

Nazi Hate Ride

1961

In early 1961, American Nazi Party founder George Lincoln Rockwell organized a national picketing campaign against the opening of the film *Exodus*.

Angered because the film showed the founding of Israel and pro-Semitism, Rockwell led racists to New Orleans on his infamous "Hate Bus." This which focused on the founding of the state of Israel. On May of that year, the NOPD received a wire from Rockwell, announcing that he was undertaking a hate-ride to New Orleans to picket the premiere of Exodus at the Civic Theater as well as the local NAACP office. On the same day that Rockwell sent his message, a group of Freedom Riders were savagely attacked by a group of Klansmen in Montgomery, Alabama. A week later, racists firebombed and beat riders north of Montgomery, outside of Anniston, AL. With both groups of Freedom Riders headed to New Orleans, Rockwell delayed the Nazi hate ride in his hate ride bus spectacle, a Volkswagen bus carrying himself and five 'storm-troopers' to match their arrival.



George Lincoln Rockwell holds a news conference in Arlington on November 3, 1965.
Source: Associated Press. Harvey Georges.

New Orleans' Jewish community was deeply divided on the best approach to the threat. Prior Jewish participation in the Freedom Rides only heightened historic mistrust from the white community, an added pressure to the weighty decision on how to proceed. The city's more established Jewish community supported a policy of quarantine. The executive committee of the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) "agreed that Rockwell's civil liberties must be respected," and quickly worked to leverage their social and political connections to undermine and cut off Rockwell's publicity. As in other cities where Rockwell staged his pickets, however, the New Orleans community of Holocaust survivors took a very different stance. More than twenty survivors gathered at Ralph's Butcher Shop in Central City to meet Rockwell head on. Having lived through the Nazi regime, the Holocaust survivors were unwilling to defend the freedom of speech of those who would abolish both speech and life.

Source

Lawrence N. Powell, "When Hate Came to Town" in American Jewish History Vol 85 1997.



Holocaust survivors who settled in New Orleans pose on the St. Charles Avenue Jewish Community Center steps, 1949. Source: Holocaust Survivors Project

In a meeting between the two groups, the Holocaust survivors gave testimony to the ADL, with Leo Scher recounting his time in the Czestochowa ghetto, and Solomon Radasky testifying on his role in the Warsaw ghetto uprising and in concentration camps. In return, the community of Holocaust survivors were told that they needed to follow the ADL plan. A heated public meeting followed, in which it became clear to the ADL and NOPD that the survivors would not back down. Rockwell was under police surveillance from the parish line, but allowed to approach the Civic Theatre.



Detail of the American Nazi Party members keeping watch outside "Lincoln Rockwell's Hate Bus."
Source: Joe Scherschel. LIFE Magazine. "Riding the Hate Bus."

The counter-protest of Holocaust survivors, armed with iron pipes and baseball bats, had moved down the block under shelter from a sudden storm that sent nearly two feet of water down Baronne street, but closed in quickly as Rockwell climbed out of his car. The police closed in as well, arresting Rockwell and his 'storm troopers' for criminal mischief and obstructing traffic.