

Near Sell-Out Crowd Attends “From Swastika to Jim Crow” Movie Fundraiser to Support Shalom Park Freedom School

By Amy Lefkof

*Joint destinies:
Jewish refugee scholars and
Black Southern college
students,
Shalom Park Jews and Freedom
School scholars
Transforming each others' lives.
Passing through the waters to
a better life.
Passing through the waters to
a free future.*

These words are from “Blacks and Jews Walking Together - Then and Now,” a poem written by Rabbi Judy Schindler as she watched the PBS documentary *From Swastika to Jim Crow* at the May 1 Shalom Park Freedom School (SPFS) movie fundraiser that drew nearly 250 Shalom Park and greater Charlotte community supporters to Sam Lerner Hall.

One supporter, Temple Beth El congregant David Cohen, observed, “Part of the dream [in creating Shalom Park Freedom School] was that through helping others in our Charlotte community, our Shalom Park community would be touched and transformed even if only in a small way. Tonight I saw that has happened. Shalom Park Freedom School is not just a reality, but a truly superb reality.”

At the beginning of the evening, SPFS Co-Chair Lisa Garfinkle announced to applause the decision of the SPFS Steering

Committee to expand the six-week literacy-based summer program for economically disadvantaged children to support 80 students in 2015, up from the 50 students that have been served since summer 2011. Of the students, called scholars, attending SPFS since 2011, 90% have suffered no summer reading loss, which is the goal of the program, with 65% gaining one or more levels of reading comprehension after just one summer.

From Swastika to Jim Crow tells the compelling but little known story of Jewish refugee scholars who were expelled from their teaching posts in Nazi Germany and found refuge and employment at historically black colleges and universities in the South. Having escaped persecution in Nazi Germany, only to encounter the racial persecution of the segregated South, these Jewish professors carefully navigated this



People from all parts of the Shalom Park community attended the SPFS May 1 fundraiser. Photo courtesy of Ralph Besnoy.

surreal environment and positively impacted the lives of their black students by mentoring them, encouraging them to apply for Fulbright scholarships and Ph.D programs, and inspiring them to dream big dreams.

Following the documentary, Jackie Fishman, the child of a Holocaust survivor and the mother of a son who attended Morehouse College, moderated a panel discussion that drew a powerful parallel between the historical relationship between American Jews and African-Americans, and the close association that exists today between the Shalom Park community and the economically disadvantaged scholars who attend Shalom Park Freedom School.

Rabbi Schindler, the first panelist, spoke to the historic linking of arms between Jews and African-Americans to register black voters during the Freedom Summer of 1964, and the infamous murder of black CORE activist James Chaney, and Jewish activists Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman. She opined how this working together has continued up until today with the linking of arms at Shalom Park Free-

dom School.

Principal Beth Wardy of Sterling Elementary, a school that sends students to SPFS, explained how 90% of her students live in poverty, with a current count of 60 homeless students. To spend six weeks at Shalom Park with enriching summer activities that include chess, opera, swim lessons, yoga, and sign language, is to have new doors opened, since most of their lives center around only two places: their apartment and their school.

The final panelist, Kevin Vandiver, SPFS's first site-director and a graduate of the Duke Divinity School, explained that Freedom Summer of 1964 also established a network of voluntary summer schools — “Freedom Schools”— as an alternative to Mississippi's totally segregated and underfunded schools for blacks, and that the current Children's Defense Fund Freedom Schools follow this model. Vandiver urged his mostly Jewish audience to remember the lesson of Queen Esther who was placed in her position as Queen to help save her people. Vandiver suggested that his Shalom Park audience was in a unique position to help support SPFS, and should do so as a matter of justice, not charity; not a hand out, but a hand up.

The SPFS program costs



(Left to right): Temple Israel congregant Alan Goldberg who photographs SPFS scholars every summer, SPFS's first site-director Kevin Vandiver, and Mary Nell McPherson, Executive Director of Freedom School. Photo courtesy of Ralph Besnoy.

\$1,200 per scholar. Although \$60,000 has already been raised to host 50 scholars for 2014, focus is now on raising funds to serve 80 scholars in Summer 2015. Event Chair Cheryl Alley said preliminary figures show donations and multi-year pledges at \$16,000 from the May 1 Event. To donate online, please go to www.spfreeschool.org and indicate Shalom Park Freedom School when making your donation. ☆



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A SURPRISING CONNECTION. A REMARKABLE LEGACY.

Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow tells the compelling but little known story of Jewish professors who fled Nazi Germany during WWII, came to America and found teaching positions at historically black colleges and universities in the South. There they came face to face with the absurdities of a rigidly segregated Jim Crow society.

Discover the connections and encounters between these refugee scholars and their students, and their great impact on each other, the Civil Rights Movement, and American society.

Presented thanks to support from the William and Patricia Gorelick Family Foundation, Shelton and Carol Gorelick, Scott and Dana Gorelick, Jeff and Bari Gorelick, Howard and Julie Levine, and Lori and Eric Sklut.



**BEYOND SWASTIKA
AND JIM CROW**

JEWISH REFUGEE SCHOLARS

AT BLACK COLLEGES

ON EXHIBIT MAY 7 - SEPT. 14, 2014



Levine Museum
www.museumofthenewsouth.org
Open daily • 200 E. 7th St., uptown Charlotte



Beyond Swastika and Jim Crow: Jewish Refugee Scholars at Black Colleges was created and is circulated by the Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust, New York City. The exhibit is made possible through major funding from the Leon Levy Foundation. Additional support provided by the Helen Bader Foundation; The Lupin Foundation, The Blanche and Irving Laurie Foundation; public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts, a state agency; the Alpern Family Foundation; and the Charles and Mildred Schnurmacher Foundation.