

**GREENSBORO VOICES/GREENSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARY ORAL HISTORY
PROJECT**

INTERVIEWEE: Rabbi Joseph Asher

INTERVIEWER: Eugene E. Pfaff, Jr.

DATE: April 22, 1982

EUGENE PFAFF: --the library with Rabbi Joseph Asher, formerly of Temple Emanuel here in Greensboro [713 North Greene Street], about his experiences in Greensboro in the early 1960s. May I get some brief biographical information from you?

RABBI JOSEPH ASHER: Yes, when I came to Greensboro in 1958, I believe it was, I came here from another congregation in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, of all places, where I was at the time during the integration fight at the University of Alabama where the first black students--black student, whose name escapes me, a woman, and where there was a great deal of violence at the time.

EP: Autherine?

JA: Autherine Lucy, Autherine Lucy, that's right. And we came here in 1958, where I succeeded Rabbi Fred Rypins who was rabbi here I think for over thirty-five years; he then retired when I came here.

I was born in Germany and lived there until 1938 and became a refugee from Nazi oppression myself, and went to England. I subsequently lived in Australia for a number of years and came to this country in 1949 for more studies and reestablishing my own career. I served during the World War II with the Australian Army.

At any rate, we came here in 1958, and it was precisely because of my own background, as a victim of the restraint on my own civil rights, that I certainly became most committed and interested and, more than that, active in the civil rights struggle. And having been, of course, in Greensboro at the time, where, as, everyone knows, the sit-in movement began, I not only could not stay away from the movement, but sought every opportunity to involve myself in it.

EP: Would you say that this was extraordinary or a fairly typical attitude in the Jewish community?

JA: Well, let me put it this way: it was very--it was typical, certainly among the rabbis in the south, that served in the south. Many of them have been in the forefront of the civil rights movement. As far as the community is concerned, not every community in the south supported its rabbi in this enterprise, but I must say that my own congregation was most forthcoming. Don't forget, I had already been here a number of years; I was not one of these Johnnies-come-lately into the situation. I had earned, I had hoped anyway, to earn the respect and the trust of my congregation, so that when I did involve myself in the movement, while there may have been individuals who may have been somewhat perhaps embarrassed or [?] by this involvement, but the leadership in the congregation was entirely in support of me, and that was already as part of the tradition of the congregation.

My predecessor, Fred Rypins, also a man much devoted to human rights, while it was not at that time a very active life, because the movement had not begun at that time, but nevertheless, he made it very clear that he was a non-discriminatory person, had association with the black clergy here in the city.

And so when I came, the congregation had already been primed, really, for this sort of thing--I don't want to take all of the credit for it; Rabbi Rypins had laid the foundation for it. I made it very clear to my congregation that I could not stay away from this, for the reasons that I outlined earlier: that having been a victim myself--not to the same degree, of course. But--yeah?

EP: Was this done in the context of the service or just individual conversations?

JA: It was done in the context of the service and I preached on it from the pulpit, and then of course, in my relationship with various of my colleagues within the ministerial association at the time--it was called the Ministerial Fellowship or something like that. I remember that we used to have all kinds of prayer meetings and I was not just satisfied at leaving it at that.

EP: And that was that integrated. Was it not? Or was it?

JA: Initially, it was not. I believe that gradually we--one or two or three of the black ministers would come in on it. But, we had prayer meetings during the time when we had the demonstrations on Elm Street, particularly at Woolworth's, I believe it was. And I stated at the time that I didn't think that prayer meetings were all that was needed; that we needed to be more active and activist in the--first of all, participate in the marches. And the one clergyman who was most supportive of this was Monsignor [Hugh] Dolan [of St. Pius X]. The Catholic Church was very committed to this, he had the support of his hierarchy, and so whenever the black clergy wanted to have a white clergy participate in

any of these things, it was Monsignor Dolan and myself that the black clergy was more than eager to call upon us.

EP: Did they call upon you frequently?

JA: They called upon us quite frequently. First of all, I think that as an aside here, I remember we used to have--it is no longer customary, I don't think anywhere in this country, anymore--we used to have Religious Emphasis Week. I don't know whether you remember this; you are too young for that.

Many of the universities would have what was called Religious Emphasis Week and used to invite ministers of different denominations to come and spend a couple of days on the campus. I remember spending a couple of days of Religious Emphasis Week at A&T College, it was called A&T College at the time [now North Carolina A&T State University] and the president of the student body was none other than Jesse Jackson. And I met Jesse Jackson at the time, he was with my host at A&T; I also used to go to Bennett [College].

Now, there again, it was mostly Dolan and myself who got called upon by these at those times called "Negro Universities" who felt that if you invited either Rabbi Asher or Monsignor Dolan, you would have a very forthcoming kind of response from us. I had earned, I believe, the trust of some of the black clergy, and so, very often, what would happen, is on the Sunday, shall we say, before the march took place, or even during the week night, they used to have a service at one of the major churches. I think that it was over there on South Market [Street] or something like that, is there a South Market?

EP: Well, yes, East Market.

JA: East Market, East Market. There was a very large church there. I think there was man by--Reverend Anderson I think was the minister. He may not be there anymore, I don't know. And we used to meet at the church first, and then from the church the marches began. And the people were sort of--like a pep talk was given to them. And there again, the two clergy, the two white clergy that always showed up for these things was, again, Dolan and myself. I was asked to preach on many occasions at this particular church.

EP: Were you ever asked to speak on certain issues or was it totally up to you what you would say?

JA: It was totally up to me, of course. Now, very often, you see, as a white clergy person, I don't have the same kind of style that the black preachers had. I was always very fascinated by the black preachers, and fascinated by a man particularly who used to come here quite often from CORE [Congress of Racial Equality]; what was his name?

EP: James Farmer?

JA: James Farmer. I used to be quite friendly with James Farmer, and when Martin Luther King came on several occasions--and I remember one very interesting conversation I had with Martin Luther King--I don't like to drop names, but I had in this conversation, I asked him once as to, "Why is it that you are coming to Greensboro? Aren't there places where it's much worse than that? You should go maybe to Mississippi or Louisiana or in South Carolina."

And he made one very interesting observation, which I've always remembered. He said, "You don't go where the door is locked. You go where the door is slightly ajar. That's where you go, and there you open the door wide."

You see, going to Mississippi would be diminishing returns on that. But here, because the atmosphere in a community like this was a great deal more forthcoming and therefore, that's the place. You see, I always felt then why are we the ones always sort of involved in that, but he taught me this lesson: that you don't go where the door is locked; you go where the door is ajar and try to open it wide. And he had--I forget now the exact phrasing that he used in one of his sermons that he delivered, you know. "The door--we open the door and it is ajar and we're going to break it wide open," and that is exactly what happened here.

Also, of course, there were many of the leaders in the community. I remember the chairman of the board of education at the time, you know, who--it was shortly after the 1954 decision [*Brown v. Board of Education*] decided--

EP: Hudgins?

JA: Hudgins. Ed Hudgins, with whom I have remained friendly ever since then. And Ed Hudgins wanted to comply with the--of course, it was tokenism, to be sure, but it was a compliance. The city of Greensboro did not want to say, "Now we're not going to do this. We're going to be among the rejectionists, that we won't comply." True, it was tokenism in the beginning.

And, I again, in my own little way, I made it a point in my own religious school, for instance, in my confirmation class, I remember that very distinctly, in my confirmation class that we always have at the end of the year, we have an examination; these are kids in the tenth grade. And that particular year, I said, when the integration came more intensely in '60, '61, '62, I told my kids that, "There will be no examination this year for confirmation class. The only test of your confirmation will be when these young black children come to the school, and if I--and if you are the one who will at lunchtime invite a youngster to sit at a table with you, you see, that will be the test. If you do that, you will be confirmed. If you do not do this, then I will not confirm you." And I--

EP: Did you receive criticism from their parents as being a little too forceful?

JA: Not really. I must say that the congregation was a very exceptional congregation. I mean you had the top leadership in the city who were members of my congregation. I mean people like the late Herbert Falk, Stanley Frank. I mean these are people with significant names: the Cones, Ben Cone, certainly, and the younger Cones. I mean these were people who were very supportive of me, and because they were supportive, the congregation somehow didn't wish to rock that particular boat, either. They were supportive of me. They sometimes advised, perhaps greater, maybe perspicacity, perhaps a little bit more--to tread more softly than I would have otherwise done, but they were supportive.

So much so that we even had a black family as a member of our congregation, which was in those days, was unheard of, in any church in the city of Greensboro. We had a black family; the man was a professor at A&T College, his wife was a librarian. They are still members of the congregation, and their children came to Sunday school, and there was not a single person in the congregation who would have said, "Now, this cannot be," and I was very proud of that. When the man's membership came up, you know you have a system of membership that comes up before the board of directors and the board of directors vote on it. And the board of directors, when this man's name came up, and because he does not have a particularly Jewish name, one member of the board asked, "Is this the black professor?" And the president of the board said, "This is not a question that is appropriate for this Board. The question is 'Is the man Jewish or isn't he Jewish?'" And the persons who asked the question apologized for the record. And that night I was probably the proudest rabbi in America at that time. Don't forget, these are days of great tension, and these people are still members of the congregation; the children are now grown, I am sure. And that was the general attitude, and I take credit, perhaps, in paving the way, for some of this.

EP: Well, how about the other clergy in Greensboro? Were they critical of you?

JA: No, not really, no. I don't think anybody was critical of me. What happened was--I have been trying to sort of wrack my brain after you wrote me this letter as to now can I list another clergy in the city that sort of was with us at the time in an upfront kind of a way. You know, it's difficult, difficult to remember someone.

I think they were, they were all supportive, in a--but in a sort of quiet kind of a way. I don't think they were as willing to go out on a limb, if you--and some of them probably, much to their own embarrassment. They would have probably liked to do it but either their congregations weren't as supportive or might not have been as supportive as my congregation was of me, or--I don't think there was single clergyman that I know that

was opposed to this movement. But not being opposed to the movement and being up front in an activist kind of a way about it--

EP: So you and Monsignor Dolan are the only white clergymen that attended these prayer meetings and--

JA: Not the prayer meetings. I'm talking about going to the ministers, going to the black churches and speak.

EP: Oh, I see.

JA: You see, we were invited, you know, to speak. At that time, you know, the black people, when there was a white clergyman available, you know that to them was a very great encouragement, too. It's not like how it is now today. The movement says, "We don't need the white support quite to the same extent." But, in those days, it was still very much sought after that when a white clergy showed up at these things, it was very encouraging to these people, and we tried to do that without being sort of patronizing about it--that's very important, sometimes you can be very patronizing about this, and we avoided this patronization.

EP: Well, how about the prayer meetings that were conducted once the demonstrations began in 1962 and 1963, when they were held in the large black churches and this was prior to the marches. I am thinking specifically the period of three weeks or four weeks in May and early June in 1963. Did you attend those prayer meetings?

JA: Well, I did not [attend] every one of them. I attended those, you know, first of all I was available to go, and I attended them at the invitation of the clergy.

EP: Do you remember who amongst the black clergy specifically invited you?

JA: I think there was a Reverend Anderson, if I'm not mistaken. I've been trying to think of his name. He was of the number one; it was also a very fine, beautiful new church on East Market, I believe it was, and he was sort of very much in the forefront of this.

EP: Would that have been Mount Zion?

JA: [whispers]

EP: Well, as I understand, there was a committee formed amongst the four major black activist groups here in town: the Ministerial Alliance, the CORE, NAACP [National

Association for the Advancement of Colored People], and the Greensboro Citizens Association, and Reverend Anderson was in charge of the mass meetings.

JA: It was Anderson then. Oh, I see. Then I was not wrong, yes.

EP: Did you participate in the marches?

JA: I did participate in the marches--not every day--you know, I participated in the marches whenever I felt that A) I could make myself available or I could be useful. And sometimes I wouldn't participate in the marches, you know, to be up front; I wanted from time to time to show I'm just one of the people, because there were other white people who were participating in that also. [both speaking at the same time]

EP: Well, I wanted to ask you that--

JA: You would occasionally see a white face in the crowd because there were people, other than myself and Father Dolan, from the rank-and-file who also felt a kind of affinity for this.

Perhaps it may be of interest. You see, I remember one night when I came to Reverend Anderson--the Reverend Anderson invited me--and he said to me now, "Rabbi, when you speak tonight, why don't you compare your own experience with the experience here?"

I thought, you know--I had spoken to him prior to this. I was expelled from school and, you know, I was the only Jewish student in my class, and all of the suffering that I had endured because of that, because of the Nazis, and he wanted me to draw a parallel to this. I declined that, I refused to draw a parallel.

EP: Why did you decline that offer?

JA: Because, you see, it wasn't the same. Don't forget, in Germany, the establishment, the governmental establishment, was behind the persecution of the Jews. But in this country, you see, the governmental establishment certainly the federal establishment, was supportive of this. After all, they did want to enforce the '54 desegregation decision, the president did send troops to Little Rock, and it was the federal establishment that protected the blacks against the whites. In my situation, it was the reverse. I was not about to compare the conditions of the black people in America with the conditions of the Jews in Germany.

EP: Were there not certain comparisons of racism in any way?

JA: Oh, there were certain comparisons, but you see, certainly, I would tell the crowds that I, having known the pain of racial discrimination myself, my affinity lies with them. But I was not about to say, "Now look what happened in Germany, the same thing might happen here."

And you know, it is very difficult sometimes to decline that, because, you see, the crowds, you see, there is something very--it was then, at least--there was something very seductive about speaking to a black audience, to a black church audience. You know, they are very responsive, they are very responsive to the preacher, they are very--they applaud, they will respond with "Amen," and applaud, you know. What does one say? "How sweet it is!" And then you are liable to say things that you really didn't intend to say just to get this applause. You have to be very careful about this; one mustn't become seduced into saying something that you don't really want to say, but you are saying it because you know the enormous response that will come from it.

I remember the sermons of the black clergy. It was extraordinary, the sermonizing. I remember one minister, whose name escapes me, there was a wonderful song that they used to sing. Is it--what was that song about? "Walking, Walking, Walking," with the shoe leather, use up that shoe leather; it was a very dramatic song. There was one--and black clergy have a wonderful way of speaking in parables, in the simplest of parables. I remember one preacher, and I have used it since then as a paradigm as to how you can really put a story across in the most--the word is not primitive--in the simplest kind of a way.

Here is the sermon: "I have a friend whose name is Zachariah Zachariah and he worked for one of the companies and the company--the boss told him that every week he should put away some money into the bank and he did put it in the bank. And then came the Depression and the bank went bust. But the banker was a nice man and decided to pay off whatever money he had in alphabetical order. But of course by the time he got to my friend Zachariah Zachariah, there was no money left. That's right. So after the Depression was over, he started again to save some money, but before he did this he changed his name, he changed his name to Adam Adam."

EP: [laughter]

JA: "So he put his money in the bank, and again the bank went belly-up a few years later. And again, the banker was very, very fair about this and he decided he was going to pay off the people in alphabetical order, but this time he would start at the end. You see, this is the black experience."

That sermon--I heard that sermon in 1962, it was twenty years ago, it stuck with me. And you see, we as white clergy, and certainly as a rabbi, we don't function on that level. We function on a more intellectual level and a more, I don't know, on a more rational level, while these people, in a most visceral kind of a way. I always felt, you

know, that I really haven't got it, to talk to these people, even, because I come into this--I came to this movement from a very intellectual conviction, from a conviction of my own religious commitment, the Prophets, you see. I could quote the Prophets, you see, but I couldn't tell a story about Zachariah Zachariah and Adam Adam.

EP: So your role was not so much to--as an example of an oppressed people, or specifically an individual who had experienced racial discrimination, but as a member of a sympathetic member of the white clergy. Is that basically your role?

JA: No, not enough, that is not enough, not enough, not enough. I thought I spoke from the Jewish tradition. As a Jew, I could not sit still while this was going on. And the very fact--if you look at history, if you look at the history of the movement, among those whites who were involved in the movement, you see, the Jewish community was disproportionately represented, disproportionately represented, in unbelievable numbers. And it applied particularly in the southern, in the southern environment.

The rabbi, I believe, in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, who really went out on a limb--that's really the heart of Dixie--Hattiesburg, Mississippi for crying out loud, that's the heart of the Confederacy, that's where it was, and he went out on a limb. And true, his congregation was not as receptive to this as mine was, for reasons that are too difficult to determine, but nevertheless--He also, a man by the name of Rabbi [Charles] Mantinband, who then became nationally known as one of the few of the white clergy--but he also came from the Jewish tradition. Or--there was a man like [Rabbi] Jacob Rothschild in Atlanta who was very closely associated with Martin Luther King, who marched with Martin Luther King from the very beginning. And there were any number of men of that field, and more so just as much as when people came down to Selma, when a whole slew of rabbis came down from the North, from Cleveland, and from Chicago and from whatever it is, and some of us who were down here at first were a little bit resentful of that.

We said, "Listen, you're coming here, you see, you're coming here for the glory and in two days you're back up North, and that's the end of it, you see. And look at your own back yards. While we are out here and we are doing the work on a daily basis. You see, we have to contend with that on a daily basis." I remember once--one of the motels on--as you come in from the North, from North. What's that--

EP: I[nterstate]-85?

JA: Well, I don't know what it's called now--what it was called then. It was a main street somewhere, Bessemer? Not Bessemer. Anyhow. And a black physician came through in the middle of the night and the motel refused to put him up overnight and he happened to be a very distinguished man, and very--well distinguished. And I spoke to a business

person here--I don't want to mention his name--who had a contract with that particular motel and I said, "You cannot tolerate this. Would you cancel the contract with this motel or at least not renew it until they change their policy?" And they did.

EP: Was that exceptional for Greensboro or was it possible to approach the business community on this basis?

JA: It was possible. And there again, I appealed to this person from the Jewish point of view, the Jewish person. You see, I never made any bones about the fact that--

EP: So this was a Jewish--

JA: A Jewish person, this person, yes, yes. And I told him that as a Jewish person, he has the obligation to speak up. He would otherwise not have been that inclined to do that; that he would have to speak up. How could he square this with his Jewish conscience? And he was persuaded--perhaps reluctantly, but he was persuaded.

EP: How about the rest of the business community that could not be approached in terms of the Jewish tradition? Were they more intransigent? Was it possible to approach them?

JA: I really don't know. I really couldn't tell.

EP: Did you and Monsignor Dolan discuss this individually between yourselves?

JA: Yes. Yes. See now, Monsignor Dolan was not the kind of person--in contrast to me, shall we say, and I am not saying this in any pejorative sense--Monsignor Dolan was not the kind of person to get up and make a fiery speech; it was not in his nature, he was a very retiring person. He came as a Catholic priest, a man dedicated to the humanitarian principles, is how he came. He would maybe say a prayer at these meetings, or he would maybe say a few words, but he was not the kind, he was not that gregarious a person as I am. And again, I'm not saying this--because he had as much courage or more than I have. I didn't have that much courage because my Jewish community, while they were perhaps not that crazy about being up front, but because of their Jewish commitment, they couldn't very well say, "The rabbi has no right to speak," because it is just not in the nature of the beast.

EP: Did he indicate that he had much support in the Catholic community?

JA: Well, he did not have that much, but he was satisfied to have the support of his hierarchy. That was all that he needed. You see, I don't have that; I don't--we don't have that

system. I mean, he didn't have the fear that the hierarchy was doing to let him down, the hierarchy was behind him. Whether the rank-and-file of his congregation were behind him was of little concern to him, really. I think it was of little concern to him.

EP: Did you do anything besides attend the--did you attend any meetings between the Human Relations Commission under Bland Worley, speak to members of the city administration, the segregated operators of the segregated businesses themselves? Did you attend any of these meetings?

JA: No. No, I did not. I did not. I don't think there were many clergy who were involved in that kind of thing. We--to be honest with you, and I think--I did not go into this to gain any political clout or to exercise any. And I am not saying this out of any false modesty, I really don't. I came to that--I never had any political ambitions or anything like this. I came to this because my Jewish conscience bade me to do that. And my congregation, to that degree, was totally supportive of it. And that is why I have a very soft spot for this congregation, and because they supported me in whatever my indulgences were in those days.

EP: In terms of concluding this segment of the interview, did you ever suffer in terms of hate mail, hate calls, that sort of thing?

JA: I used get those in my office from time to time. I didn't get that much at home. I got some of it at the office and, of course, they were all anti-Semitic in nature too, you see, because after all, the White Citizens Council, the Ku Klux Klan--although the Ku Klux Klan was not really that active here in the city, really. But there were people who would sort of ventilate their anti-Semitism in that connection.

EP: So it was individual rather than any organized--?

JA: No, not organized, and it was all anonymous, of course, all anonymous. I spoke to a number of people in the community from time to time who were in positions of leadership--Jewish community--oh, maybe the president of this or president of that. And I said, "You know, isn't it time perhaps for you to be up front and integrate your organization and do this that and the other?"

Well, with a limited success because they were also bound by different mores at the time. They were perhaps, sympathetic to the cause, but were not quite willing to go out on a limb for it. There weren't that many people who went out on a limb for it, I'm going to tell you. There were some people.

And, of course, you had a very open administration in the state. You had men like Terry Sanford, you had men like Luther Hodges [governors from 1954-1965], who were

in principle committed to this endeavor, to civil rights. But the rank-and-file, you know, you have to make a living here too, and there were difficulties, there's no question about it. But, again, the very fact that the movement started here--the sit-in movement in particular--the movement started here, because there was a fertile ground for it. They knew there wasn't going to be anybody shot in the street, that's about it, and you know, I don't think we had any serious violence. Do you recall any?

EP: No, I don't. About the only serious incidents were they publicized the fact that so many people were kept at the polio hospital [Evergreens]. And there was the, what really brought about the breakthrough, in many people's opinion, was when they sat-down in the Square and there was the feeling that this was a prelude to possible violence. And that's as far as it went.

JA: There was never any real violence. And the reason for that is, the reason for that really was because the people here were by and large reasonably forthcoming to this. They weren't ready to go and say, "Now we're going to uproot this whole town and do it this way." But on the other hand they weren't going to fight this with violence. I don't recall--a few people arrested here and there, but that happens. But there wasn't really the kind of violence that you saw in Selma, that you saw in Birmingham, that you saw in Montgomery. It never, it never--because this is a very sophisticated community.

I've always been fascinated by this community. It's a very sophisticated community. I mean, you had people like-- what's his name--[attorney] McNeill Smith and you had [*News and Record* editor William] Snider. I mean these were people--very sophisticated men, and men who wielded considerable political power in the community. And there was no doubt where they stood, there was no doubt where they stood. Or [school board chairman] Ed Hudgins, you see.

And, you see, even--I remember the discussion at the time, there was a black hospital in town. I forget the name of it--

EP: L. Richardson.

JA: Yes. And by the way, [attorney and judge] Richardson Preyer, another typical personality, who, he wasn't opposed to this; I mean, he wasn't going to fight this thing, of course not.

I remember the negotiations at the time about the hospital: whether it should be integrated, whether it should be closed or it should come into Moses Cone Hospital. And yet again, I spoke to some people who said, "There's a hospital called Moses Cone Hospital?" My God, it just, it just demonstrates the Jewish presence.

On the other hand, you see, the black community was also at odds with each other also. Should they close Richardson Hospital or should they not close Richardson

Hospital? On the one hand, they wanted to integrate Moses Cone, and on the other hand they didn't want to give up the Richardson Hospital. So they didn't have a real opinion, a uniform opinion on this subject. There were certain doctors that felt that they couldn't get admitted to Moses Cone Hospital, perhaps because of their qualifications, I don't know, I am not the judge of that.

But, you see, they were also caught between a rock and a hard place. On the one hand, they didn't want to close L. Richardson Hospital, on the other hand they didn't want an exclusively black hospital. It was very difficult, you know; their livelihoods were at stake also.

But, there again, when it came to Moses Cone Hospital, I mean, I always felt very proud of the fact here is a Jewish presence, the Cone family, obviously, an eminent family in the community who were civic minded and they could have called it something else, but it's Moses Cone. It doesn't take much to discover that there was Jewish involvement there. That is why, in this town, in contrast to other towns in the state, there were more Jewish professionals in this city than any other city in North Carolina. There were a handful of Jewish doctors in Charlotte, maybe one or two, at most, in Winston Salem. Here, they were by the dozens. Why? Because of Moses Cone Hospital. Moses Cone wouldn't deny Jewish physicians to practice while other hospitals did. Even-- what's the one in Winston Salem? The university hospital.

EP: Bowman Gray.

JA: Bowman Gray. Very few Jews. They had one or two eminent professors who were Jews at Bowman Gray, but the place didn't run with Jewish doctors, while here, it's--

EP: So you are saying that the Jewish community was very supportive--

JA: Very supportive!

EP: --of the civil rights movement, and was that, in part, accounted for its success?

JA: I didn't say that, no. I'm just saying that the Jewish community did not lag behind. Let me put it this way, the Jewish community did not say, "This is none of our business." I was told by many, by several white clergymen, "It's all very well for you to go out there. How many blacks are you going to get in your church?"

EP: So they were afraid that if the barriers came down, they would be asked to receive a great many blacks into their congregations?

JA: Sure.

EP: Doesn't that though, indicate how much they misread the strength of the black church in the black community? Blacks weren't going to go out to white churches in any large numbers.

JA: They misread everything. They misread everything, you see. And I am not claiming any particular foresight on this. I am just saying that because of my own personal experience--although it was on a different level--of my own personal experience, I figured, you see, you can win a situation like that. The reason why we lost in Germany is because there was--is not because the Nazis were so strong or the Jews were that weak, the reason why this happened is because the vast majority of the people simply didn't say anything, they stood there silently.

I'm going to tell you something. I remember my children were small in the Little Rock time [September 1957 school integration crisis]. I used to sit my children down--they were maybe five or six years old, the older one, I think, eight years old maybe, I forget now what year it was--I made them sit down in front of the television set every night and watch [events in] Little Rock [on the news]. And I said to my children at the time, because I am a great believer in subliminal education. I said, "Listen, you know, your father walked like this to school from 1933 to 1936. For four years I walked like this to school; there was only one difference, that the German army was protecting not me, it was protecting others against me, and don't you ever dare do this to another child, what has happened to me."

And that is what I told my confirmation class when the black children came to Grimsley High--it wasn't called Grimsley at the time, it was called Greensboro High, I believe. I said, "If I hear, by any chance, that you have taunted a black youngster, you are done. You are done as far as I am concerned. You will not participate in confirmation, I will not have it." And it was hard[?] for these kids, because the taunting of perhaps their own white classmates. But after I told them about my own personal experience, I think they were persuaded. It was not that many of them, ten or fifteen.

EP: Was this kind of a dilemma for them? Because at least one sociologist or psychologist has suggested that the dilemma for the Jews here was that here was another scapegoat, in effect, that is going to relieve them from being the traditional scapegoat.

JA: Well, there may have been among blacks, particularly after when the tensions began between the white and the black communities, even those that were in the forefront of civil rights. And the Jews, you know, maybe we sort of [felt] if it weren't us, it would be them. So the idea, maybe, of being supportive of white supremacy was in the best of Jewish interest, but the Jews never took advantage of that. Let that be said in all candor.

The White Citizens Council, there was not a Jew in the White Citizens Council anywhere in the South. So you might say, "Well, they wouldn't have them." Certainly, the Ku Klux Klan wouldn't have them. But I would venture to say that even if the Ku Klux and the White Citizens Council would have had them, the Jews wouldn't have gone, you see. The Jews may not have been, you know, wholeheartedly and a hundred percent in the forefront, and I am not saying that every member of my--of the congregation at Temple Emanuel in Greensboro would have said, "All right, I'll come with you tonight and march." You know, you have to have a very special kind of a sentiment. You know, to me, the marching--it was not my style. I don't do it now when it comes to Soviet Jews, I don't do it for Jewish causes, I really don't, because it is not my style to march. It's not my thing, you know? It's too messy; you know what I mean?

EP: So you weren't asking them to come out, you were just saying that, "This is something that I as an individual do."

JA: I'll do it because I can overcome my reluctance to this. I am very reluctant. I don't go to demonstrations. We have demonstrations in San Francisco in front of the Soviet Consulate. I don't go to these things. I am not one to carry a placards, it is not my nature. Nobody can deny that I am very much in favor of saving the Soviet Jews, it's just not my style to do that, I'll do it in other ways. I forced myself to these marches, and not because I was not convinced of the cause, [but] because it was contrary to my own personal style of functioning. And so what I wouldn't do, I wouldn't ask for other people to do.

But certainly the Jewish community--I don't think there was a Jewish person of any consequence in this city who would have said, "Let's put those niggers down." I don't think there was.

EP: Well thank you very much, rabbi.

JA: Okay.

[End of Interview]