CHAPTER 7

Ida Weis Friend

Living Her Best Century

ROSALIND HINTON, PHD

Ida Weis Friend of New Orleans was one of two Jewish women representatives from Louisiana at the Jewish Women's Congress of the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions held at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. The Parliament is "often seen as the beginning of the modern interfaith movement" (Braybrooke 2014, 1, 70). Friend most certainly voted aye on the resolution that created what would become the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW) ("New York World's Fair – National Advisory Committees – Women's Participation – Mrs. Joseph Friend (Louisiana)," Manuscripts and Archives Division, New York Public Library). Bringing her national and international experiences back home, she helped found the New Orleans section of the NCJW and became its president from 1910 to 1916 and again in 1924. She was the national president of the NCJW from 1926 to 1932 (NCJW New Orleans Section 2017). As a founder and leader of numerous Jewish and civic organizations, she crossed denominational and racial lines and worked with women and men of many religious traditions. A letter from the New Orleans Business and Professional Women's Club (BPW) to the Loving Cup Committee of the Times Picayune Publishing Co. in 1946 (Ida Weis Friend Papers) noted that Friend was president of the local, regional, and state-wide Federation of Women's Clubs, the life president of the Home for the Incurables, president of the Travelers Aid Society and the Consumer League of New Orleans from at least 1922 to 1946, and a co-founder of the Commission on Interracial Cooperation and the Urban

League. A true club woman, she was called "Mrs. Madam President of New Orleans" by the *Times Picayune* newspaper ("Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). Her life is a rare window into Reform Jewish women in New Orleans, their influence on the public sphere, and their role in building a more welcoming and vibrant city.

Image 1: Ida Weis Friend in her forties, c. 1900s (NCJWGNO Records).

Steeped in the wisdom of the NCJW's founding women, Friend fully embraced Judaism and Americanism and seemed unapologetic about her intellect and inherited wealth, which she generously shared through philanthropic endeavors. As a first principle, Friend was unapologetic about her Judaism. She took to heart the sentiment of Mary Newbury Adams, who proclaimed from the lectern of the Jewish Women's Congress in 1893 that Queen Isabella sent a "Moorish botanist and a learned Hebrew navigator with Columbus that she might have accurate knowledge of the new lands he was to find" (Adams 1893). A second "essential principle" of the NCJW that Friend embraced in word and deed was to "continue to serve as the interpreter of America to the foreign-born Jewess, and of Judaism to America" (Brenner 1922, 54). A third principle that Friend brought to her work was

articulated by Hannah Solomon, known as the founder of the NCJW, in her Presidential report in 1894:

> Let us insist upon the most scientific methods. Let us pay more for salaries and proper investigation, for that work is better done by those for whom it is a vocation than by those for whom it is a pastime. This does not render friendly service superfluous but makes the work of the volunteer more efficient and secures juster methods of relief and aid. (Solomon 1921, 47)

Perspectives and Sources in Writing Women into History

In the past, women's history was often thought of as family history because the connections, clubs, and contexts that women create do not closely follow the patriarchal models of greatness. History from above looks at the presidents and politicians, the generals, and the singular men who make and influence history. This is an impoverished form of history. History happens to all people, and all people are a part of making history. We are not simply the victims or beneficiaries of great (White) men. Viewing history from this perspective gives us a distorted view of power as something others have, rather than embedded in communities, organizations, institutions, and systems that we shape and are shaped by. Patriarchal constructions of history make it difficult to see how small gestures, collaborations, and footwork build a synagogue, a health system, a city, or a national movement. Ida Weis Friend was the corresponding secretary of as many male-led organizations as she was president of women's organizations. Men are often remembered more than women who served, even though, as was often the case, they just pounded the gavel that opened the meeting. No matter what role she played, this biographical sketch shows that Friend was relied upon for both her vision and her attention to details.

Ida Weis Friend undoubtedly learned from watching both her parents how to pound the gavel and attend to the details of community efforts. Her father, a self-made man, German immigrant, and peddler of rags who traded his way up to a membership on the New Orleans Cotton Exchange, understood the importance of women. From an unpublished autobiography in Ida Weis Friend's papers ("Autobiography of Julius Weis"), we get to know him, in many ways, better than his daughter. As President of Touro Infirmary in 1880, he oversaw "the efforts to raise means" for building a new hospital. In this endeavor, he makes note that the "first step I took was to call the ladies together with my wife who organized and held a fair that raised $23,000." With the fair proceeds, a lottery that raffled off the

old hospital land, and the sale of bonds, Julius Friend raised the $90,000 for the new hospital building and an extra wing (23–4). Friend's view of leadership was influenced both by her father's and her mother's leadership. She witnessed women's agency and influence from an early age. She could see women's initiative in bricks-and-mortar projects like Touro Infirmary and other religious and public institutions.

I came first to the Jewish Community and this project as an oral historian post-Katrina. As part of the Katrina Jewish Voices project, I interviewed close to eighty men and women who chose to return to the city and rebuild their lives, their synagogues, their schools, their neighborhoods, their businesses and the city that they loved.[1] I learned through this project that Jewish women, trained by and involved with the NCJW, were instrumental leaders in much of this work. These women were presidents of synagogues, public and charter schools, hospitals, and NGOs, like the United Way and Second Harvest, that were critical for returning residents and post-Katrina reconstruction efforts. Inspired by their work, I continued exploring Jewish women by mounting a Tricentennial Exhibition of New Orleans Jewish Women in 2018. I was so impressed with the steady leadership of these women during Katrina that I had to look back from the present to the past, which brought me to Ida Weis Friend.

I chose to write about Ida Weis Friend because she exceeded traditional Wikipedia notability standards as a founder of the NCJW and numerous other clubs and because she had a substantial collection in the archives at Tulane University. Armed with reliable sources, I thought her story would be easy to write. However, writing women's history is often a challenge. While Friend thought enough of herself to collect her papers, she saved letters others wrote to her, but not carbons of the letters she sent. Friend kept diaries (that are very hard to read) and collected brochures, literary pamphlets, and organizational booklets that we must assume she saved because they meant something to her thinking, her interests, and her advocacy. Even though her letters to others are not in the archives, the letters she received hint at her importance. The archives include letters from Louisiana Governor John Parker, leader of the National Women's Party Alice Paul, US Speaker of the House Hale Boggs, Fanny Brice, Dorothy Day, and Mayor deLesseps S. Morrison. A 1947 note from the *New Orleans Item* executive editor, Clayton Fritchey, asked her for pre-publication comments on an editorial laying out a program for "Europe and Mankind" (Ida Weis Friend Papers). These documents provide a sense of the issues she cared about and her importance as an influencer.

Other notes point to Friend's humanity: a poor lady thanking Friend for her husband's headstone, or a man expressing sorrow for the untimely death of Friend's son coupled with thank you letters for Bunny Park, a city park Friend

established in her son's name. She saved brochures that outlined the plans for a new home for the incurables. She was lifetime president of the home and wanted the most vulnerable to live with dignity. Luckily, Friend saved the Business and Professional Women's (BPW) letter of nomination for the *Times Picayune* Loving Cup, an annual award to a man or woman who had contributed significantly to the city. It is a gold mine pointing to all of her memberships in organizations that helped build New Orleans. Friend, an independently wealthy club woman and philanthropist, was different demographically from the working members of the BPW. Nevertheless, they meticulously compiled her organizational memberships and submitted her nomination. This list is the starting point for future historians and a challenge to reconsider what it takes to live a noteworthy life (Ida Weis Friend Papers).

There are copies of a few typed speeches that are quite formal and guarded. However, what might be her most revealing sentiment was not written in her own words. She authored a book review in a 1922 edition of the NCJW's publication, *The Jewish Woman*. There, Friend reviewed a book entitled, "*The Voice of Jerusalem*, by Israel Zangwill." Friend's strongest thoughts on Judaism and Zionism are revealed when she quotes from Zangwill speaking of the carnage of World War I. "Who, remembering this ghastly quinquennium, have raised their voices to temper the frenzy and brutality of Christendom? I am moved to believe that we Jews are today the only race that would not crucify Jesus." Friend, prescient in 1922 after only one world war, highlights, in the same review, Zangwill's essay calling for territorial Zionism as "the only statesmanlike contribution to the political solution of the Jewish Problem" (Friend 1922, 12, 22).

Ida Weis Friend struggled to bring back the New Orleans Opera House and supported the Little Theatre and other cultural activities and belonged to a literary group of women who wrote poetry called the Ramblers. These were important cultural pursuits. However, in this biographical sketch, I focus on her social activism, raising up her leadership and participation in organizations that invoke the spirit and sentiments of the most progressive founders of the NCJW. It was Friend's economic, international, political, and racial interests that drew her to involvement with the National Consumers League (NCL), the local and national NCJW, politics, and her work with the Committee on Interracial Cooperation and the Urban League. These are the avenues through which Jewish women established their version of America, expressed their Jewish values, and created a vibrant, inclusive, and international spirit in a closed-minded and parochial Jim Crow South.

Consumer's League

When Ida Weis Friend founded the Consumer's League in New Orleans, she covertly brought a social-democratic agenda into the South. Its national leader, Francis Kelly, was an open socialist and, in the early days of the organization, a proponent of minimum wages and maximum hours for women and girls and a ban on child labor. Labor laws that protected female workers and children from exploitation were of particular interest to Friend. A 1963 letter from the member secretary of the National Child Labor Committee thanked Friend for her 43 years of service that "enabled us to see the abolition of child labor in all major industries except migratory agriculture" (James Myers to Mrs. Joseph E. Friend, August 21, 1963, Ida Weis Friend Papers). The local section also established science and social work as early as 1912 as the basis for volunteerism and philanthropy. While it did not erase all bias, social work replaced the unsubstantiated opinion, White supremacist ideologies, and biological determinism that underlay most assumptions of the "other" that were prevalent in the North and the South.

In a survey of leadership from the 1930s, historian Landon Storrs claims that "women who led the National Consumer League (NCL) were on the radical edge of the reform spectrum" (Storrs 2000, 264–5). Storrs noted that, as early as the 1920s, there were only two Southern chapters of the Consumers League, one in New Orleans and the other in Kentucky. The National Consumers League came into ascendancy during the Great Depression when Franklin Roosevelt named Charlotte Perkins as labor secretary. During the 1930s, the NCL and its chapters came out against a two-tier pay structure in the National Recovery Act that discriminated against African Americans. As well, the NCL was the only organization that fought against racial discrimination in the New Deal (104). In the survey previously mentioned, Storrs also notes that Friend was a Liberal Democrat who believed in racial equality (264–5). These facts put her on the radical edge of Southern men and women and indicate that the local Consumers League was committed to the national agenda. While he does not name Friend specifically, Storrs also claims, "Those few wage and hour laws that did pass in the southern states–notably in Virginia, North Carolina, Kentucky and Louisiana–were won largely through the efforts of small groups of progressive white women" (154). Friend, who was not afraid to agitate, influence legislation, or litigate, was most likely one of these progressive women along with members of the local Equal Rights for All Club (ERA) to which she also belonged.

National Council of Jewish Women

Ida Weis Friend's most documented work comes from the 1920s and 30s in the local section of the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), where Friend was a founder, leader, and significant influencer. Between the two world wars, the NCJW's chief focus was immigration. With the creation of Travelers Aid–an association of clubs and volunteer organizations–the work of immigration also gained a city-wide focus. Friend became the Travelers Aid president in 1930 and brought her NCJW troops with her (New Orleans Business and Professional Women to the Loving Cup *Times Picayune* Publishing Co., letter of nomination dated September 6, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Travelers Aid assisted eastern Europeans, and Jewish, Italian, and German immigrants who came through the port of New Orleans.

During the time of Friend's National NCJW Presidency, from 1926 to 1932, the NCJW's immigration work took place within a context of White nationalism that had dire consequences for European Jews fleeing the pogroms and persecution that led to the rise of Hitler and Nazism's "Final Solution"–the Holocaust. The *Emergency Quota Act* of 1921 and the *National Origins Act* of 1924 staunched the flow of eastern and southern Europeans to the US. The *Asian Exclusion Act* of 1924 served the same purpose for Asian immigration. White nationalism was also the basis of systematic lynching and the Great Migration as African Americans quit the South in search of better opportunities in northern and western cities. Between the wars, the New Orleans section of the NCJW worked to settle Jewish immigrants who obtained precious but limited visas into the US ("NCJW Refugee Document: Frankel Family," March 29, 1940, NCJWGNO Records).

Women influenced and guided by Friend augmented and continued her focus on immigration at the local level. This work flourished after World War II when another NCJW leader, Clara Marx Schultz, ran the citywide Port and Dock Initiative that settled war refugees of every denomination, each denomination serving their own. In 1946, Mrs. Louis Slater reported that the NCJW Port and Dock Committee in New Orleans met 14 ships and 74 Jewish immigrants that had been interned in concentration camps and "in their own words stepped out of hell into paradise." Another NCJW member trained by Friend, Gladys Cahn (who was national NCJW president from 1955 to 1959), visited displaced persons camps in 1952 in Europe after World War II and, upon returning home, devised a seven-state southern Jewish strategy to educate European Jewish women in US universities, enabling them to return to Europe to help their communities ("Gladys Freeman Cahn (1901–1964)" n.d.). The NCJW later put forward a fact sheet advocating for the *Lehman Bill*, which finally passed as the *1965 Immigration Bill* that set up a system of preferences based on family reunification known today, pejoratively, as

chain migration. Liberal Southern women from the racist South had the ear of House Majority Whip and then-Speaker Hale Boggs of Louisiana for the passage of progressive legislation through the civil rights movement. When Boggs disappeared over Alaska in 1972, his wife, Lindy Boggs, continued working with New Orleans women's groups on progressive legislation ("Boggs' Plane Down Missing," *Times Picayune*, October 17, 1972).

Many clubwomen in New Orleans were certainly involved in a process of Americanization of immigrants, but Jewish clubwomen like Friend, in contrast to the Draconian immigration bills, were more optimistic about immigration than the general public and felt the US could manage the influx of immigrants. Another difference between the NCJW and other women's clubs–even Jewish male-led groups–was, as historian Seth Korelitz notes, "NCJW's position on the place of women in society. NCJW consciously advocated for the expansion of women's role in the public sphere, both for themselves and for the women they helped" (Korelitz 1995, 177–203). For instance, Jewish women attributed the growing sex trade not to migrant women's inherent inferiority, but to their vulnerability and ignorance of urban life. Traveling alone, migrant women were often cut off from institutions such as family and church. Jewish women like Friend connected single women to the larger Jewish community (Rogow 1993, 35).

Politics

Image 2: Ida Weis Friend at Mayor deLesseps "Chep" Morrison's victory, c. 1946 (NCJWGNO Records).

Friend also had a keen interest in politics and suffrage. She was named the first woman from Louisiana in the women's auxiliary membership of the Democratic National Committee; unfortunately, the year is missing from the letter. This letter from J. Walker Ross to Mrs. Friend notes that she was chosen because the suffrage elements in the state were divided and she did not give offense to either side. One delegate was chosen from every state and was to "cooperate with the National Committee and be a factor in the shaping of policies and furthering of all causes in which woman was interested" (J. Walker Ross to Mrs. Joseph Friend, April 17 [no year], Ida Weis Friend Papers). Friend was also one of two women delegates from each state at the 1924 Democratic National Convention in New York. She was an ardent peace advocate and a true Wilsonian internationalist. During her NCJW national presidency from 1926 to 1932, the NCJW advocated for global military disarmament, a world court, the Pan-American Treaty of Arbitration, and Wilson's League of Nations. The national NCJW also came out against the militarization of secondary schools, because "such training tends to stress war psychology in the

minds of our adolescents" ("Decisions of the Twelfth Triennial Convention," 1926, 11, 15–16, Ida Weis Friend Papers).

Friend, an intellectual with many interests, was interested in community theater, opera, the symphony, and several intellectual salons. She used her board memberships in some of these organizations as a platform for peace and justice. She brought a League of Nations dignitary to New Orleans for one of her salons (Pierre Lemieux to Mrs. Friend, April 7, 1929, Ida Weis Friend Papers) and, in 1929, she secured Catholic Worker founder Dorothy Day for another speaker salon (Dorothy Day to Mrs. Friend, December 17, 1929, Ida Weis Friend Papers). In 1951, she invited her friends and colleagues to her home to hear a Norwegian board member of the Atlantic Union Committee, the precursor to the European Union (invitation from Ida Weis Friend to hear Lithgow Osborne, March 30, 1951, Ida Weis Friend Papers). As President of the Lyceum in 1946, she brought her political agenda to the Thursday night events of the Lyceum Association. A letter from a lyceum member shows how politeness and White male privilege were culturally linked to squelch liberal democratic views. The member wrote that her choices did not "remain true to the tradition of remaining true to no entangling alliances political or otherwise. In other words stick to your knitting, and we won't have any darns" (John W. Craddock to Ida Weis Friend, June 28, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers). It is not clear how Friend responded, but she kept the letter for posterity.

On another front, Friend was an ardent supporter of suffrage as a member of the ERA (Equal Rights for All) Club, founded in 1898 by Kate and Jean Gordon (Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1915, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Friend claimed that the Gordon sisters "taught her the 'new outlook for women' at the turn of the century" ("Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). A 1915 letter from Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend shows the ERA Club shared issues that were dear to Friend. These shared interests included enforceable child labor laws, factory inspectors, a juvenile court, legalizing the signature of a woman, and admission of women to Tulane Medical School. These are listed as "Some Fruits From The Era's Club Policy of Initiation and Agitation" on the letterhead (Jean Gordon to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1915, Ida Weis Friend Papers).

Historian Pamela Tyler tells us that Kate Gordon "ranked as the most outspokenly Negrophobic of the prominent southern suffragists" (Tyler 2009, 21). Gordon went on to found the Southern States Women's Suffrage Conference (SSWSC), dedicated to White women suffrage (22). Kate Gordon was a divisive figure in the Louisiana and national suffrage movement. Friend does not appear to have followed Gordon's racial views. After the passage of the 19th Amendment, which gave women the vote without Louisiana's endorsement, Louisiana Governor John Parker named Friend as one of three women–"2 housewives and 1 newspaper

woman"–out of 149 delegates at the 1921 Louisiana State Constitutional Convention. Friend, a less contentious figure than Kate Gordon, most likely influenced the progressive era reforms to the constitution that consolidated the education system under one board of education. The new constitution also removed "the sex qualification" for voting and authorized absentee voting. Absentee voting was important because many White women thought it unladylike to go to the polls (Tyler 2009, 22; Berdahl 1921, 565–8). This same constitution restricted the voting rights of African Americans, showing how White women could advance without taking other ethnic groups with them.

In another 1921 letter to Ida Weis Friend, Governor John Parker placed the appointment of the entire board of the Louisiana Industrial and Vocational Training School for Women and Girls in Friend's hands (Permelia Shields to Ida Weis Friend, March 18, 1921, Ida Weis Friend Papers). Parker's note of thanks also brings up the constitutional conventions and shows both Friend's power in the public sphere and how that power was circumscribed:

> When you and Mrs. Wilkinson were appointed as members of the Constitutional Convention a number of letters were received by me vigorously protesting the idea of having women appointed to this most important body.
>
> Permit me to write to express not only my most cordial thanks and appreciation for the magnificent work you have accomplished, but to express the sincere belief that your presence in the Convention was of untold good, a most refining influence and has created a profound impression that women, earnest, thoughtful and patriotic, are fully as well qualified to serve the State as are men.

Ida Weis Friend and the NCJW remained active in politics and, in 1946, Friend was influential in breaking the Huey P. Long machine as a leader of the "Broom Brigade." Pamela Tyler notes that the non-threatening brooms symbolized a clean sweep of city hall while maintaining the image of middle-class White domesticity. Tyler also states that the "1940s brought New Orleans women into political participation in significant numbers with much of the leadership for reform movements coming from them" (Tyler 2009, 166). Friend worked with the International Women's Organization (IWO) that abandoned non-partisan politics for "sweeping" reform and support of the candidacy of deLesseps "Chep" Morrison. The women of the IWO registered voters in a state where registration was difficult. Voters had to re-register every election, and machine politicians often threw out the registration forms of independent voters. IWO members canvassed, poll-watched, and got out the vote. The women of the IWO, lead by Friend and

others, were credited with the victory of reform mayoral candidate Morrison over machine incumbent Robert Maestri. Historian Tyler expresses the enormity of the win:

> To label the outcome "surprising" fails to covey the enormity of the shock … A poll worker commented, "About three o'clock it began to snow, and the Old Regular ladies they said, 'go home, Mrs. Bruder, you know you are whipped."
>
> "No," I said, "we will be dancing in this snow at 3 o'clock in the morning to celebrate our victory, and we did dance in the streets. It was a miracle." (Tyler 2009, 148–50)

After the election, the IWO became a permanent organization, with Friend as one of the founding members of its governing board. The IWO, with the help of many NCJW cross-over members, continues today in fights for civil rights, equal pay, family leave, gender parity, LGBTQ rights, and pro-choice politics. While the IWO expanded White voter rolls, voter registration and representation of African Americans would take longer. Friend's efforts laid the groundwork for civil rights.

Across the Racial Divide

Ida Weis Friend, along with other Jewish women, were some of the first to reach across the racial divide. She helped bring the Commission on Interracial Cooperation (CIC) to New Orleans in 1932 and the Urban League to New Orleans in 1938. Friend was a wealthy philanthropist, and it is possible that her money helped establish these organizations (New Orleans Business and Professional Women's Club to the Loving Cup Committee, *Times Picayune* Publishing Co., nomination letter dated September 6, 1946, Ida Weis Friend Papers; "Everybody Wanted Her for President," *Times Picayune*, March 3, 1955). White leaders in Atlanta founded the CIC in 1919 to quell racial unrest from Black men who were returning from service in the military. The CIC leadership carried racist stereotypes and sought cooperation, not integration or equality. Historian William Cole (1943, 456–63) notes that the New Orleans CIC existed in the 1920s but did nothing because of racist leadership. So it appears that Friend was involved in the reinvigoration of the CIC in 1932. She was also a member of the Association of Southern Women for the Prevention of Lynching and an unwavering leader in the local Consumer League. Landon Storrs (2000, 8) states that, by the time of the Great Depression, the National Consumer League "concluded that racial inequality was the linchpin of the South's separate political economy and that the unreformed South was

blocking the path to American social democracy." It seems Friend's grassroots activism with the Consumers League and anti-lynching work brought her to similar conclusions. By the 1940s, she was attending an Atlanta conference presided over by Black sociologist Charles S. Johnson. The conference participants created a

> framework within which we covenant together (and) must comprehend a concept and a charter which guarantees equality of opportunity for all people. This means more specifically as bearing upon the burden of our present counseling that the Negro in the United States and in every region is entitled to and should have every guarantee of equal opportunity that every other citizen of the United States has under the framework of the American democratic system of government. ("Atlanta Conference of Race Relations Report," n.d., Ida Weis Friend Papers)

Unfortunately, equality of opportunity still meant separate but equal to many Whites.

As president of the Urban League, Ida Weis Friend was able to gain membership of the Urban League to the Community Chest, the precursor of United Way. Indeed, this helped the local Urban League fundraise. A 1942 letter from Jessie Thomas of the National Urban League states,

> Your name Friend symbolizes the true relationship you have had to the New Orleans Urban League from its foundation. There were some others who were doubtful of its future who severed their official connections with it at a time when it really needed friends. In those days when slow was the pace, you stood by and never evidenced a desire or disposition to "abandon ship." (Jessie O. Thomas, Washington DC, to Mrs. Joseph E. Friend, November 18, 1942, Ida Weis Friend Papers)

Both the CIC, founded in 1919, and the Urban League, founded in 1911, have a middle-class liberal agenda. This more conservative agenda stands apart from a sea of radical communists, Garveyites, and the NAACP, founded in 1905 by freedom fighters W. E. B. Du Bois, Ida Wells-Barnett, Archibald Grimke, and Mary Church Terrell. The NAACP championed racial equality from the start as well as an anti-lynching agenda. But, in the South, the CIC and the Urban League gave liberal Whites, like Friend, a place to coalesce against the Ku Klux Klan and join anti-lynching campaigns. These organizations were an incubator for political leadership and activism in the 1960s Southern civil rights campaigns. They were a place for Black and White to get to know one another and hatch plans for future political campaigns. By the 1950s, this leadership also cross-pollinated other organizations, such as Save Our Schools (SOS), that worked for public school education and integration after *Brown vs. Board.* Was this enough? Had White people worked

across racial lines in coalitions at an earlier time, would they have had more radical agendas? In the 1920s, 30s, and 40s, New Orleans was controlled by racists and segregationists. White liberals, often segregationists themselves, worked with African American middle-class leadership to win a few concessions. Through Friend and the NCJW leadership, we see a continuous but painfully gradual foothold in racial justice that continues today.

Women's History as a Resource for Today

Image 3: Ida Weis Friend mentoring younger woman, c. 1950 (NCJWGNO Records).

Returning to an opening question: What does this look into Ida Weis Friend's life tell us about early 20th-century advocacy as a resource for today? Certainly, we need to leave behind the class and race supremacy that has not yet been addressed even today. Leaving these behind means addressing how privilege entrenches itself in every generation and becomes a blinding bias. The gradualism of the past is a limitation. Gradualism has not dismantled an unjust system. It works as a form of

tokenism when unjust laws are overturned without securing rights and freedoms for all times. We see this with the rise of global populism and its anti-immigrant, racist, misogynistic, and anti-Semitic agenda.

Even so, Friend's life points to several strategies that are useful for justice work today. With the Consumer's League and immigration work, Friend tied her philanthropy to grassroots work with marginalized communities. This on-the-ground attention to detail helped her grow and evolve in a way that allowed for continuity and change as the times changed. She lived a long time and was really never outdated and always seemed to be on top of the next progressive strategy, pushing some from behind and willingly leading others. Another feature of her work was creating local organizations attached to national organizations and national movements. Indeed, national connections were one key to resilience post-Katrina (Usdin 2014). My own post-Katrina interviews showed that Jewish, Catholic, Episcopalian, and Methodist denominations with national and international networks had many more resources at their disposal than African Americans in small independent churches without resources. In the racist Jim Crow South of Friend's time, this cross-fertilization between local and national organizations was critical to the flow of progressive ideas and resource development. Friend also worked collectively, through organizations, on teams, and with friends. Friend's causes were the NCJW's causes. People who knew one another worked out of each other's houses, donated to each other's volunteer and activist causes, and created a culture of care that influenced their children and helped re-instill Jewish values in every generation.

Ida Weis Friend had a constituency. Followers sought her advice, which made her what we would today call a "thought leader" in the community. She worked across a wide range of issues and sought changes using mutually reinforcing strategies that tied direct services to legislative and political advocacy. This comprehensive engagement in the community leads to my last point: Ida Weis Friend had a global reach. Her gaze was international. Influenced by her German immigrant father and spending two formative years in Frankfurt and Nice as a young woman, she looked beyond New Orleans and paid attention to world events. She was an avid clipper of the *New York Times* and followed the rise of Hitler and every invasion. Friend, like many African Americans, looked beyond provincial White-owned newspapers to publications with global perspectives. The local White papers could be quite parochial, running lead articles that affirmed Jim Crow politics, sensationalized Black crime, justified lynching, and praised Black musical talent as a quaint cultural anomaly. In contrast, Friend brought global perspectives to the local community. She went well beyond the local paper and brought an international perspective to local events, contextualizing local events in this larger

framework. Her curiosity and sense of herself as a global player brought a much-needed liberal impulse to a very mean and parochial Jim Crow South.

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Notes

1. Katrina's Jewish Voices was an initiative of the Jewish Women's Archive and the Goldring Woldenberg Institute for Southern Jewish Life.