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Southern Jewish Preaching On Civil Rights, 1954 – 1970

Lauren F. Werber

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
2002
Referee, Dr. Gary P. Zola

This thesis is dedicated to my parents,
Joan and Stephen J. Werber,
without whom it never could have been written
and to Rabbi Daniel A. Roberts,
without whom I never would have become a rabbi.

DIGEST

The purpose of this thesis is to examine sermons delivered by Southern rabbis on the subject of Civil Rights. By studying material written by approximately one-quarter of the Reform rabbis serving Southern pulpits in the 1950s and 1960s, the thesis strives to present a picture of the challenges facing Southern rabbis and the ways in which they responded. Thus, the sermon becomes a tool for understanding rabbinic motivations and beliefs, and also provides valuable information about Southern Jewish life during the Civil Rights Movement.

The first two chapters provide essential background information that enables the reader to appreciate the role of Southern rabbis and their sermons. Chapter One looks at the sermon in general, with a focus upon the Jewish sermon. This chapter provides a definitional and historical analysis of the sermon. This will aid the reader in understanding the role and structure of the sermons delivered during the Civil Rights era.

Chapter Two provides a summary of Southern Jewish history with a focus upon anti-Semitism and its impact on Southern Jews. It then offers an overview of Jewish life in the South, including religious, political, and social realities. Together, this historical and cultural framework illuminates the context in which Southern rabbis worked and preached.

Chapter Three explores the factors which contributed to rabbis' decisions about whether to publicly address Civil Rights issues in sermons. It begins with an analysis of

the impact of demography on congregants' attitudes. It then discusses the views of congregants and the impact of these views upon rabbis. Finally, this chapter explores some of the practical concerns of Southern rabbis, the internal emotional conflicts they faced, and ultimately, the decisions they made about how to respond to the salient issues of the day.

Chapter Four concentrates on the religious and rational arguments that the rabbis used to defend the rights of African Americans. It begins with rabbis' claims that Civil Rights was profoundly and essentially a religious issue. It then turns to frequently cited religious themes, including a brief look at the use of Christian Scripture, to support claims for the equality of all humanity. Finally, this chapter discusses the rabbis' reliance upon reason and science.

Chapter Five addresses the rabbis as advocates of moderation and examines political arguments for equality. The chapter argues that while many rabbis espoused their true views, some were forced to moderate these views because of the conservative cities in which they lived and/or the unsupportive congregants for whom they worked. The chapter then explores a few examples of more radical speech. Finally, it turns to the rabbis' focus on law and democracy to support equality for all Americans.

The appendices supply additional information about the rabbis and their sermons. Appendix A provides a list of the rabbis cited in this study, and the names and locales of their congregations. Appendix B presents extended excerpts of selected sermons and letters cited in Chapters Three through Five. These excerpts are intended to give the reader a greater sense of the arguments presented by the rabbis, the context in which these rabbis preached, and the style in which some rabbis wrote their sermons.

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PREFACE

Following the Civil War, the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments provided the Constitutional basis for the equality of all races. Yet, progress was virtually non-existent until the close of World War II, when integration of the United States military forces began. The heroic actions of the segregated Tuskegee Pilots proved that African Americans, given the opportunity, would serve the nation as gallantly as any of their white counterparts. At the end of World War II, movement toward full equality blossomed and, by the second half of the twentieth century, launched a new level of activism that would become known as the Civil Rights Movement.

The confluence of two key events sparked an increased commitment to the Civil Rights cause. First, an elementary school girl and her family in Topeka, Kansas, challenged the prevailing doctrine of "separate but equal" education. In the 1954 case of *Brown v. Board of Education*, the United States Supreme Court ruled that the doctrine of "separate but equal" was unconstitutional and demanded the integration of public schools.[1] Second, a forty-two year old woman refused to allow a white person to take her seat on a bus in Montgomery, Alabama. Rosa Parks' courageous action spurred the Montgomery Bus Boycott, brought the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. to the consciousness of many Americans and, in 1956, led to a United States Supreme Court decision, *Gayle v. Browder*, affirming a lower court ruling that this form of "Jim Crow"

[1] The concept of "separate but equal education grew out of the case of *Plessy v. Ferguson*, which upheld segregation in railway carriages. This Supreme Court decision is addressed in Chapter Two. See *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

law violated the Constitution.[2] In both of these cases, African Americans used the legal system to defend their rights and to promote change. With the law on their side, African Americans and those who supported them then attempted to turn de jure decisions into de facto realities.

These rulings sparked heated controversy and fervent responses by forces on both sides of the issue. Individuals such as Sheriff Bull Connor and Governor George Wallace, as well as organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, vehemently vowed to stop integration and stifle equality. Meanwhile, Martin Luther King, Jr., Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X, and others, as well as groups such as the Freedom Riders, the American Civil Liberties Union, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, and the Black Panthers used a variety of means to defend African Americans' rights and to foster equality. Even the United States Military became involved when called upon to force the University of Mississippi to enroll its first African American student, James Meredith. A decade later, the United States Congress also took a stand, passing the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Within the legal and legislative systems, the movement continues to the present day as seen in affirmative action programs and efforts to eliminate these programs, race based discrimination and violence, and continued challenges to de facto segregation in housing, employment, and education.

Throughout the Civil Rights era, members of the clergy took stands both for and against integration and racial equality. Much attention has been given to Northern rabbis and their courageous acts on behalf of African Americans.[3] A recent publication, *The*

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[2] 142 F. Supp. 707 (M.D. Ala), *aff'd per curiam*, 352 U.S. 903 (1956).

[3] See, for example, Rabbi Marc Schneir, *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Jewish Community*. (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Light Publishing, 1999), pp. 69, 76,133-143, for material about Abraham Joshua Heschel, Israel Dresner, and several rabbis involved with the Freedom Rides;

Quiet Voices,[4] brought Southern rabbis some recognition for their roles in the Civil Rights struggle. Yet, scholarly focus on the sermons of rabbis – and particularly Southern rabbis – has been minimal.

This thesis strives to shed light on the role of Southern rabbis by studying the words they preached to congregants and, in some cases, to radio listeners. Many of these sermons were gathered by Jacob Rader Marcus (1896-1995), the founding Director of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), who wrote to Southern rabbis in February, 1957 to request sermons pertaining to Civil Rights. Additional sermons were found in other collections at the AJA or within secondary sources. While this study examines only a fraction of Southern rabbis and their sermons, the sample is large enough to draw some general conclusions about rabbis' attitudes and activism in the South during the Civil Rights era.

While some of the rabbis in this study are often lauded for taking public stands in support of Civil Rights, rabbis who failed to act publicly within the larger community have, in some instances, been criticized.[5] Because the pulpit was the rabbis' forum for preaching, teaching , influencing congregants, and inspiring change, it is important to look at these rabbis' sermons in order to ascertain their perceived apathy or silence.

This thesis focuses on Reform rabbis[6] in the twelve states commonly accepted as Southern states. These are Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana,

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Kaplan, Edward K. and Samuel H. Dresner, *Abraham Joshua Heschel: Prophetic Witness* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

[4] Mark K. Bauman and Berkeley Kalin, eds. *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997).

[5] See for example, the mixed evaluation of Milton Grafman in Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era," in Bauman and Kailin, eds. *The Quiet Voices*, pp. 168-189; Introduction to Bauman and Kailin, eds., *The Quiet Voices*, p. 14.

[6] One Conservative rabbi, Simcha Kling, is also included, as he maintained ties with Hebrew Union College and the American Jewish Archives.

Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.[7] It focuses upon sermons delivered from the *Brown* decision of 1954 through the 1960s. Of approximately 100 Reform rabbis working in the South during these years, samples of 30 rabbis' sermons were evaluated and works of 24 rabbis were cited. Although not a comprehensive study, this sample is sufficient to evaluate common stylistic and substantive themes and to generalize about rabbinical involvement in, and attitudes toward, Civil Rights.

In order to better understand the social and cultural context in which these rabbis worked and delivered their sermons, the thesis includes two introductory chapters. Chapter One offers an analysis of the definition, history, and significance of the sermon. Chapter Two adds an overview of Southern Jewish life. The remaining chapters, largely through analyses of sermons, strive to offer a glimpse into the beliefs and actions of Southern rabbis struggling to guide their people through the turbulence of the Civil Rights Movement.[8]

A few brief notes about the technical challenges of working with sermons are necessary. The sermons studied for this thesis were often hand-written or typed without corrective ribbons. As a result, many sermons contain short-hand notes and typographical errors. When citing these sermons, I have corrected obvious errors without notations acknowledging the changes. I have also honored hand-written corrections in an attempt to portray the intent of the original author. I have not corrected mistakes that go

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[7] According to Gary P. Zola, these twelve states are "customarily included in the Land of Dixie." (Gary P. Zola, "Why Study Southern Jewish History?" in Southern Jewish History: Journal of Southern Jewish Historical Society (vol. 1, 1998) p.5.

[8] Chapters Three through Five are organized thematically, although other models could easily have been implemented. For example, material may have been organized according to chronology, precipitating events, or holidays on which sermons were preached.

beyond simple typographical errors. I also have not changed quotations in order to be stylistically consistent: Some rabbis, for example, capitalize "South," while others do not. These inconsistencies remain, with no special notations in the text. Additionally, I have left gendered language in the sermons and have occasionally used gendered language in my evaluations of the sermons, as it reflects the time in which these rabbis wrote. Finally, I have provided dates for as many sermons as possible. These dates sometimes reflect the date on which the sermon was written, but more often refer to the date of delivery.

A number of people made the writing of this thesis possible. First, I would like to thank my advisor, Dr. Gary P. Zola, for making time to keep me on for an extra year and for his painstaking efforts to help me produce a product in which I would take pride. Thanks also to Dr. Fred Krome, who knows everything, or at least where to find it, and to Ms. Eleanor Lawhorn who managed to schedule appointments around my baby's naps and to maintain my file with a smile. I'd also like to thank Rabbi Robert Barr for his support and for reminding me to "just do it" and Ms. Phyllis Binik-Thomas for setting my priorities straight. The members of my family deserve honorary degrees. Thank you, Brian, for sticking it out, and for keeping your eye on the prize and my hands on the keyboard. Thank you, Mom, for the gifts of babysitting, cooking, cleaning, editing, and encouragement, all of which gave me time and energy to write. Thanks, Dad, for everything, and then some. And thanks, Rachel, for reminding me of what is really important.

CHAPTER ONE

The Sermon: Its Definition, Role, and Development

The words of Moses at Mount Sinai, Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount, and Martin Luther King, Jr. at the Mall in Washington, D.C. each galvanized a people. None of these addresses were delivered at a religious service or even in a synagogue or church. Of the three speakers, only King was, in the modern sense, an ordained clergyman. Yet, these addresses can be considered "sermons" by modern day standards. Like the sermons preached in the 1950s and 1960s, they used religion and rhetoric to raise social consciousness and inspire change.

This thesis addresses the sermon as an essential element in the role of the Southern rabbi during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. During these years, America was divided geographically and racially and eventually by the trauma of the Vietnam War. Within this context of tension and division, rabbis evaluated their role in addressing central issues and as advocates of change. Sermons revealed how rabbis considered their responsibilities to themselves and their congregants, deciding if and how to use their prestige and pulpits to influence their congregants and communities.

Most Southern rabbis, despite substantial cultural, societal, and even physical constraints and dangers, played a significant role in fostering equality and supporting Civil Rights. That some of these rabbis did so aggressively, while others acted in a more subdued manner, and a few never showed public support, should come as no surprise.

The surprise, if any, is that many sermons reflected Jewish values, urged these values upon the people, and openly supported equal rights for African Americans despite the strong forces arrayed against taking such a position.

To understand the role of Southern rabbis and their sermons at this time of conflict, it is necessary to ascertain an appropriate definition of a sermon, to appreciate the historical use of the sermon, and to explore the environment and words of the Southern rabbi. This Chapter addresses the first two goals, providing a definitional and historical analysis of the sermon. This exploration will foster the reader's appreciation of the Southern rabbis' culture, environment, and sermons which will be discussed in Chapters Two through Five.

DEFINING THE SERMON

Dictionary definitions, from that of Samuel Johnson in 1755 to the present day, provide a starting point for an appropriate definition of a sermon. Johnson defined the sermon as "A difcourfe [sic] of inftruction [sic] pronounced by a divine for the edification of the people."[1] This early definition was one of the broadest and most flexible definitions offered for more than two centuries following its publication. Subsequent definitions added that the "difcourse of inftruction" must be Scripturally based.

In the early twentieth century, a leading dictionary offered two primary definitions of the term. The first was secular in nature and essentially defined the sermon as a form of lecture with no religious connotation. The second was directed to the religious sermon and declared a sermon to be "A discourse delivered by a clergyman,

[1] Samuel Johnson *II A Dictionary of the English Language.* (New York: Ames Press Inc. 1967 reprinting the original 1755 edition).

licentiate, or other person, for the purpose of religious instruction and edification, during divine service, usually founded upon or in elucidation of some text or passage of Scripture."[2]

During the Civil Rights era, a Webster's dictionary defined a sermon as a religious discourse within a religious service. Its 1966 definition portrayed a sermon as "A religious discourse delivered in public usu [sic], by a clergyman as part of a worship service."[3] Interestingly, a much earlier version of the dictionary included the idea that a sermon was "usually grounded on some text or passage of Scripture."[4] Other dictionaries through the Civil Rights era also focused on the religious aspect of a sermon and on its relation to Scripture.[5] Even today the Scriptural base of a sermon is emphasized in what is, nevertheless, a broader and more flexible definition. One entry in the 1999 Webster's dictionary defines "sermon" as: "A speech given as instruction in religion or morals, esp. by a priest, minister or rabbi during services, using a text from scripture."[6] This dictionary also offers a more secular definition, characterizing a sermon as "Any serious talk on behavior, responsibility, etc., esp. a long, tedious one."[7]

As this sample suggests, dictionary definitions of sermons include both religiously oriented discussions of Scripture and more secular explications of values. The religiously based definitions are consistent with the concept of a *D'var Torah*. The *D'var*

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[2] *VII The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia.* (under superintendence of William Dwight Whitney, Century Co., 1902).
[3] Philip Babcock Gore, ed. in chief, *Webster's Third International Dictionary.* (Springfield, Mass.: G & C Merriam Co., 1967).
[4] Noah Webster, *An American Dictionary of the English Language.* (New York: Johnson Reprint Co., 1970 reprint of 1882).
[5] See, for example, *The New Century Dictionary.* (New York: D. Appleton-Century Co., 1942).
[6] Michael Agnes, ed. in chief, *Webster's New World College Dictionary.* (Foster City, Calif.: IDG Books Worldwide Inc., 1999). Fourth ed.

Torah is an exploration or exposition of the meaning of a Jewish text. It is a discourse based on Torah or other Jewish sources that explains, edifies, or amplifies the meaning of a Torah reading. Many sermons of Southern rabbis may be understood as *Divrei Torah*, or at least incorporate aspects of the *D'var Torah*. These sermons often include proof-texts from the Torah and subsequent Jewish texts and sometimes explicate the texts in considerable detail. Most of the sermons, however, offer multiple texts in support of the rabbi's argument rather than focusing upon a single text in great detail.

Some sermons, however, include little or no Jewish text. These fit into the more modern, secular definition that expands the domain of the sermon to include morality. Secular definitions offer the rabbi an opportunity to address political issues without the need for emphasis on, and support from, Scripture. This phenomenon will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

CHRISTIAN AND AFRICAN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES

Dictionary definitions provide only a limited understanding of the sermon as a vehicle for social change. In a series of university lectures given in 1877, Phillips Brooks, the rector of Boston's Trinity Church, defined preaching as "the communication of truth by man to men."[8] He observed that the "truest truth, the most authoritative statement of God's will, communicated in any other way than through the personality of brother man to men is not preached truth."[9] Though recognizing that the preacher or pastor should communicate

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[7] *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (Fourth ed.). It is hard to determine whether the editor sought to be truthful, humorous, or cynical in the description of a sermon as "long" and "tedious."
[8] Phillips Brooks, *On Preaching*. (New York: The Seabury Press,, 1964), Introduction, p. iii. (Introduction by Theodore Parker Ferris).
[9] Brooks, *On Preaching*, p. 5.

his wisdom, he declared in absolute terms that "...we must know that there is nothing in our quality as preachers that gives us any claim to be authoritative guides to men . . . in politics, nor in education, nor in science. On one thing only we speak with authority, and that is the will of God." [10] Brooks mandated that the preacher address sins, but the sins addressed were to be personal violations of the gospel and not societal injustices.[11] Yet, Brooks did not fully negate the power of the preacher to address political issues. Without any prior suggestion, he stated that "In a land like ours, where the tone of the people is of vast value in public affairs, the preachers who have so much to do in the creation of the popular tone must always have their part in politics."[12] Thus, for Brooks, the unique character of the United States dictated that the preacher could not remain silent amidst political controversy.

Brooks' definition assumed that the preacher was able to present God's truth as an absolute. Though some Jews may accept the premise that a given rabbi knows God's truth, this foundation is inconsistent with the Jewish tradition that, from the time of the *Mishnah*, sought to ascertain the meaning of God's word and recognized that many of the "truths" found in the Bible remained *shanuy b'makhloket* (still in controversy) and *tsorikh ivrun* (needing further study). Even so, Brooks acknowledged the practical function of the sermon as moral education.

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[10] Brooks, *On Preaching*, p. 86. Brooks also noted that even in the area of God's will the preacher should not view himself as infallible.

[11] Brooks, *On Preaching*, p. 137. Brooks made clear that the preacher should address the problems posed by "all kinds of vicious acts," but described such acts as "dishonesty, licentiousness, drunkenness, cruelty, extravagance." (p. 139.)

[12] Brooks, *On Preaching*, p. 142. Brooks did not clarify whether this should be done from the pulpit or as part of the right to pass the preacher's wisdom on to congregants outside the pulpit.

A distinctly different role of the sermon is found in a powerful text addressing preaching within the African American community.[13] This text's presentation makes clear that the "Black sermon," though distinct from both white Christian and Jewish sermons, also has much in common with rabbinical sermons. A primary difference is found in the concept of hermeneutics as, to the African American preacher, this means preaching the gospel in the vernacular of the people and speaking to their immediate needs.[14] The African American hermeneutic style seeks to address real world issues so that "Black preachers . . . preach with the urgency of a 'dying man to a dying world.'"[15] The sermon speaks in powerful terms with a focus on Bible to resolve current experiences of African Americans. [16]

This approach is illustrated in the belief that the African American preacher must be a charismatic leader of the community addressing a variety of responsibilities. He must act not only as a spiritual leader providing spiritual guidance, but also as a political and social leader and proponent of education.[17] The attempt to address the needs of African American congregants is, at least in part, a reason for the "call and response" style of Black sermonizing. This approach, essentially foreign to Jewish sermonizing, is integral to the Black sermon.[18]

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[13] Henry H. Mitchell, *Black Preaching* (Philadelphia: J.P. Lippincoff Co., 1970).
[14] Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, p. 30-31. In comparison, note that from a rabbinic perspective the term hermeneutics is applied to methods of Torah interpretation.
[15] Bishop Joe Aldred, ed., *Preaching with Power: Sermons by Black Preachers*. (London: Cassell, 1998), p. vii.
[16] A collection of sermons by two eminent African American preachers can be found in Samuel D. Proctor and William D. Watley, *Sermons From the Black Pulpit* (Valley forge, Pa.: Judson Press, 1984). See also Clayborne Carson and Kris Shepard, eds., *A Call to Conscience: The Landmark Speeches of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Intellectual Properties Management, c. 2001); Aldred, ed., *Preaching with Power*.
[17] Mitchell, *Black Preaching,* p. 6-7.
[18] Aldred, ed., *Preaching with Power,* p. viii observes that "There needs to be an awareness that Black preachers rarely confine themselves to reading a sermon, and so some imagination is necessary on the part

Black preachers also played an instrumental part in the political debate about the Civil Rights Movement. Their sermons, though reliant on Scripture, clearly aimed at underlying social injustice. Drawing on examples from the late nineteenth century, but relevant to the Civil Rights era, historian Henry H. Mitchell explained:

> preaching itself was probably the most important factor in the gathering together of the Black base of political power from which and for these preachers worked. There was a very high correlation between great preacher impact for community change and great spiritual impact in the pulpit. The pulpit was the avenue of influence beyond the church walls.[19] ...

This same correlation was present during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Black recognition of the pulpit and religious leadership for social and political change was similarly recognized by Southern rabbis during the Civil Rights era. These rabbis, like African American preachers, utilized the teachings of their Bibles and the power of their positions to advance Civil Rights. The African American sermon, though clearly different in style, sought the same end as did the rabbinical sermon. The unstated definition of a sermon drawn from Mitchell's text is clear: "The sermon is a means to elucidate and expand upon Scripture as a base upon which to locate values of concern to the people and to show how those values must be advanced within the necessary social, political or legal community." This definition reflects an essential element of the definition implied by Southern Reform rabbis during the Civil Rights Movement.

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of the reader. Replicating the 'call and response' and the general preacher-congregation dynamic is virtually impossible in print."

[19] Mitchell, *Black Preaching*, p. 92.

THE JEWISH PERSPECTIVE

The dictionary definitions and Christian perspectives discussed thus far do not fully elucidate the definition of a sermon for the Southern Reform rabbi seeking to address the issues posed by racial injustice. These rabbis clearly operated out of their sense of the domain and function of the sermon. The question then becomes whether they developed this sense arbitrarily or if their understanding of the sermon was consistent with Jewish sources: Specifically, did Reform Judaism have a definition that applied to these sermons and thereby justified their substance and form? If no formal definition existed, then we may construct a definition based upon the sermons that these rabbis delivered.

Israel Bettan, a Hebrew Union College professor of homiletics, described the sermon as a "peculiar product of the Jewish mind. . . . a unique creation of the Jewish spirit."[20] While it may be tempting to see the prophets as the first creators of this "peculiar product," scholars distinguish between prophetic addresses and sermons. The prophets did not speak in the context of a religious service nor did they necessarily interpret Scripture. Though recognized for their speaking, the Biblical prophets did not give rise to the sermonic tradition.[21]

The Jewish sermon began to take root only with the rise of the synagogue following the destruction of the Temple in the first century CE. Consistent with Biblical mandates,[22] the law was read to the people and, over time, the role of the *darshan*, the preacher, developed. This person became the expounder and creative interpreter of the text whose purpose was to admonish and edify in order to sustain a sound religious

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[20] Israel Bettan, *Studies in Jewish Preaching: Middle Ages.* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1939), p. 3.
[21] Robert V. Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel" – The History of American Jewish Preaching, 1654 – 1970* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1989), p. 2.

perspective.[23] The efforts of the *darshanim*, including the midrashim they developed, provided the foundation of the modern sermon. Derived from the same root as *darshan*, the Hebrew word for sermon, *drashah*, means "to search, to investigate, to interpret."[24] From this one may derive the sermon's earliest definition as "A discourse that elucidates the meaning of Hebrew Scripture based on investigation and search of the text to set forth the true interpretation and application of God's word." This definition reflects much of the modern *D'var Torah*. However, it casts no light on the more expansive form of sermon utilized by Southern rabbis during the Civil Rights Movement. A definition of these sermons must come from more recent sources.

Perhaps the most straightforward modern definition of a sermon from a Jewish, yet universal, perspective was provided by Rabbi Jacob R. Rudin of Temple Beth-El, Great Neck, New York, as part of a series of lectures delivered at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in 1959. Offering a functional definition, he explained in detail:

> A sermon is a medium of communication. It is the means by which a preacher seeks to enter the lives of his congregation. The words he preaches are a knocking on the door of their hearts, saying "Let me in. I have something urgent to tell you." So the sermon is the preacher's messenger, declaring what he is, what he sees upon the mountain top and what close at hand, what voices he hears, what visions are before his eyes. ...A sermon at its best is the evocation of God's word. ...Thus, a sermon is both creation and transmission; and the preacher is creator and transmitter. He creates something new, because he is a person authentic in his own right. He is transmitter . . . , because he dips into the living waters

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[22] See, for example, Deuteronomy 31:10-13.
[23] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 3 - 9.

[24] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 9. These developments are more fully discussed at notes 32 – 42 and accompanying text.

> of our faith, bringing the cooling draughts which can slake the thirst of spirit in his people.[25]

Rudin's explanation described the function of the rabbi as a sermonizer. He also indicated that the content and values reflected in the sermon make a rabbi's sermon distinctly Jewish. Jewish content and values, Rudin explained, might be elucidated in part through secular material, but a midrash or Jewish text must complement or explain the secular text to provide the necessary Jewish perspective and understanding.[26]

Rudin defined a Jewish sermon by complementing his universal definition with an emphasis on Jewish content and values. Yet the substance of the sermon must also be addressed. As the creator and transmitter of Jewish content and values, one may ask, in what areas is the rabbi to speak? Rudin's response, though with some parallels to that of Philips Brooks, was significantly more encompassing. Observing that we can walk in the prophet's steps, Rudin insisted that:

> We [rabbis] shall not refrain from speaking on any theme if there be need to speak. No area in life is prohibited to us – whether it be politics or economics or social ills of whatever nature. If the voice of our prophetic tradition has to be raised for righteousness and against evil, for justice and against inequity, then we must raise it. And we must specify chapter and verse. The pulpit is the Jewish voice in the world. An insulated pulpit is an isolated pulpit. The rabbi and his sermon join the pulpit to life.[27]

Rudin lived by this statement, preaching on such subjects as theology, Bible, history, and contemporary issues. His statement of substance and obligation clearly expressed the sentiment of rabbis who chose to speak about Civil Rights. Yet, because Rudin's explanation came in 1959, one cannot ascertain whether he was influenced by

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[25] Rabbi Jacob P. Rudin, "On the Nature of the Rabbi and The Nature of His Preaching" in Dr. Eugene Mihaly, ed., *IV Aspects of Jewish Homiletics.* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, 1959), p. 7-8.
[26] Rudin, *On the Nature of the Rabbi*, p. 16-19.
[27] Rudin, *On the Nature of the Rabbi,* p. 27.

the blossoming Civil Rights Movement or reflected a pre-existing understanding of the sermon. Regardless, Rudin's attitude is consistent with the values of Reform Judaism that existed well before 1955. Already in 1885, the Central Conference of American Rabbis' *Declaration of Principles* stated that "we deem it our duty to participate in the great task of modern times, to solve, on the basis of justice and righteousness, the problems presented by the contrasts and evils of the present organization of society."[28] The 1937 *Columbus Platform* added strong statements about the equality of all, the obliteration of evils, and the establishment of a just society.[29] Although the Platforms do not mention the sermon as a means to their end, they advocate the types of political change about which Rudin and other rabbis preached.

More recently, Marc Saperstein offered a somewhat different description of the sermon. Writing about his father's sermons from 1933-1980, he focused upon "topical sermons" and described their essence. These sermons, "which addressed specific issues of the day," did not necessarily include religious texts.[30] As Saperstein explained:

> During this period, it was considered fully appropriate to address an issue of importance—which might include a new book, movie or play of Jewish or general interest, a classical work of general literature, a historical or theological matter, descriptions of experiences in travel to a distant Jewish community—with no necessary grounding in the Torah lesson or other classical Jewish texts. The religious message drawn was thought to be more important than the text from which it was derived.[31]

This description is especially relevant to the Civil Rights era, when rabbis involved themselves so thoroughly in politics. By describing the reality of Jewish preaching rather

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[28] *Declaration of Principles*, Paragraph 8.
[29] *Columbus Platform*, Sections 6 and 7.
[30] Harold I. Saperstein, *Witness From the Pulpit: Topical Sermons, 1933 – 1980.* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000, p. 2.
[31] Saperstein, *Witness From the Pulpit*, p. 4.

than the theoretical reliance on Jewish text, Saperstein revealed that many sermons were not textually based. Southern rabbis' sermons pertaining to Civil Rights would sometimes fit this model.

The explanantions of Rudin and Saperstein, combined with more ancient concepts, allow us to formulate a definition that includes the traditional *D'var Torah* and also supports and reflects the sermons of Southern rabbis that are the subject of this thesis. That definition is:

> Sermon: (1) A discourse by a rabbi based on Torah that explores, elucidates, and discusses a *Parsha* read at a service, and which places that *Parsha* into a context reflecting Jewish laws, traditions, or values applicable to the present day; (2) A means of discourse or exposition by a rabbi to a congregation predicated on Jewish Scripture, teachings, or values as applied to issues of concern to the congregation including Bible, theology, history, politics, economics, or other issues related to justice and equality.

THE MIDDLE EAST AND EUROPE TO THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

The Jewish sermon developed over a period of more than 2,500 years.[32] Although the sermon is not a direct consequence of the prophetic tradition, the prophets and later

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[32] As this section is devoted exclusively to the Jewish sermon, the adjective "Jewish" will not be used hereafter. Though not specifically "history" nor directed to the role of the sermon, a series of collected essays about Jews in the South and their times, including that of Rabbi Bernard C. Ehrenreich who moved to Montgomery, Alabama in 1906, provides a revealing sense of the historical context and understanding of Southern Jews. See Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson. *Jews in the South*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973); Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky, eds. *Turn to the South*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979); Samuel Proctor and Louis Schmier, eds *Jews of the South: Selected Essays From the Southern Jewish Historical Society* (1984).

The reader who wishes to compare the history of the sermon described herein with that of the Christian sermon can draw on a vast array of sources. See e.g., Edwin Charles Dargan, *A History of Preaching* (Burt Franklin, New York, New York, 1968 reprint of 1912 publication) (Two volumes focused on Christian preaching in the Middle East and Europe from 70 – 1900); Emory Elliott, *Power and the Pulpit in Puritan New England* (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1975) (Discussing the institutions of the Church and the forms of the Puritan sermon during the colonial period); *Preaching in American History* (Dewitte Holland, ed., Abingdon Press, Nashville – New York, 1969) (a collection of essays focused on issues addressed through American preaching from 1630 – 1967, with limited mention of Jewish sources); Samuel D. Proctor, "How Shall They Hear?" – Effective Preaching for Vital Faith (Judson Press, Valley Forge, Pa., 1992) (Written by an African-American while a visiting professor at the Divinity School, Vanderbilt University, the primary focus of this text is on Christian, not Black, sermons).

preachers shared objectives. The early preachers delved into the inner meaning of Scriptural text to deepen understanding of the beliefs and values found in the Bible. These preachers sought to provide words of comfort and "to emulate the prophets of old, who used to close their message in a hopeful, inspiriting strain . . .."[33] Many modern sermons similarly emulate the prophets.

The roots of the modern sermon began with the rise of the synagogue, following the destruction of the Temple in the sixth century BCE and the exile of the Jews from Israel. During this period, instruction supplemented prayer and song. Though we cannot accurately ascertain when the sermon came into general use, reading of the law to the people was addressed in the Bible. Deuteronomy 31:10-13 mandates such a reading and in the days of Josiah, the king gathered the inhabitants of Jerusalem for this purpose (II Kings 23:1-2). By the time of Ezra, when the masses returning from exile no longer spoke Hebrew, one may infer that compliance with the mandate to read the law required translation and interpretation.[34]

For a brief period, this requirement was met by the *Meturgeman*, the interpreter. These men, who translated Hebrew text into the Aramaic vernacular, soon began to amplify the text with personal analysis.[35] This office, however, failed to meet the needs of the populace and quickly vanished. The disappearance of the *Meturgeman* left a void as the people lacked guidance in how to live according to the law. To meet this need:

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[33] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 35.
[34] Bettan, *Studies*, p. 3-6. *Accord,* Friedenberg, "Hear O Israel" p. 2. Friedenberg observes that the early Jewish sermonic tradition was born out of the destruction of the Temple as religious leaders believed that instruction would aid in the preservation of faith in Torah. Therefore, worship services included sermons to achieve this end. "The preaching tradition had been well established in Judaism during the biblical period, predating Christianity, and long before the New World was explored and colonized."
[35] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 2-3.

> a new functionary made his appearance in the Synagogue. . . . the learned and skilled 'Darshan,' or preacher, came to take his place. The literal translation [of the Meturgeman] had become distasteful; the 'drashah,' or sermon, brought fresh interest and zest to the worshipper."[36]

At this point, the sermon began to take root as an entity at least somewhat related to the modern *D'var Torah*. The primary triad of the early preachers' homiletics – God, Torah, and Israel[37] – provided the same foundation for sermons as that used in modern times. Analysis of the meaning of the term *Darshan* further exemplifies the relationship between early and modern sermons. As "the expounder, the explorer, the creative interpreter" of Jewish text, the *darshan* built an "exegetic scaffolding" that took the Scriptural text beyond its literal meaning to ascertain its deeper meaning and significance.[38] In this way, the first homilies developed and matured.

Early in the maturation process, the preachers incorporated introductory texts and then sought to bring Talmudic teaching to the people. Preachers then interpreted the Talmud and used it to explain even the smallest details of Bible and prayer including, for example, the proper posture when reciting the first sentence of the *Sh'ma* as compared to the remainder of the prayer.[39]

Early preachers, like modern rabbis, addressed theological, linguistic, logical, and ethical aspects of Scripture. To accomplish this, they used literary and analytical approaches such as analogies, proverbs, parables, allegories, fables, and legends. These illustrative devices, when not predicated on Scripture, were "taken from the common

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[36] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 8-9. See also, Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 3.

[37] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 45.
[38] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 9.
[39] Bettan, *Studies,* p. 10-14.

experiences of life"[40] and gave the Scriptural text relevance to the contemporary listener. For example, when dealing with allegorical texts such as the phrase, "the fruit of the goodly trees" in Leviticus, the elucidation provided[41] would show that this verse could "typify the men who possess Torah and good deeds."[42]

Throughout the Middle Ages, the sermon took root and matured in a manner which brought it gradually closer to the modern sermon. Vernacular sermons remained a tradition of Jewish life until the late seventeenth century. At that time they gradually disappeared from services throughout most of Europe. This aberration in the European sermonic tradition, spanning the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, is largely unexplained, but indicated that sermons were not part of the heritage of Jews who came to America during the colonial period. Thus, in colonial and revolutionary America, Jews prayed in Hebrew, usually without vernacular sermons.[43]

THE UNITED STATES FROM THE COLONIAL PERIOD TO 1830

During the pre-revolutionary period only a small number of Jews resided in the United States. The first synagogue was erected in New York in 1730. At this time almost half of the Jewish population resided in Newport, Rhode Island where a synagogue was erected in 1768. The remainder of the Jewish community was spread among the colonies with additional organized communities only in Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Georgia. At the outbreak of the Revolution, approximately 2,500 Jews resided in the

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[40] Bettan, *Studies,* pp. 16, 24. Reliance on life experience bears a strong resemblance to the Black sermon. *See* notes 13-19, and accompanying text.

[41] Elucidation "came to be regarded as the most effective part of the preacher's task." Bettan, *Studies,* p. 23.

[42] Lev. 23:40; Bettan, *Studies,* p. 20.

[43] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 2-3.

colonies and only five of the approximately 3,000 houses of worship were synagogues.[44] A lack of Jews and Jewish communities hindered the development of a sermonic tradition.

The absence of ordained rabbis had a further impact on the development of the sermon. The first ordained rabbi, Abraham Rice, who served in Baltimore, Maryland, did not assume the pulpit until the 1840s. In colonial and revolutionary times, the community religious leader was usually a lay person who assumed the title of hazzan, serving as both cantor and reader. A lack of training coupled with limited financial support diminished any desire for these leaders to assume the additional duty of preaching.[45] Combined with the lack of a tradition of sermonizing and the practical difficulties presented by the small number of Jews who could barely comprise *minyanim*,[46] it is easy to understand the paucity of sermonizing during this period.

Paucity, however, did not mean a total absence of sermons. Early sermons were often delivered as a consequence of the desires of civil authorities to impart a message or as a reflection on specific events. Perhaps the first vernacular sermon was delivered in the colonies by Joseph Jeshurun Pinto, hazzan at Shearaith Israel in New York. Spurred by England's victory in the French and Indian Wars, Pinto held a special thanksgiving service, including a sermon, in August 1763.[47] Yet, such events and sermons were rare.

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[44] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 3-4.

[45] Freidenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 4-5.

[46] *Minyan* (plural *minyanim*) is the quorum of ten people (traditionally men) required for the recitation of certain prayers and the performance of certain rituals.

[47] For other Eighteenth century sermons, see Abraham J.Karp, ed., *Beginnings Early American Judaica: A Collection of Ten Publications in Facsimile, Illustrative of the Religious, Communal, Cultural & Political Life of American Jewry, 1761-1845* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1975), Sections 2 and 3. Section 2 presents "A SERMON Preached at the SYNAGOGUE, in Newport, Rhode Island" by Haijm Isaac Karigal in 1773. Section 3 presents "DISCOURSE, Delivered in the SYNAGOGUE in New York" by Gershom Mendes Seixas in 1798.

One estimate suggested that the total of number of sermons delivered from colonial times through 1820 did not exceed twenty-eight, even though Gershom Mendes Seixas, who became the hazzan at Shearith Israel in 1768, apparently delivered "many" sermons.[48]

With few sermons and limited records of them, it is difficult to evaluate the form and substance of sermons during this period. Seixas' sermons often bore a patriotic tone. Comparing our duties to the Creator with our duties to the community, these sermons utilized Jewish texts and history to support the Revolution and to give thanks to God for His aid. Seixas utilized other themes to support charity.[49] Despite his lack of formal education and the circumstances under which most of his sermons were delivered, Seixas "helped lay the groundwork for the development of the American Jewish preaching tradition."[50]

DECADES OF TRANSITION: 1830 – 1860

Seixas remained an anomaly and sermons did not rise in prominence until the end of the early national period. By approximately 1830, as a result of the growth of Reform Judaism in Europe, the sermon took on greater significance. The Reformed Society of Israelites, which formed in Charleston in the 1820s, illustrates this trend. In 1824, forty-seven men gave a petition to synagogue leaders requesting the translation of key prayers into English, the omission of "superfluous" elements, and the incorporation of an English

[48] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 5-9.
[49] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 8-18 which includes reference and discussion of specific sermons in terms of both form and content.
[50] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 18.

Scriptural discourse "like all other ministers." Most of these men formally broke ties with the local congregation to incorporate these elements into their worship services.[51] The European and specifically German influence on the Reformed Society of Israelites and on American Judaism in general, coupled with the national division caused by slavery, substantially affected the sermon.

Within the first decades of the nineteenth century, the concept of the vernacular sermon was widely accepted among European Jews who emulated their Christian neighbors. In Germany, Reform Judaism restored the vernacular sermon to Sabbath and holiday services, expanding the rabbi's role to include preaching. Central European immigrants to the United States in this period brought this renewed tradition of the sermon with them. Yet, one important element of the European sermon was not accepted in America. While European Jews moved toward adopting major components of the Christian sermon form, American Jews favored the more traditional sermon form of Seixas and earlier principles of the *drasha*.[52]

The first American Jewish leader to incorporate the sermon into regular services was Isaac Leeser, a well-educated German immigrant who assumed the hazzan position at Philadelphia's Congregation Mikveh Israel in 1829. Leeser, a defender of the Orthodox religious tradition, addressed exclusively religious themes.[53] He assiduously avoided sermons addressing political or civil concerns in the belief that they were outside the province of religion. He sought only to explain Torah and related sources so that "the

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[51] Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788-1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual.* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), p. 113. See pp. 111-149 for more about the Reformed Society of Israelites.
[52] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 19 – 24.
[53] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 24-28. For more on Leeser and the religious themes of his sermons, see Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1995), pp. 77, 86-88.

untaught may learn, and the learned be fortified by faith."[54] Moreover, he placed his sermons at the end of the service to permit those who wished to leave the option to do so without failing their religious obligations. The substance of Leeser's sermons was classic, stressing only the type of sermon delivered by the *darshan*. Indeed, "most of his sermons, . . . were drashah in the traditional sense: they were attempts to explain God's word as given in the Torah." His sermons also supported Webster's definition of sermon as long and tedious, averaging over fifty three hundred words.[55] Leeser's first sermon was delivered in 1830. By 1850, the sermon had become an accepted part of many American services. Sermons were given in the vernacular, which was English or German, depending on the community.

Though many sermons through the Civil War period continued to avoid discussion of current events and politics, this approach was rejected by many hazzans and rabbis. The moral crisis facing America required a Jewish response and expanded the sermon tradition beyond that of exposition and interpretation. The movement toward use of the sermon as a means to provide instruction about civil and political issues is at least partially rooted in the crisis and conflict of slavery and the Civil War.[56]

Shortly after the commencement of the Civil War[57] a number of rabbis responded with sermons to President Buchanan's request for a National Fast Day, to be held on January 4, 1861. Among the most notable speeches from the pulpits that day was that of Rabbi Morris J. Raphall in New York. This sermon broke from the *darshan* tradition as

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[54] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 28.
[55] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 36.
[56] See Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 46-47. Here, Friedenberg discussed the impact of Morris Raphall's sermon, "Bible View of Slavery" on the Jewish community. For more details, as well as discussion of Jews' antipathy toward the abolitionist movement despite their sympathy for slaves, see pp. 42-58.

it was a political sermon addressing the issue of slavery.[58] Entitled "Bible View of Slavery," it used Biblical text to elucidate Raphall's views and to justify slavery. Its importance is not the position taken, but the fact that its widespread publicity opened the door to the political sermon. Ironically, as political sermons took root, the Jewish response to Rabbi Raphall was largely limited to written publications rather than congregational sermons.[59]

Raphall's use of the political sermon and its impact are of considerable importance as, by the 1850s, at least sixty recognized Jewish leaders were in positions permitting preaching. Printed sermons of at least eighteen of these leaders, who made vernacular sermons commonplace during the decades of the 1840s and 1850s, have been preserved. Thus, "By the coming of the Civil War the transition stage was complete. Sermons were an accepted facet of American Jewish life and most of those sermons were delivered in English."[60] Rabbis and lay leaders could now use the pulpit to expound on Jewish text and to state their own views.

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[57] South Carolina issued its ordinance of secession on December 20, 1860 and attacked Fort Sumter six days later.

[58] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 39-40.

[59] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 52-56. Friedenberg offered two reasons for this: (1) a continuation of the tradition and counsel of such leaders as Leeser and Isaac M. Wise who continued to reject use of the pulpit to address controversial issues and (2) an antipathy toward the abolitionist movement combined with fear that such sermons would place them in a category with abolitionist clergy of whom they were suspicious.

[60] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 42.

FROM ISAAC MAYER WISE TO THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Rabbi Isaac Mayer Wise, one of the most significant figures in the Reform Movement, was largely responsible for the "Americanization of the Jewish Sermon."[61] Wise, unlike others, studied rhetoric and homiletics to become a polished speaker. As president of the Hebrew Union College from 1875 until his death in 1900, he encouraged others to perfect rhetorical skills and presented a model for others to emulate.[62] Ordaining over 60 rabbis,[63] Wise prepared a generation of rabbis to preach effectively. In this way, Wise promoted the transformation of sermons from rhetorically mundane exposition to rhetorically and substantively powerful speech.

Wise was not the only important Jewish leader residing in Cincinnati during this period. Rabbi Max Lilienthal, who met Wise in New York, followed him to Cincinnati where he became a community leader in his own right.[64] Beginning in 1867, Lilienthal accepted invitations to preach to Christian groups, reasoning that he did so to provide Christians with an understanding of Jewish doctrine and to improve relations between the groups. He thus laid the foundation for rabbis to address Christian congregations. Almost a century later, Northern and Southern rabbis built upon this foundation as they entered the debate over Civil Rights.

Lilienthal's initial sermon to Christians, delivered at the Unitarian First Congregational Society, used Jewish text to discuss the value of the United States'

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[61] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 59. Wise was the founder of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the Central Conference of American Rabbis and Hebrew Union College (where he served as President for thirty years). See also Temkin, Sefton D, *Isaac Mayer Wise: Shaping American Judaism* (Oxford: Published for the Littman Library by Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 249-52.
[62] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 64.
[63] *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 1971 ed., s.v. "Wise, Isaac Mayer."
[64] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 62, 78.

separation of Church and State.[65] By choosing this topic, he reflected Rabbi Raphall's willingness to utilize the sermon as a means to address contemporary issues.

Thirty years later, with the First World Zionist Congress in 1897, a major political issue galvanized Jews throughout the world. The use of sermons to address current civil and political issues now flourished as rabbis throughout the United States took a stand on Zionism. The sermons of such famous rabbis as Solomon Schechter, Stephen S. Wise, and Abba Hillel Silver now came to the fore.[66] These rabbis not only addressed the pressing need for the establishment of a Jewish state, but also continued the trend set by Isaac Mayer Wise of restructuring or "Americanizing" the Jewish pulpit and sermon.

By the turn of the century, the rabbi's job had been redefined into a distinctly American model.[67] Jerold Auerbach asserted that the rabbi, whose traditional role was that of *dayan* (judge) and "repository of legal knowledge" now adopted the preaching function of the Christian ministry in regard to addressing contemporary social problems. He explained:

> Reform rabbis emulated their [Christian preachers'] model of social activism. Wise and Magnes, who launched their rabbinical careers during the early years of the Progressive era, exemplified the pattern. Both men merged the roles of preacher and reformer, committing themselves to the

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[65] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 79-82. The identical issue was addressed by many rabbis following the United States Supreme Court 1962 decision in *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421, holding that state approved prayer in public schools violated the First Amendment. For example, a mimeographed sermon of Rabbi Robert I. Kahn of Congregation Emanul El in Houston, dated April 10, 1964, declared that the wall of separation "ought not to become an empty shibboleth" and that "There is enough religious friction now," "Shall we add to it." Quoted by Stewart in *Preaching in American History*, pp. 371, 373.

[66] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 85-106, devoted a chapter of his text to detailing the Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform approaches to Zionism. The Zionist movement, other than its effect on the willingness of Rabbis to address a political topic, is beyond the scope of this thesis and will not be discussed further.

[67] Jerold S. Auerbach, *Rabbis and Lawyers: The Journey from Torah to Constitution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 171.

public issues and liberal causes of the time. Progressive politics, infused with the Social Gospel, defined the public agenda of Reform rabbis.[68]

With this tremendous change of direction, the Reform rabbinate was ready to move into the social issues that dominated the United States following World War II. Preaching now became the rabbi's best means of educating congregants about Jewish law and tradition and presenting current issues within a Jewish context.[69] While retaining reliance upon Torah, Talmud, and rabbinic literature, rabbis such as Joseph H. Lookstein (Orthodox), Morris Adler and Robert Gordis (Conservative), and Solomon B. Freehof and Robert I. Kahn (Reform),[70] addressed issues of private faith and public concern. They did so, Rabbi Lookstein hoped, by teaching ethical norms and by inspiring audiences to act ethically.[71] Sermons were now used to provide guidance about public issues on a regular rather than sporadic basis.

This change in rabbinical philosophy was complemented by a change in presentation. In order to better reach their audiences and to involve the audiences more fully with the subject, rabbis such as Freehof and Kahn preached from notes rather than manuscripts. The sermon was now presented in a style and with a vocabulary directed to congregants' needs and understanding.[72] It moved toward informal conversation – albeit one-sided – rather than formal, scholarly discourse.

The role of the Southern rabbi during the Civil Rights Movement could now be played upon a stage – or pulpit – that recognized and accepted sermons as more than elucidation of Scripture. Rabbis were empowered to utilize the mandates of their faith

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[68] Auerbach, *Rabbis and Lawyers*, p. 171.
[69] Friedenberg, "Hear O Israel," p. 107.
[70] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 108-27, providing biographical information and the rhetorical approaches of each.
[71] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* p. 129.

and knowledge of Scripture and law to address the issues that were dividing the American people. With the sermon's purpose expanded from *drasha* to moral instruction, these rabbis could discuss segregation, inequality, and injustice nationwide and particularly in the American South.

Today, these rabbis' sermons offer invaluable historical information. As Saperstein noted, they may even go beyond memoirs, diaries, and newspapers in bringing us into a specific era. Memoirs rely on memory and may alter history with hindsight. Diaries, as "private documents," state only the author's ideas. Newspapers may bury material on inner pages and may not be read in their entirety. Sermons, especially those delivered on the High Holy days, reach a large number of people who are typically in a "receptive mood." Thus, Saperstein argued, "actual communication about matters of utmost urgency" takes place.[73] Sermons offer personal opinions, attitudes, and reactions to events, but also tell us what types of information congregants are receiving. Thus, they illustrate the rabbi's agenda and the backdrop for the community's beliefs and actions.

Furthermore, study of an adequate sample of sermons reveals trends in the responses of rabbis to the Civil Rights Movement. By studying sermons, we see what issues were most important to the rabbis and how they attempted to convince their congregants of their views. By reading between the lines, we also glimpse the pressures placed upon them and the finesse with which they tried to deliver their message despite these pressures. The sermons addressed in this thesis offer a new perspective on Southern rabbis and their roles in furthering the cause of Civil Rights.

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[72] Friedenberg, *"Hear O Israel,"* pp. 129-31.
[73] Saperstein, *Witness From the Pulpit*, p. 3. Saperstein was speaking of Holocaust era sermons, but his evaluations are applicable to the Civil Rights era.

CHAPTER TWO

The South and Its Jews: Culture and Identity

Describing Shabbat dinner in his hometown of Anniston, Alabama, a man explained, "Mama blessed the lights, and then we settled down to our favorite Friday night meal – crawfish soup, fried chicken, baked ham and hoppin' John and sweet potato pie."[1] The ironies of this man's Shabbat dinner symbolize many of the complexities and overlays of Southern Jewish history and identity.

This chapter provides a summary of Southern Jewish history with a focus upon anti-Semitism and its impact on Southern Jews. It then offers an overview of Jewish life in the South, including religious, political, and social realities. Together, this historical and cultural framework illuminates the context in which Southern rabbis worked and preached.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The first Jew to reach the New World may have landed with Christopher Columbus in 1492. Individual Jews continued to make their home in colonial America over the next decades, and a group of French Jewish exiles reached Charleston in the 1690's.[2] A

[1] Eli N. Evans, "Southern Jewish History Alive and Unfolding." in *Turn to the South*, eds. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979) p. 158.
[2] Jacob Rader Marcus, *The American Jew 1585 – 1990: A History* (Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing Inc., 1995), pp. 7, 17-18. See also Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 84, where he lists a group of Jews in Georgia as the first group to immigrate to colonial America in 1733.

century later, Savanna, Georgia and Richmond, Virginia also housed organized Jewish communities.[3] Throughout the colonial and revolutionary periods, these early settlers struggled to prosper in an overwhelmingly Christian society and their Jewish communities fluctuated between vibrancy and near extinction. As a frustrated woman in Virginia wrote in 1791: "Here they [my children] cannot become anything else [but Gentiles]. Jewishness is pushed aside here. . . . My children cannot learn anything here, nothing Jewish, nothing of general culture."[4] This woman, writing to her parents overseas, offered insight into the perception of early Jewish American settlers who felt they faced overwhelming odds when trying to maintain their Judaism – even during the earliest phases of Jewish life in the South.

Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Jewish population in the South slowly increased. Jews established new communities, and the ritual balance shifted rather quickly from Sephardim to Ashkenazim. Jews built synagogues and, in the mid 1800's, they organized Southern chapters of B'nai B'rith.[5] Also during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Reform Judaism began to take root. The Reformed Society of Israelites, established in Charleston in the 1820's, was the first organized attempt at Reform Judaism in the country.[6] This group was formed after the leaders of the local synagogue rejected a petition presented by 47 Jewish intellectuals who were peripherally involved in synagogue life. These men asked that some of the prayers be

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[3] Clive Webb, introduction to *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), p. xiii.

[4] Letter of Rebecca Alexander (Mrs. Hyman) Samuel in Jacob R. Marcus, ed., *American Jewry: Documents, Eighteenth Century* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 1950), pp. 53-54 cited by Stanley F. Chyet, "Reflections on Southern-Jewish Historiography," in Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South*, pp. 13-20.

[5] Mark K. Bauman, The *Southerner as American: Jewish Style* (Cincinnati: The American Jewish Archives, 1996), p. 22.

[6] James William Hagy, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1993), pp. 144-5.

translated into English, that the service be shortened, and that the reader incorporate an English Scripturally based commentary into the service, "like all other ministers." As seen by this organization's founding, some Southern Jews – in the first quarter of the 19th century – were already reconsidering the meaning and substance of their Jewishness in relation to their environment.[7] They looked to a reformation of Judaism based upon European Reform Judaism and local Christianity in order to make religion relevant and complementary to their lives. Interestingly, this reformation included the addition of the sermon.

Three major factors helped to shape the development of the Southern Jewish community from colonial times until the Civil Rights era of the mid-twentieth century. These factors – business ownership, participation in the slave system, and susceptibility to anti-Semitism -- set the cultural and contextual parameters for Jews during the Civil Rights Movement.

Many of the Jews who immigrated to the South during the colonial and post-colonial years gravitated toward business. Even those who eventually became land-owners usually maintained businesses as their major economic base. The Jewish community's focus on business continued throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century – up to the Civil Rights era. Ultimately, the preponderance of Jews in the world of commerce during the Civil Rights era compelled Jews to consider the economic consequences of supporting racial equality.[8]

Success in business enabled a substantial number of Jews to own slaves in the antebellum South. Yet, it is important to note that Jews, despite their concentration in

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[7] Gary Phillip Zola, *Isaac Harby of Charleston, 1788-1828: Jewish Reformer and Intellectual* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), p. 113.
[8] This will be discussed in detail below.

business and commerce, played a limited role in the slave trade in the South, as reflected in the fact that in 1860 less than 10% of auctioneers and brokers advertising in Charleston and less than 7% in Richmond were Jewish. This accounted for only a small number of slave merchants even though it represented more than the percentage of Jews in the overall population.[9] An analysis of Jewish wills performed by Jacob Rader Marcus produced similar findings. Marcus found that ¼ of the wills he studied referred to slaves owned by the deceased, a number consistent with an 1860 census revealing that ¼ of the overall white population owned slaves. While Jews, according to this data, owned slaves in a percentage equal to the total population, they owned a disproportionate number of slaves residing in cities and towns.[10]

Although many Jews participated in or at least accepted slavery as a way of life, some Jews opposed the slave system. Judah Touro of New Orleans, for example, was known to purchase slaves for the purpose of emancipating them.[11] As with the laity, the rabbis varied in their opinion of slavery[12] with some rabbis defending the South's slave system and a few, most notably David Einhorn, vigorously condemning the practice.

Loyal to their homeland, many Jews fought for the Confederacy during the Civil War. No doubt some Jews fought to protect the institution of slavery, but many had other motivations. Historian Mark K. Bauman argued that, because most Southern Jews had arrived in the South within two decades of the war, support of the Confederacy reflected a desire for acceptance by Southerners as well as resentment of potential Northern

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[9] John Solk Buckingham, in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 7. See also Bertram Korn in Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 11, who asserted that Southern Jews engaged in all aspects of the slave system though to a lesser extent than Gentiles.

[10] Bertram Wallace Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865," in Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson, *Jews in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), pp. 89-134.

[11] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 4.

[12] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 14.

domination.[13] Identification with Southern geography, values, and priorities also played a role. This complex of factors is visible in the conduct of Leopold Weil, a Jewish cotton merchant in Montgomery, Alabama, who freed his servants and then joined the Confederate army. He believed that owning another person was wrong, but forcing owners to surrender their property was a greater evil.[14]

Robert N. Rosen, author of a major study on Southern Jews and the Civil War, understood Southern motivations somewhat differently. He asserted that most Jewish Confederate soldiers were raised in the South regardless of whether their parents were born there. They considered the South their "homeland" and "spent their formative years in a South defensive about slavery and hostile to what their generation perceived as Northern aggression and condescension toward the South."[15] According to Rosen, Jews fought for the Confederacy primarily because they were a part of and a product of Southern society.

At the end of the Civil War, Jewish merchants re-established business ties with Northerners and began an economic recovery. Jewish immigration increased and Jewish communities flourished. In cities throughout the South, many small shops grew into department stores.[16] Jewish merchants attracted African-American customers as well as whites. During these years, friction between whites and African-Americans increased. Some Southerners now turned to violence in an effort to restore their perception of the

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[13] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 14.
[14] Letter of Leopold Weil cited in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 11.
[15] Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), p. 89.
[16] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 13-14.

proper social order. A small number of Jews participated in this effort and even joined the Ku Klux Klan.[17]

Although many Jews found economic success and even proved themselves on the battlefields of the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, they remained socially marginalized. Even Jews such as Judah P. Benjamin, who achieved great prosperity and was largely assimilated, faced alienation.[18] Like Jews throughout the South, a wealthy Savannah family was denied admittance at a socially elite dance society.[19] Mark K. Bauman maintained that Jews remained "at best, tolerated outsiders" a view echoed by Abraham Peck's observation that Jews formed "their own myth of nobility which paralleled that of their non-Jewish neighbors" because they were excluded from the Southern elite.[20] Success in business did not necessarily equate with social acceptance.

Alienation, and especially concerns over anti-Semitism, were and continued to be driving forces influencing Jewish beliefs and behavior in the South during the late nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century. The threat and reality of anti-Semitism shaped Jewish attitudes and behavior during the decades that preceded the Civil Rights era.[21]

The South has been considered by many to be a hotbed of anti-Semitism. The story is actually much more complex. A noted historian of anti-Semitism, Leonard Dinnerstein, described a constant presence of anti-Semitism in the South, which ebbed and flowed in intensity over time.[22] He and Mary Dale Palsson explained the

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[17] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 13-14.
[18] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 10. For more detail, see Richard S. Tedlow, "Judah P. Benjamin" in *Turn to the South*, pp. 44-54.
[19] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 7.
[20] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 7, 9.
[21] See Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, pp. 88-93.
[22] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at* Home, pp. 84ff.

development of these anti-Semitic attitudes, stating that "Through the years the southerner adopted stereotyped images of the Jew. These impressions accumulated because of fear and distrust of the outsider, through folk tales passed on from generation to generation, and from actual encounters as well."[23]

Until the Civil War, overt anti-Semitic sentiment was limited, although Jews were often restricted from holding public office.[24] In fact, several historians insisted that philosemitism was more apparent in Southern culture than anti-Semitism.[25]

During the Civil War, however, sentiment changed. Many Southern Jews maintained contact with Northern Jews and some profited in business while many other Southerners struggled economically. Attacked as "merciless speculators, army slackers, and blockade-runners across the land frontiers to the North," they were scapegoated and held in suspicion.[26] An 1862 resolution in Thomasville, Georgia sought to expel Jews from the town and a Talbotton, Georgia grand jury ruled that Jews were guilty of "evil and unpatriotic conduct." Such expressions of prejudice made it clear to Jews that they were not welcome and, in fact, forced some Jews to leave.[27] One Virginia Jew responded to the anti-Semitism he perceived throughout the Confederacy and wrote to the *Richmond Sentinel*, "I have marked with sorrow and dismay the growing propensity in the Confederacy to denounce the Jew on all occasions and in all places. The press, the pulpit, and grave legislators, who have the destiny of a nation committed to their charge,

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[23] Dinnerstein and Palsson, *Jews in the South*, p. 199.
[24] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 112.
[25] For further discussion of philosemitism, see William D. Rubinstein and Hilary L. Rubinstein, *Philosemitism: Admiration and Support in the English-Speaking World for Jews, 1840-1939* (New York: St. Martin's Press., 1999); Malcolm H. Stern, "The 1820's: American Jewry Comes of Age" in Bertram Wallace Korn, *A Bicentennial Festschrift For Jacob Rader Marcus* (Waltham, MA: American Jewish Historical Society and New York: Ktav Publishing House, 1976), p. 545.
[26] Cited in Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 112.
[27] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 112.

all unite in this unholy and unjust denunciation."[28] This individual's words underline the Jews' sense of anti-Semitism, but also illustrate that at least one Jew felt secure enough to publicly voice his concerns.

Anti-Semitism continued to some degree after the Civil War.[29] Organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, the Populist Party, and the Whitecappers harassed Jews and accused them of profiteering.[30] Harassment forced a number of Jewish merchants to flee from Louisiana in 1893, and Jewish homes were vandalized and burned in Mississippi. These acts terrified Jews, but were predicated on economics rather than ideology or ethnicity.[31] The undercurrent of nativism and xenophobia that these groups represented in the post Civil War South left many Southern Jews feeling insecure through the Jim Crow era and beyond as animosity mounted.

During these years Jews sensed that anti-Semitism posed an obstacle to their complete acceptance into Southern culture. Yet, their physical safety was threatened only sporadically. By 1913, Jews learned of the danger of anti-Semitism at its worst. The Leo Frank case was a watershed event for Southern Jews, and it served as a constant reminder of their vulnerability.

Leo Frank, a Jewish factory manager in Atlanta, was accused of murdering a young female employee. Despite shoddy evidence, a reliable alibi, and even notes from

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[28] Richmond Sentinel, 1864, cited in Howard N. Rabinowitz, "Nativism, Bigotry, and Anti-Semitism in the South" in American Jewish History 77 (March 1988).
[29] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 15; Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 112.However, Dinnerstein and Rabinowitz both noted that attitudes toward Jews changed after the war. Dinnerstein acknowledged the continuation of anti-Semitism, but added that some Southern Christians recognized and appreciated the economic benefit of Jews (*Uneasy at Home*, pp. 87-88). Rabinowitz summarized, "As elsewhere, anti-Semitism diminished with the end of the war..." ("Nativism, Bigotry" in American Jewish History 77 (March 1988).
[30] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 15; Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 112.
[31] Stephen J. Whitfield "Jews and Other Southerners: Counterpoint and Paradox," in Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South*, pp. 82-83.

the victim, he was convicted and sentenced to death. After the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment, an angry gang kidnapped him from prison and hung him from a tree. The girl's death had become symbolic of urban corruption and the Jews had become associated with that corruption.[32] Many Jews understood the ugly atmosphere that characterized his trial and lynching to be the result of his Jewishness above all other considerations.

The Leo Frank case became a pivotal event in Southern Jewish history. Imprinted in the Southern Jewish psyche, it constantly reminded Jews of their marginality and vulnerability. Even if Jews in the South achieved financial success and a degree of social acceptance, the Frank case showed that they could be scapegoated, targeted, and even killed. Given this reality, Jews would think carefully before voicing any controversial opinions or otherwise drawing attention to themselves. The Leo Frank case would be a haunting remembrance as Southern Jews debated the role they should play in the Civil Rights Movement.

The period of World War I and the interwar years saw the rise of institutional anti-Semitism, including such groups as the Ku Klux Klan, throughout the nation. Historian John Higham noted that the Klan's hostility was predominantly directed at "the shadowy, imaginary Jew" in large, distant cities and that Klan members were ashamed to pick on Jews who had been lifelong neighbors.[33] Still, the Klan's resurgence as a movement in the South remained a menacing threat to Southern Jews. A Jew in the South could not be certain that his neighbor or friend had not secretly become a member

[32] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 17.
[33] Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," p. 84.

of the Klan. These Jews remembered the Leo Frank case and they understood that they, too, were potentially at risk.

In part, the anti-Semitism that led to Frank's lynching and Jews' anxiety throughout the twentieth century stemmed from a general xenophobia that characterized much of the South. Southerners tended to distrust non-Christians, or any group that represented non-conformity. There was a pervasive concern about those groups which appeared to challenge prevailing Southern beliefs and practices.[34] While such xenophobia was a part of Southern culture, it alone does not account for the intensity and pervasiveness of anti-Semitism.

Religious differences and the fundamentalist Christianity which characterized the South intensified anti-Jewish sentiment. A 1966 poll concluded, for example, that 92% of Southern Baptists questioned held anti-Semitic beliefs.[35] After World War II, it was clear that many Jews in the South endured a high level of social alienation, partly due to fundamentalist Christians' views of them. A 1963 study found that North Carolina and Virginia discriminated against Jews twice as much as the nation as a whole.[36] Study after study, as well as anecdotal evidence, confirmed the relatively high degree of anti-Semitism in the South.[37]

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[34] Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," pp. 82, 84.
[35] Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of the Jews in the South* (New York, Athaneum, 1973) p. 219; Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, cited in Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 96, found Southern Baptists to be the most anti-Semitic religious group in the United States.
[36] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 97.
[37] This picture must be balanced by evaluations of the Anti-Defamation League indicating that though significant incidents took place in the South, the majority of attacks on Jews and Jewish institutions took place in the North. (Evans, *Provincials,* pp. 211-12.) In part this may be a function of the small number of Jews in the South and to the presence of other groups who bore the brunt of overt hostility from the Protestant majority. (Whitfield, *Jews and Other Southerners*, pp.86-87; Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 1; Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 97.).

By the post World War II era, the fear of anti-Semitism contributed to the general trend among Southern Jews to assimilate and remain inconspicuous. Thus, they rarely represented a real threat to the status quo.[38] Because they adopted, or at least adapted to Southern norms, Jews often successfully avoided being a target of hostility. While the tendency to camouflage themselves stemmed from a keen sense of fear and a constant threat of anti-Semitism,[39] it nonetheless resulted in a degree of acceptance of social mores and practices.

Polls lend credence to Jews' fear of anti-Semitism and desire to remain unobtrusive. They suggest that anti-Semitic attitudes were more pervasive in the South than in the rest of the country, despite the surprising fact that actual acts of violence were fewer.[40] Recognizing this contradiction, Evans reached the important conclusion that Southerners are "ambivalent, variable, and inconsistent in their views of Jews.[41] Aware of this ambivalence and the ironies it produced, Southern Jews stepped carefully to avoid arousing the anti-Semitic beast that seemed always to be close at hand.

By the 1950s, Jewish Southerners, whether newly arrived or with long family roots in the area, had managed to thrive in Jewish communities and in business despite the area's culture and history of slavery and anti-Semitism. The conflict inherent in the relative well-being of Jews and the disadvantaged status of African-Americans would come to a head with the dawn of the Civil Rights Movement.

The 1954 Supreme Court decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education* (*Brown*) is considered by many to be the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement in the

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[38] Webb, *Fight Against* Fear, p. 1.
[39] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 79.
[40] See for example the 1966 Anti-Defamation League poll, cited in Evans, *The Provincials*, p. 219.
[41] Evans, *Provincials*, p. 213.

United States. This decision overturned the "separate but equal" policy approved in *Plessy v. Ferguson* in 1896.[42] *Brown* mandated the integration of schools throughout the nation and had a major effect upon educational practices in the South. Following this Supreme Court decision, many Southerners, including legislators and governors, vowed to fight integration and to maintain the segregated caste system to which the South was accustomed.[43]

By this time, as noted above, Jews comprised an uneasy minority constantly striving for acceptance. While many individual Jews enjoyed material success and a degree of social acceptance, the small Jewish community nevertheless remained ever aware of its marginality. Notwithstanding their success in the South, Jews faced exclusion from clubs and their rabbis were often unwelcome in local ministerial associations. Recognizing their small numbers and precarious position, Rabbi Milton Grafman of Birmingham lamented that Jews were "very, very vulnerable" and other rabbis echoed these feelings of helplessness and powerlessness.[44] It was under these circumstances that Southern Jews, and particularly their rabbis, developed their views about Civil Rights and decided if and how to involve themselves in the Civil Rights Movement.

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[42] *Plessy v. Ferguson (Plessy)* upheld segregation in railway carriages and did not use the phrase, "separate but equal." Nonetheless, the policy outlined in the case – which relied in part upon earlier cases upholding school segregation – supported and became associated with the notion of "separate but equal" education. *Brown* overturned the policy of segregated schools which predated the *Plessy* decision. In 1868, when the Fourteenth Amendment granted citizenship to African Americans, five Northern states excluded African Americans from public education and eight Northern states permitted segregated schools. (*Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896); *Brown v. Board of Education*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954); Geoffrey R. Stone et. al., *Constitutional Law* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, Second edition, 1991), p. 499.

[43] Dollinger, " 'Hamans and Torquemadas': Southern and Northern Jewish Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," in eds. Mark K. Bauman and Berkeley Kalin, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), pp. 84-86.

[44] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 69.

JEWISH LIFE AND CULTURE IN THE SOUTH

Southern Jews lived within a distinct regional culture unfamiliar to many Northern Jews. In the mid-1950's, a Northern writer visited the South and noted that it was "the most exotic...region in America."[45] One aspect of the South's uniqueness was its relative homogeneity. During the Civil Rights era, the South boasted the highest percentage of American-born, Anglo-Saxon Protestants in the nation.[46] Even so, the South has historically housed small pockets of a large number of other ethnic groups. In many cases, these small groups have melted into the larger culture. In 1960, William D. Workman, Jr. described the South as the part of the country in which, "except for the distinct separation of the white and black races, there has been the greatest assimilation of all persons into the political, social, and cultural pattern of the existing dominant group."

Yet, groups that did not melt into the larger culture – whether because they were forbidden to do so or because they chose to remain distinct – remained aliens. Wilbur Cash, historian of the South, even used the language of racialism in describing the Anglo-Saxons' fear that their blood was being "contaminated" by other groups. Thus, many scholars believe that Jews, despite a high intermarriage rate in the South, have remained aliens, along with African Americans, Catholics, and other foreigners.[47]

Jews have existed as a tiny minority within the unique Southern milieu. Almost ½ million Jews lived in the South in 1970, but this number constituted under 1% of the South's population.[48] When compared to the fact that Jews comprised almost 3% of the

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[45] Willard Thorpe, "A Southern Reader" (New York, 1955), p. vii in Chyet, "Southern Jewish Historiography," p. 18.
[46] Abraham D. Lavender, "Jewish Values in the Southern Milieu," in Kaganoff and Urofsky, *Turn to the South,* p. 125.
[47] Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 127.
[48] John Shelton Reed, "Ethnicity in the South: Observations on the Acculturation of Southern Jews," in Kaganoff and Urofsky, eds. *Turn to the South, p.* 136.

country's overall population, it is easy to see that Jews in the South lived as a particularly acute minority.[49] In 1956, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum noted that Mississippi's population of 2 million included only 3,500 Jews, [50] which was less than .2% of the population. In 1964, only 4,000 out of 630,000 Birmingham residents were Jews and only 1,800 Jews lived in Montgomery, a city of 134,000 people.[51] A significant portion of the Southern Jewish community did not live in cities, but in small towns and rural areas scattered throughout the region. This furthered their sense of isolation and marginality.[52]

Among this small group of Jews, unique aspects of Jewish identity interacted with the Southern value system. These core values and their impact upon Southern Jews must be addressed in order to understand the problems faced by Southern rabbis. Considering these values and Southern Gentiles' attitudes toward Jews, many scholars have debated the degree to which Jews have assimilated and have been accepted into Southern society.[53]

Most scholars contend that Southern Jews have always been outsiders who, at best, live precariously on the margins of society. Despite relative success in the region, Gary P. Zola asserted, "As with all who did not fit the white Christian Protestant mold, Jews were aliens in southern culture."[54] Cash vividly expressed his view that Southern Jews "were usually thought of as aliens even when their fathers had fought in the

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[49] Marcus, *The American Jew*, p. 385; "Population of the United States." Factmonster.com. c. 2002 Learning Network. 5 Feb. 2002 http://www.factmonster.com/ipka/AO774772.html.
[50] Perry E. Nussbaum, Charles Mantinband, and Jacob Rothschild, "The Southern Rabbi Faces the Problem of Desegregation," in CCAR Journal (June, 1956), p. 1.
[51] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 69.
[52] Gary P. Zola, "Why Study Southern Jewish History?" in Southern Jewish History: Journal of Southern Jewish Historical Society (vol. 1, 1998) p. 5; Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. xiii-xiv.
[53] This debate will be discussed below. See, for example, Bauman's argument that Southern Jews resembled Northern coreligionists living in comparable communities more than they did Southern Christians, in contrast to Evans' contention that Jews were "blood-and-bones part of the South itself." (Bauman, *Southerner as American*, p. 5; Evans, "Southern Jewish History," p. 159.)
[54] Zola, "What Price Amos? Perry Nussbaum's Career in Jackson, Mississippi," in Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices*, p. 236.

Confederate armies" and stood "in the eyes of the people as a sort of evil harbinger and incarnation of all the menaces they feared and hated – external and internal, real and imaginary."[55] A number of factors have contributed to the Jews' alien role in Southern culture. These included religious and political differences as well as a perceived notion of Jewish rootlessness and a high concentration of Jews in local commerce.

Religious differences between Jews and Christians played an extensive role in marginalizing the Jew. An overwhelmingly Protestant region, the South was heavily influenced by "the fundamentalist and absolutist morality of Puritanism and Calvinism."[56] Religious affiliation was high and convictions were strong. The fundamentalism that characterized much of Southern Christianity stood in stark contrast to the liberal Judaism that dominated Southern Jewish life. The fundamentalist Christian outlook supported moralism and strong, prescriptive laws. For Southern fundamentalists, the Bible spoke absolute truth and therefore right and wrong were absolutes, revealed and confirmed through Holy Scripture. Liberal Judaism rejected the infallibility of Scripture, shied away from doctrinal absolutism, and eschewed the creation of an abundance of strict laws.[57]

Fundamentalist Christian beliefs about Jews further alienated the Jewish population. In 1966, an Anti-Defamation League poll found that 97% of Southern Baptists who were polled agreed that "Belief in Jesus Christ as Savior is absolutely necessary for salvation" and 80% agreed that "The Jews can never be forgiven for what they did to Jesus until they accept Him as the True Savior."[58] Eli Evans described the

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[55] In Chyet, "Southern Jewish Historiography," p. 14.
[56] Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 125.
[57] Lavender, "Jewish Values," pp. 125-131.
[58] In Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 131.

effect of this atmosphere, which so many Southern Jews experienced: "Some Jews crumble under it and others try to ignore it; some slink and hide, others despair, but most absorb it and block it out, and survive."[59] Pressure from Christian friends and acquaintances kept Jews constantly aware of, and perhaps self-conscious of, these religious differences. Practicing Judaism was a challenging proposition.

According to some, religion and religious observance were low priorities among Jews in the South,[60] but this claim does not reveal the complete picture. Rabbi Julian Feibelman of Atlanta explained in the 1940s, "One cannot say there is a distinct Jewish culture in New Orleans. There is rather a distinct New Orleans culture of which the Jewish community is a part."[61] As Feibelman suggested, Jews maintained their Jewish identity, but they did so within the context of Southern culture. This tendency was no different from that of liberal Jews living in other areas who strove to be a part of the larger society while maintaining the fundamentals of their religion. The very fact that Jews chose to join synagogues, subscribe to Jewish newspapers,[62] and socialize with other Jews implies that Judaism remained a vital component in their lives.

While Jews struggled to persevere, Christian culture permeated Southern life and even influenced Southerners' political views. The purview of religion was so great that a Mississippi woman explained, "Politics, economics, education, moral actions, as well as contemplation and reflection [were] parts of spirituality."[63] As this woman implied, virtually all aspects of cultural life in the South fell under the auspices of religion which dictated appropriate views and behavior.

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[59] In Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 132.
[60] See for example, Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," p. 89.
[61] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* p. 43-44.
[62] The *Southern Jewish Weekly*, for example, circulated throughout the South.
[63] Gayle Graham Yates in Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 238.

Fundamentalist Christianity often fostered political conservatism, while liberal Judaism tended to influence political views in the opposite direction. Southern Jews were over-represented among those working for social justice causes and who considered the government to be a partner in such work. They also tended to avoid conservatism and to vote in favor of liberal candidates and issues.[64] This relative liberalism extended to the realm of Civil Rights. As we will see, the clash created by the different religious values of Southern fundamentalist Protestants and liberal Jews had a strong impact upon the discussion of, and reaction to, Civil Rights issues.

In addition to disparate religious beliefs and values, Jews and Christians in the South saw their home somewhat differently. The Southern heritage stressed regional pride and a sense of attachment to the land. The high concentration of Southerners involved in agriculture contributed to this intimate connection with and loyalty to the land, which historian Stephen Whitfield referred to as "rootedness."[65]

In contrast, Jewish history discouraged Jews from establishing roots and attachment to any land other than the land of Israel. The mobile commercial practices earlier forced upon Jews in much of Europe bred a familiarity with rootlessness that continued to some extent among Jews in the South.[66] Jews struggled to harmonize their Southern connection to the land with their Jewish tradition of mobility. Eli Evans, a Jew who grew up in the South, described the cultural clash in which his identity took root:

> I am not certain what it means to be both a Jew and a Southerner – to have inherited the Jewish longing for a homeland while being raised with the Southerner's sense of home. The conflict is deep in me – the Jew's involvement in history, his deep roots. ...But I respond to the Southerner's commitment to place, his loyalty to the land, to his own tortured history, to

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[64] Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 129.
[65] Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," pp 76-77.
[66] See Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," p. 76.

> the strange bond beyond color that Southern blacks and whites discover when they come to know one another.[67]

Overlaying these differences in religion and their political effects as well as distinctions in economic bases and regional loyalty was a more positive social value associated with Southern culture. Southern culture stressed honesty and loyalty to friends and family, hospitality, manners, and friendliness. Southerners were also taught to treat others respectfully, to avoid assertiveness, and to smile and remain cordial even when in disagreement.[68] These apparently admirable values, many of which were adopted by Southern Jews, could also lead to intolerance among Southerners. As Lavender explained:

> [T]his is a value system which is more likely to label disagreement as lack of loyalty and lack of manners, and where criticism of the status quo is more likely to be labeled as lack of appreciation for hospitality. The South is a land where the past matters, where memories of things long past and persons long dead are meaningful, but where the past is often worshipped without giving alternatives or change a chance...[69]

Jews looked to a different history, possessed divergent views, and were often open to changing the status quo. This made some Jews vulnerable to criticism from traditional Southern Christians. If perceived as disloyal or lacking in appreciation of Southern hospitality – and particularly where their views of racial equality conflicted with Southern memories and beliefs – Southern Christians could easily begin to see their Jewish neighbors as "other," as aliens.

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[67] Evans, *Provincials*, p. x.
[68] Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 127. See also Alfred O Hero, Jr., "Southern Jews and Public Policy," p. 147. He speaks of "The southern experience and milieu of earthy pragmatism, close interpersonal relations, distrust of abstractions, and caution about abrupt or far-reaching social change" which impacted all southerners, whether Jewish or Gentile.
[69] Lavender, "Jewish Values," p. 127.

One scholar, Mark K. Bauman, even asserted that, despite cultural superficialities, Southern Jews had more in common with their Northern coreligionists living in comparable demographic conditions than with their Southern, non-Jewish neighbors. Bauman argued that several factors, including Jews' association with a unique history, lack of guilt over the Civil War, and failure to join Southern groups fostered a sense of alienation. Furthermore, the regional identity of Southern Jews was largely superficial, relying upon trivial elements such as cooking style and accent as well as an abstract sense of Southern Jewish identity.[70] In short, Bauman concluded, Jews adopted the external qualities of Southern culture, but remained outsiders.

In contrast to Bauman, Eli Evans insisted that "Jews were not aliens in the promised land, but blood-and-bones part of the South itself." He pointed to Jews' presence in the South from colonial times and to their participation in Southern history as evidence.[71] Evans claimed that the relatively small amount of anti-Semitism also supported the notion that Jews were accepted and essentially assimilated into Southern culture.[72] Indeed, Evans maintained that Jews have found a home in the South as well as economic success and a degree of social integration despite alienation and anti-Semitism.

Evans' view of Jewish assimilation into Southern life relied heavily upon the Jews' attempts to blend into and adopt the Southern lifestyle.[73] Thus, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum lamented that his congregants were "indistinguishable in ideology" from other Southerners[74] and a Jewish woman wrote a letter speaking of the "old fashioned

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[70] Bauman, *Southerner as American*, pp. 5, 19.
[71] Evans, "Southern Jewish History," 159-60.
[72] Evans, "Southern Jewish History," pp. 159-60. See also Whitfield "Jews and Other Southerners," p. 84.
[73] See Reed, "Ethnicity in the South," p. 137 for details.
[74] Cited in Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70.

American tradition" and "ideals of Christian honor" with which she was raised.[75] Nussbaum's congregants and the letter's author attempted to show their Christian neighbors that they fully accepted Southern values and attitudes.

As is clear from these examples, Southern Jews in some cases not only adopted external features of Southern life such as appearances, manners, and cooking, but also internalized Southern attitudes and values to some extent. In many cities, including Jackson, Mississippi and Montgomery, Alabama, Jews joined the vehemently racist White Citizen's Councils alongside their white Christian neighbors. The Jackson newspaper bragged about Jewish segregationist involvement, stating that "today many a fine Jewish leader is part of the southern resistance. Jackson's citizen's council, outstanding in South and Nation, points to them with pride."[76]

There can be little doubt that many Southern Jews quietly acquiesced to Southern values and ideology, but they usually did so in an attempt to establish their loyalty and to avoid anti-Semitism. In a harsh condemnation of this phenomenon, newspaper editor Harry Golden ridiculed Southern Jews: "The studied attempt to avoid all debate, except on purely Jewish matters, has been in force so long that it would be hard to find six Jews below the Mason-Dixon line who hold sufficiently strong convictions to be accused of anything."[77] Fear of anti-Semitism – awareness of their otherness and vulnerability – was the major factor encouraging them to avoid expressing controversial opinions.

This fear was not unfounded. The Leo Frank case loomed in Southern Jews' collective memory and anti-Semitic acts increased in the 1950's, due in part to Jewish

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[75] In 1952. Whitfield, "Jews and Other Southerners," p. 89
[76] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70.
[77] Golden, *Our Southern Landsman*, p. 100, cited in Chyet, "Reflections on Southern-Jewish Historiography," p. 18,

involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.[78] Anxiety over arousing further anti-Semitism paralyzed many Jews. As one Southern Jew explained:

> The whole Jewish community might become a target for antagonism. Other Jews would fear that one was risking the status of the entire ethnic group, and many local Jews felt that no one had any right to upset the delicate balance whereby Jews had been treated well and accepted generally as fellow southerners.[79]

Jews knew that their acceptance depended upon their acquiescence.

In reality, Jews were neither wholly integrated nor wholly alien in the South. Because Jews were "other" in the South and because they had not fully internalized traditional Southern values, they remained outsiders who lacked full acceptance. They lived in a precarious position, always in danger of being scapegoated and held in suspicion and always apprehensive about potential anti-Semitism.

Yet, they were clearly part of the Southern landscape, as were other minorities. They attempted to fit in and consciously or unconsciously took on characteristics of Southerners including cooking style, manners, accents, and, to some extent, values and ideology. Jews in the South struggled with questions of identity and often saw themselves as wholly Southern and wholly Jewish, even if others did not.

Above all, Southern Jewish life may be characterized by the enduring struggle to fit in and be accepted. Living on the margins of both Southern and Jewish culture, they possessed what one historian called a "braided identity"[80] riddled with contradiction and irony. As they strove for acceptance in Southern Christian society, they also struggled to maintain their Jewish identities.

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[78] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70.
[79] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 72.
[80] Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Braided Identity of Southern Jewry" in *American Jewish History*, Vol. 77 (September 1987 – June 1988), pp. 363-87.

CHAPTER THREE

Activism or Silence: The Rabbi's Role

For the Southern rabbi, the sermon constituted a principle form of inspiring congregants and elucidating Jewish ethics. The words the rabbis spoke are part of the history of the Civil Rights Movement. Their sermons, both in support of and against Civil Rights, reflected their environment and their personal sense of right and wrong. Most rabbis chose to speak their conscience and to support Civil Rights despite the perception that doing so might evoke negative consequences. Some rabbis chose to remain silent. One spoke in favor of segregation.[1]

Many factors contributed to rabbis' decisions about whether to publicly address Civil Rights issues in sermons. This chapter will look at these factors, beginning with the impact of demography on congregants' attitudes. It will then discuss the views of congregants and the impact of these views upon rabbis. Finally, this chapter will explore some of the practical concerns of these rabbis, the internal emotional conflicts they faced and, ultimately, the decisions they made about how to respond to the salient issues of the day. Chapter Two has already discussed Jews' feelings of marginality, desire to find acceptance, fear of anti-Semitism, and the important role that business played in Jews'

[1] See Allen Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,* (Thesis submitted to Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1967), pp. 298ff for a description of Rabbi Benjamin Schultz. Schultz, an anomaly and a right-wing Reform rabbi, is beyond the scope of this thesis.

lives: this chapter will revisit these themes in the context of the Civil Rights era, from the perspective of congregants' and rabbis' attitudes.

DEMOGRAPHY AND ATTITUDES TOWARD CIVIL RIGHTS

Before addressing the topic of congregants and their specific views, it is important to recognize that Southern communities varied in regard to their political and social character. Both Jews and Gentiles were impacted by the culture of their communities. Consequently, a rabbi's locale – in conjunction with his views and personality – had the potential to influence his activism. Because no formal rabbinic network supported Southern rabbis in their battle against segregation and each rabbi made his own independent decisions, his environment often proved critical to his actions.[2]

To date, Alfred Hero has conducted the most conclusive sociological study of Southern demographics and their impact on attitudes and activism. In his landmark study, published in 1965, Hero provided researchers with valuable attitudinal data regarding Southern Jewish perspectives on Civil Rights during this period. He concluded that Jewish residents of "larger, more dynamic cities" tended to be more liberal on issues of race than residents of "smaller, more culturally isolated towns" and especially rural

[2] Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights*. (Athens and London: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), p. 171. In 1955, shortly after arriving in Jackson, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum founded and served as president of the Mississippi Assembly of Jewish Congregations, which included twenty-five delegates. This group met annually, sponsored teacher training sessions, and gathered for occasional lectures by visiting colleagues. The group disbanded after several years, due to "the consequences of inner rivalries" and Mississippi rabbis, as well as other Southern rabbis, muddled through the Civil Rights era without the support of a formal Southern rabbinic network. (Gary Phillip Zola, "What Price Amos? Perry Nussbaum's Career in Jackson, Mississippi," in ed Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*. (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), p. 241.

areas. Moreover, Jews living "in the upper South, in mountain sections, and to a lesser degree, in the Piedmont" were more liberal than Jews in the traditional "old South."[3]

Jewish views, according to Hero, could be further characterized based on other criteria. Predictors of racial attitudes included the size and diversity of cities, as well the degree to which Jews had assimilated. Larger cities, cities with more heterogeneous Jewish populations including larger numbers of immigrants and northern transplants, and communities that evinced greater levels of Jewish identification each increased liberal views on Civil Rights while the inverse conditions encouraged conservatism. Additionally, less social contact with Gentiles correlated with more liberal views,[4] presumably because, as a cohort, Southern Gentiles tended to be more conservative than Southern Jews. Thus, greater social marginalization and isolation led to greater liberalism and a greater discrepancy in the attitudes of Jews and Gentiles. This is ironic when considering that marginalization was a major reason for Jews trying to remain inconspicuous. Finally, a more liberal white Christian community coincided with a more liberally inclined Jewish population.[5]

Hero's analysis may be used to generalize about congregants' particular beliefs and the level of pressure they placed upon their rabbis. Rabbis in small towns in the deep South, for example, did not work in the same context as rabbis in large, metropolitan areas. Thus, Atlanta proved to be a relatively progressive city throughout the Civil Rights era, and Atlanta's Jews placed very little pressure on their activist Reform rabbi,

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[3] Hero explained that the "traditional 'old south' settings" included "cities such as Charleston and the plantation sections where Negroes outnumbered whites." Alfred O. Hero, Jr., "Southern Jews, Race Relations, and Foreign Policy" in *Jewish Social Studies: A Quarterly Journal Devoted to Contemporary and Historical Aspects of Jewish Life*, (Vol. XXVII, Num 4. Edited for Conference on Jewish Social Studies, October, 1965), pp. 217-218.
[4] Alfred O. Hero, Jr., "Southern Jews, Race Relations," pp. 217-223.
[5] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," pp. 217-223.

Jacob Rothschild. The Temple Board supported him, for example, when "an irate letter of resignation" appeared after a woman saw Rothschild's daughter eating lunch in a restaurant with an African American. Rothschild remembered that the Board "wrote a letter which said they were sorry the member had failed to 'learn the lesson of Judaism taught by our rabbi in word and deed' – and agreed they would be happier elsewhere."[6] This defense of Rothschild's beliefs and actions was typical of the congregation's leadership.

Rothschild realized his good fortune. He referred to his home as the "most civilized city in the South," and was able to explicitly compare Jim Crow policy to Nazi policy with no personal consequences. While Clive Webb asserted that "in no other southern city would a rabbi have felt so secure" that he could draw this parallel, many rabbis did so in their sermons.[7] Even so, the fact that Rothschild could publicly make such a statement attested to the relatively liberal climate in Atlanta.

New Orleans, Louisiana and Greensboro and Norfolk, North Carolina also boasted relatively progressive populations. In Atlanta and New Orleans, Jews joined groups that advocated Civil Rights, such as the Urban League. In Greensboro, liberal Jews reportedly advocated change without resistance from fellow Jews.[8] Rabbi Simcha Kling of Greensboro recognized his favorable situation when he assured Jacob Rader Marcus, director of the American Jewish Archives (AJA), that he was comfortable placing his sermons pertaining to Civil Rights in the AJA. "As for restricting the collection," he wrote, "although I understand that some men may be in more difficult

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[6] Janice Rothschild Blumberg, *One Voice: Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild and the Troubled South.* (USA: Mercer University Press, 1985), p. 156-7. See also pp. 61-3, 68.
[7] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 189, 194. For sermons including this comparison, see Chapter 5.
[8] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 223.

situations than I am, I have no fear of anyone knowing precisely where I stand."[9] Malcolm Stern also expressed confidence in the liberalism of his congregants, writing that "the overwhelming majority of Norfolk Jews have whole-heartedly supported in every feasible way the local attempts by the School Board and others to comply with the Supreme Court decision."[10] Despite their relatively liberal environments, even Jews in cities such as these could become targets of hatred and violence. No city or rabbi was truly safe. In 1958, for example, Rothschild's Atlanta synagogue was bombed and, although the rabbi did not fear for his job, he faced considerable physical danger.[11]

Small-town and rural Jews tended to be more fearful than their urban peers. Jews in the small town of Hattiesburg, Mississippi cringed if their rabbi publicly supported Civil Rights. In fact, their hostility led to the resignation of two liberal rabbis – Charles Mantinband and David Ben-Ami – within two years.[12] Even larger cities in Mississippi tended to be conservative. In Jackson, Rabbi Perry Nussbaum claimed that no more than five of the 150 Jewish families in the city worked on behalf of Civil Rights and that these people were only "moderately active."[13] This was due in part to the stifling environment in Mississippi. Webb referred to the "virulence of white racism" in the state and Professor James Silver described the "closed society" that resisted liberalism and change. Political conservatism and anti-Semitism both ran rampant in Mississippi.[14] When a Memphis rabbi criticized Nussbaum for what he saw as accommodating racism,

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[9] Kling, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, March 20, 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[10] Malcolm Stern to Albert Vorspan, October 2, 1958, AJA cited in Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home: Antisemitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 139.
[11] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 189.
[12] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 200.
[13] Jack Nelson, "Terror in Mississippi Focuses on Jews," *New York Post*, December 6, 1967, p. 52 cited in Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 139.
[14] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 188, 191; James W. Silver, *Mississippi: The Closed Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1964).

Nussbaum responded, "There is no other state like Mississippi," and spoke of the challenges of promoting Civil Rights without becoming "scapegoats."[15] Nussbaum argued that the powerful racism of Mississippi made work toward integration particularly challenging and dangerous, and meant that even small steps were significant.[16]

To an even greater extent than other Southern Jews, Mississippians were silenced more by fear than from conviction. In a diary entry, Mantinband explained his congregants' views. "Grudgingly," he wrote, "they concede that my position is morally correct and consistent with the noblest teachings of Judaism."[17] These congregants knew right from wrong, but also sensed palpably the dangers of advocating what was right. Citizens Councils and the Klan exerted pressure and ostracized all those who did not remain quiet. When a Northern lawyer joined several Jewish families in Mississippi for dinner, they explained to him:

> We would lose everything we have [if we push too hard for Civil Rights]. Some of us are fourth and fifth generation Mississippians, and you can't expect us to sacrifice everything, even though we hate what is going on here. ...We have to work quietly, secretly. We have to play ball. Anti-Semitism is always right around the corner. ...We don't want to have our Temple bombed. If we said out loud in Temple what most of us really think and believe, there just wouldn't be a Temple here anymore. ...We have to at least pretend to go along with things as they are. ...Don't you see? Can't you understand? This is a dangerous place. Our phones are probably tapped. Most everybody in the State has a gun in his house. People here get lost or killed or sent away. We are constantly watched and we are afraid.[18]

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[15] Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 244.
[16] Although the actions of "Bull" Connor made Alabama a paradigm of racism and the abuse of authority to control African Americans, Mississippi was the state in which authorities allowed for the murder of the freedom riders. The racial hatred of vocal citizens of Mississippi may well have been the most vociferous of all Southern states. Certainly Nussbaum saw it this way.
[17] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 199.
[18] Marvin Braiterman, "Mississippi Marranos," in Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Pallson., *Jews in the South*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1973), p. 355-6.

Mississippian Jews illustrated that speaking out on the highly controversial subject of Civil Rights took tremendous courage and could have dire consequences. The old Southern city of Charleston, South Carolina also maintained a strong conservative bent despite it being a metropolitan area, and vocal Jews faced dangers similar to those that threatened many Mississippians.[19]

Birmingham, Alabama, home to the politically reserved Rabbi Milton Grafman, also deviated from Hero's model. Although a large, metropolitan area, it "had arguably the most abysmal record in race relations of any city in the Deep South" in the 1950's. Nicknamed "Bombingham" because of violence against African Americans, the city's few Jews feared for their safety and tended to remain quiet.[20]

Hero's study offers a backdrop upon which to contextualize Southern Jews' racial attitudes and actions. Jews in some areas faced greater danger than others. Most Southern Jews felt vulnerable and knew they would be accepted most by the larger society if they supported segregation or remained silent. Keeping these factors in mind, we now turn our attention to how Jews responded to, and how rabbis preached about, issues of Civil Rights.

PREACHING TO THE PEOPLE: CONGREGANTS AND THEIR VIEWS

As has been discussed earlier, Southern Jews felt marginal and vulnerable. In general, the desire to remain inconspicuous and the fear of anti-Semitism pushed Jews toward assimilation, acquiescence, and silence. Historian Eli Evans explained that "Jews in the South have the habit of low-profile – an instinctive shyness" brought about in part by

[19] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 223.
[20] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 208.

their sense of being unimportant and marginal.[21] A sermon by Rabbi Leon Kronish echoed Evans' sentiments while also giving voice to the internal conflict that many Jews felt. "Most of the Jewish leadership in the South," Kronish said, "lay and spiritual...while believing that segregation is morally evil, also believe that inasmuch as the Southern Jewish community is small and relatively uninfluential in the Bible Belt, Christian leaders, lay and clerical, must carry the ball in this struggle."[22] By speaking of the "small" Jewish community, Kronish implied that Jews felt helpless. Not only did they lack influence, but they would also stand out and, in so doing, make themselves and the Jewish community vulnerable to attacks if they took a public stand. While Kronish and other rabbis spoke of a moral imperative to take action despite the challenges, they must also have understood the Jews' uneasiness about exposing themselves to criticism, ostracism, and, in some instances, the threat of physical violence.

In addition, Jews' reticence to take a political stand and their financial connections to both white and African American customers kept many from taking an active role in the Civil Rights struggle. Southern Jews, according to historian Marc Dollinger, "faced the difficult task of choosing between racial equality for blacks and their own physical, economic, and social well-being."[23] Because the rabbi's job was to serve congregants whose choices were impacted by their precarious position, it is important to examine the specific beliefs and needs of the typical Southern Jew, particularly their political views and economic motivations.

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[21] Eli Evans, "Southern-Jewish History Alive and Unfolding" in Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin L. Urofsky, *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, Virginia: The University Press of Virginia, 1979), p. 160.

[22] Leon Kronish, "The Moral Imperative of Desegregation," November 9, 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.

[23] Marc Dollinger, " 'Hamans and Torquemadas': Southern and Northern Jewish Responses to the Civil Rights Movement," in ed. Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices,* p. 70.

The political views of typical congregants directly impacted the rabbis' ability to speak and to be effective. As a group, Southern Jews' political views tended to be more liberal than Southern Christians' views. Alfred Hero, who again performed the most comprehensive polls of Southern views, noted that Jews were "distinctly less inclined than white Southern gentiles to express segregationist, and particularly racist, ideology."[24] Approximately 40% of the Southern Jews that Hero interviewed in 1962 "felt that the Supreme Court school and transportation desegregation decisions had been 'unfortunate' or worse," while 75% of Southern Gentiles disapproved of the school decision and 72% disagreed with the transportation decision. The views of Southern Jews, according to Hero, "correlated with those held by gentiles of a comparable social and occupational status," but "were less conservative on average." Gentiles, in fact, were twice as likely as their Jewish counterparts to be white supremacists.[25]

While Southern Jews may have appeared liberal when compared to Southern Gentiles, their views on segregation also differed from Northern Jews. As Hero explained, "Views on race relations offered by Southern Jewish interviewers were considerably more segregationist, white supremacist, and generally conservative than those offered by non-Southern Jews."[26] Ninety-seven percent of Northern Jews, for example, supported the Supreme Court school and transportation decisions.[27] Northern Jews, in fact, were disproportionately represented in the Civil Rights struggle. Two-thirds of the white Freedom Riders and more than one-third of those involved with the Mississippi voter registration campaign of 1964 were Jews, leading one

[24] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 216.
[25] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," pp. 216-218.
[26] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 215.
[27] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 217.

historian to speak of "the Jewish phase of the civil rights revolution."[28] This involvement by Northern Jews led to increased anti-Semitism in the South and generated fear and resentment among Southern Jews.[29]

Southern Jews were not shy about voicing their resentment of Northern Jewish activism. According to a 1961 poll, the majority of Southern Jews criticized 'Yankee agitators" and "northern do-gooders" for meddling.[30] Many vocally opposed the Freedom Rides and Northern Jewish involvement in general, in part because they resented outsiders telling them what to do and because they saw Northerners hypocritically attacking segregation in the South while supporting de facto segregation in the North.[31] Yet, their opposition stemmed more from insecurity and disagreement over methodology than from their principles. As Hero explained, opposition should be attributed more to "fear of instigating negative reactions among white racist gentiles than to private disagreement with the views expressed."[32] Even Southern liberals tended to doubt the prudence of immediate integration and many believed the process was moving "too fast."[33] Rabbi Charles Mantinband, an unabashed liberal serving in Hattiesburg, expressed this sentiment stating, "My feeling is that, in the final analysis, the struggle must be carried on by

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[28] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 77.
[29] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70. See also Harvey E. Wessel, "Southern Jews are Southerners" in *Temple Beth El Bulletin*, April 1955, No. 498, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA. Wessel discussed refusal of the Southwest Council of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC) to endorse a "statement of principles" issued by the national UAHC that celebrated the *Brown* decision. The Southwest Council voted by a margin of 27 to 19 "to table" the discussion. Wessel blamed the "sizable number of Mississippians, supported by their lone rabbinical apologist," for the outcome and discussed the reality that Jews in the "middle South" were indeed Southerners ideologically. While he acknowledged that the vote was not a cessation from the UAHC, Wessel recognized the tension and resentment between Southern Jews and their Northern peers.
[30] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 68.
[31] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 73.
[32] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 218.
[33] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 74, citing Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *The Southerner and World Affairs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965), p. 475.

local leadership, white and Negro, Christian and Jew, on the home front – working despite fear of reprisal."[34]

Yet the fear of reprisal inevitably impacted Southerners' actions. While Northern Jews argued principles, Southern Jews lived a terrifying reality, and fear exacerbated tensions and resentment. One Southern Jewish woman said simply, "Every time one of you makes a speech, I'm afraid my husband's store will be burned up."[35] A Georgian Jew more directly blamed Northern Jewish activism for the upsurge of anti-Semitic agitation in his community:

> You now have been to Albany, Georgia. You have prayed on the steps in front of City Hall, you have gone to jail, you have put up bond and you have returned to the place from whence you came. Last night, for the first time in nearly forty years the KKK had a rally here, with more than 4,000 in attendance. . . you and your colleagues can take full credit.[36]

A Jewish leader in Alabama was even more antagonistic in his condemnation of Northern activism: "You're like Hitler," he said to a member of a national Jewish agency, "You stir up anti-Semitism against us."[37] Even Rabbi Perry Nussbaum, who felt that his congregants were "as racist as any white non-Jew," often attempted to "give northerners a picture of the Southern Jew's frightfully difficult political dilemma."[38] Northern Jews, seeing a clear-cut ethical obligation to act, failed to understand the shades of gray and the practical issues that complicated matters in the South. They understood their Jewish identity to be inextricably bound to social activism, including the struggle for Civil Rights.[39]

Jews in the South acted differently. Although they sought acceptance in the Southern segregationist culture, few Southern Jews "were actively racist" beyond the degree necessary to

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[34] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 185.
[35] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 191.
[36] Murray Polner, *Rabbi: The American Experience* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1977), p.83.
[37] Cited in Dinnerstein, *Uneasy at Home*, p. 137.
[38] Nussbaum cited in Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70; Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 242.
[39] See Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: A Crisis of Liberalism* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), pp. 24ff for details of how and why Jews connected their Jewish identity to social activism and political groups and causes.

succeed professionally and to avoid a perceived threat of anti-Semitism.[40] Although some Jews joined Citizens Councils, those in Montgomery claimed they did so to "inhibit the growth of anti-Semitism" and not because they shared the Council's beliefs.[41] Rather than seeing their behavior as hypocritical, many Southern Jews saw it as essential to their economic and social survival. This attitude pervaded Southern Jewish communities as practical concerns overwhelmed ideological views.

At first glance, one may applaud Northern Jews for their liberalism while attacking Southern Jews for their inclination to trade their principles for expediency. Yet, Dollinger claimed that both groups molded their attitudes based upon the norms of their culture. "Southern and Northern Jews," he explained, "linked their own successful acculturation to the legal status of the nation's African American minority."[42] Both groups, he felt, established racial views that would best serve their own interests.[43] In the North, Jews felt they could fit in best by supporting the Civil Rights cause and showing themselves to be a model minority. Assuring African American rights reasserted their own rights. In the South, Jews knew that their assimilation, social status, and economic well-being depended upon maintaining segregationist views, or, minimally, keeping silent.[44]

As Dollinger suggested, another important factor encouraging silence on Civil Rights issues was the prospect of economic reprisals, especially for the large number of Jewish merchants who populated Southern towns. Jews involved in the retail business feared the possibility of boycotts from white customers if they hired African Americans to work in

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[40] Hero, "Southern Jews, Race Relations," p. 217.
[41] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70.
[42] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 68.
[43] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 77.
[44] Many factors influenced Southern Jews' attitudes and willingness to speak. These factors will be discussed in later chapters.

relatively high-status positions or in jobs that involved interaction with white customers. Such actions were considered outside the pale for most Southern whites at that time who, for example, did not want African American salespeople waiting on them. A boycott list circulating in Little Rock, Arkansas pressured many Jews into silence and even intimidated some Jews into effectively censoring other Jews' speech.[45] The Jackson White Citizens Council, which maintained a card file stating every white Jackson citizen's racial views, also silenced Jews who feared retaliative boycotts. According to one observer, the Jackson Citizens Council "created a climate of fear that has strait-jacketed the white community in thought control enforced by financial sanctions. Throughout the South, Citizens Councils enforced segregation and silenced opposition.[46]

Compounding the situation, many Jewish retailers profited from African American patronage and could lose these customers if they aggressively supported segregation and openly participated in the Citizens Councils. Beginning in 1960, when four African American college students sat at a Woolworth's counter and demanded that they be served, department stores became a target for liberals seeking to enforce the integrationist policy which had become the law of the land. Many of these stores were owned by Jews.[47] When African Americans picketed a Birmingham, Alabama store, Rabbi Milton Grafman explained that his congregants were "caught in a vise between the Negroes and the whites –they couldn't win for losing."[48]

Rabbi Leo Bergman of New Orleans, Louisiana also recognized this dilemma. He opened a 1965 sermon with a quotation from the Talmud stating, "A man's living is his

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[45] Carolyn Gray LeMaster, "Civil and Social Rights Efforts of Arkansas Jewry," in ed. Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices,* p. 110.
[46] Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 245.
[47] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 88.See also Arnold Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 11ff. Shankman discussed the prevalence of Jewish stores and the impact of the merchant-customer relationship on both African Americans and Jews.
[48] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 71.

life and to take away his living, it is as if one has taken away his life." He then reviewed the past decade and described the predicament in which the Jewish merchant had been caught:

> Because, of necessity he must deal directly with people, he most of all has been caught in a vise that threatened to strangle him. The Klan and the Citizen [sic] Councils threatened him with a boycott if he did not discontinue serving Negroes. If he lost his Negro trade, he would often lose a basic part of his business. If he lost his white trade, he was out of business altogether. He was caught in an impossible position and...has been forced to walk on eggs so to speak, with his white Christian neighbors. He has turned and weaved, and ducked and sidestepped, hoping to avoid the need of taking sides.[49]

Jewish merchants found themselves "paralyzed by the conflicting pressures" they faced from African American and white patrons. While many merchants sympathized with the African American cause, most prioritized their business and their personal safety and failed to act. These merchants have been criticized for their cowardice as well as their uncompromising attitudes.[50] Jewish merchants often took the brunt of criticism, but historians have suggested that they were no worse to African American employees and customers than other whites.[51] Nonetheless, very few placed their ethical obligations above all else and lived according to the principles they held.[52] These merchants, quietly sympathizing with African Americans but outwardly staunch

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[49] Leo Bergman, "Is There a Jewish Ku Klux Klan in Hattiesburg?" January 15, 1965, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.

[50] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 98. Webb offered examples of scholarly criticism of Southern Jewish merchants, including Michael Nichols, who accused Birmingham's Jewish store owners of being "spineless." (In Michael Nichols, "'Cities Are What Men Make Them': Birmingham, Alabama Faces the Civil Rights Movement, 1963" (senior honors thesis, Brown University, 1974), p. 167.

[51] Webb explained that "Jewish businesses had led the forces of racial moderation in Birmingham since World War II" and offered examples of Jewish store owners in Birmingham, Atlanta, and Little Rock (pp. 98ff). Because they were "especially vulnerable" to economic and physical repercussions, many Jewish businessmen remained silent or publicly supported segregration despite their more liberal personal tendencies. Even so, their actions were no more cruel toward African Americans than other businessmen (p. 100; See pp. 97-107 for specific examples.) See also Clive Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow" in Marc Bauman, ed., *Southern Jewish History* 1999, vol. 2, pp. 56-59, for various interpretations of the relationship between Jewish merchants and African American customers.

[52] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 89.

and uncompromising in their positions, were among the congregants to whom the rabbis preached.

Those involved in retail were not the only Jews who faced professional consequences for taking a stand. A doctor in Little Rock lost patients because he integrated his waiting room and his wife involved herself in integrationist activities. Similarly, attorney Sam Levine, who had served in the House of Representatives and State Senate, was unable to hold an elected office after filibustering to protect the integration process.[53]

Clearly, merchants and other Jewish professionals placed their livelihoods and even their lives in danger when they publicly supported integration. For these practical reasons, most Southern Jews maintained a low profile and a safe distance from overt defense of Civil Rights. Yet congregants were not the only Jews threatened by action. Their rabbis also knew the dangers of publicly speaking.

THE RABBIS' LIVES: PRESSURE TOWARD SILENCE

Most Southern rabbis recognized the immorality of segregation and prejudice, but were also well aware of their congregants' views and fears. These rabbis knew that their communities' secular leaders and their congregants often wanted them to remain silent and that taking a stand against segregation could cost them their jobs and provoke physical attacks against them and their synagogues.

Rabbis were forced to weigh their congregants' and communities' wishes against their own consciences as they decided whether to speak publicly. Even Rabbi Perry Nussbaum – known for his frankness – kept silent during his early years in Jackson. Later, he explained that the typical rabbi was "torn between responsibility to one's own

[53] LeMaster, "Civil and Social Rights Efforts of Arkansas Jewry," p. 111.

people and the challenges of social justice all about him."[54] Often, the rabbi's "own people" opted for their safety and felt that the rabbi had a responsibility to remain quiet. Rabbi Leo Bergman of New Orleans explained in a sermon that, according to the typical congregant, "A Rabbi [sic] should be quiet, unobtrusive and refrain from the controversial, no matter if it is religious truth."[55]

Rabbi David Ben-Ami of Hattiesburg learned this lesson from the town's sheriff as well as from his own congregants. In January, 1964, "a small band of northern clergymen" gathered at the courthouse in downtown Hattiesburg to protest the fact that African Americans were being denied the right to register to vote. After a week of uneventful protesting, nine ministers broke the police blockade and gathered on the courthouse steps, where they were arrested. While they served four-month sentences and received little sympathy from Hattiesburg's Jewish community, Ben-Ami chose to visit them in prison. Almost immediately after the visit, an enraged sheriff called a synagogue Board member. As a Northern rabbi who participated in the demonstrations remembered, "The riot act was read to the rabbi: 'Thou shalt not visit agitators – clerical or otherwise – who have come to disturb the equanimity of our community!'"[56]

Outside pressure – from the sheriff as well as Ben-Ami's own congregants – suggested that the role of the rabbi was to promote peace and to avoid controversy. Ben-Ami refused to fill this role and, within two years, his Civil Rights involvement forced him to leave his pulpit. His story illuminates the great obstacles that Southern rabbis faced when choosing to act in a manner that was deemed unacceptable by the community-at-large.

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[54] Perry Nussbaum, Untitled sermon, delivered in Los Angeles, January, 1969, Ms. Coll. #430, AJA, p. 3.
[55] Bergman, "Is There a Jewish Ku Klux Klan in Hattiesburg?" January 15, 1965, p. 2.
[56] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 200.

Rabbi Julian Feibelman's story is less dramatic, but also points to congregants' expectations of their rabbis. Serving many politically conservative congregants in New Orleans, he was often challenged, though never seriously admonished, when he spoke about Civil Rights.[57] His congregants preferred him to simply avoid controversial subjects in his preaching.

Rabbis in virtually every Southern community felt some pressure from congregants to keep silent, but many also feared for their jobs and their physical safety should they speak.[58] Rabbi Malcolm Stern recalled threats to his job in Norfolk, Virginia, following his public support for Civil Rights. In 1951, he received a reprimand from his Board for planning an interracial service at his temple. If not for the assistance of a respected minister, he felt the reaction would have been much more severe. Three years later, following the *Brown* verdict and a sermon in which he stated that he "would not be muzzled," five Board members requested a special meeting. The President, sympathetic to Stern's agenda, reached a compromise to save Stern's job: the rabbi "would clear any public statement with two of the more liberal board members before issuing it."[59] In this way, Stern subjected his proposed statements to review while retaining the ability to voice his opinions. This imposed the possibility of censorship upon him, but also afforded him the opportunity to convince Board members that his positions were right. This compromise may have forced him to choose his words carefully and to moderate his views somewhat, but it also safeguarded the opportunity for his voice to be heard.

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[57] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 195-6.
[58] Rothschild and Sanders are notable exceptions. See LeMaster, "Civil and Social Rights Efforts of Arkansas Jewry," p. 111; Blumberg, *One Voice,* p. 61-63, for example.
[59] Malcolm Stern, Untitled and Undated, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 14-15.

The outspoken rabbi of Little Rock, Arkansas also faced professional consequences for speaking. Ira Sanders faced little opposition from his congregants, but the local Ministerial Alliance altered its Constitution to exclude him.[60] In several cities, rabbis felt tremendous pressure to choose between their voices and their pulpits.[61] In most cases, despite tension, the rabbis reached some level of compromise and managed to keep their pulpits.[62]

Charles Mantinband of small-town Hattiesburg, Mississippi was not so fortunate. A committed and outspoken integrationist, he faced invasions of privacy as his mail was regularly opened and he was constantly under surveillance, presumably by local authorities. He also endured threats to his personal safety and intimidation from the non-Jewish community. His own congregation also sought to silence him, undermining his rabbinic authority. He eventually left Hattiesburg, although whether he was forced to leave or whether he left by his own choice remains a contested issue.[63] Two years after Mantinband's dismissal, his rabbinic colleague, Bergman, still outraged, offered a response:

> And why was the Rabbi leaving? He had committed the one unforgivable sin of the South. He had dared preach the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Men – all men, even those with a different color skin. He refused to countenance in his presence the use of the term "nigger." At meetings he rose up and refused to be witness to the scorning of another faith or another race. He spoke, he preached, he acted as a Jew and as a

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[60] LeMaster, "Civil and Social Rights Efforts of Arkansas Jewry," p. 112.
[61] This was especially true in Mississippi, where Mantinband and Ben-Ami left their Hattiesburg congregation due to animosity toward their civil activities, and where Nussbaum felt constant resentment and hostility. Stern faced similar pressure in Norfolk, Virginia. These and other rabbis are discussed in this chapter.
[62] Bauman, Introduction to *Quiet Voices*, p. 15.
[63] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 191, 199. Webb (p. 199) noted that Mantinband sought "legal advice about the security of his job, despite the fact that he had been granted tenure" and quoted a congregant who said, "They made it so miserable for him that I think actually in a way they did ask him to leave." Clearly, Mantinband faced considerable resistance to his actions and pressure to leave his position, even if the Board could not literally fire him.

> Rabbi asking common decency and elemental dignity for all people. He did this with courtesy and with dignity. In Mississippi even this small defense of humanity was dangerous.[64]

Later in the same sermon, Bergman described Rabbi David Ben-Ami, the man who replaced Mantinband in Hattiesburg. When Ben-Ami participated in the voter registration drive of 1964 and otherwise supported Civil Rights, he, too, was forced to leave.[65] Hattiesburg Jews were not ready for a rabbi who raised eyebrows and drew attention to the Jewish community.

Rabbis throughout the South feared that they could be next if they spoke too freely or too frequently. Nussbaum noted that almost all clergy in Mississippi who spoke out on Civil Rights had been compelled to leave, "so," he said, "this survivor is running scared."[66] His fear was not unfounded: in 1967, several senior members of his congregation asked him to resign, but he refused and reminded them of the five remaining years on his contract.[67] Rabbi Moses Landau of Cleveland, Mississippi was so afraid for his job that he rarely spoke on Civil Rights and, when he did, he took great efforts to "discuss" issues without offending anyone. If he supported Civil Rights, he claimed, his support "would have been limited to twenty-four hours" because after twenty-four hours, "I wouldn't be there in the state anymore."[68]

In addition to job security, physical threats and attacks pressured rabbis to be silent. Bombing incidents in Atlanta, Jackson, Meridian, and Miami, as well as bomb threats in cities such as Birmingham, Charlotte, and Gastonia – not to mention the blatant

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[64] Bergman, "Is There a Jewish Ku Klux Klan in Hattiesburg?" January 15, 1965, p. 2.
[65] Bergman, "Is There a Jewish Ku Klux Klan in Hattiesburg?" January 15, 1965, p. 4.
[66] in Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 252.
[67] Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the* Jews (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993), p. 49.
[68] Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,* p. 62; Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 73.

intimidation of rabbis who spoke out on Civil Rights – served as nagging reminders that the danger was real.[69] Mantinband, for example, was followed by local authorities who documented his Civil Rights activities. At one point, a "watcher" sat next to his wife on a bus and told her, "I see the reverend is taking a trip. I seed [sic] him get into a car with a New York license yesterday. I got a little book; I know every move the reverend makes." Mantinband could not even greet African American friends on the street, for fear of repercussions.[70]

Relatively few rabbis spoke publicly about these threats, but Nussbaum admitted that he was "scared stiff" after the 1958 bombing in Atlanta.[71] Nine years later, Jackson Jews faced two bombings directed against Nussbaum, who responded to the violence by addressing his congregants . Recalling the 1967 bombing of his temple study, he asked, "Shall I admit the emotional trauma on a Rabbi and his wife...wondering just what happened inside?" He also remembered "anticipating the torrents of 'I-told-you-so's' come the bleak dawn – 'you see, you should have kept your mouth shut, Rabbi!'"[72] Not only was he attacked by militant segregationists, but he knew that many of his congregants, driven by fear, would greet the news with anger and frustration instead of sympathy. He knew that he did not have the full support of this congregation in his fight for Civil Rights.

Two months after the temple bombing, Nussbaum felt another blast when his own home was bombed by extremists. Rabbis in other cities, as well as ministers and black churches throughout the South, faced the same fate. This created a climate of fear and

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[69] Nelson, *Terror in the Night*, pp. 31-2, 121; Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 70.
[70] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 191.
[71] Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 246.
[72] Nussbaum, Untitled sermon, delivered in Tampa, May 19, 1968, Ms. Coll. #430, AJA, p. 3.

intimidation that only the boldest would challenge.[73] In this context, rabbis chose whether to speak out for justice and equality.

THE PROPHETIC ROLE: CHOOSING TO SPEAK

For many of these rabbis, the courage to speak and to act stemmed from their identification with the Biblical prophets and the prophetic tradition of Reform Judaism. Partly due to this connection to the prophets, the majority of Southern rabbis supported Civil Rights. A few chose to keep their views quiet, but most made their opinions known in some way. Yet, the degree and nature of the rabbis' activism varied. Some rabbis offered cautious support and some spoke unequivocally. Some carefully established that they spoke only for themselves while others were willing or able to speak for the larger Jewish community. These differences may be attributed to each rabbi's unique personality and to the varying degrees of pressure imposed and fear felt by each rabbi. It is also important to note that some rabbis, such as Ira Sanders, took different approaches depending on the context in which they spoke. This section will look briefly at the prophetic tradition before turning to rabbis who chose silence, to those who spoke, and to those who demanded that their congregants also speak and act.[74]

Reform Judaism in the 1960's emphasized prophetic Judaism by looking to the prophets as models in the cause of social justice. Even when prophets were not mentioned explicitly, the focus on social action implied a connection to the prophetic

[73] By 1958 Jewish institutions had been bombed in Charlotte and Gastonia, North Carolina; Birmingham and Gadsden, Alabama; Nashville, Tennessee; Miami and Jacksonville, Florida; and Atlanta, Georgia. (See note 23 in Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 409.)

[74] See Introduction to Bauman and Kailin, eds., *The Quiet Voices*, pp. 12-18, in which Bauman described rabbis who chose silence, rabbis who spoke cautiously, and rabbis who gave unequivocal support to Civil Rights.

tradition. This focus was already apparent in the 1885 Pittsburgh Platform, which outlined basic principles of Reform Judaism.[75] The 1937 Columbus Platform, Reform Judaism's prevailing statement of beliefs in the 1950's and 1960's, continued to reveal this emphasis by declaring that man "is endowed with moral freedom and is charged with the responsibility of overcoming evil and striving after ideal ends." The platform then explained:

> In Judaism religion and morality blend into an indissoluble unity. Seeking God means to strive after holiness, righteousness and goodness. The love of God is incomplete without the love of one's fellowmen. Judaism emphasizes the kinship of the human race, the sanctity and worth of human life and personality...justice to all, irrespective of race, sect or class..."
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> ...Judaism seeks the attainment of a just society ... It aims at the elimination of man-made misery and suffering, of poverty and degradation, of tyranny and slavery, of social inequality and prejudice, of ill-will and strife. It advocates the promotion of harmonious relations between warring classes on the basis of equity and justice, and the creation of conditions under which human personality may flourish....[76]

The Columbus Platform, though not binding upon Reform rabbis, served as a representation of the values of the movement. Consistent with the tone of the platform and in contrast to some congregants' understanding of their "unobtrusive" rabbis, many rabbis saw themselves as descendants or followers of the prophets and seekers of justice and truth. Leo Bergman saw the rabbi as inspired by the prophets[77] and Malcolm Stern believed that the role of the Southern rabbi during the Civil Rights era was indeed

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[75] See Michael A. Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 387-88 for text of the Pittsburgh Platform and pp. 278, 295, 318, 329, 333 for further information.

[76] "The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism" ("The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism," 1937. CCARnet.org. 1999 Central Conference of American Rabbis, most recent update 7 April 1999). See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, pp. 318, 319, 330, 383 for further information.

[77] Bergman, "Is There a Jewish Ku Klux Klan in Hattiesburg?" January 15, 1965, p. 5.

prophetic.[78] Rabbi Levi Olan of Dallas insisted that "A rabbi is not a prophet...He is only the keeper of the Biblical prophetic tradition and its teacher. He is qualified only to apply the moral insight of his faith to the events of his time."[79] Although Olan downplayed the rabbi's "prophetic" role, he actually spoke of the rabbi's tremendous responsibility to comment upon issues of Jewish concern. The rabbi, according to Olan, had an obligation to apply prophetic ethics to modern dilemmas and to teach his congregants to understand and follow these ethics. The rabbi, then, was required to involve himself with the moral struggles of his day and to take a stand. Olan did so, giving dozens of sermons and radio addresses on Civil Rights issues.[80]

Similarly, Rabbi Sidney Unger did not explicitly equate rabbis and prophets, but implicitly suggested such a connection. "It is true," he said, "that for too long a time, religious groups have emphasized non essentials at the expense of the essentials...so much so that hatreds have resulted."[81] The tone of this sermon and other sermons indicated that he blamed clergy, at least in part, for the failure to address Civil Rights issues. Referring to "the privilege which is theirs in teaching the word of God," he felt that clergy could overcome hatred by fulfilling a prophetic role and advocating justice.[82]

Rabbi Jacob Rothschild spoke more explicitly about the rabbi's obligation to speak, and implicitly connected this duty to the prophets. He did so, in part, by referring to the rabbis' sense of calling:

> For whom does the clergy speak? For the congregation or for God? For himself or for God? The spiritual leader is called upon to teach religion.

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[78] Stern, Untitled, Undated, p. 17.
[79] Levi Olan, "An Attempt at Prophecy – A Sermon for 1969," KRLD and WFAA, December 29, 1968, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA p. 2.
[80] See "The Levi Olan Papers," Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.
[81] Unger, "Voices Warn of Doom Unless----" WWNC, March 18, 1961, Ms. Coll. #315, AJA, p. 1.
[82] Unger, "Voices Warn of Doom Unless----" p. 1.

> Religion speaks to all areas of life – the social as well as the doctrinal, the controversial as well as the readily accepted. He must teach what his religion has to say on all issues. I have always believed that it is my duty to teach this congregation what Judaism has to say, not only about how to observe Passover and what we believe as Reform Jews about life after death and the Messiah. But also on such issues as the separation of Church and state, and the equality of all men...What is the true role of a minister? Is it not to lift up the congregation to a better, fuller, clearer understanding of the message of its faith? Otherwise, why is he called? Or is he simply "hired" as many would prefer to have it, as a paid employee of the institution, subject to the rules and regulations set down by a Board of Trustees?[83]

For Rothschild and others, the rabbi's role encompassed that of the prophetic teacher. As such, Rothschild felt obligated to address ethical issues such as Civil Rights and to inspire his congregants to act in a manner consistent with Judaism. Like Rothschild, most of the rabbis studied took their prophetic role seriously and felt obligated to advocate for equality and justice. As keepers of Reform Judaism's prophetic tradition, they understood that the fight for a just society was fundamentally a religious issue. When politics intersected ethics, as with the Civil Rights Movement, most Southern rabbis saw activism as a religious obligation. A few rabbis, however, chose to remain silent, despite sympathies with the Civil Rights cause. The remainder of this chapter will look to rabbis who chose silence before turning to those who spoke publicly. It will conclude with a few examples of rabbis who not only spoke on behalf of Civil Rights, but also demanded that their congregants take a stand.

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[83] Jacob Rothschild, "Pulpit and Pew: Comment on a Column," 1964, p. 2 Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 19-20. See appendix for fuller text.

PRACTICAL CONCERNS: CHOOSING SILENCE

When Jacob Rader Marcus requested material on Civil Rights from Southern rabbis, Walter Gilbert Peiser of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, offered a short response. "I have not joined with others in any organized effort to achieve these views (racial equality)," he said, "for I feel that whatever I can do is not strengthened but weakened by binding myself to a platform."[84] This simple response offers insight into the Southern milieu and into Peiser's understanding of his role as a rabbi. He perceived the complexities of the Civil Rights debate and felt that opened and organized advocacy could only hinder the process. Peiser felt that using his rabbinic position to formally advocate integration was an ineffective means of securing change. Even so, he added that his views were known in the community and that he preached two sermons on Civil Rights.[85] His conscience demanded that he voice his views even though he chose not to be a champion of the Civil Rights cause.

Only one pro-Civil Rights rabbi responded to Marcus' request for sermons by suggesting his complete silence on Civil Rights issues. Rabbi Eugene Blachschleger of Montgomery, Alabama explained that he had "made no public pronouncements on the subject." He continued defensively, reminding Marcus, "Since you, yourself, say you appreciate the problems involved, I know you will understand why I have felt it impossible to discuss this very pressing problem."[86] Blachschleger expressed sympathy for the Civil Rights cause but, unlike his peers, felt unable or unwilling to express his views. Indeed, he maintained his silence during the Montgomery bus boycotts and

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[84] Walter Gilbert Peiser, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, March 12, 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.
[85] Peiser to Marcus, March 12, 1957, p. 1.
[86] Eugene Blachschleger to Jacob Rader Marcus, March 7, 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA,.

throughout the entire Civil Rights Movement.[87] His defensiveness, however, suggests that he was conflicted as his conscience told him to act and practical concerns urged him to keep quiet. For Blachschleger, safety and security – whether his own or his congregants' – superceded the moral imperative to speak.

Other rabbis also chose not to publicly address Civil Rights. Rabbi Martin Hinchin of Alexandria, Louisiana told an interviewer in 1967:

> I don't preach to my congregation what to do with regard to this. I have my own ideas on civil rights which I don't foist upon my own congregation. They know – in private groups we discuss these matters. From the pulpit I very rarely discuss it, because I don't want to harm the Jewish community in any way, shape, or form.[88]

Hinchin supported Civil Rights, but felt a responsibility *not* to discuss the issue publicly. Regardless of the prophetic tradition of which he was a part, he saw an overriding obligation to protect his congregants and the Jewish community in general. Hinchin's words serve as a reminder that rabbis who chose silence also struggled with ethical questions and saw themselves as men of integrity.

Other rabbis took a somewhat more active role. Rabbi Milton Grafman, a Northern native who spent over five decades in Birmingham, serves as an example.[89] Generally considered a gradualist working toward integration within the letter of the law, his harshest critics claim that he was actually against integration. Arthur Levin of the Anti-Defamation League attacked Grafman, saying he "was an active opponent of civil rights," though not "publicly." According to Levin, Grafman's attitudes softened over the years, but he was "overwhelmingly and solely concerned" with the Jewish

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[87] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 208.
[88] In Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,* p. 62.
[89] Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era," in ed. Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices,* p. 168.

community at the expense of the African American community.[90] Martin Luther King, Jr. may have agreed with Levin, writing his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" in response to Grafman and seven other Birmingham clergymen who formally encouraged the city's African Americans not to follow King. King explained that the greatest obstacle to progress may be those who, like Grafman, said, "I agree with you on the goal you seek, but I can't agree with your methods."[91]

While such incidents implicated Grafman as a non-supporter of Civil Rights, other factors and actions suggested that he may have recognized the evils of segregation but wavered on how to respond. As one historian recently noted, Birmingham, with its profound KKK presence and conservative history, was also "a city with a rabbinic tradition of circumspect social consciousness and a strong tendency toward racial intransigence."[92] It was a city in which, according to reporter Harrison Salisbury, African Americans and whites lived in fear, striving to be inconspicuous, speaking secretly and carefully.[93]

Furthermore, not all of Grafman's actions suggested that he was against integration. Already in 1955, he stood up for equality. He was scheduled, with five Christian clergymen and a lay person, to participate in a Jewish Chautaqua Society Religious Emphasis program at the University of Mississippi. One of the ministers announced that he would be donating a large sum of money to the NAACP, and the University consequently withdrew his invitation. Grafman responded that he, too, would not attend. He then successfully convinced the other clergymen to refuse the invitation

[90] Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights*, p. 310.
[91] Cited in Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights*, p. 309.
[92] Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era," p. 168, 170.
[93] Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era," p. 174

and sent a telegram stating his views to the chancellor. After the story made headlines, he faced harassment and hate calls, and was even placed under FBI and police surveillance.[94] This incident, which occurred early in the Civil Rights struggle and resulted in threats against Grafman and his family, may have contributed to his tendency to work quietly.

Grafman, however, took decisive action on other occasions. When Freedom Riders were brutally attacked in Birmingham, Grafman spearheaded the release of a formal statement condemning the attack and the slow response by police.[95] After a 1963 church bombing that killed African American children, he wished to attend the funeral "so that by our presence we could indicate to his [the African American minister's] people where our sympathies lay and also could indicate to the white population" that the Jewish community supported their African American neighbors.[96] Although Grafman tended not to speak publicly on Civil Rights issues, he repeatedly answered the ethical call to action, often emphasizing that he worked for justice and not for headlines.[97]

As Grafman's career suggests, it is difficult to place rabbis in clear categories as advocates or opponents of Civil Rights. Those who tended toward silence nonetheless took action on occasion, and active rabbis sometimes chose silence. As we turn to rabbis who were outspoken advocates of integration, we will see that some of them also debated if, and when, to speak.

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[94] Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights*, p. 72-74.
[95] Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights*, p. 53-54.
[96] Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,* p. 60.
[97] See for example, Krause, *The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights*, pp. 82, 169, 188 for further explanation of Grafman's views.

SPEAKING FOR CHANGE

As we have seen, rabbis considered potential repercussions when deciding whether to publicly advocate Civil Rights. Because of the risks, some outspoken rabbis showed initial reluctance to speak. Rabbi William B. Silverman of Nashville, for example, believed in integration and was willing to make his views public. Even so, he chose virtual silence until the bombing of his city's Jewish Community Center infuriated him and precipitated a sermon about Civil Rights. Following the 1958 bombing, Silverman denounced Jews who claimed that violence could have been avoided by keeping a low profile and a segregationist viewpoint. He then attacked those who "stated that I was responsible for the dynamiting of the Jewish Community Center – and that because of my pulpit utterances during the Holydays and my pro-integration stand in the community, all the Jews of Nashville have been and will continue to be endangered." After making these strong statements against advocates of silence, Silverman offered a candid admission:

> I say this, not with pride, but with a profound sense of shame, that with the exception of my sermons during the High Holydays last September, and one Parent Teachers Association address wherein I complied with a request to speak on the implications of the bombing of the Hattie Cotton School, I have not made a single public utterance on this subject of integration, and have not been as active in behalf of social justice as my faith demands.[98]

Despite his deriding of himself for his relative silence, Silverman continued passionately, "I, for one, refuse to yield to threats. I refuse, as a Rabbi and as an American citizen to surrender to intimidation and violence – and I am not alone." After speaking for himself, he called upon his congregants to take action.[99] Silverman used passionate language to

[98] Silverman, "We Will Not Yield," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.
[99] Silverman, "We Will Not Yield," p. 4.

insist upon taking action, but he only did so after years of relative silence.[100] The bombing of the Jewish Community Center served as the impetus for Silverman's movement into the limelight as an advocate of equal rights.

Rabbi Perry Nussbaum also began in the spirit of a reluctant prophet. When he accepted the Jackson pulpit in 1954, he had no intention of becoming a leader in the Civil Rights cause. He described his convictions in a letter to a colleague in 1955:

> Ever since the era of Father Coughlin, I have consistently refused to take the leadership in race relations, on the ground that if the dominant group in the community doesn't publicly affirm leadership then the minority representative doesn't get very far – and such activity often as not boomerangs on your own people.[101]

During his first years in Jackson, Nussbaum tried to live by this philosophy, remaining inconspicuous and attempting to maintain an amiable relationship with the Temple Board. Later, he would become one of the strongest Southern Jewish voices in support of Civil Rights.[102]

Most of the rabbis in this study, like Nussbaum in his later years in Jackson, spoke in favor of Civil Rights. As Robert St. John, noted, "Throughout the region rabbis mounted their pulpits and spoke out, fearlessly."[103] The majority fully supported Civil Rights and decided that their moral obligation to seek justice superceded their concern for the consequences of taking a stand. Most accepted the risks involved and preached their beliefs.

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[100] See appendix for fuller text.
[101] Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 242.
[102] Zola, "What Price Amos?" p. 242. (Zola hypothesized as to the reasons for this change in Nussbaum's approach.) Rabbi Harry A. Merfeld of Birmingham also struggled with whether to speak publicly, but for a different reason. In a speech delivered at Oakwood College in Huntsville, Alabama, Merfeld described his apprehension about addressing the subject of integration. "Having announced the subject and thus, so to speak, having reached the point of no return," he said, "I found myself wondering if I could do justice to it. The problem is so far-reaching; it has so many facets; it is so involved that I wished for more time for background preparation and reflection. But there is a time to say something and it cannot wait upon standards of homiletical perfection." (Harry A. Merfeld, "The Anguish of the South," Undated (with cover letter dated 30 September 1957), Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.)
[103] Bauman, Introduction, ed. Bauman and Kalin,, *The Quiet Voices,* p. 9.

Because their jobs and safety were at stake, these rabbis sometimes clarified that they spoke only for themselves and not for their congregations as a whole. This clarification did not, however, diminish the power of their words. Following the murder of Emmett Till, for example, Rabbi Leo Bergman told his congregants,"[I am] speaking only for myself as an individual, as I do every Friday evening." He continued to say that he was speaking "for myself and as a Rabbi of the Reform Jewish faith who has been trained in faith founded upon the prophetic message of the Bible." Insisting that he was not speaking for the Jews of New Orleans, he explained that he must speak for his own sake, because there are "times when to be silent is never to forgive yourself."[104] Bergman implied that religion and morality demanded that he give voice to his principles. Yet, he softened his message and avoided accusations against his congregants.

Despite his reticence about speaking for others, Bergman continued to emphatically state his sense of obligation as a religious leader:

> To me the pulpit is the voice that must be made articulate when justice and righteousness and mercy are silenced. Mine is not the safe religion that says nothing, means nothing and is nothing. My brand of religion stems back to Moses fighting the injustice of slavery imposed upon his people, to Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah...
>
> When the pulpit becomes safe, silent, and harmless, then religion is dead in that pulpit. If you do not believe me read your own Bible.

Here, Bergman spoke of moral imperatives. Claiming that he spoke only for himself, he nonetheless delivered a powerful message and a call to action to his congregants.

Rabbi Ira Sanders of Little Rock qualified one of his speeches in a different context. During a public hearing on four bills pertaining to segregation, Rabbi Sanders began his speech by introducing himself:

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[104] Bergman, "God Looks on Mississippi and Emmett Till," November 18, 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.

> I am Ira E. Sanders, Rabbi of Congregation B'nai Israel, Little Rock. I have been its spiritual leader for almost thirty-one years. However, tonight I speak as a private citizen. I am representing no organization and no group. This I wish to be recorded most emphatically.[105]

Sanders may have divorced himself from his congregation in an effort to maintain amiable relationships with congregants, safeguard his job, or protect his congregants' safety. Yet, the fact that he emphasized his connection to his congregation before dismissing it suggests that he also felt he could speak more powerfully as a rabbi than as a lay person. Interestingly, Sanders reported that he felt little pressure to remain silent during this era. A pioneer in the Civil Rights struggle, he worked for the integration of the Little Rock School of Social Work in the 1920's and his activism continued through the Civil Rights era.[106] He spoke carefully and his words reflected the polite demeanor of a Southerner, but he made his ideas known through the decades of his rabbinate in Little Rock.[107]

In some cases, rabbis spoke only for themselves because their congregation demanded that they do so. When Nussbaum visited Northern Freedom Riders jailed in the South, for example, he did so with many congregants' disapproval. The Board also required that he present himself as a private citizen and not as the rabbi of Beth Israel Synagogue.[108] Although some congregants resigned over the matter, he was able to mitigate the situation, keep his job, and act in a manner he saw as just by distancing his views from those of his congregants.

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[105] Ira Sanders, Speech at Public Hearing, February 11, 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[106] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, p. 174.
[107] See for, example, Ira Sanders, Speech at Public Hearing, 11 February 1957; LeMaster, "Civil and Social Rights Efforts of Arkansas Jewry," pp. 95-120.
[108] Dollinger, "Hamans and Torquemadas," p. 77; Zola, "What Price Amos?" pp. 247-249.

In many cases, rabbis felt that they could speak unequivocally on behalf of Civil Rights, without the caveat of speaking only for themselves. Rabbis Simcha Kling and Emmet Frank used cover letters to Jacob Rader Marcus as an opportunity to describe their absolute commitment to Civil Rights and their comfort level with regard to speaking. Kling wrote:

> I deeply believe that men who represent the Spirit must speak up. Men to whom religion is supposed to mean something must show how religious teachings have affected their lives and their thinking. ...Certainly we should teach the evils of discrimination and should be counted among those who fight for true democracy.[109]

Kling felt compelled by his religion and his prophetic role as a rabbi to speak. Any risks associated with speaking out were irrelevant, as he felt obligated to "represent the Spirit."

Frank, a rabbi from Alexandria, Virginia, wrote of an enclosed sermon, "As far as I am concerned, you do not have to wait until I am dead to publish it or quote from it – I said it and I'm glad."[110] The sting of his words coupled with the bitterness expressed in the rest of the letter reveal disgust with the segregationists and frustration with apathy and silence.[111] In one sermon, Frank offered details about his motivation and his intention to continue his vocal fight for equality:

> As a rabbi, I cannot help but speak forth, for I realize equality is a religious principle intrinsic within the concept of Judaism. I will not be silent and I will not be silenced as long as the breath of life is within me, but I will continue to thunder loud and clear to further the cause of human dignity and respect...[112]

In his melodramatic style, Frank emphasized the religious duty to speak and later implied that no threat and no danger would keep him from voicing his opinions. Yet, he

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[109] Simcha Kling, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, 20 March 1957.
[110] Emmet Frank, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, 12 March 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[111] See appendix for complete letter.
[112] Emmet Frank, "Is Speech No Longer a Freedom?" 29 March 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5.

recognized the danger. "Five hundred copies of my sermon will be distributed in the city," he wrote to Marcus. "I expect to have burning crosses on my lawn any night. Can I hide in the Archives?" Frank's lighthearted comment revealed an acute awareness of the seriousness of taking a stand. For him, the duty to serve the cause of justice outweighed all other concerns, including his safety. [113]

While most other rabbis did not explicitly discuss their attitudes toward speaking, the abundance of sermons they delivered suggests a desire to voice their beliefs. Without drawing attention to their courage or their fears, they stood up and added their voices to the Civil Rights struggle.

DEMANDING ACTION

In some cases, rabbis not only took personal action, but also demanded action from their congregants. Rabbis Levi Olan and Sidney Unger did so by drawing attention to the hypocrisy and apathy that they saw within the Jewish community. Olan humorously commented that people tend to think the message of a sermon is always for somebody else, and then transitioned to a far more serious statement. "A Jew," he said, "will find prejudice in others, but never in himself."[114] Olan then spoke of the Jews' anger at being considered part of the problem, of the psychological notion of rationalization, of the Biblical Israelites tendency to blame others, and of the Prophets insistence on bringing fault back to Israel itself. He insisted that Jews were as responsible as any other group for prejudice and encouraged his congregants to hold themselves accountable.[115]

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[113] Emmet Frank, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, 9 April 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[114] Levi Olan, "With Justice For All," 8 April 1956, p. 117 paragraphs 2, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA, p. 34.
[115] Levi Olan, "Brotherhood is Our Problem," WFAA, 27 February 1955, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.

Apathy and hypocrisy were recurring themes for Unger, who asked, "Where are the religiously minded—where are their voices – where the voices [sic] of all who know the evil that is being done and fail to cry out?" He expressed optimism that the good-willed majority would defeat the few evil-doers in New Orleans, but insisted that "all of us need to cry out even against the few for as always the ill intentioned shout louder than others and the weak follow."[116] He encouraged his congregants to be voices for tolerance and brotherhood, who would counter the voices of those fighting against justice and equality.

In another sermon, Unger noted "the emphasis placed upon the commonhood of man, while at the same time this very concept is being violated." He then asked, "Why do we say with our lips that which as the days go by we deny by our actions?"[117] Unger boldly challenged his congregants to recognize their hypocrisy and to change their behavior. He called on people to stop cowering and to stand up for their beliefs.[118]

In other cases, rabbis demanded action from their congregants without first attacking their inaction or hypocrisy. In Miami, Rabbi Herbert Baumgard used Biblical text to prove his point. After reminding his congregants that their place was "in the vanguard of those who fight for freedom," he offered a caution against becoming complacent:

> On one matter, however, I must caution you. The Bible teaches, "lo tuchal l'hitaleme, thou mayest not hide thyself." No Jew can put his hands over his eyes and say, "I don't see the suffering of the Negro." You see, all right, and "you cannot stand idly by the blood of your neighbor!" It is

[116] Sidney Unger, "The Idea of 'All' in All of Life," WWNC, 5 May 1962, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 2, Folder 3, AJA, p. 2.
[117] Sidney Unger, "Brotherhood – 1961," WWNC, 25 February 1961, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 2, Folder 2, AJA, p. 2
[118] See also Malcolm Stern, "The Dangerous Present," Yom Kippur Eve, 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2, where he touched upon the idea of hypocrisy, speaking of "the moral dishonesty of our society."

> further written in our Bible, "He who harms the down-trodden, harms Me, and he who raises up the fallen, honors Me."
>
> In this great opportunity which confronts us, not to act in favor of integration is to act against it; not to raise up the fallen is to tolerate and participate in his oppression. Let us who have felt the lash of the taskmaster not be guilty of the enslavement of others.[119]

Baumgard did not offer a concrete plan of action, but made clear that he expected Jews to take a stand and to further the cause of integration. He reminded his congregants that Judaism demanded that such action be taken, and called on them to act as exemplars of the Biblical tradition.

Rabbi Louis Tuchman of Durham, North Carolina, also employed Biblical text to demand that congregants take action. He offered a Midrashic explanation for the phrase, "And Moses went into the cloud," explaining that he "did not try to circumvent or ignore it." Tuchman then expanded the lesson to apply to himself and his congregants:

> So, too, must we face our problems. If we circumvent or pretend that it doesn't exist, then the problem of integration will not disappear. We must thrust ourselves into the fray, and proclaim for every man his G-d given right to bask in the warm rays of freedom and equality which a great democracy such as ours has to offer.[120]

Like Baumgard, Tuchman did not outline a specific plan of action: he did, however, demand that his congregants enter "the fray" and speak out for equality.

In another sermon, this time at Purim, Tuchman used the theme of religious freedom to insist that "we must speak out clearly and forcefully whenever the freedom of any individual is threatened."[121] Rabbi Emmett Frank used a similar strategy to argue for action, but did so at Chanuka. "At this Hanuko season," he asked, "where are our heroes

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[119] Herbert Baumgard, Sermon "For High Holy Days, 1956, Delivered at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida for the South Dade Jewish Center," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 6.
[120] Louis M. Tuchman, Excerpt included with response to letter from Jacob Rader Marcus, 26 March 1967, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[121] Louis M. Tuchman, Excerpt included with response to letter from Jacob Rader Marcus, 26 March 1967.

– men who are not afraid even against overwhelming odds to speak their hearts and minds and fight? Where are our Maccabees?" He then concluded that "a Maccabbean effort" would be necessary to prevent the state of Virginia from over-riding the *Brown* decision, and told his congregants to vote against a segregationist proposal.[122] Frank used imagery from Chanuka to strengthen his call to action and then offered a concrete step that his congregants could take in the fight for Civil Rights.[123]

Rabbi Malcolm Stern also advocated specific, though moderate, action. After cautioning that "Norfolk, Virginia, may be tomorrow's Little Rock," and emphasizing Virginia's defiance of the *Brown* decision, he promoted the establishment of a "Legion of Honor." This group would be comprised of all "right-minded citizens of our community" who would "pledge themselves in writing to the prevention of violence on their own part and on the part of others and to the encouragement of proper attitudes on the part of our youth." Stern acknowledged that the process of integration was "far from completion," but hoped that a Legion of Honor would help to avert violence and to move toward a common goal.[124] His desire for such a group illustrates the fear of violence that overtook many Southern Jewish communities.

Stern and others risked the anger of their congregants and their communities when they demanded that their congregants take an activist role in the Civil Rights Movement. Others spoke only for themselves. Most advocated Civil Rights and shepherded their

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[122] Emmet Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 8.

[123] Following another sermon in which he spoke in favor of integration and harshly criticized segregationist Virginia Senator Harry Byrd, many of Frank's congregants became angry. The Board of Trustees even ordered Frank to issue an apology to Byrd and to praise his efforts. Frank refused, and, the following week, attacked his congregants for their cold reception of his sermon. While he did not lose his job, some congregants left the congregation as Frank became a target of animosity. This incident illustrates that even the most outspoken rabbis could face repercussions when they spoke too boldly. (Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, pp. 183, 197.)

[124] Malcolm Stern, "The Dangerous Present," Yom Kippur Eve, 1957, pp. 3, 6.

communities toward acceptance of integration. Most Southern rabbis, in fact, raised their voices in favor of equality.

CHAPTER FOUR

Religious and Rational Arguments for Change

In a cover letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, Director of the AJA, Rabbi Walter Gilbert Peiser of Baton, Rouge, Louisiana explained his two-fold position on integration. He told Marcus that "The Bible and the Jewish tradition as a whole say 'we are no different in God's sight than the Ethiopians,' and that 'the stranger among you must be treated exactly the same as the homeborn.'" He then added "That the American Tradition is also very firm in this principle; and gave it the sanction of the Constitution intentionally..."[1] Rabbi Charles Mantinband, in a printed piece, recognized the same complementary concepts. "Judaism," he explained, "is committed to the principle of the equality of all men under God. Not alone is this our noblest religious contribution, but it is the very basis of our American heritage."[2] These two concepts – that religion professes equality and that democracy demands it – stood at the heart of many of the rabbis arguments for Civil Rights. Together these beliefs formed an essential foundation for Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement.

Examination of the rabbis' sermons reveals a tendency to express these common themes and arguments, as well as rational contentions. This chapter will address the religious and rational arguments that the rabbis used to defend the rights of their African

[1] Letter to Dr. Jacob Rader, 21 March 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.
[2] Charles Mantinband, "A Message For Race Relations Sabbath, 1962." Issued by The Committee on Justice and Peace of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in Sm. Coll. #8799, p. 1.

American neighbors. It will begin with rabbis' claims that the issue of Civil Rights was profoundly and essentially a religious issue. It will then turn to the frequently cited religious themes of one God and of the imperative to care for one another. Before turning to the rabbis' reliance upon reason and science, the chapter will briefly address the use of Christian Scripture to support claims of the equality of all humanity. These religious and rational arguments emphasize universal ethics and interpersonal relationships. The following chapter will address the rabbis' political arguments and agendas, which focus upon legal rights above ethical obligations.[3] These chapters do not attempt to be comprehensive, but rather to offer examples that illustrate thematic and rhetorical trends.

CIVIL RIGHTS AS A RELIGIOUS ISSUE

As *religious* leaders, the rabbis advocated Civil Rights primarily on religious grounds. Rabbi Jacob Rothschild referred to the issue as "religious"[4] and Rabbi Simcha Kling explained that "The decision to abolish segregation in the public schools was of such historic and religious significance that I feel I must speak of it from the pulpit at a religious service."[5] Because the politics of Civil Rights had ethical consequences, and because the Jewish understanding of God and humanity impacted Civil Rights, these rabbis were able to address what had become a political issue within their rightful roles

[3] Interestingly, both the religious and political arguments altered the intent of the texts upon which they rely. While the Bible, Talmud, Constitution, and other texts insinuated or explicitly condoned racial discrimination, the rabbis insisted upon their implications of equality.
[4] Jacob Rothschild, "The Challenge of Dream," Yom Kippur, 7 October 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.
[5] Simcha Kling, "Proclaim Liberty," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.

and authority as religious leaders.[6] They saw the role of political activist as within the realm and mandate of a spiritual leader.[7]

Rabbi Leo Bergman carefully described the fundamentally religious nature of the Civil Rights issue:

> Not the Supreme Court and not the Federal Court and not the State Court are going to solve the racial problem here in the South. It is a religious problem. Either the churchgoers and their Ministers believe in the Fatherhood of One God and the Brotherhood of all men – or they do not. God has no stepchildren. Either religion will prevail or fail...[8]

According to Bergman, religiously minded people would determine the future of Civil Rights. Only by accepting and living by the religious doctrines of the Bible would justice prevail. We turn now to these religious doctrines.

ONE GOD, ONE FAMILY

Bergman's primary argument stemmed from the notion of one humanity bound by one God. All men were brothers, according to this argument, because all shared one Father.[9] The majority of sermons about Civil Rights used this argument to promote equality for all of God's children.[10] Rabbi James Wax, for example, credited Jews as those "who gave to

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[6] See also "Preachers See Racial Issue As Moral Problem" in *St. Petersburg Times*, 26 October 1956, in Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA. This newspaper article, submitted to the AJA by Rabbi David J. Susskind of St. Petersburg, described Susskind's speech at a Council of Human Relations meeting. According to the article, Susskind "ended by saying that desegregation is a moral issue which persons who consider themselves religious should endeavor to make a reality by legal means."

[7] See Chapter 1 for further analysis. See also preface to Mark K. Bauman and Berkeley Kalin, *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997).

[8] Leo Bergman, "God looks on Mississippi and Emmett Till," 18 November 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.

[9] Language here and following is gendered to reflect the language used by the rabbis.

[10] A resolution of the North Carolina Association of Rabbis in support of the *Brown* decision echoed this belief, asserting in part, "As other religious bodies, this Association proclaims its belief that the Fatherhood of God means true Brotherhood of Man and, therefore, we dare not permit the existence of laws which discriminate against any human being." ("Resolution of the North Carolina Association of Rabbis" attached to Kling, "Proclaim Liberty," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.)

the world the concept of the one God and the one humanity."[11] In a letter to Marcus, Rabbi Sidney Unger stated the importance of this belief in one God ruling one humanity, contending that over the eleven year course of his radio show, "No matter what theme I use, my thesis is always the same, namely that Judaism looks upon God as the Creator of all people which includes not only Jew, but non-Jew, Colored as well as White."[12] Whether this was literally true or he was speaking only of shows pertaining to Civil Rights, Unger clearly viewed the religious idea of one humanity under one God as evidence of the fundamental equality of all people.

Unger often reiterated his commitment to Civil Rights and to the equality of all under God. In one sermon, he argued:

> I have again and again maintained that there is no such thing as white or colored good, white or colored right, Christian or Jewish righteousness. …No sage, no teacher, no leader of any group – no Biblical character interested in the teaching and application of Biblical thought – has ever entertained any idea other than that in Gods [sic] scheme all are one and in Gods [sic] house there may be many chambers but all are under one roof, bringing and guaranteeing warmth and safety and blessing to all who seek its shelter.[13]

In this passage, Unger sought to convey a universal message of unity. Moreover, his reference to the belief that "all are one and in God's house" might well have been received as having a more literal and immediate importance: that house included the school house.

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[11] James Wax, "The Major Sins of Our Time," Yom Kippur Eve, 6 October 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.
[12] Letter to Jacob Marcus, 21 March 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[13] Sidney Unger, Opening Broadcast, WWNC, 5 October 1957, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 5, AJA, p. 4. Following the first sentence cited, Unger stated, "Good and right and righteousness have been placed before all at the very time of creation and the dangers that surround, the horrors that exist, the disruption of communities stems from our faultiness in understanding the wish and the will of God."

Another rabbi who was deeply committed to the idea of one God creating one humanity was Levi Olan, an outspoken and prolific proponent of Civil Rights. Unabashed by the controversial nature of his words, he argued:

> Ideally, the brotherhood of man would demand of us that we love each other because we are all one family, the children of one God. In this case, the white people are confronted with a difficult situation, for if God can be conceived as having a color, he is certainly not white. Two-thirds of his children are colored.[14]

Here, Olan made a radical statement, drawing attention to the ethnocentrism that led to racism. His humbling emphasis on the ethnic composition of the world offered an almost prophetic foreshadowing of the "Black Pride" movement.

These and other rabbis insisted that belief in one God dictated belief in the equal worth of all of God's children. Many rabbis used the creation narrative and/or a statement from the prophet Malachi, for textual support. For these rabbis, the creation narrative, which is perhaps the most frequently cited prooftext, offered evidence that God created one human family. Many rabbis, such as Charles Lesser, added the Midrashic commentary that "the reason God created only one man and one woman was that no person would have the right to say, 'I am superior to you; I came from better stock!'"[15]

It is interesting that the rabbis used the creation story as the foundation for their liberal views. The Reform movement of the Civil Rights era was politically and ethically oriented and reflected the desire for a more "rational" approach to Judaism. Yet, as the use of the creation narrative demonstrates, the centrality of rationalism did not necessitate

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[14] Levi Olan, "With Justice For All," 8 April 1956, p. 117 paragraphs 2, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.

[15] Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 5-6. Lesser included this commentary among a long string of prooftexts, building his argument upon the quantity of Jewish text supporting equality. This style and strategy was typical of the rabbis studied.

the abandonment of mythical, moralistic text found in the Torah.[16] These rabbis recognized that the story of creation, acceptable to both Christians and Jews, could be a potent weapon in support of Civil Rights.

Considering the emphasis that Reform Judaism historically placed upon the prophets' moral and ethical arguments, it is not surprising that the rabbis employed prophetic literature to strengthen the argument for one God and one humanity. Rothschild and others,[17] quoting Malachi, asked, "Have we not all one Father? Hath not one God created us all?"[18] Rabbis, including Charles Lesser, Herbert Baumgard, and William Silverman, used a similar prophetic text to prove their point. Citing Amos, they asked, "Are ye not as the children of the Ethiopians unto me, O House of Israel?"[19] By quoting these Biblical texts, the rabbis strengthened their ethos as rabbis and reminded congregants of their authority to speak as religious and moral leaders. They simultaneously, whether directly or indirectly, spoke to the Christian South in language readily understood and accepted within their own teachings.

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[16] The platforms of the Central Conference of American Rabbis illustrate Reform Judaism's foundations of both reason and faith. See, specifically, the 1885 "Declaration of Principles ("The Declaration of Principles" CCARnet.org. Copyright © 1997 Central Conference of American Rabbis, most recent update 22 Oct 1997) and the 1937 "The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism" ("The Guiding Principles of Reform Judaism," CCARnet.org. Copyright © 1999 Central Conference of American Rabbis, most recent update 7 April 1999).

[17] See, for example, Jesse Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2: Olan, "The Hope of Modern Man," 18 April 1954, p. 131 paragraph 1, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA, #16; Olan, "That All Men Are Created Equal," 5 January 1958, Ms. Coll. #181, Box 29, folder 4, AJA, p. 2.

[18] Malachi 2:10, in Rothschild, "The Challenge of Dream," Yom Kippur, 7 October 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.

[19] Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5; Baumgard, : Sermon "For High Holy Days, 1956, Delivered at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida for the South Dade Jewish Center," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 4; Silverman, "We Will Not Yield: The Answer of Prophetic Judaism to Violence, Threats, and Dynamite," 28 March 1958, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5; Amos 9:7.

CARING FOR OTHERS

Many sermons also employed the story of Cain and Abel, citing Cain's question, "Am I my brother's keeper?"[20] In these cases, the rabbis rejected Cain's arrogant and selfish denial of responsibility for his brother and emphasized God's implicit response that one must be his brother's keeper. Using Cain's downfall as evidence of the dangers of denying responsibility for one another, the rabbis argued that they and their congregants were responsible for the rights of their African American brethren. The rabbis generally cited the story of Cain and Abel in conjunction with other short Biblical references. They built the case for Civil Rights by amassing a number of short quotations that implied humanity's equality and responsibility for one another. Instead of following the model of the traditional *D'var Torah* and using one prooftext as the basis for their sermon, they often listed several quotations, including Cain and Abel, and then continued to make other, extra-Biblical arguments.

The injunction to "Love thy neighbor as thyself"[21] and other Biblical citations with similar meanings were often used in the same manner. Rabbi Emmett Frank, for example, asked:

> Is it not time to show the world that America has no second class citizens? When I read in the Bible, "God created man," I see no adjective of color or religion preceding it. When I read in Leviticus, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," I see no commentary following it which states Jewish neighbor or Christian neighbor – white or black neighbor.[22]

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[20] Gen. 4:9 in, for example, Olan, "The Hope of Modern Man," 18 April 1954, p. 131 paragraph 1, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA; Ira Sanders, Untitled address delivered on 28 February 1957, attached to letter to Dr. Jacob Marcus, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1; Unger, " 'What Does the Lord Require?' " Delivered at Mt. Zion Church on Race Relations Day, 8 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA, p. 7; Unger, "Brotherhood Week, 1959," WWNC, 21 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA, p. 3-4; Unger, "Voices Warn of Doom Unless --," WWNC, 18 March 1961, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 2, Folder 2, AJA, p. 2.

[21] Lev. 19:18.

[22] Emmett Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3. Finkle used a different cluster of quotations in a similar manner. See Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell

Like many of his peers, Frank argued that the creation narrative and the ethical commandments that follow creation never specified race and that, therefore, the intent of the Biblical author was equality for all. Frank recognized a lack of detail in the Biblical commandments and clarified the perceived ambiguity by insisting upon God's universalistic intent. He used an argument from silence to ingeniously claim that God's will was the equality of all peoples.

Kling made this point somewhat more explicitly, stating that the *Brown* decision was consistent with "the religious teaching of our Torah and of our rabbis..." and that it has helped make a reality of the Biblical injunction: *V'ahavta l're'acha Chamocha* – 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as Thyself' – of the teaching: *tsedek tsedek tirdof* – 'Justice, justice shall you pursue.'" He continued to cite the creation narrative as further evidence that "the color of skin never had a place in asserting human values."[23]

Olan cited the same text – to love one's neighbor as oneself – but used it differently, arguing that the Torah spoke of a unique type of familial love. He recognized that human beings by their nature do not love all people equally, but found that the Bible addressed a specific form of unconditional love. Olan explained:

> But the love of neighbor which the Bible speaks of is of a different nature. It suggests that God is the Father, and all the people on earth are His children. The world is a family made up, as all families are, of people with diverse temperaments, talents, and characters. Just as in our homes, we do not withhold love from a child who is less talented, more emotionally disturbed, or even delinquent, so in the family of the world we must bring our understanding and sympathy to all peoples.[24]

From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.

[23] "Proclaim Liberty," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5.

[24] Olan, "Brotherhood is Our Problem," W.F.A.A., 27 February 1955, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.

Here, Olan argued that, regardless of abilities and personalities, the Bible commands us to care for one another. While many sermons argued that all people are equal, this excerpt argued that differences in talent, emotional stability, and intellectual capacity are irrelevant. All people must love each other and care for each other and, therefore, all people must be treated equally if the Biblical standard is to be met.[25] Other sermons delivered by Olan demonstrated that he believed in the intellectual and emotional equality of African Americans,[26] but, here, this belief does not matter. Perhaps he was trying to appeal to congregants who believed themselves to be members of a superior race and to argue that even they had a religious obligation to treat African Americans fairly.

Rabbi Perry Nussbaum offered no qualifications when he cited the injunction to "love thy neighbor." Instead, he elevated it as the most important commandment relating to Civil Rights. "For the heart of the matter..." he said, "is the Torah and its commandments, especially that explicit commandment ...'Love your neighbor as yourself' – no qualifications about race, religion, backgrounds, social status. No ifs, whereases and buts to Jews anywhere on this earth today."[27] For Nussbaum, accepting that we must love all peoples ensured that we would treat African Americans with dignity and would grant them their Civil Rights.

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[25] Olan's reading is consistent with numerous *mitzvot* such as the mandates against oppressing a stranger for "you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Ex. 22:20) and against placing "a stumbling block before the blind" (Lev. 19:14).

[26] See, for example, "The Spiritual Foundations of Brotherhood," in which he wrote that skin color "is a superficial distinction of a person, it is pure accident," and that it "tells us nothing about the character, the joy or suffering of anyone. ...The point is that the color of a man's skin tells us nothing about the man which really matters." ("The Spiritual Foundations of Brotherhood," W.F.A.A., 28 February 1954, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.)

[27] Perry Nussbaum Untitled, 19 May 1968, Ms. Coll. #430, Box 4, folder 2, AJA, p. 5-6. See also Wax, "Brotherhood Week – 1956," 17 February 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2, which also emphasizes, "The statement – love thy neighbor as thyself – is not qualified or modified. It is a law that applies to all children of men without exception or exemption."

These arguments reminded Jews of their obligations to all beings in an effort to unify the Jewish community in support of Civil Rights for all. While they could not sway all congregants, these arguments could push those ambivalent about Civil Rights toward seeing a religious and ethical obligation to support the cause.

JUSTICE AND LAW IN THE BIBLE

Some rabbis looked beyond the Biblical injunction to care for one another. They also looked to Biblical society and the laws governing it as a paradigm for a just society. Overlooking the inequities of the Biblical social order and focusing instead on the idealization of the society, they advocated the emulation of their Biblical ancestors. Often, they turned to the prophets as role models and for elaboration on the nature and importance of this just society.

Rabbi Levi Olan offered the most extensive and frequent discussions of these themes. One of his approaches was to emphasize the legal foundation of Biblical society. In a 1967 sermon, he explained that the Ten Commandments offered the "great moral principles" that formed the "foundation" of all other laws. "Mishpatim" or "ordinances" then functioned as "specific legislative acts" that guaranteed justice and equality for all. Olan continued to explain that God gave "the law to men." Thus, "human rights" as understood through his reading of the Bible, were "given by God" and were unrelated to legislation.[28]

[28] Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 11 June 1967, Ms. Coll. #18, Box 23, folder 4, AJA, p. 1. See Appendix B for fuller text.

The prophets, according to Olan, were committed to God's law and a society built upon that law. Separating Biblical prophets from diviners, fortune-tellers, and workers of magic, he held that:

> Their [The prophets'] only source for what the future would be was their knowledge of God who ruled the world through justice and mercy. ...The prophets of Israel predicted the future on the basis of their conviction that God had created a universe of law, both physical and moral. They believed that it is just as dangerous to violate the law of justice as it is to disregard the law of gravity. Just as we can predict that two parts of hydrogen and one part of oxygen will produce water, the prophets predicted that injustice produces suffering and disaster. We know that arsenic can kill; they knew that disregard for the poor, the widow, and the orphan will lead to desolation.

As men "enthralled by the vision of a moral universe," these men – chosen to be prophets – felt compelled to share their vision of God's society founded upon a moral law. Olan's understanding of prophets and prophecy, transformed these men into ordinary people with extraordinary dreams and perceptions. He brought prophecy to modern times, making it an almost attainable skill and a means of achieving human rights.

Olan certainly respected the prophets and saw them as central to the creation or continuation of a just Biblical society. He also saw them as examples in his own time, insisting that the prophets' voices would be shouting out against the injustices of racial segregation. "The prophets would not minimize the racial tension which is confounding our nation," he said. "To them, the issue would be a moral one. In their sight all the children of earth are made in the image of God, and anything which hurts one of God's children is not only unjust, it is blasphemous."[29] Here, Olan made a strong statement not only about the prophets, but also about his own congregants. Those who did not work

[29] Olan, "If the Hebrew Prophets Preached to Our Age?" 20 January 1957, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA. In the same sermon, he also wrote, "Jeremiah condemned his country and its sin because it enslaved people and robbed them of freedom. If the prophets are correct, this moral failure argues only doom."

toward equality for all people, he implied, committed blasphemy. By using this language, Olan, like many of his colleagues, placed Civil Rights within a moral and religious framework. Supporting segregation reflected upon one's character and religiosity and not only upon one's political leanings. Such a statement would certainly offend conservative congregants who would feel judged by their rabbi. Thus, Olan's simple statement took tremendous courage.

Other rabbis also cited the prophets as models of justice. Several rabbis, including Emmet Frank of Alexandria and Ira Sanders of Little Rock, referred to the Biblical injunction that "There shall be one law for the stranger and the homeborn."[30] These rabbis understood this statement as referring to legislation governing all aspects of society, and applied it directly to racial equality. They also cited other Biblical texts that supported their argument. Sanders looked to Malachi's question, "Have we not all one father...?"[31] to show that all men shared a common bond under God. Frank cited the commandment to "Love thy neighbor as thyself, and then reminded congregants of the Exodus story and stated, "Remember you were strangers (second class citizens) in the land of Egypt."[32] He called upon his congregants to recall their ancestors' suffering and, therefore, to sympathize with African Americans and to work toward freedom. These rabbis used ancient Biblical texts to support contemporary political laws aimed at equality.

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[30] Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 7; Sanders, Untitled address delivered on 28 February 1957, attached to letter to Dr. Jacob Marcus, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1; Ex. 12:49. Frank cited the entire sentence. Sanders said simply, "Ye shall have one law."

[31] Malachi 2:10 in Sanders, Untitled address delivered on 28 February 1957, attached to letter to Dr. Jacob Marcus, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.

[32] Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 7; Lev. 19:18. Similar statements to "Remember you were strangers..." can be found in Ex. 22:20, 23:9.

Rabbi William Silverman, in contrast, focused upon moral law. Using the words of Jeremiah as evidence, he suggested that the prophets demanded adherence to God and God's wishes. But, "God does not want sacrifices," he said, "GOD WANTS OBEDIENCE OF HIS MORAL COMMANDMENTS! GOD WANTS JUSTICE!" Silverman insisted that, as the Book of Jeremiah explained, moral law was more important than ritual law and that only by adhering to the moral law do we practice prophetic Judaism.[33] For Silverman, the greatness of the prophets laid in their message to obey God's *moral* code, thereby creating a model of a just society. In fact, in the same sermon, he quoted the commandment "JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALL YE PURSUE," thus explicitly bringing justice forward as God's central desire.[34]

Rabbi Sidney Unger and others[35] cited a verse from the Prophet Micah to focus upon justice. Unger used Micah's famous verse – "It hath been told thee O man what is good and what it is the Lord doth require of thee. Only to do justice, to love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God." – as the central theme of his sermon to an interfaith group on Race Relations Day.[36] In the same sermon, he mentioned other prophets with similar philosophies, lauded the prophets as models of "righteousness and decency and right and justice..... [sic] sincerity and godliness," and cited other passages that supported the equality of all people. Without explicitly discussing the politics of Civil Rights, he made

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[33] Silverman, "We Will Not Yield: The Answer of Prophetic Judaism to Violence, Threats, and Dynamite," 28 March 1958, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 1-2.
[34] Deut. 16:20 in Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2. Other rabbis also used this quotation. See, for example, Kling, "Proclaim Liberty," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5.
[35] See, for example, Olan, "An Attempt at Prophesy – A Sermon For 1969," KRLD, WFAA, 29 December 1968, Ms. Coll. #181, Box 22, Folder 8, AJA, p. 3.
[36] Micah 6:8 in Unger, "'What Does the Lord Require?'" Delivered at Mt. Zion Church on Race Relations Day, 8 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA p. 3.

a clear statement of his support for full equality.[37] He was not a silent bystander, but an outspoken advocate of Civil Rights despite the fact that his words were carefully and tactfully crafted.

Many rabbis were able to use the prophets and Biblical law as models of conduct and belief. The prophets were to be emulated for their uncompromising commitment to ethical behavior and Biblical law was to be studied as the blueprint for a just society. Prophetic Judaism demanded adherence to the prophets' call for justice.

CHRISTIAN CULTURE AND SCRIPTURE

In addition to quoting from the Prophets and the Torah, many Southern rabbis showed their familiarity with Christian Scripture in their sermons and speeches. The use of Christian Scripture was a means to several objectives. First, it suggested that Southern Jews, who represented a marginal minority striving for acceptance, were in some way a part of the larger culture. Second, when addressing inter-faith meetings, it showed Christians that Jews were knowledgeable about, and respectful of, the Christian Bible, and that Christian Scripture spoke of values virtually identical to those of Judaism. If Judaism demanded equality on religious grounds, then so, too, did Christianity. This was a direct outreach to the Christian community. Finally, when used while addressing Jews, including their own congregants, such references would show a commonality that would help Jews to discuss religious aspects of Civil Rights with their Christian neighbors and enable them to counter Scripturally justified anti-Semitism. Again, this would be a form

[37] Unger, "'What Does the Lord Require?'" Delivered at Mt. Zion Church on Race Relations Day, 8 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA, p. 3ff.

of outreach to the Christian community, but here it would be more indirect and ultimately come not from religious leaders but from the people themselves.

These objectives are well illustrated by Rabbi Harold Hahn who, for example, described "a group of Negroes a few years ago standing amid the smoldering ruins of their church singing 'We Shall Overcome…'" and then eloquently wove the refrain into the remainder of his sermon.[38] Using popular Gospel music as his major prooftext and means of inspiring his congregation, he was able to universalize a Christian song, to display partnership with African American Christians, and to make a strong statement of support for Civil Rights.

Similarly, Rabbi Sidney Unger, speaking to an interfaith group, used the Gospel of Matthew extensively in a Brotherhood Week address and then compared the teachings in Matthew to those in Leviticus and Deuteronomy.[39] Rabbi James Wax argued that Judaism and Christianity both "stand for the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man" and then also cited the Gospel of Matthew at length to prove his point. Referencing Matthew's account of Jesus quoting the Hebrew Bible, Wax argued that the commandments to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, soul and might" and "to love thy neighbor as thyself" were, as Jesus stated, identical. "What we need to remember," he said, "is that we cannot be good Jews or good Christians" without adhering to these two commandments. Presumably speaking to an interfaith audience, Wax spent much of his sermon discussing Christianity.[40]

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[38] Harold Hahn, "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." 5 April 1968, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 17-18. See Appendix B for fuller text.
[39] Unger, "'What Does the Lord Require?'" Delivered at Mt. Zion Church on Race Relations Day, 8 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA, p. 6.
[40] Wax, "Brotherhood Week – 1956," 17 February 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2-3.

These rabbis' approaches made explicit the belief that Torah was more than the precursor to the Christian Bible and value system: the Torah's core values, according to the rabbis, were echoed in the core values of Christian Scripture. Thus, support of the Civil Rights Movement was consistent with both Jewish and Christian theology.

In a different context, Rabbi Ira Sanders employed Christian Scripture when addressing an interfaith gathering. He concluded his public statement against four bills that would support segregation in Arkansas with a lesson from the life of Jesus:

> When Jesus died on the cross He repeated those immortal words: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Legislators! may future generations reading the statute books of Arkansas laws not be compelled to say these words of you. For the sake of the glorious heritage Arkansas may yet give to our beloved America, defeat, I pray you, in toto, these four measures, and the God of all men will bless your handiwork.[41]

Sanders, a Jew who recognized his audience in the Christian Bible Belt, dramatically used the words of Jesus to preach to the crowd. Using their Scripture instead of his, he challenged them to make the correct moral choice. Although the legislation eventually passed and became law,[42] Sanders' efforts should not be viewed as ineffective. Despite the legislation, he may have inspired some in his audience to support higher religious and moral duties as opposed to blind adherence to unjust laws.

Rabbi Leo Bergman took a more confrontational approach. After the 1955 murder of Emmett Till, an African American boy, Bergman delivered a Friday night sermon in the presence of visitors and reporters. After describing his moral obligation and compulsion to speak, he added:

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[41] Sanders, Untitled address delivered on 28 February 1957, attached to letter to Dr. Jacob Marcus, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.
[42] Letter to Jacob Marcus, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.

> My brand of religion stems back to Moses fighting the injustice of slavery imposed upon his people, to Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah...Was Jesus silent to injustice?...When the pulpit becomes safe, silent, and harmless, then religion is dead in that pulpit. If you do not believe me read your own Bible.[43]

In this case, Bergman never directly quoted Christian Scripture or gave a detailed account of Christian values. Yet he told the Christians present in absolute terms that they must accept his outspoken advocacy of Civil Rights. If he could not change people's personal attitudes, he could at least hope to give them an appreciation of his perspective and its moral basis in religious history.

The context in which Rabbi Charles Lesser used Christian references is perhaps more startling. Speaking to his own congregation in Waco, Texas on the day after the *Brown* decision, apparently without Christians present, he chose to acknowledge Christian teaching. Near the end of his sermon, after arguing that all people form one family under God, he noted, "Both Judaism and Christianity are definite, unequivocal on this point. Can you imagine Isaiah or Jesus taking any other stand than that for brotherhood, tolerance, equal rights?" The comparison was intellectually challenging and emotionally compelling. Lesser compared Isaiah, who in a lengthy book of 66 chapters spoke of redemption and prophesied that a king would reign in righteousness and ministers would govern with justice,[44] to Jesus, the Christian redeemer seeking righteousness and justice. This approach forced his congregants to relate Judaism and Christianity and provided them with a tool to fight anti-Semitism and racial discrimination. If Jesus sought equality amongst all peoples, then a Christian had to

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[43] Bergman, "God looks on Mississippi and Emmett Till," 18 November 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.
[44] Isaiah 32:1.

support equality in the same way. Judaism could not, at least theologically, be attacked for teaching and seeking equality.

Clearly, many Southern rabbis possessed considerable knowledge of Christian Scripture and Christianity. They felt it appropriate, or even necessary, to cite Christian Scripture and were able to use their knowledge to address Christians and Jews in their communities. These men did not live isolated lives among their congregants, but were a part of their cities and towns, interacting with, and even preaching to, the Christian majority. Their knowledge of Christianity was probably necessary if they were to be respected in the larger community. That knowledge was also wielded as a sword in support of the Civil Rights Movement.

OUR HISTORY DEMANDS ACTION

As another strategy to muster support for the African American cause, many rabbis reminded their congregants of the suffering of the Jews through the ages. Explaining that "Jews should certainly know and feel what it means to suffer such discrimination and not be guilty ourselves of inflicting it upon other human beings,"[45] these rabbis held that Jews should be especially "sensitive to the suffering of all victims of injustice and exploitation."[46] They reminded Jews of the Biblical account of slavery in Egypt, of suffering through the millennia, and especially of the Holocaust, and drew the conclusion that a group that has suffered has a special responsibility to other oppressed peoples.

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[45] Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.

[46] Mantinband, "A Message For Race Relations Sabbath, 1962." Issued by The Committee on Justice and Peace of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, in Sm. Coll. #8799, p. 1.

In some cases, the rabbis used Jewish text to elaborate upon this theme. Wax, for example, offered an extensive description of Jewish suffering and argued that "It, therefore, should behoove us all the more to purge our souls" of prejudice. He then added the Talmudic advice to "correct yourself before you correct others," and emphasized that Jews, who know prejudice firsthand, must correct their attitudes before worrying about and criticizing others.[47] By adding Jewish text, Wax and others reminded their congregants that they spoke as religious and moral leaders and gave their arguments the weight of tradition.

Rabbi Perry Nussbaum stressed the parallels between the historic suffering of the Jews and the modern suffering of African Americans. Speaking in Tampa after the bombing of his congregation in Jackson, Nussbaum noted that the African American struggle for Civil Rights and justice was the same problem that the Jews historically faced. Nussbaum explained:

> The JEWISH problem overnight was metamorphosed [sic] into a NEGRO problem, Race Relations, human relations, Civil Rights, poverty –we even had to surrender a long-held monopoly of a word which imaged the problem, GHETTO – it is not ours any longer.[48]

Here, Nussbaum implied that the suffering of African Americans and Jews was parallel and that the two groups were therefore bound by their pain. Nussbaum and others often referred to the Holocaust explicitly when describing the horrors of prejudice. By the 1960s, and in large part due to the televised trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1961, the Holocaust had become a household term and a symbol of inhumanity.[49] After 1961, and

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[47] Wax, "The Major Sins of Our Time," Yom Kippur Eve, 6 October 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 6.
[48] Perry Nussbaum, Untitled, 19 May 1968, Ms. Coll. #430, Box 4, folder 2, AJA, p. 5.
[49] See Jeffrey Shandler, *While America Watches: Televising the Holocaust* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 83ff. Shandler also argued that the televised trial "continued to invoke the trope of

occasionally in the 1950s, rabbis used this powerful symbol as a caution against all forms of prejudice. In a 1972 speech called *Prejudice Isn't All Black*, Nussbaum railed against the popular character of Archie Bunker and then quoted Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, saying, "The Nazi holocaust [sic] did not start with building crematories but with a few cheap jokes." Later, he noted that "we've forgotten" the six million Jews lost in the Holocaust and that there is "Not even a line about them in most of our post-world war 2 [sic] history books."[50] In this speech, Nussbaum drew attention to all prejudice and used the Holocaust as a caution against hate.

Olan, Unger, Silverman, and others viewed the Holocaust as directly related to contemporary racial hatred. In one of several radio addresses mentioning the Holocaust, Dallas' Rabbi Olan reminded listeners that "The terrible holocaust [sic] of the Hitler years was the result of the Nazi belief" in their racial superiority. He then compared Nazi claims of superior blood to modern theories about a superior "race, blood, nationality, class, or any other distinction among men," all of which he found to be baseless.[51] Olan saw that American bigots resembled the Nazis in ideology and implied that hateful beliefs could lead to violent action.

Unger posited an argument that the dangers of racial prejudice were even greater than those posed by Nazism. After lamenting the apathy of the people, he attempted to rouse them to action, explaining:

> We fought a common enemy during the last war. We mustered all our energies for we were aware of the insidiousness of a Hitler and a

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witnessing as a morally charged act (p. 84). This "trope" could extend to the realm of racial injustice, implying that witnessing injustice was a moral act demanding a moral response.

[50] Nussbaum, "Prejudice Isn't All Black," 25 February 1972, Ms. Coll. #430, Box 4, folder 2, AJA, p. 1.

[51] Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," KRLD, WFAA, 19 February 1967, Ms. Coll. #181, Box 23, Folder 4, AJA, p. 1. See Appendix B for fuller quote.

> Mussolini. Are we not aware of the fact that an enemy greater than Hitler is corroding the very life we seek to maintain?[52]

Instead of using the Holocaust as a paradigm of evil and destruction, Unger concentrated on the people's response to the Holocaust. Claiming that Americans took action and defeated the evils of Nazism, he called upon his congregants to again take action against prejudice. What is remarkable here is that he understood racism and discrimination in 1958 America as an "enemy greater" than the Nazis of the 1930s and 1940s. Perhaps Unger recognized that if the rights of African Americans could be limited, so too could the rights of the Jews, or any other minority, be destroyed. For Americans, the danger of racial discrimination was close at hand while the threat posed by the Nazis was remote and distant. Unger may have been speaking to both the immediate threat to African Americans and the potential threat to Jews as he advocated a just society based on equality.

Rabbi William Silverman of Nashville alluded to the Holocaust in a different context and showed greater frustration and anger. Responding to the bombing of Nashville's Jewish Community Center, Silverman attacked those who expressed radical reactions to the crisis. At one extreme, he said, were those who used the bombing as evidence of Jews' vulnerability in the United States and who insisted upon publicly proclaiming the desperate condition of Jewish life. He then continued:

> I also repudiate the other extreme of escapist, jittery Jews, representing the counsel of timidity and silence. ...
>
> There were those who said that the Center is responsible for what happened – and that the Center brought all the trouble upon itself, just as the Jews of Germany brought all the trouble upon themselves – and if the Center had maintained a segregationist point of view, refused to even

[52] Unger, Untitled radio broadcast, 11 October 1958, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 6, AJA, p. 3. See Appendix B for fuller quote.

> consider the possibility of inter-racial meetings, the Center would not have been dynamited. I abhor this point of view as shallow and despicable.[53]

Silverman focused upon Jewish victims rather than Nazi perpetrators as he used the Holocaust rhetoreically to strengthen his argument. By comparing those Jews "representing the counsel of timidity and silence" to those who blamed Jews for the Holocaust, he sent a clear message that such an attitude was blatantly wrong.

REASON AND SCIENCE DICTATE EQUALITY

In addition to religious arguments, many Southern rabbis explicitly and implicitly offered logical and scientific arguments to support Civil Rights. Consistent with the rationalism of Reform thought, this approach allowed Civil Rights support to proceed on both religious and rational bases.[54] This duality enabled the rabbis' pleas to more fully influence the totality of the southern population.

As Rabbi Hahn suggested in a memorial to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "A rational understanding of the problem's complexity by thoughtful Americans is sorely needed."[55] For many of the rabbis, this "rational understanding" involved scientifically and rationally proving the innate equality of African Americans. Only then could they establish a basis for legal equality. Often, the rabbis looked to biological and

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[53] Silverman, "We Will Not Yield," 28 March 1958, p. 3. Silverman continued to say that "This same extremist group" blamed him for the bombing since he spoke about Civil Rights.
[54] See Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954-63*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), p. 67. Branch explained that, in an article for his Morehouse College newspaper, Martin Luther King, Jr. promoted the coexistence of reason and religion. As Branch's comment suggests, liberal religious leaders during the Civil Rights era advocated change on both religious and rational grounds.
[55] Hahn, "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." Undated, immediately following death of Martin Luther King, Jr. on 4 April 1968, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 6. Hahn continued to state, "Most of us, however, have either tried to ignore the problem or have relied on dangerously oversimplified explanations." This section, among others, was crossed out of Hahn's final draft, but nonetheless exemplifies a frustration that many of the rabbis seemed to be feeling.

anthropological studies that confirmed their beliefs. Rabbi Herbert M. Baumgard, for example, stated simply, "Today we have scientific data which points to their [the races'] essential equality."[56] Rabbi Jesse Finkle of Virginia and others added the notion of blood to their arguments, explaining that all people possess the same blood. Finkle explained:

> Let me also remind you that the principles of human freedom and equality are not only affirmed by our religious teachings; they are also clearly CONFIRMED by scientific research which has demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that there is actually no difference whatsoever in human blood between the Negro, yellow, or white races, or between Protestants, Catholics, and Jews.[57]

Finkle continued to discuss scientists of different races and religions, reminding congregants that these men worked for the good of all people. "Every sincere scientist," he said, "thinks of the good of all human beings, and not only of the good of his own particular race or religion!"

At other times, rabbis focused on personal and national experience instead of scientific data. They contextualized reality in such a way that the only rational conclusion would be the equality of African Americans and whites. Preaching on the *Brown* decision, Lesser identified Booker T. Washington and George Washington Carver as men whose "unselfish service...has enriched our general American life." He then acknowledged that time would not permit him to offer a detailed account of African American contributions to American life, but he recounted some of the patriotic and exceptional services that African Americans provided in times of war and peace. "[I]f

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[56] Baumgard, Sermon "For High Holy Days, 1956, Delivered at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida for the South Dade Jewish Center," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 4.
[57] Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.

black and white boys could share the same fox-hole in war," he said, "their children should be allowed to share the same classroom in peace."[58]

Similarly, Nussbaum delivered an entire sermon eulogizing and paying tribute to George Washington Carver, who, he said, contributed so much to American society and died without enjoying the rights due a citizen.[59] Lesser, Frank, and others used sermons as a forum for describing the successes of African Americans and for lauding their accomplishments in the face of discrimination and bigotry. These rabbis were trying to prove that African Americans, when given the opportunity, could achieve as much as whites. Contesting the claims of racists who asserted that only a select few African Americans achieved success, many Southern rabbis listed accomplishments of African Americans in an attempt to convince congregants of the equal worth and ability of African Americans.

Rabbi Simcha Kling reasoned somewhat differently, but also insisted upon equality and refuted the notion that success was the exception. "If we find some (African Americans) who are poor and apparently unintelligent," he said, "we find Whites who are the same." He stated that African Americans possess equal intelligence and abilities and would excel equally if given the chance, and even addressed stereotypes of African Americans.[60]

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[58] Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2. See Chapter Five for further discussion of this quotation and of rabbis' argument that African Americans deserved equality because they proved themselves in battle.
[59] Nussbaum "Born a Negro – Died an American," 17 January 1943, Ms. Coll. #430, Box 4, folder 2, AJA.
[60] Kling, "Proclaim Liberty," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 7-8. See Appendix B for quote. See also Arthur A. Goren, *The Politics and Culture of American Jews* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp.197ff, in which he discussed the national historical focus on "American exceptionalism" and specifically "American Jewish exceptionalism," which began in 1945. Considering that American Jews were focused on their uniqueness and their contributions to American life, it is not surprising that rabbis looked for similar qualities in African American individuals as they argued for Civil Rights.

By focusing upon reason and religious arguments for Civil Rights, these men used their status as Reform religious leaders to advocate change. They established themselves as intellectuals and religious authorities. Therefore, they could work toward political change on moral and religious grounds and could preach authentically as rabbis. Because they so clearly defined the religious nature of the Civil Rights issue, they were also able to take clear political stands. We turn now to the political aspects of their sermons.

CHAPTER FIVE

Moderate Views and Democracy

As we have seen, Southern rabbis of the Civil Rights era frequently connected their views about Civil Rights to their religious convictions and to Jewish texts. They also looked to their roles as Americans and took a more political stand. These rabbis valued the legal system within their democracy and most encouraged moderation and compliance with the law leading to peaceful, gradual change. Emphasizing patriotism and the virtues of their country, they often lauded democracy and insisted that equality was implicit in the democratic system. This chapter will first address the rabbis as advocates of moderation, arguing that many rabbis espoused their true views, but some were forced to moderate their views because of the conservative cities in which they lived and/or the unsupportive congregants for whom they worked. It will then explore a few examples of more radical speech. Finally, the chapter will turn to the rabbis' focus on law and democracy.

THE RABBIS AS ADVOCATES OF MODERATION

One of the major features of Southern Jewish life was the desire to blend in while, simultaneously, maintaining a unique identity. Thus, outspoken rabbis in the South could raise eyebrows in a Jewish culture that feared public attention and lack of conformity. Rabbis had to speak carefully and moderately if they were to remain in favor with their congregants and have their message heard and heeded. Additionally, they most likely

internalized some of the values and fears of their congregants. While the rabbis believed wholeheartedly in equal rights, they felt that the process of moving from a racially segregated society to an integrated one would have to be gradual. Following is a sample of sermons that advocated Civil Rights but demanded little or no action, as well as some that demanded moderate action. A few excerpts also suggest that the rabbis moderated their own more liberal views in order to be accepted and heard by their congregants.

A sermon by Rabbi Jesse Finkle following the *Brown* decision epitomized the sermons that emphasized moderate beliefs and little action. He began the sermon with an analysis of "one extreme" reaction to the decision: the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's (NAACP's) pronounced excitement. He then described "the other extreme," personified by many Southern politicians who were angered and disappointed. Interestingly, neither "extreme" represented radicalism, violence, or even overt action. Finkle then advocated a middle ground, characterized by moderation and explained "that we must not allow this Supreme Court decision to catapult our country into violent, inner dislocation, but that we must all maintain and exercise, in the words of Virginia's governor, 'cool heads, calm study and sound judgment.'" Near the end of his sermon, he again called on his congregation and the "people of America" to exercise "calm and firm faith and conviction."[1]

Finkle's words suggested that elation over Civil Rights victories and rapid change following such victories were as detrimental to the Southern lifestyle as was a steadfast refusal to accept progress toward Civil Rights. Only through gradual, moderate change could equality be attained and Southern values respected. Finkle did not expect his

[1] Jesse Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington, (Sermon delivered Friday evening May 21, 1954, from the pulpit of Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative), Newport News, Virginia)," 21 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1.

congregants to place themselves in the forefront of the struggle: he merely expected them to support the goal of equality.

Similarly, Rabbi Leo Bergman delivered a sermon in which he excused his congregants from taking activist roles in the Civil Rights Movement. After describing the precarious economic position of Southern Jews, he stated:

> Few, very few of us are so brave or so idealistic as to endanger our livelihood, nor does anyone have a right to expect such a sacrifice from another. However, when those same people who are forced into these unhappy positions dictated by the vilest form of bigotry and prejudice from the outside try to extend these same depraved standards into the inside of their religious life – it is time to ask: Just where does Judaism stand?[2]

The remainder of Bergman's sermon focused primarily upon the role of the rabbi and the rabbi's right and duty to address Civil Rights from the pulpit despite anger amongst congregants.[3] He acknowledged that activism need not threaten one's livelihood and prosperity, and spoke very little about his expectations of congregants. As he strove to assure his congregants that he was not trying to push them into the forefront of the struggle for African Americans' rights, Bergman seemed to refer to anti-Semitism as "the vilest form of bigotry and prejudice." His people were his first concern and he chose not to challenge them to become leaders in a cause he saw as just. He looked to the abstract concept of one's "religious life" and discussed private attitudes rather than public actions.

Rabbi Jacob Rothschild – today lauded as one of the most activist rabbis in the South – also suggested in one sermon that his congregants need not take decisive action

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[2] Leo Bergman, "God looks on Mississippi and Emmett Till," 18 November 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1-2. Rabbi Harry A. Merfeld made a similar point and devoted much of his sermon entitled "The Anguish of the South" to the need for moderation. See Appendix B for excerpt.

[3] Bergman criticized the prevailing beliefs that a rabbi should be "quiet, unobtrusive and refrain from the controversial, no matter if it is religious truth" (p. 2) and lamented, "Hear no evil, see no evil, expose no evil – this is the ministry desired by many, not alone in Hattiesburg and not alone Jewish, that the rabbi be an officiant to marry, bury, to name babies, to confirm and bar mitzvah. These are the officiant acts of a priest without the surging God-inspired fire of the prophets..." (p. 5).

against racial discrimination. In a Yom Kippur sermon, he suggested that we must maintain our ideals even though we may not live up to them. "Customs and mores," he said, "may prevent us from living up to our ideals – but let them not force us to abrogate or deny them."[4] Here, Rothschild implied that one may simply live with a dream, unable or unwilling to bring about the practical changes necessary to turn the dream into reality. Although he hoped for the vision and strength to bring about equality, he publicly stated his doubts. Later in the sermon, he spoke of principles and declared that "we must *quietly* put those principles to work" (emphasis added) and advocated "gradual" change. He shunned radicalism and sought to implement subtle change within the context of Southern culture and without creating a stir. One can hardly imagine the tension within the community when Rothschild delivered this sermon following the 1954 *Brown* decision. Perhaps he was speaking cautiously in order to maintain peace and calm during an explosive period, or perhaps he had internalized (or at least grown to appreciate) the Southern preference for gradual integration. Regardless of his motives, he successfully articulated the morality of equality while presenting himself and his views in a calm, rational, and moderate fashion.

In addition to articulating a moderate approach to the cultural struggles of the era, Rabbi Malcolm Stern publicly took moderate action. Before the scheduled reopening and integration of the Norfolk, Virginia schools in 1959, he remembered that he "had recognized that die-hard segregationists might create violence, and proposed to the governor and several legislators that, for the good of all, those who wished should be allowed to remain in the segregationist private schools..."[5] Though Stern believed that

[4] Jacob Rothschild, "The Challenge of Dream," Yom Kippur, 7 October 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 4.
[5] Malcolm Stern, Untitled, undated, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA p. 15.

the ultimate goal and moral imperative was complete integration, he also responded practically to a potentially violent reality. He did not want people to endanger themselves for the sake of equality and, therefore, he suggested that a moderate course was preferable to a radical one.

Rabbi James Wax spoke more explicitly about the need for moderation and even claimed that it was part of human nature. He stated:

> Morality does not require the extreme, but teaches us to be moderate. Implicit in morality is the idea of moderation – moderation in relation to our thoughts, feelings, moods and behavior. The ideal is ever before us, but the ideal is realized only as we apply the principles of religion in the spirit of moderation.
>
> The idea of moderation is inherent in the very nature of man and in his experience through the ages.[6]

Wax continued to cite Jewish texts illustrating that "Judaism, very early in its history" showed moderation. He lauded moderation as a moral necessity and as the key to achieving true civil integration. In another sermon, he used the Talmudic injunction -- "You are not compelled to complete the task – neither are you free to desist from it"[7] – to advocate his moderate approach. Jews, he felt, must be a part of the struggle for Civil Rights, but they need not act alone or even in the forefront.

In some cases, rabbis seem to have explicitly moderated their views for the sake of their congregants. Their views may have been more liberal and they personally may have wished for more dramatic action. Yet, they assured their congregants that moderation was the best course of action. Rabbis Herbert Baumgard and William Silverman serve as clear examples.

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[6] James Wax, "Morality and Moderation," 14 September 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1-2.
[7] James Wax, "Brotherhood Week – 1956," 17 February 19560, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 4.

In 1956, Baumgard delivered a powerful sermon demanding outspokenness and action. He criticized the "conspiracy of silence," and implored his congregation to "act boldly and quickly" on behalf of integration.[8] Then, suddenly, as his sermon neared an end, he equivocated and explained:

> I do not suggest today that we as Jews climb to the highest house-top to proclaim the urgency of integration. I suggest merely that the place of the Jew is in the vanguard of those who fight for freedom. We must join with those non-Jews who share our conviction to act as a united front. We need not act as an isolated battalion... We are not out to destroy ourselves al kiddush ha-shem, but to live al kiddush ha-shem, and to help others to live.[9]

Baumgard qualified his words out of practical concern for the safety of those who fought for integration during the early years of the Civil Rights struggle. He did not downplay the importance of the issue and he even advocated Jews standing on the frontline. At the same time, he advised against running ahead of all others in the fight. His cautious stance suggests that a hostile atmosphere and complex political and social dynamics preoccupied and influenced him. While these words may appear to have offered a caveat to Baumgard's congregants, they actually placed a significant – though attainable – demand upon them. By acting with other leaders in the struggle, Baumgard suggested, Jews could make a difference without jeopardizing their livelihoods, social status, and safety to a prohibitive degree.[10]

Silverman – a man who stood up after a bombing and proclaimed that threats could not silence him on Civil Rights issues – nonetheless provides a final example of a

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[8] Herbert Baumgard, Sermon "For High Holy Days, 1956, Delivered at the University of Miami, Miami, Florida for the South Dade Jewish Center," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 1, 5.
[9] Herbert Baumgard, Sermon "For High Holy Days, 1956," p. 6.
[10] Although Baumgard appears to have been aware of and influenced by potential economic, social, and physical repercussions of activism, it is important to note that he and his congregants in Miami, Florida lived more securely than did Jews in Jackson and Hattiesburg Mississippi and in small towns throughout the South. For more details, see the discussion of Alfred O. Hero Jr.'s analysis, in Chapter Three.

rabbi who presented a moderate position on Civil Rights when preaching to his congregants. In the same sermon in which he later declared his intentions to speak, he comforted his congregants by limiting their responsibility. "Does this mean that I will embarrass my congregation?" he asked. "Does this mean that I urge you, my members, to undertake a rash, reckless, immoderate course of action in behalf [sic] of integration?" He answered, "No." Silverman then quoted Moses who declared, "Would that all the Children of Israel were prophets of the Lord," but he recognized that this was not possible.[11] He was honest about his wishes for his congregants to act as prophets of justice, but also stated his realistic expectations. In this way, he may have been able to maintain favor with his congregants, who could have cringed at too much public crusading. While Silverman moderated his words and assured his congregants that he would not embarrass them, he eventually explained why he felt compelled to speak on behalf of Civil Rights. He calmed his congregants, but retained his voice. In other cases, however, rabbis voiced their opinions without softening the message for their congregants. We turn now to some of these sermons.

LESS MODERATE, MORE RADICAL

In some sermons, rabbis used powerful, unequivocal language to promote Civil Rights and to demand action from their congregants. Rabbis Leon Kronish, Emmett Frank, Levi Olan, and Jacob Rothschild serve as examples of rabbis who found a time in which they could give uncompromising support to Civil Rights. Kronish expressed somewhat radical ideas in a 1956 sermon addressing "The Moral Imperative of Desegregation." He

[11] William Silverman, "We Will Not Yield: The Answer of Prophetic Judaism to Violence, Threats, and Dynamite," 28 March 1958, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 5; Num. 11:29.

summarized an article by the evangelist Billy Graham, with whom he had "never been too impressed," but who spoke wisely about Civil Rights. Graham claimed that most ministers were moderates who favored integration "on buses, in railroads, in bus stations, hotels and in restaurants" but erroneously felt that school integration would be premature. "Billy Graham's point," Kronish said, "is that the church is doing far too little about the problem of racial segregation." Kronish then outlined Graham's plan of action and challenged his own congregants to live up to, or go beyond, it.[12] While "acting soberly and thoughtfully" was on Graham's list as paraphrased by Kronish, the call to uncompromising, public action was still a strong, liberal statement.

Frank more directly and dramatically encouraged his congregants to act. Near the end of a December sermon against a proposal by the Gray Commission[13] he asked, "At this Hanuko [sic] season where are our heroes – men who are not afraid even against overwhelming odds to speak their hearts and minds and fight? Where are our Maccabees?" Using Jewish history as a model, he stated unequivocally that a "Maccabean effort [was needed] to keep the light of tolerance and knowledge burning."[14] Although speaking specifically of the need to vote against the referendum, Frank asked his congregants to follow the example of the Maccabees and to courageously fight a difficult battle.

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[12] Leon Kronish, "The Moral Imperative of Desegregation," 9 November 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3. See Appendix B for Graham's steps toward integration, as outlined by Kronish.

[13] As Emmett Frank explained in his sermon ("The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1, 4), Virginia's Governor Stanley organized the Gray Commission following the *Brown* decision "with specific instruction to circumvent the decision of our land's highest court." Frank was speaking against a Gray Commission proposal to amend Virginia's state Constitution. (p. 1) As he stated, the proposal recommended three steps: 1. Assigning students to schools based on a variety of criteria masking the true criterion of race; 2. Offering tuition grants to students who chose not to attend integrated schools or in whose districts such schools were not operated; 3. Changing the compulsory education law so that no student could be forced to attend an integrated school. (p. 4)

[14] Emmett Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 8.

Like Frank, Olan dramatically condemned segregation, but he also criticized insipid responses to it. Within a year of the *Brown* decision, Olan already attacked gradualism, stating:

> There are many good people who counsel patience about the race issue in our country. They point to the need for education, gradualness, and understanding. These are all virtues and have merit. But there are situations where the blood of wrath begins to boil. A boy in the uniform of the American Army, who has just returned from fighting for his country, is told that in this restaurant he cannot be served because his skin is black. To be calm and patient with that is immoral. Last summer, one of America's most honored statesmen, a Nobel Prize winner for Peace, was a guest in our city. He had to be housed privately, because the hotels of the city would not give him a room or serve him. When one thinks that any drunken sot can rent a room in the finest hotels, while a man of spirit and goodness is turned out only because his skin is of a different color, it is not enough to talk of gradualness and patience. This is immoral and both God and man should be angry with indignation.[15]

Here, Olan openly declared that the gradual approach that many Southern Jews advocated was insufficient. Denial of Civil Rights was a pressing problem that demanded an immediate resolution. Sympathy and the slow implementation of laws would not remedy the immorality of subjugation or placate impatient African Americans for whom "the blood of wrath" was boiling.

In another sermon, Olan focused more explicitly upon the feelings of African Americans. While he denounced violence categorically, he actually advocated civil disobedience[16] and expressed an understanding of the circumstances that drew some African Americans to violence. After stating that "Even if men feel trapped and

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[15] Levi Olan, "The Anger of God and of Men," 30 January 1955, p. 68 paragraph 1, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.

[16] See, for example, Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," KRLD, WFAA, 19 February 1967, Ms. Coll. #181, Box 23, Folder 4, AJA, p. 3: Levi Olan "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 11 June 1967, Ms. Coll. #18, Box 23, folder 4, AJA, p. 4. These passages will be discussed below.

penalized by the existent laws which confine and restrict them, no organized society can ever condone violence," he added:

> The causes for the violence should, however, concern us very much. It is because we were slow and negligent about translating human rights into law that disorder and chaos broke out in our midst. The laws were used to segregate men, to deprive them of a good education, and to rob them of the opportunity to grow and develop themselves into men and women of dignity and freedom. The law was used to depress their natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Bad laws encourage civil disobedience.[17]

Although he never accepted violence, Olan unequivocally told his congregants that gradualism and injustice created the volatile situation currently facing them. He implied that unconditional, aggressive support for Civil Rights was the only solution.

Rothschild also expressed sympathy for African Americans and their plight and held his congregants partly responsible for the violence plaguing the South.[18] Almost fifteen years after the *Brown* decision, Rothschild, still advocating for better treatment of African Americans, told his congregants:

> There is no question but that we earned every bit of the skepticism and distrust – and now hatred – which black men demonstrate towards whites. We made promises and refused to keep them, proffered hope and withdrew it, weaseled on our word and lied outright. ...We rejected every appeal to reason and moved grudgingly only when we were forced to move. ...[19]

Three years earlier, Rothschild had already made his point in even more detail. Attempting to explain the cause of the riots in Watts, Rothschild explained that "We have

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[17] Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," p. 3.

[18] As seen previously, Rothschild gave some sermons in which he spoke more moderately than here. This highlights the importance of context: rabbis obviously shaped their words according to the religious occasion and social context in which they spoke.

[19] Jacob Rothschild, "To Light the Darkened Joy," Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, pp. 2-3 in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 23.

at last, given the Negro hope – but held it always tantalizingly away from him. We have promised much – and delivered little. Why are we surprised when he strikes out in fury?" Rothschild then made the radical claims that African Americans had shown tremendous restraint in the face of injustice and that they "did not learn disobedience to and disrespect for the law" from each other, but perhaps from whites. The rabbi then cited multiple cases in which whites resorted to rioting, violence, and even murder and were never brought to justice. "To learn lawlessness," he said, "Negroes need only look to us whites to find the best qualified teachers." He lauded African Americans for their self restraint and expressed wishes that they would continue to exercise self-control as the struggle for Civil Rights continued.[20]

In this sermon, Rothschild publicly acknowledged his respect for African Americans and his disdain for reactionary, violent whites. By referring to "us whites," he implicated himself and his congregants in the violent behavior of white segregationists, implying that they were all part of the problem. Like Olan, he saw the gradual, moderate approach as an insufficient means of remedying an unjust situation.

DEMOCRACY

In addition to encouraging moderate or even more radical action, many Southern rabbis argued that the United States was a paradigm of democracy and equal opportunity. Appealing to their congregants' patriotism, they argued that the American way demanded justice and equality. The rabbis insisted that because they were Americans – and not only because they were Jews – their congregants were obligated to support Civil Rights.

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[20] Jacob Rothschild, "To Lie Down in Peace," Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M/ Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, pp. 5-6 in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 22.

Rabbis James Wax, Chuck Lesser, and Harold Hahn employed this approach when they spoke about good citizenship and the American way. In a Brotherhood Week sermon, Wax presented religious arguments for equality, and then added:

> Brotherhood week teaches us also that we are Americans – reminds us of our Americanism. How many people understand what it means to be American. Being a good citizen is more than saluting the flag; more than singing the national anthem; more than buying Government bonds, which after all is a form of saving. A good citizen is one who understands and appreciates what Americanism really is, its foundation, its basis.[21]

Wax continued to explain that the core of Americanism was its foundation upon the religious ideal "that every man was created in the image of God, and there is something divine in every human being." He connected religion and Americanism, arguing that Thomas Jefferson "was stirred by the prophetic writings of Judaism."[22] He thus used political history and Americanism to bolster religious arguments for equality. Wax probably would not have used this argument if his congregants did not feel strongly attached to the United States and concerned about living in accord with American values.

Lesser was more direct in his description of American values and did not attempt to connect these values explicitly to those of Judaism. On the day after the *Brown* decision, he wrote that "We can take the change, make the adjustment in our stride, if we exercise the good old American attributes of patience, common sense, moderation, restraint, and the mutual give and take that is an essential part of every human relationship."[23] He then added that lending support to the Supreme Court's decision would "help our consciences feel a little better when we speak so glibly and glowingly of

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[21] James Wax, "Brotherhood Week – 1956," 17 February 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3.
[22] James Wax, "Brotherhood Week – 1956," 17 February 1956, p. 3. Interestingly, Wax connects Jefferson, who he acknowledged as a secular man, to Judaism's prophetic tradition.
[23] Charles Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 2.

our American democracy."[24] Lesser implied that being a good American and a defender of democracy demanded support of integration. American values could guide his congregants to an ethical decision. Furthermore, Lesser implied, support of Civil Rights would make his congregants better Americans and would present them as successfully integrated into American cultural life. Even if they were ostracized by segregationists, they would know that they were true Americans and staunch defenders of American values.[25]

An undated Yom Kippur sermon by Hahn made a similar point. The sermon never explicitly discussed Civil Rights, but spoke abstractly about religious themes such as introspection, guilt, and self-improvement. As the sermon neared its conclusion, Hahn made a series of statements which cautioned his congregants about proclaiming their righteousness. "Before we declare that we are wholly righteous as Americans," one statement read, "let us recall the responsibilities of citizenship and civic service we have shirked, the principles of democracy we have repudiated, and the American dream that has yet to be transmitted into sublime reality."[26] Without even mentioning racial injustice, Hahn demanded that his congregants had a duty as Americans to work toward the equality of all people and the implementation of true democracy. He also subtly questioned the patriotism of conservatives, who failed to appreciate the "principles of democracy."

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[24] Charles Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, p. 2.

[25] Interestingly, this paralleled the thinking of Northern Jews who disproportionately supported Civil Rights. See Dollinger in Chapter 1 of this study.

[26] Harold Hahn, Untitled Yom Kippur Sermon delivered at Ohef Shalom, 15 September year unkown, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 8.

Several rabbis saw segregation as a threat to democracy and felt that integration was a means of strengthening democracy. Frank held that the issue of segregation "could lead, not only to the decay of our free public educational system, but to our democratic society, as well." He even added that the synagogue was a "democratic institution" that taught equality under the law.[27] If congregants believed in democracy, he called upon them to carefully consider the impact of segregation on their value system.

Rabbi Simcha Kling also spoke of the impending decay of democracy, if integration were not implemented. In a newspaper editorial, he dramatically reminded readers of societies in which freedom and democracy were not valued. Kling explained:

> In a democracy, no one can be forced to mingle socially. ...However, no citizen dare be barred from public institutions open to all the citizenry. Once we deny this right to one segment of the population, other segments had better beware. Hitler practiced such a policy; so do all governments where "democracy" is a meaningless word.[28]

For Kling, the social exclusion of African Americans set a dangerous precedent that could easily degenerate into further violations of citizens' rights and even into violent oppression. Kling played upon his congregants' insecurities, implying that Jews would eventually be harmed by the same policies that ostracized African Americans.

Rabbi Levi Olan gave listeners an analysis of the price that would need to be paid in return for maintaining a strong democratic nation. For Olan, the "price tag" included fair wages to ward off Communism, well-paid teachers to help strengthen the public schools, and racial equality to promote national peace and unity. Olan said in part:

> We want domestic peace and privileges for ourselves at the same time. We want a united, strong nation, but balk at the price of equality among the races. Some people prefer bigotry to strong national unity. They delude themselves into the thought that we can segregate millions of our

[27] Emmett Frank, "The Law of the Land is the Law of God," 16 December 1955, p. 7.
[28] Simcha Kling, Letter to Editor of local morning paper, undated, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.

> citizens with the label of second-class citizenship and still retain the vigor of a healthy democracy.[29]

Like Frank and Kling, Olan argued that the well-being of the country depended upon the implementation of integrationist policies. Democracy demanded such action and could not thrive without it.

Rabbi Jesse Finkle couched this sentiment in more positive terms, stating, "I for one am convinced that America will necessarily become stronger as a democracy and leader in the world's struggle to establish freedom everywhere, as we slowly but surely work out the implementation of the Supreme Court's historic ruling."[30] He concluded this 1957 sermon with a note of consolation: If leaders carefully implemented the Court's order for integration, he told his congregation, "Then shall our beloved American democracy become more genuine and shine more brightly as a beacon light of hope and faith, justice and righteousness unto all the peoples and nations of the world! Amen!"[31] Again, democracy was personified to exert control and to demand that integration be implemented. For Finkle and the rabbis previously discussed, the ideal of democracy became a guiding principle that took on an almost sacred character.

EQUALITY EARNED THROUGH THE TRIALS OF WAR

Another somewhat political argument put forth by many of these rabbis was that African Americans proved themselves in times of war and deserved equality in times if peace. Lesser claimed "that many of our white ex-GI's owe the fact that they are living today to the bravery, and in many cases, the sacrifice of their colored comrades-in-arms" and then

[29] Levi Olan, "Take What You Want and Pay For It," 2 January 1955, p. 52 paragraph 3, in untitled compilation, Ms. Coll. #181, AJA.
[30] Jesse Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington," 21 May 1954, p. 3.
[31] Jesse Finkle, "The Legal Bombshell From Washington," 21 May 1954, p. 3.

offered the succinct conclusion "that if black and white boys could share the same fox-hole in war, their children should be allowed to share the same classroom in peace."[32]

Another rabbi made the same argument about war and peace, but within the broader framework of all Americans comprising a single nation. Rabbi Sidney Unger argued:

> Our nation is the product of all customs, habits, determinations, hopes, anxieties of all who have sought its privileges and its strength. ...And all of them have come determined to add to the greatness of America. In the two wars we have fought sons and daughters of all these people stood ready to give their all to prove with their lives the things they had said they believed in. I have been with representatives of all groups, I have had the privilege of serving in two wars with them – and in World War II as their chaplain I have had the great privilege of knowing what it is they seek and what it is they believe in and hope for.[33]

Here, Unger used military service as a sign of commitment to the ideals of the United States and claimed that those who served represented groups who deserved to have their hopes fulfilled. The nation struggled together in times of war and must remain united in peaceful times.

In a later sermon, Hahn used a different argument stemming from military activity. Rather than focusing upon African Americans' merit as soldiers, he critiqued American involvement in Vietnam to depict the hypocrisy of racial inequality. "Nor should we overlook the fact of Vietnam – ," he said, "where we have enshrined violence as a way of life ------ [sic] and encouraged the Negro to say that America can fight for

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[32] Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, p. 2.
[33] Sidney Unger, "The Demands of Freedom and Liberty," WWNC, 8 November 1958, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 6, AJA, p. 2. See also Sidney Unger, "The Idea of 'All' in All of Life," 5 May 1962, pp. 1-2 for a similar idea although without mentioning war.

liberty and freedom everywhere, but here, at home!"[34] Hahn attacked American policy in Vietnam and recognized the hypocrisy of demanding freedom in other countries while oppressing citizens at home.

COMMUNISM

Southern rabbis preached about Civil Rights as the Cold War raged throughout the United States and the rest of the world. As documentary producer Jeremy Isaacs and historian Taylor Downing explained, the Cold War was a "military, economic, ideological [confrontation] between two great power blocs, the United States and the Soviet Union, that began at the close of the Second World War and ended with the dissolution of the USSR."[35] During this period of "total war between economic and social systems," fear of nuclear war enveloped the nation.[36] Military language pervaded political dialogue about the Cold War and encouraged a "them v. us" mentality. American rhetoric depicted the conflict as pitting right against wrong and good over evil.

Within this context, anti-Communist sentiment exploded in the United States as President Harry Truman and his successors used rhetoric to villianize the perceived enemy. The House Un-American Activities Committee was established to locate and prosecute American Communists. In 1953, the execution of convicted spies, Ethel and Julius Rosenberg, demonstrated the paranoia with which the United States viewed Communism and the Soviet Union.[37] Beginning in 1947 and extending into the 1950s,

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[34] Harold Hahn, "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." Undated, immediately following death of Martin Luther King, Jr. on 4 April 1968, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 14.
[35] Jeremy Isaacs and Taylor Downing, Preface to *Cold War: An Illustrated History, 1945-1991, Companion to the CNN TV* Series (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1998), p. ix.
[36] Martin Walker, Introduction to *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, Inc., 1993), p. 1.
[37] See Isaacs and Downing, *Cold* War, pp. 44, 106.

McCarthyism ravaged the film industry as accused Communists' careers were threatened by blacklisting.[38] Because those involved in the anti-Communist movement also tended to be against Civil Rights, liberal activists – including many Jews – became popular targets of McCarthyism.[39] Many Americans saw Communism as the enemy and feared annihilation at the hands of the Soviet Union.

It was in this context that Southern rabbis incorporated Cold War rhetoric into their pleas for racial equality. Sometimes, the rabbis spoke of freedom and democratic ideals in contrast to the Communist ideology that they felt threatened their nation. Interestingly, they used the fear of Communism to convince congregants that the democratic ideal could be upheld only if racial integration took place, and that their democracy could fall victim to Communism if they failed to act in support of Civil Rights. Wax argued that, despite its imperfections, the United States government, by means of its democracy, had "given its people" more than any other country. Lauding his country's government and revealing the intense fear and disdain of Communism that had enveloped the nation, he stated, "Despite the countless problems that beset us and the threat of the evil and diabolical forces of materialistic and mechanistic Communism, there are still today more people, in number and percentagewise, who enjoy the blessings of freedom."[40] Wax argued that Communism was a threat to American democracy and that only by holding steadfast to democracy – which included racial equality – could America successfully ward off the danger.

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[38] Isaacs and Downing, *Cold War*, p. 122-3.
[39] See Gary Gerstle, *American Crucible: Race and Nation in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 238-295.
[40] James Wax, "Morality and Moderation," 14 September 1957, p. 5.

Rabbi Charles Lesser also used the threat of Communism to further his argument on behalf of Civil Rights. Immediately following the *Brown* decision, he gave a sermon in which he mentioned "the purely mathematical fact that people with color greatly outnumber those without it on this planet" and then elaborated:

> And it is mainly in this very matter of the treatment of our minorities that we are judged by those nations we hope to win over to our side or keep on our side in this present not-so-cold war we are waging with the Communist nations and their sympathizers. – On the one hand, the reaction of men like Governor Talmadge and the rest of his white supremacy 'clan', [sic] who have threatened practically to fight another civil war on the issue and set the clock of history back a hundred years, – all this is the most welcome type of grist for the Communist propaganda mill.[41]

Rather than appealing to the ethical imperative to honor the *Brown* decision and integrate the schools, Lesser focused on national security and the practical fight against Communism. To denigrate the Communist nations and woo the African nations, the United States needed to integrate its public schools and foster equality.

Rabbi Leo Bergman also warned his congregants about giving the Communists cause to celebrate. Following Emmett Till's murder, he asked, "How could this happen in America? How could it be that there should be two kinds of justice – one for the man whose skin is white and one for the man whose skin is black? This is a travesty of

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[41] Charles Lesser, "Are We Really a Democracy? – Suiting the Action to the Word," Written 18 May 1954, pp. 2-3. Governor Herman Talmadge, who Lesser mentioned, served as governor of Georgia from 1949-1955 and as a United States senator from 1957-1981. A staunch segregationist, he wrote a book entitled *You and Segregation* (1955) supporting segregated schools. As a senator, he claimed, "I never read a civil rights bill that didn't destroy more constitutional rights than it purported to give any group," and he advocated for state and local governments to decide whether to maintain integrated or segregated schools. ("Georgia Governors: Herman Talmadge." Library.gsu.edu. c. 2001 William Russell Pullen Library. Revised 7 January 2002 http://wwwlib.gsu.edu/spcoll/Collections/GGDP/talmadge.htm; "Herman E. Talmadge Collection, 1945-1987." Libs.uga.edu. c. University of Georgia. Revised 29 January 2002 http://www.libs.uga.edu/russell/collections/talmadge.html.

American justice..." Bergman then stated that the murder was a victory for Communist Russia and implied that equality must be achieved in order for democracy ultimately to triumph.[42] Democracy stood for that which was just and right, and therefore, the murder of Emmett Till betrayed the democratic ideal.

Unger, who used a reference to Communism in a different way, is a final example of the incorporation of Communism into Southern rabbis' sermons. Unger criticized average Americans for being "lazy" and lacking "the initiative to go forth and do" despite being aware of discrimination and other problems. "We do what we do," he said, "not because it is the right or the immediate and needed but because it is the expedient thing to do. In our own ways we practice the philosophy of Communism which seeks to divide in order to make it easy to conquer."[43] Through this argument, Unger transformed the impersonal, large concept of Communism into the individual, highly personal realm. He did not discuss Communism in detail, nor did he fully support his claim that acting out of expediency or seeking to create division constituted Communism, but he strengthened his point about the evils of apathy and segregation by metaphorically employing the loaded term, "Communism." At the same time, he broadened the meaning of Communism to include personal behavior.

Interestingly, Communism took on a wider meaning for the other rabbis as well. Evil in general became associated with Russia and Communism, while justice and right characterized the United States and democracy.[44] The Cold War era pitched good against

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[42] Leo Bergman, "God looks on Mississippi and Emmett Till," 18 November 1955.
[43] Sidney Unger, Closing Broadcast on WWNC, 26 May 1956, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 4, AJA, p. 4.
[44] See the previous excerpts in this section. All used "Communism" figuratively, as well as literally, as a representation of evil and wrong.

evil and, with regard to Civil Rights, many rabbis taught that good could prevail in America only if racial equality was democratically established.

LAW

Most of the Southern rabbis examined in this study emphasized the line between appropriate, constructive conduct and harmful, radical action. They tended to extol law and order, repeatedly encouraging congregants to follow the law of the land.[45] They urged others to behave lawfully and advocated peaceful protest while categorically denouncing violence and extremism.

Rabbis Olan and Rothschild spoke frequently about the rule of law and of a society based upon law. After citing the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution,[46] Olan argued in a 1964 radio sermon, "We became a nation in order to achieve equality, liberty, justice, and general welfare. The laws of the land," he continued, "are intended to concretize our ideals."[47] At the end of the sermon, Olan offered more detail about the impact laws had upon society:

> Laws will not transform evil men into good men. What they will achieve is to restrain both men and nations from destructive acts. ...The debate on Civil Rights has reached the point of crisis. The question now before us is whether we will substitute law for force. ...Peace depends upon how faithfully and capably we translate our ideals of equality and justice into

[45] Although they did not necessarily use the term, these rabbis echoed the ancient Jewish tradition of *dina di-malkuta dina*, meaning, "The law of the kingdom is the law." This was first stated by Mar Samuel in Babylon and was explained in Rashba Resp. III, p. 109. (George Horowitz, *The Spirit of Jewish Law* (Bloch Publishing Co.: New York, 1993), pp. 79-80.)

[46] Olan and other rabbis cited one or both of these documents on other occasions. See, for example"That All Men Are Created Equal," 5 January 1958, Ms. Coll. #181, Box 29, folder 4, AJA, p. 1; Levi Olan, "On Legislating Morality," KRLD, WFAA, 29 November 1964, Ms. Coll. #181 Box 27, folder 5, AJA, pp. 1-3; Sidney Unger, "'What Does the Lord Require?'" Delivered at Mt. Zion Church on Race Relations Day, 8 February 1959, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 7, AJA, p. 7; Sidney Unger, "The Idea of 'All' in All of Life," 5 May 1962, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 2, Folder 3, AJA, p. 1.

[47] Levi Olan, : "On Legislating Morality," 29 November 1964, p. 1. On p. 2, he explained that, despite the imperfections of some laws, and "Contrary to the popular view, what we need are more laws and a better respect for law itself."

> laws. Our basic faith is in a view of life in which God is a lawgiver and where men try earnestly and devotedly to govern their lives by His laws.[48]

In Olan's opinion, law controlled behavior and maintained social order. When the white population stymied justice and evaded the law, African Americans were compelled to resort to unruliness and violence. Thus, only by the white population honoring the laws of the land and working toward integration could the United States be a peaceful, law-based democracy.[49] Olan connected his beliefs to Judaism by looking to the Bible as a paradigm for a law-based society: Just as Moses received the law from God and the Israelites lived under ethical laws,[50] so too should Americans strive to establish just laws and to create a moral society.

Rothschild added the idea that laws helped society to progress morally. He argued:

> Every single moral advance in the history of the human race was made possible because some enlightened men saw the vision of a nobler law. Laws do not wait for general acceptance. They are not the results of universal agreement. They stimulate and coerce a way of life that is better than the way they seek to modify.[51]

In a 1964 Rosh Hashana sermon following the passage of the Civil Rights Act, Rothschild added, "What men refused to do because it was morally right they will now be

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[48] Levi Olan, "On Legislating Morality," 29 November 1964, p. 3. See Appendix B for full paragraph.
[49] See, for example Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 19 February 1967, p. 3, discussed previously in this chapter.
[50] See, for example, Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 19 February 1967, pp. 2; Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 11 June 1967, p. 1.
[51] Jacob Rothschild, "The Challenge of Adversity," Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, p. 6 in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 10.

forced to do because it is legally correct."[52] For Rothschild, laws not only had the power to enforce ethical behavior, but also to define the nature of that behavior for society as a whole. Laws pertaining to Civil Rights would compel people to respect equality even if they did not believe such support to be an ethical imperative. In time, public morality would catch up to the legal code.

Considering Rothschild's emphasis on the power and value of law, it is not surprising that he attacked those who defied the law. In one sermon, for example, he marveled at the sad reality that Americans were "deny[ing] the principle of government by law" and thereby jeopardizing "the whole structure of American life."[53] Rothschild attacked perpetrators of violence who were "taking the law into their own hands" and advocated that law remain a guiding force defining proper behavior.

Other rabbis also spoke about following the law of the land. In a sermon that both described and responded to segregationist John Kasper and an article in *Look* magazine that exposed him as a rabble-rouser, Leon Kronish attacked "the pro segregationists who are fanatically and violently determined to defy the law of the land." He then told his congregants that they had a role in countering such people. "And perhaps the most important thing that we, Mr. and Mrs. Average American, can do," he explained, "is uphold the hand of the law and strengthen those who appeal for the rule of law instead of the rule of the mob." In this case, Kronish encouraged his congregants to write letters to newspapers supporting them for exposing extremists who Kronish described as

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[52] Jacob Rothschild, "A Love Affair With Life," Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, p. 3 in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 21.
[53] Jacob Rothschild, "Our Gift to the World," Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, p. 7 in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 11.

"dynamite laden cross burning anti-Semitic hate-mongers."[54] Rather than stoop to the level of those without respect for the law, he encouraged his congregants to use the democratic values of freedom of speech and freedom of the press to support integration.

William Silverman expressed a similar sentiment, but couched it in explicitly moderate terms. While insisting that his congregants support integration and those leaders who were working to advance the cause, he assured them that they need not put themselves in the limelight. After the bombing of the local JCC and a threat to his Nashville congregation, Silverman expressed gratitude that within the community:

> There is the growing conviction that this has been an assault upon law and order, the principles of democracy, and the very foundation of the Judaeo-Christian [sic] ethical heritage. Ministers and citizens who have been most reluctant about speaking forth now indicate that from this time on their voices will be heard in behalf of law, order, and moral action. The conscience of the community has been aroused. ...As a religious congregation dedicated to the principles of prophetic Judaism, we need not initiate or take an overly conspicuous part in advocating integration. We are morally committed, however, to join with the law enforcement agencies, the Federal Judiciary, the Christian clergy and church, and the citizens of our community in supporting decency, religious values, and the democratic rights of all the citizens of our community and our nation.[55]

Silverman spoke carefully and moderately, delivering a sermon at a time when his congregants were frightened and angered by the anti-Semitic violence that had erupted in their city. Nonetheless, he praised those who supported the law and contended that his congregants must also promote the law and support those who enforce it.

Although the rabbis generally promoted adherence to law, some rabbis endorsed civil disobedience in the form of peaceful protest.[56] Olan, for example, explained:

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[54] "The Moral Imperative of Desegregation," 9 November 1956, p. 1, 4.
[55] William Silverman, Letter to congregation, 21 March 1958, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 1-2.
[56] This topic is also touched upon in the "Less Moderate, More Radical" section of this chapter.

> Bad laws encourage civil disobedience. Great men like Henry Thoreau go to jail rather than submit to them. When he was in prison, Emerson visited him and said, "Henry, what are you doing in prison?" Thoreau is supposed to have answered, "Waldo, what are you doing out of prison?" Bad laws must be protested, even to the extent of arrest and jail, though never by taking the law into one's own hands.[57]

Rabbi Charles Mantinband also supported civil disobedience. He praised "those students who place life and limb in jeopardy for the sake of their convictions" by means of peaceful protest. Insisting that their methods were "in keeping with the rights granted them by our Federal Constitution," he saw them as followers of Martin Luther King, Jr. who declared that he would only follow just laws.[58]

For Mantinband and Olan, peaceful protest celebrated the ideals of democracy even if such protest led to punishment within the democratic legal system. Civil disobedience did not constitute taking the law into one's own hands, which they discouraged. Rather, it was a means of using the system to promote ethical and legal changes. Although they lauded democracy and promoted change within the legal system, the changes they advocated were, for many in their communities, radical.

SUMMARY

The tendency to preach diplomatically despite radical goals must be seen within the context of Southern society at that time. One may be tempted to impose modern sensibilities or a "Northern" perspective on this phenomenon and to conclude that these rabbis were cowards or hypocrites. In fact, these rabbis showed great courage by

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[57] Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 19 February 1967, p. 3; Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 11 June 1967, p. 4. This excerpt appeared in two different sermons. One was delivered over the radio and one's location of delivery is unknown, but was most likely within a congregational setting.

[58] Charles Mantinband, "A Message For Race Relations Sabbath, 1962." Issued by The Committee on Justice and Peace of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, pp. 2-3 in Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA.

speaking as they did. Had they not spoken gently and diplomatically, their message may have been utterly rejected. Within the context of the South, they had to choose their words carefully. Only then would congregants be likely to give their arguments a fair hearing.

Each rabbi's conduct reflected his environment, his personal character, and his political perspective. These factors compelled some to speak in muffled or moderate tones, while others engaged in far stronger rhetoric. Although each rabbi took a unique approach, common political and social themes do emerge: the exaltation of democracy and condemnation of Communism, the focus on African Americans' wartime and peacetime accomplishments, and the emphasis on the importance of following the letter of the law. Most spoke calmly and moderately about these topics as they strove to balance their communities' wishes and their personal safety with the dictates of their consciences.

CONCLUSION

Rabbis throughout the South took a stand on Civil Rights issues. Many rabbis used the sermon as an opportunity to express their views and as a vehicle of communication with congregants. In creating these sermons, most rabbis appeared to employ a definition of a sermon that included the use of Jewish text or tradition to advocate social justice and change. For these rabbis, a primary function of the sermon became moral instruction rather than exclusively Jewish education. These sermons, perhaps more than any other body of literature, embodied the principles that Southern rabbis valued most and the social issues they chose to address.

A sense of social justice, however, was not the only component in each rabbi's decision about how to respond to the turmoil of the Civil Rights Movement. The Southern milieu, as well as the demographics of each rabbi's community, played a significant role. From the time that the first Jews arrived in the New World in the fifteenth century, they existed as a small minority in a relatively homogeneous, Protestant culture. Throughout the centuries, they struggled to maintain their Jewish identities and to find social acceptance and economic success.

Economic success in the South came largely through involvement in business, specifically in retail. As traveling merchants, and later store owners, Jews came into contact with the African American community as well as the white Christian community. While the exact nature of the commercial relationship between Jews and African

Americans in the South awaits a thorough historical analysis, contact between the two groups seems to have led to some level of understanding and sympathy, while simultaneously creating a sense of resentment among African Americans toward Jews' dominant position.[1] As the Civil Rights Movement began, African Americans and Jews remained connected through commerce and possessed a long history of relationship. As a result, many Jews quietly sympathized with the Civil Rights Movement and some publicly defended it.

Jews' decisions about whether to take an activist role were impacted by their surroundings. Despite financial success, Jews in the South remained, to a large extent, outsiders. As a group with a divergent history and a distinct belief system, many Southern Jews faced alienation and lived in fear of anti-Semitism. The lynching of Leo Frank in 1915 intensified Jews' fears of anti-Semitism in the South and reminded them that their financial success did not guarantee social integration or physical security. Living as a small minority in the most religiously homogenous region in the country, Jews feared physical repercussions and economic peril if they took unpopular positions. Fear of ramifications and an unquenchable desire for acceptance pushed Jews toward subtle action or silent acquiescence.

Rabbis, who served as the spiritual leaders of these vulnerable groups of Jews, recognized that their people lived on the margins of both Southern and Jewish life. In choosing their path with regard to Civil Rights, they faced the same fears of anti-Semitism that silenced many of their congregants. They also confronted other forces pushing them toward silence: Pressure from congregants, fear of losing their jobs or

[1] Arnold Shankman, *Ambivalent Friends: Afro-Americans View the Immigrant.* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), pp. 111-148.

professional standing in their communities, and the threat of retaliatory bombings encouraged rabbis to remain silent or to choose their words sparingly and cautiously.

Moreover, each rabbi's locale influenced his response to Civil Rights issues. Rabbis in larger, more liberal cities, for example, faced less pressure to be silent than did rabbis in more conservative small towns and rural areas. Each congregation also had its own culture, giving some rabbis more security and freedom to speak than others.

While some rabbis responded to outside pressures with silence, most looked to Reform Judaism's prophetic tradition and felt compelled to speak. Many made their opinions known and insisted that Judaism and Americanism demanded support of equal rights for all. Some went even further, demanding that their congregants take explicit action to support African Americans in their struggle for Civil Rights. These rabbis risked their physical safety and sometimes even their jobs, but they spoke their consciences and acted as leaders in the drive for social change.

The rabbis who publicly supported Civil Rights used a variety of arguments in promoting their views. They firmly believed that granting Civil Rights was a moral and religious imperative. In their opinion, the fight for equality was essentially a matter of religious principle. As Jewish leaders, they turned to Jewish texts, including the Bible and Talmud, to support their views. Some also employed Christian Scripture and the life of Jesus to emphasize the universal truth of their positions. Many of these rabbis also looked to science and reason for evidence of people's fundamental equality.

In addition to being religious leaders, these rabbis saw themselves and their congregants as patriotic Americans. They argued that the American ideal of democracy

could be realized only when all people became equal under the law. Without Civil Rights, they said, the evils of Communism could overtake the merits of democracy. For the sake of the country and the democratic ideals upon which it was founded, the rabbis felt that their communities must advocate equality.

For the most part, however, these Southern rabbis were moderates who supported compliance with the law and gradual change. While most sympathized with African Americans and some even expressed an understanding of the forces compelling African Americans to turn to violence, Southern rabbis worked for peaceful change. Several rabbis even reminded their congregants that they need not place themselves in conspicuous roles or dangerous positions. The decision to preach moderately probably stemmed, in part, from practical concerns about their jobs and safety.

A few rabbis, however, preached more radically and demanded unequivocal action from congregants. These rabbis felt compelled to act despite the risks. They could do so, in part, because they lived in communities in which they felt secure enough to speak their minds. While they must have been prepared for congregants to be displeased with them, most probably did not fear for their jobs and physical safety. Nonetheless, these rabbis showed great courage as they mounted their pulpits and spoke words they knew would create tension and resentment.

The rabbis who chose to speak publicly confronted potential repercussions and found the strength to do what they felt was right. Some rabbis who chose to remain relatively silent also felt that they were taking the right action by working in the best interest of their congregants. While we may look back at the Civil Rights era and

criticize all but the boldest of rabbis, it is important to avoid an historical myopia which occurs when the past is judged by the standards of the present.

One must assume that none of these rabbis intended to harm the Jewish or African American communities. Without the benefit of hindsight, they were forced to make difficult decisions in which the dictates of their consciences, their congregants, and their security could be in conflict. It is difficult to imagine what each of us would do in such a situation.

Today, other morally and religiously charged political issues face rabbis. These issues – such as the rights of gay and lesbian couples, a woman's right to an abortion, school prayer, and private school vouchers – divide the nation. The prophetic tradition in Judaism and the role of the sermon as described in this study suggest that these are issues that call for a rabbinic response. While the Central Conference of American Rabbis has responded to many such issues, rabbis make their own decisions about which topics to discuss. Like the Southern rabbis struggling with shades of gray, today's rabbis must decide when to take chances, when to speak their minds, and when to remain silent. Even with secure jobs and physically safe environments, not all rabbis are willing or able to take controversial stands on contentious social issues.

Looking back on the Civil Rights era, some may have expected Southern rabbis to have transcended their fears. These critics may accuse the rabbis of being too cautious and hesitant. Yet, rabbis and lay people in our day should be able to relate to their situation. My experience as a student rabbi in a small town in the South serves as an example. Prior to my arrival at my pulpit, I was explicitly told not to discuss racial issues or homosexuality. As a student, I understandably acquiesced and left those issues

publicly untouched. The important question is whether I would have spoken from the pulpit had I been this community's full-fledged rabbi. I do not know the answer. Speaking about these and other controversial issues would have required going against the community norm. I would have alienated many of my congregants, invited hostility toward myself, and placed my "job" on the line. Furthermore, if congregants became angered and, consequently, were incapable of hearing my message, then I would have made myself vulnerable to criticism without a tangible, positive result. I may have felt good about my actions, but I may not have accomplished the greater goal of effecting social change.

At the core of the dilemma that I would have faced, and that Southern rabbis of the Civil Rights era and modern rabbis throughout the country face, is the definition and role of the rabbi. The rabbi is clearly a "teacher," as the translation of the title suggests. If the teaching is understood narrowly, then the rabbi's domain is simply Biblical and Talmudic exegesis. A broader understanding of a teacher, however, suggests that religious values and religiously grounded responses to current issues also fall within the rabbi's realm. Likewise, if the rabbi is merely an employee of the congregation, then his/her primary duty is to serve congregants and maintain a comfortable relationship with them. If, however, the rabbi is more than an employee and is in some way "called" to his/her profession, then the rabbi must serve as an ethical example and must uphold the highest values and teachings of the Jewish heritage.

Many Southern rabbis in the Civil Rights era served congregants who related to them as employees. These lay leaders thought that their rabbis should define their rabbinic roles somewhat narrowly. Yet, many of the rabbis placed themselves within the

prophetic tradition of Isaiah, Amos and all prophets who spoke for justice and equality. With a sense of calling and an awareness of a higher duty, they chose to promote equality and the ethical teachings of Judaism. Today, American rabbis face similar challenges of defining their roles and finding the courage to follow their consciences.

APPENDIX A

The Rabbis and Their Congregations

This list includes only rabbis cited in this study.

Rabbi	Congregation/Organization	City of Residence
Baumgard, Herbert M.	UAHC, South Florida Sermon at University of Miami	Miami, Florida
Ben-Ami, David	Temple B'nai Israel	Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Bergman, Leo A.	Touro Synagogue	New Orleans, Louisiana
Blachschleger, Eugene	Temple Beth-Or	Montgomery, Alabama
Finkle, Jesse J.	Rodef Sholom Congregation (Conservative)	Newport News, Virginia
Frank, Emmet A.	Beth El Hebrew Congregation	Alexandria, Virginia
Grafman, Milton	Temple Emanu-El	Birmingham, Alabama
Kling, Simcha	Beth David Synagogue (Conservative)	Greensboro, North Carolina
Kronish, Leon	Temple Beth Sholom	Miami Beach, Florida
Lesser, Charles B.	Rodef Shalom	Waco, Texas
Mantinband, Charles	Temple B'nai Israel	Hattiesburg, Mississippi
Merfeld, Harry A.	Temple of Reform Judaism	Birmingham, Alabama
Nussbaum, Perry	Temple Beth Israel	Jackson, Mississippi
Olan, Levi	Temple Emanu-El	Dallas, Texas
Peiser, Walter Gilbert	Congregation B'nai Israel	Baton Rouge, Louisiana
Rothschild, Jacob M.	The Temple	Atlanta, Georgia

Rabbi	Congregation/Organization	City of Residence
Sanders, Ira E.	Temple B'nai Israel	Little Rock, Arkansas
Silverman, Dr. William B.	The Temple (Congregation Ohabai Sholom)	Nashville, Tennessee
Stern, Malcolm H.	Ohef Shalom	Norfolk, Virginia
Susskind, David J.	Temple Beth-El	St. Petersburg, Florida
Tuchman, Louis M.	Beth El Congregation	Durham, North Carolina
Unger, Sidney E.	Congregation Beth Ha-Tephila	Asheville, North Carolina
Wax, Dr. James A.	Temple Israel	Memphis, Tennessee
Wessel, Harvey E.	Temple Beth El	Tyler, Texas

APPENDIX B

Extended Excerpts

JACOB ROTHSCHILD
FROM "PULPIT AND PEW"

In this sermon, Rothschild discussed the rabbi's obligation to speak and outlined his understanding of the rabbi's role. (Jacob Rothschild, "Pulpit and Pew: Comment on a Column," 1964, p. 2 Microfilm #1032, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," AJA, in Alvin M. Sugarman, "Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild's Sermons on Civil Rights, 1948 to 1968," Term paper, 26 May 1969, Small Collection #10494, Box 511, AJA, p. 19-20. Cited in Chapter 3, footnote 83.)

For whom does the clergy speak? For the congregation or for God? For himself or for God? The spiritual leader is called upon to teach religion. Religion speaks to all areas of life – the social as well as the doctrinal, the controversial as well as the readily accepted. He must teach what his religion has to say on all issues. I have always believed that it is my duty to teach this congregation what Judaism has to say, not only about how to observe Passover and what we believe as Reform Jews about life after death and the Messiah. But also on such issues as the separation of Church and state, and the equality of all men...What is the true role of a minister? Is it not to lift up the congregation to a better, fuller, clearer understanding of the message of its faith? Otherwise, why is he called? Or is he simply "hired" as many would prefer to have it, as a paid employee of the institution, subject to the rules and regulations set down by a Board of Trustees? If the church or synagogue wants only an administrator or an executive then let them engage one...

Religion cannot be made significant – a vital force in the constant struggle to ennoble men and their society – unless its teachings stand forth as a constant challenge to the best that is in man. This, it seems to me, is the true role of the religious teacher. That is the essential function of religion – to lift men up to the nobler vision of their purpose and their rightful place as children of the living God. Good and evil are in man. Good needs guidance and strengthening if it is to prevail. This is the proper function of religion.

Of course there are members of the congregation who know as much about politics and government as its clergyman. But that is not the point. He does not claim to be an expert in these fields. He claims only to be an expert in the field of religion. That is why he was called – or hired, if you prefer. He is obligated to speak the truth – religious truth – even in areas that are not theological or doctrinal. Otherwise, religion is not the all pervading force that we so glibly aver it to be.

WILLIAM SILVERMAN
FROM "WE WILL NOT YIELD"

Silverman responded to the bombing of the Jewish Community Center in Nashville by criticizing extreme reactions, advocating moderation, and encouraging hic congregants to take a stand. He also vowed to speak against discrimination after years of virtual silence. (William B. Silverman, "We Will Not Yield," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 2-6. Cited in Chapter 3, footnotes 98-100.)

Now that we have had the time and calm to view these events in sober perspective, what was revealed? There were three points of view expressed by our Jewish community. Two points of view were extreme to the extent of hysteria, the third, the calm, courageous and dignified reaction of the majority.

What were the two extremes? The first insisted that what happened is undeniable proof that we are in golus, exile; that the community of Nashville is rampant with anti-Semitism; that America is no longer safe for those of the Jewish faith; that the Jews of America are doomed! I repudiate this extreme with all the conviction of my heart. I refused to listen to those who would have me protest over radio and television – who urged me to protest through newspapers and magazines – who insisted that I, in my capacity as a Rabbi, proclaim to the world that JEWS ARE IN DANGER. Quite to the contrary, when I was asked to appear on television it was my suggestion that the President of the Ministerial Association, the Chancellor of Vanderbilt University, and the Secretary of the Nashville association of Churches speak and clearly demonstrate that this is NOT a Jewish problem, but a COMMUNITY PROBLEM – a problem of civil liberty, a problem of moral decency, a problem of law and order for the Church as well as the Synagogue, for Catholic and Protestant, as well as for those of the Jewish faith.

I also repudiate the other extreme of escapist jittery Jews, representing the counsel of timidity and silence. There were those who said – the word "Jewish" should never have been on that building – and if it had been called the COMMUNITY CENTER, and not the JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER, the dynamiting would never have occurred.

There were those who said that the Center is responsible for what happened – and that the Center brought all the trouble upon itself, just as the Jews of Germany brought all the trouble upon themselves – and if the Center had maintained a segregationist point of view, refused to even consider the possibility of inter-racial meetings, the Center would not have been dynamited. I abhor this point of view as shallow and despicable.

This same extremist group further stated that I was responsible for the dynamiting of the Jewish Community Center – and that because of my pulpit utterances during the Holydays and my pro-integration stand in the community, all the Jews of Nashville have been and will continue to be endangered.

I say this, not with pride, but with a profound sense of shame, that with the exception of my sermons during the High Holydays last September, and one Parent Teachers Association address wherein I complied with a request to speak on the implications of the bombing of the Hattie Cotton School, I have not made a single public utterance on this subject of integration, and have not been as active in behalf of social justice as my faith demands. ...

While we do not believe that Nashville is anti-Semitic, can we possibly conclude that anti-Semitism is not being exploited by the racists and the segregationists in our community? Do we think that the hate groups throughout the nation have not concentrated upon Nashville – with the pattern and the line that the communist Jew forced the Supreme Court Decision [sic] in behalf of integration, that the communist Jew controls the Nashville Newspapers [sic] and the school board. On March 14th, two days before the dynamiting of our Jewish Community Center, the Anti-Defamation League issued a report stating that "hate publications from across the country had been distributed in Nashville to agitate the smouldering [sic] fires started by local individuals [sic]. ...When will we learn...that when you scratch a Negro hater, you find an anti-Semite, and a bigot dedicated to the destruction of the Catholic Church, civil liberties and the values of Christianity itself?

Whether we are silent, or whether we speak forth in behalf of decency, morality, law and order, the Jew will be attacked, because this has been the historic stereotype of anti-semitism [sic], – but is this to deter us from preserving the values and ideals that are sacred to Judaism? Does this mean that we must scuttle into caves of cowardice and pull the covers of silence over our conscience, because of bigots, goons and men of violence? Does this mean that we must tremble and cower because we advocate, not only the teachings of our Jewish faith, but the basic principles of our American heritage?

I, for one, refuse to yield to threats. I refuse, as a Rabbi and as an American citizen to surrender to intimidation and violence – and I am not alone. I have referred to two extremes, but I feel and I am confident that the vast majority of this congregation and of the Jewish community of Nashville shares the conviction that we must stand for decency, law, morality and social justice for those of every faith and every race – and not prostrate ourselves and crumble into whimpering, fear-ridden devotees of doom.

We are not alone, because there has been an outpouring of messages, letters, resolutions, from the clergy, from the Christian Church, from the decent, respected citizens of our community expressing shame, indignation, and a sense of outrage – but what is even more significant, the realization that this isn't a Jewish problem, but a Christian problem, a community problem, an attack upon Christian values as well as upon Jewish property. They know as well as we do, that the purpose of this violence is not to take human life, but to deter and frighten the community to prevent the integration of our public schools and frighten respectable leadership from supporting the decision of the Supreme Court.

AND NOW YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO ASK: WHERE DO WE STAND? AND WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Let me first speak for myself, as your Rabbi, and I believe that any spiritual leader who does not speak forth and lead his congregation on moral issues is not worthy of being the Rabbi of this or any other congregation, -- and I speak clearly and without equivocation that all may understand: TOGETHER WITH THE CENTRAL CONFERENCE OF AMERICAN RABBIS AND THE UNION OF AMERICAN HEBREW CONGREGATIONS, I FAVOR INTEGRATION – not only because I am a Jew not only because my religious faith teaches that God is our universal father, that all men are brothers, created in the divine image; that all men regardless of their faith or their race are endowed by God with equal rights. I FAVOR INTEGRATION – not only because of an Amos who asked in the name of God: ARE YE NOT AS THE CHILDREN OF THE ETHIOPIANS UNTO ME, O CHILDREN OF ISRAEL: not only because the Torah commands "JUSTICE, JUSTICE SHALL YE PURSE"; not only because of the religious heritage of Judaism that insists upon social justice for white and black, for brown, yellow and red – not only because I am a Jew, but because I am an American – and as an American I not only have the right, but the moral mandate to support the constitution [sic], the bill of rights [sic], the decision of the Supreme Court, and the laws of our nation.

It has been said that I am a nigger-lover. That is true! I love and I want God to help me love even more, Negroes and Caucasians, those of every race, every faith, every nationality – because to love one's fellowman is a moral requirement of the Jewish faith, and to be a Jew is to despise prejudice and bigotry in every form.

Does this mean that I will embarrass my congregation? Does this mean that I urge you, my members, to undertake a rash, immoderate course of action in behalf of integration? No. I might yearn and hope with Moses when Eldad and Medad were reported prophecying [sic] in the camp: WOULD THAT ALL THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL WERE PROPHETS OF THE LORD – but as I stated in my letter to you, as a southern congregation we need not initiate or take an overly conspicuous role in advocating integration – but we are not only a southern congregation, we are a Jewish Congregation, and as a religious congregation dedicated to the principles of prophetic Judaism, we are morally committed to join the law enforcement agencies, the Federal judiciary, the Christian clergy and church, and the citizens of our community in supporting decency, religious values, and the democratic rights of all the citizens of our nation. We want to do something; we want action? I urge the members of our congregation to join and support the Nashville Community Relations Conference, a reputable, moderate organization that is concerned with much more than racial understanding, but with the immediate need to further harmonious and high-minded human relations. I urge my congregation to study Judaism and learn what Judaism has to teach about racial justice. As disciples of Isaac Mayer Wise, as proponents of prophetic Judaism, committed to love righteousness and morality, I urge my congregation to identify itself with the eternal laws of God and not the transitory mores of a geographic

area; I urge my congregation to believe that the Voice of Jacob is more powerful than the hands of modern Esaus who kindled the fuse, or the explosive potential of dynamite.

We will not set our sights by the bigoted scum, the potential murderers, who would degrade man to the gutters of depravity and reduce him, degrade him to the level of savages, -- but with abiding faith we lift our eyes to the psalmists and the prophets of Israel who would dignify, raise and elevate man to a status but little lower than the angels.

WE WILL NOT YIELD TO EVIL. We will not capitulate to fear. We will not surrender to violence. We will not submit to intimidation but, as Reform Jews, we shall continue to speak for truth; we shall continue to dedicate ourselves to social justice and to the brotherhood of ALL men, knowing and believing that all men are created in the divine image, and this includes Negroes as well as Caucasians. And even as we stand at the threshold of Passover, our Festival of Freedom, the season of liberation, with resolution and reverence, our hearts touched, warmed and ignited by the Eternal flame of an eternal faith, we shall continue to consecrate ourselves to human rights, and civil liberties – we shall, with God's help, continue to dedicate ourselves to the cause of freedom and justice for all the children of man.

And so, in the words of the Haggadah, in the spirit of Passover, we pray, "May He who broke Pharaoh's yoke forever shatter all fetters of oppression. Soon may He cause the glad tidings of redemption to be heard in all lands so that mankind, freed from violence and from wrong, and united in an eternal covenant of brotherhood, may celebrate the universal Passover in the name of our God of Freedom. [sic]

Amen

EMMET FRANK
LETTER TO MARCUS

This letter accompanied the first sermon that Frank sent to Jacob Rader Marcus in response to Marcus' request for civil rights material. (Emmet Frank, Letter to Jacob Rader Marcus, 12 March 1957, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA Cited in Chapter 3, footnote 111.)

March 12 1957

Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus,
Hebrew Union College,
Clifton Avenue,
Cincinnati 20, Ohio

Dear Dr. Marcus:

Under separate cover I am sending you without a doubt the greatest masterpiece in the form of a sermon I delivered in regard to better race relations. As far as I am concerned, you do not have to wait until I am dead to publish it or quote from it – I said it and I'm glad.

Next week or so I will deliver a sermon on Bill #60, which was introduced by some b_____ who is in the House of Delegates in the state of Virginia which, as you know, deals with investigating any organization trying to force integration.

The bill is specifically designed to dishonor any work of the NAACP. I hope that you find this material worthy of your archives, but please do not show the sermon material to Dr. Bettan as he might call me back for another course in homiletics.

Looking forward to seeing you, I hope, at the Toronto Biennial, I remain

Most cordially yours,
Emmet [name signed]
Rabbi Emmet A. Frank

EAF:vrk
P.S. – Part of the sermon which you will receive has already been quoted by the New York Times.

LEVI OLAN
FROM "CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE"
June 11, 1967

This excerpt illustrates Olan's recurring theme of using the Bible as a paradigm of a law-based society. (Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 11 June 1967, Ms. Coll. #18, Box 23, folder 4, AJA, pp. 1-2. Cited in Chapter 4, footnote 28.)

The Bible has something helpful to say about this matter. It proposes a society based upon law. First there are the great moral principles upon which the whole legal system rests. The Ten Commandments are the foundation upon which all laws depend. Then the specific legislative acts are spelled out in what are called in Hebrew 'Mishpatim' or ordinances. Thus, for example, right after the pronouncement of the Ten Commandments it declares that a servant shall have his complete freedom in the seventh year. This is by law. "There shall be one law for the native and for the stranger who sojourns among you." All men are equal before the law and their rights as men are a matter of laws.

This concept of men ruled by law is basic to the theology of the Bible. God as Creator gives the law to men; He is a lawgiver. Human rights are given by God or as Jefferson said, men are "endowed by their Creator" with these rights. These do not depend upon the whim of governments, rulers, or people. It is the law of God and to deny a man his rights is what religion calls blasphemy. It is this concept of natural law which guided the fathers of our country. They projected a government of laws and not of men. They made that very clear when they quickly added the Bill of Rights to the Constitution even before the ink was dry upon it. Since then, laws have been passed protecting these rights and they are made secure by the Constitution. The general principle of a man's rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" has been spelled out in ordinances upon our statute books.

HAROLD HAHN
FROM "IN MEMORIAM: MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

This excerpt, transcribed as accurately as possible from freehand notes, was delivered on the day after the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. At the end of the excerpt, Hahn used the refrain from an African American spiritual to express his hopes for the future. Unfortunately, the record of the sermon is incomplete, ending in the middle of Hahn's rhetorical use of the words, "We shall overcome." (Harold Hahn, "In Memoriam: Martin Luther King, Jr." 5 April 1968, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 1-3A, 17-18. Cited in Chapter 4, footnote 38.)

I cried last night. I began to weep when I heard the horrible news that this brilliant, eloquent – passionate apostle of liberty and freedom, Martin Luther King – was dead – assassinated – struck down in the fullness of his life.

...My mind went back over the years, recalling the many times I had heard him speak – how I was caught up in the power of his rhetoric – the magnificent flow of words – each concept stronger and more inspiring than the one before – thrilling to the imagery [sic] – cascading like a waterfall upon my heart and mind.

Who can ever forget the final words of his address before the Lincoln Memorial: "I have a dream" – of black children and white children who will sit together at the table of brotherhood – "I have a dream."

But – That dream has become a nightmare.

Yes – Martin Luther King died last night in Memphis, Tennessee – and there died with <u>him</u> all hope that America will secure his dream through peaceful and non-violent advocacy of liberty and justice.

...There is one more scene that was flashed on TV last night that I would share with you.

It was a group of Negroes a few years ago – standing amid the smoldering ruins of their church singing "We shall overcome, Deep in my heart, I do believe – we shall overcome." Strange isn't it that they sing so amidst the horror and ruin.

But they have a faith, – and it is my faith too – a faith that grows out of the words of the Psalmist, "Weeping may tarry for the night but joy cometh in the morning."

We shall overcome – because we know that no lie can live forever.

We shall overcome because we know that no people can continually oppress & persecute & hate, without losing its own soul.

LEVI OLAN
FROM "CIVIL RIGHTS AND CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE"
February 19, 1967

Here, Olan used Holocaust imagery to illustrate the dangers of prejudice and relied upon history and science to dismiss claims of a superior race. He acknowledged that individuals are born with different abilities, but insisted that nothing in the human composition gave any race an advantage. (Levi Olan, "Civil Rights and Civil Disobedience," 19 February 1967, Ms. Coll. #18, Box 23, folder 4, AJA, p. 1. Cited in Chapter 4, footnote 51.)

The opposition to the idea of the equality of men goes back to ancient times. The Greeks, who considered themselves intellectually and culturally superior to the Barbarians relegated the others to beasts while they were men. There was no possibility of equality between animals and humans. In the last century there arose the myth of race which was used to distinguish between superior and inferior peoples. The terrible holocaust of the Hitler years was the result of the Nazi belief that the Aryan race is superior to all others. There are some today who advance the theory that it is a matter of blood. The Negro they claim is by his very inheritance inferior to people who are white, who have a better blood.

That all of these theories of superiority of one group to another are superstition and myth is clear to any student of history or science. There is not a shred of evidence to validate any theory that race, blood, nationality, class, or any other distinction among men makes one group superior to another. It is true that some are born disadvantaged because they are deprived. But this can happen to white as well as colored, Chinese as well as American. Every test indicates that there is no basic difference in the human composition. Given freedom and opportunity all men regardless of blood, race, or national condition are born equal. There are too many brilliant scientists, philosophers, statesmen, and artists among all peoples to make possible any theory of superior race, class, or nation.

SIDNEY UNGER
FROM UNTITLED RADIO BROADCAST

Unger claimed that racial prejudice in the United States posed a greater risk than Nazism posed in Europe. He argued that apathy in the United States made the racial situation particularly dangerous. (Sidney Unger, Untitled radio broadcast, 11 October 1958, Ms. Coll. #315, Box 1, Folder 6, AJA, pp. 3-4. Cited in Chapter 4, footnote 52.)

If I were to underscore the greatest curse of our day – I would list that of apathy, indifference and lack of willingness to do something about it all. And this is the curse which seems to be eating away the very basis and foundation of the Judeo-Christian civilization. What is wrong with those who say they are intelligent or are awake to conditions? I talk with Christian ministers and with educators in all walks of life – and the story is the same all along the way. The people are asleep. Something seems to have lulled them into a stupor which somehow or other has taken such hold that for those of us who read history and seek an interpretation of things ---- it is all too unbelievable. Let no one say "Nothing can be done!" We fought a common enemy during the last war. We mustered all our energies for we were aware of the insidiousness of a Hitler and a Mussolini. Are we not aware of the fact that an enemy greater than Hitler is corroding the very life we seek to maintain? Is it not the duty of all who call themselves by the name Christian and those who declare themselves to be professing Jews, to band themselves together fighting the danger and disease which are with us and which if we do not awaken fast will spell doom as surely as the doom resulted not alone after the preachings of the prophets but even before and after their time.

Yes my friends, we need be concerned. This is no time to pass the responsibility on to another. Each one after his own kind and way must share. The biggots [sic] in our communities, the narrowminded, the disregarders of the law won't stop at anything. We are at war, and we need awaken to the realization that the "Let George do it attitude" won't work. We must awaken if we care and I have the feeling that we do care.

SIMCHA KLING
FROM "PROCLAIM LIBERTY"

In this sermon, Kling described Civil Rights as a religious issue. He also stated his belief that all people were equal and that African Americans would excel if given a fair chance, (Simcha Kling, "Proclaim Liberty," 21 May 1954, Box 2143, AJA, p. 7-8. Cited in Chapter 4, footnote 60.)

...I am sure that even though no one has actually expressed their bias to me, personally, there no doubt must be some anti-Negro prejudice, even among our people. If there is such, I can only say unhesitatingly that such prejudice is absolutely unfounded and is unequivocably [sic] irreligious. One cannot be prejudiced and be true to God! One cannot be biased and believe in the Jewish or Christian religion! Negroes are not born more or less intelligent than Whites, are not born slower or quicker than Whites, are not born with any different brain capacity from other peoples. If we find some who are poor and apparently unintelligent, we find Whites who are the same. If we find some who are slow, we find many Whites the same. If you believe the charge that Negroes exude a peculiar odor, you must know that every human being does. I can but repeat the statement of Marshall Wingfield: "Prejudice is not held against people because they have evil qualities. Evil qualities are imputed to people because prejudices are held against them." We can rest assured that once Negroes are given the same opportunities as other people, given the same kind of education and the same social and economic opportunities, we will find that they think, act, react, produce and create the same as other citizens. Perhaps the South has not had much chance to find this out until now; now, it will have the opportunity.

HARRY MERFELD
FROM "THE ANGUISH OF THE SOUTH"

In this sermon, delivered at Oakwood College in Huntsville Alabama, Merfeld repeatedly lauded moderation. He never took a personal stand for or against integration, but instead discussed the historical context of the civil rights crisis and advocated moderation, law and order, and compromise. (Harry Merfeld, "The Anguish of the South," Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, pp. 1, 3, 4. Cited in Chapter 5, footnote 2.)

...The social crisis in which we in this part of the South are caught up is moving rapidly toward some sort of climax that bodes ill for the happiness and welfare of its people. The voices of intolerance and of violence are loud in the land. The crusading shock troops on both sides of the issue are marching. The tempo of violence in speech and action is increasing. The law enforcing agencies seem powerless to stem the tide of violence or to apprehend the perpetrators of violent acts. Only the voices of reason, tolerance and goodwill are muted. Only the vast mass of the middle group of the moderate minded is unorganized, irresolute and virtually without voice, and it is out of this group that solutions must come. This is the group that must be heard, that must assert itself. For the choice before us is between an orderly process of evolution and a violent upheaval of revolution. The forces of evolution will work if given a chance, and that chance is possible only if moderation prevails.

Moderation does not mean inaction. There seems to be a disposition abroad in this middle group that if we just wait, keep quiet and do nothing, the situation will somehow go away. So we avoid talking about it, are genuinely shocked and distressed when violence breaks out, and suffer from bad consciences because we do nothing about it. Such an attitude is completely unrealistic and wholly inadequate in the present crisis. The situation will not solve itself automatically. The gauntlet has been thrown down, the battle lines have been established, the bridges of retreat have been burned, the opposing forces committed virtually to victory or death. The choice between evolution and revolution has already been made in some quarters. It may already be too late for evolution. Yet surely the effort must be made. Beethoven, I believe, once said that organized violence always wins over unorganized [sic] goodwill, a truism proven again and again in human history. The issue now before us goes deeper than our convictions regarding segregation or de-segregation. It is a question of the maintenance of law and order.

There is no doubt that a majority of Southerners would retain segregation by choice, but the crux of the question is whether they would do so at any price. This is doubtful. ...

...The realities of the situation are these: on the one hand, a body of dedicated Negroes committed to the abolition of segregation. They are completely fearless. They will never give up, and they have basic law on their side. In recent months they have

discovered a tremendous [sic] effective weapon, the technique of non-violence. ...Regardless of our feelings or wishes, these people intend to press forward to their goal.

On the other hand is a body of equally dedicated white people, just as committed to the preservation of what they regard as their sacred way of life, conditioned by their history, their social pattern and their basic attitudes. They have undertaken to use every legal stratagem to uphold segregation, and they believe they can achieve their goal. On the fringes – and herein lies the real peril – are the extremists who will stop at nothing, who are committed to violence, if they deem it necessary, and recent events indicate they do.

Neither side can be deflected from their purpose by argument. Both are convinced that right and justice are with them.

Then we have the Supreme Court decisions. ...

This does not mean that we just join the crusaders for either side. Few of us are fitted temperamentally for the crusader role, and this is fortunate. For granting the social and spiritual validity of the crusader as a goad to conscience and social progress, he does not bring about solutions. Solutions come from the meeting of minds, from the application of reason, from the exercise of tolerance, from the judicial adjustment of differences. Solutions depend upon conciliation, upon the art of creative compromise, and these are not the techniques nor the virtues of the crusader. Unfortunately this conciliatory function is not being effectively performed by anybody in this crisis. ...

LEON KRONISH
FROM "THE MORAL IMPERATIVE OF DESEGREGATION"

Kronish devoted much of this sermon to summarizing a plan outlined by the Reverend Billy Graham. He then challenged his Jewish listeners to live up to the standards set forth by Graham, a Christian leader. (Leon Kronish, "The Moral Imperative of Desegregation," 9 November 1956, Sm. Coll. #8799, AJA, p. 3. Cited in Chapter 5, footnote 12.)

And so as a springboard for the Church to take a greater measure of responsibility, Billy Graham refutes the usual cliche arguments, so often advanced, that the Bible itself has sanctioned segregation. If you are interested in the details of this distortion of the Bible and its devestating [sic] refutation, I refer you to the article in Life Magazine....What I do want to stress are the very tangible steps which Billy Graham suggested as the means by which the churches can help create a climate of good will:

Step 1 – If you will really believe in Christianity, then you must believe in love, compassion and good will.

Step 2 – There must be no deadly rationalizing or watering down of love.

Step 3 – Be Christians in your ordinary daily contacts and make sure that you show courtesy and patience, humility and unselfishness regardless of how the other fellow behaves.

Step 4 – Begin teaching love for the other races in your home. Be careful not to pass on to your children the sins of prejudice.

Step 5 – Accept your responsibility. If you are a Christian, you are your brother's keeper. It is easier to conform to the crowd, and to avoid sticking your neck out: But it's our duty to know, to proclaim, and to live by the truth.

Step 6 – Take a stand in your church for neighbor love and help your church move forward in bettering race relations.

Step 7 – Be honest with yourself. If you think you've done enough, you're in danger of hypocracy [sic].

Step 8 – Act soberly and thoughtfully, but act on principle, never condone a wrong for the sake of expediency.

Well, there you have a Christian attitude. How shall Jews face the test? Shall the attitude of Judaism be lesser than the crusading evangelist?

LEVI OLAN
FROM "ON LEGISLATING MORALITY"

In this concluding paragraph, Olan advocated a respect for law as a solution to the civil rights crisis (Levi Olan, "On Legislating Morality," 29 November 1964, p. 3. Cited in Chapter 5, footnote 48.)

Laws will not transform evil men into good men. What they will achieve is to restrain both men and nations from destructive acts. They can also lead to opportunities where men may learn higher motivations to love the Lord and to love one's neighbor. This is a crucial hour in American history. The debate on Civil Rights has reached the point of crisis. The question now before us is whether we will substitute law for force. The atmosphere is charged with trouble. It is no longer a matter of what the white man will give to the colored people. The Negro is now demanding his rights. Twenty millions [sic] of Americans will no longer accept second class citizenship. The potential danger has been demonstrated several times in the past few years. Peace depends upon how faithfully and capably we translate our ideals of equality and justice into laws. Our basic faith is in a view of life in which God is a lawgiver and where men try earnestly and devotedly to govern their lives by His laws.

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