

"A Bunch of Jews Defending Them Damned Niggers!":
Radical Jews in the ILD's Scottsboro Campaign

by

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This thesis is my own work
and all sources used have been acknowledged.

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Introduction

Scottsboro and Black-Jewish Historiography

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: to use the International Labor Defense's (ILD) Scottsboro campaign of the 1930s to show the significant role that radical leftist Jews played in early struggles for African-American rights; and to shed light on the structural reasons and personal motivations that led the Scottsboro Jews to participate in this watershed episode in the movement for African-American liberation.

The ILD's Scottsboro campaign marks a virtually uncharted terrain for students of black-Jewish history. I say virtually uncharted because pictures of Samuel Leibowitz, the lead Jewish defense attorney in the trials, are periodically included in monographs on black-Jewish history, but never accompanied by any analysis of the broad role that Jews played in the campaign. Consequently, as a story of radical Jews and blacks united in a struggle for African-American lives and rights, Scottsboro has never been tapped or gleaned for its secrets. This is largely due to the fact that historians of black-Jewish relations have tended to rely on secondary sources, and standard accounts of the trials have never given serious attention to the Jewish character of the ILD or its Scottsboro campaign. In Dan Carter's seminal work on the trials, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South*, the ethnic constitution of members in the ILD was understandably incidental to

his more pressing portrait of Southern racism.¹ James Goodman's more recent study of the case similarly marginalizes the role of Jewish ILD lawyers, rank-and-file members and sympathizers active in the Scottsboro movement. While in many ways Goodman's book does live up to its admirable ambition of providing "a story about the conflict between people with different stories of Scottsboro," his study ultimately fails to recount the stories of the radical activists, most of whom were Jewish.²

Not only have historians of black-Jewish relations neglected the ILD's Scottsboro campaign, but they have also overlooked the whole phenomenon of radical Jewish activism and its enormous contribution to African-American struggles for social, political, economic and civil rights. Historians wanting to highlight the positive achievements of black-Jewish cooperation have opted instead to focus on the apparent golden age of the black-Jewish alliance, the period beginning in the post World War II years and culminating in the Civil Rights Bill of 1964. Conversely, those searching for answers to the contemporary crisis in black-Jewish relations, evidenced by the Crown Heights uprising of 1991, have in turn underscored the development of anti-Semitism within black communities or anti-black racism in Jewish ones. In this race to explore the controversial history of black-Jewish interaction, early radical Jewish activism, and the alliance between radical Jews and African-Americans during the Scottsboro campaign, have been almost entirely ignored.³

¹Dan T. Carter, *Scottsboro: A Tragedy of the American South* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

²James Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro: The Rape Case that Shocked 1930's America and Revived the Struggle for Equality* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1994), xii.

³See in particular Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong: The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York: Free Press, 1995); Lenora E. Berson, *The Negroes and the Jews* (New York: Random House, 1971); James Baldwin and others, *Black Anti-Semitism and Jewish Racism* (New York: R.W. Baron, 1969); Robert G. Weisbord and Arthur Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter: The Afro-American and the American Jew* (Westport: Negro Universities Press, 1970); Jonathon Kaufman, *Broken Alliance: The Turbulent Times Between Blacks and Jews in America* (New York: Scribner, 1988).

While Jewish radicalism has largely been ignored by historians of black-Jewish relations, the period when it flourished in the United States, roughly from 1900 to 1940, has not. At the expense of other ventures, enterprises and associations uniting blacks and Jews during this time, historians have unduly highlighted the role of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). For many of those searching for the roots of the black-Jewish alliance, the bourgeois-liberal NAACP represents the single most important organization in the early twentieth century to bring African-Americans and Jews together in constructive action for black civil rights. Lenora Berson, who almost entirely avoids the 1930s, claims that "the alliance between Negroes and Jews was solidified in August 1945 when NAACP and American Jewish Congress lawyers began working together."⁴ In her only chapter on Jews in the civil rights movement, Hasia Diner also focuses her attention on Jews who worked with or for the NAACP. In a later study, David Levering Lewis continues in this tradition with a fresh interpretation of African-American and Jewish behavior in that prominent race organization. In fact, the only other source of black-Jewish cooperation that has received serious attention from historians covering this period is Jewish philanthropic devotion to African-American institutions and causes, most notably Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute or the segregated YMCAs established in the North.⁵

The focus on the NAACP and Jewish philanthropy has placed Jewish elites and Jewish liberalism in the spotlight of black-Jewish history. Jews who joined or worked with the NAACP more often than not came from affluent and privileged German Jewish backgrounds. Men like Joel and Arthur Spingarn, two of the most prominent Jewish leaders in the NAACP, were

⁴Berson, *The Negroes and the Jews*, 96-97.

⁵Hasia Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915-1935* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1977), especially 118-163; David Levering Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences: Assimilationist Strategies of Afro-American and Jewish Elites from 1910 to the Early 1930s," *The Journal of American History* 71, no. 3 (1984): 543-564.

members of New York's German Jewish elite. Well known philanthropists such as Isaac Seligman, Julius Rosenwald, Jacob and Mortimer Schiff and Felix Warburg were also well-established wealthy Jews. This emphasis on German Jewish elites has in turn led many historians to underscore the importance of liberalism as the political philosophy underlying early Jewish participation in African-American causes. They argue that Jewish activists in the NAACP and Jewish philanthropists earnestly believed in progress through reform, and worked for a society without racial prejudice through generally accepted avenues of change.⁶

As a result of this limited focus, radical leftist organizations have rarely been studied as sites or initiators of black-Jewish interaction or as centers of strategy in the diverse civil rights movement. Indeed, although the ILD was a leader in legal reform and mass action for African-American rights -- Scottsboro being just one of its many cases on behalf of black Americans -- it has gone largely unnoticed by historians of black-Jewish relations.⁷

This study of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign will break with these current trends in black-Jewish historiography. I will not cover the official civil rights movement of the post World War II decades, the NAACP, German Jewish elites, Jewish philanthropy or Jewish liberalism. I will, however, cover the history of a largely forgotten group of Jews who struggled for African-American rights and equality in the 1930s. These were the ILD's Scottsboro Jews, often Communists or fellow-travelers who were among a distinct and

⁶While Diner includes working-class and Yiddish-speaking Jews in her book, she only studies Jewish leaders within these groups. Lewis limits his focus entirely to affluent and mainly German Jewish elites. Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 122-154; Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences," 543-564; Friedman, *What Went Wrong*, 42-51.

⁷The very dearth of information available in black-Jewish historiography on early radical organizations and their role in the civil rights movement is made all too obvious in John Bracey and August Meier's more recent call for detailed study in the area. In setting a new agenda for black-Jewish history, they point out that, "A most important question is what exactly has been the role of Jews in the civil rights movement in the twentieth century, beginning with the NAACP, and later including CORE, SCLC, and SNCC." Notice that the ILD and the Communist Party, two champions of African-American rights in the twentieth century, are both missing from this list of civil rights organizations. See John Bracey and August Meier, "Towards a Research Agenda on Blacks and Jews in United States History," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (spring 1993): 65.

ephemeral group in Jewish-American history. They were mainly East European Jews, themselves immigrants or the children of immigrants who had experienced poverty first-hand. As proponents of radical philosophies, they supported systemic change in the quest for a just and harmonious society. As radical participants in the Scottsboro campaign they were among the first to advocate and practice militant mass protest, in addition to meticulous courtroom strategy, in the struggle for African-American rights. "The anti-racist vanguard in the South during the early 1930s was not the NAACP," historian Hugh T. Murray astutely observes, "it was the radicals under the red banner of the ILD."⁸ For this reason it is high time that radical Jews, in this case the ILD's Scottsboro Jews, take their rightful place in the history of black struggle in the United States.

In this thesis I will also enter the debate that has been raging among historians for some time on what motivated Jews to participate in struggles for African-American rights. More specifically I will critically evaluate current historiographical approaches that maintain that Jews primarily cooperated with African-Americans in early struggles for black rights as a means of promoting their own sectarian interests. These arguments find their intellectual roots in Harold Cruse's diatribe, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual*, one of the few works that broaches the subject of radical Jewish interaction with African-Americans. In this book Cruse vigorously contends that Jewish involvement in radical movements was little more than a sectarian quest for power and an opportunity to show the white Protestant majority in America that Jews were their intellectual superiors. According to Cruse, African-American intellectuals fell victim to this sinister Jewish scramble for group domination. Radical Jews exploited black Americans in their effort to elevate themselves within the Communist Party. Cruse consequently condemns Jewish Communists for failing "to make Marxism applicable to anything in

⁸Hugh T. Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," *Science and Society* 35 (summer 1971): 192.

America but their *own* national-group social ambitions or individual self-elevation."⁹

Cruse's criticism of Jewish motivation was taken up by a new generation of historians, although his inclusion of radical Jews in the saga of black-Jewish history was not. This marked the beginning of a revisionist trend in the historiography of black-Jewish relations. While earlier works on black-Jewish interaction generally emphasize the humanitarian sentimentalism of Jews who supported African-American causes, later studies focus almost entirely on self-interest as the reason for Jewish involvement. Hasia Diner's *In the Almost Promised Land* is an excellent example of this revisionist genre. Diner argues that Jewish leaders used black issues and causes as a means of acculturating to American society. Hers is a story of Jewish needs being satisfied through a parasitic relationship with blacks. Those Jews who participated in the early civil rights movement, which for Diner means those Jews involved in the NAACP, were utterly "committed to Americanization and acculturation."¹⁰ According to Diner, they believed that they "could best serve the Jewish cause from their position within the black civil rights movement."¹¹ She further contends that Jewish leaders publicized their involvement in black struggles in a bid to demonstrate to their fellow non-Jews their ethical superiority and highlight how truly American they had become by pursuing the lofty principles of liberty, equality and human dignity.

Building on many of Diner's arguments, David Levering Lewis contends that Jewish and African-American elites formed an alliance in organizations like the NAACP and the National Urban League in order to accelerate the assimilation of both minority groups. According to Lewis, Jewish elites turned to African-American affairs out of desperation and

⁹Harold Cruse, *The Crisis of the Negro Intellectual* (London: W. H. Allen, 1969), 158, 147-180.

¹⁰Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 124.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 154.

despair. The growth of anti-Semitism in the early years of the twentieth century startled these elites, and convinced them that the best way to fight anti-Jewish discrimination was through a civil rights program focused on black advancement. In this way Jewish elites did not risk encouraging anti-Semitism by further publicizing its existence, but could support causes that by extension would ultimately serve their own minority group needs. Their approach, as Lewis explains, was one of "minimum visibility and vulnerability. . . By establishing a presence at the center of the civil rights movement with intelligence, money, and influence, elite Jews and their delegates could fight against anti-Semitism by remote control."¹² Although Lewis moves beyond Diner's analysis to show that this collaboration between elite African-Americans and Jews was in many ways mutually beneficial, he ultimately remains very much within the revisionist historiographical camp. According to Lewis, Jewish elites used black civil rights to struggle vicariously for their own liberation and group integration.

Like much of black-Jewish historiography, these revisionist accounts leave out the stories of radical Jews, and for my purposes the Scottsboro Jews. Most of the Scottsboro Jews became involved in the ILD's campaign not because they desired acculturation, assimilation, publicity or even an alternative way to fight anti-Semitism, but because they were dedicated radical activists. In conjunction with changing positions on nationalism in the Communist Party in the late 1920s, the ILD established a new interventionist policy for African-American cases. The Scottsboro trials and campaign were a direct result of this new approach. Hence, radical Jewish involvement in the Scottsboro campaign was less an expression of a particular Jewish interest in African-American affairs than a by-product of a general dedication on their part to the goals and politics of leftist radicalism. Revisionist historiography,

¹²Lewis, "Parallels and Divergences," 554-555. See also David Levering Lewis, "Shortcuts to the Mainstream: Afro-American and Jewish Notables in the 1920s and 1930s," in *Jews in Black Perspectives: A Dialogue*, ed. Joseph R. Washington (Cranberry: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 83-97.

focussed as it is on elite politics and liberal movements, and reckoning as it does costs and benefits in terms of narrow ethnic sectarian interests, can offer no insight into the motivation of the Scottsboro protagonists or into the significance of the burgeoning inter-ethnic alliances they formed. Indeed, if we are to understand the alliance between radical Jews and African-Americans in the Scottsboro campaign, historians must break with the preoccupation with individual motivation, which seeks to deconstruct benevolence to discover self interest, and enter the more fertile grounds of structural phenomenology, where agency and structure converge.

I attempt to do just this in my thesis. In the first chapter, I will introduce the reader to Jewish-Americans involved in the Scottsboro campaign and briefly outline their specific roles in the ILD-sponsored movement. This chapter demonstrates the overrepresentation of radical Jews in the campaign. In chapter 2, I will show how anti-Semitism, alongside and entangled with anti-black racism, dominated the Scottsboro trials. Prominent Alabamians noticed the disproportionate number of Jews involved in the case and brought this news to the public's attention. In contrast with revisionist historiography, then, it was not the radical Scottsboro Jews who sought publicity for themselves or their ethnicity. Moreover, they were quite willing to sacrifice sectarian Jewish interests in this struggle for black rights.

Chapter 3 begins a new focus of this thesis. While the first two chapters of the thesis deal predominantly with Scottsboro as an event, the next two chapters analyze the structural factors and personal motivations that led to Jewish involvement in this African-American cause. In chapter 3, I argue that the disproportionate number of Jews in the Scottsboro campaign reflected the general overrepresentation of Jews in radical movements of the 1930s. Consequently, in this chapter I will explore why the Scottsboro Jews turned to radicalism, the central question that needs to be answered if we are to understand why Jews became involved in this struggle for African-

American rights. In the fourth chapter, I will continue this discussion of what motivated the Scottsboro Jews to become radical, but now with specific attention focused on anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitism is often described as the single most important factor in the "making" of the Jewish radical. In this chapter, I will argue that to understand the role of anti-Semitism in shaping these people's radicalism we need to consider its place among the host of historically-specific factors which formed the Scottsboro Jews' consciousness.

In the final chapter of the thesis I will explore African-American reactions to the Scottsboro campaign. This is particularly interesting in light of Harold Cruse's criticism of the radical black-Jewish alliance. African-Americans viewed ILD activists in terms of race, political affiliation and ethnicity -- they were whites, reds and Jews -- and whichever way or ways they saw them, many blacks enthusiastically endorsed the campaign. Most of the black Americans who were involved in the Scottsboro campaign would have strongly disagreed with Cruse's depictions of them as pawns, outwitted by radical Jewish cunning. In fact, many African-American contemporaries argued that without the ILD, the Scottsboro youths would have been long dead and cold in their graves and the spirit of black protest would still lie dormant. As a result, the Scottsboro Jews won praise from a great number of African-Americans. These blacks perceived the new relationship between radical Jews and blacks as a mutually constructive one between partners on the march in the war against racism and hate.

Having outlined the contents of the thesis, let me say a quick word on what this thesis is not about. I will not cover in any detail the history of the Scottsboro trials, the broader issue of Southern white-black relations or the relationship of the ILD to the Communist International. This is primarily a discussion of Jewish activists in the Scottsboro movement, and my emphasis throughout the work will remain on them -- whether through investigation of their personal and collective biographies or the ways that others saw them.

In writing this thesis, I have relied extensively on primary sources. As part of my fieldwork I spent four months traveling in the United States to research my topic. During that period I was able to consult the original ILD papers stored at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture in New York City, the numerous leftist periodicals, publications and files held at New York University's Tamiment Institute Archives, the Robert Minor Papers and the Richard B. Moore Papers also in New York, the Alan Knight Chalmers Collection in Boston, oral histories from the Columbia Oral History Project and the Southern Oral History Program, the official records and documents of the Alabama Department of Archives and History, the Commission on Interracial Cooperation Collection in Atlanta, Georgia, and a considerable number of press articles dealing with the case published throughout the country. These first-hand accounts and oral testimonies have been indispensable in tracking the largely forgotten history of the Scottsboro Jews.

I have also spent a significant portion of my time collecting personal memoirs and histories of Jewish ILD activists. After publishing notices of intent to study the case in leftist Jewish periodicals and the mainstream press, I received positive responses from former Scottsboro activists. Many historians have also helped me establish connections with living radical Jews. As a consequence, I have both spoken and corresponded with several Jewish ILD attorneys, grassroots members and bureaucrats. I have used this intimate testimony to help construct the personal worlds, thought and culture of the Scottsboro Jews. While aware of the problems inherent in using contemporary reflections to map out historical processes, I am confident that these letters and interviews have strengthened my analysis. They have given me invaluable insights into the realities of being radical and Jewish in the 1930s.

Chapter 1

Radical Jews in the International Labor Defense's Scottsboro Campaign

On March 26, 1931, in the midst of the Great Depression, a fight broke out between several unemployed African-American and white hoboes aboard a freight train headed to Memphis. Ejected from the gondola, the white youths immediately explained the situation to a nearby station master and indicated that they wished to press charges against that "bunch of Negroes."¹ Two stops later the train was searched and nine black youths, ranging in ages from twelve to twenty, two white women dressed in overalls and men's caps, and one white youngster were found. About twenty minutes later, the two women, Ruby Bates and Victoria Price, accused all nine blacks of raping them. Within two weeks of the incident, Olen Montgomery, Haywood Patterson, Ozie Powell, Clarence Norris, Willie Roberson, Charlie Weems, Eugene Williams, Roy Wright and Andy Wright had been tried and found guilty. Their trials were a sham. The youths were denied effective counsel and evidence strongly suggested that they had not raped the women. Nevertheless, eight of them were sentenced to the electric chair and the youngest to life imprisonment.²

¹As quoted in Carter, *Scottsboro*, 4.

²*Labor Defender*, May 1931; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 3-7; Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 177-178. Tried in Scottsboro, the Jackson, Alabama, county seat, the nine were thereafter known, for

While the youths awaited their fate, the ILD promptly condemned the legal lynching of the "Scottsboro boys" and sent Allan Taub and Joseph Brodsky, two of its top attorneys, to take control of the case. Founded in June 1925, the ILD was largely the brainchild of James P. Cannon, a prominent American Communist, and William "Big Bill" Haywood, the exiled leader of the anarchist Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Meeting in the Soviet Union in early 1925, the two discussed the need for a comprehensive legal defense organization for American political prisoners and their families, and debated the various advantages and disadvantages found in existing Soviet and IWW models. Upon returning to the United States, Cannon developed support for the radical legal organization, and a few months later over one hundred delegates met in Chicago's Ashland Auditorium to launch the ILD.³

From its genesis, the ILD set ambitious goals. According to its official platform, the ILD was an organization "to defend all persecuted for their activity in the labor movement, to defend the struggles of the national minorities, and to support the families of victims of ruling class terror regardless of their color, creed, nationality, or political belief."⁴ The ILD, in short, was the radical left's pragmatic response to capitalist justice. In the years preceding its inception, hundreds of workers, labor leaders and political activists had been harassed and imprisoned for their beliefs and activities. Strikers had been beaten and sent to jail. Communists had been deported and anarchists hanged. The ILD was formed to confront the repression of the modern state with all of the ammunition that the state

better or worse, as the "Scottsboro boys." For accounts of their lives and stories, see Clarence Norris and Sybil D. Washington, *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys: An Autobiography* (New York: Putnam's Sons, 1979); Haywood Patterson and Earl Conrad, *Scottsboro Boy* (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1950); and, of course, Carter, *Scottsboro*; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*.

³Charles H. Martin, "The International Labor Defense and Black America," *Labor History* 26 (spring 1985): 167-168; Charles H. Martin, Introduction to *Guide to the Microfilm Edition of Papers of the International Labor Defense* (Frederick: University Publications of America, no date), vii-viii; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "International Labor Defense."

⁴Martin, "The International Labor Defense," 167.

provided it. It used the judicial system to both expose capitalism's hollow promise of justice and to free radical prisoners and victims so that they could rejoin the workers' struggle. In this way the ILD was invincible. When the organization lost a case, it only confirmed its conception of the rotten nature of the American judicial system. But when it succeeded, the ILD reclaimed one more soldier for the armies of social revolution.

To achieve its goals, the ILD relied on a full-time staff, a group of sympathetic lawyers, scores of volunteers and thousands of members. The staff and lawyers were generally paid for their services, although in periods of financial strain they worked without remuneration. At all times, however, their pay was low and barely enough to subsist. In 1934 a full time African-American organizer for the ILD testified to receiving about "four bits a day."⁵ This was just enough, he observed, to pay for his meals. Even the national secretary of the ILD, one of the organization's highest posts, received only \$27.50 per week in 1939.⁶ Whether they were lawyers, bureaucrats or organizers, it is safe to say that none of the ILD activists joined the organization to become rich.

To fund its programs, pay its staff and maintain its offices, the ILD relied on fundraising campaigns, membership fees and voluntary contributions. Each of these sources of funding was unreliable and consequently at times the ILD was forced to turn to the Communist Party to remain solvent. The relationship between the Communist Party and the ILD was unambiguous. Although nominally independent, the ILD followed a clear political line. "Only the ILD," stated an official publication, "seeks political guidance from the party of the working class -- the Communist Party."⁷ While membership in the organization was open

⁵House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Testimony of Pettis Perry*, 73rd Cong., 2nd sess., 8 August 1934, 256.

⁶House Special Committee on Un-American Activities, *Testimony of Anna Damon, National Secretary of the International Labor Defense*, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 16 October 1939, 5928-5955.

⁷*Educational Bulletin*, April-May, 1934, 3.

to everyone, Communists constituted a particularly powerful group in the ILD's leadership and its committed rank-and-file membership. They directed the organization's movements, planned its operations and infused the institution with militancy, purpose and spirited optimism. It should be pointed out, however, that while Communists dominated the ILD, they did not limit ILD services to Communist Party members. Indeed, the pattern set by the ILD in its first year, aiding some 128 political prisoners, "none of them apparently Communists," was to continue throughout its 21 years of existence.⁸ Certainly the Scottsboro trials fell within this tradition, for the defendants "were simply victims -- indeed, nothing but victims."⁹

The Scottsboro campaign marked the debut of the ILD and Communist Party in African-American affairs. Beginning in 1928, when the Sixth Communist International Congress met in Moscow and determined that the African-American population constituted an oppressed nation in the South, the Communist Party and ILD increasingly sought the support of America's blacks. At a convention in the United States in the spring of 1930, members passed a resolution declaring that "the building and the work of the party cannot be effective without a serious change in its attitude and practices in regard to the work among the Negro masses and the transformation of passivity and underestimation into active defense and leadership of the struggles of the Negro masses."¹⁰ According to the Communists, black Americans faced a "special oppression," different in form and character from what most white laborers encountered and which required unique strategies for attack. If blacks were to be brought into the fold, they believed, then

⁸Martin, "The International Labor Defense," 167-168.

⁹Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, *The American Communist Party: A Critical History, 1919-1957* (Beacon Hill: Beacon Press, 1957), 213.

¹⁰Edmund Wilson, "The Freight-Car Case," *New Republic* 68 (26 August 1931): 40.

Communists would have to prove that they understood the intricacies of racism, fought it with tireless vigilance, and respected black Americans as equals.

Thus, when Scottsboro hit the front pages of the national press, Communist leaders seized it as an opportunity to take a strong and public stand against racism and to mobilize African-Americans into the workers' movement. According to a letter sent by the National Bureau of the ILD to its members, "Legal assistance can be furnished in cases involving Negroes where the case is unconnected with the class struggle or the anti-imperialist struggle ONLY WHEN THE CASE IS OF THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL VALUE."¹¹ And Scottsboro was just that. The Communist Party urged the organization to intervene. With limited funds and lawyers, a pragmatic ILD entered the Scottsboro case knowing that the trials would expose the frame-up of these innocent youths while spotlighting Southern racism. William Patterson, the first African-American national secretary of the ILD, later explained:

The ILD *was* out for propaganda -- it was out for propaganda against racism and extra-legal lynching; propaganda against the racist policy of government; propaganda vital to the struggle for the lives of the intended victims; propaganda against the conspiracy to slaughter the boys as an act of terror calculated to quell the unrest of the Negro masses and to throw up a barrier to Negro-white unity.¹²

Having made the decision to enter the case, the ILD now acted to gain absolute control over the defense. This was not an easy task. A bitter and acrimonious power struggle erupted between the NAACP and the ILD. Initially the NAACP turned a blind eye to the flagrant miscarriage of

¹¹"Legal Defense Work Among Negroes," 29 December 1931, ILD Vertical Files.

¹²William L. Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide* (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 136-137.

justice, arguing in the pages of its monthly, the *Crisis*, that it was not "an organization to defend Black criminals. We are not in the field to condone rape, murder and theft because it is done by Black men." Its author frankly admitted, "When we hear that eight colored men have raped two white girls in Alabama, we are not first in the field to defend them. If they are guilty and have a fair trial the case is none of our business."¹³ Therefore, while the NAACP took an easy way out, the ILD catapulted itself into the case, condemning the reformist race organization for betraying black Americans by remaining silent on Scottsboro.

In the aftermath of this negative publicity, the NAACP reversed its approach to the case. Thereafter both the ILD and the NAACP scrambled to lead the defense, sending representatives to collect affidavits of allegiance from the defendants, who tended to cede the defense to whichever group happened to be asking for it at the time. But in a brilliant move, the ILD turned to the families of the convicted youths. Because most of the Scottsboro defendants were minors, their parents held the authority to determine who would ultimately control the case. These parents readily ceded the defense to the ILD. One Scottsboro mother explained to her son, "If you ever listened to me before, I want you to listen to me right now. I got no money to help you, but the International Labor Defense is doing everything possible to save your lives from the electric chair."¹⁴ Her message was absolutely clear -- stick with the ILD.

The parents of the Scottsboro youths knew little about the organization that so enthusiastically proffered them assistance. But the magnitude of their decision to cede the defense to the ILD should not be underestimated. The United States government did not look kindly on radical organizations, as evidenced by the Palmer Raids and Red Scare of

¹³N.A.A.C.P., "Is the N.A.A.C.P. Lying Down on Its Job?" *Crisis* 40, no. 10 (1931): 343, 354.

¹⁴As quoted in *Daily Worker*, 25 April 1931.

the post World War I era. The American South, with its penchant for Klan-style conservatism, xenophobia and brutal racism, was to prove even less hospitable to radical movements and organizations. Whether or not the Scottsboro parents considered the potential backlash of enlisting the ILD is impossible to say. In the face of almost certain death for their children, they boldly accepted the ILD's assistance, and in so doing allied themselves to the well-nigh universally despised radical left.

In January 1932 the NAACP formally withdrew from the case. In the end, it was the ILD's rapid response to the crisis, its shrewd policy of turning to the parents of the Scottsboro defendants for support, and its public campaign to discredit the NAACP that ensured its control over the case. The ILD maintained its authority in the campaign for the better part of the next four years. Twice it brought the case before the U. S. Supreme Court. In November 1932, the Court reversed the convictions against the youths. In *Powell v. Alabama* it found that the defendants had been denied their right to adequate counsel and ordered new trials to be heard. In April 1935, the Supreme Court again reversed the convictions, arguing in the landmark case of *Norris v. Alabama* that Clarence Norris had been deprived of the right to equal protection of the law because African-Americans had been systematically denied the right to serve on Alabama's juries. Again new trials were ordered.¹⁵

II

The Scottsboro trials and campaign lasted in earnest for some six and a half years. Throughout that period, Jews dominated the Scottsboro defense.¹⁶ Two of them, Allan Taub and Joseph Brodsky, visited the youths in their decrepit Birmingham jail in April 1931, only days after the first convictions. According to Clarence Norris, one of those convicted,

¹⁵Carter, *Scottsboro*, 161-163, 322-324; Goodman, *Stories of Scottsboro*, 112-113, 243-244.

¹⁶For a guide to prominent Jews in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign, see the appendix.

the two lawyers masqueraded as redneck farmers to pass relatively unquestioned into the prison. The forlorn youths were absolutely stunned by the encounter. "These men brought us the first kind words from the outside world since we had been arrested," explained Norris.¹⁷ With their thick New York accents, Taub and Brodsky no doubt sounded strange to these Southern youngsters. The way they acted, however, provided an even bigger shock. As Norris later recalled, "I had never met white men like them."¹⁸ His parents had always told him to avoid whites, but these white ILD attorneys treated him with kindness and respect.¹⁹

Like most of the ILD lawyers involved in the Scottsboro movement, Brodsky and Taub were radical New York Jews. Allan Taub was born in Manhattan and educated in New York, graduating from Cooper Union and Fordham Law School. He was the first attorney sent by the ILD to investigate the convictions of the Scottsboro youths, and it was largely he who masterminded the ILD's drive to out-manuever the NAACP in an effort to control the defense. He remained active in the case for many years and contributed to both the legal and the public campaigns, delivering numerous speeches across the country on behalf of the Scottsboro youths.²⁰

A brilliant ILD attorney, Taub was also active in the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Labor Party. In the 1930s, he participated in many radical cases, including the 1932 coal miners' strike in Harlan, Kentucky, and the 1933 Tuscaloosa, Alabama, murder trial of the African-American, Dan Pippen Jr. With little care for the physical dangers involved in these controversial legal battles, Taub invariably encountered

¹⁷Norris and Washington, *Last of the Scottsboro Boys*, 26. Also see Patterson and Conrad, *Scottsboro Boy*, 18; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 55-56.

¹⁸Norris and Washington, *Last of the Scottsboro Boys*, 26.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 33.

²⁰*New York Times*, 12 May 1995; ILD Press Release, 14 April 1931, International Labor Defense Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (hereafter cited as ILD Papers); *Daily Worker*, 19 May 1931; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 57.

fiery crowds and outright violence. For his work in Kentucky, he received serious head injuries and was thrown into jail. In Tuscaloosa, he barely escaped a lynch mob by leaving the city in disguise and under the protection of the local militia.²¹

Taub's partner and friend, Joseph Brodsky, was to become the most celebrated radical ILD attorney involved in the Scottsboro trials. Born in Kiev, Russia, in 1889, Brodsky immigrated to New York City with his family when he was two. As a teenager, Brodsky was an avid Socialist soapboxer, and by the time he graduated from New York University he was determined to use the law for the benefit of those who fell victim to American capitalist justice.

Known as the Communist Party's chief counsel and the lawyer of the *Freiheit*, the Yiddish organ of the Communist Press, Brodsky was a founding member of the Communist Party, the ILD and the International Workers' Order. In the summer of 1928, Brodsky led a group of Americans on a six week tour of the Soviet Union. Like many of his contemporaries, he was thrilled by the potential of the Russian Revolution and wanted to see this new society for himself. In 1931, Brodsky became an active member of the Scottsboro defense team, vigorously arguing the case before the Alabama Supreme Court in 1932 and aiding Samuel Leibowitz when the latter became chief defense attorney in 1933. With years of experience in public speaking and a keen mind that thrived under pressure, Brodsky stirred countless audiences with his first-hand accounts of the trials, the long-suffering, imprisoned Scottsboro youths and the raging Alabama crowds.²²

²¹Taub, Allan, "Prelude to a Lynching," *New Masses* 8 (August 1933): 6-7; Around the World, *Jewish Currents*, July-August 1995; ILD Press Release, 14 April 1931, ILD Papers; Senate Committee on Manufactures, *Conditions in Kentucky Coal Fields*, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., 12 May 1932, 50-55; Robin Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe: Alabama Communists During the Great Depression* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 88.

²²*New York Times*, 29 July 1947; *Daily Worker*, 31 July 1947; *Daily Worker*, 1 August 1947; *Daily Worker*, 3 August 1947; House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Statement of Joseph R. Brodsky*, 72nd Cong., 1st sess., 15 March 1932, 94-98; House Special Committee on Un-American

Although flooded with other legal cases, Brodsky always made a considerable effort to look after the welfare of the Scottsboro youths. It was largely at his insistence, for instance, that several parents of the defendants were taken to see their convicted sons. In late 1932, Brodsky was already campaigning to raise funds so that the young men could meet their parents a second time. Before a group of the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners, an adjunct of the ILD, Brodsky argued that, "It's only fair to take the parents down again to see the boys who have been saved again." "Of course," he continued, "someone who is sarcastic about it will say what's the use, we take them 700 miles and they [the prison guards] give them seven minutes."²³ Yet, despite the difficulties and costs involved, he insisted that the needs and wishes of the parents and the convicted youths came first. This, no doubt, reflected the necessity of keeping the parents and youths on side, but it also revealed the touching concern that ILD activists repeatedly showed for the defendants. Brodsky himself visited the Scottsboro youths on several occasions, and developed particularly warm friendships with them.

The Scottsboro youths appreciated Brodsky's forthright assistance, kindness and charm. Even when the youths questioned their affiliation with the ILD, they always made a point to express their gratitude to Brodsky. In 1934, after news broke out that the ILD had attempted to bribe Victoria Price to withdraw her testimony that she had been raped, Clarence Norris decided to remove the ILD from his case. "Now Mr. Brodsky," Norris wrote in the wake of his decision, "as for my opinion of you, I do not think anyone could find any greater friend that what you have prove yourself to be toward me doing [*sic*] these trying days. I will

Activites, *Testimony of Joseph Brodsky*, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 5-13 September 1939, 4492; Ann Fagan Ginger, *Carol Weiss King: Human Rights Lawyer, 1895-1952* (Niwot: University Press of Colorado, 1993), 10-11, 114; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "Brodsky, Joseph."

²³Minutes of NCDPP Meeting, 7 November 1932, ILD Papers.

always [*sic*] have the highth [*sic*] respect toward you. Every living thing that you have did for me since the Dawn of this fraim [*sic*] up against me are appreciated."²⁴ Another of the youths, Haywood Patterson, decided to stick with the ILD despite the scandal. He candidly explained to Brodsky that, "I do not have the feeling that I will be ever misrepresent [*sic*] by you."²⁵

While Taub and Brodsky are probably the most well-known ILD attorneys associated with the Scottsboro trials, many lesser-known lawyers also contributed substantially to the movement. More often than not, these unsung heroes were also Jews. For example, Elias Schwarzbart, Brodsky's younger nephew, was an attorney intimately connected with the case. Born in New York City, his father a Polish-Jewish immigrant, Schwarzbart graduated from Cornell University and St. John's Law School. As a twenty-four year old legal novitiate, he travelled to Alabama at Brodsky's behest, spending nearly two years there conducting vital background research, appearing in court as associate counsel and meticulously preparing appeals. Like his uncle, Schwarzbart also made a habit of spending time with the imprisoned youths -- "to bring cheer and comforts," as he later put it.²⁶ While indexed in neither Carter nor Goodman's accounts of the Scottsboro trials, Schwarzbart was an active member of the ILD's defense team throughout the case.²⁷

Working closely with Schwarzbart, Carol King was yet another key player in the Scottsboro defense team. Born in Manhattan to an affluent Jewish family, King developed unconventional habits for a respectable lady of her time -- she reputedly smoked, drank and swore like the most colorful of sailors. As described by an acquaintance, King was a "woman

²⁴Clarence Norris, letter to Joseph Brodsky, 29 October 1934, ILD Papers. Throughout this thesis, I will only use "sics" when they are absolutely necessary to indicate that the text is problematic in the original. Otherwise, I will attempt to leave primary material uncluttered with "sics" in order to maintain the continuity and integrity of the text.

²⁵As quoted in Carter, *Scottsboro*, 318.

²⁶*New York Times*, 11 February 1989.

²⁷*Daily Worker*, 21 January 1932; *New York Times*, 12 November 1995.

sitting at a desk piled high with law books, hair sticking out from her head, busy on the Scottsboro case. The cigarette in her mouth was scattering ashes down the front of her blouse."²⁸

King graduated from New York University law school in 1920, established a partnership with Joseph Brodsky and other like-minded, left-thinking lawyers, and enthusiastically helped build the ILD into an intelligent mass organization. Although generally not an attorney of record for the Scottsboro trials, King was frequently, sometimes daily, consulted by Brodsky and other lawyers on matters of strategy and tactics. In the desperate days of the winter of 1933, for instance, Elias Schwarzbart asked King to help him convert a transcript of a recent court hearing into a narrative record. While working against a tight deadline, and with little chance of public recognition, King and Schwarzbart spent the next three days and two nights at the printer's office. As Schwarzbart later remembered, "this was not her assigned duty. An emergency had arisen -- that determined her duty."²⁹ Time and again King researched various constitutional questions for the defense, co-authored legal briefs for the case, and helped whenever she was needed. Yet, like Schwarzbart, she would not be familiar to readers of the standard accounts of the Scottsboro trials.³⁰

According to African-American Communist, Benjamin Davis, King "was a remarkable personality -- generous, warm, dynamic, self-sacrificing . . . She could have had a fabulously lucrative career, but she devoted her life to principles, to the victims of class justice."³¹ Although King

²⁸Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 50, 149.

²⁹Elias M. Schwarzbart, letter to Ann Fagan Ginger, 8 March 1953, Carol Weiss King Collection, Meiklejohn Civil Liberties Library (hereafter cited as CWK Collection).

³⁰Elias Schwarzbart, letter to Ann Fagan Ginger, 8 March 1953, CWK Collection; *New York Times*, 23 January 1952; House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization, *Testimony of Carol King*, 74th Cong., 1st sess., 3-4 April 1935, 28.

³¹Benjamin J. Davis, *Communist Councilman from Harlem: Autobiographical Notes Written in a Federal Penitentiary* (New York: International Publishers, 1969), 91.

consistently denied that she had ever joined the Communist Party, she was an ardent activist for leftist causes throughout her life. She was a founding member of the ILD, the International Juridical Association, the Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Commission, the Civil Rights Congress and the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born. Though primarily an expert in immigration and deportation law, King's outstanding career included defending such world-renowned radical and labor figures as Harry Bridges, Gerhart Eisler and Earl Browder.³²

Irving Schwab, Irvin Klein, Samuel Neuburger, David Levinson, Fannie Horowitz, all Jewish and mostly New Yorkers, were likewise dedicated ILD lawyers. Together they formed an internal network of advice, and a counsel and cache of labor for the Scottsboro defense team.³³ Indeed, with the notable exception of George W. Chamlee, a non-Jewish Southerner, the overwhelming majority of lawyers serving the ILD's Scottsboro campaign were Northern Jews. Many of them were radicals and Communists, and most had strong leftist sympathies. All of them were absolutely determined to do everything they could to see the Scottsboro youths go free.

III

The ILD maintained a two-pronged strategy in its Scottsboro campaign. First, ILD leaders believed that the Scottsboro defendants deserved the best possible courtroom defense. This meant acquiring the services of attorneys with experience and acumen, and sometimes going beyond the leftist circle of radical lawyers to do so. For this reason, they turned in 1932 to Walter Pollak, a distinguished constitutional attorney of

³²*New York Times*, 23 January 1952; Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 75, 119-120, 260, 307, 434.

³³*Birmingham News*, 3 April 1933; *New York Times*, 18 April 1943; Samuel Neuburger, interview by Mary Licht, tape recording, 16 December 1982, *People's Weekly World*, New York; *Daily World*, 28 August 1985; *New York Times*, 19 November 1947; *Daily Worker*, 27 May 1936; *African-American*, 15 April 1933; *New York Times*, 6 December 1964.

Central European Jewish parentage, to argue the first Supreme Court appeal for the Scottsboro youths. Pollak was hardly a tried-and-true radical, being neither a Communist nor a fellow-traveler. Yet, having previously argued two free speech cases before the Supreme Court, he brought crucial expertise that was otherwise lacking from the collective talents of the Scottsboro defense team.³⁴

Prominent, non-radical lawyers like Pollak were engaged by the ILD for their ability as "court-room technicians" and not for their political sympathies. "The lawyer is not a revolutionist," William Patterson avowed, "nor does the sale or contribution of his services to a revolutionary organization make him one."³⁵ True revolutionaries, he implied, worked on the streets or in the factories with the great masses of people. They were organizers, strategists, polemicists and workers -- not mainstream, middle-class lawyers. But while ILD leaders believed that the courts were corrupt spheres ultimately dominated by the ruling class, they treated them extremely pragmatically. They knew that talented and experienced lawyers had to be employed if the Scottsboro youths were to stand a realistic chance at regaining their freedom. Until more experienced radical lawyers could be found, then, the ILD officials felt that they had to enlist members of the bourgeois elite in its Scottsboro struggle.³⁶

Interestingly, the majority of non-radical lawyers retained by the ILD for the Scottsboro defense team were also Northern Jews. It was Samuel Leibowitz's incredible track record as a criminal lawyer -- in fifteen years he had defended seventy-eight individuals accused of first-degree

³⁴The cases were *Gitlow v. New York*, decided in 1925, and *Whitney v. California*, decided in 1927. See Louis H. Pollak, "Advocating Civil Liberties: A Young Lawyer before the Old Court," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 17, no. 1 (1982): 5-7; "Draft of Memorial for Bar Association Based on C. S. S. Version of May 7, 1941," CWK Collection; Louis H. Pollak, letter to author, 4 October 1995; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 160.

³⁵*Daily Worker*, 7 April 1933.

³⁶ILD Press Release, 14 April 1931, ILD Papers.

murder, seventy-seven of whom were acquitted -- that led to his retention by the ILD in January 1933. During his lengthy and successful career, Leibowitz defended such celebrated public enemies as "Mad Dog" Vincent Coll, triple slayer Robert Irwin, and the infamous gangster Al Capone, who threw Leibowitz a banquet in gratitude for his efforts.³⁷ For the Scottsboro trials Leibowitz agreed to serve under the banner of the ILD without receiving payment. "I told them," Leibowitz declared not long after being hired, "that money would not enter into the question at all, as long as they gave me free rein in the matter, but not before admitting to them that I was a Democrat -- a Roosevelt Democrat."³⁸ Leibowitz, a Romanian Jewish immigrant raised on the streets of Brooklyn, became the leading attorney associated with the Scottsboro trials.³⁹

While a favorite of many Northerners throughout the trials, Leibowitz was never able to win the respect or admiration of Southern audiences. He seemed to rub Southerners all wrong, exhibiting little understanding for their customs or culture. To his credit Leibowitz insisted that prosecuting attorneys refer to African-American witnesses as "mister." In a region where blacks were often called by their first names, this courtesy hardly endeared him to many Southerners. To make matters worse, in the aftermath of Haywood Patterson's second conviction in early 1933, a contemptuous Leibowitz denounced the Southern jury as a bunch of "bigots whose mouths are slits in their faces, whose eyes pop out like a frog's, whose chins drip tobacco juice, bewhiskered and filthy . . ."⁴⁰ His indiscreet comments were widely published in the South, intensifying Southern animosities against the ILD and its lawyers.

³⁷*New York Post*, 25 June 1959.

³⁸*Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1933.

³⁹Goodman, *Stories*, 101.

⁴⁰Carter, *Scottsboro*, 198, 244.

Another non-radical attorney brought into the Scottsboro defense was Osmond Fraenkel. He was retained both for his wide experience in civil liberties litigation and his ability to offset the local unpopularity that Leibowitz had caused. Born in mid-Manhattan to affluent German Jewish parents, Fraenkel provided the defense with innumerable services, preparing and arguing appeals for the Alabama Supreme Court in June 1934 and the federal Supreme Court in 1935, traveling to Alabama to present motions whenever necessary, and participating in public lectures and mass meetings. According to Alan Knight Chalmers, head of the later-formed Scottsboro Defense Committee, Fraenkel was "a rock in the defense to the very end."⁴¹

IV

The second prong of the ILD's defense strategy, which substantially distinguished it from other progressive legal organizations of the time, was its policy of militant mass action. Unlike the NAACP, which quietly worked within existing legal structures, the ILD insisted that "the most effective means of defense are not the legal points raised by the lawyer in court but the mass pressure brought on the capitalist courts by the workers outside."⁴² Downright skeptical of capitalist justice, the ILD pragmatically united courtroom strategy with mass street protest. Thus, while the NAACP was flooding the press with statements asserting that "such cases must be won not in newspapers but in courts of law," the ILD successfully harnessed the energies of outraged blacks and whites in extensive international demonstrations.⁴³

⁴¹Osmond K. Fraenkel, interview by Mark N. Bloom, transcript, July 1974, Columbia Oral History Project, Butler Memorial Library, New York; Goodman, *Stories*, 173; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 304-306, 339.

⁴²*Labor Defender*, April 1933; *Daily Worker*, 7 March 1933; *Daily Worker*, 23 June 1934. For a comparison of NAACP strategies with the ILD's mass defense, see Mark Solomon, *Red and Black: Communism and Afro-Americans, 1929-1935* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), 505-507.

⁴³Herbert J. Seligmann, "The Communists and the Scottsboro Case," *New Republic* 67, no. 860 (27 May 1931): 47.

American consulate windows shattered from bottles and stones thrown by Scottsboro demonstrators in Geneva, Dresden and Berlin. In the Soviet Union a collective farm was re-named "Scottsboro." And in the United States, hundreds of marches, mass demonstrations and public protests forced the Scottsboro trials into the collective American consciousness.⁴⁴ Here, too, Jews played a pivotal role in the Scottsboro campaign. Jews sent large numbers of protest letters and telegrams to Alabama officials. In one such telegram, one hundred and eighty delegates to the national convention of the Jewish Children's School, a subsidiary of the International Workers' Order, "denounced the attempt of the boss's courts to murder the nine Negroes at Scottsboro."⁴⁵ In St. Paul, Minnesota, radical Jews even established their own Jewish Scottsboro Branch of the ILD.⁴⁶

Jews also participated extensively in bringing African-Americans into the Scottsboro campaign. The ILD and Communist Party made black Harlem a central focus of its mass protest campaign. In Harlem the ILD organized numerous local branches around the Scottsboro issue, held Scottsboro "teas" and ran countless public demonstrations. Radical Jews actively contributed to this Harlem offensive. As historian Mark Naison has pointed out, "Jewish-Americans provided most of the shock troops for Harlem protests around the Scottsboro issue and constituted the bulk of

⁴⁴Carter, *Scottsboro*, 138-143; *Labor Defender*, June 1931. Scottsboro demonstrations also reached Australia. At a meeting in Newcastle, the mayor, members of the Australian Labor Party and several leaders of workers' federations unanimously "decided to ask President Roosevelt by cable to order the immediate release of seven [*sic*] negro boys concerned in the Scottsboro, Alabama, case." *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners Advocate*, 25 January 1934; also see [Australian] *Workers' Weekly*, 6 May 1932; *Workers' Weekly*, 13 May 1932.

⁴⁵Telegram to Governor Bibb Graves, 26 May 1931, Papers of Governor Bibb Graves, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as BG Papers).

⁴⁶*Harlem Liberator*, 29 April 1933; Sylvia Turner, letter to Louis Colman, 2 June 1938, ILD Papers; telegrams to Alabama governors, BG Papers and Papers of Benjamin Miller, Alabama Department of Archives and History (hereafter cited as BM Papers).

the white administrators and educational directors sent into the Harlem section after James Ford's accession to leadership."⁴⁷

Behind the numerous mass demonstrations and myriad of petitions, a diligent staff of ILD bureaucrats and volunteers, publicists and organizers ensured the smooth functioning of an international campaign. According to Melech Epstein, to be a Communist Party member in the Depression years required, "endurance and a readiness to be knocked about . . . Ceaseless demands were made on a man's time, energy and purse."⁴⁸ It was no different for ILD members and activists. These men and women gave unstintingly of their time and talent to the Scottsboro movement. In this backstage arena of everyday ILD work, and with little chance of fame or fanfare, Jewish-Americans contributed enormously.

Proclivity to radical action in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign was not confined to Jewish men. Contrary to Elsa Dixler's contentions that the Communist Party excluded women from positions of power and policy making, many of the ILD's most powerful and capable leaders and decision makers were Jewish women Communists. The statistics cited in Dixler's work further suggest that Jewish women were overrepresented among female Communists and ILD activists as a whole.⁴⁹

Consider, for example, Anna Damon. Damon rarely glittered in the public spotlight of the Scottsboro campaign. Neither does she figure

⁴⁷Mark Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 321.

⁴⁸Melech Epstein, *The Jew and Communism: The Story of Early Communist Victories and Ultimate Defeats in the Jewish Community, USA* (New York: Trade Union Sponsoring Committee, 1959), 249.

⁴⁹Elsa Dixler, "The Woman Question: Women and the Communist Party, 1929-1944" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1974), 247, 274. Dixler's assertions are echoed in Henry Srebrnik's recent article on Jewish women in the Stepney Tenants' Defence League in East London. See Srebrnik, "Class, Ethnicity and Gender Intertwined: Jewish Women and the East London Rent Strikes, 1935-1940," *Women's History Review* (1995): 292. My latter claim is based on Nathan Glazer's assertion that "a great majority of the Party in New York City was Jewish," and Dixler's claim that in New York City, one third of the Party was female in 1933, while in the same year, women constituted only nineteen percent of nationwide Party membership. Given the dubious nature of these figures, my suggestion is purely speculative. Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1961), 221; Dixler, "The Woman Question," 225.

prominently in standard accounts of the trials. Yet this partially deaf, wholly tenacious woman played a crucial role in the Scottsboro movement in particular and in radical causes in general. "If seven of the Scottsboro boys are free today," Benjamin Davis declared following her death in 1944, "Anna Damon had a great deal to do with it."⁵⁰ When she died, still active in the ILD and the radical left, her comrades remembered her as a superb human being and an exemplary representative of the Jewish people. William Patterson, a close co-worker and friend, fondly recalled that "Anna Damon came from a great people and in everything that she did she reflected the limitless courage and nobility of the Jews."⁵¹

A Latvian Jewish immigrant who arrived in the United States when she was eight, Damon spent her early years as an organizer for the Chicago branch of the Hat, Cap and Millinery Workers' Union. She was a charter member of the Communist Party, served on its central committee, directed its Women's Commission, and edited *Working Women*, a monthly publication of the Commission which by the 1930s had a circulation of about 8,000 copies. In 1933 she also helped found the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born. Damon was well known in leftist circles, as were her intimate relationships with some of the left's more prominent leaders. She was the sweetheart of Charles Ruthenberg, one of the first general secretaries of the Communist Party, and later was rumored to have had an affair with Vito Marcantonio, the radical Italian congressman from East Harlem and one-time ILD secretary.⁵²

⁵⁰Benjamin J. Davis Jr., letter to Louis Colman, 31 August 1944, as quoted in *Equal Justice and Democracy in the Service of Victory; Continuing the Work of Anna Damon*, New York 1944, ILD Vertical Files.

⁵¹William L. Patterson, letter to Louis Colman, 24 July 1944, as quoted in *Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files.

⁵²House Committee, *Testimony of Anna Damon*, 5925; Rose Baron, letter to Josephine Powell, 15 July 1935, ILD Papers; Anna Damon, letter to Gussie McLeasy, 16 November 1935, ILD Papers; Carol King, letter to Anna Damon, 21 November 1934, ILD Papers; Editorial, *Nation* 139, no. 3623 (12 December 1934); Anna Damon, "Experiences in Work Among Women," *Party Organizer* 6 (August-September 1933): 61-63; Robert Shaffer, "Women and the Communist Party, USA, 1930-

In 1934 Damon became acting organization secretary of the ILD, and in 1937 she replaced William Patterson, who had fallen ill, as the ILD's national secretary. An administrative mastermind known for building bridges between progressives and radicals, Damon coordinated fundraisers and public protests for the Scottsboro youths, wrote extensively on the trials, and resourcefully completed the day-to-day work of the organization. She, too, took a keen interest in the personal welfare of the Scottsboro youths, frequently corresponding with them and visiting them and their families on at least two occasions.⁵³ Far from an isolated and insensitive bureaucrat, Damon was known and loved for her brand of personalized radical activism.

Of all the ILD activists that they had the chance to meet, the Scottsboro youths particularly cherished Anna Damon. When Haywood Patterson wrote to ILD activist Rose Baron, he sang Damon's praises. "I have liked Anna for a many things," he wrote to Baron, "for her fineness and loveliness. And I like her for her courage and strength. And my one satisfaction is that I think she are [sic] a courageous fighter."⁵⁴ Damon's relationships with the Scottsboro defendants were genuine and reciprocal. When Willie Robinson asked Damon about her life in the North, she responded to his questions in detail. "I wish I could tell you that my life is an easy one, as I am sure you would like to hear," she wrote, "but that is not the case either."⁵⁵ She sent him long letters, snapshots of herself and copies of the latest popular songs. In return, Robinson tried to follow her

1940," *Socialist Review* 9, no. 3 (1979): 95; Mari Jo Buhle, *Women and the American Left: A Guide to the Sources* (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1983), 131; Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*, 144; Annette Rubinstein, telephone conversation with author, 23 June 1995; *Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files.

⁵³House Committee, *Testimony of Anna Damon*, 5925; Rose Baron, letter to Josephine Powell, 15 July 1935, ILD Papers; Anna Damon, letter to Gussie McLeasy, 16 November 1935, ILD Papers.

⁵⁴Haywood Patterson, letter to Rose Baron, 5 February 1937, ILD Papers.

⁵⁵Anna Damon, letter to Willie Robinson, 13 November 1934, ILD Papers.

advice and remain calm and optimistic while trapped away for years in prison.

Haywood Patterson and Damon shared an especially warm friendship. Having spent little time in school, Patterson learned to write in jail. In letter after letter he confided in Damon his longings and grievances, and she listened compassionately and comforted him. In a touching letter of January 1937, Patterson explained to her that always "there remained at the rest of my heart the precious hope that someday I would win out."⁵⁶ Four days later, Damon wrote back, "After I finished reading your letter, there were tears in my eyes and I felt that if there was anything in the world that I could do at that moment to make you a little less sad and a little more cheerful, I would have done it."⁵⁷ Damon on several occasions visited Patterson and the other youths in Alabama. After one such visit, Patterson passionately wrote, "Anna I feel always that you are a real friend . . . I read in your eyes last time I saw you. I saw there in them good things. And just where you were a good harmless little girl and wishes to be friendly to everyone."⁵⁸ "Know," he told her in another letter, "that we are all brothers and sisters under the skin."⁵⁹ The friendship established between Damon and Patterson during the trying years he spent in prison successfully transcended the entrenched racism of generations.

Anna Damon was but one of a network of radical Jewish women that provided the foundational backbone of the Scottsboro defense. These women served as powerful organizational leaders within the ILD, while also providing the Scottsboro defendants with more personable assistance. As head of the ILD's National Prisoners' Relief Fund, Rose Baron, a

⁵⁶Haywood Patterson, letter to Anna Damon, 11 January 1937, ILD Papers.

⁵⁷Anna Damon, letter to Haywood Patterson, 15 January 1937, ILD Papers.

⁵⁸Haywood Patterson, letter to Anna Damon, 18 January 1937, ILD Papers.

⁵⁹Haywood Patterson, letter to Anna Damon, 2 July 1938, ILD Papers.

Russian Jewish immigrant who spoke an accented English, vigorously raised funds for the campaign. Baron did not shy away from targeting children for the cause, initiating the slogan "One Million Pennies for the Scottsboro Boys." As an ILD publication asked, "Children collect for the Jewish National Fund for Palestine, why not for Scottsboro?"⁶⁰ That the audience for such a plea was obviously Jewish went without saying.

Like Damon, Baron was hardly new to the radical leftist scene. A committed Communist, she directed the Sacco-Vanzetti Emergency Defense Committee in the 1920s, organized the ILD's Young Defenders youth group, and headed the New York District ILD. Baron was also one of five women on the very first national committee of the ILD. As director of prisoners' relief, she implemented creative programs that aided the immediate families of ILD prisoners. One such program was the Summer Milk Fund Drive, a campaign that ensured that children of ILD prisoners would not go without milk. It was also Baron's responsibility to send ILD prisoners and families, including the Scottsboro youths, a monthly allowance throughout their imprisonment.⁶¹

Baron, as well as Mina Klein, Frances Levkoff and others, made life a little more bearable for the Scottsboro youths. They corresponded with the defendants regularly, providing them with a sympathetic audience that connected them to the free world beyond their prison walls. The nine youths responded to their kindnesses with sincere gratitude.⁶² "When I

⁶⁰*Educational Bulletin*, January 1934, 2.

⁶¹*Working Woman*, November 1933, 14; *Labor Defense News*, 10 March 1934, ILD Vertical Files; "Conference for Summer Milk Fund Drive for Children of Labor's Prisoners," 15 May 1937, ILD Vertical Files; House Committee, *Testimony of Anna Damon*, 5954; Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996. Prisoners' relief programs were greatly appreciated by their recipients. For example, the immortalized Ned Cobb, an African-American living in the South, recalled how "the ILD sent me five dollars a month the whole time that I was in prison. And they was helpin [*sic*] my wife, too. That's what the organization believed in -- takin [*sic*] care of a man's family when he's pulled away from em [*sic*]." Theodore Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers: The Life of Nate Shaw* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 342.

⁶²For example, see Anna Damon, letter to Haywood Patterson, 15 July 1937; Rose Baron, letter to Haywood Patterson, 3 February 1937; Charley Weems, letter to Mina Klein, 14 September 1934, all found in the ILD Papers; Goodman, *Stories*, 91, 269-277; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 91.

am free," wrote Charlie Weems, "I want to meet all of the workers of the ILD who have fought so hard for my freedom."⁶³ Haywood Patterson declared that he could "never forget the wonderful deeds and splendid cooperating that the ILD have shown me through all these years of misery."⁶⁴ And in a passionate letter, Eugene Williams insisted, "The ILD means everything to me and I praise it 'to the highest.'"⁶⁵

The final Jewish ILD officials who served in the Scottsboro movement that I have been able to identify were Sasha Small and Frank Spector. Both Small and Spector were long-standing radicals who worked behind the scenes for the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. The daughter of foreign-born radicals, Sasha Small served as the ILD's publicity director during part of the trials and wrote for the ILD monthlies, *Labor Defender* and *Equal Rights*. Born near Odessa, Russia, in 1895, Frank Spector worked for the ILD primarily in the early days of the Scottsboro campaign. Apart from his little-known activities in the Scottsboro movement, Spector also served in the 1905 revolution in Russia, functioned as a section organizer for the Communist Party in Los Angeles, and eventually acted as a coordinator of International Red Aid, an ILD affiliate, in English-speaking countries.⁶⁶

Numerous Yiddish-speaking Jews also supported the Scottsboro campaign. The Yiddish press in America covered the Scottsboro trials with indefatigable interest and zeal. As Hasia Diner found, "of all the events in the history of race relations from 1915 to 1935, no single episode received as much attention from the Yiddish press as did the Scottsboro case."⁶⁷ In the first five years of the trials alone, some 104 articles were

⁶³Charlie Weems, letter to Mina Klein, 7 September 1934, ILD Papers.

⁶⁴Haywood Patterson, letter to Anna Damon, 12 October 1937, ILD Papers.

⁶⁵As quoted in *Daily Worker*, 8 January 1932.

⁶⁶Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996; *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, s.v. "Spector, Frank E."

⁶⁷Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 42.

published on the case in the *Morgen Journal* and *Jewish Daily Forward*. It seems that substantial numbers of American Jews, or at least Jewish editors, were mesmerized by the unfolding drama of Scottsboro. Many contributed to the ILD's Scottsboro defense fund; a few joined local branches of the ILD. The International Ladies Garment Workers' Union, a focus of Jewish radicalism, was one of the mostly Jewish unions that helped finance the Scottsboro campaign.⁶⁸

V

In June 1931, a group of prominent American writers, activists and educators founded the National Committee for the Defense of Political Prisoners (NCDPP), an adjunct of the ILD. "The time is ripe for American intellectuals to render some services to the American worker," declared Theodore Dreiser, one of the notable writers in attendance at this historic meeting.⁶⁹ From its commencement, the NCDPP played an active role in the Scottsboro campaign, helping to replenish the ILD's limited financial reserves, sending members to public protests in Birmingham and elsewhere, and publishing scores of essays and leaflets publicizing the trials. Much to the chagrin of orthodox Communist Party comrades, the NCDPP bridged political and ideological boundaries in its social activities, bringing affluent, liberal elites into the Scottsboro coalition. The NCDPP regularly sponsored lively Scottsboro benefits and dances for prominent socialites and musicians, a crowd not generally reputed for its commitment to proletarian movements for change.⁷⁰ Members in the NCDPP also unofficially monitored the ILD's performance in the trials and

⁶⁸Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 42, 219; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "International Ladies Garment Workers' Union."

⁶⁹As quoted in Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 56.

⁷⁰*Labor Defender*, June 1931; *Daily Worker*, 16 January 1932; *Daily Worker*, 19 January 1932; *Amsterdam News*, 21 February 1934; Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 72, 82; Goodman, *Stories*, 30.

campaign, with a few at one point criticizing William Patterson for having hired Samuel Leibowitz, a man whom they saw as corrupt, racist and a bane for the defense.

Like many in the Scottsboro campaign, Jewish intellectuals and activists were prominent in the NCDPP's contribution to the movement. They were strongly represented in the organization's administrative structure. Elliot Cohen, a native Alabamian, worked as the executive secretary of the NCDPP. Diana Rubin, wife of notable literary critic Lionel Trilling, served as its secretary of the Prisoners' Relief Committee. Likewise, Lionel Trilling himself, Joshua Kunitz, Joseph Gelders, Alfred Hirsch, Franz Boaz, Michael Gold, John Lawson and Sidney Hook, to name only a few other Jewish members, supported the Scottsboro campaign through the NCDPP, some as noteworthy signatories on national protest letters, and others in more physically active and courageous roles. Some of these Jewish NCDPP members later became known as the New York Intellectuals.⁷¹

John Lawson was a particularly outspoken NCDPP activist. Outraged that the Scottsboro youths had been in solitary confinement for four months -- prisoners normally remained in confinement for only fourteen days -- Lawson led a group of NCDPP representatives to visit the youths in July 1934. A distinguished playwright and third generation Jewish-American from New York, Lawson was twice arrested in Alabama for his activities on behalf of the Scottsboro defendants. Later in the campaign, Lawson investigated charges that the Communist Party was siphoning money from the Scottsboro movement for its own "nefarious" purposes. He found no indication of such corruption, and the experience helped convince him to join the Communist Party. As an active radical artist, Lawson later helped found the Screen Actors Guild in Los Angeles.

⁷¹Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 56-64; NCDPP Press Release, 12 September 1932, ILD Papers.

In the late 1940s, Lawson was indicted and blacklisted from his profession as one of the notorious "Hollywood Ten."⁷²

The great majority of Jews involved in the Scottsboro campaign came from Northern cities. The NCDPP and the ILD were both based in the North and concentrated most of their activities there. This was, in part, because the South and its Jews were notoriously anti-radical. But there were a few Southern Jews who did support the Scottsboro campaign. Those Southerners who participated in the movement to free the Scottsboro youths often endured enormous financial hardships and outright violence as a reward for their services. Nonetheless, these independent-minded individuals went out of their way to join the Scottsboro movement, working in constant fear of reprisal and public condemnation.

Joseph Gelders was one of the few Southern Jews who publicly advocated fair play for the Scottsboro defendants. Born and raised in Birmingham, Gelders resigned from his comfortable position as a physics professor at the University of Alabama to devote himself wholly to radical causes. In 1935, Gelders and his family relocated to New York City, where he became secretary of the NCDPP. Working closely with Allan Knight Chalmers, who had been appointed the director of the Scottsboro Defense Committee, Gelders made two trips to Alabama and succeeded in establishing a committee of Alabamians for justice at Scottsboro. In August 1936, Gelders returned with his family to their native Alabama to launch a Southern branch of the NCDPP. Gelders' primary role in the campaign was to bring liberal Southern whites into the Scottsboro

⁷²Goodman, *Stories*, 238; Alan Wald, letter to author, 21 September 1996; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "Lawson, John Howard."

coalition in an effort to prevent the campaign from being seen as a wholly Northern radical affair. This task was exceptionally difficult.⁷³

While raised in an affluent Jewish community, the son of a wealthy restaurateur, Gelders readily accepted the hardships that beset radicals. Of his activities in the South, Virginia Durr, an activist for the Southern Conference for Human Welfare, recalled, "I know that he worked and worked and had no money at all . . . I remember coming into Lee Geyer's office one morning," she continued, "and finding him on the front steps. He had been there all night long. He didn't even have a place to sleep."⁷⁴ In September 1936, while on his way home from an ILD meeting, Gelders was abducted. The assailants broke his nose, blackened his eyes and bruised and lashed his body. They left him unconscious, naked and bleeding on an isolated back road.⁷⁵ While this incident was only indirectly related to the Scottsboro movement -- Gelders had been carrying literature on the trials -- it plainly reveals the danger that radicals, even homespun Southern radicals, experienced in the depths of the American South.

The only religiously-affiliated, high-profile Jew that devoted substantial time and effort to the Scottsboro cause also worked in the South. Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein of Temple Beth-Or in Montgomery, Alabama, became a vociferous advocate for both the Scottsboro accused and for Southern African-American sharecroppers. Educated at the

⁷³Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 130; Robert P. Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham During the 1930s," *The Journal of Southern History* 47, no. 4 (1981): 527-528; Esther Gelders, "Professor, How Could You?" *New Republic* 94, no. 1213 (2 March 1938): 96-97; Joseph Gelders, letter to Rose Shapiro, no date, Allan Knight Chalmers Papers, Mugar Memorial Library (hereafter cited as AKC Papers); Hosea Hudson, *Black Worker in the Deep South: A Personal Record* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), 64.

⁷⁴Virginia Foster Durr, interview by Jacquelyn Dowd Hall and Sue Thrasher, transcript, 15 March 1975, Southern Oral History Project, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 101-102 (hereafter cited as SOHP).

⁷⁵Senate Committee on Education and Labor, *Testimony of Joseph S. Gelders*, 75th Cong., 1st sess., 14 January 1937, 779-782; Ingalls, "Antiradical Violence in Birmingham," 526-527; Robert P. Ingalls, "The Flogging of Joseph Gelders: A Policeman's View," *Labor History* 20, no. 4 (1979): 576-578. For local Alabamian reactions to the flogging, see *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 25-26 August 1936; *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 17 November 1936; *Birmingham News*, 24-26 September 1936.

University of California and the Jewish Institute of Religion in New York, Rabbi Goldstein accepted the position with the congregation in Montgomery in 1929. When he arrived in the South he came with preformed ideas on race and activism. "I came with the realization, as anyone else would have, that the Negro problem, and all its economic, political and social phases, was the biggest here in the South," he wrote.⁷⁶ Two years later, when the Scottsboro case broke out, Rabbi Goldstein broached the matter in sermons, directly questioning the prejudice and injustice that he saw in the Alabama courtrooms. To his surprise, his congregation protested against any reference to the trials. As Rabbi Goldstein later explained, "I was told by Jews on innumerable occasions that the Negro was treated most kindly here in the south but it was always insisted upon that 'he must be kept in his place' -- a position never adequately defined unless it meant the position the Jew formerly occupied under his persecutors."⁷⁷

Rabbi Goldstein repeatedly petitioned the Alabama press to cover the Scottsboro trials fairly and with editorial restraint. A tireless advocate for the nine defendants, he visited them on several occasions in the Kilby prison, presided over controversial and dangerous Scottsboro meetings and doggedly raised funds for the ILD's defense. He also joined the NCDPP, spoke out against black deaths in custody, and supported the League of Struggle for Negro Rights.

Rabbi Goldstein was bitterly reproached for his support of the Scottsboro youths. His activities astonished and angered Jews in his Montgomery congregation. The community, to the extent that it did not

⁷⁶Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 18 April 1933, Central Conference of American Rabbis Collection, American Jewish Archives (hereafter cited as CCAR Collection).

⁷⁷Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 18 April 1933, CCAR Collection. For biographical details on Goldstein, see Jewish Institute of Religion, First Annual Commencement Exercises Leaflet, 26 May 1926, CCAR Collection; *The Temple Chronicle*, Temple Emanu-El, San Francisco, 22 February 1929, CCAR Collection.

share in the prevailing Southern racism, feared outright attacks and retribution if they were seen to support in any way the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. Simon Wampold, the former president of the community, explained that members "became alarmed that Rabbi Goldstein . . . would bring about great economic harm to the Jews through their connection with their Gentile neighbors."⁷⁸ Several members warned Rabbi Goldstein to desist in his public support of the Scottsboro movement. He refused.⁷⁹

In response, the Beth-Or community forced Rabbi Goldstein to resign. "I was told . . .," he grimly explained, "that my sympathy for the Scottsboro boys . . . had caused a partial boycott of Jewish merchants in Montgomery and neighboring communities. Furthermore, I understand that the Ku Klux Klan is now burning crosses by night in the front yards of Jewish citizens down there."⁸⁰ Rabbi Goldstein fled Montgomery in mid-1933 after receiving numerous threats and hearing inflammatory and utterly false rumors that he was to "lead a riot of negroes against the whites on May 20."⁸¹ From his new home in New York City, a melancholy Rabbi Goldstein concluded that "Anyone who tries to take an impartial attitude towards the conduct of the Scottsboro case down there is immediately branded a communist and a nigger lover."⁸² For many Alabama Jews, the risk of being associated with radicalism and the ILD, in addition to that of being Jewish, proved too heavy a cross to bear.

⁷⁸Simon Wampold, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 27 April 1933, CCAR Collection.

⁷⁹Lawrence Gellert, report to the ILD, 31 March 1933, ILD Papers; *New York Times*, 27 March 1933; *Birmingham Reporter*, 1 April 1933; Olive Stone, interview by Sherna Gluck, transcript, 27 June 1975, SOHP.

⁸⁰*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 May 1933. An inquiry into the forced resignation of Rabbi Goldstein was made by the Social Justice Commission of the Central Congerence of American Rabbis. The CCAR Collection includes critical letters dealing with the incident, including Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 28 April 1933; Morris Newfield, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, no date.

⁸¹*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 May 1933; *Jewish Daily Bulletin*, 13 April 1933; *New York World Telegram*, 19 August 1933.

⁸²*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 May 1933.

Reflecting on the Goldstein affair, one Beth-Or member solemnly intoned, "It is an unpleasantness we will be glad to forget."⁸³

VI

Although vastly overrepresented in its ranks, the actual number of Jews in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign remains unclear, with numerical precision an impossibility. Mainstream, radical and African-American media colluded for different reasons to keep secret what everybody knew. They all generally described the Scottsboro movement in racial or political terms, often sidestepping the issue of Jewish radicalism entirely. Indeed, the Communist Party and ILD rarely debated the question of why Jews, more than any other ethnic group in America, seemed so disproportionately involved in the radical left, much less in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. Caught up in the political exigencies of their time, the Scottsboro Jews themselves left relatively few public traces of their Jewish identities. According to Hasia Diner, "Jews sought to publicize their achievements and link their name openly with the struggle for black advancement."⁸⁴ But such was not the case with the Scottsboro Jews. If they drew attention to anything, it was their radicalism. They saw themselves as veteran radicals dedicated to a broad political program that encompassed, but was not limited to, African-American rights.

Nevertheless, Jews did dominate the Scottsboro campaign. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., a prominent black minister and politician, was correct when he observed that "most of the [Scottsboro] attorneys were Jews."⁸⁵ And Jews themselves recognized their distinct overrepresentation in all aspects of the Scottsboro movement. Abraham Osheroff, a member of the

⁸³*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 May 1933. Interestingly, the authorized history of the Montgomery congregation does not include these tumultuous events in its description of Goldstein's tenure there. Perhaps they managed to forget it after all. See *The First 100 Years of Kahl Montgomery*, (1952), 21-22, CCAR Collection.

⁸⁴Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 209.

⁸⁵Adam Clayton Powell Jr., *Marching Blacks* (New York: Dial Press, 1973), 64.

Young Communist League at the time, recalled, "I was quite involved in the Scottsboro campaign, and very aware of the disproportionate involvement of Jews in that movement."⁸⁶

The reason behind their massive involvement in the Scottsboro campaign is the broader proclivity of Jewish-Americans to leftist radical activism. As we have seen, the majority of the Scottsboro Jews participated in a wide variety of leftist causes. Scottsboro was just one of these. Thus, as Lucille Perlman, a former ILD research assistant, astutely concluded, "The preponderance of Jewish supporters in the Scottsboro case, followed the preponderance of Jews in the radical movement of the early 20th century."⁸⁷

The Jewish identity of so many of the ILD lawyers and activists in the Scottsboro campaign was not lost on Haywood Patterson. While in prison, Patterson had ample time to fraternize with the ILD attorneys and activists. This close interaction encouraged Patterson to think of Jews as friends and partners striving for his liberation. The ILD lawyers and activists amused him, interrupted the monotony of his prison routine, and taught him Yiddish words and phrases. "I like the Jew race of people and always have, and all my life nearly was spent among them daily," he wrote to Anna Damon. Patterson continued, "Why they have never caused me to grief or to suffer any misfortune. Honestly some of them seems to like me so much . . . I can never feel against Jew or even anyone. I like them. They are really the best sort of people and I gets a great kick at hearing some of them talk."⁸⁸ For Patterson, and probably the other Scottsboro youths as well, the ILD activists set a powerful example of radical Jews campaigning for justice in this very personal black cause.

⁸⁶Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 15 March 1996.

⁸⁷Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996.

⁸⁸Haywood Patterson, letter to Anna Damon, 11 December 1936, ILD Papers.

But more important to the Scottsboro youths was the fact that the ILD, like no other organization, had come to their rescue. The importance of the ethnicity of the ILD activists seemed to shrink into insignificance when contrasted with what the ILD had actually done for them. To these young men, ILD activists were their saviors and mentors. While they sometimes wrote scalding letters of criticism to the ILD, they also extolled the organization for its tireless campaign, warmhearted activists and clever attorneys. "We certainly do appreciate your hard and faithful struggle with poor, innocent and unfortunate boys," declared Andy Wright.⁸⁹ Or as Charlie Weems explained in a letter to his penpal Mina Klein, "I always had a good spirit and will always have one until the end . . . I do because the ILD people is always my friend and that is what gives me such a good spirit."⁹⁰

Thus, in the early days of the campaign, the Jewishness of the ILD activists hardly seemed to enter the Scottsboro equation at all. That many of the activists were Jews did not pass unnoticed, but what seemed to matter most was that they were radicals fighting for black rights. This was all to change, however, when the Scottsboro Jews came face-to-face with white Southern prejudice. Then they learned that bigotry could as easily incorporate Jews as well as African-Americans into its cornucopia of hate.

⁸⁹As quoted in George Chamlee, letter to the ILD, 10 November 1932, ILD Papers.

⁹⁰Charlie Weems, letter to Mina Klein, 14 September 1934, ILD Papers.

Chapter 2

Entangled Fury: Blacks and Jews on Trial at Scottsboro

Walking the desolate streets of Decatur, Alabama, in the spring of 1933, a reporter entered the local Apollo poolroom. Inside he witnessed an animated exchange between several young white men. Leaning against the cigar counter of the smoke-filled room, a group of five youths intently discussed the already infamous Scottsboro trials, and more specifically, the ILD's leading defense lawyers. "'Two of them is Jews,' one boy with a fat, roly face and squinting eyes says indignantly. 'Yeah,' says another. 'A bunch of Jews defending them damned niggers.'"¹

The story of Scottsboro begins with racism, but does not end there. By early 1933, the racism permeating the initial convictions had been thoroughly entangled with an anti-Semitism that was directed most violently against the ILD and its legal staff. White Alabamians recognized the dominant role that Jews played in the Scottsboro campaign, and many exploited this knowledge to maintain popular opposition to the Scottsboro movement. Had white Alabamians not underscored the Jewishness of the ILD's lawyers and staff, the issue would have passed without widespread notice or reflection at the time. But as it happened, the State of Alabama put both blacks and Jews on trial at Scottsboro, and by doing so spotlighted

¹As quoted in *Daily Worker*, 6 April 1933.

the convergence of two histories -- a collision between radical Jewish activism and an African-American struggle for freedom and dignity.

II

In April 1933, at Haywood Patterson's second trial, the wall of silence surrounding the Jewishness of the ILD activists in the Scottsboro movement was shattered. Samuel Leibowitz conducted his first Scottsboro trial with merciless precision. In a spectacular climax, an uncharacteristically well-dressed Ruby Bates testified on behalf of the defense, dramatically recanting her initial accusation of rape against the nine youths and admitting that the African-American defendants had never even spoken to her or to Victoria Price. In stunned disbelief, the prosecuting Attorney General, Thomas E. Knight Jr., responded in the only way he thought possible to counter such debilitating testimony. Picking up on Bates' showy new clothes, a point not lost on many of the courtroom spectators, Knight insinuated that she had succumbed to bribery by the defense.² "Where did you get that coat?" he pointedly asked. "Who gave you the money to buy it?" he further questioned.³

But it was not until Wade Wright, speaking for the prosecution during the closing arguments of the same trial, that these sentiments came to chilling fruition. Criticizing one of the defense witnesses, Wright told the jury that "if he [the witness] had been with Brodsky another two weeks he would have been down here with a pack on his back a-trying to sell you goods . . . Are you," Wright continued, "going to countenance that sort of thing?"⁴ From among the front-row spectators, a loud "No!" was voiced with, as one reporter described, all of "the fervor of 'Amen' in church."⁵

²Carter, *Scottsboro*, 231-5; Goodman, *Stories*, 131-133.

³Carter, *Scottsboro*, 233.

⁴*New York Times*, 8 April 1933.

⁵*Ibid.*

Then, only minutes later, Wright unabashedly tapped into a primed-and-ready reservoir of Southern prejudice. In a powerful voice, arms waving through the air, Solicitor Wright furiously roared, "Is justice going to be bought and sold in Alabama with Jew money from New York?"⁶ With less than a day's deliberation, the jury walked into the courtroom, good-humored and laughing, and announced their verdict -- guilty as charged.

Wright's speech constituted a turning point in the Scottsboro case, for now Jews, along with blacks, had become embroiled in the racist hysteria surrounding the trials. The first wave of Scottsboro convictions in April 1931 underscored anti-black racism, but by April 1933 the Scottsboro trials and movement had come to represent the entangled fury that both blacks and Jews evoked in Alabamian society. Reporters at the trial observed that "Wade Wright's anti-Semitic summation was the most effective single statement by the counsel for the prosecution."⁷ In an atmosphere satiated with violent, anti-black racism, surely sufficient in the South to convict blacks of allegedly raping white women, why did this plea to anti-Semitism so effectively clinch the case for the prosecution?

The answer to the question is to be found in the meaning of the core concept "Jew." The concept of "Jew" in Alabama at the time of the Scottsboro trials represented a powerful symbol, and when Wade Wright and other Alabamians referred to the "Jew," they confidently evoked a cache of meanings and emotions. Like other categories for terrors and villains common in Southern parlance such as "Yankee," "Catholic" or "Red," the catchword "Jew" was a historically received repository of prejudice. Assured of an audience already well schooled in anti-Semitism, Wright and others used anti-Jewish remarks to lend force to their arguments. As treasuries of widely shared symbolism and stereotype in

⁶*New York Times*, 8 April 1933. Other accounts can be found in *Time*, 17 April 1933; *Daily News*, 7 April 1933; *New York Times*, 7, 9 April 1933.

⁷Carter, *Scottsboro*, 240.

Alabama, concepts such as "Jew" were easily amenable to suit a variety of political programs that variously incited, exploited and reproduced hate. This is not to say that Jews in Alabama were subjected to a constant, unrelenting hostility. Neither is it to say that all Southerners were anti-Semites. Like other symbols, the "Jew" was a referent usually held in simmering abeyance, but strategically invoked by some when the exigencies of a particular context gainfully lent themselves to its use.⁸

Of all of the traditionally loathsome catchwords of prejudice hurled by Southerners at the ILD and the Scottsboro campaign, none seemed able to compete with the emotive and effectual response evoked by "Jew." The power of the monosyllabic symbol, "Jew," arose in the Scottsboro context from its ability to encapsulate so many of the fears that strangled this Southern community with the advent of the Scottsboro movement. The ILD's Scottsboro defense assaulted white Alabama society on multiple fronts. Obnoxious "outsiders," "Yankees," and "New Yorkers" were yet again invading the South on a crusade of disrupting race relations between blacks and whites. "Reds," "radicals," and "Russians" had infiltrated the South, wreaking havoc in their call for social equality and fair employment practices. And "Jews" -- "Jew money," "Jew lawyers" and the "Jew press" -- were questioning and trampling Alabama justice. By Wade Wright's summation of April 1933, all of these catchwords and real fears culminated in one word -- "Jew" -- and this symbol implied,

⁸For broader discussions of Southern reactions to Jews in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century see Leonard Dinnerstein, "A Neglected Aspect of Southern Jewish History," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 61, no.1 (1971): 52-68; John Shelton Reed, "Ethnicity in the South: Some Observations on the Acculturation of Southern Jews," *Ethnicity* 6 (1979): 97-106; Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Anti-Semitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987); for detailed accounts see Leonard Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968); Harry Golden, *A Little Girl is Dead* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1965); accounts relating Populism with anti-Semitism include Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform: From Bryan to F.D.R.* (New York: Knopf, 1956), 77-81; Irwin Unger, "Critique of Norman Pollack's Fear of Men," *Agricultural History* 39, no. 2 (1965): 75-80. For generalized American reactions to Jews see, Oscar Handlin, "American Views of the Jew at the Opening of the Twentieth Century," in *The Jewish Experience in America*, ed. Abraham J. Karp (Waltham: American Jewish Historical Society, 1969), 1-22.

reinforced and was interchangeable with virtually all of the epithets used against the ILD.

III

The ILD and the Scottsboro lawyers embodied a host of traditionally loathed categories. Throughout the ILD's involvement in the Scottsboro trials, Alabamians criticized the organization for its unnecessary interference in strictly Southern affairs and ultimately for its status as an outsider. "The activity of the ILD in the case," a mild *Birmingham News* article stated, "can be regarded only as meddling."⁹ The argument against outsiders was a simple one of cultural relativism. Outsiders only made troublesome matters worse because they did not understand the South, its social rituals, values or system of race relations. In the wake of the Patterson conviction, R. E. Tyler of Springville, Alabama, pointed out that "the two races get along here better without outside interference."¹⁰ At the same time, an editorial in the *Charleston News and Courier* contended that "if there has been no fair trial, outside pressure on Alabama is chiefly responsible for it."¹¹ Whether Southerners questioned the motives of the ILD or not, those who publicly discussed the affair all seemed to agree that "outside meddling makes it more tragic FOR THE NEGRO."¹²

Adding insult to injury, outsiders that flocked to Alabama in the wake of Scottsboro carried with them the inglorious history of the vanquished South -- they were Northerners. The ILD lawyers and staffers constituted an unpleasant reminder of the humiliating past inscribed in the annals of the Civil War and Reconstruction. Alabamians suffered a deep psychological fear of outsiders, as one observer explained, that was

⁹*Birmingham News*, 12 April 1931.

¹⁰*Birmingham Post*, 13 April 1933.

¹¹As quoted in *Birmingham News-Age Herald*, 16 April 1933.

¹²Author unknown, letter to William L. Patterson, 21 April 1933, ILD Papers. See also Kenneth D. Coates, letter to editor, *Nation* 138, no. 3576 (17 January 1934).

rooted in this bitter sectional past. "It should not be forgotten," he warned, "that this interference had its climax in the horrors of reconstruction."¹³ In the mythology of Southern Reconstruction, the Northerners were the "real villains" of the period, not the blacks who entered Southern politics and demanded their rights. As historian Lewis Killian, assuming the position of a Southern white, explains, "It was they with their uninhibited commercial avarice and their complete lack of familiarity with the ways of black men, who swarmed over the prostrate region to exploit the ignorance of black southerners and the helplessness of white southerners."¹⁴ At the time of Scottsboro, Northerners were still seen as detestable carpetbaggers hungry for spoils.

Not surprisingly, then, the Scottsboro trials were often portrayed as the revived clash of North against South, the sovereignty of the State of Alabama against the suffocating unity of the nation. "Alabama is determined to burn the Scottsboro boys not only to teach 'niggers' to stay 'in their place,'" declared John Spivak of the *Daily Worker*, "but to teach the North and the rest of the country that it intends to run its own state as it pleases."¹⁵ The stakes were high, for the "people of Alabama," the "good name of Alabama," and "Alabama justice" -- not to mention the lives of nine African-American youths -- all hung in the balance.¹⁶

According to Olive Stone, a sociologist in Montgomery during the Scottsboro trials, "there were two things that were touchy questions in the South: one was race relations and the other was Yankeeism."¹⁷ For many Southerners, the ILD was simply an organization of insufferable Yankees. Yet, distinctions were even made among Yankees, and those coming from

¹³*Birmingham News*, 28 June 1933.

¹⁴Lewis M. Killian, *White Southerners* (New York: Random House, 1970), 23.

¹⁵*Daily Worker*, 4 December 1933.

¹⁶*Monroe Journal* and *Alabama Courier*, as quoted in *Jackson City Sentinel*, 29 June 1933; *Charleston News and Courier*, as quoted in *Birmingham News-Age-Herald*, 16 April 1933.

¹⁷Stone, interview.

big-city backgrounds seemed especially detested in Alabama. From the initial intervention of the ILD in the trials, the Southern press made a point of underscoring the New York backgrounds of the defense attorneys and staff. In June 1931, "Joseph Brodsky, New York attorney," was warned to "get out of town and stay out."¹⁸ By June of 1933, a weekly bulletin of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America contended that the case stood as "a vindication of Alabama justice against attacks from the North, and particularly New York."¹⁹ Even Samuel Leibowitz commented on the amazing potency that the accusation "New York" brought to the trials. "Every time these cases have been tried," he declared, "they've got in the business about New York at the very end . . . That seems to be the clincher, and its worked every time."²⁰

Scouting out the opinions of people in Decatur, Louis Berg captured the spirit and voices of angry townsfolk caught up in the complex web of Scottsboro. "They ought to lynch ever [*sic*] one of them . . . ever [*sic*] last God damn New Yorker down here."²¹ More than "outsider" or "Northerner," the concept of the "New Yorker" conjured up images of big cities, big business and big capital. Only in New York, it was rumored, was a "how do you do" really an "inquiry as to the size of your bank account."²² In Haywood Patterson's trial of 1933, an expert medical witness testified that Victoria Price's story contradicted scientific evidence. The reaction of locals to the medic's testimony was similar to the reaction that Ruby Bates later received when she recanted her own story of the rape. "When a nigger has expert witnesses," a bystander declared, "we have a right to ask who is paying for them."²³ New York represented the interests of the

¹⁸*Birmingham News*, 5 June 1931.

¹⁹As quoted in *Jackson City Sentinel*, 29 June 1933.

²⁰*New York Times*, 21 July 1937.

²¹Louis Berg, "All Quiet in Morgan County," *New Masses* 8, no. 9 (May 1933): 4.

²²*Montgomery Advertiser*, 19 April 1933.

²³*New York Times*, 16 April 1933.

moneyed elite, and it was New York money that had corrupted Bates' and the physician's souls. In praise of the uncompromising Victoria Price, prosecuting attorney H. G. Bailey courteously reminded the jury that she, "didn't come here in New York clothes, didn't have her food paid for by a Brodsky . . . and didn't come here after consorting with sinister influences in New York that are trying to obstruct the course of justice in Alabama."²⁴

Although powerful in their own right, neither the rallying cry of "outsider" nor "Northerner" compared with the more evocative epithet of "New Yorker." Even before the days of the Populist crusade, New York and Wall Street had come to symbolize the indifference and cutthroat treachery of the country's industrialists. New York spelled unmasked corporate greed and the secession of traditional agrarian lifestyles and values. Immigration, internal migration and technology had spawned an industrial explosion which transformed American landscapes in the North forever. In the wake of these transformations, a new industrial and urban elite formed, and with it a burgeoning middle class rooted in prestigious and complementary white-collar professions. For many in the South, trapped in a stagnant and depressed rural economy, the term "New York" represented these unsettling changes and became a word of fear, envy, loathing and contempt.²⁵

Nevertheless, the full power of the epithet "New Yorker" contingently depended on the existence of the other regional pejoratives. Each slanderous term fell within a hierarchy of specificity. An "outsider" was not an indigenous Alabamian; the "Northerner" was a more defined "outsider;" and a "New Yorker" was both a more specific "Northerner" and "outsider." The more specific the term, the more historical and

²⁴*Daily News*, 7 April 1933.

²⁵Dinnerstein, "A Neglected Aspect," 59-62; Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform*, 60-93; Handlin, "American Views of the Jew," 19-22; Nancy Maclean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), passim; Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (London: Macmillan, 1967), 76-132.

cultural baggage it carried, and the more evocative it ultimately was. In the context of the Scottsboro trials, growing specificity incurred increasingly intense disapproval. The "outsider" was someone who should not interfere in Alabama's business. The "Northerner" was the obnoxious "outsider" who insisted on intervening in Alabamian business like the Yank of the Civil War and the carpetbagger of the Reconstruction. And the intolerable "New Yorker," the most wretched of them all, who epitomized both the "outsider" and the "Northerner," was the rich, corrupting, arrogant, powerful, urbane industrialist.²⁶

IV

But the Scottsboro campaign represented much more than a regional threat to Alabamians. The ILD, with its mass protest techniques and links to the Communist Party, challenged the very heart of political wisdom in Alabama at the time. During the Great Depression, times were especially turbulent. While radicals heralded the period as the last gasp of moribund capitalism, rejoicing in the revolution to come, many Alabamians genuinely feared the changes resulting from the social collapse. The radical politics and ideology of the ILD were universally disavowed in the Southern white press, and the Scottsboro defense team and ILD activists were effectively stigmatized by that other color-inspired label -- Red. Along with many progressive organizations active in the South, the ILD became a political scapegoat used to explain virtually "all unrest in Alabama during the Depression."²⁷

From the start, the language used to thwart the ILD's defense advantageously blurred the distinctions between political and regional threats, blending regional fears with anti-Communist rhetoric. Hence,

²⁶For similar depictions of radicals and ILD activists in a different Southern context, see John A. Salmond, *Gastonia 1929: The Story of the Loray Mill Strike* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), especially 75-78.

²⁷Carter, *Scottsboro*, 120.

radical ILD activists always seemed to come from northern places. "A horde of Communists has *descended* upon our state," shrieked an early report.²⁸ Or, as many agreed, the intervention of radicals in Scottsboro was yet another installment of the barbarous Civil War, only "from a different angle." This time, as the *Wiregrass Journal* put it, it was "a Russianized northern element [that] defends the negroes when we stop to summarize Leibowitz, Brodsky and I.W.W."²⁹ The "propaganda" of the ILD, John Fletcher similarly surmised, "counsels a new civil war between the white and the blacks."³⁰ These resulting admixtures, in which political fears played on regional ones and vice versa, proved more potent weapons mobilized against the ILD than either one could have been alone.

The most advantageous example of this regional-political admixture resulted when the ILD was branded an organization of radical foreigners. Bending and transcending the logic of regionalism, the stressed foreignness of the radical ILD activists played on the nationalistic fears of the country as a whole. When portrayed as foreigners, ILD activists threatened the very integrity of the nation, not just Alabama. Thus, while New Yorkers were Northerners, they remained Americans and hence were linked through patriotism to their Southern counterparts. The same, of course, could not be said of foreigners. The Alabama press consistently published articles that described suspected radicals as exotic cosmopolites and malevolent Russian revolutionaries. For example, the *Jackson County Sentinel* reported that,

Two foreign looking guys dropped into town Wednesday . . .
and introduced themselves as reporters from the *New York Times* wanting information and "dope" on the [Scottsboro]

²⁸ *Birmingham News*, 24 August 1931. Italics mine. Also see *Birmingham News-Age Herald*, 16 April 1933.

²⁹ As quoted in *Jackson City Sentinel*, 29 May 1933. The author mistakes the ILD for the IWW.

³⁰ John Gould Fletcher, "Is this the Voice of the South," *Nation* 137, no. 3573 (27 December 1933).

negro case. They showed supposedly good credentials, but both were sort of Russian looking and they soon collected a crowd of local people who had a suspicion they were meddling Reds.³¹

The stereotype of the radical ILD "foreigner" seemed to reach into the highest echelons of Alabama society. In a letter to Roger Baldwin of the Civil Liberties Union, J. H. Dillard expressed his doubts that any "first-class 'local' lawyer will agree to association with any 'foreign' lawyer, including Mr. Leibowitz."³² Likewise, the State Interracial Commission, a conservative organization made up of Southern whites and African-Americans, declared that the ILD was a dangerous "worldwide organization" made up of "sinister alien influences."³³ Even Hollace Ransdell, a reporter who covered the trials for the Civil Liberties Union, remembered the astonished look she received from Alabama officials who disliked her investigative journalism. "[They thought] I must be straight from Moscow or something like that. And they were puzzled because I didn't look like somebody from Moscow."³⁴

Radical members of the ILD -- humorously heralded as the "strangers with Russian accents and long hair" -- were said to wreak havoc wherever they appeared. The litany of complaints directed against them remarkably paralleled more regional grievances. "The [Montgomery] Advertiser was revolted from the first," raged an editorial, "by the Communistic vermin that swarmed into the picture, without invitation, not to serve justice . . . but to make political capital."³⁵ Reports insisted that the intervention of the radical ILD made it worse for the Scottsboro

³¹ As quoted in Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 182.

³² J. H. Dillard, letter to Roger Baldwin, 19 November 1935, AKC Papers.

³³ "Radical Activities in Alabama," Report of Sub-Committee of State Interracial Commission, 1931, Commission on Interracial Cooperation Collection, Robert W. Woodruff Library (hereafter cited at CIC Collection).

³⁴ Hollace Ransdell, interview by Mary Frederickson, transcript, 6 November 1974, SOHP.

³⁵ *Montgomery Advertiser*, 12 June 1937.

youths and African-Americans in the South as a whole. "Communist activity, in short, is hurting the interests of the negroes," declared the *Birmingham News*.³⁶ Will Alexander, director of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation, mournfully agreed. "A good deal of what the ILD have done thus far has simply increased the difficulties so far as the boys are concerned."³⁷ Rumors abounded that the opportunist ILD deliberately used the youths for its own profit. "Many persons have averred," intoned one editorial, "that the ILD wishes to make martyrs of these Negro defendants, that it wishes to insure their execution in order to add incendiary force to its world-wide Communistic propaganda . . ."³⁸

The palpable antipathy evoked by the specter of Communism, according to some Alabamians, loomed larger than issues of mere legal justice. "The Communists are more of an issue than are the FACTS of the case," asserted Judge Hawkins, the first judge to convene the trials in 1931.³⁹ Anti-radical slogans focused on the potentially massive disruption that Communism could bring to Southern lifestyles, and especially to its system of race relations. Its specific program of social equality, with all of its sexual and racial connotations, haunted many whites in the South.⁴⁰ "The chief idea of the ILD and the Communists is agitation, strife, trouble -- here, there, everywhere."⁴¹ Or as B. H. Richardson of Childersburg declared, "To the defense attorney and his Communist backers, will go the credit of turning back our state fifty years in the solution of our race problem."⁴² As agents of social disintegration, ILD activists became objects

³⁶*Birmingham News*, 5 June 1931.

³⁷Will W. Alexander, letter to Dr. George E. Haynes, 25 February 1933, CIC Collection.

³⁸*Birmingham News*, 19 April 1933. Also see *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 18 June 1931.

³⁹As quoted in Carter, *Scottsboro*, 119.

⁴⁰For more detailed discussions of the sexual and gendered implications of anti-Communism, see Maclean's *Behind the Mask of Chivalry*, 117-119; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 29, 79-80; Nell I. Painter, "Social Equality, Miscegenation, Labor, and Power," in *The Evolution of Southern Culture*, ed. Numan V. Bartley (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 47-67.

⁴¹*Montgomery Advertiser*, 16 April 1933.

⁴²*Birmingham News*, 19 April 1933.

of violent contempt. Only weeks after the ILD entered the case, the *New Republic* astonishingly reported that "animosity toward radicals is almost as strong in the South as is the underlying tension between Negroes and whites."⁴³

V

If meddling outsiders were troublesome and Communists detestable, then Jews in Alabama at the time of the Scottsboro movement were some of the most despised of all. In a brief background study of the Scottsboro trials, Raymond Daniell declared that it was left to Wade Wright to "lift the curtain on what had become a real issue of the trial."⁴⁴ By Haywood Patterson's second trial of April 1933, the real issue defining Scottsboro in the minds of myriads of Alabamians was whether Jews -- "New York Jews," "Communist Jews," and "Jew money" -- would be able to buy Alabama justice. Emotions were running feverishly high when Wright bellowed his anti-Semitic summation in the crowded Decatur courtroom. Resonating in the still quiet recesses of the hall, his attack on "Jew money" became a powerful weapon in the State of Alabama's already amply loaded arsenal.

The efficacy of Wright's words, "Jew money," sprang from their very ability to insinuate the vindictive slurs that Alabamians regularly mobilized against the ILD, and to crown these evocative slogans with the final smear of "Jew." With the efficiency of one word, "Jew" was able to connote the entire range of objectionable attributes associated with regional outsiders and political rebels. The Scottsboro Jew represented the ultimate outsider, the degenerate Communist. To these already effective anti-ILD slogans were added the particularities of Jews who stubbornly

⁴³Editorial, "The Communists and the Scottsboro Case," *New Republic* 66, no. 858 (13 May 1931): 343.

⁴⁴*New York Times*, 16 April 1933.

remained both racial and religious outsiders -- eternal foreigners. In the Scottsboro context, "Jew" was the concluding concept on a historically finite ideological spectrum. Epitomizing the sum total of what the ILD represented -- a regional, political, religious, racial and cultural threat -- the Scottsboro "Jew" incurred the most ferocious response in white Alabamians.

In response to a survey conducted by *The American Hebrew* on anti-Semitism in the United States in 1890, Senator Zebulon Vance of North Carolina observed that in the South there was an "unreasonable propensity to consider the Jew under all circumstances as a foreigner."⁴⁵ Some forty-one years later in Alabama, with the intervention of the ILD in the Scottsboro trials, the Jew was still deemed a foreigner. In fact, "Jews" could simultaneously evoke the emotion-laden images associated with regional, political, racial and religious "foreignness" -- with all of their contradictions and ambiguities -- even while enabling the vagaries of one specific image to come to the foreground. The contextual needs of the situation ultimately determined the focus that "Jew" would produce. While encompassing the totality of threats, then, the concept of "Jew" could at one moment express the antipathies of North and South during the Reconstruction, and in another context and time underscore the radical political ideologies of the ILD, while in a still different setting emphasize the modern disparities between the industrialized, urban North and the more rural, agricultural South.⁴⁶

Thus, as some Alabamians would have it, if you scratched him or her deeply enough, you would always find that the obnoxious outsider, Northerner and New Yorker of the ILD was a Jew. The most popular

⁴⁵Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, 90.

⁴⁶Much of this analysis draws on Pierre Bourdieu's work on practical taxonomies. See Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), especially chapter 3.

pejoratives for ILD attorneys were those that stressed that they were "Jew lawyers from New York."⁴⁷ In the aftermath of the 1933 Patterson trials, Victor Elwood canvassed the neighborhoods and business sections of Morgan County, Alabama, in an attempt to monitor public opinion in the area for the defense. He found angry citizens who directed their fury as much against the ILD attorneys as against the Scottsboro youths. For these men and women, the terms "Northerner," "New Yorker" and "Jew" were used interchangeably, often placed side by side, and frequently preceded by expletives. Mr. and Mrs. Lumas, for instance, argued that the "people shouldn't have let that damn Jew lawyer come," and that if he returns "the people have made up their minds to take him, and all the rest of the New York Jews and the 'Niggers' and lynch them."⁴⁸ The proprietor of a lunch room similarly threatened that "those God darn New York Jews will be killed too if they try to come down here and clear those Black Bastards."⁴⁹ Also Mr. Ware, a barber in touch with "lots of Decatur men," knowingly declared that the "'Niggers' and those damn New York Jews would be lynched if they ever come to Decatur again."⁵⁰ Indeed, when Samuel Leibowitz disembarked from a train in Alabama, he recalled seeing a book entitled, "Kill the Jew from New York." It sold for fifty cents.⁵¹

Many Alabamians begrudged the ILD for being a New York organization comprised mainly of Jews. "They were city men from far away. They were -- there is no use caviling -- Jews," an editorial in the *Raleigh News and Observer* perfunctorily admitted. But indicative of the Alabama press, the editorial did not stop there. The ILD attorneys were

⁴⁷ Editorial, "The Week," *New Republic* 77, no. 991 (1933): 58-59.

⁴⁸ Depositions of Victor Ellwood, June 1933, ILD Papers.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ *Amsterdam News*, 2 April 1935, clipping found in Richard B. Moore Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (hereafter cited as RBM Papers).

city-slicker Jews, true, but they also "represented radical labor" -- a fact far more frightening for those middling sorts and "better classes" of Alabama society.⁵² For these individuals, "Jews" were largely associated with images of unruly "Russians," "radicals," and "Reds." "The ILD is employing almost exclusively New York Jews with Russian names," declared Reverend William McDowell, an Episcopalian bishop in Alabama. Moreover, he continued, "this is beginning to accomplish what the KKK could never do, namely irritate the better class of Southern people and to arouse all the latent anti-semitism [*sic*] which all Gentiles potentially have."⁵³ Alabama government officials similarly seemed to equate ILD attorneys with radical Jews. Scores of Jewish-sounding names were circled on several ILD publications found in the papers of Alabama Governor Benjamin Miller. In the margins and blank spaces were written: "all russian jews," "Russian jews," and "All Russians, foreigners, negroes and jews."⁵⁴

Representing the interests of these "better classes," the larger Alabama newspapers used anti-Semitic stereotypes to highlight their more stridently anti-radical, anti-ILD programs. Sometimes members of the press wrote in codes, making only oblique reference to the "Jewish" character of the ILD's defense team. "It has been the duty and the privilege of *The Advertiser* to defend the good name of Alabama against the stupid slanders of a heathen world," boasted Grover Hall, the Pulitzer-Prize winning journalist famed for his investigative expose on the Ku Klux Klan. Although not explicitly stated, Hall's "heathen world" of "Communist vermin" was unmistakably the universe of the Jewish radical. Counting on an educated audience, Hall couched his anti-

⁵²*News and Observer*, 22 April 1933.

⁵³W. G. McDowell, letter to James D. Burton, 20 April 1933, CIC Collection. Also see *Jackson City Sentinel*, 8 May 1933.

⁵⁴Scottsboro Case Public Appeals to the Governor, BG Papers. Also discussed in Carter, *Scottsboro*, 241.

Semitism in the euphemisms of high culture, insisting that the ILD, like Shylock, could gain nothing "by demanding the final pound of flesh."⁵⁵ The embodiment of Jewish physical stereotypes by foreigners was also a method used by the press to incite anti-Semitic prejudices. Under the heading "New York 'Reporters' Believed Imposters," a *Chattanooga Times* story provided one such description of visitors to Scottsboro. "All were foreigners. One of them wore glasses and a gray suit. He had a prominent nose."⁵⁶ Ironically, although Grover Hall was not averse to a bit of stealthy anti-Semitism himself, especially of the variety that equated Jews with radicalism, he later condemned the "uncritical, gullible Gentiles" who believe that "Communism is a characteristic Jewish doctrine."⁵⁷

Smaller, local newspapers seemed less restrained in expressing outright anti-Semitic sentiments. Distinctions between racial, regional and political threats were often blurred in these attempts to harness popular, anti-Semitic stereotypes for a more avowedly anti-Communist campaign. Reports integrated regional-based images of the Jew -- as "Northerner," "New Yorker," "Yankee" -- with more ideological critiques of the radical politics of the ILD attorneys and staff. Playing on the emotions engendered by Wade Wright's attack, for example, an editorial in the *Alabama Courier* announced that, "the New York Jew says there is no such thing as a fair trial in Alabama." Having reproduced such regionalized forms of anti-Semitism, the editorial then proceeded to add its own anti-radical twist. "This recent recruit from Russia," it continued, "is a poor sort of chap to try to blight the good name of Alabama."⁵⁸ In a

⁵⁵ *Montgomery Advertiser*, 12 June 1937.

⁵⁶ *Chattanooga Times*, 21 May 1931, as quoted in Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 183. Italics mine.

⁵⁷ *Montgomery Advertiser*, 4 December 1938.

⁵⁸ *Alabama Courier*, as quoted in *Jackson City Sentinel*, 29 May 1933.

similar vein, an editorial in the *Pickens County Herald* declared that "not all the Leibowitzs and son-of-witzs from the back alleys of New York to the slums of Moscow could save them."⁵⁹

Without direct reference to the Scottsboro defenders, the Alabama press sporadically published articles that contributed to the characterization of Jews as radicals. With the outbreak of Hitlerism on the European continent and the subsequent persecution of Jews in Germany, it was hardly surprising that Dr. Henry Elmer Barnes began a three part series on "the persecution of Jews, past and present" for the *Birmingham Post* in late March 1933. Coinciding with Haywood Patterson's second trial, however, the trilogy outlined a historical narrative that combined Jews with communism at a time when Alabama bristled from its own confrontation with the radical ILD. In an article precariously subtitled the "Rise of Jewish Race in Money World Traced," Barnes revealed that socialism was "derived from the teachings of a Jewish philosopher, Karl Marx, and was organized by Jewish leaders."⁶⁰ Similarly, in the *Birmingham Age Herald*, a self-congratulatory report on the yearly Jewish fast of *Yom Kippur* declared that at least in America a Jew can "go to his synagogue for repentance, and find a place safe and free from assault." That there were sinners among the Jews, the author determined, was as certain as there were "'radicals' interspersed among them."⁶¹

Thus, to understand the evocative power that "Jew" possessed during the Scottsboro campaign, how this word effectively clinched a guilty verdict, it is necessary to examine its multiple, contextually-specific meanings. Having explored the diverse symbolism encompassed in the word "Jew" in Alabama at the time, let us now return to Solicitor Wade Wright's summation for the Patterson trial in April 1933.

⁵⁹*Pickens County Herald*, as quoted in *Jackson City Sentinel*, 29 May 1933.

⁶⁰*Birmingham Post*, 3 April 1933.

⁶¹*Birmingham Age-Herald*, 26 September 1936.

Wright's speech started with references to the expensive clothes that Ruby Bates and Lester Carter, another defense witness, wore, implying that their testimony had been bought, like their clothes, by the defense. From there, Wright assailed Carter for his financial dependence on ILD attorney, Joseph Brodsky, who had paid for his living expenses and suit while both were in New York. Bribery had now moved from a nebulous accusation to a crime embodied in one particular New Yorker -- Brodsky. Wright proceeded to suggest that Carter be renamed "Mr. Carterinsky," lambasted him as the "prettiest Jew" he ever did see, and speculated that, given more time with Brodsky, Carter would have been a Jewish carpetbagger. Brodsky had now been transformed into a specifically Jewish criminal, reminiscent of the Yankee opportunists of Reconstruction. With blurred imagery that gracefully crossed decades, Brodsky became "the creature with the long nose and pack on his back."⁶² At this point, Wright brought his rhetorical *tour de force* full circle, connecting his initial claim of bribery with this new-old creature of Southern nightmares, the moneyed, corrupt New Yorker, the Jew, evoking both the painful days of Reconstruction and the ignominious economic stagnation of the early twentieth-century South. The people and state of Alabama, according to Wright, were under attack from "Jew money from New York."

The high courtroom drama of Scottsboro, according to a circumspect reporter, left the "average juror's mind, representative of popular sentiment . . . emotionally circumvented."⁶³ The prosecution, the Alabama press, government officials and respected members of society had so effectively played their anti-Semitic cards that the initial anger directed against the African-American youths was momentarily forgotten. It was the "Jew lawyers from New York [who] were the cause of the niggers not

⁶²Carter, *Scottsboro*, 80; Samuel Leibowitz, letter to James E. Horton, 18 April 1933, ILD Papers; *New York Times*, 8 April 1933.

⁶³*Greensboro Daily News*, as quoted in *Birmingham News-Age-Herald*, 16 April 1933.

getting what they deserved, the chair . . . "64 Not surprisingly, the violent anger of the crowd, especially after Wade Wright's speech, was primarily directed against the defense attorneys. In a private letter to Alabama Governor Benjamin Miller, Judge W. W. Callahan noted that while he had "never heard but little expression of feeling against the negroes. There has been some feeling expressed against the lawyers in the case."⁶⁵ Robert Eleazer, reporting to the Southern-based Interracial Commission, also observed the popular anger and aggression confronting the ILD attorneys. "Indignation was directed not primarily at the defendants," he surmised, "but at Ruby Bates and the attorneys."⁶⁶ Likewise, George Haynes, the executive secretary of the Federal Council of Churches, warned concerned ministers of the enormous prejudices, "both anti-Negro and anti-Jewish," that were "in danger of dominating the situation."⁶⁷

VI

Small scale violence erupted on the streets of Alabama in the aftermath of Wade Wright's anti-Semitic tirade. Crosses burned in Huntsville and Decatur, restive mobs formed and rabid death threats circulated against the lives of Samuel Leibowitz, Joseph Brodsky and the other ILD activists. Both Leibowitz and Brodsky required around-the-clock security, and the entire defense team spent one night in the sheriff's custody for fear of mob violence.⁶⁸ Belle Leibowitz was so frightened that she started cooking all of her husband's meals lest he be poisoned.⁶⁹

⁶⁴Depositions of Victor Ellwood, October 1933, ILD Papers.

⁶⁵W. W. Callahan, letter to Governor B. M. Miller, 14 November 1933, BM Papers.

⁶⁶R. B. Eleazer, letter to George Haynes, 11 April 1933, CIC Collection.

⁶⁷George Haynes, draft letter to Alabama ministers, November 1933, CIC Collection.

⁶⁸*Birmingham News*, 6-7, 9 April 1933; *New York Times*, 12 November 1995; *Montgomery Advertiser*, 10 April 1933; R. B. Eleazer, letter to George Haynes, 11 April 1933, CIC Collection; *Afro-American*, 8 April 1933, 29 April 1933.

⁶⁹Robert Leibowitz, *The Defender: The Life and Career of Samuel S. Leibowitz, 1893-1933* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1981), 197; also Goodman, *Stories*, 152.

Indeed, numerous reports that the Ku Klux Klan had staged a revival in Birmingham surfaced after Wright's outburst. Zealous Klan members distributed leaflets warning African-Americans to keep their distance from the ILD and its malevolent attorneys.⁷⁰ "NEGROES BEWARE," some read. "DO NOT ATTEND COMMUNIST MEETINGS," they advised.⁷¹ According to the *Southern Worker*, a female representative of the ILD, Alice Burke, was even refused treatment for an illness while she was in jail after being arrested at an unemployment demonstration in Birmingham. The reason given for this harsh treatment was that Burke was connected "with that organization that's fighting for those dirty Scottsboro boys."⁷²

But ILD activists and lawyers were not the only ones to suffer from this popular anti-Semitic uproar. In a letter to Will Alexander, Reverend William McDowell insisted that the trials were "injuring the standing of Southern Jews more than they realize . . . The ILD, by employing a New York Jew in Decatur and Dadeville is 'putting the Jews on the spot' in the South." He concluded, "I wonder if Southern Jews see that as yet?"⁷³ Many did. Alabama Jews increasingly found their loyalties questioned in the wake of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. According to Charles Fiedelson, a former secretary of the Young Men's Hebrew Association in Birmingham, "Jews were looked upon with suspicion. It was taken for granted that a Jew was a Communist, or at least in secret sympathy with the terrible reds."⁷⁴

⁷⁰*Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 May 1933; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 15 April 1933; *Afro-American*, 15 April 1933. After Wright's anti-Semitic outburst, once polite relations between defense and prosecuting attorneys plummeted. See *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1933.

⁷¹*Labor Defender*, April 1933.

⁷²*Southern Worker*, 12 July 1933.

⁷³William G. McDowell, letter to Will Alexander, 17 April 1933, CIC Collection.

⁷⁴*Daily Worker*, 4 December 1933.

The blurred symbolism that linked all Jews to perpetual foreignness and international radicalism spilled over into the already tenuous position occupied by Alabama Jewry. Contrary to Robert Weisbord and Arthur Stein's contention that differences between whites were submerged in a South "preoccupied with maintaining the subordinate status of blacks," Alabama Jews found themselves separated from and by other white Southerners.⁷⁵ According to Rabbi Goldstein, crosses were set ablaze in the front yards of specifically Jewish residents and a partial economic boycott of Jewish merchants was in effect.⁷⁶ In response, members of the Montgomery Jewish community forced Rabbi Goldstein to resign in order to distance themselves from any association with the radical Scottsboro campaign. Their actions lend credence to Joseph Fichter and George Maddox's finding that the acceptance of Jews into Southern society "depends on continuous public manifestations of accommodation."⁷⁷ This was certainly the case with some of the more outspoken personalities within Alabama Jewry. These Jews wanted their Gentile neighbors to know that they had their priorities straight, that they categorically put their Southern identity and heritage first.⁷⁸

Thus, not long after Goldstein fled to the North, a group of Jewish citizens in Montgomery issued a formal statement to repudiate Goldstein's radical activism and throw their support behind the mayor of the city. They wanted Montgomery's citizens to know that they, too, resented these Northern outsiders who intervened in Alabama's business. They, too, despised the political program of social equality that the radical

⁷⁵Weisbord and Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter*, 22.

⁷⁶*Montgomery Advertiser*, 27 May 1933.

⁷⁷Joseph H. Fichter and George L. Maddox, "Religion in the South, Old and New," in *The South in Continuity and Change*, eds. John C. McKinney and Edger T. Thompson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1965), 382.

⁷⁸This observation has been paralleled in other studies of Southern Jews. See Reed, "Ethnicity in the South," 101; Fichter and Maddox, "Religion in the South, Old and New," 380-382; Killian, *White Southerners*, 80-81.

ILD activists brought with them. One unnamed member of the Montgomery Jewish community explained that, "In the South certain restrictions to which the negro is subjected exist as a matter of necessity. Anyone familiar with the events which took place in the South immediately after the War Between the States will appreciate better the reasons why these conditions exist."⁷⁹ The same individual continued:

I believe as the years go on the race problem will gradually settle itself -- provided only that outside interference is not brought to bear on either group. It is just such outside interference that is responsible for the present status of the Scottsboro case, and directly responsible for the unfortunate racial clash in Tallapoosa County."⁸⁰

Although these Southern Jews were as much a product of a specific racist, regional and anti-radical ideology as their Gentile compatriots, a certain amount of anti-Semitism no doubt played a part in their reactionary and conformist behavior. As Lewis Killian put it, "It might be said that there has been enough latent anti-Semitism in the South to make good southerners out of many Jews. Their marginality has placed a high premium on conformity to the regional mores."⁸¹

Perhaps even more than Alabama's Jews, the Scottsboro youths felt the strain of the multifaceted fury directed at the ILD attorneys and staff. While driving three of the defendants from a Decatur courthouse to a Birmingham prison, an Alabama sheriff and his deputy ordered the handcuffed lads to dismiss their attorneys and drop the ILD. Clarence Norris, one of the youths present, told how Deputy Edgar Blalock began "cussing our 'Communist, Jew, Northern lawyers'."⁸² Ozie Powell,

⁷⁹ *Montgomery Advertiser*, 28 May 1933. The individual was not identified.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ Killian, *White Southerners*, 81.

⁸² Norris and Washington, *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys*, 162.

another of the youths, was outraged by these comments. "I'd rather have those lawyers than any I've ever seen," he shouted back.⁸³ Shocked by Powell's impertinence, Deputy Blalock slapped the youth. When the deputy turned his head, Powell furiously reached with his one free hand for a hidden pocket knife and slashed the deputy across his mouth. The sheriff immediately stopped the car and shot Powell point blank in the head. With a bullet lodged deep in his skull, Powell suffered permanent brain damage. In a neuropsychiatric examination conducted later in prison, Powell sadly admitted, "I haven't did no crime to be locked up, although I did cut that sheriff when he slapped me for saying I didn't want no Alabama lawyer."⁸⁴ Despite the perils of continued association with the organization, Powell remained fiercely loyal to the ILD.

VII

Although the ILD had met with resistance in other campaigns, the organization was in no way prepared for the virulent anti-Semitism it encountered at Scottsboro. Some of the fiercest criticism of the ILD concentrated on the organization's choice of Samuel Leibowitz as chief defense attorney. "Here, they argued, was a Northerner, a Jew, with a long record for defending gangsters and getting them off; a man who would make the worst possible impression on a Southern community."⁸⁵

Anticipating an anti-radical backlash, the ILD had explicitly chosen a mainstream Democrat to lead its defense. "His political affiliations," an ILD bulletin argued, "make it impossible for enemies to throw up the famous bogey -- using a case for political capital. The ILD made no

⁸³*Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 February 1935.

⁸⁴Report of Neuropsychiatric Examination, 10 January 1937, AKC Papers. For a full description of the incident, see Carter, *Scottsboro*, 348-352.

⁸⁵John Henry Hammond Jr., "The South Speaks," *Nation* 136, no. 3538 (26 April 1933): 465. In a letter to Allan Knight Chalmers, one observer frankly wondered "if your committee realizes that those negroes will be hung because of not in spite of Leibowitz." C. R. Edson to Alan Knight Chalmers, 16 July 1937, AKC Papers.

compromise. It used Leibowitz to assure the nine boys the best legal defense in the court."⁸⁶ That Leibowitz's Jewishness, or in fact the Jewishness of virtually the entire defense team, could substantially retard the ILD's defense and campaign had never been seriously considered. "Why send a Jewish lawyer into the South?" the ILD reflexively asked. "Because the ablest lawyer happened to be a Jew," it confidently replied.⁸⁷

From the first days of its intervention at Scottsboro, the ILD had sought Southern attorneys to aid the defense. Finding Southerners willing to defend African-Americans accused of rape, however, was not an easy task. General Chamlee was virtually the only qualified Southerner willing to take up the cause.⁸⁸ The intense anti-ILD hostilities engendered by the campaign, set within the context of a brutally racist system, made the organization's task of defending the youths an especially difficult one. "There is no doubt that Southern people can act more effectively to save their lives," Malcolm Cowley, of the *New Republic*, insisted. "But will they act?"⁸⁹ Despite the uproar it had caused in the South, the ILD consistently maintained that its presence in the case had decisively saved the lives of the Scottsboro youths. "The boys realize this, their parents do, and even the capitalist press is forced to admit it," explained an official ILD publication.⁹⁰ But after over three years in the forefront of the Scottsboro campaign, a besieged ILD again stepped up its search for Southern attorneys and a broad progressive coalition that could serve and support it in the upcoming trials and appeals.⁹¹

⁸⁶*Educational Bulletin*, January 1934.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*

⁸⁸The ILD used the 14th Amendment to argue in favor of the constitutional rights of African-Americans to participate on juries. As Leibowitz remarked, "No Southern lawyer would have dared to bring up such a point." *Daily News*, 10 April 1933.

⁸⁹Malcolm Cowley, letter to Howard Odun, 5 October 1933, Arthur Raper Papers, Southern Historical Collection, University of North Carolina Library (hereafter cited as AR Papers).

⁹⁰*Educational Bulletin*, January 1934.

⁹¹Roger N. Baldwin, letter to William G. McDowell, 3 November 1933, CIC Collection; Carter, *Scottsboro*, 330-335.

This time the ILD deliberately sought non-Jewish allies for the Scottsboro defense team. "Northern defenders of the negro are quietly looking around for a good liberal Southern Democrat with an Anglo-Saxon name to take over the defense . . .," reported the *Washington Merry-Go-Round*.⁹² In December 1935, the Scottsboro Defense Committee was formally established, and the ILD publicly relinquished its control over the defense. "We feel that the cause of the Scottsboro boys will be immensely strengthened by the formation of this committee," explained an ILD report.⁹³ They had good reason to believe so. The Scottsboro Defense Committee was made up of five progressive groups, the ILD, NAACP, American Civil Liberties Union, League for Industrial Democracy and the Methodist Federation for Social Service; a coalition that effectively deflected Southern hostilities away from the ILD and dispersed them across a more ambiguous target. Furthermore, Allan Knight Chalmers, the diplomatic pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle Congregational Church in New York, had been chosen to direct the new coalition. Chalmers, who descended from a "long line of Presbyterian and Congregational ministers," a point often underscored in the press, proved a stark contrast to the very Jewish Samuel Leibowitz and the Jewish-dominated ILD defense team.⁹⁴

While the Scottsboro Defense Committee provided a glossy new face for the Scottsboro campaign, many of its backstage administrators remained die-hard ILD radicals. Anna Damon, Joseph Brodsky and Joseph Gelders, among others, doggedly continued the fight for the Scottsboro youths. Anna Damon regularly attended Committee meetings, corresponded with the youths, and encouraged public awareness of the

⁹²*Washington Merry-Go-Round*, 16 October 1934, as quoted in Files Crenshaw Jr. and Kenneth A. Miller, *Scottsboro: The Firebrand of Communism* (Montgomery: Press of Brown Printing Co., 1936), 253.

⁹³*Daily Worker*, 30 December 1935.

⁹⁴*New Jersey Journal*, 31 December 1935; *New York Times*, 20 January 1936.

case long after the ILD could benefit from such activities.⁹⁵ Although greatly marginalized from the defense, Samuel Leibowitz, too, refused to give up the struggle for the young men. Along with the formation of the Scottsboro Defense Committee, a new attorney was brought into the defense, as one reporter put it, "to test the theory that a Southern lawyer would be able to overcome local feeling against 'outside interference.'"⁹⁶ Sitting next to the Southern attorney who had largely replaced him, a mostly immobile and silent Leibowitz watched over the final courtroom dramas of the Scottsboro trials. As the *New York Times* candidly reported, "Samuel Leibowitz, chief of defense counsel, whose attacks on the Southern jury system have made him hated as bitterly as the original Communist sponsors of the defense, sat silently by his Southern associate, C. L. Watts of Huntsville, taking no part in the choosing of the jurors."⁹⁷

Despite the Christian leadership and Southern elements in the new Scottsboro coalition, the organization retained some of the Jewish character of the ILD-sponsored campaign. Although sidelined to appease Southern prejudice, many Jewish activists and attorneys remained as committed as ever to the youths and to their struggle for freedom.⁹⁸

⁹⁵See minute reports of SDC in AKC Papers. Anna Damon attended virtually all of the SDC meetings, sometimes holding them in her own home, and also aided the SDC's financial campaign. See minutes from: 17 February 1936, 27 February 1936, 30 April 1936, 8 August 1936, 12 June 1937, 15 July 1937, 28 July 1937, 30 July 1937, 23 August 1937, 27 September 1937, 1 October 1937, 20 October 1937, 28 March 1938, 21 June 1938, 13 September 1938; and Rose Shapiro, letter to Allan Knight Chalmers, 1 October 1937, AKC Papers.

⁹⁶*New York Times*, 18 July 1937.

⁹⁷*New York Times*, 21 January 1936.

⁹⁸Carter, *Scottsboro*, 340-342; Goodman, *Stories*, 291. At times it seemed as if Chalmers was largely a figurehead for the SDC and that Shapiro and other administrators carried the burden of work. See Morris Shapiro, letter to Allan Knight Chalmers, 1 December 1936, AKC Papers.

Chapter 3

Internal Sources of Jewish Radicalism: A Case Study of the Scottsboro Jews

Jewish commitment to the Scottsboro campaign was unique and exceptional. What motivated these otherwise ordinary men and women to become activists in this struggle for African-American rights? In this chapter I will argue that Jews were overrepresented in the Scottsboro movement because they were overrepresented in the American left as a whole. Their commitment to the Scottsboro youths stemmed from a unique Jewish proclivity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to political radicalism that included, but was never reducible to, the struggle for black rights. To understand the Scottsboro Jews -- and especially what drove them to help save the lives of nine African-American youths -- we must first ask ourselves why they turned to radicalism. It is the answer to this conundrum that will ultimately shed light on how Jews came to dominate the ILD's Scottsboro campaign.

II

Scholars, politicians, anti-Semites, philo-Semites and other speculators have long observed and commented on the phenomenon of Jewish radicalism.¹ With eyes keenly focused on Western European

¹ Among scholarly studies that investigate Jewish radicalism are: Daniel Aaron, "Some Reflections on Communism and the Jewish Writer," in *The Ghetto and Beyond*, ed. Peter Rose (New York: Random House, 1969); Percy S. Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews* (New York: Academic Press, 1980);

history, historians have pointed to such well-known figures as Ferdinand Lasalle, the founder of German social democracy, Rosa Luxemburg, a prominent radical theoretician and leader in the Spartacist uprising in Berlin, and French socialist and Prime Minister, Leon Blum, to show the peculiar Jewish penchant for radical politics. As Robert Michels speculated in 1915, "There has not during the last seventy-five years been any new current agitating the popular political life in which Jews have failed to play an eminent part."² Radical Russian Jews also bask in the historical limelight of Jewish radicalism. Menshevik and Bolshevik leaders such as Pavel Axelrod, Lev Davidovich Bronstein, also known as Leon Trotsky, Raphael Abramovitch, Julius Martov, Lev Kamenev and others have all been paid homage in the chronicles of radical Jewish history.³ And in the United States some of the most brazen and brilliant leaders of the radical left, including Daniel De Leon, Morris Hillquit, Emma Goldman, Benjamin Gitlow, William Weinstone, Max Schactman, Jay Lovestone, Herbert Aptheker and Michael Gold were all Jews.

No wonder that in a lecture on the 1905 Revolution, Lenin commended Jews for providing "a relatively high percentage of representatives of internationalism compared with other nations."⁴ For as the voluminous literature on Jewish radicalism reveals, Jews have indeed played a large and complex role in political struggles for radical social

Werner Cohn, "Sources of American Jewish Liberalism -- A Study of the Political Alignments of American Jews," (Ph.D. diss., New School for Social Research, 1956); Epstein, *The Jew and Communism*; Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*; Allen Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America: Assimilation and the Crisis of Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971); Irving Howe, *A Margin of Hope: An Intellectual Autobiography* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1983); David Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail: Jewish Working-Class Radicals in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989); Arthur Liebman, *Jews and the Left* (New York: Wiley, 1979); Naomi Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies: Jewish Women as Rebels and Radicals* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1993); Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the New Left* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982); Robert Wolfe, *Remember to Dream: A History of Jewish Radicalism* (New York: Jewish Radical Education Project, 1994).

²Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracies* (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1915), 272.

³Stephen Whitfield, *Voices of Jacob, Hands of Esau: Jews in American Life and Thought* (Hamden: Archon Books, 1984), 74-77.

⁴As quoted in *Daily Worker*, 8 March 1934.

change. In fact, in 1939, a concerned U. S. Congressman asked Earl Browder, the general secretary of the Communist Party, whether Communism was "synonymous with 'Jews,'" and whether "Jews are predominant in the Communist movement in the United States."⁵ It is within this long and illustrious tradition of Jewish radicalism, and for these purposes Jewish-American radicalism, that we must first locate the Scottsboro Jews.

While Jewish radicalism is commonly observed and identified, few scholars agree as to what gave rise to this particular ethnic propensity for radical politics. Theories of Jewish radicalism are diverse, but generally fall into two categories -- those which highlight radicalizing pressures coming from within the Judaic tradition, and those which focus on the external historical circumstances of the Jew-turned-radical. This chapter will examine those theories which stress the internal factors that have encouraged the Jewish-American predilection for radical leftist politics. The following chapter will investigate theories that rely on the external force of anti-Semitism to account for Jewish radicalism. In both chapters, I will use these theories in an attempt to clarify the sources of the radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews. In their turn, the stories of these radical Jews provide a case study for testing these seemingly competing explanations.

Many of those who argue in favor of internal explanations for Jewish radicalism underscore the religio-cultural compulsions in Judaism. Louis Ruchames, for example, argues that the biblical exodus from Egypt, with its dual emphases on bondage and liberty, has given Jews a passion for freedom and equality that directly translates into a radical or liberal political agenda. "The memory of that period," he writes, "and the anti-

⁵House Special Committee to Investigate Un-American Activities, *Testimony of Earl Browder*, 76th Cong., 1st sess., 6 September 1939, 4492. Browder responded, "The whole business is utter nonsense. It is merely an exhibition of the attempt to direct the sentiment of those who are against communism -- to direct them against the Jews. This is one of the ways in which the anti-Communist slogan is used generally, to try to break up the unity of the people, to set one group to fighting another and so on."

slavery attitudes resulting therefrom were deeply ingrained in Jewish religious thought and practice and have had a significant impact even upon non-religious Jews."⁶ Other cultural and religious values cited for spawning Jewish radicalism or liberalism include a love of learning and intellectualism, a culture of non-asceticism and the dream of a Messianic utopia where peace and harmony encompass the earth.

While acknowledging all these factors, political historian Lawrence Fuchs also highlights the role of charity, or *zedakeh* in transliterated Hebrew, in instilling Jews with the pressing mission of coming to the aid of the poor and underprivileged. According to Fuchs, *zedakeh* was more than benevolent alms-giving to the poor, but the serious duty of all Jews to seek and establish social justice. In the United States, he argues, the religious and cultural tradition of *zedakeh* was translated into a Jewish inclination towards liberal political values and a general alignment with the left. The influence of *zedakeh* was so broad that it, "as well as Jewish insecurity, would help promote Jewish sympathy for the Negro and help induce a favorable attitude toward progressive taxation, Roosevelt's war on the economic royalists, social security, and most of the programs which constituted the New Deal."⁷ Both Fuchs and Ruchames, then, believe that Jewish radicalism is ultimately an outgrowth of the religio-cultural imperatives inherent in the Judaic tradition.

Arthur Liebman's theory of a radical Jewish subculture, or contraculture, uses a similarly introspective approach to explain Jewish radicalism. Instead of searching for values linked to the Jewish religious tradition, however, Liebman argues that Jewish-American radicalism is historically indebted to a radical Jewish subculture that first flourished in

⁶Louis Ruchames, "Jewish Radicalism in the United States," in *The Ghetto and Beyond: Essays on Jewish Life in America*, ed. Peter Rose (New York: Random House, 1969), 228.

⁷Lawrence H. Fuchs, "Sources of Jewish Internationalism," in *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, ed. Marshall Sklare (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), 604.

Russia and Eastern Europe. According to Liebman, the historical development of capitalism in Russia facilitated the birth of a Jewish working class with a particularly strong ethno-proletarian consciousness. These Yiddish-speaking, radical Jews built a subculture that united like-minded Jews in a maze of political, labor, social and cultural institutions and networks that maintained a dual struggle for both workers' and Jewish minority rights. Liebman contends that Jewish immigrants then transplanted this subculture in the United States where harsh working conditions, a strong indigenous American left, a weak Jewish religious establishment, and a generally more tolerant political climate all contributed to the success and longevity of Jewish radicalism in the American landscape.⁸ Thus, in contrast with Fuchs and Ruchames, Liebman sees Jewish radicalism as the product of a specific conjunction in Jewish history, informed by class and group oppression, that gave birth to a Jewish culture of radicalism and protest.

III

Let us now turn to the Scottsboro Jews to evaluate the explanatory power of such internally-oriented theories in accounting for the overrepresentation of Jews in this watershed campaign. When considering the diversity of the Jewish ILD activists, one quickly realizes that there can be no simple explanation for Jewish involvement in the Scottsboro movement. Those Jewish activists who participated in the campaign came from all walks of life, and with a variety of personal hopes, dreams, interests and ambitions. Within this diversity, however, the Scottsboro Jews shared many distinctive characteristics. As we will learn, the majority of Scottsboro Jews were subject to many of the same historical forces, and privy to many of the same social processes that

⁸Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, 26-33.

ultimately were to weave their lives together into a common pattern. It was for these structural reasons, then, that Jews were disproportionately overrepresented in the ILD and its Scottsboro campaign.

Perhaps one of the most instructive bonds uniting the Scottsboro Jews, albeit with a few notable exceptions, was their Russian or Eastern European origins. Divisions within the American Jewish community in the 1930s often related to the divergent ethno-geographic backgrounds and immigration patterns of its members. Such distinctions gave way to a short-hand categorization of American Jews as either "German" or "East European." In such categorizations, the "German Jews" referred to those Jews coming from Germany and other West European countries. The "East Europeans," on the other hand, hailed from Eastern Europe and Russia.⁹ Although there were some German Jews involved in the Scottsboro campaign, the overwhelming majority were East European Jews.

Beginning in the early 1880s, East European Jews flooded the deceptively golden shores of America. By the outbreak of World War I, some two million Jews, approximately one third of the combined East European Jewry, had immigrated to the United States. Their immigration to America expressed an unwillingness to endure the bigotry and bitterness of the Old World as well as a yearning for political freedom and economic opportunity.¹⁰ Victor Rabinowitz, a former ILD lawyer and the son of a Russian-Lithuanian Jewish immigrant, insisted that, "I would suppose that most of the Jews who came to this country between 1880 and

⁹Bernard D. Weinryb, "Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to American," in *The Jews: Social Patterns of an American Group*, ed. Marshall Sklare (Glencoe: Free Press, 1958), 5.

¹⁰Moses Rischin, *The Promised City: New York's Jews, 1870-1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 20; Rita J. Simon, *In the Golden Land: A Century of Russian and Soviet Jewish Immigration in America* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 3-11; Jacob Kabakoff, "The View from the Old World: East European Jewish Perspectives," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, eds. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 41-59; Gerald Sorin, *The Prophetic Minority: American Jewish Immigrant Radicals, 1880-1920* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985), 43.

1910 were radicals of one persuasion or another, who were seeking to escape the repression of Eastern Europe."¹¹ Among these masses of East European immigrants were a great many committed socialist Jews already schooled in revolutionary thought and dedicated to militant class-based struggle against capitalism and the repressive state. Following the failed 1905 Russian Revolution, the number of these radical Jewish immigrants arriving in America rapidly multiplied. Between 1906 and 1910, the *Arbeiter Ring* (Workmen's Circle), a progressive Jewish fraternal order in New York, increased from 6,776 members to 38,866 members. Most of its new members were veterans of the 1905 Revolution.¹²

Several of the ILD's Scottsboro activists were among those East European Jews who arrived in the United States as experienced and dedicated radicals. Such immigrants brought with them, as many ILD activists remembered, "anti-authoritarian" ideas, a "socialist orientation," a stubborn "rebelliousness," and practical radical experience.¹³ Rose Baron was one such immigrant who, as a young woman in Russia, devoted considerable time and effort to the Revolutionary Red Cross. Frank Spector also served the revolutionary Russian cause in his pre-immigration youth, carrying messages between the mainland and the battleship *Potemkin*. Both Spector and Baron migrated to New York after the 1905 Revolution, quickly adapting their radicalism to the indigenous

¹¹Victor Rabinowitz, letter to author, 25 March 1996.

¹²The development of an ethno-class consciousness among East European and Russian Jews is discussed in Ezra Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale: The Formative Years of the Jewish Workers' Movement in Tsarist Russia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970); and Yoav Peled, *Class and Ethnicity in the Pale: The Political Economy of Jewish Workers' Nationalism in Late Imperial Russia* (London: Macmillan, 1989); Abe Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996; Susan A. Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl: Life and Labor in the Immigrant Generation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 180; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "Workmen's Circle."

¹³Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996; Henry Libby, letter to author, 6 May 1996; Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996.

American radical scene. As veteran international Communists, they became leading members in the Communist-affiliated ILD.¹⁴

Those Scottsboro Jews who were not themselves immigrants from Eastern Europe or Russia often descended from parents who were. Moreover, like Baron and Spector, many of the parents of these Scottsboro Jews immigrated to the United States as committed radicals. They shared their enthusiasm for socialism and radical politics with their children, imparting to their mainly American-born sons and daughters a peculiarly East-European Yiddish zeal for social justice. The parents of ILD publicity director and journalist Sasha Small were two such foreign-born radicals, and when Small eventually joined the Communist Party, it was because it was the "normal thing to do."¹⁵ Gloomy predictions made at the time that children of Jewish immigrant Socialists cared little for the political philosophies of their elders belied the very real contribution that family socialization made to maintaining Jewish-American radicalism. In 1912, a Yiddish journalist presumptuously announced, "It is a fact that most of the children of the Yiddish Socialists in America are divorced from the ideals of their elders. The father, the Socialist, is to them a 'greenhorn' and his socialism is just a manifestation of his inability to adapt."¹⁶ But for many of the Scottsboro Jews the opposite held true. As in Sasha Small's case, familial political orientation played an enormous role in facilitating adult radicalism in the Scottsboro Jews. Early experiences with radicalism within the safe confines of the home and close community exposed them to a wide range of political alternatives and socialist ideas, and was a major factor that facilitated their participation in the ILD.

¹⁴*Working Woman*, November 1933; *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, s.v. "Spector, Frank E."

¹⁵Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996.

¹⁶As quoted in Paul Buhle, "Jews and American Communism: The Cultural Question," *Radical History Review* 23 (spring 1980): 14.

Joseph Brodsky and his siblings were all nurtured in radicalism from an early age. Brodsky's Russian immigrant father, Benjamin, was a militant Socialist and founder of Branch One of the *Arbeiter Ring*. Benjamin's radical politics and passion for socialism proved critical in the development of his children's political consciousness. As Carl Brodsky, Joseph's brother, later recalled, "Our father always held the ideal of Socialism up before us; Joe fought for that goal."¹⁷ Following in the footsteps of their father, Joseph and Carl Brodsky joined the Socialist Party. By 1917, both young men were delegates to the Socialist City Central Committee and members in its national left-wing movement. Thoroughly dissatisfied with the policies and politics of the Socialists, the Brodsky brothers later became founding members of the Communist Party in 1919, and numerous other organizations that sprang up in its wake. Like the Brodsky's, Abraham Osheroff, too, internalized the radical political orientation of his family. Osheroff's father, Eleazer Osherowitch, was an immigrant from Belarus, and his socialist political sympathies and union activism profoundly influenced his son. By the time Abraham was 16, he was a member of the Young Communist League and an eager activist in the Scottsboro campaign.¹⁸

Such stories of family politicization were not limited to Jewish ILD activists, but were common among Jewish-American radicals of East European and Russian descent. Benjamin Gitlow, an early leader in the Communist Party, recalled that "joining the Socialist Party had seemed to me the proper and necessary thing to do. My father and mother were Socialists. Our home in the lower East Side of New York City was a gathering place for radical Russian immigrants."¹⁹ Will Herberg, a

¹⁷*Daily Worker*, 1 August 1947. Also see *The Worker*, 3 August 1947; *Encyclopedia of the American Left*, s.v. "Workmen's Circle."

¹⁸Abe Osheroff, letters to author, 15 March 1996, 9 April 1996, 10 August 1996.

¹⁹Benjamin Gitlow, *I Confess: The Truth About American Communism* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1940), 13.

renowned Jewish-American sociologist, theologian and former Communist, similarly remembered inheriting his parents' "passionate commitment to socialism."²⁰ The radicalism of numerous Scottsboro Jews, like that of many radical Jews at the time, was the outgrowth of an early socialization in radical politics that took place within the structural confines of the immediate family and that represented the political orientation of East European and Russian immigrant Jews.

But Jewish radicalism was not simply a product of family socialization. The great majority of East European and Russian Jewish immigrants arrived in the United States as paupers. These Jewish immigrants crowded into the slums of America's largest cities, especially into New York's Lower East Side and Chicago's West End, where they struggled to build new lives, labors and loves. By the early twentieth century, more than 700 people per acre on average resided in Manhattan's Lower East Side, a population density greater than in Bombay's worst slums.²¹ Large-scale evictions were common in such overcrowded tenement areas, and immigrant Jewish families were often forced to take in boarders to help make ends meet. Prostitution flourished among young female Jewish immigrants, and Jewish crime and gangsters won great notoriety. Although exaggerated in contemporary descriptions of Jewish ghettos, these more troubling phenomena were subsequently downplayed in later literary and historical depictions.²²

²⁰David G. Dalin, "Will Herberg's Path from Marxism to Judaism: A Case Study in the Transformation of Jewish Belief," in *The Americanization of the Jews*, eds. Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 120.

²¹Thomas Sowell, *Ethnic America: A History* (New York: Basic Books, 1981), 83; Milton Reizenstein, "General Aspects of the Population: New York," in *The Russian Jew in the United States*, ed. Charles S. Bernheimer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1905), 43-49; Philip Davis, "General Aspects of the Population: Chicago," in *The Russian Jew in the United States*, ed. Charles S. Bernheimer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1905), 57-60.

²²Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 83; Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter: A History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989), 152-176; Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 23-27; Seymour Martin Lipset and Earl Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 18-25; Stephen Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America* (New York: Atheneum, 1981), 114-115.

Within these overpopulated and poverty-stricken Jewish ghettos, immigrant Jews steeped in socialist ideas constructed a vibrant radical subculture. This radical subculture went against the grain of much of what America stood for -- rugged individualism, the entrepreneurial spirit, capitalism -- and in this sense can be thought of as a Jewish contraculture.²³ During the heyday of American Jewish radicalism, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jewish ghettos reverberated with the sounds and spirit of an effervescent and infectious political radicalism. The growing uncertainty and unrest felt during the turbulent times of the Great Depression further nurtured this contracultural spirit. Describing the neighborhoods of Chicago's Jewish ghetto, one woman recalled that even "the air was tinged with movements."²⁴

This political contraculture within a minority culture linked Jews of radical orientation in a matrix of political institutions and social networks. Radical immigrant Jews built mutual assistance societies, established schools, summer camps, theaters and operated social clubs for other leftist Jews. The Reynolds Hills Colony in Peekskill, New York, is one such camp that was founded by radical Jewish immigrants in 1929, and still exists today. Along with other radicals, they organized singing associations, too, like the Freiheit Chorus, the Daily Workers' Chorus, and the ILD Song Group which was directed by Elie Siegmeister.²⁵

This radical Jewish existence encompassed all aspects of life, enveloping its participants in a holistic web of activity and thought. Many radical Jews became staunch, if at times unruly, activists in the Socialist and Communist Parties, and auxiliary organizations such as the ILD and

²³Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, 26-33; Melech Epstein, *Jewish Labor in U.S.A.: An Industrial, Political and Cultural History of the Jewish Labor Movement, 1882-1914*, vol. 2 (New York, 1969), 1-10.

²⁴Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 179.

²⁵R. Serge Denisoff, *Great Day Coming: Folk Music and the American Left* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971), 42; Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 177-183; Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 20-38.

the NCDPP. From its inception, the ILD was woven into the fabric of this radical immigrant subculture. Only months after the ILD was founded, an exasperated J. Louis Engdahl reported that "the ILD branches have considered themselves clubs, sympathetic to the Communist Party, helping the language papers, aiding almost everything but the main task -- defense."²⁶ Radical Jews also formed or led unions such as the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union and the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union, and published radical Yiddish newspapers like the anarchist *Arbeiter Shtimme*, the Socialist-inclined *Jewish Daily Forward* and the Communist *Freiheit*.²⁷ It is important to stress that radical Jews always remained a minority within the American Jewish community. Nevertheless, they built a lively, influential and all-encompassing radical contraculture that helped generate and sustain a leftist perspective among significant numbers of American Jews.

This radical Jewish subculture is important in explaining why so many American Jews became dedicated and principled members of the ILD. Not dependent simply upon memories of relatives who had been radical in the Old World or even upon the examples of actively radical parents in America, the radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews rested on the vibrant and institutionalized radical subculture that surrounded them. Most of the Scottsboro Jews lived within the confines of urban American Jewish ghettos, where the influence of the radical Jewish subculture was keenly felt. "I was brought up in largely, but not entirely Jewish neighborhoods until my marriage," declared Lucille Perlman, a research assistant at the national ILD office during the Scottsboro campaign.²⁸

²⁶Report by Comrade Engdahl on ILD to Political Bureau, 21 September 1931, RM Papers.

²⁷Arthur Liebman, "The Ties that Bind: The Jewish Support for the Left in the United States," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 66, no. 2 (1976): 288; Thomas Kessner, *The Golden Door: Italian and Jewish Immigrant Mobility in New York City, 1880-1915* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 7-14, 19, 76-77; Rischin, *The Promised City*, 33, 69-70; Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 15.

²⁸Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

Similarly, Abraham Osheroff explained that "my neighborhood, Brownsville in Brooklyn, was ninety-five percent working-class Jews."²⁹ It was in these Jewish immigrant neighborhoods and social environs that many of the Scottsboro Jews were first schooled in radical thought and politics, and subsequently introduced to the Scottsboro campaign.

Radical parents and family members were one obvious springboard into the radical Jewish subculture. Joseph and Carl Brodsky, Sasha Small and Abraham Osheroff were among those Scottsboro Jews who were initiated and integrated into the radical Jewish subculture under the watchful eyes of their parents. Where close family connections did not lead to participation in the radical subculture, potent leftist ideas and proletarian consciousness that crisscrossed and permeated Jewish neighborhoods of the time often did. "In many instances," recounted Lucille Perlman, "the children of older radicals were the source of radical thinking for the children of less political families."³⁰ The infectious nature of the radical Jewish subculture was not confined to adolescents. As lawyers sharing the same office, Scottsboro attorney Elias Schwarzbart introduced Samuel Perlman to left-wing radicalism, and more specifically to the ILD.

The influence of the thriving radical Jewish culture extended into non-Jewish spheres as well. It was during an internship with the law firm Halle, Nelles, and Shorr that Vito Marcantonio met Joseph Brodsky.³¹ "From Joseph Brodsky," Marcantonio was later to declare, "I learned that a legal career is worthless unless it is given in service to the oppressed."³² While a teenager in Cleveland, Ohio, the celebrated African-American

²⁹ Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996.

³⁰ Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996.

³¹ For insights into the cross-fertilization of radical ideas within the Jewish community, see Perlman, letter to author, 21 March 1996; Gerald Meyer, *Vito Marcantonio: Radical Politician, 1902-1954* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 14.

³² As quoted in *Daily Worker*, 1 August 1947.

poet Langston Hughes was also introduced to socialism through East European and Russian immigrants, many of whom were Jewish.³³

Though foreign in origin, the radical Jewish contraculture took root and flourished in the fertile American soil of industrial exploitation. As one Jewish worker in the garment industry, Fannia Cohn, explained, "many girls came here from a revolutionary background . . . then they were plunged into the sweatshop. The sweatshop was not only a physical condition, but moral and anti-spiritual. They found there was no Bill of Rights off the street, in the shop."³⁴ Or as ILD activist Ruth Goldberg similarly recalled, "When they [Jewish immigrants] got here in the early days they were exploited in sweatshops, developed a strong union movement [that] encapsulated into their hearts and minds the ideas of struggle for justice."³⁵ Hence, radicalism appealed to many Jewish immigrant workers not only because it was part of a cultural heritage that many brought with them from the Old World or that flourished in their new American ghettos, but also because it made sense of their everyday lives as workers in America's industrial empire.

In the United States, the proletarianization of East European and Russian Jewish immigrants proceeded on a massive scale. Many immigrants found work in factories, sweatshops and the manual occupations. By 1890, virtually half of all Jewish-American industrial workers were employed in the needle industries. According to a 1905 study, over fifty percent of male Russian Jewish workers and seventy-seven percent of female Russian Jewish workers in New York worked as dressmakers, hat and cap makers, milliners, seamstresses, tailors and the like. Many other Jewish immigrants became pushcart peddlers, clerks,

³³Arnold Rampersad, letter to author, 23 July 1997.

³⁴Glenn, *Daughters of the Shtetl*, 180.

³⁵Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996. Also see Epstein, *The Jew and Communism*, 55.

casual laborers and small goods entrepreneurs.³⁶ Stereotyped as bankers and merchants, the proletarianized East European and Russian Jewish immigrants startled contemporary observers. Isaac Rubinow, working for the Bureau of Statistics at the time, noted that, "[t]he predominance of industrial laborers in a social group that long had the reputation of being fit for commercial life only is striking."³⁷ Somewhat misled, the author was unaware that many immigrant Jews had also been employed as workers in the Old World.³⁸

Contrary to Lucy Dawidowicz's contention that Jewish proclivities for radicalism have been "long mistaken as an expression of class interest," many of the Scottsboro Jews joined the ILD precisely because of their perceived oppression and exploitation, which led them to identify with the immediate goals of the workers' revolution.³⁹ "The ideas of communism attracted me first of all because I had a worker's background and I felt that the worker was being exploited," explained "Harry S.," a rank-and-file ILD supporter.⁴⁰ As a New York garment worker, Harry took half days off from work to stand on street corners to collect money for the Scottsboro youths.⁴¹ It seems that most of the Scottsboro Jews came from working-class backgrounds. Frank Spector, Elias Schwarzbart, Anna Damon, Victor Rabinowitz, Lucille Perlman and Joseph Brodsky all experienced the privation of working-class livelihoods first-hand.⁴²

³⁶Isaac Rubinow, "Economic and Industrial Condition: New York," in *The Russian Jew in the United States*, ed. Charles S. Bernheimer (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co., 1905), 102-121; Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 79-85; Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 24-5.

³⁷Rubinow, "Economic and Industrial Condition: New York," 108.

³⁸Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 5-6.

³⁹Lucy Dawidowicz, *The Jewish Presence: Essays on Identity and History* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1977), 119.

⁴⁰Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 190, 19-21. Also see Leibman, "The Ties that Bind," 287-288. Leviatin does not give the full names of his informants, so from here on I will be forced to use his shorthand -- Harry S.

⁴¹Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 189.

⁴²*New York Times*, 12 November 1995; *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, s.v. "Spector, Frank E."

Benjamin Brodsky, for example, worked as a shirt maker in the garment trades of the Lower East Side. His wife sewed buttons on trousers "to send her sons to school."⁴³ Together this family of ten, in addition to three boarders, shared a four-room, cold-water flat. These childhood conditions left an indelible mark. "Joe never forgot the weeks when his father . . . was out of work," recalled Carl. "Nor the many days when the family went hungry."⁴⁴

While the Scottsboro Jews often experienced privation as children, the majority had escaped working-class life by adulthood. As historians have shown, working-class American Jews were generally a one-generation phenomenon. By 1950, a majority of employed Jewish-Americans were white-collar workers and professionals.⁴⁵ It was largely through acquisition of a tertiary education that children of immigrant Jews were able to move into white-collar professions. The fact that municipal colleges and night schools in New York were often free proved an added bonus for this education-hungry Jewish immigrant generation. By the 1930s, more than one half of the graduates of City College of New York -- informally known as "Jews college" -- were Jews of East European and Russian descent. Some 56 percent of students in the six law schools in New York City in 1934 were also Jewish.⁴⁶ According to a contemporary, "The night schools of the East Side are practically used by no other race. City College, New York University, and Columbia University are graduating Russian Jews in numbers rapidly increasing."⁴⁷ In the wake of this great educational impulse, a coterie of young East European and

⁴³*The Worker*, 3 August 1947; *Daily Worker*, 31 July 1947; Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 11, 73.

⁴⁴*The Worker*, 3 August 1947.

⁴⁵Dawidowicz, *The Jewish Presence*, 121-122; Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 25-31; Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 88; Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*, 89-105; Kessner, *The Golden Door*, 59-70, 120-126; Rischin, *The Promised City*, 71-75.

⁴⁶Sowell, *Ethnic America*, 91; Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 31-35; Dawidowicz, *The Jewish Presence*, 110.

⁴⁷Hutchins Hapgood, as quoted in Dawidowicz, *The Jewish Presence*, 109-110.

Russian Jewish writers, thinkers and editors, including Elliot Cohen, Felix Morrow, Sidney Hook, Joseph Freeman and Lionel Trilling, sprang into the public and literary limelight. Many immersed themselves in radical organizations and movements, including the Scottsboro campaign, reflecting in their leftist leanings and activities the influence and tenacity of the radical Jewish subculture.⁴⁸

Typically, then, many of the American-born Scottsboro Jews, or those who had immigrated as children, obtained university level educations, advanced into prestigious professions and moved into more middle-class economic situations. These advances did not lead them into bourgeois apathy, but rather propelled them into leadership positions in the radical left. Samuel Goldberg and Abraham Osheroff, for example, both went to public schools and colleges. Born in Poland and arriving in the United States at age 15, Goldberg graduated from City College of New York and then completed a diploma at a night law school. Shortly after, he joined the ILD as a volunteer attorney. Osheroff, the son of immigrant Jews from Lithuania and Belarus, also graduated from the City College of New York in 1936. ILD lawyers such as Joseph Brodsky, Elias Schwarzbart, Allan Taub and Irvin Klein all received law degrees from private universities. Many of these educated and newly middle-class Jews sought a challenging political outlet for their recently acquired skills and status. They found it in the ILD. The ILD was an organization which enabled the Scottsboro Jews to combine the legal expertise, education, and leadership skills of their current privileged status with the radical culture of their East European and Russian Jewish immigrant heritage.⁴⁹

⁴⁸The lives of those Jewish intellectuals who later became known as the “New York Intellectuals” are investigated in Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*; Alexander Bloom, *Prodigal Sons: The New York Intellectuals and Their World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

⁴⁹Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996; Abraham Osheroff, letters to author, 15 March 1996, 9 April 1996, 10 August 1996; *New York Times*, 19 November 1947. Also see chapter 1 of thesis.

While many of the Scottsboro Jews moved into middle-class professions and positions, they continued to identify with the class of their immigrant origins. Victor Rabinowitz recalled that many of the ILD's top leaders "were very, very close to the working class. Their parents were working class. They were brought up in working-class communities, and they thought of themselves as workers rather than as intellectuals."⁵⁰ Although firmly within the middle class, Samuel Neuburger was another ILD attorney who maintained close connections with the workers and working-class movements of his youth. As he saw it, "One could hardly be philosophically a Marxist, a Communist, and not be very closely allied with the working people."⁵¹

In effect, many of the Scottsboro Jews were suspended between two classes, two generations and two vastly different worlds. Joseph Freeman, an editor of the radical *New Masses*, described in his autobiography the conflicting pressures that he and other promising young Jews experienced. Entering Columbia University in the fall of 1916, Freeman recalls, "My friends and I were caught between two social classes -- the proletariat, with which we had grown up and with which we identified ourselves, and the bourgeoisie, whose culture we were absorbing at the university."⁵² The key to the persistent identification of the Scottsboro Jews with workers' movements and the left lies in their own working-class backgrounds and in the radical subculture, replete with its own value system, networks and institutions, that once flourished in the early twentieth century Jewish-American ghetto.

More than devotees to a fashionable rhetoric, the Scottsboro Jews sincerely believed in the ideas and goals that the ILD actively pursued.

⁵⁰Rabinowitz, interview.

⁵¹Neuburger, interview.

⁵²Joseph Freeman, *An American Testament: A Narrative of Rebels and Romantics* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1936), 119.

They lived and breathed a comprehensive radicalism, and they supported their beliefs with hard-hitting action. Those ILD activists who were lawyers and professionals could easily have earned larger salaries in the business sector, but instead they chose to put their talents at the disposal of organizations like the ILD. For Joseph Brodsky life "meant struggle in a good cause."⁵³ Elizabeth Gurley Flynn, a fiery Irish-American Communist, recalled at Brodsky's funeral, "Only workers, poor people were his clients. Never any landlords or employers."⁵⁴

The same could be said of Samuel Neuburger. He pointedly argued that he "couldn't be a lawyer unless first I was a human being . . . and in applying human values I can not under any circumstance use whatever little abilities I have to defend the rights of people who would deprive large sections of our population of the right to live, to be properly fed, hallowed and clothed."⁵⁵ Whether as workers or professionals, the radical Scottsboro Jews solidly supported the working-class in its bid for power, and in so doing broke with the all-American quest for material wealth and prestige. Like many of his ILD colleagues, David Levinson consequently earned the reputation of "a fighter for the rights of the underdog, frequently at his own expense and with no prospects of getting paid for his services."⁵⁶

Unlike those Jews in the NAACP who might have sought to facilitate their assimilation through work for African-American civil rights, the Scottsboro Jews never strove to be blended into the corrupt American melting pot. Writing for the *New Masses*, Mike Gold captured the spirit of young Jewish radicals of his day: "We are not satisfied. We

⁵³*Daily Worker*, 5 August 1947.

⁵⁴*Daily Worker*, 4 August 1947.

⁵⁵Neuburger, interview.

⁵⁶*New York Times*, 6 December 1964.

are not part of this American empire. We repudiate it . . . We revolt."⁵⁷ The privation of the Great Depression -- especially the stark disparity between rich and poor, black and white -- served only to redouble their commitment to radicalism. Samuel Neuburger recalled the special urgency that those bleak Depression days brought to his work. "Case after case presented itself," he explained, "in which it became quite evident that the roots of justice did not apply to blacks, did not apply to radicals, did not apply to minorities, and to that extent I felt compelled, to the best of my abilities, to participate."⁵⁸ As radicals struggling to overthrow a system that fostered inequality, the Scottsboro Jews strove for justice. Their efforts did not endear them to mainstream America and cannot be said to have facilitated their acculturation or assimilation into it.

IV

The Scottsboro Jews shared more than a common heritage of East European and Russian immigrant radicalism. They also shared similar attitudes toward their religion and Jewish culture. With but one exception, namely Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, the Scottsboro Jews were secular. This exemplified the distinct secularism of the broader radical Jewish subculture of which they were part. But the point must be made from the outset that for many of the I.L.D.'s most prominent leaders and activists in the Scottsboro campaign, there was no dramatic apostasy from Judaism or repudiation of its ways. Many of the Scottsboro Jews did not so much choose their non-religious orientation as continue in the secular traditions set by parents, grandparents and other relatives. As Ruth Goldberg succinctly put it: "I am Jewish, born to non-religious immigrant parents who were Socialists."⁵⁹

⁵⁷Mike Gold, "Let it Be Really New!" *New Masses* 1 (June 1926): 24.

⁵⁸Neuburger, interview.

⁵⁹Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 25 March 1996.

Thus, contrary to theories which stress the religious underpinnings of Jewish radicalism, the impact of Judaism on the political orientation of many of the Scottsboro Jews was at best indirect. Indeed, religious tenets hold little sway over individuals who have never been exposed to them. Siblings Victor Rabinowitz and Lucille Perlman, for example, were raised in an avowedly radical and secular home. "In all of my youth and up to the present," Victor Rabinowitz explained, "I've had no training in religion, no sympathy toward it and in fact a great deal of hostility to it."⁶⁰ Both Rabinowitz's father and grandfather felt the same way. In fact, his maternal grandfather wrote articles attacking religion for the anarchist Yiddish press. As youngsters, the Rabinowitz children were deliberately sent to school on sacred Jewish holidays. As principled, secular Jews, their parents believed it would have been hypocritical to have done otherwise.⁶¹ Victor Rabinowitz, Lucille Perlman, Sasha Small, Joseph Brodsky, Samuel Neuburger, and Ruth Goldberg among others all continued in long-standing family traditions of secular Jewish radicalism. Their radicalism did not -- in fact could not -- spring out of the tenets of Jewish religious doctrine.

A minority of the Scottsboro Jews did, however, come from religious families, and to varying degrees did break with the religious traditions of their parents. Although it is difficult to ascertain the various factors that led to their secularization, it can be said that the powerful sway of the radical and secularist Jewish subculture certainly played its part. Radical ideas and movements that pervaded Jewish ghettos provided young Jews searching for a creed with political alternatives not readily available to most other Americans. One of six children born into an

⁶⁰Rabinowitz, interview.

⁶¹Rabinowitz, interview; Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996. Such stories are not uncommon among Jewish radicals. See Neil M. Cowan and Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1989), 247.

Orthodox Jewish family, Samuel Goldberg, an ILD attorney who raised funds for the Scottsboro campaign, was the only one of his siblings to "give up the orthodoxy." Goldberg was thirteen at the time, a *bar mitzvah*, who turned to radicalism having been "looking for something to believe in, influenced by a rapidly radicalizing group of young New York City intellectuals, [and] hoping that the new Russian revolution would bring a shining model to the world."⁶²

A few Scottsboro Jews were raised in families that maintained a modicum of religious practice while not strictly holding to the tenets of Orthodox Judaism. Abraham Osheroff's mother, for example, did not go to synagogue, but she kept a traditional kosher home and insisted that her son be "*bar-mitzved*." In contrast, Osheroff's father, a house painter and dedicated union man, was an atheist. On *Yom Kippur*, a solemn day of fasting for religious Jews, the Osheroffs would draw the shades and secretly eat.⁶³ The mother of Samuel Perlman, another ILD lawyer, also maintained a kosher kitchen and occasionally attended religious services. Perlman's father, however, was generally known to be a non-believer. The impact of religious exposure on the radicalism of these Scottsboro Jews is very difficult to assess. What can be said is that these Jews were a minority among the Scottsboro Jews that I studied. None of them ascribed their radicalism to religious practices, beliefs, tenets or doctrines.⁶⁴

Rabbi Goldstein was the only Scottsboro Jew institutionally linked to religious Judaism, and even he was rumored to be a closet atheist. In the course of Rabbi Goldstein's tenure at the Reform Temple, Beth-Or, in Montgomery, he delivered several speeches that led many in his congregation to believe that he was a religious heretic. According to Charles Moritz, one Beth-Or member, Rabbi Goldstein stressed five main

⁶²Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996.

⁶³Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 10 August 1996.

⁶⁴Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 3 October 1996.

points in an autobiographical speech to his congregation on "What I Believe." In the speech, Rabbi Goldstein allegedly stated that:

1. I do not believe in God, but about God.
2. I do not believe in Immortality.
3. I do not believe in Prayer.
4. I do not believe in Traditions of Jews.
5. I am a socialist, and if that doesn't satisfy me, I will follow the communist."⁶⁵

For Moritz and others in the community, Rabbi Goldstein "broke down the fundamentals of Judaism," and showed that he was "a radical, aye a red."⁶⁶ Many wanted to dismiss him because of his uncommon religious beliefs. But according to Rabbi Goldstein, those who wanted to relieve him of his duties did so because he publicly supported the Scottsboro campaign. In effect they used his alleged atheism to rationalize their cowardly decision to force him to resign.

While Rabbi Goldstein admitted that his "ideas on God, prayer and immortality were not orthodox,"⁶⁷ he convincingly argued that "the thing was not very serious until they began to understand my economic and social viewpoints based upon whatever religion I possess."⁶⁸ The last several words in Rabbi Goldstein's quote are critical, for they reveal the underlying belief that his political radicalism was somehow based on religion -- or as he put it, "whatever religion I possess." Rabbi Goldstein was the only Scottsboro Jew who directly linked his support for the ILD's Scottsboro campaign to religious faith based on the Judaic tradition. Yet, while unique as a religious Jew, Rabbi Goldstein was not alone in relating his radicalism to Jewish cultural values.

Although predominantly secular, many of the Scottsboro Jews have linked their concern for social justice to Old World traditions rooted in

⁶⁵Charles F. Moritz, letter to Rabbi Louis Wolsey, 18 April 1933, CCAR Collection.

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Rabbi Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 18 April 1933, CCAR Collection.

⁶⁸Rabbi Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward L. Israel, 28 April 1933, CCAR Collection.

their Jewish history and culture. "Whatever its debt to religion (and scriptural exhortations)," wrote Lucille Perlman, "this attitude was cultural -- bred in the bones, as it were."⁶⁹ Not all of the Scottsboro Jews thought that their radicalism stemmed from anything particularly Jewish. But those who did often likened it to the Hebrew concepts of *zedakeh* and *tikkun olam* -- or "charity" and "repairing of the world," respectively. According to many Jewish radicals, these were the tried-and-true principles of the Jewish experience, where survival often depended on group reliance. Hence, Ruth Goldberg explained that she and her husband "both felt that a life lived on a solely personal level was useless, boring, a repudiation of our heritage. Charity, concern for the poor, were part of my parent's life, and they became part of mine and my two sisters."⁷⁰ This reveals the cultural continuity expressed through the radicalism of some of the Scottsboro Jews.

It is not surprising, then, that many of the Scottsboro activists expressed their Jewishness by pursuing ideals they believed were part of a Jewish inheritance fastidiously passed down through the generations. They distinguished between religious Jews, which they surely were not, and good Jews, which they tried to be. "When the Scottsboro boys [*sic*] case came up -- you heard about that? -- I went around from door to door, ringing doorbells collecting money for the defense," Max Hirsch recalled. "That was the kind of Jewishness that I wanted. I wanted to be a Jew -- feeling the sympathy, the responsibility for goodness, the desire to do goodness. And I couldn't get that in a *yeshiva* [Jewish religious school]."⁷¹ Similarly, although Samuel Goldberg stopped practising his religion, he

⁶⁹Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996. Percy Cohen found remarkably similar trends in his own study. "The principal core tenet with a positive value mentioned by respondents of both types," he writes, "is a 'strong sense of justice.'" See Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews*, 106-7.

⁷⁰Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 25 March 1996; Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996.

⁷¹Cowan and Cowan, *Our Parents' Lives*, 282.

"brought his very Jewish concern for justice and equity into the radical movement."⁷²

Significantly, the Scottsboro activists further believed that they could not limit their efforts to helping co-ethnics alone. Contrary to revisionist historiography that underscores the narrow sectarian motives for Jewish activism, the Scottsboro Jews repudiated all forms of sectarianism. By reinterpreting traditional Jewish values in terms of a radical, universalist culture, they posited that *zedakeh* was a duty and right of all persons, regardless of color, culture or religion. "I think that what distinguishes us from many others," reflected Victor Rabinowitz, "is that this humanity and justice, which we think is due to our fellow creatures, is due to all of them and not merely to a selected group whom we find sympathetic, and whom we like, and who talk the same language, or practice the same religion, or have the same skin color."⁷³

V

I have so far focused my attention solely on Jewish participants who were both radical and East European. Yet, other powerful Jewish figures appear throughout the story of the Scottsboro movement. How do these individuals relate to this study of Jewish radicalism, and to the massive effort to save the Scottsboro Boys?

In the summer of 1935, Marge Gelders encountered Manhattan's Lower East Side for the first time. Born and bred in Alabama, the product of an upper-middle-class German Jewish community, she had little idea of what East European Jewish ghettos had to offer. "The colors, the smells, the language, the whole new world," she writes, "were eye-opening."⁷⁴ While her father, Joseph Gelders, went to lectures at the Workers' School,

⁷²Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 25 March 1996.

⁷³Rabinowitz, interview.

⁷⁴Marge Frantz, "Red Diaper Baby," working paper, University of California, Santa Cruz, 1995.

Marge crisscrossed the streets of the Lower East Side. Together they attended countless meetings and demonstrations, enjoying left-wing theater productions and Soviet films. It was in this period that she "began to absorb the culture and politics of the East European Jews."⁷⁵ Soon after, and in a thick Southern accent that entertained the crowds, she delivered her first soapbox speech -- an explication of the Scottsboro trials.⁷⁶

German Jews were brought into the Scottsboro campaign through two main avenues. Some, like Marge Gelders, were enticed by the radical Jewish subculture of the East Europeans. Others were brought in through social contacts with radicals, both Jews and non-Jews. Carol King, for instance, was first introduced to Joseph Brodsky and his colleagues at the Civic Club on Manhattan's West 12th Street, a well-known meeting place for left-thinking professionals. Quickly dubbed the "little rich girl," King became Brodsky's devoted friend and law partner. When Scottsboro broke out, Brodsky turned to King for help and she responded with gusto. It was at King's behest that Walter Pollak, a family friend, and quite possibly Osmond Fraenkel, another family friend, were invited to argue the case before the Supreme Court.⁷⁷ Samuel Leibowitz is the one major exception to these generalizations, being of East European origin but not radical. He was brought in to lead the defense by ILD national secretary William Patterson.

The German Scottsboro Jews appear regularly enough in the campaign's narrative to warrant further investigation. The experience of the German Jews in America was vastly different to that of the East European Jews. Arriving generally between 1815 and 1875, German Jewish immigrants preceded and were far less numerous than their East

⁷⁵Ibid, 7-8.

⁷⁶Ibid, 8.

⁷⁷Craig Thompson, "The Communist's Dearest Friend," *Saturday Evening Post*, 17 February 1951, 30, 91-3; Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 121-122; Fraenkel, interview.

European counterparts. Their migration patterns usually followed personal inclination and individualized distress rather than fluctuations in anti-Semitism, political repression and poverty. German Jews tended to settle in major metropolises, and by the time of the East European Jewish waves of immigration, generally lived in distinctly middle and upper-class neighborhoods.⁷⁸ They are often described as an acculturated elite, who "exchanged orthodoxy for bourgeois Americanism."⁷⁹ As one East European activist remembered, "the vast majority of German Jews came earlier, were rich, and already quite assimilated."⁸⁰ The early relationship between German and East European Jews in the United States was strained. While many German Jews criticized the embarrassing folkways of their East European counterparts -- coining the epithet "kike" -- East Europeans generally responded by tagging the German Jews as paternalistic snobs. While East European Jews tended to be struggling sweatshop workers, German Jews tended to be middle and upper-class professionals, industrialists and owners of sweatshops.⁸¹

Carol King and Osmond Fraenkel were prominent German Jews associated with the Scottsboro trials. Their experiences clearly demonstrate the substantial differences that existed between German and East European activists. Both were born in New York City to wealthy families and did not face the difficulties associated with immigrant adjustment. Fraenkel's mother, born in Baltimore, came from a family of German Jews that had immigrated to the United States before the Civil War. As an educated immigrant from Germany, Fraenkel's father worked

⁷⁸Weinryb, "Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to America," 4-5, 627; Rischin, *The Promised City*, 53; Leibman, *Jews and the Left*, 148-150.

⁷⁹Steven M. Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson: The German-Jewish Community of Washington Heights, 1933 -1983* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 20.

⁸⁰Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996.

⁸¹Weinryb, "Jewish Immigration and Accommodation to America," 17; Rischin, *The Promised City*, 95-98; Dawidowicz, *The Jewish Presence*, 127; Sanford Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me a Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy* (New York: Knopf, 1989), 16-17; Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996; Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996.

as a mining engineer. King's father was raised on a farm in Pennsylvania by immigrant parents, attended Yale University, and eventually practiced corporate law for large corporations and companies like Standard Oil. King's mother came from a prominent, mid-West mercantile family. As the children of successful professionals and merchants, King and Fraenkel's lives were marked by affluence. King's childhood included summer holidays spent in the family's second estate in Maine. Fraenkel's family made frequent trips to Europe, where his grandmother took "the cure at Carlsbad." Likewise, both King and Fraenkel attended the finest schools and private universities, without the financial concerns that often characterized the educational pursuits of their East European counterparts. As a young, married student completing her law degree at New York University, King received a comfortable home in Chelsea and a permanent housekeeper as gifts from her mother.⁸²

The commitment of German Jews to the Scottsboro campaign and other left-wing causes often required a conscientious shift from the established political orientation of their families. Joseph Gelders inspired considerable familial fury when he became active in radical causes. As his daughter remembers, "[mother] had married this young Jewish fraternity boy from an affluent family with every expectation of continuing her comfortable middle-class life."⁸³ With Gelders' political conversion to radicalism, both his and his wife's families unsuccessfully urged his wife to divorce him.⁸⁴ Also born into an "eminently respectable, middle class, bourgeois family," King described herself as "the only black sheep."⁸⁵

Therefore, unlike the East European activists who lived and breathed an atmosphere of political radicalism, the German Jews generally

⁸²Fraenkel, interview, 1-2, 4, 10, 17, 25; Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 11-13; *New York Times*, 23 January 1952.

⁸³Frantz, "Red Diaper Baby," 4.

⁸⁴Ibid.

⁸⁵Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 262.

encountered radicalism outside their family circles. Both King and Fraenkel were introduced to socialism and the labor movement while at university, with Fraenkel joining the Socialist Party and campaigning for Eugene Debs, and King volunteering at the Local 25 of the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union.⁸⁶ Indeed, King's activism and lifelong devotion to immigration law sharply diverged from the conservatism of her parents. According to King's biographer, King reasoned that if her father could use the law to "protect the rich . . . she could use it to safeguard the rights of the poor."⁸⁷ As a bourgeois advocate of socialism, Osmond Fraenkel similarly knew that a contradictory relationship existed between his family's affluence and his newfound socialist beliefs. "[T]he two were completely inconsistent," he explained, "my family was a capitalist family . . . [and] I took that all for granted."⁸⁸

Although considerably more left-wing than their parents, the German Scottsboro Jews were more reluctant than the East Europeans to attach themselves to organizations or embroil themselves within the internecine ideological entanglements so common to radical politics of the time. Neither King nor Fraenkel limited their legal efforts to Communist Party matters or institutionalized radical work.⁸⁹ Similarly Walter Pollak balanced his civil rights work with his involvement in financial and business law.⁹⁰ It seems that the German Jewish activists followed a liberal pragmatism patterned on the bourgeois humanism and individualism of their class. German Jews would not easily bow to the leadership of

⁸⁶Ibid., 13; Fraenkel, interview, 25.

⁸⁷Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 14.

⁸⁸Fraenkel, interview, 34.

⁸⁹Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 73, 159, 170; Ann Fagan Ginger, "Workers' Self-Defense in the Courts," *Science and Society* 47, no.3 (1983): 262, 268; *New York Times*, 23 January 1952; *Daily Worker*, 14 February 1952; Fraenkel, interview, 32, 35.

⁹⁰Carl Stern, "Draft of Memorial for Bar Association," CWK Collection.

recently-arrived, working-class East European and Russian Jews, nor stoop as low as the vulgar fray of radical political squabbles.

Thus, although a lifelong devotee to radical causes and the legal representative of many Communists, King never herself joined the Communist Party. She reputedly cared little for the radical ideologies of her clients, but was "passionately interested in their rights to struggle for their ideas."⁹¹ Likewise, while Fraenkel joined the American Labor Party in its early years, he dropped out "because it seemed to be too much under Communist domination."⁹² After leaving the American Labor Party, Fraenkel never again enrolled in a political party. "Since then . . .," Fraenkel later explained, "I've taken no part whatever in any political activities."⁹³ Fraenkel did, however, become a dedicated member of the American Civil Liberties Union for the greater part of his legal career, acting as both counsel and national board member.⁹⁴ Furthermore, although the German Jews were less inclined to join the ranks of the Communist Party, it cannot be inferred that they were any less actively committed to the Scottsboro movement or other liberal issues.

As one of the few German Jews involved in the Scottsboro movement who did join the Communist Party, Joseph Gelders proves a potent exception to most of this analysis. Although raised in the comfort of a middle-class home, Gelders was willing to sacrifice his financial security and reputation for his political beliefs. When he was brutally beaten in 1937 for his leftist activities, a concerned New York University professor reminded Alabama's Governor, Bibb Graves, that here was a man who "has given up a comfortable life in a university to be a friend

⁹¹Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 159.

⁹²Fraenkel, interview, 35.

⁹³Ibid.

⁹⁴Ibid., 54.

and helper of people who have no friends and help."⁹⁵ Gelders wholeheartedly integrated himself within the left, and was always ready to assist whenever his skills or expertise were needed.

At a time when keeping company with Communists frequently tarnished one's reputation, all of the non-radical Scottsboro Jews fearlessly cooperated with their radical counterparts. As Fraenkel grew older, he drifted away from the active politics of his more idealistic youth, and moved into suburbia, fatherhood and more mainstream civil rights work. Nevertheless, he refused to allow the hysterical label of "Communist" to hinder his work with others who shared similar goals. "I didn't see any reason why we could not get along with Communists," he explained, "as long as they were for civil liberties."⁹⁶ Time and again, the German Scottsboro Jews withstood public disapproval for their political tolerance. In a caustic article written one year before King's death, Craig Thompson of the *Saturday Evening Post* bitterly referred to the Scottsboro defense and campaign as a "Brodsky-King manipulation," and maliciously portrayed King's lifelong devotion to immigration law as the sinister effort to establish a Communist legal machine and "to keep real or would-be subversives out of jail and busy at their prescribed mischief."⁹⁷

Like their East European counterparts, the German Jewish activists were uniformly secular. Yet, in many cases their separation from religion and its cultural derivatives proved more stark and less politically motivated than that of the East European radicals. Their secularism stemmed from a West European Jewish tendency towards assimilation dating back to the enlightenment of the eighteenth century. "For the German Jews," historian Steven Lowenstein has argued, "unlike the eastern European Jews, there was one main scale of Jewishness and that

⁹⁵Richar T. Cox, letter to Governor Graves, 15 October 1936, BG Papers.

⁹⁶Fraenkel, interview, 118.

⁹⁷Thompson, "The Communist's Dearest Friend," 30, 91.

was religion."⁹⁸ This held for the German Scottsboro Jews. In some ways, their secularization represented a loss of part of their Jewish cultural identity. Osmond Fraenkel readily acknowledged that "I am very little conscious of my being a Jew, although there were occasions when it was made conscious for me."⁹⁹ He referred to his family as "heathens," remarking that "none of them ever attended any religious observance of any kind whatever." When Fraenkel was asked what role organized religion had played in his life, he responded without hesitation, "none whatever."¹⁰⁰ Carol King, who also came from a secular, assimilated family, eventually married a non-Jewish Harvard man and celebrated such holidays as Christmas. King was so far removed from Jewish traditions and culture that in a letter to a close companion she described her conscience as that "curious relic of Christianity in my pagan life."¹⁰¹ Neither was religion a prominent aspect of Joseph Gelders' or Walter Pollak's upbringing. Raised in a family that socialized in Jewish country clubs, not synagogues, Gelders was an atheist, "a product of the science vs. religion ideology of the early twentieth century."¹⁰² Indeed, by Walter Pollak's generation, Jewishness in any religious sense had quite simply "dropped away."¹⁰³

Like the East European Jewish radicals, the German Scottsboro Jews, and even Leibowitz, were noticeably concerned with values such as justice and equity. While Gelders expressed a "passion for social and racial justice," Pollak radiated "generous enthusiasm for justice."¹⁰⁴ Unlike the East European Jewish radicals, however, the German Jews rarely seemed

⁹⁸Lowenstein, *Frankfurt on the Hudson*, 35.

⁹⁹Fraenkel, interview, 26.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 145, 156, 162.

¹⁰²Marge Frantz, letter to author, 11 September 1995.

¹⁰³Louis H. Pollak, letter to author, 4 October 1995.

¹⁰⁴Frantz, "Red Diaper Baby," 15; Zechariah Chafee, Jr., "Walter Heilprin Pollak," *Nation* 151, no. 15 (1940): 318-319.

to relate these concepts to specific Jewish traditions, culture or history. In fact, when the German Jews of Scottsboro did identify with their Jewishness, they did so in a variety of complicated if not contradictory ways. More Americanized than the East European activists, they rarely mentioned cultural connections to their Jewish heritage, and few seem to have noticed, much less celebrated, their Jewishness. Consider Osmond Fraenkel, for instance, a man who often "forgot" that he was a Jew. Raised without "any knowledge of Jewish history whatever," he felt as little identification with Jews "as anybody you could think of."¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, Fraenkel selectively constructed his Jewish consciousness, idiosyncratically indulging in Jewishness when it pleased him. While Jewish criminality failed to disturb him, for instance, he did acknowledge that he felt a certain "pride in the achievements of many important Jews, and particularly the achievements of Israel in the past twenty-five years."¹⁰⁶

Carol King, on the other hand, seemed to express a type of revulsion for her Jewishness, referring in a letter to the "horrid Semitic-looking" pictures of her published in the press. King's relationship to her Jewishness, even if it sometimes took a negative slant, was not without its own ambiguities. As a free spirit who evaluated individuals in terms of their intellect and integrity, King's inner circle of friends was largely comprised of Jewish intellectuals and professionals. Thus, having been raised within more assimilated environments than their East European counterparts, the German Scottsboro Jews did not perceive their liberalism or radicalism in terms of anything particularly Jewish.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Fraenkel, interview, 26.

¹⁰⁶Ibid.

¹⁰⁷King, letter to Clara Binswanger, as quoted in Ginger, *Carol Weiss King*, 273; Justine Wise Polier, Interview by Ann Fagan Ginger, 22 June 1982, CWK Collection.

VI

Clearly, then, many of the Jewish activists of the Scottsboro campaign, whether of German or East European extraction, shared several traits. They were predominantly Northerners, secular, and passionately devoted to justice. It is when confronting their dissimilarities, however, that a correlation between their respective social and historical environments, and the way they chose to act out their concern for civil rights and other radical causes, becomes apparent. On the one hand, East European Jews -- largely the products of working-class, immigrant families and Jewish ghettos -- were more likely than their German counterparts to identify with working-class struggles and be ideologically aligned to organized radical parties. German Jews, on the other hand, tended to express their left-wing proclivities in terms of classic liberal humanism. As Osmond Fraenkel explained, "the Jew must maintain the flame of reason."¹⁰⁸ The offspring of middle-to-upper class families, often more assimilated and conservative, German Jews were less likely to be doctrinaire Marxists, while considerably more likely to divide their energies between both radical and mainstream interests. Though theoretically less radical, the German Scottsboro Jews were no less enthusiastic participants in the campaign than their East European and Russian colleagues.

While this observation might shed light on the two main forms of activism that characterize Jewish participation in the Scottsboro movement, it does not explain why the Scottsboro Jews became active in radical organizations or how they came to dominate the ILD. Yet, some tentative conclusions can now be drawn. Those radical Scottsboro Jews coming from East European and Russian immigrant traditions generally became involved in the ILD because they had been nurtured in radicalism

¹⁰⁸Osmond K. Fraenkel, "For Free Speech," *The Menorah Journal* (spring 1936): 100.

from youth, identified with working-class movements and ideologies, and were rooted in a pervasive radical Jewish subculture. The ILD was especially appealing to middle-class Jews, often the children of immigrant working-class radicals, who continued to identify with the radical Jewish subculture. In effect the ILD enabled them to put their bourgeois professional skills and training to work while remaining true to their radical political sympathies and social origins. In this way the ILD successfully harnessed the energies of the next generation of radical Jews.

Those Scottsboro Jews who came from German backgrounds generally became involved in the ILD and the Scottsboro campaign because of the infectious nature of the radical East European Jewish subculture and friendship networks that traversed the early German-East European divide. Exceptions to such generalizations, as epitomized by Joseph Gelders' life, exist. Nevertheless, all of the Jewish activists studied here expressed their behavior in terms of a passion for justice and equality. Furthermore, all of these Jewish participants translated their beliefs into action, albeit in distinct manners reflecting an ideological diversity, and subsequently joined the ILD's Scottsboro campaign.

Let us now briefly return to those theories of Jewish radicalism canvassed earlier in the chapter. Explanations that stress the role of religion and religious values in the formation of Jewish radicalism cannot adequately explain the radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews, who were, barring Rabbi Benjamin Goldstein, unanimously secular. Yet, while religious tenets generally played no significant part in the radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews, cultural values bred of the Jewish experience did. Many of the radical East European and Russian Scottsboro Jews located their ideological sympathies within Jewish culture and history, and believed that their struggle for social justice, for the Scottsboro youths, reflected traditional Jewish values. Several expressed their radicalism in terms of

the Judaic concepts of *zedakeh* and *tikkun olam*; others saw it as an extension of a universal humanism.

Thus we can now say that as expressions of broad historical forces -- state persecution in Russia and Eastern Europe, immigration, industrialization, class oppression and the formation of a radical Jewish subculture that to some degree embraced and refashioned traditional group values -- internal cultural factors did play an important role in predisposing the majority of the Scottsboro Jews to radicalism. As such the lives of these activists shared many of the features outlined in the radical subculture thesis proffered by Arthur Liebman. Nonetheless, the reflections of the Scottsboro Jews do echo some of the insights of those historians who stress religio-cultural compulsions in Judaism.

Liebman's structural explanation, however, tells only part of the story. The radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews was ultimately the product of their own individual preferences. In their words, many joined the radical left and the Scottsboro campaign because they sought social justice and truly believed in a socialist ideology that denounced racism as a root evil of the capitalist system. While historical forces ultimately predisposed the Scottsboro Jews to radicalism, it was through their personal choices that these structural factors were expressed. Their lives exemplify the complex interplay between structure and agency, a conjunction beautifully embedded in the words of ILD activist Victor Rabinowitz: "I joined radical organizations because that was the way that I felt, and when I got there I found most of them were Jewish."¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹Rabinowitz, interview.

Chapter 4

External Sources of Jewish Radicalism: A Case Study of the Scottsboro Jews

Scholars who emphasize the role of the external environment in explanation of Jewish radicalism rarely allow for the influence of intrinsic religio-cultural values. Instead of focusing on the apparent continuity in Jewish radicalism, they stress the abrupt break that radicalism spells for traditional Jewish history. Allen Guttman, for example, concludes that a negative correlation exists between Judaism and political radicalism. He contends that "Jews who have rejected the political and economic status quo have also rejected Torah and Talmud. Their radicalism has meant the abandonment rather than the intensification of their faith in Judaism."¹ Similarly, in a recent monograph by Naomi Shepherd, the political radicalism of the Jewish women she investigated "went together with a rejection of orthodox Jewish values."² Whether written almost half a century ago or more recently, studies that emphasize external pressures generally describe their subjects as rebelling against "the ethnic culture and social organization of their parents," or at the very least of "putting it behind them."³ Implicit in most of these theories, then, is the

¹Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America*, 136.

²Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies*, 15.

³Cohen, *Jewish Radicals and Radical Jews*, 90; Bloom, *Prodigal Sons*, 51.

assumption that the Jewish radical has undergone a process of metamorphosis -- one from traditional Jew to cosmopolitan radical.

Such a transformation, of course, did not happen with the majority of the Scottsboro Jews. As we have seen in the preceding chapter, a remarkable historical continuity can be traced in the radicalism of these ILD activists. Raised in the secular tradition of political radicalism, and influenced by a radical subculture that pervaded Jewish working-class neighborhoods and life in the early twentieth century, many of the Scottsboro Jews became radicals, and hence continued in a tradition of Jewish radicalism born in the lands and misery of Eastern Europe and Russia. These radicals assuredly did not break with the culture or social organization of their parents; neither did they put it behind them.

Still, the fact that radicalism was homespun for many of the Scottsboro Jews does not in itself rule out the possible contribution of external factors to the making of Jewish-American radicalism. Many historians of Jewish radicalism believe that the paramount explanation for radical tendencies among Jews is to be found in the social predicament of Jews living in largely Gentile societies. They argue that anti-Semitism, an obvious external factor that separates Jews from non-Jews, is the most significant force that has driven Jews to radicalism. Anti-Semitism is said to sensitize Jews to injustice and discrimination through the suffering inflicted upon them.⁴ As one proponent of such arguments, Daniel Aaron, contends, "[the Jew's] commitment to Communism or socialism is a measure of democratic failure, the response to a cruel exclusiveness."⁵

⁴Among studies using concepts such as anti-Semitism, marginality and alienation are Aaron, "Some Reflections on Communism and the Jewish Writer," 253-269; Daniel Bell, "A Parable of Alienation," *Jewish Frontier* (November 1946): 12-19; Fuchs, "Sources of Jewish Internationalism," 595-613; Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*; Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America*, especially chapter 4; Charles Liebman, *The Ambivalent American Jew: Politics, Religion and Family in American Jewish Life* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1973), 153-159; Michels, *Political Parties*, 272-274.

⁵Aaron, "Some Reflections on Communism and the Jewish Writer," 258.

This sensitivity translates into a strong desire to effect positive change in society so that Jews will be recognized and treated equitably. Thus, it is the burning desire for equality and recognition, bred of the injustices of anti-Semitism, that ultimately radicalizes Jews. The left appeals to these Jews because it proffers them a militant political program against minority discrimination, and hence provides them with a base from which they can wage their principally sectarian wars against anti-Semitism.⁶

There are many variations of the anti-Semitism hypothesis. Borrowing from theories of Thorstein Veblen, Allen Guttman describes the Jewish radical as one afflicted by a twofold alienation -- from both Judaism and the Gentile world at large. He argues that this marginality is unsettling, and hence the Jew dreams of escaping his or her inauspicious position within society. "Utopia is the goal of that escape," he concludes. "Political and social revolution is the means."⁷ Scholars who have used similar alienation or escapist theories to explain Jewish radicalism include Isaac Deutscher, Robert Michels and Daniel Bell. Some of them saw radicalism as an empowering process that enabled Jews to transcend their ethnicity and denigrated status -- or in less flattering terms, to escape their Jewishness -- by becoming cosmopolitan citizens of the world.⁸

Other historians have argued that anti-Semitism drove Jews to radicalism because it gave them an opportunity to tear apart a society that had rejected and humiliated them -- in essence, a chance to "screw the goyim."⁹ As Jewish historian Lucy Dawidowicz concludes, "To some Jews who had been exposed to anti-Semitism, who felt themselves isolated and excluded from a society they had wanted desperately to be part of,

⁶Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, 11-12.

⁷Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America*, 135-137.

⁸Isaac Deutscher, *The Non-Jewish Jew and Other Essays*, ed. Tamara Deutscher (London: Oxford University Press, 1968); Bell, "A Parable of Alienation," 12-19; Michels, *Political Parties*, 247-8.

⁹Rothman and Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism*, 121. "Goy" derives from the Hebrew word meaning "nation." In twentieth century usage, however, a "goy" refers somewhat derogatively to a non-Jew.

becoming a Communist was a way of revenging oneself on that exclusionary society, an expression of one's wish to violate it and destroy it."¹⁰ All varieties of the anti-Semitism hypothesis are fundamentally based on psychological speculations and as such are extremely difficult to substantiate, but the radicalism-as-revenge hypothesis is particularly so. Dawidowicz does not substantiate her hypothesis with credible examples of radical Jews who said or showed that they wished to take revenge on an inhospitable society. Furthermore, the premise of this argument, that leftist radicalism is a destructive, anti-social force, reveals more about the historian's ideological commitments than about her subjects'.

Psychoanalysts Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter largely share Dawidowicz's hypothesis. They use the Jewish anecdote of little Moritz and his mother to exemplify what they see as typical of a Jewish frustration and anger at being rejected by the Christian world. "Little Moritz sees an historical film showing the early persecutions of the Christians. During a Roman circus scene in which many Christians are thrown to the lions, Moritz breaks out in sobs and says to his mother: 'Look at that poor little lion there, it has not got any Goy to eat!'"¹¹ Such anecdotes, however, are no substitute for a historical study of the world view of real-life radicals. They are taken out of context and may or may not be representative of the feelings of large numbers of Jews, much less specifically of early twentieth-century Jewish-American radicals. In an attempt to explain why some Jews have become radical while the majority

¹⁰Lucy Dawidowicz, review of *The Social Basis of American Communism*, by Nathan Glazer and *Writers on the Left: Episodes in American Literary Communism*, by Daniel Aaron, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 53 (December 1963): 195.

¹¹Rothman and Lichter, *Roots of Radicalism*, 122. Among Rothman and Lichter's many pearls of wisdom regarding why Jews turned to radicalism is the following gem. "On a deeper level, many Jewish radicals from 'nice' families, who had always had doubts about their masculinity and their sexuality, may have felt that they could finally express both masculine aggression and sexuality freely because they were part of a powerful 'revolutionary' group. More than that, they could recapture the polymorphous perversity of childhood. Their mothers would want them because, unlike their fathers, they were truly potent. At the same time, their masculine potency would protect them from being engulfed by their mothers. Finally, because time does not exist in the unconscious, they could imagine that their 'Garden of Eden' would last forever." *Roots of Radicalism*, 137.

have not, psychoanalytic analyses turn to stories of the psycho-social development of these ethnic deviants. Radical Jews are classified as carriers of a pathological abnormality that finds expression in political radicalism. Their successfully adjusted ethnic counterparts, it would seem, are better equipped to deal with the exigencies of being Jewish in a Gentile world and have no need for such extreme respites as radical politics.

Psychoanalytic speculations aside, all of the anti-Semitism hypotheses share the common conviction that Jewish radicalism is predominantly a response to the external pressures of anti-Semitism. However, by focussing on an experience common to all American Jews, most of whom did not turn to radicalism, such accounts only beg the question of why it was that only a few responded to anti-Semitism with radicalism, while the majority did not.

The one as yet unmentioned variety of the anti-Semitism hypothesis that attempts to account for this apparent discrepancy is the status-incongruity theory. It claims that not all Jews have equally suffered from anti-Semitism. It was the upwardly-mobile Jews who encountered the most insidious strain of anti-Semitism as they moved into high paying jobs and professions. This variety of anti-Semitism struck middle and upper-class Jews most because an established American elite inhibited the social integration of Jews into the upper echelons of society in an effort to secure its exclusivity. Jewish professionals were consequently left to endure a traumatic status disequilibrium, where their high economic status was not matched with an equally high social status, and hence they suffered more from anti-Semitism than their working-class counterparts. It follows that those most in status disequilibrium -- affluent, educated and professional Jews -- would be most favorably disposed to the left. The

radical platform of the left became their only hope for instituting broad systemic change and thereby facilitating their own social integration.¹²

In this chapter, I will explore the explanatory value of these anti-Semitism hypotheses. I will argue that anti-Semitism was emphatically not the ultimate factor that propelled the Scottsboro Jews to radicalism. While building on arguments presented in the preceding chapter, I will show that American Jews did not need to turn to political radicalism to challenge anti-Semitism. They had many less hazardous alternatives open to them to achieve the same purposes. Moreover, the relatively low level and latent nature of anti-Semitism in the American North did not inspire the Scottsboro Jews to devote their lives to an all-out war against it. In fact, many Jewish contemporaries argued that Jewish radicals were inadvertently encouraging anti-Semitism by reinforcing negative stereotypes that portrayed Jews as Bolshevik conspirators.

Nonetheless, this chapter will show that while anti-Semitism on its own did not significantly drive the Scottsboro Jews to radicalism, it did shape the quality and character of their radicalism. Experiences with anti-Semitism sensitized them to their own bitter racial oppression. When this special "race" consciousness combined with the Communist Party's active platform for African-American rights, Jews became among the most ardent advocates of black causes. Yet, it should be emphasized that the radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews preceded their gravitation toward black causes. In fact, it was largely the anti-racist platform of the left that drove the Scottsboro Jews to expose the glaring abuses of white supremacist America and to sympathize with the plight of America's black population. Only as radical Jews with a prescribed leftist mission did the Scottsboro

¹²Michels, *Political Parties*, 274; Edward O. Laumann and David R. Segal, "Status Inconsistency and Ethnoreligious Group Membership as Determinants of Social Participation and Political Attitudes," *American Journal of Sociology* 77, no.1 (1971): 36-61; Marvin E. Olsen and Judy C. Tully, "Socioeconomic-Ethnic Status Inconsistency and Preference for Political Change," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 5 (1972): 560-574; Liebman, *Jews and the Left*, 12-20.

Jews become passionate activists for African-American civil rights. As committed radicals, then, they chose to fight for society's weak and underprivileged. As particularly Jewish radicals, many came to feel a special bond with African-Americans whom they saw as partners in the struggle against racism and bigotry.

II

The political and social environment of early twentieth century America has far too often been described as an anti-Semitic nightmare for those Jews unfortunate enough to have lived through it.¹³ Jewish historian Arthur Hertzberg, perhaps with a touch of post-Holocaust hindsight, incorrectly argues that "Before the onset of the Second World War, almost no [American] Jew could make a free, personal decision about his education and career. At every turn, the fact of his Jewishness meant that many, if not most, options were simply not available to him. There was a fence around Jews."¹⁴ There is no doubt that direct attacks on American Jews increased in the early years of the twentieth century. Prominent figures like Tom Watson, Henry Ford and Father Charles Coughlin successfully spread their anti-Semitic gospel to large portions of the American public even while popular nativist movements made Jews one of their many favored targets. Jews also faced exclusionary policies in hotels, universities, law firms and other public spaces. These stories, of course, are not new to historians.¹⁵

¹³An exaggeration of anti-Semitism in the American context, or its simplification through a one-sided depiction that concentrates on prominent anti-Semites but not on Jewish responses to anti-Semitism, pervades literature on Jewish radicalism and liberalism. For example, see Aaron, "Some Reflections on Communism and the Jewish Writer," 253-269; Fuchs, "Sources of Jewish Internationalism," 595-613; Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*; Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America*, especially chapter 4.

¹⁴Hertzberg, *The Jews in America*, 245.

¹⁵Carey McWilliams, *A Mask for Privilege: Anti-Semitism in America* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1949); Dinnerstein, *The Leo Frank Case*; Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*.

But these anti-Semitic figures, movements and policies must be viewed within their historical context. We must attempt to see them as American Jews did in the early twentieth century and not as historians in these post-Holocaust years. Compared with their experiences in previous countries, especially Eastern Europe and Russia, Jews had been emboldened by their unprecedented success in America. In America, they learned that they no longer needed to fear the state, as they had in the Old World, as an organizing force behind anti-Semitic pogroms. There simply were no pogroms in America. In the United States, Jews could move freely throughout the country, find industrial jobs, attend inexpensive or free municipal schools and universities, and eventually enter prestigious white collar professions. This marked an enormous change from life in the Old World, where conditions were harsh and prejudices deeply entrenched. The emphasis for many Jews, then, was on their relative liberty and prosperity. As the *Yiddish Daily Forward* explained, "Many of us ourselves were oppressed in Old Russia as the Negroes are in free America."¹⁶ While this generation of American Jews certainly experienced anti-Semitism, from their perspective such oppression seemed to have relatively diminished.

Life experiences of American Jews bolstered their optimistic perspective. While anti-Semitism and prejudice did, at times, limit the choices available to them, they did not, as Hertzberg suggests, spell the end of individual freedom and economic advancement. Indeed, in 1937 Jews constituted one fourth of the population of New York City, but comprised around 66 percent of that city's legal practitioners, 64 percent of its dentists, 59 percent of its musicians and music teachers and 56 percent of its physicians.¹⁷ The unparalleled economic mobility of Jews at least partially

¹⁶As quoted in Diner, *In the Almost Promised Land*, 71.

¹⁷Simon, *In the Golden Land*, 27. Also see Lipset and Raab, *Jews and the New American Scene*, 22-23.

testified to their unique position in American society. They were on an upward trajectory, prospering from the American social order, and they knew it.¹⁸

The relative confidence and strength of American Jewry is further revealed in the ways that Jews responded to anti-Semitism. By and large American Jews did not endure anti-Semitic encounters as helpless victims, or accept it as a natural part or "given" of the American experience. Instead, they learned to band together and confront their foes head-on through legitimate political and economic means. In the wake of the Leo Frank trials in 1913, when a young Jew was convicted and later lynched in Georgia for a murder he did not commit, a Jewish watchdog organization called the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) was founded. Five years later, several Russian Jewish immigrants joined forces to form a new defensive body, the American Jewish Congress (AJC). The founders of the AJC had been dissatisfied with the elitist German Jewish leaders and conservative policies of the American Jewish Committee, an organization they believed was managed by "cowardly autocrats and appeasers."¹⁹ Despite their different approaches, both the American Jewish Committee and the AJC launched effective programs and campaigns to expose and fight anti-Semitism in its various manifestations.

In the early 1910s, the American Jewish Committee started a trend when it lobbied the state legislature of New York to outlaw commercial discrimination against any ethnic group in public places of accommodation. The Committee's efforts were successful, and in 1913 a civil rights bill forbidding such discrimination was signed into law. Soon after, the ADL joined forces with the American Jewish Committee to

¹⁸Stuart E. Rosenberg, *The Search for Jewish Identity in America* (Garden City: Doubleday and Co., 1964), 118-120; Steinberg, *The Ethnic Myth*, 94-5.

¹⁹Gregg Ivers, *To Build a Wall: American Jews and the Separation of Church and State* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), 42, 46-56.

successfully push similar legislation through several other state legislatures.²⁰ These early victories gave American Jewish leaders experience and confidence in the ways and means of combating anti-Semitism in the pluralistic American system. By the late 1930s, the American Jewish Committee, the ADL and the AJC worked together to fight the anti-Semitic messages of the charismatic radio priest, Father Charles Coughlin. Using a far-reaching educational campaign, they effectively challenged Coughlin's bitter calumny.²¹

Individual Jews, too, increasingly used their own economic leverage or turned to the court system to challenge anti-Semitic discrimination and undermine its scurrilous effects. When in the late nineteenth century Joseph Seligman, a prominent Jewish banker, was refused admittance to the Grand Union Hotel in Saratoga, New York, Jews quickly retaliated with an innovative counter strike. They bought several prominent hotels in the same resort area and within one decade "half the summer population was Jewish."²² Beginning in 1920, Henry Ford's *Dearborn Independent* launched a spiteful anti-Semitic campaign, publishing abusive texts such as *The International Jew* and *Aspects of Jewish Power in the United States*.²³ Five years later, Aaron Sapiro, a Jewish general counsel for the American Farm Bureau Federation, filed a libel suit against the *Dearborn Independent* and stopped Ford in his tracks. In a statement released to the press in July 1927, Ford profusely apologized to American Jews for his anti-Semitic attacks, pledging to cease forever such activities.²⁴

²⁰John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), 133.

²¹Ivers, *To Build a Wall*, 50.

²²John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), 129.

²³McWilliams, *A Mask for Privilege*, 33-35.

²⁴Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 327; Robert M. Seltzer and Norman J. Cohen, *The Americanization of the Jews* (New York: New York University Press, 1995), 104-5.

Thus the first point to be made in this discussion of anti-Semitism and Jewish radicalism is one of historical context. In the early twentieth-century, Jews did not see anti-Semitism in America as dangerously limiting to them as some historians have suggested. Compared with Old World anti-Semitism theirs was an improved lot. Nor did they respond to American anti-Semitism like powerless victims, for powerless they were not. Instead, they effectively challenged it with the growing means that they had at their disposal.

It is therefore quite probable that in the early twentieth century, many American Jews never felt a great urgency to dedicate themselves to an all-out war against anti-Semitism, a disturbance that in comparison to its Russian or Eastern European counterpart seemed relatively attenuated. Moreover, when Jews wanted to challenge anti-Semitism, they did not need recourse to radical politics. American Jews had several mainstream political alternatives at their disposal at the time -- including the American Jewish Committee, AJC and ADL -- that not only effectively confronted anti-Semitism, but did so without the hardship, public scorn and endless tumult that marked the life of the political radical. This is not in any way to diminish the very real presence of anti-Semitism in American society, but simply an attempt to show how Jews coming from East European and Russian immigrant backgrounds perceived it.

III

Let us now turn our attention to the personal experiences that the Scottsboro Jews had with American anti-Semitism. Growing up in metropolitan immigrant ghettos, many of the Scottsboro Jews first encountered anti-Semitism in public schools and on neighborhood streets. "In my high school teens," explained Abraham Osheroff, "I learned I was a

'Christ-killer . . . and experienced social ostracization."²⁵ On his way to high school, Osheroff walked through a Catholic neighborhood where Irish, Polish and Italian youths taunted him. Such interethnic street fights between rival gangs frequently erupted in the ghettos of America's multicultural cities. In his largely autobiographical novel, *Jews Without Money*, Michael Gold describes how the protagonist of his story is chased by a gang of Italians when caught outside of Jewish territory in New York:

'Christ-killer!' some one yelled. All the boys took up the ancient cry. The mob grew; there must have been fifty boys chasing me now. A stone caught me on the temple, and I tasted blood on my lips. A brick cut my right shin. My ribs were bruised by the sticks; my shirt slimy with horse-dung and rotten vegetables . . . I sobbed and ran. I grew weaker. At last I came to the Bowery, and managed to cross it into my own Jewish land.²⁶

Like this young Jewish protagonist, the Scottsboro Jews sometimes found themselves the sharp end of a distinct anti-Semitic urban street warfare.

The next major arena where the Scottsboro Jews encountered anti-Semitism was in the institutional realm. In most cases, institutional anti-Semitism in the United States took the form of exclusionary policies and quotas at universities, hotels and social clubs. This variety of anti-Semitism naturally struck hardest at those upwardly mobile Jews who increasingly found themselves in direct competition with middle and upper-class, old-stock Anglo-Americans. John Higham, a prominent historian of American ethnic identity and conflict, convincingly argues that this privileged elite felt that their esteemed status was atrophying as more and more Jews struggled to enter their ranks. In an attempt to

²⁵Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996.

²⁶Gold, *Jews Without Money*, 188.

preserve their exclusive status, many institutions adopted anti-Semitic policies to curtail this upward social mobility of Jews.²⁷

Many of the Scottsboro Jews confronted such policies of exclusion, especially those American-born activists who were able to afford tuition at prestigious universities or vacation at expensive hotels. In 1931 Lucille Perlman's application to Barnard College was denied, a response she believed was related to the small quota Barnard imposed on Jewish students. "I felt, and feel now, that my being Jewish was a major factor in my rejection by Barnard . . . It was not the only determinant, but in view of my high school record and enthusiastic endorsements from many of my teachers, it had to be a factor in the rejection."²⁸ Similarly, when Victor Rabinowitz told his high school adviser that he wanted to go to West Point military academy, his adviser quipped, "Your name is Rabinowitz, you couldn't go to West Point."²⁹ The adviser's intention was clear: Jews were not wanted in America's top military academies.

Another area where the Scottsboro Jews encountered anti-Semitism was in the professional job market. As a legal aid organization, the ILD relied on well-trained attorneys. Jews applying to America's best law schools generally escaped the anti-Semitic discrimination that plagued other professional educational programs at the time. Unlike many competitive medical schools, for example, whose costs exceeded student fees, law schools "operated at a profit and could expand with enrollment demands."³⁰ If Jews could pay, they could attend the best law schools. Yet, aspiring Jewish lawyers did not evade anti-Semitism altogether. Many prestigious law firms refused to employ Jews, regardless of their merit. When Victor Rabinowitz graduated from law school, experienced friends

²⁷Higham, *Send These To Me*, 117-152.

²⁸Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

²⁹Rabinowitz, interview.

³⁰Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 140.

warned him not to apply to one notoriously anti-Semitic Wall Street firm. He applied anyway, and his application was quickly rejected. "I was offended by it," Rabinowitz recalled, "and I put this firm and all of the other similar firms on a personal hate list. But I would have been miserable at that firm anyhow. I never would have lasted."³¹

Although the Scottsboro Jews experienced anti-Semitism, the impact of such encounters was attenuated by a number of factors. They knew that some of the anti-Semitism they experienced was the product of an ethnic-based, immigrant adjustment process that affected all non-WASP immigrant groups. Abraham Osheroff, for example, underwent much of the trauma associated with the adjustment process of non-English speaking immigrants. "Up to that time," he explained, "to be Jewish (for me) meant bi-lingualism, hostility from Polish, Irish and Italian 'neighbors' when we ventured outside of our Jewish ghetto, a sense of shame when I traveled outside our area with my mom, who spoke a very limited Yinglish, and therefore drew contemptuous attention to us. Born in America, I felt like an outsider."³²

It is significant that Osheroff's alienation, feeling like an outsider, was not the simple product of anti-Semitism, but erupted from a farrago of inexperience, disorientation and interethnic hostility that he faced as a bewildered immigrants' son. He knew that Jews were hated, but he also understood that Irish, Italians and Poles were equally despised. Each group was pitted against the other; each group tried to protect its own.

Moreover, while the borders between Jewish ghettos and other immigrant communities were often sites of interethnic skirmishes, vibrant Jewish neighborhoods more often than not provided their inhabitants with an overarching feeling of safety. Most of the Scottsboro

³¹Rabinowitz, interview.

³²Abraham Osheroff, letter to author, 9 April 1996. For a similar description of ethnic hostility, see Cowan and Cowan, *Our Parents' Lives*, 66-67.

Jews lived in concentrated Jewish neighborhoods, went to schools with significant Jewish populations and moved in largely Jewish social networks. They consequently felt the strength of their relative numbers. The ghetto environment somewhat sheltered Jews from the cruel world of the anti-Semite. "I can't say that I felt that anti-Semitism held me back very much," recalled Victor Rabinowitz, and added, "as I said, the neighborhoods I lived in, and for that matter the schools that I went to below university, were all basically Jewish schools."³³ For Jews raised in American metropolitan ghettos, as Daniel Bell has observed, "Being a Jew was a simple, undramatic, accepted fact of life. There was a knowledge of being different. But this was taken for granted."³⁴

Questioned on the matter several decades later, none of the Scottsboro Jews attributed their radicalism to the influence of anti-Semitism on their lives. The form and intensity of anti-Semitism that they had experienced did not inspire them to want to take revenge on American society or wreak havoc on the Gentiles. Besides her nasty experience at Barnard College, Lucille Perlman recalled that "with one other blatant but inconsequential experience of being turned away from a hotel, this was the only time of my life that anti-Semitism has affected me."³⁵ Similarly, as a clerk in a New York delicatessen, Harry S. interacted with numerous non-Jews, but encountered virtually no anti-Semitism. He remembered, "Working there I came in contact with a lot of Gentile people. I didn't find any anti-Semitism from them, and I didn't find any animosity against me. They considered me just working. It didn't make any difference."³⁶ Likewise, while Victor Rabinowitz "heard" about anti-Semitism from friends and relatives, and even experienced it himself, he

³³Rabinowitz, interview.

³⁴Bell, "A Parable of Alienation," 15.

³⁵Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

³⁶Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 184.

still insisted that he encountered relatively little of it personally. "There was a great deal of anti-Semitism in New York as I was growing up," he recalled, "but the cold fact of the matter is that I felt very little of it. Occasionally small incidents would happen to me which I attributed correctly or incorrectly to anti-Semitism. I think most of the time it was correctly. But they were trivial and it didn't upset me."³⁷ The Scottsboro Jews experienced anti-Semitism -- talked about it, got angry and frustrated with it, and sometimes challenged it. But they also learned to shrug it off.

In fact, many of the Scottsboro Jews learned that their Jewishness had the welcome effect of opening up a range of potential opportunities not necessarily available to other minorities and impoverished whites. The Scottsboro Jews most affected by institutional anti-Semitism, the educated professionals, had the option of turning to Jewish law firms, hospitals or businesses for work and patronizing non-discriminating resorts or hotels for pleasure. While unable to force himself into law firms that discriminated against Jews, Victor Rabinowitz comforted himself with the knowledge that "there were plenty of Jewish law firms in New York with which I could have, and in fact did, get a job."³⁸ That ethnic ties and connections actually opened up opportunities for aspiring Jews was made vividly clear to William Patterson, the African-American secretary of the ILD, upon graduating from Hastings Law School in San Francisco. At that time, two of his Jewish friends pointed out:

Well, it's true, Pat, that when we come out of school we're going to have difficulties in getting placed, but not the difficulties you will meet. If you are refused accommodation in a hotel or restaurant, you go back to your own community and find there is no one who can do anything practical about it. When we are

³⁷Rabinowitz, interview.

³⁸Ibid.

refused, our fathers often can build a hotel or restaurant with comparable but better accommodations. This doesn't resolve the problem but it sometimes helps."³⁹

Thus, the Scottsboro Jews avoided the pain and strain of much of the anti-Semitism that surrounded them by turning inward and joining Jewish businesses and organizations. While they tested the limits of institutional anti-Semitism, as Rabinowitz did by applying to a Wall Street firm he knew in advance discriminated against Jews, the Scottsboro Jews knew that they could fall back on community organizations for support in hard times. In fact, many even preferred working with other Jews to working with Gentiles, a response no doubt partially conditioned by a long history of anti-Semitism. Hence, Jewish-American clannishness, among other things, could turn a virtual necessity into a virtue. African-Americans, by comparison, did not always have the economic leverage, political freedom or social connections to avoid racism.⁴⁰

In many ways, the Scottsboro Jews rode on the coat tails of a Jewish-American success story. Many lived in sheltered environs in which Jewish interests were increasingly being looked after by Jewish defense organizations. Many of them also enjoyed the numerous benefits that came with the newfound economic mobility that Jews as a group experienced. While the Scottsboro Jews encountered anti-Semitism, generally in the form of street rumbles and exclusionary quotas and policies at prestigious institutions, these encounters were not as disastrous to them as some historians would suggest. Anti-Semitism, then, should be seen as only one factor among many that colored the lives and radicalism of the Scottsboro Jews, but not the decisive one.

³⁹Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 38.

⁴⁰Weisbord and Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter*, 14. Of course, there were other responses to discrimination beyond group centrism and community help programs including assimilation, suicide and emigration.

IV

While anti-Semitism, on its own, did not drive the Scottsboro Jews to radicalism, it did significantly shape their radicalism. Anti-Semitism conditioned the way that the Scottsboro Jews perceived and engaged with their world. It was one of many factors that made their radicalism uniquely Jewish in flavor and character. Whether encountered personally or indirectly through stories passed down through the generations, experiences with anti-Semitism influenced the radical Scottsboro Jews in three main ways. First, they equipped the Scottsboro Jews with a paradigm through which they understood American racism and prejudice. Second, knowledge of anti-Semitism engendered the Scottsboro Jews with an emotive urgency and a moral imperative to fight racism that went well beyond the progressive political agenda of the time. Finally, experiences with anti-Semitism affected the way that they personally interacted with African-Americans, and was one factor that encouraged them to envisage an alliance between their two communities.

Encounters with anti-Semitism furnished the Scottsboro Jews with an idiom or paradigm through which they apprehended racial and minority discrimination. The Scottsboro Jews used their own knowledge and sensitivity to anti-Semitism to make sense of the ethnic and racial conflicts they saw unfolding around them, and came to believe that African-Americans and Jews shared a similar history of vilification, discrimination and ostracization. Reflecting on the African-American experience, ILD attorney David Levinson explained, "As a Jew, I know what it means to suffer injustice, indignity and intolerance. My people have been lynched too."⁴¹ Or as Samuel Leibowitz told a mainly African-American crowd at a Scottsboro rally, "This is an opportunity for all of us, Jews and colored people alike, for we are victims of prejudice just as you

⁴¹*New York Times*, 6 December 1964.

are."⁴² In short, the Scottsboro Jews refracted the black experience through a prism colored by the anti-Semitism of their own Jewish history, and then marveled at the inevitable similarities that they found between the two groups. "The diaspora and anti-Semitism," Lucille Perlman consequently believed, "echoed in the Black experience."⁴³

The peculiar nature of American racism -- in which anti-Semitism and white supremacy went hand-in-hand -- encouraged the Scottsboro Jews to identify anti-Semitism with other varieties of minority discrimination. For many Jewish radicals, anti-Semitism and black oppression coexisted in the United States as two expressions of a single phenomenon -- broad spectrum racism.⁴⁴ When Ruth Goldberg recalled the anti-Semitism she had faced in America, she immediately located it within a larger framework of minority discrimination. "No teaching jobs were available to Jews in upstate New York. I knew that," she explained. "But they were not available to Catholics either and certainly not to Blacks."⁴⁵ Similarly, when Victor Rabinowitz was denied a position in the Wall Street law firm, he attributed it to the fact that "they just didn't hire Jews for the exact same reason that they didn't hire blacks, or for that matter that they didn't hire women."⁴⁶ The white American bigot, who indiscriminately directed his or her hate at a variety of minority group targets, compelled many Jewish radicals to believe that African-Americans and Jews shared a common oppressor and hence a common struggle.

The identification of anti-Semitism with broad spectrum racism was even further indebted to the staunch, anti-racist political platform of the American left. The radical left seized upon virtually every

⁴²*New York Age*, 15 April 1933.

⁴³Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

⁴⁴Broad spectrum prejudice is discussed in John Higham, "American Anti-Semitism Historically Reconsidered," in *Antisemitism in the United States*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 237-258.

⁴⁵Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996.

⁴⁶Rabinowitz, interview.

opportunity to stress the similarities and parallels between anti-Semitism and other varieties of racism and oppression. Blacks and Jews were regularly compared to each other in the literature of the left. According to Doxey Wilkerson, an African-American leader in the ILD, "The related struggles of the foreign-born, of the Negro and Jewish peoples, and of labor and political prisoners, all found a common focus in the program of the ILD."⁴⁷

Hitler's dramatic rise to power in 1933, which coincided with and eclipsed Solicitor Wade Wright's anti-Semitic closing arguments, provided the left with additional ideological ammunition. In an article that compared Scottsboro to the Reichstag trials, an educational bulletin of the ILD announced that, "Hitler and Alabama. Alabama and Hitler. The situation differs somewhat politically and economically but basically the aims of the state in each case are just the same . . . It matters not whether it is gentile against Jew, white against Negro, employed against unemployed, men against women or youth against age."⁴⁸ An ILD letter to President Roosevelt demanding the release of the Scottsboro youths similarly argued that "this violent oppression and terror against the Negro people and white toilers is all of the same infamous pattern as the bloody suppression of the working class and the persecution of the Jews and other minority groups in Hitler's fascist Germany."⁴⁹ While the intention of such statements was to forge solidarity between a variety of oppressed groups, they effectively singled out blacks and Jews as peoples sharing a historical bond born of their respective racial persecution. As a result, the obvious differences between these two groups, and the distinct nature of the prejudices facing each, were blurred into insignificance.

⁴⁷*Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files.

⁴⁸*Educational Bulletin*, January 1934, ILD Papers.

⁴⁹"Mr. President, Free the Scottsboro Boys!" no date, ILD Papers.

The radical monthly *New Masses*, which at the time was a center for prominent Jewish writers and editors such as Michael Gold and Joseph Freeman, also jumped on the bandwagon, creatively associating African-American suffering with German Jewry's crisis. In sketches accompanying a report on the Scottsboro trials, caricatures depicting Aryan supremacy were directly linked to racism in the American South. In the first sketch, a fierce Hitlerian figure points to a Jewish youth. The caption reads: "His Grandmother Was Jewish." The second image depicts a white Christian man angrily pointing to a Southern black worker. "He's Guilty Because He's Black," announces the subtitle.⁵⁰ The left increasingly depicted blacks and Jews as victims of a homologous racism. These depictions both expressed and further facilitated radical Jewish identification with African-American causes.⁵¹

Having cast African-Americans and Jews as partner victims of hate, the radical left launched a campaign to mobilize both groups in a united struggle against broad spectrum racism. Radical organizations repeatedly held lectures and protest meetings to bring blacks and Jews together to discuss the dual issues of racism and anti-Semitism. As early as April 1931, ILD national secretary William Patterson held a lecture in Harlem entitled "Can Negroes Obtain Complete Racial Equality in the United States as Jews and Other Minority Groups Have Done in Soviet Russia under the Communists?"⁵² Two years later, the Rasefske branch of the ILD held a meeting in a Jewish center in Long Island in which Carl Brodsky spoke on the themes of "KKK terror against the nine Scottsboro

⁵⁰Berg, "All Quiet in Morgan County," 4-5. Also see William Patterson, ILD newsletter, September 1933, ILD Papers; *Daily Worker*, 8 April 1933.

⁵¹This identification of blacks and Jews as fellow victims of racism continued in the left after the devastating news of the Holocaust became public. For instance, in a 1947 article, Jewish Communist Nat Ross wrote that "in the huge prison called the rural Black Belt, the brutality and lynch terror against the Negroes, which are hidden from the American people by a heavy cotton curtain, are reminiscent of Dachau and Buchenwald." Nat Ross, "Two Years of the Reconstituted Communist Party in the South," *Political Affairs* (October 1947): 929.

⁵²*Daily Worker*, 15 April 1931.

Boys and the Nazi terror."⁵³ Likewise, the League of Professional Groups organized a symposium at which Eugene Gordon, a prominent black reporter, Joshua Kunitz, the secretary of the NCDPP, and several others spoke on the by then commonplace subject of "Cultural Minorities: Negro and Jew."⁵⁴

The coupling of anti-Semitism and racism in the radical political platform of the left had far-reaching consequences. The unified campaign to highlight the plight of African-Americans and German Jews gained widespread support among the mainstream Jewish-American community. Non-radical American Jews increasingly spoke out against the dual injustices of Scottsboro and the Reich. At a 6,000-person-strong Scottsboro protest meeting in Brooklyn, Rabbi Alexander Lyons told an enthusiastic crowd that, "I feel that it is proper for me to be here tonight because I am a native of Alabama and a native of the Household of Israel. I am here to talk to you for two reasons. Over there in Germany a Jew has been maltreated and here a Colored boy has been unjustly handled."⁵⁵ On several occasions, proud Democrat Samuel Leibowitz made similar observations. Pronouncing his unwavering commitment to see the youths free, Leibowitz bellowed, "I am going down there to fight the battle of 14 million Negro Americans and I am going down there to fight for my people, because Hitlerism in Germany is Hitlerism in the South only by a different name."⁵⁶ Bernard Deutsch, president of the American Jewish Congress, also attended mass meetings for the Scottsboro youths, at one point even urging President Roosevelt to "use his good offices to see that

⁵³*Daily Worker*, 9 April 1933.

⁵⁴*Harlem Liberator*, 20 May 1933.

⁵⁵*Chicago Defender*, 22 April 1933. Also see *Amsterdam News*, 19 April 1933; *Chicago Defender*, 22 April 1933; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 April 1933.

⁵⁶*Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 April 1933. In another context, Leibowitz similarly argued, "I feel for the Negro because I am a Jew and my bretheren are now suffering in Germany what the Negro has been suffering for generations under the midnight sun of the South." *Amsterdam News*, 12 April 1933.

the defendants in the Scottsboro case receive fair trials."⁵⁷ Even Jewish film executives, traumatized by the "ugly, anti-Jewish Hitlerite activities in Germany," suggested a film venture to aid the Scottsboro defense.⁵⁸ Internalizing the radical messages of the day, many Jews came to believe that "Scottsboro is everywhere" -- that the lessons of Scottsboro applied equally to blacks and Jews.⁵⁹

The anti-racist platform of the left also served to direct the sensitivities that the Scottsboro Jews had developed from their experiences with anti-Semitism away from themselves and towards other oppressed groups. In short, while anti-Semitism sensitized Jews to their own misfortune, it was largely the radical platform that transformed this sensitivity into action for other minority groups and especially on behalf of African-Americans. An excellent case in point is that of Rabbi Goldstein and his congregation in Montgomery, Alabama. As we saw earlier, many in the Beth-Or community repudiated Goldstein's outspoken campaign for justice in the Scottsboro trials and forced him to resign from his position at Temple Beth-Or. While these Jews had certainly experienced anti-Semitism, and indeed were under pressure from anti-Semitic sentiment fomenting in Alabama at the time, they did not express any concurrent natural sympathy for blacks. They emphatically did not stand up for African-American rights, for their main concern was unambiguously self-preservation. But from Rabbi Goldstein's perspective, anti-Semitism and racism were one and the same. He lamented that "the Jews in the South, who had heard their persecutors apologize for treatment of the Jews under the same phrase, could never see its application in this situation."⁶⁰ Anti-Semitism had not led these

⁵⁷*New York Sun*, 4 December 1933.

⁵⁸*Black Dispatch*, 24 June 1933.

⁵⁹*Amsterdam News*, 21 September 1932.

⁶⁰Rabbi Goldstein, letter to Rabbi Edward Israel, 18 April 1933, CCAR Collection.

Southern Jews to sympathize with other oppressed groups, but inspired instead a particularist sectarian behavior. The leftist Rabbi Goldstein, however, was spurred into action at a considerable personal cost. In general, then, the effect that anti-Semitism has on the Jew depends on the historical contingencies of the immediate context. There is simply no such thing as a simple causal link between anti-Semitism and radicalism.

The experience of anti-Semitism combined with the anti-racist concerns of the left fueled the Scottsboro Jews' interest in African-American issues. George Charney, for example, first became interested in the predicament of African-Americans while attending ILD meetings on the Scottsboro trials. As a young Jewish lawyer, he listened to Joseph Brodsky's spell-binding reports and joined in numerous Scottsboro rallies in Harlem. Then, and only then, did he find himself compelled to come to the aid of America's black population. In his thoughtful autobiography, *The Long Journey*, he candidly reveals:

The Scottsboro Trial had brought home to me, for the first time, the plight of the Negro in American life; the degradation of a people which had by no means been erased by the Civil War, and which now threatened the health and unity of the nation. Growing up in the twenties without contact with the Negro community, I had been affected by the prejudice prevailing in our own. Scottsboro was a transforming experience. It dramatically illustrated the evil institution of Jim Crow that was not only embedded in our social structure but in the hearts of the white majority of which I was a part.⁶¹

Thus, the tragic position of African-Americans in the United States did not force itself into the political consciousness of the Scottsboro Jews because they themselves had been victims of racial discrimination.

⁶¹George Charney, *A Long Journey* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), 26-27.

Contrary to radical historian Paul Buhle's argument, there was no "bedrock of Jewish self-consciousness," and being Jewish did not lead to some automatic "association of one's own oppression with that of others at home and abroad."⁶² On the contrary, it was the radical anti-racist platform of the American left and its outspoken campaign against white chauvinism and racism that first exposed many of the Scottsboro Jews to the dismal position of black Americans. The Communist Party, the ILD and radical Jewish-Americans were simultaneously introduced to African-American causes through the Scottsboro campaign.

Although the Scottsboro Jews saw similarities between anti-Semitism and racism, they never doubted which one demanded the most urgent attention and redress in the American context. The comparatively limited nature of anti-Semitism in America, both in form and intensity, led the Scottsboro Jews to conclude that anti-black racism was the most acute racial problem assailing the United States. "[I]n the United States the Blacks were the most oppressed -- and still are," explained Lucille Perlman, more than sixty years later.⁶³ This is not to say that radical Jews belittled anti-Semitism. They simply viewed it in a broader perspective. In a 1936 article calling for the restoration of political and civil rights in Nazi Germany, Osmond Fraenkel argued that "anti-Semitism is surely not new . . . Frequently through the centuries this ugly manifestation of the human spirit has erupted, sometimes against the Jew, oftener against some other unpopular minority."⁶⁴ Although not a participant in the Scottsboro campaign, Jewish Communist Howard Fast echoed similar sentiments in the winter of 1944. Articulating much of the beliefs of the Scottsboro Jews, he mused, "For me, a Jew is a man. He is persecuted; so are other minorities. He is libeled; so are others. There is discrimination

⁶²Buhle, "Jews and American Communism," 24.

⁶³Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

⁶⁴Fraenkel, "For Free Speech," 100.

against him; is there none against Negroes? He has been murdered, tortured, driven across the face of the earth, but isn't that the fate of millions who are not Jewish?"⁶⁵

The Scottsboro Jews clearly saw African-Americans as the American underdog. Blacks, in fact, became America's Jews.⁶⁶ It was not until her high-school years in upstate New York that Lucille Perlman became aware of the distinctions that were made between Jews and non-Jews, "but they did not bespeak anti-Semitism."⁶⁷ But when Perlman went out on a date with a black member of the ILD, Frank Griffin, she tasted the bitter lot of the African-American. "Our problem was where to go for dinner where Frank would be served! In New York City!"⁶⁸ While the United States represented a haven for Jewry, Perlman quickly learned that life in America remained a nightmare for most blacks.

The same lesson can be found in an intriguing series of letters to the editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune*. Here Saul Carson and L. F. Coles exchanged views on the ILD's performance in the Scottsboro campaign. Coles, a black journalist, argued that the Jewish ILD attorneys severely damaged the youths' defense, and insisted that a Southern attorney, even a racist Ku Klux Klan sympathizer, could do a better job. Carson, a non-radical Jew, firmly disagreed. His response demonstrates the relative confidence of American Jewry. It also reveals his conviction, so similar to those of the Scottsboro Jews', that blacks more than others needed his help. He wrote, "I doubt whether the ILD or the Jews need my defense. I am not a member of the ILD. I am a Jew, but probably a bad Jew from the viewpoint of my old rabbi. But the Negroes need defense from Mr. Coles.

⁶⁵Guttman, *The Jewish Writer in America*, 140.

⁶⁶Diner, *In The Almost Promised Land*, 74.

⁶⁷Lucille Perlman, letter to author, 6 May 1996.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

And I believe I am a better Negro than Mr. Coles. I do not crawl before lilywhites."⁶⁹

Anti-Semitism gave radical Jews a moral imperative and urgency to assist African-Americans in their struggle for civil rights. This moral compulsion went beyond the typical radical agenda against racism. In 1932 in Brownsville, Brooklyn, the Communist Party placed a Jewish couple on trial because they had objected to their daughter marrying an African-American. Israel Amter played the main prosecutor, and he delivered a moving and powerful speech for what must have been a largely Jewish audience. He was outraged, he exclaimed, "that a Jew, who had suffered in Czarist Russia, should be the bearer of ideas that helped the capitalists of America to enslave a people which constituted a majority of the population of the Black Belt."⁷⁰ The parents pleaded guilty to the charges, were suspended for three months from the Party, and were required to make amends through close work with African-American groups.⁷¹

As revealed in the trial, radical Jews held themselves up to an especially rigorous standard of anti-racism. They believed that as Jews -- who had suffered *in Russia* -- they had no excuse for any displays of bigotry. They had been victims of racial prejudice; they should never become its perpetrators. Inherent in this understanding was the notion that the long history of Jewish suffering taught Jews, or at least should have taught them, the moral lesson of tolerance. In a letter to the editor of the *Harlem Liberator*, Leah Stern, an avid Scottsboro demonstrator, wondered "what those people who are so much against our good work would think if we would see someone drowning and we would stand by

⁶⁹*Philadelphia Tribune*, 11 May 1933; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 25 May 1933; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 15 June 1933.

⁷⁰*Freiheit*, 9 November 1932, as quoted in Epstein, *The Jew and Communism*, 247.

⁷¹Epstein, *The Jew and Communism*, 247.

[and make] no effort to save that drowning person, because he might not be of our color or race."⁷²

Like so many of the Scottsboro radicals, Leah Stern saw the desperate position that America's "invisible" black population occupied, and felt a moral imperative to come to their aid. Stern's awareness of the plight of African-Americans was bred of her radical politics and reinforced by her history as a Jew. George Charney similarly found himself consumed with the desire to effect positive change for victims of racial prejudice. Once made aware of the tragic condition of American blacks, he movingly describes how their troubles "became a personal problem as well, which forced me to purge myself of the moral guilt of years of indifference and insensitivity and hence complicity with this immoral condition."⁷³ As himself a member of an ostracized group, Charney felt a moral compulsion to come to the aid of black Americans that surpassed the anti-racist radical platform.

It was primarily for this reason that anti-racist campaigns topped the radical agenda of so many of the Scottsboro Jews. Congressman John Coffer, for example, recalled that Anna Damon "was a sworn and militant enemy to all efforts to discriminate against minority groups, such as Negro-baiting, Jew-baiting, Red-baiting and labor-baiting."⁷⁴ In a eulogy of Anna Damon's life, Benjamin Davis directly attributed her unusual concern for African-Americans to her history as a Jew. He added, "The Negro people will ever remember her and treasure her life and work for she was sensitive to the last degree to the problems and aspirations of Negro Americans, being fully imbued with all that is best and fine within

⁷²*Harlem Liberator*, 1 July 1933.

⁷³Charney, *A Long Journey*, 26.

⁷⁴*Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files.

her own people -- the Jewish people."⁷⁵ Ruth Goldberg herself argued that she had few certainties but one. She forcefully wrote, "I am certain that racism is wrong, that is an abuse of our basic humanity. It is evil."⁷⁶ Likewise, Samuel Neuburger was wholly convinced that "there can be really no victory for peace until racism is disposed of in every part of the world."⁷⁷ He consequently devoted a central part of his life's work to combating manifestations of racism, be they in the American South, Hitler's Germany or Zionist Israel. He later recalled, "From the latter part of the 1930s and for the rest of my legal life, I supported, and I still do, practically every radical organization, and particularly every defense organization, that had as its objective the defense of a political minority."⁷⁸

Being Jewish, and having an acute understanding of the injustices bred of prejudice and bigotry, also influenced the way that the Scottsboro Jews personally interacted with African-Americans. One former black Communist Party member recalled, "With the ILD, they were busy showing they were genuine friends of the negro people."⁷⁹ As we have seen, many of the Scottsboro Jews took pains to develop remarkably close relationships with the Scottsboro youths, showing great concern for their well-being.⁸⁰ To a limited extent, they also built close friendships with African-Americans in the ILD and other radical organizations. One particularly memorable interracial friendship was that between William Patterson, the black secretary of the ILD, and Rose Baron, the head of the ILD's Prisoners' Relief Fund. In his autobiography, Patterson recalled how

⁷⁵ Benjamin Davis, letter to Louis Coleman, 31 August 1944, as quoted in *Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files. Also see "Anna Damon -- Peerless Leader and Organizer," 5 July 1944, ILD Papers.

⁷⁶ Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 16 May 1996.

⁷⁷ Neuburger, interview.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Herbert Krugman, "The Appeal of Communism to American Middle Class Intellectuals and Trade Unionists," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 16 (fall 1952): 338.

⁸⁰ See chapter 1 above.

he vowed never to forget Baron's special kindnesses. While on a trip from New York to Boston in 1927, Baron and another Communist tirelessly worked to ensure that Patterson did not encounter racist attacks. As Patterson later explained, they "made sure that stops for lunch and other needs [were made] where I could not be refused and insulted because of my color." He continued, "I made a mental note of that . . . It was evidence of sensitivity that touched me."⁸¹ According to Patterson, Baron's special sensitivity arose from her experiences as a Jew "under the whiplash of the tsar's Cossacks."⁸²

Benjamin Davis also enjoyed warm friendships with many of the Scottsboro Jews. As a young lawyer, he worked closely with Carol King, recalling that when she died, "I felt I had lost a close relative; we had worked so often together -- an experience which forms the strongest type of bond between people."⁸³ Davis was also a good friend of Carl Brodsky's. When the latter withdrew his nomination as candidate for the New York council with the explicit purpose of giving Davis a chance to run, Davis characteristically attributed Brodsky's selfless act to his Jewishness:

Carl Brodsky was truly a representative of the Jewish people. In withdrawing in my favor, under circumstances in which the Jewish people needed a representative in the City Council, he demonstrated the close bonds of cooperation that could exist between the Jewish and Negro people. His action was a warm, human and generous symbol of recognition on the part of progressive Jewish workers of their own profound stake in the cause of Negro liberation.⁸⁴

⁸¹Patterson, *The Man Who Cried Genocide*, 82.

⁸²Ibid.

⁸³Davis, *Communist Councilman from Harlem*, 91.

⁸⁴Ibid., 106-7.

At a time when meaningful contact between black and white Americans was greatly limited, African-Americans and Jews were increasingly coming together in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign.

However, it is important to stress that this alliance between radical blacks and Jews was made possible by the hospitable environment and mass protest techniques of the ILD. The ILD brought blacks and Jews together for a common cause, namely to confront a common enemy. In the highest echelons of the organization, African-American and Jewish professionals worked together as they decided case strategies and organized mass campaigns. At the street level, even larger numbers of blacks and Jews mixed together as the Scottsboro campaign gained momentum in black communities in Harlem, Chicago and elsewhere. With their distinct histories and social spaces, these people most likely would never have met otherwise. Victor Rabinowitz explained, "I did not come across very many blacks . . . except in organizations such as the ILD and the Communist Party."⁸⁵ "Other blacks, working-class blacks," he continued, "the people who picked up my garbage, for example, or cleaned the streets or did the laboring work in the community, I really had very little to do with."⁸⁶

The ILD's Scottsboro campaign was a political movement to confront the injustices commonly faced by African-Americans, not a social movement to unite blacks and Jews. But in the process of the campaign, radicalized blacks and Jews increasingly formed social bonds and friendships that challenged the basic tenets of American racism. These relationships were to pave the way for much of the black-Jewish alliance that flourished in the post World War II struggles for civil rights.

⁸⁵Rabinowitz, interview.

⁸⁶Ibid.

V

Any consideration of the role of anti-Semitism in the radicalization of the Scottsboro Jews would not be complete if it failed to consider the fact that political radicalism actually fueled anti-Semitic sentiment in America. The radical activities of the Scottsboro Jews intensified and aggravated American anti-Semitism. Jews from all walks of life, and of all ideological commitments, were painfully aware of this. Nevertheless, this did not deter the Scottsboro Jews from radical activism. If the main thrust behind their radicalism had been to escape the debilitating effects of anti-Semitism or to fight it by remote control, then we must ask ourselves why they chose to link Jews to political radicalism, thereby reinforcing prevailing anti-Semitic stereotypes.

In the preceding chapters I have shown that the Scottsboro trials and movement unleashed considerable anti-Semitic furor in the white populations of Alabama, where ILD activists were stigmatized as foreigners, New Yorkers and Jews. Yet, while anti-Semitic sentiment during the Scottsboro trials peaked most dangerously in Alabama, where high-ranking state officials and prominent newspaper editors fanned its flames, it also erupted in the North. There, anti-Semitic comments generally remained private, failing to gain widespread public legitimacy or produce direct popular action. Such comments tended to surface after Wade Wright's summation in early 1933, the event that publicly revealed the Jewishness of so many of the Scottsboro activists.

Letters posted by Northerners to Alabama officials or Scottsboro activists expressed no less disgust and hatred as similar letters composed by Southerners. For example, in a letter dated April 17, 1933, a Brooklyn resident advised Alabama Governor Benjamin Meeks Miller to deal once and for all with the Scottsboro youths and their attorneys. "Hang the nigger bastards," admonished the author, "and fry the jew bastards who

are worse than the niggars."⁸⁷ In another letter to the Alabama Governor, Augusta Nuloen of New York City passionately declared that it was "a calamity for these communistic Jews to interfere with, and stir up the negroes of the South." She speculated that "If the people of this country knew the Jews as we who live in New York do, they would not let them get in such power."⁸⁸ Writing to lead defense counsel Samuel Leibowitz after the compromise of 1937 when four of the Scottsboro youths were freed, one writer further lamented, "Well you and some other trash freed your 'niggers.' If you had been a white man, I would have been really surprised but since you are a little dark too, naturally you would fight for a close race."⁸⁹ The letter was signed, "a white girl and a D___ Yankee besides."⁹⁰

At the time of the Scottsboro trials, a belligerent stereotype of the radical, foreign Jew flourished across the United States -- not just in Alabama.⁹¹ Sociologist Nathan Glazer partially attributed this stereotype to the objective origins of members of the Communist Party. "The image of the Communist as an outlandish foreigner, so common in America," he explained, "is derived from the reality of the twenties," when most Communist Party members were foreign born.⁹² Yet, there can also be no doubt that this stereotype took an explicitly anti-Semitic twist. In a speech given before a Senate committee in 1919, a concerned Methodist minister testified that Russian Bolsheviks had drawn much of their inspiration from Yiddish-speaking Jews in New York.⁹³ By 1930, several angry Southern witnesses told the Fish Committee Hearings in Birmingham,

⁸⁷Unidentified author, letter to Governor Miller, 17 April 1933, BM Papers.

⁸⁸Augusta Nuloen, letter to Governor Miller, 11 April 1933, BM Papers.

⁸⁹Unidentified author, letter to Samuel Leibowitz, 27 July 1937, ILD Papers.

⁹⁰Ibid.

⁹¹See chapter 2 above.

⁹²Glazer, *The Social Basis of American Communism*, 61.

⁹³Higham, *Strangers in the Land*, 279.

Alabama, that Jews were the pernicious carriers of Communism.⁹⁴

Traveling throughout the United States, Rose Pesotta, an organizer for the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU), readily acknowledged the widespread American stereotype that paradoxically pitted Jews as both corrupt capitalists and wily Communists. In a 1933 letter to Max Danish, then editor of the ILGWU organ *Justice*, she explained that "All bosses to their opinion are Jews and all Jews are bosses, hence they are doubly hated. The American element also despises Jews as Bolsheviks."⁹⁵

Stigmatized with the undesirable stain of Marxism, many American Jews criticized the actions of their radical Jewish counterparts. They censured these radicals because they feared anti-Semitic reprisals if the "misguided" actions of an unrepresentative handful became widely known. Others believed that Jewish radicalism would disastrously hinder Jewish assimilation. And still others shared the same hysterical fear of Reds that seemed to be gripping so many contemporary Americans. Hence, Jewish leaders frequently called for American Jews to distance themselves or, at the very least, their ethnicity from radical activities. In 1919, an editorial in the *Hebrew Standard* labeled radicalism in no uncertain terms as "a sign of anti-Americanism."⁹⁶ While speaking to a crowd of radical Jewish students in Wisconsin in 1934, Rabbi Max Kadushin argued that the students' activities "were jeopardizing the security of 650 other Jewish students on the campus as well as their own cause." They could be Communists, he granted benevolently, but they

⁹⁴Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 29.

⁹⁵Rose Pesotta to Max Danish, 15 December 1933, as quoted in Shepherd, *A Price Below Rubies*, 262-263.

⁹⁶*Hebrew Standard*, 31 October 1919, as quoted in Zosa Szajkowski, *The Impact of the 1919-20 Red Scare on American Jewish Life*, vol. 2 of *Jews, Wars and Communism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1974), 106.

ought to be Communists only as individuals -- not as Jews. "Why make it a Jewish cause?" Rabbi Kadushin asked the students.⁹⁷

The fierce intensity of this mainstream Jewish campaign to silence Jewish radicals was similarly expressed in the pages of the American Jewish Congress' *Congress Weekly*. By 1939, the publication berated Jewish Communists for complaining "of the campaign waged against you by the Jewish press and public opinion. There is one way of silencing that campaign. Withdraw from Jewish life!"⁹⁸ While not all Jews criticized their radical counterparts -- one Yiddish editorial, for example, wondered "Why, after all, may not any Jews be Communists?"⁹⁹ -- enough did to suggest that many resented the activities of radical Jews. They predicated their misgivings on the belief that radicalism fueled anti-Semitism. As news of the chilling anti-Semitic fury surrounding the Scottsboro trials became known, and stories of the backlash against Alabama Jewry circulated, they might have felt that their fears had been largely vindicated.¹⁰⁰

The Scottsboro Jews knew that their radical activities aggravated anti-Semitism. But they nevertheless continued unrepentant in the struggle to save the Scottsboro youths. The sacred lives of nine African-American youths urgently cried out for attention; the rights of minorities, women, and the foreign born demanded immediate redress; the needs of millions of hungry, unemployed and oppressed American workers deserved top priority. For the radical Scottsboro Jews, these issues took precedence over the reactionary and rather mild forms of anti-Semitism

⁹⁷In a report on the radical Wisconsin students by Dr. A. L. Sacher, National Director of the Hillel Foundation, Sacher remarked, "The youngsters have a right to their economic ideologies, but I should hate to see every radical movement in this country linked up always with Jews." Zosa Szajkowski, *The Attitude of American Jews to World War I, the Russian Revolutions of 1917, and Communism, 1914-1945*, vol. 1 of *Jews, Wars and Communism* (New York: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 1974), 418-419.

⁹⁸Szajkowski, *Jews, Wars and Communism*, 1: 421-422.

⁹⁹*The Day*, 22 October 1935, as quoted in Szajkowski, *Jews, Wars and Communism*, 1:436.

¹⁰⁰See chapter 2 above.

that they had encountered or even inspired. They believed that such anti-Semitism was a popular maneuver to direct attention away from the real issues, and they would be damned if they would allow it to interfere with their work. Not long after Wade Wright's anti-Semitic attack, Samuel Leibowitz assured those following the case that it would take "more than a crowd of hooded bigots to scare a Jew boy from the sidewalks of New York."¹⁰¹ As Jews who had enjoyed the relative advantages and safety of their environment, many of the Scottsboro radicals felt confident pushing and prodding the limits of anti-Semitism.

The anti-Semitic outbursts accompanying the Scottsboro trials and campaign were by no means unusual in the everyday lives of radical Jews. Jewish ILD attorneys were often subjected to anti-Semitic epithets and abuse when representing social or political undesirables. When Samuel Neuburger represented several Communists in Oklahoma City in late 1939, he was unfondly dubbed the "New York Jew." On many occasions, hostile residents threatened his life with lynching and repeatedly attempted to drive him from the city. Neuburger later recalled, "I was not very happy to know that one of the ways of getting over their rough habits was hanging me to the nearest tree."¹⁰² In spite of the potentially injurious consequences, however, Neuburger stayed on as defense attorney. In June 1933, ILD attorneys Irving Schwab, Frank Irvin and Allan Taub were similarly branded "Communist Jew" lawyers while on a case in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. Mobs formed and demanded that the attorneys be handed over for swift justice. As one Southern police officer explained, "At first I thought the crowd was just goin' to tar and feather them. That would have been all right, but I soon found that they really meant business, so I helped the lawyers. You know it would have been

¹⁰¹*Decatur Daily*, 6 May 1933.

¹⁰²Neuburger, interview.

bad publicity on us to have lynched them."¹⁰³ While their radical activities often incurred anti-Semitic wrath and outright violence, the Scottsboro Jews largely remained committed to their leftist causes. Thus, contrary to Harold Cruse's contention that "At no time or place, on no issue or circumstance, in the duration of this alliance, were Jews of any parochial persuasion ever called upon to sacrifice Jewish interests on behalf of civil rights," radical Jews repeatedly sacrificed sectarian Jewish interests in the struggle for the Scottsboro youths and African-American rights.¹⁰⁴

VI

Beginning in early 1933, Hitler's ruthless implementation of an explicitly anti-Jewish program renewed anti-Semitism as an acute and critical issue in its own right. As the years progressed, the opinions of the Scottsboro Jews on the relative importance of the struggle against anti-Semitism subtly changed. Anti-Semitism became critical to Victor Rabinowitz "when Hitler rose, because there being Jewish was a serious matter."¹⁰⁵ Or as Ruth Goldberg put it, "Anti-Semitism certainly changed my feelings. Hitler was the *coup de grace*, as he was for so many."¹⁰⁶

Germany's program of National Socialism and the plight of European Jewry called for urgent action, and Jewish activists in the ILD quickly responded to the call. According to national secretary Anna Damon, ILD attorneys, young and old, flocked to the American armed forces.¹⁰⁷ As Samuel Neuburger recalled, "I felt strongly that every able bodied person at that time, particularly one of the Jewish faith, had to be in

¹⁰³J. R. Steelman, October 1933, "Notes: Tuscaloosa Investigation," AR Papers. Also see Taub, "Prelude to a Lynching," 6-7.

¹⁰⁴Harold Cruse, *Plural But Equal: A Critical Study of Blacks and Minorities and America's Plural Society* (New York: William Morrow and Co., Inc., 1987), 160.

¹⁰⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶Ruth Goldberg, letter to author, 24-26 April 1996.

¹⁰⁷Anna Damon, Report to National Conference of ILD, 12 June 1943, ILD Papers.

the armed forces in the war against Nazism."¹⁰⁸ Ever a vigilant activist, thirty-eight year old Neuburger, a husband and father of two, became an officer in the United States army. Although his decision was a personal one, it derived much of its passion from Neuburger's own history as a Jew. He explained, "my children were not to wear yellow bands on their arms."¹⁰⁹ Moreover, his was a decision that remained consistent with a lifelong ambition to root out racism in all of its manifestations -- be it against blacks, Jews, Palestinians or any other oppressed minority.

To say that the Scottsboro Jews turned to radicalism to fight anti-Semitism, or to escape their Jewishness, or even to take revenge on an inhospitable society, is to grossly oversimplify their motivations. In this chapter I have argued that the Scottsboro Jews experienced a limited form and intensity of anti-Semitism in the United States. While their encounters with anti-Semitism frustrated and angered them, they formed only one of many factors that ultimately propelled them to radicalism.

In the American context, the Scottsboro Jews generally felt that other minority groups suffered far more than Jews did and hence deserved their fuller attention. Moreover, they were keenly aware that their radicalism actually provoked an anti-Semitic backlash. Still, they remained committed activists. This strongly indicates that the Scottsboro Jews were not motivated to become radicals out of any selfishly sectarian desire to fight anti-Semitism vicariously or to escape their Jewishness. While many of them sought to expose the deep injustices of the American capitalist system, their motives sprang less from taking revenge on a Gentile world than from the positive desire to build a socialist society where the interests and needs of most people could be satisfied. Some sixty years after becoming a radical, Victor Rabinowitz tellingly reveals, "I

¹⁰⁸Neuburger, interview.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

was interested in establishing socialism. It was an affirmative rather than a defensive position."¹¹⁰

Anti-Semitism, then, played a secondary and indirect role in radicalizing the Scottsboro Jews. It shaped their radicalism and helped give it a distinctly Jewish character. Anti-Semitism sensitized the Scottsboro Jews to the injustices of discrimination, and became a paradigm through which they empathized with African-Americans and interpreted their oppression. When this cultural sensitivity combined with a radical political agenda that denounced anti-black racism, the Scottsboro Jews became staunch advocates of African-American rights. They further believed that they shared a common bond with black Americans, whom they came to see as partners on the march against prejudice and racism.

Consider, in conclusion, the life transforming experiences of Harry S. In many ways his experiences illustrate the lessons of these last two chapters. Harry was first attracted to the Communist Party because he was a worker, and as such felt that he was being exploited. After that, however, he explains:

The main attraction was the idea of the equality of people -- that everyone is alike, Jews, black people, Indians -- there is one human being. This was the main attraction. I remembered as a boy I was pointed out as a Jew, that the Jew was different. So this was what attracted me. That also made me work. Especially I worked among the black people."¹¹¹

Anti-Semitism taught the Scottsboro Jews that they were different. The political platform of the radical left showed Jews that they were not alone. When the lessons of anti-Semitism coincided with radical politics, the

¹¹⁰Rabinowitz, interview.

¹¹¹Leviatin, *Followers of the Trail*, 190.

Scottsboro Jews became passionate supporters of African-American liberation and rights.

Chapter 5

African-American Responses to the ILD's Scottsboro Campaign

When Ben Gold, the Jewish Communist leader of the International Fur and Leather Workers' Union, was jailed during the second hunger march of the Unemployed Councils in December 1932, he was given the task of scrubbing the stairs of the penitentiary. Gold quickly tired from the hard work, and attempted to enlist the help of an African-American prisoner. The man did not respond to his entreaties. But the instant that Gold mentioned the ILD, everything changed. The man abruptly stopped what he had been doing and together he and Gold finished the work.¹ The Scottsboro campaign of the 1930s captured the imagination and support of large numbers of African-Americans. It transformed ILD activists from largely unknown quantities into highly visible champions of black rights. For many African-Americans, perhaps like Gold's prison comrade, ILD activists became genuine allies in the struggle for black freedom and dignity.

This chapter tells the story of how African-Americans responded to ILD activists and the Scottsboro campaign. Black Americans viewed the Scottsboro activists predominantly in terms of race, political affiliation and ethnicity -- they were whites, Reds and Jews. While black reactions to the ILD were as varied as the life histories that informed each opinion, in the final

¹Epstein, *The Jew and Communism*, 415.

analysis, thousands of African-Americans could not help but admire the dogged determination of the radicals, and enthusiastically endorsed the ILD's Scottsboro campaign.

II

At the most basic level, African-Americans categorized the Scottsboro activists in terms of race. The black press repeatedly described ILD activists as whites -- white friends, white sympathizers, white workers, white radicals -- as if amazed that whites were willing to stoop to the defense of nine black youths.² Many African-Americans, accustomed as they were to white racism, marveled at the ILD activists' commitment to racial egalitarianism -- both within their own ranks and in society in general. That ILD activists treated blacks personably and with respect, and that they practiced what they preached, proved an enormous drawing card for the Scottsboro campaign.

Pettis Perry was one African-American struck by the personal example that these white activists set as proponents of black rights. Born in Marion, Alabama, in 1897, Perry migrated to Los Angeles and found work as a jack-puller at a cotton seed mill. While on the job in April 1932, an acquaintance invited Perry to an ILD picnic. He attended, finding himself at a gigantic social affair of some thirty-eight hundred people, with only about fifty other blacks in attendance. Police soon arrived, and in a tense moment, demanded that the blacks leave the gathering. The picnic's organizers steadfastly refused to comply, and the police, utterly outnumbered, were forced to leave unheeded and humiliated.³ Perry recalled, "[t]his seemed to be a different type of white population from any I'd ever seen. I'd seen white individuals

²See *Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1933; *Washington Tribune*, 12 May 1933; *Harlem Liberator*, 13 May 1933; *Daily Worker*, 18 May 1931.

³Richard O. Boyer, *Pettis Perry: The Story of a Working Class Leader* (1952), pamphlet, Pettis Perry Papers, Southern California Library for Social Studies and Research (hereafter cited as PP Papers); House Committee, *Testimony of Pettis Perry*, 256-258; *Biographical Dictionary of the American Left*, s.v. "Perry, Pettis."

who were all right but I'd never seen a mass of white people standing together for Negro rights. Made quite an impression on me."⁴

Like many other black Americans, Perry admired these white activists who stood up for blacks. He joined the Los Angeles branch of the ILD that month, and within nine months was appointed chairman of its Scottsboro Committee. In June of the same year, Perry also joined the Communist Party, largely for the same reasons. The everyday examples set by ILD activists and Communists challenged Perry's stereotypes of ignorant and racist white Americans. Here were people willing to fight for their beliefs and endure the consequences of their radical struggles for racial and economic equality. He was increasingly compelled to distinguish between whites and radical whites, the latter earning his approbation and respect. "I had seen a white man shot for trying to get Negroes to join the Communist Party and Negroes beaten because they tried to hear the Communist Party platform. I saw white Communists beaten, a white Y. C. L. [Young Communist League] girl slugged to the sidewalk and kicked in the face as she was trying to enter the Ford meeting." With characteristic Perry daring and aplomb, he explained, "I thought this was the kind of thing I better join."⁵

In addition to the power of the personal example, many blacks accepted ILD activists as friends precisely because they, too, were so reviled by their enemies. When the African-American Nate Shaw was arrested in Alabama in December 1932, ILD attorneys came to visit and interview him. As Shaw recalled, "They was friends to me -- I could tell that by the way the sheriff treated em [*sic*]; he didn't like em [*sic*] at all, tried to hamper em [*sic*] from talking to me."⁶ Although Shaw was not directly involved in the Scottsboro campaign, his reaction was quite similar to that of other blacks who were. Again, when confronted by the deep divisions within white

⁴Boyer, *Pettis Perry*, PP Papers.

⁵Ibid.; House Committee, *Testimony of Pettis Perry*, 256-257.

⁶Rosengarten, *All God's Dangers*, 325.

society, in this case the spectacle of whites violently suppressing other whites, African-Americans were increasingly driven to distinguish between whites and radical whites.

Southern blacks lauded ILD activists for being particularly courageous Northerners. That they were Northern *whites* often went without saying. Like their white Southern counterparts, Southern blacks internalized the history of their region, and this regionalism became one way of making sense of the ILD activists. It is not surprising that when the *Chicago Defender* asked readers "Do you think better results could be obtained in the Scottsboro case if southern lawyers were employed to defend the boys?" only Southern blacks seem to have responded.⁷ Northern blacks simply did not perceive the ILD activists in terms of North-South divisions. Southern blacks did, and four of the five published responses applauded the ILD's efforts.

In the spring of 1931, when word of the sham convictions at Scottsboro broke out, fury and disgust quickly spread among Southern blacks. In a black Birmingham church, a man interrupted the service and shouted, "That's too many young Niggers to be put to death at one time." A chorus of "Amens!" followed the emotional outburst.⁸ While most would have agreed with him, they knew that they had few sanctioned political channels available to them to change this unfortunate but common scenario. But when they heard that white Northerners had entered the fray, they thought that latter-day Abolitionists had come to finish the business of their forefathers. They were thankful that they were finally getting the outside assistance that they so desperately wanted. "We need someone to speak for us," Jesse Temple, an African-American from Birmingham, explained. Like many other Southern blacks, Temple believed that only Northern white lawyers and activists would do the job properly.

⁷Chicago Defender, 27 April 1933.

⁸Hosea Hudson, tape recording, Oral History at Schomburg, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Hosea Hudson was one of those African-Americans who welcomed these white Yankee saviors. He vividly remembered the days when "the old slave people . . . said that the Yanks was going to come back one day and free the Negroes."⁹ So when Hudson heard about the ILD and the Scottsboro campaign, he thought of those stories -- so deeply ingrained in black collective memory -- and decided he wanted to be a part of the action. Hudson explained that, "when the Scottsboro Case was exposed as a frame-up, when telegrams began to pour in from New York and other Northern states, as well as cables from all over Europe, I thought this was the time somebody was coming to help us do something to free ourselves. So when I heard the word 'organize' I wanted to join up."¹⁰ On September 8, 1931, while at his first radical meeting, Hudson enthusiastically joined the Communist Party, in the face of so many dangers, and became a courageous activist for the Scottsboro youths.¹¹

African-American opponents of the ILD also emphasized at times the whiteness of the ILD activists, turning color into an effective critique of the Scottsboro campaign. Some blacks were merely cautious. As the *Negro World* warned, "Let the liberal minded *whites* prove themselves."¹² But others believed that color mattered more than political conviction, and that political self-interest would always be driven by race. Robert Vann, editor of the *Pittsburgh Courier*, predicted that "If the cause of Communism ever rises in power to the point of assuming governmental control, the Negro will be treated by his Communistic leaders then just as the Negro is treated by the Republicans and Democrats now."¹³ All political parties were inherently the

⁹Hudson, interview.

¹⁰Hudson, *Black Worker in the Deep South*, 37; Hudson, interview.

¹¹For a fascinating discussion of how African-American folk interpretations of history, culture and music combined with black radicalism in the South, see Robin D. G. Kelley, "Comrades, Praise Gawd For Lenin and Them!": Ideology and Culture Among Black Communists in Alabama, 1930-1935," *Science and Society* 52, no. 1 (1988): 59-82.

¹²*Negro World*, 15 August 1931.

¹³Robert L. Vann and others, "Negro Editors on Communism: A Symposium of the American Negro Press," *Crisis* 41, no. 5 (1932): 154.

same, Vann believed, for all were primarily controlled by whites. Thus, while radicals would make endless promises to blacks, those promises would just as easily be forgotten -- as Frank M. Davis, black editor of the *Atlanta World*, asked, "for aren't they white men too?"¹⁴

While critics did make their voices heard, on the whole black public opinion swung behind the ILD activists, finding in their race no reason to shun their assistance. Joseph Sunday, a black resident of New York City, severely criticized those African-Americans who refused to cooperate with the predominantly white ILD. "For the life of me I cannot see what we stand to lose by accepting help from any source, provided it is sincere, and when white people are willing to defend Negroes in America when charged with rape and expose themselves to all sorts of ridicule and taunts, not forgetting physical injury from the minions of the state, I would be less than an ingrate to challenge their sincerity."¹⁵ Asbury Smith, an African-American member of the Baltimore Urban League, similarly lauded white ILD activists. "It is easy to understand," he wrote, "that Negroes would follow any white leaders that are courageous and daring in their fight for Negro rights as are the leaders of the International Labor Defense."¹⁶ For many African-Americans, ILD activists were valiant whites ably fighting for black rights.

III

The white Scottsboro activists quickly persuaded African-Americans across the United States that they were different. They fought for African-American rights, treated blacks with respect, and took considerable risks for the causes they believed in -- all activities that distinguished them from the vast majority of white Americans. In order to make sense of these differences, many African-Americans focused on the political radicalism of the Scottsboro

¹⁴Carl Murphy and others, "Negro Editors on Communism: A Symposium of the American Negro Press," *Crisis* 41, no. 4 (1932): 119.

¹⁵*Daily Worker*, 18 May 1931.

¹⁶Asbury Smith, "What Can the Negro Expect from Communism?" *Opportunity* 11, no. 7(1933): 211.

activists. Thus, while African-Americans characterized the ILD activists as whites, they also saw them as radicals, reds and Communists.¹⁷ In this, the reactions of the black community paralleled those of white Southerners and Americans as a whole. Yet, while white Southerners generally feared the radical activists as a threat to their political, economic and social stability, African-Americans, with little to gain from the existing social structure, welcomed them with open arms.

The identification of the Scottsboro activists as radicals shifted the focus of the debate in the African-American community from race to ideology and politics. ILD activists earned the admiration of large numbers of black Americans precisely because they were radicals and advocated radical solutions to the crisis facing the Scottsboro youths. As Asbury Smith observed, "The International Labor Defense is Communism in action for Negro rights and Scottsboro is its supreme example."¹⁸ From the outset of the trials, African-Americans appreciated the ILD for stepping into a case that looked so hopeless that even the reformist NAACP had avoided it. As one black woman asked, "Is it possible that the NAACP is going to stand by and see our children killed as beasts?"¹⁹ While the NAACP -- renamed the Nicest Association for the Advancement of Certain People by one disgruntled onlooker -- wavered, the ILD sprang into action.²⁰

Many African-Americans realized that the ILD was the only legal-defense organization struggling to save the Scottsboro youths, and the radical activists were their only allies in the battle. Andy and Roy Wright's mother, Ada Wright, wholeheartedly applauded the ILD's efforts on behalf of her

¹⁷For insightful discussions of black reactions to Communism, the ILD and Scottsboro, see Solomon, *Red and Black*; Martin, "The International Labor Defense and Black America," 165-94; Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*. For less helpful accounts, see William Nolan, *Communism Versus the Negro* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1951); Wilson Record, *The Negro and the Communist Party* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951); Wilson Record, *Race and Radicalism: The NAACP and the Communist Party in Conflict* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1964).

¹⁸Smith, "What Can the Negro Expect from Communism," 211.

¹⁹*Pittsburgh Courier*, as quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 18 May 1933.

²⁰*Labor Defender*, August 1931, 157.

sons, exclaiming, "The International Labor Defense and the League of Struggle for Negro Rights -- they call them Reds at home, down South -- I don't care what they call them -- they are the only ones trying to save our boys and I am going to live with them and die with them."²¹ Another Scottsboro mom, Janie Patterson, declared, "I haven't got no schooling, but I have five senses and I know that Negroes can't win by themselves . . . I don't care whether they are Reds, Greens or Blues. They are the only ones who put up a fight to save these boys and I am with them to the end."²² To Janie Patterson, the ILD activists were not just whites, the color noticeably missing from her list, they were radical friends and allies in the life and death struggle to save her son.

From the beginning, the ILD and Communist Party insisted on linking Scottsboro to a wide variety of injustices faced by blacks. Anna Damon, the national secretary of the ILD, and James Ford, the black Communist presidential candidate in 1932, consistently argued that, "The Scottsboro fight and the issues around the Scottsboro case and the tremendous lessons learned in this struggle must be made a basis for a fight for the larger interests of the Negro people. A fight against lynchings, mob violence and police brutality; for the enactment of a federal anti-lynching law; for the right to vote, serve on juries, and enjoy complete civil liberties -- these are a part of this great struggle developed around Scottsboro."²³ To the ILD, Scottsboro was not an isolated case of justice gone awry, but a prime example of the systemic racism that plagued the lives of all African-Americans.

The ILD gained the confidence of African-Americans by recognizing this complex nature of American racism, and by stressing the broad significance of Scottsboro to the lives of all blacks. While Hosea Hudson

²¹*Daily Worker*, 18 May 1931.

²²As quoted in Carter, *Scottsboro*, 144. For another example of those pragmatists who supported the ILD, see *Washington Tribune*, 12 May 1933.

²³James W. Ford and Anna Damon, "Scottsboro in the Light of Building the Negro People's Front," *Communist* 16, no. 9 (1937): 847. This point is also made in John Williams, "Struggles of the Thirties in the South," *Political Affairs* 44 (February 1965): 15-25.

understood very little of the theoretical discussion at his first Communist Party meeting, when he heard a speaker mention Scottsboro his ears pricked up. "In the biggest part," he later remembered:

I didn't know what he was saying. All I know is about the Scottsboro case. He was explaining about how the Scottsboro case is a part of the whole frame-up of the Negro people in the South -- jim crow, frame-up, lynching, all that was part of the system. So I could understand that all right . . . That was the beginning.²⁴

Henry Winston, a black Mississippian who became national chairman of the Communist Party, similarly warned an audience of young blacks that, "You are liable to get pulled off of a freight-train and sent off to jail or a chain gang for the crime of looking for work. *You* are running the risk of becoming another Scottsboro boy."²⁵ For many African-Americans, Scottsboro symbolized the systemic racism they faced everyday. The ILD was the only organization to correctly diagnose and battle this intricate disease. As James Ford lamented, "The life of the Negro people today is a thousand bloody Scottsboros."²⁶ But blood had not been shed at Scottsboro, and many blacks knew that it was due to the relentless struggle of the ILD.

The two-fisted strategy of the ILD -- uniting mass pressure with the best legal defense -- impressed a wide spectrum of black Americans. African-Americans applauded the ILD for using radical "mass pressure" tactics to publicize internationally the Scottsboro case and the plight of blacks in America. An editorial in the *Philadelphia Tribune* explained, "we feel that such publicity will create, refresh and instill in the minds of hundreds of people a greater sense of race discrimination. People who heretofore had not thought of a race problem are now weighing the question to determine its place in the

²⁴Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*, 87.

²⁵Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 179; Nikolau Mostovets, *Henry Winston: Profile of a U. S. Communist* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1983), 19.

²⁶Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 179.

scheme of things."²⁷ At a more personal level, Janie Patterson, mother of Haywood, wrote to her imprisoned son, "Everywhere I've been along, all people know about [the] Scottsboro boys." She warned him, "So don't you change your mind to the NAACP. You stay with the ILD because it is fighting hard for your freedom."²⁸

Numerous blacks also praised the radical ILD for providing the Scottsboro youths with a skilled and intrepid defense team. Reverend T. H. Medford, a secretary of the African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Zion board of foreign missions, told a symposium of black ministers, "I think the Communists, through Mr. Leibowitz, have done more than anybody else could have done. I do not believe you could have gotten a Southern white man to push the case forward as far as it has gone. Nobody has the courage to do what those Reds do."²⁹ Berrel Scott, a black resident in Arkansas, similarly believed that the "International Labor Defense is going about it in the right fashion. You have got to shame the South into doing the right thing."³⁰ While the NAACP repudiated the ILD's double-fisted tactics, uneducated, poor and working-class African-Americans sung their praises. As Clarence Norris' mother, Ida, summed it up, "We are poor and we never had a chance to get much learning, but we have sense enough to know that it is the fight of the ILD lawyers and united mass protest behind them that saved us up to now. We know this is our only hope."³¹

African-Americans were grateful to the ILD for personally involving large numbers of blacks in the public struggle for the Scottsboro youths. From the start, strategists placed the mothers of the Scottsboro youths in the forefront of the ILD's mass protest movement. Only months after the initial trials in 1931, Janie Patterson and Josephine Powell toured New York and

²⁷*Philadelphia Tribune*, 4 May 1933.

²⁸Janie Patterson, letter to Haywood Patterson, 2 May 1934, ILD Papers.

²⁹*Afro-American*, 6 May 1933.

³⁰*Chicago Defender*, 29 April 1933.

³¹Ida Norris, letter to William H. Davis, 22 January 1935, ILD Papers.

other large cities, speaking at dozens of "Free the Scottsboro Boys" demonstrations and rallies. Ada Wright traveled with ILD chairman J. Louis Engdahl to twenty-six countries on a European Scottsboro tour in 1932. For women who had never traveled extensively or participated in mass protests, such new experiences must have carried an air of profound exhilaration. "I left home on last Friday to be here for the first of May to be in a demonstration," Mamie Williams wrote her son, "and I mean we had some time and it sure was some people."³² She warned Eugene not to leave the ILD because no one brought people together to protest the convictions like the ILD did. "I wish you could of been up here yesterday," she mused, "and seen the people yelling and hollering 'Free the Scottsboro Boys.'"³³

African-Americans across the country rallied behind the Scottsboro movement, reveling in the unprecedented power they enjoyed as partners with white radicals in the struggle. As one black educator noted, "There's too much rabbit in most of us and this Scottsboro case has taken a lot of rabbit out and made us fight."³⁴ Many blacks did not see the ILD as a charity organization, or its activists as wealthy benefactors. Instead they thought of ILD activists as radical ringleaders -- inspiring, challenging and pushing them to stand up as a group and fight for their own rights. An editorial in the *Cleveland Call and Post* entitled "A Good Sign!" watched with pleasure as blacks increasingly threw their personal and monetary support to the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. The author remarked, "Too long have we been dependent upon philanthropy for financial aid in all of our activities. When a race becomes conscious of the fact that it must purchase with its own money its place in the sun, from that time on, it will begin to win respect and make real progress."³⁵ Or as W. P. Dabney, the black editor of *The Union*, keenly

³²Mamie Williams, letter to Eugene Williams, 2 May 1934, ILD Papers.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Martin, "The International Labor Defense and Black America," 193.

³⁵*Cleveland Call and Post*, 10 June 1933.

observed, "The Communists came, not bringing charity but brotherhood, not bringing words but deeds! What matters motive? When a man is drowning does he demand reasons for the helping hand?"³⁶

There can be no doubt that the Scottsboro movement was an enormous political windfall for the ILD and the Communist Party. As Benjamin Davis, a black ILD lawyer and activist, recalled, "my impression of the Communists was formed during the period of Scottsboro -- the case which epitomized in all its horrible completeness the plight of the Negro and at the same time symbolized the zealously-executed and correct policy of the Communist Party."³⁷ According to Asbury Smith, an African-American member of the Urban League, the black masses were "shouting happy over what Communism has done for them, and praising God for what they expect it to do." "Undoubtedly," he continued, "this sudden interest in Communism has in a large measure grown out of the Scottsboro case."³⁸

Thousands of black Americans became members of the ILD and the Communist Party in the aftermath of the Scottsboro campaign. The parents of the Scottsboro youths became some of the most ardent supporters of the ILD's political radicalism. "I am a CP member," wrote Viola Montgomery, Olen's mother, "and I would not be anything else because if the CP had not push [*sic*] the ILD the nine Scottsboro boys would have been dead two years ago. So I am with the Party as long as I live. I don't care who likes it or who don't like it. I do, and I think every fair minded person would like it as well as I do."³⁹ Janie Patterson similarly declared, "And I am a Red too. I tell the white and I tell the black I am not getting back of nothing else. I mean to be with you all as long as I live . . ."⁴⁰ What in large part attracted these parents

³⁶Vann and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 156.

³⁷Benjamin J. Davis, "Why I Am a Communist," *Phylon* 8, no. 2 (1947): 109.

³⁸Smith, "What Can the Negro Expect from Communism," 211.

³⁹Viola Montgomery, letter to ILD, 24 February 1934, ILD Papers.

⁴⁰As quoted in Wilson, "The Freight Car Case," 42. For other expressions of the Scottsboro families' solidarity with the ILD, see Viola Montgomery, letter to ILD, 13 October 1934, RBM Papers; *Daily Worker*, 25 April 1931; Lucille Wright, letter to Samuel Leibowitz, 27 July 1937, ILD Papers.

to the Communists was the old-fashioned respect and dignity that radicals afforded them. Frank Davis, the black editor of the *Atlanta World*, found that "Talks with a few Atlanta relatives of the Scottsboro boys showed me that Communistic friendliness, pronouncements of social equality, the use of 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.' and their treatment in Dixie as men and women instead of Negroes was what got 'em."⁴¹ Or as Janie Patterson concisely put it, "I can't be treated any better than the Reds has treated me."⁴²

Many African-Americans quickly overcame the stigma associated with the radical left. At a mass meeting in Manhattan, the black Reverend Purcell from Raleigh, North Carolina, told an enthusiastic crowd, "I am not a red. But brothers and sisters I love the ILD. The ILD is fighting for those boys, for my people. Keep on fighting ILD. Get behind the ILD, my people."⁴³ In a surprising move, many black ministers threw their full support behind the ILD, donating their churches as meeting halls for Scottsboro demonstrations. In some cases this reflected the growing appeal of radicalism among black ministers. In one insightful letter to the ILD, a black preacher remarked, "I have joined the ILD here in Baltimore, and there are many other preachers in this organization. We poor Negro preachers are beginning to realize just where we stand -- shoulder to shoulder with the working class, fighting against this system."⁴⁴ The ILD encouraged such conversions and tempered its own anti-religious inclinations to do so. As an official ILD publication explained, "We decided to appeal especially to the Negro people in the churches, where most of them can be reached . . . Stress was laid on not attacking religion, but on emphasizing the need of mass pressure and the

⁴¹Murphy and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 119.

⁴²Wilson, "The Freight Car Case," 42. For other examples of praise for the ILD and Communist Party's platform of social equality, see *Afro-American*, 5 January 1932; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 July 1933; Murphy and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 118.

⁴³Reverend Purcell is quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 13 April 1933.

⁴⁴Editorial clipping entitled "Negro Preacher Joins Struggle," no date, RM Papers. For an example of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign in black churches, see *Educational Bulletin*, August-September 1934, 10-12.

unity of Negro and white."⁴⁵ In fact, the ILD was so conciliatory in its attempts to bring blacks into the struggle that the organization was even criticized by the Communist Party for opportunism.⁴⁶

But in other instances, it was the rising tide of positive public opinion for the radical Scottsboro campaign that actually forced reluctant black ministers to cooperate with the ILD. In Chicago, Harold Gosnell found that African-American ministers "were afraid not to co-operate with a movement which aroused such deep-seated emotions among their followers."⁴⁷ When the *Pittsburgh Courier* described black ministers and Communists as "strange bedfellows," a reader responded, "the Negro ministers whom you so unjustly criticized in your editorial . . . should really be honored." In the same edition, members of the Church of God in Christ called "upon our entire congregations throughout the Nation to contribute funds and moral support and to aid the International Labor Defense in defending the boys."⁴⁸

In the South, black membership in the ILD and the Communist Party increased dramatically. Historian Robin Kelley has shown that with the advent of the Scottsboro campaign, the ILD was transformed from a largely unknown organization that advocated justice for poor Southern blacks to a movement overwhelmingly composed of them. By 1934, the ILD in Birmingham had some three thousand members, making it one of the largest black organizations in the area. There were approximately one thousand Communist Party members in Alabama by 1934, ninety-five percent of whom were black. In Little Rock, Arkansas, twelve ILD branches were opened, and in Atlanta, Georgia, there were at least one hundred fee-paying ILD members. In the words of Hosea Hudson, "the Party and the ILD too, was too far

⁴⁵*Educational Bulletin*, August-September 1934.

⁴⁶C. A. Hathaway, "A Warning Against Opportunist Distortions of the United Front Tactic," *Communist* 12, no. 6 (1933): 525-537; C.P.U.S.A., "The Scottsboro Struggle and the Next Steps: Resolution of the Political Bureau," *Communist* 12, no. 6 (1933): 570-582.

⁴⁷Harold F. Gosnell, *Negro Politicians: The Rise of Negro Politics in Chicago* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935), 328. Also see Carter, *Scottsboro*, 149.

⁴⁸*Pittsburgh Courier*, 10 June 1933.

balanced, too far one-sided, all black and no white. But actually, the Negroes was easier to recruit. They was ready to come."⁴⁹ It was largely the ILD's Scottsboro campaign that had primed them. The ILD filled a political vacuum for these poor Southern blacks; it became their organization voicing their political needs and aspirations.⁵⁰

The psychological impact of the ILD-led Scottsboro campaign on Southern blacks was profound. In the 1930s, a Southern radical black culture blossomed out of the labor, unemployment and civil rights movements. In this new hybrid culture, traditional black folk music and radical thought combined to produce lyrics that reflected the new spirit of unrest and protest evolving among Southern blacks. The Scottsboro campaign loomed large in this popular culture. Among others, the melody of "Give Me That Old Time Religion," a favorite black spiritual, was used to create the easily-remembered "Scottsboro Song:"

The Scottsboro verdict,
The Scottsboro verdict,
The Scottsboro verdict,
Is not good enuf for me.

Its good for big fat bosses,
For workers double-crossers,
For low down slaves and hosses.
But it ain't good enuf for me.⁵¹

The ILD was particularly eulogized in the hymn "We Got A Stone," which became the official ILD song in the South. Sung to the tune of "A Stone Came Rolling Out of Babylon," the hymn, written by an African-American woman from Birmingham, praised the ILD's militancy and encouraged listeners to join the worthy organization:

Don't you want that stone,

⁴⁹Painter, *The Narrative of Hosea Hudson*, 114. For details of membership in the ILD and Communist Party in the South, see Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 90; Kelley, "Comrades, Praise Gawd For Lenin and Them," 60; Davis, *Communist Councilman from Harlem*, 85; *Equal Justice and Democracy*, ILD Vertical Files.

⁵⁰Kelley, *Hammer and Hoe*, 91.

⁵¹As quoted in Kelley, "Comrades, Praise Gawd For Lenin and Them," 75.

That was hewn out of history?
The ILD is the stone,
That was hewn out of history.
Put your shoulder to that stone,
That was hewn out of history.

Come a-rollin' through Dixie,
Come a-rollin' through Dixie,
A-tearing down the kingdom of the boss!⁵²

Not only in the South, but across the country black Americans increasingly sympathized with the ILD and the Communist Party. According to the *Afro-American*, the largest interracial movement of 1931 -- only one year into the Scottsboro campaign -- was "the rise of the Communist Party, which has enrolled thousands of colored members."⁵³ Although little research has been done on the ILD in the North or West, it stands to reason that comparable or even greater numbers of black Americans joined the organization there than in the South. This is primarily because the ILD focused its mass action campaign in black centers of the North, especially in large cities like New York and Chicago, where a greater degree of freedom of expression existed for both African-Americans and white radicals. The bleakness and stark privation of the Depression also did much to open African-American minds and hearts to the radical programs and ideology of the ILD. Respected intellectuals, black and white, increasingly wrote under the banners of socialism, and Roosevelt's New Deal itself seemed a triumph of forward-thinking, modern America. With so many factors in its favor, the ILD's Scottsboro campaign could not have been more timely.

The organization's pragmatic focus on Northern blacks paid off. According to historian Hugh T. Murray, "The Scottsboro case was to be the most effective campaign conducted by the Communists among Negroes, and

⁵²*Southern Worker*, July 1934; Kelley, "Comrades, Praise Gaud For Lenin and Them," 74-75. The *Liberator* published a "Spiritual for the Struggle of Negro Rights" entitled "They Burn Children in Alabama" that also deals with the Scottsboro theme. See *Harlem Liberator*, 16 January 1932.

⁵³*Afro-American*, as quoted in the *Daily Worker*, 5 January 1932.

it raised the ILD to prominence as a defender of black rights."⁵⁴ Indeed, one week after Haywood Patterson's second conviction, the spirit of outrage and protest was so strong in Harlem's African-American community that nine new ILD branches were established. Each of these branches was named after a Scottsboro youth. With zealous African-American and white activists canvassing the community, the ILD increased its membership in Harlem alone to 1,700. Related organizations like the Communist-affiliated League of Struggle for Negro Rights also grew as a result of the popularity of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign among African-Americans in the North.⁵⁵

Of course, not all black Americans responded favorably to the ILD radicals. When some emphasized the radicalism of the ILD activists, they did so to reproach the organization for being Communist -- and hence dogmatic, narrowly sectarian and a dangerous Russian tool. The standard accusation leveled by ILD critics was that the organization used the Scottsboro campaign for political propaganda value. As James Ivy of the *Pittsburgh Courier* claimed, "Despite all the ballyhoo of the Communists about the predicament of the Scottsboro Boys and their so called efforts to save them, they really have no deeper interest in the case than the propagandizing of their own bizarre creed. Electrocutation of the boys would actually be welcomed; it would make good sales talk for their Russian rags."⁵⁶ In addition, several blacks accused the ILD of misusing funds and turning the campaign into a financial racket.⁵⁷

Criticism also came from the NAACP, whose position as the leading organization in the struggle for black civil rights was being undermined by

⁵⁴Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 178.

⁵⁵*Daily Worker*, 19 May 1931; *Harlem Liberator*, 29 April 1933; Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 85-87. Langston Hughes immortalized the Scottsboro trials in his play, "Scottsboro, Limited," *New Masses* 7 (November 1931): 13-16.

⁵⁶*Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1933.

⁵⁷These charges are dismissed in Hugh T. Murray, "The NAACP Versus the Communist Party: The Scottsboro Rape Cases, 1931-1932," in *The Negro in Depression and War: Prelude to Revolution, 1930-1945*, ed. Bernard Sternsher (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), 267-282.

the ILD. W. E. B. Du Bois, editor of the NAACP's journal *Crisis*, censured the ILD activists and Communists for lacking an appreciation of the historical specificity of the black experience. Du Bois firmly believed that radicals did not understand the intense hatred that white workers held for blacks.⁵⁸ Thus, when the ILD called for black-white worker solidarity, Du Bois fastidiously reminded his readers that, "Throughout the history of the Negro in America, white labor has been the black man's enemy, his oppressor, his red murderer."⁵⁹ He attributed the ignorance of radical activists to their youthful inexperience and largely foreign origins. Many black Americans, including Du Bois, also believed that the double onus of being black and Communist in the United States could only spell disaster for the African-American community. For example, Asbury Smith concluded that "If the Negroes accept Communism more rapidly than the whites they will be oppressed with a cruelty and relentlessness unknown since Civil War days. Bad as conditions are now, they will be much worse."⁶⁰

Among those black critics were a few who publicly speculated whether African-Americans should accept help from anyone outside of the black community, let alone from radicals. "Now come the Communists," Kelley Miller of the *Amsterdam News* observed, "with open and outstretched hands bidding him welcome and offering him political and economic salvation."⁶¹ Miller believed that blacks would be willing to turn to any party that would improve their condition, including the Communists, and forcefully decried this lack of black self-sufficiency. He concluded, "Such, alas! is the lamentable

⁵⁸Other black editors who believed that poor and working-class whites proved a formidable enemy to an interracial Communist movement included William M. Kelley of the *Amsterdam News*, W. P. Dabney of *The Union*, Roscoe Dunjee of the *Black Dispatch*, and I. Willis Cole, of the *Louisville Leader*. See Murphy and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 117-119; Vann and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 154-170; W. E. B. Du Bois, "Marxism and the Negro Problem," *Crisis* 40, no. 5 (1933): 103-104, 118.

⁵⁹W. E. B. Du Bois, "Postscript," *Crisis* 40, no. 9 (1931): 315.

⁶⁰Smith, "What Can the Negro Expect from Communism," 212; Du Bois, "Postscript," 315; Cedric Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed, 1983), 335.

⁶¹*Amsterdam News*, 31 May 1933.

predicament of people who seek salvation outside of themselves."⁶² J. Alston Atkins, editor of a black newspaper in Texas, concurred. "In the life of the American Negro," Atkins wrote, "every expression which is labeled 'Communism' is for the most part both planned and worked from without. In my opinion we can not solve the problems which Negroes face in America except as we develop our own plan suited to our own needs, and as we ourselves continually improve upon and sacrificially and unselfishly work that plan from within."⁶³ While these concerns were directed more to blacks than to the ILD or the Communist Party, a similar line would later be used by black nationalist scholars such as Harold Cruse to denounce the Communist Party, and those Jews within it, for their stranglehold on black affairs.

A few contemporary black Americans echoed similar concerns. Although grateful to the ILD lawyers, Cash Murphy wanted to see more African-Americans in leadership positions in the campaign for the Scottsboro youths. He argued that, "[t]he race must wake up and give us some more real men."⁶⁴ Those who held this opinion often argued that it was admirable for white radicals to have intervened in the trials. But they also felt that the African-American needed to be reminded "that the Scottsboro fight is *his* fight and that no sacrifice is too great for him to make in saving the lives of those defendants . . . It is the fight of the Negro everywhere for his life against legal lynchings . . . and he must win."⁶⁵

IV

Had it not been for attorney Solicitor Wade Wright, black Americans might have continued to perceive the ILD activists as whites and as Communists. But when Wade Wright lambasted the ILD's defense team for its Northern Jewish attorneys, "Jew money" and Jewish influence, he forever

⁶²Ibid.

⁶³Murphy and others, "Negro Editors on Communism," 119.

⁶⁴*Pittsburgh Courier*, 1 July 1933.

⁶⁵*Amsterdam News*, 15 March 1933. Italics mine.

changed the way that black Americans thought of the ILD and its activists. A new twist had been publicly recognized in the Scottsboro equation. No longer were these simply whites and radicals coming to the aid of Southern blacks; the ILD activists and lawyers were unmistakably Jews.

Many African-Americans were shocked that Wade Wright reproached Jews for defending the Scottsboro youths. An editorial in the *Richmond Planet* observed that, "We have never seen an instance of more pronounced prejudice which was divided between the prisoner at the bar and his counsel, who happened to be a Jew and from a Northern State."⁶⁶ Or as Roscoe Dunjee, the editor of the *Black Dispatch*, determined, "Fact and truth falling down, the would-be legal murderers sought to detract the mind of the natives with distorted insinuations about the Hebrew people."⁶⁷ From the moment that Wade Wright publicly exposed the distinctive Jewish character of the defense, blacks took a keen interest in the Jewishness of the ILD and the Scottsboro campaign. Hamilton Seay, a New York resident, was particularly flabbergasted to learn that "Jews are even more interested [in the Scottsboro case] than we of the colored group are . . ."⁶⁸

At a basic level, the Scottsboro campaign challenged certain black stereotypes of the Jew. The large number of Jewish ILD activists in the Scottsboro movement, so valiantly fighting for this black cause, forced many African-Americans to view Jews in a more positive light. For instance, in the North, some African-Americans characterized Jews as neighborhood exploiters. Yet, as historian Mark Naison found, "[i]n the early '30s, white Jewish communists in Harlem, insofar as they were identifiable as such, contravened this negative image rather than reinforced it -- most were young, poor, and willing to take substantial physical risks in behalf of black

⁶⁶*Richmond Planet*, 29 April 1933.

⁶⁷*Black Dispatch*, 13 April 1933. Also see *Afro-American*, 15 April 1933; *California Eagle*, 14 April 1933.

⁶⁸*Amsterdam News*, 19 April 1933.

neighborhood residents or black victims of injustice."⁶⁹ African-American Reverend Adam Clayton Powell Jr. similarly noted how the Scottsboro campaign challenged black anti-Semitism. "Anti-Semitism among blacks," he wrote:

was a tragic and ironic paradox . . . It grew as black workers heard their Christian employers at home and in industry condemn the Jews. Black nationalists, especially in Harlem, found it profitable to stir up anti-Jewish feeling. Bewildered, frustrated blacks carried bitterness toward Jews in their hearts. The Scottsboro case was the first successful refutation of the anti-Semitic propaganda with which the blacks had been bombarded.⁷⁰

In the aftermath of Wade Wright's diatribe, large numbers of African-Americans applauded Jews for their role in the Scottsboro campaign. "American Negroes and black people the world over owe much to the generosity, courage and brotherhood of the Jewish race," declared an editorial on Scottsboro in the *Black Dispatch*.⁷¹ As the most prominent Jewish activist involved in the trials, Samuel Leibowitz received much of the praise directed toward Jews. William Kelley of the *Amsterdam News*, for example, pointed out to readers that, "Here is a Jew of considerable means and fame, a man who risks his life every day he is in the State of Alabama going out of his way to serve the cause of justice . . ."⁷² T. R. Poston, of the same paper, played on historical ironies and likened Leibowitz to a latter-day Jesus fighting for Christian principles. He wrote that, "While a peaceful Jew with a lamb in His arms looked down from the stained glass windows of a temple built in His name, a fighting member of the same race stood before 2,000 persons in

⁶⁹Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 323.

⁷⁰Powell, *Marching Blacks*, 65.

⁷¹*Black Dispatch*, 13 April 1933.

⁷²*Amsterdam News*, 12 April 1933.

Asbury M. E. Church here yesterday and hurled defiance at a state which had challenged the teachings of the former."⁷³

Many black Americans seemed to welcome Wright's bigoted comments, not because they shared his sentiments, but because they believed that they had much to gain from Southern anti-Semitism. At a basic level, some blacks suggested that the Jew money incident would expose to all and sundry the virulently racist and oppressive nature of the South. White Americans, they believed, were hardened to Southern racism, but maybe they would not remain so callous if they were to see that this racism also incorporated anti-Semitic prejudice. "When an attorney for the State was permitted to stand up in open court and declare that a witness for the defense was 'bought with Jew money' without rebuke from the bench," declared an editorial in the *Richmond Planet*, "one can well imagine the hostile atmosphere in which this particular case was tried."⁷⁴ Others hoped that Northern whites would finally be driven to action because of Wright's unpalatable anti-Semitic remarks. Such was the response of the *Afro-American* when it surmised that, "Even Scottsboro's prosecution lawyers, who talked about Jew money and Communists down in Alabama last week, alienated a number of persons who might have stood for this clap-trap without protest."⁷⁵

Moreover, many African-Americans took comfort in knowing that they were not alone in facing racial discrimination and hatred. They underscored the importance of Wade Wright's comments to demonstrate that blacks and Jews faced kindred plights. Both groups were victims of racial bigotry; both groups shared a common adversary. In the aftermath of the "Jew money" affair, *The Gazette*, an African-American paper based in Cleveland, Ohio, noted that there "is no longer any 'religious' prejudice against the Jewish

⁷³*Amsterdam News*, 3 May 1933. Also see *Afro-American*, 27 May 1933; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 20 May 1933.

⁷⁴*Richmond Planet*, 29 April 1933.

⁷⁵*Afro-American*, 15 April 1933.

people. No one pays any attention to that part of their life, anymore. It used to be the case, but is not so now. The prejudice against them is racial and economic."⁷⁶ According to black New Yorker H. Jandorf, "The Scottsboro case demonstrates anew the readiness of the bigots to connect Jews and Negroes and it is highly significant that Jews are proud that those most eager to secure justice for the condemned are of that oppressed and persecuted race."⁷⁷ Or as the *Portland Advocate* frankly put it, the "Jew money" incident "shows that Jews are hated equally with Negroes."⁷⁸

If blacks and Jews shared a similar enemy, as many African-Americans believed, then they also shared a common interest -- the struggle against bigotry and racism. As Theodore W. Jones, a black Virginian, poignantly observed, "Does [*sic*] not both races have a common cause?"⁷⁹ Many African-Americans stressed the commonality of interests between blacks and Jews because they felt that Jews would make powerful allies in the struggle against racism. Contrary to later scholarly criticism of the alliance, most notably Harold Cruse's critique, these African-Americans actually encouraged the political solidarity of blacks and Jews.⁸⁰ This reaction was often the result of an inflated understanding of Jewish power and wealth. Ironically, this was a stereotype also held by anti-Semites. For example, when blacks and Jews were restricted under a quota system at Harvard University in the 1920s, the black journal *Messenger* responded, "We have no prejudice against Jews, but we are glad to see them being excluded along with the Negro. Hitting the Jew is helping the Negro. Why? Negroes have large numbers and small money: Jews have small numbers and large money. Together, the two have

⁷⁶*The Gazette*, 15 April 1933.

⁷⁷*Amsterdam News*, 19 April 1933.

⁷⁸*Portland Advocate*, 10 June 1933. For other examples, see *Afro-American*, 6 May 1933; *Philadelphia Tribune*, 20 April 1933; *Houston Defender*, 15 April 1933; Jacob J. Weinstein, "The Jew and the Negro," *Crisis* 41, no. 7 (1934): 197-198; *Black Dispatch*, 13 April 1933.

⁷⁹*Richmond Planet*, 29 April 1933.

⁸⁰See introduction above.

large numbers and large money."⁸¹ The same logic could be applied to Scottsboro.

Many African-Americans hoped that by demonstrating the common destiny of blacks and Jews, Wade Wright's anti-Semitic comments would unite the two in a powerful alliance against racism. In an editorial entitled "Scottsboro A Blessing," the *Philadelphia Tribune* concluded that the "Scottsboro case is the finest thing which has happened in America in a long time." Among other reasons, the author argued that the trials were a boon for blacks because they "should bring a closer union between the two races [blacks and Jews]." The author did not hide his hopes that a black-Jewish alliance would present a stronger, more effective front against American racism. To this end, he prodded even more Jews to become active in the struggle for African-American rights. "It is hoped," he wrote, "that our Jewish brothers . . . will follow the lead of that great lawyer, Leibowitz, a Jew, who fought so hard against bigotry and prejudice and injustice."⁸²

While most comments on the Jewishness of the Scottsboro activists were positive, a few African-Americans did use the "Jew money" incident to accuse the ILD of mismanaging the case. Rather than placing the blame on Alabama Solicitor Wade Wright, they attacked the ILD for having chosen Jews to lead the defense. In a list of ILD offenses, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, a strong NAACP supporter, argued that "a third faulty tactic was to bring in a Jewish lawyer from New York City as defending attorney. It might have been foreseen by any rational person that the prosecution would seize upon this fact to inflame the jury and the populace generally and so jeopardize even more so the lives of the accused men."⁸³ The vitriolic A. Fitzholan Wallace claimed that the ILD had deliberately chosen Jewish lawyers as part of a

⁸¹As quoted in David J. Hellwig, "Black Images of Jews: From Reconstruction to Depression," *Societas* 8 no. 3 (1978): 211-212.

⁸²*Philadelphia Tribune*, 20 April 1933.

⁸³*Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 April 1933. Also see *Afro-American*, 22 April 1933.

sinister Communist plot. He believed that "the recent trial of Patterson was not a true trial of the Scottsboro case, but a trial of the ILD, in an atmosphere filled with hatred and bigotry, carefully planned by the ILD itself and designed to win converts among Negroes and Jews to the cause of Communism."⁸⁴ It is worth noting, however, that contemporary black critics did not accuse the ILD activists of using the Scottsboro campaign as a sectarian Jewish quest for power, as a vicarious fight against anti-Semitism, or as an assertion of their superiority over white Protestant Americans.

The Scottsboro trials took place during a time of international turmoil. Adolf Hitler's rise to power in the early 1930s competed with Wade Wright's anti-Semitic summation for headlines in national newspapers. For those blacks already looking for similarities in the black and Jewish experiences, parallels between Scottsboro and Hitler's Germany were obvious. Both represented variations on the dominant theme in black life -- brutal racial oppression. An article in the *Carolina Times* concluded, "Hitler's enactments against the Jews on the other side of the Atlantic and the Scottsboro case on these shores clearly show that the world today is propelled by race hatred and bigotry and class distinction."⁸⁵ Or as the disheartened Herbert Johnson, a reporter for the *Philadelphia Tribune*, observed, "It is quite unfortunate that the anti-Jewish movement should have been launched in Germany and the Scottsboro case in America at this time, a time when the people of the entire civilized world should be bound together for the good of all."⁸⁶

It was now African-Americans who used their own experiences as a paradigm through which to understand the plight of European Jewry. Many black Americans believed that blacks and Jews suffered from a similar racial oppression. Coming on the heels of the "Jew money" incident, this observation seemed self-evident to blacks. Thus, when the *Chicago Defender*

⁸⁴*Pittsburgh Courier*, 6 May 1933.

⁸⁵*Carolina Times*, 22 April 1933.

⁸⁶*Philadelphia Tribune*, 4 May 1933. Also see *Pittsburgh Courier*, 29 April 1933.

asked readers what they thought of Hitler's policy of driving Jews out of Germany, Cassius J. Foster replied, "All American Race people should be in sympathy with the Jews because that is the identical problem that confronts the black man in many parts of the United States."⁸⁷ Or as George H. Binford, an African-American from Virginia, surmised, "The Jew and the Negro, regardless of their contribution to civilization, have been the objects of racial hatred and persecution. I admit that to suffer alone is almost unbearable; but when the Jew thinks of his fellow sufferers, the Negroes, he can at least feel that he is not alone in the role of suffering."⁸⁸

Just as African-Americans were able to call Scottsboro and the "Jew money" incident a blessing, so many were also able to find the brighter side of Hitler's Germany. For example, while United States diplomats and officials publicly decried Hitler's policy towards Jews, they remained virtually silent on questions of racism in America. In response to this hypocrisy, an editorial in the *Pittsburgh Courier* argued, "The Hitler persecution of Jews may not be entirely an unmixed blessing, much as it is to be deplored, if it can smoke out these American hypocrites and force them to take a position against race discrimination in industry, business and the professions." With a similarly upbeat perspective, the same editorial incidentally also found reason to hope that German anti-Semitism "may also go a long way toward liberalizing many of our Jewish neighbors who as readily discriminate against Negroes as do the prejudiced Anglo-Saxons."⁸⁹

⁸⁷*Chicago Defender*, 15 April 1933.

⁸⁸*Norfolk Journal and Guide*, 15 April 1933. Also see *Harlem Liberator*, 29 April 1933; W. E. B. Du Bois, "The Jews," *Crisis* 40, no. 5 (1933): 117; *Afro-American*, 17 June 1933; *Richmond Planet*, 29 April 1933. While some blacks agreed that blacks and Jews faced a similar racial oppression, others stressed that there were gradations of oppression and that American blacks were considerably worse off than Jews. For example, reflecting on the lessons of the Scottsboro trials, Theodore W. Jones of Richmond, Virginia argued, "The indignities and persecutions to which the Jewish people in Germany are subjected at this time appeals to people of every civilized nation on earth, and rightly so. But the plight of the Jews in Europe does not in any sense equal the plight of the Negroes in the Southern States of America -- a prolonged plight of lynching by courts as well as by mobs, a plight prolonged by Ku Klux Klan atrocities and human burnings at the stake, relics of barbarism." As quoted in *Richmond Planet*, 29 April 1933. Also see *Houston Defender*, 15 April 1933; *Pittsburgh Courier*, 15 April 1933; Weisbord and Stein, *Bittersweet Encounter*, 50-51.

⁸⁹*Pittsburgh Courier*, 22 July 1933.

Thus, both the Scottsboro movement and Hitler's Germany suggested to black Americans that they shared much in common with Jews. Not surprisingly, then, in the aftermath of Scottsboro, African-Americans increasingly called for a progressive alliance of blacks and Jews. They thought that this alliance would serve each group's interests, and they hoped that as a united force blacks and Jews would be able to conquer bigotry and racism. As an editorial in the *Cleveland Call and Post* insisted:

The combining of these Jewish forces with those of the Negro should argue well for the successful finish of a task well begun. These two minority groups have much in common. They have felt the hand of segregation, ostracism and persecution. They have refused to be crushed under the wheels of Nordic civilization as it progresses madly along. Both have contributed much to the upbuilding of this nation and both have shed their blood on every one of its battlefields.⁹⁰

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According to Murray Friedman, a historian of black-Jewish relations, Communism was never popular among the African-American masses and hence was "added to the catalogue of black grievances against Jews."⁹¹ This was clearly not the case with the ILD's Scottsboro campaign. Numbers of black Americans threw their support to the radical ILD, its lawyers and activists, whether they saw them as whites, radicals, Jews or some combination of all three. These African-Americans did not see themselves as pawns in a sinister Jewish plot, but as genuine participants in the struggle for their rights, lives and dignity. As a result of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign, African-Americans and radical Jews became partners on the march.

⁹⁰*Cleveland Call and Post*, no date, clipping from ILD Papers.

⁹¹Friedman, *What Went Wrong*, 122.

The reverberations of the Scottsboro campaign would continue to be felt in black and Jewish communities for many years to come. In mid-1933, Adam Clayton Powell Jr. told an audience of more than 5,000 at Harlem's St. Nicholas Arena, "It's about time that Negroes got off their backsides and got into action."⁹² Three days later, on May 8, over 3,000 black and 1,000 white radicals, arm-in-arm, gathered in Washington demanding the release of the Scottsboro boys. Travelling from all over the country to take part in this parade, these militant protesters also presented to Congress a comprehensive Civil Rights Bill that aimed to give enforcement power to the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments.

This Civil Rights Bill -- officially titled the Act to Bar Discrimination in the Exercise of Civil Rights by Reason of Race, Nationality or Color -- was meant to be an African-American bill of rights. Written by members of the League of Struggle for Negro Rights, the Bill was publicly endorsed by the ILD and the National Scottsboro Action Committee. It contained thirty sections that were meticulously composed according to vigorous legal standards and that covered the broad spectrum of American racism. Section 3 of the Bill prohibited the exclusion of any person from the right to vote or hold public office for reasons of race, nationality or color. Section 4 proscribed the exclusion of any person from jury service. Sections 5 through 16 outlawed discrimination in education, transportation, hospitality, housing, employment, relief, insurance, the professions, organizations, civil appointments, the U. S. armed forces and hospitals. The Bill also mandated an end to peonage, lynching, and miscegenation laws.⁹³

The Civil Rights Bill was to apply equally to all states, territories, colonies and districts of the United States. With keen foresight its composers armed the federal courts with supervisory powers and equal jurisdictional

⁹²Naison, *Communists in Harlem*, 81-86. Also see *Harlem Liberator*, 13 May 1933.

⁹³A complete draft of the Bill can be found in *Harlem Liberator*, 13 May 1933.

rights with states over any infringements against the provisions set out in the Bill. Those who violated the provisions were to be guilty of a felony and imprisoned from one year and one day to five years. Those injured through such violations were to be given the right to legal action for damages and the ability to place an injunction against the offender. In an attempt to preempt a Supreme Court decision declaring the bill unconstitutional, the final section instituted a severalty clause that preserved each section as a separate law.⁹⁴

The 1933 March on Washington exemplifies the spirit, strategies and successes of the ILLD's Scottsboro movement. As an eyewitness to the march, Mark Chapman recognized in this event the lofty achievements of the whole campaign. "The stage is set," he proudly declared, "the battle is on; let the Negro unite and fight until the Scottsboro boys are free and our rights are established equally with every other group in this great and powerful United States of America."⁹⁵ Thirty years later, this relatively obscure event was remarkably paralleled by the celebrated March on Washington and the passing of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Scottsboro had been the turning point.

⁹⁴Carter, *Scottsboro*, 249-250.

⁹⁵*Washington Tribune*, 12 May 1933.

Conclusion

The Legacy of Scottsboro

After years of fierce negotiations, the Scottsboro Defence Committee reached an imperfect compromise with the Alabama state prosecution. On July 24, 1937, four of the Scottsboro defendants went free, while five remained in prison. There was nothing logical about this arrangement. Virtually the same evidence that had convicted five of the youths freed the other four, but political expediency left the state prosecution wanting to end the trials once and for all. Hence Alabama dropped charges against Eugene Williams, Roy Wright, Willie Roberson and Olen Montgomery. In an explanatory statement, the authorities ruled that Roberson and Montgomery had simply not taken part in the rape. Both had suffered from severe physical disabilities at the time of their arrest -- Roberson from advanced venereal disease and Montgomery from near blindness -- that would have made it impossible for them to participate in the alleged rape. The State further argued that Wright and Williams, who had been 12 and 13 years old in 1931, had already served enough time for their crime. After six and a half years in jail, the four youths were freed and quickly whisked off to New York for celebrations.¹

Those left to rot in prison were not as lucky. According to Clarence Norris, the day that the others left was the saddest of his life. He later wrote, "I believe if there is a God he forgot about me and my companions in the

¹Carter, *Scottsboro*, 369-376.

case."² In the days before the compromise, Norris had been convicted for a third time and sentenced to death. That same month Andrew Wright was tried for the second time, convicted and sentenced to ninety-nine years in prison. Charlie Weems was also tried for the second time in July 1937. He, too, was convicted and sentenced to seventy-five years. Ozie Powell, who had knifed a sheriff and been shot in return, pleaded guilty to the assault and through another compromise was sentenced to only twenty years in prison. And Haywood Patterson, who in January 1936 had been tried for the fourth time, and convicted and sentenced to seventy-five years in jail, learned in October 1937 that the Supreme Court had refused to review his case.

For several years thereafter, the imprisoned Scottsboro youths faced numerous disappointments. In July 1938, Norris's death sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, but in that same year the Alabama Pardon Board and Governor Bibb Graves denied the pardon applications of all five of the imprisoned Scottsboro youths. Then sporadically in the 1940s four of the remaining defendants were paroled. Norris and Wright violated their parole arrangements by leaving Alabama and were subsequently arrested and returned to Kilby prison. Some time later, they were again paroled. Haywood Patterson, repeatedly denied parole because of his violence and sexual aggression in jail, escaped from prison in 1948 and fled to Detroit. Two years later, after stabbing a man to death in a barroom brawl, Patterson was convicted and returned to prison, where he died from cancer in 1952.

Regardless of when the Scottsboro youths tasted freedom again or for how long, their lives were fraught with hardship. But even the victims of this tragedy could see the larger implications of the Scottsboro campaign. Reflecting on the case, Haywood Patterson underscored the ultimate successes of the movement. He knew that there was more at stake in the

²Norris, *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys*, 171, 178.

struggle than his own life or those of the others. "They helped me," he explained, "helped the country, helped my people:"

I guess my people gained more off the Scottsboro case than any of us boys did. It led to putting Negroes on juries in the South. It made the whole country, in fact the whole world, talk about how the Negro people have to live in the South. Maybe that was the biggest thing of all. Our case opened up a lot of politics in the country. People said more about lynching, the poll tax, and a black man's rights from then on. In 1936 when I went on trial for the fourth time they said the South was the number one economic problem. My case helped the country to realize that.³

Although his life had been marked by tragedy, Patterson saw in Scottsboro the birth of a new era in the long saga of the struggle for black rights.

The legacy of the ILD's Scottsboro campaign is complex and, like all history, open to interpretation. But like Haywood Patterson, I believe that Scottsboro was a turning point in African-American history, and it is for this reason that the ILD's campaign is so rich for students of the civil rights movement. The campaign was the first time that large numbers of radical Jews publicly participated in a struggle for African-American rights. As we have seen, they joined the Scottsboro campaign largely because they were committed radicals. Yet because of their experiences as Jews they strongly identified with black oppression and became frontline soldiers in the war against racism. Speaking to an audience of Jewish Communists in 1938, black Communist James Ford observed that "to their eternal credit, the Jewish people have played a prominent role in every progressive movement, in every struggle for Negro rights."⁴ Scottsboro marked the historic beginning

³Patterson and Conrad, *Scottsboro Boy*, 245.

⁴Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 324.

of an alliance between radical Jews and blacks. As Reverend Powell later explained, "Nothing has done more to solidify the black and the Jew."⁵

Moreover, the efforts of the Scottsboro activists forever colored the theories, strategies, and tactics used in later campaigns against racism and prejudice. One of the most significant legacies of the Scottsboro campaign is that it encouraged African-Americans to participate actively in the struggle. By focussing their efforts in black communities across the country and subsequently bringing African-Americans into the campaign, ILD activists empowered large numbers of blacks with the experience, knowledge and will to fight for their rights. Black activist Hosea Hudson, who had been profoundly influenced by the Scottsboro campaign, later concluded, "I would never have been able to play my small part in the historical campaigns to defeat lynch justice, to build the union, and to win elementary civil rights without the fellow-workers and the progressive organizations that schooled us in struggle."⁶ For many black Americans, Scottsboro was a practical crash course in direct mass action. "Yes, brother, a new thing is born," exclaimed one excited bystander at a Scottsboro demonstration. "It's a new people and we're marching for our rights."⁷

Direct action and mass protest were the signatures of the Scottsboro campaign, and probably form the major tactical contribution of the ILD and Communists to the later civil rights movement and other protests for social justice. Having researched the trials, Hugh Murray concluded that "had liberals or socialists conducted the defense, the case would have remained unnoticed and the boys electrocuted."⁸ But with the militant defense and mass agitation of the ILD, the case became an international *cause célèbre*. At a time when the only other significant civil rights organization, the NAACP,

⁵Powell, *Marching Blacks*, 64.

⁶Hudson, *Black Worker in the South*, 122.

⁷Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 85.

⁸Murray, "Aspect of the Scottsboro Campaign," 179.

repudiated mass protests, marches and rallies, the ILD encouraged, sponsored, organized and provoked them. Even in the face of criticism from the Communist Party, the ILD maintained a campaign punctuated with tactical flexibility in an effort to draw as many people as possible into the struggle. It was the ILD's trademark policy of militant mass protest that ultimately saved the lives of the Scottsboro youths, roused the African-American community to action, and inspired righteous indignation in thousands of Americans who refused to remain silent on racism.⁹

The ILD's mass protest campaign also spurred other less radical organizations to participate more actively in mass action movements. As a result of the assertive and populist activities of the ILD and the Communists in the 1930s, the NAACP reevaluated and eventually expanded its more moderate program of legal reform. The reason for these changes, according to historian Harvard Sitkoff, was that the organization feared "being supplanted by the Communists as the leading protest group for blacks The more the CP and its fronts involved themselves in civil rights, the more the NAACP tried to match their militancy in asserting the demand for sweeping changes in America's race relations."¹⁰ Indeed by 1935, W. E. B. Du Bois had resigned from his position as editor of the NAACP's *Crisis* magazine because he was convinced that the conservatism of that civil rights group was grossly inadequate for solving the problems facing America's black population. The ILD's Scottsboro campaign was one factor that had forced Du Bois's about-face. Along with other radical mass struggles of the period, the Scottsboro campaign legitimized mass protest tactics, thereby giving both contemporary and later civil rights organizations a new weapon in their arsenal of protest.¹¹

⁹Naison, *Communists in Harlem During the Depression*, 80-83; Murray, "Aspects of the Scottsboro Campaign," 178; Howe and Coser, *The American Communist Party*, 213.

¹⁰Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 257.

¹¹Robinson, *Black Marxism*, 336; Murray, "The International Labor Defense and Black America," 193-194.

Beyond these significant achievements, the ILD's aggressive policy of mass protest also confirmed the value of interracial struggle, and this, too, linked Scottsboro to later civil rights organizations that championed interracial action. While particularly encouraging African-Americans to participate in the campaign, the ILD consistently stressed the importance of interracial protest -- "black and white, unite and fight" was a popular Scottsboro slogan. This policy was rooted in the radical ideology of class politics. Although the ILD recognized the special oppression of African-Americans, it ultimately believed that blacks and whites needed to organize politically along class lines if real gains and systemic change were to be realized. The Scottsboro campaign proved that interracial struggle worked, and worked well. "From Scottsboro," Reverend Powell declared, African-Americans "emerged with white hands clasped in theirs."¹²

Those white hands, as this thesis has shown, were often Jewish hands. But in contradistinction to those revisionist theories outlined in the introduction, the radical Jews of Scottsboro did not become involved in the campaign for any ulterior motives. The involvement of Jews at Scottsboro reflected a much broader trend in Jewish-American history -- the overwhelming commitment of a significant minority of Jews at the time to radicalism. As I have shown, the decisions of the Scottsboro Jews were ultimately structured by the historical experiences of their group. They were mostly radicalized East European and Russian immigrants or their descendants. Many were workers or the children of workers, and most were producers and products of a strong radical Jewish subculture that thrived in America. Profoundly influenced by these factors, then, the Scottsboro Jews were ardent radicals, and it was because they were radicals that most of them became active and dominant in the ILD's Scottsboro campaign.

¹²Powell, *Marching Blacks*, 69.

Therefore, revisionist historiography cannot account for the stories of the Scottsboro Jews. They did not use the Scottsboro campaign to assimilate or acculturate into American society. As radicals they rejected much of what American society represented, and were reciprocally rejected by American society for their radicalism. Moreover, the sheer scope and pervasive influence of the radical Jewish subculture enabled the Scottsboro Jews to remain largely in Jewish social and political circles where many felt most comfortable. This was hardly conducive to assimilation. Neither did the Scottsboro Jews join the campaign to fight anti-Semitism by remote control. They believed that fighting capitalism and white supremacy were more pressing ventures for the American radical of the early 1930s. With the rise of anti-Semitism in Nazi Europe, they partially redirected their energies to confronting anti-Semitism, but directly and without subterfuge. Finally, Jewish ILD activists did not use the Scottsboro campaign as a Jewish publicity bonanza. Ironically the Jewishness of the ILD's Scottsboro defense team was made public by an Alabama state prosecutor, not by the Jews themselves. Their Jewishness, in fact, clearly became a liability to the defense.

The Scottsboro saga came to an abrupt end on October 25, 1976, when Clarence Norris, the only surviving "Scottsboro boy," received a full pardon from Alabama Governor, George C. Wallace. According to a unanimous decision of the State Pardon and Parole Board, some forty-five years after the initial trials, Norris had never committed a crime. The decision, by implication, could have been extended to all of the Scottsboro youths.¹³

The ILD did not conduct Norris's appeal. The organization had dissolved in 1946, when it merged with the National Negro Congress and the National Federation for Constitutional Liberties to form the Civil Rights Congress. Ironically, it was the NAACP, the bourgeois-liberal organization so at loggerheads with the ILD for most of the trials, that conducted the last

¹³*New York Times*, 26 October 1976.

Scottsboro appeal. In what made a double irony, it was a Jewish lawyer, James Meyerson, who handled this final Scottsboro plea.¹⁴

At a news conference held after the pardoning, Clarence Norris broke down into tears. Scottsboro had meant more to him than a personal tragedy; the pardon signified more to him than a belated personal victory. With his voice shaking, Norris poignantly told a group of journalists and friends, "The lesson to black people, to my children, to everybody, is that you should always fight for your rights, even if it costs you your life. Stand up for your rights, even if it kills you. That's all that life consists of."¹⁵

This is the most powerful lesson of Scottsboro. The ILD's Scottsboro campaign of the 1930s proved that fighting for one's rights could save lives, empower peoples, establish lasting coalitions between whites and blacks, blacks and Jews, and rally large numbers of people around the world into positive and harmonious action for social justice.

The Scottsboro campaign was indeed a turning point in African-American history; it gave hope to all those who dared to dream of freedom. As one Southern black miner explained, "I always wanted freedom . . . All of us Negro miners wanted freedom, but we figured we could never get it. When we heard of Scottsboro, that meant freedom. From then on we knew we could win."¹⁶

But this realization, gleaned through struggle, was only achieved through partnership with others, and as it happened, those others were often Jews. With uncanny foresight, black editor Roscoe Dunjee correctly predicted,

This case, regardless of its outcome, will do a number of constructive things. It will serve to expose southern injustice to the world; it will cement Negroes and Jews into a closer relationship,

¹⁴Norris and Washington, *The Last of the Scottsboro Boys*, 231.

¹⁵*New York Times*, 26 October 1976.

¹⁶Nat Ross, "Some Problems of the Class Struggle in the South," *Communist* 14, no. 1 (1935): 67.

and it will stiffen manhood and spirit into millions of black people who live below the Mason and Dixon Line -- in the bowels of America's Congo."¹⁷

¹⁷*Black Dispatch*, 13 April 1933.

Appendix: Quick Reference to Prominent Jews in the Scottsboro Campaign

Brodsky, Joseph. (1890-1947) Born in Kiev, Brodsky served as the chief ILD attorney in the Scottsboro trials. He was a founding member of the Communist Party, the ILD and the International Workers' Order and served as counsel for each of these organizations.

Damon, Anna. (1898-1944) Served as national secretary of the ILD in the 1930s, Damon was a Latvian immigrant who also worked as a trade unionist, edited the monthly *Working Women*, served on the central committee of the Communist Party and directed its Women's Commission. She was a founding member of the Communist Party and the American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born.

Fraenkel, Osmond. (1888-?) Argued Scottsboro appeals before the Alabama Supreme Court in 1934 and the U. S. Supreme Court in 1935. Fraenkel was born in Manhattan of German-Jewish origin. He joined the Socialist Party, the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Labor Party in his early years.

Gelders, Joseph. As an NCDPP and ILD activist, Gelders attempted to bring white Southerners into the Scottsboro coalition. He is one of a handful of radical Southern Scottsboro Jews that I have been able to identify.

Goldberg, Ruth K. (1912-) A grass-roots activist for the Scottsboro campaign. Born to immigrant socialists, Goldberg was a Communist Party member and served in the later civil rights movement in the South.

Goldberg, Samuel. (1905-1989) An attorney in the ILD who helped raised funds and participated in rallies for the Scottsboro campaign. Goldberg was born in Poland and immigrated to the United States when he was fifteen years old.

Goldstein, Rabbi Benjamin. A member of the NCDPP and the rabbi of the Beth-Or synagogue in Montgomery, Alabama, Rabbi Goldstein was one of the few in the South who spoke out against the Scottsboro frame-up and raised funds for the campaign. As a result, his congregation forced him to resign.

King, Carol. (1896-1952) A backstage attorney for the Scottsboro trials who helped prepare briefs for the defense. Of German Jewish descent, King was a founding member of the ILD, Joint Anti-Fascist Refugee Commission, American Committee for the Protection of the Foreign Born and the Civil Rights Congress. She specialized in immigration law.

Klein, Irvin E. (1893-1947) An ILD attorney who helped in the backstage arena of the campaign, Klein was an American-born labor attorney. He was also a member of the American Labor Party.

Lawson, John Howard. (1894-1977) Prominent activist for the Scottsboro campaign under the auspices of the NCDPP, Lawson was a Communist, writer and third-generation Jewish-American.

Leibowitz, Samuel. (1893-?) Leibowitz became the chief attorney in the Scottsboro trials in 1933. Born in Romania, he immigrated to the United States when he was four and became a successful criminal law attorney representing such figures as Al Capone and "Mad Dog" Vincent Coll. Leibowitz was a proud Democrat.

Neuburger, Samuel. (1904-1985) Part of the ILD's defense team, Neuburger was a member of the Communist Party and the Civil Rights Congress, and a founding member of the National Lawyers Guild. A prominent radical lawyer, Neuburger served as a counsel for the United Auto Workers and the *New Masses*.

Osheroff, Abraham. A grass-roots organizer for the Scottsboro movement, Osheroff collected money for the campaign, gathered petition signatures and spoke at Scottsboro rallies. He was a member of the Young Communist League, organized workers in the 1930s, fought with the International Brigades in Spain, worked in Mississippi during the civil rights movement and was a social activist in Nicaragua. His father was an immigrant from Belarus; his mother an immigrant from Lithuania.

Perlman, Lucille. A volunteer research assistant at the national office of the ILD during the Scottsboro trials, Perlman was an American-born leftist. Her father was a Russian-Lithuanian immigrant; her mother's father was an East European anarchist. Perlman is Victor Rabinowitz's sister.

Pollak, Walter H. (1887-1940) Twice argued the Scottsboro case before the United States Supreme Court, both times successfully quashing death sentences. Pollak's father was an immigrant from Austria; his maternal grandfather was from Hungary. Although Pollak was not a radical, he was well known for his work on civil and personal liberties, and defended Benjamin Gitlow, a Socialist. Pollak was a close friend of Carol King's.

Rabinowitz, Victor. A young member of the ILD at the time of the Scottsboro campaign as well as a Communist Party member, Rabinowitz continues to serve the Left as a radical attorney. His father was a Russian-Lithuanian immigrant; his mother's father was an East European anarchist immigrant. Rabinowitz is Lucille Perlman's brother.

Schwab, Irving. (1904-1943) An ILD attorney sent with Allan Taub to investigate the trials, Schwab also defended veterans of the International

Brigade of the Spanish Loyalist Army and African-American Dan Pippen Jr.

Schwarzbart, Elias. (1907-1995) Sent by his uncle, Joseph Brodsky, to Alabama in 1931 to aid the defense, Schwarzbart was a radical ILD attorney born to a Polish immigrant tailor. Schwarzbart was one of the only ILD radicals who became conservative in his later years.

Spector, Frank E. (1895-1982) Born near Odessa, Russia, Spector was an early secretary of the ILD and helped direct the Scottsboro campaign in its infancy. He was a founding member of the Communist Party, and served as a section organizer in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Taub, Allan. (1902-1995) The first ILD attorney to interview the Scottsboro youths, Taub was a radical, civil-rights attorney who also defended the Harlan strikers in 1932 and Dan Pippen Jr. in 1933. He was born in Manhattan and was associated with the American Civil Liberties Union and the American Labor Party.

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