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Paradoxical Toleration: Southern Antisemitism in the Nineteenth Century

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement  
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from  
The College of William and Mary

by

Jason Blau

Accepted for

Highest Honors  
(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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## Introduction

*In this, our own free and tolerant land, where wars have been waged and constitutions violated for the benefit of the African negro, the descendants of barbarian tribes who for 4000 years have contributed nothing to, though in close contact with the civilization of mankind, save as the Helots contributed an example to the Spartan youth, and where laws and partisan courts alike have been used to force him into an equality with those whom he could not equal, we have seen Jews, educated and respectable men, descendants of those from whom we derive our civilization, kinsmen, after the flesh, of Him whom we esteem as the Son of God and Saviour of men, ignominiously ejected from hotels and watering places as unworthy the association of men who had grown rich by the sale of a new brand of soap or an improved patent rat-trap!*

-An excerpt from "The Scattered Nation", a speech given by Zebulon Baird Vance<sup>1</sup>

In the winter of 1874, Zebulon Baird Vance, a devout Presbyterian, former Confederate governor and US congressman, and future senator and governor of North Carolina, was facing a downturn in his fortunes. He had just been defeated in his campaign to be the senator of North Carolina and was facing financial difficulties. He began work on an endeavor that would pass the time until the senatorial election and earn some income. This was "The Scattered Nation," a speech he would give with only occasional modifications for over the next two decades of his successful political career to crowds throughout the South in exchange for speaking fees.<sup>2</sup> In it, he would instruct the crowd to, "learn to judge the Jew as we judge other men- by his merits. And above all, let us cease the abominable injustice of holding the class responsible for the sins of the individual. We apply this test to no other people."<sup>3</sup> Zebulon Vance was a politician and played the game of public opinion throughout his life. Thus, it seems that audiences across the South wanted to and were willing to hear Vance speak on this topic. He would not have given a hated and unpopular speech for decades. This reflects the fact that the South had been a haven of

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<sup>1</sup> Zebulon B. Vance, *Scattered Nation*. (Nabu Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> Gordon B. McKinney, *Zeb Vance: North Carolina's Civil War Governor and Gilded Age Political Leader*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 273.

<sup>3</sup> Zebulon B. Vance, *Scattered Nation*. (Nabu Press, 2010).

*Jewish* tolerance throughout much of the nineteenth century. But Vance was speaking in what were the waning days of common tolerance among white Christians for Jewish people in the South, in the latter third of the nineteenth century. Indeed, in this thesis, I will show that the region shifted from being the most tolerant in the country, to the least. The question is, could this story really be correct? For much of the nineteenth century, was the South disproportionately accepting of Jews? It seems paradoxical that a society would combine vicious racism and philosemitism. This thesis documents, though, that this was the case in the nineteenth century South and seeks to explore various possibilities for how and why the South was less antisemitic in this period.

The nineteenth century southern Jewish experience has oft been relegated to a footnote in Jewish-American studies and history.<sup>4</sup> Historically, most surveys fixate on the Eastern European migratory wave as *the* Jewish-American experience. These histories launch quickly into the north of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, essentially focusing on Ashkenazi assimilation in urban centers, to the exclusion of Jewish minority experiences in other parts of the country. Over the past several decades, this has begun to change, with a growing focus on the divergent and unique contexts that Jews operated in throughout American history. A salient example of these overlooked contexts is the early and mid-nineteenth century South. Historians have long debated the exact nature of the South.<sup>5</sup> The answers to whether the South has been *continuously* unique, whether the northern and southern states were diverging before the Civil War, whether capitalism was enabled or restricted by enslaved labor, and so on cannot be

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer A. Stollman, *Daughters of Israel, Daughters of the South: Southern Jewish Women and Identity in the Antebellum and Civil War South* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 14.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830–70." (*American Jewish History* 86, no. 1, 1998): 56. Egerton, Douglas R. "Markets without a Market Revolution: Southern Planters and Capitalism." *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (1996): 207.

answered here. This thesis will take the position that the mid-nineteenth century South prospered due to an extractive agrarian economy that relied on enslaved labor, enforced by a strict racial caste system, and that one can successfully delineate between it and the North. The distinctions between the North and South in the nineteenth century also arguably correlated with a sharp difference in the relation between Jews and Gentiles. Contemporary foreign observers like Salomon de Rothschild were acutely aware of this contrast.<sup>6</sup> They considered the North to be more anti-Semitic, while southern gentiles were viewed as relatively tolerant. Some might consider this to be paradoxical, given the centrality of racism during the period. The white South proudly emphasized their prejudice, exemplified by Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens description of the aims of the Confederacy in 1861:

The prevailing ideas entertained by him and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the formation of the old constitution, were that the enslavement of the African was in violation of the laws of nature; that it was wrong in principle, socially, morally, and politically. It was an evil they knew not well how to deal with, but the general opinion of the men of that day was that, somehow or other in the order of Providence, the institution would be evanescent and pass away. This idea, though not incorporated in the constitution, was the prevailing idea at that time. The constitution, it is true, secured every essential guarantee to the institution while it should last, and hence no argument can be justly urged against the constitutional guarantees thus secured, because of the common sentiment of the day. Those ideas, however, were fundamentally wrong. They rested upon the assumption of the equality of races. This was an error. It was a sandy foundation, and the government built upon it fell when the "storm came and the wind blew.

Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner-stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.<sup>7</sup>

Would anyone expect that in the same society that Senator Vance could preach of Jews that:

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<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Sarna, and Adam Mendelsohn, *Jews and the Civil War*. (New York: NYU Press, 2010), 116.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander Stephens, 1812-1883. "African Slavery, the Cornerstone of the Southern Confederacy: A Speech ... Delivered at the Atheneum", Savannah, March 22, 1861.

Though dead as a nation— as we speak of nations— they yet live. Their ideas fill the world and move the wheels of its progress, even as the sun, when he sinks behind the Western hills, yet fills the heavens with the remnants of his glory.

The contrast between tolerance and intolerance might be considered odd in our culture. Many people assume prejudices towards one group means one is prejudiced towards others.<sup>8</sup> At least in our current culture, this is not an ill-founded assumption, as social psychologists have discovered that this does seem to be the case.<sup>9</sup> They theorize that prejudice is generalized, in which the same factors internal to the subject, that cause prejudice towards one group, causes prejudice towards another.<sup>10</sup> In fact, one of, if not the, most cited and prominent foundational books on prejudice, *The Nature of Prejudice*, explicitly states that, “if a person is anti-Jewish, he is likely to be anti-Catholic, anti-Negro, anti any out-group.”<sup>11</sup> For some in southern society, Jews may not have been considered an out-group to even be prejudiced against. Yet even this requires explanation, considering that, as Deborah Lipstadt said when referring to the persistence of anti-Jewish sentiment in Western culture, “Anti-Semitism has been rightfully called the longest hatred.”<sup>12</sup> For the public, prejudice towards one group goes hand in hand with prejudice towards another. Why was this not the case in the South?

As this tension between southern race prejudice and religious broadmindedness is peculiar from our contemporary cultural lens, it has been commented upon by historians such as

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<sup>8</sup> Jim Everett et al. “Speciesism, Generalized Prejudice, and Perceptions of Prejudiced Others.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 6 (2019): 786.

<sup>9</sup> Nazar Akrami, Bo Ekehammar, and Robin Bergh. “Generalized Prejudice: Common and Specific Components.” *Psychological Science* 22, no. 1 (2011): 57.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Everett et al. “Speciesism, Generalized Prejudice, and Perceptions of Prejudiced Others.” *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 22, no. 6 (2019): 786.

<sup>11</sup> Gordon Willard Allport, Kenneth Clark, and Thomas Pettigrew. “The Nature of Prejudice.” (1954): 68. Irwin Katz. “Gordon Allport’s ‘The Nature of Prejudice.’” *Political Psychology* 12, no. 1 (1991): 125.

<sup>12</sup> Gabriel Falcon. “The Longest Hatred: Anti-Semitism on the Rise.” CBS News. CBS Interactive, December 9, 2018. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/anti-semitism-on-the-rise/>.

David Gerber and Bertram Korn. Yet, it remains contested. This is unsurprising. Many scholars would not desire to investigate such an awkward friendship between early Jews and slaveholding southern whites and might doubt such an odd connection. However, the relation between the South and relative tolerance towards Jews deserves to be investigated. The relationship between the two factors can help uncover the nature of prejudice, and how different manifestations of it can interact with one another. As Aristotle said, we are required to honor truth above our friends, and this includes the examination of a relationship between southern antiblack racism and philosemitic tolerance, however uncomfortable it might be to the history of American Jewry.<sup>13</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to demonstrate the existence of that tolerance and analyze the underlying factors in the South that might have caused this. It begins with a broad overview of the relevant historiography, followed by a brief introduction to southern Jewry during the nineteenth century. It then investigates the degree of societal anti-Semitic feeling in the region, and examines a Southern city's relationship with Jews, Richmond. The thesis then examines how this acceptance towards Jews fit into the broader conception of race in the South and offers potential answers to the relationship between tolerance and intolerance in southern society.

The historiography on southern Jews during the antebellum period is extensive. The attention brought to bear on Jewish southern life was almost exclusively the work of amateurs for many decades. While much attention was already focused on northern Judaism, the South had often been overlooked due to its relatively smaller Jewish population. The amateur works were usually general, and made for popular audiences, and were more focused on contemporary politics and narrative than any sort of rigorous investigation.<sup>14</sup> This scholarship was often more

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<sup>13</sup> Aristotle. "The Internet Classics Archive: Nicomachean Ethics by Aristotle." The Internet Classics Archive. <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/nicomachaen.html>.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn, *Jews and the Civil War*, 3.



focused on demonstrating Jewish patriotism and combatting antisemitism. These works followed mainstream orthodoxy and attempted to present a national “impartial” viewpoint, that depicted the Civil War as a tragedy and the white southern way of life as a quaint bygone era. Other southern Jewish works were often local, focusing on a single community, and were often compiled by a rabbi or other interested amateur.

Southern Jewish history was initially dominated by amateurs. The first work to address Jewish life in the Civil War was written in 1888. *The Hebrews in America*, from 1888, mostly told tales of gallantry, combat, and ignored any serious issues, such as anti-Semitism and slavery.<sup>15</sup> Katie Magnus’s work, the 1890 *Outlines of Jewish History* does not even mention slavery or antisemitism in the Civil War at all. Max Kohler then contributed “The Jews and the American Anti-Slavery Movement”, providing a much more detailed and analytical approach, although he was an amateur. He viewed Jewish slaveholders as misguided and noted the tendency for American Jews to assimilate to the surrounding gentile communities’ views but was sympathetic to southern Jews. He did present Jewish abolitionists in a more favorable light. Additionally, Judah P. Benjamin, became, for the first time, partially due to Max Kohler, a figure for Jewish pride, rather than embarrassment, and was lionized, and attributed with many (false) anecdotes that gave him a strong Jewish self-identity.<sup>16</sup> As he was a US Senator, and a Confederate Secretary of State, War, and Attorney General at various points, many Jews naturally wanted to paint him as ‘one of their own’. Thus, his reputation waxed as the passions of the Civil War cooled.

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 9.

The early works that exclusively focus on the southern Jewry are generally local and lack much analysis. This includes *The History Of The Jews Of Richmond From 1769 To 1917* by Herbert T. Ezekiel, or Barnett Elzas's *The Jews of South Carolina*, published in 1917 and 1905 respectively. These works were often more focused on compiling and listing facts than any critical analysis or conclusions on the community, but still provide much valuable information.

The first professional historians in the field inaugurate a new era in historiography. There was no longer as much of a need to extoll Jewish virtue, as World War Two and the quota debate was now past.<sup>17</sup> The first trained historian was Philip Foner. Philip Foner, a Communist, who had been fired from his university post due to his political beliefs, reversed the narrative. He began a new approach, focused on the Civil War, that extolled Jewish individuals in line with their antislavery beliefs and incorporated Jewish women. However, this work was primarily polemical. Jacob Rader Marcus explored southern Judaism in the antebellum period as well, and provided the first professional, non-polemical works, most importantly, his several volumes of "Memoirs of American Jews", which collect many sources<sup>18</sup>.

Jacob Rader Marcus's student, Bertram W. Korn, was the most important historian of this era. His book *The American Jewry and the Civil War* is regarded as central to understanding antebellum southern Jewish life. It incorporates many topics, such as religious disputes, attitudes towards abolition, and the like.<sup>19</sup> Bertram W. Korn in large part founded the field and became president of the American Jewish Historical Society. His address in 1961, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South 1789-1865" covers a multitude of issues relevant to this thesis.<sup>20</sup> He

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>20</sup> Bertram W. Korn, "Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789–1865," *Jews and the Civil War*, 2010, pp. 87-122.

outlines the presence of enslaved Jews, intermarriage, social norms regarding status and Judaism in the South, and so on. His output provided a foundation for much of southern Jewish historical research. This period in the 1950s and 1960s can be seen as the beginning of a “modern era” of scholarship in southern Jewish history.

After the era of Bertram W. Korn, the field’s focus began to shift towards the southern Jewish world in later periods, especially the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Much research up to the present day has been spent revising Korn’s views, which has proven him mostly correct, except on abolitionist perspectives. On this, he viewed abolitionists as little invested in Jewish problems, and dogmatically Christian, while there is evidence that many abolitionists did understand the plights of a Jewish minority.<sup>21</sup> However, Bertram W. Korn has largely set the field’s foundation for the mid-nineteenth century.

There is still ongoing and significant research on Jewish life in the nineteenth century South. One of the more prominent historians currently is Jonathan Sarna, who is known for his work analyzing Grant’s Order No. 11 and its consequences, the most blatantly discriminatory act ever committed against Jews in the United States. Another excellent historian is David Gerber, who has analyzed antisemitism in the country at large, while Jaher’s *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: the Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*, is invaluable for its extensive documentation.<sup>22</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein’s works are also invaluable and are the standard for general histories of American antisemitism.

Research today often focuses on smaller areas, such as specific cities. There are also some biographies being produced in recent decades, especially those of Judah P. Benjamin, with

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<sup>21</sup> Jonathan Sarna and Adam Mendelsohn, *Jews and the Civil War*, 19.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew R. Heinze, and Frederic Cople Jaher. “A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America.” *American Historical Review*. American Historical Association, 1995.

Eli Evans's work, "Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate" as a prominent example. There is a shifting tendency towards southern Jewish colonial and early Republican history, rather than the immediate pre-Civil War and wartime periods. However, one historian has attempted a general history on the scale of Bertram Korn's, specifically regarding the Confederacy and Judaism. This work, *Jewish Confederates*, has been regarded as the new classic by many, but others regard it as overly sympathetic to the South.<sup>23</sup>

Questions about the role of gender, antisemitism, and regional differences in nineteenth-century southern Jewish life are more prominent focuses in modern day scholarship. There has been some recent scholarship on the topic of antisemitism and whiteness. A work by Jennifer Stollman, *Daughters of Israel, Daughters of the South: Southern Jewish Women and Identity in the Antebellum and Civil War South* is relatively limited in scope but informative. It examines the identity of Jewish women's identity in the South. It argues that upper class Jewish women saw the interaction between themselves and enslaved individuals as a method of demonstrating their own whiteness. She also argues Jewish women emphasized their own southern culture as a method of prevention against antisemitism. Some other relevant works that deserve to be mentioned, "Unconditional Loyalty to the Southern Cause: Jews, Whiteness, and Antisemitism in the Civil War South 1840-1913" by Bonnie Goodman, and "Changing Notions of Identity: Transformations in Jewish Self Identification Before, During, and After the American Civil War", by Heather Byrum, both undergraduate theses published in the past year, the latter author being a William and Mary alum. The latter work primarily examines Jewish self-conception and self-identity, arguing that Jews integrated throughout the period, but faced increasing antisemitism during and after the Civil War. The former, by Bonnie Goodman, despite

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan Sarna, review of *Jewish Confederates*, by Robert Rosen, *American Jewish History* 89, no. 3 (2001): 335-37.

numbering several hundred pages, does not contain much primary source research and is predominantly quotation based.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it serves as an excellent repository of interesting and useful sources.

Mark Greenberg published two works, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah Georgia 1830-1870” and “Creating ethnic, class, and southern identity in nineteenth-century America: The Jews of Savannah Georgia, 1830-1880”. These two papers are both extremely informative and have relatively little overlapping information. They conduct a deep dive into Jewish life, examining trading relations, last names, and even dueling trials, that demonstrates strong Jewish-Gentile cultural integration. Another work, from 1997, Leonard Rogoff’s. “Is the Jew white?: the racial place of the Southern Jew.” is useful as an analysis of southerner’s viewpoints, but focuses on intellectual and elite opinion, and covers a broader period, focusing mostly after the Civil War.<sup>25</sup> It does demonstrate the wide variety of intellectual opinions during this period, however, and the lack of ‘scientific’ consensus on the racial status of Jews. A relatively recent work, from 2006, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*, charts American-Jewish identity and whiteness beginning in the late nineteenth century. It is quite well researched and tries to demonstrate that the whiteness that Jews negotiated was in some ways encouraged by elites attempting to preserve an optimistic and stable view of their future, while many Jews attempted to define themselves as different from other whites, even distinguishing themselves as a separate race at points.

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<sup>24</sup> Bonnie K Goodman, “Unconditional Loyalty to the Cause: Jews, Whiteness, and Anti-Semitism in the Civil War South, 1840-1913,” 2020, Heather Byrum, “Changing Notions of Identity: Transformations in Jewish Self-Identification Before, During, and After the American Civil War” (2020). Undergraduate Honors Theses. Paper 1562.

<sup>25</sup> Leonard Rogoff, “Is the Jew White?: The Racial Place of the Southern Jew,” *American Jewish History* 85, no. 3 (1997): pp. 195-230.

Many scholars have found that the South was less antisemitic during the antebellum period, and for some time after the Civil War.<sup>26</sup> Some scholars, especially Leonard Dinnerstein disagree with this assertion.<sup>27</sup> In “A Note on Southern Attitudes toward Jews” Dinnerstein examines the claim that Jews experienced less antisemitism in the South than elsewhere and found it lacking. In his view, most evidence of antisemitism is merely proof of resistance against antisemitism and failed to demonstrate a strong regional difference. He points out that the “Scattered Nation” speech, often a centerpiece of such a claim, is defending Jews, in which it constantly implied that the norm is antisemitism, rather than philosemitism. He quotes Zebulon Vance’s famous speech, “Never before, was there an instance of such a general rejection of the person and character, and acceptance of the doctrines and dogmas of the people.”<sup>28</sup> Dinnerstein ends this essay with a challenge to future scholars to demonstrate a substantive difference in antisemitic attitudes between northern and southern gentiles.<sup>29</sup> The goal of this paper is to address this challenge and provide proof of Southern tolerance.

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<sup>26</sup> Bertram W. Korn, “Jews and Negro Slavery in the Old South, 1789-1865: Address of the President.” *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 50, no. 3 (1961): 200. Gerber, David, “Introduction,” in *Antisemitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 29.

<sup>27</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, “A Note on Southern Attitudes toward Jews.” *Jewish Social Studies* 32, no. 1 (1970): 44.

<sup>28</sup> Zebulon B. Vance (2010). *Scattered Nation*. Nabu Press.

<sup>29</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, “A Note on Southern Attitudes toward Jews.” *Jewish Social Studies* 32, no. 1 (1970): 48.

## Background

*Here I stand now with many thousands of the sons of the sunny South, to face the foe, to drive him back, and to defend our natural rights. O Lord, God of Israel, be with me in the hot season of the contending strife; protect and bless me with health and courage to bear cheerfully the hardships of war.*<sup>30</sup>

-An excerpt from Rabbi Michelbacher's "Prayer of the C.S. Soldiers"

Jewish life in mid nineteenth century America was marked by change. This can be seen in the population numbers for Jews in the United States. In 1824, there were 6,000 in the whole of the United States. This increased in 1850 to 50,000 individuals, and by 1860 to 150,000 Jews. This dramatic change, with a population growth of 2400% within 36 years, demonstrates a central facet of Jewish life in the United States.<sup>31</sup> Jews in the United States experienced rapid and exponential growth, with a concurrent rise in gentile consciousness. This change also was linked to the demographic basis of the Jewish population changing, from a Rhode Island/Charleston based axis of settled Sephardic Jews to an overwhelming preponderance of immigrant German Jews, often peddlers, who were much lower on the class scale.<sup>32</sup> The Jews of the United States were bifurcated by this ethnic divide, with different clubs, synagogues, and social acceptance. There was often cooperation, but many more established Jews sought to distance themselves from their German brethren. This dynamic was prevalent throughout the United States but was more evident in the North. The rapid German Jewish migration to the United States had mostly flowed to urban centers, which in turn primarily meant a rapid increase in northern Jewish

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<sup>30</sup> "The Prayer of the C. S. Soldiers. by Rev. M. J. Michelbacher, Minister of the Hebrew Congregation, 'House of Love,' Richmond, Va.," Richmond Daily Dispatch (Boatwright Memorial Library, n.d.)

<sup>31</sup> Samson D. Oppenheim, "American Jewish Yearbook," 1917: 32.

<sup>32</sup> A Sephardic majority culturally speaking, as Ashkenazi Jews in the colonial and Early Republican period would assume Sephardic identities and customs, as it was seen as more prestigious. Theodore Rosengarten and Dale Rosengarten, *A Portion of the People: Three Hundred Years of Southern Jewish Life* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press in association with McKissick Museum, 2002), 2.

populations.<sup>33</sup> The major exception to this was New Orleans, then one of the largest cities in the country, and was full of many Jewish migrants. The southern Jewish population was more settled compared to its northern counterpart but was smaller numerically and proportionally. Many southern Jews were immigrants, as in the North but there was already a strong core of native-born Jews. Politically, Jews were not considered to be partisans of any party. They generally took the position of their class and surroundings. This is amply demonstrated by the Jewish view on abolition. There were Jewish abolitionists, but for the most part, American Jews often considered abolition to be tied to Christian zealotry. Most southern Jews were pro-slavery, while northern Jews tended to have the opposite viewpoint, albeit to a lesser degree.<sup>34</sup>

The Jewish population of the United States was concentrated in certain industries. Just like any other group, they could be found in many professions, from planting, to soldiering, to politics. However, a vastly disproportionate amount engaged in commerce, especially peddling goods throughout the country. This was seen as a job good for newly arrived immigrants, who could then acquire enough capital to found, often jointly with a partner, some commercial enterprise. American Jews tended to be concentrated in urban areas and commercial professions, albeit not yet in professional occupations, as they later would be. Jews were predominantly located in the northeastern seaboard, where many had recently arrived.<sup>35</sup> Southern Jews were generally not planters, but many occupied white-collar roles, especially ones in the wholesale business.<sup>36</sup> This profile was quite like their northern counterparts.

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<sup>33</sup> Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Cincinnati, 1949), 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Mark I. Greenberg, "Creating Ethnic, Class, and Southern Identity in Nineteenth-Century America: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830-1880." (University of Florida, 1997), 90.



American Jews were in an uncertain and undefined situation during the nineteenth century. Jewish life in America was much more secular than back in Europe. There were many intermarriages and a relative lack of religiosity and ethnic consciousness. Many of the most prominent American Jews were only ancestrally Jewish, due to conversions, and the commonality of interfaith marriage. There were restrictions on Jewish rights in some states, such as limits to officeholding, but these were mostly done away with over the first few decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>37</sup> The vast majority of Jewish national leaders were rabbis, as there were few laymen interested in working for the American Jewish community as a national community.<sup>38</sup> There were some lay regional leaders, but their efforts did not translate into national programs or ambitions.

Jews had only begun to assert their status as a community before the end of the antebellum period. One event, however, does showcase the first signs of mobilized Jewish participation in American civic life. During the Damascus Affair, a Christian monk disappeared in February 1840, when the city was under the rule of Muhammad Ali. The Jewish community of Damascus was accused of taking him and his servant as an ingredient for matzo. In other words, an accusation of blood libel. Anti-Semitic riots broke out through the city, prominent Jews were arrested. The international Jewish community responded with outrage. In the United States, Jews in six cities protested, and President Martin Van Buren lodged a formal diplomatic protest.<sup>39</sup> There were Jewish based charities and cultural organizations, such as the Independent Order of B'nai Brith, who had twenty lodges by 1855, and while this trend was rapidly growing right

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<sup>37</sup> Edward Eitches, "Maryland's 'Jew Bill.'" *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (1971): 266.

<sup>38</sup> Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War*, (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961), 6.

<sup>39</sup> Bonnie K Goodman, "Unconditional Loyalty to the Cause: Jews, Whiteness, and Anti-Semitism in the Civil War South, 1840-1913," 2020, 85.

before the Civil War, it was still not the norm.<sup>40</sup> Religious education was in a state of disarray and was regarded as a weak point by American Jews. Sunday school teaching was poor, children were not interested, and resources were always lacking.<sup>41</sup> Jewish self-consciousness was relatively weak in the United States, until after the Civil War, after which it began to steadily grow, along with the concurrent tide of German, and then Russian and Polish immigrants.

Jewish life in America was still unsettled and had not achieved any sort of stability or decisive form. The American Jewish community was wracked by denominational disputes, as well as ethnic ones, that define the Jewish American experience to this day. The first national American Jewish leader was Isaac Leeser, the founder of Conservative Judaism. He was a Westphalian immigrant, and first became acculturated in Richmond, where he would gain his initial prominence. He then became the most prominent rabbi of Philadelphia, and then, the United States. He introduced vernacular English preaching, founded the first Jewish-American university, and importantly for this thesis, founded the *Occident*, a popular American-Jewish newspaper, which had a strong Southern perspective, and was based in Cincinnati. He was controversial and considered radical by many orthodox Jews. He reformed the religion to be more in line with Protestant norms at the time, yet he still maintained a strong adherence to basic Jewish traditions and beliefs, such as dietary restrictions. Samuel M. Isaacs was another leader of conservative American Judaism, but his influence was strongest in New York.

The other side of the religious schism, now termed “Reform Judaism”, had already appeared by the mid nineteenth century. Reform Judaism was relatively powerful in the South, especially Charleston, compared to its regional competitors, but the movement was nationwide,

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<sup>40</sup> Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961), 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

and like all facets of Jewish life during the mid to late 19<sup>th</sup> century, most of the population, energy, and leadership, came from northern urban areas. Isaac M. Wise, a Bohemian immigrant, was an expert organizer and, relying on the preexisting German-Jewish reform movements, led a radical project to change Jewish life to a more secular and “modern” form, abandoning many rituals and restrictions. This movement was a success in the United States, as the greater tolerance, religious diversity, and the turmoil of mass migration, meant that a less strict form of Judaism was more popular. David Einhorn was another of these prominent Reform rabbis and came directly from the leadership of the German Reform movement.

As these leaders fought viciously over the future of Judaism in America, and with a total lack of lay leadership, there was little ability for a national organization to take root. For example, even when Leeser and Wise cooperated, such as an attempt to organize a meeting of major Jewish congregational leaders, radical Reformers scuttled the project.<sup>42</sup> Generally, the most traditionalist edge of American Judaism could not bring itself to cooperate with reformers, and the most radical Reformers felt likewise. The central issue of one’s placement on the traditional-reform spectrum dominated the times. Some Jewish groups were following traditions utterly unchanged, while others contended that even divine law was not sacrosanct from the light of reason.<sup>43</sup>

American Judaism was also cleaved by ethnic divides. Whether that be language or ancestry, there was an array of Jewish groups that had yet to achieve dominance or synthesize. There were German-speaking ‘48ers, Sephardic Jewry who could trace their ancestry back centuries, and even some Russian Jews. Another problem for a strong national ethnic

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<sup>42</sup> Bertram Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961), 10.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

organization was the fear that such a posture would provoke antisemitism.<sup>44</sup> This was the era of the Know-Nothings, anti-Catholicism, and a national organization or “Jewish vote” might be seen as an un-American project. The Jewish-American world of the mid-nineteenth century was a fragmented one and was in a state of turmoil throughout the period.

However, the American Jewish community’s lack of unity was partially matched by a lack of unity in the United States. American Jews were treated quite differently by the gentile population depending on where they lived. The Jewish experience was a complex one, and there was no ‘common experience’. A Polish immigrant and an upper-crust Charlestonian not only had little in common, but they also often recognized this fact despite their shared religion. This diversity makes the task of analyzing antisemitism a complex one. Nonetheless, an image emerges of a disunited yet vibrant Jewish-American world, spanning from Westphalian rabbis to areligious senators, that must be closely analyzed if the underlying presence of antisemitism is to be properly examined.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 13.

## Contested Ground: Attitudes towards Jews in the Mid-Nineteenth Century

*I believe when our fellow citizens of this persuasion take their position as a company of Israelites, as they propose, with their own butcher and other officers, with their own cooking utensils, &c, they will emulate the best troops in our Confederate army and be pointed at by our best generals as examples to the rest.*

-A Christian minister's solution to ensure the right of Jewish soldiers to observe Kashrut.<sup>45</sup>

The United States of America may have had relatively less antisemitism, with the freest Jewish diaspora community in history up to that point, the difference, was, though, only relative.<sup>46</sup> While state sanctioned child kidnapping in the Papal States, and pogroms in the Russian Empire may make anti-Semitic biases in extending commercial credit seem minor, to the shop owners denied a loan, it could mean the difference between prosperity and bankruptcy.<sup>47</sup> Jews made up a tiny minority of an overwhelmingly Christian nation, and accordingly were ignored, vilified, or glorified based upon the cultural image that people had of Jews, whether or not it was accurate. This chapter will examine that image, how it interacted with the Jewish community, and its geographic and temporal variations.

Antisemitism is a complex phenomenon. Drawing on previous scholarship in Jewish-American studies, this work defines antisemitism as having four facets, which a given individual can have any number of. Paraphrasing David Gerber's work, they are defined as:

1. the belief that Jews are different and alien, not simply in creed or faith, but in physiognomy, and even more importantly in inner nature or psychology;

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<sup>45</sup> "Israelites" *Savannah Daily Morning News* (Savannah, Virginia), Feb 23, 1863.

<sup>46</sup> Hasia Diner, "The Encounter Between Jews and America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era." v. 11. no. 1 (*Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 2012).

<sup>47</sup> i.e. the Mortara Case. David Gerber, "Cutting out Shylock: Elite Anti-Semitism and the Quest for Moral Order in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Marketplace," in *Antisemitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 201.

2. the tendency to think of Jews in terms of negative imagery and beliefs which lead one to see them as power-hungry, materialistic, aggressive, dishonest, or clannish;
3. the fear or dislike of Jews based on their presumed alienness and on the understanding that these negative traits are not simply a response to past victimization or discrimination but rather a manifestation of a supposed inherent malevolence towards others, especially non-Jews;
4. the willingness to shun Jews, speak ill of them, subject them to social discrimination, or deny them social or legal rights, afforded to society's non-Jews based on a belief that Jews must be treated differently because they are different, alien, and malevolent.<sup>48</sup>

This definition demonstrates the complexities of determining levels of American anti-Semitism. Many Americans were quite fine with the flesh and blood "Jew Next Door" but detested "The Jew" as an abstraction. A story succinctly illustrating this point unfolded during the Civil War's peak. In 1864 Georgia, the grand jury of Talbotton declared a presentment on the "evil and unpatriotic conduct of the representatives of Jewish houses." Quite reasonably, Lazarus Straus, the only Jewish inhabitant of the town, took this to be directed at him, and decided to leave. Isidor Straus, his son, related:

"Father's action caused such a sensation in the whole county that he was waited upon by every member of the grand jury", and "also by all the ministers of the different denominations, who assured him that nothing was further from the minds of those who drew the presentment than to reflect on father, and that had anyone had the least suspicion that their action could be construed as they now saw it clearly might be construed, it never would have been permitted to have been so worded."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> David Gerber, "Introduction," in *Antisemitism in American History*, ed. David Gerber (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 3. He bases this definition on Melvin Tumin's *Antisemitism in America*.

<sup>49</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1865*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 204.

The grand jury of Talbotton Georgia, amidst wartime shortage and financial ruin, issued a presentment, an accusation of criminal behavior, against Jewish households for lack of patriotism. Nonetheless, they were confused when the only Jewish household head saw this declaration as targeted. A categorization of the individual grand jury members as simply antisemitic is far too crude.

In another telling anecdote, in the 1870s Rabbi Max Lilienthal was invited to speak in place of the pastor at the First Congregationalist Society in Cincinnati (often regarded as a southern city.)<sup>50</sup> He related in the speech, how, one day, while he was helping soldiers' families during the war, a gentleman offered him a ride home in his buggy. "During the ride he said to me, 'You are a Jew.' Yes, said I. 'You seem to be a good man.' I am happy to meet your approval, was my remark. 'And I am sorry you will be lost,' he said with a sad tone. I didn't know what to answer."<sup>51</sup> Presumably, the individual that Rabbi Lilienthal met believed that all faithful Jews were going to be tortured for an eternity, and yet, seemed to bear no specific animus towards them.

Positive or negative, American feelings towards Jews were mainly centered around two main themes. There was the religious component, centered around the Old Testament, and the economic component, centered around supposed Jewish prosperity. One must consider the complexities of American life, and how Jewish imagery and individuals interacted in a world where over 99 percent of the population was Christian. Israel Joseph Benjamin, a German Jew, modeled himself off the medieval Jewish scholar Benjamin of Tudela, and undertook several journeys to explore and document the Jewish diaspora, from Yemen, to North Africa, all the way

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<sup>50</sup> Joseph Holt, Report of the Judge Advocate General on the "Order of American Knights" (United States: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1864), 5. Apparently, some people referred to Cincinnati as the "South Carolina of the North".

<sup>51</sup> Scrapbook. Uncategorized. MS-452. Jacob Ezekiel Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

to California. While in Cincinnati during the spring of 1859, he related one story, from a certain Joseph Jonas, a watchmaker. A farmer brought Joseph a watch, and upon returning on a Saturday, he found the store mysteriously closed. Confused and worried, he asked a neighbor why the store was closed and was told that Joseph Jonas was Jewish. The farmer's mother, upon hearing the story, was surprised that there were still Jews in the world and wished to go into the city to see this man. Joseph Jonas was asked, "Are you really truly a Jew – a descendant of Abraham? When Joseph answered in the affirmative, she put her hands in prayer and declared, "How can I thank Thee, O Lord, that I have lived to see one of the descendants of Abraham before my death!"<sup>52</sup> Christian views of Jews were just as often determined by the Bible than by any (likely infrequent) personal experience.

Christian perceptions were highly focused on the Bible, both for good and ill. Judah P. Benjamin, a prominent southern politician and charismatic orator, was also a character in a contemporary popular novel, *The Sunny South*, by J.H. Ingraham. In this book, his talents are explained as being due to his descent from David Isaiah, Abraham, and Solomon, which gave him a princely lineage.<sup>53</sup> Another popular book of the era struck a different tone. *The Manners of Ancient Israelites* commented, "The Jews hate all the rest of mankind; they even think themselves obliged to kill them, unless they submit to the precepts given to Noah; and nobody is with them their neighbor but an Israelite."<sup>54</sup> The 1831 textbook *Geography for Children* stated that Jews had been persecuted for 1800 years as punishment for not accepting the New Testament, while New England schools used a poem in their curriculum, "Christ's Crucifixion",

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<sup>52</sup> Israel Joseph Benjamin, *Three Years in America, Volume I*. (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), 303.

<sup>53</sup> Louis Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth Century America's Perception of the Jew*. (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988), 105.

<sup>54</sup> Claude Fluery, *The Manners of Ancient Israelites*. (Manchester: S. Russell, 1820), 459.



which calls Jews a “wretched race.”<sup>55</sup> In an 1861 book, *Judea In Her Desolations*, the author accepts that previous Jewish suffering is God’s punishment for killing Christ, but tells her readers to not despise Jews, as God protects them, and the Messiah was born from them.<sup>56</sup> Most Americans viewed Jews first through the lens of their own faith, and secondly as independent subjects distinct from Old Testament characterizations.<sup>57</sup>

Aside from religious prejudice, the other facet of American antisemitism that should be noted was the age-old attack on supposed insular Jewish commerce, greed, a propensity for trickery, and so on. Antisemitism centered around accusations some individual or group being “Shylock” or insinuations that the Rothschilds were Jewish agents, who covertly manipulated the political scene. This type of antisemitism became particularly common during the Civil War.<sup>58</sup> For example, a cartoon in *New York Illustrated News* has Lincoln declaring to a hook-nosed caricature, “No Shylock—we did not come about the loan- we have money enough, and to spare, at home. But we thought, since our English brethren had come to be ruled by such hirelings, yonder, that we had better keep an eye on you.”<sup>59</sup> An example of this can be found in the *Niles’ Register*, a nationally prominent Baltimore paper which in 1820 stated that Jews “will not sit down and labor like other people-they create nothing and are mere consumers. They will not cultivate the earth, nor work at mechanical trades, preferring to live by their wit in dealing and

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Rockaway, and Arnon Gutfeld, “Demonic Images of the Jew in the Nineteenth Century United States.” *American Jewish History* 89, no. 4 (2001): 361-362.

<sup>56</sup> Louise Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth Century America’s Perception of the Jew*. (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988), 23.

<sup>57</sup> Hasia Diner, *A Time For Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 171.

<sup>58</sup> Gary L. Bunker and John Appel, “‘Shoddy,’ Anti-Semitism and the Civil War.” *American Jewish History* 82, no. 1/4 (1994): 45.

<sup>59</sup> *New York Illustrated News*, 26 August 1861, 272.

acting as if they had a home nowhere.” It goes on to emphasize that these preferences cause hostility everywhere Jews go.<sup>60</sup>

A southern example, from a Richmond correspondent in Montgomery during the early days of the Civil War, compares Lincoln to Shylock:

Lincoln has accepted an invitation to visit soon the Theatre in Washington, say the papers, and it is to be hoped that the manager will have produced on the occasion Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, in the same spirit that Hamlet had presented to the incestuous King and Queen their murder of his father. --Let the President see the knife and scales drop from the nerveless hand of Shylock, when told that his bond gives him an equal pound of flesh, to be cut from Antonio 's breast, but not one drop of blood, and remember that the attempt to "hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the United States," or collect the revenue, will cause a shower of blood to fall in witness of it and we shall then see if the incumbent of the "Black House" will not be affected as was the dirty and exacting Jew.<sup>61</sup>

The motif of Shylock was a prominent figure in the American consciousness. This example, playing off the [pejorative] designation of the Republican Party, the “Black Republicans”, identifies the occupant of the “Black House” (Lincoln) as a Shylock, and hopes he will fail in his aims, as does the “dirty and exacting Jew” in the *Merchant of Venice*.

Many newspapers also obsessed over the Rothschilds. In an article from the *Richmond Daily Dispatch* recounting the rise of the patriarch, Mayor Anselm, the journalist used Jewish tropes to explain their prosperity, “With the instinct of his race, Anselm did not forget to put the money out on good interest, so that before Napoleon had gone to Elba, and the illustrious Elector had returned to Cassel, the capital had more than doubled.”<sup>62</sup> While this might a compliment to Jews in a certain sense, it is still taken for granted that Jews have certain innate characteristics not possessed by gentiles.

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<sup>60</sup> *Niles Weekly Register* (Baltimore) 19 (October 20, 1820), 114.

<sup>61</sup> J.R.P. “Correspondence of the Richmond Dispatch” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), April 8, 1861

<sup>62</sup> “The House of Rothschild” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), May 14th, 1864.

A method to determine whether there was a difference in antisemitism between the North and South requires caution and care. Undoubtedly, both sections were antisemitic to some extent. Also undoubtedly, American mid-nineteenth century antisemitism was less than that in Europe, given the lack of specific antisemitic political programs, pogroms, and the mass immigration to the United States for the exact reason of religious freedom. It is quite clear that the South was *more* antisemitic than the North by the turn of the twentieth century.<sup>63</sup> One need only look at the blatant lynching of Leo Frank, an innocent Jewish factory superintendent, or the antisemitic vitriol directed at the attorney for the Scottsboro Boys, Samuel Leibowitz, who required the protection of the national guard.<sup>64</sup>

Nonetheless, there are a substantial number of facts that demonstrate an era of nineteenth century Southern tolerance. One circumstantial piece of evidence is simply the number of prominent Jews in the South, relative to the North, despite the population disparity in favor of the North. While some of these Jewish individuals converted to Christianity, many were openly practicing Jews or became irreligious in general yet managed to gain position of power and prestige. Judah P. Benjamin was a U.S. Senator, Confederate Attorney General, Secretary of War, and Secretary of State. Senator David Levy Yulee of Florida was of the Sephardic Ibn Yuli clan of Morocco, famed for being advisors to the sultan.<sup>65</sup> Moses Jacob Ezekiel, a southern Jew, was compared to Michelangelo at his height in fame as a sculptor and was even the Corporal of the Guard at Thomas “Stonewall” Jackson’s funeral.<sup>66</sup> Abraham Myers was the Confederate

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<sup>63</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 179.

<sup>64</sup> William F. Pinar, “The Communist Party/N.A.A.C.P. Rivalry in the Trials of the Scottsboro Nine.” *Counterpoints* 163 (2001): 783.

<sup>65</sup> C.S. Monaco, “Moses Levy of Florida: Jewish Utopian and Antebellum Reformer” (Baton Rouge: LSU Press, 2015).

<sup>66</sup> Herbert L. Hetzler, “Moses Ezekiel: The Search for a Reputation. (*Generations: Jewish Voices of the Civil War*. February 2012). Vol. 12, no. 1. pp. 14–16. Moses Jacob Ezekiel was the first Jewish cadet to enlist at the Virginia Military Institute. He participated in the famous Battle of New Market in which there were almost no Confederate troops to be found in the Shenandoah Valley. For the first (and only) time in the United States, a student body was

Quartermaster-General. David Camden de Leon was the Confederate Surgeon General. Phoebe Pember managed the largest southern hospital during the Civil War, Chimbarazo in Richmond. The Lieutenant Governor of both Louisiana and South Carolina were Jewish, both leading up to the Civil War. Benjamin F. Jonas was a senator from Louisiana after the Civil War, as well a Confederate major, along with two other Jewish officers, Adolph Proskauer and Alexander Hart.<sup>67</sup> Mordecai Manuel Noah was born in Philadelphia, but his career as a successful lawyer, US consul, and founder and editor of the *National Advocate* and *New York Inquirer* only took off after he moved to Charleston.<sup>68</sup> David Emanuel became governor of Georgia, while a Jew presided over the Baltimore City Council in 1825, another became mayor of Richmond in 1818, and there were Jewish mayors of Charleston, Georgetown, and Alexandria. There were Jewish congressman from Maryland, Alabama, and Texas.<sup>69</sup> In comparison, northern Jews who achieved public prominence in this period, despite being a greater percentage of the population, were seemingly few. Lewis Charles Levin was a US congressman from Pennsylvania who was born, raised, and achieved prominence in Charleston, South Carolina.<sup>70</sup> There was a significant number of northern Jews who rose high in the Union army, and Uriah P. Levy became a Commodore in the US Navy, the highest rank available at that time, but he faced extensive antisemitism, being wrongly court-martialed six times, was forced to defend himself before

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(on a voluntary basis) taken into service, in this case successfully attacking a much larger Union army. Thomas Jackson was an instructor at VMI.

<sup>67</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 118. Frederic Jaher. *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 177.

<sup>68</sup> Robert Gordis, "Mordecai Manuel Noah: A Centenary Evaluation." (*Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 41, no. 1. 1951), 4.

<sup>69</sup> Frederic Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 122, 177. "The Mayor Likes it". *The Jewish South* (Richmond, Virginia), September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1893.

<sup>70</sup> Henry Morais, *Jews "The Jews of Philadelphia"* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1894).

Congress, and engaged in multiple duels.<sup>71</sup> There were no northern Jewish senators until Herbert H. Lehman, of New York, in 1949, *over a century* after the South had sent its first Jew, and had afterwards sent three more.<sup>72</sup> There simply were more prominent southern Jews in the public sphere. This would seem to point towards a relative lack of anti-Jewish feeling amongst the gentile population of the South.

One point in the South's favor was the difference in the treatment of Jews during the Civil War. While both the North and South experienced rampant antisemitism during the war, it was only through Northern arms, that, as a state mandated policy, there occurred an official Jewish expulsion. When General Grant, expelled all Jews from the district of Tennessee, accusing them of being disloyal, Northern soldiers searched and found Jewish individuals, and summarily expelled them, in a striking moment of anti-Jewish bigotry.<sup>73</sup> The Richmond Times responded by condemning such acts:

The order of Gen. Grant expelling the Jews from his department, it now turns out, was not directed alone against pedlars and smugglers, but was a sweeping and arbitrary decree of banishment against a whole people. Such an act of tyranny is unheard of at the present day even in monarchical Europe. It is worthy of the dark ages, and of the darkest and most hypocritical despotism now in existence in the civilized globe.<sup>74</sup>

While this is merely one incident, and the policy was quickly rescinded by Lincoln, it cannot be discounted as entirely meaningless. There was no instance of Southern armies doing the same, despite much greater privation. Another instance of difference in official policy is comparing the Northern and Southern requirements for chaplaincy. While in the South, the draft law requiring

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<sup>71</sup> Simon Wolf, "Biographical Sketch of Uriah P. Levy." (The American Jewish Yearbook, 4. 1902), 44.

<sup>72</sup> The four senators in question being, David Lee Yulee, Judah P. Benjamin, Benjamin Jonas, and Isidor Rayner of Maryland in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Joshua Block. "Isidor Rayner (1850-1912)." *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* 40, no. 3 (1951): 288.

<sup>73</sup> Jonathan D. Sarna *When General Grant Expelled the Jews*. 1st ed. New York: Nextbook, 2012, 5.

<sup>74</sup> "Gen. Grant and the Jews" *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), January 16<sup>th</sup>, 1863.

chaplaincy was quietly altered to allow Jews, in the North, it became a political firestorm. For much of the war, only Christian chaplains were allowed in the Union Army.<sup>75</sup>

Another piece of evidence that the South was less antisemitic during the antebellum period are the statements of people living at the time. I.J. Benjamin states in his study on American Jewish life based on his travels between 1859 and 1862, *Three Years in America* that:

The southern states... for natural reasons, outdid, in many respects, the northern states in hospitality. The white inhabitants felt themselves united with, and closer to, other whites – as opposed to the Negroes. Since the Israelite there did not do the humbler kinds of work which the Negro did, he was quickly received among the upper classes and easily rose to high political rank. For this reason, until now, it was only the South which sent Jews to the senate. Benjamin came from Louisiana; Yulee from Florida, Louisiana has elected Hyams lieutenant-governor; and in Charleston Israelites occupy the most distinguished places.<sup>76</sup>

Other observers, such as Salomon Rothschild, also noted this trend.<sup>77</sup> People at the time considered it to be a given that the South was more tolerant of Jews. When a Sunday law that forced all businesses to cease activity, no matter the owner's creed, was repealed in Virginia, after much Jewish protest and agitation, the prominent Jewish newspaper *The Occident* celebrated. It proclaimed:

We therefore repeat that we rejoice at this first success of an appeal for justice to one State Legislature, and hope to be able to announce a similar result in all other parts of the Union; and sure we are that agitation will be carried forward, nay, there too where Jews have no influence as yet, even in New England, till such a thing as a compulsory Sunday law shall not exist in the whole country.<sup>78</sup>

The Occident took it as obvious that Jews had little to no support in New England for supporting their religious rights. Oliver Wendell Holmes commented on this phenomenon, when discussing

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<sup>75</sup>Bertram Wallace Korn, *American Jewry and the Civil War* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1961). 57.

<sup>76</sup>I.J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), 76.

<sup>77</sup>Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews*, Volume III (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955), 104. Yes, a member of *those* Rothschilds.

<sup>78</sup>"Sunday Laws in Virginia," *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), December 1849.

his own internal struggle against antisemitism. He attributed it to the “Old Calvinist spirit” of New England, and the Jewish rejection of Jesus.<sup>79</sup>

New York was also considered to be antisemitic. In comparison with Charleston, the only other city with a comparable number of Jews through the early and mid-nineteenth century, it was much less welcoming.<sup>80</sup> In one example, the *New York Times* editorialized in May 1860 during the secession crisis that J.P. Levy, brother of Commodore Levy, was “laying pipes for a ticket to consist of Senators Benjamin and Yulee as the President and Vice-President of Southern Jerusalem.”<sup>81</sup> In 1850, a mob of mostly Irish men, led by police, ransacked a synagogue in New York on Yom Kippur, due to a rumor that the Jews had killed a Christian girl for the holy day. Violence in urban America against Jews was in fact far from unknown. Catholic Germans fought Jews in cities such as Philadelphia, Cleveland, and Detroit.<sup>82</sup>

In contrast, Jewish-gentile relations could often be cooperative in southern cities. Jews and Christians regularly interacted in a positive fashion. In Natchez, Mississippi, one of the smallest Jewish congregations in the country, managed to raise 2600 dollars through a ballroom fundraiser open to all creeds. A similar Mobile Purim ball was attended by all sects in the city and raised a substantial sum.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Louise Mayo, *The Ambivalent Image: Nineteenth Century America's Perception of the Jew*. (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1988), 56.

<sup>80</sup> Frederick Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 186.

<sup>81</sup> Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates*. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>82</sup> Leonard Dinnerstein, *Antisemitism in America*. (New York: Oxford University Press), 28.

<sup>83</sup> Jennifer A. Stollman, *Daughters of Israel, Daughters of the South* Southern Jewish Women and Identity in the Antebellum and Civil War South (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 60. Minute Books 1865-1940 Hebrew Ladies Aid Association in Natchez, Mississippi, Temple Bnai Israel, American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati. *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), July 1850. (*Daughters of Israel* incorrectly notes June 1850 as the date of this newspaper article).

These Purim balls were not an aberration. In 1838, *every* Christian denomination in Savannah donated money to help fund a Jewish synagogue building.<sup>84</sup> In 1840, during the height of the Damascus case, Jews and Christians held mass meetings in Charleston against false blood libel accusations, while Christians attended Jewish Sunday Schools examinations in Columbia, South Carolina.<sup>85</sup> When the governor of South Carolina forgot to include the Jews in his Thanksgiving proclamation in 1812, he apologized, stating that it was unintentional.<sup>86</sup> Virginian John Tyler acted similarly, when he also forgot to include Jews in a Thanksgiving address, apologizing for the oversight.<sup>87</sup> Purim balls were a regular feature of southern society, in which Jewish women would organize and raise money for the needy and for their synagogues. They were popular events and attended by many gentiles, and took place annually in Savannah, Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans.<sup>88</sup> A popular book in the antebellum South, *Ivanhoe*, was not opposed to close Jewish-gentile relations. It features a beautiful “Jewess” Rebecca, whose father, Isaac, has many stereotypes, such as being hook-nosed and greedy. Nevertheless, he is loyal and kind underneath his rough exterior. The protagonist, Wilfred, Rebecca, and Isaac, all save one another’s lives through the novel, climaxing with Wilfred riding day and night to defend Rebecca in a trial for witchcraft.<sup>89</sup> Another work, this one by William Gillmore Simm, a

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<sup>84</sup> “Jews in Savannah,” *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), July 1843.

<sup>85</sup> James Hagg, *This Happy Land: The Jews of Colonial and Antebellum Charleston*. (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1993), 43. “Examination of the Sunday School at Columbia,” *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), June 1849.

<sup>86</sup> Frederic Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 126.

<sup>87</sup> Frederic Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 177.

<sup>88</sup> “News Items” *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), April 1846. Jennifer Stollman, *Daughters of Israel, Daughters of the South: Southern Jewish Women and Identity in the Antebellum and Civil War South* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2013), 60.

<sup>89</sup> Frederic Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 127. Scott, Walter. *Ivanhoe*. (UK: Wordsworth Edition, 1817).



native of Charleston, *Pelayo: A Story of the Goth* has Jewish characters braving battles against tyranny, while the Jewish villain is portrayed as having betrayed his heritage.<sup>90</sup>

Legally, one can also discern antisemitic tendencies and regional difference. By 1840, only five states had legal restrictions on Jews: North Carolina, New Jersey, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut.<sup>91</sup> In these states, Jews were barred from holding political office. Jews were aware of this fact and funded and supported efforts to repeal these restrictions. *The Asmonean*, a Jewish newspaper, declared that Jews should avoid voting for Franklin Pierce in the 1852 Presidential Election, as he was a native of New Hampshire.<sup>92</sup> However, in some states, that law was not enforced vigorously. Despite reaffirming the ban on Jewish officeholders in a series of attempted legislative repeals in the 1850s, a Jew, Jacob Henry, successfully served in the North Carolina House of Commons, without taking a Christian oath. He challenged the House of Commons to repeal the ban on Jewish officeholders, as the Declaration of Rights in the North Carolina Constitution declared that “All men have a natural and unalienable right to worship Almighty God according to the dictates of their own consciences.” Rather than change the law, or expel Jacob Henry, it was clarified that the ban on non-Protestants holding office only applied to the legislative and judicial branches. The North Carolina legislature seemed to be more interested in a symbolic Protestant supremacy than any fundamental antipathy towards Jews or will enforce it. In fact, during Reconstruction, there was a nearly unanimous vote for granting for full legal equality for the Jewish population, apparently under the idea that it was

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<sup>90</sup> Frederic Jaher, *A Scapegoat in the New Wilderness: The Origins and Rise of Anti-Semitism in America*. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 129.

<sup>91</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Volume I. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 496).

<sup>92</sup> *Asmonean*, July 16<sup>th</sup>, 1852, 101.

absurd to have non-whites hold office, and still disenfranchise Jews.<sup>93</sup> This lax attitude towards enforcement was not the case in the other four states, all northern, and three in New England.

The Christian attitude towards Jews in the United States was not a stable or clear one. There was a multiplicity of viewpoints, feelings, and thoughts, ranging from virulent anti-Semitism to glowing praise of Jewish life. Governors attended Jewish balls, governors *were* Jewish, governors were banned from being Jewish, depending on the time and place. The Jews in the United States were a tiny minority and were dependent on the larger gentile population's viewpoint. Within the same newspaper, one could have hooked nosed caricatures and laudatory speeches side by side. Nonetheless, there are clear trends during the mid-nineteenth century. While the South would become known as a haven for antisemitic feeling, during the early and mid-nineteenth century, it was the South that was more accommodating and tolerant. This was not a rule, nor was it as drastic as difference between the United States to practically the entire Old World. The South was one of the first places where Jews became full members of non-Jewish society, not only in name, but in spirit. It was not to last. Mark Twain commented:

In the cotton States, after the war, the simple and ignorant negroes made the crops for the white planter on shares. The Jew came down in force, set up shop on the plantation, supplied all the negro's wants on credit, and at the end of the season was proprietor of the negro's share of the present crop and of part of his share of the next one. Before long, the whites detested the Jew, and it is doubtful if the negro loved him.<sup>94</sup>

Whether or not this hypothesis is correct, in the 1880s, and then more dramatically in the 1890s, the regional difference in Jewish tolerance switched. American-Jewish life thrived in the North, while the powerful Jewish southern aristocrats of the mid-nineteenth century became a distant memory.

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<sup>93</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus. *United States Jewry 1776-1985*, Volume I. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 508).

<sup>94</sup> Mark Twain, "Concerning the Jews" *Harper's Magazine*, March, 1898,

## Roman Tolerance: The City of Seven Hills

### *Outrage*

*-A marble monument at the Jewish burying-ground was defaced and injured by some malicious persons, one day last week. A reward of \$20 is offered for the apprehension of the perpetrators.*

*-The Richmond Dispatch, November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1860<sup>95</sup>*

The famed sculptor and native son Moses Ezekiel once related that Richmond prided itself on being built on seven hills, just like Rome. These seven hills were not particularly obvious, and perhaps pointing towards the awkwardness of the comparison, arguments still rage today about which of the many hills in Richmond count as one of the seven.<sup>96</sup> Nonetheless, these seven “hills” were the source of the names of the cats (gangs) adolescent boys formed. There were the “Shockoe Hill Cats”, the “Gamble Hill Cats”, and so on. They were no idle business, participating in rock throwing battles, in which boys were often severely injured. Intriguingly, however, these cats were not split by geography, or religion, but by class status. Each of the seven gangs were ranked along a spectrum from patrician to plebian status.<sup>97</sup>

This telling anecdote points towards the larger picture of social stratification. Richmond had more than enough prejudice but discriminated through class and race, rather than religion. Jews, as an upper and middle-class group in nineteenth century Richmond, were not seen merely as outsiders, but as whites. As most Jews owned enslaved people in early nineteenth century

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<sup>95</sup> “Outrage” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), November 8th, 1860.

<sup>96</sup> Mark Holmberg, “Holmberg: Which Are the Seven Hills of Richmond?” WTVR. WTVR, July 7, 2012. <https://www.wtvr.com/2012/07/05/holmberg-which-are-the-seven-hills-of-richmond/>.

<sup>97</sup> Peter Adam Nash, *The Life and Times of Moses Jacob Ezekiel : American Sculptor, Arcadian Knight*. (Lanham, Maryland: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2014), 29. Stanley F. Chyet, “Moses Jacob Ezekiel: A Childhood in Richmond.” *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62, no. 3 (1973): 292. Moses Ezekiel, *Memoirs from the Baths of Diocletian*. (Detroit: Wayne State University Press), 82.

Richmond, according to the 1820 Census, a sign of at least some wealth, this class status meant that, given social acceptance, most Jews were part of the upper and upper-middle class.<sup>98</sup> I.J. Benjamin confirms this sense. When traveling through Richmond at the height of the sectional crisis, he notes that “there is not a Jew there in need of any charitable assistance and most of the Jews are well-to-do.”<sup>99</sup> This is of course an exaggeration. He also writes of the four Jewish charitable organizations that exist in Richmond, and contemporary synagogues records are peppered with pleas and financial grants for needy widows and the poor in general.<sup>100</sup>

One must examine daily life to determine the level of antisemitism in the South. Most people are not senators or colonels, and most people’s lived experience takes place on the local level. Additionally, there are many details one can miss if one only examines life from such a broad scope as the southern half of a nation, or as Alexander Stephens put it, an area “greater than all France, Spain, Portugal, and Great Britain, including England, Ireland, and Scotland, together.”<sup>101</sup>

Richmond is an interesting test case for the acceptance of Jews as part of the body politic. In some ways, Richmond follows a similar trend to other southern cities. There was a spirit of acceptance and integration during the nineteenth century, interrupted by an outburst of short-lived antisemitism during the Civil War. This spirit eventually declined through the 1890s. However, unlike Charleston and Savannah, whose population was dominated by aristocratic “old blood” Jews throughout the nineteenth century, Richmond is a less studied and more diverse case, in which a moderately sized upper-class population coexisted alongside a much larger

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<sup>98</sup> Ira Rosenwaike, “The Jewish Population of the United States,” pp. 164-166.

<sup>99</sup> I.J. Benjamin, *Three Years in America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), 308.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, Page 8, Beth Shalom Synagogue Records. Beth Ahabah, Richmond, Virginia.

<sup>101</sup> Alexander Stephens, 1812-1883. “African Slavery, the Cornerstone of the Southern Confederacy : a Speech ... Delivered at the Atheneum”, Savannah, March 22, 1861. This was *before* the border states joined the Confederacy, hence excluding both Confederate states such as Virginia and Southern states such as Maryland. The size of the South was around twice as large as the area Alexander Stephens referred to.

contingent of Jewish immigrants.<sup>102</sup> The former group did not overshadow the newer immigrants, and slowly lost members and influence throughout the period, and their synagogue, Beth Shalome, would eventually be merged into Beth Ahabah, the German synagogue, in 1898.<sup>103</sup> As Richmond was a newer city, even much of the more established population did not claim old lineages but were themselves the assimilated descendants of merchants. While the first synagogue in Richmond, Beth Shalome, had a Portuguese rite, like other Jewish communities in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Jewish population was still made up of German Jewish settlers. In the words of new Richmond resident Rebecca Samuel in a 1791 letter to her parents:

You cannot imagine what kind of Jews they have here [in Virginia]. They were all German itinerants who made a living by begging in Germany. They came to America during the war, as soldiers.

She then adds:

One can make a good living here, and all live at peace. Anyone can do what he wants. There is no rabbi in all of America to excommunicate anyone. This is a blessing here; Jew and Gentile are as one. There is no galut [exile] here.<sup>104</sup>

The original Jewish residents were mostly German merchants, who maintained a pretension to Sephardic Judaism. Nonetheless, these Jews did quite well for themselves, clearly, as the change in the economic picture from 1790 to 1820 shows.

The ethnic character of Richmond changed, with the influx of German immigrants in the mid-nineteenth century, however, and despite their continuity in origin, two distinct Jewish communities formed. In 1860, a Jewish traveler reported to Isaac Leeser's newspaper *The Occident* that:

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<sup>102</sup> Mark I. Greenberg, "Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830–70." (*American Jewish History* 86, no. 1, 1998): 56.

<sup>103</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond*. (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 256.

<sup>104</sup> Quoted in Marcus, *American Jewry, Documents, Eighteenth Century*, pp.51-52. Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe*. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 79.

Sabbath last I spent in the pleasant city of Richmond, Va., and visited the Synagogue of the Portuguese Congregation, one of the oldest in this country. The building itself, situated in what was formerly one of the most fashionable portions of town, still retains its ancient architectural features, but I am sorry to say that the attendance on Sabbath is very small indeed. This, perhaps, is owing to the fact, that the old residents have one by one passed away to their eternal abode. *The present Jewish population is mostly German* [italics mine], and they are worshipping in a synagogue where their own Minhag has been adopted.<sup>105</sup>

There were two major Jewish communities in mid-nineteenth century Richmond, an upper class one dating back to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and a newer one formed by German immigration. There were also two other smaller Jewish synagogues with small communities formed around them during this period. The first was Keneseth Israel, a strictly Orthodox congregation formed in 1856.<sup>106</sup> The second was the Sir Moses Montefiore Congregation, being founded in 1886. This congregation was Russian, and poetically purchased its synagogue from the dying Beth Shalome.<sup>107</sup> By the end of the nineteenth century, the building that had once housed the first Jewish community, now housed its future, the Russian Jewry.

The tale of Richmond Jewry is not a united one. These distinct ethnic subgroups were not merely distinctions of convenience or synagogue memberships. They were separate communities. In fact, Jacob Mordecai, a leader of the Richmond Jewish community, noted that his children would likely marry gentiles, as they were preferable to German Jews.<sup>108</sup> When a German-Jewish immigrant attempted to court a Miss Hays, a member of one of the wealthiest and most prominent families of Beth Shalome, the Hays family made his accent the subject of ridicule, and outright rejected him.<sup>109</sup> This divide was not only shown by snobbery on the part of

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<sup>105</sup> "Notes by the Way-Side," *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), November 1860.

<sup>106</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond*. (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 275.

<sup>107</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond*. (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 279.

<sup>108</sup> Ellen Mordecai to Solomon Mordecai, Richmond, May 8<sup>th</sup> 1823; Jacob Mordecai Papers, William R. Perkins Library.

<sup>109</sup> Ellen Mordecai to Solomon Mordecai, Richmond, February 1st 1829; Jacob Mordecai Papers, William R. Perkins Library.

the older inhabitants. After Beth Ahabah, the German congregation, split from Beth Shalome, they determined that they needed to form their own aid society. They petitioned the Virginia General Assembly and referred to themselves as “the German inhabitants of the City of Richmond, professing the Jewish faith.”<sup>110</sup> This split was not merely rites based, but functionally made a difference in daily life. While the Hebrew Beneficial Society supported the needy members of the old Jewish community, the German Hebrew Society supported its own poor.<sup>111</sup> The distinction between these groups was not lost on gentiles. In one example, in 1861, the Richmond Dispatch reported that a presumed spy had attempted to insert themselves into the Confederate ranks as an officer:

He claimed to have been sent by President Davis to Gen. Floyd. As it had been recently ascertained that he was an arrant impostor, being really [an] illiterate German Jew, and as he was strongly suspected of being a spy, he was asked for his pass or commission. Having none to show, he was sent in custody to Gen. Wise 's headquarters.<sup>112</sup>

This example from Richmond was not an aberration. It was quite common to specify between different groups of Jews throughout the South. Another example from the Dispatch, was an excerpt from news in Charleston, in which the paper specified that the person in question was a German Jew.<sup>113</sup>

The general trend was to specify if the Jewish person was recently Russian, German, and to otherwise not specify. When George S. Jacobs, the “Reverend” of Beth Shalome, opened the Virginia House of Delegates in 1861 with solemn prayer (the members adjourned later that day to attend the Virginia Secession Convention), they specified he was from the “Hebrew

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<sup>110</sup> German Inhabitants: Petition, Richmond, December 20, 1848, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

<sup>111</sup> Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 59.

<sup>112</sup> “Attempted Suicide of Col. Adler.” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), September 10th, 1861

<sup>113</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), July 13th, 1861.

Church”.<sup>114</sup> Yet, when Captain Marcus was killed in dramatic fashion defending Fort Gilmer from the (much emphasized) attack of “whites and *negroes*”(italics mine), the Richmond’s Dispatch’s long eulogy of his actions did not fail to end with a mention of what kind of Jew officiated:

Captain Marcus was a young man, between twenty-five and thirty. He was an Israelite; and although a number of his people who were in the army were granted leave of absence to attend upon the ceremonies of the "Feast of Atonement," which is a season of release from all labor, the Feast of Tabernacles closely following, yet he asked no leave, considering that in performing his duty to his country he worshipped his God in an acceptable manner. The funeral services were performed in the German Jewish Church, Rev. Mr. Michelbacher.<sup>115</sup>

The *Dispatch*’s term “German Jewish Church”, the synagogue Beth Ahabah, might indicate that this differentiation between German and non-German Jew came with disdain for the former.

While this was true in some cases, the synagogue construction itself was partially funded by non-Jewish donors. This was no small sum either. When the Reverend Michelbacher appealed in 1847 to “the liberality of their fellow-citizens to aid them in their present undertaking, feeling that although foreigners they are not strangers among them”, Christian Richmond answered. Stunningly, while Beth Ahabah members contributed \$1,495, non-Israelites contributed \$810, *more than half of what its own members gave*. This is more than double what Israelite non-members gave, presumably members of the wealthier Beth Elohim.<sup>116</sup>

Nevertheless, this distinction between German immigrant and old stock Jewry still was correlated with more prejudice against the newcomers. The cemetery that suffered a potential antisemitic attack mentioned at the beginning of this chapter was shared between Beth Shalome

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<sup>114</sup> “House of Delegates” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), February 19<sup>th</sup>, 1861.

<sup>115</sup> “Captain Madison Marcus” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1864.

<sup>116</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 261.



and Beth Ahabah, but invariably, most antisemitism was directed towards the German population.

#### Disturbing public Worship.

The congregation of the German Hebrew Synagogue, on 11th street, were much annoyed while engaged in wershhip on Saturday last, by a gang of illbred boys, and we learn that this is not the first instance of their disreputable behavior in that locality. The authorities ought to apply the remedy for an evil of this description without delay.<sup>117</sup>

One cannot prove that these boys targeted German Jews, but antisemitic incidents seemed to have disproportionately focused on newcomers. It is not difficult to imagine how a gang of boys looking to fight “Christ-killers” might identify a group of peddlers speaking a foreign tongue as more salient than visibly indistinguishable, upper class, native English-speaking individuals. One must judge the situation of Richmond Jewry with an awareness of ethnic distinction.

Undoubtedly, there was antisemitism in Richmond throughout the mid-nineteenth century.

Nevertheless, when Jews were stripped of their “ethnic” character, and seen as native stock by the gentile population, the Jewish-gentile integration was even more impressive. This can be shown in a multitude of ways.

Child psychology has demonstrated the centrality of identity to inter-peer friendships. Generally, friendships and social groups fracture on relevant social divisions. In the case of many Richmond Jewry, it seems that close gentile-Jewish relationships were not just common, it was the norm.<sup>118</sup> Rachel Mordecai, born in Warrenton, North Carolina, but raised in Richmond, wrote to an English correspondent that:

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<sup>117</sup> “Disturbing Public Worship” *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), March 17th, 1862.

<sup>118</sup> Willard W. Hartup, “The Peer Context In Middle Childhood.” Essay. In *Development Development During Middle Childhood: The Years from Six to Twelve*, edited by W. Andrews Collins, 240–82. Washington D.C.: National Academy Press, 1984.

in this happy country, where religious distinctions are scarcely known, where character and talents are sufficient to attain advancement, we find the Jews to form a respectable part of the community...

Residing in a small village, her father's the only family of Israelites who live in or near it; all her juvenile friendships and attachments have been formed with those of persuasions different from her own, yet each has looked upon the variations of the other, as things of course-differences which take place in every society.<sup>119</sup>

Her brother, Solomon Mordecai reported a similar story:

To the kindness of the best, most liberal-minded parents, am I indebted for the more extended views, less contracted ideas on the subject of religion, educated as I have been in their sentiments, brought up exclusively in the society of Christians, among them have my early attachments been formed and I have been taught to believe that the good man, whatever creed soever he may have been led to adopt, was an example to me, which if steadily imitated would lead to the inheritance of happiness in a future state.<sup>120</sup>

Both siblings report the ubiquity of Christian-Jewish friendship and acquaintance. Nor were these interfaith connections limited to friendship. In the case of the Mordecai family, this spirit of interreligious mingling continued despite the patriarch Jacob's best efforts, to the point that nine of his thirteen children married gentiles, while only two married Jews. This pattern was not an aberration. Hetty and Solomon Jacobs, another Sephardic family, had four children, all of which chose gentile partners. Out of two Elcan brothers, among the first Jews who settled in Richmond, one had no children, the other married a gentile, and had no Jewish descendants. Out of Joseph Marx's ten children, only three married other Jews.<sup>121</sup> One can hardly be surprised that with this level of intermarriage, the old synagogue of Beth Elohim declined through the nineteenth century. When Abraham Cohen, the future Jewish leader of Richmond, courted his future Jewish wife, *who was then Christian*, she reported that a friend stated, "Why, Jane, you have made a grand conquest of the high-priest's son". Her laughing response, "of a Jew", was

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<sup>119</sup> Rachel Mordecai to Maria Edgeworth, Richmond, May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1823; Jacob Mordecai Papers, William R. Perkins Library.

<sup>120</sup> Solomon Mordecai to Ellen Mordecai, Richmond, Sept 24<sup>th</sup>, 1821; Jacob Mordecai Papers, William R. Perkins Library.

<sup>121</sup> Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 109-111.

met with “Jew or Turk, it matters not, provided he loves you”.<sup>122</sup> At least this piece of nineteenth century Richmond, terminology aside, might well belong in *West Side Story* New York.

Intermarriage and friendship were not the only examples of social integration. Apparently, the premier social club of Richmond was partially founded by Major Myers, a Jew, while another one of its premier clubs, Westmoreland, had a Jewish president in the 1880s.<sup>123</sup> Beth Shalome’s annual Hebrew School Fund balls proved to be quite the hit among elite society, just as in other southern cities. In 1847, The *Richmond Daily Enquirer* reported that upon the conclusion of the first one that:

This interesting assemblage of “Jew and Gentile” took place on Wednesday night last at the City Hotel. It was the first public entertainment of the kind that our Hebrew neighbors have held in the city... We can say that the “Hebrew School Fund Ball” was a brilliant affair, and we trust that much good may result from it.<sup>124</sup>

These balls continued for some time. Two years later, the *Richmond Republican* described the Third Annual Hebrew School Ball as such:

Every portion of the room sparkled with flashes from the eyes of gentile and Hebrew beauties; the gay quadrille and graceful waltz kept time to the fine music of the Armory Band till ‘the small hours about the twa;’ everybody seemed bright and happy. The room, with its floor richly decorated by Mr. Clarke, and the corridors were ornamented with United States flags and evergreens, and the supper, artistically arranged, was worthy of the taste and skill of Mr. Boyden and the Exchange. We were happy to see the Governor and the two Speakers of the General Assembly mingling freely in the gay throng.<sup>125</sup>

These parties were no small matter. Not only were they valuable for networking, but they served the all-important task of fundraising. It was not only Beth Shalome that employed them. By the 1880s, the Germans had mostly integrated, and the eastern European Jews were the foreign

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<sup>122</sup> S Jane Cohen-Picken, *Henry Luria; or, the Little Jewish Convert; Being Contained in the Memoir of Mrs. S.J. Cohen, Relict of Dr. A.H. Cohen, Late Rabbi of the Synagogue in Richmond, VA.* (New York: Miller), 50.

<sup>123</sup> John A. Cutchins, *Memories of Old Richmond (1881-1944)*, 155, 158, 167.

<sup>124</sup> “The Hebrew School Fund Ball” *Richmond Daily Enquirer* (Richmond, Virginia) February 15<sup>th</sup>, 1847.

<sup>125</sup> “Third Annual Hebrew School Fund Ball at Richmond, Va,” *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), April 1849.

element. German Jews successfully hosted their own balls. The *Richmond Times* described the balls of the Ladies Hebrew Benevolent Society, a German-Jewish charity organization, as having the same prestige as the “colonial Ball and that of Lee’s inauguration.”<sup>126</sup>

The Richmond Jewry also did not lack institutional standing. Samuel Marx became President of the Bank of Virginia and Director of the James River and Kanawha Canal. Moses Myers established an international shipping firm, while a relation, Samuel Myers, made a fortune off tobacco, while an unrelated Judah Myers helped found the Franklin Savings Institute.<sup>127</sup> Another Jewish resident of Richmond, Gustavus Myers, was one of the most prominent personages of his day. The at times President of the Richmond City Council, member of the Virginia House of Delegates, director of the Richmond Publishing Company, the R. F & P. Railroad and the Mutual Assurance Society of Virginia, and knew and corresponded with many personages, such as Jefferson Davis, Abraham Lincoln and John Marshall.<sup>128</sup> A Jewish Richmonder, Solomon Jacobs, was the acting mayor of the city for some time.<sup>129</sup> For a Jew to be able to lead the city itself speaks to far more general acceptance than even the term “toleration” indicates. In the 1880s, William Lovenstein, was not only was elected to the Virginia state senate for three decades, but he also became the president pro tempore. He was known for being interested in the welfare of the black community, a reputation that apparently did not trigger antisemitism.<sup>130</sup>

True acceptance requires the majority’s acknowledgement of difference. One cannot regard a minority as fully welcomed without the majority accepting that there *are* differences

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<sup>126</sup> “LHBA Ball,” *Richmond Times* (Richmond, VA), February 16<sup>th</sup>, 1887.

<sup>127</sup> Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 127.

<sup>128</sup> Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 127.

<sup>129</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 85.

<sup>130</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), May 24<sup>th</sup>, 1887.

between the two groups. If Jews were integrated, only be silenced, and converted, one would be justified in questioning Richmond's lack of antisemitism. However, Richmond Jewry was politically active *as* Jews. In 1850, this passage was published in the *Occident*, the premier American-Jewish newspaper. This paragraph is quoted in full:

We love this old commonwealth; it is the home of generous feelings, and the seat of true liberty of conscience; this has been frequently proved, especially by the late act to repeal all punishments for not observing Sunday on the part of those who keep the seventh day Sabbath; for though at one time misled to enact an exceptional law, that State repealed it as soon as the injustice was made manifest; and next to not committing an error, it is to acknowledge the wrong and amend it; in truth, it is more generous to do so, especially in public bodies, who are often swayed by contrary notions to those of abstract justice. When the convention to amend the State Constitution, met in 1829 or '30, under the Presidency of Mr. Monroe, once President of the United States, the clergy of various Christian denominations were invited to open the daily sittings with prayer. This act of exclusion roused the zeal of the Reverend Abraham Hyam Cohen, then the minister of the Jewish Congregation, and he succeeded in having the rights of the Jews respected. We now see the fruits of this well-directed remonstrance. The offence is not repeated again, and we see that the Rev. Mr. Eckman, the newly arrived minister of the Portuguese Synagogue, has been invited to open the meeting of the House of Delegates.<sup>131</sup>

The latter part of the passage outlines how Abraham Cohen (whose wife converted to Judaism, to the indignation of few.<sup>132</sup>) protested to James Monroe on the lack of Jewish invitation to the State Constitution. Not only were they then included, but Jews were afterwards regularly included to open legislative sessions, as the example of Reverend Eckman or Reverend Michelbacher demonstrates.

The former, however, relates to the central battle for Jewish freedom in Richmond in the mid-nineteenth century. The Sabbath controversy began in 1817, when the City Hall considered a petition to enforce a Sunday ban on business. While this move was dismissed for several decades, in 1845, the city government finally gave in to pressure and enacted the ordinance, fining any who conducted business on Sunday, which naturally impacted the Saturday Sabbath

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<sup>131</sup> "Virginia," *Occident* (Cincinnati, OH), March 1850.

<sup>132</sup> Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 219.

observing Jews. This act met with the furor of the Jewish and not an insubstantial part of the Christian population for its religious overtones. The Jewish community led by Abram Levy, with the probable help of Joseph Mayo, a city council member, expert legal mind, and attorney for the city, crafted a long petition to the city, pointing out that this ordinance was patently unfair and discriminatory. They also set a petition to the State of Virginia, boldly outlining the illegality of a Sabbath enforcing law. The city of Richmond backed down, and quietly abandoned its policy of enforcing the Sabbath. Virginia enacted a new law code, with a new Sabbath law and religious exemption.<sup>133</sup>

This was not the only example of Richmond Jewry proving that they would not be quiet. When native Virginian and US President John Tyler referenced America as a Christian nation during a proclamation, Jacob Ezekiel was quick to send a letter correcting his usage. President Tyler apologized in a personal reply, extolling the Jewish people, stating he had not meant to exclude his fellow-citizens”.<sup>134</sup> Jews led protests in Richmond time and time again during the nineteenth century, over the discriminatory treaty with Switzerland, the Damascus Case, and the Montrara Case.<sup>135</sup> Richmond Jews were out on the streets, claiming not only their rights, but were secure enough in their position that demanding that the American government intervene to protect foreign Jewish rights would not be immediately met with a backlash of “dual loyalty” accusations.

These protests were often regarded sympathetically by the gentile population. In 1867, the rapidly increasing antisemitism of the northeast resulted in several insurance companies

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<sup>133</sup>Herbert Ezekiel, *History of the Jews of Richmond* (Richmond: Ezekiel, 1917), 104, 116. Ask for the remission of fines imposed on them as Jews for violating the Sabbath: Petition, Richmond, February 20, 1846, Legislative Petitions Digital Collection, Library of Virginia, Richmond, Va.

<sup>134</sup> American Jewish History Society, No. 9, p. 162.

<sup>135</sup> Myron Berman, *Shabbat in Shockoe* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia), 149, 155.

declaring that they would no longer insure “Jew risks”. Beth Ahabah and Beth Shalome cooperated to organize a protest meeting. The *Dispatch* proclaimed:

“Insurance companies who have thus heedlessly given this insult have done that for which they should make the most ample reparation; or the outraged community is entirely justifiable in making them feel the consequences through the severe retaliation it is in the power of the injured to bring to bear upon them. A people so largely engaged in commerce, and possessed of so great a part of the wealth of the country, certainly have power enough to make themselves respected; and it is an honor to them that they are as sensitive about all matters relating to their faith, and as prompt to defend it as any other in the world. Citizens are generally invited to attend the meeting.”<sup>136</sup>

This meeting was packed, filled with personages such as a former mayor, many gentiles, and practically every prominent Richmond Jew.<sup>137</sup> The Jews may have been well integrated, but they were not quiet. They loudly claimed their rights as American citizens, and fought discrimination, both at home and abroad.

Unfortunately, these times of acceptance were not to last. Richmond was not an exceptional city. It followed the national norm. Slurs against Jews became increasingly frequent through the 1890s.<sup>138</sup> Rebekah Bettelheim Kohut compared her times to the friendship between her father, the rabbi of Beth Ahabah, and James Gibbons, a future Catholic cardinal, in the 1870s, and bemoaned the “hardening of religious lines.”<sup>139</sup> In one striking instance in 1893, a woman who sold dresses to Jewish ladies was thrown out of her apartment by her landlord, as he did not want “Jew women”. He apparently stated that “Jews and niggers” were always giving him trouble, and that there was only one decent Jew in town.<sup>140</sup> For a time, however, Richmond was a spot of tolerance in world of antisemitism, a city in the seemingly unlikely South where true interreligious cooperation and integration was possible between gentile and Jew. The

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<sup>136</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), March 27th, 1867.

<sup>137</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), March 28th, 1867.

<sup>138</sup> *Richmond Daily Dispatch* (Richmond, Virginia), September 19th, 1891.

<sup>139</sup> Rebekah Kohut, *My Portion* (New York: A. & C. Boni, 1925), 16.

<sup>140</sup> “More Intolerance”. *The Jewish South* (Richmond, Virginia), September 9<sup>th</sup>, 1893.

nineteenth century was a period of acceptance for Jews, where the city saw them as whites, and accorded them full status as equal citizens.



## Explaining Tolerance: Antisemitism, Race, and Immigration

[speaking of the Romani] *Unlike the Jews, they have never taken part in the march of civilization, but have everywhere kept themselves isolated, and their blood almost pure. Like the Hindoos, (of which they are a tribe), they have much smaller heads than the Hebrews, and other White Races, and their lives and characters have been the result of an inferior organization, which they received from the almighty. Intellectual activity and progression belong to the very nature of the Jewish race; intellectual quietude and dislike belong to the Hindoo races.*

-Josiah Nott's Essay on the Natural History of Mankind, Delivered Before the Southern Rights Association, 1850<sup>141</sup>

When Josiah Nott, a South Carolinian scientist, and one of the leading early proponents of polygenism, that each race sprung from a different ancestor, welcomed Jews into the “Great Caucasian Family”, in one of his many works, this was no small time crank proclaiming his pet theories.<sup>142</sup> Josiah Nott was one of the leading figures of 19<sup>th</sup> century race science, and one of the first to put polygenism, the notion that each race was created separately, in contradiction to the Biblical account, into the mainstream. His speech above, purporting to scientifically justify slavery, to the Southern Rights Association, who were then formulating terms of possible secession (before the Compromise of 1850 narrowly averted that possibility for a decade) was no small thing either. He was chosen to give the lecture to the Association before they discussed how to prevent California's admission as a free state. This long essay mentions Jews many times, referring to their venerable ancestry and purity of blood, and yet, alongside reams of virulent

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<sup>141</sup> Josiah C. Nott, *An Essay on the Natural History of Mankind, Viewed in Connection with Negro Slavery: Delivered to the Southern Rights Association, 14th December 1850* (Mobile: 1851).

<sup>142</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18.

racism and claims of innate inferiority attaching themselves to all sorts of ethnicities, nowhere is there any sense of anti-Jewish bigotry.<sup>143</sup> He was a man of his times.

In the nineteenth century South, there was even an occasional notion that Jews were “hyper-whites”, that is to say, somehow more emblematic of “white virtues” than gentiles. This view coexisted with antisemitism and the most common view, that Jews were merely “normal” Caucasians. This tendency is also noted by Eric Goldstein, in his book, *The Price of Whiteness*, in which he states that it was common to view Jewish survival as exemplifying the Caucasian ability to persist through adversity, rather than a distinguishing feature of Jews *from* whiteness.<sup>144</sup> It was not unheard of to give Jews a status that placed them not merely with, but above, other whites. In 1874, a Doctor Madison Marsh from Port Hudson, Louisiana, published an article purporting to demonstrate that Jews had a longer lifespan, and lower rates of disease, especially tuberculosis, compared to Christians. Marsh remarks upon the “high average physique of the Jew, which is not less remarkable than the high average of his intellectual gifts”. He then enumerates the various historical persecutions that Jews have gone through, which he states should have enfeebled or extinguished the Jewish people, and expounds that:

“How different is the result? After only about fifty years of political, social, mental, and religious emancipation, they have achieved an enviable prominence in science, literature, finance, political distinction, and governmental position, in all civilized countries. Thus, proving themselves of the purest, finest, and most perfect type of the Caucasian race. With a more perfect physical organization than any other people; fortified against, unsusceptible, and almost invulnerable to the most fatal disease, and I might say to a certain extent all disease, the Jew has come out of *The Wilderness*, like a pure diamond, untarnished by age, unscathed by wear, undimmed by time, presenting a problem for the study of the moralist, philosopher, and scientist, and a special lesson to the physician, of the grand results of wise and long continued dietetic regimen, especially

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<sup>143</sup> Robert A Smith, "Types of mankind: polygenism and scientific racism in the nineteenth century United States scientific community." (2014). *Electronic Theses & Dissertations*, 80, 123.

<sup>144</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18.

the rigid abstinence from hog meat, with its measles, trichina, cholera, and many other disgusting diseases”.<sup>145</sup>

The esteemed medical journal, *Medical and Surgical Reporter*, saw fit to publish an argument that claimed that Jews were the “purest, finest, and most perfect type of the Caucasian race”. This article sparked a backlash from at least one individual, a *Jewish* physician from Cincinnati. Ephraim M. Epstein, and “two Jewish gentlemen, of superior education and impartiality of mind” who happened to be present in his office, strongly disagreed with Marsh’s claims. In fact, he states that Jews have a normal longevity and rates of disease, both venereal and respiratory, and that all three of them had many anecdotes of such things. Confusingly, he then attributes the advantages and reality of Jewish health to the lack of intermixing with gentiles, despite his denial of health differences.<sup>146</sup> Marsh responded to this challenge in an extensive article that reiterated numerous statistics, dissected his opponent’s contradictions, and wrote finally, “and thus he abandons every point, and comes round, step by step, to my position, that ‘they have proved themselves of the purest and finest type of the Caucasian race’...”<sup>147</sup> In other words, Marsh’s statement that the Jews were the finest type of Caucasian, was no off-hand literary flourish in one article, but a summary of his *actual position*. Marsh, a Louisianian gentile, claimed that out of all the groups of white folks, Jews were the “highest”.

Madison Marsh was not an isolated figure in granting the Jews a special biological status. John S. Billings, the President of the American Library Association, the main planner of the John Hopkins University Hospital, and Washington D.C. resident, issued a special report in the *North*

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<sup>145</sup> Madison Marsh, "Jews and Christians," *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 30 (1874): 343-44

<sup>146</sup> Ephraim Epstein, "Have the Jews any Immunity from Certain Diseases?" *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 30 (1874): 440-441.

<sup>147</sup> Madison Marsh, "Have the Jews any Immunity from Certain Diseases?" *Medical and Surgical Reporter* 31 (1875): 133

*American Review* in 1891. He obtained permission from the census authorities to send out a special questionnaire to Jewish families, to determine their longevity and health. He found that Jews suffered much less from tuberculosis, and had a significantly higher life expectancy, and lower rate of disease in general, which he posited might be due to hereditary features. He ends the article by wondering if the Jews, who had survived adversity so well, would be able to maintain their long years through a trial of wealth and freedom.<sup>148</sup>

Another example of this southern notion of Jewish superiority can be found in Zebulon Vance's speech, where he employs race science in a quite unusual manner:

“The average duration of Gentile life is computed at 26 years— it certainly does not reach 30; that of the Jew, according to a most interesting table of statistics which I have seen, is full 37 years. The number of infants born to the married couple exceeds that to the Gentile races, and the number dying in infancy is much smaller. In height they are nearly three inches lower than the average of other races; the width of their bodies with outstretched arms is one inch shorter than the height, whilst in other races it is eight inches longer on the average. But on the other hand, the length of the trunk is much greater with the Jew, in proportion to height than with other races. In the Negro the trunk constitutes 32 per cent of the height of the whole body, in the European 34 per cent, in the Jew 36 per cent. What these physical peculiarities have had to do with their wonderful preservation and steady increase, I leave for the philosophers to explain.”<sup>149</sup>

He goes on to argue that pauperism and prostitution is essentially non-existent in the Jewish community, and that practically all can read and write. What is most interesting, however, is that he implicitly juxtaposes whiteness and blackness, and then puts Jews as somehow “whiter” than a European, through implying a relationship between physical distinctions and prosperity. There would be little interest for most listeners in hearing the relative average percentage of the trunk compared to the height of the body, if there were not some sort of subtext. Zebulon Vance revised and repeated this speech many times as his source of income and would likely not have employed such extraneous statistics if they were not for some point.

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<sup>148</sup> John S. Billington “Vital Statistics of the Jews.” *The North American Review* 152, no. 410 (1891): 84.

<sup>149</sup> Zebulon B. Vance, *Scattered Nation*. (Nabu Press, 2010).

A useful method to track antisemitism is the notion of whiteness. Jews were usually accepted as white during the mid-nineteenth century, albeit with many exceptions.<sup>150</sup> Whiteness was central to American identity and determined who was a core tenet of who could truly be part of the body polity. This went as far as excluding certain groups at times from whiteness, despite the white color of their skin, exemplified by nativist attitudes towards the so called “simian race”, the Irish.<sup>151</sup> If a group did not fit into American norms, many would view them as non-white. Whiteness was a multifaceted phenomenon, that not only predicted tolerance and assimilation, but also was a term that expanded and contracted based upon elite attitudes towards certain groups.

The idea that one group was white or not might be ex post facto justified by pseudo-science, but in practice, would be determined by underlying social conditions. In the case of the Irish, they were often compared to enslaved individuals, given that they mostly were employed in manual labor in the mid-nineteenth century, in the various port cities of the Eastern seaboard.<sup>152</sup> If an immigrant dug a ditch, laid railroad track, or worked on a plantation, they were often seen as potentially crossing the southern white-black divide.<sup>153</sup> Italian immigrants suffered this issue too, with their labor in sugar plantation putting them at risk of losing their “white” status.<sup>154</sup> This equating of blackness with manual labor went quite, deep, especially in the South. A common term was to “nigger it” or to do hard work, while “white niggers” were white workers

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<sup>150</sup> Hasia Diner, “The Encounter Between Jews and America in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era.” *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 11, no. 1 (2012): 12.

<sup>151</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 18.

<sup>152</sup> Eric L. Goldstein, *The Price of Whiteness: Jews, Race, and American Identity*. (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2006), 19.

<sup>153</sup> Mark I. Greenberg, “Becoming Southern: The Jews of Savannah, Georgia, 1830–70.” *American Jewish History* 86, no. 1 (1998): 58

<sup>154</sup> Jean Ann Scarpaci, “Immigrants in the New South: Italians in Louisiana’s Sugar Parishes, 1880-1910.” *Labor History* 16, no. 2 (1975): 175.

in unskilled or subordinate positions.<sup>155</sup> Race and occupation were inseparably related concepts in nineteenth century America.

If one examines the occupation of Jewish households, then the answer to the reason for southern tolerance becomes much clearer. Most Jews were merchants, lawyers, doctors, retailers, and the like.<sup>156</sup> As I.J. Benjamin said, Jews did not do the work that enslaved people did, and this made them more popular in the eyes of white folk.<sup>157</sup> When Oscar Straus's father was peddling in Georgia, he "was treated by the owners of the plantation with a spirit of equality that is hard to imagine today. Then too, the existence of slavery drew a distinct line of demarcation between the white and black races. This gave to the white a status of equality that probably otherwise he would not have enjoyed to such a degree."<sup>158</sup> While this is an interesting hypothesis, slavery alone cannot explain southern tolerance, however. The tolerance lasted for some time after slavery ended. Additionally, the white-black divide that likely increased white solidarity in the South was certainly still present and strong post-abolition. Arguably, white southerners became even more unified in their antiblackness in the latter nineteenth century, just when antisemitism was picking up, with the "Solid South". Why was there a relatively high degree of gentile-Jewish integration in the South, and why did it decline? There is some work on increasing Southern antisemitism in this period, suggesting it has to do with the agricultural depression of the 1890s and the populist movement.<sup>159</sup> However, it remains understudied, and most works are region

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<sup>155</sup> David R. Roediger, Mike Davis, and Michael Sprinker. *The Wages of Whiteness Race and the Making of the American Working Class*. Rev. ed. London: Verso, 2007: 144.

<sup>156</sup> John S. Billings, "Vital Statistics of the Jews." *The North American Review* 152, no. 410 (1891): 79.

<sup>157</sup> Israel Joseph Benjamin, *Three Years in America* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1956), 76.

<sup>158</sup> Jacob Rader Marcus, *Memoirs of American Jews, 1775-1865, Volume II*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955, 291.

<sup>159</sup> William F. Holmes, "Whitecapping: Anti-Semitism in the Populist Era." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 63, no. 3 (1974): 244.

specific, and do not address broader trends. For scholars to uncover the true foundation for mid-nineteenth century Southern tolerance, much more research is necessary. However, it almost certainly is related to the specific economic niche that Jews filled throughout this period. One cannot help but wonder whether this change in tolerance was produced by the difference in economic perspective towards the merchant class by the small white farmer, as compared with the larger Southern grandee. In this way, the political and economic shifts in the post-war South would slowly spill into a cultural shift in attitude as well. This is merely a hypothesis, and much more research would have to be done to support such a thesis.

Nonetheless, it can be confidently stated that as antisemitism in the South rose, the strength of identification between whiteness and Jewishness decreased. In 1893, when a police court reporter wrote an account in the *Richmond Dispatch* of a dispute between a “white man” and a “Polish Jew”, the editor of the newspaper may have apologized, but the fact was that no longer were Jews to be given whiteness automatically.<sup>160</sup> The South would become the opposite of what it once was, from the most tolerant place in the United States, to the least.

Some contest whether Jews were tolerated more in the South in this era. This contention was well intentioned, as previous authors had not relied on much more than the words of some contemporaries to demonstrate their point. However, the South *was* more accepting. As shown even in Richmond, a city which was far from prominent for a powerful or integrated Jewish population, southern Jews were seemingly accepted as friends, confidants, spouses, business leaders, political figures, and more, by the larger gentile population. This acceptance was disproportionate in the southern region of the United States and was known to be throughout the country. It might seem unlikely to us, as this pattern was contrary to the South’s virulent anti-

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<sup>160</sup> *The Jewish South* (Richmond, Virginia), October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1893.

Black prejudice. Surprisingly, this very prejudice might be the key to explaining why the region was tolerant, as Jews became identified with a niche opposite to where the racial caste system dictated Black individuals belonged to. The very prejudice of the South likely allowed Jews to become white. Once upon a time, the South was a uniquely tolerant place for Jews.



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