

**“Justice, Justice You Will Pursue?”
Orthodox Jewry and the Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1970**

A Thesis Presented

By

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Introduction.....	1
Participation in the Movement: Nationwide Activity and Religious Motivations	9
Orthodox Leadership (1954-1970): A Trend towards Introspection	28
Yeshiva University Students: The Civil Rights Movement and Other Priorities	49
Conclusion	72
Bibliography	76

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I would like to dedicate this thesis to my Saba, an incredible and unique grandfather whom I think of often. Like a father who, spreading honey on wooden letters, sweetens his child's first taste of Hebrew, Saba's joyful love of knowledge surely sweetened its essence for me.

Introduction

The history of the 20th century black American Civil Rights Movement is fairly well documented. Southern Jim Crow laws limited blacks by restricting and segregating everything from bus seating to hospital services. In Northern industrial cities such as New York and Detroit, blacks were legally liberated, but they still lived in ghetto communities with little racial integration, low professional attainment, and unsuitable housing.¹ While the older and well-known National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) attempted to integrate American society through the courtroom,² other organizations arose that were dissatisfied with the results of the NAACP's strategy and style. For example, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), founded in 1957 by the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., promoted non-violent protest.³ It was joined in the 1960s by the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), a "student-run organization" dedicated to community organizing in the South and surfacing from the 1960 sit-in movement.⁴ Meanwhile, by 1960, fifty percent of the black population lived in "urban centers" outside of the South.⁵ More militant messages of black freedom and nationalism began to find an audience within black communities; this

¹ Bruce J. Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement (New York: Pearson Longman, 2004) 9, 15, 41.

² *ibid*, 163.

³ William T. Martin Riches, The Civil Rights Movement: Struggle and Resistance (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004) 52. Also, Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement 164.

⁴ Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement 164.

⁵ Marc Dollinger, "'Hamans' and 'Torquemadas': Southern and Northern Jewish Responses to the Civil Rights Movement, 1945-1965," The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880's to 1990's, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press: 1997) 89.

call for Black Power took on different meanings for different groups, and its effects ranged from cultural pride to anti-white racism.⁶

Before being shut out by the Black Power Movement, Jewish Civil Rights Movement volunteers – especially Northerners – figured largely among white participants. Jewish students “comprised roughly two-thirds of all white freedom riders,” courageous bus-riders who specifically rode across Southern state lines in integrated buses in 1961.⁷ In addition, more than “a third of the volunteers” who registered black voters in Mississippi in 1964 were Jewish.⁸ Yet of these Jewish volunteers, Orthodox Jews are rarely mentioned. Though one author writes that Orthodox rabbis supported the 1963 March on Washington,⁹ more often than not, Orthodoxy is left entirely by the wayside. Debra Schultz’s *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* explores the motivations and experiences of Northerners, women, Jews, and whites who went down South to help the Movement, using the testaments of 15 Northern Jewish white women. Though several of these women point to Jewish influences, none is Orthodox; in addition, while particular rabbis are mentioned, not a single one is described as having an Orthodox affiliation.¹⁰ If one looks in *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880’s to 1990’s*, one finds a multitude of essays on Jewish involvement, with a focus on rabbinical participation, but only two discussions of Orthodox Jews. The first

⁶ Paul Le Blanc, ed., *Black Liberation and the American Dream: The Struggle for Racial and Economic Justice: Analysis, Strategy, Readings* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2003) 72. Also, Waldo E. Martin, Jr., “Nation Time! Black Nationalism, the Third World, and Jews,” *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 346-50.

⁷ Dollinger, “Hamans’ and Torquemadas,” 77. Also, Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement* 162.

⁸ Dollinger, “Hamans’ and Torquemadas,” 77.

⁹ Norman H. Finkelstein, *Heeding the Call: Jewish Voices in America’s Civil Rights Struggle* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1997) 152. This March is famed for Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “I Have a Dream” speech. Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement* 157.

¹⁰ Debra L. Schultz, *Going South: Jewish Women in the Civil Rights Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2001).

briefly notes the small number of Orthodox rabbis in the South, and attributes their lack of involvement to their limited presence.¹¹ The second spans a total of two pages (out of the book's 337), and discusses the pro-integrationist stance of one Orthodox rabbi in Durham, North Carolina.¹² One reads that Orthodox Jews "in particular had refrained from any public association with the Civil Rights Movement" in a book on Southern Jewry,¹³ and nothing is mentioned about the Miami Orthodox community whose synagogue was bombed in *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960*.¹⁴ Rabbi Marc Schneier's *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Jewish Community* references specifically Orthodox Jews in passing, highlighting their "limited interest" in participating in the Movement.¹⁵ The author prefaces this cursory glance at the Orthodox response by claiming that:

The majority of those Jews who went South to help blacks or who demonstrated in their own communities or gave money to the movement were neither rabbis nor adherents of Orthodoxy. It was just the opposite. In fact: most Jews who participated in the movement were the *least* religious of Jews [emphasis in the original].¹⁶

Perhaps because Orthodox Jewry played a smaller role in the Civil Rights Movement, its actions have not been independently considered.

Who exactly is an Orthodox Jew, in any case? The question is deceiving in its simplicity. Professor Jack Wertheimer defines Orthodoxy as "a movement that views

¹¹ Mark K. Bauman, "Introduction," *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997) 10.

¹² Leonard Rogoff, "Divided Together: Jews and African Americans in Durham, North Carolina," *The Quiet Voices: Southern Rabbis and Black Civil Rights, 1880s to 1990s*, ed. Mark K. Bauman and Berkley Kalin (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1997) 203-04.

¹³ Clive Webb, *Fight against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens, GA.: University of Georgia Press, 2001) 57.

¹⁴ Synagogue bombings will be addressed in the second chapter. Raymond A. Mohl, *South of the South: Jewish Activists and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2004) 28.

¹⁵ Rabbi Marc Schneier, *Shared Dreams: Martin Luther King, Jr. And the Jewish Community* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 1999) 25.

¹⁶ *ibid*, 15.

itself as the only authentic continuation of traditional Judaism;” in other words, it regards itself as the sole bearer of untarnished tradition.¹⁷ In contrast, Conservative Judaism accepts greater modification of Jewish law in light of contemporary times, while Reform Judaism does not view this law as binding.¹⁸ One could categorize Orthodox Jews as those who believe “in the historical event of the revelation at Sinai, as described in the Torah [Jewish Bible],” accept “divine law, in its written and oral forms,” and recognize “the authority of duly qualified rabbis.”¹⁹ However, this categorization is problematic in that individual Orthodox Jews may or may not fully believe in or practice each of the dogmas listed. In addition, Orthodoxy has confronted modernity with varying degrees of assimilation and rejection.²⁰ In the mid-1960s, some “remnants of East European” Jewish immigrants were culturally and socially Orthodox simply because it was familiar, rather than for religious reasons.²¹ Others affiliated with Orthodox institutions but had no commitment to Orthodox ritual practice according to *halakhah*, or Jewish law. Religiously committed Orthodox individuals were difficult to separate numerically, though about four percent of American Jews kept the laws of Sabbath.²² Of the committed Orthodox, sectarian Orthodox Jews, largely recent immigrants from Europe, centered their lives on the exceedingly strict practice of religious dictates and the insulated worlds of charismatic leaders and *yeshivot*, or institutions of Jewish learning.²³

¹⁷ Jack Wertheimer, *A People Divided: Judaism in Contemporary America* (USA: Brandeis University Press/University Press of New England, 1997) 254.

¹⁸ Norman Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*, Very Short Introductions, vol. 11 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996) 101-105, 107-108.

¹⁹ Samuel C. Heilman, "Orthodoxy," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, eds. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 516-517.

²⁰ Solomon, *Judaism: A Very Short Introduction*, 105-107.

²¹ Charles S. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American Jewish Life," *American Jewish Year Book, 1965*, ed. Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, vol. 66 (New York: American Book -- Stratford Press, Inc., 1965) 31.

²² *ibid*, 31, 34, 36.

²³ *ibid*, 67.

In other words, these ultra-Orthodox Jews attempted to “recreate an idealized version of what had been destroyed” during World War II.²⁴ In contrast, Modern Orthodox Jews hoped to combine religious practice with a more contemporary way of life;²⁵ given their comparatively open lifestyle, it is these centrist Orthodox practitioners whom I would expect to be involved in the Civil Rights Movement.

As a self-identified Modern Orthodox Jew studying the Movement, I could not help but question the dearth of information regarding Orthodox participation in the struggle for black equality. Is it true that Orthodox individuals – particularly non-sectarian affiliates – did not volunteer in the Civil Rights Movement? Why is it that Orthodoxy did not make a lasting impression in the Movement? Was it because other priorities consumed Orthodox leadership’s energy during the time period? And exactly what time period was I examining? These questions developed into my prospectus, and their answers, culled from interviews, newspapers, archive records, and a number of books, matured into my thesis.

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case, resolved by the Supreme Court in 1954, seemed to be an appropriate place to begin my research. Hailed as the “pivotal civil rights case of the twentieth century,” *Brown v. Board of Education* destroyed the legal basis of segregated public schools, claiming that forced racial separation led to inherently disparate education.²⁶ Though Southern states greeted this ruling with fury and did their best to forestall its real-life consequences, *Brown v. Board of Education* implied the

²⁴ Rivkah Blau, Learn Torah, Love Torah, Live Torah: Harav Mordechai Pinchas Teitz: The Quintessential Rabbi (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, Inc., 2001) 155.

²⁵ Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 48.

²⁶ Finkelstein, Heeding the Call 125. Also, Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement 21-24, 156.

beginning of the end for Southern Jim Crow laws.²⁷ Since one could claim that “the modern civil rights movement emerged” from the Supreme Court’s verdict,²⁸ 1954 marks the beginning of my time period of interest. The concluding year proves difficult to define, as no one court case denotes the end of the modern Movement. Indeed, its ideology still resides in American society today. However, the rise of the Black Power Movement, its attraction to various segments of the Civil Rights Movement, and its subsequently drastic effects on black-Jewish relations prove quite interesting and illuminating. The Black Power Movement certainly changed the nature of Jewish activism,²⁹ and thus marks a new phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Therefore, I will bring my research to a close in 1970, a year chosen because it is then that we see the full-blown consequences of the Black Power Movement.

In my thesis, I will focus as much as possible on religious Orthodox Jews who were willing to step outside the confines of their community; in other words, from this point forward, unless otherwise noted, the term “Orthodox” will refer to centrist or Modern Orthodox Jews. Because I cannot scrutinize the religious beliefs of those I interviewed, any possible incongruity between denominational label and individual must be accepted as an inevitable research condition; I accept as Orthodox those who define themselves as such and are not specifically deemed otherwise by rabbinic figures. In addition, due to the ambiguity of Orthodoxy’s definition, there will be cases in which I have relied upon published material referring to only one segment of the Orthodox Jewish population, without my knowing so. Such uncertainty, though regrettable, is another unavoidable research caveat. As is the case within Judaism in general, to be Orthodox is not to define

²⁷ Dierenfield, The Civil Rights Movement 21-25.

²⁸ Le Blanc, ed., Black Liberation 62.

²⁹ Finkelstein, Heeding the Call 168.

oneself solely according to theology, but also in terms of culture, lifestyle, and even ethnicity; therefore, one must recognize that while Judaism provided the sources for theologically-based activism, these sources did not bind all Orthodox individuals to take part in the Movement, and could not have been the only factor behind Orthodox Civil Rights Movement activity. Although there is no such thing as one single Orthodox community, the very existence of individuals who define themselves as Orthodox, especially with regard to institutional affiliation, points to a larger whole. Thus, though its borders remain hazy, this phrase serves as a helpful tool with which to refer to the aforementioned group.

In the first chapter of my thesis, I will break down the notion of Orthodoxy's indifference to the Civil Rights Movement through two exercises. I will begin with an examination of a number of different cases of Orthodox participation in the Civil Rights Movement. Then, in an attempt to understand the religious nature of Orthodox involvement, I will analyze some of the theological motivations which spurred these individuals to volunteer in the first place.

If one were to read the first chapter on its own, one might forget that despite Orthodoxy's committed activists, the denomination had limited to no recognition of its accomplishments. The second chapter, then, addresses the fact that Orthodox leadership did not make a lasting impression upon historians of the Civil Rights Movement. In this chapter, I will explore a variety of other issues which may very well have necessitated the input of a massive amount of Orthodox leadership's time and energy, to the detriment of the Civil Rights Movement. Many of these concerns, including the survival of the Orthodox denomination, the effects of massive Eastern European Orthodox immigration

to the United States, and the existence of anti-Semitism at home and abroad, promoted a trend of introspection and inward-focused activity.

In the third chapter, I will focus upon Yeshiva University, a microcosm of the Orthodox scene. Yeshiva University presents a wonderful combination of a college locale and a religious environment, which allows for the juncture of Orthodoxy and a plainly fertile volunteer setting. Through interviews and primary source materials, I have found that the Civil Rights Movement was a topic of discussion for many, and that there were some diligent participants. However, most Yeshiva University students focused their little spare time on a variety of other priorities and ideologies, such as religious practice, schoolwork and administrative changes, Israel, the Vietnam War, and anti-Semitism.

In the course of researching, I have found that most studies of the Civil Rights Movement are motivated by the author's interest in a particular aspect of the struggle. Perhaps one could say the same of most academic scholarship, despite scholars' desire to write objectively. This thesis is no different. My motivating interest, as discussed in greater detail in the concluding chapter, is to investigate the historical precedent left to the Orthodox young adults of today – my generation. While we are more privileged and more established than our parents and grandparents, some suggest that we are less active outside of the Jewish community than they were. Thus, the legacy of participation in the Civil Rights Movement offers a powerful paradigm of the intersection of religious values, leadership, and, ultimately, making the world a better place. The candid and sympathetic examination of the historical forces leading to contemporary Orthodoxy can serve not only to augment the academic notions of Orthodoxy in the 1950s and the 1960s, but also to enhance the Orthodox conception of its past and its future.

Participation in the Movement: Nationwide Activity and Religious Motivations

On March 21, 1965, Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led thousands of marchers from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in a political move that would ultimately lead to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.³⁰ Though Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel's presence at the front of the crowd has graced photographs of the event ever since, the story of Rabbi Saul Berman's imprisonment in a Selma jailhouse just days before seems to have drawn a smaller audience. Rabbi Berman was arrested on the Jewish fast day of *Ta'anit Esther*, which fell that year on March 17.³¹ At nightfall, when the fast ended, Rabbi Berman was not able to break his fast on prison food, for it did not meet traditional Jewish dietary restrictions; a friend rummaged through Rabbi Berman's suitcase and brought back the salami upon which Rabbi Berman was hoping to break fast. This friend also found another cylindrical item in the suitcase – a scroll containing the text of *Megillat Esther*, the tale of a Jewish girl who became queen of a massive kingdom and saved her people from certain destruction. Both the salami and the *Megillat Esther* proved to be of great use to Rabbi Berman: having broken the fast, Rabbi Berman celebrated *Purim*, a holiday commemorating the story of *Megillat Esther*, by reading the scroll out loud to “about 250 people” crowded into the jail.³² One can imagine the power reverberating throughout the room as a young Orthodox rabbi, far from his congregation, read an ancient narrative recounting the deeds of a Jewish queen who saved her people

³⁰ Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement* 115-116, 118.

³¹ Michael J. Radwin, *Hebcal Interactive Jewish Calendar*, 2005, <http://www.hebcal.com/hebcal/>, 20 November 2005.

³² Rabbi Saul Berman. Personal interview with the author. 7 June 2005.

from an enemy within the government – a story that could easily resonate with a group of people hoping to save blacks from their own government’s voter registration prejudices.³³

Just two years before, rabbinical degree in hand, Rabbi Berman arrived in Berkeley, California ready to work at Congregation Beth Israel. For the five years he served there, Rabbi Berman worked to better the rights of blacks in Berkeley and beyond.³⁴ He returned to Berkeley after the 1965 Selma-Montgomery March determined to become more engaged with local civil rights politics. Though Berkeley’s high school was integrated, its lower education public school district lines were drawn in a way that separated white and non-white students. According to Rabbi Berman, two opposing forces were at work at once: one group wished to redraw the school lines so as to integrate the lower schools, while another group hoped to create a second high school that would essentially keep students segregated. Rabbi Berman primarily toiled to integrate the schools, though the community agenda additionally dealt with issues of free speech and, ultimately, the Vietnam War.³⁵

Rabbi Berman’s case, though not the norm for the majority of Orthodox Jews in America, is by no means unique. Rabbis and some Orthodox laymen throughout the United States of America not only endorsed the Civil Rights Movement, but also worked to end racism against blacks. This chapter will commence with an exploration of the activities of representative Orthodox participants, focusing on both the wide variety and the numerous regions of activity. Then, I will discuss the problem of Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua Heschel’s inclusion in the category of Orthodox participants, even though he is a paragon of religious involvement in the Civil Rights Movement. This section will lead

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ Rabbi Berman worked there from 1963-1969, with one year of sabbatical. *ibid.*

³⁵ *ibid.*

into a short examination of the disproportionate prevalence of rabbis among Orthodox volunteers. Finally, the chapter will end with an investigation of the mainly religious motives which spurred certain Orthodox activists to take part in the Civil Rights Movement.

Rabbi Berman's colleague in New York, Rabbi Irving (Yitz) Greenberg, also contributed to the Civil Rights Movement. Along with his wife, Rabbi Greenberg first supported the Movement through donations to "various civil rights groups and voting for candidates that were sympathetic to the [Movement];" soon, the two were "attending rallies or special demonstrations" for the improvement of the status of blacks in American society.³⁶ As a faculty member at Yeshiva University, a Modern Orthodox institution in New York City, Rabbi Greenberg took the opportunity to bring in speakers who discussed various aspects of the Civil Rights Movement. As a rabbi of the Riverdale Jewish Center, an Orthodox congregation, Rabbi Greenberg "spoke passionately" about the Movement's necessity.³⁷ Finally, Rabbi Greenberg involved himself in *HaTza'ad HaRishon*, a controversial and ultimately unsuccessful group founded for the benefit of so-called black Jews. Certain American communities of blacks were presenting themselves as Jews,³⁸ though the Orthodox community did not accept them as such. For instance, the Commandment Keepers Congregation of the Living God, based in Harlem, NY, identified itself as a sect of Judaism, though petition for institutional acceptance

³⁶ Rabbi Irving Greenberg. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Thesis Research." Personal e-mail. 19 September 2005.

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ The term "black Jew" has its faults. There are many different types of blacks who are Jews; some are descendents of Jews or of Jewish converts, while others belong to communities that have taken Judaism in one form or another upon themselves without formal conversions. Here, I speak of the latter. Of these, many would identify themselves as Hebrews or as Israelites rather than as Jews. Thus, not all who identified as black Jews, Hebrews, or Israelites are actually Jewish according to traditional Jewish law. Jacob S. Dorman, "The Rainbow Covenant: Black Jews, Black Power, & Black-Jewish Relations," Stanford University, 1996, 1-34, 62.

failed.³⁹ Established in 1964, *HaTza'ad HaRishon*, or “The First Step,” hoped “to serve the Jewish social, cultural, and educational needs of New York’s Israelites, to unify their communities, and to integrate Black Jews into...mainstream” Judaism.⁴⁰ It funded and organized social gatherings, Israeli dancing, “activities with other [white] Jewish youth groups,” prayer events, financial aid and placement in Jewish schools, educational discussion-based seminars, and edifying liaisons to white Jews who would discuss the existence of black Jewish communities.⁴¹ In addition, the group provided access to Orthodox conversion resources, should its members desire to ensure their full acceptance by all parts of the Jewish community.⁴² Ultimately, between incredibly charged questions of Jewish legitimacy, authority, and conversion, this group collapsed.⁴³ *HaTza'ad HaRishon*, though not the norm, represents both the race-blind aspect of Jewish conversion, and the fact that at least some Orthodox Jews did not view blacks through the lens of ‘absolute other.’

In New York, Rabbi Greenberg was joined by the young Tsvi Blanchard, not yet a rabbi. Rabbi Blanchard was heavily involved by the late 1950s, and continued to take part in the Movement until the year after the 1965 Selma-Montgomery March. Splitting his time between college and *yeshiva* (a traditional Jewish institution of learning) in St.

³⁹ Howard Brotz, *The Black Jews of Harlem: Negro Nationalism and the Dilemmas of Negro Leadership* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970) 12, 51, 56.

⁴⁰ Dorman, "The Rainbow Covenant," 46, 49.

⁴¹ *ibid*, 61, 127.

⁴² Greenberg. "Re: Thesis Research." 19 September 2005. Also, Rabbi Irving Greenberg. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Thesis Research." Personal e-mail. 27 February 2006.

⁴³ A number of black rabbis felt that their turf had been invaded. Many black Jews did not see a need for conversion – after all, in their eyes, they were already Jewish. In addition, with the rise of Black Nationalism and Black Power, group members grew increasingly committed to remaining within and under the authority of their black communities. The difficult alignment of two loyalties – black and Jewish – ultimately ruined *HaTza'ad HaRishon's* chances. Jacob Dorman's thesis, which focuses on black Jews and *HaTza'ad HaRishon*, does a wonderful job of pulling the reader through the organization's complex history, as well as the complicated and varying sources of black Judaism. I strongly encourage anyone interested in this topic to read Dorman's work, as one paragraph cannot do it justice. Dorman, "The Rainbow Covenant," 72, 126-128.

Louis, Rabbi Blanchard worked hard in Missouri and around his home in Rochester, New York to further the Movement's goals. In St. Louis, he "was involved in redeveloping areas of the black ghetto." In addition, Rabbi Blanchard participated in the boycotting and picketing of Woolworth's and Eastman Kodak.⁴⁴ The Woolworth's story is fairly well known: in 1960, four black students started a sit-in at a Greensboro Woolworth's to protest segregated seating; within weeks, the "Greensboro four" had inspired sit-ins and picketings across the country.⁴⁵ In contrast, the Eastman Kodak narrative dealt with employment issues: Rabbi Blanchard joined Saul Alinsky, community organizer extraordinaire, to challenge Rochester's Eastman Kodak to hire more black workers.⁴⁶ At the same time, Rabbi Blanchard involved himself in "a whole series of various and sundry picketings of racist speakers," and supported "black self-organization efforts" such as those surrounding the Kodak protest.⁴⁷ The Selma-Montgomery March both highlights and marks the final stage of Rabbi Blanchard's activity in this paper's time period: when he returned to Rochester from Selma, he spoke to the Kiwanis Club about the March and felt he helped the Club view the Civil Rights Movement in a significantly more positive light. Soon after, Rabbi Blanchard made his way to Israel in order to further his Judaic studies.⁴⁸

Even the South, homeland of the Jim Crow laws and their overt supporters, hosted at least two Orthodox rabbis who quietly worked to promote the message of the Civil Rights Movement. One rabbi from Atlanta chooses to remain anonymous, but writes that he

⁴⁴ Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard. Personal interview with the author. 6 June 2005.

⁴⁵ Dierenfield, *The Civil Rights Movement* 52-53, 56.

⁴⁶ Sanford D. Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky -- His Life and Legacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1989) 493-505.

⁴⁷ Blanchard.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

participated casually throughout the time period; for instance, he would occasionally deliver sermons supportive of the Movement.⁴⁹ At times he would host observant Jewish activists who had recently been released from jails in Atlanta, Birmingham, Montgomery and elsewhere. Finally, this rabbi took part in “informal discussion groups” on the matter.⁵⁰ Another Southern rabbi, Rabbi Louis Tuchman of Durham, North Carolina, followed a similar pattern. Though his congregation hired him specifically because he was not a Civil Rights activist, Rabbi Tuchman was preaching pro-integration by 1957. He specifically incorporated the themes of freedom during the Jewish *Purim* and *Hannukah* holidays, relating the holidays to the black quest for full integration. Unfortunately for Rabbi Tuchman, that same year his congregation moved to the suburbs and to Conservative Judaism.⁵¹

Rabbi Tuchman and his anonymous colleague in Atlanta deserve special recognition for their work. According to Mark Bauman, fewer than forty Orthodox rabbis served congregations in the South in 1954. The states of “Alabama, Arkansas, Kentucky, North Carolina, and Mississippi... claimed a total of three Orthodox rabbis,” and no Orthodox rabbis served Florida communities apart from those in Miami and Miami Beach.⁵² Bauman posits that the “limited” involvement of Orthodox rabbis in the South corresponds to the small number of Orthodox rabbis actually present.⁵³ This theory relies upon only one incidence of Orthodox involvement noted in his book’s collection; however, one cannot ignore the fact that some forms of informal involvement may prove quite difficult to trace. For instance, more than one or two Orthodox rabbis may have

⁴⁹ Rabbi Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." Personal e-mail. 9 September 2005.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Rogoff, "Divided Together," 203-04.

⁵² Bauman, "Introduction," 10.

⁵³ *ibid.*

presented this controversial topic to their congregants through holiday sermons. Since participation in the Civil Rights Movement can include actions outside of a certain model of 1960s volunteering,⁵⁴ the judgment of ‘limited’ involvement may be based upon somewhat incomplete evidence.

Rabbis Berman, Greenberg, Blanchard, and Tuchman, in addition to the anonymous rabbi, were not alone in their attempts to promote or support the efforts of the Civil Rights Movement. Around the United States, formally and informally, rabbis, future rabbis, and laymen joined the cause. Some, such as Chicago’s Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, were better known; this leading Orthodox scholar passionately discussed the basis for equality in *halakhah* in the keynote address at a national convention for Orthodox affiliate Young Israel.⁵⁵ Others participated during their college years: Glenn Richter volunteered in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) office during the summer of 1963, and was a member of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in Queens College, New York.⁵⁶ During his summer vacations in California in his pre-rabbinic years, Rabbi Charles Sheer joined SNCC “social service projects” such as clothing drives.⁵⁷

While the rabbis mentioned above certainly deserve recognition, if there were an Orthodox rabbi known to the public, it would have to be Rabbi Dr. Abraham Joshua

⁵⁴ One’s participation is often framed by the undercurrent of the classic participant mold (Freedom Rider, Voter Registration Volunteer, and so forth); while this notion is helpful in identifying some participants, it also excludes others who helped in quieter ways through financial donations or directed conversations.

⁵⁵ Lawrence Grossman, "Mainstream Orthodoxy and the American Public Square," Jewish Polity and American Civil Society: Communal Agencies and Religious Movements in the American Public Sphere, ed. Alan Mittleman, Jonathan D. Sarna, and Robert Licht (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002) 293.

⁵⁶ Glenn Richter. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Civil Rights Interview." Personal e-mail. 26 July 2005.

⁵⁷ Rabbi Charles Sheer. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Thesis Research Questions." Personal e-mail. 21 August 2005.

Heschel. Heralded as “the best-known rabbi in the civil rights movement,” Rabbi Dr. Heschel felt personally responsible to the black quest for justice.⁵⁸ His prophetic appearance mirrored his theologically driven motivation, which heavily relied upon a vision of the Biblical prophets as the voice of society’s marginalized. Close to Reverend Dr. King, Jr., clearly visible at many Civil Rights events, and inspiring to his like-minded colleagues, Rabbi Dr. Heschel determinedly devoted himself to the cause.⁵⁹ Indeed, Rabbi Dr. Heschel is a prime example of a religious participant in the Civil Rights Movement; his status as an Orthodox participant, though, is more complex.

Although Rabbi Dr. Heschel practiced traditional Judaism, he was not necessarily accepted by Orthodox communities as one of their own. Many in the Orthodox community greatly admired Rabbi Dr. Heschel for “his contributions to Jewish thought, made both on the popular level . . . and on an intellectual level,” for “his personal spiritual charisma and commitment,” and for his Civil Rights work.⁶⁰ In fact, Rabbi Meyer Strassfeld of Boston, an energetic participant in the Movement,⁶¹ “attended his

⁵⁸ Finkelstein, Heeding the Call 150.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 147-150, 162, 166.

⁶⁰ Rabbi Robert Klapper. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Civil Rights Movement." Personal e-mail. 21 December 2004.

⁶¹ In Massachusetts, Rabbi Meyer Strassfeld utilized his position to bring leaders of the Civil Rights Movement to his community. In this way, the rabbi of Agudas Israel fostered a strong relationship between himself and the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Several days after having Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s advisor over for a Passover *seder* (a festive meal), Rabbi Strassfeld had Reverend Dr. King deliver a Passover sermon to his Orthodox congregation. The sermons and classes that Rabbi Strassfeld gave “exposed” his congregation to the fight. Like Rabbis Berman, Greenberg, and Blanchard, Rabbi Strassfeld took part in the Selma-Montgomery March in order to lobby for equal voting rights for blacks. He traveled to Selma with a group of Boston rabbis of all denominations (including one other Orthodox rabbi), choosing to work together to attempt to end discrimination. Jonathan D. Sarna, “The Jews of Boston in Historical Perspective,” The Jews of Boston: Essays on the Occasion of the Centenary (1895-1995) of the Combined Jewish Philanthropies of Greater Boston, ed. Jonathan D. Sarna and Ellen Smith (Boston: The Combined Jewish Philanthropies, Inc., 1995) 108. Also, Rabbi Meyer J. Strassfeld. Letter to the author. 14 December 2004. Finally, Rabbi Murray I. Rothman, “Montgomery March -- a New Exodus,” The Jewish Advocate April 1 1965.

lectures in Boston” and the Jewish Theological Seminary, and calls Rabbi Dr. Heschel “a true representative of Torah and Judaism in the fullest.”⁶²

Yet Rabbi Dr. Heschel cannot be included in this section on Orthodoxy without some qualification. At the time of the Civil Rights Movement, Rabbi Dr. Heschel was teaching in the Conservative Jewish Theological Seminary; thus, while he may have practiced Orthodoxy in his personal life, his “institutional loyalty” placed him in the Conservative camp.⁶³ As Rabbi Blanchard recalls, Rabbi Dr. Heschel was “seen as a representative” of Conservative Judaism, for “he lived in the [Jewish Theological] Seminary, [and prayed] in the Seminary;” though people “saw him as observant,” his institutional affiliation separated him from “the Orthodox movement.”⁶⁴ In a similar vein, Yeshiva University’s Rabbi Yosef Blau writes in an e-mail that his “impression was that the majority of rabbis who participated [in the Civil Rights Movement] were not Orthodox, with the late Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel from the Jewish Theological [Seminary] the most prominent.”⁶⁵ Here, Rabbi Blau places Rabbi Dr. Heschel within a group of non-Orthodox rabbis.⁶⁶ In a final example of the issue’s complexity, and, ultimately, its irresolvable contradictions, while one interviewee claims that “Orthodox Jews in Berkeley, California, certainly considered Rabbi A. J. Heschel to be Orthodox at the time of his death in 1972,”⁶⁷ Rabbi Berman asserts that his Orthodox Berkeley community “unfortunately saw [Rabbi Dr.

⁶² Strassfeld.

⁶³ Since the demarcation between liberal Orthodoxy and right-wing Conservative was “very thin,” “institutional loyalty” proved important. Liebman, “Orthodoxy in American,” 45.

⁶⁴ Blanchard.

⁶⁵ Rabbi Yosef Blau. Please ask author for e-mail address. “Re: Orthodox Theology and the Civil Rights Movement.” Personal e-mail. 8 November 2004.

⁶⁶ Rabbi Klapper, former rabbinic advisor to Harvard Hillel’s Orthodox community, writes that although Rabbi Dr. Heschel clearly practiced in an Orthodox manner, “from a sociological perspective... [he] was not part of the Orthodox community;” again, Rabbi Dr. Heschel is caught between his observances and his professional community in a way that does not comfortably allow for his inclusion. Klapper. “Re: Civil Rights Movement.”

⁶⁷ Mike Gerver. Please ask author for e-mail address. “Re: Civil Rights Movement.” Personal e-mail. 25 January 2005.

Heschel] as a faculty member at the Jewish Theological Seminary and therefore as belonging to the Conservative movement.”⁶⁸ Yet the first Berkeley interviewee acknowledges that he could “well imagine” Heschel was not as accepted among Orthodox Jews in New York,⁶⁹ while Rabbi Berman points out that a number of rabbis “saw [Rabbi Dr. Heschel] very differently,” and found great meaning in his way of thinking as it applied to Orthodoxy.⁷⁰ In conclusion, one might have to agree with Rabbi Berman that “labels don’t quite work for someone of [Rabbi Dr. Heschel’s] stature.”⁷¹ whether or not Heschel represented Orthodox or Conservative Jewry, his place in the religious Jewish world will forever be bound with his work in the Civil Rights Movement.⁷²

Like their super-denominational colleague Rabbi Dr. Heschel, rabbis seem to have comprised the majority of Orthodox individuals involved in the Civil Rights Movement. In some cases, such as those of Rabbi Blanchard and Rabbi Sheer, participants were too young to be rabbis at the time, but they eventually received their rabbinical certificates. This trend seems to contradict the viewpoint of the leadership of the Union of Orthodox Congregations, who refused to financially aid Rabbi Strassfeld in his travels to Selma; these Union representatives “reasoned that a rabbi’s place was with his congregation,”

⁶⁸ Berman.

⁶⁹ Gerver. "Re: Civil Rights Movement."

⁷⁰ Berman.

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² As will be discussed in the second chapter, Orthodoxy in this era was both defending itself from the popularity of the Conservative movement, and slowly turning to the right. It is possible that from the vantage point of someone in the Orthodox scene today, Rabbi Dr. Heschel would not fit any of the Orthodox molds, even if he may have fit into the Orthodox scene of his time. Perhaps the path of Orthodox American history has prevented the incorporation of Rabbi Dr. Heschel’s legacy, and thus his identity as an Orthodox participant in the Civil Rights Movement has been challenged more than it would have been at the time.

and did not comprehend the connection between Rabbi Strassfeld's rabbinical position and his support of the Civil Rights Movement.⁷³

However, it appears that rabbinical leadership did not entirely reject a role within the Civil Rights debate. By 1964, supposedly motivated by competition for "allegiance of the young" liberals flocking to Conservative and Reform denominations, the Rabbinical Council of America publicly declared its support for the Civil Rights Movement.⁷⁴ Young Israel, another Orthodox group, had already backed the Movement in a 1962 editorial.⁷⁵ The Orthodox Union, in turn, preceded Young Israel by agreeing with a "strongly liberal" plan for "civil rights and civil liberties" in the 1950s, and it continued to support the "civil rights gains of blacks" throughout the 1960s.⁷⁶

Why is it, then, that a greater percentage of Orthodox rabbis seem to have participated in the Movement, when compared to the percentage of their laymen? Perhaps the role of the rabbi in his community (or of a leader in any religious community) can offer one incomplete solution to this query. A rabbi has a bully pulpit; thus, rabbis could participate through speechwriting and speech delivery. A rabbi has the context within which to reach out to other community leaders, for they are, in a sense, his colleagues; therefore, rabbis could have better access to other leaders already polarized for or against the Civil Rights Movement, and could base their actions upon those of their colleagues. Finally, a rabbi represents and serves his community; hence rabbis could act in the name of their congregants. If, as the anonymous Atlanta rabbi writes, Southern "Jewish involvement [in the Civil Rights Movement] was limited to rabbis and to certain communal Jewish

⁷³ Hillel Levine and Lawrence Harmon, The Death of an American Jewish Community: A Tragedy of Good Intentions (New York: Free Press, 1993) 84.

⁷⁴ Grossman, "Mainstream Orthodoxy," 286.

⁷⁵ Young Israel Viewpoint 5 October 1962. Quoted in Grossman, "Mainstream Orthodoxy," 288.

⁷⁶ Grossman, "Mainstream Orthodoxy," 288.

organizations,” one can imagine that those laymen who were supportive of the Movement relied upon their representative rabbis and/or communal institutions to participate in their place.⁷⁷ For example, one interviewee from the Northeast writes that many Orthodox rabbis involved themselves in the Civil Rights Movement, while most Orthodox laymen, though supportive of the cause, stood to the side and often contributed monetarily.⁷⁸ Rabbi Berman recalls that his congregation was on the whole “oriented very positively toward Civil Rights issues,” and backed his decision to go Selma during *Purim*.⁷⁹ In fact, Rabbi Berman asserts that the congregation felt it was supporting the March vicariously through his presence.⁸⁰

Yet one cannot claim that all Orthodox laymen were supportive of their rabbis’ efforts in the Civil Rights Movement. Though Rabbi Strassfeld maintains that his Boston congregation supported him with “understanding,” and was “proud that their Rabbi [had] devoted” himself to the cause,⁸¹ an academic study of the decline of Jewish communities in certain Boston areas notes that Rabbi Strassfeld was “ritually in sync with the synagogue’s families but politically at odds with them;” his involvement in the Civil Rights Movement instigated a great deal of tension between himself and his community.⁸² Meanwhile, Rabbi Yakov Pollak’s New York congregation criticized his work on the implementation of the Princeton Plan, a busing proposal for black children from ghetto areas. Though Rabbi Pollak’s laymen respected his ethically-driven work, they felt their rabbi should focus his energy on issues within the Jewish sphere. The

⁷⁷ Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." 9 September 2005.

⁷⁸ Gerald Cohen. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Interview." Personal e-mail. 21 August 2005.

⁷⁹ Berman.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*

⁸¹ Strassfeld.

⁸² Levine and Harmon, *The Death* 83-84, 86, 88-90.

competing needs of the Orthodox community will be fleshed out in great detail in the second chapter. His congregation was not alone in their hesitation; some of Rabbi Pollak's colleagues also questioned his work.⁸³ These colleagues and congregants serve as a reminder that, while this chapter presents a rather rosy view of Orthodox involvement in the Civil Rights Movement, the majority of Orthodoxy did not necessarily participate in the Movement.

In addition to refuting the idea that there was no Orthodox participation in the Civil Rights Movement, this chapter gives voice to those who did participate, and addresses some of the challenges they faced. Considering the role Judaism played in these Orthodox participants' lives – especially among the rabbis, for whom Judaism formed the basis of their career – the fact that many of these volunteers seem to have been religiously motivated to take part in the Movement is not surprising. Their religious inspirations stemmed from many sources, but fall into roughly two major categories: the first emphasizes the equality of mankind, and the second stresses the need to create a just society.

In a speech to a Boston Rotary, Rabbi Strassfeld underscores the Rabbinic notion that the first man according to the Jewish Bible, Adam, was purposefully created utilizing “dust...from the 4 corners of the earth, so that no nation could claim superiority over the other;” in other words, God created Adam with materials from around the world, so that no nation or race could say that they better mirrored Adam and thus were a better race, or were more beloved by God.⁸⁴ Rabbi Strassfeld expounds upon this theme in a different

⁸³ Rabbi Yakov Pollak. Phone interview with the author. 1 December 2004.

⁸⁴ Rabbi Meyer J. Strassfeld, "The Perspectives of Civil Rights," (1966) 2-3.

speech, in which he writes that since man was created in God's image,⁸⁵ all men should be treated with equal "dignity" and "with the honor due to a likeness representing" God.⁸⁶ As proof for the fact that the *Torah*, or Jewish Bible, does not distinguish between people of different colors, Rabbi Strassfeld recalls that the command to shed the blood of he who shed another man's blood does not differentiate between different types of men.⁸⁷ Nor is it established anywhere in the *Torah* "that G-d created different kinds of men," though the *Torah* does point to diverse sorts of animals.⁸⁸ If anything, not only is all of man traceable to Adam, but all the nations listed in the *Torah* also trace back to Noah and his family, the only people left on earth after God's destructive flood.⁸⁹

In addition, Rabbi Strassfeld points to the Biblical injunction to love one's neighbor as oneself:⁹⁰ though the command suffers from "physiological relativity," for one might not treat one's own self well, if the verse motivates someone to better the life of one's (black) neighbor, one ought to proceed and act according to the verse.⁹¹ Rabbi Strassfeld adds to this theology in his second manuscript by citing Rabbi Dr. Heschel's concept of humiliation: since one cannot humiliate a person in public without suffering a terrible punishment (for example, denial of a place in the world to come), and since "by silence we [anyone who has not shown their support of the Civil Rights Movement] have become accessories to this humiliation of our brethren," those who remain silent on the issue will theoretically be forced to suffer the consequences.⁹²

⁸⁵ Please see Genesis 1:27.

⁸⁶ Rabbi Meyer J. Strassfeld, "The Torah View of Race Relations," (exact year unknown) 2.

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ *ibid.*

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁰ Please see Leviticus 19:18.

⁹¹ Strassfeld, "The Perspectives of Civil Rights," 4-7.

⁹² Strassfeld, "The Torah View," 4.

Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, among others,⁹³ joins Rabbi Strassfeld in this argument for equality. Though the speech which Rabbi Soloveichik gave at the Young Israel conference is not available to the author, one of Rabbi Soloveichik's articles entitled *Civil Rights and the Dignity of Man* deals specifically with the matter of race and color. It is possible to derive at least some of Rabbi Soloveichik's religious motivations from this article. There, he fiercely writes that "from the standpoint of the Torah...any discrimination shown to a human being on account of the color of his or her skin constitutes loathsome barbarity;" the *Torah* itself does not differentiate between a black and a white person.⁹⁴ Indeed, all people, "regardless of religion, race, origin or creed [are] endowed with Divine dignity," for all are created in God's image; thus, every person deserves "to be treated with equal respect."⁹⁵

In addition to being motivated by the equality of man inherent throughout the *Torah*, many Orthodox participants were motivated by their sense of justice. Here, too, their motivation derived from Biblical injunctions. Both George Farkas and Rabbi Soloveichik point directly to Deuteronomy 16:20, which reads, "justice, justice you will pursue." For Farkas, this command relates to the Biblical vision of the Jewish people as a "holy nation;"⁹⁶ through his activity in the Civil Rights Movement, he could "bring people closer to Torah:" in other words, Farkas could demonstrate to others the Torah's beauty and righteousness.⁹⁷ Farkas also looked to both Jewish and non-Jewish role models of

⁹³ See, for instance: Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz, "Rabbi Pinchas M. Teitz's Speech at a Rally at the Polo Grounds in New York on Sunday, August 25, 1963 to Build Participation in the March on Washington That Wednesday," (1963).

⁹⁴ Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik, Logic of the Heart, Logic of the Mind: Wisdom and Reflections on Topics of Our Times (New York: Genesis Jerusalem Press, 1991) 61.

⁹⁵ Soloveichik, Logic of the Heart 62.

⁹⁶ Please see Exodus 19:6

⁹⁷ George Farkas. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Fwd: [or-Minyan-Misc] Civil Rights Movement." Personal e-mail. 16 November 2004.

righteousness, with the Biblical story of Noah paving the way. Noah, a non-Jew, was the only person whose family was saved during God's destruction of the world; thus, Farkas felt comfortable following in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi and the Reverend Dr. King, Jr.⁹⁸

Like Farkas, Rabbi Soloveichik examines the phrase "justice, justice you will pursue." However, in this case, Rabbi Soloveichik derives meaning from the doubling of "justice." Referencing another commentary, he claims that by repeating "justice," "the Torah intimates how the same standard of justice and righteousness that is applied toward our Jewish brothers is also to be applied toward all Gentiles."⁹⁹ The doubling reinforces the concept of justice as a value to be applied universally. Rabbi Soloveichik continues by exploring the various ways in which the *Torah* applies the same degree of finesse towards property laws concerning Jews and non-Jews.¹⁰⁰ Finally, he concludes by demonstrating the ways in which Moses embodied the value of justice and employed it equally in cases involving two Jews, two non-Jews, and a Jew and a non-Jew. Clearly, justice is a principle which must be applied to the world outside of the Jewish community.¹⁰¹

Others agreed with the religious value of justice, without necessarily defining the concept in such exact terms. For instance, Rabbi Blanchard feels he acted in accordance "with [his] religious values...centered around justice and certain notions of fairness and equality."¹⁰² Though he does not reference specific verses, Rabbi Blanchard maintains that he was motivated by a religious sense of the principle. He is joined by Richter, who,

⁹⁸ Farkas. "Re: Fwd: [or-Minyan-Misc] Civil Rights Movement."

⁹⁹ Soloveichik, *Logic of the Heart* 65.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid*, 65-66.

¹⁰¹ *ibid*, 66-67.

¹⁰² Blanchard.

in addition to pointing to his parents as a source of notions of “fairness,” stresses that he was motivated by “emerging religious beliefs of right and wrong and [the] need to take a stand” against injustice.¹⁰³

Although overwhelmingly religious notions of justice and equality seem to have driven the interviewees, individual motivations were of course highly personalized. Some, like Richter, feel that their parents’ values influenced their actions a great deal. Rabbi Sheer invokes his parents’ “strong social consciousness” while also claiming that while “religious ideas” did contribute to his decision to be active in the Civil Rights Movement, he “would have done what [he] did in any case, even if [he] had not been Orthodox at the time.”¹⁰⁴ It seems, then, that his parents contributed much more to his involvement than his Orthodoxy did – though of course, religious ideas are not at all the exclusive domain of the Orthodox. For instance, Rabbi Greenberg and his wife “felt highly sympathetic to the demand for equality and justice” especially because “figures like Martin Luther King invoked...models such as Exodus” to frame their notion of the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁵ The Biblical Exodus story recalls the Israelites’ journey from slavery to freedom with Moses as their leader; similarly, religious blacks hoped to follow a journey from their slave past to complete freedom within the American system. In other words, the couple was drawn into the Movement in part because of the Movement’s profound religious underpinnings, particularly in the South.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Richter. "Re: Civil Rights Interview."

¹⁰⁴ Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions."

¹⁰⁵ Greenberg. "Re: Thesis Research." 19 September 2005.

¹⁰⁶ For further discussion on religion, Southern blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement, please see: Keith D. Miller, "Beacon Light and Penumbra: African American Gospel Lyrics and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 'I Have a Dream'," The Role of Ideas in the Civil Rights South, ed. Ted Ownby (United States of America: University Press of Mississippi, 2002) 57. Also, Aldon D. Morris, The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change (New York: The Free Press, 1984) 4-16.

Still other motives, though linked to religion, were more political in nature. The anonymous Atlanta rabbi felt that Jews could not “expect to fight discrimination [against] themselves if they [were] silent about the discrimination” of other minorities.¹⁰⁷ For him, participation in the Movement was crucial in the fight against Jewish discrimination. In the previously explored speech to a Boston Rotary in 1966, Rabbi Strassfeld declares that the Civil Rights “battle” deals with “the very soul of democracy, the very promise of our Founding Fathers” that “all men are created equal with the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.”¹⁰⁸ Rabbi Strassfeld’s insertion of these core democratic values into a principally theological speech suggests that he may have associated the political values of democracy with the religious values of equality and justice. It also points to Judaism’s triplet existence as a religion, a culture, and a nation. Since the theological aspects of Judaism are so completely intertwined with Orthodox family life, cultural life, and political life, the gap between theological and political motivations may serve better as a helpful analytical tool, rather than as a strict division between political and religious life.

To comprehend better the ways in which each of these motives intersect, one can examine Rabbi Berman’s reasons for participating in the Civil Rights Movement. Rabbi Berman subscribes to a philosophy of *mitzvot*, or religious injunctions, in which each *mitzvah* (singular) “has one of three purposes;” they “instruct us in truth, or... perfect some inner human quality, or... produce justice in society.”¹⁰⁹ In other words, every *mitzvah* serves as a lesson, as a measure to perfect the individual, or as a way to better society as a whole. For Rabbi Berman, the Movement “fulfilled all three of those

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." 9 September 2005.

¹⁰⁸ Strassfeld, "The Perspectives of Civil Rights," 8.

¹⁰⁹ Berman.

purposes:” it taught that every human is inherently equal, it helped develop the qualities of compassion and thankfulness, and it served as a chance to perfect “the character of justice” in society as a whole.¹¹⁰ Thus, Rabbi Berman applied principles of religious commandments to the Civil Rights Movement, and in doing so specifically stepped outside of his own Jewish community and into the realm of politics in the Berkeley area.

This chapter commenced with Rabbi Berman’s lesser-known story of reading *Megillat Esther* in a Selma jailhouse, and ends with the theology underlying his religious excursion into the world of the Civil Rights Movement. In-between the two points, I explored the varied forms of Orthodox participation throughout the United States, the difficult question of Rabbi Dr. Heschel’s position within this thesis, the role of Orthodox rabbis as representatives of their congregations within the Movement or as maverick actors, and finally, the deeply religious theology motivating certain Orthodox participants. Though Orthodoxy clearly did not play as large a role in the Civil Rights Movement as did other denominations, one would be hard pressed to claim that Orthodox individuals – whether picketing, marching, or donating funds – played no role at all.

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

Orthodox Leadership (1954-1970): A Trend towards Introspection

Having responded in the first chapter to the dearth of information regarding Orthodox participation in the Civil Rights Movement, I could continue with an exploration of student responses to the Movement at Yeshiva University, a microcosm of the Orthodox scene. However, to do so would be to ignore questions as pressing and as pertinent as that of whether Orthodox individuals volunteered in the first place: why is it that Orthodoxy as a denomination did not respond to the call for black equality with as much force as did other Jewish denominations? What other priorities captured the energies of Orthodox leadership? Before describing the involvement of a student subset of Orthodox Jewry, I will investigate Orthodoxy's main concerns between 1954 and 1970. Indeed, while marginalized blacks were struggling to overcome a prejudicial American society, Orthodoxy was fighting its own battle against marginalization within American Judaism. In this chapter, I will discuss Orthodoxy's fight for life, as well as its parallel turn to protective insularity and trend towards the religious right. In addition, I will delineate some of Orthodoxy's other concerns, such as Israel and her survival, anti-Semitism in the United States and the Soviet Union, the aftermath of the Second World War, the Vietnam War, and the violence of some elements of the Black Power Movement. While none of these may have fully prevented Orthodox leadership or individuals from participating in the Civil Rights Movement, one or any combination of the above may have turned attention away from blacks and towards the survival and protection of Orthodoxy and its needs.

In the 1950s, Orthodox rabbis were quite concerned with the continuation of the Orthodox community at large: how could they protect their movement from falling prey to the rising popularity of other denominations and secularism?¹¹¹ Though concrete boundaries between Orthodox and Conservative Judaism did not necessarily finalize until the 1960s,¹¹² Orthodox rabbis expended a great deal of energy attempting to stem the tide of Orthodox lay members switching to Conservative synagogues. A study published in 1952 finds that the vast majority of Orthodox young adults were moving away from Orthodoxy, with half of them set on ‘transferring’ to the Conservative denomination; “within two decades,” the study’s predictions were fulfilled, and Orthodoxy lost the popularity contest.¹¹³ For the rabbinical graduates of the 1950s, the “battle to save Orthodoxy in America”¹¹⁴ lumbered on with a war over synagogues: could they prove victorious over Conservative rabbis in the job market? Often, these young hopefuls were relegated to “smaller [synagogues] of humbler pasts and doubtful futures.”¹¹⁵ Orthodoxy would have to rely upon quality of practice, rather than quantity of supposed practitioners, to save itself from what appeared to be a near disaster.¹¹⁶

Orthodoxy’s battle seems to have influenced the actions of at least some rabbis vis-à-vis the Civil Rights Movement. For instance, one rabbi writes that he could “not afford the luxury of expending” energy on the black plight when his “own Jews were going

¹¹¹ Webb, Fight Against 170.

¹¹² Jeffrey S. Gurock, From Fluidity to Rigidity: The Religious Worlds of Conservative and Orthodox Jews in Twentieth Century America (Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies, The University of Michigan, 2000), 16-17, 34.

¹¹³ Jonathan D. Sarna, American Judaism: A History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004) 278.

¹¹⁴ Victor B. Geller, Orthodoxy Awakens: The Belkin Era and Yeshiva University (New York: Urim Publications, 2003) 33.

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 31-32.

¹¹⁶ Sarna, American Judaism 278.

down” yet again.¹¹⁷ Harking back to the first chapter, one wonders whether this issue may have motivated Rabbi Pollak’s somewhat-resentful congregants to ask him to focus on their progeny’s spiritual endurance rather than on black children’s educational vigor. Even Rabbi Sheer, who was active in the Civil Rights Movement as a college student in the 1960s, sympathizes with the rabbinic “need to endure as” an Orthodox community rather than take the “ethically on target” route and participate in the Movement.¹¹⁸ If rabbis and other community leaders were to focus on Orthodox fortitude, they may not have been able to afford to reach out to a community other than their own. In fact, to do so could have been constructed as an undue and unfair snubbing of the Orthodox plight.

Orthodox leadership expended a significant amount of energy strengthening its denomination in a variety of ways. For example, in order to increase lay commitment to tradition, Orthodox rabbis focused on developing communal education. An anonymous Southern rabbi prioritized work which helped “make Jews more Jewish:” in his fight against “assimilation and intermarriage and Jewish ignorance,” this rabbi did the best he could to create a knowledgeable group of laypeople through the study of Jewish texts and history.¹¹⁹ He poignantly compares the Orthodoxy of the 1950s to “a sinking ship:” “I saw my task as rescuer, pulling bodies out of the water to keep them from drowning as Jews, reviving them, and helping them back to a healthful Jewish life.”¹²⁰ Another rabbi in the South, Rabbi Aaron Borow, spent his time on similar pursuits throughout the 1950s and 1960s; he particularly worked with youth – the next generation – and hoped to instill the significance of traditions such as keeping the Sabbath, practicing dietary restrictions,

¹¹⁷ Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." 9 September 2005.

¹¹⁸ Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions."

¹¹⁹ Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." 9 September 2005.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*

and learning Jewish texts.¹²¹ Indeed, the mid-1950s saw a heavy investment in religious day schools and seminaries.¹²² Between 1944 and 1963, over 200 new day schools were founded across America (compared to around 50 previously existent Orthodox schools); about half of these were non-sectarian.¹²³ Additionally, some rabbis supported Orthodox university students as they confronted religiously challenging curriculums. Rabbi Greenberg proves an excellent example of this aid: he involved himself with Yavneh,¹²⁴ an organization founded in the 1960s¹²⁵ that was committed to helping Orthodox students align their religious beliefs with their secular education.¹²⁶ Yavneh offered both “an outlet and support” for these university students, who found themselves confronted by ideas “radical in comparison” to their day school education.¹²⁷

With the initiation of the journal *Tradition* in the late 1950s, the publishing house also required Orthodox leadership’s attention. Comprised of articles written by Modern Orthodox rabbis, this journal contested the viewpoints of their non-Orthodox colleagues, and presented Modern Orthodox opinions on a variety of subjects.¹²⁸ Thus, paper titles in the first edition range from “Halakhic [meaning: of *halakhah*] Implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls”¹²⁹ and “Review of Recent Halakhic Periodical Literature,”¹³⁰ to “The Need

¹²¹ Rabbi Aaron Borow. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Thesis Research." Personal e-mail. 27 July 2005. Within this framework, Rabbi Borow also taught the commandment to love one’s neighbors, including blacks.

¹²² Wertheimer, *A People Divided* 13.

¹²³ Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Touchstone/Simon & Schuster Inc., 1989) 356-57.

¹²⁴ Greenberg. "Re: Thesis Research." 19 September 2005.

¹²⁵ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Higher Education, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988) 170.

¹²⁶ Greenberg. "Re: Thesis Research." 19 September 2005.

¹²⁷ *ibid.*

¹²⁸ Wertheimer, *A People Divided* 13.

¹²⁹ Sidney B. Hoenig, "Halakhic Implications of the Dead Sea Scrolls," *Tradition* 1.1 (1958): 64.

¹³⁰ Hyman Tuchman, "Review of Recent Halakhic Periodical Literature," *Tradition* 1.1 (1958): 117.

for Tradition: The Editor's Introduction to a New Journal,"¹³¹ in which the editor summarizes his view of *Tradition's* purpose:

This is the function of [*Tradition*] – to interpret the Tradition, the Word of God, the heritage of *Torah* and *mitzvot* in a manner and form that the modern, educated, thinking Jew can understand...[*Tradition*] is a "Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought." In these pages responsible thinkers will explicate our faith, teach its principles, and demonstrate its relevance to the concerns of contemporary men.¹³²

In other words, *Tradition* was created in order to promote the continued exposition of traditional Judaism within a "responsible" framework, so as to educate modern Jewish readers and validate the applicability and significance of "the heritage of *Torah* and *mitzvot*" in current times.¹³³ This journal served as yet another tool in the fight for Orthodox survival.

The mid-1960s showed signs of relief in the struggle against the popularity of other Jewish denominations. A vibrantly optimistic American Jewish Yearbook article claims that due to increased numerical and financial force, Orthodoxy in 1965 was "on the upsurge."¹³⁴ Owing in part to the more comprehensive Jewish education found in the day-school system, the Orthodox community had a higher baseline of traditional knowledge; Orthodox individuals naturally "gravitated toward compact enclaves of like-minded people" with similar educational backgrounds.¹³⁵ In addition, the Orthodox synagogue was now comprised of a generally more committed Orthodox group, which attended services, learned Jewish texts, and kept the commandments of the Sabbath, among other injunctions. The education and drawing in of those who were less observant or knowledgeable were not necessarily the rabbi's priority; rather, he focused on his more

¹³¹ Norman Lamm, "The Need for Tradition: The Editor's Introduction to a New Journal," *Tradition* 1.1 (1958): 7.

¹³² *ibid.*, 11-12.

¹³³ *ibid.*

¹³⁴ Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 22.

¹³⁵ Geller, *Orthodoxy Awakens* 227.

committed members, who, in turn, expected their rabbi to practice his faith meticulously and have a mastery of Jewish texts.¹³⁶ Though Orthodoxy was still losing members to the Reform and Conservative denominations, some individuals were switching to Orthodoxy in search of a more spiritual “personal religious experience,” smaller congregations, and the intimacy that smaller communities could offer.¹³⁷

Yet just as Orthodoxy gained confidence in its own viability, young Orthodox rabbis began to veer towards the right in religious practice, which hampered Orthodox participation in the Movement by enhancing and cementing Orthodoxy’s inward focus. The growing population base, with its mounting income, gave rabbis the freedom to be more stringent with their congregations.¹³⁸ In addition, the most religiously conservative forces within Orthodoxy (sectarian and not) had “become more acculturated,” and therefore had gained better tools with which to effectively influence the Orthodox left-wing and pull it to the right.¹³⁹ So while an Orthodox rabbi serving a suburban congregation in the 1950s simply “accepted the fact that many of [his] members would” not practice their faith scrupulously,¹⁴⁰ a rabbi in the 1960s might feel he had more of a right to chastise and instruct his congregants on the proper Orthodox lifestyle. Meanwhile, the Rabbinical Council of America (RCA), the one Orthodox organization particularly recognized as containing “American, English-speaking” rabbis,¹⁴¹ also began to move right-ward. In the mid-1960s, a key debate unfolded within the RCA over “its relationship with non-Orthodox rabbinical groups” such as the New York Board of

¹³⁶ Geller, *Orthodoxy Awakens* 227-228.

¹³⁷ Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 35-36.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ Sarna, *American Judaism* 290.

¹⁴¹ Wolfe Kelman, "Religion," *American Jewish Year Book, 1961*, ed. Morris Fine and Milton Himmelfarb, vol. 62 (New York: American Book -- Stratford Press, Inc., 1961) 139.

Rabbis.¹⁴² At the same time, the RCA defended itself from “the Conservative movement’s new aggressiveness” in certain, typically Orthodox-controlled domains, such as the management and direction of *kosher* food, or food prepared under Jewish dietary restrictions.¹⁴³ The combination of these two factors – the theological debate over pluralistic organizations and the defense against Conservative assertiveness – combined to ensure a greater tendency towards self-segregation. And while Orthodox leadership turned to the right, it also confronted a smattering of anti-Orthodox sentiment in the Jewish world. Many Orthodox Jews were “denied employment” in “national Jewish organizations” or their smaller, Jewish Federation institutional affiliates, simply because they would not work on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays.¹⁴⁴ Some prominent Jews, many of whom had divorced themselves from their Orthodox backgrounds, resented and were bewildered by the seemingly sudden Orthodox stability of the 1960s, and thus discriminated against Orthodox Jews through unfair stereotyping and personal prejudice.¹⁴⁵ Due to the “alienation” felt by those Orthodox Jews who suffered from fellow-Jew discrimination, the “relative prosperity” of the Orthodox world, and the amplification of strict Jewish religious practice, Orthodoxy banded together more than before, and drifted away from the other Jewish denominations.¹⁴⁶ One wonders whether this situation may have influenced some rabbinic leaders: rather than turning outwards towards the black Civil Rights Movement along with their rabbinic peers from other denominations, they focused inwards and assuaged their religious wounds. In other words, their need to defend Orthodoxy from external forces, as well as their distrust of

¹⁴² Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 51.

¹⁴³ *ibid.*, 53.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, 91.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

occasionally anti-Orthodox sister denominations, may have discouraged these rabbis from joining a non-Orthodox, non-Jewish movement.

While it was forced to address issues of Orthodox insecurity, American Orthodox leadership also confronted generally anti-Semitic conditions. Throughout World War II, about half of the American public was deemed to have some anti-Semitic opinions.¹⁴⁷ This trend declined after the Second World War due to a combination of factors, including the horrific nature of the Holocaust and the presence of mostly native-born American Jews.¹⁴⁸ In addition to this decline in anti-Semitic public opinion, post-World War II American Jewish veterans benefited immensely from their inclusion in the GI Bill, through which they could take advantage of higher education, cheaper mortgages, and the ease and other benefits of suburban living.¹⁴⁹ Yet not all was well in the Jewish scene. Jews were prevented from purchasing homes in certain neighborhoods, such as Rochester, New York.¹⁵⁰ As will be discussed in the next chapter, medical schools applied strict Jew quotas throughout the 1950s.¹⁵¹ While American Jews hoped to integrate into their surrounding society as equals,¹⁵² they faced a number of synagogue bombings throughout the South in the 1950s and 1960s,¹⁵³ including one in “Miami’s Orthodox Temple Beth-El” in 1958.¹⁵⁴ The particularly violent strain of Southern anti-

¹⁴⁷ Seymour M. Lipset, "The Political Profile of American Jewry," Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 150.

¹⁴⁸ Peter Novick, The Holocaust in American Life (USA: Houghton Mifflin, 1999) 113.

¹⁴⁹ Karen Brodtkin, How Jews Became White Folks: And What That Says About Race in America (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1998) 36-42. After having experienced the pain of being barred from social and educational mobility, some Jews utilized the black cause as a way to further the Jewish one: by legally securing rights for blacks, Jewish mobility would be secured as well. However, many Northern Jews simply wanted to fit into the suburban mold. Dollinger, "'Hamans' and 'Torquemadas'," 69, 81, 87-88.

¹⁵⁰ Blanchard.

¹⁵¹ Gurock, The Men and Women 157-62.

¹⁵² Peter Y. Medding, "The New Jewish Politics in America," Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 91.

¹⁵³ Bauman, "Introduction," 6-7. Also, Dollinger, "'Hamans' and 'Torquemadas'," 70.

¹⁵⁴ Webb, Fight Against 55.

Semitism, often promoted by the same groups who terrorized Southern blacks,¹⁵⁵ inspired fear in Southern Jewish communities and certainly prevented some Orthodox rabbis from openly participating in the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, the consequences of open action proved so vicious, that Southern Jews were often upset by the supposedly callous actions of their Northern brethren, who would rile up Southern anti-Civil Rights agitators and leave the Southern Jewish communities to suffer the physical, social, and financial consequences.¹⁵⁷ In addition, corrupt real estate agents in the 1960s, supported by bank officials and politicians among others, practiced a technique called ‘blockbusting:’ they literally terrified Jewish homeowners into quickly selling their houses, so that certain Jewish neighborhoods in Boston, Houston, Philadelphia and elsewhere were unfair victims of white flight.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, Orthodoxy, already forced to confront insecure conditions within the Jewish community, may also have been inspired to turn inward due to uncomfortable conditions in American society.

While focusing on the quality of Orthodox Judaism in imperfect conditions, rabbinic leadership was also forced to deal with thousands upon thousands of Orthodox refugees to America, beginning from the mid-1930s and continuing past the end of the Second World War.¹⁵⁹ Refugees from Europe brought with them a form of Orthodox “self-[segregation]” as yet unpopular in the United States.¹⁶⁰ A taboo on mentioning the

¹⁵⁵ *ibid*, 56, 62.

¹⁵⁶ Borow. "Re: Thesis Research." Also, Anonymous. "Re: Thesis Research." 9 September 2005.

¹⁵⁷ Dollinger, "Hamans' and 'Torquemadas'," 70-77.

¹⁵⁸ Levine and Harmon, *The Death* 3-7, 195-196.

¹⁵⁹ Gurock, *From Fluidity to Rigidity*, 15. During the Holocaust, six million Jews suffered death at the hands of the Nazis. By 1988, world Jewry's population had still not reached pre-World War II numbers. For more, please see: Sergio DellaPergola, "Changing Cores and Peripheries: Fifty Years in Socio-Demographic Perspective," *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 15. Also, U. O. Schmelz, "The Demographic Impact of the Holocaust," *Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945*, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 44.

¹⁶⁰ Gurock, *From Fluidity to Rigidity*, 15. Also, Wertheimer, *A People Divided* 11.

Holocaust publicly during the 1950s¹⁶¹ did not prevent Orthodox immigrants from influencing their American Orthodox counterparts. The Orthodox Europeans were “the first group of Jews in all of American history to come not primarily in search of bread but to find refuge for its version of Jewishness;” in other words, these Orthodox Jews preferred nothing more than to recreate the independent communities in which they had lived prior to the War.¹⁶² Rather than rely upon the extra-curricular Judaism classes that Reform, Conservative, and American Orthodox Jews utilized to educate their public-school children, the European ultra-Orthodox founded their own, Yiddish-speaking schools. American Orthodoxy, though much less separatist, “had little choice but to follow the example of the newest arrivals;” it was clear that the commitment of their children to Orthodoxy depended upon a better education.¹⁶³ Thus, as previously discussed, so many new Orthodox day schools were founded that “by the mid-1970s, almost all children of Orthodox families” – sectarian or not – were sent to Jewish schools.¹⁶⁴ As right-wing Orthodoxy helped inspire educational separatism in its American counterpart, it also attempted to pull American Orthodoxy away from the formal recognition of rabbis from other denominations. Eastern European rabbis strongly urged “Orthodox self-segregation” within a decade after the end of the Second World War.¹⁶⁵ When in 1956 “eleven...heads of rabbinic” seminaries joined with the “leader of the [sectarian] Hasidic Lubavitch movement” in circulating an edict against Orthodox involvement with rabbinic organizations incorporating non-Orthodox rabbinic leadership,

¹⁶¹ Novick, The Holocaust in 96.

¹⁶² Hertzberg, The Jews in America 356-57.

¹⁶³ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁵ Wertheimer, A People Divided 12.

the RCA and its contingent of American rabbis were thrust into a heated debate.¹⁶⁶ Though the RCA president defended the edict, the widely-recognized Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik declined to add his signature; most of the RCA rabbis followed Rabbi Soloveitchik's lead.¹⁶⁷ Ultimately, however, the very presence of this heated debate points to both the concerns of Orthodox leadership and the affect of the Holocaust on American Orthodoxy.

In the 1960s, the taboo against speaking about the Holocaust relaxed due to a variety of factors, including the highly-publicized capture and trial of Nazi Adolf Eichmann.¹⁶⁸ By the late 1960s, "the trauma of the Holocaust...erupted into public consciousness" as new fears arose for Jewish safety in Israel.¹⁶⁹ Orthodox leadership had already proven itself quite interested in the status of the State of Israel during the 1950s. In 1957, "two Orthodox Zionist adult male groups" merged to form the Religious Zionists of America, though their parallel women's and youth groups remained disconnected.¹⁷⁰ In 1967, with the explosion of the Six Day War after increasing tensions between Israel and its Middle Eastern neighbors, Israel's territorial victories molded her into a military powerhouse. Israel changed from the "David" of the Middle East – small, young, and insecure – into the new "Goliath" – strong, proud, and mighty.¹⁷¹ For American Jews, this incredible military feat aroused fervent sentiments of pride in the Jewish country;¹⁷² Orthodox Americans certainly augmented their investment in Israel. For example, in the weeks

¹⁶⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ Novick, The Holocaust in 127-34.

¹⁶⁹ Wertheimer, A People Divided 29-30.

¹⁷⁰ Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 61.

¹⁷¹ Robert G. Weisbord and Richard Kazarian, Jr., Israel in the Black American Perspective (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1985) 31-32.

¹⁷² Michael E. Staub, ed., The Jewish 1960s: An American Sourcebook (USA: Brandeis University Press, 2004) 165-66.

leading up to the Six Day War, Rabbi Berman joined other Berkley campus Israel aficionados and convinced political theorist Eric Hoffer to lead a pro-Israel rally on campus. After spending the entire night printing and plastering posters, they managed to attract 8,000 students and change the current of anti-Israel rhetoric on campus.¹⁷³ Following the 1967 War, many Jewish students flocked to Israel to help in factories and on *kibbutzim* (agricultural communities).¹⁷⁴ Jewish “immigration...[to] Israel rose more than 500 percent.”¹⁷⁵ According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs website, a total of 17,900 Americans immigrated to Israel during the first three post-War years.¹⁷⁶ The call for *aliyah*, or immigration to Israel, pulled Orthodox American Jews across the ocean. From 1969 to 1970, “over one-third of the American [immigrants] defined themselves as Orthodox,” which points to a clear trend of “over-concentration and selectivity” in Orthodox *aliyah*.¹⁷⁷ Orthodox leadership must have been forced to confront the realities of a shifting population demographic, as well as the upsurge in interest and commitment to Israel and her success. The Civil Rights Movement may simply not have figured prominently into the equation.

This theory of Israel-centricity proves especially compelling when one notes the parallel reaction of American Jewry to the American left. After 1967, the left-wing rejected Israel as a Middle Eastern bully.¹⁷⁸ Not only did this rejection clash with

¹⁷³ Berman.

¹⁷⁴ Joshua Michael Zeitz, "If I Am Not for Myself.' The American Jewish Establishment in the Aftermath of the Six Day War," *American Jewish History* 88.2 (2000): 260.

¹⁷⁵ Sarna, *American Judaism* 316.

¹⁷⁶ *Aliyah*, 2002, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2002/10/Aliyah, 21 December 2004.

¹⁷⁷ Calvin Goldscheider, "American Aliya and Sociological and Demographic Perspectives," *The Jew in American Society*, ed. Marshall Sklare (New York: Behrman House, Inc., 1974) 379-80. In addition, there is a "[pattern] of over-concentration and selectivity among religious," though not necessarily Orthodox, immigrants to Israel. For more, please refer back to Goldscheider, "American Aliya," 379-80.

¹⁷⁸ Lipset, "The Political Profile," 158.

American Jewry's strengthened pride in the Jewish state, but it also included instances of blatant anti-Semitism, particularly amongst "Black Power advocates" who identified with the Arab cause.¹⁷⁹ For example, SNCC's 1967 summer pamphlet utilizes obviously anti-Semitic symbols in its cartoons: the Israeli general Moshe Dayan is "portrayed with dollar signs on his epaulets," while a hand displaying "a Shield of David and a dollar sign" holds nooses around the necks of then-Egyptian President Abdel Gamal "Nasser and the American boxer Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay)."¹⁸⁰ The dollar symbols point to the stereotypical portrayal of Jews as money-wielding misers and lenders, even if they are meant "to reflect American backing of Israel," while the presence of the Star of David on the hand holding a noose around boxer Muhammad Ali's neck seems extraneous in a cartoon supposedly commenting on the 1967 Six Day War.¹⁸¹ Though some Civil Rights leaders, including the Reverend Dr. King, Jr., decried anti-Israel and anti-Semitic tendencies,¹⁸² Orthodox leadership would not have necessarily hopped on a bandwagon that the majority of American Jewry had rejected. Considering the Zionist ideology and right-wing tendency of many non-sectarian Orthodox Jews in America, it seems unlikely that Orthodox rabbis would commence participating in the Civil Rights Movement in the late 1960s.

Indeed, SNCC's incorporation of such anti-Semitic themes highlights another trend: Orthodox leadership's clash with Black Power and its often militant overtones. Though the Black Power Movement was in essence a campaign utilizing black cultural "self-definition" in order to tap into the American power structure and directly influence daily

¹⁷⁹ Finkelstein, Heeding the Call 171.

¹⁸⁰ Weisbord and Kazarian, Israel in the Black 29, 32-33.

¹⁸¹ *ibid*, 35.

¹⁸² Zeitz, "If I Am Not for Myself.": 263. Also, Schneier, Shared Dreams 165-66.

concerns, it was comprised of a number of ideologically distinct sub-movements, some of which proved quite violent.¹⁸³ For example, Black Islam incorporated Black Nationalism by describing Allah as a black man. Along with a stringent lifestyle based upon classic Islamic ideals, Black Muslims called for political and social partitioning from white society.¹⁸⁴ By 1966, SNCC had also taken upon itself a form of Black Power separatism. According to one account, it expelled its white members; according to another, it asked its white affiliates to attend to the white community rather than to the black one.¹⁸⁵ In either case, SNCC clearly moved away from encouraging the aid of white students, many of whom were Jewish.¹⁸⁶ From the mid-1960s onwards, as anti-white and at times anti-Semitic currents grew stronger in the Black Power Movement, general black-Jewish affairs “deteriorated significantly;”¹⁸⁷ ultimately, the rising of Black Power resulted in less Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights Movement overall.¹⁸⁸

The white association of Black Power with “violence and destruction, racism [against whites], and black domination”¹⁸⁹ was not lost upon the Jewish community,¹⁹⁰ Orthodox and other. During the more than 300 black riots which took place between 1964 and 1968, many Jewish-owned stores, left over from the Jewish move to the suburbs, were

¹⁸³ William L. Van Deburg, New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965-1975 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992) 9, 28.

¹⁸⁴ C. Eric Lincoln, The Black Muslims in America (USA: Beacon Press, 1973) 75, 77, 83.

¹⁸⁵ Clayborne Carson, "Black-Jewish Universalism in the Era of Identity Politics," Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 188. Also, Paul Buhle and Robin D. G. Kelley, "Allies of a Different Sort: Jews and Blacks in the American Left," Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 214.

¹⁸⁶ Cheryl Greenberg, "Negotiating Coalition: Black and Jewish Civil Rights Agencies in the Twentieth Century," Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 166.

¹⁸⁷ Medding, "The New Jewish," 109-10.

¹⁸⁸ Finkelstein, Heeding the Call 168.

¹⁸⁹ Van Deburg, New Day in Babylon 18-19. Interestingly, blacks rarely identified the Black Power movement with such fear and violence. For more, please refer to *ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ Martin, "Nation Time!" 352.

“burned and looted by rampaging mobs” of angry ghetto protesters.¹⁹¹ When Jews relocated to their suburban homes, they often left behind both their “immigrant parents” and their “Orthodox synagogues.”¹⁹² Due to the infrastructure required for Orthodox practice, Orthodox Jews were some of the last to exit the city ghettos.¹⁹³ Thus, Orthodox leadership sometimes dealt with the most bitter of moves: those forced by violence. For example, a Boston synagogue was sold to a group of Hassidim (sectarian) when its original members left for the suburbs. These Hassidim unknowingly entered a complex conversation between Boston’s Combined Jewish Philanthropies (CJP) and Elma Lewis, a black patron of the arts who ardently hoped to turn the facilities into a black cultural center. Complicating matters further, the Hassidim did not keep up the grounds well, though they did use the facilities for schooling and services. Soon after Reverend Dr. King, Jr.’s untimely death, CJP officials were warned by anonymous radicals that unless blacks were given the building free of mortgage, it would be burnt to the ground. CJP quickly decided to sell the building to Lewis, who successfully demanded to be given the facilities free of charge.¹⁹⁴ Though sectarian Orthodox Jews lost the building, the transfer itself is indicative of the tensions between blacks and Jews, blacks and specifically Orthodox Jews, and Orthodox Jews and their non-Orthodox peers. Meanwhile, in 1968, SNCC “leader James Forman and other radical black leaders” declared that synagogues and Jewish businesses in black areas should pay reparations to blacks, shocking Jews and synagogue communities.¹⁹⁵ Not only did the concept seem unfair, but the term “reparation” was linked, in the Jewish mind at least, to World War II and German

¹⁹¹ Finkelstein, *Heeding the Call* 171.

¹⁹² Hertzberg, *The Jews in America* 321.

¹⁹³ Geller, *Orthodoxy Awakens* 112.

¹⁹⁴ Levine and Harmon, *The Death* 96, 131-151.

¹⁹⁵ *ibid*, 138.

reparations for the Jews.¹⁹⁶ In New York, the late 1960s brought, among other events, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville debate, in which new policies of “community control” clashed with the traditionally liberal United Federation of Teachers.¹⁹⁷ Fired Jewish teachers presented cases of anti-Semitism, while the black and Puerto Rican parents and principal called for educators whose lives (often meaning skin color) better mirrored those of the public school’s students. In the end, community control was severely reduced and the ten fired teachers were reinstated.¹⁹⁸ One interviewee notes that many Orthodox teachers worked in the New York school system; accordingly, the Ocean Hill-Brownsville clash contributed to a “general hostility” towards the Black Power movement.¹⁹⁹ Rabbi Berman concurs, claiming that the debate signaled to the Orthodox community that blacks were anti-Semitic, and ultimately “cut off what could have been a fruitful” relationship between the two sides.²⁰⁰

Although the vocal voice of black anti-Semitism alienated Orthodox Jews, at least one group of Orthodox rabbis decreed that it would not tolerate anything short of perfectly ethical behavior on the part of its laymen’s interactions with the black community. When unhappy tenants took their case against Orthodox slumlord Israel Mindick to the Boston *Beit Din*, or Orthodox Court of Law, the *Beit Din* came to the conclusion that Mindick must repair his property – and that his tenants had to treat the property respectfully. Because Mindick did not fulfill his side of the deal, the *Beit Din* fined him nearly fifty

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Jonathan Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: The Struggle in the Cities," *Struggles in the Promised Land: Toward a History of Black-Jewish Relations in the United States*, ed. Jack Salzman and Cornel West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997) 113.

¹⁹⁸ Jim Sleeper, *The Closest of Strangers: Liberalism and the Politics of Race in New York* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990) 98-99. Also, Kaufman, "Blacks and Jews: The Struggle," 112-17.

¹⁹⁹ Bernie Kabak. Phone interview with the author. 28 July 2005.

²⁰⁰ Berman.

thousand dollars. Mindick could not take the pressure, and moved to Florida.²⁰¹ In this example, Orthodox leadership did not simply side with its own layman; rather, it worked within Jewish law in order to create a more ethically proper situation.

Other Orthodox Jews responded to the violence and anti-Semitism associated with the black ghetto communities more disrespectfully. For example, one charismatic New York Orthodox leader, Rabbi Meir Kahane, founded an organization entitled the Jewish Defense League (JDL) in 1968.²⁰² JDL chapters formed community patrols in order to defend the Jewish “elderly and the [Jewish] poor” left behind in the ghetto by the waves of white flight.²⁰³ Ironically, even as Rabbi Kahane claimed his group (and Judaism) drew strength from the practice of Jewish law, or *halakhah*,²⁰⁴ the violent militancy with which the JDL accomplished its goals seems to have derived more from Black Power models than from Jewish history.²⁰⁵ Thus, when Jewish Bostonian youth asked Rabbi Berman for support as they formed a JDL community patrol, Rabbi Berman only agreed on the condition that the patrol groups carry no weapons, consist of volunteer black and white patrolmen, and have a system of immediate contact with area police. Though Rabbi Kahane was upset by Rabbi Berman’s intrusion, he let the patrols take place as stipulated.²⁰⁶

²⁰¹ Levine and Harmon, The Death 184-193.

²⁰² S. Daniel Breslauer, Meir Kahane: Ideologue, Hero, Thinker (Lewiston, N.Y.: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1986) 23-24.

²⁰³ Berman.

²⁰⁴ Actually, by the 1970s, JDL’s membership base had shifted. “Many Jews who were attracted to the movement... were restless with Orthodoxy. The youthful leaders of the movement tried to explain that while the JDL observed Jewish law it was not a religious movement. Such explanations, however, were inconsistent with the way in which religious ideology was used to justify political involvement, and conflicts over religious practices were present even in the most committed factions of the JDL.” Breslauer, Meir Kahane 24, 61.

²⁰⁵ Breslauer, Meir Kahane 24-25, 155-156.

²⁰⁶ Berman.

The JDL also grew quite active in the fight for the freedom of Soviet Jewry.²⁰⁷ Under Joseph Stalin's dictatorship, the millions of Jews in Soviet Russia had suffered from the blocking of government positions, show trials, Yiddish-language censorship, and the imprisonment and execution of Jewish leaders perceived to be unreceptive to Stalin's policies. After Stalin's 1953 death, the USSR continued to practice anti-Semitic procedures.²⁰⁸ The government carried on systematic destruction of Jewish communal, cultural, and personal life. It published anti-Semitic documents and put Jews on trial for endorsing Zionism, practicing Judaism, or committing false economic crimes.²⁰⁹ Rabbi Kahane broke off from non-violent Soviet Jewry movements in the twilight of the 1960s, convinced of the need for "civil disobedience and violence" in order to succeed in the campaign for Soviet Jewry.²¹⁰ JDL members fought for Soviet Jewry with the notion that they would not act as docilely as did the Holocaust generation before them.²¹¹ In 1969, the JDL "sponsored a 'Hundred-Hour Vigil'" in front of the Soviet Mission; as hundreds of "protestors rioted," other protestors "chained themselves to a Soviet airliner at Kennedy Airport."²¹² Clearly, Rabbi Kahane specifically utilized militant actions in order to take advantage of the publicity they inevitably amassed.

Orthodox leadership outside of the JDL was involved with the Soviet Jewry Movement as well. As will be discussed in greater detail in the third chapter, Jacob Birnbaum's Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ), organized in the early 1960s, worked peacefully and continuously in order to change the anti-Semitic conditions under

²⁰⁷ Breslauer, Meir Kahane 81-83.

²⁰⁸ Staub, ed., The Jewish 1960s 121-22.

²⁰⁹ Jacob Birnbaum, "Fortieth Anniversary of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ): Seminal Role in the Rise of the Soviet Jewry Movement in the 1960s," (Center for Russian Jewry with Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, 2004), 1.

²¹⁰ Yossi Klein HaLevi, "Lessons of a Movement," Jerusalem Post 11 June 2004: 21.

²¹¹ Breslauer, Meir Kahane 83.

²¹² Yossi Klein HaLevi, "Jacob Birnbaum and the Struggle for Soviet Jewry," Azure.17 (2004).

which Soviet Jews lived. After the 1967 Six Day War, the American Movement proved especially crucial: the USSR broke off relations with Israel, produced more “anti-Zionist and anti-Semitic propaganda,” and armed anti-Israel Middle Eastern countries and terrorists.²¹³ Some rabbis involved with the Civil Rights Movement were also participants in the Soviet Jewry Movement.²¹⁴ Returning to Rabbi Berman, one learns that he helped create the Northern California Council for Soviet Jewry; took part in demonstrations and community education programs in California, Boston, and New York; “served on the [SSSJ] board;” and participated in an international Soviet Jewry conference in Europe.²¹⁵ For some, the struggle for Soviet Jewry proved at least as important as that for American blacks, if not more so.

As the Black Power Movement discouraged white participation, and the Soviet Jewry Movement roped in strong Orthodox leaders, the Vietnam War also received a fair bit of attention. The majority of Orthodox leadership supported the War, or at least was not involved in anti-War efforts.²¹⁶ According to one popular opinion, one had to support the Vietnam War in order to ensure America’s protection of Israel and Israeli policy.²¹⁷ Others felt that American Jews could not afford to work against the government;²¹⁸ this idea was rooted in the insecurities of American Jewry, as discussed previously. However, a strong-voiced minority certainly expended much energy on the affair and worked to end

²¹³ Steven L. Spiegel, "American Jews and United States Foreign Policy (1945-1990)," Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 177. Also, Robert S. Wistrich, "Anti-Semitism in Europe after 1945," Terms of Survival: The Jewish World since 1945, ed. Robert S. Wistrich (New York: Routledge, 1995) 277.

²¹⁴ Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions." Also, Greenberg. "Re: Thesis Research." 19 September 2005.

²¹⁵ Berman.

²¹⁶ Michael E. Staub, Torn at the Roots: The Crisis of Jewish Liberalism in Postwar America (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002) 14.

²¹⁷ Hertzberg, The Jews in America 370.

²¹⁸ Staub, Torn at the Roots 14.

the United States presence in Vietnam.²¹⁹ Rabbi Blanchard, a committed Civil Rights Movement volunteer, heightened his participation in anti-War efforts after being told that the efforts of white Civil Rights volunteers would soon prove unnecessary. Though he was exempt from the draft due to his rabbinical studies, Rabbi Blanchard operated “Vietnam Summer” in St. Louis, organizing various anti-War activities.²²⁰ Rabbi Ahron Soloveichik served as “a spiritual beacon for the awareness that one needed to look at the issues of involvement...through the prism of *halakhah*,” in other words, he gave a decidedly religious twist to the debate over Vietnam, by considering the ways in which Jewish law affected involvement.²²¹ For example, Rabbi Soloveichik *paskened*, or made a ruling according to Jewish law, that a Jew could not pilot for the Air Force in Vietnam: the bombing of entire villages suspected of hosting Viet Cong activity entailed a degree of “direct [civilian] massacre” unacceptable in accordance with Jewish law.²²² Clearly, Orthodox leaders took the time to express a variety of opinions regarding the Vietnam War.

For Rabbi Soloveichik, the Vietnam War required a decidedly Jewish examination. In this sense, it was no different than the theologically-driven motivations of Orthodox participants in the Civil Rights Movement, as shown in the first chapter. However, it seems that Orthodox leadership in the 1950s and the 1960s focused mostly on self-preservation rather than on issues pertaining to American society in general. It concentrated on the schooling and segregating effects of immigrant absorption after World War II, the fight against Conservative Judaism’s popularity, insecurity and anti-

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ Blanchard.

²²¹ Berman.

²²² *ibid.*

Semitism in the United States and abroad, Israel's survival and her post-1967 setting, and finally, the often militant overtones of the Black Power Movement. Whether or not these issues hampered Orthodox participation in the Civil Rights Movement depended upon the individual; indeed, some readers of this chapter might find it to be an insufficient explanation of Orthodoxy's lack of response. To these readers I would explain that Orthodoxy was not necessarily ignoring the oppression of American blacks; it was more often than not attempting to survive an uphill battle from which it could not escape. My hope is that this chapter will allow its readers to assess Orthodoxy's response in light of its historical context.

Yeshiva University Students: The Civil Rights Movement and Other Priorities

In 1965, the same year in which Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. led the Selma-Montgomery March, the American Jewish Year Book published an article on Orthodoxy in which Yeshiva University (YU) is hailed as “the one institution most prominently identified with modern Orthodoxy;” indeed, the same author theorizes that YU served so many communities through its rabbinical graduates, its community programming, and its college education that “were Yeshiva University to impose a definite direction” on Orthodox practice in America, “it would have the most profound repercussions within the Orthodox world.”²²³ Clearly, YU played a valuable role in the Orthodox milieu. Because of this university’s importance within the non-sectarian Orthodox scene, YU provides relevant material on varying responses to the Civil Rights Movement within the Orthodox college world, as well as bountiful material on the other, more pressing priorities of its student body.

However, before discussing the ideals and actions of YU students, one must first understand the context in which these students lived. Based in New York City, YU strove to “[embrace] the heritage of the best of western civilization, along with the ancient traditions of Jewish law and life,”²²⁴ through a philosophy and educational system of *Torah U’Madah*,²²⁵ or the study of both religious and secular disciplines.²²⁶ YU contained both undergraduate and graduate schools, though not all the graduate schools were specifically religious or even Jewish. Of the religious schools, Yeshiva College

²²³ Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 62-64.

²²⁴ About YU, <http://www.yu.edu/aboutYU.asp>, 12 December 2005.

²²⁵ *Torah U’Madah* literally means "Torah [Jewish Bible] and science."

²²⁶ Geller, Orthodoxy Awakens 184.

(YC) taught young men, while Stern College for Women (SC) instructed their female counterparts; in addition, YU included the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), a rabbinical school.²²⁷

Though other divisions existed,²²⁸ the materials available from YC, SC, and RIETS will form the basis of this chapter's primary research. This material includes newspaper articles, journals, yearbooks, archived documents, interviews, and several works on YU institutional history. Unfortunately, an imbalance exists between the available data on Yeshiva College and Stern College. Since the YU alumni offices could not give out personal contact information, I relied upon word of mouth and mass e-mail requests to find YU graduates willing to be interviewed; unlike the male alumni, no Stern graduate responded to my requests. In addition, YC's official newspaper, *The Commentator*, compiled a series of alumni recollections just last year; Stern's newspaper, *The Observer*, does not seem to have followed suit. Finally, *The Commentator* records are complete for the period of interest, while *The Observer*'s records are missing editions between 1954 and May 29, 1959. However, the extant Stern archival material suggests that Stern students often had lifestyles and ideals similar to those of their male counterparts.²²⁹ For instance, both YC and Stern students specifically chose to attend an Orthodox college, where they would learn secular and Judaic studies; in addition, these young men and

²²⁷ For more information on the various divisions, please see Gurock, *The Men and Women*.

²²⁸ Other divisions included the Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University and the Teachers Institute for Woman, which, though Orthodox, was not included in this chapter for logistical reasons.

²²⁹ Of course, a variety of individuals attended YC and Stern; these students hailed from different locals and Orthodox backgrounds. See, for example, Gurock, *The Men and Women* 203-205, 209. However, with this caveat in place, it is still possible to recognize various projects and ideals which occupied the students' time.

women were compatible enough to befriend and date each other.²³⁰ Thus, rather than exclude Stern from this chapter, I hope to present at least part of the female YU voice.

Without question, YU students actively discussed the Civil Rights Movement, though not necessarily right away. The record for the 1950s is largely silent on the matter, and aside from late-night dorm-room conversations²³¹ and a short editorial despairing over the bigotry extant at the University of Alabama,²³² there may not have been much debate over the plight of blacks in America. However, analysis of student publications shows that by the beginning of the 1960s, students often discussed and educated themselves about the Movement. For instance, in 1961, Stern students listened to a Nigerian leader maintain the need for blacks and whites to work together.²³³ They later had the opportunity to hear the administrative assistant of the NAACP's Executive Secretary speak about the history, purpose, methods, and goals of that prominent organization.²³⁴ In 1964, the YC Yavneh, an "Orthodox Jewish students organization,"²³⁵ hosted a panel on the Civil Rights Movement.²³⁶ An entire supplementary edition of *The Observer* was dedicated to questions on the causes of black rioting, theoretical solutions to help alleviate racial tension, comparisons between blacks and Jews in the United States, and comparisons between blacks and Israeli-Arabs.²³⁷ In fact, from 1967 onwards, black rioting and episodes of black anti-Semitism clearly affected the rhetoric on campus. Musing over the previous summer's black riots, one YC student wondered whether there

²³⁰ Gurock, *The Men and Women* 204, 209, 211-212.

²³¹ Berman.

²³² "Trouble at Alabama," *The Commentator* 27 February 1956.

²³³ "Nigerian Urges Harmony," *The Observer* 28 February 1961.

²³⁴ "'We Must Live Together' States NAACP Speaker," *The Observer* 31 October 1963.

²³⁵ Gurock, *The Men and Women* 249.

²³⁶ "Yavneh Chapter Hosts Civil Rights Speakers," *The Commentator* 22 April 1964.

²³⁷ "Observer Supplement," *The Observer* 23 October 1967.

was any possibility of calming the revolts.²³⁸ The editor of *HaMevaser*, the “official student publication of the religious divisions” of YU, acknowledged that SNCC had rejected Jews,²³⁹ yet felt that “a true religious person” could not blame all blacks for the actions of SNCC and its partners.²⁴⁰ Another *Observer* supplementary edition addressed issues of Black Power, Jewish racism, Jewish withdrawal from the black-Jewish dialogue, and black anti-Semitism.²⁴¹ That same month, the grassroots campus publication *Pulse* published an author who was discouraged with the fact that black rioting and anti-Semitism had led some Jews to equate the push for black equality with extreme violence and fear, and thus to unsettling memories of the Holocaust. Rather than step away from American black society, this author hoped to encourage interracial discourse and the dissolution of negative black stereotypes among Jews.²⁴² Still another student, disgusted with the turn of events, claimed that the Civil Rights Movement had generated a “Frankenstein” of violent militants.²⁴³

YU students did not simply discuss the Civil Rights Movement; they also actively pursued its goals. For example, in 1960, YU was a member of the Metropolitan Students for Non-Violent Civil Rights Action, and YU students protested Woolworth’s Southern lunch counter policies by picketing and distributing leaflets in front of a New York branch.²⁴⁴ The next year, YU students started a tutoring program in a local public school;

²³⁸ Barry Axler, "The Negro Revolt," *The Commentator* 28 September 1967.

²³⁹ As discussed in the second chapter, SNCC rejected its white volunteers. Many of these volunteers were Jewish.

²⁴⁰ Jon Bloomberg, "Negro Anti-Semitism," *HaMevaser* 28 March 1968.

²⁴¹ "Observer Supplement," *The Observer* 28 October 1968.

²⁴² Alan Radzin, "Black is Beautiful, or Shvar'tze?" *Pulse* 24 October 1968.

²⁴³ Noah Baer, "One Dimensional Movement," *The Commentator* 13 March 1969.

²⁴⁴ "Student Pickets Fight Color Bars," *The Commentator* 5 May 1960. Also, "Fight for Equality," *The Commentator* 5 May 1960.

this program served as a model for other colleges.²⁴⁵ One wholeheartedly dedicated Stern student published her memoirs of the March on Washington, where Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his famous “I Have a Dream” speech; she later reported on a Washington, D.C. conference on apartheid, Southern segregation, and Northern discrimination.²⁴⁶ This student soon worked with other Yavneh leaders to organize a “mass boycott of New York City public schools,” in which Yavneh members taught freedom schools and picketed throughout Harlem and Washington Heights.²⁴⁷ In fact, YU even donated the use of one of its buildings for the endeavor.²⁴⁸ By the late 1960s, over 100 YC students were tutoring through the Yeshiva University Neighborhood Youth Corps (YUNYC),²⁴⁹ and SC started its own version of the same.²⁵⁰

Other students may have participated through their learning of religious texts, though the effects of their involvement cannot be measured in any scientific manner. These students placed civil rights injustices within a category of general injustice, and claimed that by studying Biblical and rabbinic texts, they fought as much of a struggle against wrongdoing as those who physically participated in the Civil Rights Movement.²⁵¹ One can better comprehend this point of view by examining the philosophy of *tikkun olam*, “fixing of the world,” espoused by Rabbi Y. A. Korff, who claims that “observing [the Sabbath] and observing [dietary restrictions] is as much *tikkun olam* as fighting for

²⁴⁵ "Volunteers to Help Tutor H.S. Students for Welfare Club," The Commentator 27 April 1961. Also, "Announce Tutoring Program to Aid Local Junior High," The Commentator 11 December 1961.

²⁴⁶ Phyllis Corbett, "We'll Walk Hand in Hand. Today," The Observer 31 October 1963. Also, Phyllis Corbett, "Segregation, Discrimination, Prevail, Says Delegate to Annual Youth Conference," The Observer 7 January 1964.

²⁴⁷ "Committee for Civil Rights Boycotts New York Schools," The Jewish Collegiate Observer February 1964.

²⁴⁸ Michael Schopf, "Negroes Here for a Day as School Boycott Held," The Commentator 17 February 1964.

²⁴⁹ "Youth Corps Receives Encomium for Tutoring in Local Schools," The Commentator 26 December 1968.

²⁵⁰ "Give a Damn Now -- Stern Formulates Area Youth Corps," The Observer 11 March 1970.

²⁵¹ Gurock, The Men and Women 223.

anybody's civil rights," for the fulfillment of commandments helps "repair the world."²⁵² In other words, by fulfilling religious injunctions, including that of text-study, one makes the world a better place. Thus, a YC senior argues in *Pulse* that students who constantly learn religious texts "are the pillars which support the world;" perhaps it is due to their merit, he continues, that justice and respite have been achieved in any issue.²⁵³ However, these dedicated scholars of Jewish texts did not escape scathing criticism from those involved in organizations like YUNYC, who felt that these intellectuals were simply apathetic and hypocritical.²⁵⁴ Hence the nature of their involvement, or lack thereof, depends upon the religious mindset of the person examining their activities.

YU as an institution encouraged a positive perspective on the Civil Rights Movement. In 1961, it awarded an "honorary Doctor of Laws degree" to Chief Justice Earl Warren,²⁵⁵ who was quite influential in the 1954 vote to end segregation.²⁵⁶ Just four years later it bestowed another Doctor of Laws degree upon then Vice President Hubert Humphrey, who was "known for his strong civil rights stand."²⁵⁷ In addition, its medical school application did not ask for a photograph, and thus had color-blind admissions.²⁵⁸ This fact is noteworthy in a country whose medical schools were not fully open to blacks until 1966.²⁵⁹ Starting in 1969, the medical school's King-Kennedy Medical Program subsidized lower-income blacks as they prepared their pre-medical curriculum, so that

²⁵² Rabbi A. Korff. Personal interview with the author. 25 May 2005.

²⁵³ Theodore Grossman, "The Black-Hatted Masmid," *Pulse* 27 May 1969.

²⁵⁴ Ed Levin, "Here Be Monsters," *Pulse* 27 February 1969. Also, Gurock, *The Men and Women* 218-19.

²⁵⁵ "Chief Justice Given Degree at Dedication of New Building," *The Commentator* 27 March 1961.

²⁵⁶ "Champion of Freedom," *The Commentator* 27 March 1961.

²⁵⁷ "Humphrey to Address Anniversary Assembly," *The Commentator* 18 February 1965.

²⁵⁸ Gurock, *The Men and Women* 160.

²⁵⁹ Until 1968, most black physicians graduated from black medical schools. In 1955, only about 30% of blacks in medical school attended "predominantly white schools;" in 1969, about 50% of black medical school students attended non-black medical universities. The medical community remained prejudiced in its hospitals, classes, and medical services throughout this time period. Lenworth N. Johnson and O. C. Bobby Daniels, *Breaking the Color Line in Medicine: African Americans in Ophthalmology* (United States of America: Slack, Inc., 2002) 37-38.

they could later improve medical care in their ghetto communities.²⁶⁰ That same year, a black Jewish YC freshman discussed his identity in *The Commentator*; clearly, a black Jewish student in the College was not only tolerated, but openly accepted.²⁶¹

Though the institution seems to have acknowledged certain values of the Civil Rights Movement, a vocal group also begged its contemporaries to work with caution. For instance, one student responding to the Woolworth's protest unashamedly critiqued the Student Council for officially backing the picketing: because of this backing, the Student Council had turned YU students into unwilling representatives of all East-coast Jews.²⁶² Rabbi Lichtenstein, a major figure in the school, felt that Orthodoxy's slow response to issues such as the Civil Rights Movement was due to an appropriate sense of prudence;²⁶³ still others felt YU could not afford to critique society publicly when it was just proving the possibility of living religiously and functioning fully within America.²⁶⁴

Yet another group of students may not have formulated extensive opinions on the Civil Rights Movement at all. Throughout the timeframe, *The Commentator* and *The Observer* published articles scorning the supposedly commonplace apathetic student lifestyle. Whether deriding the student body for voting half-heartedly, if at all, in the Student Council elections,²⁶⁵ or simply condemning students for displaying "indifference" towards non-academic activities,²⁶⁶ student leaders at SC and YC

²⁶⁰ Isaac Gewirtz, "Yeshiva Inaugurates King-Kennedy Medical Program to Subsidize Ghetto Youths Studying for Med. Degree," *The Commentator* 20 February 1969.

²⁶¹ Norman Turoff, "Allen Terry Believes Religion Remains Irrelevant to Race," *The Commentator* 30 October 1969.

²⁶² David Segal, *The Commentator* 5 May 1960.

²⁶³ Gurock, *The Men and Women* 224.

²⁶⁴ Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions."

²⁶⁵ "Wake Up!" *The Commentator* 5 November 1956.

²⁶⁶ "School Spirit," *The Commentator* 20 October 1966.

despaired over the seemingly “contagious” apathy displayed by their classmates.²⁶⁷ This laziness does not necessarily point to an entire generation of bookworms. As one 1963 graduate recalls, “while some of [his] classmates went south” in order to participate in the Civil Rights Movement, “a bunch of [his] friends” also considered spray-painting the tarnished YU domes gold.²⁶⁸ In other words, these students were often doing what so many past and present students have done: enjoying their time in college without necessarily contributing to national movements.

Indeed, while the “dominant picture” of the Civil Rights Movement generation is one in which the vast majority of college students actively participated in various movements pushing for social change, in truth, many teenagers simply went to college in order to learn and to have a good experience.²⁶⁹ For example, one YU graduate fondly reminisces over his four years on the varsity wrestling team, as well as his time on the intramural volleyball team;²⁷⁰ considering the one-to-two pages of space devoted to YU sports teams in almost every issue of *The Commentator*, this former student had a good crowd of teammates and sports aficionados. According to Professor of Jewish History Jeffrey Gurock, author of *Judaism’s Encounter with American Sports* and assistant men’s basketball coach at Yeshiva University, sports helped these YU students prove that they were not dissimilar to other college students across America.²⁷¹ For some, sports offered a way to fit into the network of regular college students, even if they were learning at a unique Jewish institution.

²⁶⁷ “Warning: Contagious Disease,” *The Observer* 28 February 1961.

²⁶⁸ Larry Schulman, “Math, Physics and Mischief,” *The Commentator* 16 May 2005.

²⁶⁹ Paul Lyons, *New Left, New Right, and the Legacy of the Sixties* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1996) 1-2.

²⁷⁰ B. Barry Levy, “My Experience at Yeshiva,” *The Commentator* 8 March 2005.

²⁷¹ Jeffrey S. Gurock. Discussion with the author. 21 July 2005.

At SC, part of the college experience included serious relationships and possibly marriage, especially to YC men.²⁷² In May of 1961, *The Observer* reported that nearly half the graduating class was already married, and two women had already borne children.²⁷³ Interest in femininity encouraged the young women to bring a special instructor on “posture, hair care, make-up, and fashion” to the school three times during the 1963 to 1964 school year.²⁷⁴ Just a year later, Stern women asked for a class focusing upon the laws of *Taharat HaMishpacha*, or Family Purity; these laws define some of the religiously-dictated relations between a husband and wife upon marriage.²⁷⁵ The issue of feminism does not seem to come up until the very end of the 1960s, when at least one student took the matter quite seriously and asked her classmates to ponder their roles as females and/or as feminine beings.²⁷⁶

For all of their apathy and college obsession over sports or dating, it seems that YU students also heavily invested themselves in a series of activities and ideologies other than the Civil Rights Movement. Religious issues affected their day-to-day lifestyle. They restricted their eating by following the laws of *kashrut* (religious dietary practices), and for a full day every week, they celebrated the Sabbath, a day in which they would not write or use electricity.²⁷⁷ Of course, whether or not an individual subscribed to each injunction cannot be ascertained; however, religious practice did seem to require time and energy. For example, SC women would have special *Shabbatons*, or Sabbath gatherings,

²⁷² Gurock, *The Men and Women* 209.

²⁷³ "Poll Shows Seniors Lead Active Interested Lives," *The Observer* 23 May 1961.

²⁷⁴ "Mrs. Lind Expostulates on Beauty Treatment," *The Observer* 31 October 1963.

²⁷⁵ "And Sundry Things," *The Observer* 11 May 1965.

²⁷⁶ Sherry Fyman, "Women of the World -- Unite! Realize Your Total Potential," *The Observer* 25 February 1970.

²⁷⁷ Sabbath restrictions include other commands too numerous to list here. However, these two serve as good examples.

for the out-of-towners.²⁷⁸ In addition, students would hold and attend group learning sessions on Jewish texts.²⁷⁹ Some students even felt that their religious lifestyle gave them immediate access to an “ultimate purpose” – a meaningful experience which nullified the need for rebelliousness, LSD-use, and free sex.²⁸⁰ The combination of difference in religious practice and religious values made student travel outside of the Orthodox community somewhat difficult. On the one hand, they faced an “unsympathetic world” with few of the institutions necessary to easily observe *kashrut* or the Sabbath, and with little tolerance for restrictive lifestyles.²⁸¹ On the other hand, some worried that their actions would unfairly represent all of Orthodoxy for non-Orthodox Jews and non-Jews, so that every step outside of the Orthodox community required great consideration.²⁸² This situation may have prevented some students from participating, or participating more actively, in the Civil Rights Movement.

In addition to keeping religious dictates, YU students concerned themselves with the survival of Orthodoxy and Judaism. For example, in 1958 the donations of a YU Charity Drive were to be divided amongst organizations dedicated to “the furtherance of Orthodox Judaism.”²⁸³ Certain students felt Jewish needs ought to come before non-Jewish needs, and would rather spend their free time working as teachers in Jewish education than volunteering in the Civil Rights Movement.²⁸⁴ As far as they were concerned, Judaism in the United States was still insecure and unstable, and the burden of

²⁷⁸ "Girls Visit Forest Hills," The Observer 4 March 1960.

²⁷⁹ Zelda Lee Badner, "Badner Reviews Past Year's Events," The Observer 13 May 1968.

²⁸⁰ Stephen Bailey, "The 'Out' Crowd," The Commentator 16 February 1967.

²⁸¹ Gurock, The Men and Women 157.

²⁸² "Our Religious Responsibility," The Commentator 5 November 1959.

²⁸³ "1958 Y.U. Charity Drive Specifies Goal of \$5,000," The Commentator 14 February 1958.

²⁸⁴ Gurock, The Men and Women 222.

supporting and strengthening Judaism fell upon observant Jews.²⁸⁵ Following this logic, the YU Youth Bureau agreed to send Stern and Yeshiva students to different Jewish communities in order “to spend a weekend there and help spread Torah spirit.”²⁸⁶ Finally, students struggled to synthesize the “Modern” and “Orthodox” within Modern Orthodoxy. Whether asking questions about this synthesis in a session with the YU President²⁸⁷ or attending a forum on the path of *Torah U'Madah* in the future,²⁸⁸ students seem to have approached one of 1964’s “most discussed subjects” quite often.²⁸⁹

In addition to religious priorities of practice and support, schoolwork took a toll upon student time. YU college students had to survive a dual curriculum of secular and Judaic classes, some of which were held on Sundays.²⁹⁰ Often, classes were scheduled during the night hours.²⁹¹ The cumulative workload was so intense that several students wondered whether the four-year program ought to be expanded to five years.²⁹² At least on the men’s side, many students hoped to matriculate in medical school or law school after graduation.²⁹³ In the 1950s, those hoping to enter medical school faced a quota system so difficult that YU founded its own medical school;²⁹⁴ thus, they had to excel in order to have the chance to further their education. Though this quota system basically

²⁸⁵ Ginny Habercorn, "March on Jewish, Soldiers," The Observer 5 March 1968.

²⁸⁶ Shoshana Bacon, "YU Plans Torah Tours," The Observer 24 February 1969.

²⁸⁷ "Now for the Second Step," The Commentator 17 February 1954.

²⁸⁸ Steven Bayme, "Yeshiva College: Reminiscences of the Past, Visions of the Future," The Commentator 6 December 2004.

²⁸⁹ "A Possible Solution," The Commentator 28 May 1964.

²⁹⁰ Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions."

²⁹¹ "My Brother Was an Only Child," The Commentator 27 March 1961. Also, "Cleaning Clatter," The Commentator 2 June 1966.

²⁹² See, for example: Martin L. Leib, "Numb Minds," Pulse 18 September 1968.

²⁹³ Henry Kressel, "Looking Back: My Yeshiva College Years," The Commentator 8 March 2005. Also, Cohen. "Re: Interview."

²⁹⁴ Gurock, The Men and Women 160-61.

disappeared in the 1960s,²⁹⁵ many students planning to enter professional fields still worked diligently.²⁹⁶

Issues with the institution of YU also called for substantial student efforts. Students jostled with the administration over guidance networks, freedom of speech and attendance, the curriculum, and school facilities. In 1954, YC men worked with the faculty to pair students off in a student-faculty mentorship program.²⁹⁷ In the late 1950s and early 1960s, *The Commentator* launched a minor campaign against the direct “suppression” of student activities and newspaper articles by the YU administration.²⁹⁸ Soon, though, the discussion moved from censorship to attendance, and students in Stern and Yeshiva fought to abolish class attendance requirements. The first year of the new decade brought more stringent attendance standards upon vocally ambivalent Stern women.²⁹⁹ YC juniors, seniors, and underclassmen with certain grade point averages were first allowed to miss class only after a 1968 threat of student strike.³⁰⁰ Meanwhile, class-attending students put their extra-curricular hours to work evaluating their courseload. In the first half of the 1960s, YC and RIETS men labored over curricular reviews,³⁰¹ and in the late second half, Stern women partnered with their professors to appraise classes and teachers.³⁰² Finally, in the late 1960s, Stern women spent much energy on their fight for the erection of a new school building. Constantly facing

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, 162.

²⁹⁶ Murray Geller, "In Review," *The Commentator* 18 May 1961. Also, Bernard Firestone, "In Retrospect," *The Commentator* 27 May 1970.

²⁹⁷ "Council to Assist Student Guidance," *The Commentator* 17 February 1954.

²⁹⁸ Josef E. Fischer, "In Review," *The Commentator* 27 May 1957. Also, David Segal, "In Retrospect," *The Commentator* 24 May 1962.

²⁹⁹ "Cut System: Fair or Unfair?" *The Observer* 23 November 1960.

³⁰⁰ "Faculty Approves Policy of Unlimited Cuts but Registrar Orders Attendance Records," *The Commentator* 15 February 1968.

³⁰¹ "SOY Sets RIETS Evaluation; Seeks Official Cooperation," *The Commentator* 15 December 1960. Also, "Results of Council Curriculum Evaluation," *The Commentator* 28 May 1964.

³⁰² "Give a Damn," *The Observer* 5 May 1969. Also, "Faculty Aids Crucial Issues," *The Observer* 25 February 1970. Also, Meryle H. Cherrick, "The Arrangement," *The Observer* 25 February 1970.

unfulfilled pledges, these students protested in 1967,³⁰³ drafted their own plans for the empty lot in 1968,³⁰⁴ and put on a massive school strike for construction in 1969.³⁰⁵

While administrative issues served as a source of frustration, Israel remained a top priority throughout the timeframe. Significant student efforts went towards meeting the needs of the recently-established Jewish state.³⁰⁶ Fundraising drives for Israeli establishments were commonplace. For example, a 1955 drive went towards the strengthening of Israel's military,³⁰⁷ whereas a 1965 drive hoped to support four girls in an Israeli orphanage.³⁰⁸ In a strong show of encouragement and assistance, every YU student council joined to fundraise for the Geshar Foundation, established in Israel by YU alumni in order to draw non-religious Jews back to traditional Judaism.³⁰⁹ One graduate of the 1950s claims that "an overwhelming concern of Yeshiva students during this period was the fledgling State of Israel,"³¹⁰ while a faculty member recalls the period around the 1967 War as one in which YC "in effect closed" because "Israel was under attack."³¹¹ Stern students joined their male classmates around the radio, waiting for every snippet of news.³¹² These women succeeded in raising nearly \$40,000 for Israel just before and during Israel's Six Day War (1967), in addition to joining a March on Washington in support of the Jewish state.³¹³

³⁰³ "Riot -- Ground Breaks," The Observer 30 May 1967.

³⁰⁴ "'No Building Now' -- YU," The Observer 17 October 1968.

³⁰⁵ Cyndi Reiss, "Diary of a Strike," The Observer 24 February 1969.

³⁰⁶ Cohen. "Re: Interview."

³⁰⁷ "Give to the Y.U. Drive," The Commentator 9 February 1955.

³⁰⁸ "Council Meets; Programs Slated," The Observer 4 October 1965.

³⁰⁹ "Geshar Foundation Hopes to Act as Bridge between Orthodox and Non-Orthodox in Israel," The Commentator 20 February 1969.

³¹⁰ Sheldon Rudoff, "Reflections on the Legacy of the Fifties," The Commentator 29 March 2005.

³¹¹ Ruth A. Bevan, "Transformations," The Commentator 18 April 2005.

³¹² Rivkah Landesman, "This above All.," The Observer 30 May 1967.

³¹³ Josie Sebrow, "Stern Aids in Six Day War," The Observer 23 October 1967.

Within American Jewry as a whole, the 1967 Six Day War served as a turning point, for it catalyzed American Jewish support of, and pride in, Israel.³¹⁴ Among YU students, however, it seems that the 1967 War simply drew upon emotions already present throughout the 1950s and 1960s. Even when not fundraising, rallying, or tensely listening to the news, YU students celebrated the country, educated themselves about it, and even moved there. In 1959, YC founded a religious Zionist club chartered on the advice of their rabbinic leader, Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik.³¹⁵ Israeli Independence Days were annually celebrated with dancing and speakers.³¹⁶ In 1962, *The Observer* published a list of different opportunities available to Stern students trying to visit or study in Israel.³¹⁷ Four years later, a YU student outlined some of the opportunities for work and study in Israel and forcefully argued that there was no excuse for people to “[stay] behind” in the States.³¹⁸ Perhaps the only major difference after the 1967 War was intensity of ideology: for example, in 1968, the editor of *The Commentator* felt that YU should promote *aliyah* “even at [YU’s] expense;” this call appears more extreme in nature than previous calls to work, study, or live in Israel, for it claims that YU should promote these moves even if they cause financial harm to the academic establishment.³¹⁹ In fact, it seems that many YU graduates did make *aliyah*, though not necessarily before completing their education.³²⁰

³¹⁴ Staub, ed., *The Jewish 1960s* 165-66.

³¹⁵ "Torah Scholar Advises against S.Z.O. Chapter," *The Commentator* 2 December 1959. Also, "Advice and Comment," *The Commentator* 2 December 1959.

³¹⁶ See, for example, "Dr. R. Yarden Speaks About Israel Birthday," *The Observer* 29 May 1959. Also, Dr. Joseph Dunner, "Dr. Joseph Dunner Attacks Arabs' View of History; Reasserts Israel's Claim to the Holy Land," *The Commentator* 27 May 1965. Also, "Student Celebration Marks Israel's Nineteenth Birthday," *The Commentator* 25 May 1967.

³¹⁷ Naomi Belle Minder, "Let's Take a Trip to Israel," *The Observer* 18 January 1962.

³¹⁸ Jeffrey Roth, "The Merits of Studying for a Year in Israel," *The Commentator* 2 June 1966.

³¹⁹ Morton Landowne, "Confronting Our Priorities," *The Commentator* 31 October 1968.

³²⁰ Eugene Korn, "God, Torah and Yeshiva in the 1960's," *The Commentator* 30 August 2004.

Israel may also have influenced student opinions on another highly-discussed topic: the Vietnam War. Some students and faculty linked their support for Israel with their support for the Vietnam War, for, the reasoning followed, if the United States supported the Israeli army, any supporter of Israel ought to be loyal to the American army in return.³²¹ In 1966, twenty-seven YC students collected 800 signatures backing American policy in Vietnam and presented them to key government officials;³²² clearly, the pro-War voice had a place on campus, at least at first. However, the anti-War voice soon broke through, and loudly. Though the men on campus could easily (and often dishonestly) dodge the draft by filling out a deferment form in which they claimed they were studying to be rabbis and would eventually become military chaplains,³²³ many still took strong stances on the Vietnam War. A 1968 Stern survey shows that a full ninety-three percent of Stern women wanted the United States military to withdraw from Vietnam, either immediately or through different phases.³²⁴ In 1969, YU joined other universities in an Anti-War Moratorium, during which activities, speakers, and discussions on the Vietnam War culminated in a “city-wide rally” in Bryant Park.³²⁵ Some students protested the Moratorium, reminding the College that a pro-War voice still survived.³²⁶ However, few seemed to deny the validity of a YU student strike over the killing of four student protestors at Kent State and the United States Army’s forays into

³²¹ Morris Kalka, "Social Mores of Yeshiva College Students," The Commentator 18 April 2005.

³²² "YU Washington Delegation Presents Vietnam Petition," The Commentator 18 February 1966.

³²³ Kalka, "Social Mores." Also, Joan G. Haahr, "My Yeshiva Career," The Commentator 8 March 2005.

³²⁴ Debbie Shanker, "McCarthy Wins in Choice '68 Rocky Second, Kennedy Third," The Observer 13 May 1968.

³²⁵ Joe Belitsky and Mark Spanglet, "Vietnam War Involvement Blasted During YC Moratorium Proceedings," The Commentator 30 October 1969.

³²⁶ *ibid.*

Cambodia.³²⁷ Yeshiva ultimately gave YC students the option to end the secular-studies part of the semester early, so long as they were involved in anti-War protest.³²⁸

In addition to Israel and the Vietnam War, students spent time dealing with the aftermath of the Second World War. From the 1950s to the mid-1960s, it seems that numerous students were either directly related to European immigrants or were in communities to which these immigrants had moved. One graduate recalls that many students, their families, and their communities were still quite involved with the inclusion of Holocaust survivors.³²⁹ Meanwhile, a YU professor of Political Science writes that students through the mid-1960s “were first generation Americans, at best:” they spoke with their families’ “mainly East European accents,” and incorporated “their families’ belief that the world at large worked against them as Jews.”³³⁰ These were truly children of the Holocaust generation. The “acceptance of foreign-born students, refugees, and survivors of Hitler’s persecutions” into the YU faculty and student body³³¹ as a direct result of the War ensured that individuals of European heritage had a significant impact upon the school. By the early to mid-1960s, these immigrants may have followed the historical trend to more openly publicize their “memories [and]...collective sense of obligation to those who had not survived” the Holocaust.³³² The legacy of the Second World War especially manifested itself in YC during the late 1950s and early 1960s,

³²⁷ Sheldon Toibb, "Referendum Passes by Wide Margin as YC Protests Cambodian Action," The Commentator 27 May 1970. Also, "YU Reacts to National Crisis: Undergrad and Grad Divisions Issue Separate Statements," The Observer 12 May 1970.

³²⁸ Avi Goldman, "Students and Faculty Exhibit Hypocrisy in YC Referendum," The Commentator 27 May 1970. Also, Gurock, The Men and Women 228-31. Actually, though many students took the option, fewer fulfilled the caveat, perhaps because they were protected from the draft.

³²⁹ Cohen. "Re: Interview."

³³⁰ Bevan, "Transformations."

³³¹ Gurock, The Men and Women 165.

³³² The influence of European Orthodox immigrants was discussed in great detail in the second chapter. Sarna, American Judaism 275, 96.

generally through articles discussing the role Germany and its language should play in the student community. In 1959, the Student Council denied a German club charter.³³³ A year later, in a three-article series, a YU reporter in Germany wrote that the European country was (in his view) dishonorably shifting the blame for the Holocaust over to other parties.³³⁴ In 1961, with the trial of infamous Nazi Adolf Eichmann, more articles concentrating on the legacy of the Holocaust appeared; among other topics, these articles dealt with the trial itself,³³⁵ discussed the horrific comparison of Israel to the Nazis,³³⁶ or reported on educational programs on the Nazi regime.³³⁷ Even as late as 1968, YU men and women volunteered to collect eyewitness testimony from Holocaust survivors throughout the New York area.³³⁸

The Holocaust influenced student reactions to the national and international environment. When Israel fought the 1967 War, student response incorporated the concept that the Holocaust's threat had not disappeared; rather, the Nazi's anti-Semitic allies were still robust and the possibility of Israel's destruction signified just another "phase" of the war against Jews.³³⁹ A report of a 1967 synagogue bombing in Miami, Florida spurred one Stern journalist to lament that white racists had espoused "a Nazi-type anti-Jewish terrorism" in the South.³⁴⁰ The idea that the Holocaust could be extended through people besides the Nazis also seems to have shaped student reactions to the Black Power Movement in the late 1960s. With the commencement of black rioting in

³³³ Gerald Blidstein, "Letter to the Editor," The Commentator 17 December 1959.

³³⁴ Abraham Siegelman, "Commentator Reporter Doubts Official German Sincerity," The Commentator 18 February 1960.

³³⁵ Mel Granatstein, "Call for Death Penalty," The Commentator 18 May 1961.

³³⁶ Herb Bloom, "Toynbee Compares Israel with Nazis," The Commentator 27 March 1961.

³³⁷ Abe Sofaer, "Nazis Scored by Greenberg," The Commentator 18 May 1961.

³³⁸ Lila Magnus, "Guest Lecturer Stresses Extension of Nazi Statute," The Observer 15 January 1968.

³³⁹ Bevan, "Transformations."

³⁴⁰ Randy Goodman, "Miami: Press Reflects Hate," The Observer 26 December 1967.

Northern cities, some students jumped to the conclusion that the parallels between rioting and “the Nazi reign of terror” were too compelling to continue to be associated with the Civil Rights Movement.³⁴¹ The development of anti-Semitic rhetoric among a vocal black minority further scared students, for whom this rang of Nazi propaganda.³⁴² For instance, SNCC’s 1967 summer pamphlet includes, among other tidbits meant to educate readers about the Arab-Israeli conflict, a one paragraph reference to the Rothschilds:

“the famous European Jews...who have long controlled the wealth of many European nations, were involved in the original conspiracy with the British to create the “State of Israel” and are still among Israel’s chief supporters. That The Rothschilds Also Control Much of Africa’s Mineral Wealth.”³⁴³

The reference to Rothschild control of European wealth and African goods, “associated as they are with enduring myths about worldwide Jewish financial domination,” soundly resembles anti-Semitic rhetoric.³⁴⁴ Ironically, when speaking to one of YC’s honor societies, Black Power activist Phil Luciano fiercely asserted that blacks were being subjected to a form of American holocaust, and were the only obstacles in the way of greater anti-Semitism in the States.³⁴⁵ This speaker obviously hoped to gain his audiences’ attention by locking into the legacy of the Holocaust – a topic which was sure to win their consideration. What this speaker could not have known is that only months later, a string of knife attacks and other acts of violence against YU students and staff in the Washington Heights neighborhood would augment student fears, create small bands of student vigilantes, and form the impetus for founding a Jewish Defense League (JDL)

³⁴¹ Radzin, "Black Is Beautiful, or Shvar'tze?"

³⁴² David Luchins, "An Orthodox Reaction to Black Anti-Semitism," HaMevasser May 1969.

³⁴³ SNCC Newsletter (June-July 1967). Quoted in Weisbord and Kazarian, Israel in the Black 33.

³⁴⁴ Weisbord and Kazarian, Israel in the Black 35.

³⁴⁵ Morton Landowne, "Speaker Rails Jews for Lack of Negro Support," The Commentator 23 May 1968.

chapter.³⁴⁶ The JDL attempted to protect Jews by teaching and practicing self-defense techniques. This League felt that guarding Jews and their material goods should be its members' ultimate priority, and therefore had no interest in interracial dialogue.³⁴⁷

The expenditure of energy on anti-Semitism and the general Jewish plight during the 1960s extended beyond the 1967 War and the Black Power Movement. Indeed, it ranged from a 1960 telegram from the Student Council to the Secretary of Defense over anti-Semitism in the Navy,³⁴⁸ to student attempts to stop the tide of Christian missionaries converting impoverished North African Jewish refugees,³⁴⁹ to a rally over the public hanging of nine Jewish Iraqi men for questionable charges of espionage.³⁵⁰ Many students may have subscribed to the opinion of *The Commentator's* editor-in-chief when, while listing a series of contemporary national and international cases of anti-Semitism in a 1962 editorial, he drew the gloomy conclusion that anti-Semitism "[would] never be eradicated" through either judicial systems or rational thought.³⁵¹

The matter of Soviet anti-Semitism did not escape the notice of this editor-in-chief.³⁵² Recall that beginning with Stalin, millions of Soviet Jews were prevented from taking certain government careers, were censored in their language and worship, and were unfairly tried and accused in show courts. In addition, the USSR government published

³⁴⁶ Paul Pollack, "Review of Past Muggings Yields No Definite Answer to Problem," *The Commentator* 27 November 1968.

³⁴⁷ Gurock, *The Men and Women* 221-22.

³⁴⁸ "Hit Anti-Semitism in U.S.'s Arab Plan," *The Commentator* 5 May 1960.

³⁴⁹ "Ben Yisroel La'amim," *The Commentator* 24 May 1962. Also, "Will Nothing Happen?" *The Observer* 18 January 1962.

³⁵⁰ Hannah Pavlov, "Memoirs or Prophecy?" *The Observer* 24 February 1969.

³⁵¹ David Zomick, "An Alien World Views the Plight of Today's Jewry," *The Commentator* 1 November 1962.

³⁵² *ibid.*

anti-Semitic propaganda and harshly punished any Zionist tendencies.³⁵³ YU students approached the situation slowly. In the late 1950s, they contrasted the freely practicing Irish Jewish community with Soviet Jewry's imperfect living conditions.³⁵⁴ In 1961, student leaders discussed Soviet Jewry's predicament with the unsympathetic Soviet representative to the United Nations,³⁵⁵ and in 1963, a Stern activist invited her classmates to send messages to their congressmen "urging definite action."³⁵⁶

With the arrival of charismatic immigrant Jacob Birnbaum to the New York scene, many in the YU community rallied around the cause of Soviet Jewry. On April 27, 1964, Birnbaum founded the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) during a city-wide meeting.³⁵⁷ Though not necessarily true outside of New York, this SSSJ chapter drew many Orthodox Jews to its ranks,³⁵⁸ in part due to Birnbaum's policy of meeting with YU students and Modern Orthodox educators.³⁵⁹ Once established, SSSJ led the American fight for Soviet Jewry,³⁶⁰ and riled up YU campuses along the way. In June of the same year, a Stern student declared that SSSJ protests and publicity efforts would persist throughout the summer.³⁶¹ Over the next two years, SSSJ sponsored around thirty events,³⁶² and YU students were sure to take a part. For instance, they reported on an SSSJ trip to Washington, D.C. in which delegates met with a Soviet Embassy official and

³⁵³ Staub, ed., *The Jewish 1960s* 121-22. Also, Birnbaum, "Fortieth Anniversary of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ): Seminal Role in the Rise of the Soviet Jewry Movement in the 1960s," 1.

³⁵⁴ "Dr. Jakobovits Discusses Status of Jews in Ireland," *The Commentator* 28 February 1957.

³⁵⁵ "Russian Official Rejects All Charges of Anti-Semitism," *The Commentator* 11 December 1961.

³⁵⁶ Shelly Schulman, "Letters: Russian Jews," *The Observer* 31 October 1963.

³⁵⁷ Jacob Birnbaum, "U.S. Jewish Student Activism for Soviet Jewry in the 1960s," (Center for Russian Jewry with Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry, 2002), 1.

³⁵⁸ Eli Lederhendler, *New York Jews and the Decline of Urban Ethnicity, 1950-1970*, Modern Jewish History, ed. Henry L. Feingold (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2001) 188. Also, HaLevi, "Jacob Birnbaum," 36.

³⁵⁹ Birnbaum, "U.S. Jewish Student Activism for Soviet Jewry in the 1960s," 2.

³⁶⁰ HaLevi, "Lessons of a Movement": 21.

³⁶¹ Naomi Belle Minder, "Summer Protest," *The Observer* 4 June 1964.

³⁶² Birnbaum, "Fortieth Anniversary of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ): Seminal Role in the Rise of the Soviet Jewry Movement in the 1960s," 2.

scouted sites for a future “mass” march for Soviet Jewry.³⁶³ Stern and Yeshiva students joined a 1,000-strong rally in December of 1966,³⁶⁴ and helped with a massive Passover Youth Protest sponsored by the New York Youth Conference for Soviet Jewry.³⁶⁵ Over the next few years, SSSJ continued to run numerous events, activities, councils, and educational programs. Birnbaum particularly highlights the 1968 Liberty Boat Ride, in which Stern women decorated two rented ships and “transformed them into Exodus Freedom ships,” publicizing the predicament of censured and confined Jews in the USSR.³⁶⁶ Activity continued on through the end of the 1960s: almost one hundred YU students picketed Russian newspaper editors touring America in 1970,³⁶⁷ and students gathered again to demonstrate against the anti-Zionist imprisonment of Boris Kochubiyevsky just months later.³⁶⁸

Not all students and faculty supported the non-violent SSSJ tactics. For some, protest lay in the realm of the irreligious, and was alien to Orthodoxy; rather than protest, one ought to rely upon the actions of the *Gadolei HaDor*, or Giants of the Generation, learned and respected men who would solve such problems for the masses quietly and cautiously.³⁶⁹ Birnbaum recalls his fight against this “entrenched traditional Orthodox concept of ‘*Shtadlonus*,’” for among those who were certain that rabbis were already engaged in secret diplomatic negotiations with Soviet Russia, any public displays of

³⁶³ Noah Lightman, "SSSJ Group Confers with Soviet Official," The Commentator 27 May 1965.

³⁶⁴ Lenore Wolfson, "Chanukah Begins with March for Soviet Jewry," The Observer 10 January 1966.

³⁶⁵ Lenore Wolfson, "Passover March Big Success! Youth Pleads for Soviet Jews," The Observer 2 May 1966.

³⁶⁶ Birnbaum, "Fortieth Anniversary of the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ): Seminal Role in the Rise of the Soviet Jewry Movement in the 1960s," 2.

³⁶⁷ Morris Grinfeld, "Students Picket Russian Editors," The Commentator 19 February 1970.

³⁶⁸ Ira Eisenman, "Yeshiva and Stern Protest Soviet Anti-Zionist Policies," The Commentator 27 May 1970.

³⁶⁹ David Luchins, "The Urge to Protest," HaMevaser 9 February 1967.

protest not only seemed disrespectful, but also potentially dangerous for Soviet Jews.³⁷⁰ Other students listened to Rabbi Kahane, head of the JDL, as he pushed for disrespectful and violent means more suited to the decade's zeitgeist. He and his followers felt that SSSJ's tactics, though noble, were simply unable to garner the necessary amount of attention.³⁷¹ Meanwhile, YU leadership did not at first appreciate the toll the Soviet Jewry Movement was taking upon the limited time and overloaded curriculum the students shouldered. However, once the administration understood that the matter of Soviet Jewry was in fact "a matter of survival," it consented to the cause.³⁷²

SSSJ tactics were by no means without inspiration – in fact, they were based upon the non-violent protest espoused by certain factions of the Civil Rights Movement. SSSJ leaders also encouraged,³⁷³ and received, the public backing of major Civil Rights leaders, including the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.³⁷⁴ One of the original founders of SSSJ, Glenn Richter, feels that a number of religious college students sympathetic to the Civil Rights Movement, but unable to become involved in it for one reason or another, "found an acceptable" Jewish "outlet" for their sympathy through SSSJ activities.³⁷⁵ Accordingly, SSSJ's opening letter parallels the "wrongs suffered" by American blacks to the "silent, strangulated pain" of Soviet Jews.³⁷⁶ The letter also calls upon the legacy of the Holocaust, reminding its readers of their condemnation of silent

³⁷⁰ Birnbaum, "U.S. Jewish Student Activism for Soviet Jewry in the 1960s," 2.

³⁷¹ Ella K. Shapiro, "Rabbi Kahane Defends JDL Tactics; Believes Active Protests Essential in Battling Increasing Anti-Semitism," The Observer 11 March 1970. For more information on JDL's tactics, please refer to the second chapter.

³⁷² Sheer. "Re: Thesis Research Questions."

³⁷³ Richter. "Re: Civil Rights Interview."

³⁷⁴ Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Speaks out on Behalf of Soviet Jewry. "SSSJ Collection: Programs -- Soviet Jewry Information," 1965-1968, Yeshiva University Archives.

³⁷⁵ Richter. "Re: Civil Rights Interview."

³⁷⁶ Jacob Birnbaum, Bernard Caplan, Moses Stambler, and James Torczyner, College Students' Struggle for Soviet Jewry. "SSSJ Collection: Founding Meeting April 27 1964," Yeshiva University Archives.

bystanders during World War II, and asking its readers to follow their words with action in the war for Soviet Jewry's freedom.³⁷⁷ In fact, one of the reasons that Birnbaum so emphasized the acquisition of support from Christian clergy and Civil Rights leaders was that through the joint efforts of the American community at large, he envisaged an almost redemptive "counterpoint to the radical aloneness" of the Jewish community during World War II.³⁷⁸ In the case of SSSJ, the Holocaust, the Civil Rights Movement, and the fight for Soviet Jewry were inextricably intertwined.

Though Birnbaum's Soviet Jewry Movement incorporated some of the leaders and tactics of the Civil Rights Movement, one would not say the same for YU student investment in religious practice, schoolwork, administrative changes, Israel, the Vietnam War, or other cases of anti-Semitism. Thus, while classmates did discuss the Civil Rights Movement, and some were even quite active within it, many others seem to have spent their time on distinct priorities and ideologies.

³⁷⁷ *ibid.*

³⁷⁸ HaLevi, "Lessons of a Movement": 21.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, I analyzed the priorities of Yeshiva University's religious student body. Within an environment where Orthodoxy, intellectual pursuits, and extra-curricular life coexisted, it seems clear that the Civil Rights Movement – as well as its brother Black Power Movement – inspired a great deal of discussion, a thirst for education, and some action. However, this same environment engendered a number of other student priorities, and most YU students spent what little time they had on a variety of affairs ranging from school administration and religious practice to Israel's survival and the Vietnam War.

Yeshiva University's students did not act on any of these issues alone. Just as some students proved deeply committed to the causes of the Civil Rights Movement, other Orthodox individuals across the United States participated in an array of activities supportive of the Movement, from community organizing to picketing. In addition to revealing some of these narratives and exploring Rabbi Dr. Heschel's position as an Orthodox participant, my first chapter exposed the religious motivations behind Orthodox Civil Rights activity. Yet just as YU students often concentrated on issues closer to the proverbial Jewish home, such as anti-Semitism in the Soviet Union, Orthodox leadership seems to have addressed issues of greater Orthodox concern with more attention than it did the Civil Rights Movement. As discussed in the second chapter, Orthodoxy spent the 1950s and the 1960s fighting for survival, supporting Israel, assimilating some of the values of its newer European immigrant constituency, reacting negatively towards anti-Semitism, anti-Orthodoxy, and the Black Power Movement, and arguing for and against

the Vietnam War. These matters may have helped lead Orthodoxy away from the struggle for black equality.

As I bring this project to a close, the novelty of much of my material has left me with questions just beyond its scope. For example, I feel that my thesis is male-oriented; women rarely responded to requests for material, whether on YU or on the Civil Rights Movement. Does this fact point to a generation of Orthodox women who were less proactive than their male counterparts? Were Orthodox women living in a culture that discouraged involvement in such tumultuous affairs? Or is some fluke of communication at fault for this skewed result? In addition, my thesis focuses on Orthodoxy without differentiating between *Sephardic* and *Ashkenazic* religious brands; these labels signify ancestry from different areas of the world, and carry the connotations of differing customs and cultures.³⁷⁹ What were the competing priorities of the *Sephardic* minority?³⁸⁰ Were religious *Sephardic* Jews involved in the Civil Rights Movement to the same degree as *Ashkenazic* Jews?

Though my thesis cannot possibly examine all aspects of the Orthodox milieu in the 1950s and 1960s, one observation which struck me as a Modern Orthodox college student in 2006 was the seeming similarity between Orthodoxy's priorities then and now. Obviously, the Vietnam War has long passed, and the immediate effects of the Black Power Movement are not as violent or as fresh. We are now two generations removed from the Holocaust. Yet the voices which speak through *The Observer* and *The Commentator* feel much more familiar than foreign, and I cannot help but re-examine my

³⁷⁹ Solomon, *Judaism: A Very* 106.

³⁸⁰ According to the 1965 American Jewish Yearbook, there were "an estimated 25,000" *Sephardic* Jews in America at the time, "largely of Spanish and Portuguese, Syrian, Greek, Egyptian, North African, and Yugoslav origin." They were challenged by the threat of "cultural dilution," as they lacked their own institutions of training for religious leaders. Liebman, "Orthodoxy in American," 66.

thesis as it pertains to a similarly Orthodox student who daily decides which of her campus opportunities she will prioritize.

Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard writes that the Orthodox community today is not as committed to issues outside of the Jewish community as it was during the Civil Rights era.³⁸¹

Meanwhile, Rabbi Saul Berman notes that the contemporary Orthodox community differs significantly from that of the 1950s and the early 1960s, in that it is almost homogeneously committed to religious precepts and firmly based in its Jewish day school education. Orthodox Jews have made inroads in almost every profession possible, and at the same time, Orthodoxy is more alienated from general American values.³⁸² Modern Orthodoxy has weakened since Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik's withdrawal from "public engagements" in the 1980s, and Orthodoxy in general has continued its trend to the religious right.³⁸³ On the other hand, Orthodoxy is much more comfortable in the limelight – take, for example, the case of Joseph Lieberman's vice presidential campaign in 2000; through his nomination, an Orthodox individual was elected to represent the Democratic Party in national elections.³⁸⁴

I wonder whether the precedent of Orthodox involvement in the Civil Rights Movement has been passed down to the next generation. Most of the Orthodox individuals with whom I have discussed my thesis are intrigued by its topic simply because it astounds them. Looking back, I realize that although my Orthodox day school celebrated Martin Luther King Day with passion, it never presented examples of participation that we could relate to as Orthodox Jews. Rosa Parks, a historically

³⁸¹ Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard. Please ask author for e-mail address. "Re: Orthodox Theology and the Civil Rights Movement." Personal e-mail. 11 November 2004.

³⁸² Berman.

³⁸³ Sarna, American Judaism 306.

³⁸⁴ *ibid*, 365.

significant and courageous figure, did not represent an attainable model any more than Napoleon Bonaparte. I hope that through the process of preparing and submitting this thesis, I have inspired my co-religionists to recognize new models of Orthodox activity. Ultimately, the legacy of Orthodox Civil Rights volunteers is a powerful example of the intersection of religious values, individual leadership, and *tikkun olam*.

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