

The Protest Issue

SPRING 2021

AJS

# PERSPECTIVES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES







2 ART CONTRIBUTOR: ANDI ARNOVITZ

➤ Read AJS Perspectives online at [associationforjewishstudies.org](http://associationforjewishstudies.org)

*Coat of the Agunot*, 2010. Digital scans of antique ketubot, threads. 60.2 x 59.4 in.  
Photo by Avshlom Avital. Permission for use of the ketubot courtesy of the National Library of Israel.  
© 2010 Andi Arnovitz. Courtesy of the artist.

From the Editors	6	Urgent Witness: Spaces of Belonging in Jewish Argentina	57
Essay Contributors	8	Natasha Zaretsky	
Art Contributors	9	From Israel's Black Panthers' Protest to a Transnational MENA Jewish Solidarity	60
The Jewish Hercules: How Sports Created Space for Hellenic Judaism in Salonica	17	Aviad Moreno	
Makena Mezistrano		Jewish Symbols in German Gangsta Rap: A Subtle Form of Protest	64
Prophetic Protest in the Hebrew Bible	19	Max Tretter	
Marian Kelsey		The Ordeal of Scottsboro	66
A Color-Blind Protest of Jewish Exceptionalism and Jim Crow	25	Stephen J. Whitfield	
Wendy F. Soltz		Reading Prophetic Protest without Anti-Judaism	69
White People's Work, or What Jessica Krug Teaches Us about White Jewish Antiracism	28	Ethan Schwartz	
Naomi S. Taub		Violence Justified: Resistance among the Hasmoneans and Hong Kongers	71
Alternative Rituals as Protest	30	Dr. V	
Lindsey Jackson			
Early Rabbinic Reluctance to Protest	34		
Matthew Goldstone		<b>The Profession</b>	
The 1943 Jewish March on Washington, through the Eyes of Its Critics	36	The Invisible Meḥizah	74
Rafael Medoff		Jodi Eichler-Levine	
A Golem for Protest: Julie Weitz's <i>My Golem</i>	42	A Protest Novel That Went Unheeded	78
Melissa Melpignano		Josh Lambert	
Uprising against Butchers!	46	When Your Book Is Protested: Lessons in Communal Knowing	82
Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler		Claire Sufrin	
This Is Brazil: Jewish Protests under Democracy and Dictatorship	48	A Protest against the JCC Conception of Jewish Studies	85
Michael Rom		Benjamin Schreier	
Allyship and Holding One's Own Accountable: The New Jewish Labor Movement	54	After the Pittsburgh Shooting: A Scholar Cries for Justice	88
Susan R. Breitzer		Rachel Kranson	



# AJS Perspectives: The Magazine of the Association for Jewish Studies

Please direct correspondence to:  
Association for Jewish Studies  
15 West 16th Street  
New York, NY 10011

T: 917.606.8249  
F: 917.606.8222  
ajs@associationforjewishstudies.org

associationforjewishstudies.org

AJS Perspectives is published  
bi-annually by the Association  
for Jewish Studies.

© 2021 Association for  
Jewish Studies ISSN 1529-6423

AJS Perspectives reserves the right to  
reject advertisements or other items not  
consonant with the goals and purposes  
of the organization. Copy may be con-  
densed or rejected because of length  
or style. AJS Perspectives disclaims  
responsibility for statements made by  
advertisers and contributors.



## 1 COVER ARTIST CONTRIBUTION: SIONA BENJAMIN

Detail from *Finding Home #75 (Fereshteh)*  
"Lilith," 2005. 30 x 26 in. Gouache on wood  
panel. © 2005 Siona Benjamin. Courtesy of  
the artist.

## 27 BACK COVER ARTIST CONTRIBUTION: ARCHIE RAND

*Cain and Abel*, from *The Nineteen Diaspora*  
*Paintings*, 2002. Acrylic on canvas, 48 x 64 in.  
© 2002 Archie Rand. Courtesy of the artist.

### Editors

Chaya Halberstam  
*King's University College*

Mira Sucharov  
*Carleton University*

### Art Editor

Samantha Baskind  
*Cleveland State University*

### Roundtable Editor

Jason Schulman  
*New York University*

### Editorial Board

Samantha Baskind  
*Cleveland State University*

Zachary Braiterman  
*Syracuse University*

Ophir Münz-Manor  
*Open University of Israel*

Devin Naar  
*University of Washington*

Joshua Schreier  
*Vassar College*

Christopher Silver  
*McGill University*

Jacqueline Vayntrub  
*Yale University*

Daniela R.P. Weiner  
*Stanford University*

Melissa Weininger  
*Rice University*

Yael Zerubavel  
*Rutgers University*

### Managing Editor

Karin Kugel

### Graphic Designers

Carrie Chatterson Studio  
Amanda Morante Wolin

### President

Jeffrey Shoulson  
*University of Connecticut*

### Vice President / Membership and Outreach

Sarah Bunin Benor  
*HUC-JIR*

### Vice President / Program

Robin Judd  
*The Ohio State University*

### Vice President / Publications

Laura Leibman  
*Reed College*

### Secretary / Treasurer

Kenneth Koltun-Fromm  
*Haverford College*

### Past President

Christine Hayes  
*Yale University*

### AJS Staff

Warren Hoffman  
*Executive Director*

Michelle Katz  
*Director of Membership and  
Conference Content*

Karin Kugel  
*AJS Perspectives Managing Editor;  
Website Manager*

Amy Ronek  
*Director of Marketing and  
Communications*

Heather Turk  
*Director of Events and Operations*

Amy Weiss  
*Grants and Professional  
Development Manager*



# Distinguished Lectureship Program



## SMART, ENGAGING SPEAKERS FOR YOUR PUBLIC PROGRAMMING

Virtual and live events available—  
for live events, we'll cover up to  
**\$750** in travel expenses!

Speakers provide compelling and intellectually  
stimulating public lectures on virtually any  
Jewish topic:

Jewish-Muslim Relations

Jews & Comics

Jewish Supreme Court Justices

Holy Land Archaeology

**+300  
more!**

Schedule a speaker now: [associationforjewishstudies.org/lectures](https://associationforjewishstudies.org/lectures)

# Adventures in Jewish Studies Podcast

Entertaining. Intellectual. Engaging.



The official podcast series of the  
Association for Jewish Studies takes  
listeners on exciting journeys that  
explore a wide range of topics  
featuring the expertise and scholarship  
of AJS members.

**Catch up on the first three seasons now,  
including:**

- Rethinking Black-Jewish Relations
- The Origins of the Jews
- Why Most American Jews Are Democrats
- Are Jews White?

**LISTEN NOW**

[associationforjewishstudies.org/podcast](https://associationforjewishstudies.org/podcast)



# From the Editors

If 2020 was the year of the pandemic, it was also the year of protest. In some cases, as with Israeli protests against Prime Minister Netanyahu, or with protests against the lockdowns in certain US states, Covid-19 was a direct or precipitating factor for the frustration and unrest. Other times, in city streets across America in the wake of the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police, the issue was as old as America itself: racial injustice. People around the world protested the excesses of capitalism, the death of democracy, and climate inaction. And then, just as 2020 gave way to 2021, the US Capitol was the site of what the participants themselves might have felt was legitimate protest but what most observers saw as just the opposite: namely, unadulterated, antidemocratic insurrection.

In a Jewish Studies context, protest stretches back to the biblical prophets who fruitlessly railed against social injustice, false piety, and God. And while most public protest these days is against groups or governments, rather than against the divine, and some protest deploys violence against property or people, other protest speaks loudly by doing nothing more than being visibly Jewish in risky spaces. Protest can be meticulously premeditated or completely unintentional. It can be a lifelong vocation or a flash of energy. A protester may be driven by righteous anger, while those protested against can feel the sting of betrayal.

In this issue of *AJS Perspectives*, we explore protest from the Hasmoneans to Hong Kong, from books to Black Lives Matter, from meat prices to the *meḥizah*. A majority of the essays look at the contours of Jewish protest, or protest within the Jewish tradition. They investigate forms of

American Jewish protest: participation in the labor movement, movements for racial justice, marches on Washington, and action over Jewish ritual. Beyond the United States, other essays in this issue tackle Jewish political protest in Brazil; art, music, and sport as resistance in Argentina, Germany, and Greece; and global solidarity among MENA Jews. The authors, at times, themselves take part in these stories, writing in first person about the aftermath of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life synagogue shooting and the protests in Hong Kong. Others direct their gaze farther back into history, casting new light on biblical and rabbinic modes of protest.

In our section on the profession, two essays form an intriguing point and counterpoint, one recounting the unpleasantness and frustration of being on the receiving end of protest from close colleagues, and the other an impassioned plea for *more* unvarnished commentary within the academy. Two other essays explore unwelcome intrusions into academic spaces and the compulsion to push against them; both explore cases that call for more protest where there was little to be found.

For whatever reason, our call for papers for this issue yielded no submissions on pedagogy. We both have personal experiences, however, of the way protest emerges from and shapes our teaching that we'll share briefly here:

**Mira Sucharov:** In my Israeli-Palestinian relations courses, protest has proved a fruitful topic to teach. But protest has also manifested right in the classroom in uncomfortable ways. A few years ago, I was taken by surprise as my students pushed back against a particular type of framing that I had offered to assess the applicability of the term "apartheid" to analyze Israel. Unprepared for the intensity of the students' reaction, and reacting to the charged





Mira Sucharov & Chaya Halberstam

classroom atmosphere, I turned brittle where I should have been more agile. Much inward searching later, I revised my teaching approach, and developed a book to help myself and others tackle the most sensitive issues on the subject (*Social Justice and Israel/Palestine: Foundational and Contemporary Debates* [University of Toronto Press, 2019, coedited with Aaron J. Hahn Tapper]). All of this is recounted in my recent memoir (*Borders and Belonging* [Palgrave Macmillan, 2021]).

**Chaya Halberstam:** I had always been proud of my ability to engage my audiences, spark interesting debate, and listen attentively to student questions and comments. And yet, from the beginning of my teaching career, I noticed a student evaluation ceiling—particularly in larger classes—that I simply could not break. Alone in my office, I would read barbed comments from handfuls of students with a growing sense of shame and inadequacy. It wasn't until I moved to a unionized faculty environment and joined my faculty's feminist caucus that this shame morphed into anger and then solidarity in a province-wide protest against using these scores as a measure of teaching effectiveness for tenure and promotion. As we each spoke up and compared notes, the systemic nature of our seemingly individualized performance reviews came into view. "Women, racialized, and LGBTQ2S+ faculty, as well as faculty with disabilities, receive lower scores than their white male colleagues," a report would later summarize. And then a ruling in Toronto, as another university's faculty association would take the matter to arbitration: "[SET] averages establish nothing relevant or useful about teaching effectiveness." Armed with this collective win, I now teach with more confidence, projecting an air of authority

I thought I had lost. My evaluation scores have stayed exactly the same.

*Mira adds: With a growing awareness of these systemic problems, and after years of consultation, my own university has just this year redesigned the student-evaluation survey in the hope that the new instrument will be more fair and more revealing of actual student learning and growth.*

Along with our art editor, Samantha Baskind, we received a stunning array of artwork submissions. You'll notice the accepted submissions placed among the essays, each numbered in orange. Although some share pages with essays, orange-labeled art does not directly illustrate any essay—rather, each is a separate work on this issue's theme of Protest.

As you read the essays in this issue, we invite you to reflect on the ways protest has shaped your academic field and your professional life, as well as on the ways you, or the communities and people you study, have lodged protests against the status quo and sought to change the world.

Chaya Halberstam  
*King's University College*

Mira Sucharov  
*Carleton University*



# Essay Contributors



Makena Mezistrano



Marian Kelsey



Wendy F. Soltz



Naomi S. Taub



Lindsey Jackson



Matthew Goldstone



Rafael Medoff



Melissa Melpignano



Julia Fermento-Tzaisler



Michael Rom



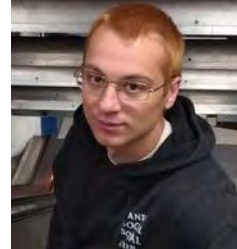
Susan R. Breitzer



Natasha Zaretsky



Aviad Moreno  
Courtesy of the Katz Center for  
Advanced Judaic Studies



Max Tretter



Stephen J. Whitfield



Ethan Schwartz



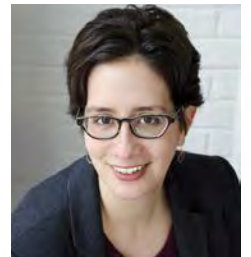
Dr. V  
Photo by Sides Imagery



Jodi Eichler-Levine



Josh Lambert



Claire Sufrin



Benjamin Schreier



Rachel Kranson

# Art Contributors



**1 SIONA BENJAMIN** is a painter from Mumbai, now living in the US. Her work reflects her background of being brought up Jewish in Hindu and Muslim India. She was awarded two Fulbright Fellowships to India and Israel.

**Film about the artist:** *Blue Like Me: The Art of Siona Benjamin*: [amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07FKRG7TJ](https://amazon.com/gp/video/detail/B07FKRG7TJ)

@sionaware [artsiona.com](http://artsiona.com)



**6 EMILY MARBACH** is an American self-taught figurative artist based in London. Her most recent exhibition *A Sky of Stars* explored the experiences of Bulgarian Jews during the Holocaust. *The Collage Haggadah* includes over seventy handmade collages exploring the themes of the festival of Passover and the Israelites' exodus from Egypt.

@collagenottinghill  
 [collagehaggadah.com](http://collagehaggadah.com)



**2 ANDI ARNOVITZ** lives and works in Jerusalem. A conceptual artist, she uses etching, digital information, printmaking processes, fabric, and thread to create print series, artist books, and large-scale installations. These pieces explore various tensions that exist within religion, gender, and politics. Andi has exhibited in Europe, Asia, and North America. Her art is in both private and public collections, universities, museums, and institutions.

@andi\_arnovitz [andiarnovitz.com](http://andiarnovitz.com)



**7 MARSHA FINELT-BROOK** studied art since 1960, modeling at a New York jewelry casting company. She studied with world-renowned artists, carving stone and casting in bronze. She creates public and private commissions for clients on both coasts. Among her celebrated exhibits include fifty portraits of activists.

[marshabrookstudio.com](http://marshabrookstudio.com)



**3 18 MARLEENE RUBENSTEIN** is a Los Angeles-based artist whose multidisciplinary work in drawing, painting, sculpture, book arts, and installation explores elements of fragility, memory, and the passage of time. Her work is characterized by being conceptual, labor intensive, tactile, and bleached of color.

@marleenerubenstein  
 [marleenerubenstein.com](http://marleenerubenstein.com)



**8 ILANA ZEFFREN** is an Israeli comics artist living in Tel Aviv. She has published comic books, strips, and stories in newspapers, magazines, and literature anthologies, and for the past seven years has been publishing a weekly cartoon in *Haaretz* newspaper.

[ilanazeffren.com](http://ilanazeffren.com)  
*Photo by Ido Peretz*



**4 LINDA BAR-ON** In Bereishit the first act of Adam and Eve on attaining Knowledge was to sew themselves aprons. We have been sewing ever since. In Linda Bar-On's work the past flows into the present, recycling both fabric and fable.

**Coming soon:** "Textales: Stitched Stories from Bible Lands."

*Photo by Michael Bar-On*



**9 BRIAN COHEN** was born and raised in London and is a graduate of the Royal College of Art, with a master's degree in Photography. He is the founder and director of The Documentary Works ([thedocumentaryworks.org](http://thedocumentaryworks.org)), organizing and managing justice-oriented collaborative projects. Brian lives in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

[briancohenphotography.com](http://briancohenphotography.com)



**5** In her studies at Bezalel in Jerusalem, **CHANA CROMER** concentrated on painting and printmaking, especially etching and large-sized sculptures in paper techniques on metal structures. Since 1988, she's been using dyeing, silk screen, and other textile techniques on fabric, alongside painting and collage and, more recently, mixed media installations.

[chana-cromer.com](http://chana-cromer.com)



**10 IRVING LEVITT**, a self-trained artist, has been drawing and painting for over 90 years. His work can be called Expressive. An active Democrat, he led the Delaware Democratic Party in the 1990s.

**Video about the artist:** [vimeo.com/479705316](https://vimeo.com/479705316)



# Art Contributors



**11 GABRIELLA BOROS** has shown her prints, paintings, and multimedia works nationally and internationally. Currently focusing on woodblock prints, Gabriella also paints, draws, and sculpts. Born in Israel, Gabriella immigrated to the US as a child.

🌐 [gabriellaboros.com](http://gabriellaboros.com)



**16 RUTH SCHREIBER** creates sculptures, paintings, video art, photography, and installation pieces and has exhibited and sold her art in Israel, Europe, and North America. *Aguna*, her sculpture in this issue, represents a woman's neck with a heavy hand-built earthenware chain repeatedly wound around it: the weighty, suffocating burden that an *aguna* carries the entire time, chained as she is to a cruel, vindictive man.

🌐 [ruthschreiber.com](http://ruthschreiber.com)



**12 TALI MARGOLIN** is a visual artist working in acrylic, oil, and mixed media. In her artwork, she presents a contemporary approach to traditional drawing methods, crossing a boundary between drawing, painting, and sculpture. She holds a BFA from the School of Visual Arts and a master's degree in Art from Lehman College.

📷 @margolintali 🌐 [talimargolin.com](http://talimargolin.com)



**17 ALI SHRAGO-SPECHLER** makes paintings, installations, and interactive events which examine the malleability of history, memory, and imagined community. Her hybrid actions explore the comedy, violence, and ubiquity of Jewish histories while creating a familiar and strange space for her audience.

📷 @alishragospechler 🌐 [alispechler.com](http://alispechler.com)



**13 LLOYD WOLF** is a veteran freelance photojournalist based in Arlington, VA, concerned with issues of community and justice for all.

📷 @wolflloyd

🌐 [lloydwolf.com](http://lloydwolf.com)  
[lloydwolfphoto.blogspot.com](http://lloydwolfphoto.blogspot.com)



**19 KEN GOLDMAN** is a contemporary Jewish artist, a graduate of the Pratt Institute and Brooklyn College, and a member of Kibbutz Shluchot in Israel. Ken's mixed media works have been shown in Israel, Europe, and the United States.

🌐 [kengoldmanart.com](http://kengoldmanart.com)



**14 RONNA GILBERT** holds a BFA from SUNY at Buffalo and an MFA from the Ohio State University. Her experience includes being a master printmaker in the House of Printmaking, Tel Aviv, Israel; professor of Sculpture and Etching at the Art Teachers Training College, Tel Aviv, Israel; managing art director at Conde Nast Magazines, NYC; and printmaker in Fort Worth, Texas.



**20 SHARON FELDSTEIN'S** paintings are reflective of her life and experiences, each layer a stage of introspection. The final composition is a result of processing these experiences. She paints mainly with acrylics using palette knives for very textural layers and adds details with ink, oil pastels, and charcoal.

📷 📺 @sharonfeldsteinart

🌐 [southernheartstudio.com](http://southernheartstudio.com)



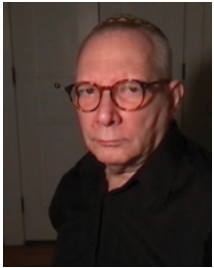
**15 PAUL MARGOLIS** is a documentary and fine art photographer, as well as a writer and lecturer. His subjects include people living on the margins of society, vanishing Americana, Jewish life in the US and overseas, historic architecture, and the vibrancy of life on the streets. While he has adapted to digital photography, he still works almost exclusively with mechanical cameras and black and white film, which he processes and prints himself.

🌐 [paulmargolis.com](http://paulmargolis.com)



**21 OR-NAH RAN'S** specialty is environmental sculpture and mosaic art. Her sculptures are located within and around the city of Jerusalem. She is a graduate of the Bezalel Art Academy and has a master's degree in Indian Culture from the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

📷 @orna.ran 🌐 [or-nah.com](http://or-nah.com)



**22 RICHARD MCBEE** is a painter of biblical subject matter and writer on Jewish art. He is a founding member of the Jewish Art Salon. His artwork and reviews can be seen at [richardmcbee.com](http://richardmcbee.com).



**25 MAXWELL BAUMAN** is editor-in-chief of *Door Is a Jar Literary Magazine*. He is the author of *The Anarchist Kosher Cookbook* (CLASH Books, 2017). His new sci-fi/fantasy adventure *The Giant Robots of Babel* is forthcoming from Aggadah Try It Books in November 2021.

[@maxwellbauman](https://twitter.com/maxwellbauman) [maxwellbauman.com](http://maxwellbauman.com)



**23 JACOB YASHA SOFFER** was born in 1979 in the Bronx, NY and was raised in Jerusalem. He completed a BFA with a specialization in animation from Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem in 2007. His first children's book *Pattho is Lost* was published by Kinneret in 2011. He resides in Austin, TX since 2015.

[@wowlookhowpretty](https://twitter.com/wowlookhowpretty)

[cargocollective.com/yashasoffer](http://cargocollective.com/yashasoffer)



**26 KINNERET NOAM** grew up in a religious home. As a child, Yom Kippur was a dramatic and ecstatic event. She created a series of seven decorated Torah ark covers illustrated around the question, "What's happening in the sky on Yom Kippur," from a changing perspective. The illustrations consist of ornaments from the Jewish tradition and are based on descriptions from the Talmud, Kabbalistic texts, the prayer cycle, and childhood memories.

[@kineretnoam1](https://twitter.com/kineretnoam1) [kineretnoam.com](http://kineretnoam.com)



**24 ROBERT FIELDS** is an artist, sculptor, and sometimes printmaker based in Chicago. His work in this issue, *Nine Hundred +, seen through a JewishEye,\** speaks to *b'tzelem elohim* (being in the image of God), *pikuach nefesh* (saving a life), and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Protest? Shaking a clenched fist towards heaven.

[robertfieldsartist.com](http://robertfieldsartist.com)

\*The term "JewishEye," is from Vanessa Ochs's "Ten Jewish Sensibilities" within Hannah Pressman's "IV. 9, Identities and Communities," in Yehuda Kurtzer and Claire E. Sufrin, eds. *The New Jewish Canon: Ideas & Debates 1980-2015* (Brookline, MA: Academic Studies Press, 2020), 370-380.



**27 ARCHIE RAND**, Presidential Professor of Art at Brooklyn College, is the subject of more than 300 solo and group shows. His work can be found in the permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Art Institute of Chicago, and Bibliothèque Nationale de France, among many others.



## SCHOEN BOOKS

*Buying & selling scholarly Judaica since 1990.  
Catalogues issued. Want lists & visitors welcome.  
We share the Connecticut River Valley with  
many colleges and also the Yiddish Book Center.*

**413-665-0066 [www.schoenbooks.com](http://www.schoenbooks.com)  
[ken@schoenbooks.com](mailto:ken@schoenbooks.com)**





# The Association for Jewish Studies is pleased to recognize the following **Institutional Members:\***

## FULL INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

Arizona State University, Center for Jewish Studies  
Boston University, Elie Wiesel Center for Jewish Studies  
Brandeis University  
College of Charleston, Yaschik/Arnold Jewish Studies Program  
Columbia University, Institute for Israel and Jewish Studies  
Cornell University, Jewish Studies Program  
Duke University, Center for Jewish Studies  
Harvard University, Center for Jewish Studies  
Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
Indiana University, Robert A. and Sandra S. Borns Jewish Studies Program  
The Jewish Theological Seminary, The Gershon Kekst Graduate School  
Johns Hopkins University, Leonard and Helen R. Stulman Jewish Studies Program  
Lehigh University, Philip and Muriel Berman Center for Jewish Studies  
McGill University, Department of Jewish Studies  
Michigan State University, Jewish Studies Program  
New York University, Skirball Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies  
Northwestern University, Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies  
The Ohio State University, Melton Center for Jewish Studies  
Rutgers University, Department of Jewish Studies and The Allen and Joan Bildner Center for the Study of Jewish Life  
Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership

Stanford University, Taube Center for Jewish Studies  
Touro College, Graduate School of Jewish Studies  
University of California, Berkeley, Center for Jewish Studies  
University of California, Davis, Jewish Studies Program  
University of California, Los Angeles, Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies  
University of California San Diego, Jewish Studies Program  
University of Connecticut, Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life  
University of Florida, Center for Jewish Studies  
University of Michigan, Jean & Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Carolina Center for Jewish Studies  
University of Texas at Austin, Schusterman Center for Jewish Studies  
University of Toronto, Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies  
University of Virginia, Jewish Studies Program  
University of Washington, Stroum Center for Jewish Studies  
Vanderbilt University, Jewish Studies Program  
Yale University, Program in Judaic Studies  
York University, Israel and Golda Koschitzky Centre for Jewish Studies

## ASSOCIATE INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

Academy for Jewish Religion  
American University, Center for Israel Studies and Jewish Studies Program

Appalachian State University, The Center for Judaic, Holocaust, and Peace Studies  
Barnard College, Program in Jewish Studies  
Blavatnik Archive Foundation  
Brown University, Program in Judaic Studies  
California State University, Fresno, Jewish Studies Program  
Chapman University, The Rodgers Center for Holocaust Education  
Colby College, Center for Small Town Jewish Life and Jewish Studies Program  
Fordham University, Jewish Studies  
The College of Idaho, Judaic Studies\*\*  
The Fritz Ascher Society for Persecuted, Ostracized and Banned Art\*\*  
The George Washington University, Judaic Studies Program  
Hebrew College  
Loyola Marymount University, Jewish Studies Program  
Northeastern University, Jewish Studies Program  
Old Dominion University, Institute for Jewish Studies & Interfaith Understanding  
Portland State University, Harold Schnitzer Family Program in Judaic Studies  
Princeton University, Program in Judaic Studies, Ronald O. Perelman Institute for Judaic Studies  
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College  
Rice University, Program in Jewish Studies  
Stetson University, Jewish Studies Program  
Temple University, Feinstein Center for American Jewish History  
Towson University, Baltimore Hebrew Institute

University of Arizona, the Arizona Center for Judaic Studies

University of Cincinnati, Department of Judaic Studies

University of Colorado, Boulder, Program in Jewish Studies

University of Denver, Center for Judaic Studies

University of Massachusetts-Amherst, Judaic and Near Eastern Studies Department

University of Minnesota, Center for Jewish Studies

University of Oklahoma, Schusterman Center for Judaic and Israeli Studies

University of Pennsylvania, Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies and the Jewish Studies Program

University of Pittsburgh, Jewish Studies Program

University of Wisconsin - Madison, George L. Mosse/Laurence A. Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies

University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, the Sam and Helen Stahl Center for Jewish Studies

Washington University in St. Louis, Department of Jewish, Islamic, and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures

Wyner Family Jewish Heritage Center at New England Heritage Genealogical Society\*\*

Yiddish Book Center

#### AFFILIATE INSTITUTIONAL MEMBERS

Association of Jewish Libraries

Association for Israel Studies

Latin American Jewish Studies Association

World Union of Jewish Studies

More information about AJS Institutional Membership, including a list of benefits, can be found at <http://bit.ly/ajs-im>

\* As of April 26, 2021

\*\* We are pleased to recognize our new 2021 members!

2021 Institutional Membership is now open for enrollment! Go to <http://bit.ly/ajs-im> to get started.

For questions or help enrolling your institution, please contact **(917) 606-8249** or [mkatz@associationforjewishstudies.org](mailto:mkatz@associationforjewishstudies.org)

# AJS 53RD ANNUAL CONFERENCE

December 19-21, 2021 | Chicago, Illinois

## Join the AJS for more than 190 sessions devoted to the latest research in Jewish Studies.

- Major exhibit of leading publishers of Jewish Studies scholarship
- Evening film screenings and performances
- Plenary Lecture on Sunday, December 19
- Evening receptions sponsored by Jewish Studies programs and research institutions
- Jewish Studies and Digital Humanities workshop (featuring the latest digital research projects and teaching tools)
- Professional development sessions, mentoring opportunities, and more!

**Special reduced room rates:** The AJS is pleased to announce that the Sheraton Grand Chicago, located at 301 East North Water Street, Chicago, IL 60611, US, has extended the AJS a rate of \$134 per room, single and double occupancy, not including taxes, with a limited number of rooms for students at \$114.

**For best rates** register before November 13, 2021. See the AJS website for registration information.

**For information on exhibiting,** advertising, or sponsoring at the 53rd Annual Conference, please contact Heather Turk, Director of Events and Operations, at [advertise@associationforjewishstudies.org](mailto:advertise@associationforjewishstudies.org).



# Thank you to our donors

The AJS expresses its gratitude to the following individuals and institutions for their generous support of the organization and its programs through the AJS Annual Fund January 1, 2020 – March 18, 2021. Donors to the fund are updated monthly at [www.associationforjewishstudies.org](http://www.associationforjewishstudies.org)

Jeffrey Abt  
Howard L. Apothaker  
Alan Appelbaum  
Ari Ariel  
Joëlle Bahloul  
Zachary M. Baker  
David A. Barish  
David and Rachel Biale  
Rene Bloch  
Matthew Boxer  
Francesca Bregoli  
Rachel Feldhay Brenner  
Flora Cassen  
Aryeh Cohen  
Judith R. Cohen  
Julia Phillips Cohen  
Rachel Cohen  
Alon Confino  
Alanna Cooper and Moshe Shapiro  
Andrea Dara Cooper  
Jessica Cooperman and  
Hartley Lachter  
Lila Corwin Berman  
Lara and Dean Curtis  
Arnold Dashefsky  
Joseph M. Davis  
Jesús de Prado Plumed  
Rachel Deblinger  
Erez DeGolan  
Fabio DeLima and Zenilde DeLima  
Nathaniel Deutsch  
Hasia and Steve Diner  
Marc and Marci Dollinger  
Jodi Eichler-Levine  
David Ellenson  
Todd and Judith Endelman  
Samuel Sami Everett  
Noah Fabricant  
Harriet A. Feinberg  
Adam and Naomi Ferziger  
Gabriel Natan Finder  
Talya Fishman  
David M. Freidenreich  
Joshua J. Furman  
Gregg E. Gardner  
Stephen Garfinkel  
Judith Gerson  
Leonard S. Gold  
Dara Ellen Goldman and Itai Seggev  
David N. Gottlieb  
Arthur Green  
Judith S. Greenblatt  
David Greenstein  
Christine Hayes and  
Michael Della Rocca

Isabelle S. Headrick  
Bernice A. Heilbrunn  
Lynne E. Heller  
Ellen Hertzmark  
Carolyn Starman Hessel  
Warren Hoffman  
Alfred L. Ivry  
Alex P. Jassen  
Jessica and Daniel Kirzane  
George and Carol Jochnowitz  
Lisa Fishbayn Joffe  
Willa M. Johnson  
Kathryn Johnston  
Jonathan Gribetz and  
Sarit Kattan Gribetz  
Norma and Howard Joseph  
Robin E. Judd  
David Zvi and Yael Kalman  
Ethan Katz  
Martin Kavka  
Hillel J. Kievul  
Melissa Klapper and Noah Gradofsky  
Eric Chaim Kline  
Shira M. Kohn  
Ruth Langer and Jonathan Sarna  
Phyllis and Jacob Lassner  
Lisa Moses Leff  
Lori Hope Lefkowitz  
Marjorie Lehman  
Laura Leibman  
Nancy Levene  
Jon A. Levisohn  
Laura S. Levitt  
Julia R. Lieberman  
Deborah Lipstadt  
Vivian Liska  
Lital Levy and Kenneth Reisman  
Judith and Daniel Liwerant  
James Loeffler  
Steven M. Lowenstein  
Howard N. Lupovitch  
Timothy Martin Lutz  
Marc Mandel  
Susan Marks and Bruce Black  
Maud Mandel and Steven Simon  
Frank Mecklenburg and  
Atina Grossmann  
Michael A. Meyer  
Deborah Dash Moore  
Aviad Moreno  
Jody Myers  
Pamela S. Nadell  
Rachel Rafael Neis  
Ronnie Olesker

Ruth Olmsted  
Noam and Rachel Pianko  
William Plevan  
Riv-Ellen Prell  
Shari Rabin  
Howard Richler  
Yosef Dov Robinson  
Meri-Jane Rochelson  
Cara Rock-Singer  
Sara Ronis  
E.M. Rose  
Daniel Rosenberg  
Jesse Rosenberg  
Moshe and Lynne Rosman  
Roberta Sands and Samuel Klausner  
Richard Sarason and Anne Arenstein  
Allison Hope Schachter  
Carsten Schapkow  
Lawrence H. Schiffman  
Robert S. Schine  
Immanuel Clemens Schmidt  
Ismar Schorsch  
Allison Elizabeth Schottenstein  
Daniel B. Schwartz  
Shuly Schwartz and Eric Fishman  
Shai Secunda  
Kenneth R. Seeskin  
Sanford Seltzer  
Susan Shapiro  
Adam B. Shear  
Sam Berrin Shonkoff  
Jeffrey Shoulson  
Maeera Shreiber  
Lisa Silverman  
Nancy Sinkoff  
Stanley and Susan Sokoloff  
Ori Soltes

Haim Sperber  
Nanette Stahl  
Suzanne Last Stone  
Max Strassfeld  
Mira Sucharov  
Claire Sufrin  
Lance J. Sussman  
Michael D. Swartz  
Paola Tartakoff  
Joshua Teplitsky  
Magda Teter  
Nick Underwood and Annabel Kaplan  
Kerry Wallach  
Chaim I. Waxman  
Doug Weber  
Daniela R.P. Weiner  
Herbert and Judy Weisberg  
Chava Weissler  
Jenna Weissman Joselit  
Beth S. Wenger  
Avishalom Westreich  
Matthew Williams  
Aryeh J. Wineman  
Sebastian Wogenstein  
David J. Wolpe  
Michal Ben Ya'akov  
Steven Zipperstein  
Gary P. Zola

## AJS Legacy Society Members

Zachary M. Baker  
Judith R. Baskin  
Shaul and Pam Kelner  
Michael Meyer  
Jonathan Sarna and Ruth Langer  
Magda Teter

## JOIN THE AJS LEGACY SOCIETY

The AJS invites members to join its new AJS Legacy Society, a planned-giving initiative that enables supporters to include a gift to the AJS in their estate plans. For more information on the society and how to join, please visit [www.associationforjewishstudies.org/plannedgiving](http://www.associationforjewishstudies.org/plannedgiving).

Please support the AJS, your intellectual home.

Your contributions sustain a rich array of AJS programs, resources, and publications and help keep membership dues and conference fees affordable. For further information, please go to [www.associationforjewishstudies.org](http://www.associationforjewishstudies.org) or contact Warren Hoffman at [whoffman@associationforjewishstudies.org](mailto:whoffman@associationforjewishstudies.org) or (212) 294-8301 ext. 6249.

# AJS Dissertation Completion Fellowships

The Association for Jewish Studies congratulates recipients of the 2021-2022 AJS Dissertation Completion Fellowship:

## Fellowship Recipients

### ANNA BAND

University of Chicago, Department of History

"At Home in My Room: Jewish Spaces of Longing and Belonging in World War I through Weimar Berlin"

### BENNY BAR-LAVI

University of Chicago, Department of History

"Figures of Godless Immanence: Judaism and Islam in the Christian Political Discourses of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Europe"

### AMANDA SIEGEL

University of California, Berkeley,  
Department of Comparative Literature

"Jewish-Argentine Literature: Its Origins, Its Others, and Its 'Afterlives'"

### HANNAH ZAVES-GREENE

New York University,  
Department of Hebrew and Judaic Studies

"Able to Be American: American Jews and the Public Charge Provision in United States Immigration Policy, 1891-1934"

## Honorary Fellows

### DANIELLA FARAH

Stanford University, Department of History

"Forming Iranian Jewish Identities: Education, National Belonging, the Jewish Press, and Integration, 1945-1981"

### NICOLE FREEMAN

The Ohio State University, Department of History

"Our Children Are Our Future: Child Care, Education, and Rebuilding Jewish Life in Poland after the Holocaust, 1944-1950"

## Finalists

### SAMUEL CATLIN

University of Chicago, Department of  
Comparative Literature and the Divinity School

"The Rest is Literature: Midrash, Secularism, and the Institution of 'Theory'"

### SAMUEL SHUMAN

University of Michigan, Departments of  
Anthropology and Judaic Studies

"Cutting Out the Middleman: Displacement and Distrust in the Global Diamond Industry"

### SOPHIA SOBKO

University of California, Berkeley,  
Graduate School of Education

"Weaponized as White: The Contradictions of White, Soviet Jewish Assimilation in the United States"

### DIKLA YOGEV

University of Toronto, Centre for Criminology and  
Sociological Studies and Anne Tanenbaum Centre for  
Jewish Studies

"Police Legitimacy among the Haredim in Israel"





**3 ART CONTRIBUTOR: MARLEENE RUBENSTEIN**

*Sackcloth and Ashes*, 2017. Paper, thread, photocopy, ink, ash, charcoal, coffee, dirt, bandages. 42 x 30 in. Shown in the 2017 Jerusalem Biennale as part of a group presentation from JAI (Jewish Artists Initiative) on Human Rights. © 2017 Marleene Rubenstein. Courtesy of the artist.

# The Jewish Hercules: How Sports Created Space for Hellenic Judaism in Salonica

Makena Mezistrano

A 1950s photograph captures the eleven men of Salonica's Iraklis (or Hercules) soccer team, one of the oldest athletic teams in Greece. The players stand in front of a packed crowd at the Pan-Thessalonikan Athletic Club of Constantinopolitans, or PAOK, stadium. Even though the photo isn't in color, I know their uniforms are a patriotic blue and white, inspired by the Greek flag. A handwritten roster on the photo's verso lists the teammates' names: Paraskos, Seravithis, Karpozilos. But the fourth name on the roster—the player standing fourth from the left in the photo—stands out. His name is Jack Abravanel: Salonican-born Jew, Bergen-Belsen survivor, and my grandfather—or, in Greek and Ladino, my Papu. In a city transformed by Nazi persecution and a willful amnesia on the part of the Greek government, Jack engaged in a unique form of Jewish protest in Salonica.

Compared to the more overt protests staged by Salonican Jews in the decades before and after the Holocaust, Jack's was more subtle. As the sole Jewish player on Iraklis, he challenged the boundaries that the Greek state had attempted to draw between Hellenic and Jewish identity after the city became part of the new Greek state in 1912. For the Jewish and non-Jewish spectators who watched him play, Jack became an important symbol of Hellenic Judaism—a dual identity embodied by other Jewish athletes who came before him.

Jack and other Jewish athletes were certainly not the first to negotiate a Hellenic Jewish identity in Salonica, but athletic competitions emerged as an exceptional space for Jews to embody this duality, because the sports arena was noticeably more tolerant than other public spaces in Salonica. By contrast, the commercial port, historically closed on Shabbat to accommodate the majority of Jewish workers, was also closed on Sundays in 1924 to favor the Orthodox Christian day of worship. The only way for Jews to avoid losing two days of income was to

**Jews in Salonica often complicated the monolithic identity that the state was attempting to craft due to their multilingualism, public support of the former Ottoman rule, and for some, Zionism.**

work on Saturday. Similarly, in 1923, for the first time, Jews were forced to vote in a separate electoral college. The costly sacrifice required to vote within the newly defined majority would have been conversion to Orthodox Christianity. To play on Greek sports teams did not generally require these major abandonments of Jewish identity; even if Jewish players abstained from playing on Shabbat, it would not have constituted a major financial loss, and was therefore a much different calculus. Thus, the sports arena became a unique space in which Jews could most successfully embody Hellenic Judaism before an audience of Jewish and non-Jewish spectators alike.

Changes to the international marketplace and the local government were part of the Greek state's project to establish a nationalist history and identity, both of which erased the former "backward" Ottoman administration. Jews in Salonica often complicated the monolithic identity that the state was attempting to craft due to their multilingualism, public support of the former Ottoman rule, and for some, Zionism. All of these orientations posed a threat to this nationalist definition of Greekness, and were viewed as anti-Greek. But athletic competitions were a place where this threat was momentarily suspended. With this opening, many Jewish athletes thrived on Greek teams and were publicly celebrated. One particular moment of Jewish athletic excellence occurred at Greece's first international soccer match, held on a Sunday in Athens in 1929, when Salonican-born Alberto Nahmias scored the first goal for Greece against Italy. Nahmias and other Jewish athletes thus simultane-





*Iraklis (Hercules) team photo taken at Salonica's PAOK stadium, c. 1950. Author's grandfather, Jack Abravanel, fourth from left. PAOK stadium had previously been the cemetery for the local dönme community, Jewish followers of the false messiah Sabbatai Zvi, who converted to Islam en masse in the seventeenth century. The dönme (also known as ma'aminim, or "believers") and Salonica's general Muslim population were forced out during a 1923 population exchange with Asia Minor.*

ously became Greek heroes for non-Jews and also powerful representatives for the Jewish community—and symbols of Hellenic Judaism to all. This dual identity was itself a protest, intentional or otherwise. If the stadium was a microcosm of Greece's image on the world stage, a Jewish athlete's public achievement showed that a successful Greek state did not necessitate the erasure and exclusion of Salonica's Jews in the name of Greek nationalism.

Seven years after Nahmias's goal, Hellenic Judaism faced its greatest threat. As the Greek state continued to craft its nationalist past, the enduring Jewish presence in Salonica became a contentious issue. From 1917 and through the 1930s, government and university representatives, and members of the Orthodox Christian population, advocated expanding the Aristotle University campus over Salonica's Jewish cemetery. These were the largest Jewish burial grounds in all of Europe, and the longest-standing evidence of a Jewish presence in

Salonica. Protest against this proposal was overt and multifaceted, but one strategy deployed by Jewish community leaders was to position the lengthy epigraphs on the tombstones, which often included the deceased's accomplishments, as a record of the region at large. Thus, the cemetery was not only vital in documenting a Jewish past, but also a Greek past.<sup>1</sup> Amid the cemetery crisis, Jewish athletes from Salonica were still becoming Greek heroes, lauded by the Orthodox Christian spectators who watched them play. Each protest—defending the cemetery, and Jewish athletic achievement—demonstrated the indispensability of Salonican Jews within Greek culture.

Being a Jewish athlete in Salonica carried different implications after the Holocaust, as the burden of Jewish representation fell squarely on individuals. Survivors who returned to the city had to reconstruct their identities without the majority of Salonica's Jewish institutions, such as the cemetery, which was demolished in 1942. Survivors also had to negotiate the identities imposed upon

them: their trauma and subsequent demands for official compensation earned them the Greek classification of *omiros*, or hostages—a bureaucratic description of their victimhood, and an identity marker that only accentuated their Otherness in Greek Salonica. In the eyes of much of the Orthodox Christian public, Jews were a nuisance, battling to reclaim property that many Orthodox Christians had come to view as their own. Now the price of “becoming Greek” did not necessitate abandoning Shabbat observance or converting, but rather forgetting past injustices in order to quietly reenter society—which, for many survivors, would have been an unimaginable insult to the memory of their deceased. Without most of the city’s Jewish institutions left to fortify a physical representation of Hellenic Judaism, that burden now fell to a select few.

When Jack stepped onto the field at PAOK stadium in 1950, he entered into that exceptional space of which many Salonican Jewish athletes before him had taken part. Jack’s Jewish contemporaries who watched him play saw that vision of Hellenic Judaism reemerging, and the protest against their community’s erasure by the Greek state was reinvigorated once again.

**Now the price of “becoming Greek” did not necessitate abandoning Shabbat observance or converting, but rather forgetting past injustices in order to quietly reenter society...**

Looking at the photo of my Papu standing with Iraklis and the crowd in the background, I hear the memories of a young Jewish spectator, another survivor who would become Jack’s brother-in-law, who proudly listened to a crowd of Orthodox Christians cheer for one player as he ran toward the goal: “Abravanel, Abravanel.” As they applauded his success, Jack demanded that his predominantly non-Jewish audience publicly acknowledge that their Greek hero was a Jew.

---

**MAKENA MEZISTRANO** is the assistant director of the *Sephardic Studies Program at the University of Washington in Seattle*. She holds a BA in English Literature and an MA in Biblical and Talmudic Studies, both from Yeshiva University. Her maternal grandparents are Holocaust survivors from Salonica.

---

i See Devin E. Naar, *Jewish Salonica: Between the Ottoman Empire and Modern Greece* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

## Prophetic Protest in the Hebrew Bible

Marian Kelsey

The Hebrew Bible contains many examples of protest against God. Such protest was crucial to the role of a prophet. It is normally understood as intercession, in which the prophet pleads for God’s leniency regarding human transgression. Yet the word “intercession” obscures the fact that prophets do criticize God, however cautiously they phrase it. Sometimes God allows the criticism, and changes his plans accordingly, and sometimes the criticism is rejected. The protest itself is, however, expected, even demanded, by God. In the book of Ezekiel, God complains that “I sought for anyone among them who would repair the wall and stand in the breach before me on behalf of the land, so that I would

**A well-known example of prophetic protest is Abraham negotiating with God in an attempt to spare Sodom and Gomorrah.**

not destroy it; but I found no one” (Ezek 22:30). God demands that we exercise moral judgement, even toward God—although, needless to say, he will not always accept our rulings.

A well-known example of prophetic protest is Abraham negotiating with God in an attempt to spare Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18). God tells Abraham that he intends



**God determines to destroy each city,  
and the cities' contrasting responses  
result in contrasting fates.**

to destroy the wicked city Sodom. Abraham asks God whether he would destroy the whole city if fifty righteous people could be found in it. Hearing that the whole city would be spared for that number, Abraham gradually negotiates God down to an assurance that for only ten righteous people, the city would be spared. Unfortunately, Abraham's stopping point was a little optimistic. Future events demonstrate that not even ten righteous inhabitants can be found, and the city is destroyed. Abraham's protest to God, however, goes without challenge: "Far be it from you to do such a thing, to slay the righteous with the wicked ... Far be that from you!" Abraham's language is suitably self-effacing, but his point is blunt: God's initial plan to destroy the city without considering the righteous was unjust, and unworthy of God.

A rather different approach is taken by Jonah. He travels to Nineveh at God's command, and proclaims that in forty days the wicked city will be overthrown. The inhabitants have other ideas, and change God's mind with a great display of penitence and fasting, even among their livestock. Jonah, however, is greatly displeased and remonstrates with God for relenting from punishment. Rather than exasperation, God's reaction to Jonah's protest seems almost one of amusement. God toys with a recalcitrant Jonah, sending a miraculous bush and worm, to tease out the reasons for Jonah's anger.

The stories of Sodom and Nineveh are interconnected. Both concern wicked gentile cities. God determines to destroy each city, and the cities' contrasting responses result in contrasting fates. Both prophets protest, though on different grounds. Abraham attempts to avert Sodom's overthrow, whereas Jonah is angry that Nineveh was spared. Abraham asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do what is just?" while Jonah complains "Is not this what I said while I was still in my own country? ... For I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful." And each protest apparently fails. Jonah, sitting outside the city, sees Nineveh still standing. Abraham, early the next morning, looks down on Sodom's smoking remains.

Yet the "failure" of the prophetic protests is not all that it seems. Abraham, asking for justice, in fact desires mercy. Jonah, describing God's mercy, actually wants justice. Matching the obliqueness of their words, each gets

exactly what his lips speak, though not what his heart wishes. God agreed to each of Abraham's propositions, so was just by the definition Abraham presented—and in fact went further, destroying Sodom when "all the people to the last man" proved wicked. Similarly, despite Jonah's protest against God's relenting nature, later in history, Nineveh was utterly destroyed. God is more just than Abraham dared expect, and less merciful than Jonah feared.

Another protest which is prophetic, if not from a prophet, is found in the book of Job. In her only recorded words, Job's wife exclaims, "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die." Though Job's wife is often viewed negatively, her insight cuts to the heart of Job's experience. At the beginning of the book, God asserted Job's integrity, while the satan contended that Job would curse God, if only he suffered enough. Job having lost family, wealth, and health, God is so far winning, but Job seems unaware of the stakes in this game. Job's wife correctly identifies both the issue at hand and the current state of affairs. Job, thus far, has persisted in his integrity, as God had predicted and Job's wife affirms. In urging Job to curse God, Job's wife presents to him the very test that God had set. This is in marked contrast to Job and his friends, all of whom miss the point: Job is at a loss to understand God's actions and considers his treatment unjust and unworthy of God. Job's friends insist that he must have sinned, and try to prove God just by denigrating Job.

The insight of Job's wife is implicitly acknowledged by God in the final scenes of the book. Here, God confirms Job's integrity. God also rebukes both Job and his friends. As with Abraham and Jonah, their views of God's justice fall short. There is no condemnation of Job's wife. Abraham and Jonah, Job and his friends, all try to fit God's actions to human conceptions of what is appropriate for the nature of God, and protest when God's actions fall short of those conceptions. Their protests are tolerated, but the stories reveal the shortcomings of their conceptions of God. Job's wife, meanwhile, in calling for a curse, is the one character who seemingly has little patience with human notions of God's justice, and does not expect God to abide by them. Abraham and Jonah



get precisely that of which they speak, though their protest fails in what they mean to accomplish. By contrast, the protesting speech of Job's wife is not heeded; and yet, in refusing to expect God to act according to human notions of God's justice, she is the only character in the book who does not earn God's rebuke.

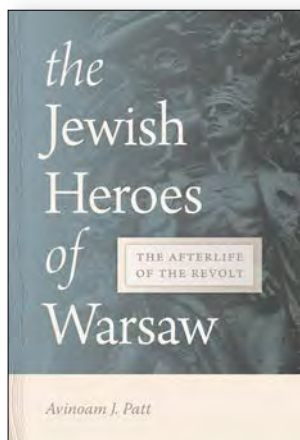
**MARIAN KELSEY** is a visiting scholar at the University of St. Andrews. She is currently researching the literary role of foreign cities in the Hebrew Bible and writing a chapter on *Jonah and Ruth* for *The Cambridge Companion to Biblical Narrative*.



4 ART CONTRIBUTOR: LINDA BAR-ON

*The Female Leviathan*, 2014. Quilt. 43.3 x 52 in. © 2014 Linda Bar-On. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Yoram Reshef.



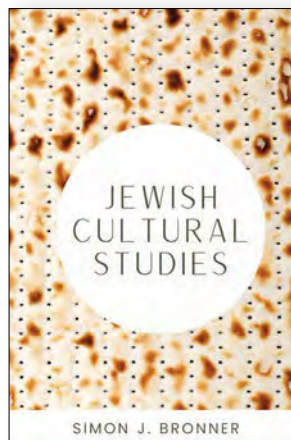


**THE JEWISH HEROES OF WARSAW**

**The Afterlife of the Revolt**  
Avinoam J. Patt  
ISBN 978-0-8143-4835-2 paperback  
hardcover and ebook available

"This is the best account of one of the major pillars of Jewish collective memory of the Holocaust, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising of 1943. Patt offers a superb analysis of a fraught and complex story: how the uprising was interpreted in a postwar Jewish world that struggled to recover from a national catastrophe."

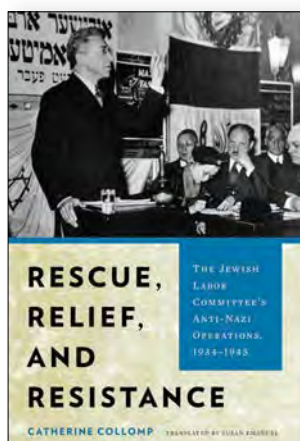
—Samuel D. Kassow



**JEWISH CULTURAL STUDIES**

Simon J. Bronner  
ISBN 978-0-8143-3875-9 paperback  
hardcover and ebook available  
*Raphael Patai Series in  
Jewish Folklore and Anthropology*

"Bronner caps a lifetime of research about Jewish life and lore with an original, provocative cultural perspective that changes the way people think about what Jews do, say, and feel."—Haya Bar-Itzhak



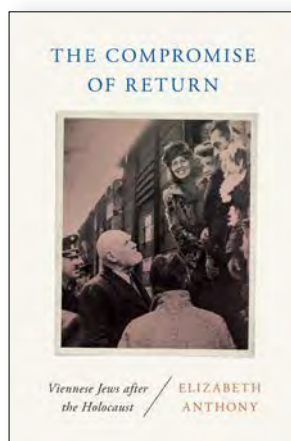
**RESCUE, RELIEF, AND RESISTANCE**

**The Jewish Labor Committee's Anti-Nazi Operations, 1934-1945**  
Catherine Collomp

Translated by Susan Emanuel  
ISBN 978-0-8143-4620-4 paperback  
hardcover and ebook available

"Impressive in every respect, [this book] reveals the efforts of many unsung heroes, and should be regarded as an essential Holocaust source."

—Robert D. Parmet

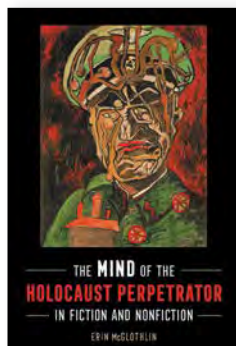


**THE COMPROMISE OF RETURN**

**Viennese Jews after the Holocaust**

Elizabeth Anthony  
ISBN 978-0-8143-4838-3 paperback  
Open Access ebook available

"Deeply researched and beautifully written, this book tells the poignant story of Jewish survivors' return to Vienna, really for the first time. Brimming with insights, it gives voice to the returnees; it is they who stand at the core of this history." —Dirk Rupnow

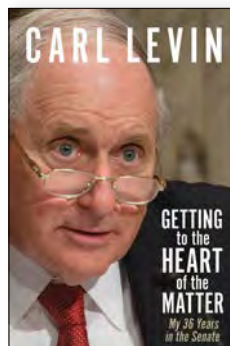


**THE MIND OF THE HOLOCAUST PERPETRATOR IN FICTION AND NONFICTION**

Erin McGlothlin  
ISBN 978-0-8143-4834-5 paperback  
hardcover and ebook available

"McGlothlin offers sophisticated, nuanced, and cogent interventions into scholarly conversations about (a) how to come to terms with the Holocaust; (b) narrative ethics, empathy, identification, and mind-reading; and (c) the relations between fiction and nonfiction."

—James Phelan



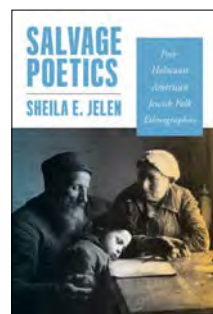
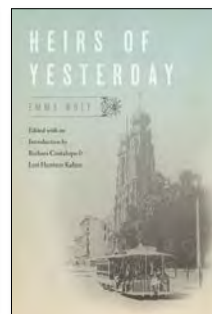
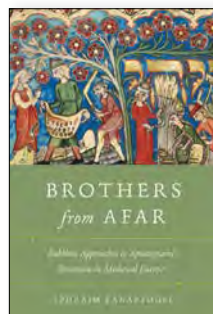
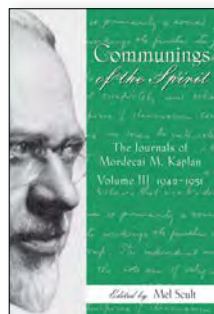
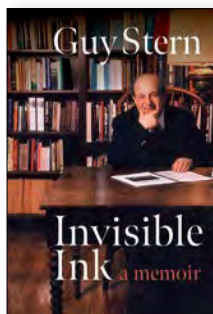
**GETTING TO THE HEART OF THE MATTER**

**My 36 Years in the Senate**

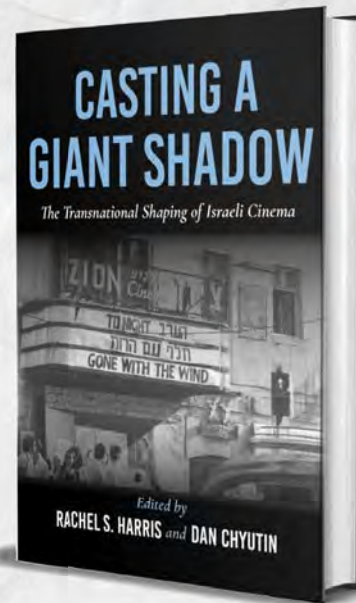
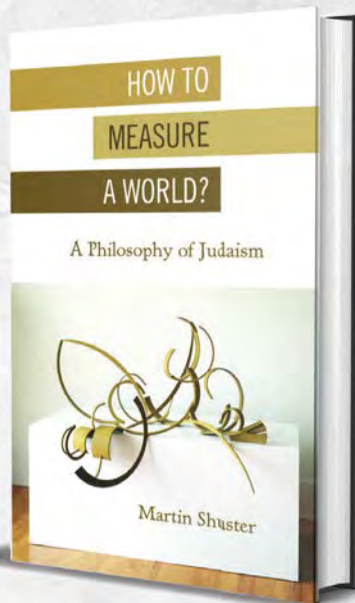
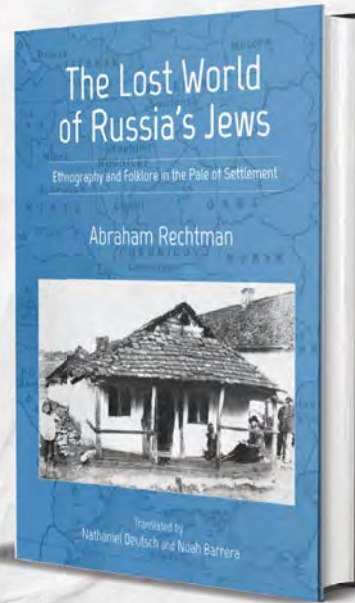
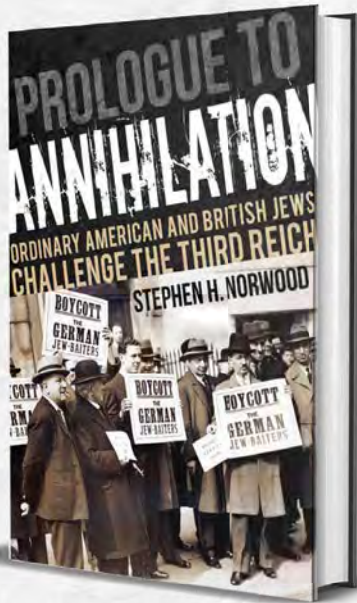
Carl Levin  
ISBN 978-0-8143-4839-0 hardcover  
ebook available

"This memoir reminds us there are patriots like Carl Levin who define 'honesty, integrity, and civility.' In a lifetime of dedicated service, he made government more accountable, the nation more secure, and fought for opportunity for all. He is an American hero."

—U.S. Senator Jack Reed



# New From Indiana University Press



INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS  
iupress.org

Use code "IUPress30" at checkout for a 30% discount





**5 ART CONTRIBUTOR: CHANA CROMER**

We look into the abyss, eyes open. It is a mass of error, waste, missed opportunity. Below is a void made of our mistakes, our losses, our negligence, our greed, our forgetfulness. *Ode to the Fallen Workmen*, 2019. Mixed media installation. 125 x 86.6 x 19.7 in. © 2019 Chana Cromer. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by Adam Cromer.

# A Color-Blind Protest of Jewish Exceptionalism and Jim Crow

Wendy F. Soltz

Before Ibram Kendi's 2019 book, *How to Be an Antiracist*, we were often told to be color-blind with regard to race. But ignoring race, or rather assuming that everyone has the same privileges, denies identity and ends up perpetuating racism. By being an antiracist one acknowledges that racial discrimination is a universal problem and everyone must play a role to stop it within their own lives.

Almost seventy-five years before Kendi's book, Allard Kenneth Lowenstein enrolled at the University of North Carolina (UNC) at Chapel Hill to do just that: put an end to Jim Crow racism by protesting Jewish exceptionalism in his own life. After college, Lowenstein became a Democratic member of the US House of Representatives and was murdered in 1980, but during his college years he discovered he was part of a dormitory segregation process. It turned out that his Jewishness, a part of his identity that he wanted to shed, was a determining factor in where he slept every night. In Lowenstein's mind, this was similar to the segregation of Jews in Europe into ghettos and concentration camps as well as the segregation of Jews in a new nation-state. Furthermore, he linked this segregation of Jews to Jim Crow segregation in the South. But were they actually connected in the minds of others? If one fought against the segregation of white-skinned Jews, did that protest affect the segregation of black-skinned Southerners?

Lowenstein had always had an identity crisis. His close childhood friends stated that "the whole thing about being a Jew" caused Lowenstein a "powerful sense of inferiority." His closeted homosexuality, coupled with the stifling nature of the surrounding Jewish community, prompted Lowenstein to head South after graduating high school.

While in Chapel Hill, Lowenstein attended the Presbyterian church and the Catholic Student Center and sought out non-Jewish friendships. He avoided dating Jews and

**Lowenstein was positive that the university was not following the policy and was actively segregating Jews.**

wrote term papers that supported intermarriage. Lowenstein also changed the pronunciation of his name to *Lowenstine* because it sounded less Jewish. Later, in oral histories, one fellow student recalled that Lowenstein "wanted to be accepted into WASP circles," in order "to be a regular fellow." Another classmate recalled, "This Jewish boy from New York knew more Southern Baptist hymns than the choir director at a tent revival." Due to the whiteness of his skin, Lowenstein was able to engage in this transformation more or less successfully.

Lowenstein's conflict with his Jewish identity led him in a fight to desegregate the dormitories at UNC. As a freshman in 1945, Lowenstein discovered that all students with Jewish-sounding names, including himself, were paired with each other in dormitory rooms. But according to university policy, rooms were to be assigned in the order in which applications were received. The policy had an additional stipulation: a student could choose his or her own roommate or request a new roommate—not by specific name, but by *type* of "what he [or she] wants as well as what he [or she] does not want." A 1942 poll surveyed American high school students about their last choice for a college roommate. Blacks and Jews were at the top of the list with Catholics and Chinese tied for distant third. Therefore, it would have been common for UNC students to write "Not Jewish" on their housing applications. The stipulation in the policy also allowed Jewish students to choose a Jewish roommate, and some likely did.

But would *all* Jewish students make this choice? Lowenstein was positive that the university was not following the policy and was actively segregating Jews. It was quite



**Maintaining separate dormitories for Jews was simply a microcosm of the ghettoization of Jews and the creation of a separate nation-state for Jews.**

the Zionist concept of Jewish 'differentness' is wrong ... the whole fight is one and should be won, with a goal of One Society in One world." In his mind, fighting to desegregate the UNC dormitories and speaking out against Zionism was bucking Jim Crow in the South.

While it seems that Lowenstein's protest helped to stop top-down segregation of Jewish students, UNC still segregated Black students upon arrival. In 1951, the law school admitted two Black students, Kenneth Lee and Harvey Beech, and administration assigned them rooms in segregated dormitories. Three years later, when asked to comment on why more Black students continued to be isolated, the UNC president at the time, Gordon Gray, responded, "I just don't remember. I doubt that the Board of Trustees made the decision [to segregate them]."

Despite this claim, a UNC housing officer insisted that he had received instructions to reserve empty rooms for incoming Black students in a specific dormitory, even though there was a waiting list of white students for dormitory accommodations. It is unclear exactly when this segregation ceased but the *Daily Tar Heel*, UNC's student-run newspaper, reported it continued well into the 1980s.

While at first glance, Lowenstein's actions appear to be antiracist, he unfortunately remained color-blind. This color-blindness likely prevented his protest for Jewish students from making an impact on the lives of Black students years later. The UNC administration did not connect Jewish segregation to Jim Crow in the same way he did; many would still agree today. White and Black divisions are such an ingrained custom in the United States to this day that a victory for Jews, with white-skin privileges, often does not result in a similar win for Blacks.

---

**WENDY F. SOLTZ** is an assistant professor of History and director of the Public History Program at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.



**6 ART CONTRIBUTOR: EMILY MARBACH**

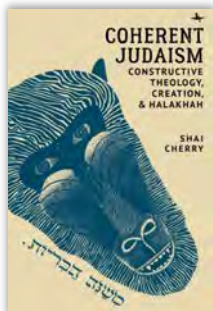
*Let My People Go*, 2020. Mixed media collage on paper. 16.5 x 11.5 in.  
© 2020 Emily Marbach. Courtesy of the artist.

easy for administration to know who among the students was Jewish (roughly 6 percent of the student body) because several university forms required students to list their religious preference. When asked about Jewish segregation, UNC staff replied that they had an unofficial policy, of sorts, to assign Jewish students to rooms with other Jewish students. Upon hearing this, UNC president Frank Porter Graham declared the situation a disgrace and demanded the university stop segregation immediately.

But this win was just the beginning for Lowenstein. He believed that all types of segregation were interconnected and should be abolished. Maintaining separate dormitories for Jews was simply a microcosm of the ghettoization of Jews and the creation of a separate nation-state for Jews. He wrote a letter to President Truman stating that Zionism was wrong and that refugees should be sent to other places around the world, not just Palestine. Lowenstein argued in term papers that, "Jim Crow is a wrong ...



# NEW FROM ACADEMIC STUDIES PRESS



## COHERENT JUDAISM

Constructive Theology, Creation, and Halakhah  
SHAI CHERRY

2020 | 9781644693407 | 570 pp. | Cloth | \$29

"A thinker from the tradition of Conservative Judaism, Cherry offers a poetic and thoughtful account of how theology emerges from history, traditional sources, and his own experience."

—Laurie Zoloth, University of Chicago Divinity School



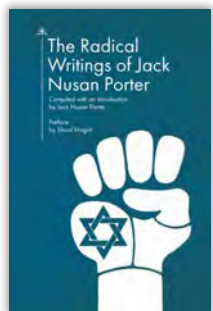
## PALESTINE FOR THE THIRD TIME

KSAWERY PRUSZYŃSKI  
Translated by WIESIEK POWAGA

*Jews of Poland*  
2021 | 9781644695654 | 202 pp. | Paper | \$22.95

"This short book, written in a fateful year, is prophetic. With great sureness of touch, it describes the human vibrations which would soon give rise, as its author foresaw, to the state of Israel."

—Norman Davies, historian, author of *God's Playground*



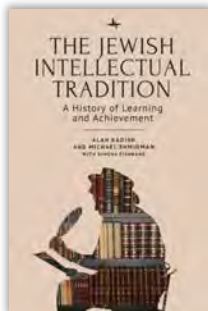
## THE RADICAL WRITINGS OF JACK NUSAN PORTER

JACK NUSAN PORTER

*Cherry Orchard Books*  
2020 | 9781644694640 | 314 pp.; 1 illus. | Paper | \$21.95

"Jack Nusan Porter has devoted more than half a century to studying and advocating Jewish radicalism. His collected writings—many little-known and some previously unpublished—illuminate many aspects of the radical tradition in American Jewish life."

—Jonathan D. Sarna, Brandeis University



## THE JEWISH INTELLECTUAL TRADITION

A History of Learning and Achievement

ALAN KADISH, MICHAEL A. SHMIDMAN, & SIMCHA FISHBANE

*Judaism and Jewish Life*  
2021 | 9781644695623 | 400 pp.; 27 illus. | Paper | \$28

"A helpful introduction, not only to Jewish thought, but to Jewish history and literature."

—Rabbi Marc Katz, Jewish Book Council

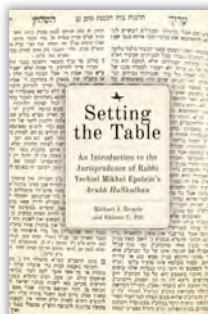


## JUDAISM'S CHALLENGE

Election, Divine Love, and Human Enmity  
Edited by ALON GOSHEN-GOTTSTEIN

*Jewish Thought, Jewish History: New Studies*  
2020 | 9781644691496 | 238 pp. | Paper | \$25

The present collection highlights the challenges that face Judaism, as it continues to uphold a sense of chosenness and as it seeks to engage the world beyond it. The challenge is captured by the dual implication of election: divine love and enmity with others.



## SETTING THE TABLE

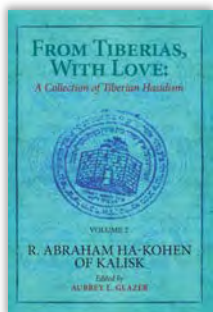
An Introduction to the Jurisprudence of Rabbi Yechiel Mikhel Epstein's *Arukh HaShulhan*

MICHAEL J. BRODY & SHLOMO C. PILL

2021 | 9781644690703 | 428 pp. | Cloth | \$139

"In this fascinating work, Brody and Pill ... bring to life the intellectual choices made by the *Arukh Hashulchan*, situating their work within the long history of attempts to codify Jewish law. ... This is an invaluable contribution to our understanding of rabbinic jurisprudence."

—Suzanne Last Stone, Yeshiva University



## FROM TIBERIAS, WITH LOVE

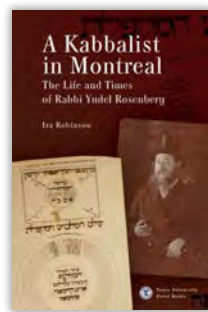
A Collection of Tiberian Hasidism. Volume 2:  
R. Abraham ha-Kohen of Kalisk

Edited by AUBREY L. GLAZER

2021 | 9781644694565 | 418 pp. | Cloth | \$119

"These essays and translations show early Hasidism—and contemporary scholarship—at their most profound levels. This book is a 'must' for both historians and seekers."

—R. Dr. Arthur Green, Rector of Hebrew College Rabbinical School



## A KABBALIST IN MONTREAL

The Life and Times of Rabbi Yudel Rosenberg

IRA ROBINSON

*Touro University Press*

2021 | 9781644695036 | 314 pp. | Cloth | \$119

"After decades of meticulous archival research, Professor Ira Robinson has produced a groundbreaking biography of Yehudah Yudel Rosenberg, a giant in the religious history of Montreal, and annals of modern Judaism."

—Jeremy Phillip Brown, University of Notre Dame



# White People's Work, or What Jessica Krug Teaches Us about White Jewish Antiracism

Naomi S. Taub

"There is no ignorance, no innocence, nothing to claim, nothing to defend." That's what Jessica A. Krug wrote on September 3, 2020, the day she cancelled herself, after being found out. A white Jewish professor at George Washington University, Krug had posed as a woman of color for years, shrouding herself in forms of Blackness and Latinidad from North Africa, the Caribbean, and the Bronx, even testifying before the New York City Council as "Jess La Bombalera." When I read the post, my stomach immediately clenched around a tangle of emotions. In that tangle I sensed fear, confusion, anger, frustration, and pity, but not, I must confess, surprise. In truth, my first thought was: *I know why she did this.*

I do not at all excuse Krug's deplorable actions. But I think I understand them. Perhaps in part this comes from what we have in common, both white Jewish women with difficult backgrounds, academics engaging with racial justice, sometime denizens of Kansas City and Washington, DC. And though I've never acted on it, I, too, have felt the impulse to hide from or deny my whiteness and all that it entails.

I also see Krug reflected in my research, which tracks the evolution of contemporary Jewish whiteness. As much as her masquerade may have been driven by her own pathologies, it also belongs to a cultural pattern of purposeful self-misrecognition. Krug is an (unusually obvious) avatar of a structural problem, which makes it all the more important to reckon with the issues her duplicity raises, as uncomfortable as that may be.

Not all Jews are white. But many of us are. And we have an ethical responsibility—perhaps to Jews of color above all—to acknowledge and think critically about the privileged position from which we speak. We should heed the call of Black Canadian writer and activist Dionne Brand, who asserts, "Racism is not our problem. ... It's a white problem. I think we can fight against it.... But in terms of

**I needed—we needed—to have honest conversations about how we are implicated in the very problems we are trying to solve.**

doing things like changing white attitudes, white people have to do that work." Unfortunately, many white Jews seem content instead to inhabit our minority status and thus distance ourselves from racism and white supremacy. And sometimes even those white Jews who want to do the work don't want to do it *as white people*.

I started my PhD in August 2014, only days after Michael Brown was murdered in Ferguson, MO. Witnessing the protests that followed, I began to recognize a conflicted entanglement both in myself and in Jewish antiracist activism more broadly. I needed—we needed—to have honest conversations about how we are implicated in the very problems we are trying to solve. I also quickly realized that for many American Jews, our whiteness and our sense of collective trauma—particularly in the context of Holocaust memory—are deeply interwoven. Recognizing and earnestly probing those links is a crucial element of the progress we need to make.

In "Collective Responsibility," Hannah Arendt maps this same constellation of issues into a discussion of responsibility, guilt, and conscience in ways that I find both productive and fundamentally flawed. She defines the titular term through two conditions: "I must be held responsible for something I have not done, and the reason for my responsibility must be my membership in a group." This is important and relevant: our assimilation into whiteness, however recent, makes us collectively responsible for how white supremacy structures every facet of American life. Yet Arendt also reveals a crucial gap in her thinking when attempting to distinguish responsibility from guilt. Chiding those "good white liberals" with "guilt feelings" about racism, she writes, "There is such a thing as responsibility for things one has

not done.... But there is no such thing as being or feeling guilty for [them].”<sup>iii</sup>

Of course, these “guilt feelings” do exist. What’s more: they *should* exist. For what Arendt fails to see is how deeply our ability to enact reparative justice is shaped by what we are and are not willing to feel. Later, Arendt describes conscience as one’s capacity to “live explicitly also with themselves,”<sup>iii</sup> but she frames it as the product of intellect rather than emotion. This is precisely where Krug re-enters the conversation. Though she was clearly unwilling to “live explicitly also with [herself],” I doubt the problem was a lack of *thought*. Krug knew she was white and repeatedly engaged intellectually with both white complicity and white denial. But she wasn’t willing to *feel* white. And in a desperate effort to avoid feeling that which we should, we often behave unconscionably.

Collective memories of persecution play an undeniable role in the construction of contemporary Jewish identity and condition nearly every aspect of Jews’ (mis)understanding of their whiteness. When, for example, I broach the subject of Jewish whiteness with those who wish to deny it, many cite the persistence of antisemitism in the United States and indeed all over the world. When the subject of Jews’ involvement in the slave trade or South African apartheid comes up, the Spanish Inquisition and the Holocaust are never far behind. And while I will not deny or disavow what we have endured, the fact remains: privilege and prejudice are not mutually exclusive. They do not cancel one another out.

These protestations exist on a spectrum that also includes Jessica Krug’s deception, each a deflection of our responsibility to engage with how whiteness complicates our cultural and historical position. Wielding histories of persecution as a shield against culpability is nothing new. Like many others, Jessica Krug was wrapping someone else’s oppression around herself like a cloak, hiding the naked implications of her whiteness.

As a white woman in antiracist spaces, it is often difficult to face the feelings that accompany each new revelation of how ethically compromised I am. And it can be difficult to find the line between productive accountability and performative atonement. None of this, however, is an iota as difficult as the actual experience of being a person of



**7 ART CONTRIBUTOR: MARSHA FINELT-BROOK**

Created to inspire the activist in us all. *The Way to Freedom*, 2013. Bronze on black marble base. 20 x 9 x 12 in. © 2013 Marsha Finelt-Brook. Courtesy of the artist.

color in America. And like prejudice and privilege, whiteness and Jewishness do not cancel each other out. We cannot shirk our white people’s work.

**NAOMI S. TAUB** is a PhD candidate in English at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, where she is also affiliated with the Program in Jewish Culture and Society. Her dissertation, “*Distant Proximities: Whiteness and Worldedness in Contemporary Jewish Literature*,” juxtaposes texts from the US, South Africa, Israel, and Britain to demonstrate how contemporary Jewish literature continually stages multi-layered encounters that transcend national boundaries and ultimately reveal Jewish whiteness as always-already worlded.

i Jessica A. Krug, “The Truth, and the Anti-Black Violence of My Lies,” *Medium*, September 3, 2020, <https://medium.com/@jessakrug/the-truth-and-the-anti-black-violence-of-my-lies-9a9621401f85>

ii Hannah Arendt, “Collective Responsibility,” in *Amor Mundi: Explorations in the Faith and Thought of Hannah Arendt*, ed. J. W. Bernauer (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 43.

iii Ibid, 49.



# Alternative Rituals as Protest

Lindsey Jackson

When I mention that the topic of my PhD dissertation is the decision taken by some Jews not to circumcise their sons I am often met with disbelief, confusion, shock, and sometimes even anger. These responses generally stem from the feeling that rejecting circumcision is a gross violation of Jewish tradition, and by extension, of Judaism itself. Despite the halakhic ruling that anyone born of a Jewish mother is Jewish, the rejection of this particular life-cycle ritual often brings into question one's Jewishness. Can one really be Jewish *and* against circumcision? Is a Jewish man *really* Jewish if he is not circumcised? Are noncircumcision Jews rejecting Judaism? To put it simply—yes, one can be Jewish and against circumcision. Yes, a Jewish man is Jewish regardless of his circumcision status. And no, noncircumcision Jews are not necessarily rejecting Judaism. In fact, noncircumcision Jews provide a compelling model for intracommunal protest. And the site of this protest is not in the streets with banners and posters, but in the ritual space with family, friends, and a rabbi present. Jewish parents who are choosing not to circumcise their sons are using this ritual moment to take a stand against a ritual they deem harmful, unnecessary, and patriarchal. But instead of opting out of the bris entirely, many noncircumcision parents are adapting the ritual and replacing the removal of the foreskin with other symbolic actions. This particular model of ritual rebellion demonstrates how protest represents engagement with, and not rejection of, Judaism and Jewish tradition.

A bris is a celebratory moment, where family and friends congregate to celebrate the birth and entrance of a baby boy into the covenant. Food is usually served, and a social gathering follows the ritual enactment. So what does it mean to opt out of circumcision? Opting out of circumcision does not necessarily mean opting out of this celebratory moment—in fact, alternative noncutting rituals are often just as meaningful and celebratory.

**Opting out of circumcision does not necessarily mean opting out of this celebratory moment—in fact, alternative non-cutting rituals are often just as meaningful and celebratory.**

Opting out of circumcision does not represent opting out of Judaism—noncutting rituals are undoubtedly Jewish and these rituals affirm the Jewish identity of the newborn baby. For the majority of my research subjects, what opting out of circumcision *does* represent is a declaration of dissent against a particular component of the ritual—the removal of the foreskin. The ritual performance, then, becomes a site of protest and affirmation—protest against a specific ritual action, and affirmation of the Jewishness of the family and, in particular, the newborn baby boy, through the alternative ritual.

Not all noncircumcision Jews opt for an alternative ritual. Some simply choose not to circumcise and forego any ritual enactment. But the overwhelming majority of my interlocutors *do* opt for a noncutting alternative. So how is the removal of the foreskin replaced in alternative rituals for some noncircumcision Jews? Well, this depends on the family. Sometimes the removal of the foreskin is omitted without replacing it with another action. Sometimes parents choose to include a symbolic cutting, usually of a fruit. Sometimes the *milah* is replaced with another action entirely, such as washing the baby's hands and feet with water, an homage to the biblical story where Abraham washes the hands and feet of people who visit his home (Gen 18:1-4) Other times blood is incorporated in the ritual in an entirely novel way, such as through the parents donating blood on behalf of their newborn child. The essence of the ritual—the gathering of family and friends, revealing the Hebrew name and explaining its significance, and establishing a connection to Jewish tradition—are all maintained. The ritual isn't rejected in its entirety; it is simply tweaked and adjusted to accommodate the new parents' views on circumcision. To use a particularly apt expression here, the baby isn't thrown out with the bath water.

But the decision typically involves some blowback. Even if it makes for a more comfortable and less anxiety-inducing ritual enactment, the decision is often accompanied by protests from disgruntled family members.

Grandparents, especially, are often troubled by the decision to opt out of circumcision. In most cases, the conflict subsides once the ritual enactment is complete, but the lead-up is very often contentious and combative. These rituals inspire protest from various angles—from the parents who are actively choosing not to circumcise, and from family members who often disagree with this ritual choice. Protest envelops this ritual moment in more ways than one.

Debating, questioning, disagreeing, and protesting—these are all important facets of Jewish tradition. And by voicing their disagreement, noncircumcision Jews are indeed participating in this long-standing tradition. By challenging this quintessential life-cycle ritual and adapting it in uniquely Jewish ways, noncircumcision Jews are, contrary to popular belief, doing the most Jewish thing of all.

**LINDSEY JACKSON** is a PhD candidate in the Department of Religions and Cultures at Concordia University.



8 ART CONTRIBUTOR: ILANA ZEFFREN

“Go” (“Lech” in Hebrew) became the slogan of the long-running Israeli protest against Benjamin Netanyahu, the rallying cry for him to resign and leave office. Go, 2020. Pencil and Photoshop, 3.6 x 3.6 in. From the weekly column “Petting Corner” in Haaretz newspaper. © 2020 Ilana Zeffren. Courtesy of the artist.

## If you aspire to lead in Jewish educational settings

such as camps, experiential educational programs, Hillels, synagogues, day schools, museums, Federations and more, consider the Horstein Program’s new MA-EdM track.

### MA in Jewish Professional Leadership and EdM in Jewish Educational Leadership

In partnership with the Brandeis University Education Program

**hornstein**  
JEWISH PROFESSIONAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



- Featuring:
- Generous tuition scholarships
  - Job placement
  - Seminars in Israel
  - Mentoring by renowned faculty
  - Meaningful fieldwork
  - Travel study seminars to U.S. and international sites
  - An active community of alumni, faculty, and Jewish professionals

MA/MBA, MA/MPP, MA/MA NEJS dual degrees also offered



**Brandeis**  
UNIVERSITY

The Hornstein Jewish Professional Leadership Program is a graduate degree program at Brandeis University Waltham, Massachusetts 781-736-2990 hornstein@brandeis.edu brandeis.edu/hornstein



# Fellowship Opportunity for 2022–2023 Academic Year

Application Deadline: October 18, 2021

## Jews and Modern Legal Culture

During the 2022–2023 fellowship year, the Katz Center turns its attention to the study of law between the 18th and 21st centuries, an age of transition from a world of empires to the modern age of the nation-state and international law. This year's fellowship aims to encourage new research in the study of Jews and the law across disciplinary perspectives, a focus that includes Jewish law as it has developed in modern contexts as well as the role of Jews within other legal cultures.

The Katz Center invites applications from scholars working on projects related to this focus, including legal scholars alongside scholars approaching the study of law from other fields and disciplines. The Center seeks to draw from a wide range of methodological and disciplinary approaches, including but not limited to social, legal, and intellectual history, anthropology, literature, religious studies, jurisprudence, political science, the social sciences, and philosophy.

Katz Center fellows are provided with the time and resources needed to pursue their individual projects but are also expected to actively engage in an interdisciplinary intellectual community drawn together by seminars, conferences, collaborative activities, and on-going conversations. Applications from scholars worldwide are encouraged. All applicants must hold a doctoral degree or expect to receive it by the start date of the fellowship. Fellows will be expected to take residence in Philadelphia where they will be provided with an office and full library privileges.

*For more information about the Katz Center's fellowship program, including a full description of the year's theme, examples of possible projects, eligibility, and requirements, please visit us online.*

**HERBERT D.  
KATZ CENTER**  
FOR ADVANCED JUDAIC STUDIES

University of Pennsylvania



**katz.sas.upenn.edu**

From  Haus Publishing

# GERMAN JERUSALEM

The Remarkable Life of a German-Jewish Neighborhood in the Holy City

**Thomas Sparr**

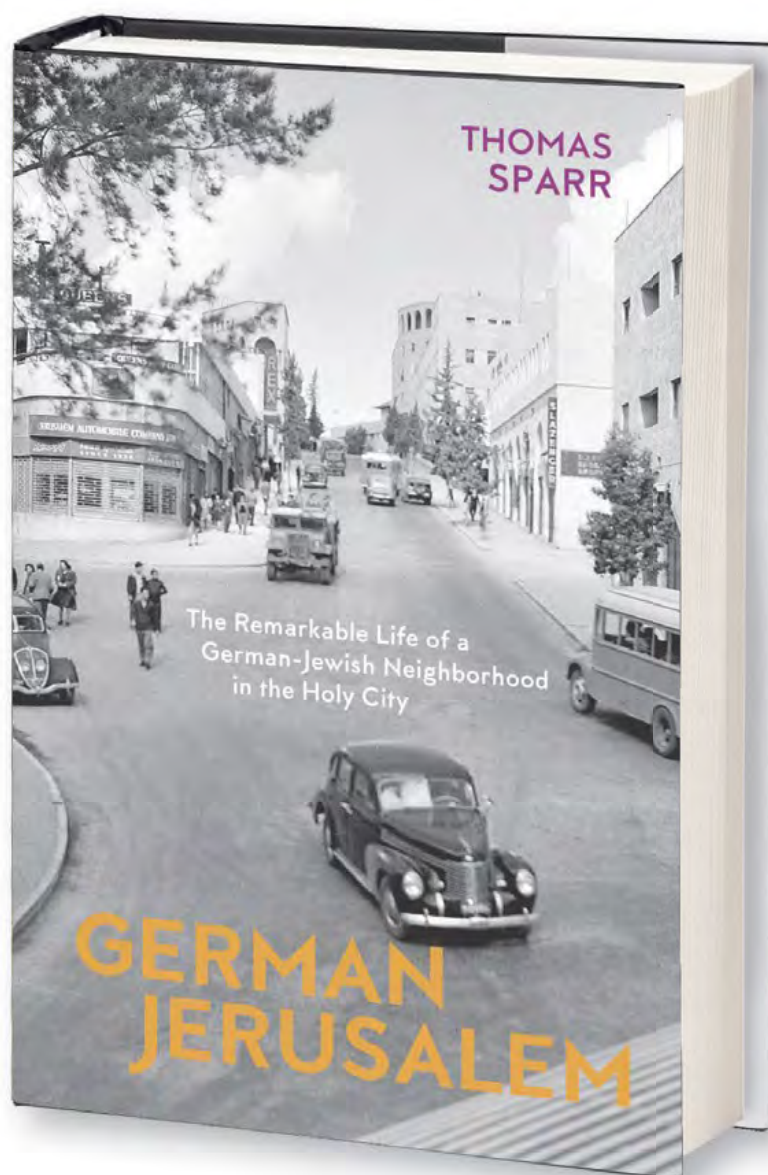
Translated by  
Stephen Brown

**“Lively and  
poignant.”**

—Michael Berkowitz,  
University College  
London

Cloth \$24.95

Distributed by the  
University of Chicago Press  
[www.press.uchicago.edu](http://www.press.uchicago.edu)







9 ART CONTRIBUTOR: BRIAN COHEN

Untitled (Squirrel Hill, 30th October, 2018). Photograph. 11 x 17 in. © 2018 Brian Cohen. Courtesy of the artist.

## Early Rabbinic Reluctance to Protest

Matthew Goldstone

“Why did *all* of the children of Israel weep for Aaron for thirty days [after he died] but for Moses only [some of] the children of Israel and not *all* of the children of Israel wept for him? Because Aaron never said to a man or woman ‘you sinned.’ But Moses, because he rebuked them, it was said about him that [only some of] ‘the children of Israel wept for Moses’ [Deut 34:8]” (Sifra, *Shemini* 1).

Speaking out against wrongdoing is no easy endeavor. If Moses was not up to the task, then how could anyone else possibly hope to succeed? Early rabbinic literature paints a portrait of the challenges involved in protesting effectively and the potential for even well-executed rebuke to fray the bonds of interpersonal relationships. The difficulty and dangers involved in this activity help us to understand why the early rabbis, though renowned as masters of debate and disagreement, are remarkably reluctant to protest against behavior of which they disapprove.

**If Moses was not up to the task, then how could anyone else possibly hope to succeed?**

Protest can take many forms. An analogue in the Greco-Roman world of antiquity, *parrhesia*, the duty of speaking the truth, could manifest as confrontation with a powerful political figure or as constructive criticism by a conscientious friend.<sup>i</sup> While typically one might imagine the former to pose the greatest threat to the practitioner, the early rabbis repeatedly demonstrate that they envisioned protesting against both peers and subordinates as fraught activities, even regarding entirely justifiable or mundane matters. In their eyes, even the towering figure of Moses was not able to challenge the Israelites’ improper behavior in the desert without suffering some amount of backlash.

Sifre Devarim (*piska* 1), the early rabbinic midrash on the book of Deuteronomy, opens by asserting that all of the

**In a contemporary setting, protest is frequently employed to prompt change among those with power.**

words (*devarim*) that Moses spoke to the Israelites in the desert were expressions of rebuke. Moses even served as an exemplar for later prophets who challenged the people's behavior. But the midrash also imagines all of the pushback that Moses might have endured had he not executed his task proficiently. If Moses had only confronted some of the people, then the others would have chided their peers by saying, "You have heard this from the son of Amram, and you did not answer him back?! Had we been there, we would have responded to him four or five times for every one of his words!" Anticipating resistance, Moses cunningly preempted any challenge by informing all of the people at the outset, "I am about to rebuke you. If anyone has anything to say in rebuttal, let him come forth and speak!" While Moses was able to control the situation in the moment, he nevertheless seems to have fostered prolonged indignation by those who refused to mourn for him.

The danger of inculcating resentment appears to have influenced the *Tannaim* (the early rabbis), who immediately jump from the difficulties Moses faced to admitting their own inabilities: Rabbi Tarfon declares that no one in his generation is able to rebuke, Rabbi Elazar ben Azariah responds that no one knows how to accept rebuke, and Rabbi Akiva reiterates that no one knows how to properly rebuke. The threefold denial of the possibility of successful rebuke underscores rabbinic anxiety toward fulfilling the biblical commandment to rebuke one's fellow (Lev. 19:17).<sup>ii</sup> Despite their penchant for vocal disagreement over Jewish law, when it comes to directly confronting people about their behavior, the rabbis are reluctant.

At first blush, the rabbis appear more open to protesting (ה.נ.מ) than rebuking (נ.נ.י). A number of passages provide prescriptive instructions for circumstances in which protesting is allowed and when it is impermissible. However, the majority of these instances relate to conflicts between neighbors, businessmen, and others rather than specifically rabbis. When the rabbis do appear in situations in which they might protest against activities in Jewish communities, we can detect their hesitancy.

Mishnah and Tosefta Ketubbot (M. Ketubbot 1:5 and T. Ketubbot 1:1) explicitly portray the sages as refraining from protesting against certain marriage practices that they found problematic, and M. Menahot 10:8 reports that the people of Jericho stacked up grain against the wishes of the sages, but the sages did not protest against

them. The one case that depicts the sages actively protesting appears in Mishnah Pesahim 4:8, in which the sages protested against three practices of the people of Jericho but refrained from protesting against three other practices. Yet, this mishnah presents an emended version of an earlier tradition (T. Pesahim 3:19) in which the sages merely expressed dislike for the practices of the people of Jericho, rather than protested against them.<sup>iii</sup> The revision was apparently prompted by Rabbi Yehuda, who was bothered by the fact that people were not letting the sages dictate their practice. Recognizing the original version of this tradition leaves us with several instances in which Jewish communities were acting against the will of the rabbis and the sages refrained from protesting against them.

In a contemporary setting, protest is frequently employed to prompt change among those with power. But protest also occurs on a more local level among friends and followers. Even in these contexts, however, challenging another person's behavior can involve danger. The *Tannaim* were keenly aware of the limits to their ability to interfere in the practices of others, and expressed their anxiety by portraying the biblical hero Moses as meeting intense resistance to his critiques of others. If even Moses, the first link in the chain of tradition, faced great challenges, then anyone else can expect the same or even greater opposition. No wonder the early rabbis were so reluctant to protest!

---

**MATTHEW GOLDSTONE** is assistant academic dean and assistant professor at the Academy for Jewish Religion. He is the author of *The Dangerous Duty of Rebuke: Leviticus 19:17 in Early Jewish and Christian Interpretation* (Brill, 2018) and co-author of *Binding Fragments of Tractate Temurah and the Problem of Lishana Aharina* (Brill, 2018).

---

i Michel Foucault and Joseph Pearson, *Fearless Speech* (Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e): Distributed by MIT Press, 2001).

ii This same rejection of rebuke by the *Tannaim* appears in *Sifra*, the midrash on the book of Leviticus, as part of the commentary on Leviticus 19:17.

iii Shamma Friedman, *Tosefta Atiqta Pesah Rishon: Synoptic Parallels of Mishna and Tosefta Analyzed with a Methodological Introduction* (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2002), 380–404.



# The 1943 Jewish March on Washington, through the Eyes of Its Critics

Rafael Medoff

Three days before Yom Kippur in 1943, more than four hundred Orthodox rabbis marched to the White House to plead with President Franklin D. Roosevelt to rescue European Jews from the Nazis. For a cause which on its merits would seem unobjectionable, the march encountered a surprising amount of opposition. The president refused the rabbis' request to hand him a petition. FDR's Jewish advisers denounced the protesters. A prominent Jewish member of Congress urged them to cancel the march. Some Jewish leaders publicly condemned them. Why did the march provoke such criticism? Why did the organizers insist on going ahead with it, nonetheless?

In a generation that has seen hundreds of thousands of American Jews protest in Washington for Soviet Jewry (1987) and Israel (2002), a march by hundreds of Orthodox rabbis may not seem impressive.<sup>i</sup> But it was the only such protest in the nation's capital during the Holocaust. The very fact that it was so unusual contributed to the wave of alarm that it triggered in official Washington.

President Roosevelt's decision to snub the rabbis was based on cold political logic. He opposed using even minimal resources to aid Europe's Jews, and he did not want to elevate the rabbis' pleas for US intervention. A meeting with the president—even just “a few minutes of his most precious time,” as the rabbis put it—would legitimize their cause, bring them added attention, and increase pressure on the White House to respond to their plea for rescue. In the end, FDR avoided seeing the marchers by slipping out of the White House through a rear exit.

The Jewish opposition to the march, however, went beyond mere political calculations. A prominent Jewish member of Congress, Representative Sol Bloom (D-New York), urged the rabbis to call off the march on the

## President Roosevelt's decision to snub the rabbis was based on cold political logic.

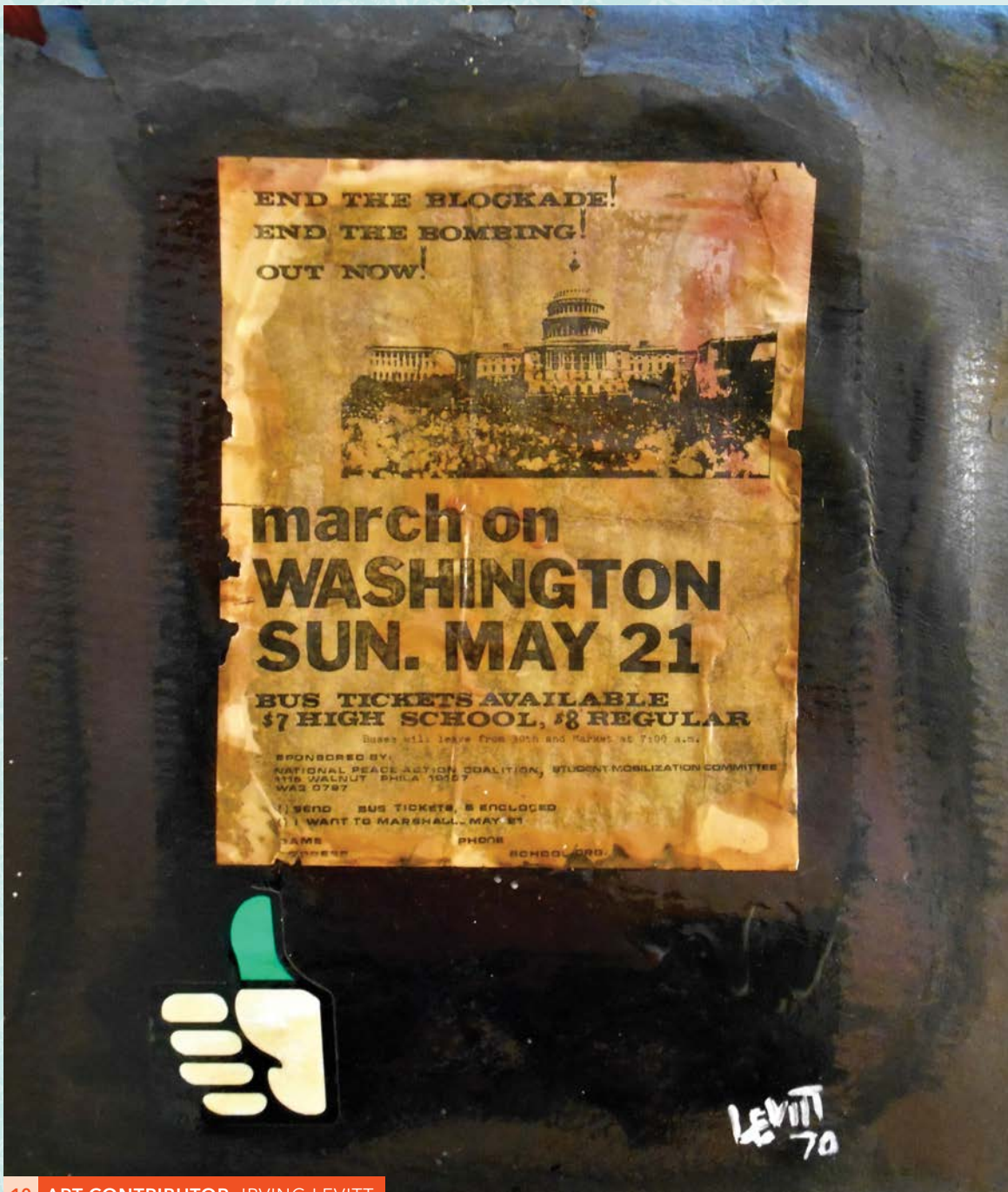
grounds that “it would be very undignified for a group of such un-American looking people to appear in Washington.” Bloom was referring to their long black coats and beards; the marchers were, overwhelmingly, European-born and Yiddish-speaking—today they would be characterized as Haredi. Bloom later urged the Justice Department to deport one of the organizers of the march (who was not a US citizen), on the grounds that his activities could “provoke sufficient antagonism among the citizens of the United States to cause anti-Semitic pogroms.”<sup>ii</sup>

In a similar vein, Samuel Rosenman, President Roosevelt's senior adviser and speechwriter, told the president that the rabbis were “not representative of the most thoughtful elements in Jewry”; that “the leading Jews of his acquaintance opposed this march”; and that he “had tried—admittedly without success—to keep the horde from storming Washington.”<sup>iii</sup>

The era's most prominent American Jewish leader, Rabbi Stephen Wise, criticized the march in somewhat similar terms. Wise, who headed the American Jewish Congress, the World Jewish Congress, and the American Zionist movement, wrote that “the orthodox rabbinical parade [*sic*]” was a “painful and even lamentable exhibition.” He derided the organizers as “stuntists” and accused them of offending “the dignity of [the Jewish] people.”<sup>iv</sup>

Wise was a staunch supporter of President Roosevelt and his administration and did his best to counter or suppress Jewish criticism of the president. It was not that Wise was indifferent to the suffering of European Jews, but he was convinced—or convinced himself—that FDR could be relied upon to do what was possible to aid them.<sup>v</sup>





**10 ART CONTRIBUTOR: IRVING LEVITT**

*March on Washington, 1970. Collage with cardboard, paper, acrylic, lacquer, and adhesive sticker. 16 x 20 in. © 1970 Irving Levitt. Courtesy of the Levitt Family Collection.*

The way in which Wise chose to frame his opposition to the marchers is telling. Instead of assessing the merits of Roosevelt’s refugee policy and the marchers’ demands, Wise focused on the protesters being Orthodox and, in his view, undignified. Wise, a Reform rabbi, was given to occasionally making unsympathetic remarks concerning Orthodox Jewry; but his hostility toward the marchers had more to do with their appearance than theological differences. Old-world garb and accents were, in his view, undignified.

Faced with such strong opposition, why did the protesters go forward? Precisely because their view of the place of Jews in American society was so different from that of their critics.

One of the groups that organized the rabbis’ march was led by foreign citizens. The Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, commonly known as the Bergson Group, was headed by militant Zionist activists who had come to the United States temporarily,



from Palestine and Europe. The co-organizer of the march was the Va'ad ha-Hazalah, an Orthodox rescue advocacy committee representing rabbis who resisted acculturation and insulated themselves from American society and culture. The Bergsonites and the rabbis, each for their own reasons, were unconcerned about being accepted by the non-Jewish public.

Jeffrey S. Gurock has posited that American Jewish leaders' responses to political and social controversies often can be understood according to where the individuals may be found along what he calls the Americanization continuum. Those furthest along on the continuum are the most sensitive to the attitudes of the general public because their overriding goal is to be accepted as Americans; those who resist Americanization tend to be the least interested in such considerations.<sup>vi</sup>

This helps explain why the foreign nationals of the Bergson Group and the Haredi rabbis of the Va'ad ha-Hazalah were indifferent to the complaints of their opponents. It also helps clarify why the Yiddish-language press—by its very nature, a bastion of resistance to full Americanization—not only accorded the march extensive and sympathetic coverage, but criticized President Roosevelt in language that was unheard of in the English-language Jewish press.

The *Forverts*, for example, headlined its report, "Rabbis Conduct Impressive Demonstration in Washington," and one of its columnists reported that "in open comment [in the Jewish community] it is voiced that Roosevelt has betrayed the Jews." A columnist for the *Morgen Zhurnal* complained of the "cold reception tendered the rabbis." A columnist for *Der Tog* called the protest "a grand and glorious demonstration." In the *Yiddish Kempfer*, a columnist asked, "Would a similar delegation of Catholic priests have been thus treated? Would our President, had they come to intervene for their doomed co-religionists, sent them to his secretary? No, this would not have happened."<sup>vii</sup>

Despite the fears of their opponents, the rabbis' march did not cause an antisemitic backlash. Ironically, the president's snub ended up giving the protest the front-page news coverage that the president and his advisers had hoped to avoid. As a result, the march helped galvanize public and congressional sympathy for rescue.

That boosted the subsequent efforts on Capitol Hill by Jewish activists, which, combined with behind-the-scenes pressure from the Treasury Department, eventually compelled President Roosevelt to establish the War Refugee Board. Despite receiving meager government funding and little cooperation from the president or other government agencies, the board played a major role in the rescue of more than 200,000 refugees during the final fifteen months of the war.

---

**RAFAEL MEDOFF** is founding director of the David S. Wyman Institute for Holocaust Studies, and author of more than twenty books on Jewish history and the Holocaust. His most recent book is *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust* (Jewish Publication Society of America / University of Nebraska Press, 2019).

---

i According to most estimates, "more than 200,000" attended the Soviet Jewry rally in Washington, DC on December 6, 1987 ("Colorful, Dedicated Thousands Travel for Soviet Jewry Rally," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, December 7, 1987). "More than 100,000" attended the April 16, 2002, rally for Israel ("Speakers Stick to Consensus Theme at National Solidarity Rally for Israel," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 16, 2002).

ii Bloom's remark was quoted by one of the organizers of the march, Eri Jabotinsky, in a private letter to supporters, October 12, 1943, Emergency Committee to Save the Jewish People of Europe, Jabotinsky Institute, Tel Aviv. Bloom's request is cited in Alden to Ladd, March 24, 1945, Records of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, made available to the author under the Freedom of Information Act.

iii William D. Hassett, *Off the Record with F.D.R. 1942–1945* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 209.

iv "Propaganda by Stunts," *Opinion*, November 1943, 4.

v In the first draft of his autobiography, Wise alluded to his (belated) disappointment at Roosevelt's response to the Holocaust, but in the end, he could not bring himself to include those lines in the published version. See Rafael Medoff, *The Jews Should Keep Quiet: Franklin D. Roosevelt, Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, and the Holocaust* (Lincoln, NE: Jewish Publication Society of America / University of Nebraska Press, 2019), 305–6.

vi Jeffrey S. Gurock, "The Americanization Continuum and Jewish Responses to Christian Influences on the Lower East Side, 1900–1910," in *Christian Missionaries and Jewish Apostates* ed. Todd Endelman (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987), 255–71.

vii M. J. Nirenberger in *Morgen Zhurnal*, October 8, 1943; S. Dingol in *Der Tog*, October 16, 1943; *Forverts* front-page headline, October 7, 1943; Zivyyon in *Forverts*, October 16, 1943; Shlomo Grodzensky in *Yiddisher Kempfer*, October 15, 1943.



LSA

FRANKEL INSTITUTE FOR  
ADVANCED JUDAIC STUDIES  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

## 2022-2023 Fellowship Opportunity Mizrahim and the Politics of Ethnicity

The Frankel Institute for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Michigan invites scholars for a residential fellowship in 2022-2023 to develop interdisciplinary and intersectional conversations on the meaning of ethnicity in the study of Mizrahi (Arab-Jewish) culture. Our goal is to gather a dynamic forum of scholars from a variety of disciplines, willing to reflect on the state of the field, and further expand, diversify, and theorize the discussion of Jewish/Israeli society and culture.

Whereas Mizrahim have become more visible and prolific in Jewish and Israeli cultures, they are still underrepresented, even invisible, in Judaic and Ethnic Studies. In Israel and within global Jewish communities, Mizrahim have historically been constructed as 'Edot, ethnic groups, within a hierarchical discourse of Ashkenazi dominant culture. This has reduced a diverse group of people to essentialized objects of anthropological study, obscuring their complexity and interconnectedness. But once released from this binary paradigm, subjectivity and agency emerge, and the intersections of "the ethnic" within frameworks of gender, class, sexuality, queerness, and dis/ability can be rendered tangible.

We seek proposals from scholars who will explore and grapple with questions such as: What are the political, economic, and cultural challenges confronting people of Mizrahi descent? What are their struggles for inclusion and advancement in both Israel and abroad? How should we undo cultural myths and practices of exclusion? What should the critique of logical systems, categories and hierarchies in Israeli/Jewish culture be? What connections can we draw between the study of Mizrahim and that of Palestinians and other Minorities? How does one compare or translate ethnic relations and conflicts? How can we write new histories and narratives of Mizrahi experiences? How can scholarship on Mizrahim enrich conversations on ethnicity within Judaic Studies?

By bringing together a diverse group of scholars who approach the material from a variety of perspectives within the humanities and social sciences, the Frankel Institute hopes to develop new understandings of Mizrahim and the politics of ethnicity.

Applications due November 8, 2021

For more information, and complete application materials go to  
[www.lsa.umich.edu/judaic/institute/applications](http://www.lsa.umich.edu/judaic/institute/applications)

[judaicstudies@umich.edu](mailto:judaicstudies@umich.edu) • 734.763.9047



# AAJR

AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

## CONGRATULATIONS

### **Salo Baron Prize Winner**

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winner of its annual Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish studies published in calendar year 2020. The prize honors:

**Alexander Kaye, *The Invention of Jewish Theocracy: The Struggle for Legal Authority in Modern Israel* (Oxford University Press)**

Alexander Kaye's book explores the development of the idea of a theocratic halakhic state. While most historians have claimed that the Six Day War was the turning point in transforming religious Zionists from pragmatic collaborators with the secular state into theocratic activists, Kaye argues that the demand for a halakhic state originated in the 1940s. Kaye focuses on the writings of Isaac Herzog, the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi of Palestine from 1937 and, after 1948, the new State of Israel. Kaye demonstrates that Herzog's argument for a halakhic state was based less on rabbinic sources than on legal theories of modern nationalism. In pre-modern rabbinic discussions of the relationship of Torah to secular law, most commentators favored legal pluralism. But modern theories called for a unitary law emanating from the state. Herzog applied these theories to a Jewish state, whose unitary law, he thought, should be the halakhah. The rejection of the secular Jewish state and its courts that Kaye finds in Herzog and some of his contemporaries was thus present even as the state came into being in 1948. Kaye's book illuminates the complex and, at times, paradoxical way religious Zionists have thought and continue to think about the Israeli state.

The American Academy for Jewish Research ([www.aajr.org](http://www.aajr.org)) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Its membership consists of senior scholars whose work has made a major impact on their field.

The Baron Prize honors the memory of the distinguished historian Salo W. Baron, a long-time president of the AAJR, who taught at Columbia University for many decades. It is one of the signal honors that can be bestowed on a young scholar in Jewish Studies and a sign of the excellence, vitality, and creativity of the field.

# AAJR

AMERICAN ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RESEARCH

## **Congratulates Its Graduate Student Summer Funding Recipients**

The American Academy for Jewish Research is pleased to announce the winners of its grants for graduate student summer research funding.

AAJR provides stipends for up to \$4,000 to promising graduate students in any field of Jewish Studies at a North American university who have submitted their prospectus and have a demonstrated need to travel to archival, library, or manuscript collections or for ethnographic research.

**Gavin Beinart-Smollan, New York University**

*Fragile Ties: The Transnational Family Strategies of Lithuanian Jews Through Migration and War*

**Amy Fedeski, University of Virginia**

*What We Want To Do As Americans: Jewish Political Activism and United States Refugee Policy (1965-1989)*

**Steven T. Green, University of California, Santa Cruz**

*Noshing in the Midwest: Foodways in Midwestern Jewish Communities*

**Hannah Zaves-Greene, New York University**

*Able to Be American: American Jews and the Public Charge Provision in United States Immigration Policy (1891-1934)*

**Rachelle Grossman, Harvard University**

*Cultural Capitals: Postwar Yiddish Publishing in Buenos Aires and Warsaw (1945-1984)*

**Tamara McCarty Hauser, The Ohio State University**

*Marginalized Motion: Late-Medieval German Dance in Law, Practice, and Memory*

**Isabelle S. Headrick, University of Texas at Austin**

*A Family in Iran: Networks of Love, Learning and Labor in the Alliance Israélite Universelle (1908-1978)*

**Aleksandra Jakubczak, Columbia University**

*Protecting the Jewish Daughters: The Economics of Sex Work and Mobility between the 1870s and 1939*

**Sayantani Jana, University of Southern California**

*Mass Violence, Gender and Silenced Memory: The Kristallnacht of 1938 in Berlin and the Great Calcutta Killings of 1946*

**Ellen E. Johnson, Clark University**

*Encountering Others: Jewish Social Identity and Intergroup Relations in the Riga Ghetto*

**Rachel Smith, University of California, Los Angeles**

*The Alliance Israélite Universelle and the Racial Politics of Ethnography*

The American Academy for Jewish Research ([www.aajr.org](http://www.aajr.org)) is the oldest professional organization of Judaica scholars in North America. Composed of the field's most eminent and senior scholars, it is committed to professional service through this initiative and others, including the Salo Baron Prize for the best first book in Jewish Studies and workshops for graduate students and early career scholars.



# A Golem for Protest: Julie Weitz's *My Golem*

Melissa Melpignano

In Jewish mythology, a golem is a creature made of clay that assumes human or anthropomorphic features to realize the mission of its creator. Since 2017, Los Angeles-based artist Julie Weitz has been revisiting this tradition of Jewish folklore in her long-term multimedia, visual, and performance project *My Golem*, an activist alter ego that engages in social justice protests, summoning up the Jewish values of *tzedek* (justice) and *tikkun olam* (repairing the world).

*My Golem* tackles issues of racial injustice with a mix of humor, sensuality, and spirituality. While acknowledging the growing antisemitism in the United States as well as how Ashkenazic Jews benefit from whiteness, Weitz interrogates the active role that Jewishness and Jews can play in practices of social justice. Her interventions summon her fellow Jews to join the fight to undo the patriarchal structures of oppression that enable the multiple ways in which white supremacy manifests—from race- and nationality-based violence to environmental damage.



Julie Weitz as *My Golem*. Her face is covered with porcelain clay. On her forehead, she carries the Hebrew letters *aleph*, *mem*, and *tav* that traditionally bring a golem to life and form the word *אמת* (*emet*), "truth." By emphasizing eyebrows, eyes, and mouth with blue paint, Weitz accentuates *My Golem's* corporeal expressivity as a strategy of visibility in sites of protest and as a vehicle of affect.



Image (detail) from Julie Weitz's performative ritual service *Tashlich*, where *My Golem*, wearing *shtreimel* and *tallit*, uses the *tzitzit* as a tool of interconnection. *My Golem* often wears white tights and a leotard together with items traditionally associated with religious men: the *shtreimel* becomes her crown, the *tallit* a solemn cape, while the *tzitzit* and the *tefillin* wrap her chest and arms, transforming her into a Hasidic ancestral and futuristic superheroine. The emphasis on and recontextualization of Jewish religious symbols strengthen Weitz/*My Golem's* Ashkenazic Jewish identity in order to reframe Jewish spirituality for the purpose of protest.

*Tashlich*. Performance with small gathering. Los Angeles, CA, 2019.  
Photo by Aaron Farley.

Still from Julie Weitz's *The Great Dominatrix* (1-channel HD video, 5:40m, 2018). Here, *My Golem* is wrapping tefillin around her hands, and eventually arms, chest, and pelvis, repurposing a (traditionally) male religious symbol into leather straps for bondage. Weitz references BDSM culture to parody and flip oppressive practices of political domination and affirm *My Golem's* sensual, liberating role(-playing) as spiritual dominatrix.

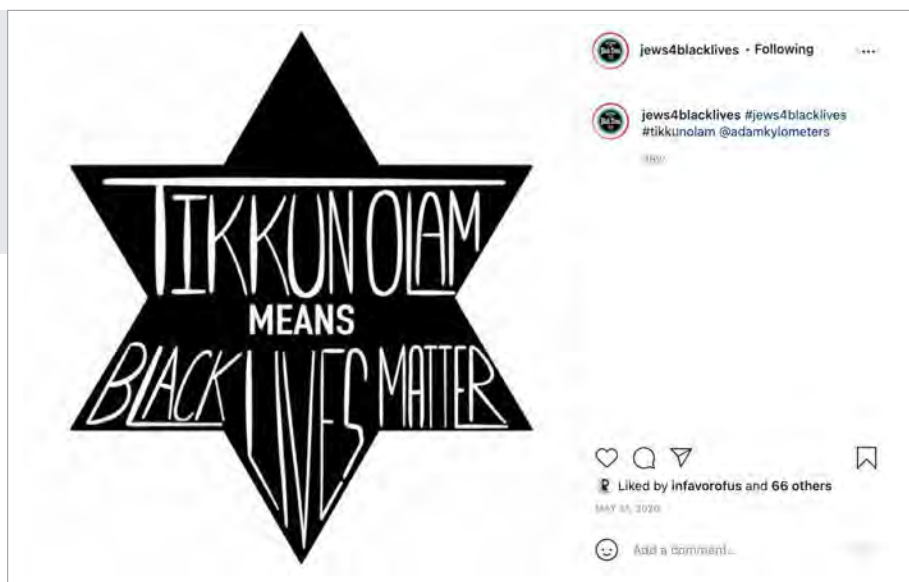


Still from the film *No More Torches of Hate* (2017). In her first appearance on Instagram, in October 2017, *My Golem* presented herself naked, wearing only a necklace with the Star of David, announcing the end of white supremacy by blowing off the flames of the “torches of hate,” represented by two prosthetic penises. As announced on the Instagram account @mygolem\_is\_here, the initial mission of *My Golem* was “to end white supremacy” by undoing its structures and logic through performative protests.

One of the primary sites of Weitz's activist intervention is immigration rights. In the actions now documented in “*My Golem* Protests: In Defense of Immigrants' Rights” (2019–2020), *My Golem* calls for the abolition of the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Agency.



A screenshot from the Instagram account @jews4blacklives, established by Julie Weitz in May 2020 when the protests of the Movement for Black Lives started.



In a video protest on Instagram, *My Golem* shows the sign “GOLEM AGAINST I.C.E.,” with a large smile and raised eyebrows, accentuated by blue paint on her mouth and eyes. With klezmer music playing in background, *My Golem* meticulously fills a bowl with ice, and pours boiling water in it, with the jovial expressions of a TV cook host that invites her audience to do the same, proudly showing how the ice effectively melted. Like Charlie Chaplin’s *The Tramp*, *My Golem* allows Weitz to call out the injustices and horrors of humanity with sardonic humor and without the restraint of social norms. Direct performative metaphors are probably *My Golem*’s most crucial protesting strategy, which also allow her to draw a powerful comparison between Jewish history and the current immigration crisis in the United States.



Here *My Golem* participates in a protest organized on May 5, 2020, in front of the Geo Group ICE Detention Center in Adelanto, CA. Wearing a large tallit as a superheroine cape and priestess-like dress, *My Golem* manifests by holding signs saying “CLOSE THE CAMPS” and “NEVER AGAIN MEANS FREE THEM ALL.” *My Golem*’s protesting body acts as a cross-reference between stories and histories. By conferring sacredness to her humorous, performative persona through costuming and physicality, *My Golem* bridges the history of the Holocaust with that of contemporary immigration at the US-Mexico border, and the stories of the victims of the Holocaust with those of incarcerated immigrants and families separated at the border.

*Photo by Molly Tierney.*

By embodying a Jewish supernatural creature able to feel, acknowledge, and tackle injustice, Weitz creates cross-temporal sites of solidarity. By embodying *My Golem*, Weitz reframes Jewish mythology in a contemporary context, affirming the urgency of Jewish ancestral ethics and setting a Jewish agenda for the present.

---

**MELISSA MELPIGNANO** is director of Dance and lecturer in the Department of Theatre and Dance at the University of Texas at El Paso. Her scholarship appears in *The Dancer-Citizen*, *Dance Research Journal*, and in the forthcoming *Oxford Handbook of Jewishness and Dance*, among others.

---

Sources to know more about Julie Weitz/*My Golem*’s actions:

IG: @mygolem\_is\_here

IG: @jews4blacklives

<http://www.julieweitz.com/>



# Uprising against Butchers!

Julia Fermento-Tzaisler

In New York City in early May 1902, the price of kosher meat was raised from twelve cents to eighteen cents per pound. After several failed trials to reach a satisfying agreement between the butchers and the wholesalers of the meat, women started picketing around Monroe Street and Pike Street. In a matter of days, 20,000 Jewish women of the Lower East Side were publicly protesting against the butchers. The women boycotted kosher butchers and held a raging and often violent rally, during which they broke into butcher shops, took meat into the streets, soaked it in gasoline, and set it on fire. Reports on the protest appeared daily in the Yiddish and American press. On May 15, 1902, the Orthodox Yiddish newspaper *Tageblatt* featured the headline, “Women’s Revolution! Uprising against Butchers!” The “women’s revolution” ended after three weeks when the price per pound of kosher meat was reduced to fourteen cents.

The established historical scholarship on the 1902 kosher meat boycott avoids emphasizing religion as the main force of the boycott, focusing instead on other factors. Historian Herbert Gutman, one of the primary proponents of the “new labor history,” reads the boycott as an event that belongs to pre-industrialist America. Historian Paula Hyman argues for an understanding of the boycott as evidence of women’s participation in politics. Since the early twentieth century, Jewish revolutionary movements have been generally viewed as highly anticlerical. But revolutionary politics and religious observance need not be mutually exclusive. In order to debunk this conventional understanding, I am interested in asking: What did kosher meat symbolize for the Jewish protesters of 1902?

In the case of the 1902 kosher meat boycott, I contend that first, we need to understand kosher meat as a focal point for Jewish identity and not only as a staple food. Second, we need to examine the religious, cultural, political, and economic connection of Jewish women to kosher meat before their arrival in the United States. The kosher meat the women were fighting for was a meta-

**The kosher meat boycott can be looked at as a cultural performance, a social process of memory and forgetting.**

phor for *freedom*—freedom from the authorities, and freedom to practice religion without a rabbinical tyrant. The source for this claim can be found in the literature of the Haskalah movement, where meat appeared frequently as a metaphor for liberty and was an integral part of their ideas of Jewish modernization. The meat metaphor in the kosher meat boycott integrates the Jewish past in czarist Russia into the streets of the Lower East Side in 1902.

Eliminating the dichotomy between “the traditional” (keeping kosher) and “protest” permits us to see the unexpected interconnectedness between the two in the literature of the Haskalah and in the events that occurred several decades later on the Lower East Side. In order to better understand why the east European Jewish immigrants were so highly politicized we need to examine how memories of some particular times and places become embodied in and through performances. The kosher meat boycott can be looked at as a cultural performance, a social process of memory and forgetting. What the rioters remembered and wanted to forget can be discussed through maskilic literature.

Three maskilic writers help us understand these protests in a new light. Yehuda Leib Gordon’s 1870 Hebrew fable “Fattened Geese” is a rhymed story about a Jewish woman who buys a pair of geese several weeks before Passover. On the day of the slaughter she takes them to the rabbi, who, because of overly meticulous interpretation of kashrut, immediately adjudicates that they are not kosher. The poem poignantly calls attention to the oppressive encounter between kashrut laws, Jewish eating habits, and gender. Gordon recognizes the source of oppression and its mechanism—the rabbi as a signifier of redundant rabbinical religiosity.



In Mendele Moykher Sforim's 1869 play *The Tax, or a Gang Town of Benefactors*, Abramovitsh focuses on the ongoing unethical practices of the wealthiest members of the Jewish community. The *korobka*, a kosher meat tax imposed on members of the Jewish community, ostensibly was levied to cover the communal costs of ritual slaughter, but in fact mostly lined the pockets of the religious elite. The play condemns this corrupt practice and portrays their greed as troublingly integrated with their religiosity.

And lastly, a newly found, undated Yiddish play by Morris Winchevsky, a socialist activist, journalist, and renowned Yiddish poet who was also known as the "grandfather" of Yiddish proletarian literature, *The Kosher Meat Strike*, further illuminates this episode. I found the never-published, performed, or translated play at the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research in New York in 2016. *The Kosher Meat Strike* is a fascinating direct response to these events, placing the boycott within a historical Jewish narrative of oppression related to kosher meat. The plot revolves around an argument that divides the community: to support or not to support the striking women in their fight against butchers. Winchevsky understood the 1902 kosher meat boycott as an event that was part of a long and complex history of kashrut and maskilic literary narratives of resistance. Winchevsky's powerful and courageous poetic intervention is to refuse conventional narratives of Jewish politics, narratives that tend to either defend or condemn the divergence of Jewish law and rituals from the perceived norms of a secular-liberal politics. Like the other works discussed here, Winchevsky's play opens the door to reading the 1902 kosher meat boycott as an event within the tradition of Jewish political radicalism, and helps remind us of the often-ignored intersections of Jewish tradition and radicalism.

**JULIA FERMENTO-TZAISLER** received her PhD from the University of California San Diego. She's a postdoctoral fellow at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev engaged in research about the symbolism of meat in modern Jewish American literature. She's also a fiction writer; her second novel, *By the Orange Orchard*, won the Israeli Ministry of Culture Award for Young Authors.

11 ART CONTRIBUTOR: GABRIELLA BOROS

Suzy Post: *Jacob's Ladder*, 2020. Woodblock print. 14 x 29.5 in.  
© 2020 Gabriella Boros. Courtesy of the artist.





12 ART CONTRIBUTOR: TALÍ MARGOLIN

*Protest and Protect*, 2020. Mixed media on paper. 28 x 20 in. © 2020 Tali Margolin. Courtesy of the artist.

## This Is Brazil: Jewish Protests under Democracy and Dictatorship

Michael Rom

When a German immigrant verbally harassed a Jewish peddler in a bar in São Paulo, a Brazilian man came to the peddler's defense. "This is Brazil!" the Brazilian cried, landing a punch between the German's eyes. "The Brazilian does not differentiate between men, on the basis of religion, race, or color." This incident, the climactic moment of a short story by Bernardo Schulman that appeared in the Brazilian Jewish newsweekly *Aonde Vamos?* in September 1944, evoked the emergent national myth of racial democracy, which claimed that Brazil was a land of uniquely harmonious race relations,

and that this racial harmony was a defining national characteristic. By using the myth to simultaneously assert Jewish belonging in Brazil and challenge the belonging of their foreign adversaries, Schulman's story provided a template for subsequent Brazilian Jewish protest movements to emulate.

This article examines two Brazilian Jewish protest movements, a leftist-led protest in 1950 against the presence of a fascist war criminal named Herberts Cukurs in Rio de Janeiro, and a Zionist demonstration in 1979 in São Paulo



**The depiction of the protest as being on behalf of Jewish rather than Brazilian interests was one reason for the failure of the anti-Cukurs movement.**

against the prospect of a Palestine Liberation Organization diplomatic office in Brazil. While the first protest occurred during Brazil's postwar democracy, which lasted from 1945 to 1964, the second took place during the military regime that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985. Surprisingly, the first protest was unsuccessful, and led to the arrests of three participants, while the second achieved its goal, and resulted in no arrests. These diverging outcomes were the result of three important factors: Cold War geopolitics, generational differences between the protesters, and most crucially, the distinct ways in which each protest engaged with the myth of racial democracy.

The first protest demonstration involved a five-mile march from downtown Rio de Janeiro to the home of Herberts Cukurs on the Rodrigo de Freitas Lagoon in August 1950. Cukurs, a Latvian war criminal responsible for the murders of hundreds of Latvian and Lithuanian Jews during World War II, fled to Brazil in 1946, where he lived openly under his own name and ran a paddle-boat rental business on the lagoon. In June 1950, the Rio de Janeiro Jewish Federation held a press conference to denounce his presence in the city. Although the Federation attempted to discreetly lobby the Brazilian government to expel Cukurs, a coalition of Brazilian Jewish leftists decided to take a bolder approach. Carrying banners calling for Cukurs's immediate expulsion, Jewish protesters arrived at his home, where they began attacking his paddle boats, until police arrived and arrested three of the protesters.

This protest infuriated the influential newspaper, which gave it front-page coverage, invoking the myth of racial democracy to discredit the protesters. "In Brazil there is no climate for antisemitism," the newspaper claimed. "Just as there isn't any climate for antisemitism, there isn't any for Semitic demonstrations, organized as such above and beyond the laws of the country." The depiction of the protest as being on behalf of Jewish rather than Brazilian interests was one reason for the failure of the anti-Cukurs movement. This impression was only enhanced by the fact that many of the protesters were recently arrived immigrants. Another cause can be attributed to Cold War geopolitics: with Brazil and the USSR having broken diplomatic ties in 1947, Brazil was unable to extradite

Cukurs to Soviet Latvia, and the Brazilian government decided not to initiate expulsion proceedings against him.

Conversely, the second protest was more successful precisely because of how it adroitly employed the discourse of racial democracy. Eager to secure access to oil in the wake of the 1973 Arab oil boycott, the Brazilian military dictatorship pursued closer relations with the PLO, officially recognizing the organization as the representative of the Palestinian people in 1979. When newspapers reported that the military regime was considering authorizing a PLO diplomatic office in the country, the Zionist Youth Council decided to take action. In December 1979, young Zionist activists organized an anti-PLO demonstration in the São Paulo Jewish neighborhood of Bom Retiro. Carrying signs that warned of the danger that the PLO office posed to Brazilian Arab-Jewish harmony, the demonstrators appealed to the idea of racial democracy, and were careful to couch their concerns in terms of Brazilian national interests.

Surprisingly for a protest taking place during the dictatorship, this demonstration resulted in no arrests, and even more remarkably, the protesters achieved their aim. In July 1981, the Brazilian foreign minister Ramiro Saraiva Guerreiro held a press conference to announce that Brazil would approve the PLO office on condition that it did not lead to conflict between Brazilian Arabs and Jews. When these two communities faced off in rival demonstrations throughout Brazilian cities following Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon, the Brazilian foreign ministry decided to veto the office altogether. Anti-PLO protesters succeeded where the anti-Cukurs protesters had failed, since they were Brazilian-born, and hence more attuned to the nuances of racial democracy. Cold War politics also played a role, as the military regime, which distrusted the PLO as a leftist liberation movement, was happy to find an excuse to avoid granting it an office, while still appearing to support it.

While racial democracy was far from an accurate depiction of Brazilian race relations, the myth retained its power as a national discourse throughout the Cold War. This discourse, however, was a double-edged sword: ostensibly embracing of ethnic and racial diversity, while intolerant toward ethnic or race-based forms of political



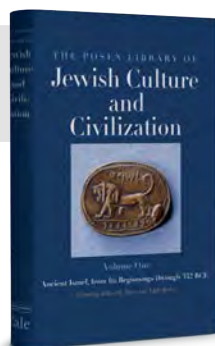
Surprisingly for a protest taking place during the dictatorship, this demonstration resulted in no arrests, and even more remarkably, the protesters achieved their aim.

mobilization. Portrayed in the press as a specifically Jewish demonstration, anti-Cukurs's protesters were unable to generate the necessary support for Cukurs' expulsion, and he would remain in Brazil until his assassination by the Mossad in 1965. Better versed in Brazilian idioms, anti-PLO protesters succeeded in portraying the PLO office as a threat to Brazilian national interests. Consequently, they were successful in their attempt to prevent the establishment of the office, and the PLO would not open a diplomatic office in Brazil until 1993, during the Oslo Accords.

**MICHAEL ROM** is the inaugural postdoctoral research fellow at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town, South Africa. He recently completed a PhD in Latin American and Jewish history at Yale University, and is currently preparing a book manuscript entitled *Brazilian Belonging: Jewish Politics in Cold War Latin America*.



**THE POSEN LIBRARY OF JEWISH CULTURE AND CIVILIZATION PROUDLY ANNOUNCES THE PUBLICATION IN PRINT AND ON THE POSEN DIGITAL LIBRARY**



## The Posen Library of Jewish Culture and Civilization, Volume 1: Ancient Israel, from Its Beginnings through 332 BCE

Edited by: Jeffrey H. Tigay, Emeritus A. M. Ellis Professor of Hebrew and Semitic Languages and Literatures at the University of Pennsylvania, and Adele Berlin, Emerita Robert H. Smith Professor of Biblical Studies at the University of Maryland

An anthology of the culture of ancient Israel, Volume 1 covers a period that witnessed the initial development of many phenomena that would come to define Jewish culture.

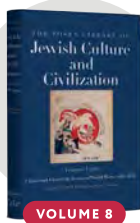
### THIS PUBLICATION MARKS THE RELEASE OF THE FIFTH VOLUME IN THE GROUNDBREAKING TEN-PART ANTHOLOGY SERIES FROM THE POSEN LIBRARY

"... with examples drawn from every medium and area of Jewish life, this is the composite story of how a creative people laughs, sings, thinks, acts and prevails against history's greatest odds." **Best Books of 2020, Chosen by Mosaic Authors**

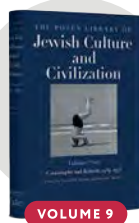
#### AVAILABLE NOW IN PRINT AND ON THE POSEN DIGITAL LIBRARY



**Confronting Modernity, 1750–1880**  
edited by Elisheva Carlebach



**Crisis and Creativity, between World Wars, 1918–1939**  
edited by Todd M. Endelman and Zvi Gitelman



**Catastrophe and Rebirth, 1939–1973**  
edited by Samuel D. Kassow and David G. Roskies



**Late Twentieth Century, 1973–2005**  
edited by Deborah Dash Moore and Nurith Gertz

VOLUMES OF THE POSEN LIBRARY CAN BE PURCHASED IN PRINT FROM YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS OR ORDERED WHEREVER YOU PURCHASE BOOKS

FOR ACCESS TO THOUSANDS OF THESE IMAGES AND EXCERPTS FROM PRIMARY SOURCES, REGISTER **FOR FREE** ON THE POSEN DIGITAL LIBRARY AT [WWW.POSENLIBRARY.COM](http://WWW.POSENLIBRARY.COM)

**A Unique, Interdisciplinary, and Global Graduate Program in Judaic Studies**  
***The MA and PhD in Judaic Studies at the University of Connecticut at Storrs***

Interested in pursuing graduate studies that incorporate the study of the history and cultures of the Jews within a single, consolidated program that extends well beyond Near or Middle Eastern Studies? Look no further.

The University of Connecticut's graduate program leading to a MA or PhD in Judaic Studies is sponsored by the Department of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages ("LCL"), which is home to the Hebrew and Judaic Studies Section ("HEJS").



Areas of special emphasis include:

- the literatures, history, and archaeology of Graeco-Roman and Late Antique Palestine
- the translation, exegesis, and comparative study of Hebrew Scripture from ancient through medieval times
- Jews, Christians, and Muslims in the medieval and early modern Mediterranean world
- Jewish literary, cultural, and institutional responses to catastrophe
- Jewish identities, including the self-representation of Jews in their literatures and the representation of Jews and Jewish themes in the writings of non-Jews
- Jewish responses to the Holocaust during and following World War II

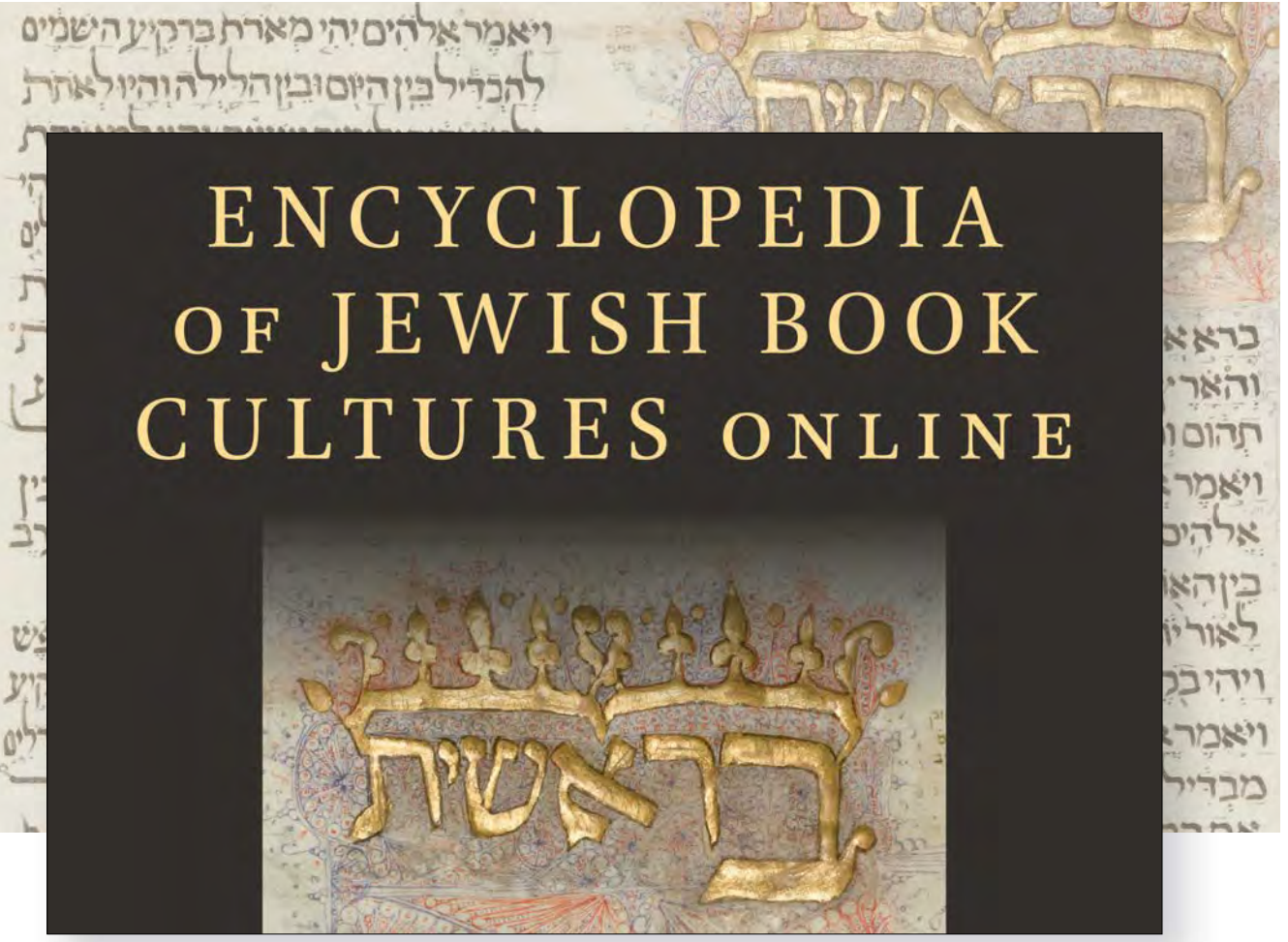
UConn's Center for Judaic Studies and Contemporary Jewish Life and the Department of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages offer support for graduate studies in the form of teaching and research assistantships that cover tuition and fees and include a stipend for living expenses.

Contact Professor Stuart S. Miller at [stuart.miller@uconn.edu](mailto:stuart.miller@uconn.edu) for further information

Avinoam Patt, Director  
Stuart S. Miller, Academic Director  
[www.judaicstudies.uconn.edu](http://www.judaicstudies.uconn.edu)

Thomas J. Dodd Research Center  
405 Babbidge Road, Storrs, CT 06269  
(860) 486-2271





## Encyclopedia of Jewish Book Cultures Online

General Editor: **Emile Schrijver**

Assistant General Editor: **Lies Meiboom**

Associate Editors: **Katrin Kogman-Appel, Stefan Litt, Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, Joshua Teplitsky, and Falk Wiesemann**

Being an encyclopedia on book *cultures* rather than book contents, this work places textuality and materiality of the book in the center of its investigation. The singularity of the Jewish book can only be understood in full if it is studied in its broader cultural and intercultural context. This encyclopedia does that by focusing on the paleographic features, intended function, cultural significance, readership, acceptance, and design of particular books and genres, as well as the producer-consumer relations involved in the making and circulating of books. It covers more than 2000 years of Jewish book cultures from all corners of the earth.

The EJBC will appear online first with full-text searchable, richly illustrated articles. The print edition will be released after all online content is complete and will include one introductory volume, dealing with the fundamental research questions in the wide field of Jewish Book History, followed by three alphabetically organized volumes, offering a classic entry-by-entry encyclopedia, with articles of greatly varying length.

[brill.com/ejbo](http://brill.com/ejbo)

Institutional outright purchase price:

US\$3,450/€2,850

ISSN: 2772-4026

Follow us on Social Media:



[facebook.com/BrillJewish](https://facebook.com/BrillJewish)



[twitter.com/Brill\\_Jewish](https://twitter.com/Brill_Jewish)

The Schusterman Center for Israel Studies at Brandeis University promotes exemplary teaching and scholarship in Israeli history, politics, culture, and society. We've got resources and programs for you!



Visit us online to learn more: [brandeis.edu/israelcenter](http://brandeis.edu/israelcenter)

### PROGRAMS

We present a diverse range of live, online events open to all, at no cost. Academic lectures, panel discussions, and film screenings featuring world-class artists, authors, public intellectuals and leading scholars.

[tiny.cc/israelstudiesevents](http://tiny.cc/israelstudiesevents)

### YOUTUBE CHANNEL

Missed an event? Looking for a video to show your students? Visit our YouTube channel to watch recordings of a large selection of our events, and subscribe to be notified when new recordings are posted.

[tiny.cc/israelonyoutube](http://tiny.cc/israelonyoutube)

### RESEARCH GUIDE TO ISRAEL STUDIES

For scholars, educators, students, and anyone wanting to learn more about Israel. The most comprehensive guide of its kind available, visit our one-stop shop for Israel Studies queries and information.

[tiny.cc/israelresearchguide](http://tiny.cc/israelresearchguide)



**THE OHIO STATE  
UNIVERSITY**

MELTON CENTER FOR  
JEWISH STUDIES

*Two graduate fellowships in Jewish Studies offered each year:*

**The George M. and Renée K. Levine Graduate Fellowship in Jewish Studies**

**The Samuel M. Melton Graduate Fellowship in Jewish Studies**

Each fellowship includes a nine-month stipend plus a full tuition waiver for one year to a student enrolled in a graduate program at Ohio State and working on a Jewish studies topic.

Applications must be made through affiliated Ohio State graduate program.

[MELTONCENTER.OSU.EDU](http://MELTONCENTER.OSU.EDU)



# Allyship and Holding One's Own Accountable: The New Jewish Labor Movement

Susan R. Breitzer

The Agriprocessors kosher meat scandal in Postville, Iowa, was a watershed moment in American Jewish labor history. The reports of mistreatment of migrant workers that culminated in a federal government raid on the meatpacking plant put a negative spotlight on a familiar and essential contributor to Jewish life—kosher meat production. It called the meaning of kashrut into question and raised the challenge of how (or if) ethical standards should help define kashrut. But just as significantly, it revived a Jewish interest in labor issues, albeit with a new focus on allyship and the willingness to hold one's own accountable..

There is precedent for this focus. Jewish participation in the American labor movement is well known, especially in the garment trades. What is less well known is a Jewish history of allyship among the employer class. These efforts came less from employers themselves than from rabbis and others who promoted social justice in the Reform movement, inspired by the nineteenth-century Protestant Social Gospel movement. The nineteenth-century American Reform movement's efforts included those of individual rabbis, most notably, Rabbi Emil G. Hirsch, who wrote and spoke extensively about labor and economic issues, and, during the 1910-11 Chicago men's clothing workers' strike, headed an effort to mediate. Similarly, Rabbi Judah Magnes, the head of the New York Kehillah, played a key role in arbitrating the labor disputes between Jewish workers and employers, and bridging the divide between "uptown" and "downtown" Jews in early twentieth-century New York. The idea that bridged the gap between the Jewish working class and the Jewish employer class was the underlying sense of how a Jew should behave. Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis keenly noted this when mediating the 1910 New York garment workers' strike, hearing a worker shout at one factory owner: "You should be ashamed! Is

**The Postville scandal has also inspired Orthodox pushback against the question of how ethics (and whose ethics) should shape Jewish law.**

this worthy of a Jew?" This consciousness would filter back into the Jewish community, inspiring Jews to hold their own accountable when it came to labor issues in Jewish institutions, most notably during the struggles of religious school teachers over issues ranging from pay to rights of religious observance.

There are many similarities between contemporary Jewish allyship with workers and earlier efforts, but also notable differences. The key similarities include the role of Jewish religious leaders who have taken their message beyond their institutions and communities to bring awareness to the larger world. A notable example is Rabbi Morris Allen, the founder of Hechsher (later Magen) Tzedek, an ethical certifying organization for kosher food producers. What also remains constant is the invocation of religious principles, by way of demonstrating that concern for workers and workers' rights is more than the province of socialist or other leftist politics. This has included finding grounding in the sources, and in many cases, downplaying secular political focuses, except to illustrate contemporary realities about work that confirm (or demonstrate the limits of) ideas presented in the texts. There has also been, in many cases, the reality of the ongoing tension between social justice and communal order, which has meant working within the limits of Jewish communal power structures.

Even with these similarities, however, there are also salient differences. The most notable is that in contrast to a past common Jewish worker identity, the current assumption is a middle-/employer-class identity for most American Jews, heralding the shift to an emphasis on

allyship. Just as significant is the new reality of Jews as employers of non-Jewish workers, many of color, which gives the classic question of “how a Jew should behave” a new valence. Another factor that is not unprecedented, but more prominent than in times past, is the paradoxical roles of Orthodoxy. On the one hand, the growing political conservatism of Orthodox Jewry, which was not as significant a factor in the past, has become an additional source of tension between Orthodox and non-Orthodox Jews, especially over the issue of whether labor violations by Jewish employers cause antisemitism or talking about them does. The Postville scandal has also inspired Orthodox pushback against the question of how ethics (and whose ethics) should shape Jewish law. Yet there is also the visible Orthodox participation in labor-related protest, mainly from within Open Orthodoxy.

Beyond actions, though, the biggest change may be found in the theological underpinnings of the new Jewish labor justice movement. While the prophets are still invoked, as are the appropriate texts in the five books of the Torah, there is also an unprecedented use of talmudic and rabbinic sources to buttress the Jewish case for justice in the workplace. One of the most prominent activists in this regard, Rabbi Jill Jacobs, has highlighted her own effort to bring a more solidly textual basis to Jewish labor (and general social justice) activism, beyond the often vaguely defined Tikkun Olam, arguing that “reducing the Jewish voice to a general call for justice or vague references to the past deprives the public debate of the texture that a more specific look at Jewish text and experience might contribute.” Her efforts and those of others have influenced the development of newer Jewish labor-focused organizations—and the direction of old ones. The former includes religious-based efforts to incorporate ethics into kosher certification—the Conservative Movement’s Hechsher/Magen Tzedek, and the somewhat more successful Uri L’Tzedek, the Orthodox social justice organization, each trying to maintain its own balance between rewarding ethical practices and avoiding fusion with traditional kosher certification. More of moment, however, has been the changing emphases of the venerable Jewish Labor Committee. Founded in the 1930s by Jewish trade unionists, over the decades it has morphed in purpose from being primarily a labor



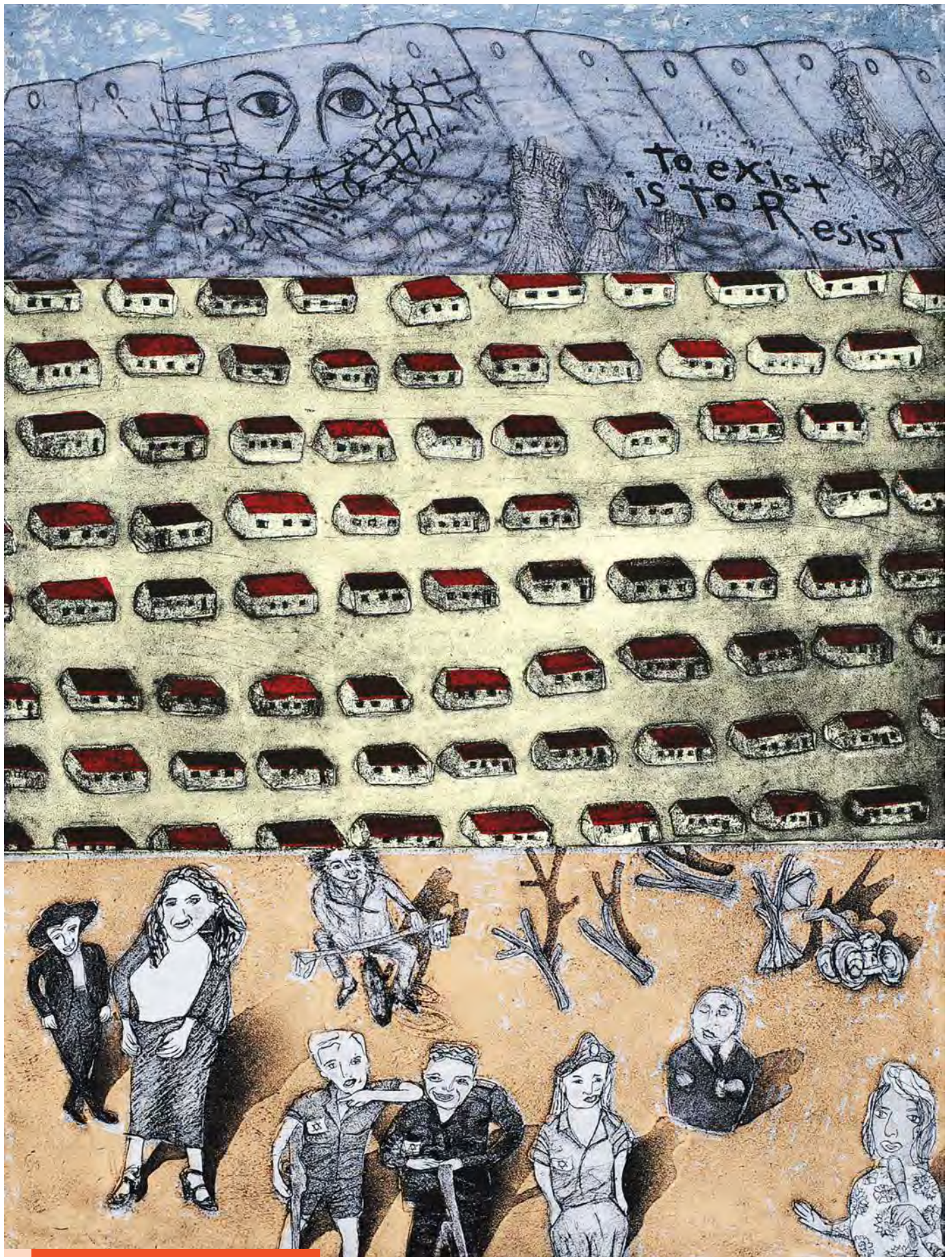
13 ART CONTRIBUTOR: LLOYD WOLF

Ruth Bader Ginsburg Memorial Vigil, US Supreme Court DC - 024, 2020. Digital image printed as an archival giclée print. 19.5 x 12.7 in. © 2020 Lloyd Wolf. Courtesy of the artist.

federation to a labor support group. In addition, the traditionally socialist-oriented JLC has in recent times put out education material emphasizing prolabor biblical and rabbinic sources. All these developments show the possibility for workers’ rights to remain a mainstream Jewish concern, at a time when such consciousness is especially needed.

**SUSAN R. BREITZER** is an independent historian and freelance book reviewer for Kirkus Reviews. She recently completed a podcast for the Organization of American Historians’ Intervals series, entitled “American Religion during the Spanish Influenza and the Possibilities of Religious Cooperation During a Pandemic.”





14 ART CONTRIBUTOR: RONNA GILBERT

*The Settlements*, 2019. Etching/silk screen. 30 x 22.5 in. © 2019 Ronna Gilbert. Courtesy of the artist.



# Urgent Witness: Spaces of Belonging in Jewish Argentina

Natasha Zaretsky

Eugenia Bekeris remembers the bombing very clearly, even decades later, turning to vivid details of the moment of disruption in 1994 when the main Jewish community in Argentina was destroyed: “When the attack happened, no matter where you were, you could hear the bombing. I ... could hear the glass [and walls] shake.” She could not believe what happened at first, and then ran to buy supplies to take to the site of the building, now in ruins, trying to help in whatever way she could.

On that day, Monday, July 18th, 1994, a truck bomb destroyed the AMIA (the Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Society), killing eighty-five people and wounding hundreds. The community center was destroyed, along with Yiddish-language community archives. Considered one of the worst cases of antisemitic violence in the Western Hemisphere, the attack fractured a sense of belonging for Jewish Argentines. In response, they tried to find a way forward, rebuilding community practices and demanding justice from the state through protests that folded Jewish practice into Argentine civil society. These cultural practices were based in remembering the victims to resist their disappearance from the public consciousness, all with the hopes of finding answers.

Years later, questions remain: Who did it? Why? Will they ever be held accountable? There have been allegations made against Hezbollah and Iran, but they have denied responsibility. Many Argentines are also concerned with the role of state agents in relation to the bombing and the botched investigation that further frayed any chance for establishing the truth of what happened. Despite two trials and local and international advocacy, no one has taken responsibility for this attack, and the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights declared that Argentina has failed to provide justice in this case. What does it

**Over many years, the Monday morning protests were a way to build a shared fabric of remembering, a collective form of public testimony to stand in for the justice they hoped would come.**

mean, then, for citizens to continue fighting for justice after decades of impunity? And what might new forms of witnessing tell us about sustaining Jewish belonging?

For years after the attack, Monday mornings were devoted to standing in front of the high courts in protests organized by the group Memoria Activa. Every week, at the day and time of the attacks, they would blow the shofar to remember the victims, and invoking Deuteronomy 16:8, to shout *zedek, zedek tirdof, justice, justice, you shall pursue*. For them, the pursuit of justice was a profoundly Jewish and Argentine act, as such public protests also aligned with how other human rights groups, like the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, challenged the state on the impunity related to the 1976–1983 dictatorship. Over many years, the Monday morning protests were a way to build a shared fabric of remembering, a collective form of public testimony to stand in for the justice they hoped would come. And despite the inadequacy of the trials that have taken place, they did open up new forms of witnessing, which have been just as important to the process of survival for Jewish Argentines.

It was in the audience of the most recent AMIA trial where I met Eugenia in 2018, who was there as an artist to chronicle the trial. Eugenia’s earlier project, *El Secreto* (The Secret, 1995), “was meant,” she said, “as an homage to her family who had died in the Shoah, but in reality, it became [a way to remember] the AMIA and also, the





Eugenia Bekeris. Sara Rus at the ESMA megatrial, 2013. Drawing for Dibujos Urgentes. Courtesy of the artist.

disappeared,” here referring to the estimated 30,000 victims of the 1976–1983 dictatorship, many of whom were Jewish.

This work later led her to join the artists’ collective Dibujos Urgentes (Urgent Drawings), which visually chronicles the proceedings of human rights trials, a new form of witnessing prompted by a call from the group HIJOS, children of those disappeared during the dictatorship. Cameras had been banned in many human rights trials after the 2006 disappearance of Julio López, who had been tortured during the dictatorship and then disappeared again when he was supposed to testify in the trial of Miguel Etchecolatz, one of the perpetrators accused of crimes against humanity.

Since photography was not allowed in these trials, Eugenia and a team of other illustrators (including María Paula Doberti) used ordinary notebooks and pencils to register visual details that may not otherwise appear in the trial transcripts—the expressions on a face, the

moments of humanity and vulnerability. (They recently published their artwork in a book.)

Eugenia found the task challenging. While she had worked with Holocaust survivors before, she struggled with her first drawing at a trial, where she illustrated a woman giving her testimony about her friend who was a victim of the death flights of the disappeared, whose bodies were thrown from planes into the River Plate. The drawing included with this article depicts Sara Rus, a Holocaust survivor who lived through the war in the Lodz Ghetto and later in the Auschwitz-Birkenau and Mauthausen concentration camps. She migrated to Argentina in 1948, and her son Daniel Lázaro Rus was disappeared during the dictatorship in 1977. She is a member of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, Founding Line.

Eugenia told me she went there “with [her] heart in her hands,” adding, “the drawings are called ‘urgent’ and they have an aesthetic quality that we respect—they are done rapidly, and we do not touch them afterwards ... we

take fragments from the testimonies and we are trying to trap this image from the trials, so it has to be quick.” Trapping this image means holding on to that which would otherwise dissolve, perhaps, into that moment, into time itself.

Yet, she also learned what was most important. As one of the witnesses she illustrated told her, “We are not interested in the drawings. What matters to us is that you are there.”

Although originally conceived as a way to chronicle the human rights trials related to the dictatorship, Dibujos Urgentes extended this form of witnessing to the 2015–2019 AMIA trial, which was taking place in the same court building. In this way, they also helped expand the framing of the AMIA case as a question of the impunity that affects all Argentines. In this way, it also implicated them as citizens and invited new forms of witnessing—whether it is protesting in the streets or sitting in the courtrooms, as Eugenia does, to urgently draw and visually register the testimony, opening the space of witnessing to those who cannot be present there through the act of viewing these illustrations.

**As one of the witnesses she illustrated told her,  
“We are not interested in the drawings.  
What matters to us is that you are there.”**

In thinking about the call from their years of protests in front of the high courts—*zedek, zedek, tirdof*—it may be that justice might never materialize in the AMIA case. But perhaps, even if the justice Jewish Argentines are pursuing might perpetually hover on the horizon, their *participation* as citizens in the demands for justice still matters, carving out a space of belonging that also lies at the heart of their desire for repair.

**NATASHA ZARETSKY** is senior lecturer at New York University and visiting scholar at the Rutgers University Center for the Study of Genocide at Human Rights, where she leads the Truth in the Americas Initiative.

She recently published *Acts of Repair: Justice, Truth, and the Politics of Memory in Argentina* (Rutgers University Press, 2021).

i <https://www.andigital.com.ar/interes-general/item/83574-dibujos-urgentes-testimoniar-en-juicios-de-lesa-humanidad>

**spertus**  
יהי אור  
Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning & Leadership

**High Impact Jewish Learning**  
spertus.edu

Spertus Institute is a partner with the Jewish United Fund in serving our community.

**Academic Depth | Applied Learning | Nondenominational  
Onsite, Online, On Your Schedule | Based in Chicago with Students Worldwide**



# From Israel's Black Panthers' Protest to a Transnational MENA Jewish Solidarity

Aviad Moreno

This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the 1971 demonstrations by the Israeli Black Panthers movement. This was a historic event in which Jewish immigrants of MENA origins in Israel, most prominently Moroccans, participated in mass public protests to draw attention to ignorance on the part of the Ashkenazi-dominated political establishment of their acute social and economic distress as new immigrants in the country.

As might be evidenced by their choice of name, the Israeli Black Panthers movement was influenced by a broader global context of non-Jewish minority protests, including, but not limited to, the US Black Panther Party, founded in 1966 by African Americans. The domestic demonstrations and the broader ethnic struggle in Israel at the time are therefore generally understood as the manifestation of unjust global hierarchies between "Western" (Ashkenazic) elites and underclass "Easterners" (Mizrahim). But what might be overlooked when we categorize the Israeli Black Panthers' activity exclusively only as a manifestation of inequality between Mizrahi and Western/Ashkenazic Jews? The early 1970s gave rise to a growing global awareness of racial and social inequalities, and an increase in civil rights activism and minority protests. The same period saw a global campaign of Jewish solidarity on behalf of Soviet Jewry, as well as for the Jews in Syria, which were deemed "Jewries in distress," dependent on the support of their coreligionists in the West.

At the time of the 1971 demonstrations, some 75 percent of world Jewry was concentrated in the Americas, Western Europe, and Oceania. About a third of the Jews who lived in Muslim majority countries in the mid-twen-

**The early 1970s gave rise to a growing global awareness of racial and social inequalities, and an increase in civil rights activism and minority protests.**

tieth century had moved to these regions by that time. As in Israel, immigrants of North African origin in France, Canada, Spain, and Venezuela figured prominently among the Jewish populations. In these and in other places like Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Panama, and the United States, the relatively prosperous immigrants from other Muslim majority countries began to mobilize separate organizations, each based on hometown or country-of-origin identities, depending on the size of the diasporic community in each location.

The 1971 Israeli Black Panthers demonstrations caused a stir among some of these communities worldwide, and in fact served to unite them in solidarity with the condition of Mizrahim in Israel. A year after the demonstrations, 280 representatives of Sephardic communities across the United States, themselves mostly recent MENA Jewish immigrants, gathered in New York to found the American Sephardi Federation. The same year, the Latin American Sephardi Federation was founded in Lima, Peru, to represent Sephardic Jews from several countries in the continent. It was followed by the establishment of similar organizations in Canada, Australia, and in several Western European countries. Their goal, shared by related associative initiatives, was to express solidarity with the underclass Mizrahim in Israel and support them financially, morally, and politically. One notable individual in this context was Nessim Gaon, a wealthy Sudan-born businessman living in Geneva, who chaired the World Sephardi Federation in 1973, and negotiated with the Israeli government about the employment and housing of Mizrahi Jews in Israel.

Following the local protests of the Israeli Black Panthers, MENA Jews in Israel and the West became engaged in a new conversation. In 1972, the World Sephardi Federation convinced the World Zionist Organization to establish a designated department for Sephardic communities around the world. Their goal was to address, for the first time, the poor conditions of MENA immigrants in Israel, rather than to "recruit" Jewish immigrants abroad, as it would typically do. This department began to post

emissaries to Sephardic communities in the English-speaking world, Latin America, and Asia. Many, like Shimon Der'i and Avi Chlouch in Montreal, were Israelis of Moroccan descent who had lived in Israel's periphery before moving abroad. One of their goals was to make the Israeli public more aware of the cultural assets of the global MENA Jewish and Sephardic diasporas. The ethnic as well as the more mainstream Israeli press reported the intention of Sephardic communities abroad to work toward solving unemployment, lack of education, and housing shortages among the Mizrahi minorities in Israel.

Shaul Ben Simhon, the founder of the Israel-based Brit Yoze'i Maroko (Alliance of Immigrants from Morocco) gathered at the Jerusalem Mimouna day in 1972 some one hundred leading figures from the North African Jewish communities of ten countries, from Argentina to Switzerland, to discuss Israel's ethnic gap. One of their solutions was to raise funds from affluent counterparts abroad to fund academic scholarships in Israeli universities.

Global Jewish solidarity therefore encouraged the subethnic divisions that had seemingly served to challenge it from within. Francophone North African Jews in Quebec, for example, sometimes found it easier to socialize with the Catholic Francophone majority of the province. The North Africans' strained relations with the mostly Anglophone Ashkenazim of Quebec was a result of a local context which could conceptually map onto Israel's subethnic dynamics. Solidarity with their counterparts in Israel helped this community in Canada establish Sephardi-centered philanthropic missions independent of the local Ashkenazic ones. As a report in the Sephardic community's newspaper, *La Voix Sépharade*, indicates, annual trips for Sephardim to Israel in the 1980s had a declared goal of promoting social-welfare activities "in the small development towns of 10/15,000 inhabitants, with a Sephardic majority, in a place somewhat forgotten by the [greater Ashkenazic] Jewish diaspora." These annual welfare expeditions constituted a kind of "Birth-right" trip that was in fact driven by subethnic motivations to empower Jews of MENA origins worldwide, as opposed to the more traditional Zionist cause.

Public and scholarly views of the Israeli Black Panthers protest regard it as a domestic event that should be understood vis-à-vis the global context of non-Jewish racial and ethnic hierarchies and minority discrimination, and as therefore fracturing Jewish solidarity. A closer look into intercommunal and transnational ties however, demonstrates how the Israeli Black Panthers served as a catalyst for a transnational solidarity among subethnic

Jewish groups in Israel and overseas. This global Jewish perspective entails a newer approach that would pay more attention to the global power relations between the various groups of Jews from MENA region within and without Israel, rather than solely to domestic relations between Ashkenazim and Sephardi/Mizrahi minorities.

**AVIAD MORENO** is a faculty member at the Ben-Gurion Research Institute at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. His current research focuses on the transnational ties between Middle Eastern and North African Jewries in Israel, Western Europe, and the Americas. He is coeditor of *The Long History of Mizrahim: New Direction in the Study of Jews from Islamic Countries (in tribute to Yaron Tsur; Ben-Gurion University Press, 2021 [Hebrew])*.

15 ART CONTRIBUTOR: PAUL MARGOLIS



Top: Supporter shows solidarity with Israel at this pro-Israel rally in Union Square in New York City in 2015. *Pro-Israel Rally, 2015*. Gelatin silver darkroom print. 8 x 10 in. © 2015 Paul Margolis. Courtesy of the artist. Bottom: Demonstrator protesting the US executive order known as the Muslim Ban at this pro-immigrant rally in Times Square in New York City in 2017. *Pro-Muslim Rally Demonstrator, 2017*. Gelatin silver darkroom print. 8 x 10 in. © 2017 Paul Margolis. Courtesy of the artist.



# BLAVATNIK ARCHIVE

## PRIMARY RESOURCES

113,000 items, across 15 collections, including photographs, diaries, letters, postcards, video testimonials and more

## SUBJECT AREAS

Primarily 20th century Jewish history, with a special emphasis on World War I, World War II, and Soviet Russian history

## DIGITAL ACCESS

12,250 items currently available online, with over 5,000 cataloged, in a high-resolution, metadata-rich environment



# BLAVATNIKARCHIVE.ORG

## HBI Congratulates the 2021 Research Award Recipients

HBI Research Awards support research or artistic projects in Jewish women's and gender studies across a range of disciplines.

Elazar Ben-Lulu  
**Celebrations in LGBTQ Families: A Comparative Analysis of Reform Jewish Life-Cycle Rituals in the USA and in Israel**

Rachel Furst  
**'For Our Women Engage in Commerce': Gender and Economics in Medieval Ashkenaz**

Pearl Gluck  
**Little Miss Hasid: The Revolutionary World of the Bais Yaakov Movement**

Hannah Greene  
**Able to Be American: American Jews and the Public Charge Provision in United States Immigration Policy, 1891-1934**

Hannah Kosstrin  
**Kinesthetic Peoplehood: Dance, Israel, and the Jewish Diaspora**

Shira Levy  
**Oral Storytelling and Destabilization of Hegemonic Narrative and in Zora Neale Hurston and Grace Paley's Literary Work**

Lynn Melnick  
**Refusenik, poems**

Samantha Pickette  
**Bridging the JAP: The Female-Driven Re-Conception of the Young Jewish Woman in American Popular Culture during the 1970s**

Jessica Roda  
**Beyond the Sheitl. Orthodox Jewish Women and Performances in the Digital Age**

Jennie Rosenfeld  
**Singled Out: Navigating Sex, Ethics, and Halakhah**

Leehee Rothschild  
**Polyamorous and Queer Families in Practice - Living Arrangement, Child Rearing and Law**

Sivan Rajuan Shtang  
**The Mizrahi Feminist Turn in Israeli Art: Race, Class and Gender in Third Generation Mizrahi Feminist Art**

Lea Taragin-Zeller  
**Gendered Antisemitism and Islamophobia in the UK**

Zohar Weiman-Kelman  
**(Un)archiving Yiddish Sex: the Poetry of Celia Dropkin**

Rebecca Wollenberg  
**Reading Each Other: Female Bodily Practices as Authoritative Text in Abrahamic Communities**

Florian Zabransky  
**Agency and Male Jewish Intimacy during the Holocaust**

# Brandeis

HADASSAH-BRANDEIS  
INSTITUTE

The application for the 2022 HBI Research Awards will open in July 2021.

For more information and to apply, visit [brandeis.edu/hbi](https://brandeis.edu/hbi)

FOLLOW US ON TWITTER: @BRANDEIS\_HBI  
LIKE US ON FACEBOOK: FACEBOOK.COM/BRANDEIS.HBI  
EMAIL US: HBI@BRANDEIS.EDU



# Jewish Symbols in German Gangsta Rap: A Subtle Form of Protest

Max Tretter

## Jewish German Gangsta Rap and Societal Expectation Norms

Linke Hand die Tora	Left hand Torah,
Rechte Hand die Neuner, yeah	Right hand nine millimeters, yeah
Rapper sind nur Träumer, yeah	Rappers are just dreamers, yeah
Will in' Himmel zu Eloah	I want into heaven to Eloah
Ein Yahudi, der haram vertickt	One Yahudi, that is ticking haram
Mit der Araber-Clique, Marihuana-Traffic	With an Arab-clique, marijuana-traffic

*Part 1 of the song "Eloah" by Sun Diego (author's translation)*

These lyrics from the German Jewish rapper Sun Diego's song "Eloah" seem unsettling. On the one hand, he raps about his criminal and violent lifestyle as a drug dealer and implies that he is connected to organized crime. On the other hand, he describes himself as a Jew (*Yahudi*), and mentions the Torah as well as his religious ambitions to meet Eloah in heaven. He invokes gangsta rap and criminal lifestyle here and Jewish identity and religion there, two motifs that seem to belong to two completely different worlds.

Combining typical gangsta-rap themes with Jewish symbols seems to be Sun Diego's signature style. In the music video for his song "Yellow Bar Mitzvah," Sun Diego, a.k.a. SpongeBozz, surrounds himself with scantily clad women, sports cars, drugs, and jewelry—in other words, common gangsta-rap motifs. In the same clip, he wears a yellow cloth star saying "Jude," poses in front of a giant menorah, and dances inside a large Star of David constructed out of neon tubes.

While the genre of German gangsta rap typically has strong affinities to sex, drugs, and crime, hardly anybody in the genre raps about Judaism or uses Jewish symbols.



*Scenes from the music video "Yellow Bar Mitzvah" by SpongeBozz*

This is not necessarily due to the fact that German rap is an antisemitic genre—although there is a lively discussion about this<sup>i</sup>—but primarily because there are few German Jewish rappers.<sup>ii</sup> Since rap is a mirror of society, this relative lack of Jewish rappers points to a deeper problem. It indicates the existence of an implicit norm about Jews in German society: the expectation that they only display their identity in ways that do not contradict German collective identity as well as the images they have of Jews. Specifically, Jews are expected to limit their expressions to selected topics (primarily the Shoah) and

... his use of Jewish symbols in German rap cannot (and must not) be reduced to marketing: his raps exceed his own, nonpolitical intentions.

to only express certain perspectives (anything that may contribute to the German-Jewish reconciliation process) in designated formats (e.g., *Jewish* film, literature, etc.)<sup>iii</sup> This norm assigns Jewish expression a distinct role in German culture—and excludes it from any other part of society.

Sun Diego's use of Jewish symbols in his rap clearly does not meet this expectation, which raises the questions: What is Sun Diego's motivation in deviating from it? Is it just marketing—or are there any political intentions?

### **Jewish Symbols as a Form of Marketing**

When he was questioned in an interview on the meaning of the Jewish symbols in his songs, Sun Diego referred to rap as an "entertainment business." To be successful in this business one has to market one's own identity—where his identity is constituted by a combination of criminal lifestyle and Judaism. "We are in the entertainment business. Nowadays people use their religious symbolism, their roots, their identity. It's normal, other rappers do it the same way. Except they're not Jewish. ... It's kind of like a game."<sup>iv</sup>

In Sun Diego's own interpretation, he uses Jewish symbols to market his own identity and to generate attention. By deviating from the norms of German society he generates more attention.<sup>v</sup> If some listeners perceive this deviation as an antisocial act of provocation—as some comments under his videos, his social media posts, and in rap-forums suggest—this might generate even more attention. In the end, in Sun Diego's own words, it all comes down to generating sales.

Although Sun Diego denies any political intentions, his use of Jewish symbols in German rap cannot (and must not) be reduced to marketing: his raps exceed his own, nonpolitical intentions.

### **Beyond Marketing: Jewish Symbols as Emancipation and Subtle Form of Protest**

It is the social norm itself, its moral illegitimacy, as well as the fact that it arbitrarily restricts the freedom of expression of a large population group, that makes Sun Diego's deviance from it more than a nonpolitical or even antisocial act of pure self-marketing. His use of Jewish symbols

and his expression of his Jewish identity in ways and formats not specifically reserved for it are instead to be understood as a political act of *self-emancipation*. It shows that there is nothing morally "wrong" with expressing one's Jewish identity—neither in rap nor in society—but that the norm itself is illegitimate. However, this in turn has political consequences for three different groups.

First, for his non-Jewish listeners, his rap raises awareness of the relative lack of Jewish artists both in gangsta rap and other "non-Jewish" formats and might lead them to the realization that Jewish expressions in German society are limited to very few topics, perspectives, and formats. He makes visible to them the societal norm that restricts Jewish expression and whose existence they were either unaware of or ignored until now.

Second, for his fellow Jews in Germany, his self-emancipation as a *Jewish German gangsta rapper* proves that they do not have to limit themselves to certain expressions in order to meet norms expected of them. Sun Diego might become an example of *Jewish disintegration*<sup>vi</sup> and encourage them to freely express and emancipate themselves.

Third, for German society as a whole, his rap turns out to be a confrontation with Jewish identity and Jewish symbols in unexpected ways. This forces society into a learning process in the course of which it will (hopefully) get to know and learn to accept Jewish Otherness—and contributes to overcoming this illegitimate social norm in the long term.

Its emancipative potential as well as its political consequences proves Sun Diego's Jewish German gangsta rap as a (possibly unconscious) subtle form of Jewish protest.

### **Developing a Sense for the Subtle Forms of Jewish Protest**

This example shows that protest does not always appear in typical forms. It may be as unexpected as bringing Jewish symbols into German rap and performing as a *Judenrapper* (Jewish rapper).<sup>vii</sup> And sometimes the protest is not even intended as a protest.

Such subtle acts of Jewish protest can be found wherever people/artists assert their Jewish identity or draw inspira-



tion from it in a foreign and possibly hostile context. Due to their subtlety (and possibly unintentionality), such acts are often not considered a protest. At this point, the task of the academic community is to sharpen their own senses in order to perceive such subtle forms of protest in various forms and in various unexpected places.

---

**MAX TRETTER** is a Protestant theologian and a research assistant in the Department of Systematic Theology at Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg. His research focuses on the ethics of digitalization, art and culture in the political public sphere, and the relation between hip hop, religion, and politics. His most recent publication is “By All Memes Necessary: Hip Hop, Memes, and the Internet,” (PopMeC Research Blog, May 4, 2021, <https://popmec.hypotheses.org/4265>)

- i An overview of antisemitism and German rap is provided by Marcus Staiger, “Antisemitismus im deutschen Rap,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 68, no. 9 (2018): 40–45. <https://www.bpb.de/apuz/265108/antisemitismus-im-deutschen-rap>.
- ii One might mention other German Jewish rappers, e.g., Ben Salomo, who explicitly raps about his Jewish identity and his struggles as a Jew in Germany. But like Sun Diego, Ben Salomo is an exception—and often discusses his experiences as an outsider. Cf. Ben Salomo, *Ben Salomo bedeutet Sohn des Friedens* (Munich: Europa Verlag GmbH, 2019).
- iii Cf. Max Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!* (Munich: Veltman Distributie Import Books, 2018).
- iv Dmitrij Kapitelman, “Ich Bin Halt ein Judenrapper, mein Gott,” *Spiegel*, November 3, 2018. <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/musik/yellow-bar-mitzvah-von-spongebozz-ich-bin-halt-ein-judenrapper-mein-gott-a-1195862.html>. (author’s translation)
- v David Schraven, and Finn Schraven, “Yellow Bar Mitzvah: Sun Diego über Rap und Rapper,” *Correctiv!*, February 28, 2018. <https://correctiv.org/ruhr/debatte/2018/02/26/yellow-bar-mitzvah-sun-diego-ueber-rap-und-rapper>.
- vii Cf. Czollek, *Desintegriert euch!*
- vii A term used by Sun Diego to describe himself, cf. Kapitelman “Ich Bin Halt ein Judenrapper.”

## The Ordeal of Scottsboro

Stephen J. Whitfield

To recover a past usable enough to inspire protest, Jews need to look no further back than Alabama during the 1930s. As millions of readers of the retrospective novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) know, the legal system of that time and place did not intend to achieve justice. As constitutional historians know, no set of trials generated more turbulent emotions or more legal consequences than when nine Black teenagers were charged with raping two white women during a brief train ride near Scottsboro. That a jury composed entirely of white men would acquit these Deep South defendants was inconceivable. Even if the virtually friendless and barely educated adolescents were innocent—which they were—some leading citizens warned that acquittal for this capital crime would endanger white womanhood throughout the region. A foregone conclusion that began in a Scottsboro courthouse in 1931 exposed such blatant injustice that it sparked international outrage. Opprobrium even included a popular Yiddish play that premiered in Warsaw in 1935. Written by Mikhl Vaykher

**That a jury composed entirely of white men would acquit these Deep South defendants was inconceivable.**

(1890–1967), the mistitled *Mississippi* highlighted the plight of impoverished Southern Blacks and suggested a bond of suffering between two beleaguered minorities.

Although the defendants were quickly convicted, thanks in part to feckless local counsel, many whites were dissatisfied. A *New York Times* reporter heard them grumble that “the old way of the rope was better than the newer way of the law.” Yet two Northern Jews achieved the impossible; they intervened to save all of the Scottsboro Nine from the electric chair. One was Joseph Brodsky, the canny strategist who headed the Communist Party’s International Labor Defense. Brodsky hired the Romanian-born Samuel S. Leibowitz, a flamboyant attorney who took the case pro bono. Both of them needed to surmount a very high bar—not “beyond a reasonable doubt”—but beyond any doubt whatsoever of the innocence of their clients. The ILD’s tenacity, plus Leibowitz’s resourcefulness, managed to keep the defendants alive by demanding that procedural rights be enforced. In *Powell v. Alabama* (1932) and then in *Norris v. Alabama* (1935), the Supreme Court required of state courts that counsel in capital cases be adequate, and furthermore that jury rolls not exclude Black citizens. By

enlarging the scope and meaning of the Fifth and Sixth Amendments, the Court blocked what Professor Felix Frankfurter called “judicial murder” in Alabama.

Brodsky and Leibowitz personified the outside interference that Southern whites often resented whenever the system of Black subjugation came under attack. The duo’s bravery deserves admiration. So does the rabbi of Temple Beth Or, a Reform synagogue located in Montgomery, the first capital of the Confederacy. Born in Oklahoma, raised in California, Benjamin Goldstein (1905–1957) became the only white clergyman in town to visit the teenagers, having convinced the warden that they wanted him to be their spiritual advisor. How could their death sentences be explained? Goldstein blamed bigotry, and he defied the warnings of the synagogue’s trustees to “leave the Negro question alone.” The Yom Kippur sermons he gallantly delivered in 1931 and in 1932 proclaimed the innocence of the hapless defendants. Along with two congregants, Bea and Louis Kaufman, the rabbi also spearheaded the struggle to raise funds for the appeals of the Scottsboro Nine. In the spring of 1933, he chaired a Birmingham rally that featured the Black president of the local chapter of the NAACP, as well as other white speakers. Most of them risked losing their jobs as a result of the meeting, Goldstein acknowledged, “but we are here in spite of it all.” At the conclusion of the rally, he urged the attendees to help fund the ILD legal team.

**Goldstein blamed bigotry, and he defied the warnings of the synagogue’s trustees to “leave the Negro question alone.”**

So ardent a pursuit of racial justice would predictably exact a high price. In early April, 1933, immediately after Haywood Patterson, the first defendant to be tried, was convicted, the president of the synagogue told Goldstein to sever all of his connections to the case—or resign. The next day he resigned. Congregants openly acknowledged to the press that, however doubtful the courtroom verdict, the conspicuous support that he was giving to the Communists and their defense attorneys posed too direct a threat to the welfare of the Jewish community. Boycotts leveled against Montgomery’s Jewish merchants—the pillars of the congregation—constituted an intimidating prospect. The trustees of Temple Beth Or disseminated a press release the following month, reaffirming “their unequivocal support for segregation.”

The city fathers piled on too. A new municipal ordinance defined the act of speaking or writing “subversive doctrines” to be a crime, and Mayor William A. Gunter warned Goldstein of his vulnerability to the charge of “criminal anarchy.” Although an interpretation of the First Amendment allowing such peaceable expression was already gaining ground in constitutional jurisprudence, that trend had not reached Montgomery. Menacing



**16 ART CONTRIBUTOR: RUTH SCHREIBER**

*Aguna (Chained Woman)*, 2010. Hand-built earthenware, painted and glazed. 12.6 x 13.4 x 14.6 in. © 2010 Ruth Schreiber. Courtesy of the artist. Photo by David Schreiber.



**17 ART CONTRIBUTOR: ALI SHRAGO-SPECHLER**

*Souvenirs of the Nation State*, 2018. Concrete and magnet cylinders. Each magnet is approximately 2 x 2 in. © 2018 Ali Shrago-Spechler. Courtesy of the artist.



... Goldstein's refusal to be a bystander showed either exceptional courage or sheer recklessness.

phone messages also jolted Goldstein into realizing that he was risking not only his career but also his life. That summer he and his family fled to New York City. The Central Conference of American Rabbis investigated the conflict at Temple Beth Or, but punted, issuing no criticism of the synagogue.

Goldstein's subsequent career, spent outside the South, was checkered. He briefly served congregations in the borough of Queens and in Cuba; he twice changed his name; he joined the New York staff of the Hillel Foundation. But he worked under FBI surveillance, and his leftism kept him from permanent employment. Living with his sister in San Francisco, Goldstein died of leukemia, in complete obscurity. By then none of the Scottsboro Nine was still serving a sentence for a crime that never happened. On the website of Temple Beth Or, its official history names the rabbi who was hired in 1933—but not whom he had replaced. Given the ferocity

with which the Deep South was determined to maintain white supremacy, and given the precariousness of Jewish communal life in the region, Goldstein's refusal to be a bystander showed either exceptional courage or sheer recklessness. "The reasonable man adapts himself to the world; the unreasonable man persists in trying to adapt the world to himself," George Bernard Shaw declared in *Man and Superman* (1903). Therefore, he added, "all progress depends on the unreasonable man."


---

**STEPHEN J. WHITFIELD** is professor emeritus of American Studies at Brandeis University. He is the author of *Learning on the Left: Political Profiles of Brandeis University* (Brandeis University Press, 2020).



THE ROBERT A. AND SANDRA S. BORNS  
**JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM**

**EDUCATING THE  
NEXT GENERATION  
OF SCHOLARS**



Master's Degree in Jewish Studies

Doctoral Minor

Yiddish Minor

Exceptional Mentoring and  
Peer Support

Extensive Graduate Fellowships

---

Review of Graduate Fellowship  
Applications Begins:  
December 1, 2021

For more information visit  
[jewishstudies.indiana.edu](http://jewishstudies.indiana.edu)



INDIANA UNIVERSITY

Background: Detail from *Nurture*, 2018. Scotch tape, photo transparencies, thread. 27 x 33 in. © 2018 Marleene Rubenstein. Courtesy of the artist.

# Reading Prophetic Protest without Anti-Judaism

Ethan Schwartz

“But let justice roll down like water, righteousness like a mighty stream” (Amos 5:24). According to the biblical book that bears his name, the prophet Amos thundered these words in the eighth century BCE. Nearly three millennia later, they reverberated on the lips of Martin Luther King Jr. during the civil rights movement. For King, as for many Jews and Christians, they represented the spiritual zenith of biblical prophecy: its protest against the injustice of the powerful. Not for nothing has the word “prophetic” become virtually synonymous with social critique. This critique appears in nearly every prophetic book.

However, this inspiring verse is only part of the story. The beginning of the passage strikes a different tone: “I hate, I abhor your festivals!” Amos screams in God’s voice (Amos 5:21). Israel showers God with worship while ignoring or exploiting the vulnerable of society. Most prophetic calls for justice share this context, and it is theologically essential. The point isn’t simply that justice is good. It’s that justice is the core of genuine service to the God of Israel, over against obvious (but misleading) alternatives like worship. By thinking that lavish offerings get them off the hook, the Israelites haven’t simply come up short. They’ve damningly shown that they don’t understand anything about the God they claim to serve.

The prophets’ protest against prioritizing ritual over justice doesn’t always play much of a role in Christian justice work. However, since antiquity itself, it has played an important role in Christian anti-Judaism. It’s easy to see why. Early Christians saw faith in Christ, including a commitment to justice, as the replacement for myopic Jewish ritual. The prophets were the harbingers of this shift. The Epistle of Barnabas, an early Christian text, captures this nicely: “[God] has made it clear to us through all the prophets that he needs neither sacrifices

## Does this mean that even critical scholarship on prophetic protest is doomed to devolve into covert apologetics?

nor whole burnt offerings nor general offerings.... He has abolished these things [to make way for] the new law of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Barn 2:4–6).

Unsurprisingly, Jews have generally disagreed: the prophets rejected *corrupted* ritual, not ritual itself. Rashi wrote that sacrifice is abominable when practiced alongside transgressions. Abraham ibn Ezra clarified that God hates sacrifice when it becomes crudely transactional. Yom Kippur features a reading from Isaiah’s call for a “fast” of justice, not ritual self-affliction—even though the day still requires such self-affliction.

Academic Bible scholars study prophetic protest for insight into the history of Israelite religion. One would hope that they’d manage to transcend Jewish-Christian polemic. Alas, they’ve ended up divided along the same lines: whether the prophets’ critique of worship was absolute (Christian) or contingent (Jewish). It turns out that the texts themselves provide little basis for litigating this. If condemnation of ritual corruption is sufficiently passionate, it might sound like condemnation of ritual altogether—and prophetic protest is nothing if not passionate.

Does this mean that even critical scholarship on prophetic protest is doomed to devolve into covert apologetics? Not necessarily. The prophets’ own views are indeed out of reach. But this problem itself suggests a solution. We don’t directly see the prophets protesting worship. We *read* about them doing so, secondhand, in a *book*. What if we took this textual medium seriously? What if, instead of straining to hear Amos or Isaiah, we listened more closely to the anonymous scribes who





19 ART CONTRIBUTOR: KEN GOLDMAN

*Fear Is the Highest Fence*, 2018. Plastic cups. 25.6 x 246.1 in. © 2018 Ken Goldman. Courtesy of the artist.

curated and canonized their words?

Nowadays, writing has little connection with official power. Activists challenging society from its margins can reach thousands with just a social media account and at no cost. It's therefore tempting to imagine Amos tweeting at the priests and watching the "likes" roll in (like a mighty stream). This fits with a picture that has long dominated popular and academic imaginations alike: a diametric opposition between charismatic but powerless prophets and uncharismatic but powerful priests. However, most scholars now believe that the scribal production of the Bible was more complexly situated between these two theoretical extremes. Large-scale scribal activity—the sort necessary for the creation of entire scriptural books—was probably associated with the centralized power of the Temple. This is because of the substantial material and logistical considerations involved—quite unlike today's internet-enabled activists. The very fact that a given biblical book became part of the canon implies that it passed through the hands of scribes who, at a minimum, were trained in some connection with the Temple establishment. This makes sense as the background for, say, the extensive ritual in the Torah. However, it's strange to imagine a scribe on the priestly payroll sitting in the Temple as he copied out "I hate, I abhor your festivals." Yet this is exactly what the history of scribal activity implies! Prophetic protest was preserved under the auspices of individuals with ties to the very institutions that it targeted.

This social reality suggests that the canonical preservation of ritual alongside the prophetic critique thereof might be more theologically intentional than theories of diametric opposition would have it. Scribes with ties to

the priesthood probably didn't see the prophets as fundamental critics of priestly ritual. They'd be sawing off the branch they sat on. At the same time, we shouldn't dismiss these scribes as shills for the establishment. Presumably, they were capable of criticizing inadequacies or failures in their own institution. Their incorporation of prophetic protest into the canon may be understood in just this way. The scribes saw it as a valuable recognition of a real danger for worship to displace all other religious commitments, including justice. In moments where this might happen, the prophets would be there—a built-in system of theological checks and balances. The scribal integration of ritual and prophecy, of power and protest, expresses a cohesive vision of religion in which these seemingly opposed elements interact constructively.

Is this reading still stuck in Jewish-Christian polemic? It does align with the typically Jewish view. However, there's a crucial difference. I have no pretense of recovering what the prophets "actually" thought. Were I to meet Amos, I'd be prepared for the possibility that he'd say, "That Jesus guy! *He* understood me." Maybe the prophets did want justice to replace ritual. All I'm saying is that the earliest interpreters we can access—those who preserved the prophets in the first place—show that we don't *need* to read them that way. Traditions of seeing prophetic protest as a dynamic part of Judaism, not a rejection of it, go back to the Bible itself. This should both reassure and empower contemporary Jews doing the hard work so that justice may indeed roll down like a mighty stream.

---

**ETHAN SCHWARTZ** is assistant professor of Hebrew Bible in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies at Villanova University.

# Violence Justified: Resistance among the Hasmoneans and Hong Kongers

Dr. V

Horror. Maybe that is too strong. Confusion? Distaste.

That's how I used to think about Judah Maccabee and his brothers' struggle against the Seleucid Empire. That might sound strange coming from someone who has written a book, a commentary, several introductions, and a number of articles on the sources relating to the Hasmonean rebellion. But it is true. I could never wrap my head around how violent their resistance was depicted, how quickly they seemed to shift toward guerrilla warfare without so much as attempting a peaceful resolution. Their tactics, their martial inclinations, their lack of moderation, all felt unrealistic to someone like me, a white liberal male raised in the comforts of Western modernity. It did not ring true as an account of resistance. It looked, instead, like a version of events meant solely to glorify Hasmonean martial efforts. But, mine is a social location where oppression has been more the product of speculation than a lived reality, where the protection of the status quo is paramount in any political activity. It is a position that seeks change, but only incrementally. That framework fell apart when I took an active role in Hong Kong's anti-extradition protests in the summer and autumn of 2019. The experiences I acquired during that time gave me a whole new perspective on the methods of the Maccabees, and more importantly, on the justified use of violence as a form of protest. These experiences helped me to solve a problem I had always had when analyzing 1 and 2 Maccabees and Josephus as authentic accounts of resistance. They led me to understand that, putting aside the precise historicity of these accounts, they depicted an authentic trajectory of a successful rebellion.



20 ART CONTRIBUTOR: SHARON FELDSTEIN

*Fighting Evil Amalek*, 2020. Mixed media (acrylic, charcoal, fabric) on canvas. 40 x 30 x 1.5 in. © 2020 Sharon Feldstein. Courtesy of the artist.

**Their tactics, their martial inclinations, their lack of moderation, all felt unrealistic to someone like me, a white liberal male raised in the comforts of Western modernity.**

Over the last decade, I have lived and worked as a professor in Hong Kong. Throughout my time here, I have been a motivated protester when a cause arose that I thought to be worthwhile. So, by June 2019, when the city's residents gathered en masse against a proposed law that would allow for the extradition of political dissidents from Hong Kong to the People's Republic of China, I was eager to join the fray. Like many a good white male liberal, I felt that I could take pride in engaging in peaceful protests on behalf of civil rights. I could imagine myself to be carrying on the legacies of Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. But, I remained in a position of privilege, free to pick and choose when to engage in political action, and free to judge those protesters and tactics I thought to be uncivil. Blinded by my own entitlement, I gave myself license to "other" political actors who turned to violence. I was willing to deem violence to be a primitive tool of political messaging, whether it was wielded by contemporary oppressed peoples, or the Hasmoneans.

When I read about their violent resistance, I believed it was more a way to lionize protesters like the Maccabees based on now-outdated patriarchal values than it was a genuine illustration of the escalation of a political movement. In the earliest days of his resistance to the restrictions imposed by the Seleucid emperor Antiochus Epiphanes, Mattathias, along with his family and those



**These accounts accurately depict the necessary shift from conscientious non-violence toward proactive aggression if political resistance is going to succeed against a totalitarian regime.**

sympathetic to his cause, takes a nonviolent stance of resistance. They circumcise children in secret, hide away precious scrolls, refuse requests to sacrifice on makeshift altars erected throughout Judea, and eventually hide themselves away in the wilderness. This all occurs before Mattathias and his followers turn toward violent resistance. The ancient sources all depict the Maccabees following this course of action in the face of increasing violence against those who resist the king's enforcers. The descriptions had always been there, and I had recognized them; I had always thought of them as artistic inventions meant to emphasize the necessity of violent action. I had not yet begun to understand the truth of the story that they told until I saw firsthand how quickly violent protest develops from peaceful resistance in the face of an oppressive regime.

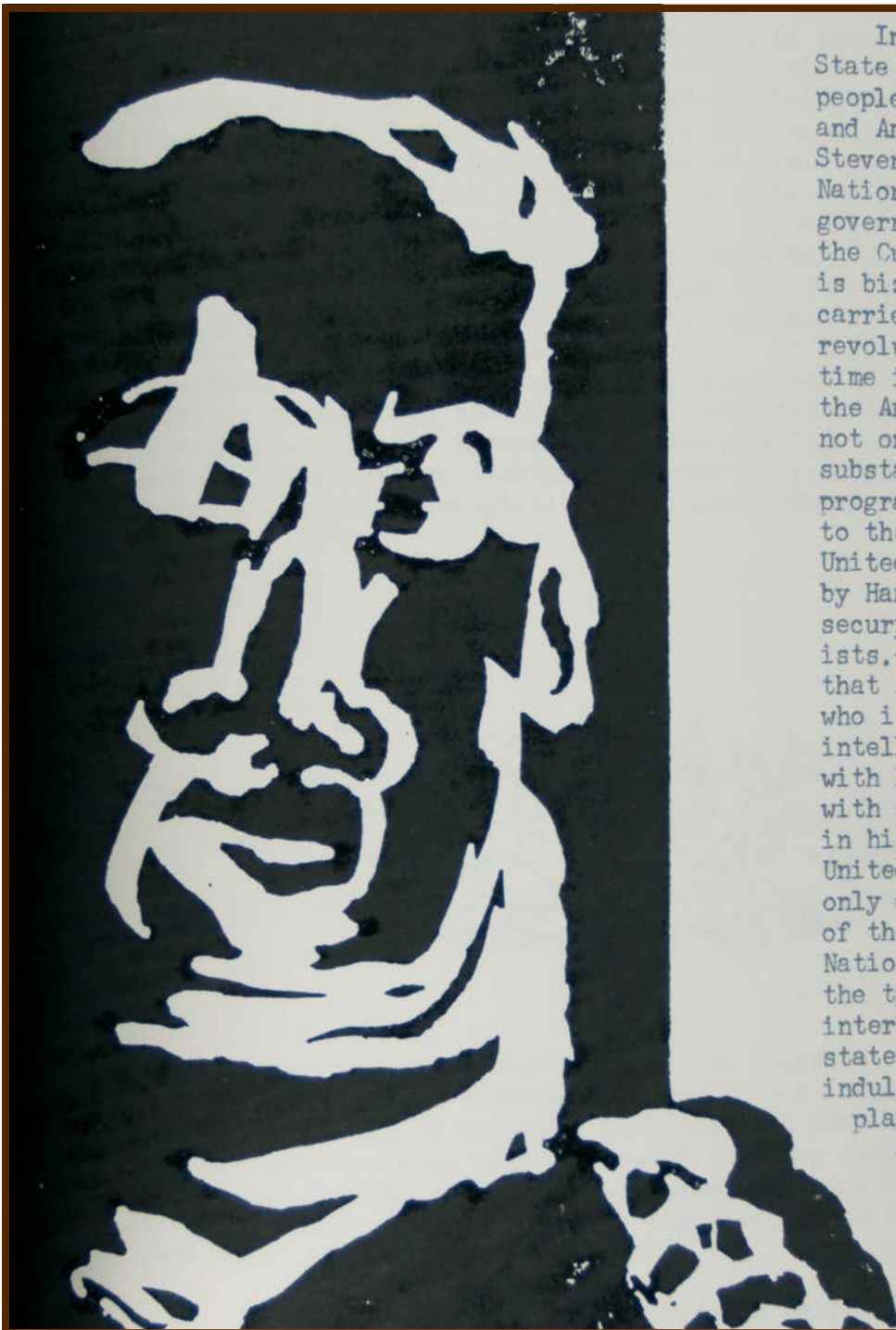
When I began protesting in earnest in Hong Kong, I noticed a pattern emerge. Protesters of all ages, from small children to octogenarians, would gather together to reiterate the five demands of the Hong Kong protests. After some time, platoons of police in riot gear, derisively called raptors because of their inhuman appearance and behavior, would muster around the perimeters of these protests warning us. If we did not desist with our illegal gathering, they said, the police would be forced to take action. Because these gatherings were all that we had to collectively express our political will, we persisted in disrupting traffic, economic activities, and the steady drone demanding that we recognize the government's authority. The police would then respond with violence. On several occasions I had tear gas fired in my direction. Once, while at a sit-in with my children, raptors invaded the protest space, forced us against a wall, and nearly trampled my children in the process. This rapid escalation threatened my safety and that of my family. I recalled that in most sources the final scene before the Hasmoneans begin their real campaign of violent resistance involves a group of Jews who had retreated to caves in the wilderness so that they would not be forced to obey the king's ordinances. The king's soldiers follow them. Then, after failing to force their obedience, they proceed to slaughter every last one of them, men, women, and children. In the stories, this shows that all peaceful means of resistance have been expended.

There is nothing left for the Maccabees but to go on the offensive. And that is precisely what they do. I had interpreted this scene before as elevating the manliness of a figure like Mattathias as the first to move toward violence. But I have come to realize that, in addition, this piece of the story narrates a turn to violent action that becomes necessary for a protest subdued by violence to have any chance of success at all. By late July and into the autumn, a group of Hong Kong protesters began to instigate violence on the edges of most public protests. Frontliners performed some of these activities out of frustration with the police and their tactics. But, strategically, they served a vital purpose for the protests. They acted as a first line of defense against the increasing police violence and intimidation against peaceful protesters. Moreover, they amplified the voice of the protesters, which had been ignored for too long.

The ancient depictions of the Maccabees, then, transmit a genuine quality of successful political resistance. These accounts accurately depict the necessary shift from conscientious nonviolence toward proactive aggression if political resistance is going to succeed against a totalitarian regime. Mattathias and his men wage a rebellion that results in securing an autonomous Jewish territory.

Of course, there is a sad epilogue to the story in Hong Kong. The protests continued until the rise of COVID-19 in January 2020. Then, fears of an outbreak in Hong Kong put a stop to most large gatherings. By June 2020, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress unilaterally passed a National Security Law for Hong Kong, which enshrined into the constitution the criminality of all protest activity against the People's Republic of China. This action effectively instituted the extradition law, and made illegal any form of speech against it. I never participated as a frontline protester. But I was thankful for them. I saw that their controversial tactics made my protest matter in a way it never would have without them.

*The author has opted to write under a pseudonym for this essay. Openly identifying himself as a participant in the 2019 Hong Kong protests could lead to fines and incarceration under China's National Security Law. He remains committed to the liberation of Hong Kong.*



In April, 1961, the State Department told the people of the United States and Ambassador Adlai Stevenson told the United Nations that the Cuban government had "betrayed" the Cuban revolution. This is bizarre. Cuba had carried out a democratic revolution for the first time in the history of the Americas. Cuba had not only proclaimed, but substantially realized, a program almost identical to the one betrayed in the United States in the 1790s by Hamilton and the security-holding capitalists.<sup>1</sup> One must assume that Ambassador Stevenson, who is widely known as an intellectual, is familiar with history--or at least with American history. Yet in his outburst to the United Nations, he not only displayed ignorance of the rules of the United Nations, which do not allow the type of meddling in the internal affairs of another state that Mr. Stevenson indulged in; he also displayed incredible ignorance (for an "intellectual") of his own country's 170-year old betrayal of its own revolution. Before his

**"THE NEW FREEDOM": CORPORATE CAPITALISM**

Perlman, Fredy; John Ricklefs (illustrator)  
1961, New York. 1/91 copies

Fierce critique of capitalism that draws on history, economics, political theory, philosophy, sociology, literature and religion. Details how corporate capitalism consolidated production, education and communication while converting the masses into the means for maintenance and growth of private wealth. Asserts an economic interpretation of the U.S. Constitution. Alexander Hamilton is repeatedly criticized for desiring governance by the rich and well-born and for promoting economic speculation for personal profit by a few, which runs contrary to the democratic ideals of equality, untrammelled communication, education and self-governance. Covers utopian and socialist experiments, the press, advertising, politicians and how the aristocracy extends its dominion under the cover of democracy by use of fraud, deception and violence. (28079) \$475.

*Handprinted woodcut by John Ricklefs; mimeograph typescript (cropped)*

ART  
PHOTOGRAPHY  
ARCHITECTURE  
MODERNISM  
JUDAICA & BIBLES  
HOLOCAUST  
YIDDISH & HEBREW  
FOREIGN LANGUAGE  
OLYMPIC GAMES  
APPRAISAL SERVICES



ERIC CHAIM  
**KLINE**  
BOOKSELLER

WWW.KLINEBOOKS.COM  
818.920.9968 ■ info@klinebooks.com  
P.O. Box 829 ■ OUT-OF-PRINT  
Santa Monica, CA 90406



# The Profession

## The Invisible Meḥizah

Jodi Eichler-Levine

This is a story about how Jewish Studies still has a gender problem because it still has a religion problem.

Telling this story is my protest.

Jewish Studies programs are entangled with Jewish communities, foundations, and institutions. Happily, today many Jewish Studies scholars are not Jewish. This is as it should be: no one should have to belong to a community to engage in its study. Likewise, in the AJS 2018 membership survey<sup>1</sup>, over 50 percent of the respondents were women, and close to 2 percent of respondents identified as nonbinary or genderqueer.

But when the AJS was founded in 1968, most members were Jewish men. Residues of that history linger. So there are spaces where the line between the synagogue and the seminar room is porous. This story happened there, in that in-between.

I'm not trying to hurt the people in the story. I'm telling it to highlight social structures and how they affect female-identified scholars. This tale, occasioned by a minor error, provides a perfect storm, a collision between

academic and ritual spaces. The problem lies in our field, and how its legacies of gendered exclusion linger, not in individuals. I'm telling it here because we, as a guild, need to reckon with the vulnerability these overlaps still engender. We need to have some uncomfortable conversations. Otherwise, such moments go unremarked by the scholars whose bodies are privileged in both spaces—the academy and synagogue.

This story, of course, has a *meḥizah*

---

A few years ago, I participated in a weeklong Jewish Studies seminar cosponsored, for the first time, by my own Jewish Studies center. A preponderance of the scholars were Jewish, though some were not. Hebrew terms of endearment bounced around the room all week. The more senior men in the group were sometimes even dubbed with the honorific "*ḥakham*:" a sage. Overall, though, it was a typical academic gathering.

Then Shabbat happened.

**I broke personally. That moment of exclusion shredded my Jewish sense of self.**

For the weekend, our group moved to a location near a synagogue. There would be optional services and group study on Saturday afternoon, before work continued Sunday. We weren't *required* to go to the synagogue, but our meals were served there, and members of the group were leading the group study in ways that built upon their academic expertise.

With light trepidation given my liberal Jewish upbringing, I expected the synagogue to be traditional. *It will be fine*, I told myself. *You've been to Orthodox services before! We're all just guests there.*

So there will be a mechitzah dividing the men and the women, I told myself. You've seen them, if rarely. *Pretend it's ethnography!*

I considered not attending services—but I am Jewish. I do observe Shabbat. I decided to go and stick with the group. It's not like we were leading the service, I thought.

*We were all just guests.*

Until we weren't.

I got through Friday night behind the blessedly low, waist-high *meḥiḏah*, battling through my wistful memories of leading Friday night services as a teenager. I sat next to a non-Jewish woman from our seminar, playing prayer book tour guide; the other Jewish women from our group were more traditionally observant and seemed comfortable. I was sad, but ... *fine*, I told myself. I drank a bit extra at dinner. I was ... fine?

But then, on Shabbat morning, I felt much more alone in the women's section. The other women from the seminar had slept in. The men I had talked with all week, tried to connect with intellectually and befriend, seemed so far away.

The Torah scroll was far away, too. Then they called up a member of our seminar for an *aliyah*, the ritual honor of saying the blessing before a section of the Torah reading. An immense honor. Wait, I thought. The group is *participating*? Maybe it's just him.



21 ART CONTRIBUTOR: OR-NAH RAN

This artwork was part of the Jewish Agency's invitation to a delegation of artists for an art project on the theme "Home." The mosaic was inspired by a demonstration of five pregnant women in search of a better place to raise their unborn children. The protest was designed by Maya Ben David during the COVID-19 pandemic. *She Deserves It*, 2020. Mosaic with natural stones and ceramic on cement board. 35.4 x 59.1 in. © 2020 Or-Nah Ran. Courtesy of the artist.

But then, another male scholar from our group was called up for an *aliyah*. And another. And another. Nearly all of the Jewish men in our group. All standing before the scroll, touching its handles. All intoning the familiar chant.

And I broke.

I broke personally. That moment of exclusion shredded my Jewish sense of self. All those teenage years in my Reform synagogue, *leyning* Torah, of *munaḥ 'etnaḥtas* and *munaḥ segols*, the *yad* my grandmother had given me heavy in my hand. Decades of taking the privilege of my inclusion in three different denominations for granted. I felt exposed, stripped of my Jewish personhood.

I broke professionally. I had wanted to impress these male colleagues on equal footing. When they ascended the *bema* while I couldn't, it was clear that I was not, in fact, their equal. I had never felt more vulnerable.

But most of all: I broke because I felt *ashamed*.

"How will I face them in the seminar room tomorrow?" I thought. "How can any of them respect me after this? How can any of them see me as their colleague *in the same way* they see the men beside them?"

That's how internalized shame works. Before I was furious with anyone else, *I was angry at myself*. Being able to give a Torah blessing does not have any bearing on one's scholarship. But it broke the sense of scholarly camaraderie I had been fighting for all week. *You're not really*



## The Profession

*one of them, I thought. If only you were a man, this would not have happened.*

—

That *mehizah* is why Jewish Studies has a gender problem.

How can Jewish Studies ever be a truly equitable field when male-only homosocial spaces have played, *and continue to play*, such an enormous part in our guild's networks?

You could say, Shabbat services shouldn't be part of an academic seminar—and I would agree with you. (They are no longer a part of that program.)

But this wasn't the first time Jewish Studies and Jewish observance have been blended, and it won't be the last. In fact, our field's push towards greater public engagement makes it *more likely* that this will happen again. Jewish Studies scholars frequently serve as scholars-in-residence at synagogues. When a Jewish institution chooses to host a scholar in residence—perhaps, sometimes, through the AJS Distinguished Lectureship Program—which scholars' bodies will signify expertise to them, and why?

Ironically, this whole episode occurred because of a mistake. Months earlier, my colleague had been promised those members who preferred a more liberal service would find a second minyan elsewhere in the building. But it was an "off" week. There was no other service.

The mistake revealed the privilege of the men behind the proverbial curtain, the comparative ease of their ability to ascend in literal and figurative ways.

Some of those men are my dear friends now and have seen me through tough times. I have collaborated with others professionally. I am happy when I see them at conferences. All of them. I did not write this to shame them. I doubt many of them even remember this incident.

I didn't write this essay because I want anyone else to change the way they worship.

**The mistake revealed the privilege of the men behind the proverbial curtain, the comparative ease of their ability to ascend in literal and figurative ways.**

I wrote this essay because when I tell this story to other women in Jewish Studies, they nod in recognition. They tell me their own *mehizah* stories from other professional settings. Some are from long ago. Some are recent. Why are we still telling these stories?

Internalized shame is real, and it is painful. *If only I were the right kind of woman in Jewish Studies*, I thought that day. *The kind who was "more" observant and wasn't upset by a mehizah. Then I would belong.*

*If only I had simply been born a Jewish man*, I thought.

No one should still feel that way in our field.

And so, we need to keep talking about the gender problems in Jewish Studies and their link to the Jewish problems in Jewish Studies. This protest doesn't happen on the streets. It happens when we are blazingly, painfully honest with one another. The risk is not facing tear gas or police batons. It is, simply, tears.

In this story, a misunderstanding and a real *mehizah* made an invisible *mehizah* visible.

Jewish Studies won't be a truly inclusive place until we tear the invisible one down.

---

**JODI EICHLER-LEVINE** is *Berman Professor of Jewish Civilization and professor of Religion Studies at Lehigh University. Her most recent book is Painted Pomegranates and Needlepoint Rabbis: How Jews Craft Resilience and Create Community (University of North Carolina Press, 2020).*

—

i <http://bit.ly/AJS2018survey>



22 ART CONTRIBUTOR: RICHARD MCBEE

*Absalom Rapes David's Concubines* (2 Samuel 16: 15-23), 2013. Oil on canvas, 50 x 40 in. © 2013 Richard McBee. Courtesy of the artist.



Background: Detail from *The Common Interest*, 2013. Charcoal on paper. 11.8 x 8.3 in. © 2013 Jacob Yasha Soffer. Courtesy of the artist.

## A Protest Novel That Went Unheeded

Josh Lambert

[cw: suicide, spousal abuse]

It's not controversial to call Susan Taubes's *Divorcing*, first published by Random House in 1969 and reissued this October by *New York Review*, an autobiographical novel. Reviewers did so in 1969, and again, with increased sophistication, this fall. What's less clear is what we should do, once we accept that the novel conveys unsavory truths about real-world figures.

The book tells the story of a fictional character, Sophie Blind, whose experiences obviously and straightforwardly line up, in many ways, with those of the novelist, Susan Taubes (1928–1969). Both were born in Hungary and moved to the United States. Both married a charismatic rabbi and Jewish Studies scholar: Sophie marries Ezra Blind, Susan married Jacob Taubes (1923–1987), author of *Occidental Eschatology* and *The Political Theology of Paul*, and famed mentor or influence on Giorgio Agamben, Marshall Berman, and Avital Ronell, among others.

In the novel, Sophie understands that her marriage defines her and makes her life easier, but Ezra is hardly an ideal husband. He cheats, exploits her, and—most damagingly—refuses to divorce her. “You have no reason to want a divorce,” he tells her. “You just want to break the marriage. Why? Are you evil? Are you bent on destruction?” “So that’s what you are. A bitch,” Ezra says, thinking further: “It’s a psychiatrist she needs. Or a lover, or a beating. Beat her blue.” Eventually, in a phantasmagoric trial sequence, Sophie, already dead, demands her divorce from a rabbinical court, and, after a series of testimonies (by her father, Ezra’s lovers, and other

witnesses) the rabbis declare that “her divorce is granted, whether she is alive or dead,” and, lying in her coffin, “she is presented with a Bill of Divorce.”

The tragic and gruesome context in which one has to read the novel is that one week after it was published, Susan Taubes committed suicide. While such a series of events might be expected to have created a *succès de scandale*, elevating the profile of the book, the opposite seems to have happened: the novel received a little press, then quickly went out of print, and more or less disappeared, until this new reprint.

—

What relationship between art and life should inform the way we think about this novel?

One possible answer—a bad one—is to imagine a causal connection between the novel’s reception and the end of Taubes’s life. This has been common, even in recent reviews of the novel prompted by its reissuing, but the most succinct and blunt statement of this idea was a 1969 article in a New Jersey newspaper headlined, “Novel Panned, Author Suicide.” This isn’t a mistake only because it propagates a false narrative about artistic failure that ignores the realities of depression, mental illness, and suicide (although that is a major problem with it). It also isn’t really true, in the case of *Divorcing*: the novel hadn’t been panned, but reviewed respectfully. Even a widely cited, generally quite stupid and misogynistic review in the *New York Times Book Review* praised the last third of *Divorcing* as “tantalizing and coherent.”

**None of this seems to have affected Jacob Taubes' professional opportunities while he was alive, or his reputation after his death.**

—

What about the other link we might make between the novel and real life—the one that, at least after #metoo, feels obvious? Might the fictional husband character whose treatment leads Sophie to contemplate suicide repeatedly, culminating in scenes in which she is dead, be telling us something about the real-life Jewish Studies scholar whose ex-wife committed suicide in November 1969? Might we not posit that Jacob Taubes, if his conduct had been similar to that of Ezra Blind in the novel, bears some culpability for his ex-wife's having "been despondent for more than a year" (according to the notes found in her purse after her death)?

Indeed, while most articles about Susan Taubes's suicide did not mention her ex-husband at all, Jacob Taubes has been reported to have insisted that he was, in fact, partly responsible. In a memoir, the philosopher Babette Babich recalls Jacob Taubes telling her in the 1980s that she, Babich, "looked 'just like' his former wife" who, "he declared with a strange satisfaction, as if it were somehow to his credit, had taken her life, walking into the ocean, as he put it, when he left her to marry" another woman. According to Babich, at least, Jacob Taubes not only seemed to have taken "credit" for Susan Taubes's suicide, but also—like the fictional character Ezra Blind—he seems not to have taken at all seriously the contention, made explicitly and at length in *Divorcing*, that to be married to a man like Taubes could be so harrowing that death would seem preferable.

None of this seems to have affected Jacob Taubes' professional opportunities while he was alive, or his reputation after his death. For decades after the publication of *Divorcing*, Taubes was employed as a professor at the Free University of Berlin, where he taught and mentored many students. Stanford University Press published translations of two of his books in the 2000s, calling him "one of the great Jewish intellectuals of the twentieth century." He has been the kind of academic celebrity whom graduate students in Jewish Studies are supposed to have read and thought about and taken seriously.

Respectful studies and memoirs have tended either to ignore his personal life entirely, or briefly acknowledge

that he was "sad and sick" before turning to focus on his philosophical and theological writing. What would it mean to say, instead, that the first and primary fact one should know about Jacob Taubes is that he was an awful husband who terrorized his brilliant wife until she committed suicide, and was proud of that?

That's more than many people would be willing to say, on the basis of *Divorcing*, which is, of course, a novel. It is fiction; it is fiction even though, within it, Sophie says that the book she is writing is "not really fiction." The book includes many scenes that cannot describe actual events, in which the dead speak, in which characters transcend space and time. It is fictional, which would seem to imply that it cannot function as testimony.

And yet, thanks to scholars like Leigh Gilmore, we also know that women who have testified about the misogynistic abuse they have suffered have been often been attacked verbally and physically, and that many women have understood that, because of those dynamics, they need to share information about abuse using means that protect them from such attacks, like whisper networks. And we also know that the genre of the roman à clef has, for hundreds of years, been one such venue, relied upon by women writers who have felt that they cannot otherwise tell the truth about abuses they have suffered at the hands of powerful men.

To be clear, I am not calling on anyone to "cancel" Jacob Taubes, and I'm frankly not sure what it would mean to cancel a religious philosopher who died twenty-three years ago and published relatively little. But I would be eager to see anyone translating, citing, or teaching Jacob Taubes' work take seriously Susan Taubes's claims about ethically despicable conduct he engaged in, especially as it is reflected in his work as a thinker, teacher, and influence on the field.

—

**JOSH LAMBERT** is *Sophia Moses Robison Associate Professor of Jewish Studies and English and director of the Jewish Studies Program at Wellesley College.*



GEORGE L. MOSSE / LAURENCE A. WEINSTEIN  
**CENTER FOR JEWISH STUDIES**

**FACULTY**

Michael F. Bernard-Donals - English  
Amos Bitzan - History  
Jeff Blakely - Classical & Ancient Near Eastern Studies  
Rachel Feldhay Brenner z"l - Jewish Studies  
Teryl Dobbs - Music  
Ivan Ermakoff - Sociology  
Chad Goldberg - Sociology  
Sara Guyer - English  
Jeremy Hutton - Classical & Ancient Near Eastern Studies  
Mark Loudon - German, Nordic, and Slavic  
Tony Michels - History  
Steven Nadler - Philosophy  
Anna Paretskaya - Sociology  
Cara Rock-Singer - Religious Studies  
Douglas Rosenberg - Art  
Jordan Rosenblum - Religious Studies  
Nadav Shelef - Political Science  
Judith Sone - Jewish Studies  
Adam Stern - German, Nordic, and Slavic  
Scott Straus - Political Science  
Jeanne Swack - Music  
Chontel Syfox - Classical & Ancient Near Eastern Studies  
Uri Vardi - Music  
Sunny Yudkoff - German, Nordic, and Slavic  
Marina Zilbergerts - German, Nordic, and Slavic



George L. Mosse / Laurence A. Weinstein  
**Center for Jewish Studies**  
UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

# JEWISH STUDIES AT UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON

## GRADUATE FELLOWSHIPS

**Laurence A. Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellowship in Education and Jewish Studies**  
Supports the work of exceptional graduate students working at the intersection of education and Jewish studies. Awarded at regular intervals through the generous gift of Frances Weinstein, this fellowship affords the successful candidate a package that includes an academic stipend and tuition.

### **George L. Mosse Program in History: Graduate Exchange Program**

Named for historian George L. Mosse, and offered through the Mosse Program in History, the Graduate Exchange Program allows graduate students from a variety of fields in the humanities and social sciences at UW-Madison and the Hebrew University to spend an academic year at the respective partner university in order to advance their studies and to broaden their intellectual and international horizons.

### **Julie A. and Peter M. Weil Distinguished Graduate Fellowship**

Offered to outstanding Ph.D. candidates who wish to study American Jewish history, this fellowship is made possible through the generosity of Julie A. and Peter M. Weil. The fellowship package, available only to incoming students, consists of five years of guaranteed support.

## MOSSE/WEINSTEIN CENTER INITIATIVES

### **Conney Project on Jews and the Arts**

A multidisciplinary initiative for exploration of Jews in the arts. Encouraging new scholarship and production in the field, this project is made possible by the generosity of Mildred and Marvin L. Conney.

### **Greenfield Summer Institute**

Made possible by the generosity of Larry and Ros Greenfield, this annual conference promotes lifelong learning in Jewish studies by showcasing research from scholars around the country.

### **Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture**

Provides programming and supports scholarly inquiry into Yiddish language, literature, history, and arts. The program is named for Sherry Mayrent, an avid supporter of Yiddish culture.



# When Your Book Is Protested: Lessons in Communal Knowing

Claire Sufrin

There are two aspects of protests that I hadn't really understood until recently. The first is the degree to which protests are not about knowledge so much as they are about what sort of knowledge matters. The second is the way in which protests can reveal points of tension within a community.

The protest from which I learned all of this was a protest of a book, my book, and it unfolded—as things do these days—online: on Facebook mainly but also in the *Forward* and *Marginalia* and a few other sites.

*The New Jewish Canon: Ideas & Debates*, which I coedited with Yehuda Kurtzer, is an anthology of excerpts from about eighty primary nonfiction sources written between 1980 and 2015. The pieces offer an incomplete but rich snapshot of the conversations Jews had about themselves as they shaped and responded to the world in which they lived during this period: debating their values, determining their communal priorities, educating their children, and more. The primary sources are all accompanied by commentaries written by contemporary scholars—some senior Jewish Studies colleagues, but many mid-career or junior; some firmly entrenched in academia and others writing from various alt-academic vantage points.

Together with a brief summary, the book's table of contents appeared on the publisher's website in mid-April, three months ahead of its scheduled publication date. Yehuda posted a link on his Facebook page. And within just a few days, that post became the site of several dozen attacks on the book and on Yehuda and me. Our book was under protest—or, to be more specific, our book's table of contents was under protest. At issue

**Inclusion in the volume does not mean our approval of the individuals or their works.**

was our choice to include excerpts of writing by three individuals who have been accused of—and to varying degrees have admitted to—a range of sexual misconduct toward women in professional settings.

Initially we responded on Facebook by protesting the protest with more information. We chose sources out of recognition of the importance they had had at the time they were published or recognition that they reflected intellectual shifts as they were happening, even if we could only see those shifts in retrospect. Inclusion in the volume does not mean our approval of the individuals or their works. We were not seeking to rehabilitate the reputations of people known to have committed acts of sexual violence or any other bad acts; we were not seeking to rub salt in the wounds of those who had been hurt by these acts.

As the Facebook protests continued, it became clear that no one was reading what we had written, and Yehuda and I decided to stop responding. Behind the scenes, we made a few changes to the book, in particular by rewriting a section of the introduction to more explicitly address #metoo. We wrote an op-ed that was published in *Marginalia* in June, addressing both the book's aims and the experience of having been, as we put it there, "on the wrong side of call-out culture." Both that op-ed and our introduction, once the book finally appeared, were well received, which was gratifying. One speaker mentioned the *The New Jewish Canon* once in a round-table on #metoo at the AJS Annual Meeting in December 2020, but no one else picked up on it.

From an intellectual perspective, I believe that the protest of our book led us to make it better. Insofar as the protest demanded a response, I clarified for myself what I think should be the longer-term ramifications when it becomes known that a colleague has engaged in a pattern of sexual misconduct toward colleagues. Insofar as people now care what I think about this topic, I have unwittingly become something of an expert on the legacy of #metoo, and for as long as people find my take helpful, I am happy to share my views.

But here's the thing. There may be times when public shaming is called for. Certainly, when leaders and public figures act in ways that harm society or otherwise call their qualifications to serve as leaders into question, public shaming can be the most effective way for the everyday person to express their displeasure and create change. But publicly questioning a book's table of contents and the integrity of its editors (and by extension those who wrote commentaries for the book) without first asking about the book's aims? Are we not, as scholars, committed to research as a means of understanding? This is the part of the protest that I simply do not understand.

All of this speaks to what I referred to above as the first aspect of protest, namely, knowledge. I've tried to capture the various ways knowledge played into the protest of the *The New Jewish Canon*. But it's the second aspect of protest, namely, the revelation of a tension or even a fissure within the community that leaves me more concerned.

Yehuda and I never expected that the editorial choices we made would go unquestioned. Interestingly, though, no one has yet questioned, let alone protested, the material we ourselves find most troubling. In particular, the primary sources in the book include several that are widely viewed as politically extreme; we chose to include them to make the specific point that calling someone's views extreme makes it all the more important to understand those views and even to recognize how close they may come to the so-called mainstream. I hesitated most around including material from *Torat Ha-melekh*, a 2009 text justifying the killing of non-Jews in halakhic terms. This is a text that is not widely known even as its authors and the institutions they run have inspired some Jews in acts of terror against Arabs in Israel and the Occupied Territories. There is no question that publishing it in our book gives it a wider audience, as you will struggle to find any part of it in English anywhere else. Despite my



**24 ART CONTRIBUTOR: ROBERT FIELDS**

*Nine Hundred +*, 2019. Wire screen, waxed wood, and acrylic paint on wood panel. 30.5 x 14.5 x 4 in. © 2019 Robert Fields. Courtesy of the artist.

unease, I am glad we included it for the exact reason that I prioritize knowledge and understanding and the recognition that these views too are part of the contemporary landscape of Jewish ideas.

But where are the protests around this source? Though it surprised me at first, I assume this reflects a general understanding that our inclusion of these pieces does not signal an endorsement of the views it expresses or the violent acts associated with it and its authors. I suspect that these views are so beyond the pale for most,



## The Profession

if not all, of our readers that they cannot imagine that we ourselves might hold them.

Why did the same general understanding not extend to our inclusion of writings by authors known to engage in sexual misconduct? My best guess at this point comes down to a concern or even a fear on the part of the protesters that the issue of sexual misconduct has not yet been resolved. That the mainstream view of these men and their acts is not yet condemnatory enough such that it actually could be the case that Yehuda and I included them in the hopes of helping to rehabilitate their reputations, because somehow we think that their sexual misconduct is unproblematic.

Sexual misconduct cannot and should not be tolerated. But how can we make that our norm if we can't talk openly about the longer-term implications of learning that the very same colleagues who produced field-shaping work were taking advantage of their professional

stature to mistreat us? Some of the protesters questioned whether Yehuda and I cared how much the victims of sexual misconduct were hurt by seeing the names of perpetrators in print. We do care, very much. But as scholars, we took upon ourselves the responsibility of representing the ideas and debates of the decades between 1980 and 2015 as we understand them to have unfolded and not as we wish them to have been. Furthermore, I would suggest it is only with better understanding of what happened that we have the right to hope for a better future.

---

**CLAIRE SUFRIN** is associate professor of Instruction in Jewish Studies and assistant director of the Crown Family Center for Jewish and Israel Studies at Northwestern University. She is coeditor of *The New Jewish Canon* (Academic Studies Press, 2020), which was a finalist for a 2020 National Jewish Book Award in *Modern Jewish Thought and Experience*.



Academy for Jewish Religion | CA  
*Transforming the Jewish World*

For nearly 20 years, AJRCA's spiritually-based programs have educated rabbis, cantors and chaplains to serve in a wide variety of Jewish, secular and multi-faith environments.

Master's degree specializations offer leadership development in Interfaith Relations, Sephardic Studies, Jewish Values and Ethics, Music in Jewish Life, and Creativity in Jewish Life.

On campus or online ~ Flexible ~ Student-friendly ~ Accredited  
Accepting applications year-round

Degree programs approved by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, Senior College and University Commission (WSCUC)

To learn more

213-884-4133

[admissions@ajrca.edu](mailto:admissions@ajrca.edu)

[ajrca.edu](http://ajrca.edu)

[Facebook.com/AJRCA](https://www.facebook.com/AJRCA)

# A Protest against the JCC Conception of Jewish Studies

Benjamin Schreier

Jewish Studies mostly embraces Salo Baron's famous exhortation against a "lachrymose conception of Jewish history." Baron worried that Jewish historiography was too dedicated to the cliché of Jewish suffering, rendering it blind to Jewish joy and achievement; and indeed, Jewish Studies sometimes still likes to pat itself on the back by ritually retelling the story of its auto-emancipation from the lachrymose, a kind of *fort/da* of celebratory self-legitimation. But I'd like to draw attention to a more insidious narrative contaminating Jewish Studies discourse, active at least since Jewish Studies has consolidated into a professional identity, a more-or-less coherent field—that is, over and above a confederation of independent disciplines—in the last generation: what I call the "JCC conception of Jewish Studies."

With its other trials, summer 2020 brought an experience with a Jewish Studies journal that exemplifies this paradigm. I was asked to write a book review, but when I told the editor about my significant criticisms of the book's methodology and implied theorization of Jewish Studies practice, I was told "the journal can't afford that kind of controversy" and that the review had to be "productive," which was clarified as "we'd rather not publish take-downs." The editor wrote, "If you find the whole book offensive and retrograde then it's probably better to pass the review on to someone else....I know there is value in criticism, and for its ability to show how things don't work, but [journal name] as a whole aims to also put forward models for how things should work." I inwardly steamed, and sighed, noting the conspicuous if implicit opposition between "show[ing] how things should work" and *not* "find[ing] the whole book offensive and retrograde": it's not at all clear why the set of things that show how things should work" should be assumed to never



25 ART CONTRIBUTOR: MAXWELL BAUMAN

*LEGO Anarchist Aleph*, 2021. LEGO blocks. 6.5 x 5 x 0.5 in.  
© 2021 Maxwell Bauman. Courtesy of the artist.

**Luckily, I then saw the CFP for this issue of *AJS Perspectives*, an opportunity to leverage my rage for professional achievement.**

intersect with the set of things that "show how things [that are "offensive and retrograde"] don't work," but given the expression of anxiety about publishing "takedowns," it's obvious that in the editor's ethicoprofessional calculus, "the whole book," crucially, also necessarily means *the author*. This professional performance of the intentional fallacy adapted for the world of academic publishing shines light on the norm that *productive* be subordinated to *laudatory*. In any case, we agreed that the journal would find another reviewer, and I wondered why the will to affirmation is rarely explicitly, or perhaps *positively*, admitted. Luckily, I then saw the CFP for this issue of *AJS Perspectives*, an opportunity to leverage my rage for professional achievement.

Like most "studies" formations, Jewish Studies includes many academic disciplines and aggregates several not-necessarily-compatible methodologies; accordingly, the field obviously relies on a structuring concept of Jewish identity to unite its endeavors. I say "obviously," but in fact Jewish Studies devotes remarkably little energy to analyzing how it so structures itself (and possibly how it operates more generally—even granting



## The Profession

... because of the field's bad-faith identity problem, scholars interpellated in Jewish Studies can too easily see the necessarily antagonistic negative labor of criticism as bad manners...

its celebrated escape from the lachrymose). Most troubling, despite sporadic lip service paid since the 1969 founding of the AJS, there has been little sustained critical effort to disambiguate the concept of identity organizing the objects of Jewish Studies—the Jewish “stuff” Jewish Studies scholars address—and the concept of identity organizing its subjects—the scholars affirming themselves practitioners of Jewish Studies, most of whom can claim by currently accepted metrics to be Jews. This elision can end up suppressing intellectual dispute, whether methodological or theoretical, in favor of a kind of professional *sholom bayis* that has recently taken root. When the line between a critic's ideas about their object and their ideas about their self blurs—even, maybe especially, as registered by others—the old chestnut about not having anything nice to say takes on (even in the best of circumstances) a kind of earnest ethnological weight that, in a victory for reactionary intellectuality, can masquerade as professional decorum: one might (ideally) disagree with another's claims, but it's a lot harder to justify disagreeing with another's sense of identity. Leaving negativity at the door might sound good in the abstract (and indeed may respond to a very real history of inequity), but, bromides about Jews' predilection for disagreement aside, because of the field's bad-faith identity problem, scholars interpellated in Jewish Studies can too easily see the necessarily antagonistic negative labor of criticism as bad manners, or worse, *sinas khinam*.

The problem is not simply that Jewish Studies often manifests as a club (I imagine this is common in academic fields); it's that its habit of recognizing itself in its scholarly objects makes this insiderist affect a criterion of scholarly legitimacy, elevating self-referentiality (whose flipside is necessarily defensive disinterest in self-criticism) as an intellectual virtue. And this validating clubbiness metastasizes into a taboo against imagining Jewish Studies scholarship as anything other than producing, refining, and circulating historicist knowledge about Jews and Jewishness, themselves undertheorized concepts that, liberally and expansively imagined, are little more than the always recognizable spectral reifications of a keyword search. God forbid I object to ethnological historicism on its own terms, but as someone who went through the

trouble of getting a PhD in literary studies, I feel honor bound to insist that thinking can take other forms.

A “glance” at Facebook while I was preparing this essay yielded a useful field-scape in someone's announcement of a book review they'd just published. Though neither is scholarly, the book and review venue are intellectual and let's say haute-popular (the review venue is in fact nationally visible and widely read); but the book is Jewish Studies-y, the reviewer is a Jewish Studies professor, and it's predominantly Jewish Studies-ers who posted comments on the thread. Brass tacks: despite raising some respectfully submitted objections—the book's likely prejudicially-motivated lapses of coverage, its underconceived ideas about Jewish canonicity, its author's dubiously restricted intellectual-political imagination, etc.—the review redeems the book via the reviewer's own particular affirmations. And the Facebook comments mostly repeat some variant of “great review; generous while still taking some issue with the book; good job,” followed by the reviewer's responses peppily justifying the review's reticence to go too far into the weeds. Nothing unexpected in the presumption that reviews, in the antagonism-quashing vocabulary of the New Academic *Sholom Bayis*, should be “productive.” Which would be fine, at least normal, except that what the book got wrong in these takes in fact amounts to serious contravention of current canons of political and scholarly responsibility, orbiting around the book's repeating, if in sanitized form, the proclivities of the infamously reactionary Jewish Studies scholar, now known as much for their screeds in *Commentary* defending Trump for his Birchite Zionism as for their reactionary scholarship, who taught where the book's author received their bachelor's degree. To be clear, the Facebook commenters I'm describing here would I imagine mostly endorse my description of the book and its author's teacher (if perhaps not my politico-poetic flourishes). And to be clearer, many of them are tenured. So we have a book that recirculates reactionary biases and blindnesses, a review that while pointing out some of these predispositions insists on being positive, and a bunch of Jewish Studies scholars who, despite challenging those prejudices, congratulate the reviewer. This arrangement serves the affective pleasures of being “in” a community or network, but not

necessarily responsible scholarship. Have we learned *nothing* from Groucho Marx?

The review ends on an anodyne note: maybe this book, despite its flaws, can get people to think more highly of reading, and therefore of accepting nuance in these politically perilous times. It's the backbone of the review's positive tone, its—to use the term conspicuously repeated across many of the Facebook comments—"generosity." But for shit's sake, it's a book review, in a book review section; this platitude is given. The celebratory site of this positive affective feedback loop is simply a cliché. It's one thing for popular intellectualism to engage in Norman Vincent Peale-ism, but shouldn't scholarship have more self-respect? Christ, if all I were after was compliments I'd go to a strip club with a pocket full of small bills.

What I tententiously diagnose as the New Academic *Sholom Bayis* is certainly not the only affective modality of Jewish Studies intellectuality, but it's indisputably

ascendant. A long time ago Edward Said warned about the differences between disciplines and fields: while the former define themselves epistemologically and methodologically, the latter cohere otherwise, and can tend to elevate received ideas, practices, and communal protocols. When they begin to resemble guilds, fields like Jewish Studies can be intellectually perilous. Let's ditch the JCC and fight more.

---

**BENJAMIN SCHREIER** is *Mitrani Family Professor of Jewish Studies and professor of English and Jewish Studies at Pennsylvania State University*. He is author, most recently, of *The Rise and Fall of Jewish American Literature: Ethnic Studies and the Challenge of Identity* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), and, since 2011, editor of the journal *Studies in American Jewish Literature* (Penn State University Press).



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

**The Arizona Center  
for Judaic Studies**

**The Arizona Center for Judaic Studies** at The University of Arizona invites applications for the **Jeffrey B. Plevan Endowed Chair in Israel Studies**, tenure eligible, open rank, to begin August 2022 in Tucson, Arizona. The successful candidate will have a Ph.D., a record of scholarly excellence in research, teaching, and service/outreach, will possess a commitment to diversity and to undergraduate and graduate education, and will have a desire to raise the visibility of Judaic Studies on campus and beyond. The position includes service and research requirements and carries a 2-2 teaching load. For more information, please contact: Martha Castleberry, [marthac@arizona.edu](mailto:marthac@arizona.edu)

[www.judaic.arizona.edu](http://www.judaic.arizona.edu)



## After the Pittsburgh Shooting: A Scholar Cries for Justice

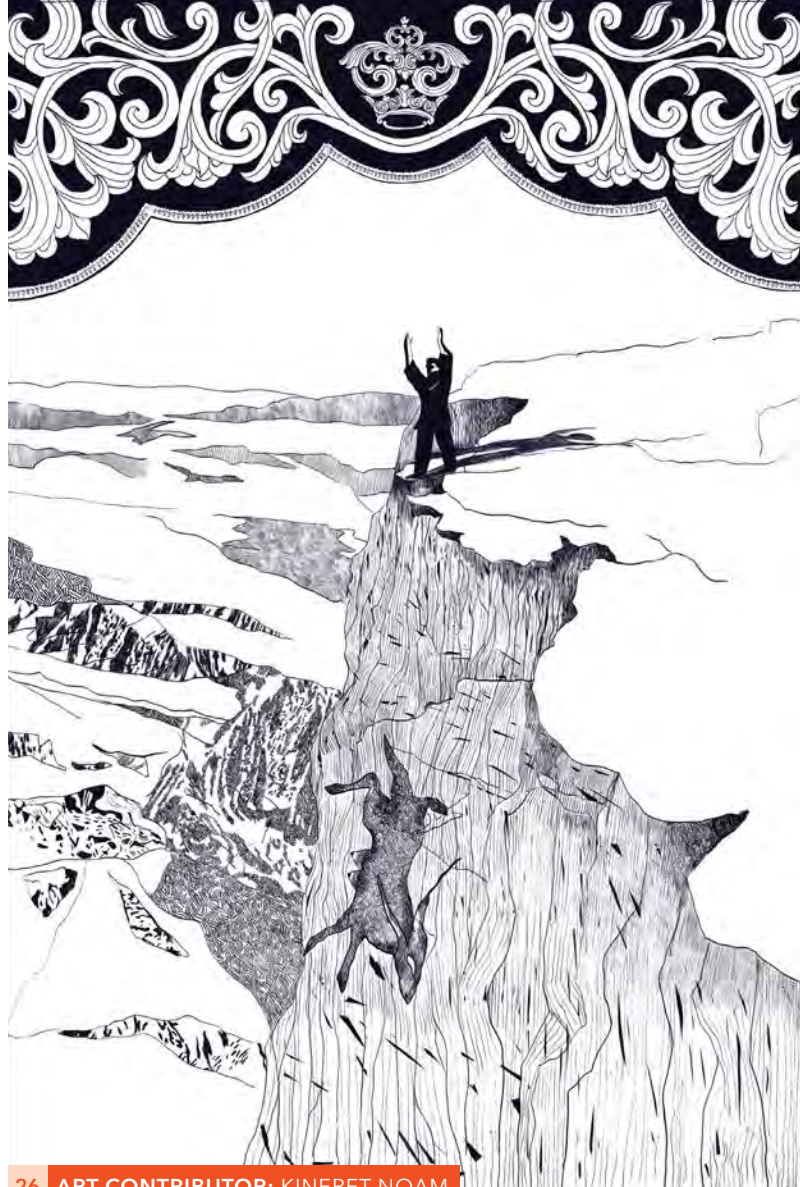
Rachel Kranson

Before a white supremacist gunman attacked a synagogue in my neighborhood, I believed myself to be well positioned as a politically engaged scholar. As both a practitioner of American Jewish history and an organizer with the Pittsburgh contingent of Bend the Arc Jewish Action, I never doubted that my scholarship would always complement my quiet activism, seamlessly and with minimal conflict. As a historian, I would meticulously create books and articles that revealed Jews to be, above all, deeply human. And as an activist, I would take the lessons of Jewish history and—with careful precision honed through my intellectual training—harness them for impactful social change.

Responding to the 2018 shooting, however, highlighted the ways in which my training as a scholar did not prepare me for the rawness, or the inevitable messiness, of frontline activist work.

Like so many others in my neighborhood of Squirrel Hill, in the city of Pittsburgh, and beyond, the synagogue shooting left me reeling. I was devastated by the anguish of friends who lost friends, by the suffering of a wounded neighbor, by my inability to reassure my children that they could feel safe in their school and synagogue. Most overpowering was my unrelenting sense that every person I cared about was in imminent danger. Just one week before the attack, my son and I had attended a bat mitzvah in the Tree of Life building. In the days following the shooting, I repeatedly visualized us in that space, running from a murderer.

Together with the crushing fear and sorrow, I nurtured my fury. Even before the attack, I knew that President Trump's encouragement of white nationalism and conspiratorial thinking endangered Jews of all racial backgrounds,



26 ART CONTRIBUTOR: KINERET NOAM

*Seven Illustrated Furs*, 2019. Illustration printed in hot press on linen fabric. 47.2 x 70.9 in. The work was done as part of a final project in the Visual Communication Department at Bezalel directed by Sharon Etgar. © 2019 Kineret Noam. Courtesy of the artist.

**Most overpowering was my unrelenting sense that every person I cared about was in imminent danger.**

along with non-Jewish people of color, immigrants, Muslims, and so many other Americans. Combined with our government's unconscionable failure to regulate access to firearms, the United States had been courting just this sort of calamity. Both in my academic work and my activist work, I spent a lot of time thinking about the conditions that make Jews vulnerable. While I could never have predicted that this attack would happen so close to home, it also did not feel entirely unexpected.

And yet, when disaster struck, I found myself unable to draw on my intellectual training. Scholarship—even public-facing scholarship—demands the kind of sustained concentration and clear, systematic thinking that I simply could not muster during a moment of trauma.

**The activist imperative to respond quickly to a fleeting news cycle made it inevitable that we would make mistakes and that we would make them publicly.**

So, during the brief period in which the world turned its fickle attention to the Jews of Pittsburgh, I relied on my fellow Bend the Arc activists to shape my response to the massacre. Alone, we were breaking down. But together, supporting one another, we crafted an open letter holding President Trump responsible for the hateful rhetoric that radicalized the gunman. When President Trump had the temerity to visit the Squirrel Hill neighborhood without denouncing the murderer's white nationalist ideology, we organized a march in protest. We led thousands of Pittsburghers in the Jewish mourning ritual of *kriah*, viscerally expressing our pain through rending fabric. We drew the city—and the nation—into the grief of a community ravaged by cynical, irresponsible leadership.

The activist imperative to respond quickly to a fleeting news cycle made it inevitable that we would make mistakes and that we would make them publicly. At one point, we did not adequately articulate the relationship between antisemitism and white nationalism. At other moments, we let reporters bait us and veer us away from the talking points. Still, we trusted that the most crucial elements of our message would reach the many people who needed to hear it.

This mode of engagement runs counter to academic frameworks which provide us with layers of protection against being raw, emotional, imprecise, and unpolished. As scholars, we never expose those messy first drafts to public view; we revise them multiple times, seek comments from trusted colleagues, and then participate in peer review. While we may complain about clueless, grumpy reviewer #2, there is security in the process. It may not be nimble, but the resulting work tends to be well insulated from missteps and infelicities. We are left with a public record of refined work, carefully engineered to hide the fact that we are as fallible, and as entirely human, as the people we write about.

In the days and weeks after the shooting, I never felt more fallible, or as entirely human. Along with my fellow organizers I made the choice to free fall into a moment of political crisis, without the protections of revision or peer review. Imperfect as it may have been, our work still changed how the press and our elected leaders under-

stood the political stakes of the Tree of Life tragedy. I wouldn't, couldn't, have done it differently.

Over time, I've regained my capacity to think about the shooting systematically, but I refuse to write about it dispassionately. On this issue, I suffuse my scholarship with the terror, pain, and fury that animated my activism in the wake of the attack.

Still, I struggle with this. Strong emotions are inherently messy and imprecise. I worry that I'm sacrificing professionalism. I worry that I was not close enough to those lost in the shooting to claim this much pain. In my worst moments, I worry that the protest that took so much out of me was not nearly enough, that the moment demanded more than I was able to give, that my reflections on it are self-aggrandizing and unworthy of the historical contributions I want to make. Writing in this mode feels like another free fall, but I can't imagine doing it differently.

I have to accept that anything I write about the shooting will be riddled with inevitable missteps and infelicities that no amount of peer review can fix. Still, I intend to bring to it everything I carry: the intellectual rigor, the political engagement, and the trauma.

**An earlier version of this essay was part of an online series of the *Political and Legal Anthropology Review* entitled "Living in Pittsburgh in the Aftermath of the Tree of Life Shootings." My thanks to editors Heath Cabot and Michal Friedman for their suggestions on the original essay.**

---

**RACHEL KRANSON** is associate professor of *Religious Studies* at the University of Pittsburgh. She is the author of *Ambivalent Embrace: Jewish Upward Mobility in Postwar America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2018) and is currently researching American Jewish engagement in the politics of abortion.





# ACADEMY FOR JEWISH RELIGION

*A pluralistic education.  
A spiritual home.*

## ***Join AJR's Global Student Body***

***Real-time distance learning options***

- **Rabbinic Ordination**
- **Cantorial Ordination**
- **Master of Arts in Jewish Studies**  
*Step into a robust curriculum from wherever you stand in the community*
- **Cantors to Rabbis**  
*For currently ordained cantors who would like to earn rabbinic ordination*
- **Kol-Bo**  
*AJR's newest program for those interested in simultaneous rabbinic and cantorial ordinations*

***“We are as great as the challenges we have the courage to undertake.”***

***~ Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks z"l***

***Strive for greatness at AJR!***

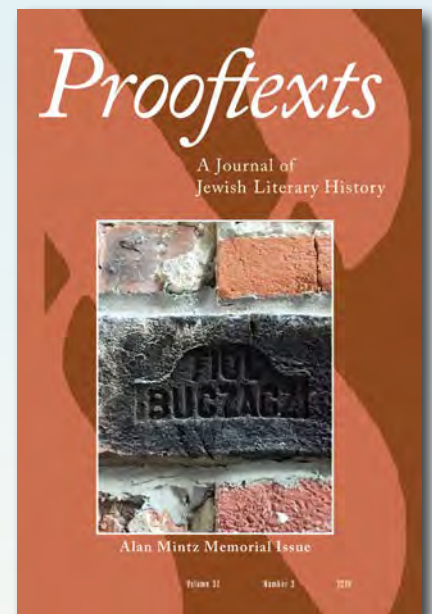
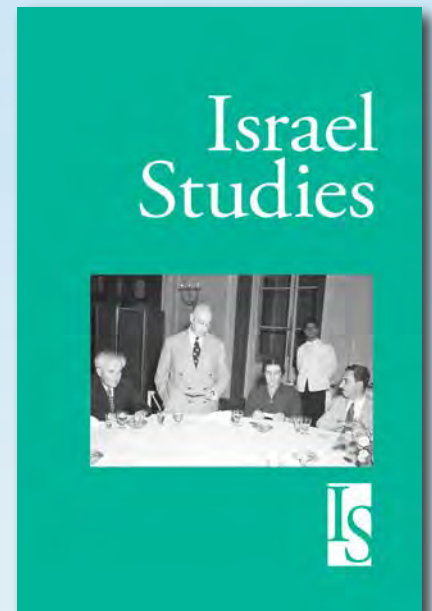
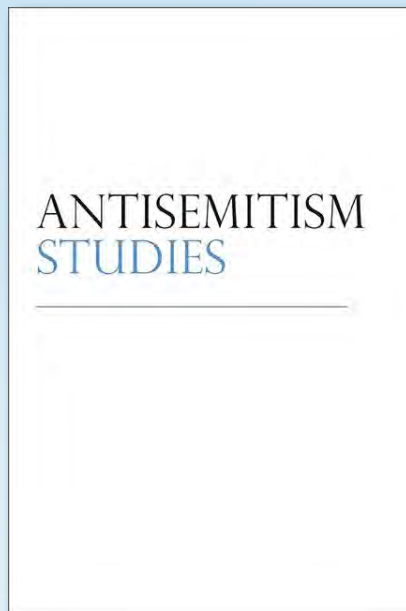
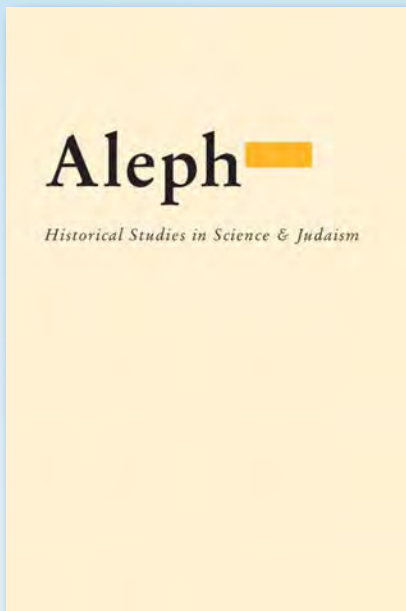
Accredited by the Association of Theological Schools



28 Wells Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10701 | 914.709.0900 | [ajr.edu](http://ajr.edu)

For more information please contact Cantor Lisa Klinger-Kantor at [lklingerkantor@ajr.edu](mailto:lklingerkantor@ajr.edu)

or 914.893.4028



**PRESS**  
Journals

Indiana University Press is a full-service publisher committed to excellence in the dissemination of scholarly research and has been at the forefront of journal publishing since 1987.

*Exploration Awaits*

[bit.ly/iupj-ajs](http://bit.ly/iupj-ajs)



**ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES**

15 West 16th Street  
New York, NY 10011

