Who By Fire and Who By Water:
Rabbinical Responses to Select Epidemics and Natural Disasters in American Jewish History

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Abstract of Thesis

American rabbis today, like in generations past, are being forced to respond to the impossible circumstances imposed upon them by natural disasters and epidemics at an unprecedented rate. This thesis seeks to present and analyze the historical impact of specific epidemics and disasters on American Jewish communities and the rabbis who led them. James K. Gutheim (1817-1886), Max Samfield (1844-1915), Henry Cohen (1863-1952), Jacob Voorsanger (1852-1908), Jacob Nieto (1863-1930), and Robert Loewy lived through epidemics and natural disasters that left indelible marks on the history of their rabbinates. This work constitutes the first attempt to integrate the fields of disaster history and American Jewish history, to analyze specific rabbinical responses to disasters and to place these rabbis and their contexts in conversation with one another. In studying a half dozen American rabbis who found themselves leading religious communities in cities that had experienced a calamitous natural disaster, it is possible to discern certain recurring themes in their biographies and styles of leadership that can help us understand responses in our own time and hopefully better plan for future crises. The American rabbinical response to epidemics and disasters was historically typified by pastoral care, fundraising, and organizational and civic leadership, and has now come to include revisioning for a more unified Jewish community. Four overarching themes emerge from these rabbis' responses: 1) resilience and adaptability; 2) Tikkun Olam; 3) frontier mentality; and 4) the power of the written word. The primary sources used to support these findings include newspapers, sermons, notes, letters, and memoirs located predominantly at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, the largest repository of rabbinic papers in the world.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the product of nearly ten years of thought, research, writing, and editing. I first became aware of the many yellow fever epidemics that savaged the American South in the Memphis Pink Palace Museum around 2010. I was first introduced to the terrible impact yellow fever had on the Orthodox Jews of Memphis, when Rabbi Joel Finklestein of Anshei Sphard Beth El Emeth congregation handed me a book of cemetery records that listed deaths up until 1873 and did not pick back up until the 1890s. I am eternally grateful for Finklestein for sparking the beginnings of this journey, and for Professor Tom Bremer for believing in my ability to become an American Jewish historian.

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Introduction

I was fifteen years old when Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans on August 29, 2005. I have vivid memories of evacuation, sideways rain, and the unbelievable images of my city in shambles. Nineteen trees fell on my house. Six inches of water (minimal by comparison) caused greenish-brown mold to creep its way up my bedroom walls, destroying memories and the facade of protection homes provide.

I spent one week not knowing if my mother was dead or alive. Cell-phone service was almost non-existent, and while I could text her, she did not know how to text back in response. I spent one month in exile from my beloved city, from my home, from my community, from my friends. I spent one year working alongside my parents to rebuild our lives. We slept on mattresses on bare, concrete floors, with sheetrock and wooden studs peering at us, a reminder of all we had lost.

The church in which I was raised looked like an open Chinese takeout box after the storm. Katrina's violent winds broke apart the triangular structure, leaving the pipe organ jutting out into the sky, and the life-sized statue of Jesus scattered in pieces in the parking lot. The priest, who remained in the rectory during the storm, witnessed firsthand the destruction of his sacred space. He was rescued by the National Guard, but he would never be the same. His trauma was so great that he could not return to his church or his vocation.

Individuals who experience great tragedies are never the same. If you ask anyone who survived Hurricane Katrina, they will say that they now understand there to be three distinct periods of time: Pre-Katrina, Katrina Year, and Post-Katrina. We see our lives and our history as noticeably segmented by how we saw ourselves and our communities

before the storm, during the storm itself and the year immediately following. Now, nearly fifteen years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall, we see who we have become and what we have done in the years since our lives changed forever.[1]

Hurricane Katrina forced me and so many others to ask deep questions about God's role in disasters and in the many tragedies that shape our lives. Like many others in New Orleans, I could not help but ask, "Why me? Why my family? Why my community?" As I grew in my Judaism, and as I grew as a student of American Jewish history, I found myself asking these questions of the texts I encountered. In 2012, I was at the American Jewish Archives researching the history of yellow fever epidemics and their impact on Jews in the American South. It was not until two years later, while in rabbinical school, that I realized my interest in the topic derived from my own personal experience and trauma during and after Hurricane Katrina. As a future rabbi and historian, I now find myself asking broader questions about how rabbis and community leaders responded to particular epidemics and natural disasters and how their responses then and now can offer a framework or model for understanding disaster response in our own time.

Disasters affecting our communities are on the rise. Hurricane Harvey in August 2017 and Hurricane Maria which hit less than a month later as well as the Tubbs and Woolsley Fires—October 2017 and November 2018, respectively—destroyed Jewish

[1] Because my family was no longer a part of a religious community, we predominantly relied upon the assistance of the American Red Cross. My parents attended therapy sessions through the Red Cross and received a variety of resources. Although we applied to receive a FEMA trailer to live in during the reconstruction of our home, we never received it. However, because my father was a disaster contractor, he was able to give my mother a temporary job with his company selling roofs, enabling my mother to continue to support our family financially. At the same time, my father was able to repair our roof before the rest of his clients, ensuring that our home was repaired enough to be livable.

homes, sacred spaces and camps.[2] Rabbis, clergy, and leaders are having to deal with their fallout as a more regularized part of their professions. Today, ministers, pastors, priests, and rabbis have access to resources on disaster relief and development from FEMA and Homeland Security as well as through a variety of religious organizations including the Episcopal and Presbyterian churches among others.[3]

Now, just as throughout American Jewish history, and Jewish history in general, rabbis are required to respond to the disasters that traumatize and redefine their religious and civic communities. Perhaps we can look, collectively, to the past to see how Jewish leaders in previous generations supported their own communities through these life and death situations. This thesis seeks to present and analyze the historical impact of specific disasters on American Jewish communities and the rabbis who led them. More specifically, this study will focus on six Reform rabbis who lived through epidemics and natural disasters that left indelible marks on the history of their rabbinates. In studying them as a group, one can distill certain recurring themes in their biographies and styles of leadership that can help us understand responses in our own time and hopefully better plan for future crises.[4]

Overview of Disaster History

2 https://www.sun-sentinel.com/florida-jewish-journal/fl-jj-rabbi-torahs-california-wildfires-20181121-story.html

3 Gladys Gichomo, Larry A. Mercer, Randolph Rowel, "Role of Pastors in Disasters Curriculum Development Project: Preparing Faith-Based Leaders to be Agents of Safety," *Journal of Homeland Security and Emergency Management*, vol. 8, No. 1, 2011; In the wake of Hurricane Katrina, Bill Terry, the Rector of St. Anna's Episcopal church in New Orleans, provided tips and lessons for disaster recovery. https://www.episcopalrelief.org/uploads/EducationFileModel/157/file/clergy-post-disaster.pdf, Tatsushi Hirono, and Michelle Emery Blake, "The Role of Religious Leaders in the Restoration of Hope Following Natural Disasters," *SAGE Open* (April 2017).

4 The focus of this thesis does not veer into the realm of "man-made" disasters prompted by terrorist attacks and acts of gun violence. However, historians of the American Jewish experience are called upon to begin such a study of rabbi's pastoral, communal, and organizational responses to these types of disasters in the future.

Natural disasters undoubtedly impacted communities worldwide prior to the 20th century, but epidemics posed a much more terrifying prospect to world populations in the first millennium. Sheldon Watts, in his book *Epidemics and History: Disease Power and Imperialism*, covers seven diseases which plagued the world between the 13th and 20th centuries, including the bubonic plague, leprosy, smallpox, syphilis, and yellow fever.[5] These epidemics not only hit Jewish communities as well, but they often resulted in anti-Semitic violence that caused the death of hundreds if not thousands of Jews. The bubonic plague in the 14th century causing the near destruction of Jewish communities in the Rhineland is one such example.[6] David Roskies' work, *Responses to Catastrophe in Jewish History* as well as Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi's book *Zachor: Jewish History and Jewish Memory* present literary and theological responses to disasters throughout Jewish history.[7] This work, instead, will focus on the quotidian duties and responsibilities that specific rabbis assumed in response to natural disasters.

Few historians of American Jewish history have explored the impact of epidemics on the American Jewish experience.[8] Yellow fever epidemics, in particular, played a significant role in shaping the American Jewish experience in the South. Each year, yellow fever cases peaked in September or October, usually near the High Holy Days before trailing off after the first frost.[9] Rabbis and Jewish leaders were faced with the

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[5] Gert H. Brieger, "Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism," review of *Epidemics and History* by Sheldon Watts, *The New England Journal of Medicine* (1997): 1.
[6] S. J. Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power, and Imperialism* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1999).
[7] Yosef Hayim Yerushalmi, *Zakhor Jewish History and Jewish Memory* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 2002), David G. Roskies, *Against the Apocalypse: Responses to Catastrophe in Modern Jewish Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse Univ. Press, 1999).
[8] Naomi Sandweiss is one of only a handful of historians who are engaging in the subject, Naomi Sandweiss, "Beating the Flu," *Tablet Magazine* (6 December 2018).
[9] The origin of yellow fever was not determined until the early 20th century, when Walter Reed expanded upon a previous theory establishing that mosquitos were the cause of the disease. His discovery that a

difficult task of addressing the timing between epidemics and the High Holy Days. After all, the words of Unetane Tokef "Who by water, and who by fire...who by earthquake and who by plague" evoke deep theological questions while reminding individuals and communities of their loss.[10] Yet American rabbis never limited their response to the bimah or pastoral care alone. In the wake of epidemics and natural disasters they took on the added responsibility to address the physical and organizational necessities of their communities—within the Jewish community and beyond. In fact, the ways in which rabbis have responded to natural disasters in the United States shed light on the distinctive characteristics of the American Jewish experience itself.

Disaster history is a relatively new historical field that began in Europe in the late 1980s and emerged out of the fields of environmental and urban history.[11] In 2007, the pre-eminent disaster history scholar, Gerrit Jasper Schenk, proposed that the future of disaster history should be interdisciplinary and involve comparative cultural studies. Over ten years later, the field of disaster history fulfilled Schenk's initial estimations for this "forward-thinking discipline."[12]

Andy Horowitz, an associate professor at Tulane University who specializes in disaster history, was one of a number of scholars who contributed to a special 2018 issue of *The American Historian*—the flagship journal of the Organization of American Historian (OAH)—dedicated to disaster history. Horowitz makes the argument that "disasters have histories" because "who is in harm's way, and the sort of harm they are in

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critical mass of infected mosquitoes might lay dormant for months or years helped to explain the peaks of yellow fever epidemics during these months. John R. Pierce and Jim Writer, *Yellow Jack: How Yellow Fever Ravaged America and Walter Reed Discovered its Deadly Secret*s (Hoboken, New Jersey; John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 194.

[10] "Unetane Tokef" Translation https://www.sefaria.org/Unetaneh_Tokef?lang=bi.

[11] Gerrit Jasper Schenk, "Historical Disaster Research. State of Research, Concepts, Methods and Case Studies," *Historical Social Research / Historische Sozialforschung* 32, no. 3 (121) (2007): 16.

[12] Ibid., 19.

the way of, are products of human decisions and social arrangements."[13] As such, historians have an obligation to contextualize the impact disasters have on communities and their disruption of political, social, economic and religious processes. Disaster history is all the more important especially in the light of the increase in the numbers of hurricanes, floods, and fires affecting Americans each year.[14] This current work seeks to add to the emerging field of disaster history while integrating its theories and findings into the study of American Jewish history.

We must first define what exactly constitutes a disaster. Joshua Miller, in his book, *Psychosocial Capacity Building in Response to Disasters*, defines a disaster as a

> process that encompasses an event, or series of events, affecting multiple people, groups, and communities, causing damage, destruction and loss of life. There is a public and collective dimension to a disaster as well as individual suffering. The disaster process is socially constructed…as being outside of ordinary experience, overwhelming usual individual and collective coping mechanisms, disrupting social relations and at least temporarily disempowering individuals and communities.[15]

His definition speaks to the individual and social trauma survivors experience and the collective toll catastrophes take on communities. At the same time, it does not limit the scope of a disaster to the initial moment of crisis but includes a series of events leading up to and following a disaster. Andy Horowitz, in his article "The Complete Story of the Galveston Horror: Trauma, History, and the Great Storm of 1900," describes how first-

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[13] Andy Horowitz, Chad H. Parker, and Liz Skilton, "Disasters Have Histories:" Teaching and Researching American Disasters," *The American Historian* no. 15 (February 2018): 21.
[14] Ibid., 21.
[15] Joshua L. Miller, *Psychosocial Capacity Building in Response to Disasters* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), 7.

hand accounts of disasters often portray them as "acute events that rupture in a catastrophic instant."[16] Such accounts often limit their scope to only the day or night of a particular disaster.[17] Disaster history seeks to move beyond the immediacy of an event recognizing that individual and societal trauma caused by disasters are "shaped by history, culture, social structures and processes, and political economies"[18] that have much longer trajectories. Each of these factors plays a part in determining communal and individual responses to disasters.

Scholars identify clergy and spiritual leaders as playing a particularly integral role in communal recovery in the wake of disasters. These individuals are the cultivators of collective resiliency in their efforts to "assist with recovering, grieving, and healing."[19] Miller suggests that religious leaders and communities utilize specific interventions that aid in "psychosocial recovery."[20] They serve their constituents—individuals, families, and communities—on a regular basis by providing assistance in acknowledging the importance and necessity of grieving and mourning, while inspiring hope, helping others to recognize links to the past, establishing moments to allow for healing, fostering connection to others, ensuring the physical and psychological safety of congregants, while exuding a calming presence, and providing a sense of place.[21] Miller argues that "recovery from disaster is an ongoing, perhaps never-ending process, as the disaster experience (along with other experiences) is continually reworked, examined, and

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[16] Andy Horowitz, "The Complete Story of the Galveston Horror: Trauma, History, and the Great Storm of 1900," *Historical Reflections / Réflexions Historiques* 41, no. 3 (2015): 96.
[17] Ibid., 96.
[18] Miller, *Psychosocial Capacity Building*, 8.
[19] Ibid., 153.
[20] Ibid., 159–160.
[21] Ibid., 159.

reintegrated into the warp and weft of a person's life."[22] Although he sees recovery as a "never-ending" process, he does seem to suggest long term ways of addressing the psychosocial needs of communities. These long-term responder activities include; critical incident and stress management, restoring social networks, establishing mutual aid and support groups, empowering activities, training of trainers, community organizing, resource and capacity development, human rights and social justice activism, peace and reconciliation initiatives, and collaborative memorializing.[23]

As we will see, the six rabbis studied in this work all participated in or actively led short or long-term responder activities, including assessing damage and providing emotional, psychological, and physical triage; guiding congregants through the grieving and mourning process; working alone or with an institution to restore social networks and provide mutual-aid and support; working with organizations to cultivate resource and capacity development; utilizing religious spaces to encourage and establish moments of collaborative memorializing; as well as providing individual counseling.[24] Through these interventions, they were able to address a wide variety of needs on their own or in concert with others.

Disasters often prompt a reshaping of an individual's and community's worldview. While addressing their own struggles in this theological or ideological space, rabbis must address "one of the most profound areas affected by disaster...the destabilizing and deconstruction of meaning."[25] Through their interactions with congregants, writings, and sermons, rabbis set the stage for personal and communal

[22] Ibid., 155.
[23] Ibid., 159.
[24] Ibid., 155.
[25] Ibid.

reconstruction of meaning.[26] A thorough analysis of this reconstruction is beyond the purview of this study, but theological issues will be discussed as they constitute part of the leadership response by these rabbis.

Finally, leadership during times of crises almost always involve acts—whether large or small—of heroism. However, as scholars of the past, we must be careful not to delve too much into hagiography, venerating these people and their work as if they could do no wrong and are, in some way, superhumans. We must be mindful of the fact that leaders—of any time or place—are human beings with flaws who operate under stressful and trying circumstances that necessarily test their roles as leaders. To provide a critical analysis of these rabbis is not to denigrate their work in any way, but rather to reconstruct their roles and offer an objective evaluation based on that reconstruction.

Summary of Thesis

Throughout American Jewish history, epidemics and natural disasters have forced rabbis to expand their roles. Rabbis today, like in years past, are forced to contend with the power of mother nature and the deleterious effects it can have on entire communities, and to decide what their role will be when disaster strikes and it is time to recover and rebuild. To date, no one has attempted a critical historical analysis of the role of the American rabbi during and in the wake of epidemics and natural disasters. This thesis will seek to do just that.

Yellow fever was the first epidemic in American Jewish history which evoked a noteworthy response by a substantial number of American rabbis.[27] Yellow fever

[26] Ibid.

outbreaks prompted the establishment of homes for widows and orphans, Jewish benevolent associations, and empowered rabbis to pursue funds via networks established by B'nai B'rith and Jewish newspapers like Isaac Mayer Wise's *The American Israelite*.[28] Disasters in the early 20th century, such as the Galveston Hurricane of 1900 and the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906, posed new challenges for rabbis, who in the modern world and in the American context, needed to balance their disaster responses to their congregations and the larger Jewish community with their leadership in the civic world. The thesis seeks to explore patterns and trends in the 19th and 20th centuries in order to present a comparative analysis of rabbinical responses to disasters which may be pertinent to future rabbinic leadership in the 21st century.

The thesis will focus on the following rabbis and events: Rabbi James K. Gutheim and the Yellow Fever epidemics of 1853 and 1878 in New Orleans, Louisiana; Rabbi Max Samfield in Memphis, Tennessee in 1873 and 1878; Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Galveston Flood of 1900; Rabbis Jacob Nieto and Jacob Voorsanger during the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906; as well as Rabbi Robert Loewy in New Orleans, Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina. The rabbis depicted in this thesis were influential religious leaders in their own Jewish community and, also, in their cities during these moments of crises. As such, significantly more material exists on them than other Jewish

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[27] It was only after 1840 that it was only after 1840 when the American Jewish community grew to be large enough to bring ordained rabbis to the United States that we can say the American rabbinate really takes shape.

[28] The first major yellow fever epidemic to impact the course of American Jewish history occurred in 1733 upon the arrival of Jewish immigrants to Savannah, GA. Dr. Samuel Nunes Ribiero played a key role in turning the tide of the epidemic. When he and a handful of Jews arrived in Savannah, yellow fever was raging. Had he not treated the ill surely many more people would have perished (Pencak 147). Furthermore, his service to the community ensured the acceptance of the Jews into the colony (Rubin 3). In 1798 a yellow fever epidemic hit New York City. Theodore Cohen and others have written extensively on Jonas Judah and his role as a young medical student who volunteered and perished during the epidemic. Theodore Cohen, "Walter Jonas Judah and New York's 1798 Yellow Fever Epidemic," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 48, no. 1 (1996), 23-34.

leaders at the time. All of them happen to be Reform or liberal rabbis, which may have contributed to the wealth of documentation on their rabbinates as they spent time serving the Jewish and larger civic communities in which they inhabited. These rabbis and the way they inhabited their roles during disasters will be presented in three chapters concluding with a brief description and analysis of the role Rabbi Loewy played in responding to Hurricane Katrina as it related to his synagogue while also reshaping the interdenominational and geographic fabric of the broader New Orleans' Jewish community.[29]

The role of these rabbis during epidemics and natural disasters will be explored through an analysis of primary and secondary source documents. Primary sources examined include sermons, newspaper articles, synagogue records, organizational documents, and correspondence housed in The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio; the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkley. These sources provide us with concrete evidence of the rabbis' work on the ground: what they wrote; what words they spoke in synagogue; who they visited; how they coped; in sum, what their daily lives were like during and in the months following the disasters.

[29] The conclusion will begin by describing Rabbi Robert Loewy's response to Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, Louisiana. In 2005, Loewy was the most senior Reform rabbi in the city. Additionally, the legacy of his response to Hurricane Katrina can still be seen today in the way in which Reform and Orthodox Jews interact with one another in the city. As of 2019, little has been written regarding modern day rabbis' response to natural disasters including hurricane Katrina. Amanda Abrams' rabbinic thesis, "After the Storm" does deal with the communal response to Hurricane Katrina. However, her thesis focuses primarily on the organizational response of the Jewish community rather than on the role of the rabbi. Amanda Abrams, "After the Storm: Re-Envisioning New Orleans," MA Thesis, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 2007.

Secondary source material will help us to contextualize the rabbis' relief efforts and how they fit their larger biographies. Although biographers of each of the rabbis do, in fact, make mention of epidemics and disasters in their works, they frequently do so in passing and are not focused on the intersection between rabbinic leadership and disasters. Similarly, histories of B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee only sparingly reference epidemics and natural disasters and the rabbis who worked with these organizations to respond to the needs of American Jews in crisis.[30] Thus, this thesis will supplement the historical literature and will assemble primary source material that will benefit future historians. In addition, the thesis seeks to encourage historians to further explore the intersection between epidemics, disasters and American Jewish history.

Chapter 1

As stated above, yellow fever outbreaks in the American South during the nineteenth century were the first to require not only a pastoral but organizational response from rabbis like James K. Gutheim and Max Samfield. The first chapter will consider Gutheim and Samfield's roles as rabbis and civic leaders during major yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans and Memphis through an analysis of sources including contemporary newspaper articles, cemetery records, memoirs, organizational board minutes, eulogies and sermons given by the rabbis during or in the aftermath of the epidemics, as well as letters from the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith pertaining to the rabbis and their work

[30] B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish Committee remain proud of their disaster relief efforts. B'nai B'rith proudly announces on their website that they have been providing disaster relief since 1865. https://www.bnaibrith.org/disaster-relief.html, Deborah Dash Moore, *B'nai B'rith and The Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1981). Bernard Postal, "B'nai B'rith: A Century of Service," *The American Jewish Year Book* 45 (1943): 97–116, http://www.jstor.org/stable/23602859, Marianne Sanua, *Let Us Prove Strong: The American Jewish Committee, 1945-2006* (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2007), Nathan Schachner, *The Price of Liberty: A History of the American Jewish Committee* (New York: American Jewish Committee, 1948).

during these epidemics. Gutheim's organizational response to yellow fever epidemics, alongside his peers and community members, sparked the establishment of a Jewish orphanage as well as a broader national system of Jewish disaster response through B'nai B'rith and Jewish newspapers. Samfield, on the other hand, provides us with an example of Jewish pastoral care in the wake of disasters as well as the reality of what it meant to choose to stay or to leave when disaster strikes.

Chapter 2

Natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and fires became (and have remained) the primary cause of mass casualties outside of war in the 20th century. The Galveston Hurricane and Flood of 1900 marked the first significant American natural disaster of the 20th century. Rabbi Henry Cohen's position within the Jewish community and even more so within the larger civic community of Galveston enabled him to take on a crisis leadership role during and after the storm. In so doing, he expanded the role of rabbi beyond the Jewish community to encompass the larger non-Jewish Galveston community as well. Chapter two will present and analyze Rabbi Henry Cohen's role as a rabbi and civic leader in Galveston from 1888 through the aftermath of the Galveston Hurricane and Flood of 1900.[31] Furthermore, it will examine his efforts to provide emergency relief to the city's hospitals, while also working alongside B'nai B'rith to aid the Jewish community's recovery. Evidence will be gleaned from contemporary newspaper accounts, letters written to and from Cohen, sermon notes written in the weeks

[31] James Lee Kessler, "B.O.I.: A History of Congregation B'nai Israel, Galveston, Texas," doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1988, 135.

and months after the hurricane, and memorial volumes published after his passing in 1952.

Chapter 3

American geologists recognize the San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 as one of the strongest earthquakes of all time, while the fire consumed 2,600 acres and demolished 490 city blocks of the city. The two leading rabbis of San Francisco, Jacob Voorsanger and Jacob Nieto, took it upon themselves to respond to the Jewish and civic communities' needs. At this time, they were part of a shift in the role of the rabbi as a leader in disaster relief and fundraising.

Prior to 1906, B'nai B'rith and Jewish newspapers constituted the primary conduits for acquisition of disaster relief funds as led by local rabbis. However, rabbinic leadership in San Francisco fundraising initiatives after the earthquake and fire was overshadowed by the involvement of the newly founded American Jewish Committee, which assumed a leading role in fundraising and disaster relief efforts that had been – up to that point -- under the purview of local rabbis and the B'nai B'rith lodges.[32] The third and final chapter will explore how Voorsanger and Nieto, the leading rabbis of San Francisco in 1906, utilized their roles as clergy to address the immediate and long-term challenges created by the earthquake and fire. Voorsanger and Nieto rushed to address the needs of the citizens of San Francisco. They demonstrated their civic leadership by working with the mayor and other leaders to bring order out of chaos. Each of them

[32] At the time, the American Jewish Committee had not yet developed its current-day structure of regional offices. This meant that the AJC's involvement was conducted from its remote headquarters in New York City. In response to these trying circumstances, these two San Franciscan rabbis took it upon themselves to travel across country and even to Europe to raise funds to cover the costs of the Jewish community of San Francisco.

addressed a basic need of San Francisco's citizens: providing food, water, and sanitation. Voorsanger and Nieto utilized their charismatic leadership to propel the financial and building recovery efforts of the San Francisco Jewish community by traveling as far as London to raise additional funds for the ailing Jews and Jewish institutions of the city. The rabbis navigated a changing political landscape in relation to national fundraising for ongoing communal recovery efforts. The two men who, over the course of their respective careers in San Francisco, did not always see eye to eye were able to join together in an effort to care for their people and to bring San Francisco back to life.

The thesis will conclude first by presenting Rabbi Robert Loewy's response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005, as a model for the changing landscape of rabbinic disaster leadership in the 21st century before embarking on a summative analysis of the various roles that American rabbis have played during select epidemics and natural disasters in the 19th and 20th centuries. This conclusion will synthesize the key findings derived from each of the three preceding chapters. The conclusion and its summative analysis will shed new historical light on how the role of the rabbi has changed over time in relation to epidemics and natural disasters in American Jewish history.

There are four overarching topics and personality traits that can be identified when examining the leadership role of each of these six rabbis: resilience and adaptability; tikkun olam; a frontier mentality; and the power of the written word. Before these themes are fleshed out below, though, it is important to keep in mind that the nature of the rabbinic response to these disasters depended, in large measure, on circumstances that were outside the power and control of these rabbis. The scope and severity of the emergency as well as the civic and Jewish communal capacity to respond to the needs of

citizens and community members need also be considered. The type or level of rabbinic response depended on the severity of a disaster in terms of its death toll and damage to the socio-economic wellbeing of families and synagogues. Indeed, the financial wellbeing of the Jewish community as well as the number of recent Jewish immigrants impacted the ability of a city or Jewish community to respond to epidemics and disasters.

Yellow fever epidemics in the nineteenth century could be particularly virulent, and as there were no truly effective treatments, thousands could die at a time. The Boards of Health in New Orleans and Memphis were not particularly effective in the mid to late nineteenth century in part due to ineffectual civic leadership prior to the Civil War as well as the austerity imposed on Southern cities by Reconstruction. Under these circumstances, community leaders like Gutheim and Samfield stepped up to provide capable leadership and pastoral care in order to address the immediate and long-term concerns posed by epidemics.

San Francisco had its own level of civil dysfunction around the turn of the century as the city was run by a political machine led by Abe Ruef. Although the political machine could have posed serious problems in the wake of the earthquake and fire, Ruef's position as a Jew, and the city hall's new proximity to the Jewish community, as the civic courts were temporarily housed in Sherith Israel's synagogue in the aftermath of the earthquake, gave added authority to Nieto and Voorsanger as they served as leaders during the immediate relief efforts for city and in their long term recovery endeavors for the Jewish community in particular. The scope of the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire was far greater than that of the Galveston Hurricane and Flood in terms of its impact on the Jewish community simply because Galveston had yet to receive a serious influx of

recent Eastern European immigrants. Henry Cohen's response to the Hurricane may have been vastly different had the storm occurred after the Galveston movement, which, starting in 1907, brought East European Jewish immigrants through the port of Galveston to settle in the western portion of the United States.

1. Resilience and Adaptability

For many of these rabbis, the adversities presented in their early biographies along with their peripatetic existence cultivated a sense of resiliency and adaptability that served them well as leaders during disasters. In general, it helped them respond proactively to what was happening around them. Henry Cohen, for example, derived his resilience and adaptability from his experiences in Africa, his work with a British relief agency known as the Board of Guardians, his time as the rabbi of the synagogue in Kingston, Jamaica, as well as his work as an itinerant rabbi in the American South. Cohen, therefore, was better able to adapt to trying circumstances, persist in the wake of trauma, change course, and engage with people wholly unlike himself. Voorsanger, like Cohen, served as a circuit-riding rabbi in Texas, where he helped Jews on the frontier to establish synagogues and schools in trying circumstances. The role of the itinerant rabbi required immense flexibility and prompted Cohen and Voorsanger to think proactively to address the needs of rural Jewish communities. Jacob Nieto's resilience and adaptability came from his experience growing up in Kingston, Jamaica, as well as his own time as a refugee following a fire that destroyed his childhood synagogue.

2. *Tikkun Olam*

Even before disasters hit their respective communities, each of these men's rabbinate embodied the value of *Tikkun Olam*, of repairing the world. Although none of the rabbis used the term to describe their work, one can characterize their rabbinates as pursuing initiatives that promoted healing and social justice.[33] Prior to epidemics and natural disasters, the rabbis found themselves working to address systemic problems in their respective cities. Gutheim, for example, served on the New Orleans school board, while Cohen made hospital house calls, and gave large amounts of charity to Jews and non-Jews alike. Gutheim, Samfield, Cohen, and Voorsanger established particularly strong interfaith relationships with their Christian colleagues to better serve their larger civic communities. When an earthquake damaged a San Francisco Unitarian church, Voorsanger, for example, welcomed the community to worship at Temple Emanu-El on Sundays while their church was being repaired. Similarly, four churches worshipped in Cohen's temple following the hurricane. Similarly, in the wake of the disasters, each of these rabbis continued to devote themselves to bettering the world. In particular, Samfield devoted himself to the cause of child and animal cruelty, while Nieto and Cohen fought for prison reform. While these rabbis may never have used the term Tikkun Olam, their efforts during disasters were part of a professional continuum of civic engagement and social justice.

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[33] In his book *Response to Modernity*, Michael Meyer, emphasizes that Classical Reform rabbis, in the early 20th century began emphasizing the importance of pursuing social justice. According to Meyer, this new emphasis on social justice grew out of Progressivism and the Social Gospel Movement in Protestantism. Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State Univ. Press, 1998), 287. Prior to the use of the terms Tikkun Olam or social justice, American rabbis advocated for what they called "prophetic Judaism" (Meyer, 213). At the same time, the concept of Tikkun Olam far predates Reform Judaism. *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Thought and Law* traces the intellectual history of the value of Tikkun Olam in Jewish texts and into modern history. David Shatz, Chaim Isaac Waxman, and Nathan J. Diament, *Tikkun Olam: Social Responsibility in Jewish Thought and Law* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

3. Frontier Mentality

Each of the rabbi's presented were on the frontier of rabbinic leadership in America. They saw the nearly unlimited promise of life for Jews in cities and towns on the periphery while also seeing themselves as frontiersmen paving a new role for the rabbi in America. Every one of the rabbis depicted in the thesis immigrated to America as young adults, and their rabbinates were marked by their willingness to push the boundaries of previous models of rabbinic leadership. As such, they allowed the freedom of America to influence the limits they placed on their roles in the Jewish and broader civic communities. Their frontier mentality fostered an ease at which the rabbis moved to help other groups. According to Shari Rabin in *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth Century America*, the United States enabled but also "sacralized" mobility.[34] This type of mobility was previously limited for Jews in Europe as religious identity restricted "travel, residence, and economic opportunity."[35] Such limitations for "white" men simply did not exist in America. Rabin, in her work, builds upon Sander Gillman's reformulation of Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier thesis, arguing that the frontier "refers not only to western lands" as Turner proposed, but also "'the conceptual and physical space where groups in motion meet, confront, alter, destroy, and build'

[34] Frederick Jackson Turner's Frontier Thesis predominated American historical discourse for nearly a century. Turner argued that American democracy formed out of the experience of the frontier. According to Turner, the continual movement of the boundaries of what constituted the frontier impacted individual and communal experience. It has since been associated with American colonialism and lost a great deal of its credibility. However, the concept of pushing the boundaries of "frontiers" remains core to scholarship of the American West. Frederick Jackson Turner,, and John Mack Faragher, *Rereading Frederick Jackson Turner: "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" and Other Essays* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1998). Shari Rabin and others have begun to reclaim the concept of the "frontier" for understanding ideological and sociological phenomena. Shari Rabin, *Jews on the Frontier: Religion and Mobility in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: New York University Press, 2017), 4.
[35] Ibid.

interactions that are profoundly shaped by economic and political realities."[36] This definition expands the way we understand frontiers, and provides a framework for envisioning the frontier as an ideological, social, and physical construct impacting individuals and communities.

Cohen's experience on the frontier of South Africa undoubtedly contributed to his understanding of himself as a "frontier" rabbi. Not only did he serve small and far-flung communities in Mississippi and in Texas, but his rabbinate would have been nearly unrecognizable to rabbis in other areas of the country or the world as Cohen saw no difference between the emotional and financial support he offered to his congregants and to his Christian brethren. Although other rabbis worked closely with Christian clergy, Cohen and Father James Martin Kirwin, rector of Saint Mary's Cathedral in Galveston, serve as an early example of an interdenominational clergy team addressing societal ills. In contrast, Gutheim was on the forefront of rabbinic leadership in his founding of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations prior to the establishment of the Central Conference of American Rabbis. While Gutheim was on the cutting edge of regional and national rabbinic leadership, Nieto led the way in visioning for the future of congregational life. Nieto was on the cutting edge in the 1890s when he proposed the idea of erecting a synagogue building which included space for a community center. Cohen and Voorsanger saw themselves as leaders in the fight to protect Eastern European Jews from the increasing numbers of pogroms at the turn of the century. Cohen pioneered the Galveston Immigration Movement while Voorsanger sought to create an international establishment which would address this Jewish crisis, but which would serve Jews in crises all over the world long after this rise in anti-Semitism passed. With this in mind,

[36] Ibid., 5.

Voorsanger established the International Jewish League (IJL) in San Francisco, an organization dedicated to Jewish defense initiatives at home and abroad. Voorsanger's initiative with the IJL which took place in January of 1906 predated the founding of the American Jewish Committee by more than six months.

4. Power of the Written Word

Each rabbi studied here understood the power of the written word and used it to his advantage. By the late nineteenth century, the American Jewish press was proliferating and many of these rabbis understood that their publications could help shape the discourse of American Jewish life.[37] In particular, they used their sermons and published newspaper articles to describe and make sense of the disaster, to bring solace to their co-religionists, to solicit relief, and sometimes to challenge existing systems. Long before moving to New Orleans, Gutheim worked as a correspondent for Isaac Leeser's newspaper, *The Occident*. Throughout his career Gutheim utilized *The Occident* and later *The American Israelite* as platforms for his sermons prior to and following epidemics. His sermon following the 1853 epidemic seeks to provide comfort for those mourning the deaths of their loved ones. Samfield's eulogies give us a window into his devotion to pastoral care and providing a space for reflection and mourning in the wake of disaster. Voorsanger's publications were initially interrupted by the earthquake and fire, but he persevered in re-establishing the paper soon after the disaster. Together, Voorsanger and Nieto, used the pages of *The Jewish Messenger* as well as *The Jewish Times and*

[37] See Shari Rabin's article, "People of the Press: The *Occident*, the *Israelite*, and the Origins of American Judaism," in *By Dawn's Early Light: Jewish Contributions to American Culture from the Nation's Founding to the Civil War*, ed. Adam Mendelsohn and Dale Rosengarten (Princeton: Princeton University Library, 2016), 75–82.

Observer to express their criticism over what they perceived to be the imperious and condescending approach taken by the American Jewish Committee in its response to San Francisco's Jewish communal appeal for relief funding in the aftermath of the earthquake. In contrast to Gutheim, Samfield, Voorsanger, and Nieto, Cohen was not the producer of a newspaper. However, he did contribute to both Jewish and secular newsprint. His article in the *American Israelite* provides us with a clear view of the damage caused by the hurricane to the Jewish community of Galveston.

We cannot determine when the next major epidemic, storm, quake, or fire will wreak havoc on American Jewish communities. However, in studying how our forebears utilized their power and authority to bring order out of chaos, to provide immediate physical, emotional, psychological, theological, institutional, and financial relief to our congregants and broader communities, we are developing useful models of leadership that can hopefully be applied in our own time and into the future. Rabbis James K. Gutheim, Max Samfield, Henry Cohen, Jacob Voorsanger, Jacob Nieto, and Robert Loewy, provide twenty-first century rabbis with a broad picture of the roles American rabbis have and will continue to play in responding to crises. There is no doubt that in the future, rabbis will be similarly called upon to respond to epidemics and disasters. Their legacy and lessons will continue to be of genuine benefit to those who will continue to be faced with these challenges in the future.

Chapter 1

Rabbis James K. Gutheim and Max Samfield: Their Pastoral and Communal Responses to Yellow Fever Epidemics in the 19th Century

Yellow fever epidemics shaped the American South, never discriminating against the rich or poor, black or white, Christian or Jew. The history of yellow fever and its devastation in the South has focused largely on outbreaks in New Orleans and Memphis and the establishment of the National Board of Health, on Walter Reed's cure of the disease, and its influence on public health. Although a handful of scholars have addressed yellow fever epidemics and their impact on select Jewish communities in the nineteenth century, none have focused their attentions on the role of the American rabbi during these times of crisis.[1]

To this day, rabbis James K. Gutheim and Max Samfield are inscribed in the historical record for their dedication to their pastoral duties and their unfailing leadership during crises. Through their steadfast leadership as rabbis and community figures, rabbis Gutheim and Samfield served as major forces in the communal response to the yellow fever epidemics that hit New Orleans and Memphis in the latter half of the 19th century. This work will analyze Gutheim and Samfield's responses to yellow fever epidemics by

[1] See Bailey Romano, "Yellow fever and the Jews of the American South: New Orleans, Louisiana and Memphis, Tennessee, 1853–1878," Term Paper 2013, SC-16086, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; Alan M. Kraut, "A.E. Frankland's History of the 1873 Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis, Tennessee," *American Jewish Archives Journal* 59, no. 1-2 (2007): 89-98.; and Shana Goldstein, "Through the Eyes of A.E. Frankland: Memphis and the Jews During the Yellow Fever Epidemic 1873," Thesis 2002, SC-14890, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

examining their emergency response to the sick and dying as part of their pastorates as well as their involvement in the broader Jewish communities' recovery efforts.

It is important to note that each rabbi, minister or priest has his/her own approach to pastoral care. Although one cannot definitively describe the pastoral approaches of these two rabbis in their entirety, Howard Clinebell's basic types of pastoral care do provide us with a framework for understanding the approaches they used to address the emotional and spiritual needs of their communities.[2] According to Clinebell's framework, both Gutheim and Samfield provided "short-term pastoral care in crises" as well as "bereavement caregiving."[3]

While both men spent a great deal of their time focusing on the pastoral needs of their communities, only Gutheim played a direct role in the Jewish community's organizational recovery efforts. Gutheim utilized his role as rabbi to influence the establishment of a number of relief organizations while also securing funds from Jews around the country to support the recovery efforts of the New Orleans Jewish community in 1867 and 1878.

This chapter will consider Gutheim and Samfield's roles as rabbis and civic leaders through an analysis of sources including contemporary newspaper articles, cemetery records, memoirs, organizational board minutes, eulogies and sermons given by the rabbis during or in the aftermath of the epidemics, as well as letters from the Independent Order of B'nai B'rith pertaining to the rabbis and their work during these epidemics.

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[2] Howard John Clinebell, and Bridget Clare McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling: Resources for the Ministry of Healing and Growth* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2011).
[3] Ibid.

Yellow Fever: A Brief History

In the late eighteenth century, yellow fever epidemics occurred in a number of northern cities including New York and Philadelphia.[4] However, by the nineteenth century, yellow fever was synonymous with the southern United States. Although many ideas and theories attempted to explain the prevalence of yellow fever, scientists did not fully understand its cause and spread until the early twentieth century. In 1881, Carlos Findlay, a Cuban epidemiologist, theorized that mosquitos harbored the disease and transmitted it to humans.[5] Findlay's theory was later confirmed by the Walter Reed Commission of 1900. The Commission proved that an infected mosquito could transmit the disease to humans. Furthermore, it determined that the disease could also be passed through a mosquito's eggs, which might lay dormant, typically in water, for months or years.[6] As a result, an epidemic might not occur until a critical mass of diseased mosquitoes were able to hatch and infect the population.[7] In urban areas such as New Orleans and Memphis, stagnant water and poor sanitation provided the perfect conditions for rapid spread of the disease.

The early symptoms of yellow fever were similar to that of the flu: high fever, aches and pains, nausea and vomiting. However, once it progressed to the toxic phase, a patient presented with jaundice, profuse bleeding from the nose, mouth and eyes, in

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[4] Claude Edward Heaton," Yellow Fever in New York City," *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 34, no. 2 (Apr 1946): 1.
[5] Charles Finlay, with Rudolph Matas, "The Mosquito Hypothetically Considered as an Agent in the Transmission of Yellow Fever Poison," *New Orleans Medical and Surgical Journal* 9 (1881): 601–616.
[6] John R. Pierce and Jim Writer, *Yellow Jack: How Yellow Fever Ravaged America and Walter Reed Discovered its Deadly Secret*s (Hoboken, New Jersey; John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 194.
[7] Margaret Humphreys, *Yellow Fever and the South* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 5.

addition to intense delirium. A patient would almost surely die if they reached the toxic phase of the disease.[8]

Over time, scientists and residents of the South realized that long-term inhabitants had immunity to yellow fever, whereas visitors or immigrants were more likely to succumb to the disease due to lack of immunity and dismal living conditions. The largest and most devastating yellow fever epidemics occurred during periods of large-scale immigration to southern cities. Between 1840 and the early 1880s, large groups of German and Irish immigrants settled in the American South. A number of these German and Central European immigrants were Jews who settled in New Orleans and Memphis.[9]

As a port of entry for immigrants in addition to being a hotbed for the mosquitos who harbored yellow fever, New Orleans was known as one of the deadliest places to live in America in the mid-nineteenth century. Yellow fever killed more than forty thousand people in the city. The epidemics which took place between 1853 and 1858 produced a "staggering eighteen thousand casualties and virtually wiped out the city's nonimmune immigrant population."[10] In 1867 the number of yellow fever deaths in the city of New Orleans reached over 3,000.[11] In 1878, after a ten-year gap without a severe epidemic, the number of deaths in the city climbed to a little over 4,000.[12]

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[8] Louisiana Office of Public Health, "Yellow Fever," in *Infectious Disease Epidemiology Annual Report* (1934): 1-7, http://ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/Annuals/LaIDAnnual_YellowFever.pdf, 2.
[9] Jonathan D. Sarna, *American Judaism: A History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 63–64.
[10] Pierce and Writer, *Yellow Jack*, 2–3.
[11] Louisiana Office of Public Health, "Yellow Fever," in *Infectious Disease Epidemiology Annual Report* (1934): 1-7, http://ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/Annuals/LaIDAnnual_YellowFever.pdf, 3
[12] Louisiana Office of Public Health, "Yellow Fever," in *Infectious Disease Epidemiology Annual Report* (1934): 1-7, http://ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/Annuals/LaIDAnnual_YellowFever.pdf, 3

With the overwhelming number of deaths also came scores of orphans, widows, and widowers. Families already living hand to mouth quickly became destitute, leaving religious and charitable organizations scrambling to serve the needs of the city. Healthcare workers, clergy and leaders of charitable organizations including the Howard Association and B'nai B'rith, were the first responders during yellow fever epidemics. They did not abandon their posts despite the risk to their own lives. Lack of civic leadership made it necessary for clergy and leaders of charitable organizations to ramp up their emergency relief and recovery efforts.

In 1833, following a particularly virulent cholera epidemic, a small group of men made a promise to care for one another in the case of yet another epidemic. This small group was formally constituted as the Howard Association in 1837 with the express purpose "to relieve the destitute in a period of epidemics."[13] Over time, the Howard Association became synonymous with serving the needs of yellow fever sufferers. Up until 1878, Health Boards were fairly ineffective in responding to epidemics, so when the New Orleans city council refused to take action during the 1853 epidemic, the Howards determined to publish a proclamation declaring the existence of yellow fever in the city while also providing a list of doctors and apothecaries which could assist yellow fever sufferers. Each man would be placed in charge of a district and was responsible for finding doctors, nurses, and medicine for their area. The Howards took a proactive approach checking on families regardless of whether or not yellow fever had been reported in a home.[14] The Howards went on to serve the city of New Orleans and other

[13] Elizabeth Wisner, "The Howard Association of New Orleans," *Social Service Review* 41, no. 4 (1967): 411.
[14] Ibid., 414.

southern communities, including Memphis, until 1905 when fear of yellow fever epidemics significantly diminished.[15]

The International Order of B'nai B'rith (I.O.B.B.), founded in 1843, became and continued to be the primary Jewish organization to provide epidemic and disaster relief for American Jewish communities up until the early 20th century. Its philanthropic objectives were outlined in its constitution: "B'nai B'rith has taken upon itself the mission of uniting Israelites in the work of promoting their highest interests and those of humanity….alleviating the wants of the poor and needy; visiting and attending the sick; coming to the rescue of victims of persecution; providing for, protecting, and assisting the widow and orphan on the broadest principles of humanity."[16] In tandem with rabbis like Gutheim, B'nai B'rith provided support for communities facing yellow fever epidemics by providing volunteers and organizing fundraising efforts.

Throughout the nineteenth century, many wealthy families and individuals who had the means to flee the city during the summer months, or when facing a potential epidemic, did so without delay. Unlike many of their co-religionists and their fellow clergy both Christian and Jewish, James K. Gutheim of New Orleans and Max Samfield of Memphis remained during yellow fever epidemics to serve their congregants and all those in need in their respective cities. Their leadership was shaped by their dedication to their vocation and to the continued well-being of their Jewish and civic communities. In their own ways, both men were integral to the emergency relief and recovery efforts during the yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans and Memphis.

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[15] Ibid., 411.
[16] Bernard Postal, "B'nai B'rith: A Century of Service," *The American Jewish Year Book* 45 (1943): 98–99.

Brief Biography of Gutheim

Charles Palmer, the esteemed Christian minister of New Orleans, spoke highly of his friend and colleague, Rabbi James K. Gutheim, at his funeral in 1886. He concluded his eulogy for Gutheim by saying, "He was a man always to be found, when wanted, and to be trusted, when found."[17] These words were later inscribed on Gutheim's headstone marking him as what he was—an indispensable leader of the New Orleans Jewish and civic communities.

James Koppel Gutheim was born in Menne, Westphalia on November 15, 1817.[18] His father, Meyer Gutheim, was a Hebrew scholar who ensured that his son was well educated in Torah and Talmud. After receiving certification in teaching and Hebrew proficiency, he served as a Hebrew teacher in Oberlistinge.[19] Although Gutheim would later go on to become a preacher and educator in Westphalia where he worked from 1838–1842, we have no record of him receiving rabbinic ordination.[20]

In 1843, Gutheim came to the US and started his career working for his brother as his bookkeeper. Soon after that, he started writing articles for American Jewish newspapers including Isaac Leeser's *The Occident*, where he served as a news correspondent for a number of years. He was offered and accepted a position in Cincinnati in 1846 as the principal of the Cincinnati Hebrew Institute which instructed 58 students at the time.[21] Not long after his arrival, he accepted a position at congregation

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[17] Max Heller, "Rev. James K. Gutheim," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Yearbook* 28 (1917): 4.
[18] Leo Shpall, *Rabbi James Koppel Gutheim* (New Orleans: T.J. Moran's Sons, 1939), 167.
[19] While there he also studied with a Protestant minister. See Gary P. Zola, "James Koppel Gutheim," *American National Biography* Vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 736–737.
[20] Ibid.
[21] *The Occident* (1 April 1846).

B'nai Yeshurun where he gave sermons every other Shabbat.[22] As one of the leaders of the Jewish community of Cincinnati, in 1848 Gutheim gave a speech at a function for the Hebrew Benevolent Association appealing for funds with the goal of assisting the community "in the prosecution of its duties during the coming inclement season."[23] Gutheim was already dedicating himself to philanthropic causes, which may have included preparing for the possibility of a yellow fever or cholera epidemic. In fact, in 1849, cholera did sweep through the city of Cincinnati depleting the resources of the Jewish community.[24]

Both Gutheim's actions and words endeared him to the Jewish community of Cincinnati while providing him with the recognition needed to advance his career. In the 1840s only a handful of rabbis were capable of giving sermons in English, Gutheim being one of them. Throughout his time in Cincinnati, Gutheim published a number of English sermons in *The Occident*. By all accounts his sermons were well received by his congregants and his readers, making him a personality in high demand.[25] Gutheim was so beloved by Cincinnati's Jewish residents that it is said that when he left for New Orleans, the Jews of Cincinnati bewailed their loss, saying "the Crescent City has robbed the Queen of the West of one of the brightest ornaments in her diadem."[26] His success in

[22] *The Occident* (1 June 1846).
[23] *The Occident* (1 April 1848).
[24] Although we do not have any evidence of Gutheim's involvement during the cholera epidemic of 1849, we are aware of the financial challenges facing the community based on an article in *The Occident* from December 1, 1850 which states that during a meeting of the Cincinnati Hebrew Benevolent Society "the funds of this excellent society having been severely encroached on during the past two years, in consequence of the disastrous effects of the cholera, it is to be hoped every exertion will be used by the officers and members to replenish the exhausted treasury, so as to be able to meet the increased demand on this institution" (*The Occident*, 1 December 1850, 476).
[25] Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872–1922* (New Orleans: American Print, 1922), 49.
[26] Max Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai, 1872–1922* (New Orleans: American Print, 1922), 49.

Cincinnati foreshadowed the rising career of the young rabbi who would spend nearly the rest of his career and life in New Orleans.

During his tenure in New Orleans, Gutheim served three different synagogues. In 1850, Gutheim accepted the call to become the rabbi at Shaare Chesed, also known as the German congregation in New Orleans.[27] However, four year later, Gutheim declined to renew his contract with Shaare Chesed, and instead began working at the more recently-established Dispersed of Judah, which was supported by the wealthy philanthropist, Judah Touro.[28] Although there is little documentation describing why Gutheim moved from one synagogue in New Orleans to another, it appears that he was interested and willing to serve as a rabbi at newly established synagogues where the pay may have been better. Later on, he accepted the position at Temple Sinai because it was a newly established *Reform* synagogue, and as we will see the offer enabled him to return to New Orleans after a hiatus following the Civil War.

Around eight years after his arrival in New Orleans, Gutheim married Emilie Jones of Mobile, Alabama, and together, the couple had one son. [29] Like her husband, Emilie was dedicated to charity and visiting the sick. Following her death in 1904, Temple Sinai's Board adopted the following resolution describing Emilie's character: "she was a friend to every member of our congregation, she shared our joys and sorrows; with tireless zeal and inexhaustible energy she cheered the sick, watched by the bedside of the dying, comforted the sorrow-stricken; her sunny temperament brought healing and

[27] Shpall, 167.
[28] *The Occident* (1 January 1854): 48.
[29] Zola, "James Koppel Gutheim," 736–737.

joy to hundreds of homes."[30] In Emilie, Gutheim found a helpmate and partner in his dedication to the relief of human suffering.

Any biographical sketch or work related to Gutheim would be remiss without mentioning his political leanings during the Civil War. After nearly fifteen years in New Orleans, Gutheim considered himself a Southerner. He was an ardent supporter of the Confederacy, and his devotion to the South prompted him to refuse to take the oath of allegiance to the Union when General Butler entered New Orleans in 1862 which resulted in him leaving the city in 1863. On August 1, 1865, *The Occident* reported that Gutheim had returned to his post at Dispersed of Judah in New Orleans after a two-year absence.[31]

In 1868, following the epidemic of the previous year, Gutheim accepted a position at Temple Emanuel in New York.[32] While at Emanuel, he became engaged in the synagogue's reforms. Five years later, Gutheim left New York in order to return to his beloved New Orleans to become the rabbi at Temple Sinai, the first Reform synagogue in Louisiana, where he would remain until his death in 1886.[33]

Gutheim was a leader in the Jewish organizational life in New Orleans through his work with the Hebrew Relief Association and as a major supporter for the establishment and continued success of a Jewish hospital. Upon the death of Judah Touro and following the intense need presented by the recent epidemic, Gutheim began serving on the board of Touro Hospital upon its establishment in 1854. One of his crowning achievements as a leader in the New Orleans Jewish community was his assistance in

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[30] Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir of Temple Sinai,* 102.
[31] During the war and his time away from New Orleans he preached there and in Columbus, Georgia. Before returning to New Orleans, he was offered positions in Montgomery and San Francisco, both of which he declined *The Occident* (1 August 1865): 41.
[32] Shpall, 168.
[33] Ibid., 169.

establishing the Home for Jewish Widows and Orphans, which will be discussed below.[34] Gutheim was also an impressive civic figure as he served on the board of a number of organizations, including vice president of the school board of New Orleans for many years. He was active in endeavors related to the education of the city's children for the majority of his tenure in the city.

While his outstanding leadership in the New Orleans Jewish community is unquestioned, his rabbinic presence and the reach of his leadership was felt beyond the Crescent City and throughout the South. He was known as the Dean of Southern Jewry for his nearly forty years of service to the Jews of the South. On April 14, 1885, Gutheim was elected as the first president of the newly formed Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations with Rabbi Max Samfield serving as vice president.[35] In this role Gutheim served as the figurehead of Southern Jewish rabbis until his untimely death in 1886. At an emergency meeting following Gutheim's death, with Rabbi Max Samfield now serving as the organization's president, the group remarked that Gutheim was largely responsible for "the advancement of Judaism in the South."[36] In their conclusion, the small group led by Samfield suggested that they "recommend to our sister organizations throughout the Southern States that, as a mark of respect to our illustrious dead, their respective pulpits

[34] Heller, "Rev. James K. Gutheim," 4.

[35] Although the Union of American Hebrew Congregations and the Hebrew Union College were founded in 1873 and 1875 respectively, the Central Conference of American Rabbis would not be established until 1889. This delay was due in part to the establishment of two regional rabbinical conferences, one in the east and one in the south. Gutheim was a founding member of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations and remained its leader until his untimely death in 1886. The conference brought together rabbis from all over the South to discuss a variety of issues facing their congregations and to outline their goals and ideology. Gary Phillip Zola, "Southern Rabbis and The Founding of The First National Association of Rabbis," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 4 (1997): 353–72.

[36] Minute Book, Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations Minutes 1885–1887, SC-2435, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

be draped in mourning, during the next thirty days."[37] Their resolution signifies the deep respect Southern rabbis had for Gutheim and his leadership of Southern Jewry.

The Yellow Fever Epidemics of 1853, 1867, and 1878

Between 1852 and 1853, over twenty thousand immigrants from Germany and Ireland arrived in New Orleans.[38] The "Stranger's Disease," yellow fever, would visit nearly all of them by the end of the year.[39] Over the four plus months that the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 raged, approximately 40 percent of the city's 150,000 to 160,000 population developed the disease. Final numbers reported that between 8,000 and 16,000 people died from yellow fever during that time. According to Elizabeth Wisner, the yellow fever epidemic of 1853 "was considered the worst single epidemic to strike an American city."[40] It is estimated that over seven thousand of those who perished were recent immigrants to the area.[41]Among those seven thousand dead, were over a hundred Jews most from the Lafayette neighborhood, a poorer section of town, comprised primarily of recent immigrants.[42] *The Occident* reported that 117 Jews had been buried in the Shangarei Chesed cemetery, "the victims of the epidemic being mostly unacclimated foreigners."[43]

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[37] Ibid.
[38] Pierce and Writer, *Yellow Jack*, 48.
[39] According to Henry M. McKiven Jr., "A 1995 study of mortality during the epidemic supports the theory that newcomers, particularly European immigrants, were more susceptible to disease than longer-term residents." Henry M. McKiven Jr, "The Political Construction of a Natural Disaster: The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1853," *Journal of American History* 94, no. 3 (December 2007): 734–742. For more information regarding immigrants, yellow fever and mortality rates, see Jonathan B. Pritchett and Insan Tunali, "Strangers' Disease: Determinants of Yellow Fever Mortality during the New Orleans Epidemic of 1853," *Explorations in Economic History* 32 (Oct. 1995): 517–39.
[40] Wisner, "The Howard Association of New Orleans," 411.
[41] Pierce and Writer, *Yellow Jack*, 48–49.
[42] *The Occident* (1 September 1853): 329.
[43] *The Occident* (1 November 1853): 427.

With the next epidemic of yellow fever in 1858, the death toll reached just over one thousand by the end of August.[44] At its height, on September 3, "92 out of 120 deaths were caused by yellow fever.[45] As with most yellow fever epidemics of the time, the death toll declined as the days grew colder. Unfortunately for New Orleans the first frost did not arrive until November 3. The Louisiana Board of Health, however, held off until November 19th to declare the conclusion of the epidemic.[46] The epidemic raged in the city from July 18 through November 25, with the highest rate of death occurring between August 26 and September 19.[47] According to the Board of Health's report, 4,046 people died in New Orleans during the epidemic, and of that number, 2,344 of them were children.[48] The Hebrew Rest Cemetery records note that ninety-three persons were interred due to yellow fever between July 26th and November 24th of 1878.[49]

Gutheim's Approach to Spiritual Care

Upon his death, Gutheim was praised by Christians and Jews alike for his "heroic actions" during the epidemic of 1853 and the subsequent epidemics of 1867 and 1878.[50] Gutheim's "heroic actions" can be divided into two categories 1) pastoral care and 2) communal recovery and resilience. In terms of spiritual care, he addressed the needs of

[44] John H. Ellis, *Yellow Fever & Public Health,* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1992), 45.
[45] Ibid., 46.
[46] Ibid., 56.
[47] Ibid., 57.
[48] Ibid., 59.
[49] Touro Synagogue, "Death Records of the Hebrew Rest Cemetery July-November 1878," in Touro Synagogue Records, MF 221, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[50] Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir*, 28.

his community by ministering to the sick and giving sermons that acknowledged his congregants' anxiety and grief in the immediate aftermath of the epidemic. *The Occident* and *The American Israelite* provide contemporary accounts of Gutheim ministering to the sick and dying during the epidemics of 1853 and 1878.

Articles published in *The Occident* shed light on Gutheim's service and experience during the epidemic. *The Occident* was the primary source of Jewish news in 1853 and provides us with a picture of Jewish community and Gutheim's response to the epidemic. In an article published in September, the author notes that a large number of the Howards and physicians serving the city of New Orleans during the epidemic of 1853 were Jewish and that Guheim "had been seized with the yellow fever, but was recovering."[51] It is important to note that there were Jewish Howards, and that while Rabbi Gutheim remained well, he served alongside them.[52] Gutheim's first response to yellow fever was to remain at his post. By staying and ministering to the poor and sick in the neighborhood of Lafayette, he put himself in harm's way.[53]

In a letter to *The American Israelite*, a firsthand account of Gutheim's visit with the author and his son is given:

> Having myself been a sufferer from yellow fever, I can assert with confidence that our leading men acted nobly during this trial, and

[51] *The Occident* (1 September 1853): 329.
[52] Although it is possible that Gutheim was in fact a part of the Howard Association, his name is only listed as a financial contributor to the cause in the "Report of the Howard Association of New Orleans" from 1878. However, the structure of the Howards was such that there were a limited number of official members which could be supplemented by additional volunteers in times of need. This was likely the case with Gutheim. Howard Association, *Report of the Howard Association of New Orleans of Receipts, Expenditures, and Their Work in the Epidemic of 1878, with Names of Contributors, Etc.*, (New Orleans, LA: A.W. Hyatt, 1878), https://archive.org/details/9711174.nlm.nih.gov/page/n35.
[53] Heller, *Jubilee Souvenir*, 28.

> especially do I feel grateful to Rev. Dr. J. K. Gutheim and to Mr. E. J. Kursheedt, who visited myself and my little son daily during our illness and provided us with all comforts and necessities.[54]

Gutheim and Kursheedt, attended this man and his son going above and beyond their duties as Jewish leaders. They were not medical professionals and could provide little medical attention. However, the men could provide comfort and meaning in a time of uncertainty and loss. According to Howard Clinebell, rabbis and professionals "symbolize the dimension of ultimate meanings" and they "have valuable resources for responding to the spiritual needs awakened by crises and losses."[55] Gutheim's daily ministrations to this man and his family gave him comfort and hope in his time of need.

For the most part, during the yellow fever epidemic of 1853, Gutheim responded to the emotional suffering caused by the epidemic through his sermons. His Rosh Hashanah sermon provides us with a window into his pastoral response to yellow fever epidemics as he provides his congregants with the space to reflect on their anxieties regarding their mortality as well as on the losses they experienced in recent months.

At the beginning of his sermon, he describes the fear a mother experienced during the epidemic.

> Ask the modest, industrious mother—she too has tasted the cup of bitterness. Now it was the husband's care-worn brow, that filled her heart with grief: now it was the couch of sickness that claimed her attention and chased away the sweet slumbers from the anxiously wakeful maternal eye; again it was an apprehensive foreboding conceding the happiness and

[54] "Letter to the Editor 1," *The American Israelite* (1 November 1878): 2.
[55] Clinebell and McKeever, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care & Counseling*, 120.

> welfare of her dear offspring, that disturbed the sympathies and affections of her maternal bosom.[56]

This unknown woman's fears are reminiscent of emotions felt by Temple Sinai members leading up to and during the epidemic. By lifting up their anxieties, Gutheim acknowledges the very real crisis so many of his congregants faced and validates their emotions. This is the first step he takes to walk them along the path of acknowledging their loss and providing comfort in the wake of collective crisis and grief.

After framing their experience of fear, Gutheim encourages his congregants to acknowledge both their personal and communal losses by asking them to reflect on those who were not standing next to them, those who had died in the recent days of the epidemic. In doing so, he forces his congregation to acknowledge their individual loss and to see the larger impact of the collective crisis and the grief that it caused.

> Look around you, among the circle of your relatives, friends, and acquaintances! Many a one has been called from the stage of this life…many a one has, within the year just past, entered his eternal home…For the destroyer, with sword unsheathed, entered our walls, and death, mourning, and desolation marked his appalling presence.

Gutheim then recognizes survivors and the gratitude associated with surviving a traumatic experience.

> And those who were brought near to the gates of death and are safely returned, and those who were exempt from the effects of this awful

[56]James K. Gutheim, "The Past and Future: A Sermon by Rev. J. K. Gutheim, of New Orleans, Delivered on the Second Evening of Rosh Hashanah, 5614 (Oct. 3)," *Occident* (1 November 1853): 21.

> visitation; —we all, who have thus been spared, stand here as monuments of the mercy of God, and gratefully acknowledge his goodness.

The sense of thankfulness he espouses is tied to God's ability to be merciful to human beings. His words impress upon his congregants the need to give thanks to God for their survival. While Gutheim recognizes God's mercy in sparing himself and others, he does not engage with the question of why bad things happen to good people or the issue of survivor's guilt. Gutheim's approach to pastoral care in this moment is a matter of lifting up emotions and experiences and acknowledging them.

Gutheim shifts his focus from the emotions his congregants were feeling to the channeling of that emotion into action. Empathy could propel individuals to provide care and comfort to the sick and bereaved. He writes that "if a brother is afflicted, we shall hasten to his relief; we shall soothe the pain of the sufferer and dry the tear of the mourner."[57] He suggests that his congregants actions must not be limited to ministering to the sick and comforting the mourner. This moment of collective grief and loss, he insists, must not be forgotten and instead should drive the community to work towards a greater good not only in this moment but long after the epidemic has past:

> But shall the dangers and scenes we have passed, shall the examples we have witnessed of our common lot, which is certain to one day overtake every mortal, fade away from our memory without effect, without lasting

[57] James K. Gutheim, "The Past and Future: A Sermon by Rev. J. K. Gutheim, of New Orleans, Delivered on the Second Evening of Rosh Hashanah, 5614 (Oct. 3)," *Occident* (1 November 1853): 21.

benefit? Should the recollection of these not rather afford us a new stimulus to work for our true welfare?[58]

Gutheim's words prompt his listeners to ask how the memory of this tragedy could lead to them to create a better world and to bring meaning to the horrible events that had transpired. Although he does not explain what he means by working "for our true welfare," he appears to point towards the betterment of the world and the legacy of the yellow fever epidemic of 1853.

Although we do not have examples of Gutheim's sermons during the epidemics of 1867 or 1878, we do have newspapers which report on Gutheim's care for his flock and the impact his High Holy Day services had on his congregation. Rosh Hashanah of 1878 fell on the 27th of September with Yom Kippur beginning on October 7.[59] The holidays arrived just after the peak of the epidemic, meaning that it was possible that those who contracted the disease earlier in the summer and survived would be attending services as had also been the case in 1853. A letter to the editor of *The American Israelite* describes the scene at Temple Sinai on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. He particularly notes the absence of the sexton or shamas, A. Weil, and how tired and haggard Gutheim appeared. On Rosh Hashanah "at Temple Sinai the attendance was considerable, many mourners were to be seen, the loss of that good and active Shamas, Mr. A. Weil, was noticeable on entering the edifice. Rev. Mr. Gutheim, though nearly exhausted from his labors during the epidemic, still officiated the whole day with exception of a recess."[60]

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[58] Ibid.

[59] https://www.hebcal.com/hebcal/?year=5639&month=x&yt=H&v=1&nh=on&s=on&lg=s&vis=on&D=on&d=on&c=off.

[60] "Letter to the Editor 1," *The American Israelite* (1 November 1878): 2.

Gutheim was dedicated in his service to his congregants in their personal time of need during the epidemic. Based on the previous account, the rabbi pushed himself to his limits to ensure he could be present at the bedside of those who needed him while also presiding over and leading the most important services of the year in the midst of the epidemic.

In another editorial, from *The American Israelite*, we encounter a description of Gutheim's Yom Kippur service which demonstrates his continued devotion to pastoral care as well as how the Yizkor (memorial) service impacted his congregation.

> The holidays were observed very religiously at all the synagogues and temples—Yom Kippur especially so. At the Temple the Rev. Jas. K. Gutheim, although very fatigued from his incessant labors, going around as he has day after day ministering to the wants of the sick and needy and, in fact, doing all in his power to relieve their suffering; nevertheless he conducted services in his usual solemn and impressive manner. His prayer for the dead on Yom Kippur was so affecting that it drew tears from the entire Congregation.[61]

During the High Holy Days Gutheim addressed the diverse needs of his congregants. Firstly, he continued to visit the sick in order to provide them with pastoral care during the "impact phase" of their trauma. The impact phrase is understood as the onset of a disaster or event which continues until the physical or emotional damage has concluded.[62] At the same time, he addressed the needs of his congregants who had survived the epidemic and who were processing their losses and experiences in the "short

[61] E. Weil, "New Orleans Letter: Death List," *The American Israelite* (18 October 1878): 2.
[62] H. G. Koenig, *In the Wake of Disaster: Religious Responses to Terrorism & Catastrophe* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2006), 1.

term aftermath phase," meaning that they were just beginning to "recognize the implications" of the events of the epidemic and their need for communal support.[63] It is at this point that Gutheim is able to guide his congregants to start to grieve their loss and to begin to attribute meaning to their experiences.[64] Yizkor in itself provides a framework for individuals to acknowledge and to continue to process their grief years after a loved one has died. In this case, Gutheim utilized the rituals associated with Yizkor to help his congregants to process their recent personal and communal grief. By ministering to the sick, writing sermons, and officiating services, Gutheim sought to meet the needs of his congregants and help them to begin to process their individual and communal trauma.

Gutheim's Communal Relief Efforts

Gutheim worked in tandem with other community leaders and organizations to provide emergency relief and to address long-term challenges caused by yellow fever epidemics in the 19th century. He contributed to community recovery through infrastructure development, rabbinic supervision, and fundraising. Gutheim directly contributed to short term and long-term solutions establishing a precedent for future rabbinic responses to epidemics and natural disasters.

A major factor in Gutheim's impact on the relief and recovery efforts of the Jewish community was his involvement in a number of organizations that participated in emergency relief efforts. Their initial efforts prompted further infrastructure development. Gutheim served as a board member or founder for the following organizations which helped in the emergency relief and later recovery efforts for the

[63] Ibid., 2.
[64] Ibid.

Jewish community during the yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans between 1853 and 1878: the Hebrew Relief Board and the Hebrew Benevolent Association, Touro Infirmary, and the Hebrew Widows and Orphans Home.

During the epidemic of 1853, Gutheim was an active member of the Hebrew Relief Board. In a speech delivered in 1855, Gutheim noted the impact that the Hebrew Benevolent Association had on the Jewish community, "many a poor pilgrim, stricken down with disease far from his home and kindred, has received at its hands that aid and sympathy which, under Providence, snatched him from the portals of death, or, at least, soothed the last solemn hours of his life."[65] As part of the organizations' relief efforts, he recalled how $4,500 was spent to care for the sick and poor.[66]

Gutheim's work with the Hebrew Relief Association spurred him to address the immediate and long-term consequences of yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans. He sought to establish communal resiliency by erecting institutions which would enable long-term relief security for the community's orphans and widows. In an address given at the laying of the cornerstone of the Home for Jewish Widows and Orphans, Gutheim reminded his audience of the importance of infrastructure building and thinking of long-term exigencies, "it cannot be overlooked that the relief granted by [many] charities is only of a temporary character; and yet there is a class of unfortunate beings among us who…demand our permanent support and protection."[67] He was devoted to charitable causes that fulfilled the needs of the community not only in moments of crises but for the long term.

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[65]James K. Gutheim, "Address Delivered at the Laying of the Corner-stone of the Home for Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans, August 7th, 1855 by Rev. James K. Gutheim," *Occident*, 10 January 1855, 9.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Ibid.

A large part of his plan for the future rebuilding of the New Orleans Jewish community relied upon the establishment of the Home for Jewish Widows and Orphans. From 1844 until 1855, the Hebrew Benevolent Association supported the widows and orphans of New Orleans. However, with the overwhelming number of women and children now dependent on the Jewish community following the epidemic of 1853, the city's Jews were forced to establish a new institution which would serve their needs. Gutheim was one of 17 individuals who proposed and later established the New Orleans Hebrew Widows and Orphans Home, which was the first of its kind. The Home provided food, shelter, as well as secular and Jewish education for orphans until 1946.[68] Gutheim served the institution for thirty years and held positions on the board including secretary and first vice president. Additionally, he acted as the Home's first Hebrew and Judaics teacher while also serving as the chairman of the Education Committee and providing rabbinic supervision over admissions.[69]

Part of his rabbinical responsibilities on the board of the Association for the Relief of the Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans was to approve new candidates for the home. This task became all the more important during the recovery of the Jewish community in the days and weeks following a yellow fever epidemic, since

[68] Marlene Trestman, "Religious Education in New Orleans's Jewish Orphans' Home (1856–1946)," paper presented at the Southern Jewish History Society conference on November 4, 2017, Cincinnati, OH, 5. My thanks to Marlene for letting me cite from her work.

[69] A number of term papers, academic presentations and books have been written which address the founding, running and later closure of the Home which include Arthur Bielfeld, "A Study of the Home for Widows and Orphans of New Orleans Taken from the Minutes of the Meetings of the Association, 1855–1884," Term Paper, 1962, SC-8877, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; Steven M. Gross, "The Early Development of Jewish Orphanages in the United States: A Study of Three Jewish Orphanages," Term Paper, 1994, SC-14038, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; Solomon T. Greenberg, "The Care of Jewish Orphans in New Orleans in the Second Half of the 19th Century," 1964 Term Paper, HUC-JIR, SC-8869, AJA, Cincinnati, OH; Trestman, "Religious Education in New Orleans's Jewish Orphans' Home, 5; Caroline E. Light, *That Pride of Race and Character: The Roots of Jewish Benevolence in the Jim Crow South* (New York: New York University Press, 2014).

Gutheim served as a gatekeeper for the home by suggesting and approving candidates based on whether or not they were Jewish.[70]

For example, following the epidemic of 1867, there was an appeal found in the Board Minute Books of the Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans of a widow asking that her children—four under the age of 10—be permitted to enter into the Home. Their father, David Jacob, died during the epidemic. Gutheim, in his report, recommended their admission, meaning that he affirmed that the family was Jewish and could be admitted halachically.[71]

Again, in 1878, Gutheim sought admission to the Home of "several children who had been made orphans by the epidemic."[72] Over the course of the year of 1878, 45 children were admitted to the home, most likely due to yellow fever deaths in New Orleans and in Memphis.[73] The annual meeting of the board included a report given by the president of the association describing the impact of the epidemic on the home. In the report he states "that in spite of all precautions the yellow fever invaded the Home. However, of the thirty-five children attacked but two died. The Home sustained a heavy loss in the death of Mrs. Mary Shoenberg, who fell ill only after she had rendered faithful service in the discharge of the onerous duties that fell upon her at such time."[74] For the

[70] Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans, Board Meeting Minutes, January 1857, as found in Notes Compiled by Marlene Trestman-Selected Excerpts Related to James K. Gutheim, 8.
[71] Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans, Board Meeting Minutes, November 5, 1867, as found in Notes Compiled by Marlene Trestman-Selected Excerpts Related to James K. Gutheim, 18-19.
[72] Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans, Board Meeting Minutes, October 27, 1878, as found in Notes Compiled by Marlene Trestman-Selected Excerpts Related to James K. Gutheim, 39.
[73] "Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans of New Orleans," *The American Israelite* (16 May 1879): 4.
[74] Ibid.

first time, in the history of the home, yellow fever had claimed some of their own, those taken in after their parents had died of the dreadful disease.

In 1879, a year after yellow fever claimed a handful of inmates and one of the caretakers, Gutheim was elected as the first Vice President of the Home.[75] Undoubtedly, as the religious leader and teacher for the Home, Gutheim would have been moved by the tragic deaths that befell some of the residents the year before. By taking on this role in the Home, Gutheim continued to respond to the emotional and institutional trauma left in the wake of the epidemic.

He also contributed to the long-term strength of the community through his fundraising efforts which provided monetary relief to organizations and individuals. During the epidemic of 1853, the Jewish community of New Orleans largely took care of emergency and recovery efforts itself. Although *The Occident* records names of the deceased and provides an overall report of the epidemic, it does not catalogue national contributions for the relief of the Jewish community. However, by 1867, systems were in place, through *The American Israelite* and B'nai B'rith, which enabled Gutheim to appeal for funds for the relief of the city's Jews nationwide. In 1867 and 1878, in particular, he spent a significant portion of his time working with pre-existing organizations and networks to meet the needs of the community.

The summer of 1867 brought with it another disastrous yellow fever epidemic, the first in nearly ten years (a small one having occurred in 1858).[76] The number of yellow

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[75] "Out of Town: Galveston, Texas, Augusta, GA. Milwaukee, Wis…" *The Jewish Messenger* (4 April 1879): 2.

[76] Louisiana Office of Public Health, "Yellow Fever," in *Infectious Disease Epidemiology Annual Report* (1934): 1-7, http://ldh.la.gov/assets/oph/Center-PHCH/Center-CH/infectious-epi/Annuals/LaIDAnnual_YellowFever.pdf, 3.

fever deaths in the city skyrocketed in the city to over 3,000 in a short period of time.[77] According to the Hebrew Rest Cemetery Records, there were at least 81 interments with the cause of death listed as yellow fever in that year,[78] and the occupants of the Home increased from fifty-four to eighty-six between 1866 and 1867.[79]

For the first few weeks and early months of a yellow fever outbreak the majority of funds and charitable work were gathered and performed by local Jewish organizations in New Orleans. However, once the death toll rose to a epidemic levels, and the economic situation worsened, outside sources of assistance were sought through the auspices of B'nai B'rith as well as *the American Israelite*. B'nai B'rith Lodge No. 7, in particular, became increasingly active in the latter half of the nineteenth century in securing funds for the relief of the Jewish community of New Orleans to supply emergency relief funds for the recovery effort in the wake of the epidemic. Rabbi Gutheim was the initial recipient for all funds received for the city. He remained the point person for all donations sent to the city of New Orleans from B'nai B'rith chapters and from individuals and Jewish communities all over the country during both the 1867 and 1878 epidemics.

In September of 1867, a number of letters were sent on behalf of the Jewish community in New Orleans under the auspices of a newly formed executive committee established by the main B'nai B'rith lodge in New York. This committee was known as the Office of the Executive Committee in aid of the Widows & Orphans, the Sick, the Poor, and Destitute Israelites of New Orleans, LA. Solomon Marx, the secretary of the

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[77] Ibid.
[78] Touro Synagogue, "Death Records of the Hebrew Rest Cemetery July-November 1878," in Touro Synagogue Records, MF 221, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[79] Greenberg, "The Care of Jewish Orphans in New Orleans," 5.

Executive Committee states in a letter dated September 23, 1867, that "the yellow fever in its most epidemic form has again become the plague of its inhabitants." He goes on to say that many "Israelites and those who have lately made their domicile there" have been affected. Marx continues to recount the plight of the Widows and Orphans Home and how it is "filled to such an extent that no more room is left for any additional number." Marx indicates the dire financial situation of New Orleans' Jewish charitable organizations by saying that "the funds of the Hebrew Benevolent Association, and all other charitable institutions are exhausted." At the same time he reports that "the School Rooms of the Hebrew Educational Society have been converted into a hospital."[80] Furthermore, those Jewish individuals who have not taken sick "are engaged day and night to attend the sick and the dying" allowing little to no time for them to appeal to others for assistance whether for financial aid or for volunteers.[81] The letter finally appeals to affluent Jews and begs them to send donations which will then be forwarded to Rev. James K. Gutheim.

A day later, another letter from the Constitution Grand Lodge in New York appealed to B'nai B'rith members around the United States for funds for the community of New Orleans, citing the unceasing work of the Howard and charitable Associations serving the city and Jewish community. Two days later, a letter was sent to Solomon Marx "conforming to a call of Rev. Mr. James K. Gutheim" sending the Executive Committee $4,500 to be apportioned to the various Jewish organizations in the city. Other letters like this one appear in the records of B'nai B'rith showing true concern and concern for the lives of Jews in the South. Not only did Jews around the country reply

[80] Letter from Salomon Marx, 24 September 1867, Salomon Marx Correspondence, 1867, SC-7879, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[81] Ibid.

with great speed, they also responded with generosity and kindness for the sake of their co-religionists.

During each epidemic, Gutheim provided pastoral care to the Jews of New Orleans. Although he was only performing the duty he was obligated to perform his duty as a rabbi, namely by fulfilling the mitzvah of bikur cholim (visiting the sick), he went above and beyond in his call to duty, risking his life to care for his community. Gutheim's long-term response to the epidemics centered on the establishment and running of Jewish institutions that would provide security and resiliency to the community during future epidemics. Such infrastructure development, including the establishment of the Home, necessitated his rabbinic supervision. Finally, as national means of fundraising developed, Gutheim worked within these channels to ensure that there were funds to support the struggling organizations of New Orleans while guaranteeing that new Jewish widows and orphans were sufficiently cared for by the community.

Although his fame as an orator proceeded him, the true value of his rabbinate was not to be found in his words alone, but through his actions in response to yellow fever epidemics in the late nineteenth century. Gutheim could have easily left the challenges of New Orleans with its yearly bouts of yellow fever to go to San Francisco or to remain in New York at Temple Emanuel, but he did not. He remained with his beloved people and his beloved city. Through his service to the community in pastoral care and leadership, he became a major force in the Jewish response to yellow fever epidemics in the nineteenth century.

"The Small Man with a Large Heart:" Rabbi Max Samfield and the Yellow Fever Epidemics of 1873 and 1878

> Brethren of the Congregation B'nai Israel, I am now yours. The vigor of my youth, the faculties of my soul, the energies of my mind; nay, my very life, I consecrate to your moral welfare and the welfare of Judaism and humanity...I will share your joys and your sorrows; your children shall be my children. Let us be a band of brothers who, without contention, strive to secure peace as the greatest blessing here on earth and eternal salvation as their reward in the world beyond.[82]

Rabbi Max Samfield's words inaugurating his long and successful career as the rabbi of Temple Israel in Memphis characterize his dedication to the care of all human beings and to Jews in particular. In his first few years in Memphis, Samfield would put his words to the test, risking his life to care for his congregation and all those whom he encountered. For the rest of his life, Rabbi Samfield would share in the joys and the deepest sorrows of his congregation, especially during the fateful yellow fever epidemics of Memphis in 1873 and 1878. Samfield served as a major force in the emergency response and recovery efforts during and after the epidemic of 1873, and exclusively in the recovery efforts of 1878. By responding to the impact and short-term aftermath phases of trauma caused by the yellow fever epidemics in Memphis, Samfield made an indelible mark on the city and its Jewish community.

Brief Biography of Samfield

[82] Judy G. Ringel, *Children of Israel: the story of Temple Israel, Memphis, Tennessee, 1854–2004* (Memphis, TN: Temple Israel Books, 2004), 18.

Max Samfield was born in Bavaria on January 23, 1844. His father was an ordained rabbi, but never practiced the profession. Instead, he passed his teacher's exams and was a public school teacher for nearly forty years. Due to his father's diligent teaching, Samfield began an intense course of rabbinic study in Talmud and Jewish texts at age 12. He continued his Judaic studies training until entering Julius University where he studied philosophy. Concurrently, he studied rabbinics under Rabbi S. Seligman Baer Bamberger in Wurzburg.[83]

Samfield immigrated to the United States in 1867 where he soon heeded the call to serve Congregation B'nai Zion of Shreveport, LA. He quickly learned English, began to build his congregation, and became a serious advocate for reform. After the Shreveport synagogue building was completed, he instituted the use of Isaac M. Wise's prayer book, *Minhag America*. As part of his efforts to enact reforms, Samfield instituted the confirmation service for young persons in his religious school. His work in this area was recognized by Jews and Christians alike.[84]

In 1870, Rabbi Simon Tuska of Temple Israel in Memphis died of a heart attack, forcing the congregation to search for his replacement. By February 1871, the synagogue advertised for a new leader in *The American Israelite* and *The Jewish Times* (New York). By this time, the synagogue had transitioned from orthodoxy to reform and was interested in a candidate who could continue guiding them on this path. On June 18, 1871, Rabbi Max Samfield was elected to be their new religious leader. His experience as a reformer

[83] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," in *Memorial Volume to Rabbi Max Samfield of The Jewish Spectator,* SC-8210x, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[84] Ibid.

in Shreveport provided Temple Israel with the leadership it needed to continue with further reforms.[85]

When he arrived in Memphis, the Jews of the city were still much divided along religious lines. Samfield made it his goal to bring the community together.[86] Within a year, the synagogue's membership doubled; he established a "Sabbath School;" and convinced the congregation to build a new temple.[87] Temple Israel initially only hired Samfield for one year, but he went on to serve the synagogue and the Jewish community of Memphis for over forty years.

In addition to building up the congregation's membership and bringing the fragmented Jewish community of Memphis together, Samfield also assisted other more rural Jewish communities to establish synagogues and religious schools. He dedicated cornerstones for newly established synagogues in Natchez, Miss., Little Rock, Ark., Greenville, Miss., and Jackson, Tenn., among others.[88] Additionally, he was an active member of District No. 19 of the Synagogue and School Extension Department of the American Hebrew Congregations where he helped to establish religious schools in the region beginning around the turn of the century.[89]

Although he was devoted to his congregation and to Jews in the region, Samfield was also dedicated to his family. In 1873, two years after taking up his post at Temple Israel, Samfield married Pauline Frank.[90] The couple had been married for only a short time prior to the 1873 yellow fever epidemic and only a little over five years before the

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[85] Ringel, *Children of Israel*, 17.
[86] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 13.
[87] "A Man of Dreams: Rabbi Max Samfield," 1915, Nearprint, Samfield, Max, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[88] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.
[89] Ibid., 13.
[90] "Memphian at 100 Recalls the Days of Yellow Fever," *The Commercial Appeal* (1954), Temple Israel Archives, Memphis, TN.

epidemic of 1878. Over the course of their nearly forty years together, they had four sons: Lawrence, Marcus, Samuel, and Joseph and three daughters Helene, Rosiland and Lelia.[91] In addition, the Samfields took in two orphans.[92]

Samfield was intensely committed to the pursuit of charity and social justice. He was involved in nearly every Jewish charitable organization in the South and beyond. He was one of the founders of the Hebrew Relief Association prior to the epidemic of 1873, and in the 1880s he helped found the Young Men's Hebrew Association of Memphis. Later he was elected as the first vice-president of the Federation of Jewish Charities of Memphis and as a trustee of the New Orleans Jewish Widow and Orphans Home.[93] Samfield also served on the board of the Jewish Hospital for Consumptives in Denver and was a member of the Hebrew Sheltering and Immigrant Aid Society of New York.[94] His charitable work, however, was never limited to the Jewish community alone as he was one of the founders of the Tennessee Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and Children in addition to the United Charities of Memphis. Furthermore, he was one of the organizers and members of the board for the Memphis Howard Association in favor of prison reform.[95] His leadership roles also included serving on the board of governors of the Hebrew Union College and as the Vice President and later President of the Conference of Southern Rabbis.[96]

Samfield was beloved by Jews and non-Jews alike in Memphis and around the South. After forty years of service to the congregation, on May 8, 1910, Temple Israel of

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[91] "Profile of Rabbi Max Samfield, PhD Spiritual Leader of Congregation Children of Israel 1871-1915," Temple Israel Archives, Memphis, TN. http://www.timemphis.org/sites/default/files/Samfield_0.pdf
[92] "A Man of Dreams: Rabbi Max Samfield," 1915, Nearprint, Samfield, Max, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[93] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.
[94] "Dr. Samfield Dead," *The American Israelite* (30 Sep 1915).
[95] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.
[96] "Dr. Samfield Dead."

Memphis elected Samfield to be their rabbi for life.[97] Upon his death on September 28, 1915, the date on which he was supposed to retire, the Jewish and civic communities of Memphis lauded his service to the city.[98] According to the *Memphis Herald,* there was "no man [who] was better known, none stood so high in the affections of the people. While he was the leader of the Jews, he was equally the leader among the Gentiles."[99]

Dr. Benjamin Cox, a Baptist minister in Memphis, gave a eulogy for Samfield from his pulpit at Central Baptist Church on Sunday, October 3, 1915. In his address he acknowledged their friendship as fellow clergy and paid tribute to Samfield for his service to the city over the course of his career and especially during the yellow fever epidemic of 1873:

> A few days ago Memphis lost one of her very greatest men, and it is fitting, I think, that we pay a tribute of respect to his memory this morning. I had the pleasure of meeting Rabbi Samfield when I first came to Memphis. It was very appropriate that the great temple in which he ministered for so many years and the nearby streets should be thronged with people when the simple little coffin was carried in…Though he was small in body he impressed me as being a giant in brain and heart. True greatness has always shown itself in service. Rabbi Samfield will be best remembered because he lived so much for others. The spirit he showed during the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis, when he ministered to Jew and Gentile alike, characterized his entire ministry, and was the secret to

[97] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 13.
[98] Ibid. .
[99] "Memphis Herald,"" in *Memorial Volume to Rabbi Max Samfield of The Jewish Spectator,* SC-8210x, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 19.

his success. I feel very thankful for having had the friendship of such a man.[100]

Cox's speech gives us a glimpse into Samfield's spirit and devotion and demonstrates his impact on the overall response to the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis in 1873. Samfield's dedication to service during and after the yellow fever epidemics of the 19th century which so devastated the city, is recalled by Jewish and Christian clergy alike. He, like Gutheim, lived to serve others, to be there with them in their joys and their sorrows, and to ensure the protection of the most vulnerable of his city. Samfield's character was defined by his devotion to charity and service to his entire community, Jewish or otherwise, over the course of his life. However, Samfield is best remembered not for his charitable spirit in general but for his role in the emergency relief and recovery efforts during and after the yellow fever epidemic that plagued Memphis in 1873. He addressed the immediate and long term emotional and spiritual needs of his community by ministering to the sick and addressing their grief through eulogies. Although his responses to the epidemics of 1878 and 1879 in Memphis were less consequential, as he was only present for the recovery efforts following the epidemics occurring in those years, this work seeks to correct, in part, the historical record which supposes Samfield's presence during the aforesaid epidemics.

[100] "Eulogize Dr. Samfield: Baptist Minister Says Rabbi Will Be Long Remembered," in *Memorial Volume to Rabbi Max Samfield of The Jewish Spectator,* SC-8210x, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 16.

Memphis and the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1873

Memphis experienced two minor epidemics (minor in comparison to the ones that followed) in 1855, which resulted in the deaths of 220 individuals, and 1867, which killed 595 people.[101] In 1855, a chapter of the Howard Association was formed to help with the relief efforts, which would provide well needed aid during all future epidemics.[102]

On the heels of the Civil War and in the midst of Reconstruction, Memphis was in near financial ruin. This led to gross oversight by the leaders of the city who continuously ignored the threat of an impending epidemic. During the 1870s, the city's streets were littered with garbage while sewage was being dumped into the Mississippi River and into the bayous downtown, specifically Bayou Gayoso.[103] The summer of 1873 brought with it multiple diseases which wreaked havoc on the city. Although cholera and smallpox played a role in the pestilence scouring the city, yellow fever was the most deadly. The epidemic raged between mid-September and early November. In that nearly two-month period, five thousand cases of yellow fever were reported, and out of five thousand, more than two thousand died.[104]

The Jewish community, primarily made up of recent Central European immigrants, was hit especially hard. Like in New Orleans, many of them did not have the funds to flee the city, and were therefore forced to remain, knowing they would more than likely contract the fever. During the epidemic 51 Jews were buried in Temple Israel's cemetery which was double the number of interments which usually took place

[101] Ringel, *Children of Israel*, 18.
[102] Pierce and Writer, *Yellow Jack*, 68.
[103] Ringel, *Children of Israel*, 18.
[104] Ibid., 18.

over the course of one year. The Orthodox cemetery, run by Beth El-Emeth, counted 43 internments due to yellow fever. In total 23 children were orphaned, 17 children perished, 31 were widowed, 11 became widowers, and 158 children lost at least one parent.[105] The epidemic devastated the city of Memphis and its Jewish community.

Samfield's Response to Emotional and Psychological Suffering

In the communal memory of Memphis, Samfield's legacy is tied to yellow fever. Still today, one may pass through the Pink Palace Museum in Memphis and see Samfield's picture hanging up in the Yellow Fever exhibit which lauds his courage and perseverance during the scourge of 1873. He, like Gutheim, was a leader of his entire community and an example of how clergy could and should respond to calamity; with deep devotion to the well-being of all individuals, dedication to the cultivation of institutions for the immediate and future challenges posed by the disaster at hand, as well as the cultivation of connections with those around the country who could help to provide aid. Gutheim set the stage by working with B'nai B'rith to form lines of communication and fundraising which provided funds for desperately needed supplies, medicine, and aid, in addition to helping to establish the Jewish Widows and Orphans Home which would go on to serve the orphans of Memphis' yellow fever epidemics. Samfield, unlike Gutheim, would respond to epidemics within the framework of the institutions and systems of fundraising established by Gutheim years earlier. Samfield, for the most part, provided desperately needed emotional and spiritual support as a rabbi and religious leader to Jews and Christians alike. In addition, he provided emergency relief through his work with the

[105] Ibid., 19–20.

Howard Association by visiting the sick and dying and providing medicine, doctors, and nurses to those in need.

While many of his co-religionists fled the city of Memphis in 1873, during one of the city's most devastating yellow fever epidemics, Rabbi Samfield stayed to faithfully serve the Jewish and larger civic communities.[106] Time and again, from newspaper articles and testimonies during and following the epidemic, we uncover a man tirelessly serving his community remaining in Memphis to serve all people. Not only did Samfield stay, but he provided aid and emotional support to all those afflicted with the fever, not only members of his own community. The memorial volume of *The Jewish Spectator* recalls that Samfield was utterly devoted to attending "to the sick and destitute," and that he was constant in his "services to the dead and dying regardless of creed, sex or race, with the most sublime forgetfulness of self."[107]

The majority of Samfield's emergency response to the epidemic of 1873 consisted of visiting the sick and burying the dead. In these moments, Samfield provided pastoral care for those in need. He worked alongside A.E. Frankland as part of the Hebrew Relief Association and B'nai B'rith. Frankland was an important lay leader in the Memphis Jewish community and was a past president of Temple Israel.[108] At the time, he served as the president of the Hebrew Relief Association, the Grand Nasi of the Memphis B'nai B'rith Lodge, in addition to serving on the Memphis Citizen's Relief Committee. Following the epidemic, Frankland recorded the events in a memoir as well as in a report to B'nai B'rith. His memoir and papers pertaining to the epidemic of 1873 are an

[106] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Ringel, *Children of Israel*, 19.

invaluable resource for understanding the impact the epidemic had on the Jewish community and on Rabbi Samfield's role and response during and after the epidemic.[109]

In Frankland's memoir and report to B'nai B'rith, Samfield's name appears a number of times always in reference to his response to the emotional and spiritual suffering of the community. In his report sent to all B'nai B'rith lodges, Frankland recalls Samfield praying with congregants on their deathbed and his officiation of funerals day and night throughout the epidemic:

> Praise, thanks, appreciation are so many useless phrases that he, the little man with the great, large heart, would scorn to receive them. He, above all others, that visited the poor and lowly, sick and destitute... who repeated the 'Shema' for the last time with the dying, and stood at the grave and recited the burial service at every funeral of man, woman, and child in his own Congregational cemetery, and among all the sick Israelites of the other. He was indeed everywhere; rain or shine, heat or cold, day or night, Reverend Max Samfield was there.[110]

In addition to ministering at the bedsides of the poor, sick and dying of the city during the epidemic, Samfield also officiated funerals at the Jewish cemetery for Reform and Orthodox Jews. This is a remarkable feat as only a few years earlier, the two groups were deeply divided and would likely never have allowed a reformer to officiate at their congregants' funerals. With the high number of Jewish dead, Samfield spent many days

[109] A.E. Frankland, Report of A.E. Frankland...on the Yellow Fever Epidemic in Memphis, Tenn., 1873, (Price, Jones & Co., Memphis, TN: 1873) 7.
[110] Ibid.

and nights remaining at the cemetery "from one sunrise to another" with many burials being done by torchlight.[111]

The Memphis Appeal, in an issue from 1873, recounts not only the desperate situation the Jews of Memphis faced, but also acknowledges Samfield's moving words at a series of three funerals in one day, following the conclusion of Shabbat. The final words of the article reflect the intense sorrow facing everyone in the city of Memphis, and how Samfield was able to bring them comfort:

> The epidemic which for the past three weeks has been raging in our midst has been noticeably felt among the Israelites of our city. Many of their families have been visited by the scourge, and their sorrow is great. Last evening a most solemn scene was witnessed at their burial ground on Bass avenue. It was the occasion of the burial of three of their faith, citizens of our once happy city…All these had died of the yellow fever yesterday morning, but it being the Jewish Sabbath, they were not interned until the night after the ending of their Sabbath…By the faint light of a lantern, Rabbi Samfield, in a most feeling and solemn manner, read the burial service. It was a sight never to be forgotten. The prayers of the noble rabbi, who has during all the sickness nobly and faithfully performed the duties of his office, not alone to those of his faith, but in the hut of the lowly infected district has he daily given succor and consolation to all, regardless of their creed—met a heartfelt response to the breasts of those present; and as the cold sod fell on the rude coffins a prayer was uttered

[111] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.

that our affliction might end, for our cup of sorrow was filled to overflowing.[112]

Samfield's heartfelt devotion to all human life shines forth from this and every other testimony regarding his leadership during the epidemic of 1873. His presence, his words, and his ability to attend to those who needed him, made him indispensable for the Jewish and larger civic communities of Memphis.

He was known as an accomplished orator who delivered addresses and sermons to nearly every organization in the city of Memphis.[113] During the epidemic of 1873, Samfield gave many lectures for large audiences in order to raise money for the Masonic Relief Board, which benefited yellow fever sufferers. One of the speeches he gave during this period includes a eulogy given at the B'nai B'rith Lodge of Sorrow memorializing a number of the chapter's members who had died during the epidemic.[114] The eulogy provides us with a window into Samfield's approach to pastoral care.

In his eulogy, Samfield recalls the dying words of a woman he attended during the epidemic. He quotes the woman as saying, "I know now what the change from life to death is, and I am now convinced that the mercy of God makes it easy. My feelings and sensations are confused and disturbed, and pain and suffering are not felt."[115] By repeating the words of dying woman, he acknowledges his audience's recent brush with death, while also pointing to their own confusion and numbness during and even now after the conclusion of the epidemic.

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[112] Ibid., 14.
[113] "A Man of Dreams,"Memorial volume to Rabbi Max Samfield of the Jewish Spectator, in *Memorial Volume to Rabbi Max Samfield of The Jewish Spectator,* SC-8210x, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 13.
[114] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.
[115] Max Samfield, "Eulogy Delivered at the Lodge of Sorrow, I.O.B.B., Memphis, Tenn. by Rev. M. Samfield," *The Israelite* (6 February 1874): 4.

He continues saying that "while the yellow fever raged in its fury, our thoughts and feelings too were confused and disturbed; we were unable to pause at the corpse of a fallen brother, or to reflect what calamity had befallen the family of the departed, what loss society had sustained in general, and the Benai Berith [*sic*] in particular."[116] Unlike Gutheim, Samfield focuses on confusion and emotional disturbance. Moreover, Samfield notes the need for continuous action, noting the importance of deferring the pain of loss for a later time. Samfield along with other members of B'nai B'rith, those who survived and those who perished, experienced the need to keep moving and serving the needs of the ill and dying regardless of their own emotional states. Seventeen members of B'nai B'rith died during the epidemic, but at this very moment, however, he stands amongst his brethren in B'nai B'rith, and with the families of those whom they have lost pausing to acknowledge their intense pain.[117]

Samfield then turns his attention to recognizing the overwhelming sense of grief in the community. He calls to mind the sorrow of all those present through the words of the Psalmist, "By the rivers of Babylon we sat and wept" in an effort to help his audience to accept the reality of their loss.[118] Only after acknowledging their own grief can these members of his community begin to make meaning out of their experiences. Thus, he calls upon his listeners to bring "peace... to the ashes of our fallen brethren, peace to their souls, peace to their memory, and God may grant that the same sweet sound, the acme of all blessings, find a hundredfold echo in the hearts and homes of their unfortunate widows and orphans."[119] Samfield exhorts the attendees to reflect on the virtues that their

[116] Ibid.
[117] Ibid.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.

loved ones epitomized and to strive to live according to their example by saying, "Fidelity to our dead, honor to our departed, sympathy to the bereaved, are the only objects which we endeavor to make realities in this solemn hour."[120] In order to make the memories of each of their loved ones a blessing, Samfield remarks that "the remembrance of the righteous must be made a blessing by his surviving brethren in the transfusion of his good qualities into their hearts and souls... In spirit they will be ever present in our deeds, and the eternal and everlasting principles of their virtue and goodness live in us and our children forever."[121] Like Gutheim, Samfield calls upon his congregants to act with kindness and generosity. They are not to be complacent in their grief, but rather to take the heroic actions of their loved ones to heart, and to live according to their example, providing for the sick, the widow and the orphan. Samfield crafts his eulogy in such a way that it acknowledges the emotional and psychological state of his audience while also pushing them to create meaning and to strive to improve the world based on their experiences.

Samfield's service during the epidemic was not limited to his role as a rabbi, at the bedside of the dying, at the graves of the deceased, or in the sermons or speeches he gave. He was also one of the founders and most active members of the Hebrew Hospital and Relief Associations which were active in Memphis in response to the needs of those sick, dying, and destitute during and in the aftermath of the epidemic.[122] During both the 1873 and 1878 the epidemics, he served as a member of the Masonic Relief Board and

[120] Ibid.
[121] Ibid.
[122] "A Beautiful and Useful Life Brought to a Close," 14.

was a part of the Howard Association.[123] Like Gutheim, he was also in charge of recommending orphans to the Home or to the Cleveland Orphan asylum.[124]

Samfield, with all of his service to the Jewish and larger Memphis community, is remembered not for his civic accomplishments nor necessarily his implementation of reform for Temple Israel, but rather for his leadership and unfailing dedication to the city of Memphis during its most desperate time of need. He, like Gutheim before him, demonstrated dedication to the protection of the poor, the sick, dying, the widow and the orphan. He was the small man with a big heart, and his actions during the yellow fever epidemic in Memphis in 1873 made him a major player in the communal response to this epidemic, in particular.

As was often the case, the yellow fever epidemic raging in New Orleans in 1878 made its way up the Mississippi to Memphis. By all accounts this epidemic was the most widespread the South had ever experienced, helped in large part by the growing number of railroads. Quarantine, a tactic long used in preventing the spread of epidemics, did not work as well this time. In a matter of months, the epidemic had spread to most parts of the Mississippi Delta.

By the end of July, the *Memphis Daily Appeal* reported that New Orleans had counted 24 cases of yellow fever and that all train services to Mobile had been discontinued.[125] This article and others like it continued to be published on the last page of the newspaper until mid-August, when yellow fever reports from New Orleans were moved to the front page of the paper. Reports that the fever raged in Grenada, MS, not far

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[123] Ibid.
[124] Following the epidemic of 1873, orphans were sent to both institutions. However, in 1878, all Memphis orphans were sent to New Orleans. Selma S. Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt: The Jewish Community of Memphis, Tennessee, 1840s–1960s* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1998).
[125] *Memphis Daily Appeal* (31 July 1878): 4.

from Memphis, stirred up a great amount of fear in the city.[126] By August 22, with twelve reported deaths from the disease that day in the city, the newspaper no longer denied reports of yellow fever in Memphis.

By August, when the city finally acknowledged one death from yellow fever, the city was already experiencing an epidemic. In under a week, half of the city's inhabitants had fled, leaving behind 20,000 residents who could not afford to escape. Over the course of the epidemic, nearly 85 percent of the population contracted the fever and 5,100 of them died. Between July and November, 223 Jews became ill with the fever, 85 died, 32 were orphaned, and 46 children lost at least one of their parents.[127]

Unfortunately, we do not have a great deal of documentation regarding Samfield's leadership during the epidemic of 1878. We do know, however that the yellow fever epidemic of 1878 had a direct impact on Samfield's immediate family. Of his and Pauline's seven children, two succumbed to yellow fever. A short time later, they adopted two children, both of whom had lost their parents in the same epidemic which killed the Samfield's biological children.[128] After all of Rabbi Max Samfield's perseverance during the epidemic of 1873, he was unable to protect his children. There is nothing so devastating as the loss of a child, and so we must imagine the depth of pain Rabbi Samfield must have experienced at the loss of not one but two of his children.

Where was Samfield during the epidemic? Was he a major part of the emergency relief efforts? Despite accounts including that of Selma Lewis in her book *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt* and Judy Ringel in *Children of Israel*, we find no contemporary sources which cite Samfield's presence in the city. Through newspaper articles we are

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[126] *Memphis Daily Appeal* (13 August 1878): 4 and (16 August 1878): 1.
[127] *The American Israelite* (20 Dec 1878): 2.
[128] "Profile of Rabbi Max Samfield," 2.

able to piece together a picture of where he was and how he managed to respond to the needs of his community. Samfield was present in Memphis in the early weeks of June as he officiated Confirmation on June 8 and was present for his election to the officers of the elite Jewish club, The Phoenix, prior to June 12.[129] We do not know if Samfield continued to reside in Memphis or if he was elsewhere for the better part of a month. We do know, however, that he attended the Fifth Annual Council of the Union for American Hebrew Congregations on July 19, 1878 in Milwaukee.[130] According to an article in *the American Israelite*, Samfield was not present in Memphis during the 1878 epidemic.[131]

It seems likely that Samfield continued to reside outside of Memphis prior to his return likely sometime in late November or early December. During that time, however, we do know that he spent time in St. Louis where he apparently joined with other yellow fever refugees sometime in early September to raise funds for yellow fever sufferers.[132] Upon his arrival back in Memphis, on December 1, Samfield officiated at a memorial service for those who died during the epidemic including Rabbi Ferdinand Sarner, the rabbi of the Orthodox congregation.[133] In the same month, Samfield resumed his Friday night lectures, was elected Vice President of the Hebrew Relief Association and to the Board of Directors for the Hebrew Hospital Association.[134] In both of these roles he worked to raise funds to provide for the recovery efforts of his community. Additionally, by this point the Jewish community of Memphis had determined to send all of their

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[129] *The Memphis Daily Appeal* (8 June 1878), 4 and *The Public Ledger* (12 June 1878): 3.
[130] Editorial Correspondence: Fifth Annual Council of the Union for American Hebrew Congregations, *The American Israelite* (19 July 1878): 4.
[131] "Benai Berith: Convention of D.G.L. No. 7 at New Orleans Fourth Day—May 7th Fifth Day—May 8th," *The American Israelite* (23 May 1884).
[132] *The Memphis Daily Appeal* (4 September 1878): 2.
[133] *The Public Ledger* (2 December 1878): 4.
[134] *The Memphis Daily Appeal* (8 December 1878): 2.

orphans to the Home in Memphis, after previously splitting them between the Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum and the Home in New Orleans. This meant that Samfield had to take on a greater role in both recommending these orphans for admission to the home and supporting the board and financial security of the Home, which he accomplished by sitting on the board of the home beginning in the 1880s.

Although Samfield was a part of the recovery efforts after the epidemic ceased to plague the city of Memphis in 1878, he did not stay to serve his congregants during the height of the epidemic. As it would appear, Samfield left the city with his family and sought refuge in St. Louis. While it is entirely plausible that Samfield was practicing as an itinerant rabbi during the summer months, it begs the question why he did not return to Memphis to minister to the sick and dying of his city? After all, he had become somewhat of a legend during the last epidemic occurring five years earlier. At the same time, the loss of two of his children to the disease makes his evacuation that much more understandable.

Rabbis and clergy in general throughout history have been faced with the question of whether to stay or to leave in the face of disaster and disease. In 1878, Samfield decided to leave to protect himself and his family. His abandonment of his post in this case, however, does not diminish his influence on the emergency response during the yellow fever epidemic of 1873 or his continued investment in helping his congregants and community in their emotional, psychological, and financial recovery efforts following both epidemics. Samfield's pastoral and organizational responses to the epidemic of 1873 were invaluable to the city's overall emergency and recovery efforts. By providing comfort to the most vulnerable of the city, he provided comfort to his co-

religionists while also demonstrating the role of the rabbi in society and the invested interest of the Jewish community in caring for their own.

Conclusion

Gutheim and Samfield spent a great deal of their lives in the pursuit of similar objectives: charity, the care and education of children, and their continued dedication to the well-being of their congregants as well as the overall Jewish and civic communities of their respective cities. Both men served on Jewish and civic boards provided pastoral and organizational leadership during crises.

The two men, especially in light of their experiences during the yellow fever epidemics of the late nineteenth century, were active in the continued pursuit of the financial security and continuity of the Home in New Orleans. Following Gutheim's death, Samfield stepped in to become the president of the Conference of Southern Jewish rabbis, in addition to taking on Gutheim's role as the speaker for the cornerstone laying of the new building for the Home in New Orleans, the same position which Gutheim filled in the 1850s.

In his benediction, Samfield refers to Gutheim without specifically mentioning his name, but alluding to his devotion to charity and philanthropy and his deep devotion to the Home.

> Oh how we remember in this hour the generous-hearted champions of this holy cause, who are no more with us to behold in life the crowning glory of their own philanthropic efforts, and especially do we reverently remember him, the noble teacher of charity whose loving heart was in this

> great undertaking from the beginning, and who had to leave his design on the trestle board unfinished, unfulfilled, when he entered the sanctuary of immortal life.[135]

Although Gutheim was not there to see and bless the new building for the home, Samfield, in many ways his successor, was able to do just that. While Samfield did not establish the Home or help to create and perpetuate the number of institutions formed and led by Gutheim, he was able to step into his predecessor's shoes and to continue to pursue the protection of the most vulnerable of society.

Both men were deeply devoted to the pursuit of charity, and in many ways this devotion was tied to their experiences and responses to the yellow fever epidemics which they faced.

Gutheim and Samfield's personal lives and rabbinates were both intimately impacted by the devastating epidemics they faced in the late nineteenth century. Gutheim survived a bout with yellow fever, while two of Samfield's children died from the disease. It is impossible to ignore the direct influence these events had on their lives and on their impetus for continued dedication to serving the institutions which assisted the Jewish community in their aftermath.

Their rabbinic responses to yellow fever were shaped by the mounting deaths they witnessed first-hand at many a sick bed and cemetery, and the tear-stained faces of the overwhelming number of widows and orphans they encountered. They remained at their posts when others fled, and they were the leaders when others were too grief stricken to act.

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[135] "Hebrew Charity: The Laying of the Corner-stone of the New Home for Jewish Widows and Orphans at New Orleans, La," *The American Israelite* (3 December 1886): 1.

In the Jewish culture of the South, where you take care of your own, Gutheim and Samfield did so by seeking to establish and perpetuate Jewish organizations and institutions which would assist retroactively to help the community recover, and to be prepared if and when the next disaster struck. Their involvement with the Home in New Orleans, demonstrates their continued dedication to the protection and education of Jewish children orphaned by epidemics and thoughtful long-term planning ensuring the future of their communities. Furthermore, Samfield's willingness to open his doors to two orphans following the deaths of two of his own children, provide us with a heartrending and hopeful sign of his devotion in midst of utter calamity.

In their respective cities, their work as religious and civic leaders were lauded by all. Each man's funeral was attended and speeches given by at least one non-Jewish minister who spoke regarding their merits and exchanges over the years. Even though it has been proven a number of times that interfaith relationships in the South remained quite positive throughout the 19th century, it is possible that Gutheim and Samfield's actions during and after the yellow fever epidemics they faced impacted the public opinion of Jews in their respective cities.[136] Theodore Palmer's speech at Gutheim's funeral as well as their long friendship which weathered storms including yellow fever epidemics demonstrates Gutheim's effect on interfaith relations in the city, while Cox's effusive words regarding Samfield demonstrate the impact he had on his fellow clergy members as well.

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[136] See Lewis, *A Biblical People in the Bible Belt*; Mark Bauman, *Dixie Diaspora: An Anthology of Southern Jewish History,* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2006); Marcie Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg eds., *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2006); and Theodore Rosengarten, Dale Rosengarten, eds., *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, Press, 2002).

According to descriptions of Rabbi Samfield's ministrations to the sick and dying of Memphis, there was a sense that it was the job of the rabbi to serve ALL those in need regardless of religion, race or gender. There was a sentiment engendered not just by the rabbis but by the Jewish community at large that clergy of all faiths needed to work together to serve all the inhabitants of the city. In an editorial in *The Jewish Messenger*, we find this sentiment clearly expressed; "the clergy have proved true heroes in the crisis: walking between life and death, the have failed to stay the plague, and many of them have fallen. Catholic, Protestant, Jew, and Dissenter, they have made their appearance before God as brothers at last. But why postpone brotherhood until the hour of death when every day human suffering and crime call for united, harmonious action among the clergy of the different creeds?"[137]

Samfield and Gutheim's pastoral and organizational responses to yellow fever were integral to the relief and recovery of their communities. While both men responded as rabbis, their actions were not always the same. Gutheim's experience with epidemics prompted him to found institutions and establishing means of fundraising which Samfield would benefit from during his own city's yellow fever epidemics. Samfield, therefore, could appeal directly to national organizations for help and relief, while also realizing what structures needed to be put in place to assist in the relief and recovery efforts. At the same time, while we know that Samfield ministered to people of all faiths, we do not have such evidence related to Gutheim. Although some of his closest friends were Christian clergy, and he was well liked by all, we do not hear of him venturing outside of the Jewish community during the epidemics to serve the broader community. Moreover, we know that while Gutheim remained in New Orleans for all three of the major

[137] "Removal," *The Jewish Messenger* (13 September 1878): 4.

epidemics to hit New Orleans in the second half of the nineteenth century, Samfield was only present for the epidemic of 1873. While their responses differ, they each present a way for rabbis to respond to calamities, through pastoral care, and organizational leadership.

Even though they were integral to the emergency and recovery efforts of their cities during and following yellow fever epidemics in the 19th century, the question remains whether or not Gutheim and Samfield acted heroically and responded to these disasters because they were rabbis or because there was something unique about them or these epidemics in particular? Arguably both men were predisposed, outside of their vocations, to the pursuit of charity and social justice (before social justice became synonymous with Reform Judaism). At the same time, there can be little doubt that their personal and communal experience of yellow fever epidemics shaped their rabbinates, and thus their need to respond to the sick, dying, and vulnerable in their communities.

Chapter 2

Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Galveston Hurricane of 1900:

Moving Beyond Jewish Communal Relief

The greatest disasters of the 18th and 19th centuries in America were by and large caused by epidemics. The historical record is replete with evidence pertaining to the loss of life and shifting demographic landscapes of cities and regions due to yellow fever, cholera, and smallpox. The 20th century, overall, saw a significant decrease in epidemics with the advent of effective public health departments and vaccines for diseases such as yellow fever and polio. Still, the Influenza Pandemic of 1918 killed 50 million people worldwide and 675,000 in the United States.[1] The end of the 20th century brought with it the HIV/Aids Epidemic, which at its peak in the early 1990s, became the second highest cause of death for men between the ages of 25 and 44.[2] Although these two health crises undoubtedly shaped the course of world and American history, natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods, earthquakes, and fires became and remained the primary cause of mass casualties outside of war in the 20th century. One of the first of many natural disasters was the Galveston Hurricane and Flood.

On September 8, 1900, floodwaters lapped the steps leading up to Rabbi Henry Cohen's home in Galveston, Texas. Soaked to the bone after distributing blankets and apples to people fleeing their homes, Cohen's wife finally convinced the rabbi to take shelter indoors. As he and his family sat down to Shabbat lunch, winds shook the house

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[1] "Remembering the 1918 Influenza Epidemic," https://www.cdc.gov/features/1918-flu-pandemic/index.html.

[2] CDC, "The HIV/AIDS Epidemic: The First Ten Years," https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/preview/mmwrhtml/00001997.htm

while white plaster from the ceiling and walls splattered the table and floor with each new tremor. The rabbi, ever conscious of the emotional state of others, whispered to his wife, "I don't want [the children] to see the water rising."[3] In the end, Mollie Cohen opened a book of Gilbert and Sullivan Songs and began to play *Patience* on the family piano.[4]

Henry Cohen is well known in American Jewish history as a leader of the Galveston Movement which routed Jewish immigrants—largely from Eastern Europe—through the post of Galveston between the years 1907 and 1914. Although a handful of biographies exist recounting Henry Cohen's life, including those by Jacob Rader Marcus and James Kessler, most focus primarily on Cohen's life and work with the Galveston Immigration movement. Biographies of Cohen, by and large, only mention the Galveston hurricane and flood of 1900 in passing. Anna Gray, in her term paper "Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Recovery of Galveston," analyzes Cohen's recovery efforts following the storm, but her work is primarily descriptive and limited to sources found at the American Jewish Archives.[5] Overall, little has been written on Cohen's response to the hurricane, which killed approximately 8,000 people and obliterating the city's economy. A study of his role as rabbi and community leader at this time—based on primary sources such as newspapers, and Cohen collections at the AJA and the Dolph Briscoe Center for American History at the University of Texas at Austin—hopes to fill that lacune.[6]

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[3] Anne Nathan Cohen and Harry Isaac Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas; the Life of Rabbi Henry Cohen* (New York, London: Whittlesey house, McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1941), 132.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Anna Gray, "Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Recovery of Galveston, Texas Following the Hurricane of 1900," Term paper, Spring 2007, HUC-JIR, SC-15483, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[6] Henry Cohen, *Kindler of Souls: Rabbi Henry Cohen of Texas, Focus on American History Series.* 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007), 44.

This chapter will present and analyze Cohen's role as a rabbi and civic leader in Galveston from 1888 through the aftermath of the hurricane in 1900.[7] Furthermore, it will examine his efforts to provide emergency relief to the city's hospitals, while also working alongside B'nai B'rith to aid the Jewish community's recovery. Evidence will be gleaned from contemporary newspaper accounts, letters written to and from Cohen, sermon notes written in the weeks and months after the hurricane, and memorial volumes published after his passing in 1952. In short, Rabbi Cohen's dedication to pastoral care, his acceptance and elevated position within the larger community, and his deep relationship with leaders and citizens of the city made his response during the hurricane all the more impactful.

The Early Life of Henry Cohen

Henry Cohen was born in London on April 7, 1862 to David and Josephine Cohen, poor Eastern European immigrants.[8] Henry was one of seven children—five girls and two boys.[9] As a young boy he attended Jews' Hospital, a Jewish school for impoverished immigrant children, where students spent two hours a day studying Hebrew and the rest of the time learning a trade or skill.[10] After concluding his studies at age 15, Henry planned to attend London College. Instead, he decided to work during the day and attend Jews' College at night, where he studied to be a "minister."[11] Jews' College was

[7] James Lee Kessler, "B.O.I.: A History of Congregation B'nai Israel, Galveston, Texas," doctoral dissertation, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1988, 135.
[8] Henry Cohen and James V. Allred, H. Y. Benedict, George Waverly Briggs, and A. Stanley Dreyfus, *Henry Cohen*, *Messenger of the Lord: A Tribute to the Memory of Its Beloved Rabbi on the One Hundredth Anniversary of His Birth by Congregation B'nai Israel of Galveston* (New York: Bloch publ. Co, 1963), 7.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Jews' Hospital, despite its name, was not in fact, a hospital but rather a school. Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 3.
[11] Ibid., 4.

established in 1855 to train young men to be ministers, chazanim, and teachers.[12] The college sought to produce graduates who, in the words of the *London Jewish Chronicle*, were "men thorough of English feelings and views, as conversant with the classics of their own language as with those of the sacred tongue, as acquainted with modern science as versed in ancient lore;...whose ardor and enthusiasm will break forth and rouse and kindle with Shakespearean vigor and Miltonian sweetness."[13] Jews' College promoted an integrated identity which Cohen would carry with him throughout his life, enabling him to be both fully British and fully Jewish.

During the day, Cohen worked for the Board of Guardians, a Jewish social work agency in London, as a caseworker. Cohen's devotion to charity and his predilection to social work is often attributed to his time working for the Jewish welfare organization where he provided meals and clothes to poor Jewish families.[14] Each day he went from house to house serving the needs of the poor. Jacob Rader Marcus describes Cohen's deep commitment to universalism saying, "Though he loved his own people, he devoted most of his time to the needs of the larger world about him. He was primarily a pastor whose field was not the small confines of the Jewish parish but the entire community of which he became the throbbing heartbeat."[15] Throughout his life, Cohen would continue to visit congregants and community members in their homes and in so doing embraced a charitable and benevolent approach to his rabbinate.

In 1881, at the age of 18, Cohen put his studies on hold to travel with his brother,

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[12] Isadore Harris, *History of Jews' College November 11th, 1855–November 10th, 1905* (London: Luzac and Co., 1906).
[13] Henry Cohen, *Kindler of Souls,* 4–5.
[14] Ibid., 5.
[15] Jacob Rader Marcus, "Henry Cohen (1863–1952)," *The American Jewish Historical Society*, XLII, no. 4 (1953): 45.

Mark, to South Africa. While there, he learned the click dialect of the Zulus as well as how to shoot a rifle for target practice from British soldiers.[16] In February 1883, a group of Zulus attacked the town of Robertson, where Cohen was living. The young adventurer stood his ground alongside sixteen other men. Unfortunately, in the midst of the skirmish, Cohen was hit on the head, leaving him with a scar for life.[17]As James Kessler writes in his biography, Cohen facilitated relationships with a frontier mentality. His experience in Africa with the Zulus and British soldiers expanded his world. This incident and his time abroad marked him as an individual who could function in two worlds at once, translating words and needs between Christians and Jews, rich and poor, imprisoned and free.[18]

Cohen returned to England following this incident in 1883. One year later, he graduated from Jews' College and was given the title of "minister" as rabbinical ordination was not proffered upon students in England at the time.[19] Cohen's first pulpit was at the Amalgamated Congregation of Israelites in Kingston, Jamaica. He arrived there in 1884 to find two rival congregations struggling to merge into one.[20] After a year of unsuccessful negotiations, Cohen determined to return to England to find a more suitable congregation.[21]

On route from Jamaica to London, Cohen stopped in New York where he met Rabbi Henry S. Jacobs. Jacobs had been the rabbi in Kingston in the early 1850s and who was, at the time, the rabbi of B'nai Jeshurun.[22] It was Jacobs who suggested that Cohen

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[16] Cohen, *Kindler of* Souls, 6.
[17] Ibid., 7.
[18] James Kessler, *Henry Cohen: the Life of a Frontier Rabbi,* (Austin, Tex: Eakin Press, 1997), vi.
[19] Ibid.
[20] Ibid., 11.
[21] Ibid., 14.
[22] Cyrus Adler, "Henry S. Jacobs," in *The Jewish Encyclopedia*, vol.7 (New York and London: Funk and Wagnalls Co., 1901), 45.

serve a congregation in Woodville, Mississippi, which might be more to his liking.[23] Cohen accepted the position and thus began his life in America.

Within a short time, Cohen won over the hearts of his congregants as well as the those of the non-Jewish residents of Woodville. Cohen's charisma and deep devotion to the wellbeing of all people made him particularly valued at the time.[24] *The American Israelite* noted that many individuals from Woodville's Christian high society—lawyers, doctors, a captain in the army, as well as a minister and his family—were present at Rosh Hashanah services in 1887.[25] The people of Woodville were not the only ones who recognized Cohen's gift as an orator and spiritual leader. Like Gutheim before him, Cohen was sought after for rabbinic positions in various communities. During his tenure in Mississippi, he was solicited by the Jews of Natchez to become their rabbi, but chose to remain in Woodville.[26]

On May 13, 1888, following a speaking engagement at Temple B'nai Israel in Galveston, Texas, he accepted the position to serve as the rabbi of the synagogue.[27] In Galveston, Cohen embarked on a new adventure, serving a much larger city and congregation where he would remain for the next 64 years.[28] At the time of his arrival, the Galveston's Jewish community rivalled the rest of the state. The city's population numbered 22,000, with around 1,000 Jews, and a Temple of about 175 families.[29] In 1888, at age 26, Henry Cohen was on track to become a particularly influential rabbi.

Not long after arriving in Galveston, Henry met young Mollie Levy. Levy was

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[23] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 17.
[24] Ibid., 19.
[25] Ibid., 22.
[26] Cohen and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas*, 59.
[27] Kessler, 135.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 22.

born in Houston on January 8, 1862; she was a lifelong Texan.[30] The couple married on March 6, 1889 and would go on to spend the next fifty plus years together. On July 4, 1890, they welcomed a daughter, Ruth, into their family. A few years later, in 1893, the small family moved into a white house with twelve steps leading up to the first floor[31] and in October of that year, Harry, the couple's second child was born.[32]

Pastoral care was always Cohen's top priority, and it enabled him to cultivate an environment where Jews were welcome in Galveston, and where it made sense for the rabbi to take on civic leadership roles. Just as he had done in Woodville, Rabbi Cohen made it his mission to serve all the citizens of the city. During the sixty-four years he served the people of Texas he "made their cares and problems literally and actively his own."[33] The citizens of Galveston came to the rabbi "for every conceivable kind of aid and advice, and with his keen, intuitive mind and out of his apparently bottomless pocket" he helped them regardless of race, religion, gender or position in society. All he needed to know was that the person's need was true.[34] Cohen is often quoted as saying, "There's no such thing as Episcopalian scarlet fever, Catholic arthritis, or Jewish mumps."[35] His universalism and ecumenicalism made him a rabbi for all people. According to Marcus, "To the Jews of Texas he was, as one dubbed him, a master architect of the human soul' to the Christians, he was—to quote them—the nearest approach they had ever known to the teachings of their Saviour."[36]

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[30] Ibid., 29.
[31] The Cohen's home, as indicated by the number of steps, was a raised home. As such it would have been in position to be elevated above the majority of the storm surge into the city.
[32] Ibid., 30.
[33] Cohen and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed in Texas*, 4.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, xiv.
[36] Marcus, "Henry Cohen," 455.

The rabbi was well known for his charity. It is said that without Mollie keeping track of the family's finances, the Cohen's would have become destitute.[37] When describing the stream of visitors to Rabbi Cohen's home, Marguerite Marks, a former congregant, writes "None left without hope. Each was directed towards a new job, or to a hospital, or to the benevolent society for necessary funds. And each went with a note from the rabbi telling the man's ability, story and need. Rabbi Cohen was the social welfare agency for the Jewish community in Galveston and sometimes for the state."[38]

Even in his dress, he never veered from his role as rabbi. His white collar and tie were worn in all seasons. A black rabbinical suit was his garb. From the sleeves of his coat peered white cuffs on which anyone could see scribbling—the rabbi's ever-present notebook, the list of all of the people, Jewish and otherwise, he had to see that day.[39] His notebook listed the many calls he made to hospitals, orphanages, homes, and businesses. Each day, the rabbi went out into the community and built relationships. Cohen was known for saying "Other men play golf for recreation. My hobby is helping people."[40]

In addition to his devotion to pastoral care and ecumenicism, the rabbi was also involved in organizational leadership in the city. Cohen served on numerous committees and boards which supported needy members of the community. He was president of the Lasker Home for Homeless Children,[41] chairman and one of the founding members of the Galveston chapter of the Red Cross, and a member of the Galveston Community

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[37] Ibid., 29.
[38] Marguerite Meyer Marks, "Memories of Rabbi Henry Cohen as I Knew Him," *Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly* 18 (January 1986): 120–125, 121.
[39] Ibid., 120.
[40] Cohen et al., *Messenger of the Lord*, 52.
[41] The Lasker Home for Children was founded by a group of women in the late 19th century. The Home was predominately run by women but had a governing board of all men. Women from churches as well as Temple B'nai Israel participated in the running of the Home. Elizabeth Hayes Turner," Lasker Home for Homeless Children," https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/ynl01.

Council.[42] He also worked with city leadership to execute programs for the poor. During the economic depression of 1893, for instance, he ensured food for the homeless by creating a meal ticket system which would go on to be used in the aftermath of the storm as well as in 1906 following the Earthquake and Fire of San Francisco.[43]

Cohen was also heavily involved in Jewish scholarly and organizational pursuits. Cohen joined the American Jewish Historical Society at its inception in 1892 and published a number of articles on the early Jews of Texas which remain seminal works on the subject.[44] Later in his career, he utilized his national influence to insist that Jewish chaplains serve in the United States Navy. He supported and served on the Jewish Agency board and supported the United Palestine Appeal even though his beliefs aligned with the anti-Zionist American Council for Judaism, of which he was also a member.[45] In addition to his legacy as the "driving force in the Galveston movement," Cohen's dedication to solving the issue of juvenile delinquency and advocating for prison reform in Texas set him apart as an early social justice leader in the Reform movement.[46]

The twelve years between Cohen's arrival in Galveston and the Hurricane of 1900 made him a fixture in the civic and religious lives of its citizens. In order to accomplish his countless tasks, Rabbi Cohen had to have nearly endless amounts of energy. In an article he published in the *Texas Journal of Education* in 1890, Cohen wrote that a "vast amount of good work...can be accomplished by "energy."[47] In fact he argued that energy

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[42] Cohen et al., *Messenger of the Lord*, 53.
[43] Ibid., 53.
[44] Marcus, 452.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 454.
[47] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 6.

was the only quality that had the ability to raise people out of poverty and into wealth.[48] His devotion to pastoral care and social work, his cultivation of relationships with clergy of all faiths, in addition to his work for organizations and institutions solidified his status as a leader in the community. His role as established leader of the larger Galveston community in the years leading up to the hurricane enabled him to be a guiding force in the emergency relief, recovery and rebuilding efforts in Galveston after the storm.

Galveston in 1900: A City on the Rise

Galveston was a city on the rise in the early years of Cohen's career. In fact, Galveston was competing with Houston for the most prosperous city in Texas. With this in mind, it should not come as a surprise that in 1900, *The New York Herald* nicknamed Galveston the "New York of the Gulf."[49] In *Isaac's Storm*, Erik Larson paints a picture of the city's increased wealth and prominence. According to Larson, by 1899, Galveston "had become the biggest cotton port in the country and the third-busiest port overall."[50] The city boasted upwards of forty steamship lines including the White State Line, which travelled between Galveston and Europe, and the city included consulates from sixteen countries including Japan and Russia.[51] Based on the census of 1900, the city's population had grown by thirty percent in just under ten years.[52]

Galveston was not only the site of great commerce, travel, and charity but of amenities and culture as well. The city boasted electric lights, streetcars, telephone

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[48] Ibid.
[49] *Galveston Daily News*, 10 March 1874, p. 1.
[50] John Edward Weems, *A Weekend in September* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 1980), 23.
[51] Virginia Eisenhour, *The Strand of Galveston* (Galveston: Rosenberg Library, 1973), 1.
[52] *Galveston Daily News*, 8 September 1900.

services, telegraph companies, concert halls, and many hotels.[53] By 1900, the city was considered cosmopolitan with its French chefs, millionaires, and mansions.[54] Not long before the hurricane, the editor of the *Galveston Tribune*, Clarence Ousley, described the city in the following way:

> A city of 38,000 happy and busy people...of splendid homes and broad clean streets; a city of oleanders and roses and palms; a city of the finest churches, school buildings and benevolent institutions in the South; a thriving port with many ocean-going ships at anchor...a seaside resort, with hundreds of bathers at play in the safest and most delightful surf in the world; a city of great wealth and large charity.[55]

We should not overlook the fact that Galveston was no stranger to hurricanes and their potential for disaster.[56] The citizens of Galveston had witnessed the impact of other storms on neighboring cities and towns and even had its own share of flooding. In 1875, intense storms hit Indianola, Texas, another port town along the Gulf Coast. The storm killed 176 people and changed the physical landscape of the town: "The appearance of the town after the storm was one of universal wreck. Not a house remained uninjured, and most of those that were left standing were in unsafe condition. Many were washed

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[53] Eisenhour, 1.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 41.
[56] According to Chester R. Burns in his article for the Texas State Historical Association titled "Epidemic Diseases," Galveston witnessed approximately nine yellow fever epidemics between 1839 and 1867. The city experienced yellow fever major epidemics in 1853 and in 1867, similarly to New Orleans. In 1853, Galveston only numbered about 5,000 people (Chester R. Burns, "Epidemic Diseases," *Texas State Historical Association*, https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/sme01). In that year alone about 60 percent of the city's population contracted the disease and 523 died. According to the Texas Almanac for Harris County, by 1867, the city's population had grown to 15,000 residents ("Harris County," in *The Texas Almanac* (Galveston: Richardson and Co, 1867) https://texasalmanac.com/sites/default/files/images/1867Harris.pdf). By September a little over 700 Galvestonians succumbed to the disease (Chester R. Burns, "Epidemic Diseases," *Texas State Historical Association*, https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/sme01)

away completely and scattered over...the town; others were lifted from their foundations and moved...over considerable distances."[57] So many people were killed, and the devastation was so complete that not one of the survivors returned.[58]

The Texas Gulf Coast experienced three hurricanes in the late summer and early fall of 1886.[59] Out of the three, only one on Oct. 12–13, 1886 posed any real threat to the city.[60] Most significantly, the storm pushed the waters of the Gulf into downtown Galveston. According to David Roth of the National Weather Service, although the water was high and the winds reached approximately 50 mph, there was no significant damage to the city.[61]

In the immediate aftermath of the storms in Indianola and in Galveston, the city's leadership recognized the need to do something to protect the city from future storm surges. Galveston's leaders embarked on an improvement plan which expanded the land area of the city. Although they ensured that the new land would be eight feet above sea level, the new plan did not include a seawall.[62] Even though the city did eventually approve a seal wall, it was never erected based on the prevailing view held by nearly all Galvestonians that no storm could best their city.

The Day of the Storm

September 8, 1900 dawned clear and bright in Galveston, but by 9AM gusts of wind

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[57] Isaac Cline, "West India Hurricanes," *Galveston News* (16 July 1891).
[58] Ibid.
[59] David Roth, "Texas Hurricane History," National Weather Service, https://www.weather.gov/media/lch/events/txhurricanehistory.pdf, 22–24.
[60] Ibid., 24–25.
[61] Roth, "Texas Hurricane History," 25.
[62] Erik Larson, *Isaac's Storm: A Man, A Time, and the Deadliest Hurricane in History* (Thorndike, ME: G.K. Hall, 2000), 76.

reached the city's shore as rain showers battered the streets.[63] Although few if any citizens of the city were alarmed, by 10AM the tenor of the situation changed. The winds picked up significantly, and the water rose, producing a panic in residents living on the shoreline. People began to flee their homes, carrying a handful of belongings and nothing else. Many residents opened their doors to find that the water was already waist deep. Within an hour the entire city was flooded, the water measuring two to four feet deep. By that time, houses on stilts near the water began to sway in the wind as the Pagoda Bathhouse, which was two blocks long, was swallowed by the waves.[64]

Around noon, people began to take heed of the pending disaster. Hundreds of people fled their homes trying to get to higher ground.[65] Between 3PM and sunset the city was almost entirely underwater. With the electric and gas company's flooded, the city was left in total darkness by nightfall.[66] Residents knew that if they left their homes, they would drown, and that if they stayed it was more than likely that the wreckage swiftly floating through the town would knock their homes into the Gulf.[67] Some ventured into the water in an attempt to save lives or to reach their waterlogged homes and families from downtown; nearly all drowned. As the wind howled and the rain lashed at the buildings, the screams of the lost and dying pierced the night air.[68]

Around 1:45AM the flood waters suddenly began to recede.[69] By daybreak, the streets were nearly dry. When residents returned to the beach, there was nothing left but a

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[63] Nathan C. Green, ed., *Story of the Galveston Hurricane* (Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2000), 6.
[64] Ibid., 7.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Ibid., 8.
[67] Ibid., 12.
[68] Ibid., 13.
[69] Ibid.

sea wall of wreckage nearly forty feet high.[70] It was calculated that one out of every forty people had perished in the storm.[71] In the first days and weeks following the storm, the city estimated that approximately 6,000 lives were lost. However, the final count revealed that the number was likely higher—somewhere between 8,000 and 10,000. Essentially overnight, nearly a quarter of the city's population perished in the storm.[72] The sheer loss of human life was unimaginable, and yet there were other major challenges facing the city in its immediate emergency response and recovery efforts. For one thing, the city's water supply was cut off from further inland. Seventy-five percent of the business district was destroyed. Persons displaced from their homes were living in tents, and the city had to find a way to feed the devastated population.[73]

Cohen and the Storm

Rabbi Cohen's own personal account of the storm commences after the conclusion of Shabbat services at Temple B'nai Israel around ten that morning. As Cohen walked home on the morning of September 8th, he noticed streams of families and children carrying clothes and food down the street. Standing in the road, he heard snippets of what had transpired thus far. According to the stream of people, "the sea had risen; it had destroyed the Midway; the bathhouse were about to collapse into the Gulf; the streetcar trestle was so thoroughly undermined it could not possibly stand much longer."[74] The rabbi soon realized that this bedraggled group of people were now homeless, fleeing for their lives,

[70] Ibid., 14.
[71] Cohen, *Kindler of* Souls, 55.
[72] Ibid., 44.
[73] Ibid., 56.
[74] Cohen and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed*, 133.

searching for higher ground.[75] Cohen ran quickly up the stairs to his house and gathered up as many blankets and umbrellas as he could find. He then brought them to the street, where he handed them out to the people who he deemed to have the greatest need, “mothers with babies and toddlers, the elderly who moved so slowly against the wind."[76] His wife Mollie found some apples in their pantry and gave them to him to pass out. After doling out all that he could, Cohen was soaked to the bone and freezing, an odd feeling for September in Texas.[77] He remained outside as long as he could until his wife demanded he seek shelter indoors.

While the family ate Shabbat lunch by candlelight, Mollie noted that she had seen a similar storm in 1886. Her father's store on Market Street had flooded, but no flood waters had ever gotten as far as Broadway, where the Cohen home was located. Brushing the storm off, she said, "It's just a little blow."[78] Just then, a massive gust of wind hit the house so hard that it knocked the plaster off the walls. Each subsequent burst of wind, caused more and more plaster to fall. Cohen rushed to the front door to assess the situation. To his dismay, the water had in fact reached Broadway, contradicting his wife's statement.[79]

By the time the water had reached the sixth step up to the house, Cohen made the decision to move the family to their neighbor, Mr. Lee’s, house next door.[80] Once there, Cohen and Lee worked together to create a hole in the first floor of the house so that the

[75] Ibid.
[76] Larson, 156.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Cohen and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed*, 134.
[79] Ibid., 135.
[80] Ibid.

waters would enter the home rather than pick the structure up off of its foundations.[81] The two families then made their way to the second story, while throughout the night the waters continued to rise on the first floor.[82] The house groaned around them, as the water and wind lashed out at the city of Galveston. When the house began to creak and groan less and less, Rabbi Cohen poked his head outside and gave the all clear. The waters had receded, debris left in their wake. Cohen checked on his home before settling his family there.

Immediate Action

After securing his family's safety, the rabbi began assessing the needs of his community and doing what he could to provide relief. As Cohen wandered the streets, he came across corpses of those who did not survive the storm as well as other men prepared to provide relief for the citizens of the city. Rabbi Cohen's primary concern in the immediate aftermath of the Hurricane was the safety and supplies needed for the hospitals. In the hours following the hurricane, Cohen managed to find a wagon, and to get his hands on medicine and supplies to deliver to hospitals in the city. It is important to note that prior to the establishment of martial law, looting was widespread, "even ghoulish, as thieves cut fingers off corpses to plunder rings."[83] With this in mind, someone gave Cohen a pistol, reminiscent of his days in South Africa. He never used the gun, but had it with him just in case.[84]

Outside of his work for the hospitals, Cohen also went about giving out food and

[81] Ibid., 135–136.
[82] Ibid., 136.
[83] Hollace Ava Weiner, "The Mixers: The Role of Rabbis Deep in the Heart of Texas," *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (1997): 317.
[84] Ibid.

clothing to those who had lost homes and in many cases, also their family members.[85] These survivors wandered the streets searching for loved ones lost in the storm, standing in lines waiting for food, medicine and clothing.[86] Although the need for food, medicine and clothing were severe, the greatest challenge facing Rabbi Cohen and the city initially was the unprecedented death toll and what to do with the bodies.

Last Rites: Responding to the Death Toll

Although at first the estimated number of dead was in the hundreds, the living knew that the toll had been much greater. As the residents of Galveston continued to emerge from their homes and shelters, a grim and terrifying sight awaited them. According to Larson, "throughout Galveston, men and women stepped from their homes to find corpses at their doorsteps. Bodies lay everywhere. Parents ordered their children to stay inside. One hundred corpses hung from a grove of salt cedars at Heard's Lane. Some had double puncture wounds left my snakes. Forty-three bodies were lodged in the cross braces of a railroad bridge."[87] Even over a week later bodies were still appearing. On September 19 alone, “two hundred and seventy-three bodies were found.”[88] The city was overwhelmed by the number of bodies needing to be buried to prevent disease, and the gravediggers could not keep up with the rising body count.

The mayor and others feared a potential outbreak of yellow fever or other diseases which would spread if the dead were not buried post haste. Thus, there was a serious need

[85] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 44.
[86] Ibid., 139.
[87] Larson, 231.
[88] *The Galveston Daily News*, 19 September 1900.

for cremation. Even though cremation is against Jewish and Catholic traditions, Father Kirwin, the leader of the Archdiocese and Rabbi Cohen both gave their permission for bodies to be cremated when necessary.[89] Their permission provided a stamp of approval for Jews and Christians who could not bury their dead and to the city who needed to dispose of rotting corpses as fast as physically possible. Even if a family was left intact, it was highly likely that they lost their homes and all of their belongings as 3,600 homes were destroyed by the storm.[90] In response, the U.S. army sent military units to pitch tents for the thousands of homeless.[91] With such a high death toll and number of homeless, the city had to create a plan of action, and Cohen was a part of that plan.

City-Wide Relief Efforts

On Sunday, after the waters receded, and the relief efforts began in earnest, the mayor of Galveston, Walter Jones, held a meeting at the Tremont hotel.[92] The majority of the city's leaders were in attendance, including Rabbi Cohen. *The Galveston Daily News* reported on the meeting in its abbreviated edition published on September 10th: "On motion the chairman appointed chairmen of committees on finances, correspondence, hospitals,

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[89] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls,* 44.
[90] Weiner, 317.
[91] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls,* 44.
[92] In Clarence Ousley's official record of the storm, he includes a list of important members of the CRC which included; Stephen E Barton, Mis Clara Barton, the President of the Red Cross Society of America; Walter C. Jones, Mayor of Galveston; William A. McVitie, chairman of the committee; John Sealy, R.V. Davidson, state senator and secretary; I. H. Kempner, member of the Finance Committee; Noah Allen, chairman of the Relief Labor Bureau; Daniel Ripley, chairman of the Hospital Committee and Transportation Committee; Ben Levy, alderman and chairman of the Burial Committee; Jens Moller, chairman of the Labor Committee; Bertrand Adoue, chairman of the Building Committee; W. V. McConn, member of Building Committee; Miss Williams, stenographer; George A. Soper, sanitation expert; Rev. Henry Cohen, member of Hospital Committee; Morris Lasker, businessman and chairman of Correspondence Committee (Elizabeth Hayes Turner, "Clara Barton and the Formation of Public Policy in Galveston, 1900," http://rockarch.org/publications/conferences/turner.pdf.)

burials, general relief. The committees were at once filled out and got to work."[93] In the article, Rabbi Cohen is mentioned as the head of the subcommittee on hospitals where he worked side by side with Father Kirwin, another clergy member who worked tirelessly to provide relief and assistance in the recovery and reconstruction of the city. The two clergymen quickly became partners and were practically inseparable from that time onward. Throughout reconstruction, the rabbi became increasingly closer with Father Kirwin. Every evening the two men would have a drink and reflect on their experiences during the storm and the challenges they faced as spiritual and community leaders in its wake. Over time, residents became accustomed to seeing "the rabbi and Father Kirwin of the Catholic Diocese dash down the street together." One of Cohen's congregants wrote, "The city knew the two were fast friends who helped one another in congregational needs. They were an example for all to follow." The two men would go on to be lifelong friends and compatriots during many a battle against bigotry in the era of the New South.

Cohen was also appointed to the Central Relief Committee (CRC) which was established to bring order to a city in chaos.[94] The CRC was comprised of a variety of civic leaders which included three other Jewish members: I. H. Kemper, M. Lasker, and Ben Levy, all prominent businessmen who played pivotal roles in the rehabilitation of Galveston.[95] For the first two days following the storm, the Central Relief Committee was the primary provider of resources and order to the city. However, within one week, donations and relief began pouring in. The army arrived and began pitching tents for

[93] "First Meeting Held Sunday Afternoon. Committee Appointed," *Galveston Daily News*, 10 September 1900, MF June 30, 1900 thru October 10, 1900, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[94] Gary Cartwright, *Galveston: A History of the Island* (Ft. Worth, Tex: TCU Press, 1998), 171.
[95] Flora Weltman, *Jews of Texas* (Chicago: Reform Advocate, 1910), 5.

refugees.[96] In order to truly make order out of chaos, the city imposed martial law which continued to be in effect for twelve days.[97] The CRC worked together with the military to provide direct services to residents in camps. Nine days later, Clara Barton, the President of the American Red Cross, arrived on the scene. Barton mustered headlines and a national relief effort that sent money, clothing, and food to an island in despair.[98]

Cohen's role on the hospital committee included improving the conditions of the makeshift tent cities which started springing up shortly after the storm. In a report of the Central Relief Committee published in the *Galveston Daily News* on September 28, 1900, the building committee noted that there were numerous individuals and families who were living in "roofless houses amidst debris that covered decomposed bodies, and over which they were obliged to climb in order to reach the remnants of their homes." Still more of these refugees began setting up camps on their own property in one of the thousands of tents sent by the U.S. Army, some merely left over from the Civil War and the more recent Spanish-American War. In addition to those who set up tents on their own property, migrant workers and those without land set up a "White City on the Beach," which included a few hundred tents cramped together. Residents of the "White City" built floors and furniture out of the debris. This tent "city" included a hospital, kitchen, and dining room tents. Rabbi Henry Cohen was in charge of elements of the makeshift tent city, specifically the hospital, but he also supervised meal preparation and supplies, and provided recommendations to the Medical Officer in Command of the camp.[99]

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[96] Green, ed., *Story of the Galveston Hurricane*, 134.
[97] Ibid., 162.
[98] Weiner, 137.
[99] Turner, "Clara Barton," 11.

As part of his work in the camps, Cohen met regularly with Leo Hume the Medical Officer in Command in the Marine-Hospital Service who was in charge of the camp. In one of their letters, Hume requests that Cohen send him someone to work and provide leadership in the refugee camp. He concludes by saying, it "will soon be in evidence and it is absolutely essential that someone be here who is able to transit in keeping the camp in order, from every standpoint."[100] Even more telling than this request is a letter sent by Hume to Cohen five days later in which a miscommunication between the two seems to have taken place:

> Desiring to consult with you I left the camp this morning just a short time before you arrived here. I did not expect you here today. Your note has been read and your suggestions were acted upon long since, in fact it has been my endeavor to stop all squabbling etc ever since my stay here; I have even expelled one family to obtain this result. I make it a point to be at the mess tables during meals daily, in order to keep down disturbing members.[101]

It is apparent from this letter that Hume consulted with Cohen on how to best maintain the camp in general. Secondly, we are informed that Cohen made recommendations that were followed by Hume. Hume goes out of his way to make a case that he has addressed issues of "squabbling" and being seen by the members of the camp. Thirdly, as it relates to the former point, the medical officer appears to be asserting his own authority while

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[100] "Letter from the Office of Medical Officer in Command, Marine-Hospital Service to Rabbi Cohen," 25 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence Sept 21–30, 1900, Sept 1900–April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[101] "Letter from Leo Hume of the Office of Medical Officer in Command, Marine-Hospital Service to Rabbi Cohen," 30 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence Sept 21–30, 1900, Sept 1900–April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin, 1.

simultaneously adhering to Cohen's advice.

The following paragraph of the letter makes this power dynamic even more apparent in relation to the distribution of sick to the hospital tent in the camp versus the hospitals which were in operation:

> You state that it is the desire of the committee to have all sick people sent to the hospitals. May I ask then, why it is that these sick people are sent here instead? Also please inform me as to how I am to get the sick in camp to the hospital? Kellog has plenty of work to do. I cannot allow him to do carpentry or to wait on the table as he has his hands full now. I desire also to inform you that I have drawn up rules and regulations for the camp and my orders are enforced. In future please give no orders here without consulting me, as much annoyance has been occasioned by your directions, relation to who should eat first, which you gave this morning. I have been very modest in my requests to you but must insist that I have a horse and buggy or I cannot stay here.[102]

Based on Hume's words we can assume that in his absence, Cohen gave orders to keep the citizens of the camp in line. In doing so, he went over the head of the chief medical officer, which elicited this letter. At the same time, it appears that Hume understood that his success depended, in part, on Cohen's knowledge and authority of the people and resources in Galveston.

Unlike Gutheim and Samfield, Cohen had a direct impact on the broader recovery efforts underway in Galveston in the days, weeks, and even months after the storm. Cohen's role as a member of the hospital subcommittee of the CRC in addition to his

[102] Ibid., 2–3.

correspondence with Hume reveal how much power and authority he had over the continued safety and wellbeing of hundreds of people in the “White City” refugee camp. Cohen emerges from the storm not only as a leader of the Jewish community but of the entire city of Galveston.

Impact of the Galveston Hurricane on the Jewish Community

The Jewish community of Galveston was affected by the storm much in the same way as the Christian residents of the city. Family members perished in the storm. Homes were destroyed, and their belongings were literally scattered to the wind. Jewish businesses were flooded, and incomes frozen until recovery efforts got underway. Cohen’s account of the impact of the storm on the Jewish community is detailed in a letter he sent to the *American Hebrew* on October 12, 1900, a little over a month after the storm. His letter gives us a clearer view of the loss of life, property, damages to the Jewish cemeteries, and the assistance he and his community required during reconstruction.

> Water to the depth of eight or ten feet swept through our cemeteries, the wind blew down nearly all the tombstones, and the combined elements tore away the railing--200 by 260 feet--and other fences that enclosed the plots, thus making our "Botai Hajim" grazing grounds for stray cattle. The I.O.B.B. will, in a measure, help individuals rebuild their homes or resume their businesses. The synagogue will also be provided for, but we need special aid for the restoration of our cemeteries, the old and the new. Since you wish to help us, you might find the means of doing so in this particular way. You were right in advising that all general appeals should

be distributed through the I.O.B.B. Contributions for the cemeteries, however, should be sent to me or to the secretary of our Hebrew Benevolent Society, and the purpose thereof distinctly stated. With my personal regards, and again thanking you for your interest, I am, yours faithfully, Henry Cohen.[103]

According to his letter, Cohen was immensely busy with the tasks at hand, working on the hospital relief sub-committee and taking care of his own congregants in need. Out of the 1,000 Jews in Galveston, 41 perished. [104] In addition, nearly every home in Galveston was devastated, and Jewish families needed assistance to first find their loved ones and then to rebuild their lives. In the days and weeks following the storm, Rabbi Cohen received hundreds of telegrams from all over the country seeking information regarding the safety and wellbeing of family and friends. Some were short and poignant, like one from Max Lemmons, "Is my brother alive answer at once."[105] Others expressed concern and included monetary donations to the general relief fund before asking for information, such as Henry Frieberg's telegram from September 14th: "Money sent to governor do you want help sent direct for coreligionists Julius King and two children reported lost are wife and remaining children alive answer."[106]

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[103] Rabbi Henry Cohen, "The Condition of Jews in Galveston," *The American Hebrew* (12 October 1900): 622.

[104] Two such individuals included Abraham C. Labatt, originally from Charleston and New Orleans and a longtime resident of Galveston and Julius King. "Texas," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (24 November 1905): 783. "Telegram from Henry Frieberg to Rabbi Cohen, " 14 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Telegrams 1900, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin

[105] "Telegram from Max Lemmons to Rabbi Cohen," 13–15 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Telegrams 1900, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

[106] "Telegram from Henry Frieberg to Rabbi Cohen," 14 September 1900, Box 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Telegrams 1900, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

As the death toll continued to rise and the city was, in many ways, inaccessible, few people had information regarding their loved ones. As the list of missing people continued to grow, loved ones sent Rabbi Cohen specific descriptions of their family members in the hopes that they would be identified among the dead. A letter from a member of the B'nai B'rith lodge in Beaumont, Texas described a missing Jewish woman named Annie Braum. The author provides the address of where she was staying and a description of what she would have been wearing around the time of the storm. Cohen became the point person for all inquiries regarding the safety and wellbeing of the Jews of Galveston and in some cases the point person for identifying the deceased.

During the first two weeks following the storm, Jewish newspapers around the country ensured that their readers were aware of what was going on in Galveston even though they had not yet contacted Rabbi Cohen directly with an update on the situation. On September 14th, *The Jewish Messenger* ran an article describing the damage caused by the hurricane, calling for relief, and describing the country's response to the disaster. The article paints a picture of the Jewish community prior to the storm and the newspaper's failed attempts to make contact with the rabbi, "Galveston has a flourishing Jewish community-its synagogue is an attractive edifice, and Rev. Henry Cohen is universally beloved. No tidings from him have been received, although the attempt was made to ascertain how he and his congregation withstood the catastrophe."[107] *The American Hebrew*, meanwhile, published an editorial on September 14th describing the storm and reminding American Jews of their responsibility to assist their co-religionists, saying, that "the response" to the storm "must be prompt, strong and generous. It must be made by us as citizens of the United States, and as such the Jews have never failed to do

[107] "The Texas Calamity," *The Jewish Messenger* (14 September 1900): 6.

their full duty."[108]

I.M. Wise and his *American Israelite* as well as B'nai B'rith served a major role in acquiring funds for ailing Jewish communities and synagogues in the previous century in the wake of yellow fever epidemics. By the turn of the twentieth century, however, they were not the only national Jewish organizations and outlets providing relief to cities and communities in need. One such organization was the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) which took on a new role providing assistance to the Jewish community of Galveston following the hurricane. Rabbi Joseph Silverman, the president of the CCAR at the time, was a liaison between congregations and Rabbi Cohen in pertaining to the wellbeing of the synagogue and then in attempting to provide assistance to all the Jews of Galveston. In Rabbi Cohen's correspondence from those early days we find letters and telegrams from Silverman offering both sympathy and financial support. On September 15th, he writes, "Our profoundest sympathy with you and your Congregation, Does your Temple need anything which Conference could give especially in view approaching holidays wire instructions. Joseph Silverman, Pres't Central Conference."[109]

Hurricane season and yellow fever epidemics have a bad habit of arriving on or around the High Holy Days. Ironically, gathering thousands of congregants together had an advantage for raising funds to be sent to Jewish communities in need. Rabbi Silverman was aware of that and sent this follow up message to Cohen on September 17; "I am prepared to send out an appeal to all Rabbis to make collection in the Synagogues

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[108] "The Galveston Disaster," *The American Hebrew* (14 September 1900): 480.

[109] "Telegram from Joseph Silverman to Rabbi Cohen," 15–16 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Telegrams 1900, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

during the coming holidays for the Jewish poor of Galveston. Do you and your congregation sanction such an appeal? Consult your officers wire immediately to insure prompt action."[110] It can be assumed by the amounts of money raised that this appeal was sanctioned and welcomed by Cohen.

In the midst of feeding the hungry, healing the sick, clothing the naked, and providing housing for the homeless, Rabbi Henry Cohen prepared for the High Holy Days. As part of his preparations, he wrote down notes for his sermons reflecting on what he would say in his synagogue, a refuge for so many without homes. On Rosh Hashanah morning he spoke of the day in terms of memory. “This day is intimately connected with Yom Kippur [and] the Yomim Noroim,” he wrote. On this day, we “turn over a fresh page.” But not only do we begin the new year, we also recall the old. Rosh Hashanah, is “a day of memorial. A day of sounding the Shofar. A day of memorial price.” For the rabbi, the new year could not help but bring up memories of the price exacted on the community in recent times. Not only that but it is a day that “calls up the past, the old family home, festivals” held there, which are no longer whole. In his sermon notes he remarks on the deep and searing changes of the past year and even more so in recent weeks. Next, Cohen speaks about the “Shofaros prayer” referencing Shofar as an alarm that reminds us of our imperfection. Rosh Hashanah is a Yom Teruah, a day of the shofar blast. He then connects the shofar to the battle of Jericho, where with the shofar, the walls came tumbling down. He writes, “Shall a trumpet blast make the people not tremble?”[111]

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[110] Telegram from Joseph Silverman to Rabbi Cohen, 17 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Telegrams 1900, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

[111] "5661 Rosh Hashanah Morning," 13 September 1900, 3M327, Undated-Notes for Sermons, 1900–1905, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

They had all so recently found themselves trembling in fear. It is undoubtable that the words he spoke that morning, based on these notes, touched his congregants in the pews. They knew the power of walls crashing down.

On Kol Nidre, ten days later, Cohen spoke of reconciliation and its importance for Judaism. In it he emphasized a shift away from materialism, saying, that the purpose of Yom Kippur was introspection, communion with God, a cessation from worldliness essential to man. [There are] higher and nobler things than material." Many of his congregants were without material things, clothes or shelter. Yom Kippur, a day of reflection, was for him, removing the material and finding connection and comfort in God. In his final remarks, he stated, "O Day of God, be with us yet. Lest we forget-lest we forget."[112] When in despair, it is easy to forget that God is with you. Cohen reminds his congregants that material things may provide us physical comfort, but they do not bring succor to our souls. Only God and community can do this.

On Yom Kippur morning, Cohen's thoughts turned to the sense of victory and knowledge we might have over the natural world, "the secret things belong to [...] the Eternal God," thus "the Day (Yom Kippur) is for the individual not [a] natural victory or a great event." We cannot say, "See what we have done!" Instead only "sadness, knowledge, literature, drama, give them testimony. He pushed on the question of the power of human wisdom, saying,

> ... have we solved one single problem of life? Have we unravelled one single mystery? Do we know what makes the blade of grass grow?...Is there more justice in the 12 [story?] building? Now what hovel? Are

[112] "Yom Kippur Evening 5661," 22 September 1900, 3M327, Undated-Notes for Sermons, 1900–1905, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

> we...quicker to attend the sick because of the electric car? Will the body go quicker above in a silver clasped casket? Can love, will, or wisdom call forth from the grave those loved ones who have gone?[113]

In his sermon, Cohen responds to the question: Why did human knowledge and advancement not avert the destruction of Galveston. Not only that, be he castigated his congregants for perhaps not doing enough to help the sick in their times of plenty. But more importantly, his final question touched on the one of the greatest questions of humanity regarding our finitude. "Can love, will, or wisdom call forth from the grave those loved ones who have gone?" No matter what we do, none of these things we cling to can bring our loved ones back to us. Here, in this moment, Henry Cohen reminded his congregants of the reality of their loss and attempted to remind them that it did not matter how far humanity advanced that death and mourning would always be present in our lives.

Cohen and the National Jewish Response to the Hurricane

The Galveston Hurricane, as with yellow fever epidemics in the 19th century, necessitated a national Jewish response to provide sufficient funds to ensure the recovery and rebuilding of the community. Like Gutheim, Cohen became the channel through which B'nai B'rith and the *American Israelite* sent funds to congregants and local Jewish institutions in need. His primary role, in this case, was to communicate with Jewish entities to facilitate fundraising for his community's recovery efforts.

Between September 13th and 19th Cohen received letters from rabbis who wanted to use the High Holiday period as an opportunity to secure relief for the Galveston Jewish

[113] Ibid.

community. Rabbi Maximilian Heller of Temple Sinai in New Orleans, for instance, wrote to Cohen determined to make an appeal for funds on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur for the relief of Galveston. He expressed that he was unsure of who to send it through—either the CCAR or B'nai B'rith.[114] In the end, Heller reported that Temple Sinai gathered $863.00 for the continued relief of the Jewish community of Galveston on Rosh Hashanah alone.[115] By the beginning of October, after the conclusion of the holidays, Rabbi I. Leucht of New Orleans along with another gentleman from B'nai B'rith travelled to Galveston to work with Rabbi Cohen to disperse funds directly to individuals in need. Based on a letter from David Schwartz, Leucht was relying almost exclusively on Cohen to secure the names of those in need.[116]

Although Cohen managed to respond to some telegrams in the days and weeks following the storm, his letter to the *American Israelite* did not appear until October. His primary concern at that time was raising money for the reconstruction of the cemetery. Outside of the loss of life, the destruction in the cemeteries was particularly difficult for the community to bear. After all, there were more bodies buried than would have been interred in an entire year in the Jewish cemetery. Not only that, but the cemetery was in ruins.

In this instance, similar to what occurred during the 19th century with yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans and Memphis, B'nai B'rith took on the role of soliciting,

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[114] Letter from Rabbi Max Heller to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 21 September 1900, Personal Correspondence Sept 21–30, 1900, Sept 1900-April 1901, Box 3M222 Henry Cohen Papers, 1850-1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

[115] Letter from Rabbi Max Heller to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 30 September 1900, Personal Correspondence Sept 21-30, 1900, Sept 1900-April 1901, Box 3M222 Henry Cohen Papers, 1850-1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

[116] Letter from David Schwartz to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 8 October 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900-April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850-1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

gathering, and disbursing funds to needy families and individuals in the Jewish community. For instance, by September 13th, presidents of B'nai B'rith Lodges began to send funds to Rabbi Cohen and other Jewish community leaders in Galveston to aid in the Jewish recovery efforts. M. Friedman, the president of the lodge in San Antonio, sent Cohen $100 "for distribution to Israelites only if it is in need."[117] Archibald Marx, the president of District Grand Lodge 7, wrote to Cohen from Houston where he was staying at the time, providing the rabbi with information on who from B'nai B'rith would be sending funds and assisting refugees in Houston. In the letter he notes that the District Lodge will send $5,000 for aid. Marx indicates that Henry J. Dannenbaum, another correspondent of Cohen's, would be helping to coordinate the direct relief efforts in assisting those who fled to Houston after the storm.[118]

Besides providing information on what was occurring on the ground in Galveston and allocating funds, Cohen also provided input relating to the best way for B'nai B'rith to provide relief. On the 21st, Marx made a point to ask Cohen to provide his own ideas for how B'nai B'rith could best assist the Jewish community of Galveston by creating what he termed a "detailed report as to what you consider the best plan possible."[119]

At the same time, Cohen, as the primary religious leader of the community, continued to play a role in gathering certain funds for the cemetery in order to help the Hebrew Benevolent Society. In the period following the storm, Cohen was in frequent contact with Henry Freiberg who was in charge of gathering funds from the Jews of

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[117] Letter from M. Friedman to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 13 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[118] Letter from Archibald A. Marx to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 12 September 1900, 3M222, Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[119] Ibid.

Cincinnati. In one of his letters Frieberg explains that the Cincinnati Relief Committee raised $10,000 for the relief of the city of Galveston. As part of his letter, he indicates that this money is intended specifically for the Jewish community. However, Frieberg also notes that many of Cincinnati's Jews donated to the general fund supporting Galveston's recovery efforts.[120] In the end Jews from around the country gathered funds for the relief of Jewish families in Galveston to the tune of $26,427.33.[121]

In Its Wake: Cohen and Galveston After the Storm

Henry Cohen, with all of his seemingly endless energy, finally had to take a break and begin to process his own loss. At a certain point, Cohen and his family headed to Woodville to recover physically and emotionally after the storm. When the Cohens arrived in Woodville, Mississippi, Henry's former congregants and friends asked the Rabbi and his wife to tell them all about the storm. According to his son, Henry and Mollie refused to speak of what happened to them during the storm. In contrast, however, the rabbi was happy to discuss plans for the new sea wall and the reconstruction efforts underway.[122]

One of the projects Cohen was most passionate about was the erection of a sea wall. Although the project was approved and passed in 1901, the sea wall would not be completed until 1910.[123] In the end the wall was seventeen feet higher than the beach and

[120] Letter from Henry Freiberg to Rabbi Henry Cohen, 18 September 1900, 3M222 Personal Correspondence, Sept 1900–April 1901, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.
[121] "Texas," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (24 November 1905): 783.
[122] Cohen and Cohen, *The Man Who Stayed*, 146.
[123] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 45.

seven feet wide.[124] On August 15, 1915 yet another major hurricane hit Galveston causing a substantial amount of damage to the newly renovated synagogue. In the end it would cost the synagogue upwards of $7,000 to repair the structure.[125] Again we are told that Rabbi Cohen worked diligently to provide comfort in yet another time of great suffering.[126] However, under the protection of the seawall, the city fared much better overall.[127]

By all accounts Cohen was in Woodville during the hurricane in 1915. However, according to a letter sent by Stephen Wise to Cohen dated August 20th, Galveston's rabbi wasted little time in rushing to serve his beloved city. In his letter to Cohen, Wise writes

> My dear Friend Cohen: I am surprised to learn that you are hastening back to Galveston. That is exactly what I expected you would do. I am sure you will serve [...] and serve well, though I earnestly hope you will not find th[...] in the same state in which they were fifteen years ago." Wise concludes his letter by expressing his wish for Cohen to move to New York as, in Wise's view, Cohen had "served Galveston long and faithfully enough."[128]

In 1900 the city of Galveston was on the rise, and so too was Rabbi Henry Cohen. After all, he was the rabbi of the largest city in Texas. Unfortunately, following the storm, the city's dreams of continuing on the path to greatness diminished. Although the city's population rebounded in the years after the storm, with its population rising up to

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[124] Larson, 265.
[125] Temple B'nai Israel, *Henry Cohen Memorial* (Galveston, TX: Temple B'nai Israel, 1955), 7.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 45.
[128] Letter from Stephen S. Wise to Henry Cohen, August 20, 1915, MS 263, Folder 11, Stephen S. Wise 1912-1922, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 1.

50,000, it still could not keep pace with Houston's growth.[129]

Cohen's traumatic experience during and in the aftermath of the hurricane, in addition to the shrinking size of the Galveston could very well have prompted him to leave. It was not as if his services were not often requested by congregations around the country. Rabbi Wise asked Cohen time and again to move to New York to become a leader of a congregation and the Reform movement there. However, whenever Cohen was asked following the hurricane if he would relocate to the Northeast, he said, "No I have enjoyed the prosperity of my people; I cannot now forsake them to their poverty.[130] Rabbi Cohen was devoted to his community body and soul and he would not abandon them in their time of need, he would serve them long after the debris was collected and the city was back on its feet.

Years later, Cohen recalled the storm in a poem, written eighteen years later.

O Galveston!
I sing not of material things
That make our city;
Things that nature for us wrought
In years ago, that still with us abide—
The harbor, bay, and headland,
The flowering oleander, and salt cedar,
Child of weed gulf and sandy waste.
Nor doth my muse chant later boons,
Seeing that their birth was caused

[129] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, 45.
[130] Jeff D. Ray, "Henry Cohen Rabbi at Galveston 50 Years," *Ft. Worth Star Telegram* (12 December 1937): 1.

By storm and stress—the toll of angry waves...[131]

The Hurricane of 1900 would remain with Rabbi Cohen for the rest of his life. However, in this poem he expressed both the destruction wrought by the waves and the "later boons," improvements made by the city that could only have occurred following the storm. Eighteen years later, Galveston remained Cohen's home, and like it, he too had been shaped by the wind and waves, by the "storm and stress." And like the city of Galveston, he remained.

[131] Henry Cohen, "O Galveston!" *The Galveston News* (19 September 1918): 1.

Conclusion

There are three factors that led Cohen to remain in Galveston and to become such an integral part of the relief and recovery efforts in the wake of the Hurricane. First and foremost, Cohen lived his life as a human being and as a rabbi devoted to living according to the tenet, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Secondly, he was a huge proponent of ecumenicism, and thirdly, Galveston’s acceptance of Cohen, due to his talent at relationship-building through pastoral care and social work, enabled him to serve the entire city.

In June 1916, Rabbi Cohen gave an address for the graduates of the Hebrew Union College in which he discussed the theme of "being a rabbi." His speech presents colorful moments in his life, in his tenure as a rabbi, in addition providing a window into his motivations related to his pastoral care and organizational leadership.[132]As part of his address, he said,

> No more than we can all love one another in the intimate sense of the word can we be even friendly, each with the other, in the intimate sense of the world! “Love thy neighbor as thyself” explains the condition. Affection is not here considered, the implication is righteous interest. Now, I am positive that when a rabbi is interested in his flock, half the struggle for their welfare is accomplished.[133]

For Cohen, Judaism's purpose was repairing the world. He could not succeed in this aim without ministering to all human beings. "I want to continue serving my fellow men regardless of race, color, or creed just as I have always striven to do in accordance with

[132] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls,* 67.
[133] Ibid., 76.

the ethics of the Bible. Men are men the world over. They need spiritual guidance here as elsewhere."[134] Cohen's statement along with his actions characterize his commitment to ecumenicalism and universalism. Cohen's relationship with Father James Kirwin typifies his dedication to ecumenicism. Henry Cohen's friendship with Father Kirwin enabled him to expand his influence to the Catholic community, in addition to providing him with the emotional and spiritual support needed to continue his tireless work. Their success in building bridges during reconstruction continued throughout their lives and bled into the fabric of the city. Every citizen of Galveston knew the names of the two primary religious leaders in the city. Their public relationship following the hurricane contributed to the culture of the city.

Later in his speech to the new ordinees in 1916, Cohen referenced the epitaph found on Rabbi Gutheim's gravestone, "A man always to be found when wanted, and always to be trusted when found."[135] Cohen saw himself as following in the footsteps of Gutheim and encouraged new rabbis to do the same. He took the epitaph to mean that as congregational rabbis, there is a deep and sincere responsibility to pastoral care above all else. Cohen was the epitome of the prophet Micah's words, "Do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God."[136] In response to the many accolades that were spoken of him throughout his life, he said, "Too much has been said about me. Too little about the community of which I am a part. Without its generous aid I could have done nothing."[137] To that point, it is unlikely that Cohen would have been as successful as he was in Galveston without the support and trust of the lay people, clergy, and leaders of the city.

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[134] Rosella Horowitz, "Ten Church Leaders," 75.
[135] Rabbi Henry Cohen, "Address to the Graduating Class of the Hebrew Union College 1916," Henry Cohen, Nearprint Biographies, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 317.
[136] Horowitz, "Ten Church Leaders," 75.
[137] Ibid., 74.

By providing spiritual, emotional, and social support for all of the citizens of the city, he gained their utmost trust in him. Without his sincere devotion to serving all people, regardless of race, gender, or religion, he would not have been incorporated into the leadership of the Citizen's Relief Committee and been able to play a much larger role in the relief and reconstruction of Galveston following the hurricane of 1900.

Upon his lifetime election as the rabbi of Temple Israel of Galveston, one of Cohen's congregants wrote,

> Dr. Cohen is of a broad, catholic disposition. His left hand never knows what good his right hand does. When one is in distress and justifies succor, the rabbi never inquires of what denomination he or she is, but relieves the distress so far as lies in his power. In doing this he has never hesitated to appropriate funds from his own private purse, oftentimes, in his charity, unselfishly sacrificing himself to the widow or the orphan, the poor and the needy. He is pre-eminently a man of the people, and through his school of human nature has learned to find his way to the hearts of the people. It is small wonder that not only his congregation has learned to love him, but acquaintanceship with those of every creed eventually ripens into friendship, and from that to a stronger and more abiding human sentiment actuated by the heart.[138]

Rabbi Henry Cohen was familiar with Presidents of the United States and leaders of American Judaism, not to mention the civic and religious leaders of Galveston. President Woodrow Wilson called Cohen "the first citizen of Texas," and Rabbi Stephen

[138] "Elected for Life," *The American Israelite* (26 May 1900), 3M313, Newspaper Clippings 1851–1911, Classified Files Newspaper Clippings 1851–1922, Henry Cohen Papers, 1850–1951, Dolph Briscoe Center for American History, The University of Texas at Austin.

S. Wise said that Cohen was the “finest rabbi we’ve got.”[139] His devotion to pastoral care and social work, his sincere belief in the importance of universalism and his dedication to ecumenicism enabled him to provide desperately needed care and leadership during a time of crisis for all of the citizens of Galveston.

In the months and years following the storm, Galveston began to rebuild, but it would never be the same. As is often the case following an epidemic or natural disaster, the storm prompted a number of the city’s residents to relocate elsewhere. One such individual sent the rabbi a note saying "Have gone back to Russia where they don't have storms." Cohen's response? "Only pogroms!"[140] Cohen, however, had very little time to think about those Galvestonians who chose to relocate after the storm. Every morning he was out in his buggy supervising the relief efforts. It is undebatable that his work with the Board of Guardians provided him with the tools to diligently serve the Central Relief Committee, the Jewish and civic communities of Galveston in the relief and reconstruction efforts.[141]

Although he could have easily left following the recovery and reconstruction of Galveston, Cohen remained in the city for the rest of his life. When asked why he never accepted one of the myriad offers he received to serve congregations on the east coast, Cohen responded “But this is my home. I like a city of this size. A man gets to know everybody. He can see the results of his work.”[142] Cohen was indeed able to see the fruits of his labors, to see a city which he so influenced remain a stalwart of tolerance in the face of pure hatred rising in the early 20th century. Rabbi Cohen’s rabbinate, his

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[139] Cohen, *Kindler of Souls*, xi.
[140] Weiner, 141.
[141] Green, *The Story of the 1900 Galveston Hurricane*, 141.
[142] Waldron, "Rabbi Cohen: First Citizen of Texas," 100.

leadership during and after the storm, provided an example for future generations of rabbis. As we will see his model of rabbinic leadership based on compassion for all people and a devotion to relationship building and ecumenicism will be repeated time in again in the 21st century.

Chapter 3

The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906 and the Rabbis who Rebuilt the Golden Gate City

On April 18, 1906, Temple Emanu-El stood tall as one of the grandest religious buildings in San Francisco. It boasted twin towers plated in bronze and gold rising 175 feet in the air. The synagogue's height and architecture made it a conspicuous sight along the San Francisco skyline.[1] Less than twenty-four hours later, Temple Emanu-El was a shell of its former self. Only the skeleton of its towers remained; its beautiful stained glass and stars of David burned and shattered.[2] The Earthquake and Fire of 1906 stands as a defining moment in the history of the city of San Francisco and as a turning point in the rabbinic and national Jewish response to epidemics and disasters.

Images of Temple Emanu-El represent the utter destruction wrought on the Jewish community of San Francisco by the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. However, it does not tell the whole story; the story of other synagogues that were destroyed or managed to survive, or for that matter, the rabbis who worked alongside the civic government, their synagogue boards, and the larger San Francisco Jewish community to rebuild the city. Nearly a year and half after the disaster, Temple Emanu-El became an important symbol of the revival of the city's Jewish community.

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[1] The Temple survived both the earthquakes of 1868 and 1906. Fred Rosenbaum, *Visions of Reform: Congregation Emanu-El and the Jews of San Francisco 1849–1999* (Berkeley, CA: Judah L. Magnes Museum, 2000).

[2] "Great Destruction Brought by Earthquake and Fire, Showing Temple Emanuel, San Francisco. Cal," New York Public Library Digital Collections, http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47e0-44bf-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99.

According to the United States Geological Survey, the earthquake in San Francisco in April 1906 "ranks as one of the most significant earthquakes of all time."[3] The fire which followed the quake prompted city leadership to explore options to prevent future fires of that magnitude from ever destroying large swaths of the city again.[4] Even over a hundred years later, the disaster remains ingrained in the fabric of San Francisco's history. The Earthquake and Fire of 1906, like the Galveston Hurricane and Flood of 1900, is representative of a shift in the type of major disasters facing American Jews in the 20th century.

Rabbis Jacob Voorsanger (1852-1908) and Jacob Nieto (1863-1930) were the leading rabbis of San Francisco in 1906.[5] Both men utilized their roles as clergy to address the immediate and long-term challenges wrought by the earthquake and fire. They demonstrated their civic leadership by working with the mayor and other leaders to bring order out of chaos. Each of them addressed a basic need of San Francisco's citizens: providing food, water, and sanitation. With the immediate needs of the city met, their attention turned to rebuilding their synagogues and Jewish institutions, and communicating with Jewish newspapers and organizations that could come to their aid. When funds were not disbursed to the Jewish community of San Francisco, Voorsanger and Nieto began writing articles and appealing to Jews—both nationally and internationally—to provide for the ailing community. These two rabbis used their prominence and the written word to advocate for their community.

Voorsanger and Nieto also employed their charismatic leadership to influence the financial and building recovery efforts of the San Francisco Jewish community. The

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[3] "The Great 1906 Earthquake," https://earthquake.usgs.gov/earthquakes/events/1906calif/18april.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "Emissaries from San Francisco," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger* (2 Nov 1906): 539.

rabbis navigated a changing political landscape vis-à-vis national fundraising to safeguard their community's recovery. The two men who did not always see eye to eye were able to join together in an effort to care for their people and to bring San Francisco back to life.

Although Voorsanger and Nieto were not the only rabbis in San Francisco addressing the needs of the Jewish community in the wake of this calamity, they were the most influential rabbis in the community who then became spokesmen in a national fundraising effort for the Jews of San Francisco. Rabbi Meyer S. Levy (1852-1916) of Temple Beth Israel, for example, actively fundraised for his specific synagogue, but did not play a significant role in the overall rehabilitation of the Jewish community of San Francisco.[6] Attention, therefore, will mostly be paid to Voorsanger and Nieto.

The most detailed biography of Jacob Voorsanger comes to us from Judah Magnes in his 1909 article in the *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*.[7] Fred Rosenbaum built upon Magnes' scholarship in his books *Cosmopolitans, Visions of Reform*, and *The Jews of San Francisco*, where he primarily focused his attention on broader topics and only deals with Voorsanger's biography and the catastrophe for a few pages in each work. A handful of primary source documents pertaining to Voorsanger and the earthquake and fire have been published in *The Western States Jewish History Journal*, but have yet to be analyzed. Kenneth Zwerin has written an analysis of Voorsanger's shifting role from cantor to rabbi, but does not touch on his

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[6] "Emissaries from San Francisco," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger*" (2 Nov 1906): 539, American Jewish Committee, "Special Articles", *American Jewish Year Book* (Jewish Publication Society, Volume 5 1903–1904), 75, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/1903_1904_3_SpecialArticles.pdf.

[7] J. Leon Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society*, no. 17 (1909): 224-26.

role in the disaster. Even less has been written on Jacob Nieto, the rabbi of the second largest synagogue in San Francisco in 1906, Temple Sherith Israel. In *Cosmopolitans*, for instance, Nieto's role in the rebuilding of the San Francisco Jewish community is mentioned only in passing. Zwerin did publish a number of articles and primary sources in *The Western States Jewish History Journal*, however, he provides no analysis of Nieto's response to the earthquake and fire of 1906.

This work seeks to add to the historical record relating to Rabbis Voorsanger and Nieto by analyzing their efforts to respond to the Jewish and larger civic communal crisis caused by the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire. The chapter will include analyses of articles, accounts, and newspapers relating to and from both men and their experiences and responses to the earthquake and fire. Overall, this chapter includes more sources on Voorsanger than on Nieto due to the former's national influence and his prolific writing. More research conducted at the Bancroft Archives at UC Berkeley—where Jacob Nieto's papers are housed—may reveal additional sources pertaining to his role in the immediate and long-term relief and recovery efforts following the Earthquake and Fire of 1906.

Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger: A Brief Biography

Voorsanger's life and career prior to the Earthquake and Fire help us to understand him as one of the leading rabbis of the American West in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Voorsanger was known for his public persona and tireless devotion to his congregation and the Jewish people. Edgar M. Kahn, in his history of Emanu-El of San Francisco where Voorsanger served as rabbi for more than two decades, describes him as having a "warm Jewish temperament and a strong personality, endowed with a

sound common-sense approach to everyday problems. He dedicated his life to the children of Israel so they should go forever forward. He was more than a spiritual leader; he was a public figure enjoying national status. He represented the finest type of European born and trained, who consecrated his life's energy to better serve San Francisco Jewry."[8] This description paints a picture of a man who worked tirelessly to rebuild his beloved city and to support his congregants and co-religionists with his whole being.

Jacob Voorsanger was born in Amsterdam on November 13, 1852, the son of a diamond cutter.[9] Between the ages of twelve and nineteen, he achieved a "limited high school level, Hebrew day school education."[5] Voorsanger immigrated to America in 1873 in his late teens.[10] Though he had no official training as a rabbi or as a cantor, he quickly secured employment as a cantor for a congregation in Philadelphia. After 1876, he bounced around from congregation to congregation in the northeast before accepting a position as the rabbi of Beth Israel Congregation in Houston, Texas where he served from 1878 to 1886.[11] In the 1880s, Voorsanger, alongside four other rabbis in Texas, became a circuit-riding rabbi to serve the various remote Jewish communities of the state.[12] As part of his work, he helped to set up religious schools, provide textbooks, lessons, and create services geared towards children, while also providing adult education, and encouraging the establishment of synagogues in outlying Texas towns.[13] In 1886, he accepted a

[8] Edgar M. Kahn, "The Saga of the First Fifty Years of Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco," Western States Jewish Historical Quarterly 3, no. 3 (April 1971): 142–143, 27.
[9] Kenneth C. Zwerin and Norton B. Stern, "Jacob Voorsanger: From Cantor to Rabbi," *Western States Jewish History Journal* 15, no.3 (1993): 196.
[10] Ibid., 195.
[11] Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," 224–226.
[12] Ibid., 305.
[13] Ibid., 306.

position to be the associate rabbi at Temple Emanu-El in San Francisco. By the time he reached Temple Emanu-El, Voorsanger was known as one of the best Jewish orators in the country.[14] Voorsanger succeeded Rabbi Elkan Cohn (1820-1889), following the former's death, and served as the synagogue's Senior Rabbi until his own death in 1908.[15]

Despite the absence of formal rabbinic training, Voorsanger quickly rose in the ranks of the growing Reform movement. During his stay in Houston, he served as the secretary of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations alongside Rabbis James K. Gutheim and Max Samfield.[16] During his tenure at Emanu-El, he was a board member of Hebrew Union College, Vice-President of the CCAR, and an editor of the *Union Prayer Book*.[17] In early 1906, he established the International Jewish League to assist Jewish communities around the world to achieve civil and religious liberties.[18] Voorsanger was highly aware of antisemitism and various challenges facing Jews around the world, particularly in Eastern Europe. The International Jewish League was born out of his impatience with New York Jewish leadership to establish an institution to address the needs of Jewish communities worldwide.[19] However, once the American Jewish Committee (AJC) was established ten months later in November of 1906, the League

[14] Zwerin and Stern, "Jacob Voorsanger," 199.
[15] Congregation Emanu-El (San Francisco, Calif.), *Ninety-five Years of Congregation Emanu-El* (San Francisco, 1945), 7.
[16] Minute Book of the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations, 1885–1887, SC-2435, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 1.
[17] Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," 225.
[18] Mark Steven Goodman, "American Jewish Life as Reflected in the Anglo-Jewish Press of Baltimore, Cincinnati, New York, Philadelphia and San Francisco from 1905–1910," rabbinical thesis, 1975, SC-9895, Cincinnati, OH, p. 21.
[19] Ibid., 22.

disbanded and was absorbed into the AJC.[20] As such, Voorsanger continued to serve on the executive board of the AJC up until his death.[21]

Voorsanger, like his contemporary Max Samfield, also added to the Jewish journalistic landscape of the 19th and 20th centuries. Over the course of his career, he edited multiple Jewish newspapers including the *Jewish South* (1881–1883) as well as the *Jewish Progress* (1890–1893), which became the *Emanu-El*, a weekly Jewish newspaper that he edited until his death.[22] Although the production of nearly every Jewish newspaper ceased in the wake of the disaster in 1906, Voorsanger made it a major priority to move his newspaper's operations to Oakland so he could continue printing the news during the relief efforts and recovery process.[23]

Voorsanger's academic credentials also grew throughout his career. He was awarded two honorary degrees by the Hebrew Union College—a "Bachelor of Theology" in 1895 and a Doctor of Divinity a few years later.[24] He also helped to establish a department for Semitic Languages and Literature at the University of California in Berkeley.[25]

Voorsanger died at the Hotel Del Monte in Monterey, CA on April 27, 1908.[26] His death is attributed to the intense stress brought about by the ongoing recovery and rebuilding efforts in San Francisco which sent him to the east coast and to Europe to

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[20] Ibid., 24.
[21] "Jewish Committee Meets: National Body to Protect Civil Rights, Officers Elected," *The New York Times*, (11 November 1907), https://timesmachine.nytimes.com/timesmachine/1907/11/11/104712077.pdf.
[22] Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," 224–225.
[23] Ibid., 224-225.
[24] Zwerin and Stern, "Jacob Voorsanger," 200-201.
[25] Ibid., 225.
[26] Zwerin and Stern, "Jacob Voorsanger," 201.

secure funds for the Jewish community.[27] At the time of his death, he had served Temple Emanu-El and San Francisco for approximately twenty-two years.[28]

Voorsanger's early career and leadership style were influenced by his experience as a "frontier rabbi." His experience in rural Texas communities provided him with an innovative perspective on the role of the rabbi in the synagogue and larger Jewish community. Voorsanger arguably followed in the footsteps of Isaac M. Wise, albeit on a smaller scale, to serve as a leader not only of his regional and congregational community, but as a creative national force sculpting the future of American Jewry.

Rabbi Jacob Nieto: A Brief Biography

Nieto was arguably one of the most innovative and charismatic rabbis in the American West. His childhood and early professional life gave him the education he needed to function as a rabbi and Jewish educator. His experiences in Jamaica, including his own brush with disaster, helped him to see beyond the traditional framework of the synagogue towards a new vision for congregational life. Jacob Nieto was born in London on December 22, 1863.[29] At age seven, Nieto's father, a chazzan, moved the family to Kingston, Jamaica.[30] Nieto graduated from primary school in 1879 on the island. That summer he travelled to New York, where he enrolled in public school. In 1881, he became a freshman at City College. Simultaneously, he attended Temple Emanu-El of New York's Preparatory School, a program that channeled young, prospective rabbinical

[27] Edward Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2006), 50.
[28] Magnes, "Jacob Voorsanger," 224.
[29] Kenneth C. Zwerin, "Rabbi Jacob Nieto of Congregation Sherith Israel," *Western States Jewish History* 28, no. 3 (April 1996): 201, "Rabbi Jacob Voorsanger of San Francisco on Jews and Judaism: The Implications of the Pittsburgh Platform," in The American Jewish Historical Quarterly 63 (December 1973): 185-203.
[30] Ibid.

students to Hebrew Union College from New York City.[31] Nieto graduated from this program in January of 1882 and returned to Jamaica to enter university.[32]

His plans were thwarted when a major fire broke out in Kingston in 1882 and his entire family returned to London. Three years later, Nieto became an assistant teacher at the North London Collegiate School.[33] In 1886, he accepted a position as a teacher at the Jews' Hospital and Orphan's Asylum of West Norwood.[34] Part of his work involved distributing funds to poor Jewish families. A letter to the Sheffield Jewish Board of Guardians includes glowing remarks regarding Nieto's service to the community in this position.[35] In the same year, Nieto reported the amount of funds raised at various charitable events. In the report, he explains that the Board of Guardians distributed funds to 26 families and 11 individuals.[36] Nieto's work as a teacher and fundraiser prepared him for his role in reforming Jewish education in San Francisco. It also gave him the tools to address the financial needs of Jewish San Franciscans in the wake of the earthquake and fire of 1906.

Three years later, without any further rabbinic training, he was elected a minister, teacher and secretary at the Sheffield Hebrew Congregation.[37] In 1892, he left Sheffield to pursue his rabbinical studies at Jews' College in London; however, he remained for only one year.[38] After leaving Jews' College, Nieto had a difficult time finding steady work in England. It is interesting to note that his lack of rabbinical ordination or even an

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[31] Ibid., 201.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid., 202.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Jacob Nieto, "Sheffield Jewish Board of Guardians Statement of Accounts and Annual Address 1891," Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 4.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Zwerin, "Rabbi Jacob Nieto of Congregation Sherith Israel," 203.
[38] Ibid., 204.

advanced degree one sort or another posed no hindrance to his future career in the United States.

In 1893, Nieto travelled to New York to find work where his father was serving as a cantor.[39] Although he preached a sermon at B'nai Jeshurun in New York, it was ultimately the young Stephen S. Wise (1874-1949) who secured the position.[40] In the spring of 1893, Nieto was invited to lead services and to deliver a sermon at Sherith Israel in San Francisco.[41] On June 8 of that year Nieto was elected as the minister to the congregation, and he was installed a short time later.[42]

The young rabbi became known as an accomplished orator, who drew large crowds to Sherith Israel. On many Shabbatot, congregants together with members of the Christian community members filled the synagogue to capacity.[43] On Yom Kippur in 1893, for example, every seat in the synagogue was filled.[44]

In addition to the large numbers he attracted to the synagogue, Nieto made it a priority to become deeply involved in charitable causes in San Francisco, just as he had in Sheffield. Less than a month following his installation, Nieto was already working on fundraising for the Hebrew Benevolent Society and offering the organization a meeting

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[39] Ibid., 204.
[40] Ibid., 204–205.
[41] "Invitation from Alexander L. Badt from San Francisco," (24 May 1893), Jacob Nieto, Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[42] "Order of Service Arranged for the Installation of Rev. Jacob Nieto as Rabbi of the Sherith Israel," 14 June 1893, Jacob Nieto, Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[43] Kenneth C. Zwerin, "Rabbi Jacob Nieto of Congregation Sherith Israel--Part II," *Western States Jewish History*, 18, no. 3 (January 1996): 211.
[44] "Fasted All Day: Sermons in the Temples," Undated, Jacob Nieto, Microfilm Nos. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

space at the synagogue.[45] His dedication to charity would be deeply impactful in his relief and recovery efforts following the earthquake and fire of 1906.

In 1894, Nieto married Rose Frankel and together they had four children: Frank, Anita, Julie, and John.[46] One of the greatest tragedies of Nieto's life was the loss of his eldest son, Frank, who drowned in 1909 around age 14.[47] Their younger son, John, was born with Down Syndrome seven years after Frank's death. Although he began his life at home with his parents, he was sent to live in a home where he died in 1937.[48]

Although Nieto's personal life consisted of a number of tragedies, his professional life was particularly successful. His marriage coincided with his rising fame in San Francisco in the late nineteenth century. Initially, Nieto and Voorsanger collaborated on communal projects. Not long after his marriage to Rose, Nieto and Rabbi Voorsanger, celebrated a joint Thanksgiving service between Sherith Israel and Temple Emanu-El. At the service, Nieto spoke glowingly of the spirit of unity exhibited by the service saying, "We believe this to be the first joint service ever held in San Francisco, and it is a happy augury of the closer relations in which not only these congregations, but all others in the city, are to be brought. Without doing violence to the congregational system, it can but benefit the cause to see the various religious bodies drawn somewhat nearer."[49] Unfortunately, this example of friendly relations between the rabbis proved short-lived as the following year the congregations celebrated the American holiday separately.[50]

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[45] "Letter from Rabbi Jacob Nieto for First Hebrew Benevolent Society," July 1893, Jacob Nieto, Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[46] Zwerin, "Rabbi Jacob Nieto, Part II," 213.
[47] Ibid., 215.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 213.
[50] Ibid.

The consistently high attendance rates at Sherith Israel prompted the synagogue to discuss renovating and expanding the building in 1895.[51] Nieto promoted a grand plan for the new synagogue which included the addition of a gymnasium, library, and a lecture hall.[52] His proposal suggested that the synagogue would be more than a place of worship—a full-fledged community center.[53] Nieto's proposal placed the two rabbis at odds with one another. As Zwerin points out, the crowds attending services at Sherith Israel already took away attendance from Voorsanger's lectures at Emanu-El.[54] Building a community center would only drive more people to Sherith Israel.

Nieto's innovative concept for the synagogue as community center placed the two rabbis at odds with one another. In 1896, they engaged in verbal parries through their respective contributions to the *San Francisco Call* and the *Emanu-El*. Although Nieto validated his friendship with Voorsanger, his rhetoric points to division between the two. In one particular article, Nieto responded to an attack by Voorsanger saying: "You have thrown down the gauntlet. I accept the challenge. Let the battle proceed."[58] Voorsanger did not respond to Nieto's forceful rhetoric. Simultaneously, the plans for the new synagogue were placed on hold. Synagogue construction did not begin until 1903, and

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[51] Ibid.

[52] "Sherith Israel About to Build, A Handsome Jewish Place of Worship in the Western Addition, Rabbi Nieto Suggested It," Undated, Jacob Nieto, Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

[53] David Kaufman's book, The Shul with the Pool, gives us a better sense of how Nieto developed his conception of the synagogue center. The idea of a synagogue center was popularized in the late 1880s and early 1890s by Rabbi Henry Berkowitz, one of the first ordinees of the Hebrew Union College. In 1888, Berkowitz created a new type of auxiliary organization which would "oversee non-religious activities within a congregation." According to Kaufman, the auxiliary "marked the first attempt to develop a religious-social synthesis in America." (Kenneth Libo. "*Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (review)." *American Jewish History* 88, no. 2 (2000): 303-305. https://muse.jhu.edu/ (accessed March 31, 2019). In 1877, the YMHA in New York installed its first gymnasium. Rabbi Moses Gries, of Cleveland's Tifereth Israel, instituted the first synagogue gymnasium in 1901, six years after Nieto's initial proposal (David Kaufman, *Shul with a Pool: The "Synagogue-Center" in American Jewish History* (Hanover: Brandeis University Press, 1999, 39).
Zwerin, "Rabbi Jacob Nieto, Part II," 213.

[54] Ibid., 218.

when the new Sherith Israel building was dedicated in 1905, it included neither a gymnasium nor a school building as initially proposed.[55] Although we do not know exactly what prompted the dissolution of Nieto's initial concept for Sherith Israel, it is likely that the two came to some agreement that would preserve their friendship and Voorsanger's position as the leading rabbi of the city.

By 1897, Nieto and Voorsanger worked together to re-envision Jewish education in San Francisco. Prior to Nieto's arrival, B'nai B'rith was in charge of providing Jewish education to the city's youth. A child could not receive religious instruction if his father was not a member of B'nai B'rith. In 1897 B'nai B'rith discontinued its education efforts, and the direction of religious schooling in San Francisco was taken over by Rabbis Voorsanger and Nieto who formed the Jewish Educational Society.[56]

Nieto's leadership and renown was primarily limited to San Francisco. He was a prolific writer for Jewish and civic newspapers, including *The Jewish Times and Observer* as well as the *San Francisco Bulletin*.[57] He spent almost twenty years of his life fighting against capital punishment. He served on the San Francisco board of education; was the president of the Board of Ministers of Northern California; and an active member in the Grand Masonic Lodge of California. His leadership within the Jewish community of San Francisco included organizing the Y.M.H.A., serving on the board of the Jewish Educational Society as well as a prominent leader of B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge No. 4.[58] According to the Bancroft Library's biography of Nieto, he was the of the

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[55] Ibid.
[56] Jacob Nieto, "History of the Jewish Educational Society: The Founding and Growth of an Adequate Hebrew School Described by One of its Prime Movers," *The Jewish Journal* (4 September 1929).
[57] The documents found in the archives related to Jacob Nieto, specifically on microfilm, include a variety of articles he wrote for both papers. Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.
[58] "Rabbi Jacob Nieto Dies in San Francisco," *Jewish Daily Bulletin* (30 March 1930).

Western Association of Jewish Ministers and one of the founding members of the San Francisco Council of the Boy Scouts. He also worked alongside Catholic priests to protest the American Protective Association, which was anti-Catholic.[59]

Voorsanger and Nieto served as the primary leaders of the Jewish community of San Francisco in the latter part of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As such, throughout their careers they worked in tandem and sometimes in competition with one another. Their dispute in the last decade of the nineteenth century demonstrates their divergent views on the acceptability of the "synagogue-center" model and their contrasting visions for the future of the American synagogue. However, they were able to work together despite these differences in order to promote important initiatives for the San Francisco Jewish community in terms of education and organizational infrastructure. Their collaboration prior to the earthquake and fire enabled them to work together as part of the Jewish relief efforts in the wake of disaster.

San Francisco: The Golden Gate City

Before the dawn of the Gold Rush, in January 1848, California's population hovered a little over 18,000.[60] During the Civil War, many individuals and families made their way west. Between 1860 and 1870, the state's population increased from 380,000 to 560,000.[61] In 1902, when George Pardee (1857-1941) became Governor of California, he remarked that the state was in "exceptionally good shape" and that his role was to "tinker,

[59] John Higham, "The Mind of a Nativist: Henry F. Bowers and the A.P.A.," American Quarterly, vol. 4, no. 1 (Spring 1952), pp. 16–24, John Higham, *Strangers in the Land Patterns of American Nativism, 1860-1925* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011.
[60] Simon Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World: America and the Great California Earthquake of 1906* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 121.
[61] Ibid., 128.

fine tune, and to tread water."[62] At the turn of the twentieth century, the city boasted considerable wealth due in part to the continued discovery of precious metals, as well as increased exports of dairy, wheat, and fruit.[63] The millionaires of San Francisco ensured that the city was filled with modern attractions and amenities: "fine restaurants, music halls, bars and high-class brothels....the streets...were fast being paved with cobbles; handsome signs were being put up" while running water was brought into the city "from small reservoirs" and "offered to all residents fortunate enough to live in the center of the city."[64] By 1873, cable cars lined the steep hills. While in the years to come "an opera house, an art gallery, a synagogue, and various asylums for the troubled and afflicted were erected in addition to a variety of public gardens."[65]

The city was metropolitan in its diversity as well. According to the 1855 edition of the *Annals of San Francisco*, the city's population was comprised of "people of many races of the Hindoo land; Russians with furs and sables; a stray, turbaned, stately Turk or two, and occasionally a half-naked shivering Indian; multitudes of the Spanish race from every country of the Americas" not to mention the English, German, Italians, French, Jews, and Chinese.[66]

The sentiments of the times were not kind to non-whites or Jews. Although the *Annals* referred to a number of Jews as "thick-lipped, hooked-nosed, ox-eyed, cunning, oily Jews," racist sentiments were more commonly directed towards the Chinese residents of the city. By the 1870s there were approximately 45,000 Chinese living in a

[62] Ibid., 130.
[63] Ibid.,131.
[64] Ibid., 214.
[65] Ibid., 216.
[66] Ibid., 219.

small area which came to be known as China Town.[67] The *Annals* describe the Chinese as being of "a different language, blood, religion and character, inferior in both mental and bodily characteristics, the Chinaman is looked upon by some as only a little superior to the negro...his person does not smell sweetly, his color is unusual, his penuriousness is extreme; his lying, knavery and natural cowardice are proverbial."[68]

In line with the times, San Francisco's new Town Hall was a symbol of the city's modern appeal and dysfunction. The new Town Hall cost $6 million dollars to build and took a little over a quarter of a century to complete.[69] The grand building was "by far the biggest building west of Chicago and the grandest civic structure west of the Mississippi.[70] Like other cities in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, San Francisco was run not only by the mayor, but by the city's political machine. The grandeur of city hall, hid a corrupt government. The mayor of San Francisco in 1906, Eugene Schmitz (1864-1928), would go on to be indicted and jailed alongside the city's Jewish boss, Abraham Ruef (1864-1936).[71]

Despite the city's modern sensibilities, there were clear concerns regarding its infrastructure and ability to withstand a major fire. Dennis T. Sullivan (1852-1906), the renowned fire chief of San Francisco who lost his life in 1906 earthquake, recognized that the city was a fire disaster waiting to happen.[72] Although he advocated for better

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[67] Ibid., 220.
[68] Ibid., 221.
[69] Ibid., 225.
[70] Ibid.
[71] On June 13, 1907, Mayor Schmitz, the mayor during the earthquake and initial recovery was convicted and sentenced for corruption in the makeshift courtrooms established at Sherith Israel. Fred Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 175.
[72] Sullivan was in fact mortally wounded during the earthquake and fire and died four days following the disaster. "Death of Fire Chief Engineer Dennis T. Sullivan," http://www.sfmuseum.net/hist10/dtsullivan.html.

access to freshwater from cisterns long abandoned under the city, his recommendations were ignored.[73] The National Board of Fire Underwriters agreed with Sullivan, saying that the city's "water supply system, despite being able to deliver 36 million gallons a day, was structurally in such poor shape that the hydrants would not be able to halt anything approaching a major fire."[74]

On the eve of the earthquake, San Francisco consisted of nearly half a million people.[75] The Governor of California and the Mayor of San Francisco were confident in the continued flourishing of their people and the bright future of the Golden Gate City. Then came that fateful day in 1906 when, as one historian observed, "everything suddenly went spectacularly and memorably wrong."[76]

San Francisco Jewish Community

San Francisco was the first Jewish community to be in established in the American West.[77] It comprised approximately 7 percent of the total population of San Francisco in 1906. Although only a small portion of the population, the Jewish community accounted for a significantly larger portion of the city's overall wealth.[78] The wealthiest of the Jewish community lived in extravagant Victorian houses filled with

[73] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, 228–229.
[74] Ibid., 229.
[75] Ibid., 230.
[76] Ibid., 131.
[77] Fred Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans: A Social and Cultural History of the Jews of the San Francisco Bay Area* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 13.
[78] It should be noted that while Fred Rosenbaum cites the population of San Francisco as 400,000 the *San Francisco Herald* as well as a number of other sources cite the number at 450,000. Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 171; Bill Niekirken, "1906 San Francisco Earthquake," San Francisco Chronicle, (18 April 2018), https://www.sfchronicle.com/thetake/article/1906-San-Francisco-earthquake-Old-photos-offer-12836621.php.

stain glass windows and servants.[79] In stark contrast to the Jewish elite, about 5,000 predominantly poor Eastern European Jewish immigrants lived south of Market street.[80] Most of these newcomers lived in shacks which served to fuel the already powerful fire which would sweep across the city in April of 1906.[81]

These two groups could not have been more different, and yet they made up the fabric of the most vibrant Jewish community in the West.

The Jewish community of San Francisco was composed of a strong network of institutions and synagogues. In his *Jewish Encyclopedia* article from 1899, Voorsanger lists the synagogues of San Francisco along with their leaders: Emanu-El: Rabbi Voorsanger, Cantor E. J. Stark; Bush Temple (Ohabai Shalom) Rabbi Myers and Cantor D. Meyerson; Geary St. Temple (Beth Israel) Rabbi M.S. Levy and Cantor Joseph Rabinowitz; the Taylor St. Temple (Shearith Israel) Rabbi Nieto and Cantor D.S. Davis; Stockton St. (Shaare Zedek) Rabbi N. Mosessohn, Rev. J. Rosenbaum (Cantor); Mission St. Shule (Beth Menachem Streisand) Rev. M. Reznik.[82] At the turn of the century there were approximately 1,600 Jews who were members of synagogues noted as in Voorsanger's encyclopedia article. However, Voorsanger proposed that each synagogue could have supported 4,000 people based on the Jewish population at the time being quoted at or around 16,000.[83] Some synagogues were indeed growing and expanding their facilities. The new Sherith Israel building was dedicated in September of 1905 and

[79] Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 90.
[80] Ibid., 170.
[81] Ibid., 170.
[82] Mark S. Hurvitz, "Jewish Life in San Francisco 1897–1899: As Depicted in Jacob Voorsanger's Weekly, *Emanu-El*," (4 April 1977), SC-5273, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 5.
[83] Voorsanger proposed these statistics in an effort to explain that the synagogues could collectively sustai the Jewish community. However, according to this statistic, a great number of San Francisco's Jews were unaffiliated with a congregation. Ibid., 5.

was located further away from the rest of the synagogues in the residential part of the city.[84] At the same time, the Geary St. Temple (Beth Israel), Rabbi Levy's congregation downtown, was nearing completion in April 1906.[85]

There were also a variety of organizations that provided assistance to the city's Jewish community. The Eureka Benevolent Society played an important role in providing assistance to Jews in need, while the Hebrew Free Loan Association helped Jews get back on their feet.[86] There were two homes for the most senior members of the community including the Home for Aged and Disabled (Orthodox) Hebrews as well as the Old People's Home.[87] The city also boasted a Jewish Orphan Asylum, Young Hebrew Men's Association, Mt. Zion Hospital, three Jewish newspapers, and the Emanu-El Sisterhood Settlement House. In addition, the B'nai B'rith building included a massive library with approximately 14,000 books.[88] All in all, at the time of the time of the earthquake and fire of 1906, San Francisco's Jewish community was on the rise.

San Francisco Earthquake and Fire

On April 18, 1906 at a few minutes past five in the morning, the most intense earthquake in historical memory struck the vibrant city of San Francisco.[89] At this hour in the morning, it was "still not yet light."[90] According to Sir Courtney Bennett, the British Consul General in San Francisco, "The disturbance lasted 48 seconds. On looking from

[84] Rudolph I. Coffee, "Jewish Conditions in San Francisco," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger* (31 Aug 1906): 317.
[85] "Emissaries from San Francisco," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger* (2 Nov 1906): 539.
[86] Coffee, "Jewish Conditions in San Francisco," 317.
[87] Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco*, 54.
[88] Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 171.
[89] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World,* 12.
[90] Ibid., 14.

the window of our hotel, which was badly shattered—two men in fact to right and left of our rooms were killed—I saw the whole City enveloped in a pile of dust caused by falling buildings."[91] When the aftershocks wore off, the fires began. The fire, as Chief Dennis Sullivan had predicted, was nearly impossible to control. After all was said and done, the fire burned 2,600 acres and demolished 490 city blocks.[92] The prominent American novelist and journalist, Jack London (1876-1916) wrote that "By Wednesday afternoon, inside of twelve hours, half the heart of the city was gone."[93]

We must remember that it is difficult to distinguish the numbers of those who perished in the earthquake from those who died in the subsequent fires.[94] Chimneys were the most common cause of destruction wrought by fire. Homes and businesses erupted in flames as chimneys collapsed due to the quake. Simon Winchester explains in his book, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, that at the time in San Francisco, "most buildings had open fires and furnaces, and boilers were invariably fueled by wood, or soft and sooty coal." In the end, around "95 percent of all of San Francisco's chimneys collapsed. According to official reports, over 28,000 buildings were destroyed, over 3,000 killed, and 225,000 were homeless. Perhaps the most tragic part of this combined disaster was the fates of those stuck beneath rubble unable to escape the advancing flames."[95] Intense winds propelled the fire forward throughout the city, making it nearly impossible to contain:[96]

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[91] Ibid., 274.
[92] Ibid., 291.
[93] Ibid., 294.
[94] Ibid., 275.
[95] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, 274.
[96] Ibid., 294.

> For the first three days after the earthquake, the city was buffeted by wildly gyrating winds generated by the changing patterns of weather and the internal workings of the firestorms…By late Friday, a strong northwesterly wind from off the ocean had reasserted its dominance, cooling the city and forcing the fire back toward the waterfront and across fresh combustibles.[97]

The fires continued to rage for three days, but on Saturday it began to rain. The rain squelched the fires, but brought little physical comfort to the thousands of refugees residing in makeshift shelters.[98]

Brigadier General Frederick Funston (1865-1917) was a leader in the recovery efforts of San Francisco. Shortly after the catastrophe, Funston reached out to Washington for tents, provisions, and medicine. William Howard Taft, then Secretary of War, responded without delay.[99] Towards the latter part of the day, Funston had approximately 1,500 soldiers committed to re-establishing order in the broken city.[100]

According to Fred Rosenbaum, following the calamity, over half of the city's population was homeless and by the Fall, forty thousand of those initial refugees remained in tent cities.[101] Like in Galveston, the city set about establishing refugee camps. These camps were made up of army-issued "small green-painted officially issued earthquake cottages."[102] Approximately 6,000 of these buildings replaced the tents

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[97] Philip L. Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906: How San Francisco Nearly Destroyed Itself; With a New Preface* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 52.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World,* 310.
[100] Ibid., 311.
[101] Fred Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 170–171.
[102] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, 313.

initially issued by the military. These camps became like tiny cities with governments, social hierarchies, and personalities of their own.[103]

On Friday, as thousands of people fled the city, community leaders banded together to begin the relief and rebuilding efforts in earnest. Some of these groups and committees included "The Committee of Fifty" of which there were many subcommittees such as "Resumption of Civil Government, Resumption of the Judiciary, Transportation, Light and Telephone, Water, Housing, Medical Supplies, Relief of Sick and Wounded, Relief of Chinese" and the Finance Committee.[104] Nieto made different decisions based on his priorities as a crisis leader, namely focusing on sanitation and the systematic distribution of rations. Sherith Israel, which remained intact and which was in close proximity to the now defunct City Hall building, became the primary offices for the government. This meant that during the recovery process, the government was stationed in Nieto's synagogue, making him *de facto* an integral part of the rebuilding efforts.

The Earthquake and Fire's Impact on the Jewish Community of San Francisco

Recounting his own experience of the earthquake, Voorsanger wrote, it was as if "the abyss yawned at our feet and it seemed that with the overturning of the world we would be lost forever."[105] The city was nearly decimated both physically and financially. Although the Jewish community made up only a small percentage of the overall

[103] Ibid.
[104] Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*, 176.
[105] Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans*, 169.

population, the combined residential and commercial property loss from the fire reached nearly a billion dollars.[106]

The majority of the city's synagogues were in shambles. As referenced at the beginning of this chapter, Emanu-El was a shell of its former grandeur; only its towers and facade remained standing. Rabbi Cohn and Cantor Stark's libraries, the synagogue's board minute books, synagogue records, and the Torah scroll given to the temple by Moses Montefiore in 1851 were all destroyed in the fire.[107] According to Henry Wagenheim, the president of Emanu-El, the disaster also ruined large swaths of the synagogue's cemetery. He reported to the board that over 800 headstones and mausoleums had been damaged. The chapel within the cemetery was irreparable. Luckily, one structure erected the year before the earthquake and fire remained intact and could be used for funerals if needed.[108]

In contrast, Nieto's synagogue, Sherith Israel, suffered only minor damage from the earthquake and was repaired without delay.[109] The Geary Street Temple, Beth Israel, on the other hand, whose building was nearly completed prior to the quake, was ostensibly demolished. The 47-second tremor, which caused $68,000 damage, so devastated the membership of the synagogue that Rabbi M.S. Levy had to go East for assistance."[110] The Russ Street synagogue, Keneseth Israel, lost not only its building but

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[106] Fred Rosenbaum cites this number in his book the *Cosmopolitans.* He does not specify if the "1 billion dollars" in damages corresponds to currency in 1906 or for 1989 when the number he quotes from Gladys Hansen and Emmet Condon's book *Denial of Disaster* was published. It is likely, in my view, that the number would be 1 billion dollars in today's currency based on a Consumer Price Index Report (Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis Community Development Project, "Consumer Price Index (estimate) 1800–", Retrieved January 2, 2019). The citation from Rosenbaum can be found on p. 171.
[107] Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco*, 50.
[108] Henry Wagenheim, "Report of the President," 28 October 1906, Congregation Emanu-El Records, 1906–1913, X-84, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 38.
[109] Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco*, 50.
[110] Ibid., 50.

also twenty Torah scrolls.[111] As the fire threatened the Bush Street synagogue, Rabbi Bernard Kaplan dashed into the building, saving the Torah scrolls and moving them to safety.[112]

Other Jewish organizations also suffered damage of varying degrees. In 1900, The Eureka Benevolent Society, completed a new three-story building. After the earthquake and fire, only the facade remained.[113] The records and books housed in the B'nai B'rith building on Eddy Street went up in flames. Thankfully, although the building of the Jewish Orphan Asylum suffered severe damage, none of the nearly 200 orphans were hurt. According to the Superintendent, Henry Mauser, "For two nights we all camped out on the grass. The third day, being terribly moist and foggy, we occupied our Gymnasium."[114] Similarly, the Home for Aged and Disabled (Orthodox) Hebrews which was located on Lombard Street was decimated. Tragically, Zwerin recounts that "the 14 residents lived in the open air until they were aided by the Salvation Army."[115] All three of the city's Jewish newspapers were wiped out. Voorsanger, however, was committed to getting his paper back up and running, and he soon was publishing out of Oakland.[116] Some buildings, fortunately, suffered minimal damage or none at all. The Old People's Home located on Silver Avenue received only minor damage. In addition, the Mt. Zion hospital was left unscathed by the earthquake and fire.[117]

Among the many refugees finding their way to makeshift camps, there were "five thousand Jews...almost all of them East European newcomers, whose wood-framed

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[111] Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans,* 171.
[112] "Earthquake Echoes," *The American Israelite* (3 May 1906): 7.
[113] Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco*, 51.
[114] Ibid., 54.
[115] Ibid., 53.
[116] Ibid., 50.
[117] https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/k6ht2m7p/entire_text/.

shacks and cottages had quickly become fuel for the flames."[118] Voorsanger estimated that there were approximately 10,000 Jews who were either homeless or in need of aid.[119] Although this number would come into question by the committee sent from the East Coast to assess the needs of the Jewish community of San Francisco, it reveals the intense need that presented itself in the wake of the disaster.

Voorsanger and Nieto as First Responders

Rabbis Voorsanger and Nieto utilized crisis management leadership as they participated in the immediate relief efforts and long-term planning for the rebuilding of the San Francisco Jewish community following the events of April 18, 1906. Rabbi Voorsanger sprang into action. In his account, published in the journal *Out West*, he reports that an hour after the earthquake, he and others gathered at the Pavillion on Larkin street sent there "by a common impulse to organize for the rescue of the dead and wounded."[120] He was amazed by the throng of people prepared to rush to the aid of their fellow human beings:

> I can scarcely describe the motley crowd that came rushing into the improvised hospital…the automobile emergency service…had begun its blessed, helpful work in bringing in the dead and wounded. Within, an army of physicians, nurses, clergymen, monks, nuns, Sisters of Mercy…stood ready to render service—service of the body and service of

[118] Rosenbaum, *Cosmopolitans,* 170.
[119] Jacob Voorsanger, "San Francisco Jewry After the Earthquake," *The American Israelite* (19 March 1908): 5.
[120] Jacob Voorsanger, "The Relief Work in San Francisco" in *Out West: A Magazine of the Old Pacific and the New* 24 (January-June 1906): 526–531, 527.

the soul. But all station, rank and creed were as completely forgotten as if they had never existed.[121]

While he was actively working with this group to provide immediate aid to the residents of the city, he was also concerned with making contact with the mayor. Apparently, he was prevented from doing so by a "sea of fire" located between the Pavillion, where this ragtag group of first responders gathered, and City Hall. Because of this, he was not able to meet with the mayor until the third day, when Mayor Schmitz moved to the police station.[122]

Voorsanger attended the first meeting called by the mayor regarding initial relief efforts. Voorsanger was asked to serve on the Committee of Fifty, formed to address the immediate needs of the citizens of San Francisco. Schmitz placed Voorsanger in charge of the Food Committee. As chair, he oversaw the first meeting of the men tasked with feeding the city of San Francisco. He mentions that, at the time, they really did not fully grasp the immensity of their work. According to the Committee on Housing and Homeless, there were approximately two thousand refugees in Golden Gate Park alone. He was charged with an immense task that he knew if left unchecked would lead to chaos. Voorsanger is quoted as saying that "Above all, the people must be fed. Hunger is the worst anarchist in existence. The insanity of thirst and empty stomachs creates infinitely more mischief than the wrath of the earthquake or the fury of the fire."[123] With the assistance of the YMHA, twenty-five wagons delivered food, and prior to Shabbat on Friday evening, a number of food stations were established. The first two stations were

[121] Ibid., 527–528.
[122] Ibid., 529.
[123] Fradkin, *The Great Earthquake and Firestorms of 1906*, 177.

located at the Masonic Lodge at Golden Gate Park and at the YMHA building.[124] Voorsanger mused that "the Saturday before I had preached in the Temple of the living God, for it was the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. That following Saturday I was the biggest thief in the United States."[125]He saw himself as the "biggest thief in the United States" because he was taking food from some places in order to distribute it to the hungry. Here Voorsanger recognizes the cognitive dissonance between his role as a rabbi encouraging Shabbat observance and his obligation to respond to the most basic needs of his Jewish and civic communities.

By April 25, Voorganger reported that sixty relief stations were operating in the city and that more would be opening that evening. The rabbi suggested that San Franciscans return to work as soon as possible so that food could be purchased "even on a nominal basis." After setting up relief stations, Voorsanger described his intention of establishing what he called "the Galveston card system for the issuing of rations."[126]

Nieto, while not a part of the Committee of Fifty, also participated in the immediate relief efforts following the earthquake and fire. On Friday, two days after the earthquake, Nieto feared that an epidemic might break out in the city if clean water was not supplied to the people. In response, Nieto authorized two men to dig for water in Jefferson Square.[127] While he was busy leading this effort, a handful of doctors suggested that Nieto share his idea with other leaders in the city. Nieto then went in search of the

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[124] Ibid., 531.
[125] Ibid.
[126] Although Voorsanger mentions the "Galveston System," and later Nieto also used the same term, I have yet to uncover this system described in sources from Galveston in connection to the relief of hurricane victims or for that matter, addressing hunger in wake of recessions occurring in the late 19th century. "Relief Work Progresses: General Conditions Are Hopeful and Thousands of Men Are Working," *The San Francisco Call* (25 April 1906): 3. Erik Larson does not confirm nor deny the existence of an early "food stamp" system following the hurricane.
[127] Jacob Nieto, "Account from November 18th," Microfilm No. 1402, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 1.

mayor to obtain permission to dig pits in other parts of the city. As part of his efforts to secure safe drinking water and to promote sanitary conditions in the city, he also sought disinfectant. On Saturday, he directed three additional pits be dug near the synagogue on Sutter street where he says, "quite a number of people in the surrounding areas had taken refuge-the sanitary conditions making it imperative that some action be taken immediately."[128] Although Nieto initially authorized two men to dig for water at Jefferson Square, the military later took over this project.[129] Nieto had the forethought and wherewithal to find willing and able men to begin it in the first place attempting to ensure the immediate and long term welfare of all San Franciscans.

Nieto also made a point to concern himself with the nature of the sewers in the city. He writes that "upon going through Sanches Streets, I noticed a number of erections over the manholes in the several parts of the city, and I discovered that there was no running water through those sewers."[130] Nieto directed a doctor to prohibit people from using sewers in those areas. For the first few days following the disaster, he could not directly supervise excavations for fresh water outside of his immediate area. However, once he acquired a car he set about making visits to various parts of the city where excavations were taking place.[131]

At the same time, Nieto saw the need for an additional food station and set about establishing one as well as a system to distribute food fairly to the populace. According to his account, Nieto noticed that there was trouble with distributing food, with "some people getting too much and others getting none." In response, he "organized a sub-

[128] Ibid., 1.
[129] Ibid., 2.
[130] Ibid.
[131] Ibid.

station at the corner of Bush & Webster for the purpose of giving food to the people in the six blocks between Laguna and Fillmore." Over the course of one week, the substation provided 350 families with food. Not only that but "with the exception of the first day, when the men in charge were not quite used to the work," there were no complaints. He described the system and the scene saying, "the people are not compelled to stand in line and wait; they come between certain hours and present a ticket that has been issued to them by a volunteer employed to go around and discover how many persons in each house, and, on presentation of this ticket the necessary amount of rations is distributed; repeating is prevented by the officer in charge stamping the tickets "Served this A.M." or "Served this P.M." with the date."[132] Nieto's relief and recovery efforts demonstrate his realism and action-oriented crisis leadership style.[133]

Besides his efforts to guarantee proper sanitation and provide orderly food distribution, Nieto also established Sherith Israel as a space for homeless Jews to register as safe. In doing so, Nieto could respond to the telegrams he received for information regarding families and individuals' safety and whereabouts in the community. He writes that, he "established an office in my temple, corner of California and Webster Streets for the purpose of having people of the Jewish community who are homeless, register their whereabouts with me, so that I may be able to reply to the numerous telegrams for information which are reaching us almost every month."[134] Nieto, like Henry Cohen in Galveston, and other rabbis before him, served as a point of connection between local Jews and their families across the country.

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[132] Ibid., 1. Nieto, here, also references what Voorsanger termed the "Galveston Card System." However, there are no sources which currently corroborate this assumption.
[133] Ken Naglewski,"Are You Ready," 48.
[134] Jacob Nieto, "Account from November 18th," 2.

Since Sherith Israel experienced only minor damages, the majority of the city's courts established their offices in the Temple. Nieto writes that "both the Judges of the courts and myself hope that in consequence of the courts being located in the Temple it will be the inducing of a spirit of conciliation and compromise between the various litigants who have cases now pending and the criminal departments fervently hope that being houses as they are lawyers will forget to say nasty things in the course of trials."[135] In a 1907 interview for the *London Jewish Chronicle*, Nieto said,

> It is so spacious a building, and contains so many chambers and ante-rooms and classrooms that eight of the twelve superior courts sitting in the city have been able to be accommodated by us since the earthquake, when the Law Courts were demolished. One of the Judges, Judge Coffey, a Roman Catholic, remarked, on taking his seat in one of these improvised courts, that he thought it was eminently proper that justice should be administered from the Temple.[136]

Regardless of Nieto's actual involvement with Mayor Schmitz or the courts themselves, the collegiality of Nieto and the city government demonstrated a dedication to working together to rebuild the city of San Francisco and ensured that Nieto had at least some influence in this process.

Sherith Israel continued to hold services throughout the initial relief efforts. Temple Emanu-El, on the other hand, had to find a temporary home. Rabbi Nieto offered

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[135] Ibid., 2.

[136] "Nieto Interviewed on the San Francisco Jewry: Its Temple and the Earthquake;" *Western States Jewish History* 28, no. 3 (April 1996): 231–234, 232–233.

his synagogue to Temple Emanu-El, however this offer was kindly refused.[137] Initially Emanu-El's services were held at Calvary Church's lecture hall until they moved their operations to the First Unitarian Church for the High Holy Days. Emanu-El remained at the Unitarian Church for the remainder of the time the synagogue continued to be under construction. While at the church, the synagogue rented an office, classroom, and the sanctuary. This was an exchange of sorts as the Unitarian church had been housed by Emanu-El following an earthquake in 1888 while its congregation was being rebuilt.[138]

Voorsanger and Nieto demonstrated their own varying styles of crisis leadership in the wake of the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. In the above-mentioned cases and actions taken by both men, they sought to address the immediate needs caused by the disaster, prior to engaging in forward thinking or an outcome-focused view of the situation.[139] In doing so, they addressed the most pressing needs of their constituents before personally or professional processing the trauma they, their congregants, and community members experienced.

Theological Responses to the Earthquake and Fire

Voorsanger, as an editor, published far more material than Nieto did in the wake of the earthquake and fire of 1906. Voorsanger made an effort not only to publish in Jewish journals and newspapers but also in secular ones as well. As such, we have a record of Voorsanger's theological processing and understanding of the disaster. In June of 1906, Voorsanger published an article in *Out West*, a magazine about the Old and New West,

[137] Congregation Emanu-El, "Congregation Emanu-El (San Francisco, CA) Records, 1906-1913, X-84, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 11.
[138] Rosenbaum, *Architects of Reform*, 57.
[139] Naglewski, "Are You Ready," 48.

relating to his relief work in the aftermath of the earthquake and fire in San Francisco two months prior. He begins the article by referring to the text of the *Unetaneh Tokef*:

> In the ritual of the Synagogue for the new Year and the Day of Atonement, fatalistic like all Oriental rituals, there occurs a famous poem of Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, which is the quintessence of all doctrine on foreordination and predestination. 'On the New Year it is written, and on the Day of Atonement it is finally ordered" when the "Books of Record are open before Almighty God; that therein is written the destiny of all men…who shall live and who shall die, who by fire and who by water, who by earthquake and who by pestilence.[140]

Like Rabbi Amnon of Mayence, Voorsanger's own personal experience of the quake impacted his theological response to disaster. The text of *Unetaneh Tokef* speaks to Voorsanger's experience of death and destruction in 1906. He writes, "Out of the terrible personal experience of this learned medieval Jew came a lesson we in San Francisco have spelled out to the very last letter of the alphabet, and we are still learning, still under the spell of the cataclysm that wiped out our past and compels us to interrogate the future."[141] Voorsanger addresses the ongoing emotional trauma caused by the earthquake and fire, which prompted a new vision for Jewish San Francisco as well as a new understanding of God's role in the disaster.

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[140] Unetane Tokef is translated as "We shall proclaim the holiness of this day." The piyyut, or liturgical poem, recited on Rosh HaShanah depicts God's yearly judgement regarding who shall live and who shall die. The prayer lists a variety of ways by which a person might die during the coming year. It is impossible to hear Unetane Tokef and not be struck by the power of the words to recall those of our loved ones who died by drowning, fire, disaster, injury, or disease. This prayer, said amidst the atmosphere of repentance during the High Holy Days, threatens the congregant with the fear that he or she may face a similar fate. How much more so, then, did this prayer evoke such sentiments in congregants who recently nearly lost their own lives and the lives of their loved ones to epidemics and disasters? Voorsanger, "The Relief Work in San Francisco," 526.

[141] Ibid.

Voorsanger described his own terror in light of the earthquake: "I am not ashamed to own it, the terror of those four-fifths of a minute was a common one. When we realized at last that we had escaped the doom of death, we did not yet know what the inscrutable hand of Destiny had traced for us."[147] Voorsanger describes the disjunction between a crisis response to a disaster and the secondary emotional and theological processing which only comes later.

Relating to the connection between God's role in the quake and fire, Voorsanger wrote,

> I said one hour after the earthquake that we had the advantage of all the world, for it still awaited its Day of Judgement and we had had ours. Grim joke, that; but the truth underlying is that Almighty God cannot, could not, send us a more terrible experience than this of quake and holocaust, desolation and impoverishment, and I make this statement in the face of all the remarkable spirit our people have manifested, in the face of wondrous hope and courage that pervaded us all, the more remarkable because of all the awful terror that did not paralyze our energies and convert thousands of us into raving maniacs or despairing, babbling idiots.[142]

According to Voorsanger, the earthquake and fire of 1906 served as a "Day of Judgement" for the people of San Francisco. He directly attributes the cataclysmic event to God's intervention in the world. For Voorsanger, this "terrible experience" prompted

[142] It should be noted that for generations the term "holocaust" was used to translate the Hebrew word "olah" meaning a totally consumed sacrificial offering. It was not until the 1950s when the term became appropriated as the English term for the Shoah. Ibid.

San Francisco and the Jewish community to ask deep questions about their actions in the world and ways in which they could reform their ways.

At the same time, he also gives thanks to God for witnessing the power of the human spirit and the ability of human beings to join together in times of great tragedy:

> The old prophets and rabbis, in the years that separate us from them, already foreshadowed the times when human nature, attaining to its glorious maximum, would call into existence the time of Messiah—the time of humanity made whole and sound by its great virtues and healed from its great sorrows and afflictions. It seemed to me, in this second hour of the catastrophe, and in the marvelous hours that followed, that God mercifully permitted me to witness the noble rise of human nature to its fullest height.[143]

For him, God causes cataclysmic events, but God also enables human beings to demonstrate kindness and virtue which enables the repair and rebuilding of societies in the wake of disaster.

Regardless of the death and destruction caused by the earthquake and fire, Voorsanger emphasized the power of God to unify in the wake of disaster. He writes that there was "but one religion. The touch of God was upon man, and out of the crumbling churches and synagogues had come the spirit of love and peace. We ministered that morning to a congregation that heard but one interpretation. I saw a cowled monk lean over an Orthodox Jew and whisper words of the tenderest comfort into his ears."[144] Based

[143] Ibid.
[144] Ibid., 528.

on this statement, Voorsanger understood God as a merciful and unifying judge, promoting unity out of chaos.

His theological response to the earthquake and fire, written two months after those harrowing events, was deeply connected to the language of *Unetaneh Tokef* and the theme of God's judgement. At the same time, Voorsanger's words called to mind images of a merciful and compassionate God, while also alluding to the Messianic Age when all people turn to God and to one another in unity.

The Rabbis as Fundraisers

While theology was a concern posed by the disaster, the primary issue facing Voorsanger and Nieto was raising enough funds to support the impoverished Jews of San Francisco for the short and long term. Both men utilized their influence as prominent and respected clergy in the community to promote giving while engaging in debates regarding the level of need in the community. In particular, Voorsanger's connection with the mayor and his overall standing in the American Jewish community enabled him to appeal for funds for the impoverished Jews of San Francisco. Nieto, although lacking the national renown of Voorsanger, also played a role in acquiring funds and defending the needs of San Francisco Jewry on the east coast as well as in England.

The two rabbis worked individually and together to procure funds for the community. Both wrote letters to newspapers appealing for financial assistance as well as critiquing the American Jewish community in its failure to come to the aid San Francisco Jewry. As part of their fundraising efforts, they also travelled to New York and London.

The American Israelite and other Jewish newspapers played a significantly smaller role in the fundraising and relief efforts following the earthquake and fire in San Francisco than they had following the Galveston hurricane, for example. Similarly, B'nai B'rith was notably absent in the long-term financial recovery efforts of the San Francisco Jewish community. In its place, the American Jewish Committee took on the role of determining the damage and financial need of the Jewish community and dispersing funds as the committee deemed necessary.

In the weeks following the earthquake and fire, Voorsanger and Nieto put out a joint appeal to the American Jewish community in the *American Israelite*:

> *The Israelite* has received a telegraphic message from Rev. Dr. Jacob Voorsanger, rabbi of Temple Emanu-El, and Rev. Jacob Nieto, rabbi of Congregation Sherith Israel, both of San Francisco, sitting there are the stricken city thousands of Jewish families that are homeless, destitute and ruined, who must look to their co-religionists for anything beyond temporary shelter and maintenance, especially for assistance to re-establish themselves in their various avocations, and become once more independent, respected and self-supporting citizens they were before this awful catastrophe engulfed in one common ruin practically the whole of San Francisco's 30,000 Jews-than whom there was no finer, more public spirited, more charitable and more hospitable Jewish community in the world. *The Israelite* commits to sending out appeals to American Jewry, while also acknowledging that many of its readers have already contributed. *The Israelite* has never encouraged the asking of contributions

> for specially Jewish purposes in cases when the need for help was not exceptionally great and urgent. That the conditions in San Francisco are soul harrowing every reader of the daily papers knows. That the Jews of that city need special help Dr. Voorsanger tells us. He is the chairman of the general committee on food and has been actively engaged in relief work since almost the very hour of the earthquake, and is, therefore, in a position to speak advisedly.[145]

With this first major appeal, Voorsanger became the point person and primary leader in the acquisition of funds for the relief of the San Francisco Jewish community. In following appeals, he distinguishes between what the Jewish institutions need and what services families and individuals require.

A major challenge facing Voorsanger was the rebuilding of Temple Emanu-El. While Voorsanger continued to serve on the Committee of Fifty dealing with the basic needs of the community, his Temple Board, and especially Emanu-El's president, Henry Waugenheim, began the process of rebuilding the Temple itself. At the first meeting recorded in the new Temple minute book, Waugenheim was empowered to do what he thought necessary to assess the damage to the synagogue and enlist contractors to begin the rebuilding process.[146] Meanwhile, Voorsanger agreed to a temporary decrease in his salary while sources of revenues were low.[147] Waugenheim's work ensured that Voorsanger could continue playing an active role in the direct relief efforts on the food committee and to work with Jewish institutions nationwide to provide further aid than the Jewish community of San Francisco could raise on its own.

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[145] "An Urgent Appeal: Thousands Homeless and Destitute," *The American Israelite* (3 May 1906): 4.
[146] Congregation Emanu-El (San Francisco, CA) Records, 1906-1913, X-84, AJA, Cincinnati, OH,10.
[147] Ibid., 12.

It was not until May 11th that The San Francisco Jewish Relief Committee, established by the National Conference of Jewish Charities in New York, arrived in San Francisco. Rabbi Judah Magnes (1877-1948), the rabbi-elect of Temple Emanuel of New York and Dr. Lee K. Frankel (1867–1931) of the United Hebrew Charities of New York, served as its representatives.[148] While there, the two men visited a number of the camps and consulted with Voorsanger and the Red Cross. After their visit, the Jewish community of San Francisco decided to wait to appeal to the American Jewish community for funds, instead choosing to rely on the "reserve funds of local societies and by increasing subscriptions from the wealthier element of the community."[149]

In some ways, the committee did come to solid conclusions. After all, the Jewish community was indeed able to go about addressing the basic needs of the city's Jews. The Young Men's Hebrew Association was transformed into a supply outpost and home for refugees, while the Hebrew Free Loan Association provided interest free loans to Jews with a demonstrated financial need. Unfortunately, the money allocated by the Relief Committee in addition to the services offered by the San Francisco Jewish community could not keep up with demand.

Although Voorsanger's initial estimates of the city's needs were quite high, at the outset, he believed that the San Francisco Jewish community could take care of itself. Voorsanger was overconfident in his community's ability to provide financial assistance to all those in need. While the two largest temples could in fact pay for their own recovery efforts, the coffers of the Jewish charitable institutions were not deep enough to

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[148] Daniel P. Kotzin, *Judah L. Magnes: An American Jewish Nonconformist* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse Univ. Press, 2010).; Elizabeth Fee, "Lee K. Frankel (1867–1931): Public Health Leader and Life Insurance Executive," *American Journal of Public Health* 101, no. 10, 2011; 1870, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222356/ (April 4, 2019).
[149] Zerin, *Jewish San Francisco*, 52.

address the needs of the broader Jewish community. The Relief Committee's report argued that the needs of the Jewish community of San Francisco was actually much lower than Voorsanger suggested. The discrepancy, it seems, may have come from a lack of understanding regarding what would and would not be covered by insurance. Four months after the initial shock of the earthquake and fire, Rabbi Rudolph I. Coffee (1878-1955) wrote an article in *The Jewish Messenger* explaining this as a major challenge facing the community:[150]

> The damage by the earthquake was not covered by insurance. Where the loss was sustained through fire, the people are slowly being paid their insurance money. It has already been stated, and quite correctly, that the poor Jewish people suffered severely. The reason is, that the fire which succeeded the earthquake took its rise near that quarter of the city where the immigrant Jewish people had their homes. This portion of the city, south of Market street, was one of the three sections where the earthquake did especial have. A large number of houses, and even hotels, were completely demolished.[151]

The Jewish community went about addressing the basic needs of the city's Jews by turning the building over to the government and transforming the Young Men's Hebrew Association into a supply outpost and home for refugees. At the same time, the Hebrew Free Loan Association provided interest free loans to Jews with a demonstrated

[150] Rudolph Coffee was a fairly prominent rabbinic figure in the 20th century. He was the rabbi of Temple Sinai in Oakland, CA."Coffee, Rudolph Isaac," *Encyclopaedia Judaica,* (March 27, 2019). https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/coffee-rudolph-isaac.
[151] Coffee, "Jewish Conditions in San Francisco," 317.

financial need. While, a little further afield, the Jewish community of Oakland provided space in their homes and synagogue.

Seven months after the harrowing events of the earthquake and fire, Voorsanger continued to appeal to the American Jewish community. In his article in *The Israelite*, Voorsanger detailed the damages to each Jewish institution and approximately how much it would cost each organization to rebuild. He appealed to Jews all over the country for $100,000 to support these groups in the recovery process. This money, he emphasized, would go to all institutions and synagogues with the exception of Sherith Israel and Temple Emanu-El, which he noted could repair and rebuild using their own funds.[152]

In an article published in *The American Israelite* on March 19, 1908, Voorsanger takes Judah Magnes and Dr. Frankel to task criticizing their assessment of the damage done to the San Francisco Jewish community by the earthquake and fire two years prior. According to Voorsanger, he and other rabbis were accused of over-exaggerating the numbers of Jews in need. In response, the rabbi of Temple Emanu-El quoted the governor of California, Pardee, relating to the mental and emotional state of the citizens of the city saying, "We had all been crazy and we were just getting a bit sane again."[153] The committee determined to get statistical data which was likely skewed, in Voorsanger's view, since so many San Franciscan Jews were displaced. According to Magnes and Frankel's assessment, there were 400 Jews in the Golden Gate Park camp, 600 in another and 25 in a small shanty town set up from the rubble making that number 1,025. Another study found 2,025 Jews to be taking refuge in Oakland. The board asked the question,

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[152] Jacob Voorsanger, "The Appeal for San Francisco," *The American Hebrew & Jewish Messenger* (23 November 1906): 61.
[153] Jacob Voorsanger, "San Francisco Jewry After the Earthquake," *The American Israelite* (19 March 1908): 5.

why were Voorsanger's numbers of 10,000 Jews so different from theirs? The San Francisco rabbi rebuffed this argument by saying:

> Neither the Red Cross nor the Conference of Jewish charities approached the San Francisco calamity in the right spirit. Instead of allowing our citizens to work out their problems according to their own knowledge of local conditions, a demand was made that we must be controlled by the judgement of visitors, who no matter how kind and considerate, no matter how anxious to be of assistance, formed hasty conclusions of our needs, and believed that this awful tremendous disorganization of a community of half a million people could be whipped into shape by methods obtained in the treatment of the poor in a charity society. The calamity of San Francisco was unique in the world's history.[154]

Voorsanger points to the fact that the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire was the very first disaster in which local organizations and rabbis were not in charge of allocating funding to Jews and Jewish institutions in need. Even B'nai B'rith, an international organization, used regional and local representatives to report on the challenges facing a community in crisis. This new committee moved away from a past model of engaging with rabbis and community leaders, and instead utilized a more paternalistic model of fundraising and philanthropy based in their experience with Eastern European immigrants and settlement houses in the East. Or, perhaps, there was a fear on the part of the committee, that such a largess of funds would not be disseminated appropriately by Voorsanger, Nieto, or the Jewish institutions in San Francisco.

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[154] Ibid., 5.

Voorsanger provided the context for his discontent before presenting additional statistics provided by the Hebrew Board of Relief of San Francisco in its sixth annual report. The report found that, "from the time we began to compile histories of our cases-that is to say June, 1906-up to the end of the past fiscal year, December 1907-1,662 applicants for aid. Of these 1,662 cases, 1461 were refugee cases, 1,716 were families resident in the district south of Market street alone."[155] He argued that the smallest possible estimate of homes destroyed could be 2,500 below Market and another 300 in the valley district. He makes the point that there were 1,662 cases reported to the Conference of Jewish Charities in New York which added up to 8,310 people who required direct aid. According to the report made by the Hebrew Charities, Voorsanger appealed to the Conference for between $30,000 and $40,000 when, in actuality, Voorsanger says he requested $150,000 to support individuals and families as well as to rebuild Jewish institutions. He concluded his article by saying, "The result of their mission was that our people are still struggling and that speaks well for our people but not so well for the mission from which we expected so much and gained so little."[156]

Nieto, like Voorsanger, was frustrated by the amount of money raised by Jewish institutions in the East and American Jewry, generally, to help the community of San Francisco rebuild. Seven months after the earthquake and fire, he published an article in *The Jewish Times and Observer* pointing out the failure of the American Jewish community to come to the aid of San Francisco. "They do not even realize the vastness of the area that has been devastated and the long and weary stretch of ruins that tell the tale

[155] Ibid., 5.
[156] Ibid., 5.

of those three awful days when our city was the victim of flames," he wrote.[157] "Something is wrong," he added. "Either they have not had time to read the descriptions with which journals and magazines abound, or then, safe in the peacefulness of their environment, believe that we have exaggerated our misfortunes."[158] Instead, he admits that perhaps the community overestimated its ability to take care of itself: "If we have been proud and confident and refused as a community to accept charity till we had exhausted all our own resources, it still remains a fact that we have a dreadful situation to confront and a very difficult problem to solve."[159] He accused rabbis and Jewish businessmen in the East of only seeking to provide commercial assistance rather than address the direct needs of families and institutions.[160] Nieto makes the point that the committee should have focused on "immediate relief" as in providing food, clothing, and shelter for refugees in an effort to get them back on their feet so that they could pursue economic recovery if that was their primary goal.[161]

In the case of those who had insurance, including the middle and upper classes, some of their claims were denied because the damage done to their businesses and properties were not caused by fire but by the earthquake, thus they never received funds they believed they were due.[162] This meant that although the initial estimates demonstrating the need of the community were lower than they needed to be, families would not necessarily be able to afford to rebuild their homes if they received no insurance pay out. Nieto impugned the committee saying,

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[157] Jacob Nieto, "Nieto's San Francisco Protest and Appeal," *The Jewish Times and Observer* (9 November 1906) 8-9 republished in *Western States Jewish History Journal* 28, no. 3, 225–226.
[158] Ibid., 226.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Ibid.
[161] Ibid., 227.
[162] Ibid.

> we insist that the intention of the donors was never and could never have been charity as it is "scientifically" understood, and we commend these people for their delicacy of feeling, their heroism under great suffering, and want and despite the cynicism of some of our Eastern friends and their sneer as to our sensitiveness do insist that all monies collected for the relief of our sufferers should be forwarded.[163]

Based on this statement, it appears that funds gathered by the committee which they deemed to be “extra” were withheld in the East for future disasters instead of being placed into the hands of the rabbis and community leaders of San Francisco who were still trying to meet the needs of their constituents.[164]

Voorsanger and Nieto blamed the community’s lack of funds on the National Council of Jewish Charities, but they also acknowledged their possible role in the Committee’s decision to limit the amount of funds disbursed to the Jews of San Francisco. Nieto writes in his appeal to the committee, saying, even “if we have been proud and confident and refused as a community to accept charity till we had exhausted all our own resources, it still remains a fact that we have a dreadful situation to confront and a very difficult problem to solve."[165] His statement points to the failure of the two leading rabbis of the city to acknowledge the likelihood that the city’s Jews could provide enough money for the recovery effort to cover necessary costs.[166]

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[163] Ibid.

[164] Ibid., 228.

[165] Jacob Nieto, "Nieto's San Francisco Protest and Appeal," *The Jewish Times and Observer* (9 November 1906), 8–9.

[166] It is likely that the American Jewish Committee wanted San Francisco Jewry to expend its own resources before accepting donations from Jews in other parts of the United States. Further research in the archives of the American Jewish Committee would be required to ascertain documentation to support this theory. The San Francisco Earthquake and Fire occurred in April of 1906. Magnes and Frankel arrived on the scene a few weeks later in May. However, a decision was not made to make an appeal for the Jews of

Other national Jewish organizations were not without fault in Nieto's eyes. The Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations also fell short in providing assistance to the Jews of San Francisco. "The Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations should esteem it their most sacred duty not only to appeal to all congregations, but to raise the money" themselves.[167] He appealed to these institutions to allow American Jews to contribute to the continue rebuilding and recovery efforts underway in the San Francisco Jewish community, saying, "Let our brethren give us more than a mere lip demonstration of sympathy, let them do that which will convince the American public that the Jew is really very much concerned with the welfare of his religious institutions."[168] He compares the weak Jewish response to the robust outpouring of support in the Christian community: "every Christian denomination has subscribed and is still subscribing to re-erect and support the churches in San Francisco, and for a paltry hundred thousand the Jews of the United States cannot afford to be out of the race."[169] If nothing else, Nieto hoped that the American Jewish community would step up to the plate ensuring that their care attention to the recovery and rebuilding efforts in San

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San Francisco until November of 1906 and the actual appeal letter itself did not go out until January of 1906, meaning major fundraising did not begin to be led by the American Jewish Committee for seven months following the disaster. Magnus and Frankel respond to the pleas of Voorsanger and Nieto by November approving an appeal for $100,000 and directing the exact amounts which should be solicited and acquired from 11 regions. On January 1, 1906 Magnus and Frankel release the appeal saying that "we do at this time endorse the appeal made in the name of the Ministers' Association of San Francisco." Judah L. Magnes and Lee K. Frankel, "The Appeal for San Francisco," National Council for Jewish Charities, 1 January 1906, American Jewish Committee Archives, http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx?panes=2, (April 4, 2019).; The American Jewish Committee, "Letter Regarding Assistance for Jewish Educational and Religious Institutions," 5 December 1906, American Jewish Committee Archives, http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx?panes=2, (April 4, 2019).

[167] Nieto, "Nieto's San Francisco Protest and Appeal," 228.

[168] Ibid., 228–229.

[169] Ibid.

Francisco at least matched that of the many Christian churches and communities in the city.

Despite their frustration with national Jewish institutions and their unimpressive financial relief, there were scores of Jews around the country who did contribute funds for the recovery effort. According to an article in *The Los Angeles Times* published on May 21, 1906, a children's society associated with B'nai B'rith in Los Angeles raised money by putting on shows for the relief of Jewish children in San Francisco.[170] In another article this time one published in *The American Israelite,* "The children of Miss Leah Rosenthal's class at the...Plum Street Temple,...nearly all the children of very recent immigrants, voluntarily collected $1.50 among themselves and contributed it to the [San Francisco] relief."[171] Meanwhile, on the east coast, "the National Council for Jewish Women at an executive gathering in New York provided funds from its various chapters to be administered through its San Francisco Section for relief following the Earthquake-Fire of 1906."[172]

It appears by these accounts that there were funds being raised for the relief efforts in San Francisco. However, the problem facing Rabbis Voorsanger and Nieto was their lack of control over the communal and individual disbursement of said funds and or if they would ever receive them. This situation forced Nieto, Voorsanger and other rabbis to leave San Francisco over the course of the next several years to pursue funds directly from individual Jews and communities around the country as well as in Europe.

Voorsanger, Nieto, and Rabbi Levy of Temple Beth El all travelled to New York at one time or another to appeal for additional funds. According to an article in *The*

[170] Ibid., 10–11.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Ibid., 10.

American Hebrew published in November of 1906, Rabbi Levy traveled to New York to "seek the aid of Eastern Jews for the rehabilitation of Jewish institutions destroyed by the San Francisco earthquake."[173] This should come as no surprise as "Dr. Levy's temple, which was nearly completed when the catastrophe occurred, was totally destroyed, the congregation having paid over the contractor a little while before over fifty thousand dollars. It has cost the congregation over ten thousand dollars since to clear away the debris of the destroyed temple."[174] It is noted in the article that Voorsanger and Levy together were likely going to "appeal to the American Jewish Committee and the New York Board of Jewish Ministers" to secure additional funds and or to actually receive funds raised for their cause which had not be forwarded to San Francisco.[175] It was not until January of 1906 that Magnus and Frankel recommended an appeal for the Jews of San Francisco.[176] However, this appeal still did not meet the needs of the community.

In an interview with Nieto published in an issue of *The London Jewish Chronicle* in July 1907, it was reported that "during the past few weeks London has been visited by two San Franciscan rabbis-Dr. Voorsanger, Rabbi of Temple Emmanu-El, and the Rev. Jacob Nieto, Rabbi of Sherith Israel Congregation."[177] The fact that both men deemed it necessary to visit London to solicit funds, demonstrates their dedication to securing additional funding for the continued relief and rebuilding efforts in the San Francisco community.

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[173] "Emissaries from San Francisco," *The American Hebrew and Jewish Messenger* (2 Nov 1906): 539.
[174] Ibid., 539.
[175] Ibid.
[176] Judah L. Magnes and Lee K. Frankel, "The Appeal for San Francisco," National Council for Jewish Charities, 1 January 1906, American Jewish Committee Archives, http://ajcarchives.org/ajcarchive/DigitalArchive.aspx?panes=2, (April 4, 2019).
[177] "Nieto Interviewed on the San Francisco Jewry: Its Temple and the Earthquake," 231.

Voorsanger and Nieto, like rabbis before them, utilized American Jewish newspapers to appeal for funds for their ailing Jewish community. When that failed, or fell short, they travelled to New York to both personally address the American Jewish Committee and to solicit funds from prominent Jews and synagogues in the area. Additionally, the two travelled to London together to continue their fundraising efforts abroad tapping into Nieto's former London connections. Their work—individually and as a team, especially in relation to the American Jewish committee—demonstrates a distinct shift in the power and authority of rabbis to gather and directly allocate funds to Jews in need in the wake of a disaster. This shift points to a much more national Jewish organizational approach to financial relief and recovery efforts, which would become far more typical as the twentieth century continued.

Conclusion

Voorsanger and Nieto rushed into the fray to address the needs of the general citizens of San Francisco as well as the Jewish community. They assumed leadership roles in working with the mayor and others to establish order. Each one addressed a basic need of the citizens of San Francisco: providing food, water, and sanitation. Over time, their concerns shifted to focus on the rehabilitation of their synagogues and Jewish institutions, while continuing to communicate with newspapers and national Jewish organizations. When funds were not directed to San Francisco, they began writing articles and appealing to Jews around the country and the globe (specifically, England) to continue to give to the ailing community. They recognized that it was their responsibility to advocate for their community and to shift public perception.

Voorsanger and Nieto served as crisis leaders for the Jewish community of San Francisco in the wake of the Earthquake and Fire of 1906. They were proactive in their efforts to provide essential resources and to promote recovery. Each of them made critical decisions in the immediate and long-term stages of the relief and recovery efforts. However, they did demonstrate a willingness to learn from past mistakes, and to ask for additional assistance when they were not able to meet the financial needs of their communities.

The two leading rabbis utilized their penchant for charismatic leadership to impact the financial and political challenges facing the San Francisco Jewish community. They led relief efforts on the ground while also striving to rebuild the city's institutions with longevity in mind. The two men, who did not always see eye to eye, were able to join efforts to care for their people and to bring San Francisco back to life.

At the same time, the rabbis began to reflect on their own experiences of the disaster and the impact it had on their theology. Although we only have documents pertaining to Voorsanger's theological take on the disaster, it is undoubtable that Nieto would have been engaging in a similar thought process relating to God as compassionate parent and as a judge. Voorsanger's theology lifts up the challenging characteristic of God as judge in relation to *Unetane Tokef*, but balances pre-determination with an emphasis on the unity fostered by the experience of disasters.

The two men differed in their political approach to long-term crisis management. Nieto admits that initially he and others in San Francisco thought they could go about their recovery on their own. Although Nieto was willing to learn from their mistake, the damage was already done. The two men refused to wait for the San Francisco Relief

Committee to provide additional funds for the recovery effort. Instead, Nieto and Voorsanger participated in fundraising visits to New York and England in an effort to directly address the needs of their community.

> In his book, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, Simon Winchester writes:
>
> [that] trials of any kind—war, pestilence, natural or human violence, with wholesale death or total physical destruction, or both...may slow that growth or cause some other setback; but such things are just setbacks, and before long...life returns, buildings and roads are rebuilt, new monuments spring up or old ones are found and dusted off, and...the city returns to its old self, ready to see what more fate can hurl at it, to challenge and strengthen and temper its will to survive. It may not always entirely regain its pre-disaster status...But generally...great cities always recover.[178]

Voorsanger and Nieto made this their goal. They desperately wanted their beautiful city to recover, and it did. At the rededication of Temple Emanu-El in September of 1907, Voorsanger looked forward to the future saying, "So shall this beautiful edifice be re-consecrated to its high mission, serve indeed as the sacred emblem of the redeemed city by the Gate, its beauty restored, its sins purged, its temples rebuilt, its children reunited in [their] mission."[179] The Golden Gate City rose from the ashes as did its Jewish community, led by Rabbis Voorsanger and Nieto.

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[178] Winchester, *A Crack in the Edge of the World*, 303.
[179] Rosenbaum, *Visions of Reform*, 104.

Epilogue

Rabbi Robert Loewy and Hurricane Katrina

הנה מה טוב ומה נעים שבת אחים גם יחד!
How good it is for brothers and sisters to dwell together![1]

Hurricane Katrina was the first major hurricane of the 21st century. Climate change is making natural disasters even more destructive so rabbis—as leaders of their communities—will need to adapt their professions to this new condition. It has been nearly fifteen years since Hurricane Katrina made landfall in New Orleans on August 29, 2005, and yet each year the city mourns those who lost their lives and takes note of the devastating changes that it wrought on the city. The Jewish community, like the rest of New Orleans, responded to the destruction in its own way. Each of the rabbis and clergy in New Orleans played a role in providing pastoral care and recovery to the Jews of the city. Rabbis Robert Loewy, Edward Cohn, Andrew Busch, Isaac Leider, Yisroel Schiff, Uri Topolosky, and Cantor Joel Coleman offered individual responses to Hurricane Katrina and the devastating impact this storm had on their synagogues and community members.[2] The case of Rabbi Loewy, however, is of particular interest to us as he served as a bridge builder between his Reform congregation and the Orthodox congregation that had been left without a building as a result of the hurricane. The friendship that grew between Loewy and Topolosky, the rabbi tasked with rebuilding the Orthodox congregation, Beth El, serves as a model of intra-faith cooperation that future religious leaders can use to bring positive change to otherwise very difficult circumstances.

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[1] Bailey Romano, "Translation of Psalm 133:1."

[2] It is important to note that Uri Topolosky arrived in New Orleans nearly two years after Hurricane Katrina. Although he was not a major player in the initial recovery efforts in New Orleans, his partnership with Rabbi Loewy changed the dynamics of the Jewish community of New Orleans.

Due to time constraints, this will not be a comprehensive study of Rabbi Loewy's response to Hurricane Katrina; rather, it will be a jumping off point for a broader study of those rabbis who were present in New Orleans during the hurricane and its aftermath and more generally of rabbis' responses to 21st century natural disasters. Because many of these rabbis are still operating in the field, the bulk of their papers have not yet been deposited at the AJA or other archives. Small amounts, however, are being collected. The Jewish Women's Archive, for example, contains interviews and testimonies from laypersons and Jewish clergy who lived through Hurricane Katrina, including Edward Cohn and Joel Coleman.[3] The AJA has a Hurricane Katrina sermon collection which documents rabbinic responses around the country in the aftermath of the devastation. My hope is that more and more primary sources from this period will be archived and made available to researchers in the coming decade.

Jewish New Orleans, Rabbi Loewy, and Katrina

According to the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, prior to Hurricane Katrina, the city's Jewish population hovered around 9,500.[4] The metropolitan area of New Orleans boasted three Reform synagogues (Temple Sinai, Touro Synagogue, and Gates of Prayer), one Conservative synagogue (Shir Chadash), two Orthodox synagogues Beth Israel and Anshe Sfard, and a Chabad House. In 2005, the city maintained two Jewish Community Centers, one in New Orleans proper and one in Metairie.

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[3] "Katrina's Jewish Voices," Jewish Women's Archive, https://archive.org/details/KatrinasJewishVoices (April 8, 2019).; "Rabbi Robert Loewy," 29 November 2006, https://archive.org/details/RabbiRobertLoewy-29-Nov-2006-KatrinasJewishVoices (April 8, 2019).; "Cohn Edward" (25 July 2007) https://archive.org/details/CohnEdward200707251of2 (April 8, 2019).; "Joel Coleman," 31 August 2006, https://archive.org/details/JoelColman-31-Aug-2006-KatrinasJewishVoices (April 8, 2019).; Hurricane Katrina. Nearprint, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.; Hurricane Katrina Sermon Collection, SC-15290, AJA, Cincinnati, OH.

[4] Gail Chalew, "Jewish New Orleans," https://jewishnola.com/our-community.

It is important to understand the scope of Hurricane Katrina and its overall impact on the Jews of New Orleans. A large portion of the Jewish community evacuated prior to Katrina's landfall. This, in addition to the generally middle-class status of the Jewish population, meant that there were, in fact, no Jewish casualties. However, the majority of Jewish New Orleanians experienced major damage to their homes according to Weil's "Survey of the Jewish Community of Greater New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina" published in 2007. Most of these households reported having 2-8 ft of flooding.[5] All of the synagogues experienced some level of flooding and damage as well.

At the time of Hurricane Katrina, Loewy was the most senior Jewish clergy member in the city, having arrived at Gates of Prayer in Metairie, Louisiana, in 1984. [6] The senior rabbi of Temple Sinai, Edward Cohn, arrived in 1987, and Andrew Busch began his tenure at Touro Synagogue only a month prior to the storm.[7] Throughout his career, Loewy was an active leader in the Jewish community of New Orleans and in the region. He was the president of the Southwest Association of Reform Rabbis, as well as the Greater New Orleans Rabbinic Council. Throughout his career in New Orleans, he served as a member and leader of a variety of Jewish and civic organizations.[8]

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[5] Frederick Weil, "A Survey of the Jewish Community of Greater New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina," 2007, https://www.lsu.edu/fweil/lsukatrinasurvey/NOJPost-Katrina2006Results-Slides.pdf.

[6] "Our Rabbi Emeritus," https://www.gatesofprayer.org/our-rabbi-emeritus.html.

[7] Alan Smason, "Hurricane Katrina: A Tale of Two Rabbis," *Cleveland Jewish News*, 25 August 2006. https://www.clevelandjewishnews.com/archives/hurricane-katrina-a-tale-of-two-rabbis-one-year-later/article_5ce75b09-b45d-5b84-a160-797bf9451214.html, http://templesinainola.com/about-us/clergy-staff/edward-paul-cohn-d-min-d-d-2/.

[8] During his tenure in New Orleans, he served as the chair of Jewish Community Relations Committee, program chair for the CCAR, and board member of ARZA, the Jewish Community Day School, Jewish Family Services, and Henry S. Jacobs Camp. His leadership in New Orleans and in the southwest was not limited to the Jewish community. He was a leading member of the East Jefferson Interfaith Clergy Association and a board member of the Dillard University Center for Black/Jewish Relations. In addition, he served as a leader for the New Orleans Women's Shelter, and the East Jefferson General Hospital Pastoral care program. "Our Rabbi Emeritus," https://www.gatesofprayer.org/our-rabbi-emeritus.html.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm, Loewy and the rabbis of New Orleans busied themselves trying to assess the damage to their synagogue buildings, checking in with families, and traveling to various cities where congregants evacuated. Loewy's e-mails and memoirs—which were examined as part of this research project—offer us a glimpse into his own personal experiences that resulted from the hurricane as well as his rabbinic response to Katrina. Loewy participated in the short- and long-term relief and recovery efforts by assessing damages to the synagogue; helping to provide damage control; reaching out to congregants; ministering to dispersed congregants around the South; providing resources and financial assistance to families and individuals; creating spaces for acknowledging loss; accepting the "new normal;" fostering hope; and cultivating intra-faith relationships. In contrast to many of his colleagues, including Rabbi Cohn, who promoted inter-faith dialogue and cooperation with Christian counterparts, Loewy focused on intra-faith dialogue with an Orthodox rabbi and his community, which distinguishes his story from many of his predecessors and his colleagues. In the long-term, Loewy's response to the needs of the broader Jewish community, in particular, to Beth El's need for a building and partnership that grew out of that need, resulted in a dramatic shift in the relationship between the synagogues while also reshaping the geographic landscape of the New Orleans Jewish community.

Rabbi Loewy, like the majority of his congregants and rabbinic colleagues, evacuated prior to Katrina's landfall. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the storm, he, like so many others, was displaced from his home and city. During the first few days post-Katrina, Loewy corresponded with congregants who still remained in Metairie to ascertain the status of the synagogue. At the same time, he began reaching out to

congregants in Baton Rouge, Houston, and other places to see how best he could serve them.

Loewy's immediate response was pastoral. He wanted to make sure that his congregants were safe and to provide whatever support he could for them in their time of need. As soon as cell phone service resumed, he began contacting people he knew in the hope of providing as much assistance as possible:

> My initial focus was to reach out to as many people as I could to assist them in whatever ways possible, spiritual and financial. I began periodic e-mail messages, updating people on what was happening, informing them of how they could receive assistance, offering a D'var Torah, which almost always was linked to hope and comfort, whether I was feeling hopeful or not. I established a new Rabbi's Discretionary Account so that I could collect funds to distribute.[9]

He utilized words of Torah as a means of serving as a rabbinic presence to his flock even if they were spread out across the South. He acted as a pastor, trying to provide hope in a desperate situation, regardless of whether or not he felt hopeful himself. Loewy was aware that like all rabbis, he could not do it all. He recognized the need to refer congregants to various groups while also providing funds directly from his discretionary fund.

After nearly a month, he officially reached out to the CCAR, updating them on his congregation's situation:

> As most of you know, I am now the rabbi for a congregation, Gates of Prayer, which has a new understanding of what it means to be dispersed.

[9] Robert H. Loewy, "Katrina: A Rabbi's Story," Hurricane Katrina, Nearprint, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 4.

> Katrina came and devastated our community. At least half of my 475 families have major damage to their homes and businesses, many totally destroyed. The synagogue was flooded just enough to require us to tear apart the sanctuary sitting area (pulpit is fine), pull carpet throughout the building, throw out any wood products that had contact with water (mold is growing), throw out most of the toys in our nursery school, strip the walls from 4 ft up down to their studs. We will not be able to reopen our schools until after Thanksgiving.[10]

Loewy's initial message harkens to the dispersal and exile that Jews have felt throughout the centuries. This time, however, dispersal was not only in the Torah, but rather a real part of his and his congregants' lives. With so many of their congregants dispersed around the country, Loewy and other rabbis from the Crescent City were suddenly itinerant, traveling from city to city to make sure they made contact with their members:

> So, I have a new job as a rabbi. First, I will wander from community to community where my members now reside. I have already conducted services in Houston, where I am living, and Baton Rouge. I can imagine that I will possibly be traveling to Atlanta, Memphis, and Jackson, where others now are. Plus, as some return to Jefferson Parish, which is possible, I will be back in Metairie. I am on the phone and e-mail constantly keeping contact, finding ways to help.[11]

Loewy realized that providing emotional support and presence were important, but that more than anything else his congregants needed guidance on how to

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[10] Robert Loewy, "E-mail from Robert Loewy to D. Silverman," 23 September 2005.
[11] Ibid.

acquire necessities like housing, food, and clothing. He recognized that the basic needs of his congregants had to be met before real healing and spiritual communal recovery could occur. So, Rabbi Loewy went about procuring the things he needed to get his own family back on its feet, hoping to set an example for his congregants to follow:

> I personally utilized governmental and charitable systems to receive FEMA allotments, Food Stamps and Red Cross assistance cards, making sure that all of my members knew how to do the same. It is not easy to convince people who are accustomed to being the donors of tzedakah dollars to be open to being recipients. By words and modeling that behavior, it opened doors.[12]

In the process, Loewy continued to gain new skills as he navigated the various needs of his community. Serving a congregation in the midst of its own financial challenges on top of serving congregants trying to navigate this complicated road added to Loewy's already new and variegated skillset post-Katrina.

Loewy knew that worship would be an important component of the community's spiritual and emotional long-term recovery efforts. Worship, even if brief, had the power to sustain hope:

> On September 9, my soloist and I offered a Friday evening service in Houston for the New Orleans Jewish community, preceded by a Shabbat dinner provided by Congregation Emanu El. The next week we were on the road in Baton Rouge at Congregation Beth Shalom, which opened its doors to us to host a New Orleans community service, followed by

[12] Ibid.

> Shabbat dinner at a local restaurant. It was a moving moment as the Bar Mitzvah boy who was scheduled to have been marking his milestone that night came forward wearing his jeans to lead us.[13]

It did not matter what the bar mitzvah boy wore, he was celebrating his Jewish heritage and marking this special moment in his life in spite of Katrina, a sign that the Jewish community of New Orleans would indeed rise again.

After returning to Gates of Prayer full time, Loewy and his synagogue leadership worked to provide ongoing opportunities for healing of body mind and spirit:

> Each week services became an opportunity to feel a sense of calm, amidst turmoil, each new face an opportunity for an embrace.
> Since most of those who returned did not have kitchens, we offered meals frequently, which is not easy when the usual restaurants and caterers were not yet open...One Sunday we brought in a massage therapist to offer free seated massages. Another week the reconstituted youth group provided free car washes since dust was everywhere. For Continuing Education we replaced the previously planned Talmud class with one on Jewish meditation. We created four different support groups, one each for the elderly, business people, those dealing with children and those simply feeling great stress.[14]

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 5.

Nearly two months after Katrina, the Jewish community of New Orleans was coming back slowly but surely. Although the city and Jewish community had experienced great loss, Rabbi Loewy expressed hope saying, “there is a greater measure of hope for the future. We are in the ‘hope business’ after all."[15]

Rabbi Loewy and Rabbi Topolosky: Building Bridges

Most interesting, Hurricane Katrina encouraged some in the Jewish community of New Orleans to build bridges in a way that they would not otherwise do. Each moment of shared community was a small victory and one more step towards wholeness. For those who were able to sit in their own sanctuaries on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, no matter how gutted or changed the building, the buildings became unimportant. Material importance fell away, as thankfulness for life reigned supreme.

In 2006, Rabbi Loewy and Congregation Gates of Prayer opened their doors to Congregation Beth El, which had been homeless since the Hurricane. The synagogues and communities, which once had very little in common with each other, began to share space.[16] In 2012, an article was written about the reopening of Beth El in which the synagogue’s president, Eddie Gothard, praised Loewy for his support saying, "from the beginning, Rabbi Loewy stressed to us that in his opinion it was important that the complete Jewish community be

[15] Robert Loewy, "E-mail from Robert Loewy," 26 October 2005, Hurricane Katrina Nearprint, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 1.
[16] Bruce Nolan, “New Orleans Synagogue Reopens 7 Years After Katrina,” 29 August 2012, https://sojo.net/articles/new-orleans-synagogue-reopens-7-years-after-katrina.

represented in New Orleans, and that included a Modern Orthodox congregation like us."[17]

Between 2006 and 2012, Beth El used one of Gates of Prayer's meeting spaces, the Bart Room as their synagogue and social hall, as well as an office and kitchen space as part of a rental agreement. In 2007, Rabbi Uri Topolosky was hired to guide Beth El through their recovery and transition into a new home. Loewy and Topolosky soon became fast friends and began an enduring "partnership and cooperative spirit" which "cemented an implied contract between the Reform and Orthodox congregations."[18] With such a connection in place the two synagogues began negotiating the sale of a part of Gates of Prayer's property which would serve as Beth Israel's new home.[19]Today, the two synagogues continue to share a campus demonstrating the power that rabbis have to respond to the disasters by creating a more unified Jewish community. Although both rabbis worked to foster such a relationship, Loewy took it upon himself, to create space so that another rabbi and community could have a congregational home in their building and later on their grounds. He could have easily said no to sharing space with Beth El, but he did not. In this case, Loewy had power and he utilized it to create tikkun, repair, in the Jewish community.

Somehow throughout the recovery process, Rabbi Loewy remained hopeful for the recovery of his community, and he was right to be hopeful. Of those Jewish residents who evacuated, 80% returned to the New Orleans Greater

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[17] Ibid.
[18]"Congregation Beth Israel Opens Its Doors," *Crescent City Jewish News,* https://www.crescentcityjewishnews.com/congregation-beth-israel-opens-its-doors/, accessed 27 March 2019.
[19] Ibid.

Area by 2006.[20] The 20% who relocated to other cities primarily moved to Texas, Atlanta, or Baton Rouge.[21] For the most part, the Jewish community of New Orleans remained optimistic about their recovery and the revitalization of Jewish life in the Big Easy.[22] According to the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans, the Jewish population of New Orleans surpassed pre-Katrina numbers in just six years, and it is continuing to grow. The New Orleans Jewish community is now 10,000 strong.[23]

Although Rabbi Loewy is not the only twenty-first-century rabbi who has had to respond to natural disasters, his actions provide us with a framework for how modern clergy can lead in disaster situations as problem solvers who vision for the future. Without Loewy's willingness to work together with Topolosky, the two synagogues would have remained at odds with one another and in their own separate spheres. Instead, today, Gates of Prayer and Beth El share a campus demonstrating that Reform and Orthodox Jews can live in harmony, share space, and create something beautiful out of tragedy. This example demonstrates an enhanced role that rabbinic leadership plays in the aftermath of a natural disaster. In studying Loewy's example, we recognize that by addressing the spiritual, emotional, and financial needs of a congregation that has faced trauma as a result of a natural disaster, a rabbi can also also create partnerships and long-lasting relationships that will sustain communities throughout the recovery process and help us to create more vibrant and resilient Jewish communities for the future.

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[20] Frederick Weil, "A Survey of the Jewish Community of Greater New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina," 2.
[21] Ibid., 3.
[22] Ibid., 8–9.
[23] Gail Chalew, "Jewish New Orleans," 1.

Just as Loewy actualized his hope for a more collaborative future, so too will future generations of rabbis faced with the task of relief and recovery frame their responses to disasters with the broader Jewish community in mind, seeking to bring communities closer together to vision for a brighter Jewish communal future in the wake of tragedy.

Conclusion

Communities around the world are experiencing natural disasters at an unprecedented rate. The United States experienced 212 natural disasters between 2005 and 2014 costing the nation $443 billion dollars.[1] In 2018 alone, five natural disasters devastated the continental United States including the Montecito mudslides, flooding in Maryland, Hurricane Florence, Hurricane Michael, and the Camp and Woolsey Fires.[2] Today, just as in generations past, rabbis must respond to the disasters that traumatize and redefine their religious and civic communities. Rabbis and cantors are being forced to address an expanding array of short and long term needs of their constituents who are living through these extenuating circumstances. The disasters and the rabbis depicted in this thesis demonstrate a variety of tactics Jewish clergy have and will continue to utilize in their response to disasters.[3]

This work represents a pathbreaking effort to integrate the fields of disaster history and American Jewish history. Although biographies and histories exist relating to each of these rabbis and the disasters that impacted their cities, this thesis is a pioneering historical inquiry not only to analyze specific rabbinical responses to disasters but also to place these rabbis and their contexts and in conversation with one another.

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[1] UNISDR, "Economic and Human Impacts of Disasters: 2005-2014," https://www.flickr.com/photos/isdr/16111599814/, 1.

[2] Emily Shapiro, "5 Natural Disasters that Devastated the United States," 8 December 2018, https://abcnews.go.com/US/natural-disasters-devastated-us-2018/story?id=59367683.

[3] The focus of this thesis does not veer into the realm of "man-made" disasters prompted by terrorist attacks and acts of gun violence. However, historians of the American Jewish experience are called upon to begin such a study of rabbi's pastoral, communal, and organizational responses to these types of disasters in the future.

Summary of Chapters

Rabbi James K. Gutheim and the Yellow Fever epidemics of 1853 and 1878 in New Orleans, Louisiana; Rabbi Max Samfield in Memphis, Tennessee and the yellow fever outbreaks of 1873 and 1878; Rabbi Henry Cohen and the Galveston Flood of 1900; Rabbis Jacob Nieto and Jacob Voorsanger during the San Francisco Earthquake and Fire of 1906; as well as Rabbi Robert Loewy in New Orleans, Louisiana during Hurricane Katrina were influential rabbis in their cities during these moments of crises. These rabbis responded to the diverse needs of their Jewish and civic communities in variegated ways. This thesis charts the responses of these six rabbis and, in so doing, highlights certain similarities which can be used to model future responses.

Yellow fever epidemics shaped Jewish life in the American South in the 19th century and prompted rabbis like James K. Gutheim and Max Samfield to respond as pastors and organizational leaders not only for their synagogues but for their entire Jewish community. Gutheim and Samfield served as rabbis and community leaders during major yellow fever epidemics in New Orleans and Memphis respectively. Although Gutheim provided pastoral care to his congregants, more importantly, his organizational response to yellow fever epidemics sparked the institution of a Jewish orphanage as well as the creation of a broader national system of Jewish disaster relief through B'nai B'rith and Jewish newspapers. Samfield, on the other hand, provided pastoral care to all whom he encountered regardless of religion while also publicly memorializing the deceased. Samfield's career also provides us with a picture of a religious leader who faced the impossible decision of whether to stay or to leave when disaster strikes.

Natural disasters served as the second leading cause of mass casualties in the 20th century second only to war. The first significant natural disaster of the 20th century was the Galveston Hurricane and Flood of 1900. The Galveston storm marked the beginning of a long list of natural disasters to impact Jewish communities in the 20th century. Rabbi Henry Cohen's status as the rabbi of Galveston and, by reputation the "rabbi" for all people Jewish or otherwise, enabled him to take on a civic crisis leadership role while also attending to the needs of the Jewish community. Cohen's efforts to provide emergency relief to the city's hospitals, while also working alongside B'nai B'rith to aid the Jewish community's financial recovery provides us with one example of how disasters sometimes expand the role of clergy leaders; providing them an opportunity to move beyond the boundaries of their synagogues and Jewish communities, to serve as rabbis for the general community as well. His response transitioned the role of the rabbi outside of the limits of the Jewish community and into a larger sphere of influence, previously unascribed to Jewish clergy in Europe or even in America.

The San Francisco Earthquake of 1906 was one of the strongest earthquakes of all time, demolishing a significant portion of the city and leaving thousands homeless. The two leading rabbis of San Francisco, Jacob Voorsanger and Jacob Nieto, took it upon themselves to respond to the needs of the Jewish and civic communities. Like Cohen, they too became civic crisis leaders while also seeing to the needs of their congregants and the broader Jewish community. They utilized their roles as clergy to address the immediate challenges created by the earthquake and fire by seeing to the most basic needs of the citizens of San Francisco: food, water, and sanitation. Voorsanger and Nieto then began navigating the changing national Jewish landscape in relation to national

fundraising and disaster relief which was largely taken in hand by the fledgling American Jewish Committee instead of under the purview of B'nai B'rith. Although the two rabbis did not always see eye to eye in terms of visioning for the future of congregational life, they were able to join together in an effort to care for their constituents and to begin the process of returning San Francisco to its former glory.

Eric Stillman, the former executive director of the Jewish Federation of New Orleans described the impact Hurricane Katrina had on the city saying, "since the Civil War, no American city has been destroyed like New Orleans."[4] Loewy, of Congregation Gates of Prayer, provides us with a framework for how modern clergy can respond to disasters as pastors, as community leaders, and as problem solvers who vision for the future of their Jewish communities. Katrina forced rabbis to work together to address the urgent needs of their displaced communities around the South. Loewy was one such rabbi whose rabbinate suddenly took on a new context. He was a rabbi on the move acquiring the skills and resources necessary to address the needs of his congregation and of the Jewish community of New Orleans regardless of where they were displaced. Loewy's long-term response to Katrina came in the form of his partnership with Rabbi Uri Topolosky at Beth El synagogue. It is possible to say that the destructive effects of Katrina provided Rabbis Loewy and Topolosky with an opportunity to enhance intra-Jewish collaboration and cooperation. These two men recognized that the era of rebuilding after the storm had opened up a rare opportunity for revisioning the landscape of the New Orleans Jewish community. Loewy made space for intra-faith dialogue with Topolosky merging their two religious spheres. Their efforts demonstrated that when

[4] "UJC Hurricane Katrina Fund Final Report May 2007," Hurricane Katrina, Nearprint, AJA, Cincinnati, OH, 18.

Reform and Orthodox Jews work together in the wake of tragedy, they were able to redefine intra-faith relationships and reshape the Jewish community in the process. Loewy's long-term recovery response reminds us of the importance of cultivating partnerships and long-lasting relationships that may lead to more vibrant and resilient Jewish communities in the future.

Summary of Findings

Four overarching themes emerge from these rabbi's stories connecting them to each other and contextualizing them in the American Jewish experience.

Firstly, each rabbi's biography contributed to their ability to develop the personal qualities of **resilience and adaptability**. Without resilience, rabbis like Gutheim and Samfield, would not have been able to continue to address the needs of their communities year after year as hundreds of their co-religionists perished due to virulent disease. Cohen, Nieto, and Voorsanger required adaptability to be able to emerge from their day to day experiences as rabbis and then to switch gears to be the supervisors of food distribution, hospital tents, and sanitation efforts.

Secondly, rabbis like Samfield, Cohen, and Nieto saw themselves as social reformers whose work prior to and even after the epidemics and disasters they faced impacted the Jewish and broader civic communities. Although none of the rabbis depicted in the thesis ever used the term **Tikkun Olam** to describe their work, each one of them sought to create a better city and a better community for all in the wake of epidemics and natural disasters. The rabbis under study in the thesis joined together with other faith leaders to fight for prison reform, fair treatment of children, immigration, and

many other social reform initiatives which today would be identified as efforts to heal the brokenness of the world. Loewy, of a different generation, represents tikkun, or repair, not necessarily for the world, but for the Jewish community of New Orleans in particular. All of the rabbis mentioned throughout the thesis witnessed both the terrible brokenness of the physical world and also the potential for spiritual as well as physical healing, by working with other faith leaders or city officials to make systemic change both in the immediate aftermath of epidemics and natural disasters and throughout their rabbinates.

Thirdly, each of the rabbis examined in the thesis exhibited a **frontier mentality**. All of the rabbis were, in fact, immigrants.. Nearly all of them found themselves in a new country that placed few limits on their abilities to cross boundaries and to be who they sought to be regardless of training or education. In this new world, they were able to pave a new road for modern rabbis, whose work would not be limited to their congregations or to the Jewish community for that matter. The relationships between Jewish and Christian clergy, like the partnership between Cohen and Father James M. Kirwin in Galveston, demonstrated a new aspect of the rabbinate. Each of these rabbis found themselves innovating or relating to their rabbinates in ways their European predecessors would not recognize. Loewy moved beyond the boundaries of Reform and Orthodox Judaism to welcome an Orthodox rabbi and his congregation into his synagogue. Loewy's thinking about the post-storm reconstruction period prompted him to push the boundaries of the typical limits of a Reform synagogue by creating a shared campus with an Orthodox Jewish congregation. Their frontier mentality enabled them to provide the most extensive amount of assistance to their congregants and communities in need as part of their short and long-term response to epidemics and natural disasters.

Fourthly, they utilized the **power of the written word** to respond to the epidemics and natural disasters that impacted their communities. Their sermons and eulogies sought to bring comfort to the ailing, shaken, and bereaved as an integral part of their pastoral care efforts. Samfield, Cohen, and Loewy, for example each utilized the written word through sermons to provide comfort. Additionally, they exercised their power and authority through the written word in their own newspapers and in national circulations which allowed them to speak to their experiences of disasters while also fundraising for the many needs of their communities in the wake of hurricanes, floods, disease, earthquakes, and fire. Gutheim began utilizing newspapers as a means of communication and fundraising in the mid-nineteenth century. This method of disaster relief continued even with the assistance and intervention of B'nai B'rith into the 20th century. At the same time, rabbis like Nieto and Voorsanger, used the written word to castigate those in national positions of power who failed to come to their aid in their city's time of need. To this effect, both criticized the failure of the American Jewish Committee to secure the needs of the San Francisco Jewish community.

Areas for Further Research

Disease, hurricanes, floods, fires, and earthquakes shaped the rabbinates of the individuals examined in this thesis. These traumatic events should not be merely glossed over in congregational or communal Jewish histories or biographies. It is incumbent upon future American Jewish historians to continue to uncover the stories of rabbis and their communities that faced unimaginable tragedy. The study of these interesting and difficult epochs offers us instruction as to how our forebears responded to these

challenges. It is a study that proves to be inspiring and useful in that the patterns of response may certainly be applied to the way American Jews will respond to the disasters and emergencies that some Jewish communities will inevitably face in the inscrutable future. Scholars may begin some of this work by investigating the role American rabbis played in responding to cholera and tuberculosis epidemics in the nineteenth centuries, the Spanish Flu, as well as the AIDS epidemics in the 20th century. In terms of natural disasters, scholars may choose to investigate the Dust Bowl's impact on Jewish families and rural communities as well as the impact the 1937 Ohio River Valley flood had on Jews in the Midwest. At the same time, researchers and archivists should begin the important work of gathering sources from rabbis and communities in New Orleans, Houston, Puerto Rico, Los Angeles, and so many more to ensure that future scholars have the documents necessary to tell the stories of 21st-century rabbis and their responses to natural disasters.

Conclusion

Each Rosh Hashana we stand evoking the words of our ancestors:

בראֹשׁ השָׁנָה יִכָּתֵבוּן וּבְיוֹם צוֹם כִּפּוּר יֵחָתֵמוּן כַּמָּה יַעַבְ ·ון וְכַמָּה יִבָּרֵ ·ון מִי יִחְיֶה וּמִי יָמוּת .

> On Rosh Hashana it is written, and on Yom Kippur it is sealed. How many shall pass from this earth? How many will be created? Who will live and who will die? Who will die after a long life and who before their time? Who by water and who by fire, who by sword and who by beast,

who by famine and who by thirst, who by earthquake and

who by plague, who by strangling and who by stoning?

Our ancient texts remind us during the High Holy Days of the very real dangers posed to us by forces that are out of our control. These words compel us to confront the real possibility of disasters and emergencies in our midst and the ever-looming prospect that our world is fragile, and all that seems secure may be taken from us without warning. Epidemics and natural disasters have in the past and will continue to prompt American rabbis to respond to the needs of their Jewish and broader civic communities. Rabbis will continue to experience and respond to disasters throughout the 21st century. Although the specifics of the rabbinical response to disasters will inevitably evolve throughout the years ahead, it seems certain that rabbis will always be the ones who foster hope for the Jewish community. As Rabbi Loewy says, "we are in the hope business after all."[5]

[5] Robert Loewy, "E-mail from Robert Loewy," 26 October 2005, Hurricane Katrina nearprint, AJA, Cincinnati, OH. 1.

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