

The University of North Carolina Press

Post Office Box 2288 | Chapel Hill, North Carolina 27515-2288

March 2005

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IN CELEBRATION OF THE 350th ANNIVERSARY OF JEWISH LIFE IN AMERICA, THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA PRESS PROUDLY ANNOUNCES A NEW ILLUSTRATED EDITION OF AN AMERICAN, SOUTHERN, AND JEWISH CLASSIC:
THE PROVINCIALS: A Personal History of Jews in the South by Eli N. Evans

“I believe that no one born and raised in the South can escape its hold on the imagination. I was touched in childhood by its passions and myths, by its language and literature, by the heartbeat of its music, by the rhythm of its seasons and the beauty of its land, by the menacing fear of violence, by the complexities of race and religion, by the intensity of its history and the turbulence of its politics. . . . With such entanglements, a native son remains irredeemably and enduringly Southern. So it has been with me, immersed in the endless fascinations and dense matrix of Southern history entwined with Jewish roots, resonating in my soul forever.”

**—Eli N. Evans, from the Introduction to the 2005 edition of
*THE PROVINCIALS: A Personal History of Jews in the South***

A new, revised, and illustrated edition of *THE PROVINCIALS* provides fresh evidence that, as Pat Conroy, author of *The Prince of Tides*, has said:

“*THE PROVINCIALS* remains the seminal, indispensable book about the Jewish experience in the South. . . . One of a kind, a masterpiece.”

(Chapel Hill, N.C.) One afternoon in the late 1960s, after one of those legendary publishing lunches that lasted through dinner, *Harper’s* editor Willie Morris—enthralled by the stories Eli Evans had told him of growing up Jewish in the South—offered to send Evans on a trip

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through the South for a series of articles that would eventually become his timeless contribution to Southern literature, *THE PROVINCIALS*. In his foreword, Morris reflects on the history of the book, and calls it “a multilayered book of great warmth and feeling. . . . It has become an enduring classic.”

Brilliantly evoking the rhythms and the heartbeat of Southern Jewish life, *THE PROVINCIALS* is at once a richly textured social history and the author’s personal quest to understand the contradictions of being both a Jew and a Southerner—“to have inherited the Jewish longing for homeland while being raised with the Southerner’s sense of home.”

Evans brings to his writing the unique perspective of one who has grown up Jewish in the Bible Belt, and has created, in the words of Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Alfred Uhry, “not only first rate American history, [but] also a first rate coming-of-age memoir.”

In the midst of a yearlong celebration of the 350th anniversary of Jewish life in America, the University of North Carolina Press is proud to reissue a revised, new edition of *THE PROVINCIALS*. Accompanied for the first time by a gallery of family and historical photos, as well as a new introduction by the author, *THE PROVINCIALS* stands—alongside such other great bestsellers as *Our Crowd* and *The Grandees*—as one of the lasting portraits of the Jewish experience in America.

In language that inspired Abba Eban to declare, “The Jews of the South have found their poet laureate,” Evans sifts through the intimate memories of his own family life, and the sweeping changes in the New South that have transformed the lives of Southern Jews over the past thirty years.

In a chapter called “Atlanta: The Great Jewish City of the Twenty-First Century,” Evans looks at the extraordinary growth in Southern Jewish communities in the last quarter of a century, especially in the “New Atlanta,” whose Jewish population, already quadrupled, continues to grow at such a rapid pace that the city is “destined to become in the next century one of the major centers of Jewish life in America.”

In a recent, wide-ranging interview, Evans points out that although the book was

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originally published in 1973 (and fully updated in 1997 and 2005), its relevance has only grown with time:

“Jews are different and have always been ‘the other’ in almost every country they have lived in. In the South, they stand apart from the overwhelming religious presence that dominates Southern culture. In a twenty-first century American political environment, where religious beliefs, values and practices define the cultural divide between sections of the country, the experience of growing up Jewish in the Bible Belt can offer important insights into the soul of the South.”

Significantly, Evans observes that, “the Jews of the South were not insular, but participated ardently in civic life. They developed a unique Southern Jewish consciousness and understood that a better community for everyone was a better community for Jews. In community after community, all over the South, Jews have been elected to office, served on boards of museums, libraries, schools, and civic organizations. Looking at the South through the prism of Jews in the South, and through the eyes of Jewish Southerners who live and lived there, can teach us a great deal about both America and the South today and the importance of religious pluralism as a bedrock American value.”

When asked why should the public be interested in the minor history of Jews in the South compared to the major story in the big Northern cities, Evans replied:

“The easy answer is that they are part of the American story (and not so small anymore, with 1.2 million people).” But, he continued, “there is a deeper more important reason. Historians and commentators know that Jews are shaped by the ethos they grow up in. In the American ethos, the air we breathe radiates with religious liberty. In the period just after the American Revolution, Washington and Jefferson campaigned for the Bill of Rights which included freedom of religion. America was not a ‘Christian nation,’ though we still debate the issue today. It was a haven for all faiths because religious liberty was in the DNA of the American dream. Jews were a test for the nation’s commitment to this revolutionary idea of religious freedom, which has shaped the American Jewish experience.”

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He added that, “For the South, the role of Jews in its history is important because their presence demanded, for the most part, a pluralistic attitude. You cannot understand America without understanding the South. And many readers have told me how much they learned about the South from reading about it from a Jewish perspective.”

When asked about anti-Semitism, the Klan, and the racism Jews encountered, Evans asserted that:

“Unfortunately, anti-Semitism is the most extensively written about aspect in much of the literature about Jewish life in the South. But the history of Jews in the South lies not in cross burnings, bombing, acts of overt anti-Semitism and violence. It is a story animated by hope, reflected in the indomitable spirit of immigrants who worked for pennies to bring over their families in the faith they could build a life in America. Jews have prospered in the South despite their religious differences and the spasms of violence and demagoguery that mar its history. One of the reasons lies in an emotional and psychological reality at work in the psyche of the Christian community. I call it a ‘reverence for Jews’ and it has not been deeply explored or understood. To many Southerners, Jews were the chosen people, and had a Biblical dimension to them.”

With regard to the future prospects for Jews in the South, Evans was optimistic:

“Overall, the Jewish population in the South has tripled in size since I first started writing about it in 1970—from 382,000 to an estimated 1,200,000 in 2004. Atlanta is now one of the fastest growing Jewish communities in America, growing from 16,000 and three congregations when I first wrote about it in 1969 to well over 100,000 and thirty-seven congregations today. Austin, Texas, has grown from 500 Jews when I was first writing about it to 15,000 to 18,000 today, mainly because of the arrival of Dell Computer and other high tech firms and the growth of the University of Texas. The Research Triangle of the Durham-Chapel Hill-Raleigh area has quadrupled in the last twenty years and Charlotte is well on its way to becoming the Atlanta of the twenty-first century.”

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“The history of Jews in the South is now centuries old,” he concluded, “but the story is still being written. Southern Jews of today are building communities with a new sense of self confidence, pride and self esteem in a ‘New South’ that, after a century of social change, has wrestled with its demons and now faces a new dawn in a more pluralistic America.”

Evans was born and raised in Durham, North Carolina, and is a graduate of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Yale Law School. He served in the U.S. Navy and worked as an aide and speechwriter in the Lyndon B. Johnson White House. Since the original edition of *THE PROVINCIALS* appeared in 1973 and went on to become an enduring classic, Evans has written two other highly acclaimed works, *Judah P. Benjamin: The Jewish Confederate* and *The Lonely Days Were Sundays: Reflections of a Jewish Southerner*. He is president emeritus of the Charles H. Revson Foundation and lives in New York City.

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THE PROVINCIALS

A Personal History of Jews in the South

By Eli N. Evans

With Photographs and a New Introduction by the Author. Foreword by Willie Morris.

The University of North Carolina Press

Publication date: February 28, 2005

ISBN 0-8078-2958-7, \$34.95 hardcover; ISBN 0-8078-5623-1, \$21.95 paperback

440 pp., 32 illustrations

For more information see: www.unc.edu/books/T-7827.html

Materials for media use, including a jacket image, photographs, and the full text of a conversation with Eli N. Evans are available at:

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CRITICAL ACCLAIM FOR THE PROVINCIALS

“***THE PROVINCIALS*** is a classic portrait of Jewish history in the American South. Drawing on his own roots in North Carolina, Eli Evans eloquently explores the contributions of Jews in communities—from small towns to large cities—throughout the region. In recent years the book has inspired an exciting new field of teaching and research on Jewish studies in the American South. This impressive collector’s edition of ***THE PROVINCIALS*** is enriched by the addition of historic and family photos, along with a new introduction by Evans. The book is an essential resource for courses on the American South and on Jewish history in the region. It is also a powerful reminder of the distinguished contributions Jews have made both to the American South and to our nation.”

—**William Ferris, former Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities, coeditor of *The Encyclopedia of Southern Culture***

“Eli Evans’s ***THE PROVINCIALS*** remains the seminal, indispensable book about the Jewish experience in the South. I returned to the book again and again as I wrote *Beach Music*, not only for its extraordinary insights and the quality of the writing, but because the book is one of a kind, a masterpiece.”

—**Pat Conroy, author of *Beach Music* and *The Prince of Tides***

“***THE PROVINCIALS*** is not only first rate American history, it’s also a first rate coming-of-age memoir. Eli Evans knows everything there is to know about growing up southern and Jewish at the same time.”

—**Alfred Uhry, author of *Driving Miss Daisy* and *The Last Night of Ballyhoo***

“Evans endows his narrative with a human texture which elevates it to literature. ***THE PROVINCIALS*** is a multi-layered book of great warmth, with a unique Southern Jewish consciousness . . . It has become an enduring classic.”

—**Willie Morris, author of *North Toward Home*, from the Foreword**

“Such a fine and valuable book—thoughtful, informative, revealing—a reminiscence and a history that works on both counts.”

—**Jonathan Yardley, Pulitzer-Prize winning critic, *The Washington Post***

“A warm and illuminating . . . book about people. It fills a gap in the South's literature.”

—**Claude Sitton, former Southern correspondent, *The New York Times***

“A fresh subject—‘Personal’ in the subtitle is the key to this book’s attractiveness. Evans grew up in the tobacco town of Durham, N.C., where his father ran the only integrated lunch counter and served as mayor during the civil rights struggles between 1950 and 1962. His maternal grandmother founded the first Southern chapter of Hadassah, the women’s Zionist organization, for which his mother traveled . . . His book is a testament to their example.”

—**Walter Clemons, *Newsweek***

Praise for the author:

“The Jews of the South have found their poet laureate. . . . Evans's prose is like himself—stylish, serene, reflective, and relentlessly candid about the issues that moved his generation.”

—**Abba Eban**