The Liberal Jew, the Southern Jew, and Desegregation in the South, 1945–1964

To an astonishing degree they [the Jews] have made the fight of the American Negro their fight.
—James Farmer, Chairman, Congress of Racial Equality, 1964

Though both types [of prejudice] have sharply declined in recent years, anti-Negro prejudice is still far more prevalent in modern America than anti-Semitism.
—Thomas F. Pettigrew, Jews in the Mind of America, 1965

Of all the changes in American life that resulted from World War II, perhaps none was as profound as the reformulation of American ideology in the sphere of intergroup relations. The victory over the axis powers and European fascism compelled the United States to rectify the disparity between the reality of its group life and the ideals of equality and freedom. The Swedish sociologist Gunnar Myrdal thought that the war had made the contradiction between the system of values to which Americans were in theory committed and the nation’s actual racial practices particularly glaring and that circumstances provided the United States with its greatest opportunity for ameliorating group problems. “The American creed,” as Myrdal called it, consisting of the values of liberty, equality, justice, and fair opportunity for all, created a “moral dilemma” for Americans confronted by the nation’s highly imperfect adherence to these values.¹

The war revived the idea that what united Americans was a great deal more important than what divided them, and the new attitude was expressed through popular music, radio shows, and the consensus history
being written by some of the country's most respected historians. The new ideological formulation was embodied in the statement of purposes of the Common Council for American Unity, a group long interested in ethnic affairs: "To help create among the American people the unity and mutual understanding resulting from a common citizenship, a common belief in democracy and the ideals of liberty . . . and the acceptance, in fact as well as in law, of all citizens, whatever their national or racial origins, as equal partners in American society."  

Perhaps no group imbibed of the new dispensation as enthusiastically as American Jews. The late historian Lucy Dawidowicz called the period after 1945 the "Golden Age" of American Jewry and wrote that the "experience of the war years had had a transfiguring effect on American Jews and on their ideas of themselves as Jews." Having made important contributions to the war effort, many Jews felt the tension between their identity as Jews and as Americans dissipate. The Nazis were the enemies of both the Jews and the United States, thus rendering anti-Semitism the attitude of a defeated enemy rather than of the ideal American. Indications that anti-Semitism was on the decline were overwhelming. Public opinion polls taken between 1940 and 1962 reveal that anti-Semitism, as measured by the number of non-Jews who thought Jews were radicals, had too much power, were "unscrupulous," or lacked culture and good breeding was at historically low levels. The barriers that had prohibited Jews from getting into prestigious colleges and universities declined in the 1950s, as these institutions focused on academic achievement as the primary factor for admission. The increasing tolerance of America's social life was accompanied by an expanding economy that saw new opportunities open up for Jews and other minorities. While pockets of exclusion remained, Jews exhibited high economic mobility, high per capita income, and disproportionate representation in professional, managerial, executive, and proprietary positions in the economy. Polls also revealed a greater acceptance of Jews in politics, as political campaigns became increasingly void of overt anti-Semitism. By 1962, three-fourths of Americans claimed they would vote against a candidate solely because he was anti-Semitic. The decline of political anti-Semitism was symbolized by the demise of the notorious Jew-baiting congressman from Mississippi John Rankin. By 1947 Rankin had been turned out by Mississippi voters in a runoff election to fill the seat of the deceased Senator Theodore Bilbo, if not because of his Jew hatred, then at least in spite of it. Five years later Rankin lost his own congressional seat in a runoff election with another incumbent con-
gressman. "The demise of Rankin," writes historian Edward Shapiro, perhaps over optimistically, "meant the virtual end of anti-Semitism in Congress." 8

Other evidence of the decline of anti-Semitism in the immediate postwar period abounded. No larger anti-Semitic activity was ignited when Julius and Ethel Rosenberg were convicted of espionage and executed in 1950s, nor did the populist anti-Communist crusade of the Wisconsin Senator Joseph McCarthy descend into Jew-hatred. 9 The new willingness to accept American Jews as full citizens also became apparent in popular culture. In 1945 Bess Meyerson became the first Jew to win a Miss America contest, and fans cheered Hank Greenberg as he led the Detroit Tigers to victory over the Chicago Cubs in the World Series. But the most dramatic change in America's perception of the Jew showed up on the big screen. Hollywood saw the reversal of the "de-Semitizing" of movies in the thirties that had anglicized the names of Jewish characters or removed them entirely from movies. Films like The Sands of Iwo Jima (1949), Action in the North Atlantic (1943), A Walk in the Sun (1945), Objective Burma (1945), Pride of the Marines (1945), and The Purple Heart (1944) prominently featured Jewish characters in war-time situations, often unabashedly proclaiming their Jewishness and the belief in the equality of all men. In 1947, Crossfire and Gentlemen's Agreement, Hollywood's two preeminent films on anti-Semitism up to that time, vied for the Academy Award for best picture. 10

"Like All Other Americans . . ."

But if Jews were pleased with the decline of anti-Semitism in postwar America, there was still a sense of uneasiness. For one thing, the Holocaust weighed heavily on American Jews, whose feelings of vulnerability were accentuated by the knowledge that the fate of their European brethren had not mattered very much to the Allied powers. For another, the American celebration of diversity had been something less absolute than it appeared to be. For the most part, the message of diversity and group pluralism was almost always assimilationist in that the objective was to achieve ideological consensus and unity as the foundation for domestic tranquility. As the historian Philip Gleason wrote of the new order, "Ostensibly, it repudiated assimilation; in fact it embodied assimilation because it assumed that everyone agreed about basic matters that were actually distinctive to the United States." 11 Allegiance to the liberal values of democracy, freedom, equality,
and respect for individual rights constituted the new "American identity," but the precise role of ethnic loyalties in American life was left undefined. This ambiguity exacerbated what for American Jews had been a decades-long debate over what would constitute Jewish identity in America and the proper degree of assimilation. The reaction of some of the Jewish critics at Commentary magazine to Laura Hobson's Gentlemen's Agreement, and to the 1947 Hollywood movie based on that novel, provides some insight into the difficulties Jews faced. The American Jewish Committee had founded Commentary in 1945 as "an act of faith in our [the Jews'] possibilities in America" and in the belief "that out of the opportunities of our experience here, there will evolve new patterns of living, new modes of thought, which will harmonize heritage and country into a true sense of at-homeness in the modern world." But Gentlemen's Agreement revealed that the synthesis between heritage and country that Commentary hoped for remained elusive.

Hobson's story features a gentile journalist named Phil who, in an attempt to get a fresh angle for a series of articles for a mass-circulation magazine, decides to disguise himself as a Jew so that he can discover firsthand the nature of anti-Semitism. Through Phil's relationship with his gentile fiancée, and her unwillingness to sell a family home in Connecticut to Phil's Jewish friend, the subtle, genteel anti-Semitism of the middle and upper classes is revealed. For this achievement, the film drew accolades from Elliot Cohen, the editor of Commentary, who raved that the "plain fact is that Gentlemen's Agreement is a moving, thought-provoking film, which dramatically brings home the question of anti-Semitism to precisely those people whose insight is most needed—decent, average Americans." What Cohen liked best about the film was Phil's masquerading as a Jew, because it underscored the notion that anti-Semitism was always a matter of "false identity, the hallucinatory identification of flesh-and-blood Jews with that centuries-old myth of the Western world: the somehow-sinister Yid." The belief that Jews possessed no distinctive Jewish traits or cultural behavior patterns that could elicit discriminatory behavior from non-Jews was expressed through Phil's experiences with restrictive covenants, gentile-only job ads, arbitrary insults, the schoolyard fights of his child, and the gamut of institutional exclusion.

But there was a flip side to all of this. Cohen noted that the message of the film seemed to be that tolerance is necessary because we are all the same: "The converse seems to be that if we weren't, one would not need to be tolerant." In reference to Phil's ability to slip unimpeded in and
out of his Jewish disguise, another Commentary critic wrote in her review of the novel that “Mrs. Hobson recognizes no valid differences between them [Jews and gentiles] except the differences created, on the Gentile side, by a state of mind ignorantly... and, on the Jewish side, by the awareness of being discriminated against.”17 Cohen himself warned that making tolerance conditional on uniformity is risky business and insisted that, to most Jews, being Jewish is more than “being religious in the creedal sense” and joining the fight against anti-Semitism: “There is a richness, variety, and value in group life that the ‘no difference’ formula overlooks.” The literary critic Leslie Fiedler put the question of Jewishness in Hobson’s novel succinctly: “What, after all, is a Jew in this world where men are identified as Jews only by mistake, where the very word becomes merely an epithet arbitrarily applied?”18 But Gentlemen’s Agreement was an attempt to close the gap between liberalism in practice and liberal ideals, and anti-Semitism for the postwar American liberal was clearly a case of mistaken identity in which the world thinks that Jews are different when in fact they are like everyone else.

“. . . Only More So”

While most white ethnic groups in the postwar period experienced some difficulty negotiating this “no difference” formula, the dilemma for American Jews was more acute.19 Before the war American Jews had wrestled with issues of Judaism and Jewishness, or whether Jews constituted an ethnic nationality, a religious group, or both. During the war, high levels of anti-Semitism and discrimination had continued as an issue around which all Jews could unite. In addition, the cause of Jews in Europe and Palestine drew many of those on the margin into Jewish circles. After the war, the decline of anti-Semitism, the establishment of a Jewish state in 1948, and the increasing affluence and suburbanization of Jews and other Americans made it far less obvious how American Jews differed from other Americans in their social and political interests. It was in this atmosphere of acceptance and openness that the Marxist-turned-Jewish theologian Will Herberg espoused his belief that American pluralism was rapidly becoming a pluralism of the major religious faiths, each representing an equally valid expression of a common American faith, rather than a pluralism of ethnic groups that lent itself to competing loyalties.20

The question of religious meaning itself was a troubling matter for
American Jews. If Judaism had gained equal legal and social status with Christianity, then discrimination and exclusion could no longer be the focal point for the concept of "chosenness" that had been at Judaism's spiritual core throughout the ages and that had long blurred the line in Jewish thought that separated the Jewish religion from Jewish peoplehood. This sparked a debate in which some Jewish scholars, like Herberg and Arthur A. Cohen, called for a revitalization of Jewish life through ritual and others, like the conservative rabbi Robert Gordis, who urged Jews to revitalize their religious life through a commitment to social justice. Nevertheless, the Holocaust, the failure of the Allies to do enough about it, and lingering pockets of discrimination made it likely that many Jews would continue to identify with the one aspect of being Jewish most accessible to them: the experience of anti-Semitism and the fight against it. As the historian William Toll has written, "the great majority of influential rabbis and laymen set about reconciling the Jewish sense of chosenness with the moral mission of America as exemplar of democracy and self-determination." 21

Increasingly, many Jews found their religious identity in the work of national defense organizations like the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, and the B'nai B'rith's Anti-Defamation League (ADL). These organizations continued with their original mission to act politically on behalf of Jews as an ethnic group with distinct interests, while simultaneously becoming more important in defining the religious dimension of Jewish life in terms of democracy, equality, civil rights, and racial brotherhood. 22 After World War II, many young Jews took jobs as civil servants in Jewish communal agencies and helped shape Jewish identity as they did so.

For many Jews, the fight against anti-Semitism in America through the liberal formula of equality, individuality, and rationality, along with the issue of support for a Jewish state in Palestine, took precedence over the formulation of a specific religious identity and in a sense substituted for such an identity. Liberalism and the fight for equality also represented one way by which Jews could sustain a distinctive group purpose in the democratic project. In his 1945 essay "Full Equality in a Free Society," Alexander Pekelis, the legal counsel for the American Jewish Congress, declared that "the philosophy and practice of cultural pluralism offer the opportunity for a new form of Jewish autonomy." It was Pekelis's belief that Jewish identity could be catalyzed by providing a Jewish platform for general political action and by reconciling the need for communal purpose with the need for faith. "American Jews will find more reasons for taking an affir-
mative attitude toward being Jews... if they are part and parcel of a great American and human force working for a better world... whether or not the individual issues touch directly upon so-called Jewish interests.” Pekelis wrote. Pekelis was typical of most Jewish communal leaders who viewed their efforts as part of a larger struggle against the problem of prejudice and discrimination toward any group of people. As the famed attorney for the American Jewish Congress Will Maslow would say of the Jewish motivation to join the civil rights movement, “you can’t fight discrimination against one minority group without fighting it against others. It was logical for Jews and Negroes to cooperate.”

This approach to identity found the Jews at the core of the fast-developing postwar civil rights coalition. The recent comments of Jack Greenberg, the illustrious civil rights lawyer, about Jewish attraction to civil rights reveals how overwhelmingly this impulse was related to Jewish identity. Like Will Maslow and Alexander Pekelis, both of whom immigrated to the United States as children, Greenberg came from an “Eastern European, Socialist-Zionist culture,” which his father had brought with him from Poland. This “culture,” rather than Judaism per se, instilled in Greenberg the “belief that discrimination and persecution were evils and that Blacks, like Jews, suffered from a deep, economically based, racially motivated hatred that had to be opposed.” But Greenberg confesses that it “might be facile to attribute too much to the Socialist-Zionist milieu” in which he grew up. Socialist Zionism could not account for those German Jews who came out of a very different background, yet still supported civil rights, people like Herbert Lehman, his niece Helen Buttenweiser, Arthur Springarn, and Lessing Rosenwald, all associated with either the American Jewish Committee or the NAACP. As Greenberg explains it, “that pro-civil rights sentiment spanned German and Eastern European Jews suggests the power of the shared experience of anti-Semitism and its resemblance to the Black experience.”

The incongruity of the Jewish emphasis on anti-Semitism as the central mode of group identity and the simultaneous leveling of anti-Semitism in the United States was conspicuous enough for the Columbia University economist Eli Ginzburg to take note of in his 1949 volume, *Agenda for American Jews*. Ginzburg warned that a Jewish identity based on fighting anti-Semitism would not provide a sufficient basis for the sustenance of the Jewish community. “Today at least among large numbers of American Jews,” he wrote, “the ‘defense activities’ have usurped a position of priority. This was more or less inevitable since many of these Jews have lost
all interest in positive Jewish values[;] their entire adjustment is externally oriented.” 26 But Ginzburg’s warning went unheeded and, according to one historian, “Working for a society in which economic disadvantage and intolerance would have no place became for Jews an almost religio-cultural obsession.” 27

As the national Jewish organizations and other liberal groups began to win major legal and legislative victories at the state and federal levels, local and national Jewish “defense” agencies, which were originally formed to combat anti-Semitism, became “community relations” agencies and shifted their focus to the broader battle for civil rights. In 1945 the American Jewish Congress began working with the NAACP to form the central axis around which other groups—including the American Civil Liberties Union, the Jehovah’s Witnesses, the Japanese-American Citizen’s League, the Anti-Defamation League, the National Lawyers Guild and the AFL-CIO—gathered to campaign for antidiscrimination statutes and fair employment practices legislation. In 1947, in response to a request from the NAACP to support an antilynching bill in Congress, the more politically reserved American Jewish Committee formally made the commitment to minority causes not specifically Jewish with the statement that “it is a proper exercise of the powers of our charter that the AJC join with other groups in the protection of the civil rights of the members of all groups irrespective of race, religion, color or national origin; and that it is our general policy so to do.” 28 At the 1956 Conference of the National Community Relations Advisory Council, the coordinating body of six national Jewish organizations and thirty-five local community relations councils, the chairman, Bernard Trager, pointed out that “the entire substantive program of Jewish Community Relations rests upon the thesis that Jewish equality is only as secure in a democratic society as the equality of other groups.” 29

The alliance that linked Black and Jewish civil rights groups between the years 1945 and 1964 has been called the “Golden Years” of the Black/Jewish alliance. 30 Ostensibly, the goals of both groups were similar—the end of legal segregation and the destruction of legal barriers to full inclusion. But the places from which American Jews and Black Americans arrived in this civil rights coalition were demonstrably different. For whatever else motivated the Jewish involvement in the cause of equal rights for Blacks, and there can be no doubt that this included commitments derived from Jewish theology as well as the shared experience of oppression, participation in the civil rights struggle also represented one of the ways by which Jews could continue to identify as a distinct cultural group within
a pluralistic democracy, rather than being seen merely as individuals who adhere to a separate but increasingly homogenous religious faith.

That this was a radical approach to Jewish identity in America can be seen by what the postwar civil rights movement revealed about Black identity. Since the end of the slave system in the American South, Black American political discourse has embodied the competing impulses of separatism and integration. One strain espouses the view that Black Americans constitute a permanently excluded race whose full participation in American democracy will never be realized and the other the belief that Blacks are an ethnic group capable of winning legal equality and full integration in American life. During World War II, Black leaders of the NAACP, the National Urban League, and other organizations were strengthened in their arguments against racial separatism by the reaction against the racial theories of the Nazis, and they won partial victories in integrating work places and the armed forces. After the war, most Black leaders continued to commit themselves to ethnic group politics, using the legal system and, later, political agitation to promote their interests. The fight for full integration and the battle for desegregation in the South meant that Blacks had accepted, for a time, a more conservative definition of Black identity, one that saw Blacks not as a separate civilization charged with forming the vanguard of a race-based international coalition against Western domination, as some Black nationalists had wanted, but as a group of Americans eager to take their place in America’s ethnic flux.

The Jews in America were facing a far different situation. At the very moment they became aware that it was possible for them to “melt” away as an ethnic group, they were refusing to do so, in part, through their involvement in the march for equal rights. The decision of the major Jewish organizations to pursue civil rights for all constituted a commitment to Jewish “otherness” through liberalism, while the same decision on the part of Black organizations and leaders constituted a commitment to Black “sameness” (or at least Black “similarity”). As William Toll has written, Black Americans “have approached ethnic pluralism as the more conservative option, while Jewish leaders see it as the more radical, because each group has come to politics from a very different social status.” The irony was that many Jews viewed the broader struggle to tear down the legal barriers to full integration as one way by which Jews could stave off complete assimilation.
"Like All Other (White) Southerners . . ."

Perhaps the most rewarding effort of the Black-Jewish alliance came in 1950, when the American Jewish Committee hired the Black psychologist Kenneth B. Clark to conduct a study on the impact of segregation on Black children. Professor Clark found that segregation had a profound impact on the psychology and self-esteem of Black children. After Clark presented his findings to a White House Conference on Children, NAACP lawyers asked him to assist them as an expert witness in three of the four cases they were bringing before the Supreme Court. In its famous Brown v. Board of Education decision of May 1954, which found that racial segregation in America's public schools was unconstitutional, the court cited the original Clark manuscript in its famous footnote eleven, as well as two other investigations conducted by the American Jewish Congress.34

It was immediately clear that this court decision would cause a serious division among America's Jews. The Jews who lived in the Southern states most impacted by the Brown decision had long acclimated themselves to a social and political milieu very different from that familiar to Jews in the North, and they had long dropped any pretensions to being an ethnic group with a distinct political outlook. The Jews of the South did not share the psychological attachment to the Black cause that so many Northern Jews did, and the matter of civil rights was not integral to their identity as Jews, as it had become for so many Jews in the North.

The predominance of peddlers and small merchants among the Jews who had migrated to the Southern region of the United States inspired the historian Stephen Whitfield to describe the position of Jews in the South in the following way: "Few in number and unobtrusive in manner, most Southern Jews have seemed to want nothing more than to make a living; their history can perhaps most fully be categorized as a branch of business history."35 Living in a region characterized largely by an overpowering caste system and fierce racial bigotry, Southern Jews trod lightly and made their way in a place that was largely ambivalent about their presence. Since their arrival in the South in 1733, Jews had faced periods of significant discrimination and had been subject from time to time to a number of legal proscriptions, as they were throughout most of prerevolutionary America. In colonial times, Jews were permitted to hold public office in none of the thirteen colonies. Other legal restrictions prohibited Jews from voting and from worshiping in public. But these restrictions were very
loosely applied and were aimed at disabling Catholics far more than Jews.36 Perhaps the most significant strain of Southern anti-Semitism came in the form of the agrarian populism of the 1890s, whose obsession with money, credit, and conspiracy led writers like Ignatius Donnelly to identify the Jew with the usurer and the “international gold ring.”37 While populist denunciations of Jews were primarily rhetorical and rarely resulted in riots, pogroms, or even exclusionary laws, the former populist rabble-rouser Thomas E. Watson was able to incite the mob that lynched Leo Frank using anti-Semitic imagery.38 For the most part, however, these kinds of actions were tempered by countervailing Southern ideas concerning the equality of all white men, the overriding concern with the subordination of Blacks, and the usefulness of the Jewish presence as merchants and artisans. In general, anti-Jewish attitudes peaked in times of crisis but subsided when crises ended, much as they did elsewhere in the nation.39

Spread thinl y throughout the vast region, Jews in the South tended to avoid taking public stands on controversial issues. When the issue of slavery tore the country in two during the Civil War, for example, Southern Jews largely accepted slavery and supported the South. “The behavior of Jews towards slaves seems to have been indistinguishable from that of their non-Jewish friends,” wrote Bertram Korn.40 “It is true, however,” he noted, “that their small number militated against the creation of a distinctively Jewish approach to any political or social question other than anti-Semitism.”41 The Southern Jewish approach, then, to any political or social question was not necessarily to avoid anti-Semitism, though that concern was always present; the Jew’s position as peddler or merchant—and, therefore, as alien in a region so characterized by a commitment to agrarian ways—made it likely that he would adopt the attitude of his customers or keep silent about his differences, not only because he feared physical reprisal but because his livelihood depended on not rocking the political boat.

Given all of this, the Southern Jew, whose social position remained precarious, was quite shaken by the desegregation movement in the South, which came to a head in May 1954 with the Supreme Court’s decision striking down the constitutionality of “separate but equal” public schools. Albert Vorspan, the Reform Jewish leader and civil rights activist, wrote that “the segregation crisis has shaken Southern Jews more severely than any national event since the civil war.”42 As during the Civil War, the Jewish community of the 1950s constituted less than one-half of 1 percent of the Southern population and was largely composed of merchants dependent on the goodwill of the community. This time, however, the sit-
uation had become even more perilous, because Jews in the South had gained a modicum of respect among white Southern gentiles. As one Jewish businessman from the South explained it, "The small town Jew in the South 'arrived', perhaps to a greater degree than that of his co-religionists in other sections of America. That is what makes so painful his current dilemma involving the Negro problem. He has something precious to lose—his acceptance as 'one of us.'" 43

For some Jews in the South, the situation was more complicated because of the willingness of the Jewish merchant, beginning after the Civil War, to cater to Black clients as well as white. The "success of the Jewish merchants is believed to be due to winning the negro trade," wrote John Dollard in his study *Caste and Class in a Southern Town.* 44 Dollard went on to explain the reasons for the success of the Jewish merchants among Black customers. Whereas the gentile white store owners would say to a Black customer, "Well, boy, what do you want?" even if the Black customer was eighty years old, the Jewish merchant would manage to skirt the issue by saying, "What can I do for you?" Jews were also more willing to let Blacks try on merchandise without being obligated to make a purchase. The need to appeal to both Blacks and whites necessitated that the Jewish merchant strive to avoid alienating either party. 45 It was a position that Black Americans themselves seemed to be aware of. Dr. Kenneth Clark believed that Southern Jews were vulnerable to the propaganda, subtle pressure, and threats from the more aggressive segregationist groups and that the more sensitive Southern Blacks were aware of the Jews' delicate situation. Clark quoted a Black American couple he was visiting in South Carolina in 1957 after listening to a Jewish political candidate on the desegregation issue. "He hasn't taken a stand on it and we don't think it would be fair to ask him to take a public stand. He owns a business and if he said that he was for desegregation he might hurt his business. He is no worst. He must be better." 46 After talking with several hundred Black residents of the South, Clark concluded that "this sensitivity seems to dominate the general attitude and feelings of Negroes toward Jews in the South." 47

"... Only Less So"

On balance, Southern Jews remained cautious on the issue of desegregation, often pressuring national Jewish agencies through local community councils to soft-pedal the issue so as not to associate Jews with the cause.
In one instance, the Jewish Federation of Montgomery, Alabama, threatened to silence the national Jewish agencies by withholding its yearly allocation to them. The general strategy of laying low on the part of many Jews in the South is reflected in the finding of a 1959 survey that showed that two-thirds of Southern gentiles did not know where their Jewish neighbors stood on the issue of desegregation. Only 1 percent of white gentiles surveyed felt that Jews were the group that had “done the most to stir up trouble over the [race] issue in those Southern communities where a serious dispute exists over the Supreme Court decision.”

Nevertheless, while Jews in the South did not embrace the cause of desegregation with as much enthusiasm as Northern Jews or the national Jewish organizations did, polls and surveys from the period indicate overwhelmingly that Jews were, on the whole, more accepting of desegregation than other Southern whites. In 1960, a survey indicated that Jews were more than twice as likely as Southern Protestant whites to feel that desegregation was both inevitable and, in general, desirable in the long run, and only about one-third as inclined as the latter to believe that Blacks were constitutionally inferior to whites. Moreover, only a handful of Jews were actively racist beyond the conformity apparently required for maintaining their businesses or professional careers in strongly segregationist communities. One researcher, Joshua Fishman, found that many Southern Jews who objected to the public statements of national Jewish organizations often privately agreed with them. In a survey administered between 1959 and 1962, Alfred Hero found that Southern Jews were “distinctly less inclined than white Southern gentiles to express segregationist, and particularly racist, ideology.” Hero explained that even when educational, occupational, and social differences were held constant, “significant differences [between Southern Jews and Southern gentiles] were evident in their views on race relations.” The survey found that the majority of Jewish informants ranged from “mild segregationists to integrationists” and that “white gentiles of similar occupation and income were almost twice as likely as the local Jews to be relatively strong white supremacists.”

In another study of a Southern Jewish community, the political scientist Theodore Lowi found that Jews who had lived in the South longer tended to be more conservative politically than Jews who had recently moved to the South but that “the old Jews will make the inevitable adjustment to integration more easily and more quickly than their white Christian brethren....” Another poll, this one conducted by a private testing agency at the request of the Catholic Digest, showed that, while 65 percent of white...
Jewish organizations, the situation of the Jews in the South as a relatively
wherever prejudice against one group was found, prejudice against other
certain human needs had been repressed during their childhoods.
Protestants and 63 percent of white Catholics living in the South opposed
According to a study of Jews in Roanoke, Virginia, in the mid-1950s, 70
privileged people challenged their fundamental beliefs about what it meant
to be a Jew and about the sacred connection between race prejudice and
anti-Semitism. The conflict consisted in the belief of Southern Jews that
ties worth, a close aide to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., claimed that “the
response of Southern Jews to the [civil rights] movement certainly com-
pares favorably with that of numerous other white groups.”

Nevertheless, the response of Southern Jews was considered entirely
inadequate by many liberal Jews in the North and by the national Jewish
organizations, for whom the fight for racial integration had become a par-
ticularly Jewish concern. For many Northern Jews and for the national
Jewish organizations, the situation of the Jews in the South as a relatively
privileged people challenged their fundamental beliefs about what it meant
to be a Jew and about the sacred connection between race prejudice and
anti-Semitism. The conflict consisted in the belief of Southern Jews that
desegregation in the South had a more direct impact on them than on
other Jews and that their immediate safety and social standing were at stake.
The national Jewish agencies, on the other hand, believed that the civil
rights crisis extended equally to all Jews across the land.

The roots of this crisis appeared to be in the incompatibility of the liberal
view of anti-Semitism with the actual experience of Jews living in the
South. The approach that the national Jewish organizations took toward
anti-Semitism and group prejudice was embodied in the findings of the
series of studies produced under the auspice of the American Jewish Com-
mittee and the Anti-Defamation League. Essentially, these studies rein-
forced the liberal belief that the causes of bigotry and discrimination were
the same no matter whom the object of hatred was and that, therefore,
wherever prejudice against one group was found, prejudice against other
minority groups was almost always just off the horizon. The lead study in
this series was The Authoritarian Personality, conducted under the leadership
of the Marxist émigré scholar Theodore Adorno and published in 1950.
This study found “a syndrome of unenlightenment” that linked intolerance
to personality structure and reported that people who manifested intoler-
ance toward one group had a high degree of intolerance toward all groups
because certain human needs had been repressed during their childhoods.
In accordance with these findings, liberals believed that prejudice and discrimination were indivisible and that, as long as one minority group was being persecuted, no minority group was safe. 58

Adorno’s study has been severely criticized for its reliance on abstract theories of personality at the expense of historical data and trend analysis, for its lack of a true understanding of American culture, and for its implication that authoritarian traits are the exclusive domain of those on the political right. 59 But the national Jewish organizations were galvanized by its findings, which confirmed the belief that Jewish self-interest was at stake in the struggle for Black equal rights and that Jewish involvement was therefore more than justified. Shad Polier, the vice president of the American Jewish Congress, writing on behalf of the Congress’s Commission on Law and Social Action, explained that “with respect to the community as a whole, we view the fight for equality as indivisible and as part of the general struggle to protect democracy against racism. Hence, any manifestation of racism, whether against Jews, Negroes, Japanese, Puerto Ricans or others, affects all Americans, majority and minority alike.” 60 Another communal leader, David Danzig, stated in an address to the Southwest Regional Conference of the American Jewish Committee in 1959 that “some Southern Jews believe that because the Negro is the traditional target of hostility, they can ward off trouble by staying out of the desegregation battle. History has shown the fallacy of this position time and again. . . . Quite aside from the moral obligations of citizenship, Jews cannot expect to be permitted to remain on the side-lines.” 61

But, in fact, this appeal to self-interest did not resonate with Jews in the South. Their experience was not consistent with the liberal image of the South as a violent and savage place for all minorities. As the historian John Higham has written about attitudes toward Jews throughout the United States, “diverse and conflicting attitudes have always existed side by side in American minds,” and this ambiguity evinced itself in the South. 62 For almost every instance of observable anti-Semitism, a countervailing philo-Semitism could be discerned. Louis Galambos found that Southern farmers were far more likely to attack big business than Jews at the turn of the century, indicating that rural Southerners’ animosity over their rapidly changing environment was not completely unfocused. John Higham maintains that the Ku Klux Klansmen of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries centered their anger on the distant Jew of the Northern urban centers and felt “guilty and ashamed at picking on the Jews whom they had known as good neighbors all their lives.” 63 As far
back as the Civil War when General Ulysses S. Grant issued his infamous order number eleven, which expelled Jews from the department of the Tennessee, public opinion so heavily favored the Jews that the order was completely ignored in certain communities. It has also been pointed out that even before the Civil War, and especially after it, the political climate in the South was such that Jews were able to hold a number of powerful elective and appointive political offices. Between 1945 and 1970, Southerners elected at least twenty-seven Jewish mayors, thirty-eight Jewish state legislators, and sixty-six other Jewish city councilmen and miscellaneous officials.

The historic lack of a consistent and systematic anti-Semitism in the South can be attributed to two phenomena, one being the dominance of Protestantism in the region and the South’s reverence for the Old Testament. The editor of the Carolina Israelite, the author and humorist Harry Golden, has argued that from this Anglo-Calvinist devotion to the Old Testament and the Hebrew prophets came a solid tradition of philo-Semitism. “The rural peoples of the South hark back to the agrarian civilization of the original thirteen colonies, and they are living heirs of the old American tradition of philo-Semitism,” wrote Golden. It is for this reason that in the South, the Jew is a Jew by religion and not by secular ethnic culture, for to the Southern white Christian he represents the “unbroken tie with sacred history and the prophets of the bible, he is the ‘living witness’ to the ‘Second coming of Christ,’ the link between the beginning and the end of things.”

The racial divide was, of course, a more substantial reason that anti-Semitism in the South remained tempered. “Negroes acted as an escape-valve in Southern society,” wrote Bertram Korn. “The Jews gained in status and security from the very presence of this large mass of defenseless victims who were compelled to absorb all of the prejudices which might otherwise have been expressed more frequently in anti-Jewish sentiment.”

While there were a variety of caste and class distinctions among whites in the South, the presence of Blacks and the primacy of the color line fostered the acceptance of Jews in high places. As I. J. Benjamin wrote, “The white inhabitants felt themselves united with, and closer to, other whites—as opposed to the Negroes. Since the Israelite there did not do the humbler kinds of work that the Negro did, he was quickly received among the upper-classes, and early rose to high political rank.” In this sense then, not only did Black Americans act as a “lightning rod for prejudice”; Southern fears of Black advance also relieved Southern Jews of the
animus caused by economic competition with other whites, an animus many Northern Jews felt keenly.

The postwar liberal assumption that ethnic prejudice is unified and all of the same kind is almost certainly mistaken. Scholars have long pointed out that the prejudices held by bigots about different groups vary in source and kind and have a great deal to do with the type and intensity of discrimination that is meted out. It has been argued, for instance, that the anti-Black hatred of the classic racist is motivated by conscious and unconscious anxieties and the projection of these anxieties onto Blacks.70 However, these projected images differ significantly from those held by the classic Jew hater. Whereas the anti-Black bigot sees Black Americans as mentally inferior sexual predators, the classic anti-Semite is more likely to see Jews as brainy and conspiring. In his study of anti-Semitism, Norman Cohn points out that “the fantasy of an infinitely powerful, world-dominating conspiracy does not, in fact, get projected onto Negroes, and that may well be why not even the most fanatical Negro-haters dream of genocide. It is a different matter with the Jews... Jews are seen above all as ‘bad’ parents, and this makes them seem so overwhelmingly powerful that the only way to cope with them is to destroy them utterly.”71

Perhaps the most eloquent refutation of the liberal belief in the “unity of prejudice” comes from George McMillan, an expert on the Ku Klux Klan. McMillan has explained that to “hate Blacks is not to hate everything else equally as well. If blackness can become symbolic enough in a psychological sense, then hatred of Blacks can sufficiently fill your psychological need to hate.”72 An interview with a small-town newspaper editor in the South recorded by Eli Evans for his study of Southern Jews confirms McMillan’s contention. The editor associated the fairly decent treatment of the Jews in the South with the Southerner’s guilt over race. “Jewish people were white and they were the good and generous people. We felt sufficiently guilty about colored prejudice to make up for it with them.”73 For these reasons, it is not surprising that Charles Stember found, in his study Jews in the Mind of America, that between 1939 and 1962 the South (excluding Blacks) was the least anti-Semitic of all the regions in the United States.74 There were, in fact, indications that the “disunity” of prejudice, or the existence of intolerance toward one minority group and not necessarily another, was not restricted to the South. In 1958, roughly two-thirds of whites in a nationwide Gallup poll said they would vote for a well-qualified man nominated by the political party of their preference if he were Jewish; only two-fifths said they would if he were Black. The
percentages of white Christians in the early 1950s who said it would be "a little distasteful to eat at the same table" with a Black ranged from 50 in Elmira, New York, to 92 in Savannah, Georgia. The percentages who said that it would be distasteful to eat with a Jew varied from only 8 percent in Steubenville, Ohio, to 13 in Savannah.75

Ironically, it was a vociferous attack by a national Jewish leader on the issue of desegregation in the South that put the lie to the belief that bigotry was indivisible. In a widely read article entitled "Recklessness or Responsibility," Isaac Toubin, the director of the American Jewish Congress, defended Jewish involvement in the struggle for desegregation by reiterating the position of the national Jewish agencies that civil rights was a national and international problem. To support his argument, Toubin used the example of the Arab League's operations in South America. The Arab League had published attacks on the Jewish community of the United States, accusing it of being responsible for the exploitation of Black Americans. Toubin argued that this propaganda jeopardized the security of Argentinean Jewry and that it was incumbent upon American Jewish defense agencies to furnish proof that they had done much on behalf of Blacks in the United States. Toubin exclaimed that "if the Jews had done nothing, what would we have been able to reply?"76 Clearly, Toubin failed to see that the use of Black suffering by Arab anti-Semites to attack Jews proved that bigotry against one group did not, necessarily, imply bigotry against the other.

Jewish leaders associated with the civil rights cause and national Jewish organizations continued to press their belief that Jews were directly threatened by discrimination against Blacks and that race prejudice and anti-Semitism went hand-in-hand. Toubin himself wrote that the national Jewish agencies know "the real security of the Jew can be achieved only in a society which advocates full equality for all...they know that anti-Negroism is a prelude to anti-Semitism."77 A number of Jewish academics promulgated this line of thought, as well. Charles Glicksberg, a professor of English at Brooklyn College and a frequent contributor to Jewish periodicals, wrote that "if prejudice, whatever the particular form it takes, is indivisible, then so long as one minority group is persecuted on account of color or creed, religion or ancestry, the Jew is not and cannot be free."78 Louis Ruchames, the acclaimed historian of the American left and the director of Hillel Foundations of Western Massachusetts, speaking to a crowd during Negro History Week in 1955, observed that, because of the Nazi Holocaust, Jews had a particular attraction to the idea of the unity of persecution. Ruchames wrote that the idea that "no minority group is safe
while others are victims of persecution, has been seared into our minds and hearts through the burning flesh of six million of our brethren in Europe.” Ruchames also demonstrated that many Jews felt that their own well-being was peculiarly tied to the well-being of Black Americans: “I know of no more appropriate and meaningful act then to join our observance with that of the Negro people, whose history touches ours at so many points and whose welfare is so directly related to ours.” Dr. Sanford Goldner, who wrote a publication for the Committee for Negro-Jewish Relations on the West Coast, believed that the segregationists of the South and America’s anti-Semites were, “in almost complete detail, one and the same.” Therefore, Goldner believed, Jews had a special concern with the plight of Black Americans. “The massive struggle of the Negro people is therefore our struggle. The main and most powerful blow against anti-Semitism in America is the blow against the enemies of the Negro people. The self-interest of the overwhelming masses of the Jewish people therefore demands that they identify themselves with this fight.”

The strength with which liberal Jews felt this unity with Blacks resulted in many instances in an alarming insensitivity to the circumstances of Jews in the South. Carl Alpert, writing in the respected journal of opinion The Reconstructionist in 1946, identified a “Jewish Problem in the South,” in which he accused the Jews of the South of being accessories to the crime of injustice to Blacks. “The law makes provisions, we must remember, for accessories before and after a crime. Southern Jews, alas, go beyond passivity—they are accessories.”

Some Jewish leaders believed so strongly that the Jewish fate was tied to that of the Blacks that they described the Jews’ stake in desegregation as equal to their stake in the defeat of Nazi Germany during World War II. At the 1956 National Jewish Community Relations Council meeting, Professor Arnold Rose, a coauthor with Gunnar Myrdal of the classic An American Dilemma, compared the reluctance of Jews in the South to speak out in favor of desegregation, and what he perceived to be its muzzling impact on national Jewish organizations, with the actions of Nazi collaborationists: “If [Jewish leaders] do not take a long run and courageous view of the current crisis [on segregation], they are playing the same role as the collaborationist Jews played in Europe during the Nazi period.”

Referring to Senator James Eastland, a segregationist from Mississippi, another Jewish writer also drew an analogy between Southern Jews and Nazi collaborationists: “Shouldn’t the Anti-Defamation League’s educational effort include a comparison between fascism in Germany and its
counterpart, Eastlandism in the South? Surely the Jewish collaborators of Hitler are despised by the masses of Southern Jews. Everyone knows that silence and appeasement only brought destruction to the appeasers and to those who thought they could save themselves by silence and non-resistance."

It became virtually impossible for many Jews to disentangle Blacks and Southern Jews after the emergence of the white citizen's councils. The white citizen's councils were a collection of loosely connected grass-roots groups that sprang up in Indianola, Mississippi, in opposition to the Supreme Court's 1954 desegregation decision. The councils varied in strength and size across the South, but their common purpose was to stop or at least slow down integration in public schools. The councils concerned many Jews in both the North and the South, mostly because of their resemblance to the Ku Klux Klan, especially the original Klan of the Reconstruction period. But there were crucial differences between the two organizations. The councils strove hard to achieve respectability, drew their membership from the most respectable citizens in the community, shunned the violence of the Klan, and gave prominence to speakers from the universities and the ministry at their meetings. The white citizen's councils also tried not to become associated with anti-Semitism, though their record on this remains debatable. Asa Carter's North Alabama Citizen's Council was limited to those who believed in the divinity of Jesus, but that was the exception. The Mississippi Council once sent out some anti-Semitic literature, but, when challenged, its leader quickly apologized, claiming that some of his best council members were Jews. The lack of respect afforded anti-Semitism in the South was evinced in the reaction to a Memphis speaker who remarked at a rally that "The NAACP is the worst organization to come along since the one that crucified Christ—and I may as well say it—it's the same organization." The conservative newspaper Commercial Appeal attacked the meeting for its anti-Semitic overtones, and the council issued a lengthy apology the following day.

The real problem for Southern Jews came when they had to decide, not whether the councils were anti-Semitic, but whether to join them. Citizen's councils carefully canvassed Jews, and the danger in refusing to join or sign petitions was apparent: many Jewish business owners ran the risk of losing a substantial amount of commerce, and many others simply ran the risk of being labeled an outsider, a "Nigger lover," or a communist. A small minority of Jews joined willingly out of conviction. Others joined so as not to be singled out for attention. But most did not join. The
dilemma of the Southern Jew was summed up by one who did not join: "I lost friends, I’m sure of that, and maybe some business, but I felt I just couldn’t do this. I tried to explain to them that while we shared much in this community, the Jewish tradition would make it impossible for me to do this. I think some understood. Others, I guess, won’t want to.”

For the national Jewish organizations, the issue of the citizen’s councils was clear cut: through the racism and alleged anti-Semitism of the councils, Jews and Blacks were tied. In 1958, the Anti-Defamation League issued a report stating that the citizen’s councils were one of three types of organizations through which the forty organized anti-Semitic groups that were operating in the South at the time worked. While granting that the councils varied widely in their approach toward anti-Semitism, the report said the councils had recently crystallized into essentially a single movement that covered the entire South. A reporter for *Jewish Life* wrote that “the strong anti-Semitic current in the white citizen’s councils is a clearly established fact by now.”

Isaac Toubin of the American Jewish Congress wrote that the fear of reprisal felt by Southern Jews revealed that the white citizen’s councils as well as the Ku Klux Klan, at heart, were as opposed to Jews as they were to Blacks. “They understand,” Toubin wrote of the Southern Jew, “the mind and the intent of the hate-monger who today suppresses the Negro and tomorrow, with equal venom, may suppress the Jew.”

For the most aggressive Jewish civil rights activists, terrorist violence against Jewish institutions in the South confirmed their view that Jews and Blacks shared the same position in the civil rights struggle. Between June 1, 1954, and October 12, 1958, there were eighty-three bombings in the South, including seven bombings and attempted bombings of Jewish institutions. Albert Vorspan, the director of the Committee on Social Action of the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, the national body of the Reform movement, believed that the message of the bombs was that “hatred is indivisible. The Jew is caught up in the storm of the South whether he likes it or not, and there is no place to hide.” Apparently, that Jews were caught up in the storm had its positive aspects for Vorspan, who seemed pleased that the bombings had once again established Jews as certifiable victims. “The Jew has often been the barometer of the moral health of a society,” wrote Vorspan. “The bombers have again unwittingly rendered to the Jew this tribute. The years ahead will demonstrate whether American Jewry will be worthy of this compliment.”

But where the series of synagogue bombings and attempted bombings signaled for Jews like Vorspan the need for more intense Jewish involve-
ment in the desegregation battle, many Jews, Northern and Southern, were convinced by the bombings that the leadership role of liberal Jews and national Jewish organizations in the movement for desegregation rendered Southern Jews a vulnerable target for extremists. Responding to surveys that found a higher incidence of anti-Semitic attitudes among white segregationists in Southern communities under pressure to desegregate than in the region generally, Alfred Hero concluded in his study that “the discomfort among many Southern Jews over support of desegregation and racial equality by national Jewish organizations . . . is understandable, as is their sensitivity to any Jewish prominence in liberal movements, especially racially oriented ones.”

Some national Jewish organizations made attempts to reconcile their commitment to civil rights with the safety concerns of Southern Jews as they became sensitized to the dangers Jews faced in the South. In the past, the ADL had been excoriated by Southern rabbis for being insensitive to the position of Southern Jews. In a memorandum, a well-known leader of the ADL wrote, “[W]hy be too intimidated by the fear and anxiety of some Southern Jews and some Southern non-Jews? We have a responsibility to moral principle, to the Negro community, and to fellow Christians who join with us on this issue.” But during a controversy sparked by a July 7, 1958, editorial in the Virginia newspaper The Richmond News Leader, which blamed the ADL’s distribution of pro-integration materials for the rise in anti-Semitism in the South, the national office of the ADL demonstrated a willingness to compromise with Southern Jews. The editorial suggested that Southern Jews reevaluate their relationship with “a Jewish organization that foments hostility to Jews.” The national office of the ADL in New York saw the editorial as a poorly disguised attempt by the News Leader to drive Jews out of the desegregation effort. Many Jews in the South, however, agreed with the editorial that the national organization had “plunged the Jewish community into unnecessary confrontations with their neighbors.”

In response to this immediate crisis, the local Virginia ADL office and the national office worked out an agreement in which the local office would temporarily refrain from the use of literature, films, and activities that could be interpreted as dealing with the issue of racial desegregation, and the national organization agreed on a resolution that any action taken by the national ADL that would affect a regional constituency would be undertaken only after consultation with that constituency. In effect, the national organization agreed that while it would not shift away from its
pro-integration stance, “it was prepared to move in a cautious manner in the super-heated atmosphere of Virginia.”

The change in attitude of those Jewish organizations that became more sensitive to the concerns of Southern Jews resulted in some animosity among the major defense organizations. At a 1956 symposium in Miami, representatives of the American Jewish Committee and the B’nai B’rith indicated that quiet, behind-the-scenes methods might be more appropriate for Jews who wanted to exert their influence without jeopardizing the safety of the Southern Jewish community. The representatives of these groups advocated “education”; one of them claimed that “while we are in favor of the Supreme Court decision, we do not believe the Jews of the South are expendable.” The representatives of the Jewish Labor Committee (JLC), an organization formed in 1934 to defend the rights of Jewish workers, also expressed sympathy with a more subtle approach. Emanuel Muravchik of the JLC offered the solution “to do sometimes publicly, always privately, that which will advance desegregation.” He cautioned Jews not to be first, not to act alone, but to join with other groups that were moving in the desired direction. A representative from the American Jewish Congress, however, made a straightforward demand that there be no doubletalk, that Jewish leaders and organizations speak up and say publicly what they were saying behind closed doors. The Jews of the South, he thought, should not hang back one step behind other groups that were advancing on the issue.

The American Jewish Congress seemed to be the most militantly desegregationist of national Jewish communal organizations; it had apparently not retreated in response to local protests. Isaac Toubin of the American Jewish Congress charged in May 1956 that two national Jewish organizations had been conspicuously silent on the desegregation issue. Apparently alluding to the American Jewish Committee and the Anti-Defamation League, Toubin claimed that “the white citizen’s councils of the South have not only blackmailed their Southern Jewish neighbors, but effectively silenced two national Jewish organizations which pride themselves on their defense of civil rights of all.”

In part, this organizational conflict had its roots in the history of the organizations involved. The American Jewish Congress, as the representative agency of the Eastern European Jews, had always been more politically aggressive than the staid German-Jewish-led American Jewish Committee and B’nai B’rith’s Anti-Defamation League, both of which preferred
Jews demonstrated an admirable regard on the part of some agencies for Jewish identity. Jewish identity was perhaps more attenuated in the South, Jews who were perhaps the first in the United States to discover that their Judaism as they relate to civil rights or to posit a specific Jewish tradition, Jews of the North and those of the South over what methods to use to prepare studies on more than five hundred instances of racial violence, enforcement officials, conducting investigations into synagogue bombings, and lobbying Washington for stronger action.

The terrorist bombings and the willingness of some national Jewish organizations to shift policy in response to the safety concerns of Southern Jews demonstrated an admirable regard on the part of some agencies for the safety of local Jewish communities. But the differences between the Jews of the North and those of the South over what methods to use to oppose segregation should not be minimized, particularly as they relate to Jewish identity. Jewish identity was perhaps more attenuated in the South, but it relied more heavily on religious forms than the ethnic/political identity of the majority of Jews in the Northern-based civil rights movement. The conflict between the Jews of the North and the Jews of the South over racial desegregation reflected the difference between liberal Jews for whom, on balance, the Black struggle for equality came to take precedence over any perceived threats to the welfare of fellow Jews and a group of Jews who were perhaps the first in the United States to discover that their collective well-being was not directly linked to the fate of Black Americans. The point here is not to enter a debate concerning the ethical precepts of Judaism as they relate to civil rights or to posit a specific Jewish tradition,
but rather to demonstrate that the Southern Jewish community was loath to link its religious identity with strong political imperatives, as had so many liberal Jews.  

Specifically, Southern Jews were uncomfortable with approaching desegregation as a distinctively “Jewish concern.” Morton Gaba, the executive director of the Jewish Community Council of Norfolk, Virginia, explained that it was of primary concern to the Southern Jew that the battle for desegregation be fought by Jews on an individual basis, as Americans, rather than as Jews. As Gaba wrote, “we feel that those of us who are strongly moved by the issue should act solely as individuals and not as representatives of another minority group. I feel certain that point of view represents majority thinking.”

Rabbi Gerald Wolpe, the spiritual leader of Synagogue Emmanuel in Charleston, South Carolina, recommended that “Jewish ‘self-protection organizations’ do not rush into print with opinions which are not based on personal investigation in the South” and that Jewish professionals “refrain from arriving armed with programs of action which were outlined in the insulated security of a New York office.”

Perhaps no one expressed the exasperation of some Southern Jews better than Rabbi Perry Nussbaum of Jackson, Mississippi. Nussbaum had an admirable record on speaking out on civil rights but explained that he was not inclined to ask the same of his congregants: “In the Delta area of our state, where the Jewish merchant is pressured into taking sides, I would be the last to ask that he make a martyr of himself and his family and prepare to move when he is compelled to join the citizen’s council.” In 1963, after the death of the Black civil rights leader Medgar Evers in Mississippi, Nussbaum bitterly reported that all the clergymen in his state who had been outspoken in the cause of civil rights had been removed or forced from their pulpits—all except him. Nussbaum concluded his article with this lament: “Support for civil rights? Who argues? A solution to the problem of the last survivor, who has it?”

It is no accident that the bulk of the criticism of the national Jewish organizations came from Southern rabbis, communal leaders who often found themselves in the most precarious of circumstances. The clergy generally held a status in the South that was rarely afforded them in the North, and Southern rabbis were considered the spokesmen for the Jewish community, thus helping to create a natural friction between them and the national Jewish agencies, led in many instances by secular Jewish leaders. Writing in Conservative Judaism, Rabbi William Malev of Houston, the
spiritual leader of one of the South's largest Conservative congregations, explained that, in the South, Jews were seen by non-Jews as a religious and not as an ethnic group, in which capacity they were not a minority but one-third of the community of the "three great faiths." The defense organizations, on the other hand, were an anomaly to the non-Jew in the South and served to confuse outsiders as to who in fact was a legitimate representative of the Jews. Because the ADL is a secular organization like the NAACP, Malev argued, it is despised in the South and therefore is a liability to Southern Jewish communities. Malev recommended that the national defense organizations stop "their unfortunate habit of beating the drum on every possible occasion" and "let religious leaders of the Jewish communities be the spokesmen for them." Malev clearly articulated the Southern belief that it was Jewish leadership on the matter of desegregation that had linked Jews and Blacks in the minds of Southern racists, but that in fact this linkage was false. "It is because the demagogue and the agitator equate the Jew and the Negro, and thereby separates the Jew from the rest of the community, that much of the difficulty has come." 109

While there were a number of outspoken integrationist rabbis in the South, including Charles Mantinband of Mississippi, Emmet Frank of Virginia, and Jacob Rothschild of Georgia, in general the Southern rabbinate varied in its approach to desegregation according to the size of the Jewish population in the general community, the openness of the community, the number of "Old South" Jews in the congregation, and the proportion of congregants who were businessmen.110 But even Jacob Rothschild, one of the most outspoken integrationist rabbis, expressed his doubt that "the rabbi in today's South will serve any good purpose in leading crusades. Where there are forces at work in the community—human relations councils and the like—he should become a part of them by all means. But let him labor alongside others of like mind and dedicated purpose." 111

The testimony of these Southerners indicates that the heart of the problem between Northern and Southern Jewry involved the question of Jewish identity. Many Southerners had long accepted the definition of Jewishness as strictly a religious designation, one that many Northern Jewish liberals were uncomfortable with and were trying to mitigate through political activism. It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the criticism of Southern Jewry that came from the North on the desegregation issue centered around the identity of Southern Jews and their alleged willingness to assimilate. For liberal Jews who had so fully based their own identity on the crusade for desegregation, the identity of Southern Jews who appeared
lukewarm or apprehensive about desegregation became highly suspect. A tepid approach by any Jew toward desegregation, in the mind of the liberal Jew, was the ultimate sacrilege.

One Jewish civil rights lawyer compared the anxious Jews of the South to the Marrano Jews of Spain who publicly denied their Judaism during the inquisition.\textsuperscript{112} Writing in \textit{The Reconstructionist}, Carl Alpert explained that the problem with the Southern Jew was not that he was more anti-Negro than his gentile neighbor: "his only crime is that he is like his neighbor. The sort of Jews who fear to be distinctively Jewish might gain some comfort from that thought, and use it to prove again and again that Jews are no different from anybody else, as if that fact itself were a virtue."\textsuperscript{113} Joel Dobin, a rabbi from Pennsylvania who visited a community in the South for six months, complained that it was an "incorrect" Jewish orientation that was at the heart of this small Southern Jewish community's lack of enthusiasm for the desegregation campaign. While acknowledging the peculiar economic and social pressures on Southern Jews, Dobin wrote that "there is a need for constructive action. There is a need for reviving in these Jews a sense of positive Jewish identification."\textsuperscript{114}

Albert Vorspan conducted one of the most vitriolic attacks on the Jewishness of Southern Jews for what he considered its lack of aggressiveness in the area of civil rights. Making reference to an Episcopal priest who had excommunicated a congregant who objected to attending church with Blacks, Vorspan asked, "[C]an this be said of Jews?" Coming from a leader of Reform Judaism, a movement whose very existence is predicated upon Judaism's lack of a central authoritative body with powers of excommunication (cherem), this is startling.\textsuperscript{115} More than the other Northern liberals, Vorspan defined Judaism in terms of radical racial protest and then questioned the Judaism of anyone who did not adhere to this criterion. In a tirade that reads as if it had been written by a member of the Orthodox leadership at the turn of the century, when Reform Judaism was in its ascendancy, Vorspan decried the excessive tolerance of American Judaism: "There are no standards for synagogue membership. . . . He [the Jew] has only to pay his dues in the temple and he has as much right there as anybody else. . . . Are there no lines to be drawn? No standards to be met? No demands to be made upon ourselves?"\textsuperscript{116}

It is not necessary to endorse the lack of resolve demonstrated by many Southern Jews on the issue of desegregation, or to deny that the relationship of many Jews in the South to the idea of Jewish peoplehood had become severely attenuated, to see that a pattern among liberal Jewish leaders had
emerged. In this pattern, the needs of sizable Jewish communities are relegated to second-tier status behind liberal objectives, in this case racial integration. The opposition of the local Jewish community to the presence of nineteen Conservative rabbis at a protest march in Montgomery, Alabama, in May 1963 dramatized the differences between Southern Jews and liberal Northern Jews. Andre Ungar, perhaps the most prominent member of the rabbinical delegation, reported that the local community seemed to be saying, “Boychiks, we know you are right, but still, how could you do this to us, your brothers?” and the rabbis were saying, “Jews, dear scared little Yidden, how can you side with racism, with Hitler’s heritage; and yet, you are our brothers, and we love you, we love you, forgive us, please.” One cannot help noticing the irony in a group of Southern Jews, most of whom had long deemphasized Jewish solidarity, asking the rabbis for special consideration in the name of Jewish brotherhood. But this episode also demonstrates that, in the battle over desegregation, the needs of Southern Jewish communities in conflict with liberal ideals were sacrificed to the increasingly dubious need of Jewish liberals to be counted among the persecuted. As the remaining chapters show, this pattern continued in the 1960s, when the Black struggle for equality moved North and again posed serious challenges to Jewish communities throughout the nation, most of which, like many Jewish communities in the South before them, were entering the advanced stages of assimilation.

It is perhaps appropriate, then, to conclude this episode in the history of Blacks in Jewish thought with Harry Golden, the editor of the Carolina Israelite, a figure whose life in many ways embodied the fissures between Southern and Northern Jews and whose keen insight helps to illuminate the misconceptions of both groups of Jews. Golden was born on New York’s Lower East Side. He moved to the South in 1941, when he was in his late thirties, to begin publishing the Carolina Israelite from his North Carolina home. A prolific humorist, Golden used his famous wit to mercilessly lampoon racial segregation in the South. In response to a series of laws passed by the North Carolina Legislature in 1956 to prevent the integration of that state’s public schools, Golden introduced what he called his “Vertical Negro Plan.” Golden had noticed that the tremendous industrial growth and economic prosperity experienced by the South in the decade after World War II had been accomplished by the elimination of “vertical segregation.” That is, the tremendous buying power of the South’s twelve million Black Americans had been harnessed by the admittance of Blacks into white supermarkets, grocery stores, banks, telephone booths,
department stores, and drug stores. In all of these purchasing situations, Golden noted, the Black is required to stand up. By contrast, “It is only when the Negro ‘sets’ that the fur begins to fly.” So Golden proposed that the South could comply with the Supreme Court’s ruling on segregation by passing an amendment “which would provide only desks in all the public schools of our state—no seats.” Golden explained that since “no one in the South pays the slightest attention to a Vertical Negro . . . this will completely solve our problem.”

Golden also offered his “White Baby Plan to End Racial Segregation” after he noticed that several Black school teachers were admitted to a segregated movie house when they were accompanied by the children of their white friends. Golden suggested that whites could solve their baby-sitting problems and Blacks could go to the movies wherever they wanted if whites would “pool their children at a central point in each neighborhood” so that Blacks could pick one up every time they wanted to go to the movies. “Eventually,” wrote Golden, “the Negro community can set up a factory and manufacture white babies out of plastic, and when they want to go to the opera or to a concert, all they need to do is carry that plastic doll in their arms.”

Golden’s own favorite was his “out of order plan.” Golden had once prevailed on the manager of a department store to shut the water off in his “white” water fountain and put up an “out of order” sign. Over time, whites began to drink out of the water fountain designated for the “coloreds,” and by the end of the third week everybody was drinking the “segregated” water. Golden proposed that a special government committee be set up to investigate his “out of order” plan. “It is possible,” he wrote, “that the whites may accept desegregation if they are assured that the facilities are still ‘separate,’ albeit ‘out-of-order.’”

In his more serious moments, Golden had much to say about the relationship between Black Americans and Jews and about the subject of desegregation. Golden’s viewpoint was clearly that of the Northern liberal, and his friend Eli Evans would later comment that since Golden’s audience was in the North, “he wrote from the perspective of the peddler’s pushcart, relevant for the immigrant generation but less valid for Jews in the South.” So it was typical of Golden to suggest that, in the deep South of 1956, “the white man fears the Negro; the Jew fears the white man; and the Negro, the focal point of this entire embroglio, fears no one.” Anyone even vaguely aware of the region’s sensibilities could see that the Black in the South had quite a bit to fear from white men. Like many
Northern liberals, Golden looked with awe at the new willingness of Blacks to risk personal safety for their rights and with disdain at the fear of Southern Jews. But from his North Carolina perch, Golden was able to see insightfully, and to express more eloquently than many other liberal Jews, precisely why the Jews of the South were not benefiting from the system of segregation.

Golden shrewdly distinguished between what Southern Jews had come to accept as equality and what full equality really meant, pointing out that the Southern Jew “prides himself on being well-integrated in the gentile society of his community, yet he will argue for hours against the publication of a resolution passed by some organization far away in New York. And he does not see any inconsistency in this.”

Most important, Golden was sensitive enough to see that in some ways the situation of the Jews in the South was more tenuous than that of the Blacks. The Jew in some ways envies the Black, Golden thought, because, despite never having been entirely excluded from the white gentile world, the Jew still asks, “What will happen to us here?” The Black, in contrast, “never thinks of himself in terms of actual survival. All the Negro wants is to ride the buses, go to better schools and get better jobs. No one has yet heard him say ‘What will happen to us here?’”

Perhaps, then, to a degree rarely noted, Northern and Southern Jews were responding the best way they knew how to similar historical pressures. Perhaps liberal Jews in the North were also asking themselves, “What will happen to us here?”—but in reference to the increasingly open and democratic United States. While Southern Jews faced issues of physical safety and economic viability, the issues facing Jews outside the South were freedom and assimilation, and their answer to the challenge of Jewish survival was reflected in the adoption of the cause of racial justice as their own. At the very moment Jews outside the South became aware that it was possible for them to “melt” away as an ethnic group, they were refusing to do so, in part through their involvement in the march toward desegregation.

If the Jews of the South had internalized the attitudes of Southern whites, only less so, they believed this was the best way to ensure their survival. If the Jews in the North had absorbed the postwar commitment to freedom and equality, only more so than other Americans, they believed that was one way of ensuring communal purpose and survival. Just as Golden suggested that Jews in the South envied the Blacks, the involvement of Northern Jews in the civil rights movement, and their insistence that desegregation was every bit as much a Jewish fight as it was a Black fight,
indicates that in the deepest recesses of their consciousness, liberal Jews may have coveted the special status of Black Americans, the weight of whose historical presence on the American scene precluded any foreboding about group survival.