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Mark K. Bauman, *Editor*

Rachel Heimovics Braun, *Managing Editor*

Dana M. Greene, *Book Review Editor*

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Harry Golden, *New Yorker*: I ♥ NC

by

Leonard Rogoff

At a Raleigh reception several years ago, *New York Times* columnist Tom Wicker observed that whenever he returned home to North Carolina he was astonished by the number of people who wanted to know, “What do folks in New York think of North Carolina?” The answer, of course, is that they don’t think about North Carolina at all.

The fact that the question is asked says more about North Carolinians than it does about New Yorkers. As southerners, why should North Carolinians care? Supposedly in southern mythology, New York represents sin, commerce, urbanism, ill manners, fast-talk, and, of course, Jews. New York is Satan, crass and materialistic, sexually libertine. For the Populists it was the home of financial parasites who manipulated markets and herded good farm folk into factories. The war between country virtue and city vice is a theme as old as folklore. The Leo Frank case was not just about a murder, but it pitted poor Georgia Christians against rich New York Jews, Tom Watson’s *Jeffersonian* against Adolph Ochs’s *New York Times*. The mythic South is the Plantation Ideal, that sunny South of neighborly conversation and self-effacing courtesy, of mint juleps on the veranda, starlit nights on the bayou, bird hunting, biscuits and slow-cooked pork. New York, as the mythology has it, is fast-paced and wise-cracking, rye bread and pastrami. New York is neither field nor forest but all pavement where life is lived not in the great outdoors but in office, theater, and nightclub. New York represents everything the South

is supposedly not. Why should the Lazy South care about the City that Never Sleeps?

New York Jew

For Harry Golden of Charlotte, North Carolina, New York City was *The Greatest Jewish City in the World*. He even wrote a book with that title.¹ Golden reveled in being a New York Jew, a Lower East Side street kid, a shtick that he played self-consciously to the point of caricature: quick with a quip, ready to do battle as champion of the outcast and downtrodden everywhere. Born Harry Goldhirsch in eastern Galicia, he had a classic ghetto upbringing with a poor but Jewishly learned father. He attended City College without graduating, and, after trying his hand at a variety of trades including a stint as soapbox Socialist speaker, he ran a bucket shop, speculating in stock with other people's money. In 1929 his brokerage house went bust, and Goldenhirsch found himself in jail for fraud. After three-and-a-half years in the Atlanta penitentiary, he renamed himself Harry Golden and returned to New York where he sold newspaper advertising. In 1941 he relocated to Charlotte to write and sell ads for the *Labor Journal*.

In 1942 Golden printed a first issue of his own newspaper, the *Carolina Israelite*, and began regular publication two years later. His topics included Jews, Zionism, labor rights, politics of all sorts, racial justice, brotherhood, Jewish-Christian relations, and history, both ancient and modern. He wrote of Jews in every aspect, as an ancient people, as victims of pogrom and Holocaust, as small-town southerners, as paragons of civilization, as American immigrants, as fighters for Zion. Yet, his primary subject was himself. He engaged his reader in conversation and was by turns didactic, nostalgic, witty, satirical, sentimental, informative, and, not infrequently, insightful. He reduced injustice to ridicule with his various plans, most famously his Vertical Negro Plan. Observing that in a segregated society blacks and whites frequently stood in lines together but could not sit together, he suggested that schools could integrate by removing chairs. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., praised him, and his list of friends and admirers includ-

ed Carl Sandburg, Norman Thomas, Robert Kennedy, and Adlai Stevenson. The *Carolina Israelite* endured for twenty-four years, its circulation rising at its peak in the late 1950s and early 1960s to thirty thousand with a worldwide readership. His collections of essays, *Only in America* and *For 2¢ Plain*, put him on the best-seller list, and he became a national celebrity, a regular on television and in the print media.

Southern Alien

This unabashed liberal, conspicuous Jew and loud-mouthed New Yorker called North Carolina home. After Golden published his last *Carolina Israelite* in 1968, editor Jonathan Daniels of the *Raleigh News and Observer* wrote appreciatively that Harry wore “a Hebrew’s skin . . . as a costume—almost a sort of comic armor.” Golden, he observed, “energetically played the role of Jewish clown to serve his cause.”² If the southern ideal of manhood was the football quarterback, the NASCAR driver, or the outdoorsman, Harry was short and potbellied, chompin’ a cigar rather than chewin’ ‘bacco. The admonition of southern Jews was to fit in, and Harry was decidedly unfit. In his columns he rhapsodized on kosher pickles and argued that a plate of brisket would cure any antisemite of his prejudice.³

By rights, then, if stereotypes hold true, Golden is living proof of Charlotte native W. J. Cash’s observation in *The Mind of the South* that the southern Jew is an “eternal Alien” in the region.⁴ Golden admitted as much: “Calling the paper the *Israelite* meant that while I didn’t please the folks anymore, still they only said, ‘Oh, that’s just a Jew paper talkin’.”⁵ Indeed, when Harry Golden closed the *Carolina Israelite*, the *Atlanta Constitution* reprinted from the *Los Angeles Times* a feature article reviewing Golden’s nearly half-century career under the headline “Home Town Hated Golden.” The article opened, “Revered around the world but reviled at home, Harry Golden is known here as ‘that little fat Jew that pops off about the niggers and is always trying to stir up trouble.’” It noted that except for Charlotte’s newspapers, “which have frequently paid tribute to Golden, the demise of the *Israelite* was generally greeted with indifference or an attitude of good rid-

dance." A New Yorker who "cherishes Charlotte as his hometown," Golden was "deluged with hate mail and late night phone calls that begin 'You Jew bastard.'" It continued, "Charlotte ostracizes him, although he has a small circle of devoted friends – newspapermen, ministers, physicians, and other professional people." It quoted one such friend, journalist Kays Gary: "The one thing Harry wants in this town is what he can't get – respect. . . . Most of the power structure knows him only by reputation and doesn't want to know him personally. He's still mostly known as that 'little fat Jew.'"⁶

The disrespect that Harry engendered was not limited to antisemites. The local Jewish community held a begrudging attitude toward him. After Harry wrote a public letter in 1969 to the *Charlotte Observer* protesting the exclusion of blacks and Jews from the Charlotte City Club, Jewish community leader Morris Speizman wrote to the club president, "Harry Golden does not speak for me."⁷ On another occasion, Speizman stated, "This man, who has acted as the voice of Jewry in the Southeast has actually been a peripheral member of our own Charlotte Jewish community."⁸ A Charlotte rabbi bemoaned, "We wish he'd go away and leave us alone."⁹ Harry admitted that he "annoyed the Jews. Not all the Jews, but some of them." Jews, he wrote, had asked him to "give up the paper . . . 'because the Gentiles think you speak for all of us.'"¹⁰ Jonathan Daniels noted perceptively, "Harry Golden is not, never has been, and never will be the Israelite of Carolina."¹¹

Southern Jew

If hate mail, threatening phone calls, and social ostracism were Charlotte's gift to Golden, how does one account for his cooing love songs to his adopted city, state, and region? Journalists who wrote life reviews of Golden from the vantage point of his 1968 retirement suggest that he had always been a despised outsider, a local prophet without honor. Yet, as early as 1949, when Golden made his rounds to sell ads for his labor journal, he complained that he felt too much love. The mill owners who wanted to talk Bible or world affairs with him were keeping him from other potential clients: "I do not go to see [them] anymore even

*Harry Golden posing in front of his house/office.
The historical marker, from the early 1970s, commemorates his achievements.
(Courtesy of Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC-Charlotte.)*

though it is a sure sale, because they keep me there a few hours."¹² In 1953, prior to the Supreme Court's desegregation decision, he observed "that the Southerner arches his back only at his critic who runs away, but actually welcomes the same critic when he becomes a part of the community. Why the Christians here loved it, every word of it and said so—from Judge John J. Parker of Charlotte to Jonathan Daniels of Raleigh, to Don Shoemaker of Asheville to Reed Sarratt of Winston-Salem. These are the men who more or less mold 'Gentile' reaction in the state. . . . Recently, I asked the question in my paper whether I was a Tar Heel and four daily papers and five weekly journals wrote EDITORIALS welcoming me to the f aternity [*sic*]." ¹³ In a 1956 letter to Dr. George Mitchell of the Southern Regional Council, Golden described himself as "a fellow who has but three passionate loves in this life—The Jewish people, America, and the South."¹⁴ He returned their love. When invited to write about civil rights in national journals or testify before congressional committees, Golden mostly refused, noting that he did not want to join the chorus of northern liberals badmouthing the South. He would have more credibility with southerners speaking as one of them.

Even his ideological enemies loved him. Although he repeatedly and publicly criticized Governor Luther Hodges for presiding over a segregated state, Hodges consulted Golden before attending a White House conference on the 1957 Little Rock integration crisis. The governor later appointed him the state's Ambassador of Sunshine.¹⁵ Golden ghostwrote speeches for a Republican congressman. Pro-segregation columnist James Kilpatrick, writing in the *Richmond News-Leader* in 1958, referred to Harry as a "liberal Jew, born on New York's lower East Side, who transplanted himself to the South and made a million friends, including several hundred thousand who disagree with him strongly."¹⁶ Kenneth Whitsett, head of the local Patriots of North Carolina, a group described as "somewhat to the right of the White Citizens Council," wrote Golden, "You and I disagree except that we like each other. At least I know I like you."¹⁷

Although Golden was consistently an integrationist, he did not offend southern sensibilities. His humor and his Jewishness

were defensive shields. Moreover, he personalized conflict to remove its sting. Just because a senator might hold deplorable racial views did not mean he was not good for a glass of bourbon. In the 1950s, racial integration was not obsessively a headline theme for the *Carolina Israelite*. The issue after the May 17, 1954, Supreme Court decision outlawing segregation in the public schools contained on its front page articles about Augustus Caesar, Alexander Hamilton, and American and German Jews. A short paragraph noted that "Negro lawyers are preparing two cases to bring into court."¹⁸ Nor did he address the 1957 Little Rock school desegregation crisis directly in the *Israelite*. Instead, he philosophized on "Racism" abstractly, calling for more "COMMUNICATION," "LOGIC," and "HUMANITY."¹⁹ Similarly, when Virginia's "political bosses" defied court-ordered integration threatening to close the public schools, he appealed to the state's "great people" to remember that they were the "mother of presidents" and had given birth to John Marshall. "And what a civilization is this Virginia!" Golden extolled.²⁰ Appealing to their better natures, he actually made Virginians feel good about themselves as they massively resisted integration.

The title of his journal included *Carolina* as well as *Israelite*. A 1957 headline read, "THE SOUTH IS GREAT. . . . BUT NORTH CAROLINA IS THE GREATEST." In 1958 *Saturday Evening Post* reporter John Kobler walked Charlotte's streets with Golden, observing that he was a "well-entrenched town character." In "Why They Don't Hate Harry," Kobler noted that "few townsfolk think of him as an alien, rather as a civic institution." Golden led the town's St. Patrick's Day parade singing "The Wearing of the Green."²¹ The "power structure" may have disdained him, but a local friendship circle that included "newspapermen, ministers, physicians, and other professional people" hardly suggests marginality. When his home office burned accidentally in 1958, a newspaper reported that "editors, friends, the local police chief and others . . . have rallied behind Mr. Golden." People brought him food, lent him a car, and donated office space. Golden wrote, "It is with a full heart that I thank you, and through you, the rest of the city of Charlotte for the high-hearted spirit of generosity

which followed the fire." He especially thanked the "strangers" in Chantilly, North Charlotte, Second Ward, and Dilworth who held a prayer meeting for the restoration of his incinerated subscription list.²² 1958 was momentous for Golden. It marked both the publication of *Only in America* and the public revelation of his criminal past for securities fraud. Yet, once his history as a former convict hit the national media, he found "only friendly understanding." Local journalists confessed they had known of it but sat on the news. "From the minute the secret was out," *Life* reported, "he was swamped not with abuse but phone calls, wires, letters (3,000 to date) and new offers to lecture."²³ He began listing his speaking engagements in the *Israelite*.

Civic and business Charlotte may not have invited Harry to join the club, but he was hardly a pariah. When in 1962 department store magnate George Ivey decided to integrate his dining salon, he asked Golden how to handle it. Early issues of the *Carolina Israelite* included among its advertisers Carolina Power and Light, First Citizens Bank, Rubbermaid, Broyhill Furniture, Neese's Sausages, and Burlington Industries. Such advertising continued to the last issue in 1968. Charlie Cannon, the textile magnate, wrote to him, "Dear Golden: Enclosed is \$3 for renewal. Half your paper stinks, but the other half gives us all lots of pleasure."²⁴ In 1969 the University of North Carolina at Charlotte proclaimed Harry Golden Day and dedicated an archive and lecture series in his honor. Golden served as secretary of the Charlotte Committee on Public Affairs and as board member of both the city and state Human Relation Councils.

A New Southerner

What's going on here? Hated New York Jew or beloved Son of the South? Which is it? Harry Golden wanted to have it both ways, defending the South to northerners who did not understand how things are done down South and admonishing southerners for their bigotry and backwardness. Perhaps Golden's complexities speak to deeper confusions about southern identity itself. Perhaps, as recent scholars argue, the South has been a more cosmopolitan place than the plantation myths and provincial

*Harry Golden with national and local dignitaries, 1959.
Golden with Eleanor Roosevelt and, to her left, seated on sofa arm is
Gladys Tillett, Charlotte resident and delegate to the UN Women's
Commission. Charlotte Mayor Philip Lance Van Every is standing on right.
(Courtesy of Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC-Charlotte.)*

stereotypes suggest. Perhaps the northern urbanism that Golden roundly embodied was not alien at all to the mind of the South and of Charlotte particularly. When David Goldfield of UNC-Charlotte, historian of southern urbanism, describes the ethos of the New South cities as "boisterous boosterism," he could have been describing the character of Harry Golden. The city, Goldfield observes, is "the greatest symbol" of the South's integration into the nation,²⁵ and Charlotte crowned itself the "Queen City."

Harry Golden as southern New York Jew was a herald of a changing urban, cosmopolitan South. "Charlotte is all about tomorrow," Golden's friend Walter Klein likes to say. New South cities like Atlanta and Charlotte emulate New York by building

ever upward. Their skylines today contrast with an Old South city like Charleston that restricts the height of its buildings. Charleston is all about yesterday. Charlotte is not the South of Lost Causes and Confederates in the Attic, massively resisting change, but the South of what C. Vann Woodward labeled, “the bulldozer revolution.”²⁶ A year after the *Carolina Israelite* folded, the word *Sunbelt* entered the lexicon.

If the New South had an instant of birth, most accounts trace it to a famous speech delivered by journalist Henry Grady in 1886 to the New England Society in, of all places, New York City. Although Grady had begun editorializing on the New South in his native Atlanta as early as 1874, it was this talk that defined the New South creed.²⁷ Grady extolled a South whose cities were buzzing as “vast hives of industry.”²⁸ He described an economy diversifying beyond agriculture, and—even as Jim Crow was preparing to make his entrance—extolled its harmonious race relations. Grady saluted the “Georgia Yankee” who has come south to build its factories. The precedents for Harry Golden as a Carolina New Yorker, or “Yenkee Tarheel” as he called himself, reached back more than half a century. When asked why he settled in the South, he responded, “I sensed that the next big story of America would develop there, the shifting of a whole social order from agrarianism to urbanization.”²⁹ In 1957 Golden pumped it as “the greatest news story of the 20th century.”³⁰ He returned to this theme often.

It was an old story. Southern states had long established boards and sent agents north to draw immigrant labor. The *Charlotte Observer* in an 1878 article, “Northern People Coming South,” proclaimed, “North Carolina should be trimming her sails to catch her share of this South-bound tide.”³¹ Although wary of carpet-baggers who sought political office, the southern media overflowed with New South boosterism as states competed in offering incentives to skilled labor, technicians, industrialists, and capitalists. As early as 1866, a Richmond newspaper proclaimed, “Where there are no Jews, there is no money to be made. . . . We hail their presence in the Southern States as an auspicious sign.”³² And, in 1881, the *Greensboro Patriot*, declared, “To Yankee brains

and capital we shall extend a cordial welcome."³³ After the 1880s northern capitalists began investing more heavily in southern industries. From 1880 to 1910 the urban population of the South grew by five million.³⁴ It was the industrial South that drew Golden: he first came as a labor journalist.

Whether in country hamlet or budding New South metropolis, the name New York was emblazoned across the South. Charlotte's Belk brothers were native sons, not Jews, who started with a New York Racket Store and built a department store dynasty. In 1911 in Charlotte one could eat at the New York Restaurant, stock up on goods at the New York Household Supply, buy a policy at the local agency of New York Life Insurance, try on a suit at the New York Furnishing Company, and get the clothes tailored at the New York Misfit Parlor. Or take Hemp, North Carolina, which changed its name to Robbins in 1943 to honor the textile mill owner and philanthropist Karl Robbins, who kept the town solvent through the depression years. Robbins himself was a Russian-born, New York Jew and a benefactor of Yeshiva College and the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York. A local resident wrote, "In New York Mr. Robbins lives in Central Park West. But in some respects we can also think of Karl Robbins as North Carolinian."³⁵ Former presidential-candidate John Edwards portrays his hometown of Robbins as archetypal small-town South. As agents in creating an urban, commercial, and cosmopolitan South, Jews were not leading the South in a direction that it did not want to go.

As Stephen Whitfield notes, Harry was hardly the only New Yorker to enter southern mythology. In 1957 North Carolinians revered New York not for giving it a "little fat Jew," but a tall skinny one named Lennie Rosenbluth, who, as the nation's most valuable player, led the Tar Heels basketball team to a national championship. UNC Coach Frank McGuire, a New York Irishman, commented, "He did a lot for his religion in the South."³⁶ Not to be outdone, Duke imported all-American Art Heyman. A climax of the Duke-Carolina basketball rivalry was a 1961 game when two New York Jews, Heyman and UNC's Larry Brown, exploded into fisticuffs as southern loyalties trumped ethnic bonds.

Another New York Duke basketball player, Marshall Rauch, married a Jewish co-ed from Gastonia where he settled and was elected to the state senate for twelve terms, becoming perhaps the state's most powerful politician. In 1970 a newspaper asked, "Can a tall, dark and handsome Jew from New York City survive and prosper as an aspiring politician and manufacturer (of Christmas ornaments no less) in rural, agricultural, predominantly Protestant North Carolina. Answer: It's what's happening."³⁷ The New Yorker may not have been native, but he was no longer lonely. In 1950, one in twelve southerners was northern born; by 1980, it was one in five.³⁸

Ambitious southerners have long dreamed of making it in New York no less than the thousands of poor blacks—and poor whites as well—who undertook the Great Migration north in search of opportunity. North Carolinians John Coltrane and Thelonious Monk achieved jazz immortality in the city. Thomas Wolfe did not go home again to Asheville; he went to New York, where he found solace in the arms of a New York Jew. Nor was Faulkner a stranger to New York. Eudora Welty studied advertising at Columbia University, returning home only when her father died. Tennessee Williams's life traced a triangle between New Orleans, Key West, and New York, and, as for Truman Capote, there is *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. Mississippi's Willie Morris wrote memoirs *North toward Home* and *New York Days*. As Morris said in an interview with Charlie Rose, a North Carolinian who also made it big in the city: "This is one of the sturdy chords in American literature—the provincial coming to New York—and being immersed in its drama, its power, its glamour." Literary critic Elizabeth Hardwick's obituary noted that as a southern Protestant reared in Kentucky, she had always had "her eye on New York City and its culture." In 1979 she told an interviewer: "Even when I was in college, 'down home,' I'm afraid my aim was—if it doesn't sound too ridiculous—my aim was to be a New York Jewish intellectual."³⁹

There is nothing more southern among southerners with ambition than the desire to escape the South, to sample the cosmopolitan world, to be able to discover home, as expatriates have done everywhere, by leaving it. Having a play on Broadway

Harry Golden and Billy Graham at a book presentation luncheon. Golden (right) shakes hands with Mayor Stanford Brookshire of Charlotte. Seated are Graham (left) and George Ivey, Sr., owner of Ivey's Department Store. The occasion was the presentation of Bible Words That Guide Me, edited by Hubert A. Elliott, published in 1963, with favorite Bible verses by well-known people including Golden and Graham. (Courtesy of Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC-Charlotte.)

or being published in New York was a benediction and validation for southerners, who knew that they came from a benighted region of racism, poverty, disease, and illiteracy. Making it in New York was the ultimate refutation of any feelings of inferiority, of that supercilious northern attitude that equated a southern accent with ignorance. The final crusade of Billy Graham's long evangelical career was a triumphant revival held in New York City, which he described as his valediction.

Golden was available locally to give southerners his New York blessing without their having to travel north. He was hardly

the first New York Jewish comedian to play a southern stage. Jewish vaudeville acts and companies from New York have long toured local opera houses, often Jewish-owned. In 1895 Simeon Archibald Schloss assumed management of an opera house in Wilmington, North Carolina, building a chain that controlled fourteen regional houses. Linked to the Theatrical Syndicate of New York, Schloss brought Shakespeare, melodrama, minstrel shows, and symphony orchestras to places like Monroe, Tarboro, and Charlotte.⁴⁰ Golden, too, had a sense of himself as an ambassador of cosmopolitan culture, a member in good standing of North Carolina's literati, who included Shakespeare in his lecture inventory. Look at the cultural calendars of virtually any southern city today, and you will find at its local arts center a Broadway theater series cheek by jowl with blues festivals and bluegrass concerts.⁴¹ Robert Weiss, a New York choreographer who turned the Carolina Ballet into a national company, splashes its *New York Times* reviews in all its promotional materials.

Southern Progressive

Caricatures of a parochial South and a cosmopolitan North exaggerate differences. To regard Harry's labor and civil rights activism as an alien import is to overlook the region's own progressive traditions, which, however beleaguered, have been persistent undercurrents of North Carolina history. That the South is racially, religiously, and politically conservative is measurably true, but Golden's liberalism is hardly alien to the mind of the South. When Charlotte schools integrated, several did so without incident although at one middle school a black girl was cursed and spat upon. The Charlotte City Council responded by passing a resolution, endorsed by the mayor, denouncing "die hards" and "stubborn attitudes" and pledging to keep schools open: "We believe in changing times, the live and let live policy."⁴² Golden relished telling southern audiences, both Christian and Jewish, that he was saying what they were thinking and he noted how his remarks were always greeted with applause, even standing ovations. North Carolina may have elected and re-elected Jesse Helms, but it also sent progressives Frank Graham, Kerr Scott,

Terry Sanford, and John Edwards to the Senate, and Scott, Sanford, and Jim Hunt to the governor's house. Scott's 1948 gubernatorial campaign slogan was "Go Forward." Scott and Graham were Golden's friends and intimate correspondents.

As a southerner, Golden was never alone in his crusading, liberal, personal journalism. P. D. East in Mississippi and Arnold Eiseman in Savannah also self-published newspapers that were out of step with their neighborhoods. Editors like Sylvan Meyer of Gainesville, Georgia, and Hodding Carter of Greenville, Mississippi, along with Ralph MacGill of the *Atlanta Constitution*, bravely fought against the segregationist tide. Golden and MacGill joined Carl Sandburg, a fellow NAACP member, at the poet's North Carolina mountain home to renew their sprits and cogitate on the issues of the day. Sandburg, a Chicagoan who also embraced the South as his own, found himself "washed by waves of Southern hospitality."⁴³

Golden's advocacy did provoke racial extremists. The South has been notable for its courtesy, but also for its hatreds. When asked what quality of Harry Golden he admired most, his friend Walter Klein cites his bravery in brushing off menacing calls and letters.⁴⁴ In 1962 Golden alerted the FBI to one such death threat, noting offhand that he received "vast" vitriolic mail and "crackpot phone calls."⁴⁵ In refusing to castigate the South before Congress or in national publications Harry was not standing solely on principle but was toeing a strategic line of self interest, constantly aware of just how far he could go. His discretion tempered his valor. Yet, among Golden's voluminous collected papers at Special Collections of Atkins Library at UNC-Charlotte, letters expressing interest and support are more numerous than hate mail.

Antisemitism was important to Golden's worldview and sense of himself. Like many of his generation, his perspective was shaped by the personal experiences of a ghetto youth and by the Holocaust. He wrote of antisemitism as a "constant of western culture," and it validated his own marginality and fellowship with the oppressed and persecuted.⁴⁶ Dramatist Paul Green, in his folkloric dictionary of the southern vernacular, defined a "Jewish

disease" of hypersensitivity.⁴⁷ Violent antisemitism provoked fear. Dynamite was planted at synagogues in Charlotte and nearby Gastonia in the late 1950s, but prejudice in Charlotte more commonly took the form of the country-club social discrimination commonplace in the America of Golden's day. But even there the alleged indifference of Charlotte's "power structure" to him can be explained without reference to his being a "little fat Jew." Where in the America of the fifties or sixties would a "power structure" respect a person who agitated for labor unions, organized a clemency petition for a convicted communist, advocated for a gay man convicted of sodomy, and had a criminal past for securities fraud?⁴⁸ A rumbled, ill-dressed man was not likely to cut much of a figure with the pin-striped, uptown crowd. Golden himself was puzzled by Charlotte's Jewish millionaires who perceived themselves as outsiders.

Golden felt southern, which did not contradict his New York nostalgia. However much he may have differed from his neighbors in his views on race and social justice, he sat on his front porch sipping bourbon from his rocking chair. As Chapel Hill literary scholar Louis Rubin, Jr., observed in his memoir *My Father's People: A Family of Southern Jews*, "What is striking is the swiftness with which the process that sociologists call 'acculturation' took place" among Jews who came South.⁴⁹ A tolerant, ecumenical man, married to an Irish Catholic, Golden had an innate sense of courtesy that harmonized with southern codes of civility. In a 1962 letter to George Ivey, Jr., Golden wrote, "I doubt seriously whether I have ever held up to scorn and ridicule any man or institution."⁵⁰ As Stephen Whitfield notes, Golden lacked two New York qualities: the "caustic" and the "tragic."⁵¹ When two stalwarts of the northern Jewish intelligentsia, Philip Roth and Ted Solotaroff, attacked Harry for being both a Jewish sentimentalist and a southern apologist, Golden took personal umbrage, lamenting "it must be sad to go through life with fists so tightly clenched."⁵²

Harry Golden challenged Jewish stereotypes of southerners as much as he challenged southern stereotypes of New York Jews. He constantly told both Jews and southerners how much he loved

them. A refrain in southern-Jewish oral histories describes an encounter with northern brethren who express shock upon learning that Jews actually live in a place where hooded Klansmen burn crosses and biscuits are baked in pig fat. Southern Jews, in turn, express their bemusement at how contentedly and comfortably they live with their gentile neighbors compared to the anxieties of northern Jews.⁵³ As a sentimentalist, Golden, in his stories, touched the hearts of a people who live, as Eli Evans reminds us, in "a storytelling place."⁵⁴

Not only have Jews acculturated to the South, but the South has also acculturated to the Jews. W. J. Cash recognized an Old Testament severity in southern Christianity as expressed in its ballads and spirituals.⁵⁵ Golden played to southern philosemitism, that romantic religiosity that viewed Jews not as Christkillers but as People of the Book, of the Savior's very flesh and blood. Beyond religious philosemitism, ethnic Jewishness also became pervasive as the region integrated into the mainstream American culture principally through the medium of television. Golden became a national celebrity in the late 1950s and 1960s, traveling to New York to appear on the Jack Paar and Dave Garroway shows. Edward R. Murrow came to Charlotte to interview him for *Person to Person*. In Golden's day southerners, too, laughed aloud in their living rooms at wise-cracking Jews like George Burns, Jack Benny, Sid Ceasar, and Milton Berle. In succeeding generations they guffawed with the rest of the nation at self-conscious Jews like Woody Allen, Jerry Seinfeld, and John Stewart.

As northerners flocked to the Sunbelt, drawn by its temperate climes and booming economy, North Carolina became more multicultural. Its Jewish population has grown exponentially. Yiddishisms like *schmooze* or *kvetch* no longer definitively mark the speaker as a Jew, and a sports page congratulated a black Davidson basketball player for his on-the-court "chutzpah."⁵⁶ Across the South the bagel has fruitfully multiplied, sometimes blended with blueberries, while the traditional biscuit has to be hunted. Golden's pioneering efforts to enlist Christian fundamentalists in support of Israel has become so pervasive that some evangelicals outdo Jews in their zeal for Zion.

Harry Golden with his three surviving sons, May 1969.

They are, left to right, Richard, Billy, and Harry Jr.

A fourth son, Peter, died in 1958.

(Courtesy of Special Collections, Atkins Library, UNC-Charlotte.)

Changing Times

When Golden closed the *Carolina Israelite* in 1968 he recognized that the times had moved beyond him. That fact, more than any local or regional alienation, accounted for the newspaper's demise. His audience of immigration-era Jews was aging and dying. A new generation of college-educated, suburban Jews was little interested in Lower East Side nostalgia. People were no longer buying what he was selling, and he was tired of losing money. In his last column he wrote in capitals: "THE CAROLINA ISRAELITE WAS A VENTURE FOR PROFIT." He recognized that print

journalism was yielding to television, and even the metropolitan dailies were suffering. He was expending his income from book royalties, speaking fees, and syndicated columns to support a dying medium. His advertising salesmen, conniving and hard-drinking, tested his tolerance. Moreover, Golden now played on the national stage with an open mike at *The Nation*. Although he did not mention it, he also closed the newspaper one year after the Six Day War. A passionate Zionist, he had written ardently of the valiant struggle to create a Jewish state, often in bold headlines, but after the 1967 war he wrote an occasional, tepid column opposing arm sales to Arab states or saluting Israel's foreign aid to Africa. The postwar issue featured New Year's wishes to his Jewish readers and a report on his gall bladder operation. Like the Israelis, Golden was no longer an embattled underdog, a stance that had once fired his inspiration. More especially, the "fight for civil rights lost its romance." He observed, "There was something inherently absurd about segregation when I began the *Israelite* in the early 1940s." By 1968 younger African American black power advocates like Stokely Carmichael had spurned white patronage, and integrationists like King found themselves contending with black separatists. The black antisemite that he had once dismissed as comic and unconvincing was now bitter and menacing. Golden lamented the changed ethos of civil rights in his final editorial in the *Israelite*: "There is nothing funny about it anymore nor do I attempt to find its humor." He saw "no end in sight." Simply put, Golden was burned out. The crusader, not in the best of health, had lost his fire. Three months after Golden's last issue, King would be shot dead.

Seen in perspective, Harry Golden's trajectory from a regional personality to a national celebrity reflected larger southern transformations and expressed the larger ambitions of his home city. If his writings were nostrums to placate middle-class suburban sensibilities, as Solotaroff suggests, they were coming from a Charlotte that was less provincially southern and more suburban like the rest of America.⁵⁷ Charlotte, too, was passing Harry Golden by. It no longer had interest in his nostalgia or the time for his neighborly conversation. Like Atlanta, it was too busy to hate.

*Title page,
Amerika Sheli (My America),
by Harry Golden, published in
Israel, in Hebrew, and containing
selections from Only in America
and For 2¢ Plain.
(Courtesy of Special Collections,
Atkins Library, UNC-Charlotte.)*

In his last issue, Golden recognized the city's changed racial ethos: "They'd make Martin Luther King Mayor of Charlotte tomorrow if somehow he could promise no collective bargaining." In 1963 he had written dramatically about the brave struggle of a black architectural student to integrate Clemson University. Two years after Golden died in 1981, Harvey Gantt would serve the first of his two terms as Charlotte's mayor. Jews who were once civic outsiders now had their names on a downtown museum and art center.

North Carolina was reaching out to the nation, and the nation was coming to North Carolina. The evolution from *Carolina Israelite* to *Only in America* anticipates the emergence of Charlotte's North Carolina National Bank into the Bank of America. NASCAR followed a similar route from its moonshine origins on country dirt roads to a national sport covered by the *New York Times*. The Charlotte Bobcats compete in the National Basketball Association and the Panthers were one touchdown away from the National Football League's Super Bowl. Down the road in Raleigh, playing "redneck hockey" on ice under the southern sun, the Carolina Hurricanes won the National Hockey League championship in 2006. Its RBC arena is named for a Canadian bank.

Never modest about his prescience, Golden in 1954 boasted that “I have spread the name of this city far and wide—(with 4 subscribers in Africa, I now cover every continent).”⁵⁸ Golden, like Charlotte, went global. The Atkins Library holds copies of his books in eight languages. His horizons were those of a South that increasingly saw itself as an international player. I-85 from Charlotte to Greenville, South Carolina, is nicknamed the Autobahn for all the German firms located there, and Lufthansa and British Airways serve the local airport. Charlotte is now a global banking center, and Wachovia, First Union, and Bank of America rank among the world’s largest. A post-modernist barn in Charlotte serves as headquarters for the Billy Graham Evangelistic Association’s International Ministries with offices in seven nations. When Graham left for the Holy Land, Golden gave him tourist advice and did networking.

Harry Golden, the *New Yorker* as southerner, offers a corrective to myths and stereotypes. Exulting in both his urbanity and regionalism, he challenges essentialist views of both southern and Jewish identity. His contradictions were indeed those of the South itself, which dreamt of New York even as it bedded in cotton fields. Charlotte is the kind of place that puts front-porch rocking chairs in the soaring atrium of its international airport. Identity is never one thing and the South has always been more complex, nuanced, and ambiguous than its myths and stereotypes. The South, despite its traditionalism, has absorbed new elements, accepting what it nominally rejects and evolving over time. Harry Golden as *New Yorker* and southern Jew embodied the multitudinous, cosmopolitan South that insists on its difference even as it becomes more generically American, that claims to be laid-back even as it competes fiercely in global markets, that calls Mayberry home even as it builds skyscrapers ever higher.

To anyone who wanted to know what folks in New York thought of North Carolina, here was the transplanted Harry Golden to tell them: I love you.

NOTES

I thank Robin Brabham, Special Collections, Atkins Library, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, for providing research assistance and gracious hospitality as a Harry Golden Visiting Scholar.

¹ Harry Golden, *The Greatest Jewish City in the World* (New York, 1972).

² *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 1, 1968.

³ John Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 20, 1958, 125.

⁴ W. J. Cash, *The Mind of the South* (New York, 1941), 342.

⁵ *Carolina Israelite*, January-February, 1968. This essay replicates Golden's sometimes eccentric capitalization and punctuation.

⁶ *Atlanta Constitution*, March 17, 1968.

⁷ Morris Speizman to Walter Barr, December 29, 1969, Harry Golden Papers, Atkins Library, University of North Carolina, Charlotte, hereafter, Golden Papers. Included is Golden's undated letter to the newspaper. All correspondence is in the Golden Papers unless otherwise noted.

⁸ Morris Speizman, "Harry Golden: Every Man has his Quota of Warts and Pimples," May 1983, typescript, Morris Speizman Papers, Atkins Library, University of North Carolina, Charlotte.

⁹ Quoted in Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," 124.

¹⁰ Harry Golden, *The Right Time: An Autobiography* (New York, 1969), 264.

¹¹ *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 1, 1968.

¹² Harry Golden to Lewis Bernstein, February 24, 1949.

¹³ Harry Golden to Elliot P. Cohen, December 24, 1953.

¹⁴ Harry Golden to Dr. George Mitchell, February 2, 1956.

¹⁵ Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," 124.

¹⁶ *Richmond News Leader*, April 4, 1958.

¹⁷ Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," 124.

¹⁸ *Carolina Israelite*, June, 1954.

¹⁹ *Carolina Israelite*, September-October, 1957.

²⁰ *Carolina Israelite*, September-October, 1958.

²¹ Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," 124.

²² *Guild Reporter*, March 28, 1958; Golden, *The Right Time*, 343-344.

²³ "The Strange Case of Harry Golden," *Life*, October 6, 1958, 59-60.

²⁴ *Charlotte Observer*, October 1, 1978.

²⁵ David Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities: Interpreting the Urban South* (Baton Rouge, 1997), 280.

²⁶ C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge, 1960), 3.

²⁷ See Paul M. Gaston, *The New South Creed: A Study in Southern Mythmaking* (New York, 1970).

²⁸ Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities*, 273.

²⁹ Kobler, "Why They Don't Hate Harry," 126.

³⁰ *Carolina Israelite*, August, 1957.

³¹ *Charlotte Observer*, March 15, 1878.

³² Quoted in Steven Hertzberg, *Strangers in the Gate City: The Jews of Atlanta, 1845-1915* (New York, 1989), 34.

³³ *Greensboro Patriot*, September 7, 1881.

³⁴ A. J. Ayres, *The Promise of the New South: Life after Reconstruction* (New York, 1992), 55.

³⁵ "Changing the Name of Hemp," *The State*, September 4, 1943, 18-19.

³⁶ *Jewish Week*, March 9, 2007.

³⁷ *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 1, 1970.

³⁸ Goldfield, *Region, Race, and Cities*, 290.

³⁹ Jack Bales, ed., *Conversations with Willie Morris* (Jackson, MS, 2000) 130; *New York Times*, December 5, 2007.

⁴⁰ Paul Wilson, "That's Entertainment," *Our State*, October, 1996, 30-33.

⁴¹ Curiously, it was in New York where Harry met humiliation when a dramatic rendition of *Only in America* flopped on Broadway. No one suggested antisemitism caused its failure.

⁴² City of Charlotte, North Carolina, October 1, 1958, Golden Papers.

⁴³ Gene Roberts and Hank Klibanoff, *The Race Beat: The Press, the Civil Rights Struggle, and the Awakening of a Nation* (New York, 2006), 205; John Egerton, *Speak Now against the Day: The Generation before the Civil Rights Movement in the South* (Chapel Hill, 1994), 345. Golden self-consciously modeled his *Carolina Israelite* on *American Freeman* published by E. Haldeman-Julius, a Jewish immigrant's son from Philadelphia who became a crusading journalist in Kansas.

⁴⁴ Walter Klein interview with author, June 11, 2007.

⁴⁵ Harry Golden to FBI, Charlotte, NC, August 30, 1962.

⁴⁶ Harry Golden to Bob Suritz, February 10, 1965.

⁴⁷ Paul Green, *Paul Green's Wordbook: An Alphabet of Reminiscence* (Boone, NC, 1990), 604.

⁴⁸ For Golden's efforts on behalf of Junius Scales, the convicted communist, see "A Petition for Executive Clemency," April 16, 1962, and related correspondence in Golden Papers.

⁴⁹ Louis Rubin, Jr., *My Father's People: A Family of Southern Jews* (Baton Rouge, 2002), 3.

⁵⁰ Harry Golden to George M. Ivey, Jr., July 6, 1962, Jewish Heritage Foundation of North Carolina. Golden counted among his friends and intimate correspondents people like Governor and U. S. Senator Kerr Scott, University of North Carolina President and U. S. Senator Frank Graham, evangelist Billy Graham, dramatist Paul Green, *Atlanta Constitution* editor Ralph McGill, and UNC sociologist Howard Odum.

⁵¹ Stephen J. Whitfield, "The Golden Era of Civil Rights: Consequences of The Carolina Israelite," *Southern Cultures* (forthcoming).

⁵² Theodore Solotaroff, "Harry Golden and the American Audience," in *The Red Hot Vacuum and Other Pieces of Writing on the Sixties* (New York, 1970), 54, 61, 66, 68; Philip Roth, *Reading Myself and Others* (New York, 1976), 141, 144; Harry Golden, letter to the editor, *Congress Weekly*, undated typescript, Golden Papers.

⁵³ The popular image of New Yorkers as rude and uncaring would suffer a deathblow on 9/11 – September 11, 2001 – with the bombing of New York's Twin Towers.

⁵⁴ Eli Evans, *The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South* (New York, 1976), 13.

⁵⁵ Cash, *Mind of the South*, 58-59.

⁵⁶ *Raleigh News & Observer*, March 21, 2008.

⁵⁷ Solotaroff, "Harry Golden and the American Audience," 56-57, 61.

⁵⁸ *Carolina Israelite*, March, 1954. I thank Robin Brabham for the citation.