In celebration of Jewish Book Month 2012
Spertus Institute presents

ONE BOOK | ONE COMMUNITY

One More River
by Mary Glickman
Books allow readers a glimpse at a different slice of life. Spertus is based in Chicago, so we’re already quite familiar with the Northern metropolitan Jewish experience. To help flavor the guide for *One More River*, a novel exploring the Southern Jewish experience, we’ve sprinkled in quotes from real Southern mamas from the book *Suck Your Stomach In & Put Some Color On!* by Shellie Rushing Tomlinson. Now ain’t that a peach?
Jewish Book Month

Jewish Book Month is an American-Jewish celebration of Jewish books. It is observed each year during the month preceding Hanukkah. It began as Jewish Book Week in 1925 when Fanny Goldstein, a librarian at the West End Branch of the Boston Public Library set up a display of Jewish themed books. In 1927, with the encouragement of Rabbi S. Felix Mendelsohn of Chicago, Jewish Book Week was adopted by communities around the country and coincided with Lag B’Omer, a festival which traditionally honors scholars. In 1940, Jewish Book Week was changed to precede Hanukkah to encourage the sale of books as gifts. In 1943, Jewish Book Week was extended into a month-long celebration.

For more about Jewish Book Month, visit jewishbookcouncil.org

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“Make your books your companions, let your cases and shelves be your pleasure grounds and gardens. Bask in their paradise, gather their fruit, pluck their roses, take their spices and myrrh. If your soul be satiate and weary, change from garden to garden, from furrow to furrow, from prospect to prospect. Then will your desire renew itself and your soul be filled with delight.”

— Jewish philosopher Judah Ibn Tibbon, c. 1190

One Book | One Community

Today there are citywide, statewide, and even country-wide reading programs all over the world. Spertus Institute is proud to again bring this concept to our local Jewish community with our second annual **One Book | One Community** program.

In November and early December, in conjunction with Jewish Book Month, Spertus will provide resources, programs, and events—in locations across the Chicago region—all related to Mary Glickman’s *One More River*.

*One More River* is the story of Mickey Moe Levy and Laura Ann Needleman and their quest to marry. To prove his worth and pedigree, Mickey Moe must uncover his deceased father’s past. Moving seamlessly between the 1920s and 1960s, *One More River* explores race, class, and Jewish life in the American South.

We will kick off this year’s programming with a screening of *Shalom Y’All*. It’s a wonderful film and the perfect way to get in the spirit of *One More River*. Rabbi Capers Funney will join us to introduce the film, lead a discussion, and assist with the Q & A. And the evening’s light refreshments will give us a taste (literally) of the Jewish South.

Several weeks later, an informal book discussion at Spertus will be led by Rachel Kamin, a librarian and expert on Jewish books.

Then, responding to your feedback, this year’s author events will be even more accessible, with three free appearances by Mary Glickman in three locations. Please join us at Anshe Emet on Chicago’s north side, at Congregation Etz Chaim in Lombard, or at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El in Highland Park. See P6 for more information.

We hope that *One Book | One Community* attracts readers and book groups from across the Chicago area’s diverse community. Read *One More River* on your own or with your book club, congregation, friends, or family, then join us for our kick-off event, book discussion, and any of our author events.

We look forward to reading and learning with you!

Beth Schenker
Director of Programming
About the Book

True to his forebears, he took one look at Laura Anne Needleman, at her fine-boned face and figure, at her long honey hair, and his course was fixed. He could not have looked elsewhere if a horde of men yelled “Fire.” (P5)

Bernard Levy was always a mystery to the community of Guilford, Mississippi. He was even more of a mystery to his son, Mickey Moe, who was just four years old when his father died in World War II. Now it’s 1962 and Mickey Moe is a grown man. He must prove his pedigree to the disapproving parents of his girlfriend Laura Anne Needleman to win her hand in marriage. With only a few decades-old leads to go on, Mickey Moe sets out to uncover his father’s murky past, from his father’s travels up and down the length of the Mississippi River to his heartrending adventures during the Great Flood of 1927.

Mickey Moe’s journey, starting at the dawn of the civil rights era, leads him deep into the backwoods of Mississippi and Tennessee, where he meets with danger and unexpected revelations. As challenges unfold, he discovers the gripping details of his father’s life—a life filled with loyalty, tragedy, and heroism in the face of great cruelty from man and nature alike.

A captivating sequel to Mary Glickman’s bestselling Home in the Morning, Jewish Book Award finalist One More River tells the epic tale of ordinary men caught in the grip of calamity and inspired to do extraordinary acts in the name of love.

One More River is available in soft cover and e-book versions.

“With fine craft, pivoting back and forth in time, the author illuminates ‘Southern’ Jews. We are with them as their lives precede and then coincide with two of the most fought over social issues of the twentieth century: the civil rights movement and the women's movement. The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 is both a backdrop for the intriguing plot and a foreshadowing of the enormous change to come to the South and to the country.”
— Penny Metsch, Jewish Book Council

“. . . will move you in ways you never thought possible.”
— Good Choice Reading

“The beautiful descriptions of the south immediately caught my attention and drew me into the novel. But more than the setting, the characters of Mickey Moe Levy and Laura Anne made me fall in love. “
— Chasing Empty Pavements

“This is one of those special novels that one should read slowly, little by little, in order to enjoy it. Its prose is so rich, so beautiful that it flows like a peaceful stream and not like the wild waters of the Mississippi on whose shores a big part of the action takes place.”
— Lakis Fourouklas, Fiction & More
He learned that rough men felt fear, that women could bear pain, that a body could watch moonbeams dance on the river and go mad from the sight.” (P95)

Born Mary Kowalski on the south shore of Boston, Mary Glickman is the fourth of seven children raised in a traditional Irish-Polish Catholic family. From an early age, Mary was fascinated by faith. Though she attended Catholic school as a child and wanted to become a nun, her attention turned to the Hebrew Bible and she began what would become a lifelong relationship with Jewish culture. “Joseph Campbell said that religion is the poetry that speaks to a man’s soul,” Mary has said, “and Judaism was my soul’s symphony.”

In her twenties, Mary traveled in Europe and explored her passion for writing. When she returned to the U.S., she met her future husband Stephen, a lawyer, and with his encouragement began to consider writing as a career. She enrolled in the Masters in Creative Writing program at Boston University under the poet George Starbuck, who encouraged her to focus on fiction writing. While taking an MFA class with the late Ivan Gold, Mary completed her first novel, Drones, which received a finalist award from the Massachusetts Foundation for the Humanities but was, unfortunately, never published.

Mary also worked as a writer for nonprofit organizations, on projects ranging from a fundraising campaign for the Hebrew Rehabilitation Center to an instructional video for the National Scoliosis Foundation’s screening project.

Mary and Stephen married in 1978. Mary converted to Judaism and later worked as treasurer and secretary for her synagogue.

The origins of Mary’s love for all things Southern arose from a sabbatical year. In 1987, Mary and Stephen first traveled to the south of Spain, soaking in the life of a fishing village called La Cala. After seven months abroad, hoping to extend their time away, they sought a warm, more affordable, U.S.-based locale. The romance of South Carolina—with its Spanish moss, antebellum architecture, and rich cultural life—beckoned.

Mary and Stephen rented a house in Seabrook Island, North Carolina, and soon fell in love with the people, language, and rural beauty of their new home. Mary and Stephen now live in Seabrook Island with their cat and a horse named King of Harts.

Mary Glickman’s Home in the Morning was published in 2010 to both literary and popular acclaim. It has been optioned for film by Jim Kohlberg, director of The Music Never Stopped (Sundance 2011), and is currently in production. One More River, a finalist for the Jewish Book Award, is her second published book.
Interview with Mary Glickman

The older he got, the more curious he was about his name-twin. He felt their fates were related, tied together, that one day they would meet, and discover themselves brothers in the soul. (P73)

Q: Where does the novel’s title come from?
A: One More River comes from a famous spiritual, “One More River to Cross.” Authentic spirituals are dynamic, their lyrics change with the spontaneous inspiration of the singer of the moment. The lyrics I’ve chosen to use in the book were taken down in the early 19th century, which suits the action of one of my story threads, the life of Bernard Levy. I liked it especially as it refers to the great River Jordan, a wide river, a golden chariot (symbolically related to death and resurrection) that shakes the sky—which seemed flood-like to me—and powerful love, its first line being “a greater love was never told.” All of these suited the concerns of both One More River’s Bernard Levy and his son.

I’d used a spiritual for the title of Home in the Morning, too. Both work as titles, I think, because spirituals are a distinctly iconic African American Southern art form. And they tie the two novels together.

Q: One More River revolves around parallel stories of two men—father and son—attempting to forge paths in a frequently hostile American South. Why did you decide to center the novel on Mickey Moe’s quest to discover his father’s identity?
A: Lineage is very important in the South. One of the first questions you might hear from a Southerner is “Who are your people?” and the answer is likely to be a long, a very long, catalogue. It’s also common to meet people, men and women, with family names given as first names and even middle names, so you’re likely to meet a woman named Grayson McCallister Beyers and realize she’s carrying her people’s history... so it seemed obvious that a boy with a mysterious father would want the puzzle solved.

The South is history obsessed, which is part of this, too. And, as a Jewish author, I can state that, for Jews, memory is history. History defines Jewish identity, so I can relate to these concerns. I felt that Mickey Moe not knowing who his people were was a dilemma that would ground the story both in its era and in its setting.

Mama said, “Simple courtesy and gentleness help to grease the wheels of social interaction.”
Q: The novel's action is set during the early 20th century, as well as during the civil rights era of 1962. Could you tell us about these two time periods and how they relate to each other?

A: The Great Flood of 1927 and the civil rights era both transformed the South in indelible ways. Both altered the way the South works, thinks, operates. Both resulted in a diaspora of African Americans from the South. That one event was the result of nature and the other of man only made them more interesting to pair. I needed to look at both events on a personal level, not a strictly historical one. The point was that when an individual finds himself in the crosshairs of history, he or she acts in ways never before anticipated, especially when love is involved.

Q: Could you tell us a little about the Great Flood of 1927? How did it change the course of the Southern economy? Why did you choose to use it as a backdrop to the climax of One More River?

A: In 1927, the Mississippi River flooded from Cairo, Illinois, to the Gulf of Mexico, overflowing as much as 50 miles on either bank of the river. The banks of the river were the center of all commerce, so the first economic calamity was the devastation of much of the South’s resources that lay along the shores of the Delta. Businesses, ports, farmland all went under water. The homes of nearly a million people were wiped out. After the flood, there was no livelihood for the people who worked that land and in Greenville, Mississippi—a hub of the Delta economy—up to 45% of the African-American labor force left, going North or West to find work.

This was not an easy migration. In many cases, African Americans were conscripted for the labor of reconstruction, forced to work in camps under armed guards in unsanitary, horrific conditions, sleeping on the mud of the levees and sharing that space with thousands of livestock. Common laborers, sharecroppers, and professional African Americans were plucked out of what was left of their homes—regardless of class—and forced into this dirty, miserable work. They were paid in chits for meager amounts and types of food if they were lucky. Initially, there were no tents or eating utensils for them. They ate with their fingers, crouched in the mud. Meanwhile, white citizens enjoyed ample rations of food sent by the federal government and a thriving black market in luxury items.

On a federal level, it was acknowledged by the Corps of Civil Engineers that a levee system alone could not prevent the Mississippi from periodic ravagement of the countryside. A new system of flood plains and catch basins was devised and implemented while—for the first time in American history—massive federal funds were devoted to the rebuilding of the flood zone. In fact, more federal funds were used to aid the flood victims and lands than the government had ever expended before, except in wartime.
Q: Both One More River and Home in the Morning feature Jewish men who fall in love with African-American women. To what extent are these relationships meant to evoke the intersection of the Jewish and African-American experience in the segregated South?

A: You can’t write about the South and not write about race. Race relations in the South are very complex. Culturally, the races share more than they don’t. They lived in such close proximity that this was inevitable. Many close relationships existed between the races—white and African American, and Jewish and African American both—whereas in the North, ghettoization reinforced original cultural ties, making close relationships between different ethnic groups, let alone races, more difficult to achieve.

The historian George Tindall has suggested that Southern Jewish ethnic and religious identity have been shaped by encounters with white and black Gentile cultures. He explains that both Jews and Southerners—white and black Southerners—share an “outsider status”, Jews because of their immigrant status and Southerners because of their isolation from the rest of the nation. In addition, Jews in the South were at the center of white and black Gentile communities and played an important, visible role as merchants and itinerant peddlers. As Tindall reports, Southern black and white cultures bubbled away side by side, with ingredients spilling over from one into the other. That cultural encounter and blending became part of the Southern Jewish experience.

Q: Why did you decide to introduce the women’s liberation movement in One More River? Why is it important to you that readers understand the struggle that women have faced, and continue to face, for equal rights in America?

A: The births of the civil rights era and the women’s movement were nearly concurrent. They came to fruition around the same time. So it seemed a natural progression to talk about women’s liberation in River. Plus, the women’s liberation movement was important to my own maturation. I lived it. Between the time I graduated high school and left college, the role of women completely changed. It was remarkable, startling, confusing. In some ways, liberation wasn’t what we thought it was and unexpected adjustments in thinking and acting, adjustments One More River explores with the character of Laura Anne and also Mickey Moe’s oppressed sister, Eudora Jean, were required. When I look at young women today, I fear they are in peril of forgetting how far we’ve come in regard to women’s rights. From my perspective, they often look to be backsliding. So I thought I might remind them of a few things.
Programs and Events

KICK-OFF EVENT
FILM SCREENING | RECEPTION
Saturday, November 10 at 7 pm
at Spertus Institute

Shalom Y’all

Traveling in a vintage Cadillac, filmmaker Brian Bain, a third-generation Jew from New Orleans, takes a 4,200-mile road trip through the American South. He discovers a vibrant regional culture and history infused with both Jewish and Southern roots. This film helps set the stage for our second One Book I One Community selection. Enjoy the film, refreshments, and a chance to hear more about One More River and Jewish life below the Mason Dixon Line.

Post-screening discussion will be led by Rabbi Capers C. Funnye, Jr. of Beth Shalom B’nai Zaken Ethiopian Hebrew Congregation in Chicago.

$20 includes reception

BOOK DISCUSSION
Thursday, November 29 at 6:30 pm
at Spertus Institute

One More River

Join us for an informal discussion of One More River with Rachel Kamin, Director of the Gray Cultural & Learning Center at North Suburban Synagogue Beth El. Perfect for those who have read the book, plan to read the book, or just want to learn more.

Free. Reservations recommended.

Visit spertus.edu/OneBook for information and reservations.
AUTHOR EVENTS

Author Mary Glickman

*Three presentations in* **three** **locations!**

**Sunday, December 2 at 9:30 am**
**Anshe Emet Synagogue**
3751 N. Broadway, Chicago

**Sunday, December 2 at 2:30 pm**
**Congregation Etz Chaim**
1710 S. Highland Avenue, Lombard

**Monday, December 3 at 7 pm**
**North Suburban Synagogue Beth El**
1175 Sheridan Road, Highland Park

Free. Reservations recommended.

Visit spertus.edu/OneBook for information and reservations.

*One More River* will be for sale at all events and can be ordered at spertusshop.org.

For events at Spertus, $10 discounted parking is available with validation at the Essex Inn, two blocks south of Spertus.
Discussion Questions

*Daddy said, Baby, the world is full of men good at courting sweet, inexperienced gals. They’re all soft words and flowers and bowing when they open the door. Don’t say a peep about their character. Now, blood does.* (Lot Needleman, P56)

1. Eli Evans, author of *The Provincialis: A Personal History of Jews in the South*, said, “I have for years been intrigued with the ways in which Jews and southerners are alike—stepchildren of an anguished history.” In what ways do Jewish and Southern cultures overlap in *One More River* and when do they collide?

2. Lineage plays an essential role in both Judaism and Southern tradition. When the Needlemans dismiss Mickey Moe for not knowing about his father’s people, are they honoring a Jewish tradition, a Southern tradition, or both?

3. To what extent does Bernard’s love for Aurora Mae evoke the intersection of the Jewish and African-American experience in the segregated South? What elements of these two “outsider” groups relate to one another?

4. The Holocaust is never mentioned in *One More River*, even though Bernard Levy fought in World War II. Why do you believe the author chose not to mention the Holocaust? What effect, if any, does its absence have on the story?

5. The war in Vietnam bookends Mickey Moe’s narration and the entire novel. Why might Vietnam have been chosen? What other connections exist between Vietnam and conditions in the American South during the time periods (the early 1920s and the 1960s) that the novel takes place?

6. “Motivated by social obligation as much as piety, Laura Anne and Mama often went to services at Temple Ohabai Shalom, the largest Reform synagogue in three counties...” (P46). To what extent do the Jews in *One More River* observe religious practices to keep up appearance and to what extent out of spiritual devotion? How do the Sassaports and the Needlemans define themselves as Jewish? Do their practices differ from Jews in other parts of the United States?

7. Members of the Spertus staff noticed that those of us raised in the North, unlike those raised in the South, were not taught about the Great Flood in school, in spite of its nationwide impact. What do you think of this discrepancy? What are its implications?

8. The plight of African Americans and Jews is often linked and compared. Many Jews had strong opinions on the civil rights movement and the roles Jews should take in it. What were the various ways Jews took part in the civil rights movement? Discuss the reasons that Jews may or may not have participated. What was the impact of their participation? What was the impact on their silence?

9. “He was one of those boys who thought that change should come for the colored folk. By contrast, he hadn’t heard a whisper about any movement afoot to free women of their bonds...To his mind, they were good at what they did because the responsibility and the worry didn’t lay heavy on their shoulders” (P82-83). The novel introduces both the civil rights movement and the women’s movement. Mickey Moe feels that civil rights issues are blatantly clear and change needs to come, but he doesn’t understand the need for the women’s movement. Why do you think this is? Is it typical of the time?

10. Mary Glickman uses the Great Flood as the climax of Bernard Levy’s story and the civil rights movement as a climax for Mickey Moe’s. By doing so, she compares these two cataclysmic events. Discuss the two events, their similarities and differences, and their roles in the novel and the lives of the characters.
Recipe for Root Beer BBQ Sauce

By Spertus Executive Chef Laura Frankel
Adapted from her book *Jewish Slow Cooker Recipes* (John Wiley and Sons)

This is my version of the regional Southern American sauce. I love this sauce with its earthy spices and the way it clings to a slow-cooked melt-in-your-mouth brisket. It’s also lovely on chicken, with caramelized onions and coleslaw on the side for a refreshing crunch.

Yields 3 cups

2 cups root beer (regular, not diet)
1 cup Heinz ketchup
¼ cup fresh lemon juice
¼ cup fresh orange juice
¼ cup bourbon (or apple cider if you prefer non-alcoholic)
½ cup ginger snaps-crumbled
1 ½ tablespoons dark brown sugar
1 tablespoon light molasses
½ teaspoon lemon zest
½ teaspoon cayenne pepper (optional)
½ teaspoon grated ginger
2 cloves of garlic, grated on a microplane
1 medium onion, grated on a microplane
2 teaspoons kosher salt
1 tablespoon freshly cracked pepper

Place all of the ingredients in the insert of the slow cooker and cover. Cook on HIGH for 6 hours. Adjust salt and pepper to taste. Store covered in the refrigerator for up to one week or freeze for up to 3 months.

Chef Laura’s cookbooks are available at the Spertus Shop and online at spertus.edu

Mama taught me to never return a dish to a friend empty. Always return it with something you’ve cooked.
Jewish Population in the South

Don’t forget you’re a Jew. Things is easy for us most times here, that is true. Especially when compared to up North or in the old counties. But when there’s trouble, folks always seek to remind you of what you are. You can bet on it. So don’t forget. They won’t. (Granddaddy, P92)

When Jews came to America from Eastern Europe, not all settled in cities in the North. Some chose a life in the South, often working as merchants and becoming an active part of small-town communities. It’s been said that at one time a Jewish family lived in every small town, with synagogues dotting the Bible Belt. However, Jews faced (and continue to face) challenges in areas less familiar with non-Christian ways of life. The target of anti-Semitism, many eventually left for bigger cities. But Jewish culture took root and remains.

### 1927

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Statistics courtesy of the American Jewish Yearbook.

Mama said, “As you get older, ask people about their family members and listen to their response! And always tell them, ‘Tell yourmama I said hi.’”

Photo of The Old Hebrew Union courtesy of the Institute of Southern Jewish Life.
The Leo Frank Case
In 1913, Mary Phagan, a 13-year-old factory worker was found murdered. Leo Frank, the Texas-born Jew who was superintendent of the Atlanta pencil factory where she worked, was arrested. After deliberating for less than four hours, the jury found Frank guilty.

Two years later, Georgia Governor John M. Slaton concluded that Frank had been wrongly convicted and commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. Slaton’s decision enraged much of the Georgia populace, leading to riots throughout Atlanta. Frank was kidnapped from the state prison where he was housed. He was taken to Marietta, Georgia, where he was beaten and hanged.

The lynching of Leo Frank, which was later proved to have been planned and led by prominent area citizens, was highly publicized and had far-reaching effects, bringing attention to anti-Semitism in the United States.

In 1986, Leo Frank was pardoned due to the State of Georgia’s inability to protect him. However he was not exonerated.

Mississippi Burning
In 1964, the Council of Federated Organizations (COFO) planned a summer of voter education and registration in Mississippi for African American and Native American voters. In what became known as “Freedom Summer,” they organized volunteers and activists to work on these issues. That same summer, 20 African American churches were firebombed in Mississippi.

Michael Schwerner and Andrew Goodman, two Jewish New Yorkers in their 20s, were in Mississippi to register African American voters. With them was James Chaney, a native Mississippian also working in the voter registration campaign.

Jews, Anti-Semitism, and the Civil Rights Movement
I can see he’s a Jew, same as you. Nine outta ten of those agitators are Jews. Everybody knows that. Folks say all you Jews stick together. That you got a method of signals and handshakes, and every one of you know what the rest are up to. (Billy, P163)
The three young men were arrested by Deputy Sheriff Cecil Price after visiting one of the burned churches. At 10 pm on the night of June 21, 1964, they were released from jail in a plan later found to have been in accordance with the Ku Klux Klan. Schwerner, Goodman, and Chaney were ambushed, kidnapped, beaten, and lynched by Klan members.

The following day the FBI began its investigation into the case of the missing civil rights workers. On August 4, their bodies were found in an earthen dam. Eighteen individuals were indicted for endeavoring to deprive the three of their civil rights, as Mississippi was unwilling to hand down murder charges. Only seven of the 18 were charged, with their sentences ranging from three to 10 years in prison.

In 2005 Edgar Ray Killen, a minister indicted in the case, was tried for the murder of the three boys. He was found guilty of manslaughter. The verdict, although appealed, was upheld by the Supreme Court in 2007. He is currently in prison with a tentative release date of 2031.

Northern and Southern Jewish Involvement in the Civil Rights Movement

During the Civil Rights movement, Northern Jews had a greater propensity to participate and speak out. For Southern Jews who had worked hard to assimilate into Southern society, the issue was more nuanced. Although Southern Jews were known to allow African Americans to patronize their stores and treat them with respect, outright participation in the civil rights movement was a separate consideration.

Whereas Northern Jews were praised and celebrated for their moral stance, Southern Jews risked backlash from the Klu Klux Klan and serious repercussions for their involvement. One such example was Rabbi Perry Nussbaum of Temple Beth Israel in Jackson, Mississippi. As the Civil Rights Movement began to elbow its way into existence in the 1950s, Rabbi Nussbaum at first remained neutral. However, upon learning that several civil rights activists were incarcerated in a maximum security prison, Nussbaum took it upon himself to counsel the prisoners and carry messages back to their families. Despite efforts to recruit fellow Rabbis to join his prison aid efforts, he received no support.

On September 18, 1967, the newly built Temple Beth El Israel was bombed. This violence was followed by an even more personal attack on Rabbi Nussbaum, when, on November 21, 1967, his home was bombed. In the south, it was often the rabbis who championed activism, with their congregations following far behind.
The 1927 Great Mississippi Flood

Lay down, woman…Lay down and marry the goddamn river. (Bernard the Handsome, P182)

It started raining in 1926 and continued deep into 1927, eventually giving way to the great Mississippi Flood of 1927. The flood would forever impact that African American population in the Mississippi Delta and beyond, with consequences effecting everything from local race relations to infrastructure financing to national politics.
The 1927 Great Mississippi Flood
(continued from previous page)

Facts and Figures
13 crevasses in the central Mississippi Levee
27,000 square miles were flooded
350 million dollars in damages
   (equal to roughly 5 billion dollars today)
256 people died as a result of the flood
330,000 people were rescued from rooftops
   and higher grounds
700,000 refugees, the majority of them
   African American, were housed in
   makeshift Red Cross camps

Results and Consequences
The Great Flood gave many African Americans
a push to leave the deplorable conditions of
the Delta and head North, with many settling in
Chicago. By the end of 1927, 50 percent of the
African American population had left the Delta.

In the past, local governments had to match the
funds raised by the federal government, in this
instance local contribution was waived. It was
decided that the federal government would pay
for damages and work as a result of the flood.

In 1928 the Flood Control Act was passed. This
gave the Federal Government the authority
to decide how the Mississippi River would be
controlled and to construct and design the
necessary containment devices.

The election of 1932 was the first in which
African American votes began to abandon the
party of Abraham Lincoln. As supporters of
Robert Moton (see following page), principal of
the Tuskegee Institute, they voted for Franklin
Roosevelt when Moton shifted his political
allegiance to the Democratic Party.

Forced labor on the levee in
Memphis, Tennessee. Courtesy of
the National Archive and Records
Administration.

Mama would say,
"Your actions speak
so loud I can't hear
your words!"
Key Political Players in the Aftermath of the Great Mississippi Flood

“With us, when you speak of ‘the river,’ though there be many, you mean always the same one, the great river, the shifting, unappeasable god of the country, feared and loved, the Mississippi.”

— William Alexander Percy

LeRoy Percy
LeRoy Percy of Greenville, Mississippi, was descended from a wealthy and prestigious family. He made his name in government and was known for his progressive treatment of the African American workforce in the Mississippi Delta. He was appointed to the United States Senate in 1910, but lost the reelection to Mississippi Governor James Vardaman, a rampant racist. In 1922 Percy gave a much publicized speech condemning the actions of the Ku Klux Klan. He called on the Greenville community to prevent the Klan from infiltrating their home town. The success of Percy’s plea solidified his position of popularity and respect in Greenville, at least for a time.

Herbert Hoover
During the flood, President Calvin Coolidge appointed Herbert Hoover head of the flood relief action. He formed the Colored Advisory Commission, to inspect conditions in the refugee camps and on the levees. The publicity surrounding Hoover’s actions and efforts during the flood likely earned him the presidency in 1928.

Robert Moton
A prominent African American Republican, Robert Moton believed the best method for the improvement of African American status was hard work and integrity. When Hoover created the Colored Advisory Commission, he appointed Moton as its head. This commission was charged with investigating the reported abuses and instances of misconduct in the camps. The commission uncovered inhumane treatment of the African American population, including forced labor, lack of food, and generally dire circumstances. When Moton took this report back to Hoover, the future president sought to bury the commission’s findings. In exchange for Moton’s discretion, Hoover promised him that if he was elected president, Moton and his associates would be allowed unprecedented access to and roles in government. Furthermore, Hoover intimated that he would see to it that major changes would occur in the delta with regards to African American sharecroppers and white planters. After his election, Hoover reneged on his pledge to Moton. When Hoover ran against Franklin Delano Roosevelt in 1932, Moton and his supporters voted for Roosevelt, the Democrat candidate, an incredible political shift.

William Alexander Percy
The son of LeRoy Percy, Will Percy inherited his family’s sense of decency and leadership. Will Percy set himself apart from his father during the crisis of the Great Mississippi Flood. After the Mounds Landing levee broke, causing the Mississippi Delta to overflow, Will Percy was appointed head of Washington County Relief Committee. This put him in charge of refugee relief efforts. Will Percy sought to evacuate the refugees, many of whom were African American. The white planters balked at this proposal, fearing that if the African American work force left Mississippi nothing would bring them back. LeRoy Percy sided with the planters and the stranded African American community was abandoned. In response, Will Percy turned the levee into a Red Cross distribution center, hoping to ensure the African American workers their entitled provisions. However, the bulk of the rations went to the white population, while the African Americans were forced, often at gunpoint by the National Guard, to remain in the camps and continue laboring despite lack of food, shelter, and other necessities.
Suggested Reading

“Read, read, read. Read everything—trash, classics, good and bad, and see how they do it. Just like a carpenter who works as an apprentice and studies the master. Read!”
— William Faulkner

Jewish Life in the South

*Evans, Eli.* The Lonely Days were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner. University Press of Mississippi: Jackson, 1993.

*Evans, Eli.* The Provincials: A Personal History of Jews in the South. The University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill, 1995


Anti-Semitism and Civil Rights


The Great Mississippi Flood


Fiction
If you enjoyed *One More River*, you might also like:

