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Allison Klein 2 April 2012

# Holocaust Survivors and Jim Crow

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An abstract of
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Abstract

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This thesis discusses the postwar experiences of Holocaust survivors who immigrated to the Southern United States in the immediate years after World War II. During this period, African Americans suffered from extreme prejudice and discrimination, especially in the South. This study investigates how survivors perceived and reacted to anti-black racism and Jim Crow, which, at times, survivors connected to their own experiences with prejudice and persecution under Nazi rule. This thesis also shows that survivors framed their identity as survivors of prejudice and persecution through their engagement with Southern culture. Additionally, due to their background, Holocaust survivors approached and understood Jim Crow in a distinct way and formed a unique interpretation of racism in America.

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## I. Introduction

Elizabeth Gevirtz recalls the first moments of her arrival in the United States after surviving Auschwitz. As her ship, filled with other Holocaust survivors, pulled into New York's harbor, she encountered the Statue of Liberty, the Mother of Exiles, who symbolized freedom and shelter for the tired, poor, and "wretched refuse" of distant shores. In her recollection, she remembers these first moments: "'We started to scream: 'We are in America!' And look at the Statue of Liberty, that we heard about, that we learned about in school. The thought that, Jew or non-Jew, this is ours. We are free in America.'"[1]

After the Holocaust between the years 1946-1953, 140,000 Jewish survivors sought refuge in the United States, hoping to build new, free lives in this country. Most Holocaust survivors settled in large metropolitan areas with established Jewish communities, such as New York. Smaller communities with less concentrated Jewish populations also received refugees, including many areas in the South, such as Louisiana, South Carolina, and Georgia.

In a land that symbolized a new home for immigrants, free of persecution, Holocaust survivors who resettled in the South confronted the remnants of the 'peculiar institution'. Jim Crow reigned supreme in the South and pervaded all aspects of the South's political, economic and social life. Holocaust survivors, who had survived extreme prejudice and persecution, encountered in the South a social and political system that reminded them of their situation under Nazi rule. Now, however, it was being applied to another minority group. Most Holocaust survivors imagined America as the

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[1] William B. Helmreich, *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), 23-24

'Land of the Free' that lived up to ideals of freedom and equality. However, Southern reality and its prejudiced treatment of African Americans contradicted this image. These refugees reacted to America's paradox in different ways.

Many Holocaust survivors perceived Southern racism as similar to their own experiences and drew parallels between their own encounters with prejudice and their observations of anti-black racism. They felt that their Holocaust experiences connected them in a particular way to the plight of African Americans. As a result, some viewed and interacted with African Americans in a way that defied Southern norms. But not all were as brave or as open about their feelings. Others merely noted and disapproved of the deep-seated prejudice in the South yet still conformed to the culture of segregation and Jim Crow. Most were focused on rebuilding their lives and put their energies into adjusting to the demands of everyday life. Many wanted to be accepted by their new American neighbors, both Jews and non-Jews, and concentrated on assimilating into American society as quickly as possible. After the trauma of the Holocaust, many survivors were also plagued with the fear of resurgent antisemitism and prioritized Jewish survival. They did not want to risk their newly acquired liberties and freedom from persecution. Some did not feel a connection to African Americans at all.

Nonetheless, many Holocaust survivors framed their identities as survivors of prejudice and persecution through their engagement with Southern culture. Additionally, this framework fostered a distinctive analytical approach to the political and cultural consequences of American anti-black racism. Survivors' experiences in the Holocaust acted as a point of reference for understanding their new home and the plight of African Americans in the South.

**II. Literature Review**

Even though the Holocaust is arguably a well researched and highly documented area of study, research concerning the immediate postwar lives of survivors is rather limited. The major contributions to the general topic concern American Immigrant-Aid services and their efforts on behalf of World War II refugees in America. These are key windows into the postwar experiences of Jewish Holocaust survivors. Beth Cohen's *Cased Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America* and Lyman Cromwell White's *300,000 New Americans: The Epic of a Modern Immigrant-Aid Service* are both comprehensive and monumental works in this area.[2]

Other studies also approach the adaptation experiences of refugees in America through the analysis of oral testimonies and survivor interviews. William B. Helmreich's *Against All Odds: Holocaust Survivors and the Successful Lives They Made in America* is the first and only comprehensive study of this research pursuit. Helmreich analyses 170 interviews with Holocaust Survivors to draw his conclusions.[3] Similarly, Dorothy Rabinowitz's *New Lives: Survivors of the Holocaust Living in America* explores the immediate postwar experiences of over 100 survivors who immigrated to the United States.[4] These studies are instrumental because the focus of my research analyzes the William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum's collection of oral testimonies from Holocaust survivors living in the South. Although the works of Helmreich and

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[2] White, *300,000 New Americans: The Epic of a Modern Immigrant-Aid Service (*New York: United HIAS Services, 1957); Beth Cohen, *Case Closed: Holocaust Survivors in Postwar America (*New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007)
[3] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*
[4] Dorothy Rabinowitz, *New Lives: Holocaust Survivors Living in America* (New York: Avon Books)

Rabinowitz are helpful in providing examples of similar scholarly pursuits, they constitute a macro-historical approach to the postwar lives of Holocaust survivors. In contrast, I approach this topic through a micro-historical lens. This allows for a more in-depth investigation of a smaller subject scope. Consequently, I focus on a geographically specific region as well as a distinct aspect of refugee resettlement experiences.

A few key micro-historical studies of Holocaust survivors do exist. They were conducted on smaller and geographically specifically scales. Arwen Donahue's *This is Home Now: Kentucky's Holocaust Survivors Speak* is an intimate study of nine survivors of the Holocaust who immigrated to Kentucky. It documents their lives after the war and their experiences adjusting to small town and rural American life.[5] Rudolf Herberle and Dudley S. Hall explore how refugees adapted to life in Mississippi and Louisiana in *New Americans: A Study of Displaced Persons in Louisiana and Mississippi*.[6] Helen Glassman's *Adjustment in Freedom: A Follow-up Study of One Hundred Jewish Displaced Families* reviews refugee casework of the United Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) in Cleveland, Ohio. Barbara Burstin's *After The Holocaust: the Migration of Polish Jews and Christians to Pittsburgh* in part documents the experiences of 120 Polish survivors in Pittsburgh after the war.[7]

My Honors Thesis contributes to this essential area of Holocaust studies. It helps fill the gap in the scholarly literature concerning Holocaust survivors' experiences in the

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[5] Arwen Donahue, *This Is Home Now: Kentucky's Holocaust Survivors Speak (*Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2009)
[6] Rudolt Heberle and Dudley S. Hall, *New Americans: A Study of Displaced Persons in Louisiana and Mississippi (*Baton Rouge: Displaced Persons Commission, 1951)
[7] Helen L. Glassman, *Adjustment In Freedom: A Follow-Up Study of One Hundred Jewish Displaced Families* (Cleveland: United HIAS Service, 1956)*;* Barbara Stern Burstin, *After the Holocaust: The Migration of Polish Jews and Christians to Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1989)

Southern United States and their confrontation with the legacies of American slavery. As Peter Gray, an émigré from Nazi Germany, poignantly stated in a lecture for The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, "So much has been produced about it [the Holocaust] that [it] seems virtually unthinkable that there still are topics that have not yet been completely explored… But I want, and I want us, to look beyond that, to recognize that we still need to know more about those who lived, not just about those who died."[8]

**III. Background of Holocaust Survivors: A Brief History of the Holocaust**

Jews who lived under Nazi rule experienced an unprecedented amount of prejudice and persecution. Antisemitism was the central tenet of National Socialism. Nazism promulgated exclusionist racial ideologies that specifically targeted Jews. It defined Jews as a degenerate race that corrupted the purity of German society and the German people. Adolf Hitler promised to eliminate the Jewish threat and restore the racial integrity of the German nation. As Hitler gained complete control of the German state, he began instituting 'solutions' to the 'Jewish Problem'. These eventually developed into the genocidal 'Final Solution'.

Hitler's antisemitic program escalated gradually. At first he attempted to force Jews to emigrate from Germany. He instituted legal reforms that politically disenfranchised and socially isolated Jews in order to alienate them from society. In 1933, the government passed laws that dismissed Jews from several professions, barred them from public service, and restricted their admission into public schools and

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[8] Peter Gay, "Moritz Fröhlich- Morris Gay: A German Refugee in the United States", *Mona And Otto Weinmann Lecture Series* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum: Center For Advanced Holocaust Studies, 23 June 1999), 13 Accessed 1 April 2011. http://www.ushmm.org/research/center/publications/occasional/1999-09/paper.pdf

universities.[9] Then in 1935, the government politically disenfranchised the Jewish population of Germany with the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws. The Nuremberg Laws stripped Jews of their political freedoms and citizenship.[10] The Nuremberg laws also banned marriage and sexual relations between Jews and non-Jews. By 1935, Jews were denied the use of many public amenities, such as parks, benches, pools, inns, recreational establishments, and transportation. Signs dotted Germany: 'Jews Not Welcome' and 'Jews Not Served'. These measures redefined German society along racial lines and the Nazi regime effectively segregated Jews from the rest of society.

The Nazis also sought to eliminate Jews from the economic sphere of Germany and set out on a program of 'Aryanization'. The Nazis forced the transfer of Jewish businesses into 'Aryan' possession. Regulations also eliminated Jews from the retail trades, banking industry, building trades, agricultural business, and artistic professions. These were the first steps to alienate Jews and relegate them to the status of second-class citizens in Germany. These steps pauperized Jews and made them inferior socially, economically, and politically.

The situation for Jews worsened with the onset of World War II. After the start of war, the Nazis were able to develop more extreme solutions to the 'Jewish Problem' with the acquisition of Eastern European territories. After the invasion of Poland in 1939, the Nazis established ghettos in Poland for the Jews of Eastern Europe that physically segregated Jews. Jews from Germany were also deported to these Eastern ghettos. The

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[9] David M. Crowe, *The Holocaust: Roots, History, and Aftermath (*Boulder: Westview Press, 2008), 113

[10] Deborah Dwork and Robert Jan van Pelt, *The Holocaust: A History* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2002), 89

ghettos were overcrowded and ridden with disease, starvation, and death.[11] Many Jewish inhabitants of these ghettos were forced to perform slave labor or were transferred to work camps as slave laborers.

The invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 initiated the first massacres of Jews by the German army and *Einsatzgruppen*, special Killing Squads, who killed Jews through mass shootings. Mass shootings, however, were not efficient enough for the Germans to completely eradicate the 'Jewish Threat' and they turned to other methods of mass murder. The Nazis began instituting gas killings and created multiple extermination camps that employed this method of murder.

With the conquest of Europe and the Soviet Union, the Nazis formulated Operation Reinhard, which called for the total annihilation of European Jewry through extermination in killing centers. The Jewish ghettos in Polish territories transformed into storage pens for Jews to be transported to annihilation sites. While the Germans had incrementally liquidated portions of the populations in ghettos to concentration work camps since their establishment, in 1942 they ordered the complete liquidation of the ghettos. They deported the inhabitants to extermination camps and other concentration camps.[12] Furthermore, the Germans transformed the slave labor camps of Auschwitz and Majdanek into dual functioning annihilation camps and work camps.[13] The rest of the Jewish genocide unfolded along this path. By the end of World War II on May 8, 1945, racial prejudice and antisemitism had led to the genocide of six million Jewish people.

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[11] ibid, 238-247
[12] Crowe, *The Holocaust*, 188
[13] Ibid, 293

**IV. 'Land of the Free': Southern Jewish History**

Some Jews managed to escape from Europe during the earlier stages of Nazi persecution while others survived the later, deadlier plans for the 'Jewish Solution'. Both groups of Holocaust survivors looked to America as the 'Land of the Free'. Many of their relatives and friends had immigrated to American in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to seek a safe haven from the prejudice in Western Europe and pogroms in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, as America entered World War II, it promulgated propaganda that America was fighting to defend liberty around the globe and to defeat the evil that threatened it. For these reasons, many Holocaust survivors immigrated to the United States during and after World War II because it stood as one of the leaders of the free world. They believed that freedom in America was unlimited.[14] Milton Lasoski, a child of Holocaust survivors who immigrated to New Orleans, recalls his parents' expectation of America: "'my parents had heard that America was the 'Land of the Free' and thought everyone was treated first class.'"[15]

Upon arrival, these immigrants rejoiced in the freedom and security that the United States offered, especially after their experiences under fascist rule and confrontations with virulent antisemitism. A report issued by the Committee for the study of Recent Immigration from Europe in 1947 described how Jews were impressed by the absence of signs such as 'For Jews Forbidden' and 'Jews Unwanted'. The report quoted a Jewish refugee who felt that "the feeling of independence and the democratic way of life

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[14] Maurice R. Davie, *Refugees In America: Report of the Committee for the Study of Recent Immigration from Europe* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), 48

[15] Rebecca Lasoski, *Helen Przerchadski Lasoski: Journey From Nazi Persecution to the Big Easy* (American Digital Services, 2011), 34

were 'as a gift from heaven'. The familiar and the beautiful things about European life were missed, but all of these 'don't mean a thing compared to the intangible things that everyone enjoys in this country- the Bill of Rights, the standards of equality and justice.'"[16]

America seemed to live up to its rhetoric of egalitarianism and liberty for these immigrants, who were considered white at the time of their arrival in the United States. However, when Holocaust survivors came to the United States after the end of the war, American Jews themselves had only recently been accepted into privileged, white society that followed America's egalitarian rhetoric.

Throughout their history in the United States, Jews had worked hard to earn this relative security and prosperity in Anglo-Saxon, Protestant American society.[17] Although not as pronounced in the 19th century as in the early 20th century, Jews had held a precarious position in the social hierarchy of America that organized itself around the black-white racial divide. The position of Jews was uncertain in this social construction because their relationship to whiteness was ambivalent.[18]

During the late 19th and early 20th century, some gentile Americans associated Jews with African Americans "because one means of defusing the troubling ambivalence of the Jewish racial image was to liken Jews to African Americans, trying to find similarities between the two groups."[19] In order to place different ethnic groups neatly on one side of the black-white divide, some gentile Americans perceived these groups as

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[16] Davie, *Refugees in America*, 52
[17] Michael E. Staub, *Torn At The Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism In Postwar America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 11
[18] Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 56
[19] ibid, 42

both racially inferior and uncivilized minorities. They linked Jews and African Americans "together by their unassimilability in American society."[20] Jews fought against being associated with African Americans and "in order to allay fears that they were an unstable racial element in white society, Jews often felt the need to assert a distinguishing line between themselves and the country's black population."[21] Alternatively, many white, gentile Americans considered Jews a distinct, racial minority but also believed that they could eventually overcome the stigma of their Jewish race by fully assimilating into American society.[22] Many Jews eagerly seized the opportunity to gain acceptance into the dominant, white majority and were willing to comply with the black-white divide.

The black-white divide has defined the Southern United States throughout its history. After the Civil War and the Era of Reconstruction, the New South still rested on the primary principle of its Old world, "a world in which the Negro was still 'mud-sill', and in which a white man, any white man, was in some sense a master."[23] In the aftermath of the Civil War, Southerners formed an even stronger, united identity that rested upon "the doctrine of white supremacy and the determination to maintain a bi-racial system."[24]

Jews, however, did not fit neatly into this bi-racial construction in the South and their relationship with gentile Southerners was ambiguous and tenuous. The white, gentile understanding of Jews within the Southern racial caste system was filled with

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[20] ibid, 42
[21] ibid, 3
[22] ibid, 50
[23] W.J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York: Alfred a. Knopf, Inc., 1941), 107
[24] Carolyn Lipson-Walker, *'Shalom Y'all': The Folklore and Culture of Southern Jews* (Ann Arbor: University Microfilms International, 1986), 50

"contradictions", "inconsistencies", "ambiguities" and "tortured logic."[25] The racial categorization of Jews posed a problem for gentiles in a society whose framework "sharply divided the world between blacks and whites."[26] Despite their white skin, Jews were considered racially different and not fully white due to their distinct, and often exclusionary, ethnic and religious customs as well as their tendency to self-segregate. Jews still earned the stigma as 'others', 'racial outsiders', and 'aliens'.[27] Thus, the position of Jews in the South was precarious and "Jewish identity occupied a socially liminal and unstable position in a southern racial epistemology that ascribed concreted meaning only to blackness and whiteness as polar opposites."[28]

Despite this ambiguity, for the most part Jews in the South were 'white enough' because they did not "conform to the assumptions many Americans made about the lowly status of despised racial minorities."[29]In many cases, Jews felt driven to advance themselves professionally and socially through economic and academic gains. Many managed to involve themselves in the "urban, industrial, capitalist order."[30] In this way, Jews in the South distinguished themselves from the inferior perception of African

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[25] Willard B. Gatewood Jr., "Stranger and the Southern Eden: The South and Immigration, 1900-1920", *Ethnic Minorities in Gulf Coast Society,* Ed. Jerrel H. Shofner and Linda V. Ellsworth (Pensacola: Gulf Coast History and Humanities Conference, 1979), 1

[26] Eric L. Goldstein, "'Now is the Time To Show Your True Colors': Southern Jews, Whiteness, and the Rise of Jim Crow", *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Havover: University Press of New England, 2006), 134

[27] Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 2

[28] Caroline Elizabeth Light, "Uplifting 'The Unfortunate of Our Race': Southern Jewish Benevolence and the Struggle Towards Whiteness'", *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses*, (Proquest, 2000), Accessed 1 February 2012. http://search.proquest.com/docview/304606356/13531B3835C7758C685/1?accountid=10747

[29] Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 2

[30] ibid, 2

Americans and minimized their comparison.

Consequently, Jews in other parts of the United States might have experienced more discrimination than Jews in the South because "the very sharpness of this [color] division served to heighten equality among whites- indeed, subsuming all other differences, even creating a privilege that Jews could acquire merely by embracing white supremacy."[31] In fact, many scholars of Southern Jewish history argue that the Southern Jewish experience was unique because, due to their white skin, "Jews have been more accepted in the South than elsewhere."[32] This allowed established Jews who had lived in the South for generations the opportunities to participate in political life in the 19th century, including electoral politics. Some Jews even "occasionally won election to municipal or state office."[33] Established Jews also were in many ways integral in Southern communal life. They supported community organizations and became involved in community life. For example, Jews participated in "cultural activities, better business and chamber of commerce groups, and philanthropic endeavors."[34]

Nonetheless, Jews still suffered some consequences for their 'otherness', such as limited social opportunities. However, it did not compare to the discrimination and exclusion that African Americans experienced because "even if some southern Gentiles considered the Jews not quite white, they were not black either, and this fact was their

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[31] Laurence N. Powell, *Troubled Memory: Anne Levy, the Holocaust, and David Duke's Louisiana* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 409
[32] Mark K. Bauman, *The Southerner as American: Jewish Style (*Cincinnati: The American Jewish Archives, 1996), 23
[33] Deborah Dash Moore, "Separate Paths: Blacks and Jews in the Twentieth-Century South", *Struggles in the Promised Land.* Ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 282
[34] Ibid, 280

greatest advantage in adapting to the region."[35] African Americans absorbed most of the prejudiced treatment in the South and anti-black racism acted as a buffer against anti-Jewish discrimination.

Jews also suffered less discrimination because their small numbers did not make them too conspicuous. Further, because Jews settled in such few numbers in the South, they did not pose a threat economically, socially, or politically to the white majority. Since the era of Reconstruction, Jews have only constituted about one percent of the general population.[36] In contrast, by the mid-twentieth century, 10 million African Americans lived in the South and constituted about one fifth of the entire population.[37] Thus, Jews in no way rivaled the threat of black power, which white Southerners feared above all else. This centrality of anti-black racism in Southern culture mitigated the growth of antisemitism and "the degradation of African Americans … served as a vessel for Jewish absorption into the social, political, and economic life of the South."[38]

Their white skin allowed Jews the opportunity to assimilate into white society, however, with the requirement that Jews ascribe to all the codes and values of Southern society, especially the 'color line'. Following the rules of Jim Crow was essential because "southern Jewish social success relied upon the Jewish subject's ability to self-represent as unmistakably white." Jewish access to all the benefits of white citizenship depended on adopting the norms of Southern society, including discriminating against African

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[35] David Goldfield, "A Sense of Place: Jews, Blacks, and White Gentiles in the American South", *Southern Cultures* 3, No. 1 (Center for the Study of the American South, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 60
[36] Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2003), 16
[37] Moore, "Separate Paths", 277
[38] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 9

Americans.[39] Because Jews occupied an ambiguous position in the black-white divide in the South, many were eager to "prove their racial credentials to their fellow white southerners."[40]

Additional pressures propelled Jews to accept the racial caste system in the South. Firstly, the South valued conformity and sameness. Community outsiders were considered deviant and foreign influences were looked upon with suspicion. For this reason, Jews in the South, especially new immigrants, felt even more pressure to adopt Southern cultural values. Secondly, Jewish security depended on acquiescing to Southern norms since they were a small minority living amongst a majority whose attitudes towards Jews were ambivalent. Thirdly, Jews depended on their gentile neighbors for their livelihood since most Jews were storeowners and merchants.

Jews also adapted easily to the region due to circumstance. Because Jewish communities were so small in the South, Jews had less of an opportunity to maintain their European and religious customs and "living as an insignificant numerical minority in the South, the Jews tended to assimilate."[41] For this reason, a unique characteristic of Southern Jews was their "accelerated conformity."[42] As a rabbi in Norfolk, Virginia explained, "'probably nowhere [else] in America is the old principle of Jewish history, 'Wie es Christel sich, so Judel sick' (as the Christians do, so do the Jews) so apparent.'"[43]

As in most parts of the country, Jews in the South were not a monolithic, cohesive group. Their origin, time of arrival, denomination, and acculturation level differed.

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[39] Light, "Uplifting 'The Unfortunate of Our Race'", 19
[40] Goldstein, "'Now Is the Time'", 135
[41] Lipson- Walker, *'Shalom Y'all',* 105
[42] ibid, 103
[43] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Uneasy At Home: Anti-Semitism and the American Jewish Experience* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 232

Although an extremely small number of Jews lived in the South in the 18th and early 19th century, "the first sizable Jewish settlement in the South began in the 1840s with the immigration of German Jews."[44] By the end of the century, most had greatly acculturated into Southern society. After living there for generations, they had no foreign accents and few foreign customs. Even their practice of Judaism had greatly evolved and as Jews "rose economically, Americanized and enjoyed relative tolerance they gradually followed the path of Reform influenced by their desire to be accepted by their Protestant counterparts and by their acceptance of the host culture's ways."[45]

Thus, German Jews took great steps in assimilating into the dominant, gentile society. While many had started as peddlers and scraped by a living as small merchants in the South upon arrival, over the decades they had climbed the economic ladder.[46] Many became successful and prosperous shop owners, retailers, merchants, and mercantilists.[47] This in turn also led to their increased social status and acceptance in the Southern social landscape.

However, their climb to the ranks of white, middle class still did not permit them complete assimilation into gentile society. For example, Jews were still restricted from joining elite gentile country clubs and many neighborhoods did not allow Jewish residents. In part, this allowed Jews to retain some religious and cultural distinctiveness.

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[44] Lipson- Walker, *'Shalom Y'all',* 39
[45] Bauman, *The Southerner as American,* 22
[46] "Role Theory and History: Ethnic Brokerage in the Atlanta Jewish Community", *American Jewish History*, 73, No. 1. (American Jewish Historical Society Quarterly, September 1983), 73
[47] Clive Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow". *Southern Jewish History*, 2. ed. Mark K. Bauman (Southern Jewish Historical Society, 1999): 56, Accessed 12 January 2012 http://www.jewishsouth.org/sites/default/files/sjh_vol_ii_article_1003.pdf

Jews founded many exclusively Jewish institutions and organizations. Religious congregations, self-help associations, such as B'nai B'rith chapters, and Jewish country clubs, such as the Standard Club in Atlanta, proliferated. Thus, Judaism's relationship to whiteness still remained ambiguous, although for the most part benign. Still, by the time Eastern European Jews began coming in droves to the United States in the late 19th century through the early 20th century, German Jews resembled their gentile neighbors more than their Eastern European co-religionists.

Eastern European Jews were conspicuous in the United States, especially in the Southern environment that prided conformity. While most immigrated to Northern cities with large Jewish populations, some made their way to the South. Many of these immigrants knew hardly any English and spoke with foreign accents. They were poor, wore clothing styles of the Old, European world and practiced Judaism in a conspicuous, Orthodox way. The assimilated German Jews felt threatened by the arrival of Eastern European Jews. They believed that gentiles would generalize all Jews as inassimilable and "many feared that the poverty and social backwardness of the newcomers would stigmatize Jewishness in the popular consciousness."[48] For this reason, the Americanized German Jews generally shunned their Eastern European brethren, forcing them to open their own synagogues and community organizations. At the same time, German Jews initiated many programs and self-help institutions to Americanize their co-religionists as quickly as possible.[49] Eventually, Eastern European Jews assimilated in the coming decades. They, too, climbed the economic ladder from poor peddlers to successful retailers and merchants. The Eastern European immigrants, most of who were Russian,

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[48] Light, "Uplifting 'The Unfortunate of Our Race'", 2
[49] Bauman, *The Southerner as American,* 23

eventually opened up grocery stores and markets that met relative success. Their religious practices also evolved and "most, little by little, in the overwhelmingly Christian environment of the South, relinquished their piety and traditionalism."[50]

Throughout their history in the South, Jews came into contact with African Americans mostly through peddling and retail businesses. One interpretation of this business relationship between Jews and African Americans posits that Jews exploited African Americans and "duped unsuspecting African Americans into buying goods they did not need or receiving credit at a rate of interest they could not afford."[51] Alternatively, another interpretation asserts that Jewish merchants were very tolerant of their African American customers and treated them as fairly as possible. Webb argues that a more accurate understanding of the relationship between Jews and African Americans exists in the middle ground.[52] While recent Jewish immigrants did not hold such racist attitudes towards African Americans or treat them with such discrimination as their gentile neighbors, their behavior towards them was still for the most part in line with the expected social norms of the South's racial caste system. Although acquiescing to Jim Crow made Jews uncomfortable and conflicted "with [Jews'] self-image as a historically persecuted minority group", upon assimilation, most adopted the stance of their fellow Southerners on the issue of race.[53]

In the 19th century, Jewish peddlers serviced African American customers without hesitation. Jewish storeowners often opened their businesses in African American neighborhoods and serviced the African American community. Many developed positive

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[50] Lipson- Walker, *'Shalom Y'all',* 123
[51] Ibid, 57
[52] Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow"
[53] Goldstein, "'Now Is The Time'", 136

relationships with their African American patrons. The Jewish community also earned a positive reputation for their willingness to provide services to African Americans that gentile retailers refused to offer. For example, Jewish mercantilists were the only ones who would give credit to their African American patrons. In addition, Jews were known for treating their African American customers with kindness and dignity unheard of in the South.[54]

In the early 20th century, Russian Jews treated African Americans with more dignity and respect than assimilated German Jews and the gentile majority afforded them. In fact, many Russian immigrants felt sympathetic with the plight of African Americans because it reminded them of their experiences of persecution and prejudice in Russia. Like the German immigrants of previous generations, the Eastern European immigrants did not have reservations about doing business with African Americans. They allowed African Americans to sample goods and try on clothes, which Southerners forbid, and addressed them respectably as 'Mr.' and 'Mrs.'.[55]

However, for the most part Jewish immigrants complied with the color divide and still accepted the racial caste system of the South. In trying to make a living, Jewish retailers of both the 19th and 20th century knew that business could only continue if they followed the status quo concerning race. Although many Jewish merchants "held no prejudice towards African Americans, [they] refrained from any overt action that might risk retaliation from enraged whites."[56] This attitude is apparent in an exchange between an established Jewish merchant and a recent Russian immigrant in Savannah in the early

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[54] Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow", 62
[55] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 29
[56] Webb, "Jewish Merchants and Black Customers in the Age of Jim Crow", 55

20th century. The Jewish merchant warned the new Russian immigrant about upholding the status quo of race relations. He reminded him, "'I'm here for a living, not a crusade.'"[57] Similarly, the daughter of a Russian immigrant who ran a store in Tennessee in the early 20th century remembers how her father could only go as far as small acts of kindness when dealing with his African American customers.[58]

Jewish sympathy for African Americans could not go farther than small acts of kindness due to fear of threatening their personal and economic security in addition to their desire to advance in white society. If at times Jews crossed the color divide, there were reprisals. A few salient examples have been documented. In 1868, a Russian Jew "was seized by Klansmen and shot dead. [He] had caused offense to the white folk of Franklin, Tennessee, by fraternizing with the blacks who shopped at his store." In 1869, "Samuel Fleishman, a Jewish hardware merchant, was murdered in almost identical circumstances in Marianna, Florida."[59]

Jews also adopted discriminatory attitudes and behaviors towards African Americans as part of their assimilation into Southern society without coercion. Once becoming established within Southern society, Jews "counted themselves as sons and daughters of Dixie" and thus conformed to the expected attitudes and behaviors of the prevailing social order.[60] It is argued that "in general, the degree of sympathy which Jews had for blacks was inversely related to the amount of time the former had spent in the South." Children of these immigrants began to use derogatory terms like 'nigger' "'with

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[57] ibid, 55
[58] ibid, 55
[59] ibid, 65
[60] Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, *The Quite Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), 70

the same venom and contempt as the term 'Zhid' was used in the old country.'"[61] The process of Americanization naturally led to adopting the normative customs of the white, gentile majority and these included negative attitudes toward blacks.

For example, many Jews who had immigrated in the mid 19th century and who had worked their way up from peddlers to store owners did not employ fair business practices with African Americans. They lent credit to the African American sharecroppers at unfavorable rates and "took advantage of the whole pattern of society that was designed to keep the black where he was."[62] However, it could also be argued that even extending credit to African Americans at all was considered more tolerant since white, gentiles did not.[63] Later in the 20th century, many Jewish businesses adopted segregationist customs, such as separate and unequal bathroom facilities.

Discrimination also existed beyond the economic sphere. For example, at times the Jewish community in Birmingham organized public events with the Ku Klux Clan.[64] Although an extreme manifestation of racist attitudes, Karl Friedman, a native Jewish Southerners, recalls how his family celebrated his bar mitzvah in 1937 by inviting guests "'to view a Saturday night lynching in downtown Birmingham.'"[65]

Despite this, few Jews held extreme racist attitudes or were staunch supporters of segregation. However, their desire to remain a part of white society motivated them to

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[61] Charles Rubin quoted in Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers Within the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1978), 191
[62] Louis Schmier, "'For Him the 'Schwartzers' Couldn't Do Enough,'" *American Jewish History* 73, No.1 (1983), 55
[63] Webb, "Jews and Black Merchants in the Age of Jim Crow", 61
[64] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 18
[65] ibid, 20

follow the customs of Jim Crow. Jews were not "able to oppose or resist the basic social structure of the Jim Crow South in any direct or sustained way."[66]

Many Jews also feared that showing sympathy with the plight of African Americans and defying Southern social norms would increase antisemitic attitudes and discrimination against Jews. Although antisemitism was not a huge factor in Southern life, for Jews in the South, "latent insecurity [was] strong enough to make Southern Jews attempt to conform in an unnaturally accelerated manner to the ways of the South."[67] Jews felt insecure because the gentile population still in some ways viewed Jews as racially distinct. This fostered Jewish anxiety about falling on the wrong side of the color divide in the South. Thus, although antisemitism was not characteristic of Southern life, "Jews of the South harbor[ed] deep-seated insecurities. Although many Southern Jews [were] able to move easily within the upper echelons of Southern society, they never drop[ped] their wariness."[68]

Beyond feelings of insecurity, the threat of anti-Jewish prejudice still persisted, even if dormant at most times. In a region that prized conformity above all else, Jews still remained the 'other' in a culture dominated by Protestantism, "the Jew, with his universal refusal to be assimilated, is everywhere the eternal alien; and in the South, where any difference had always stood out with great vividness, he was especially so. Hence it was perfectly natural that, in the general withdrawal upon the old heritage, the rising insistence of conformity to it, he should come in for renewed denunciations."[69] Thus, Jews developed a precarious relationship with their gentile neighbors. While at most

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[66] Goldstein, "'Now is the Time To Show Your True Colors'", 136
[67] Lipson- Walker, *'Shalom Y'all',* 110
[68] ibid, 109
[69] Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 333-334

times it was cordial, "just beneath the surface lay a bed of prejudice ever ready to label Jews as Christ-killers and Shylocks."[70] For this reason, it was even more necessary to comply with the black-white divide.

Because the white majority held ambivalent views about Jews, bouts of antisemitism intermittently flared up, especially during times of conflict and tension. Jews sometimes served as the scapegoat for current problems. For example, in the 1890s depression swept the South. In response, Louisiana and Mississippi farmers issued terrorist campaigns against Jewish merchants, whom they believed purposefully issued gentile farmers credit in order to indebt them.[71] Angry mobs also set upon Jews in Georgia, Tennessee, and Kentucky in response to the economic downturn.[72]

The 20th century also inspired antisemitism in the South in response to a developing anxiety over a changing American society. As the rest of the country moved towards urbanization, industrialization, and increased immigration, the rural, agrarian, and homogeneous South held onto its old way of life with even more tenacity. The lynching of Leo Frank in 1913 can be seen as a violent response to these anxieties of change. Frank, a Yankee, urban, industrialist Jew who was seemingly corrupting the ways of the South, acted as a scapegoat for these fears of the transitioning country and inspired one of the most infamous cases of antisemitism in the South. Frank's murder showed that even the white skin of Jews did not protect them from ingrained bigotry in the South and "served as a stark reminder that their acceptance within the white

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[70] Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 177
[71] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 17
[72] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy At Home*, 88

community, now matter how widespread, was still conditional."[73] Frank's lynching remained in the conscious of Southern Jews for the next decades and created a permanent fear of resurgent antisemitism.

After World War I in the interwar years, antisemitism grew in the United States as it fed off of the xenophobia and isolationist sentiments of the time. Consequently, the relatively favorable position that Jews held in Southern society due to their white skin shifted to a more ambiguous and less privileged one. Additionally, the South at this time experienced a religious revival.[74] Thus, the Jew as the Christ-killer also lent strength to antisemitic feelings. During this time, Jews were dismissed and excluded from civic affairs. Their restriction from country clubs was strictly enforced. Jews were generally excluded from the dominant, gentile society in the South.[75]

Yet, at the end of World War II, anti-Jewish sentiments and discrimination began to decline, and the position of Jews in the South recovered. Jews were seen as patriotic and loyal due to their service in the war. Furthermore, in the period of optimism that ensued, there were little anxieties to project onto Jews. Polls commissioned by the American Jewish Committee in 1950, 1951, 1953, and 1954 revealed increasingly favorable attitudes towards Jews. Professional and educational barriers subsided for Jews and social barriers lessened, such as restricted entry into country clubs.[76] The 1940s marked a new period of Jewish stability and recognition as part of the white majority.[77] Consequently, Jewish Holocaust survivors who immigrated to the United States were

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[73] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 18
[74] Cash, *The Mind of the South*, 291
[75] Moore, "Separate Paths", 280
[76] Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*, 154-158
[77] Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness*, 189

given the opportunity to be a part of the dominant national life of the United States upon assimilation.

However, antisemitism was by no means eliminated and Jews recognized that this newfound security was only too recent. They still remained concerned about their personal and communal security. For this reason, many Southern Jews continued to acquiesce to the racial order because identifying as white served as a survival strategy[78] American Jews who had worked hard to gain this relative equality with white, gentiles recognized that this required upholding the status quo of race relations. The intensified marginalization and discrimination that Jews experienced in the early 20th century created an ambivalent attitude among American Jews when confronted with this unspoken stipulation to discriminate against another minority. However, the economic and social benefits of integration into the white majority quieted their discomfort and perceived connection with the plight of African Americans.

In the following decades after World War II, the Southern Jewish position on Jim Crow was scrutinized and Jewish security depended upon accepting the black-white divide. During this time in the Civil Rights era, "the test of the 'true Southerner' was the acceptance of a system of racial segregation… Southern Jews remained so quiet that it appeared that they were in agreement with most other white Southerners."[79] The majority of Southerners rejected integration and "the white Southerner [was] determined to preserve the 'old order'."[80] Only a minority of Southerners favored integration and these individuals were "regarded as evil men who would desecrate the cherished ways of the

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[78] Light, "Uplifting 'The Unfortunate of Our Race'", 4
[79] Lipson- Walker, *'Shalom Y'all',* 112
[80] James A. Wax, "The Attitude of the Jews in the South Toward Integration", in *CCAR Journal: The Jewish Reform Quarterly (*June 1959), 17

South."[81] In their attempt to defend their 'cherished ways', Southerners instilled fear within all of those whom challenged Jim Crow. Those who worked on behalf of improving civil rights for African Americans faced economic reprisals, social ostracism, and even violence. During the time of desegregation, fear dominated the South and "any efforts made in behalf of integration [were] fraught with peril and danger…It is against this emotional background that we must understand the attitude of the southern Jew towards integration."[82]

Southern Jews were reluctant to become involved in any activity that defied the cultural norms of the South for fear of social ostracism as well as violence. Firstly, they were dependent on the goodwill of their gentile neighbors. In addition, pressure from the Ku Klux Klan, White Citizens Council, and the local police kept them silent on the issue of race.[83] In fact, some Jews joined White Citizens Councils, although many times through force and coercion. At the same time, many were sympathetic to the plight of African Americans. In 1959, A Jewish Reform Quarterly commented on these sentiments, "many [Southern Jews] have a vague feeling that segregation is morally wrong. Subconsciously, they feel that the segregation of the Negro is similar, if not identical, to the ghettoization of the Jew. They realize that the treatment of the Negro is a manifestation of prejudice."[84] However, most remained silent as African Americans fought for equality.

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[81] ibid, 17
[82] ibid, 16
[83] Eric J. Sundquist, *Strangers in the Land: Blacks, Jews, Post-Holocaust America* (Harvard University Press, 2005), 192
[84] Wax, "The Attitude of the Jews in the South Toward Integration", 17

Southern Jews did not want to jeopardize the social standing they had gained in Southern society by the end of World War II. When the Supreme Court decided on *Brown Versus Board of Education* in 1954, "Jews had carved a comfortable niche in southern society."[85] Jews now had earned economic prosperity, high social standing, and the opportunity to participate in civic affairs. In the postwar years, "Jews were most clearly distinguished from the people on the lowest run of the racial hierarchy- blacks- making it far easier for Southern Jews to see themselves among the privileged rather than among the victimized."[86] These inroads, however, depended on being accepted by the gentile majority. Thus, Jews did not want to antagonize their gentile neighbors in anyway and threaten these successes.

Furthermore, some Jews who had lived in the South for generations felt just as Southern as the gentile majority. A few had completely adopted the racist convictions of Southern culture and were just as prejudiced as their gentile neighbors. A small number of Jews were notorious for their support for segregation.[87] These Jews fought against desegregation because "the Civil Rights Movement was … as much a threat to their established way of life as it was to any other white southerner."[88]

Like other Southerners, Jews were threatened with violence if they supported the cause of African Americans. However, their fears were exponentially compounded by the insecurity and ambiguity that they had experienced in the South for generations. In fact,

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[85] Clive Webb, "A Tangled Web: Black-Jewish Relations in the Twentieth-Century South", *Jewish Roots in Southern Soil: A New History*, Ed. Marcie Cohen Ferris and Mark I. Greenberg (Havover: University Press of New England, 2006: 192-209), 195
[86] Seth Forman, "The Unbearable Whiteness of Being Jews: Desegregation in the South and the Crisis of Jewish Liberalism" in *Strangers & Neighbors: Relations Between Blacks & Jews in the United States*, 624
[87] Webb, "Jewish Segregationists", *Fight Against Fear*, 114-146
[88] Webb, "A Tangled Web", 202

their historical status as racial and ethnic outsiders made them more vulnerable to reprisals by the white majority.[89] Concerned for their own safety, Jews remained silent in pubic if in private they did not condone Jim Crow.

Southern Jews also feared that support for African Americans would inspire antisemitism and "even when… Jews… said there had been little overt anti-Semitism [in their communities], they usually admitted that they feared it would develop as racial disputes became central in local thinking, particularly if local Jews disagreed overtly with the attitudes of the white majority."[90] However, their fears were in some ways grounded and "the desegregation crisis was the catalyst for the most dramatic outbreak of anti-Semitism in southern history."[91] According to the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), distribution of antisemitic literature in the South increased by 400 percent in the five years following *Brown v. Board of Education*.[92] Jews were also in many ways scapegoated for the burgeoning racial unrest. *The Virginian*, a pro-segregationist monthly publication based in Newport News, Virginia, published statements such as, "'Jewish obsession with race-mixing often (reaches) neurotic extremes… Jewish spokesmen tirelessly use the big lie in an effort to soften up white resistance to race mongrelization.'"[93]

In 1958, synagogues were bombed in North Carolina, Alabama, and Atlanta, Georgia as a reaction against Southern rabbis who preached integration. After these

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[89] ibid,199
[90] Alfred O. Hero, Jr., *The Southerner and World Affairs* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1965) 496
[91] Webb, "A Tangled Web", 196
[92] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 46
[93] *The Virginian* quoted in "The South: New Field For an Old Game", *The ADL Bulletin* (October 1958), 1

terrorist attacks, an ADL Bulletin publication from 1958 gave voice to fears of resurgent antisemitism. It stated: "an anti-semitic campaign, constantly increasing in intensity, is today being fought in the South. It is submerged in the broad canvas of the war over desegregation… the professional anti-Semite is at work in the South as never before. The issues of desegregation give him his sanction for operating."[94]

Civil Rights activism threatened the peaceful coexistence between Southern Jews and their white neighbors and "Jews south of the Mason-Dixon line lived in a climate of fear and intimidation."[95] It must also be noted that in the South, Jews were more vulnerable to antisemitic backlash for supporting integration from their white neighbors unlike in the North, where there was a larger and more concentrated number of Jews. At the beginning of the desegregation crisis in the South, Jews only constituted about two percent of the entire population of the South and "only four Southern cities [had] Jewish populations in excess of ten thousand." Southern Jews were isolated and did not have the support of a large community against attacks by the overwhelmingly gentile majority. Consequently, "being an infinitesimal fraction of the general population is a fact that has influenced the attitude of Jews toward integration."[96]

The liberal and public stance concerning integration of many Reform, Southern rabbis alarmed Jews in the South. In the South, Jews depended on their rabbis to act as liaisons of the Jewish community to the gentile community. A community's rabbi was deterred from defying social norms and antagonizing their gentile neighbors because he would then lose the support of his congregation. Thus, many Southern Jews urged their

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[94] Arnold Forster, "The South: New Field For An Old Game", *The ADL Bulletin*, Vo.15, No.8. (October 1958), 1
[95] Bauman, *The Quiet Voices,* 68
[96] Wax, "The Attitude of the Jews in the South Toward Integration", 16

rabbis to remain silent for fear of being associated with the Civil Rights Movement. For the few Southern rabbis who did not remain silent, their "individual acts of bravery were denounced as foolhardiness by a Jewish community fearful of antagonizing the white Gentile majority."[97]

The highly public involvement of Northern Jews in the Civil Rights Movement also frightened Jews and created a rift in the American Jewish community. Southern Jews appealed to their Northern coreligionist to not meddle in these affairs since they did not understand how adversely their involvement would affect them. Southerners denounced their Northern coreligionists "for making public efforts to promote racial equality. The southern Jew believed that the endeavors of their Northern coreligionists, such as those in the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, to achieve racial equality triggered the reactions of the Southern bigots."[98] For example, when the Freedom Rider Movement came to the South, Southern Jews feared that they would be associated with integration since two-thirds of the protesters were Northern Jews. In response, Southern Jews "moved swiftly to dissociate themselves from the Freedom Riders."[99]

When building their new lives in the South, Holocaust survivors confronted a Southern society vehemently fighting to hold onto the racial status quo. Survivors also faced a Jewish community plagued by fears of antisemitism inspired by the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. In addition, Americans, Jews and non-Jews alike, did not warmly receive survivors. American Jews felt especially ambivalent about accepting and

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[97] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 21
[98] Dinnerstein, *Uneasy At Home*, 234-235
[99] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 79

welcoming refugees. They feared that the arrival of many Jewish foreigners would again threaten the inroads they had made towards acceptance and success in gentile society. For these reason, many survivors felt extreme pressure to assimilate as quickly as possible, which included accepting the system of Jim Crow.

Thus, Jewish immigrants who came to the United States during and after World War II benefited from the newly won social status of American Jews that required the acceptance of racist and discriminatory attitudes and policies. These newcomers were received as white immigrants who would be accepted into the dominant society once they Americanized. However, as Holocaust survivors confronted Jim Crow and the prejudiced treatment of African Americans, many were troubled by the pervasive racial discrimination.

**V. Holocaust Survivors' First Experiences of Jim Crow**

When Holocaust survivors arrived in the United States between the 1930s and 1950s, the status and treatment of African Americans, especially in the South, laid bare America's 'peculiar' contradiction. In the 'Land of the Free', African Americans did not have full liberties or civil rights. In the North as well as in the South, African Americans were racially segregated from white society and were viewed as second-class citizens. In the North, African Americans lived in a system of *de facto* segregation. Through economic, social and political discrimination, African Americans lived in near poverty in segregated neighborhoods and attended segregated, low quality schools. African Americans also suffered unfair treatment in undesirable and low paying jobs.

However, racist attitudes and discriminatory policies were most entrenched in the South. Jim Crow laws encompassed every part of Southern Life. Jim Crow laws

mandated *de jure* racial segregation in all aspects of Southern society, "from education to public transportation, from health care and housing to the use of public facilities."[100] Jim Crow laws also prohibited marriage and sexual relations between blacks and whites. Furthermore, many policies, as well as intimidation, prevented African Americans from voting and exercising their civil rights and liberties. The racial etiquette of the South consistently demonstrated the inferiority of African Americans at every chance, including the fact that African Americans could not try on clothes at stores or sample foods at markets. This racial prejudice at times resulted in violent persecution. Although lynching of African Americans peaked in the 19th century, this murderous consequence of persistent racism continued into the 20th century. In the 20th century, "the burden of slavery and a history of segregation and state sponsored racial oppression and authoritarianism shaped the South."[101] Although the 1950s marked a watershed moment in the fight for equality beginning with the *Brown Versus Board of Education* decision in 1954, racial segregation and inequality persisted well into the 1970s.

America's rhetoric of liberty and equality only existed for its white population (in which Jews had only recently joined its ranks). This injustice disturbed many Holocaust survivors. Many survivors remember their surprise at the site of segregated buses and water fountains. Due to their initial ignorance of Jim Crow laws, many survivors' first experiences with racism in the South showed their horrified shock and lack of understanding in facing this situation. Bella Urbach Solnik, a Polish Jew who survived the Lodz ghetto and slave labor in various concentration camps, reflects upon he first

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[100] Susan Falck, "Jim Crow Legislation Overview"*, The History of Jim Crow (*New York Life) Accessed 1 February 2012. http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/resources/lessonplans/hs_es_jim_crow_laws.htm

[101] Moore, "Separate Paths", 277

experiences with Jim Crow. After coming to Atlanta in 1949, she remembers one experience where she was forcibly moved from sitting next to an African American woman on a bus in Atlanta. It was in this moment that she fully realized the great paradox of the 'Land of the Free', "I learned how that, actually, the black people didn't have the same rights than the white people, which was very, very surprise to me. I thought I'm coming to a free country."[102]

Sigmund Tobia, a Jewish refugee from Germany, noticed for the first time on a train from San Francisco to New York the designation of 'whites' and 'colored' to enforce segregation at a stop in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He was shocked by these practices and in recalling this moment, Sigmund explains, "'I reacted as if I had been slapped in the face.'"[103] Gilbert Metz, a survivor of Auschwitz and Dachau, first encountered bigotry working in his uncle's store in Mississippi. He recalls his reaction to Jim Crow, "'my uncle had two water fountains in the store; one was marked 'colored' and the other 'white'. And it was a big mystery to me…I thought it was the silliest thing I'd ever heard in my life.'"[104]

Clara Eisenstein, a Polish Jew who survived slave labor in a Polish ghetto, was extremely distressed by Jim Crow policies when she first arrived in New Orleans before moving to Atlanta in 1949. She remembers how at first she could not understand why African Americans could not sit in the front of the bus and she could not sit in the back:

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[102] Bella Urbach Solnik, Interview by The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum. *New Lives: Coming to America Exhibit,* http://www.thebreman.org/exhibitions/online/newlives/profile.php?ID=50 Accessed 1 November 2011

[103] Helmreich, *Against All Odds,* 43

[104] ibid, 44

> It was unbelievably painful to me, to us, all of us. And going to the store to work I was taking bus. And there was never room in the front to sit down. And I would go way back to sit between the black people. I didn't have the slightest idea I shouldn't do it. I didn't understand English. I didn't know what's going on really yet. And they [the white Americans] would look at me and… I was wondering why they looking at me…They saw idiot women who doesn't understand what they talking to her.[105]

Henry Friedman, a Hungarian Jew who immigrated to Atlanta in 1950 after growing up with antisemitism and surviving abuse in slave labor camps in Hungary, also remembers how at first he could not understand the system of Jim Crow:

> I remember about very vividly, I remember drinking fountains for 'colored only', for 'white only'. I didn't know why… I never agreed but I actually I did not comprehend. It did not came to me exactly why is that. I was never able to justify in the beginning. Later on naturally I learned about the hatred one race against the other one. I learned about the difference. But I never knew why and I never agreed with it why. Why something like that.[106]

Josef Golcman, a Polish survivor who lived through the horrors of ghetto life, was so disturbed by the segregationist policies of buses he never went on a bus again. He recalls his first and only experience on a bus in Savannah, Georgia in 1949:

> So I got in on the bus. And I came and I sat down. As I sat down later came up a [black] lady and the bus was full. And the lady came, the black lady, and that time we didn't know black, white. We were in Europe we didn't know this. And she was pregnant. And she was standing there and she never sat down. So I got up and let her sit down. The guy stopped the bus and he said, 'can you read there'. Now I know what he said but before I didn't know. That the whites there, blacks there, and the whites here in the front. He said, 'you no get up and no let her sit down'. And he said, 'sit down'. And I said, 'no I'm not going to sit down'. And I went down off the bus. And never was on a bus, never. I wasn't on MARTA yes, and I never was in on a bus, never.

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[105] Clara Eisenstein, #10174, Interview by Sandra Berman, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 1 May 2001

[106] Henry Friedman, #10220, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 23 October 2000

It is likely that Josef's experiences with virulent antisemitism in Poland affected his strong reaction against Jim Crow and anti-black racism. Earlier in his interview, he discusses the extreme antisemitic attitudes and behaviors of his Polish, gentile neighbors that existed before the war and only escalated during the war. At points these experiences were too painful to talk about. In his interview, he explains, "before the war, close to the war, we were afraid in the daytime, afraid in the nighttime… But painful to even talk about."[107]

In small rural towns, Jewish survivors encountered a more extreme discrimination against African Americans. Herbert Kohn immigrated to Demopolis, Alabama with his family in 1940 and worked on farms alongside African Americans. He and his family had escaped from Germany shortly after Kristallnacht. He remembers how traumatic the anti-Jewish discriminatory measures and attitudes were for him and his family, especially the segregationist measures. Starting a new life in the South, Hebert milked cows with African American farmers and also brought them water while they were working in the fields. Herbert recalls how difficult it was adjusting to a life where he worked alongside African Americans whom he felt were treated as if they were basically still share croppers just out of slavery. He explains:

> The town we lived in was Demopolis, which had 5,000 population. 3,000 African Americans. 2,000 whites. Completely segregated. The schools were segregated. And actually the black population was only one year out of slavery literally. Especially on the farms. They worked from sun up 'til sun down for one dollar a day…We were right next to work alongside of them. With them. And it was a tremendous adjustment to make… They were a whole different class of people and they were completely dominated economically, they had no opportunities.

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[107] Josef Golcman, #10249, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 23 May 2001

> They were not treated as equals, they were not treated as United States citizens that we were so proud of to become.

He remembers specific discriminatory restrictions against African Americans:

> We rode on the back of the truck with them when we went to town. Because they were only allowed on the back of the truck. Even from the farmer. Yes those people had to be off the streets in Demopolis by sundown except on Saturdays… They were allowed to do that on Saturdays. But if they got in any kind of trouble or any kind of fight…the town police would not think twice about shooting somebody and there was no investigation of who killed who. It was just. It was very difficult, very different from anything we'd ever been accustomed to… And we were very close to the people because we were in the barns milking cows. And we were out in the fields working next to it.[108]

Some survivors were so disturbed by the extent of racist practices in the South that they relocated to the North because they could not handle the prejudice and discrimination that was a part of their acculturation. Lola Shtupak, a survivor of various ghettos and concentration camps, moved to New York after living in the South due to her traumatic experiences with anti-black racism and Jim Crow. In one incident in the South, she remembers how she sat down in the back of the bus in Houston, "'a man came over, a cowboy, and he grabbed me and threw me off the bus. When I came home, my aunt said: 'you're lucky he didn't kill you because they thought you're a troublemaker, fighting for the blacks.'" She also remembers the racism that infected her American relatives, "my aunt gave her black maid food that we wouldn't eat and made her eat outside, like a dog. When I fought with her, she called me a communist. So I saw this was no life for me and I left for New York.'"[109]

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[108] Herbert Kohn, #10407, Interview by Michele Lesser, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 16 November 2000

[109] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*, 44

However, some survivors who settled in the South were not as affected by Jim Crow policies. One reason is that some survivors did not venture outside of their Jewish communities. Issues such as segregation did not trouble Isle Schwartz, a German Jewish refugee who fled after Kristallnacht, because she mostly associated with the Jewish community in Atlanta. When her interviewer asked, 'how do you feel coming to a city that was in the midst of the Jim Crow and the segregated races? I mean, what was that like coming from Germany', Isle responded, "that didn't bother me at all because I associated only with Jewish people, so that didn't bother me at all. And I was busy studying and working."[110]

Likewise, Myra Green, a Polish survivor who grew up with the virulent antisemitism of her Polish gentile neighbors and survived Auschwitz, has no reflections on Jim Crow because she remained insulated in the Jewish community of Atlanta. After coming to Atlanta in 1949, she felt distant from the racial policies and tensions because she only associated with the Jewish community, "I'll tell you the truth. We had nothing to do with them. We had nothing to do with the blacks or with the whites. We lived with us. You know with the Jewish people. And we always had you know something good with us. Go to the seder, go to shabbas, and we davvening."[111]

Francis Bunzl, who suffered through the escalation of antisemitic measures in Germany and fled after Kristallnacht, did not feel that segregation made much of a difference in her life. When asked directly if she had any memories of the years of

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[110] Isle Schwartz, #10629, Interview by Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 17 March 2004

[111] Myra Green, Interview by The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum. *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum

segregation, she responded, "not so much personally." Arriving in Atlanta in 1941, she simply does not have any reflections concerning Jim Crow after immigrating to the South.[112]

Alan J. Hall did not dwell upon segregationist policies. A Polish Jew, Alan had experienced virulent antisemitism his whole life until fleeing across the Russian border upon the German invasion of Poland. Growing up in Krakow, Hall remembers how Jews were segregated from the gentile community and considered second-class citizens. Living in Atlanta since 1947, Alan did not feel that Jim Crow policies were a major factor in Southern life. He felt that the United States was overall a free society. He explains, "This is an open society. Always was. And the Jim Crows, etcetera, at least from, I can only speak from 1950 on. They were never really a major factor. They were a factor, but not major."[113]

Albert Baron, who moved to Atlanta from Quebec in the 1970s, also did not feel anti-black racism existed on such a great scale. A French Jew, Albert and his family fled to the French countryside after his father was caught and arrested in a roundup of Jews during the war. They remained in hiding until eventually finding refuge in Quebec, Canada in 1944. After moving to Atlanta in the 1970s, Albert remembers his first thoughts concerning the issue of race in the South, "Surprising enough I did not see as much racism as I had been forewarned… It was really at least from what I saw here a little over blown." Albert remembers noticing the complete separation of white and black

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[112] Francis Hamburger Bunzl, #10366, Interview by Sara Ghitis, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 13 December 2005

[113] Alan J. Hall, #10782, Interview by Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 29 July 2011

neighborhoods in Atlanta, but he still believed that racial inequalities and tensions in Atlanta were less pronounced. He notes, "There was a difference that you could feel. But you know Atlanta, as I said, Atlanta it was too busy to hate. There was some truth to it. The blacks were not as militant here as I noticed or experienced in even in Chicago or most other cities."[114] However, it must be noted that desegregation processes had been underway for about two decades by the time Albert moved to Atlanta and thus the situation was remarkably improved.

**VI. Holocaust Survivors Perceive a Connection with African Americans**

Some Holocaust survivors used the framework of their own experiences of prejudice and persecution under Nazi rule to understand racism and Jim Crow policies in the South. They saw the situation of African Americans through the lens of their own confrontations with Nazi racism. Some even related their own experiences of prejudice under Nazi rule to the situation of African Americans in the South. The work of sociologist Erving Goffman sheds light on this phenomenon. Goffman defines framework as a specific way of perceiving and describing an event. Each person infuses their interpretation of an event with their own meaning based on their individual history. He theorizes, "observers actively project their frames of reference into the world immediately around them." Thus, for many survivors, their past history "enforce[d] an additional meaning" onto their understanding of the plight of African Americans.[115]

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[114] Albert Baron, #10055, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 17 January 2001

[115] Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis: An Essay On the Organization of Experience* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1986), 39

For many survivors, their first memories of persecution under Nazi rule began with segregationist policies and for this reason Jim Crow was especially disturbing. These were Jews who "had been denied seating on German park benches labeled Nur Für Arier (Aryans only), and who ended by fleeing for their lives. When these Jewish refugees read the White Only signs displayed matter-of-factly in… restrooms and drinking fountains, restaurant and theater entrances, park benches and public libraries, they protested to their new American friends: 'but this is like Hitler.'"[116] Josephine Heyman, a native of Atlanta who assisted with the settlement of Jewish war refugees in Atlanta, remembers how survivors pointed to parallels in their situation under Nazi rule and African Americans. She recalls how she would respond, "'now look, there's a big difference between sitting in the back of a streetcar and being led to a gas chamber, being killed. And they said, yes, of course they did, but they thought that was the beginning and that was the way they got started.'"[117]

Survivors were shocked at racism against African Americans because some felt that it was "an equally vicious form of discrimination" as the antisemitism that they experienced in Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.[118] When Henry and Helen Lasoski first arrived in New Orleans, the racial tension and segregation practices disturbed them "because it was reminiscent of the pre-war discrimination that marked the beginning of the Nazi terror."[119] They had grown up with virulent Polish antisemitism and had survived Polish ghettos and various concentration camps during the war.

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[116] Melissa Fay Greene, *The Temple Bombing* (London: Vintage, 1997), 80
[117] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 38
[118] ibid, 38
[119] Lasoski, *Helen Przerchadski Lasoski,* 34

Jack Gay had experienced the gradual escalation of antisemitic measures in Germany. When he resettled in Atlanta in 1939, he so disapproved of the racism he encountered in the South and explains, "'especially of course having been persecuted in Germany. It was the furthest thing from our mind to feel superior to anyone else.'"[120] When Clara Eisenstein came to New Orleans and saw how African Americans could not walk on the same sidewalks at the same time as a white individual, she remembers the emotions and thoughts it elicited, "Terrible. Painful. Terrible. I said I came back to the same what I left."[121]

Eddie King had no knowledge of anti-black racism that existed in the United States before he immigrated. When he first witnessed Jim Crow customs, Eddie was so disturbed because it distinctly reminded him of the painful experiences living in Poland. Growing up in Poland, antisemitism was a part of his daily life. He also lived through life in a Warsaw Ghetto but eventually fled to Russian territories, where he was also bullied as a Jew. Although he lived in New York until moving to Atlanta in the 1970s, Eddie traveled extensively in the South for business since arriving in the United States in 1941. He recalls his first experiences with Jim Crow in the South that reminded him of the prejudice against Jews in Poland:

> I was in Dexter, Georgia… And I remember distinctly because I was the one that was walking on the sidewalk there, and this man stepped off, and I thought he was crossing the street, but then I saw him walk back on the sidewalk after I passed. And I was with somebody, and I said, 'what the heck was that all about?' You know? He says, 'well, that's the way they are in the South. Dexter, Georgia's still South South. They're still fighting the Civil War here.'… It reminded me of Poland… Because when you saw a German walking on the sidewalk you better get the heck off and bow, and get off. Have to actually physically go like that and get off the damn sidewalk. And he could be a corporal or some moron, but you

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[120] Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 38
[121] Clara Eisenstein, *The Legacy Project*

> have to respect him. To an officer, just an ordinary moron, and you have to do that.

Later in the interview Eddie recalls another experience with Jim Crow on one of his business trips to Albany, Georgia. He remembers reacting so negatively to it because it again reminded him of his experiences in Poland:

> And when I came South, I worked for this company, and I traveled to Albany, Georgia and places like that and I used to see black people walking off the sidewalk when you were walking. They would step off the sidewalk. I said, 'This got to be crazy. It's just like the Jews in Poland.' A Jew had to step off the sidewalk if a German was coming or a Pole was coming. Step off the sidewalk. Or else you were shot or beaten. I said, 'My God, this is like Poland.' That's what rang in my head. I said, 'God Almighty, this is just like Poland!' A black man is walking, you have to, he has to step off the sidewalk, like you're better than he is. And it annoyed me, okay? It annoyed me.

Because of his experiences with antisemitism in Poland that led to the most extreme consequences of discrimination, all forms of prejudice trouble Eddie King. He tells his interviewer, "And any prejudice now bothers me. I don't care whether it's against a black, a white, a purple. Prejudice bothers me an awful lot. That's how it starts. That's how I lived with, I lived with prejudice since I'm a baby. Okay? And I just can't see it. It bothers me, okay? It bothers me."[122]

Jeanine Storch, who lived through the German occupation of France and the subsequent antisemitic prejudice and persecution, recalls her first experience with segregated bus seating after moving to Atlanta in 1949. It distinctly reminded her of her painful confrontations with antisemitic Nazi policies:

> So I took the bus and the first time that I took the bus, I go into the bus, there are maybe two white people sitting in the front. In the back of the bus is all black people, standing room only. And I walked in and I wanted so much to go and sit

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[122] Eddie King, #10398, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 6 March 2009

> with them, but I didn't have the courage. And I sat in the front and I cried because it reminded me when during the war, when I was a teenager, and I would take the Metro subway in Paris, and I was only allowed to go to the last wagon as a Jew. …. And here I found myself, the same thing, these black people were not allowed to sit in the front and I didn't have the courage - just like the French people, I accepted the system. And so it made me very, very sad, and I was happy that eventually, these unfair practices disappeared.

Jeanine comments again in the interview how Jim Crow policies reminded her of her life under Nazi rule in France. She relates another memory of segregation in Paris to that in Atlanta:

> But when they [French gentiles] were sitting in the train and they would see me with my yellow star running to catch the last wagon, they had this blank look on their face, they weren't, they were looking through me, and I always used to think how cowardly that was. And, but, nobody was bad to me, but how cowardly it was. And here I was in same type of situation and I didn't have the courage to do anything. And I thought if I go and sit there and I start speaking with my accent they may even put me in jail. So it was a strange feeling, at first, when I came here, or to see the, to go in a government building and to see a water fountain that said 'colored' and the other one that said 'white'. I remember in the park in Paris and in the surrounding area where it said, 'No Dogs and No Jews Allowed'. And so it was painful to see that.[123]

Similarly to Jeanine, Erica Komisarow remembers how the situation of African Americans in the South reminded her of the discrimination she experienced in Nazi occupied France. Erica survived the war years hiding in the French countryside. However, her father was caught in one of the Jewish roundups, where he was sent to and died in Auschwitz. After immigrating to the United States in 1953, she lived in multiple places in the South, such as Jacksonville, Florida, Atlanta, Georgia, and Fort Wayne, Texas. Erica recalls how her encounters with Southern racism reminded her of her own experiences in France during the war, "it bothered me a lot… you know the, what is it,

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[123] Jeanine Storch, #10704, Interview by Marsha Bruner, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 18 January 2001

the Jim Crow, I remember being in Paris and my subway stop was the first car and Jews were supposed to go in the last one. And one time, one of the conductor told me go in the last car."[124]

Jack Storch, Jeanine Storch's husband, also recalls his encounters with Jim Crow policies that he related to his experiences in the Holocaust. A Polish Jew, Jack survived the Lodz ghetto, slave labor and Auschwitz. Upon immigrating to Atlanta in 1947, he recalls how Jim Crow reminded him of his experiences in Nazi concentration camps:

> Well a matter of fact when I bought my restaurant on Marietta Street I was not allowed to serve to black people. The black people had to come behind the kitchen and we set up a few tables there and that's where we served them. But it was also, it was horrendous due to the fact I have experienced quite a bit in that department. And it reminded me of when I was in prison with the Germans in concentration camps.[125]

Bella Urbach Solnik remembers how she felt after her first experience with segregation on a bus in Atlanta, "I felt sorry for them, I felt, you know, me as being a slave and…not equal… it was painful for me to see it." She saw a connection between her experience as a slave and the prejudiced treatment that African Americans suffered in Atlanta when she arrived in the South, "We actually felt very sorry about the black the way, in that time, the black people should sit in the back [or] when we went to the doctor. They had bathrooms special for the blacks, separate for the white. And it bother us coming from, we came from they keep us as slave. We couldn't [understand] that people are not treated equal."

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[124] Erica Komisarow, #10410, Interview by Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 15 June 2003

[125] Jack Storch, #10704, Interview by Marsha Bruner, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 18 January 2001

Bella was disturbed by segregationist practices because it reminded her of her experiences in the Holocaust in an additional and distinct way. She remembers vividly her first bus ride in Atlanta, in which she sat next to an African American woman and was asked to move to the front of the bus. She grew troubled that someone in America was taking away her freedom, just like in Poland:

> I went to sit down next to a black lady, a really black middle age lady. She still stays in the front of my eyes. And some people came up and said I should go sit in the front. And I said, 'why'. And they said, 'because you can't sit next to a black lady.' And I said, 'Hitler is dead. Nobody will tell me what to do. I'll sit here.' So another person came up and told me to move to go in the front and I didn't want to move. I felt nobody can tell me now anymore because it's after the war. I'll sit wherever I want to… And other people came over, I mean, people came constantly over, didn't want to let me sit there. When the black lady understood more than I did so she got up and she walked away from me. So that was the first experience.[126]

Paula Popowski, a Polish Jew who was sent to labor camps and different ghettos throughout Poland, remembers witnessing the laws of racial segregation in the South in her very first days in the United States in 1947. Traveling by train from New York to her new home in South Carolina, Paula was shocked to see how African Americans had to get off the train to back carts as they stopped in Washington, D.C. This troubled her because it reminded her of her own experiences with discrimination:

> And we came to Washington [and] the black people had to get off the train and go in the back. Mason Dixon line. And I said 'oh, why they doing that'. Because we were so discriminated and here they [too]. Then we came to South Carolina. There was another story on the buses. They had to sit in the back. When the front and if they was no room to sit down, and was room in the front and they didn't let them sit in the front. That was the South Carolina law… I really didn't like it. I

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[126] Bella Urbach Solnik, #10672, Interview by John Kent and Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 13 February 2001

> really didn't like it. I said 'why do they do that'. You know, it took us a little time to get used to people another color. At that time in Charleston.[127]

Similarly, Rubin Pichulik recalls his first time dealing with segregation in public transportation after immigrating to Atlanta in 1951. A Polish Jew, Rubin fled to Russia during the war years and spent the war in slave labor camps in Siberia. His memories of discrimination against African Americans in the South directly reminded him of his experiences with antisemitism in Poland. He felt that African Americans must feel the same way he did when he lived in Poland:

> I feel very bad about this. I feel like I been discriminated in Poland and we did not have the rights with the Polish people and we no had the rights to work in the government job or even in the city job. In Poland you had no, want no have Jewish men who used to work in the post office or even outside janitor… [Jews] not on the streetcars. Not in the offices. Not in the post office. No kind job. A Jewish man not able to have this in Poland. And that was new to me and when I came over and they [African Americans] probably feel like I been feeling in Poland. And that is not right.[128]

A couple who lived in New Orleans for their first six months in the United States after surviving a concentration camp were frightened by the 'white' and 'colored' signs. These stark markers of segregation reminded them of their experiences with antisemitism in Nazi occupied Europe. They recount their initial reactions:

> They struck a terrible chord. Even long before we were arrested and taken away to the camps, there had been these signs forbidding Jews to sit in the park, or to walk certain places. My husband and I were frightened of the regime in the South the moment we saw this and we decided, as soon as we could, to get out of there whatever we had to do. We left after six months, and came North; there was no use

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[127] Paula Popowski, #10546, Interview by Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 1 October 2003

[128] Rubin Pichulik, #10532, Interview by The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 1 January 2001

> trying, we could never be comfortable, because racial laws meant only one thing to us.[129]

The first time Hilde Hoffman, a German refugee, was confronted with Jim Crow was on her very first day in Asheville, North Carolina in 1946. She was walking in a park with her fiancé when she approached a water fountain. At the water fountain she saw the disturbing evidence of Jim Crow. She remembers this moment vividly:

> When I got there, there was a sign on it, 'Whites Only', and I couldn't believe my eyes. And I ran back [to my fiancé] and said, 'What does it mean. Does it mean tomorrow that there will be a sign that there are 'No Jews Allowed'. Am I back in Germany?' And I was terribly upset... I couldn't go have a drink. I felt just awful...For weeks I couldn't get over this business, whites only.[130]

Hilde had experienced the rise of antisemitism and discrimination in her hometown of Leipzig, Germany, which was extremely traumatizing for her. She managed to escape Nazi persecution after Kristallnacht in 1938, although her parents both were murdered in concentration camps. These experiences led her to perceive an explicit connection to the plight of African Americans in the South, which deeply disturbed her.

Jaap Groen, who learned about Jim Crow as a young boy in Amsterdam, Holland, perceived a connection to the situation of African Americans even before immigrating to the United States. As a young child, Jaap learned about the situation of African Americans in the United States through a black friend, Rosie Paul, who lectured him about issues, such as Jim Crow. When Hitler came to power in Germany and enacted discriminatory measures against the Jews, Jaap connected the situation to his knowledge of the status of African Americans in the United States. He remembers his early

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[129] Rabinowitz, *New Lives,*106-107

[130] Hilde Hoffman, Interview by the William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum. *New Lives: Coming to America Exhibit*, http://www.thebreman.org/exhibitions/online/newlives/profile.php?ID=108. Accessed 1 November 2011

education of American anti-black racism through Rosie, "and that's where I learned what segregation meant, which we found out as Jews when Hitler came in. And that always stuck with me. And now I come to the United States [and see Jim Crow] after what I experience during the war in the camps." With the start of the war, Jaap suffered in various prisons and work camps in Holland. After Germans arrested him for his participation in underground Dutch resistance movements, he was deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, was experimented on by Dr. Josef Mengele, and then later was transferred to Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. Jaap also lived through a Death March from Mauthausen until Liberation. He finally immigrated to the United States in 1957 and settled in Atlanta.

Interestingly, what upset Jaap greatly about the racial inequality in the United States was that he believed that Jews in the South did not feel badly about the situation or act to change it. This was especially disturbing to him because he felt that their knowledge of the Holocaust should have motivated them to help other oppressed minorities. He explains:

> And what made it so difficult. It was not even living in it, but to find out that my fellow Jewish people had almost the same idea about it… that was tough on me. It was not easy for me to accept that my own people. They didn't go to the concentration [camp]- but I did go to the concentration camp and they should know now what it is. And they were just like them. Not all of them, but most of them…. I thought that all Jews would be against another segregation or another ugly attitude. Not here.[131]

Henry Friedman had grown up in a Hungarian community plagued by pervasive antisemitism before surviving slave labor during the war. When asked about his

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[131] Jaap Groen, #10295, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 20 March 2009

perception of the African American population in Atlanta in the 1950s, Henry Friedman responded:

> I cannot afford that luxury, that to discriminate, what happened to me, to discriminate one against someone else or one race against someone else. Because that is what I went through because I was discriminate[d against]. So how can I discriminate, how can I look down one race against the other one…I would like that I would be able all my life to judge someone by their character and not by color of their skin.[132]

Ernst Moritz Manasse, a German refugee who became a professor in a historically black college, North Carolina Central in Durham, remembers how witnessing anti-black racism pained him because he connected it to his experience under Nazi Germany: "'well, I came from a situation of forceful segregation where we were the victims and now suddenly I was on the other side; I belonged not to the oppressed but to the oppressor. And that was certainly very, very uncomfortable for me.'"[133] Professor John Herz, a German refugee, taught at a historically black college, Howard, in Washington, D.C. He recalls how explicitly he perceived a connection between African Americans. They, too, were oppressed and were subjected to racial prejudice and hate in the same way that Jews were under Nazi rule:

> Here were people with whom I could empathize because they were also victims of racial policies and racial persecution. And I think that especially in the case of Ralph Bunche, that established right away a bond (Bunche was then chairman of the Political Science department at Howard) because Bunche had that feeling that these German refugees, Jews and others were –especially Jews because of so-called racial persecution, racial policies of Hitler- were- there was something which- which how you say- make them close to their own experience and their own fate. They were discriminated here in this country and- as we were or had been in- in Europe.[134]

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[132] Henry Friedman, *The Legacy Project*
[133] Gabrielle Simon Edgcomb, *From Swastika to Jim Crow: Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges* (Krieger Publishing Co., 1993), 71
[134] Ibid, 80

However some survivors did not perceive any parallels between their experiences with prejudice and discrimination against African Americans in the South. When Herbert Kohn was asked if the treatment of African Americans reminded him of his experiences in Germany, he responded, "it's a good point and I hadn't thought about that a great deal."[135]

While some survivors did perceive a connection to the experiences of African Americans, some did not go as far as to say they were in any way parallel. Earlier in her interview Paula Popowski made a comment about feeling a connection to the plight of African Americans. She later vehemently explains, "there is no parallel for that. As much as the demonstrations…Charleston pretty much adjusted to it. We did not have any episodes like beating up or shooting at somebody or no. So how can you compare. They had demonstrations. And they demonstrated very peacefully." In fact, Paula's daughter-in-law, Mindy, tried to make a comparison between Paula's situation in Europe and the situation of African Americans in the South. Paula explained comparing the two situations ignored the uniqueness of her experience in the Holocaust. She remembers feeling hurt by this, "[Mindy tried to] generalize how the people in the South… I said 'Mindy', I don't argue with her, but I said 'please don't generalize'."[136] Rebecca Lasoski, the grandchild of survivor Helen Lasoski, uncovered similar sentiments when she interviewed her grandmother. She notes how Helen did not draw comparisons of "the ghettos to the urban projects in many large cities that congregated poor blacks in one location."[137]

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[135] Herbert Kohn, *The Legacy Project*
[136] Paula Popowski, *The Legacy Project*
[137] Lasoski, *Helen Lasoski*, 37

The perception of a shared plight as victims of prejudice between Holocaust survivors and African Americans served as a reference point for how many survivors understood their experiences under Nazi persecution. Additionally, it provided a framework for not only their experiences in the Holocaust, but for their new lives in the South, as well. It contributed to their understanding of anti-black racism that pervaded Southern society. The response of these survivors validates Sigal and Weinfeld's study in *Trauma and Rebirth,* which found that, "those affected by the Holocaust would be more opposed to the principles of Nazism and thus more committed to democratic beliefs and civil liberties, and more tolerant of minorities. Survivors would, as former victims, have more compassion for other victims, and they and their descendents might undertake actions that would prevent a repetition of the victimization they suffered."[138] The testimony of survivors used in this thesis's research shows that many survivors drew their empathy for the plight of African Americans from their own confrontations with prejudice and persecution in Europe. Many survivors perceived parallels that heightened their compassion for African Americans and their distress over Jim Crow.

However, another study's hypothesis that Holocaust survivors would display more empathy with victims of prejudice, persecution, and even genocide was proven wrong. Groth surveyed 196 Holocaust survivors and questioned them as to whether they saw some or any equivalence to the Holocaust and events in Bosnia, Rwanda, and Cambodia. Goth placed the responses on a "four-point ordinal scale that measures the

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[138] Nancy Isserman, "Political Tolerance and Intolerance: Using Qualitative Interviews to Understand the Attitudes of Holocaust Survivors", *Contemporary Jewry* 29 (2009), Accessed 10 November 2011, http://web.ebscohost.com.proxy.library.emory.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?sid=4ec5db1a-c8b5-4989-8d22-afbf6c3cad3a%40sessionmgr13&vid=5&hid=18), 27

degree of empathy among our survivors."[139] 39% saw no comparability; 14% saw little comparability; 33% saw some comparability; and 12% saw quite a lot of comparability. His research with this group shows that survivors' empathy for other victims of prejudice and persecution is somewhat low. He also found that, "generally speaking… the *greater* the respondents' *past suffering*, the *less* sympathetic their reactions to the Bosnians, the Cambodians, and the Rwandans."[140] Of the survivors surveyed, their empathy for victims of persecution was inversely related to the extent of their suffering in the Holocaust.

There are numerous studies like those conducted by Sigal and Weinfeld and Groth and results are extremely varied. However, it must be noted that interviews with Holocaust survivors used in this thesis's research were conducted decades after survivors arrived in the South and first witnessed anti-black racism and policies of Jim Crow. When survivors immigrated to the United States in the late 1940s and 1950s, many were discouraged from speaking about their experiences in the Holocaust. Many also did not want to talk about their experiences, themselves, because they were too traumatic. For these reasons, it might have been hard for survivors to connect their experiences in the Holocaust to the plight of African Americans suffering under Jim Crow. While studies may prove the empathy or lack of empathy that survivors exhibit for other victims of prejudice based on their experiences in the Holocaust, it ignores the fact that most survivors silenced and buried their traumatic memories in their first years in America. Thus, survivors' experiences in the Holocaust may not have acted as a distinct factor in their empathy for African Americans when they first arrived in the United States. Only in

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[139] Alexander J. Groth, *Holocaust Voices: An Attitudinal Survey of Survivors* (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2003), 182
[140] ibid, 185

the 1960s did discussion of the Holocaust and Holocaust testimony become more acceptable and mainstream. Only then, when the Holocaust became a part of the public conscious and discourse, was there an appropriate avenue for a perceived connection to and heightened empathy for the plight of African Americans in the South.

**VII. Holocaust Survivors and African Americans in the South**

However, this perceived connection to the plight of African Americans did not motivate many survivors to challenge the status quo of the black-white divide in the South. Yet, many Holocaust survivors in the South did develop relationships with the African American community through business, especially in the retail trade. Most Holocaust survivors owned grocery markets and other similar types of stores. In Atlanta, many Holocaust survivors took over grocery stores from Russian immigrants, whom had opened up stores in African American neighborhoods decades before. Survivors also opened up grocery businesses, themselves, in African American neighborhoods, which brought them into direct contact with this minority group. Most of these new immigrants had little capital upon arrival in the United States and for many their only options were to start small stores in African American neighborhoods. For instance, "interviews with survivors in Atlanta indicate that it was limited opportunities that propelled the survivors into ownership of mom-and-pop stores there."[141] Thus, many of these Jewish immigrants often dominated businesses that catered to African Americans. This did not pose a problem for survivors because "coming from the ghettos of Eastern Europe, they did not have the anti-black attitudes common to native whites."[142]

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[141] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*, 306
[142] Ruth Schuster, *The Refugee Jewish Grocery Store Owner In the Black Ghetto of Atlanta,* Folder 00-060 VIF S in The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Archives of the

Business usually ran smoothly and many survivors comment on the great relationships they had with their African American customers. Bella Urbach Solnik's husband opened up a grocery store in Atlanta in an African American neighborhood. In her interview, she explains how her husband got along well with his customers.[143] Similarly, Josef Golcman owned a delicatessen that also operated as a supermarket in Savannah, Georgia. His clientele was mostly African American. He remembers how he always had a great relationship with his African American customers and treated them with kindness, even though that was not the norm in the South, "I was the best man with schwartze (blacks)… When I opened the store, schwartze worked for me. I didn't know [about anti-black racism], now I know more or less… but they are human beings."[144] Helen and Harry Lasoski opened a dry goods store in New Orleans. The Lasoskis believed that employing African Americans in their store, catering to them as their clientele, and using African American nannies for their children "was evidence of their belief in equality for all."[145]

However, as the Civil Rights Movement began to gain more traction in the 1960s, many Jewish refugees left these businesses due to the growing racial tension. In fact, "in the late 1960s, vandalism, boycotts and attacks on Jewish grocers by blacks became frequent."[146] For instance, the Lasoskis' dry goods store suffered from numerous robberies in New Orleans' black business district.[147] Rubin Pichulik's store in Atlanta also experienced conflicts in the African American neighborhood in which it was located.

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William Breman Jewish Heritage Museum, 3
[143] Bella Urbach Solnik, *The Legacy Project*
[144] Josef Golcman, *The Legacy Project*
[145] Lasoski, *Helen Lasoski*, 37
[146] Schuster, *The Refugee Jewish Grocery Store owner In the Black Ghetto of Atlanta*, 7
[147] Lasoski, *Helen Lasoski*, 45

His wife, Sarah, remembers these difficult times, "the store was not too good either… A few times a week we have hold ups…what could we do."[148]

Rella Solksy Sloman, a Lithuanian Jew who survived ghettos and forced labor in concentration camps, owned a grocery market in Atlanta and recalls the Atlanta riots in the 1960s. She remembers how the first riot took place at her supermarket, "If you remember, Dixie Hills had the first tsouris (trouble) from the schwartzes." Before the riots, Rella explains that she had a good relationship with her African American customers, who in fact often offered condolences for her and her husband's experiences in the war. However, the riots affected the Slomans greatly and even reminded them of the violence against Jews in Europe, "it was terrible, that was very scary… It wasn't very good, you know, not pleasant at all. Memories, a lot of memories... I wouldn't talk about it, *veh lo haya naim. Me'od lo* (and it wasn't pleasant. Not at all)." The Slomans were so scarred by the rioting, which reminded them of the violent persecution of Jews in Europe, that they soon sold their market.[149]

Simon Fraley recalls the positive relationships he had with his African American customers in his grocery store in Atlanta. A Polish Jew, Simon grew up with virulent antisemitism. He survived the war by escaping to Russia and working as a forced laborer. After immigrating to Atlanta in 1949, he first opened a grocery store called Carver's Market in an African American neighborhood. In his interview, he reminisces fondly about his relationship with his African American customers:

The black people love me. They were buddy buddy with me. They even came to

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[148] Rubin Pichuluk, *The Legacy Project*
[149] Rella Solsky Sloman, #10663, Interview by Sara Ghitis and Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 17 March 2004

> my new shop in Lenox Square to visit me. [They always screamed],'Simon!'… They just like Simon. When they come to the shop they need a cola, I gave them a coke. They need on the bus back then a dime or I think fifteen… so I gave them for the bus. But it makes no difference. I helped out as I could.

Simon even remembers that his customers loved him so much that, during the riots in Atlanta, his shop was spared due to the protection of his African American customers, "they held up everybody around me, everybody around me was held up, but this guy (pointing to himself) wasn't held up. I always had someone watching me. They liked me a lot. They came to Lenox square (after he relocated his store) [and said,] 'Simon oh what the heck you doing here. You should have stayed there!'"[150]

Myra Green and her husband owned a grocery store in Atlanta in an African American neighborhood. Myra recalls how she and her husband had great relationships with their African American customers. When the Greens feared that Atlanta would be taken over by riots after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., like those that were raging in other cities of the South, such as Washington D.C., Baltimore, Louisville, and Kansas City, Myra remembers how her African American customers stayed with them in the store to assure their safety and offer protection.[151]

Alan Hall owned his own construction business and did not adopt the segregationist practices of his new Southern home, either. When one of his construction projects included building homes in African American communities, he did not think twice about hiring an African American contractor. In fact, he thought it would be inappropriate not to have an African American in charge of the project considering he

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[150] Simon Fraley, #10206, Interview by Sara Ghitis, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 2 November 2001

[151] Myra Green, *The Legacy Project*

was building for the African American population. Alan had no reservations working with African Americans or treating them as equal business partners.[152]

Some survivors did not have positive experiences with African Americans. Maria Dziewinski, a Polish Jew who survived Plaszow, Auschwitz-Birkenau and Litchtwerden labor camps, moved into an African American neighborhood in Atlanta in 1949. At first she sympathized with African Americans:

> The black population when I came here, I felt very sorry… And I was always as little as I had I was taking the food to the… [the black] superintendent downstairs. I felt so sorry. I felt sorry when they had to go to sit in the back. In fact one time I was very heavy bag and I sit in the back and the driver told me to come to the front that's for the black people. I did but I really felt bad, I really felt bad.

However, her sympathy faded as she experienced negative encounters with African Americans:

> But after I got to know them better, after I got to see, I changed my mind. I changed my mind because like I was living in the black neighborhood and I was keeping them as friends, you know. I tried to invite them to my house to cook, to have them, you know. But they were stealing. They were doing beatings. They were fighting. They were everything that what I didn't think they do. And they put me off. And it turns me off now when someone is doing something wrong.[153]

**VIII. The Response of Holocaust Survivors to the Jim Crow South**

Despite the empathy that survivors felt for African Americans and the mostly positive relationships they developed with them, many survivors felt deterred from speaking out on the behalf of African Americans. Many were simply focused on blending into the American landscape in order to build new lives. Financial stability was a priority and their main focus was earning a living. After the trauma of the Holocaust, many simply wanted to fit into society to make money and continue surviving.

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[152] Alan J. Hall, *The Legacy Project*
[153] Maria Dziewinski, #10166, Interview by John Kent, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 4 June 2001

Most survivors were eager to work and achieve financial stability when starting their new lives in America. Their primary focus was finding a job and supporting themselves and their families. However, many of these immigrants had to overcome obstacles in finding a secure job, such as lack of language, technical skills, and education. While thirty-six states did establish services, such as Displaced Person (DP) commissions, to help survivors find employment, "the impact and worth of their efforts varied considerably." Dinnerstein claims that the South had one of the most ineffective DP agencies in terms of providing survivors with jobs, skill training, and educational opportunities.[154]

Despite these setbacks, most survivors were determined to become financially independent and self-sufficient. In fact, many new immigrants felt pressured by social service agencies to become independent as quickly as possible. Cohen argues the scope and mission of these agencies were extremely limited. The agencies merely wanted "the newcomers to stand on their own as quickly as possible" through employment and economic independence.[155] Thus, survivors' daily efforts focused on making a living and "the psychic energy of many survivors was largely mobilized to meet the demands of work and growing families, which provided purpose and meaning in their lives."[156] This did not leave much time for speaking out against Jim Crow. Most survivors were occupied by the efforts of surviving in their new American home.

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[154] Leonard Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 213
[155] Cohen, *Case Closed*, 22
[156] Shamai Davidson, *Holding on to Humanity- The Message of Holocaust Survivors: the Shamai Papers* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 50

Couples like Frank Spiegel and Helen Spiegel, German refugees who lived through the escalation of antisemitic and exclusionary measures, were upset at first by discrimination against African Americans when they came to Georgia in 1939. However, they got used to Jim Crow in order to get by in American life and make a living. Frank remembers the discriminatory practices and his acceptance of them:

> Well of course you still had the discrimination against the blacks because it was still separate. You still would go in the restroom and one said 'white' and one said 'colored'. Or the water fountains where one said 'white' and one said 'colored'. And the colored people that you got in touch with at your customers' places were in inferior jobs from the bosses. And that was the way it was. And you got used to or at least you had to get used to it in order to make a living.[157]

Alan Hall recalls how Jim Crow affected his business relationship with his African American construction contractor. However, he was too focused on providing for his family financially to be preoccupied by the issue. Hall remembers how he and his African American business partner could not have meals together at restaurants or share motel rooms together when traveling. Despite this, he remembers not thinking twice about it, "we frankly, we didn't even think- it's interesting. We had a fully integrated corporation, but we never thought of sitting and making an issue of integrating a lunch counter or a restaurant. Just didn't cross my mind. I guess we were too busy for that. We were making money." Like many survivors, Hall was focused on rebuilding his life in American and earning a living.[158]

Paula Popowski recalls that she was too busy building a new, American life after the war to become involved with any Civil Rights activities. She remembers being

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[157] Frank Spiegel, #10679, Interview by Paula Gris, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 15 October 2000

[158] Alan J. Hall, *The Legacy Project*

occupied by making a living and leading a normal life, "no in that time I was not active [in the Civil Rights Movement], like I said, I had to help my husband in the store and take care of four children and cook the meals at home." She continues, "when in the beginning when we came [to Charleston] we were so absorbed with making a living, raising the children." However, living in South Carolina where racial slurs were common, Paula forbid her children from saying such remarks and still did not let her children succumb to this dark side of their new lives. She also privately supported integration measures that were occurring in her son's school. Looking back on this period of integration, Paula explains, "I thought that they [African Americans] had the same right to go to the same school as the white children. David (her son) was the first one to integrate. And he made good friends with that [black] guy."[159]

Rubin Pichuluk also discusses how finding a job was always his primary goal since arriving in America, "since I came to America, the fist day, I been looking for a better job, and for a better work." Since immigrating to Atlanta in 1951, he worked seven days a week and only took a one-week vacation in the twenty years of his professional life in America. He remembers how his life was all about work, "we worked for 16 hours a day, 7 days week." His wife, Sarah, also explains how difficult life was upon arriving in Atlanta because she and her husband were both consumed by work. She remembers, "The biggest hurt was that the children was coming and I could not open the door and see them and take them in [because I had too much work]."[160]

Erica Komisarow remembers her life as only filled with work when settling in the South, "I was working. And that curtails a lot of activities. I was working five days a

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[159] Paula Popowski, *The Legacy Project*
[160] Rubin Pichuluk, *The Legacy Project*

weeks. Sometimes six. And I brought work home. And I had a family to feed and raise. I never had a chance to do anything besides that."[161] Thus, survivors' main concern was building a new life and providing for their families after they had been deprived of this in the war. They did not seem to have time, energy or resources to speak out against the injustices they saw around then.

Survivors also felt pressure to Americanize as quickly as possible, which included adopting the values of the South. They wanted to be fully a part of the American community and "Jewish immigrants to the United States showed themselves especially eager to attain American citizenship."[162] Many recognized that America was at first reluctant to allow refugees into their borders. Extensive and controversial immigration quota battles ensued in the immediate postwar years and it was not until the passage of the Displaced Person (DP) Act of 1948 that more refugees gained immigration papers to America.[163] Survivors also recognized that assimilation was imperative through their contact with American social service organizations. For the social services that aided Jewish refugees upon arrival, "integrating the refugees smoothly into American culture was… a priority."[164] In addition to these pressures, most survivors merely wanted to be socially acceptable and to be exemplary citizens.[165] In the South, this included accepting the black-white divide.

Survivors also felt pressure from their new American neighbors to assimilate quickly. Some newcomers felt welcomed by Americans. However, many did not. The

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[161] Erica Komisarow, *The Legacy Project*
[162] White, *300,000 New Americans*, 235
[163] Dinnerstein, *America and the Survivors of the Holocaust*
[164] Helmriech, *Against All Odds,* 60
[165] Davidson, *Holding Onto Humanity*, 21

American communities and Jewish communities as a whole were not receptive to the influx of refugees and were "wary of the problems" that refugees brought.[166] These attitudes by Americans added pressure for Jewish immigrants to assimilate. Assimilation proved more traumatic for Jews in the South. They did not have the same extent of cultural comforts as Jews who immigrated to places like New York where Jewish ethnic enclaves proliferated. Some could not bear the quick and drastic adaptation they had to make in the South where Jewish communities were small and very integrated into gentile society. For example, of the seven refugees placed in Montgomery, Alabama, one remained. Of the twenty-six refugees who at first settled in Savannah, Georgia, only five remained.[167]

Paula Popowksi remembers her reception in Charleston. "We were like freaks [to them]", she recalls.[168] Herbert Kohn also remembers how people viewed him and his family in the same way, "We were kind of like freaks."[169] Maria Dziewinski recalls her poor reception by the American people as well, "American people did not want to associate with us. We were the greener (foreigners)."[170] Francis Bunzl experienced a similar reception, "we were not easily accepted into the community until much later… [about] 15, 20 years, 'til you proved yourself somehow, you know. It was very- I mean it was not a very- integration first part did not go (inaudible). You always were treated more or less as an outsider."[171] Albert Baron felt especially shunned by his fellow American Jews in Atlanta, "but the Southern Jews… if you are not born in Atlanta for

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[166] Cohen, *Case Closed*, 65
[167] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*, 62
[168] Paula Popowski, *The Legacy Project*
[169] Herbert Kohn, *The Legacy Project*
[170] Maria Dziewinski, *The Legacy Project*
[171] Francis Bunzl, *The Legacy Project*

instance or live or have lived here for many years, you are not as readily as accepted. You're still somehow not part of that clique."[172] This reception often motivated survivors to assimilate as much as possible. By adopting American values and Southern customs, survivors hoped to blend into American society and eradicate the unwelcoming attitudes of their new neighbors.

Similarly, survivors had mixed experiences. In some cases, survivors felt more shunned by the Jewish community than the gentile community. Although Maria Dziewinski first comments in her interview how she did not feel accepted by the American community she later explains, "gentile people. Lovely, friendly. When you heard Southern hospitality then when it was, then when it was. So trying to help you… I never met anyone, anyone, you know and people try to so hard to be friendly. Really. I never had bad experience."[173] Francis Bunzl discusses her poor reception by the Jewish community in Georgia, "we all had accents. You know, they [Jews] might have been embarrassed, you know."[174]

For survivors, one of their first priorities was to learn English in order to blend into the American landscape. Francis Bunzl remembers how her foreign accent made fellow Americans, especially Jews, uncomfortable because it reminded them that they were "charity cases."[175] Learning English was also essential for working in America. Rubin remembers his first anxieties about coming to American and making a living, "it was hard. How can I go into grocery store without a language? Without nothing?"[176]

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[172] Albert Baron, *The Legacy Project*
[173] Maria Dziewinski, *The Legacy Project*
[174] Francis Bunzl, *The Legacy Project*
[175] Francis Bunzl, *The Legacy Project*
[176] Rubin Pichuluk, *The Legacy Project*

Paula Popowski similarly comments on the need to overcome the language barrier, "in Charleston in order to survive and to be able to function, you had to learn quick English."[177]

Assimilating was not easy for many survivors. Myra Green, Maria Dziewinski, and Alan Hall all comment how their lack of English was one of their biggest obstacles when first arriving.[178] Herbert Kohn even remembers how one of his teachers made him roll marbles around in his mouth in order to get rid of his thick, German accent.[179] Bella Urbach Solnik also remembers how horrible her English was, "I couldn't even pronounce Atlanta. Atlanta, Ge-or-gia I said." She remembers how it was extremely hard to communicate. She recalls the first years settling in Atlanta and trying to adapt to her new home, "first thing we didn't know the language. It was a different culture. It's a different, I mean it was, everything was different. It was hard to get adjusted…I didn't like it. It was hard. Hard to get adjusted. It was different. It was everything was different."[180] Rubin Pichuluk expresses similar sentiments, "we had a hard time with the language, and a hard time even going around in town. It was a hard time."[181] Thus, for many, assimilation did not come smoothly. Survivors focused their energies on assimilating, which may have prevented them from challenging the unfair treatment of African Americans.

Besides feeling pressure to assimilate, most survivors just wanted to blend into the American environment in order to lead normal and secure lives. However, they were

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[177] Paula Popowski, *The Legacy*
[178] Myra Green, *The Legacy Project*; Maria Dziewinski, *The Legacy Project*; Alan J. Hall, *The Legacy Project*
[179] Herbert Kohn, *The Legacy Project*
[180] Bell Urbach Solnik, *The Legacy Project*
[181] Rubin Pichuluk, *The Legacy Project*

conspicuous in the American environment and "as newly arrived immigrants, the survivors were highly sensitive to every nuance, every comment and every slight."[182] For many, assimilation did not follow smoothly. Their lack of familiarity with American culture and the English language, especially, proved to be a huge obstacle and remained a central concern, "they were self-conscious about their accents, their lack of education, and their unfamiliarity with American ways."[183] Thus, their attempt to assimilate weighed heavily on them and pre-occupied them, in addition to making a living. They recognized that leading a successful and normal life in America depended on adopting American values and customs and "all the psychic energy of the survivor was mobilized for adaptation to the demands of reality."[184] In the South, this also meant accepting Jim Crow.

Prioritizing their own survival in the United States after their experiences in the Holocaust, survivors may not have even thought about challenging their new and foreign home that they were so desperately trying to become a part of. Jack Storch comments how he just wanted to Americanize as quickly as possible. It motivated him to accept all aspects of American life without question, including Jim Crow. He wanted to blend into the American social landscape and lead a normal life. He reflects upon accepting class differences and social statuses in the South, which in many ways were dictated by the color divide, "as I say when you live here and you know, you learn the culture of America and American people and difference between somebody who works in the office

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[182] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*, 71
[183] ibid, 72
[184] Davidson, *Holding Onto Humanity*, 23

or somebody who is low class person, you know, which I experienced in my restaurant, you know. And I continued on life as it dictated."[185]

Helen Spiegel also remembers how she felt held back from participating in making any changes to the situation of African Americans because they were foreign immigrants. She just wanted to be accepted into American society and make a new American life. She believed that she did not have the power or opportunity to make changes since they were struggling immigrants who had just escaped persecution. She felt that she owed her continued survival to their immigration to America and did not want to disrupt American life for these reasons:

> I remember whenever Frank's bosses from the North came and they got to the airport and they were always so shocked to see the fountains, you know white, black, colored... And they say, 'How can you live here? Doesn't it bother you?' You know and I said, 'but we are not the ones you know to change this kind of thing, you know.' And it was horrible and the sitting down in the back and the front you know. And but you couldn't, you didn't have, lets' say we didn't have it in us to be revolutionaries, you know. You felt like there by the grace of God, you got your American citizenship, you cannot start a revolution in the country that took you in. Yet you compared in some ways always what was going on. You felt very sympathetic and you of course got really enthusiastic when civil rights law was passed and you know. You felt things were going to be better. And they were and they have.[186]

The fear of resurgent antisemitism also deterred survivors from challenging the unjust practices of their new home. The fear of antisemitism especially troubled Holocaust survivors whom had escaped Nazi persecution. The antisemitism they experienced in Europe traumatized survivors and many believed that the Holocaust could reoccur anywhere at anytime. The trauma of the Holocaust led some survivors to see the

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[185] Jack Storch, *The Legacy Project*
[186] Helen Spiegel, #10679, Interview by Paula Gris, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 15 October 2000

world as a threatening place and "perceptions of danger and insecurity stem from their war experiences… [and color] their current worldview."[187] Many did not want to call attention to themselves or challenge society for fear of antisemitic backlash. They did not want to behave in anyway that would lead to more prejudice and persecution.

Upon immigrating, survivors witnessed resurgent antisemitism in the South during the burgeoning stages of the Civil Rights Movement. Antisemitic sentiments in the South increased at times of crisis, especially during the desegregation crisis in the Civil Rights era. For many Southern American Jews, antisemitism was the main reason for their lack of involvement in Civil Rights activities. Survivors were undoubtedly aware of this connection and probably feared inspiring more antisemitic fervor. This compliments Helmreich's reflection based on his interviews with survivors, "among the survivors, the less concerned the person was about anti-semitism, the more he or she was concerned about equal rights for others. Perhaps those who were worried about anti-Semitism didn't have room to worry about others."[188]

Francis Bunzl remembers some of the antisemitic outbursts that resulted from the desegregation crisis. Living in Atlanta, she remembers the Temple bombing in 1958, "There was terrible. I mean of course everybody thought it was Ku Klux Klan, you know, the usual antisemitism stuff. Yeah. And Rabbi Rothschild (the rabbi of the Temple) was very against segregation. And that I'm sure had something to do with it."[189] Henry Friedman also discusses how the Temple bombing in Atlanta was related to the Civil

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[187] Isserman, "Political Tolerance and Intolerance", 33
[188] Helmreich, *Against All Odds*, 201
[189] Francis Bunzl, *The Legacy Project*

Rights Movement.[190]

A discussion between two rabbis, both German refugees, also exemplifies the fear that plagued Jews and survivors in the South concerning participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Rabbi Albert Friedlander, a rabbi in New York, was a German Jewish refugee who left after Kristallnacht. Upon immigrating, he was placed in a Jewish foster home in Mississippi. His experiences in losing civil liberties in Germany motivated him to be active in the Civil Rights Movement. On March 7, 1965 he marched along with six hundred demonstrators from Selma to Montgomery. However, before the march, Friedlander contacted Selma's rabbi, also a German Jewish refugee, to discuss the protest. The rabbi from Selma responded, "'please get off the phone because it may be tapped and I can't afford to be associated with rabble-rousers from the East and I'll lose my position.'"[191]

Friedlander was particularly upset by this exchange. He thought that Selma's rabbi would have similar motivations to support civil rights causes because he, too, was persecuted in Germany. However, this episode displays that Holocaust survivors recognized and felt the same pressure as Southern American Jews to stay clear of integrationist movements. In addition, it conveys how survivors did not want to challenge their acceptance in both Jewish and gentile society by supporting segregation. For these reasons, many survivors were deterred from speaking out against Jim Crow.

Because survivors were victims of extreme trauma, many viewed the world as a threatening place and feared resurgent antisemitism.[192] Thus, may survivors may have

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[190] Henry Friedman, *The Legacy Project*
[191] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 80
[192] Isserman, "Political Tolerance and Intolerance"

been more sensitive to the antisemitic backlash that followed the progress in the Civil Rights Movement. Fear of antisemitism may have contributed to the silence of Holocaust survivors on the issue of Jim Crow in the South.

Many survivors also experienced antisemitism personally in the South. Jaap Groen remembers a specific encounter. One day, he was pumping gas into his car with his sleeves rolled down. A man noticed his tattoo from Auschwitz and said to him, 'I think they forgot to gas you.' Despite this enraging incident, Jaap controlled his anger and left. However, the concepts of discrimination and racism still plague Jaap to this day and he fears for a repeated outcome of their extreme consequence:

> People should know that this is possible [for the Holocaust to occur again]… And the trouble is, and that is what I always say at the end when I talk about it with my friends, these people that do that during the day to us Jews in a camp sanctioned by the government, they go home at night and they sit on the floor playing with electric trains with their children. So they are not that much different from other people at that time, but the only difference is that they have a chance to become something that is close to monster, just by [government] sanctioning. And that makes me sometimes very afraid, and I'm an optimist. I'm an optimist. But sometimes it gets me, because that can happen anywhere, anytime. After all this what has happened, that there was no lesson learned. Because anywhere today on earth, the beautiful planet that we live on, there is a government that sanctions these kinds of things…. It's frightening. And the big scare is that we have not learned, we – they – have not learned the lesson, because it's coming up all the time.

Jaap again states later in his interview these same fears that something like the Holocaust could occur again, "there is tremendous fear in me in the, in the subject, and it is always one fear that is always coming up."[193]

Simon Fraley also had troubling experiences with antisemitism when working in Atlanta. He recalls one moment, "I had a customer here one time…. And I left the job. I didn't do the job. I took off and 'forget about it.' I didn't want to finish the job….He start

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[193] Jaap Groen, *The Legacy Project*

acting like a (inaudible) antisemite. You don't have to tell me twice. I can feel you out in a minute. How he started acting. So I left the job."[194] Myra Green also remembers confronting antisemitism at work, "I work downtown at Macy's. They start to call me damn Jew. And I was crying, you know, I was very upset and they keep telling me don't pay them attention. And so I think I went somewhere else to be with more Jewish people."[195]

Clara Eisenstein felt the terror of antisemitism when she first moved to Atlanta, "when we moved to that little house. The antisemitism. The people around started to scream, 'we don't want Jews'. It was strictly a neighborhood for a white, antisemitic people… in the beginning it was a disaster, back in Germany."[196] Hilde Hoffman also notes how when she first moved to Asheville, there was one gentile neighborhood and its public school that still excluded Jews.[197]

Jack Storch remembers how he always instinctively evaded the question of his religion, "I made myself Jacque. And Jacque was actually a French name. But when they [Americans] ask me many of times what religion are you and I said, as you know, all French men, all French people are Catholics. That didn't mean that I said I am a Catholic. But I said all French people are Catholics. So they got used to the idea. And I had an accent so."[198]

Isle Schwartz remembers an incident with neo-Nazis in Atlanta. She recalls:

I was at Lenox Square, and there was this young guy with his father, and he had

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[194] Simon Fraley, *The Legacy Project*
[195] Myra Green, *The Legacy Project*
[196] Clara Eisenstein, *The Legacy Project*
[197] Hilde Hoffman, #10334, Interview by Ruth Einstein, *The Legacy Project* in The Cuba Archives of The William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum, 19 July 2002
[198] Jack Storch, *The Legacy Project*

> on a red swastika, and he had the German uniform on. And I went up to the young man, I said, 'do you know what you're doing?' He says, 'Yeah. We hate Jews.' I says, 'Well I'm Jewish'. He says, 'No you're not'. I says, 'Yes I am'. The father came over, 'Get away from my son.' That happened at Lenox square.

In her testimony, Isle Schwartz imparted advice to those listening to her interview, "I try to tell them that the people are the same all over the world, and you got to be prepared… [Antisemitism], it is going on, but we have to concentrate to fight it before it gets passed on to many people."[199]

Although Francis Bunzl did not believe that there was a lot of antisemitism when she first immigrated or currently, she still thinks that it has the potential to infect the American people, "I mean, there is antisemitism here, not as bad, but I imagine if the right guy comes along and has the right words, it might spread here, too. I mean I don't think we're immune against it."[200] In her closing remarks in her interview, Rella Solsky Sloman was asked what she wants to tell the world as a survivor. She answers, "that they should be very careful. To my brothers and sisters, not to think that it cannot happen."[201]

Having just survived persecution themselves, some survivors acquiesced to the system of Jim Crow and focused on staying out of harm's way. Personal survival was always a top concern. An American born son of a survivor couple who immigrated to New Orleans remembers his parents' response to the pervasive racial inequality, "'they looked at it this way: as long as they weren't picked on.'"[202] The husband of a child survivor who immigrated to New Orleans also comments on how his wife and her parents did not challenge the dominant racial order because of the trauma they experienced

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[199] Isle Schwartz, *The Legacy Project*
[200] Francis Bunzl, *The Legacy Project*
[201] Rella Solsky Sloman, *The Legacy Project*
[202] Powell, *Troubled Memory,* 371

during the war. His comments suggest that "they were philosophically stretched by their experiences with persecution…so they gave highest priority to the matter of Jewish survival and, more than that, to their own survival."[203] Thus, the Southern Jewish community's fear of resurgent antisemitism, which was heightened during the Civil Rights Movement, may have deeply impacted some survivors and factored into their acceptance of Jim Crow in their new, American lives.

Despite some encounters with antisemitism, survivors recognized that they experienced unprecedented freedom from persecution in the United States. They praised America for the liberties they enjoyed and the relevant equality they felt. They cherished this and did not want to jeopardize it. For survivors, "having known at first hand the full effects of religious and political persecution… they longed to participate fully in all the responsibilities as well as the privileges of American citizens."[204] Many were focused on living their freedoms to the fullest. They did not want to risk losing them by antagonizing their new American neighbors whom offered them this freedom.

Simon Fraley comments on his experiences with freedom from persecution in America, "I felt when I came to America and I'm going, don't have to put up with no antisemitism, no go to school everyday and fight, throwing rocks. In Polish a Jew is a Zyd. And always 'Damn Zyd , damn Zyd'. Like the Germans. Worse." He elaborates, "I was very happy to raise children in America. They were equal. They didn't, being different in Europe and Poland. And in America, you are human. Over there, they treat you like a third class, not a second class."[205] Jeanine Storch also praises America for its

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[203] ibid, 412-413
[204] White, *300,000 New Americans*, 235
[205] Simon Fraley, *The Legacy Project*

freedom and lack of discrimination, "and this country is magnificent. It really is the country of freedom…But true freedom is really in this country. Where you can prosper."[206]

Bella Urbach Solnik remembers her first impressions of coming to America. She was so grateful for being allowed to immigrate to America and partake in the opportunities it afforded her. She recalls her first expectations and impressions of America, "[I was happy about] building a new life in a free country, of course. My husband has now a little pillow what it says, 'God Bless America'. Took in so many people from DP camps and every one of us worked very hard, and built up a beautiful life so they can have something for the future."[207]

Paula Popowski also prizes how immigrating to American allowed her children a bright future on equal footing with gentiles. She explains, "To me… the biggest accomplishment was that my children got a high education. Which in other countries would have been unavailable to me."[208] Alan Hall also feels extreme gratitude for the equality and opportunities living in the United States afforded him, "As I feel about Atlanta, I feel the same way about the United States. See, I choke up. It's an extraordinary country." He explains with such pride how he and his brother went to colleges and law schools and how both of his grandsons attend Harvard. He explains, "there were no barriers to us because of our Jewishness." This access to education is especially meaningful for Alan because in Poland his father was restricted from attending Polish universities. He explains, "Now your religion is still an issue in almost every

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[206] Jeanine Storch, *The Legacy Project*
[207] Bella Solnik, *The Legacy Project*
[208] Paula Popowski, *The Legacy Project*

country in the world but the United States, and that's why I feel as I do about this country."[209]

Thus, survivors were focused on making a living, assimilating, dodging antisemitism, and taking advantage of their newfound liberties in America. For these reasons, many survivors could not and/or did not try to change the status quo of race relations in the South.

**IX. Holocaust Survivors and the Civil Rights Movement**

However, there are notable exceptions where Holocaust survivors defied Southern social norms in order to help the African American community during the Civil Rights era. Harold Hersch, a Polish Jew who survived the Lodz Ghetto and several concentration camps including Auschwitz, owned a grocery store in an African American neighborhood of Atlanta. Through his business, he became closely association with Atlanta's African American community. He demonstrated his empathy for and commitment to oppressed people by helping the African American community.

Hersch became the first white in the city to hire African Americans as cashiers, which deviated from the standard economic and professional discrimination against African Americans. The *Atlanta Inquirer* noted how Hersch was praised for altering "'the usual Southern pattern of restricting Negro employees to sweeping out, uncrating and the lowest-paid muscle work.'" When expanding his grocery business in the 1960s, Hersch integrated his new supermarket and community members noted, "Hersch was not a man who had to be 'pressured into sound and democratic employment policies.'" Hersch also broke down barriers by allowing African Americans to advance professionally and he

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[209] Alan J. Hall, *The Legacy Project*

even provided his employees with technical training at cash register schools.[210] He created opportunities and encouraged professional advancement for African Americans through his own initiative. Hersch explained that he fostered democratic and equal business practices because of his experiences in the Holocaust, "'with me there are no two ways about this thing. I have seen my share of persecution.'"[211]

In addition, Hersch also directly participated in the Civil Rights Movement and became friendly with Civil Rights leaders in Atlanta. One Civil Rights figure whom he associated with was Martin Luther King Jr., himself, whom was also a regular customer. Hersch was also committed to justice and equality even under times of extreme tension and conflict between African Americans and whites. For example, when African American rioters threatened many business owners at the time of King's assassination, "instead of closing down out of fear, Hersch stayed open… Hersch traces his empathy for blacks to his own suffering in the ghettos and camps of Europe."[212]

Jaap Groen was also very active in the Civil Rights Movement and became acquainted with its leaders and influential figures, such as Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis.[213] A friend of Jaap's, Rosemary Axelrod, had fled from Germany before

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[210] "Hails Integrated System at Simpson Rd. Supermarket", *The Atlanta Inquirer* (Atlanta: 1964), *Harold Hersch Family Paper, 1934-1991* in Box MSS 193, Container 1, Folder 4 of 9, The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Community Archives of the William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum; "Hersch's Super Value Market", *Harold Hersch Family Paper, 1934-1991* in Box MSS 193, Container 1, Folder 4 of 9, The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Community Archives of the William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum

[211] "Hersch's Supermarket Tribute to Democracy", The Ida Pearle and Joseph Cuba Community Archives of the William Breman Jewish Heritage and Holocaust Museum; "Hersch's Super Value Market"

[212] Helmreich, *Against All Odds,* 104-105

[213] John Lewis was a prominent figure in the Civil Rights Movement. For more information see: http://johnlewis.house.gov/john-lewis/full-biography

Kristallancht and taught at a black university in Atlanta. She introduced Jaap to Civil Rights activities and leaders. Jaap remembers attending the secret meetings she held at her house at night for the advancement of African American rights. It is possible that Jaap's experiences in the war also served as a motivating factor to join the Civil Rights Movement. Jaap was extremely active in the Dutch Underground Resistance Movement during the Nazi occupation of Holland. Thus, Jaap had experience in participating in activities that challenged the status quo for a greater cause.

In the 1960s, Jaap demonstrated against the segregated policies of Leb's Restaurant, a Jewish delicatessen, in Atlanta. Jaap proudly recalls this moment in the Civil Rights Movement:

> And it was just when we won a little bit ground with Martin Luther King and John Lewis, with the Movement. And Lebs [sic] was as anti-black as Maddox… [Lester Maddox], the man with the, with the ax handle he was going to use if black customers entered Maddox's restaurant. And he [Leb] closed his store, his delicatessen, and pasted all the windows with brown wrapping paper, and on that wrapping paper, so you could see it from the outside, was written, 'I don't want niggers in my place'. And on the other one it says, 'I don't want niggers because they pee on your table'. And all these things. And we decided to march. So John [Lewis] got it all together. And he got blacks, he got whites, and he got Jewish people.[214]

In that moment, Jaap and Leb also had a heated exchange concerning the

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[214] Lester Maddox, a devout segregationist, owned and operated a restaurant near Georgia Tech. He and his customers were notorious for supporting segregation and opposing the federal government's intervention in such policies. For more information, visit: http://www.civilrights.uga.edu/cities/atlanta/atlanta_printable/pickrick_cafe_printable.html; Charles Lebedin, known as Leb, owned and operated Leb's Restaurant, a New York-style delicatessen in Atlanta. It catered mostly to white, middle class Atlantans and Leb fought against integrating his restaurant. Webb's *Fight Against Fear* gives a detailed account of the protest that took place in the summer of 1963 at Leb's, in which Jaap participated. When protesters blocked traffic in front of the restaurant, Leb and his white employees attacked the protesters. The demonstrators were beaten, kicked, and dragged from the restaurant. When police arrived, they arrested 116 demonstrators and tensions escalated to the point that police declared a state of emergency in the downtown area. For more information, see: Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 109-113

involvement of Jews in the Civil Rights Movement. During this altercation, Jaap revealed that his motivation to participate in the Civil Rights Movement stemmed directly from his experiences with prejudice and persecution in Europe. Jaap recalls:

> So we were walking around with our placards and Leb opens the door and he walks up to me, and he said, 'Aren't you ashamed to do this as a Jew?' I said, 'You are talking? Aren't you ashamed of doing this on your windows? After what I went through?' And I raised my hand (to show concentration camp number). And you know what he did? He spit in my face. And the other guys jumped on him, and the police came, and they got him back in his store. And you know, nobody did anything about it. He never got to jail. So that was the big one. So, you see, it's everywhere. He was afraid that black people in those years, Negroes, were coming to his restaurant and sat there and ate his wonderful sandwiches.

Jaap's interest in advancing civil rights is not only motivated by his experiences during World War II. It also extends back to his childhood in Europe. Jaap was friends with Rosie Paul, a black woman, who lectured him about the unequal treatment of African Americans in the United States. Thus, Jaap was knowledgeable about the situation before Hitler even came to power. However, upon arrival in the United States, his knowledge did not prepare him for confronting first hand the discriminatory practices against African Americans:

> Now, I knew about it, because I did all these things with Rosie Paul, so I was very informed…You know, it was very much, as a kid, very much involved, and heard about this, so I was informed. So now I come to the United States and I knew what was going on. But I didn't know. I did know what was going on, but I didn't connect the people that much with it. It was the Southern governments of these states that were involved, from the Civil War on. So I knew, but I didn't know what it meant to the people. So when I came here, I knew about the signs, you know, 'Coloreds Only' but I thought, well, one day it's going to change. Took a long time… when I knew about it that is different when you live in it. Was not easy in the beginning.

However, Jaap admits that because he was not born in the United States it was still hard for him to connect to the Movement and the plight of African Americans. He concedes, "But you know, I was for- like I said a little earlier, I was foreign so it didn't

hit me that hard. There was some, some things that I had no idea. I never thought of." He did not even consider himself a part of the Civil Rights Movement. As an interviewer asked about his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, he replied, "It is a big word 'in the Movement'. I knew all these people and I marched a little bit, but as- I am not a joiner... I am not a joiner. You know how I got in there? Through Rosemary Axelrod. Through the Atlanta University. Otherwise I would have never gotten to these people."[215]

Hilde Hoffman also participated in Civil Rights activities. Her personal background in addition to her Holocaust experiences motivated her to contribute in some way to the Civil Rights Movement. Recalling a memory of a conversation with her mother as a young girl in Germany, Hilde reveals that lessons of tolerance were part of her upbringing. One day as she and her mother took a trip to the zoo, her mother gestured her to look at the nearby flowerbeds. Hilde remembers her mother's words:

> You see how many different kinds [of flowers] they are and what a beautiful flowerbed they make. They are planted right next to each other and not one pushes out the other. That is what people have to learn. To live together no matter what kind they are, no matter what color they are because they make a beautiful flowerbed that God wanted them to be.

Hilde explains, "I have never forgotten that." She then describes her participation in a sit-in in Asheville with pride, "We went to the first sit in where you could have, where black people were allowed to have refreshments on counters like in Woolworth, or in restaurants. So we went to Woolworth the first day and we sat in with the black people and that gave me such a wonderful feeling to think that things are really changing and getting better all the time."[216]

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[215] Jaap Groen, *The Legacy Project*
[216] Hilde Hoffman, *New Lives*

**X. Conclusion**

Harold Hersch, Jaap Groen and Hilde Hoffman were exceptional. Most survivors who perceived a connection with the African American plight nevertheless accepted this racial caste system as a part of their new life in America. Most did not speak out against these injustices. After the trauma of the Holocaust and the challenge to start anew in a foreign country, most survivors were focused on acculturating into their American society and rebuilding their lives. Making a living and achieving financial stability occupied their energies. They also wanted to be accepted by the rest of their fellow Americans and thus followed the stance of their new compatriots on the issue of race. The influx of European refugees already seemed threatening to Americans, especially American Jews. American Jews knew that their new acceptance into white society depended upon "their continued compliance with the prevailing social order" and Jewish immigrants recognized and adopted this stance.[217]

Furthermore, survivors did not challenge race relations in the South due to the fear of resurgent antisemitism. Holocaust survivors were, in fact, more sensitive to the fear of increased antisemitism that followed the growing Civil Rights Movement. In many ways, they followed the strategy of American Jews. They remained silent on the issue of race in order to thwart antisemitism. Although they disapproved of the injustice in the South, most immigrants merely tried to survive in America after the Holocaust, "these survivors, who had suffered much discrimination, somehow adjusted, as did many Americans, to the discriminatory practices of post-War American society."[218] Driven by their desire to adapt to and thrive in American society and the fear of antisemitism, most

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[217] Webb, *Fight Against Fear,* 43
[218] Lasoski, *Helen Przerchadski Lasoski,* 37

Jewish refugees who were disturbed by Southern racism did not and/or could not act upon their disapproval.

For the most part, survivors mostly did not attempt to improve the injustice in the South that reminded them of their own traumatic backgrounds. The oral testimonies of survivors prove that their empathy and perceived connection to African Americans remained only in their rhetoric. Their feelings and disapproval could not overcome their current battle to start a new chapter of survival in America.

It must also be noted that these interviews with Holocaust survivors were conducted from 2000-2011, about fifty years after their first experiences in America. The memories and reflections are therefore subject to historical influences as well as contemporary influences. Anti-black racism and racist discrimination is no longer acceptable. Celebration of and reverence for the Civil Rights Movement is unquestionable. In addition, these survivors are in their seventies, eighties, and nineties. Their memories are imperfect and have had years to become reshaped and ingrained in ways that might not necessarily be true to the situation of the time. Thus, due to several factors, memories are easily distorted and adapted.

The efforts of Holocaust survivors to speak out against racism and prejudice in the American South was typical of the average Southern American Jew. What is unique was that many Holocaust survivors constructed their identities and thought of their experiences in Europe in new and different ways. These immigrants, who had survived a system of racial prejudice and persecution, understood their identity and experiences as Holocaust survivors in the context of the American South and Jim Crow. This new framework propelled them to perceive a connection between the consequences of

German antisemitism and American anti-black racism. Additionally, survivors used their background experiences to evaluate their new, American life in a distinct way. This framework provided a way of understanding their new culture and society and shaped a unique comprehension of Jim Crow. While survivors pursued different paths in response to Jim Crow, many used the racist environment of the South to construct their identities as Holocaust survivors and to understand their new home, the ‘Land of the Free’.

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