.org/index.cfm?DisplayPage=output.cfm&file_id=7349).

<sup>43</sup> "Crystal Swimming Pool," PCAD, accessed July 21, 2013, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/structures/3107/>; "Union Stables," PCAD, accessed July 21, 2013, <https://digital.lib.washington.edu/architect/structures/18162/>.

<sup>44</sup> Kingsley, "Emil Weil."

<sup>45</sup> All of Weil's nontheatrical designs were in New Orleans or its environs. It appears, furthermore, that he executed at least two of the commissions in Table 3 for family members. Besides the residence for Fannie Kiefer Newman, the aunt of Weil's wife, Marie, there was the home for Simon Shwartz, Marie Weil's first cousin. Marie K. Wolf confirmed addresses and ownership of family-related sites, referencing *New Orleans Architecture Volume VII: Jefferson City* (Gretna, LA, 1989) and *New Orleans Architecture Volume VIII: The University Section* (Gretna, LA, 1997). Marie K. Wolf, telephone conversation with and e-mails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, July 19, 2013. See also Kingsley, "Emile Weil"; "Emile Weil: Early 20th Century Architect," Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans, accessed June 25, 2013, <http://www.prcno.org/programs/preservationinprint/piparchives/1979%20PIP/December%201979/4.html>; Weil Office Records.

<sup>46</sup> Flom, "Priteca, B. Marcus (1889–1971)"; "Architects: Priteca, Benjamin."

<sup>47</sup> Lachoff and Kahn, *Jewish Community of New Orleans*, 7; Cone, Droker, and Williams, *Family of Strangers*, 4, 103.

<sup>48</sup> Milton G. Scheuermann, Jr., "Moises H. Goldstein," KnowLA Encyclopedia of Louisiana, accessed July 20, 2013, <http://www.knowla.org/entry.php?rec=874>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Lachoff and Kahn, *Jewish Community of New Orleans*, 83; Thomas Rosell, "Architect Pics: Leon C. Weiss," Preservation in Mississippi, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://misspreservation.com/2013/07/17/architect-pics-leon-c-weiss/>.

<sup>51</sup> Malcolm Gladwell, *Outliers: The Story of Success* (New York, 2008), 62.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 15 (Jerusalem, 1972), 1606, 1614.

<sup>54</sup> For a history of the evolution from nickelodeons, or cinemagraphic showings, to theaters, see C. W. Ceram, *Archaeology of the Cinema* (New York, 1965), 245–254.

<sup>55</sup> Joseph Valerio and Daniel Friedman, *Movie Palaces, Renaissance and Reuse* (New York, 1982), 17.

<sup>56</sup> "Marcus Loew Facts," Your Dictionary, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://biography.yourdictionary.com/marcus-loew>.

<sup>57</sup> Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 37.

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<sup>58</sup> "From Nickelodeon to Picture Palaces," *Some Enchanted Evenings: American Picture Palaces*, accessed July 21, 2013, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cap/palace/early.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Gomery, *Shared Pleasures*, 36–44.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 38, 65, 63–64, 38; Sarah Biandich, "A Cinema Landmark Milwaukee's Oriental Theatre," *Express Milwaukee.com*, accessed June 2, 2013, <http://expressmilwaukee.com/article-7452-a-cinema-landmark-milwaukee%E2%80%99s-oriental-theatre.html>.

<sup>61</sup> "Florence/Sheffield, Alabama," *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*, accessed June 22, 2013, [http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/al/florence\\_sheffield.html](http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/al/florence_sheffield.html); see also Jonathan Rosenbaum, *Moving Places: A Life at the Movies* (New York, 1980).

<sup>62</sup> "Lubliner & Trinz theater chain," *Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society's HistoryWiki*, accessed June 10, 2013, [http://rpwrhs.org/w/index.php?title=Lubliner\\_%26\\_Trinz\\_theater\\_chain](http://rpwrhs.org/w/index.php?title=Lubliner_%26_Trinz_theater_chain).

<sup>63</sup> Ross Melnick, *American Showman: Samuel "Roxy" Rothafel and the Birth of the Entertainment Industry, 1908–1935* (New York, 2012), 1.

<sup>64</sup> Valerio and Friedman, *Movie Palaces*, 35.

<sup>65</sup> "Thomas W. Lamb," *Wikipedia*, accessed June 10, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas\\_W.\\_Lamb](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_W._Lamb).

<sup>66</sup> "John Ebersson," *Wikipedia*, accessed June 10, 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Ebersson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ebersson).

<sup>67</sup> Valerio and Friedman, *Movie Palaces*, 31.

<sup>68</sup> David Naylor, *American Picture Palaces: The Architecture of Fantasy* (New York, 1981), 216–219. A tabulation by Dennis Sharp including only twenty-nine theaters leads to similar results. In this list the big three architects account for 66 percent of all the theaters tabulated. No theaters by Priteca or Weil are listed. However, this is not surprising since the total number of theaters is much smaller than Naylor's compilation. Sharp's findings do reinforce the key role played by the top three architectural firms. Dennis Sharp, *The Picture Palace and Other Buildings for the Movies* (New York, 1969), 218–219.

<sup>69</sup> Roy Benjamin offers a prime example of a prominent Jewish architect in the South who did similar work as Weil and Priteca. Benjamin's commissions included at least one synagogue, the Jacksonville Jewish Center (1927), while he achieved greatest recognition for his numerous theaters from Florida to Georgia to Mississippi. Born in Atlanta in 1887, nine years after Weil and two years before Priteca, Benjamin grew up in Ocala, Florida, and moved to Jacksonville, Florida, in 1901 where he established his architectural practice. Although Benjamin is not among the architects mentioned in David Naylor's book, *American Picture Palaces*, three of his theaters are featured in Naylor's *Great American Movie Theaters* (Washington, DC, 1987). Hopefully further research will elaborate on other such individuals working in the region. Jill Benjamin (the architect's granddaughter) e-mail to Rachel Heimovics Braun, June 13, 2013; Jacksonville's Architectural Heritage, accessed July 2, 2013, <http://jaxhistory.com/architects.htm>.

<sup>70</sup> "Walter W. Ahlschlager," *Wikipedia*, accessed June 10 2013, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter\\_W.\\_Ahlschlager](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_W._Ahlschlager).

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<sup>71</sup> David Parry, "Gustave A. Lansburgh," Encyclopedia of San Francisco, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.sfhistoryencyclopedia.com/articles/1/lansburgGustave.html>.

<sup>72</sup> "Alexander L. Levy," ZoomInfo, accessed June 10, 2013, <http://www.zoominfo.com/p/Alexander-Levy/303335267>.

<sup>73</sup> Brookline Preservation Commission Demolition Application Report, accessed July 21, 2013, [https://www.brooklinema.gov/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_download&gid=6827](https://www.brooklinema.gov/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_download&gid=6827).

<sup>74</sup> Parry, "Gustave A. Lansburgh."

<sup>75</sup> Paul Gapp, "A Gesture To Throw New Light On The Granada," *Chicago Tribune*, July 20, 1987, accessed July 21, 2013, [http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-07-20/features/8702230356\\_1\\_theater-historical-society-palaces-epstein-sons](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1987-07-20/features/8702230356_1_theater-historical-society-palaces-epstein-sons).

<sup>76</sup> "Alexander L. Levy;" Arthur M. Feldman, *Faith and Form: Synagogue Architecture in Illinois: An Exhibition Organized by the Spertus Museum* (Chicago, 1976), 89.

<sup>77</sup> Brookline Preservation Commission Demolition Application Report.

<sup>78</sup> Herman Kohlmeyer attributes the anecdote concerning Weil's retirement because of his refusal to work for Long to Jack Stewart, a New Orleans building contractor, and that concerning Weil's consideration of a temporary move to Germany to Edmond L. Bendor-nagel, Jr., grandson of Albert Bendor-nagel. Kohlmeyer e-mails to Rachel Heimovics Braun, July 20, 21, and 28, 2013.

<sup>79</sup> Kingsley, "Emil Weil."

<sup>80</sup> Stertzler to Normand.

<sup>81</sup> Flom, "Priteca, B. Marcus."



# Edward Loewenstein's Midcentury Architectural Innovation in North Carolina

by

Patrick Lee Lucas \*

**E**dward Loewenstein's designs for a dozen modern dwellings in their suburban historical context communicate as distinctive representations of local culture. In a community where the sit-in movement, in part, originated and where civil rights struggles marked the decades of the 1950s and 1960s, Loewenstein's vernacular modern buildings stood intertwined with conventional architecture, grounded in the past. His story, one of the ability of architecture and design to resonate with issues of culture, suggests that Loewenstein expressed aspiration for change in the community. His work for Jewish and non-Jewish families alike helped to deliver that vision in houses that stood in contrast to those of their neighbors. These explorations of a localized modern dialect stand as material evidence of a progressive designer who, along with his innovative firm, championed civil rights, mentored up-and-coming designers across race and gender lines, and actively engaged in community service to numerous civil rights and other organizations.

Loewenstein, as a Jew married into a distinguished Jewish family, brought a distinctive design sensibility to Greensboro. By studying his first efforts in providing modern residences, we are able to see his impact on the community. Far from making a claim here for a "Jewish architecture," Loewenstein's early commissions demonstrate how he helped Jewish and non-Jewish clients alike

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visualize alternatives and new ideas commensurate with those written largely in the post-World War II suburbs throughout the nation. In this era, some Jews aspired to quiet dissent as they simultaneously sought a place in mainstream culture and identity.<sup>1</sup> Through their architecture, Jews espoused a certain cosmopolitan character rooted in the tenets of modernism. Importantly however, their modern dwellings did not contain the cold and sterile interiors of the high modernists featured in design magazines. Their residences by Loewenstein and others elsewhere stood as softer and quieter expressions of the day, safely situating this dialect not as a distinct southern Jewish identity but as one of many voices in the southern landscape whose expression helps us see and hear the social and cultural implications of Jews at home in the region.<sup>2</sup>

Although scholars have addressed various meanings of vernacular modernism in mid-twentieth century residential structures, they have largely overlooked the designs of forward-thinking architects like Loewenstein in medium-sized southern cities. Moreover, because of his social engagement, Loewenstein helped to constitute a group within a community of progressively minded individuals that helped transform Greensboro at midcentury. Loewenstein's story counters the portrayal of the Gate City as a place occupied by largely ineffectual politicians and dismal social prospects for non-whites and, at the very least, complicates our notions of the community at midcentury.<sup>3</sup>

Far from only a local phenomenon, Loewenstein's story echoes that of other designers and architects throughout the nation – professionals who struggled to redefine suburban residential design standards in the decades after World War II – with many proposing new, more contemporary styles. Despite these new alternatives, homeowners repeatedly selected linkages to the past, clinging to designs based largely on the classical revivals of the nineteenth century and the colonial buildings of the century before. However, throughout the nation some forward-thinking clients hired architects and designers to bring modernism to the suburbs. Like Loewenstein, they visually and intellectually chal-

lenged assumptions of what a house could look like and stand for in turbulent times, a design conversation of sorts in built form. With residential architecture understood as a social act resulting in sited physical and tangible products, midcentury modern residences suggested a change in ideas about politics, identity, and worldview true in Greensboro and equally valid in many sections of the United States.

Loewenstein, among others, reinterpreted the stark modernism of the two previous generations of designers and thereby brought to the American landscape a more nuanced version of the style, suited to a local context. Born in 1913, the Chicago native moved to Greensboro with his wife, Frances Stern, in 1945 following World War II Army service. Frances, a Greensboro native and stepdaughter of textile magnate Julius Cone, provided access to a large social network of contacts within and outside the Jewish community.<sup>4</sup> Through this web of relations and his community engagement, Loewenstein secured design commissions that redefined architecture in Greensboro in the postwar period. With a bachelor of architecture degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1930–1935), he established a practice in Greensboro in 1946 that continued until 1952. It was then succeeded in 1953 by a flourishing partnership with Robert A. Atkinson, Jr., that continued until Loewenstein's premature death in 1970.<sup>5</sup>

#### *Mentoring Beyond Boundaries of Race, Gender, and Class*

Loewenstein-Atkinson produced more than 1,600 commissions, one quarter of them residential. Although Loewenstein's buildings comprise a tremendous physical legacy, the architect's other great contribution to the North Carolina built environment came in the training he gave to many architects and designers who practiced throughout the state. Notably, the firm hired the first African American architects and design professionals in Greensboro and North Carolina after World War II. William Street, Loewenstein's MIT classmate who eventually joined the faculty of North Carolina A&T in Greensboro; W. Edward Jenkins, the first licensed African American architect in Greensboro; and



Clinton E. Gravely, all of whom pursued prolific architectural careers in North Carolina and beyond, counted among the first African American professionals hired by Loewenstein's firm. Equality for Loewenstein extended beyond hiring practices. As an advocate of civil rights, the firm completed buildings for the greater good of Greensboro, including the master plan and design for twelve buildings at Bennett College, a traditionally African American women's campus. Loewenstein embraced underserved populations in the design for two YWCA buildings and a major addition to the YMCA, correcting the inequities in facilities and bringing together people from the separate black and white branches that had existed through the 1960s

Despite some fallout from Loewenstein's more liberal attitude toward race, the firm continued to receive admiration while striving for diversity because of the collective spirit of enterprise within its ranks and in creative association with design professionals outside the firm. Loewenstein also mentored hundreds of students as interns and young hires, among them Frank Harmon of North Carolina and Anne Greene of Washington, D.C., both of whom went on to design award-winning buildings and interiors throughout the United States. In the end, more than thirty architects, draftsmen, and support staff worked at the firm at its peak size in the mid-1960s. As inheritors of Loewenstein's midcentury modern aesthetic, these practitioners continued to shape architectural and design endeavors in the nation with each passing decade.<sup>6</sup> Loewenstein further mentored through his teaching at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina from 1958 through the late 1960s, where he innovated an active system of learning by taking women out of the classroom and into the field of home construction. In 1957-1958, Loewenstein offered a year-long design course, offered jointly through the Department of Art and the Department of Home Economics, which attracted twenty-three students. In studio, the students designed the house, oversaw its construction, and decorated the resulting structure, dubbed the "Commencement House" by the university's public relations office.

*Edward Loewenstein, c. 1965.*

*(From a private collection, courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas.)*

Completed in 1958, the first house was followed by two others in 1959 and 1965, an important physical legacy that symbolized shifting gender roles in design as seen in higher education. In the news media, the *Greensboro Daily News* recognized the import of the 1958 Commencement House, as did the *Raleigh News & Observer*. The completion of the first house merited acclaim on the airwaves in one of Greensboro's first live remote broadcasts by WUNC-TV on the *Potpourri* program hosted by Nancy Downs, marking the unusual character of such an undertaking for young women. The notoriety of the Commencement

Houses spread from Greensboro to regional and national periodicals. Coverage for the first house appeared in *McCall's* (November 1958) and *Southern Appliances* (September 1958); the second in *Living for Young Homemakers* (October 1959); and the third in *Bride's* (June 1965). Each placement demonstrated the innovative projects' public relations value for the university to audiences far beyond Greensboro.

All three of these houses resulted from innovation espoused by Loewenstein, alongside the students and the various partners and collaborators who made the efforts possible: Gregory Ivy, first as chairman of the Art Department then as interior designer for the firm; Walter Moran and John Taylor, who assisted Loewenstein in studio on campus and on the job site; and Eugene Gullledge, contractor for all three structures. Notably, Gullledge fronted the money for these houses built essentially on speculation, ensuring their market success. The houses also represented the resiliency of Loewenstein and the firm to incorporate alternative approaches to the design process in a time of momentous and unpredictable change for the community and the nation. Just as these houses represented nonconformity of sorts in doing things in a different way while sitting silently in neighborhood settings, so too did students sit in as a form of silent protest in downtown Greensboro in 1960.

With a wide range of building types and scales, the commercial buildings Loewenstein produced throughout his career also reflected his belief in community and civic engagement. Shortly after moving to town, Loewenstein joined in temporary partnership with Charles Hartmann, Jr., to design the North Carolina Convalescent Hospital (1948) in response to a polio epidemic that swept the city and the resultant need for health care facilities to house those recovering from the disease. In the 1950s, the firm designed schools, hospitals, religious buildings, and public facilities, including the award-winning Woman's College Coleman Gymnasium (1952). In the more tumultuous 1960s, the firm designed the Golden Gate Shopping Center (1961) to provide an accessible store east of Elm Street for the growing populations on that edge of town. Through the Bessemer Land Company, Loewenstein and

the firm's employees still worked in traditionally African American neighborhoods in east Greensboro. Several commissions came through Cone Mills and its related institutions, including the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church (c. 1965) and a school complex near the mill. The landmark Greensboro Public Library (1964), the most lasting community building in Greensboro, anchored civic pride and the progressive spirit of the community in troubling times.<sup>7</sup>

### *Jews and Modernism in Greensboro*

As the only known Jewish architect practicing in North Carolina in the middle of the twentieth century, Loewenstein's work takes on great significance in understanding life as a Jew in the South, and specifically one who practiced in a profession not heavily populated with Jews.<sup>8</sup> Outside North Carolina, Jewish architects of the midcentury brought to the landscape some remarkable modern structures. Those with national or worldwide reputations such as Gordon Bunshaft, Sheldon Fox, Bertrand Goldberg, Percival Goodman, Louis Kahn, and Richard J. Neutra maintained prosperous careers in the spotlight with numerous significant commissions. All of these men, including Loewenstein, trained as modernists in architecture school and embraced tenets of the design movement in their subsequent work. They all mediated between architectural ambition and acculturation into the mainstream. Stanley Tigerman positions them, along with other Jewish architects, as outsiders who had both the liberty and the business acumen to challenge conventional notions about architecture and design, drawing parallels between Jewish history and architectural ambition. By contrast, Gavriel Rosenfeld indicates that modern buildings of the midcentury did not contain Jewish traits or features, rather markedly staying within the confines of modernism as understood throughout the nation. This view suggests that acculturation explains the behaviors of Jewish architects.<sup>9</sup>

Few Jewish architects practiced in the South. Even in synagogue design and construction, where one might expect to find Jewish names, non-Jewish architects prevailed. Even fewer Jewish architects in the South espoused modern design philosophies.

Thus Loewenstein's body of work stands out distinctly from his peers in the state and region. Curiously, Loewenstein designed only one synagogue, in Fayetteville, North Carolina. The Beth Israel Congregation retained Loewenstein's services, and he produced a space for the commission with a saw-toothed roof profile. Completed in 1962, the extant building shows the masterful plays of light and shadow Loewenstein envisioned.<sup>10</sup> In Greensboro, although he was involved on the building committee of the Beth David Synagogue in 1966, he never received a significant commission for that edifice.<sup>11</sup>

According to Ethel Stephens Arnett, industrialists including Moses and Ceasar Cone of Baltimore transformed the city in the last part of the nineteenth century, establishing textile plants in Greensboro.<sup>12</sup> By 1900, many considered Greensboro the center of the southern textile industry, with its large-scale factories producing denim, flannel, and overalls.<sup>13</sup> By the mid-twentieth century, the Cone Corporation's five plants in Greensboro produced many types of cloth, and the firm had become the world's largest manufacturer of denim. Cone supplied denim for the making of Levi's jeans both before and after World War II, cementing a secure place in clothing manufacture. In Greensboro, the Cones encountered a progressive community accepting of their religious views, and they and the town "grew up together," with the Cones helping the community and the community helping the Cones.<sup>14</sup> Eli Evans posited that "Greensboro is unique for the contribution of the Cone family. That sets it apart from other cities in the South."<sup>15</sup> Zeigenhaft and Comhoff concur, writing that "for the past 75 years, the Jews of Greensboro have lived in a town where among the most prominent, wealthy, and visible people has been a Jewish family named Cone."<sup>16</sup>

As leaders, the Cones paved a path with their own philanthropic efforts and encouraged other Jewish families to similarly dedicate themselves to the well-being of the community. Through the Cones' administration of the cultural and social life of plant workers in their mill villages, and through the significant donations that they and other Jews made to educational and recreational pursuits, politics, and the arts, the Jews in Greensboro

formed a part of the community and did not stand apart from it.<sup>17</sup> The Cones sat atop the social and philanthropic hierarchy in Greensboro, having formed a number of cultural institutions and supported countless others, particularly in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Jews helped shape communities throughout the region from the last decades of the nineteenth century (and in many cases, much earlier), in Greensboro the breadth of the Cone holdings and their ability to shape the municipality bore out over time architecturally in the construction of buildings that carry their name, notably the Cone Building on the Campus of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, the Moses Cone Hospital, Cone Elementary School, and the Cone Building owned by the City of Greensboro. That Loewenstein married into this powerful family suggests that he had an insider's view to the order of the community. Although he did little residential work directly for the Cones, Loewenstein's relationship with the Cone family did matter in the midcentury sociocultural politics of Greensboro.<sup>18</sup>

The Jews in Greensboro, as elsewhere in the South, represented a liberal faction within the town's mainstream groups. Marcia Horowitz characterizes Greensboro Jews as sympathetic but not overly active in civil rights for "fear that their contract with the white Gentiles might be broken" and for "fear of retribution."<sup>19</sup> Despite this fear, many Jews noted the openness and level of comfort in the community and the ability for Jews to integrate and interweave their lives with non-Jews. Horowitz indicates that the "Jews of Greensboro knew that social acceptance rested on diminishing differences rather than highlighting them," including intermarriage to non-Jews.<sup>20</sup> Although Loewenstein did not stand out in his liberalism within this social and ethnic group, he went beyond most others in hiring and treating equally young black architects. One may assume that Bennett College leaders commissioned Loewenstein to do so many buildings as a kind of testimony to his clear stand on race, and not because of his Cone relations.<sup>21</sup>

Because of his contacts in the business and social spheres of the town, made possible in part through the Cone network,

Loewenstein attracted clients across ethnic and racial groups. Thus Loewenstein's design work operated both within and outside the Jewish community, much like the design solutions he offered to homeowners ranged from traditional to modern. Of his two-dozen modern residences, Loewenstein planned roughly half for Jews and half for non-Jews. In the total number of commissions, however, Jews built more modern or hybrid structures than non-Jews, with nearly 40 percent preferring something other than traditional structures, as compared to 25 percent of the non-Jewish clientele.<sup>22</sup> These numbers reveal a predilection among Loewenstein's Jewish clients for modern structures over traditional ones — buildings that stand out more than those that fit in with neighbors. Loewenstein's designs for these structures, with their low key (or soft) approach to modernism, offered functional and practical homes that sat quietly on their lots and did not intrude in their neighborhoods. Rather than overtly demonstrate tenets of high modernism (or a more academic version of modernism), Loewenstein helped homeowners to fit in with their neighbors in a nontraditional way. Perhaps Jews modulating between acculturation and distinctiveness opted to state difference gently through the architecture of their homes, as a gesture towards cosmopolitan ways.

Reflective of the broader customs in architecture across the United States, Loewenstein's practice negotiated the needs of clients who desired both modern and traditional structures.<sup>23</sup> The houses he designed might be thought of as a form of conversation, with certain insecurities embedded within them about what to say and to whom. In a midcentury southern town that, like many, grappled with race and difference, Loewenstein's architectural lexicon of humanist modernism spoke a language of acceptance of new things (materials, compositions, features, furnishings) and new ideas (open planning, connecting landscape and interior). The architecture of most houses in the community spoke to conformity with tradition and obscured questions about race and class behind well-ordered, balanced, and symmetrical façades. Loewenstein's modern structures represented progressive ideas, given the choices of the day, and challenged conventions in house

building and in human identity. Just as he was devising hiring practices for his firm, he actively worked out how to reconcile the traditions of his profession with the innovations possible in the postwar era. In his buildings, he introduced a design language of the times living with and within the buildings he created. Imperfect as it was, this design language equated with the real questions confronting the community about how people encounter one another and the distinctions people draw out of their commonality.

Loewenstein's buildings in a wide range of styles, from traditional to modern to some hybrids in between, reflect viewpoints in the community about unity and diversity. These structures suggest that the families who lived in them had the same needs as their neighbors (living spaces, sleeping spaces, food preparation spaces, utility spaces), but Loewenstein organized them in different ways depending on the orientation of the family and their ability to absorb an architectural design that did not conform with the majority. Similarly, people in the community (Loewenstein among them) spoke about organizing the community and the people within it in a different way. Much like the buildings Loewenstein placed on the land, he quietly drew together whites and blacks within his drafting room and continued to challenge racial mores in the community through his civic service. He did not have a perfect language or solution to the challenges of architecture nor of segregated culture. His buildings and his leadership demonstrated an individual who was working out what it meant to be an outsider in a southern community, a Jew accepting and promoting the changes that came through civil rights.

Loewenstein's architectural story and the story of his liberal politics and identity explain one way that Jews in the South acculturated in the mid-twentieth century. As the nation reorganized after World War II, and as the suburbs provided the place for the lion's share of this expansion, this Jewish architect encountered a community filled with tradition that espoused different ways to see the world. As indicated above, his work represents an incomplete story in the sense that the buildings stand in as the material record of Loewenstein working things out. Homeowners did not record their thinking about building in traditional, modern, and



hybrid ways, thus we have to rely instead on the architecture itself to show us the differences suggested by Loewenstein and others like him around the nation. That Loewenstein was a Jewish architect practicing in the South, active in the community, and championing civil rights further makes this a story worth telling.

*Cosmopolitan Residential Architecture*

Although commercial commissions dominated the firm's job lists, residential commissions represent Loewenstein's greatest contribution to the emerging contemporary architectural lexicon of the Piedmont, where he created more than four hundred livable houses that mediated across three design variations. In addition to his own design work, he also supervised a team of designers who adopted a wide range of approaches. Reflective of his decades in practice, Loewenstein maneuvered through the polarized squabbles captured in the pages of architectural journals and design magazines and in the profession itself over traditional and modern structures. He designed both rather than one or the other, and his ability to manage a burgeoning career indicated a talent for work across stylistic genres.

Designing with a diverse clientele in mind, including key leaders of the Jewish community, Loewenstein communicated something distinctive in this combination of innovative and traditional buildings.<sup>24</sup> One approach spoke of an alternative vision for living, one that embraced the openness and promise of the future through modern expression, a certain cosmopolitan character standing in bold relief to the columned mansions of the past. The other and louder voice spoke to tradition: residential houses with classical and colonial revival details and features melded with the emerging ranch form. A third architectural voice, one of hybridization, blended all three approaches in the same building. This third category included buildings along suburban streets that might initially look as though they conformed to the tradition but, in fact, hid modernist wings, rooms, and details. This review of three residential commissions among Loewenstein's early modernist dwellings examines houses primarily of the first voice: the Martha and Wilbur Carter residence (1950–1951), the Eleanor and

Marion Bertling residence (1952–1955), and the architect's own house (1954). This trio of commissions reveals Loewenstein's fluid use of multiple styles, rather than the series of single-minded approaches often equated with modernism. Also apparent are the voices of Loewenstein's clients as they worked with the Jewish architect to determine the best ways for themselves and their families to live at midcentury, linked to the practice of making a home. Finally, quiet dissent emerged where clients and designers together shaped an original way of thinking that symbolized the cultural shifts of the 1950s and 1960s, the same shifts that ultimately brought four men to the Woolworth's counter in downtown Greensboro.

Loewenstein's career reflects his difficult position as a progressive architect in a city with profoundly traditional stylistic and social views. Far more than a tactic for survival, Loewenstein's gentle approach to design and his fluid boundaries among stylistic choices made him a popular and, for a time, the only architect in Greensboro to whom clients could turn without fear of being shunned for desiring one kind of house over another. Time and again, original owners, other clients, and collaborators spoke of Loewenstein's gentle mannerisms and design approaches. His effective work, reflective of a conflicted era in design and a turbulent time in society, demonstrates a keen understanding of the human condition and the ability of one designer to weave himself gently but firmly into the fabric of a community.<sup>25</sup>

The Greensboro that Loewenstein encountered in the late 1940s experienced growth similar to that of other midsized cities of the postwar era, including a tremendous housing boom that wrought significant changes in city and family life. Throughout the country, veterans returning from war and countless others moved outward from the core to land at the edges of urban settlements, fashioning new social hierarchies by occupying the landscape in predominately horizontal houses on sprawling lots. The resultant neighborhoods and their attendant commercial areas provided new structures for American families and communities largely based on traditional gender roles, mobility, and compartmentalization of both class and race. The changes in-

tertwinced with aspects of the race struggles of the 1960s. In a period of roughly twenty years, what people wanted in their new “dream” houses, how architects and others designed them, how designers furnished and modified them, how residents lived in them, and how homeowners paid for them dramatically shifted in this suburban milieu. As Loewenstein’s work unfolded, he responded to client needs across a wide range of budgets, site conditions, and emerging architectural opportunities in shaping a variety of houses.

The residences that Loewenstein designed, like those in other communities across the nation, stood as symbols of shifting family and community values and, particularly because of their location on the edges of cities, as places of separation from the dirty and competitive business world and from others who were different in socioeconomic class and race.<sup>26</sup> Increasingly freed from the strictures of the Victorian world of their parents and grandparents, families refashioned their houses as places of retreat to “protect and strengthen the family, shoring up the foundations of society and instilling the proper virtues needed to preserve the republic.”<sup>27</sup> For some, the suburbs and suburban residences would form the new moral center of the nation, enabling Americans to secure a bit of economic prosperity and an investment in the future, thus partly counteracting the communist threat of the cold war.<sup>28</sup>

Much of what drove such powerful transformation in domestic space and place related to the quest for single-family home ownership. Many Americans maintained an optimistic view that through suburban living, one could take a rightful place among middle-class peers as engaged democratic citizens in a great nation. However, the reality of affording a free-standing, single-family home stood worlds apart from the wherewithal of many families. So, under the aegis of federal government regulation and loan subsidies, homeowners applied for assistance. The G.I. Bill and Levittown-type developments facilitated the process. Countering the ever-moving American, the suburban residence symbolized financial and political stability and permanence, rooted in the landscape as an antidote to the high mobility of its citizens.<sup>29</sup>

Edward Loewenstein's clients espoused and encapsulated many of these views concerning race, class, gender, mobility, morality, and democracy. As the United States poised for political, cultural, and social leadership on the world stage, these Greensboro residents, like their counterparts throughout the nation, assumed new leverage as arbiters of shifting tastes and sensibilities regarding the American home, and they did so along different stylistic paths. Loewenstein, like other designers, helped to define the taste of his clients situated in the particular circumstances of a Piedmont textile town, bringing change to that community incrementally through both his traditional and modern design work.

### *Designs*

Although Loewenstein had been practicing in Greensboro since 1946 and, in that time, had produced more than a dozen residences, many observers acknowledge his first major modern residential commission as the Martha and Wilbur Carter residence, built precisely at midcentury (Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> Highly visible within the Irving Park neighborhood, and on land purchased from Martha and Ceasar Cone, the visual impact of the Carter residence at a prominent location provided the community a fine example of the type of modern dwelling emerging from the drawing boards of architects practicing after World War II. The architectural context for this structure—traditional dwellings of two stories in the previously developed streetcar suburb of Irving Park—undoubtedly catapulted this house into the community's design spotlight. Despite potential notoriety because of its differences from neighboring houses, reaction in the press to Loewenstein's modernist dwelling was low-key. A reporter for the *Greensboro Record* described the house simply as "gracious, comfortable, and young" and recounted some of the details of its construction and design related to the radiant floor heating while not mentioning its departure from the more traditional design vocabulary customary in the city's suburbs.<sup>31</sup>

Despite such a quiet entrance in the local press, Loewenstein recognized the design importance of his first modern structure and, in 1952, directed New York architectural photographer

Joseph W. Molitor on a trip through Greensboro to make images of the Carter residence, along with the Bessemer Improvement Company and Southeastern Radio Supply buildings. Molitor's pictures were featured heavily in the firm's subsequent marketing materials.<sup>32</sup> The Carter house later appeared in the North Carolina American Institute of Architect's publication, *Southern Architect*, in addition to being recognized by the NCAIA with a 1955 Merit Award. In the national press, *Architectural Record* editors included the house in the November 1952 issue, with additional photographs, a floor plan, and a story about the design process for the work.<sup>33</sup>

**Figure 1.**

*For the Carter residence, Loewenstein designed an L-shaped plan with a public wing parallel to the road and a perpendicular wing of bedrooms, opposing wings stretching into the landscape. The landscape in rear provided ample space for a large patio for outdoor living and protected the back yard from street traffic. A carport occupied the left end of the structure and provided a covered space for automobiles and sheltered the service entrance and wing of the house. The service end of the public block of the house, parallel to the street, included the carport, a maid's room, a laundry room, and storage cabinets. (Courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*

The Carters faced the same decision as many others building a dream house at that time: should they link to the traditional past or cast it aside for a more modern vision of what a house could look like? *Architectural Record* reporters indicated indecision in the client's response to this question, and surviving correspondence in the firm archives and an oral history interview reveal that Loewenstein developed two schemes for the Carters. One was based on a building depicted in Georgia O'Keeffe's painting "White Canadian Barn II" (1932), a copy of which was in the client's art collection, where O'Keeffe depicted a long, horizontal, gable-roofed structure as the main image in the work. In an alternative scheme in preliminary sketch form, Loewenstein articulated a two-story Georgian revival dwelling, more in keeping with the other structures in Irving Park. When presented with the two designs, the Carters elected for the modern scheme. They based their decision on the lower cost of construction and their love of the open plan and of the connection with the painting that served as inspiration for the architect. Fifty years later, Wilbur Carter proudly tells the story of the painting, still in his possession, and its impact on the design of the well-loved house that he and his wife built and lived in for five decades.<sup>34</sup>

East of the Carter residence in the nearby Kirkwood neighborhood, Loewenstein developed a more compact house with experimental design approaches, some based on the earlier Carter commission (Figures 2, 3, 4, and 5). As he elaborated his lexicon, he brought design features and processes introduced at Carter to greater resolution in the Eleanor and Marion Bertling commission the next year. Like the Carter residence, the Bertlings' house slipped onto the scene with little notice in the local press, despite its difference from neighboring homes. In welcoming the Bertlings to the street, nearly three dozen nearby residents signed a petition of support for the construction of a modernist dwelling, flying in the face of the unwritten restrictions from the Greensboro Planning and Zoning Department to prohibit modern structures in the Kirkwood neighborhood. It seemed that a modern dwelling that maintained a large distance from the street and a low profile on the landscape could enter a traditional neighborhood gently (Fig-

ures 6 and 7). In silently defying the development guidelines for the neighborhood, the Bertlings and Loewenstein indicated a different social order for at least part of the community based on modernism as well as an embrace of the automobile as design inspiration.

### **Figures 2 and 3.**

*Loewenstein and firm employees brought simplicity and coherency to the plan for the Bertling residence, working through design development (top) to the floor plan as built (bottom). The preliminary floor plan showed the firm's intention to organize this house around an outdoor pool. In this initial scheme, Loewenstein provided a den and guest-room suite that extended the building to the south in an ell perpendicular to the street, increasing the difference between public and private spheres within. The 3,000-square-foot final floor plan for the house included reaching ells, although Loewenstein folded the south wing into the main mass of the house and extended a north wing farther into the site, eliminating the pool and pool terrace. (Courtesy of Wilson + Lysiak.)*

**Figures 4 and 5.**

*Naturally finished materials in the building combine with light sweeping in from clerestory windows and window walls, bringing a sense of warmth and dynamism to these modernist interiors. (Courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*



**Figures 6 and 7.**

*The wooded lot obscures the presence of the house in the streetscape. The garage sits forward of the main mass of the building, further distancing and sheltering the home from the road and passersby. (Courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas.)*

Many of these experiments with space perception and use, storage, lighting, materials, and design philosophies took a more revolutionary form in Loewenstein's personal home of 1954 (Figures 8, 9, and 10). Ostensibly designed specifically to suit modernist sensibilities, Loewenstein also accounted for his wife's more eclectic tastes in the interiors, furnishings, and finishes. Further, as the house took form, Loewenstein's professional world changed. He took on partners and employees and began to direct their design approaches rather than undertaking the majority of the work himself. In addition, the team for this structure increased beyond the borders of the firm to include New York designer Sarah Hunter Kelly and lighting designer Thomas Kelly, an alliance based on Loewenstein's success working with these two professionals on an earlier commission, the Lloyd P. and Ann Tate residence in Pinehurst, North Carolina (1952). Loewenstein also retained the services of landscape architect John V. Townsend because the building required careful consideration of garden and adjacent spaces to expand living spaces beyond the walls of the home. Featured in the *New York Times Magazine* (June 1955), the house served as an archetype of Loewenstein's personal style and design approach. The local press noted the importance of the structure as a departure from tradition in the community. Under the title, "Architect Throws Away the Book, Builds Home for Himself," *Greensboro Daily News* reporter Barton A. Hickman emphasized the modern qualities of the structure in a detailed feature.<sup>35</sup>

Echoing design efforts for houses in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Loewenstein devised three-part schemes for dividing interior space for all three structures. In one area of each structure, residents and visitors occupied main living and dining spaces and sometimes a less formal family room (and, by the early to mid-1950s, its requisite television), all spaces primarily dedicated to entertaining and all with fluid spatial relationships.

Near the public rooms, Loewenstein, like other designers, located spaces that comprised a work core (kitchen, laundry, and attendant storage) with proximate adjacencies, highly efficient places that freed matriarchs from duties and allowed them to

**Figures 8 and 9.**

*The Loewenstein residence (rear view) offers the most compelling illustration of the multiple design voices at play: Loewenstein's modern dwelling echoing Frank Lloyd Wright's masterful landscape-building connections; Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's glass boxes; the clean-line, Bauhaus tendencies of Walter Gropius; Sarah Hunter Kelly's mixed-style approach to interiors, borrowed from Elsie de Wolfe's design philosophy of good taste; and Thomas Smith Kelly's ingenious lighting techniques to accent interior elements.(Top, courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas; bottom, photo by David Wilson/UNCG Alumni Magazine.)*

**Figure 10.**

*Organized along a single hallway, the floor plan for the Loewenstein residence reflects the consolidation of the architect's design ideas while also illustrating public-private dichotomies and built-ins to reinforce design strategies. (Courtesy of Wilson + Lysiak.)*

entertain more. As owners sought low-profile roofs, Loewenstein specified them. Minimizing traditional attics and omitting basements as well necessitated the provision for storage within rather than above or below the living spaces. In a number of commissions, this section of the house also included maids' rooms, indicating that, while progressive, the families for whom Loewenstein designed maintained order along class, if not racial lines, within their homes.

The third portion of each house, decidedly private, provided the location for bedrooms, bathrooms, and clothing storage, private areas rarely on view to visitors but places that accommodated the accumulation of material goods in postwar consumer society. All of these interior spaces made concrete ideas about separation and difference despite the confluence of room types and the fluid spatial relations within each subsection. Built-in cabinets and closets abounded in all three houses and in the service section of each public wing—a design feature expanded dramatically in future

commissions (Figures 11 and 12). Through their introduction, Loewenstein minimized the need for significant furnishings in bedrooms and related spaces.

### Figures 11 and 12

*The dining room built-ins provide ample storage for linen, dinnerware, and serving pieces at Bertling (left). The massive built-in cabinet fills one entire wall of the dining room and provides a colorful, glass-fronted storage system for china and a divider for the more private family room at its back. Built-in storage in the hallway leading to the guest bedroom at the architect's house (right) shows the economy of internal planning so characteristic of Loewenstein dwellings. In both floor plan and experience, the use of clothing storage works like an aural and visual barrier for private rooms. (Courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas.)*

Based on his successes in the earlier two commissions, Loewenstein designed a more extensive system of built-in cabinets throughout his own house. In the public rooms, he inserted book-

shelves as a divider between the living room and guest room wall. Somewhat uncharacteristically, he did not include built-in storage in the dining room, although he did include a "butler's pantry" adjacent to the kitchen for storage of china and silver. Loewenstein planned a kitchen, breakfast room, bar, storage closet, butler's pantry, laundry area, and maid's room in this service area. Similar to the Carter residence in size and form, these support spaces provided ease of occupation and use for the family and servants. In the private areas of the house, Loewenstein incorporated built-in cabinets and closets for storage. He also used these architectural components as space dividers and entryways to the bedrooms. In each case, the storage system and the bathrooms insulated each bedroom from the circulation spine, providing a greater degree of privacy for the residents.

Consolidating storage and built-ins within each structure permitted more flexibility in the exterior envelope. Adjacent to each home, Loewenstein shaped outdoor rooms achieved through the inclusion of landscaping features (patios, decks, pools, etc.) to provide expansive ways to live and connect the outside world with the interior. The landscaped lots, defined by wide manicured lawns and a variety of plantings, suggested a further link to individual values writ on the landscape. Because the size of residential building lots remained relatively large, Loewenstein, like others, took advantage of the opportunity to unstack the traditional two story house with its central hall and stair, opening a plethora of configurations that relied less on strict symmetry and more on fluid relationships among the spaces. Along with the open floor plans desired by many home buyers, stretching buildings along the landscape gave greater freedom to the building and expanded the spaciousness of the interior.<sup>36</sup> An expansive lawn with carefully manicured plantings accentuated the perception of spaciousness from the streets and from neighboring lots and homeowners.<sup>37</sup>

Loewenstein's careful placement of each of the three houses underneath sheltering trees stood counter to the customary practice in the neighborhood of clear-cutting the building lots before house construction. At Carter, Loewenstein provided for a 15'x50'

“solar cell” room on the front of this remarkable open, one-story horizontal plan and sensitively nestled the house among a grove of mature trees already on the lot (Figures 13 and 14). He separated this space from the adjoining living room and dining room through a series of large sliding glass doors. Typical of Loewenstein’s designs, the screened room doubled the living space during temperate seasons of the year. Later enclosed with glass walls, the year-round space manifested a Loewenstein design strategy for double living spaces often stacked side by side to give the perception of spaciousness, fluidity, and flexibility in room use and furnishings.

Despite special care by the contractors and the owners, two of the mature trees at Carter did not survive long after occupation of the structure, necessitating modifications to the front of the house in 1955 and again in 1960. Under both phases of construction, the owners enclosed the screened porch with a glass wall, removed the glass roof and replaced it with roof decking to match the remainder of the low-pitched roof, and shortened the slightly curving entrance wall (Figures 15 and 16), originally designed to provide some visual separation from the street for the solar room on the front of the house.

On each exterior, overhanging eaves provided a sharp shadow line and emphasized the horizontality of the building in the landscape (Figure 17). Where neighboring buildings conquered by height and external decoration, Loewenstein’s modern structures settled horizontally into Irving Park. Rather than stacking stories, as would be done in more traditional residential forms, Loewenstein spread buildings across the landscape, taking advantage of views and site features, preserving mature trees, and linking outside to inside in sophisticated relationships throughout each scheme (Figure 18).

Although connected to previous commissions, Loewenstein clarified organization in his own house through the deployment of a long hallway to organize the private spaces along one wing. The bedrooms, in a wing to the left of the main entrance, maintained social distance from rooms for entertaining—the living room, dining room, and front hall. Complete with a door to close

**Figures 13 and 14.**

*A mid-century view (top) of the solar room contrasts with the current-day view (bottom) to demonstrate changes made to this space over several decades: enclosing part of the glass ceiling and replacing screen panels with glass (left). (Top, courtesy of Southern Architect; bottom, courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*



### Figures 15 and 16.

*As drawn, the entry point to the structure took tangible form as a hidden (or less than obvious) entrance. As originally designed by Loewenstein, the front entry sequence for visitors included negotiating an eight-foot high brick wall, passing by the solar room toward a single-leaf door. Standing at the intersection between the public and private wings of the house, the front entry offered a moment of orientation for the visitor. To the left, the visitor looked across an expansive vista with light sweeping in from the solar room at the front of the house to the window wall view at the north end of the living room toward the backyard. By contrast, the visitor's vista toward the bedroom wing, blocked by solid walls and a series of doors, indicated that this portion of the house contained family quarters not easily accessed visually or physically by others outside the family. The midcentury view (right) depicts the house shortly after construction. Within two decades of construction, the owners removed the brick wall (to the left in the view) along with making changes to the solar cell room. (Left, courtesy of Wilson + Lysiak; right, courtesy of Southern Architect.)*

this wing from view, Loewenstein more completely distinguished the spatial experiences between private and public at his residence. He opened the public spaces through the inclusion of clerestory windows and large window walls to connect more completely to the outside (Figure 19). As a result, he designed a spine of light to stitch together the complex public spaces. Varying during the day and through the seasons, the light quality entering

these openings and the ability to catch a glimpse of trees and the sky outside enabled residents and visitors alike to experience ever-changing and evolving senses of the interior connected to a world beyond. Further underscoring this fluidity, Loewenstein incorporated a curved stone wall between dining room and living room that, like the front entrance wall of the Carter commission, simultaneously screened and embraced, drawing the infinite and the intimate into one world. Though visitors experienced this more open nature of the home in the public spaces, here they found no doubled living space as at Carter.

### Figures 17 and 18.

*Horizontal lines dominate vertical to illustrate tenets of Loewenstein – and modernist – design, looking at the carport (left) and even within the interior with its horizontal sliding glass doors set within a track (right). (Courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas.)*

Although Loewenstein and a number of lighting consultants developed more sophisticated lighting schemes in houses built later, at the Loewenstein residence the manipulation of natural light shows the experience intended by the designer for residents and visitors. Light flooded from the south façade into the solar room and then more deeply into the living and dining rooms beyond. Particularly in the winter months, this lighting strategy had

implications for passive solar heating of the bluestone floor, allowing homeowners to harness energy and reduce utility bills. The architect designed the open façade on the north side of the house and the one on the west side of the bedroom wing to link living spaces to the yard and views beyond. These fenestrations also allowed light to sweep in, although not as dramatically, as an even wash throughout the year. With the service aspects of the building on the west, and the bedroom wing on the east, Loewenstein minimized fenestrations on these façades.

**Figure 19.**

*In the living room, Sarah Hunter Kelly worked with the Loewensteins to develop multiple seating areas furnished with streamlined upholstered pieces along with campaign-style furnishings specified by Kelly and manufactured out of state. The paper and metal lantern, one of two in the space, lends interest to the sweeping diagonal ceiling supported by the handmade flanged beams, which serve as structural supports. The fan-powered ventilation system of the fireplace, to the right, permits the location of the working firebox in a glass wall, thus freeing the view from any structural restriction. (Courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*

The signature angles and placement of the large and clerestory windows throughout the Loewenstein house resulted from studies to mitigate the hot summer sun and take advantage of winter's warm rays as the sun's position shifts through the seasons. These studies impacted the design of the home in a myriad of ways, but it resulted in an almost forced perspective of the inside being drawn out through the resultant angled walls. With its expansive glass walls that brought the exterior landscape into the space, Loewenstein situated the public rooms to take full advantage of the landscape with the fireplace as a focal point in the house, significantly not blocking the landscape view by utilizing an underground ventilation system for the flue.

For all of his houses, Loewenstein envisioned palettes of natural local materials, including wormy chestnut vertical siding, bluestone floors, wood floors, and rose-colored brick walls. Both deployed inside and outside of the structure, these materials provided the seamlessness the clients intended between outdoors and the interior. Loewenstein exposed structural elements in his own house, taking the cue from early experimentation at Carter and Bertling.<sup>38</sup> Here the steel angled I-beams that support the living room ceiling show an architect between two worlds—embracing the machine aesthetic of high modernism but tempering that aesthetic with the careful fabrication of the I-beam, which has been split in two along a diagonal, one element reversed and welded back together to achieve the tapered shape. Like the inclusion of the I-beam, corrugated plastic sheeting on the roof of the porches at the Bertling and Loewenstein houses helped weave new materials and technologies into the scheme alongside more traditional materials (Figure 20). The translucent roof permitted light to penetrate the depth of the porch into adjacent interior spaces.

Working with lighting designer Thomas Kelly and interior designer Sarah Hunter Kelly, the design team deployed strategies for softening the modern appearance of the building by celebrating materials and finishes with light. For example, the design team supplemented the use of natural light, an important design feature throughout the home, by incorporating nearby hidden fluorescent fixtures for nighttime lighting across textile-clad

windows or as washes across stone or wood walls. Loewenstein included this typical lighting detail, first employed extensively at his residence, in nearly every residential commission over the next two decades. The design team included honey-colored wood for ceilings and walls in the public spaces; plaster walls in private and service spaces; a Carolina fieldstone wall between the living and

**Figure 20.**

*Loewenstein specified corrugated fiberglass sheeting on the external living space adjacent to the living room at Bertling. Overhead roof planes at Loewenstein form outside "rooms." These extensions of internal living space provide easy transitions for residents and guests and link the interior and exterior experience into a seamless one. (Courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*

dining rooms; and cork, stone, carpet, and vinyl tile floors. Sarah Hunter Kelly supplemented the warm color palette from the architectural envelope with furnishings and finishes that further emphasized a human quality throughout.

Ann Tate, who had worked with Loewenstein and the Kellys on her home in Pinehurst, North Carolina, encouraged Loewenstein to take advantage of Sarah Hunter Kelly's interiors knowledge for his own home, dropping him a note in early 1954: "I think it would be ideal if Mrs. Kelly could work with Frances," Loewenstein's wife.<sup>39</sup> From all accounts, Kelly worked with Frances Loewenstein closely as the matron of the household assembled a vision for the residence, which, after the Tate commission, represented Loewenstein's most far-reaching modern work, complete with sloping full-glass exterior walls, an open plan, and a strong formal unfolding of the building in a carefully sited landscape. One can only imagine that balancing the more modern view of the husband-architect with an eclectic approach from his wife must have been a challenge for Kelly. However, by borrowing on her design philosophy of "good taste," she achieved a relative harmony within the house's interiors, articulating a vision that accommodated family furnishings inherited from the previous generation, period antiques, and contemporary seating and case pieces that accentuated and celebrated a modern envelope.<sup>40</sup>

Kelly's mixed approach to styles showed how the oppositional tendencies in wife and husband coexisted in the same building and echoed some of Loewenstein's own sentiments about a fluid interpretation of style. From Kelly came the mediating influences of textures and colors in the brightly patterned textiles as both upholstery and, most significantly, as curtain surfaces. When the curtains were drawn, the open landscapes of the husband slipped from view, bringing a comfort and warmth to the open plan in the relief from the bold forms of the architectural enclosure. By closing the curtain panels, one experienced a whole new layer of richness relative to surface and pattern in an already complex environment. This kind of design strategy also brought a special character to the interior and grounded the human experience of space in varied and subtle ways. Kelly's husband, Thomas Kelly, was the key to the mix, designing lighting fixtures and effects throughout the house as he had for the Tate residence. Deploying washes across the patterned textiles more boldly

accented their place as an active design element, most notably in the living room where a printed fabric used for furniture upholstery as well as at the windows featured an "image taken from a contemporary painting of Loches Cathedral in France," on "linen in dull green and charcoal, with touches of brick, on a pale blue ground."<sup>41</sup>

Along with lighting techniques designed by her husband, Kelly's palette of materials and textures and the highly sophisticated enclosing envelope visualized by Loewenstein and carried out by firm employees suggested a plural vision in the interior. At the center of decision-making stood Kelly with Frances Loewenstein, who together debated the merits of furnishing choices, artwork, and accessories, making the unusual house of the South "as appropriate as a white-columned mansion."<sup>42</sup> Sarah Hunter Kelly easily juxtaposed styles across several genres, making spaces and furnishings easily livable and somehow more appealing than strictly modern or traditional spaces in contemporaneous projects, thereby bringing good taste to North Carolina in a wide-ranging and diverse approach to the house's interior.<sup>43</sup> Above all, this house represented a social web of connections, as the Kellys worked with both husband-architect and wife as well as a myriad of design professionals, craftsmen, builders, and installers.

Kelly included few furnishings made in town, instead trading that convenience for more international forms and finishes. Nowhere is that more evident than in the "campaign" style dining room suite and in the living room coffee table, rocker, and entertainment table/chair set, all based on French models from before the twentieth century. These additions to the public rooms presented the visitor to the house with an experience that bordered on the international. Alongside French antiques, the campaign furniture espoused a more modern aesthetic, fashioned of metal but softened by leather coverings, which added an additional layer of interest to an already sensory-laden space (Figure 21).<sup>44</sup>

#### *A Quiet Voice of Change*

Echoing fellow designers in all sections of the nation, Edward Loewenstein experimented with placing both traditional and

modern houses, as well as some in between, in the suburban landscape. The first of the structures he designed in private practice on his own. But as the work increased in the community and as the firm evolved, Loewenstein and his partner, Robert Atkinson, took on a number of junior designers and draftsmen who helped carry out the design intentions of the firm. He also worked with a varied network of interior designers, lighting designers, and contractors who carried forward his vision of blending modern architecture with traditional dwellings.

**Figure 21.**

*Sarah Hunter Kelly specified the dining room furnishings, attributed to French furniture designer Jacques Adnet. The colonial light fixture converses with the modern table and accompanying sideboard, all furnishings specified or accounted for by Kelly. Light sweeps in from the clerestory windows on the right, highlighting the fieldstone wall and providing ambience to the table at which meals are enjoyed. (Courtesy of C. Timothy Barkley Photography.)*

In the three commissions reviewed here, Loewenstein included in prototypical form nearly all of the ideas that matured in his residential modern work over two decades, ideas that distin-



guished his work in the more humanist or warm strain of modernism. Thus the three houses stood like others of their ilk across the United States as an expression of cultural values. In each house, the family espoused a new design vision for home life that spoke of new relationships among family members, servants, and visitors to the American home. They traded the formal, hierarchical relationships of more traditional styles and forms for more fluid interrelationships among the people and the various spaces within the building, and they did so in a manner that remained true to a sense of southern graciousness. With these houses, Loewenstein, along with firm employees, interior designers, consultants, and contractors, spoke in a dialect that diverged from but also built on southern mores.

Looking at Loewenstein's design work in this way—as an intertwining of various strands of design—one understands the many design decisions, equally reflective of client and designer, which shape these residences. Ultimately connected to a larger design discourse about experimentation in design in the decades following World War II, Loewenstein's brand of modernism bears the marks of a second generation of young architects and designers echoing and reinterpreting the work of their European and American modernist mentors.

For all three commissions, Loewenstein first experimented with separation of public/private spaces in the overall organizational scheme. He melded an interlocking relationship of indoor and outdoor through his residential buildings. Loewenstein situated all three houses on wooded lots, with the house entrance hidden from the road. He included built-in storage to reduce the amount of furniture required on the interior and to divide space. He embraced sophisticated, multivalent strategies for natural and electric lighting in these dwellings and expanded this experimentation in future homes. Finally, he adopted a palette of materials centered in North Carolina building traditions to soften the modern structures in their immediate context. All of these ideas influenced future commissions, either by his hand or with the assistance of the various firm employees, in the production of modernist dwellings.

In his future-thinking work, Loewenstein strived for seamless stories by linking materials, light, and color; interior furnishings; building systems; exterior site relationships and landscape features; and design philosophies. In planning traditional structures, Loewenstein and his firm demonstrated agility in copying the past as an easy link for clients to fit in with their neighbors and the traditions of Greensboro. His modern dwellings, particularly, relied on large glass windows, walls, and sliding doors to provide color, texture, and visual interest in rooms largely stripped of traditional décor and finishes. Working with designers who generally mixed furniture styles rather than specifying the purity of a single style, Loewenstein provided room for inherited antiques alongside midcentury modern furnishings. Such eclecticism allowed dwellers to embrace both past and present within their environment and to both stand out and fit in with their neighbors—a quiet form of nonconformism adopted by some house owners of the midcentury. Through his more modern designs, Loewenstein both represented a dissenting voice in the design community and made manifest the nonconformist spirit of Jews and others, clients who elected to differ in their ways of life from the largely traditional neighborhoods in which they resided. Loewenstein mediated the presence of modernism in a tradition-loving community by designing hybrid houses that lived comfortably between two worlds. These hybrid houses help others to understand multiple modernisms, regional and local variations on international themes, rather than a single modernism without context, site condition, or client.

Although the community of Greensboro and the greater Piedmont region provide the site for many of Loewenstein's commissions, his local story links to the national one of midcentury suburbanization in the United States where many communities dealt with the housing boom in the decades after World War II. Everywhere, architects and designers struggled with the many options for appropriate design philosophy and practice. Loewenstein, like others, translated and reinterpreted the stark modernism of the two previous generations of designers and brought to the American landscape a more nuanced version of the

style situated intimately in the local context of a progressive community struggling for its identity in the postwar world. And just as others found themselves embroiled in political and social issues, Loewenstein's support for civil rights and community engagement placed him squarely within the framework of the community's debate about race relations, again linked to a national discourse.

In his modern residences particularly, but in houses of all three genres—modern, traditional, and hybrid—Loewenstein brought a well-grounded regional touch through the use of warm and animated materials, utilizing local brick, slate, and Carolina fieldstone. He successfully paired these materials with more progressive ones—steel, glass, and plastic—and with his designer-collaborators specified finishing touches with decorative and textured wallpapers, textile-clad windows, and furniture that crossed stylistic genres. Following his convention to separate public and private areas, an often L-shaped plan included spacious living rooms and dining rooms, along with kitchen and servant spaces, in flowing and interlocking rooms that blurred boundaries between interior and exterior. In contrast, built-in storage units closed vistas to bedrooms, lessening the amount of required freestanding furniture and linking each private space to a linear hallway that connected them all. Through the incorporation of these features, sometimes in contrast with traditional modes and styles and sometimes melded directly to these more conservative forms, Loewenstein and his clients brought an avant-garde cultural and social agenda to the Piedmont, attempting to redefine itself in the 1950s and 1960s. He created a midcentury design aesthetic that captured aspiring ideas about modernism linked inextricably to the local circumstances of his buildings and the universal struggles with modern buildings in the world beyond.

Edward Loewenstein's second-generation modernist work echoes similar philosophies and outputs of a wide number of designers in other communities across the South and throughout the United States. His buildings thus provide a sound source upon which to elaborate a story of significance that links to other work.

Importantly, he is the only architect working in the Greensboro community in the 1950s and 1960s whose individual and firm approach embraced modernism in the residential design sphere. Because nearly all his residential commissions of significance stood within Guilford County and the surrounding Piedmont, and given the well-documented history of this textiles town in civil rights literature, scrutiny of these particular cultural products provides more layers than other facets of the community's character investigated by others. Loewenstein's story enriches our understanding of a local community dealing with real issues and concerns in a time of great change and gives us a more complete reading of civil rights as understood apart from the Woolworth's counter.

Loewenstein, like others, reinterpreted the stark modernism of the previous generations of designers and brought to the American landscape a more nuanced version of the style suited to a local context. Married into the powerful textile-mill-owning Cone family, he produced buildings with social and political implications, reflective of race relations, ethnic distinction, and community values through service to others. Just a few miles from the Woolworth lunch counter where the sit-in movement originated, Loewenstein hired the first African American architects in a firm in the city, provided service to the community through his work, and utilized his position within a prominent Jewish family to present a different vision of openness and acceptance of others in a community that valued the tried and true in both design and in social conventions. His emerging design lexicon shows that same interest in physical expression. Through the work of this designer and his collaborators, architecture and design as cultural expressions served as quiet agents of change in the face of more conservative modes and models, resonating with the larger national discourse about design at midcentury.



**Figures 22–29 (Opposite)**

*Images by Marion Bertling from a photograph album, documenting construction of his house. (From a private collection, courtesy of Patrick Lee Lucas.)*

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 NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eli Evans posits the idea of a unique “Southern Jewish consciousness” in his overview history of Jews in the South. First published in 1973, the author weaves together storytelling, autobiography, and interpretive history to recount Jewish histories from the earliest immigrants to the present day. Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (Chapel Hill, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> Lee Shai Weissbach's analysis of Kentucky synagogues represents the lone volume of study connecting the cultural values of architecture and Jews in the South. Centered largely on the nineteenth- and twentieth-century synagogue structures in small towns in the commonwealth, the pictorial record documents variety and significance in these structures and the architectural and cultural stories they tell. Lee Shai Weissbach, *The Synagogues of Kentucky: Architecture and History* (Lexington, KY, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> William H. Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York, 1980).

<sup>4</sup> Like Jews in a number of cities and towns throughout the South, Jews in Greensboro figured prominently in the early history of the community. Their legacy as merchants, community organizers, textiles factory owners, and philanthropists through community foundations cannot be overestimated. According to Leonard Rogoff, Jews in North Carolina experienced an intertwined relationship with African Americans in the state as blacks supported Jewish business as outsiders. Driving the economy of many towns, Jews, including Moses Cone who settled in Greensboro, involved themselves in the tobacco and cotton mill industries. Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010).

<sup>5</sup> During his early years of practice in the Piedmont, Loewenstein attempted to establish partnerships with two New York firms, Peter Copeland (Albany) and Telchin and Campanella Architects (New York City), and, unsuccessfully, to forge collaborations with several North Carolina State University School of Design faculty members. With Robert A. Atkinson, Jr., Loewenstein launched his most successful partnership and practiced mainly

throughout Greensboro and Guilford County. The firm also opened a series of satellite offices in Burlington, Martinsville, Danville, and Raleigh, the lattermost associated with Edward Waugh, then a faculty member at the NCSU School of Design.

<sup>6</sup> John C. Taylor served as the firm's chief designer for over a decade, additionally assisting Loewenstein in his Woman's College teaching. Tom Wilson collaborated on a number of key projects in partnership with Loewenstein prior to the latter's death and today continues the firm's practice as Wilson & Lysiak.

<sup>7</sup> A more abbreviated version of this biography can be found on the North Carolina Builders and Architects website, maintained by the North Carolina State University Libraries: "North Carolina Builders and Architects," accessed July 30, 2013, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu>.

<sup>8</sup> Only two other known Jewish architects practiced in North Carolina, but both did so well before the middle of the twentieth century. Alfred S. Eichberg, a Savannah architect who designed several buildings in Wilmington, was "regarded as one of the first, if not the first, Jewish architects practicing in the Deep South." Eugene John Stern practiced only a few years, from 1908 to 1915, in Charlotte, having formed with Oliver Duke Wheeler and C. F. Galliher the firm Wheeler, Galliher, and Stern, succeeded by the firm Wheeler and Stern, before relocating to Arkansas, where he formed a firm with George R. Mann. "North Carolina Architects and Builders: A Biographical Dictionary," accessed February 18, 2013, <http://ncarchitects.lib.ncsu.edu>.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Tigerman, *The Architecture of Exile* (New York, 1988); Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, *Building After Auschwitz: Jewish Architecture and the Memory of the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2011).

<sup>10</sup> Note and description from Gregory Ivy to Loewenstein, 1962, Loewenstein-Atkinson Architects. Transcription in Patrick Lee Lucas Papers, Walter Clinton Jackson Library Division of Special Collections, University of North Carolina, hereafter cited as Lucas Papers.

<sup>11</sup> Loewenstein-Atkinson Job List compiled in 2007 from archival records. Some believe, anecdotally, that Loewenstein may have had something to do with the addition to the Beth-David Synagogue in Greensboro, but no conclusive evidence has materialized to confirm this assertion. Lucas Papers.

<sup>12</sup> Ethel Stephens Arnett, *Greensboro, North Carolina: the County Seat of Guilford* (Chapel Hill, 1955), 171-174.

<sup>13</sup> Gayle Hicks Fripp, *Greensboro, a Chosen Center* (Woodland Hills, CA, 1982), 59.

<sup>14</sup> Marcia R. Horowitz, "The Jewish Community of Greensboro: Its Experience in a Progressive Southern City" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1993), 61.

<sup>15</sup> *Greensboro News and Record*, September 27, 1981.

<sup>16</sup> Richard L. Zweigenhaft and G. William Domhoff, *Jews in the Protestant Establishment* (New York, 1982), 77.

<sup>17</sup> The Cone family joined the Sternbergers, Sterns, Schiffmans, and others as charter members of the Greensboro Hebrew Congregation, uniting Orthodox and Reform constitu-

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encies in one facility. Arnett, *Greensboro*, 139. Jews also donated money for school buildings, the major hospital in town, and civic structures, besides establishing both the Weatherspoon Art Museum and the Eastern Music Festival.

<sup>18</sup> Loewenstein designed a house each for Ceasar Cone, Clarence Cone, and Herman Cone, as well as numerous minor projects for several additional Cone family houses. In terms of the Cone businesses, Loewenstein only received a single commission, a research building on the White Oak plant property. During construction of the Ceasar Cone house, Cone fell out with Loewenstein over whether the house should be air-conditioned. Loewenstein advocated the more forward-thinking approach—installing the system. This level of disagreement represented a rarity in client relations for Loewenstein, in that everyone else regarded Loewenstein a soft-spoken gentleman who always gave the client what he wanted. According to family tradition, Cone and Loewenstein had words over the subject and their relationship, not unusual for Cone with many of his business associates, family members, and friends. Richard and Joan Steele, interview conducted by author, September 17, 2007.

<sup>19</sup> Horowitz, “The Jewish Community of Greensboro,” 36, 56.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

<sup>21</sup> Loewenstein’s mother-in-law, Laura Weill Stern Cone, descended from a distinguished Wilmington family, provided leadership and financial support to a number of progressive organizations and cases in civil rights and women’s rights, including service as a trustee to Bennett College, an African American woman’s school. No direct evidence in the firm’s or the college’s archives indicates that Mrs. Cone influenced the selection of Loewenstein as architect of record for the commissions at Bennett. “Mrs. Laura Weill Cone, 81, Dies After 2-Week Illness,” *Greensboro Daily News*, February 5, 1970.

<sup>22</sup> In 1948 Greensboro had a total of three hundred Jewish families. Horowitz, “The Jewish Community of Greensboro.” Loewenstein designed houses for 11 percent of the Jewish population (thirty-four commissions) in contrast to less than 1 percent of the non-Jewish population at midcentury.

<sup>23</sup> Edward Paxton prepared a pamphlet for the Housing and Home Finance Agency in which he summarized forty-one surveys about home ownership and design in the postwar era. Published by the U.S. Department of Commerce in 1955, the pamphlet offers brilliant insight into the mindset of the homeowner at midcentury. In an overview to the surveys, Paxton reported that 42 percent preferred to build a new house rather than occupy an old one, with three quarters of the population preferring a one-story rather than multiple-story dwelling. The owners of these new houses, according to a number of the surveys, were divided in opinion about the appearance of their homes. A University of Illinois Small Homes Council Survey documented that one-third of respondents favored modern dwellings in 1945 with a slight increase to 42 percent by 1946. The 1944 *McCall’s* survey, “Architectural Home of Tomorrow,” indicated a slightly higher preference of 44 percent who wanted a modern-style home, leaving 56 percent to prefer more tradi-



tional houses. A 1948–1949 *Better Homes & Gardens* survey demonstrated the popularity of modern buildings west of the Mississippi River as 59 percent of the readers in the West Central region and 65 percent in the Pacific region indicated a preference for non-traditional dwellings. By contrast, in New England, 64 percent of homeowners preferred traditional styles (including Cape Cod and colonial). Notably, the South as a region remained unreported.

<sup>24</sup> Harry Golden suggests that a Jewish subculture flourished in the Carolinas at midcentury, with a tendency toward a slow acculturation and delicate balance in the context of communities. Edward S. Shapiro indicates the same sort of balance on the national scene, connecting Jews with the calamitous events of World War II and its aftermath as well as the civil rights movement. Arthur A. Goren reminds us that the Jews' exodus from the urban to suburban landscape in the late 1940s and early 1950s expressed the new influence of a rising Jewish middle class. Harry Golden, *Jewish Roots in the Carolinas: A Pattern of American Philo-Semitism* (Greensboro, NC, 1955), 55–56; Edward S. Shapiro, *We Are Many: Reflections on American Jewish History and Identity* (Syracuse, NY, 2005); Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Public Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, IN, 1999).

<sup>25</sup> Active in the community, Loewenstein served on the boards of the Cerebral Palsy Association, the Evergreens Retirement Home, the Greensboro Chamber of Commerce, the YMCA, the Greensboro Preservation Society, the Weatherspoon Association, and the local modern art museum. He was also president of the North Carolina Architectural Foundation, editor of *Southern Architect*, a statewide publication geared to practicing architects, and president of the Greensboro Registered Architects. The latter linked him to the North Carolina American Institute of Architects and to colleagues around the state.

<sup>26</sup> John Archer, *Architecture and Suburbia: From English Villa to American Dream House, 1690–2000* (Minneapolis, MN, 2005).

<sup>27</sup> Clifford E. Clark, *The American Family Home, 1800–1960* (Chapel Hill, 1986), 238.

<sup>28</sup> This theme is addressed in Rosalyn Baxanandall and Elizabeth Ewen, *Picture Windows: How the Suburbs Happened* (New York, 2000).

<sup>29</sup> Andrew M. Shanken, *194X: Architecture, Planning, and Consumer Culture on the American Front* (Minneapolis, MN, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Preliminary sketches of a modern house in the firm archives indicate that the 1947 James E. Hart Residence on Westridge Road predates the Carter Residence as Loewenstein's first modernist building. Hart served as a partner in the engineering firm that shared the building where Loewenstein kept his offices. Poor street and parcel numbers on Westridge, then beyond the city limits in Guilford County, prevent determining the exact location of the home that likely no longer stands. Three residences by Loewenstein or Loewenstein-Atkinson were built on the same street between 1957 and 1965. Only one survives in a radically altered form, thus preventing any further documentation about the modern

qualities of the structures other than limited resources in the firm archives for these commissions.

<sup>31</sup> "Room for Living," *Greensboro Record*, January 12, 1952.

<sup>32</sup> Loewenstein firm memo to Douglass, June 1952. A later note indicates Molitor visited Greensboro on November 16–17, 1952, and completed the photographs. Molitor photographed extensively for *Architectural Record* in the 1950s, and presumably he connected with Loewenstein in documenting the Carter residence for publication.

<sup>33</sup> "Residence for Mr. and Mrs. Wilbur L. Carter, Jr., Greensboro, N.C.," *Architectural Record*, November 1952, 190–192; "Residence for Mr. and Mrs. W. L. Carter, Jr., Greensboro," *Southern Architect*, March 1955, 21.

<sup>34</sup> Wilbur Carter, Jr., interview conducted by author, September 10, 2007. Cynthia deMiranda reported in e-mail correspondence with Lee Carter, November 13, 2007, that *Architectural Record* erroneously published the story. Wilbur and Martha Carter Residence, National Register of Historic Places Form #08000777, 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Barton A. Hickman, "Architect Throws Away the Book, Builds Home for Himself," *Greensboro Daily News*, May 9, 1954.

<sup>36</sup> Sandy Isenstadt observes that houses of the period across stylistic genres responded to homeowner desires for a new sense of spaciousness, one in which Americans placed a premium on big houses with large rooms, fluid floor plans, and spreading lots. Sandy Isenstadt, *The Modern American House: Spaciousness and Middle-Class Identity* (Cambridge, 2006).

<sup>37</sup> George Teyssot, ed., *The American Lawn* (New York, 1999).

<sup>38</sup> Underscored by the work of interior decorator Blair Smith, employed by Loewenstein and later a part of the Loewenstein-Atkinson firm, the architect and designer together developed a colorful furnishings scheme for the Carter Residence, reported in the *Greensboro News*, to contrast with the natural palette in the architectural enclosure. With the Carter residence, Loewenstein also designed highly colorful tile bathrooms as well as bathroom fittings (medicine cabinets, built-in toothbrush holders, toilet paper holders, and more) and hardware regularly included in the later houses. Thus colored furnishings and finishes on the interior contrasted with the natural palette of materials specified for the architectural enclosure, unifying the exterior and interior appearance.

<sup>39</sup> Loewenstein-Atkinson archives, 1954.

<sup>40</sup> Patrick Lee Lucas, "Sarah Hunter Kelly: Designing the House of Good Taste." *Interiors: Design, Architecture, and Culture* 1:1–2 (2010): 75–90.

<sup>41</sup> Betty Pepis, "Modernist House Down South," *New York Times Magazine*, June 19, 1955, 40.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> Jane Loewenstein Levy interview conducted by author, October 23, 2007.

<sup>44</sup> In spite of the wide variety of choices for homeowners, Loewenstein and his designers often simplified wall coverings and textiles to coordinate seamless interiors and embrace a new vision for design. They reduced clutter in decorative accessories, building on the postwar general trend toward clean and simple living even though, ironically, the 1950s

also represented a key decade in the explosion of consumer goods, as seen on television and in the actual suburban home. Anne Massey, *Interior Design Since 1900*, 3rd ed. (London, 2010); Karal Ann Marling, *As Seen on TV: The Visual Culture of Everyday Life in the 1950s* (Cambridge, MA, 1996).

# The Arrival of a Provocateur: Responses to William Dudley Pelley in Asheville, 1930 to 1934

by

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William Dudley Pelley relocated to Asheville, North Carolina, in early 1932. An author, screenwriter, and dabbler in progressive reform in the 1910s and 1920s, he was known for his unorthodox Christian beliefs after *American Magazine* published his article, "My Seven Minutes in Eternity," in 1929.<sup>1</sup> Pelley's move was prompted by the offer of a wealthy supporter to provide him with land "for a spiritual retreat" in the area.<sup>2</sup> He leased the Asheville Women's Club building just north of the city's downtown, where he established the Fellowship of Christian Economics, a short-lived school that promised to teach the application of "Christ's precepts to our modern industrial problems."<sup>3</sup>

Pelley's politics turned ugly as the Great Depression and his own financial difficulties deepened. His publications, which previously focused on Christian spiritualism, increasingly turned to antisemitism. Inspired by Adolf Hitler's ascension to the chancellorship of Germany, Pelley created the militaristic Silver Shirt Legion in January 1933. This organization promoted Pelley's messages of Christian economics as well as his admiration for Hitler, political antisemitism, and fascism.<sup>4</sup>

Pelley's praise of Hitler and embrace of antisemitic fascism made him notorious around the nation and in Asheville.<sup>5</sup> His presence concerned both Jewish and non-Jewish residents of the

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city. This article examines the collaborations between non-Jews and Jews that were designed to marginalize Pelley and disassociate the city from him and his distasteful reputation. The two most significant of these events took place in 1934. The first was the observance of Brotherhood Day in the city, a local manifestation of the effort by the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ) to associate tolerance with Americanism. The second centers on Pelley's prosecution for violating the state financial securities regulations known as the "blue sky laws."

*National and Local Perspectives*

Participants in these collaborations performed particular roles essential to the overall success of the effort to disassociate the city from Pelley. Each instance involved and enlisted the interdependent actions of Jews and non-Jews, and their motivations are worthy of attention. Historians of American Jewry have recently argued for the importance of local contexts and connections in shaping Jewish identity, particularly in smaller communities.<sup>6</sup> While endorsing this approach, historian Mark K. Bauman has also pointed out that tracing the involvement of southern Jews in wide-ranging "informal networks" and associations places them in the context of national and international movements and conversations.<sup>7</sup>

The NCCJ's 1930s and 1940s "war on intolerance" provided one such national network.<sup>8</sup> Many of its leaders believed that interfaith activism could be a tool to change American society. As Kevin M. Schultz has argued in his recent history of the interfaith movement, from its founding the NCCJ hoped to be "an active promoter of a new kind of Americanism." It harbored the "ambitious" goal of advancing a "new 'social order' centered on brotherhood and justice."<sup>9</sup> Historian Wendy Wall has noted the hopes of some activists engaged in the creation of what she has termed "ideological consensus" that their movement would significantly reshape not just social but economic relations in the United States.<sup>10</sup>

Historians have attempted to understand the shortcomings of the tolerance movement by focusing their attention on its elites.

Wall, for instance, has examined the ideas and projects in which its intellectual and organizational leaders engaged. Building consensus through formulations of tolerance meant defining some ideas as out-of-bounds or intolerable. Furthermore, invocations that treated tolerance as a personal characteristic reduced its effectiveness as a tool to redress inequality. Meanwhile, the attempts of those engaged in tolerance work to standardize difference often failed to address Americans' varied histories. Both Wall and fellow scholar Stuart Svonkin have noted that participants involved in such conversations rarely reckoned with power imbalances and the legal, economic, and cultural bases of their own privilege.<sup>11</sup>

The result was an emphasis on "comity" rather than "equality." As Wall reminds us, however, this outcome was not a foregone conclusion.<sup>12</sup> Incorporating the ambitions of local actors into the story of tolerance and the reformulation of American nationalism allows us to map more fully the course that this movement took. Attempts to disavow intolerance emerged from both far-reaching, coordinated efforts and the multiple local concerns that motivated different activists. Those motivations were not petty distractions but rather essential linkages between movement leaders who worked together in specific locales.

As this article will argue, in their way both Brotherhood Day and the legal proceedings against Pelley protected rather than reshaped Asheville's social and economic hierarchy. Activists participated in these endeavors in order to defend the image of the city and to preserve, not to dissolve, the relations and boundaries previously established between Jews and Christians. These efforts involved the city's religious, legal, and cultural authorities in a defensive action against what they considered the meddling of an interloper. The motivations that drew them into these efforts were not unique to Asheville. While most cities could not claim an antisemitic provocateur on Pelley's scale, many were likely populated with minor agitators. Furthermore, the 1930s saw a rise in anti-Catholic sentiment, as well as the creation of more than one hundred antisemitic organizations around the country.<sup>13</sup> Even without a proximate threat like Pelley, many religious and civic

figures were likely motivated by the desire to defend and define their positions in their own locales as well as the nation.

*William Dudley Pelley portrait.*

*Detail from a Wanted Poster, 1939, issued by the Sheriff of Asheville.*

*(Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,  
Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville.)*

### *Pelley in Asheville*

Pelley relentlessly publicized his idea of an antisemitic Christian commonwealth. As historian Leo Ribuffo has noted, Pelley's vision represented "a perverse contribution to the planning vogue of the 1930s."<sup>14</sup> Pelley himself compared his proposed national corporation with the War Industries Board of World War I. Ac-

ording to historian and Pelley biographer Scott Beekman, citizens would be “stockholders in this corporation, sharing the dividends,” although citizenship would be limited to those who qualified as Aryan. The corporate state would distribute goods and services based on its estimation of individuals’ worth, although a minimum amount was guaranteed to the racial citizenry.<sup>15</sup> An unsympathetic contemporary of Pelley claimed that he sought to turn “the nation into one great corporation.”<sup>16</sup>

Pelley’s plan did not envision the expulsion but rather the ghettoization of Jews, who would lose their right to vote in his corporatist nation. The controlling authority in the nation would designate one city in each state a “Beth Haven.” This haven had the dual mission of protecting Jews and neutralizing the grave threat they presented to the nation. Jewish men would have to reside in this city, but despite his professed concern for the Aryan race, he would have allowed Jewish women to reside outside these designated areas as long as they were married to men who fit the state’s racial requirement for citizenship.<sup>17</sup>

Pelley established the Silver Shirt Legion as the vanguard of his new Christian state in 1933, shortly after Hitler assumed power as Germany’s chancellor. The organization aspired to paramilitary and policing functions. Pelley encouraged the Silver Shirt chapters to act as outposts of surveillance to gather information on dangerous Jews who would later face the wrath of Pelley’s Christian corporatist state. Membership was limited to white Christians. From its headquarters in Asheville, it likely never surpassed fifteen thousand total members. While the organization had little impact nationally, Silver Shirts made their presence felt in specific locations, at times threatening individuals and defacing private property.<sup>18</sup>

Chapters were located largely in the Midwest and West, and Asheville was one of the very few sites in the South where the group established a foothold.<sup>19</sup> A September 1933 editorial in the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that the “Hitler of America” had attained a membership of one thousand “in the mountains back of Asheville,” but that number was almost certainly a gross exaggeration.<sup>20</sup> For many commentators, however, quantifying Pelley’s



strength was an ultimately unsatisfactory means of estimating the threat he represented. In September 1933, the *Southern Israelite* portrayed him as a star in the national and international antisemitic constellation. The *Israelite* asserted that Pelley was in “constant communication” with “Nazi headquarters in New York.”<sup>21</sup> Although the periodical’s editor, James Waterman Wise, scoffed at Pelley’s claims that the Silver Shirts would “loom large” in happenings in the United States in 1933, he came to the conclusion that “Chief” Pelley was “a potential danger.”<sup>22</sup> To support this assertion he had only to direct readers’ attention to Germany.

Pelley’s periodicals did not focus a great deal of attention on Asheville Jewry or the city itself. His writings were too grandiose in scope to spend much time on the events of a relatively small southern city.<sup>23</sup> He may have been hesitant to antagonize local authorities, although he bemoaned the refusal of an Asheville radio station to allow him access to the airwaves.<sup>24</sup> He did not ignore the city’s Jews. He specifically attacked their participation in civic rituals and their ability to represent American citizenship.<sup>25</sup> *Pelley’s Weekly*, a successor to his earlier journal, *Liberation*, also criticized Jewish efforts to counter antisemitic radicalism in the city. In 1936, two years after Asheville Jews had participated in ecumenical efforts to disassociate their city from Pelley, the periodical attacked Jews for supposedly fomenting disunity among an anti-communist “National Conference of Christian Ministers and Laymen” convention meeting in Asheville, which Pelley attended.<sup>26</sup> His journal crowed that Alvin Kartus, a Jewish lawyer who had played a role in Pelley’s “famous” securities trial, had asked the city’s First Christian Church to bar the antisemitic faction from meeting there, to no avail.<sup>27</sup> In the wake of the conference, *Pelley’s Weekly* announced that the city was “aroused on the Jewish question—openly, publicly.” The recent events had “vindicated” Pelley’s warnings of Jewish power and “domination” of the country. The *Weekly* boasted that the city had become “fiercely Jew conscious.”<sup>28</sup>

Pelley and his periodicals were prone to overstatement, to put it mildly. The extent to which Ashevilleans participated in the Silver Shirts or supported Pelley is unclear. One Jewish volunteer

remembered that when she assisted in the effort to discredit him she found that “not many people around” Asheville subscribed to his literature. She believed that residents “didn’t necessarily support [Pelley].”<sup>29</sup> While there may have been little active support of Pelley in the city (or, for that matter, in the country), it is possible that a greater number were sympathetic to some of his arguments, as another resident of Asheville held that “there were a lot of people [in Asheville] who agreed with” Pelley’s views.<sup>30</sup>

### *Reactions to Pelley Across Religious Lines*

Pelley’s presence threatened to disrupt the ordering of economic and social life in Asheville for both Jews and non-Jews. He upset the carefully crafted image of the city as tolerant, hospitable, and cultured. These were important characteristics for a tourist destination’s boosters to cultivate, and through the 1920s the Chamber of Commerce and others had labored to attach such adjectives to the city. Because of the city’s dependence on the tourist industry, the defense of its reputation would involve a wide field of authorities. Social relations had already likely been undermined by the economic and social dislocations of the Great Depression, which had greatly exacerbated the city’s own economic downturn that had begun in 1927.<sup>31</sup> Jews who involved themselves in the effort to marginalize Pelley did so in defense of the status they had enjoyed in the city.

Few Jews lived in Asheville prior to 1880, when the Western North Carolina Railroad reached the city. The resort town’s dramatic growth in the late nineteenth century coincided with the beginning of greater immigration from eastern Europe, and eastern Europeans were part of the first significant movement of Jews to Asheville. Both central and eastern European Jews were charter members of the first congregation in the city, Beth Ha Tephila, founded in 1891. The charter defined it as Conservative, but its leaders, who included prominent merchants, steered it towards a Reform orientation. Eastern European immigrants who arrived later in the 1890s provided impetus for the decision by some unhappy members to establish an Orthodox congregation, Bikur

Cholim.<sup>32</sup> Still, the ethnic divisions between these congregations were not always sharply drawn. Some residents were members of both congregations, and later eastern European immigrants did not necessarily join the Orthodox congregation, choosing instead to affiliate with the Reform congregation.<sup>33</sup>

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*Jewish reaction to Pelley in the Southern Israelite  
showing actual headlines from Liberation.  
(From the monthly Southern Israelite, October 1933.)*

As historian Leonard Rogoff notes, the growth of Asheville's Jewish population outpaced that of the city as a whole during the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Asheville continued to attract a significant portion of North Carolina's admittedly small eastern European immigrant population.<sup>35</sup> There were about seven hundred Jews in Asheville in 1927, when the city as a whole had approximately fifty thousand people. Although the city's overall population had grown only marginally ten years later, it held 950 Jews, the largest enclave in the state. While approximately half the size of Charlotte, it was the home of 230 more Jews. Asheville had the state's largest Jewish population and likely the greatest proportion of Jews, then, when measured against its total population.<sup>36</sup>

As in many other cities, Jewish stores populated Asheville's downtown, from newspaper and cigar shops to department stores. The most notable of these was Solomon Lipinsky's Bon Marché department store, which began in the late 1880s. Its new building in 1923 embodied the city's post-World War I economic boom.<sup>37</sup> Like their neighbors, these businesses also experienced the economic catastrophes of the Great Depression. Because of the economic misfortunes of their members, both congregations faced significant challenges to their continued existence during the 1930s.<sup>38</sup>

During the interwar years, Jews were well aware of their distinct status. Questioned many years later, Asheville Jews distinguished between rare antisemitic incidents and the stable, if implicit, areas of social exclusion that informed relations between Jews and non-Jews during the 1920s and 1930s. One Jewish resident maintained that the exclusion of Jews from clubs, spaces, and areas reserved for elite Christian whites, while largely enduring and fixed, "didn't bother us. It was there."<sup>39</sup> No Jews lived in Biltmore Forest, the exclusive white Christian town just south of the city carved from George Vanderbilt's expansive estate.<sup>40</sup> According to Asheville resident Phyllis Sultan, "basically, you knew your boundaries, you knew you were never going to be in the Cottillion and you knew you were never going to be invited to anything at Biltmore Forest."<sup>41</sup> The Junior League excluded Jews, while the Biltmore Country Club admitted a small number of

them in the 1930s. According to one Jewish resident, because of economic conditions the club briefly “took in anybody,” although the organization later stopped granting Jews new memberships.<sup>42</sup> One resident reported that a woman and her son became Episcopalians and joined a Biltmore church in the ultimately disappointed hope of gaining membership to the country club.<sup>43</sup>

*Bon Marché Department Store, 1924.  
(Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,  
Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville.)*

The city’s ornate Rhododendron Festival of the 1930s represented both what was at stake in ensuring the profitability of the city’s tourist industry and the reputedly stable social boundaries that governed relations between Jews and non-Jews. The celebration, which ran from 1928 until World War II, served as the high point of the city’s summer tourist season, attracting hundreds of thousands of visitors in June of each year. For the duration of the weeklong festival, Asheville was transformed into a “mythical kingdom of rhododendron” complete with a fictional royal court.

Southern states sent young white women to be presented as ambassadors to the kingdom.<sup>44</sup> In 1937, Cuba even sent a representative selected jointly by Asheville's Chamber of Commerce and Cuba's National Tourist Commission.<sup>45</sup>

The Rhododendron Festival depended on the labors of a wide circle of interested parties including the *Asheville Citizen-Times* and the local Chamber of Commerce.<sup>46</sup> Organizers pressured businesses to aid the festival by doing such things as buying and displaying rhododendrons in their shop windows. Jewish businesses prominently supported the festivities. Jewish-owned businesses like the department store Bon Marché entered ornate floats into the contests. As longtime resident Mary Parker later observed, Jews were important "underwriters" of the event but did not participate in the "social part" of the festivities. Only white Christian elites were elected to "royal" positions in the Rhododendron Court, and Jews were excluded from the yearly dance that honored the court and was broadcast via radio to affiliates around the country.<sup>47</sup> As Jewish residents later commented, exclusion from the social events of the festival "didn't bother us too much."<sup>48</sup> Growing up, they just knew that they would not be included in the "Rhododendron stuff . . . so it didn't bother us."<sup>49</sup> The festival and its exclusions proceeded throughout the collaborative efforts to marginalize Pelley.

Jews, however, did participate in several social or civic clubs. The first long-term rabbi of Beth Ha Tephila, Moses P. Jacobson, was a member of the exclusive literary society known as the Pen & Plate Club.<sup>50</sup> Jewish men participated in Kiwanis and Shriner organizations.<sup>51</sup> As noted earlier, Pelley focused little on Asheville in his periodical *Liberation*, but he did criticize the local Lions Club for allowing a Jew to carry the American flag in a parade.<sup>52</sup>

The clubs in which Jews were involved nonetheless often defined themselves as Christian. The optometrist, eastern European immigrant, and Reform temple member Samuel Robinson objected to the Christian invocations that began club meetings he attended.<sup>53</sup> Fellow member of the Reform congregation Leon Rocamora, however, painted Robinson as an outlier in these protests. While other Jews may have disliked these rituals, "[most] of us

would sit back and say this is pure ignorance on the most part. That's the way they are brought up."<sup>54</sup> As Rocamora's reaction suggests, Jews involved in civic groups chose not to disrupt the religious and cultural norms that defined those organizations and their places in them. Robinson's objections, on the other hand, illustrate that he was not satisfied being an object of tolerance. He desired more than just inclusion in a Christian space; he wanted a hand in defining that space. Even such spaces and associations of inclusion, then, also communicated Jewish distinctiveness.

*Pen & Plate Club 25th anniversary meeting, October, 1929.  
Rabbi Moses P. Jacobson (white hair) is seated in the front row to the far left.  
(Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,  
Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville.)*

Jews were conscious of Pelley's aggressive presence in the city's central spaces. Downtown retail storeowner Sidney Schochet, for example, recalled Pelley walking on Patton Avenue, one of the four main streets that terminate at the city's central civic space known as Pack Square. Schochet remembered that he was "always accompanied by 3 or 4 young, athletic looking guys" on his urban travels. He wore a uniform and sported "jack boots." Ruth Lowenberg recalled, "I know that we [the Jewish community] hated him. I knew that." She and other Asheville Jews were aware not only of Pelley's magazine, but also the location of his headquarters in their town.<sup>55</sup>

Jews in Asheville were concerned about Hitler's ascension to leadership in Germany as well as Pelley's local presence. Pelley boasted not only of his admiration for Hitler but of his connections to Nazi Germany. Reform Jews in Asheville went further, drawing parallels between Nazi Germany, Pelley, and the political culture of the United States, where they were cast as objects of tolerance. These connections informed the articulation of their identity as fundamentally distinct from the Christian majority and their status as vulnerable to that majority.

In 1930, Robinson, Jacobson, and another Reform congregation leader established the Temple Club, which quickly affiliated with the National Association of Temple Brotherhoods. The announcement of the club's formation in the *Southern Israelite* illustrated the many roles its leaders hoped it would serve. Its purposes included the promotion of "cultural and educational advancement among its membership" and the city's Jewish population as a whole. The club would buttress members' attachment to Judaism in part by strengthening "the spirit of comradeship between its members." Yet, the club spokesperson communicated a lingering ambivalence about the club's purposes, stating that it was "mainly" meant to encourage "religious activities."<sup>56</sup> It effected what historian David Kaufman has termed "social-religious consolidation" and provided a venue for its select members to express and discuss Jewish identity in ways other than through attendance of religious services.<sup>57</sup>



*Rabbi Moses P. Jacobson, 1930, left, and Samuel Robinson, 1931, right.  
(From the Southern Israelite, December 1930 and September 11, 1931.)*

Prompted by the visibility of Pelley and the specter of Adolf Hitler, in July 1933 the Temple Club devoted a meeting to debating the existence and implications of the relationship between Pelley, American democracy and culture, and Nazi Germany, in essence, the issue of the Jews' place in the nation. Club members took up the question, "Is a Hitleristic Form of Government Possible in the United States?" The debate blended Jews' local, national, and international concerns. These interrelated concerns underscored their status as a minority and their vulnerability in a mainstream culture. Two members answered in the affirmative and two in the negative. Unfortunately, the latter two speakers spoke with no notes, and their counterarguments were not rec-

orded. We do know that the "ladies" who were empowered to judge the debate called it a draw.<sup>58</sup>

Both "Yes" responders critiqued not so much marginal figures like Pelley as the flaws of "Anglo-Saxonism" and American democracy itself. Robinson, for instance, focused not on Pelley but rather on Bob Reynolds, who had recently been elected to the U.S. Senate. Reynolds, an Asheville native, would become known more widely for his isolationism and antisemitism in the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>59</sup> While Robinson conceded that ideally "reason and logic should govern life," the senator's recent speech at a Chamber of Commerce function had led him to conclude that this was an unrealistic expectation.<sup>60</sup> As was the case with the senator's previous exhortations, this recent offering had been "bombastic, absolutely meaningless, and moronic to any intelligent listener."<sup>61</sup> In Robinson's presentation, Reynolds served as a tool to critique American culture more widely. He warned his audience not to write off the new senator "as unsymptomatic [*sic*] of the true state of the nation." It was tempting to ridicule and marginalize the senator. Robinson, however, regarded him as indicative of what he called the "barbaric common denominator that characterizes the Anglo-Saxon throughout this land of ours." The other signs were not limited to the South and included the "Ku Klux Klan movement," the practice of lynching, and the recent milk strikes organized by Farmer's Holiday organizations, which were centered in the Midwest.<sup>62</sup> These incidents, and others like them, were due to the pernicious impact of what Robinson called the Anglo-Saxon influence on the country.

This influence, moreover, was the basis for Robinson's suggestion that a "Hitleristic" government could flourish in the United States, whose inhabitants were "[psychologically] very little different" from Germans. Such predilection for barbarism, in the context of the mass suffering caused by the Great Depression, could encourage people to shed "the finer instincts of our society."<sup>63</sup> Robinson was drawing a parallel that white Christians rarely made in public. While white newspaper editors made comparisons between the KKK and Nazi mobs, they stopped short of doing so between the Nazi government and the American South.

By focusing on Reynolds, Robinson drew such a line and also articulated a sharp sense of Jews' distance from Anglo-Saxon culture.<sup>64</sup>

The other advocate for the "Yes" position, the merchant Marcus Sterne, invoked Pelley to an extent that Robinson did not. This may have been the result of a strategic decision between advocates for the same side of the debate who wished their arguments not to overlap. Sterne noted that men such as Pelley, who "publish the weekly paper we are so familiar with," were the poisonous leaders being created in this climate of unrest.<sup>65</sup> Like Robinson, he pointed to more acceptable and mainstream political practices in the United States as potentially allowing a demagogic dictatorship to gain traction. He termed Franklin Roosevelt's presidency a "one man dictatorship" and warned of the ability of politicians to manipulate the great mass of people who were once better off financially.

Those who answered in the affirmative to the evening's question chose to characterize the country's majority as vulnerable to demagogic distortion. They were simultaneously making an implicit claim about the vulnerable and distinct place of Jews within a land governed by the moral weakness of Anglo-Saxonism, a weakness easily exploited not just by hate groups but also potentially by American politicians.<sup>66</sup> The possibilities that existed to draw connections between Pelley, American government, and Nazi Germany in the early 1930s also created possibilities to define Jewish identity as distinct and their status as vulnerable.

Moses Jacobson emphasized both this distinctiveness and vulnerability in his Purim 1933 speech delivered a few months after Pelley began his Silver Shirt organization. The Beth Ha Tephila rabbi attempted to convince his audience to protect their place in the city. Typical of other Hebrew Union College graduates of the 1880s and Reform rabbis of his generation, Jacobson considered that Zionism could be conceived by non-Jews as incompatible with loyalty to one's country. He published his criticisms of Zionism in the Jewish press and expressed them during earlier meetings of the Temple Club.<sup>67</sup> During a Temple Club meeting Jacobson also declared Zionism to be immoral because its

fulfillment “would mean the ultimate eviction of [Palestine’s] entire present Arab population.”<sup>68</sup>

Pelley’s presence, though, appeared to prompt Jacobson to paint a picture of American and Jewish history that Zionists would have largely endorsed. He argued that Jews would always be vulnerable to the demagogic attacks and inflamed passions of non-Jews, no matter what status they had individually or collectively achieved. Jacobson’s address formulated an identity that was permanently at odds with the Christian majority. Whereas Zionists imagined an end to this condition through the establishment of a Jewish state, Jacobson rejected that solution. His speech also cast doubt on the feasibility of the ideal of assimilation, which had been a goal of classical Reform Judaism.<sup>69</sup> As this speech suggests, Pelley’s presence in Asheville deepened Jews’ understanding of themselves as separate and distinct from the surrounding Christian majority. The threat that he represented underscored their apparently perpetual minority and vulnerable status.

The rabbi called on his congregants to embrace and defend this status by acting against Pelley. He placed this responsibility within the context of Jewish religious history, duty, and identity. His speech implicitly questioned the often overstated but undeniable exceptionality of America as a place free from persecution for Jews. It placed Pelley within a long, biblical narrative of Jewish vulnerability and reaction against tyrannical authority. In some respects, Jacobson’s speech was a mirror image of the optimistic narratives analyzed by Beth Wenger. Wenger examines how Jews created narratives out of elements of their heritage in order to “weave themselves into the fabric of American life,” usually in an affirmation of the salutary exceptionalism of the United States.<sup>70</sup> In contrast, Jacobson juxtaposed the Purim story with Pelley to suggest that Jews were not only vulnerable but also politically isolated, even in the United States.

The rabbi drew local and international parallels with the lessons of the Purim fable. It was not so much that Jacobson believed that non-Jews in Asheville were hostile to Jews. He acknowledged that, “Jews as a body here are respected. They are classed with the

best of our citizenship." Jacobson further conceded that it would be easy to imagine that such a people "would be immune from all danger of a local general uprising."<sup>71</sup>

Even given these conditions, the Jews' position was vulnerable to demagogic distortion. "Any unscrupulous agitator," Jacobson claimed, could very quickly turn the previous Christian amity towards Jews "into the very bitterest enmity." For Jacobson, this vulnerability was not the result of any racial differences between Jews and others. Instead, "the mere fact of [their] distinct religious differences with the majority" was enough to permanently mark Jews as different and limit the support on which they could call. His decision to define Judaism in religious rather than racial or ethnic terms was typical of many classical Reform rabbis, particularly those in the Jim Crow South.<sup>72</sup> Their vulnerability was a permanent characteristic of their status as a religious minority. In case of trouble, Jews would find "no defender outside of [their] own ranks."<sup>73</sup>

Consequently, Jacobson urged his congregation to take seriously the threat that Pelley represented, if not the man himself. He acknowledged that Pelley cut a seemingly ridiculous figure, a "discredited and crazy" leader of a "crazy movement." It was not that he had a high estimate of Pelley's ability as a demagogue, exactly, but rather a gloomy appraisal of the ease with which others could be inflamed. Pelley was dangerous, for instance, for his determination to influence and fool "a presumptive cultured coterie who are open to any sort of fanatical suggestion." Although seemingly insignificant, the rabbi imagined Pelley as a "weed [that] may eventually choke a whole garden" if not pruned. Jacobson called on his audience to do just that by countering Pelley's lies and hatred. He returned to the Purim story, but noted that Jews could not rely on its fictional and "providential" conclusion in their own lives. Instead, he stated that Jews in Asheville could only count on themselves to counter and marginalize Pelley.<sup>74</sup>

Jacobson compared Asheville to Germany, but he refused to utter the name of its new chancellor. To do so would "desecrate any place that purports to bear the character of sanctity." Jews in Germany, Jacobson cautioned his audience, did not deserve any

portion of blame for German antisemitism. Instead, the sole reason they were targeted was that they were Jews. Their "brethren" in Asheville, then, could be targeted for the same reason.<sup>75</sup> The rabbi called on members of his congregation to act against Pelley in a way that preserved their status and diasporic history as outsiders. He called on Jews to defend their position in American society and in Asheville, not to demand a revision in that position.

Jews were not the only ones troubled by the presence of Pelley and his headquarters in Asheville. Non-Jews were also concerned that he could harm the city's carefully constructed image as a tolerant and progressive city that welcomed white visitors. Tourism, like other New South industries, depended on cultivating a new, moderate image of the South.<sup>76</sup> Asheville civic and business leaders undertook multiple efforts to create this impression. In successive years during the mid-1920s, the Chamber of Commerce sent a selection of Asheville's leading businessmen, including Jewish merchant Solomon Lipinsky, to different regions of the United States on "goodwill tours" in the service of a Babbitt-like brotherhood.<sup>77</sup> Promotional pamphlets also emphasized the city's cultivation. One advertisement, for instance, listed the city's landmarks of culture: "an opera house, a fine social club, a country club, a golf club, an art gallery, and a public library."<sup>78</sup> The volume of books lent by its library, testified another pamphlet, spoke "very highly of Asheville's cultural standing" while the presence in the city of "practically every denomination" of religion exemplified its cosmopolitan attitude.<sup>79</sup>

Demonstrating orderly race relations under the auspices of white supremacy emerged as another important task for city boosters. As historian Richard Starnes has noted, vacationers were not likely to choose a place known for having disorderly or violent race relations.<sup>80</sup> A tour book published just a few years after the violent white supremacy campaign of 1898 reassured readers that "[all] this agitation about the negro does not effect [sic] *Western North Carolina*, the mountainous part of the State, very much."<sup>81</sup> In 1926, a "Visitor" wrote to the editor of the *Asheville Times* to laud the tolerance and "fair-mindedness" of the city's white citizens who were attempting to free a young African American man

from prison. In the previous year, an Asheville jury had wrongfully convicted the prisoner, Alvin Mansel, of sexual assault. The actions of Asheville's "leading" whites, the author promised, had altered the "falsely pre-conceived ideas of treatment of such matters" in the region. The visitor assured readers that the publicity attending the case would generate more good will and business for the city than any "advertising conceived by your Chamber of Commerce."<sup>82</sup>

Jews also played a role in demonstrations of the city's tolerance and hospitable nature during the 1920s. The Central Conference of American Rabbis held its convention in Asheville in 1926. Jacobson, credited with bringing the group to the city, assured his gathered colleagues that Asheville was a "place of tolerance," free of racial and religious prejudice. The *Asheville Citizen* accepted with pride Jacobson's praise.<sup>83</sup> While it noted the presence of a minority in Asheville dedicated to fomenting "religious and racial bitterness," the paper predicted that it would wither in time. The gathering of some ninety rabbis and their families at one of the city's fine hotels represented the financial benefits of tolerance. During the convention, the *Citizen* recommended to its readers that the city collectively should be "proud of its Jewish population" for their contributions to its "social and material advancement." The conference was only the most recent example of the importance of Jewish residents to the area's economic development.<sup>84</sup>

Pelley's presence in the 1930s, however, had the potential to tarnish the city's well-cultivated image. Even during the Great Depression, as Richard Starnes has pointed out, tourism was a crucial element in the city's economy and the focus of an increasingly coordinated campaign at the state level.<sup>85</sup> The city's continued economic dependence on tourism translated into the need to defend its image against Pelley. His presence was no secret. The *New York Times* and other newspapers and periodicals reported on his actions while he lived in Asheville, creating and broadcasting the association between him and the city.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, despite Pelley's wealthy donors, the media portrayed Silver Shirts members as lower-class, unsophisticated, and parochial.

These were the very images and attributes against which the city's boosters and promoters had struggled.<sup>87</sup> Although many commentators assumed that Pelley's followers were mentally unhinged, criminal, or lower-class, historians have demonstrated that participants were "drawn from the lower and middle classes" equally.<sup>88</sup>

Even after Pelley was convicted of violating the state's financial securities laws, the stigma of serving as headquarters for Pelley continued to affect Asheville's reputation. Eric Sevareid, the future CBS correspondent, reported on the Silver Shirt organization in Minneapolis in 1938. His work illustrates how Asheville's status as a headquarters for Pelley's organization could cast doubt on the city boosters' claims. In a parody of a letter written by a Silver Shirt organizer to the "boss" back home in the mountains of North Carolina, Sevareid claimed that the inhabitants of Minneapolis were not as gullible as those who resided in the "hookworm belt." In characterizing the area as gullible and using a phrase associated with southern poverty and backwardness, Sevareid, in effect, conflated Asheville with the rest of the South. In contrast to the mountains of North Carolina, Minneapolis was a difficult place to recruit members because they read "newspapers and magazines and even books."<sup>89</sup> As Sevareid's sarcasm suggests, the city's reputation as the haven for Pelley's organization undermined the efforts of boosters who had labored to paint Asheville as a cosmopolitan and tolerant locale.

#### *Collaborations against Pelley*

In 1934 Jews worked with non-Jews in two specific instances to marginalize Pelley and to disassociate the city from him. These collaborations were meant to protect the economic and social ordering of the city against any possible influence that Pelley might gather. The leading Jews and non-Jews involved had overlapping but distinct motivations.

The city's observance of Brotherhood Day provides the first instance. The function took place at the Imperial Theater downtown. The meeting was only one of thirty-three nationwide Brotherhood Day observances classified by the NCCJ as a mass



meeting and one of only six such meetings in the South.<sup>90</sup> Such a production depended on the cooperation of many participants. The NCCJ pointed out this need for collaboration, noting that a successful Brotherhood Day required the assistance of a locale's leading figures. For instance, the conference suggested that local organizers ask editors to pen editorials on the appointed day, "expressing their sentiments on the subject."<sup>91</sup> The editor of the *Asheville Citizen-Times* obliged and used the opportunity to insist that Pelley was an unwelcome stranger unrepresentative of Asheville. The editorial offers a good illustration of how local interests interpreted and adapted the interfaith project.

Leading Ashevilleans spearheaded the event on Sunday, April 29, 1934, and the *Citizen-Times* promoted it prior to the date. The venerable and well-known minister of the city's First Presbyterian Church, Robert Campbell, agreed to participate along with Father Francis McCourt, pastor of the Joan of Arc Catholic Church, and Rabbi Jacobson. Campbell, who had presided at the downtown church since the 1880s, had been involved in many reform and civic organizations throughout the 1910s and 1920s and had served as president of the city's Interracial Committee.<sup>92</sup> Haywood Parker, a locally prominent attorney who was involved in charitable social services, served as master of ceremonies.<sup>93</sup> In this minutely choreographed event, each religious figure was introduced with a musical selection associated with his faith.

Pelley's presence in the city provided context for the proceedings, but none of the speakers explicitly referenced him, although Parker and Campbell did so obliquely. Parker compared the present climate in Asheville and the United States with the flu epidemic of 1918. He noted that "certain signs seem to indicate that we are threatened today" with the even more pernicious "scourge of religious intolerance." Campbell, speaking last, argued that "there are some differences which we must combat as unsafe." Among those who represented intolerable deviance were those who circulated "secret propaganda and violence of hate."<sup>94</sup> Unsurprisingly, Jacobson did not explicitly denounce Pelley. This omission mirrored the expectations of the NCCJ, whose leaders

trusted Protestants to take the lead in combating intolerance aimed at Catholics and Jews, lest the conference be perceived as merely a mouthpiece for those minorities.<sup>95</sup>

Apart from the allusions to Pelley, the three principal speakers endeavored to explain that a commitment to tolerance would threaten nothing essential to people's lives or beliefs but would rather protect American traditions. Jacobson argued that tolerance would not pose a threat to the nation because it would distinguish between beliefs and ideals. If "men would range themselves under" the latter, he held, their overriding similarities would become apparent.<sup>96</sup> Father McCourt, whose turn was signaled by the playing of "Ave Maria," attempted to make use of this supposed consensus to protect society. According to the *Citizen*, McCourt asked his audience to take united action against moral threats such as the "salacity and obscenity of 'most moving pictures,' much advertising and general social life." He urged Protestants and Jews to "cooperate with Catholics in signing the 'Legion of Decency' pledges." Campbell also urged citizens to regard tolerance as a tool to protect the United States. The title of his speech, "Making America Safe for Differences," was one suggested by the national organization. It could just have easily been titled "Making Differences Safe for America." He assured his audience that the practice of tolerance would not disturb the country's "high standards." Instead, it could protect those norms by combating things deemed intolerable.<sup>97</sup>

The *Citizen-Times* editorial that appeared on Brotherhood Day reaffirmed both local relations between Jews and Christians and the city's image as a tolerant location by disavowing Pelley. It made the speakers' implicit repudiation of Pelley more explicit while still refraining from mentioning Pelley's name. The author acknowledged that there was a "stranger in our midst" who had brought the city into ill repute. This unnamed stranger, who was clearly Pelley, used Asheville "largely as a mailing address" to spread his intolerance. The paper asserted that "those who live here know that he does not speak the sentiments of our people. He enjoys neither local support nor local countenance."<sup>98</sup> The editorial also reminded readers of the economic benefits of

brotherhood, without which “no prosperity, no social or economic progress” would come to Asheville.<sup>99</sup>

A much more explicit and lengthy attempt to draw a sharp line between Pelley and the city ran as an investigative story the same day on the newspaper’s front page. Willis Thornton, a staff correspondent from the Newspaper Enterprise Association and not part of the paper’s regular staff, wrote the article. A short introduction to the long article stated that Thornton “was sent to inquire into the Silver Shirt business.” Perhaps an outside writer would appear to have more credibility in reporting on the relationship between the city and Pelley. The article’s subheading announced that “Asheville Fails To Get Excited Over Being Headquarters.” The story repeatedly noted residents’ lack of enthusiasm for the Silver Shirt movement. In the first paragraph, the author states that Asheville is an example of “a place that is not excited over, or seriously concerned with” Pelley. Similarly, his movement “never gained any following in this region.” Finally, Thornton wrote, “membership is almost non-existent” in the city, which was chosen as the headquarters of the Silver Shirts only because Pelley, earlier concerned with spiritualism, had established himself in Asheville in 1932. The article was not meant solely for the city’s residents and visitors; rather it was carried in all newspapers that subscribed to the services of the Newspaper Enterprise Association.

The second notable collaboration also took place in the spring of 1934. This effort eventually resulted in Pelley’s conviction in early 1935 for violating the state’s financial securities regulations known as the blue sky laws, so named because they targeted corporations that counted the empty sky as their only assets.<sup>100</sup> As biographer Scott Beekman indicates, this legal effort may have been spurred by the May 1934 visit of House Un-American Activities Committee member Charles Kramer, who subpoenaed Pelley’s records.<sup>101</sup>

Just as Jacobson had urged in his 1933 Purim sermon, Jews in Asheville worked against Pelley. Speaking of the episode many years later, residents asserted both a collective and individual impetus for countering the Silver Shirts. Longtime resident and shop

owner Sidney Schochet claimed that the B'nai B'rith sought to "get [Pelley] somehow or another." He credited one of the first Jewish lawyers to practice in Asheville, Alvin Kartus, for the legal strategy of prosecuting Pelley for violation of the state's securities laws. Kartus, a member of the Reform congregation and, by the end of the decade, president of the Southeastern District Grand Lodge of B'nai B'rith, used his relationships with other local lawyers to pursue Pelley.<sup>102</sup> According to Schochet, Kartus "got [Pelley's case] on the docket. He got the charges made."<sup>103</sup> In a somewhat hyperbolic oral history, another Ashevillean said that Kartus had once been "the biggest stinker that God ever made," but that when he returned to Asheville "he got to be a different person and he personally destroyed the Silver Shirts."<sup>104</sup>

*Alvin Kartus.*  
(From the Southern Israelite,  
February 17, 1939.)

Other Jews played important roles in preparing charges against Pelley. A local judge apparently allowed Kartus access to Pelley's records for a weekend. According to Asheville resident Sarah Goldstein, she, her sister Jennette, and her friend Hilda Finkelstein assisted this effort by spending a weekend copying the names of Pelley's subscribers to help build a case for securities fraud. In addition, Orthodox congregation member W. W. Michalove was reported to have been "sort of like an undercover agent" who also helped make possible the prosecution of Asheville's fascistic interloper. Jews would not have been able to accomplish so much, however, if they had been the only ones concerned with Pelley's presence in Asheville and the publicity it brought. If Kartus did indeed come up with the charges against Pelley, for instance, prosecutor Zebulon Nettles still had to agree to indict him.<sup>105</sup>

Pelley was tried in January 1935. The local newspapers and national press including the *New York Times* provided extensive coverage of the proceedings. Judge Wilson Warlick remarked from the bench that he had received "numerous letters and telegrams" from around the country. While Jews were following the case closely, many letters also apparently called for "justice for Pelley."<sup>106</sup> Two lawyers, Robert R. Williams and Thomas Harkins, aided Prosecutor Nettles. Despite the assistance of these non-Jewish attorneys, Pelley's lawyer, Robert H. McNeil, tried unsuccessfully to contend that the trial constituted a "private prosecution" against Pelley carried out by conspiratorial New York Jews.<sup>107</sup>

Toward the end of the month, Pelley was found guilty of two of the three charges against him: advertising stock unregistered with the state of North Carolina and advertising stock in an insolvent company. The state failed to prove that anyone had paid money for the unregistered stock, the most serious of the three charges. Still, the maximum possible sentence for Pelley was five years and a fine of one thousand dollars for each guilty count. Responding to his lawyer's prayer for judgment, Warlick offered leniency to Pelley, suspending his one- to two-year sentence on the condition that he remain on good behavior and not

*Pelley exiting the elevator of the Buncombe County  
Courthouse after his 1942 federal sedition conviction.  
(AP Wirephoto, courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,  
Pack Memorial Public Library, Asheville.)*

publish “materials relating to the sale of stock” for a period of five years.<sup>108</sup>

After the trial, Pelley’s headquarters remained in Asheville. Although he moved to Seattle in 1936, he continued to spend time in Asheville. His prediction that September 16 of that year would prove pivotal in the struggle between the Christian Silver Shirts and the Jewish-controlled New Deal proved mistaken.<sup>109</sup> Pelley ran for president that year as well, but he and his running mate only qualified for the ballot in Washington State.<sup>110</sup> His legal problems worsened in the 1940s. In 1940, shortly before the suspended sentence attached to his 1935 conviction expired, he was arrested for violating its good-behavior provision. His legal entanglements did not end until 1950, when he was paroled into obscurity after being convicted of sedition in 1942 in federal court.<sup>111</sup>

*Maintaining the Status Quo Means Change*

These legal and cultural collaborations between Jews and non-Jews to disassociate Asheville from Pelley clarify the significance of the 1930s and 1940s “war on intolerance” and the interfaith movement. Local participation should not be taken for granted but has to be understood on its own terms. The local context has been neglected in histories of the interfaith movement, which have focused on leaders, intellectuals, and experts in the Northeast and Midwest.<sup>112</sup>

In understanding the difficulties encountered by those engaged in this movement to alleviate inequality and create what many hoped would be a new social order, those local contexts are as crucial as the conceptions of tolerance. In Asheville these motivations were focused on defending the status quo. The effort to counter Pelley involved different religious, cultural, and legal authorities whose efforts were assisted by the vocabulary of tolerance. The three main speakers at the first annual Brotherhood Day observance, for instance, each in his own way assured the audience that tolerance did not threaten any critical part of either the nation or their lives. As historian Dan Puckett has demonstrated, southern white reactions to Hitler similarly stopped short of commenting on the Nazi regime, which might

have challenged or threatened the established white supremacist political order.<sup>113</sup>

As Puckett further shows, in other southern communities like Birmingham, Alabama, Nazi atrocities encouraged Jews to support Zionism.<sup>114</sup> In Asheville, Pelley's presence prompted Jews to compare the United States with Germany and therefore provided opportunities for them to draw sharp and permanent distinctions between themselves and Christian—or "Anglo-Saxon"—America, depending on the commenter. In 1926 the "ultra Reform" Rabbi Moses Jacobson proudly called Asheville a place of tolerance.<sup>115</sup> Seven years later, in his Purim speech, it was exactly this characteristic that worried him. Jews' status as objects of tolerance was inherently vulnerable. Faced with the local threat of Pelley, Jews chose to defend their place in the city rather than attempt to remake it.

The determination by Asheville Jews in the 1930s to protect their status, however, involved them in civic and ceremonial life in new ways. The 1934 Brotherhood Day event signaled the beginning of their regular civic and ceremonial presence, which had previously been sporadic. Later in the 1930s, Jews began participating in Lost Cause ceremonies, attaching themselves to the South's civil religion and simultaneously making a claim to their rightful place in Asheville.<sup>116</sup> In early May 1937, D. Hiden Ramsey, the general manager of the *Citizen-Times*, spoke to the local B'nai B'rith. A flyer advertising the talk promised that Ramsey would "bring a message of special interest" to the chapter and the Jewish population as a whole. Ramsey urged the B'nai B'rith to demonstrate its gratitude to Zebulon Vance, the Civil War and post-Reconstruction governor whose Gilded Age address "The Scattered Nation" advocated Christian tolerance of Jews. An obelisk still graces Asheville's main civic square in honor of Vance, the city's most famous native son prior to Thomas Wolfe.

Asheville Jews contributed a bronze tablet that summarized Vance's accomplishments. Previously, only his surname, carved into the monument itself, had identified the structure.<sup>117</sup> The tablet more fully explained the monument's significance. Its unveiling was the focus of a 1938 ceremony, which was broadcast over the



radio and attracted an audience of “several scores.”<sup>118</sup> The same Alvin Kartus who had worked so effectively against Pelley represented the B’nai B’rith and spoke words of tribute at the dedication. Ramsey’s newspaper gave credit to the chapter for the tablet’s placement and reported that it represented but the most recent attempt to repay the debt that North Carolina Jews owed Vance.<sup>119</sup> Jews participated in such ceremonies honoring Vance on a yearly basis through World War II and beyond. Thus during the uncertain and unstable 1930s, their desire to defend their status in the city proved to be an engine of change.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Scott Beekman, *William Dudley Pelley: A Life in Right-Wing Extremism and the Occult* (Syracuse, NY, 2005), 53; Stephen E. Atkins, *Encyclopedia of Right-Wing Extremism in Modern American History* (Santa Barbara, CA, 2011), 68.

<sup>2</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 67.

<sup>3</sup> *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 3, 1932.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>5</sup> Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War* (Philadelphia, 1983), 178.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Drake, “Kristallnacht and North Carolina: Reporting on Nazi Antisemitism in Black and White,” *Southern Jewish History* 13 (2010): 81–118; Lee Shai Weissbach, *Jewish Life in Small-Town America: A History* (New Haven, 2005); Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Mark K. Bauman, “Beyond the Parochial Image of Southern Jewry: Studies in National and International Leadership and Interactive Mechanisms,” in *New Essays in American Jewish History*, ed. Pamela S. Nadell, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Lance J. Sussman (Cincinnati, 2010), 138, 146.

<sup>8</sup> Richard W. Steele, "The War on Intolerance: The Reformulation of American Nationalism, 1939-1941," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 9 (Fall 1989): 9-35.

<sup>9</sup> Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to its Protestant Promise* (New York, 2011), 32.

<sup>10</sup> Wendy Wall, *Inventing the "American Way": The Politics of Consensus from the New Deal to the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2008), 9.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-67; Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York, 1997), 5; see also Marc Dollinger, *Quest For Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern America* (Princeton, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Wall, *Inventing the "American Way,"* 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 22.

<sup>14</sup> Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 67.

<sup>15</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 84; Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 68.

<sup>16</sup> Harold Lavine, *Fifth Column in America* (New York, 1940), 173.

<sup>17</sup> Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 70.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>20</sup> "The Silver Shirts," *Los Angeles Times*, September 13, 1933.

<sup>21</sup> Klaus Meyer, "Nazidom in the United States," *Southern Israelite*, September 1933, 32.

<sup>22</sup> Bertram Jonas, "An American Hitler: Exposing 'Commander' Pelley of the Silver Shirts of America," *Jewish Chronicle*, September 21, 1933, 2.

<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, "By All Means Let the Jews Rescue their Brethren!" *Liberation*, April 15, 1933; "What High Mentors Say of 'The Emptiness of Israel,'" *Liberation*, May 6, 1933; "The Jewish Question Reaches the Floor of Congress!" *Liberation*, June 17, 1933; "Do the Jews of America Wish us to Reply with a Boycott?" and "How Hebrews Throw Gasoline on the Anti-Semitic Fire," *Liberation*, August 5, 1933.

<sup>24</sup> "WWNC Refuses Silver Shirts Use of Radio Facilities," *Liberation*, May 20, 1933.

<sup>25</sup> Sidney Schochet, interview conducted by David Schulman, April 10, 1994; Leo Finkelstein, interview conducted by David Schulman, February 10, 1994, both in Jewish Heritage in Western North Carolina Oral History Collection (hereafter cited as JHWNC), in the D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections, University of North Carolina, Asheville (hereafter cited as RLSC); "WWNC Refuses Silver Shirts," *Liberation*.

<sup>26</sup> Albert E. Kahn, *High Treason: The Plot Against the People* (New York, 1950), 211.

<sup>27</sup> The *Southern Israelite* termed the uproar over the conference "one of the most serious manifestations of religious hatred that has ever reared its vicious head in the South." See "Violence Flares in Asheville, N.C.," and "Termites of Christianity," *Southern Israelite*, August 21, 1936, 1, 2. Interestingly, the latter article refers to Asheville as "once the stamping ground" of Pelley, suggesting that it was no longer. This editorial considered the incident to be a "threat to American Jewry on Southern soil."

<sup>28</sup> "Asheville Feels Jew Duress," *Pelley's Weekly*, September 2, 1936, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Sarah Goldstein, interview conducted by David Schulman, March 4, 1994, JHWNC.

<sup>30</sup> Marilyn Blomberg Patton, interview conducted by Sharon Fahrner and Jan Schochet, February 23, 2004, Jewish Businesses in Western North Carolina Oral History Collection, RLSC (hereafter cited as JBWNC).

<sup>31</sup> Kevan D. Frazier, "Big Dreams, Small Cities: John Nolen, the New South, and the City Planning Movement in Asheville, Roanoke, and Johnson City, 1907-1937" (Ph.D. diss., West Virginia University, 2000), 181; Bill Moore, interview conducted by Dorothy Joynes, February 20, 1993, Voices of Asheville Oral History Collection, (hereafter cited as VOA), RLSC; see also Nan K. Chase, *Asheville: A History* (Jefferson, NC, 2007).

<sup>32</sup> Leonard Rogoff, "Synagogue and Jewish Church: A Congregational History of North Carolina," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 43-81.

<sup>33</sup> Rogoff, *Down Home*, 213.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 124.

<sup>35</sup> According to the 1910 census, there were seventy-two Russian immigrants in the city, slightly more than one-tenth of the state's total of 711. A decade later, that number was 120, which was approximately thirteen percent of the state's total of 932. See Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910, Buncombe County, North Carolina; Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Buncombe County, North Carolina.

<sup>36</sup> From a population of 28,504 in 1920, Asheville reached 50,193 by 1930. By 1940, though, that number had grown to only 51,310. Asheville Jewry, on the other hand, went from 250 in 1918 to 700 in 1927 and then to 950 in 1937, which may have represented a high point. In 1950, there were an estimated 600 Jews in the city. Weissbach, *Jewish Life*, 338.

<sup>37</sup> Rogoff, *Down Home*, 133.

<sup>38</sup> *The Golden Book of Memoirs: Fiftieth Anniversary of Congregation Beth Ha-Tephila* (Asheville, NC, 1941), 27; "1899-1949, Congregation Bikur Cholim 50th Anniversary," 15, RLSC, accessed July 29, 2013, [http://toto.lib.unca.edu/booklets/congregation\\_bikur\\_cholim/defaultcongregation\\_bikur\\_cholim.htm](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/booklets/congregation_bikur_cholim/defaultcongregation_bikur_cholim.htm).

<sup>39</sup> Phyllis Sultan, interview conducted by Sharon Fahrner and Jan Schochet, July 24, 2005, JBWNC.

<sup>40</sup> Dorothy Zagier Fligel and Joan Zagier Rocamora, interview conducted by Sharon Fahrner, August 10, 2004, JBWNC.

<sup>41</sup> Sultan interview.

<sup>42</sup> Leon Rocamora, interview conducted by Sharon Fahrner, August 4, 2004, JBWNC.

<sup>43</sup> Estelle Marder, interview conducted by David Schulman, March 30, 1994, JHWNC.

<sup>44</sup> "Sponsors' Ball Will Be Elaborate Social Event," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 9, 1935. See also "Elaborate Program Is Arranged For Festival," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, June 10, 1934; "Official Souvenir for the Rhododendron Festival and Circus Program, June 11-16, 1934," Asheville Chamber of Commerce Collection, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville.

<sup>45</sup> "King and Queen Chosen For Rhododendron Fete," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 23, 1937.

<sup>46</sup> In the late 1930s, the Chamber of Commerce advertised the festival in Asheville's African American newspaper, the *Southern News*, by noting that the local Negro Welfare Council had "arranged the participation of their race" in a variety of activities. See "An Invitation," *Southern News*, June 11, 1938.

<sup>47</sup> Mary Parker, interview conducted by Dorothy Joynes, February 18, 1993, VOA; "Hundreds Are Engaged In Preparing For Fete," *Asheville Citizen*, June 8, 1935; "Radio Network To Broadcast Festival Ball," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 26, 1935. This article boasts that "civic leaders [were] elated over nation-wide publicity." It was the "first time that a Festival event has been given this nation-wide radio publicity."

<sup>48</sup> Fligel and Rocamora interviews.

<sup>49</sup> Sultan interview.

<sup>50</sup> Untitled speech, October 3, 1932, Moses P. Jacobson Papers, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. In 1932 Jacobson was nearing the end of a long career as a Reform rabbi. He was ordained by the Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati in 1886. He was the rabbi of the Reform B'nai Zion congregation in Shreveport, Louisiana, for eighteen years. Jacobson began serving as rabbi of Beth Ha-Tephila in 1922 and continued until 1934 when he retired as the congregation's first rabbi emeritus. Attendees at the 1932 event praised his high standing among the city's Jews and Christians. See "Asheville Rabbi Announces Retirement From Ministry," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, August 30, 1934; "Southern Notes," *Southern Israelite* 7, no. 22, October 31, 1932, 11.

<sup>51</sup> Rocamora interview.

<sup>52</sup> Schochet interview.

<sup>53</sup> Rocamora interview. Robinson also contested racial norms at work and at home. He was one of the few Jews in Asheville who appeared to have treated African Americans significantly better than other whites did. An optometrist, Robinson saw all patients on a first-come, first-served basis and addressed African Americans as "Mr." and "Mrs." His family also paid domestic workers twice the wages paid by their neighbors. Robinson, as a result, incurred resentment from neighbors, whose hired workers knew about the wage disparity. As an immigrant, he may not have been as acculturated to southern racial codes, although he was certainly aware of those codes. See Michael Aaron Robinson, interview conducted by Sharon Fahrer and Jan Schochet, July 17, 2003, Home Front to the Frontline Oral History Collection, RLSC. See also Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006), 59.

<sup>54</sup> Rocamora interview.

<sup>55</sup> Schochet interview; Ruth Lowenberg, interview conducted by David Schulman, April 19, 1994, JHWNC.

<sup>56</sup> "Southern Notes," *Southern Israelite*, September 19, 1930, 22.

<sup>57</sup> David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover, NH, 1999), 274.

<sup>58</sup> Temple Club Minutes, July 10, 1933, series 5: Men's Organizations, Temple Club, Beth HaTephila Collection, (hereafter cited as BHTC), RLSC.

<sup>59</sup> Julian M. Pleasants, *Buncombe Bob: The Life and Times of Robert Rice Reynolds* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 138–139. Leo Finkelstein defended Reynolds, who assisted the chapter's efforts to help a German Jew immigrate to Asheville. See Finkelstein interview.

<sup>60</sup> Letter to Max H. Crohn, July 6, 1933, BHTC. The debate took place on July 10, 1933.

<sup>61</sup> Samuel Robinson, "Answering 'YES' to the Question," speech typescript, July 10, 1933, BHTC.

<sup>62</sup> Everett E. Luoma, *The Farmer Takes a Holiday: The Story of the National Farmers' Holiday Association and the Farmers' Strike of 1932–1933* (New York, 1967); A. William Høglund, "Wisconsin Dairy Farmers on Strike," *Agricultural History* 35 (January 1961): 24–34.

<sup>63</sup> Robinson, "Answering 'YES.'"

<sup>64</sup> Dan J. Puckett, "Reporting on the Holocaust: The View from Jim Crow Alabama," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 25 (Fall 2011): 219–251. In the 1930s, motivated by Nazi measures, Jews made comparisons between those measures and lynchings in the South. This recognition, Eric Goldstein argues, motivated them to protect their vulnerable status as whites. This parallel also coincided with Jews' (and other Americans') decrease in faith in America and American democracy. At other times, Jews and white supremacist defenders of Jews were loath to make comparisons between anti-Jewish measures and violence like Russian pogroms and lynchings of African Americans. This was particularly true in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when Jews recognized that the violent Jim Crow society white southerners were constructing also made their own racial status more uncertain. See Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness*, 55, 158.

<sup>65</sup> Marcus Sterne, "Is a Hitleristic Form of Government Possible in the United States?" speech typescript, BHTC.

<sup>66</sup> Temple Club Minutes, July 10, 1933, BHTC.

<sup>67</sup> Dan J. Puckett, "In the Shadow of Hitler: Birmingham's Temple Emanu-El and Nazism," *Southern Jewish History* 11 (2008): 1–40. Zionism had support in Asheville in the 1920s and 1930s. See "25th Anniversary Of B'nai B'rith Lodge Here Is Celebrated," *Asheville Citizen*, December 8, 1937; "Zionist Group to Hear Cowen," *Asheville Citizen*, May 10, 1928; Moses P. Jacobson, "Jew and Gentile," *Reform Advocate*, June 18, 1932, 417.

<sup>68</sup> Moses Jacobson, "Reform Judaism and Zionism," *Southern Israelite*, December 1930, 16, 36 (quote). An unpublished manuscript of this article is in BHTC. Jacobson's retirement in 1934 likely had more to do with the congregation's dire financial straits than his anti-Zionist position. He had already voluntarily decreased his salary in 1930 due to members' financial setbacks, and after his retirement the congregation nearly disbanded. See *Golden Book of Memoirs*, 27.

<sup>69</sup> Puckett, "In the Shadow of Hitler."

<sup>70</sup> Beth Wenger, *History Lessons: The Creation of American Jewish Heritage* (Princeton, 2010), 9.

<sup>71</sup> Moses Jacobson, "Praeterea Consejo Germaniam Esse Delendam," speech or sermon typescript, March 9, 1933, 1, 2, Jacobson Papers.

<sup>72</sup> Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness*, 30, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Jacobson, "Praeterea Conseo Germaniam Esse Delendam," 2, 3.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Richard Starnes, ed., "Introduction," *Southern Journeys: Tourism, History, and Culture in the Modern South* (Tuscaloosa, 2003), 5. See also Edward Ayers, *The Promise of a New South* (New York, 1992); Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill, 2011).

<sup>77</sup> "The Board of Trade of Asheville, NC: What It has Done, What It is Doing, What It is Trying to Do"; "Asheville's first Annual Goodwill Tour, 2/1925"; "Western North Carolina's Second Annual Goodwill Tour, 3/16-28/1926/ under the Auspices and Direction of the Asheville Chamber of Commerce," Buncombe County Pamphlet Collection, North Carolina Collection, Pack Memorial Library, Asheville.

<sup>78</sup> Frank Presbrey, *The Land of the Sky: Western North Carolina, Asheville Plateau* (Buffalo, NY, 1920), 9.

<sup>79</sup> Asheville in "The Land of the Sky," 38, 41, D. H. Ramsey Library Special Collections & University Archives, accessed July 27, 2013, [http://toto.lib.unca.edu/booklets/asheville\\_land\\_of\\_sky/asheville\\_in\\_the\\_land\\_of\\_the\\_sky.htm](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/booklets/asheville_land_of_sky/asheville_in_the_land_of_the_sky.htm).

<sup>80</sup> Richard Starnes, "'A Conspicuous Example of What is Termed the New South': Tourism and Urban Development in Asheville, North Carolina, 1880-1925," *North Carolina Historical Review* 80:1 (2003): 52-80.

<sup>81</sup> Holman D. Waldron, *With Pen and Camera Thro' the "Land of the Sky": Western North Carolina and the Asheville Plateau* (Portland, ME, 1902).

<sup>82</sup> "A Visitor Approves," *Asheville Times*, June 26, 1926.

<sup>83</sup> The *Asheville Citizen* covered the convention extensively, with front-page stories reporting on the convention's proceedings and multiple positive editorials. "Race Prejudice Not Rife In State, Rabbi Declares," *Asheville Citizen*, June 23, 1926. See also the *Asheville Citizen*, June 22-26, 1926.

<sup>84</sup> "Tolerance in North Carolina," *Asheville Citizen*, June 23, 1926. The editorial could have been referring to the KKK, which was very active during this period in Asheville as elsewhere and had held its own convention in Asheville two years earlier.

<sup>85</sup> Richard Starnes, *Creating the Land of the Sky: Tourism and Society in Western North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, AL, 2005), 186, 90; Starnes, *Southern Journeys*, 140.

<sup>86</sup> The *New York Times* ran eight articles on Pelley and his economic and political difficulties between April 25, 1934, and January 23, 1935.

<sup>87</sup> "Manners For Millions," *Asheville Citizen*, April 5, 1938; Fred Seely, Jr., "Outside Influences," in *Our Appalachia*, ed. Laurel Shackelford and Bill Weinberg (New York, 1977), 171-172. Seely characterized the city's residents as "provincial" and recalled that "quite a bit of education" was necessary to convince them to "accept the tourists."

<sup>88</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 99-101.

<sup>89</sup> "Night Shirts Washed Up," *Minneapolis Journal*, August 4, 1938, cited in Eric Severeid, *A Reporter Tells the Truth about the Silver Shirts: An Exposé of Un-American Activities in Minneapolis* (Minneapolis, MN, 1938).

<sup>90</sup> Paul Patton Faris, "Report on the Promotion of Brotherhood Day, 1934," 3, Brotherhood Week Collection, National Conference of Christians and Jews Records, Social Welfare History Archives, Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis. Most of the six southern "mass meetings" were in cities either similar in size or smaller than Asheville, which had a population of just over fifty thousand in 1930. The exception was Dallas, Texas. The others were Hot Springs, Arkansas; Augusta, Georgia, Winston-Salem, North Carolina, and Columbia, Missouri. See Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Buncombe County, North Carolina.

<sup>91</sup> Memo, Mr. Wallach to Mr. Faris, March 21, 1934, Brotherhood Week Collection.

<sup>92</sup> Lt. L. A. Oxley to Miss Adelaide Ruffin, February 11, 1929. Records of the Department of Public Welfare, Consultant for Negro Work, North Carolina State Archives, Raleigh.

<sup>93</sup> Mary Parker, interview conducted by Sarah Judson and Helen Wykle, December 5, 2001, Oral History Collection, RLSC; "Colored Citizens Park," minutes, proceedings of the Board of Commissioners, no. 21, July 17, 1925, 293, Office of the City Clerk, Asheville.

<sup>94</sup> "Speakers Appeal For Religious Tolerance On Brotherhood Day," *Asheville Citizen*, April 30, 1934.

<sup>95</sup> Schultz, *Tri-Faith America*, 30.

<sup>96</sup> "Speakers Appeal For Religious Tolerance"; Moses Jacobson, "Brotherhood Day Address," Jacobson Papers.

<sup>97</sup> "Speakers Appeal For Religious Tolerance."

<sup>98</sup> "Brotherhood Day," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 29, 1934.

<sup>99</sup> "Silver Shirt Forces Meet Difficulties: Asheville Fails To Get Excited Over Being Headquarters," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, April 29, 1934.

<sup>100</sup> Louis Loss and Edward M. Cowett, *Blue Sky Law* (Boston, 1958); Jonathan R. Macey and Geoffrey P. Miller, "Origin of the Blue Sky Laws," *Texas Law Review* 70 (December 1991): 347-397.

<sup>101</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 107.

<sup>102</sup> "Strength in Unity," *Southern Israelite*, April 28, 1939, 35.

<sup>103</sup> Schochet interview.

<sup>104</sup> Ed Petterson, interview conducted by David Schulman, March 22, 1993, JHWNC. Historian Leonard Rogoff also credits Julius Levitch. Rogoff, *Down Home*, 240.

<sup>105</sup> Goldstein interview; Ruth Lowenburg, interview conducted by David Schulman, April 19, 1994; Anne Michelove Kolodkin, interview conducted by David Schulman, March 22, 1994, all in JHWNC. Anne Kolodkin noted that "W. W. Michelove had posed 'as a member and operating as an undercover agent for the Secret Service.'" Schulman, who lived in Asheville, noted that "a couple of people have mentioned to me that they thought that Bill Michelove was sort of like an undercover agent" who worked to bring about Pelley's prosecution. See Marder interview.

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<sup>106</sup> "Jewish Angle Injected Into Pelley's Hearing," *Asheville Citizen*, January 15, 1935.

<sup>107</sup> "Pelley Defense Fails to Prove 'Persecution,'" *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, January 15, 1935.

<sup>108</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 109; Ribuffo, *Old Christian Right*, 71. In addition, Pelley was forced to pay a fine as well as court costs, totaling about seventeen hundred dollars. See Pelley, *The Door to Revelation: An Autobiography* (Asheville, NC, 1939), 469.

<sup>109</sup> Beekman, *Pelley*, 113.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 133; *State v. William Dudley Pelley: In the Matter of the Imprisonment of William Dudley Pelley*, North Carolina Collection, Pack Library, Asheville.

<sup>112</sup> Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 4; Wall, *Inventing the "American Way"*, 7.

<sup>113</sup> Puckett, "Reporting on the Holocaust," 219–251.

<sup>114</sup> Puckett, "In the Shadow of Hitler," 1–40.

<sup>115</sup> Schochet interview.

<sup>116</sup> Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865–1920* (Athens, GA, 1983), 13. See also Karen Cox, *Dixie's Daughters: The United Daughters of the Confederacy and the Preservation of Confederate Culture* (Gainesville, FL, 2003); David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, MA, 2001); Cynthia Mills and Pamela H. Simpson, eds., *Monuments to the Lost Cause: Women, Art, and the Landscapes of Southern Memory* (Knoxville, TN, 2003).

<sup>117</sup> The United Daughters of the Confederacy received permission from the city and county commissioners in December 1937 to erect "a suitable descriptive marker" on the obelisk. See "Marker for Vance Monument," minutes, proceedings of the Board of Commissioners, no. 21, December 2, 1937, 205.

<sup>118</sup> "Tablet is Unveiled to Zebulon Vance in Fitting Exercises," *Asheville Citizen*, May 14, 1938.

<sup>119</sup> "Bronze Tablet Will Be Unveiled Friday on Vance Monument," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, May 8, 1938.





# Black Mountain and Brandeis: Two Experiments in Higher Education

by

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**A**mong the legendary episodes in the history of American higher education are Harvard under Charles W. Eliot and the University of Chicago under Robert M. Hutchins, plus CCNY in the 1930s and Berkeley in the 1960s. Belonging on that small list is the short life of Black Mountain College, located in the foothills of western North Carolina near Asheville. The college was founded in 1933, never got accredited, and vanished in 1956. Thus its life spanned only twenty-three years. But within that period a highly combustible collection of artists and thinkers juiced up the avant-garde and expanded the contours of American culture so strikingly that the temptation to be elegiac cannot easily be resisted. Just as Black Mountain College was declining and facing the prospect of disappearance, another experiment was inaugurated with the establishment of Brandeis University. If survival counts as a minimal test of institutional success, the contrast with the ill-fated bohemia in the Blue Ridge could not be greater. Brandeis, the world's only Jewish-sponsored, non-sectarian university, has remained very much alive nearly two-thirds of a century after its founding in 1948.

This essay seeks to juxtapose these two educational gambles. No one interested in the development of Black Mountain College, however, can fail to express indebtedness to Martin Duberman, whose history, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community*, was published a little over four decades ago. Based on research in the

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North Carolina State Archives in Raleigh and on taped interviews with several veterans of this experiment in democratic community, his book amply conveys how Black Mountain sought to nurture creative impulses and to promote self-fulfillment. Could the author have done an even better job? In the *New York Times Book Review*, reviewer Herbert Leibowitz felt that Duberman should have engaged in comparative history. Lawrence Veysey, a historian of higher education, echoed that objection, expressing the wish that Duberman had “gone farther in the direction of establishing wider resonances and connections.”<sup>1</sup> In comparing both the spectacular accomplishment and the glum fate of Black Mountain College to the first phase of the evolution of Brandeis University, this essay modestly seeks to satisfy such criticism. Apart from the difference in durability, both institutions smacked of the piquancy of cosmopolitanism and exuded an unconventional aura. Both Black Mountain and Brandeis pioneered in challenging and even defying the parochial features of American culture. The framework of Jewish history in the Diaspora is also salient, as is the afterlife of Weimar culture, which for fifteen glorious years, in Peter Gay’s crisp formulation, transformed outsiders into insiders.<sup>2</sup>

*Robert E. Lee Hall, of the Blue Ridge Assembly, North Carolina,  
the site chosen in 1933 for Black Mountain College.  
(Courtesy of Howard Morland, Wikimedia Commons.)*

Both Black Mountain and Brandeis attracted refugees from Germany as well as others who were not quite insiders. They shared some personnel. For example, Erwin Bodky, a pianist and harpsichordist who had studied with Richard Strauss, provided music instruction at Black Mountain and became a full-time member of its faculty soon after World War II. He resigned after the fall semester of 1949 and became the first musician whom Brandeis hired. Five years later Bodky chaired Brandeis's School of Creative Arts. In 1948 Peter Grippe offered classes in sculpture at Black Mountain and, beginning five years later, taught the same subject continuously at Brandeis. Brandeis's student union named Grippe Professor of the Year in 1974, a decade after he won a Guggenheim Fellowship. In 1946 Black Mountain hired the painter Jacob Lawrence, celebrated for his *Migration* series depicting the trek of southern blacks to the North. Nineteen years later, when Brandeis established an artist-in-residence program for students in fine arts, Lawrence became the first honoree. Paul Radin, who studied under Franz Boas at Columbia and specialized in Native Americans, took charge of anthropology at Black Mountain in 1942 and in 1944.<sup>3</sup> Beginning in 1957, Radin taught the subject at Brandeis, although he died two years later.

*Erwin Bodky playing the harpsichord, c. 1950.*  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)

Josef Albers constitutes a special case. He ranks among the luminaries of the Bauhaus, the famous school of design located in Weimar, then in Dessau, and finally, briefly, in Berlin from 1922 until 1933. He and his wife, the weaver and textile designer Anni Albers, fled the Third Reich when the Nazis seized power, and they became instructors at Black Mountain. They resigned in 1949. The following year he became chairman of the Art Department at Yale, and soon began his famous series, "Homage to the Square." The administrative responsibility Albers accepted at Yale ended in 1960. Six years later the Rose Art Museum at Brandeis mounted a major exhibition of his work, which exposed viewers, according to one critic, to "the creation of a rich language of expressive form that utilizes the barest economy of visual elements." The Rose Art Museum, which opened at Brandeis in 1961, displayed the works of other famous artists who served on the faculty or studied at Black Mountain—Franz Kline, Willem de Kooning, Robert Rauschenberg, and Cy Twombly.<sup>4</sup>

Both Black Mountain and Brandeis were noteworthy for the hospitality that they offered to refugees from Germany, Austria, and Czechoslovakia in particular. The opportunity that the college gave to vulnerable academicians and artists was fortuitous, especially since the college was founded in the year that marked the end of the Weimar Republic. In the 1930s, when antisemitism was commonplace in the American academy, the willingness of Black Mountain to provide a safe harbor for a few of the escapees from Nazi-occupied Europe before the Final Solution was imposed and when it mattered is especially striking. Because Brandeis came into existence three years after the defeat of the Third Reich (and coincidentally in the same year that Israel was founded), the campus in Waltham, Massachusetts, could not directly serve as a haven for refugees or save anyone from the flames. But Brandeis did attract to its faculty a few of the survivors from the catastrophe of totalitarianism and global warfare. The post-Holocaust era obliged some members of the Brandeis community to face the terrible, ineffable implications of what had happened; and they preserved fragments of a world that had vanished.

*Josef Albers, front center, with his drawing class, c. 1939–1940.  
(Photo by Robert Haas, courtesy of the Western Regional Archives,  
State Archives of North Carolina.)*

No one who has examined the Black Mountain experiment has failed to admire the pluck with which it envisioned higher education. Talented faculty found themselves deposited in a small rustic setting, and, in this backwoods bohemia, epiphanies of youthful self-exploration might be expected. Such interaction, the founders of the college believed, would trump the formal advancement of knowledge. They made fixed regulations taboo. They wanted a Black Mountain education to be unstructured and

carefree, which is why the curriculum did not include required courses. Nor did the faculty even bother to record formal grades for student work, which was not punctuated with frequent examinations to measure progress.<sup>5</sup> Black Mountain reduced and even obliterated the gap between teacher and student, emphasized interaction instead of formal lecturing, and integrated the challenges of learning within a pattern of joint living.

Thus the institution that founding president John Andrew Rice had imagined in breaking away from Rollins College in Winter Park, Florida, represented a gallant and singular achievement. When the president of Rollins had fired the classicist, half a dozen others either resigned in protest or were dismissed as well; and from that turmoil was born an institution that reveled in its own iconoclasm. Black Mountain, which could scarcely fit into the conventional understanding of higher education, proved to be especially important for the stateless and the persecuted.

Rice's decision to hire Josef Albers, who initially spoke little English, merits appreciation as "perhaps the key decision in Black Mountain's early years," according to Martin Duberman, the author of the only full-scale scholarly history of the institution. Albers's wife, the former Anni Fleischmann, had studied with Paul Klee and also belonged to the Bauhaus.<sup>6</sup> She claimed to be "Jewish in the Hitler sense" only,<sup>7</sup> which meant that conversion from Judaism and adherence to Lutheranism permeated her wealthy and assimilated family. Hers was a mixed marriage. Josef Albers was a Roman Catholic, while she remained a Lutheran. An Irish governess had taught her English, enabling Anni Albers to converse with the American architect Philip Johnson in Berlin, as the menace of Nazism was gaining political momentum. Her weavings impressed Johnson. When Rice asked him to recommend an artist to take charge of the new college's academic program, Johnson unhesitatingly named Josef Albers. Her weavings, his wife later claimed, thus became their passports to America. Brandishing non-quota visas, the Alberses arrived at the college in November 1933. The inflection of agrarianism that marked Black Mountain clashed to some extent with the dynamism of Weimar culture and the Bauhaus that aspired to harness

the power of industrialism rather than to reject it. But Josef and Anni Albers helped make the college into a backcountry version of the experimentalism that had ignited the scintillating power of German art after the Great War. The refugee couple turned Black Mountain into a kind of bucolic Bauhaus.<sup>8</sup>

*Anni Albers - Weaving, Rolling Thread.*

*(Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.)*

Their great-nephew, the literary scholar Christopher Benfey, has claimed that Josef Albers “ran Black Mountain College during the 1930s and 1940s, when its tremendous impact on American culture was greatest.” This claim would have come as something of a surprise to the tempestuous John Andrew Rice, or others including Robert Wunsch and Theodore Dreier who, besides Albers, served as administrative officers (called rectors). Benfey’s claim also implicitly validates the charge that Black Mountain did not add up to much of a college, because the physical, natural, and social sciences were quite peripheral. It was primarily an arts institute, bereft of an extensive liberal arts curriculum. But there is no denying the influence of the Alberses, who “taught via materi-



als; their deepest lessons lay in the contrast of textures — brick and wood, pebble and leaf.” In the late 1940s, two of the nation’s best-known postwar painters, Kenneth Noland and Robert Rauschenberg, took classes with Albers, the modernist master who — in the words of the first director of the Rose Art Museum — “helped revolutionize the visual vocabulary of art.” In 1949, when the couple resigned, New York’s Museum of Modern Art devoted an exhibition to Anni’s work, the first show mounted by the museum to honor a weaver.<sup>9</sup> At Black Mountain another veteran of the Bauhaus joined them in 1936, but the theatrical experimentation of Alexander Schawinsky proved to be too bold even for this innovative college, and he departed after two years.<sup>10</sup>

Other gifted refugees also became important teachers in other arts. For example, Duberman called Heinrich Jalowetz “probably the most beloved figure in Black Mountain’s history.” Born in what became Czechoslovakia, he had specialized in musicology at the University of Vienna and joined Arnold Schoenberg’s first composition class. For three decades Jalowetz had served as a conductor in Europe, and he became the first to perform the works of Schoenberg, Hindemith, Webern, and Berg, among others. In 1933, while conducting opera in Cologne, Jalowetz was dismissed as a “non-Aryan” and spent the next three years in Vienna, where a Czech passport luckily protected him. After the *Anschluss*, the Third Reich’s bloodless acquisition of Austria, he and his wife fled to the United States, where he applied for a job at Black Mountain.<sup>11</sup>

The letter of recommendation that Schoenberg sent to the college in 1939 remains thrilling to read. “Among several hundreds of pupils who passed through my forty years of teaching,” Schoenberg wrote from Los Angeles, Jalowetz ranked among the half dozen “who always were the dearest to me.” From the beginning, Schoenberg claimed to have recognized Jalowetz’s “great talent, his sincerity [*sic*] and his ambition to do the very best a real artist could aim for.” Schoenberg often attended the opera performances that Jalowetz conducted in Germany and Austria, “which made me very proud of my pupil.” The composer added: “He is really a lovely man . . . warm, enthusiastic, industrious . . .

and always eager to expand his knowledge of every field available to a man of his background." The candidate also offered to provide endorsements from such giants as Otto Klemperer and Bruno Walter.<sup>12</sup> The influence that Jalowetz exerted at Black Mountain College was abbreviated, however, for he died early in 1946, only seven years after his arrival.

*Heinrich Jalowetz, second from the right,  
and several Black Mountain College students, c. 1939.  
(Photo by Robert Haas, courtesy of the Western Regional Archives,  
State Archives of North Carolina.)*

Among Jalowetz's successors was Charlotte Schlesinger, who had tutored musicians in Berlin, Vienna, and Russia. Frederic "Fritz" Cohen and his wife Elsa Kahl, both German-born, came in 1942. Cohen had cofounded and codirected a ballet company in

which Kahl performed as a soloist; and he later directed the Juilliard Opera Theater.<sup>13</sup>

Others at Black Mountain enriched the limited curriculum outside the arts. Max Wilhelm Dehn had served as a professor of mathematics at the University of Frankfurt but was arrested during *Kristallnacht*. By the end of 1938, however, Dehn managed to flee Nazi Germany through Scandinavia, the Soviet Union, and Japan before eventually finding a haven in one patch of the planet—North Carolina. (To be in exile, Bertolt Brecht wrote, meant “changing our country more often than our shoes.”) From 1945 until his death in 1952, Dehn was the only mathematician on the faculty, although he also offered popular courses on Plato and ethics. Richard Gothe, with a doctorate in economics from the University of Berlin, taught that subject at Black Mountain. Both the mother and wife of psychologist Erwin Straus were classified as “Aryan,” but because his father was Jewish, Straus needed to escape from the Third Reich. He joined the faculty in 1938.<sup>14</sup> Born in Frankfurt in 1891, Straus enjoyed a very solid reputation in his field—or rather fields, because he was also a philosopher. Straus pursued innovative work in what became known as phenomenological existentialism. One staffer who examined his file concluded: “He would be a good acquisition because of his scientific attitude and training; his aesthetic and creative interests; and his personality.” Straus remained at Black Mountain for six years.<sup>15</sup>

Although these refugees tended to distance themselves from the chummy, touchy-feely ethos that the college championed, their students and their fellow teachers attested to their impact, their authoritative pedagogy, and their formidable erudition.<sup>16</sup> The hospitality of the college ensures its place in the very lively scholarly field that has come to be known as *Exilforschung* (exile research). Only the University in Exile, a division of the New School for Social Research in New York, as well as the black colleges in the rigidly segregated South, could be praised as comparable in the warmth of the welcome that Black Mountain offered to the scorned and desperate artists and academicians fleeing the Third Reich.

Black Mountain also hired as teachers Jews who had not needed passports or visas to survive. These second-generation Americans of eastern European descent differed from the refugees from highly emancipated backgrounds in *Mitteleuropa*. It was commonly the case that the ferocious and systemic hatred of Hitler had made these Germans and Austrians into Jews (though not necessarily good Jews). The Americans whose families had stemmed so recently from Poland and Russia tended to be more inescapably ethnic; their *Yiddishkeit* was palpable. The brevity of their appointments, however (often at summer institutes), meant that Black Mountain exuded little of an emphatically Jewish aura. Despite their limited service, the luster that such teachers added to the college remains impressive. For example, Ben Shahn, who later produced an elegant Haggadah (1965), taught painting and photography.<sup>17</sup> Aaron Siskind also offered instruction in the art of photography. Alfred Kazin, the future author of *New York Jew* (1978), taught literature in 1944. Four years later he helped persuade the institution to hire Isaac Rosenfeld to teach literature and writing. Presumably it did not hurt Rosenfeld's chances that another letter of recommendation came from the political philosopher Hannah Arendt, who described him as "gifted," and as possessing "charm," "judgement" and "warmth."<sup>18</sup>

#### *A Question of Prejudice*

Such institutional exemption from the academic antisemitism that marked the era makes the inclusiveness of Black Mountain seem almost too good to be true. In fact, it was. Not even this progressive institution could entirely emancipate itself from the widespread presumption that too many Jews would adversely affect the social atmosphere of learning. Black Mountain explicitly addressed the issue of whether the Jewish presence was too pronounced for so tiny a college. Frederick R. Mangold, who served as secretary while teaching Romance languages, was proud of the "policy of taking [so] many refugee scholars on our faculty." But because its composition was "quite small," he informed the director of the Institute of International Education of the limits that had

to be imposed upon the number of the foreign-born "we can assimilate at any given time."<sup>19</sup> Black Mountain was certainly less prejudiced against Jews than many more prestigious and tradition-encrusted institutions of higher learning. "To hate the Negro and avoid the Jew/Is the curriculum," Karl Shapiro bitterly proclaimed in his 1940 poem, "University." He had attended the University of Virginia, but his excoriation of discrimination is confirmed in a spate of scholarly works devoted to policies of hiring and admission, especially in the Ivy League.<sup>20</sup> Archival research has revealed that during the Great Depression, even letters of recommendation betrayed the commonplace scope of academic bias. For example, Daniel J. Boorstin was "a Jew, though not the kind to which one takes exception." Another promising historian, Oscar Handlin, was praised for having "none of the offensive traits which some people associate with his race."<sup>21</sup>

This was the sea of prejudice in which Black Mountain College was obliged to swim, and again there, too, discussions took place concerning limits that might be placed upon the number of Jewish students and faculty. Discussants could not agree upon the exact proportion, however. Theodore Dreier, a physicist and mathematician, wondered, for example, whether more than ten percent of the student body should be Jewish.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, a quota for Jewish applicants for admission went undefined, and whatever informal barrier may have been set at Black Mountain seems to have been easily scaled.<sup>23</sup> The aura of discrimination that did fester was directed in particular at candidates who came across as "too Jewish." For their own good, it was argued, their admission could in fairness be rejected, because they would not smoothly adapt to a community in rural North Carolina.<sup>24</sup>

Black Mountain College was hardly unique in confronting a challenge to the social definition and texture of the institution, a test of identity that qualified Jewish supplicants presumably posed. Elsewhere, the American academy in the interwar era showed very little desire to accommodate itself to the influx of a minority that might well alter the character of the campus. Exactly a decade after the issue surfaced at Black Mountain, Brandeis University was founded to ensure that no qualified Jewish appli-

cant would face such obstacles. The same policy was designed to apply to faculty hires at Brandeis, a Jewish-sponsored university explicitly envisioned to repudiate any discriminatory practice. If a justification for the birth of Brandeis could be traced to the policy at Black Mountain, the case would stand or fall with an economist named Maure Leonard Goldschmidt.

Black Mountain expected the funding to fill the opening for which Goldschmidt was considered to come from the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. The antecedents of its endowment had come from the mining fortune of a Swiss-Jewish immigrant, Meyer Guggenheim. The foundation was especially devoted to the patronage of scholarship and the arts. In the inter-war period, wealthy Jews could often be counted on to be generous to both Jewish and general causes—but rich gentiles were rarely asked to confront the international crisis inflamed by Nazi antisemitism. The Rockefeller Foundation, for example, agreed to help refugee scholars after 1933. But John D. Rockefeller, Jr., was personally reluctant to become a “Christian martyr” (his term) all by himself, and told an official of the League of Nations High Commission for Refugees that the Rockefeller Foundation could continue to subsidize such relocation only “if four or five large Christian contributions could be secured.” Unfortunately even the Carnegie Corporation, this official noted, was already “beginning to tire of the refugee problem,” and was running out of patience as early as 1935.<sup>25</sup> Those gifts did not come through; and just as Jewish donors were responsible for establishing the only chairs in Jewish thought and Jewish history at Harvard and Columbia, respectively, Black Mountain College asked the Guggenheim Foundation to underwrite the hiring of Goldschmidt in 1938. The situation then grew more complex.

A specialist in the field of public administration, Goldschmidt brandished bachelor’s degrees from Reed and Oxford. Competing with a historian, Gerald Barnes, the economist faced potential impediments to his candidacy. Goldschmidt had not yet earned a doctorate from the University of Chicago, and he was married (a status that was relevant to a community that prized togetherness, perhaps even over privacy). Black Mountain had

just hired Erwin Straus, and bringing Goldschmidt on board would immediately have added another Jew to the faculty. Dreier, who had helped found the college, expressed his concern to the Board of Fellows, in reporting a conversation with Robert Wunsch, who taught theater.

Wunsch exercised special authority on campus. While serving as drama coach at Rollins College, he had proposed the site where the breakaway faculty would establish the new college in western North Carolina. He had imagined how a group of buildings, dominated by Robert E. Lee Hall and owned by the Blue Ridge Assembly of the Protestant Church, could form the campus of an institution of higher learning. (In the summers during the 1930s, the Blue Ridge Assembly regained control of the campus to sponsor religious conferences—or, as Mangold once exclaimed, “nine hundred vegetarian nincompoops . . . the damndest thing I ever saw.”)<sup>26</sup> Wunsch, a native of North Carolina, had attended the state university at Chapel Hill where he briefly roomed with an ambitious young writer from Asheville, Thomas Wolfe. (Wunsch, a homosexual, hurriedly and permanently departed the college in 1945 after the police discovered him in a parked car committing “crimes against nature” with a member of the Marine Corps.)<sup>27</sup> Among the Black Mountain faculty, Wunsch and Dreier perhaps showed the greatest candor in expressing themselves on the subject of the implications of Goldschmidt’s Jewishness.

Wunsch and Dreier agreed that “we could not ignore the racial factor in considering the Barnes-Goldschmidt decision. We both wished that we did not have to consider this, but both of us felt that it would be a great mistake to have Goldschmidt, aside from other considerations (which in themselves make me favor Barnes).” Dreier drew a comparison to the admission of female applicants. Too many female applicants to the student body, he explained, would mean that “we won’t get anything but girls. And if we have too many Jews, we won’t get anything but Jews, which would be a mistake, I think.” Wunsch argued that Black Mountain would miss a historian more than an economist, and he therefore preferred Barnes. Dreier “is strongly against our taking on the Goldschmidts because they are Jewish,” Wunsch

noted, "and I think he is justified in considering that aspect of the problem." It would constitute "an overbalance." "If we should take on the Goldschmidts," Dreier reportedly warned, then "we would have our full quota of Jewish faculty members." For his own sake, Goldschmidt should not be hired, Dreier warned. Moreover, because Goldschmidt's work in economics was dismissed as "second-rate," the future availability of an abler candidate would obligate Black Mountain to dismiss Goldschmidt.

According to Dreier, the Board of Fellows also solicited the opinion of the most famous refugee on the faculty. With twenty solo shows in the United States between 1933 and 1945, Albers had achieved greater recognition in his adopted land than he had ever managed to earn at the Bauhaus. Nonetheless, he did not object to lifting the gangplank behind him. Disclaiming sufficient knowledge of what he delicately called "the racial situation" of "colleges in this country," Albers remained neutral amid this conflict over the hiring of a Jewish refugee. Mangold realized that the need to include an economist on the faculty was also at issue, and others noted that Black Mountain lacked the resources to offer a salary that would attract either "a first-rate economist" or "a first-rate Jew." Wunsch acknowledged, "we can afford only second-class teachers at this time." Although favoring Goldschmidt over Barnes in terms of individual merit, Mangold added, "I do not believe that the fact that Goldschmidt is Jewish has any bearing whatsoever on the decision." The importance of antisemitism as a factor in the choice of Barnes, who was hired for the 1938-1939 academic year, cannot be conclusively ascertained; and Duberman's book fails to mention the episode at all.<sup>28</sup>

Two years later another murky situation occurred at Harvard, which forfeited the chance to keep a first-rate Jew who was also a first-rate economist: Paul Samuelson. Although elected to the Society of Fellows, "Antisemitism blunted Samuelson's prospects," two historians of Harvard assert, and so he adorned the faculty of MIT instead. Discrimination may not have been the only factor that caused Harvard to lose a future Nobel laureate, but it apparently was a factor.<sup>29</sup>



When Black Mountain College was in its prime, Jews could hardly claim to be the chief victims of the commonplace processes of bigotry. Until the postwar era, only two blacks could be seen at the college—and they served as cooks.<sup>30</sup> The institution was, according to a Brooklyn-born sculptor and arts teacher, David Weinrib, “a northern college in the South,” but the regional mores could not be directly and openly challenged. When Jim Crow was the law of the South, the security of Black Mountain as a hotbed of experimentation could easily be imperiled. It was, after all, “an alien presence” from the perspective of its conservative neighbors, historian Leonard Rogoff maintains. In the year that Black Mountain was founded, the governing body considered an invitation to an African American guest. But “the Board of Fellows, without consulting the students or even all members of the tiny faculty, decided that although it unanimously disagreed with local mores, it would be safer to respect them,” Duberman concluded. He added that no one at Black Mountain believed in or defended the segregation that pervaded the region. Yet to defy white supremacy would risk the safety of the community and even undermine the chances of institutional survival. “Locked into a hillside in the heartland of white fundamentalism,” the leadership of the college, Duberman added, feared that the arrival of a black visitor “would probably have been suicidal” for the institution.<sup>31</sup>

The South was nevertheless changing, however glacially. Consider what happened a little more than a decade later to Ernst Manasse, a refugee scholar who taught philosophy and German at North Carolina College for Negroes (later North Carolina Central University). Manasse recommended a black colleague, who taught economics and served as the campus minister, for membership in the Southern Society for the Philosophy of Religion. The recommendation was rejected; after all, the hotels where the society conducted its meetings would certainly refuse to accommodate Manasse’s colleague. Manasse thereupon resigned from the society. But that gesture soon produced a surprise: the organization decided to change its whites-only policy.<sup>32</sup> Another sign of change occurred in 1943, when Black Mountain College dared to celebrate

Negro History Week. The program included lectures by the faculty and invitations to black high school teachers from Asheville as guests on campus. The YMCA and YWCA soon sponsored an interracial conference there as well.

A troubling question remained, however. Should black applicants to Black Mountain College be admitted as early as the fall 1944 semester? That question provoked genuine controversy, and from January through April an open debate raged. (In that same year Gunnar Myrdal published *An American Dilemma*.) Oddly enough, matriculation would probably not have been illegal. The North Carolina legislature had not enacted any laws expressly prohibiting racial integration in higher education, perhaps because no elected politician had been imaginative enough to foresee such a challenge to Jim Crow. Besides, even if such a law had been passed, it might not have affected an unaccredited college.<sup>33</sup> Black Mountain's ethos was so liberal that everyone on the faculty favored desegregation—in principle. Anthropologist Paul Radin also favored it in practice. He claimed that he was “always a radical” and that the faculty knew his politics when he was hired. The son of a rabbi, Radin nonetheless espoused Marxism.<sup>34</sup> The Jalowetzes and the Cohens joined him in favoring the immediate admission of black students. However other refugees, including the cautious Alberses and especially Straus, feared what they called “precipitous action.” The timing was wrong, they argued. With only fifty students enrolled, Black Mountain's very existence might be jeopardized. Local merchants might boycott the college, and the possibility of violence could not be ignored.<sup>35</sup> Critics of “precipitous” desegregation may not have acknowledged the connection between European Judeophobia and American racism. But they were certainly aware of their luck in finding refuge at Black Mountain and securing gainful employment among strangers. Why take chances, they asked, with so much at stake?

The split in the faculty was therefore understandable, and the debate so intense that the community was ripped apart. Those reluctant to risk the viability of the institution for the sake of racial justice ended up on the losing side, and champions of a limited

policy of desegregation emerged victorious. The faculty agreed that in 1945 the Music and Art Institutes would admit two African Americans. A fund that the Jewish philanthropist Julius Rosenwald of Chicago had established would provide their scholarships and expenses. The college subsequently admitted a full-time black student and hired a black faculty member. The new policy was also gender-specific. Rather than activate the notorious southern rape complex, the new members of the community would all have to be women. Their status remained insecure. The first to arrive at Black Mountain came from the rural South and were somehow expected to blend into a sophisticated, all-white student body, many of whom had grown up in northern cities. This was a guarantee of discomfort and displacement, if not alienation. Moreover escape from such pressures was impossible. Black students who ventured into nearby towns or Asheville were thrown back into a system of humiliation and exclusion and were obligated to respect the laws and customs of white supremacy. So black students rarely left the campus. No wonder then that, of the first five who matriculated at Black Mountain College, four failed to return for the fall semester in 1947. Estranged by the color line and finding the culture of the institution foreign, very few blacks applied thereafter.<sup>36</sup> Thanks to this premature episode of desegregation, Black Mountain College thus shares with so much else in the marrow of southern experience the entanglements of race and place.

Although ultimately spared spasms of violence, "Black Mountain was surrounded by the fiercest suspicion," Alfred Kazin recalled. In this respect Brandeis University was far luckier. Differences in social texture between the two sections of the nation should be noted here, to provide historical context. *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, which currently runs to twenty-four volumes, is a reference work that is as close to comprehensive as any reader could conceive. The entire Volume 19 is devoted to the subject of "Violence." By contrast *The Encyclopedia of New England* consists of only one hefty volume, scrutinizing half as many states.<sup>37</sup> Its editors include no section or chapter on violence, a term that does not even appear in the index. Nor, beginning in the 1950s, did any state nurture more klaverns than did North Caroli-

na, where membership in the United Klans of America exceeded that of all the other states of the former Confederacy combined.<sup>38</sup> Pockets of liberalism and tolerance certainly existed in the South, not least in North Carolina itself; and regional differences should not be exaggerated for the sake of formulating paradigmatic abstractions such as ideal types. But divergence from social and cultural patterns elsewhere in the nation did exist, and visitors to the South could not help commenting upon its distinctiveness. Whites living in the South who recognized the structure of racial injustice could not fail to be aware of how beleaguered and even isolated they were, and how easily the bigots surrounding them could be aroused and inflamed. The geniality of a phrase like “Y’all come back” was rarely extended to “outside agitators” who threatened to destabilize the least educated and most violent section of the nation. The membranes of civilization could be thin indeed.

#### *The Eclipse of an Experiment*

The ubiquity of racial prejudice in the region did not cause the decline and demise of Black Mountain College. But neither can the brevity of this educational experiment be utterly divorced from the pressures of its surroundings. It lacked communal support, the sort of local allegiance and dedication that has enabled far less distinguished colleges elsewhere to survive. Black Mountain was *in* but not *of* North Carolina. Although a black female rabbi, Alysia Stanton, would one day serve a synagogue in Greenville, that milestone would not occur until 2009, when behavioral distinctions between the dictates of custom and the affirmation of nonconformity would blur.<sup>39</sup> In the immediate postwar era, Black Mountain College still came across as a little too bohemian, and so it was almost hermetically sealed off from its neighbors, who were still paying homage to the square and the conventional. The majority of applicants to Black Mountain lived in the Northeast, and came mostly from New York and Massachusetts—a geographic profile that strikingly resembled the applicant pool for Brandeis. In upbringing and experience, neither the students nor the faculty at Black Mountain were programmed to honor the mores of the

host culture, with its suspicion of deviancy and with the moral rigidity of its Protestantism. Religiosity made Buncombe County dry, and the state's Baptists formally prohibited dancing among the faithful.<sup>40</sup> The cosmopolitan character of the college therefore made it anomalous in a region where utopians and experimentalists rarely felt welcome. Black Mountain never managed to lure students from Asheville or its immediate environs. In this regard, Asheville residents Kenneth Noland and his two brothers were quite exceptional. Only in 1956, the year that the college closed, did the North Carolina Museum of Art open to the public as the nation's first state museum; and only later did North Carolina officially promote itself as a petri dish for aesthetic novelty, as "the state of the arts."<sup>41</sup>

*Merce Cunningham at Black Mountain College.*

*(Photo by Hazel Larsen Archer, courtesy of Mondo.blog.blogspot.com.)*

To appreciate the backwardness of the North Carolina of that era, consider the experience of Arthur Miller. He visited the state in late 1941 to record regional accents for the Folklore Division of the Library of Congress. His task was to interview ordinary citizens, and it was Miller's first visit to the South.<sup>42</sup> While meeting with the head of the health service in North Carolina, Miller made the mistake of calling a black man "mister." The physician, previously friendly, was infuriated, and asked Miller to step outside, where he was warned: "You must never address a Negro as 'mister.'" Miller asked: "What am I supposed to call him?" The answer was: "Boy." Miller recalled: "I was twenty-five years old and this man was sixty!" Nor was the doctor's diet a model of healthy eating: "For breakfast he had four small bags of peanuts and two Coca-Colas. In the corner of his office were cases of Coca-Cola. He was the head of the health service of the state of North Carolina!" the future playwright recalled with some astonishment.<sup>43</sup> Such an atmosphere helps account for the isolation of Black Mountain College and may well have reinforced its inward tendency, which enfeebled the institution as well. Its peculiarly democratic, hang-loose character probably guaranteed that Black Mountain would have failed to sustain itself anywhere. But certainly the absence of support from the immediate surroundings did not help.

That sympathizers with liberal educational experimentation did not achieve hegemony in the region is not to deny or disparage its progressive tradition. The most influential of southern historians, C. Vann Woodward, made a career out of the impulse (both professional and personal) to retrieve this tradition, and his successors have included Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, Daniel J. Singal, Sheldon Hackney, Glenda Gilmore, and Patricia Sullivan. Nor was Black Mountain the only experimental institution to locate itself in the South. Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, is perhaps the most famous. But others should also be listed: folk schools like Highlander in Grundy County, Tennessee (which helped shape the activism of Rosa Parks), and John C. Campbell in Brasstown, North Carolina; the Warren Wilson College in Swannanoa, near Black Mountain itself; and the Penland School of Crafts in Spruce Pine, North Carolina.<sup>44</sup> The novelist and critic Lillian Smith

headed Laurel Falls Camp in Georgia, an educational institution devoted primarily to the arts, while achieving national prominence for her unsparing condemnation of white supremacy. These schools shared with Black Mountain a commitment to innovative liberal education. How much weight to attach to their importance in the history of higher education in the South is a question of legitimate scholarly dispute. But what is not debatable is the particular difficulty that Black Mountain itself faced, a tendency that would have doomed the institution even had it been located in much more welcoming climes.

The college confronted and finally could not solve a deeper, internal problem. What sorts of students found Black Mountain congenial? Which applicants would be attracted to an institution that no federal or regional agency ever accredited? Allowing for exceptions like the future film director Arthur Penn (*Bonnie and Clyde*), the students tended to be loners and castoffs who were unsuited for traditional classrooms. Kazin remembered the ambience as “a gallery of the higher neuroticism.” He could not imagine any graduate “who was not a complete intellectual nebbish.”<sup>45</sup> In any case, very few attendees graduated.<sup>46</sup> After all, such certification of academic achievement smacked of bourgeois values rather than the bohemianism of iconoclasts. One graduate, however, was the Jalowetzes’ daughter Elisabeth. She moved from North Carolina to New York to become a stage designer—the vocation of her distinguished husband, Boris Aronson, who designed the sets for *Fiddler on the Roof* and four Stephen Sondheim musicals, as well as other Broadway shows. Perhaps Black Mountain’s most conspicuous failure was the puny size of the applicant pool. The student body never numbered more than ninety, and by 1948 the enrollment had dropped to fifty.<sup>47</sup>

The collegial commitment to self-government hastened the process of self-destruction. The school administration treated outsiders gingerly. Initially the Board of Fellows consisted of some faculty members and included the founding instigator, John Andrew Rice, but no outsiders. Whatever independence was gained and whatever cohesive sense of self-reliance might have been fostered must be weighed against the difficulty of raising the funds

to keep the college viable. Financing was exceedingly precarious. Black Mountain lacked an endowment, a consequence of confining authority to the faculty, which sometimes had to go an entire year without drawing any salary. One can safely assume that, when staff and faculty are not compensated, their tempers are more likely to flare. The austerity of the economic and material conditions may well have fostered strength of character. Nonetheless, tensions were undoubtedly exacerbated, and the task of teaching pro bono probably failed to soften the edges of communal living. During the cold winter of 1954–1955, funds were so depleted that almost no money was left to buy coal, and classes had to be suspended for three months.<sup>48</sup>

The governing approach was supposed to be consensual and democratic. But the community suffered emotionally wrenching cleavages. Even though it treated authority without deference, strong personalities could take advantage of the spirit of mutual respect, triggering divisions that made a mockery of the ideal of *gemeinschaft*. Rice's most noteworthy attributes, according to Martin Duberman's index, included "abrasiveness," "bluntness," and "destructiveness." Such traits surely affected Rice's capacity to make the college viable, a going concern.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, a rather high price of living together was the loss of privacy. With teachers, students, and families thrown into the mix of a holistic community, autonomous space was constricted. The intimacy that was promoted inevitably became too clammy for some of the residents. "There was an extreme demand for love at Black Mountain," Kazin recollected. "No teacher living side by side with so many damaged souls and hungry minds could satisfy it."<sup>50</sup> Anni Albers, a faculty member married to a rector, recalled their exhaustion due to "the constant tension, and the constant lack of privacy, and constant lack of money, and the constant friction."<sup>51</sup>

Too few of the teaching staff willingly bore the burden. Black Mountain could boast of a star-studded faculty, festooned with Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, Lyonel Feininger, Charles Olson, John Cage, Merce Cunningham, Paul Goodman, and Eric Bentley (who became the leading American champion of Brecht). But the luster of avant-garde art could not fully disguise the thinness of



the rest of the curriculum. The 1944 split generated the departures of faculty members who had wanted to accelerate the pace of desegregation. Their withdrawal meant that immediately afterwards no instruction could be given in economics, history, psychology, or languages.<sup>52</sup> No social scientist of professional distinction ever taught there. The sciences were always weak, and, after 1944, they became even weaker. The laboratories and library were so poor that the college never had a chance to earn state accreditation.

Two theoretical physicists constitute partial exceptions, however, to the dearth of scientific talent. The Brooklyn-born, MIT-educated Nathan Rosen served as an assistant to Albert Einstein at Princeton from 1934 until 1936 and fortified the Nobel laureate's resistance to quantum theory. Rosen then taught at Kiev State University in Ukraine, at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill from 1941 to 1953, and finally at the Technion in Haifa. He is credited with playing a pivotal role in elevating the Technion to the status of a world-class scientific institution. But Rosen's formal association with Black Mountain College was confined to a summer session in 1941. Only one important scientist taught there longer: Peter Bergmann. A German-born Jew who reached the United States in 1936, he also served as Einstein's assistant at Princeton from that year until 1941, when Bergmann joined the faculty at Black Mountain. There he finished his first and perhaps most influential book, *Introduction to the Theory of Relativity* (1942). This textbook taught a generation of physicists, including the future Nobel laureate Steven Weinberg, how to grasp and teach general relativity. But Bergmann and his wife, Margot, who taught chemistry at Black Mountain, remained there for only one year.

By 1948 no funds remained for certain staffing positions that might elsewhere have been considered essential. The institution lacked a registrar, a bookkeeper, a dietitian, and a maintenance man. By that year Black Mountain could scarcely pretend to be a college.<sup>53</sup> At mid-century the college's enrollment reached a melancholy state of free fall, down from about forty-five students in the 1949–1950 academic term to about two dozen three years later. The treasury hemorrhaged to the point that the faculty could not

be remunerated. By 1954, nine students—one of whom had attempted suicide—learned whatever Black Mountain professed to offer from even fewer members of the “staff.” A slight bump at the end increased enrollment to twelve and then fifteen students; but the line between them and the teaching staff had become obscured. The poet Robert Duncan, something of a polymath, served as the last great faculty addition. True to the gloriously eccentric spirit that had animated the creation of Black Mountain College, Duncan offered a course in Persian history.<sup>54</sup> In a typical year of that final decade, fewer students were attending the college than the number of astronauts who have landed on the moon.

Black Mountain had been established after a crisis of intellectual freedom at Rollins College, and the faculty and administration learned the value of academic self-governance a little too well. The origins of Brandeis University were quite different.

#### *An Experiment Near Boston*

It emerged from the sting of antisemitism that had afflicted many of the nation’s stellar colleges and universities—roughly in Brandeis University’s own neighborhood. The force of academic antisemitism in the Northeast in particular, in an era when Jewish applicants for admission faced few such barriers in the South, is a warning against the tendency to emphasize prejudice in one region. Founded not by disgruntled faculty but mostly by Jewish businessmen based in Boston, Brandeis was located about a dozen miles west of the city in the largely working-class town of Waltham. There the founding trustees took over the financially strapped Middlesex University (also known as Middlesex Medical School). It had an unaccredited veterinary program and a charter for its medical program that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts threatened to revoke. The founders enlisted the involvement of Albert Einstein. Einstein had found a haven in the United States a decade and a half earlier, but was dismayed by the extent of campus antisemitism.<sup>55</sup> The trustees of the new institution completed the transaction and took full control in 1947, while the death rattle of Black Mountain College could already be faintly heard. The first class of Brandeis students was to be admitted in the early fall

of the following year, and the trustees selected Abram L. Sachar, a scholar of Jewish history, as the first president. Academics had founded Black Mountain College, but Brandeis began under very different auspices. Of its eight founders, only three had earned college degrees. Only one of the initial trustees, Dudley Kimball, a holdover from the Middlesex University board, was a non-Jew. Of the other five pioneering trustees, only one was native-born. None of the remaining four had even graduated from high school, nor could they speak an unaccented English.<sup>56</sup>

*The Irving and Edyth Usen Castle, Waltham, Massachusetts, 1940s.  
Formerly the site of Middlesex Medical School,  
this was the original home of Brandeis University.  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

*Albert Einstein and the "New England Associates," Princeton, 1947.  
Prominent Jews from the Boston area met in Einstein's home to support  
establishing a non-sectarian Jewish sponsored university in Waltham.  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

Unsurprisingly, these novices betrayed little familiarity with the intricacies of academic life. One trustee, for instance, apparently did not realize that teaching loads are reckoned in terms of hours per week. Having asked a young faculty member, historian Leonard W. Levy, how much he taught and getting the answer "twelve hours," the trustee thought for a moment and commented: "That's a pretty good working day. President Sachar sure expects a lot from his faculty."<sup>57</sup> In building the university, Sachar depended on the philanthropy of such businessmen, especially

nouveaux-riches Jews who had come—or whose parents had come—from eastern Europe.<sup>58</sup> One of them, Jacob Goldfarb, funded the library. Upon learning that Sachar was intending to sell off each room to other donors, Goldfarb gallantly offered to remove his own name from the library so that the president could sell it all over again.<sup>59</sup> Sachar gave these mostly self-made entrepreneurs a chance to feel that they could give something back to a nation that had enabled them to prosper. In the Old World such merchants might have been disdained as parvenus. But in Waltham they were elevated, through Sachar's charm, eloquence, and persistence, into patrons of learning. Sachar's fund-raising skills were legendary. However fragile the new university's financial condition might be, it was enviable compared to the desperation of Black Mountain's.

Nor was Brandeis insulated from its environment. Although the earliest trustees lived in the surrounding area, their reach was national, and they aspired to enlist the sponsorship of Jews throughout the United States. Brandeis was more academically ambitious than Black Mountain College. By 1953 the university had set what a historian of Massachusetts higher education called "a regional speed record," getting full accreditation from the New England Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools.<sup>60</sup> Brandeis had graduated its first senior class only a year earlier. A free-wheeling and unconventional hiring policy also produced, according to a leading historian of Jewish academicians, "probably the nation's most bizarre faculty."<sup>61</sup> The lone exception to that claim was undoubtedly Black Mountain itself. The two institutions shared an unorthodox willingness to dispense with formal credentials. Interdepartmental barriers could be easily scaled at Brandeis, which encouraged "a passion for the place," Levy recalled. "And everyone was a little off-center or unconventional in some significant way. . . . Brandeis was different, really different."<sup>62</sup>

Hiring seemed to come out of nowhere. None was more unusual than the appointment of the drama critic Louis Kronenberger, who had been a staff writer for *Fortune*, even though he had never earned an undergraduate degree. So why not encourage him to

offer courses in modern and Restoration comedy? The nascent Department of Theater Arts needed those subjects to be taught, and Kronenberger had become the chief Broadway reviewer for *Time* when he agreed to commute between New York and Waltham beginning in 1951. It seems superfluous to add that Kronenberger lacked a degree in library science. So why not also put him in charge of the library? The books were shelved in the former stables of the defunct veterinary school. Many of the initial thousand volumes or so consisted of medical and veterinary texts, as well as popular fiction more suitable for summer beaches than for the stacks. However, the collection expanded quickly and dramatically. In 1951, for example, Brandeis received treasures from the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction Collection, which Hannah Arendt and others had helped salvage immediately after the war from the ruins of Jewish libraries in Nazi-occupied Europe, especially from German and Austrian institutions. Kronenberger was nevertheless an odd choice. Because of his tight schedule as a commuter, his time on the campus consisted mostly of delivering lectures on drama, so he had barely set foot in the library. He recalled protesting to Sachar that “about libraries I knew nothing, not even about the Dewey Decimal System—which, for that matter, Brandeis didn’t use” anyway.<sup>63</sup> Perfect!

The most famous faculty member at Black Mountain College was undoubtedly R. Buckminster Fuller, whose family had attended Harvard for five generations. He wanted the young “to reform the environment instead of trying to reform man.”<sup>64</sup> But he was apolitical. By contrast the most famous theorist in the history of Brandeis was a German-born radical. Herbert Marcuse came to the campus in 1954 as a professor of politics with a joint appointment in the History of Ideas program. Like the sociologist Lewis Coser and the literary critic Irving Howe, who cofounded the socialist journal *Dissent* on the campus in the same year, Marcuse had never held a full-time tenured position before coming to Brandeis. When it offered him the first professorship that he ever held, he was fifty-four years old. It says something about the heterodox manner of recruitment that the list of the English-language publications on his CV consisted of exactly one book, a revision of

his dissertation on Hegel published thirteen years earlier, plus one book review.

*Buckminster Fuller (white hair) and students reconstructing  
and demonstrating the dome, summer 1949.*

*The man on the right is Josef Albers.*

*(Courtesy of the Western Regional Archives, State Archives of North Carolina.)*

Marcuse cut an incongruous figure in a decade when the nation's most popular work of nonfiction (other than the Bible, which was not classified as fiction) was the Reverend Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*. Marcuse insisted on the value of negative thinking, of ideological opposition to industrial and consumer capitalism. He exalted what he later called "the great refusal," and his 1955 *Eros and Civilization* imagines a

utopia utterly bereft of sexual repression. No one could have foreseen during the 1950s the stunning, imminent emergence of an international New Left, much less that Marcuse would often be designated as its unofficial faculty advisor. In 1968, at the crest of the radical movement, protesting students at the University of Rome, for instance, brandished signs with the alliterative names of Marx, Mao, and Marcuse.<sup>65</sup> As one of the marquee names of Marxist thought, Marcuse also remains the only past or present Brandeis faculty member whom the Vatican ever explicitly and specifically condemned. Singling out Freud and Marcuse in 1969, Pope Paul VI denounced the “disgusting and unbridled” manifestations of eroticism, the “animal, barbarous and subhuman degradations” that were “cloaked as liberty” and packaged as emancipation “from conventional scruples.” His Eminence’s exco-riation sounds like the caricature of Black Mountain College that its own local enemies portrayed; and a later Pope echoed the hostility to *Eros and Civilization* by reassuring the faithful that in heaven, unlike earth, there is no sex.<sup>66</sup>

*Herbert Marcuse lecturing at Brandeis in the 1960s.*  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)



The arts at their best are sublime and provide pleasure, and the curriculum at Black Mountain was designed primarily for aesthetes who could be bewitched by sonnets and sonatas. Because the rustic Carolina locale was politically uncongenial, it undoubtedly reinforced a tendency toward disengagement from civic life. The stance that Black Mountain took toward American society was not notably adversarial or critical, but it could be described as more of a defensive crouch. Here, too, the contrast with Brandeis must be highlighted. From the beginning Brandeis adopted a position that was emphatically on the left—or at least allergic to conservatism. Commencement speakers in the early years were invariably pillars of the Democratic Party: Eleanor Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, Senator Paul H. Douglas of Illinois, and Dean Acheson, who had been a former law clerk to Justice Louis Brandeis. In September 1957, when the new first-year class arrived, four faculty speakers participated in a program to welcome the freshmen. The speakers lined up as unstintingly progressive: Democrat John P. Roche of the Department of Politics, and a future national chairman of the liberal Americans for Democratic Action; the social democrat and former Trotskyist Irving Howe of the Department of English; and two colleagues even further to their left—Stanley Diamond of the Department of Anthropology and, speaking on the topic of “The Nuisance Value of a University,” Herbert Marcuse.<sup>67</sup>

Brandeis situated itself in a state where abolitionism had flourished a century earlier and where sympathy for civil rights in postwar America confronted little resistance. Black Mountain could not easily have made operational sentiments like racial egalitarianism, but the policies of the newly founded university in Massachusetts reflected an ideal of social justice. In the effort to play institutional host in a more open society, Brandeis deliberately broke barriers in the effort to include African Americans. The nation’s leading black magazine certainly appreciated a pledge of nondiscrimination in admissions. “America’s newest university,” *Ebony* proclaimed in 1952, “operates on a set of democratic principles which could easily serve as goals for every other university in the United States. There are no quotas

*Abram L. Sachar and a group of freshmen in his home,  
a welcoming tradition created by the Brandeis president.  
This group displays the diversity of Brandeis's student body.  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

limiting students of any religion and no racial barriers at Brandeis University."<sup>68</sup>

The tribute that *Ebony* paid was explicit. In a spread that ran even before any student graduated from Brandeis, the magazine emphasized that application forms for admission did not inquire into either race or religion and that "no fraternities or exclusive invitational clubs" or secret societies existed on the campus. The "University uses attractive pictures of Negro students in its school calendar and brochures," the monthly added. The result was that eight black students plus one faculty member, physicist Robert A. Thornton, could be found on the Brandeis campus. Theresa Danley, for example, was portrayed in *Ebony* with her Jewish and

Catholic roommates, though the magazine noted that blacks wishing to be domiciled with other blacks enjoyed the right to do so. Of the six males in this cohort, five played on the varsity football team. A photo showed one black player, Robert Griffin, dancing with a white coed. Such camaraderie was what the concurrent, legal segregation of southern institutions of higher learning was designed to avoid. One black student, Glenda Graham, told *Ebony* that she preferred to eat kosher in the Brandeis cafeteria: "The line is shorter and I love the way the food tastes." Another undergraduate added: "I feel just as if there are all Negro students here. That signifies just how relaxed I am."<sup>69</sup> The contrast with the simultaneous plight of the handful of black students at Black Mountain College is obvious. In 1967, when guard K. C. Jones retired from the Boston Celtics, Brandeis immediately hired him to coach varsity basketball. He may have been the first black coach of a major sport – not merely basketball – to be hired in any predominantly "white" institution.<sup>70</sup>

#### *Vestiges of Weimar*

The histories of both Black Mountain and Brandeis incorporate the saga of the migration of people and ideas from Europe to the United States. But their histories diverge, because surroundings do matter. The mind of the South, for example, exalts fidelity to roots, and therefore at least some of the fortunate survivors from central Europe would continue to feel uncertain and wary in the region. But diasporic Jewry reveals a pattern that is less about roots than about routes – and one destination was Waltham, Massachusetts. There Brandeis could miraculously revive elements of the culture of pre-Nazi Germany. The quest to define a coherent patrimony among the refugee intellectuals and artists, the effort to specify what they shared as well as what differentiated them from others, is bound to be elusive. No historian could plausibly invoke a commonality of vision that would bind, say, Josef Albers and Herbert Marcuse, or Heinrich Jalowetz and Lewis Coser. But perhaps what made Weimar culture distinctive was its acute realization of the fragility of the bourgeois order; its sense that neither liberalism nor meliorism could withstand the dark forces of

the irrational and the subterranean that would bubble to the surface in 1933.<sup>71</sup>

Let one episode serve to conclude this account of how the New World could recapture the artistic grandeur of Weimar Germany. Its most popular and enduring cultural artifact may well have been *Die Dreigroschenoper*, which opened in Berlin in 1928 with music by Kurt Weill and lyrics and libretto by Bertolt Brecht. Five years later *The Threepenny Opera* was staged in New York, where, after only twelve performances, this fiercely satiric musical suffered an ignominious death. No one in the United States dared to attempt a revival until 1952, when *The Threepenny Opera* was featured in the first Festival of the Arts at Brandeis. Weill, the son of a cantor from Dessau, had died two years earlier. But his widow, Lotte Lenya, who had made her stellar Weimar reputation in the role of "Pirate Jenny," sang it on campus. The translation and adaptation were by Marc Blitzstein, who provided the narration for what had to be, for financial reasons, only a concert version rather than a fully staged performance. Conducting Weill's score in the orchestra pit was a professor of music at Brandeis and its first chairman of the School of Creative Arts, the thirty-four-year-old Leonard Bernstein. He had agreed to introduce and direct a campus arts festival, which happened to feature the dancing and choreography of a Black Mountain luminary, Merce Cunningham.<sup>72</sup> By Bernstein thus helping ensure the durability of the German cultural legacy, he became an important conduit for the Americanization of *Die Dreigroschenoper*.

To do so while McCarthyism raged entailed an element of bravado. The nation's political atmosphere, Bernstein wrote to a Brandeis colleague, encouraged "caution" and "fear." Bertolt Brecht, then living in East Berlin, was determined to remain a stone-cold Stalinist. When the Festival of the Creative Arts transplanted his left-wing musical from the spirit of Weimar cabaret to a suburban campus, the audience was compelled to confront a savagely dramatic diagnosis of capitalism as a system that is indistinguishable from criminality, and free enterprise was equated with predatory freebooting. So heartless are the economic arrangements depicted in *The Threepenny Opera* that Mack the Knife

wonders: what is the robbing of a bank compared to the *founding* of a bank? The Brecht-Weill underworld puts a premium on treachery and on the betrayal of friendship and love.

*Leonard Bernstein, above, in rehearsal for The Threepenny Opera,  
at the 1952 Brandeis Festival of Creative Arts.*

*Below, the performance with Lotte Lenya, standing left,  
Broadway actor David Brooks, center, and Mark Blitzstein, seated right.  
(Courtesy of the Robert D. Farber University Archives &  
Special Collections, Brandeis University.)*

The Festival of the Arts showed the vestigial power of a brilliant but brittle culture that had been dancing two decades earlier

on the edge of an abyss. In a climate of renewed repression and conformism, Brandeis had shown itself secure enough to present a work of art that had drawn its inspiration from the Communist politics of Bertolt Brecht. In its scholarship and in its arts, a university had also contrived to breathe life into the endangered legacy of Weimar culture, a spirit that was inflected both with a vivid Jewishness and an edge of dissidence. Peter Gay may not have exaggerated in claiming that the exiles constituted “the greatest collection of transplanted intellect, talent, and scholarship the world has ever seen.”<sup>73</sup> Marginalized in their homelands, those scholars who escaped Nazism found a new institutional home that enlivened mind and spirit in the Boston area. Black Mountain College had been spared the suspicions of the right-wing anti-Communists in the 1950s and demonstrated sufficient independence to play its own decisive role in helping to make American civilization less provincial.

*Black Mountain College Historical Marker  
at the intersection of U.S. 70 and W. College Street,  
Black Mountain, North Carolina.*

*(Photo by Mike Stroud, 2012, courtesy of the Historical Marker Database.)*

The juxtaposition of these two institutions may shed special light on the failure of Black Mountain College to endure. It simply could not survive independent of an ecosystem that might sustain a radical educational experiment in the arts. The institution was simply not indigenous to North Carolina, and it lacked the means to form a national constituency. Brandeis University managed to last because of the willingness and resources of a nationwide Jewish community that felt responsibility for a non-sectarian institution that seemed dedicated to ideals of both learning and social justice. Faculty members at Black Mountain prized their autonomy—too deeply, as it turned out, and ultimately no one wanted to throw them life preservers. Creativity became too hard to cultivate when the books did not balance. Built in the shadow of fabled universities, Brandeis had no alternative except to try to honor conventional criteria of scholarship and academic excellence, and did so under the auspices of traditional university governance, with a board of trustees composed mostly of businesspeople. Like Black Mountain, Brandeis was “different, really different.” But it also emulated the standards of liberal arts education enough to persist.

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## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Herbert Leibowitz, “Like a Who’s Who of the Avant Garde,” *New York Times Book Review*, October 29, 1972, 38; Lawrence Veysey, “On American Educational History,” *Harvard Educational Review* 43 (May 1973): 259, 260.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: The Outsider as Insider* (New York, 1968), xiv.

<sup>3</sup> Martin Duberman, *Black Mountain: An Exploration in Community* (Garden City, NY, 1973), 180, 293–294, 333; Mark Lindley, “Erwin Bodky (1896–1958), a Prussian in Boston,” 2010 *Jahrbuch of the Staatliches Institut für Musikforschung* (Berlin, 2011), accessed March 26, 2013, [http://www.SIM.spk-berlin.de/publikationen\\_427.html](http://www.SIM.spk-berlin.de/publikationen_427.html).

<sup>4</sup> Burton M. Wasserman, “Josef Albers: His American Years,” *Art Education* 19 (October 1966): 11; Michael Rush, ed., “Introduction,” *The Rose Art Museum at Brandeis* (New York, 2009), 13.

<sup>5</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 34.

<sup>6</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 42; Christopher Benfey, *Red Brick, Black Mountain, White Clay: Reflections on Art, Family, and Survival* (New York, 2012), 126.

<sup>7</sup> Quoted in Benfey, *Red Brick*, 123.

<sup>8</sup> Benfey, *Red Brick*, 79, 124, 128; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 43; Mary Emma Harris, “Black Mountain College and its Cosmopolitan Faculty,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany and Found Refuge in North Carolina*, ed. Henry A. Landsberger and Christoph E. Schweitzer (Chapel Hill, 1996), 117–121; William H. Jordy, “The Aftermath of the Bauhaus in America: Gropius, Mies, and Breuer,” in *The Intellectual Migration: Europe and America, 1930–1960*, ed. Donald Fleming and Bernard Bailyn (Cambridge, MA, 1969), 507.

<sup>9</sup> Benfey, *Red Brick*, 13, 137; Sam Hunter, ed., “Introduction,” *Josef Albers: Paintings and Graphics, 1917–1970* (Princeton, 1971), 5; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 58, 59.

<sup>10</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 89–90.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 172–173.

<sup>12</sup> Arnold Schoenberg to Frederick R. Mangold, May 17, 1939, and Heinrich Jalowetz to John Evarts, May 5, 1939, series III, box 3, folder “Heinrich Jalowetz,” Black Mountain College Papers, Department of Cultural Resources, State Archives of North Carolina, Raleigh (hereafter cited as BMC Papers).

<sup>13</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 173, 287.

<sup>14</sup> Wendy L. Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual: Jewish Refugees and Homosexuals at Black Mountain College, NC, 1933–1956,” (master’s thesis, Brandeis University, 2007), 30–33; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 156, 229; Bertolt Brecht, “To Posterity,” in *Selected Poems*, trans. H. R. Hays (New York, 1959), 177.

<sup>15</sup> Memorandum by Fritz Moellenhoff, June 14, 1938, series III, box 6, folder “Erwin Straus,” BMC Papers; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 179.

<sup>16</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 276; Sheri Bernstein, “Purism and Pragmatism,” in *Exiles+Emigrés: The Flight of European Artists from Hitler*, ed. Stephanie Barron (New York, 1997), 259.

<sup>17</sup> Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 40.

<sup>18</sup> Alfred Kazin to Albert W. Levi, April 13, 1948; Hannah Arendt to Levi, April 12, 1948, series III, box 6, folder “Isaac Rosenfeld,” BMC Papers; Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 22; Steven J. Zipperstein, *Rosenfeld’s Lives: Fame, Oblivion, and the Furies of Writing* (New Haven, 2009), 2.



<sup>19</sup> Frederick R. Mangold to Stephen Duggan, n.d. [1939], series II, box 5, folder "Committee in Aid of Refugee Scholars from Spain," BMC Papers.

<sup>20</sup> Karl Shapiro, *Collected Poems, 1940–1978* (New York, 1978), 10; Marcia Graham Synnott, *The Half-Opened Door: Discrimination and Admissions at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton, 1900–1970* (Westport, CT, 1979); Dan Oren, *Joining the Club: A History of Jews and Yale* (New Haven, 1985); Nitzza Rosovsky, *The Jewish Experience at Harvard and Radcliffe* (Cambridge, MA, 1986); Jerome Karabel, *The Chosen: The Hidden History of Admission and Exclusion at Harvard, Yale, and Princeton* (Boston, 2005); Eunice G. Pollack, ed., *Antisemitism on Campus: Past and Present* (Boston, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession* (New York, 1988), 172–173.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Dreier to Fred Mangold, July 6, 1939, series III, box 2, folder "Theodore Dreier," BMC Papers, quoted in Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 58.

<sup>23</sup> Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 14; Harris, "Black Mountain College," in *They Fled Hitler's Germany*, 121; Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 250.

<sup>24</sup> Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 25.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Tibor Frank, "Organized Rescue Operations in Europe and the United States, 1933–1945," in *In Defence of Learning: The Plight, Persecution, and Placement of Academic Refugees, 1933–1980s*, ed. Shula Marks, Paul Weindling, and Laura Wintour (Oxford, 2011), 144, 145.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 64–65; Memorandum to the Board of Fellows, July 6, 1938, series II, box 2, file "Appointments, Faculty" (1938), BMC Papers; Monica Mercado, University of Chicago archives, e-mail to author, August 29, 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 14, 230–232.

<sup>28</sup> Bernstein, "Purism and Pragmatism," in *Exiles+Emigrés*, 254; Robert Wunsch to Anna Moellenhoff, July 27, 1938; Memorandum to the Board of Fellows, July 6, 1938, series II, box 2, file "Appointments, Faculty" (1938), BMC Papers.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard Silk, *The Economists* (New York, 1976), 14–15; Morton Keller and Phyllis Keller, *Making Harvard Modern: The Rise of America's University* (New York, 2001), 81–82.

<sup>30</sup> Fergusson, "Beyond the New York Intellectual," 59.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Benfey, *Red Brick*, 182; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250; Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 67–69.

<sup>32</sup> Christoph E. Schweitzer, "Ernst Moritz Manasse: A Black College Welcomes a Refugee," in *They Fled Hitler's Germany*, 48; Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Malabar, FL, 1993), 66–69.

<sup>33</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 175, 179, 183.

<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 182; Lewis S. Feuer, "The Stages in the Social History of Jewish Professors in American Colleges and Universities," *American Jewish History* 71 (June 1982): 443, 445, 447.

<sup>35</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 179, 180, 183, 186.

<sup>36</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 213–218.

<sup>37</sup> *The New Encyclopedia of Southern Culture*, “Violence,” ed. Amy Louise Wood (Chapel Hill, 2011); *The Encyclopedia of New England*, ed. Burt Feintuch and David H. Watters (New Haven, 2005).

<sup>38</sup> Alfred Kazin, *New York Jew* (New York, 1978), 105; David Cunningham, “Truth, Reconciliation, and the Ku Klux Klan,” *Southern Cultures* 14 (Fall 2008): 70.

<sup>39</sup> Gabrielle Birkner, “Stanton, First Black Female Rabbi, Will Leave Her N. C. Congregation,” *Forward*, January 21, 2011, 6.

<sup>40</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 74, 315; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250; Fergusson, “Beyond the New York Intellectual,” 3, 59; Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York, 2009), 53.

<sup>41</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 459 n.50; Margret Kentgens-Craig, “The Arts: Justus Bier, Second Director of the North Carolina Museum of Art,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany*, 91, 93.

<sup>42</sup> Christopher Bigsby, *Arthur Miller, 1915–1962* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), 185–186, 188.

<sup>43</sup> Quoted in Bigsby, *Arthur Miller*, 190–192.

<sup>44</sup> Leonard Rogoff e-mail to author, March 10, 2013.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 227; Laura Fermi, *Illustrious Immigrants: The Intellectual Migration from Europe, 1930–41*, 2nd ed. (Chicago, 1971), 98–99.

<sup>46</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 35.

<sup>47</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 173, 317, 391.

<sup>48</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 420, 423, 426; Harris, “Black Mountain College,” in *They Fled Hitler’s Germany*, 116.

<sup>49</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 572.

<sup>50</sup> Kazin, *New York Jew*, 107.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Duberman, *Black Mountain*, 330.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 317, 333; Wolfgang Saxon, “Nathan Rosen, 86, of Israel; Physicist Worked with Einstein,” *New York Times*, December 23, 1995; Rogoff, *Down Home*, 250, 260; Paul Halpern, “Peter Bergmann: The Education of a Physicist,” *Physics in Perspective* 7 (2005): 390–391, 396, 398–399.

<sup>54</sup> Duberman, *Black Mountain*, xi, 101, 163, 326, 344, 387, 410, 423, 430, 431.

<sup>55</sup> Susan Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning: A Picture History of the First Four Decades of Brandeis University* (Waltham, MA, 1988), 4, 6; Jamie Sayen, *Einstein in America: The Scientist’s Conscience in the Age of Hitler and Hiroshima* (New York, 1985), 240; Israel Goldstein, *Brandeis University: Chapter of Its Founding* (New York, 1951), 4.

<sup>56</sup> Richard M. Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age: Universities in Massachusetts, 1945–1970* (New York, 1992), 185–188; Arthur H. Reis, Jr., “The Founding,” *Brandeis Review* 19 (Fall–Winter, 1998): 42; Abram L. Sachar, *A Host at Last* (Boston, 1976), 20.

<sup>57</sup> Quoted in Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 74.

<sup>58</sup> Freeland, *Academia’s Golden Age*, 190–192.

<sup>59</sup> Leonard W. Levy to Ricardo Morant, March 18, 1999, copy in author's possession.

<sup>60</sup> Freeland, *Academia's Golden Age*, 190.

<sup>61</sup> Susanne Klingenstein, *Jews in the American Academy, 1900–1940: The Dynamics of Intellectual Assimilation* (New Haven, 1991), 132.

<sup>62</sup> Levy to Morant, March 18, 1999.

<sup>63</sup> Louis Kronenberger, *No Whippings, No Gold Watches: The Saga of a Writer and His Jobs* (Boston, 1970), 199–202, 225–26, 241; Belle Dorfman Jurkowitz, *Strictly by the Book: The History of the Brandeis University National Women's Committee* (Waltham, MA, 1998), 3, 7; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 167, 169.

<sup>64</sup> Quoted in "A Man Who Believed in Mankind," *Time*, July 11, 1983, 71.

<sup>65</sup> "Brandeis University Faculty, 1948–1955 (Faculty Hiring, 1944–1954)," in George Alpert Collection, box 2, Board of Trustees Robert D. Farber University Archives, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; "One-Dimensional Philosopher," *Time*, March 22, 1968, 38.

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in "Pontiff Assails Eroticism Again," *New York Times*, October 2, 1969, 23; "Pack Some Good Books," *Time*, November 23, 1992, 15.

<sup>67</sup> "341 Enter 10th Frosh Class: Curriculum, Faculty Increased," *Justice*, September 18, 1957, 1.

<sup>68</sup> "Brandeis University: New Jewish-Founded School in Massachusetts Preaches and Practices Democracy," *Ebony*, February 1952, 59; Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 133.

<sup>69</sup> "Brandeis University," *Ebony*, 59–63.

<sup>70</sup> Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 48; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 286.

<sup>71</sup> Steven E. Aschheim, *Beyond the Border: The German-Jewish Legacy Abroad* (Princeton, 2007), 102, 111, 113.

<sup>72</sup> John Bush Jones, *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical Theatre* (Hanover, NH, 2003), 101, 186; Pasternack, ed., *From the Beginning*, 88–89; Sachar, *A Host at Last*, 62.

<sup>73</sup> Gay, *Weimar Culture*, xiv.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Resettlement of Holocaust Survivors in Alabama

by

Dan J. Puckett\*

**Allen Rankin, "The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed," *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947**

**United Jewish Fund, Birmingham Jewish Federation:  
Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950;  
Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950];  
Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]**

**United Service for New Americans:  
Field Report, April 26, 1948; Field Report, September 17–19, 1948;  
and Field Report, September 17, 1951**

**W**hile researching material on Alabama Jews, World War II, and the Holocaust at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York, I found the reports of the United Service for New Americans (USNA) to be a treasure trove of information pertaining to the resettlement of Jewish Displaced Persons (DPs) in Alabama in the years after the war. The USNA Field Reports, written by USNA representatives who worked directly with local communities in Alabama, yield significant details about the dynamics within the various Alabama Jewish communities and how these communities organized themselves to assist in resettling DPs between 1948 and 1952.

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In many cases, the information contained within the USNA collection at YIVO provides more information and intimate detail about Alabama's Jews and Jewish communities in the postwar period than can be found within the various congregational and community/federation records in the state. While the papers of the United Jewish Fund in Birmingham and the Jewish Federation of Montgomery provide a broad sketch of activities surrounding DP resettlement, they provide little information about the obstacles associated with resettlement, and little to no insight into the tensions and relationships between subcommunities within the larger Jewish community. The USNA reports, on the other hand, are an intimate assessment of the interworkings of the various Jewish communities by an outside—and presumably unbiased—observer from the USNA. Moreover, these reports frequently confirm the allusions to conflict found in local records (or purposely omitted in those records altogether).<sup>1</sup> Combined, the local sources within Alabama and the USNA papers found at YIVO provide a more complete understanding of how Alabama's Jews contributed to the resettlement of Holocaust survivors in the postwar years.

At the end of the Second World War, millions of Europeans were left dispossessed and homeless. In response, the Allies quickly constructed camps in Germany, Austria, and Italy to shelter refugees who soon became known as displaced persons. Included in this number of DPs were European Jews who, unlike most victims of the war's destruction, had been uprooted, stripped of their possessions, imprisoned, and specifically targeted by the Nazis for extermination. By 1947, approximately 250,000 Jewish survivors of the Holocaust resided in the DP camps.<sup>2</sup> While some Jews were repatriated, many, primarily Polish Jews, did not have that option because of the violent antisemitism that remained. Instead, these survivors immigrated to Palestine, the United States, and other countries willing to accept them. Although the majority of Jewish Holocaust survivors—not all from the DP camps—ultimately immigrated to Palestine, approximately 140,000 ventured to the United States.

In order to address the impending influx of large numbers of Jewish immigrants, in August 1946 the National Refugee Service

(NRS)—an organization created in 1939 to facilitate resettlement of prewar Jewish refugees—merged with the National Council of Jewish Women’s Service for the Foreign Born to create the USNA, an organization devoted to assisting Jewish DPs. The Jewish DPs who resettled in the United States were not called “survivors” as they would be in the decades that followed. Instead, the USNA used the terms “DP” or “New Americans.” As historian Beth Cohen states in her examination of the postwar Jewish refugees, “While—intentionally—there was nothing about its name to suggest it, USNA was strictly a Jewish agency funded by the United Jewish Appeal. Its goal was to work with the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) in Europe and with local cooperating Jewish communal agencies around the United States . . . to facilitate the refugees’ resettlement away from New York City.”<sup>3</sup> Like the prewar refugee crisis, Jews and Jewish organizations in New York worried that the immigrants would remain in the city, overwhelming their resources and creating undesirable Jewish ghettos. While most of the immigrants who arrived in the United States between 1948 and 1952 settled in New York City and the major urban areas in the Northeast and Midwest, Jewish agencies placed tremendous pressure on the USNA to resettle the newcomers in other areas of the country.<sup>4</sup>

Alabama’s Jews had participated in the resettlement efforts prior to the war and did so again in the postwar period. Prior to the war, numerous individuals had sponsored family members who fled Nazi persecution as early as 1933, but in 1938 Alabama’s Jewish communities began working with the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees Coming from Germany (NCC), and its successor the NRS, to assist in resettling refugees who had already arrived in New York City. Each community that accepted refugees formed a refugee committee to handle individual resettlement, while community leaders created a statewide coordinating committee to work with the NRS on how best to facilitate the resettlement process among the participating communities. Refugee resettlement ended in 1942 as the influx of refugees all but ceased. In the postwar period, Alabama had no statewide committee to coordinate resettlement efforts; instead, the USNA worked

directly with local Jewish communities to resettle the recently arrived DPs, encountering numerous problems in the process. Some of the problems mirrored those of the prewar efforts, while many were new, generated by the newcomers themselves who had been profoundly affected by their experiences in the Holocaust. The war and the revelations of the Holocaust also affected Alabama's Jewish communities, producing changes and controversies that lasted well into the postwar years.

The USNA, like the prewar NRS, sent representatives to cities and towns throughout the United States to assess the willingness of the various Jewish communities to accept newly arrived DPs and assist in the USNA's resettlement efforts. When the USNA first arrived in Alabama in 1948, it found many of the Jewish communities in turmoil, a result of long-standing cultural differences and disagreements over Zionism and the newly created state of Israel. In Montgomery, the USNA's Beatrice Behrman noted the "hard feelings" between the city's Reform congregation and eastern European Jews and Sephardim over Zionism. The leadership of the Montgomery Jewish Federation was dominated by members of the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, and conflict between the Zionists and anti-Zionists caused Behrman to conclude that, "with all of this local feuding, there is the lack of cooperative spirit necessary to undertake our program of resettlement."<sup>5</sup> Such a conclusion could have been applied to Birmingham as well, since its Jews experienced similar discord.

Despite Behrman's opinion, Jews in Montgomery and Birmingham put aside their quarrels and agreed to participate in USNA's resettlement program. The local Jewish community organizations—Birmingham's United Jewish Fund and the Jewish Federation of Montgomery—directed their respective efforts and provided the funds to support the newly arrived immigrants until they could become self-supporting. In both cases, members from all three of Birmingham's and Montgomery's congregations actively participated in the resettlement efforts.<sup>6</sup>

With no statewide committee to coordinate resettlement efforts, organization was left to the individual communities, and each decided on how to receive the DPs. While the specifics dif-

ferred from community to community, each shared similar features, no doubt a result of their previous experience with prewar refugees and generous advice from the USNA. Each had employment committees to secure jobs for the newly arrived immigrants and case committees, which dealt with the immigrants' overall adjustment into the community. Other common committees dealt with housing, hospitality, and education. Birmingham, for instance, had specific committees that addressed clothing, furniture, medical needs, public relations, and transportation.<sup>7</sup> Such elaborate organization was all but impossible in smaller towns such as Selma which had far fewer resources to contribute to resettlement and relied on almost every member of the Jewish community for the program to function successfully.

The resettlement programs in Montgomery and Selma differed considerably from the program in Birmingham, and the success of resettlement depended greatly on the opportunities afforded the newly arrived immigrants. Edwin Rosenberg, the president of the USNA, said that because of their experiences in the Holocaust, the immigrants had little opportunity to learn a trade, spoke little English, and "their hardships have caused a variety of defects which require medical treatment. They are, therefore, not as readily employable and consequently a larger proportion requires help."<sup>8</sup> Located in the heavily agricultural Black Belt, Montgomery and Selma had little industry and small Jewish populations that, respectively, limited the available jobs and the help many of the newcomers required. In contrast, the industrial capacity of Birmingham and a Jewish population of 5,400 meant more employment opportunities and a social support network for newly arrived DPs that gave these immigrants a greater chance to become self-sufficient.

### *Montgomery*

The USNA, like the NRS previously, tracked the immigrants by family "units" that varied in size from a single individual to a family of five. Despite the tensions within the community, Montgomery's Jews agreed to begin accepting units for resettlement and ultimately accepted a quota of eighteen units.<sup>9</sup> According to Behr-



man, at the first meeting with members of the Montgomery Jewish Federation, it was agreed that

the composition of the committee will represent all three factions in the community, and CJW representation . . . . [and] that the men in the community represented through the Federation, would have to be responsible for the allocation of funds and employment. The CJW would be responsible for reception, housing, social adjustment and Americanization. The professionals in the community would be responsible for the casework planning for the families.<sup>10</sup>

When USNA representative Albert Meyers arrived in September 1949, he found the Montgomery resettlement effort struggling with a myriad of problems, some of their own making, others not. The two most vital problems were employment and adjustment—two central goals of any resettlement program—but the inability of the immigrants to become self-sufficient made adjustment into the community much more difficult. The lack of industry in Montgomery and in the Black Belt generally severely limited the types of jobs available to the newcomers. When they arrived in Montgomery, the employment committee interviewed them to determine what kind of work they desired, with the common answer being that they would “take any kind of work and that they wanted to start immediately.” As a result, the employment committee often pushed the immigrants “into a job as soon after they arrived as possible, regardless of the kind of job.” This led to frustration for both the immigrants and community. Meyers told members of the federation that

the newcomer’s eagerness was part of their desire to prove to themselves and to the community that they were capable, useful and a valuable addition to the community. . . . [The] newcomer would not want to declare openly his reservations about a job for fear of displeasing those whom he considers his friends and benefactors.

Typically the jobs consisted of unskilled manual labor at low-paying hourly wages, hardly enough to support a family. Such

jobs, Meyers noted, were "pointless and only mean having to look for still other jobs."<sup>11</sup>

In Meyers's September 1949 report, he noted that one newly arrived immigrant had been employed in a garage, "working 12 hours a day, 7 days per week. The employer refused to permit any time off, although the low salary paid the man came completely out of community funds." Meyers used this case to illustrate a dead-end job, the type the employment committee should try to avoid. Even if the immigrant improved his English or learned a skill, this type of job would still offer no future. This case also suggests, although Meyers did not explicitly address it, that some employers in Montgomery were willing to exploit the newly arrived DPs as a source of cheap labor, labor that would not complain about working conditions or the employers' demands.<sup>12</sup> Given the type of business involved, it is most likely that the business owner was not Jewish.

Employment problems magnified the difficulties associated with the newcomer's social adjustment. In response to the case above, members of the case committee pointed out that the work schedule "left no leisure time for the man, no time for studying English, and offered no chances of eventual financial independence."<sup>13</sup> The generally low wages offered for non-skilled workers made self-sufficiency difficult to achieve, especially for those immigrants with families to support. This lack of economic success directly hindered their adjustment into the community. While Montgomerians had warmly welcomed the newcomers, a substantial difference remained between the "costly social life" of Montgomery's Jews and what the newcomers could afford. The chairperson of the refugee committee, Bernard Lobman, noted that it became "discouraging to the people themselves who are unable to become self-supporting and live an ordinary, normal life."<sup>14</sup>

By mid-1950, Montgomery had received ten units, some twenty-one refugees. Lobman informed the USNA that Montgomery had been "unable to absorb into our community life and make self-supporting" those who had already arrived. Because of this, Lobman advised the USNA that the Jewish community could not

accept any more units for resettlement.<sup>15</sup> Montgomery lacked any social workers or professional casework agencies to help the newcomers adjust to their new life. Few of those working with the resettlement program spoke German or Yiddish to mitigate the newcomers' sense of isolation. Consequently, the USNA's Saul Travin observed that Montgomery "cannot deal too successfully with difficult cases, older immigrants or those who do not have some knowledge of English."<sup>16</sup> Indeed, the Montgomery Jewish community could scarcely relate to or assist the newcomers in their adjustment.

The numerous problems associated with resettlement in Montgomery produced a powerful sense of social isolation for the newcomers, most of whom wanted to join family or friends elsewhere or to return to New York. Moreover, they did not have anyone to whom they could turn to discuss their problems, often insisting "that only other DPs can understand them," further increasing their social isolation.<sup>17</sup> A common theme among the USNA's field reports was newcomers' desire to leave Montgomery. As Travin noted in October 1950, Montgomery's Jews interpreted this as "an indication that they had failed."<sup>18</sup> As a result, the resettlement efforts began to wane. Edith Weil, a member of the NCJW, told the USNA that Montgomery's "interest in the resettlement program is being affected by the attitude of the New Americans, their unrest and discontent," and their desire to leave Montgomery. Weil noted that much time had been spent arranging jobs for the newcomers, a task made more difficult due to their

language limitations and lack of skill. After prospective employers are persuaded to take the newcomer and train him for a job, he remains just long enough to get to be useful and then decides to leave. The employment committee is losing sympathy and patience. The case committee feels that something is wrong somewhere. Either people are persuaded to come here against their will, or they are not briefed sufficiently to know what to expect of a small southern community as to job possibilities, salaries, and so forth. . . . The whole program seems to have bogged down and we are just about ready to throw up the sponge.<sup>19</sup>

Between 1949 and 1951, Montgomery resettled thirteen units, although by September 1951 only four units remained.<sup>20</sup>

### *Selma*

Jews in the nearby Black Belt town of Selma eagerly volunteered to help resettle DPs but faced the same social and economic difficulties found in Montgomery. When Beatrice Behrman came to Selma in February 1949 and presented the problems facing the hundreds of thousands of DPs remaining in Europe, "the deep and warm human interest of these people in the plight of the overseas Jews," she recounted, "was an experience to witness."<sup>21</sup> Behrman also found a community that had successfully resettled a number of refugees prior to the war. Peter Levinson, the rabbi of Mishkin Israel, Selma's only Jewish congregation, was a refugee as well. He came to the United States in 1939 through the NRS to study at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Levinson arrived in Selma in mid-1948 and quickly acclimated to the small, southern town, gaining the acceptance of both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. With Levinson taking a leading role on the refugee committee, Selma's Jews quickly accepted a quota of six family units.

Selma's program, however, dealt with another problem beyond economic and social hurdles: the psychological trauma of Holocaust survivors. In October 1949, Joseph and Clara Sznur, along with their two-year-old son, Marcus, arrived to a warm welcome. Despite the kindness shown to them by the community, the Sznurs had difficulty in adjusting to their new life due to their experiences during the war. Originally from Poland, the couple had escaped the camps but lived for years in hiding from the Nazis. By the time they arrived in Selma, Clara Sznur exhibited signs of mental illness. She was thoroughly convinced that her husband was having an affair with a "Polish-Christian blond woman" behind her back and insisted that her husband's affair with the woman began prior to the war, persisted throughout the conflict, continued on the boat to the United States, and was ongoing in Selma. Of course, no Polish woman such as this existed in Selma, but Clara Sznur had been seen "walking around the [boarding] house at

night in the nude looking for someone or something under beds, closets, etc., apparently . . . for this Polish woman." This "irrational jealousy," her husband explained, was caused by their experiences during the war. She "was physically run down and was nervous and over-wrought as a result of her terrible experience," something not uncommon in Holocaust survivors. Joseph Sznur wanted to send his wife to New York for medical and psychiatric treatment, something unavailable in Selma, and the loud quarrels between the two had become public knowledge and convinced some in the Jewish community that the Sznurs needed to be returned to New York. The couple's problems jeopardized the resettlement program.<sup>22</sup>

By 1950, the "deep and warm human interest" toward DPs that Behrman had found in Selma had dissipated, and community leaders found it "impossible to accept any more quotas," citing the many difficulties they faced.<sup>23</sup> They did not mention the Sznurs, but it was obvious that Clara Sznur's trauma and inability to re-adjust contributed to the decision to discontinue the resettlement program. By that time, Mishkin Israel's Rabbi Levinson had departed, leaving the Jewish community without leadership. Seymore Cohn, the congregation's president, told the USNA that the various problems and lack of leadership meant that

responsibility or not—the Selma community is definitely not receptive towards accepting any additional displaced families. . . . I honestly feel that the Jewish community of Selma is hardly able to take care of any additional displaced persons and I know the feeling is that we do not *want anymore*.<sup>24</sup>

### *Birmingham*

Unlike Montgomery and Selma, Birmingham's Jews experienced a significant measure of success in resettling DPs as a result of greater economic opportunity and a viable social support network. Birmingham's primary Jewish organization, the United Jewish Fund (UJF), created a Displaced Persons Committee to coordinate resettlement. Dora Roth, the UJF executive secretary and an indefatigable force, had largely coordinated Birmingham's refugee resettlement program prior to the war. She filled the same

*Dora Roth and her husband Ben.*

*(Courtesy of Mary Kimerling, Birmingham, Alabama.)*

role in the resettlement of the DPs. Roth's coordination and involvement also helped to overcome the intercommunity turmoil over Zionism. Although a Zionist, Roth worked closely with many non-Zionists and did much to ensure the success of resettlement.

Numerous community members contributed to the resettlement program. Jerome "Buddy" Cooper, head of the employment committee, made it clear that "the task of job-finding and satisfactory placement is the responsibility of every Jewish person in the community."<sup>25</sup> Jewish physicians and dentists offered free medical treatment, the community provided a vigorous outreach and visitation program, and the fund granted assistance to newcomers who had yet to become self-supporting, a central goal for the DP committee. As the committee reported, "many of the problems that confront any community working with the resettlement of DPs

will begin to disappear once these men become self-sustaining economically, and do not feel the need and indignity of taking supplementation from the DP Committees."<sup>26</sup>

The fund used the press to raise awareness that Jews were still suffering in Europe. Birmingham's newspapers had long been a "friendly press" toward Jewish endeavors, encouraging inter-faith cooperation, publicizing Jewish community events, and supporting Jewish causes, including condemnation of Nazi persecution. It is not surprising, then, that the press publicized the United Jewish Appeal's fund-raising campaign to aid DPs in Europe. The *Birmingham News* published two articles in September 1947 that vividly described the suffering of Jews at the hands of the Nazis and the plight of the survivors still residing in DP camps. The articles recounted the experiences of two veterans from Birmingham who had witnessed the horrors of the Final Solution. David Levin, who had been one of the first Americans to enter Buchenwald, said freedom from the camps did not follow liberation. "Still, even now in 1947," he observed, "when the rest of the world has gone about its business, these same distraught people are still shut in camps—DP camps under UN supervision, but camps nonetheless." He thought it was Americans' duty to "make good the faith these people had in America and Americans when we came to the gates of Buchenwald" and to give them "their first real chance at freedom and a new life."<sup>27</sup> Not long after Levin's account appeared in the press, Tarrant's Joe Kanter explained in another article that "America has missed its big chance to see justice done for the displaced underdogs of Europe." Kanter had been in charge of DPs in the area of Selb, Germany, and believed that when Germans

saw America was not going to demand that Jews and other DPs get fair treatment, they began to feel that we were weak. There were cases of harsh treatment against DPs all over again. In one town a German official refused to give Jewish DPs any food at all. This official was a definite former Nazi. When the Germans found that we were going to round up DPs and put them in concentration camps, then they regained their old cockiness.

Kanter had little faith in the United Nations' administration of the DP problem, or that Jews could remain in Germany outside of DP camps. Nonetheless he urged the *News's* readers to contribute to the UJA campaign to assist "these unfortunate people in any case. Having failed to do more it is our duty to do this small thing."<sup>28</sup>

By 1950, Birmingham had resettled eleven units, numbering twenty-seven individuals. Chaim and Chana Schniper, for example, had escaped from Cherson work camp in the Ukraine in 1945. The Schnipers immigrated to the United States in 1950 through the auspices of the USNA and were sponsored by the United Jewish Fund upon their arrival in Birmingham. Originally from Poland, Chaim was well educated and spoke several languages, but like so many others who arrived after the war, his lack of English limited his opportunities. He had no driver's license or automobile and thus had to walk or take the bus to work, school, and the market. During the day, he worked at the Alabama Novelty House, while in the evening he took English courses at nearby Phillips High School. At home, Chaim taught what he had learned to Chana and their two sons, Jack and Abe. In 1955, the family became United States citizens. Like other DPs resettled in Birmingham, the Schnipers had been financially assisted by the fund until they could become self-supporting, eventually opening their own business, Schniper's Dry Goods. They remained in the city for the rest of their lives, serving as evidence of the vital work the community undertook to resettle Holocaust survivors.<sup>29</sup>

According to Karl Friedman, few DPs in Birmingham experienced maladjustment. He recalled that "some few who came were angry, belligerent, demanding and unpleasant, all conditions forgivable in light of what they had been subject to in their former homelands. Some never changed and lived out their lives in stress and loneliness." Despite these unfortunate and tragic cases, the resettlement efforts met with great success. Friedman noted that "about 30 families" settled in the city. No documentation exists to corroborate this number but Friedman's recollection is nevertheless a good estimate.<sup>30</sup>



*Chaim and Chana Schniper, with sons Abe and Jack.  
The photograph was taken in 1948 at the DP camp in Stuttgart.  
(Courtesy of Jack Schniper, Birmingham, Alabama.)*

*The DPs and Jim Crow*

The resettlement of DPs in Alabama and indeed throughout the South was made more difficult when these newcomers came face-to-face with Jim Crow segregation. Even in industrialized cities with well-paying jobs and larger Jewish populations, Jim Crow offered an uncomfortable reminder to the DPs of the racism responsible for their suffering at the hands of the Nazis. Although the unskilled newcomers often took low-paying manual jobs, they could not take jobs generally held by African Americans because it was considered “degrading to the [white] community.” This led some newcomers in Montgomery to believe “that they constitute a third class in the southern social structure, just a little higher than the Negro population.”<sup>31</sup>

Although the USNA field reports for Alabama do not dwell on racism or segregation, Jewish refugees who fled the Nazis prior to the war and those who survived the camps reacted in a similar fashion after being resettled in the segregated South. Some left the South, while others attempted to conform to southern society. Ben Hirsch, a Holocaust survivor who settled in Atlanta in the 1950s, remembered that on the train from New York to Atlanta "a good number" of survivors on the train "turned around in the train station in North Carolina and returned to New York City" after confronting Jim Crow for the first time.<sup>32</sup> As Lawrence Powell notes, those that remained in the South, whether they came prior to the war or after, often endured the discomfort as long as they were not persecuted.<sup>33</sup> Survivors in New Orleans or Atlanta differed little from survivors in Alabama cities in this regard.

By 1952, 137,450 Jewish refugees, including close to one hundred thousand DPs, had settled in the United States.<sup>34</sup> A large percentage of these remained in New York and other large cities in the Northeast and Midwest where they were surrounded by a vast cultural support network, numerous Jewish welfare agencies, and greater opportunities for employment and success. Small towns such as Selma, or nonindustrialized cities such as Montgomery, could provide few, if any, resources or support for the newcomers. Indeed, this pattern was also found throughout the Midwest and West where small Jewish communities, eager to help, lacked the resources or opportunities to assist in the acclimatization of the newcomers to American life.

Consequently, most of the Holocaust survivors who settled in Alabama did so many years after the war, making the adjustment to American life in places outside of the state. One might judge the USNA's attempted resettlement of DPs in Montgomery and Selma to be unsuccessful based on the number of DPs who departed for greener pastures. But this assessment overlooks the vital contribution that such small communities played in the lives of those seeking a new beginning. As the USNA's Julius Levin remarked, Montgomery "made a real positive contribution by permitting families to come to this country through its community assurances

and helping them in the most difficult period of initial adjustment to the American way of life.”<sup>35</sup>

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**Allen Rankin, “The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed,” *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947**

Three years ago a First Lieutenant with U.S. Third Army drove his truck up before the gates of Austria’s Buchenwald Concentration Camp.

Replete with bayoneted rifle and tin hat he was David Levin, now at 29, buyer for a 19th Street Clothing Store.

He was one of the first to arrive at the infamous Buchenwald torture chamber and killing pen for Jews.

“When the doors swung back,” he said, “I was horror stricken at what I saw. The German policy at Buchenwald had been to work Jewish men, women and children as slaves until they were of no further use—then to kill them, systematically.

“The people who had been saved by the arrival of our armies were lying in a stinking place called ‘the hospital’. Some were so starved, their bare bones were actually protruding.

“They had expected to die and it seemed they would rather have died even then. But miraculously, even though many were so weak they couldn’t move anything but their eyes, they still had the will to live and build a better world.

“BUT FOR THEIR RESCUE,” continued Mr. Levin, “these Jews would have been systematically murdered like millions of others. German killing methods were very systematic and economical.

“A series of iron bars juttred out from the walls just six and a half feet from the ground—just enough to pull a man up by the neck and hang him. There was no waste of rope. When a person’s toes were pulled just free of the ground, then he was beat to death with bludgeons.

“Next he was robbed of any metal in his teeth. He was given a hot bath so that his pores opened and made cremation easier so

*Allen Rankin's article in the Birmingham News, September 29, 1941.  
(Courtesy of Dan Puckett.)*

that his burning wasted no German gas. Then he was shoved into the crematorium."

David Levin's face went dark. "The suffering at Buchenwald can never be described or justified," he said. "The walls under the

hanging posts are solid concrete. But human hands and feet, fingernails and toe nails, scratched deep indentions in the stone."

YET, SAID LEVIN, the people he found in Buchenwald still wanted to live. "They thought, of course," he added, "that now that the Americans had arrived they would be set free, their life of being shut up in prison camps would be over. Still, even now in 1947 when the rest of the world has gone about its business, these same distraught people are still shut in camps—DP camps, under U.N. supervision, but camps nevertheless. They still have little to eat. They are still cold. They still have no home or no life of their own."

"It is our duty," Levin concluded[, "]to make good the faith these people had in America and Americans when we came to the gates of Buchenwald. It is our obligation to contribute to the United Jewish Fund, and after all this time, to give these people their first real chance at freedom and a new life."

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**United Jewish Fund, Birmingham Jewish Federation:  
Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950;  
Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950];  
Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]**

**Minutes of the Board Meeting, July 6, 1950**

PRESENT: Marvin Engel, William P. Engel, Jerome Cooper, Joe Goldstein, Mervyn H. Sterne, Abe Berkowitz, Hyman Miller, Morris Fisher, Mayer Newfield, Fred Nichols, Mrs. Leopold Friedman, Alex Rittenbaum, Sol Rittenbaum, Carl Hess, Max Hurvich, James L. Permutt, Harry Sokol, Eugene Zeidman, Ben Roth, Mrs. James L. Permutt, B. Harry Berman, M.H. Greenberg, and the Secretary.

Secretary read the Minutes of the previous meeting, and was instructed to make one correction, dealing with the Resolution offered concerning Secretary's work in the Fund. Mr. Sterne

stated that his original recommendation had read "we were profoundly grateful for the work done in the Fund by our Secretary in the past." The Minutes were then approved.

Secretary read the recommendations of the Nominating Committee for the Budget Committee for 1950, as follows:

FOR BUDGET COMMITTEE:

FOR RE-ELECTION:

Aland, Leon	Hurvich, Max
Allen, Jacob	Permutt, James L.
Cooper, Jerome	Pizitz, Isadore
Engel, William P.	Rittenbaum, Alex
Hess, Carl	Sokol, Harry
	Sterne, Mervyn H.

FOR ELECTION:

Feidelson, David T.	Miller, Hyman S.
Friend, E.M. Jr.	Monsky, Leroy
Hurvitch, Mrs. Max	Rittenbaum, Mrs. Sol

The nominations were approved as read, and accepted by the Board.

Secretary then read the report of the Nominating Committee recommending the Board of Directors for the year 1951. A motion was made that the nominations be approved as read, and that this recommended Board be submitted to a meeting of the general membership, which would be held immediately after the next Board meeting.

Mr. Newfield read a letter from the United Service for New Americans giving comparative quotas of Displaced Persons submitted to various communities in the United States, and the numbers accepted by these communities. He stated that it was the request of the United Service for New Americans that we in Birmingham assume the responsibility for 18 units for the year 1950-51. A motion was made by Mr. Newfield, and seconded by Mr. Sokol, that the United Jewish Fund give assurance that it will commit itself to eighteen (18) additional units to be spaced over a

period of not less than twelve (12) months beginning July 1st. Carried.

Mr. Cooper spoke on the serious problem of finding jobs. His own experiences had been that while a few co-operated fully and sincerely, that many of the those people who had been most insistent that we discharge our responsibility and take on Displaced Persons, had been most lax in either creating jobs or helping to find them. He asked for the full cooperation of all present in the matter of job finding.

It was moved, seconded, and carried that the officers of the United Jewish Fund be empowered to go to the bank and borrow \$25,000.00 for a period of 30 days.

The matter of collections was discussed. After considerable discussion, it was moved and seconded that the President appoint a Collection Committee to get to work immediately, and to send a wire at once to every delinquent 1949 contributor, and following up the telegram with personal calls from members of the Board.

The discussion concerning this particular phase of activity brought about comment from several members present that the fund was no longer a small and compact organization but one that needed constant interpretation to the Jewish Community as a whole so that its membership would be aware of the many activities covered by the United Jewish Fund. This would necessitate the establishment of a small but aggressive publicity committee, whose job it would be to disseminate regular, monthly bulletins carrying stories dealing with the Fund agencies. In this manner, more people would know what their money was being used for, and if intelligently applied, would be an instrument and means of better and more thorough collections. This discussion was finally resolved by the proposal of a motion, which was seconded and carried, that the President appoint a committee of three people who would go into this matter and begin an intelligent publicity program, working with the Collection Committee as well as the other committees within the framework of our organization.

There being no further business, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Dora Roth

Secretary

### Financial Report on Displaced Persons [c. 1950]

Ajdelsberg, Towin- Single Man - 4/5/50	\$ 324.18
Fisch, Markus - Family of three - 7/18/50 Unemployed to date	1,026.30
Grunspan, Samuel - Family of four - 5/5/50 Unemployed at present	1,563.11
Lipsutz, Simon - Single Man - 10/11/49	355.77
Nagrodzki, Szymon - Family of three - 11/15/49	1,478.16
Nay, Leon - Single - 1/30/50 Unemployed	400.00
Schauder, Paul - Single Man - 6/4/50 Unemployed	181.05
Schniper, Chaim - Family of Four - 1/31/50	1,552.70
Wagner, Stefan - Family of Five - 5/10/50	2,257.84
Wilf, Josef - Family of Three - 7/12/50	233.20
Wormser, Eric - Single - 10/1949	<u>42.50</u>
Total	9,414.76

### Report of Displaced Persons' Committee [1950]

Birmingham has eleven displaced persons' units, consisting of twenty-seven (27) individuals. The oldest DP is 60 years of age—the youngest a male infant of three months. Each unit is housed, and only two men are unemployed. One of these unemployed has been in Birmingham since June 4th, and the other since July 18th. Neither of these men can speak any English, altho both are receiving individual instruction twice each week. Only one of



these two men is unemployable, due to physical handicaps. The other man, who has worked with lumber and wood for many years, is intelligent, diligent, and anxious to get a job.

Mr. Jerome Cooper, Chairman of job finding for DP's, is out of the city, but he asks for co-operation from all members of the Board here tonight, stressing again the seriousness of a problem that will be getting more acute as more and more units come into the city. A small committee is not sufficient—the task of job-finding and satisfactory placement is the responsibility of every Jewish person in the community.

Under the supervision of Mrs. Jacob M. Solomon, adequate housing has been found for all units to date. Mrs. Amon Blumberg, Gernal [sic] Chairman of the Displaced Person's Committee, has reorganized and put into action a group of volunteers who are beginning to take over the active functioning of the Hospitality, Clothing, English, Educational, Furniture, Medical, Public Relations, and Transportation Committees. Each family unit is being visited by Mrs. Blumberg and Mrs. Kimerling, and budgets and expenditures worked out and discussed. Full cooperation has been given to all our Committees by Birmingham merchants, and all our doctors and dentists have been more than generous with their time and attention given completely free of charge.

The Displaced Persons' Committee has spent, to date, on its 11 units, \$8,995.00. Some of this represents a one time investment in furniture and household appliances. Many of the problems that confront any community working with the resettlement of DP's will begin to disappear once these men become self-sustaining economically, and do not feel the need and indignity of taking supplementation from the DP Committees.

That is why, in closing this report, I must stress once more the vital necessity of finding jobs that keep a man busy and happy, and assure him of a living wage for himself and his family.

Mayer Newfield  
Chairman,<sup>36</sup>  
Displaced Persons' Committee

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**United Service for New Americans:  
Field Report, April 26, 1948; Field Report, September 17-19, 1949;  
and Field Report, September 17, 1951**

**Field Report, April 26, 1948**

City and State — Montgomery, Alabama                      Field Representative  
Date of Visit — April 26, 1948  
Date Received — May 5, 1948                                      Beatrice Behrman

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<u>Persons Seen</u>	<u>Address</u>	<u>Affiliation</u>
<u>Name</u>		
Mr. Adolph Weil, Jr.	307 Montgomery St	President Jewish Federation
Mrs. Caroline Strass- burger	302 Glen Grattan	USNA Board Member
Mr. Lou Herman	102 Clayton St.	Chairman Information & Educa- tion Committee — Jewish Federation
Mrs. Sam Henle	1810 So. Perry St.	President — CJW
Miss Hannah J. Simon	102 Clayton St.	Executive Secretary Jewish Federation
Mr. Lucien Loeb	203 Gilmore	Former State Chair- man Emigre Committee
Mrs. Louis Kaufman		Member of Former Emigre Committee Chairman — Women's Division
Mrs. Edith Weil	106 Glen Grattan	Chairman — Emigre Committee

Mr. M. Rothschild	Commercial Building	Chairman Big Gifts Committee
Mrs. Hilliard Klein		Co-Chairman — Women's Division
Rabbi Blachschlager	Temple Beth-Or	Reformed Temple
Rabbi Seymour Atlas		Orthodox Temple
Mrs. Myron Lobman	706 Park Avenue	Council of Jewish Women

### Meetings Attended

Jewish Federation Open Meeting at Temple Beth-Or—  
Approximately 50 people.

### Follow-Up

### OBJECTIVES OF FIELD VISIT

This is the first field trip to Montgomery in five years, and was planned primarily for the purpose of obtaining a current picture of the community with particular reference to how it relates to the work of USNA. If indicated, the second purpose was to organize the community for participation in the resettlement program.

### GENERAL INFORMATION

Montgomery is principally the shopping center for the surrounding farm and cattle country. There is no outstanding industry outside of agriculture. The only industrial source in the community is the railroads. The rest of the business consists of shopkeepers. The population of Montgomery ranges between 100,000 and 110,000. The current employment situation is very good, with little current unemployment.

*Page 1 from the Field Report, April 26, 1948.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

### JEWISH COMMUNITY

This community composed of approximately 600 Jewish families, totaling about 1200 individuals, is split up into three separate factions. Approximately 50% belong to the reformed temple, about 30% to the orthodox-conservative temple, and the remaining group are sephardics. Last year the orthodox and the sephardic groups joined together to form a country club. This has helped immeasurably in making the group more cohesive. Aside from the Jewish Federation and the Council of Jewish Women, there are no other organized Jewish activities

in the community. Last year the goal for the community was \$235,000.00 of which only about \$136,000.00 was raised. The 1948 Spring campaign has not yet been organized, no quota has been set—no one has been willing to assume the chairmanship. There was great concern over this plus the difficulty in getting the campaign going, due to the split in the community over the Palestinian issue. The Jewish Federation, represented by both the President and the Chairman of the Information and Educational Committee, utilized the FR's [Field Reporter's] visit to give impetus to organizing the community for the drive.

#### JEWISH FEDERATION

The Executive Secretary of the Jewish Federation . . . has held this position for about two years. She is a very ineffectual person, who gives no leadership in communal affairs. No one in the community pays any attention to her, and they do their best to avoid working with her. Key people in the community recognize that to vitalize the Federation she should be replaced. However, since she is related to one of the outstanding families in the community, everyone accepts that she will continue in the job until she retires. There is no current relief case load. The only activity of any professional content carried by [the Executive Secretary] is relief given to transients.

#### COUNCIL OF JEWISH WOMEN

Mrs. Sam Henle is the newly elected President of the Council of Jewish Women. She has had very little experience in Council work. However, she is a person of intelligence, and has real leadership qualities. To her knowledge, there have been no current requests for migration service or location and search. Discussed at length, the contemplated Naturalization program. According to Mrs. Henle there are only three immigrant families in Montgomery, all of whom have become citizens. In her opinion, there would be no need for making any survey of the foreign born in their community, or to set up the kind of program

discussed. Mrs. Leon Kohn is no longer the chairman of Service to Foreign Born. Mrs. Henle is trying to induce Mrs. Edith Weil and Mrs. Myron Lobman to assume co-chairmanship of this committee, since they have the best background for this work. She asks that a copy of the Location Manual be sent to her for use of the new Chairman of Service to Foreign Born. She suggested that contact be made with the National Office of CJW to secure the correct listing of officers for our composite list. Mrs. Caroline Strassburger, who is a national officer of the CJW and a USNA Board member, is giving guidance and direction to the local Council, and is important in general Jewish community activity. The CJW has a local project for services to deaf children on a non-sectarian basis.

### RESETTLEMENT

All the people contacted by FR were extremely interested in the recent developments of the immigration picture, and readily recognized the need to further develop communities throughout the country for settlement for the displaced persons. There was unanimous agreement that their community would be willing to assume the responsibility for participating in a resettlement program. FR stressed all the necessary steps, namely—the formation of a Reception Committee, Housing Committee, Employment Committee, Casework Committee, Social Adjustment and Americanization Committee and Finance Committee. FR stressed the importance of trained professionals in the handling of this kind of program. Although Montgomery would not be in a position to hire a professional at this time, there are in the community three people who have had some social work training and experience who could undertake to give guidance and advice in this program. Mrs. Edith Weil, former Executive Secretary to the Federation, is a graduate with an M.S. in social work, and did carry the responsibility in the last immigration program. Accordingly, the President of Federation appointed her co-Chairman with Mr. Bernard Lobman. The composition of the committee will represent all three factions in the community, and

CJW representation. It was agreed that the men in the community represented through the Federation, would have to be responsible for allocation of funds and employment. The CJW would be responsible for reception, housing, social adjustment and Americanization. The professionals in the community would be responsible for the casework planning for the families. FR outlined this in writing for the President of the Federation, at his request, and he in turn said that he would get his committees working on this project and would let FR know when they were really organized and ready. He asked FR to send in writing figures on cost of program in communities of a similar size.

The evening meeting sponsored by the Federation was the only open meeting ever undertaken by the Federation. They were pleased by the showing, since it represented people from every faction in the community.

### RELIGIOUS FUNCTIONARIES

FR talked with Rabbi Atlas concerning his advertisement in the Morning Journal. He said that he felt that his congregation could use a Hebrew teacher and shochet. However, this would have to be presented to the head of his Board, Dr. Harry Glazer. FR was unsuccessful in contacting Dr. Glazer, since he was out of town. It was agreed that FR would write to Dr. Glazer upon her return from the field, and outline the religious functionary program for presentation to the congregation.

### CONCLUSION

Montgomery will offer limited resources, both in terms of employment and social resources for the adjustment of the immigrant. However, the community leaders are aware of these limitations and have an understanding of the problems involved in the adjustment of an immigrant to their type of community. If Montgomery should follow through and organize, FR believes that they would make a success of the program. The community

did rally to the needs of USNA, and to that extent the objectives of the field visit were accomplished.

FOLLOW-UP

1. Letter to be sent to Mr. Adolph Weil, Jr., on costs of program.
2. Letter to be sent to Dr. Glazer re religious functionary program.
3. Send new Location Manual to CJW and check with National CJW for correct Committee Chairman for composite list.

NOTE:

Of the ten units resettled in Montgomery during the previous resettlement program, only 3 families have remained in Montgomery. These 3 families have made a good social and economic adjustment. They own their own businesses.

BB:bl  
5/11/48

**Field Report, September 17–19, 1949**

City and State – Montgomery, Alabama	Field Representative
Date of Visit – September 17–19, 1949	
Date Received – September 26, 1949	Albert Meyers

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<u>PERSONS SEEN</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>AFFILIATION</u>
Mr. Bernard Lobman	904 Bell Building	Chairman – Refugee Committee
Mrs. Sigmund I. Weil	106 Glen Grattan Ave.	Co-Chairman – Refugee Committee
Mr. Leo Joseph Marshuetz	121 ½ Lee Street	President Jewish Federation of Montgomery



Mrs. Florian Strassburger	302 Glen Grat- tan Ave.	USNA Board Member and Housing Chair- man – Refugee Comm
Mrs. Hannah J. Simon	Temple Beth-Or	Secretary Jewish Federation of Montgomery
Rabbi Eugene Blachslager	102 Clayton Street	Temple Beth-Or
Mr. Aaron Aronov	4 Hubbard Street	Chairman – Employment Commit- tee
Mr. Charles H. Wampold	Bell Building	Co-Chairman – Employment Commit- tee

Meetings Attended

Refugee Committee meeting.  
Case Committee meeting.  
Employment Committee meeting.  
Education Committee meeting.  
General Community meeting.  
Personal interviews.

Follow-Up

OBJECTIVES OF FIELD VISIT

1. At community's invitation to assist them with problems of committee organization, community problems, and individual case situations.

STEPS TAKEN TO ACHIEVE OBJECTIVES

Refugee Committee Meeting: All of the Committee, except the Employment Chairman and Co-Chairman, attended the meeting.

They were interested in the Refugee Committee structure in other communities. They claimed that they had not developed a smooth working committee and a number of problems had arisen in the resettlement of their first five units. They were also disappointed by the desire of two of the units to move out of Montgomery in order to join relatives residing in other communities. The Committee felt that, perhaps, they had failed these two units and their desire to move was a result thereof.

The Chairman of the Hospitality Committee stated that they had played a minimum role with the newcomers, letting the Case Committee handle most of the work. They had been instructed to give the new arrivals ample opportunity to get their bearings before they entered the picture.

The Case Committee were at odds with the Employment Committee on the type of jobs being made available to the newcomers. The Employment Committee was inclined to push them into a job as soon after they arrived as possible, regardless of the kind of job. One new arrival had been given a job in a garage, working 12 hours a day, 7 days per week. The employer refused to permit any time off, although the low salary paid the man came completely out of community funds. The Case Committee pointed out that such a job left no leisure time for the man, no time for studying English, and offered no chances of eventual financial independence.

One portion of the community accused the Refugee Committee of pampering the new arrivals, at the same time that the other half protested that not enough was being done for them.

The Education Committee was employing the services of the principal of the Temple Hebrew School (a full-time teacher in the local public schools) and of another man, also a regular teacher. Classes were being conducted nightly at the Temple. The men were alternating with their wives in attending, thus permitting one of the parents to care for the children while the spouse attended classes. In addition to the five DP units brought

*Page 2 of the Field Report, September 17-19, 1949.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

in by the community, there were three other families, brought in by relatives, who also attended these classes. Housing for the newcomers was being provided near the center of town and, therefore, near the Temple where they could attend English classes.

However, as more new arrivals came, the Housing Committee would be compelled to look for apartments on the outskirts of the city. As a matter of fact, they are considering moving the present five units to such quarters because of the undesirability of their housekeeping apartments in which they now reside. The remoteness of the contemplated housing has brought up questions in the minds of both the Education and the Case Committees. The former will either have to provide special transportation or develop a new teaching arrangement. The Case Committee was worried about the limited contact with the rest of the Jewish community which will result.

FR informed them that, organizationally, they had an excellent Committee. It appeared, however, that the various subcommittees could work together more closely with each other, through occasional joint meetings and re-evaluation of their respective roles in furnishing a comprehensive and coordinated service to the newcomers. That while it would not seem advisable for the Hospitality Committee to go hog-wild over the new arrivals, their activity could be more extended without interfering with the functioning of the Case Committee. That while the information obtained by the Case Committee from the newcomers on personal problems should be treated as confidential, pertinent facts which might be of help to the Employment and other committees should most certainly be shared with them.

That, employment which lacked any future, or was of such a nature as to hinder a newcomer's adjustment in the community was pointless and only added unnecessary difficulties to the resettlement process. That community criticism should not only be expected but also encouraged, with the Committee making a real

effort to report and interpret to the community on the progress and problems of the local resettlement program. That their English classes were exceptionally well handled. FR had had a personal opportunity to observe them in Montgomery. Moving to remote areas might necessitate the organization of a motor squad, by the Education Committee, to transport some of the new arrivals to and from classes. Finally, as to the committees [*sic*] aim to move the families to better and, incidentally, more expensive homes, FR pointed out that, in doing so, they should consider the head of the family's future earning capacity. The rental should not be so high that, no matter what those future prospects are, it could not reasonably be met by the man's earnings when the community withdraws its financial assistance.

As a result of the multiplicity of questions arising in this overall Committee meeting, FR was to meet separately with some of the sub-committees and then to address a community-wide meeting called by the local Federation.

Employment Committee Meeting: The same questions arose as in the general Committee meeting. The men on this Committee felt that the women on the other committees were unduly concerned. The newcomers were being interviewed by the Chairman of Employment Committee and asked what kind of work they wanted to do. To date, all the newcomers had said eagerly that they would take any kind of work and that they wanted to start immediately. He had given them whatever job first came to hand, planning to get them other jobs later.

FR discussed the limitations of such planning, pointing out that the newcomer's eagerness was part of the desire to prove to themselves and to the community that they are capable, useful and a valuable addition to the community. That this same healthy attitude, so necessary for his adjustment, could easily be harmed or frustrated by a too hasty or improper assignment to a job. That the newcomer would not want to declare openly his reservations about a job for fear of displeasing those whom he considers his friends and benefactors.

It would seem better to go slow on planning employment. Regardless of his eagerness, the man should be given an opportunity to go home and discuss the various job openings with his wife. The final decision should contain their mutual approval. A low-paying job, which neither the development of greater job skill and better English speaking, will not add to the salary earned, can mean an indefinitely, prolonged financial responsibility to the community. Providing such jobs are pointless and only means having to look for still other jobs. It might also be financially practical, over the long haul, for the community to develop apprenticeships for the newcomers, with the community providing partial or complete sustenance during the training period. The Committee's reaction was very favorable. They recognized the advantages of more cautious progress and planning which considered both the future and the immediate needs of the newcomers.

Education Committee: They are doing an excellent job of teaching English to the newcomers. Nevertheless, they asked for suggestions to improve their work. FR could add little to what they are already doing other than to recommend social activities in connection with the classes. They seemed to be having such an enjoyable time during classes that it elicited their teacher's remark that the group afforded them the only opportunity to feel at ease with others. While Montgomery has been quite friendly to them, yet there is a wide difference in their economic levels and between the costly social life of the general Jewish community and the modest one which newcomers can afford.

Having the mixed class indulge in little socials after class (facilities are available for serving tea and coffee in the Temple building) would also help with their English speaking, if that is made part of the festivities. They, eventually, could prepare and arrange a small reception of their own for the Refugee Committee, giving themselves that opportunity to repay their social obligations in a very modest way.

Case Committee Meeting: The Case Committee's main complaint was about the unrealistic attitudes and demands of newcomers.

FR suggested that shortly after their arrival, they should have individual, personal discussions with the case worker handling the particular case as to how far the community was prepared or able to do for them and what the community, in turn, expected from them.

The Case Committee was happy to hear that the members of the Employment Committee were now seeing the advisability of working with the Case Committee and the necessity of considering job placement as an integral part of the adjustment process.

The matter of budgets came in for quite a bit of discussion. They had adopted the budget figures of our former Family Service Division in toto, without any changes. FR explained that the figures should be adjusted with local prices and local foods and according to the size and make-up of the individual families. They had been using flat budget figures per DP unit, regardless of size. The Committee was recommended to discuss the preparation of the budgets with the families concerned. Their initial participation would eliminate a lot of subsequent misunderstandings—such initial participation to include all the adult members of the family.

As to the two families who want to move to Cincinnati and New York City, respectively, to join relatives there, the Committee felt badly and wished to know about their responsibility. FR explained that if the local families insisted on moving and the proper agencies in the other cities were willing to accept them, the local Committee could only outline the conditions existing in the other communities, leaving it up to the clients to make the final decision. The Case Committee has the understanding that for every such unit moving out of the community, they will be sent a replacement by USNA, thus going beyond their initial commitment of 12 units.

General Community Meeting: Announcement of the meeting were sent to the entire community. Between 45–50 persons attended, including the President of the Federation and most of the Federation Board. FR spoke for about 15 minutes, bringing the community up-to-date on the latest developments in DP immigra-

tion and resettlement. Mr. Lobman followed with a short resume of the local Committee's activities. This was followed by a short question and answer session. The audience indicated a sympathetic attitude towards the whole program

Regional Conference: Mrs. Strassburger and Mrs. Weil were personally approached regarding participation in the Conference. Mrs. Weil stated that she would try to do so. Mrs. Strassburger claimed that she could do so only if USNA paid her expenses. FR pointed out that she was being invited as a representative from her community and if anyone should bear the cost, it should be up to Montgomery. She later said that she could not possibly make it as she was leaving on a trip with her husband on that week-end. There will undoubtedly be representation from Montgomery but it will probably not include Mrs. Strassburger.

#### EXTENT TO WHICH OBJECTIVES WERE ACHIEVED

The Committee and the Federation President all declared that they had been greatly helped by our visit.

#### EVALUATION OF FIELD VISIT

Besides assisting the community with their local problems, real and imaginary, there was definitely developed a greater good-will between the community and our agency. Our interest in them served to build up their courage in the knowing that they were working in the right direction and that they had someone to lean upon in emergencies.

AM:bl  
10/26/49

#### **Field Report, September 17, 1951**

City & State	Montgomery, Alabama	Field Representative
Date of Visit	September 17, 1951	
Date Submitted	September 17, 1951	Julius Levine

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<u>PERSONS SEEN</u>	<u>ADDRESS</u>	<u>AFFILIATION</u>
1. Joseph Marshuetz	121 ½ Lee St. (Business)	President, J. F.
2. Mrs. Simon	Temple Beth Or, 109 Clayton St.	Secretary, J. F.
3. Bernard Lobman	514 Hill Bldg.	Co-Chairman, Committee for New Americans
4. Mrs. Sigmund Weil	1078 Glen Grattan Ave.	Co-Chairman, Committee for New Americans
5. Mrs. Joe Levin	21 S. Lawrence	President, NCJW
6. Mrs. Edward Edwards	3032 Norman Bridge Rd.	Chairman, S. F. B.
7. Mrs. Edwin Wise	327 Felder Ave.	Chairman, Case Committee
8. Mrs. Florian Strassburger	322 Glen Grattan Ave.	USNA Board
9. Aaron Aronov (Phone)	101 Bell (Business)	Co-Chairman, Emp. Comm.

MEETINGS ATTENDED:

Committee for New Americans – 15 persons

FOLLOW-UP: (handled by B. Behrman 9/20/51)

Note change of address for Lobman and Mrs. S. Weil. The latter states she has not received any of our material since spring. Send Mrs. S. Weil current budget material from NYANA and a number of southern communities.

Migration & Settlement Consultant: Note community qualifications for referral of additional units.

Purposes of Visit:

- 1) To become acquainted with the present community program for newcomers since there has been no field visit for one year.
- 2) To discuss with the community leadership the latest developments in the migration picture and relate it specifically to Montgomery.
- 3) To offer requested information and services.

The following information was secured through individual conferences and the meeting with the Committee for New Americans:

Jewish Federation Welfare Fund:

It is significant to note that no two persons gave the same figures for the present Jewish population. It ranged from 1200 to 2000 persons. A census conducted in 1948 showed an actual count of 1200 persons. Growth of the community has been small and present Jewish Population is definitely less than 1500.

In 1950 the sum of \$93,300 was raised. This year's spring campaign did not get started until the summer and \$78,000 has been raised with several special gifts outstanding. It is not expected to raise as much as last year. No Israeli Bond drive as yet.

Budget-Services-Adjustment of Newcomers:

With a quota of 18 units, Montgomery has received 13 units. Only one unit has been received in 1951. There is no special budget allocation for the newcomers. The Jewish Federation sets aside each year a sum for local needs. Funds required for newcomers are made available as needed.

Four of the units still remain, two unattached men and two families. One family unit of four including 2 minor children receives monthly supplementation of \$50-\$60 since the man's take-home pay is \$28 a week. He is employed as stock clerk and porter and has prospects of advancing to salesclerk at a higher salary as soon as his command of English is adequate. The other units are self-

supporting. According to present trends, less than \$1,000 will be spent for newcomers in 1951.

There is some concern in the community that few of the units remain, even some that had made a satisfactory economic and social adjustment. The drive to leave this southern community for larger cities where there are relatives and friends has been irresistible. FR's interpretation that the community had made a real positive contribution by permitting families to come to this country through its community assurances and helping them in the most difficult period of initial adjustment to the American way of life was generally accepted.

Originally it was thought that in the un-industrialized community with its low wage scale for the unskilled, unattached units would be preferable. They could become self-supporting more quickly. But experience has shown that single persons find the social adjustment too difficult. The community is prepared to accept additional units, but would prefer small family units of younger-aged adults with some knowledge of English. A skilled tailor could be placed readily. FR discussed the limitations in complying with these preferences, but agreed that for the few units yet to come consideration would be given to selecting small family units with not too old adult members.

#### Committee for New Americans Meeting:

Although this meeting was called on short notice by Mrs. Weil on the very day of FR visit, there was a good attendance of 15 women. The lively discussion indicated clearly that the group is interested and willing to continue to function. It is a well-organized committee which has benefited and grown in understanding as a result of its work with newcomers.

After FR presented the latest immigration picture as a background for questions and discussion, the following points were covered:

- a) The number of additional units which the community may expect to receive and the type of units they would prefer

to get before the end of the program. FR indicated that an additional 2-3 units may be referred.

- b) When does the responsibility of the Committee for a new-comer unit stop? This was discussed in terms broader than economic self-sufficiency, but with emphasis on permitting newcomers to live their own lives and make their own decisions. As strangers in the local community setting, they may be confronted with problems for which they need help and counsel and should have the knowledge and feeling of inner security that they can turn to some member of the community.
- c) When the migration phase of the DP program is over, what national agency will continue to service local communities on the adjustment problems of recently settled newcomers? In other words, will USNA continue to function? FR indicated that the problem will undoubtedly be discussed at the coming annual meeting.
- d) The problem of the job placement for unskilled workers at minimum wages. This is a two-fold problem—the attitude of certain elements in the community that Jewish newcomers should not be placed in jobs usually held by Negroes since it is degrading to the community; the attitude of some newcomers that they constitute a third class in the southern social structure, just a little higher than the Negro population. Tendency of most newcomers to insist that only other DP's can understand them makes the problem of social integration most difficult. To some extent this problem could be handled if newcomers had sufficient knowledge of English to be placed in more responsible jobs. FR discussed it in terms of an accelerated English-teaching program and the need for upgrading at regular intervals.
- e) Budget material now used is out-dated and the Committee requested latest budget standards of NYAHA as a guide

*Page 3 of the Field Report, September 17, 1951.  
(Courtesy of YIVO, Institute for Jewish Research, New York.)*

to their local budgetary practices. FR stated this would be sent.

- f) The Committee was highly critical of the problems created in the community in August when notified that a family was coming only to be notified by wire on the scheduled date of arrival that the unit had been diverted to another community where they had relatives. No question as to the soundness of the diversion, but why didn't USNA have this information in advance? An apartment had been rented for the family and other plans made for their reception. It was a frustrating experience for the Committee. FR explained in some detail the migration operation, citing recent personal pier experiences. He stressed the fact that we are dealing with human beings, and in a program of this size there are bound to be last minute developments.

The group understood the explanation, but didn't accept it too willingly.

FR expressed appreciation for the good job Montgomery has done to date and the assurance of the Committee for New Americans that we can count on their continued cooperation until the end of the DP program.

Summation of Visit:

Montgomery still has a well-organized, functioning committee which is prepared to accept additional units within its quota. In view of the reality factors in this un-industrialized southern community, every possible effort should be made to select units in accordance with the Committee's expressed preferences.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The National Refugee Service (NRS, prewar) and its successor USNA were not the only national Jewish organizations to send field agents into Alabama's Jewish communities. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) also sent representatives into Alabama to promote and encourage the formation of AJC chapters. While the AJC representatives were not involved with DP resettlement, their detailed assessments corroborate the findings and narratives of the USNA reports.

<sup>2</sup> "Postwar Refugee Crisis And The Establishment Of The State Of Israel," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed March 27, 2011, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10005459>. Approximately one-fifth were survivors of the camps. See Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Boston, 1999), 67-68. One of the best accounts is Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York, 1982).

<sup>3</sup> Beth B. Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* (Brunswick, NJ, 2007), 18-23.

<sup>4</sup> By 1952, 78 percent of the DPs had settled in the major cities of the Northeast and Midwest, as well as California. Thirty-one percent settled in New York State alone. See Table A.13 in Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*, 287.

<sup>5</sup> Beatrice Behrman, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, April 26, 1948; Beatrice Behrman to Milton Krochmal, June 24, 1948, MKM24.27.612, USNA collection, YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York, (hereafter cited as USNA collection.)

<sup>6</sup> Birmingham had three congregations: the Reform Temple Emanu-El, the Conservative Temple Beth-El, and the Orthodox K'nesseth Israel. Montgomery's three congregations were the Reform Temple Beth-Or, the Conservative Agudath Israel, and the Sephardic Etz Ahayem. Selma had only one congregation, the Reform Mishkin Israel.

<sup>7</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950"; "Minutes of Board Meeting," July 6, 1950, folder "1947-1950," Birmingham Jewish Federation Papers (hereafter cited as BJF).

<sup>8</sup> Rosenberg quoted in Cohen, *Case Closed*, 22.

<sup>9</sup> In October 1950 Saul Travin noted that Montgomery had a quota of eighteen units, but at the time had only received ten units. Saul Travin, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, October 6, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>10</sup> Behrman, "Field Report," April 26, 1948.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Meyers, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, September 17-19, 1949, MKM24.27-613, USNA collection.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Bernard Lobman to Walter H. Bieringer, July 11, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. See also Mrs. Sigmund Weil to Lillian Collins, September 8, 1950, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection. In March 1951, Joseph Marshuetz, the president of the Jewish Federation of Montgomery, told the USNA that "it is our intention, and desire, to receive additional units whenever possible." It is unclear how many units arrived after 1951. Joseph Marshuetz to Arthur Greenleigh, March 30, 1951, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>16</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Julius Levins, "Field Report," Montgomery, AL, September 17, 1951, MKM24.27.613, USNA collection.

<sup>18</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Sigmund Weil to Lillian Collins, September 8, 1950.

<sup>20</sup> Travin, "Field Report," October 6, 1950.

<sup>21</sup> Beatrice Behrman, "Field Report," Selma, AL, February 2-3, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>22</sup> Unfortunately, no record of what happened to the Sznurs appears in the USNA files. Morton R. Adall, "Field Report," Selma, AL, October 27, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>23</sup> Seymore L. Cohn to USNA, May 26, 1949, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>24</sup> Seymore L. Cohn to USNA, June 12, 1950, MKM24.27.614, USNA collection.

<sup>25</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950"; "Minutes of Board Meeting," July 6, 1950, folder "1947-1950," BJJF.

<sup>26</sup> "Report of Displaced Persons' Committee," n.d. [1950], folder "1947-1950," BJJF.

<sup>27</sup> Allen Rankin, "The War is Over, But the Gates to Jewish DP Camps Closed," *Birmingham News*, September 24, 1947.

<sup>28</sup> Allen Rankin, "Veteran Charges U.S. Failed Handling DPs in Germany," *Birmingham News*, September 26, 1947.

<sup>29</sup> Jack Schniper, telephone interview by author, April 12, 2011; "Darkness Into Life," Birmingham Holocaust Education Center, accessed May 1, 2011, <http://www.bhamholocausteducation.org/bio-schniper.htm>.

<sup>30</sup> Karl Friedman, "Memories," *Deep South Jewish Voice*, September 1999, 28. Friedman was writing about the Nagrodski family, one of the first to be resettled in Birmingham. Szymon Nagrodski became a successful tailor in the city.

<sup>31</sup> Levins, "Field Report," September 17, 1951.

<sup>32</sup> Ben Hirsch, telephone interview by author, December 4, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Lawrence N. Powell, *Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, The Holocaust, and David Duke's Louisiana* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 370-371. William B. Helmreich noted, "in general, survivors seemed to have more problems in the Deep South than in other regions." William B.



Helmreich, *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* (New York, 1992), 101.

<sup>34</sup> "United States Policy Toward Jewish Refugees, 1941-1952," Holocaust Encyclopedia, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, accessed January 26, 2013, <http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/en/article.php?ModuleId=10007094>.

<sup>35</sup> Levins, "Field Report," September 17, 1951.

<sup>36</sup> Mayer Newfield was the son of Temple Emanu-El rabbi Morris Newfield.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Melvin Wali Ali Feiler Meyer:  
A Student's Struggle with Insider/Outsider  
Status in Civil Rights-Era Alabama

by

Dina Weinstein \*

“A Bell Rang,”

Editorial, *Crimson White*, September 27, 1962

The year 2013 marks the fiftieth anniversary of the integration of the University of Alabama. During the 1962–1963 academic school year, twenty-year-old Melvin Feiler Meyer held the post of editor of the university's student newspaper, the *Crimson White*. His tenure in that position began with a departure from typical articles covering clubs, fraternities, and sports. On September 27, 1962, he ran an editorial taking an ethical and moral stand for integration at the University of Mississippi and, by extension, the University of Alabama.<sup>1</sup> Blowback from that editorial made Meyer's year a terror-filled but also exhilarating ride. Black-and-white photos of Meyer from the University of Alabama student yearbook, the *Corolla*, depict a serious, clean-cut, dark haired college student in a suit and tie posed with a manual typewriter.<sup>2</sup> Running the flowery, political editorial would mark Meyer as a radical, an outsider, and a champion of civil rights and free speech. This was not an image he had cultivated, but rather a role he grew into.

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Racially integrated schools bucked the accepted order in Alabama and Mississippi. But the 1954 *Brown v. the Board of Education* U.S. Supreme Court ruling barred segregation in public educational institutions and brought black students to formerly segregated schools throughout the South. The equal opportunity message in the *Crimson White* riled segregationists. Meyer's Jewish religion also made him a target as the segregated way of life was slowly upturned. That outsider role continued through his life.

Today, Meyer is a resident of San Francisco, California, and a Sufi teacher. He wears his wavy, snow-white hair in a ponytail that reaches past his shoulders. A light drawl still flavors his speech. He smiles readily, revealing a gap between his top front teeth. Now known as Murshid Wali Ali, he directs the San Francisco, California-based Esoteric School of the Sufi Ruhaniat International, where he teaches Sufism, Dharma, and Dances and Walks training. Sufism is generally understood to be the inner, mystical, or psycho-spiritual dimension of Islam. Dharma is a Hindu and Buddhist doctrine of the universal truth common to all individuals at all times. Dances and Walks is a physical and artistic, folk-dance-like spiritual practice.<sup>3</sup> Never having converted to Islam, Meyer still considers himself a Jew.

Meyer's training and status was achieved after years of following Samuel L. Lewis, who was also Jewish but whose teachings drew from many spiritual traditions. Meyer connected with Lewis in San Francisco in the late 1960s while Meyer pursued graduate studies at Vanderbilt University. The counterculture was blooming, and Meyer grew as a spiritual leader during the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>4</sup> After working as a teacher at a progressive school in the South, Meyer embraced the counterculture lifestyle while studying and teaching Sufi philosophy with Lewis at his Esoteric School in San Francisco. Meyer reflects that the experience of publishing the editorial and the subsequent antisemitic backlash, plus his interest in philosophy, led him toward this unconventional path.<sup>5</sup>

Primary sources document Meyer's jarring journey during his key school year and tell the bigger story of his insider/outsider status as a Jew from Mississippi. Present-day interviews with Meyer show how taking an editorial stand for integration with all

its repercussions shaped Meyer profoundly and laid a basis for opening him to ideas that dramatically veered him away from his upbringing in the 1940s and 1950s in the segregated South.

On September 20, 1962, the entire country, including students like Meyer, watched as James Meredith made a first attempt to register at the University of Mississippi campus in Oxford, Mississippi. Governor Ross Barnett personally blocked Meredith's way. Students and others rioted in opposition to integration at Ole Miss.

Meyer and his classmates at the University of Alabama knew that integration would soon come to their institution. Many believed that they could not violently respond as students and non-students did at Ole Miss and as University of Alabama students and Tuscaloosa residents had done in 1956 when Autherine Lucy first attempted to integrate their institution. The *Crimson White* editorial, which Meyer said was actually penned by a friend but for which he was held responsible, demonstrates that many in Alabama understood integration to be a human rights issue. The language in the editorial is thoughtful, considering many sides of the argument that James Meredith deserved an education at Mississippi's capstone institution. The *Crimson White* was a student platform, and the author of the editorial, titled "A Bell Rang," was speaking to his contemporaries. But he was also speaking to the university community, and the editorial was a comment on the values of the greater community. School integration was an issue that marked this generation of students, and "A Bell Rang" directly addressed the challenge.

### *Growing Up in Mississippi*

Meyer was aware of and repelled by the segregated structure of life in his hometown of Starkville, Mississippi. He recalls separate water fountains in government buildings.<sup>6</sup> Nonetheless, he was not attuned to the civil rights protests taking place. Numerous social protests occurred in Alabama in 1962, from a judge ordering desegregation of the Montgomery library and museum to marches and demonstrations by Talladega black and white college students to a petition delivered to Birmingham officials to remove all racial signs and eliminate racial job barriers.<sup>7</sup>

Meyer did not become active in these struggles. He never belonged to student civil rights organizations like the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) or the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) that had filled the freedom rider buses in 1961. Northern Jews were well represented on the freedom rides that passed through Alabama and finished in Mississippi with the goal of enforcing integrated interstate travel. Many Jewish and gentile southerners, however, viewed the riders as outside agitators despite the fact that many of the riders were southerners. Jews who participated were moved to act because of the injustices suffered by blacks in the South under the Jim Crow system. Many, like San Francisco-based freedom rider Alexander Weiss, were the same age as Meyer. Weiss told Eric Etheridge, author of *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders*, that the discriminatory situation seemed similar to how his Austrian refugee father had suffered, and for that reason Weiss refused to stand on the sidelines.<sup>8</sup> European persecution of Jews climaxing in the Holocaust was not, however, Meyer's motivation for running the pro-integration editorial. Meyer believed that the moral argument for equal opportunity made sense under the Constitution, whereas discrimination did not.<sup>9</sup>

Standing with integrationists was complicated for Jews in the South. Jackson, Mississippi, rabbi Perry Nussbaum had secretly visited jailed Jewish freedom riders the previous summer at Parchman Penitentiary. His congregation disapproved of the outside agitators who dropped in, made waves, and then left. Jewish representation at these rides and marches made local southern Jews uncomfortable because they would be linked to their coreligionists and potentially face a backlash from the white Protestant society.<sup>10</sup>

Meyer describes his upbringing in Starkville as a traditional, middle-class one complete with African American household help. His family attended the Reform B'nai Israel congregation in Columbus, Mississippi. Despite deep family roots in the region, Meyer recalls growing up Jewish in the 1940s and 1950s as awkward. He felt like an outsider, an "extraterrestrial." A Christian classmate drove home Meyer's marginal status when the first-

grade student asked him why he killed Christ.<sup>11</sup> Meyer's sister, Marjorie Meyer Goldner, remembers understanding her differences, but fitting in.<sup>12</sup>

Meyer recalls that acculturated southern Jews strove to avoid the "New York, loudmouth, kike" stereotype.<sup>13</sup> That description served as code among genteel southern Jews for not calling attention to differences. But this was too late for Meyer. Hank Black, a college friend who was Meyer's successor as managing editor at the *Crimson White*, describes Meyer as someone who loved a philosophical argument and was often confrontational.<sup>14</sup> Meyer studied in the university's honors program. His superior intellect made him both impeccable and suspect. His powerful post, challenging personality, and Jewish faith positioned Meyer as both a hero and a villain for his stance.

#### *The Editorial*

"A Bell Rang," published on page 4 of the *Crimson White*, was unsigned as per editorial policy. That the *Crimson White* staff approached the issue of integration is noteworthy in itself. Black, then the managing editor, recalled that student staffers did not take on off-campus political topics. Typical topics included pep rallies, the military's Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, Greek life, and the athletic feats of the Crimson Tide football team and their star athlete, Joe Namath, as well as a regular 'Bama Belle photograph featuring a bouffant-haired coed from sorority row. The September 27, 1962, issue of the *Crimson White* was only the third newspaper edition Meyer had led, having inaugurated his term as editor with the last edition of the previous school year. His previous editions' staff editorials focused on the same sort of parochial issues as his predecessors', stating editorial policy and denouncing parking policies as unfair and fraternity rush as archaic.<sup>15</sup> The one exception to this rule appeared the previous week when the columnist writing as "The Mad Hatter" poked fun at a local White Citizens Council screening of the white supremacist film, *Birth of a Nation*.<sup>16</sup> Otherwise, there was little to signal the politicized direction Meyer's editorship was about to take.

The editorial begins with the words of the folk song, "If I had a Hammer," made popular by singers Peter, Paul, and Mary, who visited the campus later that year. The author makes a moral and ethical argument for why Meredith should be admitted to the University of Mississippi. In the editorial, the use of the collective pronoun "we" in phrases like "We are concerned" gives the impression that the writer is representing the opinions of the entire newspaper staff.

The editorial provides many indications that the writer is accustomed to building arguments and considering various viewpoints. In fact, Robbie Roberts, one of Meyer's classmates on the debate team and on the *Crimson White* editorial board, was the author.<sup>17</sup> Nonetheless, Meyer reflects that he received both credit and blame.<sup>18</sup> Meyer and Roberts kept Roberts's identity secret as a matter of editorial policy and because Roberts's father was a public school teacher, and Roberts believed that his father would be threatened. "I liked the way it was written, and it seemed to coincide with my moral sense of what was right," Meyer recently told a reporter for the *Crimson White*. "It was something I was willing to take a stand for."<sup>19</sup>

In the editorial, Roberts quotes journalist P. D. East to make the argument that if bias is allowed to keep out one group, other minorities will be next. "If I were a Catholic in Mississippi, I'd be worried," East wrote. "If I were a Jew, I'd be scared stiff. If I were a Negro, I would already be gone."<sup>20</sup> East was a social critic who "represented the small, and generally cautious, segment of white southern society that recognized, and tried to change, the racial injustice that defined the South in the first half of the twentieth century."<sup>21</sup> East established the *Petal Paper* newspaper in 1953 in Petal, Mississippi, and used it as a forum to promote his belief that African Americans should, and must, receive fair treatment and legal equality. By 1959, his caustic editorials and liberal racial views resulted in the loss of local subscribers and advertisers. However, the *Petal Paper* survived with sporadic publication until 1971 through donations and subscriptions from liberal supporters in other areas of the country.

*Melvin Meyer, editor of the Crimson White.*

*Editorial Board of the Crimson White.*

*Left to right: Harve Mossawir, Robbie Roberts, and Melvin Meyer.  
(Photos from the Corolla year book, 1963, courtesy of the W. S. Hoole  
Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.)*



*Front page, Crimson White, September 27, 1962,  
the day the editorial ran on page 4.  
(Courtesy of University of Alabama Digital Collections,  
William Stanley Hoole Special Collections Library, Tuscaloosa.)*

The *Crimson White* editorial asserts that it is wrong that justice and freedom were denied to Meredith. The doors of higher education institutions must be open to all, Roberts writes. He employs the famous line from John Donne, the English metaphysical poet: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. . . . I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee." Thus the readers are implicated and made personally responsible for justice and the correct execution of civil rights as promised in the U.S. Constitution. The editorial's last line completes this thought by recalling Woody Guthrie's protest folk song, "This Land Was Made For You and Me."

The eloquent bell imagery is especially poignant for the University of Alabama. The Denny Chimes bell tower is an iconic landmark on the campus quad, ringing every quarter hour.

#### *University Desegregation in the Deep South*

The editorial provided a measured response to a very violent scene at the University of Mississippi. Two days after the editorial ran, on September 29, 1962, President John F. Kennedy issued a proclamation calling on the government and the people of Mississippi to "cease and desist" their obstructive actions and "disperse and retire peaceably forthwith."<sup>22</sup> The crowd at the university turned violent, and authorities struggled to maintain order. The federal government intervened, and James Meredith registered for classes on October 1, 1962. The following August, he became the first black graduate from the university.<sup>23</sup>

Societal rules were being bent. Tempers ran high. Word of the editorial got out, and the *Crimson White* staff began to receive threats. "All hell broke loose," is how Meyer describes what happened after he ran the pro-integration editorial.<sup>24</sup>

E. Culpepper Clark, in *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama*, comprehensively documents the institution's attempt to stop, then delay, and finally deal diplomatically with integration. Meyer's short presence in the seven-year epic battle to integrate Alabama's capstone educational institution is defined by the student editor's insider status as a southerner and

a high achieving honors student and his outsider status as a Jew and thus one suspect of foreign, even communist ideas. Targeting a Jewish student editor for running a pro-integration editorial was not a difficult jump for many. Historian Clive Webb observes: "The civil rights crisis sparked an explosion of anti-Semitic extremism across the South. Segregationists accused 'Communist Jews' of having masterminded a conspiracy to destroy democratic government in the region."<sup>25</sup> Clark writes that the university viewed the editorial's dissent as something that could be dealt with by dismissing the editor and censoring the content of the student newspapers.<sup>26</sup>

B. J. Hollars has written a wide-ranging account of the University of Alabama's 1956 and 1963 desegregation attempts, as well as the little-known story of the civil rights movement in Tuscaloosa. His book, *Opening the Doors: The Desegregation of the University of Alabama and the Fight for Civil Rights in Tuscaloosa*, focuses on what he terms the "secret history behind UA's desegregation." He describes it more as a process that proved successful due to the concerted efforts of dedicated individuals including student leaders, a progressive university president, a steadfast administration, and secret negotiations between the Justice Department, White House, and Alabama's stubborn governor George Wallace. Hollars thinks Meyer's story exemplifies how one person can make a difference by taking a stand.<sup>27</sup> Hollars's recounting of the many activists, administrators, and student leaders who shaped individual and collective organization toward a peaceful integration shows that Meyer was not alone. However, Meyer faced unique threats because of his religion. Standing up for integration would not just categorize Meyer as a traitor to the white race, but peg him as an outsider. Attacks took a clearly antisemitic tone. Hollars writes that smaller actions paved the way for integration. Those actions included administrators removing Coke bottle machines and any debris on campus that could be thrown during potential rioting and enlisting student leaders to calm the population and act as ambassadors to the trailblazing first black students.<sup>28</sup>

*Documenting Meyer's Role*

The primary and related documents cited in this article depict Meyer's personal experience grappling with the violent reaction to the editorial and his polarizing status. This article goes beyond and in far greater depth concerning Meyer's experience than the previous historical accounts. A fuller picture emerges through first hand interviews with Meyer and his family, colleagues, and friends from the University of Alabama. Further reading of the *Crimson White* from 1962 and 1963 renders a clearer understanding of Meyer's insider/outsider status and of southern society. A Meyer family album assembled by Meyer's mother, Mildred, and archived at Mississippi State University, shows Meyer's personal achievements that year, as well as the threats and accolades he received following the running of the "A Bell Rang" editorial and his stand in support of it.<sup>29</sup>

Explorations of the southern Jewish experience during the civil rights era and the tensions of this group's insider/outsider status are described at length in *Fight Against Fear*, where Clive Webb writes, "Those who dared to protest against racial prejudice risked serious personal injury."<sup>30</sup> Webb's book describes the experiences of Jews who were considered leaders and others who did not fit that category. It clearly demonstrates that taking a stand on integration and civil rights was a personal choice for Jews in the South, one that came with much personal risk. Jews had a justified fear of being real targets as a minority. Just four years before the editorial, a number of bombings occurred at synagogues and Jewish community centers in the region. Jewish merchants, who owned many of the segregated dry goods and department stores in the South, were on the front lines of the protest movement, caught between segregationists and integrationists. The many community portraits depicted in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, edited by Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin, describe the various tacks southern rabbis took as leaders and the varying degrees of support they received from their congregations.<sup>31</sup> Many pro-integration rabbis in the South looked to the teaching of the biblical prophets for guiding princi-

ples for ethical decisions on the moral high road. Rabbis described in *The Quiet Voices* often acted as representatives of the local Jewish community.

Meyer did not share this motivation and did not see himself as a representative of the Jewish community. He admits his Reform Jewish education was limited. In printing "A Bell Rang," Meyer communicated for the majority view of the student newspaper's editorial board. The editorial's moral and ethical argument is not directly drawn from Jewish prophetic writings.<sup>32</sup> Meyer was no doubt a leader. His strong sense of journalistic integrity and developing sense of philosophical precepts and ethical theory drove his decision to run the editorial. He was a brash young opinion setter in the face of slow-moving change in an environment of rage.

Meyer family scrapbooks, or albums, include documents of Melvin's and his older sister Marjorie's academic careers in pursuit of advanced degrees at the University of Alabama. The first scrapbook's thirty-five pages document the year 1960 when Meyer began studying at the University of Alabama and worked at the *Crimson White* in the news and rewrite department and then as a sports writer. The second album, one hundred pages long, documents Meyer's wild ride assuming the post of student editor during the 1962-1963 academic year. It includes articles in the state and national press regarding the running of the "A Bell Rang" editorial and about Meyer receiving threats and praise for the act, as well as coverage of the guards paid by the University of Alabama to protect Meyer from harm. Also in the album are Meyer's writings about the experience for a student press association, transcripts, correspondence pertaining to applying and being accepted to graduate school, and documentation of his participation in other student activities.

A clipping from the *Birmingham News* in the second album from October 14, 1962, with the headline "Crimson-White editor gets threats after UM editorial" reports that a cross was burned in front of Meyer's fraternity house and that Meyer had received threatening phone calls. Fraternity brother Joseph J. "Skipper" Levin, Jr., remembers angry callers to the Zeta Beta Tau fraternity

house shouting to whomever answered: "Nigger lover!"<sup>33</sup> The antisemitic criticism of Meyer reverberated at his Jewish fraternity. Meyer recalls being a pariah at Zeta Beta Tau for making the fraternity a target of hate.<sup>34</sup> He recounts that much of the hate mail he received was antisemitic.<sup>35</sup> Meyer and Levin tell this tale of terror in a factual, almost lighthearted way as if to say: "Can you believe this happened to me?" The retelling is mixed with a sense that hate was a known behavior that, despite Jews adhering to conformity of the white cultural norms, could descend randomly or when those norms were questioned or deviated from. Meyer and Levin also conveyed a sense of the reality that, despite great efforts to acculturate and conform, being Jewish in the Deep South set one apart, and with that came the risk of ostracism in social settings and even this shocking extreme of targeting.

*Pledge Class, Zeta Beta Tau, University of Alabama, 1960.  
Melvin Meyer is in middle row, second from left;  
Joseph Levin is front row, second from right.  
(Courtesy of Joseph L. Levin.)*

Clive Webb wrote, "Anti-Semitic extremists seized the opportunity to portray Jews as the masterminds behind the integration movement."<sup>36</sup> A six-page *Fiery Cross* newsletter, the official publication of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, dated November 17, 1961, and filed in the Meyer family album, shouts the headline: "KU KLUX KLAN Declares WAR! Against Negro-Jew Communism." A section of the rambling article titled "Forward the Klan" reads: "The evil scheme of the jew [*sic*] to overthrow the American Government cannot be denied by any just man. Therefore, they are traitors, and they are not American. Their supreme loyalty, by their own admission, is to ONE WORLD JEWRY with the gentile white man branded as their slaves. It is so written in their foul Talmud law."<sup>37</sup>

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*Ku Klux Klan  
Fiery Cross  
November 17, 1961.  
(Courtesy of Henry Meyer  
Papers, Mitchell Memorial  
Library, Special  
Collections,  
Mississippi State  
University, Starkville.)*

One letter written in loopy cursive from Chicago, Illinois, dated November 14, 1962, reads:

Hello Jew, I see in the papers that some red-blooded Americans down there are out to get you. Well you asked for it, you and all the sneaking undermining [*sic*] Jews who are at work in this country trying to break it apart so it can be handed to your communist friends in Moscow. It makes me sick to see you dirty Jews going around pretending to be Americans. Someday soon the white people of this county will cleanse themselves of scum like you.

The letter goes on for three more paragraphs and is signed “Seig Heil! A Nazi!”<sup>38</sup>

Both hate letters and letters of support illustrating the range of opinions and emotions of the era are included in the family album. A typed letter signed W. D. Archer of Mobile, Alabama, dated October 6, 1962, reads:

Your editorial “A Bell Rang . . .” renews my faith in right eventually prevailing. Right could prevail now, if those adults who respect law and order and whose religion really has some meaning, will have the same courage that your Editorial Staff has demonstrated in daring to stand up for principles that seem to have lost their meaning to a great number of people at a time when they are most needed.

We still have a wonderful government—we have the form of a wonderful religion. Perhaps, it will take the youth of America to give them spirit again. Without spirit, neither our government nor our religion can live.

Another typed letter directed to Meyer’s mother from Virginia H. Thorpe at the Air Base in Columbus, Mississippi, had a congratulatory tone. Dated October 15, 1962, the original was written entirely in capital letters. It follows here with all its errors:

You don’t know me, or I you, or your son but I do want to congradulate you and him on his courageous stand in this James Meredith and “Ole Miss.” situation. It takes a lot of character to champion such an unpopular cause. I realize that he didn’t state anything but the right of James Meredith to go to the school of his choise and its moral and legal justification



but this is something that I never expected to see in a boy from Starkville. I know that a lot of the credit for such a fine boy goes to the mother and father who raised him and I only hope that I can do such a fine job with my 3 year old son. I know your mothers heart swelled with pride when he took his open stand in this cause. . . . He may lose some so called friends and I know that his path will be rocky from here on but I think what self respect he has gained. As I grow older I realize more every day what a great thing this is (self respect I mean) and how it gives us courage and fortitude in later life. This one thing, is what I hope to instill in my son. Not to be a sheep and follow the leader because that is the easiest way and the thing to do, but to have his own opinions and his own course of action independent of groups. I am trying to teach him even now that he must not be small and petty in his relations with other people. I am keeping the article on your son's editorial to show him graphically what I mean to stand in the face of popular opinion for something that you believe in. . . . I hope that you will send my best wishes to your boy and I am sure that they will be only one of the very many he will receive.<sup>39</sup>

A telegram from Larry C. Jackson, student body president of the Tuskegee Institute and dated December 13, 1962, reads:

TUSKEGEE STUDENTS HAVE READ WITH GREAT INTEREST THE ACCOUNT OF YOUR ACTION. WE SALUTE YOU FOR YOUR GALLANT STAND AND PLEDGE OUR SUPPORT TO YOU.<sup>40</sup>

Such a statement of support from the students of the all-black college must have been especially meaningful and gratifying for Meyer.

#### *State and National Reaction*

Following the publication of the editorial and the subsequent response, Meyer turned inward to his small circle of friends: student journalists, philosophers, and artists. He remained with the newspaper and continued to be called on the rug by the university administration for his coverage of events. The hateful responses also jarred Meyer's fraternity brother, Joe Levin, from an existence he classifies as complacent to one of uncomfortable awareness of

hate. Levin bristled at hearing Jews both in the fraternity and in his hometown of Montgomery critical of Meyer's stand.

The University of Alabama clamped down on the *Crimson White* staff. Meyer remembers the university censoring the newspaper's articles after September 27, 1962. The implications of the editorial rippled beyond the campus.<sup>41</sup>

After he ran the editorial, Meyer's family also became targets. Not only did the Klan burn a cross on the lawn of his University of Alabama Zeta Beta Tau Jewish fraternity house, but also on his parents' lawn in Starkville, Mississippi. Meyer's family felt further repercussions when Oktibbeha, Mississippi, county officials pulled their business from Henry Meyer's printing company when he refused to denounce his son's editorial.<sup>42</sup> The Meyers did not tell their son about the pressure, loss of business, or about the hate crime that ruined a rose trellis. They did not want that to influence their son's journalistic integrity. The hate crime especially hurt, as it pegged the Meyers as outsiders, even though Henry Meyer had championed the betterment of Starkville as newspaper editor.<sup>43</sup>

On November 14, 1962, the *New York Times* reported that the University of Alabama had hired two private detectives, former police officers, to protect Melvin Meyer. Ten days later, the *New York Times* printed an article headlined: "Alabama Acts to Bar Violence at University—Negro's Application to School is Expected Next Term, Leaders Urge Governor-Elect to Back Law and Order."<sup>44</sup>

The *New York Times* article devoted three paragraphs to Meyer. It explained that the editorial created consternation. The article notes that Tuscaloosa served as national headquarters for the United Klans of America, Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Inc., and home to Robert M. Shelton, a former Tuscaloosa rubber plant worker and the Klan's imperial wizard. Meyer told the *New York Times* reporter that he received anonymous telephone threats telling him "that if the student did not leave town within 24 hours the Klan would see that he left 'in a pine box.'"<sup>45</sup>

The student editor felt immune from threats. He indicates that he saw it all as a joke because of his youth. He saw the gram-

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*Above: Telegram from Larry C. Jackson, president of the Tuskegee Institute Student Body. Below: Letter from Virginia H. Thorpe.  
(Courtesy of Henry Meyer Papers, Mitchell Memorial Library, Special Collections, Mississippi State University, Starkville.)*

matical mistakes and garbled syntax in the hate mail and viewed the writers as uneducated people.<sup>46</sup> Meyer would have been at an even bigger risk had he taken these views of equality and equal opportunity further with outreach like voter registration drives conducted by the subsequently murdered Jewish 1964 Freedom Summer volunteers Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman and their African American co-worker, James Chaney, among many others. Meyer's insider status may have protected him even while many whites reacted angrily to the editorial.<sup>47</sup>

Nonetheless the university's move to protect Meyer was justified. The United Klans of America was notorious for numerous acts of brutality including a number of murders.<sup>48</sup> The James C. Bennett papers, housed in the University of Alabama's W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, contain reports filed by former police officers referred to as operatives.<sup>49</sup> The reports demonstrate that the guards spotted real danger: night riders circling Meyer's off-campus apartment.<sup>50</sup>

As the administration backed off, Meyer opined on student journalists' right to press freedom in the October 10, 1962, edition of the *Crimson White*.<sup>51</sup> Meyer's standing behind the "A Bell Rang" editorial led to recognition from his peers. Clippings in his family album from February 28, 1963, in the *Crimson White* and in many other newspapers, reported that Meyer was named college Editor of the Year by the U.S. Student Press Association.<sup>52</sup>

Outside organizations invited Meyer to speak, and the album documents the growing attention focused on him. He sat on a panel concerning press freedom that winter, for example, at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Yet he remained wary of outsiders. Once, when a group of students from the University of Chicago called him to ask what they could do for the civil rights movement on a weekend in the South, Meyer told them to stay in their city and work to better it.<sup>53</sup> Meyer detailed the censorship and tension at the *Crimson White* in an article for the spring 1963 edition of the *Journal of the Student Press* titled, "Alabama Crisis." He wrote:

During the weeks immediately following the editorial, I began to have a pretty good idea of what the inside of the president's office looked like. I was called in for "counseling sessions" about twice every day. In the course of these lengthy sessions I was forcefully impressed with the point of view that the University could not afford a truly free student newspaper. . . . With this in mind they read all *Crimson White* copy and censored the next week all the Letters to the Editor, and a review of Carlton Putnam's "Race and Reason" by a University anthropologist. . . . So I resolved either to have complete freedom or resign. . . . [W]e now have editorial freedom in the real sense of the word—freedom to comment meaningfully on significant issues. But the whole series of events underlines one basic point—if you value real freedom of the press, you are under an obligation to fight for it.<sup>54</sup>

The *Crimson White* staffers continued writing their first take on history and documenting the integration process at the University of Alabama. Ultimately, Meyer was considered too much of a lightning rod. He believes that his selection as a Peace Corps summer intern in Washington, D.C., was a careful choice to get him off campus while black students were scheduled to register. In a recent interview Meyer said he was comfortable in his new role as a symbol of the ethical and moral high ground of integration. Meyer reflected on the experience in an e-mail:

When I was thrust into the public spotlight as a focus of the battle for de-segregation, I looked deep into myself and felt very much at home with the editorial view that our newspaper had taken. Something rose in me as a response to gladly step forward and represent these ideals. I genuinely liked this feeling. At the same time I had a relatively small circle of friends who I could really rely on. And with the cross burnings, and the hate mail, and the "operatives" who were veterans of Bull Connor's Birmingham Police Force, a certain amount of mature caution was required.

But probably the deepest way the experience affected me was in the deepening of my heart's feeling nature and thus finding deeper empathy and relationship with peoples whom I had never thought too much about before.

One story tells it all in a nutshell. I drove home to Starkville over the spring holiday at Alabama. On the way I stopped at a roadside place for a coffee and overheard two local fellows who were already seated in a nearby booth having some negative opinions about me. It didn't affect me very much but I was glad to leave. While I was home my mother asked me to go over to Cora's in one of the black neighborhoods and take the wash that my mother wished her to do. I had no relationship with Cora. When I stopped my car and got out an old woman comes running out of her house. She is crying and trying to talk at the same time. "Mr. Melvin, Mr. Melvin they're going to let Mr. Meredith back into Ole Miss. They're going to let him back in!" And here she had to break down and cry—tears of relief for such an unheard of event—feelings that she felt comfortable to share with me because she trusted where my heart was.<sup>55</sup>

### *Postscript*

While Meyer was away in Washington, D.C., serving as a Peace Corps intern, the status quo changed at the University of Alabama. In June 1963, Vivian J. Malone and James A. Hood became the first African Americans to sustain enrollment at the university. This second attempt to integrate the university was peaceful in comparison to the riots that accompanied Autherine Lucy's enrollment, due in large part to the university's meticulous planning of the event. However, then-Governor George Wallace had vowed in his inaugural address to "stand in the schoolhouse door" if necessary to prevent federal authorities from integrating any school in the state. True to his word, Wallace stood in front of Foster Auditorium on June 11, 1963, when Malone and Hood arrived to register for classes. Ordered to "cease and desist" by a proclamation from President Kennedy, Wallace refused to step aside for more than four hours until Brigadier General Henry Graham of the Thirty-first Division of the National Guard enforced the presidential order.<sup>56</sup>

The primary and related documents investigated for this article demonstrate that the following year Meyer left the *Crimson White*. His transcript shows high grades in courses in western

culture and the philosophy of religion. Meyer says he dipped into antiwar protests.<sup>57</sup> In his last semester at the University of Alabama he did not shrink away. He took the Graduate Record Exam and applied to graduate schools to further his studies in philosophy. He also acted in the role of Estragon in a production of *Waiting for Godot*, the absurdist play by Samuel Beckett where two characters wait endlessly for a guest. There is no simple meaning to *Waiting for Godot*, but for the young actors it might have been an exercise of finding meaning in the societal change that they themselves found they needed to engage in, as both their black counterparts made waves and their white elders changed policies.

On May 31, 1964, Meyer graduated from the University of Alabama and began graduate studies in religion and philosophy at Vanderbilt University. The experience as editor of the *Crimson White* and running the editorial, "A Bell Rang," made a long-term mark, opening him to other ideas. He reflected that the experiences of that year pushed him to seek spiritual meaning:

The experience of expanding my interest and empathy continued. The outer identity as a social justice figure quickly gave way to the role of student of Philosophy and Comparative Religion, and from there into absorption in mysticism, the continual longing for the Beloved and the union in the Beloved, and then deeper study and discipleship with a Sufi Master.<sup>58</sup>

Meyer continues to bridge cultures through examination of Eastern and Western philosophy. He expounds on the concepts of expression, relaxation, and universalities. His friend Joe Levin credits the experience of confronting prejudice with leading him to later co-establishing the Southern Poverty Law Center, a non-profit organization that combats hate, intolerance, and discrimination through education and litigation.<sup>59</sup> The Southern Poverty Law Center identifies and confronts hate groups directly while reaching out to educators with ideas on how to teach tolerance.

For Meyer the fiftieth anniversary of the integration of the University of Alabama does not hold deep significance. He has never returned for a reunion, nor does he maintain ties to his alma

mater. He believes his stand for equal rights is one that can yield significance for students today. In fact, that act in 1962 remains an inspiration for Jewish students at the university. In a 2011 *Crimson White* letter to the editor denouncing a racist event, a Jewish student active in Hillel and Meyer's Zeta Beta Tau fraternity cited Meyer as a precedent for denouncing prejudice.<sup>60</sup>

Meyer's experience as a southern Jew in the heated civil rights era is distinct in that he was a young man with a title and a platform often reserved for older leaders with greater prominence. Most Jews in the South did not make waves because they feared social and economic repercussions from segregationists or they agreed with southern racial mores and practices. But like those Jews who openly supported integration, Meyer acted alone and found support from a small group. He suffered ostracism and was threatened. The experience changed him, but he also made a lasting impact. The year following the publication of the editorial, the University of Alabama administration did not enforce restrictions on the young student journalists at the *Crimson White* as they wrote a first draft of the history, based on fact and opinion, of the monumentally significant year.<sup>61</sup>

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**"A Bell Rang," editorial, *Crimson White*, September 27, 1962**

**A Bell Rang . . .**

If I had a bell,  
 I'd ring it in the morning,  
 I'd ring it in the evening,  
 All over this land.  
 I'd ring out justice,  
 I'd ring out freedom,  
 I'd ring out love for my brother and my sister,  
 All over this land.

. . . . American Folk Song.

A bell rang this week in Oxford, Mississippi.



It tolled not the ending of segregation as some had thought it might. Its message was rather the seeming success of Gov. Ross Barnett, who literally "stood in the schoolhouse door" and denied admission to James Meredith, Mississippi Negro.

We are concerned that Meredith did not gain access to the University of Mississippi. We think he should have been admitted.

Morally, there is no justification for his rejection.

Legally, there can be no doubt he is entitled to become a student at Mississippi.

But this is not our prime concern.

James Meredith's rights have been denied before and will, no doubt, be denied again. This is not to suggest that these denials are justified, for they are not. But it is to suggest that he probably has been forced to rationalize his existence in the society to which he was born.

We are more concerned with the precedent that has been set at Oxford, and the trend that may have been established.

People say that Meredith should not be allowed to attend the University of Mississippi if the majority of the people there and throughout the state do not want him.

This argument has frightening implications in terms of where it might lead. Does freedom of speech mean that the majority is to vote to determine whom they wish to hear? Is freedom of religion to be extended only to those whose beliefs conform to what the majority has decided is orthodox?

More specifically, if the bigot or the demagogue can muster a majority to turn on the Negro, will he necessarily stop there? Or will he next turn to the Catholic, and the Jew, or the member of any other minority group?

People who have studied prejudice attribute much of it to the necessity of the individual to have a tangible scapegoat upon whom to vent his wrath. The Federal Government makes a mistake and it's because the damn Catholics are in control.

And the sheer necessity of having to have someone to look down upon forces the element closest to that of the Negro to oppose the betterment of the Negro's lot.

*A Bell Rang, editorial,  
page 4, the Crimson White,  
September 27, 1962.  
(Courtesy of University of  
Alabama Digital Collections,  
William Stanley Hoole Special  
Collections Library, Tuscaloosa.)*

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P. D. East, editor of the **Petal Paper** and author of **The Magnolia Jungle**, puts it this way, "If I were a Catholic in Mississippi, I'd be worried. If I were a Jew, I'd be scared stiff. If I were a Negro, I would already be gone."<sup>62</sup>

This is our point of prime concern. The basis of the democratic system is equality before the law, and the system is but a mockery if the laws are only to extend to a portion of the citizenry.

Every time the rights of one citizen anywhere are denied, every citizen is harmed.

Every time we trim our legal sail to meet the whirlwinds of the times, the course of the Ship of State is altered, and the destination toward which we have steered for 170 odd years grows more remote.

Bias is a force that strikes at one and all. We have come much too far, and fought far too long, to abandon our democratic system to appease the great god, Expediency.

We lost something American in Oxford this week, and every American citizen is the less for it.

John Donne said: "No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main; . . . I am involved in mankind; and therefore never send to know for whom the bell tolls; it tolls for thee."

There was no need to send to Oxford this week to see what bell rang. It wasn't the bell of justice and freedom; it rang for you and me.

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## NOTES

I wish to recognize and thank the following people and collections who helped me: Melvin Wali Ali Meyer, Marjorie Meyer Goldner, Joseph L. Levin, Henry Black, Don and Barbara Siegal, Scott M. Langston, and Robert Robertson; also, E. Culpepper Clark, University of Georgia; Mattie Abraham, Special Collections Department, Mississippi State University Library, Starkville; Jessica Lacher-Feldman, formerly at the W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa; and

the staffs at the University of Alabama digital archives, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, University of Miami Otto Richter library, and the Miami Dade Public Library System.

<sup>1</sup> "A Bell Rang," *Crimson White*, September 27, 1962, 4.

<sup>2</sup> University of Alabama, *Corolla* (Tuscaloosa, 1963) 50, 51.

<sup>3</sup> Dances of Universal Peace International, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://dancesofuniversalpeace.org/home.shtm>; "Dances of Universal Peace & Walking Concentrations," Sufi Ruhaniat International, accessed July 28, 2013, <http://www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/dances-of-universal-peace-and-walking-concentrations>.

<sup>4</sup> "Murshid Wali Ali Meyer," Sufi Ruhaniat International, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.ruhaniat.org/index.php/explore/leaders/2012-06-15-13-40-56/11-murshid-walil-ali-meyer>.

<sup>5</sup> Melvin Wali Ali Meyer, e-mail to author, January 14, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> Melvin Wali Ali Meyer, Skype interview conducted by author, March 8, 2012.

<sup>7</sup> "Timeline," Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://rg.bcri.org/gallery/>.

<sup>8</sup> Eric Etheridge, *Breach of Peace: Portraits of the 1961 Mississippi Freedom Riders* (New York, 2008), 195; Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women and the Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2001).

<sup>9</sup> Meyer e-mail to author.

<sup>10</sup> Gary Philip Zola, "What Price Amos? Perry Nussbaum's Career in Jackson, Mississippi," in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa, 1997), 230–257.

<sup>11</sup> Melvin Wali Ali Meyer, Skype interview conducted by author, November 26, 2012.

<sup>12</sup> Marjorie Meyer Goldner, Skype interview conducted by author, November 30, 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Henry Black, Skype interview conducted by author, December 4, 2012.

<sup>15</sup> See for example, *Crimson White*, September 20, 1962.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Robbie Roberts, an Alabama resident, is retired from an extensive career at the Environmental Protection Agency and the U.S. Air Force.

<sup>18</sup> Robbie Roberts, Skype interview conducted by author, December 2, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Jordan Cissell, "Alabama's desegregation leaders recall struggles, eventual victories," *Crimson White*, March 4, 2013, accessed July 28, 2013, <http://cw.ua.edu/2013/03/04/cp-throughthedoors/>.

<sup>20</sup> P. D. East, East Side column, *Petal Paper*, March 15, 1956, quoted in P. D. East, *The Magnolia Jungle: The Life, Times and Education of a Southern Editor* (New York, 1960), 179.

<sup>21</sup> "East (P. D.) Collection," The University of Southern Mississippi—McCain Library and Archives, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.lib.usm.edu/legacy/archives/m324.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> "Integrating Ole Miss: a Civil Rights Milestone: Days of Confrontation," John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://microsites.jfklibrary.org/olemiss/confrontation/>.

<sup>23</sup> "Ole Miss Integration," Civil Rights Digital Library, accessed March 1, 2013, [http://crdl.usg.edu/events/ole\\_miss\\_integration/](http://crdl.usg.edu/events/ole_miss_integration/).

<sup>24</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>25</sup> Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001), xv.

<sup>26</sup> E. Culpepper Clark, *The Schoolhouse Door: Segregation's Last Stand at the University of Alabama* (New York, 1993) 160–162.

<sup>27</sup> B. J. Hollars, interview conducted by author, October 23, 2012, on his then forthcoming book: *Opening the Doors: The Desegregation of the University of Alabama and the Fight for Civil Rights in Tuscaloosa* (Tuscaloosa, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> The Meyer family scrapbooks document Melvin's activities at the University of Alabama from 1961 to 1964, the period when he was editor of the school newspaper and when he was censured for writing favorably of James Meredith and integration at the University of Mississippi. The scrapbooks are in the collection named for Melvin's father, Henry Meyer, at Mississippi State University. Meyer family album (1960–1964) photocopy, Henry Meyer Papers, MSS.528, Mitchell Memorial Library Special Collections, Mississippi State University, Starkville, MS (hereafter cited as the Henry Meyer Papers.)

<sup>30</sup> Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, xv.

<sup>31</sup> Bauman and Kalin, eds., *Quiet Voices*.

<sup>32</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>33</sup> Joseph Levin, telephone interview conducted by author, October 17, 2012.

<sup>34</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 71.

<sup>37</sup> *Fiery Cross*, Official Publication of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, Tuscaloosa, November 17, 1961.

<sup>38</sup> Anonymous letter from "A Nazi," Chicago, addressed to "Hello Jew," November 14, 1962, Henry Meyer Papers.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence from Virginia H. Thorpe to Mrs. Meyer, October 15, 1962, Henry Meyer Papers.

<sup>40</sup> Larry C. Jackson to Melvin Meyer, December 15, 1962, Henry Meyer Papers.

<sup>41</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>42</sup> Henry Meyer, a native of Selma, Alabama, was a 1932 journalism and English graduate of the University of Alabama and a Starkville, Mississippi, resident from 1933. He managed Blumenfeld and Fried, a Starkville wholesale grocery business from 1933 to 1946. In 1946, Meyer and his brother Morris purchased the Starkville Publishing Company, a firm that handled job printings and office supplies and published the *Starkville News*, a

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weekly newspaper. The Meyers turned the *News* into a daily in 1960 and continued to publish it until 1966. Later, Henry Meyer taught journalism at Mississippi State University where the media center was named for him.

<sup>43</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012; Goldner interview.

<sup>44</sup> Claude Sitton "Alabama Acts to Bar Violence at University," *New York Times*, November 14, 1962.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>47</sup> Meyer says that hate mail and hateful telephone calls poured into the *Crimson White* and that they published the letters, but a search of the newspaper's digital archives could not confirm this recollection. Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> "The Ku Klux Klan Legacy of Hate," Anti-Defamation League, accessed March 1, 2013, [http://archive.adl.org/issue\\_combating\\_hate/uka/default.asp](http://archive.adl.org/issue_combating_hate/uka/default.asp).

<sup>49</sup> Vice President Jefferson J. Bennett Papers, record group 114, W. S. Hoole Special Collections Library, University of Alabama.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "Editorial Responsibility," *Crimson White*, October 10, 1962.

<sup>52</sup> "Melvin Meyer Wins Editorial Award," *Tuscaloosa News*, February 15, 1964.

<sup>53</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Melvin Meyer, "Alabama Crisis," *Journal of the Student Press Association* (Spring 1963), 16, 17.

<sup>55</sup> Meyer e-mail to author.

<sup>56</sup> "Brief History of UA: Opening Doors," The University of Alabama, 40th Anniversary Opening Doors, accessed March 1, 2013, [http://www.ua.edu/openingdoors/history\\_openingdoors.html](http://www.ua.edu/openingdoors/history_openingdoors.html).

<sup>57</sup> Meyer interview, March 8, 2012.

<sup>58</sup> Meyer e-mail to author.

<sup>59</sup> "Who We Are," Southern Poverty Law Center, accessed March 1, 2013, <http://www.splcenter.org/who-we-are>.

<sup>60</sup> Alex Grodner, "Jewish students support African Americans," *Crimson White*, accessed February 22, 2011, <http://cw.ua.edu/2011/02/22/jewish-students-support-african-americans/>.

<sup>61</sup> Black interview.

<sup>62</sup> East, East Side column, *Petal Paper*, March 15, 1956.



## Book Reviews

**Prophet in a Time of Priests: Rabbi “Alphabet” Browne, 1845-1929: A Biography.** By Janice Rothschild Blumberg. Baltimore: Apprentice House, 2012. 410 pages.

In her latest work, a biography of her maternal great grandfather, Janice Rothschild Blumberg has again made a genuine contribution to the historical study of Judaism in America. She has combined herculean research, sustained by genuine family love, with a stance of detachment and full disclosure of the facts as she has discovered them. The result is a highly detailed, historically critical, but touchingly sympathetic portrait of a maverick rabbi who rose and fell countless times during a long, bizarre career.

In fact, Browne’s career is so strange that it is difficult to compress it in a brief overview. Born in Slovakia as Moshe ben M’hader Yaakov Braun, Edward Benjamin Morris Browne was a brilliant Talmud student who earned a “theological degree” after one year at a local rabbinic school and then, without explanation or cause, moved to America. There he was privately ordained by Isaac M. Wise. But Browne also earned a genuine “doctor of medicine” degree and a law degree, as well as several other academic diplomas. Thus he gained the nickname of “Alphabet” Browne. Although he did not practice medicine, he did occasionally dabble in the law, usually with disastrous results. His career was nevertheless remarkable. Browne served in as many as eighteen pulpits, from Reform to Orthodox, offered opening prayers on Capitol Hill in Washington, was given honors as pallbearer for former President Ulysses S. Grant, and personally supported and communicated with Theodore Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement. The polyglot Browne also seems to have learned English effortlessly.

Although an extreme example of a late nineteenth-century American rabbi, Browne exemplifies a little-understood period in the history of Judaism in the United States. First, during the second half of that century, Judaism had not yet settled into the three-track denominational system that characterized much of the twentieth



century. Secondly, if the last quarter of the nineteenth century was, as historian Jonathan D. Sarna suggests, the “Great Awakening of American Judaism,” Browne’s career indicates more a rude awakening than a golden dawn. This was also an era when congregational presidents—a role that cries out for intense historical research—served long terms, and rabbis turned over rapidly. Few rabbis, however, could match Browne’s eighteen pulpit turnovers! Blumberg also demonstrates that internecine rabbinic politics were often (and still might be) just as rough as the conflicts between rabbis and lay leaders. In a certain sense, *Prophet in a Time of Priests* could be read as a cautionary tale. Ambitious rabbis seeking to hit a rabbinic grand slam to propel them into fame and the shifting world of clerical influence are thus warned.

Browne worked mostly at the “right” of the Reform movement, when it was tilting to the religious left because of the challenges that Ethical Culture, Unitarianism, and modernizing influences posed. He therefore generally found himself at odds with major trends in his home movement. Thus, in order to participate in Grant’s funeral, which was held on a Saturday, Browne needed to seek out permission to walk in the procession while other clergy rode. Similarly, he was a steadfast opponent of the Sunday Sabbath movement of Reform Judaism in the early twentieth century. On the other hand, like some progressive rabbis, he embraced biblical criticism and the Darwinian theory of evolution, which pitted Browne against more established leaders like Wise and David Einhorn.

Blumberg, a native Atlantan, is particularly sensitive to Browne’s self-conscious efforts to define a specifically “southern Jewish” identity, a quest that persists to our own day. In large part, this was accomplished by the creation of the *Jewish South*, a regional newspaper that Browne published from 1877 to 1881 and was the first of its kind. The South, Blumberg shows, like the Midwest and the East Coast, constituted a regional factor in the dynamics of American Jewish life. Because Wise’s main base was in the Midwest, he doubted that he could allow Browne to build his own base in the South, a section where Wise needed to check the influence of the radical reform rabbis in the East. Although at first actively cultivating Browne as a disciple, Wise cut him down in the national

rabbinic arena and ultimately bought and closed down the *Jewish South*.

Browne also played a role in anchoring the American Reform movement in Talmudic literature, thereby giving it much needed religious *gravitas*. After Wise invited Browne to prepare a translation of the Talmud shortly after his arrival in the United States, the young immigrant scholar pounced on the offer and completed the formidable project in record time (perhaps relying on a German translation). Wise, who had publicly debated the role of the Talmud in Reform Judaism and conducted negotiations on this question with Isaac Leeser at the Cleveland Conference of 1855, envisioned the sponsorship of a translation of the Talmud as critical to reinforcing his legitimacy as a rabbinic leader. An American Talmud, moreover, would further his goal of creating a rabbinic school, which he did in Cincinnati in 1875. Lastly, though the translation was never published due to inadequate funds, such failure was typical of the age. Even Marcus Jastrow had to rely on the children of his religious school to raise money to pay for his famed 1903 Talmudic dictionary. The irrepressible Browne made the best of the situation and was able to mine his Talmudic “research” for years to come.

Finally, a word about the title of this book. In the context of Reform Jewish history, the role of prophet is generally viewed as superior to that of priest. For the prophet, in this view, ethics trump ritual. A prophet, moreover, is a leader ahead of his time. From this perspective, the title of this biography is apt. Perhaps the unpredictable behavior of prophets should also be considered in this regard. Indeed, Browne appears to have been generally maladjusted (a claim that Blumberg sustains) and was compelled to wander from pulpit to pulpit throughout his long and tumultuous career, a sharp contrast to stereotypically politically motivated, dynastic priests deeply anchored in institutional polities.

*Prophet in a Time of Priests* is somewhat diminished by the “student press” quality of the publication and the unfortunate lack of an index, which hopefully will be prepared as a helpful addendum in the future. Given the complexity of Browne’s career, a basic chronology would also have been useful to the reader. Moreover, Blumberg’s explanation of Wise’s private ordination of Browne should have been linked to Wise’s long rivalry with Isaac Leeser and his rabbinic

school, Maimonides College, which did graduate rabbis in the late 1860s (15). Also, Baltimore's famed Lloyd Street Synagogue is misidentified as being on Floyd Street (117). None of these errata are serious and do not detract from the important contribution Blumberg has again made to the study of the American Jewish experience. Thanks to her, the maverick Rabbi "Alphabet" Browne is firmly implanted into the memory bank of Judaism in America. That story is now both more colorful as well as darker than ever because of the impressive research efforts of Janice Rothschild Blumberg.

*Lance Sussman,*

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The reviewer may be contacted at kirabbiljs@aol.com.

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**Rich's: A Southern Institution.** By Jeff Clemmons. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2013. 223 pages.

When the last book about Rich's department store was published in 1967, the Atlanta-based regional chain was still thriving and expanding, one hundred years after the Hungarian Jewish Rich family had founded their first retail business. *Atlanta Constitution* columnist Celestine Sibley wrote her adulatory *Dear Store* that year, testifying to Rich's role in Atlanta's history and the deep affection and loyalty Rich's had fostered in the city. Hers was the third book written about Rich's in fourteen years—a volume of attention that might perplex anyone not already devoted to the topic.

Today Rich's is no more. A buyout by a holding company terminated its family ties to Atlanta in 1976. The store was merged with Macy's in 2003, and the Rich name was expunged from the business altogether two years later. Now that Rich's is defunct, its full history—not only its rise and its heyday, but also its decline and absorption into a national retail conglomerate—has been written by local historian Jeff Clemmons.

While Sibley reported on her subject with undisguised warmth and a willingness to leave out unpleasant incidents (more about this presently), Clemmons aspires to greater objectivity and thoroughness. He achieves this, in part, by focusing on the workings of the

company itself. In the process he leaves mostly unexamined the individuals and communities who founded, ran, worked in, and shopped in the store—their motivations, their circumstances, their inner thoughts and lives. Leon Harris, author of *Merchant Princes: An Intimate History of Jewish Families Who Built Great Department Stores* (which includes a chapter on the Riches), began his book by declaring it to be “not about stores but about storekeepers and their families.” Clemmons might have led off with the inverse: his is a book about a store, not so much about storekeepers or their families. Call it the “Citizens United” approach, in that it assumes corporations are as interesting as people.

Clemmons’s contribution to the chronicles of Rich’s channels an astonishing amount of detail about the business of the store. He documents the cost, construction, and design of its buildings, all the way down to square footage, architectural features, and floor layout. We learn about the prices of merchandise: in May 1917, for instance, customers could buy “a ten-piece Chinese Chippendale dining room set for \$225.00, originally \$305.00” (51), and First Lady Mamie Eisenhower spent \$73.92 on four pairs of curtains in 1956 (74). The text is peppered with sales figures, both for individual stores and for the company as a whole, most frequently in the hundreds of thousands or multiple millions. But were these sales figures impressive compared to other local or national department stores? How did Rich’s prices compare: did Mrs. Eisenhower get a bargain on those drapes? Were Rich’s stores bigger, more lavish, than other stores? Did the cars that could fit in Rich’s parking lots (the quantity of which the reader will come to know) outnumber the cars that could fit in competitors’ lots? We are never given any context or contrast for these details, and so we never learn how to understand these figures or why they matter.

Clemmons is especially attentive to Rich’s public relations triumphs, which were crucial to maintaining the company’s presence and stature in Atlanta’s culture. Their fashion shows brought internationally renowned designers to the South, and their popular Charga-Plate program enabled middle-class and working-class customers to purchase consumer goods that otherwise would have been out of their reach. Rich’s Pink Pig children’s monorail ride and their enormous annual Christmas tree were both seemingly irresistible

destinations for families visiting downtown Atlanta during the holidays. Clemmons also notes the company's philanthropic efforts, which were substantial. All of these phenomena are catalogued with thoroughness and enthusiasm, and anyone interested in Atlanta's commercial and civic life will likely find utility in his descriptions. These too, however, are presented without analysis; again, the cultural context within which these projects were conceived and executed is absent.

For instance: what might we learn about Atlanta's Jewish community, or about religion in the South, that a prominent Jewish family yearly erected a gigantic Christmas tree festooned, at one point, with "900 ornaments that were twelve inches in diameter; 600 ornaments that were six inches in diameter; 13,000 lights; 900 non-lighted ornaments; and a seven-foot-wide star on its crown"? (95). (I believe the word Clemmons is looking for here is *ongepatshket*.) Further questions: Can Rich's abandonment of downtown Atlanta and relocation to the suburbs, not to mention its creation of all those parking spaces, shine a light on other changes in the city's demography and economy since World War II? Was the 1976 buyout of Rich's by Federated Department Stores, and Federated's subsequent bankruptcy, indicative of broader transformations in American capitalism? Clemmons's discussion of these issues is woefully shallow. These are missed opportunities to make a case for the company's broader historical importance.

Clemmons does devote significant attention to the sit-ins and anti-segregation protests that staggered Rich's management in 1960. The story of the Magnolia Room—Rich's posh restaurant where African Americans worked as servers but could not dine—and its significance to civil rights history has already been told a number of times, most recently and masterfully by Kevin Kruse in his 2005 book *White Flight*. Kruse's meditations on the protests and their consequences are far more potent, and interesting, than Clemmons's. Still, considering that Sibley ignored the sit-ins entirely (even though she wrote her book nearly a decade after they happened), Clemmons's attention to them is exceedingly welcome.

*Marni Davis*, Georgia State University, Atlanta.

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## Exhibit Review

**Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War.** Curator: Ken Yellis. Presented jointly by the American Jewish Historical Society and the Yeshiva University Museum. Accompanying book: *Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War* (October 2013). Yeshiva University Museum at the Center for Jewish History, New York City, through August 2013; Jewish Museum of Maryland, Baltimore, October 2013–February 2014. Website: <http://yumuseum.tumblr.com/CivilWar>.

On my frequent trips south of the Mason-Dixon line, I am always struck by how 150 years after the close of the Civil War that turning-point moment in American history continues to captivate the attention of southerners—Jews included. The many battlefield monuments, tours of those sites, and frequent full-dress recreations of what some still call “The War of Northern Aggression” certainly keep the memories of the Lost Cause alive. Perhaps the losers of this unforgettable struggle feel its reverberations in the driest of their very bones and thus recall the details of the war and its aftermaths more readily than do the winners. For me, as a dyed-in-the-wool northerner and New Yorker, the Civil War is a subject that looms prominently in our history books, but not in my consciousness. As a Jew it is a moment in time that until now has paled in significance to other themes in the nineteenth-century American Jewish narrative.

Thus, as a citizen of Gotham and as a Jew who was born and bred in the metropolis, I appreciate how much *Passages through the Fire: Jews and the Civil War* has heightened my awareness of how important these four years of conflict were to my city and our people’s history in the United States. Throughout the display of some 275 intriguing objects and video commentaries, the New York story looms large, even if the next stop of this exhibit that ran in New York from March to August 2013 is the Jewish Museum of Maryland in Baltimore. Even before entering the galleries that contain the bulk of the rare documents and artifacts, visitors who start their tour in the Center’s Great Hall are immediately alerted to how important New York is to the curator’s vision. The three highlighted aspects include

the interesting changing vision of Lincoln among Jews, predictably the wartime experience of Jewish soldiers, and, significantly, the unique context of the War between the States and the metropolis.

*Entry to the exhibition.*

*(Photo by Bilyana Dimitrova, courtesy of the American Jewish Historical Society and the Yeshiva University Museum.)*

Beginning with that thoughtful highlighting of my city, I was reminded throughout of how supportive many of its residents were of the secessionist position, with many of the articulate Jews in town constituting secession's key advocates. Not all Jewish voices were or could be heard. Poor folks rarely have time to write accounts for the later use of historians and curators. In all events, this "southern exposure" was deeply rooted in the need of the urban center's merchants for raw materials—particularly cotton—as well as their desire to sell finished goods in every region of the nation. In this business realm, I particularly enjoyed examining an advertisement for Solomon Brothers "segars [cigars] expressly manufactured for Georgia and Alabama" that were made in New York. Through the video clips that work well with the documents and clear text explanations, an articulate group of historians including Dale Rosengarten and Adam

Mendelsohn, whose work is well-known to the Southern Jewish Historical Society, complement the extant financial reports and advertisements with cogent explications of the symbiotic relationship between regions at war over slavery.

*Confederate bond and coupons displaying Judah P. Benjamin's image.  
(From the collection of the American Jewish Historical Society,  
courtesy of the exhibition.)*

On the crucial ideological and indeed theological issue of the status of African Americans, the exhibit emphasizes how in 1861 Rabbi Morris Raphall of New York City articulated perhaps the most definitive statement of biblical support for slavery. Passages through the Fire balances this well-known source with a display of intriguing documents highlighting the wealth of both critical and supportive Jewish reactions to Raphall's understanding of the tradition within and without Jewish Gotham. Here, too, the panel of scholars appearing in the video panels has the last words. Lance Sussman of



Philadelphia leads the discussion on the video screen as he notes the ancient Jewish sources that supported denigration of Negroes and explicates how modern rabbis of varying stripes interpreted controversial verses in light of their modern understandings of the faith.

Predictably as an exhibit on a military subject, there is much room allotted for the display of swords, pistols, and rifles owned and used by Jews as well as portraits of the more illustrious Jewish officers for the Union and Confederacy. I enjoyed more the daguerreotypes of enlisted men and draftees that remind us of the many unsung heroes of any tragic military confrontation.

*Mykell Myers Goldsmith, who gave his life for the Confederacy.  
A 1st Lieutenant in the Georgia Reserves, Goldsmith was  
accidentally killed near Macon in August 1864,  
when the trigger of his rifle caught on barbed wire.  
(From the collection of Dr. and Mrs. Jeffrey Oppenheim,  
photo by Bilyana Dimitrova, courtesy of the exhibition.)*

The oft-told two major examples of antisemitism—the initial refusal of the army to allow Jewish chaplains to minister to Union troops until Lincoln interceded and Grant’s General Orders #11 that threatened to expel Jews “as a class” from occupied southern territories—are also given their just due. Once again the team of historians explicates the larger meaning of the events that are chronicled through the encased rare primary sources. They suggest that these attacks and other forms of Jew-hatred were generally aberrations and that Jews were ready, able, and accepted to fight in both armies. Their ability to be counted in was a statement of that minority group’s freedom in America.

As far as vignettes of tolerance rather than antipathy toward Jews was concerned, I was taken especially by a letter that General Robert E. Lee penned to Rabbi Max Michelbacher of Richmond, Virginia, declining his request to excuse Jewish soldiers from active duty during the High Holidays. Although the military leader did not accommodate the request that the persistent rabbi made three times during the war, Lee did allow Jews to celebrate their sacred days while on post and considered individual requests for furloughs. Most significantly, in thinking over the petitions, Lee presumed what was certainly true—that Jews “would not want to jeopardize a cause you have so much at heart.” In this case and elsewhere, Jews—whose patriotism was generally not questioned—were accepted as brothers under arms, blue and gray. Their service constituted a reaffirmation of Jewish emancipation in America. The ten thousand who served in one or the other army and the two thousand who, despite initial communal reservations, proudly came from New York, continued to pave the road toward full acceptance that Jews today enjoy comfortably in America, including New York.

*Jeffrey S. Gurock*, Yeshiva University, New York City

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## *Glossary*

**Aron Kodesh** ~ literally *Holy Ark*, in which the Torah scrolls are kept

**Ashkenazic** ~ having to do with the Jews and Judaism associated with central and eastern Europe

**Bikur Cholim** ~ literally *visiting the sick*, refers to doing mitzvot, good deeds, such as tending to those who are ill

**Bimah** ~ platform from which services are led in a synagogue

**Chabad** ~ an acronym for the Hebrew words for wisdom, understanding, and knowledge; an alternative name for the Lubavitch movement, one of the most famous and powerful Hasidic sects

**Diaspora and diasporic** ~ Originating in the sixth century BCE with the Babylonian exile, refers to Jewish communities and their residents living outside Palestine or modern Israel; more generally, people settling outside their homeland; may imply the concept of living in exile

**Haggadah** ~ book read during the Passover seder describing the exodus from Egypt and related ritual and customs

**Hasidic** ~ referring to **Hasidism**, a Jewish mystical sect founded in Poland in the mid-eighteenth century

**Hazan** ~ cantor; individual leading prayers/chants during religious services

**High Holidays** ~ Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the two most important holidays on the Jewish calendar

**Holy Ark, ark** ~ *see* **Aron Kodesh**

**Kashrut** ~ Jewish laws governing food

**Kristallnacht** ~ literally *night of broken glass*, November 9–10, 1938, Nazi-sponsored pogrom throughout Germany and Austria, bringing widespread murder, arrests, and property destruction, escalating the violence against Jews

**Mitzvot** ~ commandments; good works or deeds (singular: **mitzvah**)

**Nebbish** ~ a loser; a timid, meek, or ineffectual person

**Ongepatshket** ~ haphazardly decorated or overdecorated, messily overdone

**Rosh Hashanah** ~ literally, *head of the year*; New Year on the Hebrew calendar; one of holiest days of Jewish year

**Seder** ~ ceremonial meal, usually held on the first and second evenings of Passover, commemorating the exodus from Egypt

**Sephardic** ~ having to do with Judaism and Jews originating in the Mediterranean region, especially Spain and Portugal; **Sephardi**, a person of Sephardic heritage (plural: **Sephardim**)

**Shabbat** ~ Jewish Sabbath; Friday evening to Saturday evening at the appearance of the first stars

**Shul** ~ congregation or synagogue

**Talmud Torah** ~ Jewish religious day school

**Yiddishkeit** ~ Yiddish culture

**Yom Kippur** ~ Day of Atonement; holiest day of the Jewish year

## *Note on Authors*

**Marni Davis** is assistant professor of history at Georgia State University in Atlanta. She holds her doctorate from Emory University and is the author of *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition* (2012).

**Seth Epstein** received his Ph.D. in history from the University of Minnesota in 2013. He is currently a lecturer at the University of Tennessee-Chattanooga. His dissertation, "Tolerance, Governance, and Surveillance in the Jim Crow South: Asheville, North Carolina, 1876-1946," argues that the logical underpinnings of tolerance were central to emerging forms of urban government in New South locales such as Asheville, during the first half of the twentieth century. The article in this issue of *SJH* is his first publication. His next project examines North Carolina's pioneering but neglected Bureau of Work Among Negroes, which began in 1925 as a branch of the state's Department of Public Welfare. The project will focus on the stakes in the bureau's shift between the 1920s and 1950s from an emphasis on encouraging community organization to implementing sociological approaches.

**Jeffrey S. Gurock** is the Libby M. Klapperman Professor of Jewish History at Yeshiva University. His most recent book is *Jews in Gotham: New York Jews in a Changing City, 1920-2010* (2012).

**Patrick Lee Lucas**, associate professor and director, School of Interiors, College of Design, University of Kentucky, received his Ph.D. in American studies from Michigan State University (2002), his M.S. in Interior Design from the University of Kentucky (1998), and his B.Arch. from the University of Cincinnati (1988). He explores the intersection between design and community in two major projects, one on Greek Revival architecture and "Athens" nicknamed communities and a second on the North Carolina architect Edward Loewenstein and his midcentury modern design aesthetic as evidence of community values. Active in history, American studies, and design organizations, Lucas has given numerous papers at conferences throughout the United States and abroad. He has published in several journals and his work appeared in the premiere issue of *Interiors: Design, Architecture, and Culture*. Lucas teaches history and theory of design courses and studio, engaging in community conversations and encouraging students to think about the place of design in the world.

**Eugene Normand** (B.S. Chemical Engineering, M.S., Ph.D. Nuclear Engineering) has been a Technical Fellow at the Boeing Company, which he joined in 1984. He has also written about topics in the Jewish world, especially those relating to Sephardic Jews. He coedited *The Beauty of Sephardic Life, Scholarly, Humorous and Personal Reflections* by Sam Bension Maimon and wrote, "Syrian Influences on the Seattle Sephardic Community," *Western States Jewish History* (2000), and the decade-by-decade history of Congregation Sephardic Bikur Holim in Seattle, Washington, <http://www.sbhseattle.org/about/our-history/90th-anniversary-history-by-decades/>. His current research interests are focused on Jewish topics, in particular those related to Sephardic studies.

**Dan J. Puckett**, Ph.D., associate professor of history at Troy University, was a Starkoff Fellow at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (2011-2012). He currently serves on the Board of Trustees of the Southern Jewish Historical Society and on the Alabama Holocaust Commission. Puckett has published numerous articles on World War II, the Holocaust, Alabama Jewry, and race relations in Alabama. His book, *In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama's Jews, the Second World War, and the Holocaust*, was published in 2013.

**Lance J. Sussman**, Ph.D., is Senior Rabbi of Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania, and a visiting lecturer in American Jewish history at Princeton University. Author of *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism*, he is currently researching Jews and culture in antebellum America.

**Dina Weinstein** is a Miami, Florida-based journalist who advises the student newspaper at Miami-Dade College. She earned a Master of Science degree from Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. Weinstein curated a traveling exhibition on cartoonist and children's book author Syd Hoff on his centennial. She is continuing her research on Hoff with the goal of writing a book on the artist. Her current research interest includes the 1964 St. Augustine, Florida, civil rights movement and the experiences of the fifteen rabbis jailed there during the protests.

**Stephen J. Whitfield** holds the Max Richter Chair in American Civilization at Brandeis University, where he has taught since 1972. He is the author of eight books and the editor of two others. Raised in Jacksonville, Florida, and educated at Tulane University, Yale University, and Brandeis University, he received the Samuel Proctor Award for Distinguished Career Scholarship in Southern Jewish History in 2010.

## Errata for Volume 15 (2012)

The following is a correction for an error found in *Southern Jewish History*, volume 15, published in 2012.

On page 92, the date in the photo caption should read January 30, 1968, and not January 30, 1958.

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### *Quadrennial Award for Best Article in SJH*

*Recipients of the SJHS quadrennial prize for the outstanding article published in Southern Jewish History:*

2001 (volumes 1-4) Scott Langston for "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans" in volume 3.

2005 (volumes 5-8) Adam Mendelsohn for "Two Far South: Rabbinical Responses to Apartheid and Segregation in South Africa and the American South" in volume 6.

2009 (volumes 9-12) *cowinners* Dianne Ashton for "Quick to the Party: The Americanization of Hanukkah and Southern Jewry," in volume 12; and Leonard Rogoff for "Harry Golden, New Yorker: I ♥ NC," in volume 11.

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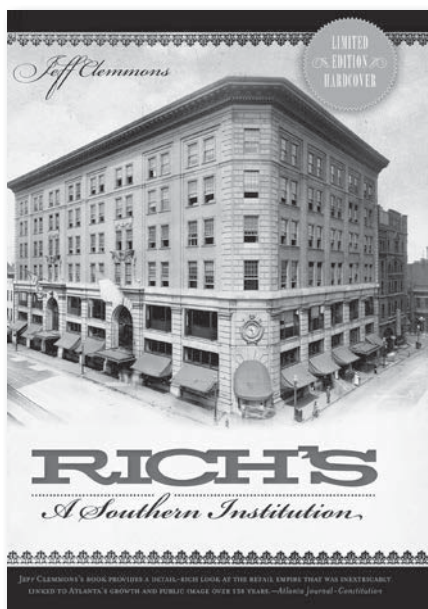
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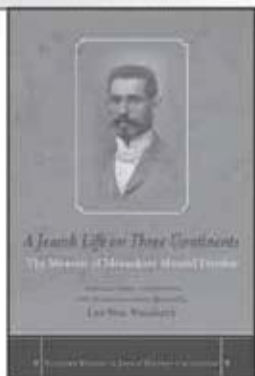
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