

**Two Far South:
The Responses of South African and Southern Jews to
Apartheid and Segregation in the 1950s and 1960s**

By

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Dissertation submitted in *fulfilment* of the requirements for the
award of the degree of Master of Arts in Historical Studies.

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2003

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the
award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to,
and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other
people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Abstract

This dissertation uses the comparative historical method to compare and contrast the responses of Southern and South African Jews to apartheid and segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. It focuses on the interrelationship of the two communities with reform rabbis and international Jewish organizations. The dissertation argues that the nature of individual and institutional responses was significantly shaped by exposure to a set of factors common to the South and South Africa. The dissertation is thematic, employing a variety of case studies.

The dissertation begins by examining the effect of frontier conditions on reform rabbis. The author argues that the dispersed reform pulpits prevalent in these two contexts, and the type of rabbi that they generally attracted, served to inhibit civil rights activism. Differential exposure to these conditions, together with the presence of various liberating features, determined the risks and opportunities that frontier rabbis encountered.

Thereafter, the dissertation analyzes the interactions of the Southern and South African Jewish communities with northern-based national Jewish organizations (in the case of the former) and international Jewish organizations (in the case of the latter). The author compares the interplay of the Southern lodges of the B'nai B'rith with the Anti-Defamation League, and the interrelationship of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies with various overseas Jewish groups. Whereas in the first section, rabbinical responses in the South Africa and the South are analysed together, here the two communities are dealt with separately. The author argues that the

responses of external organizations were shaped by pressure from constituencies in the South and South Africa. These pressures competed with other philosophical and political considerations in determining policy towards segregation and apartheid.

Acknowledgements

I am particularly grateful for the advice and encouragement of my two supervisors, Milton Shain and Howard Phillips. Both performed this role in an exemplary fashion, providing the perfect mix of enthusiasm, support and indulgence - always backed up by humour - that added immensely to my enjoyment of the research and writing of this thesis.

I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the financial assistance that I received for this research from the National Research Foundation, the Harry Oppenheimer Centre for African Studies at the University of Cape Town, the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town and the University of Cape Town.

This project was immeasurably improved by a memorable month spent as the Joachim Prinz Fellow at the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio. I appreciate the assistance provided by Gary Zola, Fred Krome, Kevin Proffitt, Christine Crandall and Camille Servizzi at the Marcus Center.

The following individuals also provided invaluable assistance: Mark Bauman of *Southern Jewish History*; the ever-helpful Janine Blumberg of the Kaplan Centre; Naomi and Reuben Musiker at the Archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg; the staff of the Amistad Research Center at Tulane University; Yvonne Arnold at the McCain Library and Archive, Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Charlotte Bonelli at the American Jewish Committee Archives; Gerry Baumgarten of the ADL Research Department and Betty Reuben and Maury Gurwitch of Hattiesburg, Mississippi.

Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation, or any other institution or individual.

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Introduction

The American South and South Africa has long been the subject of comparison. In 1915, Maurice Evans, a pioneer in the field, drew on South Africa's experience with territorial segregation to suggest remedies for the South's "race problem."¹ The 1950s and 1960s saw a brief, but superficial and tendentious, burst of comparative interest in the South and South Africa. Thus, for example, Shaun Herron compared the two societies, arguing that the differences were overwhelming.² More recently, John Cell and George Fredrickson have returned to the subject. Their influential studies explored the root causes of segregation and apartheid, comparing the historical development of racial exclusion in both societies.³ Cell and Fredrickson provide benchmarks for comparison of race relations in South Africa and the South, at least for the period up until the Second World War.⁴

The overwhelming focus of comparison has hitherto been on the influence of underlying structural forces on patterns of racial interaction. Micro-issues, particularly the behavior of white minorities, have not been investigated. It is the intention of this

¹ See Maurice Evans, *Black and White in the Southern States: A Study of the Race Problem in the United States from a South African Perspective* (London, 1915).

² Shaun Herron, "South Africa is Not the Southland," *A.M.E. Review*, March 1957: 24-30.

³ John Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: the Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South*, (New York, 1982); George Fredrickson's *White Supremacy: a Comparative Study in American and South African History* (New York, 1981). See also George Fredrickson, *The Arrogance of Race* (Middleton, Conn., 1988).

⁴ Few works have focused exclusively on the post-war period. For examples, see the seminar papers collected in "Beyond White Supremacy: Towards a New Agenda for the Comparative Histories of South Africa and the United States," University of London Institute of Commonwealth Studies, 1997; George Fredrickson, "Resistance to White Supremacy: Non-Violence in the U.S. South and South Africa," *Dissent*, 42, Winter 1995: 61-70; James Orten, "Similarities and Differences in the U.S. and South African Civil Rights Struggle," *Social Work*, 33, 1988: 299-303; JoAnne Cornwell, "The United States and South Africa: History, Civil Rights and the Legal and Cultural Vulnerability of Blacks," *Phylon*, 67, 4, 1986: 285-293.

dissertation to shed light on this subject, analyzing Jewish responses to segregation and apartheid in the American South and South Africa.⁵ While of limited importance in the quest to understand structural similarities and differences, investigation of the role of the Jewish minorities provides a revealing window onto the convergence and divergence of the two societies in general, and of Jewish political behavior in these contexts in particular.

The approach adopted falls into what Todd Endelman has termed “internal comparisons,” contrasting two Jewish communities separated geographically.⁶ It is intended as a “microsocial account” – tightly limited by regional and contextual boundaries.⁷ The comparative method has seldom been used for comparing twentieth century Jewish communities. There are some notable exceptions to this, although more often sociological than historical in nature.⁸

⁵ Maurice Evans may have also initiated comparison of the Southern and South African Jewish communities, with his antisemitic aside that

the signs indicate that the ubiquitous Jewish race has seen and seized the trading opportunities of the South. I found here one of many parallels between the South and South Africa. In South Africa, the proportion of Jewish immigrants to any of [sic] other British peoples is very large indeed, the boat train Waterloo Station on any Saturday morning in the year will prove that. They come, not to do any manual labour, they neither do that nor engage in agriculture, but to exploit those, who by reason of their environment or race, have proved such a lucrative field, the Dutch speaking country population – the Boer – and the native.

Evans, *Black and White in the Southern States*, 56

⁶ Todd Endelman, “Introduction: Comparing Jewish Societies,” in Todd Endelman, ed., *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Michigan, 1997), 1-3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 16-17.

⁸ See, for example, Peter Medding, “Towards a General Theory of Jewish Political Interests and Behaviour,” *Jewish Journal of Sociology*, 19, 1977: 115-144. For a collection focused exclusively on this area see Todd Endelman, ed., *Comparing Jewish Societies* (Michigan, 1997). For a recent study comparing antisemitism in the United States of America, Canada and South Africa, see Milton Shain, “Ethnonationalism, Identity Politics and Antisemitism: the North American and South African Experience” in Sander Gilman and Milton Shain (eds.) *Jewries at the Frontier: Accommodation, Identity, Conflict* (Chicago, 1999), 335-350.

This dissertation does not provide a comprehensive chronological account of Southern and South African Jewish political behavior in the 1950s and 1960s. This has been explored elsewhere.⁹ Instead it adopts a thematic approach, comparing and analyzing the interrelationship of the two communities with individuals and institutions with regard to apartheid and segregation. The impact and influence of Southern and South African Jewish actions and attitudes on others, specifically reform rabbis and various external organizations that operated in South Africa and the South, are scrutinized. It will be argued that the responses of rabbis and the outside organizations to events in South Africa and the South were shaped by a common set of conditions and pressures.

The political options available to reform rabbis, discussed in the opening chapters of this dissertation, were narrowed by structural constraints that clustered in frontier communities. These frontier factors are central to understanding the motives and decisions of rabbis in response to apartheid and segregation. Thereafter, the dissertation analyzes the influence of the South African and Southern communities on national and international Jewish agencies. The relationships between these organizations and their Southern and South African constituencies are explored, demonstrating how changing relational dynamics shaped institutional responses to political developments in the two regions. The discussion will focus on the interactions of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies with a variety of Jewish agencies that involved themselves in international

⁹ See, for example, Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: the South African Experience (1910-1967)* (Cape Town, 1980); Gideon Shimoni, "South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis," *American Jewish Year Book*, 8, 1988; Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, Georgia, 2001).

Jewish affairs, and on the interplay of the Southern lodges of the B'nai B'rith with the Anti-Defamation League. These chapters will trace the trajectory of these relationships and analyze the sources of leverage enjoyed by the South African and Southern communities.

From the 1950s through the 1960s, South Africa and the American South were moving in opposite directions. While in the South segregationists were engaged in a forlorn fighting retreat against the advance of integration, apartheid legislation steadily entrenched and extended racial separation and inequality in South Africa. Constituting minorities within the white populations of both societies, the majority of Jews responded to these parallel racial crises by assuming a quiescent and largely inactive role.¹⁰ The explanations offered for Jewish behavior during the civil rights struggle and apartheid are nearly identical, focusing on the insecurities and fears of the two communities.¹¹ Jews in both locations were aware of the parallels between the two situations. In both the South and South Africa, the local Jewish press reported extensively on the responses of the counterpart community to the racial crises.¹²

¹⁰ The Southern Jewish population was approximately 200,000 in the 1950s, comprising less than 0.5 percent of the total population of the South. The South African Jewish community numbered 118,200 at its peak in 1970, making up 3.2 percent of the white population and 0.1 percent of the total population. See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 364; Alfred Hero, *The Southerner and World Affairs* (Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 1965), 474.

¹¹ For recent scholarship that follows this trend see, for example, Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, Georgia, 2001); Claudia Braude (ed.), *Contemporary Jewish Writing in South Africa* (Lincoln, Nebraska, 2001).

¹² André Ungar claimed that events at Little Rock in the United States were “picked up and gloated over” by South African Jews who found vicarious reassurance that others shared their racial problem: “You see, we are no worse than Jews elsewhere.” Ungar’s account of South African Jewish responses to apartheid was printed in *Conservative Judaism* alongside an analysis of the Southern Jewish community and segregation by Rabbi William Malev of Houston, Texas. The two articles formed a joint analysis of the “Jew and the Negro,” *Conservative Judaism*, 13 (1958). See also Adam Mendelsohn, “‘South African Jews also face Racial Crisis’: American Jewish Newspapers on Apartheid South Africa during the Civil Rights

Beyond the overlap in the timing and nature of the societal crises, the South African and Southern Jewish communities also shared similar histories. The two communities were molded by the parallel waves of immigration: first a steady trickle of Jews from Central and Western Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, later and in larger numbers from Eastern Europe.¹³ In both cases, Jews headed south chasing opportunity or following chain migration. Although by the 1960s the bulk of the Jewish communities were concentrated in a few large cities, Jewish populations were still present in small towns and rural areas as well. Jews in South Africa were prominent in the retail trade in these small towns, matching their counterparts in the American South. Often isolated in a deeply religious population - Calvinist in South Africa, Baptist and Methodist in the South - Jews encountered philosemitism and limited antisemitism.¹⁴ More importantly, they were forced to engage with questions of race and power.

Era," *Jewish Affairs* 56:3, (2001); Charles Mantinband, "The Horns of a Dilemma," *Central Conference of American Rabbis Annual Convention*, 74 (1964): 249.

¹³ In the South, these new immigrants encountered an older Sephardi community.

¹⁴ This rural presence has since all but disappeared.

Chapter One

Two Far South: Explaining the Responses of Reform Rabbis to Apartheid and Segregation

The stories of two rabbis provide a bridge between the Jewish communities in the South and South Africa, revealing parallel and intertwined experiences, and suggesting the differences and similarities between the two contexts. André Ungar and David Ben-Ami, both young foreign-born rabbis, were committed to social justice causes. Their rabbinical careers in South Africa and the South followed a similar path. Ungar spent two years in South Africa between 1955 and 1957. Ben-Ami replaced Charles Mantinband, a rabbi popular for his charm but not for his outspoken opposition to segregation, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, from August 1963 until February 1965. Aside from the close parallels between their experiences, Ungar and Ben-Ami's paths crossed. Ungar resurfaced at the protests in Birmingham, Alabama in May 1963, and again in Hattiesburg a year later as the town became a focal point of the 1964 Freedom Summer. Ungar was present in Ben-Ami's story, participating in an incidental role in a drama near identical to his own in South Africa.

Beyond highlighting broad similarities between Jewish responses to apartheid and segregation, David Ben-Ami and André Ungar's experience suggests a tentative model for civil rights activism among rabbis in the South and South Africa. Their stories are a springboard to explore the factors that shaped the responses of Southern and South African rabbis to apartheid and segregation. This section focuses on frontier rabbis, those who served the scattered and isolated Jewish communities dotted

across the South and South Africa. The nature and extent of rabbinical involvement will be traced to a set of underlying conditions specific to frontier pulpits, and it will be argued that a common set of factors limited, sometimes dictated, and often inhibited the civil rights options of frontier rabbis.¹ The examination of the varied responses in both contexts reveals broad schools of rabbinical behavior, ranging from that of the crusading outsiders, transient newcomers, and entrenched veterans. The clustering of common rabbinical responses across this loose spectrum suggests the differential exposure and impact of frontier conditions on their worldview, ambitions and options.

Pulpits in the South and South Africa, particularly outside the larger cities, offered few attractions to rabbis. Positions in small Southern towns were regarded as a “rabbinical graveyard.”² These were often poorly paid, isolated backwater postings that lacked prestige and opportunities for advancement, but that came with a taxing job description that could include the additional roles of Hebrew school teacher, prison chaplain, and itinerant rabbi in the case of the circuit rider. South African Reform pulpits were little more attractive for similar reasons. The salaries offered by South African temples paled next to that of their American counterparts.³ South Africa was distant from home, family and jobs, and its political situation off-putting.⁴

¹ The concept of frontier Jewish experience is raised in Shain and Gilman, *Jewries at the Frontier*.

² Balfour Brickner to Leon Feuer, February 19, 1963, folder 4, box 19, MS 34, Central Conference of American Rabbis Papers (hereafter CCAR), Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio (hereafter cited as AJA).

³ Rabbi Moses Cyrus Weiler complained of the financial strain of recruiting American trained rabbis: “All of our congregations are over-bonded and find it difficult to meet their budget because, in order to get Rabbis from America – and strictly between ourselves they are little more than mediocre – we have to pay a salary of £2,000. per annum, and even then we find it difficult to get them.” Moses Weiler to Lily Montagu, December 15, 1950, folder 10, box D8, MS 16, World Union of Progressive Judaism Papers (hereafter WUPJ), AJA.

⁴ See Bertram Jacobs to W. Blumenthal (SA Union for Progressive Judaism), October 21, 1977, folder 13, box D8; Malcolm Stern to Maurice Silverman, September 21, 1976; Malcolm Stern to Victor

However, the frontier congregation had its own attractions and compensations, often providing stability, local prominence, freedom from hierarchy, and latitude for innovation and independence.⁵

Despite the difficulties of recruitment and retention experienced by many frontier communities, these congregations offered their rabbis enhanced status, although not necessarily increased leverage. Paradoxically, the scarcity and isolation of the rabbis magnified the role and power of the temple board. Sparsely represented frontier rabbis were scattered over large distances, making interaction and practical cooperation difficult. Moreover, the kind of rabbis that these congregations attracted often ensured that the temple board dominated the minister. Frontier rabbis were often those who had been unable to find success elsewhere, whether because of personality factors or lack of training, or men with few ambitions and even fewer prospects, content to settle into long-term service. Moses Cyrus Weiler, the Chief Minister of the South African Progressive Movement, thought that recruits to South African temples were often “little more than mediocre,” an evaluation shared by commentators on rabbis in the South.⁶ Rabbi Balfour Brickner of the Union of American Hebrew Congregation (UAHC) despaired at the number of Southern pulpits occupied by men with “mediocre skills or [who had] drifted from congregation to congregation throughout a tortured career.”⁷

Brasch, August 24, 1977; Malcolm Stern to Anthony Holz, November 29, 1976, Box G1; Report of the Southern African Union for Progressive Judaism (1959?), folder 10, box 8, MS 16, WUPJ.

⁵ See Hollace Ava Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas* (College Station, 1999), xiv; David Sherman quoted in the Transcript of proceedings of the 14th Conference of the World Union for Progressive Judaism, July 7, 1966, folder 5, box C2, MS 16, WUPJ.

⁶ Moses Weiler to Lily Montagu, December 15, 1950, folder 10, box D8, MS 16, WUPJ; see also Jacob Rader Marcus quoted in Weiner, *Jewish Stars in Texas*, xix.

⁷ Balfour Brickner to Leon Feuer, February 19, 1963, folder 4, box 19, MS 34, CCAR, AJA.

This imbalance of power between pulpit and pew hardly mattered prior to the civil rights struggle. Most congregations were satisfied so long as their rabbi performed his duties, calculating that his scarcity value outweighed his idiosyncrasies. The civil rights struggle altered this equation, producing acute sensitivity to the rabbi's political stance and simultaneously reducing his already limited leverage. Congregations concluded that it was better to go without a rabbi than to be stuck with one who was embarrassing and who generated anxiety and insecurity. The rabbi could be pressured by resignations as well as by withdrawal of financial support from the congregation. The prospect alone was often enough to inhibit a rabbi.⁸ This pliability in turn increased the dependence and vulnerability of frontier rabbis, a group that was already immobilized by the absence of alternative work prospects, low salaries, consequent reliance on a hard-earned pension typically payable by the congregation for future support, and long service. The position of the frontier rabbi was further weakened by his isolation, as physical distance placed him beyond the reach and protections of rabbinical associations and support organizations. Conversely, congregations were shielded by the principle of non-intervention. For example, the UAHC was restricted by a constitution that guaranteed congregational autonomy and prohibited interference in the affairs and management of individual congregations.⁹ Moreover, national Jewish organizations were often wary of inflaming their sensitive southern members. David Ben-Ami reproached these national Jewish organizations for abandoning Southern rabbis, leaving them to "stand utterly alone" while

⁸ Moses Landau of Cleveland, Mississippi explained why he preferred to steer clear of Jewish civil rights activists: "In dealing with such a problem I have to consider these people whose rabbi I am and who will most certainly resign if any action is taken by my side to make them more 'nervous'. Then I would have no congregation." Landau to Nussbaum, January 15, 1965, MS430, Box 2 folder 4, Perry Nussbaum Papers, AJA.

⁹ See Marc Lee Raphael, *Profiles in American Judaism* (San Francisco, 1984), 18.

convening “conferences where like-minded liberals pat each other on the back.”¹⁰

During the civil rights struggle these factors militated towards rabbinical passivity, as the imbalance of power enforced a dependent relationship between congregation and rabbi, and raised the cost of nonconformity.¹¹

In a few cases, this web of constraining features was counteracted, either wholly or partially by a set of liberating factors, specifically, financial independence, celebrity, youthfulness, mobility, and alternative job prospects. While these mitigating factors on their own did not propel rabbis to activism, they served as crucial preconditions that freed some rabbis, who were already inclined toward activism, to speak out. Not all rabbis who became involved in civil rights activities benefited from these buffers. Some, like Perry Nussbaum, the rabbi of Temple Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi, who engaged in activism despite the absence of these protections, suffered the consequences of the exposure of the frontier condition. Nussbaum’s example suggests the costs for those who chose to act despite the absence of liberating factors, in circumstances representative of the frontier norm.

¹⁰ Dave Fogel wrote to Ben-Ami that “You don’t have the right meal tickets.... today Hillel couldn’t get a job because he doesn’t belong to the union [the Central Conference of American Rabbis].” Fogel to Ben-Ami, December 23, 1964, Ben-Ami Papers, McCain Library and Archives, University of Southern Mississippi (hereafter USM); *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965.

¹¹ For example, Rabbi Martin Silverman of Congregation B’nai Israel in Monroe, Louisiana recognized that confronting his congregation on the race issue risked “all that [he] had built up” over his period of service. Silverman to Leon Feuer, September 10, 1963, folder 3, box 20, MS 34, CCAR.

Chapter Two

The Cost of Courage: Perry Nussbaum and the Consequences of Frontier Activism

In his career trajectory and temperament, Perry Nussbaum epitomized the frontier model, illustrating the constraining effect of frontier dynamics on rabbinical activism.¹ As a peripatetic mid-career rabbi with few prospects, burdened by a cantankerous personality and a series of pulpit failures, Nussbaum lacked mobility.² His relationship with his congregation was never easy. Thin-skinned and easily offended, Nussbaum's abrasive style and fondness for feuding alienated many potential supporters. His congregational skills did not help matters. By his own admission, he was a poor sermonizer.³ He lacked finesse, often adopting a blunt, confrontational approach in his private affairs, from the pulpit, and the lectern.

Inclined towards outspokenness, itself rare among rabbis in the South and South Africa, but constrained by his vulnerability, Nussbaum was initially reluctant to become involved in civil rights activities, and steered clear of significant

¹ For a full account of Nussbaum's troubled tenure see Gary Zola, "What Price Amos? Perry Nussbaum's Career in Jackson, Mississippi" in Mark Bauman and Berkley Kalin (eds.), *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s-1990s* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, 1997), 230-257.

² Before Jackson, Nussbaum served communities in Australia, Texas, Colorado, Kansas, Massachusetts, and Long Island. Perry Nussbaum to Murray Polner, February 27, 1976, folder 15, box 3, MS 88, Murray Polner Papers, AJA.

³ Nussbaum wrote, "[A]fter I had delivered what I thought was an exceptionally good sermon, the only comment of a visitor was, 'Hasn't he beautiful teeth!' Or when I thought I had been giving my Jackson congregation hell about our lack of support for civil rights, etc. my very dearest friend and family physician, a native of Georgia and until his lamentable death a year ago a very loyal Jew but a vicious racist, would shake my hand, congratulate me and say that I was wonderful – but continue to practice his racialism!" Perry Nussbaum to Murray Polner, folder 14, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers.

commitment.⁴ His reluctance partly stemmed from his belief that the bulk of his congregation was “indistinguishable in ideology” from other whites, “as racist as any non-Jew.”⁵ These racial attitudes were “not the by-product of antisemitism, but an honest conviction.”⁶ The local *Jackson State Times* concurred, approvingly noting in 1958 that “Today many a Jewish leader is part of the Southern resistance. Jackson’s Citizens Council, outstanding in south and Nation, points to them with pride.”⁷ His limited early forays confirmed his judgment, producing a backlash from his congregation, intended, to Nussbaum’s mind, to “cut me down to size.”⁸ Ideological incompatibility was at the core of this conflict, but the rabbi’s opponents harbored a diverse range of grievances.⁹ His political stance became the rallying point for his

⁴ Nussbaum reminisced, “I had always considered myself not only a liberal in theology but very much of a liberal in matters of social justice. I had not minced my words in my preaching or in positions that I took up North, but very quickly I could understand that if I were to accomplish my primary purpose, which was to do something about this congregation, that it wouldn’t come as easy as in other congregations far removed from the state of Mississippi. There would be realities that would have to be faced.” Transcript of Oral History Memoir of Rabbi Perry Nussbaum (Recording made at Rabbi Nussbaum’s study, Temple Beth Israel, Jackson, Mississippi) Thursday morning, August 5, 1965, folder 16, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers.

⁵ Nussbaum estimated that fewer than five of the city’s 150 Jewish families openly sympathized with the civil rights movement. “Third generation Jews are no different from Christians... We have our segregationists and integrationists. A closed society is a product of history. Not even the Prophets of Israel assumed history can be reshaped overnight.” Nussbaum quoted in Murray Polner, *Rabbi: The American Experience* (New York, 1977), 79-81.

⁶ “What our friends in the North do not fully appreciate is the fact that there is no difference between most of the Jews and their Christian neighbors in their attitudes towards the Negro... For these Jews desegregation represents not merely a school problem, but also a problem of mixing of races. The Jew, like his Christian neighbor, resents ‘Northern’ interference. The Southern Jew is a proud and independent man, suh!” Perry Nussbaum, “Pulpit in Mississippi Anyone?” *CCAR Journal*, 14, (June 1956): 3.

⁷ *Jackson State Times*, October 24, 1958.

⁸ Perry Nussbaum to Al Vorspan, October 29, 1958, MS430, Box 2 folder 6, Nussbaum Papers; see also Minutes of Meeting of the Temple Board, Jackson, Mississippi, Beth Israel Congregation, SC5585, AJA.

⁹ Nussbaum wrote to Charles Mantinband that the “personal attack on me was spearheaded by Sidney Rosenbaum of Bbrith – whom I had taken to task last Spring for having a Citizens Council Program; by Chas MCCowan whose son I wouldn’t confirm and shopped around in Christian churches last Fall when the Board raised his dues; by one or two others who have been trying to become “machers” but don’t have the substance to back up their pretension. The rest just went along – most regret their action – and I believe, gam zu, l’tovo, my friends will be on the alert from now on ... I came home from the CCAR considerably depressed about stories disseminated there that an element in your congregation was out to get rid of you...” Perry Nussbaum to Charles Mantinband, August 22, 1958, folder 3, box 1, Charles Mantinband Papers, AJA.

opponents. He expected that any further controversy would result in being given “walking papers by a drumhead courtmartial of my Board of Trustees.”¹⁰

This circumspection evolved into activism, prompted by events within Mississippi. The imprisonment of the first wave of freedom riders in 1961 pushed Nussbaum into the engagement that he had previously sought to avoid. The rabbi took on the responsibility for the jailed activists, but felt obliged to conceal this work from his congregation, fearing recriminations.¹¹ Prior to this point Nussbaum’s tenure was indistinguishable from that of other frontier rabbis, sympathetic to the goals of the civil rights movement but immobilized by the fear of sanctions from both inside and outside of his congregation. Rabbi Moses Landau of Cleveland, Mississippi typified this mindset, balking at Nussbaum’s requests for help in assisting freedom riders incarcerated in Parchman Penitentiary: “I am paid by my Congregation, and as long as I eat their bread I shall not do anything that might harm any member of my congregation without their consent.”¹²

Thereafter Nussbaum became a vocal proponent of tolerance and racial change in Jackson, allying himself with sympathetic liberal clergymen. This local public prominence produced an uneasy coexistence with his congregation. Nussbaum’s wife Arene, a native of Texas, shared the misgivings of the congregation about her husband’s activities. She, like many others had a “sincere conviction that Blacks were

¹⁰ Perry Nussbaum to Murray Polner, February 27, 1976, folder 15, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers.

¹¹ See Perry Nussbaum to the Rabbis of Mississippi, July 28, 1961, MS430, Box 1 folder 7, Nussbaum Papers.

¹² Moses Landau to Perry Nussbaum, August 3, 1961, MS430, folder 7, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

not ready for integration,” a belief rooted in “well founded private doubts (never in public, but only to her husband) about the path of racial integration.”¹³

As long as Mississippi remained the focus of national attention, Nussbaum was provided with some temporary measure of protection from his temple board. Such visibility, however, did not spare him from radical segregationists who bombed Temple Beth Israel and Nussbaum’s home in two separate incidents in 1967. The bombings undermined his already shaky relationship with the local Jewish community, inviting an “inevitable backlash from those racist and assimilated Baalhabteem [sic] here whose harassment and nitpicking [became] fierce.”¹⁴ Crucially, the incidents restored an imbalance of power to his relationship with the congregation. In the wake of bombings, the temple board tightened its hold over the rabbi, demanding a loyalty pledge from the president and vice-presidents “that they would resign rather than involve the congregation in any future racial crises.”¹⁵ The temple board was hostile, vindictively acting to “keep [the rabbi] under restraint.”¹⁶

Nussbaum was unhappily forced to wait out his contract, unpopular, frustrated, and fearful of the violence of white supremacists. His latter years in Jackson were spent haggling over his meager salary and pension with an

¹³ Nussbaum provided a list of reasons for his wife’s “disagreeing with my integration activities:

- a. insecurity about my tenure in Jackson
- b. a native of Texas
- c. A Welfare Department worker whose caseload was primarily Black
- d. A sincere conviction that Blacks were not ready for integration
- e. That Christian clergy stayed out in the early years.
- f. By the early 1960’s she mellowed.

Nussbaum to Polner, February 27, 1976, folder 15, box 3; notes written by Perry Nussbaum, folder 15, box 3; Nussbaum to Polner, November 22, 1976, folder 15, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers.

¹⁴ Perry Nussbaum to Max Nussbaum, October 23, 1968, MS430, Box 1 folder 4, Nussbaum Papers.

¹⁵ Perry Nussbaum to the President of the CCAR, September 19, 1968, MS430, Box 2 folder 6, Nussbaum Papers.

¹⁶ Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, June 5, 1969, MS430, Box 1 folder 4, Nussbaum Papers.

unsympathetic and domineering temple board, clutching on to the “tenuous degree of support” and vainly searching for a pulpit elsewhere.¹⁷ He had few allies and fewer prospects. The CCAR Placement Commission offered as an alternative “the worst of pulpits,” those rejected even by newly ordained rabbis. He did not want, nor could he afford “to sink ... away in a small, isolated town, at a salary less than I get here.”¹⁸ He felt abandoned and betrayed, resentful at the lack of recognition despite his persistence “in maintaining his concept of Judaism in a time and place which [had] contributed to being a persona non grata not only to several of his congregants, but to most of the congregations in the State, most of the Christian power structure as well; who persisted in keeping his congregation in the Union, [and who kept] B’nai B’rith lodges from flight from the national body....”¹⁹ Only in 1973, after 19 years at Temple Beth Israel, did an embittered Nussbaum leave Jackson.

By contrast, André Ungar, David Ben-Ami, and Charles Mantinband were exceptions to this model, benefiting from a variety of factors that provided a degree of latitude in their relationships with their congregations. The frontier pulpits that they served differentiate them from rabbis like Julian Feibelman in New Orleans and Jacob Rothschild in Atlanta. Feibelman and Rothschild benefited from the advantages of their location: a relatively temperate political environment, a large Jewish population, and opportunities for forming coalitions with like-minded liberals. These advantages were unavailable to frontier rabbis. Charles Mantinband’s position was bolstered,

¹⁷ See Perry Nussbaum to Leon Cohen, September 2, 1970; Morris Graff to Perry Nussbaum, March 17, 1969; Perry Nussbaum to Morris Graff, February 19, 1969; Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, May 6, 1968, Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, October 24, 1971; Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, October 20, 1971; Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, May 18, 1972, all MS430, Box 1 folder 4, Nussbaum Papers.

¹⁸ Perry Nussbaum to Max Nussbaum, October 23, 1968, MS430, Box 1 folder 4, Nussbaum Papers.

¹⁹ Nussbaum recalled later that “For years, there wasn’t a Board of Trustees meeting which didn’t provoke an argument and bad feelings because I would not let them resign from the UAHC.” Polner,

amongst others, by his celebrity, itself a byproduct of his activism, as well as by his relative financial security. Transient rabbis, new to the South and South Africa, felt free of the responsibilities that narrowed the options available to their anchored colleagues. Exemplars of the latter, André Ungar and David Ben-Ami were in some ways freedom rabbis, midway between frontier rabbis and the Jewish freedom riders who flocked to the South in the 1960s. They intentionally chose pulpits on the frontline, seeking to apply the lessons of the prophetic tradition to the civil rights scene while simultaneously fulfilling personal ambition. Mantinband, Nussbaum, and others in the South were driven by similar motivations, but disagreed with the newcomers over the appropriate forms that activism should take. The frontier experience also shaped preferred methods of activism. Whereas Mantinband and Nussbaum, like many other southern liberals, trusted mediation over marching, Ungar joined Rabbinical Assembly delegations to protest in Birmingham in 1963 and Hattiesburg in 1964. The roots of Ungar's later activism can be traced to his time in South Africa.

Rabbi, 87. See also Perry Nussbaum to Stanley Chyet, February 20, 1967; Perry Nussbaum to Charles Mantinband, April 17, 1964, MS430, Box 1 folder 4, Nussbaum Papers.

Chapter Three

André Ungar in South Africa

Born in Hungary but trained in London, André Ungar took up the pulpit of Temple Israel in the city of Port Elizabeth in January 1955 at the age of 25. The newly established Reform congregation, one of only four in Southern Africa, had a membership of over three hundred.¹ The Jewish community, comprised of storekeepers, businessmen, and professionals, was solidly middle class. Most of Port Elizabeth's 1,000 Jewish families were nominally Orthodox, observant of tradition but acculturated. As elsewhere in South Africa, the Progressive movement was a newcomer, regarded with suspicion by the dominant Orthodox leadership.

Ungar arrived at a key moment in South African history. The National Party (NP), first elected in 1948 and thereafter in every election until 1994, was consolidating its hold on power. The government was gradually introducing new racial policies, supplementing the preexisting, largely unlegislated social, economic and cultural segregation with expansive and rigid race laws. Legislation central to the apartheid system was first applied and enforced during the early 1950s. In 1956 the sleepy coastal city of Port Elizabeth was introducing the measures stipulated by the Group Areas Act, entailing a transfer of non-white residents out of areas allocated to whites. Apartheid issues had little immediate and practical impact on South African Jews in the 1950s, entailing minimal inconvenience to a group that was regarded as white.

Yet the Jewish community had a diffident relationship with the government. Many were troubled by memories of the 1930s and early 1940s, when Afrikaner nationalist politicians used antisemitic rhetoric freely. The National Party had introduced the “Jewish Question” into political debate in the 1930s, railing against the undesirability of Jewish immigration and negative Jewish influence on South African society. Antisemitism was seized upon by a ragtag assortment of fascistic Afrikaner shirt organizations, many allied or associated with the National Party. Although by the late 1940s NP leader Daniel Malan had dissociated the party from antisemitism, promising white solidarity, the rapprochement between the ruling party and the South African Jewish community was slow and unsteady. Fears persisted throughout the 1950s, particularly as the NP itself seemed divided over the correct course to pursue in its relationship with the Jewish community. While Malan spoke in conciliatory terms, he was surrounded by a coterie of senior leaders who had openly expressed their Nazi sympathies a decade before. These leaders occasionally lapsed into old antisemitic habits, reawakening dormant insecurities. Membership of the Transvaal branch of the National Party remained closed to Jews until 1952.² The South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the community’s official representative body, was equally uncertain of the National Party’s long-term intentions.³ This produced an acute sensitivity to public perceptions of the community. That the NP periodically scolded South African Jewry for its apparent over-representation in opposition ranks, particularly in the trade union movement, the Communist Party and in opposition

¹ Temple membership comprised 122 men, 118 women, and 75 children. See A. Ungar immigration papers, PIO, vol. 1583, ref. 69693E/1, South African Archives, Cape Town Depot.

² For the shifts in National Party policy towards the Jews see Milton Shain, *The Roots of Anti-Semitism in South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1994), 142-153 and Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 96-136.

³ The South African Jewish Board of Deputies serves as the community’s interlocutor with the government and defends the interests of South African Jewry.

benches in parliament, did nothing to ease these concerns. The Board of Deputies frowned on actions that confirmed these negative perceptions, preferring to encourage conciliation with the government. This was buttressed by a policy of strict political neutrality.⁴

Members of the broader Jewish community certainly shared the Board's lingering sense of unease, disapproving of actions that could potentially antagonize the government. However, it would be mistaken to suggest that insecurity and caution concealed a widely shared preference for racial equality. In their voting patterns and political associations most Jews mirrored the behavior of their white, middle-class English-speaking peers.⁵ While mainstream Jewish political opinion ranged across a spectrum from conservative support of the status quo to liberal humanitarianism, this majority found the idea of surrendering the privileges of race in pursuit of a more equitable society to be distinctly unappealing, never mind unthinkable. The highly visible Jewish minority that supported this departure had a fraught relationship with the community, poisoned as much by political polarity as by a mutually shared disdain. The disproportionate part played by this radical clique in the ranks of the Communist Party, trade union movement and African National Congress was the cause of much dismay and embarrassment.⁶

⁴ For the relationship of the Board of Deputies with the National Party government see Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 206-234.

⁵ See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 301-304.

⁶ See Joshua Lazerson, *Against the Tide: Whites in the Struggle Against Apartheid* (Cape Town, 1994), 90-91; Franklin Hugh Adler, "South African Jews and Apartheid," *Patterns of Prejudice*, 34 (:4) (2000): 23-36. For analysis of Jewish participation in radical leftwing opposition see Mark Israel and Simon Adams, "'That spells trouble': Jews and the Communist Party of South Africa," *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26 (:1) (2000): 145-163; James T Campbell, "Beyond the Pale: Jewish Immigration and the South African Left" and Gideon Shimoni, "Accounting for Jewish Radicals in Apartheid South Africa," both in Milton Shain and Richard Mendelsohn (eds.), *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience* (Johannesburg, 2002).

At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the doctrinaire approach of the NP won little enthusiastic support. An obscure minority was persistent, and consistently unsuccessful, in its attempts to persuade other Jews to join the NP. Most Jews were attracted neither by the National Party's fixation on the color question, nor by its appeal to the interests of working class Afrikaans voters. Sizeable Jewish support for the NP only emerged in the 1970s in response to changes in the party, the waning of memories of its erstwhile antisemitism (although the party won most of its support from older Jewish voters), a shift in the political landscape and South Africa's burgeoning relationship with Israel.⁷ Thus in the 1950s, the overwhelming majority of Jews supported the centrist United Party, their traditional party of preference. Although the race policies of the United Party were less rigid and exacting than those of the governing National Party, it supported continued racial segregation and was pushed rightwards by the latter's extremism. The inclusive, catch-all nature of the party meant that its Jewish supporters held a broad spectrum of political views, ranging from liberal to conservative on race matters. While a small parliamentary alternative advocated the removal of the system of racial privileges, only a minority of the white electorate, Jews included, gave it support.⁸

André Ungar, who was sympathetic towards the position of this liberal minority, came to Temple Israel committed to making social justice the focus of his ministry. For someone brought up in a Modern Orthodox household and exposed at

⁷ Interpretations of the South similarly emphasize a division between old time Jews and newer arrivals, with the former having a greater tendency to accept and sometimes support segregation. See Henry Lever, "The Jewish Voter in South Africa," *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 2 (:2) (1979): 432-433.

⁸ For the political behavior of South African Jews see Harry Schwarz, "Jewish Modes of Opposition," *Jewish Affairs*, 52 (:1) (1997): 27-30; Milton Shain and Sally Frankental, "'Community with a Conscience': Myth or Reality" in G. Abramson, ed., *Modern Jewish Mythologies* (Detroit, 1999), 57-67; Gideon Shimoni, "South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis," *American Jewish Year Book*, 8 (1988): 3-59.

close quarters to virulent racism, the progressive movement offered a socially relevant alternative to traditional Judaism. Ungar combined his doctoral studies in modern philosophy in London with rabbinical training, first at the Orthodox Jew's College and later under Leo Baeck and Harold Reinhart. Baeck, a symbol of loyalty to his calling and spiritual resistance to oppression, was a distinguished role model for an activist rabbi. Baeck's brand of Progressive Judaism sought to harmonize social engagement with Jewish teachings, looking to the prophets and early rabbinical reformers as appropriate sources for inspiration. As with David Ben-Ami a decade later, Progressive Judaism's social agenda resonated with Ungar's personal encounter with antisemitism. Ungar, who escaped the Holocaust by living on false papers in Budapest, was "haunted" by his wartime experience.⁹ Progressive Judaism incorporated the lessons of the Holocaust into the framework of prophetic Judaism. The Holocaust had altered thinking about the role of bystanders. For Ungar, and other progressive rabbis trained in the prophetic tradition after the war, to be a passive spectator to injustice was equivalent to acquiescence in evil. In his eyes, the rabbi's responsibilities extended beyond his congregation to the pursuit of justice for all.

Newly ordained and in search of a position, Ungar was offered the pulpit of Temple Israel in Port Elizabeth. Although not a prestigious post, it was well remunerated and a first step on the rabbinical ladder. The job was probably earmarked for Ungar by Leo Baeck, president of the World Union for Progressive Judaism. Ungar was a member of the organization's governing body, serving as liaison officer for the youth section. A posting of this kind was in line with its goals of spreading Progressive Judaism abroad. South Africa was seen as a receptive new frontier for

⁹ Unpublished letter from André Ungar to press (n.d.), Box 800, Public Relations Files, SAJBD.

expansion.¹⁰ Moreover, for Ungar, South Africa presented the challenge and opportunity of practical fulfillment of the ideals of prophetic Judaism. Despite the misgivings of his family, by then living in Israel, and the apprehensions of his wife, Ungar accepted the pulpit fully aware, and perhaps relishing, the “dangers” of such a posting.¹¹

Ungar revealed these inspirations and intentions at his induction in Port Elizabeth.¹² Moses Cyrus Weiler, the Chief Minister of the Progressive movement in South Africa, probably sensing the spirit of the new arrival, warned Ungar of the necessity of restraint in dealing with sensitive political issues. Sol Marcus, the president of the temple, concurred and stressed the “importance of caution and experience for newcomers in finding their place in a new country.” Ungar’s reply that his “ultimate loyalty is to no one else than God and Israel as an organic whole.... The Rabbi is indeed the Rabbi of one particular congregation, but above all he is a Rabbi of the Jewish people,” should have forewarned his congregation of the strength of his convictions, the independence of his thinking, and his resistance to advice and criticism. Above all, André Ungar regarded it as his “task to bring to the [congregation’s] notice in no uncertain terms the concrete implications of our ethical implications of apartheid racial policies for Jews in South Africa.”¹³

¹⁰ See Michael Meyer, *Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism* (Oxford, 1988), 340-342.

¹¹ André Ungar to author, June 6, 2002.

¹² Ungar’s career in South Africa is discussed in some detail in Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience, 1910-1967*, 278-280.

¹³ Ungar defended his engagement with South Africa’s racial problems by arguing that he was “not a politician and the policies of anyone are not my business as such. But, on the other hand, I am a minister of religion and it is my duty to take what I consider a moral approach to all actions that concern the life and welfare of my people. It is not that they [the ruling party] are Nationalists that worries me. But in their policies, I consider there have been certain actions the ethical principles of which all religions, not only mine, cannot accept. I consider it the duty of all men of faith, especially ministries of religion, to fight against prejudice, [and] oppression men’s inhumanity to man wherever they are. Primarily it is the problems of the society in which he lives that a religious man must grapple,

The rabbi's early attempts to discuss the race issue in private were warily rebuffed: "*That ... is a lifetime's study. You must be born there to understand it. Foreigners can know nothing about it. Besides, it is an unsavory topic, a communist thing to worry about [italics in original].*"¹⁴ Making little headway in personal discussions, Ungar decided to bring his views before his congregation in a sermon titled "Apartheid Three Thousand Years Ago" on Passover eve in 1955. Ungar's pointed comparison of the treatment of Jews in biblical Egypt with contemporary attitudes towards blacks aroused "pained consternation" from his congregants, who pleaded that he in future "preach us *religion*, not politics [italics in original]."¹⁵

Initially forgiving of what they regarded as an isolated political sermon, the temple board and membership were dismayed by his return to the race issue in a sermon preached a few weeks later. Responding to an article in a local newspaper detailing the denial of a passport for a black student to study in America, Ungar ridiculed the government from his pulpit as "arrogantly puffed up little men [who acted] in heartless stupidity," perpetrating "a greater tragedy than the biblical episode of Moses being denied entry into the Promised Land." Ungar concluded his sermon by provocatively offering prayers on behalf of his congregation "for all who suffer in their innocence."¹⁶ Many temple members were furious. Some were outraged at the presumptuousness of a newcomer's meddling in a local political issue, others upset by the implied criticism of Ungar's message and his disregard for their warnings, and

but his moral responsibilities reaches [sic] beyond geographical confines." This last statement would have unwitting relevance to his later civil rights activities in the South. Quoted in *Eastern Province Herald*, December 10, 1956; see also André Ungar, "My Expulsion from South Africa," *The Reconstructionist*, March 18, 1960: 27.

¹⁴ Quoted in Ungar, "My Expulsion from South Africa," 25.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*: 28.

most disturbed by his reckless fixation on an unpopular racial theme. This widely felt consternation was exacerbated by the publicity that the sermon generated in the local and national press, raising the fear that its sentiments would be understood to be representative of member, and wider community, opinion. Particularly worrying was the attention that the Afrikaans press gave to the story.¹⁷

Rabbi Ungar had become an “acute source of embarrassment” to the Jewish community, discussed in agitated correspondence between concerned regional representatives and the national head office of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.¹⁸ Statements of this kind were anathema at a time when the Board sought stability in its relationship with the ruling party. The government would be unlikely to differentiate between the views of a rabbi and those of the broader community, potentially confirming its association of Jews with the liberal parliamentary, and radical extra-parliamentary opposition. Ungar claimed to speak in the name of Jewish tradition and urged the Jewish community to take a collective stand against apartheid. Hostile statements from a rabbi, seen as a community leader, risked undermining various countervailing efforts to portray South African Jews as loyal white citizens. The South African Union of Progressive Judaism was also concerned by the incident. J. Heilbron, the President of the Union, thought it necessary to issue a stern warning:

I do deplore the words you are reported to have used to describe the members of our Government, men with outstanding careers behind them, and men who have been appointed to act as this country’s leaders and spokesmen.

¹⁶ *Eastern Province Herald*, July 30, 1955.

¹⁷ See, for example, *Transvaler*, November 15, 1956; *Oosterlig*, December 11, 1956.

You must realize, Dr. Ungar, that all men do not think alike, and by making use of such unfortunate expressions in your Sermon, you are doing no good to anybody or to anything, least of all to the cause which you obviously have so much to heart....you are new to our country, cannot possibly in the short time you have been here fully understand all the political problems with which we have to deal in South Africa. I would beg of you, therefore, to avoid making political speeches that can do infinite harm not only to yourself as a spiritual leader, but also to the general Jewish community...

Very friendly relations indeed exist between the South African Government and the Jewish Community in this country. We want to keep it that way for as long as possible. Whilst you are fully entitled to disagree with Government policy, there can be no excuse for personal abuse.¹⁹

For Heilbron and the Board of Deputies, the demands of the prophetic past were no match for the demands of the pragmatic present. The priorities of the Jewish community, rooted in concerns about safety, acceptance in white society, and the preservation of what was regarded by some as a tenuous status quo, conflicted with the ambitions and convictions of an outsider rabbi. Ungar was seemingly insensitive to these local priorities, later in a similar vein calling for all Jews to leave South Africa, failing that, to support black opposition to the government in the expectation of an eventual dividend. Although the controversy gradually abated and tempers cooled, the rabbi and his congregation thereafter coexisted in an uneasy truce.²⁰

¹⁸ See Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism*, 279; see also Gus Saron to A.M. Spira, August 1, 1955, Box 840, Port Elizabeth Correspondence, South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archive, Johannesburg (hereafter cited as SAJBD).

¹⁹ J. Heilbron to André Ungar, August 12, 1955, Box 800, Public Relations Files, SAJBD.

²⁰ Ungar, "My Expulsion from South Africa," 28; André Ungar, "Rabbi in Three Worlds," *Present Tense*, July 1975: 15.

Instead of serving to subdue the rabbi, the congregation's shrill complaints and demands backfired, spurring an increasingly headstrong Ungar to extend and deepen his involvement in local racial matters. Ungar's commitment to social justice assumed a public form. He was elected to the regional executive committee of the South African Institute for Race Relations, an outspoken liberal organization probably regarded as politically radical by some in his congregation. Ungar also became involved in fighting the local implementation of the Group Areas Act by joining the interracial Group Areas Action Committee. His public statements in this latter role brought further press attention and controversy. Speaking at a public meeting in November 1956, Ungar compared his own experience of Nazi ghettoization in Hungary to the relocation of communities from their homes into segregated suburbs. Openly chastising the local Jewish community for its passivity, Ungar warned that Jews were shortsighted and foolish if they ignored the National Party's core "basic identity of both anti-Jewish and anti-black racialism." Ungar next condemned the Group Areas Act as a "despicable evil," admonishing his audience, and all South African Jews, that "Hitler was not defeated [as] his spirit was marching triumphantly" across South Africa.²¹

Statements of this kind reinforced the Board's view that the rabbi was reckless and irresponsible, drawing attention to the Jewish community at a time when it was better for it to be inconspicuous. Ungar was seen to be playing a dangerous game, tempting fate by riling politicians averse to reminders of their shady past connections. Yet beyond reprimands, cautions, and pleas, the community was almost powerless to

rein in their rabbi. Ungar was unmoved by the appeals of his critics. The imagined concerns of an “accepted, respected and pigmentocratically privileged” community paled next to the reality of daily black suffering.²² To be swayed by the pressure for silence would be the equivalent of complicity. The prophetic tradition demanded that he stand up for an unpopular but just cause. It also provided a salve for the stinging rebukes, and encouragement to remain steadfast when facing an obdurate congregation. For were not the biblical prophets, wrote Ungar in the *Temple Israel Bulletin*, because of

the partisan, and apparently revolutionary nature of their teachings, the focal points of heated controversy, more often than not, exposed to extreme unpopularity. . . . They had something definite to say, and they said it even though some people raised their eyebrows in shocked horror at their outspokenness. . . . So much for any outward resemblance there may be between the zealous prophets of old and some of the fearlessly enthusiastic champions of Progressive Judaism in the contemporary world.²³

The temple board exerted little leverage over their rabbi. Its weakness was probably compounded by the inexperience of board members. Ungar was the congregation’s first rabbi; the Temple had only been founded in 1951. The board members were faced with an unprecedented situation made more difficult by the ineffectiveness of the standard constraints on a frontier rabbi’s behavior. Long service could create a web of understanding and dependency between a rabbi and his

²¹ Ungar, “My Expulsion from South Africa,” :23; see also Port Elizabeth *Evening Post*, November 7, 1956.

²² André Ungar., “The Abdication of a Community,” *Africa South*, 3 (:1) (October-December 1958): 31.

congregation. Over time a rabbi was likely to win the respect of his congregation and even of the broader community. Time together was also likely to heighten the rabbi's sense of responsibility to his congregation, creating an awareness and sensitivity to local concerns and priorities. Conversely, the congregation were likely to tolerate the idiosyncrasies of a long serving rabbi for longer, whether his controversial political stances or perceived personal and rabbinical failings. Unlike established ministers in frontier pulpits, Ungar's brief tenure ensured that these links of mutual dependency were frail. It also meant that the usual considerations of job and pension security played a lesser role in his thinking, particularly as he was employed on a short contract. Moreover, unlike most other rabbis on the frontier, Ungar's qualifications, coupled with his youth, ensured a high degree of mobility. Even firing the rabbi was problematic, risking embarrassment and stigma, potentially making recruitment of future rabbis difficult. Barring dismissal before the natural conclusion of Ungar's contract, the congregation was left with few ways to control their rabbi's behavior.

Ungar's increasing involvement in opposition to apartheid coincided with and contributed to a deteriorating relationship with his own congregation. Although the rabbi toned down the political content of his sermons, he began needling his congregants with pointed political commentary in the *Temple Israel Bulletin*.²⁴ Sometimes his approach was blunt. For example, he lashed out at the Port Elizabeth Jewry's "bundu backwoodsmanship of intolerance and prejudice."²⁵ Temple Israel members began to believe that Ungar was neglecting his pastoral duties by devoting more time to his social justice interests than to his rabbinical responsibilities. A

²³ *Temple Israel Bulletin*, July 1956.

²⁴ See *Temple Israel Bulletin*, May, July, September, and November 1956; Memorandum from the Secretary of the Eastern Province Committee to the National Secretary, ICC 25, September 1, 1955, Box 800, Public Relations Files, SAJBD.

member of Temple Israel recalled that Ungar was “more in the [black] townships surrounding Port Elizabeth, than at shul. When you needed him – he wasn’t there.”²⁶ His self-described “hotheaded” temperament and provocative personality may have also estranged the rabbi from his congregation.²⁷ They were easily upset by the criticism of outsiders (particularly so given Ungar’s youth), and intolerant of those regarded as self-righteous meddlers in South Africa’s problems. While the majority of his community was willing to forgive what Ungar later termed his “pulpit naughtiness,” most are likely to have privately disapproved of his breaching of racial taboos. According to his own account, temple members found his interracial friendships, invitations to black friends to drop in at his home, and his visits to the black townships, unacceptable.²⁸ That these friends included political activists such as Dennis Brutus and Govan Mbeki, both later imprisoned on Robben Island, only made matters worse. In response the community stepped up pressure on their rabbi through a “barrage of telephone calls, personal visits, emergency meetings” and “threats, reproofs, [and] anonymous letters.”²⁹ Ungar became impervious to his congregation’s demands. He realized that he had reached a stalemate and probably sensed the approaching end to his tenure. He was perhaps also taunting his members with his provocative and public interracial contacts. This combination of an outspoken stance on racial matters and private friendships across the race line produced an open confrontation with the Temple Sisterhood Committee. Ungar was censured by the committee, which disapprovingly noted with “grave concern” that the rabbi had holidayed with two black companions, seeking assurances that “such a thing would

²⁵ *Temple Israel Bulletin*, July 1956.

²⁶ Roz Hirsch to author, May 9, 2002.

²⁷ André Ungar, “Silent Guests,” *AJA Quarterly*, 3 (March 1957): 19.

²⁸ *Ibid.*: 28-29.

²⁹ *Ibid.*: 22-23.

not reoccur.”³⁰ The congregation was “on the whole upset, afraid, at times outraged, generally icily unsympathetic” towards their own spiritual leader.³¹

In October 1956, barely a year and a half after assuming his first rabbinical position, André Ungar informed his temple board of his acceptance of an offer for the more modestly paying position of rabbi at the Settlement Synagogue in London’s East End. Ungar opted to leave, although he agreed to delay his departure until January 1957 so that Temple Israel could find a replacement, because he was “beginning to feel that we had reached an impasse,” recognizing that with “all the amiability in the world, Congregation and Rabbi cannot remain wed unless there is a basic acceptance of common principles.” At Temple Israel “that substantial agreement which is the foundation of serving a congregation was lacking.”³² Although his combustible interactions with the temple board and strained relationship with his congregation largely dictated his decision, other factors were likely involved as well. There were few prospects for a Reform rabbi in South Africa, a relative backwater of the Progressive movement. Port Elizabeth was a small and unsophisticated city with an “arid cultural scene,” an uninspiring first posting for a highly educated and cosmopolitan minister.³³ Ungar had a restless personality, moving from his next two pulpits in quick succession.

Although his congregation may have been pleased to see him depart, the government, probably unaware of his announced resignation, was even more determined that he leave South Africa. In December 1956, a month before his

³⁰ One of these companions was Govan Mbeki, father of current South African President Thabo Mbeki.

³¹ Ungar, “The Abdication of a Community,”: 33.

³² Ungar, “My Expulsion from South Africa,”: 23.

³³ *Temple Israel Bulletin*, May 1956.

scheduled departure and days after arrests nationwide of 156 anti-apartheid activists who were charged with treason, the government revoked Ungar's temporary residence permit.³⁴ The national press trumpeted him as "virtually deported."³⁵ While Ungar regarded this unexpected order for his departure as a "compliment" to his "modest efforts", becoming the first rabbi to be "expelled" from South Africa, his congregation and the Board of Deputies saw things differently. Ungar's earlier resignation proved to be a relief for his congregation, absolving them of their obligation to defend their rabbi. Most were not "unpleased when he had to leave."³⁶ The pattern of the reactions from Port Elizabeth Jewry to Ungar's departure presaged the nature of later South African Jewish responses to apartheid.

The national Jewish press dealt with the Ungar affair in what was to become characteristic of its later coverage of Jewish dissidence in racial matters, opting for either circumspection or avoidance. The *South African Jewish Chronicle* shunned the controversy entirely, limiting its comments to a cryptic editorial about the "Dilemma of the Jewish Rabbi." The editorial avoided naming Ungar, vaguely proclaiming that rabbis must "preserve the relevance of Judaism," but steer clear of "identifying the lay community with every rabbinical assessment."³⁷ The *South African Jewish Times* defended Ungar's right to freedom of the pulpit, although it castigated him for the

³⁴ Ungar was awoken on the morning of the arrests by an anxious congregant who was relieved to discover that the rabbi was not among those arrested. The government later justified its decision to expel Ungar by referring to the rabbi's political activities: "Rabbi Ungar addressed political meetings denouncing the South African Government's racial policies in intemperate language, he referred to 'the shadow of the Swastika marching across the Free State' ... he associated with organizations with Leftwing [and 'pinkish'] tendencies, and members of his own flock publicly attacked him in the press as a 'non-desirable visitor to South Africa' and described his utterances as 'irresponsible and undignified.'" Letter from Union of South Africa Department of External Affairs, State Information Office to Fritz Flesch, January 14, 1958, Fritz Flesch Papers, Detroit Public Library.

³⁵ *Evening Post*, December 10, 1956.

³⁶ Roz Hirsch to author, May 9, 2002.

³⁷ *South African Jewish Chronicle*, 28 December 1956.

“little discretion in the way he used it” and his “intemperate statements.”³⁸ The Board of Deputies’ response was derived from its policy of assuming neutrality in political matters it regarded as not directly affecting the Jewish community. Ungar, the Board argued, “went on to the political platform and must therefore bear the consequences as an individual.”³⁹ He had spoken “entirely as an individual – neither for his congregation nor for South African Jewry as a whole.” Jews, the Board proclaimed repeatedly, held a spectrum of political opinions, “in common with other sections of the South African people.”⁴⁰ Not content with this declaration of dissociation, one member of the Board of deputies later made his case against Ungar in *Jewish Affairs*, the organization’s official publication:

it is [not] true that Judaism imposes upon its adherents opposition to Apartheid as such. Judaism enjoins consideration and justice for all people, assistance to the sick, the poor and the underprivileged, facilities for all people to live their lives in peace. This writer, at least, fails to see any reason why these desiderata cannot be achieved within the framework of the social separation that has been traditional in South Africa since even before the Union [of South Africa] began.⁴¹

The article suggests the range of acceptable attitudes on racial matters within mainstream Jewish opinion, a spectrum that stretched from liberal humanitarianism

³⁸ Rabbi Dr Leslie Edgar shared this view of his colleague and former pupil: “Rabbi Andre Ungar is certainly a man of considerable ability. He is keenly concerned with the impact of Judaism on the social problems of our time, especially the racial problem, and expresses his views most forthrightly... Personally I think he tends to state his views in rather extreme ways.” Rabbi Dr Leslie I Edgar to Jacob Marcus, November 13, 1958, folder 13, box 18, MS 34, CCAR; *South African Jewish Times*, December 14, 1956.

³⁹ Memorandum from J.M. Rich to National Executive Committee, December 14, 1956, Public Relations Files, Box 509, SAJBD.

⁴⁰ *Evening Post*, December 14, 1956.

(exemplified by Helen Suzman in parliament) to endorsement of the racial status quo. It can also be interpreted as an attempt to limit the potential political consequences of Ungar's call for a collective Jewish stand against apartheid. Its timing is significant in that it was published during the Treason Trial at which Jewish radicals were disproportionately represented among the white defendants.⁴² While the Board of Deputies and Jewish press studiously avoided making this connection known, all but avoiding a major national event, criticism of Ungar's lesser antics offered the means to obliquely disassociate the community from actions hostile to the government that might also enflame passions against the Jewish minority.

Ungar himself interpreted the termination of his residence permit as an act intended to intimidate the South African Jewish establishment and thus to bully the insecure community into "if not active conformity, then at least into a fearsome silence."⁴³ Ungar, returning to and expanding on this fear-centered explanation for Jewish behavior in his later writing, employed themes and tropes instantly recognizable to anyone familiar with historical writing about Southern Jewry and segregation. South African Jews were "frustrated, terrified and unhappy," a suspect minority caught in the middle of an enveloping struggle between blacks and whites.⁴⁴ In its current state, the Jewish community concealed its "fearfully hushed up nightmare" of potential antisemitism and racial exclusion, hiding a "nervous

⁴¹ See Anonymous, "Points of View," *Jewish Affairs*, (January 1959): 21-22.

⁴² The treason trial of the 156 activists, 14 of whom were Jewish, dragged on until March 1961. All were acquitted, although most were later re-arrested. See David Saks, "The Jewish Accused at the South African Treason Trial" *Jewish Affairs*, Autumn 1997.

⁴³ The South African Jewish Board of Deputies disavowed Ungar's claim. See letter by André Ungar, *Evening Post*, December 17, 1956; also *Evening Post*, December 10, 1956; *Evening Post*, December 14, 1956.

⁴⁴ André Ungar, "'As the Children of Ethiopians...'" (An Essay on Jews and Judaism in South Africa)," *Conservative Judaism*, 13 (:1,) (1958): 1.

apprehension” that was revealed only in a “tone of nervousness.”⁴⁵ Jews were “uncomfortably near the [racial] fence to feel really secure.”⁴⁶ While the racial divide was currently positioned so as to accommodate Jews as whites, it could easily be moved, ejecting Jews from their privileged perch. Ungar was suggesting that Jews would never gain full acceptance as whites in a society structured by race: their racial in-betweenness would only be eliminated in the egalitarian society promised by the opponents of apartheid. Jews, Ungar warned, were already victims of social antisemitism and coerced conformity.⁴⁷ Echoing the calls of Jewish defense agencies active in the South, Ungar cautioned that passivity and acquiescence would win only a temporary respite: “How long before the intrinsic disruptiveness of racialism begins to weed out the less desirable from within the light-skinned fold?”

His admonition that the Jews would be “most vulnerable” when white supremacists “follow out the essential logic of their position,” replicated countless warnings made to Southern Jews by Anti-Defamation League and American Jewish Committee officials.⁴⁸ Ungar and the defense agencies were articulating what John Higham has termed the theory of the unitary character of prejudice. This paradigm, dominant in the 1950s and 1960s, was rooted in a psychological explanation for racism. According to this theory, racists, no matter their preferred target, shared a

⁴⁵ André Ungar, “Silent Guests,” *AJA Quarterly*, 3 (:1) (March 1957): 10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*: 14.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*: 14.

⁴⁸ Ungar continued, “The mechanics of racial mentality work in such a way as to endanger anyone who does not belong to the innermost core of the herrenvolk...it is purely a matter of time before the edge of discrimination is turned against sections which at the moment are tolerated.” Ungar, “Silent Guests,”: 19; Ungar, “The Abdication of a Community”: 35. See also John Higham, *Send These to Me: Immigrants in Urban America* (Baltimore, 1984), 154-155; Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice* (New York, 1997); Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind* (New York, 1998).

“generic need to hate.” By implication, bigots would shift their negative attentions to new groups once a particular hatred was sated or a target disappeared.⁴⁹

Yet, unlike commentators on Southern Jewry, Ungar was ultimately unsympathetic and accusing. Whereas observers from the defense organizations and historians such as Clive Webb, Leonard Dinnerstein and Mark Bauman have pointed to the “innate sympathy” of Southern Jews to the civil rights struggle, Ungar’s judgment about the political and racial sympathies of the South African Jewish community was damning. For all their fears and vulnerabilities, South African Jews were “wholly and beyond redemption part of White South Africa, sharing its privileges, interests and prejudices.”⁵⁰

Not all Jews in Port Elizabeth agreed with Ungar’s claim that the government was attempting to intimidate the community. Many were just pleased to see Ungar depart. His departure prompted an outpouring of bitterness and barely concealed gloating in the press. While the vitriol vented in the pages of the local newspapers may not have been representative of Port Elizabeth Jewry, the sheer volume of correspondence hostile to Ungar suggests that he had won few supporters in the wider community. Although letters defending Ungar did appear in the press, much of this

⁴⁹ See Higham, *Send Tese to Me*, 153-155.

⁵⁰ Driven by bitter memories of his experience in Port Elizabeth, Ungar later wrote that South African Jews were guilty of “deliberately throwing away – the living heart of the essence of Judaism.” “In vain would one say that Jewish historical experience and Jewish religious concepts make it impossible for the Jew to subscribe to racial oppression. Some accept it *de facto*, many also *de jure*. The Jew in South Africa is wholly and beyond redemption part of White South Africa, sharing its privileges, interests and prejudices.” South African Jews were an example of the moral “abdication of a community,” guilty of “full connivance” with the Government and “betrayal” of their “theological and ethical heritage.” Speaking in Miami in 1968, Ungar lambasted South African Jews who “benefit from the racial hell of South Africa ... [the racial situation in South Africa] makes Mississippi look like a Sunday school picnic... South African Jews are squirming ...and are embarrassed, but the vast majority like what is going on.” See Ungar, “As the Children of Ethiopians...”: 16; André Ungar, “What’s Ahead for the

support came from non-Jews.⁵¹ The *Jewish Review*, the otherwise politically unengaged official monthly of Port Elizabeth's Orthodox Jewish majority, was scathing in its criticism of Ungar:

The entire Jewish community resents Dr Ungar's act of making a publicity stunt out of it, encouraging the press to make a whole 'Tzimes' about it. A rabbi serving a community usually consisting of members holding different points of view, should concentrate on the job to which he is appointed or which he is called upon to do rather than indulge in political controversy of any kind. Was there for him not enough work to do, within the framework of his congregation to prevent him wasting time on arguments with the government? Are there not more competent people in our community older and more experienced than Dr Ungar to instruct the community in matters of 'Universal Justice'? Was it for Dr Ungar, a recent arrival in this country, who has never had a chance of studying thoroughly and properly the complex racial problems in South Africa, and their implications, to take this task on himself? It is from this point of view that that we venture to say, that Dr Ungar's departure

Jews of South Africa?" *American Judaism*, 11 (xi) (Winter 1961): 18-19; Johannesburg *Star*, November 4, 1968. See also Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, xiv-xvi.

⁵¹ A Jewish letter writer praised Ungar for being "prepared to castigate his own people, if necessary, to try and awaken them from their long sleep, and stimulate them, not only to read the holy word of God but to apply the principles of the words in their lives." He was "proud" of Ungar's "great spiritual work for the freedom of mankind." Non-Jews weighed in, denouncing the community's silence. One acknowledged that the Jewish community was "more vulnerable" than other whites, but maintained that "of all people [they] have good historical reason to know how little is to be gained from bowing down in the house of Rimmon. With the exception of Rabbi Ungar, however, the Jewish churches ... have been conspicuously silent...Morally speaking this is inexcusable." See *Evening Post*, December

from our country will be received by some of us with a sigh of relief.⁵²

Another Port Elizabeth Jew wrote to a local newspaper to record his

indignation at the abuse of the freedom of the press by the non-desirable visitor to South Africa, Rabbi Ungar. If he is planning to get cheap publicity and pave the way for his future career in one of the London suburban congregations, let him not drag into this controversy the whole Jewish community. Let him also not run away from South Africa with the idea that he is Emile Zola or a Rev. Mr Scott, because he lacks the responsibility and dignity of a responsible leader of a community. The friendly and good-neighborly relations between the South African Jew and his non-Jewish fellow citizens will not be affected by Rabbi Ungar's, or any other foreigner's radical and subversive ideas. We are citizens of this country and we owe our allegiance to the Government and people of this country. As Jewish members of this community we demand from our leaders, those who are graced or disgraced, the sense of dignity and responsibility which befits a Rabbi. On the occasion of Rabbi Ungar's departure, the Jewish community of Port Elizabeth should pronounce the traditional

21, 1956; *Evening Post*, December 24, 1956; *Eastern Province Herald*, December 19, 1956; see also *Eastern Province Herald*, December 22, 1956.

Hebrew blessing of ‘Baruch Sheptorau’, i.e. ‘Thank God we are getting rid of this Rabbi’,⁵³

Ungar was lambasted as self-seeking and publicity hungry, a young upstart and “foreign busybody” with a “Messiah complex.”⁵⁴ The criticisms directed at Ungar mirrored similar condemnation of “outside agitators” who became involved with the civil rights struggle in the South.⁵⁵ Northern rabbis who came south in the 1960s were berated in nearly identical terms.

As André Ungar departed Temple Israel of Port Elizabeth in January 1957, sent off to the strains of *Aveinu Shalom Aleichem* sung at the airport by students of the Temple Hebrew School (which suggests that politics rather than his personality was primary in alienating him from his congregation), few would have predicted that he would play a coincidental but crucial role in a parallel drama, encountering and affecting the experience of a rabbi in a similar position at Temple B’nai Israel in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. Ungar’s experience in South Africa had affected his *weltanschauung* and priorities. Social justice, already important to the rabbi, had become a central concern. After a brief stint in unsatisfactory positions in London and Toronto, he was appointed associate rabbi to Dr Joachim Prinz at Temple B’nai

⁵² In September 1956 The *Jewish Review* had noted with “great satisfaction” the “attitude of the South African government to our Jewish community,” praising the Government for showing “great understanding of Jewish problems” and “deserving our gratitude.” *Jewish Review*, December 1956.

⁵³ Reverend Michael Scott was a leading proponent of the use of passive resistance in opposition to apartheid. *Evening Post*, December 18, 1956.

⁵⁴ Ungar, “My Expulsion from South Africa,”: 27.

⁵⁵ Another letter writer rebuked Ungar for his presumption in moralizing on South Africa’s problems: “A two-year’s residence barely suffices to get more than an elementary knowledge of the vast problems confronting South Africa, and basically the gentleman’s criticism was not leveled against this government only, but against at least 75 percent of South Africa’s population, including his own congregation. Whether we call it Apartheid or segregation, the vast majority of Europeans feel the same. So why oppose Group Areas, which is the only logical consequence of this attitude.” *Evening Post*, December 11, 1956.

Abraham in Newark. At the time, Prinz was the president of the American Jewish Congress. From there he took the pulpit of Temple Emanuel in Westwood, New Jersey, a position he still holds. Ungar continued to mull over his South African experiences, writing and lecturing extensively about South Africa.⁵⁶ Having cut his civil rights teeth in South Africa, Ungar transferred his concern with social justice to his new environment. Gradually interest and involvement in the southern civil rights struggle came to complement his continued opposition to apartheid.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ While the tone of Ungar's writing about his South African experience in the years immediately following his departure suggested a residual bitterness and anger at South African Jewry, a recent conversation suggests a mellowing of his attitudes. Author's conversation with Rabbi André Ungar, March 4, 2001.

⁵⁷ Ungar maintained his interest in and commitment to South Africa after his departure. See for example *London Jewish Chronicle*, November 29, 1957; *Jewish Currents*, 20 (:4) (April 1966); *Johannesburg Star*, November 4, 1968.

Chapter Four

The Micah of Mississippi

While Ungar was battling his congregation in South Africa, Rabbi Charles Mantinband was fighting a similar (and similarly unsuccessful) lonely war of attrition in Hattiesburg, Mississippi.¹ Although Hattiesburg was perhaps “less rigid in its resistance” to integration than other towns in the State of a comparable size, Mississippi was hostile to dissenting views on the racial status quo.² However, Hattiesburg was tolerant of Charles Mantinband, more perhaps than was his congregation. Mantinband, having taken up the pulpit of Temple B’nai Israel in 1951, explained this tolerance as a consequence of his established position and familiarity in the small town by the time the focus of the civil rights struggle shifted to Mississippi in the early 1960s. Locals did not see him as an outside agitator, but perhaps instead as a misguided liberal race mixer, but their misguided liberal:

...when you live in a town long enough, you get to know everybody, and you’re given the opportunity to befriend everybody. And, if after ten years or more you have gotten this fellow a job, and this fellow you visited when he was in the hospital, and this person you were able to get a scholarship for his child, and this person you did a favor – you served on a committee with him ... they’ll say, ‘Well now, this fellow is

¹ For a detailed account of Mantinband’s civil rights experience in Hattiesburg see Clive Webb, “Big Struggle in a Small Town: Charles Mantinband in Hattiesburg, Mississippi” in Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices*, 213-229.

² See J. Rosenthal, “Mezuzahs and Magnolias,” in folder 1, box 1, Mantinband Papers, AJA.

out of step, and he's ahead of his times and he's crazy – we don't like what he says – but don't touch him, he's my friend, and I like him!' Whatever the case may be, I stayed a long time.³

Mantinband ministered to Hattiesburg's 50 Jewish families, a total of 180 Jews in a population of 35,000.⁴ A native Southerner, Mantinband came to Hattiesburg towards the end of his rabbinical career, already having served communities elsewhere in the South. His personal charm, geniality, and familiarity with the region would serve as a crucial buffer as his civil rights activism awakened insecurities and raised tempers.⁵ He was held in affectionate regard, an honored and respected figure in Hattiesburg, who was active in the broader community.⁶ This esteem was magnified by the Southern regard for clergymen. However, Mantinband's outspoken opposition to segregation generated mixed responses from his congregants. Some resented his sermons supporting racial change, a small like-minded minority was encouraged by his willingness to deal with a taboo subject, but the majority "brooded in silent unease or in friendly-sinister warnings to 'take it easy.'"⁷

While most would have tolerated some "pulpit naughtiness," many were upset when Mantinband took to activism beyond the pulpit. This resentment and unease

³ Allen Krause, "The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights" (Rabbinical thesis, Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion, 1967): 161.

⁴ See *American Jewish Yearbook* (New York, 1956), 78.

⁵ A friend enumerated his virtues: "Friendly, courteous, public spirited, his is the common touch. He is never too busy to hear the woes and share the burden of the man in the street." Notes on "Most Unforgettable Character" (n.d.), box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center, New Orleans. See also Anna Mantinband, "Time for Remembering," unpublished memoir: 57-62, AJA.

⁶ The president of the temple felt "able to laugh off the Rabbi's well known pro-integration opinions in conversation with Gentile friends by saying: 'a man like that is entitled to be a little crazy.'" Rosenthal, "Mezuzahs and Magnolias," 11.

⁷ *Ibid.*: 12.

boiled over when Mantinband's activities were publicized in the local press. One such incident in 1956, his public denunciation of Mississippi's staunchly segregationist senior Senator James Eastland, that the *Hattiesburg American* headlined as "Local Rabbi Says Race Relations Stink," produced outraged responses from his congregation. At an emergency meeting, the rabbi promised to avoid future publicity.⁸ Responding to calls for his resignation, Mantinband's allies within the temple chose not to defend his racial stance, instead pointed to his virtues as a man and the difficulties that would be created by the firing of their rabbi.⁹ Mantinband's transgression of local racial mores, as in the case of André Ungar, was another cause of friction. Members of the temple objected to Mantinband's interracial friendships, made all the more unacceptable by the visits of African Americans to his home opposite Temple B'nai Israel. That his friends included Clyde Kennard, Vernon Dahmer, and Medgar Evers, all prominent civil rights activists in Mississippi, made these visits even more unpalatable. Citing a Mississippi law that threatened to remove tax-exempt status from facilities that used premises on non-segregated basis, a delegation urged the rabbi to stop these visits. An indignant Mantinband refused, retorting that the house may be temple property, but it was also his "home."¹⁰

Although massive resistance measures adopted by the Mississippi legislature suppressed the already limited support for dissent and reduced the scope for opposition activism, Mantinband remained committed to the civil rights cause, his

⁸ Mantinband, "Time for Remembering," 62; see also *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 22, 1962.

⁹ They argued that firing Mantinband would produce more adverse publicity, potentially persuading the CCAR to obstruct attempts to hire a replacement rabbi. Mantinband himself thought that the national publicity that the spat generated had cowed the congregation. See Rosenthal, "Mezuzahs and Magnolias," 14-15; Charles Mantinband, "Rabbi in the Deep South," *ADL Bulletin* (May 1962): 4.

¹⁰ See Charles Mantinband, "The Board Prefers the Rabbi Remain Silent," *CCAR Journal*, 14 (June 1956): 3-5; Polner, *Rabbi*, 89. For segregationist legislative measures adopted by Mississippi and

involvement eliciting disapproving responses from some members of his community. The concerted challenge to the stasis in race relations in Mississippi in the early 1960s, including freedom rides and Freedom Summer projects organized by civil rights organizations hoping to undermine segregation in the most racially recalcitrant state, injected new fire into Mantinband's relationship with his congregation. Tensions between rabbi and congregation escalated alongside the level of activism in Mississippi. While the rabbi's political position was unpopular, made more so by his forthrightness and prominence, Mantinband was still admired and valued by his congregation. A series of incidents, climaxing in 1962, persuaded Mantinband to leave Hattiesburg. In May 1962 the rabbi was again reprimanded by his congregation at an emergency meeting after he was publicly linked with the Mississippi State Council, an inter-religious body that sought to advance acceptance of desegregation. The responses at a congregational meeting illustrate the range of concerns within the Jewish community. The temple's president objected to the identification of the congregation with a liberal cause, expressing a widely shared fear of antisemitic reprisals.¹¹ These fears were particularly acute at a time when freedom riders, among them a disproportionate number of northern Jews, poured south. The arrival of freedom riders galvanized radical segregationists and prompted a surge in distribution of segregationist literature, some laced with antisemitism.¹² Another congregant complained that the rabbi's civil rights stance created divisions within the congregation, an untenable situation in a small and vulnerable community. A final

efforts to coerce conformity see Numan Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance* (Baton Rouge, 1997), 66-67, 211.

¹¹ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 199.

¹² Much of the antisemitic literature was imported from the North. Few Southern groups had the resources to produce and print their own segregationist literature, opting instead to draw on the materials of professional hate groups. Northern and California-based professional antisemites tailored their literature for the Southern market, hoping to win converts in the South and to opportunistically introduce an antisemitic component into the segregationist platform. See Arnold Forster, "The South: New Field for an Old Game," *ADL Bulletin*, 15 (:8) (1958).

complainant articulated what other members were likely to have felt, but were reluctant to express in public, also suggesting the incompatibility of Mantinband's liberal attitudes with those of some of his congregants: "Why must the rabbi mix with the niggers? Let us sell to them and keep them in their place."¹³

Mantinband refused to compromise or back down, agreeing only to avoid publicity "for the time being" and to steer clear of bi-racial meetings.¹⁴ The congregation was unsatisfied by these reassurances, having heard similar promises in the past. Gathering again later, the temple board agreed to additional steps to restrain their rabbi. Mantinband was unhappy with the strictures imposed on his civil rights activism and stung by the acrimony expressed at these meetings with his congregation. Further news was disheartening. The small Jewish community of Brookhaven cancelled Mantinband's weekly visits. Word trickled back to him that a congregational delegation had met with the president of the local college, a friend and ally in local civil rights matters, urging him to rein in his friend.¹⁵ The cancellation of a public lecture at a black college in compliance with his congregation's demands solicited a disappointed rebuke from the college president: "It is indeed a sad day to know that the Children of the Seed of Abraham, themselves persecuted down the ages, have yielded to the persecution of their black brothers."¹⁶

These actions suggest both the congregation's desperation and its weakness. While Charles Mantinband displayed some of the characteristics of the frontier rabbi

¹³ Charles Mantinband, "From the Diary of a Mississippi Rabbi," *American Judaism* (Winter 1962-1963): 8.

¹⁴ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, March 1, 1963.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* See also Mantinband to Bruce Aultman, May 9, 1962, box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center.

¹⁶ Rosenthal, "Mezuzahs and Magnolias," 15.

condition, particularly his long service to a single community, a number of factors served to reduce his dependence on Temple B'nai Israel. In many ways Mantinband was atypical of the frontier rabbi. While his political views engendered hostility in Hattiesburg, Mantinband's charm, celebrity, and success guaranteed him prospects elsewhere, reducing the importance of job security.¹⁷ The dismissal of a rabbi during the civil rights era produced embarrassing press attention and potentially hindered the recruitment of a replacement. Mantinband's prominence all but ruled out this option. This unusually high level of job security was augmented by the timing of his service in Hattiesburg. Mantinband held the pulpit of Temple B'nai Israel towards the end of his career and beyond into retirement age. This reduced his financial vulnerability by ensuring him access to a pension. Maury Gurwitch, a member of the temple board, recalled that Mantinband "was old and set in his ways and money meant little to him so you could not pressure, sway or change him."¹⁸ These critical liberating factors reduced the temple board's leverage over their rabbi, simultaneously serving as facilitating factors that produced confidence and scope for activism and outspokenness.

Yet although the Temple B'nai Israel board had limited direct leverage over Mantinband, he was attuned and sensitive to local concerns. His long residence in Hattiesburg produced sensitivity to the community and a stake in the maintenance of a positive relationship with his congregation. The deterioration in this relationship was therefore particularly troubling. In an intimate congregation, those who were upset

¹⁷ "To many throughout the country, Rabbi Mantinband has become something of a legend or symbol. He is much in demand as a speaker and consultant, in all parts of the country. For every invitation he accepts, he declines many." Amongst others, Mantinband was awarded the first George Brussel Memorial Award by the Stephen S. Wise Synagogue and the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Humane Letters from Lincoln University.

¹⁸ Maury Gurwitch to author, May 24, 2002.

were often friends and long-term acquaintances. Mantinband, unlike Ungar, was therefore more responsive to the pleas of his congregation, and they were tied together through bonds of obligation.

At this point Mantinband reached a state of impasse with his congregation similar to that which had persuaded Ungar to leave Port Elizabeth. While he was still highly regarded within the congregation, the rabbi was frustrated by the restrictions placed on him, unhappy in representing a reluctant congregation, unwilling to continue his involvement in the civil rights struggle in half measure, and certain to have known that renewed activism in the heated climate would bring about an acrimonious departure. Mantinband was caught in a dilemma; a return to smooth relations with his congregation dictated a reduction of his controversial public activities, but withdrawal from the fight for civil rights would compromise his principles.¹⁹ Ill feeling continued to fester throughout 1962, probably exacerbated by Mantinband's contact with freedom riders and the tension generated by challenges to Mississippi's racial caste system.

Temple B'nai Israel's problem with their rabbi ceased in March 1963 when Mantinband resigned and left Hattiesburg. Mantinband's decision to leave, clearly the product of much soul searching, was motivated by a combination of factors. The departure was made possible by the attractive offer of the pulpit of a new congregation in Longview, Texas. Mantinband explained that he "moved because of special circumstances of a personal nature: [in Longview] we were near our grandchildren and we were near our family...there was a brand new congregation that

¹⁹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, March 1, 1963; Rosenthal, "Mezuzahs and Magnolias," 14-15.

challenged me.”²⁰ Mantinband was attracted by the “less turbulent pastures” of Texas that offered an escape from the “day to day tensions” he and his wife had experienced for years.²¹ By his own admission, Hattiesburg had become “increasingly difficult to work in” and likely to become more difficult as Mississippi became the focal point of the civil rights struggle.²² However, Mantinband may have simultaneously been pushed out of Temple B’nai Israel. Rabbi Perry Nussbaum of Jackson, Mississippi, a colleague and civil rights ally, wrote of Mantinband’s “removal.”²³ Leo Bergman, rabbi of the Touro Synagogue in New Orleans maintained that Mantinband’s claim that he left for family reasons was a “polite pretense,” arguing that he “was leaving by a mutual gentleman’s agreement between Congregation and Rabbi.”²⁴ Rabbi Allan Schwartzman of Greenville, a close friend, thought that Mantinband was “ridden out on a rail.”²⁵

Charles Mantinband was given a warm send off by the non-Jewish community at a public farewell banquet. Few of Hattiesburg’s Jews attended; apparently it had been “difficult to interest the Jewish group” in the occasion.²⁶ The membership of Temple B’nai Israel was ambivalent about the loss of their rabbi. While the temple board had attempted to persuade Mantinband to stay, the congregation had cause to

²⁰ Quoted in Krause, “Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,”: 162.

²¹ The Mantinband Megillah 1964, M327, folder 6, box 2, Mantinband Papers, McCain Library and Archives, USM.

²² Mantinband quoted in Krause, “Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,”: 163; The Mantinband Megillah December 1962, M327, folder 6, box 2, Mantinband Papers, USM.

²³ Perry Nussbaum to Charles Mantinband, April 17, 1964, MS430, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum papers.

²⁴ Sermon by Rabbi Leo Bergman, Touro Synagogue, New Orleans, January 15, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA.

²⁵ Embattled Ole Miss Historian James Silver wrote to Mantinband, “It seems to me that it is possible that you have been ‘driven’ from Mississippi whether or not you will say it that way. In this ‘closed society’ we do drive people out even though sometimes done gently. Or is it gently? I say these things in the realization and I might say expectation of being driven out myself within the next year.” Silver to Mantinband, March 4, 1963, writings folder, box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center. See also interview notes, folder 12, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers.

²⁶ Rabbi Leo Bergman sermon, January 15, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA.

feel relief at the rabbi's planned departure.²⁷ A final demonstration of the burden of having an outspoken and prominent rabbi had come in the frank and revealing extracts from Mantinband's personal journal printed in *American Judaism*. This critical and intimate portrait of his congregation, detailing its obstructionism and exposing its prejudices, suggests why some within a congregation sensitive to its image and wary of conspicuousness would have been comforted by the prospect of a more reticent replacement rabbi.²⁸ This was not to be.

²⁷ Board of Trustees minutes, December 3, 1962, Temple B'nai Israel Records, AM98-59, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

²⁸ Mantinband realized that his community was acutely sensitive, warning Paul Kresh, the editor of *American Judaism*, "that this will [article] is something all my members are bound to read. On the whole, they have been patient and cooperative." Mantinband to Paul Kresh, October 26, 1962, Writings Folder, Box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center; Charles Mantinband, "From the Diary of a Mississippi Rabbi," 48-51; see also *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, March 1, 1963.

Chapter Five

Ben-Ami and Other Outsiders

Less than two years after Mantinband's departure, his replacement, Rabbi David Z. Ben-Ami left Temple B'nai Israel in much the same circumstances as André Ungar had departed Temple Israel in Port Elizabeth. During his brief tenure in Hattiesburg, Ben-Ami's path crossed with his historical *doppelganger*; Ungar playing an incidental role in the first act of Ben-Ami's personal drama.

Temple B'nai Israel began looking for a rabbi after Mantinband left for Longview and soon settled on David Ben-Ami. It is uncertain as to who referred or nominated Ben-Ami as a candidate (indeed he seems to have been the only candidate), although he did enjoy the enthusiastic backing of temple president Alvin Sackler.¹ Sackler nonetheless later turned on his charge, becoming the major proponent of the speedy termination of the rabbi's services. Ben-Ami was not a member of the CCAR and therefore not recommended by the organization's placement commission. The temple board may have been attracted by Ben-Ami's background, promising a low-key alternative to his high profile predecessor.

Ben-Ami, born in Germany in 1924, was on the surface an unusual candidate for a Southern pulpit. He had trained in social work at New York University and practiced as a social worker in New York, a career that the temple board believed to

¹ Board of Trustees minutes, March 22, 1963, Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Congregation B'nai Israel, March 25, 1963; Board of Trustees minutes, July 8, 1963, all Temple B'nai Israel Records, AM98-59, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

be far removed from political activism.² He received his rabbinical training in the late 1950s from the Academy for Higher Jewish Learning, a small, newly established independent seminary.³ His motives for this mid-career turn to the pulpit are unclear.

The reasons for his choice of Hattiesburg are equally uncertain. Temple B'nai Israel paid a modest salary, a sum smaller than that which elicited complaints from Perry Nussbaum.⁴ Ben-Ami later claimed that he was driven by prophetic motives, intentionally opting to serve on the “frontlines” of the civil rights struggle.⁵ However, he came to Hattiesburg with his wife and three young children, not a propitious platform for activism in Mississippi’s turbulent political climate. He was surely also aware of Charles Mantinband’s experience at Temple B’nai Israel, certainly a discouragement to all but the most foolhardy of activists. He may have been seeking celebrity if his later activities in the town are indicative. Alternatively, his motives may have been more practical. His wife used his brief tenure to complete a masters degree in education at the Hattiesburg campus of the University of Southern Mississippi, undertaken with an eye to future employment as a teacher in New York.⁶ Ben-Ami wanted to join the CCAR. Without membership his prospects for employment and advancement were limited. Not having trained at one of the “recognized theological schools” that would have gained him automatic membership, he was required to serve a five year probationary period at UAHC affiliated temples

² Harry Alpert to David Ben-Ami, December 24, 1964, David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

³ The Academy for Higher Jewish learning was established in 1956 to provide an alternative to the major seminaries that followed movement-based and denomination specific approaches to religious practice. The seminary primarily attracted students, like Ben-Ami, who came to the rabbinate as a second career.

⁴ Board of Trustees minutes, April 12, 1963, Temple B’nai Israel Records, AM98-59, USM; Perry Nussbaum to Malcolm Stern, October 24, 1971, MS430, folder 4, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

⁵ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965.

⁶ See Pearl Crystal to David and Evelyn Ben-Ami, December 19, 1964, David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

in order to qualify.⁷ Four years in the rabbinical backwaters of Irondequoit and Brewster in New York left only one year in Hattiesburg to fulfil this requirement, thereafter leaving him “free to return to ‘civilization.’” He looked forward to then finally finding a “suitable (decent) position.”⁸

Ben-Ami’s background placed him between Mantinband and Ungar on the frontier spectrum. Whereas Ungar’s mobility allowed him to place the demands of the prophets before the responsibilities of the pulpit, Ben-Ami exhibited both the weaknesses of a frontier rabbi and the strengths of an outsider. While he did not share Mantinband’s deeply felt sense of responsibility towards his congregation, he was constrained by a set of factors typical of the frontier condition. For example, his wife’s studies tied him to Hattiesburg, an inducement to maintain a relatively stable relationship with his congregation. While his age and family responsibilities may have been counterbalanced by the possibility of return to his secular profession, he had few alternative prospects within the rabbinate. Lacking membership of the CCAR, he was excluded from the support and protection offered by organizational ties. His mobility as a rabbi was further reduced by the coincidence of his tenure with a period of crisis in the Reform rabbinate. The rapid growth of the Reform movement in the 1950s had slowed by the mid-1960s, producing an oversupply of rabbis. The already small pool of attractive pulpits shrunk, leaving few desirable options for rabbis who were not

⁷ The “CCAR does not recognize the smicha of individual rabbis because the CCAR constitution requires that a candidate for admission be ordained by a recognized theological school.” The requirements for admission to the CCAR were “A Bachelor of Arts degree; a knowledge of Bible, Rabbinics, Jewish religious thought, Jewish history, Jewish literature, Jewish education, and homiletics; a degree from a recognized Hebrew rabbinic authority or from a recognized yeshiva; the candidate must have served a minimum period of five years in a Reform congregation; the candidate must be recommended by members of the CCAR who know him well; the candidate must be personally interviewed by all members of the Admissions Committee.” Jacob Marcus to Charles Shoulson, January 29, 1961, folder 18, box 18; Jacob Marcus to Louis Schechter, May 16, 1960, folder 14, box 18, MS 34, CCAR.

⁸ David Ben-Ami to Phillip Bernstein, March 3, 1964, SC 836, AJA.

served by the CCAR Placement Commission. Another consequence was a change in power relationships within congregations as temple boards and the laity became more assertive and made inroads into the rabbi's sphere.⁹ Moreover, unlike Temple Israel in Port Elizabeth, Hattiesburg's congregation was experienced in dealing with a troublesome rabbi. Crucially, Ben-Ami seems to have regarded his move to Hattiesburg as temporary. He never formed the lasting attachments that restrained many frontier rabbis. However, Ben-Ami was more pliable than Ungar and Mantinband. He ultimately reduced his involvement in public civil rights activities in response to congregational pressure.

David Ben-Ami's problems began within months of his arrival when Hattiesburg became a center of the Freedom Summer project in Mississippi.¹⁰ Freedom Summer began in Hattiesburg on January 21 1964 with a demonstration outside the Forrest County Courthouse organized to coincide with the South's inaugural Freedom Day. Two hundred of Hattiesburg's African American residents, joined by fifty pastors from the National Council of Churches, stood in the rain all day outside the courthouse waiting to register as voters.¹¹ Among the poster-toting protestors was André Ungar, who participated in the first week of protests together with a small delegation from the Rabbinical Assembly.¹² The day's demonstration

⁹ See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 369-370.

¹⁰ Ben-Ami began his service in Hattiesburg in August 1963.

¹¹ The National Council of Churches was involved in the training of many of those involved in the Freedom Summer project.

¹² Friends wrote to Mantinband that "We are finally getting our share of excitement – for ten days or so we have had pickets walking around the courthouse – with twice as many helmeted police or deputies walking around them. Two rabbis were here with all the ministers – but they left before arrest started – thank goodness! The Jewish community is in a state and it is very hard on Rabbi Ben-Ami." Charles Mantinband was eager for details of the goings on in Hattiesburg: "Who were the visiting rabbis (in the march)? Did they have any contact with Hattiesburg Jewry? Why did they go home so quickly? What is the status now? Suppose you cut out some photographs and news items from your local press, and without comment if you prefer, send them to me." May and Jimmy to Charles Mantinband, February 4,

was uneventful, the first of a series of protests on the steps of the courthouse that continued through spring.¹³ The protests and the presence of the northern rabbis had an unsettling effect on the Hattiesburg Jewish community, which disapproved of their “marching around for the news cameras.”¹⁴ The rabbis were a noticeable presence among the mainly black protestors; “white men with beards and black suits,” they were “obviously Jewish.”¹⁵ To add to the community’s worries, the courthouse was in the heart of Hattiesburg’s business district and the demonstrations disrupted commerce including turnover at Jewish-owned businesses.

Their disquiet was intensified when Ungar and fellow rabbi Jerome Lipnick announced that they planned to attend the Friday night service at Temple B’nai Israel.¹⁶ The rabbis were forewarned that the service could be cancelled if they chose to come.¹⁷ This threat was not carried out; instead many members of the congregation seem to have demonstrated their displeasure by not attending.¹⁸ Reluctantly invited into the temple, Ungar, Lipnick, and several Protestant ministers who accompanied them joined a turnout of fifteen members for the service. Much to the rabbis’ disappointment, David Ben-Ami did not deliver a sermon, relinquishing, what to their minds was a perfect opportunity to apply the lessons of the weekly torah portion to the events in Hattiesburg. Appropriately the torah portion described the exodus from

1964; Mantinband to May and Jimmy, February 6, 1964; Mantinband to Judea Miller, April 6, 1964, writings folder, box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center.

¹³ See Fred Powledge, *Free At Last? The Civil Rights Movement and the People Who made it* (New York, 1992), 471-473; for the account of another rabbi involved in the Hattiesburg protests see A. James Rudin, “Harvest of Hate,” enclosure with letter to the CCAR, February 2, 1967, Correspondence File on Social Justice Activities of Various Rabbis 1965-1967, AJA.

¹⁴ Marvin Reuben quoted in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 82.

¹⁵ Maury Gurwitch, former president and trustee of Temple B’nai Israel, to author, May 24, 2002.

¹⁶ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 199-200.

¹⁷ Perhaps unwilling to join the service at Temple B’nai Israel or expecting to be made to feel unwelcome, a group of Jewish participants in the Freedom Summer project later arranged their own service in a church. See Paul, “From Hattiesburg, Mississippi,”: 35.

Egypt, material that Ungar himself had used to much effect and disaffection in his first controversial sermon in Port Elizabeth nearly a decade before.¹⁹ The rabbis' presence and the start of the Freedom Summer project in Hattiesburg set in motion a train of events marked by escalating tensions between the rabbi and his congregation that led to the unseating of David Ben-Ami within a year.

Ungar was familiar with the cold welcome of his Southern co-religionists. In May 1963, he and 18 other Conservative rabbis left the annual Rabbinical Assembly convention in the Catskills to travel to Birmingham in a show of solidarity with the civil rights protests in the city.²⁰ The expedition had been spontaneously suggested as a means to demonstrate commitment to social justice, an issue that took on immediate relevance when the daily newspapers showed scenes of police brutality in Birmingham.²¹ While Ungar relished the short visit, rhapsodizing that the delegation had come within "hissing distance of the grand sweep of history itself, of the immortal battle between good and evil," Birmingham's Jewish community was much less enthusiastic.²² Indignant at the rabbis' failure to warn them of their plans and concerned that the delegation's presence could spark equally spontaneous recriminations, the local Jewish leadership tried to persuade the delegation to leave immediately. Failing that, they sought reassurances that the rabbis would consult with

¹⁸ Maury Gurwitch recalled that "We tried to let these rabbis know that they were hurting their fellow Jews, were not welcome, and requested they leave our city." Gurwitch to author, May 24, 2002.

¹⁹ Rabbi Jerome Lipnick, "From Where I Stand," (undated), David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA.

²⁰ Rabbis from the Rabbinical Assembly also joined protests in St. Petersburg in 1964, and Selma in 1965. See Charles Silberman, "A Jewish View on the Racial Crisis," *Conservative Judaism*, 19 (:4) (Summer 1965): 6-7.

²¹ See André Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," *Conservative Judaism*, 18 (:1) (1963): 1-2. See also Jonathan Bass, *Blessed Are the Peacemakers: Martin Luther King, Jr., Eight White Religious Leaders, and the "Letter from Birmingham Jail"* (Louisiana, 2002); Terry Barr, "Rabbi Grafman and Birmingham's Civil Rights Era" in Bauman and Kalin, *The Quiet Voices*, 168-189.

²² For accounts by other rabbis in the delegation see Arie Becker, SC 2852 and Jacob Bloom, SC 2853, AJA.

the community before taking any action.²³ Ungar was unsympathetic to and suspicious of the community's timidity. He scornfully dismissed their fears in much the same way that he spurned the pleadings of Port Elizabeth's Jews:

Our coming had already caused much harm already; let us not bring it to the boil by being seen in the streets as demonstrators. We were solemnly warned about the peril to our own lives. The number of dynamite sticks recently found under the Temple was solemnly adduced. How the forthcoming convention of the States' Rights Party and the as yet quiescent Klanners wreak vengeance for our misdeeds on the heads of the local Jewish population was starkly portrayed. Also, we were assured of the liberal sentiments and the behind-the-scenes commitment of Birmingham Jewry, as well as their efforts on behalf of civil rights. Hints were flashed our way about the public recognition that Robert Kennedy might flash our way if only we withdrew now and forever. ... The Birmingham Jew was squarely on the side of reaction.²⁴

²³ One of the participants recalled that "The objective of the leadership was to dissuade us from any public action, or failing that, to secure our agreement to consult with them before taking action which might endanger them... Having come, we ought to return as fast as possible." The Jewish Community Council also persuaded the local newspapers not to give coverage to the rabbis' visit. In a letter to the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), Harold Katz, the head of the Birmingham Jewish Community Council, wrote that it "was the opinion of the Council that serious anti-Semitism would result from a community conclusion that Jews are leading the local integration fight and the publicity about the Rabbis' pilgrimage might have had serious consequences." While the fear was genuine, NCRAC is unlikely to have been sympathetic to any other explanation for the Council's actions. See R. Rubenstein, "The Rabbis visit Birmingham," *Reconstructionist*, May 31, 1963: 7; Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back," 3-4; Harold Katz, Memorandum on Racial Problems Affecting the Birmingham Jewish Community to National Community Relations Advisory Council, July 3,

Although the trip coincided with a lull in the protests as city officials negotiated with the protesters, the delegation was denounced by Birmingham's Jewish leaders as "irresponsible," "intoxicated," "ill-timed and ill-conceived."²⁵ After discussing the visit with Rabbi Milton Grafman of Temple Emanu El in Birmingham, Charles Mantinband apparently agreed with this assessment, adding a final reproachful "ill-advised" to the alliterative list of epithets.²⁶ Despite the frosty reception from Birmingham Jewry, Ungar and his colleagues were inspired by their perceived success and excited that a mere "handful of individuals may indeed leave their worthy mark." "Who," Ungar concluded, "is more called upon than Jews, God's chosen, and among them rabbis, the chosen people's chosen ones, to fulfill that holy task?"²⁷ This sense of obligation and excitement motivated Ungar to return to the South a few months later, this time to Hattiesburg.

The ill feeling that Ungar encountered in Birmingham and Hattiesburg reflected a resentment of outside intervention in what was perceived by many Southerners to be a problem that was theirs alone to solve. This reaction was part of a broad response in the South, manifested in a widely shared suspicion of "outside agitators" and "Yankee foreigners."²⁸ Everyone from extremists blaming "communist Jews" for secretly pulling the strings of the hated NAACP, to moderate, educated

1963, Mark Elovitz Research Material on Birmingham Jewish History, file 781.5.7.2.18, Birmingham Public Library, Alabama.

²⁴ Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back,": 10-11.

²⁵ Indicative of the contrary perspectives of northern Jews, Murray Friedman, a representative of the ADL in the South, described the delegation as "Nineteen Messiahs." Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York, 1995); see also Rubenstein, "The Rabbi's Visit Birmingham,": 6; Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back,": 10-11; Harold Katz, Memorandum on Racial Problems Affecting the Birmingham Jewish Community.

²⁶ Mantinband to Nussbaum, June 2, 1963, folder 3, box 1, MS 563, AJA.

²⁷ Ungar, "To Birmingham, and Back,": 17.

²⁸ See, for example, J. Gumbiner, "A Rabbi takes his Stand in Dixie," *Reconstructionist*, January 12, 1962: 11.

Southerners criticized northern interference.²⁹ David Danzig, the American Jewish Committee's program director, encountered this feeling among Jewish leaders in the South when he received the unspoken admonition that "if Northern Jews 'would go away and leave us alone' – keep hands off the desegregation situation – everything would be alright."³⁰ Charles Mantinband similarly advised his northern colleagues that "we who live in the South know how to proceed."³¹ This resentment was a rare area of commonality between the minority of rabbis who openly supported integration and the minority of vocal Jewish segregationists. Progressive rabbis could agree with the sentiment expressed in the pamphlet *A Jewish View on Segregation*, written by a Mississippi Jew (avowedly a "Jewish Southerner," "not a Southern Jew") and published by the Mississippi Citizens' Council:

Is it too much to ask that they leave us to the solution of our own problems? Any jackass can be a Monday morning quarterback, an armchair general. Any idiot can successfully rear the other fellow's children or make a go of his marriage or solve his financial difficulties. But it is the smart man who knows that each person has not only the right but the obligation to settle his own problems to the best of his ability.³²

²⁹ David Chappell argues that this generalized segregationist focus on and blame of "outside agitators," rooted in a failure to appreciate Southern black pressure for desegregation, was central to the success of civil rights movement. Chappell, "The Divided Mind of Southern Segregationists," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 82 (:1) (1998): 50.

³⁰ Address by David Danzig at AJC Southwest Regional Congress, Houston, Texas, March 22, 1959, Southern States File, Blaustein Library, American Jewish Committee, New York; see also Alfred Hero, *The Southerner and World Affairs*, 479-480; Cheryl Greenberg, "The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights" in James V. Franklin (ed.), *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict* (Columbia, Missouri, 1998), 143-163.

³¹ Mantinband also complained that the Northern Jewish press "blew things up and complicated things for us." Quoted in Polner, *Rabbi*, 89.

³² Anonymous, *A Jewish View on Desegregation* (Greenville, Mississippi, n.d.), 12; Clive Webb, "Charles Bloch, Jewish White Supremacist," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 83:2 (1999): 278-279.

Even outspoken supporters of civil rights were annoyed by the criticisms and moral demands made by their Northern counterparts.³³ The pronouncements of Northerners often ignored the need for practicality and slow, steady progress.³⁴ Mantinband “didn’t have too much respect for the North or their attitudes towards the Negro,” urging “them not to feel superior” and pointing out that “it is easy to be liberal one thousand miles away from the scene of the battle.”³⁵ Echoing Mantinband’s words, Rabbi William Silverman of Nashville cautioned that “It is little help to beat one’s breast in New York and preach at us in Boston.”³⁶

This resentment extended to the perceived insensitivity of northern Jewish organizations to their southern constituency, often compounding the problems of already embattled rabbis. For example, the UAHC’s invitation to Martin Luther King, jr. to address its Biennial Banquet in Chicago in 1963 was criticized by seven Mississippi rabbis, Ben-Ami included, as a “completely unnecessary provocation,” that generated unwanted publicity and visibility for Southern Jews.³⁷ Rabbi Moses

³³ Nussbaum complained that “some of us down here have been on the receiving end of some unnecessary condescension from our Northern colleagues – it is not only the headline maker in Dixie who is devoting his energies to making an improvement of this unholy mess.” In responding to an article in *Midstream* chastising Southern Jews as “Mississippi Maranos,” Nussbaum moaned that the rabbis’ problem is to “cope with all the experts on Judaism and the Jewish Problem with special reference to Social Justice. Do you understand what went on in this capital of the Deep South, you in the North who from the security of your own *kehillahs* were quick to advise and consent about our leadership? ... The colleague and the expert, so blandly reassuring in his prophecy as set down in social justice writ, has still to learn some hard facts of life about rabbis and small congregations. Or else hold his tongue in check. ... Tell me, colleagues, how did Isaac feel when that knife was poised above his head?”

Perry Nussbaum, “Pulpit in Mississippi Anyone?” *CCAR Journal*, 14 (June 1956): 3; Perry Nussbaum, “And Then There was One – In the Capital City of Mississippi,” *CCAR Journal* (July 1963): 17-19.

³⁴ David White, publisher of the *Jewish Herald-Voice* of Houston and advocate of gradualism, pithily articulated this annoyance: ‘why hinder us with these outside pronouncements?’ Quoted in *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, November 21, 1958.

³⁵ Quoted in *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, February 14, 1958.

³⁶ “It is a hard and aching row we hoe and every bit of human understanding, every drop of human kindness is needed in these days.” Quoted in *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, November 23, 1958

³⁷ See Perry Nussbaum to Solomon Kaplan, October 28, 1963, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

Landau reported that Jews in the Deep South were “full of sound and fury” about the selection of banquet speaker: “Boards meet and pass resolutions...Even the moderates join in...People speak of secession from the UAHC....It is 1860 here again.”³⁸ Perry Nussbaum thought that the invitation indicated that the UAHC “has no regard for the security of the Jewish communities” in Mississippi. Moreover, it undermined his own efforts as “a one man vocal defender of the Union,” as well as the work of other “Rabbis of congregations fighting the battle for our national bodies day by day, and year by year.” Nussbaum ominously warned that “our small Mississippi Jewish community...were restrained until now from aggressive displays toward the Union,” suggestively highlighting his congregation’s “steady history of financial support.”³⁹ With the Social Justice Commission of the UAHC “on the march,” seemingly placing political motives before the concerns of their southern colleagues, Nussbaum found himself “committed to a position wholly unrealistic and untenable – a brinkmanship unworthy of a Jewish doctrine of responsibility toward Jews also!”⁴⁰

Many Southern rabbis also resented the brief visits of northern rabbis who came south to join civil rights protests. Northern rabbis, whose participation in the civil rights protests earned them praise in their own region, were often regarded as interfering meddlers in the South. The visitors were not tied down by local responsibilities and were unaffected by the factors that constrained frontier rabbis. The security of fleeting prophetic tourism, the remoteness of congregational obligations, and the perceived Manichean moral nature of the South’s problems freed the rabbis to say and do what many would not in the North. Rabbi Arnold Turetsky of

³⁸ Moses Landau to Maurice Eisendrath, November 1, 1963, folder 14, box 19, MS 34, CCAR.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Some Southern Jews had opposed the creation of the Commission on Social Justice. See Ibid; Robert Blinder to Leon Feuer, October 23, 1963, folder 4, box 19, CCAR.

the Jewish Center in Jacksonville, Florida complained that the visits of crusading rabbis were counterproductive, creating “a great deal of resistance and resentment even among those [in the Jewish community] who consider themselves moderates.”⁴¹ Turetsky regarded the rabbis’ visits as impolite, questioning “the propriety and the courtesy of someone coming down to my community” and deprecating “hit-and-run, sporadic, staccato” morality.⁴² Mantinband complained that had “long become accustomed to visits by investigators from the North who, after a few days, become experts upon conditions in Dixie. I should not presume to venture any opinion about the sorry situation in New York City.”⁴³ Nussbaum dismissed northern rabbis who came south as “carpetbaggers.”⁴⁴ The actions of Northern rabbis in the South were often embarrassing for both the Southern rabbi and his community and potentially disrupted relations with the non-Jewish community and sometimes undermined low-key desegregation initiatives. Unrestrained by local responsibilities and often not in contact with their Southern counterparts, the temporary visitors often left their colleagues with bruised egos and angry congregations.⁴⁵ Some Southern rabbis, Nussbaum included, suggested restrictions on these unsolicited visits by northern

⁴¹ “... I don’t think that generally the Jewish community has risen in the Negroes’ eyes or command any more respect than it did (before the rabbis came).” “American Rabbis Split on Civil Rights Issue,” *London Jewish Chronicle*, August 28, 1964.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Charles Mantinband, “The Horns of a Dilemma,” *Central Conference of American Rabbi Annual Convention*, 74 (1964): 249.

⁴⁴ See Gary Zola, “What Price Amos? Perry Nussbaum’s career in Jackson, Mississippi” in Bauman and Kalin *The Quiet Voices*, 247-252; see also folder 7, box 2; Nussbaum to Moses Landau, January 7, 1965, folder 6, box 2, MS 430, Nussbaum Papers.

⁴⁵ Rabbi Joseph Friedman complained to Perry Nussbaum that “If it were not so tragic it would be positively funny, when one realizes the extent to which some of our colleagues are going to sacrifice us, not themselves, in the struggle. Like the English fighting to the last Frenchman, so they are quite willing to fight to the last Southern Rabbi.” See Joseph Friedman to Nussbaum, November 8, 1963, box 1, folder 6, Nussbaum Papers.

colleagues.⁴⁶ Anshe Chesed Congregation in Vicksburg, Mississippi formally requested that “no rabbi should come to Vicksburg.”⁴⁷

Resentment at outside interference became particularly pronounced during the freedom rides and the Freedom Summer projects, soured with additional indignation at the perceived hypocrisy of Northern Jewish activists who failed to protest inequalities closer to home.⁴⁸ The Jewish Northerners who made up a sizeable proportion of the white freedom riders were often met by private hostility from their co-religionists in the South. Mantinband regarded the freedom rides as “grandstand stunts for publicity.” He bitterly complained that the “greatest experts on Mississippi are persons who have never been there or those demonstrators who are there for 48 hours and get arrested and their names in the papers.”⁴⁹ Jacob Rothschild similarly argued that the Freedom Riders, unlike participants in the sit-ins, were “often ... outsiders who have come in without consulting people really involved in the situation.”⁵⁰ Mantinband preferred a strategy that avoided confrontation, fearing that civil rights protests, particularly by outsiders, would trigger a segregationist backlash, radicalizing and polarizing the political climate, and undermining the slow and steady efforts of moderates. Mantinband had “never seen active demonstrations where a messier condition wasn’t left after the demonstrators go. I deplore such actions

⁴⁶ See Perry Nussbaum to the Steering Committee on Resolutions, CCAR, April 26, 1965; Moses Landau to Perry Nussbaum, August 6, 1964, box 2 folder 6, MS 430, Nussbaum Papers.

⁴⁷ Victor Jacobs to Samuel Soskin, July 24, 1964, folder 7, box 21, MS 34, CCAR. See also Cheryl Greenberg, “The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights” in Franklin, *African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century*, 143-163.

⁴⁸ Allen Krause encountered this in some of his interviews. One respondent commented indignantly to Krause’s questions “Why pick on the South? Since when does the South have a monopoly on racism?” Krause, “Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights”: 1. See also “Jewish Freedom Fighters and the Role of the Jewish Community: An Evaluation,” *Jewish Currents* (July-August 1965): 5, 11-12.

⁴⁹ “Rabbi from Mississippi call freedom rides publicity stunts” (undated newspaper article), scrapbook, Mantinband papers, AJA.

because it may do as much bad as good.”⁵¹ Rothschild thought that “direct non-violent action often creates violence” speculating that “perhaps some of the Riders may have hoped for violence.”⁵² Negotiation was more productive than “self-defeating” and badly-timed protests.⁵³ Mass protest made for inflexibility, obviating the possibility of compromise: “one [side] becomes more extreme, forcing the other to do likewise.”⁵⁴ Rothschild argued that persuasion was preferable to coercion. Solutions should be sought by bringing local moderates together, not imposed by outsiders: “whites [begin] to understand and to be willing to speak, to know who the other people were and, therefore, able to do something in the community.” To his mind “there is a value ... in working with the so-called power structure because it can change and do something.”⁵⁵

The Freedom Summer projects signaled a change in strategy by bringing the civil rights struggle into the Deep South and challenging segregationists on their home turf. Freedom Summer also challenged the approach of many Southern liberals, “civil rights” rabbis included. The new focus on confrontational tactics, press attention, and national pressure conflicted with the compromise and gradual, negotiated change preferred by many Southern liberals. The familiar *modus operandi*, drawing on a network of contacts and sympathizers, and necessitating a familiarity with the local political scene, was being replaced by mass action. Already distrustful of forced

⁵⁰ “The first Freedom Ride was a dramatization of the conditions and served its purpose. But to have almost 150 people in jail does not accomplish permanent results.” Minutes of Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, June 1, 1961, folder 19, box 18, MS 34, CCAR.

⁵¹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, August 2, 1963.

⁵² Rothschild’s position was contentious within the Commission on Social Action itself. See Minutes of Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, June 1, 1961, folder 19, box 18, MS 34, CCAR.

⁵³ Mantinband thought that “Non-violent demonstrations in the long run are a contradiction in terms, and serve little purpose except to focus attention on the issue.” Mantinband to Francis Harmon, February 24, 1965, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center; Mantinband, “The Horns of a Dilemma,”: 245.

⁵⁴ Commission on Social Action minutes, November 22-23, 1964, folder 3, box 53, MS 72, AJA.

change and sharing misgivings about outside interference, many Southern liberals were resistant to the new tactics that diminished their importance, leaving them on the sidelines as spectators to the change and rendering their long established role as interracial intermediaries largely redundant. That those involved in civil rights protests, most of whom were outsiders and scornful of the Southerners' liberal credentials, were suspicious of their commitment and motives only made matters worse. The unease of Southern liberals, the "civil rights" rabbis among them, was magnified many times over in the broader white community.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Chapter Six

Battling Ben-Ami

While David Ben-Ami was unfortunate in that his tenure coincided with a period of volatility in Hattiesburg, his own actions in the spring and summer of 1964 did much to anger the membership of Temple B'nai Israel.¹ Many of his congregants thought Ben-Ami far too friendly towards the Northern activists and clergymen involved in the Freedom Summer project in Hattiesburg. According to one of the ministers who participated in the protests, Rabbi Ben-Ami “was the only local citizen in Hattiesburg to show any amount of friendliness” to the delegation of northern clergymen. He invited them to his house and talked with them at the courthouse.² While the congregation would have disapproved of visits by the clergymen to the rabbi’s home because of their sensitivity about associating the temple with the protestors, they were probably enraged when Ben-Ami housed rabbis participating in the registration project.³ The rabbi also visited the nine clergymen arrested during the second week of the protests. Informed of his visit by the sheriff, the temple board read Ben-Ami the “riot act ... Thou shalt not visit agitators – clerical or otherwise – who have come to disturb the equanimity of our community.”⁴ Alvin Sackler, Temple B'nai Israel’s president, complained that despite meeting with Ben-Ami, “we did not make a dent on the Rabbi as to his dealing with Presbyterian ministers in regards to

¹ A number of episodes from Ben-Ami’s stormy tenure in Hattiesburg are described in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 199-202.

² See Rabbi Elbert Sapinsley to Rabbi Malcolm Stern, February 3, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA; see also Dave Fogel to David Ben-Ami, December 25, 1964 and Anne Badon to David Ben-Ami, October 15, 1964, both in David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

³ See Krause, “The Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,” 307; Rabbi Elbert Sapinsley to Rabbi Malcolm Stern, February 3, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence, AJA.

integration.” While they could not persuade the rabbi to cease his contacts with the ministers, Ben-Ami was sympathetic to their warnings about the potential consequences for Jewish businessmen if Jews were seen to be involved in the protests.⁵ However, the rabbi did not heed this demand. Instead he befriended Robert Beech, a northern clergyman who was serving as a representative of the Delta Ministry of the National Council of Churches in Hattiesburg.⁶ Ben-Ami also raised funds for the Committee of Concern to rebuild black churches destroyed by white supremacists, a project actively promoted by Perry Nussbaum.⁷

The relationship between Ben-Ami and his congregation rapidly disintegrated after the first public protests in January 1964. Members of the Jewish community pressured Ben-Ami to cease his association with the civil rights activists, writing letters and telephoning the rabbi to express their displeasure.⁸ His initial failure to comply brought a harsher response. Sackler threatened to resign from the congregation if the rabbi was not fired. The temple minutes noted tersely that “he had lost confidence in Rabbi Ben-Ami. Cannot do anything with the Rabbi.”⁹ Other members of the congregation displayed their discontent in a blunter fashion by boycotting the temple services and withdrawing their financial support.¹⁰ Their actions eventually persuaded Ben-Ami to reduce his controversial public presence. Unlike Ungar, Ben-Ami buckled under congregational pressure. He was sufficiently

⁴ Morris Margolies, a rabbi from Kansas City who joined Ungar and Lipnick in Hattiesburg, quoted in the *Jewish Monitor*, 16 (:11) July 1964: 57.

⁵ Board of Trustees minutes (undated), Temple B’nai Israel Records, AM98-59, McCain Library and Archives, USM.

⁶ The National Council of Churches provided training to those involved in the Freedom Summer projects. See Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 200; *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965.

⁷ Robert Stone to David Ben-Ami, January 5, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA.

⁸ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965.

⁹ Minutes of Special Congregational Meeting, April 24, 1964, Temple B’nai Israel Records, USM.

dependent on his position to back away from continued activism, choosing job security over prophetic self-sacrifice.

Frowning on their rabbi's activities and probably dreading a replay of their experience with Mantinband, the congregation was provided with no respite as Hattiesburg became the largest Freedom Summer site in Mississippi. Alongside the voter registration drive, the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) opened freedom schools in Hattiesburg and adjoining Palmer's Crossing in July 1964.¹¹ Many of the northern college students recruited to teach at the freedom schools were Jewish.¹² Hattiesburg's Jews were already sensitive to their image in the white community and fearful of stirring antisemitism and critical of the civil rights struggle.¹³ The presence of Jewish activists magnified their preexisting hostility to the Freedom Summer project. In some of their eyes it looked too much like a "Jewish protest."¹⁴ Their opposition could not have been helped by the content of some of the lessons taught at the freedom schools. Doug Baer, a student who had just returned from a year in Israel, made the similarities between the Jewish historical experience of persecution and the black struggle in America the theme of his classes, pointing to Israel's mettle as a model for the civil rights movement.¹⁵ As if to prove their fears well founded, Rabbi Arthur Lelyveld, a volunteer from Cleveland, Ohio, and a small interracial group of co-workers were assaulted while walking in broad daylight.

¹⁰ Rabbi Leo Bergman sermon; Rabbi Elbert Sapinsley to Rabbi Malcolm Stern, February 3, 1965, David Ben-Ami Correspondence file, AJA. See also *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965.

¹¹ Although the recruitment and coordination of the Freedom Summer was largely performed by COFO (Council of Federated Organizations), SNCC was given responsibility for Hattiesburg.

¹² As many as two-thirds of the white volunteers for the 1964 Mississippi Freedom Summer project were Jewish. See Debra Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women and Civil Rights Movement* (New York, 2001), 18.

¹³ See Webb, "Big Struggle in a Small Town," 222; *Washington Post*, December 25, 1964.

¹⁴ Maury Gurwitch quoted in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 82.

¹⁵ See D. Segal, "Jewish Young Folksinger in Mississippi," *Jewish Currents* (March 1965): 10.

Although the Jewish community was unsympathetic to Lelyveld, the attack unsettled Hattiesburg's Jews.¹⁶ It was an unpleasant reminder of the threat implicit in the antisemitic literature that had been distributed along with segregationist material in Hattiesburg during the summer.¹⁷

David Ben-Ami was a less likable figure than his predecessor. His relationship with his congregation was marred as much by "personality factors" as by an incompatibility of convictions and priorities.¹⁸ His colleagues in the Mississippi Reform rabbinate thought that he was not a competent congregational rabbi because he lacked "the qualities that would have kept him in his congregation, civil rights issue or not."¹⁹ While Temple B'nai Israel may have been willing to hire anybody "who professed to be a rabbi", the community suspected that Ben-Ami fell short of even this low bar.²⁰ One congregant recalled that his "ability and education as a rabbi (if he was one) was obviously minimal."²¹ He failed to perform his rabbinical duties, perhaps distracted by his part time teaching at the University of Southern Mississippi. Sackler composed a lengthy list of "grievances against [the] Rabbi": services did not start on time, he was under-prepared, did not teach at the Sunday School, "talks bad about the congregation out of town," "disregards wishes of board of directors," and

¹⁶ A delegation of Hattiesburg Jews visited Lelyveld in the hospital and "firmly suggested he leave our city as soon as he was able, and to go handle problems in Chicago (sic) where he lived." Lelyveld reported to Charles Mantinband that "Only one Jew has showed any interest in me ... I contacted Dr Reikes but aside from x-raying my skull in the line of duty he was a total loss." Arthur Lelyveld to Mantinband (n.d.), writings folder, box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center; Maury Gurwitch to author, 24 May, 2002; see also Arthur Lelyveld Affidavit to the FBI, SC6786, AJA.

¹⁷ See Irene Paul, "From Hattiesburg, Mississippi," *Jewish Currents*, September 1964: 35; "My Grandfather's Ghost in Hattiesburg," *Jewish Currents* (January 1966).

¹⁸ The Union of American Hebrew Congregations investigated the causes of Ben-Ami's departure. Rabbi Richard Hirsch of the Religious Action Center of the UAHC concluding that after "We went into great detail and upon a considerable amount of investigation, [we] learned it was not only the ... issue of principle but there were personality factors which were involved..." Quoted in Krause, "Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights,": 307.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

failed to “set [an] example for [the] community in personal life.”²² Shortcomings that might have otherwise been overlooked were fodder for a faultfinding temple board. Ben-Ami also seems to have lacked Mantinband’s finesse and charm, virtues that were essential in soothing and placating a raging congregation. Like Ungar, he appears to have been quick to judge and disapprove of his congregation’s timidity. Suggesting poor judgment, he most likely distributed reprints of a sermon by a rabbi jailed at Albany, Georgia, to some members of congregation:

Let those who embrace a faith without a passion for justice at its core, without a willingness to act – sacrifice, if need be without ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself,’ and all that implies of human responsibility – let them do what they will, but let them not call that faith by the name of Judaism. For their temples are only comfortable shams, their God is opportunism, and in the place of the Torah they might well build their idols to success, conformity, respectability and ambition – for truly this is already the religion of their heart.²³

Ben-Ami was unhappy in Hattiesburg, and he expressed his disappointment about the congregation and community to Perry Nussbaum shortly after his arrival.²⁴ However, he received little sympathy from his rabbinical counterpart in Jackson. Nussbaum chided that Ben-Ami “must have been fully aware of what developed in

²¹ Lou Ginsburg to author, June 5, 2002; Betty Reuben to author, June 6, 2002; Maury Gurwtich to author, May 24, 2002.

²² Minutes of Trustees meeting, April 24, 1964, October 28, 1964, Temple B’nai Israel Records, USM.

²³ Ben-Ami bought 25 copies of the sermon, presumably distributing it to members of his congregation. See “Jewish Freedom Fighters and the Role of the Jewish Community: An Evaluation,” *Jewish Currents* (July-August 1965): 18, 22-23.

this congregation and in the city towards the end of Mantinband's ministry" before he accepted the pulpit in Hattiesburg. Nussbaum refused to believe that the congregation had "turned against" Ben-Ami over his civil rights activities, as their "attitudes and concerns were already fixed by the time he arrived."²⁵ Ben-Ami complained that he was isolated in the small town, receiving no support from national Jewish bodies beyond "pious statements."²⁶ The tense local scene troubled the rabbi: "I had to tremble when walked in the street or when someone knocked at my door. It reminded me of Germany where I was born."²⁷ The rabbi's despondency was rooted in frustration and disappointment. He began looking for alternative postings barely months after taking up his position in Hattiesburg, probably realizing that his already stormy tenure was likely to be short lived.²⁸ "Decent" pulpits were still out of his grasp. Not yet a member of the CCAR, he was offered positions in Bluefield, West Virginia, and Muskegon, Michigan.²⁹ After years of sacrifice in the expectation of eventual reward, all he could look forward to were further frontier pulpits.

In October 1964 the temple's trustees unanimously agreed to terminate the rabbi's three-year contract, giving Ben-Ami the "prerogative of leaving at anytime prior" to the termination of his tenure of service.³⁰ He was offered the inducement of three months salary if he opted to leave early.³¹ Ben-Ami reached a mutual agreement

²⁴ Nussbaum to Rabbi Randall Falk, January 28, 1965, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, February 5, 1965.

²⁷ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965.

²⁸ Nussbaum to Randall Falk, January 28, 1965, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

²⁹ Malcolm Stern to David Ben-Ami, September 18, 1964, folder 7, box 21, MS 34, CCAR.

³⁰ Minutes of Trustees meeting, October 28, 1964, Temple B'nai Israel Records, USM.

³¹ Nussbaum to Randall Falk, January 28, 1965, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

with the temple board that he would leave the following February, amicably and quietly satisfying both parties.³²

However, he left Temple B'nai Israel in the blaze of publicity that the congregation had long sought to avoid. The controversy and resulting press attention arose out of the "Christmas in Mississippi" project, a scheme hatched by black entertainers Dick Gregory and Sammy Davis Jr. to provide 20,000 turkeys to the poor of Mississippi for Christmas.³³ The Salvation Army was enlisted to distribute the turkeys, but many of its local officers refused to participate.³⁴ It was left to volunteers to fulfil this function. When David Ben-Ami's name was included in a list published in the *New Orleans States-Item* of those distributing turkeys in Hattiesburg, alongside the names of the controversial Reverend Robert Beech and a black Baptist minister, members of Jewish community were enraged. Temple B'nai Israel held an emergency meeting the next day.³⁵ The publicity was considered to be a final provocation and even Ben-Ami admitted that the "notoriety ... added fuel to the fire." Rumors swirled that segregationists were planning a retaliatory boycott of Jewish owned stores.³⁶ To further worsen matters, the timing of this final act created the impression that the incident had precipitated Ben-Ami's departure. The national Jewish press trumpeted Ben-Ami's "ousting" as a scandal, claiming that the rabbi had "lost his position with the congregation because of his advocacy of civil rights."³⁷ Temple B'nai Israel was

³² Minutes of Congregation Meeting, November 2, 1964, Temple B'nai Israel Records, USM; *Southern Israelite*, December 25, 1964.

³³ This incident is recounted in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 199-202.

³⁴ A number of prominent Hattiesburg Jews sat on the local Salvation Army Board. See Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 266 n.93; Telegram from Leonard Bowers to David Ben-Ami, December 11, 1964; Alfred Osborne to David Ben-Ami, December 11, 1964; WG Sims to Drew Pearson, December 25, 1964, all in the David Ben-Ami Papers, McCain Library and Archive, USM.

³⁵ See *New Orleans States-Item*, December 26, 1964, December 23, 1964

³⁶ *Southern Israelite*, December 25, 1964.

³⁷ See *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965; Krause, "Southern Rabbi and Civil Rights," 306.

swamped by angry letters from across the country decrying the betrayal of Jewish values.

Relations between the rabbi and his congregation reached a nadir. Some of the congregants were so distrustful and upset that Ben-Ami “had to have the Salvation Army’s National Commander ... in New York wire the board to assure them that I was not a subversive character.”³⁸ The incident also soured the rabbi’s relationship with his Mississippi colleagues. Perry Nussbaum, who had shortly before reminded Hattiesburg’s rabbi that “the rabbis and congregations in Mississippi would still have a lot of problems once he was gone,” an implicit warning against provocative actions as his departure grew near, resented the complications created by the controversy.³⁹

Like André Ungar, Ben-Ami could not resist making a final splash. While Ungar made his last public speech fiercely condemning the Group Areas after having announced his resignation to his congregation, so too did David Ben-Ami use this opening to take a controversial public position. To Nussbaum’s mind, he had acted in a manner unrestrained by congregational responsibilities and due regard for the interests of his fellow Jews in Mississippi.

Ben-Ami’s departure in February 1965 was not regretted by his congregation. Exhausted and distressed by their experience with two troublesome rabbis, Temple B’nai Israel elected not to seek a replacement. Congregants would conduct their own

³⁸ *Southern Israelite*, December 25, 1964.

³⁹ Nussbaum had encountered this problem before. He complained to Solomon Kaplan, the Director of the Southwest region of the UAHC, in October 1963 that the increasingly uncooperative and obstructive Rabbi Allan Schwartzman of Greenville “is leaving Mississippi, and in the leaving doesn’t care what he is bequeathing to us.” Perry Nussbaum to Solomon Kaplan, October 28, 1963, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

services in the future. The congregation did not want to “get ‘stuck’ again after our disappointment with Ben-Ami.”⁴⁰ Before leaving Hattiesburg, Ben-Ami took a last swipe at his congregation, at the same time justifying his own actions: “The Jews position as Jews is morally untenable, but the rabbi in the South cannot always act in the rabbinic tradition. Either we had to do what was right, or we compromised with evil.”⁴¹ The tone and sentiments expressed could easily have been André Ungar’s.

⁴⁰ The congregation later struggled to hire another rabbi. According to Nussbaum, Temple B’nai Israel “tried repeatedly for years and offered exorbitant salaries (for Mississippi), but Rabbi’s were reluctant to sink themselves away in that small town.” Nussbaum to Murray Polner, November 20, 1975, folder 15, box 3, MS 88, Polner Papers; Maury Gurwitch to author, May 24, 2002.

⁴¹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 1, 1965.

Chapter Seven

Micah, Mantinband, Amos, and Ben-Ami

These sentiments reflect a trend within progressive Judaism in the 1950s and 1960s. In America, the UAHC under Maurice Eisendrath pushed the rapidly expanding Reform movement towards greater engagement with social justice issues, providing institutional backing for the civil rights activities of rabbis and congregations.¹ Ben-Ami credited Eisendrath's "call to action" as an inspiration for his own activism.² André Ungar drew similar inspiration from Leo Baeck who urged his students to exemplify the ideals of prophetic Judaism: "the message is not the preaching of a Rabbi, but the man himself... Only if he himself is a message, can he bring a message."³ Both Ungar and Ben-Ami were influenced by this renewed effort to synthesize Judaism and human service, a movement that resonated with their own personal encounters with Nazism.⁴ These same forces galvanized the social justice movement within Progressive Judaism. The expansion of the Reform and Conservative movements and the accompanying institutional support for the social message of prophetic Judaism provided a platform and a niche for the turbulent priest-prophet. The postwar period offered opportunity and encouragement for idealistic rabbis to exemplify prophetic Judaism, whether by assuming

¹ See Meyer, *Response to Modernity*, 364-366.

² *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965.

³ Charles Mantinband drew similar inspiration from his teacher Stephen S. Wise: "Charles, the best sermon you can preach, can be manage without opening your mouth. It is by the life you lead, the influence you exert, the example you set." Charles Mantinband to the Editor of the *Jewish Post*, November 13, 1958; Notes on "Most Unforgettable Character," box 2, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center.

⁴ To Ungar, South Africa offered obvious and vivid parallels with recent Jewish history: "anti-Semitism and apartheid were palpably kissing cousins as forms of racial hatred." André Ungar to author, June 6, 2002.

pulpits in Mississippi and South Africa, or more commonly by participating in the freedom rides and Freedom Summer projects. Ben-Ami, working as a social worker in New York, claimed to have seized the opportunity to live out what he saw as the ethical implications of his religious heritage. He “volunteered to serve on the front lines of the civil rights struggle,” wanting to be on the “firing line instead of dealing only with dialog on racial strife.”⁵ André Ungar “felt keenly the duty to articulate the traditional Jewish laws on social justice,” arriving in South Africa with “leaping hopes and blazing ideals,” driven by a vision of a “community thriving in its fulfillment of prophetic Judaism.”⁶

Both rabbis derived inspiration from the prophetic model, understanding social justice to be central to Jewish values and to be intimately bound up with Jewish identity.⁷ Ben-Ami presented his activities in the South as that of “a ‘witness’ laboring in the prophetic tradition, and therefore not able to assume a ‘hands-off’ and neutral position in the struggle for civil rights.”⁸ Ungar saw himself as the heir to rabbinical reformers and prophets, articulated this commitment to “living Judaism” in a *cri de coeur* in the *Temple Israel Bulletin*. As “Justice is the highway to piety,” the rabbi’s responsibilities extend to

Human Dignity, the equality of all peoples and races, the oneness of mankind and the worth of all its members. Prophetic courage was- and is- needed to assert

⁵ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965; *Chicago Sun-Times*, December 17, 1964

⁶ André Ungar, “Rabbi in Three Worlds,” *Present Tense*, July 1975: 15; André Ungar, “Apartheid – One Generation Later,” *Jewish Spectator* (Winter 1986).

⁷ Ungar maintained that “Relevance is the keynote to true Judaism...it is the duty of every generation of Jews to come to grips with the most vital problems of their own age and land, applying the eternal principles of Jewish ethics to the concrete situation around them.” Transcript of a public meeting on “Progressive Judaism and Problems of Today,” 10th International Conference of the World Union of Progressive Judaism, July 8, 1957, folder 14, box c1, MS 16, WUPJ.

⁸ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965.

them amidst circumstances which let the negation of these values pass as permissible and even respectable. ... The pulpits and written pronouncements of progressive Jewish congregations always represent focal points of the struggle for human rights, social equity, universal moral standards.

While Ungar and Ben-Ami defined Judaism in prophetic terms, entailing inescapable universal responsibilities, their congregations preferred their religion to be a socially acceptable counterpart to that of their conservative, churchgoing neighbors. The temple stood at the center of an orbit of religious, social, education, fundraising, and sisterhood activities, but was resistant to the pull of controversial social justice activities. The perception of vulnerability, coupled with disinterest and disinclination persuaded South African and Southern Jews to steer clear of political involvement. Ungar scorned the “hollow automatism of lip and limb movement” of a Judaism that placed appearance before substance, warning that without commitment to prophetic ideals South African Jewish “spiritual coherence will be reduced to the level of a common liking for gefillte fish.”⁹ Instead it was necessary to “infuse meaning into outward observance; and spread Jewish relevance from its arbitrary ritual confinement to all levels of life.”¹⁰ David Ben-Ami shared this concern, counseling that a morally unengaged Judaism was unsatisfactory.¹¹

This clash of perceptions extended to the appropriate role of the rabbi. Above all, Temple B'nai Israel in Hattiesburg wanted its rabbi to be presentable, as much an

⁹ Unpublished letter from André Ungar to press (n.d.), Box 800, Public Relations Files, SAJBD.

¹⁰ *Temple Israel Bulletin*, May 1956.

ambassador to the gentiles as a representative of God's preferably undemanding message.¹² Although Charles Mantinband fulfilled this later role, participating in an assortment of civic organizations, he was headstrong and resistant to pressure from his congregation. Ungar, and to a lesser extent Ben-Ami, was no more malleable, unwilling to "consecrate the status quo."¹³ In his eyes, the rabbi's paramount obligation to fulfillment of prophetic teachings beyond his community dwarfed his congregational duties.

The divergence between the needs of congregation and rabbi points to the widening gulf between progressive Judaism, pushed by the social justice orientation into activism, and South African and Southern Jewry, pulled by the countervailing tug of conservative conformity. Ben-Ami and Ungar's brief tenures also suggest the dynamics of the frontier power relationships. Both were isolated, André Ungar on a double frontier. If Port Elizabeth was an outlying settlement of Jewry in South Africa, Temple Israel was a beleaguered outpost of reform Judaism in its midst. Although Port Elizabeth had a large Jewish community, the tensions between Reform and Orthodoxy ensured that the lone Progressive rabbi was unable to draw on the support of his Orthodox colleagues.¹⁴ Nor did he have the support of the fledgling Progressive movement, which was hostile to his political stance. David Ben-Ami could not rely on the support of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, one potential ally, because he was not a member. Elements in the

¹¹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 29, 1965.

¹² See Board of Trustees minutes January 15, 1964, Temple B'nai Israel Records, USM; Malcolm Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi in the South" in Nathan Kaganoff and Melvin Urofsky (eds.), *Turn to the South: Essays on Southern Jewry* (Charlottesville, 1979), 27.

¹³ Ungar, "Rabbi in Three Worlds," 15.

¹⁴ See David Sherman, "Reform Judaism in South Africa: Its Origins, Growth and Principles," *Jewish Affairs* (Autumn 1993): 27-31.

rabbis' backgrounds made their positions even more precarious and problematic. Their outsider status, by virtue of their foreign origins, simultaneously sensitized them to injustice and created barriers between them and their congregations. It also activated the endemic suspicion of outsiders, impeded their acceptance into the community, and reduced their commitment and sense of attachment to their congregations. Although their temple boards attempted to dominate them, Their relative youth, qualifications, and brief tenures provided the option of mobility that many of their counterparts lacked. Nonetheless the sway that the congregation held over even these two unusual rabbis is demonstrated in the liberating effect that the lifting of the burden of residual congregational responsibilities and curtailment of the leverage temple board had. Ungar and Ben-Ami became most vocal, and most troublesome for their congregations after they agreed to depart.

The place that the two rabbis currently occupy in Southern and South African Jewish consciousness also hints at the fickle nature of memory. Although David Ben-Ami's name still elicits disapproving murmurs from Hattiesburg's older Jewish residents, André Ungar has been retrospectively embraced by the South African Jewish community as a Jewish struggle hero.¹⁵ However, in the late 1950s and 1960s, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies found Ungar to be a persistent irritant, particularly in its international relationships.¹⁶

¹⁵ See Milton Shain et al, *Looking Back in Anger: Jews in the Struggles for Democracy and Human Rights in South Africa* (Cape Town, 2001), 83, as well as the exhibition of the same name.

¹⁶ The South African Jewish Board of Deputies continued to follow Ungar's actions and writings until the late 1980s. *Jewish Affairs*, January 1959; Gus Saron to Paul Kresh, April 3, 1962, Overseas Reactions, Box 394; Memorandum from Gus Saron to Executive Council, "Crusader Against South African Jewry," March 6, 1974; Gus Saron to S Abramowitch, February 7, 1968; also Biography File: 199 Ungar, Rabbi André, all SAJBD.

Chapter Eight

The Board Abroad: the South African Jewish Board of Deputies' External

Contacts

The Board's international relations have received no substantial scholarly attention.¹ This was an important dimension of its work. The Board was sensitive to its image abroad and careful to husband its connections with overseas Jewish organizations. As with the frontier rabbis, the decisions and actions of these international groups were shaped by the terms and nature of their relationships with the South African Jewish community.

The Board was initially aided by the period of institutional consolidation that followed the Holocaust. The destruction of European Jewry and its institutions altered the balance of power in the Jewish world, catapulting American Jewry into a position of pre-eminence. The disruption and destruction had a significant influence on international Jewish organizational life. The Holocaust's transnational dimensions encouraged national organizations to think and engage regionally and internationally, reinforcing the already powerful concept of Jewish solidarity. It also produced a political vacuum that provided space for the emergence and expansion of Jewish organizations which concerned themselves with international Jewish affairs.² These

¹ The Board's internal affairs vis a vis the apartheid question has been the focus of considerable analysis. See, for example, Gideon Shimoni, *Jews and Zionism: the South African Experience (1910-1967)* (Cape Town, 1980); Shimoni, "South African Jews and the Apartheid Crisis," *American Jewish Year Book*, 8, 1988; Atalia Ben-Meir, *The South African Jewish Board of Deputies and Politics 1930-1978*, Doctoral thesis, University of Natal, 1995.

² For the purpose of this study, the term international Jewish organizations refers to groups like the World Jewish Congress, the Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations and the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations that directed their energies exclusively to international Jewish cooperation, as

agencies replicated the broader trend toward growth and professionalization experienced by many American Jewish organizations in the post-war period. The movement towards internationalization was also stimulated by the formation of the United Nations and the establishment of the State of Israel. Lobby and interest groups, Jewish organizations among them, benefited from the influence and prominence that participation at the United Nations provided to professional and proactive non-governmental groups. Active participation in the forums, councils and backrooms of the UN greatly enhanced the status, and expanded the reach, of these organizations. The advantages and opportunities for generating publicity, forming coalitions, lobbying and vocalizing concerns at the UN persuaded many Jewish organizations to join those with whom they shared interests to form new professionally staffed agencies. The novelty and fluidity of this post-war stage encouraged Jewish organizations to jockey for prominence and influence, often entailing skirmishes between rival groups keen to mark out control over responsibilities.

The South African Board was a direct beneficiary of the uncertainties and transformations of this post-war period. Many Jewish organizations were distracted by inter-organizational competition. When noticed, the Board was seen as a potential ally in the dogfights for dominance. Most potential suitors were too preoccupied with the priorities of communal revival and security to pry closely into the Board's political positions. These twin preoccupations were often manifested in a hypersensitivity to indications of renascent Nazism or organized antisemitism, a dominant concern that reinforced the overriding importance of Jewish solidarity and

well as to others with narrower or more occasional international interests, like the B'nai B'rith and the defense agencies.

community safety.³ International Jewish organizations were careful to steer clear of actions that could potentially jeopardize (or allow them to be accused of endangering) a Jewish community.⁴ Inter-organizational rivalry also provided the South African Jewish Board of Deputies with an unusual degree of leverage in the 1950s and early 1960s. These same organizations were more likely to abide by an unspoken code that emphasized consultation, propriety and deference in their interactions with the Board. This ensured that international Jewish agencies were reluctant to intervene in or comment on matters relating to the turf of the South African Board. While some organizations were restricted by constitutional restraints on their actions, the code rested on the willingness or reluctance of the Board's partners to enforce it. When the affiliation, friendship or favor of the Board was sought after, it was strictly adhered to. In the late 1960s, with the decline of Board's relative influence and importance, and the rise in concomitant political costs of adhering to the code (and with it the easy advantages of outspokenness on apartheid), it was less zealously maintained.⁵

Beyond concerns over propriety, a number of additional factors combined to dissuade external Jewish organizations from undertaking actions that might offend the Board of Deputies. Their existent, but limited, ties with the Board were positive and productive.⁶ These contacts were rooted in common problems and concerns. The Board cooperated in countering professional antisemites who distributed their material internationally.⁷ Other areas of cooperation included fundraising for Israel,

³ See Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 8-9.

⁴ For example, see Isaiah Minkoff to Gus Saron, November 10, 1958, SAJBD.

⁵ See Telegram from Easterman to WJC, July 19, 1949, Box H305, folder 14, MS 361, World Jewish Congress Papers (hereafter cited as WJC), AJA.

⁶ For indications of this see Simon Segal to Gus Saron, November 19, 1959, SAJBD.

⁷ For cooperation on antisemitism see Jack Baker to SAJBD, December 18, 1958; George Kellman to Gus Saron, September 27, 1962, SAJBD; Lionel Hodes to Monty Jacobs, March 31, 1964; Monty Jacobs to Lionel Hodes, April 10, 1964, folder 18, box 371, WJC.

youth work and adult education.⁸ The Board and its international partners also shared a concern with the association of Jews with Communism.⁹ The Board's shoestring operation benefited from access to the resources of professional Jewish organizations overseas. It turned to outside agencies for advice, particularly in matters relating to combating local antisemitism.¹⁰ In the 1950s, the Board used films and literature designed by the American Jewish Committee for its own inter-group relations education programs. (While it employed material intended to improve the understanding and acceptance of the Jewish community, it decided that films "which highlight the Negro problems are unsuitable for South Africa."¹¹ A similar decision was reached by a number of Southern Jewish communities.¹²) An amicable relationship with the Board promised reciprocal benefits for international Jewish

⁸ For the high regard for South African Zionism see Extract from "Report of the International Affairs Department of the World Jewish Congress, 1961-1964" (JMR/HG 4872), October 21, 1964, SAJBD; Gus Saron to Max Melamet, December 2, 1958, SAJBD.

⁹ In the 1950s, one of the American Jewish Committee's rare contacts with the Board over apartheid came after the Foreign Policy Association distributed a pamphlet to American schools that incidentally (and correctly) observed, in a discussion of political developments in Africa, that the leadership of the Communist Party of South Africa "is mostly white and, as in similar groups in Europe, often Jewish." The Committee's Dr S. Andhil Fineberg, who led the organization's campaign against Communism, sprung into action, lodging protests with the Association. The Foreign Policy Association conceded that the reference was a "careless slip" and as it "would not countenance anti-Semitism ... should have been excised from the text."⁹ The AJC conducted a low-key campaign to have the pamphlet withdrawn from use in schools. The Board was also concerned about the perception of Jewish sympathy for Communism. Saron wrote to Sam Spiegler of the National Community Relations Advisory Council in the early 1960s asking for advice and assistance in countering this claims of this connection: "I hope my letter does not create an impression of undue alarm about this particular issue of identification of Jews with Communism. It is not a new problem. However, in the prevailing atmosphere in this country, which seems to be moving more to the right and to be increasingly critical radical or leftist attitudes, it may be important to challenge the distorted image of the Jew which is being fostered in certain circles." Gus Saron to Sam Spiegler, September 10, 1963, folder 8, box H307, WJC; Confidential Memorandum from Isaiah Terman to the SAJBD, May 10, 1960; Philip Jacobson to NJCRAC, September 26, 1963, SAJBD.

¹⁰ For example, the Board sought the counsel of the National Community Relations Advisory Council when deciding whether to participate in a commission of inquiry into the exclusion of "undesirable publications" from South Africa. The American Jewish Congress strongly urged the Board not to participate, arguing that the potential advantages in excluding some antisemitic material from South Africa would be "more than offset by the loss of prestige abroad for identifying itself with a device obviously brought into being for the purpose of keeping out of South Africa literature which is critical of South Africa's racial policies." Abraham Hyman to Simon Kuper, May 11, 1955, folder 15, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

¹¹ The Board was reluctant to make an issue about its film selections, advising its agent that: "Possibly our friends may disapprove of our selection, in which case please be guided by their opinions." Gus Saron to Sylvia Rich, May 18, 1949, SAJBD.

¹² See Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 72-73.

organizations, not least access to the South African Jewish community and its resources. The Board was seen as the gatekeeper of the community, able to deny or facilitate access.¹³ Philip Klutznick, international president of the B'nai B'rith expressed his desire that “irrespective of who gives the most and who takes the most, to develop as close a working relationship between the Union [of South Africa] and our organization.” While the B'nai B'rith sought the cooperation of the Board to expand its network of lodges in South Africa, a task that would become substantially more difficult without its approval and support, Klutznick also expressed a genuine sense of solidarity and fellow feeling: “We have a fraternal relationship as Jews with Jews, and we need no formality to help one another as far as I am concerned.”¹⁴

The links that the Board maintained with outside Jewish organizations were buttressed by the personal ties and friendships that existed between Board officials and their counterparts abroad. These personal connections later served as a crucial buffer, as decision-makers turned to and trusted the Board as a source of advice and information. Long-serving Board officials like Gus Saron encountered the same small cadre of counterparts repeatedly at congresses and conferences, and on official visits.¹⁵ The intimate nature of international Jewish leadership created bonds of fraternity and friendship between fellow Jewish civil servants and community

¹³ Alex Easterman, head of the World Jewish Congress' political department, considered South African Jewry to be “very highly organised – more so than any other community that I have encountered. The Board of Deputies has been given, by all sections of the community, and all organisations in it, an unusual measure of authority which it exercises to the full. The Board, in turn, exercises its authority through the Executive, which is all-powerful and exercises a firm control over practically every activity in the community. So firmly established is this Executive that the community expects any representation of a Jewish organisation to obtain the Board's permission to come to South Africa for the purposes of the organisation.” Alex Easterman to I Schwartzbart, 17 June 1949, h305, folder 13, South Africa General Correspondence 1948-9, WJC.

¹⁴ Philip Klutznick to Max Melamet, October 28, 1958; see also Gus Saron to Isaiah Minkoff, October 14, 1958; Saul Jofes to Gus Saron, December 12, 1965, Intergroups Relations Files, SAJBD.

¹⁵ See for example Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960; Simon Segal to Gus Saron, May 25, 1962, SAJBD.

professionals. The Board also profited from serendipity. Maurice Perzlweig, the influential director of the World Jewish Congress' political department, had family in South Africa, visited the country on a number of occasions and had studied alongside Board officials at Cambridge. This colored his perspective on and perception of South African Jewry.¹⁶ The Board also encouraged presentable and persuasive community representatives to make contact with the leadership of foreign Jewish communities when traveling abroad, conducting a low key, and low budget, public relations offensive.¹⁷

The South African Board of Deputies quickly discovered that it also was necessary to project a convincing self-presentation abroad. It first deployed elements of what was to become a characteristic presentation in response to the brief flurry of interest in South Africa following the National Party's electoral victory in 1948.¹⁸ The election results triggered the antennae of organizations attuned to Jewish security worldwide. The Anti-Defamation League, perhaps hoping to burnish its credentials as an organization with international reach, filled its newsletters in the last months of 1948 with portentous warnings of a resurgence of antisemitism in South Africa. Arnold Forster, the director of the League's Civil Rights Division warned that the Jewish community was "seriously threatened by the [Government's] new, official anti-Semitic policy":

¹⁶ See Maurice Perzlweig to Joachim Prinz, February 12, 1952, folder 6, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

¹⁷ See for example Gus Saron to Isaiah Minkoff (the Executive Director of the National Community Relations Advisory Council), January 2, 1958; Gus Saron to John Slawson (Executive Director of the American Jewish Committee), January 7, 1958, SAJBD.

¹⁸ See, for example, Arnold Forster to Gus Saron, July 27, 1948; Arnold Forster to Gus Saron, October 29, 1948; Arnold Forster to Gus Saron, January 3, 1949, Box 394, Overseas Views of South Africa, SAJBD; *The Home Front*, vol. 5, no.1, 1 January 1949.

The trend toward second class citizenship is already in effect. A parallel to the crisis of South African Jewry would be for American Jews to have a man of John Rankin's philosophy in the White House.... Malanists openly spread the Goebbels doctrine throughout South Africa, bringing in their wake a number of 'shirt' outfits more powerful today than during Adolph's heyday.¹⁹

Forster's argument reflected both the centrality of concern with Jewish safety and his own organization's political agenda. Forster maintained that South African Jews were victims alongside the black population, fellow targets of a state enforcing a "modified version of the Nuremberg Laws."²⁰ Blacks and Jews, Forster implicitly advised, had a mutual interest in cooperation, whether in South Africa or the United States. Neither community could afford to ignore racism, no matter whom the target. The Holocaust offered lessons about the need for Jewish mutual support and the dangers of complacency: although "South Africa is geographically remote ... contemporary history has proven that anti-Semitism in any part of the world has an impact on Jews everywhere."²¹ Jews worldwide, Forster implied, needed an assertive and effective advocate, preferably the ADL.

The Board of Deputies was averse to the advice of external critics, particularly when the source was seen as self-serving and the suggested approach regarded as politically inexpedient. The Board was loath to link blacks and Jews, keen to maintain a positive image abroad and at home, and wary of the meddling of international

¹⁹ John Rankin, a notorious anti-Semite, represented Mississippi in the United States Congress in the 1940s and early 1950s. See Edward Shapiro, "Anti-Semitism Mississippi Style" in David Gerber (ed.), *Anti-Semitism in America* (Chicago, 1986), 131-137.

²⁰ *New York Star*, December 1, 1948; see also *ADL Bulletin*, December 1948; *The Facts*, November 1948.

²¹ *The Facts*, November 1948.

Jewish organizations. In this instance, the Board was confronted with the first of two dominant (and contradictory) portrayals of the position of South African Jewry. These contrasting representations formed the basis for much of the criticism of the Jewish community's response to apartheid. Forster's portrayal of South African Jews as a precarious and imperiled minority faced with resurgent antisemitism was a forerunner of later criticism that scolded the community for its blindness to looming danger.²² Critics later counselled that vulnerability should compel the Board of Deputies to recognize that the community's long term interests (and moral heritage) were best served by either choosing to side with the oppressed majority or encouraging en masse emigration from the country.²³ The Board's failure to act and speak out while it still possible, the logic ran, would doom the community to either white antisemitism (when the NP inevitably reverted to old habits) or black revenge (in the backlash against the community after a future revolution). Thus the Board erred by choosing passivity, endangering the entire Jewish community through its neutrality. The Board was equally vulnerable to a contrary interpretation of the position of the Jewish community. Rather than harping on communal insecurity, other critics pointed to evidence of South African Jewry's success and integration as an indication of communal complacency and political acquiescence. The community was faulted on this flank as the pliant and passive beneficiary of an unjust system. The popularity of these two portrayals, and the attendant criticisms, fluctuated alongside political developments in South Africa.

²² In this instance, the Board of Deputies moved quickly to suggest a cautious alternative interpretation of events in South Africa. Gus Saron's response was reprinted in *The Facts* in June 1949.

²³ Max Melamet wrote that American Jews "can't understand is why Jews don't see the writing on the wall and start making arrangements now, while there is still time, to get out." Max Melamet to Gus Saron, April 14, 1960, SAJBD.

The Board responded by propagating a self-representation that sought to delicately counterbalance the impression of both precariousness and security.²⁴ Although emphasizing the vulnerability of the community could quiet calls for active opposition to apartheid (lest its fragile position be eroded further), overplaying this hand risked upsetting a Government sensitive to its image abroad, or worse, encouraging external organizations to rush to its rescue. Underplaying insecurity would encourage outside critics to question its political neutrality. The Board adjusted its message for different audiences, subtly emphasizing the insecurity motif when criticized for passivity, staunchly demurring when it was suggested that the situation was hopeless.²⁵ While its image-conscious actions were in no way sinister – often undertaken to offset the wilder claims of uninformed outsiders, and genuinely reflecting the sentiment and thinking of its members on the South African situation – the Board did seek to shape perceptions of the South African Jewish community.

During the 1950s, the harshest criticism of the Board came from letters and editorials printed in the Jewish press in Britain and America. The Board occasionally directed appeals to editors to rethink their negative coverage.²⁶ It particularly wanted to discourage reports that recited the past-Nazi sympathies of government officials, which “muddy the water.”²⁷ Attacks of this kind from identifiably Jewish sources were politically embarrassing and potentially dangerous if they inadvertently ignited old animosities.²⁸ While the Jewish community was generally portrayed as imperilled,

²⁴ See for example Gus Saron to the editor of *Jewish Frontier*, December 13, 1950.

²⁵ Compare Gus Saron to S. Roth, December 9, 1958 with Gus Saron to FJ Thiel (draft not sent), March 16, 1959; Gus Saron to Isaiah Minkoff, November 19, 1958, SAJBD.

²⁶ See Jon Kimche to Gus Saron, May 5, 1960, SAJBD.

²⁷ See for example CC Aronsfeld to Gus Saron, March 26, 1962; Gus Saron to Paul Kresh (editor, *American Judaism*), April 3, 1962, SAJBD.

²⁸ As Saron wrote later, the frequent “pointed reminder[s]” in press coverage of the anti-Semitic antecedents of NP leaders was imprudent: “What good purpose does this reminder serve? ... [it] might create in Government circles a feeling of frustration and even of bitterness. They may say to

the Board itself came under assault in the pages of the London *Jewish Chronicle*. The paper was the preferred forum for the Board's critics, many of whom were themselves South African.²⁹ Articles critical of apartheid policy typically also criticized or cajoled the Jewish community for its neutrality. This blurring of focus placed the Board in an invidious position: it was difficult to rebut criticism of its own stance without countering criticism of South Africa. To do so might give the impression that the Jewish community agreed with, or was insensitive to, attacks on South Africa.

While the Board's letters to the press were generally defensive in nature, correspondence with overseas contacts often presented the community far more positively. The Board was aware that the Department of Information assiduously monitored South Africa's image in the international press. Indeed, the Board was occasionally prompted to write to the overseas Jewish press following suggestions from the Secretary for Information.³⁰ This knowledge severely limited the public defence that the Board could safely offer overseas, although it did allow for conspicuous demonstrations of its cooperation and loyalty. Private correspondence was free of these restrictions, enabling a different presentation that focused on factors

themselves: 'We have made a genuine attempt, and have largely succeeded, in eliminating anti-Semitism from political life, yet here is a leading Jewish body which gives us no credit for our good work but keeps on harping on a past that we want to bury.' ... Publication of your article would be interpreted as meaning that, instead of giving recognition these efforts, a leading Jewish organization overseas wishes to keep alive the impression that the Government is anti-Semitic or is on the verge of becoming so, and thus hands to South Africa's enemies another stick with which to beat it – an unfair stick because it relates to the past and not to the present." JM Rich wrote in a similar vein: "There is nothing that the Nationalist leaders resent more at the present time than having their pre-1948 statements exhumed ... [the Board has] been at great pains, since the Nationalist Government came into power, not to repeat a single word of them." JM Rich to AD Massel, April 27, 1961; Gus Saron to Saul Jofes, March 8, 1962, SAJBD.

²⁹ See for example Gus Saron to Max Melamet, October 14, 1958, SAJBD.

³⁰ The Government's requests suggest that it harbored an undue regard for the influence of Jews, rooted in stereotypes of Jewish power. See J Wentzel to Gus Saron, July 4, 1963; Gus Saron to the Secretary of Information, July 5, 1963; Gus Saron to the editor, *Montreal Star*, July 5, 1963; JC van Rooy to Gus Saron, October 2, 1963; WG Meyer to Gus Saron, November 22, 1963; RW Sherwood to Gus Saron, January 17, 1967; Gus Saron to S Rappaport, January 31, 1967; Sam Davis to Gus Saron, March 10,

that were excluded for political reasons from the press. A letter from Aleck Goldberg, Secretary of the Board's Public Relations Committee, is illustrative of this:

As far as Jews in this country are concerned, there are many who condemn the injustice of the racial situation. There are, indeed, some Jews who are amongst the most voluble in their condemnation of this. The situation is, however, so complicated that inequality and injustice cannot be easily erased. One cannot expect South African Jewry as a whole to actively oppose racial discrimination in a country in which it is inherent since the time of recorded history, which is more than three centuries ago – long before any Jews came to this country.

If one is to be honest, one must admit that there are a number of Jews who are quite unconcerned and insensitive to discrimination against anyone other than themselves. There are also other Jews who are sympathetic to the aspirations of the non-white population, but yet find it extremely difficult to take an active stand in assisting them. There are again those Jews, whom I mentioned before, who are the avant garde of those South Africans seeking to destroy racial discrimination of any sort.³¹

Goldberg frankly admitted the seriousness of the racial situation and deftly highlighted the Jewish role in opposing apartheid.³² This portrayal placed the community in a sympathetic light. Goldberg acknowledged, in an almost apologetic

1971; CP Mulder to Sam Davis (n.d.); Memorandum 5983, "South African Jewry and Race Policy", December 29, 1971.

³¹ Aleck Goldberg (for Gus Saron) to Miss Ruskin, March 4, 1960, SAJBD.

³² Goldberg wrote that "racial discrimination of White against Black in South Africa is, of course, the over-riding problem ... As there is discrimination and inequality it is, of course, natural that there should be injustice." Ibid.

tone, the divisions in the community, but returned repeatedly to the prominent role played by Jews in opposition politics. This tacit claim of association with radical Jewish opponents of apartheid neglected the Board's ambivalent relationship with the community's political fringe.³³ By contrast, the Board studiously avoided making this controversial connection known in the public arena. The Board benefited from the attention the international Jewish press gave to prominent Jewish opponents of apartheid. Few outside South Africa were aware of the diffident relationship between the Board and dissident rabbis, never mind its difficulties with radicals. In private communications like the letter above, the Board blurred the line between itself and the radical minority. This seems to have had the desired effect, persuading some influential individuals that the Board had allied itself with opponents of apartheid. For example, when Jacob Javits was questioned on the Board's approach, he recalled "the fact that the Jewish Committee within the Union of South Africa itself is actively opposed to apartheid."³⁴

³³ Gus Saron made a similar point in a letter to the American Jewish Committee:

"The idea which seems to be prevalent abroad, that Jews are indifferent or callous about the racial problem, is completely false. It is common knowledge (although under Emergency Regulations no names may be published) that a rather high percentage of the white persons who have been detained under the Emergency Regulations, or earlier "named" as Communists, are members of the Jewish community. The Jewish community has been very much relieved that public attention has not been focussed on this fact. Apart from these outspoken leftists, many of the Jews who are active in politics, whether in our National Parliament or in the Provincial Councils, have been critics of the Government's Apartheid policies. One or two Rabbis have also published the text of their sermons in which current racial policies have been sharply criticized.

The Board of Deputies has always stressed the view that the individual Jewish citizen has a right, and indeed a duty to play his part in public affairs. In the light of the facts I have given, however, you will not be surprised to know that it has come to our ears that persons in the Government are somewhat unhappy about the lack of support given to them." Gus Saron to Simon Segal April 20, 1960, SAJBD.

³⁴ This presentation may have also made an impact on the public. Philip Slomovitz, the editor of *Portrait*, a Jewish newspaper in Michigan wrote that "it would be unfair to overlook the fact that while the Jews in [South] Africa are divided on the issue – wie es christelt sich so judelt sich – many Jews there have risked their security to oppose the government and fight for justice." Jacob Javits to Fritz Flesch, February 4, 1958; Israel Goldstein to Fritz Flesch, January 17, 1958, Fritz Flesch Papers; Philip Slomovitz to Fritz Flesch, March 23, 1963, SAJBD.

Yet for the most part, in the 1950s the Board did not need to actively defend the image of the South African Jewish community abroad. A handful of Jewish organizations devoted consistent attention to South Africa. The majority relied solely on the press for information about events in South Africa, a source that provided infrequent and often unreliable coverage. This ensured fluctuations in interest, spiking when events were understood to affect the local Jewish community. The Board supplied some organizations with first-hand news reports and press cuttings.³⁵ This information-gathering role enabled the Board to regulate the kind of information supplied, suggesting its own interpretation of events.³⁶ The Board also vetted material that was sent for comment, excising politically sensitive and pessimistic analysis.³⁷

Most Jewish groups regarded news of apartheid legislation as an unpleasant but peripheral issue, outside their purview. Although the imposition of race laws in South Africa was disquieting, the Jewish community was not imminently threatened. These same organizations were already faced with multiple demands from within the Jewish world. The perceived significance of the slow and steady imposition of restrictive apartheid laws was easily eclipsed by issues that had a direct and immediate impact on Jews: antisemitism in the Soviet Union, German reparations and the vulnerable state of Israel. Maurice Perlzweig summed up what was a commonly

³⁵ Gus Saron also served as a member of the South African Jewish Telegraphic Agency committee (alongside representatives from the Zionist Federation and of the World Jewish Telegraphic Agency).

³⁶ See for example E. Tannenbaum to Monroe Sheinberg, November 4, 1949; Gus Saron to Saul Jofte, March 8, 1962, SAJBD.

³⁷ For example, the American Jewish Committee removed negative references to Daniel Malan and the National Party from a confidential memorandum that it distributed in 1949. Among the lines identified for exclusion by Gus Saron: "This party [the NP] was, and still is anti-Semitic, anti-Negro, anti-British, anti-immigration and pro-German. The Herenigde Nasionale Vol[k]spartei formed in 1940 ... the principal objective of which was the negotiation of a separate peace with the Nazis. The Party denied membership to Jews." See "Union of South Africa", AJC Memorandum, January 12, 1949, Intergroup Relations Files; Arnold Forster to Gus Saron, November 24, 1948, SAJBD.

held position: “a Jewish organization should give the highest priority to Jewish responsibilities.”³⁸

The few organizations with the professional staff, resources and inclination to participate in broader social justice causes were often already engaged elsewhere. The American Jewish defense agencies (the American Jewish Congress, American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League) were actively involved in the civil rights struggle, the highpoint of a long historical attachment to the civil rights movement.³⁹ The Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism, another body that was attempting to rally Jewish opposition to segregation in the South, had similar priorities. Not only was South Africa of distant concern because of its “geographical remoteness,” but the organization faced a “multiplicity of immediate and pressing problems” closer to home. The Commission needed to focus its energies “first about racial integration in the United States, a problem we face in every community, north and south.”⁴⁰

³⁸ The Consultative Council of Jewish Organizations (comprising the American Jewish Committee, the Alliance Israelite Universelle and the Anglo-Jewish Association) had a similar policy of refraining from “intervening in all but emergency situations immediately affecting our coreligionists.” See Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, June 7, 1960, SAJBD Papers; Moses Moskowitz to Fritz Flesch, February 13, 1958, Fritz Flesch Papers.

³⁹ For the background to the black-Jewish civil rights alliance see Clayborne Carson Jr., “Blacks and Jews in the Civil Rights Movement” in Maurianne Adams and John Brace, eds., *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States* (Amherst, 1999); Marc Dollinger, *Quest for inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in modern America* (Princeton, 2000); Seth Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind: a crisis of liberalism* (New York, 1998); Murray Friedman, *What Went Wrong? The Creation and Collapse of the Black-Jewish Alliance* (New York, 1995); Cheryl Greenberg, “Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century” in Maurianne Adams and John Brace, eds., *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States* (Amherst, 1999); Stuart Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice: American Jews and the Fight for Civil Liberties* (New York, 1997).

⁴⁰ Eugene Lipman to Fritz Flesch, December 2, 1957, Fritz Flesch Papers.

Chapter Nine

A House Divided: A Case Study in Contrasting Approaches to South African Jewry

The World Jewish Congress, and its affiliate, the American Jewish Congress, were among the few Jewish organizations that did take an active interest in South Africa, although for very different reasons. Both were spurred by multiple motives, yet their contrasting relationships with the South African Jewish community was pivotal in shaping their divergent responses to events in South Africa. In the late 1940s and 1950s, the intersection of inter-organizational rivalry, financial insecurity and political positioning persuaded the World Jewish Congress to court the South African Jewish community.¹ By contrast, the American Jewish Congress (AJCongress), which had only limited productive and advantageous contacts with the Southern and South African Jewry, applied the precepts of prophetic Judaism to its relations with the two communities. The approach that the AJCongress adopted closely accorded with the prophetic position of André Ungar. Indeed Ungar became a bit-player in the clash between these opposing approaches. By contrast, the World Jewish Congress' approach was pragmatic, constrained by considerations relating to its constituency in South Africa.

In the immediate post-war period, the South African Jewish community presented a tempting target to the World Jewish Congress. The perceived significance of the South African Jewish community was magnified by the concurrence of a

¹ The World Jewish Congress was founded in 1936 to represent the interests of Jewish organizations at the international level. Although its renaissance following the Second World War was primarily tied to the American Jewish community, its affiliates included Jewish communal organizations worldwide.

number of interrelated factors. The Congress was faced with a budgetary shortfall that threatened it with disaster. The situation necessitated urgent remedy: one senior leader warned in 1950 that without an additional source of income, “the present trend will either bankrupt us completely or force us to decide on such cuts as to make it impossible for us to operate effectively.”² The South African community was seen as a possible financial savior. Its potential contribution was estimated as an annual sum of £25,000, offering the solution to the organization’s severe “financial problems.”³ Alex Easterman, the Political Secretary of the World Jewish Congress, concluded that the only way to tap the “wealth of South African Jewry and the generosity of its giving” was to win the affiliation of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies.⁴ Gaining the allegiance of the Board offered other major advantages. The Board of Deputies was understood to be an “all-powerful institution [that] in a real sense rules the community and all its activities.” The World Jewish Congress believed that, at a stroke, it would gain access to the resources and the allegiance of South African Jews, enabling it to claim to represent an entire community on the international Jewish stage. Moreover, it conjectured that the Board, once wooed, would be pliable owing to its internal structure that concentrated authority in hands of a few individuals.⁵

Membership promised more than merely money. It would be a significant political coup, pulling the South African community from the orbit of the British Board of Deputies. Loosening ties to the British Board offered the prospect of a

² Robert Marcus to Alex Easterman, August 8, 1950; Alex Easterman to Nahum Goldmann, August 2, 1950, folder 14, box H305, MS361, WJC.

³ Robert Stone to Alex Easterman, February 9, 1948; Alex Easterman to I Schwarzbart, June 6, 1949; Easterman to I. Schwarzbart, July 3, 1949, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁴ Easterman wrote that “The Board exercises a rigid authority over all matters, not the least that of fund raising, and there is simply no chance in the world of our obtaining any financial assistance unless under the auspices of the Board.” Alex Easterman to I. Schwarzbart, May 30, 1949, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁵ See Easterman to I. Schwarzbart, July 10, 1949, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

public victory in the struggle to claim the authority (and resources) to speak for world Jewry. It could contribute to the achievement of this ambition in practical terms, enhancing the Congress' claim to represent Diaspora Jewry at the United Nations. The prospective transfer of allegiance would render the South African Board's membership of the British-led Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations (CBJO) redundant, undercutting this organization's rival status as a Jewish non-governmental organization at the United Nations.⁶

Despite its best efforts, centered on Alex Easterman's visit to South Africa in 1949, the World Jewish Congress failed to win the affiliation of the South African Board. On first encounter, Easterman found the Board's leadership to be "pompous, even arrogant, stiff-necked and obstinate."⁷ His opinion of the Board deteriorated further after months of exasperating negotiation. Unable to persuade the Board's wily and tightfisted leadership to reach a decision, he railed in letters to his superiors against the "swines who run the Board of Deputies [whose] sheer boorishness and impertinence, they are beyond all endurable limits."⁸ The Board's reluctance was ostensibly borne of the "fear of an active association with an international organization in view of the general political situation in South Africa." The Congress was skeptical of this claim, pointing to the organization's links to the B'nai B'rith and the British Board.⁹ Easterman and his colleagues thought it more likely that their efforts had been poisoned by a whispering campaign conducted by their rivals in Britain. However, the South African Board was probably wary of antagonizing its

⁶ See Memo from Maurice Perlzweig to the London Office, February 4, 1954, folder 4, box H306, WJC; for background to the CBJO see Deborah Dash Moore, *B'nai B'rith and the Rise of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany, 1981), 209.

⁷ Easterman to I. Schwartzbart, May 30, 1949, folder 13, H305, WJC.

⁸ Easterman to N Barou, July 15, 1949, folder 13, H305, WJC.

British ally, potentially undermining a long-standing relationship. The World Jewish Congress struggled to prove that the switch of allegiances would provide definite benefits, instead of merely duplicating the role performed by the CBJO. Members of the South African Board probably also sensed that the financial cost of paying for its fealty to two organizations was outweighed by the possibility of playing the two organizations off against one another.

After much haggling, Easterman eventually secured an annual subvention from the South African Board, although substantially less than the initial optimistic estimates and subject to re-approval every year. The arrangement hinged on a tacit agreement that governed the relationship of the Board and the Congress for the next decade:

Whenever the Congress deems it desirable that action of a political character should be taken on the national level, it will invite the Board to consider and give effect to this action in the Union of South Africa.

In accordance with its fundamental principles, the Congress will not, without the specific authority or consent of the Board, take political or other action with regard to matters affecting the internal affairs of the South African Jewish community.

The Board will use its good offices to enable the Congress to receive from the South African Jewish community an adequate financial contribution by way of an annual grant.¹⁰

⁹ See Memo from I. Schwarzbart to the Organization Department, June 24, 1949, H305, folder 13,

The Board decided not to join the World Jewish Congress, instead adopting an arrangement that loosely associated the two organizations. The informal pact was profitable for both parties. The Congress received a variable (but not inconsiderable) annual contribution, as well as the ability to claim the allegiance of the South African community.¹¹ It hoped to formalize and solidify this relationship at a later point.¹² Whether intended or not, the Board's decision proved to be a masterstroke, providing an extraordinary degree of leverage in its relationship with the Congress, particularly over the question of apartheid. The impermanent nature of the arrangement, coupled with the Congress' eagerness to strengthen ties with the South African community, worked to the Board's advantage. The Congress was not only reluctant to pressure the Board on apartheid, lest the latter withdrew its contribution (or potentially extract itself from the tenuous relationship) but actively shielded the Board from criticism and hostile actions from within the Jewish world.

The terms of the relationship were first tested in 1954 when the United Nation's General Assembly established the Commission on the Racial Situation in the Union of South Africa, appealing directly to the World Jewish Congress and other selected organizations that were "actively engaged in activities designed to eradicate prejudice and discrimination" for submissions. The timing of the appeal was significant, overlapping with a visit by Simon Kuper, the Board's chairman, to New York. Kuper had informed the Congress that the renewal of the South African subsidy had been agreed only "in principle."¹³ The organization was placed in a delicate

WJC.

¹⁰ Alex Easterman to Maurice Perlzweig, May 26, 1954, box H306, folder 4, MS 361, WJC.

¹¹ See Dr. Roth to W. Pulvermann, October 18, 1956, Box H306, folder 15; Memo from Maurice Perlzweig to the London Office, February 4, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

¹² See David Petegorsky to Sidney Jacobs, March 23, 1953, H305, folder 14, WJC.

¹³ Memo from Maurice Perlzweig to the London Office, February 4, 1954, H306, folder 4, WJC.

position, aware that the B'nai B'rith and CBJO were pressuring the Board to nullify its contacts and cooperation with the Congress. It was unwilling to jeopardize its subsidy and mindful that the South African Board itself was divided on the question of affiliation.¹⁴ Maurice Perlzweig, the Director of International and United Nations Affairs at the Congress argued that it would be “manifestly be a very foolish thing for us to send a highly critical document on South Africa to the UN, and it would certainly wreck the hope of doing anything in regard to affiliation (sic).” Simon Kuper, an advocate of affiliation, “would rightly regard it as betrayal.” Consultation with the Board would be a “futile and possibly foolish step ... which would weaken Kuper’s hand.”¹⁵

The Congress decided that self-censorship was the most appropriate response. Maurice Perlzweig explained the decision in an internal memorandum:

It is clearly my duty to inform the officers of the WJC that, with whatever regret – and my own regret is deep and genuine – this seems inevitable in view of our relationship with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. It is equally my duty to make it clear that this act of omission on our part will not go unnoticed. We are paying the price for [South African] affiliation. In saying all this, I am doubtless reflecting all the doubts and feelings of all of us, but I see no other way.¹⁶

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Memorandum from Maurice Perlzweig to Nahum Goldmann, March 19, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

¹⁶ Memorandum from Maurice Perlzweig, March 17, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

No other Jewish organization participated in the United Nation's Commission, a fact not least achieved because of Congress prodding.¹⁷ The avoidance of potential ructions with the Board came at the cost of a spat with the American Jewish Congress. At the heart of this squabble was a clash of approaches and priorities.

David Petegorsky, the executive director of the American Jewish Congress, wrote to register his "vigorous protest", insisting that the "matter is one of principle." For him, silence on South Africa bore a striking resemblance to similar pressures from Southern Jews:

Needless to say, I am not unaware of the problem posed by the South African Board of Deputies.

Some constituent bodies of the WJCongress have faced this problem before. You may not be aware of the fact that last year, the AJCongress filed a brief amicus in the segregation cases before the Supreme Court. A delegation of three Jews from the South came to New York to visit Dr. Goldstein [the AJCongress president] to demand that we withdraw our brief and threatened that if we did not withdraw our brief, we would be denied allocation from Welfare Funds in the South. Dr Goldstein promptly told them that while he had no idea how we would be financially affected, this was to us a matter of basic principle and we would under no circumstances yield to any such demands.¹⁸

¹⁷ W. Zuckerman to G. Saron, March 12, 1958; Memorandum JMR/HG 2908, April 14, 1958, Intergroup Relations Files, SAJBD; see also the Fritz Flesch papers (passim).

¹⁸ David Petegorsky to Maurice Perlzweig, March 17, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

Perlzweig was stung by the comparison, replying that the “analogy with the three gentlemen from the South is no analogy.” He adopted an argument that the Congress was to employ again in the future, maintaining that the organization was “inhibited from intervening in the affairs of any country in which we have an affiliate.” While “South Africa is not yet, in the technical sense, an affiliate, our relations at this moment are such that we could not even remotely contemplate any action in relation to South Africa without at least consulting with the local Board of Deputies.” He failed to mention that, in this instance, the Congress had no intention of consulting with the Board.¹⁹

The bitter exchange continued, with the American Jewish Congress disputing

that the problem of segregation in South Africa is a domestic issue. Evidently the United Nations did not think so when it set up its commission.

I might point out that our actual allocation from the Southern part of the United States is far greater than the sum which the South African Board contributes to the WJCongress and our potential allocation many times that. That has, nevertheless, not prevented us from being so outspoken on the problems of segregation, despite instances such as I mentioned in my first memo.²⁰

The angry exchange of letters reflected the incompatibility of approaches adopted by the two organizations. The AJCongress viewed its responsibilities to South Africa differently, following a prophetic agenda that clashed with the World Jewish

¹⁹ Memorandum from Maurice Perlzweig to David Petegorsky, March 19, 1954, Box H306, folder 4,

Congress' pragmatism. The incompatibility of these two agendas was highlighted repeatedly in the 1950s and 1960s.

The American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress' largest constituent, was propelled by its own distinct interests, instincts and inclinations.²¹ The AJCongress' worldview was premised on the understanding that the protection of Jewish communities required the active defense of the rights of other minorities. The fight against discrimination was regarded as integral to the advancement of the interests of Jewry, removing a threat shared by all minority groups and pushing forward the boundaries of collective acceptance. The AJCongress found confirmation for its thinking in the intermixing of antisemitism and racism by some segregationists in the South.²² While both the World Jewish Congress and the AJCongress agreed that Jewish safety was paramount, the latter alone was convinced that this objective would be secured by altering the environment that the communities existed in. Although the Jewish communities of the South and South Africa would temporarily suffer embarrassment and inconvenience, their long-term safety would be ensured by assisting in the uprooting of protean and hydra-like racism. By contrast, as a "general rule" the World Jewish Congress gave priority to the immediate "interests of Jewish

WJC.

²⁰ Memorandum from David Petegorsky to Perlzweig, March 23, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

²¹ The "AJCongress has inevitably special relations with WJC and a large influence, much larger than any other affiliate, in the formulation of its policies. The principal officers of the AJCongress are either officers or executive members of the WJC." Memorandum from Maurice Perlzweig to Will Maslow, November 7, 1956, Box H306, folder 4, MS 361, WJC.

²² "So far as American organizations are concerned, there are principals, purposes and traditions which I need not rehearse because you are well acquainted with them. Some of these organizations have the closest ties with Negro bodies; and there are places in the American South where active anti-Semitism and resistance to integration are closely allied." Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD.

communities.”²³ The AJCongress’ philosophy was also interwoven with the belief that Jews had a particular moral responsibility to combat discrimination; an obligation rooted in religion and historical experience. Joachim Prinz, the president of the American Jewish Congress made these connections explicit:

I believe that the plight of the American Negro and his battle for equality of rights is of very great concern to all people, including Jews and particularly Jews. By the same token we shall not be silent in the face of any injustice that we feel is being committed.

...As you know, I was in Germany when American Jewry spoke up against Hitler. There was some German Jews who were squeamish about it and I never forget the meetings which were held in Berlin at the time protesting Stephen Wise’s ‘interference’... I have not changed my mind on such matters and I am not going to.²⁴

These prophetic inclinations existed alongside practical and tactical considerations. Inactivity in the South or South Africa opened it to accusations of ostrich-like behavior, narrow self-interest or moral abdication. Quietism could potentially cost it the support of socially-minded Jewish youth. This consideration was compounded by the competition between the AJCongress and other Jewish defense organizations for membership, resources and leadership.²⁵ Moreover,

²³ In the 1930s, the World Jewish Congress chose not to adopt a position critical of all fascist regimes, rather than risk the safety (and potential disaffiliation) of the Italian Jewish community. Maurice Perlzweig to Gerry Riegner, October 9, 1969, folder 8, box H306, WJC.

²⁴ Joachim Prinz to Maurice Perlzweig, May 20, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

²⁵ This is suggested in the AJCongress’ response to news of the proposed United Nations conference on racial discrimination: “Will invitations be extended only to international organizations, or will national organizations be included as well? I ask because if national organizations will be included, the American Jewish Committee and the B’nai B’rith will probably make certain that they are invited, and

conspicuous passivity could equally effect the AJCongress's close working relationship with black civil rights groups. Its participation in the civil rights alliance produced a medley of expectations and pressures that shaped its response to South Africa. The AJCongress was expected to participate in the anti-apartheid movement, its leadership invited to join the International Sponsoring Committee Against Apartheid in South Africa and the American Committee for Africa.²⁶ These pressures could reach comic proportions – for example, the call by the American Committee on Africa for the AJCongress to boycott South African lobster tails, despite the “incongruity of a Jewish group agreeing to boycott a trefe [non-kosher] article.”²⁷

This combination of pressure and political preference brought the AJCongress into conflict with the World Jewish Congress over South Africa. The clash was magnified by difference in operating styles. Whereas the World Jewish Congress relied on compromise and diplomacy, balancing the taxing demands of its fee-paying constituents against its own agenda, the American Jewish Congress was loud and confrontational, preferring public protest.²⁸ Although the AJCongress did not have a constituency in South Africa, a factor that freed it of the considerations that tied the World Jewish Congress' hands, it felt bound by loyalty to respect the latter's relationship with the Board of Deputies. This placed the AJCongress in an ambivalent and uneasy position. Isaac Toubin, the organization's associate director, reflected on the pull of opposing pressures: “Frankly, I do not know how Congress can stay out of

I believe it would be most important that the AJCongress, in addition to the WJC, should participate.” Memorandum from Petegorsky to Perlzweig, June 3, 1954, folder 4, box H306, WJC.

²⁶ Bayard Rustin and A. Philip Randolph established Americans For South African Resistance in response to Defiance Campaign in SA. In 1953, it was renamed the American Committee on Africa. Rustin and Randolph worked closely with various Jewish organizations over the next decades.

²⁷ Memorandum from Isaac Toubin to Dr Goldstein, November 7, 1957, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

²⁸ Memorandum from Will Maslow to Joachim Prinz, March 17, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

²⁸ See Svonkin, *Jews Against Prejudice*, 23.

such [anti-apartheid] rallies, nor do I know how we can participate without violating the understanding of the WJC with South Africa.”²⁹

The partnership between the AJCongress and World Jewish Congress created a similar dilemma for the latter. The Congress was caught between an organization keen to be at forefront of protest against apartheid and a reluctant South African Board. Moreover, the Congress’ leadership was torn between its sympathy for the anti-apartheid movement and the overriding demands, as Perlzweig put it, of “tact and, if I may put it brutally (as Nachum [the Congress president] might say), of expediency.”³⁰ The Board’s cooling relationship with the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations provided a warning of the consequences of Board disfavor.³¹

While the conflicting approaches to South Africa produced some sparring between the AJCongress and the World Jewish Congress in the 1950s, these tensions erupted into confrontation and conflict after Sharpeville. The attention that the Sharpeville massacre generated transformed the South African question, thrusting it onto the floor of the United Nations and onto the agendas of civil rights groups. Whereas previously apartheid jostled with other issues for exposure, overnight South Africa seized the headlines. The incompatibility of the two approaches crystallized.

²⁹ Memorandum from Isaac Toubin to Dr Goldstein, November 7, 1957, Box H306, folder 4, WJC.

³⁰ Memorandum from Maurice Perlzweig to Will Maslow, November 7, 1956, Box H306, folder 4, MS 361, WJC.

³¹ The CBJO was less willing to accommodate the Board’s wishes. This is best illustrated in the contrasting submissions made by the CBJO and the South African Board to the second United Nations Conference on Non-Governmental Organizations in Consultative Status Interested in the Eradication of Prejudice and Discrimination in Geneva June 1959. The CBJO boasted of the practical application of techniques that it had committed to in 1955 to counter racism: legal challenges and legislative proposals, community action and dissemination of education and information. While the CBJO trumpeted the expansion of the range of its activities to include efforts to hasten desegregation in the South, the South African Board submitted a brief and defensive justification for its neutrality. The Board sought to minimize its commitments to the CBJO, opting to be inconspicuous while its partners

The American Jewish Congress felt unable to ignore the combined force of principle and pressure. The World Jewish Congress was compelled to repeatedly interpose itself on behalf of the Board of Deputies, attempting to forestall potentially damaging AJCongress actions.

Following Sharpeville, Maurice Perlzweig engaged in a prolonged holding action on behalf of the Board, a duty that he found “difficult and disagreeable” but felt obliged to perform. For him, it was a “war” that he had to “force myself to fight.”³² Perlzweig marshalled the armory of arguments that the Board advanced in its own defense, tailoring his message for different audiences. The first fusillade in this lengthy battle of wills and words was launched in March 1960 in an effort to preempt the American Jewish Congress’ response to Sharpeville. Perlzweig worried that an outburst would result “in breaking our association with the South African Board.”³³ The Board would cut ties to save itself “unnecessary embarrassment.”³⁴ Perlzweig was convinced that a single statement would have a contagious effect, convincing other organizations of the necessity of adopting public positions, and letting “loose a flood of unrestrained and competitive righteousness such as from time to time marks or mars the American Jewish scene.”³⁵ Perlzweig was “greatly worried” that Jewish organizations would “not be able to resist the temptation of publicly commenting on these events,” succumbing to the calculus of “competitive publicity.” He did “everything possible to dissuade the leaders of these organizations from making such

enthusiastically endorsed binding international human rights legislation. See Addendum 1 and 3, Draft CBJO Geneva Paper, Box 502, US Correspondence, SAJBD.

³² He concluded one letter to Alex Easterman: “let me sum up the situation in a single sentence: if any recipient of this memo would like to take my place, it will be made available immediately and without hesitation.” Maurice Perlzweig to Saul Hayes, June 7, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Alex Easterman, June 7, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 25, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

³³ Maurice Perlzweig to S. Roth, June 3, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

³⁴ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, April 4, 1960; see also Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD; Maurice Perlzweig to JM Rich, March 29, 1960, WJC.

statements.” It was also necessary “to prevent the wholesale involvement of Jewish public opinion,” an auxiliary anxiety that necessitated keeping the issue out of the Jewish press.³⁶

This concern was magnified by the prospect of the American Jewish Congress’ Biennial Convention in May 1960.³⁷ The AJCongress was seen as the most likely candidate to break the “united front” that held Jewish organizations back from criticizing South Africa, and the convention as the ideal platform to do so.³⁸ Its confrontational style would then precipitate a “burst of competitive righteousness” from other groups. Perlzweig had battled with the AJCongress before over South Africa, persuading the organization to forego participation in a boycott of South African produce only after making “strong representations.” He had also had difficulty in getting the AJCongress to agree not to publish an article, written by Rabbi André Ungar, that attacked the political stance of the South African Board of Deputies.³⁹ Perlzweig had “sweated blood” to prevent the Congress “from shooting their mouths off on South Africa.”⁴⁰ He foresaw trouble at the upcoming convention:

the brilliant idea has been conceived of inviting this same Rabbi Ungar to speak on “Report on South Africa.” This gentleman, who is now Prinz’s [rabbinical] assistant was formerly in South Africa, and claims to have been expelled by the Government, though there are South Africans who say he was

³⁵ Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 25, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

³⁶ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, April 4, 1960; see also Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD; Maurice Perlzweig to JM Rich, March 29, 1960, WJC.

³⁷ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD; see also Perlzweig to Saron, June 7, 1960, SAJBD; AL Easterman to Gus Saron, June 10, 1960, SAJBD.

³⁸ Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 25, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

³⁹ The American Committee on Africa had solicited the AJCongress’ participation in the boycott of South African lobster tails. Memorandum from Will Maslow to Joachim Prinz, March 17, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

expelled by his congregation. Whatever the truth may be, and whatever the merits of this controversy, I view with apprehension a public statement on South Africa which can hardly be other than strongly partisan in character.⁴¹

Perlzweig addressed the “strongest possible appeal to Rabbi [Joachim] Prinz,” the president of the American Jewish Congress, to prevent a public attack on the South African Board and to forestall “any resolution likely to cause [the Board] embarrassment.”⁴² Perlzweig hoped to deflect attention away from South Africa, suggesting that the discussions and eventual resolutions should deal only with “racialism in general terms.”⁴³ Failing this, he hoped that any discussion of apartheid would not “involve the Jewish community of South Africa.”⁴⁴

Perlzweig eventually persuaded the AJCongress to cooperate, although not without “some unpleasant encounters” that drove him “to use very strong language.”⁴⁵ In deference to Perlzweig’s pleas, Joachim Prinz avoided specific mention of South Africa in his speech, limiting himself to a statement of support for all African freedom

⁴⁰ Maurice Perlzweig to S. Roth, June 3, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² He hoped to persuade the AJCongress “at all costs avoid vicarious heroism and self-righteousness, those besetting sins of Jewish oratory.” Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 11, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁴³ Perlzweig wrote to Prinz that he

would venture to suggest that any resolution should begin by dealing with the problem of racialism in general terms and should underline the obligation of Americans to fight its manifestations, whether against Negroes or Jews, in their own country. It could go on to say that, in loyalty to the same principle, the Congress is opposed to manifestations of racialism wherever they occur throughout the world, and it could express the hope that the efforts of the United Nations and its Secretary General to secure the implementation of the principles of the Universal Declaration would succeed with the help of all right-minded people.

Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 11, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁴⁴ He wrote to Prinz that “This is what I fear most of all. It would not be an edifying act to provide a platform for a denunciation of the South African Board in its absence ... I hope most sincerely that those who speak on South Africa will be persuaded to leave the Jewish community alone.” Ibid.

⁴⁵ Perlzweig also tried to persuade Dr Nahum Goldman, the president of the World Jewish Congress, to refrain from mentioning South Africa in his contacts with the AJCongress. See telegram from Maurice Perlzweig to Dr. Goldman, May 13, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Will Maslow, May 13, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC; Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD.

movements. Although Prinz insisted on the adoption of a resolution condemning apartheid, he undertook that it would not be communicated to the press. The organization did issue a press release “probably intended for the Negro press.”⁴⁶ Perlzweig avoided André Ungar’s address at a session on international affairs, fearing that Ungar would be “violently attacking the South African Board of Deputies.”⁴⁷ Perhaps mindful of the Board’s prickliness towards Ungar, Perlzweig scoured the press for mention of Ungar’s speech.⁴⁸

The AJCongress’ muted response in the months following Sharpeville was in large measure achieved through Perlzweig’s efforts, reflecting as much the impact of his persistent cajolery as the strength of his arguments. His strategy centered on urging the World Jewish Congress’ affiliates to delay their public responses until after the Congress had consulted with the Board, hoping that their interest and urgency would abate with time.⁴⁹ Perlzweig presented this to the Congress’ affiliates as a

⁴⁶ The press release was headlined: “National Convention Hails Negro Sit-Ins, Condemns Apartheid; Vows to Keep Up Fight Against Racial Discrimination in North as Well as South,” and described how Joachim Prinz “who led the AJCongress picket-line demonstration in front of Woolworth’s Fifth Ave. store protesting lunch-counter segregation in the South, was re-elected national president of the organization.” This suggests an attempt by the AJCongress to burnish its civil rights credentials, but also the diffusion of the anti-apartheid message into the platform of the civil rights movement. See Richard Cohen, Press Release, May 31, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Alex Easterman, June 7, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

⁴⁷ “What will happen at the special session on international affairs in relation to South Africa, I cannot predict, but Rabbi Ungar’s report on South Africa is described in today’s Herald-Tribune as a ‘special feature.’ I only hope that this and the resolution will not receive extensive publicity and thereby create serious difficulty for us” Maurice Perlzweig to Alex Easterman, May 26, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

⁴⁸ “Nothing appeared in the reports printed by the metropolitan press here, though the Jewish National Monthly, which probably reaches South Africa, had what I considered to be a rather silly sentence, but no more than a sentence out of Ungar’s speech. I began to breathe freely until I obtained copies of some releases issued by the Public Relations Director of the American Jewish Congress...one of which is a longish report of Ungar’s speech...This has not appeared in any of the papers I have seen, and is probably intended for the Negro press.” Maurice Perlzweig to Alex Easterman, June 7, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

⁴⁹ Perlzweig asked whether the “delay of a month or so in the formulation of a clearer opinion could be regarded as tragic or too high a price to pay for the avoidance of errors which would drive South African Jewry into a more difficult position.” Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 11, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

pragmatic delay, borne of “melancholy necessity.”⁵⁰ He appealed for respect for the established practice of consultation, warning that unilateral action “would not only be tactless but at the very least would create the most undesirable tensions” with the Board.⁵¹ Perlzweig planned to confer with a Board delegation before the meeting in Paris in July 1960 of the Conference of Jewish Organizations.⁵² This meeting served an allied purpose, providing opportunity for the Congress to persuade its partner organizations to “maintain cooperative contact with South African Jewry, in spite of our differing views.”⁵³ Perlzweig realized that the Congress would not be able to stall indefinitely; the meeting would “minimize the damage and perhaps [allow the Board and Congress to] agree on how this agreement to differ should be conducted.”⁵⁴

He also sought to interpret the Board’s passivity favorably to its critics, leaning heavily on the Board’s self-presentation when appealing for patience:

⁵⁰ Maurice Perlzweig to Marc Turkow (Congreso Judio Mundial), May 10, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁵¹ Outspokenness would “be a clear violation of the proprieties of the situation, to put it at its lowest, if it took public action of any kind on South Africa without at least some prior intimation which would give the Board an opportunity to express and opinion.” Perlzweig also expressed his skepticism at the value or desirability of a response to events in South Africa “unless it is done with a real understanding and without self-righteousness”:

I say with profound respect that anything we say must reflect our sense of our own inadequacies. There must be somewhere a note of humility if we are to carry our own conviction among those whose blood is being spilled. As a Jewish agitator put it in an earlier day: “Let him who is without sin among you cast the first stone.

Maurice Perlzweig to Will Maslow, 23 March 1960, folder 2, box, H306, WJC.

⁵² Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, April 22, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁵³ “The view which has developed, and which we share with B’nai B’rith, is that it would be wrong to say anything about the specific situation in South Africa until we have had the opportunity of consulting with the representative of South African Jewry. This is the line I have taken in advising our constituents everywhere, and it has been faithfully followed from Sydney to Montreal, with one small exception. The exception was a student group in the Argentine, which adopted a resolution remarkable chiefly for its mildness, after pressure for moderation both from the local Israel Embassy and the DAIA.” Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, 11 May 1960, folder 13, box H305; Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 25, 1960, folder 5, box H306, WJC.

⁵⁴ He sensed “that it would be impossible to hold back indefinitely the tide of protest.” Maurice Perlzweig to S. Roth, October 17, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to S. Roth, June 3, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

It is perfectly true, as you report me to say, that the South African Board of Deputies has not taken a position on apartheid. Some people think that this is to be condemned. It may strike you as odd, but there are others who praise this as an act of courage. To refuse to support the principle which is common both the Government and the larger part of the Opposition in South Africa is not unlike a refusal to go along with the wilder denunciations of the Soviet during the McCarthy period. This is an imperfect analogy, if only because the public and legal pressure in South Africa is greater than it was in this country, where its spokesman was a demagogue and not the Government. I have very little doubt that there are people who denounce the Board as 'subversive' for refusing to commit itself.

The Board at one point passed a resolution, though in very general terms in favor of equal and just treatment for all races and religions. It has never attempted to persuade the Jews, rabbinical or lay, from participating in the fight for equality. Indeed it has emphasized their complete right to do so, and has in effect encouraged them.⁵⁵

Perhaps realizing that gentle pleas would be unlikely to quiet the American Jewish Congress for long, the World Jewish Congress requested that the Board provide it with material that showed "any Jews siding with the other side." While it was reluctant to put the Board in an "awkward position" by highlighting the prominent role played by Jews in opposing apartheid, it advised that it could not afford to "ignore the issue completely" if it hoped to buttress the Board's image

⁵⁵ Ibid.

abroad.⁵⁶ Perlzweig also requested copies of the Board's statements on the "general topic of justice for minorities," material that could be used in "calming spirits" of querulous overseas critics.⁵⁷

Perlzweig copied another key component of the Board's self-presentation, highlighting the community's vulnerability to resurgent antisemitism:

The leaders of the present Government represent a doctrine which the late Field Marshal Smuts correctly described as fascist. During the war many of them actively supported the Nazi cause. Until they took office they were outspokenly anti-Semitic, though their official attitude to the Jewish community underwent a change for pragmatic reasons subsequently. They have since disavowed anti-Semitic policies. Nevertheless this is no more than a surface change, and we must ask ourselves what effect our pronouncements may have on the Jewish position.

The Government today exercises limitless and uncontrolled powers over individuals, and is answerable to no court or other authority. What pressures they may decide to bring to bear on the Jewish community in the light of its international connections we have yet to see.⁵⁸

To these arguments Perlzweig added additional reasons, ranging from the claim that constitutional obstacles barred the World Jewish Congress from taking

⁵⁶ SJ Goldsmith (World Jewish Congress) to Gus Saron, March 29, 1960, SAJBD.

⁵⁷ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD.

⁵⁸ He wrote to Prinz in a similar vein, urging him to "bear in mind that the South African government is now clearly exercising powers normally taken only by a Fascist administration, and that its leaders have a long pro-Nazi and anti-Semitic record. The change which took place on the assumption of

action to highlighting the South African government's support for Israel.⁵⁹ This last reason was disputed within the World Jewish Congress itself, "countered by the fact that the Knesset has declared, in firmly expressed terms, its views on the apartheid question." Doubts emerged in the Executive of the organization as to the validity of the Congress' position. Even Alex Easterman was disquieted:

I feel some diffidence in maintaining this cautious attitude which is, unfortunately, very considerably affected by our relations ("moral and material", as Mr. Ben Barka might put it), with the South African Board. On the principle, there is very little to choose between the stand we took on the Nazi racial policies and practices at the time when there was an existing large Jewish community affected by them, and the South African Jewish position in relation to the nationalists' apartheid policy and acts. We are, therefore, in an unpleasant dilemma over South Africa, and we shall have to wriggle out of it as best we can, on the basis of the facts of political life. It is fortunate that we are able to 'stall' by maintaining that we should wait and see what emerges in Paris, on the information and advice which will be given by the Chairman of the South African Board to the Conference of Jewish Organizations, and perhaps to us, in a more limited and confidential circle.⁶⁰

power was for pragmatic reasons and is superficial." Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 11, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Marc Turkow, May 10, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁵⁹ "We are, as a matter of fact, forbidden by our Constitution to take any public action relating to the internal affairs of any country in which there is an organized community which can speak. This is a formal reason why we cannot as yet speak, though it is in the existing situation one of the great importance." Maurice Perlzweig to Joachim Prinz, May 11, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Marc Turkow, May 10, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

⁶⁰ Alex Easterman to Maurice Perlzweig, May 13, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

Easterman's uneasiness reflected both the prick of principle and the "great and mounting pressure" that the Congress was under to issue a statement on apartheid.⁶¹ This pressure was linked to the controversial nature of the Board's political neutrality. A variety of individuals urged the World Jewish Congress to influence the Board to alter its stance.⁶² Alongside the wrangling and tension that compulsive silence produced, the policy had potential political implications. Perlzweig and Easterman feared that in the long term "silence is on balance going to do more harm than good." The policy could jeopardize the Congress' contacts with North African governments, particularly its "long established associations" with the Tunisian president.⁶³ More troubling were the potential consequences for the organization's close relationship with Black organizations. Perlzweig worried that the World Jewish Congress would "not be able to maintain these relationships with an attitude of public indifference to one of the great tragedies of our time."⁶⁴

Perlzweig was perspicacious in predicting that delay would cool interest in South Africa. By the middle of 1960, the attention of Jewish organizations had drifted. The pressure exerted on the World Jewish Congress dissipated. It returned to its efforts to wean the Board away from the rival CBJO.⁶⁵ For the time being, the Congress continued to carefully husband its relationship with the Board, encouraging

⁶¹Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD; see also Perlzweig to Saron, June 7, 1960, SAJBD; AL Easterman to Gus Saron, June 10, 1960, SAJBD.

⁶²"At one point, Mrs. Roosevelt, among others, was drawn into this discussion, and it fell to us to defend the position of non-interference which we have consistently adopted." Criticism also came from "Jewish crusaders, some of them survivors of Nazi persecution." Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, April 4, 1960; see also Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, May 16, 1960, SAJBD; Maurice Perlzweig to JM Rich, March 29, 1960, WJC.

⁶³ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, August 5, 1960, folder 8, box H308; Maurice Perlzweig to S. Roth, June 3, 1960, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

⁶⁴"We are working closely with Negro groups, and only today I was in conference with an official of the United Nations who is working on an application for consultative status of an international Negro organization which asked me to represent its interests at the UN." Maurice Perlzweig to Marc Turkow, May 10, 1960, folder 13, box H305, WJC.

fellow organizations to soft-peddle South Africa, lest “incautious or imprudent expressions of views ... involve them in situations of an even graver character than they are now.”⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, December 12, 1961, folder 5, box H306, MS 361, WJC.

⁶⁶ Perlzweig reported to Saron in December of 1961 that “we have done our best to see that your problems are not increased by anything which is said on behalf of Jewish organizations at a meeting in January of the UN Subcommittee on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities.” Perlzweig to Gus Saron, December 12, 19, 1961, folder 5; Maurice Perlzweig to Gerry Riegner, October 9, 1969, folder 8; “Report of the International Affairs Department of the World Jewish Congress, 1961-1964: South Africa”, folder 3, box H306; Andre Jabes to Elizabeth Eppler, April 26, 1965, folder 6, box H383, WJC.

Chapter Ten

After Sharpeville

While Perlzweig won the Board a respite, his efforts only temporarily arrested the public manifestation of a deeper trend. Sharpeville forced the Board to add new urgency to its public relations efforts. The Jewish press showed new attentiveness to developments in South Africa. Before Sharpeville interest in the Board and the community had been confined to a few newspapers.¹ Suddenly the Jewish media was fascinated with events in South Africa.² Gus Saron complained of an “avalanche of propaganda from overseas”. He grumbled that the “press, in particular, have been constantly ‘pumping’ us and it has not been an easy task to persuade them to present a balanced and objective picture of developments.”³ Saron’s complaint reflected the negative tone that crept into much of this reportage in the 1960s. Although articles presented a range of views on South Africa, almost all were uniformly pessimistic about

¹ Perhaps the Board’s staunchest press critic was the London *Jewish Chronicle*. Its editor, William Frankel disapproved of the Board’s political stance. He argued that apartheid was a “moral” issue, on which the “Jewish attitude – that of condemnation – ought to be perfectly clear.” To his mind, “the official Jewish organizations in S. Africa for reasons of their own comfort have kept quiet.” In his private correspondence with Frankel, Gus Saron retorted the Board’s hands were tied, arguing that it risked igniting an antisemitic backlash if it was seen to work against the National Party. Saron complained to Frankel that the newspaper gave undue attention to South African Jewry:

Has the Chronicle been equally concerned for instance about the attitude of Jews in the Southern States of America – whose problems are in some respects analogous to ours? Has it reverted to this subject time and again?

See William Frankel to Gus Saron, April 20, 1960; Gus Saron to William Frankel, April 26, 1960; Gus Saron to William Frankel, May 5, 1960; Gus Saron to William Frankel, May 17, 1960; Gus Saron, ‘South African Jewry and “Apartheid”’ (not published), May 1, 1960, Box 800, SAJBD.

² See, for example, *Reconstructionist*, December 14, 1962; *American Judaism*, Winter 1961, *Hadassah*, January, 1963; *Jewish Observer and Middle East Review*, October 11, 1963; *New York Herald Tribune*, March 30, 1964; *Glasgow Jewish Echo*, February 5, 1965; *California Jewish Record*, December 15, 1965.

³ Memorandum to provincial secretaries (15-102), January 8, 1960, SAJBD.

the position of the Jewish community. This trend is typified by an appraisal that appeared in the *Reconstructionist*:

The Jews of South Africa ought to begin to think in terms of migration. They should learn to read the handwriting on the wall. Tragically, other communities were liquidated because they refused to face up to realities; South Africans can still save themselves.... when the very bloodstream of a civilization carries the disease of racial or religious persecution, the lessons of Jewish history should be heeded.⁴

The Board felt compelled to respond to these gloomy forecasts, repeatedly challenging the claim that “South African Jewry is a fear-ridden community.”⁵ Its responses were forceful and unequivocal, countering the criticism of the Board’s neutrality that was implicit in many of these pessimistic pronouncements.⁶ The Board’s concern was magnified by the dramatic deterioration in the South African government’s relationship with Israel, a breakdown that was reported extensively in the South African press.⁷ Outsiders were seen to be stoking tensions that the Board was keen to smother, potentially sending unwelcome signals to the government. More than ever, it was also impolitic towards Pretoria to leave these portrayals unchallenged, particularly when

⁴ *Reconstructionist*, December 14, 1962; see also October 18, 1963.

⁵ See “Suggested approach for letter to *The Reconstructionist*, draft by Edgar Bernstein” (n.d.)

⁶ “The writer presents a picture of a panic-stricken and intimidated community that is completely at variance with the facts.” “South African Jewry not under pressure, Nor does Board of Deputies maintain ‘embarrassed silence’” Draft by Edgar Bernstein, The Editor, *Hadassah Magazine*, February 4, 1963; Z. Infeld to the editor of the *Reconstructionist*, December 3, 1963, SAJBD.

⁷ The Board also became acutely sensitive to the content of the local Jewish press, reluctant to create cause for further embarrassment or draw negative attention to issues that concerned the community. It approached

reports from the overseas Jewish press were reprinted locally, amplifying their effect.⁸ Articles of this kind were equally unpopular with the local Jewish community.⁹ Hence Saron's doughty defense in the *Hadassah* magazine that "South African Jewish citizens are accepted, and have always been, as an integral element of the South African community as a whole. For weal or woe, their lot is cast in South Africa."¹⁰ The Board worried that this surge of pessimism would diffuse into the thinking of international Jewish organizations, poisoning their view of the community. Much of the new writing was laced with criticism of the Board.¹¹ Saron and others argued that the Board had an "obligation" to confront this criticism:

because it is our duty to protect the good name of South African Jewry not only in this country but also abroad. Our friends, individuals and organizations are being let down if we do not put a reasonable case in their hands so they can stand by us. Our concrete work here would suffer, e.g. the willingness of persons abroad to come and serve an organization whose policy they would disapprove of.¹²

The Board's concern with seeping pessimism was not unfounded. The B'nai B'rith assimilated this negative interpretation of events. In a report on South Africa and

editors, urging them "exercise discretion" in their coverage. See Issy Maisels to Gus Saron, June 10, 1960; "Premier van Israel steun boikot teen S.A.," *Die Burger*, June 3, 1960.

⁸ See for example a report from a AJC meeting in New York reprinted in the *Daily Dispatch* as "Jews in SA 'in peril,'" November 2, 1962; Carl Henry to Gus Saron, May 29, 1969, SAJBD.

⁹ See, for example, Cyril Israelson to JM Rich, May 9, 1962, SAJBD; *South African Jewish Times*, May 6, 1960.

¹⁰ Gus Saron to the editor, *Hadassah Magazine*, February 12, 1963; see also Gus Saron to Jon Kimche, October 23, 1963, SAJBD.

¹¹ See for example "Southern Africa: Jews Walk Tightrope," *Hadassah Magazine*, March 1967.

¹² Gus Saron to N Philips and A Suzman, Statement of Board's Policy (undated); see also Edgar Bernstein to JM Rich, February 4, 1963, SAJBD.

its Jewish community released in 1962, the B'nai B'rith predicted that the future was “certain to bring on the kinds of tempestuous social tensions which have augured ill for Jews and which has already generated a deep uneasiness among specifically South Africa’s Jewry.” The organization saw “hostile attitudes to the Jew ... just below the surface.” The Board was faulted for not heeding and acting on the signs of trouble, instead adopting a faustian “tacit understanding” whereby “the Jewish community accepts the prevalent Government policy” in exchange for its safety.¹³ The B'nai B'rith’s prognosis demonstrates the meshing of negative views of South Africa with skepticism about the correctness of the Board’s stance. As was still the accepted custom, a draft of this report was sent to the Board for comment.¹⁴ The B'nai B'rith was only one of many organizations that interpreted events pessimistically, prompting the Board to write repeated forceful letters and memoranda that sought to downplay the danger to Jews in South Africa.¹⁵

Concerned that negative media coverage was closing the minds of influential American Jews to its own case, the Board attempted to bypass the press and appeal

¹³ “That the central body of the organized Jewish community – the South African Jewish Board of Deputies – has determinedly adhered to this ‘tacit understanding’ cannot be doubted. Repeatedly it has refused to take positions on apartheid.... The Board has emphasised over and over again that it ‘does not enter the political arena, save in matters affecting the Jewish community as such.’” *Survey 9: The “Laager Mentality” and Anti-Semitism*, B'nai B'rith International Council, 1962

¹⁴ In response, alongside its more familiar arguments, the Board criticized the author’s “presuppositions”, a formula hardly likely to win over its critics: “The author proceeds on the assumption that everything about apartheid is evil – that any form of segregation or racial discrimination is wrong – and reflects little or nothing of the real complexities in the relationship between a white minority and a large non-white majority, differing greatly in their standards of civilisation, etc.” Gus Saron to Saul Jofes, March 8, 1962, SAJBD.

¹⁵ Gus Saron to AG Brotman (Board of Deputies of British Jews), April 8, 1964; Gus Saron memorandum to Label Katz (B'nai B'rith), SJ Roth (World Jewish Congress), Yehuda Hellman (World Conference of Jewish Organizations), J Slawson (American Jewish Committee), S Spiegler (National Community Relations Advisory Council) et al, April 9, 1964, SAJBD.

directly to opinion makers. It orchestrated a letter writing campaign, drafting a letter to be sent independently by sympathizers in the United States:

As a person who has influence in American Jewish circles, I would like to put before you a problem which is troubling the Jewish community of South Africa... In common with other South African Jews, I have been disturbed by the line taken by journals especially in the United States of America, in sharply criticizing the attitudes of our community here and failing to understand the complexities of the South African situation as a whole... If you feel that there is some validity in the point of view presented, I trust you will be able to support it in your own circles.

Claiming that the “outside world has a grossly distorted view of the situation,” the Board appealed to Jewish leaders to not prejudge the situation. The letter concluded by arguing that “American Jews misunderstand our position,” falsely equating South Africa with the South, and “overlooking the fact that whereas there is one white man for every four non-whites in this country, there are in the United States ten whites to every Negro (and no consequent fear of the whites being ‘swamped’ by the Negroes).”¹⁶

The campaign, and the clumsy attempt to cloud the comparison of the South and South Africa, suggests both the Board’s sense of vulnerability and its concern with

¹⁶ See Gus Saron to Leon Saffer, April 9, 1962 as well as the draft letter, April 9, 1962; Leon Saffer to David, May 3, 1962, SAJBD.

another disturbing trend that emerged in the mid-1960s.¹⁷ In the early 1960s, most American Jewish groups either paid no attention to South Africa or limited their condemnation of apartheid to occasional statements and resolutions. Although the parallels with the South were difficult to ignore, and activism accorded with their progressive inclinations, South Africa was physically distant and emotionally removed, trailing far behind the South in terms of resonance and political importance to American-centric organizations.¹⁸ This changed in the mid-1960s as the civil rights movement shifted its focus northwards and outwards, buoyed by its apparent victory in the South, reveling in its new prominence and status, and dazzled by the seemingly limitless possibilities for effecting change. This atmosphere of heady optimism awakened interest in South Africa.

Pressure steadily built on American Jewish organizations to adopt forceful positions on apartheid. The new impetus for outspokenness was linked to the surge in disquiet about events in South Africa at the United Nations and among civil rights organizations. This diffused into the agendas of Jewish groups active at the United Nations and affiliated with the civil rights movement, triggering their interest and indignation. Jewish organizations were swept along by the anti-apartheid current. Although it never became a central issue, opposition to apartheid became unavoidable and desirable, complementing pre-existing progressive agendas and becoming a prerequisite for partnership in the civil rights alliance. Max Melamet of the World Jewish

¹⁷ See, for example, Max Melamet to Gus Saron, June 8, 1960; Maurice Perlzweig to Gus Saron, April 4, 1960; Yehuda Hellman to JM Rich, June 9, 1961; Max Melamet to JM Rich, August 26, 1963; Gus Saron, Report on Visit to the United States, US-SALEP Report, December 29, 1966, SAJBD.

¹⁸ See Gus Saron, Report on Visit to the United States, US-SALEP Report, December 29, 1966, SAJBD.

Congress recognized that as the influence of black states increased in international forums, “one’s attitude toward apartheid tends to more and more to become the touchstone of the genuineness of one’s commitment to human rights.”¹⁹ Any organization concerned with civil rights that failed to adopt a position on apartheid would be conspicuous – even the United States Congress, ambivalent about the pace of developments in the South, began deliberations on legislation on South Africa.

While the response of American Jewish organizations mirrored the broader trend, their declarations and resolutions probably masked the new defensiveness and discomfort felt by many Jewish groups. The increasingly radicalized and exclusionary civil rights movement was no longer operating in the distant South, but now tackled issues that directly impacted on the Northern Jewish community. A visible and vocal stand on apartheid promised distinct political advantages. It offered the means to painlessly and publicly bolster civil rights credentials, particularly to shore up unraveling alliances with black civil rights groups, while directing attention away from divisive issues. Criticism of South Africa was most likely an uncontroversial way of displaying continued commitment to the goals of the civil rights cause, even as mood and actions of the movement became more troubling. This interpretation is buttressed by the brevity of this interest in South Africa. To be sure, the fissuring of the civil rights movement and the surge in concern with black antisemitism coincided with the disappearance of apartheid from the agendas of nearly all American Jewish groups.

¹⁹ Memorandum from Max Melamet, November 11, folder 12, box H307, WJC.

This political motive is suggested in the emotive declaration released by the National Community Relations Advisory Council (NCRAC), an organization that coordinated the inter-group relations activities of a number of prominent American Jewish organizations, in 1966.²⁰ NCRAC's statement, probably pushed by the American Jewish Congress, was produced without consulting the Board.²¹ Condemning apartheid, in language similar to that of André Ungar, as a "haunting echo of Nazi Germany's superman theories that flourish in the racism of the Republic of South Africa," NCRAC committed itself to fighting racism everywhere:

The struggles of oppressed people for liberation from the chains of racism are not remote and foreign struggles from which we can stand aloof; they are inseparable from our own struggles at home against the deadening weight of racism on our national life. We, as Jewish organizations impelled by the thrust of the tradition and historic experience of our people into the forefront of every struggle for equality and by our sense of the indivisibility of freedom, cannot be indifferent to the plight of any group anywhere in the world that is denied its basic human rights.²²

NCRAC called for economic and military sanctions, a review of private and public loans to South Africa, and the enforcement of federal fair employment legislation in regard to

²⁰ At this point, neither the American Jewish Committee, nor the Anti-Defamation League were members of NCRAC. These organizations perhaps would have exercised a restraining influence on the American Jewish Congress within the NCRAC.

²¹ Memorandum from Gus Saron to Honorary Officers of the SAJBD (7744), August 10, 1966, SAJBD.

²² Draft Statement on Apartheid prepared for the Steering Committee of the NCRAC Commission on International Community Relations Concerns, August 10, 1966; see also Gus Saron, Report on Visit to the United States, US-SALEP Report, December 29, 1966, SAJBD.

American companies with subsidiaries abroad, foreshadowing the broad call for sanctions by American Jewish organizations in the late 1970s and 1980s. NCRAC, and its affiliate, the American Jewish Congress were positioning themselves in the vanguard of the anti-apartheid movement and as exemplars of prophetic Judaism. In these circumstances, the prophetic approach yielded pragmatic outcomes. The provocative position they adopted produced publicity, echoing the indignant tone of black civil rights groups, but entailed few practical responsibilities. Neither organization had a constituency in South Africa.

By contrast, the B'nai B'rith, an organization that had a small South African constituency, responded to similar pressures in a more moderate manner. Unlike NCRAC, the B'nai B'rith forewarned the Board of its intention to adopt an anti-apartheid policy. Dr A Wexler, the B'nai B'rith president, wrote to the chairman of the Board of Deputies in January 1966, signaling that domestic political pressures had pushed the organization into openly condemning apartheid.²³ While the Board was invited to provide its "observations" about this change in policy, it was clear that the Board's throttling veto power on matters relating to South Africa was being downgraded to that of polite protest. The Board carefully drafted an appeal to the B'nai B'rith, questioning its motives and doubting its access to "reliable first-hand knowledge of the situation in our country." It also subtly highlighted the potential repercussions of the B'nai B'rith's policy shift, hoping to persuade the organization to place quiet caution about politically advantageous action. The Board's message was very different from its retort to the B'nai B'rith's pessimistic speculations on South African Jewry of a few years earlier:

²³ William Wexler to Maurice Porter, January 28, 1966, see also Jay Kaufman to Gus Saron, August 15, 1968; Gus Saron to Jay Kaufman, September 3, 1968, SAJBD

We do not suggest that any overseas body should be deterred from what it conceives to be its clear duty, because of the possible repercussions upon the South African Jewish community. Nevertheless, it is relevant, we think, to mention that when attacks upon South Africa come from Jewish sources – and especially from the State of Israel at the United Nations – these have attracted a good deal of attention locally, and there has sometimes been a tendency to identify the local Jewish community with these attacks.²⁴

Neutrality, the Board argued suggestively, was preferable to “embroiling the Jewish community in the fierce party political arena.”²⁵ Perhaps as a concession, the B’nai B’rith’s statement on apartheid was issued by its Administrative Committee, a lower-profile alternative to the Supreme Lodge.

The B’nai B’rith’s original approach to the Board was conciliatory and apologetic. Whereas NCRAC had few connections with South Africa, the B’nai B’rith risked jeopardizing its access to the Jewish community and alienating present and future South African members.²⁶ If this was not readily apparent to the B’nai B’rith, AW James, the National President of the B’nai B’rith lodges of South Africa, made his disapproval abundantly clear:

²⁴ Memorandum to President of the B’nai B’rith (USA) on South African Jewry and Apartheid, February 28, 1966; see also draft (probably not sent) of letter to A Wexler from SAJBD, February 22, 1966, SAJBD.

²⁵ Ibid.

with the rest of South Africa, we would emphatically resist outside interference in the domestic affairs of our country, especially of course, if emanating from Moscow or Peking who – and this I state categorically – would like to convert South Africa into a place of chaos like the Congo or Nigeria, or many other newly emergent African States. We would set our face against any provocation emanating from such centres, designed to turn the clock back on civilisation. We also would not take kindly to dogmatic solutions, however well intended, which may emanate from other parts of the world, or from the United Nations. ... I wish to reiterate that South Africa, including Jews, cannot support measures or efforts coming from outside which would lead to the self-destruction of our country and bring about national suicide. We hope and trust that B'nai B'rith, an all embracing Jewish Organisation, will not commit the error of rashly identifying itself with any particular point of view concerning a distant country whose uniquely complicated racial and ethnographical factors cannot be adequately comprehended by outsiders – our position is without parallels in any part of the world.

Such a step by B'nai B'rith would preclude our organisation, not only from expanding, but possibly even from maintaining what it has achieved.

Unrealistic sentiments cannot alter the hard facts of a national situation, as obtained in South Africa.

The Jewish community which has sunk deep roots and reaped rich rewards, is firmly determined to maintain its position, to develop its institutions, to offer its

²⁶ For suggestion of “the B'nai B'rith's international ambitions” see Alex Easterman to Maurice Perlzweig, November 14, 1963, folder 11, box H306, MS 361, WJC; See Jay Kaufman to Gus Saron, August 15, 1968,

assistance to Israel, as evinced by recent events, and with their fellow citizens of the Republic, promote the welfare of the country, maintaining its character as an outpost of Europe, on what is unfortunately still a dark continent.²⁷

James' complaints echoed those of some Southern Jews. Outside meddling was inappropriate and misguided. Only Communism would profit from pointless and counterproductive intervention. Outsiders did not understand or fully appreciate the complexity of the situation. His warning was explicit: the B'nai B'rith would suffer. South African Jews would be unwilling to affiliate with an organization that took a firm public position against apartheid.²⁸

NCRAC and the B'nai B'rith were only two of many Jewish organizations that adopted public positions on South Africa in the late 1960s.²⁹ Although motives varied, often mixing self-promotion with prophetic convictions, it had become politically inexpedient to abstain from formal condemnation of apartheid, and politically advantageous to do so. The Board recognized and disapproved of this tendency "to make capital of the South African situation."³⁰ Even the World Jewish Congress' ardor began to ebb. It did not rush to protest when the AJCongress sponsored the National Conference on the South African Crisis in 1965. Nor did its efforts match those of the immediate

SAJBD.

²⁷ Address Prepared by Mr. AHW Jones, National President B'nai B'rith, South Africa for Delivering at B'nai B'rith International - Congress at Caracas 23rd-27th September, 1967, SAJBD.

²⁸ See also Saul Jofes to Gus Saron, December 12, 1965, SAJBD.

²⁹ For example, the Coordinating Board of Jewish Organization participated in a United Nations Seminar on Apartheid in Brasilia in 1966. In 1968, its representative organized the United Nations Non-Governmental Organization community observance of "The Day for the Elimination of Discrimination," highlighting the injustices of apartheid. See SAJBD Memorandum 419, Coordinating Board of Jewish Organizations, May 17, 1968, SAJBD.

post-Sharpeville period when the AJCongress issued a statement and adopted an anti-apartheid educational program in 1966. This despite the AJCongress' call for the imposition of "full economic sanctions" and complete "economic disengagement" from South Africa.³¹

The Board's value to the World Jewish Congress had diminished. The significance of the South African financial contribution was reduced as the Congress became self-reliant. Crucially, South African membership was no longer sought after for its promised political fillip. Instead, the political price of chaperoning the Board vastly increased as the anti-apartheid movement gained momentum. Association with South Africa became a potential liability. In the late 1960s, one Congress official complained of the "grilling of Jewish NGOs at the UN in regard to affiliates in South Africa."³² The Soviet Union and Arab states accused the World Jewish Congress of having a South African affiliate and "engaging in political work in South Africa" in an effort to deny it

³⁰ Gus Saron to Maurice Perlzweig, April 28, 1960, SAJBD.

³¹ The suggested outline for a discussion on South Africa among groups of Congress constituents proposed that

The position of South African Jewry is a complex one. The South African Board of Jewish Deputies feels it cannot as a representative of a religious or cultural or ethnic community take a stand on a question which it considers to be entirely political in character. They warn against attempts to introduce Jewish issues into the political life of the country. The Jewish community in South Africa, for the most part belongs to the wealthier class. As a community, its members also do not wish to be identified with a particular position on apartheid, although they concede to individuals the right to take their own stand. Rightly or wrongly, South African Jewish leaders maintain that to adopt a collective Jewish policy would be to embroil the Jewish community in fierce party politics and endanger its safety. This is a situation they feel they must avoid.

Questions for discussion:

How can we respond to the attitude of the South African Jewish Community towards apartheid? Without standing in their place, do we have the right to demand that they take action that they allege will imperil their safety? On the other hand, can we, in conscience, refrain from requiring them to join in resisting the feudal immorality of apartheid?

American Jewish Congress Resolution on Apartheid, 1966, folder 21, box 51, American Committee On Africa Papers, Amistad Research Center, Tulane University.

³² Memorandum from Max Melamet, November 11, 1970, folder 12, box H307; see also Gerhart Riegner to JM Snoek, March 12, 1971, folder 7, H383, WJC.

consultative status at the United Nations. Maurice Perlzweig regarded the option of inviting the Board to formally affiliate with the Congress as a “risk.”³³ The World Jewish Congress now had serious qualms about inviting the board to officially affiliate. It was torn between the desire to represent the whole of organized Jewry and the conviction that the Congress “must give expression and fight for those values and ideals which are of the substance of Jewish tradition.” The Congress must “seek to make a Jewish contribution to the advancement of humanity as a whole in its striving for peace, justice and freedom.” Maurice Perlzweig knew from experience that these two considerations - pragmatism and principle - could come into conflict. He knew all too well that it was from just “this circumstance that our difficulties flow.”³⁴

With even its allies reevaluating their relationships, the Board was briefly courted by unlikely bedfellows. The American Council for Judaism saw affinity with the Board’s apoliticism, but was shooed away when it was discovered to be fiercely anti-Zionist.³⁵ Other organizations continued to see opportunity in opposition to apartheid, adopting provocative platforms. In 1969 the American Jewish Congress petitioned the United States Government to deny South African Airlines landing rights in South Africa.³⁶ Yet the latter years of the decade were a high-water mark of criticism by international Jewish organizations, a point not returned to until the early 1980s. Much of the hot air that inflated this brief bubble dissipated as the civil rights alliance deflated. The souring of the alliance removed much of the impetus for pronouncements on South Africa. Interest in

³³ Maurice Perlzweig to Gerry Riegner, October 9, 1969, folder 8, box H306, WJC.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Bill Gottlieb to Gus Saron, October 21, 1965, SAJBD.

apartheid proved to be transient. In the absence of dramatic developments it was displaced by other distractions – Black Power, the Vietnam War, and Israel. This waning of interest was temporary, reviving a decade later in the service of new political needs.

³⁶ See Advertisement “An open letter to the American Jewish Congress,” *New York Times*, April 25, 1969; Gus Saron to Carl Henry, April 29, 1969, Carl Henry to Gus Saron, May 29, 1969; Samuel Wang to Gus Saron, June 20, 1969; Gus Saron to Samuel Wang, July 1, 1969, SAJBD.

Chapter Eleven

Southern Discomfort: the B'nai B'rith and the Anti-Defamation League in the Deep South

The actions of the national Jewish agencies that operated in the South were equally influenced by competition between their convictions, constituencies and civil rights commitments. The relationship between the Southern lodges of the B'nai B'rith and the Anti-Defamation League in many ways mirrored the interactions of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies with its international counterparts. Although Southern Jews had no official representative association comparable to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the B'nai B'rith had an extensive network of lodges in the region. The Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, a professional and progressive defense agency, was welded to the mass membership B'nai B'rith. No other national organization had a comparable constituency in the South. Perry Nussbaum, who was one of the American Jewish Committee's 23 members in Mississippi, considered the South to be "ADL country."¹ The American Jewish Committee had offices in Miami, Dallas and Atlanta, but neither the staff nor network of the Anti-Defamation League. The American Jewish Congress had an office in Miami, but only a handful of members elsewhere in the South. Nussbaum had "no use" for the AJCongress, an organization that was widely seen to represent the "extreme position in Civil Rights."²

¹ The Committee had only 200 members in Alabama. Perry Nussbaum to Samuel Gaber, August 1, 1963, folder 1; Samuel Gaber to Perry Nussbaum, September 16, 1963, folder 6, box 1, Nussbaum Papers; Memorandum on the Situation in Alabama, April 1961, folder 2, box 4, Fineberg Papers.

The B'nai B'rith had particular appeal for Jews living in small towns and communities, providing opportunity for identification, solidarity and social interaction outside of the temple.³ It performed the dual function of secular fraternal order and service organization, focusing on philanthropy, civic responsibility and mutual aid. B'nai B'rith membership comprised a cross section of Southern Jewry. Although its largest lodges in the region were in Atlanta and New Orleans, it had members wherever a handful of Jewish families clustered together. The activities of these individual lodges were overseen by state organizations. State structures were apportioned into District Grand Lodges. In 1954, District Grand Lodge #7 represented 98 lodges spread across Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Texas, an area with a Jewish population of 105,000.⁴ The Washington-based Supreme Lodge was at the top of this pyramid. As the spokesmen of the largest mass membership Jewish organization in America, the leadership of the B'nai B'rith was influential in the American and international Jewish world.⁵ This influence was amplified by the prominence and success of the B'nai B'rith's constituent commissions, auxiliary organizations that it funded and supported – the B'nai B'rith Youth Organization, the B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundations and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith (ADL).

B'nai B'rith and Anti-Defamation League structures were intertwined at the lodge and District level. Lodge ADL Committees assumed responsibility for the implementation of ADL programs and provided a conduit for the distribution of

² “Needless to say, if anybody should ever know I’m telling you this, I would find myself on the receiving end of vituperative criticism.” Perry Nussbaum to JP Coleman, April 24, 1958, folder 4, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

³ Deborah Dash Moore, *B'nai B'rith and the Challenge of Ethnic Leadership* (Albany, 1981), 208.

⁴ 1967 Lodge Leadership Conference, Audiovisual Aids, 1968-1973, box 1, MS 180, B'nai B'rith District Grand Lodge #7 (hereafter BB).

League literature. The lodges served as the League's listening posts, closely attuned to local developments. The ADL's regional offices relied on the network of lodges for information about and access to communities across the South. In District #7, the ADL had offices in Houston, New Orleans, and Atlanta, tasked respectively with Texas and Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas and Mississippi, and Tennessee and Alabama. Each office had only a handful of professional staff. Regional Advisory Boards, constituted by B'nai B'rith members, oversaw the activities of these offices. In turn, the League sought to secure the safety and status of the Jewish community, countering antisemitism and challenging institutional discrimination. This symbiotic relationship was essential for the League's success, broadening its reach and aiding its fieldworkers, but rendering it dependent on local lodge initiative and support.

For all the advantages of the relationship, the familial ties between the Anti-Defamation League and B'nai B'rith were also pregnant with potential for tension. These tensions were unleashed when the priorities of the League and Southern B'nai B'rith lodges conflicted. The ADL's steady drift toward greater involvement in broad civil rights issues in the late 1940s and early 1950s elicited consternation in the South.⁶ The first paroxysm came when the League proposed filing amicus briefs in the *Brown v. Board of Education*, and the precursor *Briggs v. Elliot* case. The Southern Regional Board, a supra-advisory body, argued against the filing with "such vehemence and genuine sincerity" that the ADL deferred the decision for a number of

⁵ See Moore, *B'nai B'rith*, 213.

⁶ At the 1950 B'nai B'rith national convention, Southern delegates threatened to leave the organization, complaining that its involvement in the race issue was "embarrassing." While a minority at B'nai B'rith national conventions, Southern representatives increased their political clout through alignment with northern conservatives. Some liberal members took "the position that the Dixie Northern conservative bloc should be permitted to take a walk for the good of the national organization." "Large Jewish Organization in Controversy," *The Call*, March 31, 1950 reprinted in M. Adams and J. Bracey, eds., *Strangers and Neighbors: Relations between Blacks and Jews in the United States* (Boston, 1999), 520-521.

months.⁷ The pressure exerted by Southern Jews fed doubt and debate within the Anti-Defamation League about the extent and appropriateness of engagement with black civil rights.⁸ The decision to file the brief was finally made after lengthy debate at an ADL National Commission meeting in Chicago, punctuated by protests from Southern delegates who warned of the danger of an anti-Semitic backlash.⁹ Benjamin Epstein, the president of the ADL, recalled that the discussion polarized along regional lines. Eventually the “North won and the South lost.”¹⁰ The Regional Board, meeting later in Atlanta, endorsed the National Commission’s decision. For Label Katz, the president of District #7, this was a “thrilling moment.”¹¹ Yet Katz and other District leaders were out of step with sentiment in many lodges.¹² Despite the enthusiasm of the District leadership, the division within the ADL National Commission between North and South prefigured a larger looming rift within the B’nai B’rith.

In August 1954, the B’nai B’rith’s Administrative Committee urged all members of the Order to support the Supreme Court’s decision on school

⁷ Quoted in Greenberg, “Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights”: 151.

⁸ Benjamin Epstein, the president of the ADL, recalled that there was “division in the Jewish community on whether or not we should take sides in the black controversies that were beginning to develop.” Interview with Benjamin Epstein in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, iii-iv; Greenberg, “The Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights”: 149-151.

⁹ Epstein remembered that the delegates urged: “Don’t do it. There’ll be blood in the streets of Birmingham and Mobile and so forth.” Interview with Benjamin Epstein in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, iii-iv.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ “This relentless struggle on behalf of this basic democratic and decent principle reached its culmination the United States Supreme Court recently declared segregation in public schools unconstitutional. I fervently hope that all of us recognize the wisdom and righteousness of this decision which echoes the old testament.” Label Katz, Presidential Message, June 1954, Presidential Reports, box 8, BB.

¹² The District leadership was more progressive than much of the B’nai B’rith membership, probably a product of its leaders’ origins, location and ambitions. The District office was located in New Orleans and many of the leaders progressed from the city’s large lodges to regional leadership duties. Katz went on to become the president of the Supreme Lodge, serving in this position from 1959 to 1965.

desegregation.¹³ B'nai B'rith lodges in North Carolina, Louisiana, Mississippi responded by passing resolutions admonishing the ADL to reevaluate its stand on school desegregation.¹⁴ Following the lead set by the ADL and the Supreme Lodge, District Grand Lodge #7 passed its own resolution at its annual convention in 1954 pledging compliance with the desegregation measures.¹⁵ Again there was dissent from a "minority opinion."¹⁶

The Supreme Court decision, and the B'nai B'rith and Anti-Defamation League stance, precipitated a crisis for the B'nai B'rith in the Southern states, and produced a tidal wave of protest from B'nai B'rith lodges in the Deep South. Philip Klutznick, the Supreme Lodge president, recalled that the B'nai B'rith faced a "revolution" in its Southern lodges. Although the rebellion was centered in the Mississippi Delta, where the Citizens Council movement began its weed-like growth, protests came from throughout the South. The protests of the Delta lodges stemmed from a mixture of conviction and concern, ripened by the uncertainty of the

¹³ See Edward Grusd, *B'nai B'rith: The Story of a Covenant*, (New York, 1966), 263.

¹⁴ See Greenberg, "Southern Jewish Community and the Struggle for Civil Rights": 151; Levinson, "Different Lives," 48; Harry Golden, "Caught in the Middle," *AME Review*, March 1957: 46.

¹⁵ The resolution read:

Whereas, B'nai B'rith is dedicated to certain principles regarding our duty to mankind, and these principles and duties obtain though men differ in color and creed; and, Whereas, the Supreme Court has ordered that we initiated full acceptance of our fellow man in one of the basic institutions of American democracy – the public schools; and, Whereas, though such an adjustment will be difficult for some of us, we understand that, as B'nai B'rith, we can do not less than the law demands because our faith has taught us that we are all children of God and that we shall accept one another as brothers; and, Whereas, B'nai B'rith, as the world's largest and oldest Jewish service organization, has responsibility for leadership and guidance of its members according to the principles of its great Order; and,

Therefore be it resolved, that the delegates assembled at the 1954 annual Convention of District Grand Lodge No. 7 of B'nai B'rith believe that the Court, the public schools and the people of this country are united in a common goal of equality of opportunity for all children. We have faith that, working together in a cooperative and democratic spirit, we can attain this goal by orderly and legal adjustment consistent with both religious and democratic ideals. We pledge ourselves and petition all people to abide by the law as duly interpreted by the Supreme Court of the United States.

Proceedings of the Annual Convention 1954, Convention Reports, box 13, BB.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

sympathies of the nascent Council movement and an atmosphere heady with passionate protest. Members threatened to “disown the B’nai B’rith and move out of it,” and passed “notices of condemnation and withdrawal.”¹⁷ Others called for the B’nai B’rith to sever its relationship with the Anti-Defamation League. District #7 found itself in the middle of an “emergency.”¹⁸ Hoping to quell the rebellion, Klutznick volunteered to visit the fractious lodges in Mississippi.¹⁹ The trip, which involved “open discussion and exchange of views” with members in Greenville, Clarksdale, Cleveland, Greenwood, Jackson and Biloxi, was “kept under wraps.”²⁰ His job was delicate and difficult, calming heated tempers and preserving “the unity of B’nai B’rith without scuttling basic Jewish principles of justice.”²¹ Although Klutznick was “shocked by the kind of treatment” that he received in the Delta, he succeeded in persuading the lodges to refrain from publicly disowning and departing from the B’nai B’rith.²²

Klutznick’s tour blunted the impulse for immediate action, winning “confidence and respect” for the organization.²³ Yet his trip was a placebo rather than a cure, only superficially and temporarily suturing over the malignancy within the movement. Joseph Cahn, the District Executive Secretary, visiting the Deborah lodge #161 in the Delta town of Greenville in March of 1955, found “an excellent

¹⁷ Interview with Philip Klutznick in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 173.

¹⁸ Aaron Topek, Presidential Message, June 1955, box 8, BB.

¹⁹ Klutznick recalled that “There was a discussion about somebody going down to Mississippi. I bravely said that since it is the B’nai B’rith that’s involved, only the President of B’nai B’rith should go. And I overruled everybody and said, ‘I don’t care who wants to go, I’m going.’ And I did... We went down South and were shocked by the kind of treatment we got.”

²⁰ Memorandum from Joe Cahn to DGL #7 Executive Committee, October 13, 1954, Lodge Leaders Meeting, box 5, BB.

²¹ Joe Cahn to Stanley Kaufman, 1960, District Officers Minutes, box 3, BB.

²² Interview with Philip Klutznick in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 173.

²³ Aaron Topek, Presidential Message, June 1955, box 8, BB.

background of good feeling about B'nai B'rith nationally district-wise, because of Phil Klutznick's visit to Greenville last year." However, the "most extraordinarily good impression" generated by the trip did not prevent serious debate among its members about disbanding the lodge.²⁴ Similarly Aaron Topek, president of District Grand Lodge #7 complained in June 1955 that a "major part" of his administration was "concerned with the problems of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith." This refrain was repeated for several years by successive District presidents. Many members wondered whether the B'nai B'rith and Anti-Defamation League would be better parted. B'nai B'rith leaders felt it necessary to routinely justify this relationship. George Fagin, the chairman of ADL Committee in District # 7 defended the League in his address to the 1955 District convention against critics who questioned the programs and presence of the ADL in the South:

Freedom and liberty cannot be bought with complacency. Social and economic freedom can be received by a constant struggle that will create greater understanding and appreciation of the traditional American concept of democracy and generate intelligent opposition to both open and hidden forces which seek to destroy it. A militant unity among freedom-minded men is necessary, knit into an organizational structure that can hit - and hit hard - at bigots, national fascists and anti-Semites. Such an agency is the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.

ADL is a part of B'nai B'rith. Its operational structure, the viewpoint with which it approaches its task, and the resources which it brings to bear, derive from its relationship to B'nai B'rith. The work of your committee has

²⁴ Joe Cahn to DGL Executive Committee, March 16, 1955, Membership Committee folder, box 7, BB.

followed the national policy that it is better to prevent anti-Semitism through extensive educational programs than to be continually playing fireman to sporadic anti-Semitic blazes.²⁵

By 1955, the leaders of the District Grand Lodge were optimistically predicting that the B'nai B'rith had seen off the worst of the "crisis." Aaron Topek expressed the view that time would "solve the situation."²⁶ Although the "situation is still one involving areas of possible concern," the "situation has been greatly clarified." There were indications of "a great deal of understanding on the part of the B'nai B'rith constituency."²⁷ This guarded optimism was seriously misplaced.

While Klutznick's tour ensured that few lodges left the B'nai B'rith, it did not prevent members from departing in droves. Whereas membership levels in District Grand Lodge #7 were stable in the late 1940s and early 1950s, hovering between a high of 11,482 in 1948 and a low of 10,874 in 1952, numbers began a steady slide in 1954.²⁸ With 11,225 paid members at the beginning of the year, the District expected "unprecedented growth" for 1954, setting the target at 12,000.²⁹ Instead of the heralded expansion, the Order shrank by 500 members.³⁰ The District leadership

²⁵ George Fagin, Report of Anti-Defamation League Committee, Pre-convention Reports 1955, box 8, BB.

²⁶ Minutes Executive Committee Meeting, January 16, 1955, Pre-convention Reports 1955, box 8, BB.

²⁷ Maurice Dannenbaum, Report of the Anti-Defamation League Committee, Proceedings of Annual Convention 1956, box 13, BB.

²⁸ Annual paid membership numbers were 11,310 in 1947, 11,482 in 1948, 11,157 in 1949, 11,279 in 1950, 11,023 in 1951, 10,874 in 1952 and 11,042 in 1953. Of these, 1398 lived in Alabama, 1373 in Louisiana, 720 in Mississippi, 1913 in Tennessee, 5336 in Tennessee in 1953. Executive Secretary's Annual Report, 1954, Executive Secretary Reports, box 4, BB.

²⁹ Executive Secretary's Annual Report for June 1, 1953 to May 31, 1954, A Factual Report of District Grand Lodge #7 for Delegates to the 79th Annual Convention, June 1954, box 4, BB.

³⁰ In December 1954 membership in the District stood at 10,737. Joseph Cahn, Executive Secretary District Grand Lodge #7, An Evaluation Study of District Grand Lodge #7 B'nai B'rith Operations, December 31, 1954, box 3, BB.

prematurely lamented this as a “low ebb.”³¹ The decline continued despite aggressive retention programs adopted by District leaders dismayed by the “Vexing problem” of “no Substantial Membership Increase.”³² Figures collected at the end of 1956 “showed that the paid membership income of dues collections was even less than in the least productive year for some years.” Fundraising for the Supreme Lodge also decreased substantially.³³ In 1960, a number of the largest lodges in Louisiana, Arkansas and Tennessee failed to contribute to the Service Fund, the portion of annual dues paid to the Supreme Lodge.³⁴ Other lodges opted to withdraw from the B’nai B’rith entirely in protest to its stand on segregation.³⁵ Although the rate of decline was uneven, the trend was downward in all the states in the District. Between 1954 and 1965, B’nai B’rith membership in District #7 declined from 11,225 to 9,558.

The problem was particularly acute in Mississippi and Alabama. Membership in Mississippi fell from 720 in 1954 to 408 in 1960. The rate of loss then slowed but continued throughout the 1960s.³⁶ These losses reflected a disproportionate number of resignations and withdrawals from lodges.³⁷ Despite the precipitous drop, the decline in numbers concealed the extent of the malaise within the movement. While

³¹ Joe Cahn to DGL Executive Committee, March 16, 1955, Membership Committee folder, box 7, BB.

³² Joseph Cahn, A Statement of General Observations and Recommendations concerning the Preparation of January 1, 1956 to December 31, 1956 District Grand Lodge Number Seven Budget, box 4, BB.

³³ Minutes Executive Committee Meeting, August 1960, box 4, BB.

³⁴ New Orleans had more than one lodge. Minutes Executive Committee Meeting, August 1960, box 4, BB.

³⁵ David Emanuel lodge #1698 of Waycross, Georgia disaffiliated from the B’nai B’rith in 1959 as its members “were opposed to the liberal stand taken by the national organization towards civil rights.” See James Lebeau, “Profile of a Southern Jewish Community,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, 58 (4), June 1969: 433-435.

³⁶ The Mississippi lodges of the B’nai B’rith had 412 members in 1965, 402 in 1966, 383 in 1967, 367 in 1968 and 366 in 1969.

³⁷ In 1958, 54 members withdrew or resigned in Mississippi, 92 withdrew in Alabama. In 1959, 154 members resign or withdrew in Alabama, 55 resigned in Mississippi. In 1960, 74 members resigned in Mississippi, 88 left lodges in Alabama. Analysis of Gross Dues Charged and Collected Year 1958; Analysis of Gross Dues Charged and Collected Year 1959; Statement of Gross Dues Charged and Collected Year 1960, Auditors Reports, box 1, BB.

many lodges ceased to function, their members maintained a passive membership out of habit and a sense of obligation. Their passivity exacerbated the spiral as dormant lodges failed to recruit and retain members. Across Mississippi, lodges settled rapidly into lassitude. At the beginning of 1956, Albert Feldman, the president of the Mississippi state organization complained that over the previous year “most of the lodges in Mississippi had been dormant,” but hoped for “a revival soon.”³⁸ This was not to happen. Clarksdale’s Delta #660, with 103 members the largest lodge in Mississippi in 1954, slipped into inactivity.³⁹ It did not meet formally or informally for four years, until it was briefly revived in 1959.⁴⁰ Yet in spite of its dormancy, the majority of its members retained affiliation, paying their annual lodge dues.⁴¹ A number of other Mississippi lodges ceased to communicate with the District Grand Lodge, or maintained intermittent contact, suggesting their torpidity. These same lodges failed to collect their allocated quota for the Service Fund. This suggests the motives of lodge members, displaying a willingness to retain nominal affiliation to the local lodge, but cutting ties with the national organization. While this pattern was particularly pronounced in the Mississippi Delta - the Greenwood, Vicksburg, Cleveland and Greenville all but ceased to function – lodges elsewhere in Mississippi were equally moribund.⁴²

³⁸ Executive Committee Minutes, January 21, 1956, box 13, BB.

³⁹ Cleveland had 68 members in 1954, Greenville had 46, Greenwood 56 and Jackson 62. Aaron Topek, An Evaluation of DGL# 7 B’nai B’rith operations, December 31, 1954, Executive Committee Minutes, box 3, BB.

⁴⁰ Sydney Rosenbaum, Report of B’nai B’rith Mississippi State Association, Pre-convention Reports 1959, box 8, BB.

⁴¹ The lodge shrank to 85 members in 1956, and 66 in 1958. Joseph Cahn, Annual Evaluation Report, January 1959, District Officers Minutes, box 2, BB.

⁴² For example, the lodges in Gulfport, Columbus, Laurel and Lexington. See Louis Barg to Ely Bergman, December 1, 1957; Harry Friedman, President’s Second Quarterly Report, 10 January 1958, Membership Committee Correspondence; See Robert Besser to Joseph Cahn, September 8, 1957, box 7; Report of Warren Katz, President Emanuel Lodge #103, Reports for the Eighty Eighth Convention, 1963, Pre-convention reports 1961-1963, Box 8, BB.

The leadership of the District was troubled by the “big leak” in members, blaming its problems on the repeated “failure” of membership campaigns, a new membership accounting system, and an increase in dues.⁴³ Repeated attempts to revive the lodges in the Delta failed. The District continued to battle with “trouble spots in the Delta” in mid 1960s.⁴⁴ In spite of his best efforts, Al Shapiro, the president of the Mississippi state association in 1963 lamented that the “roots just wouldn’t take hold in the soil and flourish.”⁴⁵ His successor found himself “confronted with fact that [in] Northern [Mississippi] B’nai B’nai was almost non-existent.” A state delegation sent to Clarksdale in 1963 “received a cold, unfriendly reception.”⁴⁶ The visit to Deborah Lodge #161 in Greenville, Mississippi met with a similar response. In 1954, the lodge had 78 members.⁴⁷ In 1963, the town, with the largest Jewish population in the state, had neither a functioning lodge, nor a Temple Brotherhood.⁴⁸ Yet the remaining nucleus of lodge members argued against reviving the organization, preferring to limit their activities to sponsorship of a “cub scout pack.”⁴⁹

Developments in Alabama mirrored the situation in Mississippi. In January 1956, a group of Jewish citizens in Selma “vigorously protest the various actions taken, and literature published, by the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, and the constituent agencies of the National Community

⁴³ Joe Cahn to Stanley Kaufman, 1960, District Officers Minutes, box 3, BB.

⁴⁴ Simon Weil, Report of the ADL, Pre-Convention reports, Executive Committee Meeting, 1965, box 8, BB.

⁴⁵ Al Shapiro, Report of State Association of Mississippi 1963, Pre-convention Reports 1961-1963, box 7, BB.

⁴⁶ Mississippi Executive Meeting, Magnolia Lodge, Laurel, August 10-11, 1963, Mississippi State Conference 1950-1965, box 18, BB.

⁴⁷ Joe Cahn to DGL Executive Committee, March 16, 1955, Membership Committee folder, box 7, BB.

⁴⁸ The *American Jewish Year Book* in 1959 estimated that the town’s Jewish population was 525.

⁴⁹ Minutes of State Association visit to Deborah Lodge #161, Greenville, Miss., June 23, 1963, box 18, BB.

Relations Advisory Council in its support of integration.” They threatened a “serious” reduction in membership of the local B’nai B’rith lodge and a cut in provision of funds to these organizations. In 1957, the same lodge unanimously passed a resolution requesting the Alabama B’nai B’rith president to call a special meeting to “discuss and determine the advisability of withdrawing from B’nai B’rith on a State level.”⁵⁰ Although the meeting never took place, Selma’s Zadok #155 lost over 30 percent of its members over this two-year period, the highest percentage decrease of any lodge in the District.⁵¹ Contributions to the Jewish Welfare Fund, the communal fundraising and disbursement body, shrank dramatically. Whereas the Fund collected \$38,000 in 1946, by 1961 it was collecting only \$10,500 annually. This slipped to a low of \$7,500 in 1965.⁵² Visiting sociologist Joshua Fishman found that the Montgomery lodge, Emanuel #103, was “plagued by membership resignations and protests over the desegregationist pronouncements and activities with which it and its intergroup relations division, the Anti-Defamation League, have been identified.”⁵³ Due to “the many difficulties surrounding Montgomery at this time,” the lodge leadership decided that it was “not propitious for embarking on any particular programs other than Lodge Membership retention.”⁵⁴ In 1957, this same lodge had struggled to “overcome a strong feeling against expressions in the National Jewish Monthly [the national B’nai B’rith magazine] on their stand on segregation.” The lodge “had a number of resignations and more threatened for that reason.”⁵⁵ By 1963, the lodge was entirely

⁵⁰ Marshall Bloom, “A Participant Observation Study of the Attitudes of Selma Jews Towards Integration,” April 1966, Selma, Alabama collection, AJA.

⁵¹ Joseph Kahn, Lodges that Show Decreased Membership for Second Consecutive Year, District Officers Minutes, box 2, BB.

⁵² Marshall Bloom, “A Participant Observation Study of the Attitudes of Selma Jews Towards Integration,” April 1966, Selma, Alabama collection, AJA.

⁵³ Joshua Fishman, “Visits to Two Southern Cities (A Preliminary Report),” folder 8, box 18, MS294, AJA.

⁵⁴ Minutes of the Executive Meeting, State of Alabama Officers of B’nai B’rith, April 19, 1959, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

⁵⁵ Paul Klotz, August 4, 1957, Membership Committee Correspondence 1957-1958, box 7, BB.

inactive.⁵⁶ The Morris Karpeles #368 in Birmingham, one of the largest lodges in the South, lost nearly 10 percent of its membership in 1958 alone. It contributed only a fraction of its quota to the Service Fund.⁵⁷

According to JS Gallinger, the president of the Alabama state association, lodges owed their survival to “a hard core of loyal convenanters.” The majority of members maintained their membership only “as a matter of habit and persuasion.” In 1961, Gallinger found that the “large masses of merely dues paying members” lacked “an urgency of commitment.”⁵⁸ In the late 1950s and 1960s lodges lost heavily from this group, shedding the marginal members who chose to cut ties with the organization, or allowed their memberships to lapse. What made these mass withdrawals particularly disquieting was the apparent vitality of Jewish organizational life across the South in other spheres. Joseph Cahn, the long-serving executive secretary of District #7, noted that

With the exception of a few rural areas the Jewish population has increased and so has income. There has been and is today, extensive construction of Temples, Synagogues, educational buildings and Jewish Community Centers. Congregations that never had Rabbis engage them; large city congregations have assistant Rabbis, educational directors and executive secretaries for administration. Country clubs composed exclusively of Jewish membership are in most of our large communities.

⁵⁶ Report of Warren Katz, President Emanuel Lodge #103, Reports for the Eighty Eighth Convention, 1963, Pre-convention reports 1961-1963, Box 8, BB.

⁵⁷ Joseph Cahn, Lodges that Show Decreased Membership for Second Consecutive Year, District Officers Minutes, box 2, BB.

⁵⁸ JS Gallinger, Report of the Alabama State Association, Executive Committee Meeting, August 1961, box 4, BB.

Nationally known Jewish organizations, with a single purpose, organize new membership units and conduct successful fund raising events in areas where B'nai B'rith membership remains static and where B'nai B'rith fund raising is non-existent or meager at best.

It seems a paradox indeed that B'nai B'rith in District Seven with its many faceted program shows no membership growth; in fact, since 1948 it has lost a few hundred members.⁵⁹

In many communities, the B'nai B'rith's decline was inversely related to the expansion of other organizations. Temple Brotherhoods, men's clubs constituted by members of the reform temple, were major beneficiaries of the souring mood against the B'nai B'rith. Many lodge members formed or joined these groups, preferring the more amendable, and less controversial, local Brotherhood club to a group allied to what some perceived to be intrusive national organization. As early as 1955, the District leadership received "negative reports coming from both Greenville and Jackson to the effect that B'nai B'rith was becoming threatened with possible extinction by the creation of Brotherhoods because in these respective cities there was doubt cast as to whether B'nai B'rith had a role to play or not."⁶⁰ Brotherhood groups replicated the social and community functions of B'nai B'rith lodges, but retained greater autonomy from the North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods (NFTB). In towns where the Jewish population was small, the B'nai B'rith competed for the time and resources of a handful of Jewish men. For example, in Waycross, Georgia, all the members of the lodge belonged to the Waycross Hebrew Center. The

⁵⁹ Joseph Cahn, A Statement of General Observations and Recommendations Concerning the Preparation of January 1 1957 to December 31 1957 District Grand Lodge Number Seven Budget, Executive Secretary Reports, Box 4, BB.

⁶⁰ Joe Cahn to DGL Executive Committee, March 16, 1955, Membership Committee folder, box 7, BB.

lodge leadership justified its decision to disaffiliate from the B'nai B'rith in 1959 because "duplication seemed a waste of time and effort."⁶¹

A similar move was mooted in Jackson. Although Perry Nussbaum was initially an advocate of the establishment of a Temple Brotherhood, he felt torn between the "choice of promoting one for congregational and JC [Jewish community] objectives, or standing firm in behalf of B'nai B'rith in this area at a time when all the lodges were dissolving because of the burgeoning race relations positions taken on the national level." To have taken up "the cause of NFTB would have meant the deathknell for B'nai B'rith."⁶² Nussbaum felt uneasy

about forcing the issue about a Temple Brotherhood, because it would involve the same men, the community cannot stand two such organizations, and, as much as I find fault with the B'nai B'rith program, I find myself unable to go along with some of my other Mississippi colleagues who apparently have taken advantage of antipathies to ADL to organize a Brotherhood and let the Lodge deteriorate completely. To my mind it becomes an indirect endorsement of the fight against integration.⁶³

A smaller, but potentially more embarrassing problem emerged with the flirtation between some Delta lodges and the mushrooming Citizens Council movement. Jewish membership of Citizens Councils in the Deep South was not uncommon, whether out of conviction or self-preservation, but no exclusively Jewish

⁶¹ Lebeau, "Profile of a Southern Jewish Community": 434.

⁶² Perry Nussbaum to Sylvan Lebow, February 7, 1969, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

⁶³ Perry Nussbaum to Sylvan Lebow, March 6, 1959, folder 8, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

Council existed.⁶⁴ In 1957, members of Cleveland's lodge proposed forming a Council. The initiative caused consternation amongst the rabbis of Mississippi. Perry Nussbaum feared that it would be

Chillul Hashem if any semblance of a Jewish White Citizens' Council makes its appearance and issues statements in our State. Some Rabbis, including myself, who for years have had a difficult time living with our Jewish consciences and maintaining Sholem in the Jewish community will be confronted with a need to interpret and clarify such statements in terms of our religious beliefs. The inevitable result will be public washing of some very dirty Jewish linen. ... I pray that you will exert your influence to keep the group from organizing and making statements.⁶⁵

In response, fifteen rabbis from Mississippi and Louisiana met in New Orleans in November 1957 to discuss the problem, promising to "issue a strong counterstatement" if the Council was created.⁶⁶ The Cleveland group probably formed the short-lived Southern Jewish Laymen's Association.⁶⁷ This problem was not limited to Cleveland. Nussbaum spoke on a number of occasions to persuade "B'nai

⁶⁴ Joshua Fishman reported that prominent Jewish businessmen, along with all the "decent citizenry tumbled over each other to join" the Montgomery Citizens Council. An American Jewish Committee survey found that 16 Citizens Council had one or more Jewish members in 1957, and 20 had Jewish members by the end of 1958 (40 percent of all Councils). Memorandum from Dr. S. Anhil Fineberg, Summary of a Survey on White Citizens Councils and Related Matters, March 10, 1958; Summary of a Survey on White Citizens' Council, November 1958, S. Anhil Fineberg to survey group, December 26, 1958, folder 2, box 4, Solomon Anhil Fineberg Papers; S. Anhil Fineberg to Irving Engel, October 17, 1958, Irving Engel Papers; Marshall Bloom, "A Participant Observation Study of the Attitudes of Selma Jews Towards Integration," April 1966, Selma, Alabama collection; Joshua Fishman, "Visits to Two Southern Cities (A Preliminary Report)," folder 8, box 18, MS294, AJA.

⁶⁵ Perry Nussbaum to Moses Landau, November 7, 1957; Moses Landau to Perry Nussbaum, November 4, 1957, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

⁶⁶ Minutes of Commission on Social Action, November 25, 1957, folder 1, box 53, MS 72, UAHC Papers.

⁶⁷ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 78-79.

B'rith lodges from flight from the national body."⁶⁸ His belligerent approach was not always successful

I spoke to a B'nai B'rith lodge in the Delta, a member of which having just written a Jewish concurrence with the Citizens Councils [A Jewish View on Segregation], telling those Jews how ashamed I was of them and if this kind of footsie playing didn't stop I'd show them what washing dirty linen in public could be like...I never got invited back to the Delta.⁶⁹

The problem was not confined to the Delta. Nussbaum complained when the B'nai B'rith lodge in Jackson held a "Citizens Council program," presented by a "guest speaker [who was] one of the worst leaders of the Citizens Councils."⁷⁰ This approach to the local B'nai B'rith lodge was typical of the Citizens Council expansion strategy. The Councils targeted service clubs and civic organizations, hoping to co-opt respectable and conservative white leaders.⁷¹ Nussbaum himself was invited to give an invocation to a meeting of Jackson's Citizen Council, an indication of the Councils' efforts to recruit broadly from the respectable white community.⁷² The Councils' campaign was effective.⁷³ Nussbaum had to appeal to his congregation not to attend a follow up meeting, "reminding them that our Bible does not sanction racial

⁶⁸ The pamphlet was counterpart to the Citizens Councils' "A Christian View of Segregation." McMillen, *Citizens' Council*, 35; Perry Nussbaum to Stanley Chyet, February 20, 1967; Perry Nussbaum to Emil Leipzier, Sidney Regner, Jay Kaufman, Al Vorspan, October 23, 1958; Perry Nussbaum to Ephraim Cohen, October 30, 1957, folder 4, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

⁶⁹ Perry Nussbaum to Murray Polner, February 27, 1976, folder 15, box 3, Polner Papers.

⁷⁰ Perry Nussbaum to Emil Leipzier, Sidney Regner, Jay Kaufman, Al Vorspan, October 23, 1958; Perry Nussbaum to Ephraim Cohen, October 30, 1957, folder 4, box 1, Nussbaum Papers; Perry Nussbaum to Charles Mantinband, August 22, 1958, folder 3, box 1, Charles Mantinband Papers, AJA.

⁷¹ See Neil McMillen, *The Citizens' Councils: Organized Resistance to the Second Reconstruction 1954-1964* (Chicago, 1994), 20-21.

⁷² Transcript of interview with Perry Nussbaum (n.d.), folder 16, box 3, Polner Papers.

⁷³ Charles Mantinband wrote to Nussbaum that America "is a free country, and Jews may join the Citizens Councils if they so desire. Up in the Delta, there are many who have, even though they do not

discrimination of any sort.”⁷⁴ His condemnation brought him into conflict with the local and state president of the B’nai B’rith.

The steady deflation in the size and strength of Southern lodges was primarily caused by the puncturing pressure of antagonism towards the Jewish defense agencies. This burgeoning discontent built upon a bedrock of existing resentments and grievances, but was cemented by fear and distrust. Philip Klutznick’s account of his reception on his tour of the B’nai B’rith lodges in the Mississippi Delta in 1954 suggests this “scapegoating” of the defense agencies:

And I spoke to the people. What do you do when you have a leader of the synagogue a man who has a cotton field where he finds his workers rebelling against him, and he sees the loss of his fortune overnight because of those terrible people up North. My answer to many of them in conversations up and down the delta, where cotton was, of course, the big money crop, was that I don’t know why you blame anybody. These suits were instituted and supported by organizations that have helped us when we needed help. When the Nazis were attacking us, labor was on our side, other human rights organizations were on our side. Here are people that are discriminated against. What could we do but join in the subject with those who supported us? It isn’t that we sought this action. Thank goodness it came, from my point of view. But it would have been indecent, inhuman and dishonorable if we hadn’t joined with those who joined us when we needed them. And I kept making

subscribe whole-heartedly to their methods.” Charles Mantinband to Perry Nussbaum, January 1, 1956, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

⁷⁴ Perry Nussbaum to Emil Leipziger, October 23, 1958, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

that plea, and it finally got through. I got out with my skin. And nobody left us.

But I must say, I saw many people hurt and angry. And, interestingly enough, it was 'the New York Jews.' It wasn't the black people, it wasn't the human rights issues. They were taking the liberty of hating their own as an answer to their problems.⁷⁵

The American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and particularly the high profile ADL, made easy targets. They were based in the North, worked in alliance with the civil rights movement, and were led by the liberal New York Jews whom radical segregationists railed against. Many Southern Jews were suspicious of their motives and intentions. The agencies were seen to be unfamiliar with local conditions, meddling beyond their expertise, and stirring a storm that the Southern Jewish community alone would have to ride out. Harry Sokol, the state chairman of the ADL in Mississippi, was confronted by an expression of this hostile undercurrent at a lodge meeting in Clarksdale in 1963: "You as a Jew are gentlemen but it's that bunch of Jews in your office in Washington that we object to in their proposing what I have to do in Mississippi while they stay north."⁷⁶ Moreover, the contact that most Southern Jews had with these agencies was limited and often unflattering. From a distance, it was difficult to differentiate between their positions and activities. The Anti-Defamation League was often reproached for the rhetoric of the American Jewish Congress. Given this blanketing bias, the defense agencies were

⁷⁵ Interview with Philip Klutznick in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 173.

⁷⁶ Mississippi Executive Meeting, Magnolia Lodge, Laurel, August 10-11, 1963, Mississippi State Conference 1950-1965, box 18, BB.

often blamed both for the difficulties of desegregation and for the anti-Semitism that slunk in its shadow.

The nervousness and uncertainty that accompanied change in the South amplified Southern Jewish sensitivity towards antisemitism. The defense agencies were accused of irresponsibly inciting antisemitism by unnecessarily dragging Jews into the civil rights issue. Aside from sharing the widespread unease with the prospect of imposed desegregation, many worried that the prominent role of the agencies would crystallize the association of Jews and civil rights in the minds of Southern whites. This thinking was shaped by a mix of rumor and reality. Rumors circulated of boycotts of Jewish-owned businesses because of the pro-civil rights stance of the defense agencies.⁷⁷ Violence directed against Jewish institutions confirmed fears that extremist segregationist groups would not discriminate between Northern Jewish organizations and the Southern Jewish community when picking their targets. The explosion of opportunistic antisemitism, particularly the apparent popularity of the venomous version peddled by agitators like John Kasper and John Crommelin, provided further support for this pessimistic prognosis. The defense agencies were seen to provide “grist to the mill” of segregationist antisemites, simultaneously making ordinary white Southerners more receptive to antisemitism.⁷⁸ Given this interpretation of the impact of the agencies, it is unsurprising that for Southern Jews,

⁷⁷ For example, that “immediately following the announcement of ADL’s contribution to the [Medgar] Evers’s fund, one merchant was deluged by white withdrawals of their accounts.” Alex Miller, the head of the Atlanta office of the ADL, questioned the validity of rumors of this kind: “I represented ADL for many years in the South and my headquarters for a decade were in Atlanta. During that time – and since coming North – I have heard many generalized statements about the hardships visited upon Jewish individuals in the South because of the liberal stand which Jewish organizations or Jewish leaders have taken on the race question. Believe me, I have tried on numerous occasion to find proof which would document these broadsides. I have never been successful.” See Perry Nussbaum to Samuel Gaber, August 1, 1963, folder 1, box 1, Nussbaum Papers; *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, July 19, 1963.

as one observer put it, the “villain of the piece, responsible for the actual and potential difficulties of the Southern Jewry, is not the segregationist or the White Citizens’ Councils – but ‘Jewish agencies.’”⁷⁹

Albert Vorspan, the director of the Commission on Social Action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, encountered this antagonistic sentiment on a tour of Southern Jewish communities in 1956:

In the more embattled communities like Montgomery and Birmingham, there is a genuine fear, sometimes based on hard realities, sometimes based on an hysterical, almost paranoid reaction. The latter Jewish communities do not talk of the dangerous anti-Semitic potential; they feel they have already been seriously harmed by the statements and actions of Jewish organizations nationally and locally. They believe that Jewish leadership, by identifying the Jewish community with anti-segregation has coupled Jew and Negro in the public mind and thus are bringing down upon the Jewish community the fanatical and powerful hatreds of the communities as a whole. Many of these people are essentially assimilationist and are fully integrated into business and civic life of the general community. They obviously feel deeply threatened when they are singled out and set against the deeply-held prevailing sentiments of the community. They argue that they are not ‘expendable’ and they bitterly resent the fact that they are committed in this struggle by the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Congress, the Union, and other national Jewish bodies. Their claim that

⁷⁸ Joshua Fishman, “Visits to Two Southern Cities (A Preliminary Report),” folder 8, box 18, MS294,

they are fully accepted and 'secure' in their communities is, of course, refuted by their agonizing anxiety as to their loss of status, prestige and business. It is my impression that, while some of these people over-react and are virtually pathological when they seek to scapegoat Jewish organizations as the source of their trouble, they do have a profoundly difficult and serious problem. We have the right neither to ignore their situation nor to give them a veto over the policies of a national Jewish organization.⁸⁰

Southern Jewish resentment of the activities of national Jewish organizations extended to a strong sense of disappointment with the B'nai B'rith. While the presence of the American Jewish Congress and American Jewish Committee in the South was patchy, most B'nai B'rith lodges had an ADL committee. The B'nai B'rith could serve as a palpable stand-in target, a focus for frustrations that could not be relieved against the distant defense agencies. However, some grievances were particular to the B'nai B'rith. Many members felt that the organization was guilty of a breach of faith. The B'nai B'rith's appeal was rooted in Jewish solidarity, the sense of attachment and responsibility towards fellow Jews.⁸¹ The ADL and B'nai B'rith

AJA.

⁷⁹ Albert Vorspan, "Dilemma of Southern Jews," *Reconstructionist*, 24: 47.

⁸⁰ Vorspan was convinced that the sense of grievance harbored against the defense agencies was justifiable. He was "persuaded that statements and resolutions by national bodies serve little purpose and may do harm. What concerns me is not that some of our people in the South resent these statements, but that they are not effective. The statement that we need fewer resolutions and more resolution is apt. We must do more, not less, on this issue, but we should do more, talk less. Self-righteous and flaming statements are easy to issue in New York (at this point, my readers are supposed to murmur to themselves that Vorspan was corrupted by the Southern point of view) but newspaper publicity is not what is needed in this situation. ... Statements arouse implacable and irrational fears and opposition." His sentiments were echoed by Charles Mantinband: "Much of what the national Jewish bodies do embarrass us here in Mississippi. It is easy to wax eloquent, a thousand miles from the scene of the battle. Besides, unless a person lives in an area where there is a dense Negro population, he just cannot understand the situation. On the other hand, many of the statements of our national bodies are encouraging." Charles Mantinband to Perry Nussbaum, January 1, 1956, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers; Memorandum from Albert Vorspan to the Commission on Social Action, April 24, 1956, correspondence file, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center.

⁸¹ Moore, *B'nai B'rith*, 252.

stance on desegregation was seen to undermine this core principle, needlessly endangering the Southern community for political gain. An organization that should stand in their defense was instead understood to working to their disadvantage. This was complemented by the view that Jewish organizations should exclusively concern themselves with “helping the Jews,” since it “was on this basis that these organizations requested and received support from Jewish individuals and communities throughout the nation.” Involvement with black civil rights was therefore a “misdirection of their energies.”⁸² The Northern lodges were seen as insensitive and unsympathetic.⁸³ Others felt aggrieved that the B’nai B’rith had adopted its position without canvassing its lodges in the South, imposing its views and failing to adequately represent Southern members.

⁸² Joshua Fishman, “Visits to Two Southern Cities (A Preliminary Report),” folder 8, box 18, MS294, AJA

⁸³ For example, members of the Deborah Lodge #161 in Greenville, Mississippi lodge objected to “Negro comedian Dick Gregory being named Man of the Year by a Northern B’nai B’rith Lodge.” Protests were sent to the District Executive Secretary and to the New Orleans ADL Office. Kurt Rose, vice president of Mississippi State association responded by pointing “out that it was unfair for B’nai B’rith to be made the scapegoat for a number of unpopular stands and that any Lodge had the right to make awards of their own choosing no matter how unpopular this may be elsewhere.” Minutes of State Association visit to Deborah Lodge #161, Greenville, Miss., June 23, 1963, box 18, BB.

Chapter Twelve

The Southern Jewish Sharpeville: the B'nai B'rith and ADL in crisis

The terms of the relationship between the Anti-Defamation League and Southern B'nai B'rith lodges were redefined by a series of incidents in late 1957 and 1958. Just as Sharpeville entrenched, at least temporarily, the pattern of interaction between the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the World Jewish Congress, the combined impact of these consecutive events reshaped the approach that the ADL adopted towards Southern Jews. This crisis was spurred by a peaking of state-led resistance to desegregation. Integration advanced unevenly in the South, pushed ahead in spurts by the juddering civil rights movement and impeded (and at times forced back) by segregationist resistance. The League's relationship with the lodges followed a similar pattern, alternating between periods of friction and reconciliatory lulls. In 1957 and 1958, the challenge to segregation, and the fierce retort of segregationists, created a mood of anxiety and uncertainty in the white South. Moreover, Massive Resistance created an environment that encouraged rebellion against Northern authority. The mood and actions of the lodges matched this crescendo of discord and confrontation.

The first key incident arose when the ADL attempted to file an amicus brief in *NAACP v. Alabama* in October 1957. The Supreme Court case tested the right of the state of Alabama to impose a \$100,000 fine on the NAACP for its refusal to disclose its membership lists. The fine followed months of sustained harassment conducted by courts and state legislatures across the South, in an attempt to incapacitate the

NAACP.¹ The ADL justified its involvement by pointing to the potential implications of this precedent for all voluntary organizations. Although the brief was later refused by the court, the case reopened the wounds of the *Brown* decision, producing a major rift between the ADL and the Alabama B'nai B'rith lodges. The friction stemmed from a confluence of factors. The ADL was seen to have disregarded the wishes of the Alabama B'nai B'rith membership and failed to consult with its lodges. Moreover, it had sided with an organization widely held in contempt in the South. Albert Vorspan reported after his Southern tour that

What we have heard about the reputation of the NAACP in the South is true - in spades. You can travel throughout the Deep South and you will be hard put to find a liberal white to say kind words about the NAACP. It is universally equated with the White Citizens councils as the two extremes. Of course this is hogwash; but it is how people feel. The NAACP is the universal scapegoat - it fouled up the Lucy case, it plotted the Montgomery bus boycott, it led to Citizens Councils, its statements incense even the decent Southerner, its professionals stir up 'agitation' in order to build membership and gain publicity and not solve problems.²

The ADL's action was interpreted as another instance where the defense of black civil rights was placed above the protection of the interests of the organization's Southern constituents. Mayer Newfield, a Birmingham lawyer and member of the ADL Southeastern regional advisory board, recalled that his community was "very

¹ See Bartley, *The Rise of Massive Resistance*, 215-222.

² Memorandum from Albert Vorspan to the Commission on Social Action, April 24, 1956, correspondence file, Mantinband Papers, Amistad Research Center.

much disturbed” and “violently opposed” to the filing of the brief.³ The fallout was “immediate and forceful,” the state association threatening to censure the ADL.⁴ Alabama B’nai B’rith leaders called a protest meeting in Birmingham. A senior delegation from the League, comprised of Bernie Nath (chairman of the National ADL Executive Committee), Benjamin Epstein, (national ADL director), and Arnold Forster, (national director of ADL’s Civil Rights Division), addressed this audience, hoping to dissuade the association from pressing ahead with the censure. Epstein remembered that despite the full day of debate, their mission ended in failure: “There were 83 people present. The vote was 80-3 to uphold the censure. Nath, Forster and Epstein voted against censure. We didn’t convince a soul in the room.”⁵ A resolution was adopted stating that it was “the sense of the meeting that filing of the brief was a serious mistake.”⁶

The incident had two major consequences. It precipitated a flood of resignations from B’nai B’rith in Alabama, immobilizing many lodges. District #7 B’nai B’nai leaders bracketed this incident alongside the crisis that immediately following the *Brown* decision.⁷ The second consequence was more far reaching. Although the ADL claimed that the principle of consultation was a central tenet of its platform, the concerns of the Southern B’nai B’rith constituency were rarely allowed

³ This incident is also described in Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 77. Interview with Mayer Newfield in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 22-23.

⁴ Memorandum from Herbert Maulitz to ADL Chairmen, B’nai B’rith Presidents, Southeastern Regional Board Members, March 15, 1958, ADL Collection, folder 2, box 1, Amistad Research Center; Interview with Benjamin Epstein in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, iv-v.

⁵ Interview with Benjamin Epstein in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, iv-v.

⁶ Memorandum from Herbert Maulitz to ADL Chairmen, B’nai B’rith Presidents, Southeastern Regional Board Members, March 15, 1958, ADL Collection, folder 2, box 1, Amistad Research Center.

⁷ See Joe Cahn to Stanley Kaufman, 1960, District Officers Minutes, box 3, BB.

to override policy premised on principle.⁸ The Alabama protest, and the incidents that followed it in 1958, served to narrow the gap between principle and pragmatism in policymaking. Following the Birmingham meeting, a committee of five Alabama representatives attended the National ADL Executive Committee meeting in Chicago. On their advice, the Committee unanimously adopted a resolution that “Whenever any public action shall be contemplated by the ADL affecting a regional constituency, such action shall be taken only after consultation with such regional constituency; in any public action by the ADL, full consideration be given to the welfare and best interest of all Jews throughout the country, including those who reside in the area affected.”⁹ The resolution was approved by the National ADL Commission meeting in Miami, Florida in December 1957.¹⁰ Although this declaration was not unprecedented, it was the first indication of a subtle shift in the ADL’s relationship with the B’nai B’rith in the South.

This dispute had barely been settled before a wave of bombings and attempted bombing struck Jewish institutions in Nashville, Jacksonville, Charlotte, Gastonia and Birmingham. The bombings stoked tensions and fueled anxieties about the activities of ADL in the South.¹¹ The Regional Board of Virginia reacted by passing a resolution calling for a “dramatic modification of ADL activities in the state,” warning that unless the “ADL decides to change the direction and emphasis of its

⁸ Mayer Newfield recalled that “Even though the principle was well established that ADL would not take a public position without consulting local opinions and feelings, contrary to local feelings, without ‘clearance’ from the local group, still there might be a matter of such pervasive importance that ADL nevertheless would take a stand notwithstanding the opposition of a local group.” Interview with Mayer Newfield in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 22-23.

⁹ Memorandum from Herbert Maulitz to ADL Chairmen, B’nai B’rith Presidents, Southeastern Regional Board Members, March 15, 1958, ADL Collection, folder 2, box 1, Amistad Research Center.

¹⁰ See John Horwitz, *Anti-Defamation League Report 1958*, box 7, BB.

¹¹ Edward Hirschler to Henry Schultz, November 13, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

program and printed materials," it could expect "far stronger protests."¹² Others again questioned the "legal relationship" between the B'nai B'rith and the ADL, suggesting "that there be a separation between them."¹³ In response to these expressions of disapproval, the ADL convened a meeting of 75 Southern lodge and community leaders in Atlanta in May 1958. The League was represented by Benjamin Epstein, Arnold Forster and Alexander Miller, the community service director. The discussion revolved around the position of the Southern Jewish community and the causes of the bombings. Despite arguing forcefully that Jews would be targeted "even if Jews said or did nothing," the trio failed to unseat the belief that the statements and actions ADL had worsened the position of the Southern community.¹⁴ The discussion was enlivened by a "strong sense of anger" directed against the League. Alexander Miller reported that some

even went so far as to ascribe the increase of anti-Semitism and even the bombings themselves to a reaction by Southerners to the position in favor of desegregation taken by national agencies. The ADL was described as the most culpable of the national organizations. For one thing, the League is the best known and most active Jewish organization in the South and it has by far the largest constituency. As a result, activities of any Jewish organization which Southern Jews felt hurt them were ascribed to the ADL. For example, a few days prior to the Atlanta meeting, Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., Negro leader of the Montgomery, Alabama Bus Boycott had appeared on the platform of the Annual Convention of the American Jewish Congress in Miami. Many of

¹² Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

¹³ Report of the Anti Defamation League Committee, July 1958, Proceedings of Annual Conventions 1958-1959, box 14, BB.

those attending the Atlanta meeting held ADL responsible for Rev. King's appearance on the Congress platform. When the distinction between the two organizations was spelled out, these same individuals argued that the League nevertheless should have censured the Congress' invitation to King.

Assurances that the League would not undertake any action without the approval of the Southern lodges was regarded as insufficient. One Virginia delegate demanded a readjustment of the relationship between the ADL and its Southern constituency. He objected that the Southern lodges would be unable to influence ADL policy, given that it was "inevitable that the South would be in a minority on both the ADL Commission and the ADL National Executive Committee." He suggested that "special machinery," in the form of a National ADL Committee, be established to ensure "adequate representation."¹⁵ Yet for all the apparent animus directed against the agency, the incident also produced the first signs of an alteration of attitudes towards the League. The bombings generated a curious combination of distrust and dependence on the ADL. While some still accused the League of fomenting antisemitism in the South, the shock of the bombings persuaded others of the necessity of turning to the ADL's expertise. The Atlanta meeting ended with "many requests" that the agency provide "constructive advice to Southern Jewish communities as to how they might better protect themselves and their institutions from further threat of violence." The ADL also agreed to send more staff to its Southern offices.¹⁶

¹⁴ ADL to Perry Nussbaum, June 23, 1958, folder 2, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

¹⁵ Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

¹⁶ Ibid.

This progress was undermined with the publication of an inflammatory editorial in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* in July 1958.¹⁷ Its author, James Kilpatrick, was a rising star within the state rights movement, challenging desegregation on specious constitutional grounds.¹⁸ Kilpatrick operated alongside a cluster of influential lawyers and lawmakers that included Charles Bloch, a Jewish lawyer from Macon, Georgia.¹⁹ Although the state rights movement sought to preserve segregation, its approach was far removed from the overt racism of the coarser Citizens Councils. The civil rights movement, as well as the defense agencies, blurred the boundaries of the broad and divided segregationist camp, discrediting constitutional segregationism by linking it to the violence of fringe extremists. Kilpatrick's editorial was intended as a counterattack:

Southern Jews who are dismayed at manifestations of anti-semitism in recent months would do well to ask themselves what has prompted this deplorable violence, for the South has no tradition of anti-semitism. This is a new thing. We are strangers to it. A South that has honored Baruch and Strauss, and placed a Judah P. Benjamin on the Confederate Cabinet, knows nothing of anti-semitism. But it is apparent that something is stirring up hostility to the Jews, and it may be that Jews will soon be asking themselves if that something is not their own Anti-Defamation League. By deliberately involving themselves itself in the controversy over school segregation, this branch of

¹⁷ This incident is described at length by Murray Friedman, the director of the Virginia-North Carolina office of the ADL at the time, in "One Episode in Southern Jewry's Response to Desegregation: An Historical Memoir," *American Jewish Archives*, 33, 2, 1981: 170-183.

¹⁸ See David Chappell, "The Divided Mind of Southern Segregationists," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 82, 1, Spring 1998: 51-58.

¹⁹ See Clive Webb, "Charles Bloch, Jewish White Supremacist," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 83, 2, Summer 1999: 267-292; Chappell, "The Divided Mind of Southern Segregationists": 56-58.

B'nai B'rith is identifying all Jewry with the advocacy of compulsory integration.²⁰

The Anti-Defamation League portrayed the editorial as an antisemitic assault, arguing that it evinced the antisemitism that lurked beneath the veneer of “respectable” segregationists. The organization pointed to the menace of the final paragraph:

In a free country, the ADL of course is free to interest itself in any phase of ‘bigotry.’ The rights of free speech and free association embrace the organization’s right to take whatever militant stand it wishes on any subject. But militancy invites retaliation, and the B’nai B’rith, diving into these muddy waters, has to expect to get wet. Relations between Jews and Gentiles were excellent in the South before the ADL began setting up regional offices, as in Richmond, and stirring up clouds of prejudice and misunderstanding. What possible service the Jewish community finds in a Jewish organization that foments hostility to Jews, we have no idea. Perhaps some of the South’s esteemed and influential Jews will want to inquire into this matter.²¹

²⁰ Kilpatrick continued that:

“Last week the Richmond regional office of the ADL provided some pro-integration literature for distribution in a Charlottesville ‘workshop’ for Negro parents and students involved in the school controversy there. This workshop for local colored people was sponsored by the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of the Colored People, a sponsorship understandable by even the most ardent segregationist. But it requires no great stretch of the imagination to hear embattled whites asking resentfully what segregation at Venable school has to do with defamation of the Jews. Such inquiries, once bruited about, will be seized upon by the ADL as evidence of anti-semitic feeling. And having thus stirred up defamation of the Jews, ADL can lustily combat defamation of the Jews. ‘Look how much anti-semitism there is!’ But where did it come from?”

²¹ *Richmond News Leader*, July 7, 1958.

The editorial was widely circulated within the Southern Jewish community, eliciting varied responses.²² Many of those who doubted the value of “taking the lead” in civil rights agreed with Kilpatrick’s comments.²³ Shaken by the editorial, the Virginia Regional Board engaged in a “serious discussion about whether ADL in Virginia must go.”²⁴ Although the Board decided not to break ties, the incident produced an important shift in the relationship between the ADL and its Southern structures. The regional boards were relatively new and untested in the South, having been established alongside the ADL offices during the League’s postwar expansion.²⁵ The boards were easily bypassed. Designed to perform an advisory role and exercise oversight over the activities of locally stationed professional staff, in practice the boards were more often reduced to providing post de facto approval to actions already undertaken.²⁶ In this instance, the regional board’s protest forced the national ADL office to buckle, backing away from the confrontational response that it proposed to the editorial, an “action other than that recommended locally.”²⁷ Under pressure from the national office, the board eventually consented to meeting with Kilpatrick to “protest the attack upon the ADL.” The delegation did meet with the editor, although

²² For a thorough description of reactions in Richmond see Friedman, “One Incident in Southern Jewry’s Response to Segregation”: 532-534.

²³ Just a month before, ADL fieldworkers encountered similar sentiment at community meetings in the Deep South: “There were a number of quite hostile individuals who turned out for the community meetings. They exhibited a good deal of unsophistication, repeating to me the canards about the ADL which have been voiced by the White Citizens Council leaders, Ku Klux Klansmen and others.” See Alexander Miller, *A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958*, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers; Alvin Coleman to Irving Engel, July 14, 1958, Irving Engel Papers, Blaustein Library; Murray Friedman to Alex Miller, November 19, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

²⁴ Murray Friedman to Alex Miller and Arthur Gilbert, November 26, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

²⁵ Regional Boards were only established for Southcentral office in 1954 and Southeastern office in 1955.

²⁶ See interview with Bernard Mintz in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 52.

²⁷ Edward Hirschler to Henry Schultz, November 13, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

expressed a position closer to concurrence than condemnation.²⁸ More importantly, the force of protest compelled the national office to cede authority over local decision making to the regional board, an unprecedented step.²⁹ In effect, it signaled its willingness to retreat from the desegregation programs that its Richmond office had promoted. According to one participant in the Richmond revolt, this amounted to the League engaging in “program favored locally but which until this time was contrary to ADL’s national policy.”³⁰ The regional board regarded this a triumph. It rapidly reevaluated its relationship with the League, replacing barbed rhetoric with praise of the potential for “close cooperation.” It was magnanimous in victory, voting a sizeable increase to the Joint Defense Appeal.³¹

In its compromise with the assertive Virginia Board, the national ADL office placed pragmatism before principle. Some within the office complained that the League had “gone to far in capitulating to local pressures.”³² Yet to do otherwise risked an acrimonious rift with lodges and leaders roused by the cumulative effect of the events of 1958. As in the case of the World Jewish Congress, pragmatism was imposed by uneasy expediency. The secession of the board would have been disastrous, establishing a precedent for other discontented leaders to follow, if not spurring the disaffiliation of the state’s lodges. The ADL was aware that its lodge infrastructure, particularly local ADL committees, was under serious stress elsewhere

²⁸ Kilpatrick wrote that instead of “expressing ‘distress’ at an ‘attack’ on the ADL,” the delegation “expressed almost exactly the opposite view.” Although they regretted the editorial, “they felt it would do a great deal of good.” The delegation assured Kilpatrick that “they intended to use their influence with the ADL toward the end that the ADL’s involvement in the school desegregation controversy could be minimized.” See Irving May to Joseph Proskauer, September 23, 1958, Irving Engel Papers, Blaustein Library; Friedman, “One Episode in Southern Jewry’s Response to Desegregation”: 534-535.
²⁹ *Ibid.*, 535-538.

³⁰ Edward Hirschler to Henry Schultz, November 13, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

³¹ Benjamin Epstein to the National Commission, October 3, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

in the South.³³ Principle would have come with a price-tag. In 1957, the Richmond Jewish community alone donated \$7,000 to the Joint Defense Appeal. However, the pressures for concessions competed with countervailing compulsions. The ADL and its officers needed to reconcile financial and organizational considerations with incompatible philosophical convictions and political concerns.

³² Friedman, "One Episode in Southern Jewry's Response to Desegregation": 537.

³³ See John Horwitz, Report of the ADL Committee, Proceedings of the 1957 Convention, box 14, BB.

Chapter 13

The ADL's own Civil Rights Struggle

The League relied heavily on its Southern constituency for fundraising. In 1954, the ADL spent approximately \$50,000 in the states that constituted District Grand Lodge #7. In turn, the District contributed \$6,300 of its total budget of \$48,670 directly to the ADL.¹ By 1961, the ADL's spending in the South had more than doubled. District Grand Lodge #7 contribution was only marginally larger.² While the direct contribution from District #7 to the ADL was relatively small, lodge offices and members played a crucial role in securing allocations for the League from welfare funds.³ Most Jewish communities raised funds that were then distributed between local and national Jewish organizations. Although the contributions from these welfare funds were sometimes insubstantial, collectively they provided a sizeable source of revenue. In 1955, George Fagin, Chairman of the District #7 ADL Committee urged the

B'nai B'rith in each community to make the past accomplishments and services of ADL and ADL potentialities for greater service known to the entire Jewish community, so that the Joint Defense Appeal [the collective annual

¹ Joseph Cahn, Executive Secretary District Grand Lodge #7, An Evaluation Study of District Grand Lodge #7 B'nai B'rith Operations, December 31, 1954, box 3, BB.

² In 1961, ADL Southeastern regional office spent \$42,242, the Southcentral office \$19,083, and the Southwestern office \$30,176. The ADL spent \$15,807 on its Civil Rights Southern Operation. This total of \$107,308, excluded special projects and the expenses of national staff drafted into the South. The ADL received 11.8 percent of the District's total budget in 1965. See Joseph Cahn, Report for Officers Meeting, September 26, 1959, Box 4, Executive Secretary Reports; Simon Weil, Report of Anti-Defamation League Southeastern Regional Chairman, Executive Committee Meeting, August 1961, box 4, BB.

³ See Perry Nussbaum to Sylvan Lebow, March 6, 1959, folder 8, box 1; Perry Nussbaum to Isaac Toubin, October 6, 1955, folder 1, box 1, MS 430, Nussbaum Papers.

fundraising appeal by the American Jewish Committee and the ADL] may secure an adequate and just share of the Welfare Fund money collected. Further, that it is the responsibility of every B'nai B'rith member to work in the Welfare Fund so that additional sums can be collected and therefore additional money be made available, and that our B'nai B'rith leadership be represented on welfare fund boards and budget committees. Our B'nai B'rith lodges should take official action urging the Welfare Fund to vote a fair and adequate allocation to JDA.⁴

The contraction of the B'nai B'rith network in the South and the unpopularity of the defense agencies constricted access to this source of revenue. Moreover, the ADL faced additional competition for funds from the newly established community relations committees established by a number of Southern Jewish federations.⁵ The committees were intended to supplement (if not replace) the activities of the defense agencies on the local level.⁶ In 1956, Arthur Levin, director of the ADL's Southeastern region, complained that allocations to the Joint Defense Appeal by community welfare funds and individuals had "not kept pace, seriously hampering the

⁴ George Fagin, Report of Anti-Defamation League Committee, Pre-convention Reports 1955, box 8, BB.

⁵ See Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers; See, for example, Simon Weil to AI Botnick, January 4, 1965, folder 12, box 1, MS 94, Julian Feibelman Papers.

⁶ Lester Walman, national director of the ADL's program division in the 1950s, recalled that the Jewish Community Councils were "not always very friendly and usually unfriendly to the ADL which it regarded as a national organization coming in and setting up rules for local communities. These local community representatives felt this was an invasion of their rights to determine how the communities should respond" to the local situation.⁶ Alexander Miller, not an entirely objective observer, adjudged Councils, "more than any other area of the Jewish community," to be "subject to local prejudices and local pressures. Furthermore, because it is a local group, it is not subject to the leavening influence and discipline of a national agency with policies based on broad principles...Most Federation directors, anxious to remain secure in their present positions, would hesitate to counter the ideas of the most fiscally potent individuals in the community no matter how reactionary these ideas might be." Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers; Interview with Lester Waldman in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 87.

activities of the Regional Offices.” His office had been forced to turn down requests for educational material “because of lack of resources.”⁷ The termination of the Joint Defense Appeal in 1963 increased the League’s dependence on lodge leaders to lobby for a separate allocation.⁸ These repeated appeals for money did little to endear the ADL to its already prickly lodges. Sidney Rosenbaum, the president of the Mississippi state association expressed his exasperation in 1959:

We in Mississippi ask only one thing of others as regards B’nai B’rith work. Give us a chance to recoup the losses we have suffered without pushing us for money, money, money. Somewhere in this organization there must be something to offer than requests for bequests.⁹

The demands of fundraising shaped the League’s priorities. Oscar Cohen, the ADL program director, reflected, with a dollop of hindsight, on a strategic policy-planning meeting in 1951:

Ben Epstein called the senior staff together at a retreat where, for three days, we developed a blueprint which would, once and for all, indicate the direction we would take. The Civil Rights Division was a “given.” Fact-finding and the

⁷ Maurice Dannenbaum, Chairman of the District #7 ADL Committee similarly “emphasized the importance of each Lodge assuming its responsibilities in representing the needs of the Anti-Defamation League before their respective Federations and Budget Committees, in order that the program of the League should not be hampered by the same lack of funds which has confronted the agency the past years.” Maurice Dannenbaum, Report of the Anti-Defamation League Committee; Arthur Levin, Report of the Anti-Defamation League Committee, Proceedings of Annual Convention 1956, box 13, BB.

⁸ Simon Weil, the District ADL Chairman in 1965 reported that “ADL problems have been complicated of course by the need to spend a certain portion of its time on fundraising. We feel that each leader can be of help by aiding in the obtaining the maximum allocation for ADL from its local welfare or community fund. Fund raising is a great drain on our time but a necessary one. We urge your support.” Simon Weil, Report of the ADL, Pre-Convention reports, Executive Committee Meeting, 1965, box 8, BB.

attention given to extremists were paramount. No one was going to seriously try to curtail its or lessen its priority in the League... Mainly, the activities of the professional anti-Semites and hate-mongers were at that time the lifeblood of the agency. Nothing excited the lay committees more than the stories of these extremist groups with their violent anti-Jewish publications and public demonstrations such as those put on by the Ku Klux Klan. That budget was to remain sacrosanct. Personally, while I recognized the excitement of the lay people, it did not cause me any great concern about the welfare of the Jewish people. The extremists were not the people who were the gatekeepers of American society. They did not determine the course of events in America. They constituted a sideshow, full of sound and fury, but not signifying very much except that they caused fury in the Jewish community, if not outright fear. So, Civil Rights was always secure and, indeed, constantly expanded.¹⁰

This approach could be applied equally profitably with the Southern lodges. Fear drew Southern Jews closer to the League, and served as an unguent for fundraising and recruitment.¹¹ The ADL speaking tours that propped up lodge programs encouraged increased giving.¹² Antisemitism sold well.¹³ Following the

⁹ Sidney Rosenbaum, Report of B'nai B'rith Mississippi State Association, 1959, Pre-Convention Reports, box 8, BB.

¹⁰ Interview with Oscar Cohen in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 62-63.

¹¹ Alexander Miller, Director of ADL's Miami office in 1943, recalled that his first meeting lodge meeting: "The meeting chairman did his best to put me at my ease. "Scare the sugar out 'em," or words to that effect. "They're too damn apathetic." I didn't know it at the time but I was to be haunted by the same injunction from chairmen and presidents for the next 30 years." Interview with Alexander Miller in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 35-36.

¹² See PD East to Adolph Botnick, November 8, 1962, box 1, Botnick-East Papers, Amistad Research Center.

¹³ The Southern satirist, PD East, sardonically, but not entirely mistakenly, complemented the director of the ADL New Orleans office that "Getting that Nazi-type kid [John Kasper] to picket the Miami office was a stroke of genius. This ought to be good for many thousands of dollars." PD East to Adolph B Botnick, February 27, 1963, box 1, Botnick-East Papers, Amistad Research Center.

Atlanta Temple bombing, one B'nai B'rith circular claimed that the incident had been put "to good advantage in furthering the efforts of membership and retention workers." The bombing was used in the "most intensive membership campaign in the history of the order;" the lodges receiving flyers "showing reprints of newspaper publicity on the bombing, in efforts to get delinquent members to pay their dues...Quite a few lodges used this material with gratifying results."¹⁴ Yet this approach could easily backfire. Morris Dannenbaum, first vice president of District Grand Lodge #7 warned the Alabama state convention in 1961 that recruitment using this method was shortsighted:

I know how easy it is to go to a man and to pin him back on the Jewish situation, to approach him and pin him back on the things we are trying to stop from arising in this country. I know how easy it is to scare the daylights out of the average Jew on the matter of Anti-Semitism, and no man here can deny the importance of this fine work. We have got to carry it on and tear down the work of our opponents, and it is the proper attitude for the Jews to work together in this country, in future, but, I don't want the B'nai B'rith membership sold to the Jews upon a story of fear alone. I know and you know we have sold B'nai B'rith memberships in the past on the theory of what might happen if we did not have such an institution as the Anti-Defamation League that goes out and enlists the support of the Jew and Gentile alike to fight those subversive interests, because as soon as the shadow of that dogma passes, then B'nai B'rith loses that membership, because it is the responsibility of every decent thinking Jew to support the full fledged program

¹⁴ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, December 26, 1958.

of B'nai Brith and not simply one branch, such as we are carrying on in the Anti-Defamation League.¹⁵

Some lodges grew impatient with this diet of pessimism, requesting that the ADL provide speakers and programs on “positive Jewish topics,” instead of the perennial lectures on “the dangers of antisemitism and the poverty of Moroccan Jewry.”¹⁶ Jack Drew of the Alabama state association complained to his District counterpart that the lodges were “fed a steady stream of fears.” He instead called for the planning of “things of joy,” activities that would positively engage the community.¹⁷ Antisemitic incidents could be turned against the ADL. Albert Vorspan worried that Southern Jews would use evidence of antisemitism “as an argument against doing or saying anything in favor of integration.”¹⁸ Others regarded the ADL as “alarmist,” an indication that its focus on antisemitism could alienate as well as attract.¹⁹

Yet this pessimistic presentation reflected a perspective borne from more than fundraising concerns. While financial considerations counseled caution, the League’s worldview created counter-pressure for engagement in the Southern civil rights struggle. The ADL’s outlook was grounded in the ascendant social scientific understanding of racism that conceived of prejudice as protean and broadly threatening.²⁰ The defense agencies’ involvement hinged on the associated conviction

¹⁵ Minutes of the Alabama State Convention, March 4-5, 1961, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

¹⁶ Joshua Fishman, “Visits to Two Southern Cities (A Preliminary Report),” folder 8, box 18, MS294, AJA.

¹⁷ Jack Drew to Abe Kaplan, April 12, 1964, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

¹⁸ Minutes of Commission on Social Action, November 25, 1957, folder 1, box 53, MS 72, UAHC Papers.

¹⁹ Charles Mantinband to Perry Nussbaum, January 1, 1956, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

²⁰ See Higham, *Send These to Me*, 153-174.

that the defense and extension of civil rights would be advantageous to all minority groups. It was also underpinned by a pessimistic interpretation of the place of the Jew in American society.²¹ One ADL fieldworker, reporting on the Southern Jewish community, neatly encapsulated this perception of the position of American Jewry:

As a minority group historically persecuted they have been vulnerable to attack both insidious and overt. They are unwilling to accept the stark reality of the situation that Jews have not yet achieved ultimate security in this country and that there is much potential anti-Semitism extant ready to be evoked by any tension situation. For to make this admission would indicate that the foundations on which they have built economic and social well-being are so weak that they might be toppled by the first heavy storm.²²

The agency's outlook and expectations were drawn from its understanding of Jewish historical experience. The ADL anticipated an upsurge in antisemitism in the South.

Oscar Cohen, speaking in 1959, saw

every reason for assuming that the present situation in the South is and will continue to result in a deterioration in the status of the Jew. In historical and sociological perspective, periods of serious social tensions have always affected the status of the Jew. This was true whether the situation was the France of 1870; the Germany of the '30s; World War 1, the Depression, and/or World War II in the United States. What happened during and after the Civil

²¹ See, for example, Memorandum from Irwin Schulman to Jewish Leaders in Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi, May 28, 1963, folder 12, box 1, MS 94, Julian Feibelman Papers, AJA.

²² Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

War is of particular relevance. Prior to the Civil War the Jews were a favored minority in the South. Their acceptance, their integration in the life of the South was remarkable... Moreover the Jews of the South were by and large pro-slavery. Nevertheless during and after the Civil War there was a serious rise in anti-Semitism and the Jews lost a position they held in the South never to regain it. It is true that since then the position of Jews in the South has been equal and probably superior to that of Jews in other parts of the country in terms of their acceptance by the Christian community. But this does not deny the fact of what happened to the Jewish community at the time of the Civil War. ... it would be an astounding reversal of what history and the social sciences have shown us if over a period of years we did not find some of the social tensions rubbing off on Jewish-Christian relations.

Cohen argued that the situation in the South demanded sustained engagement over "a period of five to ten years."²³ Working from the assumption that the roots of antisemitism and racism were intertwined, Cohen advised that the ADL should not limit itself to tackling antisemitism, but rather "to alleviate racial tensions, to maintain law and order, to keep schools open, and to help achieve the inevitable acceptance of the Supreme Court decisions."²⁴ In effect, he was encouraging the League to override the objections of Southern members who opposed action. Given that Cohen and the

²³ The League relied heavily on surveys and opinion polls to demonstrate the danger of Southern antisemitism. Oscar Cohen recalled that "We made many mistakes that I can shoot myself. I wish I was back 20 years ago, because we did not give people an opportunity to express what they consider to be positive about Jews. Our questions, even though we retested, and so forth, were in a sense loaded." Transcript of Oscar Cohen and Eli Evans interview, June 19, 1981, folder 13, box 20, Oscar Cohen Papers; see also Oscar Cohen, "The South: How Much Anti-Semitism, Attitudes Appear to be as Friendly as Ever- Until Crisis Strikes," *ADL Bulletin*, 16:9, November 1959: 6-7.

²⁴ Oscar Cohen to Ben Epstein, May 5, 1959; speech delivered by Oscar Cohen at the National Executive Committee, September 25, 1959, folder 8, box 18, MS294, Oscar Cohen Papers.

League believed that the Southern situation contained the “seeds of danger to the status of the Jew,” active involvement in the civil rights struggle was an imperative.²⁵

A cluster of additional factors made a retreat from civil rights difficult and undesirable. Involvement in the civil rights struggle provided a number of practical and political advantages. It offered opportunity to create or enhance beneficial relationships with other organizations. For example, the Anti-Defamation League sought to improve its cooperation with trade unions by encouraging their participation in civil rights related activities. The League’s Benjamin Segal touted the Southern crisis as “an excellent opportunity for working with the trade unions.” A civil rights program targeted at unions would “encourage unions in various parts of the country to use and work with the ADL Regional offices.”²⁶ While a visible and effective supporting civil rights role could equally improve relations with black civil rights groups, the expectations of its alliance partners created pressure and incentive for involvement. Perceived failure to adequately support black civil rights in the South would have its own costs and consequences. The League was constrained by the perception of similar expectations from its own Northern constituency. The retreat from civil rights commitments, even a tactical withdrawal of the sort conducted in Virginia, could impact on the organization’s reputation. In turn this could have

²⁵ “The present crisis situation in the south contains the seeds of danger to the status of the Jew and an intensified program in the South is indicated, designed to reduce the rise of prejudice and to prevent prejudices from becoming institutionalized in discriminatory practices.... We will probably not be able to ascertain with any certainty for a period of about five years as to whether or not the level of unfavorable attitudes has risen significantly in the South. In the meantime, the only safe assumption we can make is that the crisis situations are dangerous and that our program in the South should be intensified in anticipation of possible deterioration of the Jewish position.” Speech delivered by Oscar Cohen at the National Executive Committee, September 25, 1959, folder 8, box 18, MS294, Oscar Cohen Papers.

²⁶ Memorandum from Benjamin Segal to Oscar Cohen, June 18, 1957, folder 1, box 1, Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Records, Amistad Research Center.

consequences in its competition for resources and leadership with the other defense agencies.

Together these factors – financial, philosophical and political – acted as constraints on the League’s options. The clamor for consultation could be sidestepped, but at the risk of jeopardizing access to Southern funds and hastening the decline of the lodges. Alternatively, relinquishing authority to skittish regional boards could undermine national civil rights policy. Disengagement from civil rights activities, never a likely option, was incompatible with the League’s principles and national political priorities. Instead the ADL responded by intensifying a program intended to repair the breach with its Southern constituency. Ironically, this effort was aided by the bombing of Atlanta’s Reform Temple in October 1958. The bombing wrested momentum away from the League’s Southern critics, rendering Southern Jews more receptive and reliant on the Anti-Defamation League.

Chapter Fourteen

In League with the Lodges: the ADL's Southern Strategy

In the years immediately following the *Brown* decision, the League's Southern regional directors undertook initiatives intended to directly advance acceptance of integration. Despite limited resources and shallow local support, they distributed educational material and sought to rally white opposition to segregation. Although the concerted lodge protests in 1958 were directed primarily at the national ADL program, they also signaled rejection of the actions and priorities of the regional ADL offices. The bombings and the accompanying criticism persuaded the League to reposition itself, shifting from active promotion of desegregation to efforts that indirectly facilitated the success of the civil rights movement. This was a compromise position, entailing neither withdrawal from the South, nor a retreat from principle.¹

The League reframed its involvement in the South to outflank its critics. It adopted rhetoric that resonated with Southern Jews. The agency shifted from openly extolling the advantages of participation in the "march of human rights" to advocacy of law and order.² The League recognized that this theme transcended ideological divisions, offering a salable common goal that appealed to "all decent forces in the community,

¹ See interview with Oscar Cohen in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 139.

² Compare, for example, Aaron Topek, Presidential Message, June 1955, box 8 to Harry Friedman, Presidential Report to Annual Convention, June 26, 1957, box 9, BB.

despite disagreements on desegregation and related issues.”³ This adjustment of rhetoric reflected its reallocation of resources to programs aimed at combating extremism in the South. The Southern Jewish community was more confident of the agency’s value in this role. The League publicized its efforts to “create a better climate of public opinion and to strengthen the forces of law and order, help make law enforcement officials more sensitive to their responsibility in handling acts of violence and dynamiting directed against minority groups.”⁴ This adjustment in self-presentation all but replaced the League’s campaign to persuade the Southern constituency that it was only possible to “combat anti-Semitism by combating the fight against desegregation.”⁵

The League also improved its communication with the Southern lodges. Following the discussions with lodge leaders in Atlanta in 1958, fieldworkers fanned out across the South to meet with representatives of Jewish communities. The tour of 143 towns and cities, conducted over one month, provided opportunity to demonstrate the League’s concern with the welfare of Southern Jewry.⁶ The meetings were intended to reform the ADL’s image, focusing solely on the assistance that the organization could offer to bolster the position of the Southern community. The fieldworkers presented a practical program of measures to prevent and counteract antisemitism, stressing that the League would comply with local decisions.⁷ The tour initiated an effort to increase contact with the Southern lodges, primarily by encouraging regular visits by ADL

³ Alfred Salinger, Anti Defamation League Report, 1959, Pre-Convention Reports, box 8, BB.

⁴ ADL to Perry Nussbaum, June 23, 1958, folder 2, box 1; Henry Schultz to William Rogers, April 29, 1958, folder 4, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

⁵ Interview with Burnett Roth in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *‘Not the Work of a Day’: Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith Oral Memoirs*, 94.

⁶ Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

representatives. The League transferred staff and resources to the Southern offices, increasing the staff complement by reassigning twelve additional personnel from other areas. This “crash program” increased the presence of the ADL in the South, making the activities of fieldworkers on behalf of the Southern community more visible and boosting its capability for undertaking programming.⁸ With these additional resources, the League was perceived to be “more efficient and serviceable to the B’nai B’rith membership.”⁹ The fieldworkers routinely earned high praise, even as the national ADL office was denigrated.¹⁰ In addition, the League reevaluated its relationship with the regional advisory boards. Whereas the boards had previously been sidestepped as impediments to action, the regional directors now sought to work more closely with the local ADL committees. In practice, the lay advisory boards still exercised little control, but the flattery of routine consultation by League professionals and the appearance of authority were persuasive in ensuring cooperation. The League’s efforts quickly achieved success. Robert Banks, District Grand Lodge #7 president, reported that over the course of 1959

we heard more about the positive and affirmative programming of the ADL and less rumblings about misinterpretation of ADL work. It is our observation, based on extensive travel, that the more that the more our professional directors and key

⁷ Label Katz to Perry Nussbaum, October 21, 1958, folder 2, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

⁸ Joseph Cahn reported that interfaith meetings organized by the ADL fieldworkers, “brought enthusiastic commendations for the ADL whereas for the past several years, there were certain reservations; in fact, direct opposition to the extent of considering turning back lodge charters. Today, this positive program is one of the most exciting events of the entire year.” Joe Cahn, Report of the Executive Secretary, 1961, Pre-convention Reports 1961-1963, box 7, BB; ADL to Perry Nussbaum, June 23, 1958, folder 2, box 1, Nussbaum Papers.

⁹ See Edward Hirschler to Henry Schultz, November 13, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center; Alfred Salinger, Anti Defamation League Report, 1959, Pre-Convention Reports, box 8, BB.

ADL personnel get out to the lodges to interpret the real work of the ADL and to answer questions about this work that we begin to receive enthusiastic support for the vital and needed work of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith.¹¹

The bombing of the Atlanta Temple in October 1958 made Southern Jews more receptive to the repositioned ADL. The shock was magnified by a combination of factors. Atlanta had styled itself as a city "too busy to hate," an outpost of tolerance and coexistence in the troubled South. The Jewish community was one of the largest in the region, and the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation the temple of its wealthiest citizens.¹² It was a symbol of the acceptance and success of Atlanta, and Southern Jewry. Moreover, Atlanta, the city of Leo Frank, held a sensitive place in Southern Jewish memory. Although the bombing initially revived the familiar chorus of protests against the League, these criticisms quickly subsided.¹³ The incident played to the League's strengths, enabling it to present itself as protector and guardian of Southern Jewry. Its enlarged Southern staff was visible and vocal, quickly onto the scene, willing to furnish the press with quotable information, and able to provide Southern communities with reassurance

¹⁰ See Alexander Miller, *A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958*, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

¹¹ Robert Banks, *The President's Message, Pre-convention reports 1959*, box 7, BB.

¹² For accounts of the bombing of the Temple, see Arnold Shankman, "A Temple is Bombed – Atlanta, 1958," *American Jewish Archives*, November 1971: 125-153; Janice Rothschild Blumberg, "The Bomb that Healed: A Personal Memoir of the Temple in Atlanta, 1958," *American Jewish History*, 73:1, September 1983: 20-38.

¹³ Alfred Sallinger, District ADL Chairman, reported that

"some of our people urged that we withdraw from the South, some that we be not in the forefront, some that we be not quoted on anything for newspaper publication. A few even pondered the advisability of as to whether the action of ADL should be limited merely to fact finding with submission of such fact finding data to local community relation committees in consultation for their evaluation and determination of action, and a few other outsiders even accused the ADL and American Jewish Committee of trying to make an anti-Semitic issue out of the recent temple bombings in Peoria and Atlanta, asserting that the real issue in the bombings is Southern lawlessness and not anti-Semitism."

and practical advice.¹⁴ Sustained contact with the League's fieldworkers altered perceptions of the ADL. It was no longer a distant and crusading organization, rather an agency which would defend the vulnerable Jewish community.¹⁵

The Temple bombing was a turning point in the relationship between the League and the lodges. Although the change was not instantaneous, cooperation improved steadily. Joseph Cahn, District Grand Lodge #7 executive secretary, found that in 1960 the ADL was still "problem," but "more on a routine basis." There were no longer the "panics" of the earlier period. The regional board, lodges and League interacted smoothly: a "far cry from the fall of 1954 and later days of tension in Alabama when our District Administration had one task: To preserve the unity of B'nai B'rith without scuttling basic Jewish principles of justice."¹⁶ This reevaluation of attitudes was intertwined with a revised perception of the threat from the antisemitism that accompanied the move of the civil rights struggle into the Deep South. Southern towns that "previously had felt that the ADL could not be of help to them" now welcomed the programs and assistance offered by fieldworkers. The professional staff that the District Grand Lodge sponsored to work in Mississippi during the "long hot summer" of 1964 were well received by the local lodges. Their work

Minutes of the Executive Committee Meeting, 1959, Pre-Convention Reports, box 8, BB.

¹⁴ Janice Rothchild Blumberg, wife of the rabbi of the Temple, recalled that the ADL was the only organization to circumvent a communal ban on issuing statements. She speculated that the "ADL's only purpose was to seek publicity for itself." Blumberg: 30-31; see also Alfred Salinger, Anti Defamation League Report, 1959, Pre-Convention Reports, box 8, BB.

¹⁵ See, for example, Murray Friedman to Alex Miller, November 19, 1958, folder 2, box 1, ADL Records, Amistad Research Center.

¹⁶ "We received the call from a community alarmed and perplexed because of Anti-Semitic vandalism. One call from the Atlanta Office to Arthur Levine and another to Robert N. Banks, Chairman of Regional ADL Board, led to rapid and satisfactory solution of the problem." Joe Cahn to Stanley Kaufman, 1960, District Officers Minutes, box 3, BB.

resulted in newspaper editorials upholding law and order, helped police departments in taking a stand against unlawful acts, and added immeasurably to the security of the Jewish population of these communities, by the feeling of support and interest in their welfare ... We feel that its success can be gauged by this fact. There was a time when ADL was not only unwelcome in Mississippi but were actually asked not to visit some towns. Now our people are not only welcomed but urged to work with communities.¹⁷

Lodges that had previously rejected the Anti-Defamation League now openly sought its assistance. A special meeting of state lodge leaders in Jackson “urged the ADL continue its summer program over the winter.”¹⁸ Similarly, the Birmingham lodge, at the center of the movement to censure the Anti-Defamation League in 1957, pressed for the establishment of a regional office in Birmingham.¹⁹

While at times the League was still required to choose between Southern sensitivities and its other political priorities, it managed to avoid repetition of earlier ructions. In spite of requests for assistance from the civil rights movement, the League refused to endorse or support sit-ins and boycotts of stores in the South.²⁰ Its unwillingness probably stemmed from the large number of Southern Jewish businessmen

¹⁷ Simon Weil, Report of the ADL, Pre-Convention reports, Executive Committee Meeting, 1965, box 8, BB.

¹⁸ Simon Weil, Report of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith 1965, box 7, BB.

¹⁹ Ibid.; see also Alabama State Association, Reports for 1964-1965, March 12-14, 1965, Alabama State Conference; Minutes Alabama State Association, June 28, 1964, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

²⁰ Interview with Burnett Roth in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 61.

involved in the retail trade. In other instances, it responded to contrary pressures. The Anti-Defamation League initially bowed to appeals from Southern lodges not to take part in the Selma march in 1965. It later backed away from this decision, most likely because of pressure from its Northern constituency and the participation of the American Jewish Committee and American Jewish Congress, but promised to avoid publicity.²¹ Following its repositioning, the League was held in a new regard in the Deep South. Its presence and practical assistance was valued, particularly in this tense and often violent atmosphere. Perry Nussbaum, a state ADL chairman in the mid-1960s, but ever an acerbic observer, ascribed its success to “taking every advantage” of antisemitism in Mississippi to consolidate “its stance as the defender and preserver of Jews and Judaism.”²²

Despite the improvement in the relationship between the lodges and the League, the national B'nai B'rith battled to overcome the sense of grievance that was firmly lodged in the minds of some Southern constituents. Members of the Greenville lodge still complained in June 1963 of the 1954 “Friend of the Court case,” when they had been “sacrificed on the altar of humanitarianism.”²³ This residual distrust was equally strong in parts of Alabama.²⁴ The freedom rides reactivated these resentments. In 1962, 116 B'nai B'rith members out of a total of 473 in Mississippi resigned, probably in protest against the encouragement that the freedom riders received from a number of Northern Jewish organizations.²⁵ The fallout did not reach the level of ferocity of 1954 and 1958.

²¹ Interview with Burnett Roth in Oscar Cohen and Stanley Wexler, eds., *'Not the Work of a Day': Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith Oral Memoirs*, 61.

²² Perry Nussbaum to Sylvan Lebow, February 7, 1969, folder 6, box 2, Nussbaum Papers.

²³ Minutes of State Association visit to Deborah Lodge #161, Greenville, Miss., June 23, 1963, box 18, BB.

²⁴ See State Association Executive Meeting April 17, 1966, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

²⁵ By contrast, in 1962 Louisiana, lost only 33 out of its 1312 members to resignations and withdrawals. The president of the Mississippi state association found that Northern Mississippi lodges “non-existent” in

Moreover, most of it was not directed at the Anti-Defamation League. The rapprochement between the ADL and its Southern constituency did not translate into a revival of B'nai B'rith lodges. The decline in membership slowed in the 1960s, but continued in most states for the rest of the decade. While the Jewish population grew substantially in all seven states of District Grand Lodge #7 between 1950 and 1965, only Tennessee increased its lodge membership, and Texas suffered an insignificant decline.²⁶ Mississippi B'nai B'rith membership halved over the same period, despite a near doubling of the state's Jewish community.²⁷ Joseph Cahn, long a disappointed herald, in 1966 predicted the B'nai B'rith's returned to sustained growth:

Today we show quantitative gains for the first time in several years – not huge gains – but gains for membership and the service fund.

Today the civil rights issue recedes (sic) rapidly in Alabama, Arkansas, Louisiana, Mississippi and Tennessee where for over ten years we had losses. Losses of members – of money – of more import – losses of values – Jewish values as well as basic ones of American Democracy. But today, the fears grow less and there is a beginning of re-affiliation – A beginning not a stampeed (sic), but with past leaders now coming to the front and new ones, younger ones joining up and beginning to play active roles.²⁸

1963. Analysis of Memberships Year Ended 1962, Auditors Reports, box 1; State Association Executive Meeting April 17, 1966, Alabama State Conference, box 16, BB.

²⁶ Statistical Information Requested by District President Relative to Membership Enrollment – Jewish population – and Potential for New Members, Membership Committee Correspondence, box 7, BB.

²⁷ Comparison of Membership, Membership Committee Correspondence, box 7, BB.

²⁸ Joseph Cahn, Executive Secretary Report, April 22, 1966, box 4, BB.

He was to be disappointed once again. Although the focus of the civil rights movement shifted to the north, the once-vibrant B'nai B'rith lodge network in the South had been crippled by its own civil rights struggle with the Anti-Defamation League.

Conclusion

We have seen how Southern and South African Jews interacted with external Jewish organizations, seeking to shape their responses to segregation and apartheid. The communities' regard for these agencies fluctuated substantially, falling when they were seen to work against local interests and rising when their services and support were needed. Both communities derived influence from the size of their financial contributions. However, the Southern lodges of the B'nai B'rith were unable to consistently apply concerted pressure on the Supreme Lodge and Anti-Defamation League. The resignations of individual members had a delayed and cumulative effect, sapping the strength of the Southern constituency, and failing to produce the confrontation needed to force policy change. At most, lodges and state associations could exert negative pressure through protest, withholding contributions or withdrawing from the national organization. By contrast, the contingent nature of the South African Board's annual subvention to the World Jewish Congress magnified its value. Yet it had no equivalent relationship with other international Jewish organizations. The Board was therefore compelled to conduct its own public relations campaign abroad, attempting to actively counter criticism of its position and politics, but with little leverage and less success.

In turn, these organizations balanced competing pressures, reconciling the concerns of their constituencies with their civil rights obligations and convictions. Although these relationships were rooted in interdependence, the influence that the South

African and Southern communities exercised shifted over time, swayed by internal and external developments. This was clearly demonstrated in the case study of the World Jewish Congress. During its courtship of the South African Jewish community, the Congress sought to shield the South African Board from criticism. With the erosion of the relative value of the Board's financial and political contribution, and the concomitant rise in the political costs of association with South Africa in the 1960s, the Congress became less eager to interpose itself on the Board's behalf. Similarly, only in 1958 did mounting pressure from the Southern B'nai B'rith lodges force the Anti-Defamation League to review its approach to its Southern structures.

The two communities had no comparable leverage over the American Jewish Congress. The South African community had infrequent contact with the agency, relying on the World Jewish Congress to tame its American affiliate. Although the AJCongress was threatened with the loss of access to Jewish Welfare Funds in the South – recall the delegation that visited Congress president Israel Goldstein in 1954 – the Southern Jewish community provided an insignificant portion of its fundraising requirements.¹ Only in Miami, where the AJCongress had a following, did the local constituency act as a partial brake on its activist inclinations.² As with the Northern rabbis who trooped South in the early 1960s, the AJCongress was not tied by the bonds of mutual obligation that constrained long-serving Southern rabbis and entrenched Jewish agencies. This enabled the two groups to view the South through a prophetic lens. Thus, for example, the

¹ David Petegorsky to Maurice Perlzweig, March 17, 1954, Box H306, folder 4, WJC; Harry Golden and Julian Scheer, "Southern Jews and Segregation," *Jewish Life*, 10:7, 1956: 24; *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, May 23, 1958.

AJCongress' invitation to Martin Luther King Jr. to address its biennial convention in Miami in May 1958, an incident that riled Southern Jewish leaders.³

The American Jewish Congress could also claim the politically advantageous moral high ground. Isaac Toubin, the director of the AJCongress, charged that the American Jewish Committee and Anti-Defamation League were "significantly silent" on the desegregation issue. He accused the two agencies of abandoning principle to please and placate their tremulous Southern constituencies:

How can we achieve a moral society if we ourselves are guilty of immoral behavior? Is it not immoral to pose as a defender of civil rights when one applies for an allocation from a Jewish welfare fund in the North and then have another set of answers when one applied for an allocation from a Jewish welfare fund in the South? It is not enough to claim that the Jewish community of the South is being held hostage in the civil rights struggle. Even if it were true, which it is not, the Jews of America should be the very last to consider the desertion of their Negro brothers in this struggle for human equality ... No one should minimize the dilemma that confronts the Jewish communities in the South, but their plight, real or imagined, cannot relieve us of making clear where we stand.⁴

² See Raymond Mohl, "'South of the South?' Jews, Blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960," *Journal of American Ethnic History*, Winter 1999: 20-24.

³ For an account of King's address see Michael Staub, *Torn at the Roots: the Crisis Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America* (New York, 2002), 19-22; see also Clive Webb, "Charles Bloch, Jewish White Supremacist," 281; see also Yaffe, "Negro integration," 30; Alexander Miller, A Digest of Reports Submitted by ADL Field Representatives, 1958, folder 8, box 18, Oscar Cohen Papers.

⁴ AJCongress Press Release, May 22, 1956, "American Jewish Congress Leader Deplores Failure of Two National Jewish Agencies to Take Stand on Segregation," reprinted in Adams and Brace, *Strangers and Neighbors*, 559.

Toubin's statement accorded with the sentiments and motivations of André Ungar and David Ben-Ami, but was far removed from the delicate mixture of pragmatism and principle that guided the frontier rabbis and Jewish organizations that worked in the American South and South Africa.

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