



## **Jewish History of the American South and the Civil Rights Movement: Past and Present**

**Dates: March 11-18, 2024**

### **Background:**

The "deep south" holds a prominent place in the complex tapestry of race relations in the United States. It boasts a distinctive heritage, often celebrated for its hallmark traits of "southern hospitality" and industriousness. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that a significant portion of the region's historical prosperity was built on the backs of enslaved individuals and endured despite the persistence of legal segregation well into the 1960s. The historical narrative of the American South also encompasses the Jewish community, whose presence and contributions have played a pivotal role.

Jewish history in the American South is an integral part of this broader narrative. Beginning in the 19th century, Jewish immigrants found their way to the southern states, establishing vibrant communities that engaged in various facets of the region's development. While facing their own challenges, including anti-Semitism, they gradually became integral to the South's social and economic fabric. During the tumultuous 1960s, the American South became a focal point in the fight for civil rights. African Americans and their allies, including Jewish activists, joined hands to confront racial injustice head-on. Jewish individuals and organizations, motivated by their own experiences with discrimination and a commitment to justice, played pivotal roles in the Civil Rights Movement. Their involvement was instrumental in challenging segregation, promoting equality, and advancing the cause of civil rights. Leaders like Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched side by side with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., embodying the unity of diverse communities in the pursuit of justice.

Today, the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement still resonates across the country. While progress has been made, many issues related to race and equality remain unresolved, necessitating ongoing efforts to combat discrimination and ensure social justice. The Jewish community in the American South and beyond continues to be actively engaged in these struggles, advocating for equal rights, challenging systemic racism, and working towards a more just and inclusive society. Their historical involvement in the Civil Rights Movement serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring commitment to a fair and equitable America, transcending religious and cultural boundaries.



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## Itinerary

### **Day 1, Monday, March 11, 2024: Arrival**

**[No guide, no transportation]**

- Arrive in Birmingham, Alabama and transfer to your hotel (on own).

*Overnight: Hampton Inn, Birmingham (No meals)*

### **Day 2, Tuesday, March 12, 2024: Birmingham, Alabama**

**[Guide, Transportation]**

- Meet your expert guide in the lobby of your hotel for a welcome, introduction, and overview of the trip.
- Learn about the Jewish history in Birmingham including the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, the attempted bombing of Temple Beth El, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" directed at fellow clergy.
- Have lunch on your own at the Pizitz Food Hall.
- Visit the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute, an interpretive museum that depicts the struggles of the American Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s and 1960s. Explore the story of a persecuted people and their ongoing movement toward justice and equality.
- Visit the historic 16th Street Baptist Church, bombed by Klansmen in 1963.
- Stroll through Kelly Ingram Park where sculptures depict the reality of the police dogs and fire hoses that were turned on demonstrators who gathered here to protest segregation laws. See the A.G. Gaston Motel and Masonic Temple, both sites of significant civil rights activism. Stroll historic 4th Avenue North.
- Have a group dinner followed by a group processing and discussion session.

*Overnight: Hampton Inn, Birmingham (B, D)*

### **Day 3, Wednesday, March 13, 2024: Birmingham to Selma**

**[Guide, Transportation]**

- Check out of the hotel and travel south to Selma (1.5 hour drive).
- Upon reaching Selma, visit the historic **Selma Temple (Mishkan Israel)** and hear from a historian about the Selma Jewish community.
- After a break for lunch, visit the **Brown Chapel AME Church**, where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. launched the voting rights march.
- Visit the **Selma Interpretive Center**, located at the foot of the Edmund Pettus Bridge, marks the beginning of the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail.



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- Cross the **Edmund Pettus Bridge**, where the civil rights march began in 1965 and where law enforcement personnel confronted voting rights marchers on Bloody Sunday. Two weeks later, a second march unfolded. President Lyndon B. Johnson had mobilized the Alabama National Guard, ensuring the protection of the 3,200 participants. Dr. Martin Luther King appealed to faith leaders to join him in Selma. Responding to the call, Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and other prominent rabbis and in total approximately 450 clergy members of all faiths participated in the march. These marches and other protests around the state eventually led to the Voting Rights Act of 1965.
- Tour the **National Voting Rights Museum & Institute**, the cornerstone of the contemporary struggle for voting rights and human dignity.
- Drive to Montgomery (1 hour drive).

*Overnight: Embassy Suites, Montgomery (B)*

**Day 4, Thursday, March 14, 2024: Montgomery**  
**[Guide, Transportation]**

- Start with a visit to the **Legacy Museum**, built on the site of a former warehouse where black slaves were imprisoned, and explore the legacy of black America from slavery to modern-day mass incarceration.
- In the afternoon, visit the **National Memorial for Peace and Justice**, known as the “Lynching Memorial”, the nation’s first memorial dedicated to the legacy of enslaved black people, the terror of lynching, African Americans humiliated by racial segregation and Jim Crow, and people of color who continue to be burdened with contemporary presumptions of guilt and police violence.
- Check out of the hotel and visit the **Civil Rights Memorial Center**, dedicated to those killed in the struggle for the equal and integrated treatment of all people, regardless of race, during the 1954-1968 civil rights movement.
- Briefly stop in front of the **first White House of the Confederacy** and the **Alabama State Capitol**, the birthplace of the Confederacy and the final stop along the Selma-to-Montgomery march.
- Check into the hotel and have a **group processing and discussion session**. Have dinner on your own.
- For those who are interested, take taxis on your own for an **optional evening out with live music and soul food at B.B. King’s Blues Club**.

*Overnight: Embassy Suites, Montgomery (B)*



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**Temple Beth El**  
Reform Judaism, Santa Cruz Style  
Jewish Community Center Aptos, California



## **Day 5, Friday, March 15, 2024: Montgomery to Atlanta, Georgia**

### **[Guide, Transportation]**

- Visit **The P.O.W.E.R. (People Organizing for Women's Empowerment & Rights) House** which houses the **Montgomery Area Reproductive Justice Coalition**. There, meet an abortion rights access activist.
- Visit the **Dexter Avenue King Memorial Baptist Church and Parsonage Museum** where Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. lived and the only church he pastored from 1954 to 1960.
- Honor **Rosa Parks' legacy** by stopping at a memorial plaque at the site of her arrest.
- Walk to the **Freedom Rides Museum**. In 1961 groups of volunteers made history by challenging the practice of segregated travel through the South. They called themselves Freedom Riders as they crossed racial barriers in depots and onboard buses. Hundreds of Jews, including a many rabbis, participated in Freedom Rides.
- Then, travel to Atlanta (2.5 hour drive). Check into the hotel and prepare for Shabbat.
- Join **Kabbalat Shabbat services at The Temple**, followed by a **festive Shabbat dinner**.

Overnight: *Hyatt Place Atlanta Downtown, Atlanta (B, D)*

## **Day 6, Saturday, March 16, 2024: Shabbat in Atlanta**

- Join **Congregation Beth Averim** led by **Rabbi Michael Rothbaum**.
- Have lunch at the synagogue following services.
- Spend the day at the synagogue learning with rabbis, musicians, and participating in a **Diversity Equity and Inclusion training** led by **Victoria Raggs**, the co-founding Executive Director of the **Atlanta Jews of Color Council**, an organization that fosters grassroots activism, systemic change, and global inclusion education.
- Return to the hotel and have dinner on your own.

Overnight: *Hyatt Place Atlanta Downtown, Atlanta (B, L)*

## **Day 7, Sunday, March 17, 2024: Atlanta**

### **[Guide, Transportation]**

- Visit the **Breman Museum**, committed to preserving and nurturing the proud history of Jewish life in the Southeastern United States, including their special exhibit on **Leo Frank**.
- Meet with a representative from the **Southern Christian Leadership Conference**, and learn about their role in several historic civil rights activities including the March on Washington, the Selma Voting Rights Campaign, and the March to Montgomery as well as their modern day mission to educate youth and adults in the areas of personal responsibility, leadership potential, and community service to ensure economic justice and civil rights and to eradicate racism wherever it exists.



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- Visit the **National Center for Civil and Human Rights**, a museum that connects the American civil rights movement to today's global human rights movements, from women's rights to immigration to child labor to LGBTQ+ issues. Permanent exhibits include a timeline about the civil rights movement, Dr. King's personal papers, and a lunch counter similar to the ones where black students staged sit-ins demanding to be served food alongside whites.
- Have a free evening.

*Overnight: Hyatt Place Atlanta Downtown, Atlanta (B)*

### **Day 8, Monday, March 18, 2024: Atlanta**

#### **[Guide, Transportation]**

- Check out of the hotel.
- Visit the **Ebenezer Baptist Church**, where Dr. King delivered his first sermon in 1947 and served as associate minister and later co-pastor with his father.
- Visit the **Martin Luther King Jr. National Historic Site**, consisting of Dr. King's boyhood home, a museum that chronicles the American civil rights movement, and a firehouse displaying an exhibit on the desegregation of the Atlanta Fire Department.
- Stop at the **King Center (The Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change)**, pay your respects to Dr. King's legacy, and learn how his legacy continues today.
- There is a vegan fast casual restaurant nearby where the group can get lunch on their own.
- Spend a few hours volunteering.
- Have a closing group processing and discussion session before transferring to the airport for

[B]



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