

# SOUTHERN JEWISH HISTORY

**Journal of the Southern Jewish Historical Society**

Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Sandra Berman, *Primary Sources Section Editor*

Stephen J. Whitfield, *Book Review Editor*

Phyllis Leffler, *Exhibit Review Editor*

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## Book Reviews

### **Screening a Lynching: The Leo Frank Case on Film and Television.**

By Matthew H. Bernstein. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2009, 332 pages.

I first learned about the trial and lynching of Leo Frank from my grandmother, Phyllis Benjamin, during the mid-1950s. A newlywed in 1914, she had just moved to Jacksonville, Florida, from New York City. The details of the case horrified her: a Jewish Atlantan had been unfairly convicted of murdering an employee, thirteen-year-old Mary Phagan. This was followed by Frank's incarceration, anti-Jewish rabble rousing, the kidnapping of Frank from prison, and his death by hanging (after the commutation of his death sentence). My grandmother recounted the story solemnly and concluded with a whisper, "people were afraid," meaning southern Jews, some of whom left Atlanta in fear. For a woman whose Jewish consciousness identified with the prosperous and secure "Our Crowd" families of Manhattan, the shock of Frank's death led her to question a future in the South. As time passed, however, she and other southern Jews, especially influential Atlantans, believed it best to keep the story quiet. "Nobody speaks about it any more," she said. I was then a teenager wholly unaware of religious animosity at the time, so I could not truly relate, at least not until two 1950s antisemitic outbursts—the Temple bombing in Atlanta and a frightening vandalism incident at our synagogue, Ahavath Chesed, in Jacksonville, Florida. Both episodes seemed to echo the Frank case and altered my innocent perception of southern Jewish history.

Since the 1915 lynching, the Frank case has inspired numerous books and articles by notable authors such as Leonard Dinnerstein, Harry Golden, and Charles and Louise Samuels. Each added more detail and speculation to the scenario. Steve Oney's massive 2004 work, *And the Dead Shall Rise*, a volume that

for the first time revealed the names of the lynch-party ringleaders, serves as the culmination of this literature. Many were prominent Marietta, Georgia, businessmen and politicians who snatched Frank from a prison cell and hanged him in their hometown. The incident directly led to the establishment of the Anti-Defamation League and conversely to a revival of the Ku Klux Klan, a group sworn to protect southern white womanhood.

While various publications detailed the case many times over, forming a consensus that Frank was undeniably innocent, films and television programs have been produced with a degree of caution, mirroring the reticence about which my grandmother spoke. Filmmakers have tended to fictionalize or leave out relevant facts, perhaps fearful of provoking incidents of anti-Jewish sentiment or legal action. Matthew Bernstein's *Screening a Lynching: The Leo Frank Case on Film and Television* is the first scholarly examination of the scenarios by which Hollywood has depicted the case and its aftermath. The story remains far more than a murder mystery, involving sectionalism, antisemitism, class antagonism, media exploitation and sensationalism, employee-management conflicts, racial tensions, and child labor—all key issues a century ago.

*Screening a Lynching* discusses four Hollywood treatments of the Frank case. Two are motion pictures: black filmmaker Oscar Micheaux's *Murder in Harlem* (1936) and Mervyn LeRoy's *They Won't Forget* (1937), and two television programs: the *Profiles in Courage* episode entitled "John M. Slaton" (1964), and a two-part NBC mini-series, *The Murder of Mary Phagan* (1988). Based on detailed research and insightful analysis, Bernstein probes each production fully from the screenwriting, acting, and direction through the marketing, distribution, and critical reactions. Throughout he compares how the films portray the principal characters—Frank, prosecutor Hugh Dorsey, Governor John Slaton, key witness Jim Conley, and the fiery populist Tom Watson, whose vitriolic newspaper fanned the flames of Jewish hatred—in terms of what is fictionalized, what is not, and why and how the characterizations evolved with each succeeding production.

Quite strikingly, Bernstein reports on two early cinematic representations of the Frank case: *Leo M. Frank and Governor Slaton* (1915), a sympathetic fifteen-minute documentary by writer-director Hal Reid made with the cooperation of Frank's family, which showed actual footage of Frank from prison. Reid's distributor capitalized on the ongoing press coverage by proclaiming to prospective exhibitors that the film "had millions of dollars of front page publicity." That same year the National Board of Review banned George Roland's five-reel feature, *The Frank Case*, because it advocated Frank's acquittal while his case remained under appeal. No prints of either film exist. Newsreels after Frank's death showed the lynch mob and his body hanging. The mayor of Atlanta and the city's censorship board instructed local theaters to cut out the portions concerning Frank, however, because "prominent officials and citizens" believed that it might upset the feelings of many people in Atlanta. Coincidentally, this was the heyday of the decade's most profitable film, D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation*, which glorified racism and southern white women. A Russian Jewish immigrant, Louis B. Mayer, distributed the film in New England and parlayed the resulting profits into a career as the powerful mogul of MGM studios in Hollywood. Indeed *Birth of a Nation*, in lockstep with the Frank case and the creation of the Knights of Mary Phagan, provided the impetus for the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan.

The Frank case was ripe for storytelling in the conventional Hollywood sense, but only up to a point. It is a detective story and courtroom drama, fraught with sensational journalism, which culminates in one extraordinary sacrifice from a politician, Georgia Governor John Slaton. The person most identified through the years as the likely murderer, Jim Conley, a janitorial employee of Frank's, put his mark on history as an African American whose testimony helped convict a white man, an almost unprecedented event in the Deep South. Through the lens of each film Bernstein provides a fascinating look at how the case was judged and marketed within a given era, factoring in a changing knowledge of the facts and the passage of time. For example, during the 1930s Bernstein notes that central lingering issues—Frank's Jewishness and

its role in his fate—were too hot to handle. The theatrical films made then fictionalize the roles and fail to identify the Frank character as being Jewish.

Micheaux, who was in Atlanta in 1913 and perhaps attended Frank's trial, wrote and directed the earliest of the movies. The case became a lifelong obsession for him. Financed by Jewish investors, he made *Murder in Harlem* from a black point of view and clearly incorporates similar characters and situations as the actual case, although it avoids many of its compelling points. Particularly excepting a white Frank and Phagan, nearly all the actors in *Murder in Harlem* are black, and tend to be portrayed sympathetically. Conley's character betrays an extreme fear of "the white man," which includes his own possible lynching; and the film offers various plot twists involving his participation along with Frank's allegedly unpleasant personal traits. Bernstein discloses that during the actual trial, black publications like the *Chicago Defender* cheered Frank's setbacks, while the NAACP magazine, the *Crisis*, fully endorsed his conviction. Conceivably Micheaux played on black/Jewish differences by portraying his Frank as a mendacious lecher, possibly guilty of perjury but ultimately not murder. *Murder in Harlem* ends with the guilt pinned on an unrelated character, a means by which Micheaux exhibited at least some empathy towards his otherwise offensive lead subject while exonerating Conley.

It is likely that the Warner brothers, Polish Jewish immigrants whose studio was known for provocative 1930s fare, empathized with the fears of the southern community about which my grandmother spoke, and therefore avoided stirring the pot of antisemitism at a time when popular radio commentators Father Charles Coughlin and Gerald L. K. Smith did so. Their studio's *They Won't Forget*, penned by Jewish screenwriters Aben Kandel and Robert Rossen, incorporates many details of the Frank case. But their protagonist is simply a northerner, an outsider in a region still simmering with Civil War resentment of Yankees. Based on Ward Green's novel, *Death in the Deep South*, the film remains a "veiled treatment, a powerful portrait of southern sectionalism and mob violence." Its stars include Claude Rains, in the



Hugh Dorsey role as the politically ambitious prosecutor, and Lana Turner, in her motion picture debut as Mary Clay (a.k.a. Mary Phagan). Green, who covered the original trial and aftermath as a reporter, felt that antisemitism did not act as a crucial factor initially in the case. He based his reasoning on the fact that five Jews served on the grand jury that indicted Frank. The film portrays Frank as a college professor, played by handsome contract actor Edward Norris, who seems unsettled among the town's residents and is possibly enamored with his student, the sexy Turner.

Even if studios were reluctant to characterize Jews at all on screen at that time (*The Life of Emile Zola* [1937] was an exception), a major hurdle for Warner Brothers and director LeRoy had nothing to do with southern Jewish feelings. The powerful Production Code Administration, a forerunner of today's Motion Picture Association of America and its rating board, maintained a policy of rejecting stories that dealt with ethnic bigotry. Bernstein ably notes the evolution and several revisions of the screenplay of *They Won't Forget* as the studio and the PCA ironed out objectionable story lines depicting "a stark perversion of justice, scenes of drunkenness, perjured witnesses, excessive brutality, and mob violence." The final version shows a man convicted, somewhat honestly, on circumstantial evidence and "revamps horrifying episodes into acceptable entertainment." The film, which opens with a group of Confederate Army veterans espousing the Lost Cause, uses sectionalism and the hatred of a man who has purportedly threatened southern womanhood as its principal themes. *They Won't Forget* ultimately blames the entire fictional town for the resulting events. Atlanta's censor therefore kept the film out of the city, with the support of local Jewish leaders. The latter remained afraid that a movie about the Phagan-Frank case might reignite antisemitism in a place that two decades hence would bill itself as "the city too busy to hate."

*They Won't Forget* concludes with a symbolic image of the hanging, a dangling mail sack at an empty railroad stop. While the victim's innocence is implied throughout the picture, the lynch mob gets away with the crime, just as it did in 1915, while the

murder itself stays unresolved. It ends with a reporter saying to the prosecutor, "I wonder if he really did it."

In 1964 NBC acted unafraid of using bigotry as a theme when it aired the television series, *Profiles in Courage*, based on John F. Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning bestseller. The network previously featured episodes on the fearlessness of Frederick Douglass, Woodrow Wilson, and Louis D. Brandeis in the face of intolerance. "John Slaton" centers primarily on the Georgia governor's commutation of Frank's death sentence a day before his scheduled execution. Although Kennedy's book only portrays U.S. senators, NBC needed more episodes to fill out its season. Given JFK's and later his estate's approval of Slaton as an appropriate subject, the program and the series itself were partly intended to rebut FCC chairman Newton Minow's famous condemnation of broadcast television as a "vast wasteland." Written by veteran television writer Don Mankiewicz, who had contributed several scripts to the series including the Douglass program, "John Slaton" was directed by Robert Gist (*Peter Gunn*, *Route 66*, *Twilight Zone*) and painstakingly researched by Bernard Weintraub. Airing several years after the publication of Charles and Louise Samuels's *Night Fell on Georgia*, the program could finally revisit the horrible details of the case factually without fear of hostile reaction. As Bernstein notes of the era, "the notion that a mob could kidnap a white prisoner from state authority and lynch him might have seemed as historically remote as the Salem witch trials."

Bernstein astutely observes the difference in Slaton's characterization, from the portrait of the governor as a pessimistic protester in *They Won't Forget* to a "man embodied with inspiring selflessness" in *Profiles in Courage*. Slaton knew the risks of commutation, including a possible lynching, and expected a certain end to his political career. He had considered a senatorial run; and one definitive scene shows him at odds with Watson, whose newspaper helped inflame sentiment against Frank and "jew money." Whereas Slaton, played by the up-and-coming Jewish actor Walter Matthau, appears in virtually every scene, neither Leo Frank nor Jim Conley is depicted at all.

In 1965 veteran filmmaker Stanley Kramer optioned Golden's book, *A Little Girl is Dead*. Despite the financial clout Kramer no doubt wielded, however, the movie was never developed. It was assuredly a tough sell, I can now report, as an ex-*Atlanta Constitution* reporter and aspiring screenwriter named William Diehl learned. In 1975 he attempted to develop and finance his screen treatment based on the Leo Frank case. Diehl hoped to counteract the fictional nature of previous cinematic depictions with a treatment he wrote adhering strictly to the factual record. The prospects of funding any motion picture out of Atlanta were slim, and doing so with a story many important locals wanted buried forever proved impossible. At one point Diehl received an anonymous call from a man purporting to be descended from the family of Lucille Selig, Frank's spouse, who threatened that "anyone trying to make a movie about the Leo Frank case in Atlanta will be ruined financially." Since Diehl was close to being broke at the time, he laughed the call off. His treatment failed to come to fruition, but he later wrote successful action novels including *Sharky's Machine* and *Primal Fear*, both of which became major motion pictures.

NBC's 1988 two-part mini-series, *The Murder of Mary Phagan*, perhaps satisfied Diehl's and Kramer's vision of how the Frank case should have been depicted. This thorough five-hour dramatization was broadcast several months after Alonzo Mann, a former office boy at Frank's firm, the National Pencil Company, revealed, at age eighty-eight and dying, that he had seen Jim Conley carrying Mary Phagan's body to the cellar of the building. Conley had told him to keep quiet or else "I'll kill you." Mann stayed mum at the trial and then for another seventy-three years until he cleared his conscience. His testimony would at least have proven Conley a perjurer and perhaps set Frank free.

Inspired by Golden's book, producer George Stevens, Jr., and director Billy Hale brought A-team savvy to the making of *The Murder of Mary Phagan*. Beginning with a script from the Texas novelist Larry McMurtry, later to be revised by Emmy winner Jeffrey Lane, the mini-series boasts seasoned talent like Richard Jordan (Dorsey), Peter Gallagher (Frank), Charles Dutton (Conley)

and, most notably, Jack Lemmon as Slaton. James Stewart had turned down that gubernatorial role because the script was “a liberal tract.” The program strives for visual and historical authenticity without taking away from commercial potential. It examines an extraordinary number of incidents from the case and vividly displays for the first time on film the loud anti-Jewish sentiment from the crowd outside the courtroom. Moreover, *The Murder of Mary Phagan* fully considers the consciousness and impact of Frank’s religion as the story progresses. Lemmon’s character, earlier played by his *Odd Couple* partner Walter Matthau in the *Profiles in Courage* episode, sits at the heart of the production. Lemmon believed that you can “entertain, enlighten, and make people think” within the same framework. While Bernstein is surely correct in assessing *The Murder of Mary Phagan* as “the most nuanced and fullest account to date,” opposing views came from Atlanta amid generally positive national notices. Mary Phagan’s great-niece, Mary Phagan-Kean, who later published a book on the case, called the teleplay “not very factual or accurate at all.” Tom Watson Brown, the demagogue’s great-grandson, agreed, claiming “a factual error on every page” of the script.

Bernstein concludes with the hope that filmmakers will continue to return to mine the case. Ideally, he will add a chapter to a revised edition of his book by analyzing *The People v. Leo Frank*. This 2009 documentary film, which the stellar commentary of Steve Oney enhances, gives Phagan-Kean and Watson Brown a soapbox as well. Regardless, *Screening a Lynching* is an illuminating book, which contributes more layers to a haunting story and benchmark case in American law.

Repercussions of the Leo Frank case continue to spring forward in my own experience. In 2000, as an entertainment-oriented advertising executive representing an Atlanta theatrical producer, Theater of the Stars, I helped promote a series of plays. They included *Parade*, the musical written by Alfred Uhry based on the Frank story. Our agency routinely worked out mutually beneficial advertising promotions for each show with the *Marietta Daily Journal*. When I contacted the newspaper’s advertising vice president about our normal promotion in relation to *Parade*, he replied:

"Hell no, that story will remind everyone that our publisher's ancestor, Bolan Glover Brumby, was a leader of the lynch mob." Perhaps signaling a shift in Atlanta's acceptance of the case, *Parade* succeeded financially despite the newspaper's refusal to participate in the marketing of the musical.

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**Moses of South Carolina: A Jewish Scalawag during Reconstruction.** By Benjamin Ginsberg. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010. 219 pages.

If anyone remembers Franklin Moses, Jr., today, it's as South Carolina's Jewish scalawag and "Robber Governor" who led his state to "financial and moral ruin" (x) during Reconstruction. However, Benjamin Ginsberg, a professor of political science at Johns Hopkins University, positions Moses in the context of his time and place in order to reveal the man that Moses's enemies, who wrote the histories of his era, willfully neglected to see. Ginsberg finds a very mixed bag. Moses *was* indeed corrupt, but Ginsberg elucidates the rest of the story. In multiple ways, Moses was a century ahead of his contemporaries. He launched several modern-style social programs, including land redistribution, education reform, and the racial integration of state institutions. He formed a black militia and protected the freedmen's civil and political rights. And, most significantly, he honestly believed that blacks were his equal and acted accordingly. He advocated racial social equality. He was friendly with many freedmen and invited them to his home, extending a hospitality that was anathema to the white South. In short, he lived what Senator Charles Sumner, the Radical Republican from Massachusetts, preached. By flagrantly violating southern racial taboos, Moses lost everything.

Ginsberg skillfully narrates the history of South Carolina and the role of Jews in the state just prior to and after the Civil War.

His writing is clear and easy to follow without becoming simplistic or condescending. He explains how and why Moses started his political career as an ardent secessionist, yet ended up as an equally dedicated ally of the so-called Radical Republicans. The author deftly navigates his way through the complexities of the ever-shifting factionalism of South Carolina party politics during Reconstruction. And, because Moses's ultimate downfall resulted from the North's abandonment of Reconstruction little more than a decade after Appomattox, Ginsberg weaves in the impact on the state of national politics. The result is a rich and compelling picture of postbellum South Carolina.

Despite these contextual strengths, the story is less clear in its portrait of Moses. Very little has been written about him, and he appears to have left virtually no papers or letters. This book must rely on Moses's commentary and editorials in the *Sumter News*, his hometown newspaper, which he edited from 1866 until 1867, as well as his public record as a delegate to the South Carolina Constitutional Convention of 1868, as a representative in the South Carolina House, and as governor, covering the years 1868 to 1874. From then until his death in 1906 at the age of sixty-eight, essentially no records of the "Robber Governor" exist.

Historically the main source of information about Moses has been the Democratic Party-controlled press in South Carolina, as well as early twentieth century accounts of the Reconstruction period written primarily by white southerners. The journalists were his virulent enemies, who rarely if ever published anything positive about Moses, his policies, or his supporters. The latter were equally one-sided, viewing Reconstruction as a catastrophe for the region and depicting the return of white Democratic control as Redemption. Even modern historians gloss over Moses's achievements, according to Ginsberg. The major questions about Moses's life and motivations therefore remain open to conjecture. How corrupt was he? Why did he so ardently espouse the cause of the freedmen? Why did he ultimately fail so disastrously, losing everything—reputation, career, and family? And how did his partly Jewish origins affect his career?

Ginsberg concludes that Moses was no more corrupt than his contemporaries (thus damning him with faint praise), but his accomplishments well outweighed the negatives. Ginsberg adds that graft and corruption were two of the few tools open to the Republicans, who faced a better organized, more experienced, and, most significantly, frequently violent opposition. Thus Moses did not line his own pockets, but rather used the money to keep himself and the Republicans in power.

Why then was Moses so vilified and demonized? Ginsberg's thesis is that it was because he was partly Jewish and because he violated the South's most rigid social code: he fraternized with blacks. The combination was ruinous. The son of a Jewish father and a Protestant mother, Moses was raised as a Methodist. He married an Episcopalian and became a vestryman at his wife's church. Ginsberg offers no evidence that Moses ever thought of himself as Jewish. Yet his Jewish heritage marginalized him socially, especially as feelings toward Jews in South Carolina changed from general toleration to postbellum hostility. Moses's mother-in-law even refused to recognize her daughter's marriage to a Jewish "parvenu" and never allowed him into her home. Moses was a "court Jew," privileged and well-regarded, but not a member of aristocratic society — nor would he ever be. Ginsberg claims that such a status typically breeds resentment and ambition (22), which is exactly what happened with Moses.

Realizing that he had no chance of advancement in the Democratic Party, he espoused racial equality as a Republican. This accomplished three objectives for him. First, by aligning himself with blacks he created a powerful voter base that propelled him to the office of speaker of the South Carolina House and then governor of the state. Second, albeit unspoken, it paid the white Democrats back for rejecting him, his father, and his heritage. And third, he found the one group in South Carolina that would accept him without reservations; he had friends again.

Throughout *Moses of South Carolina*, one question remains unasked and unanswered. Although Moses did not see himself as Jewish, others most definitely did. Did this identification move Moses from a politically expedient alliance with blacks to treating



them as social equals? Ginsberg suggests that Moses foreshadowed later Jewish-black alliances based on a commonality of “allies at the margins” of American society (5). If this were true, then the answer to the question would be yes. But the connection is tenuous at best and not fully explored, and the evidence Ginsberg accumulates suggests that other factors played a strong role. Moses himself complicates the question. He said: “I wanted to be Governor. . . . I saw there was but one way – to make myself popular with the niggers . . .” If he stopped there, it would be a clear sign of hypocrisy. But he went on: “My life was ruined. I was made an outcast. I did not dare to go back to Sumter. I had to meet my own father in secret” (191). This is too high a price to pay to attribute merely to political expediency, personal ambition, and the vice of hypocrisy.

So the answer remains out of reach. Its resolution would be the subject of another fine book on South Carolina, its Jewish population, and the elusive but tantalizing Franklin Moses, Jr.

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**Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina.** By Leonard Rogoff.  
Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010. 422 pages.

*Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* tells the story of North Carolina Jewry and integrates that narrative within the broader American Jewish, southern Jewish, and North Carolinian experiences. Leonard Rogoff chronicles North Carolina Jewry from the Colonial era through the present day and emphasizes the similarities and differences between their experience and those of Jews elsewhere in America, concluding that it “is not unique among American Jews, but an argument can be made for its difference in degree if not in kind” (4). *Down Home* also contextualizes Jewish life within the larger growth and development of North Carolina, and suggests that “the Jewish rise from



immigrant poverty to middle-class prosperity, from marginality to the American mainstream, parallels the North Carolina story" (5). Ultimately, *Down Home* succeeds in not only compellingly documenting the narrative of the North Carolina Jewish experience, but also in setting it within these broader contexts.

North Carolina was seemingly a welcoming place for Jews in colonial America and the early republic, yet Rogoff notes that most Jews avoided the state because settlement would not further their economic interests. In its early days, North Carolina was "a polyglot immigrant society," and its many religious groups "made it welcoming to religious diversity even as its Protestant character led it to suspect those who did not share the faith" (1-2). Yet despite this potentially welcoming environment for Jews, Rogoff argues that North Carolina was "too economically backward" (16) and "lacked an economy that could sustain a Jewish community" (45). Colonial Jews were largely involved in commercial trade, and Rogoff maintains that because "few towns existed where a Jewish merchant could find customers for silk, crockery, and glassware" (45), growth was slow. This situation did not rapidly change, although in postbellum North Carolina, "as the economy expanded, growing numbers of Jews established themselves in the budding cities and mill market towns" (99).

The number of Jews in North Carolina grew rapidly, Rogoff demonstrates, only with the mass influx of eastern European immigrants in the late nineteenth century. While southern Jewish historians often emphasize earlier historical periods, Rogoff maintains that the arrival of eastern European Jews was a critical turning point in North Carolina. Moreover, he also underscores that the community they created in North Carolina looked very different from those they created elsewhere in America. While these new immigrants frequently worked in the sweatshops of large cities, North Carolina lacked a large urban center. Accordingly, those who came to the state were "fueled with ambition to be self-employed, not wage earners in a factory" (107), creating a very different economic profile. For example, Rogoff notes that 77 percent of Durham's Jews were self-employed in 1910, when over 70 percent of New York Jews were factory workers.

These eastern European Jews settled in North Carolina for economic reasons, “not in quest of Jewish community” (63), and as a result, institutional life took on a far different appearance in the state than elsewhere. New immigrants to North Carolina, Rogoff argues, “were breaking from Jewish community” (63), not seeking to create it, and institutional Judaism did not emerge until the 1870s—much later than in other parts of America. Cemeteries and benevolent societies were the first to appear, followed by congregations—a pattern typical to American Judaism. The early North Carolina congregations were Reform, yet, as elsewhere, the eastern European immigrants created their own orthodox synagogues. While there were contentious splits between German and eastern European Jews in other parts of America, Rogoff believes that “North Carolina communities were too small to factionalize, and synagogue finances were too precarious to let any Jew remain an outsider” (179). Throughout much of the twentieth century, “a common refrain among North Carolina Jews was—in contrast to the divisions that wracked northern, urban communities—Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox Jews enjoyed unusual harmony” (347).

While much of *Down Home* emphasizes the similarities and differences between the North Carolina Jewish experience and that of American Jewry, Rogoff also compares the state’s Jews to their non-Jewish neighbors. “Jewish immigrants, with few skills and little capital, shared the southerners’ ‘collective history’ as a ‘people of poverty’ in a land of prosperity,” he argues, “but the ambition of North Carolina Jews was to rise out of the working class, not with it” (125). Moreover, though he details antisemitism and incidents of violence, Rogoff argues that “North Carolinians appreciated these honest, hardworking people, who, like themselves, were rising from poverty to prosperity, from old to new, from defeat to success” (190–191).

While much of *Down Home* is devoted to the historical origins of North Carolinian Jewry, Rogoff connects this history to the contemporary North Carolina Jewish community. “Just as the New South had welcomed the Jewish peddler, storekeeper, and industrialist, so, too, did the Sunbelt extend warm greetings to the

Jewish doctor, engineer, scientist, professor, and entrepreneur,” he maintains (304). Although he emphasizes continuities, he also accounts for the discontinuities between the present community and its past by connecting it to the larger trends in North Carolina. “If North Carolina Jewry is new and diverse, if its community is discontinuous with its past, so is the North Carolina they call home,” he believes (375).

By weaving the complex narrative of North Carolina Jewry into its broader context, Leonard Rogoff has made a valuable contribution to the study of Jewry in North Carolina, the American South, and in the United States more broadly. Rogoff’s work is engaging and is in many ways a bottom-up history of American Jewry told through the lens of North Carolina. His use of secondary sources is exemplary, and his primary sources include those gathered by the biographers of such important individuals as Aaron Lopez and Jacob Mordecai, as well as his own archival research. He offers a selection of primary documents interspersed in the work, strengthening the text and offering the reader clear examples of the arguments that he makes. Perhaps the primary weakness of this work derives from its greatest strength—it is at times difficult to discern between the American, southern, and North Carolinian Jewish experiences because Rogoff weaves the narratives together so effectively. Yet *Down Home* is a fantastic portrait of Jewry in North Carolina, and will undoubtedly serve as a model to those endeavoring to write southern Jewish history.

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**We Were Merchants: The Sternberg Family and the Story of Goudchaux’s and Maison Blanche Department Stores.** By Hans J. Sternberg with James E. Shelledy. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2009. 141 pages.

On the surface, this book details the story of the rise and fall of a department store empire in America, which is fascinating enough. But the book offers far more. It is also the story of several generations of a Jewish merchant family, its escape from the Nazis, and its rise to success in America through hard work and adherence to family traditions and values. Written by the last family owner of the chain, the book succeeds as a family history, a business history, a history of American Jewish merchants, and a personal reflection on the impact of larger historical events and trends.

Beginning in the 1930s, two generations of the Sternberg family owned Goudchaux's and Maison Blanche department stores in Louisiana. In the 1980s they expanded into Florida to become the largest family-owned department store chain in the nation. By 1990, shortly before the enterprise was sold, the Sternbergs employed 8,800 full- and part-time employees in twenty-four stores, with annual sales exceeding \$480 million.

Headed by Erich and Lea Sternberg, the family arrived in America from Germany in the 1930s. The first three chapters discuss the family's two-hundred-year heritage as merchants in Germany and, faced with growing Nazi persecution, their difficult decision to leave family and business behind to make a new start in America. Their personal story illuminates how difficult it was, while enmeshed in unfolding events, to see that what appeared to be another round of hard times was actually leading to the tragedy of the Holocaust. The Sternbergs barely made it out in time; other members of the family did not escape. The act of emigrating to America was, in itself, fraught with danger. Their emigration required extended planning and subterfuge in order to escape with the capital that would allow them to start anew. How hard it must have been for Erich to leave his wife and young children behind until he was established. How thrilling it was to read of Lea's courage as she and the children made a hairbreadth escape from the Nazis snapping at their heels like hungry wolves.

Once in America, Erich's story mirrors that of many Jewish immigrants who tapped into networks of extended family to open doors and receive a hand up. Previously settled relatives in

Mississippi and Louisiana led Erich to the South and eventually introduced him to an opportunity he could make his own. Over a three-year period, Erich purchased the Goudchaux department store in Baton Rouge, a business with its own three-decade history. The middle chapters of the book focus on Goudchaux's growth and improvement under Erich from 1939 to the 1960s, as he built a reputation for high-end fashion, furs and bridal wear, as well as a solid commitment to customer service. As a family business, all members were involved in daily operations, including the children who began working at minor tasks when just five years old.

Reading these middle chapters made me long for the "golden age" of department stores in America, when customer service built loyalty and imparted a family feel, while specialty departments offered a wonderland of merchandise. I am dating myself to admit that I can remember the end of the golden age, when department stores carried such specialties as sewing and notions, stamps and coins, records and books, and had entire floors that might be devoted to toys, furniture, or appliances. For younger readers unable to relate to the concept, I suggest viewing the Marx Brothers movie *The Big Store* (1941) for a hint of what these department stores were like.

The final chapters follow the expansion of the business into a multi-state chain under the direction of Erich's sons, Josef and author Hans, as well as their diversification into insurance, travel agencies, and television and radio, ending with the personal and business trials that led to the sale. The story provides an insider perspective on the problems that beset large department store chains in the 1980s and 1990s, including an economic downturn, over-extended debt, and competition from large specialty stores able to undercut prices. Enlightening, too, was the detailing of high-stakes negotiations in buying and selling multi-million dollar businesses.

But none of this gets at the passion that imbues this book. It is difficult to convey in this short review how much more there is to this story than just a business or family history. For example, interspersed among the pages are reminiscences from customers and employees that bring to life the Sternbergs and the experience

of shopping in their stores. Snippets illuminate how the Sternbergs dealt with antisemitism and boycotts arising from the civil rights movement, or illustrate their aid to other Jews fleeing the Nazis or their later civic philanthropy. This interweaving of experiences is what enriches the story.

This handsomely designed book, well-written and edited, and illustrated with black-and-white photographs and quoted reminiscences, should appeal to many readers. Those interested in business history, the rise and fall of department stores, family history, and Jewish history will all find something of value. Hans Sternberg has successfully made the transition from a businessman to an author, but there is no doubt that the writing was a labor of love.

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**The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas.** By Bryan Edward Stone. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2010. 294 pages.

In recent years, the story of Texas and its Jews has attracted the attention of serious scholars. While their work has focused on narrow topics like the state's rabbis or the various subjects in the recent collection of essays, *Lone Stars of David*, no one has yet published a serious overall history of Texas Jews until now. Bryan Stone's *The Chosen Folks: Jews on the Frontiers of Texas* offers a fresh and unique description of the Jewish experience in a state that straddles the South and the West. Previous attempts at a general history have generally been filiopietistic and uncritical, focusing primarily on prominent Jewish Texans and their contributions to the state. Stone moves far beyond such provincial analysis and presents an insightful and rich, if not comprehensive, account of Jewish life in the Lone Star State.

Stone relies heavily on the metaphor of the frontier, common in western history, which he defines abstractly in terms of identity rather than in Frederick Jackson Turner's classic formulation. Stone conceives of cultural identity as a set of frontiers, and Texas Jews, according to Stone, have struggled to define themselves and negotiate a balance between being Jewish and being Texan. Living on the periphery of the Jewish Diaspora, Texas Jews defined themselves in contrast both to other American Jews and to their gentile neighbors. Stone compares the Jews in Texas to those in other frontier regions and finds much in common. He does not make simplistic claims of Texas uniqueness, as previous writers have done. Instead he shows how Texas Jews fit into the national context of American Jewish history. This does not mean Stone ignores the state's cast of colorful characters. He provides profiles of distinctive Texas figures including the country music singer and political raconteur Kinky Friedman; Waco's possum-eating rabbi, Berenhard Wohlberg; and Breckenridge's Charles Bender, the cowboy Zionist, who caused a stir when he visited Israel in his cowboy boots and hat.

Rather than a traditional survey, Stone offers a series of chronological vignettes that shed light on the theme of the frontier and how it shaped Texas Jewish history. Some are well known, such as the Galveston Movement, which sought to distribute Jewish immigrants around the country through the Texas port, and the Basic Principles controversy of Houston's Beth Israel, in which the leaders of the classical Reform congregation sought to exclude Zionists and traditional Jews from full membership. In other cases, Stone unearths new material that adds a fresh perspective on the subject, including Houston's Henry Dannenbaum and his conflict with national Jewish leaders in New York over supposed Jewish involvement in international prostitution rings, and the remarkable diary of Alexander Gurwitz, a devoutly Orthodox Jew and Hebrew scholar in San Antonio.

One of Stone's biggest achievements is to debunk several myths about the presence of Jews in early Texas that have often been based on assumptions about vaguely Jewish-sounding names rather than hard evidence of Jewish identity or ancestry.



Stone, for example, shows convincingly that Samuel Isaacks, often credited as the first Jew to settle in Texas, was not Jewish.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of *The Chosen Folks* is its analysis of how Texas Jews related to the Ku Klux Klan and the civil rights movement. Stone describes Ku Klux Klan Day at the Texas State Fair in 1923 as well as the curious involvement of prominent Jewish businessman Alex Sanger in the festivities. Caught in the middle between Texas governor Pa Ferguson and his Klan-backed opponents, Jews were forced to choose between identifying with the white majority of Texas or with their more narrow concerns as Jews. Stone argues that the rise of the Texas Klan highlighted the differences between Jews and other white Texans, making the clever and insightful point that "Jews were Anglos, perhaps, but they could never be Anglo-Saxons" (194).

The issue of southern Jews and the civil rights movement has been well trod by historians, few of whom have looked at Texas. But as Stone shows, Texas offers an interesting case study. He argues that Jews were "racial middlemen" (196), who used their difference from the white mainstream to take the lead in brokering compromises to avoid the violence of massive resistance. He describes how prominent Jews in Dallas, like Julius Schepps and Sam Bloom, argued that integration made economic sense and that resistance to federal authority would be disastrous. Jewish-owned department stores, like Neiman-Marcus, that had been staunch defenders of segregation, were the first to end discrimination when the federal courts had ordered integration of the city's public facilities. This active leadership role complicates previous portrayals of southern Jewish merchants as passive victims of larger social forces.

While Stone's method of focusing on symbolic events and fascinating characters makes his book a delight to read, it does prevent him from offering a comprehensive survey of the Jewish experience in the entire state. For example, after learning of the important role Jewish business elites played in bringing about peaceful integration in Dallas, the reader is left wondering whether similar events played out in Houston or San Antonio. Did small-town merchants differ in their approach to the civil rights



movement, and, if so, how? In addition, Stone spends most of a chapter looking at newspaper editor Edgar Goldberg and his Houston-based *Texas Jewish Herald*, but does not examine the other Jewish newspapers in the state, including Fort Worth's *Jewish Monitor*, which briefly had a Yiddish section.

Despite these omissions, *The Chosen Folks* offers the first substantive analytical history of Texas Jews. Southern Jewish historians will find its use of the "frontier" to be quite helpful and applicable to their own field. For students of American Jewish history, the book constitutes a worthwhile addition to the growing literature of hinterland Jewish communities. In the end, Stone makes a strong case that, however remote the frontier of the Diaspora where Texas Jewish history unfolded, its lessons strike deep in the heart of the American Jewish experience.

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**Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era.** By Clive Webb. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2010. 301 pages.

In this well written, deeply researched, and often nuanced book, British historian Clive Webb analyzes the causes, characteristics, and consequences of far-right resistance movements in the South during the desegregation crisis of the 1950s and 1960s. Webb shows how right wingers' thoughts and behavior blended in with centuries-old cultural norms where whites assumed their innate racial superiority and African Americans "knew their place." For both whites and blacks there was no ambiguity about societal expectations.

These dynamics changed, however, after the Supreme Court declared segregated public education unconstitutional in 1954. The decision left white southerners shocked, aghast, and demoralized. It was the most serious attack on their way of life since the

abolition of slavery in the 1860s. Most southern leaders respected the law, however, and eventually tried to implement the court's order. On the other hand, there were many elected officials who dragged their feet and/or defied the new requirement. By conveying their opposition, whether articulated or not, community leaders encouraged outraged citizens to air their views.

In a series of carefully thought-out case studies, Webb focuses on the activities of four men – Bryant Bowles, John Kasper, Rear Admiral John Crommelin, and J. B. Stoner – and shows how they entered various communities, whipped up public passions, and encouraged opponents of desegregation to rally and demand retention of the status quo. These antics ultimately prolonged resistance to integrating the schools. To be sure, the four men were generally intelligent, even if they sometimes appeared deranged, and they expressed views held by hundreds of thousands of southerners. They articulated their belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ and attributed desegregation to an all-powerful “Jewish communist conspiracy.” Their followers and associates also included a disproportionate number of former military leaders with similar outlooks. In the South, most “right-thinking” people accepted Protestantism as the true faith and could not understand why Jews would not want to take Jesus into their hearts. Where the rabble rousers differed significantly from most others in the South was in their hysteria and their calls for vigorous and sometimes violent protests of the federally imposed order to desegregate public schools.

There were other southerners, however, who disliked the forced integration of the schools but recognized that they could protest in a dignified manner without attracting newspaper headlines. Again, their views did not differ from those of the right-wingers, but their methods were more subdued. In addition, forward-looking community leaders favored economic development and knew that bad publicity for their towns and cities would deter industrialists from coming in, creating jobs, and propelling growth.

What is particularly telling about Webb's account is how many southerners believed that their values and social order had

been ordained by God. Southerners are probably more devoted to their faith and church attendance than are other Americans. What one believes and where one worships are crucial aspects of southern acceptance in many areas of the region. As Webb notes, little has been written about the role of the white Christian churches in the desegregation years. Perhaps more important would be a study of Christian teachings and how they underlay most of the South's beliefs and traditions.

*Rabble Rousers* is a particularly insightful study of an era where events seem blatantly clear, while showing nuances and contradictions as the author peels the onion of layered levels of opposition to desegregation. Moreover, I am unfamiliar with any other account of desegregation and the civil rights movement that penetrates as deeply as this one does in showing how much anti-semitism existed in the South at the time and how few southerners opposed its dissemination. (There are exceptions to this, of course. In 1958, after the Temple was bombed in Atlanta, townspeople, community and church leaders, and elected officials came out in droves to denounce the act and to embrace their Jewish neighbors with warmth and sympathy.)

Clive Webb is to be congratulated for revisiting the southern school desegregation crisis. His analysis of how far-right rabble rousers discombobulated several communities in their efforts to prevent a major change in the southern way of life is a significant accomplishment. His book offers a window into an aspect of the desegregation years that had not been fully explored earlier.

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