

Variations on the Mortara Case in Midnineteenth-Century New Orleans

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During the midnineteenth century three major international incidents galvanized American Jewry and pushed it toward unified action. In 1840, with the instigation of the French consul, Jews in Damascus were charged with murdering a Capuchin monk and his servant to use their blood for making Passover matzoth. A number of Jews were jailed, some of whom underwent torture and died. Jews, recognizing an identity that transcended national boundaries, protested in many American cities as well as in Great Britain and France. President Martin Van Buren expressed his disgust at this antisemitic blood libel through foreign policy channels. Following the second incident, Van Buren's two successors in the presidency negotiated a trade treaty with Switzerland. Jews were excluded from much of that country, and the treaty allowed the cantons to reject visas to Jewish American citizens. A delegation of Jews requested that James Buchanan revise the treaty, but to no avail.¹

The most important event for American Jewry occurred in Bologna in 1858. On the basis of canon law established by Pope Benedict XIV a century earlier, the Italian police took six-year-old Edgardo Mortara from his parents. They did so based on the testimony of a family servant, Anna Morisi, who claimed that she had baptized the Jewish boy to save his soul when she feared that he, while still an infant, was about to die from an illness. In spite of international protest, the kidnapped child received a Catholic education and became a priest. Again the Buchanan administration refused to intervene when lobbied by American Jews.

Given the prevalent friction over distinctions based on national origin and religious practices, prior attempts at unity instigated especially by Isaac Leeser had failed.² Now cognizant that similar incidents were bound to occur and that a unified response would be most effective, representatives of various congregations established the

Board of Delegates of American Israelites. Persecution accomplished what American freedom and voluntarism had discouraged. The Board of Delegates, representing lay leadership rather than rabbinical authority, attempted to encourage unity by recommending educational improvements, collecting demographic data concerning American Jewry, and making more rational the provision of charity. It also collected funds and attempted to influence public opinion.³

In his study of the Mortara incident, the late Bertram W. Korn indicates that the American Jewish response to the incident reflected a lack of unity and the “inexperienced fumbling which characterized most Jewish leaders,” as well as the willingness of American Jews to voice their opinions, the association of American Jews with Jews in need overseas, and the belief of American Jewry that it had the equality and liberty to protest, petition government, and appeal to fellow Americans for aid.⁴ Thus the Mortara case illustrated both the strengths and weaknesses of midcentury Jewry in the United States.

Korn places the incident squarely within the political and sectional debates of the era, and he explains how various interest groups used it to their advantage and reacted to it within these frameworks. In so doing, he emphasizes the impact of slavery and sectionalism on



Rabbi James K. Gutheim (1817-1886)
(Courtesy American Jewish Archives)

southern Jewish reactions. In essence, Jews in the South were less willing to protest openly and expressed greater agreement with Buchanan’s equivocal position than Jews elsewhere. In Charleston, South Carolina, Mobile, Alabama, and New Orleans, Louisiana, for example, the Jewish communities did not report their protest activities in local newspapers,⁵ and they tended to support Buchanan’s position of limited national power and states’ rights. Like Buchanan, southern Jews supported the Democratic Party and were reluctant to have the American government criticize a

foreign country's position on the civil rights of its citizens when they, and the United States, were vulnerable to a similar rebuff over the issue of slavery.

At the 1859 annual banquet of the Jewish Widows and Orphans Homes of New Orleans, Korn explains, four speakers including D. C. Labatt, Henry M. Hyams, and Benjamin F. Jonas, praised the positions of Buchanan and Secretary of State Lewis Cass. Rabbi James K. Gutheim chaired the meeting. These men were among the most politically connected and influential Jews in the community. They were all also future supporters of the Confederacy.

Gutheim became an ardent Confederate and fled New Orleans during the war to avoid giving an oath of loyalty to the Union. A successful attorney and plantation owner like his cousin Judah P. Benjamin, whom he accompanied from Charleston to New Orleans in 1828, Hyams served as Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana during the Civil War. He was the first Jew elected to such a position. Owner of dozens of slaves, he had actively opposed abolitionist agitation beginning in the 1830s. Hyams and Benjamin Jonas were law partners. Jonas's family illustrated the vicissitudes of geography, the divisions wrought by the war, and the countervailing unifying influence of blood and religious identity. Those of his brothers who were raised in Kentucky served in the Confederacy and those raised in Illinois did their part for the Union. His father, Abraham Jonas, was an attorney, a Kentucky and Illinois legislator, postmaster of Quincy, and friend and political supporter of Abraham Lincoln. Abraham Jonas helped found the Illinois Republican Party, and Benjamin Jonas became a legislative leader of the Louisiana Redemption movement and the first observant Jewish United States Senator. While Benjamin participated in the protest over Mortara in Louisiana, Abraham urged Senator Lyman Trumbull to introduce a Mortara resolution in the Senate, according to Korn, as a political ploy to help the Republican Party in 1860.⁶

Korn recognized that the Mortara baptism and kidnapping were not isolated events. In 1826, for example, a young Jewish woman was forced into a convent, and during the 1840s a Jewish child was "separated," as the Catholic Church described it, from his parents. Both of these incidents occurred in Italy but did not result in

protest, because Italian Jews had not been free to protest prior to the unification of that country. In St Louis, Missouri, Captain Paulson Dietrich, a Jew, was baptized without his consent as he lay dying in the Sisters of Charity Infirmiry. A fellow Jewish patient reported the incident to the president of the local congregation who intervened. The priest in charge of the infirmiry refused to discuss the situation or to allow visitors to see Dietrich, and appeals to Archbishop Kendrick were denied. The church buried the young man in a Catholic cemetery, although official action resulted in his disinterment and reburial in a Jewish cemetery.⁷

Korn did not realize that a similar incident to the Mortara case took place in New Orleans almost simultaneously, and that this incident and its outcome reflected the positions taken by southern leaders to the more publicized international event. This case related to a young Jewish girl who was orphaned; it involved the French government, did not require national or international protest, and had a decidedly different outcome.

Context

The New Orleans Association for the Relief of Jewish Widows and Orphans was the key agency involved in this incident, and its leaders were those who framed the community response to the Mortara case. In 1854 twenty-one “gentlemen” created this organization, the first Jewish orphanage in the country, under the leadership of Gershom Kursheedt.⁸ Obtaining a state charter the next year, the men referred to themselves as “Israelites.” Following the flowery language of the era, the preamble of the society’s constitution waxed poetic:

Within the compass of humanity there is nothing which touches more powerfully the heart of the true Philanthropist, than the destitute, forlorn condition of the poor widow and orphan Bereft of their nautal Protector, exposed to the merciless sufferings of a selfish World – the one, with the fine Sensibilities of her Sex, cramped in her executions to secure a maintenance – the other, with powers and capacities yet undeveloped, tossed about by the fierce waves of privation and hunger, and unguided impulse, they represent the Strongest claims to the Sympathies of the good and benevolent.⁹

Although this statement reflected the nineteenth-century perceptions of the roles of men and women in society in a

condescending fashion, in reality the frequent yellow fever epidemics and particularly those of 1847 and 1853 in the Mississippi area created the demand for assistance. The preamble referred to the provision of such assistance to be a Jewish religious responsibility. It noted that the Jewish population of New Orleans was increasing dramatically, that many of the newcomers died while they became acclimated, and that the current Jewish charities could not meet demands.¹⁰

According to the by-laws, a matron directly responsible to the male board “shall be charged with the domestic economy of the Home and regarded as head of the household.” The men held the power but recognized the woman’s role over daily governance. The committee on applications for relief gave the board reports documenting “the merits of every applicant after due and careful investigation,” as well as the “character of employment best adopted to each applicant.”¹¹ These and other policies were in keeping with the nineteenth-century view of charity. Recipients, in this case the “inmates,” had to demonstrate their worthiness and were subject to intense control.

Individuals from throughout the South joined the association, and contributions were received from as far away as Philadelphia. As in the Mortara case, the provision of assistance to fellow Jews overcame all other divisions. Nonetheless, subscriptions to a building fund were insufficient, and loans and a subsidy from the Louisiana legislature had to be solicited. The donation from the legislature, requested by David C. Labatt, one of the speakers Korn identified, was particularly welcomed in that it represented the honor and esteem in which Jews were held by the Christian community of Louisiana. It also reflected the willingness of the New Orleans leadership to solicit state government aid and to become visible even when such visibility might be negatively construed.¹²

By April 1856, the association erected “a Home for the unfortunate of our race.” The following year a primary school and domestic economy program were added, and President M. M. Simpson reported that “beneath this roof may be found the aged friendless spinster... whose sole aim in life is to go hence in peace... the aged matron with widowed heart still clinging to the past.” Yet all was not well. Simpson continued: “Perhaps in this particular [general discipline], more than all other, combined, has the forbearance and sagacity of the Board

been tested.” To overcome the problem, “industrial pursuits” were to be expanded. “From profitable employment among the Adults, it is confidently hoped, the seeds of cheerfulness will spring; it will relieve a sense of dependence too keenly alive, and render all more subservient to the rules and regulations.”¹³

The Case of Alice Levy

Five months after Edgardo Mortara was abducted, Joseph Simon, chair of the application committee, applied for Alice Levy’s acceptance into the Home. A resolution passed unanimously accepting the child “in obedience to the dying injunction of the Mother,” and to inform Mr. and Mrs. Capdeville that the Home was “prepared to receive child at once.” M. M. Simpson presided, Gutheim served as secretary, and Labatt participated as a board member. The decision was made December 26, 1858, a date important because of its relation to the Mortara protests. President Solomon Cohen of Savannah’s Mickve Israel wrote to Buchanan on November 17, urging the president to exert moral influence on the papacy. On the following day, delegates of twelve New York synagogues met to plan concerted actions. Representatives of New Orleans’s congregations did the same on December 12, with Gutheim as chair, and passed resolutions condemning papal policy and agreeing to work with other American synagogues if a convention was called for such a purpose. Shaarai Shomayim of Mobile acted similarly on December 19. The next day representatives of five Philadelphia congregations appealed to Cass.¹⁴ Thus the Levy case unfolded at the same time that Jews in New Orleans and throughout the country were enmeshed in lobbying on behalf of Mortara.

Simon officially delivered Alice Levy to the Home on January 2, 1859, two days before Buchanan wrote his first and only direct response to the Mortara case. The monthly board minutes indicate that “Mrs. Capdeville had acted a very kind and charitable part towards said orphan” and that a motion was passed to thank her “for the kind care she has bestowed on the said child, activated by motives of true charity and benevolence.” The Capdevilles were invited to the society’s “next anniversary celebration... as a slight token of our esteem.” This was the meeting to which Korn referred, at which society officers paid

tribute to President Buchanan. The association also allocated twenty-five dollars “to be paid to Mrs. Francois, the guardian nurse of the orphan child Alice.”¹⁵

Thus far Alice Levy’s situation could only be viewed as unusual in the recognition given to the Capdevilles and the seemingly positive contribution to the nurse. Yet later in the same minutes the following appears: “The President [M.M. Simpson] states that the French Consul Count de Mejan had officially enquired concerning the orphan Alice Mortara Levy, at the instance of the French government. On motion it was resolved that the Secy. furnish him with a statement of the case.”

Although a copy of Simpson’s letter could not be located, the consul’s response and subsequent correspondence explicate the incident:

Consulate of France at New Orleans

New Orleans, March 16, 1859

Mr. President,

His Excellency, the minister of Foreign Affairs of His Majesty, the Emperor Napoleon, has done me the honor of writing me, under the date of the 9th February last, for the purpose of calling my attention to the facts concerning a young orphan girl, Alice Levy, daughter of French parents, who had been delivered to a charitable woman of New Orleans, for the object of being raised in the Catholic religion, contrary to the last disposition of her mother, who had expressed the desire that her child be raised in the bosom of the Jewish religion, which was that of her parents. Attached to this communication were several papers, and among others, a letter of the grand-mother of this young girl, Madame Widow Meyer Lichtenberg, nee Levy, who stated, that the delivery of said child had been refused by the Jewish Society of New Orleans, because it had already been baptized.¹⁶

His Excellency, the Count Walewsky,¹⁷ has given me the order to use my influence and, if necessary, take legal steps, in order to realize the wishes of the deceased Mrs. Levy.

According to the information which I have gathered, this intervention has become unnecessary, since the said child has been, after some prudent considerations (après quelques discretions), entrusted to the good care of the Jewish Society.

This information, however, can not fully satisfy me. I therefore believe that I cannot do better than to address myself to you, Sir, as the president of the association and of the Jewish Asylum, and to beg of you to let me know the result of the intervention, in order that I may act accordingly, and transmit an answer to His Excellency, the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Please accept, Mr. President, the assurance of my high consideration.

The Consul of France

(Sig.) Cte [Count] Mèjan

Mr. Simpson

President of the Society for the care of Israelite widows and orphans of New Orleans¹⁸

Although the attachments including the grandmother's letter could not be located, Simpson's response followed directly in the minutes of March 15, 1859:

New Orleans March 19th, 1859

Cte [Count] Mejan

Consul of France at New Orleans

Respected Sir,

In compliance with your request, on behalf of your government, I have the honor to communicate to you the desired information, regarding the orphan child, Alice Levy.

Mrs. Levy, the mother of said child, died in the early part of September last. During her sickness she was attended by Israelites and on her demise she was buried with the Jewish rites in a Jewish cemetery. Prior to her death she expressed a desire to have orphan child Alice, then about 16 mos. old, placed in the Jewish Widows and Orphans' Home. The nurse having charge of said child pleaded, that she was much attached to it and asked permission, to keep it about a week longer, when she would deliver it to the custody of the Home. She, however, did not keep her promise, and her residence being unknown, some time elapsed, before the where about of the child could be discovered.

It then appeared, that the nurse had meanwhile applied to Mrs. Capdeville and represented to this Lady, that the said orphan had been abandoned and was without protection. Mrs Capdeville thereupon

made suitable provision for the maintenance of the child and had it baptized in the Catholic religion.

It is conceded, that this estimable Lady acted from purely charitable motives and, what appeared to her, a sense of duty. For, altho' she refused to give up the child, when first demanded by the chairman of our Com[mitt]ee. On Application and Relief – yet when called upon by the undersigned, to surrender said orphan to its legitimate guardian, she complied with the demand and regretted the circumstances that had placed her in so unpleasant an attitude.

The said orphan has been an inmate of our Institution since the 28th of December last. In common with other Jewish orphans, it will enjoy the benefits of our Asylum, and special care will be taken to raise it in the religious faith of its parents.

The accompanying copy of the Constitution and By-Laws governing the Home will afford an adequate idea of the character and objects of our Institution.

In communicating the details of this affair permit me to add, that it is a source of peculiar gratification to the Israelites of this country, to witness, at this juncture, the prompt intervention of your Government in a case so similar to that of the Italian child Mortara, for whose parents there seems to be no prospect of relief. It is an earnest of that firm and enlightened policy, which has won for his majesty, the Emperor of France, the respect and admiration of the whole world. It presents the magnificent spectacle of an enlightened government of a powerful nation listening to the complaints of one of its humblest citizens and stepping forward to vindicate the sacred right; to worship God according to the dictates of one's own conscience. And I am fully persuaded, that this act will elicit from all Israelites, the most fervent prayers after the welfare of France and her august Ruler, and the kindest regards for your self.

Please accept, Sir, the expression of my high consideration and esteem, in subscribing myself,

Your obedt. servant

(Sig) M.M. Simpson

The Levy and Mortara Cases Come Together

The France of Napoleon III was clearly not identical to the Papal States under Pius IX. Both the government and people of France

had protested vociferously even before Americans became aware and involved in the Mortara case. Korn suggests that the Mortara incident weakened the alliance between the papacy and Empire, although Napoleon was not yet prepared to withdraw his troops and thereby break completely with the pope. As in America, French Jewry unified through the Alliance Israélite Universelle, “the only permanent result” of the incident in Europe. Paradoxically, when Mortara feared that Italian unification and control of the Papal States would result in his return to his parents, he fled to France to be able to practice his Catholic faith freely.¹⁹

The Widows and Orphans Home Board did circulate information about the Levy incident nationally. The February 1858 issue of Isaac Leiser’s the *Occident* and *American Jewish Advocate* included a report on the January 9, 1858 anniversary dinner meeting of the society amidst heavy coverage of the Mortara case. The report noted:

By-the-by we must mention a circumstance which transpired lately in connection with the Home. An infant, left motherless, was entrusted to a nurse. She took the child and gave it to a Catholic lady who had it baptized, and when the thing was discovered refused first to yield the baby to its kind and religious protectors, we mean the ladies of the Home, who had taken it in charge. But as New Orleans is not in the Roman States, the zealot had to yield up her surreptitious convert, and the child was thus restored to its friends and Judaism. Henceforth no child will be left out to nurse outside of the Home. Let our readers mark this! And then say whether the efforts made in the Mortara case are not based on a deep and holy principle; and still there are some who appear indifferent to this dreadful violation of human rights.²⁰

The next issue of the paper listed actions and resolutions from across the country on behalf of Mortara, including those from Mobile and New Orleans. James K. Gutheim chaired the joint committee organized by the New Orleans congregations that met on December 12, and M. M. Simpson served as secretary. On April 28, 1859, *The Occident* and *American Jewish Advocate* printed the fourth annual report of the association given at the March 12 meeting. Part of Simpson’s remarks described the case alluding directly to the Mortara incident:

I cannot close this Report without referring to an interesting circumstance, which forms an incident of the epidemic of 1858 in

our city. The subjoined correspondence [between he and Mèjan], which I have the honor to submit, will furnish a correct account of the proceedings connected with this affair. The prompt action of the French Government to redress the grievance of one of its humblest citizens, is an evidence of its wise and liberal policy and a signal tribute to the humanity of the age.

The child of Mortara is lingering a prisoner of His Holiness the Pope: the afflicted parents mourn his loss as one gone forever. But the age is not one of silence. Incidents such as that related below, of recent date in our community, must tend to strengthen the arm of justice and avenge “the deep damnation of his taking off.”

On April 29, 1859, Isaac M. Wise’s *The Israelite* reprinted the exchange of letters between Count Mèjan and M. M. Simpson under the headline, “No Mortara Case,” without Simpson’s full report. By advertising the case, the association was giving credit to the French government and, thus, further admonishing the Papal authorities by placing their actions in contrast.

Beyond Sectionalism

What lessons are to be learned from the Levy incident? Apparently the Papal policy of recognizing coercive conversion of Jews by individual lay people was well known, and its implementation extended beyond the infamous Mortara case. Conversely, some Catholics exemplified by the Capdevilles and French officials rejected the practice. Private American citizens acting independently of the United States government could effectively intervene even with foreign governments. Thus practical experience at least partly supported the position of those Jewish leaders who accepted Buchanan’s arguments.

Although Korn emphasized regional distinctions concerning responses to the Mortara case, what is more striking is the degree to which Jewish religious identification tempered sectional differences. Congregational leaders from the South as well as elsewhere in the United States pledged to work together under the auspices of committees formed in New York City. New York leaders had no qualms about using Gershom Kursheedt of New Orleans as their representative in Europe. In fact, Kursheedt was but one of the many individuals crossing sectional lines via organizational, familial, and business connections in a seamless pattern during their lives. Southern

representatives actively participated in the first annual meeting of the Board of Delegates of American Israelites in New York as late as August 23, 1860.²¹ The fact that northern spokespeople supported the Union and their southern counterparts becoming ardent Confederates did not substantially impact the unity forged by adversity. In contrast to the major Protestant denominations – Baptist, Methodist, and Presbyterian – that split along sectional lines between the mid-1830s and 1840s, on the eve of the Civil War, Jews formed their first truly national organization, the Board of Delegates of American Israelites. Some Jews, especially descendents of earlier immigrants, espoused Lost Cause mythology in the decades after the war.²² Nonetheless, Gutheim spent four years (1868-72) welcomed in a prestigious New York pulpit before again returning to New Orleans. Southern congregations rapidly joined the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (1873) and supported Hebrew Union College (1875). Rabbis in the South readily endorsed the Pittsburgh Platform (1885) and consequently cooperated in forming first a regional and then a national body (the Central Conference of American Rabbis, 1889). Moreover, rabbis in the South, as in the Midwest and West, recognized the affinity of Reform with the needs of their congregants. But many were also trained at the same institution and spent years in pulpits crossing sectional lines. Communication and cooperation came naturally. When in 1885 the Conference of Rabbis of Southern Congregations adopted as its motto, “Union, peace and progress,” the members, many of whom went on to distinguished careers in northern congregations, expressed their desire to overcome religious division.²³ But they used language that smacked of the New South ideology of North/South cooperation and reconciliation. These events occurred while the Protestant denominations remained divided and actually increased their competition for adherents in the South. Truly, Jewish history in the South and throughout America reflected American history and was impacted by it, but Jewish identity in its changing and numerous manifestations should not be underrated as at least an equally influential force.

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Notes

¹Initial research for this article was undertaken while the author was the 1999-2000 Starkoff Fellow of the Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives. The author greatly appreciates the support and gracious assistance provided by Gary Zola, Kevin Proffitt, Camille Servizzi, and the staff of the Archives. Jonathan Frankel, *The Damascus Affair: "Ritual Murder," Politics, and the Jews in 1840* (New York: 1997); Joseph Jacobs, "The Damascus Affair of 1840 and the Jews of America," *Publications of the American Jewish Historical Society* (1902): 119-28; Jonathan D. Sarna, *Jacksonian Jew: The Two Worlds of Mordecai Noah* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1981), 61-75. For brief descriptions of the three incidents, see Hasia Diner, *A Time for Gathering: The Second Migration, 1820-1880* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992); Arthur Hertzberg, *The Jews in America: Four Centuries of an Uneasy Encounter* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989). The Swiss Treaty remained an issue through the time of the Mortara case. Other immediate concerns included the Jews' Bill being debated in Parliament and similar issues in North Carolina and New Hampshire, and the plight of Jews in Morocco. The Board of Delegates of American Israelites addressed many of these causes. The support of the latter for the petitions and protests of North Carolina Jews against the religious disabilities in their state constitution on the eve of the Civil War reflected cross-sectional unity. See *The Occident* and *American Jewish Advocate*, September 1857-March 1860, (especially July 25, 1860, and August 9, 1860, for the North Carolina issue).

²On Leeser, attempts at union, conflicts within Philadelphia, the Mortara case, and the Board of Delegates of American Israelites, see Lance J. Sussman, *Isaac Leeser and the Making of American Judaism* (Detroit, MI.: Wayne State University Press, 1995), 211-19.

³Bertram W. Korn, *The American Reaction to the Mortara Case, 1858-59* (Cincinnati: The American Jewish Archives, 1957); Max J. Kohler, "The Board of Delegates of American Israelites, 1859-1878," *PAJHS* (1925): 75-131; Allan Tarshish, "The Board of Delegates of American Israelites (1859-1878)," *PAJHS* (1959): 16-32.

⁴Korn, *American Reaction*, 79-80.

⁵Contrary to Korn's claim, the Charleston resolutions included a provision to publish their protest resolutions in the local press. Although the New Orleans committee did not see fit to publish its resolutions in the local press, the *New Orleans Times-Picayune's* editorial position reflected that of the local Jewish committee. The paper noted the Philadelphia memorial to Buchanan and Cass's response on the front page. It described and decried the incident in no uncertain terms. The newspaper also published an account of the annual meeting of the Hebrew Widows and Orphans Association that included remarks from the keynote speaker, attorney Eleazer Block. In part, Block said, "We appeal to you, our Christian friends now present, to unite with us to secure an expression of popular opinion throughout the Union, that, uniting with the loud-voiced remonstrances of Europe, may point out to the tyrant the perils in his path, that may awaken his dormant humanity, and induce him to restore to a mother her child." The account continued: "Loud and long applause accompanied the close of the address that followed." In Memphis, Tennessee, the resolutions approved by congregation Children of Israel did urge the government to have American foreign ministers

“lend their moral influence” on behalf of Mortara. These instances fail to support Korn’s implication that southern Jews avoided publicizing their protests over the Mortara incident within their local communities. *The Israelite*, December 24, 1858 (Charleston), January 29, 1859 (comments to *Picayune* editor at the annual meeting of the Widows and Orphans Home Association), February 18, 1859 (Memphis); *Daily Picayune*, December 7, 1858, January 11, 1859 (New Orleans).

⁶Ibid., 43-46, 55-56, 92, 88-90, 93; Robert N. Rosen, *The Jewish Confederates* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 2000), Gutheim: 9, 244, 249-50, 254-57, 363-64; Hyams: xi, 25, 28-29, 41, 143, 413 n. 226; Jonas: 88-90, 93, 148-53, 344-46, 356-58, 365-66. See also William Warren Rogers, Jr., “‘In Defense of Our Sacred Cause’: Rabbi James K. Gutheim in Confederate Montgomery,” *Journal of Confederate History* 7 (1991): 112-22. Gutheim, the society secretary, offered the opening prayer at the Home’s dedication ceremony on January 8, 1856, and Jonas gave the oration. Jonas remained involved fifty years later. New Orleans banker George Jonas, Benjamin’s uncle and Abraham’s brother, served as the orphan society’s second president. Montefiore was made an honorary member on January 18, 1856. Simpson, Gutheim, Joseph Manger, and Joseph H. Marks were forced to resign offices in the society in 1863 because General N. P. Banks’s decree banished them from New Orleans. As Manger explained, “The war between the States closed in May, 1865, and the exiles returned to their home.” *The Story of the Jewish Orphans Home of New Orleans*, Joseph Manger, compiler (New Orleans, 1905), 12-13, 23, 26, 38. This fiftieth anniversary publication, written by an early and long-time member, does not mention either the Alice Levy or the Mortara incidents.

⁷Korn, *American Reaction*, 12-13, 37-38. On Christian missions to the Jews and Jewish responses, see Jonathan D. Sarna, “The American Jewish Response to Nineteenth-Century Christian Missions,” *Journal of American History* 68 (June 1981); Lorman Ratner, “Conversion of the Jews and Pre-Civil War Reform,” *American Quarterly* 13 (Spring 1961): 43-54; Robert M. Healey, “From Conversion to Dialogue: Protestant American Mission to the Jews in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 18 (Summer 1981): 375-87.

⁸In 1859 Kursheedt, a merchant then residing in London, was authorized by the New York committee that had been organized to respond to the Mortara case and, by proxy, many other American Jewish communities to accompany Sir Moses Montefiore to the Vatican to meet with Pope Pius IX. Although the mission failed, this illustrates the high regard the leaders of American Jewry had for Kursheedt. Born in Richmond, Virginia, Kursheedt was the grandson of Gershom Mendes Seixas of New York, the first American-born rabbi/hazan. He organized the New Orleans Hebrew Benevolent Society and exerted strong influence over Judah Touro on behalf of Judaism and Jewish philanthropy. Kursheedt, chair of the original executive committee, declined the presidency of the Home because he was obligated to carry out Judah Touro’s bequests in Jerusalem with Montefiore. See Korn, *American Reaction*, 157; Manger, *Story of the Jewish Home*, 8. Charleston, South Carolina, dedicated a Hebrew Orphans Home on January 8, 1860, in response to the yellow fever epidemics in that city. See *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, January 19, 1860. Similar orphans’ homes were later sponsored by B’nai B’rith lodges on a district basis. The literature is extensive. See, for example, Gary Edward Polster, *Inside Looking Out: The Cleveland Jewish Orphan Asylum, 1868-1924* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1990); Bradford Ward Trevathen,

“The Hebrew Orphans’ Home of Atlanta, 1889-1930,” (honors thesis, Emory University, 1984); Howard Goldstein, *The Home on Gorham Street and the Voices of its Children* (Tuscaloosa, AL.: University of Alabama Press, 1996); Reena Sigman Friedman, *These Are Our Children* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1994); Hyman Bogan, *The Luckiest Orphans: A History of the Hebrew Orphan Society of New York* (Urbana, IL.: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, Press, 1992). The B’nai B’rith Seventh District Grand Lodge sponsored the New Orleans home beginning in 1875. See Manger, *Story of the Jewish Home*, 34-35.

⁹New Orleans Association for the Relief of Widows and Orphans, 1855-1939 annual minutes, constitution, 1855, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Box 35 (hereafter, citations will refer to “annual minutes,” “monthly minutes,” and “semi-annual minutes”). All quotations will appear as they are in the original without the use of “[sic].”

¹⁰Annual minutes, constitution, 1855; Manger, *Story of the Jewish Orphans Home*, 5. Yellow fever was an epidemic disease during the nineteenth century. In December 1858 *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate* reported one hundred Jewish deaths in New Orleans during a ninety-day period. Isaac Leeser contrasted this with one hundred and ninety-four deaths in his Cherry Street Congregation over a twenty-one-year period. The New Orleans losses equaled half of those of this largest Philadelphia synagogue over a dramatically different time period. Mobile created a male Hebrew Relief Association on April 10, 1859 in response to the epidemics, and the preacher and hazan, Dr. M. Mayer of Charleston’s Beth Elohim, resigned because he claimed the trustees refused to grant him leave every summer to flee the city during yellow fever season. They pleaded with him to remain, but to no avail. See *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, June 23, 1859, September 15, 1859, November 10, 1859, and November 18, 1859.

¹¹Annual minutes, bylaws, 1855.

¹²Semiannual minutes, October 17, 1855; October 6, 1855; Manger, *Story of the Jewish Home*, 15.

¹³Simpson was elected president after the preliminary committee completed its activities and continued in that capacity until his retirement from office on March 26, 1865. Semi-annual minutes, January 8, 1856; March 15, 1857; March 26, 1865. Vocational and, for women, “domestic” education remained hallmarks of the institution. In 1904 the Isidore K. Newman Manual Training School opened its doors under the auspices of the society. (Manger, *Story of the Jewish Home*, 37, 98-99).

¹⁴Executive Board monthly minutes, December 26, 1858; Korn, *American Reaction*, 36-37, 39, 55-56.

¹⁵Executive Board monthly minutes, January 2, 1859; Korn, *American Reaction*, 62-63. Alice was one of forty-eight admitted into the home in the previous year and one of forty-seven child inmates. There were only six widows. The Home always housed only a very small number of widows, and in 1881 it decided to place these at the Touro Infirmary. (Manger, *Story of the Jewish Home*, 19, 40-43).

¹⁶ Having been unable to locate the grandmother's letter, her role remains enigmatic. Why did she seemingly support the maid's position, and why did she not offer to raise Alice?

¹⁷ Sir Moses Montefiore had an audience with Walewsky in Paris on his return trip to England from Rome, in which he acknowledged the intervention of the French government in the Mortara case. (*The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, August 11, 1859.) Walewsky had sent the note to the Pontifical government through the French ambassador to Rome at the behest of Napoleon III protesting the abduction of Mortara, and he also informed the Israelite Consistory of Paris of this action. (*The Israelite*, November 19, 1859.) Walewsky is spelled "Wallewski" in the newspapers.

¹⁸ Count Mèjan's original letter in French was translated and reprinted in *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, April 28, 1859, as part of Simpson's annual report to the association. I greatly appreciate the assistance of Helen McKinney and Sonja Wentling for translating the document before I located the newspaper account.

¹⁹ Korn, *American Reaction*, 13, 159.

²⁰ A list of interments from August 1 to November 8, 1858 in the Jackson Street Jewish Cemetery follows: The cause of the extensive deaths was yellow fever. Two are listed as Levy, with France as the place of origin: Clarisse Levy, age twenty-five and H. Levy, age twenty-two. Alice Levy's mother died in September, so it is likely that she would be included in this list. Because of the circumstances, it is unlikely that the first name of the mother would be unknown. Therefore, probably Clarisse Levy was Alice's mother. On March 31, 1859, a correction appeared in *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*. The fault was placed on the nurse and not the women to whom the baby had been taken. This notice also included information on another similar incident. A bohemian immigrant named Bernhard had married a Christian woman in St Louis. They had three sons before her death, and she requested that they be raised as Jews, something she could not do during her lifetime because of her Roman Catholic parents. Bernhard had great difficulty getting his children back from a Roman Catholic asylum, where he had placed them temporarily. He then fled to New Orleans because "St Louis was no longer a place of safety for him." The three boys underwent circumcision and conversion under the auspices of congregation Temime Derech. Isaac M. Wise covered this story as a separate item in *The Israelite*, January 29, 1859.

²¹ Simon Berman of Richmond, Virginia recommended the creation of agricultural colonies in America to receive the persecuted from Europe in response to the Mortara and similar incidents. Isaac Leeser and others championed the cause and urged the Board of Delegates to establish a Hebrew Colonization Society. See *The Occident and American Jewish Advocate*, September 8, 1859, October 6, 1859, October 18, 1859, March 8, 1860, and August 23, 1860. In a front-page editorial on January 17, 1861, Isaac Leeser advocated "conciliation and peace" and denounced those in the North who denounced the South.

²² Rosen, *Jewish Confederates*, chaps. 8 and 9.

²³ Gary P. Zola, "Southern Rabbis and the Founding of the First National Association of Rabbis," *American Jewish History* 85 (December 1997): 353-72.