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## New Voices in Jewish-American Literature

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## NEW VOICES IN JEWISH-AMERICAN LITERATURE

# Reenacting Exodus and the Civil War: Passover and *All Other Nights* by Dara Horn

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This article discusses how Dara Horn recuperates the integral roles played by Jewish Americans in the Civil War by using reenactment as a structuring concept in her novel *All Other Nights* (2009). Given that the Passover seder entails a kind of historical reenactment of the ancient Israelites' exodus from Egypt, Horn casts the antebellum period itself not only in terms of competing interpretations of the Book of Exodus, but also as reenactments of key moments in Jewish history from antiquity through the mid-nineteenth century. Just as the seder is meant to strengthen Jewish communal bonds and inspire Jews to apply Exodus to their present context, the protagonist's various personal reenactments, from childhood memories to various religious rituals, show him how learning about Jewish history and religion might motivate civic engagement in the United States. *All Other Nights* consequently poses a problem: how might Jewish Americans both prioritize communal ties while also putting Judaic principles into practice on behalf of others? Ultimately, I suggest the novel argues for Jewish solidarity with African American liberation struggles while also shedding light on the specific complexities of Jews' experiences on each side of the Mason Dixon line. *All Other Nights* emphasizes the enduring importance of viewing Jewish Americans as a distinct ethno-religious group whose very *Yiddishkeit* existed generations before, and yet has also been shaped by, a nation riven over chattel slavery.

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While watching Civil War reenactors perform in a synagogue, Dara Horn was struck with a thought: 'Jews practically invented historical reenactment' (Horn, 2010b). Like authentic Civil War scenes, Horn observed, the holiday of Passover is an example of how rituals in Judaism typically 'are not mere commemorations of the past', but 'physical reenactments of it', and therefore 'there is no "as if" in eating matzo any more than there is in eating hardtack' (Horn, 2010b). At the Passover seder, Jews recount the Israelites' liberation from enslavement in Egypt and their exodus to Canaan. We read from the script provided in the *Haggadah* (which means 'the telling', of a story or memory) and are supposed to imagine ourselves as if we came forth from the 'house of bondage'. Meaning 'order' and 'arrangement', the Hebrew word 'seder' signifies not only that the Exodus is to be reenacted in a specific sequence, but also that the feast will present an array of symbols of the Exodus. In the process, Passover is meant to connect us with the long arc of Jewish history. In fact, the medieval rabbi called Rashi posited that God liberated the Israelites from Egypt precisely for future Jews to commemorate it (Plotkin 2013). Victorian-era rabbi Morris Joseph saw Passover, correspondingly, as a holiday that affirms individual Jewish identity and collective Jewish peoplehood by cultivating historical consciousness:

Passover is, above everything, the commemoration of the great Deliverance—a deliverance which transformed a horde of slaves into a people. It is, then, Israel's birthday ... the greatest of all the historical festivals. ... No other so powerfully appeals to [the Israelite's] historic sympathies. He is one, for the moment, with his ransomed fathers; he shares with them the proud consciousness of the free, the dignified sense of nationality that is beginning to stir in their hearts. (Joseph, 1903: 217)

However different in kind, Civil War reenactments and Passover seders have fundamental aspects in common.

Horn's novel *All Other Nights* (2009) is Jewish Civil War reenactment.<sup>1</sup> It makes the presence of Jews in mid-nineteenth-century America more legible to readers by

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<sup>1</sup> *All Other Nights* began as a story titled 'Passover in New Orleans', published in *Granta* in 2007. Quotations from the novel are referred to as *AON*.

portraying Jewish experiences in the North and the South while recuperating the lives of Jewish men and women whose influences have receded in national memory. *All Other Nights* depicts a fictional Union Army spy named Jacob Rappaport, whose work brings him face to face with fictionalized versions of several Jewish operatives for the Confederacy: from Confederate spy Eugenia Levy Philips to Henry Hyams, the Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana, and Judah Benjamin, the second Jewish U.S. Senator and subsequently the Confederate Secretary of State. Horn reimagine these figures and the epoch-making moments that took place around or because of them, connecting readers to this dimension of Jewish American history.<sup>2</sup> Though a new voice in Jewish American literature, in this way, Horn actually continues a project stretching back to the years following the Civil War. *All Other Nights* contributes to a historiographical effort descending from Nathan Mayers' novel *Differences* (1867) and Simon Wolf's book *The American Jew as Patriot, Soldier and Citizen* (1895), which likewise chronicled Jewish life during the Civil War and their participation in it. These texts answered postbellum commentaries that minimized or denigrated the Jews' roles in the conflict (Mendelsohn, 2004: 437–54). In the early twenty-first century, Horn renews attention to this history and fosters a type of literacy about it to counteract historical amnesia.

Through its own form of historical reenactment, *All Other Nights* examines American Jewry at a turning point for the nation—by which I mean not just the U.S., but also the biblical nation of Israel. I argue that *All Other Nights* reads like a *Haggadah* inasmuch as it is a narrative about cultivating (to use Rabbi Morris' words) 'historic sympathies' and thus the 'proud consciousness of the free' and 'dignified sense of nationality' among American Jews. The historical reenactment that constitutes the seder assumes literal and metaphorical functions as Horn not only juxtaposes seder practices in the Union and the Confederacy, but also uses

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<sup>2</sup> A small influx of Jewish immigrants arriving in the years leading up to the Civil War, especially during the 1840s and 1850s, brought the Jewish population in the United States to only 150,000. Jews were thinly spread across the country, with the majority residing in New York, followed by New Orleans. About 7,000 Jewish men then served in the Union Army and 3,000 in the Confederate Army (Sarna, 2004: 62–134).

Passover's reenactment paradigm as a governing motif in the novel. U.S. history itself is portrayed as reenactments of pivotal events in the history of the Jewish people, from ancient times to the medieval period, on through the nineteenth century. Moreover, some characters perform psychological reenactments when they recall their upbringings and personal histories. As in Passover, the trope of reenactment corresponds in this novel with a reinvigoration of Jewish self-identity. *All Other Nights* centers on Jewish American life during the mid-nineteenth century and correspondingly views American history through a Jewish lens. What we might call Jewishness and Americanness are rendered mutually constitutive of, and yet also discrete from, one another—especially when they became enmeshed in one another, as they certainly were in this era. Correspondingly, Horn's narration replays the successes Jewish immigrants found as well as the forms of institutionalized prejudice and discrimination that were essentially transposed in new forms from Europe to the U.S., and from antiquity to modernity, before and during the Civil War.

Just as the Exodus forged a concept of unified peoplehood among the newly freed Israelites, and just as telling the story during Passover has long connected Jews to this heritage, so do the reenactments in *All Other Nights* ultimately affirm Jewish American identity grounded in a concept of the distinct ethno-religious culture defining *Yiddishkeit*. Over the course of the novel, Jacob Rappaport comes to regain an appreciation of his Jewish identity after growing up with an image of himself as only an American. And as Jacob and Confederate spy Jeannie Levy fall in love and start a family, the novel is also about a reconciliation among Jews riven by the divide between Union and Confederacy. Without creating a false equivalence between the two sides, Horn traverses the divergent paths and common grounds among 'Israelites' as one community spanning across the Mason-Dixon line. In the process, as I will discuss, *All Other Nights* effectively throws into relief how '[between] the dominant position of the white majority and the marginal position of peoples of color ... American Jews have no clearly designated place on America's multicultural map which acknowledges their difference', so that 'Jewish identity is itself constituted both of descent and consent models, of genealogy and of performance, of ethnicity and religion' (Wirth-Nesher and Kramer, 2003: 8). Moreover, I believe Horn's novel

bolsters Marla Brettschneider's argument about how Jewish Americans factor into modern notions of diversity. Given that the Jewish people have existed as an entity for millennia, 'Jews are asking to end explicit anti-Semitism and to be allowed to participate as particulars, as Jews, and not as the culturally stripped universal individual agents demanded at least since the Enlightenment' (Brettschneider, 1999: 20). Accordingly, as Horn depicts the rituals of Judaism, alludes to stories in Jewish folklore, and evokes patterns in Jewish history that were repeated during the Civil War, *All Other Nights* invests itself in collective self-consciousness and -determination among American Jews.

Horn frames the plot of *All Other Nights* and the Civil War itself as the religious precepts and biblical paradigms of Exodus writ large. While there were several Exodus typologies through which nineteenth-century Americans interpreted the nation's destiny, *All Other Nights* explores reading the U.S. as Canaan for Jews, but Egypt for black families held in slavery. As we will see, Horn's Passover trope correspondingly threads through Jewish philosophies of justice as other operative points of reference alongside Exodus. As a result, the novel challenges at least Jewish readers to reflect personally and collectively on their historical relationship to slavery and anti-black racism, with an eye toward reconciling a tension between engaging and disengaging from black liberation struggles. *All Other Nights* acknowledges that some Jews owned slaves—and therefore could be read as embodying both Israelites and Egyptians at once.<sup>3</sup> For them, this practice was not necessarily paradoxical, Horn shows, and Passover's history in the North and South partly explains why. Yet *All Other Nights* Jacob's growing cross-racial empathy with African Americans is juxtaposed with depictions of Jews being subjected to Judeophobia by the Union, supposedly the side of black liberation, perhaps to an even larger extent than the Confederacy, which was fighting for continued black enslavement. Reminding readers how anti-Semitism has historically transcended the

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<sup>3</sup> Since most readers tend either not to know about Jews' relationship to the slave trade or to exaggerate it, the facts bear repeating: in the antebellum period, one-fourth of Southern Jews owned slaves, comprising 0.2% of all slaveholders. Instead, most Southern Jews were poor merchants or small-business owners. Granted, many nonetheless benefitted from industries dependent upon slave labor or trading (Korn, 1961). That Horn highlights slaveholding families shows her concern about the problem that even one slaveholding Jewish American represented.

political spectrum and regional differences, *All Other Nights* consequently intimates that Jews should promote racial justice but also free themselves from partisan movements to protect themselves as a community. Horn examines affinities as well as rifts between Jewish and African Americans in this period, demonstrating how 'religion provides an originary narrative common to Blacks and Jews' that 'encompasses dramatic political alliances and conflicts, dilemmas of identity and assimilation, and persistent questions of ethnic division and economic inequality' (Goffman, 2000: 1).

Examining *All Other Nights* as religious, cultural, and political allegory along these lines seems to be important for understanding both the milieu as depicted in the novel and Horn's approach to writing Jewish American fiction. Exodus offers a master narrative describing Jewish Americans' historical trajectory in America and thus provides a metaphorical lexicon for Jewish American literature as a genre. As Horn has written: 'In America, Jews have become Josephs in Egypt, former strangers who have risen to prominence through a talent for interpreting dreams—in this case, the American one' (Horn, 2005: 318). Competing interpretations of the Exodus as well as the American Dream structure how *All Other Nights* reads United States history as a Judaic text, an American adaptation of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish folklore. At the same time, the novel emphasizes that Jewish Americans should retain their own customs and beliefs in spite of white Christian American expectations for them and for the country. By Horn's account, gaining that sort of perspective can clarify how Jews' opportunities to become Josephs resulted from institutionalized white supremacy—that is, from the ways Ashkenazim and Sephardim were racialized into whiteness—and thereby reveal a possible shortcoming among Jewish Americans to recognize Judaically ethical choices at a moment of moral and political crisis for the country. But some Jewish American authors would disagree with this approach. As I will posit later, in their own ways, the novels *Landsman* (2007) by Peter Charles Melman and *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* (2012) by Lois Leveen cast the Civil War as an example of why Jewish Americans might rethink the kind of identity politics presented in *All Other Nights*. In any case, Horn's novel offers insight into the longstanding and sophisticated meanings of Passover for Jewish Americans, not

to mention an interpretive context for current seder practices that connect the Israelites' liberation to others through acts of historical reenactment.

### **Reenacting Israelites and Egyptians**

The Civil War is not just the setting for *All Other Nights*. Neither is Exodus just an allusion. In the nineteenth century, Americans viewed the U.S. itself as replicating Exodus. Who played which role, however, remained an open question. 'All parties ... Northerner or Southerner, slave or free, Jew or Christian—laid claim to Hebrew origins', Leonard Rogoff explains, 'read[ing] the Israelite saga as the narrative of providence ... that served as the civil religion for each side' (Rogoff, 2012: 27). 'Through Israel', Rogoff continues, 'Unionists and Confederates alike sought to justify their rival claims as the legitimate heirs of the American Republic', so that brewing conflicts over secession and the fate of chattel slavery formed nothing less than 'a retelling of Exodus' (Rogoff, 2012: 27). Every subsequent military victory or defeat meant 'Confederates, Unionists, African American slaves, not to mention Jews themselves, could choose from many Israelite narratives: Covenantal Israel, the chosen of God; or stiff-necked Israel, sinful and disobedient. Triumphant Israel, the conquering army of the Lord of Hosts; or Wandering Israel, defeated and in exile' (Rogoff, 2012: 27–8). Writings and speeches on the chattel slavery cited the Book of Exodus accordingly. Some were from Christian abolitionists, whose arguments were often philo-Semitic or anti-Semitic (see Ruchames, 2010: 145–56; Michael, 2005: 87–106). Jewish abolitionists and slavery apologists alike evoked Exodus with varying degrees of biblical literalism and self-reflection on Jewish heritage (see Sokolow, 2010: 125–44). The Israelites' enslavement, liberation, and nation-building formed perhaps the most important frame of reference for the 'slavery question'.

American Jews themselves interpreted Exodus differently through the Passover seder. For some, Passover was a strictly theological celebration of divine intervention for the selective liberation of the Israelites as God's chosen people. For others, the holiday also represented a sacred moment to appreciate the U.S. as the Jewish people's primary refuge from Europe and to acknowledge the type of enslavement practiced in their new country. In other words, Jewish Americans tended to hold

particularistic or universalistic views on Passover. As Michael Hoberman argues, 'Exodus was more pliable to nineteenth-century American Jews than it appears to be to present-day readers', such that 'the story's specifically Jewish implications ... dictated its interpretation by Jews on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line' (Hoberman, 2015: 54). These religious perspectives carried ideological implications regarding the nation's most polarizing issue: slavery. Southern Jews mostly assimilated the particularistic view of Passover, which did not contradict the enslavement of black people. Northern Jews mostly assimilated the universalistic view, which clashed with the South's 'peculiar institution' (see Hoberman, 2015: 53–4). Nevertheless, in practice, the celebration of Passover also fostered Jewish community across battle lines. If they could obtain furloughs, Jewish Union soldiers observed Passover with co-religionists in Confederate cities. Jewish Confederate soldiers found it important to create seders in their encampments or seek furloughs to join civilian families at their seders. While American Jews wrangled over their political allegiances, they bonded over this and other shared religious practices (see Byrne and Soman, 1985: 235, 239; Korn, 1951: 90–4).

*All Other Nights* replicates this facet of Judaism's history in America by establishing—and then collapsing—a dichotomy between Passover in New York in 1862 and Passover in New Orleans. The Northern and Southern seders illustrate that regional differences in how the holiday was observed rested on contrasting yet also similar interpretations of the same text. In New York, celebrating the Exodus stimulates a rigorous discussion about America as the land of liberation for some yet bondage for others. Jacob Rappaport's father, Marcus, having found entrepreneurial success in America, believes that the country represents economic as well as religious freedom. Consequently, the seder provides a space to explore the immorality of chattel slavery along with the economic and political ramifications of emancipation. For the Rappaports and their friends, the feast is therefore about the extent to which the ancient Israelites' experience, as well as modern Jewish history, apply in a new context. As Horn depicts it, the seder itself illustrates the socio-religious significance of observing Passover at all:

Otto Strauss wouldn't stop arguing that the abolitionists were right, that the slave question wasn't only a moral problem but an economic one ... Hermann Seligman wouldn't stop arguing that Otto was wrong on the business point even if he was right on the moral point, that ... revolutions nearly always ended in disaster, as his cousin's prison sentence in the German states so clearly demonstrated, and anyone heading down that path ought to have a plan ... and then Jacob remembered how his father had silenced his fighting guests by pointing out ... with or without a war, they all ought to be grateful to God simply for the fact of America ... and be willing to devote absolutely everything to this country ... out of gratitude for the unimaginable truth that all of them were here, sitting with their own free children around a Passover table, with no one to terrify them, and no one to make them ashamed. (AON, 8)

Each turn in this conversation applies the lessons from then-recent Jewish history as well as its ancient religious precepts. Just as God chose to rescue the Israelites from Egyptian bondage, so God subsequently rescued some Jews from European repression. Others faced the fallout from the Revolutions of 1848. As Horn suggests, knowing this informed Northern Jewish families' conflicted views on the U.S. and the outbreak of war over the slavery question. To an extent, what transcends this argument at the seder is the seder itself—that is, a sense of Jewish peoplehood. Yet Marcus' proposition that American Jews should refrain from political engagement is one that *All Other Nights* questions.

The southern Jews in the novel likewise perceive themselves as having arrived in Canaan. They reflect Sue Eisenfeld's description of Jewish attitudes toward Dixie: 'after all they'd suffered and fled through the ages, the South was their new motherland, the land of milk and honey (and cotton)' (Eisenfeld, 2014: n. pag.). Consequently, in her depiction of Passover in New Orleans, Horn posits a situational irony in the optics of the feast: 'Jacob wondered if there could be anything stranger than sitting down to a Passover seder, the feast of freedom, with every part of the meal served by

slaves' (*AON*, 22). However, the irony is not lost on the elite Confederate Jews at the table. For them, there is no irony. Accordingly, Jacob's uncle, Harry Hyams (based on Henry Hyams), conducts the service mostly in the traditional Hebrew but with 'more than enough awkward passages about freedom ... read proudly in English' (*AON*, 22). We can glean that the particularistic view of Passover undergirds this seder as Hyams 'chant[s] along with the rest of the company that they had once been slaves in Egypt until God took them out with a mighty hand' (*AON*, 24). Even Jacob, unsupportive of slavery, is almost taken in by this outlook when he considers the Exodus 'one of the few moments of Hebrew glory' (*AON*, 24, 25). Similarly, it is this interpretation of Passover that explains Hyams' enthusiasm for the Confederacy. Hyams zealously recites Jeremiah 10:25, as would have been custom near the end of the seder: 'Pour out Thy wrath on the nations that do not know Thee, and upon the nations that do not call upon Thy name'—the Union being first among them for Hyams—'For they have devoured Jacob, and laid waste his habitation' (*AON*, 34). Everyone at the table numbers among the biblical children of Jacob, God's chosen, while the aptly named Jacob Rappaport has been sent to kill Hyams and thus lay waste to Hyams' home, as though the Confederacy were the ungodly nation. Yet Horn puts a further figurative twist on the end of the Jeremiah passage as Hyams, then poisoned, vomits before the Eternal rather than calling upon His name. Convulsing in the throes of death, 'his entire life poured out of his mouth before the heavens of the Lord' (*AON*, 35–6). Who is playing the Israelites, who the Egyptians—consequently, to invoke Yom Kippur liturgy, who shall live and who shall die—is thrown into flux even as Horn implies that the Confederate statesman met a deserved fate.

The historical figure of Judah Benjamin subsequently represents a key interpretive problem with respect to Exodus and the Civil War. However obscure now, Benjamin was an important person in Jewish American historiography in that he was 'the first Jewish political figure to be projected into the national consciousness' (Evans, 1988: xxi). Horn does not celebrate Benjamin, deeming him a 'talented statesman who served a justly doomed cause' in her author's note (*AON*, 357). Instead, she plumbs the significance of his ascent to a high seat of power. Part of this significance lies in Jews' divergent attitudes toward him in the antebellum period. Considering that,

in Genesis, Jacob goes by the name of Israel, Jacob Rappaport confronting Judah Benjamin in *All Other Nights* analogizes the Civil War to another North–South conflict: the separation of the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah. This allusion serves as a metaphor for the schism within American Jewry over the Confederate Secretary of State:

Southern Hebrews saw him as the messenger of the Messiah, the herald who would proclaim liberty throughout the land to anyone who had ever felt that Jewish fear of power. Northern Hebrews saw him as the beginning of a descent into an American Jewish hell, and whispered at Friday night tables that if the Confederacy were to prevail, the rot of centuries would eat through even the freshness of America and the Jews would be blamed again. (*AON*, 23)

Horn complicates the Passover paradigm here by suggesting Confederate Jews exalted Benjamin as Elijah, the prophet ritually invited to the seder as a harbinger of *Moshiach*. However, Elijah hailed from the northern Kingdom of Israel, not the southern Kingdom of Judah. In other words, this passage intimates that although it is conceivable why some Jews would have glorified Benjamin, they would have been fundamentally mistaken about what he symbolized.

At the same time, Horn also challenges common northern characterizations of Benjamin. Developing this complexity seems to be the point inasmuch as Jacob develops a more sophisticated viewpoint on him by refining his Jewish perspective. At first, Benjamin strikes Jacob as some *schande vor de goyim* (an embarrassment) since he represents unprecedented political success for Jews but ‘had chosen to devote his talents to, of all supposed countries on earth, the Confederacy’ (*AON*, 7). Then Jacob notices the Judeophobic attitudes his Christian commanders hold toward Benjamin. Calling Benjamin ‘Judas Isacariot Benjamin’, they cast the arch-secessionist as the archetypical Jewish traitor (whose betrayal, after all, occurred during the Passover seder). Consequently, Jacob develops a more complex view. Having a shared ethnic identity with Benjamin starts to matter to him. Looking at a Confederate two-dollar bill, which bore Benjamin’s image, Jacob ‘feel[s] a twinge of pride’ because this ‘was the first time a Hebrew face had appeared on currency since the days of ancient

Judea' (*AON*, 38). Though Jacob ultimately infiltrates Benjamin's spy network, a small part of him sympathizes with Benjamin nonetheless: 'Benjamin may have been the enemy, but Jacob knew how much he had suffered, how he had borne his entire life as a burden of proof' (*AON*, 336).<sup>4</sup> Observing Passover in New Orleans, meeting Benjamin at his uncle's seder, introduced this notion to Jacob. Horn introduces it to readers by using the holiday as the basis for representing Benjamin's career.

As the right-hand man to Confederate President Jefferson Davis, Benjamin is almost portrayed as Pharaoh's vizier. Like Joseph interpreting Pharaoh's dream, Benjamin has interpreted the American dream. Indeed, Horn characterizes Benjamin as 'a clear American genius ... who achieved nothing through birth and everything through self-transformation' (*AON*, 23). To underscore this idea, Horn embeds his biography in the narration. In short, he was born in the Caribbean, and then his parents moved to South Carolina, selling fruit to earn enough money to send their gifted son to law school at Yale when he was fourteen. There, Benjamin weathered the storm of institutionalized anti-Semitism. Yale admitted him 'despite his name, lineage, and utter lack of funds' (*AON*, 23) before ejecting him on fabricated theft charges. Despite this setback, Benjamin moved to New Orleans, where he opened a law practice and got elected to public office on the state and then the federal level. Benjamin thus appeared to be a trailblazer for the acceptance of Jews in America. Even more uncommon among Jews at this time, he procured a plantation sustained by slaves, which, in Horn's words, seemed 'a fine prelude to becoming the second-in-command of the entire Confederacy' inasmuch as it epitomized 'American brilliance, plain and simple' (*AON*, 23). For all of Benjamin's intellect and work ethic, however, Horn casts his upward mobility as a function of the power structures peculiar to the U.S. Benjamin mastered the American game, but because he was allowed to play. In a notorious meeting of Congress in 1853, Ohio senator Benjamin Wade publicly smeared Judah Benjamin, then a senator for Louisiana, as an 'Israelite with Egyptian

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<sup>4</sup> American attitudes toward Jews broadly were often expressed through references to Judah Benjamin. Throughout his life, he apparently was self-conscious of being read as a Jew on account of his name and features (see Evans, 1988).

principles' (see Evans, 1988: 96–7). Horn engages with and ultimately destabilizes this notion.

Consequently, *All Other Nights* argues for and against the idea that Judah Benjamin was self-effacing as a Jew. On the one hand, Horn writes, Benjamin's 'entire life was an elaborate refusal of the person he had been born to be', since he married a French Catholic woman in order really to be 'married into the Southern aristocracy', despite the prejudices leveled at him (*AON*, 24). Though 'everyone who looked at him remarked that they had never seen such a Hebrew face', he wanted to join the white Christian powerbrokers. On the other hand, Horn depicts Benjamin as deeply conscious of his heritage. This first becomes clear at the seder: 'Glory isn't for the Jews', Benjamin tells Hyams, continuing, 'We can be slaveowners, we can own whole plantations, but as far as everyone else is concerned, you and I will always be runaway slaves' (*AON*, 30). Benjamin casts a distorted image of himself as a Jew in America, of course, since while he uses 'runaway slave' metaphorically, there were literal runaway slaves that the Confederate project sought to keep in bondage. In any case, he remains conscious of himself as a Jew in a Gentile's country throughout the novel. When he proposes a controversial plan to manumit slaves in exchange for military service (on the proposed Confederate emancipation proclamation, see Evans [1988: 259–75]), his reasoning is rooted in Jewish perspective: 'All Hebrews know that there is nothing honorable about subjugation and defeat' (*AON*, 267). In other words, Benjamin's concept of himself and his work stems not from disavowing his Jewishness, but embracing it.

Accordingly, Horn conveys that Jewish readers, versed in the *Haggadah*, may be the ones to determine authoritative historiographical readings of the Civil War in terms of Exodus. Through seder-specific allusions, Horn wrests narrative authority over Exodus typologies from the Christian hegemony and returns it to Jews. In the opening pages, a Union commander labels Jacob 'another Hebrew spy, like in Scripture', typologizing him as Caleb or Joshua, the scouts Moses sent to scope out Canaan (*AON*, 10). But as Jacob arrives at the New Orleans seder, the narration assumes particular knowledge about Passover from the reader. When Hyams' wife, Jacob's aunt, expresses her apprehensions about her four sons in the Confederate

army, Horn's narration ironically evokes the *Haggadah* paradigm of the Four Sons: like the *chacham* who asks detailed questions about the rituals, one of Jacob's cousins writes letters about military law; like the *rashah* who dissociates himself from Judaism, another cousin writes irreverent jokes; like the *tam* who asks basic but earnest questions, another cousin writes simplistic letters amid the warfare; and like the *sh'eyno yodeah lishol* who cannot formulate a question, the fourth cousin has not written home. This allusion ultimately conveys a sense of the mutual destruction between Northern and Southern Jews: the third son is probably concealing the fact that he lost an arm; the fourth is probably dead. Jacob speculates that he shot his cousin or tripped over his corpse in a battlefield—which begs the question whether Jacob embodies Moses, 'a hero, a savior, the one who would, in a single simple gesture, redeem the entire world, tonight', or instead 'the angel of death' (*AON*, 18–19). Readers who know the seder would perceive the references here. Horn suggests that they, therefore, should be primed to explore the complex ways in which Exodus maps onto the Civil War.

*All Other Nights* expects readers to be familiar—or familiarize themselves—with Passover rituals as well as the biblical story it retells. And with the seder serving as such a specific frame of reference in the opening chapters, the rest of the novel subsequently shifts the terms of Exodus typologies to craft a distinctly Jewish historiography of the Civil War. This rhetorical move is presaged before the narrative even begins: the very title of the novel, after all, evokes the traditional question posed at the start of the seder: *How is tonight different from all other nights?* The authorial technique here seems to be meant not to alienate, but educate: 'Jews are the only people who are ever worried about being too Jewish', Horn has recently remarked, 'The trauma in our history causes us to be ... hesitant to embrace our heritage, or to seem like we're shoving it in people's faces [when] the whole point of literature is communication' (Shollar, 2016: n. pag.). This notion underlies the final narrative event in the novel that takes place at Passover, after which the holiday functions as a metaphorical concept. When Jacob eavesdrops on Judah Benjamin and Harry Hyams during the customary break before the final rituals of the seder, a frog leaps

toward the house and Hyams remarks that frogs had even come inside. The scene's choreography patently evokes one of the plagues God descended on Egypt when Pharaoh refused to emancipate the Israelites. Readers would know that these plagues are ritualistically enumerated during the seder. Horn thus codes Hyams' estate as a literal house of bondage, more than the figurative 'house of bondage' Egypt is called in the *Haggadah*. However, Horn's historiography is no simplistic Manichean tale casting Jacob as good and Hyams as evil. Jacob notices the frog leaping toward him as 'the croak repeated, louder this time, and closer to his foot' (*AON*, 31). This plague comes for Jacob, too, and he cannot escape its symbolism: he is no messianic figure, and arguably, the opposite in some measure. After all, he poisons his uncle's ritual fourth cup of wine—not only violating the First Commandment, passed down to Moses at Mount Sinai during the Exodus, but also desecrating the wine, which readers should intuit was sanctified with the traditional blessing as his uncle brought the cup to his lips. Readers can therefore glean the bleak significance of Hyams dying right when Jacob then performs the most sacred part of the seder: opening the door for Elijah, the messiah. This sequence prefigures how *All Other Nights* toys with the paradigms of Passover, ultimately creating an interplay between Jewish identity and anti-racist politics.

### **Israel's Deliverance**

Horn's representations of Passover conceptually foreshadow how Jewish American experiences themselves are imagined in *All Other Nights* as a series of historical reenactments. On the one hand, the U.S. served as a refuge after several further instances of Jewish enslavement in the millennia following the Exodus. In a scene when Jacob tries to get information from the actor Edwin Booth (brother of Lincoln assassin John Wilkes Booth), Jacob spells his last name, and the narration spells out its historical significance: the Rappaports 'arrived in Italy in the first Christian century against their will as slaves brought from Jerusalem to Rome' (*AON*, 247). Earlier in the novel, an old widower recounts when Russian soldiers, upon defeating Napoleon in 1812, 'made a game of capturing Jewish girls and taking them as slaves' (*AON*, 87). By comparison, America was Canaan. However, the most pernicious

Judeophobic ideas were replicated all the same in the new land of milk and honey. North and South, Jewish characters in the novel hear such canards as the blood libel as though they were repeated from a centuries-old script adapted for the Civil War stage. For instance, there were the widespread anti-Semitic theories about why the war had continued after emancipation: 'The niggers and abolitionists got what they wanted, and now it's the Republicans and the Jews running the show. It always was, behind it all', a hack driver in Philadelphia rants. 'The Seligman are the ones making the uniforms. The more boys ... killed or mangled, the richer they get ... blood is their gold' (*AON*, 222). The reference to Joseph Seligman—now an obscure figure in the history (and specifically Jewish history) of American industrialization—illustrates how anti-Semitic themes such as Jewish greed and conspiratorial cabals were revived in the U.S. during this contentious moment (see Bunker and Appel, 2010; Mendelsohn, 2012).

In the same vein, *All Other Nights* informs readers that old anti-Semitism was made new in the Union army. Indeed, the Union was hostile to Jews in ways resembling the oppression they had escaped across the Atlantic. Beyond the Judeophobia in the remarks of Jacob's commanders early on, Horn introduces this concept when she depicts an Old Testament reenactment in a Union encampment. Stationed in Virginia under the evocative alias of Samuels, Jacob finds that his fellow soldiers oscillate between fearing him and exalting him as a Jew. Working from their Christian eschatological idea that 'Living Hebrews are good luck ... evidence of the kingdom of the Lord on earth' (*AON*, 162), they mount a burlesque of the story of King Saul, Samuel, and the Witch of Endor. As Samuel prophesied to Saul that the united monarchy of Israel would lose against the Philistines, the men pretend, so might 'Samuels' portend for Ulysses S. Grant the defeat of the Union by the Confederacy.

Yet the Union soldiers' burlesque also presages the way Grant embodied Pharaoh or European monarchs when he issued General Orders No. 11 in December 1862, which singled out '[t]he Jews, as a class' on specious charges of war profiteering through the contraband trade and expelled or arrested Jewish people in the Department of Tennessee (see Korn, 1951: 121–55; Sarna, 2012). Premised in stereotypes about the

disloyalty and opportunism of the 'nation' of Israel, Grant's order echoed European removal policies that had further thrown the Jewish people into diaspora. Horn specifically has Jacob's Gentile comrades-in-arms remark that they were surprised by how easy the order was to execute because the 'grandmothers ... were already packed when we came for them' (AON, 195). That is to say, the older generation of Jews possessed the communal knowledge of Jewish history and consequently the foresight that comes with remembering their people's past. Capt. Philip Trounstine of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ohio Cavalry, one of the only Jews in the Union army even to reach an officer rank, resigned from service in protest for his Southern coreligionists affected by the order. Jacob, hearing of this, views Trounstine as 'a braver man' for extracting himself from a political entity so hostile to Jewish inclusion (AON, 194). With distinctly Jewish gallows humor, Horn's narration quips that the 'only surprise would have been that it had taken so long' for these Jews' new home to emulate the Old World. Or, to put it in terms of ancient Jewish history, it was just a matter of time until the conquest of this Kingdom of Judah led to another sort of Babylonian exile.

Yet anti-Semitism does not define Jewishness in *All Other Nights*. Indeed, Horn underscores the *sui generis* nature of American Jewry, grounded in Jews' engagement with biblical stories, Yiddish lore, and the rites of Judaism. Accordingly, the Passover allegory running through the novel builds toward the self-determination and liberation of American Jewry, as an ethno-religious group, against the dominant Gentile culture. While Jacob initially internalizes his parents' desire for him to acculturate to the U.S.—he prides himself on having publicly sung the national anthem, itself a historical reenactment (of the War of 1812)—some soul-searching redeems his Jewish identity. Finding himself in the Virginia woods, Jacob recalls a particular moment in his Hebrew education: when he learned the legend about the first Jews to arrive in Poland, who saw the Talmud carved into the trees of the Polish woods. As he replays this memory in his mind, Jacob reenacts this legend as well by 'absurdly examining the tree trunks hoping for a sign' (AON, 132). By Horn's account, the Polish legend typifies how Jewish communities coped with forced migration by 'adapting to the demands of a new country' and 'creating continuity with a specific "old" country: the Nation of Israel' (Horn, 2010a: n. pag.). Like God's redemption of

the Israelites in Exodus, Jacob believes 'the providence of God' then brings him to an old Jewish burial plot, where he imagines departed souls in the Virginia woods are 'awaiting their resurrection from their native land' (*AON*, 133). This spiritual moment for Jacob marks a clear development in his character from when he arrived in New Orleans at the beginning of the novel, at which point he enters a cemetery in spite of Jewish laws forbidding him (as a *kohen*) from being near the dead. In that moment, the force of assimilation and military orders from Union officers overpowered his Judaism: 'The entire edifice of law and custom dissolved before his eyes' when 'a braver man, or a wiser man ... might have asked God what he was doing, or why' (*AON*, 13–14). Over the course of the novel, Jacob is redeemed to the Nation of Israel and the Jewish religion.

Jacob comes across as a metonym for Jewish American communities broadly as *All Other Nights* shows typical Southern Jews similarly reconsolidating their Jewish identities. At one point (and consciously in contrast to Gentile Union spy Timothy Webster), Jacob strategically capitalizes on his and Judah Benjamin's shared religion to infiltrate Benjamin's office on a Sunday morning. While Christians were at church, 'Hebrews were free to be themselves', Horn writes:

Hebrew children were allowed to be children ... free to argue and rampage without the haunting fear of embarrassing their parents and thereby ruining their prospects for the lives of their dreams. The adults ... would at last raise their voices ... talking about whatever they wanted in whatever language they wanted, casting their hands wildly through the air as they spoke, delirious with freedom, relieved, for an entire hour, of the everlasting burden of worrying what others would think. For that magical hour each week, America was theirs. (*AON*, 256)

If nothing else, this tableau presents Jews owning and enjoying their *Yiddishkeit*—their Jewishness—even if its expression is partly determined by the practices and attitudes of the Gentile majority. Moreover, it is vital to note that the 'magical hour' is not unique to either the North or the South. Rather, the narration emphasizes that this weekly freedom takes place 'in every American city', ritualistically during 'every

week'. Moments like these illustrate the idea that 'the call for selfhood emerging from Jewish interactions in a Christian world is in the group-defined form of being self determining in our cultural practices, art, relations, self-esteem and ideologies' (Brettschneider, 1999: 20).

It is the synagogue that then comes to represent the Mount Sinai in *All Other Nights'* Exodus allegory. Synagogues in the novel are sites of reenactment, where biblical stories are retold and rituals are repeated, and where family traditions of going to temple are formed. They are figured as community centers, as well as houses of worship. Furthermore, *shul* forms a liminal space between being part of world Jewry and part of the American citizenry. Whatever binaries might separate religion from politics is reconfigured in scenes where synagogues provide physical and mental spaces for Jews to discover themselves and develop their social outlook, not just across different regions in the U.S., but even across Ashkenazi and Sephardic traditions. Consequently, in Manhattan, the historic Ashkenazi congregation B'nai Jeshurun comes across as an example of American Jewry focusing on itself and resisting hegemonic Christianity: the temple was 'not intended to outshine the churches in the manner of Temple Emanu-El ... but rather simply to outshine the old Spanish-Portuguese synagogue' (AON, 214). In contrast, the members of the historic Sephardic congregation Beth Shalome in Richmond seem to have borne the historical weight of acculturation and the pull toward code-switching: Jacob imagines the congregants believe his Eastern European 'ancestors had been fools, refusing conversion during the Crusades and dying by the sword', whereas 'the Spanish Jews during their own Inquisition had been smart enough to feign conversion, pretending to serve one master while actually serving another' (AON, 283). Whatever schisms persist among these Israelites, however, are ultimately reformulated in response to the American law handed down to them as U.S. citizens—particularly those governing slavery.

Throughout the Union and the Confederacy, congregations typically limited services to spiritual and theological concerns. Yet some rabbis in the nineteenth century used the *bima* also as a platform to speak to secular controversies. *All Other Nights* connects readers to this historic turn in American Judaism and Jewish American politics. Along these lines, there is an important moment in *All Other Nights* when

Jacob attends *shul* with his father on Yom Kippur at B'nai Jeshurun. To start with, this moment represents a revival in the Rappaports' religious observance, as the family's 'pre-war religious life' mostly consisted of 'social events like the annual Purim parties and the Simchas Torah ball' (*AON*, 214). However, when Jacob returns from the military, going to services becomes a political and religious reawakening. That reawakening, importantly, results from a kind of reenactment, as Jacob remembers the last time he went to B'nai Jeshurun with his parents for Yom Kippur. The Rappaports apparently heard rabbi Morris Raphall deliver his infamous proslavery sermon there on Yom Kippur, 1861, in which Raphall contended that the enslavement of black people would seem to be permissible according to Judaic precepts, although the South's implementation of it violated the conditions enumerated in biblical law (see Rogoff, 2012: 38–39; Southard, 2012: 137–55). While the significance of the service was lost on Jacob at the time, he later recalls to his mind the 'long and convoluted exegesis' that 'sparked a conflagration' among the congregants, who felt that Raphall 'was making the whole congregation look like bigots at best and traitors at worst, they who could least afford to be either'. This memory, in replaying a moment in Jacob's adolescence as well as a Judaic ritual, gives Jacob a new appreciation for the link between practicing his faith and engaging with American society.

### **Freeing Other Hebrews**

Like the seder, where historical reenactment strengthens Jewish communal bonds and inspires Jews to apply Exodus to their present context, Jacob's various reenactments in *All Other Nights* throw into relief for him the ways in which learning Jewish history and religion might motivate civic engagement. The late American historian and rabbi Bertram W. Korn argued that, in light especially of the Jewish welfare societies' relief efforts in the Union and the Confederacy, the Civil War had indeed raised the 'old question of the nature of Jewishness and of the status of the Jew in a democratic environment': 'What, if any, are the responsibilities of the Jewish community, *qua* community, to America?' (Korn, 1951: 120). For Korn, this question relied on the phenomenon that there seemed to have been '*American Jewish unity in an emotional*

*sense'* to no small extent in the antebellum period although no national Jewish organization had been established (Korn, 1951: 120, emphasis in original). Well versed in Korn's scholarship, Horn explores the complexities of 'American Jewish unity in an emotional sense' and suggests in *All Other Nights* that the broad Jewish American community—constitutive of both the American nation and the diasporic Nation of Israel—has historically fulfilled its social responsibilities by both safeguarding itself and participating in politics beyond itself. The argument threaded through the novel seems to be that Jews should somewhat model that behavior by turning inward as well as outward, both disengaging from and engaging with American conflicts.

*All Other Nights* figuratively warns against Jewish passivity or indifference to social crises—particularly when it comes to black liberation. When Jacob recalls that the first Rappaports were liberated from bondage in Rome because 'fellow Hebrews had bought them and set them free, following the ... obligation of every Hebrew to redeem Hebrew captives, no matter the cost' (*AON*, 247), in some measure, 'Hebrews' comes to refer literally to Jewish Americans and metaphorically to African Americans. An old widower named Isaacs becomes emotionally detached from the Civil War conflict based on his memories of anti-Semitic atrocities in Prussia. Evoking Exodus, Isaacs expresses to Jacob that the Jewish people have been merely wandering in the desert that is the U.S.: 'Living here is like living in the wilderness, with no pillar of fire to lead us' (*AON*, 85). The Civil War thus seems inconsequential to him. 'Wars come and go ... like the weather, like a storm or a drought', he tells Jacob, advising him to 'take shelter and wait for them to pass' (*AON*, 87). However, Jacob recognizes that the ebbs and flows of anti-Semitism in Europe do not transpose to America quite the way Isaacs figures. Black people were the ones systemically discriminated against in America, with many Jews benefitting from their labor (directly or indirectly) and fighting in a war that would determine their future in the American economic, political, and social superstructure. Jacob therefore recognizes that withdrawing from the conflict altogether was not exactly possible in the way Isaacs implies. Jacob realizes that 'in this new wilderness, wars were no longer like the weather ... he and Jeannie weren't victims but perpetrators' (*AON*, 87). In this fashion, especially since

the specter of European-style bigotry against Jews also rears its head, the problem before Jewish Americans in the novel is to clarify for themselves their position as Jews who were American, and as Americans who were Jews.

Just as the ancient Israelites' arrival at Mount Sinai resulted in the first Day of Atonement, so do the Exodus allegories in *All Other Nights* lead the Jewish characters to reckon with their participation in the sinful institution of chattel slavery. After all, one pitfall of assimilation is complicity in the atrocities of the hegemonic culture. Inspired by the murder of Confederate spy Rose Greenhow's father, Horn depicts the murder of Jeannie's mother at the hands of one of the Levy family's slaves. Importantly, Deborah Levy's death comes across as a horrible yet righteous act of retribution. The slave woman used her master's shotgun, and the bullet sailed through to 'the south side of the room' (*AON*, 65). The choreography of the scene suggests that this murder was a response to the southern institution of slavery, in which the Levy family was a willing participant. Even Jeannie's father, Philip, views his wife's death this way. As he sees it, his Deborah 'was a wonderful person, but she was wrong' to make Virginia home, and consequently 'died because of where we lived' (*AON*, 101). The Levys' participation in chattel slavery is not grounded in their Judaism, but in Southern culture. As a result, feeling responsible for the conditions that led to the murder, Philip attends temple on Deborah's *yartzeit*, which is all the more significant given that he claims to be irreligious. Accepting what had happened, he manumits the other enslaved persons in his household and thus extracts the family from the 'peculiar institution' of the South. However, his daughter Charlotte redoubles her commitment to the Confederacy, blinded by rage in her grief. If there is a lesson here, it seems to be a reminder that Judaic ethics require self-reflection, atonement, and recompensing those one has wronged. In America, this principle would mean at least refusing the temptation to learn the full power available through anti-black racism.

*All Other Nights* conveys, moreover, that nineteenth-century Jews should have refused this temptation because they were merely afforded what Matthew Frye Jacobson has termed 'probationary whiteness' (see Jacobson, 1999: 171–200). Indeed, Horn shows how Ashkenazim and Sephardim were brought into the fold of racial formations in American culture as their ethnicity and religion together marked them as members of

a 'Hebrew race'. This classification—in essence, both white and not white—meant Jews were denied some privileges of whiteness yet granted others. Being 'Hebrew' provided the basis for discrimination as well as upward mobility. Complicating the white-black dichotomy that often frames discussions of the Civil War period, Horn illustrates this idea when Jacob receives his initial assignment in the Union army to infiltrate Harry Hyams' seder. Jacob's major promises to him: 'Your actions would do honor to your race' because 'Judas Benjamin has done your race a great disservice' (AON, 9, 10). It takes Jacob aback to hear himself othered and to be exploited precisely for that otherness in an effort against members of the same minority group. Consequently, Jacob develops something akin to W. E. B. Du Bois' double consciousness as he perceives how he is perceived as white yet not: 'While he looked in the mirror and saw [an] American boy, the three men at this table looked at him and saw Judah Benjamin' (AON, 9). Jacob thus recognizes on some level that, in the U.S., Jews have historically possessed what Jacobson has termed 'whiteness of a different color' (Jacobson, 1999). In this fashion, *All Other Nights* makes legible to readers an aspect of the Civil War that most readers probably have not considered: the mutable place of Jews within the American racial hierarchy—and its attending socioeconomic and political effects.

Up to a point, it was the presence of black people as a legally enslaveable race in America that conferred any privileges of whiteness upon Jews. Put another way, Jews were perhaps spared from being turned into Israelites again because another group was coerced into that role (indigenous people aside). That logic comes through in *All Other Nights* when Horn figures the Southern criminal justice system as the site where Jews' probationary whiteness comes into full force. When Jeannie gets engaged to Jacob, Jeannie's Gentile ex-lover writes her an anti-Semitic diatribe, claiming, 'it is a prison you live in, a prison built by your family, your race, and your vengeful God' (AON, 78). While he calls Jewish identity a 'prison', Horn intimates that the 'prison' is Jews' misplaced desire to be incorporated—or their misperception of having been incorporated—into the white Christian hegemony. It is this metaphorical prison that lands Jeannie's father in an actual prison. When Jeannie's ex-lover disrupts the wedding, Philip shoots him in a duel, which apparently puts Philip in the role of Southern white male: we read that Philip's 'hands were raised in front of him and

clasped together high [around the pistol], as if in some sort of ecstatic Christian prayer' (AON, 93). While this act seems like Judaic righteousness—evoking the manifestation of God that guided the Israelites from Egypt, Philip's hat 'blazed like a pillar of fire'—it turns out that the rules of Southern dueling are selectively applied. Philip is arrested, and his mistreatment in prison illustrates Jewish Americans' status between 'white' and 'black'. The courts violate his constitutional rights: 'The judge denied him bail, and didn't even bother to set a date for trial' (AON, 99). He is housed with a black prisoner, which segregation practices would not have allowed if Philip were fully 'white'. The slight hierarchization of Jews above African Americans extend into jail practices: 'Unlike Philip, [the Negro] was shackled not only at the wrists and ankles, but also at the neck' (AON, 124). Moreover, the extrajudicial violence that white citizens visited on African Americans hangs over Philip: 'If the judge let me out on bail', he says, 'I would have already been lynched'. This line evokes the real lynchings of Jewish men between the 1860s and early 1900s (see Hieke, 2013: 149–52; Berger, 2014). Jacob thus observes how Jews, if they appeared dangerous to the status quo, could see subjugation approximating what African Americans experienced. Whereas earlier, he 'noticed slaves being transported in shackles around town ... but he had always turned away from them', in the jail, he distinctly notices the fetters on Philip and Philip's cellmate (AON, 100). Horn implies that Jewish Americans gained a false sense of security in modeling themselves on the hegemony. Horn thus illustrates the complexities of bigotry directed at Jews and, in so doing, mobilizes the novel's interest in black-Jewish solidarity.

With respect to black liberation, consequently, Horn posits *tzedakah* as a guiding principle. Though *tzedakah* is commonly understood as 'charity', it really refers to an obligation to bring justice to those denied of it. Medieval Jewish philosopher Maimonides famously explained in his *Mishneh Torah* that *tzedakah* entails aiding the impoverished so they can sustain themselves. In *All Other Nights*, this notion translates to Jewish Americans helping African Americans mobilize their own freedom struggle. For instance, from behind bars, Philip purchases the release of his cellmate—who turns out to be one of the black dispatches that performed espionage for the Union. Rendezvousing with the man outside the prison, however, Jacob also comes to acknowledge some of

his limitations as an emancipator. As Jacob struggles to undo the man's fetters, Horn weaves a scene that reads like an allegory about Jewish alliance with African Americans:

“Let me open these”, [Jacob] told him, and set to work unlocking the shackles  
... It took much longer than it should have. ... As he fumbled with the ankle  
lock, Caleb laughed out loud, bending down and taking the key out of  
Jacob's hand. He freed himself. (*AON*, 125)

On some level, the phrase '[i]t took much longer than it should have' speaks to abolition itself. More specifically, the passage portrays a Jewish man faltering in a cross-racial interaction, possessing the desire and the means to free this black man yet not quite knowing how to follow through. By the figurative logic of the scene, the key for Jews is to empower African Americans to break the chains that bind them. Horn cues the reader to interpret the scene this way by couching it as another reenactment of Exodus. Indeed, here, Horn has turned a historical black dispatch named John Scobell into the fictional character of Caleb Johnson—the biblical Caleb being one of the Hebrew spies sent by Moses to explore the Promised Land. Correspondingly, when Jacob encounters Caleb Johnson again, Caleb calls Jacob 'my personal Moses' (*AON*, 141).

What I am seeing here as a kind of parable in the novel—or, a *mashal*, to use the Hebrew term—culminates in an image of solidarity between Jewish and African Americans based in shared religious beliefs. *All Other Nights* allows that Jewish and African Americans could both qualify figuratively as Israelites. In reality, Exodus formed a point of divergence and convergence between Jews and black Christians in this period. Slave spirituals and abolitionist tracts rearticulated the Book of Exodus to advocate for emancipation and express a collective black identity (see Coffey, 2014: 145–80). In *All Other Nights*, Jacob develops an interethnic and interfaith connection along these lines with two simultaneous reenactments: again replaying a moment in his formative years and part of the Exodus story. Welcomed into the black dispatches' hideout, Jacob forges a bond with Caleb's young son, Ellis, over their shared interest in the Song of the Sea—the poem in Exodus describing the Israelites' journey across

the Red Sea and God's annihilation of Pharaoh's army, as well as the selection Jacob chanted as a rite of passage into Jewish adulthood. Looking at the song printed in Ellis's bible, evocatively, represents 'the parting of the sea of memory' in Jacob's mind as he recalls not just the voyage down the Mississippi River at the beginning of the novel in a barrel stowed on a ship to New Orleans, when he is coded as baby Moses (or Jonah), but also his *bar mitzvah* (*AON*, 139). At first, Horn alludes to the ways that the text made many American Jews indifferent to chattel slavery: the song praises the divine 'for drowning the Egyptian army' more than 'the parting of the water, or even the fact of liberation' (*AON*, 139), and Jacob risks alienating Ellis by starting to sing it in Hebrew. However, Ellis desires to hear 'how Moses would've done it' (*AON*, 139). Jacob becomes swept up in the song, the memory and the new spiritual experience washing over him and drowning 'the person he used to be', that is, someone mostly apathetic toward Judaism and abolitionism. While the song initially makes Jacob feel ashamed about the evils of slavery, Ellis's appreciation for his performance represents Jewish and African Americans finding some common ground. Horn thus codes Jacob and Ellis both as *Am HaSefer* (People of the Book), linked through the Old Testament.

Except, that common ground is also strewn with rocks. This cross-racial and -religious connection requires some negotiation, between Jewish complicity in slavery and Christian hostility toward non-Christians. Horn explores this conflict through the imagery in the scene. When Jacob places a Confederate two-dollar bill on the table next to the Ellis' bible, he casts his eye over 'the cross emblazoned on the book's cover' and 'Judah Benjamin's face' on the bill (*AON*, 137). In this image, Horn consolidates two proslavery defenses—Christianity and capitalism—coupled with the epitome of a 'Hebrew' finding success on the backs of black people. Noticing a scar on Ellis' neck, Jacob recognizes that while he never owned slaves, he has benefitted from Ellis having been enslaved. But Jacob also has reason to feel uneasy about Ellis opening the New Testament. Indeed, seeing the bible reminds him of proselytizers in the Union army who 'tried to persuade him to abandon his apparent fate of Eternal Tarnation' (*AON*, 138). For the Christian zealots who had served with him, moreover, 'the persuasion process had always involved reading

aloud to him about Jesus, and had never ended well' (AON, 138). So it is meant to be (funny and) fortunate that 'Ellis' Bible was opened to a place quite close to the beginning, nowhere near the second half' (AON, 138). In this fashion, Horn signals how the differences posed by Christianity versus Judaism created a potential barrier to, or limitation on, a relationship between black and Jewish Americans. The fact of the matter was that there were official forms of religious discrimination against Jewish soldiers as well as informal practices within the Union ranks to proselytize them (see Korn, 1951: 56–97). Likewise, there was a prominent strain of evangelism in the abolitionist movement that infused advocacy for black rights with Christian fervor, including such stock inflammatory claims as the blood libel. In the words of one famous abolitionist, Jews 'did sometimes kill a Christian baby at Passover' (Rosen, 2000: 38–9). From staunch abolitionists like William Lloyd Garrison to the writers of liberal-leaning newspapers, anti-Semitism formed part of the anti-slavery movement (see Ruchames, 2010: 147–54). In *All Other Nights*, religion thus forms a possible chasm, as well as bridge, between Ellis and Jacob.

But the moral bent of the novel is toward an assessment of Jewish ethics. Jacob's interaction with Ellis also reveals a fissure between Judaic theory and practice with respect to Jews' perspectives on African Americans. When Jacob finishes the Song of the Sea, Ellis memorably comments, 'A nice song ... But your singing's awful' (AON, 139). The distinction here between a song and the singing of a song conveys that while the precepts of Exodus offer redemptive ideals, the children of Israel have perhaps fallen short in turning those ideals into progressive action. Horn's novel advances the case all the same for Judaism going hand in hand with progressive action (see Sicker, 2001: 91–117). Indeed, an important dimension of *All Other Nights* is how Jacob comes to link practicing Judaism with intervening in American forms of injustice. He realizes that observing his faith entails not merely debating *halakha*, but more exactly, defining one's relationship to humankind. 'Most Jewish arguments' once seemed as immaterial to Jacob as 'arguing about whether people should be permitted to raise chickens on the moon without a kosher butcher', the narration reads, until he recognizes that, actually, 'those arguments were about how

best to be human, about the most trivial and most horrifying obligations involved in repairing a broken world' (*AON*, 214). The specific phrase 'repairing a broken world' alludes to Judaism's concept of *tikkun olam*—meaning 'repair the world' in Hebrew—which calls for living more righteously, improving family relationships, and working toward social reform (see Dorff, 2005; Jacobs, 2007). The phrase itself forms a motif in the novel. Infiltrating Judah Benjamin's office as a Union spy, Jacob sees himself as 'knee-deep in repentance ... gathering up the pieces of a broken world' (*AON*, 288). In other words, *tikkun olam* means embracing one's Judaism to help free the unfree. *Tikkun olam*, along with *tzedakah*, can strengthen Jewish identity and provide a lodestar toward a more just society. To borrow the title of one of Maimonides' major texts, *All Other Nights* offers this repeated phrase as a guide for the perplexed.

Yet the novel also conveys that opposing racism does not require an intellectual or spiritual exercise. Jacob breaks his mind free from the ways American culture had desensitized him to the racial subjugation of black people. The Southern town of New Babylon is described as 'a wretched place for thinking' because the 'only businesses that were still running well were the slave auctions' (*AON*, 106). Horn's depiction of a slave auction there portrays how the constant presentation of black people as beasts of burden primed Americans not to recognize black humanity. But whereas abolitionist fiction in the antebellum period made sentimental appeals to white readers, establishing the capacity to cry over black characters as a moral barometer, *All Other Nights* prioritizes disgust at racist violence. During the auction, Jacob witnesses human beings being treated like horses and being sexually humiliated for the first time. Repulsed, Jacob 'stepped into an actual horse's stable, retching wildly', finding 'he could not vomit [the image] away' (*AON*, 109). Initially, Jacob can neither help thinking about the business side of the slave auction nor feeling aroused at the sight of naked women on the auction block, but ultimately, his body reacts so violently because the sale he watches separates a slave family. Afterward, he mentally juxtaposes a memory of himself with his bride as 'the image of Dorrie and Dabney on their knees [was] seared into his stomach' (*AON*, 110). For Horn, it seems that

one's personal ethics are revealed less in shedding a tear than throwing up one's guts. Jewish ethics, in this view, requires insight into institutionalized bigotry and revulsion at it.

At the same time, another principle posited in *All Other Nights* is prioritizing the Jewish family. The narrative technically builds toward the dissolution of Jacob and Jeannie's respective allegiances to the Union and the Confederacy when they join together again as a family with their daughter, Deborah. The underlying concept here seems to be *ahavat yisrael*—the love for fellow Hebrews, that is, despite factional differences. But Horn almost veers into a paradox regarding civic engagement, if Jews should both maintain strong communal ties while putting Judaic principles into practice on behalf of others. So when Philip asks Jacob, 'One can devote oneself to a cause, but what cause could be worth more than a child?' (*AON*, 230), the message seems to be that Jews should focus on raising (Jewish) children instead of taking up social causes. However, those two tacks are not mutually exclusive in the novel. Horn implies that *ahavat yisrael* can indeed carry a larger sociopolitical potential. As she writes in her author's note, 'social changes tend to happen only when enough people see the problem at hand as something that affects their own children—or ... are motivated to care about other people's children' (*AON*, 372). Hence interacting with Ellis and seeing the slave family separated through the auction stir in Jacob an awareness of injustice as well as a desire to bond with his wife and daughter in the final movement of the novel. Judah Benjamin himself warns Jacob at one point, 'I made a grave mistake with my own daughter ... I hope you will never make one like it' (*AON*, 304). In this fashion, Jacob's recommitment to family may at first glance seem to represent Jewish American insulation. However, it also means Jacob's family is potentially 'repairing the world' precisely because they are strengthening their small corner of the Jewish community and cultivating a mindset that should align them, at least theoretically, with justice for African Americans as 'other Hebrews'.

The ending of the novel does the most both to reaffirm and challenge this line of thought about the novel. On the relationship between the endings of literary narratives and reader interpretation, Peter Rabinowitz notes that an ending 'is not

only to be noticed; there is also a widely applicable literary convention that permits us to read it in a special way, as a *conclusion*, as a summing up of the work's meaning', though the case may be that readers simply '*assign* a special value to the final pages of a text' and then form their interpretation accordingly (Rabinowitz, 2002: 304, emphasis in original). If *All Other Nights* were a *mashal*, in other words, we could expect to find in the ending the *nimshal*, or, moral. Yet the final moments of *All Other Nights* seem to embrace and resist this interpretive mode at the same time. In essence, Horn stages the ultimate reconciliation and reconsolidation of the Jewish American home across ideological divides. Jacob and Jeannie both remove themselves from the Civil War conflict by abandoning their espionage work and raising a family. Just as the biblical Deborah redeems the people of Israel in the Book of Judges, so does Jacob's daughter Deborah descend on him when she appears amid the fall of Richmond in April 1865. The Jewish family achieves harmony, party lines and sociopolitical ideology dissipating and no longer setting mother and father at variance with one another. Divine influence itself appears to release Jacob, and Jews by extension, from hegemonic American culture: as they argue on the threshold between a Christian and Jewish cemetery in Richmond, Jacob and the Confederate courier John Surratt are 'blown off the graves, as the wrath of God shook them free from the foundations of the earth' when explosives detonate during the fall of Richmond (*AON*, 350). Horn's play on the biblical phrase 'the foundations of the earth' is unmistakable, metaphorically releasing Jacob from both the Confederacy and the Union and unmooring American Jewry from fundamental aspects of American society. Jacob, Jeannie, and Deborah are free to be a family together apart from the conflict, whose end is almost certain with the defeat of the Confederacy in its capital city.

The figurative logic of this sequence may sound like a call for Jewish insularity, which would seem to be incongruent with the novel's strong interest in exploring Jewish American civic engagement. However, Horn's conclusion is more complex than that. How this family will negotiate that question and rise to that challenge (or fail to) is yet to be determined as the narrative closes. Confronted with John Surratt's own anti-Semitic tirade against him, Jacob entertains the interpretation that Surratt 'was merely spiteful—unmanned and enraged, like every white person

in the burning city below, by the fact that he had lost' and arrives once again at a deep understanding of himself as a Jew, mentally answering Surratt with an assertion that the chosen people are distinctly meant 'to fulfill a contract with God; to recall the pain of slavery and the shock of liberation; to accept forever the gift of free will; to sense, in every living moment, the presence and the power of the law' and, Horn finally adds, '[t]o serve our country' (*AON*, 348–9). In other words, Horn reaffirms that Jewish Americans thus serve their country when they have a strong sense of communal identity, and that communal identity informs their course of action or inaction as well as their conceptions of their social obligations. Whether having a daughter will inspire Jacob's newly reunited family to help secure freedom for other people's children or whether they will distance themselves from racial politics tacitly remains the choice before them in the end.

Dara Horn has certainly not been alone in this kind of literary project; other Jewish American novelists of the early twenty-first century have similarly explored these themes through historical fiction about the Civil War. Peter Charles Melman's novel *Landsman* (2007), about a Jewish Confederate soldier, also depicts antebellum Jewish American identity amid the practice of slavery. However, Melman anticipates and rejects Horn's emphasis on a more cohesive Jewish American community. He does so through irony: the title of the novel evokes the Yiddish term that diaspora Jews have long used for communal bonding, while Elias Abrams, the protagonist whose very name evokes such significant figures as Elijah the messiah and Abraham the patriarch, forgoes Judaism altogether in favor of secular humanism. When a soldier mentions Judah Benjamin and Henry Hyams as prominent Jews in Confederate governments, Elias Abrams retorts, '[t]hat don't mean they're kin to me' (Melman, 2007: 33). Regarding Jewish slaveholding, Melman puts the Judaic lens aside. At a New Orleans synagogue, Abrams feels disconnected from Judaism in the first place, and then notices a designated area for slaves. Despite the rabbi's sermon about justice, Abrams concludes there is no specifically Jewish conundrum to examine. Having Abrams decide he 'no longer holds these Hebrews in contempt for the lives they have chosen', Melman critiques slavery strictly as an American problem (Melman, 2007: 196). Discussing the real abolitionist sermons of Rabbi David Einhorn, Abrams agrees

with racial equality between Jewish and African Americans, yet not from a Jewish perspective, but a universalistic one. Evoking Exodus, Melman crafts an allegory wherein Abrams designs a scarecrow that first looks like a black man and then ‘the picture of Moses himself partin’ the Red Sea’ (Melman, 2007: 76). The weather strips the scarecrow of its artifice, so that it is ‘no nigger, no Jew’, but ‘the bare wooden skeleton beneath’ (Melman, 2007: 317). *All Other Nights* almost culminates in a similar disappearance of racial divisions, when the ashes swirling around the besieged city of Richmond appear ‘to erase the races, making the white people look like Negroes and the Negroes look like whites’ (AON, 342). Yet, Melman’s anti-racism seems to preclude identity politics. By one reviewer’s account, *Landsman* is patently ‘anti-tribal’ insofar as ‘Justice ... is achieved not collectively but individually, and it’s colorblind’ (Sanders, 2007: n. pag.). In contrast, Horn encourages a reinvigoration of Jewish identity and community with much the same aim of justice in mind.

Lois Leveen’s *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* (2012), which portrays the true story of an ex-slave who infiltrated Jefferson Davis’ household as a Union spy, combines Horn’s and Melman’s viewpoints. Likewise evoking Exodus and other paradigms from Judaism, *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* presents abolition as a Judaic allegory. Though Leveen reinforces the analogy between ancient Israelites and modern African Americans, it tacitly renounces Jews who missed the analogy, although this typological discourse was more complicated in the antebellum period. Unlike Horn, Leveen presents no narrative of reconciliation among members of the tribe. Rather, she locates Jewish consciousness squarely in the progressive movements that combated institutionalized racism. Leveen’s own identity led her to infuse the novel with Jewish themes in these terms, even though *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* focuses on African American rather than Jewish American history. ‘Mary’s trajectory is an exploration of what it means to be chosen, in ways that are directly related to my Jewish understanding of that concept as implying a responsibility to serve some greater good’ Leveen has maintained, adding, ‘to serve the community through *tikkun olam*’ (Leveen, 2012a: n. pag.). Leveen viewed Mary Bowser ‘in a tradition of chosen individuals that includes Moses, Daniel, Esther—even the reluctant Jonah’

(Leeven, 2012a: n. pag.). Coding her fictional version of Mary Bowser as a metaphorical Israelite, Leveen alludes to Judaism throughout the novel, including Mary's quip that 'even Moses himself had more time to lay plans for leading the slaves to freedom' (Leveen, 2012b: 420). When a twelve-year-old Mary performs her literacy before her classmates at a school for black girls, the scene reads like a *bat mitzvah*. But the lone Jewish character is Judah Benjamin, whom Leveen condemns in stronger terms than Horn does. Leveen belittles Benjamin with the nickname 'Aunt Piss' and caricatures him as a *kvetch* who 'complained constantly about how hard he worked to serve the Confederacy' and 'moaned over how his rivals criticized his work as secretary of war' (Leveen, 2012b: 308, 309). When two Confederate senators express anti-Semitic hostility toward him, *The Secrets of Mary Bowser* simply suggests he might have known better than to work in the service of their ambitions.

The dynamic in these historical novels between Jewish identity and anti-racism reflects a longstanding interplay between the observance of Passover and social activism. From at least the late nineteenth century through the twentieth century, progressive Jewish organizations have issued customized *Haggadot* or *Haggadot* supplements emphasizing the traditional theological dimensions of the Exodus and the importance of commemorating it through the seder while also motivating various forms of social action (Cooper, 2012: 16–18). This practice has endured into the early twenty-first century, practically becoming a modern custom. The logic of these *Haggadot* is that Passover should strengthen Jewish American communities and inspire them to stand against the oppression of others. The subjects addressed have ranged from racial injustice to gender violence, poverty, immigration-related issues and refugee crises, not to mention the State of Israel (see Kustanowitz, 2017). In 2009, coincidentally the year *All Other Nights* was published, Jews United for Justice produced a supplement comparing the Israelites' servitude to the plights of day laborers. In the Passovers since, organizations such as Jews For Racial & Economic Justice and T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights have essentially revisited the antebellum typological discourses regarding the ancient Israelites, Jews, and African Americans by discussing the histories of forced labor and state-sanctioned repression

in the United States, from chattel slavery to convict leasing in the postbellum era and the criminal justice system in the present. As *All Other Nights* reminds us, to situate the observance of the seder against contemporary manifestations of Egypt's bondage in America has been a deep-rooted and at times thorny practice.

If Horn's novel sends up a pillar of fire, it could be that historical fiction is a genre specially equipped to refine American Jews' collective memory, reaffirm their identity politics, and reenergize their social involvement. Just as readers from the *Haggadah* at the Passover seder are supposed to imagine themselves as Israelites in Egypt, so readers of *All Other Nights* are tasked with imagining themselves as Jews in America during the Civil War. Reflecting on how she situates her work in a body of literature about this crisis, Horn has noted that whereas most Civil War fiction 'take[s] a particular approach to who the "good guys" and the "bad guys" are, whether they are novels nostalgic for the old South or novels that explore the evils of slavery', *All Other Nights* depicts 'situations where the boundaries between good and evil don't run between people, but within them' (AON, 368). This concept operates on several levels at once: within the Union, the Confederacy, Jewish communities, and individuals. Horn thus writes not to excuse Jews' complicity in anti-black racism, but to probe their perspectives on what the Union and Confederacy represented. Readers, like Jacob, should thus gain a nuanced perception of Jewish history, American history, and how those bear on perennial endeavors in the U.S. for freedom. Other novels by Dara Horn work within this literary aesthetic, as *The World to Come* (2006) likewise melds Ashkenazi history with Yiddish folklore and religious allegory, and *A Guide for the Perplexed* (2013), set in Egypt, couches themes of history, memory, and faith in a Joseph allegory. For Michael Kramer, the 'ethnic awakening' that comes through in 'self-consciously Jewish writing' by authors like Horn ironically 'takes on literary-historical significance primarily in terms of a prior state of successful assimilation' (Kramer, 2011: 306). Nonetheless, perhaps the ultimate act of Israelite-like liberation in *All Other Nights*, at least, is that it posits a way for readers to acknowledge the ethno-religious distinctiveness of the Jewish people by positing a distinct way of reading American history itself: as Jewish stories reenacted.

## Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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