

A Holocaust Survivor Who Became a Freedom School Teacher: Marione Ingram’s Journey from Hamburg to Mississippi

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Abstract: *Marione Ingram was born in 1935 in Hamburg, Nazi Germany. In late July 1943, two days before the date of Ingram’s family’s deportation, the Hamburg air raid, one of the biggest air raids during World War II, began. Ingram and her mother narrowly survived it and spent the rest of the war in hiding. In 1952, Ingram immigrated to the United States to follow after her mother. Upon learning about the discrimination against African Americans, Ingram became involved in the civil rights movement to protest racial bigotry and prejudice. She worked for the March on Washington in 1963 and as a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi in 1964. Through her involvement in the civil rights movement, Ingram transformed herself from a “victim” of the Holocaust into a “combatant in a campaign against racial injustice.” This study aims to demonstrate an example of how a Holocaust experience could turn into power to bring peace and equality to the world through the analysis of Ingram’s autobiographies, *The Hands of War* (2013) and *The Hands of Peace* (2015), which Miyuki Kita translated to Japanese.*

Keywords: Holocaust Survivors, Hamburg Air Raid, Civil Rights Movement, African Americans, Marione Ingram, Mississippi Freedom Summer Project

Introduction

It is well known that Jews made up a large percentage of white volunteers in the civil rights movement. Oft-cited examples that illustrate the alliance and friendship between Jews and African Americans include the incident when three activists, James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner, were killed by the Ku Klux Klan during the Mississippi Freedom Summer Project in 1964. Two of them, Goodman and Schwerner, were Jewish. Another pertinent example is Abraham Heschel, a rabbi, who walked in the front row with Martin Luther King, Jr. in one of the Selma-Montgomery marches in 1965. Although Jews made up only 2–3% of the nation’s population, they reportedly

accounted for as many as half to two-thirds of the white volunteers in the civil rights movement.¹

Previous studies explained the motivation for Jewish commitment to the civil rights movement as follows: that Jews and African Americans shared a history of “slavery,” that Judaism emphasizes “justice (zedakah),” that Jews have experienced and remember the Holocaust, and that Jews have experienced outsider status because of anti-Semitism in the United States.² Another study pointed out that social movements in general were familiar to Jews from Russia and Eastern Europe because they had been at the center of the labor union movement in the ready-made clothes industry in the early 20th century.³

Though Rabbi Heschel’s appearance at the Selma-Montgomery march is widely known, Judaism itself did not seem to be a major reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. In fact, many students and young adults who constituted the majority of participants were either secular Jews who rarely visited synagogues and did not keep kosher rules, or recognized themselves as “very Reform Jewish.” For example, Bruce Hartford, an activist of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), said he had never been to synagogues except for opportunities to attend other people’s weddings.⁴

Similarly, previous studies did not consider the Holocaust a major reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement. This is because, after the Nuremberg Trials, American Jews regarded the Nazi regime as having been destroyed, and tended to be more concerned about Israel’s independence, McCarthyism, atomic bombs, and nuclear development than about “the genocide.”⁵ There was also a tendency among Jews to refrain from asserting their Jewish identity, history, and culture because of their strong desire for assimilation into American society.

Nevertheless, according to Anita Grossmann, the Holocaust, which claimed the lives of 6,000,000 or two-thirds of European Jews, was an event that profoundly changed the way Jews viewed the world, and must have had a significant impact on their behavior in the 1960s.⁶ Indeed, the aforementioned Hartford became involved in the civil rights movement in 1962 in Los Angeles, when he watched a news film about the American Nazi Party throwing eggs at

¹ Garza, *African Americans and Jewish Americans*, 149.

² Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion*; Forman, *Blacks in the Jewish Mind*; Greenberg, *Troubling the Waters*; Schultz, *Going South*.

³ Green, “Blacks, Jews, and the ‘Natural Alliance,’” 79–104.

⁴ “Jews, Religion, and the Movement.”

⁵ Grossmann, “Shadows of War and Holocaust,” 99–100.

⁶ Grossmann, “Shadows of War and Holocaust,” 99–100.

pickets of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), which had sought to end housing-related discrimination.⁷

In this context, I would like to argue that the Holocaust holds a larger place as a reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement than has been previously regarded. Indeed, by the 1970s, the center of American Jewish identity was not “adherence to Judaism,” but “remembering the Holocaust.”⁸ American Jewish historian Jonathan Sarna states that the arrest and subsequent trial of Adolf Eichmann in 1960, and the victory of Israel in the Six-Day War of 1967, have solidified this trend.⁹ Another American Jewish historian, Hasia Diner, argues that the Holocaust had been a never-to-be-forgotten event among American Jews since the 1950s, and the civil rights movement served as a platform for the commemoration of 6,000,000 people.¹⁰

The Holocaust and the Jim Crow laws differ in the respects of when, where, and how they occurred and developed. In both persecutions, however, both Jews and African Americans were deprived of their rights to employment, education, and housing, were prohibited from getting married to mainstream citizens because of “race” differences, were beaten, imprisoned, and finally murdered. It would be worthwhile to examine the parallels American Jews found between the Holocaust and Jim Crow.

This paper examines the case of Marione Ingram. She is a Holocaust survivor who became involved in the civil rights movement, which means she experienced both the Holocaust and Jim Crow firsthand. She was born in Nazi Germany in 1935, narrowly survived the Hamburg air raid, and spent the last 18 months of the war in hiding in a small shed. After she immigrated to the U.S. in 1952, she began throwing herself into the movement to protest bigotry and discrimination against African Americans. She became friends with African American colleagues and neighbors, worked for the March on Washington, and worked as a Freedom School teacher in Mississippi. Even now Ingram joined the #BlackLivesMatter movement to protest systemic racism. By looking at Ingram’s case, we can locate the Holocaust as a reason for Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement.

⁷ D.C. Everest Area Schools, *The Nation’s Longest Struggle*, 83.

⁸ Novick, *The Holocaust in American Life*, 7.

⁹ Sarna, *American Judaism*, 333–34.

¹⁰ Diner, *We Remember with Reverence and Love*, 1–17, 266–73.

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