

**Riding in Solidarity:
Jewish Americans, African Americans, and the Fight Against Interstate Bus Segregation**

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In the black Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, Jewish Americans were notable for their participation. Over half of the white lawyers who defended African Americans in the South were Jewish. And the deaths of Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner in Mississippi represent merely one example of the ways that Jewish Americans risked their lives for racial justice. In my book manuscript, *Before the Freedom Riders: African Americans, Bus Corporations, and Black Protest Politics, 1920-1946*, I explore the black-Jewish alliance for racial equality, but press back to an earlier era when this relationship was still forming. I analyze the ways that bus corporations, such as Greyhound and Trailways, discriminated against hundreds of black passengers in the era of the Great Migration, whether it was through racial segregation (which was illegal on interstate carriers), verbal threats, or physical violence.

Jewish Americans served as important allies in the fight against bus segregation, stretching from individuals to organizations. Notably, Jewish citizens contested this racial inequality at a moment of heightened anti-Semitism. For example, in 1927, Samuel Siegel, a Jewish man in Chicago, witnessed a devastating episode of racial segregation on a Greyhound bus in Michigan. “As a member of the Jewish race, which is still subjected to uncivilized persecution,” Siegel wrote to the *Chicago Defender*, “I deeply and sincerely resent such incidents.” Similarly, college student Eleanor Guttman was so appalled at segregation that she sat in the black section of an Illinois bus, and was arrested for contesting the color line. Not only did individual citizens publicly denounce racial segregation on buses, but Jewish lawyers represented African Americans, and Jewish judges often ruled in favor of black plaintiffs over bus corporations. Following World War II and the tragedy of the Holocaust, Jewish Americans continued to express solidarity with African Americans. In 1946, Isaac Woodard, a black veteran, was discharged from the army and traveling on a Greyhound bus when a South Carolina police officer beat him and gouged out both of his eyeballs. In the aftermath, three Jewish organizations—including the American Jewish Congress, the American Jewish Committee, and the American Jewish Council of New York—rushed to Woodard’s defense, offering legal assistance, money, and expressions of solidarity. These are but a few examples of the Jewish men and women who fought for integration on interstate buses. As I conduct further research, I will be able to theorize about how this black-Jewish alliance changed over time.

In this project, I am seeking to answer several questions. First, I ask how virulent anti-Semitism in the United States and Europe from the 1920s until the 1940s shaped Jewish American engagement with black civil rights. Next, I wish to explore the origins of the Jewish civil rights lawyer, asking whether the advocacy of Jewish attorneys and judges in the interwar era contributed to the widespread presence of Jewish lawyers in Southern courts by the 1960s. Finally, I am interested in examining the connections between the *migration* of African Americans out of the South and the *immigration* of Jewish Americans into the United States. Many black and Jewish citizens settled in the same cities, such as Chicago, Pittsburgh, and Cleveland. I am eager to explore how these shared processes of Black and Jewish (im)migration helped to forge solidarities in an era of Jim Crow and anti-Semitism.

With the support from the Kirk and Sharon Profit Social Justice Research Fund, I will travel to libraries and archives to conduct further research into the black-Jewish alliance. I will be on sabbatical in Winter 2020, which will offer long stretches of time to read through a range of textual sources. In New York City, I will visit the archival collections of the American Jewish Committee and the American Jewish Congress. And in Washington, D.C., I will read through black newspapers, as well as the *Jewish Advocate* and the *Jewish Exponent*. Both of these trips will likely introduce me to new dimensions of the black-Jewish alliance in the interwar period.

This research on Jewish activism for civil rights will register short-term and long-term public impacts. As people throughout the United States are grappling with a disturbing rise of racism and anti-Semitism in 2019, learning about the black-Jewish solidarities forged in an earlier era of hostility and intolerance will offer crucial lessons. And in the long term, I will share this important research through public talks, student workshops, and publications, described below.

There are many ways that I will disseminate the results of this project. Once I have completed this research and return to my faculty position in Fall 2020, I intend to deliver public talks for Jewish Studies and the History Speakers Series at EMU. Additionally, I would be eager to meet with student groups, such as Hillel, to share my research. In my talk with Hillel, I would especially emphasize the role of Jewish college students, such as Eleanor Guttman, and her bravery to stand up for justice in the face of violence and arrest. As college students at EMU and across the country are active in conversations about justice, I believe that this research will offer important inspiration for current movements. Beyond EMU, I would be eager to visit schools, historical societies, and libraries. Since many of my examples come from the Midwest, this represents a fantastic opportunity to discuss Jewish history and life in Michigan and Illinois, which is often obscured in favor of a discussion of Jewish culture in East Coast cities. Additionally, there is an important legal aspect to my project, and I would be eager to present this research to the American Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. Beyond these engagements with the community and the public, I will also publish this research. Since the black-Jewish aspect of my book manuscript provides a compelling but specific overview, I might consider submitting this for publication in a history journal, such as the *Journal of Civil and Human Rights*. However, in the next two years, I will submit the entire manuscript to my editor, Brandon Proia, at the University of North Carolina Press. Proia has already expressed interest in this project, and UNC is the preeminent, academic press in African American history, where my first book was published in 2018 and I am confident I could obtain another book contract.

I am a historian because I believe that by learning from past mistakes, citizens can develop tolerance, understanding, and empathy. This current project epitomizes my definition of social justice because it illuminates the ways that two marginalized communities in American history—African Americans and Jewish Americans—forged solidarities around matters of racial justice. As victims of anti-Semitism, Jewish Americans were deeply sensitive to injustice, and gave their time, their expertise, their resources, their money, and their humanity, to African Americans at a moment in U.S. history when few white Americans would do so. These historical visions of social justice from the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s can animate current justice movements in 2019.