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Witnessing History: Civil Rights and the Jews of Selma, Alabama

by

Amy K. Milligan *

"Well, here's one for your book," Leonard laughed. "You know, it's funny. I just told you that we never faced any antisemitism, but one night one of them [Ku Klux Klan members] showed up at our house. They were just tryin' to shake people up, make 'em scared. Mother and Daddy served the Blacks in their store, and we were Jews, so, you know, they didn't like us." He paused and took a breath. "One night, one of them KKK guys showed up at our house, bangin' on the door in the middle of the night. Scared the shit outta us. Daddy opened the door and just stood there, probably thought he was gonna see a cross burning on our lawn. The idiot in the sheet yelled at him and then Daddy, well . . ." Leonard paused for dramatic effect, knowing that I could not anticipate the way the story would turn. "He looked him in the eyes, right through the holes he had cut in that goddamn sheet, and he said, 'Go home, John. I sold you that sheet last week.' And that robed idiot ran for the hills, straight across our lawn. Daddy closed the door and then he sat there for the rest of the night with his back against the door, holdin' his gun. Mother made us children sleep in the bathtub. But he never did come back, except to shop in our store. But he didn't never buy another sheet from us."[1]

Leonard's description of an encounter with the KKK in Selma stood out among my interviews. I have spent the last seven years collecting oral histories from Jews who live or have lived in Selma. When I asked these individuals directly about whether Jews in Selma had trouble with

* The author may be contacted at amilliga@odu.edu.

antisemitism, the KKK, or the White Citizens' Council (WCC), almost unanimously they responded that Selma was a great place to be Jewish—and I knew they earnestly meant it. Yet, as our conversations developed, several stories like Leonard's emerged, leaving me to wonder about the ways in which whiteness and Jewishness intersected and how the Jews of Selma understood their role during and after the civil rights movement.[2]

In this essay, I trace the evolution of white supremacy in Selma from the KKK to the WCC, discuss the various stances on integration espoused by Selma's Jews, and assess how Selma's Jews perceived their experiences as unique in comparison to other southern communities that also experienced the civil rights movement.

Ethnography, Folklore, and Interviews

I write as a qualitative ethnographer, folklorist, and historian. Since 2017 I have recorded over two hundred hours of interviews with informed consent that form the backbone of a larger manuscript on the Jews of Selma. These interviews are supplemented by archival and textual sources that contextualize the experiences of those who lived in Selma, including a data set collected by then-student sociologist Marshall Bloom during the 1960s. In this essay, I analyze seventy-two interviews conducted between 2018 and 2022. The interviewees—thirty-nine women and thirty-three men—ranged in age from seventy to ninety-six years old. All lived in Selma during the civil rights movement. Presently only three Jews still reside in the city. As part of the larger research informed consent process standard within my field, interviewees were offered the choice to use a pseudonym. Many chose to do so, and I have honored their requests in this text.

As a folklorist and ethnographer, I work with memory—something that can shift and change shape with time. I have contextualized the memories of those whom I interviewed with historical details, but I also have shared their unedited recollections, making note when they have misremembered facts. As a folklorist, I do this because I understand that memory shapes our decisions and the ways in which we approach the world, even if it is not the factual truth. The stories that we are told and that we tell ourselves and others become our personal reality, and it is imperative that we continue to interrogate these narratives for truth. I

offer the memories of my interviewees here as their personal beliefs, assessing them for truth and accuracy against the historical backdrop in which they exist.[3]

Degrees of Whiteness: From the KKK to the WCC

The Ku Klux Klan has a long history in Alabama.[4] After World War I, the Klan experienced national and statewide renewals.[5] American society typically sees this type of xenophobic pushback and marginalization of cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious minorities around economic and social conflicts, especially after wartimes or during times of cultural or political dissonance. Once again, postwar white Americans became distrustful of anything or anyone they perceived as foreign or unchristian. Although most of Selma's Jews had resided in the United States for generations, an influx of eastern European Jews occurred between 1880 and 1920. As the Klan fixated on proving things to be "100 percent American," these new Americans were aware of the fragility of their whiteness as both immigrants and Jews. One interviewee, Marty, a seventy-two-year-old retired educator, shrugged as he reflected on his family: "at least we looked white." He continued, "In Selma there were whites and Blacks. And the Blacks were Christians. And the whites were Christians, too, except for the Jews. So in Selma there were whites, Blacks, and Jews. It doesn't really make sense, and the Jews were white, but also not a hundred percent in the white community. You follow?"[6] Marty described what sociologists call provisional whiteness, a label that reflects how some immigrant or ethnic communities are afforded the privileges and power of whiteness by complying with white narratives and upholding the social structures of white supremacy. However, at tension points, this whiteness can be lost or contested.[7]

For American Jews, racial categorization has historically been complicated.[8] When looking specifically at Selma, for example, 1830 and 1840 city census data divided the population of the city into two categories: white and Black, categorizing Jews as Black.[9] By 1870, these categories expanded to include white, enslaved Black individuals (on the census labeled "slaves"), Black freed people, and Hebrews.[10] Not until the early 1920s were Jews regularly categorized as white on city documents.

The evolution of the privileges of provisional whiteness afforded to Jews throughout the United States allowed Selma's Jews to become

involved in civic and local government leadership, as well as to own shops and businesses that filled the downtown streets and flourished within white southern society. Selma's Jews were not reminded of their societal difference until the resurrection of the KKK in the 1910s. Initially the city held the Klan at arm's length. Selma had large Catholic and Jewish populations—both groups targeted by the Klan—and although the Black community certainly would not agree, white citizens believed that Selma acted relatively fairly to its Black population, holding onto a misguided and racist belief that Black individuals accepted segregation and should be satisfied with their situation.

As the Klan gained power, many of Selma's white citizens believed they were morally above its divisive and violent tactics. On January 10, 1923, in a prominently placed article, the *Selma Times-Journal* quoted local Kiwanis President W. B. Craig: "there is no room for bigotry in Selma. Let's laugh the Ku Klux Klan out of America."[11] Shortly thereafter, the Kiwanis, American Legion, the Selma Bar, and the Selma Medical Association issued a joint "Statement in Opposition to the Ku Klux Klan in Selma," which they ran as a full-page advertisement "to demonstrate that they [were] against the mask and the flowing robe." They called on citizens to recognize that "the Klan can serve no necessary purpose in this City and may lead to untold harm in upsetting the relations of goodwill now existing among neighbors and friends." They concluded by calling on faith groups, noticeably including Jews and Catholics: "We devoutly hope that all classes and creeds among our people, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, Episcopalians, Christians, Catholics, Jews and all, may continue to find in our community's bounds the fullest social, civil, and religious freedom and that all elements and all faiths may continue to stand together in behalf of good will, good neighborliness, good citizenship, and a generous charity that reaches to the community's utmost needs." Two days later, the paper's editorial announced, "Selma has no room within her confines for that ugly malevolent institution of the devil known as Ku Kluxisms, and her citizenship has risen almost as one man to speak in thunder tones against this nursery of suspicion and hate gaining a foothold in her midst." The Selma City Council, a signatory of the original statement, responded by banning the wearing of masks, an action aimed at preventing Klan members from hooding in public and thereby attempting to hide their identities.[12]

Selma Times-Journal*, May 18, 1923. (Newspapers.com.)*

Were one only to look at the newspaper, local opposition to the Klan seemed clear. Yet this is misleading. By December 1923, a provisional Klan chapter organized in Dallas County, and shortly thereafter two hundred new members were initiated at a ceremony held on Orrville Road. By 1926, Alabama's Klan succeeded in electing two members to public office: Governor Bibb Graves and Senator Hugo Black.[13] Locally the Klan held steady, evoking fear in Selma's citizen minorities and influencing local politics and business. Even the American Legion came under attack by the statewide Klan when it chose Moritz Frohlich, a Jewish lawyer from Selma, to represent them on the national executive committee. Frohlich's presence suggested ludicrously to the Klan that the American Legion was no longer "100 percent American."

World War II brought important changes to the city. Selma's economy dramatically changed when Craig Airfield opened nearby. The agricultural economy experienced a downturn, and Black farmers sought employment in the city. Selma, which had previously been 90 percent white, now demographically split almost equally between its Black and white populations.[14] As the city's demographics changed, the white citizens of Selma supported "separate but *more* equal" facilities. One interviewee, Harriet, an eighty-eight-year-old retired writer, described these changes: "There was a new Black high school, new Black churches, new athletics for Blacks. Things were changing real fast, and the Jewish community knew it, too."[15]

Although Jewish businesses had engaged with Black patrons previously, new Jewish shops opened in what Harriet referred to as "the Black part of town," and downtown shops engaged openly with Black clientele, several also employing Black salespeople. In a 2021 interview, Claire recalls her memories of shopping in Jewish stores as a young Black girl. She reminisced: "I remember goin' into Barton's [department store] with my mama. She was a cook, and that white family paid her checks. But we couldn't cash 'em 'cause Mama didn't have a bank account. But the Bartons always took care of us. They cashed her checks every week, then we'd shop a little in their store. They made us feel welcome even though we was different races." She paused in reflection before adding, "I think Jews understood a little bit better, you know, gettin' what it's like to have people hatin' you, least that's how I always felt." We nod at each other and then her eyes sparkle. She laughs, "One more thing I

remember. The Jewish stores? They had the best Christmas displays in town!"[16]

Despite some positive interactions like Claire described, Selma's citizens knew their city contained racial tensions long before it became a lightning rod for the civil rights movement. On April 26, 1953, the *Selma Times-Journal* fanned the flames of racism that had been brewing in the city since the 1940s with the headline "Attack Foiled by Young Mother in Bout with Negro; Invader Disarmed and Chased from Home." The story especially caught the city's attention because the woman in question was Jean Rockwell, the mayor's daughter. Rockwell was allegedly attacked by a Black man while alone in her apartment with her two small children. Although numerous arrests were initially made, Rockwell did not identify any of the men as her attacker.[17]

A comparable report had appeared a month earlier, and nine similar reports from other women followed Rockwell's alleged attack. The city filled with rumors, fear, and gossip. One interviewee, Sarah, a seventy-six-year-old retiree, remembered, "You didn't know who to believe. I was a young woman, and a Jew no less. My parents were afraid I would be raped. Their fear became my fear."[18] Several Black community organizations, including the Elks and Veterans of Foreign Wars, offered rewards for the capture of the attacker, but white Selmians largely overlooked their effort. On May 16, William Earle Fikes, an intellectually disabled man who worked at a local garage, was arrested after being persuaded to confess to the crimes.[19] Ultimately, Fikes received a sentence of ninety-nine years in prison but, to the surprise of the white community, escaped the electric chair. The trial mobilized Selma's Black community and connected them for the first time to national resources like the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), which supported Fikes throughout his trial.

The division and mistrust between Black and white Selmians continued to escalate, and white politicians harnessed these fears for political gain. For example, Walter Given announced in a campaign speech that the NAACP aimed "to open the doors of our white women to Negro men."[20] He used this type of fearmongering racism to secure election as Dallas County's state senator and later organized WCCs across the Black Belt.[21] When he became president of the statewide WCC in 1958, he moved its headquarters from Montgomery to Selma—a nod to the fact that Selma's

WCC had been the first in Alabama. Its creation, largely in reaction to the 1954 U.S. Supreme Court decision *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* appeared on the cover of the *Selma-Times Journal* on November 28, 1954. The article announced a meeting to "reveal [a] plan of defense for segregation." The call for action indicated that "the white population in this county controls the money and this is an advantage that the Council will use in a fight to legally maintain complete segregation of the races." The author of the article explained that they intended to make it difficult or impossible for any Black community members who advocated for desegregation to "find and hold a job, get credit, or renew a mortgage." Anticipating backlash, the group demurred: "we are not anti-Negro; we only want segregation maintained. And we are not vigilantes. We will operate openly, and violence is the furthest thing from the minds of the council members. We have lived with Negroes all of these years without trouble, and it is our utmost desire to continue this happy relationship but on a segregated basis."[22] An estimated 1,200 white men gathered at the Dallas County Courthouse the next night, where over six hundred white Selmians paid three dollars each to join the organization.

Selma's WCC, modeled after the organizations in Mississippi, was replicated throughout the state as white citizens joined together to oppose integration. These councils perceived themselves as a highbrow and nonviolent alternative to the KKK. Unlike the noisy parades, harassment, vandalism, and violence of the Klan, WCCs used boycotts, economic pressures, and tactics like firing those who tried to register Black voters. Although not formally sanctioning violence, violent rhetoric filled their meetings and writings, laying the groundwork for additional racial conflict.

Selma's WCC actively advertised that, unlike the Klan, it was open to Jewish and Catholic members. The inclusion of Jews stood in opposition to other Alabama WCCs that contested the whiteness of Jews and rejected Jewish membership. In February 1956, several northern Alabama WCCs distributed antisemitic pamphlets that blamed Jews for integration. Shortly thereafter, the North Alabama Citizens' Council began requiring that members have a "belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ."[23] The debate around allowing Jewish membership split Alabama's WCCs. Birmingham's Asa E. Carter led the northern Alabama group, which maintained that those who admitted Jews into the group were connecting with the

"anti-Christ, atheistic elements with Communist ideologies who [used] the Negroes as a tool." The other group, led by Alabama senator Sam Engelhardt of Macon County, noted that if WCCs excluded Jews, "we won't have anybody left to help us."[24] In a letter to the *Selma Times-Journal*, cosigned by at least one Jewish WCC member, WCC leaders "repudiate[d]" antisemitism because it had "no place and definitely [was] not a part of our organization" and that the only requirement for council membership was "to be a white, law-abiding citizen."[25]

Selma's WCC made its first big move in August 1955 after twenty-nine Black parents signed a petition to the Selma school board calling for the integration of public schools. Immediately, eight of the signatories lost their jobs, followed soon after by eight additional firings. This pressure prompted five individuals to retract their signatures, maintaining that they did not understand the petition when they signed it. The council continued applying economic and social pressure on signatories, silencing their voices through figurative strangulation. The WCC then acted against John Smitherman, a local Black grocer. Smitherman stopped carrying Cloverleaf Creamery items in his store after Cloverleaf fired Joseph Holmes for signing the petition. The creamery sent a white woman to investigate why sales had declined so dramatically. Smitherman, caught off guard, gave the woman his phone number and asked her to call him later to discuss the matter—an action she misconstrued and misrepresented as an indication of his sexual desire.[26]

Days later, William D. Bailey, a local police officer, and several accomplices set fire to what they believed was Smitherman's home. Upon learning that they had ignited the wrong house, they returned the next night and fired shots into Smitherman's home, injuring his wife, Helena. Bailey and his accomplices were temporarily jailed but not indicted, and the charges were eventually dropped. Days later, Bailey committed suicide. Along with additional harassment of those who signed the petition, these actions sent a clear message about how the white community would protect the guilty among them at the expense of innocent Black individuals, as well as the depths of law enforcement's racism and complicity.[27] Despite not formally espousing violence, the message of the council was clear: do not cross us.

While the WCC flexed its power over the Black community, Selma's Jews became increasingly aware of what was happening to Jews around

the state. Their concern centered around the boycott of Jewish shops; rising antisemitism and the potential (whether realized or not) for violence against Jews; the destruction or bombing of synagogues and other buildings; and the blackballing of Jews from organizations and society groups. The feeling that it was worse somewhere else elicited a romanticized notion in Selma that kept many of Selma's Jews feeling as if they ought to be thankful for how good life was for them in Selma. They certainly could see what was happening elsewhere to Jews, as well as what happened when individuals transgressed white societal norms in their city. Therefore, like most white southerners, they stayed within the boundaries of their segregated world.

In reflecting on this time, interviewees presented idyllic memories of growing up in Selma. For example, seventy-four-year-old retired businessman Alan contrasted his experience in Selma with that of Jews throughout the Deep South: "We had it real good in Selma. I mean, when you think about what was happening to other Jews, we knew we were accepted in Selma, so we'd have been fools to want to live somewhere else."[28] In her interview, Helen, an eighty-two-year-old homemaker, recalled the fear her family felt about attempted synagogue bombings. She recounted, "They were blowing synagogues up, you know. Dynamite and guns." She remembered, "You know that story about the kid who shot up the temple [in Gadsden, Alabama] during prayer and those guys were just left bleeding out. So, yeah, living in Selma was like living in Mayberry," referencing the fictional community portrayed on the *Andy Griffith Show*.[29]

Indeed, the Gadsden tragedy particularly impacted the perceived security of Selma's Jews and was frequently mentioned in interviews. Just two and a half hours north of Selma, Gadsden's Congregation Beth Israel was another small Jewish synagogue comparable to Selma's Temple Mishkan Israel. On March 26, 1960, as the congregation gathered to dedicate a new addition to their building, a Molotov cocktail came crashing through the window, although it failed to ignite. The congregation scrambled, and sixteen-year-old Jerry Hunt circled the building with a .22 caliber rifle and fired several shots before driving away. Two members of the congregation, Alvin Lowi and Alan Cohn, were shot and seriously wounded although, thankfully, both survived the attack. As the terrorized congregation waited for the police, they sang "Bless this House" together, eventually finishing their dedication service as an act of steadfastness and

Selma Times-Journal,
March 27, 1960.
(Newspapers.com.)

bravery. As reports came out after Hunt's arrest, he confessed that he had gone to a rally for John Crommelin, a local antisemitic politician. He also recounted that after losing a game of chess to a local Jewish boy, he decided to paint red swastikas on a local Jewish store and later determined to attack the temple.[30]

Interviewees also frequently referenced news of the attempted synagogue bombing in Birmingham on April 28, 1958, as eliciting fear among Selma's Jews. Although the fifty-four sticks of dynamite set outside of the building failed to explode, the threat of violence was imminent and real, as were the swastikas painted on Temple Beth-El. Interviewees expressed

clear awareness of the increasing discrimination and attacks against Jews across the state. Other instances of antisemitic violence mentioned in interviews included the attempted bombing at Temple Emanuel in Gastonia, North Carolina; a dynamite explosion at Miami, Florida's Temple Beth El; the bombing of the Jewish Community Center of Nashville, Tennessee; a second homemade bomb at Temple Beth-El in Birmingham; the bombing of the Jewish Center of Jacksonville, Florida; and the bombing of The Temple in Atlanta, Georgia, by the "Confederate Underground," an event so newsworthy that President Dwight Eisenhower released a statement denouncing the violence. The frequency with which interviewees identified these events speaks to the weight they exerted in the moment and in their memories.

Selma's Jews and Integration

When it came to integration, where did Selma's Jews stand?[31] The simple answer is, like most white southerners, they were divided. Still, their experiences differed from other white Selmians because of the space that they occupied between the Black and white Christian populations of their city. They received the economic, political, and social benefits of being white, but, like other Jews in the South and throughout the United States, their Jewishness overlays their experiences of whiteness.

In 1965, one hundred Jews lived in Selma, all of whom held membership at Temple Mishkan Israel. Fifty-five were of German Jewish descent and boasted long family roots in the city; twenty-one were eastern European immigrants or their children; eleven had moved to Selma from the Northeast; and thirteen were Holocaust refugees who had been resettled in Selma. The majority identified as moderates or moderate integrationists (60 percent), liberals (15 percent), or ambivalent (5 percent). Those identifying as liberal were more likely to come from the Northeast, to have lived outside of the South, and to work in businesses that were not customer service oriented. In a 1966 survey of the entire temple membership, nearly all Jewish women and most of Selma's store owners classified themselves as moderates.[32]

Twenty percent of the Jewish community identified as segregationists. However, their voices were the loudest, influencing the public perception of Jewish opinions. As student sociologist Marshall Bloom wrote in his 1966 thesis, "since their [segregationist] opinions conform to

local norms, they do not feel they are risking anything by talking." However, in oral histories conducted during the civil rights movement, numerous Temple Mishkan Israel members called their segregationist peers negative terms like "extremists" and "asses," suggesting that they were not representative of the larger Jewish community.[33] Selma's Jewish segregationists were predominantly male, the descendants of Selma's old German Jewish families, and highly assimilated southerners. Almost all these men belonged to the WCC. When interviewed in 1966, they articulated a far stronger sense of being Alabamian than they did of being Jewish, which often manifested as negative feelings towards Jews outside of the South. These social identities are comparable to other southern Jewish segregationists.[34]

These men especially articulated anger and distrust toward B'nai B'rith, a long-standing national Jewish fraternal organization that had been publicly discussing integration in partnership with other national organizations like the Anti-Defamation League. Many southern Jews, even those who were not segregationists, believed that B'nai B'rith's stance might stimulate antisemitism. As one interviewee told Bloom in 1966, "I hate northern Jews. They threw us to the wolves. B'nai B'rith told us there were more Jews in one block in Brooklyn than in Alabama," alluding to feeling invisible as a Jew in the Deep South.[35]

In January 1956, members of Selma's B'nai B'rith lodge issued a public statement asking "northern Jewish groups" to stop intervening in affairs outside of Jewish issues. They wrote, "Jewish Citizens of Selma Alabama . . . vigorously protest the various actions taken, and literature published by the American Jewish Committee, the Anti-Defamation League and the constituent agencies of the National Community Advisory Council in its support of desegregation."[36] This letter was followed in 1960 by another written to and published in the *Montgomery Advertiser*, undersigned by ten of Selma's Jewish community members expressing "complete disapproval" of the American Jewish Congress's request that Georgia's governor pardon Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This letter stressed that there was "not a congress or governing body of American Jewery [*sic*]," nor one entity that speaks "for all people of Jewish faith," especially not the American Jewish Congress, which they accused of being "composed of so-called 'liberals' residing chiefly in the larger eastern cities" and with "no membership that we know of in the South [that]

does not represent the thinking of the vast majority of southern citizens, whether Jewish or Christian."[37] Arthur J. Lewis and Sol H. Tepper, respectively the most vocal Jewish integrationist and the most vocal Jewish segregationist in the city, signed the letter, indicating that the distrust of northern and outsider meddling in southern affairs was a topic about which they agreed.

Seventy-three-year-old Janet, a self-identified moderate, retired businesswoman, and enthusiastic community volunteer, explained this skepticism: "They came on in with guns ablazin' and they didn't know the lay of the land. They didn't stop for a minute to think about what a mess they left behind for us to clean up. I agreed with their stance, but they didn't care to know us, the ones they left behind in their wake."[38] Many interviewees expressed the same sentiment that when representatives of northern Jewish organizations came to Selma proudly identifying themselves as Jewish, they made it difficult for the local non-Jewish community

Tepper's Store at Broad Street and Water Avenue, Selma, c. 1955–1960.
(Courtesy of the Selma – Dallas County Library.)

to distinguish between the opinions of national or northern-based organizations and local Jews. Alan observed, "Our neighbors were asking questions and we didn't even know what [the northern Jewish groups] were out there doing or saying, but they said it on behalf of all Jews, on our behalf, without knowing us."[39] Marty added, "They made a lot of false assumptions about the South. The worst part is that I actually agreed with them, politically, you know. I just didn't agree with how they did it."[40]

Selma was home to one of the most infamous and vocal southern Jewish segregationists, Sol Tepper. In contrast to Georgia's Charles Bloch and South Carolina's Sol Blatt, who held advanced degrees and conducted high-profile legal and political careers, Tepper, who is not identified with a pseudonym, remained in Selma after serving in World War II and worked in the family business. He was a prominent member of the local WCC and author of countless inflammatory opinion pieces and editorials. An active member of Temple Mishkan Israel, he served several terms as congregational president. For Tepper, segregation was a Jewish issue. In one of his letters to Jewish integrationists, he observed, "I am proud of my Jewish heritage. I am not proud that you call yourself a Jew. In fact, I say you are not." Although most members of Temple Mishkan Israel considered his views radical, Tepper retained his synagogue membership. Sarah commented, "where else could he go? There weren't other synagogues. We couldn't turn a Jew away because we didn't agree with him. But good God, he was just so vocal about his ideas."[41]

In 1963 Tepper established the Committee for the Economic Improvement of Colored People. The group mailed letters and published advertisements in northern newspapers offering to "help move Negroes to your city. . . . [W]e can supply any number that you desire." The group attempted to cloak itself in respectability and claimed it was "helping" Black Selmians. In their campaign, they wrote, "The colored people of the South have not had the opportunities for advancement which they are capable of attaining. . . . [W]e have concluded that your area has a labor shortage and since you have set an example of employment regardless of race and your citizens believe in equal opportunities for all, we would like to send a number of our colored people to your area for employment. Please let us know the number needed."[42] Unsurprisingly, no one took Tepper and his committee up on their offer. The committee argued this

lack of response proved that northern integrationists were unready to integrate in the ways they pressed southern cities to do.

Tepper has captured the American imagination, not because of his Jewishness but because of the ways in which he is an easily identifiable villain. For example, National Public Radio released a serialized podcast in 2019 called *White Lies* that investigated the 1965 cold case of Rev. James Reeb, a Unitarian minister who was beaten to death by segregationists in Selma. The podcast understandably wove Tepper's story throughout, as it is difficult to talk about civil rights in Selma without including one of the loudest antagonistic voices. Ultimately, Tepper stood as part of the sheriff's posse on Bloody Sunday at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, poised to attack, and was involved in the violent riots that ensued. He serves as the perfect foil to the revered image of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marching with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Within American Jewish narratives, the counterpoint of Tepper and Heschel is utilized as a reminder of the coexistence of good and bad in the Jewish experience.

However, Heschel was not a Selmian, although his role remains an important one in the larger history of Jews and civil rights. The Lewis family provides the lesser-known local Jewish counterpoint to Tepper. They were one of the only white families willing to take a definitive and public stance for integration within the Jewish community as well as within the city. As the conflict heated in Selma, their experience reinforced the Jewish community's silence.[43] CBS Radio interviewed three Selmians under pseudonyms, two of whom were Jewish. Arthur Lewis, who appeared as "Herbert Golden" on the program, urged his fellow Selmians to "maintain law and order." After the interview, he and his wife Muriel wrote a private letter to friends stating their position as moderates and asking for racial harmony. The WCC illegally opened the letter prior to its delivery, photocopied, and widely distributed it throughout the city. This disclosure resulted in significant harassment of the Lewises: midnight phone calls, the contentious end of long-time friendships and business partnerships; a boycott of their automobile business; and hate mailings that were photocopied and distributed around Selma. This hate literature utilized classic antisemitic tropes and called Arthur "an oily, greasy Kike who became rich during World War II by working people for starvation wages."[44]

In their letter, the Lewises noted that Bloody Sunday prompted them to finally speak out: "Until the riot on the bridge on our terrible black

Marchers south of the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 21, 1965, the first day of the Selma to Montgomery March. Front row: John Lewis, unidentified woman, Ralph Abernathy, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Bunche, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, F. D. Reese. Note the man at far right in a yarmulke, or "freedom cap." (Courtesy of the Alabama Department of Archives and History. Donated by the Alabama Media Group. Photograph by William McCormick, Huntsville Times.*)*

Sunday we kept our views quiet." They closed their letter: "We are confused, more than ever tonight. We must live with ourselves, but we also want to live here. It would be so easy to be quiet, but it would not let us sleep any easier than we do now. All we ask from you is partial understanding, and compassion." They concluded, demonstrating a keen awareness of the danger in which their letter placed them, "We ask that you do not show it to your friends or even talk about it; this information is for the people who mean something important to us." Soon after, fifty-three-year-old Arthur sustained two heart attacks, the second of which ended his life. Muriel held the harassers responsible for her husband's death: "All this carrying on just brought [what] killed him."[45] Even if Tepper lacked the backing of the majority of Selma's Jews, a public posse stood behind his beliefs. In contrast, Arthur and Muriel Lewis stood publicly alone.

Unlike the Lewises, the rest of Selma's Jewish integrationists and moderates stayed publicly silent on civil rights. The temple took no official stance and issued no public statements. Despite 80 percent of those surveyed in 1966 perceiving themselves and their families as integrationists (in contrast to an estimated 30 percent of the general white population), they remained tightlipped.[46] They spoke about the fear they felt as being "next in line," articulating an acute understanding of their

Arthur J. Lewis (right) receiving award from Joe N. Greene, Birmingham Red Cross, 1955. (Courtesy of Amy K. Milligan.)

otherness as Jews, even in a community that largely accepted them.[47] In particular, they felt concerned about the boycott of white merchants by Black activists and how it directly impacted the sales of Jewish stores, especially those with a predominantly Black clientele. The threat of losing their remaining customers loomed large, prompting most of Selma's Jewish business owners to remain silent to align with neither integrationists nor segregationists. Both moderates and those who called themselves ambivalent generally hid their beliefs within the Jewish and general communities.

Temple Mishkan Israel became heavily involved in the resettlement efforts of the United Service for New Americans (USNA) program after the Holocaust, and the thirteen Holocaust refugees who lived in Selma overwhelmingly sympathized with the Black community, enumerating the similarities that they saw between how Hitler treated Jews and the treatment of Black Americans. However, they were quiet about their beliefs, the least likely to be vocal about integration, but simultaneously felt the most strongly about its importance.[48] The swirl of antisemitic rhetoric, nationally and locally, impacted the Holocaust refugees and their willingness to speak out. When interviewed in 1966, one Holocaust refugee proclaimed, "I'm on the side of the Negroes. How could I not?"[49] Despite these beliefs, the refugees' sense of precarity deeply shaped their involvement in the civil rights movement. In his 1966 interview, another interviewee told Bloom, "If I were young, I would do something." His wife retorted, "No, you wouldn't." And he replied, implying that he at least desired involvement: "Well, maybe I wouldn't, but . . ." The couple was reluctant to be interviewed, citing concerns for the safety of their family and fear about what would happen if others learned about their sympathetic beliefs.[50] In a private conversation in 2019, one of Selma's Holocaust refugees, Jacob, discussed experiencing similar anxiety: "We had the most to lose. We already were poor, and our psyche [was] broken. I wanted to do something." He paused for a moment, then continued, "I should have done something. But I didn't. That's the truth. I didn't. But I am sorry."[51]

One particularly difficult issue for Selma's resettled refugees to navigate during the civil rights movement was the rhetoric of comparing Bloody Sunday and the Holocaust. In the days immediately following Bloody Sunday, ABC televised *The Nuremberg Trials*. Midway through the

Members of Selma's resettled refugee community.
Frieda Kahn, aged sixteen, c. 1918; Hermann Berger, aged twenty-two, c. 1926;
Hermann and Frieda Berger outside the Bendersky's Store in Selma, n.d.
(Courtesy of the Alabama Holocaust Education Center,
Birmingham. Donated by Hanna Berger.)

documentary, a news broadcast interrupted with a long segment about Bloody Sunday, helping viewers link the violence and hate of the two events. The next day, numerous individuals from across the United States traveled to Selma and overran the streets. No rental cars were to be found, and people began caravanning and carpooling from Montgomery's airport to Selma. Religious identity motivated many of these activists to join the cause, including Jews who felt it especially incumbent on them to participate. They could not stand by and watch hate, injustice, violence, and racism, turning a blind eye like had been turned to Jews during the Holocaust. While these individuals certainly were meritorious in their dedication and bravery, it left Selma's Holocaust refugees feeling unmoored. Many were not in the psychological or economic state in which they felt that they could engage freely with the movement. Holocaust education had not yet entered the American lexicon, and they were watching others (many without full knowledge of their experiences) interpret their trauma and link it to the civil rights movement. Although their lived experiences were why they privately identified as integrationists, they felt uncertain about the application of the Holocaust as a device, especially by those who knew little or nothing of their stories or trauma.

Although public silence emanated from Temple Mishkan Israel, individuals expressed strong feelings about the role that the temple and its members should play. Nancy, a retired women's clothing buyer, reflected, "Sol [Tepper] was a piece of scum. He was a racist, a terrible man. We don't get to pick who is in our community, but we do have to deal with them. The Jewish community is just so small, and he was part of it." She reminisced about the Lewis family: "It was just hard. I was young. I look back now and wish I had been more like them, but I did the things that I could, even if they weren't as public." At ninety-five years old, she confessed for the first time to her family that she accompanied the family maid, Sadie, to the courthouse to help her sign up to vote. She recalled thinking, "I'm gonna see that she's not intimidated, and she'll get to vote." When Sadie was turned away, Nancy stood her ground and told them, "Do you know who my daddy is? Sadie's [part of my] family. She gets to vote." In the end, she approached the rest of the line of registering voters and told them, "You tell me if they give you trouble. I'll get the paper to publish the names of these bigots who are preventing Blacks from voting."[52] She admitted that she knew she was leaving for graduate school

soon and that if she were to have stayed in Selma, she did not know if she could have been quite as brave.

Seventy-six-year-old Ellen, a recently retired social worker, told a similar story about her quiet protest: "I was more liberal. I wanted to take up for the Blacks and stand up for their rights, and I was a fresh-faced college girl at a school in the North, so I thought I knew something." She began writing letters to the local paper: "You are discriminating because there are nothing but dirt roads in the Black section and all these paved and gold streets for the whites." Although afraid to sign her name to the letters, she continued to send them. After about two months, the city paved Green Street, which ran through a Black neighborhood. Her focus turned to the rabbi, and she wrote to him asking him to speak out: "'The Jews were discriminated against, and now you are discriminating against Blacks.' I was so mad. But he did nothing."[53]

Indeed, Temple Mishkan Israel's Rabbi Lothar Lubasch remained silent. Lubasch, identified here without pseudonym, had just arrived in the city in 1959. He had fled to the United States in 1937 from Hitler's Germany and took several pulpits before arriving in Selma, where he served from 1959 until his retirement in 1975. Lubasch was the longest-serving rabbi in the history of Temple Mishkan Israel and had the distinction of being the temple's last full-time rabbi. He accepted the pulpit appointment at the age of sixty-three and retired at age seventy-nine, also making him one of Selma's oldest rabbis. He died one year after retirement.

The congregation looked to Lubasch for guidance, but he offered no public statements and little private guidance. He did not speak about race or civil rights from the pulpit, nor did he want the temple to acknowledge the movement in any way. When physician Zanvel Klein visited Selma as part of the Medical Committee for Human Rights, he noted that Lubasch did not seem to correlate his experiences in Nazi Germany with that of the Black population of Selma, and he responded with "every cliché in the book, from Negro irresponsibility to 'would you marry one?'" In this way, Lubasch stood in contrast to the other Holocaust refugees in Selma, who remained united, albeit publicly silent, about supporting integration. During his visit, Klein and his associates were invited by two of these refugee families for dinner, which he called "a brave act" given their somewhat precarious experiences as refugees. Klein recalls that at one dinner a woman and her daughter hosted them, but her husband was not present

Rabbi Lothar Lubasch, 1965.
(Judson College Year Book. Courtesy of Amy K. Milligan.)

because he was "in the hospital suffering from severe depression" brought on, they suspected, by the successful boycott that had closed his family's business.[54]

The reasons for Lubasch's silence remain unknown, but in interviews, Selma's Jews commented on how the resurgence of the Klan across Alabama undergirded their silence and lack of action, even for those who identified as integrationists. For example, on August 2, 1958, fifty cars filled with Klan members arrived for a nighttime "parade" through Selma's Black neighborhoods, blasting their horns and yelling from the cars in reaction to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s arrival to speak at the Baptist Sunday school. Although the city had refused to issue parade permits to the Klan (as well as to the delegation sent to welcome King), the police did not arrest members of the motorcade, insisting that it was not a parade because it did not include a marching band. Other fear-inducing tactics included erecting "welcome signs" on the roads leading into Selma painted with sawmill blades dripping with blood from their teeth. Although technically illegal, these signs were not removed because Governor John Patterson, whom the Klan supported, insisted that the signs remain. The police and governor essentially issued the Klan a green light to terrorize citizens.

By March 7, 1965, when Bloody Sunday became the turning point of the civil rights movement, Jewish activists from across the country poured into the city.[55] The prominent presence of Jews in the march resulted in some Black freedom marchers wearing yarmulkes, which they called "freedom caps," symbolizing solidarity and oneness under God and honoring the participating rabbis present. But white and Black Selmians were confused by these Jewish protestors—were they there because the temple had invited them; were they part of the temple; did this mean that Selma's Jews supported the march; did the temple hand out yarmulkes to Black freedom marchers? Tensions heightened and the lines blurred between local and national voices, and local Jews felt certain that, once again, outsiders were speaking on their behalf. Most Jews stayed at home and watched televised news coverage, but others left the city because they feared what might happen next. Shop owners closed their stores hoping they would not be looted, and yet another Jewish storeowner was hospitalized from the stress of the boycotts. The national coverage of Jews in the city depicted Heschel marching arm and arm with King, as well as Tepper standing at the foot of the bridge, weapon in hand, with the sheriff's posse. Yet, other than Tepper, Selma's Jews were not captured in this footage, even if the rest of America seemed to think that the images they saw on their television screens included members of Temple Mishkan Israel.

The March: Reactions and Impact

Journalist Gay Talese wrote, "Memphis was where Dr. King was murdered in 1968 by a white man, and yet that city had not been demonized as Selma had been after Bloody Sunday, even though on the latter occasion not a single demonstrator had been killed."[56] Indeed, within a short period, Selma went from a relatively unknown city in the Deep South to an iconic location for civil rights history. Historian Alston Fitts explained, "Selma's name has been etched indelibly into the nation's memory. Visitors to the city often ask to be shown the place where Bull Connor unleashed his dogs, which is in Birmingham; or where George Wallace stood in the schoolhouse door, an event in Tuscaloosa; or even where Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, a Memphis tragedy. It is hard, sometimes, to convince them that every significant event in the history of the civil rights movement did not take place in this one small southern town."[57]

The *Selma Times-Journal* reported daily on the events that *did* happen in Selma. Roswell Leslie Falkenberry, the newspaper's editor, committed to reporting fairly and truthfully about what ensued, which led the WCC to attack him and the paper. The WCC believed that the paper openly attacked "white unity" and wanted to hold Falkenberry accountable. Despite significant threats, Falkenberry persisted with unbiased reporting.[58]

Tepper wrote extensively to the newspaper during this period, with so many letters that Falkenberry could not possibly publish them all. Still, the editor ran a representative sample of Tepper's correspondence so that he could offer differing perspectives. Moreover, he noted in his editorials that he respected Tepper's willingness to sign his name to his words. Despite Falkenberry's commitment to presenting unbiased accounts of events, Tepper accused the *Selma Times-Journal* of no longer being objective because it "furnished aid and comfort to this kinky-haired, thick-lipped, mulatto, race-baiter Martin Luther King."[59] Other WCC members also took issue with Falkenberry's reporting and called on local merchants to remove their advertising from his newspaper. Jewish business owners again felt caught in the crosshairs. In interviews they indicated that they supported freedom of the press but feared that continuing to advertise in the newspaper would result in being targeted by the WCC for additional boycotts.

In response to the WCC's pressure to withdraw advertising, prominent Jewish businessman Charles Hohenberg and another local businessman, Frank Wilson, called a meeting of "concerned moderates" at the Hotel Albert in April 1965. The group gathered more than 1,100 signatures on a petition, and on April 16, a special session of the city council heard the moderates' position. Their statement opened, "In light of recent developments in Alabama, we feel the business community has an obligation to speak out for what it believes to be right. The vast majority of the people in Alabama, like other responsible citizens throughout our nation, believe in law and order, and in the fair and just treatment of all their fellow citizens. They believe in obedience to the law regardless of their personal feelings about its specific merits. They believe in the basic human dignity of all people of all races." Several chambers of commerce, the Alabama Bankers Association, the Alabama Textile Manufacturers Association, and the Associated Industries of Alabama undersigned the

document, which ran as a full-page advertisement throughout the state. On the following page, local Selmians took out an advertisement endorsing the message. Numerous civic and business associations were listed, as well as individual signatories, including thirty-five of Selma's one hundred Jews.[60] These signatories provided the first public endorsement of moderate or liberal stances by a large number of Jews.

The city council reversed its stance on boycotting advertising with the newspaper, but not without significant contentiousness. During more than two hours of heated debate in which, as the paper reported, "Names were called, tempers flared, and voices became impassioned," the WCC demanded that the chamber's previous stance be re-endorsed because the new position paved the way for school integration.[61] During the arguments, Jerome Siegel, a member of Temple Mishkan Israel and the founder of the Committee of One Hundred, an organization designed to draw business and industry to the city, stepped forward and stood alongside McLean Pitts, the city attorney, to discuss the implications of such decisions on local industry. Siegel maintained that it was already difficult to attract and retain industry in the city and that these radical voices and actions were angering Hammermill and Dan River Mills, which were unhappy with the city's current politics. The withdrawal of such manufacturers could potentially threaten the city's already fragile economy. Still, Tepper and his followers dug in their heels, insisting that if the white community remained united behind Sheriff Jim Clark, they would defeat integration. Despite Tepper and the WCC's efforts, Selma's formerly all-white schools opened with thirty-one Black students on September 3, 1965.[62]

Navigating the Legacy

Selma's Jews existed in a locational heart of the civil rights conflict. Four key factors illuminated their experiences of the movement: (1) their perceptions of danger, (2) the impact of Holocaust refugees on their community response, (3) the testing of their provisional whiteness, and (4) their role in truth telling.

The Jews of Selma perceived themselves to be uniquely or especially in danger economically and physically. In reality, the fears that they experienced were similar to those articulated by Jews across the state who also feared that their businesses would be boycotted if they did not fall in line

with the white status quo. The repetition of these narratives among Selma's Jews reinforced the potential of this economic threat. Likewise, they perceived that they were potentially at higher risk for physical threats, especially as a small community, as they repeatedly discussed the attempted synagogue bombings, the Gadsden shooting, and concerns for their physical safety in a city with a KKK presence and a WCC that utilized violent rhetoric.

Regardless of whether the Jews of Selma faced imminent danger, they perceived themselves to be at risk. This perception of danger does not excuse inaction or negative actions, but it does offer context toward the psychological motivations and perceptions of the individuals involved. By drawing a contrast between themselves and other Jewish communities in cities at the heart of the civil rights movement, they perceived themselves to be at even higher risk. Although their experiences were similar to Jews across the state, Selma's Jews felt that their experiences differed from those of Jews in Montgomery and Birmingham, for example. As Alan explained: "Those were big cities, they had infrastructure, police, lots of citizens. Selma was a small town." Nancy echoed a similar sentiment: "We saw what was happening in the big cities, but when it happened here, I just don't think people can understand how small Selma is until they come here and [see] how spread out everything is."[63]

However, perhaps the greatest contributing factor of Selma Jews' heightened perception of risk comes from the presence of Tepper in their congregation. His antagonistic and provocative voice echoed throughout the entire state. Moreover, he proudly identified himself as a Jew *and* as a Jew from Selma, which drew unwanted attention to other members of the congregation who feared that they would be mistakenly aligned with Tepper's views. Simultaneously, they also feared speaking out against Tepper. In his interview, after a long pause, Marty noted: "Listen, how else can I say this? It wasn't a good look for us as Jews. We couldn't win either way we cut it." Leonard agreed: "It was bad enough what he was saying, but then he had to go and say 'And I'm a proud Jew from Selma, Alabama.' I cringe just thinking about it." He added: "The one thing I did respect, though, was that he had the balls to say it as himself and not hide behind a hood. Sol was himself. He said what he meant, and he meant what he said. I didn't agree with him, but I can respect that he was man

enough to say it to someone's face and not hide like a coward."[64] Because of the increased tension in the city caused by the presence of Tepper, the Jews of Selma perceived themselves to be at higher risk and had a heightened awareness of their instability, and, although other southern Jews were experiencing similar anxieties, Tepper's presence exacerbated their fears.[65]

The impact of the presence of Holocaust refugees in the community heightened Selma Jews' feelings of precarity. Interviewees repeatedly said that they had "never experienced antisemitism." While this was their self-perception, their interviews are filled with anecdotes and stories that suggested otherwise: at minimum, they experienced antisemitic microaggressions. After I considered the post-Holocaust stories of Selma, this tension came into focus. In a community that had willingly offered placement for a disproportionately high number of Holocaust refugees—Selma's seventy Jewish families resettled six refugee families in comparison to Birmingham's Jews, who resettled eleven families among their one thousand households—even the nonrefugee perceptions of antisemitism were predicated on experiences of the Holocaust.[66] Selma's Jews also contrasted their acceptance in their city with the experiences of Black Selmians, whom they believed to be mistreated. When compared with the Holocaust and racism, they believed that they had never experienced "true hatred."

Although they grew up feeling fully integrated into white society, during the 1960s Selma's Jews were reminded of their provisional whiteness. One only need to consider the tensions of the KKK and the WCCs across the state—all the KKK groups affirmed their hatred of Jews, whereas the councils literally divided over the issue of whether Jews were white enough to gain membership. These tensions, underscored by the fear of violence, demonstrated how, for many Jews in Selma, their whiteness was, seemingly for the first time in their lifetime, contested. Full awareness of this tension varied, nonetheless the stability which they had previously felt shifted. Aligning themselves with the Black community or with the white northern protestors called for a reckoning of their comfort and privilege. If they were "like them," they took on risk for what would happen after the protests ended. As retired entrepreneur Larry observed: "When they left, we were left behind, and we had to live with our neighbors. We already knew that Jews were being called niggers elsewhere, so

we clung to our whiteness. It isn't something my family is proud of, but it does make me more aware now as I do my own social justice work. It was a mistake, a big mistake, and one that we have to reckon with."[67]

Ultimately when outside activists and protestors departed, Selma was left to rebuild, shaken to its core on all levels by what had occurred. The Jewish community faced a difficult position as it moved forward. The greater American narrative of civil rights history proudly boasts about the Jewish involvement in the Selma marches, the role of Heschel and other northern rabbis, and the commitment of Jews to civil rights as born out of their understanding of *tikun olam*. Jewish schools, tourists, families, synagogues, and others come to Selma interested in the role of Jews in the movement, expecting to hear about the temple's involvement. Yet, that is not the story that can be truthfully told. Instead, congregation members have been called on to tell the larger American story of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement while simultaneously holding themselves accountable for truth telling. This type of reckoning is one few of us will experience—one in which they retell the story of their congregation repeatedly, each time telling the truth of their community to a

Temple Mishkan Israel, Selma. (Photograph by and courtesy of Amy Milligan.)

surprised audience. Those who come to Selma are prepared to believe that Temple Mishkan Israel organized the Jews to support voting rights and integration. Rather, the temple carefully presents itself at the crossroads, telling a story of other Jews while also admitting that their congregation remained largely uninvolved, grappling with their temple's civil rights legacy while simultaneously interpreting a story, which is not necessarily their own. Moreover, as the congregation has aged, those left to tell the story were children at the time of the marches. Still, they hold themselves accountable for the truth of their temple's history.

When asked what Selma's Jewish civil rights legacy is, Janet offered a summation that captures the themes across my interviews. She earnestly began, "We live in a city that is defined by its very worst day." She shrugged sadly and offered a gentle smile. "Selma's a wonderful place if you come to know us, but not many people do." When I pressed her, she concluded:

> We live in a divided world. Instead of pointing fingers at Selma, maybe our story can help people learn that there are good and bad people everywhere, in all of our religions and races. Those that are especially good or especially bad are easy to pick out. But all those other people in the middle, the majority, that is who we really need to worry about. I wish my family had done something to help during civil rights, but they didn't. I'm also glad that they didn't do anything bad. That inaction, well, that's their legacy, but it doesn't have to be mine. All I can do now is tell the truth about what happened and hope that it helps other people to take account of their own inaction. Maybe that's the lesson that comes out of Selma's Jewish community: do the right thing, even if you are scared.[68]

NOTES

[1] Leonard (pseudonym), interview conducted by author, June 27, 2018. This narrative as a story has been told with variations in several Jewish communities. Leonard's story is comparable, for example, to the "I sold you those shoes" narratives documented by Leonard Rogoff in his work on Jewish North Carolina. Other folk narratives exist in Birmingham about a Jewish storeowner who had an open relationship with customers who were members of the KKK and sold them sheets, although he was not threatened in his home. See, for example, "Southern Jewish Folklore: How'd Your Family Wind up Here?," Jewish Heritage in

North Carolina, June 27, 2022, accessed March 13, 2023, https://jewishnc.org/southern-jewish-folklore-howd-your-family-wind-up-here.

[2] Leonard's experience in Selma was not unique, but the context of his city would cause his story to take on cultural significance. Selma's Jewish community did not encounter higher levels of Klan violence than other Jews in the state, nor was Selma's temple directly threatened by bombings; yet, Birmingham's April 28, 1958, attempted bombing was particularly impactful in eliciting fear in Selma, and this larger context formed a nexus of awareness for the Jews of Selma like Leonard's father. They became deeply aware of a lived duality in their city, in which they experienced both precariousness as Jews and certain privileges that were influenced in part by the prominence of Jews in the city and their incorporation into organizations like the WCC. For helpful comparisons and context see, for example, Jonathan D. Sarna, "The 'Mythical Jew' and 'The Jew Next Door' in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Anti-Semitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Urbana, IL, 1986), 57–78. For more on these parallel experiences, see Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA, 2001); Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin, eds., *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights: 1880s to 1990s* (Tuscaloosa, 2007); P. Allen Krause, *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone: Southern Reform Rabbis and the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Mark K. Bauman with Stephen Krause (Tuscaloosa, 2016); Jack Nelson, *Terror in the Night: The Klan's Campaign Against the Jews* (Jackson, MS, 1996).

[3] I have struggled with the inclusion of direct quotations that utilize derogatory, racist, and/or anti-Black rhetoric. My choice to include certain direct quotations is not to exploit or cause harm to the Black community, but rather to paint a full and honest picture of the violence, hatred, and racism still faced by Black Americans. I have carefully evaluated these quotations and kept them to a minimum; but it is my belief that eliminating them whitewashes history and fails to hold white individuals or groups accountable for their language and racism.

[4] Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society, and the Klan in Alabama, 1915–1949* (Tuscaloosa, 1999); Wayne Greenhaw, *Fighting the Devil in Dixie: How Civil Rights Activists Took on the Ku Klux Klan in Alabama* (Chicago, 2011); Shawn Lay, ed., *The Invisible Empire in the West: Toward a New Historical Appraisal of the Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s* (Urbana, IL, 2004).

[5] As such, this national renewal was in some ways even more radical in the North and Midwest, where de jure segregation did not exist. See Paul R. Mullins, "Engagement and the Color Line: Race, Renewal and Public Archaeology in the Urban Midwest," *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 32 (Summer 2003): 205-29.

[6] Marty, interview conducted by author, August 17, 2019.

[7] Steve Garner, *Whiteness: An Introduction* (Oxfordshire, UK, 2007); Ashley "Woody" Doane and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, eds., *White Out: The Continuing Significance of Racism* (London, UK, 2003).

[8] For more on this phenomenon in relation to American Jews, see Karen Brodkin, *How Jews Became White Folks and What That Says About Race in America* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1998); Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (Princeton, 2006); David Schraub, "White Jews: An Intersectional Approach," *AJS Review* 43 (November 2019): 379–407.

[9] The city census data does not classify enslaved individuals or freed people on these documents in 1860 but rather only classifies white, Black, and mulatto as racial categories. Elsewhere the census officials use the label "colored" as a descriptor for household composition, although this still does not include enslaved or free status.

[10] When referring to enslaved individuals, I do not use the word "slaves" unless in a direct quotation. A person is not, as their core identity, a slave, nor is that a choice anyone would make for themselves. By using enslaved individual, I acknowledge an abusive and nonconsensual system, affirming the personhood of the individual, and utilizing their enslavement as an adjective describing their circumstance rather than their identity.

[11] "Kiwanis Laugh at the Ku Klux," *Selma Times-Journal*, January 10, 1923.

[12] "Statement—In Opposition to a Ku Klux Klan in Selma," *Selma Times-Journal*, May 18, 1923.

[13] Hugo Black has a complicated relationship with antisemitism and Alabama's Jews. See, for example, Virginia Van der Veer Hamilton, *Hugo Black: The Alabama Years* (Tuscaloosa, 1982).

[14] Alston Fitts III, *Selma: A Bicentennial History* (Tuscaloosa, 2016), 199–204.

[15] Harriet, interview conducted by author, June 26, 2018.

[16] Claire, interview conducted by author, June 28, 2021.

[17] "Attack Foiled by Young Mother in Bout with Negro: Invader Disarmed and Chased from Home," *Selma Times-Journal,* April 26, 1953.

[18] Sarah, interview conducted by author, October 15, 2019. Throughout their interviews, individuals were unclear on whether Rockwell and the other women were sexually assaulted. Newspaper reports suggest that Rockwell fended off her potential assault and used veiled language to allude to the rape of other women, but the interviewees recalled messaging from the larger white community that white women needed to be careful around Black men, feeding into stereotypes that several interviewees, in reflection, acknowledged were racist. These memories can be categorized among classic racist tropes of lascivious Black men raping innocent white women that were and are used as rhetorical racist tools.

[19] Those who have studied and discussed the case note that his confession matches the police report narratives and the conjecture published in the local newspaper. See, for example, E. Barrett Prettyman, Jr., "The Unconstitutional Conviction of 'Baby,'" *Yearbook: Supreme Court Historical Society* 68 (1978): 68–78; Gary May, *Bending Toward Justice: The Voting Rights Act and the Transformation of American Democracy* (New York, 2013), 9; Fitts, *Selma*, 222–29.

[20] This example demonstrates, again, the use of the lascivious Black male trope as a fearmongering tactic to uphold white systems of power.

[21] Fitts, *Selma*, 262–65.

[22] "Group to Reveal Plan of Defense for Segregation: Economic Pressure to Promote Cause," *Selma Times-Journal*, November 28, 1954.

[23] In response to what they called "the Jewish issue," Selma's WCC announced in a November 29, 1954, meeting that, "there is no place for prejudice [against Jews] in this movement." Fitts, *Selma,* 222.

[24] "Split over Anti-Semitism Widens in Alabama Segregation Groups," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, March 8, 1956. Engelhardt shared the same sentiment about Catholics, who were also contested among Alabama's WCCs.

[25] Henry King, "Anti-Semitism Repudiated," *Selma-Times Journal*, March 9, 1956; Ben Price, "Struggle for Control: Council Chiefs Divided on Anti-Semitism Issue," *Montgomery Advertiser*, March 6, 1956.

[26] This interaction is yet another example of the racist sexual trope previously noted.

[27] Fitts, *Selma*, 260–68. Smitherman eventually sold his grocery store and left Selma.

[28] Alan, interview conducted by author, July 22, 2020.

[29] Helen, interview conducted by author, October 23, 2020.

[30] William O. Bryant, "Boy, 16, Admits Gadsden Bombing," *Alabama Journal*, March 26, 1960; "Gadsden, Alabama," ISJL Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, accessed September 25, 2021, https://www.isjl.org/alabama-gadsden-encyclopedia.html.

[31] S. L. Wisenberg, "What was on the Minds of Selma's Jews?" *Tablet,* March 6, 2015, accessed March 14, 2023, https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/what-was-on-the-minds-of-selmas-jews; Larry Brook, "In 1965, Selma's Jews were in a Tough Position," *Southern Jewish Life*, March 25, 2015.

[32] Marshall Bloom, "A Participant Observation Study of the Attitudes of Selma Jews Towards Integration" (master's thesis, Amherst College, 1966), 116–26.

[33] Ibid., 55.

[34] For comparison see, for example, Alfred O. Hero, Jr., "Southern Jews," in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge, 1973): 217–50; Leonard Dinnerstein, "Southern Jewry and the Desegregation Crisis, 1954–1970," *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (November 1986): 113–22.

[35] Bloom, "Participant Observation Study," 70.

[36] King, "Anti-Semitism Repudiated."

[37] "Misleading Telegram," *Montgomery Advertiser*, October 30, 1960.

[38] Janet, interview conducted by author, June 22, 2018.

[39] Alan interview.

[40] Marty interview.

[41] Sarah interview.

[42] Sol Tepper, "Relocation Move Instigated Here to Aid Negroes," *Selma Times-Journal*, September 27, 1963. Tepper's actions parallel the Reverse Freedom Ride attempts made by segregationists in 1962, during which Black individuals were given free one-way bus tickets and promised free housing and jobs in northern cities, only to arrive and find that they had been deceived.

[43] The Lewis family is not identified with pseudonyms because their story is widely known.

[44] Fliers in private collection of Hermine Gross Cohen, Selma, Alabama.

[45] Lewis writes this in a private letter sent to another member of the congregation.

[46] Bloom, "Participant Observation Study," 116–26.

[47] This type of provisional acceptance was not uncommon. See, for example, Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era* (Athens, GA, 2011).

[48] For comparison, see Rabbi Moses M. Landau interview in Krause, *To Stand Aside or Stand Alone*: 252–64. Other helpful context can be found in Timothy Riggio Quevillon, "Moshe Cahana, Ethical Zionism and the Application of Jewish Nationalism to Civil Struggles in the American South," *Southern Jewish History* 23 (2020): 125–65.

[49] Quoted in Bloom, "Participant Observation Study," 6.

[50] Ibid., 107.

[51] Jacob, interview conducted by author, August 17, 2019.

[52] Nancy, interview conducted by author, November 2, 2018.

[53] Ellen, interview conducted by author, October 12, 2019.

[54] John Dittmer, *The Good Doctors: The Medical Committee for Human Rights and the Struggle for Social Justice in Health Care* (Jackson, MS, 2017), 117–19.

[55] For more on this critical event, see David J. Garrow, *Protest at Selma: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Voting Rights Act of 1965* (New Haven, 1978); Richie Jean Sherrod Jackson, *The House by the Side of the Road: The Selma Civil Rights Movement* (Tuscaloosa, 2011); Robert A. Pratt, *Selma's Bloody Sunday: Protest, Voting Rights, and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (Baltimore, 2017); J. Mills Thornton III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa, 2002).

[56] Quoted in Fitts, *Selma*, 262–63.

[57] Fitts, *Selma*, 263.

[58] Although significant outside press covered events, Falkenberry's voice, editorial choices, and knowledge of the city catapulted the newspaper into recognition, for which he received the Alabama Press Association's Journalist of the Year award in 1965 in recognition of his unbiased reporting.

[59] Quoted in Fitts, *Selma,* 263.

[60] "Statement of Public Endorsement," *Selma Times-Journal*, April 18, 1965.

[61] "Chamber Reverses Stand on Advertisement Issue," *Selma-Times Journal*, April 18, 1965.

[62] Fitts, *Selma,* 267.

[63] Alan interview; Nancy interview. According to census data, in 1960 Birmingham had a population of approximately 341,000 citizens, Montgomery 134,000, and Selma 28,000.

[64] Marty interview; Leonard interview.

[65] For examples of these commonalities in different southern cities see Webb, *Fight Against Fear*.

[66] Dan J. Puckett, *In the Shadow of Hitler: Alabama's Jews, the Second World War, and the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa, 2008); Dan J. Puckett, "Resettlement of Holocaust Survivors in Alabama," *Southern Jewish History* 16 (2013): 169–214.

[67] Larry, interview conducted by author, June 2, 2019.

[68] Janet interview.