

# SHALOM *Y'all*

GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG INSTITUTE OF  
SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

SUMMER 2023

Travel to  
Mississippi with  
the ISJL in 2024!  
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## COMMUNITY VISITS

ON THE ROAD IN THE JEWISH SOUTH

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## ON THE COVER

Melvin Myles and Rabbi Micah Lapidus—performing together as Lapidus & Myles—shared their incredible music with us at the Mississippi Freedom Seder, held in April at the Two Mississippi Museums in Jackson.

Learn more about Lapidus & Myles' time in Mississippi on page 14, and meet all of our new roster presenters on page 16!

*Photograph courtesy of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History.*

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# COMMUNITY VISITS

FROM OUR EARLIEST DAYS, THE GOLDRING/WOLDENBERG Institute of Southern Jewish Life (ISJL) has valued being *in* the communities we serve. This concept has been at the very heart of our work, in every program we offer. We don't just offer resources; we offer direct support. We offer the kind of connection best achieved by being together.

We put our staff and presenters on the road, committed to meeting people where they are—even in the very smallest of communities. Particularly since we serve some Jewish communities so small that few if any other Jewish entities reach them, this is a deeply meaningful approach.

Twenty-three years later, we're still committed to that approach... but a lot has changed.

Beginning in March 2020, and for most of the following two years, we had to move all of our programming online, over Zoom, and over the phone. We were still unwavering in our support of our communities, but it looked—and felt—quite different. Some of the changes were incredibly rewarding, and will be retained moving forward.

But we sure missed those community visits.

This year, 2023, has been our first full year of resuming all of our planned in-person programs and events. Culminating with the return of the in-person ISJL Conference this June, our staff, presenters, and community members have all experienced moving moments of reconnection as we fully resumed our on-the-ground approach to Jewish communal service.

That's why the theme of this issue of *Shalom Y'all* is **Community Visits**. Each of our three divisions—Education, Culture, and Spirituality—will share some of their recent experiences from being back on the road or hosting events. Our leadership and presenters will also offer glimpses into the impact of community visits.

We're grateful, too, for the ways technology allows us to continue cultivating meaningful connections even when we're not on the road. Accessibility and inclusion are enhanced by these measures, and that contributes to a wider communal reach. Our online offerings are here to stay... and we're also excited for all the places we'll go.

*The Board & Staff of the ISJL*



# FROM THE CEO



## MICHELE SCHIPPER CEO

WANT TO COME VISIT YOUR COMMUNITY.

No, really—I mean it!

Let me explain: one of the most meaningful aspects of the ISJL's work is the way we meet communities right where they are—literally. From the very beginning, we put people and programs on the road, delivering dynamic visits directly to communities with a “we’ll come to you!” approach, rather than an “if you want it, come and get it!” mindset. I really believe in this model, and every time one of our program staff returns from a trip full of stories and insights from the road, that belief is strengthened.

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"FROM THE VERY BEGINNING, WE [HAVE DELIVERED] DYNAMIC VISITS DIRECTLY TO COMMUNITIES WITH A 'WE'LL COME TO YOU!' APPROACH, RATHER THAN AN 'IF YOU WANT IT, COME AND GET IT!' MINDSET."  
.....

As CEO of the organization, though, I don't get to travel in quite the same way that our incredible presenters and program staff get to travel. Because I live in an ISJL community, I certainly take advantage of every program that happens in Jackson, Mississippi, where our team is based—and we do

have a lot of excellent programming happening right here in our local community! But most of the time, when I hit the road for the ISJL, it's to connect with donors, professionals, and community leaders who can help enable our work to continue.

That might sound a little less exciting than leading a Tot Shabbat or attending a comedy show. But the truth is, it's an honor to get to tell the ISJL story and get others involved in the vital work that we do. It's energizing to be around others who are just as committed as we are to Jewish life and community-building. A lot of my travel is within our thirteen-state southern region. But the truth is, we need supporters from well beyond our program area. That's why in addition to my southern travels, I'm often planning trips to New York, Los Angeles, the Bay Area, Chicago, or St. Louis, to name a few.

.....  
"IT'S AN HONOR TO GET TO TELL THE ISJL STORY AND GET OTHERS INVOLVED IN THE VITAL WORK THAT WE DO."  
.....



Michele welcomes participants to the Mississippi Freedom Seder in 2019.

These past few years, the pandemic didn't just put the brakes on program travel. It paused my travel as well. For almost two years, most of my meetings were online. It still led to some great conversations, but it's just not the same. In the past year, I've eagerly resumed my visits to communities throughout the South and beyond. In the year ahead, I want to spend even more time on the road. If you think there's someone in your area who needs to know about the work the ISJL is doing, please let me know!

Because truly... I want to come visit your community.

See you soon,

# FROM THE BOARD CHAIR



JAY HESDORFFER  
BOARD CHAIR

**A**LTHOUGH I GREW UP IN JACKSON, Mississippi, it's been decades since I lived there. For most of my time as ISJL Board Chair, I've lived in the Chicago area. Visiting the ISJL's southern communities to see our programs in action wasn't something I often had the opportunity to do. Thus, one of the bright spots in the height of the pandemic was when I was able to virtually attend our 2021 online adaptation of LAB (Literacy Achievement Bonanza), the ISJL's literacy program for Mississippi public school students. Getting to see the program in action, watching the ISJL team enthusiastically building community and fostering a positive relationship with reading while improving literacy skills for 1st through 6th graders, was inspiring even on screen. I was glad to get to see it.

However—even though it meant I couldn't pop in via Zoom to experience the exuberance in the room—it was much, much better to know that this year, the students and staff were back together, sharing their love of literacy in person. The kids were pumped, the program was thriving, and even without being “in the room,” the stories and pictures from the program reinvigorated my commitment to this program. There's just something special about being together.

That's been true for all of the ISJL's programs. Hearing the accounts of staff hitting the road once more, of our presenters flying

around the South to bring Jewish cultural programs directly into southern communities, and gearing up right now for this summer's in-person ISJL Conference, all feels like what this organization is truly meant to be doing.

.....  
"THERE'S JUST SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT BEING TOGETHER."  
.....

Throughout the 13 states we serve, we are back in full force, and feeling the gratitude and the impact of our footprint. As I write this, our rabbi just returned from a five-state Passover Pilgrimage tour, leading seder celebrations in Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Tennessee. Our historian is in Louisiana, teaching visitors about the southern Jewish experience, sharing meals and casual conversations in addition to the formal content of the program. On a recent visit to El Paso, Texas, a Program Associate's love of architecture inspired students to learn about and explore their beautiful and architecturally significant synagogue. What better way than through a creative scavenger hunt? It's only possible because our Program Associates are back on the road, delivering their enthusiasm and making connections up close.

It's inspiring to get updates on all of these travels and touchpoints. These days, I divide my time be-

tween Chicago and Sarasota, Florida. This will give me more opportunities to connect with our staff and programs, since some of them will be closer to my backyard. But even when I'm not directly experiencing the ISJL's programs, I know how much they matter to people and what a difference they make. Especially after remote-only service for two years, this return to doing what this organization was designed to do is truly meaningful.

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"EVEN WHEN I'M NOT DIRECTLY EXPERIENCING THE ISJL'S PROGRAMS, I KNOW HOW MUCH THEY MATTER TO PEOPLE AND WHAT A DIFFERENCE THEY MAKE."  
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I hope that no matter where you live, you'll join me in supporting the ISJL's ongoing commitment to serving Jewish communities in the South... on the ground, across the region, meeting people where they are and strengthening the ties that bind.

# EDUCATION

## WHAT WE LEARN ALONG THE WAY

MOLLY LEVY  
*DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION*

WHEN ONE OF OUR EDUCATION team members returns from a community visit, we immediately write what we call a “trip report” to share with the office. These trip reports contain a lot of valuable information. They include an overview of what we did while we were visiting the community, from programs we ran to services we led. They also feature any interesting folks we met and if any other division needs to reach out to connect about a spiritual or cultural need. However, we are also sure to mention any delicious restaurants we visited or point out the farm stand on the way that has the best ice cream (Donna’s #6, for the curious).

However, when I asked our current Program Associates what they love the most about being on the road, none of them brought up their favorite sightseeing opportunities or strawberry stands. They all mentioned how excited they were to see how each community interacts with the ISJL, and uses their skills in completely different ways. Our team was struck that even though each community was using the ISJL curriculum, their schools, classrooms, and needs were completely different.

Some communities need a full-service visit with itineraries that include everything from a Shabbat service to a text study to a family program on Sunday. This often happens in our small and



Program Associate Sophie Bernstein by the fire with students from Congregation Agudas Achim in San Antonio, Texas.



Molly (and fellow former Education Fellow Allison Parshall) at a Montgomery Biscuits game in 2010.

medium-sized congregations, and our Program Associates provide a much-needed service and boost of energy for the staff. Other congregations simply need us to be there to schmooze with their members, sharing stories from our travels. Others want us to be more involved with the community, attending school plays and local events. No matter what they ask, we love every part of fully immersing ourselves into our partner communities for a weekend.

Because of this, our Program Associates learn to adapt to any community and situation. They make sure that they can be whatever a community needs them to be. Need them to lead services? You got it. Do you need someone to pour tiny cups of grape juice while singing a silly song about grapes? Sure. The religious school is having a Maccabiah and you need someone to run through the classrooms wearing a Superman outfit? Hand us a cape.

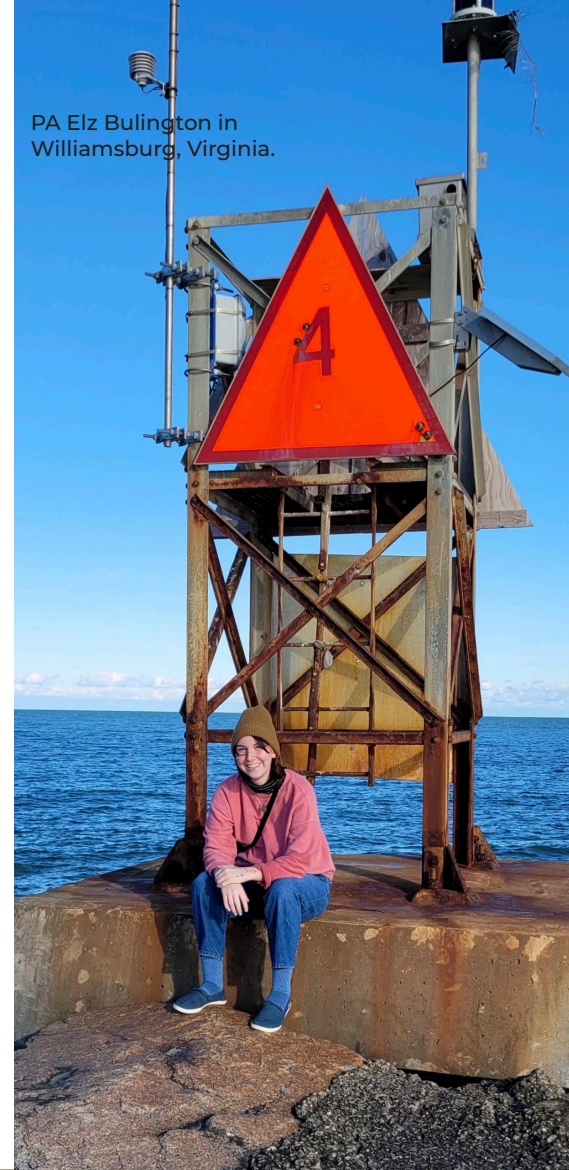
These visits aren't just helpful for the communities we serve, though. All of these experiences are also incredibly formative

for our Program Associates. They are learning to think on their feet, connect with new people, and be there for folks who need them. When I was an ISJL Education Fellow from 2009-2011, I enhanced so many Jewish leadership skills: service-leading, reading Torah, and working on a team.

But the communities I visited taught me so much more. On the road for the ISJL, I learned the basics of baseball (Montgomery, AL), to appreciate jazz music (Baton Rouge, LA), and how to make a goat cheese pasta that will impress any guest (Panama City, FL)—all important lessons learned on my community visits around the South.

We are so lucky to do this job and come into your communities, even just once a month. Every trip is different and we never know what we are going to learn. What stays the same is the warmth, energy, and incredible feeling of belonging that we experience in our region. Thank you, and see y'all on the road!

PA Elz Bulington in Williamsburg, Virginia.



Students crafting at Rodef Shalom Temple in Newport News, Virginia.



To learn more about Education at the ISJL, email [jewisheducation@isjl.org](mailto:jewisheducation@isjl.org).

# CULTURE

## HIT THE ROAD WITH THE ISJL

NORA KATZ

*DIRECTOR OF HERITAGE AND INTERPRETATION*

**W**HAT'S YOUR FAVORITE THING ABOUT TRAVELING? IS IT MEETING AND BEFRIENDING LOCAL PEOPLE, WHO ARE eager to share family stories and memories of growing up in their hometowns? Is it lingering over great meals with new friends, and always ordering dessert? Is it visiting museums and asking big questions about how we tell complicated stories about the past? Is it experiencing music and art that helps you get to know yourself and your place in the world? Is it going off the beaten path to see things you could never experience at home?

I've had experiences like these across the South, whether I'm traveling on my own to favorite destinations like Hot Springs, Arkansas, and the Great Smoky Mountains; on the road with the ISJL in cities like Tulsa, Charleston, and Dallas; or leading Southern Jewish Heritage Tours in Alabama, New Orleans, and Memphis. But my favorite place to travel is the place I'm lucky to call home: Mississippi.

Since moving to the Magnolia State in 2017, I've taken road trips to small towns and larger cities; driven down the Natchez Trace more times than I can count; gone swimming in lakes, rivers, and the Gulf of Mexico; camped under the stars at a regenerative farm in north Mississippi; and even gotten stuck in the mud deep in the Delta National Forest.

My favorite part of traveling in Mississippi is the people: the local experts who tell nuanced and truthful stories about our state's history, the folks who welcome visitors into their homes and communities, and the people who are always excited to introduce me to their friends and family, their favorite restaurants and music venues, and their favorite historic places. The ISJL is lucky to be connected to so many people in communities across Mississippi who are advocates for southern Jewish life, history, and culture. Even in places where the Jewish population is small, these people ensure that Mississippi's Jewish stories aren't lost.



Visiting historic Club Ebony in Indianola, Mississippi.



Yale Hillel students at the end of a long work day at the Isaiah T. Montgomery House in Mound Bayou.





A view from the back seat—on the road in the Delta with ISJL colleagues.



Tour participants in discussion at Longwood in Natchez, Mississippi.



Tour participants chatting with former Indianola mayor Steve Rosenthal.



Views of farmland in the Mississippi Delta.

The ISJL Culture team is excited to bring you here to experience Mississippi. In February 2024, there will be two opportunities to travel through our home state with us. You'll hit the road with our staff, experiencing off-the-beaten-path destinations, big conversations about southern Jewish culture and history, and the best art, music, and food Mississippi has to offer. If you're looking for a weekend getaway with a focus on good meals and music, join us for **Jews, Blues, and Food in Jackson, Memphis, and the Mississippi Delta from January 31 to February 5.**

If you prefer a more relaxed pace, a longer trip, and want a chance to stay in luxurious accommodations, join us for **Jewish Life in the Most Southern Place on Earth: Jackson, Natchez, Vicksburg, and the Mississippi Delta from February 18 to 25.** You can see all of the details for both trips on the following pages.

What can you expect on your southern Jewish journey? Delicious meals, world-class museums, and visits to vibrant southern Jewish communities. We'll gather virtually before the tour to give you an overview of the experience, offer a comprehensive reading (and watching and listening!) list, and give you a chance to get to know your fellow travelers before we hit the road. Throughout the trip, we'll offer expert leadership, lead thought-provoking discussions, and welcome you into our own Mississippi Jewish lives.

We're especially excited to offer the opportunity to travel and learn with folks from across the South and across the country—including ISJL staff. I've had the distinct pleasure of traveling extensively with my colleagues Shira Muroff (ISJL Director of Programs) and Josh Parshall (ISJL Director of History). Whether we're deep in the Mississippi Delta, on the road in Virginia, or meandering through Alabama,

I'm always happy to be on the road with my teammates.

Shira is an expert at podcast recommendations, organizing car snacks, and connecting the dots between the stories we hear on the road and things we've read or heard about in other places. Josh is always down to go off the beaten path, eat delicious meals, and curate an impeccable playlist. I am an advocate for reading every roadside interpretive panel, getting to know the public transit systems of unfamiliar cities, and lingering in art museums (sometimes a bit longer than my companions might prefer). All three of us will bring our unique sensibilities, expertise, and food opinions on the trip.

Planning and leading Southern Jewish Heritage Tours for the past six years has been the honor of a lifetime—I am so excited for this evolution of our tour program, and I can't wait to travel with you.

Learn more and register for our tours at [www.isjl.org/tours](http://www.isjl.org/tours).  
To learn more about Heritage & Interpretation at the ISJL, email [heritage@isjl.org](mailto:heritage@isjl.org).

# JEWES, BLUES, AND FOOD IN JACKSON, MEMPHIS, AND THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

January 31 to  
February 5, 2024

Get a taste of southern food, history, culture, and music on this **immersive and intimate journey** in Jackson, Memphis, and the Mississippi Delta. Engage with community members and fellow travelers during visits to **interactive museums, legendary music venues, and vibrant southern Jewish communities**.

## Wednesday, January 31

Arrive in Jackson.

## Thursday, February 1

### *The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*

Get to know your guide and fellow travelers, and set intentions for the journey | Spend the day learning about Mississippi as the birthplace of the modern Civil Rights Movement | Enjoy an opening dinner at one of Jackson's iconic music venues.

## Friday, February 2

### *Jews and the Blues*

Travel to the Mississippi Delta to meet with Jewish community leaders before diving deep into the Delta's musical legacy | Celebrate Shabbat with a local congregation.

## Saturday, February 3

### *Welcome to the Mississippi Delta*

Get to know the complexities of the Delta's rich Jewish history, then tour historically African American communities including Mound Bayou and Ruleville | Spend the evening at a juke joint in Clarksdale.

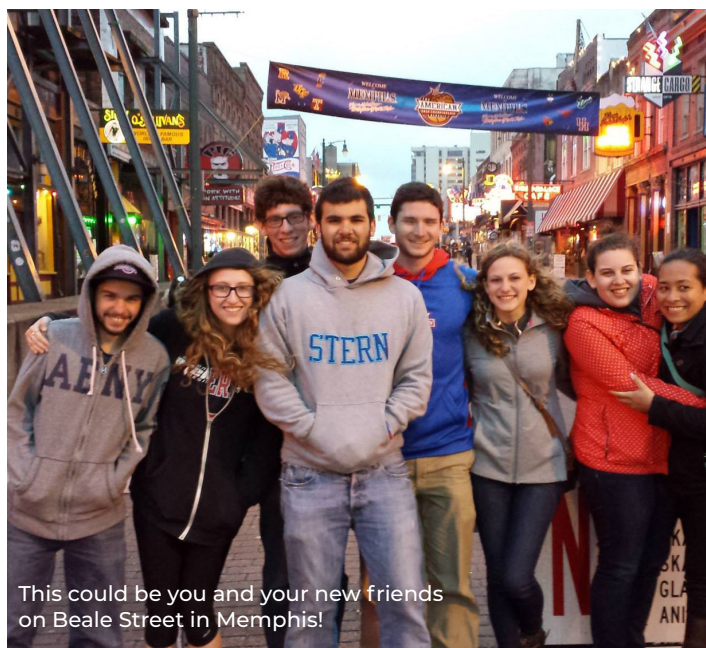
## Sunday, February 4

### *Civil Rights and Soul in Memphis*

Consider the legacy of the Civil Rights Movement, then sing along with the hits of the 1960s at the Stax Museum | Enjoy a closing group dinner and a night out on Beale Street.

## Monday, February 5

Return home with new friends, new recipes, and a new perspective on Jewish life and culture in the American South.



This could be you and your new friends on Beale Street in Memphis!

For more details, pricing information, and tour registration, visit our website at [www.isjl.org/tours](http://www.isjl.org/tours). We can't wait to travel with you!

# JEWISH LIFE IN THE MOST SOUTHERN PLACE ON EARTH: JACKSON, NATCHEZ, VICKSBURG, AND THE MISSISSIPPI DELTA

February 18 to 25, 2024

Join the ISJL's expert staff on a **deep dive into Mississippi's Jewish history and culture**. Understand the ways in which Mississippi's Jewish history intersects with stories of slavery, the Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement, all while engaging in meaningful conversations about southern Jewish identity and heritage. This luxury trip features **exclusive hotels, award-winning restaurants, and off-the-beaten-path cultural experiences**.

## Sunday, February 18

### *Welcome to the Jewish South*

Arrive in Jackson and spend the day in conversation with Institute of Southern Jewish Life staff and Jackson community leaders.

## Monday, February 19

### *The Mississippi Civil Rights Movement*

Tour sites including Jackson State University and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum, learning about Jackson's Civil Rights Movement history along the way | Enjoy dinner and a show at one of Jackson's iconic music venues.

## Tuesday, February 20

### *Early Mississippi Jewish History + Jews and Slavery*

Travel to Natchez, Mississippi, via the Forks of the Road, once the site of the second-largest domestic slave market in the Deep South | Tour historic Temple B'nai Israel, home to the oldest Jewish congregation in the state | Meet with the historians and preservationists working to tell the full story of Natchez's history.

## Wednesday, February 21

### *Jews and the Civil War + Jewish Assimilation*

Travel to Vicksburg, Mississippi, site of the decisive Siege of Vicksburg, and learn about the depth of Jewish involvement in the Civil War | Get to know the complexities of the Delta's rich Jewish history.

## Thursday, February 22

### *Welcome to the Mississippi Delta*

Tour historically African American communities in the Delta, learning about legacies of Black creativity and resistance .

## Friday, February 23

### *Jews and the Blues*

Dig deep into the Delta's musical legacy and meet with Jewish community leaders | Celebrate Shabbat in the heart of the Delta.

## Saturday, February 24

### *Remembering, Reminding, and Forgetting*

Follow the footsteps of Emmett Till on a pilgrimage through the Delta | Return to Jackson for a closing group dinner at an award-winning local restaurant.

## Sunday, February 25

Return home with new ideas, new questions, and a new perspective on Jewish life and culture in Mississippi.





Josh on the road in Oklahoma City in 2012.



Former History Intern Aaron Welt in Dalton, Georgia, in 2009.

# HISTORY IS HELD WHERE IT HAPPENED

DR. JOSH PARSHALL  
*HISTORIAN*

FOR A LONG TIME, THE “HISTORY road trip” was a staple of the ISJL experience. The organization has been involved in historical research, preservation, and interpretation since its founding in 2000, and the organization’s roots in southern Jewish history stretch back for more than a decade before that. Initially, the best way to learn about Jewish history and culture in many of our communities was to get in the car and drive there. And that’s just what we did.

Over the years, ISJL staff have perused local history archives, examined synagogue records, and conducted oral history interviews across the region. Things look a little different in 2023, but we still believe that spending time in southern Jewish communities whenever possible allows us to tell richer, more meaningful stories about the Jewish South.

The most obvious change for historical researchers over the past two decades has been the increase in the online availability of

historical information. From census records and city directories to electronic books and journal articles, we can often access both raw data and historiographic interpretation without so much as standing up from our desks. (As a graduate student in the mid-2010s, I realized how spoiled I had become when I started grumbling about visiting the library stacks to consult a physical book.) Ten to fifteen years ago, however, the ISJL relied on local visits just to lay hands on many basic historical records, and our internal trip reports document research trips to all corners of the region.

The specific situation of the ISJL has also made in-person research trips less immediately necessary. First, we have already collected a lot of the information we need to do our work. When I revise an entry in the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities, for example, I start by pulling our existing files for that town or city. Second, we conducted research in many of

our communities as they declined. In a number of cases, there are no (or very few) Jewish residents left to interview. As families relocated and synagogues closed their doors, the historical materials related to those communities made their way to other cities, often finding homes in state, regional, or national archives.

The COVID-19 pandemic further altered our research methods. It’s easier than ever to get someone on a call, whether by phone or video, and archives are increasingly willing to scan their materials on request.

It’s hard not to wonder: do I really need to visit a community to write its history?

The answer is: as often as possible, yes.

In-person trips to our communities reinforce my sense of responsibility to the people I write about and the interconnected stories that form their local contexts. Spending time in the location pro-

vides an irreplaceable sense of place that informs my interpretations of the past and present. Travel allows ISJL staff to collect our own high-quality scans and photographs for use in the Encyclopedia and other publications. Finally, the in-person visit allows for more casual, free-ranging conversation, which reveals information and experiences that may not turn up in a more formally scheduled call.

By the time this reaches your mailbox, this year alone I'll have visited Louisiana to lead tour groups, North Carolina for a speaking engagement, and Arkansas to conduct research for the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities. Hopefully, I've bumped into some of our readers on the road. And if you'd like to see me in your community (whether in the ISJL region or beyond), then please reach out about programming opportunities. I'd love to spend some time in your community!



Former History Interns Margaret Norman and Jacob Morrow-Spitzer relaxing on the beach during a research trip to Florida in 2019.



Josh posing with a moose head in a barbecue restaurant in Wharton, Texas, in 2011, during his time as the ISJL's Oral Historian.



Babbette Samuels helps Josh visit the Jewish cemetery in Corsicana, Texas, in 2010.



A scenic overlook on a research trip to Oklahoma in 2012.

To learn more about History at the ISJL, email [history@isjl.org](mailto:history@isjl.org).

# THE MISSISSIPPI FREEDOM SEDER: REFLECTIONS AND REACTIONS FROM LAPIDUS & MYLES

SHIRA MUROFF  
DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS

IN 2019, THE ISJL AND THE MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF ARCHIVES AND HISTORY (MDAH) HOSTED THE MISSISSIPPI Freedom Seder in Jackson, Mississippi. This event celebrated the 50th anniversary of the inaugural Freedom Seder that took place in Washington, D.C., after the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. A team of people from different institutions collaborated to create a unique *haggadah* (seder booklet) and program, bringing together Passover traditions and stories of Mississippians fighting for change.

After three years of pandemic hiatus, we were so excited to resume the Mississippi Freedom Seder this April. When considering what musical element to bring to our 2023 seder, we realized that this was the perfect time to bring in our presenters roster musical duo Lapidus & Myles for an exciting community visit to Jackson. Rabbi Micah Lapidus and Melvin K. Myles performed virtually for ISJL communities in August 2022, and we knew their music would fit perfectly with the seder's themes.

Melvin Myles is a Mississippi native, making it a perfect match to have his voice grace our seder table, and we knew that Rabbi Micah Lapidus had been waiting for a chance to visit Melvin's home state. This community visit would also give them the chance to perform for and interact with the ISJL, MDAH, and the Mississippi Jewish community, as well as the interfaith crowd at the seder.

Our 2023 Mississippi Freedom Seder was an astounding success. Over 120 people gathered together at the Two Mississippi Museums campus, home to the Museum of Mississippi History and the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum. We came together to sing, eat, and celebrate. I asked Lapidus & Myles to reflect on their experience.

Melvin Myles (left) and Rabbi Micah Lapidus brought their incredible music to the Two Mississippi Museums.



**What did you think when you were approached about being a part of the Mississippi Freedom Seder?**

**Lapidus & Myles:** What an honor; what a beautiful synergy; and how can we figure out how to be in Jackson on March 28th! The Mississippi Freedom Seder aligns perfectly with our vision of creating music for people of conscience. It is an experience rooted in faith and spirit with deep ties to the Civil Rights Movement while simultaneously being a completely contemporary and forward-looking gathering of present-day people of conscience. With our music we constantly strive to honor the rich and often complicated legacy of the past but in fresh and forward-thinking ways. The Mississippi Freedom Seder does precisely that. Add in the fact that Melvin is a proud native of Clarksdale, Mississippi, and it felt “meant to be.”

**Which of your original songs help tell the themes of the Passover story? How did you create a song cycle for the seder?**

Passover's themes are universal and timeless. Egypt, the Wilderness, and the Promised Land—these are all physical but also spiritual locations. Each of us can identify times when we feel that we feel we are in Egypt, in the Wilderness, and, hopefully, also moments when we feel that we have reached the Promised Land. As an intellectual exercise we can quite literally go through our catalog of original music and categorize songs as “Egypt”, “Wilderness”, and “Promised Land” songs. As far as this particular song cycle, there's an added layer—not only can we be in all three places at once, but our journeys are never truly linear. The “Promised Land” selection for our song cycle just might turn the whole journey on its head. As the

song says, “The Promised Land... is full of sand.” Just like the Wilderness, just like Egypt... but then again maybe not!

**What was your experience spending time together in Mississippi for the first time?**

We’re still processing our time in Mississippi together. From Micah’s perspective, it was deeply rewarding to be in a place and connect with a series of narratives that are so personal and rich with memories and experiences for Melvin. For Melvin, a Clarksdale native, it was great to share some of Mississippi history and in particular some of the challenges faced by

Melvin’s family and so many others who had to endure the racism and prejudices of that time, so many of which continue to this day. It was impactful to say the least.

**What was it like working with the ISJL and MDAH to execute this event?**

We felt like honored guests from start to finish. Not only were the logistics incredibly smooth, but our time in Jackson was inspiring and eye-opening. Touring the Two Mississippi Museums as well as Beth Israel Congregation really helped us understand the multifaceted and complex context that is Jackson and Mississippi more general-

ly. The passion of the staff at MDAH and ISJL was palpable and made a very strong impression on us. It was wonderful to be immersed in such a mission- and values-driven community.

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*We loved having Lapidus & Myles with us for this meaningful interfaith moment. If your community needs inspiring interfaith performers for an upcoming event, Lapidus & Myles are a wonderful choice. Email programming@isjl.org to learn how we can help bring them to your community!*



Lapidus & Myles toured the Mississippi Civil Rights Museum with Freedom Rider and museum docent Hezekiah Watkins (above) and Deputy Director (and former ISJL staff member) Rachel Myers (below).



Above: visiting the Mississippi Civil Rights Trail marker at Jackson’s Beth Israel Congregation. Below: the crowd at the Mississippi Freedom Seder.



**Are you looking to do more interfaith programming in your community? We have many presenters on our roster who specialize in engaging interfaith audiences. Check out Lapidus & Myles, Rabbi Joshua Garroway, Jane Larkin, and Lex Rofeberg—email programming@isjl.org to learn more!**

# NEW PRESENTER HIGHLIGHTS

**W**E'VE BEEN HARD AT WORK PUTTING OUR AMAZING PRESENTERS ON THE ROAD ACROSS THE SOUTH. AND we're excited to welcome several excellent musicians, artists, and speakers to our roster! **If you'd like to bring these folks to your community, email us at [programming@isjl.org](mailto:programming@isjl.org).**

## BETH HAMON

Singer-songwriter, music educator, drummer and visual artist whose work focuses on love, hope, sustainability and inclusion. Her years as a performing musician and music educator are evident in her programming, whether through coffeehouse shows, Shabbat service leading, songwriting workshops or making musical instruments and Judaica from found objects. Through story, song and art, Beth uses her voice to encourage others to find and use theirs.



## LEX ROFEBERG

Lex Rofeberg serves as Senior Jewish Educator for Judaism Unbound. He co-hosts and produces its weekly podcast, downloaded over 2 million times worldwide, and serves as a faculty member of Judaism Unbound's UnYeshiva—a digital center for Jewish learning and unlearning. Ordained as a rabbi in 2021 through the Jewish Renewal movement, his courses and guest lectures focus on topics including Digital Judaism, Judaism and Sports, Jewish Pop Culture, and Interfaith Families.

## ELLIE FLIER

An inspiring performer and songleader, Ellie Flier has found her passion and purpose in writing Jewish music. An eclectic mix of Jewish day school, a college major in opera, and ten years as a Nashville songwriter gives Ellie a unique quality and sound as she deconstructs Hebrew liturgy to find deeper meaning in the context of the world around us today. At home she co-founded and leads Jewsic City, a popular monthly musical service for young professionals. On the road she has performed at the URJ Biennial conference and at communities around the United States, Israel, and Europe.





## LAPIDUS & MYLES

Lapidus & Myles is a collaboration between two faith-based musicians in Atlanta. Micah Lapidus is a Reform rabbi and composer-in-residence at The Temple. Melvin Myles is a highly regarded soloist with the Historic Ebenezer Baptist Church Choir, former pulpit of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Evocative of the long-standing ties between these communities, their music and message is all about bringing people together in a spirit of love, respect, peace, and justice.



## WHO KNOWS ONE? LIVE WITH MICAH HART

Who Knows One? LIVE is a hilarious show that uses the phenomenon of Jewish Geography to illustrate how interconnected we all are, no matter our backgrounds or how we identify as Jews. Building on the popular game show that became a hit in the Jewish community during the pandemic, this in-person program incorporates interactive games, storytelling, and community-building to create a unique, memorable, and FUN evening for audiences of all ages!

## PAPER MIDRASH FEATURED PRESENTERS AT THE 2023 ISJL CONFERENCE

For our keynote at the 2023 ISJL Conference, Paper Midrash will present a "Make Your Own Golem" paper-cutting workshop. Rabbi Shawna and Isaac Brynjegard-Bialik will teach the legend of the golem and its connection to our current times. This workshop will be a time for exploration, reflection, and reinvigoration. Our hope is to bring an experience to our participants that will help them reconnect to their passion for Jewish education and community. Participants will then be taught how to use paper-cutting materials and will create a golem out of comic books that embodies what their community needs in the coming year. This will not only be a fun, educational workshop, it will be an opportunity to use a new medium to set goals and intentions.



# WELCOME, SUMMER INTERNS!

EACH SUMMER, THE ISJL CULTURE DIVISION WELCOMES PUBLIC HISTORY INTERNS TO JACKSON FOR TEN WEEKS OF historical research, writing, and immersive experiences of the Jewish South. This summer, our interns will work on updating the Arkansas entries in the Encyclopedia of Southern Jewish Communities as well as doing research for upcoming episodes of Southern & Jewish (formerly the ISJL Virtual Vacation). Get to know Ana and David!



## ANA BERMAN

Ana is a recent graduate of Macalester College, where her honors thesis examined Jewish heritage tourism and historic sites across Spain. Graduating with a double-major in History and Religious Studies, as well as a minor in Spanish, she was awarded the Roetzel Family Fellowship, the J. Huntley Dupre Prize in European History, and the Yahya Armajani Prize in Global History. Coming from a family who are long-time ISJL supporters (and keep *Shalom Y'all* on the living room coffee table), Ana is thrilled to have the opportunity to work with the ISJL team to produce Jewish history and heritage tourism content. In addition to her love of history, Ana enjoys working as an educator—including at the Mount Zion Temple religious school in St. Paul, Minnesota, and the Francisco Solano dual-language school in Seville, Spain. Originally from New York, she grew up at Congregation Rodeph Sholom and is an alum of New York City's High School of American Studies. Ana is also a soccer player, and a big New York Rangers hockey fan.

## DAVID TAPPER

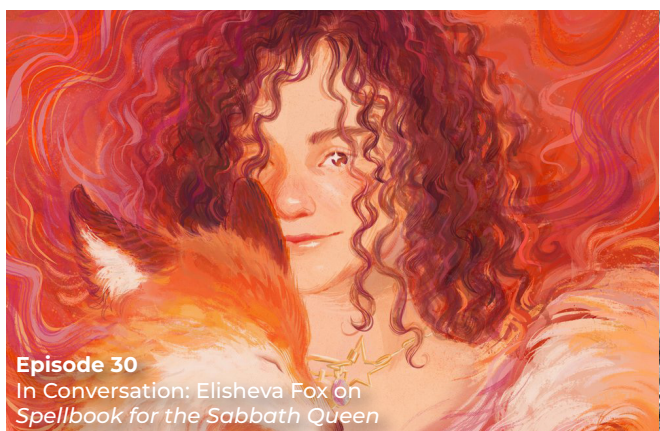
Originally from Chicago, David is a rising junior at Brown University. At Brown, he is studying philosophy and religious studies, and is interested in 20th century German-Jewish idealism and the history of philosophy. Currently, he is taking German and attempting to hone his philosophical skills while continuing to learn about the history of philosophy. Aside from his studies, David enjoys playing psychedelic and bluegrass guitar, listening to music, writing poetry, and reading. He also plays in a campus-based Grateful Dead cover band, participates in undergraduate research in the religious studies department, and serves as a department undergraduate group leader in the religious studies department. David is passionate about learning, thinking, and growing through dialogue and openness to new and challenging ideas.



# THE ISJL VIRTUAL VACATION IS NOW SOUTHERN & JEWISH

*A video podcast from the ISJL*

After three years of producing the ISJL Virtual Vacation, we're excited to announce an exciting change for the show—it's **now available for download on your favorite podcast platforms!** Plus, it has **a new title that better reflects the breadth and depth of the series.** The engaging visuals you know and love will still be there, with the added bonus of being able to listen on the go. Catch our most recent episodes on the podcast feed, and stay tuned throughout the summer as we drop our legacy episodes. As always, the show will remain available for free on demand on our website. **We can't wait to share more stories from the Jewish South.**



**Episode 30**  
In Conversation: Elisheva Fox on  
*Spellbook for the Sabbath Queen*



**Episode 25**  
Boca on Broadway: *Road Show*,  
Addison Mizner, and Florida's Jewish Boom



**Episode 28**  
More Than Cookies:  
Southern Jewish Girl Scouts



**Episode 31**  
In Conversation: Lowen on  
Making Music in the Jewish South

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# SPIRITUALITY

## ENDINGS AND BEGINNINGS

RABBI CAROLINE SIM  
DIRECTOR OF RABBINICAL SERVICES

IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE THAT MY TIME at the ISJL is drawing to a close. Being the Director of Spirituality for the ISJL, and serving our southern Jewish communities, has been a true pleasure and a blessing.

I began my tenure at the ISJL during a difficult time. It was the summer of 2020, and the pandemic was still a new and intense reality. Although we were all hopeful for a swift conclusion to social distancing and all of the safety measures in place, none of us actually knew when things would get back to normal—nor indeed did we realize how different our “new normal” would be.

My first few months at the ISJL were busy, getting used to a new location, new coworkers, and new daily tasks. Add onto that, the fact that so much that was taken for granted—the High Holidays, for example—needed to be completely reconceptualized to accommodate our early-pandemic realities. While I was introducing myself to our ISJL communities in virtual town hall meetings, I was also teaching myself Zoom, and learning how to lead digital services, and then turning around and teaching that newly-earned knowledge to our communities.

Even a year later, when we were able to return to visiting the communities in person, it felt like I was just beginning again. Although I had become familiar with many aspects of my job, it felt like I was re-learning much of it. It felt almost like a second first year, as I familiarized myself with the logistics of physically visiting communities,

and how to integrate that with the other work done at the office.

Just as I was feeling like I had a real handle on my position at the ISJL, three years in—I am preparing to say farewell.

Until I saw how soon my last day was approaching, I don't think I realized just how much I had learned, and how much I had done, at the ISJL. It has been a joy getting to know all of our various communities. There are some that I only had the opportunity to visit once. But several I was able to visit many times. Especially due to a marked increase in lifecycle events (conversions, B'nei Mitzvah, and weddings, oh my!), I often returned to the same communities, and I was able to form deeper connections to them and with the congregants.

One of my innovations as the ISJL rabbi was to introduce a bi-weekly Torah study, conducted live over Zoom. This has allowed me to share our tradition with congregants, no matter where they might be. There have been several people who have consistently attended, and it has been wonderful getting to know them as individuals, and becoming familiar with their minds and ideas. My experiences with them have truly made Torah “sweet as honey on our tongue.”

I also had the pleasure of welcoming three new communities into the fold. It was a gift to be the first ISJL rabbi to serve them. I know that we have many years of a strong relationship to look forward to in the years to come.



Rabbi Sim leading a children's service in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 2022.



The Passover Pilgrimage in New Iberia, Louisiana, in 2023.



Leading High Holiday services in Beaufort, South Carolina, in 2022.

It is also a bittersweet that there were several communities who found rabbis who could serve them more consistently—in a bi-weekly or monthly capacity—and thus no longer needed me to visit them specifically. While I was saddened that I wouldn't have the opportunity to visit again, I was overjoyed that their congregations were able to get rabbis who could serve them to the fullest extent of their needs.

I am deeply indebted to previous ISJL rabbis: Debra Kassoff, Bat-sheva Appel, Marshal Klaven, Jeremy Simons, and Aaron Rosovsky, for reaching out to me and offering help and guidance, especially during my first year. I also owe tremendous thanks to former ISJL Education Director Rabbi Matt Dreffin for all of his help and guidance during my first two years at the ISJL. Together with former Assistant Director of Education Rachel Glazer, they greatly expanded my knowledge and capacity to teach and reach out to children. I know that much of my success in those areas are due to their guidance and support. I am also very grateful for the connections made

at the Southwest Association of Reform Rabbis (SWARR). They have been a wonderful source of connection, friendship, and knowledge.

In the end, my experiences at the ISJL have been a true demonstration of what community is, both locally and as a Jewish People. It is reaching out, living together, working together, praying together. I am secure in the knowledge that, for whoever serves as the next ISJL rabbi, all of our congregations and the ISJL staff will be warm and welcoming, inviting them to join the larger ISJL family.

It has been a true honor, being able to serve at the ISJL and to connect with all of our communities. According to our tradition, “for everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under heaven” (Ecclesiastes 3:1). Although the time has come for my tenure at the ISJL to end, I know the ISJL and all of our communities will greet the future with strength and determination. You have inspired me to become a better educator, a better leader, a better rabbi, and a better person. Thank you, and may all your journeys be blessed.



Rolling the torah in Beaufort, South Carolina.



Rabbi Sim in front of the ark at Beth Israel Congregation in Jackson, Mississippi.



The Passover Pilgrimage in Panama City, Florida, in 2023.



Rabbi Sim with Teri Tillman during the Passover Pilgrimage in Natchez, Mississippi. Teri shared her conversion story in the winter 2023 issue of *Shalom Y'all!*

To learn more about Spirituality at the ISJL, email [rabbi@isjl.org](mailto:rabbi@isjl.org).

# OUR SUPPORTERS

## MEET THE DONORS

# DEBORAH ROBERTS AND MEGAN ROBERTS KOLLER A MOTHER, A DAUGHTER, A SHARED COMMITMENT TO SOUTHERN JEWISH LIFE

ISJL CEO MICHELE SCHIPPER RECENTLY SPOKE with two ISJL supporters—Deborah Roberts and her daughter Megan Roberts Koller. They both have a deep commitment to family, Judaism, their southern communities, and the ISJL. We're so grateful that they shared such candid insights into why that's true (and also shared so many delightful photographs).

### Can you tell us a little bit about your connection to the ISJL?

**Deborah:** My daughter Megan became an ISJL Education Fellow after she finished college. Then our congregation in Knoxville, Tennessee—Temple Beth El—began using the ISJL's education program. I was a Hebrew school teacher at the time, so I got to use the curriculum. I was also very involved in my synagogue through the cemetery committee, caring committee, and various board positions including as president, so I saw the many ways the ISJL serves communities like ours. Our Knoxville Jewish archives has reached out to Dr. Josh Parshall, the ISJL's historian. I enjoy all the ISJL program offerings.

**Megan:** When I was an undergrad at Indiana University, I met a girl from Lexington, Mississippi, through the campus Hillel. Her cousin Macy had a cool project known as "the ISJL." I looked into it, applied, and became an Education Fellow. My two years as a Fellow were 2007-2009, and it established many meaningful connections for me.

### Why do you choose to donate to the ISJL?

**Deborah:** In my mind and my heart, the connections of Jews in the South are something of primary importance. I love the work of the ISJL. It's a way for me to give back; the ISJL has done so much for my community of Knoxville, for me, and for Megan.



Above: Deborah and Megan. Below: Deborah with Megan's children.



**Were there any particular moments when you really felt the impact of the ISJL?**

**Deborah:** I attended an ISJL conference one summer. When I arrived, I ran into Charlett Frumin—and learned that she's one of the ISJL board members! I knew her as my counselor at Camp Judea years ago. Her husband Marshall's mother and my grandmother were friends. Charlett and I had not been in contact for years! It was such a sweet reunion. Another moment of impact was when Josh Parshall came to Knoxville and conducted an oral history interview with my dad, just a couple of years before he passed away. That was very meaningful to me.

**Megan:** All of the communities that I served as an ISJL Education Fellow meant so much to me. B'nai Zion in Chattanooga, Tennessee, was where my grandfather grew up, so getting to spend time there was really special. I had many wonderful moments at Hebrew Union

Congregation in Greenville, Mississippi; in addition to my regularly-scheduled visits, I volunteered at the storied Greenville Deli Day event. I have fond memories of staying with the Lamensdorf family in Rolling Fork, and even got to test out some of the farm equipment. It was personal and heart-breaking to see the devastation in Rolling Fork earlier this year. I served Panama City for both years of my fellowship. Those are just a few of the many wonderful memories; it's also just so nice staying in touch with community members after I left the ISJL. When my husband Josh and I got married, I heard from so many people via Facebook celebrating the news. The ISJL community is truly our community!

**In what ways do you choose to give to the ISJL, and what other causes are near and dear to your heart?**

**Deborah:** I give through the Chai Club. I like knowing that my on-

going monthly support is something the organization can rely on throughout the year. Many congregations need the support the ISJL provides, and I want to support all of that outreach—the education, culture, and spirituality components. Our southern region is often overlooked and under-supported. The ISJL changed all that. I also appreciate that communities are brought together so we don't feel isolated. For me, my giving embodies the value of *tikkun olam*, repairing the world. In addition to the ISJL, I regularly support Habitat for Humanity, Doctors Without Borders, and Second Harvest.

**And finally, what's your favorite Jewish food?**

**Deborah:** Lox and bagels.

**Megan:** Obviously, my mom's charoset. And also bagels from Goldie's Bagels in Columbia, Missouri, which is owned by my dear friend and former ISJL Education Fellow Amanda Rainey!



These are some of Megan's 2007 to 2009 ISJL memories—recognize anyone you know?



To support the ISJL's work, visit [www.isjl.org/donate](http://www.isjl.org/donate) or email [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org).

## MEET THE BOARD

# JACK C. BENJAMIN, JR.

THE ISJL HAS A NATIONAL BOARD, WITH MEMBERS WHO LIVE across the country—almost all of whom have deep southern roots. We are delighted to welcome a new member to our board: Jack C. Benjamin, Jr.

Jack C. Benjamin, Jr., was born and raised in New Orleans, and he currently lives in Metairie, Louisiana. He is a graduate of Washington and Lee University, the Japan America Institute of Management Science, and the A.B. Freeman School of Business and Tulane Law School. He has been practicing law for nearly thirty years, and has served in various leadership positions with professional organizations and civic organizations.

Jack is married to Jennifer Hanley Benjamin, and they have two adult children, Emma and Jack, both of whom had their *b'nei mitzvah* and both of whom were active as regional members of the North American Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY)'s board.

Jack is a lifelong member of Temple Sinai of New Orleans, where he previously has served as President of the Brotherhood and as a member of the Board of Trustees on multiple occasions. In the past, he also has been a member of the board of the Jewish Endowment Foundation of Louisiana, Hillel of Tulane, Jewish Family Services, and Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans. Jack's maternal ancestors hailed from Mississippi, and he is honored to be asked to join the ISJL to ensure the outreach of Judaism continues to communities that otherwise may not have access to the resources provided by the ISJL.



To view the entire ISJL Board of Directors list, visit [www.isjl.org/board-of-directors](http://www.isjl.org/board-of-directors).  
If you are interested in supporting the ISJL's work or learning more about leadership opportunities, email [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org).

# SHALOM IN YOUR INBOX!

# y'all

Don't wait months between issues—**sign up for monthly emails from the ISJL** with insights, updates, recipes, and more!

To join the mailing list, email us at [information@isjl.org](mailto:information@isjl.org).





# GIVING THANKS

## THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

IN THESE PAGES, YOU CAN SEE THE IMPACT THE ISJL HAS ON THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE JUST LIKE YOU. WITH DEEP APPRECIATION, the Goldring/Woldenberg Institute of Southern Jewish Life extends thanks to everyone who made a contribution or pledge from January 1 to April 15, 2023.

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Teens from Temple Israel of the City of New York and Stephen Wise Free Synagogue along the waterfront in New Orleans, Louisiana, on a Southern Jewish Heritage Tour earlier this year.



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THE CHAI CLUB IS THE ISJL'S MONTHLY GIVING SOCIETY—all of the donors listed here make recurring gifts to the ISJL each month, directly deducted from their accounts; an easy, meaningful way to give!

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