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"The Implacable Surge of History": Investigating Jewish Activism in Atlanta During the Civil Rights Movement

Abstract

Existing works on southern Jewry illustrate how most southern Jews were concerned with self-preservation during the Civil Rights Movement. Many historians have untangled perceptions of southern Jewish detachment from civil rights issues to explain how individuals and communities were torn between their sympathy towards the African- American plight and Jewish vulnerability during a period of heightened racial tension. This project draws connections among the American Civil Rights Movement, the southern Jewish experience, and Atlanta race relations in order to identify instances of southern Jewish involvement in the fight for racial equality. What were the forms of activism Jews chose, the circumstances that shaped those decisions, and the underlying goals behind them? Studying Atlanta's Jewish communities during the 1950s and 1960s helps broaden the conversation on Jewish activism, raise questions of southern Jewish identity, and uncover distinctive avenues for change. Analysis suggests that, although their story is less known, Jewish organizations and individuals in Atlanta found ways to contribute to the fight for civil rights equality within the context of the Jim Crow South.

Keywords

Civil Rights Movement, Atlanta

Disciplines

Jewish Studies | United States History

Comments

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“THE IMPLACABLE SURGE OF HISTORY”:
INVESTIGATING JEWISH ACTIVISM IN ATLANTA DURING
THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

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Introduction

On October 7, 1954, Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild of the Hebrew Benevolent Temple Congregation in Atlanta delivered his morning Yom Kippur sermon, entitled “The Challenge of A Dream.” In the Jim Crow South, he acknowledged, Jews suffered prejudices of their own. He asked his congregants, “Shall we endanger our own safety by becoming involved in this larger struggle [of the Civil Rights Movement]?” He answered with a strong, affirmative “yes.”¹ However, Rothschild understood that while southern Jews recognized “ideals which we know to be right and good,” they were “led by the desire to be comfortable and safe.”² Compared to national Jewish organizations that took assertive stances in the fight for civil rights, Jewish individuals and organizations in the South often hesitated to challenge the status quo, fearful of disturbing their placement on the white side of the black/white color divide.³ Notwithstanding this generalization, there is a need for a more thorough examination of southern Jews in the context of the Civil Rights Movement to uncover fully the extent to which “the desire to be comfortable and safe” precluded civil rights activism in the Deep South.

The moral, political, and economic stakes for southern Jews during this era were compelling. While the historical literature has examined the Civil Rights Movement, national Jewish civil rights activism, black-Jewish relations, and the Jewish experience in the American South, these studies rarely evolved in unison. Furthermore, existing historical studies on Jewish activism in the South tend to evaluate northern Jews

¹ Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, Yom Kippur morning sermon, October 7, 1954. "The Challenge of a Dream," Series 3, Box 11, Folder 1, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

² Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid.*” Speech, 3, Box 17, MSS 69, File 8, The Temple Records, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern History, The Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

³ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 23.

performing on a southern stage. Similarly, analysis of black-Jewish relations predominantly focuses on the national relationship between the two minorities. As the majority of current studies on Jewish organizational and individual activism do not take an in-depth approach to analyzing resistance by southerners, this thesis draws on primary and secondary sources and questions whether, how, and why southern Jews became involved in the greater civil rights struggle. Moreover, it investigates how southern Jews, northern Jews, and African Americans negotiated their complex relationships below the Mason-Dixon line. By digging deeper into the multifaceted landscape of Jewish actions and reactions in Atlanta during the Civil Rights Movement, this project aims to explore the responses of southern Jews to the events happening in their own backyard.

The scholarly consensus suggests that southern Jews were passive during the Civil Rights Movement in comparison to the national Jewish community. As the struggle for civil rights gained momentum, national Jewish agencies such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), American Jewish Congress (AJCongress), and the American Jewish Committee (AJC), increasingly fought prejudice on national and international levels.⁴ After World War II, as questions of civil liberties took center stage in the American political arena, these organizations shaped national Jewish conversations on “race, ethnicity, liberty, and equality.”⁵ Tracing the activities of the ADL, AJCongress, and AJC demonstrates that, on the national level, Jewish organizations endeavored to further Jewish interests by attacking minority discrimination during the Civil Rights Movement. Simultaneously, they found themselves aspiring to resolve their status as “white” without

⁴ Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 10. The ADL was founded in 1913 to combat anti-Semitism, the AJCongress was founded in 1918 to defend Jewish interests nationally and globally, and the AJC was founded in 1906 to protect Jewish rights globally.

⁵ Svonkin, 10-11.

adopting white racism and to promote equality without provoking anti-Semitic sentiment.⁶ Consequently, instead of evoking specifically Jewish or racial issues, they chose broad ones, such as discriminatory housing and unfair employment policies directed toward all minority groups.⁷ Although these studies do not provide insight into organizational trends in the South, they demonstrate models of understanding prejudice and working ideologies that prove useful when studying southern organizations against the backdrop of the nation as a whole.

Existing works on southern Jewry illustrate that most southern Jews were concerned with self-preservation during the Civil Rights Movement. Previously, many historians attempted to untangle perceptions of southern Jewish detachment from civil rights issues to explain how individuals and communities were torn between their sympathy towards the African-American plight and Jewish vulnerability during a period of heightened racial tension.⁸ Scholarly essays deepened this conversation by posing question questions such as “what is a southern Jew”? Generally, as a diversionary tactic in the face of anti-Semitism, Jews attempted to identify as “white” Americans and avoid the implication that the Jewish people were a distinct racial minority.⁹ Until the late 1960s, Jews straddled the black/white racial line as “probationary whites who had all the civic privileges...but they were often excluded from social and cultural venues where their uncertain status might undermine the assertion of white racial purity and

⁶ Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, (Princeton: Princeton, 2006), 194.

⁷ Goldstein, 195.

⁸ *Fight Against Fear*, 88. Jeff Clemons, *Rich 's: A Southern Institution*, (Charleston: The History Press, 2012), xiv.

⁹ Goldstein, 86.

integrity.”¹⁰ Consequently, some argue that Jewish inaction in the South resulted from fear, not prejudice, in the face of their uncertain racial, social, and economic position in society.

The case study of Atlanta, nicknamed the “City too Busy to Hate,” provides a unique prospective into the events that both inspired and discouraged change during the Civil Rights era.¹¹ Racially progressive events in Atlanta hinted at a more tolerant environment within a tumultuous region of protests, cross-burnings, and bombings. For example, Atlanta hosted the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) National Conference in 1962 and a dinner honoring Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Nobel Peace Prize in January 1965.¹² Moreover, Atlanta’s business and political leaders took great strides to foster peaceful relations between white and black segments of society. From the early 1940s to the late 1960s, Mayors William Hartsfield and Ivan Allen Jr. formed “a political system that saw racial progressivism and economic progress as inseparable.”¹³ Nonetheless, Atlanta was not immune to the wide range of regional socio-economic factors that contributed to the violence of the period. Complex and conflicting developments in Atlanta, the capital of the “New South,” frequently prevented legal and social institutions from protecting vulnerable minorities through law

¹⁰ Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg, *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis, 2006), 135.

¹¹ Kevin Michael Cruise, *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 3. William Berry Hartsfield, who served as Mayor in Atlanta from 1937 to 1941, and again from 1942 to 1962, coined this term.

¹² Shirley Brickman, oral history recorded by author, Atlanta, Georgia, March 13, 2014, University of Pennsylvania Oral Histories Independent Study, transcript, 10. Box 1, Folder 4, MSS 72, Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler Papers, 1919-1984, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern History, The Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

¹³ Cruise, 20.

and order.¹⁴ This environment presented Atlanta Jews with a distinctive dichotomy, as they shared many insecurities of their fellow southern Jews while living in a city that fought to find its footing in support of civil rights progress.

While previous studies have immensely expanded discussions of Jewish American history and the Civil Rights Movement, there is still a population whose story has yet to be told. In an effort to tackle unanswered questions, primary source research for this thesis was conducted in New York and Atlanta. In New York, the ADL, AJC, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research provided published and unpublished studies on anti-Semitism, reports on the economic consequences of prejudice, statements before Congress on housing discrimination and other civil rights issues, studies on intergroup relations, and newspaper articles on Atlanta events, among other pamphlets and reports. Primary source material focusing on Atlanta Jewish communities were predominantly drawn from two Atlanta archives: the Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library at Emory University and the Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum's Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Emory's archives provided an in-depth look into sermons and writings by Rabbi Rothschild, as well as letters to him following the Temple bombing from rabbis, businesses, churches, Jewish organizations, and black communities across the world. Moreover, articles from newspapers such as the *New York Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Atlanta Constitution* revealed national and local responses to both the Temple bombing and Rothschild's civil rights work. At the Breman Museum, records from the Temple, speeches by community leaders, and family papers were analyzed to depict Jewish activism and black-Jewish relations on a local level.

¹⁴ William Fitzhugh Brundage, *Lynching in the New South: Georgia and Virginia, 1880-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

Additionally, *Atlanta Jewish Times* articles and Atlanta Jewish Federation records relayed Jewish perceptions of civil rights developments. As a whole, this research presents various angles of Jewish experiences in Atlanta before, during, and after the Civil Rights Movement.

In addition to reading relevant materials from the Breman's Jewish Oral History Project of Atlanta, I conducted two oral history interviews with Jewish residents of Atlanta who gave insight into their experiences during the Civil Rights Movement: one with Shirley Brickman, who lived in a predominantly black neighborhood in Atlanta with her parents who emigrated from Europe, and another with Henry Birnbrey, who escaped Germany in the 1930s and took an active role in the Atlanta Jewish community and the Southern Regional Council (SRC). Both relay valuable accounts of their Jewish experience in Atlanta and are referenced throughout the thesis to paint a richer picture of southern Jewish dilemmas.

This thesis is divided into three distinct parts. In Chapter 1, I describe Rabbi Rothschild's civil rights activism and the 1958 Bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple to provide readers with a firm understanding of the various tensions at play, all of which intersect at this crucial event. Chapter 2 details national and local opportunities for Jewish activism, the North/South dichotomy, and black-Jewish relations between individuals and organizations. In Chapter 3, I wrestle with Jewish reactions in Atlanta to sit-ins and boycotts by African-American students, the desegregation crisis, and the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Together, these three chapters evidence Jewish activism in Atlanta and its influence on the local development of the Civil Rights Movement.

This project draws connections among the American Civil Rights Movement, the southern Jewish experience, and Atlanta race relations in order to identify instances of southern Jewish involvement in the fight for racial equality. It investigates the forms of activism they chose, the circumstances that shaped those decisions, and the underlying goals behind them. In many ways, studying Atlanta's Jewish communities during the 1950s and 1960s broadens the conversation on Jewish activism, raises questions of southern Jewish identity, and uncovers distinctive avenues for change. Analysis suggests that, although their story is less known, Jewish organizations and individuals in Atlanta found ways to contribute to the fight for civil rights equality within the context of the Jim Crow South.

Chapter 1: Atlanta, An Introduction **“To seek to change the hearts of all men.”¹⁵**

Introduction

The 1958 bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple, commonly referred to as the Temple, stands as the starkest memory of the Civil Rights Movement for many Jewish Atlantans. Even in a cosmopolitan city such as Atlanta, Jews were not safe from anti-Semitism. Studying the bombing not only reveals much about the Civil Rights South, but also the fragility of the Jewish community within it. Moreover, the activism of the Temple’s rabbi, Jacob Rothschild, before, during, and after the bombing displays the influence of Jewish contributions to civil rights progress in Atlanta. As a result, this event illuminates how perceptions of the Civil Rights Movement within the Atlanta Jewish community determined concrete activism and, in turn, how Jewish involvement shaped events.

Clive Webb, in *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights*, presents one of the few regional studies of how the relationship among southern Jews, northern Jews, and African Americans unfolded below the Mason-Dixon line throughout the Civil Rights Movement. He explains that southern Jews were torn between their sympathy toward the African-American struggle and their own vulnerability.¹⁶ Some Jews who may have been in favor of civil rights equality “feared that making strong statements in favor of integration would mean personal economic ruin and ostracism.”¹⁷ Apparent inaction and passivity, Webb argues, resulted from fear, not prejudice, as a

¹⁵ “A statement on the Segregation-Integration Issue,” 2-3, Rothschild Papers, Series 3, Box 11, Folder 2, MSS 873, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁶ *Fight Against Fear*, xiv.

¹⁷ Box 4, Folder 6, MSS 59, The Temple Records, 1853-1989, “A Temple is Bombed: Atlanta, 1958” by Arnold Shankman, p. 2, 1969, Emory University, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern History, The Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

product of social and economic uncertainty. Even if a history of anti-Semitism sensitized Jews to Jim Crow, Webb maintains that the racial hierarchy of the region precluded massive resistance. Consequently, historians note the lack of unified activism within southern Jewish communities during the Civil Rights Movement, especially when compared to national Jewish efforts.¹⁸

However, the story of the Civil Rights Movement in the Jewish South is more complex than it initially appears. Activism prospered, even in the wake of fear-instilling events such as the bombing of a Temple. In his sermon following the bombing, Rabbi Rothschild proclaimed that although the bomb was intended “to strike terror in the hearts of men,” namely those of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, it instead lit “a new courage and a new hope” within both the Jewish community and the greater Atlanta area.¹⁹ Janice Rothschild Blumberg, Rabbi Rothschild’s wife, recalled that the Temple bombing served as “a shock treatment” that “released long-buried thoughts” for Jews and non-Jews on the topic of desegregation in Atlanta.²⁰ To comprehend both the target and the aftermath, it is vital to understand Rabbi Rothschild’s own history of civil rights activism. Analyzing Rothschild’s career and his High Holiday sermons paints a richer picture of Atlanta Jewish experiences during the Civil Rights Movement and demonstrates the power of an individual to sway thought and influence action.

Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild: An Atlanta Jewish Activist

¹⁸ *Fight Against Fear*, 219.

¹⁹ Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 1.

²⁰ Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *As But A Day: To a Hundred and Twenty, 1867-1987*, Atlanta, GA: Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, 1987, p. 107. Janice Rothschild remarried after Jacob Rothschild’s passing, taking on the name Janice Rothschild Blumberg.

Southern rabbis found themselves in a precarious position during the Civil Rights Movement. Many supported racial equality, yet as leaders of congregations and representatives of communities they recognized that immersing themselves in the civil rights struggle risked intensifying segregationists' assertion that there existed a Jewish desegregation conspiracy in the South. In Atlanta, Rabbi Rothschild's civil rights advocacy threatened to unravel the work southern Jews had accomplished in placing themselves on the white side of the racial line. Congregants and rabbinical colleagues throughout the South expressed concern with his forthrightness, to the extent that many wrote to him directly.²¹ M. William Breman, an active member of the Atlanta Jewish community, recalled that Rothschild was "not the most beloved by everybody" because he advocated for racial equality during a period when "Atlanta was not accepting."²² As early as Rosh Hashanah of 1947, Rothschild annually discussed civil rights injustices in his High Holiday sermons, taking a much more direct stance with regard to addressing inequality than his predecessor.²³ Breman described him as "a man who couldn't care what other people thought about what he said...Lots of times it wasn't what people wanted to hear."²⁴ Rothschild's outspoken civil rights rhetoric drew such attention to his congregation that many believed the bombing target was chosen because of him.

²¹ "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," 8-13. Moreover, Rothschild's advocacy strained his relations with the Temple's board members. In 1954, for example, the board refused to accept his proposal to establish a Social Action Committee among congregants. Despite these layers of disapproval, Rothschild's work in Atlanta continued.

²² M. William Breman, January 7 and January 28, 1990, OCH10095, p. 23-24, from the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Collection, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern History, The Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

²³ The Jewish High Holidays usually take place in September or October of the calendar year and include Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, and Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. Box 1, MSS 238, File 25, Janice Rothschild Papers, "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," p. 4, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

²⁴ Breman, 24.

In the fall of 1946, Rothschild began his tenure as rabbi at the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple. Although he had already spent ten years leading a congregation in Pittsburgh, PA, most still perceived him as a young newcomer with little rabbinical experience.²⁵ Rothschild differed greatly from his predecessor, Rabbi Emeritus Dr. David Marx, who continued to influence leadership of the Temple after having “ruled with an iron will for 52 years.”²⁶ Consequently, it took considerable time for the congregation to look to Rothschild as the spiritual leader.²⁷ Dr. Marx was a “rather extreme reform Rabbi” who aspired to diminish outward religious differences between his congregants and Christian Atlanta.²⁸ He preferred the title of “Doctor” over “Rabbi,” eliminated Hebrew from his services, and added Sunday morning services.²⁹ As Janice Rothschild Blumberg described, Dr. Marx worked “to turn his Jews into Americans” while Rothschild’s “[mission] was ‘to turn his Americans into Jews.’”³⁰ Rothschild addressed this struggle of reconciling American and Jewish identities and criticized its divisive nature in an article for the *Southern Israelite* in August 1963, entitled “No Place to Hide.” He wrote, “does the Southern Jew really want to establish a dichotomy between his patriotism and his religion...for what is he saying? That there are two separate compartments of his life.”³¹ In contrast to Dr. Marx, Rothschild hoped to bridge this divide by melding these distinct identities and strengthening his community behind a shared religious experience.

²⁵ *As But A Day*, 95-97.

²⁶ *As But A Day*, 95-98. “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 2.

²⁷ *As But A Day*, 95-97.

²⁸ Breman, 7.

²⁹ Traditionally, synagogues and Temples provided mainly Saturday Sabbath services. Adding Sunday morning services meant that Temple congregants could attend services when their Christian friends attended Church. *As But A Day*, 59.

³⁰ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 4.

³¹ Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South* (Macon: Mercer UP, 1985), 149.

Rothschild was not immediately attuned to the delicate balancing act southern Jews mastered in the racially regulated South. He moved to Atlanta in adulthood and did not view segregation as a natural way of life.³² Blumberg remembers that Rothschild experienced “culture shock” when initially confronted with the extent of Atlanta’s racial segregation and the customs of southern Jews.³³ More specifically, Rothschild struggled against the “‘don’t dare speak out’ syndrome of Southern Jewry.”³⁴ In the aforementioned *Southern Israelite* letter, he wrote about his frustration with Jews who “contrived illogical and inconsistent excuses for their failure to become actively involved” in struggle for civil rights.³⁵ Nonetheless, Rothschild remained undeterred in his advocacy, continuing to work toward integration both on and off the pulpit.

As a gradualist, Rothschild believed he could foster support for and acceptance of integration by consistently appealing to white consciences.³⁶ He played an active role advocating equality, justice, and intergroup relations in Atlanta communal life on the SRC, the Georgia Council of Human Relations, and the Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations.³⁷ He also aided the creation of the Community Relations Commission, which addressed housing inadequacies, and served as the organization’s Vice Chairman alongside Chairman Reverend Samuel Williams, his African-American friend.³⁸ In addition to his community involvement, Rothschild internalized the idea that religious leaders should espouse morality before their congregants and “affect a change in our own

³² *Fight Against Fear*, 172.

³³ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 2-3.

³⁴ *As But A Day*, 95-97.

³⁵ *One Voice*, 149.

³⁶ *Fight Against Fear*, 181.

³⁷ *Fight Against Fear*, 182. “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 years After,” 3.

³⁸ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 41.

hearts and thereby seek to change the hearts of all men.”³⁹ Analyzing Rothschild’s High Holiday sermons not only identifies this approach to activism throughout his career, but also depicts the relationship between southern Jews and Jim Crow, as perceived in Atlanta by a high visibility spokesman and prominent voice.

Rothschild and His Sermons

Rothschild’s High Holiday sermons are noteworthy for a number reasons. First, they took place during Jewish holidays that mark periods of reflection and atonement at the onset of the Jewish New Year. Rothschild seized this opportunity to stress the moral impetus behind the Civil Rights Movement, referencing religious themes of brotherhood and recounting stories of overcoming prejudice in Jewish history. These services coincided with the beginning of the school year, which proved timely during the desegregation crisis. Additionally, attendance at High Holiday services always exceeded that of other holidays, allowing Rothschild to reach a larger audience. Most importantly, Rothschild’s sermons reveal his “courage to proclaim his belief publicly long before it became expedient or even physically safe to do so in a Southern city.”⁴⁰

After his first year on the Temple’s pulpit, Rothschild stressed ownership and accountability in the realm of justice. As it was not yet fashionable to discuss the topic of civil rights, congregants most likely did not expect sermons about racial equality.⁴¹ On October 13, 1948, he delivered a Yom Kippur sermon entitled “The Greater Sin,” in which he asserted that resolving southern problems was the responsibility of southern

³⁹ “A statement on the Segregation-Integration Issue,” 2-3.

⁴⁰ *One Voice*, Forward.

⁴¹ “Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948-1968,” Dr. Chyet, History 302, Alvin M. Sugarman, May 26, 1969, Rothschild Papers, p. 2, Series 4, Box 19, Folder 8, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

citizens. “Unless decent people take up the burden,” he told his audience, “the South faces a return to the most primitive kind of bigotry and race hatred. Let us, then, be among those who are willing to do something.”⁴² Although the post-World War II economy brought affluence to the Atlanta Jewish community in 1948, Rothschild recognized that his congregational members nonetheless lacked confidence in their status as white citizens in the South.⁴³ He preached, “there’s nothing wrong with this desire to safeguard our position in the community, only the emphasis is misplaced...if we want our non-Jewish friends to respect us, then we must first respect ourselves.”⁴⁴ Rothschild urged his members to stop worrying about how the greater Atlanta community perceived them, underscoring the fact that he recognized southern Jewish concerns merely a year into his residency in Atlanta. In an attempt to drive up membership, strengthen the community, and spread civil rights rhetoric, Rothschild called upon Jews to worship in large numbers and unite behind their Jewish heritage to improve existing circumstances.

The majority of Rothschild’s High Holiday sermons fused Jewish teachings and current events. He dedicated full sermons to the political issues of the day, both national and international, addressing topics such as the Little Rock desegregation crisis and the nuclear arms race.⁴⁵ Rothschild never took a pessimistic stance when considering current events, instead focusing on the progress that could be achieved by adhering to law and order. He discounted the assertion that politics did not belong on the pulpit, arguing that civil rights and morality were intertwined.⁴⁶ On October 7, 1954, Rothschild offered a

⁴² Yom Kippur Sermon, October 13, 1948, 4-5, “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” 1948-1958, Series 3, Box 11, Folder 1, MSS 637, p. 1-2, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁴³ “Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948-1968,” 1.

⁴⁴ “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” Yom Kippur Sermon, October 13, 1948, 7.

⁴⁵ “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” 1-2.

⁴⁶ “Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948-1968,” 6.

Yom Kippur sermon entitled “The Challenge of a Dream” that emphasized religious morality. In the South, Rothschild conceded, Jews faced religious prejudices and indoctrination of the status quo. He asked, “We still have our own problems of security and acceptance. Shall we endanger our own safety by becoming involved in this larger struggle?” He answered his own question by saying, “Certainly, the problem is not a Jewish problem. But it is a religious one.”⁴⁷ Espousing the multi-faith belief that all men are created equal, Rothschild called upon religious themes to preach equality.

It is important to note that Rothschild understood that many of his congregants held attitudes that “had been deeply ingrained from birth and therefore could not be easily altered.”⁴⁸ He freely acknowledged before his congregation, “Generations of indoctrination must be erased from the heart and mind of man.”⁴⁹ For example, Breman admitted that his upbringing in the Deep South made it challenging for him to adopt a pro-civil rights viewpoint. He remembers that repeated assertions by his friends and his wife slowly altered his racial views.⁵⁰ In his relentless fight to encourage his community to take a stand in the Civil Rights Movement, Rothschild simultaneously retained sensitivity to southern Jewish concerns. He astutely perceived southern disdain for northern interference during the Civil Rights Movement, stating after the *Brown v. Board of Education* desegregation decision of 1954, “no one outside the South can fully appreciate the cataclysmic changes- emotionally and spiritually- that the implementation of the decision will require.”⁵¹ Moreover, he communicated the difficult situations faced

⁴⁷ “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” 1948-1958, Series 3, Box 11, Folder 1, MSS 637, p. 3, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁴⁸ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 6.

⁴⁹ *One Voice*, 61.

⁵⁰ Breman, 25.

⁵¹ *One Voice*, 61.

by his southern friends to northern audiences. At Temple Israel in Boston in April 1962, he delivered a speech, “Social Upheaval and Personal Peace,” in which he proclaimed:

I have watched the South writhe in its agony- and decent Southerners writhe in theirs. For what the law now requires of them has shattered the very foundations of their lives. It has disturbed the comfortable pattern of their existence. It has destroyed their inner peace.⁵²

Rothschild’s tact suggests that he was not simply a northerner who traveled south to upset the relationship between Jews and their present society. Rather, he was aware of the tension his sermons and his activism generated among the Jewish community during such a tense period of history and thoughtfully crafted his messages accordingly.

Nonetheless, Rothschild insisted that any unease or discomfort on the part of Atlanta’s Jews did not absolve them from their duty to right societal wrongs.⁵³ In addressing the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Rothschild proclaimed, “no amount of double talk can excuse the individual white man from treating the Negro as an equal and accepting him as a partner in the life of our society.”⁵⁴ He continuously discredited any excuses individuals gave against upholding Supreme Court decisions. Blumberg believes that Rothschild got away with his “daring action” of outspoken civil rights rhetoric for so long because he “had not waited until the racial issue heated up to begin talking about it.” Instead, Rothschild acculturated his congregation to hearing about civil rights issues from the beginning of his tenure.⁵⁵ However, in the fall of 1958,

⁵² “Social Upheaval and Personal Peace” Delivered at Temple Israel, Boston, Mass., at the Annual Joshua Loth Liebman Sabbath. April 6, 1962, p. 3, in “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” 1959-1964, Series 3, Box 11, Folder 2, MSS 637, p. 1-2, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁵³ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 7.

⁵⁴ *One Voice*, 179.

⁵⁵ *One Voice*, 57.

bombers attempted to intimidate Rabbi Rothschild into silence and instill fear in his reform congregation.⁵⁶

The Bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple

In the early hours of Sunday morning, October 12, 1958, forty sticks of dynamite blew up the most prominent synagogue in Atlanta. By attacking the Temple during the desegregation crisis, a period during which Rothschild increasingly publicized his support for integration, white supremacists proved that Jewish fear of civil rights advocacy was not unfounded.⁵⁷ Wayne Chester, a worker at the *United Press International*, reported that he received a telephone call from a man who introduced himself as “General Gordon of the Confederate Underground” that morning. General Gordon proclaimed, “We bombed a Temple in Atlanta. This is the last empty building in Atlanta that we will bomb...Negros and Jews are hereby declared Aliens.”⁵⁸ Both General Gordon and the bombing itself reminded Atlanta’s Jewish community that their skin color did not guarantee them entry into mainstream American life. However, instead of deepening collective fear and insecurity, the bombing demonstrated to the Temple’s congressional members that the people of Atlanta stood beside them, united in opposition to such violence.

The bombing forced members of Atlanta’s Jewish communities to step back and reassess the progress it had made in the years since the lynching of Leo Frank. On April 29, 1913, Frank, a member of the Temple, was accused of murdering Mary Phagan, a

⁵⁶ *Fight Against Fear*, 182-189.

⁵⁷ Box 4, Folder 8, MSS 59, The Temple Records, 1853-1989, “Continuing Education,” Elmo Ellis, 1978, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

⁵⁸ Arnold Shankman, “American Jewish Archives,” in *A Temple is Bombed- Atlanta, 1958* (1971), 131-132. May 2015 Final Paper, 2014-2015 Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Fellowship, Penn Humanities Forum 20 Danielle Kerker, College of Arts and Sciences ’15, University of Pennsylvania

thirteen-year-old employee at his pencil factory. Evidence against him hung on the testimony of Jim Conley, a black janitor who claimed to help carry Phagan's body to the coal cellar. While sitting in jail, Frank was kidnapped by the "Knights of Mary Phagan" and hanged from an oak tree close to Phagan's birthplace in Marietta, Georgia.⁵⁹ This period of heightened anti-Semitism left scars on the memories of Atlanta Jews and served as a harsh reminder that, despite their "whiteness," Jews remained no safer from white supremacy than African Americans.

The Frank trial also highlights the social dislocation in Atlanta wrought by industrialization and urbanization as the city emerged as the capital of the "New South" at the turn of the twentieth century. Southerners who envisioned factories as a new plantation system among whites, which functioned through a social balance between the upper and lower classes viewed Frank, the owner of the National Pencil Factory and a northerner, as a "lascivious capitalist come South to upset the delicate balance that southern whites and African Americans had achieved in the post-Civil War era."⁶⁰ Prevalent stereotypes of African Americans, Jews, and northerners demonstrate why the black/white dichotomy between Frank and Conley was overshadowed during the case, which southerners painted as a conflict between themselves and "Yankee" capitalists threatening the status quo.⁶¹

Although Frank symbolized the northern "Jewish industrialist" during a transitional period in Atlanta, the Jewish community focused on Frank's hanging based

⁵⁹ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2003), 17.

⁶⁰ Jeffrey Melnick, *Black-Jewish Relations on Trial: Leo Frank and Jim Conley in the New South* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 7. Although Frank was born in Texas and married into a prominent Atlanta family, the Selig family, he spent the majority of his life in Brooklyn and was educated at Cornell. See Melnick, page 34 for reference.

⁶¹ *Fight Against Fear*, 18.

on the testimony of a black man and the trial's accompanying anti-Semitism.⁶² Many historians have analyzed the lynching culture to highlight regional socio-economic sources of violence that targeted and controlled members of minority groups. Mary Phagan allegedly stood for the purity of southern white womanhood tarnished by a member of an inferior race. After the lynching, Atlanta Jews understood that minimal religious associations did not protect a Jew from falling victim to white supremacy. Leo Samuel Elpan, a Jewish lawyer in Atlanta, explained in the late 1970s that the lynching "broke down most all of the barriers between the orthodox and the reform Jews. They found out that there was no such thing as one being better than the other."⁶³ Congregants of the Temple reacted similarly to the 1958 bombing, which initially communicated that even a reform Temple attended by relatively integrated Jews was not as secure as they formerly thought.⁶⁴

While the Frank lynching preceded the Civil Rights Movement by several decades, its impact on the collective memory of southern Jews lingered throughout the Civil Rights era. Rabbi Newton J. Friedman of Temple Emanuel in Beaumont, Texas wrote to Rothschild on October 12, 1958, "The news of the bombing...will go down in Atlanta's history along with the Leo Frank Lynching."⁶⁵ Looking back in 1993, Blumberg wrote that Frank's lynching "left longtime Temple members with a paralyzing fear of

⁶² Brundage, 91.

⁶³ Leon Samuel Eplan, February 11 1976, OCH10095, pp. 46, the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Collection, Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta, GA.

⁶⁴ Melisa Fay Green. The Temple Bombing. (MA: Addison-Wesley, 1996), 245.

In a letter to Rabbi Rothschild after the bombing, Rabbi Bertram Klausner, of B'nai El Temple in St. Louis, went as far as to call the congregation members the "flesh of Atlanta's flesh and the blood of Atlanta's blood." Congregants of the Temple, particularly, had a reputation for being a strong presence in the larger Atlanta community. Letter to Rothschild on October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Emory University.

⁶⁵ Letter to Rothschild on October 12, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Emory University.

Gentile disapproval.”⁶⁶ However, the immediate reactions of leaders and communities, both local and national, to the Temple bombing “reassured those Jews who had experienced the horror of the Leo Frank case and the events it triggered that this incident would not cause another such wave of anti-Semitism.”⁶⁷

The Reaction to the Temple Bombing

The bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation Temple in Atlanta was not a unique event. In a 1958 study, the ADL documented over forty anti-Semitic organizations across the South, including White Citizens Councils, the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), or other extremist groups.⁶⁸ Moreover, according to ADL records, following *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1964, there were “93 bombings or attempted bombings in the South. Of these, seven were directed at Jewish institutions or houses of worship.”⁶⁹ Among the targeted cities were Charlotte, Nashville, Jacksonville, and Birmingham.⁷⁰ In Jackson, Mississippi, Beth Israel Congregation’s Rabbi Dr. Perry E. Nussbaum wrote an editorial entitled “(Dis)honor Roll” in which he compared the burning of synagogues and books in Hitler’s Germany to the dynamiting of synagogues across the South during the desegregation crisis.⁷¹ However, as bombing threats grew more common amidst heightened racial tension, the Temple bombing in Atlanta stood out for the proactive measures taken both nationally and locally in its wake.

⁶⁶ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 5.

⁶⁷ *One Voice*, 82.

⁶⁸ Arnold Forster, ADL Bulletin, October 1958, Vol. 15, No. 8, *THE SOUTH: New Field for an Old Game: The Professional Anti-Semite is Capitalizing on the Anguish of the South's Dilemma*, 1.

⁶⁹ Forster, 8.

⁷⁰ “The Bombings in the South,” December 15, 1958, 1, The American Jewish Committee Community Affairs Department, Rothschild Papers, Series 4, Box 19, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁷¹ Letter to Rothschild on October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 11, MSS 873, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

The Temple bombing ignited a widespread uproar in the South and across the United States. William Schwartz, Jr., the President of the Temple, and Rabbi Rothschild were joined at the bomb site on the morning of October 12th by Mayor William B. Hartsfield, who had heard of the bombing over the radio on his way to church and immediately rerouted his driver to 1589 Peachtree Street. Standing before journalists, television crewmen, and photographers, Hartsfield voiced his shock both at the act itself and its occurrence in Atlanta, a city that had “prided itself in becoming a beacon of tolerance and racial and religious decency in the South.” He went as far as to declare the violence an “out-of-town gang operation” and called upon the South to stand up against such acts of destruction.⁷² Hartsfield’s spontaneous reaction set the precedent for an “overwhelming show of support from all segments of the general community.”⁷³

Reporters, ministers, politicians, and business leaders all echoed the Mayor’s sentiments. Even Marvin Griffin, Georgia’s segregationist Governor, declared the bombing “deplorable.”⁷⁴ Ralph McGill, the editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, published a widely read article the next day entitled “A Church, A School...” that condemned the bombing. McGill’s powerful response, which blamed national and city leaders’ lack of authoritative strength for the act of lawlessness, earned him a Pulitzer Prize the following year. He wrote that inaction in the face of hatred “[opened] the gates to all those who wish to take law into their own hands.” Admonishing those who passively watched prejudice wreak havoc, McGill warned, “When the wolves of hate are loosened on one

⁷² Greene, 241.

⁷³ *One Voice*, 82.

⁷⁴ Ellis, “Continuing Education,” 7.

people, then no one is safe.”⁷⁵ The Jewish community, in particular, appreciated this reaction. Samuel Lubin, the director of the AJC’s Atlanta branch, thanked McGill for his response to the Temple bombing and his work “in the Southland at this critical hour of its existence.”⁷⁶ McGill’s writing, along with similar quick and strong declarations by Atlanta media outlets, undoubtedly contributed to the general sentiment of shock and repulsion.

Diverse communities across Atlanta, the nation, and the globe overwhelmed the Temple with gestures of kindness and sympathy. Bible Belt southerners condemned “the desecration of a house of worship” as “an abomination” and offered support and comfort to the shaken congregation. Southerners, Rothschild observed, were a “deeply religious folk” and Atlanta “was a city of churches” that respected Judaism as the root of Christianity.⁷⁷ The First Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, for example, volunteered substitute facilities for worship and Sunday school classes. Ministers and rabbis wrote Rothschild from over thirty states and from Canada. Some letters carried undertones of fear, making it clear that many religious leaders wondered if a future attack would strike them next.⁷⁸ Moreover, a large number of businesses offered monetary and physical aid in addition to condolences.⁷⁹ Although damage was covered by insurance, generous contributions were continuously mailed to Rothschild and the Temple.⁸⁰ These various responses to the bombing lessened the Jewish community’s fears for safety.⁸¹ In a letter to Rothschild, McGraw-Hill Book Company Inc. described the bombing as a “tragedy

⁷⁵ South East Area (Atlanta), RG 347.4.25-.26/953-1968, Box 2, Ralph McGill 1957-62, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

⁷⁶ South East Area (Atlanta), Ralph McGill 1957-62, YIVO.

⁷⁷ *One Voice*, 83.

⁷⁸ Letter to Rothschild on October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Emory University

⁷⁹ Letter to Rothschild on October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Emory University.

⁸⁰ *One Voice*, 83.

⁸¹ *Fight Against Fear*, 63.

that befell your congregation and the city of Atlanta alike,” calling upon a citywide feeling of shame and signaling to the Atlanta Jewish community that they were not alone.⁸² Generosity and support did not go unappreciated by Rothschild and the congregants, as the Temple installed a plaque in dedication to those, both known and anonymous, who helped rebuild “Friendship Hall” when the restoration project ended in May 1960.⁸³

President Eisenhower’s response to the Temple bombing is a testament to the national attention the event garnered. Upon hearing about the bombing, Eisenhower ordered an FBI investigation to aid local police efforts.⁸⁴ He wrote to Mayor Hartsfield applauding his “swift and efficient efforts” after the “wanton” bombing. Moreover, he acknowledged that Hartsfield’s “forceful and unequivocal denunciation” not only preserved Atlanta’s reputation as the “City too Busy to Hate,” but also “set an example for the entire nation.”⁸⁵ Eisenhower’s response contributed to the distinctiveness of the bombing, as he had not reacted similarly to previous acts of violence across the South. On October 13, 1958, the *New York Post* published an article entitled “Ike and the Southern Terrorists” congratulating Eisenhower for his actions but decreeing them overdue, as “perhaps the country might have been spared much of this present nightmare if he had been able to find his voice- and his FBI reports- when the explosions began many months ago.”⁸⁶ Whether Eisenhower’s call to arms was a cause or effect of the

⁸² Letter to Rothschild on October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Emory University.

⁸³ *As But A Day*, 111-112.

⁸⁴ Greene, 246.

⁸⁵ Ellis, “Continuing Education,” 7.

⁸⁶ Newspaper Clippings from October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Series 4, Box 18, Folder 2, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

national and local reactions, it greatly aided the national coverage of the bombing and the investigation of the perpetrators.

Chief Herbert Jenkins gave one hundred Atlanta police officers high priority to work with FBI agents to investigate the bombing. Additionally, over seventy-five city detectives and Georgia's Bureau of Investigation contributed to the effort.⁸⁷ Although five members of hate groups were arrested, only George Bright stood trial.⁸⁸ A native of New York, Bright belonged to a group called the Columbians, a neo-Nazi organization rooted in Atlanta. Atlanta media outlets omitted Bright's six and a half hour anti-Semitic rant and other anti-Jewish testimonies from public news, perhaps in an effort to begin quelling tensions.⁸⁹ In the end, two trials later, lawyers were able to demonstrate only that Bright was anti-Semitic, not that he had committed the crime.⁹⁰

Although the investigations and trials yielded negligible results, change was nevertheless underway. The bombing brought civil rights discussions into the public arena and made them pertinent to everyday life, ensuring that the question of integration was not solely discussed in legislative meetings and newspaper articles. Moreover, the Temple's congregants felt more secure in the greater Atlanta community, recognizing that their best interests may lie in action instead of silence.⁹¹ The "shock and revulsion of all America" following the verdict proved to southern Jews that the bombers were not

⁸⁷ "New Georgia Encyclopedia: Temple Bombing." *New Georgia Encyclopedia*. (Georgia Humanities Council and the University of Georgia Press, 2004).

⁸⁸ The men belonged to groups such as the National States Rights Party and the Kings of the White Camilla. Forster, 5. *One Voice*, 106-107.

⁸⁹ ADL Bulletin, February 1959, Vol. 16, No. 2, *THE TRIAL OF GEORGE M. BRIGHT: "He hates Jews. The Atlanta Temple was bombed. And that's all,"* 7.

⁹⁰ *THE TRIAL OF GEORGE M. BRIGHT*, 7.

⁹¹ Letter to Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, from Lipsan (Albert Vorspan and Rabbi Eugene J. Lipman, directors), subject "Atlanta Dynamiting and Other Urgent Matters," October 13, 1958, Rothschild Papers, Series 2, Box 3, Folder 11, MSS 873, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

representative of the majority, but were instead “a cancer to be cut out of the body politic and left to die,” as described by Rabbi Rothschild in his sermon following the bombing.⁹² Although Rothschild feared that congregants would not show up for services the Friday following the bombing, “over 900 of the 1,000 Temple members came” and overcrowded the rubble-filled space.⁹³ Even after a disappointing trial, Rothschild assured his community that they were neither alone nor vulnerable.⁹⁴

“And None Shall Make Them Afraid...”

Rothschild’s Friday night sermon following the Temple bombing, “And None Shall Make Them Afraid,” a reference to Ezekiel 34:28, embodied the way in which he used his position on the pulpit to advocate for a stronger Jewish contribution toward “a vision of universal brotherhood and a world of peace.”⁹⁵ He delegitimized the Jewish concern surrounding “personal security” when he said, “now we have discovered at long last what can happen when men are afraid to speak and when they allow the shadow of cowardice to creep into their souls.” Now, he argued, the Jews carried a responsibility to shatter the silence, to lift “the curtain of fear,” and to “achieve peace and tranquility for all humanity.”⁹⁶

This last phrase, “all of humanity,” demonstrated how Rothschild spoke to the theory of the unitary character of prejudice, which viewed anti-Semitism and white supremacy as interlocking issues. Since a fully democratic American society would lead

⁹² Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 3-4.

⁹³ Article by Eleanor Ringel from *The Atlanta Constitution* on October 12, 1978, “Bomb of Hate Backfired at the Temple,” Rothschild Papers, Series 4, Box 19, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

⁹⁴ Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 1.

⁹⁵ Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 4.

⁹⁶ Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 3.

to Jewish security, a commitment to civil rights should be a Jewish priority.⁹⁷ As will be described in the following chapter, national Jewish organizations advocating for Jewish rights as part of a broader program for civil rights took this position. This larger message can be traced throughout Rothschild's sermon, especially when he said, "one building dedicated to the worship of our Heavenly Father stood in ruins." Rothschild referred to the Temple as "*one* building," not *our* building, implying "one of many."⁹⁸ He told the congregation that the support the Temple received "[was] addressed to us, but their words bring comfort and hope to all whose hearts have been gnawed by fear and whose souls were corroded by doubt."⁹⁹ Rothschild relayed to his congregation that discrimination in Atlanta was not solely a Jewish problem, but a larger societal one as well.

Rothschild embedded his sermon with religious language, yet his usual pleas for civil rights activism typified the majority of his speech. He preached that October 12th provided many lessons with regard to law, morality, and responsibility. He urged, "This must be a land ruled by law and not by men" because disregard for the law was fostering a society of "anarchy," "violence," and bids for "personal power." Although his words were race neutral, they extended beyond the bombing and underlined the law's failure to protect African-American citizens. Moreover, he argued, this law should be "the moral law" based in religious ideals that espouse "all men are brothers...we must love our neighbors as ourselves." To choose this path meant to choose the path of democracy and justice.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Svonkin, 18.

⁹⁸ Rothschild, "...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*," 4.

⁹⁹ Rothschild, "...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*," 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ Rothschild, "...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*," 2.

Furthermore, Rothschild emphasized responsibility, asking, “for who is to blame for the wave of violence that has swept across our land?” Echoing McGill’s article, Rothschild argued that the guilty ones were not solely those politicians who fueled a culture of political hostility or the perpetrators who planned attacks. The responsibility also lays with “those good and decent people who choose to remain silent in such a time.”¹⁰¹ Rothschild addressed these issues before his congregation in the hopes that the bomb would pierce the silence of a community that quietly stood by as lawlessness enveloped the nation.¹⁰² His message after the bombing demonstrated the same activist oratory that characterized the majority of his prior sermons, despite the fact that such bold rhetoric may have positioned the Temple as an attractive bombing target in the first place.

Conclusion

In discussing civil rights issues on the pulpit, Rothschild countered the assumption that rabbis in the South did not advocate for civil rights. He wrote, “the impression seems to be that the majority of ministers and rabbis in the South solved the dilemma by keeping silent. I am not so sure. At least, I did not. And I am convinced that many of my colleagues likewise spoke out.”¹⁰³ Perhaps the minimal reactions among congregants in the South to the preaching of these ministers and rabbis spurred impressions of nominal institutional and rabbinical activism.¹⁰⁴ Given the bold nature of Rothschild’s sermons for their time, it is clear why his congregants were apprehensive of

¹⁰¹ Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 3.

¹⁰² Rothschild, “...*And None Shall Make Them Afraid*,” 1.

¹⁰³ “Sermons from a Southern Pulpit,” 1-2, written sometime between 1958 and 1973.

¹⁰⁴ This topic will be addressed in the next chapter, when investigating the North/South dichotomy and the role of national Jewish organizations.

his undisguised civil rights advocacy. Nonetheless, Rothschild recognized the potential results that his leadership could bring about through civil rights discussions and educational programs at the Temple.

Rothschild's ability to speak publically about civil rights confirmed for him, "it is possible to open men's minds and change their hearts after all."¹⁰⁵ Following the bombing of Birmingham's 116th street Baptist Church in 1963, which killed four girls in Sunday school merely five years after the Temple bombing, Temple members donated \$3,500 to help restore the building. These donations were sent with letters, "many of them from children, [which] testified to the results of Rothschild's advocacy among his own congregation."¹⁰⁶ After Rothschild's passing in the winter of 1973, a CBS special aired on January 2, 1974 remembering him as someone who "helped awaken the conscience of the community" through a "happy combination of intellect, wit, wisdom, and sheer will."¹⁰⁷ Moreover, Dr. and Mrs. King Sr., Coretta Scott King, and Maynard Jackson, the first African American elected as Mayor of Atlanta, were among those who attended his memorial, serving as a testament to his accomplishments during the civil rights struggle.¹⁰⁸

Rothschild's work, while controversial, confirmed the ability of Jewish activists to stand up before others and touch a large audience. To understand the place of this narrative within the larger story of the Civil Rights Movement, it is necessary to understand not only local and national events of the era, but also the history of the Atlanta Jewish community within the context of the Civil Rights Movement. As

¹⁰⁵ "Sermons from a Southern Pulpit," 1-2.

¹⁰⁶ "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," 4.

¹⁰⁷ CBS Segment on January 2, 1974, p. 1, Paul Dhiels, TV 5 Newscene, Condolences: Special, Series 6, Box 21, Folder 4, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹⁰⁸ "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," 44.

demonstrated by the Temple bombing, Atlanta leadership responded proactively to civil rights events, a topic that will be explored further in subsequent chapters. The highly supportive response of local and national communities influenced the willingness of Atlanta Jewish individuals and organizations to overcome their fear and engage with civil rights activism. While Rabbi Rothschild is among one of the best-known Jewish activists in Atlanta during the Civil Rights Movement, he was by no means alone. A plethora of Jewish men and women fought for racial equality, both on a large and small scale. And, as will be seen, the progression of the Civil Rights Movement forced Jews to make difficult, and at times dangerous, decisions.

Chapter 2: Setting the Stage “The Jew, while hated, is nevertheless White.”¹⁰⁹

Introduction

The response of Atlanta authorities to the bombing of the Hebrew Benevolent Temple congregation raised questions within the African-American community as to whether such consideration would have been extended to them had the Temple been a black church. Many African Americans responded sympathetically towards the Jews after the bombing, as Janice Rothschild Blumberg remembers, “among the thousands of letters [Rothschild] received from all parts of the world after the bombing, the most poignant ones were those written by African Americans.”¹¹⁰ However, the bombing reminded other African Americans of the attacks they endured that garnered negligible sympathy from white society.¹¹¹ Annie Moore, a black southern woman who had lost her father, the Florida state director of the NAACP, to a bomb in 1951, wrote a letter to editor Ralph McGill contrasting the reaction to the Temple bombing with the lack of sympathy shown to her family after her father’s murder. Moore pondered, “could this be the reason: the Jew, while hated, is nevertheless White.”¹¹² Blumberg echoed this thought, reflecting in the 1980s, “that [the Temple’s] members were Jewish made no difference. That they were well-known and white probably did.”¹¹³ By confirming that Jews and African Americans occupied distinct positions in Atlanta society during the Civil Rights Movement, as opposed to sharing similar experiences as minority groups, the Temple

¹⁰⁹ Clive Webb, “Counterblast: How the Atlanta Temple Bombing Strengthened the Civil Rights Cause,” *Southern Spaces*, University of Sussex, 22 June 2009, <<http://southernspaces.org/2009/counterblast-how-atlanta-temple-bombing-strengthened-civil-rights-cause>>.

¹¹⁰ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 18.

¹¹¹ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 18.

¹¹² “Counterblast: How the Atlanta Temple Bombing Strengthened the Civil Rights Cause,” *Southern Spaces*.

¹¹³ *One Voice*, 83.

bombing stirred discord within African-American communities and unsettled black-Jewish relations.

During the Civil Rights Movement, black-Jewish relations were characterized by both cooperation and tension. Many interactions, whether through organizations, in business, or by way of interpersonal relations, cultivated a mutual understanding of prejudice. In his speech at the Fiftieth Anniversary of the AJC in 1957, Otto Klineberg, the former head of UNESCO's Division of Applied Social Science, stated that the minority issues of blacks and Jews, although different, gave them enough in common to tackle their problems together.¹¹⁴ Before the Union of American Hebrew Congregation's (UAHC) 47th Biennial Banquet, Martin Luther King Jr., told his Jewish audience, "we are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, it affects all indirectly."¹¹⁵ Nonetheless, respect and common ground did not preclude instances of violence and hostility. Unpacking black-Jewish relations in Atlanta, both within organizations and between individuals, against the backdrop of the national Jewish civil rights strategies identifies both opportunities for and impediments to southern Jewish civil rights activism.

Black-Jewish Relations: Cooperation, Black Anti-Semitism, and Jewish Racism

From the 1940s through the mid-1960s, the mutual goal of equality anchored the relationship between African Americans and Jews in the United States. The Jewish Federation, for example, asserted in 1963 that equality was not just a problem for the

¹¹⁴ Proceedings of the Fiftieth Anniversary Observance of the American Jewish Committee: 56525, April 10-14, 1957, "The Pursuit of Equality at Home and Abroad," (Book Craftsmen Associates, Inc.: New York, 1958), Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

¹¹⁵ K 94-122 Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers, Nov 20, 1963, p. 2-11, Photocopies of Speeches, Vertical File. Introduction of Martin Luther King, Jr. by Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, Hebrew Benevolent Congregation, Atlanta, GA, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

Jewish people, but also a cause to be fought for alongside African Americans. In a plenary session of the National Community Relations Advisory Council in New Jersey, the Federation stated, “As Jews, we react with special sensitivity to the negro’s demands. We too, have stood before the oppressors demanding freedom. We, too, know the inexorable power of a righteous ideal. We, too, have buried our martyrs.”¹¹⁶ Furthermore, Jews helped form organizations and protest groups that contributed to the African-American cause, such as the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) and the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC).¹¹⁷ Two early presidents of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), Arthur Spingarn and Joel Spingarn, were Jewish, as was half of the organization’s legal committee in the 1930s.¹¹⁸ While it is important not to over generalize, it is clear that Jews contributed in significant ways to the Civil Rights Movement.

Similarly, African-American leaders and organizations denounced anti-Semitism, recognizing parallels between American racial prejudice and Jewish persecution globally. For example, *The Afro-American*, published in Baltimore, compared Germany’s anti-Semitic Nuremberg Laws in the mid-1930s to the slave codes of the pre-Civil War South.¹¹⁹ Comparing anti-Semitism to southern prejudice may have stemmed from a hope among African American leaders that highlighting similarities for their American

¹¹⁶ Although the word “negro” today carries racist connotations, it was more commonly used in the 1950s and 1960s when referencing African Americans. Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 4, Jewish Federation, National Community Relations Advisory Council, Plenary Session, June 27-30, 1963, Shelburne Hotel, Atlantic City, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

¹¹⁷ Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We’ll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry*, (Boston: Mariner Books, 2011), 44.

¹¹⁸ Michael E. Staub, *Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America*, (New York: Columbia University press, 2002), 25.

¹¹⁹ Huey L. Perry and Ruth B. White, “The Post-Civil Rights Transformation of the Relationship Between Blacks and Jews in the United States,” *Phylon (1960-2002)*, Vol. 47, No. 1 (2nd Wtr., 1986): 55, *Clark Atlanta University*, JSTOR, Article DOI: 10.2307/274694, JSTOR, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/274694>>. The referenced article was published sometime during World War II.

oppressors would spur action. However, it can also be surmised that mutual respect drove cooperation.¹²⁰ A Harris Poll taken in 1963 that surveyed 1,157 randomly selected African-American men and women concluded, “in general, the opinion of Negroes on the stand of Jews [regarding Civil Rights] is more favorable than unfavorable.” Of those surveyed, 42 percent considered Jews “helpful,” while only 9 percent considered them “harmful.”¹²¹ African-American leaders, such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., built friendships with Jewish leaders, such as Rabbi Joshua Heschel and Rabbi Rothschild, which fostered meaningful collaboration in the fight for civil rights.¹²² In September 1967, Dr. King wrote to Rabbi Rothschild, “it would be impossible to record the contribution that the Jewish people have made toward the Negro's struggle for freedom...it has been so great.”¹²³

Some historians, such as Cheryl Greenberg, argue the Civil Rights Movement fostered cooperation on an institutional level between black and Jewish communities but that socioeconomic tension impeded it on an individualized one. Although images of collaboration between black and Jewish leaders, such as the iconic picture of Rabbi Heschel and Dr. King marching together in Selma, spur the perception of a strong black-Jewish alliance, Greenberg questions whether a “golden age” of relations truly existed. She further claims that blaming the disintegration of black-Jewish relations towards the end of the Civil Rights Movement on black militant extremism or a shift to Jewish-

¹²⁰ *Fight Against Fear*, 34.

¹²¹ Peter I. Rose, “Blacks and Jews: The Strained Alliance,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 454, *America as a Multicultural Society* (Mar., 1981): 61, *Sage Publications, Inc.* in association with the *American Academy of Political and Social Science*, JSTOR, May 2014, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/1044245>>

¹²² Abram Joshua Heschel was a rabbi, scholar, and civil rights activist from New York. “Abraham Joshua Heschel,” *Religion & Ethics Newsweekly*, *PBS.org*, January 18, 2008, <<http://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2008/01/18/january-18-2008-abraham-joshua-heschel/1789/>>

¹²³ *Fight Against Fear*, 24.

centered goals neglects the intergroup hostility that persisted throughout period. Consequently, defining a simple black-Jewish alliance, Greenberg asserts, “[misses] the complexity and the drama of the civil rights struggle” by overlooking the tension embedded in the black-Jewish relationship.¹²⁴

Black anti-Semitism, exacerbated by socioeconomic tension, frequently hindered cooperation between the two minority communities. As African Americans struggled after the Civil War to establish their position in American society, Jews immigrated to the United States and immediately encountered opportunity for economic mobility.¹²⁵ The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders found that out of fifteen large cities surveyed in the 1960s, Jews owned 39 percent of stores in neighborhoods that were predominantly black and most of these stores were the largest and most profitable in the area.¹²⁶ Consequently, Jews found themselves more economically secure than their black counterparts, which strained black-Jewish relations and spurred animosity. This sentiment particularly festered below the Mason-Dixon line. A 1964 study by Gary T. Marx on black anti-Semitism found that, of 527 black adults polled in New York City, Chicago, Atlanta, and Birmingham, anti-Jewish responses were more common in the South.¹²⁷ In the case of Atlanta, this regional disparity can in part be explained by the ways in which economic considerations motivated Jews to comply with segregationist business practices, a topic that will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

¹²⁴ Cheryl Lynn Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters: Black-Jewish Relations in the American Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 14.

¹²⁵ Series 4, Box 4, Folder 8, MSS 637, “Reference Material: Civil Rights,” *The Wall Street Journal*, “Allies No More? Decades-old Alliance Between Jews, Negroes Is Beset by Animosity: Jewish Gifts to Civil Rights Dwindle; Black Militants See Jews as 'Oppressors'; A 'Combat Zone' in Boston,” written by Alan Adelson, written sometime after 1966, Emory University, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

¹²⁶ Adelson, “Allies No More,” the Breman.

¹²⁷ Rose, 62.

Tense black-Jewish relations in Atlanta also stemmed from the fact that Atlanta contained two separate real estate markets for its African-American and white communities, which bred concentrated pockets of minority housing. Many white families, including Jews, upheld housing lines in an effort to maintain the “integrity” of their neighborhoods.¹²⁸ Although the pressure of the Civil Rights Movement and the growing number of black homeowners brought racial change to their doorsteps, residents fought city planners to preserve homogeneity.¹²⁹ In the eyes of African Americans, Jewish inclusion in white residences further cemented Jews within the larger white community and separated them from their minority status.¹³⁰

Racist actions by Jewish organizations and individuals in Atlanta can be attributed to personal prejudices as well as a desire to avoid anti-Semitic backlash. On March 31, 1961, Charles Wittenstein, the Southeast Area Director of the AJC, wrote a letter to Harry Fleishman, the director of the AJC’s National Labor Service, stating he did not receive an invitation to a conference at Clark College in Atlanta on desegregation and employment bias, titled “Religious Cooperative Action and the Civil Rights Crisis in the South.” Wittenstein wrote that this exclusion was a welcomed excuse “to avoid attendance,” as “public identification with the NAACP in this geographical area would impair our agency’s effectiveness.”¹³¹ Wittenstein, along with many others, feared that linking the AJC so publically with the NAACP could threaten the validity of the Jewish agenda by inciting negative associations that could create anti-Semitic sentiment.

Jewish individuals also took proactive steps to distance themselves from civil

¹²⁸ Cruise, 103.

¹²⁹ Cruise, 103-4.

¹³⁰ Nonetheless, Shirley Brickman remembers, “there were several neighborhoods in Atlanta where no Jews were allowed to buy homes.” Brickman, 9.

¹³¹ South East Area (Atlanta), *YIVO*.

rights efforts. For example, at a Temple Sisterhood Luncheon in 1955, women grew outraged upon hearing that a black couple would attend their programmed discussion on “The Moral and Legal Aspects of Desegregation.”¹³² Moreover, when Blumberg commented to her friends after the *Brown v. Board of Education* Supreme Court decision that her husband encouraged people to comply with the ruling to desegregate, a woman nearby “turned to [her] in abject horror and demanded, ‘What does Jack want to do to us, start the [Leo] Frank case all over again?’”¹³³ Whether out of fear or prejudice, these Jews opposed the idea of both attending an integrated event and supporting integration, despite the fact that they were willing to discuss the complications of desegregation openly within their own community.

As Greenberg suggests, black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism hindered the possibility of an unconditional civil rights partnership between African-American and Jewish communities in Atlanta. However, open channels of communication allowed opportunities for productive contributions to the Civil Rights Movement on the part of Jewish individuals and organizations. In Atlanta, investigating Jewish civil rights activism requires understanding conflicting tensions, intergroup collaboration, and the motives behind each. To uncover political, social, and economic regional particularities that affected change, it is necessary to first understand national Jewish civil rights activism.

The National Scene

National Jewish organizations fought for civil rights while simultaneously trying to resolve their status as “white” Americans. Some Jewish rights activists and

¹³² *One Voice*, 56.

¹³³ *One Voice*, 57.

organizations invoked Judaism as a means of spurring civil rights sentiment, demonstrated through Rabbi Rothschild's sermons in the previous chapter and pamphlets published by the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Central Conference of American Rabbis concerning race equality.¹³⁴ However, more frequently in public discourse, Jewish organizations confronted white racism while avoiding religious language that could elicit anti-Semitic responses.¹³⁵ Consequently, as historian Eric Goldstein affirms, many Jewish leaders worked "to obscure all references to the Jews as a distinct race."¹³⁶

Previously, Jews searched for racial roots to stabilize their self-identity in a socially shifting society.¹³⁷ However, Progressive Era Jews of the early twentieth century worked to define themselves as "American Jews," as opposed to "Jewish Americans," abandoning efforts to define themselves in racial terms.¹³⁸ Some historians view this early to mid-twentieth century denial of race associations as "a diversionary tactic rather than a reflection of their true feelings" because Zionists continued to utilize racial language.¹³⁹ Goldstein observes, "what is striking about Jewish ambivalence concerning racial identity during the 1930s is that American Jews wavered on *how strenuously* to assert Jewish racial distinctiveness, but rarely on the question of *whether* they were distinct in race."¹⁴⁰ Despite this internal debate, from the Progressive Era to the Civil Rights Movement, American Jews avoided projecting racial associations, recognizing

¹³⁴ Pamphlets by the Commission on Justice and Peace of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, Rothschild Papers, Series 4, Box 19, Folder 8, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

¹³⁵ Beckerman, 44. Goldstein, 194.

¹³⁶ Goldstein, 40.

¹³⁷ Goldstein, 40.

¹³⁸ Goldstein, 86.

¹³⁹ Goldstein, 92-93.

¹⁴⁰ Goldstein, 185.

that it could threaten their classification as “white” and their inclusion in mainstream society.¹⁴¹

Consequently, instead of evoking specifically Jewish or racial issues when advocating for civil rights equality, national Jewish organizations chose broad ones, such as unfair housing and employment policies targeting all minorities.¹⁴² The three main national Jewish organizations, the ADL, the AJCongress, and the AJC, fought discrimination in the mid-twentieth century through the theory of the unitary character of prejudice, which viewed “anti-Semitism, white racism, and all other forms of bigotry as inseparable parts of the same phenomenon.”¹⁴³ A 1959 statement by the AJC before Congress epitomizes this approach, announcing that “the welfare and security of Jews are inseparably linked to the welfare of all Americans...an invasion of the Civil Rights of any group threatens the safety and well-being of all groups in our land.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, discrimination toward any religious, racial, and ethnic minority hindered equality for all, and thus threatened Jewish security. During an 1961 NBC broadcast entitled *The Open Mind*, Edwin J. Lukas, attorney and director of the National Affairs Department of the American Jewish Committee, remarked, “it would be literally impossible, even if it were desirable which it is not, for the Jew to identify with the Civil Rights problem largely in Jewish terms” because “legally, culturally, educationally, or otherwise” it was necessary to promote the rights of all minorities to secure civil rights.¹⁴⁵ Dr. Alfred J.

¹⁴¹ Goldstein, Chapter 4. As will be seen, this tactic shifted again towards the end of the 1960s during the ascendancy of the Black Power movement.

¹⁴² Goldstein, 195.

¹⁴³ Svonkin, 18.

¹⁴⁴ Statement of the American Jewish Committee on Civil Rights Bills to the Senate Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights, First Session of the 86th Congress, p. 1; April 13, 1959; American Jewish Committee, records; D9F8; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

¹⁴⁵ Script of *The Open Mind*, Sunday, February 26, 1961; NBC Television; American Jewish Committee, records; D9F7; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

Marrow, the Chairman on the Commission on Intergroup Relations, took this a step further when he spoke before the Federal Civil Rights Commission in 1959, proclaiming, “the effects of discrimination and segregation are physically and psychologically harmful to every citizen—not just to minority group members.” This is an even subtler argument, implying that not only are the sufferings of different minority groups intertwined, but also that those who inflict suffering are harmed.¹⁴⁶

Though the unitary concept of prejudice served as a strong backbone for Jewish activism, it ultimately held an “internal contradiction.”¹⁴⁷ The 1950s witnessed the assimilation and suburbanization of American Jews as they gradually enjoyed more freedom in American life than those minorities for whom they were advocating.¹⁴⁸ As African Americans struggled to realize equal rights, American Jews “[experienced] socioeconomic, professional, and residential mobility that brought them closer, in terms of socioeconomic status and interpersonal contact...to the white, suburban middle and upper classes.”¹⁴⁹ When the announcer of the aforementioned NBC segment asked Lukas whether Jewish issues were as “intense” as African-American ones, Lukas responded, “I think not, and for one very good reason. The Jew has made slightly more progress in the years that he has been [in the United States].”¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 4, Atlanta Jewish Federation Records, 1906-1983. Also, Container 207, Series III, Folder 1, Ci-Co, 1945-1969 Testimony of Dr. Alfred J. Marrow, Chairman, Commission on Intergroup Relations, before the Federal Civil Rights Commission on Feb 2, 1959, 1-3, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

¹⁴⁷ Svonkin, 191.

¹⁴⁸ Beckerman, 42.

¹⁴⁹ Statement on Civil Rights Law by Morris B. Abraham; American Jewish Committee, records; D9F6; American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY. Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 191.

¹⁵⁰ Script of *The Open Mind*.

This progress is evidenced by a 1965 ADL report that definitively demonstrates a national decline in discrimination towards Jews. It found that between 74-76 percent of the population viewed Jews as “warm and friendly people” who were “becoming more and more like other Americans.” Although 52 percent of those surveyed “had no contact with Jews at work or in business” and “never had a ‘close’ Jewish friend,” this study nevertheless documents declining negative perceptions of Jews.¹⁵¹ Moreover, similar conclusions can be drawn from an unpublished poll by the AJC that surveyed Gentile opinions, inquiring which groups posed a threat in the United States. While 18 percent named the Jews in 1946, this number was reduced to one percent by 1954.¹⁵² Despite this changing social landscape, national Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement remained strong until the 1970s, suggesting that Jewish participation was not primarily determined by a mutual experience of current oppression.

Compared to national organizations, historians surmise that the South did not have a strong enough network, Jewish or otherwise, to engage with the charged racial tension of the Civil Rights era. The AJC’s Community Affairs Department wrote in 1958, “the fact remains that the South has not developed anything comparable to the network of government and private intergroup relations agencies that exist through the North and West.”¹⁵³ National perceptions of southern Jews carried traces of stereotypical judgments about the “backwards” region below the Mason Dixon line and “the elaborate caste

¹⁵¹ Box 1, MSS 18, Folder 9, Abe Goldstein Family papers, 1913-1987, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309. Also, ADL Bulletin, “Report: Anti-Semitism Studies,” conducted for the League by the University of California Survey Research Center, February 1965, Anti-Defamation League, New York.

¹⁵² Beckerman, 42.

¹⁵³ “The Bombings in the South,” December 15, 1958, Emory University.

system” of society.¹⁵⁴ As residents of the South for centuries, some Jews supported segregation and opposed Jewish participation in the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁵⁵ For example, Karl Friedman of Birmingham, Alabama celebrated his Bar Mitzvah in 1937 by inviting guests to view a downtown lynching.¹⁵⁶ In September 1967, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote to Rabbi Rothschild, “I think we all have to admit that there are Jews in the South who have not been anything like our allies in the civil rights struggle and have gone out of the way to consort with the perpetrators of the status quo.”¹⁵⁷ However, further evaluating the North/South dichotomy during the Civil Rights Movement reveals that this sentiment was not widespread and that southern Jews cooperated with African Americans to achieve integration.

The North/South Dichotomy

The South, and within it the Jewish South, has its own unique story in the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Similar to the nation as a whole, the South did not witness prevalent anti-Semitism. Henry Birnbrey, an active member of the Atlanta Jewish community, remembers that “occasionally there’d be snide remarks, but I never was really the subject of anti-Semitism.”¹⁵⁸ By the mid-twentieth century, many Jews in Atlanta had taken prominent roles in economic, political, and civic life. Dick Rich owned the largest department store in downtown Atlanta, Rabbi Rothschild served on boards that promoted interfaith and interracial cooperation, and prominent Jewish individuals

¹⁵⁴ Arnold Rose, “Social Change and the Negro Problem,” Introduction to *The Negro in America*, University of Minnesota (New York: Harper torch books, 1964): 10, Published as Pamphlet by the ADL.

¹⁵⁵ Box 4, MSS 59, Folder 6, The Temple Records, 1853-1989, the Breman. Also , Shankman, “A Temple is Bombed: Atlanta, 1958.”

¹⁵⁶ *Fight Against Fear*, 20.

¹⁵⁷ *Fight Against Fear*, 24.

¹⁵⁸ Henry Birnbrey, oral history recorded by author, Atlanta, Georgia, March 13, 2014, University of Pennsylvania Oral Histories Independent Study, transcript, 2.

such as Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler, Sherry Zimmerman Frank, Cecil Alexander, and William M. Breman took local initiatives in furthering the Civil Rights Movement, which will be discussed in later pages. Moreover, Jewish communities continued to grow, as according to statistics from the American Jewish Yearbook, Georgia's Jewish population increased by 11.4 percent between 1961 and 1972.¹⁵⁹

Jewish Atlantans nonetheless recognized that their status as southern Jews depended on an intricate balancing act. An AJC report on proposed programming in Atlanta from September 1958 to June 1959 stated, "The Jewish group enjoys status and prestige in Atlanta, although there are a number of facets of community life in which social discrimination does exist."¹⁶⁰ For example, private clubs often excluded Jews, forcing them to form separate Jewish-sponsored ones, such as the Standard, Mayfair, and Progressive clubs, in the early twentieth century.¹⁶¹ Speaking about integration, Shirley Brickman points out "I was also separated. Not that I couldn't drink out of the water fountain at Rich's [department store]. But I certainly couldn't go to their clubs."¹⁶² As the only Jewish student in her class at Leigh Street School, she noticed, "If there was a birthday party, I was never invited." Although she and her two best friends would exchange Christmas presents, she never set foot in either of their homes.¹⁶³ Brickman adds, "what really, really was in my mind was, 'why can't I come play with you?'"¹⁶⁴

Birnbrei observed that, as a result of social discrimination, southern Jews "were not as active about [the Civil Rights Movement] as the northern Jews were because

¹⁵⁹ "Jews and Georgians: A Meeting of Cultures 1733-1983," Sponsored by the Atlanta Jewish Federation at the Schatten Gallery, Emory University, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁶⁰ South East Area (Atlanta), RG 347.4.25-.26/953-1968, Box 2, AJC Programming in Atlanta, 1960, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

¹⁶¹ Brickman, 9.

¹⁶² Brickman, 12.

¹⁶³ Brickman, 6.

¹⁶⁴ Brickman, 12.

they were living [in the South] and they were making a living, worried about their own security.” Birnbrey, who immigrated to the United States from Hitler’s Germany in the late 1930s, concluded from his experiences in Atlanta that, generally, “southern Jews had a sort of inferiority complex or something. They were just very passive.”¹⁶⁵ Advocating for civil rights risked undermining their identity as “white” Americans, and, as a result, southern Jews “were sort of caught betwixt and between and they were scared to fight [for civil rights].”¹⁶⁶ In the eyes of southern Jews, northern Jews who traveled to the South to advocate for civil rights brought attention to the southern Jewish community without understanding the delicate racial hierarchy of the region, which southern Jews navigated on a daily basis.¹⁶⁷ Thus, Jews in the South carried “an anxiety not to be led into danger by the recklessness of those who did not understand the South and its ways.”¹⁶⁸

Despite this concern with self-preservation, Birnbrey recalls that much of “the [civil rights] leadership did come from southern Jews.”¹⁶⁹ A 1959 opinion poll demonstrates that Jews were more supportive of civil rights initiatives than non-Jews in the South. However, only 15 percent of Gentiles believed Jews were in favor of desegregation, perhaps indicating that Jews successfully downplayed their support for

¹⁶⁵ Birnbrey, 10-11. Birnbrey’s experience in Hitler’s Germany and later as a soldier in World War II provided him with unique insight into the Jim Crow South. In a paper entitled *In the Shadow of Segregation and Integration*, Birnbrey aptly observes, “I had escaped from one injustice, the persecution of Jews in Germany to become witness to another injustice, the segregation of Blacks and Whites in the South.”¹⁶⁵ Moreover, it may have leveraged his civil rights activism. Henry Birnbrey, for example, considers his chief involvement in the Civil Rights Movement to be his participation with the Southern Regional Council (SRC), an integrated southern organization that worked “to educate people about...eliminating segregation.” He asserts that the organization’s main accomplishment in Atlanta during his involvement was hiring the city’s first Black policeman. However small the contribution, it is interesting to note that even Jewish Holocaust survivors transplanted to a foreign city found the courage to take a stand for civil rights in Atlanta.

¹⁶⁶ Birnbrey, 11.

¹⁶⁷ *Fight Against Fear*, 15, 68.

¹⁶⁸ *Fight Against Fear*, 87.

¹⁶⁹ Birnbrey, 11.

civil rights in order to avoid the backlash of white supremacists.¹⁷⁰ Birnbrey confirms that in the South, “Jews certainly...were much more tolerant than non-Jews were with the black people. There’s no question about it.”¹⁷¹

Regional particularities shaped social and cultural atmospheres and elicited varied responses to the Civil Rights Movement below the Mason-Dixon line. The Jews of the Mississippi Delta, for example, experienced a different reality than the Jews of cosmopolitan Atlanta.¹⁷² Similar to the rest of the South, Atlanta’s Jews found themselves grappling with decisions about action and inaction that profoundly affected their engagement with the Civil Rights Movement. However, Atlantans encountered unique economic considerations as their city worked to solidify its status as the emerging capital of the “New South.”¹⁷³ Although Jewish merchants feared “personal, political, and commercial repercussions,” they also worried that resisting civil rights laws would negatively affect Atlanta’s economy.¹⁷⁴ Mutual institutional goals, economic motivations, and interpersonal relationships characterized collaboration between African-American and Jewish communities in Atlanta and reveal significant contributions from southern Jews to the African-American struggle for equal opportunity.

Black-Jewish Relations in Atlanta: Institutions

To promote civil rights progress, many Atlanta Jewish institutions followed the lead of their national counterparts by attacking prejudiced behavior against all

¹⁷⁰ *Fight Against Fear*, 44, 168.

¹⁷¹ Birnbrey, 11.

¹⁷² Ferris, 135.

¹⁷³ *Fight Against Fear*, 61.

¹⁷⁴ *Fight Against Fear*, 107.

minorities.¹⁷⁵ In Atlanta, both African Americans and Jews faced discrimination in housing, private clubs, universities, and businesses. Furthermore, both groups fell victim to attacks by white supremacists groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and the Columbians.¹⁷⁶ Consequently, organizational cooperation in Atlanta was both visible and strong because “blacks and Jews had different but overlapping goals and interests which converged” and leaders within both communities “recognized that convergence as well as an opportunity for cooperation.”¹⁷⁷ After the bombing of the Temple, for example, an informal interracial “dinner group” of clergy, and at times businessmen and university leaders, met biweekly to open lines of communication and establish friendships across ethnic divides.¹⁷⁸ Mutual goals allowed these minority groups to join forces in pursuit of equality.

In many cases, economic considerations drove collaboration between Jewish business owners and black customers. Nationally, Jewish organizations argued that public discrimination undermined the American economy. In 1965, the American Jewish Committee National Labor Service produced a fact sheet entitled “Equality of Opportunity” in which Elmo Roper, a public opinion analyst, projected that the cost of discrimination amounted to \$30 billion per year. Roper estimated that minorities “would have earned \$72 billion, given equal opportunity and earning power,” while in actuality “they earned only \$42 billion.”¹⁷⁹ Additionally, he argued that discrimination in public accommodations drained the nation’s economy by calling for the duplication of pools,

¹⁷⁵ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 4, Atlanta Jewish Federation Records, 1906-1983, Memorandum from the American Jewish Committee in NYC.

¹⁷⁶ “Columbians,” *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Web, 30 April 2014
<<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/columbians>>

¹⁷⁷ Greenberg, 1.

¹⁷⁸ “Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After,” 19.

¹⁷⁹ National Labor Service, “Equality of Opportunity. A Fact Sheet,” 1959, p.2-12, American Jewish Committee, D9 F7, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

theaters, and other facilities for different races and religions. By underlining the fiscal burden of discrimination, Jewish organizations hoped to reach those Americans who might surrender personal prejudices in favor of practicality.

Similarly, Jewish businessmen in Atlanta recognized the economic effects of discrimination. Many small business owners moved to the United States in the early 20th century and found that, as foreigners and members of a minority group, they could reap more business in black neighborhoods than in established white communities. European Jews particularly “depended very strongly upon the Black in order to make their living.”¹⁸⁰ In many cases, Jewish business owners catered to large populations of black customers with whom they interacted on a day-to-day basis and fostered relationships that depended on high levels of trust. For example, Shirley Brickman’s father, Mr. Irvin Berkowitz, arrived in Atlanta as a Jewish immigrant in the early 20th century and established a grocery store that ran on credit, allowing black customers the flexibility to “pay on part of the bill” and return with the rest whenever they had it.¹⁸¹ Furthermore, some of these small businessmen, including Mr. Berkowitz, raised families in the black neighborhoods where they kept their shops, developing a sense of community tied to their neighbors. Brickman recalls forming close relationships with customers, noting, “this was not only a customer [relationship], it was a friendship relationship.”¹⁸²

Likewise, economic considerations affected black-Jewish relations for Jewish owners of larger companies. Dick Rich, who owned Rich’s, the largest department store chain in downtown Atlanta, “scored a number of significant firsts in improving treatment

¹⁸⁰ Eplan, 49.

¹⁸¹ Brickman, 3.

¹⁸² Brickman’s mother, for example, would trade recipes with customers, as “that’s where she got her pecan pie recipe. And that’s where they got her vegetable soup recipe.” Brickman, 3-4.

of African Americans.” He prohibited segregated drinking fountains, gave credit to African-American customers, and asked employees to address all customers, no matter their skin color, as “Mr. and Mrs.”¹⁸³ While Rich’s policies may have stemmed in part from racial tolerance, economic considerations most likely influenced his choices. In the early 1960s, African Americans constituted 38 percent of the Atlanta population, providing department stores with a 7-11 percent profit margin.¹⁸⁴ Rich undoubtedly recognized the competitive advantage that progressive racial policies would bring his business. In sum, in large and small businesses alike, financial incentives behind favorable relationships undoubtedly influenced Jewish interactions with African-American customers in mid-twentieth century Atlanta.

Black-Jewish Relations in Atlanta: Individuals

Despite black anti-Semitism and Jewish racism, impactful collaboration between leaders and community members occurred at the individual level in Atlanta, epitomized by Jewish activists such as Rabbi Rothschild and Sherry Zimmerman Frank. While these cases may present exceptions to the norm, they nonetheless demonstrate that the Civil Rights Movement cultivated opportunities for individual cooperation, creating a channel for Jewish activism.

The friendship between Rabbi Rothschild and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. proves not only that individual cooperation took place, but also the large net of influence it had the potential to cast. Blumberg remembers that Dr. King and Rothschild corresponded as friends, as did she and Dr. King’s wife, Coretta. Moreover, the couples occasionally met

¹⁸³ *Fight Against Fear*, 90.

¹⁸⁴ Interview with Lonnie King, conducted by Dr. Carole Merritt, Monday, November 21, 2005, transcript, 28, Atlanta History Center, 130 West Paces Ferry Rd NW, Atlanta, GA.

for dinner and discussion in one of their Atlanta homes.¹⁸⁵ Without this camaraderie, Rothschild might not have been able to introduce Martin Luther King Jr. to Jewish audiences and open more minds to his civil rights rhetoric. As Rothschild expressed in an Atlanta memorial service for Dr. King following his assassination in 1968, it was vital to “set about changing not the laws of America but the hearts of America.”¹⁸⁶

In November 1963, Rothschild introduced Dr. King before a Jewish audience at the Union of American Hebrew Congregation’s (UAHC) 47th Biennial Banquet, announcing, “We know much about him. Now we would like him to know us a little.” As usual, Rothschild acknowledged southern Jewish fear, stating that he wanted Dr. King “to know that we too -- yes even those among us who are made for the moment fearful and uncomfortable by the implacable surge of history -- are mightily concerned with the struggle for freedom and dignity.” In Martin Luther King Jr.’s subsequent address, he thanked his friend for the introduction and extended his gratitude to those who had supported the struggle for equality, whether through prayer, financial contributions, or participation in demonstrations. That Dr. King not only acknowledged public means of support, but also private ones, such as prayer, hints that he too understood dilemmas that confronted southern Jews in the face of the Civil Rights Movement. He called upon the “interrelated structure of reality” to emphasize the need for collaboration in the march towards justice.¹⁸⁷ Reiterating Rothschild’s message of brotherhood, Dr. King’s rhetoric resonated with the unitary theory of prejudice espoused by Jewish organizations, further solidifying the link between Jewish and African-American goals in action as well as language.

¹⁸⁵ *One Voice*, 174-175.

¹⁸⁶ *One Voice*, 202-3.

¹⁸⁷ K 94-122 Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers, the Breman, 2-11.

Sherry Zimmerman Frank, an active member of the AJC, also stands as a testament to the effort by Jewish individuals to advance the Civil Rights Movement in Atlanta. Like Rothschild, she fought for equality in the public sphere, illustrated through her work supporting the Voting Rights Act of 1965 and the creation of the Black-Jewish Coalition.¹⁸⁸ Frank worked with the Black-Jewish Coalition through the 1990's to organize retreats that “[brought] eleventh-grade Blacks and Jews together for a weekend and try to overcome stereotypes and just empower kids to work together in their schools to break the racism, to stop the anti-Semitic jokes.”¹⁸⁹ Moreover, she co-chaired the Atlanta mobilization for the annual anniversary of the March on Washington in the 1980s alongside Tim McDonald, the Executive Director of Concerned Black Clergy.¹⁹⁰ Frank's contributions demonstrate that individuals actively found the means to positively and constructively contribute to the African-American cause.

Moreover, Frank formed a close friendship with Congressman John Lewis, the first co-chair of the Black-Jewish Coalition, a Freedom rider, and Chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) from 1963-1966.¹⁹¹ Through this relationship, the Lewis and Frank families gained insight into each other's religious and racial experiences in Atlanta. Frank supported and admired Lewis's political efforts and was willing “to do what I could, but out of the spotlight.”¹⁹² Likewise, the Lewis family experienced Jewish life in Atlanta by accompanying the Franks to “weddings and bar

¹⁸⁸ Sherry Zimmerman Frank, April 21, 1993, June 16, 1993, April 27, 1994, OCH10095, p. 26-28 from the Herbert and Esther Taylor Oral History Collection, Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta, GA.

¹⁸⁹ Frank, 92.

¹⁹⁰ Frank, 78-82.

¹⁹¹ Frank, 26-28.

¹⁹² Frank, 57-58.

mitzvahs.”¹⁹³ When Lewis traveled to campaign for Congress, his son, John Miles, spent weekends with Frank’s son, Andy.¹⁹⁴ The two boys, one African-American and the other Jewish, also built a strong friendship and, as they were born on the same day, “shared many birthday parties together.”¹⁹⁵ Similar to the Kings and the Rothschilds, the Lewis and Frank families proved that amidst the tense environment of the Civil Rights South, some Jews and African Americans formed meaningful and productive relationships.

Conclusion

Although racial prejudice and anti-Semitism permeated the Deep South throughout the Civil Rights Movement, Jews in Atlanta took stances that supported civil rights equality. Jewish business leaders became social leaders, implementing policies and practices that benefited their African-American customers. Moreover, individuals forged friendships that bridged religious and racial divides. Cooperation between African-American and Jewish communities in Atlanta, whether driven by economic, institutional, or personal motivations, proved that fear did not always inhibit activism. Although the scale of and motivations for Jewish activism may have differed from that of the North, southern Jewish activism unquestionably contributed the struggle for civil rights.

Nonetheless, civil rights progress in Atlanta remained slow and lagged behind the pace of northern communities. For example, according to the National Labor Service’s “Equality of Opportunity: A Fact Sheet,” Georgia was not one of the twenty-three states that passed civil rights laws prohibiting public discrimination.¹⁹⁶ Additionally, Atlanta schools did not comply with the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling of 1954 until 1961.

¹⁹³ Frank, 26-28.

¹⁹⁴ Frank, 57-58.

¹⁹⁵ Frank, 57-58.

¹⁹⁶ “Equality of Opportunity. A Fact Sheet,” 2-12, AJC.

However, major national events, such as the Greensboro sit-ins, the desegregation crisis, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced members of Atlanta's Jewish, African-American, and white communities to confront the slow engine of civil rights progress head on. Investigating levels of civil rights activism among Atlanta Jews surrounding these three events reveals a wide-ranging spectrum of collaboration and opposition, as well as the avenues available to implement change.

**Chapter 3: The Boycott of Rich's Department Store,
The Desegregation Crisis, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964**
“We were *not* Montgomery. We were *not* Selma. We were Atlanta.”¹⁹⁷

Introduction

In April of 1964, Joseph Ross, a former resident of Atlanta, stated in a interview with the *Atlanta Constitution* that the city had “a head start” in dealing with racial issues plaguing the nation because of its improvements in housing, education, and unemployment among African-American communities, which he attributed to strong Atlanta leadership.¹⁹⁸ Two mayors, William B. Hartsfield and Ivan Allen Jr., who served consecutively from the early 1940s to the early 1970s, took great strides to maintain peaceful coexistence among Atlanta’s white and black communities. Moreover, they set expectations for compliance with national civil rights laws, encouraging all sectors of society to support racial equality. The actions and reactions of city leadership, both Jewish and non-Jewish, to civil rights events demonstrate a concern with preserving Atlanta’s revered title as the “City Too Busy to Hate.” Looking back in 1979, Cecil Alexander, a member of the Atlanta Jewish community, recalled, “In a way, Atlanta became a Mecca” for pilgrims searching for more progressive race relations below the Mason-Dixon line.¹⁹⁹ Shirley Brickman supports this assertion, expounding, “We were *not* Montgomery. We were *not* Selma. We were Atlanta.”²⁰⁰

As the Civil Rights Movement gained traction, Jewish organizations and individuals in Atlanta prepared for and assisted with the changes that swept through their city. Civil rights turmoil not only threatened Atlanta’s economic fortitude, but also

¹⁹⁷ Brickman, 10.

¹⁹⁸ South East Area (Atlanta). RG 347.4.25-.26/953-1968, Box 2, Atlanta Chapter Annual Meeting, April 1964, Joseph Ross, Archives of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research, New York.

¹⁹⁹ Cecil Alexander, Jewish History Project of Atlanta, Interviewer L.W. Leeds, April 1979, November 10, 1980. The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia. 76.

²⁰⁰ Brickman, 10.

challenged its relatively accommodating approach to racial change. Although endeavors in Atlanta did not compare to the voluble efforts taken by national networks of advocacy, Jewish responses to the 1960 student sit-ins, the desegregation crisis, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 illuminate the causes and effects of Jewish activism during the Civil Rights Movement. Despite instances of segregationist fervor, Atlanta Jews more frequently chose action over passivity in the 1960s.

The Boycott of Rich's Department Store

On February 1, 1960, four African-American freshmen at A&T College demanded service at a whites-only counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. Their activism inspired a parallel campaign for desegregation in Atlanta by black students from the Atlanta University Center, which included Atlanta University, Clark College, the Interdenominational Theological Seminary, Morehouse College, Morris Brown College, and Spellman College.²⁰¹ That month, African-American students in Atlanta formed the Committee on Appeal for Human Rights (COAHR) with the intention of sparking a student sit-in movement advocating integration.²⁰² Led by Lonnie King, they published "An Appeal for Human Rights" in March, publically supporting student sit-ins across the South and announcing their fight against racial injustice in education, employment, housing, voting, and other sectors of American life.²⁰³

COAHR targeted eleven locations during the student sit-ins of 1960, marking a watershed moment that escalated racial tension in Atlanta and brought national events to

²⁰¹ *Fight Against Fear*, 124-125. Lonnie King, recorded interview by Timothy Frilingos, for exhibition "Return to Rich's: The Story Behind the Store," 2013, William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁰² King, recorded interview by Timothy Frilingos. Clemons, 124-125.

²⁰³ "An Appeal for Human Rights," *Civil Rights Movement Veterans*, 2006, <<http://www.crmvet.org/docs/aa4hr.htm>> Note: Lonnie King is not related to Dr. King.

the forefront of local news.²⁰⁴ Primarily, the students chose to boycott department stores downtown because of their visibility and the clarity of the associated message. Targeting a courthouse or government building, in contrast, carried complex legal and economic associations that might have alienated some supporters.²⁰⁵ Moreover, King understood that African Americans constituted a reasonable percentage of department store clientele and rationalized that these customers could drive negotiations by impacting profit. Rich's department store, the largest retail store in downtown Atlanta, sat at the top of the list.²⁰⁶ King firmly believed in a "domestic domino theory," asserting that if Dick Rich, the Jewish owner, desegregated his department store's restaurants, other business owners would follow suit.²⁰⁷

King's assumption that Rich would prove sympathetic to COAHR's cause was not unfounded, as Rich previously instated progressive racial practices in his business.²⁰⁸ However, the students quickly grew frustrated by the lack of cooperation and support they received from Rich, who proved hesitant to make wide-ranging concessions in business before Atlanta's schools were integrated. Apprehensive that he might lose white customers and cognizant of his obligations to shareholders, Rich concerned himself with practical business over social change and political upheaval.²⁰⁹ As the sit-ins became boycotts, Rich maintained that desegregation was bad for business and an issue that should be tackled first through the public school system.²¹⁰ Birnbrey hints at another layer of Rich's hesitation, explaining, "the Jews were still scared" after the Temple

²⁰⁴ Cruise, 180. King, recorded interview by Timothy Frilingos.

²⁰⁵ Cruise, 189.

²⁰⁶ *Fight Against Fear*, 89.

²⁰⁷ It is interesting to note that King drew on his economics teachings at Morehouse and the "domino theory," as discussed in international politics. Clemons, 124. *Fight Against Fear*, 89.

²⁰⁸ *Fight Against Fear*, 91. Cruise, 189.

²⁰⁹ *Fight Against Fear*, 92.

²¹⁰ Cruise, 86-190.

bombing and “unfortunately the black community focused on...Jewish establishments” during the sit-ins and boycotts of 1960. Even sympathetic Jews experienced paralyzing and conflicting pressure from both black and white communities, apprehensive of “personal, political, and commercial repercussions” if they acquiesced before widespread support for desegregation was established in Atlanta.²¹¹ These conflicts indicate the strained relations between the two minority communities and the stakes involved for both parties.

On June 27, 1960, the group staged a noteworthy sit-in in Rich’s segregated Magnolia Room, a restaurant described by *ArtsATL* as “the epitome of fine dining in Atlanta for many years.”²¹² Rich refused to serve the protestors, lining up his black waitress staff to prevent the students from entering. The police eventually broke up the demonstration and drove Lonnie King to Police Chief Herbert T. Jenkins Sr.’s office at headquarters, where he met Rich.²¹³ Rich requested that King wait until schools desegregated the following year before boycotting his store, explaining that if he desegregated too soon he would lose valuable white customers.²¹⁴ If the students waited, Rich promised that merchants would cooperate.²¹⁵ In the meantime, Rich threatened King and his fellow students with arrest if they demonstrated again.²¹⁶ However, despite Rich’s attempt to compromise, the students proved unwilling to abide by his request for patience, believing that his refusal to integrate hindered potential progress with smaller

²¹¹ *Fight Against Fear*, 107.

²¹² Clemons, 125. Also, Andrew Alexander, “Review: ‘Return to Rich’s’ captures character of the store that ‘married’ Atlanta, at the Breman,” *ArtsATL: Atlanta’s source for arts and reviews*, <<http://www.artsatl.com/2013/12/review-richs/>>

²¹³ Clemons, 125.

²¹⁴ Cruise, 86-190.

²¹⁵ Cruise, 187.

²¹⁶ Clemons, 125.

businesses.²¹⁷

It is interesting to note that older generations of African Americans did not support COAHR's choice to protest at Rich's. They felt alienated by the outspoken students who cracked the foundations of their relatively stable, and gradually built, coalition with Jewish business owners.²¹⁸ Not only did they believe that Rich treated them with respect, but also recognized that a boycott of Rich's would affect their purchasing power in Atlanta.²¹⁹ Nonetheless, the students saw room for improvement amidst lingering segregationist policies at Rich's and defied the wishes not only of Rich but of the older generation as well. For example, African-American patrons could not try clothes on in the store and the black restroom was far from sanitary.²²⁰ Moreover, with the bigger picture in mind, COAHR aspired to take advantage of the upcoming presidential election between Richard Nixon and John F. Kennedy. They asked Martin Luther King Jr. to join their boycotts, hoping that the accompanying publicity would force politicians to address issues of desegregation more forcefully in national political debates.²²¹ According to Lonnie King, Dr. King gave the best speech of his life during the boycotts at Warren Memorial Church in Atlanta, underscoring the importance of holding Atlanta's leaders and businessmen accountable.²²²

Mayor Hartsfield, who served from 1942 to 1962, worried that the ensuing demonstrations would provoke the KKK and other white supremacist groups to counter-protest. Ralph McGill commented on the heightening tensions, writing in the *Atlanta*

²¹⁷ Cruise, 190.

²¹⁸ Cruise, 182.

²¹⁹ Cruise, 185.

²²⁰ Cruise, 185.

²²¹ Clemons, 126.

²²² King, recorded interview by Timothy Frilingos.

Constitution, “I must say, I feel like a citizen of a medieval walled city who has just gotten word that the plague is coming.”²²³ His comment was not far off the mark, as the boycotters continued to threaten public and political peace by targeting business owners closely allied with Hartsfield. The instability wrought by both the protestors and white supremacist groups hardened businessmen against racial concessions, whereas they had previously been willing to help Hartsfield maintain a peaceful veneer over Atlanta life.²²⁴

On October 19, 1960, Dr. King joined roughly 80 students in protesting at Rich’s and other stores across Atlanta. He and Lonnie King were arrested after once again demanding service in the Magnolia Room. Hartsfield, who put stock in peaceful negotiations when addressing civil rights issues, called a meeting three days later, with sixty African-American academic, business, political, and religious leaders across Atlanta. The group agreed to use their influence to pause protests for thirty days so that Hartsfield could talk to white businessmen about desegregating their stores.²²⁵ Additionally, mid the chaos, Hartsfield slipped in a white lie to help quell tensions. As the students had hoped, Dr. King’s arrest sparked national interest and prompted Kennedy’s aide to inquire about the negotiations. Hartsfield stretched the truth, however, by reporting that Kennedy himself asked for the discharge of Dr. King and the other jailed protestors. The mayor calculated that releasing the protestors through this strategy would overcome objections on both sides and help soothe over lingering tensions.²²⁶ On March 7, 1961, it was publically announced that lunch counters would integrate once

²²³ Cruise, 181.

²²⁴ Cruise, 181.

²²⁵ Cruise, 188.

²²⁶ Cruise, 188.

public schools did so in the fall.²²⁷

Still, Dick Rich resented that black customers took advantage of his prior generosity and forced him to choose between his livelihood and what he considered a premature civil rights tactic.²²⁸ He did not think he was acting out of the ordinary by maintaining segregation in his store's restaurants, just as everyone else did.²²⁹ Some members of the Atlanta Jewish community were surprised by Rich's resistance to COAHR. Janice Rothschild Blumberg remarks, "Those of us who knew Dick personally and knew his record of progressive action in behalf of the city were doubly puzzled and resentful."²³⁰ Rabbi Rothschild, who was out of country during the boycotts, wrote to Rich and seemed to empathize with his dilemma: "[T]here was no more decent and liberal member of our community than you and I couldn't see how my voice could do anything but add to the problems with which you were faced and the struggle to find a solution to them."²³¹ Rothschild expressed a degree of caution, revealing his gradualist approach to civil rights issues. Despite his strong commitments to the Civil Rights Movement, Rothschild deeply understood the challenges faced by his congregants and the difficulties of generating rapid change. Although some could not reconcile Rich's "decent and liberal" nature with his outwardly segregationist response to the boycotts, the plausible economic and social consequences clarify his choices.

While on the surface it may appear that Rich refused to help his African-American customers in the fight for equality, closer inspection reveals that he found his own solution to the boycott. Whether motivated by loyalty to African-American

²²⁷ Clemons, 130-131.

²²⁸ Birnbrey, 11.

²²⁹ Cruise, 86-190.

²³⁰ *One Voice*, 143.

²³¹ "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," 26-27.

customers or concern over economic repercussions, Rich allowed black customers to order goods over the telephone. Instead of publically breaching the boycott by walking into the store, black customers could order items for delivery by an unmarked truck.²³² This surreptitious delivery of goods underscores the concern for business in Atlanta and unveils the way in which Rich found opportunities for quiet action if not bold activism.

Although Rich's actions during the student sit-ins would not have been applauded by national Jewish organizations that fought loudly for civil rights, they nonetheless should be recognized. He successfully found the means to assist African-American customers within the context of his particular situation. In a similar way, the desegregation crisis parallels the Atlanta Jewish experience during the Civil Rights Movement by revealing personal difficulties faced by Jews in the choice between sympathizing with the African-American cause and protecting their own interests.

The Desegregation Crisis

Following the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, which declared segregated public schools unconstitutional, many Georgia political leaders resisted desegregation. In March of 1956, 101 of the South's 128 congressional representatives signed the "Declaration of Constitutional Principles," also known as the "Southern Manifesto," opposing integration. Georgia's entire senate delegation backed this document, forecasting that desegregation would come neither easily nor swiftly.²³³ Five years later, in the fall of 1961, Atlanta desegregated its public schools with Hartsfield's delicate touch, maintaining a "great deal of image control."²³⁴

²³² Clemons, 130-131.

²³³ Cruise, 131.

²³⁴ Cruise, 147.

Hartsfield preserved the outward appearance of tranquility by carefully keeping segregationists at arms length in his political dealings. Moreover, he convinced businessmen that, despite personal preferences, it was in their interest to help ease the transition and avoid the chaotic racial upheaval sweeping other cities.²³⁵

Atlantans had watched nervously as cities such as Little Rock, Arkansas and New Orleans, Louisiana struggled to desegregate public schools. In 1957, Little Rock attracted national attention during the battle over Central High School. When Arkansas Governor Faubus sent the state National Guard to prevent the newly enrolled black students from entering the school, President Eisenhower ordered the 101st Airborne Division to protect the “the Little Rock nine.”²³⁶ In New Orleans, white protestors threw eggs and tomatoes at black elementary school transfer students and verbally harassed white parents who kept their children in integrated public schools.²³⁷ Violence and intimidation triumphed in New Orleans as business and political leaders refused to intervene.²³⁸ As the events of Little Rock and New Orleans unfolded, it became clear that *Brown v. Board* alone would not bring about change.

When it was Atlanta’s turn to desegregate public schools, Hartsfield took action to ensure a smoother transition. For example, members of the Little Rock Chamber of Commerce flew to Atlanta to give counsel based on their own experiences with integration, which armed their Atlanta counterparts with knowledge they had gained in hindsight.²³⁹ On August 30th, 1961, nine black transfer students attended class in four

²³⁵ Cruise, 41, 147.

²³⁶ Press Release, Executive Order 10730, Providing for the Removal of an Obstruction of Justice Within the State of Arkansas, September 24, 1957. Box 20, Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower as President, 1953-1961, Dwight D. Eisenhower Presidential Library.

²³⁷ Cruise, 146-147.

²³⁸ Cruise, 147.

²³⁹ Cruise, 148.

white high schools in Atlanta, marking the beginning of desegregation in the city. Within days, public facilities followed suit.²⁴⁰ In the eyes of the media, the day unfolded peacefully. The police department took great care to prevent the violence that befell other cities, going as far as to protect the homes of the new transfer students. Furthermore, City Hall organized both a bus tour and cocktail dinner for the journalists covering the events, which was catered by Coca-Cola. Although the transfer students, and Atlanta as a whole, would soon experience the difficulties associated with the protracted process of desegregation, city leadership applauded itself for avoiding riots and producing a favorable public image that marked a seemingly effortless victory in Atlanta's civil rights history.²⁴¹

Atlanta's Jewish communities paralleled this preparedness, as organizations and individuals took preemptive steps to anticipate desegregation. To guide a peaceful transition, synagogues joined Organizations Assisting Schools in September (OASIS) and many Jews involved themselves in Help Our Public Schools (HOPE).²⁴² Moreover, Jewish institutions debated opening their buildings as substitute schools if public ones closed. The AJC Community Relations Committee compiled a confidential report, entitled "Guide to the Use of Jewish Communal Buildings if Public Schools Are Closed," which declared it in the best interest of Jewish children and the community at large to continue public education and uphold the law. They concluded that if schools shut down, Jewish facilities should serve as an emergency, nonsectarian, and temporary substitute for public education. The report hinted that opening permanent establishments could

²⁴⁰ Clemons, 130-131.

²⁴¹ Cruise, 152-153.

²⁴² "Jacob M. Rothschild- His Legacy 20 Years After," 23.

diminish the possibility of reopening public schools later. Furthermore, the guidelines decreed that “no public statement or announcement should be made prior to school closing intimating that Jewish institutional buildings would be made available for educational purposes,” perhaps for fear of fueling theories of Jewish desegregation conspiracies or garnering unwanted political attention. Nevertheless, the AJC’s proactive steps indicate that the organization was not only deeply attuned to the issues at hand, but also in favor of complying with *Brown v. Board* and prioritizing the interests of the greater Atlanta community.²⁴³

It is important to note that despite the public relations success and the well-intentioned efforts involved, desegregation in Atlanta was far from perfect. Many civil rights leaders, such as John Lewis, grew increasingly disappointed by the city’s painfully slow process of school desegregation. City officials were not only slow to accept transfer orders, but also limited the number of students and schools involved.²⁴⁴ Once enrolled in desegregated schools, black students encountered verbal and physical harassment from both students and faculty.²⁴⁵ A small, vocal minority of students often made their hatred known by ostracizing the new transfers. Some teachers reacted as poorly as their pupils, refusing to address the transfer students in class and even assigning them different homework.²⁴⁶ Over time, many white families transferred to private schools so that although Atlanta schools legally “desegregated,” true integration in education had hardly occurred.²⁴⁷ Atlanta had achieved its “image control,” but the task at hand remained

²⁴³ “Guide to the Use of Jewish Communal Buildings If Public Schools are Closed,” AJC Council, Community Relations Committee, Series 4, Box 19, Folder 8, MSS 637, Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library, Emory University.

²⁴⁴ Cruise, 169.

²⁴⁵ Cruise, 157.

²⁴⁶ Cruise, 158.

²⁴⁷ Cruise, 169.

incomplete.

Jewish businessmen sought guidance on how to handle desegregation's developments and challenges. On November 5, 1963, Max M. Cuba, President of the Atlanta Jewish Community Council, spoke at a meeting of the Southern Civil Rights Congress, convened by the National Community Relations Advisory Council. His speech, entitled "Counseling Jewish Businessmen," advised caution when advocating for civil rights issues, positing that non-Jews equated the action of an individual Jew with that of an entire community. If one Jewish businessman were to integrate his store too soon, all Jews might be labeled integrationists.²⁴⁸ He counseled, "Jewish businessmen cannot presume to publicly advertise their Jewishness when involved in a civil rights controversy and fail to realize the implications of these pronouncements."²⁴⁹ According to Cuba, the responsibility of the Jewish community was to ensure that a situation involving an individual Jewish business did not evolve into a larger Jewish one.²⁵⁰ However, he did not go as far as to warn against activism entirely. Instead, he advised securing group support, stating that Jewish business owners "must act silently behind the scenes and do what he can to get group action in his line of business or industry."²⁵¹ In stressing educational initiatives to make Jewish businessmen feel secure in the greater Atlanta community, Cuba spoke to the precarious position of Atlanta's Jews and the challenges of outspoken civil rights support.²⁵² His speech supported the view that Jewish businessmen should find means of collective activism while simultaneously protecting

²⁴⁸ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 4, Max M. Cuba, Speech at a Meeting of the Southern CRC's, November 5, 1963, 2, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

²⁴⁹ Cuba, 6.

²⁵⁰ Cuba, 5.

²⁵¹ Cuba, 2.

²⁵² Cuba, 6.

themselves from potential anti-Semitic responses.

In addition to Jewish organizational efforts, Jewish individuals, such as Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler, wife of Cecil Alexander, pondered ways to advance integrated education in Atlanta. Amidst the desegregation crisis, Mantler, an active member of the AJC in Atlanta, organized a play that illustrated group dynamics and portrayed the negative implications of racial tensions. While no archival evidence exists about the play's content, the responses to it suggest that the "socio-drama," performed for high schools and interfaith groups, communicated the dangers of racial stereotypes in an interactive way. The play was well received, described in letters to Mantler as "revealing," "instructive," and "fun." Nancy Perkins, of the Greater Atlanta Council on Human Relations, wrote to Mantler in October 1961 that the performance at a minister's luncheon "was the most interesting part of our program" and "showed very effectively how fruitful such dramatizations could be for stimulating thought and discussion on race relations in church groups."²⁵³

High school audiences seemed particularly responsive to Mantler's play, even during the early days of the desegregation crisis. After a performance at the Quaker House, a high school with African-American transfer students, Jane Coles, an audience member, wrote to Mantler that she was initially very "protective" of the black students and fearful of the general student body reaction. However, she wrote, "I found myself squealing and giggling and generally reacting with great enthusiasm and relief." Most importantly, she added, "the ten [transfer students] especially needed to squeal and giggle (thank heavens for laughter)." Although a seemingly small occurrence in the grand

²⁵³ Box 1, MSS 72, Folder 3, Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler Papers, 1919-1984, The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

scheme of the Civil Rights Movement, Mantler's play, according to Coles, "[relieved] some of the ghostly tension and [brought] out some of the dreads and suspicions into the open where they could be laughed over, reacted to, and even hashed over."²⁵⁴

Moreover, Mantler fought for educational equality beyond 1961, addressing teacher employment discrimination in the Habersham County school system. In 1970, out of the four schools in Cornelia, GA, five percent of students and less than one percent of teachers were black. In November 1970, she sent a letter to Mr. Flanagan, the Field Secretary of the State Conference of Branches of the NAACP in Atlanta, on the suggestion of Dan Hollowell, who served on the Equal Opportunities Employment Commission in Atlanta. In her letter, Mantler referenced three qualified African-American teachers, Gloria Anderson, Sarah Cook, and Rena West, who held degrees in elementary school education yet had not received responses to their job applications. Hiring African-American teachers, Mantler argued, could both lower the dropout rate and raise the quality of the learning experience for African-American students.²⁵⁵ Although the results of her efforts in the Habersham County school system are unknown, Mantler's work furthered race relations in Atlanta, even if only by touching a handful of small audiences or supporting one teacher at a time.

Although southern Jews might not have publically supported desegregation in large numbers or marched with placards and banners, they should not be characterized as passive bystanders in the arc of Atlanta's civil rights history. The reaction of Atlanta's Jewish organizations and individuals to the desegregation crisis reinforces the notion that Jewish communities supported integration and hoped to ease the transition. Furthermore,

²⁵⁴ Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler Papers.

²⁵⁵ Helen Eiseman Alexander Mantler Papers.

their actions relay a desire to uphold the law while also maintaining sensitivity to public perceptions, as lingering concerns for safety hindered unconditional public support. Whether through confidential reports, public meetings, or isolated individual acts, Jews in Atlanta participated in the discussion on desegregation and influenced its evolution. In a similar vein, scrutinizing the reception of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 in Atlanta highlights the proactive, yet peaceable, contributions of southern Jews, as well as the ways in which Atlanta's mayors continued to guide the march toward equality.

The Civil Rights Act of 1964

In the summer of 1963, Atlanta Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. traveled to Washington, D.C. to advocate for the elimination of segregation, which he referred to as “slavery’s step-child.”²⁵⁶ He stood before Congress as the only southern politician to testify on behalf of the Civil Rights Bill, which made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of “race, color, religion, sex, or national origin.”²⁵⁷ Bringing the issue into sharp focus, he told Congress, “Like a foundling baby, this awesome problem has been left on the doorsteps of local governments throughout the nation.”²⁵⁸ Allen witnessed the challenges of discrimination and segregation firsthand and argued that Atlanta had achieved its relative success because the city adopted a pragmatic approach, “[accepting] the Supreme Court’s decisions as inevitable and as the law of our land.” However, he observed that private

²⁵⁶ “Excerpts from the Statement by Allen: Atlanta’s Mayor Backs Rights Bill,” *The New York Times*, Saturday, July 27, 1963, Container 207, Folders 4, MSS 82, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁵⁷ Memorandum: Atlanta Jewish Community Council: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Bill, July 15, 1964, Container 207, Folder 6, Mss 82, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia. Civil Rights Act of 1964. National Archives and Records Administration. General Records of the U.S. Government. Record Group 11, National Archives Identifier: 299891. <<http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/civil-rights-act/>>

²⁵⁸ *The New York Times*, July 27, 1963, “Excerpts from the Statements by Allen: Atlanta’s Mayor Backs Rights Bill.”

institutions increasingly circumvented existing laws to justify segregationist policies. Without the strong assertion of national law in the case of the Civil Rights Bill, Allen warned, civil rights progress in Atlanta and across the nation would surely reverse itself. He implored Congress for guidance, arguing that a failure to pass the bill “would amount to an endorsement of private business setting up an entirely new status of discrimination.”²⁵⁹ Allen’s remarks were so well received in D.C. that both local and national media outlets praised him as a voice of courage and dignity.²⁶⁰ The *Atlanta Constitution* proudly applauded Allen for showing the nation “one of the keys to Atlanta’s greatness: its sense of fairness and local responsibility in racial matters.”²⁶¹

A year later, back in Atlanta, Allen called for a coordinating committee to establish voluntary integration in public accommodations in advance of the Civil Rights Bill.²⁶² Thirty people, including the Chief of Police, the heads of the Chamber of Commerce, the leaders of hotel and restaurant associations, community leaders, and the TV station WSB, met in Cecil Alexander’s home on June 24, 1964. In an off-the-record discussion, Allen outlined an orderly approach to the Public Accommodations Section of the Bill, urging individuals and organizations with leadership roles to comply publicly with the law and ensure that the city’s facilities follow suit. Although Atlanta cultivated a favorable reputation for its approach to the desegregation crisis, Allen recognized the

²⁵⁹ *The New York Times*, July 27, 1963, “Excerpts from the Statements by Allen: Atlanta’s Mayor Backs Rights Bill.”

²⁶⁰ *The New York Times*, Saturday, July 28, 1963, Container 207, Folders 4, MSS 82, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁶¹ “Allen May Have Put Cart Before Horse But He Earned New Respect for Atlanta,” *The Atlanta Constitution*, Saturday, July 27, 1963, Container 207, Folders 4, MSS 82, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁶² Container 207, Mss 82, Folder 6, Memorandum: Special meeting called by the Mayor’s coordinating committee, Wednesday evening, June 24, 1964, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

unsatisfactory aspects of Atlanta's desegregation process and strove to foster a more positive response to the Civil Rights Bill of 1964.

Moreover, Allen aptly understood that a recipe for peaceful reception not only required law and order, but also voluntary action. He had explained before Congress, "By developing the lines of communication and respectability, [Atlanta has] been able to reach amicable solutions."²⁶³ For example, Atlanta politicians appointed black community leaders and local white businessmen, such as theater, restaurant, and hotel owners, to help rectify issues with desegregation that they dealt with directly. At the meeting in Cecil Alexander's house, Allen once again stressed the necessity of voluntary action and media support to encourage an atmosphere of cooperation. In the situation of the small business owner who might struggle economically amidst pro-segregationist pressure, the majority of the group agreed that the community should act in the best interest of society.²⁶⁴ Even if the business owner may lose customers and face financial repercussions, complying with the national law and serving the greater interests of the city took priority.

A memorandum from the AJC, entitled "After the Civil Rights Bill," reveals that the Jewish organization also understood the importance of collective and voluntary compliance. The document expressed that the passage of the Civil Rights Bill "[required] mobilization of diverse community elements," including the proactive engagement of the Jewish community.²⁶⁵ Political leaders needed to stress law and order, while business

²⁶³ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 4, *The New York Times*, Saturday, July 27, 1963, "Excerpts from the Statements by Allen: Atlanta's Mayor Backs Rights Bill," The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

²⁶⁴ Container 207, Mss 82, Folder 6, Memorandum: Special meeting called by the Mayor's coordinating committee, Wednesday evening, June 24, 1964, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁶⁵ Memorandum from the AJC: "After the Civil Rights Bill." Container 207, folder 6, Mss 82. The Breman May 2015 Final Paper, 2014-2015 Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Fellowship, Penn Humanities Forum 71 Danielle Kerker, College of Arts and Sciences '15, University of Pennsylvania

leaders needed to emphasize economic stability.²⁶⁶ As the Atlanta Jewish Community Council observed, the effective process of compliance in Atlanta following the Civil Rights Bill was due to “the attitude of civic, professional and business organizations” across the city, in addition to “the actions of the city administration, the sentiment of the power structure...the newspapers and the positions taken by responsible Negro leadership.”²⁶⁷

This last phrase “responsible Negro leadership” implies that even well meaning and progressive people were willing to posit the notion of a “responsible negro,” identifying members of the African-American community whose behavior they deemed appropriate. Indeed, African-American leadership in Atlanta following the passage of the Civil Rights Act was instrumental. For example, a spokesman for the NAACP publicly opposed a wave of black protests and mass demonstrations against businesses that had not yet complied with the law, apprehensive that targeting business owners allied with Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. might threaten future local progress.²⁶⁸ Instead, the NAACP intended to meet with city officials and press their case peacefully.²⁶⁹ However, language that denoted “responsible leadership” also suggests the existence of another group of African Americans that Atlanta Jews did not consider to be cooperative, alluding to the previously mentioned tensions in the black-Jewish relations.

Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁶⁶ Memorandum from the AJC: “After the Civil Rights Bill.”

²⁶⁷ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 6, Memorandum: Atlanta Jewish Community Council: Atlanta and the Civil Rights Bill. July 15, 1964. Typed by M.C. Gettinger. Executive Director of National Community Relations Advisory Council. The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, GA 30309.

²⁶⁸ Cruise, 182. Container 207, Folder 6, Mss 82, *The Atlanta Constitution*, “Pleased by Rights Compliance, NAACP Opposes New Protests,” July 11, 1964, The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁶⁹ *The Atlanta Constitution*, “Pleased by Rights Compliance, NAACP Opposes New Protests,” July 11, 1964.

Atlanta Jews were not immune to racist attitudes that prevailed for generations in the South, demonstrated by the segregationist attitude and actions of Charlie Lebedin, the Jewish owner of Leb's Restaurant, in January 1964. Amidst the tension of the Civil Rights Act, another wave of confrontational student protests swept Atlanta.²⁷⁰ Lebedin refused to cooperate with forty protestors, including the SNCC leader John Lewis, who occupied his segregated eatery. When the police refused to help, Lebedin took action by blocking restroom doors and locking everyone inside. The non-violent protest quickly turned violent, as students smashed glasses, flipped booths, and relieved themselves on the floor.²⁷¹ Since the majority of Leb's customers were black, the occupation and ensuing boycott "basically put him out of business."²⁷² Lebedin posted black paper on his restaurant's windows in mourning and dramatically declared defeat, proving that, in some instances, even economic considerations in business could not overcome personal prejudices.²⁷³

Although exceptions to compliance existed, the argument for integration increasingly prevailed in Atlanta as the issues of the Civil Rights Movement compounded and national law proved stronger than local prejudice.²⁷⁴ In fighting to advance the civil

²⁷⁰ Cruise, 216.

²⁷¹ Cruise, 216.

²⁷² Birnbrey, 11.

²⁷³ Cruise, 220.

²⁷⁴ In Atlanta, Lester Maddox and Moreton Rolleston took public stances against the Civil Rights Act that garnered national media attention. For more information, see *White Flight: Atlanta and the Making of Modern Conservatism*. Also, Newsfilm clip of news report about segregation at Lester Maddox Cafeteria, Civil Rights Digital Library: Documenting America's Struggle for Racial Equality: Digital library of Georgia, The University of Georgia: Freedom On Film: Civil Rights in Georgia, WSB-TV (Television station: Atlanta, GA). Comments by Lester Maddox (segregationist), and Donald Hollowell (African American Civil Rights Lawyer), reported by Fred Briggs, online Publisher: Athens, GA: Digital Library of Georgia and Walter J. Brown Media Archives and Peabody Awards Collection, University of Georgia Libraries, 2007, <http://crdl.usg.edu/cgi/crdl?format=_video&query=idpercent3Augabma_wsbn_51708&Welcome>. Also, "Heart of Atlanta Motel v. Georgia," Opinion delivered by Justice Clark on December 14, 1964, Case No. 515, The Papers of Justice Tom C. Clark: Civil Liberties and Civil Rights Cases of the Supreme Court, May 2015 Final Paper, 2014-2015 Andrew W. Mellon Undergraduate Fellowship, Penn Humanities Forum 73 Danielle Kerker, College of Arts and Sciences '15, University of Pennsylvania

rights agenda, Atlanta's business leaders and elected officials fostered a relatively tolerant environment in which Jews could find their voice in favor of racial progress. A memorandum from Albert D. Chernin, Director of the National Jewish Community Consultation for the National Community Relations Advisory Council, observed that there was "an absence of overt community resistance to compliance, and that segregationist activity was minimal and ineffective."²⁷⁵ Furthermore, the document added, "some [reports] suggested that some restaurant and hotel owners even welcomed the law with a sense of relief in that they now no longer have an alternative in avoiding integration."²⁷⁶ Jewish business leaders, for example, could point to the law as justification for integration with lessened fear of anti-Semitic backlash, as opposed to articulating prevalent segregationist views they may not have believed themselves.

Moreover, although it was a small detail, easily brushed aside, the fact that Allen's meeting was hosted in the home of Cecil Alexander attests to the extent of Alexander's involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. An architect and a Jew, Alexander was appointed by Hartsfield to serve as the chairman of the Citizen's Advisory Committee for Urban Renewal, Atlanta's first continuous biracial committee. Although Alexander had long been active in the movement, his choice to host a meeting so closely tied to national civil rights issues, despite its confidential nature, exemplifies the growing ability of Jews to act as full members of the Atlanta community and participate at the forefront of political and civil developments.

Tartlon Law Library: University of Texas school of Law, Center for Legal Research,
<http://tartlon.law.utexas.edu/clark/view_doc.php?id=a179-03-05>

²⁷⁵ "Community Round-Up of Experiences Since Passing of Civil Rights Law." Container 207, Folder 6, Mss 82. The Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum: Ida Pearle & Joseph Cuba Archives and Genealogy Center. Atlanta, Georgia.

²⁷⁶ "Community Round-Up of Experiences Since Passing of Civil Rights Law," the Breman.

Conclusion

By cultivating a culture of compliance during the Civil Rights Movement, Atlanta Mayors encouraged all sectors of society to adhere to national civil rights laws. However, it is important to note that the lack of outward resistance to civil rights developments in Atlanta did not preclude complications beneath the surface. Atlanta leadership sidestepped public relations disasters, yet symbolic gestures to keep the peace may have been more about “image control” than reality.

Although progress at times proved more nominal than real, Atlanta Jews still found ways to support the Civil Rights Movement while acting within the parameters of the Deep South. As seen by the progression of the student boycotts of 1960, the desegregation crisis of 1961, and the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Jewish individuals and organizations in Atlanta demonstrated degrees of civil rights involvement when confronted with political, economic, and social choices, despite the personal and communal stakes involved. Whether public or private, these actions attest to concrete instances of southern Jewish activism during a turbulent period.

Epilogue

On April 9, 1960, an article entitled “Prinz Breaks Jews’ Silence on ‘Sit-ins’” reported that AJCongress President Rev. Dr. Joachim Prinz supported the movement of lunch-counter sit-ins led by African American students across the South. Newspapers lauded Prinz and the AJCongress for “[marking] the first declaration of support for the Negro sit-down strikes in the South by a national Jewish organization.”²⁷⁷ Meanwhile, the nation criticized southern Jews for their segregationist reactions. However, as has been demonstrated, the decisions confronting Jewish storeowners during the student protests were more complex than they appeared on the surface. Often, economic and social stakes motivated the decisions made by southern Jews regarding civil rights issues, causing them to sometimes support and other times avoid the problems of the day. Studying the intersection of the American Civil Rights Movement, the southern Jewish experience, and specific events that occurred in Atlanta reveals that deeper tensions at play blurred the line between the right and the easy choice.

Upon closer inspection, a particular brand of activism emerged among Atlanta Jewish communities. In contrast to the strong public stances taken by national Jewish organizations, Jewish civil rights activism in the South generally occurred on a smaller scale. For some Jews, such as Rabbi Rothschild, this activism manifested in targeted civil rights oratory, while for others, such as Dick Rich, activism occurred out of the public eye. Whether acting alone, together, or in cooperation with African Americans, Jewish institutions and individuals in Atlanta worked within the context of their racially prejudiced environment to influence change. Despite personal concerns for economic,

²⁷⁷ Container 207, Folder 2 MSS 82, “Prinz Breaks Jews’ Silence on ‘Sit-ins,’” The Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History, The William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 1440 Spring Street NW, Atlanta, Georgia 30309.

social, or political security, a number of Atlanta Jews demonstrated that they could circumvent societal restrictions imposed by Jim Crow to prioritize civil rights progress.

The case study of Atlanta presents a unique view of southern Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. As the 1960s advanced, preoccupations with preserving Atlanta's peaceful veneer and protecting economic growth proved to be persuasive factors for both Jews and Gentiles in complying with national civil rights laws. Moreover, political and business leaders reacted proactively to national social and legal change, encouraging all sectors of society, including Jewish communities, to adhere to racial progress. These collective efforts gradually mitigated Jewish fears for safety and prompted individuals and organizations to act in support of the African-American cause.

However, the 1970s witnessed the devolution of Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. The emerging Black Power movement, escalating tensions in Israel, and a shift in Jewish strategic priorities to focus more inwardly on Jewish communal issues diminished Jewish civil rights activism on both a local and a national level. Throughout the mid-twentieth century, American Jewish leaders faced an interesting dilemma, as they promoted Jewish integration into American life while also concerning themselves with maintaining a Jewish American identity.²⁷⁸ In Atlanta, this desire to strengthen religious identity is evidenced in the 1950s with the founding of the Hebrew Academy, an important milestone in Atlanta's Jewish educational endeavors.²⁷⁹ However, while "progress [had] been made against housing, employment, and education

²⁷⁸ Container 207, MSS 82, Folder 2, The Jewish Labor Committee's Fourth National Trade Union Conference on Civil Rights, May 26-30, 1961, Large section dedicated to "Anti-Semitism 16 Years After Hitler," which Isaiah Minkoff discussed in the USA, Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta, GA.

²⁷⁹ The Hebrew Academy was founded in 1954. Series 1, Container 2, MSS 13, Folder 25, Cuba Family Archives for Southern Jewish History at the Breman Museum, Atlanta, GA.

discrimination” toward American Jews, black anti-Semitism caused by resentment of Jewish economic status and support for Arabs in the Israeli crisis constituted a rising threat to Jewish interests.²⁸⁰ Consequently, Jewish civil rights support lost some of its momentum as Jews began to focus their attention on their own communities.

Historian Eric Goldstein argues that toward the end of the Civil Rights Movement, Jewish leaders feared that their search for “whiteness” came at the expense of strengthening a Jewish identity, recognizing that “their embrace of whiteness had circumscribed their expression of group distinctiveness.”²⁸¹ As a result, the ADL, AJCongress, and AJC redirected their focus from a “civil rights” agenda to a “Jewish” one following 1967. This date, which also marks the Six Day War in Israel, hints that this aforementioned assertion of Jewish pride and self-identity can be linked to international Jewish developments.²⁸² Instead of the unitary theory of prejudice, Jewish organizations emphasized the American particularist ethos, stressing the uniqueness of an American Jewish identity and the need to preserve it.²⁸³ Inevitably, this development altered Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.²⁸⁴

This shift also coincided with the rise of the Black Power Movement, a militant form of African-American civil rights activism between roughly 1966 and 1975. Whereas African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement viewed Jews as allies, or even friends, African-American advocates of the Black Power Movement regarded Jews as

²⁸⁰ The Jewish Labor Committee’s Fourth National Trade Union Conference on Civil Rights, May 26-30, 1961, “Anti-Semitism 16 Years After Hitler.”

²⁸¹ Goldstein, 208.

²⁸² Rose, 63.

²⁸³ Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life* (Mariner Books, 2000), 7.

²⁸⁴ Novick, 175.

obstacles on their march toward black autonomy and equality.²⁸⁵ The Black Power period brought a new level of aggression to the Civil Rights Movement, as black activists grew frustrated with the slow legal and legislative pursuit of equality and aspired to fight for civil rights issues on their own, “simultaneously [demanding] cultural autonomy, racial pride, and equal citizenship.”²⁸⁶ Although a degree of cooperation between Jews and African Americans persisted beyond the 1960s, black nationalists increasingly considered Jews part of white society, as opposed to differentiating them as a minority group who could empathize with their cause.²⁸⁷ In the late 1970s, one AJC report concluded that, “blacks [tended] to be more anti-Jewish than any other group.”²⁸⁸ As the Black Power movement progressed, many Jews felt increasingly bewildered and betrayed by what they perceived as a fracture of a once productive alliance.

As previously mentioned, civil rights strains between African Americans and Jews were not novel. For example, Henry Birnbrey reveals that deeper tensions were at play during the boycott of Rich’s department store, recalling that, “When Hosea Williams marched around Rich’s he was carrying some very anti-Semitic... Placards.”²⁸⁹ However, Jews actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement, such as Jacob Rothschild, nevertheless struggled with the new developments in the black agenda, particularly the

²⁸⁵ Jack Nusan Porter, “Black-Jewish Relations: Some Notes on Crosscultural Research,” *International Review of Sociology*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (September, 1971): 157-165, *International Journals*, JSTOR, May 2014, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41495930>>

²⁸⁶ Peniel E. Joseph, “Forward: Reinterpreting the Black Power Movement,” *OAH Magazine of History*, Vol. 22, No. 3, Black Power (Jul., 2008): 4-5, *Organization of American Histories*, JSTOR, May 2014, <<http://www.jstor.org/stable/25162179>>

²⁸⁷ Goldstein, 213.

²⁸⁸ A “Digest of the Harris Study Done for the NCCJ,” to Bert Gold, Seymour Samet, Milt Himmelfarb, H Bookbinder, from Haskell Lazare, xvii, Feb 12, 1979, American Jewish Committee, Records, Betram Gold Boxes, 1970s, “Civil Rights- Conversions,” Box 64, Folder 1, American Jewish Historical Society, New York, NY.

²⁸⁹ Birnbrey, 11. Also, for reference on Hosea Williams, an African American Civil Rights leader, see “Hosea Williams (1926-2000), *New Georgia Encyclopedia*, Web, 30 April 2014 <<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/history-archaeology/hosea-williams-1926-2000>>

fact that the Black Power movement excluded them from its trajectory. In 1968, speaking before a group of prominent black professionals at the Hungry Club in Atlanta, Rothschild asserted:

I don't like being told it's not my fight. It is...As a Jew, I have a commitment to justice and dignity and equality. And as a Jew, I am not going to forgo my religious commitment in the face of black separatism any more than we Jews withdrew from the battle in the face of white segregationism.²⁹⁰

Unfortunately, Rothschild's remarks were not well received and, as Blumberg remembers, "he was hissed and booed for the first time in his life." Although Rothschild's friendships with black individuals endured, he no longer found allies in the broader African-American community.²⁹¹

Nonetheless, to this day, the particularities of Atlanta and the contributions of the Jewish community to the Civil Rights Movement remain visible. Sherry Zimmerman Frank states that although she had opportunities to take another job with the American Jewish Committee outside of Atlanta, she refused, stating, "I think there is an openness here, a possibility here that doesn't exist in other places...a progressiveness in part because the Civil Rights Movement started here."²⁹² Looking forward, future research might examine the impact of the Civil Rights Movement on methods of activism in the Atlanta Jewish community today, as well as any ways in which the black-Jewish relationship influenced Jewish and African American involvement at the forefront of Atlanta's political, social, and business life.

²⁹⁰ *One Voice*, 208-9.

²⁹¹ *One Voice*, 208-9.

²⁹² Frank, 128.

Sherry Zimmerman Frank noted in the early 1990s, “the Jewish community is very over-organized in terms...of everything.”²⁹³ William Breman echoed this statement in 1990, remarking, “The [Atlanta] Jewish community today is an organized Jewish community.” Not only are structures in place to support activism and political initiatives, but the community also “[has] contacts within the non-Jewish community and we’re respected.”²⁹⁴ Despite the immense progress within Atlanta Jewish communities since the Civil Rights Movement, it is clear that Jews of the 1950s and 1960s found the means to contribute to the fight for civil rights equality in creative ways. Analyzing this particular chapter of the Civil Rights Movement reminds us that even during an era when inaction frequently prevailed over activism, Jewish individuals and organizations in Atlanta proactively engaged with the changing tides of history.

²⁹³ Frank, 96.

²⁹⁴ Breman, 29.

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