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A Tale of Two Cities: Race, Riots, and Religion in New Bern and Wilmington, North Carolina, 1898

by

Leonard Rogoff*

In 1898, as election day approached in North Carolina, racial tensions erupted. To undo African American political gains, Democrats had launched a white supremacist campaign marked by intimidation and night-riding violence. This campaign was especially virulent in eastern North Carolina, where the black population was most concentrated. In two coastal port cities, New Bern¹ and Wilmington, Jews stood prominently on both sides of this conflict. In Wilmington, S. H. Fishblate, the town's former mayor, marched at the front of a mob of Democratic white redeemers who would unleash a bloody race riot. Up the coast in New Bern, Joseph Hahn, the county sheriff, stood before hundreds of African American Republicans urging them to fight.

The North Carolina election of 1898 has served as a case study of racial politics, a historically unique instance of the violent overthrow of a democratically elected government in America. The Jewish involvement, which has been little noted, sheds light on the contentious issues of the Jews' racial identity, social accommodation, and relations with African Americans. Jews were very few in North Carolina in the late 1800s, perhaps several thousand. Nonetheless, in New Bern and Wilmington, they played critical roles in an election still recalled as a turning point in the state, regional, and even national political history.²

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*S. H. Fishplate of Wilmington, North Carolina, 1895.
(Courtesy of the New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, NC.)*

In 1894 a fusion of Republicans and Populists had won the governorship and General Assembly, ending almost two decades of Democratic rule. African Americans loyal to the Republican Party were the critical constituency of this coalition. In 1898 Democratic redeemers overthrew fusion government in a vicious white supremacist campaign, climaxed by the Wilmington race riot of 1898. By 1900 North Carolina disenfranchised blacks and encoded Jim Crow into law. The national press headlined the Wilmington riot and its consequences, and President William McKinley found himself unwillingly entangled. In the succeeding decades urban race riots broke out in Atlanta (1906), East St. Louis

*Sheriff Joseph Hahn of New Bern, North Carolina.
(Courtesy of his grandson and namesake, Joseph Hahn,
and the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina.)*

(1917), Chicago (1919), and Tulsa (1921). Attesting to the election's persisting legacy, in 2000 the North Carolina General Assembly, seeking truth and reconciliation, created the 1898 Wilmington Race Riot Commission.

Both New Bern and Wilmington were port cities, which by 1890 had African American majorities. Since colonial days, each had been points of commerce on the coastal mercantile seaway that extended from Newport to the Caribbean. New Bern had been founded at the confluence of the Trent and Neuse rivers in 1710 by Swiss settlers and served as the colonial capital. Incorporation

rated in 1739, Wilmington, sixty miles south in the Cape Fear basin, drew settlers from Barbados and South Carolina and grew into the state's largest city. The ports were home to a cosmopolitan elite of planters, traders, and merchants, Jews among them. North Carolina's contribution to the Atlantic trade consisted of tar, cotton, timber, and produce from inland plantations worked by African slave labor. When the Civil War ended, some 350,000 slaves were freed, with eastern North Carolina hosting the state's largest numbers. In 1890 Wilmington held 8,731 whites and 11,324 blacks, while New Bern was home to 2,572 whites and 5,271 blacks.³

The Jews of Wilmington and New Bern

Although Jews were present in both New Bern and Wilmington during colonial days, they did not arrive in sufficient numbers to form communities until the late antebellum years. In the mid-eighteenth century Sephardic merchants tied to Charleston, Newport, and New York established trade relations in the towns. With the advent of the railroad and steamships, immigrant German peddlers and storekeepers set up shop, some prospering as merchants and wholesalers. The city's commercial importance rose dramatically during the Civil War. Wilmington's blockade-runners, some Jewish-owned, and its railroad were the lifeline of the Confederacy. Although Jews suffered from anti-semitic charges of profiteering, they served the Confederacy loyally, and, in the postwar years, participated fully in the city's civic, political, and religious life. Jews, including the rabbi, were leaders in the town's German societies. By 1852 Jews were sufficiently numerous to organize a benevolent society, and three years later they dedicated a Jewish cemetery. Some forty Jewish families began congregational efforts in 1867, which sputtered until 1875 when ground was broken for the Temple of Israel, the state's first synagogue. It was erected on a downtown corner among the city's elite churches. In the 1890s eastern European immigrants augmented the city's largely German Jewish community of several hundred. Peddling and storekeeping, these immigrants catered to both a black and white

working-class clientele, and by 1898, the year of the riot, they organized B'nai Israel.⁴

New Bern experienced sporadic Jewish settlement. A Jewish burial ground dates to 1809, although no evidence suggests a viable community. By the 1850s German immigrants operated a handful of downtown stores. Most were retail outlets for wholesalers in Philadelphia or Baltimore with whom they had family ties. Not as old, large, or well established as Wilmington Jewry, New Bern's Jews were nonetheless well integrated into local society. Newspaper columns record Jews attending elite social events even as white-black tensions grew. The federal occupation brought more Jews to the community. Land was purchased for a new cemetery in 1877. In 1893, when little Chester Reizenstein asked why Jews did not have a church, New Bern Jews organized a congregation, which they named in his honor, Chester B'nai Scholem, and a year later they purchased land for a synagogue (which did not arise until 1908).

Historically, North Carolina Jews had lived on the political margins. The state's 1776 constitution limited public office to Protestants. When a Jew, Jacob Henry, was elected to the state legislature from Cartet County in 1808, his right to serve was challenged, and he held his seat only by a technicality. In 1835, in sympathy to Roman Catholics, the law was enlarged from "Protestant" to "Christian." The religious test survived constitutional challenges in 1858, 1861, and 1865. The *Occident and Jewish Advocate* documents for a quarter century the fruitless efforts by the state's Jews, spurred on by its editor Isaac Leeser, to eliminate the restriction. Not until 1868 when a postwar constitutional convention dominated by Republicans and African Americans enfranchised former slaves did North Carolina abandon the sectarian religious test, ranking it among the very last states to do so.⁵

The constitutional disqualification was an irritant to Jews but did not categorically disqualify them from politics or public service. In antebellum Raleigh Michael Grausman had served as an official of the state treasury. In 1865 Abram Weill was a Charlotte alderman, and two years later Emil Rosenthal was appointed to the Wilson town council. By the 1870s, with the religious test

removed, Jews won municipal elections. In Wilmington clothier Solomon H. Fishblate was first elected an alderman in 1873 and later served three terms as Democratic mayor in the years preceding the calamitous 1898 election. A Conservative Democrat, he spoke for white supremacy. Fishblate's son-in-law, Solomon Weill, served as a Democratic presidential elector, an assistant U.S. district attorney, and a member of the Democratic state executive committee from Wilmington.⁶ In nearby New Bern, Meyer Hahn and his nephew Joseph Hahn, owners of a livery, bakery, and dry-goods store, were elected as Republicans to various offices in the 1880s with overwhelming African American support. The Hahns and Fishblate were all synagogue-affiliated Jews.⁷

North Carolina Jews involved in politics generally identified with the Democratic Party—despite the religious test—sharing their neighbors' disdain for what they regarded as Republican radicalism. When a Democratic Club had formed in Wilmington in 1863, six prominent Jews were listed as members. In 1868 Maurice Bear, a Jewish Wilmingtonian, heard rumors that he had voted for the Republican Radicals. He went to the *Daily Journal* office to denounce the "lie" and aver that he had "voted the white man's ticket." Jewish-born Kope Elias led the Democratic patronage machine in western North Carolina. In 1887 he was elected to the state Senate even as the Raleigh *Caucasian* newspaper alleged that Elias, a member of his wife's church, was "anti-Christian." Jews served on the town councils of Tarboro, Charlotte, and Wilson, and Henry Morris was mayor of Tarboro in 1885. This pattern of Jewish civic involvement was commonplace across the South, Midwest, and West, in small towns especially.⁸

As Democrats, North Carolina Jews were repaying their loyalty to Governor Zebulon Vance, the state's most venerated statesman. At war's end, Vance had been arrested in Statesville by federal troops who had sought to humble the corpulent governor by riding him on horseback to prison. Local Jewish merchant Samuel Wittkowsky saved Vance from humiliation by offering his carriage. The two became lifelong friends. About 1868 Vance, a nationally celebrated Chautauqua orator, first presented his philo-semitic speech, "The Scattered Nation," in which he praised Jews

as our “wondrous kinsmen.” The speech was delivered and printed countless times across the state and nation. In fustian prose Vance expressed outrage at those who compared the moral, civilized Jew to the savage, barbaric Negro. Coming shortly after the adoption of a new state constitution that qualified Jews for public office, Vance intended “The Scattered Nation” to remove “objections to the Jew as a citizen.”⁹

Although Vance noted a racial hierarchy among Jews, with Germans at the top, he cast Jews as undeniably white. After the Civil War, with blacks freed, the South was reordering its racial, social, and political relations, and the place of the Jew was unsettled. Eric Goldstein in *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* argues that southern Jews generally supported black disenfranchisement but “shied away from high profile engagement with racial issues.”¹⁰ Jews aspired to whiteness, he argues. Conformity, fitting in, was necessary for social acceptance and economic success. Rarely did southern Jews advocate for black social or civil equality, according to Goldstein.

Historically, southern Jews had *not* been distinctive in their racial attitudes. Jews who held slaves had done so in ways typical of other southerners of their class and locale. Bertram W. Korn, the leading scholar of Jewish slaveholding, found “a pattern of almost complete conformity to the slave society of the Old South on the part of its Jewish citizens.” Jewish behavior toward slaves, he notes, was “indistinguishable” from non-Jews. A study of Charleston, for example, revealed that 83 percent of Jews owned slaves compared to 87 percent of Christians. Similar patterns were found in Atlanta and Savannah. In the early 1800s Wilmington Jews, such as the planter and industrialist Aaron Lazarus, had owned slaves, but slaveholding was rare among the more recent German immigrants. Only two Wilmington Jews were listed owning slaves in 1860.¹¹ Whether for reasons of principle, affordability, or inclination, Wilmington Jews were not at wartime directly invested in the plantation economy.

Commerce, however, intertwined Jews and African Americans. Jewish peddlers and storekeepers catered to black trade, especially as freedmen established themselves in towns. Jewish

merchants were accused of taking unfair advantage of poor blacks through credit and crop liens. Mark Twain in his essay *Concerning the Jews* wrote disparagingly of how northern Jews came south “in force, set up shop,” and exploited black farmers through the crop lien system.¹² In eastern North Carolina Jewish merchants did indeed purchase crop lands, obtaining some by foreclosure. Sheriff Joseph Hahn of New Bern owned tenant farms worked by African Americans, but local blacks supported him repeatedly and overwhelmingly in more than a decade of elections, which would not suggest anti-Jewish feelings. In Wilmington eastern European Jews, who began arriving in the early 1890s, resided and opened stores in a racially mixed, working-class neighborhood where they served a biracial clientele. As immigrants, eastern European Jews focused not on politics but on the immediate needs of earning a living, learning a language, and acculturating to a new society.

*S. H. Fishplate's clothing store in Wilmington.
(Courtesy of the New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, NC.)*

Economic tensions in the 1890s threatened the Jews' security. After the Panic of 1893, which depressed farm prices, enraged farmers in the Deep South burned the stores of Jewish merchants who held crop liens. In their disdain for financial markets Populists, a party that emerged largely from farmers' movements, sometimes employed a coded antisemitic language. As commodity prices declined and crop liens led to farm foreclosures, Jews were often conflated with finance, personified by British and New York bankers. Rothschild was the straw man, especially after a bond scandal during the Cleveland administration. The question of Populist antisemitism has been contentious. South Carolina's Ben Tillman denounced Judas financiers, including the "London Jew" Rothschild, and Georgia's Tom Watson, who avoided antisemitic rhetoric during the 1890s, would later use popular resentment against rich New York Jews in rousing agrarian mobs against Leo Frank. In 1896 Democratic presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan, supported by the Populists, repeated canards about Jewish financial manipulators. North Carolina Governor Elias Carr, who served from 1893 to 1897, hoped to wean blacks to the Democrats by charging that "our negro brethren, too, are being held in bondage by Rothschild." Even the philosemitic Vance as a United States Senator warned Americans that "money changers were polluting the temples of their liberties."¹³

Populists, Richard Hofstadter argues, understood postwar American history as "a sustained conspiracy of the international money power." The Populist antisemitism of the 1890s was a "verbal" or "rhetorical" antisemitism, Hofstadter contends, but did not go so far as "a tactic or program" despite sporadic violence. Contrarily, C. Vann Woodward does not see an antisemitism that was uniquely or particularly Populist. Stressing its insignificance relative to anti-black racism, Woodward argues that such expressions were no more than a "folk stereotype" drawing on Shylock imagery pervasive in the larger culture. For North Carolinians such antisemitism was an abstraction, which they seemed not to have applied specifically to their Jewish neighbors.¹⁴

Combustible Politics

North Carolina's postwar politics were prone to violence. Reconstruction marked the ascendancy of the Republican Party in 1867, which was supported by newly freed African Americans, carpetbaggers (newly arrived white northerners), and scalawags (a minority of native white anti-secessionists). During Reconstruction blacks and white northerners won local offices in the revitalized party, especially in eastern North Carolina. In 1875 the Second District sent African American John Hyman to the U. S. Congress. The Reconstructionist state legislature affirmed racial political equality, although certainly not social equality, by ratifying the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments. With blacks in the legislature, reforms were pushed forward in education, municipal government, civil law, and criminal justice. Although railroad money tainted politics, North Carolina did not succumb to rampant corruption. White opposition nonetheless turned violent as Ku Klux Klan terror struck Republicans, black and white alike, in the 1870s, most notably in the Piedmont counties of Alamance and Caswell. In 1876, as Reconstruction ended, the state returned to Democratic control with the election of Zebulon Vance as governor. Democratic redeemers would hold power until 1894 although Republicans remained strong in county politics. Since 1880 the "Black Second" District, where New Bern was located, had remained a stronghold of African American Republicans, who in 1882 sent James O'Hara to Congress where he served two terms.

To limit African American office-holding, the Democrats passed legislation that gave the General Assembly authority over local governments with the power to grant municipal charters, appoint officers, draw electoral wards, and manage finances. Democratic political machines, courthouse rings, dominated city and county politics. Grover Cleveland's ascendancy to the presidency in 1884 as a Democrat aligned the South with the nation. State Democratic control was narrow as a relatively strong Republican Party, with black support, contended, and each party factionalized. Of all southern states North Carolina was most given to bipartisan and multiracial politics. The Democrats in the revived party came from the rising class of business and profes-

sional townsmen. Democratic conservatives, led by former Confederates, resisted not just "Republican-Negro control," but progressives in their own party who wanted to reform currency, regulate railroads for the public good, and protect the rights and wages of workers.

In reaction to the Democrats' pro-business, pro-railroad politics, the state's numerous small farmers, suffering from the crop lien system, depressed prices, and high freight rates, organized farm clubs that evolved into the Southern Farmers' Alliance. In 1887 the Alliance formally organized in the state. By 1890 the state had 2,147 chapters with ninety thousand members. Originally loyal to the Democrats, Alliance members increasingly quarreled over monetary and railroad policy and loyalty to the national ticket. By 1892, after the Democrats nominated Grover Cleveland for president, Alliance members joined like-minded groups such as the Knights of Labor to organize as the People's or Populist Party. North Carolina historian Joe Creech observes, "produced perhaps the most powerful Populist movement in the country."¹⁵

With the inter- and intra-party fighting, political allegiances did not always adhere to the color line. Fusion created strange bedfellows. Farmers and urbanites, blacks and whites, progressives and conservatives, workers and business elites had varied interests. Among the Democrats wealthy eastern planters and poor western farmers divided over class. Progressives included both urban reformers and agrarian radicals. White Populists had originally found a home among Democratic progressives and were not accepting of black members even as they shared economic interests with them. A separate Colored Farmers' Alliance organized, which had ambivalent, uneasy relations with its white counterpart. Edward Ayers notes that white populists were "distrustful and contemptuous of black politicians but eager for black votes." Populist leaders, not always reflecting the anti-black views of their followers, tried to encourage a spirit of interracial tolerance and resisted efforts to limit black political rights, including the franchise. Blacks mostly remained loyal to the Republican Party, but debated whether to pursue a policy of black empowerment or cooperation with whites. Class lines also divided the black

community. Black professionals and tradesmen sought alliances with upper-class white Republicans, regarding them as more sympathetic than the white farmers and workers of the Populists. Other black leaders, notably George H. White, elected to the North Carolina house in 1880 from the Second District, argued for fusion with white Populists as most protective of the black franchise and political interests. In 1886 Craven County Democrats had resolved to secure Republican votes, and their candidate, Furnifold Simmons of New Bern, traced his electoral success to "the better class of colored men."¹⁶

*Furnifold Simmons.
(Courtesy of the North
Carolina Collection,
University of North Car-
olina at Chapel Hill.)*

In 1894 North Carolina Populists, outraged by Democratic efforts to dismantle the Farmers' Alliance, formed a Fusion ticket with the Republicans under the reform banner. White Populists had been wary of electoral reform for fear that it would lead to black office-holding, and expedience more than principle now led them to endorse black candidates. African American voters held the political balance, and both Democrats and Republicans sought their support. The black leadership divided between those who distrusted the Democratic legacy of the Populists and pledged their sole fealty to the Republican Party and those who saw Fusion as the route to reform and most protective of their interests. In 1894 Fusion candidates, with black support, swept the state, seizing control of the legislature and promising "to restore to the people of North Carolina local self-government." The 1895 Fusion state legislature expanded home rule, shattering Democratic hegemony. Although a Democratic-Republican ticket had won Wilmington's 1894 municipal election, the Populist-Republican General Assembly amended the city's charter to create a legislature-appointed police board to serve along with the elected board of aldermen, effectively giving the city two governments.

In the 1896 elections Democrats, in the name of white solidarity, urged the Populists to abandon fusion with the Republicans. Democratic boss Furnifold Simmons charged that the Fusionist legislature's reforms would lead to "Negro rule." The sixteen majority black counties in eastern North Carolina voted solidly Republican in 1896. Daniel Russell, a Republican who had run as a Fusionist, was elected governor, and African Americans won eleven seats in the legislature, posts in county governments, and appointments to state boards. The Fusionist state legislature ensured the black franchise and restored local government. Democrats were outraged. Simmons enlisted publisher Josephus Daniels of the *Raleigh News & Observer* to embark on an inflammatory white supremacy campaign for the 1898 elections. Their intent was to suppress the Populist vote and intimidate black voters from going to the polls.¹⁷

Political tensions were felt most violently in heavily black, eastern Carolina where white fears of "Negro domination" rose

highest. In Wilmington nearly half the aldermen were African American as were most policemen, some forty magistrates, and the port customs collector. Whites alleged crime and corruption. The *New Berne Weekly* warned that “the negro race is inseparable from Republicanism.” The people would never accept “the remotest possibility of conditions which shall give the negro a place upon the same plane as the Anglo Saxon’s.”¹⁸

Wilmington Burns

As city business people, Wilmington’s Jews had gravitated toward the Democratic Party. S. H. Fishblate, a New Yorker and Union Army veteran who had moved to Wilmington about 1868, served as a Conservative Party alderman from 1873 to 1875. A ward politician supported by the city’s political machine, Fishblate battled party reformers. In 1878 the aldermen selected the Jewish dry-goods merchant as mayor. The Republican *Wilmington Post* crossed party lines to express its “extreme pleasure” in the election of a Jew as proof of the city’s democracy and tolerance. In the 1880s another Jew, Solomon Bear, a Confederate veteran, joined Fishblate on the board. In 1893 the board voted Fishblate mayor by a vote of seven to two through an electoral system, the newspaper reported, intended “to keep the colored population from getting control of the city government.” In all Fishblate served sixteen years as alderman and three terms as mayor. Speculation was rife on a run for Congress.¹⁹

Elected from a racially mixed district, Fishblate was not at first indifferent to black political sensitivities. As mayor Fishblate promised to end “rowdyism” in the streets whether “white or black.” In 1888 he rejected white demands to end the African American Jonkonnu festivities, a Yule-time revelry of African origin. Fishblate was not alone among white Democrats in appealing to the black electorate; two of the most vicious practitioners of anti-black rhetoric during the 1898 elections, Furnifold Simmons and A. M. Waddell, had in previous decades expressed sympathy for black political aspirations. As a U.S. congressman Simmons had eschewed Democratic race baiting and supported black education and opposed black disenfranchisement. Like Simmons and

Waddell, opportunism marked Fishblate's political career. When the Fusionists enacted a new city charter in 1895, creating a police board to rule jointly with the Democratic-Republican board, Fishblate considered resigning but changed his mind, threatening the city with two mayors as well as two boards. After losing a party vote as mayoral candidate in 1898, Fishblate pledged his support for the Democrats, proclaiming, "The choice in this election is between white rule and Negro rule. And I am with the white man every time."²⁰

Alfred Moore Waddell.

*(Courtesy of the New Hanover Public Library,
Wilmington, NC.)*

Wilmington's combustible politics detonated when Alex Manly, an African American newspaper editor, wrote a provocative editorial in his *Daily Record* rebutting claims that black men

under Fusion government “would increase their ‘advances’ to women.” Manly acted after the state’s Democratic press widely reprinted the charge by Georgia racist Rebecca L. Felton that black rapists were imperiling white farm girls. To the contrary, Manly wrote that “poor white men were careless in the matter of protecting their women.” Many a “Big Burly Black Brute” who had been lynched for such liaisons had white blood himself or was “sufficiently attractive” to draw the love interest of “white girls of culture and refinement,” Manly argued.²¹

State Democratic boss Furnifold Simmons responded with an “Appeal to the Voters of North Carolina,” declaring “North Carolina is a WHITE MAN’S STATE, and WHITE MEN will rule it.” To enflame whites, Democrats distributed thousands of copies of Manly’s editorial. A campaign poster with a skull, crossbones, and a pistol warned Republicans that “degenerate sons of the white race” will “suffer the penalty.” The *News & Observer* printed daily on its front pages inflammatory headlines and racist cartoons of rapacious black beasts. It counseled, “The color line is sharply drawn. It is white against black.” The newspaper warned that Wilmington blacks were securing arms. A Secret Nine met to reestablish white rule in the city. The business community passed a resolution opposing “Negro Domination,” and white labor unions joined with the Merchants’ Association to eliminate blacks from the workforce. Hardware store owner Nathaniel Jacobi, a synagogue leader, helped draft a resolution that called upon businessmen to notify their “male Negro employees” that they would be fired if Republicans won the 1898 election. When a newspaper alleged that blacks, who were largely unarmed, were attempting to purchase guns from the North, Jacobi responded to an appeal to stop them from doing so.²² “Business interests” asked the Republican government to resign and, as a compromise thought agreeable to all parties, nominated sixteen moderate white “gentlemen,” including one Jew, Samuel Bear Jr., to replace them. Governor Russell saw a state descending into violence, and United States Senator Jeter Pritchard, a Republican, appealed to President McKinley to send federal marshals to preserve public order. The *News & Observer* denounced his appeal as a new feder-

al occupation. To a crowd gathered at the Opera House, attorney and former Confederate Colonel A. M. Waddell declared, "We will not live under these intolerable conditions. No society can stand it. We intend to change it, if we have to choke the current of the Cape Fear River with carcasses." Racist demagogue Senator Ben Tillman, who had led a massacre of blacks twenty years earlier, came from South Carolina to rouse North Carolina whites. Democrats and Red Shirts, a white-vigilante, paramilitary organization, paraded by the thousands, intimidating blacks.²³

On election day frightened blacks stayed home while white racists stuffed ballot boxes. After voting in Wilmington, Governor Russell hid in a mail car to escape a Red Shirt lynch mob. The next night whites held a mass meeting attended by Jacobi and Fishblate. A. M. Waddell was asked to read a resolution, apparently drafted by business leaders, that became known as the "White Declaration of Independence." The United States Constitution, it argued, "did not anticipate the enfranchisement of an ignorant population of African origin" or "for their descendants [*sic*] subjection to an inferior race." The declaration asserted that the "action of unscrupulous white men in affiliating with the negroes" was "causing business to stagnate." It ordered Manly to close his press and leave town in twenty-four hours or he "will be expelled by force."

After the crowd stood to cheer, Fishblate urged more extreme action. Unwilling to wait for the newly elected Democrats to establish white rule, Fishblate—playing to the crowd and likely coveting the mayoralty for himself—proposed that the mayor, police chief, and aldermen resign immediately. In response, a committee of five, including Fishblate, was appointed to amend the draft's wording. While the committee worked, Waddell and others urged a peaceful resolution of the crisis. Another speaker warned that Fishblate's resolution would lead to "anarchy." As a compromise, the committee suggested wording that only the mayor and the police chief should resign immediately. Fishblate and Jacobi objected that such wording did not go far enough, and that the aldermen should also be removed. Jacobi urged that city officials "should be commanded to resign one by one." Assured

*Nathaniel Jacobi (left) and
the interior of his hardware
store, Wilmington (below).
(Courtesy of the New
Hanover Public Library,
Wilmington, NC.)*

that their concerns would be addressed, the meeting approved the call to remove the mayor and police chief. The declaration was signed by 455 white citizens, among them eight Jews including Jacobi and Fishblate. Reporters, among them Charleston journalist Augustus Kohn, were called upon to serve as secretaries to record the transactions. A Committee of Twenty-five white citizens summoned thirty-two black leaders to the Court House and read them the declaration. They were given until 7:30 next morning to respond. Meeting at a barber shop, the black leaders dissociated themselves from Manly, who had already fled town, and agreed to comply. Fearing armed whites in the streets, they mailed their response, which did not reach the white leadership by the morning deadline.²⁴

Early the next day, "600 armed white citizens" met at the armory, which was located directly across the street from Temple of Israel. Led by Waddell, with Fishblate among the business leaders at the front, they marched to the Love and Charity Hall that housed Manly's press and set it aflame; accidentally, they claimed. Although some white leaders counseled peace, and some personally risked their own safety by protecting blacks, the redeemers unleashed a monster. Waddell's call for the mob members to go home went unheeded. All day armed white racist gangs pursued blacks and rampaged in black neighborhoods where they met feeble resistance. The Wilmington Light Infantry enforced martial law, arresting blacks and pointing rapid-fire guns, purchased by businessmen, at black churches in a futile search for arms. African Americans fled for forests and swamps where they huddled for a cold night. Estimates of black dead, some mowed down by Gatling guns, range from eleven to sixty. The Committee of Twenty-five marched on City Hall and forced the mayor, aldermen, and police chief to resign. They then installed their own Democratic government with Waddell as mayor. Among the appointees was Michael Kirchbaum, secretary of the Orthodox synagogue, as health officer. White Republicans and black elites were jailed overnight, placed on a train under armed escort, and exiled from town. Seeking asylum in New Bern, they were instead sent north on a steamer. Across the North protest rallies

*Alex Manly (above) and the destruction by a white mob of the
Manly printing press, November 10, 1898.
(Courtesy of the New Hanover Public Library, Wilmington, NC.)*

demanded federal intervention, but President McKinley refused. Philadelphia's *Jewish Exponent* compared the Wilmington riot to a Russian antisemitic pogrom. In Wilmington that Sunday, Reverend Payton Hoge of the First Presbyterian Church sermonized, "We have taken a city."²⁵

New Bern Simmers

In New Bern, sixty miles up the coast, Jews also found themselves ensnared in racial politics. In 1880 Meyer Hahn of New Bern was elected Craven County sheriff on the black-Republican ticket, which swept the district. The all-black township of James City, founded by former slaves, supported him 387 to 13. He was reelected in 1882 and 1884, defeating a wealthy white Democrat, Daniel Stimson. In 1886 Stimson defeated Hahn as the Republicans, Democrats, and African Americans each factionalized. Hahn alleged fraud, claiming that the Republican vote had been suppressed, even as Democrats claimed intimidation by the "Hahn faction." The North Carolina Supreme Court agreed with Hahn and declared the seat vacant. Hahn returned as sheriff in 1888.

Meyer Hahn and his brother Adolph had arrived in New Bern from New York as "newcomers" in 1866. Adolph had likely first come as a soldier in the Union occupation army. The German-born brothers operated a bakery, livery, and dry-goods store. The R. G. Dun & Company Credit Report described them as "sober enterprising men" of "excellent habits and good standing."²⁶ Adolph left town, but his son Joseph took over the bakery. The Hahns served on the Jewish cemetery board, and Meyer was the first president of New Bern's synagogue, Chester B'nai Scholem.

The *New Bern Daily Journal* noted disapprovingly that the Hahns attended black-Republican meetings. Joseph Hahn was elected Register of Deeds in 1892 and sheriff in 1894. He won James City by 311 to 5 as the Republican-Populist Fusion ticket swept the state. In that year Meyer was also elected county treasurer. With the legislative electoral reforms of 1895 county commissioners, once dominated by the Democratic Party, could no longer dismiss elected officials from their posts.

Joseph Hahn playing cards with himself.

A trick photo by Joseph Hahn.

*(Courtesy of his grandson and namesake, Joseph Hahn,
and the Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina.)*

In 1896 Joseph and Meyer ran against each other for sheriff with the nephew winning decisively. The Hahns' divisions likely reflected the uneasy, shifting alliances among Populists, Republicans, and African Americans. Some Craven County black Republicans had suggested running an all-black slate of their own rather than share the ticket with whites. Speaking at a black political rally in 1896, Joe Hahn confessed that, as a Republican, Fusion was not entirely to his liking, but he advised the crowd to "all vote the straight ticket." Blacks were divided on Fusion, on whether to accept white Republican patronage or pursue a politics of black political liberation. In the 1896 elections, party divisions and a national Populist Party that had endorsed Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan for president challenged black support of the Republicans. Historian Jeffrey Crow points to the Republican "dilemma of needing black votes for election yet

resenting negro office holding and activity in party circles." In 1888 Governor Russell had stated unequivocally, "The negroes of the South are largely savages . . . no more fit to govern than are their brethren in African swamps." Yet in 1896 he changed his tune: "I stand for the negro's rights and liberties. I sucked at the breast of a negro woman." African Americans disdained Russell personally for his history of race baiting, and his nomination for governor splintered black Republicans. In the 1896 elections, although the Populist vote declined, Democrat Bryan won the state's presidential vote; Republican Russell won the governorship; and Fusion controlled the state legislature. The Black Second District sent George H. White to Congress. Judging by the overwhelming black support he received, Joseph Hahn was not victimized by anti-white sentiment.²⁷

In 1898 the Populists were further challenged as the agrarian economy improved, McKinley held the presidency, and Democrats embarked on the white supremacy campaign.²⁸ As racial tensions flared during the 1898 election, white supremacists targeted Joe Hahn after he brazenly chained black and white prisoners together for their transport from the New Bern jail to Raleigh's Central Prison. The outraged *Raleigh News & Observer*, in the midst of its white supremacist campaign, headlined, "CHAINED TO A NEGRO, Sheriff Hahn's Negro Deputies and His Idea of a Joke." It noted that Hahn was "more or less famous and infamous as the man who has nothing but negro deputies." The article continued, "'Yes,' said Sheriff Hahn, with great complacency, 'I brought a batch of convicts to the penitentiary yesterday. I brought the only Democratic-Populist in Craven County among the number and when I got ready to leave I picked out the blackest negro in the bunch to chain him to.' Then the sheriff laughed." The paper concluded, "It was difficult to tell which enjoyed the situation more, the sheriff or his negro deputies." The next day the *News & Observer* printed a front-page, racist cartoon that depicted a portly, strutting Hahn holding a rope leash at the end of which was a forlorn white farmer and a buffoonish African American.²⁹ Playing the race card, publisher Josephus Daniels wanted to wean white Populists back into the Democratic fold.

"To the Penitentiary"

The cartoon that appeared with Joseph Hahn's likeness in the

Raleigh News & Observer, October 14, 1898.

(Courtesy of the North Carolina Collection,

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)

On October 27 the Hahns were two of four whites among four hundred blacks at a Republican rally entertained by a brass band, for voters who "intended to cast their ballots for negroes." Joe Hahn called the "congregation" to order and delivered the keynote address. According to the *New Berne Daily Journal* account, "He advised the negroes to be quiet on election day, but if white men 'insulted' them 'to beat them like the devil the next day.'" It claimed that Hahn urged them "'to vote in the names of your wives and children,'" an assertion that struck the newspaper as "pathetic."³⁰ One day later, a letter to the editor, signed "SUPREMACY," asked, "Did Hahn Mean It?" The letter writer continued, "What I want to know is, whether a man in Craven county can give such advice to negroes without being in danger. I

do not believe he can, and I warn Sheriff Hahn of Craven county that if there is trouble with the negroes before, during or after election day, and there is loss of life, that he will suffer for it." The writer concluded ominously, "When the time comes for action the few white leaders will be put to test first." The *New Berne Daily Journal* echoed, "Joe Hahn defied public decency." Three days later Meyer Hahn appeared at a Court House rally of three hundred blacks. He was among three white men to attend.³¹

On November 5, at a counter-rally of "resolute men of the Anglo-Saxon race," a speaker counseled, "When the day of reckoning comes, don't vent yourselves on the poor dupes but on the miserable scoundrels who led them." Among the names shouted was that of Joe Hahn. A speaker denounced Hahn as an "insult to the whole race." On November 10, a letter signed "Anglo Saxon" listed Hahn among the "vile traitors" to the white race who should be "shunned as you would a viper." In Wilmington rioters had placed nooses around the necks of such "white niggers" and threatened them with lynching.³²

Yet, after the November 8 election New Bern did not explode even as Republicans bucked the state and national trend by holding onto Craven County government. The black vote remained steady although the Populist vote declined. The "revolutionary proceedings at Wilmington" have "stirred the people of New Berne," the newspaper noted, but "local conditions . . . are vastly dissimilar." It continued, "No disorders exist here, and while negro domination has been and is our portion, it is not so rank as to necessitate rash or precipitate action." The newspaper called for "cool deliberation" even as a Citizens Committee of Businessmen had organized to warn those fleeing Wilmington that New Bern, too, was "hot." The newly elected Democratic legislature would "redeem" local government, the newspaper opined. Within a year, the legislature replaced the county's black jailer and deputies with whites. In 1899 the county commissioners, as "an active and visible expression of the wish of the white people," removed Joe Hahn from office. The *Journal*, mouthpiece for white supremacy, observed, "Personally, Sheriff Hahn has made an efficient, honest and thorough going official, but it was the system which

*Examples of racist cartoons that appeared with frequency in 1898.
(Courtesy North Carolina Collection,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.)*

he represented that was obnoxious." It objected that "a white man" had appointed "negro deputies." In his resignation letter Joe Hahn thanked the county board "for your uniform courtesy extended me during my official term, but feeling party affiliations render the course I am now pursuing to be the best interest of all concerned."³³

Aftermath: Embers of Redemption

In all the accusations against the Hahns as race traitors, their religious affiliation as Jews was never mentioned nor was their race questioned. Joe Hahn was admonished to heed his "white intelligence." Nor, by contemporary accounts, did racial antisemitism play a role in Wilmington although modern observers argue that a Jewish anxiety to fit in motivated Fishblate's racist politics. In 1901 writer Charles Chesnutt, a black North Carolinian, expressed his disappointment with Jews in his novel about the riot, *The Marrow of Tradition*. Chesnutt describes a "well-known Jewish merchant" who manned an anti-black checkpoint: "A Jew-God of Moses!—had so forgotten twenty centuries of history as to join the persecution of another oppressed race!" Chesnutt reflected the popular view that Jews were racially distinct. As did African American leaders some sixty years later, he assumed that blacks and Jews—whose "God of Moses" had liberated Hebrew slaves—would unite as pariah peoples. His expectation of sympathy counters the stereotypes of the Jew as an exploiter or financial manipulator of blacks.³⁴

Modern commentators were more likely to point to antisemitism as a significant factor in Fishblate's politics than did contemporary observers. In a memoir John D. Bellamy Jr., reflected, "Mayor Fishblate was a Jew, and he had many enemies among the people, but only for that reason." Bellamy, who had been a leader of the White Government Union and a speaker at Democratic white supremacy gatherings, had won election to the U. S. Congress in 1898 from a district that included Wilmington. He implied that the antisemitism was economic rather than racial or religious: "I must say that in my business dealings with him, I found him to be always honorable and fair." In fact, the R. G. Dun

& Company Credit Reports had described Fishblate, who suffered numerous financial embarrassments, as not a “desirable customer,” but the reports, written by local agents, did not specifically attribute his failures to the fact that he was a Jew, as they often did for other Jews in similar circumstances. Bellamy wrote his memoir in 1942 when antisemitism was rampant. As Woodward notes, Populist era antisemitism appears more “ominous and hideous” when viewed from a Nazi-era perspective. Contemporary newspaper accounts describe Fishblate as popular and speculate about his return to politics.³⁵

A recent historian of race relations, Laurie Gunst excoriates Fishblate as a racist in *Off-white: A Memoir*. Gunst, who was Fishblate’s great-granddaughter, attributes his politics to a Jew’s aspiration to whiteness.³⁶ Her feelings for Fishblate are entangled in personal and family history, and her perspective on black-Jewish relations reflects that of a modern cultural critic interested in race as a social construct. Certainly, Fishblate vocally identified with what he saw as the white man’s privilege, but whether he was motivated by anxieties about his own racial status is at least open to question. He was also a native New Yorker with Union Army service, a politician playing to the crowd, and a merchant whose livelihood depended on public goodwill. He would have wanted to affirm his southern allegiance perhaps even more loudly than a native would have.

Whatever prejudicial undercurrents may have flowed, two leaders of the white supremacy campaign, A. M. Waddell and Josephus Daniels, qualify as friends of the Jewish people. When Wilmington’s Jews laid the cornerstone of their synagogue in 1875, Waddell was the city’s official representative. The former Confederate colonel, who later threatened to choke the river with black carcasses, extolled the Jews as paragons of civilization. Daniels’s philosemitism traces to intimate Jewish friendships in his childhood and college years. Later as an ambassador he would assist Jews escaping Nazi Europe and rank among the nation’s leading Christian Zionists. Jews were a portion of the people. Religiously and politically, if not socially, Jews felt secure and were well integrated in Wilmington. In New Bern, a smaller town, the

few Jews mixed more easily with elites. Days after the 1898 election, a *New Berne Daily Journal* column on "gay circles" described a "pleasant entertainment" for Mrs. E. W. Rosenthal that included (judging by surnames) nine Christians and four Jews.³⁷

As a religious community Jews did not take a stand. At least one Wilmington minister, Reverend J. W. Kramer of the Brooklyn Baptist Church, served on the supremacist Committee of Twenty-five, and some Protestant clergy apparently joined the mob. After the riot, church sermons embraced white supremacy, and Kramer preached that "whites were doing God's service." No contemporary records document the role of Rabbi Samuel Mendelsohn of the Temple of Israel, but twelve years earlier he had spoken from the pulpit of the black First Baptist Church. A contributor to the rabbinic dictionary of Rabbi Marcus Jastrow of Philadelphia, whose niece he had married, the scholarly Mendelsohn was unlikely to join a gun-toting mob. He was civically involved with progressive groups dedicated to moral and intellectual uplift, one of which he served as state president. In 1879 he had written to Mayer Sulzberger, a national Republican leader in Philadelphia, that he had not yet become "so republicanized" as to "hazard my ease & avocation" by espousing "carpet-bag notions" on issues indifferent to a theologian. Seven years later, responding to the political question of home rule, he sermonized that "order is the most essential element of liberty; that such order can not exist without obedience to law."³⁸

Reconstructionist antagonisms toward the "carpetbagger" had given way to a warmer welcome to northerners who could bring capital and commerce to an economically depressed, agrarian society, and Jews were hardly alone among the newly settled northerners who ascended into positions of prominence in politics and business. Silas P. Wright, the Republican mayor of Wilmington, whom the mob would depose, was, like Fishplate, a northerner who had arrived after the Civil War. New Southerners embraced a capitalist ethic, and northerners were wanted, even recruited by state immigration boards, as investors, merchants, mechanics, and industrialists. With slaves freed, white southerners saw northern immigration as a means to ensure racial

hegemony. The Dukes of Durham, who had imported Jewish immigrant labor to work their tobacco factory, were prominent Republican dissenters, and Fusion Governor Russell came from the planter class. Like many of the state's Republicans, the Hahns were northerners with Union army service. They brought their politics down the railways along with commerce. Woodward notes that southerners held a "divided mind" on the New South commercial progress that its boosters claimed would outdo the North. Even as they "earnestly professed [a] code of shopkeeper decorum and sobriety," southerners still adhered to a "tradition of violence."³⁹

The riot led to one-party, Democratic government and opened the door to franchise restrictions. Wilmington's black population declined from 1890 to 1900, and whites became a slim majority. The *Raleigh News & Observer* reported, "Negro rule is at an end in North Carolina forever." It regretted the violence, but saw the action as necessary. Within two years the state legislature reversed the reforms that the Fusionists had enacted. The assembly instituted a poll tax and a referendum to disenfranchise blacks with a grandfather clause that protected illiterate whites if they had an ancestor who had voted prior to 1867. These actions achieved their intention to cripple the Republican Party. At the 1900 Craven County Republican convention, chaired by Joseph Hahn, fewer than fifty delegates gathered, three quarters of whom were black. Averse to "opposing White Supremacy," the party's county executive committee decided not to run a ticket. In 1904 less than half of the state's electorate voted.⁴⁰

"Southern progressivism," Woodward asserts, "generally was progressivism for white men only." The Wilmington Chamber of Commerce endorsed white redemption, and the *Charlotte Observer* applauded the political consequences of the riot: "The business men of the State are largely responsible for the victory." In the wake of the 1897 depression businessmen were especially vigilant. When first organized, the Farmers' Alliance movement had advocated cooperatives to compete with established merchants. Fusion politics threatened the businessman's economic wellbeing.⁴¹ The Jewish white redeemers of Wilmington no doubt

felt they were acting as guardians of morality and public order against what they saw as criminal, anarchic black rule. The *Jewish South*, a newspaper published in Richmond, cast the Democratic white redemptionists as reform-minded progressives: "The struggle for white supremacy in North Carolina was not a race war," the newspaper editorialized. "It was simply an organized effort to exchange a bad government for a good one." The *Jewish South* chastised the *Philadelphia Jewish Exponent's* advocacy of "the rights of the negro," echoing southern racial extremists who argued that blacks had degenerated since emancipation, that education had only made them more "immoral and dishonest." The newspaper averred, "Let us be thankful that the people of Wilmington have a good, clean government at last." In Atlanta's *Jewish Sentiment*, Frank Cohen also responded to northern Jewish criticism of the Wilmington riot as a "deformed opinion" of the "negro question." Here Jews were echoing the voices of other Democratic redeemers who saw white supremacy as an instrument of good government. Publisher Josephus Daniels, who orchestrated the white supremacy media campaign, was also a progressive Democrat. In 1900 progressive Democrats, led by Governor Charles Aycock, a former Red Shirt nightrider, oversaw a referendum that disenfranchised blacks. Yet, Aycock is still revered as the state's "Education Governor." Within the limits of racial segregation, as long as African Americans knew their place, white Democrats could safely advocate black uplift through education but certainly not through politics or social equality.⁴²

Jacobi and Fishblate's Democratic politics were consistent with those of white merchants of their class and color. If Zebulon Vance had once observed race-based "objections to Jews as a citizen," with Democratic redemption, North Carolina Jews were now secure in their political place as whites. Jews joined Democratic machines that ran city and county politics but were also very prominent among the reform advocates of a New South. In 1888 a writer observed that Sam Wittkowsky, a Charlotte alderman, "identified himself with the progressive element" of the city. In Enfield, Prussian immigrant Simon Meyer, whom a newspaper lauded as a "whole-souled, genial descendant of God's chosen

people," chaired the Democratic executive committee in 1898 and held numerous civic offices. In the late 1890s and early 1900s North Carolina Jews served on civic councils in the hamlet of Scotland Neck, the town of Goldsboro, and the city of Asheville. In the Progressive era, circa 1900 to 1914, Jews elected to office identified with home-rule efforts to place local politics in the hands of the citizens rather than with the legislature. Civic reform campaigns echoed across the South. Lionel Weil, who began an eighteen-year term on the Goldsboro town board in 1904, pioneered statewide efforts to reorganize municipal government, and in Asheville the Merchants Association president, Solomon Lipinsky, took a leadership role. In 1903 Fishblate considered another run for mayor.⁴³

The Hahns were hardly alone among southern Jews in the postbellum South who held Republican principles or involved themselves in racial politics. In Donaldson, Louisiana, historian Stuart Rockoff points to brothers-in-law Marx Schoenberg and Morris Marks who served as mayor and judge respectively in the Republican Reconstructionist government. Democrats, spurred on by inflammatory newspapers, physically threatened Schoenberg and Marx as carpetbaggers. In 1870 Schoenberg, a Radical Republican, was shot to death, and African American supporters killed the murderer in revenge. Hyman Rubin III identifies perhaps a half-dozen scalawags with Jewish-sounding names in South Carolina during Reconstruction, including the half-Jewish governor Franklin J. Moses, Jr.⁴⁴ During Reconstruction Samuel Fleishman of Marianna, Florida; M. H. Lucy of Alachua County, Florida; and S. Bierfield of Franklin, Tennessee, were murdered for black or Republican sympathies rather than for their religion. In Montgomery, Radical Republican H. E. Faber, a synagogue officer, served as mayor with black support until he was defeated in 1875 by Democratic white redeemer Mordecai Moses, a fellow Jew. The *Montgomery Advertiser* charged that Faber was a "bumbling, anti-Semitic Reconstructionist." Eric Goldstein describes Republicans as a "recognizable minority" among their fellow Jews in the post-war South. Newspapers rarely mentioned the religion of Jewish Republicans even in cases where they were threatened or subject to violence.⁴⁵

In their involvement in local politics, Fishblate, Jacobi, and the Hahns very much fit a national profile of Jewish political involvement. "First, Jews entered politics as businessmen," Hasia Diner observes. Despite sporadic outbursts of anti-immigrant prejudice, American politics became more inclusive over the nineteenth century, Diner notes. Mercantile interests dominated politics, and Jews, too, committed themselves to public service, which was in their economic self-interest. In the New South especially, with its gospel of salvation through commerce and industry, merchants envisioned themselves as agents of progress, builders of cities, and guardians of public order. Although nationally rabbis and Jewish journalists feared Jewish partisanship would provoke antisemitism, small-town Jews often served as mainstays of government. Frequently, they were newcomers active in local synagogues or Jewish societies. Newspapers welcomed their elections as proofs of democracy. One survey counts thirty-two Jewish mayors in thirteen southern states between 1875 and 1905.⁴⁶

Historians observe that a so-called Jewish vote did not coalesce until the 1920s at the earliest, nor did the community's putative liberalism emerge until the Roosevelt era. Jews gravitated to either party as self-interest and local politics dictated. As they rose into the middle class after the Civil War, they gravitated toward the party of pro-business conservatives, but in national elections they tended to vote Republican, a party that mixed reform with pro-business policies.⁴⁷ Southern Jews tended to be Democratic progressives, conservative on race but progressive on civic reform. In Atlanta, city alderman Joseph Hirsch, a Jewish community leader who ran for public office as a pro-business Democrat, took positions that were anti-black but supportive of municipal reform. A city publication in Donaldson, Louisiana, where Jews served twice as mayor, observed, "Our Jewish residents are reckoned among the best and most liberal minded citizens, and are associated with every progressive move." In Montgomery, Democrat Mordecai Moses, who won the mayoralty as the "true white man's candidate," oversaw the city's financial reform and electrification. In Jacksonville, Florida, Morris Dzi-

alynski, a Confederate veteran, was a Democratic alderman who battled black Republicans politically. First elected mayor in 1881, he won reelection the next year as a pro-business, “law and order” candidate—but on the People’s ticket in an effort to win Republican votes.⁴⁸

Political allegiances did not distinguish Jews. In the 1898 North Carolina elections Democrat Fishplate and Republican Hahn spanned the political spectrum. At least one Jew, Samuel Bear, Jr., was a centrist moderate, acceptable to Democrats and Republicans alike. That only eight Jews signed the White Declaration of Independence suggests that Jews were not extreme in their racial politics. Also telling are Jewish men among the city’s business elite—like Confederate veterans and community leaders Solomon Bear and Abram Weill—who did *not* sign the declaration. Nor, in the absence of evidence, can it be taken that their silence connotes a tacit endorsement of violent white supremacy. In this era of limited suffrage, generalizations about Jewish political views tend to focus on male, business elites, and the roles of women and lower-class Jews are less documented. All the Jews who signed the declaration were male merchants or industrialists mostly if not exclusively of German origin. Much of the Wilmington rioting took place in a mixed-race neighborhood where eastern European Jews were settling, yet they are absent from the detailed, extensive 2006 riot report, which is meticulous in naming names. Surviving correspondence from white Christian women includes those who endorsed the violence enthusiastically and those who expressed profound shame. The Jewish “quiet voices” of the later civil rights movement did not necessarily imply assent to racism or segregation, and a growing body of scholarship is bringing to light southern Jews who were vocal and active integrationists. Jewish women stepped forward while their businessmen husbands demurred.⁴⁹

This tale of two cities does not suggest any distinctive southern Jewish factor in matters of race, religion, or politics. In neither place was their whiteness questioned. No substantial evidence suggests that antisemitism, a specifically Jewish aspiration for whiteness, or any social desire to fit in, motivated their political

behavior. Their politics and racial attitudes were as varied as those of their white Christian neighbors. Joseph Hahn remained in New Bern as an established merchant, and in 1904 his fellow Jews elected him president of the local B'nai B'rith lodge. Not enough is known of the Hahns to dissect their political motives, but they were hardly alone among the capitalists and northerners in their political affiliation. Fishblate's and Jacobi's politics were typical of the businessmen who ruled North Carolina politics generally. Like many Democratic white redemptionists, Jacobi was a Confederate veteran.⁵⁰

The contrasting political experiences of the Hahns and Fishblate caution against defining a distinctly southern Jewish consciousness or ascribing essentialist racial or political categories to American Jewry generally. The events of 1898 demonstrate the Jews' Americanization. As Stephen J. Whitfield writes of "American Jewish culture," so, too, we can say of southern Jewry: it "has no essence, and has never been autonomous, but it does have a history."⁵¹

NOTES

This article expands the discussion of the 1898 election in Leonard Rogoff, *Down Home: Jewish Life in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 2010), 162-168.

¹ New Bern, sometimes New Berne, has been spelled variously and inconsistently, and the diverse spelling in this article reflects the spelling in the original sources.

² The Jewish role in Wilmington has been noted in an op-ed piece by Mark Pinsky, *Raleigh News & Observer*, January 16, 2007, and in Laurie Gunst, *Off-White: A Memoir* (New York, 2005). The Hahns' involvement is mentioned in local histories, most notably in Alan Watson, *A History of New Bern and Craven County* (New Bern, NC, 1987), but without reference to their being Jews.

³ Helen Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1951), 125.

⁴ For Wilmington's synagogue history, see Beverly Tetterton, *History of the Temple of Israel, Wilmington, North Carolina, 1876–2001* (Wilmington, NC, 2010).

⁵ See Morton Borden, *Jews, Turks, and Infidels* (Chapel Hill, 1984), 11–22 for a discussion of state constitutional religious tests. New Hampshire deleted its religious test in 1877.

⁶ Bill Reaves, "The Weill Family Misc. History" 1991, Bill Reaves Collection, New Hanover Public Library, 6–7; *Wilmington Messenger*, April 7, 1896. Weill relocated to New York in 1896 and died in 1898 prior to the riot.

⁷ *Wilmington Post*, March 22, 1878.

⁸ Howard Rabinowitz, "Continuity and Change: Southern Urban Development, 1860–1900," in *The City in Southern History*, ed. Blaine Brownell and David Goldfield (Port Washington, NY, 1977), 116; *Wilmington Daily Journal*, April 24, 1868.

⁹ Maurice Weinstein, ed., *Zebulon B. Vance and "The Scattered Nation"* (Charlotte, 1995), 89.

¹⁰ Eric Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006), 58.

¹¹ Bertram W. Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865" in *Jews and the Civil War: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn (New York, 2010), 108; David Goldberg, "An Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738–1925" (History Seminar, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Spring 1976), 21–22; Anton Hieke, "Jews at the Cape Fear Coast: A Portrait of Jewish Wilmington, NC, 1860–1880," *Southern Jewish History* 13 (2010): 13–15. Hieke lists one slaveholder in Wilmington in 1860.

¹² Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews," *Harper's Magazine*, March 1898, 533.

¹³ Quoted in Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York, 1987), 113; Stephen Kantrowitz, *Ben Tillman and the Reconstruction of White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill, 2000), 247.

¹⁴ Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F. D. R.* (New York, 1972), 70, 80; C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1968), 155–157.

¹⁵ Joe Creech, *Righteous Indignation: Religion and the Populist Revolution* (Urbana, IL, 2006), xxii.

¹⁶ Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 481; Edward Ayers, *The Promise of the New South: Life After Reconstruction* (New York, 1992), 250; Jeffrey Crow, "'Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism': Schisms among Negro Republicans in the North Carolina Election of 1896," *North Carolina Historical Review* 53 (October 1976): 366–372; Woodward, *Burden of Southern History*, 156–157.

¹⁷ Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1951), 124–125; Crow, "'Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism,'" 383.

¹⁸ Hugh Lefler, *History of North Carolina* (New York, 1956), 691; *New Berne Weekly*, 25, 28 October 1898.

¹⁹ *Charlotte News*, March 29, 1893.

²⁰ *Wilmington Messenger*, November 21, 1895; March 28, 31, 1898; Gunst, *Off-White*, 258; 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, North Carolina Office of Archives & History (Raleigh,

NC, 2006), 114; Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, 127. I owe the characterization of Fishblate as a political opportunist to Beverly Tetterton, historian of the Wilmington Jewish community.

²¹ 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, May 31, 2006, 98.

²² *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 8, 1898.

²³ 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, May 31, 2006, 105, 697, 698, 964–995; Goldberg, “Historical Community Study of Wilmington Jewry, 1738–1925,” 35; “1898 Wilmington Race Riot Home Page,” <http://1898wilmington.com/index.shtml> (accessed August 3, 2008).

²⁴ 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, May 31, 2006, 114. In addition to Jacobi and Fishblate the Jews who signed the declaration were A. A. Nathan, J. Elsbach, E. E. David, Martin Newman, I. L. Greenwald, and J. M. Solky. A possible ninth Jewish signee is H. D. Hahn, but both Jewish and Christian Hahns resided in Wilmington, and his name does not appear on Jewish community lists nor does evidence link him to the New Bern Hahns. LeRae Umfleet, *A Day of Blood: The 1898 Wilmington Race Riot* (Raleigh, NC, 2009), 74–75.

²⁵ 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, May 31, 2006, 436.

²⁶ Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 481; North Carolina, v. 7, pp. 62, 139, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School. Neither Fishblate nor the Hahns, all northern merchants who had come south during Reconstruction, were labeled carpetbaggers, the derogatory term placed on northerners who came south after the war in search of wealth and political power.

²⁷ Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 491; Creech, *Righteous Indignation*, 166.

²⁸ Crow, “Fusion, Confusion, and Negroism,” 365, 368–369, 375; *New Bern Daily Journal*, October 28, 1898; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 491.

²⁹ *Raleigh News & Observer*, October 14, 1898. Judging by photographs, the cartoon is a reasonable likeness of Hahn. The lack of any stereotypical Jewish features suggests no anti-semitic intent.

³⁰ *New Bern Daily Journal*, October 27, 1898.

³¹ *Ibid.*, October 29, 30, 1898.

³² *Ibid.*, November 5, 1898 and November 10, 1898.

³³ *Ibid.*, November 12, 1898 and September 14, 1899; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 492.

³⁴ Quoted in Mark Pinsky, “Wilmington, 1898: the Jewish Dilemma,” *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 16, 2007.

³⁵ John D. Bellamy, *Memoirs of an Octogenarian* (Wilmington, NC, 1942), North Carolina Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Woodward, *Burden of Southern History*, 155.

³⁶ *New Bern Daily Journal*, October 30, 1898; Gunst, *Off-White*, 257–258; Charles Chesnut, *The Marrow of Tradition* (New York, 1993), 289–290; North Carolina, v. 24, pp. 148, 149, R. G. Dun & Co. Collection, Baker Library Historical Collections, Harvard Business School.

³⁷ *Wilmington Morning Star*, July 16, 1875; Joseph Morrison, "A Southern Philo-Semite: Josephus Daniels of North Carolina," *American Judaism* 12 (Winter 1963): 78.

³⁸ Umfleet, *A Day of Blood*, frontispiece, 125; Samuel Mendelsohn to Mayer Sulzberger, November 4, 1879; Home Rule Sermon, April 23, 1886, Samuel Mendelsohn Papers, University of North Carolina at Wilmington Special Collections.

³⁹ C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877-1913* (Baton Rouge, 1971), 148, 158.

⁴⁰ *Jewish South*, November 24, 1898; 1898 *Wilmington Race Riot – Final Report*, May 31, 698; Edmonds, *Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina*, 125; Watson, *History of New Bern and Craven County*, 496.

⁴¹ *Raleigh News & Observer*, November 17 1906; Gunst, *Off-White*, 248; Kimberly Sims, "Wilmington Jewry: 1800-1914," (honors thesis, History Department, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, April 1999), 36; A. M. Waddell Papers, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill; Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore, 1992), 144.

⁴² *Jewish South*, November 24, 1898; Woodward, *Origins of the New South*, 251. Daniels, whose father was killed as a Union sympathizer during the Civil War, later regretted the newspaper's role in 1898.

⁴³ *Charlotte Observer*, January 11, 1931.

⁴⁴ Hyman Rubin III, *South Carolina Scalawags* (Columbia, SC, 2006), 119-122. See also Benjamin Ginsberg, *Moses of South Carolina: A Jewish Scalawag during Radical Reconstruction* (Baltimore, 2010.)

⁴⁵ Canter Brown, Jr., "Philip and Morris Dzilaynski: Jewish Contributions to the Rebuilding of the South," in *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History*, ed. Mark Bauman (Tuscaloosa, 2006), 223-24; Daniel Weinfeld, "Samuel Fleishman: Tragedy in Reconstruction-Era Florida," *Southern Jewish History* 8 (2005): 62-63; Stuart Rockoff, "The Mysterious Death of Marx Schoenberg: Jews & the Politics of Reconstruction in Ascension Parish, Louisiana," Southern Jewish Historical Society 35th annual conference, Chapel Hill, NC, October 22, 2010; see "Montgomery, Alabama," in the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities at <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/al/montgomery.html> (accessed February 2, 2011). I thank Norwood Kerr of the Alabama State Archives and Dan Puckett for confirming Faber's Jewish origins. See Alabama Church Records Collection, Leopold Young, "A Sketch of the First Settlers in Montgomery and a Short History of Kahl Montgomery," (Montgomery, AL, 1900): 7, 9, Alabama Department of Archives and History; Eric Goldstein, "Jewish Merchants and Former Slaves: The Economic Relationship in the Post-Civil War South" lecture, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 4, 2008.

⁴⁶ Diner, *Time for Gathering*, 144-145; "Southern Jewish Mayors throughout History" at http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/archive_mayors.htm (accessed February 2, 2011).

⁴⁷ Gerald Sorin, *A Time for Building: The Third Migration, 1880-1920* (Baltimore, 1992), 195; Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia, 1978), 157.

⁴⁸ Hertzberg, *Strangers within the Gate City*, 77–78.

⁴⁹ See Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001), 147–168; Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, 1997). In the case of signee E. David, he may have wished to dissociate himself from the store's employee, Charles McAlister, a white man who sympathized with blacks. McAlister was targeted by the Democrats, and under escort banished from the city. See Umfleet, *Day of Blood*, 114, 183, 166; "Donaldsonville, Louisiana," in the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, at <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/la/donaldsonville.htm> (accessed February 2, 2011).

⁵⁰ *New Berne Daily Journal*, November 20, 1898 and December 4, 1899; Marilyn Stern, "Timeline of New Bern's Jewish History," typescript, Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina; Umfleet, *Day of Blood*, 191. Joseph Hahn, the sheriff's grandson and namesake, did not have a ready explanation for his grandfather's Republicanism. He did note however, that his father found the family's tenant farms unprofitable, and that he gave more in charity to the African American farmers than he collected in rent. He eventually turned over the deeds to the farmers, telling them that they needed the land more than he did. Joseph Hahn telephone interview conducted by Leonard Rogoff, December 12, 2005.

⁵¹ "Donaldsonville, Louisiana," at <http://www.isjl.org/history/archive/la/donaldsonville.htm> (accessed February 2, 2011); Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry," *American Jewish History* 77 (March, 1988): 363.