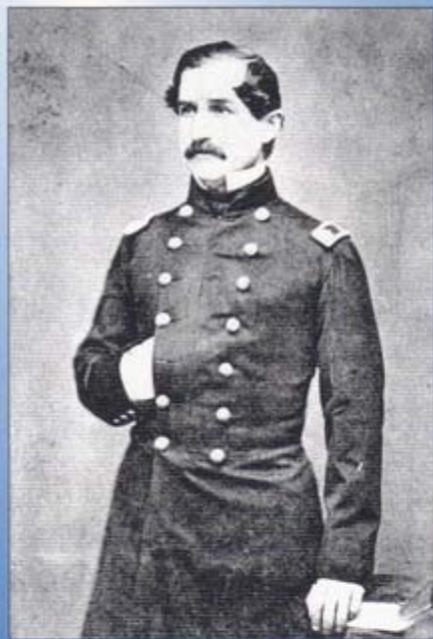


**SOUTHERN  
JEWISH  
HISTORY**



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# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society

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2012

Volume 15



# Southern Jewish History

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*Cover Picture: U.S. Army Colonel Abraham Charles Myers, c. 1850. Myers, for whom Fort Myers, Florida, was named, resigned from the U.S. Army to serve the Confederacy as its first Quartermaster General, 1861–1863, a period covered in the article on pages 41–79. (Courtesy of the Collections of the Jewish Museum of Florida, originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director. Image Copyright © Fort Myers Historical Museum.)*

## *From the Editor . . .*

I take great pleasure in looking back over fifteen years to the birth of this journal and visualizing how the field has flourished as partly reflected in these pages. *Southern Jewish History* has grown since its inception as a result of the suggestions of editorial board members, SJHS trustees, and managing editor Rachel Heimovics Braun, so that now it includes a primary source section, and book, exhibit, and website reviews.

During the editorial board discussion concerning the addition of the latter, Ronald Bayor, long-time former editor of the *Journal of American Ethnic History*, recommended a project on teaching southern Jewish history. Scott M. Langston and Bryan Edward Stone consequently assumed the task. They undertook research to ascertain perhaps the first course and teacher, all of the courses and instructors, and how courses have been taught. They also facilitated an exchange among practitioners and considered numerous issues. Hopefully their thought-provoking essay will encourage more and better course-offerings and a continuing dialog.

The 150th anniversary of the American Civil War takes place between 2011 and 2015. Adam Mendelsohn demonstrates the transnational dimension of Jewish involvement in the war with a study of a British Jewish firm that supplied materials to the Confederacy. In so doing, he highlights a relatively unexplored avenue of Jewish economic mobility but also the seamier side of the firm's business dealings.

In another new direction for the journal, Claudia Wilson Anderson explores the role of Representative Lyndon B. Johnson (D-TX) in rescuing Jews from Nazi persecution. Previous historians have granted credit to the future president for Operation Texas, a reportedly large-scale, secret effort saving hundreds of refugees. Anderson mines archival sources and interviews and

uses analysis to debunk the myth. With close ties to his Jewish constituents and empathy with the plight of refugees, Johnson, like other members of Congress, made every effort within the law to facilitate the rescue of individual Jews and even place them in federal programs, but exaggerated, weakly documented claims fail to serve the historical record.

In a revision of his SJHS Chapel Hill conference presentation, Jarrod Tanny traces the origins and nature of Jewish humor. He emphasizes how humorists have depicted the South and, in some cases, used their craft to nurture change. Readers will laugh at the numerous anecdotes while finding greater understanding of the sources of the Jewish psyche and identity.

Stuart Rockoff published one of the best (and few) studies available concerning Zionism in the South in an anthology on Texas Jewry edited by Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman. Here his primary source section essay with documents on Zionism in Lubbock, Texas, points to the pivotal roles of a rabbinic leader and women. Living in a small town, the Lubbock Zionists brought together Jews from surrounding communities while demonstrating ethnic identity and a cosmopolitan outlook.

This volume also includes a review of the Beth Ahabah Archives and Museum exhibit commemorating Richmond Jewry's involvement in the Civil War and its aftermath and another on the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life website as well as five book reviews.

Dr. P. Allen Krause, a dear friend and eminent scholar, passed away on March 3, 2012. During the 1960s Allen wrote a pioneering rabbinical thesis at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion on the roles of Reform rabbis in relation to the civil rights movement. An article emanating from the research was published and anthologized. Toward the end of a distinguished career as an activist, pulpit rabbi, and college lecturer, and in retirement, Allen returned to research. He wrote outstanding articles that appeared in this journal on Rabbi Burton Padoll in Charleston, South Carolina (volume 11, 2008) and Rabbi Benjamin Schultz ultimately of Clarksdale, Mississippi (volume 13, 2010). The first transformed our understanding of the interaction

between rabbis and congregations concerning participation in the civil rights movement and the second placed Schultz's segregationist stance in the context of his Cold War, anti-Communist views. Recipient of a society grant, Allen also gave several informative and well-received presentations at society conferences, the last being at the 2011 conference in Columbia, South Carolina. May his memory be a blessing to his widow, Sherri Hofmann Krause, son Stephen, daughter and son-in-law Gavriella and Roger Youngs, and to all who knew and admired him and find inspiration in his life and work.

As always, this volume has been a collaborative effort. Insightful peer reviewers David Burt, Michael Jolles, Catherine Kahn, Daniel Puckett, Scott M. Langston, Raphael Medoff, John Morreall, Marc Lee Raphael, Mary Corbin Sies, Lance Sussman, and Charles Webster augmented the work of the outstanding editorial board. Peer reviewers Bryan Edward Stone and Hollace Ava Weiner also served as proofreaders along with Karen Franklin. Peer reviewer Michael Jolles helped in obtaining certain photo permissions. Thanks to David S. Braun for providing Yiddish translations and transliterations. Managing editor Rachel Heimovics Braun remains unmatched in her dedication and hard work on behalf of the publication of the journal.

Mark K. Bauman



# Teaching Southern Jewish History: A Dialogue

by

Scott M. Langston and Bryan Edward Stone\*

Southern Jewish history has been an active area of academic study for several decades. During that time, professional scholars from a variety of fields, along with archivists and interested (and well-versed) non-professionals, have been uncovering, exploring, and debating the experiences of Jews in the South. While the Southern Jewish Historical Society (SJHS), with its annual conference and journal, *Southern Jewish History*, is the primary locus and stimulant for this activity, many other venues exist. These include professional organizations, major book publishers, state historical associations, and a host of local, regional, and national archives. These efforts have themselves been the subject of historical treatment.<sup>1</sup>

One aspect, however, that has not received significant attention has been the teaching of southern Jewish history as a high school, undergraduate, or graduate course. Admittedly, these types of courses are not widespread, but they are becoming more common and represent another avenue in which the experiences of Jews living in the South can be studied and presented to new audiences. These courses not only mirror major lines of scholarly treatment, but a review of them also offers the opportunity to reflect on the field itself.

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### *Statement of Method*

One of the best ways to learn about the practices employed in the teaching of southern Jewish history is to talk at length with those who have taught it. Ideally, we would have liked to bring together a panel of experienced instructors in person to talk about their experiences, but this was impractical. As an alternative, we decided to conduct an online conversation in real time—or as close to it as possible. The Yahoo! Groups website provides a free message board system that allows participants to post comments, reply to others' comments, and receive e-mail notifications of each new message. This seemed the best way to facilitate a long-distance discussion.

We began with an informal effort to identify as many people as possible who had taught southern Jewish history. We posted a query to the SJHS listserv and published a request for information in *The Rambler*, the newsletter of the SJHS. This resulted in a list of respondents with varying degrees of experience teaching the subject. We contacted all respondents, as well as many others who had been recommended to us. We explained our plans, selected a time during which the online discussion would occur, and invited their participation. We were able to gain a commitment from four people who, along with coeditor Scott Langston, became our panel: Marcie Cohen Ferris, Norman Finkelstein, Adam Mendelsohn, and Leonard Rogoff. In addition, Dale Rosengarten submitted responses to the discussion later that have been interspersed as appropriate throughout the dialogue. During the online discussion, coeditor Bryan Edward Stone served as moderator.

Prior to the agreed-upon starting date, we prepared a list of questions that could be addressed one at a time as the conversation flowed. In addition, the panelists were encouraged to ask questions of one another.

Over a two-week period, Stone posted questions and the panelists responded, sometimes within a few hours, sometimes after several days. These responses form the raw material from which we have constructed the transcript below.

In preparing the transcript, the editors of this article took license to rearrange the order of the comments and to group them

into topics to create the sense of an organized conversation. Because of the nature of online correspondence, some messages were posted long after the questions to which they were responding, and, in the meantime, other messages on other topics had been posted. The flow of a message-board exchange is very different from that of a live conversation. We have edited the comments so as to restore the flow and immediacy of a live discussion.

The content and wording of respondents' comments, however, have not been altered. We have edited for consistency in spelling and other stylistic matters, but we have left each panelist's contributions in his or her own words. The completed transcript was submitted to each of the panelists for adjustments. After minor revisions, they approved it in the form that appears below.

Full citations for all works and websites referenced in the transcript are provided in the bibliography.

*Historical Background: Early Course Offerings in  
Southern Jewish History*

Some of our panelists have been teaching southern Jewish history since 2000. They were not the first to do so, however: the teaching of southern Jewish history as a college-level course dates to at least the 1990s.

Although humbly rejecting the honor, Sheldon Hanft, a former president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society (1992–1993) and professor emeritus of history at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina, was among the first— if not the first—to teach such a course.<sup>2</sup> He initially taught the topic as an undergraduate course in 1996 and, then, three years later, as a graduate seminar. These courses grew out of a one-week course Hanft taught during the 1980s within the Elderhostel program, an organization founded in 1975 to provide not-for-credit classes on a variety of topics and in a variety of locations to Americans of retirement age. Hanft's Elderhostel course, titled *Judaism in the South*, encompassed five daily sessions, each two hours in length. After introducing students to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jewish communities, as well as important Jewish/Hebrew words

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and concepts, and considering varying definitions of Jewish identity, Hanft guided the class through four chronological phases of Jewish life in the South: the colonial period through the American Revolution, the early Republic through the Civil War, Reconstruction through World War I, and the twentieth century since the war, with emphasis on the consequences of World War II for the South and the impact of migration on southern Jews.

For each phase, Hanft addressed broader issues and events in American history that were important nationally and/or affected southern Jews, along with important events involving southern Jews and how the southern Jewish community was affected by contemporary changes in southern Jewish life. An emphasis on the distinctive characteristics of southern Jews and Judaism provided a common thread running through each of the course's sections. These courses were well attended, and participants, many of whom were Jews who had retired and moved to Florida from the North, demonstrated great interest in southern Jewish history while simultaneously being challenged by the issues studied. Elderhostel students, of course, were not seeking academic credit, so their interest often arose from questions related to Jewish identity. According to Hanft, "Throughout the week many attendees were reluctant to accept the concept that Judaism is a religious rather than an ethnic, cultural, or traditional designation."<sup>3</sup> The notion of southern Jewish identity is a topic that continues to be addressed in college-level courses. It provides context in which to set and understand southern Jewish history. Hanft set his course within the broader scope of Judaism and earlier Jewish history, but our panelists expressed various opinions on this matter. Hanft's chronological approach to the subject is, not surprisingly, one followed by most of our panelists, although readers will see some discussion over alternatives in organization and presentation.

Hanft's undergraduate and graduate courses covered many of the same issues as those he dealt with in the Elderhostel course, but with greater rigor and detail. Students were required to read Eli Evans's *The Provincials* and *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate*. Additionally, students read an autobiography chosen from a

list of books written by southern Jewish immigrants, soldiers and sailors, rabbis, and politicians. Graduate students also read Leonard Dinnerstein's *The Leo Frank Case*, along with Harry Golden's *Our Southern Landsman*.

A few years after Hanft began offering southern Jewish history courses, Gary Zola, currently the executive director of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives and professor of the American Jewish experience at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion (HUC-JIR), taught a graduate course at HUC-JIR titled *Issues in Southern Jewish History*. This course, first offered in 2000 and subsequently taught two more times, surveyed "the history of United States Jewry in the South." It was, according to Zola, popular among rabbinical students, especially since many serve student pulpits in the South and want to know more about the region and its Jewish heritage.<sup>4</sup> The initial offering of the course coincided with the SJHS's annual meeting, which was held on the HUC-JIR campus in Cincinnati, Ohio. Zola's students were encouraged to attend the conference. Over the course of the semester, students read selections from a variety of books: *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights*, edited by Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin; *Jews in the South*, edited by Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson; James Hagy's *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston*; *"Turn to the South": Essays on Southern Jewry*, edited by Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin Urofsky; *American Jewry and the Civil War* by Bertram Korn; *Jews of the South: Selected Essays from the Southern Jewish Historical Society*, edited by Samuel Proctor, Louis Schmier, and Malcolm Stern; and Zola's own *Isaac Harby of Charleston*.

After introducing students to the place of the South in American history and the study of southern Jewish history as an academic field, Zola addressed the antebellum communities of Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans before studying Jews during the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow eras. Specific topics included slavery, Jewish merchants, liberal Judaism, immigration, religion, and antisemitism. Under the rubric "The Changing South," students next encountered a variety of subjects: rabbis, Zionism and Israel, southern Jewish women, acculturation,

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Jews and African Americans, and Jews and civil rights. The course ended with a treatment of the future of Judaism in the region.<sup>5</sup>

Zola's approach highlights again the issue of southern Jewish history's contexts. How does one understand and integrate the southern Jewish experience into the broader contexts of Jewish, southern, and American history? Zola's course demonstrates an additional aspect that appears in our panelists' teaching, that is, the roles played by particular communities and individuals in southern Jewish history. Finally, both Zola's and Hanft's courses raise important considerations regarding students' backgrounds and knowledge and the impact these have on teaching. Zola's primary audience was rabbinical students, while Hanft's included, on the one hand, Jewish retirees from the North, and, on the other, undergraduate and graduate students who, for the most part, were not Jewish. Both Hanft's and Zola's students also had little knowledge of American Jewish history, much less southern Jewish history. As readers will notice, our panelists also deal with a variety of students with diverse backgrounds, motivations, and levels of knowledge.

In 2000, the year that Zola first offered his course, three other scholars taught a southern Jewish history course for the first time. Dale Rosengarten, whose experiences and thoughts are included in the dialogue below, co-taught an undergraduate course with Jack Bass at the College of Charleston, and Phyllis Leffler taught an undergraduate offering, Southern Jewish History and Culture, that was developed as part of the new Jewish studies major at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. Leffler offered her course again the following year.

Leffler's course began with exploring American Judaism and southern culture and then proceeded chronologically through antebellum, Civil War, and postbellum experiences of southern Jews. Students read a combination of academic works, historical fiction, and biography, and conducted an oral history with someone who claimed a connection to southern Jewry. Students also were specifically asked to evaluate whether or not a distinctive southern Jewish experience and identity existed, either in the past or present. In the fall 2001 semester, students were encouraged to attend

the SJHS's annual conference that was held in Norfolk, Virginia.<sup>6</sup> As did Hanft's and Zola's courses, Leffler's grappled with the issue of southern Jewish identity, a theme that continues to remain prominent in the teaching of southern Jewish history.

Since these initial offerings, a similar course was taught by another instructor at the College of Charleston and by other teachers from at least five other universities and one Jewish high school. Of those who have taught the course since 2000, six are involved in the following panel discussion, where readers will learn details related to these offerings and trace both continuity with earlier courses and new directions.<sup>7</sup>

#### *The Panel*

**Marcie Cohen Ferris** (ferrism@email.unc.edu) teaches in the American studies department at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is the author of *Matzoh Ball Gumbo: Culinary Tales of the Jewish South* and coeditor, with Mark Greenberg, of *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*.

**Norman H. Finkelstein** (nfinkelstein@hebrewcollege.edu), a retired public school librarian, is in his thirty-first year of teaching at Hebrew College in Boston, mainly in its Prozdor High School department. Finkelstein is the author of eighteen nonfiction books including *Heeding the Call* and *Forged in Freedom*, both winners of National Jewish Book Awards. His *JPS Guide to American Jewish History*, like the previous two books cited, deals in part with the history of the Jews of the South.

**Scott M. Langston** (s.langston@tcu.edu) teaches religious studies at Texas Christian University in Fort Worth, and American history at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth and Weatherford College in Weatherford, Texas. He is the author of *Exodus Through the Centuries*, as well as numerous articles and book chapters on southern Jewish history, reception history of the Bible, and religion. His article "Interaction and Identity: Jews and Christians in Nineteenth Century New Orleans," in *Southern Jewish History*, (2000), won SJHS's Best Article Award for 1998–2001.

**Adam Mendelsohn** (mendelsohna@cofc.edu) teaches Jewish history at the College of Charleston, where roughly a quarter of

his classes have a southern Jewish history focus. He is the coeditor with Jonathan Sarna of *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*. His article "Two Far South: Rabbinical Responses to Apartheid and Segregation in South Africa and the American South," won the SJHS journal's Best Article Award for 2002–2005.

**Leonard Rogoff** (lrogoff@nc.rr.com) is research historian for the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina. He is the author of *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* and *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina*.

**Dale Rosengarten** (rosengartend@cofc.edu) is curator of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston Library. Working with McKissick Museum at the University of South Carolina, she developed the traveling exhibition, *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life*, and coauthored and edited a volume of the same name.

Moderator **Bryan Edward Stone** (bstone@delmar.edu) teaches U.S. history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi, Texas, and since 2009 has taught a summer course on Texas Jews as a visiting professor at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. He is the author of *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas*, which won the 2011 Southern Jewish Historical Society Book Prize.

*Scott M. Langston*

*Adam Mendelsohn*

*Leonard Rogoff*

*Dale Rosengarten*

*Bryan Edward Stone*

*(Photos left and above are courtesy of the panelists.)*

*The Discussion**I. Courses and Students*

**S**TONE: Before we get into the details of the courses you've taught, let's start with some background. Can you tell us something about why you taught southern Jewish history? How did your course come about?

**FINKELSTEIN:** I've been teaching courses on American Jewish history for years at the Prozdor High School of Hebrew College in Boston. Aside from a general overview course, there have been offshoot courses as well. Some subjects include *Unsung Heroes in American Jewish History*; *Early American Jews: The Colonial and Revolutionary Period*; *Three Cases of Anti-Semitism: Dreyfus, Beilis and Frank*; *Heeding the Call: Jewish Voices in America's Civil Rights Struggle* (based on my book of the same title); *From Borscht Belt to Broadway*; and the ever-popular *Rough, Tough and Unorthodox: The Jewish Gangster in America*.

Four years ago I designed and taught the southern Jewish history course, *Hush Puppies and Matzoh Balls: Jewish Life in America's South*, as a direct result of the other American Jewish courses I had taught, particularly the overview course and the one dealing with early Jews in America, which dealt, in part, with early southern Jewish history. After recommending the course, we discovered that plans were in the works for Prozdor to have a student trip to the South, so the course proved to be most timely as preparation for the trip. I'm teaching the course again this semester [Spring 2012].

**LANGSTON:** During the spring 2008 semester I taught an upper-level history course, *Jews and the American South*, for the Jewish studies program at the University of North Texas (UNT) in Denton. I had previously proposed the course, and both the Jewish studies program and the history department approved it. My primary motivation in teaching the course was my own desire to teach it. Through my involvement in SJHS, I was aware of a few people who had taught this kind of course at other universities and had always hoped that I would one day have the opportunity to do so as well. When given the opportunity to propose a course

to UNT's Jewish studies program, I thought immediately of this one. I solicited advice and syllabi from others who were working in the field, including two of our panelists, Leonard Rogoff and Marcie Cohen Ferris, and then began building my own course.

Several factors made me want to teach it including my interest in southern Jewish history, and in American and southern history and religion (in its many forms and manifestations) and Jewish-Christian interactions. I also wanted to expose students to what I felt (and still feel) is an interesting and exciting field of study. Southern Jewish history, after all, provides the opportunity for students to integrate a variety of areas—those I just mentioned, as well as immigrant experiences and racial issues, to name a few. In short, it was another angle or lens through which to view and consider American and southern history and religion.

Finally, I have always felt that my own research and scholarly pursuits provide fuel for what happens in the classroom, and this was certainly the case in this instance. Attending the SJHS annual conferences and reading the society's journal, *Southern Jewish History*, and other publications of scholars in this field encouraged and motivated me to take a stab at translating some of this information into the classroom.

FERRIS: I developed my course on the Jewish South at UNC-Chapel Hill, just as the new Carolina Center for Jewish Studies (CCJS) program was founded on campus, about 2003, and I teach it each fall. Len Rogoff offered great counsel, and I drew inspiration from American Jewish history courses with Pam Nadell at American University and southern studies courses at UNC.

ROSENGARTEN: Jack Bass and I team-taught a course on southern Jewish history in 2000, when I was in the thick of developing the exhibition and book, *A Portion of the People*. Jack was one of our essayists. (See his chapter, "Just Like One of Us," about growing up in North Carolina and South Carolina, and the history of Jewish involvement in South Carolina's civic life.) As part of my position as curator and historian in special collections at the College of Charleston, I had committed to teaching one Jewish studies-related course each year, and it seemed natural to use material I was reading at the time. It also was a time when new

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sources were appearing in both print and film, and southern Jewish history seemed like an emerging field.

MENDELSON: I teach southern Jewish history both because it's a subject that I enjoy teaching and because I'm expected to teach a regular roster of courses on the subject. Unlike when I teach our regular ancient and modern Jewish history surveys, I can use primary and secondary sources in the classroom that overlap with my own research interests. And I can easily take my students out on site visits and walks through Charleston to places that resonate with topics discussed in the classroom.

*"Hush Puppies and Matzoh Balls  
Jewish Life in America's South."*

*Course sourcebook compiled by Norman H. Finkelstein.*

*(Courtesy of Norman H. Finkelstein.)*

STONE: From the responses so far, there seems to be a general pattern. All of you have taught your courses through Jewish studies or religion programs (or, in Norm's case, through a high school program at a Jewish-oriented college). This leads me to wonder if we've been segregated (if that's the right word!). Scott says that his course was cross-listed in history. Is this the case with the rest of you?

LANGSTON: Actually, my course was a history course and not cross-listed anywhere else. It originated with the Jewish studies program, but was considered an upper-level history course.

FERRIS: I also should have mentioned that the main department for my course on the Jewish South at UNC is American studies. My course on American Jewish women's history is also cross-listed with women's studies. Our Jewish studies faculty "live" in different departments at the university, not just religious studies.

MENDELSON: All of the southern Jewish history courses I have taught have been cross-listed through the history department. More than half of the forty students in the class this semester have signed up under the aegis of history, the rest through Jewish studies.

ROSENGARTEN: My teaching, like that of others here, is emphatically interdisciplinary. All my courses have been cross-listed in Jewish studies, history, historic preservation, and/or arts management.

LANGSTON: To Bryan's question, from my limited experience, I don't get the sense that southern Jewish history has been segregated, but that it is a hybrid course with elements that traverse the boundaries of strict academic disciplines. I would be interested to hear if others have found a hybrid nature to the course and, if so, how that has affected their teaching.

In my course, for instance, I found that the vast majority of students had little knowledge about Judaism, and many knew little about the South itself, much less American Jewish history (or, for that matter, Jewish history). I had planned to spend one day (the second day of class) giving a brief introduction to Judaism, the South, and American Jewish history in order to set southern

Jewish history within a broader context. I found, however, that one day was inadequate and thus, throughout the semester, constantly felt some need to give more context so the specific southern Jewish issues and events would make sense to students. I don't think this need for background and context is at all unique to teaching southern Jewish history, but without some familiarity with Judaism, the South, and American Jewish history, I think some of the specific issues and events run the risk of looking strange and exotic to students more so than anything else. This opens up many issues, but to the point of southern Jewish history being a hybrid course, I think its connections to various academic departments reflects this.

MENDELSON: I've found I've had very little time to cover broader contextual issues in my southern Jewish survey course (whether they relate to Judaism or American history). This is a consequence of time constraints—when I only have time for a handful of lectures on any given time period, southern history plays a supporting rather than a leading role.

By contrast, my courses on the Civil War and black-Jewish relations (which focus thematically on a much shorter time span) are much more closely embedded in broader historiographic debates. When I lecture about Jews and slavery, for example, roughly half the lectures deal with broader processes (the shifting nature of the slave trade, the evolution of abolitionism, etc.), rather than narrower Jewish matters.

FINKELSTEIN: Remembering my high school audience, southern Jewish history can't be taught in a vacuum. It is a part of overall American Jewish and American history. Aside from that practical need considering my students, that is also my belief. I think my writing also reflects this "one step forward, two steps backward" technique of making sure that readers/students get the larger historical background to more completely understand a particular situation.

STONE: Maybe we're getting at two related issues here: the interdisciplinary nature of southern Jewish history (how it "traverses" traditional academic fields, as Scott says) and the

resulting diversity of students who take the course, especially in their varying academic backgrounds and depth of previous knowledge.

Who are your students? Are they mostly Jewish? How much background information do you provide to help them understand southern Jewish history?

FINKELSTEIN: My students are bright high schoolers, whose knowledge of history, Jewish and otherwise, is limited. I'm aware of their limitations and provide appropriate context when needed. Students are great. They're curious and motivated. I'd be interested to hear of any other course on southern Jews geared to high schoolers.

LANGSTON: Out of twenty-five students who took my course, only one individual was Jewish, and he was quite knowledgeable.

ROSENGARTEN: The majority of my students have not been Jewish. This is also true of the many students we serve in special collections who come to the archives to do research for term projects, theses, and personal explorations of family history.

ROGOFF: My course at Duke University, *Jews and Blues: The History and Culture of Southern Jews*, in 2004, enrolled fifteen students, thirteen-and-a-half of whom were Jewish. (The half represents one student with a Jewish mother who was raised in a Christian Orthodox church but was in the process of converting to Judaism.) As I recall, only one student was a native southerner. My sense was that the students were taking the course in lieu of American Jewish history, which is not offered at Duke.

FERRIS: About a quarter of my class is Jewish, and there is often a fair amount of racial and ethnic diversity among my students. Josh Evans, son of Eli Evans, was in my first Jewish South class, which began an annual tradition of Eli Evans, who served as our first president of the CCJS, visiting my course each fall to speak to students about *The Provincials* and his student experiences at UNC in the 1950s.

Over the years of teaching this class, I tried a variety of texts/handouts to help introduce my non-Jewish North Carolinian students to Judaism. It was always too much and too little time. Now, instead of focusing on Judaism 101—the core concepts of

Judaism as a religion and as an ethnic identity—I point them to basic websites to explore commonly asked questions. They are comfortable examining these sources on their own.

I find that it works better, given my skills as an Americanist, to move them straight into discussing the broader study of American Jewish history, and how southern Jewish studies fits into the larger canon of this field, as well as southern studies. So simply put, we begin by examining “What is American Jewish history?” and “What is Southern Studies?” Then we spend time discussing major scholarly issues of these fields and a bit of historiography and background on the beginnings of both fields.

LANGSTON: Marcie, I’m interested in your comment about introducing non-Jewish students to Judaism. I found somewhat the opposite. I’m not Jewish, but I felt quite comfortable talking with non-Jewish students about Judaism, especially because I had a good idea of what backgrounds and preconceptions many of them might have. When introducing the class to Judaism, though, I did feel a little awkward knowing that one of my students was Jewish. He, however, was a great guy and very helpful to me and the other students.

STONE: The range of responses here is interesting to me. Some of you, it seems, provide lots of background information and context, especially on Jewish and southern history. Others don’t as much. The difference has been attributed to different degrees of preparation and experience among the students, and to time management. But could this difference also reflect different conceptions of the field among its instructors?

Adam, would you agree that your decision to shift southern history to a “supporting role” suggests a certain set of priorities? Scott and Norm, doesn’t your decision to include more general background suggest a view of southern Jewish history as inseparable from these other subject areas? And for all of you: how do you think your decisions about what you can and cannot cover in a limited amount of time are a product of your own definitions of the subject area?

*"Jews and the American South,"  
syllabus by Scott M. Langston, page 1.  
(Courtesy of Scott M. Langston.)*

MENDELSON: I see my survey as an overview class—an introduction to the basic chronology and major themes of Jewish life in the South. It's a chronology shaped by moments when the southern Jewish experience was unusually important in American Jewish history and to moments of profound change in the South. Thus I devote almost the entire first month to topics relating to the colonial period (commerce within the Atlantic world, colonial Judaism, the impact of the Revolution, gender), and emphasize the Civil War, Reconstruction, and civil rights.

I generally don't have time to spend more than a few minutes in each lecture discussing southern history (this is what I meant by "supporting role"). Instead I try to tell a story about how the experience of Jews was shaped both by events within the Jewish world and by turning points in southern history. I've tried to adopt a thematic approach that enables me to focus on themes that particularly interest me: slavery and race, the Civil War, civil rights.

LANGSTON: I attempted to address students' lack of background knowledge because I see southern Jewish history not only as a subfield of American, southern, and Jewish history, but also because I see it as an intersection between these three disciplines. I hoped that students could see the different forces impacting the lives and actions of Jews living in the South and how those people dealt with and responded to these forces as Americans, southerners, and Jews.

Adam's response has got me thinking about how I organized the course, which I did on a chronological basis. I wonder, though, about the benefits of organizing the course more thematically and subsuming the chronological progression within each theme. That might be a way to offset a bit the feeling that I'm sprinting across the various periods and trying to fit in all the highlights of each period while pushing on to the next era.

FINKELSTEIN: Of course, I'm coming from a different place—the high school. Yet, Scott's comments reflect my experiences, too. My students (whom you will be in contact with in just a few years) have limited knowledge of not only Jewish American history but American history in general. Like Scott, I find myself

needing to present historical background material within the framework of my class on southern Jews. Actually, I don't find that a bad thing except for the time it takes from the intended subject matter. It does, however, begin to provide students with the connectedness of history in general and the Jewish story in particular.

## II. Methods

STONE: I'd like to hear more about the materials you use in class. What texts, readings, films, music, etc. do you require students to use?

MENDELSON: The first time I taught the class I assigned both Marcie's anthology, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil*, and Mark Bauman's *Dixie Diaspora* (2006). I've also used an anthology on black-Jewish relations, *Strangers and Neighbors*, edited by Maurianne Adams and John Bracey, which contains primary and secondary material. This time I've created my own using articles and chapters scanned from a variety of sources.

I rely heavily on photocopied primary source documents to generate class discussion. Many of these come from Morris Schappes's *A Documentary History of the Jews in the United States*; Joseph Blau and Salo Baron's *The Jews of the United States*; Jacob Rader Marcus's *Memoirs of American Jews*; Marcus's *The Jew in the American World*; and Marcus's *American Jewry: Documents*. I've collected others from a variety of places over the past several years. When discussing the colonial period, I make heavy use of images drawn from the Rosengartens' *A Portion of the People*. (I gave a class on colonial Jewish portraits and material culture yesterday.)

Pity there is no anthology of primary sources focused on southern Jewish history.

LANGSTON: As required texts, I used Mark Bauman's anthology, *Dixie Diaspora*, Leonard Rogoff's *Homelands*, Dale and Ted Rosengarten's *A Portion of the People*, and the latest edition of the SJHS journal, *Southern Jewish History*. I used Mark's anthology to provide a framework and overview of many of the important issues related to the field, while I used Leonard's book to focus on issues of southern Jewish identity. The Rosengartens' book helped

give students a sense of how southern Jewish experiences in a particular place—the state of South Carolina—developed and progressed over time (i.e., three hundred years). From these three books, I tried to give students different angles from which to understand southern Jewish history.

I also arranged for students to purchase copies of the society's current journal because it always contains excellent articles that can easily be worked into the course, and it introduced students to the society. In addition to this, students did supplemental reading from previous issues of the journal, as well as from other resources.

Finally, I had students go to specific websites—the “South Carolina Jews Tell Their Stories” site of the Jewish Heritage Collection at the College of Charleston; the Institute of Southern Jewish Life's Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities; and the “Gefilte Fish in the Land of the Kingfish: Jewish Life in Louisiana” site—and view particular portions of these websites in order to expose them to Jewish life in different parts of the South. Students enjoyed the websites quite a bit and commonly were surprised at the various expressions of Jewish life in the South.

FERRIS: The PBS *The Jewish Americans* series has been a terrific resource because it is so nicely divided into discrete topics that you can easily play in class. Len Rogoff's documentary, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina*, is terrific, and much enjoyed by my students. Another favorite: Mike DeWitt's *Delta Jews*—a really powerful, insightful exploration of Jewish life in the Mississippi Delta and the impact of changing Jewish demography in the second half of the twentieth century. *A Portion of the People*—both the published text and the online exhibit developed with UNC-CH library—has been an invaluable resource for my course.

ROSENGARTEN: I find that students respond to films, memoirs, and novels more readily than secondary sources and primary document study, but I am committed to using any and all means and materials available. If I were teaching my southern Jewish experience course today, I'd change the reading list significantly, use even more multimedia, and probably change the title to reflect the considerable diversity within the region. The quality of the

sources is critical. Among the many fine films I've used, for example, *Delta Jews* is one of the best.

FERRIS: For class resources, I work with Jacqueline Solis, a terrific UNC librarian who has developed an online course page for the class—a central go-to location for all of the course readings, assignments, writing guidelines, and resources—from bibliographies to listings of films to archives, museums, research websites, and scholarly databases for American Jewish history and all things southern.

LANGSTON: I'm envious of what Marcie's developed with help from the UNC librarian. That's a great idea.

ROSENGARTEN: Yes, that's intriguing. Digital media are clearly the modern students' comfort zone and the wave of the future.

Our special collections staff at the College of Charleston has initiated a collaborative project to digitize archival materials and provide online access to primary documents. The College's Lowcountry Digital Library (LCDL) incorporates material from the Jewish History Center's oral history archives, our Holocaust archives, our manuscript collections on Zionism, selected collections of family papers (especially the Thomas J. Tobias papers), and the great William A. Rosenthal Judaica collection. Even students on our own campus who shy away from coming into the special collections use our online resources in research projects.

FINKELSTEIN: I use a mix of materials with my students. Most printed materials are put together in a course reader containing selections from history texts to provide background and articles from newspapers and journals. In particular, contemporary newspaper articles hold the most interest for students. I show several documentary films: *Delta Jews*; *Shalom Y'all*; and one on Leo Frank. "A picture is worth a thousand words," so they say. I also show one film in its entirety, *Driving Miss Daisy*, which students also enjoy and which leads to several interesting in-class discussions—the Temple bombing, for example.

STONE: Norm, I'm curious about your use of contemporary news accounts, especially because you're the only one so far to

*Dale Rosengarten and class on a field trip, in 2007,  
visiting Charleston's historic congregation, KK Beth Elohim.  
(Photo by Theodore Rosengarten, courtesy of Dale Rosengarten.)*

mention it. Can you be more specific about some issues your students have found interesting?

FINKELSTEIN: Let me give you the long answer. I go back in time to the Civil War era to find articles dealing with Jews, North and South, with a focus on Grant's Order #11. The Leo Frank case is another subject that lends itself to newspaper research as well. The *New York Times* is a great source for old stuff as well as more contemporary issues (e.g., the declining Jewish population in Mississippi). I also use the Library of Congress Chronicling America database of newspapers from 1836 to 1922. Not all southern states are included, but there is enough material to get representative articles about such varied subjects as missionaries, local synagogue events, and individuals. The Pittsburgh Jewish Newspaper Project, housed at Carnegie Mellon University and available on line, contains papers published between 1895 and 1962.

As a side benefit, it's often possible to find newspapers that have old advertisements from local Jewish-owned stores which

students find interesting not only for the items offered for sale but their prices as well. These give good indications of how Jews fit into their local communities. I haven't done this previously, but with every student walking around with a computer and/or smartphone, I'm thinking of having students search out relevant articles on their own as we cover specific events.

LANGSTON: I think what Norm expressed is a great idea—using online databases to have students gain access to primary documents. I thought I'd add that, for some time, the University of North Texas has been digitizing documents related to Texas history and making them available online with a search function. It's called the Portal to Texas History. There is much there related to Jewish history in Texas. I know Hollace Weiner, our colleague who oversees the Fort Worth Jewish Archives, took documents, photographs, and flyers to be digitized and uploaded to the Portal. There are also lots of copies of the *Jewish Herald*, a historic Houston paper, and other primary sources. Students can easily search this database for information related to research projects or particular events. If others know of similar databases like this one and those that Norm and Dale mentioned, I'd appreciate knowing about them. I'm sure there are other resources like these that could be useful to the teaching of southern Jewish history.

Speaking of Hollace Weiner, I took advantage of some local expertise and had Hollace come to class to speak on Jewish life in Texas and, in particular, in Fort Worth. Students had to engage in some primary research, and having Hollace in class gave them a wonderful contact, especially if they were interested in researching something local.

STONE: So now we know that both Eli and Hollace (who, by the way, also visited my class in Austin) have found part-time gigs as classroom experts-in-residence. Nice work if you can get it—and what great local resources to have available!

This reminds me also of Adam's comment earlier about taking his students off-campus to historic sites in Charleston. Are there other examples of making use of unique local resources to expose your students to southern Jewish life? Have you found ways to merge the on-campus world with the off-campus one?

ROSENGARTEN: Charleston's unique local resources give Adam and me an advantage in that we can guide our students toward historic sites, artifacts, archival documents, and living sources of history. No matter what the subject, my teaching has focused on methodology and field work. I teach how to research and write about ethnic history using an experiential approach, visiting archives and museums, conducting oral history interviews, and carrying out other documentary assignments.

LANGSTON: I remember that the one Jewish student in my course was graduating that semester and going on to law school at Tulane. I contacted some of the SJHS members in New Orleans and was able to supply this student with a list of congregations and other Jewish organizations, as well as phone numbers of a few people. I don't know how things have turned out for him there, but the contacts, at least, were a byproduct of the class. He, in turn, was quite enthusiastic about the need for congregation members to know more about Jewish history in general, but especially the history surrounding the congregations and their members (in this case, Texas). He arranged for me to speak at his local congregation, although it fell through due to issues beyond his control.

FERRIS: I encourage and require students to attend public lectures on campus—both those sponsored by the Carolina Center for Jewish Studies and UNC's Center for the Study of the American South.

LANGSTON: I wonder if any of you have thought about incorporating into your courses people who actually participated in some of the events of southern Jewish history. Of course, this would only work for later events. So, for instance, in dealing with southern Jews and the modern civil rights movement, students could be exposed to and given the opportunity to interact with people who lived through that era and who might have beneficial insight. I did not do this, but I toyed with the idea of bringing in, either in person or through videoconferencing, some actual participants, or putting students in touch with certain individuals via e-mail. While these people would not necessarily bring an academic perspective, they could bring the participant perspective.

STONE: Here's another subject that several of you have touched on but on which there's more we could discuss: How would you describe your teaching methods in your SJH courses? Do you rely mostly on lecture? Do students contribute to the class through presentations or group work? I'm also very interested in learning if your students conduct original research for your course. If so, what kinds of topics and materials have they pursued? Has any of your students' work been published?

FERRIS: I try to keep this class seminar-sized, so we limit it to twenty-five, which is still big for a seminar. My fifty-minute class (short!) is a mix of lecture/PowerPoint, response to reading assignments, and music. I usually begin class with music playing related to our topic – Civil War songs, ragtime, Tin Pan Alley, civil rights, a southern klezmer group. I often include ten minutes of film, sometimes at the end of class to reinforce or illustrate what we've discussed.

In the past, my students gave presentations at the end of the semester on their final research papers, but I'm thinking of switching this, and I plan to let them choose from a list of topics related to the syllabus and incorporate fifteen-minute student presentations on a regular basis throughout the semester. I want to get them more involved and to avoid presentations at the end of the term.

FINKELSTEIN: Given the limited class time during the semester (fifty minutes, one day a week, average of fourteen weeks), I do a mix of lecture and student reactions to articles in the course reader. Add to this class time for films and discussion, and not much time is left. I assign a brief "final report," giving students a list of possible subjects. We then spend the class hour discussing the student reports. It's a great opportunity to fill holes and bring closure.

LANGSTON: I *hope* in class to have a discussion rather than a lecture, but I'm sure we all know how that goes.

As I tell students, an informed discussion depends on them having an informed basis from which to discuss, and that basis comes, in large part, from the assigned readings. So, in a perfect world, students will come to class having read the assigned read-

ings, and then we have a guided discussion. This is accompanied by some lecture on my part. In reality, like with other classes, it's hard to get students to do the readings, especially as the semester grinds on. I guess I would describe my style as a conversational lecture. Students are encouraged to participate in the conversation—and many do—and I ask questions of the class based on the readings while also adding new information from the lecture.

When I taught the course, students were required to do lots of reading, take two exams (in part, to help them focus on and go through the discipline of memorizing and processing specific important aspects of southern Jewish history), write a critical review of Leonard Rogoff's *Homelands*, and carry out a research project. Students chose a topic (with guidance from me) and had to engage in some archival-type research, along with integrating the appropriate secondary material. This culminated in a ten-to twelve-page paper. Not surprisingly, some papers were very well done, others not so much, and the rest fell somewhere in between. It's been four years since I taught the course and I don't remember the topics of most of the papers. However, some focused on aspects of Jews and the Civil War, crypto-Judaism (which brought out other issues besides the topic itself), and issues related to local Jewish groups (such as the Fort Worth community). No papers have been published or presented.

Students also wrote four brief responses to selected websites, those I mentioned earlier. If I were doing this again, I might do what I currently do in my upper-level classes, which is to have students post their papers to the course website and assign other students to read particular papers and come to class prepared to ask questions of the author of the paper. The author would be given ten to fifteen minutes to comment on his/her paper (but not recount it, since students will have, at least in theory, read it) and then field questions from the assigned students and from the class as a whole. Of course, doing this would depend on the number of students in the class.

FERRIS: Scott, your term of "conversational lecture" is so accurate. That works for me, too. Constantly encouraging students to read and engage in discussion—a challenge!

I also give two exams, and I completely agree about the opportunity for students to memorize and really *study* the chronology and themes of southern Jewish history. I usually include terms for identification, a short and long essay question, and a photo/artifact to discuss. Up to this year, we've even used old-fashioned blue books for taking exams. Imagine students writing with real pens and pencils in class! My students are also required to write a ten to twelve-page final paper, a film critique, and a book review. When I teach the course in the fall of 2012, I'm thinking about designing a symposium-style format for the students to present their research, so that small groups can work together to organize panels and model professional presentation criteria.

LANGSTON: Thanks, Marcie. I'll be interested to hear how the symposium-style format works out if you decide to go in that direction. I like having students collaborate on projects, in part because "two heads are better than one." I also like students to begin to develop the ability to ask critical (but, not necessarily negative) questions as part of learning how to evaluate historical interpretations.

ROSENGARTEN: I'm also drawn to Marcie's proposal to incorporate regular student presentations throughout the term, rather than stockpiling them at the end. It is a perennial challenge to get students to do the reading and engage in discussion. Any devices that encourage reading, thinking, and class participation are worth a try—and yes, worth a workshop at the next SJHS meeting.

Students in all my courses are required to conduct term projects based on original research and to submit both written reports and audio/visual presentations. Weekly assignments include reading, site visits, and written essays. I have kept copies of many term projects and in a few cases have encouraged the students to pursue publication.

MENDELSON: My courses mix lecture with discussion of documents and images. The more senior the level, the less time I spend talking. All of my southern Jewish history courses involve independent research projects. These range from the conventional (eight-to-twelve-page papers) to the more experimental (each

student in my class on Jews and African Americans designed a themed historical walking tour of Charleston). I encourage my students to pick research topics that will involve them in research using Dale Rosengarten's Jewish Heritage Collection. Very few do. Most choose to use online newspaper collections or read memoir literature.

**S**TONE: Thanks everyone. Now, many of you have already brought up the problem of background information—that is, how much knowledge students already have—as a challenge (or perhaps we might say “opportunity”?) in teaching southern Jewish history. Are there others? What challenges have you encountered, and how have you faced them down?

**L**ANGSTON: In addition to the background issues and student knowledge that we've already discussed, there is for me an issue that arises with every course—so much to cover and so little time. So, making decisions about what issues to deal with is a struggle, on the one hand, but on the other, it presents opportunities to explore different aspects in future teachings of the course. Related to this is how best to organize the course—chronologically or thematically, or according to issues currently being debated among southern Jewish historians, or in some other way. The first and only time I taught this course I followed a chronological arrangement which gave students a good feel for the broad development of southern Jewish communities and experiences over time, but it left me wondering how well students grasped the development of particular important themes such as racial debates or religious struggles, both within the different expressions of Judaism and between Jews and Christians, as well as issues like freedom of religious expression. I felt that religious and racial issues sort of overwhelmed much of the focus of the course, as well as the question of southern Jewish identity. These are all quite important, but I felt I had slighted (although not totally neglected) some other important issues such as those related to immigration, politics, economics, class, Israel and Zionism, and so on.

I also found it challenging, especially when dealing with religious issues, to keep from making southern Jewish history primarily the history of Reform Judaism in the South.

Undoubtedly, Reform is important, but I feared students leaving the class without some sense of the role and contribution of traditional and Conservative communities. It was also challenging for me to find a good balance between highlighting the experiences and contributions of significant individuals without neglecting or under-representing the majority of southern Jews who were lesser known, as well as determining which communities to represent, which themselves can be quite diverse. All of this is to say, I guess, that there isn't *the* southern Jewish experience, but many southern Jewish experiences, so which ones do we study?

And, finally, I'd mention something discussed previously. I had hoped that students would not think of southern Jews as living in a cocoon apart from other Jews, southerners, and Americans, but achieving this was challenging. One thing I'd do differently is spend much more time thinking about what exactly I'd like students to take from the course and then explicitly identify how I want to accomplish this, that is, force myself before teaching the course to connect the various issues, people, and communities covered in the course with these specific goals and then reinforce these throughout the semester.

MENDELSON: I've been struck by two challenges. Firstly, the absence of a single narrative text that covers all (or most) of the themes I want to focus on in the classroom. Students have enjoyed Marcie's and Mark's anthologies, but I've had to supplement these with additional reading. I've tried *A Portion of the People* in this role, and found that it doesn't quite fit: it has wonderful images that make for great classroom discussion, but does not offer a broad narrative applicable outside South Carolina. Leonard's books might fit the bill but for my heavy focus on the colonial period and emphasis on South Carolina.

Secondly, as I mentioned earlier, there is no single collection of southern Jewish history primary documents, along the lines of one by Jacob Marcus. This would be a wonderful addition.

ROSENGARTEN: I agree with Adam that we lack an anthology of primary source materials focused on southern Jewish history—a project I would happily undertake in collaboration with others.

STONE: I, for one, think we should hold Dale to that offer. Now, on the flip side, what have you found the most rewarding things about teaching southern Jewish history?

LANGSTON: One of the most rewarding things for me was to hear students say after studying any of the topics, "I had no idea." Seeing eyes opening and lights coming on was very gratifying, and especially so as my students, who were with one exception non-Jewish, began to appreciate (not just know about) the experiences of people who were different in some ways from them, but similar in others. Personally, I find southern Jewish history absolutely fascinating, and having the opportunity to teach it and further my own understanding was quite a privilege. And, hopefully without sounding too weird or something, reminding myself that my students and I were studying real people—individuals—who lived their lives with hopes and disappointments. Seeing how they dealt with the various challenges and forces was something special. For these reasons, I'd teach the course again in a heartbeat, and I hope that at some point in the future I'll be in a position where I can do so.

### *III. The Field*

STONE: What do you think is the future of southern Jewish history as a teaching field? Do you expect to see more such courses or fewer offered in the future? Will you, or would you, teach it again? And is there anything that the SJHS could do to advance teaching in the field?

ROSENGARTEN: The Southern Jewish Experience in 2000 was the first and only time I taught this particular curriculum. Before and after, I have offered more experiential classes, exploring neighborhoods and ethnic history. In the spring of 1998, I taught an upper-level course in documentary field work, *St. Philip Street as a Classroom*, focused on Charleston's immigrant Jewish community. During the fall semester of 2002 when the *Portion of the People* exhibit was at the Gibbes Museum of Art, I offered a course titled *Anatomy of an Exhibition*, organized around the exhibit and catalog. While my course syllabus involved visiting the museum and using the installation as a "laboratory," I believe the

course could be replicated without the live exhibit as a resource by using the book as the core text. I'm interested to hear about Scott's experience teaching from *A Portion of the People* and Adam's use of the book to illustrate artifacts.

I've developed a number of ethnic history/documentary studies classes that feature Charleston Jewish history, though the focus is not exclusively on Jews: *King Street as a Classroom*; *East Side/West Side: Charleston's Ethnic Neighborhoods*; and *Charleston as a Classroom: Exploring the City's Archives and Historic Sites*. I've found that I attract more students and a more diverse group if the course encompasses a range of identities—ethnic, religious, racial, national.

MENDELSON: Since American Jewish history is not widely taught in the U.S., I wonder whether we can realistically hope that southern Jewish history—an even more specialized area—will catch fire as a teaching field. Perhaps we can target particular institutions that already have suitable faculty (Emory, Tulane, etc.)? Or create a database on the society's webpage of syllabi, scanned primary documents, and documentaries suitable for classroom use, maps and images that will aid anyone who plans to teach such a course? Or perhaps arrange an occasional informal gathering of those who teach it at the society's conferences to chat about classroom strategies?

FINKELSTEIN: I'm afraid I may not be the appropriate person for this question, but that doesn't stop me from commenting! If the teaching of American Jewish history on the college level is limited, imagine the situation on the high school level, particularly in the varied Jewish high school programs that exist. My students often tell me that what they learn about American Jewish history carries over in subtle and non-subtle ways to their American history courses in high school and even later in college. When I offer more specific courses (e.g. *Southern Jewish History*, *Jews in America's Civil Rights Struggle*, *The Jewish Gangster in America*), I fortunately have a bit more time to focus on a specific American Jewish history subject area. My northern-oriented students sometimes cannot imagine Jewish life beyond New York and Boston, so a separate southern Jewish history class is an eye-opening

experience. I'm fortunate that my school recognizes the importance of offering history electives, and has a large enough enrollment to permit this.

My dream is that one day we have an American Jewish history curriculum in our elementary and high school programs. Alas, it's probably a pipe dream since most kids end their Jewish education shortly after bar/bat mitzvah, with their schooling revolving around preparation for that singular life event. (Someone pass the hors d'oeuvres.)

LANGSTON: I agree with the ideas expressed by the others throughout this discussion. Southern Jewish history is certainly not a stand-alone field in that it cannot sustain (or, at least, it hasn't yet) a large enough following to generate consistent and common teaching. So, I think it serves more of a support role to bigger fields. It does, for instance, bring out an important aspect of southern history that would otherwise probably go unnoticed. My experience with non-Jewish students suggests that they would give little or no thought to Jews in the South were it not for the course. Those who teach American or southern history and who have little reason or motivation to consider southern Jews will likely overlook the Jewish presence in the South. The course, as well as the society and its journal, can continue to raise the visibility of Jews in the South, as well as emphasize their contributions. In addition to giving voice to Jewish experiences, this course also expands and, at times, challenges the dominant narratives of southern and American history. This is especially important, I think, given the predominantly Christian character of the South (and the U.S.).

Southern Jewish history opens up an important dimension related to American and southern religious history. In addition, it can bring new or different insights to other issues, such as race. I also think a southern Jewish history course can make significant contributions to a religious studies curriculum by teaching students not only about Judaism, but also the important relationship among religion, culture, social values, and institutions. So, I don't think I'll ever see anything like a significant slate of southern Jewish history courses in any college or university curriculum, but

this course can make important contributions by helping faculty and students view familiar areas of study from a different angle.

Convincing faculty and administrators of this benefit, however, may prove difficult, but the SJHS can help make this case by continuing to maintain high quality conferences and editions of the journal, as well as encouraging presentations on southern Jewish history at other professional conferences and publications in other professional journals. Another important role the society can play is encouraging and assisting archival preservation of the artifacts of southern Jewish history. Finding, preserving, and making accessible these artifacts is vital to maintaining the vibrancy of the field.

ROSENGARTEN: Scott's comments about the future of the field of southern Jewish history boosted my morale. I think the College of Charleston is moving in the right direction. Our proposed Center for Southern Jewish Culture has the potential to make a significant contribution, to paraphrase Scott, toward understanding the relationships among religion, culture, social values, and institutions.

STONE: Very good. Thank you all for participating.

### *Conclusion*

It seems unlikely, as Adam Mendelsohn observes above, that southern Jewish history will ever "catch fire as a teaching field." It is, looked at one way, too specific an area to attract very many students and instructors. It has a clear personal appeal to southern Jews themselves, but its interest to non-Jews, non-southerners, and historical generalists is less obvious. In fact, many of the students who take southern Jewish history, perhaps even the majority, are not Jewish. They are drawn to these courses for a variety of reasons, from the mundane (they need a history credit and it fits their schedule) to the more topical (they have an interest in Judaism, in religion, or in the South). In any case, the field must generate a broad appeal if it is to continue finding an audience among American students and attracting high-quality instructors. It must be about more than the personal stories of individual southern Jews, families, or communities.

As the conversation above demonstrates, the importance of southern Jewish history is indeed far more than antiquarian. It is a teaching field with great potential in its interconnections to more general subject areas. The experience of Jews in the American South touches on historical themes as diverse as slavery and immigration, global trade and regional folkways, colonial Americans and Imperial Russians, the Civil War and civil rights. It provides an opportunity, too, for history students to discover the great variety of methods and materials available to them. Our panelists expose their students to archival research, fieldwork, textual analysis, oral history, newspaper studies, and site visits, and their courses draw on primary works from literature, memoir, film, architecture, material culture, food, music, and painting. Southern Jewish history may be a narrow road, but it is one with many intersections opening onto great avenues of historical study.

Despite its specificity, furthermore, the inclusion of southern Jewish history in academic curricula is justified by the wealth of excellent scholarship available in the field. Since the 1973 publication of Eli Evans's *The Provincials*, a profound but non-academic introduction to Jewish life in the South, scholarly publication has flourished. An instructor planning a survey of southern Jewish history can select from two fine recent article anthologies as well as several now-classic ones; a growing number of state and local historical monographs and biographies; a variety of scholarly examinations of southern Jewish life, religion, politics, and identity; and fifteen years' worth of the rigorously refereed journal *Southern Jewish History*.<sup>8</sup> In addition, as our panelists describe, online resources are constantly expanding as universities, libraries, archives, and other historical agencies digitize and disseminate materials from their collections, making research easier for both students and professional scholars. And the commitment that many southern universities have made to Jewish studies—nearly every southern state today has a Jewish studies program and/or research center at a flagship university—secures a home base for southern Jewish history courses. The growing professionalization of southern Jewish history should assure it a permanent presence, if on a small scale, at major colleges and universities.

There are challenges, however, that future instructors in the field will need to address, and these seem to arise regardless of the context in which the course is taught. Student knowledge and background is a particular dilemma, especially given the interdisciplinary nature of the course and the wide variety of reasons students take it. How much time should teachers devote to constructing a contextual framework for the subject that includes general treatment of American, southern, and Jewish history, culture, and religion (including both Judaism and Christianity)? How much do students need to know about these issues in order to understand southern Jewish experiences? It is clear from our panelists that this is a universal problem, and there is a variety of ways to deal with it.

What's more, there is not a single lens for viewing and teaching southern Jewish history, but many frameworks into which it can be situated and contextualized. This offers many exciting possibilities for analyzing and explaining the subject, but instructors must consider carefully which interpretive frameworks will work best for their students. For example, notions of southern Jewish identity are a common theme in the courses that have been taught in the past. Some instructors deal with the question of whether a distinct southern Jewish cultural identity exists, while others address changing perceptions of such an identity. The difference of focus, which reflects a debate that is at the center of southern Jewish studies, is slight but significant. An instructor's decision on this point will affect every other aspect of their course design.

Finally, the vital role of access to primary documents and scholarly literature is evident. Exposing students to a variety of primary documents and classic and current scholarship is essential to these courses' success. There are many ways to address this issue, but one seems particularly important: continued support of archival preservation and widespread dissemination of these materials. Our panelists brought up the lack of an anthology of primary documents related to southern Jewish history. Such an anthology would, of course, reflect materials produced by Jews in the American South, but might also include relevant non-Jewish

materials that have bearing on southern Jewish experiences. However organized, the need for an anthology is great.

Although most of our panelists teach at the college level, it is important, finally, to note that southern Jewish history has been taught, and could be taught, in a wide variety of instructional settings. Norman Finkelstein teaches at a Jewish high school, and Sheldon Hanft pioneered the field through Elderhostel. None of our panelists has offered such a course at a Jewish Sunday school, day school, JCC learning program, or summer camp, but it is easy to imagine that someone could. It is possible, too, that non-Jewish historical societies, and even churches or Christian schools and study groups, might find it a valuable field to explore. Our panelists point the way toward a wide array of instructional opportunities, and so there is every reason to be optimistic about the future of southern Jewish history.

The authors would like to hear from anyone not mentioned here who has taught a course specifically or wholly devoted to southern Jewish history at any academic level. Please contact Scott Langston and/or Bryan Stone, and provide your name, the title of the course, the institution and department where it was taught, and the date.

Thank you very much.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> See for instance, Mark K. Bauman, "A Century of Southern Jewish Historiography," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 59.1-2 (2007): 3-78, and *Southern Jewish History* 10 (2007), where several articles recount the history of the Southern Jewish Historical Society.

<sup>2</sup> While there are others who taught courses devoted exclusively to southern Jewish history, Hanft is the first person that we have been able to verify as having done so. We also have been able to verify either conclusively or with some degree of certainty that the following individuals have not taught such a course: Mark K. Bauman, Paul S. George, Henry Green, Mark Greenberg, Bertram Korn, Jacob Rader Marcus, Sam Proctor, Stuart Rockoff, Jonathan Sarna, Louis Schmier, Arnold Shankman, Jason Silverman, Melvin Urofsky, Clive Webb, and Stephen Whitfield. We communicated directly with many of these individuals, while for others, particularly those no longer living, we relied on either information provided by those who knew them well and/or searches of institutional catalogs when available. It should be noted, however, that such a course taught as a special topics course would be unlikely to appear in college catalogs. In addition, many of those mentioned above have incorporated sections devoted to southern Jewish history into courses dealing with broader aspects of Jewish history.

<sup>3</sup> Sheldon Hanft, e-mail message to Scott Langston, January 12, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Gary Zola, e-mail message to Scott Langston, January 23, 2012.

<sup>5</sup> "Issues in Southern Jewish History" course syllabus, History 657, fall 2000, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, Ohio.

<sup>6</sup> "Southern Jewish History and Culture" course syllabus, JWST 352, fall 2001, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.

<sup>7</sup> In addition to Sheldon Hanft, Gary Zola, Phyllis Leffler, Jack Bass, and our panelists, Mark Pinsky ("The Jewish Experience in the American South: 'Kasha and Cornbread,'" Rollins College, Winter Park, Florida) and Eric Goldstein ("Jews and the American South," Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia) have taught courses devoted exclusively to southern Jewish history. Others unknown to us or unconfirmed by us may also have taught the course. Of those courses known to us, all but one (Scott Langston's) have been taught at institutions located east of the Mississippi River.

<sup>8</sup> The most comprehensive survey of scholarship in the field is Bauman, "A Century of Southern Jewish Historiography."

# Samuel and Saul Isaac: International Jewish Arms Dealers, Blockade Runners, and Civil War Profiteers

by

Adam Mendelsohn\*

In the crisp dawn of Friday, May 10, 1861, sailing ships and steamers from across the world waited to dock in Liverpool harbor. The bustling English port had once been a center of the slave trade, its merchants made rich by dispatching their vessels to rendezvous with slave traders at forts that dotted the West African coastline. Now it prospered by importing cotton picked by slaves on plantations in the American South that was transformed into cloth in the factories of Lancashire. Weeks after the bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor signaled the beginning of the Civil War, many in Liverpool expected soon to be doing business with the Confederate States of America. If they had known who was aboard one of the ships that arrived that day, the stevedores in this port city where pro-southern sentiment ran high may have given this inconspicuous passenger a hero's welcome. After disembarking, Caleb Huse was in no mood to tarry. His circuitous voyage had taken three weeks. The thirty-year-old West Point graduate, freshly commissioned a captain in the newly established Confederate army, had been dispatched on a clandestine mission. He was on his way to London, carrying on his young shoulders the knowledge that the task that awaited him might determine the fate of the Confederacy.

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The exultant glow that radiated through the South following the surrender of Fort Sumter could not long hide the stark realities that faced the hastily convened Confederate government. In its precipitate rush to war, the Confederacy had little time to create the stockpiles and systems needed to sustain armies in the field. Once it began to muster enthusiastic men into regiments—the Confederate congress authorized an army of one hundred thousand volunteers in March 1861—it quickly found itself at a massive disadvantage. On the eve of the war only a fraction of the nation's factories were based in the South. In the 1850s the South imported two-thirds of its clothing. It could barely shoe its soldiers: the North produced more than 90 percent of the nation's boots.<sup>1</sup> Each regiment was initially tasked with supplying its own uniforms. This policy was quickly reversed when it became clear that the flood of volunteers was unable or unwilling to supply outfits that approximated the cadet gray standard. Unlike northern states that scrambled to clothe the volunteer regiments, most southern states were unable to step into the breach. Instead the herculean task of outfitting the Confederate military fell to the Quartermaster Department hurriedly cobbled together under the command of Abraham C. Myers. By June 1861 Myers was placing orders for fifteen hundred sets of uniforms a week with manufacturers in New Orleans, a quantity that soon proved insufficient to satisfy demand. But for the decision of Alfred Mordecai, a senior officer in the Ordnance Department of the United States Army, to reject overtures from Jefferson Davis in March 1861, two of the most senior supply offices of the Confederacy would have been filled by Jews. Faced with conflicting loyalties to North and South, Mordecai turned down Davis's offer to head the Confederacy's Ordnance Department, instead resigning his commission and sitting out the war. The position went by default to the able Josiah Gorgas, one of the lesser-known heroes of the Confederate war effort. Abraham C. Myers, the grandson of Charleston's first rabbi, had fewer qualms in accepting Davis's offer.<sup>2</sup> As if a paucity of manufacturing capacity and an inefficient distribution system were not burden enough, Myers and Gorgas discovered that several other hurdles complicated their task. Union Commanding

General Winfield Scott's Anaconda Plan aimed to throttle the South by blockading its ports, keeping profitable cotton moldering in warehouses and imported supplies at bay. Several southern states, having newly asserted their sovereignty by seceding, chafed at Confederate efforts to centrally coordinate provisioning and preferred to channel hoarded supplies to their own troops. Some wily businessmen, reluctant to see their stocks requisitioned, proved even more recalcitrant. The Confederate military and congress carped at the quality and quantity of goods supplied.<sup>3</sup>

*Scott's Anaconda Plan.*  
*Cartoon map of General Winfield Scott's*  
*plan to crush the Confederacy economically.*  
*(Courtesy of the Library of Congress/American Memory.)*

Barring divine deliverance, Gorgas quickly and Myers more slowly realized that the South would need to rely on imported materiel to stand any hope of victory. Plans may have been in place even before Gorgas assumed his role because in mid-April 1861 Caleb Huse was dispatched to London to begin purchasing the vast quantities of military supplies needed to surmount the Confederacy's shortfall. Huse arrived without detailed instructions and with considerable discretionary power to buy and ship goods to southern ports. Finding stiff competition for rifles and other equipment from representatives of the Union, vendors who demanded exorbitant cash payments and balked at supplying the Confederacy at a time when its longevity and credit were uncertain, and overwhelming demands on his time as a one-man supply bureau, Huse turned to two firms experienced in filling military contracts. So began a fateful partnership that paired Huse with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., a British firm that had made its name in the boot making business, but now devoted its attention to serving the Confederacy. Working without support staff and under considerable pressure to forward supplies as quickly as possible, Huse came to rely on the firm and its three clerks to satisfy the new nation's gluttonous appetite for war materiel. Not only was the firm willing to extend large amounts of credit at critical moments, but it also offered expertise in navigating the landscape of the British arms industry, negotiating contracts with potential suppliers, inspecting purchased articles against defects, and organizing shipping to bypass the northern blockade. Given Huse's increasing dependence on the firm, it was probably no accident that he rented accommodation doors away from its offices in Jermyn Street in St. James. Letters to Huse were sometimes sent care of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.<sup>4</sup>

As cargo and cotton crossed the Atlantic despite the best efforts of the Union naval blockade, Britain became the largest European supplier to the Confederacy—an arsenal for the slavocracy—with Caleb Huse by far its most important purchasing agent, and Samuel and Saul Isaac, the owners of the firm, his preferred partners. Aside from their extraordinary role as crutch to the Confederacy, the experience of the Isaac siblings is intriguing

for a variety of reasons. For one, it reveals the role of Jews as military contractors in Britain and America during the Civil War, a subject little known to specialists in American and Anglo Jewish history. The wartime activities of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. have been described in brief by historians of Confederate diplomacy, supply, and blockade running. By contrast the pre- and post-war careers of the Isaac brothers remained largely obscure until recently.<sup>5</sup> None of these studies, however, fully placed the brothers and their business in the context of modern Jewish history.

*Samuel Isaac.*

*(Courtesy of Bastien Gomperts, London.)*

This article does so in a variety of ways. Firstly, it proposes that the Isaac brothers were representatives of a new kind of Jewish military contractor that appeared in the modern period. Although a small cadre of court Jews served as prominent provision agents and financiers of armies in central Europe in the early modern period, and several Jews became military suppliers in America during the colonial period, the heirs of this tradition have escaped proper attention. Unlike their forebears who leveraged their access to trading and banking networks to enter the field, Samuel and Saul Isaac were men of humbler origin whose familiarity with manufacturing and wholesaling enabled them to compete for contracts to supply modern armies swollen by *levée en masse*.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, it complicates our picture of antisemitism in the South during the Civil War, a subject of some debate.<sup>7</sup> Despite the prominent role played by the firm during the conflict, there is no evidence that it was the victim of overt public prejudice on this side of the Atlantic. This was at least partly a consequence of the firm's distance from American shores, but nonetheless offers a sharp contrast with the experience of Jewish contractors in the Union.<sup>8</sup> Thirdly, it raises uncomfortable questions about the wartime business behavior of Samuel and Saul Isaac. Given the sensitivity of the subject of financial fraud and profiteering by Jews—antisemites have long accused Jews as a group of possessing unethical mercantile mores—few historians of modern Jewry have explored examples of such misbehavior. Although it would be foolhardy to draw any wider conclusions from this case study, the example of the wartime misadventures of the Isaac brothers adds to the small but growing literature on Jewish criminality.<sup>9</sup> Fourthly, this article presents further evidence of why scholars of Jews and the Civil War need to look beyond the battlefield to appreciate the legacy of the war for Jews. Arguably the most significant impact of Jews on the war and the war on Jews came not on the battlefield, but in their role as suppliers of the rival armies.<sup>10</sup> Finally, the close study of Saul and Samuel Isaac and their business reinforces the benefits of embracing a transnational approach to the writing of American and southern Jewish history. As a field largely focused on the major subjects of social history—migration,

diaspora, ethnicity, gender, religion and race—American Jewish history is ideally positioned to answer the call made by Thomas Bender and others to produce scholarship that frames these themes in ways that look beyond the boundaries of the nation-state.<sup>11</sup> Several historians, including some who focus on southern Jews, have begun to embrace this approach. Study of the Civil War lends itself to a global perspective. A recent surge of books, articles, and conferences, many commemorating the 150th anniversary of the conflict, has plumbed the international dimensions of the conflict.<sup>12</sup> Although Jews played only a minor role in the Civil War as soldiers, the war had global repercussions for Jews. A handful of historians has begun to explore this impact.<sup>13</sup> Some of the effects were limited and are not widely known. In India, for example, David Sassoon and his sons profited by supplying cotton to the mills of Lancashire. When the blockade of southern ports and the Confederacy's King Cotton diplomacy interrupted the supply of the commodity to Britain, the Sassoons and other exporters rushed lower quality Indian cotton to satisfy the demand.<sup>14</sup> On a more significant scale, the war not only temporarily slowed the flow of Jewish immigrants to America's shores, but irrevocably changed the nation that awaited those who crossed the Atlantic after Appomattox. And as the story of Samuel and Saul Isaac reveals, Jews far from the frontlines were drawn into this epochal American conflict.

*"Mud, Jews, and Sailors"*

The rise of Saul and Samuel Isaac was rooted in the long association of Jews with military supply in Britain. From the mid-eighteenth century, small but significant numbers of Jewish traders clustered in naval towns, providing the fleet and its sailors with a variety of services. The novelist Charles Dickens remarked snidely that the Portsmouth of his youth was "principally remarkable for mud, Jews and sailors."<sup>15</sup> These services included basic banking—cashing paychecks, distributing money from prizes, and supplying goods on credit to the sailors and their wives—as well as stitching and selling slops, the rough uniforms worn by seamen.<sup>16</sup> This latter role was important enough for the Jews to enter

naval slang. “Jewing” became the naval nickname for tailoring; a “Jewing firm” was a sailor on board ship who stitched for others in his spare time; and a “Jewing bundle” was the bag in which a sailor kept his sewing kit.<sup>17</sup> Naval towns struggled after the Napoleonic Wars as the fleet was returned to a peacetime footing. Several Jewish slop sellers—those who made and sold the rough and inexpensive outfits favored by sailors—and navy agents left high and dry took their trade to London. The London *Post Office Directory* of 1800 recorded no Jewish names among the thirty-five slop sellers listed. By 1823 *Pigot’s Directory* listed seventeen, almost all near the dockside.<sup>18</sup> In 1839, the *London Saturday Journal* decried the Jewish traders who rowed out to warships anchored in the Thames, eager to sell to sailors who had been paid advance wages. Those who managed to climb aboard quickly transformed the spaces between the guns on the main-deck into a “fair, or bazaar, where all sorts of articles, such as wearing apparel, gown pieces for the ladies, watches, and trinkets that attract the seamen’s attention” were ostentatiously exhibited.<sup>19</sup> The familiarity acquired with slop work in port towns stood Jews in good stead to compete for ripe government contracts. Slop sellers sold both to sailors and to the Navy Slop Office that coordinated the supply of uniforms to Royal Navy vessels.<sup>20</sup> With the growth of bureaucracies and the formalization of state functions, ever more individuals required standardized outfits. By the end of the 1820s, the navy regularly advertised large tenders for slop clothing in the London press and purchased thousands of jackets, trousers, and shirts.<sup>21</sup> Numerous additional institutions ordered great numbers of garments to outfit soldiers, policemen, post office workers, civil servants, and convicts aboard hulks anchored in the Thames.<sup>22</sup> Hard wearing and inexpensive slop clothing remained in demand in colonial markets and among plantation owners seeking to cheaply outfit their slaves. Government supply was a profitable niche. Others prospered as suppliers and outfitters to the colonial civil service filling contracts—in Burma, for example, E. Solomon and Sons supplied water to the British navy, as well as ice to cool the drinks of wilting Englishmen—or selling fine goods to colonials pining for home.<sup>23</sup>

*Saul Isaac depicted in a cartoon.  
Saul Isaac sought public office in the 1870s.  
(Courtesy of Bastien Gomperts, London.)*

London's East End housed a cluster of military and marine stores, as well as wholesalers who competed for contracts.<sup>24</sup> The suppliers were conveniently close not only to the dockside, but also to the "great military clothing depot" located in the Tower of London. Not only manufacturers profited from their proximity to the Tower; the depot also sustained a second ecosystem comprised of dealers and traders who bought and sold surplus uniforms. Surplus and secondhand uniforms were in considerable

demand whether sold in bulk or discarded by retiring (or absconding) soldiers.<sup>25</sup> Jews were particularly active in buying from this secondary military market. Their prominence roused concern during the Crimean War, a conflict that starkly highlighted the inadequacies of the provision of the British Army and spurred military reform in the middle of the 1850s.<sup>26</sup> Eerily foreshadowing events in America, a hastily mustered volunteer army went to war underprepared and ill-equipped. Confident of a quick victory, the troops were sent outfitted in parade uniforms that were hopelessly inadequate when the war dragged on through winter. Much of the replacement clothing sent to the shivering troops proved deficient. Suspicions abounded of contracts won fraudulently and of contractors increasing their margins by using shoddy (recycled wool usually used only to line jackets) to manufacture uniforms.<sup>27</sup> A major change to the supply system—the centralization of control of contracts at military depots—heightened concerns about corruption. Some Jewish dealers in military surplus were suspected of purchasing large quantities of obsolete and substandard boots and uniforms at the auctions held at the Tower, only to later fraudulently sell these back to the quartermaster as new. Those in port towns were accused of buying and removing the distinctive markings from the uniforms of deserting sailors.<sup>28</sup>

One of those caught in the furor over Crimean War contracting was Samuel Isaac. Born in 1812 in Chatham, a town with a strategic naval dockyard and army barracks, Isaac's vaulting career exemplifies the broadening prospects opening to Jews in the clothing trade. Samuel's father was a furniture broker who almost certainly rented housewares to the transient population of military officers who came and went with the tides, and two of his uncles worked as slop sellers in a town where this was a common occupation for Jews.<sup>29</sup> Samuel and two siblings followed their family into this line of work.<sup>30</sup> By 1838 Samuel had established himself as a clothier selling outfits to soldiers and sailors, soon opening a grand store in the center of Chatham "the front of which had been made in London, and was to eclipse every other" in the neighboring towns.<sup>31</sup> This was not the only sign of his business acumen and gathering prosperity. He soon employed two

servants to tend his three-person household.<sup>32</sup> Within a decade he owned property in London and moved to the metropolis in the early 1850s. His younger brother Saul, a decade his junior, temporarily remained in Chatham, most likely tending his brother's thriving business.

By 1852 Samuel Isaac had established S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., a decision that reflected his broadened ambitions. No longer would Samuel focus on supplying the persnickety whims of single soldiers and sailors. Henceforth he sought to outfit entire armies. Although Samuel's name shared space on the marquee with Campbell, there was no question as to who was the firm's guiding force. There is little evidence that Campbell (most likely Dugald Forbes Campbell, an occasional attorney to the firm, and perhaps an early investor) played any role in running the company.<sup>33</sup> Samuel was soon joined by his brother Saul, establishing a formidable partnership. As in many matters relating to business, Samuel's timing was propitious. The size and needs of the British military were expanding as its tentacular reach circled the globe. In 1856 the *Jewish Chronicle* crowed that the firm had won the entire contract to outfit the British army in the East. In reality this was less impressive than it sounded since until 1858 Britain projected much of its power in Asia through the East India Company. The Indian mutiny and Second Opium War in China forced Whitehall to rapidly deploy more troops to the region. These soldiers were presumably clad in light cotton uniforms suitable for the tropical climate that were supplied by S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. Closer to home, the firm also won large contracts to supply boots to the new army depot at Weedon, a venture that persuaded Samuel to purchase a factory in Northampton, the town that supplied Britain with much of its cheap footwear. There Samuel innovated by introducing a mechanized factory system for producing shoes and boots, a method at odds with the tradition of outsourcing orders to workers who would sew by hand at home. In this he acted in the forefront of the industrial revolution.<sup>34</sup>

Although S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. appears to have entered the boot business too late to have its footwear dispatched to British soldiers campaigning in the Crimean peninsula and played

*The Northampton Shoemaker, c. 1866.  
(Courtesy of Northampton Museums and Art Gallery,  
Northampton Borough Council, UK.)*

only a relatively small role as a supplier during the conflict, it became entangled in the reformist zeal galvanized by the Crimean War. The firm certainly benefited from the modernization and professionalization of the army's system of procurement in 1855. Previously individual regiments were supplied by Army Houses that enjoyed a monopoly position; now competitive bids were dispatched to the War Office for assessment.<sup>35</sup> As a conspicuous beneficiary of this new centralized system, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. quickly attracted unwanted attention. An inquiry into army contracts in 1858 found evidence that the firm—the “largest army contractors contracted to supply soldiers’ kits”—had provided articles of an “inferior description, and not worth the sum paid for them by the government.” Compounding this charge, the firm was discovered to have sold items rejected by the inspector at Weedon to the depot at Chatham at a premium.<sup>36</sup> Even more damningly, the commission aired accusations of corruption. Samuel Isaac admitted to giving five hundred pounds to the principal military storekeeper at Weedon shortly before the latter absconded to America with his mistress. Despite vigorous protestations of his innocence—Isaac stated that the sum was a short-term loan, a claim that the commission endorsed—the firm was struck off the list of contractors permitted to compete for military orders from the War Department. Anguished by the loss of future contracts and fearing for the fulfilled orders as yet unpaid by the government, Isaac pleaded plaintively with the committee chairman that this unsubstantiated charge was ruinous. He protested that “to a mercantile man, character and position were great things.”<sup>37</sup> Samuel Isaac was right to worry about the stain left on his reputation. In future years, foes of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. would return to this episode, extracting a dark seam of innuendo and calumny that helped to undermine the firm at what seemed to be its finest hour.

For the moment, fate continued to favor the firm. Even as its contracts with the War Department withered, a new source of demand emerged. Political turbulence on the continent and fears that Britain was left vulnerable by an overstretched army garrisoned across the empire persuaded the government to sanction the creation of volunteer corps beginning in May 1859. A rush of

civic leaders and businessmen including Samuel Isaac rallied friends and workers into volunteer units. Each corps was responsible for supplying its enlistees with arms and equipment and was free to design its own uniform. Since supply was outside the authority of the War Department and officers were granted considerable autonomy, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was able to solicit orders to outfit these part-time soldiers. By 1862, this force grew to over 160,000. If demand for uniforms to outfit these volunteer citizen soldiers provided a drip feed of military business that sustained the company at a moment of crisis, political ructions across the Atlantic served to resurrect their fortunes.

*Northamptonshire Volunteer Officers at Althorp, Northamptonshire.  
Samuel Isaac standing, seventh from left, bearded and hat in hand, 1864.  
The Northamptonshire Independent, October 9, 1915, November 6, 1915.  
(Courtesy of the Northampton Chronicle & Echo, Northampton, UK.)*

### *Suppliers to the Confederacy*

Soon after establishing himself in London, Caleb Huse quickly turned to Samuel and Saul Isaac for assistance in sourcing supplies for the Confederacy. The siblings worked hard to cement this relationship. Along with a variety of formal services—providing entrée to military manufactories and depots, procuring travel documents, warning about surveillance by Union

*The Fifth Northampton Rifle Volunteers, 1868.*

*Major Samuel Isaac is seated, center, with elbow on the table.*

*The Northampton Independent October 12, 1922, October 21, 1922.*

*(Courtesy of the Northampton Chronicle & Echo, Northampton, UK.)*

agents, and displaying considerable initiative in sourcing supplies—the Isaac brothers were careful to cultivate personal relationships with Huse and the other purchasing agents who joined him in London.<sup>38</sup> The firm supplied tickets to the theater and other London attractions, company on excursions, and expensive meals. Samuel Isaac entertained lavishly at his home. After one such evening spent with several guests, purchasing agent Edward Anderson recounted in his diary having enjoyed “a magnificent repast, everything being in the finest style, and in superabundance.”<sup>39</sup> On a previous occasion he had enjoyed the exclusive attention of his host: “He drove me out to his residence in a cab and gave me a capital meal with a profusion of costly fruit as a dessert. His wife and son were the only persons present

except myself. After dinner we adjourned to his sanctum & smoked cigars until near midnight."<sup>40</sup> Anderson rightly recognized that this largesse was not unconditional.<sup>41</sup> Stroking the egos of Anderson and his associates was a demanding job. Anderson proved a fickle friend, easily piqued when Samuel Isaac was inattentive. For example, Isaac mollified Anderson after missing a meeting by arriving at his rented rooms "bringing with him as a peace offering a beautiful railway leopard skin."<sup>42</sup> Samuel Isaac was not alone in identifying the Confederate purchasing agents as golden geese who should be carefully cosseted. His chief rival competed for their favor, offering invitations to his country house, serving a "sumptuous dinner" with the "costliest wines" and "princely" hospitality.<sup>43</sup>

*Caleb Huse, Confederate major and arms purchaser,  
in later life, c. 1904.  
(Photo source: Wikipedia.org.)*

Even as Huse came to depend on S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., so too did Samuel Isaac stake the future of his firm on the Confederacy. Operating as commission merchants—connecting Huse with suppliers, arranging financing, and extracting a commission fee from both parties—S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. quickly became the conduit for vast quantities of munitions and ordnance, as well as cloth, leather, and uniforms.<sup>44</sup> The company ordered at least some of these articles from Jewish firms in London. It should be unsurprising that Samuel Isaac placed substantial orders with his co-ethnics, given the prominence of Jews among clothing wholesalers and their familiarity with producing low-cost garments in bulk for export. He supplied boots from his factory and other manufacturers in Northampton. In 1862, for example, a local newspaper reported that the town was enjoying “a great amount of prosperity as there was a very large demand for shoes for both armies.” The Confederacy imported one million pairs of shoes over the course of the war.<sup>45</sup> By the end of 1861 British exports to the Confederacy surpassed £240,000, the vast majority purchased by Huse.<sup>46</sup>

Huse’s partnership with the Isaac firm grew stronger in 1862. The Confederate purchasing operation was hamstrung by tenuous finances making it ever more dependent on those willing to assume the risk of doing business with the secessionist states. While others often demurred, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. continued to extend credit even as the credit-worthiness of the Confederacy fluctuated wildly with the ebb and flow of its fortunes on the battlefield. The Confederacy was slow to pay its bills, requiring Samuel Isaac to dispatch several letters begging Richmond to pay. In response to one such plea, Judah P. Benjamin, then Confederate secretary of war, wrote in March 1862,

[to] express to you the deep sense of obligation felt by this Government for the kind and generous confidence which you have exhibited toward us at a moment when all others in foreign countries seem to be doubtful, timorous, and wavering. You will find, however, that your confidence was not misplaced, and that we have not failed (as far as we could find means) to make remittances to Captain Huse, although not as rapidly as we desired; but our difficulties have been great in procuring secure

remittances. Enough, however, has been done, we trust, to relieve you from embarrassment or apprehensions. . . . Our demands for supplies from England will continue quite large, and we trust you may find your connection with our young Government equally profitable and agreeable.<sup>47</sup>

Again in January 1863 the firm wrote to Benjamin imploring prompt payment of £120,000 — only part of the Confederacy's arrears — wailing at the "extreme urgencies of our house for money and the critical condition in which we are placed from the absence of remittances." Failure to pay, they warned, would "exercise a most pernicious and withering influence on the credit of the Confederate Government in foreign countries."<sup>48</sup> They reminded the Confederate secretary of state that "in the infancy of the war, when our resources in money and credit were placed without limit at its disposal and probably contributed in some degree to the success of its armies in the field."<sup>49</sup>

The chronic cash shortage did not weaken the firm's embrace of the Confederacy. If anything, Samuel Isaac sought a closer bond with the southern states. In the middle of 1862 he instructed his twenty-six-year-old son to travel to Richmond with a formal proposal that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. be granted the sole responsibility of furnishing clothing and equipment for 100,000 soldiers. Samuel Edward Henry Isaac, then stationed in Nassau in the Bahamas to superintend the firm's blockade-running operations, was struck down by yellow fever before he could deliver the message. Soon after its delayed delivery, this overture was rejected by Quartermaster General Myers.<sup>50</sup> Huse continued to place vast orders with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. into the middle months of 1863. By June of that year the Confederacy owed the firm the astronomical sum of £515,000.<sup>51</sup> Despite the scale of the orders — millions of yards of fabric, hundreds of thousands of boots and blankets — the Confederate purchasing agents could not come close to slaking the charnel appetite for materiel.<sup>52</sup>

Default by its largest debtor was only one of the risks that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. confronted. The firm also took a leading role in shipping goods through the tightening noose of the Union blockade. In the first year of war, the Confederacy agreed

*U.S. Army Colonel Abraham Charles Myers, c. 1850.  
(Courtesy of the Collections of the Jewish Museum of Florida,  
originated by Marcia Jo Zerivitz, Founding Executive Director.  
Image Copyright © Fort Myers Historical Museum.)*

to purchase military cargoes carried by private blockade runners at a substantial guaranteed profit. Non-military articles could be sold at a hefty premium to a public grappling with wartime shortages. Once they had delivered their cargoes, blockade runners could return laden with cotton that was sold at great profit.<sup>53</sup> This arrangement offered juicy margins for firms with a stomach for risk. Over the course of the war slightly fewer than three hundred steamers tested the blockade, successfully breaching the cordon roughly one thousand times out of about thirteen hundred attempts.<sup>54</sup> Most used the Caribbean port of Nassau protected by the British guns of Fort Charlotte as an embarkation point. Nassau became a wartime boomtown: “rowdy, violent, bawdy, awash with wealth and greed.”<sup>55</sup> Along with his son, Samuel Isaac was represented on the island by his brother-in-law Benjamin Woolley Hart. They supervised the operation of several blockade runners. The *Stephen Hart* was named in honor of Samuel Isaac’s father-in-law, the *Harriet Pinckney* for Caleb Huse’s wife.<sup>56</sup> S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. also entered into a partnership with a man named Moses (likely Henry Moses), described as a “merchant of high position in Leadenhall-street” in London, to ship goods on the firm’s blockade runners.<sup>57</sup>

The first private blockade runner, an iron hulled steamer, entered the Savannah River in September 1861 with its hold crammed with munitions and consumer goods for sale at public auction. The Quartermaster Department bought most of the shoes and cloth on board, but complained that it did so at inflated southern prices rather than those offered in London.<sup>58</sup> This price differential persuaded scores of investors to dabble in the business of blockade running. Clothing was much in demand. Its importation was a high priority for the Confederacy, designated as second only to arms and ammunition as cargo on blockade runners.<sup>59</sup> Although most uniforms were manufactured within the South, many were produced using imported woolen cloth that was sent to shops set up by the Confederate government to sew uniforms, employing soldiers’ wives and other women as seamstresses.<sup>60</sup> These were supplemented by greatcoats, socks, trousers, shirts, blankets, and boots, unloaded from blockade runners in Charles-

ton and Wilmington, North Carolina. The ships also carried garments and fabric for sale to those who could afford them. As the war progressed, southerners clamored for clothing to replace their tattered and frayed finery. Cloth and clothing was in such demand that it held special value when bartered. John de Bree, the head of the Confederate Navy's Office of Provision and Clothing, explained that in the countryside, where "the people have a little more provisions than they absolutely need, but are short of tea, coffee, sugar, molasses, and especially of osnaburgs, yarns, and shirtings. . . . [N]ot a pound of bacon or wheat can be bought at any price, for money [but] the sight of a pound of yarn, or a yard of cloth will produce an effect almost magical."<sup>61</sup> In Richmond, diarist John Beauchamp Jones lamented in November 1863 that his family's clothing was "as shabby as Italian lazzaronis—with no prospect whatever of replenished wardrobes."<sup>62</sup> Southern Jewish storekeepers and merchants were accused of hoarding supplies to raise prices and conspiring to buy up the cargoes of ships running the blockade. One bigoted British merchant who visited Charleston during the war complained that the city's auction houses were "crammed with my Hebrew friends." He remarked at his astonishment at the

number of Jewish-looking faces which I had met on the stairs, in the halls and parlours of the hotel, and at breakfast. Fully one-half of the large number of guests of the house seemed as if they had just stepped out of Houndsditch, and reminded me what a friend in Mobile said, that, 'I should meet more Jews in Charleston than I could see in Jerusalem.' They also seemed absorbed in the study of the auctioneers' pamphlets, and the long advertisements of sales which half filled the papers.<sup>63</sup>

The Union government eagerly sought to staunch the flow of ordnance and equipment across the Atlantic. From the middle of 1861 until the beginning of 1862 Confederate purchasing agents were trailed by Ignatius Paul Pollaky, a Pressburg-born Jew who was one of the first of a new breed of private detectives selling their services in London. (He was immortalized in verse two decades later by Gilbert and Sullivan for "The keen penetration of Paddington Pollaky.")<sup>64</sup> The detective was hired on behalf of the

United States government to keep Huse under surveillance. He supplied a daily bulletin on the doings of the Confederates and their contractors. Pollaky acquired firsthand information about Huse's dealings with the Isaac brothers by bribing a clerk in their office to supply details of contracts.<sup>65</sup> In spite of these efforts, the flow of arms and equipment secured by S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. barely slowed. Instead Huse and his peers proved much more potent adversaries than Pollaky.

*The Fall of S. Isaac, Campbell and Co.*

The first of a squadron of Confederate purchasing agents who decamped to London, Huse was quickly joined by several others representing a variety of military bureaucracies, state governments, and private interests. In contrast, Myers only slowly followed Gorgas's example. In December 1862 he dispatched James B. Ferguson, Jr., a former dry goods import merchant, as the first dedicated foreign agent for the Quartermaster Bureau.<sup>66</sup> These often competing agents exposed the frailty of the Confederate purchasing system. The Confederacy's efforts were poorly coordinated and relied on oft-delayed and sometimes contradictory instructions carried through the Union blockade. Thus Huse and his associates worked at cross-purposes on several occasions.<sup>67</sup> All were under enormous pressure to purchase and ship supplies as quickly and cheaply as possible. Chronic financial strictures created considerable tension. Holding some control over the purse strings, Huse was usually at the center of sniping over funding. Several of his fellow purchasing agents came to resent his primacy, believing his schemes were crowding out their own ambitious plans. In some cases, they impugned his motives and patriotism on the basis both of his birth—he hailed from Massachusetts—and his close relationship with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.<sup>68</sup> What began as murmuring about extravagant contracts signed in the desperate first months of the war turned into a full-scale campaign waged by Huse's rivals to discredit him on the basis of alleged financial impropriety.

To some extent the skirmishing in London was an extension of bureaucratic infighting within the Confederate government in

Richmond. For a time Josiah Gorgas proved a powerful ally, insulating his trusted subordinate in London from his critics.<sup>69</sup> The tide began to turn against Huse in April and May 1863 when his rivals unleashed a sustained barrage of accusatory letters to the War Department. These damning missives charged that Huse was not only stymieing the efforts of his fellow purchasing agents, but was also guilty of squandering the precious foreign currency of the Confederacy. At best they suggested this profligacy was evidence of rank incompetence, at worst of self-enrichment. Several fingered S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. as either the conjurer befuddling a naive quarry with accounting tricks and misdirection, or as a scheming associate conniving with Huse to profit at the expense of their southern paymasters. William Crenshaw, one of Huse's fiercest antagonists, pointedly reminded the secretary of war about Samuel Isaac's sullied reputation from the contracting scandal of 1858. Although his critics struggled to present firm evidence to back up their claims that Samuel Isaac was systematically overcharging the Confederacy for purchases, they did have enough damning proof of kickbacks to convince the War Department that there might be truth to the grander accusations.<sup>70</sup> An agent purchasing vessels for the Confederate navy wrote of his outraged rejection of the offer from S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. to split a large commission. Huse admitted to having accepted one thousand pounds from the firm, a sum he claimed he used to defray his travel expenses and put toward the purchase of a military library.<sup>71</sup>

The drama entered a protracted final act with the appointment of Colin McRae, the Confederate agent tasked with overseeing a vast loan secured against Confederate cotton by the Paris-based banking house of Emile Erlanger, to investigate the charges against Huse and audit the accounts of S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. Samuel Isaac was one of the key beneficiaries of the Confederate loan. In a complicated scheme, his company was repaid £457,224, partly in cash, but the majority in Erlanger bonds redeemable for government-owned cotton in the Confederacy.<sup>72</sup> Temporarily Huse was the odd-man out in an accidental ethnic nexus that involved Samuel Isaac filling orders placed by

*Brigadier General Josiah Gorgas, Confederate States Army.  
(Photo source: Wikipedia.org.)*

Abraham C. Myers cheered on by Judah P. Benjamin and ultimately paid for by a loan orchestrated by Emile Erlanger. Confident of exoneration, Huse urged McRae, himself a former commission merchant, to act quickly.<sup>73</sup> Initially McRae found the firm's accounts to be "based on correct business principles, accurately made out, and sustained by the proper vouchers." Insistent tugging at niggling threads slowly unwound the elaborate skein woven by Samuel and Saul Isaac. Evidence mounted of systematic overcharging, deceptive bookkeeping, double billing, and breach

of trust.<sup>74</sup> The secretary of war was quickly convinced that the “practices of that firm were more sharp than honest.” To his mind their show of compliance was little more than a sham. When confronted with “false invoices and deceptive accounts” the firm fell back on “knavery,” “effrontery and concealment.”<sup>75</sup>

The secretary of war had little patience for the explanations offered by Samuel Isaac that these irregularities reflected the discounts and commissions taken as a matter of course by mercantile houses in England. Was S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. guilty of fraud? As his investigation dragged on into 1864, McRae became convinced that the firm “made charges that can be characterized by no other term than that of fraudulent.” He found evidence that “in many instances” it had overcharged the Confederacy from 5 to 20 per cent in addition to the commission it legitimately claimed for its services and concealed the difference in false invoices. Hired to be an honest broker between suppliers and the Confederate government, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. instead used the opportunity to charge a hefty commission to both parties. Even if this practice was “customary” among some merchants in England, to McRae’s eyes it was “immoral,” depriving “the principal of that protection to which he is entitled.” Such behavior was at odds with his goal of rationalizing the supply system of the Confederacy and perhaps offended him as a former commission merchant. McRae found evidence that the firm had gone even further, obtaining “large commissions and deductions upon invoices of goods” purchased by Huse directly without their input. They were able to do so because they “kept his accounts and sometimes disbursed his money and took receipts.” Having no bookkeeper of his own, Huse relied on the firm to manage his complicated financial affairs. This afforded prime opportunity for speculation. The firm, McRae charged, “had by means of double invoices etc etc [*sic*] furnished him with receipts for money which [they] merely paid out with one hand to receive back with the other.” To add insult to injury, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. had not only received commissions on orders placed by Huse, but had in several instances “actually charged the Govt such monies [they] had not only not paid but refused to pay [to suppliers].”<sup>76</sup>

In its defense S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. argued that, "under the circumstances [i.e., the precarious credit of the government] the profit they have charged is not unreasonable or excessive."<sup>77</sup> The firm did assume substantial financial risk and offered loyal service of a kind to the Confederacy when others were reluctant to do so. But this self-serving rationalization ultimately reveals that the firm understood its actions to be deceptive, if not dishonest. Why otherwise engage in slippery bookkeeping practices and conceal its profit margins from Huse? Even as McRae pinned much of the blame on Samuel Isaac, his opinion of Huse plummeted. In the absence of evidence of criminal intent, Huse continued to serve the Confederacy in London until the end of the war, and McRae faulted him for making "very serious mistakes," foremost placing "great confidence" in S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.<sup>78</sup> McRae, however, recognized that the scandal stemmed at least partly from the Confederacy's approach to procurement. He understood profiteering to be a systemic consequence of reliance on private enterprise for sourcing supplies. Even after uncovering ample evidence of wrongdoing and being fully cognizant that "many of their accounts will not stand a strict scrutiny," as late as February 1864 he continued to advise the secretary of war not to break off business relations with the firm. "The fable of the fox and the flies" he counseled "is as true now as it was in days of Aesop." If Samuel Isaac was shooed away, he tacitly conceded, another firm would gladly take its place and probably replicate its practices.<sup>79</sup> Concerned about the negative impact of publicity on Confederate credit and recognizing that his claims would be difficult to prove in court, McRae spent much of 1864 pressing for a settlement with S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. to recoup at least some of the money that the Confederacy had overpaid. The two parties finally agreed to the terms for arbitration in December 1864, after much stalling and heated correspondence. Nonetheless, McRae's legal representatives counseled that such a step was "practically useless." There is no evidence that the matter was resolved. The dissolution of the Confederacy's purchasing operations in February 1865 after the loss of Wilmington, North Carolina, apparently saved the firm from a final reckoning.<sup>80</sup>

Although unusual in having its deceptions so thoroughly exposed and noteworthy because of its central role in supplying the South, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was certainly not alone in extracting fulsome returns from dealings with the Confederacy. Sizeable commissions were common currency in transactions with the Confederate states. When visiting England in 1861, Edward Anderson noted with little evident alarm that the firm appointed to administer the Confederacy's financial transactions "were the recipients of large commissions upon all the funds passing through their hands."<sup>81</sup> The payment of kickbacks and bribes was reputed to be standard practice among military commission houses in England; Edward Anderson described this as "the English way of doing business." A handful of those affronted by such offers recorded their upset; those amenable likely quietly pocketed the proceeds. Anderson's diary also suggests that Confederate purchasing agents understood full well that men like Samuel Isaac sought to maximize their profits. After negotiating the charter of a blockade runner, Anderson reflected that "Friend Isaac is a most useful man to us, but he never loses sight of his profits . . . He can manage Huse without any trouble, but thinks I am a very unreasonable somebody."<sup>82</sup>

McRae's close study of contracting practices persuaded him that many of the Confederacy's commercial partners had made "enormous" sums by transacting business with it.<sup>83</sup> He grouched that his investigation was hamstrung by the "way business is done here." Not only were the firms with which S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. negotiated contracts for the Confederacy reluctant to testify openly in court, but their own business practices were equally rotten. They too were guilty of a litany of evils—"keeping supplemental ledgers where such [misleading] accounts only appear, the allowing [of] discounts, [charging a] fee for introduction" that would preclude McRae from "ever arriving at the truth."<sup>84</sup> Even if a minority of merchants may have been inspired by idealism, all were motivated by the pecuniary rewards promised by doing business with a nation that had little room to maneuver. While it is possible that Samuel Isaac may have been sympathetic to the Confederate cause, enjoyed the clout conferred

by his relationship with Huse, or became enchanted by the baubles dangled by the Confederacy—one purchasing agent suggested to Isaac that he may be rewarded with appointment as consul general in England if the South prevailed—undoubtedly profits provided the largest enticement.<sup>85</sup> Given abundant opportunity and considerable temptation, there is little doubt that S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. was not alone in boosting its profits through dishonest means.

While Samuel and Saul Isaac profited in the short term, they soon received their comeuppance. Paradoxically their financial affairs were undermined by the Confederacy's payment of its debts. The Erlanger bonds that the South used to compensate S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. proved very volatile. After the surrender of Vicksburg, in July 1863, cut off the Confederacy from the Mississippi River and its riparian cotton plantations, the value of cotton securities plummeted. Saul Isaac whimpered to a still sympathetic Colin McRae that the blow had crippled his firm, imperiling its credit and capital, and making its ability to transact business uncertain. Now the bonds could only be sold at a "disastrous" loss; Grant's victory wiped off 30 percent of their value overnight.<sup>86</sup> In an additional irony, the firm may have ultimately been saved from bankruptcy by McRae's discovery of its deceptive practices. In 1864 and 1865 the Confederacy all but ceased to do business with its former favorite. Perhaps anticipating this souring of relations, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. had begun to refocus its business on the domestic market as early as May 1863. Even if it lost massively on its outstanding Erlanger securities when the Confederacy surrendered—one contemporary pegged the final figure at £150,000—the firm had incurred no new large receipts in the previous year. These would have been unenforceable after Appomattox.<sup>87</sup>

Although hobbled by its losses, S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. limped on. Following the war the ever-enterprising Isaac brothers parlayed their appetite for international intrigue and their newly acquired expertise in blockade and gun running into the sale of two mothballed Confederate warships to a Chilean government at war with Spain. S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. evidently outfitted the

*Cyclone* and *Tornado* as marauders to terrorize Spanish merchant shipping in the style of the *Alabama* and other Confederate raiders. The capture of one of these men-of-war by a Spanish frigate off Madeira before it reached Chilean hands and the “severe confinement” of its British crew in Cadiz created a diplomatic contretemps between Spain and the British government. The financial losses incurred by this final defeat pushed the firm toward failure.<sup>88</sup> Both brothers declared bankruptcy in 1869, revealing large unpaid debts and a penchant for an ostentatious lifestyle. Saul alone owed over three thousand pounds to a wine merchant at a time when an upper-middle-class income began at roughly one thousand pounds a year. Samuel’s mansion in Kensington was tenanted after him for a season by the Begum of Oudh, but then long stood vacant. Curiously Saul’s largest remaining assets were investments in Charleston, South Carolina, and Yelbana, Sierra Leone.<sup>89</sup>

Despite this embarrassing retreat, both brothers quickly resurrected their fortunes. Saul and Samuel were married to sisters who had inherited substantial estates. This money cushioned their fall. Saul leased a colliery near Nottingham in 1870 in time to take advantage of a soaring demand for coal. This commercial coup revived his reputation. In 1874 he won a local parliamentary seat that he occupied for six years as the first Jew elected to the House of Commons as a Conservative. Perhaps unsurprisingly one of his causes in Parliament became the necessity of stockpiling “strong and effective armaments.” Saul was active in the Jewish community, serving as a synagogue treasurer for seven years, and was elected as Master of the Worshipful Society of Clockmakers—a sign of his status within London society.<sup>90</sup> Samuel had sought to represent Northampton in the House of Commons during the Civil War, but he retreated after becoming the focus of a vociferous local opposition that lambasted him as a warmongering “servant of the Southern Confederacy” and supporter of slavery.<sup>91</sup>

For Saul, this second period of brilliance faded as quickly as the first when he suffered further financial reverses. This time there was no Lazarus-like return; he died in London in 1903 with an estate valued at only twenty-nine pounds.<sup>92</sup> Samuel restored

*Sinking of Clifton Colliery pre 1871.  
Saul Isaac is standing in front.  
(Image courtesy of E Walker and [www.picturethepast.org.uk](http://www.picturethepast.org.uk).)*

his reputation by initiating and managing the construction of a railway tunnel linking Liverpool and Birkenhead—the *London Jewish Chronicle* lionized him as “the Lesseps of the Mersey tunnel” — a grand project long dormant for want of investors. Unlike his brother, he died with his fortune intact in 1886.<sup>93</sup>

For the Isaac brothers, slop selling and boot making provided a springboard for unlikely careers as arms brokers. Much like others who seized the opportunities offered by the expansion of markets in the mid-nineteenth century, Samuel Isaac transformed a modest business in response to burgeoning demand. Their enterprise was typical of other successful Jewish entrepreneurs in leveraging a familial familiarity with stitching and selling clothing, a (sometimes disastrous) penchant for risk taking, and a willingness to stake out new markets into ambitious international businesses that did not (and could not) exist when they began their careers a few decades earlier. Samuel and Saul Isaac’s long-term influence on Jewish involvement in the clothing business in Britain is less certain. By 1862 the Isaac brothers were less focused on boot making than on blockade running, in the process becoming a British *bête noire* of the United States government. While the brothers almost certainly directed orders toward Jewish clothing firms, the demands of the Confederacy drew them away from shirts and trousers toward rifles and artillery batteries.<sup>94</sup> Their withdrawal from the clothing trade was all but complete by 1869. While the height of their rise and the depths of their fall was atypical of the legions of Jews who began as slop sellers in port towns like Chatham, many others followed a more modest version of their trajectory away from petty retail toward shop keeping and manufacturing. Some followed their lead in focusing on the military market. Indeed Jewish clothiers supplied the Redcoats who sweltered under the South African sun during the Anglo-Boer War and sodden Tommies entrenched in France during the First World War.<sup>95</sup> None, however, had as large and significant an impact as Samuel and Saul Isaac and their arsenal for the slavocracy.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* (New York, 2003), 91, 95, 318.

<sup>2</sup> On Mordecai see Stanley L. Falk, "Divided Loyalties in 1861: The Decision of Major Alfred Mordecai" in *Jews and the Civil War*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, 2010), 207. Abraham Myers's controversial tenure is described in Harold S. Wilson, *Confederate Industry* (Jackson, MS, 2002), 3–92.

<sup>3</sup> Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 39, 102–103; Richard D. Goff, *Confederate Supply* (Durham, NC, 1969), 67–68.

<sup>4</sup> Stanley W. Hoole, ed., *Confederate Foreign Agent: The European Diary of Major Edward C. Anderson* (University, AL, 1976), 3, 39, 23, 43; John D. Bennett, *The London Confederates* (Jefferson, NC, 2008), 54. For an example of a letter to Huse sent care of Isaac, see *War of the Rebellion: a Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, series 4, v. 2: 539.

<sup>5</sup> The most thorough exploration of the firm's pre-war contracting and involvement in blockade running is provided by C. L. Webster, *Entrepôt: Government Imports into the Confederate States* (Edinburgh, Scotland, 2009). David G. Burt and Craig L. Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy: S. Isaac, Campbell & Co. London* (Bedfordshire, UK, 2010) occasionally echoes the prejudices of the primary sources it references. Michael Jolles's *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs* (London, 1998) provides a detailed description of the Isaac family and reflects the author's genealogical focus. Jolles offers additional information about Saul Isaac in his *Jews and the Carlton Club* (London, 2002).

<sup>6</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus describes the role of Jewish military suppliers and sutlers in America in the colonial period in *The Colonial American Jew*, 2 (Detroit, 1970), 706–718. My thanks to Mark Bauman for bringing this to my attention. From 1760 until the Revolution, a London syndicate that included Moses Franks as one of its four members supplied British troops in North America. Franks, in turn, subcontracted to family members. See William Pencak, "Anti-Semitism, Toleration, and Appreciation: The Changing Relations of Jews and Gentiles in Early America," in *The First Prejudice: Religious Tolerance and Intolerance in Early America*, ed. Chris Beneke and Christopher S. Granda (Philadelphia, 2011), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Eli Evans argues in his biography *Judah P. Benjamin: Jewish Confederate* (New York, 1989) that antisemitism reached a crescendo in Confederate Richmond during the war (198–210). By contrast Robert Rosen suggests in *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, SC, 2000) that the South was relatively welcoming of Jews, and that Jewish soldiers faced little prejudice within the ranks of the Confederate army (xii, 32, 34–35, 91, 274.)

<sup>8</sup> On antisemitic accusations made against Jewish contractors in the Union, see Adam Mendelsohn, "Beyond the Battlefield: Reevaluating the Legacy of the Civil War for American Jews," *American Jewish Archives Journal* (forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup> For examples see John Levi and George Bergman, *Australian Genesis: Jewish Convicts and Settlers 1788–1850* (London, 1974), 122–141; Charles Van Onselen, *The Fox and the Flies: The Secret Life of a Grotesque Master Criminal* (New York, 2007); Van Onselen, “Jewish Police Informers in the Atlantic World, 1880–1914,” *Historical Journal*, 50 (2007): 119–144; Susan Tananbaum, “‘Morally depraved and abnormally criminal’: Jews and Crime in London and New York, 1880–1940,” in *Forging Modern Jewish Identities: Public Faces and Private Struggles*, ed. Michael Berkowitz, Susan Tananbaum, and Sam Bloom (Portland, OR, 2003); Jenna Weissman Joselit, *Our Gang: Jewish Crime and the New York Jewish Community* (Bloomington, IN, 1983); Robert A. Rockaway, *But He Was Good to His Mother: The Lives and Crimes of Jewish Gangsters* (Jerusalem, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> See Mendelsohn, “Beyond the Battlefield.”

<sup>11</sup> See Thomas Bender, ed., *Rethinking American History in a Global Age* (Los Angeles, CA, 2002); Thomas Bender, *A Nation Among Nations: America’s Place in World History* (New York, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> See for example, R. J. M. Blackett, *Divided Hearts: Britain and the Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2001); Edward Bartlett Rugemer, *The Problem of Emancipation: The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War* (Baton Rouge, 2009); Amanda Foreman, *A World on Fire: Britain’s Crucial Role in the American Civil War* (New York, 2011). In March 2011 the College of Charleston hosted a conference titled “Civil War—Global Conflict” that examined the international dimensions of the conflict. Work by Anny Bloch, Anton Hieke, Chris Monaco, Elliott Ashkenazi, and others have placed southern Jews in a transnational context.

<sup>13</sup> For the war’s impact on the business activities of two Jewish banking families, see Elliott Ashkenazi, “Jewish Commercial Interests Between North and South: The Case of the Lehmans and the Seligmans” in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006).

<sup>14</sup> For the Civil War boom in Bombay, see Christine E. Dobbin, *Urban Leadership in Western India* (London, 1972), 25–26. On the Sassoons’ business during the Civil War, see Cecil Roth, *The Sassoon Dynasty* (London, 1941), 45, 47–50, 98; Stanley Jackson, *The Sassoons* (New York, 1968), 21, 24, 39–40, 44.

<sup>15</sup> Madeline House and Graham Storey, eds., *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, I (Oxford, UK, 1969) 423. Sailors were promiscuous in their use of the word “Jew,” often using the term as a blanket description for traders who offered them credit in advance of their wages. See Geoffrey L. Green, *The Royal Navy and Anglo-Jewry, 1740–1820* (London, 1989), 40, 132–133, 138–139.

<sup>16</sup> On the presence and roles of Jews in naval towns, see Geoffrey L. Green, “Anglo-Jewish trading connections with officers and seamen of the Royal Navy, 1740–1820,” *Transactions of the Jewish Historical Society of England* (1988): 99–108; Beverly Lemire, *Dress, Culture and Commerce: The English Clothing Trade before the Factory, 1660–1800* (Basingstoke, UK, 1997), 89–90.

<sup>17</sup> These examples are drawn from the British Navy’s Covey–Crump dictionary of slang, accessed July 11, 2012, <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20090127182544/>

and [http://royalnavy.mod.uk/training-and-people/rn-life/navy-slang/covey-crump-\(a-to-aye\)/jago-jutland/](http://royalnavy.mod.uk/training-and-people/rn-life/navy-slang/covey-crump-(a-to-aye)/jago-jutland/).

<sup>18</sup> Robert Wechsler, "The Jewish Garment Trade in East London, 1875-1914: A Study in Conditions and Responses" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1979), 30.

<sup>19</sup> *London Saturday Journal*, 11, May 25, 1839: 321.

<sup>20</sup> The Navy recognized the need for slops as early as 1623 to "avoyde nasti beastliness by diseases and unwholesome ill smells in every ship." Quoted in Henry Lawrence Swinburne, *The Royal Navy* (London, 1907), 345.

<sup>21</sup> For representative advertisements see *London Times*, September 7, 1829; April 26, 1830; May 11, 1831; March 12, 1834; December 18, 1835; March 21, 1843; April 2, 1846.

<sup>22</sup> For a sampling of advertisements see *London Times*, September 7, 1829; February 14, 1831; May 1, 1839; December 18, 1839; November 23, 1840; November 28, 1846; September 27, 1858.

<sup>23</sup> Manifold ways were employed to service the imperial project. In Port Said and Suez, for example, the shunting yard of the British Empire, enterprising Jews pimped prostitutes to sailors and tourists bound for India, the Far East, and Australia. Ruth Fredman Cernea, *Almost Englishmen: Baghdadi Jews in British Burma* (Lanham, MD, 2007), xx, 4, 8; Jacob Landau, *Jews in Nineteenth-Century Egypt* (New York, 1969), 37.

<sup>24</sup> James Greenwood, *Unsentimental Journeys; or, Byways of the Modern Babylon* (London, 1867); *London Times*, October 1, 1858.

<sup>25</sup> For advertisements of the sale of surplus slops, see *London Times* December 3, 1814, November 16, 1831, August 3, 1833; July 29, 1834; April 23, 1859; for advertisements by merchants for "left-off military and plain-wearing apparel," see August 10, 1839, October 12, 1839, June 27, 1843.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, August 8, 1854; January 2, 1855; March 24, 1855; July 11, 1855.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, September 22, 1858; September 25, 1858. On the profits generated by Crimean war contracts, see *Parliamentary Papers 1858*, 6 (*Reports v. 2*), cmd 328, "Second Report from the Select Committee on Contracts," 2193; 4910-4911. On the inadequacies of supplies, see Robert B. Edgerton, *Death Or Glory: The Legacy of the Crimean War* (Boulder, CO, 1999), 112-113.

<sup>28</sup> *London Times*, June 7, 1854; September 22, 1858; May 28, 1859; September 23, 1858; September 29, 1858.

<sup>29</sup> Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 3-6, 11, 14-16, 43-46.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel's brother Nathaniel, an army broker, committed suicide after becoming heavily indebted and forging checks.

<sup>31</sup> *The Era*, October 27, 1839, quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 44-45.

<sup>32</sup> Charles Booth used the number of servants employed in household as a measure of class status. He judged those who employed one or two servants as middle class, and those who employed three or more as wealthy. Charles Booth, *Labour and Life of the People II* (London, 1891), 40-41.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed his primary service seems to have been to provide a name that may have briefly obfuscated the Jewish ownership of the firm. If this was the intention, it only worked for a short period, if at all. The Isaac brothers were identified as Jews during the Weedon scandal. It was no secret to the Confederate government that the firm was Jewish-owned. This fact, however, was rarely commented on in America. For one such instance, see John B. Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (Philadelphia, 1866), 2, 53; Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 19.

<sup>34</sup> On S. Isaac, Campbell & Co.'s business connections with Northampton, see David Waller, "Northampton and the American Civil War," *Northamptonshire Past & Present* 8 (1990-1991): 137-139; *London Jewish Chronicle*, February 1, 1856.

<sup>35</sup> These changes are described in Webster, *Entrepôt*, 22-23.

<sup>36</sup> In a heated letter to the editor, Isaac blamed the episode on the incompetence of the inspector "an unfortunate farmer, and wholly unfit for the duty which he assumed." *London Times*, July 10, 1858. The most thorough account of the episode is provided in Webster, *Entrepôt*, 21-27. Two official reports on the scandal provide a wealth of material on the Isaac brothers' contracting business: *Report of the Commissioners Appointed to Inquire Into the State of the Store and Clothing Depots at Weedon* (1859) and the *Fifth Report from Select Committee on Contracts (Public Departments)* (1858). My thanks to an anonymous peer reviewer for drawing these two reports to my attention.

<sup>37</sup> *London Times*, November 20, 1858; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 91-95. For earlier examples of bribery, nepotism, patronage, and the use of political connections to secure military clothing contracts, see D. J. Smith, "Army Clothing Contractors and the Textile Industries in the 18th Century," *Textile History* 14 (1983): 159-160.

<sup>38</sup> For firsthand descriptions of these services, see Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 24, 28, 30, 50, 58, 64, 71.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 49, 52, 61.

<sup>41</sup> Bennett, *London Confederates*, 56.

<sup>42</sup> Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 59.

<sup>43</sup> Bennett, *London Confederates*, 54-56.

<sup>44</sup> These orders are meticulously detailed in the Huse Audit Series: S. Isaac Campbell and Co. Subseries of the Colin J. McRae Collection at the South Carolina Confederate Relic Room & Military Museum. Columbia, SC, (hereafter cited as the McRae Collection.)

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in Richard Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain* (Charlottesville, VA, 1975), 168; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 380.

<sup>46</sup> Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167. For orders placed through S. Isaac, Campbell & Co., see references to Huse and Anderson in Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 23, 36, 40, 47, 49.

<sup>47</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 1: 1007-1008.

<sup>48</sup> Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 174.

<sup>49</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 2, 3: 641-643.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, series 2, 3: 605; series 4, 2: 190–191; series 2, 3: 505.

<sup>51</sup> Using the retail price index as a measure, this sum is roughly equivalent to £37,500,000 (\$58,000,000) today. When calculated to reflect changes in average earnings, the sum is equivalent to £330,000,000 (\$517,000,000).

<sup>52</sup> For the scale of Confederate orders, see Bell Irvin Wiley, “From Finery to Tatters” in *The Civil War Soldier: A Historical Reader*, ed. Michael Barton and Larry M. Logue (New York, 2002), 110–111; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 160, 176–179; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 180, 188; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 57. On the sums expended by the purchasing agents, see Frank Lawrence Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1959), 368; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 61.

<sup>53</sup> During the latter months of 1861 one Charleston merchant wrote, “Business perfectly prostrated everything selling enormously high ... hardly any shoes to be had dry goods of every kind running out.” McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 381.

<sup>54</sup> Stephen R. Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy: Blockade Running During the Civil War* (Columbia, SC, 1991), 221.

<sup>55</sup> McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 380.

<sup>56</sup> Their braggadocio earned them the animus of the Confederacy’s agent in Nassau. *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 1: 1175; series 4, 2: 8–9, 19.

<sup>57</sup> *London Times*, June 29, 1866; November 6, 1866; Samuel Blatchford, *Reports of cases in Prize argued and determined in the District Court of the United States 1861–65* (New York, 1866), 439–440; *War of the Rebellion*, series 2, 2: 143–144; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 71, 132; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 103.

<sup>58</sup> Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 48–51; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 166.

<sup>59</sup> Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167.

<sup>60</sup> Demand for imported uniforms was seasonal. The South had ample cotton for lighter uniforms used during the summer, but not nearly enough processed wool for the warmer jackets and trousers needed in winter. Shortages were compounded by the profligacy of soldiers who were only too eager to discard surplus blankets and garments to lighten their march. Until the last months of the war the Quartermaster Department continued to issue vast quantities of clothing to its increasingly bedraggled armies and place orders for resupply from abroad. Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 65–66, 70; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 196, 212

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 106; confirmed by the Confederate Quartermaster General, 155.

<sup>62</sup> Jones, *A Rebel War Clerk’s Diary* 2, 98 (quotation), 77, 101, 235.

<sup>63</sup> W. C. Corsan, *Two Months in the Confederate States: An Englishman’s Travels Through the South* (Baton Rouge, 1996), 61. Hostility to Jews in the South is discussed in McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, 439–441. On nativism in the antebellum South, see Andrea Mehrländer, *The Germans of Charleston, Richmond and New Orleans during the Civil War Period, 1850–1870* (Berlin, 2011), 61–76.

<sup>64</sup> William Evan Fredeman, ed., *The Correspondence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: The Last Decade, 1873–1882* (Cambridge, UK, 2006), 306. The reference to “Paddington Pollaky,” appears in the Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, *Patience*.

<sup>65</sup> Bennett, *London Confederates*, 78–79.

<sup>66</sup> Goff, *Confederate Supply*, 16; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 156–157.

<sup>67</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 890; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 47.

<sup>68</sup> See, for example, William Crenshaw’s bitter turf war with Huse over shipping. Crenshaw was convinced that the Confederacy’s money problems in London would be solved if its finances “were under the control of a party who was really anxious to serve the interest of our Government, which I do not believe Major Huse is.” Huse was “not fit for the position;” in his place the South should appoint “a true-born Southern gentleman, if you please.” *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 539–547, 646–647; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 166; Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 102–104; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 51, 58. On the financial problems facing the purchasing agents, see Charles S. Davis, *Colin J. McRae: Confederate Financial Agent* (Tuscaloosa, 1961), 37–40, 46.

<sup>69</sup> In May 1863 Gorgas assured the secretary of war that although he had “no doubt Major Huse was frequently compelled to pay quite 50 per cent over the actual market value of his purchases” without seeking approval from his superior in Richmond, “authority to that effect would have been given to him without a moment’s hesitation.” Quoted in Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 162.

<sup>70</sup> For the most damning correspondence, see *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 478–479, 539–541, 555–558; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 161.

<sup>71</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 393–395, 556–558.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 644–647, 886–895. For an explanation of the workings of the loan agreement, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 36–37.

<sup>73</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 599–602, 894. On McRae’s background, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 13–34.

<sup>74</sup> See Balance Sheet, June 1863–August 1863, G11; McRae to SIC, October 28, 1863, K75; McRae to Huse, December 10, 1863, K37; S. Isaac Campbell correction of Interest Account, G17; M. H. Bloodgood to McRae, April 27, 1864, K28, Financing the Confederacy Series, all McRae Collection.

<sup>75</sup> For example, the firm was instrumental in ordering expensive Austrian rifles unsuited to campaigning in the South. To compound matters, the Confederacy appears to have overpaid for the rifles, and incurred a £25,000 fine for Huse’s delay in canceling part of the contract. *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 628–631, 1067–1068; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 161.

<sup>76</sup> Undated draft of letter, G15, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration Subseries, McRae Collection. On McRae’s ambitions in Europe, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 50–53.

<sup>77</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 3: 528, 702–704. The firm vigorously protested these accusations. Unfortunately their lengthiest rebuttal—a six-page letter defending their actions—

is almost wholly illegible. S. Isaac Campbell & Co. to Huse, April 4, 1864, K2, Financing the Confederacy Series, McRae Collection.

<sup>78</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 1067–1068; series 4, 3: 154–157.

<sup>79</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 3: 154–157.

<sup>80</sup> Messrs. Ball & Co. to McRae, August 3, 1864, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration subseries; Agreement of reference between SIC and CSA. December 1864, K9, Financing the Confederacy Series, McRae Collection.

<sup>81</sup> Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 37. See also Owsley, *King Cotton Diplomacy*, 368; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 61; Wilson, *Confederate Industry*, 167; Lester, *Confederate Finance and Purchasing in Great Britain*, 167; *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 646–647

<sup>82</sup> Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 62; Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 65.

<sup>83</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 982–983.

<sup>84</sup> Undated draft of letter, G15, McRae in England: Huse Arbitration Subseries, McRae McRae Collection.

<sup>85</sup> Hoole, *Confederate Foreign Agent*, 50.

<sup>86</sup> *War of the Rebellion*, series 4, 2: 890. On the difficulty of disposing of the bonds, see Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 38–40.

<sup>87</sup> Burt and Barry, *Supplier to the Confederacy*, 90–91; Bennett, *London Confederates*, 91. For a description of some of the British firms that were financial losers because of the Confederacy's defeat, see Wise, *Lifeline of the Confederacy*, 224. In March 1865, with the end of the war in sight, Benjamin Wooley Hart attempted to sue Jefferson Davis, Judah P. Benjamin, and George Trenholm for £20,000 of unpaid Confederate debt. See Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 112. Following the war, McRae entered into a business partnership with Judah P. Benjamin's brother in Belize. See Davis, *Colin J. McRae*, 87.

<sup>88</sup> *London Times*, February 15, 1867; March 22, 1867; May 14, 1867; *Illustrated London News*, April 20, 1867; *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates*, v. 188 (July 23, 1867), 2034–2070; G. C. Bentinck, *Case of the Tornado* (London, 1870), 1–32.

<sup>89</sup> The latter was likely an investment in his cousin Nathaniel Isaacs's trading enterprise. Nathaniel Isaacs was an unusually adventurous colonial traveler and trader. Saul owned the Adger Estate, as well as prime commercial property in Charleston. See *London Times*, June 9, 1868; June 8, 1869; July 17, 1869; November 1886; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 113, 154. On Nathaniel Isaacs see Richard Mendelsohn and Milton Shain, eds., *The Jews in South Africa: An Illustrated History* (Johannesburg, SA, 2008), 7; Louis Herrman, "Nathaniel Isaacs," *Natalia* 4, 1974: 19–21; *London Times*, July 17, 1869; November 1886.

<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 158–161, 172; Jolles, *Jews and The Carlton Club*, 28–32.

<sup>91</sup> *Northampton Mercury*, December 27, 1862 quoted in Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 107–108.

<sup>92</sup> *London Jewish Chronicle*, October 9, 1903.

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<sup>93</sup> *London Times*, November 1886; Jolles, *Samuel Isaac, Saul Isaac and Nathaniel Isaacs*, 116–124.

<sup>94</sup> This pattern of clothiers becoming general purpose suppliers who provided a range of goods was also evident among firms that supplied the Union. Mark Wilson, *The Business of the Civil War: Military Mobilization and the State, 1861–1865* (Baltimore, 2006), 121.

<sup>95</sup> See Wechsler, “Jewish Garment Trade,” 67–68. Jewish-owned factories supplied the military market beyond Britain and the United States. In Bialystok Jewish manufacturers produced the “vast majority of woolen uniforms for the Russian army.” See Rebecca Koblin, *Jewish Bialystok and Its Diaspora* (Bloomington, IN, 2010), 30.



# Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, Operation Texas, and Jewish Immigration

by

Claudia Wilson Anderson\*

In 1963, Congregation Agudas Achim, the Conservative synagogue in Austin, Texas, invited Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson to dedicate a new sanctuary on Sunday, November 24. That week Johnson would be in Texas hosting a visit by President John F. Kennedy. Johnson accepted the invitation, but on November 22, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. Johnson became the thirty-sixth president of the United States. The congregation postponed its event while its members and the country mourned Kennedy's death. Johnson honored his commitment by speaking at the rescheduled dedication dinner on December 30, 1963.<sup>1</sup>

The dedication was remarkable. The chairman of the building committee, Jim Novy, delivered a short, cryptic speech introducing his long-time friend, Lyndon Johnson. Novy, an Austin businessman and Polish immigrant, had entered the United States through Galveston in 1913 at the age of sixteen.<sup>2</sup> He may have met Lyndon Johnson as early as 1932, when Johnson worked as an aide to Congressman Richard Kleberg of Corpus Christi. Novy knew Johnson well during the years LBJ served in the House of Representatives.<sup>3</sup>

In his introduction, Novy referred to forty-two people that Johnson helped bring out of Germany and Poland in 1938. He also referred to arrangements made through Johnson to lodge Jewish

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immigrants in National Youth Administration (NYA) camps in Texas.<sup>4</sup> The NYA was created by President Franklin D. Roosevelt to help bring the United States out of the Great Depression by employing and training youth. Novy then spoke of Johnson's ardent support for Israel.<sup>5</sup>

Lady Bird Johnson described the event in her diary: "as we started out of the synagogue, person after person plucked at my sleeve and said, 'I wouldn't be here today if it weren't for him. He helped me get out.' That both frightens you and makes you happy."<sup>6</sup>

*Dedication of Congregation Agudas Achim synagogue.  
President Lyndon B. Johnson (center) and Mrs. Johnson bow  
their heads at the dedication ceremony, Austin, Texas,  
December 30, 1963. Jim Novy is to Mrs. Johnson's right.  
(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin, Texas. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto.)*

In 1989, a Ph.D. candidate at the University of Texas, Louis Gomolak, discovered Novy's remarks while working on a dissertation about the depth of experience in foreign policy that Johnson brought to the presidency. Gomolak began exploring the close

relationship between Johnson, Novy, and the small Austin Jewish community. Relying heavily on Novy's speech introducing Johnson and on interviews Gomolak conducted with Novy's friends and family, Gomolak concluded that Johnson and Novy had participated in a joint effort that illegally brought hundreds of Jews into the United States through Galveston in the early 1940s, lodging them in NYA residences, and thus saving them from the Holocaust. Gomolak named this effort "Operation Texas."<sup>7</sup>

Several authors have drawn on Gomolak's work, incorporating the story into their books and articles.<sup>8</sup> A panel at the Houston Holocaust Museum highlights Operation Texas.<sup>9</sup> Book reviewer Lewis Gould criticized biographer Robert Caro for not pointing out that Johnson was "the clandestine supporter of efforts to aid Jewish refugees."<sup>10</sup> The story received a big boost when the Institute of Texan Cultures in San Antonio posted an article by a retired professor from Oklahoma State University, Dr. James Smallwood, on its website. Although the article no longer appears on the institute's site, Operation Texas became a legend, and Smallwood wrote a longer article for the *East Texas Historical Journal* in 2009.<sup>11</sup>

Today distilled versions of the legend appear on the web where they receive wide circulation. There is even a move supported by Internet posts to have Lyndon Johnson named a "Righteous Gentile Among the Nations,"<sup>12</sup> a distinguished honor conferred by the organization Yad Vashem on those who risked their lives to save Jews from the Holocaust. Chain e-mails telling the story circulate among the Jewish community nationally, and the latest incarnation of these e-mails assures readers that Johnson was in fact Jewish.<sup>13</sup> A Google search for "Operation Texas," "Lyndon Johnson," and "Righteous Gentile" nets numerous hits, including an entry in Wikipedia, a reference in Facebook, and a blog.<sup>14</sup> The Lyndon B. Johnson Library and Museum (LBJ Library) in Austin repeatedly receives requests from people asking the archivists to provide documentation for Operation Texas. Johnson's congressional staff did not save his files dealing with immigration before and during World War II, and consequently the Johnson House of Representatives Papers at the LBJ Library include no

direct evidence of Johnson's assistance to Jewish refugees in the late 1930s and early 1940s.

The stories of Johnson's assistance to Jews and his relationship with the wider Jewish community are captivating, but they are based on Novy's speech at the synagogue dedication and a handful of interviews conducted by Louis Gomolak that Gomolak has not made public.

No author has adequately explained how Johnson and Novy could have successfully brought hundreds of Jews into the country illegally and then lodged and trained them in the NYA. Evidence available at repositories like the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) facility at College Park, Maryland, and the American Jewish Historical Society at the Center for Jewish History in New York City suggest Johnson had a strong concern for the Jewish community in Texas's Tenth Congressional District, but none shows that Johnson participated in an illegal operation involving hundreds of Jews. Drawing from careful research, this article demonstrates that the story, which has been repeated by so many authors that it now has the appearance of truth, originated with one source whose thesis and evidence are open to serious question.

### *Origins of the Story*

When Jim Novy introduced Lyndon Johnson at the dedication of Congregation Agudas Achim's new synagogue in December 1963, he told the congregation about the trip he and his son had made to Poland in 1938.

In 1938 President Johnson was a United States Congressman. During this year my son and I were to make a trip to Poland and Germany which he knew about. Before leaving, I was advised by President Johnson to get as many Jewish people as possible out of these countries, as times were going to become very difficult for them. The President gave me a personal letter of introduction to the American Embassy in Poland and called them long-distance to guarantee their support and see that anyone able to qualify as an immigrant be given a visa without delay. President Johnson also helped in getting the affidavits for these immi-

grants processed, and as a result, 42 people were brought out of Poland and Germany.<sup>15</sup>

Novy's notes continued:

In 1940 as chairman of the N.Y.A., President Johnson authorized bringing refugees to Texas from countries under the Hitler regime. The State of Texas, however, was not allowed to finance the resettlement of these refugees. Therefore, President Johnson made arrangements through Jessie [Jesse] Kellam, who was then in charge of the National Refugee Service for Texas, and myself for the Joint Distribution Committee to carry the finance of resettling the refugees, and for them to be lodged at the N.Y.A. camps all over Texas.<sup>16</sup>

It is these two paragraphs in Novy's remarks that have given rise to the legend of Operation Texas. According to the legend, LBJ and Novy used illegal maneuvers to bring hundreds of Jewish immigrants into the United States and then further illegally lodge them in NYA camps.<sup>17</sup>

*President Lyndon B. Johnson speaks at synagogue dedication.  
President Johnson, center at podium, with Lady Bird, with corsage  
seated to his lower right and Jim Novy to her right.  
(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin, Texas. Photo by Dan Lewis.)*

*Jim Novy's Claims Revisited*

Novy's remarks about his trip to Germany and Poland in 1938 seem very straightforward, and yet no author has identified a single immigrant brought to the United States as a result of Novy's trip. Jim Novy's daughter remembers her father helping family members leave Poland, but these cases either occurred before Lyndon Johnson went to Congress or after World War II. She did remember a couple of German immigrants that her father set up in businesses in Austin, but did not know if they were helped by Lyndon Johnson or were among the forty-two Novy said in his speech were brought out of Europe as a result of his trip.<sup>18</sup>

Gomolak also cites a letter to Novy seeking help for a Jewish German mother and daughter, Adel and Fanny Gontschar.<sup>19</sup> He argues that Novy and Johnson worked behind the scenes to rescue the two and bring them into the United States, but Ancestry.com lists an Edel and Fanny Gontschar as survivors living together in Berlin in 1947.<sup>20</sup> Gomolak cites no evidence indicating this case was successful or that Johnson was actually involved.

Two additional sources, Novy's daughter and a newspaper account, help flesh out Novy's speech in 1963, but these accounts differ somewhat from the legend that has developed. *Aufbau*, a German language, Jewish newspaper published in New York, includes an account of a visit Novy made to the White House on March 15, 1965, with Dr. I. J. Carmin Karpman, editor of *Who's Who in World Jewry, 1965*, to present the president with the first copy of Karpman's book. Months later Karpman gave an account of the visit to an *Aufbau* reporter, who repeated it in *Der Zeitgeist*, a biweekly supplement to *Aufbau*. Karpman recounted the story of Novy's trip to Poland in 1938. According to the article, in 1938, Johnson warned Novy of the great dangers Hitler's policies posed for Jews in Poland and neighboring countries. Johnson had told Novy, "When you come back, bring a list of the names of your friends and relatives. I'll see to it that they can immigrate to the United States. The author of the article, identified only as G. Sw.,<sup>21</sup> states Novy passed along Johnson's message, but "ran up against stubborn resistance" in Poland. In spite of the resistance, Novy

gave a list to Johnson. The article continues, "When war broke out, 42 of those on the list were able to leave Poland, and, via Cuba, reach the United States or Palestine."<sup>22</sup>

Elaine Shapiro, Novy's daughter, has stated that most of Novy's family did not want to leave when he offered to get them visas in 1938. They refused to believe that things would get worse. This corresponds with the account in *Aufbau*. Shapiro also said that several relatives did end up in Palestine rather than the United States, but they went to Palestine after surviving the Holocaust.<sup>23</sup>

Following his remarks about his trip to Europe, Novy discussed an arrangement with the NYA to shelter recent immigrants. Novy's remarks are somewhat confused and need clarification because he mixed up names and positions. Novy referred to Johnson as chairman of the NYA in 1940. Johnson had been the state director of the Texas NYA before going to Congress in 1937. Although he was no longer with the NYA in 1940, he had continued to maintain close contacts with his hand-picked replacement, Jesse Kellam. If the NYA sheltered Jewish immigrants, Johnson likely would have known about it and could have even engineered the arrangement. Novy represented the National Refugee Service (NRS) in its dealings with the NYA. Novy also mentioned his relationship with the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), another refugee organization, but it does not appear that the JDC was involved in the NYA arrangement.

According to an article in the *Texas Jewish Press* describing the organizational meeting of the Texas NRS in San Antonio, Novy presented an NYA report at the luncheon session of the 1940 meeting.<sup>24</sup> A memo from the records of the NRS outlines the arrangement with the NYA that Novy would have described in his report. According to the "Memorandum on Texas for the State Meeting in San Antonio on October 20, 1940," an arrangement between the NRS and the NYA had been completed in December 1939. The memo indicates:

This program was effected last December with the NYA administrator allowing 25 places to us. The project has not taken on State dimension or even regional. What we have done is gotten

cities such as Houston to underwrite a given number and sending boys to projects near Houston. Dallas has agreed to finance 5 boys but none have been sent because there are no projects near Dallas. Austin, while not underwriting any has assumed administrative responsibility because the NYA State headquarters are in Austin. Jim Novy of Austin, former chairman of our Committee is a friend of the NYA administrator and therefore became liaison for the National Refugee Service and the NYA.<sup>25</sup>

A chart attached to the memo shows the distribution of the twelve individuals in the NYA program at the time of the meeting: seven in Austin, three in Houston and two in South Houston.<sup>26</sup>

The file in the NRS records also includes a letter dated in April 1940 from the executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Metropolitan Houston, J. B. Lightman. In the letter, Lightman indicates that the Houston Jewish community undertook the sponsorship of up to ten boys at a cost of \$1,500. Lightman describes a visit to the NYA camp in South Houston and provides insights into life at the camp and the community's support for the three boys at the retraining resident project: "[We] learned from the refugee boys that when they first came there they thought the meal they ate was especially prepared for them, but they were delightfully surprised to find that every meal was of the same fine caliber." The letter also indicates "arrangements with the N.Y.A. Project for permission for the boys to come into the city for one of the Passover Sedars [*sic*]."<sup>27</sup>

Was placing recent immigrants in the NYA illegal as is alleged in stories about Operation Texas? Since the project was under the auspices of the NRS and involved only a handful of immigrants, it seems very likely that these young men had legally immigrated to the United States. In his research into Jewish communities in Alabama, historian Dan Puckett shows that refugee committees throughout that state sponsored ten young men at the NYA training facility in Gadsden, Alabama.<sup>28</sup> This mirrored the Texas arrangement and suggests that the arrangement was far from unique.

In January 1936, an editorial in the *Saturday Evening Post* by conservative journalist Raymond G. Carroll decried the use of New Deal programs to aid immigrants to the United States.<sup>29</sup> Among the programs Carroll specifically mentioned was the NYA. Apparently, journalists knew these programs were available to aliens, and, although Carroll considered it an abuse of the program, he did not question its legality. Furthermore, a November 17, 1938, Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) memorandum, describing relevant factors to be considered when judging whether an alien's deportation should be stayed, directs that "aliens who have been employed on W.P.A. projects should not be considered as public charges."<sup>30</sup> Apparently, the INS was not disturbed that aliens were employed in New Deal projects.

Because Johnson continued to maintain regular contact with Jesse Kellam and monitored Texas NYA activities closely, he may well have been involved in the NRS's arrangement with Kellam. Obviously, the leadership of the Texas NYA was concerned about these new residents of Texas; however, the number involved was far more modest than has been alleged. The figures cited in the NRS records place the total in the low double digits rather than the hundreds.

If Johnson did help Jewish refugees come to the United States, how did he accomplish it? Who and how many were the immigrants helped by Johnson? Although Johnson's House of Representatives Papers contained nothing on immigration cases before the end of World War II, there are clues in oral history transcripts at the LBJ Library and in State Department records and records of the State Department's Foreign Service posts found at the National Archives, particularly those dealing with Cuba and Mexico.<sup>31</sup> Apparently, the only case Johnson discussed with his friends and associates was one involving Erich Leinsdorf, a young conductor from Austria.

#### *The National Origins Quota System and the Erich Leinsdorf Case*

In 1937, a talented young Jewish conductor from Austria, Erich Leinsdorf, came to the United States on a temporary, six-month visa to serve as an assistant conductor for the Metropolitan

Opera. The six months neared its end, and the INS, the entity regulating immigrants once inside the United States, would not renew his visa. By this time the Nazis had taken over Austria, and Leinsdorf could not safely return. He sought help from his friends Charles and Alice Marsh. Charles Marsh owned a chain of newspapers including one in Austin, and the couple had become close friends of Lyndon Johnson. Marsh sought the congressman's help in getting Leinsdorf a permanent visa.<sup>32</sup>

To understand the obstacles faced by immigrants trying to enter the United States and the means available for Johnson to assist individual refugees, it is necessary to understand the intricate immigration bureaucracy in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Congress limited immigration from countries outside the hemisphere through the National Origins Quota System that established country-by-country quotas in direct proportion to the number of persons of a particular national origin in the United States in 1920. The law limited total immigration under the quotas to approximately 154,000. Because a large portion of the population in the United States in 1920 had come from Great Britain, Germany, and Ireland, the law favored immigrants from these countries but severely discriminated against immigrants from the rest of Europe, Asia, and Africa.<sup>33</sup> Over half of the available quota numbers were assigned to Great Britain and Ireland where people were not trying to flee.<sup>34</sup> Quotas from these two countries went unused, but under the law, the quotas could not be transferred to immigrants from other countries. After Germany annexed Austria in 1938, President Roosevelt ordered the combining of German and Austrian quotas, thereby relieving some of the pressure on the smaller Austrian quota.<sup>35</sup>

When Marsh asked Lyndon Johnson to help Leinsdorf, Johnson's goal would have been to have a quota number assigned to Leinsdorf, allowing him to enter as permanent resident. The law required prospective immigrants to enter under the quota of their country of birth even if they had become residents or citizens of another country, such as Mexico or Cuba.<sup>36</sup> American consuls controlled the allocation of quota numbers, examining applicants and determining whether they should be given a visa, and they

exercised wide latitude in determining suitable candidates for visas. Evidence suggests that some consuls placed roadblocks in the paths of Jews seeking U.S. visas, leading to charges of overt anti-semitism within the State Department.<sup>37</sup> Jewish visa applicants in the 1930s discovered which consuls were more likely to approve visas.<sup>38</sup>

In 1938, it was well known among the Jewish community and on Capitol Hill that it was not difficult to obtain entrance visas to Cuba. Refugees entered Cuba and waited until they were able to obtain visas and enter the United States.<sup>39</sup> The American consul in Havana, Cuba, Coert Du Bois, worked sympathetically with Jewish refugees, eventually even letting staff from the JDC assist the consulate with the processing of paperwork.<sup>40</sup> As Erich Leinsdorf described in his autobiography, Johnson first got the INS to extend the temporary visa for six months. Johnson then asked Du Bois to help Leinsdorf.<sup>41</sup> The American consul's records show that at this time Du Bois regularly requested and received block quota number allotments for Germans/Austrians from the American consul in Germany.<sup>42</sup> Leinsdorf traveled to Cuba, received a visa under the German/Austrian quota, and returned to the United States seven days later as a permanent resident.<sup>43</sup>

Senator Morris Sheppard of Texas contacted Secretary of State Cordell Hull probably at Marsh's behest. The State Department advised Sheppard to have Leinsdorf go to another country and apply for entrance under the German/Austrian quota.<sup>44</sup> With Johnson's help, Leinsdorf did exactly that.

Johnson's assistance to Leinsdorf on immigration matters did not end with his trip through Cuba. Leinsdorf later brought his mother and her sister, as well as a cousin and the cousin's wife, into the United States.<sup>45</sup> Johnson addressed inquiries to the State Department on behalf of Leinsdorf's mother and aunt.<sup>46</sup> In December 1944, Leinsdorf asked Johnson for a letter of reference when he wanted to sponsor two refugees he had met in Cuba. In the letter, Johnson wrote, "In short, Erich Leinsdorf always has a blank check with my name signed to it because he is possessed with the qualities that justify his being called a great American."<sup>47</sup>

*Erich Leinsdorf (left) with President Johnson,  
at the White House, January 30, 1958.  
Aide Doug Cater is in the background.  
(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin Texas. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto.)*

Johnson's friendship with Leinsdorf lasted through the years. When he signed the landmark Immigration Act of 1965, ending the highly discriminatory National Origins Quota System, then-President Johnson invited Leinsdorf to attend the ceremony.<sup>48</sup> The act eliminated the quota system that had excluded so many Jews from the country and changed it to a system of selection based on an immigrant's special skills, family relationship to U.S. citizens, or the need for political asylum.<sup>49</sup>

The Leinsdorf case is well-known within Johnson's circle of friends and in published works. Mrs. Johnson even alludes to it in her published diary.<sup>50</sup> However, Johnson's help in this case could be attributed to a political motive, the opportunity to do a favor

*President Johnson signs the Immigration Act, October 3, 1965.  
The signing took place on Liberty Island, New York City.  
(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin Texas. Photo by Yoichi Okamoto.)*

for Charles Marsh, a close friend and influential publisher. Evidence of Johnson's help in other immigration cases discloses a pattern of assistance and reveals his tactics.

*Johnson Intercedes for Jewish Constituents*

Johnson used the Leinsdorf model in another case in 1938, this time at Jim Novy's request. Gela Nowodworski, the widow of Jim Novy's brother, Sam, had entered Mexico from Poland years before Johnson became a congressman.<sup>51</sup> Johnson, after being elected to Congress, helped Gela and two of her three sons emigrate together from Mexico to Texas. Gela and the two sons obtained quota numbers under the Polish quota. Jim booked passage for them on a ship to New Orleans. When they arrived in

New Orleans, the immigration inspectors determined their paperwork was not done properly and excluded them. One of Gela's sons, Michael Nowodworski, told the story on videotape at a Novy family reunion. He said Jim Novy was waiting in New Orleans, and when the family was not allowed to enter the country, Novy called Johnson. Johnson directed Novy to put them on a boat to Havana, which he did. Just as in the Leinsdorf case, the American consul in Havana got their papers in order.<sup>52</sup> The family returned to New Orleans a little less than one month later and entered the country in July 1938.<sup>53</sup> Johnson also helped the third son enter. In a letter to Johnson in 1945, Jim Novy asked for help getting citizenship papers for one of the boys. Novy identifies his nephew: "[He] is one of the three Novy boys whom you helped bring to this country from Mexico."<sup>54</sup>

Another case proved difficult and ultimately failed because war broke out before the ship to the United States set sail, but it illustrates Johnson's methodology. In 1996, Rabbi Abram Vossen Goodman came to the LBJ Library and told the staff that Johnson had tried to help him get his cousin, Hermann Winter, out of Germany in 1938 and 1939. Goodman agreed to do an oral history and to give the library correspondence he had saved about the case. However, he did not have the letters LBJ had sent him. In this case, though, correspondence exists in the Records of the State Department Visa Division at NARA. In this heartbreaking story, Goodman sought and received Johnson's aid. Winter had written Goodman in 1937 asking for help fleeing Germany for the United States. Goodman contacted Johnson immediately. Soon after *Kristallnacht*, Winter sent a cable to Goodman indicating that he had been arrested and was in Dachau. Winter was released from Dachau, but had to promise to leave Germany. According to Goodman, Johnson first planned to have Winter go to Havana where he could eventually get a quota number and enter the United States. Unable to arrange this, LBJ suggested an alternate plan that would have taken Winter through Mexico.<sup>55</sup> Johnson probably abandoned the original plan because, in May 1939, the Cuban government changed its prior fairly open policy on the admission of Jewish refugees, and seriously restricted the number of visas

granted to refugees. On May 27, in a very public policy reversal, the Cuban government allowed only a few of the 937 refugees who arrived in Havana aboard the German liner the *SS St. Louis* to disembark, in spite of the fact that most held Cuban entry visas.<sup>56</sup>

In November 1938, Johnson wrote to the assistant secretary of state seeking help. Staff apparently answered the inquiry by phone and no action resulted. In April 1939, Johnson wrote to the American ambassador to Mexico, Josephus Daniels, and asked him to talk to the Mexican authorities and request that they expedite the granting of a temporary permit for Winter to enter Mexico. In his letter, LBJ assured the ambassador of Goodman's stability and worthiness; "He is one of our finest and most esteemed citizens in Austin."<sup>57</sup>

After receiving Johnson's letter, Daniels wrote to the secretary of state asking if changes were under way which would allow him to give assurances to the Mexican authorities that such immigrants would be admitted to the United States when their quota numbers were reached. George Messersmith, assistant secretary of state, responded, "While the difficult position of persons in Central European countries who find it necessary to emigrate to other countries and who desire to come to the United States eventually is appreciated, there is no way under the law by which an American consular officer may give an assurance that any applicant on the waiting list will be found at some future date to qualify for a visa, since the qualification of an alien for a visa can only be determined when his turn is reached for final consideration."<sup>58</sup>

Johnson encouraged Goodman to work actively on the case.<sup>59</sup> Goodman then consulted the Mexican consul in San Antonio and wrote to the Mexican Ministry of the Interior, which was in charge of immigration into Mexico, hoping to arrange a Mexican visa for Winter.<sup>60</sup> Goodman also contacted the National Coordinating Committee for Aid to Refugees and Emigrants Coming from Germany that was based in New York City.<sup>61</sup>

Goodman says in his oral history that Johnson "couldn't get him [Winter] into the United States, but he could get him into Mexico." Johnson made a reservation for Winter on a steamer

going from Hamburg to Tampico, Mexico, scheduled to leave on September 1, 1939. It did not sail because of Hitler's invasion of Poland that day. Failing in his attempt to depart Germany, Winter died in a forced labor camp during the war.<sup>62</sup>

Immigrant Alfred Rosenthal insists Johnson helped him enter the United States. Rosenthal, now in his nineties, grew up in Cologne, Germany. In 1938 he was arrested and taken to Dachau.<sup>63</sup> Rosenthal's father had previously connected with a family in Austin through the Jewish War Veterans, and the family asked Harold Eichenbaum, an Austin prop designer for theaters and a professional associate of Louis Novy, to help Rosenthal leave Germany. Louis Novy, Jim Novy's brother, was a well-known businessman who operated several movie theaters including one on Austin's main downtown street. Eichenbaum asked him to sponsor Rosenthal's entrance into the United States. Eichenbaum sent Rosenthal a letter promising assistance, and Rosenthal was able to secure release from Dachau. His mother purchased a ticket for him on a ship going from Amsterdam to Trinidad, and the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Amsterdam helped him secure an entry visa for Trinidad.<sup>64</sup>

While in Trinidad, the American consul helped Rosenthal obtain a job, and he was then able to bring his mother and sister out of Germany and have them join him in Trinidad. JDC representatives greeted Rosenthal when he entered New York from Trinidad on December 9, 1940, under the German quota.<sup>65</sup> He was soon on the bus to Austin where Eichenbaum met him and quickly introduced Rosenthal to his sponsor. Novy helped him secure a job with the *Austin Tribune*, and a year later, Rosenthal sponsored his mother and sister by bringing them from Trinidad to Austin through New York City.<sup>66</sup> Jim Novy had written the State Department about the immigration of Rosenthal's mother.<sup>67</sup>

Rosenthal does not know how Johnson facilitated this process but firmly believes the Novys asked Johnson for help. A cryptic letter does connect Johnson to the immigrant family. A mutual friend of the Rosenthals and Lyndon Johnson, Eugenia Boehringer Lasseter (she had introduced Lady Bird Johnson to Lyndon Johnson) wrote to Lyndon Johnson, referring to a conver-

sation she had with Rosenthal's sister, Margot Schwartz. The letter begins, "You will remember having helped the Rosenthals in Austin."<sup>68</sup> This letter may refer to help Johnson gave the family after they were "in Austin," or the phrase may be meant to distinguish the Rosenthals from other Rosenthals in central Texas. In any event, the story illustrates how closely help from the Novy brothers was linked to Lyndon Johnson in the minds of the Jewish community and may partially explain the community's readiness to attribute successful immigration cases to Johnson.

*Gathering at Jim Novy's Lake House, September 1943.*

*Alfred Rosenthal, as a freelance photographer, took this photo.*

*In attendance were Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, a few of his associates, and Jewish businessmen from Austin. Johnson, wearing bow tie, is sixth from right, standing below. Jim Novy is on LBJ's left, Louis Novy on his right.*

*(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin, Texas. Photo by Alfred Rosenthal.)*

In the Leinsdorf, Nowodworski, and Rosenthal cases, the consuls in “transit” countries in the Western Hemisphere arranged U.S. visas for immigrants who had been able to leave Europe without Johnson’s help. In the unsuccessful Winter case, Johnson was involved in developing the strategy for Winter to escape Germany, but the plan was for Winter to go to Mexico where Johnson was lobbying a U.S. consul for assistance. The case of the Deutsch family provides an example in which Johnson helped a constituent’s relatives come directly from Europe to the United States. Leon Schmidt of Austin recalls that Johnson helped his father, Jacob Schmidt, bring his wife’s sister, Lea Deutsch, her husband, Andor, and their son, Miklos, to Austin from Hungary.<sup>69</sup> Jacob Schmidt, a merchant in Austin and member of Congregation Agudas Achim, had been a merchant in the small town of San Marcos, Texas, when Johnson was a college student there.<sup>70</sup> In February 1939, Jacob’s in-laws left a port in France and entered New York under the Hungarian quota.<sup>71</sup>

These cases demonstrate Johnson’s deep interest in the Austin Jewish community, but provide no evidence to corroborate stories that he illegally helped Jewish immigrants come to Texas. His actions are similar to those of other congressmen who lobbied the State Department and consular officials for special consideration for their constituents’ relatives, and they raise the question of whether Johnson took actions to change immigration through legislation. Little appears on the Internet or in print related to his pre-presidential positions on immigration legislation. Johnson accumulated a mixed record on immigration, beginning with his first roll-call vote in the House.

*LBJ, the Legislator*

When Austin congressman James Buchanan died, Lyndon Johnson won a special election to replace him as the U.S. Representative from Texas’s Tenth District. Johnson was sworn in on May 13, 1937. Just five days later, the House considered an omnibus immigration bill, H.R. 5897, which would have stopped the deportation of fifteen immigrants, most of whom were Jews from eastern Europe who had obtained entry to the country by paying

dishonest consular officials for false visas. By 1937 the immigrants had been in the United States for years, had families and businesses, and were model residents.<sup>72</sup> Johnson's first roll-call vote was on a motion involving this bill. Some authors have described Johnson's vote as a moral stand in favor of Jewish immigrants.<sup>73</sup> But that is not the full story. There were three roll-call votes related to the bill on that day; all were votes on motions proposed by congressmen who opposed the bill.

The opponents of the immigration bill, mostly southern Democrats and a few Republicans, engaged in parliamentary tactics to kill the legislation. First, Representative Joe Starnes of Alabama moved to strike the enacting clause in an attempt to gut the bill. Johnson voted "no" with the majority, thus aligning himself with the supporters of the bill. Next, Congressman Charles Halleck (R-IN) introduced an amendment requiring one of the immigrants to leave the country and return legally in order to be eligible for U.S. citizenship. Again Johnson voted "no" with the majority to preserve the bill. The House continued debating the bill into the late afternoon. As five o'clock approached, Congressman John Rankin of Mississippi, who opposed the bill, made a motion to adjourn declaring that action on the measure could not be completed during that day's session. This time, Johnson and others switched sides, and Rankin's motion to adjourn passed, thus ending consideration of the bill. According to the *New York Times*, under House rules, the bill could not be considered again for a month. It was not brought up again in that session of Congress.<sup>74</sup> Accounts of Johnson's votes in support of the bill fail to mention that on the last vote of the day Johnson voted with the majority to end debate on the bill, and the bill died.<sup>75</sup>

It may be a mistake to read too much into this switch without knowing why Johnson changed sides. Perhaps he and colleagues who switched realized that the bill would continue to be delayed and debating into the night would be futile. Whatever the reason for Johnson's vote to adjourn, those interested in the evolution of Johnson's support of Jewish immigration should be aware of the full story. Asserting that Johnson's first roll-call vote was a vote on

behalf of immigrants is technically true.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, authors undermine their credibility when they point to his first vote as a principled vote in favor of Jewish immigration without disclosing Johnson's reversal at the end of the day, and the bill's ultimate failure.

Johnson's next vote on an immigration bill came in 1939 against H.R. 5643, a harsh bill proposed by the restrictionist Congressman Samuel Hobbs of Alabama. Opponents charged that the bill allowed the secretary of labor to order the indefinite detention of an alien if he had violated U.S. law, been ordered deported, and was unable to leave the country because he lacked a valid passport or other papers to return to his country of origin. The detention order could be appealed to a circuit court but not the Supreme Court. In spite of Johnson's vote against the bill, it passed the House, but it did not reach a vote in the Senate.<sup>77</sup>

In 1948, Johnson's last year in the House of Representatives, Congress considered the Displaced Persons bill, which provided for the admission of 202,000 displaced persons over the following two years. He was absent for the vote and was recorded as a General Pair in the *Congressional Record*.<sup>78</sup> During the vote, which was overwhelmingly in favor of the bill, Johnson was in Texas campaigning in a tough primary battle to be the Democratic Party's candidate for the Senate.<sup>79</sup> The House and Senate both passed the bill, and President Truman signed it into law.<sup>80</sup> In 1950 another Displaced Persons bill passed by a substantial margin. This time Johnson was serving in the Senate, but again was absent for the bill's passage, although he apparently supported the bill.<sup>81</sup> Johnson and his wife were on a brief car trip after the strain of getting a gas bill through the House and Senate.<sup>82</sup>

Probably the most well-known immigration bill considered by the Senate in the 1950s was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, also known as the McCarran-Walter Act. Although the bill had several positive provisions, it maintained the controversial quota system based on the 1920 census and broadened the grounds for exclusion and deportation of aliens. The bill passed but was vetoed by President Truman, who called it discriminatory in a strongly worded statement. Congress then overrode the

veto.<sup>83</sup> Probably the most difficult to understand of Johnson's immigration votes were his votes related to this bill. Not only did he vote for the passage of the bill and to override Truman's veto, he voted against a much more moderate substitute bill proposed by senators Hubert Humphrey and Herbert Lehman.<sup>84</sup> The Humphrey-Lehman bill would have liberalized the quota system by changing the basis for quotas from 1920 to 1950, and it would have authorized unused quotas to be "pooled" and used by countries with small quotas. Numerous Jewish organizations endorsed the Humphrey-Lehman bill, including HIAS and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.<sup>85</sup> Johnson made no statements explaining his votes,<sup>86</sup> but they were probably cast out of political expediency. Two years later, Johnson would be facing reelection to his Senate seat after an extremely narrow victory in 1948, and his Texas constituency was very conservative on immigration matters. Although the House voted by a comfortable margin to override the president's veto, the Senate overrode the veto by only two votes, and the proposal became law.<sup>87</sup>

In 1953, Johnson became the Senate minority leader, and he supported an immigration bill that allowed over two hundred thousand non-quota visas to be issued over a three-year period. The bill passed with help from Johnson. Soon after passage, he wrote to a Texas constituent, "I do not know where TIME Magazine or anyone else got the idea that I 'guided' the Immigration Bill through the Senate."<sup>88</sup> He supported the bill but felt it necessary to distance himself from its passage. Johnson's opponent in the 1954 Democratic primary election, Dudley Dougherty, criticized the vote claiming those to be admitted were "escapees and expellees among the millions of that class now in Europe." He further claimed the immigrants would deprive men and women in Texas of jobs and would "gum up the housing situation."<sup>89</sup>

By 1957, when another immigration bill came before the Senate, Johnson, now the Senate majority leader, again provided leadership. Among its many provisions, S. 2792 permitted unlimited entry of alien orphans under fourteen who had been adopted by U.S. citizens, provided relief for oversubscribed

eastern European quotas, and provided relief to German expellees, Dutch refugees, and others fleeing persecution. Eisenhower signed the measure but expressed disappointment that the bill did not do more to correct inequities in the immigration system.<sup>90</sup> Johnson, too, disclosed disappointment in the bill. He received a telegram from Eleanor Roosevelt citing the bill as evidence of his leadership, and he responded, "The measure is not all I hoped to accomplish, but it does represent a step forward toward the solution of a problem which has brought unhappiness to many people."<sup>91</sup>

With the exception of the McCarran-Walter Act, Johnson's voting record generally favored liberalizing the immigration process and admitting larger numbers of European refugees. Although he was absent for votes in 1948 and 1950 on Displaced Persons legislation, those bills passed easily, and his vote was not needed. Once he became the Democratic leader in the Senate, he actively supported reforms, a preface to his later support of the 1965 Immigration Act. What caused Johnson's empathy for Jewish refugees and led him to support immigration reform when most legislators from the former Confederacy opposed these measures?

#### *Johnson's Motivational Factors*

Lyndon Johnson grew up in an environment where Jews held a special place. His grandfather and aunt belonged to the Christadelphian religious sect, a fundamentalist Christian group that believes Israel will be returned to the Jews, and, when Christ returns to earth in the Second Coming, he will establish the Kingdom of God in Israel.<sup>92</sup> It is difficult to measure how much this factor influenced Johnson, but it does indicate that he could have been introduced to Christian Zionist sentiments at an early age. An oral history interview with his Aunt Jessie Hatcher supports this conclusion.<sup>93</sup> Johnson's father, Sam Ealy Johnson, Jr., who served in the Texas legislature as a populist Democrat, no doubt also had a strong influence on his son. Sam Johnson opposed the Ku Klux Klan's intolerant racial and religious views.<sup>94</sup>

An early indication of Johnson's interest in immigration appears in an undated letter to his mother written while Johnson was an aide to Congressman Kleberg, probably in 1932.<sup>95</sup> Johnson explains that he is working on immigration cases and making pleas for stays of deportation. He ends his description with "Its [*sic*] all quite interesting and in addition quite an instruction."<sup>96</sup> Very early in his career, LBJ was learning the ins and outs of the immigration bureaucracy.

Johnson also understood the dangers inherent in Nazism and had serious concerns about the situation in Germany as early as the fall of 1934. That fall, as previously mentioned, through a mutual friend, Eugenia Boehringer, Lyndon Johnson first met Lady Bird Taylor in Austin. He arranged to have breakfast with her the next morning. They spent the day together; and he reportedly proposed marriage before day's end. They married about ten weeks later. During their courtship, Johnson gave Lady Bird a book with an inscription dated September 1, 1934, probably the day of their first date and his proposal.<sup>97</sup> The book, *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization*, was a collection of essays edited by Pierre Van Paassen and James Waterman Wise, a very serious book to give to a young woman a man is courting.<sup>98</sup>

In an interview, Dr. Mathilde Krim, who is a research scientist and the wife of Arthur Krim, the former chairman of United Artists and a prominent Democratic fundraiser, discussed Johnson's empathy for Jews. This Jewish couple became close friends of the Johnsons after Kennedy died, and they spent many hours with them during the White House years and thereafter. Dr. Krim believes that Johnson met Jews early in his career who shaped his views. She observed that he did not associate Jews with particular beliefs or doctrines; rather he had recognized in them the qualities of high intelligence, decency, and strong ethics. Johnson then attributed these qualities to the wider Jewish community. Dr. Krim had asked Johnson about his feelings regarding Jews. She said, "First of all, he thinks that Jews are very smart. . . . He made this determination on the basis of his relationships, or operations, with certain Jews who lived in Austin or in his area of the world." Johnson mentioned the originator of the western hats that he

*The book by Pierre Van Paassen and James Waterman Wise that LBJ gave to Lady Bird when they were courting and the inscription he wrote within: "9/1/34, To Bird – In the hope within these pages she may realize some little entertainment and find reiterated here some of the principles in which she believes and which she has been taught to revere and respect – LBJ"*  
(Courtesy of LBJ Library, Austin, Texas.)

wore, Harry Rolnick, of the Resistol hat company. She continued, "Johnson would say, 'I admire this man,' . . . because he was a very decent person in his eyes."<sup>99</sup>

Krim also suggested that Johnson had a natural connection with the oppressed and underprivileged. She referred to Tom Segev's 1967: *Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, in which the author writes that Dr. Krim told him Johnson appreciated people who had made it the hard way, because he, too, had faced discrimination and had worked hard to get where he was. Segev recounts that the Krims thought Johnson identified with Jews and with Israel much as he did with the plight of African Americans and the poor.<sup>100</sup>

Harry McPherson, a long-time Johnson associate who began serving as an aide to Johnson while Johnson was in the Senate, is another key source. In spite of being Episcopalian, he served as a liaison between the American Jewish community and the Johnson White House. McPherson spoke of a conversation with his friend, Michael Janeway, a Columbia University journalism professor and son of Eliot Janeway, an economist and journalist, who became a friend and adviser to Johnson early in Johnson's career. Michael Janeway suggested Johnson's assistance to Jews could be linked to the friends Johnson made when he came to Washington in the 1930s. The circle of young New Dealers rotated around Harold Ickes, President Franklin D. Roosevelt's secretary of the interior. Ickes was very aware of the plight of European Jews and championed plans to settle Jewish refugees in American territories such as Alaska and the Virgin Islands.<sup>101</sup> Members of this circle included bright young Jewish attorneys like Abe Fortas, who became a particularly close Johnson friend and advisor. McPherson believed that through these relationships, Johnson knew numerous attorneys who worked for the government and could assist him. McPherson also observed that Johnson recognized when people needed help and was strongly inclined to use the power of government to aid them. Having so many friends in government no doubt enabled him to effectively help his constituents negotiate the government's bureaucracy, including Jewish constituents needing assistance with immigration.<sup>102</sup>

### *Conclusions and Methodology*

Soon after Gomolak finished his dissertation in 1989, I began to wonder how Johnson could have bypassed the government's bureaucracy and participated in an illegal operation that would not come to light for so many years after his death. I became fascinated by this possibility and began looking for documents that would clarify Johnson's role. I had worked as an archivist at the LBJ Library for twenty years but had seen nothing in Johnson's papers about Operation Texas. Finding evidence of Johnson's efforts to assist refugees is a challenge. My research journey began with the National Archives facility in

College Park, Maryland, to view State Department records, particularly the records of the American consuls in Cuba, Mexico, and Trinidad. These records revealed that Lyndon Johnson was one of many congressmen who contacted these officials on behalf of refugees.

The American Jewish Historical Society in New York City holds the records of the NRS. The collection includes several key documents clearly explaining the relationship between the NRS, the Texas NYA, and Jim Novy. The plans outlined in the NRS correspondence for twenty-five immigrants to be housed and trained in NYA facilities perfectly fit the description in Novy's speech at the synagogue.

At the Dolph Briscoe Center at the University of Texas, I consulted the Papers of Henry Cohen, the Galveston rabbi who met the boats bringing European immigrants to Texas in the early twentieth century. Cohen was the acknowledged local leader of the Galveston Plan and other programs to divert Jewish immigrants from New York through Texas. The rabbi was present when Jim Novy disembarked in Galveston in 1913, and he continued active service in Galveston until his retirement in 1949. The Cohen Papers included instructions typed in 1941 for securing Cuban visas for European refugees, confirming that it was well-known among Texas Jews that Cuba could provide a safe haven for refugees hoping to eventually enter the United States. The collection does not contain any correspondence with Jim Novy or others about a large-scale effort to bring Jews into Texas through Galveston during the years of Hitler's persecution.<sup>103</sup> If Operation Texas took place, surely Cohen would have been involved or at least been informed.

In addition to archival research, I attempted to find members of the Jewish community in Texas who might know of Lyndon Johnson's efforts. In 2002, I wrote a brief article for the newsletter of the Texas Jewish Historical Society outlining the legend and describing what I had been able to verify. At the end of the article, I asked anyone who had information to contact me and said that I would give their stories to the LBJ Library. No one came forward.

In December 2002, a member of Congregation Agudas Achim made arrangements for me to view the small archive at the synagogue related to the 1963 dedication. Unfortunately, it shed no clues on the identities of those Johnson helped, but it was an opportunity to establish contact with people in the congregation. In 2005, I received an invitation to speak to a group at Congregation Agudas Achim who were interested in Johnson. I asked the congregants who came to hear my talk to spread the word in the Austin Jewish community that I was looking for evidence of Johnson's assistance, both for my own research and to enhance the information available at the LBJ Library. Although members of the congregation were familiar with Gomolak's work, none could give me the names of immigrants helped by Johnson.

Over the years, I talked with several Novy relatives. While Novy's relatives were sure Novy and Johnson worked together to help immigrants enter the country, they were not sure there was an illegal operation, nor did they know how such an operation would have been accomplished. Novy's daughter knew of several people that her father helped, but they entered the country legally.

It is clear from federal records and from the testimony of a few people who were close to Johnson and Novy that Johnson played a role in the immigration of a number of Jewish refugees. As the examples illustrate, he contacted American consuls directly and through the Visa Division at the State Department to apply pressure for action. He vouched for sponsors by writing letters of recommendation and suggested strategies for bringing immigrants through transit countries. Some authors argue Johnson and Novy smuggled refugees into Texas through Galveston, but immigration officials met each ship coming from Europe and evading them would have been difficult. Manifests in Ancestry.com show that paying passengers had entry papers when they boarded the ship, and immigration inspectors refused to admit stowaways to the United States. Some authors may believe Johnson secured admittance for refugees under quotas from countries other than those of their births, yet no examples exist showing Johnson could do this. There is simply no evidence suggesting that Johnson acted illegally. Authors who allege that he was

behind an illegal effort to bring Jews in the country bear responsibility for showing what he did that was illegal, how this was done, and how he avoided detection.

The files of the American consuls in Mexico, Cuba, and Trinidad contain abundant evidence of congressional interest in Jewish immigration. Virtually hundreds of letters from members of Congress urging consuls to grant visas to Jewish refugees survive in the Mexico files alone. Johnson's letters on behalf of Rabbi Goodman's cousin, Hermann Winter, are heartbreaking and earnest, but not unique. The objective conclusion is that Johnson was one of a number of sympathetic congressmen and senators who lobbied American consuls in behalf of constituents.<sup>104</sup>

When asked in an oral history about Johnson's efforts to aid Jews, Lady Bird Johnson said, "I just remember that from our earliest days he had a lot of good Jewish friends, particularly the Novys in Austin. They went to bat for him, asked or unasked, and he for them. Yes. It began to get frightening and terrible in Germany. There were lots of people in our district who had relatives over there who were trying to get them out. He did work with great sympathy and determination on that." When asked if Johnson worked through the INS or at a higher level, Mrs. Johnson replied, "Frankly I don't know. I just know he worked persistently. Whatever was the way to do it, he was likely to find out that way and just have at it."<sup>105</sup> Her statement illustrates what is well known. Johnson had a strong reputation for constituent case work and aggressively pursued cases. Although Johnson's efforts may not have been unique, he used the political powers available to him as a congressman to do what he could to help the Jews in his congressional district. The correspondence in the Winter case files in the records of the American ambassador in Mexico indicates that Johnson asked the ambassador to intercede with Mexican officials on behalf of Winter. It is unusual to see a congressman this persistent in his correspondence.

I spoke with Harry Middleton, a White House speechwriter who accompanied Johnson back to Austin when he left office. Middleton helped Johnson write his memoir, *The Vantage Point*,

and later became the director of the LBJ Library. I also interviewed Harry McPherson, the White House aide who served as Johnson's liaison with the Jewish community, and the Johnsons' friend Mathilde Krim. The Krims became very close to the Johnsons and even bought property in Texas near the LBJ Ranch. Other than the Erich Leinsdorf case, Johnson had not mentioned helping Jews to Middleton, Dr. Krim, or McPherson.

Dr. James Smallwood, the retired professor from Oklahoma State University, wrote articles that appeared on the Institute of Texan Cultures website as early as 2002 and in the *East Texas Historical Journal* in 2009 describing Operation Texas, and he deserves much of the credit, or discredit, for advancing the legend. As far as can be determined, he was the first to post the story on the web. Although Smallwood's account acknowledges Gomolak only in a few footnotes, he relies heavily on Gomolak's dissertation. In his journal article, Smallwood uses articles published by others who relied on Gomolak, referencing those sources as if they had verified Gomolak's account.

One author did go beyond the work done by Gomolak, although she, too, relied heavily on his dissertation. Reporter Claudia Feldman wrote an article for *Texas: The Houston Chronicle Sunday Magazine*. She interviewed David Novy and Elaine Shapiro, Novy's children. Feldman also spoke with Lyndon Johnson's daughter, Lynda Robb, and with me, then an archivist at the LBJ Library. David Novy, who was seventy-five years old at the time, told Feldman that his father and Johnson planned a series of secret rescues though he never knew exactly how many were saved. He told Feldman it was "More than a hundred. . . . More like several hundred. It was a big amount."<sup>106</sup> Gomolak had interviewed David Novy and based parts of his account of Operation Texas on these interviews. Feldman acknowledges the lack of evidence to support Operation Texas. The lack of evidence suggests David Novy may have exaggerated his knowledge of his father's and Johnson's actions. Lynda Robb told Feldman that her father took a strong stand against antisemitism, and he would have done everything in his power to stop the suffering, but she did not know how many people he helped rescue.

The numerous published articles, references in books, and Internet accounts describing Operation Texas give the appearance that multiple scholars have now verified the stories. In truth, however, the authors are citing each other, and none has proven the existence of an illegal operation. Gomolak's dissertation, the Smallwood articles, as well as the reference in Robert Dallek's book, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and his Times, 1908–1960*, are often cited by other authors as proof of Operation Texas.<sup>107</sup> A careful look at the footnotes in any of the published sources shows each can be traced back to Gomolak's dissertation.

The identities of the forty-two immigrants from Poland and Germany that Jim Novy spoke of in his speech at the synagogue dedication have proved elusive, as have the identities of those who tugged at Mrs. Johnson's sleeve following the dedication ceremony saying, "He helped me get out." Novy's relatives, including his daughter, do not know their identities.<sup>108</sup> Novy, a natural storyteller, may have stretched the facts to include people who were not on the list he made during his trip to Poland and Germany, people like Alfred Rosenthal, his mother, and sister. Perhaps Novy also included refugees who entered after the war. For example, Johnson's House of Representatives papers include correspondence with Novy about Hirsch Jakob, a Polish Jew living in Japan in 1947.<sup>109</sup> With Johnson's assistance, Jakob entered Texas in 1948 and settled in Austin.<sup>110</sup> After the war and into Johnson's Senate and White House years, Novy continued to ask for help in immigration cases.<sup>111</sup> So many years after the fact, it may be impossible to figure out exactly who Novy counted in the forty-two, but until scholars determine the circumstances of the immigration of these forty-two people, they should be cautious in drawing conclusions beyond what is evident in archival collections and firsthand testimony about Johnson's role.

If the truth does not match the Operation Texas legend, is LBJ's stature as a friend of the Jewish community diminished? No, it is not. Here is a more realistic picture of a man seriously interested in the plight of his constituents with relatives in Europe. It shows a congressman and his staff who worked to intercede with

the government bureaucracy in behalf of his constituents. Later in his career, Johnson's support of Israel was unflinching. Harry McPherson said, "In the Johnson era, I had the feeling that there was a greater ease of association between Jews and the White House and the President and his staff, than was normal or than was usual in an American government. This was a place that people felt comfortable with."<sup>112</sup> Without question Johnson was a true friend to the Jewish community in Austin as well as nationally and internationally.

Two interesting stories emerge from the research on Johnson and his efforts to help Jews. The first is the story of Johnson's view of Judaism, his concerns about Nazi Germany, and his efforts to facilitate Jewish immigration. The second story surrounds the growing belief in the legend of an illegal effort called "Operation Texas." The first story brings honor to Johnson, recognizes his activities and attitudes, and places them in perspective. The second suggests that historians use evidence with caution and verify secondary sources to make certain that they are not just perpetuating myths.<sup>113</sup>

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Charles Kaufman, ed., *Building for the Future: Congregation Agudas Achim, Austin, Texas, May 5-7, 1989*, 1, 2 Iyar 5749 (Austin, TX, 1989) 33.

<sup>2</sup> *Texas* [San Antonio] *Jewish Press*, January 17, 1941, January 31, 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Elaine and Morris Shapiro interview conducted by author, October 16, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> Notes, Jim Novy, "Introduction of President Lyndon B Johnson," December 30, 1963, Jim Novy Papers (hereafter cited as Notes, Jim Novy), Lyndon Baines Johnson Library, Austin, Texas (hereafter cited as LBJ Library); *President of the United of States Lyndon B. Johnson Dedicates Congregation Agudas Achim, Austin, Texas*, recorded December 30, 1963, Austin Custom Records, 1964, 33½ rpm.

<sup>5</sup> Notes, Jim Novy.

<sup>6</sup> Lady Bird Johnson, *A White House Diary* (New York, 1970), 28.

<sup>7</sup> Louis Stanislaus Gomolak, "Prologue: LBJ's Foreign-Affairs Background 1908-1948," (Ph.D. diss., University of Texas at Austin, 1989), 48.

<sup>8</sup> Randall Woods, *LBJ: Architect of American Ambition* (New York, 2006), 139-140; Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-1960* (New York, 1991), 169-170.

<sup>9</sup> Jenna Berger, "Review Essay: Teaching History, Teaching Tolerance—Holocaust Education in Houston," *Public Historian* 25 (Fall 2003): 129-130.

<sup>10</sup> Lewis Gould, "A Hunger for Power" (review of Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Means of Ascent*) *Newsday*, March 4, 1990 (quotation). Gould made the same criticism in a review of Caro's *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Master of the Senate* in the *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2002. Gould was on the faculty of the University of Texas at Austin History Department when Gomolak submitted his dissertation there in 1989.

<sup>11</sup> James Smallwood, "Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson's Attempt to Save Jews from the German Nazi Holocaust," Institute of Texan Cultures, accessed August 1, 2002, <http://www.texancultures.utsa.edu/hiddenhistory/Pages1/SmallwoodLBJ.htm>; James Smallwood, "Operation Texas: Lyndon B. Johnson, the Jewish Question and the Nazi Holocaust," *East Texas Historical Journal* 47 (Spring 2009): 3-17.

<sup>12</sup> For an example of a website urging Yad Vashem to confer the honor of "Righteous Gentile," see the Orthodox outreach AISH.COM website, accessed October 15, 2011, <http://www.aish.com/jw/s/48942551.html>.

<sup>13</sup> E-mail to Anne Wheeler, Communications Director at the LBJ Library and forwarded to the Supervisory Archivist, for response, September 7, 2011, Reference File, LBJ Library. The e-mail claims the maternal ancestors of Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) were Jewish. LBJ's mother, Rebekah Johnson, was an avid genealogist. Her papers at the LBJ Library include information on her ancestors, but nothing there indicates they were Jewish.

<sup>14</sup> "Operation Texas," accessed April 16, 2011, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation\\_Texas](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Texas), Wikipedia; "Operation Texas: Topic View," accessed April 16, 2011, <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=57919800836&topic=7845#!/topic.php?uid=57919800836&topic=7845>, Facebook; Lenny Ben-David, "Lyndon B. Johnson—A Righteous Gentile," accessed April 16, 2011, <http://lyndonjohnsonandisrael.blogspot.com/>.

<sup>15</sup> Notes, Jim Novy. On the recording of Novy's presentation at the synagogue dedication in 1963, there is no mention of the number 42. Instead Novy referred to the number as "many, many." He said: "[Johnson gave] me a letter to the embassy in Poland, and he went as far as call long distance to tell them to get as many people out of Poland and Germany that we possibly can. And, of course through the efforts of the President and with the recommendation of the embassy, we were able to take many, many people out." Recording, "President of the United of States Dedicates Congregation."

<sup>16</sup> Notes, Jim Novy.

<sup>17</sup> Gomolak, "Prologue," 48-51.

<sup>18</sup> Shapiro interview, October 16, 2002; Elaine and Morris Shapiro interview conducted by author, October 11, 2010.

<sup>19</sup> Gomolak, "Prologue," 30-31.

<sup>20</sup> For information on Edel and Fanny Gontschar, see "Holocaust: Survivor List from the files of World Jewish Congress about Edel Körber Gontschar," Ancestry.com, accessed September 5, 2011, July 28, 2012, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?MS\\_AdvCB=1&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=2&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=edel&gsfn\\_x=1&gsln=gontschar&gsln\\_x](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?MS_AdvCB=1&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=2&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=edel&gsfn_x=1&gsln=gontschar&gsln_x); "Holocaust: Survivor List from the files of World Jewish Congress about Fanny Gontschar," Ancestry.com, accessed September 5, 2011, July 28, 2012, [http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?MS\\_AdvCB=1&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=2&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=fanny&gsfn\\_x=1&gsln=gontschar&gsln\\_x](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?MS_AdvCB=1&rank=1&new=1&MSAV=2&msT=1&gss=angs-g&gsfn=fanny&gsfn_x=1&gsln=gontschar&gsln_x).

<sup>21</sup> The author may be the journalist Gershon Swet who wrote for *Aufbau*.

<sup>22</sup> *Aufbau*, *Der Zeitgeist*, "Präsident Johnson intim: Jim Novy macht einen Besuch Im Weissen Haus," August 6, 1965, trans. Allen Fisher, Reference File, LBJ Library.

<sup>23</sup> Shapiro interviews, October 16, 2002, and October 11, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> *Texas Jewish Press*, October 25, 1940.

<sup>25</sup> Gomolak incorrectly asserted that no records related to the arrangement with the NYA could be found among the papers of the National Refugee Service (NRS). Gomolak, "Prologue," 50. However, a memorandum from October 20, 1940, does exist. See Texas for State Meeting in San Antonio on October 20, 1940, "Texas n.d. 1940" folder, Records of the NRS, box 3, American Jewish Historical Society, Center for Jewish History, New York (hereafter cited as NRS Records).

<sup>26</sup> Table, "Resettlements in the State of Texas, January 1, 1937 - September 30, 1940," October 16, 1940, "Texas n.d. 1940" folder, box 3, NRS Records.

<sup>27</sup> Letter, J. B. Lightman to Ephraim Gomberg, April 30, 1940, "Texas n.d. 1940" folder, box 3, NFS Records.

<sup>28</sup> Dan Puckett, *In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama's Jews and the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa, forthcoming); Puckett, "In the Shadow of Hitler: Birmingham's Temple Emanu-El and the Shadow of Nazism," *Southern Jewish History* 11 (2008): 1-39.

<sup>29</sup> Raymond G. Carroll, "Alien Workers in America," *Saturday Evening Post*, January 25, 1936, 82.

<sup>30</sup> Memorandum to the Members of the Board of Review and Boards of Special Inquiry from James L. Houghteling, commissioner of the Immigration and Naturalization Service, November 17, 1938, Record Group 84, Records of the American consul, Juarez, Mexico, 811.11, box 29, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter cited as NARA).

<sup>31</sup> General Records of the State Department, Group 59, and Records of Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, Record Group 84, at NARA in College Park, MD, include congressional correspondence about immigration cases. Documentation in these records is often sparse because State's Visa Division and U.S. consuls disposed of many immigration case files.

<sup>32</sup> Erich Leinsdorf, *Cadenza* (Boston, 1976), 76-79; Erich Leinsdorf interview conducted by Joe B. Frantz, March 18, 1969, LBJ Library.

<sup>33</sup> Congressional Quarterly Service, *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 89th Congress, 1st Session – 1965*, 21 (Washington, DC, 1966), 459; Congressional Quarterly Service, *Congress and the Nation: 1945–1964* (Washington, DC., 1965), 218.

<sup>34</sup> David S. Wyman, *The Abandonment of the Jews: America and the Holocaust, 1941–1945* (New York, 1985), 6.

<sup>35</sup> David S. Wyman, *Paper Walls: America and the Refugee Crisis, 1938–1941* (Amherst, MA, 1968), 43–44.

<sup>36</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 21, (1966) 461.

<sup>37</sup> Wyman, *Paper Walls*, 155–166.

<sup>38</sup> Roger Daniels, *Guarding the Golden Door: American Immigration Policy and Immigrants Since 1882* (New York, 2004), 53–54.

<sup>39</sup> Robert M. Levine, *Tropical Diaspora: The Jewish Experience in Cuba* (Gainesville, FL, 1993), 81–83, 91.

<sup>40</sup> Laura Margolis interview conducted by Linda Kuzmack, July 11, 1990, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

<sup>41</sup> Leinsdorf, *Cadenza*, 76–79.

<sup>42</sup> Record Group 84, Havana Consulate, General Records, 1938, boxes 39 and 40, NARA.

<sup>43</sup> Leinsdorf interview, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Senator Morris Sheppard to Cordell Hull, February 16, 1938, Record Group 59, “811.111/Leinsdorf,” box 1319, NARA.

<sup>45</sup> For Charlotte Landauer and Henriette Loebel, see manifest for ship *Nieuw Amsterdam*, December 15, 1938: “New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957 Record for Charlotte Landauer,” Ancestry.com, accessed September 21, 2010, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715\\_6260-0600&fn=Charlotte&ln=Landauer&st=r&ssrc=&pid=25193009](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715_6260-0600&fn=Charlotte&ln=Landauer&st=r&ssrc=&pid=25193009); for Arthur and Lourdes Jokl, see manifest for ship *Villa de Madrid*, July 13, 1941: “New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957 Record for Arthur Jokl,” Ancestry.com, accessed July 17, 2010, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715\\_6561-0033&fn=Arthur&ln=Jokl&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1006537388](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715_6561-0033&fn=Arthur&ln=Jokl&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1006537388).

<sup>46</sup> Johnson, Lyndon Name Card, June 28, 1938, referencing correspondence about Lotte Landauer, Decimal File Name Index, Record Group 59, box 283, NARA.

<sup>47</sup> LBJ to Leon Savage, a New York attorney, December 12, 1944, “Leinsdorf, Erich,” LBJA, box 6, LBJ Library.

<sup>48</sup> Leinsdorf interview.

<sup>49</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 21 (1966): 459.

<sup>50</sup> Johnson, *White House Diary*, 322.

<sup>51</sup> Mina Parven, Novy’s niece, interview conducted by author, December 19, 2002. Gomolak indicates Gela Nowodworski and her three sons came to the United States following Novy’s trip to Europe in 1938, but, according to Parven’s interview, Nowodworski immigrated to Mexico much earlier. See Gomolak, “Prologue,” 30–31.

<sup>52</sup> Tape, “Novy Family Reunion,” July 24–26, 1998, Austin, Texas; Parven interview.

<sup>53</sup> Manifest for ship *Morazan*, June 22, 1938: "New Orleans, Passenger Lists, 1920-1945 Record for Geia [sic] Nowodowski," Ancestry.com, accessed April 22, 2010, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7484&iid=LAT905\\_167-0405&fn=Geia&ln=Nowodowski&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1040154](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7484&iid=LAT905_167-0405&fn=Geia&ln=Nowodowski&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1040154); manifest for ship *Sixaola*, July 18, 1938: "New Orleans, Passenger Lists, 1920-1945 Record for Gela Nowodowski [sic]", Ancestry.com, accessed April 22, 2010, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7484&iid=LAT905\\_167-0591&fn=Gela&ln=Nowodowski&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1039462](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7484&iid=LAT905_167-0591&fn=Gela&ln=Nowodowski&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1039462).

<sup>54</sup> Jim Novy to Lyndon Johnson, April 4, 1945, "Justice-Novy, Sam," House Papers, box 275, LBJ Library.

<sup>55</sup> Ted Gittinger interview conducted by author, May 20, 2011; Record Group 59, Visa Division, Individual Case File, 1933-1940. "811.111/Winter, Hermann," box 1713, NARA; Abram Vossen Goodman interview conducted by Ted Gittinger, April 22, 1996, LBJ Library. Goodman was the rabbi of Austin's Congregation Beth Israel from 1935 to 1941.

<sup>56</sup> For an explanation of Decree 937, see Levine, *Tropical Diaspora*, 105-118.

<sup>57</sup> State Department correspondence includes a series of letters about Hermann Winter: copy of letter made by embassy, LBJ to Josephus Daniels, American ambassador, Mexico City, April 20, 1939, Record Group 59, Visa Division, Individual Case File, 1933-1940. "811.111/Winter, Hermann," box 1713, NARA.

<sup>58</sup> George S. Messersmith, for the secretary of state, to Josephus Daniels, American ambassador, Mexico City, June 9, 1939, Record Group 59, Visa Division, Individual Case File, 1933-1940. "811.111/Winter, Hermann," box 1713, NARA.

<sup>59</sup> Goodman interview.

<sup>60</sup> Copy of letter made by embassy, Josephus Daniels, American ambassador, to LBJ, May 15, 1939, Record Group 59, Visa Division, Individual Case File, 1933-1940. "811.111/Winter, Hermann," box 1713, NARA.

<sup>61</sup> Abram V. Goodman Papers, LBJ Library.

<sup>62</sup> Goodman interview.

<sup>63</sup> Alfred Rosenthal interview conducted by author, October 29, 2010.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> Manifest for ship *Argentina*, November 22, 1940: "New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 Record for Alfred Rosenthal," Ancestry.com, accessed August 21, 2011, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715\\_6513-0580-1&fn=Alfred&ln=Rosenthal&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1006501652](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715_6513-0580-1&fn=Alfred&ln=Rosenthal&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1006501652).

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

<sup>67</sup> Novy, Jim Name Card, July 30, 1941, referencing correspondence about Wilhelmine Rosenthal, Decimal File Name Index, 1940-44 Group 59, box 901, NARA.

<sup>68</sup> Gene Lasseter to LBJ, August 25, 1945, "Positions-Rosenthal, Alfred," House Papers, box 262, LBJ Library.

<sup>69</sup> Record of Oral Reference Request, April 6, 2000, "Jews and LBJ before and during World War II," Reference File, LBJ Library; Leon Schmidt remembered helping his father

select a thank-you gift for Congressman LBJ while on a shopping trip in New York City, and the father gave a copy of LBJ's thank-you note for the gift to the LBJ Library.

<sup>70</sup> Author to Betty Tilson, July 27, 2000, and attached documentation, "Jews and LBJ before and during World War II," Reference File, LBJ Library.

<sup>71</sup> For Andor, Lea, and Miklos Deutsch, see manifest for ship *Ile de France*, February 21, 1939: "New York Passenger Lists, 1820-1957 Record for Andor Deutsch," Ancestry.com, accessed August 21, 2011, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexoc?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715\\_6286-0721&fn=Andor&ln=Deutsch&st=r&ssrc=&pid=10041373](http://search.ancestry.com/iexoc?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7488&iid=NYT715_6286-0721&fn=Andor&ln=Deutsch&st=r&ssrc=&pid=10041373) 14.

<sup>72</sup> 75 Cong. Rec. 4668-4671 (1937.)

<sup>73</sup> Gomolak, "Prologue," 197; Smallwood (*article*), "Operation Texas," 3-4.

<sup>74</sup> 75 Cong. Rec. 4668-4671, 4719-4742 (1937); *New York Times*, May 19, 1937; 75 Cong. Rec., HR5897, 808 (1937). (History of Bills and Resolutions).

<sup>75</sup> Smallwood implies this bill passed in 1937, but by 1938 congressional attitudes had changed so Congress would no longer pass a bill allowing Jewish immigration. No change occurred, and the 1937 bill never made it to a final vote. See Smallwood (*article*), "Operation Texas," 3-4. See also Ben-David, "Lyndon B. Johnson." Based on my own research, it appears that most or all of the fifteen immigrants were able to eventually settle in the United States, although at least a few left the country and returned.

<sup>76</sup> Gomolak also contends that LBJ voted to "save aliens such as 'Nescinovich' and 'Friedman' from the Nazis, against massed southern and Republican opposition in May 1939 and October 1940." Gomolak, "Prologue," 197. The 1939 vote dealt with the deportation proceedings against Mario Nescinovich, but the bill related to Louis Friedman in 1940 was not a vote to save a life. That bill would have restored the citizenship of Louis Friedman who gave up his U.S. citizenship and became a naturalized citizen of Canada for business reasons. At the time of the roll-call vote, the bill had passed the Senate and House but been vetoed by President Roosevelt. The roll-call vote was on a simple procedural motion concerning the veto; LBJ voted against the motion. The motion failed due to lack of a quorum. Ultimately, the veto stood. See "Complete House Voting Record of Congressman Lyndon B. Johnson, by Subject from May 13, 1937 to December 31, 1948," 185, LBJ Library and 76 Cong. Rec. 13,522-13,534 (1940).

<sup>77</sup> 76 Cong. Rec. 5161-519 (1939); 76 Cong. Rec. Index H.R. 5643, 827 (History of Bills and Resolutions).

<sup>78</sup> 80 Cong. Rec. 7888 (1948). Congressional procedures allow various types of "paired" votes, none of which is tabulated in the vote tally: Live Pair, where a present member announces he is paired with an absent member taking the opposite position; Specific Pair, where two absent members are recorded as "paired" for and against the bill; and General Pair, where members planning to be absent are recorded as paired, but without taking a position on the bill. In this case, Johnson asked to be recorded as "paired," but did not announce a position, and was recorded as a General Pair.

<sup>79</sup> Oral History Staff, "1948 Chronology," 18-20, LBJ Library.

<sup>80</sup> "Statement by the President Upon Signing the Displaced Persons Act, June 25, 1948," in *Public Papers of the Presidents: Harry S. Truman, 1948* (Washington, DC, 1949) 382.

<sup>81</sup> LBJ to Catherine Richardson, June 4, 1951, "Displaced Persons," box 228, House Papers, LBJ Library; LBJ says in the letter, "I supported the original DP bill when it passed the Senate."

<sup>82</sup> Mary Rather to Mrs. Sam Johnson, April 6, 1950, "Johnson, Mrs. Sam E. (Rebekah), (March 1950–August 1958)," Family Correspondence, box 1, LBJ Library.

<sup>83</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 82nd Congress, 2nd session – 1953*, 8 (Washington, DC, 1953), 154–156

<sup>84</sup> 82 Cong. Rec. 5630–5631 (1952).

<sup>85</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 8, (1953) 158–160.

<sup>86</sup> Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, *Lyndon B. Johnson: The Exercise of Power* (New York, 1966), 48. None of LBJ's public statements from 1952 in the Statements File, box 11, LBJ Library, mentioned the McCarran-Walter Act.

<sup>87</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 8 (1953): 159.

<sup>88</sup> LBJ to Kenneth W. Fuller, August 12, 1953, "Immigration-Watkins Bill-S. 1917," Senate Papers, box 251, LBJ Library.

<sup>89</sup> Dudley Dougherty Radio Speech originating from WBAP-TV and Radio in Fort Worth, July 2, 1954, Dougherty File from General File, 1954, "54 Campaign, Dougherty" [1 of 2], Senate Political Files, box 33, LBJ Library.

<sup>90</sup> *Congressional Quarterly Almanac: 85th Congress, 1st session – 1957*, 13 (Washington, DC, 1957), 670–671.

<sup>91</sup> LBJ to Mrs. Franklin D. [Eleanor] Roosevelt, September 6, 1957, "Roosevelt, Mrs. Franklin D.," White House Famous Names, box 9, LBJ Library

<sup>92</sup> "Christadelphia Statement of Faith," Christadelphia World Wide, accessed April 2, 2011, <http://www.christadelphia.org/basf.htm>.

<sup>93</sup> Jessie Hatcher interview conducted by Paul Bolton, March 28, 1968, LBJ Library.

<sup>94</sup> Wright Patman interview conducted by Joe B. Frantz, August 11, 1972, LBJ Library; Carl Phinney interview conducted by Joe B. Frantz, October 11, 1968, LBJ Library.

<sup>95</sup> Although undated, the letter is on stationery from the Hotel Winston and shows P. M. Egerton as manager. *Boyd's District of Columbia Directory*, 1933, indicates Egerton managed the Hotel Winston c. 1932. See *Boyd's District of Columbia Directory*, 1933 (Washington, DC, 1933), 532.

<sup>96</sup> LBJ to Mother, undated, Family Correspondence, "Johnson, Mrs. Sam E. (Rebekah) (Correspondence Selected from her Papers)," box 1, LBJ Library.

<sup>97</sup> Lady Bird Johnson interview IV conducted by Michael Gillette, February 4, 1978, 16, LBJ Library.

<sup>98</sup> Museum Collection, LBJ Library. Van Paassen was a Dutch American journalist, a Unitarian minister, and a renowned Zionist. Wise, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise's son, later covered the Spanish Civil War for the *New York Times* and wrote *Swastika: The Nazi Terror*,

among other books. Pierre Van Paassen and James Waterman Wise, *Nazism: An Assault on Civilization* (New York, 1934).

<sup>99</sup> Mathilde Krim interview conducted by author, May 19, 2010. Krim actually stated that the man, whose name she did not remember, invented the Stetson hat. However, Johnson wore Resistol western hats created by Harry Rolnick. According to Jody Cox of the Associated Press (*Houston Chronicle*, September 20, 1987), Rolnick grew up in a Jewish neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, and moved to Dallas in the early 1900s.

<sup>100</sup> Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York, 2007), trans. Jessica Cohen, 119.

<sup>101</sup> Harry McPherson interview conducted by author, August 9, 2010.

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

<sup>103</sup> *Texas Jewish Press*, May 2, 1941; Rabbi Henry Cohen II, *Kindler of Souls: Rabbi Henry Cohen of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2007), 113. The Henry Cohen Papers contain multiple sets of mimeographed directions, dated October 29, 1941, for obtaining visas to Cuba, as well as "Confidential Migration Information" from the NRS, November 12, 1941, advising that Cuba was again issuing visas, but immigrants were not being permitted to leave Germany. "Immigration Information, 1900-1941," box 3M310, Dolph Briscoe Center, University of Texas, Austin.

<sup>104</sup> Bonnie Gurewitsch of the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City informed the author that even the isolationist senator from North Dakota, Gerald Nye, frequently asked for help for a constituent named Herman Stern who was trying to bring Jews to the U.S. Bonnie Gurewitsch interview conducted by author, March 14, 2012.

<sup>105</sup> Lady Bird Johnson interview IX conducted by Michael Gillette, January 24, 1979, 17-18, LBJ Library.

<sup>106</sup> Claudia Feldman, "LBJ's Rescue Mission," *Texas: Houston Chronicle Magazine*, September 27, 1998, 7-14.

<sup>107</sup> "Operation Texas," wikipedia.org.

<sup>108</sup> In addition to Elaine Shapiro, Novy's daughter, I talked to Mina Parven, Novy's niece, and Milton Simons, a Novy friend and husband of another Novy niece.

<sup>109</sup> Correspondence, "State-Jakob, Hirsch," Johnson House Papers, box 307, LBJ Library.

<sup>110</sup> Shapiro interview, October 11, 2010. Jakob entered at San Francisco, California. See manifest of ship *Marine Swallow*, January 30, 1948: "California Passenger and Crew Lists, 1882-1957, Record for Hirsch Jakob," Ancestry.com, accessed September 12, 2010, [http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7949&iid=CAM1410\\_395-0638&fn=Hirsch&ln=Jakob&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1019920](http://search.ancestry.com/iexec?htx=View&r=an&dbid=7949&iid=CAM1410_395-0638&fn=Hirsch&ln=Jakob&st=r&ssrc=&pid=1019920).

<sup>111</sup> See LBJ's House Papers, box 288 and 307; Johnson Senate Master File, Index, "Nos-Nz 200", box 138; Johnson Vice Presidential Papers, "Nos-Nz 200, 1963," box 37; White House Central Files Name File, "Novy, Jim," box 156, LBJ Library.

<sup>112</sup> McPherson interview.

<sup>113</sup> Two recent works that puncture myths concerning the early Jews in communities are Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontier of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2010) and Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010).

Between the Borscht Belt and the Bible Belt:  
Crafting Southern Jewishness  
Through Chutzpah and Humor

by

Jarrold Tanny\*

While traveling across the United States, Borat Sagdiyev, a dimwitted reporter from the former Soviet Republic of Kazakhstan, makes a brief stop in Birmingham, Alabama, to learn all about fine dining in the South. After a private lesson with Kathie B. Martin, an “etiquette coach,” Borat is invited to the Magnolia Mansion Dining Society. Although Borat fumbles his way through dinner making a number of gaffes and inappropriate remarks, his refined companions do not rebuke him for his lack of familiarity with southern decorum. “The cultural differences are vast and I think that he is a delightful man,” insists the female dinner host while Borat is in the restroom, “and it wouldn’t take very much time for him to really become Americanized.” Seconds later Borat is standing before her, carrying a plastic bag containing his feces. Yet the shocked guests retain the requisite propriety of high society, and the host accompanies Borat back to the bathroom to demonstrate the proper protocol for using an American toilet. She does not lose her poise even after Borat asks with apparent naïveté, whether “the host cleans the anus of the other?” After this lesson in etiquette they return to the table. Harmony is restored with the alien’s primitive customs being ascribed to his disconcerting yet not insurmountable cultural backwardness.

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But the congenial soirée descends into disaster when Borat's guest arrives, a black prostitute named Lanelle. Dinner is immediately pronounced to be over and the host escorts Borat and Lanelle to the front door. When he asks if Lanelle can stay for dessert, the host finally loses her composure and declares: "Absolutely not, and neither can you!" Meanwhile a voice in the background can be heard shouting, "The sheriff is on his way, the police are coming." Borat and Lanelle are rudely ejected from the Magnolia Mansion Dining Society, located on Secession Drive, in twenty-first-century Birmingham.<sup>1</sup>

*Sacha Baron Cohen as the irrepressible Borat, 2006.*

*(Source: Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan, directed by Larry Charles [2006].)*

This scene is from the 2006 hit movie *Borat*, which stars the British comic Sacha Baron Cohen as a Kazakh reporter who is studying American society and culture in order to help transform his backward Central Asian country into a modern westernized nation. Although Cohen is Jewish his character is not, and there is nothing explicitly Jewish about this scene or the rest of the film, aside from a few passing incidents and a handful of remarks by the unabashedly antisemitic Borat. Yet Borat's engagement with the Magnolia Mansion Dining Society falls within the tradition of Jewish humor, even if its setting and characters suggest otherwise. Cohen, in fact, is following in the footsteps of Harry Golden, Mickey Katz, Woody Allen, and Kinky Friedman, who have all used the South as a backdrop for their subversive Jewish comedy since the 1950s. An analysis of their humor sheds light on American Jewry's encounter with the South within the larger historical context of the Jews as a people in exile. From it, we also gain a deeper understanding of the evolution and characteristics of Jewish humor, which first emerged in nineteenth-century eastern Europe, but only reached its mature stage in post-World War II America. Jewish humor's encounter with Dixie is a window into modern Jewish culture.

*The American Jew and the Mythic South*

Even the most casual observer is probably aware that the South is neither the birthplace nor the typical site of American Jewish humor. When one thinks of Jewish humor in America, New York always comes to mind, the archetypal Jewish metropolis, where millions of immigrants transplanted the culture of the eastern European shtetl and refashioned it to suit their new environment.<sup>2</sup> Through vaudeville, the Yiddish theater, and early radio, Jewish entertainers flooded the burgeoning mass culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. From New York, Jewish humor radiated outwards in America, following the Jews wherever they went: to the Catskill Mountains in Upstate New York—the so-called Borscht Belt—where many prominent Jewish comedians got their start performing their shtick for vacationing New Yorkers; to Los Angeles where Jewish businessmen and

entertainers created Hollywood, leaving an indelible Jewish imprint on the motion picture industry and television; and to southern Florida where a populous enclave of Jewish senior citizens, seemingly out of place in the American South, still relish the culture of their formative years, the Yiddish-inflected comedy, music, theater, and film of New York, the Catskills, and Hollywood.<sup>3</sup>

To encounter Jewish humor against the backdrop of Dixie, one needs to look for it. This largely stems from the fact that the South has played a marginal role in American Jewish consciousness, and the very idea of a “Jewish South” seems improbable to many outside of the region. One scholar insists, “American popular culture keeps forgetting about southern Jewishness.”<sup>4</sup> Similarly, two other prominent historians of southern Jewry maintain that “Jews who live in regions of the country with larger Jewish communities . . . wonder: ‘Who could believe Jews actually live in the South? . . . If they really were Jewish, they wouldn’t live there.’”<sup>5</sup> And it is not just in the realm of popular consciousness: in his introduction to *Dixie Diaspora*, a five hundred page anthology of southern Jewish history published in 2006, Mark K. Bauman writes that “southern Jewish history remains an exotic aside to many, and its study is more peripheral than integrated.”<sup>6</sup>

Perception of course does not always reflect the historical record, and even a cursory examination of American Jewish history reveals the many significant Jews who were at home in the South, the major role they played in the nation’s past, and the numerous Jewish “firsts” that took place below the Mason-Dixon Line.<sup>7</sup> But southern Jewish communities, as Stephen J. Whitfield points out, have historically been small, lacking “the urban density that has enabled Jewish life to flourish” in cities like New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, and Los Angeles.<sup>8</sup> If one excludes Florida there are today only 257,000 Jews in the South—4.2 percent of America’s Jewish population, and a mere one-half of 1 percent of the South’s population, with the Jews disproportionately inhabiting major metropolises, such as Atlanta.<sup>9</sup> For many Americans, Jewishness is synonymous with New York, and

Dixie's demographic history may explain in part this discursive disconnect between the Jews and the South.

The Jewish absence from the mental landscape of the South is humorously depicted in a 1997 episode of Fox Network's cartoon series *King of the Hill*, a show about a community of rednecks in small-town Texas.<sup>10</sup> In this episode, the main character, Hank, learns that his divorced mother is dating a Jewish man, Gary Kasner. Unsure of what to make of him, Hank discusses their relationship with his culturally insular neighbors, Dale, Bill, and Boomhauer:

DALE. Kasner, is that German?

HANK. It's Jewish.

*(A moment of contemplative silence passes.)*

DALE. So, he's Jewish.

HANK. Yeah, Dale, he's Jewish.

DALE. There's nothing wrong with that in and of itself.

BILL. Is he funny?

HANK. Well, he doesn't seem too funny.

BILL. Seinfeld's funny.

HANK. Seinfeld's funnier than Gary.

...

BILL. Whoopi Goldberg's funny.

HANK. You know the man won't even eat steak. Now what's that about? Hell, my boss has a bypass surgery every year and he eats all the damn steak he wants.

BILL. Oh that's not the reason Gary doesn't eat steak, Hank, it's 'cause the cow is sacred to his people.

DALE. Nope, you're thinking of the Hindus. The pig is sacred to the Jews.

BILL. I wouldn't, myself, never join a religion that restricted my diet. See, I don't want to get into heaven that way.

Hank and his friends seem to have never encountered a Jew before, with Jerry Seinfeld and nonsensical theology being their sole points of reference. Kasner's foreignness is underscored by his Yiddish accent and inflected speech ("You want I should come

*Scene from King of the Hill.*

*Hank, on the right, tells about his mother's new boyfriend.*

*Other characters are, left to right, Boomhauer, Dale, and Bill.*

*(Photo source: King of the Hill, "The Unbearable Blindness of Laying," episode no. 23, December 21, 1997, Fox Network.)*

over there?"). He is an alien, an unknown quantity that may or may not fit into the weltanschauung of small town Texans.<sup>11</sup>

*King of the Hill* finds humor in the collision between Jew and southerner, a theme that has repeatedly surfaced in American popular culture, but often with different results. In a 1997 piece (also situated in Texas) in the satirical newspaper *The Onion*, we learn how Holocaust commemoration transpires in the Lone Star State. The month-long series of events, which are not exactly the model of solemnity one would expect, include a "Holocaust Hoedown," a barbecue, and a daily double-bill showing of *Schindler's List* and John Wayne's *True Grit*. Presiding over the opening ceremony is Rabbi Leonard "Too Tall" Sussman. In the photo, two Hasidic Jews are shown



*From The Onion, February 12, 1997.  
(Courtesy of The Onion. Reprinted with permission.  
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manning the grill, one of whom is wearing an apron that reads "Never Again, Pardner."<sup>12</sup>

The humor in *The Onion's* piece is of course rooted in the blending of Texan ritual with Jewish suffering, and the absurd recasting of Jew as southern cowboy. But ironically the hybridization of Jew and Texan results in a Jewish community that is more committed to its history than the Jews of New York or even Israel, where Holocaust commemoration officially transpires one day per year on *Yom ha-Shoah*. In Texas, the tragedy is observed for an entire month replete with public spectacle, as the "Main Street parade featuring red, white, and blue Texas blossoms spelling out 'Don't Mess With The Jews'" would suggest.<sup>13</sup> The eternally victimized Jew is toughened up through his injection into the rugged landscape of the quintessential southern frontier, without detriment to his Jewishness.

Such encounters however predate *The Onion* and *King of the Hill* by over four decades, and were a hallmark of Mickey Katz's music. Katz made an entire career out of singing Jewish parodies of popular songs, mixing Yiddish slang, broken English, and Jewish stereotypes. He produced most of his recordings between 1947 and 1957, during an era of tremendous growth in American Jewish culture invigorated by postwar affluence, the creation of Israel, and the dissipation of antisemitism.<sup>14</sup> Katz delighted in satirizing the schlemielesque Jew, by placing his characters in improbable settings, and his repertoire included several songs set in the American South: "Mississippi Shmootz" (to the tune of "Mississippi Mud"); "Roiselle from Texas" (to the tune of "The Yellow Rose of Texas"), whose female protagonist is "known in every shtetl throughout the old Panhandle" and is a descendant of the great "Andrew Jackson Cohen"; and "Feudin' and Fussin' Mit Mine Cousin," filled with his gun-toting *mishpachah* "in the hills of West Virginny."<sup>15</sup> A talented musician, Katz succeeds in making his songs Jewish not only through language and plot, but also by seamlessly overlaying klezmer flourishes onto American popular tunes that otherwise bear no connection to Jewish music and culture.

*Mickey Katz and two of his 78 rpm labels.  
(Images of "Dvoid Crockett" and "Mississippi Shmootz"  
courtesy of the Judaica Sound Archives, Florida Atlantic  
University, Boca Raton, <http://faujsa.fau.edu>.)*

Katz's most famous song is undoubtedly "Duvid Crockett" (to the tune of the "Ballad of Davy Crockett"), in which he transforms the Tennessee-born American frontiersman into a Jew, or rather a New York Jew into an American frontiersman.<sup>16</sup> Duvid Crockett leaves his native Lower East Side, the "wilds of Delancey Street, home of gefilte fish and kosher meat," to become a cowboy, making his way through the Deep South and then out West. Katz narrates Duvid's journey through classic Jewish dialect humor:

He went down south, looking for a *meydl*  
 Met a little *tsatskale* called Daisy Freidel  
 From near and far, they came to the *chippie*  
 Elected him president of the B'nei Mississippi  
 Mazel tov Duvid Crockett  
 Ah mazel tov *der mame un der alter* Crockett  
 Mazel tov Duvid Crockett, King of Delancey Street

As with the Holocaust memorial in Texas, the song's blending of Jewish and southern evokes laughter. The resulting dissonant cultural hybridizations (Daisy Freidel, B'nei Mississippi) suggest the Jew can become a southerner, but their comical incongruity underscores the alien origins of the southern Jew.

Such examples find humor in an imagined binary opposition between Jew and Dixie. Although the origins of this disjuncture can be explained in part by the historically sparse settlement of Jews in the South, of greater significance are the stereotypes that have historically governed depictions of the South and the Jews. Jewish humor below the Mason-Dixon Line almost always unfolds against the backdrop of what may be called the "mythic South," a set of popular images that geographically and temporally flattens Dixie, simplifying reality through distortion and exaggeration.<sup>17</sup> The dominant tropes embedded in the imagined South include: endemic racism, from the advent of slavery through Jim Crow to the informal exclusionary practices of the post-civil rights era; white supremacy embodied in the Ku Klux Klan; a rural landscape characterized by swamps, cotton and tobacco plantations, alligators, possums, and other critters; slow-witted rednecks and hillbillies who fear outsiders, distill moon-

shine, and speak with a drawl; the sanctification of the traditions of antebellum America and the Confederacy; aristocratic pretensions and gentility that mask the violence and xenophobia lurking below the surface; and perhaps, most significantly for our purposes, evangelical Christianity and the tendency to view everything through a biblical lens.<sup>18</sup>

It need not bear repeating that these stereotypes are a gross exaggeration of past and present. They collapse time, homogenize human diversity, and conflate regional variation, with swamps, deserts, mountains, plantations, and possums coexisting from Texas to Virginia. But representations of the South were not born in a vacuum, and they have not remained static over time. In the decades before World War II, for instance, the songwriters of New York's Tin Pan Alley—many of whom were Jewish—evoked a South that was “irenic, unthreatening, feminized, immutable, an organic society,” according to Whitfield. It was a way for immigrants and their progeny to imagine a land of nostalgia and harmony far removed from the Old World oppression of their past and the industrial urban squalor of their present.<sup>19</sup> Hollywood offered up a no less idyllic version of Dixie, with *Gone with the Wind* being its statement of epic proportions.<sup>20</sup> The hegemonic depiction of the South looked very different in the 1930s from what it would later become.

The reconstruction of the mythic South began during the civil rights era, when the battle over segregation gripped the nation and was brought into the American home through the proliferation of television.<sup>21</sup> To be sure, representations of Dixie's backwardness, racial violence, and swamps did not emerge out of thin air; what was new was their discursive primacy.<sup>22</sup> Derision—ranging from ridicule to condemnation—replaced the romantic images of earlier times, with Tom Lehrer's satirical song “I Wanna Go Back to Dixie” being an early example:

I wanna go back to Dixie  
 I wanna be a Dixie pixie  
 And eat corn-pone 'til it's comin' outa my ears  
 I wanna talk with southern gentlemen

And put my white sheet on again  
I ain't seen one good lynchin' in years  
The land of the boll weevil  
Where the laws are medieval  
Is callin' me to come and nevermore roam  
I wanna go back to the southland  
That "y'all" and "shet-ma-mouth" land  
Be it ever so decadent  
There's no place like home<sup>23</sup>

*Tom Lehrer, 1960.*

*(Photo Source: Wikipedia.org.)*

A "Media-Made Dixie," to quote Jack Temple Kirby, continued to feed the American imagination, but it evolved in conjunction with a changing America. Films such as *In The Heat of the Night* (1967) and *Deliverance* (1972), television series like *The Dukes of Hazzard* (on CBS, 1979–1985), and popular rock songs like

Neil Young's "Southern Man" (1970) ensured that rural backwardness, racism, violence, and rednecks would be Dixieland's visual and linguistic signposts.<sup>24</sup> As John Shelton Reed puts it: "The South has often served America as a whipping boy and bad example, a moral cesspool and a national disgrace, but it has not always been seen that way."<sup>25</sup> It was against the backdrop of post-World War II America's stereotyped South that Jewish humorists found a new and promising outlet.

And it was a promising outlet, in part, because prevalent Jewish stereotypes stood in sharp contrast to southern ones. Where the southerner is slow-witted and lazy, the Jew is an anxious intellectual. The southerner thrives outdoors in a rural setting, whereas the Jew is at home in the city, incapable of baiting a hook or loading a shotgun. The Jew symbolizes capitalism, trade, and the professions, and is by definition middle class. The South, conversely, remains an agrarian backwater, divided into an aristocratic elite and a destitute collective of hillbillies, rednecks, and black sharecroppers; the middle class and hence the Jew are missing from Dixie's topography. And if the South represents archaic rigid social stratification rooted in white gentile privilege, the Jew is modernity's parvenu, the ethnic upstart who has crossed the political, social, and cultural boundaries that had held him back for centuries. The Jew *is* modernity, and if modernity in the American context is New York, then the mythic South is its antithesis.<sup>26</sup>

*Jewish Humor: From the Shtetl to the Golden Land*

There is an important relationship between Jewish stereotypes, antisemitism, and Jewish humor; their genealogies are long and intertwined. But their gestation has nothing to do with the American South. Accordingly, to better understand how and why the mythic South came to serve as a milieu for the wit of Harry Golden, Kinky Friedman, Sacha Baron Cohen, and others, we need to briefly explore the origins and maturation of Jewish humor.

Jewish humor is unique in many respects, largely due to the context in which it developed. Most scholars agree that modern

Jewish humor emerged during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the Yiddish-speaking shtetls of Eastern Europe, during a time of intellectual ferment and cultural change within the Jewish community, when various ideologies arose and challenged Jewish tradition.<sup>27</sup> Movements such as the *Haskalah* transformed the Jewish perspective on their place within the surrounding world, inducing many to question their seemingly precarious existence amid a sea of hostile Christians. "Jewish humor," writes Sarah Blacher Cohen, was "born out of the vast discrepancy between what was to be the 'chosen people's' glorious destiny" of eternal election and their desperate reality of juridical segregation, destitution, and impeded upward mobility in Russia's Pale of Settlement.<sup>28</sup> Divine chosenness seemed to imply abandonment on earth, or more precisely special selection for punishment and suffering. It was as if the Jews were "the butt of a cruel joke," chosen by God for pogroms and poverty rather than the kingdom of the righteous.<sup>29</sup> As modernization engendered religious reform and secularization, attention was called to the absurdity of traditional Judaism's conception of exile.

What gives diasporic Jewish humor its distinctive flavor is the use of ironic self-deprecation to underscore this incongruity between Jewish misery in an antisemitic world and a lingering hope for a glorious future as God's chosen. This tension between the ideal of chosenness and the expected sufferings of a people in exile is at the root of kvetching. Whether satisfied, dissatisfied, jubilant, or angry the kvetch is inevitably the Jewish response. "Judaism is defined by exile," as Michael Wex puts it, and "if we stop kvetching, how will we know that life isn't supposed to be like this? If we don't keep kvetching we'll forget who we really are."<sup>30</sup> The diaspora Jew cannot express fulfillment, for to do so is to forget that he is in exile. His kvetch is his declaration of an unattainable entitlement, rooted in Jewish theology but denied by history with an ironic vengeance.<sup>31</sup>

In the secular context of modernity, Jewish comics routinely deploy this dialectic of entitlement and suffering to produce laughter. But the unabashed kvetchy self-denigration for which Jewish humor is famous masks its subversive undercurrent, a

sophisticated linguistic practice that also derives from traditional Judaism.<sup>32</sup> This is a legacy of the Talmud, which governed Jewish social and religious life for nearly fifteen centuries. The Talmud is structured around argument and debate, infamous for what appears to be endless discussions and meandering digressions. Jewish folklore and anecdotes are replete with what has been called “Talmudic logic” and “Talmudic hairsplitting,” a tendency toward over-analysis, flawed logic, and circular reasoning.<sup>33</sup> Yet the comical Jew often exploits Talmudic logic to achieve subversive ends, and this explains why Jewish tricksters and swindlers are depicted as masters of the art of linguistic manipulation.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, the linguistic foundations of Judaic tradition can be a means of empowerment, a technique to escape the expected boundaries and suffering of exile. This legacy of pre-modern normative Judaism has found its way into twentieth-century Jewish humor.

Jewish humor’s distinctiveness is thus rooted in the amalgamation of three key ingredients: the sense of entitlement of a divinely chosen nation; the self-denigration of a hapless people abandoned to their suffering in exile; and the dexterous use of linguistic manipulation stemming from a religion whose texts and daily practices were built around ritualized argument. These theologically grounded attributes of pre-modern Judaism survived cultural modernization and became the blueprint of Jewish wit, a rhetorical strategy that is palpable even when explicit references to Judaism are omitted. Its evolution can be traced over the course of a century, from Sholem Aleichem through the Marx Brothers through Mel Brooks to *Seinfeld*. A brand of humor that first emerged in the eastern European shtetl came to maturity in twentieth-century America.

Although Jewish humor originated in eastern Europe it evolved on a somewhat different trajectory in America because of the latter’s distinct social, political, and racial context.<sup>35</sup> In Europe the Jews were marked as inveterate outsiders, Christ-killers, and commercial exploiters, stereotypes that medieval Christendom bequeathed to the modern world.<sup>36</sup> But in America the status of the Jews has been far more ambiguous. On the one hand, they

carry their old world legacy of religious heresy in an overwhelmingly white Christian country. On the other hand, they were viewed as the people of the Bible, and America has historically been defined as a nation of immigrants, a land of promise for outsiders to prosper in freedom. Despite periods of hardship and sporadic outbursts of antisemitism, the American Jew did not have to surmount ghetto walls and centuries of legal exclusion—the common lot of his European ancestors and his African American neighbors. The ascription of race has thus transpired differently in America from Europe, and this has had a significant impact on the reception, mobility, and identity of the Jews whose place on the “color line” has been far from evident.<sup>37</sup>

In an immigrant society historically based on white Christian privilege and black oppression, the “whiteness” of the Jews has been contingent on time and place. The Naturalization Act of 1790 granted citizenship to “free white persons,” an expansive category that included all the peoples of Europe regardless of their status in their former lands.<sup>38</sup> Although this seemed to place the Jews firmly on the white side of the color line (and legally it did), the question of racial identity was far from resolved. The very meaning of race was contested and changed over time; it “was at once biological and cultural, inherited and acquired,” according to David R. Roediger.<sup>39</sup> America’s rapidly changing demography further challenged any neat divisions between black and white due to the mass migration of Irish, Italians, Poles, Jews, and other southern and eastern Europeans between the 1840s and the 1920s.<sup>40</sup> These “other” (non-Nordic) Europeans were now a conspicuous presence, and, in the eyes of the growing nativist movement, they were seen as racially alien to America’s purported Anglo-Saxon character. They were “conditionally white” or “inbetweens [*sic*]” who needed to prove themselves worthy of belonging to what would later be called, authoritatively, the Caucasian race.<sup>41</sup> Before World War II, insists Eric Goldstein, “Jews were a racial conundrum, a group that could not be clearly pinned down according to prevailing categories.”<sup>42</sup>

The aftermath of World War II proved to be a turning point for Jewish identity in America. Nazi genocide delegitimized

European racial stratification and the non-Nordic peoples were now accepted as Caucasians.<sup>43</sup> "Jews became white folks," as Karen Brodtkin argues, and along with this status came greater social mobility and a withering away of antisemitic sentiment.<sup>44</sup> Since World War II the Jews have enjoyed greater acceptance than ever before, but the Holocaust has scarred Jewish consciousness, and a sense of global vulnerability persists.<sup>45</sup> Postwar Jewish identity in America reflects this duality: an unprecedented sense of confidence and belonging that is tinged by a collective memory of exile.

What this duality has meant, in practice, is that American Jewry remains sensitized to racism and other forms of unjustly ascribed difference and leery of the intentions of evangelical Christians. Some scholars have argued that this explains the continued commitment of many American Jews to liberalism, the welfare state, and civil rights, even after having secured their own safety and middle class comforts.<sup>46</sup> It also explains why Jewish humor has flourished in America. The postwar American Jew can express Jewishness in public in any form he or she wishes, and can do so from within American culture facilitated by the disproportionate role Jews have played and continue to play in entertainment.<sup>47</sup> But the enduring memory of alienation and suffering has tempted Jewish comics to use humor in order to subvert the dominant values of white Christian America. Paradoxically, the condition of exile that has governed Jewish humor since it first emerged in the shtetls of eastern Europe has been fortified by American Jewish success. A ticket of admission to whiteness has proved to be a license for ironic rebellion.

*The Jewish Kvetch Unleashed in Dixie*

Post-World War II Jewish humorists have differed significantly from the previous generation of entertainers who had muted their Jewish identities in public, engaging in what Irving Howe has called "de-Semitization" and what others have called "whitening."<sup>48</sup> Whether motivated by a desire to prove their Americanness, to appeal to as wide an audience as possible, or to avoid antisemitism, the upshot was the limited presence of identi-

fiable Jews in the popular culture of the 1930s particularly in film.<sup>49</sup> But the post-World War II assault against white Christian privilege—the civil rights movement, rock ‘n’ roll, the beat generation—coupled with an emerging ethos of ethnic pluralism meant that Jewish entertainers no longer felt constrained in how they exhibited their Jewishness in public. The previous era had produced the Marx Brothers and Jack Benny, caustic wits who sparingly alluded to their heritage, and Molly Goldberg (Gertrude Berg), who underscored her Jewish identity but exemplified a lighthearted American pluralistic sensibility. Although these and other Jewish entertainers continued to flourish after the war, during the golden age of television, they were now joined by Lenny Bruce, Jackie Mason, and Joan Rivers, the embodiment of a revolution in Jewish comedy. More than anyone else, Lenny Bruce condemned racism, poverty, religion, sexual morality, antisemitism, and all forms of hypocrisy while underscoring his own Jewish background.<sup>50</sup> His iconoclastic attack was linguistically driven and, in his own words, his speech was colored by “the jargon of the hipster, the argot of the underworld, and Yiddish,” implying that the use of the Jewish vernacular was not merely a tool to deliver his satire but an act of rebellion in and of itself: it polluted and subverted acceptable public discourse and symbolized the demolition of hereditary social privilege.<sup>51</sup> Lenny Bruce, Woody Allen, writers like Philip Roth, and the legions of Jewish humorists who have followed them have deployed their Jewishness as a marker of difference, and they have used it to profess their entitlement—and the entitlement of others—to a piece of America.

With America increasingly gripped by civil rights, the Jim Crow South was a logical target for comedians, particularly for those of Jewish descent whose cultural baggage included an inherited sense of persecution. Indeed the whiteness of the Jew in Dixie was rendered even more complex than elsewhere in America because of institutionalized biracialism, evangelical Christianity, and the low Jewish population density. Eli Evans, who grew up in North Carolina, aptly sums up the conflicting forces that positioned the Jew below the Mason-Dixon Line:

The Jews were, first of all, white, or at least men who could pass for white. But they would always be outsiders, for somewhere in the roots of populism and fundamentalism lurked a foreboding distrust of the foreigner, anyone who was not a Southerner and not Christian and therefore alien to the sameness all around.<sup>52</sup>

Such a sweeping statement is of course open to debate, and the southerner's acceptance of the Jew was undoubtedly determined by a multitude of other factors, including time, place, and the individuals in question. But it does reflect the conception of Dixie used by Jewish humorists, an encounter between stereotypes voiced through the idiom of Jewish wit and irony, whose postwar renaissance coincided with the national condemnation of a South mythologized for its repression and backwardness.

The ambiguous place of the Jew (and hence the extent of his whiteness) in the South surfaces in humor involving the Ku Klux Klan, a movement whose complex history is often simplified and then deployed to represent the totality of southern racism. Although the twentieth-century incarnations of the Klan considered the Jews to be an alien presence, they were not the primary target, and, instead of fear, humor seems to have been a common Jewish response.<sup>53</sup> That irony could be found amid the revulsion of white supremacy is revealed in the memoirs of Soupy Sales, a renowned entertainer who specialized in children's television shows. Born in 1926 in Franklinton, North Carolina, where his parents had settled after World War I to open a dry goods store, Sales describes the racism and segregation he witnessed as a child, including a lynching. According to Sales,

It was a time when the Ku Klux Klan was a dominant and deadly force in the South. Fortunately, they never bothered us—probably because my father was the one who sold them their sheets. They even invited him to join the Klan, but for obvious reasons he turned them down.<sup>54</sup>

One may assume that being Jewish kept his father, Irving Supman, out of the Klan, but Sales does not elaborate. Evans makes a similar observation in his history of southern Jewry:

Rarely were Jews harassed personally by the Klan, but the rough talk and the secrecy frightened the immigrants with fresh

memories of the pogroms in Russia. Some made the adjustment rather casually: "I used to sell'em the sheets," said an old man in Alabama, "and Sam the tailor made them into robes. Let me tell you we had a good business going."<sup>55</sup>

*Soupy Sales, Lunch With Soupy, 1960.*  
(Photo source: *Wikipedia.org.*)

The southern Jew could thus adapt to his new environment, finding humor in his unexpected entrepreneurial nook in a society that was ideologically divided into black and white.<sup>56</sup>

Even with the upsurge in antisemitism and temple bombings in the South during the civil rights era, humor and irony still had their place in imagined encounters between the Jew and the color line.<sup>57</sup> In a comedy routine from the mid-1960s, Woody Allen describes a near-death experience he had in the Deep South:

I was down South once, and I was invited to a costume party . . . and I figure, what the hell, it's Halloween, I'll go as a ghost. I take a sheet off the bed and I throw it over my head, and I go to the party. And you have to get the picture, I'm walking down the street in a deep southern town, I have a white sheet over my head, and a car pulls up and three guys with white sheets say "Get in." So I figure there's guys going to the party, as ghosts, and I get into the car, and I see we're not going to the party, and I tell them. And they say

“well, we have to go pick up the Grand Dragon.” All of a sudden it hits me, down South, white sheets, the Grand Dragon, I put two and two together. I figure there’s a guy going to the party dressed as a dragon. All of a sudden a big guy enters the car, and I’m sitting there between four Klansmen, four big-armed men, and the door’s locked, and I’m petrified, I’m trying to pass desperately, y’know, I’m saying “y’all” and “grits,” you know, I must have said “grits” fifty times. They ask me a question, and I say “oh, grits, grits.” . . . And they drive me to an empty field, and I gave myself away, ‘cause they asked for donations, and everybody there gave cash. When it came to me, I said “I pledge fifty dollars.” They knew immediately. They took my hood off and threw a rope around my neck, and they decided to hang me. . . . And I spoke to them, and I was really eloquent: I said “Fellas, this country can’t survive, unless we love one another regardless of race, creed, or color.” And they were so moved by my words, not only did they cut me down and let me go, but that night I sold them two thousand dollars worth of Israel Bonds.<sup>58</sup>

Allen, who would become an emblematic New York Jew in the 1970s, offers an absurd narrative of how a hapless Jew can get entrapped in the racist world of the mythic South. Yet through his use of stereotype, Allen reveals a great deal about American Jewish identity. For one, the southerner and the Jew are peripheral to each other's consciousness, and even when they cross paths their mutual ignorance persists: Allen does not understand the implications of donning a white sheet in Dixie, while the Klansmen have no reason to take him for anything other than white until he slips up and betrays a classic Jewish stereotype — cheapness. He can no longer pass for white and must suffer the fate of one who has racially defiled nativist America. But through eloquence, chutzpah, and entrepreneurialism (which are also Jewish stereotypes), he works out a deal with his tormentors, one that is mutually beneficial to them and to Israel. The Jew can carve out a space for himself in the South, but a cloud of uncertainty always hovers over him in this unfamiliar environment.

In such examples the Jew's ambiguity is defined against the backdrop of Dixie's biracial ideology, even though its eternal victim, the African American, remains unmentioned. Yet the black man's implied presence is critical, for it underscores the situational contingency of the Jew's inclusion. Understanding what it means to be an outsider who can pass for an insider, Jewish humorists have used their wit to attack segregation and the persistence of southern racism in the post-World War II era. And nobody did so with greater frequency and diligence than Harry Golden.

Born in 1902 in a Galician shtetl in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Harry Golden, né Herschel Goldhirsch, came to New York with his family before his third birthday.<sup>59</sup> If his childhood and youth on the Lower East Side resembled that of the typical eastern European Jewish immigrant, his decision to settle in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1941 broke with convention. The following year he launched a tabloid, the *Carolina Israelite*, which, in the words of Whitfield, "was a remarkable solo act, a bold effort to liberate its southern white readers from the inertia of tradition."<sup>60</sup> Golden used his newspaper to attack segregation and all

forms of bigotry, including antisemitism, while simultaneously expressing his commitment to the Jewish people, the South, and universal human rights. He was atypical, insofar as his identity stemmed from three distinct vantage points: an inherited collective memory of life in the shtetl; a childhood spent immersed in the Jewish culture of New York; and transplantation as a northern intellectual living in the South just as the horrors of the Holocaust were becoming known and the Jim Crow era raised its violent specter.<sup>61</sup>

Golden's most famous piece is undoubtedly "The Vertical Negro Plan," published in 1956, after many southern states resisted implementing desegregation. Golden pointed out that segregation existed only when southerners sat down: the white man seemed to have no issue with standing up alongside the black man—in line at the grocery store and in the banks for instance. Golden proposed a "logical" solution: the removal of each and every seat from Dixie—from the buses, the schools, and the lunch counters. Racial integration would become the norm, since the "vertical Negro" already mixed freely with the vertical white man.<sup>62</sup>

Posterity has canonized "The Vertical Negro Plan" as Golden's quintessential polemic against segregation. But he made many other proposals.<sup>63</sup> His "White Baby Plan" called for the creation of rent-a-white-baby cooperatives (and then factories to manufacture white dolls) so black women could enter white-only movie theaters, from which they were barred unless accompanying a Caucasian child in their care.<sup>64</sup> His "Turban Plan," illustrated how racial boundaries could be transcended through clothing, citing the case of a "Negro reporter who . . . visited a half-dozen Southern cities wearing a turban" where he was taken for an exotic foreigner and thus "received in fancy hotels on a basis of fellowship with leading citizens."<sup>65</sup> Producing millions of turbans for black men and saris for black women would end segregation and revive the faltering southern textile industry.

If such proposals negated segregation through minor adjustments to everyday life, others demonstrated the utter impracticality of Jim Crow. In "The Negro Maid and Protocol,"

Golden revealed the complexities involved in driving with black domestics. Tradition dictated that a black maid must sit in the front seat, since "the back seat of the car is reserved for guests and friends of the family." But it was not so simple, Golden argued:

[It] doesn't look exactly right to be seated next to a Negro girl. The problem is solved by putting all the children in the car when the driver leaves in the morning. . . . But what if there are no children? A family cannot be expected to propagate simply to drive the domestic to work. And what if instead of one domestic, there are two? This is a real problem: three people can't sit in the front or that's real integration. And if the two domestics sit in the back, then . . . [the white] driver looks like a chauffeur.<sup>66</sup>

Segregation could also complicate a homogenously white milieu. In "We Are Color-Happy," Golden described how the child of a newly arrived family in Dunn, North Carolina, was chased out of school because "she looks like a Negro." The principal advised the parents to keep the child at home until the hysterical residents could be convinced she merely had a dark complexion. But the logic behind color-coding society, Golden insisted, necessitated a more comprehensive solution:

[The] school boards should make provision for separate classes for those children who have been tanned by the sun as well as special classes for those who are naturally dark. We will have the peaches-and-cream-complexion in one room, the ruddy in another, the milk-white in still a third and the swarthy in a fourth. This means more work for teachers as well as a whole new battery of color experts to determine the exact skin shade, and we will move children from room to room as the color changes with the seasons. Families might also have to be separated.<sup>67</sup>

And it was not just families that were affected, as Golden realized upon visiting a pet cemetery in Georgia where "a black dog owned by a white man was somewhat curiously buried in the white-dog section; a white-dog owned by a Negro was even more curiously buried in the colored-dog section."<sup>68</sup> Dixie's division by color was eternal and universal, transcending time, space, and species.

*Harry Golden in front of his home/office, Charlotte, North Carolina.  
The historical marker, from the early 1970s, commemorates his achievements.  
(Courtesy of Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC–Charlotte.)*

In the tradition of the Talmudic sages who had scrutinized the minutia of Judaic law, dissecting every possible scenario and seeming contradiction, Harry Golden exhaustively deconstructed segregation by taking its fundamental premises to their illogical conclusions. But the rabbis of yesteryear had engaged in such mental gymnastics to prove the immutability and perfection of *Halacha*, whereas Golden employed the dialectics of his ancestors to expose the entrenched color line of Dixie as archaic and defective. Through a traditional Jewish practice, Golden debated, deflated, and linguistically decimated Jim Crow, a tenacious but crumbling adversary.

Although Golden did not mention his own Jewishness in these pieces he was willing to deploy Judaism (and by implication the ghost of antisemitism) as a rhetorical strategy to undermine bigotry. Golden offered his "Plan for White Citizens" to solve the dilemma of church integration, which was opposed by various white citizens' councils in the South. His proposal was straightforward: the obstinate defenders of segregation should simply convert to Judaism en masse. That racial boundaries would be preserved, Golden was certain:

There is little likelihood of any appreciable number of Negroes ever going to shul. Every day when the sun goes down you'll have yourself a nice compact community. You'll never have to worry about Negroes again, and you'll even have yourselves your own country clubs, swimming pools, rummage sales, and book reviews.<sup>69</sup>

The more ludicrous his proposals, the more insight they offer into the constellation of race relations in the Jim Crow South. By throwing the Jews into the mix, Golden problematized the conception of the South as a biracial society. Would a southern white Christian converting to Judaism cease to be white? Would a synagogue filled with "Semitic" Jews and gentile-converts but no African Americans be a white institution? While such implied questions seem absurd on the surface, they suggest that race and religion were complex categories that often intersected in problematic ways. The meaning of "black," "white," "Christian," and "Jew" (and the boundaries between them) were not immanent, but contingent on their social and political contexts.<sup>70</sup>

Golden's ironic subversion of social convention from the margins is a common tactic in Jewish humor, which is why Borat's encounter with the Magnolia Mansion Dining Society can be viewed through a Jewish lens. Borat is an alien element of uncertain origins testing the limits of southern gentility, and he is ultimately accepted despite his overwhelming lack of etiquette, despite bringing his feces to the dinner table. But he is accepted because he can pass for white, or rather, because he can "learn the ways of whiteness," as Karen Brodtkin describes the process by which Jews became Caucasians in the 1950s.<sup>71</sup> As *Borat* takes place

in post-9/11 America, the Other of uncertain origin is no longer the Jew, but the Muslim, or rather the peoples of the Middle East and Central Asia whose foreignness is usually seen as a matter of culture rather than biology.<sup>72</sup> Invited as a special guest to a rodeo in Salem, Virginia, Borat, clad in a cowboy outfit prominently bearing stars and stripes, gets some “sensible” advice on integration from Bobby Rowe, the general manager:

Of course every picture that we get back from the terrorists or anything else, the Muslims, they look like you, black hair and a black moustache. Shave that dadgum moustache off, so you’re not so conspicuous, so you look like maybe an Italian or something’. . . . This thing gets over with and when we win it and kick the butts over there and all of them son of a butts hangin’ from the gallows, by that time you will have proven yourself and they’ll understand and you’ll be accepted.<sup>73</sup>

As an eager white in the making, Borat is granted conditional acceptance, and he is invited to open the rodeo by singing the American national anthem, a way for him to prove his worthiness for inclusion. But as soon as he is welcomed Borat pushes the boundaries of tolerance too far. At the rodeo he proceeds to mock America’s sacred canon by singing his invented version of Kazakhstan’s national anthem to the tune of the *Star Spangled Banner*. He is booed offstage and removed from the premises. In Atlanta, Borat ironically crosses the color line after meeting some African Americans on Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard in a rough neighborhood. They have a pleasant encounter and his new friends teach him how to dress and talk like a black man. But trouble ensues when Borat walks up to the reception in an upscale hotel and in his new blackened persona asks for a room:

What’s up with it, Vanilla Face? Me and my homie Azamat just parked our slab outside. We’re looking for somewhere to post up our black asses for the night. So, uh, bang bang, skeet skeet, nigga. We just a couple of pimps, no hoes.<sup>74</sup>

Borat is told to leave immediately with security threatening to call the cops. He has defiled racial purity through language corruption. He can pass for white until he takes on the guise of the Other, the African American. Much like his removal from the

Magnolia Mansion Dining Society, his conditional whiteness is revoked after he challenges the color line of the mythic South. Through trickery and linguistic manipulation Borat inveigles his way in, only to flagrantly subvert the ineffaceable social conventions of Dixie.<sup>75</sup>

*Haunted by Jesus, Our Landsman*

The comical Jew's sardonic exploitation of the mythic South is multifaceted, and the legacy of racial ambiguity is only part of the picture. Dixie is stereotyped as the Bible Belt, a land of Christian fundamentalism, often juxtaposed to its antithesis, New York, a multiethnic land of theological pluralism and, far worse, atheism. Religion, as we have seen, often fed into racial discourse in America and the two are not easily disentangled. But the historically unique relationship between Judaism and Christianity shaped Jewish self-consciousness and the ascription of otherness onto the Jews by Christians, long before the birth of our modern conception of race. The Jews of medieval Europe were branded as deicides, the slayers of the Lord Jesus, an act for which every Jew, past, present, and future, was culpable. At moments of heightened tensions, the Jews were accused of Host desecration, ritual murder, sorcery, well poisoning, and a litany of other blasphemous transgressions.<sup>76</sup> But the emergence of Protestantism engendered a gradual shift in the attitude toward the Jews.<sup>77</sup> Certain denominations embraced philosemitism, a desire to understand the Jews as the people of the Old Testament, carriers of traditions and sacred knowledge tied to the origins of Christianity. By the mid-twentieth century some evangelical Christian groups particularly in the American South came to believe that the Jews will play an integral role in the Second Coming, that the Children of Israel's return to Zion will precipitate the end of time. Kindness rather than violence toward Jews will hasten the reign of Christ.<sup>78</sup>

But antisemitism and philosemitism are two sides of the same coin. Philosemitism does not imply the elimination of Christian antisemitism's *raison d'être*, for they are both rooted in an obsession with the Jew as scriptural object, uniquely tied to divine revelation. Both phenomena are instances of what Zygmunt Bau-

man calls "allosemitism . . . the practice of setting the Jews apart as people radically different from all others, needing separate concepts to describe and comprehend them and special treatment in all or most social intercourse."<sup>79</sup> The Jews are the original Israel who forfeited their chosenness upon their rejection of Jesus, but as the progenitors of their divinely elected successors (and the Jewish messiah their Christian successors deified), the Jews are by definition a singular theological artifact, whether condemned, admired, or subject to intense curiosity. The normalization of the Jew is impossible in a world governed by Christian theology.

In the mythic South, Christian theology reigns supreme. Harry Golden describes the philosemitism of the Bible Belt, imagining the warm welcome and awe that awaited the lone Jewish peddlers who ventured into rural Dixie of yesteryear:

In small towns and rural communities where probably no one had ever seen a Jew before, the peddler was the "living witness" of biblical truth, and many people were particularly anxious to have him as a lodger for the night. The peddler himself may not have been aware of it, but for these Fundamentalist Protestants he bore identity with Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the Second Coming.<sup>80</sup>

Scripture is eternal in Dixie, and it continued to guide its inhabitants well into the twentieth century, often with humorous results. With obvious delight Golden relates the following incident:

On the occasion of Israel's first anniversary in 1949, Governor Olin Johnston of South Carolina stood before a Jewish audience and quoted from Ezekiel how God gave the Holy Land to the Jews. Lowering his voice, the governor said, "Of course, now that Israel has become a state, I shall be sorry to see many of my friends leaving South Carolina."<sup>81</sup>

The Jew was welcome in the South, but the end of exile meant he could now go home, for the southern Protestant viewed the Jew through a biblical lens, as the biblical past was very much the present. Accordingly, the Jews in the South remained ambivalent about the Christians, suspecting that at best they do not understand the Jews and at worst their kindly overtures were

dictated by ulterior motives. As a youngster, Evans was warned to "be especially careful of the *goyim*. . . . Converting a Jew is a special blessing for them."<sup>82</sup> And indeed, Evans was uniquely chosen among the chosen people of Durham, North Carolina, which he discovered when his father was elected mayor in 1951:

Once he was elected, I became the target of a number of conversion efforts by several oddballs in town who firmly believed that I was the key to the Second Coming; converting the son of a prominent Jew, I suppose might pull out the linch pin of the Jewish community and cause all the Jews to tumble into the cauldron of Christianity.<sup>83</sup>

Similarly, Golden described how Christians tried to theologically entrap him through the universal language of music, when he was standing among a crowd on a street corner listening to a Salvation Army band playing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Golden explained how the conductor waved his baton directly at him, trying to goad him into singing a solo. "I had two alternatives," Golden wrote, "I could run away, but I am no coward; or I could sing along with him, which I did. . . . I had to sing several verses before I found the opportunity to make a graceful exit."<sup>84</sup> But Golden was an eminent public figure in Charlotte, and a rumor quickly circulated that the owner of the *Carolina Israelite* had "joined, repented, that now I was a Salvationist, and it spread from Richmond, Virginia, to Augusta, Georgia. I had reached 'Blessed Assurance.'"<sup>85</sup>

Driven by such stereotypes in an era of security, humor transforms past horror into modern irony. On *King of the Hill*, while still trying to come to terms with his mother's relationship, Hank inadvertently witnesses her having sexual intercourse with her Jewish boyfriend on the dining room table. Hank is so shocked by the incident that he instantaneously goes blind. While it may be devastating for any man to catch his mother in the act, there is an obvious subtext rooted in history, racism, and theology: at one point the camera zooms in on his mother's crucifix intermingling with her boyfriend's *chai*, worn as a pendant around his neck. In *King of the Hill's* Texas, copulation with the Jewish Other can lead to disability, a stereotype that echoes

medieval antisemitism, nineteenth-century European scientific racism, Nazi ideology, and, in the case of the South, anti-miscegenation laws segregating white from black.<sup>86</sup> In the post-World War II era, Jewish humorists have taken this pseudoscientific canard and have deployed it in their material.<sup>87</sup> They are able to do so because of their unprecedented acceptance, security, and cultural prominence. But they choose to do so because the memory of Christian antisemitism is an effective device for crafting subversive humor.

The Jewish subversion of Christianity can best be seen in the use and misuse of Christianity's most potent symbol, Jesus Christ, a cultural trope that has become a hallmark of America's most famous postwar Jewish comics, including Lenny Bruce, Joan Rivers, Larry David, and Sarah Silverman. In this area, Harry Golden was also a pioneer. In 1947 Golden was asked to review a book before the congregation of the Christ Episcopal Church of Charlotte. According to his memoirs, Golden stood up at the pulpit and stated:

Before I review this book, I have a secret to tell you folks. If Jesus put Charlotte on His itinerary for the Second Coming, I would be His contact man. This is not blasphemy. In the first place, I am a cousin. In the second place, He would need an interpreter, for He probably doesn't speak this "you-all" business. In the third place, He would want a trained reporter. He would want to know what the hell are Episcopalians.<sup>88</sup>

Jewish intellectuals had in fact been reclaiming Jesus as one of their own since the eighteenth-century *Haskalah*. Forward-looking Jewish theologians, writers, and artists had been invoking Jesus as the prototypical progressive rabbi, as a Jewish revolutionary fighting Roman tyranny, and as a symbol of Jewish suffering.<sup>89</sup> But deploying Jesus in a frivolous manner before a Christian audience was something new. And it would occur with greater frequency from the 1960s onwards and with much greater irreverence (or depending on one's perspective, blasphemy), most notoriously articulated by Lenny Bruce, who declared: "Not only did we kill him, but we're gonna kill him again when he comes back."<sup>90</sup> Golden's conjuring of Jesus as his bewildered cousin is a far cry from Bruce's celebratory mocking of deicide. Nevertheless,

Golden was engaging in an act of appropriation that trivialized Christian theology and ridiculed southern discourse, by claiming his—the Jew’s—right of ownership to the Christian messiah.<sup>91</sup> Through Jesus, the Jewish comic declares his entitlement for inclusion in a world that denied him entry; his chosenness had been unjustly revoked.

One southern Jewish entertainer who has relished invoking Jesus under a cloud of blasphemy is Kinky Friedman, a satirical country music performer, prolific mystery writer, and failed gubernatorial candidate from Texas.<sup>92</sup> Brazen and politically incorrect at every opportunity, Friedman (or “The Kinkster” as he calls himself) boasts how in 1973, his band Kinky Friedman and the Texas Jewboys “received death threats in Nacogdoches, got bomb threats in New York, and required a police escort to escape radical feminists at the University of Buffalo.”<sup>93</sup> Much of Friedman’s brash cowboy demeanor resonates with the American frontier and the Old West more than Dixie. But his focus on evangelical Christianity and racial segregation places him squarely in the mythic south. No topic is off limits in his music, and much like Lenny Bruce, Friedman smashes the boundaries of respectability through the linguistic pollution of sacred space, with Jesus, Christian fundamentalism, and Jewish identity taking center stage.

In the song “Men’s Room in L.A.,” for instance, Friedman runs into trouble in a public bathroom when he discovers there is no toilet paper, only a discarded picture of Jesus. Facing a dilemma of biblical proportions, Friedman engages in some soul searching:

I said, “Lord, what would you do,  
If you were me and I was you,  
Take a chance, save your pants or your soul?”<sup>94</sup>

Sure enough, Jesus Christ (with Ringo Starr supplying the vocals) responds to Kinky’s supplication, with some sound advice and an entreaty of his own:

Kinky, it’s Jesus here, you know that I ain’t no square.  
Well, I’ve got these pictures of me,  
I mean statues, you know they’re everywhere.

Well, I may seem I come from Liverpool,  
 And then on the other hand I may come from France,  
 But if you don't get off that toilet, well I'm just gonna have to  
 dance.<sup>95</sup>

Although it is tempting to dismiss this song as little more than toilet humor with gratuitously vulgar blasphemy, "Men's Room in L.A." actually contains a level of sophistication that must be understood through the prism of Jewish collective memory and Christian antisemitism. During the middle ages Jews were often charged with (and punished for) defiling sacred Christian objects, such as desecrating the Eucharist and urinating on crucifixes, allegedly for the diabolical purpose of reenacting the execution of Jesus.<sup>96</sup> Friedman conjures up the memory of his ancestors' persecution and turns it on its head, by reframing ostensible blasphemy as mere pragmatism. Jesus's response suggests that he, too, is somewhat puzzled by his deification and the profusion of Christian iconography bearing his likeness, when in reality he shares the same mundane concerns as a Texas Jew stuck in a bathroom without toilet paper.

Kinky Friedman's appropriation of Jesus is quite explicit in many of his writings and it is often accomplished with a Jewish twist. In a 2005 memoir he contends that his escapades merely reflect a yearning to follow in the deified Jew's footsteps:

Like Jesus, I was either cursed or blessed by being born a Jew. Impressed by Jesus at an early age, I made it a point never to get married in my adult life, never to have a home, and never to have a job. Instead, I spent much of the time traveling about the countryside with a long-haired band of men, irritating many people. Also, like Jesus, I was a big believer in resurrection. I've had to resurrect my career on at least three or four occasions.<sup>97</sup>

In avowing that he "was born in a manger, died in the saddle, and came back as a horny toad," Kinky is putting forth his own gospel, rewriting scripture from the perspective of a messianic Texan outlaw, but one who sees himself as "a Judeo-Christian with Jesus and Moses in my heart—two good Jewish boys who got in trouble with the government."<sup>98</sup>

*Kinky Friedman at Southern Methodist University, Dallas,  
October 5, 2006.*

*(Photo source: Wikipedia.org.)*

But Jewish humor's blasphemous appropriation of Jesus implies neither his rejection nor the negation of Christianity. To be sure, it is an act of theological exploitation that empowers the Jew in public at the expense of Christian orthodoxy. It allows him to triumph over the inherited memory of Judaic suffering through the contortion of stereotype and the desecration of the sacred. But it is also a recognition that Jews and Christians are eternally conjoined through a shared history. The Jew is inscribing himself into the South's social landscape on his own terms; in the name of the downtrodden he is demanding inclusion in Dixie.

Humor allows the Jew and hence Jewish culture to become core elements in the mythic South even if their presence seems incongruous. With surreal hyperbole, Harry Golden describes the establishment and immense popularity of Charlotte's lone Jewish delicatessen:

The restaurant is below a main cross-town artery called Church Street, and so it happened that this Church Street began to look like the Red Sea with wave after wave of Israelites crossing over every day for stuffed cabbage with raisin sauce, pumpernickel bread, chicken-in-the-pot, and boiled beef flanken. . . . And so at noon each day as the church chimes in this greatest of all citadels of American Protestantism peel out, "We're Marching to Zion, Beautiful Zion . . ." the Jews (and many Gentiles) keep pouring across Church Street to Izzy and Jack who are already slicing the hot pastrami.<sup>99</sup>

Jewish cuisine is the key to a cross-cultural encounter in a land where religion otherwise segregates, a point Golden underscores through his use of biblical imagery to describe the pursuit of stuffed cabbage and deli meat.

The insertion of the Jew into Dixie does not obliterate Christianity, just the hegemony of its inequitable exclusionary practices and its historic conceptualization of the Jew through scripture and folklore. And exclusion can ironically work to the detriment of the southern Christian, as suggested by the denouement of *King of the Hill*. Hank is ultimately cured of his blindness when he attends a Christian revivalist meeting, but it is his mother's Jewish boyfriend who brings him, not his family or friends. Jesus can heal but the Jew plays a fundamental role as an intermediary; he is vital to this process, and, by extension, his presence in the South is necessary.

To a greater extent than anyone else, Kinky Friedman has deployed humor to wrestle with the place of the Jew in the mythic South. His music of the 1970s and his autobiographical writings of the twenty-first century are unified across time through an irreverence that disguises his musings over serious issues: politics, racism and segregation, Christian fundamentalism, and Jewish alienation. He stakes his claim on Texas as a Jew in the very first song of his first album, *Sold American*, released in 1973, with a track titled, "We Reserve the Right to Refuse Service to You." In the following year he released what is undoubtedly his most notorious song, "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore." Both songs are profound statements about the southern Jew's identity and his ambiguous place below the Mason-Dixon Line.<sup>100</sup>

The track title “We Reserve the Right to Refuse Service to You” triggers images of Jim Crow segregation, but the man denied admission in the song is in fact Jewish:

While traveling through the Lone Star State,  
 I lost my lunch before I ate.  
 It happened in a pull-ahead café, Yahoo!  
 I felt my bones begin to crunch,  
 I saw my name on the businessman’s lunch,  
 And the neck who owned the place stepped up to say:  
 “Hey buddy, are you blind?  
 Say, partner, can’t you read the sign?  
 We reserve the right to refuse service to you,  
 Take your business back to Walgreens,  
 Have you tried your local zoo?  
 You smell just like a communist,  
 You come on through just like a Jew,  
 We reserve the right to refuse service to you.”

Having been ejected from what is supposed to be (in 1973 at least) a racially, religiously, and politically neutral space, the narrator heads over to the local temple to be among his people. But his reception is no less hostile:

Well, I walked on in to my House of God,  
 Congregation on the nod,  
 Just chosen folks are doing their weekly thing.  
 Hear, O Israel, yes indeed,  
 My book was backwards, couldn’t read,  
 But I got a good rise when I heard that Rabbi sing,  
*“Boruch atoh Adonoi,*  
 What the hell you doin’ back there boy?  
 We reserve the right to refuse services to you,  
 Your friends are all on welfare,  
 You call yourself a Jew?”

Much like his exclusion from the surrounding nativist society, the narrator is banished from Judaism because he fails to meet the community's expectations of propriety and piety, despite his yearning for inclusion in both these worlds. Not even death brings him comfort:

Well it's just my luck that God's a Texan,  
 One big sonbitchin Anglo-Saxon,  
 Some crazy kind of tall Norwegian bore.

...

"We reserve the right to refuse service to you,  
 Take your business back to Walgreens,  
 Have you tried your local zoo?  
 Our quota's filled for this year,  
 On singing Texas Jews,  
 We reserve the right to refuse service to you."

The narrator will presumably spend eternity in limbo for having the audacity (or given the context, the chutzpah) to carve out his own hybrid, and thus renegade, identity as Texan and Jew.

"We Reserve the Right to Refuse Service to You" is a sophisticated commentary on the ambiguous place of the Jew in the mythic South. Much as American Jews in an earlier era were often typecast as outsiders of uncertain origins, the narrator's whiteness is put under the microscope. His exclusion is not a product of skin color, but of cultural attributes ("You come on through just like a Jew"), seditious politics ("You smell just like a communist"), and, in the case of the hereafter, a quota system based on behavior ("singing Texas Jews"). What this implies is a system of conditional whiteness; inclusion is something to be earned. But the song's title is a deliberate reference to Jim Crow and the black man's racial (i.e. biological) exclusion. Friedman is thus problematizing the Jew's place on the color line through the unmentioned African American.

The song goes even further in its acerbic social commentary with its description of Jewish practices in the South. On the one hand, the narrator's account of the synagogue service implies that

Judaism has struck deep roots and has flourished in a land of religious tolerance. The rabbi's seamless transition from Judaic prayer to Texan street lingo ("*Boruch atoh Adonoi*, What the hell you doin' back there boy?") indicates that the Jew can become a southerner if he meets the demands of a conformist society. But Kinky Friedman and his self-described itinerant "long-haired band of men" have failed to live up to the expectations of society's gatekeepers, Jewish or otherwise.

Friedman's subsequent song, "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore," ends on a much happier note. On the surface it fits the mold of outlaw country music, replete with foul language, drinking, and a bar brawl. But it is the Jew who emerges triumphant after coming to blows with a racist, antisemitic redneck. Looking to pick a fight, the redneck turns to the Jew and declares:

They oughta send you back to Russia, boy, or New York City  
one,  
You just want to doodle a Christian girl and you killed God's on-  
ly son.

Despite its brevity, this particular stanza is packed with a litany of anti-Jewish stereotypes: deicide, sexual defilement, and contempt for New York as an un-American enclave of eastern European refuse.

The shadow of Jim Crow also hangs over the racially ambiguous Jew, as revealed by the redneck's subsequent diatribe:

You know, you don't look Jewish . . . near as I could figger,  
I had you lamped for a slightly anemic, well-dressed country  
nigger.

But this is the New South in the New World, where the ghosts of Jewish persecution are merely that—ghosts; a new era has dawned and the disparaged Jew will fight back:

Well, I hits him with everything I had right square between the  
eyes.  
I says, "I'm gonna gitcha, you son of a bitch ya, for spoutin' that  
pack of lies."

...

You could hear that honky holler as he hit that hardwood floor,  
 Lord, they sho' ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore!

Having proved himself, the tough Jew leisurely strolls out of the bar, immersed in the cheers of the adulating patrons.

At its most basic "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore" demolishes the Jewish stereotype of cowardice and passivity, commonly found in antisemitic literature and in Jewish writings of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.<sup>101</sup> The Jew can transform himself into what on the surface seems to be his antithesis, a rough-and-tumble Texan cowboy. But the song, as its title suggests, also appropriates Jesus for the Jews, only to turn around and disavow him for his obsolescence:

No, they ain't makin' Jews like Jesus anymore,  
 We don't turn the other cheek the way we done before.

The Christian messiah is a Jew and a flawed one at that. Jesus is branded as the essence of Jewish timidity, the progenitor of a martyrdom extending through the Crusades, the Russian pogroms, and the Holocaust. In claiming the right to use Jesus as he sees fit, Kinky Friedman empowers the Jew; he undermines the racism of the mythic South and negates Jewish stereotype, but he does so by exploiting the language and symbols of his erstwhile Christian oppressors.

*Rewriting Dixie through Jewish Chutzpah and Humor*

Jewish humor's encounter with Dixie is at once powerful and alluring because it is multi-faceted and unified by a common set of cultural tropes drawn from stereotype, representation, collective memory, and history. To be sure, the Jewish humorists examined here have not been driven by the same agenda: Mickey Katz wanted to entertain Jewish audiences through his Yiddish-inflected Borscht Belt shtick; Harry Golden's writings reveal a deep and serious commitment to civil rights; Kinky Friedman seeks to shock, amuse, and unmask hypocrisy through blasphemy and scandalous language; Sacha Baron Cohen seeks to shock and amuse while keeping his agenda a mystery. What they share in common is their use of Jewishness as a discursive strategy that

includes access to a rich arsenal of content and technique, which they have deployed against a southern backdrop to produce laughter.

For Friedman, Golden, Katz, Cohen, and others, Jewish humor is an instrument through which they can claim America as their own. They use humor to express their entitlement to belong by paradoxically drawing attention to the collective memory of Jewish persecution and alienation as the abandoned chosen people. They do so by manipulating language, by twisting logic, by co-opting the discourse of Dixie and then subverting it through the injection of Jewishness. As a land haunted by Jesus and the ghost of segregation, the mythic south has served as an ideal backdrop for the production of Jewish humor. It is a window into the way the Jews have negotiated their identity in the modern world, after centuries of marking themselves, and being marked by others, as a people in exile.

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## NOTES

Previous versions of this article were presented by the author at the 2011 Southern Jewish Historical Society Conference in Columbia, SC (October 2011); the Tenth Annual University of North Carolina Wilmington College Day (November 2011); and at the University Club of Montreal, Canada (February 2012).

<sup>1</sup> *Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, directed by Larry Charles (2006).

<sup>2</sup> Between 1920 and 1960 the Jews were the largest ethno-religious community in New York, and by the end of this period they numbered 2.1 million (27 percent of the total population). See Eli Lederhendler, "New York City, The Jews, and 'The Urban Experience,'" in *People of the City: Jews and the Urban Challenge*, ed. Ezra Mendelsohn (New York, 1999), 54–55. On eastern European Jews in New York, see Irving Howe's *World of Our Fathers: The Journey of East European Jews to America and the Life They Found and Made* (New York, 1976); Deborah Dash Moore, *At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews* (New York, 1981).

<sup>3</sup> On Hollywood, see Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York, 1988); Patricia Erens, *The Jew in American Cinema* (Bloomington, 1984). On

the Catskills, see Lawrence J. Epstein, *The Haunted Smile: The Story of Jewish Comedians in America* (New York, 2001), chap. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Eliza R. L. McGraw, *Two Covenants: Representations of Southern Jewishness* (Baton Rouge, 2005), 166.

<sup>5</sup> Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, "Introduction: Jewish Roots in Southern Soil," in *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Waltham, MA, 2006), 2.

<sup>6</sup> Mark K. Bauman, "Introduction: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark K. Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 1. Bryan Edward Stone argues that historians of American Jewry have traditionally examined the American Jewish experience as the experience of New York Jews. See Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2010), 8.

<sup>7</sup> See Gary P. Zola, "Why Study Southern Jewish History?" *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 1–21.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry," in *Dixie Diaspora*, ed. Bauman, 427.

<sup>9</sup> Ferris and Greenberg, "Introduction," 17. Ferris and Greenberg draw their data from the 2002 edition of the *American Jewish Year Book*.

<sup>10</sup> Texas is a frontier state that can be understood as southern, western, or southwestern, depending on the context. See Stone, *Chosen Folks*, 15 and chap. 4. Indeed, many of Texas's stereotypical attributes—cowboys, the open range, audacity—suggest the Old West rather than the South. But from the perspective of Jewish humor, as will become clear in this essay, representations of Texas sufficiently overlap with those of Dixie to warrant its inclusion. This is particularly true with Kinky Friedman who portrays himself as a Texan Jew surrounded by Christian fundamentalism and the ghost of Jim Crow.

<sup>11</sup> *King of the Hill*, "The Unbearable Blindness of Laying," episode no. 23, December 21, 1997, Fox Network. Carl Reiner, who has made a pivotal contribution to the development of Jewish humor in America, provides Gary Kasner's voice.

<sup>12</sup> "Jewish Texans Commemorate Holocaust . . . Texas-Style!," *The Onion* (February 12, 1997), accessed December 1, 2011, <http://www.theonion.com/articles/jewish-texans-commemorate-holocaust-texasstyle,1663/>. [Editor's note: SJH was unable to secure the rights to reproduce the photo that accompanied the article.] Stone points out that having a barbecue to commemorate the Holocaust is the supreme example of poor taste, as it evokes the ovens and crematoria of the Nazi extermination camps. Stone, *Chosen Folks*, 10.

<sup>13</sup> "Jewish Texans Commemorate Holocaust . . . Texas-Style!"

<sup>14</sup> On Mickey Katz's music, see his autobiography, *Papa, Play for Me: The Hilarious, Heartwarming Autobiography of Comedian and Bandleader Mickey Katz*, as told to Hannibal Coons, with an Introduction by Joel Grey (New York, 1977). See also Josh Kun, "The Yiddish Are Coming: Mickey Katz, Antic-Semitism [sic], and the Sound of Jewish Difference," *American Jewish History* 87 (December 1999): 343–374; Donald Weber, "Taking Jewish American Popular Culture Seriously: The Yinglish Worlds of Gertrude Berg, Milton

Berle, and Mickey Katz," *Jewish Social Studies* 5 (Fall 1998–Winter 1999): 124–153. The growth of Jewish culture and the dissipation of antisemitism in post-World War II America is discussed below.

<sup>15</sup> Most of Katz's recordings are collected and available on the Internet through the Florida Atlanta University Judaica Sound Archive, accessed August 1, 2012, <http://faujsa.fau.edu>, and the Dartmouth Jewish Sound Archive, accessed December 1, 2011, <http://djsa.dartmouth.edu/>.

<sup>16</sup> On Duvid Crockett, see Katz, *Papa, Play for Me*, 131; Kun, "The Yiddish Are Coming," 371–372.

<sup>17</sup> Scholars from many disciplines have produced a large body of literature on representations of the South. They have demonstrated that the dominant images of Dixie have varied across time and media, including fiction, film, television, and music, although certain underlying themes have persisted. See, for instance, Jack Temple Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie* (Baton Rouge, 1978); Karl G. Heider, ed., *Images of the South: Constructing a Regional Culture on Film and Video* (Athens, GA, 1993); Edward D. C. Campbell, Jr., *The Celluloid South* (Knoxville, TN, 1981); Karen L. Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie: How the South Was Created in American Popular Culture* (Chapel Hill, 2011); Allison Graham, *Framing the South: Hollywood, Television, and Race during the Civil Rights Struggle* (Baltimore, 2001); John Shelton Reed, *Minding the South* (Columbia, SC, 2003); Marsha G. McGee, "Prime Time Dixie: Television's View of a 'Simple' South," *Journal of American Culture* 6 (Fall 1983): 100–109.

<sup>18</sup> See especially Ethelyn G. Orso, "Paradise Lost: Louisiana as a Microcosm of the South in Fictional and Documentary Films," in *Images of the South*, ed. Heider, 17–22; Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, chap. 5; Graham, *Framing the South*; McGee, "Prime Time Dixie."

<sup>19</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, "Is it True What They Sing about Dixie," *Southern Cultures* 8 (Summer 2002), 15. See also Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, chap. 1; Kenneth Aaron Kanter, *The Jews of Tin Pan Alley* (New York, 1982).

<sup>20</sup> See especially Campbell, *Celluloid South*, chaps. 3–4.

<sup>21</sup> Cox, *Dreaming of Dixie*, 164–166; Whitfield, "Is it True What They Sing about Dixie," 23–26.

<sup>22</sup> As Jack Temple Kirby points out, "In the second half of the nineteenth century the pervasive image of the American South was negative. . . . The South was brutal and backward, un-American." See Kirby, *Media-Made Dixie*, 1. Perhaps the most notoriously disdainful portrayal of the South is H. L. Mencken's, "The Sahara of the Bozart," originally published in 1917. Mencken describes the South as a formerly great civilization that has descended into "Baptist and Methodist barbarism . . . [because] the vast hemorrhage of the Civil War half exterminated and wholly paralyzed the old aristocracy, and so left the land to the harsh mercies of the poor white trash, now its masters." H. L. Mencken, "The Sahara of the Bozart," in *The American Scene: A Reader*, ed. Huntington Cairns (New York, 1965), 158, 161.

<sup>23</sup> Tom Lehrer performs "I Wanna Go Back to Dixie" on Lehrer's first album, *Songs by Tom Lehrer* recorded January 22, 1953, Lehrer Records TLP-1, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm. Born into and

raised in a New York Jewish family, Lehrer should be regarded as an important link in the genealogy of Jewish performers of satirical music, which includes Mickey Katz, Allan Sherman, and Kinky Friedman. Lehrer's music is considerably more subversive than that of his contemporaries, Katz and Sherman, with irreverent songs like "The Vatican Rag" placing him in the blasphemous company of Lenny Bruce and, more recently, Sarah Silverman. However there is nothing explicitly Jewish in either his melodies or his lyrics. See Gerald Nachman, *Seriously Funny: The Rebel Comedians of the 1950s and 1960s* (New York, 2003), 123–150; Tom Lehrer, *Too Many Songs by Tom Lehrer with Not Enough Drawings by Ronald Searle* (New York, 1981); Tom Lehrer, *Tomfoolery: The Words and Music of Tom Lehrer* (New York, 1986).

<sup>24</sup> "Southern Man" by Neil Young, appeared on Neil Young's album *After the Gold Rush*, released August 1970, Reprise Records RS 6383, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm.

<sup>25</sup> Reed, *Minding the South*, 197.

<sup>26</sup> The comedian Lenny Bruce famously quipped, "If you live in New York or any other big city, you are Jewish. It doesn't matter even if you're Catholic; if you live in New York, you're Jewish." Lenny Bruce, *How to Talk Dirty and Influence People: An Autobiography by Lenny Bruce* (New York, 1992), 5. John Shelton Reed maintains that southerners have "taken a dim view of New York for serving as the great reception center and repository for foreign immigration. . . . And what many of us really dislike about Northerners, and thus loathe in spades about New Yorkers, is their view of Southerners as yokels—if not as *Deliverance*-style Neanderthals." See Reed, *Minding the South*, 245. Other scholars insist that southerners have held a more ambiguous attitude toward New York. See, for instance, Leonard Rogoff, "Harry Golden, New Yorker: I ♥ NC," *Southern Jewish History* 11 (2008): 41–64. Rogoff describes very ambiguous reactions to New York. On the relationship between Jews and modernity, see Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton, 2004).

<sup>27</sup> Emanuel S. Goldsmith, "Sholom Aleichem's Humor of Affirmation and Survival," in *Semites and Stereotypes: Characteristics of Jewish Humor*, ed. Avner Ziv and Anat Zajdman (Westport, CT, 1993), 13–14; Avner Ziv, "Psycho-Social Aspects of Jewish Humor in Israel and in the Diaspora," in *Jewish Humor*, ed. Avner Ziv (Tel Aviv, 1986), 40–55; Sarah Blacher Cohen, "Introduction: The Varieties of Jewish Humor," in *Jewish Wry: Essays on Jewish Humor*, ed. Sarah Blacher Cohen (Bloomington, IN, 1987), 1–15. See also Jarrod Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers: Russia's Jews and the Myth of Old Odessa* (Bloomington, IN, 2011), 13–17.

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, "Introduction," 1.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Michael Wex, *Born to Kvetch: Yiddish Language and Culture in all its Moods* (New York, 2005), 6.

<sup>31</sup> Given that Jewish humor emerged in the diaspora and is linked to the concept of exile, humor in Israel—the Jewish state built upon the ideology of "the negation of the diaspora"—has evolved on a different trajectory. See Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Humor: What the Best Jewish Jokes Say about the Jews* (New York, 1992), chap. 8.

<sup>32</sup> Self-deprecation is considered to be one of the defining elements of Jewish humor. Freud was probably the first to have pointed this out, in 1905, writing that "I do not know whether there are many other instances of a people making fun to such a degree of its own character" as the Jews. Sigmund Freud, *Jokes and their Relations to the Unconscious*, trans. James Strachey (New York, 1960), 133.

<sup>33</sup> On Jewish logic and Talmudic hairsplitting, see Telushkin, *Jewish Humor*, chap. 2; Theodor Reik, *Jewish Wit* (New York, 1962), 115–119; Wex, *Born to Kvetch*, 12–13; Arthur Asa Berger, *The Genius of the Jewish Joke* (Northdale, NJ, 1997), 72; Simcha Weinstein, *Shtick Shift: Jewish Humor in the 21st Century* (Fort Lee, NJ, 2008), 88–89.

<sup>34</sup> The exemplary tricksters in traditional Yiddish folklore are the *shadchen* and the *schnorrer*. Both characters use linguistic manipulation and seemingly flawed logic to ensnare their hapless victims into elaborate schemes. See Nathan Ausubel, ed., *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore: Stories, Traditions, Legends, Humor, Wisdom and Folk Songs of the Jewish People* (New York, 1948), 267–286, 413–420; Israel Zangwill, *The King of the Schnorrers* (Hamden, CT, 1953). On the *schnorrer* in Soviet Jewish culture, see Tanny, *City of Rogues and Schnorrers*, chap. 3. The most famous trickster in Jewish folklore is Hershele Ostropolyer, a real eighteenth-century Jew who lived in Ukraine. See Ausubel, *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, 304–319; M. Stern, *Hershele Ostropoler un Motke Khab"d: zeyere anekdoten, vitsen, stsenes un shtukes nay-bearbeytet* [translation: "Hershele Ostropolyer and Motke Khabad: Their Jokes, Tricks, Vignettes and Sketches, newly revised," trans. David S. Braun.] (New York, 1900).

<sup>35</sup> There are countless studies on Jewish humor, both academic and popular, as well as hundreds of collections of Jewish jokes. Most of these works devote the bulk of their attention to Jewish humor in America. By far the most cited is William Novak and Moshe Waldoks, *The Big Book of Jewish Humor* (New York, 1981). For a detailed overview of Jewish comics in twentieth-century America, see Epstein, *Haunted Smile*. Stephen J. Whitfield has published two insightful essays that open up new avenues for research: "The Distinctiveness of American Jewish Humor," *Modern Judaism* 6 (October 1986): 245–260; and "Towards an Appreciation of American Jewish Humor," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 4 (March 2005): 33–48. But a definitive study on Jewish humor in America that is at once historical, analytical, and comprehensive has yet to be written.

<sup>36</sup> See, for instance, Robert Chazan, *Medieval Stereotypes and Modern Antisemitism* (Berkeley, CA, 1997); Joshua Trachtenberg, *The Devil and the Jews: The Medieval Conception of the Jew and its Relation to Modern Antisemitism* (Cleveland, 1961); Bernard Glassman, *Anti-Semitic Stereotypes Without Jews: Images of the Jews in England, 1290–1700* (Detroit, 1975); R. Po-Chia Hsia, "The Usurious Jew: Economic Structure and Religious Representations in an Anti-Semitic Discourse," in *In and Out of the Ghetto: Jewish-Gentile Relations in Late Medieval and Early Modern Germany*, ed. R. Po-Chia Hsia and Hartmut Lehmann (Cambridge, UK, 1995).

<sup>37</sup> There is a rich historiography on the "whiteness" of non-Anglo-Saxon European immigrants in America—the Irish, the Jews, the Poles, the Italians, and others. On the Jews specifically, see Karen Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says about Race*

in America (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998); Michael Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot* (Berkeley, CA, 1996); Leonard Rogoff, "Is the Jew White? The Racial Place of the Southern Jew," in *Dixie Diaspora*, ed. Bauman, 390–426; Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006). On the whiteness of Jewish immigrants in the context of other racially ambiguous immigrants, see Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color: European Immigrants and the Alchemy of Race* (Cambridge, MA, 1998); David R. Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness: How America's Immigrants Became White: The Strange Journey from Ellis Island to the Suburbs* (New York, 2005). For a critique of the whiteness historiography as it pertains to Jews, see Andrew R. Heinze, "Is It 'Cos I's Black?" *Jews and the Whiteness Problem* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2007); Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind* (New York, 1998), 3–17.

<sup>38</sup> Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 40.

<sup>39</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 35.

<sup>40</sup> From the 1880s until the imposition of immigration quotas in the early 1920s, approximately twenty-three million Europeans, mostly from the south and east of the continent, came to the United States. Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 27.

<sup>41</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 12, 37. According to Matthew Frye Jacobson, it was only in the mid-twentieth century that the term "Caucasian" became the authoritative inclusive category used to designate the racially ambiguous white peoples of Europe, such as the Celts, Jews, and Italians. Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 94.

<sup>42</sup> Goldstein, *Price of Whiteness*, 1.

<sup>43</sup> Roediger, *Working Toward Whiteness*, 136; Jacobson, *Whiteness of a Different Color*, 95–96; Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 3.

<sup>44</sup> Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 141–142; Rogin, *Blackface, White Noise*, 265; Leonard Dinnerstein, "Anti-Semitism Exposed and Attacked, 1945–1950," *American Jewish History* 71 (September 1981): 139–149.

<sup>45</sup> Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 140. According to one study conducted among Jews in the 1990s, 75 percent of respondents believed that antisemitism remained a significant problem in the United States. Stephen J. Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture* (Hanover, NH, 1999), 234. Such perceptions belie the incontestable evidence of Jewish acceptance, inclusion, and success in America. But the Jewish sense of vulnerability is a product of memory and the global context of Jewish identity, with the Holocaust, the persecution of Soviet Jewry, and vociferous hostility toward Israel shaping American Jewish consciousness. On the Holocaust, see Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American life* (New York, 1999); Hasia R. Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love: American Jews and the Myth of Silence after the Holocaust, 1945–1962* (New York, 2009). Gary Tobin's *Jewish Perceptions of Antisemitism* (New York, 1988) is a detailed sociological analysis of how and why American Jews continued to be wary of antisemitism in the late twentieth century. Completed in the 1980s, his study is useful for the historian because it captures a snapshot of beliefs before the liberation of Soviet Jewry, the burgeoning of post-Intifada anti-Zionism, and the national consecration of Holocaust memory in the 1990s.

<sup>46</sup> Forman, *Blacks*, 9–10, 30–33; Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton, 2006), 250–252. See also Hasia R. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935* (Westport, CT, 1977).

<sup>47</sup> Whitfield, *In Search of American Jewish Culture*, 51–52, 60; Erens, *Jew in American Cinema*, 199. In 1979 *Time* estimated that 80 percent of professional comics in America were Jewish, even though Jews only constituted 3 percent of the population. Epstein, *Haunted Smile*, x.

<sup>48</sup> Howe, *World of Our Fathers*, 567–568. In *Blackface, White Noise*, Michael Rogin argues that Jewish entertainers donned blackface—a popular form of entertainment in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—as a means of demonstrating their whiteness. By engaging in this white cultural practice, Jewish entertainers reinforced the color line, negated their own ambiguity, and claimed the right for inclusion and mobility in the dominant Anglo-Saxon society. Rogin’s provocative thesis has not gone unchallenged. See in particular Heinze, “Is It ‘Cos I’s Black?”; Stephen J. Whitfield, “Black Like Us,” *Jewish History* 22 (2008): 353–371. On Jewish comics in the pre-World War II era, see Epstein, *Haunted Smile*, chaps. 2–4.

<sup>49</sup> Although there were numerous films with Jewish themes in the 1920s, the quantity declined significantly by the mid-1930s, a trend that lasted until the late 1950s. See Erens, *Jew in American Cinema*, 135–139, 198–199; Epstein, *Haunted Smile*, 98.

<sup>50</sup> On Lenny Bruce, see Nachman, *Seriously Funny*, 389–435; Epstein, *Haunted Smile*, chap. 7; Albert Goldman and Lawrence Schiller, *Ladies and Gentlemen – Lenny Bruce!!* (New York, 1974).

<sup>51</sup> Bruce, *How to Talk Dirty*, 5.

<sup>52</sup> Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of the Jews in The South*, rev. ed. (New York, 1997), 38.

<sup>53</sup> Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*, 212; Stone, *Chosen Folks*, chap. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Soupy Sales, *Soupy Sez! My Zany Life and Times* (New York, 2001), 15.

<sup>55</sup> Evans, *Provincials*, 219.

<sup>56</sup> That humor is often drawn from reality is revealed in Stone’s history of the Jews in Texas. According to Stone, when “the Klan first marched in Houston in 1921, they wore robes and hoods bought from a Jewish manufacturer.” Stone, *Chosen Folks*, 130.

<sup>57</sup> On the resurgence of antisemitism in the South during the late 1950s, see Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001), chap. 3.

<sup>58</sup> Woody Allen, *Standup Comic, 1964–1968* (Rhino, CA, 1999).

<sup>59</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, “The ‘Golden’ Era of Civil Rights: Consequences of *The Carolina Israelite*,” *Southern Cultures* 14 (Fall 2008), 30; Harry Golden, *The Right Time: An Autobiography by Harry Golden* (New York, 1969), 19–20.

<sup>60</sup> Whitfield, “‘Golden’ Era of Civil Rights,” 29.

<sup>61</sup> For an analysis of Harry Golden’s multi-faceted identity, see Rogoff, “Harry Golden: I ♥ NC.”

<sup>62</sup> Harry Golden, "The Vertical Negro Plan," in *Only in America* (Cleveland, 1958), 121-123.

<sup>63</sup> For a summary of Golden's plans, see Clarence W. Thomas, *The Serious Humor of Harry Golden* (Lanham, MD, 1997), 25-34.

<sup>64</sup> Harry Golden, "How to Solve the Segregation Problem: The White Baby Plan," *Carolina Israelite*, March/April, 1957.

<sup>65</sup> Harry Golden, "Solve 'Race' Problem and Revive Textiles," *Carolina Israelite*, August, 1958; Harry Golden, "The Turban Plan," in *You're Entitled* (Cleveland, 1962), 200-202.

<sup>66</sup> Harry Golden, "The Negro Maid and Protocol," *Carolina Israelite*, January/February, 1960.

<sup>67</sup> Harry Golden, "We Are Color-Happy," *Carolina Israelite*, September/October, 1960.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Golden, "Cemetery Segregation," in *So Long as You're Healthy (Abee Gezundt)* (New York, 1970), 151-152.

<sup>69</sup> Harry Golden, "A Plan for White Citizens," in *Only in America*, 139.

<sup>70</sup> In another piece Golden describes southern Christianity's seemingly paradoxical approach to the Jew: on the one hand Golden was receiving numerous pamphlets urging him to convert; on the other hand he was not allowed to join the Downtown Luncheon Club because he was Jewish. "If they don't want me for one hour at the Luncheon Club," Golden wrote with ironic bemusement, "why should they seek my companionship in heaven through all eternity?" Golden, "The Downtown Luncheon Club is More Exclusive than Heaven," in *Only in America*, 151.

<sup>71</sup> Brodtkin, *How Jews Became White Folks*, 10.

<sup>72</sup> On the place of Arabs, Muslims, and Middle Easterners in American racial discourse, see John Tehranian, *Whitewashed: America's Middle Eastern Minority* (New York, 2009); Nathaniel Deutch, *Inventing America's 'Worst Family': Eugenics, Islam, and the Rise and Fall of the Tribe of Ishmael* (Berkeley, CA, 2009); Andrew Shyrock, "The Moral Analogies of Race: Arab American Identity, Color Politics, and the Limits of Racialized Citizenship"; Sawzan Abdulrahim "'Whiteness' and the Arab immigrant Experience." Both essays can be found in *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Citizens to Visible Subjects*, ed. Amaney Jamal and Nadine Naber (Syracuse, NY, 2008).

<sup>73</sup> *Borat*. The rodeo incident was authentic insofar as the management and the audience were led to believe that an immigrant from the former Soviet Union was performing for them in order to learn about America. Nobody was informed that a British comedian was pulling a stunt for a satirical film. Laurence Hammack, "Rodeo in Salem gets unexpected song rendition," *Roanoke Times*, Online, January 9, 2005, accessed December 1, 2011, <http://www.roanoke.com/news/roanoke/16655.html>. Sacha Baron Cohen's appearance in Salem is curious, given that Virginia is not the archetypal setting for a rodeo. A state on the American frontier, such as Texas, would have been a more obvious venue. Cohen may have simply shot the scene in Virginia because Imperial Rodeo Productions' appearance in Salem coincided with his filming schedule. This could also be another instance of geo-

graphically flattening the mythic South through stereotype — portraying Dixie as a culturally homogenous region from Richmond to El Paso.

<sup>74</sup> *Borat*.

<sup>75</sup> Although Sacha Baron Cohen is British, his interest in the American South predates the production of *Borat*. According to Clive Webb, who was a friend of Cohen's at Cambridge University, "Sacha wrote his final-year undergraduate dissertation on black-Jewish relations. He set out to disprove the notion of a grand alliance between the two peoples and did a substantial amount of primary source research, including a visit to the States where he worked in archives and interviewed several activists including Mississippi veteran Robert Moses." Clive Webb, e-mail communication with author, November 3, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, chaps. 4, 7, 8, 9, 10.

<sup>77</sup> Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Britain, 1656–2000* (Berkeley, CA, 2002), 19–27; David S. Katz, *Philo-Semitism and the Readmission of the Jews to England, 1603–1655* (Oxford, UK, 1982), especially chap. 3; William D. Rubinstein and Hillary L. Rubinstein, *Philo-Semitism: Admiration and Support in the English Speaking World for Jews, 1840–1939* (New York, 1999).

<sup>78</sup> Eliza R. L. McGraw, "'How To Win the Jews for Christ': Southern Jewishness and the Southern Baptist Convention," in *Dixie Diaspora*, ed. Mark K. Bauman, 452–465; McGraw, *Two Covenants*, 93–97; Yaakov Ariel, "Evangelical Christians, Biblical Literalism, and Philo-Semitism in Our Times," in *Philo-Semitism in History*, ed. Jonathan Karp and Adam Sutcliffe (New York, 2011).

<sup>79</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, "Allosemitism: Premodern, Modern, Postmodern," in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, ed. Bryan Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Stanford, CA, 1998), 143.

<sup>80</sup> Harry Golden, *Our Southern Landsmen* (New York, 1974), 158–159.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>82</sup> Evans, *Provincials*, 121.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 134.

<sup>84</sup> Harry Golden, "Singing with the Salvation Army," in *The Best of Harry Golden* (Cleveland, 1967), 201–202.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>86</sup> On miscegenation and scientific racism, see Judy Scales-Trent, "Racial Purity Laws in the United States and Nazi Germany: The Targeting Process," *Human Rights Quarterly* 23 (May 2001): 259–307; John P. Jackson, Jr., and Nadine M. Weidman, "The Origins of Scientific Racism," *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education* 50 (Winter 2005–2006): 66–79. Although the term miscegenation was rarely used regarding American Jewry, eugenics and racial degeneration figured prominently in the debates that resulted in the immigration legislation of 1924, whose restrictions were primarily directed at southern and eastern Europeans. Kenneth M. Ludmerer, "Genetics, Eugenics, and the Immigration Restriction Act of 1924," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 46 (1972): 59–81.

<sup>87</sup> In Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, originally published in 1969, the neurotic Jewish narrator lives in perpetual fear of contracting various diseases, including blindness, for

consorting with gentile women. Philip Roth, *Portnoy's Complaint* (New York, 1994), 165–168, 180.

<sup>88</sup> Golden, *Right Time*, 279.

<sup>89</sup> Matthew Hoffman, *From Rebel to Rabbi: Reclaiming Jesus and the Making of Modern Jewish Culture* (Stanford, CA, 2007).

<sup>90</sup> Bruce, *How to Talk Dirty*, 155.

<sup>91</sup> It should also be stressed that Golden was speaking in the South in a Protestant church in 1947, whereas Bruce presented his blasphemous comedy more than a decade later in seedy nightclubs and strip joints. Taking the historical context into account, it could be argued that Golden's use of Jesus was the greater act of subversion.

<sup>92</sup> For a more detailed biography of Kinky Friedman and his place in the history of Texan Jewry, see Bryan Edward Stone, "'Ride 'Em, Jewboy': Kinky Friedman and the Texas Mystique," *Southern Jewish History* 1 (1998): 23–42.

<sup>93</sup> Kinky Friedman, *Texas Hold 'Em: How I Was Born in a Manger, Died in the Saddle, and Came Back as a Horny Toad* (New York, 2005), 22.

<sup>94</sup> Kinky Friedman and Ringo Starr perform "Men's Room, L.A.," on Kinky Friedman's album *Lasso from El Paso*, recorded 1976, Epic, CBS PE34304, BL34304, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>96</sup> Trachtenberg, *Devil and the Jews*, chap. 9. Some scholars have argued that Jews in medieval Europe did periodically urinate on crosses, reenact the Passion on Purim by using the crucifixion of Jesus as a substitute for the execution of Haman, and may have put pictures of Jesus and Mary in their own latrines as a symbolic act of defilement. See Elliott Horowitz, *Reckless Rites: Purim and the Legacy of Jewish Violence* (Princeton, 2006), 160–173; Ivan G. Marcus, "A Jewish-Christian Symbiosis: The Culture of Early Ashkenaz," in *Cultures of the Jews*, ed. David Biale (New York, 2002), 484.

<sup>97</sup> Friedman, *Texas Hold 'Em*, xix.

<sup>98</sup> Kinky Friedman, *Cowboy Logic: The Wit and Wisdom of Kinky Friedman (and Some of His Friends)* (New York, 2006), 102.

<sup>99</sup> Harry Golden, "Boiled Beef Flanken Comes to Charlotte," in *Only in America*, 112–113.

<sup>100</sup> Kinky Friedman performs "We Reserve The Right To Refuse Service To You," on Friedman's album *Sold American*, recorded 1973, Vanguard, VSD79333, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm; Kinky Friedman performs "They Ain't Makin' Jews Like Jesus Anymore," on the album *Kinky Friedman*, recorded 1974, ABC Dunhill ABCD-829, 33 $\frac{1}{3}$  rpm.

<sup>101</sup> For a discussion of the stereotype of the Jew as cowardly, sickly, and effeminate, see John Efron, *Medicine and the German Jews* (New Haven, 2001), chap. 4; Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York, 1991); Peter Y. Medding, ed., *Jews and Violence: Images, Ideologies, and Realities* (Oxford, UK, 2002); Horowitz, *Reckless Rites*, chap. 7.



PRIMARY SOURCES

Zionism on the West Texas Plains

by

Stuart Rockoff\*

**Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District:  
January 14, 1948; November 3, 1948; March 1, 1949;  
December 6, 1949; May 2, 1950; November 12, 1951**

*When visiting the Southwest Collection at the Texas Tech University Archives to do research on the Jewish community of Lubbock, I came upon a small binder in a box of unprocessed records. Inside were the complete minutes of a short-lived Zionist society in Lubbock. In addition to these minutes, the Southwest Collection contains records from Shaareth Israel, the city's only Jewish congregation.*

**T**oo little has been written about the impact of Zionism on Jewish communities in the South. In one sense, this is not surprising as, by and large, the central narrative of the Zionist movement unfolded in Europe and Palestine, with the Jewish community of the United States as a relatively marginal player. Because southern Jews have long been on the periphery of American Jewish life, Jews who lived in the former Confederacy had even less direct impact on the effort to establish a Jewish state in Palestine. And yet, many southern Jews were

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drawn to the cause of Zionism. As early as 1897, just after the first Zionist congress in Basel, Switzerland, southern Jews established clubs and societies that advocated for the creation of a Jewish homeland.<sup>1</sup>

Most of these early Zionists were immigrants who had decided to come to America rather than go to Palestine. For them, a Jewish state would be a refuge for the oppressed Jews of Europe, not for themselves. Usually, these Zionist groups flourished because of what they provided their members: a strong sense of Jewish identity during a time when they were otherwise working to fit into the larger culture. In the South, where Jews were a tiny percentage of the population, this process of assimilation was quicker and more extreme. Thus, the sense of Jewish community engendered by these often small Zionist organizations was especially important in the South, where they helped to create a Jewish world that could resist or at least relieve the pressures of assimilation.

The nature of the Zionist movement in America and in the South changed during the first half of the twentieth century. After the Balfour Declaration in 1917, the seemingly remote dream of recreating a Jewish state in Palestine became a realistic goal as American Zionists began to focus on raising money to support the growing Jewish settlement there. After the United Nations vote in favor of partition on November 29, 1947, and the establishment of Israel on May 14, 1948, American Zionism narrowed to focus primarily on providing financial and political support for the Jewish state. It was during the hopeful period between the United Nations vote and Israel's declaration of statehood, that Jews in Lubbock, Texas, founded the city's first Zionist organization. While the group would not last more than four years, its brief history reflects the social needs of Jews living on the plains of West Texas, their strong attachment to the newly formed Jewish state, and their significant connection to a larger Jewish community that belied the notion that they were isolated or remote.<sup>2</sup>

*Jewish Life on the Texas Plains*

Staying connected to a larger Jewish world could be a challenge in a place like Lubbock, Texas. Located over three hundred miles west of Dallas at the southern edge of the Great Plains, Lubbock was a small thriving city of over 71,000 people in 1950. A regional center for the area's cotton farming, Lubbock became a market and processing hub for the cash crop. The creation of Texas Technological College in 1926 (later renamed Texas Tech University) brought additional economic energy and a cosmopolitanism that differentiated Lubbock from other West Texas towns. Although it was a cotton town, Lubbock was more southwestern than southern in its culture, with no history of plantations, slavery, or support for the Confederacy. Indeed, the town was not founded until after the Civil War.

As Lubbock grew in the early twentieth century, so did its Jewish population. Its first Jews settled in the West Texas town in 1916, and by the 1920s, a number of Jewish merchants had moved to Lubbock. Most were immigrants from Russia or Poland. When they first met together for the high holidays in 1929, the services were Orthodox. In 1934, these Jews established the city's first and only Jewish congregation, Shaareth Israel, which also drew members from small towns in West Texas and New Mexico. The congregants bought a house in 1937 that they remodeled into a small synagogue. In 1938, the congregation hired its first full-time rabbi, Isadore Garsek, who was trained at an Orthodox seminary in Chicago. In 1943, the small but growing congregation built a new synagogue on Avenue Q. Although the congregation was originally Orthodox, it had moved toward Reform during the 1940s, and it hired a Hebrew Union College graduate to replace Garsek in 1947.

On January 14, 1948, thirty-two Jews gathered at the synagogue to establish a formal Zionist organization, which they named the Lubbock Zionist District. At the time, the Lubbock Jewish community was in the midst of a growth spurt, increasing from approximately sixty Jews in 1937 to 212 by 1948. Most Jewish families in Lubbock at the time were involved in retail businesses, though a growing number of Jewish professionals,

many affiliated with Texas Tech, would soon move to town and eventually transform the local Jewish community.<sup>3</sup>

The impetus for the creation of the Lubbock Zionist District was the arrival of Rabbi Julius Kerman, who came to Shaareth Israel in the summer of 1947 to lead the small congregation. A native of Pinsk, Belarus, Kerman had immigrated to the United States in 1913. Perhaps it was his first-hand experience with tsarist oppression that motivated Kerman to support the idea of a Jewish state. He attended the University of Missouri School of Agriculture with the intention of moving to Palestine after graduation. While at the university, he organized a chapter of Poale Zion, the labor Zionist organization, and even volunteered to fight with Great Britain's Jewish Legion during World War I. He came back to Missouri after the war to finish his education and became the principal of a large Hebrew school in St. Louis. With the encouragement of local rabbi Samuel Sale, Kerman applied to and was accepted at Hebrew Union College, where many of his classmates remained opposed to the idea of Zionism. Ordained in 1928, Kerman served small congregations in Pennsylvania and Ohio and on Long Island before coming to Lubbock. Throughout his career, Kerman was an outspoken Zionist. When Hebrew Union College president Julian Morgenstern made negative comments about Zionism in 1943, Kerman joined with forty-four other Reform rabbis in issuing a statement condemning the remarks.<sup>4</sup>

#### *Supporting the Jewish State*

By the end of 1947, the dream that Zionists like Kerman had long envisioned was finally coming to fruition. The United Nations vote to partition Palestine into two states, including a Jewish one, was met by tremendous celebration in the Jewish world. It is no coincidence that only six weeks after this historic vote, the rabbi sought to get the members of his congregation active in the effort to create and support a Jewish state. Kerman followed the Palestine question closely and was quoted in the local newspaper in Lubbock as an expert on the subject. When the founding members of the Lubbock Zionist District selected

the group's first president, they chose Rabbi Kerman unanimously. All of the members belonged to Shaareth Israel, the city's only Jewish congregation, so it was not surprising that Kerman attracted such strong support.<sup>5</sup>

*Rabbi Julius Kerman.*

*Spiritual leader of Shaareth Israel, Lubbock, Texas, 1947–1952.*

*(Courtesy of the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute  
of Southern Jewish Life, Jackson, Mississippi.)*

In its early years, most of the society's monthly meetings followed a set pattern. After a report about the group's finances and membership dues, there was discussion about various state and national Zionist meetings. Lubbock members, usually Kerman, would represent the society at these conventions. Members then usually discussed local fundraising efforts. Each meeting culminated with a program designed to educate members about the situation in Israel. Guest speakers, documentary films, and even discussions of books or articles made up the substantive program of the meetings. Each meeting concluded with the singing of "Hatikvah," the Zionist national anthem. Finally, each meeting was followed by a social hour in which members visited, played games, and enjoyed refreshments.

The Lubbock Zionist District's typical meeting reflected the three central functions of the organization: raising money for Israel; educating Lubbock Jews about the Jewish state; and

socializing amongst its members. The social element was present from the very beginning. The minutes of the first meeting on January 14, 1948, indicate:

Mr. Langsam moved that meetings be held the first Tuesday night of the month—motion seconded and following a brief discussion was passed by majority vote. Mrs. Kessel moved that a social hour follow each meeting with refreshments being served—motion seconded and discussion followed and it was passed by unanimous vote. . . . Mr. Miller of Dallas who was present at the meeting gave the organization several chess and checker games and cards. With the singing of Hatikvah the meeting was adjourned and a social period followed—hosts being Mr. and Mrs. Abe Kessel, Mr. & Mrs. A. Bender, and Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman.

The group also held a series of dinners and banquets including a “cafeteria supper” held only a month after the group formed. Such Jewish social events were especially appealing to members since Lubbock’s culture was heavily dominated by evangelical Christianity. Southern Baptists predominated in the city, which for many years banned alcohol; by the 1960s, it was the largest “dry” city in the country. While in their everyday lives Lubbock Jews were somewhat integrated within the larger community, such social events helped them create an exclusively Jewish environment free from the pressures of fitting into a Christian culture. Indeed during this era, Lubbock Jews tended to socialize with each other, gathering together on the weekends for card games.<sup>6</sup>

While these dinners had an important social element in such a small Jewish community, their ostensible purpose was to raise money. The first cafeteria supper raised almost one hundred dollars, which the group used to bring in guest speakers and pay for member expenses to attend state and national Zionist conventions. Later, the society held Sunday socials that raised money for the group and for specific causes in Israel. Harry Lipshy and Phil Rosen headed a committee that raised eighty-seven dollars for the Food for Israel project in November 1948. In 1951, they aimed to raise one thousand dollars from

Lubbock Jews to purchase food and equipment for Israel. Archie Skibell, a prominent merchant in town, pledged one hundred dollars toward the fund-raising goal. By 1951, most meetings included some kind of direct fund-raising appeal. Two representatives from the southwest region of the Zionist Organization of America spoke to the group in November 1951, asking for donations to purchase food and ice-making equipment for Israel. They raised \$1500 for this cause in just one day of canvassing Lubbock's Jews. Lubbock also had a Jewish National Fund campaign overseen by members of the Zionist District.<sup>7</sup>

Clearly, a Jewish community as small as Lubbock was unable to raise a substantial amount of money for Israel. While collecting money was an important purpose of the Lubbock Zionist District, perhaps its central function was to educate and inform its members about Zionism and the fledgling State of Israel. Sometimes this took the form of discussing books or articles about the movement. In August 1948, Ethel Kerman, the rabbi's wife, summarized a recent article in the *Jewish Day* newspaper about the growing interest in Israel among Jews in Russia. According to the minutes from the following month's meeting:

Rabbi Kerman read several communications regarding the serious attempts being made by the government to reverse the UN decision recognizing Israel as a State. No doubt great pressure is being brought about along these lines by Great Britain and other factors. Discussion followed. A recording "The Story of Chaim Weizmann" was played and was enjoyed by all. There being no further business or discussion, it was moved and seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. A social hour followed, with Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman serving as hosts.

A few months later, another member discussed an article from the *New York Herald Tribune* Sunday magazine about the potential for Jewish settlement in the Negev, the desert region that covers much of southern Israel. This led to a general

discussion of Israeli politics and the impact of immigration on the Jewish state.<sup>8</sup>

A number of national speakers stopped in Lubbock as part of their regional tours to address the group. Just a few weeks after the Lubbock Zionist District was organized, Joseph Goldberg, the national membership chairman of the Zionist Organization of America, informed the group about what was happening in Palestine and described the movement's efforts to ensure that the United Nations partition vote resulted in a Jewish state. Rabbi Morris Fishman of the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee spoke about his time in Israel and the positive impact the country had on Holocaust refugees. According to the minutes for March 1, 1949:

The guest speaker of the evening was introduced—Rabbi Morris Fishman, who recently served with the Joint Distribution Committee in Austria and Italy, and just prior to his return to America spent two months in the State of Israel, gave a vivid, informative report of his experiences and observations. He termed the efforts of European Jewry to regain a normal life as “A memorable and a remarkable achievement” and said he had seen the transformation of skeletonized caricatures of human beings into a sturdy people eager and ready to face the future with hope and promise in Israel. A question and answer period followed. There was a motion for adjournment. A social hour followed.

Zionist leaders from other Texas cities often came to the monthly meeting to talk about various issues. In several instances they gave first-hand accounts of their visits to Israel, often illustrated with slides.<sup>9</sup>

Sometimes these speakers were not Jewish. In December 1948, a history professor from Texas Tech, Dr. O. A. Kinchen, gave a lecture about the biblical roots of the State of Israel. According to the minutes:

There being no further old, or new business, to come before the members, Rabbi Kerman introduced the guest speaker of the evening, Dr. O. A. Kinchen, Prof. of History at Texas Tech University, his subject being the “Problem of Palestine.” A question and answer period followed. Dr. Kinchen particular-

ly brought out the facts that the new State of Israel was a RECOVERY [emphasis in original] of the Jewish homeland, and was patterned themselves [*sic*] after a Democracy, like our own.

This support of Zionist ideology by someone outside the Jewish community must have been extremely gratifying to the members of the Lubbock Zionist District. Since the beginning of the Zionist movement, some American Jews worried that support for a Jewish homeland would bring charges of “dual loyalty” that questioned their patriotism. Here, Kinchen expressly linked Israel to America’s democratic political tradition, making it possible to be both pro-America and pro-Israel. At the time, few if any Jews taught at Texas Tech, so to have a strong Zionist voice on the history faculty was extremely significant for a Jewish community that had not been in Lubbock very long. Kinchen’s endorsement of the idea that twentieth-century Jews could lay claim to a land where their biblical forebears once lived anticipated the strong embrace of Israel by evangelical Christians later in the century.<sup>10</sup>

*Congregation Shaareth Israel, 23rd Street and Avenue Q, Lubbock.*

*Trudi Post, who took this photo in 1982, says this is how the building looked in 1957 when she moved to Lubbock.*

*(Courtesy of Trudi Post, Fort Worth, Texas.)*

*Connections to the Larger Jewish World*

The members of the Lubbock Zionist District were especially interested in viewing images of life in the Jewish state. On several occasions documentary films about Zionism and daily life in Israel were shown. Propagandistic in nature, films such as *Birth of a Prophecy*, *Israel Reborn*, and *The Song of the Negev* were usually produced by the United Palestine Appeal<sup>11</sup> to inspire American Jews to support the Jewish state, often depicting Israel as under threat from Arab forces. The films portrayed the State of Israel as the culmination of a centuries-long yearning of Jews to return to their homeland. The Jewish state was also presented as a necessary refuge for the Holocaust survivors mired in displaced persons camps in Europe after the war. The images in the films were quite compelling and often moving. Though these same films were viewed around the United States, for these Lubbock Jews, the striking images brought them into a larger Jewish world. Although they lived in an area far removed from the centers of American or even Texas Jewish life, the members of the Lubbock Zionist District were not isolated, but rather engaged in the international Jewish issues of the day.<sup>12</sup>

This connection to a larger Jewish world is crucial to understanding the short-lived history of the Lubbock Zionist District. Soon after forming, the group sought to make Lubbock a Zionist center for West Texas, reaching out to Jews in other towns. In June 1948, two members offered to visit Amarillo, Odessa, and San Angelo to enlist members. They were only successful in San Angelo, where nine Jews joined the Lubbock Zionist District by early 1949. While the organization was always concentrated in Lubbock, by 1950 almost a quarter of its members lived in other towns. Most of the out-of-towners lived in San Angelo, which had its own Jewish congregation, but others lived in small towns like La Mesa, Littlefield, and Plainview, which did not have any Jewish institutions. Although these out-of-town members helped to boost its membership roster, since San Angelo was over 180 miles away from Lubbock, it is unlikely that the members there were able to play an active role in the

society or even attend its monthly meetings. This was likely the reason why the district was not more successful in attracting out-of-town members. It was just too hard for them to be active members or to enjoy the social benefits of the organization.<sup>13</sup>

Despite its remote location, the Lubbock Zionist District aspired to be a part of a national movement. From its founding, the local chapter sought to affiliate with the national Zionist Organization of America. The group worked to reach the fifty members required to become an officially chartered chapter of the ZOA, a goal it achieved by the third meeting in March 1948. From the group's beginning, members took an active part in regional and national Zionist organizations. At its first meeting, members voted to send a representative to a state Zionist conference in San Antonio. During the summer of 1948, Rabbi Kerman represented the society at the national convention of the ZOA held in Pittsburgh and later gave a detailed report about the proceedings. One member, Walter Cohen, even went to Palestine to fight for the Haganah during Israel's War of Independence. Cohen, a World War II veteran haunted by the Holocaust, fought in an armored brigade in the Galilee. Although West Texas was thousands of miles away from the Middle East, Lubbock Jews were tied to this international movement.<sup>14</sup>

#### *Role of Women in the Organization*

As the Lubbock Zionist District worked to be part of a larger international movement, it also had to fit into a small local Jewish community. While the number of Jews in Lubbock ballooned to 212 people in 1948, the Jewish community was much smaller than most other Texas cities with Zionist organizations. It was an open question whether Lubbock's small community could support such a group. In addition to Congregation Shaareth Israel, Lubbock had a B'nai B'rith lodge and a temple sisterhood in 1948. The Lubbock Zionist District struggled with these limitations right away. At their first meeting, members decided to hold a social event to raise money for the

society. Two days later, the officers of the society held an emergency board meeting:

A special Board meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Friday night, January 16, 1948 at the home of Mrs. Portnoff. Those present were Mrs. Portnoff, Rabbi Kerman and Mrs. Eskin. It was unanimously decided that since the Sisterhood had not given its monthly affair that the Lubbock Zionist District postpone its money-raising plans in the form of a social affair until a later date to be announced. There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned.

The community was simply not big enough for two such events, and so the newly formed Zionist District deferred to the sisterhood.<sup>15</sup>

In 1949, Lubbock women, through the leadership of Ida Ruth Svidlow, founded a chapter of Hadassah, the women's Zionist organization that supports health care and educational programs in Israel. There had been an effort to organize a Hadassah chapter earlier in the decade, but sisterhood members feared that the Jewish community was too small to support two women's organizations. By the end of the 1940s, the community was larger, while the success of the Lubbock Zionist District likely convinced female leaders that the city could support a Hadassah chapter. The two Zionist organizations had a close relationship, with overlapping memberships. The first two presidents of the Hadassah chapter, Ethel Freed and Ida Ruth Svidlow, also belonged to the Lubbock Zionist District. On two occasions the groups held joint meetings, sponsoring guest speakers. In December 1949, Rabbi William Malev of Houston told both groups about his recent trip to Israel and the beneficial work of both the ZOA and Hadassah. The Hadassah chapter would prove to be a much longer-lasting organization, remaining active until the 1990s.<sup>16</sup>

The creation of a Hadassah chapter was somewhat surprising since the Lubbock Zionist District had both male and female members. While women were given leadership positions with the Zionist District, they often conformed to traditional gender roles. At the group's founding meeting, Rose Portnoff was

elected secretary of the organization. During the four years of the organization's life, women always filled this position. Another woman replaced Portnoff when she left Lubbock later in 1948. The secretary's duties consisted mainly of taking minutes at the monthly meetings. When the group planned a cafeteria supper or other events to raise money, the event committee consisted entirely of women who cooked and served the food. Although they filled this traditional gender role, it also gave them a certain degree of power within the organization since they were in charge of the fundraising events. This is similar to the common phenomenon of temple sisterhoods exercising "power of the purse" within congregations since they were the ones who often raised the most money. The female members of the Lubbock Zionist District were able to use this "separate sphere" to move into positions of financial power within the organization. Tillie Lipsky was appointed chairwoman of the Jewish National Fund campaign for 1948 and 1949 while Rose Eskin served as treasurer of the Zionist District for its first two years.<sup>17</sup>

#### *The Demise of the Lubbock Zionist District*

Although the Lubbock Zionist District attracted both male and female members, the group still struggled to remain active. By September 1948, just eight months after forming, members were discussing the need for a membership drive and finding "ways and means of boosting attendance at meetings." In January 1949 no meeting was held "due to the absence of so many members." After a year of activity, the Lubbock Zionist District had not grown much. By April 1949, the group had forty-nine local members and nine in San Angelo. With an estimated 212 Jews living in Lubbock in 1948, about 23 percent belonged to the Zionist organization. Since a good number of Lubbock Jews were children, the percentage of Jewish adults who were members was likely much higher. Thus, there just may not have been much room for the group to grow. Some Lubbock Jews may have been opposed to Zionism, as was the case in larger Texas Jewish communities like Houston and Dallas.<sup>18</sup>

Attendance at monthly meetings continued to drop in 1950. In April, only sixteen of forty-two paid members of the society attended the meeting in which officers for the following year were elected. The following month President Archie Skibell addressed the issue directly:

The President asked for suggestions for bringing up the attendance at meetings. Several members expressed the opinion that a Program Committee was needed to plan stimulating programs and a Telephone Committee to rally the members. The President was to appoint such committees in time for the next meeting. Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Weiss, newcomers to Lubbock and active Zionists in their former home, Portland, Maine, were introduced to the members.

Lubbock's growing Jewish community was certainly a help to the group, but clearly the content of the meeting programs was crucial in attracting people. While the April meeting had no program, the film *House in the Desert* was shown at the May meeting, which drew twenty-five people. As time went on, compelling films and Zionist speakers were sometimes hard to come by. In November 1950, the group brought in a local judge to discuss the issue of juvenile delinquency, a topic that had nothing to do with Zionism or Israel.

By 1951, meetings were becoming infrequent. The group only met three times combined in 1951 and 1952. In the minutes for the November 12, 1951, meeting, Secretary Ethel Kerman noted, "as the district has not been functioning for more than a year, no minutes were read." Kerman's comment was a bit overstated, as the group had hosted two visiting speakers from Houston in February 1951. But otherwise the group had largely become defunct by 1951.<sup>19</sup>

Finally, on July 16, 1952, the Lubbock Zionist District decided to disband. Minutes from the final meeting declared, "there having been no meetings of the Lubbock Zionist District for two years and since two of the officers are about to leave Lubbock, it was the consensus of the officers to liquidate the funds of the organization." Once again, the claim was exaggerated as the group had last met seven months earlier, yet

clearly it had become inactive. The crucial factor was the decision of Rabbi Kerman to leave Lubbock for a pulpit in Natchez, Mississippi, in the summer of 1952. Without the energy and leadership of Kerman, the group realized that it could not carry on. The group used its remaining funds to pay the postage for a shipment of canned food and used clothing to Israel and donated the rest, \$190, to the American Friends of the Hebrew University. With that, the minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District come to a close.<sup>20</sup>

There were several reasons why the group did not last longer than four years. Clearly, Rabbi Kerman was the central figure in the organization; he was its founder and two-term president. Once he left Lubbock, it was perhaps inevitable that the group would cease to function. Yet the group had become inactive over a year before the rabbi left. The relatively small size of the Lubbock Jewish community was a challenge that the group could never overcome. It was much easier to attract fifty members in a large Jewish community like Houston, Dallas, or San Antonio, which each had several thousand Jews at the time. In Lubbock, they needed to attract perhaps half of the affiliated Jewish adults in the city.

In addition, the failure of the Lubbock Zionist District stemmed from its moving away from its central appeal. One of the original purposes of the society was to offer social opportunities for Lubbock Jews who spent most of their days living and interacting with non-Jews. The social hour decreed by members during the founding meeting was stopped by 1950. While this change was never explicitly discussed in the minutes, members no longer stayed to socialize and enjoy refreshments once the monthly meetings were adjourned. Also, the educational programs became more infrequent and less related to the Zionist movement or Israel. For example, in March 1950, the Christian chaplain at Reese Air Force Base spoke to the members on the topic of "love and mercy." Later that year, members listened to a recorded reading of a Sholom Aleichem story. As the social and propaganda functions of the society faded away, all that remained was fundraising, to which members were still com-

mitted. But Lubbock Jews realized that they did not need a Zionist organization to raise money for the Jewish National Fund or other Zionist causes. Thus, while Lubbock Jews still supported Israel, they had little reason to attend monthly meetings or keep the Lubbock Zionist District alive.<sup>21</sup>

In the end, it was perhaps inevitable that the group would be unable to sustain its founding energy. The Lubbock Zionist District was established during the aftermath of the United Nations partition vote when interest and expectations were at a peak. During its first year, the district experienced the excitement of Israel's establishment as a Jewish state, the deep worry when the fledgling state was attacked by its Arab neighbors, and, finally, the elation of victory in Israel's war for independence. By the early 1950s, the Zionist cause was just not as compelling for Lubbock's small Jewish community. Indeed, this trend was national, as American Zionist organizations experienced a decline in activity and membership in the years after Israel's establishment. The story of the Lubbock Zionist District follows this national narrative, showing once again how this remote West Texas community was tied to the larger currents of American Jewish life.<sup>22</sup>

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**Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District:**

**January 14, 1948; November 3, 1948; March 1, 1949;  
December 6, 1949; May 2, 1950; November 12, 1951**

**Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, January 14, 1948**

The first meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Wednesday evening, Jan. 14, 1948 at the Shaareth Israel Synagogue.

Rabbi Julius Kerman, as acting chairman prior to election of officers, [made] several welcoming and introductory remarks. Thirty-two members were [present].

The following were unanimously elected to office:

Rabbi Kerman, President; Sidney Langsam, Vice-President; Mrs. Sam Portnoff, Secretary; and Mrs. Phil Eskin, Treasurer.<sup>23</sup>

Mr. Langsam moved that meetings be held the first Tuesday night of the month – motion seconded and following brief discussion was passed by majority vote.

Mrs. Kessel moved that a social hour follow each meeting with refreshments being served – motion seconded and discussion followed and it was passed by unanimous vote.

Mr. Harris made a motion that the organization be called the Lubbock Zionist Club – motion seconded and discussion followed and Mr. Harris withdrew motion in favor of Mr. Langsam's motion that the organization be known as the Lubbock Zionist District – motion seconded and unanimously carried.

Mr. Houstman made a motion that the organization send a representative to the San Antonio State Zionist Conference – motion was seconded and discussion followed and carried by majority vote.

Mr. Harris made a motion that Rabbi Kerman be the representative and motion was seconded and carried.

Mrs. Portnoff made a motion that money should be raised to finance our representative's trip by a money-raising social affair. Other suggestions were offered and Mrs. Portnoff's motion was restated, seconded and carried.

Mr. Miller of Dallas who was present at the meeting gave the organization several chess and checker games and cards.

With the singing of Hatikvah the meeting was adjourned and a social [hour] followed – hostes [sic] being Mr. and Mrs. Abe Kessel, Mr. and Mrs. A. Berger, and Rabbi and Mrs. Kerman.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rose Portnoff  
Secretary

### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, November 3, 1948**

A regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Wednesday, Nov. 3, 1948, at the Shaareth Israel Congre-

gation. The meeting was called to order by the President and the minutes of the September meeting were read and approved. There was no meeting held in October, due to the fact that the High Holidays came at that time.

Mrs. Eskin gave the Treasurer's report, which showed a balance of \$230.59 in the treasury as of November 1, 1948. It was moved, seconded and unanimously carried, that the following bills be paid out of the treasury: (\*) \$1.50 for Zionist pins; \$50.00 to the Zionist Organization for our share of the traveling expenses incurred in bringing Mr. Jos. Goldberg<sup>24</sup> here on a lecture engagement February 3, 1948; \$50.00 to Mr. Meyer Harris, the same being the balance due him on the money advanced by him in sending our delegate, Rabbi Kerman, to the National Zionist Convention held in Pittsburg, Pa. last July.

Mrs. Kerman gave a report on the social held Sunday evening, October 31st, at the Temple, with Mrs. Sam Kelisky, Chairman. Proceeds were \$142.05. Special recognition was given Mrs. Kessel, Mrs. Kelisky, and the other ladies who had given donations of cakes, prizes, etc. and had worked to make this affair the financial and social success that it proved to be.

It was announced that dues for the year 1949 are now due and payable. Re-enrollment of members was urged, and it was suggested that the membership campaign for new members be put off until after January 1st.

Mrs. Houstman was presented with a Zionist pin for bringing in two or more new members into the organization.

Rabbi Kerman called our attention to the fact that one of our Lubbock members, Mr. Walter Cohen, is now in Palestine with the Haganah.

Mr. Phil Rosen gave a report on the Southwest Regional Convention held in Dallas on Sept. 19th, at which time Pierre Van Paassen<sup>25</sup> was guest speaker. Mr. Rosen urged that as many members as possible attend these various conventions, as then do you have full realization as to the wonderful work being done by members of the various districts, for such a worthwhile cause.

Mr. Phil Rosen was appointed Chairman of the "Aid to Isreal [*sic*]" project.

There being no further old, or new business, Rabbi Kerman introduced the fine guest speaker of the evening, Mr. Wolfe Shaw, of Littlefield. His subject "Things We Have Not Forgotten" was certainly enjoyed by all.

There was a motion for adjournment—it was seconded and the meeting closed with the singing of Hatikvah.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ruth Shaw  
Secretary

(\*) \$2.00 to Secretary for postal cards  
\$.72 to Mrs. Kerman for Refreshments  
\$20.00 to Z.O.A. for Membership Dues

#### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, March 1, 1949**

The regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District was held Tuesday evening, March 1 at the Shaareth Israel Congregation. The meeting was called to order by the President, Rabbi Kerman. The minutes of the February meeting were ready [sic] by the secretary, Mrs. Shaw and were approved as read. A thank you note received from Mr. Harry Lipshy for flowers sent was also read. It was moved and seconded that the Lubbock Zionist District pay one-third of the cost of these flowers.

Mrs. Eskin read the treasury report which showed a balance of \$217.37.

Rabbi Kerman reported the membership of several Z.O.A. members who live in San Angelo. It was moved and seconded that San Angelo Z.O.A. members be included in the Lubbock District.

It was announced that there are 31 paid 1949 Z.O.A. members in this District. Mr. Rosen presented the slate of officers for the 1949-1950 terms. The President asked for nominations from the floor. The following officers were elected:

Rabbi Kerman - President  
Meyer Harris - Vice-President  
Mrs. S. Portnoff - Secy.  
Mrs. M.J. Shaw - Treasurer

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District,  
March 1, 1949.*

*(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)*

The guest speaker of the evening was introduced—Rabbi Morris Fishman, who recently served with the Joint Distribution Committee in Austria and Italy, and just prior to his return to America spent two months in the State of Israel, gave a vivid, informative report of his experiences and observations. He termed the efforts of European Jewry to regain a normal life as “A memorable and a remarkable achievement” and said he had seen the transformation of skeletonized caricatures of human beings into a sturdy people eager and ready to face the future with hope and promise in Israel. A question and answer period followed.

There was a motion for adjournment. A social hour followed.

Respectfully submitted,  
Rose Portnoff, Secretary

#### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Wednesday, December 6, 1949**

Tuesday evening, December 6, [1949] the Lubbock Zionist District met jointly with the Lubbock Chapter of Hadassah at the Shaareth Israel Congregation.

Mrs. Louis Freed called the meeting to order. Mrs. Julius Kerman read the opening prayer, calling to mind the sacred memory of the Jewish children who perished in a plane crash on a flight sponsored by Hadassah.

The meeting was turned over to Rabbi Kerman who introduced the guest speaker, Rabbi William Malev of Houston. Rabbi Malev and Rabbi Kerman were in the same group when they visited Israel last summer, at which time they met.

Rabbi Malev told of his experiences on the flight to Israel, during which time he stopped in France and Switzerland, too, and he related his observations of these countries, as well. Rabbi Malev discussed the great strides Israel has made in its short life as a nation, despite the large and continued influx of homeless Jews from Europe and other countries. Mrs. Malev accompanied Rabbi Malev on the trip and she visited numerous Hadassah agencies and projects. He spoke of the life-giving work that Hadassah is doing in Israel. Lastly, Rabbi Malev stressed the continued efforts

of American Jewry, through Z.O.A. and Hadassah, which is still needed.

The meeting was closed with the singing of Hatikvah.

A social hour followed—hostesses were Mrs. Julius Kerman, Mrs. Sam Kelsiky, Mrs. Louis Freed, Mrs. Louis Wilk, Mrs. Sam Portnoff, Mrs. Phil Rosen, Mrs. M. Zukav, & Mrs. H. Lipshy.<sup>26</sup>

### **Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Tuesday, May 2, 1950**

With the President, Mr. Archie Skibell, in the chair, the regular monthly meeting of the Lubbock Zionist District, was held on Tuesday evening, May 2nd, at 8 o'clock.<sup>27</sup>

The minutes of the preceding meeting were read and accepted.

The following officers were present: President, Mr. Archie Skibell, Vice-President, Mr. Phil Rosen, and the Secretary, Mrs. Julius Kerman. The Treasurer, Mr. Sidney Langsam, was absent. There were 25 people present.

In the absence of the Treasurer, no financial report could be had, but it was reported by the President that \$50 had been deposited for membership dues since the April meeting.

The President asked for suggestions for bringing up attendance at meetings. Several members expressed the opinion that a Program Committee was needed to plan stimulating programs and a Telephone Committee to rally the members. The President was to appoint such committees in time for the next meeting.

Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Weiss, newcomers to Lubbock and active Zionists in their former home, Portland, Maine, were introduced to the members.

A recess was now taken for the viewing of the film, "House in the Desert". This picture showed the triumph of stubborn faith and hope over the known scientific facts. The persistent efforts of a watchman at the Potash Works at the Dead Sea led to the conversion of salt-laden desert land, neglected for 4,000 years, into a thriving, fruitful settlement called Beit Ha-Arava or House in the Desert. It was inspiring to watch this miraculous change from arid waste to green fields, houses and hosts of beautiful children. Mr.

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District, May 2, 1950, page 1.*  
(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)

*Minutes of the Lubbock Zionist District, May 2, 1950, page 2.*

*(Courtesy Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock.)*

Harold Markman who operated the B'nai B'rith projector, was warmly applauded for his kindness in having run off the picture.

When the meeting was resumed dues of \$8 were collected for Mr. and Mrs. I. Silverman and another \$8 for Mr. and Mrs. Harold Alschuler.

The President then called on Mr. Rappaport, field representative of the United Jewish Appeal, who spoke briefly on the needs and scope of UJA work during the current year.

On motion of Mr. Mitchell Shaw, seconded by Mr. Phil Rosen, the meeting adjourned with the singing of "Hatikvah".

Respectfully submitted,  
Ethel M. Kerman, Sec'y

**Minutes Lubbock Zionist District, Monday, November 12, 1951**

Mr. Archie Skibell, with the co-operation of Mrs. William Svidlow, president of Hadassah, called the community list for the purpose of hearing Rabbi [Abraham] Herson of Waco<sup>28</sup> who accompanied Mr. Julius Israel of the Southwest Region of the ZOA. A small number of men and women appeared at the synagogue on Monday evening, Nov. 12th, at 8 P.M.

Mr. Skibell presided and introduced the two visitors; at the same time he explained that no solicitation of funds had been intended. However, Rabbi Herson made such an appeal for funds for food and ice-making equipment for Israel. Since not enough was raised, several people volunteered to solicit contributions from those who were not present; they promised to go out the following morning.

Mr. Israel brought a new color film from Israel, but it was so badly in reverse that even the valiant efforts of our faithful Bill Kuhn, plus advice and encouragement from the sidelines, failed to accomplish any good; the picture was not shown.

As the district has not been functioning for more than a year, no minutes were read.

Respectfully submitted,  
Ethel M. Kerman  
Secretary.

P.S. The collection of the following day (Nov. 13th) netted \$1,500, according to reports.

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## NOTES

I would like to thank Monte Monroe, Archivist of the Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock, for allowing me to read through the unprocessed records and for permitting *Southern Jewish History* to reproduce the images and transcriptions of the Lubbock Zionist District Minutes in this volume.

<sup>1</sup> Jews in San Antonio, Texas, established the Mevasereth Zion society in 1897. Stuart Rockoff, "Deep in the Heart of Palestine: Zionism in Early Texas," in *Lone Stars of David: The*

*Jews of Texas*, ed. Hollace Ava Weiner and Kenneth D. Roseman (Waltham, MA, 2007), 94. No one has yet written a general study of southern Zionism. At best, local studies have sometimes touched on the subject. See, for example, Bobbie Malone, *Rabbi Max Heller: Reformer, Zionist, Southerner, 1860–1929* (Tuscaloosa, 1997); Leonard Rogoff, *Homelands: Southern Jewish Identity in Durham and Chapel Hill, North Carolina* (Tuscaloosa, 2001); Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s–1960s* (Macon, GA, 1998); Wendy Lowe Besmann, *A Separate Circle: Jewish Life in Knoxville, Tennessee* (Knoxville, TN, 2001); Bryan Edward Stone, *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (Austin, TX, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Stuart Rockoff, “Jewish Racial Identity in Pittsburgh and Atlanta, 1890–1930,” (Ph.D. diss. University of Texas at Austin, 2000), chap. 3.

<sup>3</sup> “Lubbock, Texas,” Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, accessed February 17, 2012. <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/tx/lubbock.html>.

<sup>4</sup> *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 56 (1946): 388; 57 (1947): 530. Julius C. Kerman, “Adventures in America and the Holy Land,” *American Jewish Archives* 28 (November, 1976): 126–134; “Forty-five Reform Rabbis Jointly Repudiate Dr. Morgenstern’s Views on Palestine,” Jewish Telegraphic Agency, November 3, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *Lubbock Avalanche Journal*, January 18, 1948; Lubbock Zionist District Minutes (hereafter cited as Meeting Minutes), January 14, 1948, Southwest Collection, Texas Tech University Archives, Lubbock (hereafter cited as Southwest Collection).

<sup>6</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; Lawrence L. Graves, “Lubbock, TX,” Handbook of Texas Online, Texas State Historical Association, accessed February 11, 2012, <http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/hdl04>; Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work* (College Station, TX, 1999), 149.

<sup>7</sup> Meeting Minutes, December 7, 1948; February 26, 1951; November 12, 1951.

<sup>8</sup> Meeting Minutes, August 2, 1948; September 14, 1948; February 8, 1949.

<sup>9</sup> Meeting Minutes, February 3, 1948; April 6, 1948; March 1, 1949.

<sup>10</sup> Meeting Minutes, December 7, 1948.

<sup>11</sup> In 1939 the United Palestine Appeal and the American Joint Distribution Committee formed the UJA, with both agencies remaining independent beneficiaries of it. By 1952, the UPA was renamed the United Israel Appeal. In 1999 the UIA joined the UJA and Federations to form the United Jewish Communities.

<sup>12</sup> Meeting Minutes, May 4, 1948; May 2, 1950. Several of these films may be viewed at the Stephen Spielberg Jewish Film Archive’s Virtual Cinema Project, accessed July 25, 2012, [ssjfa.huji.ac.il](http://ssjfa.huji.ac.il).

<sup>13</sup> Meeting Minutes, June 8, 1948; August 2, 1948; April 5, 1949; List of Lubbock Zionist District members, October 9, 1950, Meeting Minutes, Southwest Collection.

<sup>14</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; August 2, 1948; November 3, 1948; Stone, *Chosen Folks*, 188.

<sup>15</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *To Count a People: American Jewish Population Data, 1585–1984* (Lanham, MD, 1990), 215; Meeting Minutes, January 16, 1948; “Lubbock, Texas,” *Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities*. Zionist organizations were not uncommon in Texas. By the 1930s, Zionist societies existed in large communities like Houston, Dallas, San Antonio, Fort Worth, and Galveston, as well as smaller towns like Corpus Christi, Tyler, Laredo, Kilgore, Corsicana, and Breckenridge. In addition, during the 1930s, Jews in eighty-five different communities donated money to the Jewish National Fund. Rockoff, “Deep in the Heart of Palestine,” 99.

<sup>16</sup> Lee Bradley Inselberg, “Changing Worlds: Jewish Women in Lubbock, Texas” (master’s thesis, Texas Tech University, 1982), 36; List of Lubbock Zionist District members, October 9, 1950; Meeting Minutes, December 6, 1949; Jane Winer interview by author, November 30, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Meeting Minutes, January 14, 1948; March 2, 1948; November 3, 1948; December 7, 1948; March 1, 1949.

<sup>18</sup> Meeting Minutes., September 14, 1948; February 8, 1949; Rockoff, “Deep in the Heart of Palestine,” 103–107.

<sup>19</sup> Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1950; May 2, 1950; November 21, 1950; February 26, 1951; November 12, 1951.

<sup>20</sup> Lubbock Zionist District, Final Report, July 16, 1952.

<sup>21</sup> Meeting Minutes, April 4, 1950; October 11, 1950.

<sup>22</sup> Melvin I. Urofsky, “A Cause in Search of Itself: American Zionism after the State,” *American Jewish History* 69 (September 1979): 79–91; Zohar Segev, “American Zionists’ Place in Israel after Statehood: From Involved Partners to Outside Supporters,” *American Jewish History* 93 (September 2007): 279.

<sup>23</sup> While it is not surprising that a woman would serve as secretary, it is somewhat unusual that a woman would be in charge of the organization’s finances as treasurer.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Goldberg was the national chairman of the membership committee of the Zionist Organization of America at the time. From Worcester, Massachusetts, Goldberg was the honorary president of the New England Zionist region. *Lubbock Evening Journal*, February 3, 1948.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Van Paassen was a non-Jewish journalist and author who covered the Middle East, Palestine, and the Zionist movement for many years, and who became a staunch Zionist supporter.

<sup>26</sup> The page with the secretary’s signature is missing from the December 6, 1949, minutes.

<sup>27</sup> Although Rabbi Kerman relinquished the presidency to someone new, both he and his wife were still very active in the organization while they remained in Lubbock.

<sup>28</sup> Rabbi Abraham Herson led Agudath Jacob, Waco’s Orthodox congregation.



## Book Reviews

**The Fish That Ate the Whale: The Life and Times of America's Banana King.** By Rich Cohen. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2012. 270 pages.

The Marxist insistence upon the intimate entanglement of capitalist enterprise and state power has no better validation than the history of the United Fruit Company. At the peak of its power in the first half of the twentieth century, the fate of most of the Central American isthmus was determined by the relentless quest for profit that drove this corporate giant. So subjugated was the civic life of Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador, in particular, to *El Pulpo* (the octopus) that such countries became known as "banana republics" – a phrase coined by O. Henry in 1904. *El Pulpo* became the world's biggest grower, shipper, and seller of a product that has exceeded even apples in popularity, and that worldwide has ranked below only such staples as rice, wheat, and milk. The company once amassed so much wealth that the management of United Fruit seemed absurdly easy. One prospective CEO could foresee no special challenge in running the company. "What's the big deal?" he asked. "So you have dinner once a year with the president of Honduras," a remark so striking and revealing that its absence from Rich Cohen's book is surprising. For he has produced a colorful and absorbing biography of the last major figure in the history of United Fruit, Samuel Zemurray (1877–1961.) Not only that, Cohen has also tracked down a few very aged survivors linked to the career of "Sam the Banana Man." That means that *The Fish That Ate the Whale* will not be surpassed as the most comprehensive account of the only southern Jewish businessman who was powerful enough to have violated the sovereignty of entire nations.

The most notorious example of the latter occurred in the early 1950s. Guatemala's democratically elected president, Jacobo

Arbenz, wanted to take over some of United Fruit's unused land to give to impoverished peasants. He sought to compensate the company with bonds rather than in cash, and then assessed the property according to the wildly undervalued rate on the basis of which the company had paid its preposterously low taxes. *El Pulpo* cried foul. In 1954 the Department of State and the Central Intelligence Agency joined forces to overthrow the Arbenz government, charging it—without credible evidence—with introducing Communism into the Western Hemisphere. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles had been a lawyer for United Fruit; his brother, Allen Dulles, directed the CIA. A decade earlier Zemurray had already hired the savviest public relations counselor of the century, Edward L. Bernays, to work for United Fruit. Bernays was assigned the task of organizing a propaganda campaign to undermine a legitimate government, which American military power replaced with a lethal right-wing dictatorship. Never in the history of American foreign policy had the influence of a single company been displayed more nakedly.

In Guatemala City, among those observing the outbreak of the U.S.-instigated coup to crush a legitimate government, was a young Argentine physician named Ernesto "Che" Guevara. What he saw drove him towards Communism, and towards Cuba, where he joined the charismatic son of a farmer who had leased land from the ubiquitous United Fruit. The startling triumph of Fidel Castro in 1959 activated the CIA effort to overthrow his regime two years later at the Bay of Pigs. The landing there was partly facilitated by two ships on loan from United Fruit. (By then Zemurray had sold all his stock in the company.) The spectacular failure of that invasion, plus Castro's tenacious survival for nearly six more decades, marked the decline of *El Pulpo*, which became United Brands and then Chiquita Brands International. But whatever it is called, its legacy consists of a willingness to live by the laws of the jungle.

Having arrived in Alabama as a penniless, fatherless teenager from Bessarabia, Zemurray did not write the merciless laws of competitive capitalism, it is necessary to note in exculpation. He had little choice except to live by them; but his own personal

signature consisted of a fierce determination, a faith in his own judgment, an implacable optimism, and a remorseless grasp of every aspect of the business in which he made his fortune. He had begun by peddling otherwise discarded bananas until he reached the docks of New Orleans (around 1905, Cohen estimates); by 1929 Zemurray had made a company called Cuyamel so efficient that United Fruit bought him out and made him its majority stockholder. (That incorporation of Cuyamel gives this book its title.) Three years later he was running United Fruit. Though its headquarters were located in Boston, Zemurray clung to his New Orleans roots by keeping his home there. The Boston neighborhood that he was rich enough to buy a house in kept him out, it seems, because he was a Jew.

"Here was a man who lived every aspect of the Jewish experience in America," Cohen concludes. "He came with the great influx from Eastern Europe, prospered with his times, was devastated by the [Second World] War. He married a Jewish woman, belonged to a synagogue, said Kaddish for his dead." Zemurray was also "a Zionist. Israel was important to him, and he was important to Israel. And yet he did not teach his children or grandchildren to be Jewish" (221–222). *The Fish That Ate the Whale* thus captures the pathos and poignancy, as well as the arc of achievement, of a life that the author has exposed with imaginative flair. Cohen gets closer than any reader might have reason to expect to a subject who operated his business enterprises by stealth, who spoke with brevity and concision, and who only very rarely wrote letters. The paper trail that Zemurray left behind is frustratingly elusive. Having done some research on his legacy, this reviewer can only express awe at the ingenuity and assiduousness of Cohen's research. The cutthroat aura of the banana business did not attract men of meditative and self-reflective habits, and therefore huge chunks of Zemurray's activities and attitudes are bound to be forever obscure.

One particular challenge is the character of his marriage to Sarah Weinberger. She was born in Galveston, the daughter of Jacob ("Jake the Parrot King") Weinberger, who was a rival in the banana trade. The couple lived in New Orleans on 2 Audubon

Place (which would become the residence of the president of Tulane University). But because Zemurray spent so much of his time in Central America (especially Honduras), he and Sarah lived apart as much as they were together. What bound them to one another? Who knows? The gringo who perpetuated the exploitative labor practices of *El Pulpo* was also—quite paradoxically—a progressive who admired the New Deal and backed a leftist weekly like *The Nation*. How were Zemurray's political attitudes formed? Cohen can offer no clues. But he has made a fascinating contribution to business history, to the history of hemispheric relations—and to southern Jewish history as well.

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**Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition.** By Marni Davis. New York: New York University Press, 2012. 262 pages.

In *Jews and Booze*, historian Marni Davis interweaves several powerful American stories that unfolded from 1850 to 1933: the historical relationship between Jews and various aspects of the liquor trade; the impact of those ties on the complex Jewish goals of acculturating to American society while maintaining religious and ethnic distinctiveness; and the challenges to Jewish unity and standing in the United States posed by the popular anti-liquor movement that culminated in national Prohibition during the 1920s. Davis has conducted thorough research in manuscript census materials, business records, personal and associational papers, newspapers, and trade publications, and mastered the rich secondary literature in Jewish, alcohol, and temperance history. She also achieves admirable balance in her analysis, puncturing anti-Jewish stereotypes concerning liquor-selling and wet advocacy, but also carefully documenting the actual conditions that underlay exaggeration and myth-making. As a scholarly study, *Jews and Booze* significantly contributes to the history of American Jewish

life and establishes itself as the definitive study of Jews and the American Prohibition movement.

For mid-nineteenth-century Jewish entrepreneurs, liquor commerce provided an agreeable path to business success and Americanization while retaining ties to European Jewish culture. Because alcohol was an element of cherished family-centered religious rituals and since Jews had earned a reputation for moderate drinking, American Jews of central European origin did not share early temperance enthusiasts' perception of alcohol as a destructive force. Moreover, generations of European Jews had been involved in the production and sale of alcoholic beverages, so many immigrants possessed skills suitable for work in the liquor trade. Because of limited American wine production and German domination of brewing, most Jews in the alcohol business concentrated in the whiskey industry, a tendency furthered by opportunities in the many levels of production, distribution, and sales of the whiskey trade. Both in their Jewish and professional associations, Jewish whiskey purveyors through the late nineteenth century emphasized acculturation. Their embrace of American institutions also informed Jewish opposition to the nineteenth-century temperance movement. The overtly Christian identification of temperance groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Jewish liquor advocates argued, threatened the secular basis of American democracy that protected all religious traditions. Although temperance advocates regretted Jewish lack of interest in dry reform, they respected the temperate habits of Jews and so largely refrained from stigmatizing Jews. Davis' research in the R. G. Dun & Company credit reports also reveals more favorable assessments of Jews in the alcohol trade than past studies had suggested.

That situation changed as oppression and poverty pushed up to two million Jews out of the eastern European Pale of Settlement to American ports of refuge in the decades spanning the turn of the century. Many Jews had run taverns in the Russian empire and took up similar occupations in America. Moreover, the greater concentration of culturally-insulated Jewish communities produced a new market for kosher wine in the United States,

much of which was produced or distributed by rabbis. As the Prohibition movement mobilized to ban saloons and outlaw alcohol production, attention to "Jew saloons" (114) and Jewish drinking fed a growing American antisemitism. A regional mix of racial repression, Prohibition sentiment, and antisemitism focused special opprobrium on Jewish liquor distributors and saloon owners who sold alcohol to blacks in the early twentieth-century South. Davis is especially good at mapping the perilous situation of Atlanta's Jewish community during the build-up, violent outbreak, and aftermath of the city's vicious 1906 race riot. Acculturated southern Jews endorsed white supremacy, yet were placed on the wrong side of the color divide by the Jewish saloonkeepers who maintained cordial relations with their black customers. National press coverage of the riot lingered on the presence of Jews selling liquor to blacks at the center of the riot zone. Two years later, *Collier's* magazine blamed Cincinnati liquor distributor Lee Levy's suggestively-labeled gin for black sexual assaults on white women. The sting of antisemitism energized the drive for state prohibition in the South. The notorious 1915 lynching of Leo Frank, Davis argues, followed upon a decade of accusations that Jewish liquor sellers endangered white southern women. Spectacular charges were less apparent in the North, but acculturated German Jew Simon Wolf's affiliation with the National German-American Alliance damaged his reputation and the wet cause alike in the anti-German atmosphere of World War I, advancing the passage of the Eighteenth Amendment and the adoption of national Prohibition.

Defiance, embarrassment, and factionalism marked the Jewish response to the Prohibition regime. Although a handful of prominent Jews, most of them assimilated Americans from "a German cultural milieu" (169) like Reform Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, endorsed Prohibition, the great majority of American Jews opposed Prohibition as intrusive and undemocratic. To the consternation of assimilationists who counseled fellow Jews to respect the law, residents of some Jewish enclaves behaved as if the law did not apply to them, other individuals were active as bootleggers, and a few gained notoriety as gangsters profiting off

the illegal alcohol trade. Yet the source of the most vigorous criticism of Jews, and of division within American Jewry, was section six of the Volstead Act, which allowed for the production, sale, and distribution of wine for sacramental purposes. Unlike the practice in Catholic and Lutheran churches, Jewish sacramental wine was for home use and required distribution to individual families. This weakness in the law was exploited by bootleggers and produced dismaying public scandals that divided the Jewish community. Determined to protect the American status of their coreligionists, some Reform Jews, led by the Central Conference of American Rabbis, urged Jews to substitute grape juice for fermented wine and even lobbied the commissioner of Internal Revenue, who supervised Prohibition regulations, to revoke the sacramental exemption. Traditional Jews, led by the Orthodox rabbinate, angrily rejected the proposal, joined by outraged Catholics and Lutherans. Jews had to await Repeal in 1933 to escape the dilemma Prohibition represented to their shared loyalties to America and to their identity as Jews. Thanks to Davis, this critical passage in Jewish and American history will no longer be neglected.

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**The Virginia Plan: William B. Thalheimer and a Rescue from Nazi Germany.** By Robert H. Gillette. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2011. 206 pages.

From Robert H. Gillette's opening vignette, *The Virginia Plan: William B. Thalheimer and a Rescue from Nazi Germany* provides a vivid description about a singular story of Jewish emigration from Nazi Germany to the United States immediately before the Second World War. At the center of Gillette's account are German Jewish students of agricultural science and their headmaster, Curt Bondy, and a Jewish

businessman in Virginia, William B. Thalhimer. Using a cross-cutting approach, Gillette earnestly juxtaposes the students' bleak future in the Third Reich with Thalhimer's headstrong goal of relocating the young men and women to the Hyde Farmland, in the Virginia countryside. By eliciting Jewish camaraderie and a sense of community without a long-standing sense of establishment or settlement, *The Virginia Plan* provides admirable input toward better understanding international Jewish relations and the intricate nature of immigration immediately before and during the Second World War.

At the core of *The Virginia Plan* is a story divided into three open-ended sections that follow the students from a vulnerable and dormant period in Germany, eventual arrival in the United States, and right through the farm's unforeseen closing to the lasting effects of their experiences. Each of these sections encompasses notions of endurance, sacrifice, and solidarity. By connecting the three ideals with separate settings and the senses they induce, Gillette guides readers through the winding excursion Gross Breesen students and their headmaster endured to make it to the Hyde Farmland.

Revolving around the students' anxieties regarding personal security and sense of affinity, and the international Jewish community's overall goal to protect the "future of Jewish adolescents," Gillette captures the three previously cited notions throughout the book (17-18). In the first informal section of the book, which includes these anxieties, Thalhimer's initial push to obtain visas for the students, and their eventual sentencing to the Buchenwald concentration camp, endurance is elicited (65-67). Three weeks after their imprisonment, the students are released. Their absence from Gross Breesen is connected to declining food production and pending immigration to the United States (72). Upon gaining their freedom, the students face an uncertain future in the United States. It is in this portion of *The Virginia Plan* that Gillette presents the students' serious emotional difficulties and their preparation for an ultimate or alternative sacrifice. Finally, solidarity is revealed once Gillette's focus shifts to the students' time at the Hyde

Farmland. Solidarity is further bolstered with the realization that their stay there is short-lived.

Complementing the coverage of the students' and their headmaster's complicated journey from Nazi Germany to the United States is Gillette's injection of happenings directly preceding and during the Second World War. He guides readers through an interchanging narrative of the farm's progressions and eventual non-economic successes, as well as the deteriorating atmosphere in Nazi Germany and, eventually, all of Europe in the late 1930s and early 1940s. By utilizing articles from the *Richmond News Leader* and *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, which describe the escalation of the war in Europe, Gillette showcases his "here and there" narrative and the students' reactions to Nazi Germany's hostility.

This piece of historical scholarship unearths an ignored episode in the history of German Jews who found refuge in the American South immediately before and during the Second World War. This story of the Virginia Plan, revolving around the students and Bondy, Thalhimier, and a revolving door of diplomats, presents a pathbreaking account of cross-continental ties within the international Jewish community. The author thus skillfully explores the participation of formerly oppressed people in a segregated society.

Gillette's treatment of the story of Jewish refugees' insertion into the Jim Crow South during the Second World War is fresh. But one glaring flaw hinders his narrative. While he habitually notes neighbors' and nearby townspeople's mostly favorable response to the industrious students, Gillette does not connect their participation in a traditional style of farming and the locals' acceptance of them. Instead he links Thalhimier's vision for the Hyde Farmland, which he and other supporters hoped to be self-sufficient, as the driving force behind the locals' hospitality toward the students. By simply acknowledging the agricultural changes occurring in the South through the Great Depression and Second World War, spurred by the replacement of workforces with machinery (because large landowners could manipulate New Deal agricultural legislation),

Gillette could have underscored the astonishing nature of acceptance of young German Jews in what he deems “Jim Crow Country” (21).

By utilizing archives and collections near the Hyde Farmland, like the Thalhimer Family Archives and Messersmith Papers, *The Virginia Plan* is rooted in many primary sources. Gillette’s notes and list of sources in the back of his book are helpful, as is his description of the significance of those sources. Pertinent information about Bondy’s post-Hyde Farmland newsletter, and the *Circular Letters*, is also provided (197).

Gillette’s *The Virginia Plan* is an engaging book that provides substantial insight into the ways influential Jewish Americans sought to rescue German Jews from maltreatment and certain death and how they used such arrangements to stimulate similar acts of goodwill. Whereas books like Mark Wyman’s *DPs: Europe’s Displaced Persons, 1945–1951*, and Mark M. Anderson’s *Hitler’s Exiles: Personal Stories of the Flight from Nazi Germany to America* broadly trace the flight of established and well-known Jews from the region, Gillette focuses on the emigration of a young, intellectually promising demographic of Jews fleeing the Third Reich. The most enduring and appealing aspect of this book is its author’s claim to broaden the historiography of Jewish immigration just prior to and during the Second World War within a narrative that should engage scholars as well as lay readers.

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**The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics.**

By Kathryn J. McGarr. New York: Public Affairs, 2011. 443 pages.

The meeting was at an impasse. The year was 1980. The League of Women Voters, which organized presidential debates, was ready to adjourn another unproductive session with representatives of incumbent Jimmy Carter and GOP rival Ronald Reagan.

Reagan's liaison, James Baker III, left the room for the men's lavatory. Forty-five seconds later, Carter's henchman, Robert Strauss, excused himself. Fifteen minutes later the pair returned with a twelve-point agreement scribbled on the back of a campaign envelope.

The urinal conference was vintage Bob Strauss—a deal brokered out of the limelight, one-on-one, with a wink and a hint of sexism. This was not the first time that personal relationships bridged party, ideological, and procedural differences where Strauss, a Texas power broker, was concerned.

The men's room meeting also illustrates the underlying theme of this biography, *The Whole Damn Deal: Robert Strauss and the Art of Politics*. Strauss, who in his political heyday from 1960 to 1992, took charge of the Democratic National Committee when it was mired in debt, resuscitated trade talks with Japan, and served as George H. W. Bush's ambassador to Moscow, is a folksy negotiator who used charm, wit, and insights into human nature to move the wheels of politics on a national and international scale. Personal relationships were his forte—whether facing Mikhail Gorbachev on the back of a flatbed truck or recommending his rabbi for a seat on the Board of Regents of the University of Texas. Whenever possible, this lawyer evaded sunshine laws. In the decades before red-state/blue-state divisions, Strauss crossed the aisle. He thrived on bringing together disparate people—whether that involved putting George Wallace and Ted Kennedy on the same stage in 1973 or getting Carter and Reagan to a televised debate in 1980.

One caveat for readers of this entertaining biography should be recorded: The author is Strauss's grandniece. An alumna of Stanford University, Kathryn McGarr wrote the first draft of this book while a graduate student at the Columbia School of Journalism. Some years earlier, her great-uncle, who will turn ninety-four in October, had hired a seasoned journalist to assist with his memoirs. He recorded more than seventy interviews before the partnership dissolved. McGarr utilized those interviews along with FBI records, congressional hearing transcripts, Democratic Party memos, State Department telegrams, additional personal

interviews, and research at four presidential libraries to produce a discerning political biography with forty-nine pages of endnotes.

The author apparently overlooked the 2004 anthology *Jews in American Politics* in which Gerald Pomper and Miles Pomper call Strauss “the epitome of the modern ‘court Jew,’” because of his fundraising acumen and his proximity to the Oval Office.\* McGarr’s analysis of and Strauss’s reaction to that description would have been instructive.

Organized chronologically, with colloquial chapter titles (“A Dog That’ll Hunt,” “A Bunch of Goddamn Fools”), *The Whole Damn Deal* examines not only Strauss’s deftness as Jimmy Carter’s “Mr. Fix-It,” but also his conflicts of interest involving oil, gas, and savings and loans. Among the eye-opening chapters is “Revolving Door,” which details how the Strauss law firm of Akin, Gump became the first on Capitol Hill to develop a lobbying arm, setting a dubious example that is now ubiquitous.

Strauss’s status as a political insider had its downside. He endured some tense months in 1975 while under criminal investigation for accepting rolls of currency for the Democratic National Committee. “[In] those days you handled a lot of cash,” he acknowledged (153). Rather than record exact amounts, Strauss wrote donors thanking them for “tangible evidence of your support.” Unlike his mentor, Texas Governor John Connally, Strauss escaped indictment because an amendment to the 1974 Campaign Spending Act reduced the statute of limitations on such violations from five years to three.

In 1979, Strauss had a disappointing stint as Carter’s envoy to the Middle East. Initially, he fretted that Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin would “resent” him because he lacked a “formal” Jewish education (253–254). Yet Begin bonded with Strauss, as did Egypt’s Prime Minister Anwar Sadat. Ironically, it was Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, Sr., and National Security Advisor

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\* Gerald M. Pomper and Miles A. Pomper, “Movers, Shakers, and Leaders: Jewish Party Politicians,” in *Jews in American Politics*, ed. Sandy Maisel and Ira N. Forman (Lanham, MD, 2004), 96.

Zbigniew Brzezinski with whom Strauss found himself at war. Their diplomacy was more bureaucratic than his personal brand.

Although Bob Strauss, who was born in 1918, is the great-grandson of Texas' first ordained rabbi, he had next to no Jewish education. His German-born father, Karl "Charlie" Strauss, and his uncle Louis Rosenwasser were the only Jewish merchants in Stamford, a West Texas town of about four thousand souls. The two families attended High Holy Day services one day a year at the Reform synagogue in Fort Worth, 145 miles away. Strauss's mother, Edith, hired a Hebrew tutor from Wichita Falls, 115 miles distant, to teach the Alef Bet to Bob and his younger brother, Ted. But the teacher quit thirty minutes into the first lesson, saying it was hopeless. The boys did learn from their mother that they were among the Chosen People, an insight Bob kept to himself lest his Baptist friends become jealous. So popular was the youthful Bob Strauss that the "only door closed" (8) to him in his hometown was presidency of the Baptist Young People's Union, of which he was a social member.

When Strauss enrolled in 1935 at the University of Texas in Austin, he found another door blocked. He could pledge only a Jewish fraternity. "That was a very difficult, traumatic experience for me," he recalled. "I . . . wasn't prepared for the segregated society that I found at the University of Texas where basically Jewish people lived with Jewish people" (14). However, once he joined the Jewish fraternity Sigma Alpha Mu, the Greek system provided an avenue to larger campus life. He became secretary-treasurer of the Inter-Fraternity Council and an extraordinary ticket seller for college events, foreshadowing his fundraising in years to come. Fellow students recall him as "the most popular Jewish boy" at UT (18).

It was on a blind date, but not with each other, that he met Helen Jacobs, daughter of a Dallas paper company executive. He phoned her the next day, and their relationship endured until her death in 2004. The couple wed in 1941, just before his graduation from law school in Austin. Helen was by his side during his four years as an FBI agent and in 1945, when he launched his law firm with former FBI colleague Richard Gump, a Catholic. She

accompanied Bob throughout his career, from the tumultuous Democratic Party convention in Chicago in 1972 to Washington, D.C., where he once directed her to attend LaBelle Lance's Christian Bible study group as a show of support when Budget Director Bert Lance was under investigation. In 1991, Helen moved with Bob to Moscow, where the ambassador's residence "looked like a cross between a pigsty and a West Texas whorehouse" (331). The Strausses ordered dill pickles and deli meats to be sent from abroad and raised morale by throwing picnics for the embassy staff.

Again, the personal touch strengthened Strauss's hand with bureaucrats and diplomats. The fact that he was a Democrat serving a Republican president enhanced his aura. It was a different time, a bygone, bipartisan era that McGarr effectively reconstructs. Her sketch of Strauss's political career lays out the facts so that future historians can integrate and analyze his role on the political stage.

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**Southern Civil Religions: Imagining the Good Society in the Post-Reconstruction South.** By Arthur Remillard. Athens, GA, and London: University of Georgia Press, 2011. 234 pages.

**A**lthough their numbers were small, Jews were no strangers to the New South. Rabbis, synagogues, and denominational institutions were scattered throughout the region. A chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women was established in Mobile in 1896; and Greenville, Mississippi, was home to a Young Men's Hebrew Benevolent Society. Rabbi Edward Browne began the *Jewish South* in Atlanta in 1878. Reform Jew Charles Jacobson shared a law office with Jeff Davis, the "Wild Ass of the Ozarks" and an Arkansas governor. Jacobson's Judaism did not prevent him from winning a seat in the Arkansas State Senate in 1910. Such exam-

ples of Jewish assimilation in the New South, this book argues, can be explained by their participation in a common discourse of civil religion. According to author Arthur Remillard, "they shared a commitment to philanthropic work, civic involvement, military service, and Democratic Party politics" (107).

Jews are just one of the religious groups discussed in this interesting and well-documented study of religious pluralism, public discourse, and cultural conflict in the Wiregrass region of Florida, Georgia, and Alabama. Remillard carefully uses civil religion as an interpretive tool to recover competing moral visions of the good society. Eschewing mainstream Protestants like southern Baptists and Methodists, Remillard focuses on those at the margins of New South society. A chapter on African Americans includes a discussion of "Before Day clubs," constructions of anxious white southerners that recounted stories of gatherings of black militants who plotted the murders of whites.

Women also gained entrance to New South religion through a gendered ideology that assigned women to a moral sphere. Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish women drew upon a cultural metaphor of Christian motherhood to enter the public arena and engage in reforms like Prohibition and foreign missions. The life of Leon Schwarz illustrates the Jewish variation of civil religion. A veteran of the Spanish-American War, a participant in Confederate Memorial Days, and a member of B'nai B'rith, Schwarz exemplified the military, sectional, and philanthropic loyalties of the New South image. Senator Charles W. Jones of Florida and Mother Austin Carroll of the Sisters of Mercy in Mobile and New Orleans were prominent Catholics who adopted southern civil religion.

Remillard, however, is careful to show that the multiculturalism of civil religion did not preclude bigotry and violence. Lynching, which peaked in Florida during the period under study here, became part of a civil religious discourse that bestowed a redemptive quality on racial violence. Nativism was highly prevalent as well, kept alive by groups like the Guardians of Liberty and the venomous pen of Tom Watson. In the early twentieth century, Sidney J. Catts ran successfully for governor of Florida on an

anti-Catholic platform. James E. Coyle, a Catholic priest of Birmingham, was murdered by a Methodist minister in 1921. The defendant was acquitted due in no small part to anti-Catholic prejudice.

Still, Remillard argues, African Americans, Jews, and Catholics used their vision of a good society to attack religious discrimination. In current academic jargon, these groups subverted a dominant discourse to challenge the hegemonic order of the Protestant, Democratic Bourbon South. African Americans “produced their own civil religious discourse, one marked not only by resistance but also by an understanding of freedom developed from black history and Christian theology” (61). Leon Schwarz claimed that antisemitism was “profoundly un-American” (130).

In telling his story of southern civil religion, Remillard relies heavily on the works of other historians. His account of the hostility that greeted northern Republicans in the Reconstruction South, the unrealistic hopes placed upon public schools and railroads, and the role of women in cultivating the myth of the “Lost Cause” will be familiar to students of southern history. Yet the author has made very good use of contemporary newspapers as well as manuscript letters and diaries, enabling him to present interesting stories that reflect an adept use of quotations.

By stressing division, diversity, and fluidity, Remillard’s portrait of southern civil religion reflects the characteristics of academic postmodernism. At the outset, the author claims that his subject is “the diverse and competing ideal visions of society existing in the post-Reconstruction South” (1). At another point, he characterizes the nature of southern civil religion as “chaotic and unfinished” (10). In this way, Remillard’s depiction of southern civil religion is more closely attuned to the New South described by Edward L. Ayers in *The Promise of the New South* (1992) than that of C. Vann Woodward’s *Origins of the New South* (1951).

Historians, however, might take issue with several points in a book written from the disciplinary perspective of religious studies. First, the choice of the Wiregrass Gulf as the geographical scope of the book needed to be further explained and justified. Does it indeed offer “a suitable cross-section of the American

South" (7), as Remillard claims? Historians of the American South, more familiar with areas like the cotton country of the Mississippi Delta, the low country of South Carolina and Georgia, Piedmont areas of the upcountry, and the Upper South, might wonder. The book even lacks a map to graphically illustrate the region.

Secondly, the nature of religious conflict merited more discussion. In what ways was it cultural, political, or class conflict? Third, historians will suspect that civil religion in the New South served as an ideology for the interests of particular groups or classes. Here Remillard might have well engaged the concept of hegemony that has a rich tradition in southern history. Finally, one wonders if the author has focused too much on the margins of the southern religious landscape at the expense of the mainstream. Although Remillard is careful to acknowledge the dominant forces in the Protestant Democratic South, the book might leave an inflated impression of the role and power of African Americans, women, Jews, and Catholics.

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## Exhibit Review

**That You'll Remember Me: Jewish Voices of the Civil War.** Curators: Bonnie Eisenman and David Farris. Designer, Drew Gladwell. Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives, Richmond, Virginia. Through April 2015. <http://www.bethahabah.org/bama/index.htm>

This compact exhibition takes its wistful title from a song lyric that Confederate veteran Moses Ezekiel recalled hearing at a Richmond theater during the war years. Richmond's Jewish population then included three congregations, with the oldest dating from 1789. At the exhibition's entrance an oversized map of the city in 1861 locates the synagogues and homes of Jewish leaders, all within walking distance of the soon-to-be capitol of the Confederacy and residence of President Jefferson Davis. There would be no escape from the war for Richmond's Jewry.

Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives occupies a converted rowhouse next to Congregation Beth Ahabah's beautiful synagogue and near Monument Avenue. The first floor is the exhibition area, with this one filling a middle room and its entryways. Texts and images cover the walls, with strategically placed paintings and other artifacts providing color to catch the eye. The design of this content-heavy exhibition is consistent, and yet each story stands on its own within the whole.

The exhibition addresses historical questions by emphasizing that American Jews were "a minority group anxious to assimilate." About Jews and slavery, the exhibition notes slave ownership and some small involvement in the slave trade. Richmond rabbis embraced the proslavery argument, and Jewish Confederates acted on regional loyalties, just as their northern co-religionists did. Indeed, the exhibition tells of Confederate Herman Myers, reported killed in action but who survived to return home to find his overjoyed family dressed in mourning. Myers had two brothers. One died in the Confederate service, and

the other, who moved north prior to the war, served in the Union Army.

The stories are good ones. On the north wall are a photo and the shaving cup of Philip Whitlock (his birth name in Poland is unknown), whose militia company, joined by the pro-southern actor John Wilkes Booth, went to see the abolitionist John Brown hanged. Next to him is Richard Forrester, son of lawyer Gustavus Myers and an enslaved woman, who snatched up the American flag that Confederates pulled down from the state capitol in 1861 and hid until the Union Army entered Richmond in April 1865 and the flag could fly again.

On the opposite wall is the story of Phoebe Yates Levy Pember, the matron at Richmond's Chimborazo Hospital, the largest in the Confederacy. In the exhibition's only interactive technology, a pressed button brings a recording, by a descendant, of a stirring account from her diary of how Pember stood down whisky-seeking thugs with her pistol. On the west wall are stories of immigrants from poverty and antisemitism who arrived just in time for the war and of Myer Angle, the first president of Congregation Beth Ahabah, who sent six sons to serve the Confederacy.

Angle's son-in-law, Max J. Michelbacher, was the spiritual leader of Beth Ahabah, and his letters exchanged with Robert E. Lee in 1861 and 1863 have been treasured evidence of the congregation's connection with the hero of the Confederacy. Selections from those letters appear here, too, adjacent to a discussion of the service of Judah P. Benjamin, the "Brains of the Confederacy." These stand among all the other stories, but several decades ago they would have been highlighted, along with the exhibition's closing image of the honored space set aside in Richmond's Hebrew Cemetery for burials of thirty Jewish Confederate soldiers. These evidences were once central in Richmond Jewry's postwar embrace of the Lost Cause as an assimilationist strategy.

This exhibition suggests, instead, that the multiplicity of experiences, in combat on both sides and on the home front, shows how Jews participated fully while yet retaining a religious identity. The stories also show that neither religion nor the larger society's antisemitism solely determined the various paths that

*Phoebe Yates Levy Pember,  
matron of the largest hospital  
in the Confederacy.*

*(Photo loaned to the exhibit  
by Robert Marcus. Courtesy  
of Beth Ahabah Museum and  
Archives, Richmond, Virginia.)*

*Max J. Michelbacher,  
spiritual leader of  
Congregation Beth Ahabah  
from 1846 to 1867.*

*His portrait is part of  
the exhibit.  
(Courtesy of Beth Ahabah Mu-  
seum and Archives, Richmond,  
Virginia.)*

Jews in Richmond traveled during the Civil War. Supporting that thesis are the exhibition brochure, with names of all the Richmond Jews who served in the military, and a special issue of *Generations*, Beth Ahabah Museum and Archives' publication, with extended essays on several of the most prominent people featured in the exhibition.

Recently, the *New York Times'* museum critic, Edward Rothstein, charged that the similar storytelling of Virginia's official Sesquicentennial exhibition was "a kind of exculpatory relativism," a dodge away from the issues of slavery and Union. He has a point, but this exhibition makes multiple stories the fact of the experiences of Jews in Richmond. Visitors of all stripes to Richmond during the Sesquicentennial ought to make time for this small but powerfully engaging exhibition.

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## Website Review

**Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life.** <http://www.isjl.org>. Reviewed June 13–25, 2012.

The first website review published in the 2011 volume of *Southern Jewish History* described the on-line site of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, a pre-eminent institution for scholars of American Jewish history as well as southern Jewish history. This review concerns an organization and website dedicated specifically to southern Jewish history. The Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) is descended from one of the first institutions concerned with documenting and disseminating knowledge about southern Jewish life. Founded in 1986 in Jackson, Mississippi, as the Museum of the Southern Jewish Experience, the ISJL's stated mission is "to preserve, document, and promote the practice, culture, and legacy of Judaism in the South" (<http://www.isjl.org/about/index.html>). The museum, now a subsidiary of the ISJL, collects the artifacts and stories of small southern Jewish communities with the purpose of preserving their dwindling legacies.

Perusing the website, it becomes obvious that the institute is much more than a museum dedicated to the past. It is also actively engaged in providing religious, cultural, and educational programs to communities in the thirteen states it defines as the southern U.S. A circuit-riding rabbi travels to various small-town southern Jewish communities to provide rabbinic services to shrinking congregations lacking permanent rabbis. The institute also provides support for small southern Jewish communities with religious school curricula, teacher training, and outreach from its educational staff. Additionally, the ISJL organizes Jewish cultural events throughout the region and supports interfaith and cooperative efforts between southern Jewish communities and the

*Website at [www.isjl.org/](http://www.isjl.org/).*

general public. Separate sections of the website detail each of these programs, clearly linking them from a menu on the main page.

Visitors can click on the history department link to find the section of the ISJL's website most useful to historians and others interested in the southern Jewish past. The online "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities" is the most noteworthy feature for historians. The encyclopedia includes entries for cities, towns, and regions in nine of the thirteen states served by the institute, and is organized by state through an interactive map. While Texas contains entries for regions of the state as well as specific towns and cities, other states lack this element. The encyclopedia is an on-going joint effort, with entries researched and written by ISJL interns and Dr. Stuart Rockoff, director of the history department, who also serves as editor. Rockoff invites readers to submit information to him at [rockoff@isjl.org](mailto:rockoff@isjl.org). While a list of contributors is provided, the archival and scholarly sources for the encyclopedia could be more clearly cited. For instance, the Atlanta entry lists the Breman Jewish Heritage Museum as a resource as well as Steven Hertzberg's *Strangers within the Gate City*, but many of the other entries only cite sources for their images.

*"Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities"*  
at [www.isjl.org/history/archive/index.html](http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/index.html).

The layout of this encyclopedia makes it intuitive to navigate and read. Each entry contains a brief overview of the history of the Jewish residents of that town dating back to the earliest settlement. Peppered throughout the entries are an interesting array of visuals from each community's archives, including not only photographs but also advertisements, paintings, and archival documents. The narratives are largely descriptive, telling the stories of these communities through the lives of prominent Jewish business people, those involved in local civic affairs, and religious leaders. Demonstrating the substantial contribution of Jews to political life in the South, there is a page listing past southern Jewish mayors organized by city and date. The entries also detail the specifics of Jewish communal organizing, synagogue histories, and demographic shifts over time. Interesting anecdotes in the histories of these communities are described with accompanying audiovisuals, such as the photo of Yiddish theater actress Molly Picon's visit to Fitzgerald, Georgia, and the video of Austin's Jim Novy introducing his friend President Lyndon Johnson as the keynote speaker at Congregation Agudas Achim's dedication ceremony.

The institute claims to possess an oral history archive with over seven hundred interviews. The website thoughtfully explores the ethics and procedures involved in creating oral history collections and provides links to educational resources for creators and users of oral histories. A small sample of the ISJL's oral history collection can be accessed on the website in a section called, "Southern Jewish Voices." Nine people are featured from small-town southern Jewish communities, organized thematically to correspond with a family education program. Each interview is summarized with a brief blurb, and short video excerpts are provided from the interviews. The multimedia video streaming worked seamlessly, even on my somewhat outdated computer.

My one critique of the ISJL website is in the lack of information provided about the oral history collection. Although more than seven hundred audio and video recordings have been collected, there is very little hint to that wealth of data here and no information about how to access the interviews for research purposes. It would be useful to have longer video or audio clips of more oral histories, or even transcriptions, which many other oral history collections do provide on their websites. A less labor-intensive, yet still useful, suggestion is that the ISJL website be amended to include a list of names, ages, and locations of the people included in their oral history collection, or at least a random sampling of such. To date, there is no information about the contents of the oral histories, other than the nine short snippets contained on the "Southern Jewish Voices" page.

Overall, I found the institute's website to be a beneficial starting point for those interested in the small-town Jewish south. The website is clearly and attractively laid out to promote the institute's many and varied programs. It is well-organized and easy to navigate, with clear headings and aesthetically pleasing visuals. The two features that should not be missed are the online "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities" and the slideshows with archival photos and artwork linked to each of the major website sections.

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## Glossary

**Bar mitzvah** ~ traditional coming-of-age ritual for Jewish males reaching age of thirteen

**Bat mitzvah** ~ modern coming-of-age ritual for Jewish females usually at age twelve or thirteen, introduced in the twentieth century

**B'nai B'rith** ~ literally, *children of the covenant*; Jewish social service fraternity established in 1855

**B'nei** (*variant of B'nai*) ~ sons of, children of

**Borscht** ~ a soup made primarily of beets and served hot or cold often with sour cream

**Borscht Belt** ~ theaters and nightclubs associated with the Jewish summer resorts in the Catskills

**Boruch atoh Adonai** ~ literally, *Blessed are you, Lord*, the three Hebrew words that begin many Jewish blessings

**Chai** ~ meaning *life*, its written symbol formed by the Hebrew letters *het* and *yud*, often adorning jewelry, as a pendant worn on a chain around the neck.

**Chippe** (*dialectal pronunciation of chuppah*) ~ wedding canopy

**Chutzpah** ~ gall, effrontery, brazen nerve, presumptuous arrogance

**Delancey Street** ~ located in the heart of the old Jewish neighborhood on Manhattan's Lower East Side.

**Diaspora** ~ 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 far from their original homeland

**Flanken** ~ a particular cut of beef that is usually boiled or stewed

**Gefilte fish** ~ poached, minced fish ball (usually whitefish, pike, or carp) mixed with bread crumbs or matzo meal, eggs, and onion

**Goyim** ~ Plural of *goy*; gentiles, people who are not Jewish

**Haganah** ~ the Zionist paramilitary organization in Palestine that became the Israel Defense Forces after Israel achieved independence in 1948

**Halacha** ~ Jewish law

**Hasidic** ~ referring to **Hasidism**, a Jewish mystical sect founded in Poland in the mid-eighteenth century

**Haskalah** ~ Jewish Enlightenment

**Hatikvah** ~ literally *the hope*, the national anthem of the State of Israel; before 1948, the anthem of the Zionist movement

**Kaddish** ~ the mourner's prayer

**Klezmer** ~ a joyous, eastern European style of improvisational instrumental music enjoying a revival in the United States

**Kosher** ~ conforming to Jewish law, especially dietary law

**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.

**Kvetch, kvetching, kvetchy** ~ to complain; a complainer

**Mazel tov** ~ Yiddish for *congratulations*, literally, *good luck*

**Mazel tov der mame un der alter** ~ congratulations to the mother and the old man (i.e. father)

**Meydl** ~ girl

**Mishpachah** ~ family, including extended relatives

**Schlemiel**, (adjective, **schlemielesque**) ~ loser, awkward, consistently unlucky, object of pity

**Schnorrer** ~ moocher, someone who always lets the other person pick up the tab

**Shadchen** ~ a traditional matchmaker, marriage broker

**Shmatta** ~literally *rag*; a worn piece of clothing

**Shmootz**, **shmutz** ~ dirt, filth, stain

**Shtetl** ~ small town or village in eastern Europe associated with Jewish residence

**Shtick** ~ a person's way of doing something; an act

**Shul** ~ congregation or synagogue

**Talmud** ~ collection of post-biblical ancient teachings justifying and explaining Jewish law; compilation of *Mishna* (code of Jewish religious and legal norms) and *Gemara* (discussions and explanations of *Mishna*)

**Tsatskale** ~ cute little gal

**Yom Ha-Shoah** ~ Holocaust Remembrance Day observed on the 27th day of the Hebrew month of Nisan



## *Note on Authors*

**Claudia Wilson Anderson** received a Bachelor of Arts in government, 1969, and a Master of Professional Accounting, 1984, both from the University of Texas at Austin. In 1969, she joined the staff of the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library and Museum as an archivist, and, in 2004, became the supervisory archivist. She frequently speaks to educational and civic groups about the Johnson Library, the recordings of President Johnson's telephone conversations, Lyndon Johnson's pre-presidential career, and Lady Bird Johnson. In March 2011, she delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Texas State Historical Association on President Johnson and his aid to Jewish immigrants trying to enter the United States in the late 1930s and 1940s. She previously published a short article on the subject in the newsletter of the Texas Jewish Historical Society.

**John T. Kneebone** is associate professor of history at Virginia Commonwealth University, where he is also chair of the department of history. He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia and is the author of *Southern Liberal Journalists and the Issue of Race, 1920-1944*, and a coeditor of the *Dictionary of Virginia Biography*. His current research project is a history of his university.

**Scott M. Langston** teaches religion at Texas Christian University in Ft. Worth, Texas, as well as American history at Tarrant County College in Fort Worth and at Weatherford College, in Weatherford, Texas. He has written several essays and books in the fields of southern Jewish history (including three in previous volumes of this journal), the reception history of the Bible, and religion including *Exodus Through the Centuries* (2006). He is a former president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society (2006-08)

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**Michael Murphy** is a graduate student studying history at Mississippi State University. Murphy's research focuses on modern American history with an emphasis on southern and contemporary political history. Murphy previously earned a B.A. in history with a minor in secondary education from the University of Florida. He is currently examining the development of the Sunbelt after the Second World War and how rural parts of the region deviated from its industrial and political evolution.

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**Dina Pinsky**, Ph.D., is assistant professor of sociology at Arcadia University in Glenside, Pennsylvania. Her specialties include gender, social movements, Jewish studies, and research methods. She is the author of *Jewish Feminists: Complex Identities and Activist Lives* (2009). Her current research explores the identities of Jews living in small towns in the Jim Crow South.

**Stuart Rockoff**, currently president of the Southern Jewish Historical Society, is director of the history department at the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life, where he works to preserve, document, and interpret the history of south-

ern Jews. He is the author of several articles and essays on southern Jewish history, including most recently "Chai Cotton: Jewish Life in Mississippi," published in *Ethnic Heritage in Mississippi*, edited by Shana Walton. Currently, he is working to complete the online "Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities," available at [www.isjl.org](http://www.isjl.org), of which he is the editor and chief author.

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**Bryan Edward Stone** is the author of *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* (2010), which won the Southern Jewish Historical Society Book Prize for 2011. He teaches U.S. history at Del Mar College in Corpus Christi and is a visiting professor at the Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, where he teaches a summer course on Texas Jews.

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**Hollace Ava Weiner** is a journalist turned historian. She wrote for the *Baltimore News-American* and the Fort Worth *Star-Telegram* before focusing on Texas Jewish history with the 1999 publication of *Jewish Stars in Texas: Rabbis and Their Work*. She holds a master's degree from the University of Texas at Arlington, oversees the Fort Worth Jewish Archives, and edited *Lone Stars of David* (2007). Most recently she wrote the centennial history of Fort Worth's oldest country club.

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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) *tie* 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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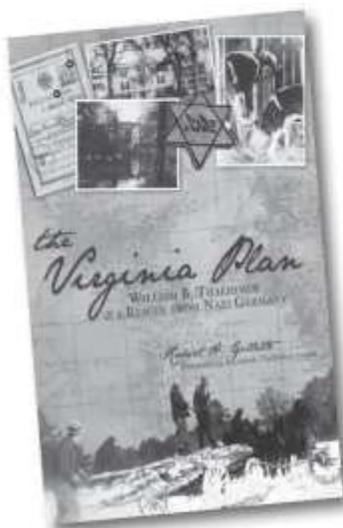
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