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BIRMINGHAM'S JEWISH WOMEN AND SOCIAL REFORM
1880-1980

by
KAYE COCHRAN NAIL

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A THESIS

Submitted to the graduate faculty of The University of Alabama at Birmingham,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in History

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA

2010

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KAYE COCHRAN NAIL

HISTORY

ABSTRACT

Many historians and scholars have argued that Jewish women kept a low profile during periods of southern social reform since the late nineteenth century. This thesis reveals a little known pattern of activism among some Birmingham Jewish women, encompassing many trends of social change over one hundred years, from 1880 to 1980.

Nineteenth century Jewish women immigrants and migrants brought to the South a social conscience rooted in the traditions of their Jewish faith. They mentored their daughters, sisters, and neighbors in the ways of community goodwill. During the Progressive Era, their numbers and voices grew in the public sphere, as they supported reforms such as aid for the poor. In the post-World War II period, several Birmingham Jewish women made a daring and dangerous stand for racial equality. As the civil rights movement shifted toward black empowerment during the 1960s, Birmingham Jewish women linked local grassroots organizations with national groups to combat poverty and racial prejudice. Birmingham's Jewish women proved to be outspoken advocates for those without a public voice.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My journey as a historian started with a love of genealogy and family stories about life in the Deep South. Following a successful twenty-five year career in business that peaked with owning my own company, I returned to UAB to complete my undergraduate degree in History. After staring down classrooms filled with fresh-faced nineteen year-olds and formidable professors, I made life-changing discoveries about myself and the world around me. I now have the opportunity to appropriately thank many of those who made this academic journey possible.

For this undergraduate, Dr. George Liber and Dr. James Tent paved the way. Dr. Liber sparked the interest in history that still burns bright for me. He never failed to find opportunities to encourage or talk about the “meaning of life.” Wisdom according to Dr. Liber, as well as his wit and pithy comments, are well-known among students. I am also convinced that he does “know people in Moscow.” I consider him a loyal friend. I hope the sentiment is reciprocated. Thank you, Dr. Liber.

Dr. James Tent took history to a new level for me. His mesmerizing lectures were filled with untold stories of brave soldiers, resourceful nations, and despicable despots. I would give a million deutschmarks to hear him growl to a class of rapt, doe-eyed students, “Those Germans!” or to hear him exclaim to students who gave the wrong answer, “Guards, seize him!” Dr. Tent made history real. He wears many hats, but his best will always be that of lecturer and mentor. Thanks for accepting me into the history “boys club.”

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There are many others who made my academic life richer in some way over the last two years. Chapter three would not exist without the generosity of Virginia Volker. Thank you, Virginia, for opening up your home and collections to my research. I owe many thanks to librarian extraordinaire, Brooke Becker. Your wit and wisdom never cease to amaze me. I am eternally grateful for the foresight of Dr. Fred Olive to open up certain oral interviews online through the Mervyn Sterne Library that proved to be invaluable for my thesis. Thanks also to UAB Archivist, Tim Pennycuff, for your words of insight and encouragement. The works of Dr. Bob Corley proved to be important to my research and continue to be significant to many other historians. I also owe many thanks to Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, Ingrid Kraus, Sally Goldstein, and Eileen Walbert for providing corrections, commentary, and much needed guidance to my research.

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Dr. Carolyn Conley, in her position as Chair of the History Department, created an atmosphere of support for my academic endeavors. She has empowered me with her confidence in my abilities. Thank you, Dr. Conley. And fortunately, I am blessed with a supportive family. Thanks Mom and Dad, for giving up a few of our weekly visits so that I could work on my paper. Your support and love has seen me through many tough days. Thank you Nick and Erica, for the hours I sat at the computer uninterrupted. I love you both more than this research. And most of all, thanks to my amazing husband Eric, for supporting my decision to go back to school, believing in me when I did not, and acting like I am as beautiful as the first day he saw me twenty-three years ago.

But this thesis is about more than me. It is about Jewish women in Birmingham who were different. Women determined to make life better for all they came in contact with, wherever they lived. I dedicate this thesis to the memory of one of those incredible women, Rita C. Kimerling.

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INTRODUCTION

The South rarely embraced change. Change, nevertheless, characterized Birmingham from 1871 onward. Rapid industrialization in Jones Valley boiled over into society, creating as many problems as it produced profits for Birmingham's industrial elite. Those concerned with capital gains stiffly resisted any suggestion of modification to their economic designs during the industrial era. Labor reform withered under oppressive corporate control. Social reformers often had little support from the community. To be sure, Birmingham's history is the counterpart of many industrial-driven American urban explosions.¹ Reformers faced unique hardship in this southern city. The divide between socio-economic and racial classes grew at a rapid pace. An increasing low-wage population and weak social services created desperate societal problems in the city. City officials strictly enforced segregation between whites and blacks.² It would take both tragedy and heroic efforts to reform the Magic City of Birmingham.

Despite the rigidity of white corporate control in Birmingham, progressive women in the city gradually emerged as a modest voice for reform. Female reformers, locally and nationally, planted daring seeds of transformation during Reconstruction. Southern reform advocates shattered the image of "True Womanhood" that rested on

¹ Carl Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham 1871-1921* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1977), vii.

² Edward Shannon LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham, 1900-1975* (Tuscaloosa, University of Alabama Press, 1995), 13.

the “virtues of purity, piety, submissiveness, and domesticity.”³ Birmingham’s ladies of refinement followed the national trend of forming clubs, establishing educational guilds, and contributing to charity. Though few in numbers, their impact on the city proved notable.

Among Birmingham women reformers, an even smaller sliver of hope rested on Jews. Jewish women reformers faced anti-Semitism, rejection, and resistance to their belief in social justice. Recent historians have interpreted southern Jews as fearful, silent, or greedy. Others suggested that Jewish women “lagged behind” during the organizing and reform efforts of the late nineteenth century.⁴ Southern anti-Semitism generally limited Jewish reform activism. However, the experience of Jewish women in Birmingham reveals a different pattern. A number of Birmingham Jewish women proved bold, vocal, and generous. They followed a path of social feminism pioneered by previous generations of Jewish matriarchs. Indeed, the Jewish Women’s Archives Encyclopedia included a “rare example” of one North Carolinian woman working for social reform.⁵ While many worked behind the scenes to accomplish change, a few women followed a different path.

Jewish women joined forces for benevolent and charitable efforts in Birmingham. In their philanthropic efforts, they worked to meet public needs ignored by existing social services. But the link with other activists, Jewish and Protestant, made them aware of racial issues in the city. A sense of social feminism empowered

³ Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood 1820-1860,” *American Quarterly* 18 (Summer 1966), 152.

⁴ Mark Bauman. “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations,” *Journal of American Ethnic History*, 22 (Spring 2003), 56. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27501315>, (accessed April 28, 2010).

⁵ Heather Geisberg Pennington, “Gertrude Weil,” *Jewish Women: A Comprehensive Historical Encyclopedia*, March 1, 2009, Jewish Women’s Archive, April 27, 2010 <http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/weil-gertrude>; Jewish Women’s Archive, “JWA Staff,” <<http://jwa.org/aboutjwa/whoweare>> , (accessed April 27, 2010).

Birmingham Jewish women to unite over improving their southern city, despite the challenges they faced. In so doing, they advanced the cause of social justice in Birmingham.

CHAPTER ONE

FROM THE SYNAGOGUE INTO THE CITY: BIRMINGHAM'S JEWISH WOMEN REFORMERS 1880-1940

Some scholars view the term “progressive” as a “slippery slope.”⁶ According to one interpretation of the Progressive Era, “three distinct reform orientations emerged--structural reformers, social reformers, and purity advocates.”⁷ As early as the 1880s two of these reform efforts could be found in Birmingham. Jews in Birmingham supported the “Liberal Element” for structural and social reform, along with Catholics, Lutherans, and some Presbyterians. This group drew membership from “ethnic political groups,” plus local business owners and the working-class, who “deplored moralistic governmental meddling.”⁸ They often opposed the “Moral Element” of the city, who dominated “polite society” and exercised “political power.”⁹ The moral reformers advocated strong government to control liquor, gambling, and debauchery. Progressive Era movements mobilized on the grassroots involvement of those concerned with reform. As pockets of unrest emerged across America to advocate political, social, and moral change, reformers linked arms at the local, state, and national level.¹⁰ So did Jewish women reformers in Birmingham.

⁶ Sherman Barker, "General Federation of Women's Clubs: A Role Playing Exercise for Studying the Progressive Era." *OAH Magazine of History*, 22 (Winter 1986), 43-44.

⁷ Raymond A. Mohl, *The New City: Urban America in the Industrial Age, 1860-1920* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 1985), 115.

⁸ Harris, *Political Power in Birmingham*, 71

⁹ Ibid, 3.

¹⁰ Elizabeth Hayes Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South 1865-1945* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson, 2009), 94-103.

By the early 1880s, Birmingham Jewish women went to work helping the poor. They made their presence known among the needy in the city by providing aid to the poor, in the same way that ancient Jewish communities had attempted to meet the needs of the people.¹¹ God's chosen people fostered a profound commitment toward public duty. According to one scholar, "Jewishkeit," the blending of contemporary practices and "historical experiences," further encouraged southern Jewish women to organize.¹² In addition, Rabbi Morris Newfield of Temple Emanu-El, preached noblesse-oblige to his congregants.¹³ Thus, Birmingham Jewish women activists poured their collective souls into local social reform.

These women had immeasurable impact on the city. In the 1890s, a women's "Club Movement" reform spread like wildfire across the nation. As part of this movement, women in Alabama formed organizations designed to "ameliorate the problems posed by rapid industrialization."¹⁴ As these women joined various outreach efforts, their organizations moved them out of traditional roles at home and into public life. Alabama club women formed to protect children, promote prison reform, ameliorate poverty, and offer medical care for the indigent. None of the Alabama club women were more active than Birmingham's Jewish women, whose reform efforts actually pre-dated the high-tide of club reform in the 1890s.

¹¹ Robert St. John, "Social Justice: The Jewish Contribution to America and Some of the Men and Women Who Made It Possible," *Judaism Pamphlet Series*. (Washington, D.C.: B'Nai B'Rith Youth Organization, 1972), 18.

¹² Bauman, *Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations*, 34.

¹³ Mark Cowett, *Birmingham's Rabbi: Morris Newfield and Alabama 1895-1940* (Tuscaloosa: the University of Alabama Press, 1986), 65.

¹⁴ Mary Martha Thomas, "White and Black Alabama Women during the Progressive Era, 1890-1920," in *Stepping Out of the Shadows: Alabama Women 1819-1990*, ed. Mary Martha Thomas (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 75.

As newcomers to the recently incorporated Birmingham, Jewish men and women filled the city proper with businesses, temples, and growing families. Those first pioneer Jewish households struggled in the early years.¹⁵ However, they survived the 1873 cholera epidemic and the concurrent national depression to establish the first temple, Emanu-El, incorporated in 1882.¹⁶ By the early 20th century around 3500 Jews lived in Birmingham, representing a small fraction of the city's inhabitants or 1.8 percent.¹⁷

Firmly fixed in the city, Jewish women turned their attention to spiritual, civic, and feminist needs. They organized several significant groups and clubs between 1880 and the early 1900s.¹⁸ They found a sense of strength and courage as "proto-social workers."¹⁹ "*Tzedakah*" is one of many Hebrew words for charity. To Jewish women, it means to be righteous and aid the poor.²⁰ Jews hold *tzedakah* in the highest religious regard. Migrant Hebrew families to Birmingham proved to be the early beneficiaries of *tzedakah* or assistance provided by early Jewish women organizations. These charitable groups, formed by the women, first developed out of an active synagogue life. However, most of the groups provided services to more than Birmingham Jews.

¹⁵ Mark H. Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie: The Birmingham Experience* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1974), 62.

¹⁶ Rabbi Morris Newfield, "The History of the Jews in Birmingham," in *The Reform Advocate*, (November 4, 1911), ed. Emil G. Hirsch. Birmingham Public Library Digital Collections, <http://bplonline.cdmhost.com/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=%2Fp4017coll8&CISOPTR=1412&REC=0&CISOBX=adler> (accessed November 29, 2009), 7; Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 4.

¹⁷ LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 46. According to the Jewish Virtual Library, 9000 Jews live in the state of Alabama today, representing 0.2 percent of the population, website, <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/states/AL.html>, (accessed June 1, 2010).

¹⁸ Newfield, "The History of the Jews of Birmingham," 29.

¹⁹ Turner, *Women and Gender in the New South*, 60.

²⁰ Robert St. John, "Social Justice: The Jewish Contribution to America and Some of the Men and Women Who Made It Possible," *Judaism Pamphlet Series* (Washington, D.C.: B'Nai B'Rith Youth Organization, 1972), 18

The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Association (HLBA) established the first documented charitable group in the city of Birmingham in 1883.²¹ Initially created to provide relief for recent Jewish migrants to the city, they soon began offering housing, food, and money to anyone in need. By the turn of the century, the city's noticeably rising population increased the demand for beneficence. Besides the usual charity offerings, one resourceful plan by the HLBA provided a cow to each family with small children. The HLBA significantly served as inspiration for "new charitable and social welfare oriented organizations" in the Birmingham hinterland.²²

Pursuing these goals, in 1895, women at Reform Temple Emanu-El established the Mite Society, later known as The Ladies Aid Society. The Jewish cemetery and temple never looked better under the careful inspection and supervision of the group's one hundred members.²³ Members of the Ladies Aid Society dedicated time and energy to meet any fellow congregant's need. During the 1890s, the Daughters of Israel as well as the Hebrew Aid Society reached out to those in distress within the Jewish Orthodox community at Kneseth Israel Congregation. And the women of The Temple Chapter at Emanu-El raised money to furnish an organ and equipment for the synagogue.²⁴ According to one Jewish publication, written by Temple Emanu-El's Rabbi Newfield, the Jews of Birmingham took exceptional care of their own.²⁵

In 1898 the local chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (CJW) organized in Birmingham under the direction of Jeanette Goldberg. The CJW held

²¹ LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham*, 46.

²² Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 45.

²³ Newfield, "The History of the Jews of Birmingham," 22; Birmingham Jewish women remain interested in preservation of local Jewish cemeteries today—see an article by Greg Garrison in *The Birmingham News*, front page, March 29, 2010, "Cemetery tells story of a latter-day Jewish exodus."

²⁴ Newfield, "The History of the Jews of Birmingham," 23.

²⁵ Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 46.

weekly study groups, advanced philanthropic efforts, and sponsored local civic programs.²⁶ For example, the CJW membership provided support for the 1900 Temple Kindergarten. The school met a communal need for free child care of whites. Children attended regardless of religious affiliation. The school remains in existence today under a new name and expanded function as the Birmingham Jewish Community Center.

Jewish women soon became associated with the Daughters of United Charity. Shortly after her arrival in Birmingham in 1884 from Natchez, Mississippi, Emma Mayer Ullman came together with a group of “public-spirited ladies.” In addition to Ullman, this coterie included Protestant and Catholic women from the community. These women shared the expressed goal of opening a charity hospital in Birmingham. Ullman brought a spirit of patronage with her to Birmingham. Married to Samuel Ullman, the two shared a goal of meeting civic responsibilities. Ullman proved to be inspired by her mother, Jannette Reis Mayer’s belief that “womanhood . . . [would] guide us to that goal where strife and prejudice have no place.”²⁷ Like her mother before her, she found unity with diverse cultural groups as a founding member of the Daughters of United Charity.

The women set about raising money to achieve their objective. Within three years the group raised enough money to open the Hospital of United Charity, serving segregated black and white indigents. They did not turn control of the purse over to men, but rather continued to improve their own money management skills. This

²⁶ Newfield, “The History of the Jews of Birmingham,” 22; According to their website, the Birmingham Jewish Community Center today is attended by citizens of all ages, races and religions. <http://www.bhamjcc.org/index.php?src=>, (accessed June 2, 2010).

²⁷ Samuel Ullman, “John Mayer and His Wife: Grandmother Mayer,” *Aunt Sister’s Book: Family Stories Retold*, (New York City, Private Publisher, 1929), 19

practice counters the argument made by one historian, Mark Bauman, who suggested that even though Jewish women “excelled in fund raising... [They] turned the money over to the men to spend.” Bauman assumed that the women “used their moneymaking acumen to impact . . . men’s decisions.”²⁸ In Birmingham, however, women asserted their own power through Jewish social feminism. To be sure, the Daughters of United Charity faced many challenges along the way to maintaining the hospital, later renamed Hillman Hospital.

An important monetary donation in 1896 from the Tennessee Coal, Iron, and Railroad Company (TCI) magnate, Thomas T. Hillman, split equally between both races, kept the newly named Hillman Hospital afloat.²⁹ The women operated the hospital under the name of the Board of Lady Managers. The women frequently met together, managing every detail for the business of the hospital. Occasionally, their management approach met with opposition from among the hospital staff. Some opposition to their decisions as managers came from outside the hospital, among the community. Nevertheless, these women, especially Emma Ullman, asserted their authority as hospital managers. In so doing, Ullman emerged as a leader and mentor to Jewish women activists in Birmingham.

The Board of Lady Managers spent decades finding a permanent home for the hospital. Board members started out by renting a desired location for the hospital. They quickly learned how to negotiate rental agreements and sales contracts.

²⁸ Bauman, “Southern Jewish Women and Their Social Service Organizations,” 57, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27501315>, (accessed April 28, 2010).

²⁹ Tim L. Pennycuff, “Hillman Hospital,” Encyclopedia of Alabama, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1592> (accessed November 28, 2009); Robert G. Corley, *Paying Civic Rent: The Jews of Emanu-El and the Birmingham Community*, (Birmingham: A.H. Cather, 1982), 9.

Eventually, they purchased a house. According to the memoirs of Katie Duncan Smith, one of the founding members, in 1893 she negotiated with the absentee owner of a home they wished to purchase. The owner, living in Florida, wrote multiple letters to Smith asking for a certain price. Smith, however, stood firm on the amount she offered. Smith later wrote, "I was unwilling to pay more. Over time the owner of the lot [and building] agreed to our bid."³⁰ The women of the Board of Lady Managers learned how to navigate the male public business sphere in order to accomplish their philanthropic goals.

By 1894, the women collected enough money to construct a building in the city, only to see their hospital burn to the ground soon after.³¹ When Emma Ullman died suddenly in 1896, her daughter Leah took over in her stead.³² According to Smith's memoirs, the board continued to face an uphill battle to keep the hospital going. The death of an important member always hurts an organization. Also during this period, raising money proved difficult. To be sure, Hillman's early donation provided important funds to keep the daily operations of the hospital functioning. But the growing facility needed more money. The Hillman board, that included Leah Ullman, turned to the Jefferson County Commission for assistance.

The Jefferson County Commission gave the Board of Lady Managers \$400 per month. But the Commission, during the early years of operation, often discontinued donations depending on the financial situation of the city. Once, in the summer of

³⁰ Katie Duncan Smith; "*History of My Connection with Hospital of United Charities, now Hillman Hospital*," Handwritten Unpublished Manuscript, Located in "University Hospital Historical Collection 1886-1965," Series/Collection MC28, Folder 1.6, UAB Archives, University of Alabama at Birmingham.

³¹ Tim L. Pennycuff, "Hillman Hospital," *Encyclopedia of Alabama*, <http://encyclopediaofalabama.org/face/Article.jsp?id=h-1592>, Accessed November 28, 2009.

³² Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 9.

1893, the commissioners “decided they could no longer bear any part of the expense of the hospital.”³³

The Board of Lady Managers also met with difficulties other than financial. Smith wrote, “shortly afterward, some trouble more between the board and the doctors which extended to the hospital staff because of a decline on the forth [effort] of the doctors to get possession of the hospital--a claim which had no foundation legally or morally!”³⁴ This issue proved to be difficult. The staff at the hospital resigned and “left us with some very sick people on our hands.”³⁵ The Board not only had to contend with a shrinking budget but with the egos of certain doctors who desired to take over the hospital. The Board women also faced adversaries in the community.

In 1896, the Board of Lady Managers secured a new building on 8th Avenue North, but residents in the community filed a complaint. According to the neighbors, “We appeal to you as ladies of refinement. We beg . . . don’t put a hospital on 8th avenue north.” Some of the more dramatic reasons included, “the moans and shrieks of the sick and dying . . . the stench of the sick and dying . . . the microbic germs of disease and death bourne upon the winds and accompanied by insufferable odor.”³⁶ The practical matter concluded--“no sewer connection.” The letter, signed by over one-hundred influential citizens from the community, included influential Jewish business owners. This proved to be one fight the ladies did not win.

The hospital did not open on 8th Avenue. However, the success of the Board of Lady Managers is a testament to Emma Ullman, Leah Ullman, Katie Duncan Smith,

³³ Smith Manuscript.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid..

and their compatriots' efforts to make health care available to the public, regardless of their racial, social, or economic standing. Hillman Hospital stands today as part of the 900-bed University of Alabama at Birmingham Hospital. Jewish women rose up to meet the challenge for continued reform efforts needed in the city.

Birmingham Jewish women faced a difficult test to collect money for their charitable work during the 1914 national and local economic depression. The Hebrew Ladies Benevolent Association joined forces with the Jewish men's Birmingham Relief Society and the Daughters of Israel. They collected \$675 and offered "interest-free loans as well as temporary shelter and meals to the needy."³⁷ Many Birmingham charitable organizations at that time received government funding. However, Jewish charities operated solely on private donations. Moreover, accepting a handout from the Jewish groups did not obligate one to suffer through judgment and admonition regarding their moral status.³⁸

Reform Temple Emanu-El, under the forty-five year leadership of Rabbi Morris Newfield and his wife, Leah Ullman, prospered economically and socially during the 1920s. Rabbi Newfield and Moses V. Joseph, President of the Emanu-El, implemented important changes in the temple constitution. Responding to the women's suffrage amendment in the U.S. Constitution, they improved the temple infrastructure "to put women on parity with men."³⁹ Women now shared the same rights as men in Emanu-El and in Birmingham. Temple equality empowered Jewish women by their vote and their voice.

³⁷ LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare*, 46.

³⁸ Ibid, 59.

³⁹ Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 79.

The Jewish community in Birmingham grew to over 4,500 Jews during the post World War I period.⁴⁰ One newcomer, Dora Roth, left her progressive mark on the community. In 1928, Kentuckian Dora Landau married Benjamin Roth in Birmingham. Dora Roth quickly became acquainted with the city's melting pot. Birmingham Jews had fully integrated into a southern American lifestyle. From peddler to professional, Jews thrived in the developing urban area.⁴¹ Dora became involved in many organizations, but she became best known for her work with the Birmingham United Jewish Fund (UJF).

By the 1920s, many Jewish charities came together and formed the Federation of Jewish Charities. This coalition drew strength from the numbers involved. Both men and women served as officers and trustees. Many of the women who participated in the Federation of Jewish Charities were part of the first wave of organizations from the 1880s to the 1910s. The constituency included members of Temple Emanu-El, Temple Beth El and Kneseth Israel Congregation. The Birmingham United Jewish Fund, where Roth volunteered, served the Federation of Jewish Charities by orchestrating their local, national, and international fund raising for social services.

By 1937 Dora Roth served as the Executive Secretary. According to Rabbi Newfield of Temple Emanu-El, the United Jewish Fund represented hope for the future of Jews in Birmingham. Roth found that "being part of the community" proved gratifying. Moreover, she believed that "I filled a need to the best of my abilities."⁴² Roth also served as inspiration to the next generation of women in the faith. One such

⁴⁰ Ibid, 98.

⁴¹ Ibid, 98.

⁴² Ibid, 115.

woman, Dorah Sterne, possibly had the greatest impact on Jewish women's activism in Birmingham.

A recent graduate of Smith College and a young bride, Dorah Sterne "plunged" into "civic work as a member of the Birmingham Chapter of the National Council of Jewish Women (CJW)."⁴³ She served three years as president and later served another term in the position. From this vantage point, Sterne's confidence as an organizer grew. She participated in many local civic groups such as the Girl Scouts and the League of Women Voters (LWV). More importantly, she joined the American Association of University Women (AAUW) in 1923. By 1938 Sterne held the office of President of the local AAUW.⁴⁴ However, Sterne did not "want to just be a name on a board."⁴⁵ She felt that work had to be done to improve Birmingham. Sterne combined the forces of both the AAUW and the CJW. As a result, through her connection with various groups, Sterne did not simply concentrate on one or even two projects. She advanced her civic influence in the community, county, and state in multiple ways.

Through the combined efforts of the AAUW and the CJW, Sterne found Jewish and Protestant women concerned about wide-ranging reforms, from oppression of women by European fascists to local needs such as child labor, and public health. One AAUW meeting focused on European Fascist regimes and the oppression of women.⁴⁶ Members also remained concerned with women's issues closer to home.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 40-42; Elovitz, *A Century of Jewish Life in Dixie*, 121.

⁴⁵ Dorah Sterne, interview by Bette Jo Hanson, date unknown, interview (AR 929), Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, AL.

⁴⁶ "Says Women Face Crisis With Rights Threatened," *Birmingham News*, 1936, American Association of University Women, Birmingham Branch Papers 1907-1986 (AR 164) Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama.

According to an article in the *Birmingham Age-Herald* in 1936, the members of the AAUW sponsored a women's conference. They listened to the presentation, "Take a Stand on the Controversial Questions of the Day."⁴⁷ The speaker, Dr. Elizabeth May, Professor of Economics at the University of Alabama, stressed the urgency to become educated and involved in order to combat male attitudes toward women. Dr. May suggested that women become involved in local matters. For example, women should stay aware of any pending legislation affecting them. Furthermore, she believed that by becoming educated and involved women would advance in the workforce. The AAUW fully supported and implemented these ideas. But Sterne and the AAUW and CJW became best known for their efforts for penal reform.

A newspaper article report on the brutal beatings of female prisoners, most of whom were black, came to the attention of the AAUW. Sterne and several other members learned everything they could about the Alabama prison system, particularly as it applied to women.⁴⁸ In a 1939 interview Sterne observed, "For several years we have been interested in the prison conditions in the city, county, and state. We have discussed this question with trained social workers, familiar with prison problems; we have interviewed the county commissioners, the personnel board, and the pastors and

⁴⁷ "Take a Stand on the Controversial Questions of the Day," *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 1936, and "Women Are Too Happy For Art, AAUW Told," *Birmingham Age-Herald*, 1936, American Association of University Women, Birmingham Branch Papers 1907-1986 (AR 164) Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁴⁸ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 40; The Southern Association of College women merged with the Birmingham Chapter of the American Association of University Women in 1912. Their focus for reform centered on women rights and social concerns for those unable to speak for themselves, "By-Laws of the American Association of University Women: Alabama Division, 2 August 1926," American Association of University Women, Birmingham Branch Papers 1907-1986 (AR 164) Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama.

other groups in the city and state equally concerned about the prisons.”⁴⁹ As president of the AAUW, Sterne not only educated the members, she led them to direct action.

During the 1930s, members of the AAUW and CJW personally visited several local and state prisons in Alabama. The horrific conditions at the penal complexes moved Sterne to urge an end to the “evil effects” of “extreme punishments” inflicted on prisoners.⁵⁰ Subsequently, the AAUW recommended that the state parole board adopt fair and equitable prison policies as it concerned the treatment of prisoners. Further, they established a citizen board to watch over prison guideline enforcement and hiring practices. In March 1939, Sterne successfully brought local and state politicians and officials linked to the Alabama Department of Corrections together for the first time in Temple Emanu-El, at a meeting endorsed by the AAUW. Jewish women made an important connection that helped them to improve the local and state prison system.⁵¹ International conflict, however, soon altered reform efforts of Birmingham Jewish women.

In October 1938, the *Birmingham News* published a retrospective article on Jewish women and social reform. Titled “Council of Jewish Women Here Looks Back Over 41 Years of Loyal Community Service.” The article reported that the CJW had grown to over 200 members.⁵² Though their city-wide reform attempts weakened during World War II war drives, nothing interrupted their participation in the Alabama Federation of Women’s Clubs, Birmingham civic organizations, and

⁴⁹ Dorah Sterne, interviewed by Peggy Harris, May 27, 1939, American Association of University Women, Birmingham Branch Papers 1907-1986 (AR 164), Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, Alabama.

⁵⁰ Dorah Sterne, interview by Bette Jo Hanson, date unknown, (AR 929), Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, AL.

⁵¹ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 41.

⁵² *Birmingham News*, “Council of Jewish Women Here Looks Back Over 41 Years Of Loyal Community Service,” October 30, 1938.

community charitable efforts.⁵³ What the Birmingham News could not have predicted, however, was that pre-World War II activism by Birmingham's Jewish women was just the beginning of something larger: their role in the Civil Rights Movements to come. In this venue, accordingly, their Progressive Era social feminism established networks and leadership crucial to their activism in the 1950s and 1960s.

⁵³ Ibid.

CHAPTER TWO

BIRMINGHAM'S JEWISH WOMEN AND THE CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

Jewish women in Birmingham became well known for their local philanthropic endeavors. They also sought to educate themselves on local political issues, international peace concerns, and the community's racial problems. Their effort to generate a positive influence on the community proved important during the Depression era, particularly among the disadvantaged. However, despite a reputation to the contrary, the impact of a few Jewish women in the civil rights movement proved still more significant. Recent scholarship documents the important role of Jewish women in the southern Civil Rights Movement in places like New Orleans and Miami. This also happened in the "cradle" of that movement, Birmingham.

After World War II, Birmingham's Jewish men and women took advantage of the postwar economic boom to advance their retail, financial, and service sector businesses. In the process, women continued in grassroots social reform endeavors. According to a *Birmingham News* article published in 1952, "the Birmingham Council of Jewish Women plays a forceful and active part in community affairs." Several dynamic women, deeply troubled by racial prejudice and discrimination, took brave stands for black voter registration, school desegregation, and the elimination of police brutality. Though concerned with protecting the religious, cultural, and economic framework of their community, Birmingham Jewish women nonetheless fought against social injustice during the southern Civil Rights Movement. They proved to be fearless advocates of social reform, desegregation, and direct action against racial inequality.

Jewish women had become accomplished at forming study groups, organizing to improve social conditions, and offering aid to those in want during the Progressive Era. What started as a religious endeavor resulted in new important links with like-minded women.⁵⁴ Like the progressive Rabbi Morris Newfield of Temple Emanu-El, the leadership of the CJW encouraged members to perform humanitarian work at the local level with other Protestant groups.⁵⁵ Thus, the Birmingham unit of the CJW followed the national pattern. However, mounting racial tensions in the city proved divisive.

Decades of white governance and racial segregation at work places and in black neighborhoods barely budged until the post World War II era. Blacks made some small gains as they sought better public housing, skilled jobs, and workplace benefits. Frustrated by racial zoning and segregation, “blacks pushed out of their original settlement areas.”⁵⁶ In Birmingham, as in many other southern cities, black progress set off a wave of white resistance and hate crimes. And the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas, et. al.*, led to a resurgence of the white supremacists groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK). In one year alone, racial strife led to the bombing of fifty-nine black homes and businesses across the south. Many of these targets were in Birmingham.⁵⁷

Time magazine accurately reported on September 27, 1963 that bombings in Birmingham started in 1947. According to the article, between 1947 and 1963,

⁵⁴ Ellen M. Umansky, “Jewish Women in the 20th-Century U.S.” in *Jewish Women in Historical Perspective*. Ed. Judith R. Baskin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press 1991), 267.

⁵⁵ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 28.

⁵⁶ Raymond Mohl, “Race and Housing in the Postwar City: An Explosive History,” *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 94 (Spring 2001), 9.

⁵⁷ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear: Southern Jews and Black Civil Rights* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2001), 66; Glenn Eskew’s chapter “Bombingham” in *But for Birmingham: The Local and National Movements in the Civil Rights Struggle*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997). For an account on anti-Semitic bombings in Miami see Nathan Perlmutter’s 1958 article “Bombing in Miami: Anti-Semitism and the Segregationists,” *Commentary*, pp. 499, 501.

“‘Bombingham’ has known fifty bombings that can be ascribed to racial conflict—not one of them has been solved.”⁵⁸ However, a September 16, 1963 article in the *Birmingham Post-Herald* stated that racially motivated bombings began in Birmingham in 1955.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the article claimed that since 1963, black neighborhoods witnessed 20 separate attacks. The article did not include the reason behind the violence. Yet as the growing black population attempted to acquire additional land for homes and businesses that encroached white neighborhoods, segregationists declared war. Birmingham Jewish women, like Dorah Sterne, refused to abandon hope for social and racial justice in their city.

Dorah Sterne

A well experience activist, Dorah Sterne felt deep shame about the local “race issue” and bombings as did many other Jewish women in Birmingham.⁶⁰ Then in 1948 the KKK attacked Sterne’s beloved Girl Scouts. Hooded terrorists confronted two visiting white Girl Scout leaders teaching a group of black counselors. The KKK incident frightened the white women leaders into leaving town. The Klan’s widespread acts of domestic terror multiplied all over the South.⁶¹ Jewish women in Birmingham felt frustrated at the inability or unwillingness of local law enforcement to stop the violence and protect all citizens equally. Their frustration reached a zenith in 1950 with the bombing of three black homes. On April 21, 1950, the *Birmingham Post-Herald* published the following article, “Jewish Women Adopt Resolution,

⁵⁸ Jesse Birnbaum, “Where The Stars Fell,” *Time*, September 27, 1963.

⁵⁹ “20th Bombing Against Negroes,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, September 16, 1963.

⁶⁰ Dorah Sterne, interview by Bette Jo Hanson, date unknown, interview AR 929, Birmingham Public Library, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Birmingham, AL.

⁶¹ J. Mills Thornton, III, *Dividing Lines: Municipal Politics and the Struggle for Civil Rights in Montgomery, Birmingham, and Selma* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 2002), 161.

Condemn Negro Home Bombing,” showing how the Birmingham Branch of the National Council of Jewish Women reacted to the bombing of the newly constructed home of black dentist, Dr. Joel Boykins of Smithfield. They resolved that:

“We, the members of the Council of Jewish Women are shocked and ashamed at the dastardly bombing of a Negro citizen’s home and office on Thursday of last week. Resolved that the police Department of the city of Birmingham and other law enforcement authorities be urged to do everything in their power to pursue the perpetrators for this crime until justice is done. Resolved further that law and order and the protection of civil and property rights be guaranteed to all citizens of this community.”⁶²

Sterne and the NCJW gave notice where they stood on the racial problem in Birmingham. Other signs of opposition to racial discord appeared, such as the Birmingham Interracial Committee. Those who participated in the newly formed Interracial Committee, including Dorah Sterne, confirmed their stand for black’s civil rights.

The 1950 Interracial Committee evolved from a 1940s drive by the Southern Field Division of the National Urban League to form a Birmingham unit. The interracial chapter of the National Urban League never took shape. Nonetheless, in its place emerged the Interracial Committee, a division of the Jefferson County Coordinating Council of Social Forces.⁶³ To be sure, many of the Interracial Committee’s moderate leaders attempted to advance civil rights while at the same time maintaining segregation. Many moderates in Birmingham had not yet fully embraced the civil rights agenda.

⁶² “Jewish Women Adopt Resolution, Condemn Negro Home Bombing,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, April 21, 1950.

⁶³ Robert Corley, “The Quest for Racial Harmony: Race Relations in Birmingham, Alabama, 1947-1963,” (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 1979), 44-63.

The Interracial Committee avoided contentious issues, such as desegregation but had some success regarding achievement of black's concerns. Yet, they did accomplish the desegregation of most city elevators and initiated discussions to hire black police officers. More importantly, the Committee's dialogue among blacks and whites established lines of communication between both races.⁶⁴ The interracial membership of the board consisted of fifty influential citizens of the city, including several Jewish members.⁶⁵ Dorah Sterne's husband, Mervyn Sterne, owner of a local stock brokering firm, provided leadership and business acumen to the Interracial Committee for many years. Sterne upheld a gradual approach to end racial discrimination. As one Jewish counterpart put it, "Sterne was a good man in many respects but he was in the white leadership that wanted things to remain as they were, white."⁶⁶ Yet, his important contribution to race relations as a member of the Interracial Committee during the 1950s should not be discounted. Dorah Sterne did not approach Birmingham's racial problem in the same way as her husband did.

The League of Women Voters (LWV) grew in numbers during the suffrage movement years. In Birmingham, LWV peaked in the 1920s and declined by the 1950s. At the time, Dorah Sterne sought to revive the LWV in order to "play a positive role" in the desegregation of the city schools.⁶⁷ She set about raising money and increasing membership to keep the group active. Beginning in the 1960s, the LWV held several forums at Birmingham-Southern College, initially to discuss implementation of the 1954 Brown decision to desegregate schools. Later, when

⁶⁴ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁵ Glenn Eskew, *But for Birmingham*, 175.

⁶⁶ Buddy Cooper, interview by Horace Huntley, date unknown, transcript, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Oral History Project, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

⁶⁷ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 41.

Governor George Wallace declared that under his reign segregation would last forever, the meetings focused on keeping public schools open. Given that, Sterne stated, “I always felt it was a mistake for the Supreme Court not to have issued guidelines. I thought we should be preparing for it. Instead it gave opponents a whole year to prepare against it.”⁶⁸ Sterne found countless teachers and parents supportive of integration. Unfortunately, Birmingham City Schools Superintendent Theo Wright openly discouraged the dialogue and meetings. Further, he adamantly refused to allow integration of the city schools. Yet, Sterne and the League of Women Voters maintained a constant vigil against the divisive segregationist stand in Birmingham.

According to one of Dorah Sterne’s compatriots, “She was different.”⁶⁹ Other Jewish women who attended the Interracial Committee meetings also proved to be unique. One such woman, Betty Loeb, raised the standard for the next wave of Jewish women activists during the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement.

Betty Loeb

Betty and Robert Loeb regularly met with the Interracial Committee at the Episcopal Cathedral Church of the Advent. The recent U.S. Supreme Court decision that separate was not equal effectively put an end to the Interracial Committee by 1956. White segregationists moved swiftly, forming citizens groups committed to preserving the southern way of life, including school segregation. Segregationists pressured local and state politicians to stand against desegregation. The groundswell

⁶⁸Dorah H. Sterne, interview by Nancy Boice, April 16, 1981. UAB Digital Collections, Oral Interviews, Mervyn Sterne Library, Birmingham, AL.
http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/oralhistory&CISOPTR=114&CISOBX=1&REC=5 (accessed November 1, 2009)

⁶⁹ Getrude Goldstein, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 18, 2009.

of white supremacy cost the Interracial Committee funding and support from the community.⁷⁰ However, Betty and Robert Loeb did not let segregationist attacks stop their efforts to end racial and social injustice in Birmingham after the Interracial Committee folded.

Pittsburgh native Betty Wolfe, the new bride of Robert Loeb in 1947, brought a distinctive, bold approach to Birmingham Jewish activism. Her civic-minded father, a former cotton broker, supervised a Pittsburg Boy Scout troop. Her mother, a Reform Jew, raised money for Youth Aliyah to get children out of Germany during World War II. Betty stated, “It was unheard of for a Reform Jew to fund raise and mother did it anyway.” Betty’s father warned her about the racial situation in Birmingham. As Loeb started her married life in Birmingham, she “was appalled at the conditions” and “thought it was terrible” the way blacks were treated.⁷¹

Loeb soon learned from Dorah Sterne the dreadful situation in local prisons. She also made a trip to Bryce Mental Hospital in Tuscaloosa, never to forget the horrible treatment of the patients. Loeb considered the attitude toward blacks, prisoners, and patients “completely foreign to me.”⁷² In Loeb’s opinion, part of the race problem belonged to southerners who “grew up here and take it all for granted.” The situation no longer pricked local residents social conscience. Loeb soon proved to be conscience enough for her sisters in the faith.

⁷⁰ Corley, *Quest for Racial Harmony*, 80-103.

⁷¹ Betty Loeb, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 28, 2009.

⁷² Ibid.

During the 1950s and 1960s, few newspaper articles printed on the subject of Jewish women's organizations failed to mention Mrs. Robert Loeb.⁷³ True, the headlines often reflected social niceties and stereotypes common to the 1950s. Captions regarding fashions shows, teas, luncheons, and "hilarious" plays often dominated the society page of local newspapers. Black and white staged photographs reflected trim, chic, well-dressed women, sometimes wearing large hats, holding props, and smiling for the camera. But a closer look at the articles revealed much more.

The *Birmingham News* and *Post-Herald* articles informed the public that the Sisterhood of Temple Emanu-El sponsored inter-faith events, importantly bringing together Birmingham Catholics, Protestants, and Jews. According to other published articles, Hadassah, the Women's Zionist Organization of America, promoted Zionism by educating the public and fundraising for aid to Israel. They also contributed to many local charities. Not surprisingly, the Birmingham chapter of the CJW put words into action. Betty Loeb, elected twice as the president of the CJW, held a variety of positions for numerous terms, chaired programs, and participated on the national organization's board.⁷⁴ Loeb's outspoken, clever, confident manner served the NCJW well. More importantly, her dynamic approach had an impact on the local civil rights movement.

⁷³ Jewish Women Organizations Folder. Collection of newspaper clippings from the *Birmingham News* and *Post-Herald* 1950-1962, The Southern History Department, Birmingham Public Library, Birmingham, AL.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

According to an article in the *Birmingham News*, the CJW “Works for Better Community and World.”⁷⁵ The group had “more than 600 members,” leading the way in community service programs that included “social welfare, relief and health work, promotion of peace and world understanding.”⁷⁶ Notably, the CJW “campaigned for improved laws” and citizen voting rights. According to Betty Loeb, one long-term project put CJW volunteers in “any school that would have us.”⁷⁷ Black and white schools allowed the women to mentor teachers and students. The group also provided a wide range of assistance to the schools, from supplies to books. All children received a free eye examination by trained CJW volunteers. Any child, black or white, who exhibited a problem would be treated by a local Jewish physician, Dr. Ed Miles, free of charge. Loeb and the CJW diligently worked each year in Birmingham’s local schools, providing eye care to students, black and white. Furthermore, Loeb chaired many other significant programs for the CJW.

After the decline of the Interracial Committee during a surge of white supremacy, Betty Loeb sought solutions for the local racial struggles. She arranged for Phillip Hammer, president of an economic research firm in Atlanta, to speak to the CJW about a study of Negro public schools conducted by the Ford Foundation. According to Hammer, the rising population of blacks in urban America pushed them into “slum areas.”⁷⁸ Further, blacks and whites competed for local jobs. He also stated that both black and whites in Birmingham lacked essential social services.

⁷⁵ “Council of Jewish Women Works for Better Community and World,” *Birmingham News*, May 14, 1953

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Betty Loeb, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 28, 2009.

⁷⁸ Jim Strickland, “Understanding Called Racial Problem Key,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, January 18, 1956.

Hammer alleged that “understanding is the racial problem key.”⁷⁹ Loeb knew that the local Jewish community needed to take more action in order to make a difference. She succinctly stated that “not all of my friends share my views.” “They still don’t,” Loeb dryly added. Yet she believed that her sisters in the faith “knew it was the right thing to do.”⁸⁰ Loeb also paid a price for her activism.

Asa Carter’s racist publication, *The Southerner*, placed Mrs. Robert Loeb on its Rogue’s Gallery list. The former members of the Interracial Committee should be watched, according to the newspaper. The April/May 1956 edition claimed “another mongrelizing mob” will appear with a different name but keep the same members.⁸¹ *The Southerner*’s predication held true. Loeb’s efforts in the American Jewish Committee and the Alabama Council on Human Relations advanced her belief, and that of other former members of the Interracial Committee, that the Jewish community could improve the lives of blacks in Birmingham.

Betty Loeb faced the arduous task of motivating others to join the cause at a time when public anti-Semitism, like that espoused by radical racist Asa Carter, filled the airwaves. Yet by their own admission, Birmingham Jews escaped the virulent hate crimes that rocked other southern communities. Irving M. Engel, a vocal opponent against black convict labor, received assurances that the local Ku Klux Klan had no intention of harassing local Jews.⁸² Joe Denaburg, owner of a local mercantile business, sold the local Klavern sheets and weapons. He became a link between local

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Betty Loeb, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 28, 2009

⁸¹ “Rogue’s Gallery,” *The Southerner*. 1 No. 2, 3 (April/May 1956), 2.

⁸² Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 25.

Jews and the Klan.⁸³ Nonetheless, local Jewry adamantly opposed the Ku Klux Klansmen and their racist, oppressive hold on the city.

Asa Carter's 1955 radio broadcast blasted the National Conference of Christians and Jews (NCCJ). He attempted to connect the group with communism. Further, Carter claimed the NCCJ promoted the mixing of the races.⁸⁴ The Loeb, among others, "blackballed the radio station and sponsors."⁸⁵ The station subsequently fired Carter. By 1956 Betty and Robert Loeb began work with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) for the purpose of establishing a Birmingham chapter. During the 1950s, the AJC initiated a "massive campaign" in support of the national civil rights movement.⁸⁶ By joining the national AJC platform, the Loeb and others hoped to gain strength against anti-Semitic zealots like Carter, as well as legitimize their efforts in the local civil rights movement.

On February 7, 1957, Samuel Lubin of the AJC's Atlanta Area Office made a field trip to Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama. In Birmingham, Lubin met with the "substantial" membership of Temple Emanu-El and "key people in the community." One local civil rights activist, Methodist minister Reverend Bob Hughes, Executive Director of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, spoke with Lubin. After the Alabama Human Relations Council had been forced out of Montgomery on the heels of the local bus boycott, Hughes moved the organization to Birmingham. While Jews physically and financially supported the Birmingham

⁸³ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 18.

⁸⁴ Corley, *Quest for Racial Harmony*, 93.

⁸⁵ Betty Loeb, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 29, 2009.

⁸⁶ American Jewish Committee, "African American-Jewish Relations, An American Jewish Committee History," <http://www.ajc.org>. (accessed November 15, 2009).

Council on Human Relations (BCHR), Hughes hoped they would take on a larger “leadership role in the work of the Council.”⁸⁷

Lubin also met with the Loebes. Robert Loeb shared with Lubin his recent discussion with Birmingham police chief Robert Lindberg at the Young Business Men’s Group. Lindberg, a segregationist, nonetheless promised to stop violence committed by the “hooded sheet wearers.”⁸⁸ Lubin also met with Rabbi Milton Grafman of Temple Emanu-El. Rabbi Grafman “approved of and accepted the general program and activity areas” of the AJC. Betty Loeb believed additional Jewish motivation for change stemmed from the attempted bombing of the Conservative Temple Beth-El in 1958. The AJC brought many in the community together to advance the movement.

By 1959, the Birmingham Chapter of the AJC formed with sixty members. According to Charles Wittenstein, of the Atlanta office, Betty Loeb set up the vote on January 5, 1959. Wittenstein said Loeb “did a first rate job . . . stimulating what I consider to be an excellent turnout.”⁸⁹ At this meeting, Hughes, president of the Birmingham Council on Human Relations (BCHR), agreed to provide the Birmingham AJC a list of all “extremists and hate groups operating in Alabama.”⁹⁰ The Loebes expressed grave concern over the recent arrests of the several black ministers at the home of local civil rights movement leader, the Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth. Robert Loeb had taken the matter before the Birmingham Bar

⁸⁷ Report of Field Trip, Birmingham and Montgomery, Alabama by Samuel Lubin, Representative for The American Jewish Committee, Atlanta Area Office, February 7, 1957, Sol Kimerling personal collection.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Memorandum by Charles Wittenstein, Atlanta Area Office of The American Jewish Committee, January 7, 1959, to A. Harold Murray, New York Area Office of The American Jewish Committee, Sol Kimerling personal collection.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

Association to no avail. In addition, Shuttlesworth's attempts to desegregate the city's buses had also proved futile, in part due to a "news blackout" imposed by local newspapers, radio, and television stations.⁹¹ The Birmingham AJC supported the efforts of the Loebes, as well as Bob Hughes and the Human Relations Council, to educate the public, fight police brutality, and protect human rights.

After the Interracial Committee disbanded in 1956, the BCHR remained the only biracial group in Birmingham.⁹² The BCHR "spent most of its money financing legal challenges to segregation."⁹³ But more important, the BCHR provided a stage for blacks and whites to maintain communication. Countless black citizens shared personal, tragic stories of police brutality and violence. They spoke of racial prejudice in housing, shopping, and on the job. These accounts did not appear in the *Birmingham News* or on the local television station. But accounts of their painfully detailed experiences moved everyone in the audience. In addition, the BCHR promoted publicity "to step up school desegregation in Jefferson County" by canvassing neighborhoods and making personal contact with local citizens.⁹⁴ The members of BCHR also surveyed "all the hospitals of Jefferson County concerning their racial policies."⁹⁵ The BCHR brought integrationists together in Birmingham on the belief that "changes for the better in a community are never an accident; they are the result of people working together for a change."⁹⁶ Betty Loeb and other Jewish women activists supported the endeavors of the BCHR.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Eskew, *But For Birmingham*, 145

⁹³ Ibid, 146

⁹⁴ Letter from Joseph W. Ellwanger, BCHR President to Friends, 1964. Sol Kimerling personal collection.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

The Loeb family as well as a host of other Jewish couples regularly attended BCHR meetings. However, they paid a price for publicly supporting the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement and the BCHR. Commissioner Eugene “Bull” Connor sent police officers to record the license plates of everyone who gave rides to blacks attending the meetings.⁹⁷ The local KKK and white supremacist groups also took down the same information.

Attendees of the meetings including local activists Dr. Frederick and Anny Kraus, Dr. Abe and Florence Siegel, and Fred and Gertrude Goldstein, all received harassing, threatening telephone calls at home and at work. Terrifyingly, the KKK “burned a cross in Rev. Hughes yard.”⁹⁸ Hughes eventually left the group when the Methodist Church issued an ultimatum to stop his activist work or lose his ministerial license. The Loeb family also encountered harassment.

Betty Loeb recalled receiving “terrible threats in the middle of the night.”⁹⁹ The callers menaced the Loeb family by threatening to burn their house down. Robert lightheartedly reminded Betty that family and friends often joked they could not find their home because “the Loeb’s lived down a dirt road behind someplace.”¹⁰⁰ If their friends could not find the house, how could the KKK? Furthermore, Robert Loeb, through sources, discovered the identity of the late night callers. Betty remembered that Robert turned the table on their stalkers one evening when he “started calling the harassers in the middle of the night.” Betty Loeb refused to be intimidated and

⁹⁷ Eskew, *But For Birmingham*, 145.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 176.

⁹⁹ Betty Loeb, interview with author, Birmingham, AL., October 28, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

continued to work with the AJC and the BCHR as did others like Florence Siegel and Anny Kraus.

Florence Siegel

In 1951, Florence Siegel arrived in Birmingham with her husband Abe. According to Siegel, she brought her “northern sensibilities” South.¹⁰¹ They had previously lived in both New York City and Washington, D.C. Their first home in Birmingham located near the local steel mills proved to be a harsh environment. To be sure, the Siegel’s had encountered discrimination and hardship before their arrival to the city. Abe Siegel’s conscientious objector status during WWII placed him on the outside of respectable patriotic circles. Moreover, he lost his job during the McCarthy era “Red Scare,” due in part to his communist boss. The Siegels came to Birmingham so that Abe could attend the medical college at the Jefferson-Hillman Hospital. Florence Siegel felt unprepared for the conditions she found in Birmingham. According to her, “Birmingham was a dump,” referring to the industrial area where they lived.

They moved to Birmingham during the long dry, dusty season of summer. The community they shared with the area’s steel mill workers, in the west end of town, proved to be unconcerned with racial problems. Siegel received prompt initiation into the ways of the segregated society of Birmingham. Siegel, pregnant and tired, made the mistake of sitting down next to a black lady in the black section of the public bus. The driver called out to Siegel, “Don’t you see the sign lady?” She replied that yes she had indeed seen the colored sign but declared that, “I’m not going to move!” The

¹⁰¹ Abe and Florence Siegel, interview with Horace Huntley, April 15, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Oral History Project, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

black lady stared at the ceiling and quietly said that she would move. Siegel insisted the lady stay put. When the bus driver insisted that someone move, Siegel “sass[ed] back to the bus driver.” He promptly stopped the bus at the next stop and put her off. Siegel said that it never occurred to her that “she could not sit anywhere on the bus.” She had grown accustomed to the integrated New York City public transportation system. Birmingham proved to be far from home in more ways than one.¹⁰²

When black people at the bus stop found out why she got off, they congratulated her stand. However, Siegel “worried that she made it worse for the people who remained on the bus.” This incident motivated her to seek out “kindred spirits.” She and Abe developed friendships with those in the medical community who shared their deep concern about the racial tensions in their new home. They also met with the BCHR to see what could be done to improve the racial segregation in the city. So too did Frederick and Anny Kraus.

Anny Kraus

World War II era immigrants from Prague, Frederick and Anny Kraus quickly wove their brand of activism into the fabric of Birmingham’s medical community. They refused to turn their backs on Birmingham’s black community during the city’s civil rights movement.¹⁰³ Dr. Joe Volker recruited Dr. Kraus to the dental school at the Jefferson-Hillman Hospital. In an interview with their daughter, Ingrid Kraus, she stated that Anny had many special talents that made her well suited for work within the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Abe and Florence Siegel, interview with Horace Huntley, April 15, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Oral History Project, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹⁰³ Florence Siegel, interview with author, October 15, 2009.

¹⁰⁴ Ingrid Kraus, telephone interview with author, May 20, 2010.

As part of the “medical center renegades,” a group of academics and physicians supportive of the Birmingham Civil Rights Movement often met at Dr. Frederick Kraus’s office and home to discuss possible action.¹⁰⁵ Ingrid explained that her mother, Anny, often hosted a *jause* in their home, where she served coffee and sweets. Anny Kraus personally invested in all she came in contact with. The women in her circle of activists all state they turned to Kraus in times of need for advice, understanding, and wisdom. According to one compatriot, “anyone with problems went to Anny.”¹⁰⁶ Ingrid stated that “people would confide in her.”¹⁰⁷

Another one of Kraus’s important attributes proved to be that “she was good at fund raising.” She might telephone someone and say, “I know you just gave \$20.00 for a cause but do you have another \$20.00 you could spare today?” Her “savvy” and intuition proved to be powerful. When Kraus knew a meeting would be “stacked against her, she would get her friends to come.” She adopted endless causes and crusades. Kraus, like several other Jewish women, met with the BCHR. She worked tirelessly for the Birmingham Opportunity Center, which served special needs children. Kraus also “hosted interracial groups at home when it was taboo.”¹⁰⁸ Moreover, Kraus provided inspiration for the next generation.

Her daughter, Ingrid, formed a loosely knit interracial group of high school students during the early 1960s. Ingrid attended the interracial Camp Higley Hill in Vermont while in high school. Here she connected with youths who knew the Frank and Sallye Davis family in Birmingham. When she returned, Ingrid met with the

¹⁰⁵ Diane McWhorter, *Carry Me Home: Birmingham, Alabama, The Climactic Battle of the Civil Rights Revolution*, (New York; Simon & Schuster, 2001), 171.

¹⁰⁶ Gertrude Goldstein, interview with author, March 23, 2010.

¹⁰⁷ Ingrid Kraus, telephone interview with the author, May 20, 2010.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

black family.¹⁰⁹ Together, the youthful shadow of the BCHR met either at the Kraus home or the home of activist Sallye Davis. According to Ingrid, the simple, yet powerful connection among young blacks and whites proved to be inspiring and empowering.

Florence Siegel and Anny Kraus joined forces with others from the BCHR to protest the suspension of the black children arrested for their participation in marches held in Birmingham. They met with the superintendent of education, Theo Wright. According to Siegel, the meeting did not go well. She stated that, “We were all mothers and we felt strongly about education.” According to Siegel, they told the superintendent that, “We are protesting the idea that they would be expelled forever. Aren’t you setting this up for worse problems if you have children who will not be educated?” Siegel declared that the superintendent was “not very friendly.” But she hoped that “our protest was one brick in the wall of other protest” to make the difference.¹¹⁰

Siegel and Kraus also took time to protest a textbook on the local and state level. *Know Alabama*, a fourth grade history book filled with “romanticized, *Gone with the Wind* versions of how blacks were treated here,” proved to be the source of their complaint.¹¹¹ Printed in 1957, the authors of the first edition of *Know Alabama*, Frank L. Owsley, John Craig Stewart, and Gordon T. Chappell, detailed the myth of the Old South. Chapter VIII, “Plantation Life,” described the era before the “War Between the States,” as the “happiest ways of life in Alabama.” The textbook stated that, “owners raised thousands of bales of cotton on the big plantations with Negro slaves to help

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Florence Siegel, interview with author, October 15, 2009.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

with the work.” The description of life on the plantation included “Mammy” who smiled while she served up big platters of food. The “Mistress” of the house “is the best friend the Negroes have, and they know it.” And when the master of the plantation inquired how his slave Sam felt, “Fine, Marse Tom, ‘jes fin. We got ‘most more cotton than we can pick,” while he “chuckles to himself and goes back to picking as fast as he can.”¹¹² After trips to both the local board of education and state board of education, it would be 1970 before a new edition would be printed, even though it included little to dispel southern myths. Other Jewish women expressed concerns like Siegel and Kraus. Gertrude Goldstein proved to be an outspoken advocate for social justice.

Gertrude Goldstein

Gertrude Binder, born in St. Louis, came with her family to live in Birmingham at the age of six months. Her Russian-born father, Sidney Binder and her mother, Bessie Loveman, a Hungarian Jew, raised their family on a traveling salesman’s salary. Growing up in Birmingham, Gertrude explained that she “was very aware of the black situation but I saw very few blacks.”¹¹³ She married Fred Goldstein in 1942. Gertrude remembers, “Freddie and I were always taking up for people. I guess that’s just something that’s born in you.”¹¹⁴ Fred and Gertrude Goldstein spent the 1950s raising a family and building a successful vending machine business. But as the tense situation in the city escalated during the 1960s, Goldstein’s attention turned outward.

¹¹² Frank T. Owsley, John Craig Stewart, and Gordon T. Chappell, *Know Alabama: An Elementary History* (Birmingham: Colonial Press, 1957), 95.

¹¹³ Gertrude Goldstein, interview with Horace Huntley, January 21, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives. Oral History Collection, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

1963 proved to be a breaking point for Birmingham. The staunch segregationist ruling political class collapsed. In April, newly elected moderate leadership moved into the marbled halls and roomy offices of City Hall, watched over by a sign that read “Cities Are What Men Make Them.” Yet, turmoil simmered in Birmingham. Boycotts and demonstrations proceeded against the segregated reality of life in the city.¹¹⁵ Images of snarling, vicious dogs and policemen attacking children protestors made international news. Letters from local pulpits and the Birmingham Jail drew the public line of dissension. Then the tragedy of the 16th Street Baptist Church bombing in 1963, where four little girls died, sent shockwaves into the city. This bloody event spurred many people in the community to take action, including women like Goldstein.

Marjorie Linn, Goldstein’s close friend and local poet, wrote a letter to a local newspaper expressing her outrage over the bombing. Linn received an invitation to the next BCHR meeting. Gertrude Goldstein went with her. As Goldstein recalled, Dr. Frederick Kraus spoke at the first meeting she attended, along with Rev. Herbert Oliver.¹¹⁶ She learned heartbreaking details about the bombing and other critical facts regarding mistreatment of blacks. Goldstein confirmed that she had previously known little about the local civil rights movement due to the media blackout. She explained that “you couldn’t get it on radio and television.” She attempted to share the reality of what happened to Birmingham blacks with her friends. According to Goldstein, “I would want to talk about it and everybody would shut up.” Her bridge group “steered clear” of the subject. And at the Hillcrest Country Club, Goldstein learned that one

¹¹⁵ Corley, *Quest for Racial Harmony*, 48.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

member asked for her resignation. Many friendships deteriorated during this period in Birmingham. Yet Goldstein believed that the “friends I made during the civil rights movement are my friends today.” The changes that occurred in Goldstein’s life mirrored that of other southern Jewish women activists during the civil rights struggle.¹¹⁷ Her new friends took the place of those who refused to support the movement in Birmingham.

The BCHR met at the Y.M.C.A, the courthouse, and by 1965, a local black church, the First Congregational Christian Church on Center Street. Many more black families spoke to the members that included the Sternes, Loebes, Siegels, Krauses, and Goldsteins. These blacks also shared personal stories of intimidation, beating, and murder at the hands of local law enforcement. On January 25, 1965 Hosea Williams gave a powerful speech about the tenuous black situation in Selma. The white oppression of black citizens resulted in widespread racial tension in Dallas County. Blacks were rendered powerless to vote. They suffered greatly at the hands of white segregationists and Sheriff Jim Clark. Several black citizens testified to the BCHR that they had been falsely arrested. One attendee, the BCHR 2nd Vice President and local civil rights activist, Eileen Walbert, spoke for many who were present that day when she asked, “What can we do to help?”¹¹⁸ Williams responded, “I’ll tell you one thing you can do to help. You can take some warm, white bodies down there and show yourselves, show that you care.”¹¹⁹ Florence Siegel, Anny

¹¹⁷ Clive Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 166.

¹¹⁸ Helen Baer, Mary Y. Gonzalez, and Eileen Walbert memoirs, interview by Max Baer, October 27, 1975. UAB Digital Collection. Oral Interviews, Mervyne Sterne Library. http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/oralhistory&CISOPTR=48&CISOBX=1&REC=8. Accessed November 13, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

Kraus, Gertrude Goldstein, Eileen Walbert, and many others were inspired that day to do more.

Concerned White Citizens of Alabama

Some members of the BCHR acted on William's suggestion. As a result of the desire to form an all-white group, the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama (CWCA) surfaced under the gifted direction of Reverend Joseph Ellwanger and others.¹²⁰ Ellwanger proved to be "devoted" to the cause.¹²¹ The CWCA "formed for the express purpose, initially, of going to Selma and marching in support of the planned Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March."¹²² Rev. Martin Luther King quickly sent a representative from the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Atlanta to give instructions on how to march and avoid violence.¹²³ Rev. Ellwanger mailed a statement to potential marchers across the state. The letter read this way,

Many white citizens of Alabama have been shocked by recent events in Selma and neighboring towns. They have felt for years the injustice of their segregated society, which allows Negro disfranchisement, police brutality and suppression of dissent. The brutality in Selma and murder in Marion have focused their discontent and made continued silence impossible. In order to dramatize their opposition to the totalitarian techniques used to suppress Negroes and whites in many areas of Alabama, a group of white citizens of Alabama has decided to march on the county courthouse in Selma on Saturday, March 6 [1965]. The leader of the group, the Reverend Joseph Ellwanger of Birmingham, will read a statement prepared for this occasion in an effort to make public the suppressed beliefs of many white Alabamians.

The statement will protest: 1) the denial to underprivileged Alabama citizens of the right to vote, 2) the intimidation and fear which stifles

¹²⁰ Laura Anderson, "Silence is No Longer Golden," paper presented at the Alabama Humanities Foundation Road Scholar 2007-2008, Birmingham, AL.

¹²¹ Gertrude Goldstein, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 18, 2009.

¹²² Anderson, "Silence is No Longer Golden."

¹²³ Helen Baer, Mary Y. Gonzalez, and Eileen Walbert memoirs, interview by Max Baer, October 27, 1975. UAB Digital Collection. Oral Interviews, Mervyn Sterne Library. http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/oralhistory&CISOPTR=48&CISOBX=1&REC=8. Accessed November 13, 2009.

dissent by white Alabamians, and 3) the brutalizing and murder of state taxpayers by state law enforcement officers.

Citizens throughout the state of Alabama have been asked to demonstrate their belief in the need to create a more just society by participating in this protest march. The number of marchers is expected to be between twenty-five and one hundred.¹²⁴

In ten short days, Ellwanger's letter and "heaven knows how many phone calls and meetings" garnered an agreement from seventy-two concerned white citizens of Alabama to take their "warm white bodies" to Selma.¹²⁵ The dedication of Ellwanger, along with the direct action of the members of the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama, women such as Siegel, Kraus, Goldstein, and Walbert, led to "the first and only documented march of Southern whites in support of blacks during the Civil Rights Movement in the South."¹²⁶

The local black community rejoiced when Dr. Martin Luther King showed up in Selma in January of 1965. As the local movement merged with the national one, King generated attention for the Southern Civil Rights Movement like no one else. Over the next two months, marches and protests occurred almost daily. Tragically, so did the "jailings, beatings, starvings, and killings."¹²⁷ Racial tensions permeated Selma by March, 1965. The CWCA gave blacks more cause for joy.

¹²⁴ Anderson, "Silence is No Longer Golden."

¹²⁵ Helen Baer, Mary Y. Gonzalez, and Eileen Walbert memoirs, interview by Max Baer, October 27, 1975. UAB Digital Collection. Oral Interviews, Mervyne Sterne Library. http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/oralhistory&CISOPTR=48&CISOBX=1&REC=8. Accessed November 13, 2009.

¹²⁶ Joseph Ellwanger, email message to author, January 9, 2010.

¹²⁷ Amelia Boyton Robinson, *Bridge across Jordan* (Washington, D.C.: Schiller Institute, 1991), 77.

The CWCA, seventy-two strong, arrived in Selma on a cold, crisp March 6, 1965.¹²⁸ The Siegels, Krauses, Goldsteins, and Walberts formed part of the procession. At the Reformed Presbyterian Church they were met with encouragement given by James Bevel, a SCLC civil rights worker and Father Maurice Ouellet. To lighten the mood, Bevel jokingly told the group that when he heard white citizens would march in Selma to support the black community, he had decided “the Kingdom was coming right today!”¹²⁹ Fortunately, the virulent segregationist Sheriff Jim Clark left town for a meeting that day, leaving the moderate Director of Public Safety, Wilson Baker, in charge.

The procession started on Broad Street. Goldstein and Siegel recalled that the CWCA members marched two by two toward the courthouse, holding signs that read “Silence Is No Longer Golden,” or “Decent Alabamians Detest Police Brutality.” For several blocks the group met no one other than “Saturday morning shoppers” surprised to see the procession.¹³⁰ As the demonstrators “turned the corner at Alabama Avenue,” folks arrived aware of why the Concerned White Citizens of Alabama were in Selma.¹³¹ According to Rev. Ellwanger:

“As we walked the one block from Broad St. to Lauderdale St., and the Dallas County Courthouse on the far side of the intersection and on the right, we saw the people who had come to witness this unusual happening. There on our right, gathered in the middle of Lauderdale St., were about 100 white men (I didn’t see any women), roughly dressed and many of them armed with baseball bats or pipes, and using foul language to let us know what they thought of us. To our left, on the far side of the intersection, in the street and

¹²⁸ Abe and Florence Siegel, interview with Horace Huntley, April 15, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Oral History Project, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹²⁹ Chuck Fager, *Selma 1965: The March that Changed the South* (Fayetteville, N.C.: Kimo Press, 2004), 89.

¹³⁰ Joseph Ellwanger, email message to author, January 9, 2010.

¹³¹ Ibid.

on the grassy area around the federal building were about 400 blacks giving us words of encouragement.”¹³²

Amelia Boynton Robinson, an outspoken activist during the Selma Civil Rights Movement, recalled the events of the day: “I can never do justice to the great feeling of amazement and encouragement I felt when, perhaps for the first time in American history, white citizens of a Southern state banded together to come to Selma and show their indignation about the injustices against African-Americans. On March 6, 1965, seventy-two concerned white citizens of Alabama came to Selma in protest. They had everything to lose, while we, the African-Americans, who were deprived and on the bottom rung of the salary scale, had nothing to lose and everything to gain.”¹³³

As the white segregationists jeered, whistled, cursed, and harassed the group, the sheriff’s department arrested a few for beating a Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) photographer. The harassers attempted to create a smoke screen covering the CWCA path, however the wind blew the offensive smoke back onto the culprits. Dallas County Sheriff Deputies met Rev. Ellwanger and the CWCA at the courthouse steps. One deputy read an unsupportive telegram from Rev. Ellwanger’s bishop, Dr. Edgar Homrighausen. Rev. Ellwanger read the group’s statement. Then, as the group sang *America the Beautiful* with seventy-two voices, the segregationists tried to drown them out with their rendition of *Dixie*. A strong, deep black chorus across the street at the Federal Courthouse helped the CWCA finish *America* then proceeded to sing *We Shall Overcome*. One witness said it sounded like a battle of the

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Robinson, *Bridge Across Jordan*, 101.

choirs. Another compared the event to a religious experience. The Director of Public Safety, Wilson Baker, approached Rev. Ellwanger. He recommended that the group return to the Reformed Presbyterian Church using Church Street. As they walked back to the church, the members of the CWCA felt euphoric. When asked if she felt fear during the march, Goldstein put it this way, “No, I was never frightened. I just always felt I was doing the right thing and I felt good about it”¹³⁴

The CWCA continued to meet through 1966. Gertrude Goldstein, along with two other women, visited Montgomery during March to meet with Governor George C. Wallace and read him the CWCA Statement of Purpose. Governor Wallace refused to see them but allowed three unidentified men to meet with them. Two of the men walked out before the group finished reading the statement. One man remained, yet failed to make a single comment.¹³⁵ The CWCA continued to take direction action.

Siegel, Kraus, and Goldstein raised money for the defense of seventeen-year-old Caliph Washington. Washington, arrested, tried, and convicted for the murder of a Bessemer police officer, languished in jail with little hope of a fair trial. CWCA members sought “actions we might take in order to be most effective in hastening civil rights in Alabama,” for Washington and other blacks. Many members suffered repercussions for their activism. Gertrude and Fred Goldstein received threatening calls to their business. Local papers like the *Birmingham Independent* published hostile pieces about many members. Several lost their jobs. Reverend Ellwanger received intimidating telephone calls, forcing him to use guards at home and church.

¹³⁴ Gertrude Goldstein, interview with Horace Huntley, January 21, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives. Oral History Collection, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹³⁵ Concerned White Citizens of Alabama, Minutes of Meeting, March 16, 1965, CWCA Box, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

Reflecting on the time, Siegel remarked, “We could have done more.”¹³⁶ When asked what she believed has been accomplished by the Concerned White Citizen March in Selma, Eileen Walbert responded that, “It helped us individually, maybe, more than it helped anybody else.”¹³⁷

In short, like their Progressive Era forerunners, Birmingham Jewish women activists immersed themselves in social activism throughout the 1960s. Ultimately, Dorah Sterne accepted a position on the Jefferson County Committee for Equal Opportunity in the 1968 War on Poverty. Betty Loeb served on the board for the Children’s Hospital for many years. Gertrude Goldstein’s valiant efforts through the Panel of American Women (PAW) brought women of different ethnic, religious, and socio-economic status together. PAW would go into the community, make a five minute speech, and then take questions about personal experiences with local prejudice and discrimination. PAW spoke in “local schools, churches, and civic organizations—anywhere, in fact, from where an invitation could be secured.”¹³⁸ Collectively, these southern Jewish women, and others just like them, proved unwavering in the fight against social injustice.

Many scholars of the civil rights movement argue that “most southern Jews held back from the civil rights struggle.”¹³⁹ Jews remained guarded with public support of the black resistance for fear of an anti-Semitic reaction in the community or negative consequences affecting their businesses or professions. Yet, according to

¹³⁶ Abe and Florence Siegel, interview with Horace Huntley, April 15, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives, Oral History Project, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹³⁷ Helen Baer, Mary Y. Gonzalez, and Eileen Walbert memoirs, interview by Max Baer, October 27, 1975. UAB Digital Collection. Oral Interviews, Mervyne Sterne Library. http://contentdm.mhsl.uab.edu/cdm4/item_viewer.php?CISOROOT=/oralhistory&CISOPTR=48&CISOBX=1&REC=8. (accessed November 13, 2009).

¹³⁸ Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 160.

¹³⁹ Mohl, *South of the South*, 6.

research by P. Allen Krause, seventy-five percent of “southern Jews are somewhat ambivalent about the whole issue, but tending toward thoughts sympathetic to the Negro.”¹⁴⁰ Further, Jewish historian Leonard Dinnerstein suggested that most southern Jews may not have openly supported black rights, but a select few differed. To be sure, his research did not include women.¹⁴¹ For here, Jewish women have always sustained strong reputations as social activists, moving from non-radical reform to racial reform during the civil rights movement. Sterne, Loeb, Siegel, Kraus, and Goldstein fought against black injustice, white segregationists, and racial prejudice. They offered a unified voice that could not be silenced.

¹⁴⁰ Leonard Dinnerstein. “Southern Jewry and the Desegregation Crisis, 1954-1970”, *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 62 (March 1973), 231.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

CHAPTER THREE

“FRIENDSHIP AND ACTION,” BIRMINGHAM JEWISH WOMEN ACTIVISTS 1965-1980

The voice of Birmingham’s Jewish women activists resonated on into the late 1960s and the 1970s. As national and local leadership tried to piece together a racially divided Birmingham, Jewish women adopted new social reform efforts. The interracial groups that brought so many of these women together splintered. The fragmented membership went in several different directions. Local grassroots movements, such as Friendship and Action, “add[ed] their voice for justice and equality.”¹⁴² Other Jewish female reformers advocated federally introduced plans to combat poverty. But they all desired the same goal—social justice.

Jewish women Gertrude Goldstein, Florence Siegel, Anny Kraus, and others had joined forces during the turbulent year of 1963 in Birmingham. The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing propelled many Jewish women into direct action against racial injustice. Working with the interracial Birmingham Chapter of the Alabama Council on Human Relations (BCHR) gave them the opportunity to learn firsthand the difficulties of daily life for southern blacks.¹⁴³ The exchange of information between whites and blacks resulted in activism such as the racial rights march of the Concerned

¹⁴² Virginia Volker Papers, Friendship and Action Folder.

¹⁴³ Helen Baer, Mary Y. Gonzalez, and Eileen Walbert memoirs, interview by Max Baer, October 27, 1975. UAB Digital Collection. Oral Interviews, Mervyne Sterne Library.

White Citizens of Alabama (CWCA) in Selma for civil rights.¹⁴⁴ However, after the CWCA march and subsequent “Bloody Sunday” marches during March 1965, a schism occurred within interracial groups.

According to Goldstein and Siegel, the members of the BCHR stopped meeting soon after the marches in Selma. The Jewish women became involved in other social reform projects. When asked why the BCHR disintegrated so quickly, Goldstein recalled that some members believed they were “not needed” anymore by some blacks in the movement.¹⁴⁵ She explained that “the Black Power wanted us to step out, that was all. The rest of them still needed us. The message came to us through the Black Power . . . the Black Panther Party. They were doing things so strong and so opposite to Martin Luther King.”¹⁴⁶ Goldstein, Siegel and other women soon found new venues for their activism. This shift held true in other Alabama Council on Human Relations groups as well.

One member of the Tuscaloosa Chapter of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, Willita Goodson, marched with the Birmingham Jewish women and others in the 1965 CWCA march in Selma. She found that soon after the Selma march, her contribution to the movement changed. She explained it this way:

“The Human Relations Council (Tuscaloosa) began its demise, I think, when there came a time, when it was obvious to me and some other whites, that we were not really welcome in the black church here in Tuscaloosa where we had begun meeting. Our opinions were not needed. The only thing that was needed, and this was true in this particular community and only at that time, our money was needed and even our martyrdom was needed. Those were the only things

¹⁴⁴ Gertrude Goldstein, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 18, 2009.

¹⁴⁵ Gertrude Goldstein, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 18, 2009; Florence Siegel, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 15, 2009.

¹⁴⁶ Gertrude Goldstein, interview by author, Birmingham, AL., October 18, 2009; Ms. Goldstein could not remember specific names of the Black Power or Black Panther Party.

left for us to contribute. I think that the blacks had begun to stand on their own feet enough that they resented whitey begin present.”¹⁴⁷

After President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Voting Rights Act of 1965, blacks gained a “new self-respect [and] a sense of importance and worth.”¹⁴⁸ The “Black Power” movement put white activists on notice, including other well-known Jewish advocates for black rights.¹⁴⁹

The Montgomery Council on Human Relations experienced the same shift. Virginia Durr, a member of the Montgomery chapter felt frustrated by the black rejection. She said, “You either had to go to the meeting and sit through it or be insulted every breath, you know, by their diatribes against white people. Ah...finally I just quit going.”¹⁵⁰, Durr further explained that “a split was developing” among the younger generation of civil rights workers and those supporting the slow motion actions Martin Luther King, Jr.¹⁵¹ One member of the Birmingham Council on Human Relations, Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, explained the change this way,

“Basically it was the recognition that doors had been opened for interracial communication at many levels--from table conversation at a restaurant to conversation in the legislative halls. So there was not the need for "clandestine" meetings and planning for the opening of doors. And there was perhaps an even more overriding conviction on the part of blacks and whites that this was the time to walk through those opened doors and make things happen--especially on the political level of running for office and participating in the decisions and actions of the public square.”¹⁵²

¹⁴⁷ Willita Goodson interview with Harriet Swift, February 9, 1977, UAB Digital Collection, Oral Interviews, Mervyne Sterne Library.

¹⁴⁸ John B. Boles, *The South Through Time: A History of an American Region Volume II*. (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1999), 547.

¹⁴⁹ Jan Gregory Thompson, *A History of the Alabama Council on Human Relations, From Roots to Redirection 1920-1968*. (Ph.D. diss., Auburn University, 1983), 146.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 145.

¹⁵¹ *Outside the Magic Circle: The Autobiography of Virginia Foster Durr*, ed., Hollinger F. Barnard, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1985), 323.

¹⁵² Rev. Joseph Ellwanger, email to the author, March 29, 2010.

The “divergence in philosophy” among members proved to be the impetus for advocating “the problems of the poor and the blacks.”¹⁵³ It also motivated several Jewish women in Birmingham to establish a grassroots effort to promote “justice and equality” —Friendship and Action.¹⁵⁴

As their participation in the BCHR faded, many of the women continued to share a strong ambition to do more. Several of the founding members of Friendship and Action (FA), including Anny Kraus, Gertrude Goldstein, and Eileen Walbert, proved committed to “bring about change.”¹⁵⁵ Their plan proved to be simple yet compelling. According to a brief history written by one member, the women involved in FA came together out of a deep desire to achieve racial equality and desegregation. They believed that through the “influence of the family” attitudes could be changed in Birmingham.¹⁵⁶ They also hoped to diminish the “racial walls [that] often separated women from working publically together.”¹⁵⁷ Friendships with women of different racial, ethnic, and religious backgrounds unified their action.

By 1966 the thirty original members of FA met in “each other’s homes and brought their children and their husbands together.”¹⁵⁸ By 1967 they had forty-four members. They made a bold stand in Birmingham by breaking down segregation and promoting equality. At one of their meetings they listed how whites and Negroes could “promote equality [and] get involved.”¹⁵⁹ For example, whites should:

¹⁵³ Thompson, *A History of the Alabama Council on Human Relations*, 46.

¹⁵⁴ Virginia Volker Papers, Friendship and Action Folder.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

1. Confront your own fears and prejudices and strive to eradicate them.
2. Set a good example for your children to follow...and don't let others use degrading terms for minorities in the presence of your children.
3. If you have a choice, always use integrated facilities, stores, etc.
4. Vote for and actively support candidates that most clearly demonstrate an understanding of true brotherhood and that will work to bring about equality.
5. If selling or renting your own home or other property, do it without restriction.
6. If you encounter blatant acts of discrimination by store clerks, teachers, or other workers in public places politely tell them you don't approve, obtain the person's name and register your disapproval with the management or administration.

In addition, whites should invite blacks to their churches, buy multiracial books and toys for their children, and become educated by reading black publications or books.

Black members should “never go to the back of the bus” and “don't let whites win the stare game—when talking to whitey hold up your face and look them in the eye.”

The members of FA put action behind these suggestions in their day to day interactions with others in Birmingham. Each member “determined to do more.”¹⁶⁰

For a time, Friendship and Action members met weekly at the Unitarian Church in Birmingham. The members heard speakers, such as poet John Beecher, great-great nephew of abolitionist Harriet Beecher Stowe. They discussed items of business, such as an appeal from Selma activist Amelia Boykin “to find individual people [to help] in low-income white neighborhoods.”¹⁶¹ But they did more than just meet.

The members implemented a plan of action. Anny Kraus and other members secured a gift from the New York Society for Ethical Culture in 1966 for \$5000.00 for the purpose of promoting interaction between whites and blacks. According to Gertrude Goldstein, during one summer in Birmingham “we had an integrated play

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

school.”¹⁶² The members did not advertise the school for fear of racist violence. In addition, one member of FA escorted eight children to New York state for participation in the integrated Camp Madison-Felicia, sponsored by the Hamilton-Madison Settlement House.¹⁶³ The grant also went toward a creative interracial dance program for children in the community. To be sure, FA appeared to be the first grassroots group that promoted racial contact among black and white families in Birmingham.

Friendship and Action’s brand of activism also left its mark on local black high school students. For example, FA members Kraus and Siegel met at Miles College to teach students how to take college admission tests. As member Virginia Volker recalled, “this all seems so elementary now but this was ground breaking in the 1960s.”¹⁶⁴ Friendship and Action was not without critics, but the source of animosity seemed unlikely.

A black Birmingham newspaper, *The Birmingham Times*, posted an editorial by the owner, Jesse J. Lewis on September 19, 1968. Lewis had attended a meeting held by Friendship and Action. Titled “One Man’s Opinion,” Lewis said that “as a Negro first and columnist second, I was trying desperately to . . . determine whether or not they are sincere.” According to Lewis, he found the members of FA to be “outcasts from their own race. There was no place for them to go other than the Negro race.” He also thought the women “were of a mental nature... alcoholics or just some plain old nuts.” While Lewis reluctantly admitted that there were “good people” in

¹⁶² Gertrude Goldstein, interview with Horace Huntley, January 21, 1999, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute Archives. Oral History Collection, Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, Birmingham, AL.

¹⁶³ Ibid; According to Goldstein, two of her daughters attended the camp. The group consisted of four boys, four girls, four whites, four blacks and chaperone Deannie Drew.

¹⁶⁴ Virginia Volker interview with the author, March 14, 2010, Birmingham, AL.

Friendship and Action, he hoped that they would join the national organization of the Panel of American Women. Lewis's criticism frustrated the members of FA, yet they had come to expect adversity as part of doing social reform work. The members later felt vindicated when he campaigned for the racist George C. Wallace in the late 1970s.¹⁶⁵ However, the membership of Friendship and Action agreed with Lewis's support for the Panel of American Women.

During the late 1960s, the Panel of American Women (PAW) made national news. Articles appeared in magazines such as the *Ladies Home Journal* and *Woman's Day*. Newspapers across the nation offered headlines like "Woman's Panel Eyes Faces of Prejudice," "Women Wage War on Prejudice," and "Causes, Results of Prejudice Explored in Program." Beginning in 1956 with Esther Brown's project for her Kansas City, Missouri Jewish women's group idea quickly took root and branched out. Brown's inspiration emerged from a personal discovery.¹⁶⁶

Brown found that in the late 1940s her maid's children attended school in little more than a shack. According to an article in *The Kansas City Times*, "she went on to prod the NAACP into bringing the now famous Brown vs. Topeka case to the Supreme Court."¹⁶⁷ Also according to the same article, historian Hugh Speer once called her the "white Mrs. Brown of the Topeka case."¹⁶⁸ Besides legal action, Brown believed one way to fight "racial and religious prejudice" would be through honest, personal conversation. Her idea called for "a panel show, no bigwigs—just women,

¹⁶⁵ Virginia Stewart, "Jesse J. Lewis still an entrepreneur." *Birmingham Business Journal*. February 9, 2009. <http://birmingham.bizjournals.com/birmingham/stories/2001/02/12/story3.html?page=2>, accessed May 20, 2010.

¹⁶⁶ "The Successful Life of Esther Brown," *The Kansas City Times*, May 26, 1970.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

housewives, but there must be a Catholic, a Jew, a Negro, and a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant. It should be lots better for a change than having some professional lecturing.”¹⁶⁹ Her epiphany resonated among women seeking a way to make a difference in their community, Birmingham included.

By 1967, FA met less frequently. And in October, discussion at their meeting revolved around efforts to join PAW. In April, 1968, members made a formal decision “to be the committee for the Panel of American Women (PAW), thereby sponsoring the discussion panel here in Birmingham.”¹⁷⁰ The existing membership of FA would “serve as panelists.”¹⁷¹ Others would be invited to serve. Birmingham Jewish women Gertrude Goldstein, Anny Kraus, and Florence Siegel participated in the Panel of American Women from the beginning.

Panel of American Women groups popped up across the United States, with Esther Brown visiting each one. The first panel in the South appeared in Little Rock, Arkansas in 1963. By 1965, panels had been established in Mississippi and Louisiana.¹⁷² When Brown came to Birmingham May 2, 1968, she found an organized group of women ready to make the transition from a grassroots operation to a practiced national agenda.

Esther Brown invigorated Birmingham’s activists. She held workshops in Gertrude Goldstein’s home. She also held an open meeting at the Spain Community Services Building, attended by more than one hundred women. According to Brown,

¹⁶⁹ Samm Sinclair Baker, “Panel of American Women,” *Ladies Home Journal* (January 1965), 93-95.

¹⁷⁰ Virginia Volker Papers, Friendship and Action Folder. There is some discrepancy as to how Esther Brown connected with FA.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Webb, *Fight Against Fear*, 160.

“Once a panel is founded it becomes a community asset.”¹⁷³ One goal of the group was to “encourage both the panelists and their audience to enlarge their viewpoints, and to seek the answer to many community problems.” The PAW sought to persuade citizens to look at everyone as an individual, not just a member of a racial or religious group. Brown found that local women addressing local problems could become a powerful weapon against racist or religious prejudice. Birmingham’s FA members agreed.

With Esther Brown’s suggested program, the Birmingham Panel of American Women tailored a panel for Alabama. Women received invitations to speak on different panels. Typically, the PAW pulled from the old and new membership of Friendship in Action. Their presentations usually included a Jew, Catholic, Negro, Japanese-American, and a WASP (white Anglo-Saxon Protestant). At a typical presentation, each member of the panel gave a five-minute speech about her experiences and then the audience would be invited to ask questions. One panel that presented many times together included Goldstein (Jewish), O’Brien (Catholic), Volker (WASP), Drew (Negro), and Dagg (Japanese-American). In a recent interview, Goldstein noted that they spoke to any group that would listen to them.¹⁷⁴

According to the *Birmingham Post-Herald*, PAW spoke to a class at the University of Alabama at Birmingham. All the women “pointed out personal experiences of discrimination.”¹⁷⁵ Black and white relations remained a controversial issue in Birmingham. PAW attempted to explain that “blacks are not trying to control

¹⁷³ Mary Pate, “To fight prejudice look at individual not group panel will urge,” *The Birmingham News*, May 2, 1968.

¹⁷⁴ Gertrude Goldstein, interview with the author, October 19, 2009.

¹⁷⁵ Barbara Casson, “UAB Class Told—Negroes Seeking Pride,” *Birmingham Post-Herald*, May 9, 1969.

the country . . . they only [want] to get their share of equality, opportunity and respect.”¹⁷⁶ Every speaking opportunity included a variety of spectators. PAW went into each discussion prepared, yet they could not predict the questions that would be asked by the audience.

The Birmingham members of PAW educated themselves on who would make up their audience at any given speaking opportunity. For example, they spoke at the Booker T. Washington Business College, in Birmingham, where those in attendance consisted of “Negro students.”¹⁷⁷ The panel would be asked questions like “Do you think Negro history should be taught in white schools?” At the St. Peter’s Catholic Church, PAW spoke to “women-wives and mothers . . . Their minister is very liberal.”¹⁷⁸ This audience asked questions such as “How do you get to know Negroes and learn more about them?” PAW also spoke to the ESA Sorority. The sorority membership included “working women, not the housewife type.”¹⁷⁹ They asked PAW: “How do you feel about inter-faith dating . . . [or] inter-faith marriage?” The PAW gave spontaneous replies.

According to the *Birmingham News*, the “idea [behind PAW] is a simple one. The program itself is not.”¹⁸⁰ The panel often “startled” their audience with their replies about “extra-sensitive subjects.”¹⁸¹ When one spectator asked the panelist what she could do to make a difference, Goldstein replied, “Why don’t you start by calling your maid Mrs. and her last name?” When asked by the *Birmingham News*

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Virginia Volker Papers, Birmingham Panel of American Women Folder.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹⁸⁰ Ben Hogan, “Why Don’t You Call Your Maid ‘Mrs.’?” *Birmingham News*, June 1, 1970.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

reporter why she was part of PAW, Goldstein replied, “I must speak out.” One member put it this way, “Because our name was Panel of American Women, they expected [a group] like the Daughters of Confederacy. Then we got there and started talking nitty gritty about the sameness of the races; they weren’t always happy.”¹⁸²

Although Goldstein and the Birmingham PAW women worked toward healing hostile race relations in their community, other Jewish women took a different path toward making improvements in the city. Poverty shrouded black communities in Alabama. Birmingham set aside precious little land for blacks, who made up 38 percent of the population.¹⁸³ Racial zoning laws kept them residentially apart from whites. After World War II, many black migrants left the segregated South for industrial jobs in the North. But many remained rooted in impoverished sections of the South. Through their charitable endeavors, some Birmingham Jewish women came into daily contact with the harsh realities the black community faced. But little had changed in the post-World War II South.

By the 1960s “slightly less than 50 percent” of all blacks in the U. S. lived in the South.¹⁸⁴ Those who stayed in the city of Birmingham lived in cramped shanties or crowded into one-third of the existing public housing units allocated for blacks. Black citizens found few prospects for employment advancement.¹⁸⁵ The World War II economic boom passed over blacks who “received unequal opportunity and

¹⁸² *When Good People Speak Up: Women in Alabama Speak Up About the Civil Rights Movement*, ed. Debra Strother, (Published by the UAB Honors Program, University of Alabama at Birmingham, 1991), Profile of Deanie Drew by Dana Ross, 12.

¹⁸³ Charles E. Connerly, *The Most Segregated City in America: City Planning and Civil Rights in Birmingham, 1920-1980*. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005.)

¹⁸⁴ Joel Williamson, *A Rage for Order: Black White Relations in the American South Since Emancipation*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 254

¹⁸⁵ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics and the Black Working Class* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 83

substandard municipal services.”¹⁸⁶ A void in employment opportunities and housing left black women particularly vulnerable. In Birmingham, the Jefferson County Committee for Equal Opportunity (JCCEO) emerged from President Lyndon B. Johnson’s Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. According to Virginia Durr, who knew Johnson well, “I would say that the two things that Lyndon believes in the most are, one, he hates poverty—and the thing he loves the most is the legislative process.”¹⁸⁷ Using both poverty and the legislative process as a guide, Johnson’s Great Society program and the War on Poverty added the “virtue of defusing protest activity in the South by creating a new arena in which blacks could expend their energies.”¹⁸⁸ But whites also promoted Johnson’s policy in Birmingham.

Dorah Sterne, accepted a position in 1968 to fight the war on poverty with the JCCEO. The JCCEO Board, established in 1965, consisted of “forty-one members, twenty –one appointed by the city and twenty by the county.”¹⁸⁹ Membership consisted of twenty-three whites and eighteen blacks. The JCCEO created “twenty-four different service programs.”¹⁹⁰ The JCCEO employed up to five hundred and fifty at one time. From 1965 to 1975, the “JCCEO became a major source of employment in the human services area, had measurable impact on the local economy through its expenditures and job training programs, and emerged as a significant social

¹⁸⁶ Horace Huntley and David Montgomery, *Black Workers’ Struggle for Equality in Birmingham* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 227.

¹⁸⁷ Virginia Durr, interview with Jacqueline Anderson Matte 1976. Oral Interviews, UAB Mervyn Sterne Library Online Collection.

¹⁸⁸ LaMonte, *Politics and Welfare in Birmingham*, 200,

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 208.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 212.

welfare agency.”¹⁹¹ One division that provided much needed public service to city to Blacks proved to be the Family Counseling Association.

The Family Counseling Association, through the JCCEO, sought to “identify multiproblem families and coordinate all available public and private services as a demonstration of what could be accomplished through such concerted action.”¹⁹² Sterne considered her work with the Family Counseling Association to be an enlightening experience.

According to Sterne, jobs would be made available to minority groups in Birmingham by the federal money sent into the community.¹⁹³ From 1968 to 1970, she “employed her personal prestige . . . [and] utilizing the large number of business acquaintances she and her husband had made,” located job opportunities for blacks in Birmingham.¹⁹⁴ Sterne came into contact with bright, educated blacks in her attempt to find them employment. She said that the interaction helped her “realize how many black college graduates we have in Birmingham.”¹⁹⁵ Furthermore, she said that, “I met and got to know some of these people, and I was amazed. It shows how ignorant I was.”¹⁹⁶ Change slowly came to Birmingham.

In 1971, when the city turned one hundred, *Look Magazine* announced Birmingham, Alabama as an “All-American City.”¹⁹⁷ And in 1976, Richard Arrington became Birmingham’s first black mayor. Birmingham Jewish women changed with

¹⁹¹ Ibid.

¹⁹² Lamonte, 143.

¹⁹³ Dorah Sterne, interview with Nancy Boice, April 16, 1981. Oral History Collection, UAB Digital Collection, Mervyn Sterne Library.

¹⁹⁴ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 42.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Dorah Sterne, interview with Nancy Boice, April 16, 1981. Oral History Collection, UAB Digital Collection, Mervyn Sterne Library.

¹⁹⁷ Corley, *Paying Civic Rent*, 54.

the times. Many held positions on boards of major corporations in the city. 1970s organizations like Women for Equality, Alabama Women Political Caucus, Birmingham NOW, Alabama for ERA, and The Jefferson County Women's Center reflected membership rosters filled with Jewish women and former members of the Panel of American Women or Friendship and Action.

CONCLUSION

Jewish women who worked for social reform and justice in Birmingham proved to be different from their peers. Their socio-economic clout set them apart, yet they used this influence to improve the lives of those around them. With the exception of Dorah Sterne and Gertrude Goldstein who grew up in the South from infancy, the women profiled in this thesis came to Birmingham as young women from the North. All started families, joined temples, and grew into outspoken, confident adults. They and their families remain in the city. During the civil rights movement, historian Leonard Dinnerstein argued that, “Unfortunately, it seems that only the northern Jewish women took risks, the southern Jewish women did not.”¹⁹⁸ Who is a southern Jewish woman? One can confidently say that Dorah Sterne is southern. Gertrude Goldstein learned to walk and talk southern tradition. The others came to the South at a tender age and took root. They are all southern women in every sense of the word.

The legacy of Birmingham Jewish women’s reform quietly slipped away. The Panel of American Women faded into obscurity and remains known to few in Birmingham. Since the 1980s Jewish women have secured academic degrees, high paying jobs, and corporate positions. Unlike the Jewish women who either worked at home or beside their husbands in the family store, today they are doctors, lawyers, and entrepreneurs. Young Jewish women are unfamiliar with the activists who paved their

¹⁹⁸ Leonard Dinnerstein, “American Jews and the Civil Rights Movement,” *Reviews in American History*, 30, 1 (March 2002), 136-140. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30031725>, (accessed June 27, 2010).

way. Still, Jewish women reformers, activists, and feminist helped make this city. From a seed-bed of social feminism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, to the confrontational activism required of civil rights reform, they delivered as a section of a more just society. Further research may show that they were part of region-wide phenomenon, at the least they stand as a profound chapter in the story of Birmingham.

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