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Jewish Communities in the Civil Rights Era in Virginia

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Throughout the civil rights struggle in the South, speaking out against the status quo system of racism and segregation brought serious repercussions from the dominant white community. Jews in this region, as a minority, were placed in a precarious situation, trying to preserve a delicate social balance in a community whose basic tenets many came to oppose. As minorities, blacks and Jews had always had much in common, with scholars accepting the idea that there was “once a ‘golden era’ of mutual support and understanding.”¹ Jews, though sympathetic to civil rights, rejected the notion that they had any particular responsibility to actively support the struggle and, initially opted for silence as their course of action in Virginia and the rest of the South. This was the case until national organizations and Jewish leaders across the South, with the Holocaust fresh in their mind, took clear and decisive stances in support of civil rights. These actions were often against the wishes of the surrounding Jewish community and caused a considerable anti-Semitic backlash. Synagogues were bombed across the South in response, flaming crosses were thrown at Jewish leaders’ homes, and life was made difficult for them through similar intimidation tactics that the white south used against African-Americans.

In Virginia, the situation was quite similar to the rest of the South. Jews in the Old Dominion were silent sympathizers to the civil rights movement into the early 1950s, fearing backlash from the surrounding white society if they spoke out. As the decade progressed, outspoken Jewish leaders and national organizations exerted tremendous

¹ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 3.

pressure on Jews throughout the Commonwealth, making them vocal advocates well before the rest of white society embraced integration and civil rights. Whites countered with anti-Semitic activity, but the actions of these rabbis and organizations set Virginia Jewry down a path in which silence and inaction on the issue were no longer possible.

This gradual change towards action and mobilization came about slowly in the mid-20th century. Jews in the South had always been a minority, never comprising more than one percent of the total population in the region. Yet interfaith relations between Jews and gentiles had always been quite good compared to the rest of the country, as one historian called the South “historically the section least inclined to ostracize Jews.”² The primary concern for Southern Jews was to fit in with the rest of white society, not act as social pioneers. Motivated by this desire and a sense of self-preservation, many even became supporters of segregation. This need for conformity prompted Norfolk Rabbi Malcolm H. Stern to remark that “nowhere [else] in America is the old principle of Jewish history...as the Christians do, so do the Jews so apparent.”³ Southern Jews “accepted support for racial segregation as the essential precondition for social acceptance among the white Christian majority.”⁴

Jews were fearful to speak out because their experiences had taught them to stay silent in crises, since anti-Semitism popped up in times of social stress. This was especially true in the South, where Jews lived in small pockets without local support

² John Higham, *Send These to Me*, rev. ed. (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), 141. See Nathaniel Weyl, *The Jew in American Politics* (New Rochelle, NY: Arlington House, 1968), 254-256. Weyl echoes Higham’s conclusion, writing that the South was more favorably inclined toward Jews in this period. In 1940, Jews were listed with six other nationalities in a survey by *Fortune* magazine of which ethnic groups made the best American citizens. Jews ranked fifth nationally but third in the Southeast. Another *Fortune* study in 1950 found the South 30 percent less anti-Semitic than the national average.

³ Leonard Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry and the Desegregation Crisis, 1954-70,” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (1973): 231-41. 232.

⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 16.

systems. Jacob Rothschild, an Atlanta rabbi, explained that “Jews in small cities don’t dare express themselves. They assume that whatever they do would be wrong.”⁵ Jews were often singled out and blamed for problems during difficult times, as had been the case in the Civil War. Two Confederate Senators were Jewish, one of whom, Judah P. Benjamin, served as attorney general, secretary of war, and secretary of state in the Confederate government. Even as Benjamin and others fought fiercely in the effort, Benjamin’s miscues were attributed to his religion and Jews were attacked as a group, as “anti-Jewish prejudice was a character expression of the age, part and parcel of the economic and social upheaval effectuated by the war.”⁶ Understanding the way that history had unfolded left the Southern Jewish community in a serious quandary, as Alexander Miller, head of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), explained in “The Dilemma of the Jew in the South.” According to Miller, “Jews are frightened because from experience they know that anti-Semitism springs up out of tension and that what is essentially a black and white situation, the bigot inevitably drags in Anti-Semitism as an important part of his campaign.”⁷

These fears first rang true in Atlanta in 1913, when a Jewish factory manager in Atlanta, Leo Frank, was wrongly accused of the murder of a 13-year-old Mary Phagan. The innocent Frank was convicted and scheduled to be executed, only to have the governor commute the sentence to life imprisonment after a lengthy appeal process. After the governor’s action, Frank was violently taken from jail and lynched by a public mob.⁸

⁵ *National Jewish Post And Opinion*, January 11, 1957.

⁶ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry,” 232.

⁷ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 25, 1957.

⁸ Russell Aiuto, “The Case of Leo Frank,” Court TV’s Crime Library, n.d. <<http://www.crimelibrary.com/classics/frank/>> (21 November 2004).

This episode first sensitized Jews to the plight of the African-Americans, alerting them that they could be subjected to a similar fate as minorities.⁹ The lynching of Leo Frank had a different effect on Northern and Southern Jewry, the first visible sign of a philosophical schism between the two regions. It prompted Northern Jews to support black causes and publicly make statements against any type of segregation, but Southern Jews acted with even more “caution, circumspection, and conformity in matters of race relations,” refraining from making any clear statements.¹⁰ It is important to note a clear distinction between Northern and Southern Jews. Southern Jews, according to Abraham Lavender, fit in the political middle as more liberal than Southern Gentiles but less liberal than Northern Jews.¹¹ They considered themselves no less Jewish because they were Southern but no less Southern because they were Jewish. Sociologist Alfred Hero proposed that Southern Jews were closer to Southern Gentiles on race issues but closer to Northern Jews on every other issue, though still more conservative.¹² As a result, the Southern Jewish community remained silent despite any natural sympathy towards blacks, hoping to fit in the community. “In the decades between the Civil War and World War II, no Southern rabbi seems to have made any attempt to deal with the race

⁹ Seth Forman, “The Unbearable Whiteness of Being Jewish,” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, ed. Maurianne Adams and John Bracey (Amherst, Ma.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1999), 623.

¹⁰ Mark K. Bauman, “Introduction,” in *The Quiet Voices*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997), 2. See Albert Vorspan, *Great Jewish Debates and Dilemmas* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1980), 11-17. Vorspan argues that Northern Jews supported civil rights in the South “because it had to do with obvious injustices in faraway communities.” He stresses the distance factor, pointing out that Jews in the North often behaved as emotionally as anyone else when it came to integrating their own communities. His conclusion is that Northern Jews might not have supported civil rights if it affected them personally.

¹¹ Abraham D. Lavender, “Jewish Values in the Southern Milieu,” in *Turn to the South*, ed. Nathan M. Kaganoff and Melvin I. Urofsky (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 133.

¹² Alfred O. Hero Jr., “Southern Jews and Public Policy,” in *Turn to the South*, ed. Kaganoff and Urofsky, 147. As time elapsed, Southern Jews, in comparison to the surrounding community, believed desegregation was inevitable and accepted it, explaining why they represented “a disproportionately large fraction of the desegregationist white-liberal minority.”

question,” Stern wrote. “The fear of anti-Semitism... remained so pervasive throughout the South, that few (if any) Jewish laymen or rabbis would have had the courage to speak out on so unpopular an issue as the rights of blacks.”¹³

The beginning of Southern Jewry’s transition towards civil rights advocacy came after World War II, when news of Hitler’s Germany and the Holocaust reached American Jews. When Holocaust survivors immigrated to the United States, they were shocked by their coreligionists’ indifference or support for racial segregation. The main lesson they learned from the Holocaust was that racial superiority should not be tolerated in any form; it was even more problematic to have the primary victim of this horror propagating segregation against another minority.¹⁴ Also, the Holocaust had taught Jews and all minorities to look out for fellow minorities, a maxim that can best be explained in the words of German Pastor Martin Niemöller, who in 1938 said, “First they came for the Jews and I did not speak out because I was not a Jew. Then they came for the Communists and I did not speak out because I was not a Communist. Then they came for the trade unionists and I did not speak out because I was not a trade unionist. Then they came for me and there was no one left to speak out for me.” Jews knew they needed to speak out for blacks, or else they too had the potential to be persecuted down the road.

This fear stimulated activity in the North, where Jews worked through national organizations to exert pressure on their Southern brethren, though their efforts did not have an immediate impact. Even if the Holocaust swung them to support civil rights, Southern Jews still remained quiet. One author looking into life below the Mason-Dixon

¹³ Malcolm H. Stern, “The Role of the Rabbi in the South,” in *Turn to the South*, ed. Kaganoff and Urofsky, 29-30.

¹⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 35.

line found that “almost every Jewish community...is quietly working with the good Christians to promote integration, but no Southern Jew boasts of it.”¹⁵ By the early 1950s, Allen Krause estimated that though most Southern Jews were ambivalent to the issue, 75 percent of them tended towards a position sympathetic to civil rights, a stance significantly more progressive than the rest of the white community.¹⁶ This marked a considerable transition, as the Jews had moved apart from their white Christian neighbors, though they were still hesitant to speak out on it. “In the South it is rare for a Jew to publicly support controversial issues,” Leonard Dinnerstein wrote, citing this struggle as the perfect example. “While many privately believe the Negro should have equal rights, few come out and say so.”¹⁷

Jews received little prodding initially from their rabbis, who also remained quiet to this point. This stemmed from the perceived interfaith relationship, where “Southern Jews tended to judge their rabbis in terms of their popularity in the white gentile community.”¹⁸ For this reason, “most rabbis have presented considerably more conservative, or noncommittal, positions to non-Jews than to their own people and have had relatively little direct impact on international attitudes beyond their congregations.”¹⁹ One Southern rabbi said that he was open to discussing his pro-integrationist views in private meetings with congregants, but that he refused to speak of the issue in his

¹⁵ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry,” 236.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Bauman, “Introduction.” 8.

¹⁸ Alfred O. Hero Jr., “Southern Jews,” in *Jews in the South*, ed. Leonard Dinnerstein and Mary Dale Palsson (Baton Rouge, Louisiana State University Press, 1973), 247.

¹⁹ Hero, “Southern Jews,” 247.

sermons while leading services, explaining that “from the pulpit, I very rarely discuss it, because I don’t want to harm the Jewish community in any way, shape, or form.”²⁰

With their religious leaders silent, few leading laypersons were willing at first to take a stand. The large majority of the Southern Jewish population was merchants, and they depended on the goodwill of the community, black and white, for their livelihood.²¹ As a result, they remained silent on the issue to maintain working business relations with both races. Their desire to not appear different than any other white Southerner muted any support they might have had for civil rights. At the same time, they had to work with a black clientele. The goal for Jews came to be maintaining community favor and “their carefully nurtured and still-fragile acceptance” with the white community, not wanting to “stick out as Jews.”²² As a result, Vorspan concluded that Southern Jews had an inner conflict, which resulted in them “baiting their rabbis and national Jewish organizations” to take a stand on an issue that they themselves did not want to.²³

This was the case in Virginia, where outspoken rabbis and national organizations triggered Jewish public action for integration. Discrimination in the Commonwealth existed nearly from the beginning of its storied history, as Jews were still not full citizens

²⁰ P. Allen Krause, “Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South, 1954-1967,” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, ed. Adams and Bracey, 543.

²¹ Albert Vorspan, “The Dilemma of the Southern Jew,” in *Jews in the South*, ed. Dinnerstein and Palsson, 334.

²² Vorspan, “The Dilemma of the Southern Jew,” 335.

²³ Bauman, “Introduction,” 6. See Stephen J. Whitfield, “Jews and Other Southerners: Counterpoint and Paradox,” in *Turn to the South*, ed. Kaganoff and Urofsky, 91. The commonly accepted view is that Judeo-Christian relations in the South were fairly strong at this time, compared to other periods in history. But scholars like Whitfield have suggested that Jews’ hesitance to take a stand for what they believed in on this issue indicates that relations were tenuous. If Jewish relations with their Christian neighbors were as solid as many indicated, then civil rights advocacy would not have been perceived as a disruptive force. This suggests that “the equilibrium was more precarious than even the most defiantly Southern of Southern Jews would have liked to believe.”

in the colony until 1705.²⁴ This changed gradually over time, as Jews felt they were fully integrated into the society and the slavery system by the Civil War. Locally, over 100 Richmond Jews served in the Confederate forces, which comprised a percentage significantly higher than the Jews of any other region, North or South.²⁵ Yet Jews would never come to make up more than one percent of the population. This was the case in 1959, when there were 30,000 Jews in Virginia – 8,000 of whom were in Richmond and another 7,500 of whom were in the Norfolk.²⁶ Given their small numbers, Jews were keenly aware of their Jewishness, a factor that significantly shaped their opinions.

When the Court issued its decision in *Brown*, Virginia Jews, as a group, silently applauded while the surrounding white community was outraged. In Roanoke, nearly 70 percent of the Jews supported integration in 1954, and most Jews in Norfolk felt the same way.²⁷ At the forefront of the *Brown* decision were many of the national Jewish organizations, as both the American Jewish Congress and the Anti-Defamation League filed *amici curiae* briefs.²⁸ This angered many Southerners, who started to blame Jews for getting involved in the case and, ultimately, the decision. Virginia Jews were alarmed by

²⁴ Dinnerstein and Palsson, *Jews in the South*, 5.

²⁵ Myron Berman, *Richmond's Jewry, 1769-1976: Shabbat in Shockoe*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1979), 176.

²⁶ Murray Friedman, “Virginia Jewry in the Desegregation Crisis,” *Commentary: A Jewish Review* 27 (January 1959): 17. See Dinnerstein and Palsson, *Jews in the South*, 22. There were 25,066 Jews in Virginia in 1937 and 37,300 in 1967. These figures were 0.92 percent and 0.82 percent of the total population respectively.

²⁷ Forman, “The Unbearable Whiteness,” 626. See Friedman, “Virginia Jewry,” 18, 23; Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 136-37; and Hero, “Southern Jews,” 144. Webb writes of three vocal Jewish segregationists: Solomon Blatt in South Carolina, Sol Tepper in Alabama, and Charles Bloch in Georgia. All three were from small Deep South communities and Webb writes that no comparable figure emerged in the urban areas or Upper South – Virginia included. To Friedman’s knowledge, not one Virginia Jew was on a White Citizens Council. Friedman also notes that most integrationist Jews across the South have been pressured into silence since 1954 by forces inside and outside the Jewish community. Hero notes that these segregations had little identity with Jewish thought and activities, though they claimed to be very Jewish.

²⁸ “ACLU in the Courts: Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka,” American Civil Liberties Union, n.d. <<http://archive.aclu.org/court/brown.html>> (10 December 2004). See *American Jewish Yearbook*, 1956. Much of the sociological support for the decision came about in part because of the efforts of the AJC.

the stances of their Northern coreligionists, fearing that they would be ostracized or suffer economically if another Jew was “identified with a position that is extremely unpopular.”²⁹ In fact, knowledge that a Northern Jew, Arthur Spingarn, was heading the NAACP shook the security of one central Virginia Jewish community.³⁰ The potential action that the Northern groups could take caused one South Carolina rabbi to urge that “Jewish ‘self-protection organizations’ do not rush into print with opinion which are not based on personal investigation in the South” and that Northern Jews “refrain from arriving armed with programs of action which were outlined in the insulated security of a New York office”³¹ Many Jews did not understand why this action had to happen as a religious group, wishing that they could simply act as individuals who happened to be Jewish. Speaking for the Norfolk Jewish Community Center, Executive Director Morton Gaba wrote that “those of us who are strongly moved by the issue should act solely as individuals and not as representatives of another minority group.”³²

This issue did not arise, interestingly enough, in the Christian community. Gentiles would not be associated with an integrationist stance that their pastors may have taken, though such churches were often philosophically divided and afflicted. As a result, many clergymen were dismissed from their positions because the liberal public stances that they took were too far in front of their congregations.³³ Jews, in contrast, were often

²⁹ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry,” 233. See Friedman, “Virginia Jewry,” 28-29. He notes that the fear of economic reprisal was extremely exaggerated and rarely happened. Yet he does recognize that Jews were more concerned about their community status than finances, as many had spent years working to prove that they ‘belonged.’

³⁰ Dinnerstein, “Southern Jewry,” 233.

³¹ Forman, “The Unbearable Whiteness,” 627.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ See David L. Chappell, *A Stone of Hope* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press: 2004). Most Christian ministers had also remained silent, indicating that another force was at work in driving Jews towards civil rights and keeping Christians staunchly for segregation. Jews were significantly more

associated with a view that their rabbi may have taken, whether or not they agreed with it. This was partially because of their status as a small minority in the South, and gentiles simply perceived their stance as unified, a common occurrence with a majority assuming that a tiny minority has one stance. The unity, however, was also voluntarily, as experiences had taught Jews that they needed to stick together. This meant that Jews would defend their rabbis even if they disagreed with their views, though they were likely in concord.

The initial wave of pressure on Jews in the Old Dominion, however, came not from local rabbis but from national organizations like the ADL that would come to exert a constant force in Virginia and the South as a whole. Two short months after the *Brown* decision, the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR) held its annual convention. The body of rabbis proposed a resolution that praised the Supreme Court's landmark decision, but a group of Southern rabbis, Virginians among them, abstained from voting.³⁴ This episode proved to be the status quo over the next couple of years, as Jews hoped that their silence and inaction would buy them immunity. In 1954, the national ADL publicized its support for integration. The Virginia chapter asked it to reconsider, calling upon the national ADL office in New York to "take no position which would interfere with the right of a state advisory board and local ADL units to deal with

sympathetic to black civil rights than whites, but this is not sufficient to explain the course of action. The key difference between the two communities was their priorities. Whites were clear segregationists, but were more concerned with peace and the social order to make "segregation the unifying principle of their culture." Jews, in contrast, had a vested interest in eliminating segregation from the social order. Experience had taught them that there was safety in numbers and that they had to stick together, meaning they would defend their rabbis. This explains the divergence of the two communities despite the similarities between their religious leaders.

³⁴ *National Jewish Post And Opinion*, July 2, 1954.

this problem according to the conditions in the area of local jurisdiction.”³⁵ The Jewish War Veterans of America held its 1956 convention in Richmond where a motion to go on record in favor of integration failed by one vote.³⁶ In late 1957, the Council of Jewish Federation and Welfare Funds tried to pass a resolution supporting civil rights, only to have it blocked by the Southern contingent, which objected “to Jewish groups exposing them to the wrath of their neighbors” by supporting such a resolution.³⁷

National organizations outside of the South responded that Jews should not shrink from supporting unpopular causes. The Indianapolis-based *National Jewish Post and Opinion* ran an editorial in early 1956 urging Southern rabbis to speak up and say something on the segregation issue, and another the following year urging Jews in the South to use common sense to become social leaders across the region. “Eventually, the South will come to accept equal treatment for the Negro,” a January 1957 editorial read. “It will be a black mark against the Southern Jew if he follows instead of leads this development.”³⁸ Yet Southern Jews were still focused on their own survival at this point and paid little attention to such statements from non-local groups. In early 1957, not one Jewish group outside of the ADL in the South publicly supported desegregation.³⁹ This silence continued into 1958, as the Southern rabbinate was angered by the ADL’s refusal to revise a harsh anti-segregation stance.⁴⁰ There was progress however, as these Southern rabbis were not in support of segregation, but rather wanted a toned-down anti-segregation position.

³⁵ Murray Friedman, “One Episode in Southern Jewry’s Response to Desegregation: A Historical Memoir,” repr. in *Strangers and Neighbors*, ed. Adams and Bracey, 533.

³⁶ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 71.

³⁷ *National Jewish Post And Opinion*, November 22, 1957.

³⁸ *National Jewish Post And Opinion*, January 25, 1957.

³⁹ *National Jewish Post And Opinion*, January 13, 1956 and January 11, 1957.

⁴⁰ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, November 7, 1958.

It turned out to be the leading national women's Jewish group that sparked action in the Old Dominion, as Jewish women took advantage of their unique situation and the infrastructure provided by the National Council for Jewish Women (NCJW). Jewish Community Councils in Virginia had been hesitant to take a progressive stance because of potential business repercussions against Jewish merchants. Any businessman that spoke out against segregation would undoubtedly have had been put in uncomfortable situations when he had to deal with segregationists.⁴¹ This kept many prominent Jewish men quiet, but their wives were under no such restrictions because of their lack of direct involvement in business. As a result, women had natural advantages over men. This asset was utilized in each of the five Virginia chapters of the NCJW: Richmond, Hampton Roads, Norfolk, Northern Virginia and Petersburg (the last of which was smallest with 90 members). In 1954, the national office sent a memo to all sections calling *Brown* a "milestone in our country's march to democracy," and the Virginia chapters responded to the cries of the memo.⁴² At the first fall meeting of the Richmond chapter in 1954, the chapter passed a resolution suggesting that state officials "devote their efforts to solving the problems facing the state in accordance with the final decision of the Supreme Court."⁴³ This message was sent to Governor Stanley, urging him and other officials to

⁴¹ See Chappell, *A Stone of Hope*, 132 and Friedman, "Virginia Jewry," 19. Jews were not the only integrationists who refused to take a public stand. Chappell quotes Richmond editor Virginius Dabney explaining that not a single businessman would take a leading role in the integration movement. Primarily teachers and preachers had attended meetings in Richmond and Atlanta, without any prominent businessmen attending. Friedman writes how Jews owned business like groceries, appliance stores or dress shops that were in the Negro parts of town or sold to Negroes. Jews were hesitant to support rights that could have negative repercussions on their own business and, as a result, the well-being of their children.

⁴² Memo, National Council of Jewish Women, National Office, Part II, Box 20, Library of Congress.

⁴³ Implementing the Supreme Court Decisions on School Segregation, January, 1955, National Council of Jewish Women, National Office, Part II, Box 20, Library of Congress. See also Minutes, National Council of Jewish Women, Richmond Chapter, Box 2, Virginia Historical Society. Research of the Richmond chapter of the NCJW indicates that it was always quite liberal, as several black speakers came to talk at

work within the ruling of the court and stop finding ways to avoid it.⁴⁴ This started a campaign of education and action in nearly every section of the state. An April 2 meeting featured four of the state's five NCJW chapters (only Petersburg did not attend), as well as the Virginia Council of Churches and the Richmond and Roanoke YWCAs. This coalition drafted a letter, which they sent to the Governor's Council on Public Education, pleading to keep the public schools open and let integration be decided at the local level.

Jewish groups started to mobilize over the Gray Commission recommendations, which proposed that public funds be allotted to children who wanted to attend private schools and thus avoid integration – in effect defying the Supreme Court.⁴⁵ The NCJW made the first statement by a citizen group at a public hearing of the General Assembly, vehemently opposing the measure from the moment it was proposed. For some Jewish organizations, the Virginia NCJW did not go far enough, as the vice-chair of the Richmond chapter, Mrs. Hank Wolfe, expressed the difficulty in fighting the ADL to make statements.⁴⁶ Local Virginia groups like the Arlington-Fairfax Jewish Center

meetings and they were bombarded with questions. These ladies, however, did not dare take direct action until encouraged by their national organization

⁴⁴ Sydney Lewis to Gov. Thomas B. Stanley, September, 23, 1954, Governor Thomas B. Stanley, Executive Department Papers, Box 110, Library of Virginia.

⁴⁵ See J. Douglas Smith, *Managing White Supremacy* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 295; Matthew D. Lassiter and Andrew B. Lewis, eds., *The Moderates' Dilemma* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998), 6-9; "Brown v. Board of Education: Virginia Responds," Library of Virginia, n.d. <<http://www.lva.lib.va.us/whoweare/exhibits/brown/resistance.htm>> (12 Dec. 2004). After Brown, Virginia Governor Thomas Stanley struggled to find a response that would not require integrated school. In August, he set up a panel of legislators, named for its chairman, State Senator Harland Gray, that would decide on a course of action. Fifteen months later, it proposed that "that laws concerning school attendance be amended so that no child would be required to attend an integrated school, that funds be allocated as tuition grants for parents who opposed schools comprised of white and black students, and that local school boards be authorized to assign white and African American students to particular schools." The second recommendation was the most critical, as voters would approve it in a January referendum. The last recommendation would come to be the Pupil Placement Board.

⁴⁶ Mrs. Hank Wolfe to Francis Cohen, May, 31, 1956, National Council of Jewish Women, National Office, Part II, Box 20, Library of Congress. This was a prime example of national organizations not understanding how unique and delicate the situation in Virginia was different. There was significant animosity between Virginia Jews and national organizations because the latter pushed the former at a pace faster than desired.

(AFJC) were in complete support of the NCJW and joined the fight. The AFJC passed a resolution on Dec. 13, 1955 that called the recommendations “a grave threat to public education, which is essential to democracy,” sentiments that president Irving Berman passed along to the Governor.⁴⁷ But the AFJC, not wanting to get actively involved, did little else whereas the five Virginia NCJW chapters, working under the statewide leadership of the Virginia Society for the Preservation of the Public Schools and the State Legislation Committee, actively worked to defeat the measure. Each of the five chapters took active roles in the efforts, focusing primarily on publicity and voter education.⁴⁸ Ultimately, their efforts were unsuccessful, as voters in January supported a popular referendum on the Gray plan. Nearly two thirds of those voting in January “favored a constitutional convention to implement” the tuition grant proposal of the plan.⁴⁹ Defeat aside, the efforts of the NCJW proved a major building block for Jews around the Old Dominion, as Jews were able to mobilize in large numbers – a considerable feat in the

The NCJW wanted the schools to reopen first, and then solve other problems, thus conceding that integration could be decided at the local level. This was not good enough for the ADL, who wanted integration across the board, though the ADL did not have to worry about the children of its not attending closed schools.

⁴⁷ Irving Berman to Gov. Thomas B. Stanley, January, 3, 1956, Governor Thomas B. Stanley, Executive Department Papers, Box 100, Library of Virginia.

⁴⁸ School Desegregation,: What is Council Doing? April, 1956. National Council of Jewish Women, National Office, Part II, Box 20, Library of Congress. In Richmond, the women of the NCJW worked through the local “Save Our Schools” Committee and also provided all of the volunteers for the Virginia Society for the Preservation of the Public Schools. They did much of the publicity, organizing speakers for local organizations and asking rabbis to base sermons on the referendum, and also served as watchers at the voting poll. The Hampton bureau similarly engaged in publicity, handing out SLC flyers and spreading the word through local PTA and community groups. Rabbis were asked to speak to their congregations and other groups about the Gray Commission recommendation, and also to host study sessions about its effect. Northern Virginia women wrote dozens of letters to local newspapers and even went door-to-door to campaign while the Norfolk chapter was particularly effective in flyer distribution. The Petersburg NCJW, which happened to be the only local group that refused to sign a 1955 petition commending Governor Stanley for his pro-segregation stance, actively distributed flyers and engaged in study despite having only 90 women in the group.

⁴⁹ Lassiter and Lewis, *The Moderates’ Dilemma*, 6, 175.

South. They learned that fellow Jews around the state shared many of their views and were willing to take a stand on those issues.

The first place that Jewish collective action began was Norfolk, which was the most progressive Virginia city in terms of its race relations, according to one former rabbi.⁵⁰ More than 15 interracial projects or organizations involving Jews existed by the time of the *Brown* decision, including the Brotherhood Week Service that Stern's Temple Ohef Shalom held in 1951. Under the auspices of a service sponsored by the Interracial Ministers' Fellowship and the Women's Council for Interracial Cooperation, Stern organized and held an interracial service with an interracial choir at Ohef Shalom. Once word of this event was made public, Ohef Shalom board members panicked at the news, and, according to Stern, "only the presence at the service of the Rev. Beverly Tucker White of the socially elegant St. Andrew's Episcopal Church rescued me from more than a reprimand from the angry temple board."⁵¹

In 1958, when federal judge Walter Hoffman ordered integration in Norfolk, Governor J. Lindsay Almond closed schools as part of Virginia's massive resistance plan. Stern took up the fight in Norfolk to keep open the schools, telling congregants on June 8, "if we don't rise above our partisan feelings of segregation versus integration, we shall have disintegration of our public schools."⁵² At the urging of others, Stern suggested holding a public meeting on the school issue to the mayor, only to be rebuffed. As he left town for summer vacation, he expected anti-Semitic responses to his activity to appear in print, though none did for almost three months. His expectations were realized shortly

⁵⁰ Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi," 30.

⁵¹ Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi," 30.

⁵² Malcolm H. Stern, "The Year They Closed the Schools: The Norfolk Story," in *The Quiet Voices*, ed. Bauman and Kalin, 292.

after he returned. On Labor Day, *The Virginian*, a segregationist magazine, distributed flyers which included information that the NAACP president was Jewish and wrote that, as a result, “all Jews were involved in this Zionist-Communist-Negro conspiracy to take over America.”⁵³

Norfolk schools remained closed in 1958, and parents began holding classes in their own homes. When these spaces were too small, parents appealed to churches and synagogues for space, creating a no-win decision for religious leaders. If rabbis allowed it, they were bowing to segregationists; if they did not, then they were keeping Jewish children from proper education. In the end, they decided that providing education for their children was most important, as the efforts of anxious parents led “all four Norfolk synagogues [to begin] hosting tutoring groups.”⁵⁴ This drew ire from the national Jewish organizations, many of which felt that Jews were conceding to segregationists by allowing life to go on while schools remained closed. This created a significant conflict and many local Jews were angered at being accused of letting segregationists win; many simply believed they were making the best situation out of circumstances beyond their control. One Virginia Jewish leader, speaking to the *Post and Opinion* on the condition of anonymity, said that the national Jewish leadership was lacking in their understanding of the local Jewish problem in Virginia in regards to the school issue. This leader spoke of the “perilous position of Jews in Virginia and need for prudence,” even demanding that regional activities conducted by national organizations need the approval of the Virginia Jews.⁵⁵ It is clear that Norfolk Jewry was left in a very precarious situation, and their

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁴ Stern, “The Year They Closed the Schools,” 295.

⁵⁵ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 10, 1958.

action should not be construed as an acceptance of school closing as a way to maintain segregation.

Despite Norfolk's progressive nature, Jews remained wary of the response from the white community. This fear manifested itself in the action taken by the Jewish Community Council at its Oct. 1, 1958 meeting. At the meeting, "a resolution was introduced calling on all those who might be spokesman for the Jewish community...to refrain from making any public pronouncements on the school issue" and it passed by a vote of 52-2.⁵⁶ Stern, despite his views, voted for the resolution because of his congregants' fears of anti-Semitism and a hostile city council meeting the previous day where the mayor of Norfolk made his strong segregationist views known in an irate outburst.⁵⁷ Stern explained this vote in his weekly sermon, and made it clear that he was still firmly for integration. He explained that "although I had no intention of making any public statement at the moment, I would not be muzzled should a further situation arise."⁵⁸ For five temple board members, even this was too much, and they wanted Stern censured for violating the JCC resolution.

The resolution brought about considerable debate on the stance of the Norfolk Jewish community on integration. The *National Jewish Post and Opinion* sent a reporter to the Tidewater area, and he concluded that Jews there did not completely support integration. The reporter divided Jews into two categories – Northern Jews, or those who had emigrated after World War II, and Southern Jews, who had been there before the War – and found that only Northern Jews were in favor of integration. Most Southern

⁵⁶ Stern, "The Year They Closed the Schools," 296.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 295-6.

⁵⁸ Stern, "The Role of the Rabbi," 31.

Jews, he found, were actually opposed to integration, though many were not willing to admit this prejudice because they did not trust the person asking them. The *Post and Opinion* report on Norfolk Jewry was met with criticism and was seriously refuted by area rabbis. Rabbi Joseph Goldman answered the report, declaring that “it is entirely accurate to say that the entire Jewish community...would favor the opening of the schools on an integrated basis to the present situation of no high school at all.”⁵⁹ He felt that the majority of Norfolk Jewry was wholeheartedly committed to integration, citing that fact that the high school closing protest meetings were 40-50 percent Jewish. Synagogues in Norfolk had long held interracial meetings when churches and other community organizations had refused. They continued to do so, even in the face of the flood of anti-Semitic literature that hit the community. According to Goldman, “every rabbi in Norfolk has spoken forth from his pulpit that integration is decent, human, moral, and Jewish.”⁶⁰ This rhetoric marked a stark departure from before, as integration was now being called Jewish, and essentially forced Jews to come out and take a stand on the integration issue. Regardless of their individual views, they would be seen as integrationists.⁶¹

Much of the debate stemmed on whether Jews should be looked to as leaders of the movement. Jews in the Norfolk area comprised just three percent of the population, which was large for a community in Virginia. They had taken partial leadership in the struggle, but Rabbi Goldman questioned whether it was “incumbent upon a minority to

⁵⁹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 9, 1959.

⁶⁰ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, January 9, 1959.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

assume leadership?”⁶² Still, the *Jewish Post and Opinion* article motivated Goldman, along with Stern, to take serious action, something the paper’s editor, Gabriel Cohen, said Norfolk rabbis had avoided to that point. Goldman and Stern widely circulated a statement explaining three critical concerns with the schools being closed, thus encouraging parents to push for the reopening of integrated schools.⁶³ In taking action, Stern and Goldman differentiated themselves from the majority of their colleagues. Most Southern rabbis dismissed direct action and mass protest, opting instead to educate their congregation about tolerance and race relations and thus provide ‘the quiet voices’ behind the movement.⁶⁴ Stern and Goldman, among other Norfolk Jews, felt action was a necessary ingredient. Jews had to vigorously defend integration almost as a way of preventing their own segregation, having a moral obligation to fight for all minorities.⁶⁵ The underlying issue for all Jews was that “if [any action] endangers the position of the entire community, this is a calculated risk that people who defend the right always must take.”⁶⁶ Stern and Goldman, as defenders of the right, took this risk and stimulate action in the Norfolk area, a trend that would spread, albeit slowly, to other areas of the state.

Stern and Goldman benefited from living in a progressive area, but Richmond presented a starkly different story, as Jews and Christians alike there were highly resistant

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Stern, “The Year They Closed the Schools,” 297-8. The statement informed parents that: teachers would soon go elsewhere to work; students would be ineligible for college without the sciences that only schools could offer; and churches and synagogues were being overused by having to double as schools.

⁶⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 171.

⁶⁵ Prinz, Joachim. Papers of the NAACP. Notes at Jewish Community Council District Conference, Harrison, NY. Microfilm 1568 ser. C part 3 reel 5, Frames 0420-0422, Alderman Library, University of Virginia. Prinz emphasizes as well that Jews were the first civil rights advocates in the world.

⁶⁶ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, December 12, 1958.

to change.⁶⁷ Richmond Jews had long ago been integrated and were highly respected members of society, even at the elite levels.⁶⁸ Among them was former Temple Beth Ahabah rabbi Edward N. Calisch, a man respected across religious lines who was named to the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*'s Roll of Honor in 1939.⁶⁹ The old Jewish families were large, wealthy and had deep roots in the community, creating a situation unlike any other area in the state or the South. The Richmond Jewish community lacked a working class and did not have serious poverty, which led to more conservative politics.⁷⁰ Richmond was largely devoid of the blatant anti-Semitism that plagued immigrant-heavy Northern cities. Though free of anti-Semitism in Richmond, the Jews were “acutely conscious of their relations with their neighbors and worried about anti-Semitism.”⁷¹ There were areas Jews could not buy property in and clubs they could not join, though this was a recent exclusion as Jews had belonged to the most fashionable city club in the nineteenth century.⁷² As a result of this clear discrimination, many Jewish leaders worked closely with the Virginia ADL.

This culture played a significant role in the slow pace in which Richmond Jews took a stance on civil rights, compared to their coreligionists across the state. “The philosophy of the old Jewish families was that they ought to be as quiet and unostentatious as possible,” wrote David and Adele Bernstein. “They just didn’t think a Jew should put himself forward.”⁷³ As a result, Jews stayed behind the scenes, but fell

⁶⁷ David Bernstein and Adele Bernstein, “Slow Revolution in Richmond, VA: A New Pattern in the Making,” in *Jews in the South*, ed. Dinnerstein and Palsson, 258-59.

⁶⁸ Berman, *Richmond's Jewry*, 298.

⁶⁹ Bernstein and Bernstein, “Slow Revolution,” 254.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 258.

⁷¹ Friedman, “One Episode,” 529.

⁷² Higham, *Send These to Me*, 141.

⁷³ Bernstein and Bernstein, “Slow Revolution,” 256.

into what Bernstein and Bernstein term an American Jewish pattern of liberal behavior towards Negroes. They were silent benefactors, as the biggest strides in interracial employment practices came from Jewish merchants. Jews also donated one-third of the money given to organizations aiming to further Negro rights came from Jews, a figure disproportionate to their population.⁷⁴ But, outside of the women in the NCJW, there was little public action among the 8000 Jews that lived in Virginia's capital in 1954, as Murray Friedman found that "part of the price Jews paid for the high degree of acceptance and success they had achieved was that they had to conform to the region's racial patterns."⁷⁵

Temple Beth Ahabah was initially pressured by national organizations to take action in the former capital of the Confederacy, as groups like the CCAR and ADL sent it regular mailings for information and distribution. One 1954 mailing from the ADL advertised the way in which it could help the Temple and the community, publishing manuals to help those "seeking to reconcile various racial groups" and serving "as an indispensable bridge between white and Negro groups."⁷⁶ Later that year, the Richmond Jewish Community Center, which had close ties to Beth Ahabah, brought in William A. Aery to speak on "Problems of Segregation and Integration," indicating a progressive movement from the temple administration. At High Holiday services in 1955, the temple handed out a pamphlet from the CCAR entitled "We seek our brethren: A message for race relations" to all those who attended. The literature made no reference to the explicit

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 261-62.

⁷⁵ Friedman, "One Episode," 529.

⁷⁶ "ADL Purpose and Program," 1954, ADL Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

actions of Jews but encouraged adherence to the ruling of the land's highest court and involvement of all citizens and minorities to create a free democratic society.⁷⁷

At Beth Ahabah, Rabbi Ariel Goldburg did not bring up civil rights until after the integration crisis had passed, saying in late 1959 that his congregants needed to think of creating a better world for their children, and to rise above their prejudices.⁷⁸ At the beginning of 1960, his sermons first took a clear civil rights overtone, largely in a matter relevant to Jews. In a sermon titled "The Status Seekers," he spoke of restaurants that would serve white trash but not distinguished blacks. He related this to his congregation, since Jews were still being discriminated against. The reasons for the prejudice were irrelevant, and Jews "must face the fact that these matters exist."⁷⁹ Goldburg may have still been giving these masked statements but he would quickly come out with his most poignant attacks on segregation. "Proclaim liberty throughout the land and to all the inhabitants thereof," Goldburg exclaimed on April 12, 1960. "Note that – to all the inhabitants – not to a few – not to a specially privileged sector – not to a majority because of race or religion or nationality– but to all." He urged his congregation that the current ills of society could be cured, but that, as a society, they must go forward and not retreat.⁸⁰ This desegregation came to even be grounded in religious belief, as Goldburg proclaimed that it was a tenet of Judaism that "no man shall ever decide his ancestry to be superior to that of his neighbors."⁸¹

⁷⁷ "We Seek Our Brethren," 1955, ADL Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

⁷⁸ "Consider the Days," October 11, 1959, Sermons Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

⁷⁹ "The Status Seekers," January 29, 1960, Sermons Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

⁸⁰ "A Basis for Freedom," April 12, 1960, Sermons Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

⁸¹ "Anti-Semitism in a Brotherly World," July 12, 1960, Sermons Box, Temple Beth Ahabah Archives.

While things moved slowly in the late 1950s in Richmond, leading Jewish citizens took active roles across the state. One Falls Church couple stepped forward in 1957 to contest Virginia's Pupil Placement Act. The Act set a series of standards in assigning children to schools in a way that was designed to circumvent the 1954 decision in *Brown*. One pair of Jewish parents in Northern Virginia, however, refused to go along with the state's agenda. Samuel and Virginia Klein would not sign the pupil placement form for their 12-year old son Joel in what they called a matter of conscience, thus precluding Joel from attending Arlington County schools that fall. Virginia Klein explained, "someone has to stand up for the Negroes and we want to do our part. If everyone just sits back and does nothing, then there is no progress."⁸² The Kleins acknowledged that their position had been met with mixed reactions. Samuel Klein reported that most Jews were completely in support of his course of action, going so far as to describe the reaction as "surprisingly favorable." Yet he did receive letters "attacking his Jewishness and attributing his stand on segregation to the fact that he was a Jew."⁸³ This response was just once episode of what would come to many anti-Semitic actions across Virginia. In rabid opposition to integration, the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties sent out vicious anti-integration literature with strong anti-Semitic overtones in the fall of 1957 to all Arlington County parents that were not Jewish or black. The mailings included a piece called "White Man Awaken" by Gerald L.K. Smith in which he accused the Jews of "promoting integration and

⁸² *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, September 20, 1957.

⁸³ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, September 20, 1957.

intermarriage...to create an inferior mulatto race—leaving the Jewish as the superior race of the world.”⁸⁴

The following summer, the segregationist *Richmond News-Leader* published an editorial titled “Anti-Semitism in the South” which blamed Jews active in the civil rights movement for creating animosity that led to this own persecution. It pointed to the Richmond ADL office providing pro-integration literature for the Charlottesville NAACP, thus “identifying all Jewry with the advocacy of compulsory integration.”⁸⁵ The editorial acknowledged the right of the ADL to interest itself in bigotry but wrote that “militancy invites retaliation” and the ADL, “diving into these muddy waters, has to expect to get wet.”⁸⁶ The editorial continued that relations between Jews and gentiles were excellent until the ADL started “stirring up clouds of prejudice.”⁸⁷ The Jewish community was somewhat shocked by the whole episode, though many agreed that the ADL had somewhat overstepped its boundary. Indicative of Richmond Jewry, ADL chairman Sam Binswanger retreated and told the *News-Leader* that the Virginia ADL did not necessarily endorse the advanced positions taken on the race issue by national Jewish groups.⁸⁸ The Virginia Board would also pass a resolution that explicitly limited its scope to combating anti-Semitism and improving interfaith relations, thus striking more ambitious national goals from its agenda in an effort to protect local Jews.⁸⁹

The editorial taught Jews in Virginia that, despite their long-time allegiances, they would never be true Southerners—they would always be Jewish first and Southern

⁸⁴ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 4, 1957.

⁸⁵ *Virginia News-Leader*, July 7, 1958.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Friedman, “One Episode,” 533.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 535.

second. Jews thought that silence could buy them immunity from the movement, but they came to learn otherwise. Harry Golden, longtime editor of the *Carolina Israelite*, bluntly wrote after this editorial that Jews were always going to be Jews first, even if their ancestors had fought alongside Stonewall Jackson.⁹⁰ To this point, Southern Jewry had been criticized for “succumbing to a silence wrought by fear, complying with regional mores, and placing a desire to be accepted above moral obligation.”⁹¹ As Anti-Semitism exploded violently across the South, six synagogues were bombed between 1954 and 1958. Though there were no violent episodes in Virginia, Jews saw the events unfolding across the South and concluded that staying silent no longer seemed rational.

This editorial also stirred up anger around the rest of the state and the South. By this time, rabbis around the commonwealth started speaking out in larger numbers, often trying to put the Jewish communities on the spot with pro-integration sermons.” Nowhere was this made clearer than a 1958 episode involving Rabbi Emmet Frank of Temple Beth El in Alexandria. Speaking to a packed congregation on Yom Kippur, Frank gave a scathing sermon denouncing segregation and the Virginia politicians who supported it. He reminded his congregation that it was “our moral obligation as Jews not to desist from being a light unto the nation...I am afraid of silence...I will not be silenced... The Jew cannot remain silent to social injustice against anyone.” He urged his congregants to speak up. “Has silence given the Jew of the South security?” he asked. “Bombings, economic reprisals have been our reward. The fresh wounds of Hitlerism, the ghettos of Europe...these are the results of silence.”⁹² Frank however, was not ignorant of the social

⁹⁰ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 13, 1958.

⁹¹ Bauman, “Introduction,” 2.

⁹² *Southern Jewish Weekly*, October 10, 1958.

repercussions of such action, telling those listening: “speak out forcibly and you will be a social outcast and suffer reprisals for awhile, but remain silent, fortify these satanic hate peddlers and let them be victorious, and they will march against every minority.”⁹³ Frank, however, did not stop by just encouraging his congregants what to do. He continued to heave verbal attacks at Virginia Senator Harry Byrd, the leader of the massive resistance policy to school integration. “Let the segregationists froth and foam at the mouth,” Frank bellowed from his altar, “There is only one word to describe their madness—Godlessness, or to coin a new synonym, Byrdliness. Byrdliness has done more harm to the stability of our country than McCarthyism.”⁹⁴ He admitted that he was proud to be a Virginian and American but stressed that he had no association with Byrd.

From inside the Jewish community, Frank received mixed reactions, as most Jews supported his stand though there was clear voiced dissent. Frank received several letters from rabbis across the South offering encouragement.⁹⁵ Within his own congregation, Frank had extremely high levels of support. There was minimal disagreement over Frank’s message, though some came from a prominent Jewish attorney from Newport News, Ben Jacobs, who copied his letter to Frank to both Governor Almond and Senator Byrd when he heard of the sermon. “You have a right to disagree with the gentlemen named [Faubus, Byrd, Almond] but you certainly do not have any right, and particularly as a rabbi, to use the language that you used comparing them destructively with Communists and coining the word 'Byrdliness' and stating that 'Byrdliness' and Godlessness' were synonymous,” Jacobs complained, explaining that he would have left

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 183.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 205.

Frank's congregation had he belonged.⁹⁶ This was atypical of the dissent, however, as most of it stemmed not from the message but rather the effect it would have. Some simply felt that there were more pressing issues the Jewish community had to deal with, since no benefits would come to the Jewish community for taking this bold public stance.⁹⁷ Others were sure that it was rabbis like Frank that were causing anti-Semitism. "As the years go on," Sidney Weil wrote to Frank, "you will reflect on the damage you have done to those to whom you were supposed to be a religious leader."⁹⁸ This was where his critics focused, as David Glil wrote to him, asking rhetorically, "Do you realize if we had no Jews like you in our midst, no synagogue would have ever be[en] bombed?"⁹⁹ The Beth El Board of Trustees agreed with this view, as they felt the sermon alarmed temple members by increasing fears of "anti-Semitism and possible violence."¹⁰⁰ As a result, the board initially demanded that Frank apologize to Byrd and even praise him on his program of massive resistance, though it would back down from that request.

Jewish fears of a backlash rung true, as the Arlington chapter of the Defenders of State Sovereignty and Individual Liberties demanded that the congregation either condemn and refute their rabbi or face prejudice. If they took no action, it would "cause irreparable damage to the hitherto friendly relations between Jews and Christians."¹⁰¹ But Frank would not back down. In his next sermon, he called any Jew "who remains silent in the face of prejudice leveled at another group of God's children is traitorous to the basic

⁹⁶ Ben Jacobs to J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., October 6, 1958, Governor J. Lindsay Almond, Jr., Executive Department Papers, Record Group 3, Box 135, Library of Virginia.

⁹⁷ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 197-8.

⁹⁸ Dinnerstein, "Southern Jewry," 240.

⁹⁹ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 198.

¹⁰⁰ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 10, 1958.

¹⁰¹ Friedman, "One Episode," 532.

principle of Judaism.”¹⁰² Some congregants walked out, but “most members of Rabbi Frank’s congregation must [have found] satisfaction whether or not they agree with it, in this indication that their rabbi is as courageous as he is conscious of his obligation as a good citizen.”¹⁰³ Though Friedman notes that these congregants were of a different ilk than the rest of Virginia Jews, as most were “federal government employees of Northern origin,” these Jews were not going to leave their rabbi out to dry.¹⁰⁴ This is a key point, as Frank’s congregation did not have to deal with as many isolated pressures as the rest of Virginia Jews. Since many were federal government employees, they were not reliant on community goodwill for their livelihood, a stark contrast to the Southern Jewish merchant presented by Vorspan. Jewish civilian leaders in Northern Virginia also rallied around Frank, led by Alexandria mayor Leroy Bendheim, who was also the head of Beth El’s board of trustees. Working with Jerome J. Dick, head of the AFJC, the two confirmed that a “rabbi in Virginia has a right to speak out on any ethical and moral problem.”¹⁰⁵ Fellow religious leaders also supported Frank, as eleven local Protestant ministers issued statements shortly after the sermon reaffirming the freedom of the pulpit and the separation of church and state.¹⁰⁶ When Frank went to speak at a Unitarian church in Arlington later that month, a bomb threat was called in, though it was a hoax. Frank, however, was not to be deterred and, tired of his congregants’ silence, forced them to take a stand. Told that his stance jeopardizes the Jew, Frank replied, “My answer is that if it is jeopardizing, then ‘damn the jeopardy.’”¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 197.

¹⁰³ *The Washington Post*, October 1, 1958.

¹⁰⁴ Friedman, “Virginia Jewry,” 22.

¹⁰⁵ *Southern Jewish Weekly*, October 24, 1958.

¹⁰⁶ *The Washington Post*, October 4, 1958.

¹⁰⁷ *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1958.

The response to Frank was just part of the anti-Semitic activity that continued to increase in intensity throughout the late 1950s.¹⁰⁸ Friedman called the Old Dominion “a prime dumping ground for anti-Semitic leaflets, magazines, and pamphlets.”¹⁰⁹ One pamphlet claimed that every liberal in the federal government was a Jew, many of whom had changed their names to appear less Jewish.¹¹⁰ Some linked the anti-Semitism directly to Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement, as one Jewish high school girl wrote a letter to the *Newport News-Hampton Times Herald*, complaining that “there was never any anti-Jewish feeling until the actions of certain characters affronted the people of certain areas of the Peninsula.”¹¹¹ She assailed the ADL, according to Norfolk Rabbi Allan Schwartzman, for crying “crocodile tears for the poor Negro” and blamed her own race for segregating itself against intermixing and intermarriage.¹¹² Other anti-Semitism was more veiled, citing the connection between Jews and the Communist Party.¹¹³ White Southerners saw the *Brown* decision and desegregation as undemocratic and pointed to Jews and Communists as masterminding the conspiracy to subvert democracy.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ See Friedman, “Virginia Jewry,” 23; Higham, *Send These To Me*, 173; and Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 183. There is no clear indication of how anti-Semitism increased or decreased during the entire period. Friedman clearly notes that though there was a rise in anti-Semitic activity, there was no clear-cut increase in anti-Semitism itself. Webb disagrees, referring to a resurgence in Southern anti-Semitism as extremists accused Jews of trying to de-stabilize democratic government. Higham uses opinion polls from the 1960s to show a clear decline nationally in “every variety of anti-Semitism,” though he does not show a regional breakdown, meaning it could have been present in Virginia. Given the fact that Friedman lived in Virginia during this period, he stands out as the most reliable source on the issue.

¹⁰⁹ Friedman, “Virginia Jewry,” 19.

¹¹⁰ Sarah Patton Boyle, *The Desegregated Heart* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1962), 235.

¹¹¹ *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 3, 1958.

¹¹² *National Jewish Post and Opinion*, October 3, 1958.

¹¹³ Weyl, *The Jew in American Politics*, 138-141. The mid-1950s was marked by the anti-communism campaign led by Senator Joe McCarthy. Jews, as liberals, condemned the movement and the CCAR in 1954 asked that McCarthy be stripped of his committee chairmanship. McCarthy himself insisted that he did not have any hostility to Jews, as many of his close advisors were Jewish. Still, the pulse of the country was largely anti-Communist and Jewish involvement as members and supporters of Communist groups created animosity and anti-Semitism. Communist organizations also devoted much energy to the civil rights struggle.

¹¹⁴ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, xv.

Jewish support for the civil rights movement created a friendly relationship between blacks and Jews, but this partnership, like any alliance, was not without its tensions. Before World War II, blacks in the South “noted the tendency of local Jews to emulate the racist attitudes and behaviors of the surrounding community.”¹¹⁵ Relations improved after World War II, as cooperation increased between the NAACP and Jewish groups, and the years 1945 to 1965 have been termed the “golden years” of the alliance.¹¹⁶ Jews played prominent roles in almost all of the civil rights organizations, offering expertise and legal resources especially, but much of this leadership came from the North as Southern Jews kept quiet. African-Americans groups and the national Jewish organizations were in constant communication, evident from correspondence between the leaders on each side in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Most of this happened at the national office, however, as there was little local mention among black sources of Jewish activity. The local black newspaper in Norfolk ignored several events that the national Jewish press covered, indicating that the African-American community in Virginia’s most progressive city was not attuned to the stances being taken by a fellow minority.

By the end of the civil rights movement, blacks were no longer content as subordinates in their own movement and the displacement of Jewish leaders gave many a sense of betrayal. Blacks became fearful of Jewish aid as well, suspecting that Jews had selfish and ulterior motives in getting involved, some of which invariably included recruitment to the left-wing movement.¹¹⁷ Jews often remained employers or merchants to blacks, causing many African-Americans to view them as exploiters. At the same time,

¹¹⁵ Greenberg 128

¹¹⁶ Forman, “The Unbearable Whiteness,” 623.

¹¹⁷ Weyl, *The Jew in American Politics*, 281.

Jews turned their efforts elsewhere, looking to the plight of Soviet Jewry and the survival of Israel after it came under attack in 1967 and 1973 from its Arab neighbors.¹¹⁸ The split finalized when Jews would come to oppose African-American causes such as affirmative action, citing “the past experience of Jews as victims of discriminatory quota systems.”¹¹⁹

During the civil rights struggle, Jews played an important role in Virginia in fighting for integration, overcoming the adversity that their pro-integration stance often caused them. They had originally tried to stay silent on the issue and buy immunity, but were forced to take stances because of the actions of national organizations and rabbis. Groups like the NCJW and the ADL stimulated action in the Old Dominion, as their stances forced Jews locally out of silence and into action. Rabbis were silent initially, not wanting to jeopardize the community’s stature, but they soon undertook the cause of civil rights and their congregants followed. In Norfolk, Rabbis Malcolm Stern and Joseph Goldman fought for integration in schools, helping guide a community that struggled through the desegregation crisis. Rabbi Emmet Frank staunchly attacked the massive resistance from his Alexandria pulpit, imploring Jews to no longer remain silent. Even in conservative and stagnant Richmond, Rabbi Ariel Goldburg made overtures towards civil rights, albeit later in the process. Jews had been silent sympathizers but the bold actions of these rabbis and organizations pushed the opinions of the Jewish community into public view. It was a drastic shift in the role of the rabbi, who, according to Stern, was “in the early years... a follower. In the era of interfaith activity, he became a leader. In the

¹¹⁸ Vorspan, *Great Jewish Debates*, 14.

¹¹⁹ Herbert Hill, “Black-Jewish Conflict in the Labor Context,” in *Strangers and Neighbors*, ed. Adams and Bracey, 609.

civil-rights era, a prophet.”¹²⁰ Jewish support for civil rights created an Anti-Semitic backlash, a reaction that many had foreseen and, as a result, stayed quiet. This backlash, however, actually turned out to strengthen and mobilize existing Jewish support for integration, as Jews realized that they would never quite fit in the white community. They would always be a minority in the South, comprising less than one-percent of the population, and could only flourish in a society of equality. Yet, through direct action and public stances, Jews came to be a significant force in the civil rights struggle in Virginia.

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