A Temple Is Bombed—Atlanta, 1958

ARNOLD SHANKMAN

I

In 1958 several Southern synagogues were bombed, causing a number of the South's 548,650 Jews to wonder whether they would soon become the targets of religious bigotry. Although nearly all Southern gentiles deplored these acts against Jewish houses of worship, it was not until an Atlanta temple was dynamited that they forcefully and dramatically demonstrated their disgust and showed their determination to stop the anti-Jewish violence. Five men who allegedly had bombed the Atlanta congregation were arrested, and one of their number was brought to trial. More important than the trial, however, was the fact that the disaster that had befallen the Hebrew Benevolent Congregation (The Temple) forced Atlantans to practice the brotherhood they had so long preached.

During the fifties many Southern Jews thought that they were facing a complex dilemma. Some favored segregation, and many were indifferent to the Negro's struggle to gain his civil rights. A third group representing a significant number of Southern Jews tended to sympathize with the civil rights movement, but anticipated that making strong statements in favor of integration would lead to their economic ruin and social ostracism. Moreover, this group resented the fact that some of their rabbis and many national Jewish organizations denounced segregation as immoral and contrary to the teachings of Judaism. Fearful that this agitation would cause gentiles to boycott their stores and offices, they claimed that the North-

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Mr. Shankman, an alumnus of Knox College, holds an M.A. degree in history from Emory University, where he is presently working for a doctorate.

1 See *American Jewish Year Book: 1959* (New York, 1959), p. 18. By "South" here are meant Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.
ern Jews active in the struggle for Black equality were hypocrites. As long as the North was itself guilty of racism, they argued, it had no right to criticize the South. Some confessed their belief that white Southerners needed a scapegoat. As one writer put it, "Jews who espouse and defend the cause of civil rights jeopardize the security of isolated Jewish communities in the South, threaten their social integration and economic position, and ultimately even their physical safety." A few, however, did deny that civil rights for Southern Negroes would lead to Southern persecution of Jews. Rabbis Charles Mantinband and Perry E. Nussbaum, both the leaders of congregations in Mississippi, reported that Jewish businessmen in that state were in no economic danger; and though Jews constituted only a minute percentage of Mississippi's population, there was little anti-Semitism.

Extremist groups were functioning in Dixie then, but only the most radical included the persecution of Jews among their objectives. The White Citizens' Council actively recruited Jewish members, and Charles Bloch, a lawyer active in the Macon Jewish community, became the vice-president of the State's Rights Council of Georgia. Jews were ineligible for membership in the various Ku Klux Klan groups, but these organizations were more interested in attacking Negroes and Lumbee Indians than in burning crosses in front of the homes of Southern Jews. One notable exception was the Aryan Klans; Horace Miller, a member of this organization, expressed his feelings towards Jews in cartoons. Perhaps the best known of his productions was one bearing the caption "Jews De-

\[\text{\textsuperscript{1}}\text{Isaac Toubin, "Recklessness or Responsibility," \textit{Southern Israelite} [SI], February 27, 1959, pp. 13–15; see also P. Allen Krause, "Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South," \textit{American Jewish Archives}, XXI (1969), 20–47.}\]

clare War on the Human Race”; it featured a python labelled “Rabbi” coiled around the Capitol inscribed “Synagogue.” Another Southerner, Atlantan J. B. Stoner, proposed that being Jewish be declared a crime “punishable by death.”

Stoner and Miller obviously represented only a tiny fraction of the South's population, and not until Dixie temples were bombed did a significant number of Southern Jews begin fearing that persecution might be imminent.

EXCEPT MIAMI BEACH

On November 11, 1957, while forty people were attending religious services, eleven sticks of dynamite were found at Temple Beth-El in Charlotte, North Carolina. Within eight months bombs and dynamite were found at Jewish houses of worship in Gastonia, North Carolina, and Birmingham, Alabama. More serious was the dynamiting of Miami's Beth-El Congregation on March 16, 1958; a bomb exploded and caused several thousand dollars' worth of damage to that Orthodox synagogue which, interestingly enough, had done nothing to promote integration and had completely avoided the “race” question. Rabbi Abraham Levitan, the spiritual leader of another congregation, received a phone call from an unidentified man warning him to stop preaching integration in his synagogue or it too would be bombed; and Rabbi Tibor Stern was told to remove a menorah from the front of his temple or his house of worship would “get it too.” That same day a bomb exploded at the Nashville Jewish Community Center, causing much damage. Rabbi William Silverman of the Temple in Nashville was telephoned to by a member of the “Confederate Underground” who threatened to bomb the Temple, kill “nigger-loving people,” and “shoot down in cold blood” Federal Judge William Miller for his court decisions upholding integration. On April 28, the Jacksonville Jewish Community Center was bombed, and the “Confederate Union” phoned Rabbi

Sanders Tofield, warning that Jews must be "driven out of Florida except Miami Beach" or they would die.  

Since the bombings seemed to follow a pattern, there was the possibility that one group was traveling about the South causing the damage. On May 5, 1958, mayors and police officials from each of the cities experiencing anti-Jewish violence met in Jacksonville to coordinate plans for combating future acts of lawlessness and to exchange information. There was hope that $55,700 offered in reward money for information leading to the capture of the criminals would help the police solve the cases. Southern Senators asked for Federal assistance, but Attorney General William Rogers did not want the FBI to get deeply involved in investigating crimes that the Government could not prosecute. No Federal law had been broken, and thus there was no justification for Federal agents to become involved. Furthermore, one FBI spokesman reasoned, if it were obvious that their agents would not solve the crime, additional pressure would be put on local officials to seek and arrest the guilty.

Naturally, these acts of terrorism were condemned in the South. Rabbi Silverman of Nashville told the members of one synagogue that his city's bombing was not representative "of sentiment of our beloved community of Nashville." Yet he warned, "We must realize that the attack upon the Negro is the undeniable portent of the attack upon the Jew, and ultimately the Catholic Church, civil liberties, democracy, and Christianity itself." The Southern Israelite quoted an Atlanta *Journal* editorial that the lunatic fringe bombers

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were "no more typical of the South than they are condoned by the decent people of the South." The editors of Southern Jewish periodicals met in Nashville and issued a statement deploiring the attacks on Jewish houses of assembly and Negro churches. They warned that such lawlessness was not only an attack on Judaism, but also an assault upon the Constitution. Even the Citizens' Council issued messages of sympathy condemning the violence.8

Atlanta Jews hoped that their city would be spared the bombers. Atlanta was more progressive and prosperous than most other Southern cities. It boasted an enlightened mayor and a respected police chief; in the opinion of the New Republic, it was the "most civilized city in the South." Negroes were represented on the city council, and the police force even had Black officers; municipal facilities other than schools were slowly being integrated. Both city newspapers were fairly liberal, and in November, 1957, eighty Protestant ministers signed and published a manifesto calling for communication between the races, maintenance of public schools, and obedience to laws and the courts.9

Many exclusive clubs nonetheless barred Jews, and Blacks were clearly second-class citizens in Atlanta. Scores of Atlanta ministers told their congregations that it would be better to close the public schools than to integrate them. Others, including many political figures, preached "segregationism." In July, five pickets marched in front of the Journal and Constitution Building with placards bearing such messages as "Constitution and Journal distort news, suppress facts," "Jewish-Controlled Press Lies that the Arabs Are Red," and "Nasser Outlawed the Communists and Jailed the Reds." Police arrested the pickets, and the five were sentenced to thirty days' imprisonment. Two would later be arrested in connection with the Temple bombing in Atlanta, and another two would be


questioned about the incident. Understandably upset at the event, the Journal reminded its readers, "Atlanta’s Jews are among the best and finest citizens in the city and Atlanta would not be what it is without them; it could not do without them."10

One week before the Atlanta Temple bombing, five ministers reported that their churches had been vandalized. Damage varied from broken windows to the stealing of typewriters. Ironically, one of the five houses of worship was the Greek Orthodox Church, which occupied the former home of the Temple. That same issue of the paper reported that a bomb had caused extensive damage to the newly integrated high school in Clinton, Tennessee.11

If an anti-Semite were planning to bomb a Jewish house of worship in Atlanta in 1958, he would have been likely to select the Temple at 1589 Peachtree because it was somewhat secluded from public view and because its spiritual leader was Rabbi Jacob M. Rothschild, a foe of segregation. The thousand-member congregation was neither the newest nor the largest Jewish house of worship in Atlanta, but its congregants included many of the leading Jews of the city.

Rabbi Rothschild, a native of Pittsburgh and a graduate of the University of Cincinnati and the Hebrew Union College, had served congregations in Davenport, Iowa, and in Pittsburgh and had been an army chaplain before coming to Atlanta. A strong believer in interfaith dialogue, he established the Institute for Christian Clergy, an annual seminar of Christian clergymen to discuss some aspect of Jewish life, and he was a co-founder of the Round Table of the National Conference of Christians and Jews. His sermons on political and social questions angered several of his congregants, but he continued to support the civil rights movement.12 In 1957 he told a Cincinnati audience: "There is a macabre and disquieting parallel between the South today and a totalitarian state. There is a curbail-


A TEMPLE IS BOMBED—ATLANTA, 1958

ment of the right to speak freely and openly if what you say disagrees with the popular point of view.”13 Later that year he applauded the eighty ministers who had signed the manifesto to keep the public schools open, and honored them in a sermon, “Eighty Protestant Ministers Who Dared to Speak—A Salute to My Christian Colleagues.”14 Even in Mississippi he denounced prejudice as strongly as he had in Atlanta and Cincinnati; clearly he was an enemy of segregation.

II

At 3:38 A.M. on Sunday, October 12, 1958, a flash of light and a loud noise rocked several blocks of Peachtree Street. One driver passing by claimed that his car had been knocked off the road by the blast. Scores of people, including Governor Marvin Griffin and his houseguests four blocks away from the site of the blast were awakened by the noise. Yet since no damage was visible on Peachtree, no one immediately knew that the Temple had been bombed. Anxious to determine what had happened, the police sent a cruiser into the area, but at 4:05 A.M. it reported seeing nothing suspicious. At 3:45 A.M., however, Wayne Chester of the United Press International had received a call from “General Gordon of the Confederate Underground,” who proclaimed, “We bombed a temple in Atlanta. This is the last empty building in Atlanta that we will bomb.” The “general” then proceeded to warn that all night clubs refusing to fire their Negro employees would also be blown up. Furthermore, he stated, “We are going to blow up all Communist organizations and Negroes and Jews are hereby declared aliens.” With that, the caller hung up. Chester recalled:

At the time [3:50 A.M.] I dismissed the call as a prank or the result of

13 Ibid., p. 109.

14 This sermon was reprinted in SI, February 28, 1958, p. 5. In 1958, the Atlanta B’nai B’rith awarded these ministers its Distinguished Service Award. For more information on Rothschild, see “Families Look to Their Rabbi,” Atlanta Journal, October 15, p. 15; Jacob Rothschild, “Yesterday or Tomorrow,” SI, September 12, p. 13. [See also P. Allen Krause, “Rabbis and Negro Rights in the South,” American Jewish Archives, XXI (1969), 35, 38–39, 47—editor]
someone having a little too much to drink. The young voice sounded like a young college student, and my first reaction was [that] the celebrating after the football game was still going strong.\(^{15}\)

At 7:45 A.M. Robert Benton, janitor of the Temple, arrived at the bombed building. Looking at the structure from Peachtree, he could not tell that anything was wrong; but as soon as he arrived at the rear entrance of the Temple, he could see the magnitude of the damage. Immediately he called William Schwartz, Jr., the president of the congregation. Within moments Fred Beerman, a member of the Atlanta Police Force and the Temple; Rabbi Rothschild, who had just returned to the city from St. Paul, Minnesota; Herbert Jenkins, Atlanta Chief of Police; Mrs. Abe Shurgin, executive director of the congregation; and William Hartsfield, mayor of Atlanta, were notified of the bombing. By 9:00 Rabbi Rothschild and Mayor Hartsfield were busy surveying the damage to the city's only Reform synagogue. Meanwhile, members of the Temple's Sisterhood were calling parents of religious school students to tell them that classes were cancelled.

The attractive building had sustained over $100,000 in damages. Shattered bricks, piles of rubble, broken fixtures, cracked plaster—these were what greeted the rabbi and the mayor. The doorway and the vestibule had been demolished and the gift shop looked as if it had been in the middle of a tornado; menorahs and other religious artifacts, baby bibs, records, and books had toppled off the display cases. Ripped from the walls was a bronze plaque commemorating Temple members who had died in the service of their country. In the sanctuary stained glass windows were broken, though the holy ark and the eternal light were undamaged. Party decorations and choir robes were ruined, but no lives had been lost.\(^{16}\)

\(^{15}\) "Here's Chain of Events After Temple Blasting; Explosion Heard for Miles but Walls Blocked the Noise," Constitution, October 13, p. 8; "Dynamite Bomb Damages Atlanta Temple," SL, October 17, p. 1; Wayne Chester, "Voice Says: 'Temple Is Bombed,'" Journal, October 13, p. 17.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.; SL, October 17, pp. 1-8; "Jewish Temple on Peachtree Wrecked by Blast," Constitution, October 13, pp. 1, 8; Frank Wells, "Bombing of Temple Follows Pattern Set in Florida, Nashville, and Clinton," ibid., p. 6.
As word of the disaster spread, reporters, photographers, and curious Atlantans sped to the scene of the crime. Chief Jenkins announced that he had requested FBI help, and Mayor Hartsfield issued a statement denouncing the "crackpots" who would destroy a Temple. The mayor suspected that the bombers had been "internationally inspired"; yet he warned, "Whether they like it or not, every rabble-raising politician is the Godparent of the cross burner and dynamiters who are giving the South a bad name." To assist the police in tracking down the guilty, he offered a thousand-dollar reward and solicited additional contributions; within a few days over $30,000 had been pledged. Rabbi Rothschild and Mr. Schwartz also had a statement in which they claimed that their shattered building showed "the contrast between the ideals of religious faith and the practices of Godless men." They warned that the blast had been directed at all Atlantans and at "the religious and democratic foundations of our country."

**These Innocent Men**

President Eisenhower was in New York at cornerstone ceremonies of the Protestant Inter-Church Building when he first heard of the bombing. Asked what he thought of the incident, he told reporters, "I think we would all share in the feeling of horror that any person would want to desecrate the holy place of any religion, be it a chapel, a cathedral, a mosque, a church, or a synagogue." Several days later he denounced the Confederate Underground as a "bunch of Al Capone gangsters" who soiled the good name of the Confederacy. FBI agents were ordered to help the Atlanta police, and army demolition experts were sent to the city. Less than twelve hours after the bombing, FBI Agent N. R. Johnson had set up a temporary headquarters in an office at 1605 Peachtree. At midnight Federal agents and local police stopped motorists passing the Temple to in-

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quire if they had traveled on that street the previous night, and if so, whether they remembered anything unusual.¹⁹

That night, "General Gordon" was busy again on the telephone. While her husband was away, Mrs. Rothschild was called and told that a bomb would blow up her house in less than five minutes. She fled her home with her daughter, who was to have had a more pleasant birthday present than a bombing scare. Fortunately this time the Confederate Underground had given a false alarm. Bombing threats were also reported by the Journal and Radio Station WSB.²⁰ Police protection was assigned to the Rothschild and Schwartz homes and to the Journal-Constitution Building.

Several theories existed as to who had bombed the Temple. Some claimed that a Negro with a scar on his face who drove a 1956 car with South Carolina plates was guilty. Others thought that the bomber was a Communist agent. The radical right suspected that the incident was a Jewish plot. The Reverend Eustace Mullins of the "Dire Society for the Propagation of Human Faith" claimed that Jews had blown up their own synagogue to secure funds for an addition to the building; prior to the bombing contributions were lagging, but now even gentiles would donate money to the Temple. He advised Mayor Hartsfield to arrest the leaders of the Jewish community and question them "night and day until they confess to this foul crime."²¹


²¹ David Lawrence, "Bombing of Temple Had all Earmarks of Communist Plot," Journal, October 15, p. 27; Dennis Holland to editor, Constitution, October 18, p. 4, col. 3; Mullins to Mayor Hartsfield, October 17 (carbon in Temple file); Mitchell Friend to Hartsfield, October 13 (original in Temple file). Friend claimed the bombing was the work of "irresponsible Southerners."
Police, however, were investigating members of rightist groups known for their anti-Semitism. At 3:00 P.M. that Sunday, they located George Michael Bright, a thirty-five-year-old draftsman, and began questioning him about the bombing. Within four days, four other suspects had been rounded up, and the five men, Bright, Wallace Allen, Richard and Robert Bolling (Bowling), and Kenneth Griffin, were formally indicted by the grand jury for willfully "destroying and injuring a house of worship." All five had previous arrest records and were known for their anti-Jewish beliefs and their membership in groups like the National States' Rights Party and the Christian Anti-Jewish Party. In their homes police had found anti-Semitic literature, including a "fat cat" letter from George Lincoln Rockwell warning Wallace Allen not to violate any laws when picketing with anti-Jewish placards. The members of anti-Jewish groups, said Rockwell, would soon be able "to do what they had talked about" because "ONE 'Fat Cat' ... is putting his $$$ where his mouth is."

Rockwell's letter proved only that Allen disliked Jews, and the turning point in the case did not come until Bright was given a lie detector test. The FBI agent who administered the test concluded that the suspect knew something about the bombing. Other evidence was accumulated to show that Bright had a personal animosity towards Rabbi Rothschild and had written the rabbi a threatening letter. Finally, an informant was found who said that the dynamiting had been discussed in May at a meeting which he attended and that Bright was to draw up the architectural plans of the Temple. Police revealed only a portion of the information they had gathered, and

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22 Rockwell was interviewed in Arlington, Virginia, but the American Nazi leader claimed to have had no foreknowledge of the bombing. He was quoted as saying that "Ninety per cent of the people in [our] ... movement are lunatics." McGill called this figure conservative, but the Constitution editorial on this subject said, "It's good to have it from one who knows." The "fat cat" was subsequently identified as Harold Noel Arrowsmith, the well-educated son of an Episcopal canon. "Text of 'Fat Cat' Letter," Constitution, October 18, p. 3; "Fat Cat Letter," Journal, October 17, p. 1; "Got Ideas From Hitler," ibid., pp. 1, 8; McGill, "Ninety Per Cent Are Lunatics," Constitution, October 20, p. 1; Ben Bagdikian, "Two Bigots," SI, February 27, 1959, pp. 26-27; American Jewish Yearbook: 1959, pp. 47-48.
not until the day of the trial was it known whom they would try first. The rapidity with which the five men had been captured won the law enforcement officers much praise.\textsuperscript{23}

After the arrest of the accused, the assistant foreman of the Fulton County Grand Jury reported an anonymous threatening phone call. The caller, who claimed to represent the Confederate Underground, threatened to "kill all of you who indicted these innocent men."\textsuperscript{24} In the next several weeks false bombing threats forced the evacuation of public schools, theaters, and the theology building of Emory University.

III

One week before the Temple was bombed, the newly-integrated high school in Clinton, Tennessee, was dynamited; the day after the Atlanta disaster a bomb shattered part of Anshai Emeth Synagogue in Peoria, Illinois. It was clear that anti-Semitism was not confined to the South. A few courageous ministers in Nashville, Miami, Birmingham, Jacksonville, and Charlotte had denounced the bombings in their cities, but they were in the minority. In Atlanta the situation was reversed, for the dynamite that struck the Temple acted as a catalyst in arousing residents of the city. Eager to prove that Atlanta was not just another bigoted Southern metropolis, they responded with sympathy, reward money, and a true sense of grief.

Ministers who had attended interfaith meetings and seminars at the Temple and who had spoken with Rabbi Rothschild before signing the Ministers' Manifesto found it impossible to be indifferent to


the bombing. Mrs. Doris Beachy, the wife of a minister and a Sunday school teacher, remembered bringing her class to the Temple the previous June. In a personal letter to the members of the Temple, she stated, "It is difficult to fathom the reasoning and hatred that prompt some humans to act with violence. Please take heart in the fact that you have many friends in the Atlanta area who are with you always." Scores of ministers changed their sermon topics on October 12, and strongly condemned the violence. Among those attending a church in which the bombing was denounced was George Bright!

Several associations of Protestant ministers met and passed resolutions expressing their feelings about the dynamiting. The Georgia Council of Churches demanded that the perpetrators of the deed be brought "to speedy justice"; the Atlanta Christian Council voiced its opposition "to anything of this nature." Similar resolutions were passed by the Atlanta Presbyterian Ministry Association, the Atlanta Baptist Pastors' Conference, the Atlanta-West Methodist Group, and the Miami Episcopate. The all-Negro Atlanta Baptist Association, headed by the Reverend Martin Luther King, Sr., wrote the mayor that they commended the "vigorous action taken by federal and city officials" in the bombing and hoped that similar activity would be shown if Negro churches were destroyed. Individual ministers called the incident an attack upon Christianity. In the words of Dr. W. Thomas Smith, it was "no time for sleeping churches." From Charlotte, North Carolina, the Reverend Billy Graham warned Christians not to follow the path of Hitler.26

25 Doris Beachy to the Secretary of the Temple, October 12 (Temple file).
26 "Four Groups of Ministers Rip Bombing," Constitution, October 14, p. 5; "Graham Asks Christians to Help Stop Bombings," ibid., October 16, p. 2; "Ministers Hit Blast, Label It 'Madness','' ibid., October 20, p. 1; Dr. W. Thomas Smith to editor, ibid., October 15, p. 4; Betty Carrollton, "Dynamiting Deplored by Churchmen," ibid., October 13, pp. 1, 6; Dr. Charles Allen, "A Blasted Temple Sickens Soul," Journal-Constitution, October 19, p. 3-E; Resolutions of Atlanta Missionary Baptist Association to Mayor Hartsfield, October 16 (copy in Temple file); Resolutions of Atlanta Baptist Pastors' Conference, October 13 (copy in letter from the Reverend J. Don Aderhold to Rabbi Rothschild, October 15, in Temple file).
Hundreds of ministers and church groups sent messages of sympathy to Rabbi Rothschild. The Reverend Ralph Abernathy denounced those "twisted minds and souls" who would dynamite a house of worship. Dean William Cannon of Emory University's Candler School of Theology expressed his condolences and noted that theology students had spontaneously taken up collections of money for the use of the Temple. Sunday school classes wrote letters of sympathy, and some of the younger students wished the rabbi a merry Christmas. Letters came from Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, New York, Scotland, and France.

From over thirty states and Canada, hundreds of rabbis representing all branches of Judaism wrote to Rothschild to express their indignation and shock and the hope that the bombing would lead to an outcry against lawlessness. Many were pleased that President Eisenhower had finally seen "fit to make this his own concern" and allowed the FBI to take an active role in the solving of the crime. Three letters, however, were of special interest on the subject of future violence. Rabbi Newton J. Friedman, of Beaumont, Texas, expected a bombing in Macon because of the inflammatory nature of the speeches the Grand Wizard of the Ku Klux Klan had made in that city. Rabbi Perry E. Nussbaum, of Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi, commented, "What can one write to you from Jackson, Mississippi? The pattern is fixed... I doubt if my own Congregation will escape." Rabbi Charles Mantinband, of Congregation B'nai Israel in Hattiesburg, wrote, "There are many here who share with you a sense of righteous indignation at this dastardly attack. And for some others, I regret to say, it is an occasion for levity and cheap talk. They say they will do a better job, when they are ready for Mississippi."

Cannon to Rothschild, October 16, and Abernathy to Rothschild, October 14. Dr. Whitney Young of Atlanta University wrote the rabbi that the bombing should make "citizens aware that unless lawlessness is curbed everywhere, it cannot be expected to be curbed anywhere." Dean Whitney Young to Rothschild, October 17. Copies of hundreds of similar letters and copies of acknowledgments sent by Rabbi Rothschild are in the Temple file.

Friedman to Rothschild, October 12; Nussbaum to Rothschild, October 13; Mantinband to Rothschild, October 19. Eugene Blachschleger, of Montgomery, Ala-
The Temple is bombed
Atlanta, 1958
THE CONFEDERACY IS DEAD

Atlanta newspapers were also upset that the tragedy had struck their city. They fully covered all aspects of the bombing and offered a $5,000 reward for information leading to the capture of the bombers. Ralph McGill in a Pulitzer Prize winning editorial column described the blast as the harvest reaped by Christian ministers who preached "hate instead of compassion" and by politicians who urged defiance of courts and laws:

It will be the acme of irony, for example, if any one of four or five Southern governors deplore this bombing. It will be grimly humorous if certain state attorneys issue statements of regret. . . . It is not possible to preach lawlessness and restrict it.

To be sure, none said go bomb a Jewish temple or a school. But let it be understood that when leadership in high places fails to support constituted authority it opens the gates to all those who wish to take the law into their own hands.28

In subsequent columns, McGill welcomed FBI assistance; denounced the "mob, which is hate," for it "always strikes the church and the school"; and urged those "who feel impelled to make some tangible expression of their feelings" to send a contribution to the Temple.

The Constitution warned that no one would be safe until the "human vultures who 'sneak about in the dark' " were caught. The bombers, it said, were "slinky cowards posing as members of the human race"; they claimed to be the Confederate Underground, yet they bombed a Temple founded in 1867 to serve the Atlanta Jewish Community and to feed and clothe released Confederate prisoners

bama, was one of many rabbis reporting that Christians had asked how to contribute money to the Temple. Blachschleger to Rothschild, October 23. All these letters in the Temple file.

of war. The Journal in a front-page editorial, "A Desecrated Temple Cries Out to Heaven," warned that if the act were not punished, "it will be repeated again and again; for the bombing was a declaration of war against all decent people... by believers in force, violence, and hatred."30

Denunciations of the bombing appeared also in the Rome News Tribune and the Cochran Journal. The latter declared, "The Confederacy is dead. And we who love and honor the memory of the men who made it, fought and died for it, have no wish to see it revived." Even the conservative Waycross Journal-Herald proclaimed, "The rabble-rouser is as much an enemy of the South as the do-gooders and social reformers who would tell us how to operate our schools." Other enraged newspapers included the Ellaville Sun and the Savannah Morning News.31

At the time of the bombing the Temple had been preparing for a $750,000 building expansion campaign, but it did not want contributions from Georgians who thought that their money was paying for the damages sustained on October 12. Insurance properly covered these losses, but some Christians insisted that they be allowed to contribute towards the building of the addition. In the words of one lady, "Whether they need this or not, I want to give this just to say for my city, 'I am sorry.'"32 Soon hundreds of people were sending in money, many of them anonymously, to help rebuild the synagogue. Governor-elect Ernest Vandiver sent a check for $250, but

30 These were all reprinted in SI, October 17, p. 5. Editor Adolph Rosenberg commented, "Never do we remember a local story receiving such coverage in these two daily newspapers." See "The Blast at Atlanta's Temple," ibid., p. 3.

31 Clippings in Temple file; other editorials reprinted in Constitution, October 16, p. 4; October 18, p. 4; October 20, p. 4; October 24, p. 4.

32 Harold Martin, "Bombing of Temple Hurt Atlanta's Pride," Journal-Constitution, October 19, p. 3-E; Marion Gaines, "Messages Come to Rabbi From all Faiths and all of Nation," Constitution, October 14, pp. 1, 6. Unsolicited money was sent to newspapers in Buffalo, Cincinnati, and Pittsburgh.
more importantly, he pledged his "complete co-operation in the fer-
reting out and bringing to a speedy trial the perpetrators of this
reprehensible deed." 33

Several churches offered Rabbi Rothschild the use of their facili-
ties for classes and religious services. The Atlanta Board of Educa-
tion made available the E. Rivers School for the religious school of
the Temple. This offer was accepted because the public school had
used the facilities of the Temple several years before. A. C. Latimer,
the President of the Atlanta Board of Education, wrote, "My own
children attended classes in the Temple... when the E. Rivers
School burned." 34 Meetings and religious services were held in
neighboring churches and in the nearby Jewish Community Center.
When the expanded Temple opened in May, 1960, the auditorium
was named Friendship Hall in honor of all who had helped the con-
gregation in its time of need.

Friday, October 17, Rothschild spoke to an overflow crowd of
1,000 who assembled in the damaged sanctuary of the Temple. He
pledged to continue by sermon and deed to fight injustice, and he
thanked those who had helped his Temple in the dark days that
followed the bombing. If the dynamiting had a message, the rabbi
claimed, it was that such deeds blackened "the façade of every
house of worship in the city." The myriad offers of help he had re-
ceived convinced him that Atlantans would be able to "raise from
the rubble of devastation a city and a land in which all men are
truly brothers and none shall make them afraid." 35 Privately Roth-
schild wrote to the policemen who had been guarding his home,

33 Vandiver to Rothschild, October 13 (Temple file).
34 Latimer to Hughes, October 15[?] (carbon in Temple file); Rothschild, Day,
p. 79.
35 Drafts of this sermon are in the Temple's files. Laura McGregor, "Rabbi Speaks
on Brotherhood at First Post-Bombing Service," quoted in SI, October 24, p. 1;
Jacob Rothschild, "And None Shall Make Them Afraid," SI, February 27, 1959,
pp. 8–9. This article is the text of a sermon broadcast on "The Message of Israel
Program." It may differ slightly from the sermon of October 17.
"Your personal interest and your warm friendly spirit were far beyond the call of duty."\(^{38}\)

IV

The trial of George Bright, the first of the five men suspected of the bombing, took place in December. Defense attorneys James Venable and Essley Burdine asked for a dismissal of the case on the ground that destroying a temple was no violation of section 26-2302 of the Georgia law code, since the 1897 law did not specifically mention houses of worship. Justice Durwood Pye replied that the defense's interpretation of the law would promote an "open season" on churches, and this had clearly not been the intention of the lawmakers. Next the judge ruled that local news and television media did not have to furnish lists of all Jewish merchants that purchased advertising from them, but he did permit the defense attorneys to receive membership lists from the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith and the Temple. Jury selection, the next order of business, was very slow. Prospective jurors who were of the Jewish faith, worked for Jews, purchased goods from Jews, or had strong feelings about the case were disqualified. Since a verdict of guilty could mean death in the electric chair, opponents of capital punishment were also unacceptable for jury duty. By the end of the first day of the trial, only six jurors had been selected.\(^{37}\)

Prosecutor Tom Luck promised to prove that Bright was anti-Semitic and that he hated Rabbi Rothschild, had conspired to bomb the rabbi's Temple, and had been present when the incident occurred. After janitor Robert Benton told about the damage, Rabbi

\(^{38}\) Carbons of Rothschild's letters to officers and patrolmen, October 27 (Temple file).

\(^{37}\) After scores of prospective jurors were disqualified, one of those accepted was discovered to be a former member of the Ku Klux Klan. "The state said it accepted the juror because it was short on challenges, and there was another prospective juror it wished to dismiss more than Mr. Cochran." "Five Are Scheduled for Trial," Constitution, December 1, p. 1; "Six Jurors Selected in Bombing Trial," ibid., December 2, pp. 1, 10; "First of Five Suspects on Trial," SF, December 6, p. 1; John Neel, "Only 9 Picked for Bomb Jury," Journal, December 2, pp. 1, 13; Pat Watters, "Bright First to Face Bomb Trial Here," ibid., December 1, p. 1.
Rothschild and Mrs. Shurgin were asked to testify. Venable objected to their taking the stand because he claimed that each year Jews took an oath that excused them from telling the truth in a court of law. The rabbi and Mrs. Shurgin explained that they had never taken any oath of the sort Venable described; Judge Pye then ruled that they could testify.

Several witnesses charged that Bright had shown antipathy towards Rothschild the previous May when the rabbi had spoken at Atlanta's First Baptist Church. The defendant's former neighbor, Richard Johnson, testified that Bright was upset when he learned of the invitation and spoke of "stringing up" a Jew. Bright had angrily told Johnson, "They are not only trying to put niggers in our schools with us but they are trying to put Jews in our churches." Later Bright told the Reverend Arnold Smith, pastor of the Baptist congregation, that he resented having "Christ-killing Jews" at the church, but Smith refused to cancel the speech. Unknown to Rothschild, Bright and others carried signs protesting the rabbi's appearance before his talk. During the question and answer session following the lecture, Bright argued with the rabbi about the number of Jews the Nazis had murdered.38

The defendant admitted composing the following note after the speech, though he never delivered it:

You have brought to us a glowing account of Judaism, glowing because you planned it that way. You are right now telling yourself that these people here tonight have just witnessed a most gratifying experience. In just a few seconds you are going to witness one of the most terrifying experiences ever in your life. In fact, you have been chosen to be the star-performer. We are going to have a question and answer period, and you are going to star with your answers.39


While FBI agent James Gormley, the next major witness, was on the stand, the jury was removed from the court room. Gormley announced the results of a lie detector test administered to Bright. Every time the defendant was asked a "critical question concerning" the bombing of the Temple, the agent stated, his blood pressure rose, his pulse quickened, and he caught his breath. In his opinion, said Gormley, Bright was lying when he claimed never to have been on the premises of the Temple and when he stated that he had no knowledge of the identities of the bombers. Bright frequently interrupted this testimony and interjected his own statements about the test, which, he claimed, had been administered without his consent. Not to be outdone by his client, Venable strongly objected to FBI "meddling" and persuaded Judge Pye not to allow the results of the test to be a part of the transcript.40

JUST BECAUSE HE IS A JEW HATER

After Mrs. Janice Rothschild testified that she thought one of the other five men accused of the bombing had telephoned her and warned of a bomb under her house, the prosecution brought the first of its two key witnesses to the stand. Leslie Rogers, owner of a janitorial service, testified that he had infiltrated the National States' Rights Party (NSRP) and the Ku Klux Klan as an FBI undercover agent. Though he was secretary-treasurer and assistant security officer of the Klan, some suspected him of collaboration with the FBI, and he was forced to resign from that group. He first met Bright and Billy Branham at NSRP meetings. Branham, he said, once suggested blowing up a synagogue on Northside Drive, and Bright had commented that if the "right" situation arrived, he and his friends should get guns and shoot Jews. Several times Bright had spoken of expelling Jews from the Government and slipping anti-Semitic literature into newspapers sold at newsstands. On another occasion he telephoned Ralph McGill and called him a "dirty rat." Venable denounced Rogers as a "police pimp" and brought to the stand several

men, including members of the Klan, to state that they would not believe Rogers' statements even under oath.

The second key witness was James DeVore, an automobile assembly-line worker and Bright's cell-mate after his October arrest. DeVore stated that Bright had confessed to him that he was present at the bombing and that he served as "look out" while Richard Bowling put the dynamite charge in place. Moreover, the witness claimed, Bright had drawn a sketch of the Temple with a blue pencil and had marked in red the spot where the dynamite should be placed. After the bombing, the defendant went to a restaurant and ordered a steak. Venable charged that DeVore had fabricated his story so that he could claim the reward money. DeVore denied this and argued that he had protected Bright from other prisoners in the jail when they cut his tee shirt with a razor blade and taunted him by calling him "the bomber." Many witnesses, including his brother Eldred and the police chief of Chamblee, Georgia, testified that DeVore was of bad character.*

Among the defense witnesses who swore that Bright was of good character were Eldon Edwards, Imperial Wizard of the United States Klans of the Ku Klux Klan; Klansmen John Felmet and Wesley Morgan; Arthur Cole, NSRP chairman; and Matt Koehl, NSRP organizer. Paul Green, an Atlanta policeman, stated that he had seen Bright at an all-night drugstore shortly before 2:00 A.M. Two service station attendants claimed that a light-skinned Negro driving a car with South Carolina plates stopped at their station for cigarettes and asked for directions to the Temple.

Before the trial ended, Bright made a six-hour statement to the jury in which he denied bombing the Temple and claimed that he was being persecuted for his segregationist beliefs, his Baptist religion, and his loyalties to the United States. Denouncing "race mixing," he told the jurors that segregation "is what I have been fighting

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for all my life.” In this unsworn statement he criticized Mayor Hartsfield and Chief Jenkins for their support of integration. After giving the jury his biography, he claimed that at the time the Temple was being dynamited, he was visiting a Mrs. Marilyn Craig and had spent the night at her home. Moreover, he professed no prejudice against Jews—he had once dated a Jewish girl and had served with Jews in the Army—yet he read anti-Semitic passages to the jury from the works of Cicero, Carlyle, Goethe, Voltaire, and Aquinas. Finally, he told the jurors that he did not have to prove himself innocent of the crime to be found innocent, but that they could not convict him unless he had been proven guilty. “Truth is on my side,” he said, “and God above won’t let anything but a just verdict be rendered in this case.”

It was 11:00 P.M. on Saturday, December 6, when Judge Pye told the jurors that they could report one of three verdicts: guilty, in which case the punishment was death; guilty with a recommendation of mercy, in which case the sentence would be life imprisonment; or innocent. The jury could not start deliberations until Monday, and so they spent Sunday playing checkers, watching television except for news programs, and reading books and newspapers with trial articles removed. Monday, December 8, at 4:55 P.M. the foreman of the jury reported a hopeless deadlock, but was instructed to continue discussing the case. On December 10, eighty-four hours after the case went to the jury, the foreman reported that there was no possibility of reaching a verdict; the jurors had voted 9 to 3 in favor of a guilty verdict with a recommendation of mercy. Pye then ordered a mistrial, and the case was rescheduled. One man who voted for acquittal charged that the state’s case was weak: “You can’t send a man to the penitentiary just because he is a Jew hater.”


*Fulton County Superior Court Records, 76657 (1958); Facts, p. 137; Richard Ashworth, “Bright Jury Resuming Its Study,” Constitution, December 8, pp. 1, 8;*
In return for countermanding their requests for early trials, the four co-defendants were released on bail. Charges against Robert Bowling were soon dropped, and defense and prosecution prepared for a new trial in January. Meanwhile Solicitor General Paul Webb, James DeVore, and Leslie Rogers reported receiving threatening phone calls, and police were assigned to protect the two "star" witnesses.

V

Several changes were apparent at the second trial. Both the judge, Jeptha Tankersley, and the defense attorney, Reuben Garland, were new. Bright's parents had come to Atlanta from Rochester, New York, to attend the trial. Finally, Prosecutor Tom Luck no longer demanded the death penalty and suggested instead that the jury sentence Bright to prison for a term of from one to twenty years. The second trial lasted two days longer than the first, partly because of Garland's antics. Reporters noted that "fruit and peanut vendors" did a brisk business in the halls of the court house.

Testimony about the incident at the First Baptist Church was repeated, and Rogers and DeVore again served as the chief prosecution witnesses. Garland's allegation that Rogers was the one who had blown up the Temple forced the prosecution to try to untarnish the reputation of its informer by summoning FBI Agent Henry King to testify in Rogers' behalf. Garland charged that DeVore was lying to the court and that the witness had fabricated his story in order to secure an early release from jail.

Mrs. Rothschild repeated her testimony about the phone call,


stating that she believed the voice on the phone to have been that of Chester Griffin. The rabbi's wife, a University of Georgia drama graduate who identified voices on tape as a hobby, refused to change her testimony despite Garland's threat to keep her on the stand for days "to break her down." After a stern rebuke from the judge, Garland still persisted and announced, "I object to this evidence and I'm going to make this as obnoxious as I can."

Tempers quickly frayed, and the trial moved slowly. Solicitor Webb's wife died, and the court adjourned for half a day, forcing it to meet at night as it had done in the first trial. There was much uproar when Garland challenged the veracity of testimony from Mayor Hartsfield and Police Chief Jenkins, implying that they belonged to a conspiracy organized by the Atlanta police, the local newspapers, the FBI, and the Anti-Defamation League.

Until Garland put Mrs. Marilyn Craig on the stand, he seemed to be duplicating the work of Venable; and it was quite a surprise when she was called to the stand. Mrs. Craig, whose testimony proved to be most influential with the jury, was a patient at the Milledgeville State Hospital and had been legally declared insane for several months, but she was allowed to testify under a Georgia law permitting the insane to give testimony in court during "lucid moments." Giving Bright the ironclad alibi that he needed, she said that she was with him from 11:00 P.M. on Saturday, October 11, until 3:00 P.M. the next day, when police picked him up. The two had met on Saturday at a drugstore and had "talked" until 2:15 A.M., when they drove to an all-night grocery to buy sausage, syrup, coffee, and cigarettes. They had hoped to watch a satellite pass over the city, but they had heard on the radio that the sputnik had fiz-

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*Pennington, "Mayor Called in Bright Case," *Journal*, January 13, pp. 1, 9, and "Mayor Challenged on Veracity at Trial," *ibid.*, January 14, pp. 1, 11; Sheppard, "Quizzing of Mayor Stirs Clash," *Constitution*, January 14, pp. 1, 12.*
zled, and so they went to Mrs. Craig's home. There they played records, held hands, watched television, and then retired to separate rooms. Not until church services the next day, she said, did either know about the bombing.

I Am Not Guilty

Prosecutor Luck sought unsuccessfully to secure an admission that she had had intimate relations with Bright. After the prosecutor finished his cross-examination, Garland suggested that she be allowed to return to the hospital. Luck replied, "it would be better if she went back." To this Mrs. Craig retorted, "Maybe I'll see you there some day." Her testimony was, in part, contradicted by a policeman and the owner of the grocery she had allegedly visited. Luck then proved that there had been no announcement that the satellite had "fizzled" until Sunday evening. The only sputnik Bright had looked for, the prosecutor told the jury, was the blast at the Temple.47

This time Bright made only a fifteen-minute unsworn statement to the jury. Again he claimed to have no animosity towards Jews and to have had no part in the bombing. Explaining his picketing of the newspaper building, he asserted that the local papers told lies about what was happening in the Middle East. After denouncing DeVore as a perjurer, he dramatically concluded, "I swear before you and Judge Tankersley, before my mother and father and before God, I did not have anything to do with it. I am not guilty."48

For two hours and eight minutes the jury deliberated the case and then found Bright innocent of the crime. The jurors were convinced that Bright was anti-Semitic, but not that he had bombed the Tem-

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ple. Adolph Rosenberg, the editor of the *Southern Israelite*, conceded that the verdict was not unexpected, for "the evidence seemed to rest mainly on circumstance. And, some observers felt, on very little of that."49

Bright was released, but Judge Tankersley sentenced Garland to forty days in jail for contempt of court. When the attorney's seventeen-year-old son asked if he could join his father in prison, the judge offered no objections. Meanwhile, Garland stormed, "Your honor, you've bankrupted me; you've ruined me."50

Charges against the others accused of the bombing were dropped, and since police told Rothschild that they honestly believed Bright and his cohorts to be the bombers, there was little likelihood that other arrests would be made.51 None ever were. Critics sneered that the crime had gone unpunished, and the *Thunderbolt*, the NSRP newspaper, gloated that the "Atlanta case was a triumph of concerted effort by the NSRP, together with allied patriotic groups."52 Some Israelis saw in the dynamiting proof that anti-Semitism plagued all Jews outside of the Holy Land,53 and a few people noted that bombings continued even after the Atlanta trial—but only a *naïf* could have thought that jailing or executing five men who may or may not have blown up the Temple would eradicate anti-Jewish prejudice.

Deplorable as the bombing was, it did bring about some good. First, Atlantans of all faiths learned that, unless they acted, the brotherhood that they had so long preached would be exposed as meaningless banter.54 For the city's Jews, remembering that Atlanta

51 Personal interview with Rothschild, January 28, 1969.
52 *American Jewish Yearbook: 1960*, p. 43; *1963*, p. 137. Robert Bowling later became national co-ordinator of the NSRP.
54 When two synagogues and the local art museum were defaced in Columbus, Georgia, in July, 1959, the Atlanta youth who had performed the deed was appre-
had been the site of the Leo M. Frank trial, the response of the community was especially heartening. Sam Massell, Jr., who years later, in 1969, would become the city's first Jewish mayor, expressed Atlanta Jewry's feelings very well when he wrote, "I am proud of Atlanta's attitude displayed by public officials, daily press and people from all walks of life."\(^{55}\)

The Federal authorities, moreover, realized after the bombing that the FBI should have a role in helping police solve this type of crime, and Congress gave more serious study to proposed legislation to make such deeds violations of Federal law. It is not unlikely that the dynamiting may have influenced some three hundred Atlanta clergymen to sign a statement asking for the preservation of freedom of speech, tolerance for individuals of different races, communication between whites and Blacks, and support of those trying to keep the public schools open.\(^{56}\)