Jewish Studies in the Academy

WINTER 2025

AJS PERSPECTIVES

THE MAGAZINE OF THE ASSOCIATION FOR JEWISH STUDIES

For seventy years, the **LEO BAECK INSTITUTE** has been a link between the past and present – a bridge between generations, but also between disciplines, across the Atlantic, and increasingly around the globe.

Our work has transformed immeasurably since 1955, when intellectual giants like Buber, Scholem, and Arendt first envisioned a scholarly institution that would collect, preserve, and write the history of German-speaking Jews.

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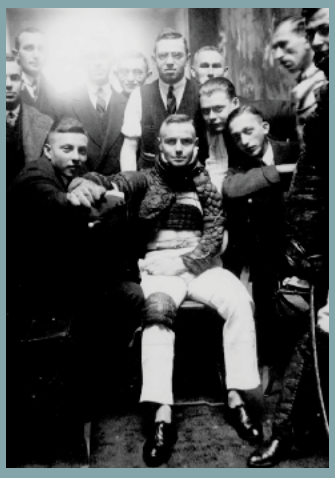

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OCTOBER 25-27, 2026 | CENTER FOR JEWISH HISTORY | NEW YORK CITY

BETWEEN REVOLUTION AND REACTION

German-speaking Jews and the Ideas, Politics, and Cultures of the Right

Beyond the liberal imaginary of Jews at the vanguard of progress, there is still work to be done to understand the full breadth of Jewish political consciousness and action. This especially so for Jewish political engagements that prioritized "tradition", "order", or "conservatism" – the key values of the right. We are seeking papers that explore Jewish responses to conservatism that ranged from rejection to attraction.

Proposals due March 15, 2026. Follow the QR code for the full call for papers.

PUBLIC HISTORY

CONNECTING SCHOLARLY VOICES WITH BROAD PUBLICS

In each episode of the **podcast** *Exile*, Mandy Patinkin tells the stories of both luminaries and ordinary people based on deep archival research. In addition to Patinkin's narration and dramatic readings of primary sources by actors, each episode features context and commentary from historians and other experts.

LBI's **public programs** also link our vast collections, new scholarship, and critical analysis of today's world. Our 2025 series on **Seven Decades of German-Jewish Historiography** provides an indispensable guide to the state of the field.

Follow the QR code to listen to *Exile* and watch *Seven Decades of German-Jewish Historiography*.

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THE GERALD WESTHEIMER CAREER DEVELOPMENT AWARD

The flagship fellowship offered by LBI is a personal grant to a scholar or professional in an early career stage, e.g. before gaining tenure in an academic institution or its equivalent.

Apply by March 3, 2026. Follow the QR code for application materials and other fellowship opportunities.

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GESELLIGKEIT

DECEMBER 15, 2025, 5:30–6:30 PM

LBI RECEPTION AT AJS 2025

Preserving and writing history can be thirsty work. Need a drink? Join us Monday evening for refreshments and conversation. Room TBA.

Jewish Studies in the Academy

WINTER 2025

AJS Perspectives:
The Magazine
of the Association
for Jewish Studies

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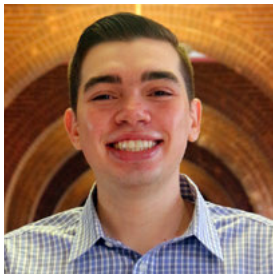
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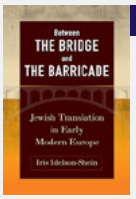

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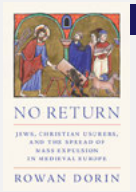

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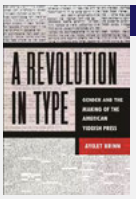

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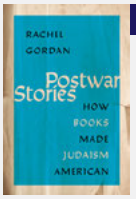

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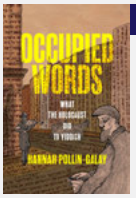

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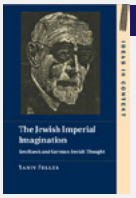

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JACOB MORROW-SPITZER
Yale University, Department of History
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Finalists

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University of Washington Seattle, Department of History and Stroum Center for Jewish Studies
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SAMUEL GLAUBER
Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Department of Jewish Thought
"Occult Modernities: Hidden Realities in East European Jewish Culture, 1880–1939"

MIRIAM SCHWARTZ
University of Toronto, Department of Germanic Languages & Literatures and the Anne Tanenbaum Centre for Jewish Studies
"Dubbed Jewish Literature: Orality, Multilingualism, and Translation in Twentieth Century Hebrew and Yiddish Writing"

SHARON ZELNICK
University of California Los Angeles, Department of Comparative Literature
"Israeli Migrants' Aesthetic Interventions in Germany"

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University of Michigan-Ann Arbor

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Returning to Routes: The Emergence of a Moroccan Jewish Diaspora in the Twentieth Century

SIMONE STIRNER
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Poetic Grief: Form and Remembrance after National Socialism

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Philadelphia, PA
December 20–22, 2026

AS ALWAYS, THE CONFERENCE WILL FEATURE:

- Interdisciplinary division categories that reflect members' research, encourage collaboration, and improve inclusivity and intellectual dynamism
- Presentation formats that foster creativity and engagement
- Opportunities to meet and network with colleagues
- A robust exhibit hall, along with a full slate of special events

We're especially excited to be in Philadelphia as the city will be celebrating the 250th anniversary of the USA all throughout 2026 with events, festivals, storytelling, and more.

The Call for Papers will open in early March 2026.

SAVE THE DATES!

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New Orleans, LA
Dec 19–21, 2027

2028:
San Diego, CA
Dec 18–20, 2028

2029:
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The Gestapo Is a Force above the Law

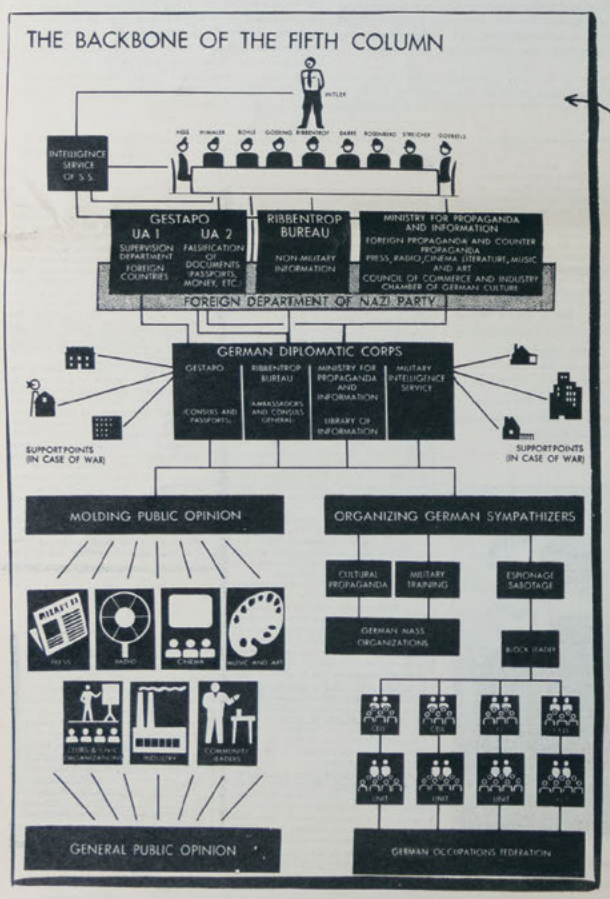
The duties of the Gestapo inside Germany are thus outlined by statute: "It is the duty of the Secret State Police to expose and to oppose all collective forces which are dangerous to the state, to collect and evaluate the results of these findings, to inform the government and to keep all authorities informed of all evidence."

The S.S. troops have this motto composed by Himmler: "Thus we have taken up our position and march according to unalterable laws; we are an order of National-Socialist soldiers and bear the Nordic stamp; we are a sworn community of clans. We march onward into a distant future, imbued with the hope and faith, not only that we may put up a better fight than our forefathers, but may ourselves be the forefathers of generations to come, generations which are necessary for the eternal life of the teutonic Germanic nation."

For nearly three years the Gestapo operated in the Reich with its functions undefined, but on May 2, 1935, the Prussian Administrative Court held that the Gestapo was not subject to judicial control. This decision was reinforced by statute February 10, 1936, by Section 7 of the Prussian law which states:

"The orders and business of the Secret Police are not subject to review in the administrative courts."

Himmler in 1937 pointed to the important role his men would play in the event of war. In a lecture to German army officers on the "Nature and Task of the S.S. and of the Police," he stated: "In a future war we shall have not only the army front on land, the naval front on water, the front of the air force in the air, but we shall have a fourth theater of war — Germany within. . . . *The internal theater of war will be the 'to be or not to be' of our German nation.*"



Pictograph Corporation, Courtesy Survey Graphic

The diagram illustrates the importance of the Gestapo to the Nazi foreign network. The foreign division of the Gestapo, the UA 1, was instrumental in Hitler's successful march into Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Poland, Norway, the Low Countries, France and the Balkans. Agents of the UA 1 are at work today in virtually every country in the world, engaged in espionage, sabotage and corruption. The psychological importance of their operations cannot be overestimated. Ewald Hermann August Banse, the Nazi theorist, writes:

"It is essential to attack the enemy nation in its weak spot . . . to undermine, crush, break down its resistance and convince it that it is being deceived, misled, and brought to destruction by its own government, in order that it may lose confidence in the justice of its cause and that thus the opposition at home . . . may raise its head and make trouble more successfully than before. The original well-knit, solid, powerful fabric of the enemy nation must be gradually disintegrated, broken down, rotted, so that it falls to pieces like a fungus when one treads on it in a wood."

This is the job of the Gestapo.

6

Himmler's Spies

Himmler Sees Reich Needing More Babies

Opens Drive for 'Victory of Children' in New Era; Wants 4-6 in Each Family

BERLIN, Feb. 23 (AP).—A German "victory of weapons" must be followed by "a victory of children," according to a new magazine which appeared today under the patronage of Heinrich Himmler, chief of all German police organizations.

The magazine, "Victory of Arms —Victory of Children," declared that the new German family for which National Socialism (Nazism) was preparing a new era should have from four to six children.

Germany, it said, needs an ever increasing number of babies to meet the needs for hands to perform the tasks "which time and destiny are thrusting at the Reich."

In a foreword addressed to the Blackshirt elite guard and the police, Hemmler said: "Two weapons are available to every people fighting for its existence: its power to defend itself and its natural fertility."

"Don't forget," he wrote, "that the strength of arms alone cannot assure a people existence into the distant future, but that an inexhaustible fountain of fertility is also necessary. Read this magazine which I give you and conduct yourselves accordingly so that the victory of German arms may be followed by a victory of German children."

The magazine opened a campaign to preserve and increase "Germanic Nordic blood," to which, it was insisted, the future belongs.

Many photographs were presented of the Nordic idea of what the new German era mother should look like. There were also pictures of "undesirable" types, with the explanation that both may guide a young man in the selection of a wife and that he should do it right away.

The charms of German women are natural, the magazine said, and don't have to be enhanced by "the idiocies of fashion."

To preserve the purity of the race, the Nuremberg laws (which include prohibitions against Jewish and non-Jewish marriages) are to be preserved, while the best eugenic practices will eliminate "silly anti-social elements."

When the New York Herald Tribune carried the above story, "Himmler Sees Reich Needing More Babies," the Gestapo chieftain urged a "victory of children" from the married couples of Germany. But read the paragraphs below, reproduced from Otto Tolischus's "They Wanted War," (Reynal & Hitchcock) and see how Himmler changed his views on the convention known as marriage. Next to the Tribune story is an excerpt from Time, April 24, 1939.

The most remarkable step in that direction, unprecedented in modern history, was taken by Heinrich Himmler as chief of the German police and leader of the Elite Guard, that represented the picked favored ones in the Third Reich. In an order issued to the Elite Guard and the police under the date of October 28, 1939, Herr Himmler decreed:

"Beyond the borders of perhaps necessary middle-class laws, customs and views, it will now be a great task, even outside the marriage bond, for German women and girls of good blood, not in frivolity but in deep moral earnestness, to become mothers of the children of soldiers going off to war, of whom fate alone knows whether they will return or fall for the Fatherland.

"On the men and women whose place remains at home by order of the State, these times likewise impose more than ever the sacred obligation to become again fathers and mothers of children."

No phase of life in Hitler's Ger supervision. Himmler's agents op in the city and in the village, in of the omnipresent activities of anti-Hitler opposition to become any other agency in Germany, wh *"Ein Volk, Ein Reich, Ein Fueh*

Nowhere is the Gestapo's thorou in its rigorous suppression of lab Eyes," Martha Dodd writes:

"The workers are given the most Nazis know only too well that, discontent and their opposition, t and his set-up. Thousands of la arrested, killed, and sent to conce in breaking temporarily the back opposition is discovered in these plants or related industries, it is other classes of society.

"One reads regularly, even in th executed because of treasonable a Hitler of course constitutes trea victim's family, relatives and co-wo or even quietly killed, are given n lives or in their work.

"With the crippling of the people guaranteed, formerly, their econo with the tightening web of espiona believe they have quelled all th expressed in the German working

No orator, scarcely a figure calculated to arouse much personal enthusiasm, Herr Himmler's primary function in Nazidom has so far been to be neither seen nor heard but to be felt. The housewife who puts quilted covers over her telephone for fear the *Gestapo* can listen in on household conversations even when the receiver catch is down has felt Herr Himmler's not-too-remote presence. The German who uses prearranged codes in letters to his relatives in or out of the country decidedly feels Policeman Himmler's existence. The discontented merchant, the dissident Party member, the persecuted Jew, the defiant churchman, the too-independent Army officer have with good reason dreaded his heavy hand—and often landed in one of Herr Himmler's concentration camps. Moreover, little neighboring countries have particular reason to fear him; the presence of SS Führer Himmler's young men in Austria, Czecho-Slovakia, Lithuania, has invariably meant that the Nazi Reich was about to expand its borders.

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THE GESTAPO
Birkhead, L. M. (ed). Kansas City/New York:
Friends of Democracy Inc, [1941]
Anti-totalitarian folio by Leon M. Birkhead, a popular Missouri minister who in 1935 talked Julius Streicher's secretary into showing him a list of N.S. friends abroad. Birkhead's Friends of Democracy was probably connected to British intelligence. With news reprints from the U.S. press, photos, documents and analysis, the booklet exposes Nazis in America and the methods by which Himmler took Europe: create a secret state police above the law; politicize the military; conduct economic sabotage to heighten domestic difficulties; intensify surveillance to spike fear; keep rich industrialists and bankers close; crush trade unions; persecute Jews, clergy and gays; employ eugenics; abduct, torture and assassinate dissidents, even high-ranking Nazi officers; control universities; rescind speech, assembly and petition rights.
(54083) $1,750
Prussian court decision May 1935: the Gestapo is not subject to judicial review

From the Editors

Laura Limonic &
F. K. Schoeman

With this issue of *AJS Perspectives*, we conclude our term as coeditors of the magazine. It has been a privilege to serve this publication and the broader Jewish Studies community, and we are deeply grateful for the opportunity to engage so widely and meaningfully with scholars, artists, and educators across the field.

This final issue, *Jewish Studies in the Academy,* guest edited by Zev Garber and Ken Hanson, invites readers to reflect on the current landscape and uncertain future of Jewish Studies in higher education. Against the backdrop of declining enrollments in the humanities, increased pressure to prioritize STEM fields, and a troubling rise in antisemitism and anti-Israel sentiment on campuses, the contributors to this issue offer thoughtful perspectives, pedagogical reflections, and personal accounts that speak to both the urgency and the vitality of our field. We are grateful to Professor Garber for curating this timely and important conversation.

We also take this opportunity to thank those who have made our editorial work possible. We are especially indebted to Karin Kugel, our brilliant and unflappable managing editor, whose sharp eye, good humor, and editorial expertise have been essential to every issue. We are grateful as well to Jason Schulman, whose stewardship of the roundtable section has added depth and dynamism to the magazine; to Doug Rosenberg, our art editor, whose curatorial sensibility has expanded the visual dimensions of *Perspectives*; and to Olga Gershenson, whose film and media section continues to be a pedagogical resource and a creative highlight. We also thank AJS President Laura Leibman for her trust and encouragement, AJS VP of Publications Laura Lieber for her leadership and creative ideas, and AJS Executive Director Warren Hoffman for his steady support and commitment to the magazine's success.

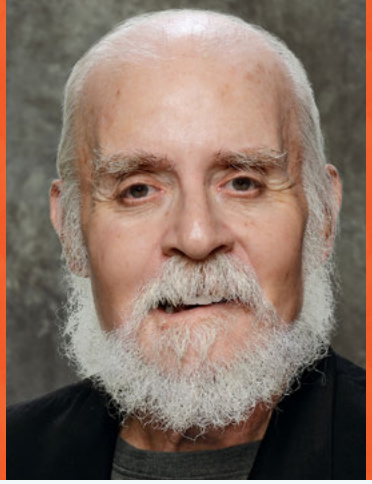
Finally, we extend our heartfelt thanks to the scholars, artists, writers, and readers who have contributed their work and ideas to *AJS Perspectives* during our tenure. Your submissions, feedback, and engagement have made this a collaborative, generative space for Jewish Studies across disciplines and institutions.

As we pass the baton to our successors, Drs. Jonathan Skolnik (University of Massachusetts Amherst) and Laura Auketayeva (Sandra Bornstein Holocaust Education Center), we do so with excitement and confidence. We look forward to seeing how they shape the magazine in the years ahead, and we remain grateful to have been part of its ongoing story.

Laura Limonic
SUNY Old Westbury

F. K. Schoeman
University of South Carolina

Zev Garber &
Kenneth L. Hanson



From the Guest Editors

Jewish Studies in the Academy

In recent years, Jewish Studies programs across college and university campuses have found themselves at a critical crossroads. Shifting academic priorities have led to a pronounced emphasis on STEM disciplines—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics—often at the expense of the humanities and liberal arts. These fields, once regarded as the bedrock of a well-rounded education, now face dwindling enrollments and budgetary constraints. Within this challenging landscape, Jewish Studies programs—already niche by nature—have felt the strain more acutely. Declining student interest, shrinking financial support, and a reallocation of institutional resources have raised pressing questions about the sustainability of these programs.

Yet the challenges extend far beyond academic restructuring. In recent years, there has been a marked rise in antisemitic and anti-Israel sentiment on campuses across the globe. Jewish students and educators frequently encounter hostility and marginalization, casting a shadow over Jewish academic spaces and complicating open discourse. The implications for Jewish Studies are profound: How can these programs thrive in an environment where expressions of Jewish identity and scholarship are increasingly fraught? How can educators foster a spirit of inquiry and pride in Jewish heritage amid growing tensions?

The essays in this collection confront these questions with urgency and insight. Drawing from historical analysis, pedagogical innovation, and personal reflection, the contributors explore the evolving role of Jewish Studies in contemporary academia. They not only offer a diagnosis of current challenges but also propose thoughtful and creative pathways forward. From reimagining curriculum design to strengthening community engagement, these essays present a vision for Jewish Studies that is resilient, adaptive, and forward-looking. Together, they form a blueprint for sustaining and revitalizing Jewish intellectual life in higher education, ensuring its relevance and vibrancy for generations to come.

Addendum:

At the University of Central Florida, several Jewish Studies courses have been canceled due to low student interest. To counteract this trend, the program transitioned many courses online, enhancing accessibility and reducing scheduling conflicts. I have leveraged my background in television and communication, transforming my teaching style by creating documentary-style video episodes and integrating innovative technologies. These include AI-generated historical avatars, interactive online quizzes, AI-produced podcasts, and even an educational video game, *The Siege of Jerusalem*, developed in collaboration with the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy. These immersive approaches have not only revived student engagement but also attracted positive feedback, suggesting that modern technology can reinvigorate humanities education. I argue that Jewish Studies—and humanities programs broadly—should lead in pedagogical innovation, capitalizing on technological tools to enhance learning experiences and secure their relevance in the digital age.

—KH

In May 2025, the election of Cardinal Robert Francis Prevost as Pope Leo XIV and the murder of two Israeli Messianic Jewish staffers outside D.C.'s Capital Jewish Museum add to the importance of inserting Judeo-Christian heritage, including the legitimacy of *dvar Yeshua*, in Jewish Studies classes. The presentation is straightforward and transforming: dialogue and the celebration of uniqueness without polemics and apologetics. As a practicing Jew who dialogues with Christians, I have learned to respect the covenantal role that Christians understand to be the way of the scriptural Jesus in their confessional lives. Jews and Christians in dialogical encounter with select biblical texts can foster mutual understanding and respect as well as personal change and growth within their faith affirmations. Moreover, interfaith study of scriptures acknowledges differences, requires that participants transcend the objectivity and data-driven detachment of standard academic approaches, and encourages students at all levels to encounter Torah and Testament without paternalism, parochialism, and prejudice. My *dvar Yeshua* is infused with the teachings of the sages: *talmud torah ʿim derekh ʾereẓ*, here meaning study Torah and respect ideological differences. Critically speaking, teaching *dvar Yeshua* by conversation, not conversion, twists and winds to the wellspring of Torah (teaching).

–ZG

Zev Garber
Los Angeles Valley College

Kenneth L. Hanson
University of Central Florida

From the President

Laura Leibman

Figure 1: Detail of William Blaeu, Map *(c. 1648). National Museum of American History, GA.24335.*

I am thrilled to introduce this important new issue of *AJS Perspectives*, which tackles the question of how the place of Jewish Studies in today's academy has shifted amid contemporary realities and challenges. Contributors to this issue shed light on the path ahead for Jewish education in college and university settings and provide insights on how we can secure the future of Jewish Studies. This is crucial work. Antisemitism has ravaged Jewish campus life, but has also been weaponized by the current administration in ways that will have a long-lasting impact on how scholarship on Jews, Judaism, and Israel is taught. Amid all this strife, we continue to believe that Jewish Studies can bring lessons from the past to bear on understanding and grappling with the present.

As a scholar of Jews across the Americas, I believe that the history of antisemitism on this continent is particularly crucial for making sense of present conflicts in the United States. Whenever people ask me about the reasons behind the surge in antisemitism on American and European college campuses, my mind goes back not only to October of 2023, but also to 1647. That was the year when the first yellow fever epidemic erupted in Barbados, one of the islands on which I work. By 1648, the disease swept across the Caribbean Sea to Vera Cruz and then overland to Mexico City. The virus hit the city's population with a vengeance. As residents reeled and looked for whom to blame, their gaze landed upon the region's Portuguese traders, many of whom had Jewish ancestry. The colonial government and church often blamed the Portuguese for the slave trade, which they correlated with the new disease. Although the Spanish were just as much implicated in the slave trade as the Portuguese, colonists weren't wrong about the correlation of slavery and the new disease. The same ships that transported enslaved Africans brought the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito infected with yellow fever to the Americas and Europe (Figure 1).

As I have shown in my work on Jews and epidemics, this pattern of disease followed by bouts of Judeophobia would be repeated each time pandemics spread across the Americas. Epidemics brought not only death but the need for someone to blame, and Jews often became a locus of ire. Equally important, however, part of the American story was that anti-Jewish violence was a predictor of other groups who would be targeted. While people with Muslim and Jewish ancestors were the primary targets of the Inquisition in Iberia, race and sexuality had a central place in crackdowns in the Americas.

In New Spain, for example, while the Inquisition began with the idea of heresy, it soon turned disproportionately to people of African descent (Figure 2). Half of those accused by the Inquisition in early Mexico City had African ancestry, even though they only made up about 10 percent of the city's population.[i] Even among those accused of being secret Jews, not all fared equally: men accused of sodomy as well as Judaizing were three times as likely to be executed as those only accused of one of these "crimes." In New Spain, sex crimes were the second most common "deviance" brought before the inquisitors.[ii] Sexuality became a way to police people in the colonies, particularly those with non-European ancestry. This intertwining of sex, race, and religion points to the increasing racialization of anti-Judaism as well as the importance of integrating the history of Jews into the story of discrimination in the Americas.

As Aron Rodrigue has shown, Judeophobia became a blueprint for the concept of race and racism that developed in the colonies.[iii] But Judaism also served as a blueprint for resistance and resilience. Throughout the early colonial period, indigenous peoples in the Spanish colonies often styled themselves as Israelites or one of the lost tribes in order to establish their superiority over conquistadors. In early Mexico City, for example, mestizo choral director Juan de Lienas used a lamentation taken from the book of Jeremiah that recalled the fall of Jerusalem. His haunting melody reframes the fall of Tenochtitlán, positioning the Nahuas as God's chosen people and the conquistadors as pagan Romans. Likewise, after the conquest, the city's indigenous residents performed plays about the Akedah in Nahuatl, restyling the biblical story to

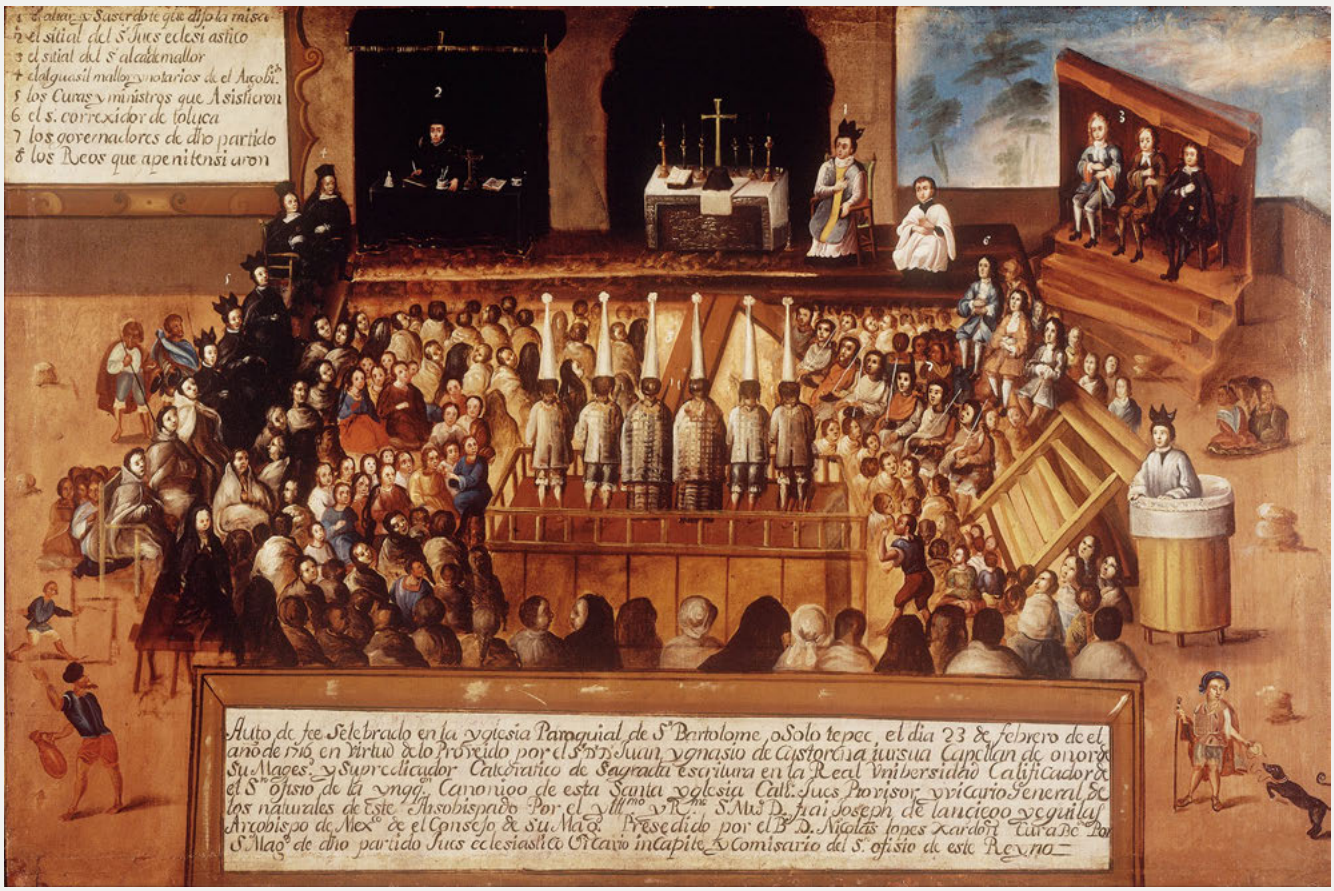


Figure 2: Anonymous, An auto-da-fé in the town of San Bartolomé Otzolotepec, Museo Nacional de Arte, INBA.

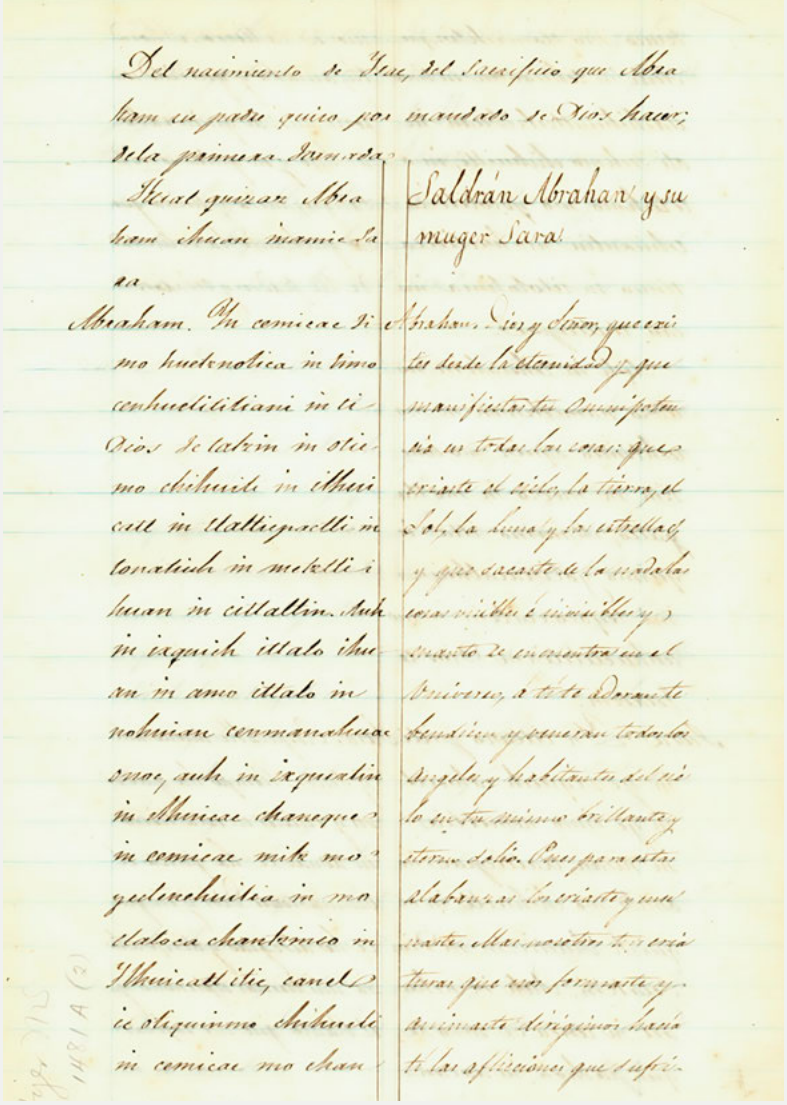


Figure 2: "Abraham and Isaac." Faustino Chimalpopoca Galicia, translator. Mexico City, 1856 [1678]. Newberry Library: Ayer MS 1481 a2.

explain both Christian and preconquest sacrifice (Figure 3). Thinking of themselves through the lens of Israelites helped the city's indigenous peoples understand their suffering and survival. The use of these texts also highlights why all Americans—not just Jewish ones—need a deep understanding of the Hebrew Bible.

While I have focused here on the correlation of antisemitism and pandemics, Jewish Studies scholars of other eras and geographies bring their own expertise to bear on understanding the patterns and agents that have given rise to the current political climate. Or as Bernard Cooperman puts it in his article in this issue, "Bottom line: if the challenges are real, they are not new." Sharing our strategies for how to move forward can help us thrive despite these challenges and to reshape our own narratives and futures. To this end, I deeply appreciate the attention in the articles across this issue to how new modalities can make our courses more appealing and relevant for students and deepen their learning. The time and care that members and the editors of this issue have taken to make their scholarship available in the public-facing format of *AJS Perspectives* gets at the heart of the mission of the AJS: namely, to "foster greater understanding of Jewish Studies scholarship among the wider public." As always, it is an honor to be able to be part of this organization and the connections it cultivates.

Laura Leibman
Princeton University

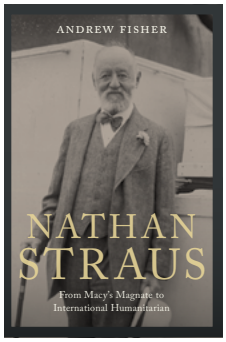
i Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Indiana University Press, 2003), 1–2.

ii Ruth Behar, "Sex and Sin, Witchcraft and the Devil in Late-Colonial Mexico," *American Ethnologist* 14, no. 1 (1987): 35–36.

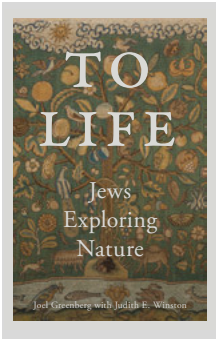
iii Aron Rodrigue, "The Jew as the Original 'Other': Difference, Antisemitism, and Race," in *Doing Race: 21 Essays for the 21st Century*, ed. Hazel Rose Markus and Paula M. L. Moya (W.W. Norton, 2010), 194–97.

BOLD Ideas, **ESSENTIAL** Jewish Studies

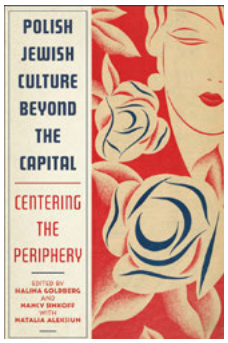
MENACHEM KIPNIS
Yiddish Folklore and Photographs from Interwar Poland
Edited by Sheila E. Jelen



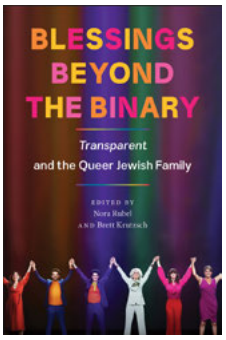
NATHAN STRAUS
From Macy's Magnate to International Humanitarian
Andrew Fisher



TO LIFE
Jews Exploring Nature
Joel Greenberg
With Judith E. Winston

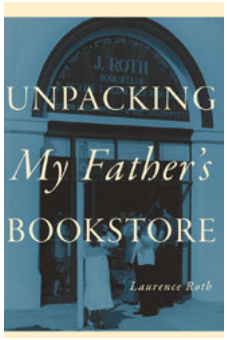


POLISH JEWISH CULTURE BEYOND THE CAPITAL
Centering the Periphery
Edited by Halina Goldberg and Nancy Sinkoff
With Natalia Aleksiun

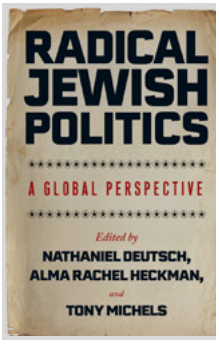


BLESSINGS BEYOND THE BINARY
Transparent and the Queer Jewish Family
Edited by Nora Rubel and Brett Krutzsch

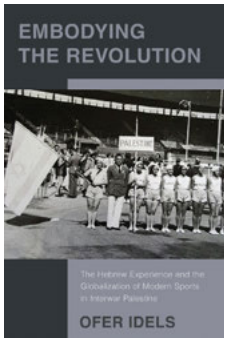
SMOOTHING THE JEW
"Abie the Agent" and Ethnic Caricature in the Progressive Era
Jeffrey A. Marx



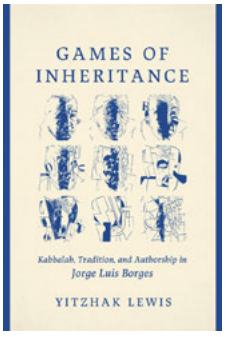
UNPACKING MY FATHER'S BOOKSTORE
Laurence Roth



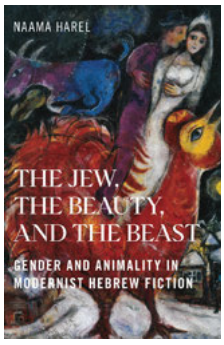
RADICAL JEWISH POLITICS
A Global Perspective
Edited by Nathaniel Deutsch, Alma Rachel Heckman, and Tony Michels



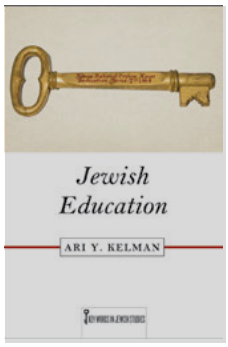
EMBODYING THE REVOLUTION
The Hebrew Experience and the Globalization of Modern Sports in Interwar Palestine
Ofer Idels



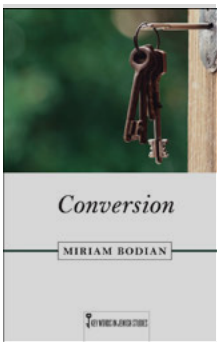
GAMES OF INHERITANCE
Kabbalah, Tradition, and Authorship in Jorge Luis Borges
Yitzhak Lewis



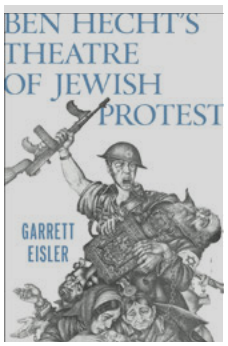
THE JEW, THE BEAUTY, AND THE BEAST
Gender and Animality in Modernist Hebrew Fiction
Naama Harel



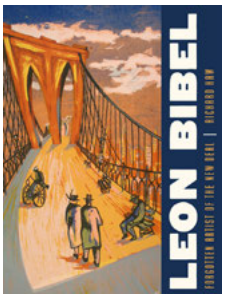
JEWISH EDUCATION
Ari Y Kelman
Key Words in Jewish Studies



CONVERSION
Miriam Bodian
Key Words in Jewish Studies



BEN HECHT'S THEATRE OF JEWISH PROTEST
Garrett Eisler



LEON BIBEL
Forgotten Artist of the New Deal
Richard Haw

FRANKEL INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED JUDAIC STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

2027-2028 Fellowship Opportunity
Rethinking Jewish Peoplehood: Towards a New Archive

Who is a Jew? What makes something Jewish? Is Judaism a religion or ethnicity, or both? What is Jewish peoplehood and (if such a phenomenon even exists) how is it constituted? These issues have been interrogated in great depth by scholars of modern Judaism(s). But we often write as if such questions only emerged with the complications of early modernity—as if premodern Jewishness were an organic and self-explanatory category uncomplicated by questions of how, why, and with whom to be Jewish. The theme year Rethinking Jewish Peoplehood: Towards a New Archive seeks to move beyond the horizon of modernity to interrogate the ways Jewishness was constructed among a diverse set of premodern Jewish communities and thinkers—uncovering forgotten historical models of Jewish belonging and reshaping our sense of what it meant to be a Jew in the premodern world.

Research on premodern Judaism(s) has, of course, considered the question of Jewish identity and how it was constituted. But scholars who have ventured to interrogate these questions have largely focused (albeit critically) on those strains of premodern thought that gave birth to currently hegemonic conceptions of Jewishness. This theme year proposes to (re)visit the premodern past in a different register. We will gather scholars working to complicate our understanding of how concepts such as Jewishness, ethno-religion, peoplehood, Jewish racial and ethnic diversity, conversion, Jewish-adjacent practitioners, and Jewish belonging have been constructed and utilized in premodern Jewish communities and literatures.

While our research will remain firmly rooted within our individual expertise in late antique or medieval Judaism(s), this theme year will also push participants to consider the ways in which we can begin to integrate research of different periods on these questions—acknowledging that the construction of Jewishness has always been complicated, contested, and diverse. Specifically, we will consider how different historical models of imagining Jewish belonging might offer affordances for thinking about present phenomena. Our historical research will be premised on the principle that the archive is not static. Perceptions of the Jewish past are constantly remade as texts and histories are suppressed and forgotten—through uneven patterns of preservation, publication, translation and pedagogy. But we work in a moment where more of the archive than ever is available to be reexamined and Rethinking Jewish Peoplehood invites researchers to engage with the archive in ways that expand and even transform our conceptual frameworks for understanding what it means to be Jewish.

We invite scholars, experts, and practitioners from an array of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences to join us in this multidisciplinary exploration. We encourage applicants to consider questions of diversity, inclusion, and the voices that are amplified or marginalized in different media contexts.

Applications due November 2, 2026

For more information, and complete application materials go to
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judaicstudies@umich.edu • 734.763.9047

Jewish Studies in the Academy

Teaching Zionism: Two Views on the Zionist Idea, Then and Now

Enlightenment and emancipation brought a radical departure from traditional thought patterns and aspirations.

Zev Garber

In the 128th year since the birth of modern Zionism (1897), there is much of the biblical message to celebrate: a sovereign Jewish nation on its ancestral land, the ingathering of the exiles, Jewish identity revival, and, no less a miracle, the triumphant rapprochement in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations. From the birth of Zionism to today, religious tropes have dominated Israeli society and continue to be appropriated by Israeli politicians and pundits with a zeal matched only by the ancient prophets. My perspective will reflect on "Understanding Zionism in Terms of 'The Land,' Religion and Nationality" and "The Contours of Religious Zionism."

1. Understanding Zionism in Terms of "The Land," Religion and Nationality

The function of Zion in early Israelite religion and later Judean nationalism appears in the biblical age: from the Abrahamic cycle of self-dependence ("Not a thread or a sandal strap least you [the Nations] shall say: 'I [we] have made Abram rich,"' Gen 14:23), to the Covenant at Sinai by which a priestly nation was born ("You shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation," Ex 19:16), to the settlement of the Land under Joshua and the Judges, to the destruction of the First Temple by the Babylonians (587–586 BCE.).

- Sinai and Zion (Jerusalem): divine plan and religious idealism versus political realism and earthly sanctuary (Ex 25:8, 9, 40; 1 Chron 28:19).
- The First Exile ("By the rivers of Babylon there we sat and wept, as we thought of Zion" and "If I forget thee, O' Jerusalem," Ps 137:1, 5) and the hope of return ("Let us go up to the Mount of the Lord [Zion] to the House of the God of Jacob," Isa 2:3; Mic 4:2).
- The rise and fall of the Second Jewish Commonwealth (164–163 BCE).
- First- and second-century *ʾEreẓ Yisraʾel* in turmoil.
- The Great Revolt against the Romans, fall of Jerusalem, and Second Temple, Masada suicide (66–73 CE), and Bar Kokhba Rebellion (133–135 CE): triangular nationalism (Zealot-pacific-messianic).
- *Golah* (Diaspora, dispersion, "Off-the-Land") versus *Galut* (exile, banishment, captivity).
- Beyond nationalism, the ascendancy and triumph of rabbinic Judaism: Torah as a portable homeland.

Enlightenment and emancipation brought a radical departure from traditional thought patterns and aspirations. Emancipation destroyed the authority of the Jewish community and the Enlightenment offered an ideological justification for surrendering the authority of Jewish tradition. The organic relationship of God-Torah-Israel (religion, culture, peoplehood) was now challenged by reason and egalitarianism. Count Clermont Tonnerre's declaration to the French National Assembly in 1791: "To the Jew as an individual—everything; to the Jew as a nation—nothing," and the position adopted by the French Great Sanhedrin in February 1807, though bestowing civic rights upon Jews, began the process of redefining Jewish doctrines and values.

Unlike the national-religious identifying Jews in the Arab world and in eastern Europe, Jews of the West now saw themselves as nationals of their countries of citizenship and worshipped in the "Mosaic faith." However, what

The author with Menahem Begin at a reception before Begin spoke at LA Valley College to an audience of about 2000, Beverly Hills, CA, c. 1978–79. Photo courtesy of the author

Fin-de-siècle Zionism provided an alternative to the reverential responses kneeling down to European assimilation, nationalism, and modern antisemitism.

Jews as individuals may have gained by emancipation, Jews as a group lost. By leaving the ghetto and attaining the status of citizens, Western Jews loosened the bonds of Jewish group identity, which in many cases led to total assimilation. Fin-de-siècle Zionism provided an alternative to the reverential responses kneeling down to European assimilation, nationalism, and modern antisemitism.

2. The Contours of Religious Zionism

> And the many peoples shall go and shall say: "Come, Let us go to the Mount of the Lord, To the House of the God of Jacob; That He may instruct us in His ways, and that we may walk in His paths." For Torah shall come forth from Zion, the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. – Isaiah 2:3

In pre-State of Israel ideology, Religious Zionism contributed an important *torah* (teaching): nationalism and religion are both necessary for the rebirth of a nation. Nonetheless, differences in methodology, personality, and philosophy bear further exploration.[i]

Illustrations are in order. Rabbis Yehudah Hai Alkali (1798–1878) and Zvi Hirsch Kalischer (1795–1874) were religious activists bordering on the messianic who clashed with the authoritative rabbinical pietism, passivism, and quietism of their day. Alkali spent his early years in *ʾEreẓ Yisraʾel* and then returned to his native Siberia in 1825, from where he advocated the preparation of the Land for later redemption. As early as 1834, he argued for Jewish settlement in *ʾEreẓ Yisraʾel*, which became an obsession for him following the Damascus libel (1840). His book *Minḥat Yehudah* (1845) posits the rabbinic dual messiahs, *mashiaḥ ben Yosef* and *mashiaḥ ben David*, in modern garb. The first messiah is the process (philanthropic, military, political) that acquires and sustains the Land, the *ʾatḥalta di-geʾulah* "the beginning of the redemption," which sets the stage for the ingathering of the exiles by the divinely appointed second messiah. For Alkali, the revival of spoken Hebrew as the language of instruction and of the streets is the *conditio sine qua non* for the dawning and the eschatological fulfillment of the messianic age.[ii]

Kalischer's book *Derishat Ẓiyon* (1862) propounds the theory, by reference to scriptural and talmudic sources, that the messianic era must be preceded by the establishment of Jewish colonies in *ʾEreẓ Yisraʾel* through the cooperation of willing governments, the benevolence of wealthy Jews (the Rothschilds, the Montefiores, the Baron de Hirschs, etc.) and "agricultural self-help." The latter inspired the Alliance Israélite Universelle to establish the Mikveh Israel agricultural training school near Jaffa and Petaḥ Tikvah, a Jewish agricultural colony.

Like a soul ablaze, the revolutionary religio-mystical philosophy of Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), first chief rabbi of Mandatory Palestine, is grounded in kabbalistic particularity ("The People of Israel, the Torah, and the Land of Israel are One") but soars to heights of universality (the whole earth, and all therein, is His creation). In Kook's *Weltanschauung*, the love of God is fully demonstrated in love for all God's creation; the impurity of the Exile, a cosmic distortion, is corrected by the return to Zion, a cosmic restoration. We are no longer to cast our sight on a heavenly Jerusalem but rather to look to our own (religious and secular alike) efforts here below to make the earthly Jerusalem a fit place to live in, an outpouring of divine "light unto the nations," perfecting the world (*tikkun ʿolam*) through reconciliation, harmony, and peace. Rav Kook's intellectual sincerity and piety were one giant step in bridging the chasm between secular Zionism and the religious tradition.

Less philosophy and theology and more history and politics characterize the rabbinic calling (Reform), community service, and Zionist orientation of San Francisco–born Judah L. Magnes (1877–1948). An orator and writer, socially and religiously committed, a pioneer of American Zionism, he is best known as a founder of

the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1925, chancellor; 1935, president) and for his humanistic, pacifistic plans of engagement between Arabs and Jews. However paradoxical and controversial his positions, and sometimes misunderstood and misjudged, he remained dogged in fulfilling his brand of Zionism in Judaism: in his self-imposed distance from American Reform and departure from the American Zionist establishment; in his unswerving pacifism, uncritical faith in cultural enlightenment and progress, and commitment to prophetic Judaism embarrassingly abated by events in World War II; and in the opposition that greeted his founding of Ihud "Unity" (with Martin Buber in August 1942) that called for the establishment of a binational state in *ʾEreẓ Yisraʾel*. He taught as he lived– "a dissenter in Zion."

Martin Buber's (1878–1965) religio-cultural-mystical approach to Zionism, with roots in Hasidism, which he discovered and interpreted for the West, is interlaced with his viewpoint on the nature of Man. His central question on the meaning of humanness is expressed in his recurring word *Wessen* (essence, being, nature), as understood in terms of two primary word pairs: "I-Thou" and "I-It." The I-Thou relationship is total involvement of self and other in intimacy, sharing, empathy, caring, openness, and trust. The I-It relationship consists of self viewing the Other in abstract terms, resulting in possession, exploitation, and distrust. The I-It pair permits the self to objectify the other, creating a state of manipulative dependency, and the I-Thou pair encourages an atmosphere of interdependence, permitting growth and respect. Only through genuine I-Thou encounters do people discover their humanity and, by mutually affirming and confirming one another, come face to face with the Eternal Thou. Thus, for Buber, Zionism is fundamentally social, consisting of interpersonal relations between "self and other," and the result is the nation's communal experience as expressed in righteousness, justice, and moral action. The faith in Buber's strand of national religion gives rise to a new type of Zionist personality, in which the ideals of a nation and the interests of humanity coincide. For Buber, the deepest motive for Jewish presence in the homeland is in the religious-social arena, invoking and involving the cooperation of Israel and her neighbors on the basis of equality and brotherhood.

To face the crises in the Black Sabbath Israeli-Gaza/Hamas war (terror and elimination), and the variety of opinions regarding a two-state solution to resolve the seemingly perpetual territory dilemma between Israel and Palestine, may the prophetic voice from Zion, written on the wall of the United Nations building in New York City, become the realized hope for all humanity:

> And they shall beat their swords into plowshares,
> And their spears into pruning-hooks;
> Nation shall not lift up sword against nation,
> Neither shall they learn war no more.
> – Isaiah 2:4

For Buber, the deepest motive for Jewish presence in the homeland is in the religious-social arena, invoking and involving the cooperation of Israel and her neighbors on the basis of equality and brotherhood.

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i On Religious Judaism's contribution to *ha-ʾumah ha-yisraʾelit*, see my review of Y. Zerubavel's *Recovered Roots: Collective Memory and the Making of Israeli National Tradition* in *Modern Judaism* 18, no. 2 (1998). My comments on G. Shimoni's *The Zionist Ideology* in *AJS Review* 22, no. 2 (1997): 266–69, evaluate the major thinkers and venues of Zionist thought.

ii Alkali on Joel 3:1: "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh and your sons and daughters shall prophesy."

Jewish Studies: Accomplishments and Challenges in Today's Academy

Bernard Dov Cooperman

How curious that the American Jewish community, through a wave of donations, handed over the Jewish education of its youth to secular —indeed, to non-Jewish— institutions of higher learning.[i] Universities had a stake in accepting these donations since the same donors could be enticed to make far larger contributions for other projects. But the Jewish community would also benefit: it was far cheaper to establish a few positions than to try to maintain separate Jewish institutions of higher learning. The response was good. Positions were established in school after school. Students sought a sophisticated narrative of the Jewish past, especially in the euphoria following the Six Day War. And for grad students, there were jobs.

Nowadays, the challenges to this model are obvious. First, the humanities are collapsing generally. The unconscionable costliness of university education has made the humanities degree no longer a viable career path. At the same time, our students seem unable to read the longer books or articles that were once the standards of university education. And teaching basic reading and writing skills seems less necessary in the age of spell-check, Grammarly, and AI. Large, expensive campus libraries are hard to justify in the Internet age. Will specialized collections (like those in Hebrew and Yiddish) be among the first to be de-accessed?

The networks of Jewish day schools present their own challenges. On the one hand, introductory-level Jewish Studies courses seem redundant to day-school graduates. But our more advanced courses don't fulfill students' general education requirements. Moreover, their content may also appear threatening to students freshly enthused by traditionalist outreach programs, whether the March of the Living, a gap year in Israel, a Tikvah summer fellowship, or even Shabbat at the campus Chabad House. Current ambivalence about the politics of Israel has made Hebrew language and Israeli culture courses less attractive, if not potentially embarrassing or worse. Beyond BDS, October 7, or the latest war in Gaza, the ostensible specificity of Jewish Studies seems out of place within ambitiously comparative and universalist, "global" curricula. Celebrating nationalism is difficult when it comes up against colonialism; group solidarity is hard to enjoy when it is labeled exclusionary or even racist. The old paradigm of Jewish history—they tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat!—seems less easy a joke when others are starving.

We may be returning to the more limited enrollments of an earlier era. But this shouldn't be a surprise. The content, direction, and popular resonance of academic curricula have always formed a shifting equilibrium; in this, Jewish Studies is no exception. It is the nature of languages and bodies of literature, disciplines and programs of study to flourish and be lost, sometimes to be revived and sometimes to become the province of only a few antiquaries. In his 1902 poem "Levadi," Bialik mourned the abandonment of traditional learning as new times attracted his contemporaries away from the House of Study. By 1923, however, he was confidently calling for a Hebrew-language journal in Berlin to serve the needs of a reawakened Jewish nation.[ii]

It is no surprise when intellectual shifts are expressed in sociological terms, concretized in new institutional contexts that we mistakenly assume are "natural" and "permanent." The trick is to respond to the demands of the moment. Jewish Studies began in the United States in a network of Jewish-sponsored schools: after-hours programs for high schoolers and teachers' colleges and rabbinic schools. Many of those schools have now been transformed or even disappeared. The populations they served moved to suburbia, sent their children to day schools, and then on to universities. Jewish Studies moved with them. Salo Baron was attracted to New York in 1926 to teach at Stephen Wise's Jewish Institute of Religion; when he was offered a job at Columbia

We may be returning to the more limited enrollments of an earlier era. But this shouldn't be a surprise..

University in 1930, he was afraid there would be no students. To his surprise, there were students, but many of them came without the training in traditional Judaica that had been assumed in an earlier era. Baron devoted much of his long career to creating a bibliographical guide intended to make Jewish Studies possible for them in this new context.[iii]

By the mid-sixties, the field was beginning to blossom in North American universities. The optimism is palpable in Arnold Band's survey of "Jewish Studies in American Liberal-Arts Colleges and Universities" (*American Jewish Year Book* 67 [1966]: 1–30). But rereading Band's article almost sixty years later, I am struck by the academic status categories that he took for granted. He gingerly extricated "Jewish Studies" from older specializations where Judaica had been housed—that is, in linguistic, textual, biblical/literary, and religious departments. And he carefully highlighted institutions not sponsored by Jews, distinguishing the "top-ranking" schools and universities from all the "others." Such hierarchies of institutions and departments were givens during the years of American postwar expansion and power. Band assumed they would be the bedrock on which academic Jewish Studies could be built in the United States.[iv]

The growth of Jewish Studies in the academy was never easy or undebated. Sociologists of knowledge will not be surprised to learn that there were intense battles among practitioners. Jewish Studies pioneers invested enormous intellectual and personal effort carving out, and defending, status for themselves within the Academy's hierarchy. On the one hand, they sought to highlight their own textual and linguistic expertise while demonstrating their mastery of their colleagues' fields. On another level, they sought to legitimize their own academic approaches by distancing themselves from "Black" and then other "ethnic" programs that were nothing but "identity studies." And as the number of Jewish Studies chairs grew, they were also on their guard against "illegitimate" Jewish competitors: the rabbis who sought the status of university appointments without advanced academic degrees, and generalists, especially from the social sciences, who tried to claim any of the new Jewish Studies positions on the grounds that they themselves were Jewish or had studied contemporary Jews. In retrospect, Jewish Studies' initial boundary lines seem quaint; we need only recall that topics like the Holocaust or Jewish women's studies were once dismissed as marginal.

Jewish Studies programs faced their own challenge of legitimacy from another direction. Scholars trained in Israel as political scientists or military analysts, ethnographers or Arabists, economists, literary theorists or archaeologists, have often been loath to join "ethnic" departments of Jewish Studies in America. Maya Arad captures this paradoxical moment of change in her description of a likeable ex-pat Israeli teaching American Jewish kids elementary Hebrew at a midwestern university. She is pushed out of her job by a far more sophisticated professor of literature, less *simpati* perhaps, but himself an ex-pat Israeli reaching out to a different generation. (*The Hebrew Teacher*, 2018; English, 2024).

Bottom line: if the challenges are real, they are not new. I have responded by redesigning many courses as comparative treatments, and gratifyingly, this has presented new and stimulating ways to explore my subjects and bring up enrollment. A course on Zionism considers the achievements as well as the dangers of nationalism. A course on pogroms gains focus by comparison with other instances of social violence. Studying Christian antisemitism becomes more intriguing when I explore contradictions between the church's broader efforts at social discipline and the complex tolerance it uniquely offered to the Jews in Italy.

Each semester, as I redraft my syllabi, I search for the sweet spots in the university's course catalog where students will be able to take my courses. It is not my task to pass on what I learned from my teachers but to challenge students to rethink the assumptions that *they* bring to class and to inspire them to learn more.

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BERNARD DOV COOPERMAN *holds the Louis L. Kaplan Chair in Jewish History at the University of Maryland. His study "The Right to Exclude: the State and the Rise of Jewish Self-Government in Early Modern Italy," appeared in* Jews and State Building, *which he co-edited with Serena Di Nepi and Germano Maifreda (Leiden: Brill, 2025).*

i On the situation at the start of the 1990s, see my talk at the Wilstein Institute of Jewish Policy Studies at the University of Judaism (*Jewish Identity in America*, ed. David M. Gordis and Yoav Ben-Horin [New York: Ktav, 1991], 195–206), together with responses by Arnold Band and Steven Zipperstein. Expanded version: "Jewish Studies and Jewish Identity: Some Implications of Secularizing Torah," in *Judaism* 42, no. 2 (Spring 1993): 228–42.

ii See his letter to the editors of *Dvir*, and the remarks of Gershom Scholem. "Mitokh hirhurim ʿal ḥokhmat Yisraʾel" in *Luaḥ ha-ʾarez̲* 5 (1944–45).

iii For the background and intent of Baron's never-completed *Social and Religious History of the Jews*, see my "Organizing the Jewish Past for American Students: Salo Baron at Columbia," in *Salo Baron: The Past and Future of Jewish Studies in America*, ed. Rebecca Kobrin (New York: Columbia University Press, 2022), 37–80. Baron's work, overtaken by the sheer bulk of scholarship, has been replaced by search engines and computerized databases.

iv Stephen Steinberg, *The Academic Melting Pot; Catholics and Jews in American Higher Education. A report prepared for the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1974). See also the reviews by Paul Ritterband in *American Jewish Historical Quarterly* 65, no. 2 (December1975): 178–79 and by Andrew Greeley in *The Journal of Higher Education* 46, no. 1 (January/February 1975).

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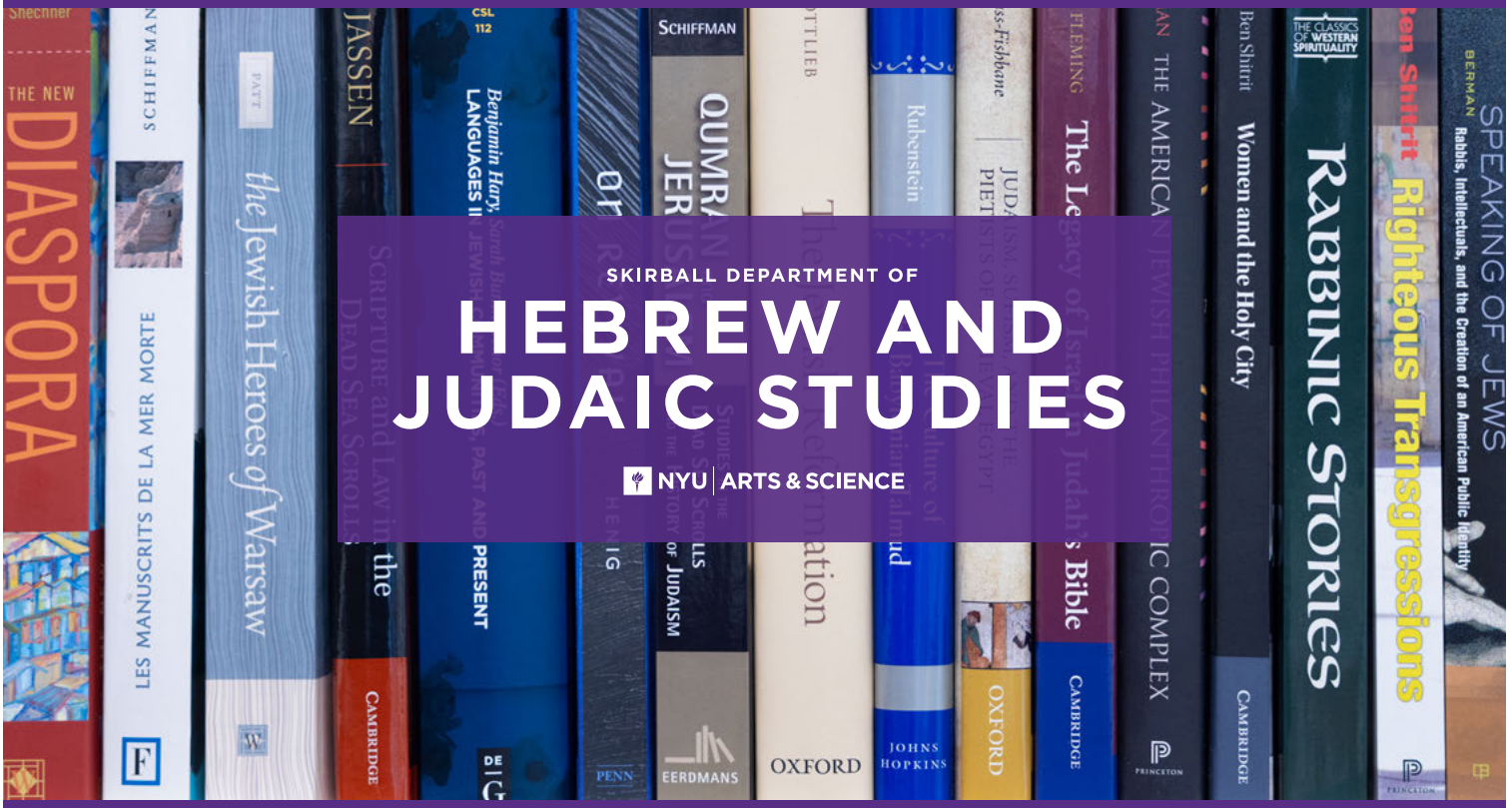

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Consuming Jewish Studies

Matthew Kraus

People say the strangest things about Jewish Studies. "Do you have to be Jewish to major in Jewish Studies?" Did anyone ever ask whether you have to be a gladiator to study Classics or a cockroach to study entomology? The cliché "What can you do with a Jewish Studies degree?" has sadly begotten "My parents will not pay for my college if I major in Jewish Studies." Some graduates have confidently confirmed the "uselessness" of their Jewish Studies major, although they omit mentioning that they failed numerous courses because of unpreparedness, absences, unsubmitted assignments, and cheating. We ourselves are not immune to our discursive landscape. A colleague of mine, during a discussion about promoting Jewish Studies, quipped, "I have no interest in being a used-car salesman." While sympathetic to resistance to any task that distracts us from our primary mission of research and teaching, it is thought-provoking to compare Jewish Studies to a used car, a probably faulty, undesirable product that must be deceptively hocked to a customer who has to settle for something cheaper. The dynamic and essential roles that Jews, Judaism, and Jewishness have played in history, literature, religion, and culture, coupled with the marginality of the Jewish experience that highlights the center, hardly resemble a used car. Similarly relevant and new are topics like Holocaust, Bible, and Israel, as well as the natural multi- and interdisciplinarity of our field. Even so, these justifications for Jewish Studies that may appeal to colleagues, administrators, and potential donors may be unfamiliar or not compelling to our high-school-educated consumers. Such typical comments underscore the gap between my own love for the multi- and interdisciplinary, transcultural and transchronological character of Jewish Studies and the perceptions of students and their financiers who are on a completely different scroll. My perspective is no doubt skewed by being faculty at a public university where learning for its own sake is often overwhelmed by learning for the sake of getting a job.

I wish it were possible to ignore distorted oversimplifications of Jewish Studies exacerbated by misperceptions of the value of a college education in general and the study of humanities in particular. I wish that the small number of inspiring and inspired faculty, students, and alumni in Jewish Studies would be sufficient to counter these views and sustain its future vitality. Regrettably, one of the most serious challenges facing Jewish Studies has been the consumerist model of undergraduate education embraced by many universities.[i] In this scenario, students and their funders are the consumers. The product they perceive to be purchasing is an education. It becomes especially problematic when universities begin to subdivide and measure their educational "products" not simply by college (business, engineering, teaching, liberal arts, etc.), but by smaller units of departments and programs. In this environment, measurability becomes confused with substantive value. When value is measured by the number of students in an academic program, Jewish Studies is at a distinct disadvantage. The primary consumer has a high-school education and most of their adults have never heard of Jewish Studies or superficially reject the field. Students are required or encouraged to choose their concentration when they matriculate, so it is no wonder that so few opt to concentrate in Jewish Studies. How can they be expected to focus on a field that is hardly known to them? Where in high school will they hear about Jewish Studies? Even Classical Studies has an advantage with high-school Latin courses, an AP Latin exam, and a robust Junior Classical League. A consumerist model depends on an informed consumer. Our potential consumers may not even be aware of Jewish Studies until they attend university. By then, it can be too late. If a student does not "discover" Jewish Studies by the end of their second year, it becomes virtually impossible to meet the requirements of the major. The consumerist model has an additional weapon discouraging the pursuit of Jewish Studies. Namely, despite evidence to the contrary, it seems to require a leap of faith to consider Jewish Studies as a major that will enable them to secure a job.

Partnerships are essential because they make Jewish Studies accessible to a broader constituency.

Thus, the consumerist model of higher education assails Jewish Studies on three fronts. First, the consumer is encouraged to make an informed choice, but that informed choice is constrained by information, marketing, and messaging over multiple years that exclude Jewish Studies. Second, if the return on investment of a university education is a high-paying job immediately upon graduation, then we are further disadvantaged. Third, when universities evaluate their units based on the number of consumers, then the Jewish Studies product division will almost always be in a precarious position. For example, the State of Ohio recently passed a bill, Senate Bill One, which requires the termination of any academic program that does not graduate five majors per year over a three-year period.[ii] A Lightcast analysis of several well-known Midwestern universities indicates that no Jewish Studies program meets even this minimum threshold, except for Hebrew Theological College.

At first glance, the most obvious solution is to create more informed consumers. Easier said than done. Until a student is in a Jewish Studies class, we rarely have a captive audience and lack the resources to capture an audience. While it is certainly useful to gather data about the value of a BA in Jewish Studies and make it available, we still rely on the consumer to access this information in the first place. We have statistics that demonstrate that BAs in the humanities do end up with salaries comparable to those of STEM students, especially later in their careers.[iii] Such information makes it easier to justify a humanities major, but hardly makes it irresistibly attractive: "Major in Jewish Studies because in twenty years you will be the strongest candidate for a high-paying managerial and supervisory position!"

Rather, there are more effective ways of addressing the consumerist environment inflicted upon Jewish Studies. Partnerships are essential because they make Jewish Studies accessible to a broader constituency. At University of Cincinnati, for example, we regularly cross-list courses with other departments, collaborate with Hillel, develop formal and informal community partnerships that include a co-op, internships, and participation in a local program where high school students attend college classes. We also participate in introductory classes on the liberal arts and foreign languages. Such strategies are obvious, but their value becomes especially high when viewed as opportunities to reach consumers who are not aware of the existence or meaning of Jewish Studies. In addition, faculty regularly volunteer to speak to prospective students on campus tours. A twenty-minute spiel can go a long way!

Other potentially productive partnerships are more challenging because of institutional cultures. Ideally, student advisors would steer appropriate students to the so-called smaller majors for a better academic experience with more individual attention, but advisors are overworked, and it can be a challenge getting on their radar. Support from upper administration would also be helpful. While caps on majors are a cardinal sin against the consumerist model, would it really be so bad if a dean encouraged units with hundreds of majors to direct students to less populated departments? Further, units like English and Political and International Affairs offer courses required of all students. As they scramble to find instructors, they could be encouraged by upper administration to include faculty from Jewish Studies who are well qualified to teach writing or civics. We have an associate dean of humanities who has been especially effective in promoting the humanities. Among many initiatives, he created a popular one-credit course, "Calling Bullshit," that functioned as an introduction to the various humanities departments. This has been one of the few cases where upper administration has actually taken the initiative to help departments like Jewish Studies flourish.

Another strategy is to push back on the conventional narratives by preaching to the unconverted about the purpose of higher education. This would involve a partnership with admissions, advising, and academic administration. Instead of leaning into the common view

that the purpose of a college education is to get a job, the narrative should be that a college education facilitates personal and professional success. The university should take a more active and effective role in defining the product, not catering to the consumer. I am reminded of the famous story of Hillel and Shammai and the converts. "Convert me on the condition that you teach me the Written Torah, but not the Oral Torah," says one of the potential proselytes. Without endorsing Shammai's violent response of beating him off with a stick, I sympathize with his annoyance at proselytes demanding to convert on their terms based on their own definition of what constitutes Judaism. Hillel, however, understands the consumerist model. This empowers Hillel to accept converts without accepting that the "customer is always right." Rather, he cleverly teaches them to redefine their notion of what constitutes Jewish Studies.

MATTHEW KRAUS *is associate professor and head of the Department of Judaic Studies at the University of Cincinnati. He recently authored "Jerome's Reception of Philo" in* The Reception of Philo of Alexandria*, Courtney Friesen, David Lincicum, and David Runia, eds., Oxford University Press (2025) and provided the annotations, commentary, and introduction to the "Wisdom of Solomon" for* The Jewish Annotated Apocrypha.

The university should take a more active and effective role in defining the product, not catering to the consumer.

i The problem of consumerism and higher education has long been recognized but is often unaddressed. Hanna Holborn Gray, "The Higher Learning and the New Consumerism," AEI Annual Dinner, December 9, 1982 (https://www.aei.org/research-products/speech/the-higher-learning-and-the-new-consumerism/) and more recently, Miguel Martinez-Saenz and Steven Schoonover Jr., "Resisting the 'Student-as-Consumer' Metaphor: The Wrong Metaphor at the Wrong Time," Academe, November–December 2014 (https://www.aaup.org/academe/issues/100-4/resisting-student-consumer-metaphor).

ii There is some relief. A program can apply for a waiver or be one of many tracks within a larger unit such as Near Eastern Studies.

iii Kathryn Palmer, "Debunking Perceptions about Value of Humanities Degrees," *Inside Higher Ed*, November 1, 2023 (https://www.insidehighered.com/news/students/academics/2023/11/01/humanities-majors-make-more-workers-without-degrees#).

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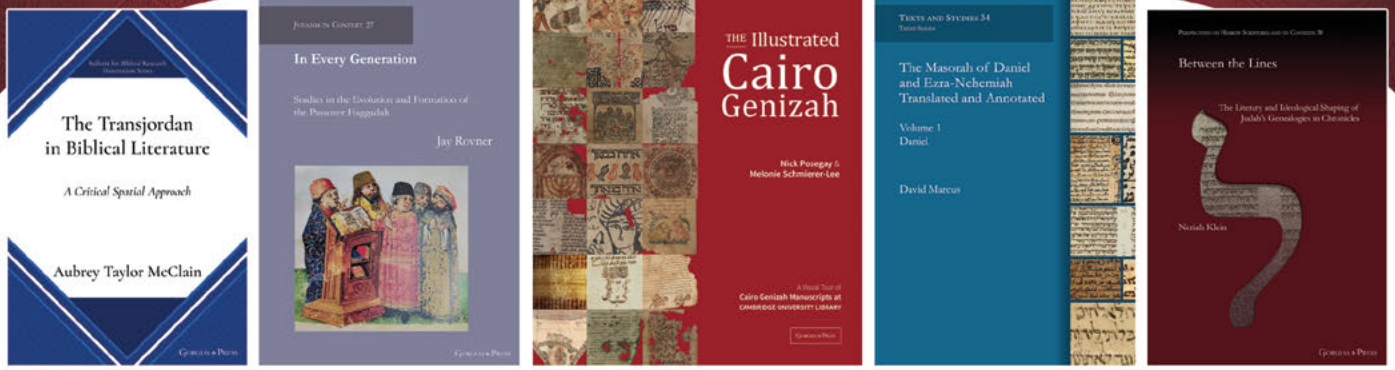

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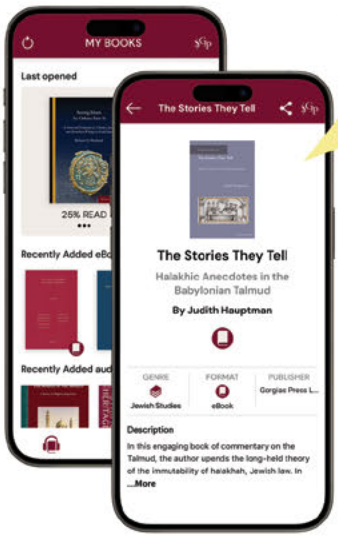

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Jewish Studies Is Jewish Education

Ari Y. Kelman

Jewish Studies is Jewish education. I don't know how to say it any more plainly than that.

Most Jewish Studies scholars work at universities where they teach students. They write syllabi for their courses that function as curricular outlines. They evaluate student performance. They research and write articles that they hope people will read (even people outside of their narrow subfield of specialization) and from which they might learn something. They work in educational institutions and they both study and teach Jewish material. Even if their professional efforts end with teaching and research, it seems like a stretch to conclude that scholars of Jewish Studies are not involved primarily in educational efforts and that those efforts could reasonably be called "Jewish."

But Jewish Studies scholars will protest. "Sure, we're educators," many scholars would say, "But we're not Jewish educators." The resistance to being called a Jewish educator appears to derive from the presumption that whatever it is that Jewish educators do, Jewish Studies doesn't.

Scholars of Jewish Studies tend to regard Jewish education primarily as something that takes place in Sunday schools or summer camps, that it is geared largely toward children, that is fundamentally religious in nature, and that it is largely guided by an impulse for what used to be called "Jewish survival" or "Jewish continuity." It is not concerned primarily with cultivating a student's critical faculties, but with ensuring their ongoing commitment to Jewish life.

Meanwhile, Jewish educators resist associations with Jewish Studies, which they tend to regard with some measure of curiosity—like an eccentric cousin from another country: it is interesting, and we even share certain qualities, but we are on different paths and do not, in the end, care about the same things.

If they regard it at all, Jewish educators regard Jewish Studies as a kind of esoteric practice. It might produce interesting ideas, but, by and large, the scholarship that emerges from Jewish Studies has little to no bearing on what happens in synagogues or schools or summer camps. An innovative reading of a biblical text or the recovery of a historical incident might be interesting, but Jewish Studies has a hard time explaining why it matters beyond that.

Of course, these are caricatures. They are descriptions of distorted and exaggerated beliefs which, nevertheless, do cultural and conceptual work for both Jewish educators and Jewish Studies scholars, allowing for the easier construction and maintenance of difference between two fields that share more than either cares to admit. Caricaturing Jewish education allows Jewish Studies scholars to distance themselves from efforts to teach what they deem hokey or simply not serious, and to adopt a stance of cool remove from their subjects and students. Caricaturing Jewish Studies allows Jewish educators to avoid engaging with the critical analyses and scholarly currents that offer important insights into Jewish life, culture, religion, experience, and community, and might force them to change how and what they teach.

On college campuses, these caricatures often reduce to a kind of institutional choice: if students want Jewish education, they can go to Hillel. If college students want to engage with Jewish ideas in a rigorous intellectual format, they should seek out Jewish Studies.

But these caricatures are just caricatures, and they deserve to be treated as such, and not as evidence of any empirical observation. Most Jewish Studies scholars don't spend much time in Sunday schools or summer camps, and most Jewish educators are not enrolled in Jewish Studies courses. Certainly, neither party reads research about the other. All of this is to say that these caricatures do not describe realities with which the people who hold them are directly familiar. Though they might feel true, they might be better understood by looking not at their accuracy but at the symbolic or conceptual work they perform for the people who hold them.

The caricatures Jewish Studies scholars project onto Jewish educators and the ones that Jewish educators return make it easier to dismiss the efforts of others and justify one's own. It allows for much disparagement and even mockery—Jewish educators are brainless saps!

Jewish Studies scholars are heartless eggheads!—and a kind of retrenchment of precisely the sort that makes both enterprises the object of suspicion, often from their own students.

Rather than investing in shopworn caricatures that sharpen opposition, we might take this opportunity to explore how Jewish Studies might learn from Jewish education and vice versa.

Particularly for a community that does not require faith and which has a long history of critical engagement with sources, ideas, and authority, Jewish Studies seems vital to Jewish education because it offers a way of engaging with that very history that is also congruent with that history. Jewish education, for its part, could benefit from the critical engagements of Jewish Studies, from its appetite for hard questions and unpleasant answers, and for the openness it often creates for students to find their own ways through the questions they have about Jewish subjects. Jewish education could benefit from embracing the thornier elements of Jewish Studies in order to engage its students around critical issues and in difficult conversations, to challenge them to explore more deeply and think more critically about their own Jewish lives and the kinds of worlds they want to create and inhabit. Jewish Studies is exceptionally good at this.

At the same time, Jewish Studies can benefit from opening itself to Jewish education's concerns for our students as whole beings, as curious learners, and as emerging adults. Without sacrificing classroom rigor, Jewish Studies scholars can engage their students as people who show up in their classrooms with questions that matter to them, and they can attend with greater care to those students and the questions that drew them to Jewish Studies classrooms in the first place. One does not have to invest in ensuring that their students observe Halakhah or feel a certain way about Israel to take the care necessary when raising challenging issues in class and helping students cultivate the habits of mind necessary to engage with Jewishness in the twenty-first century.

Jewish Studies scholars would be wise to get over themselves and accept the breadth of their role as educators, and to accept the complexity and responsibility of that role. At the same time, Jewish educators might wish to embrace some of the methods or insights of Jewish Studies and consider the intellectual heft of the tradition they labor to uphold. It does nobody any good here to fear the contributions of scholars, but neither does it benefit anyone for scholars to pretend that they are above investments that their own teaching shape the lives, minds, beliefs, and actions of their students.

We might take this opportunity to explore how Jewish Studies might learn from Jewish education and vice versa

The oppositions between Jewish Studies and Jewish education, steeped as they have been in caricatures and skepticism, are not doing anyone any favors. They might be serving the egos and identities of their respective practitioners, but they are doing a significant disservice to our students, many of whom readily cross back and forth between the institutional structures that appear to be so firmly and clearly delineated. The same people go to Hillel or Chabad and take Jewish Studies courses. The same students go on Birthright trips and write papers on Jewish subjects.

Diminishing oppositions might allow each to learn from the other, or at least, regard the other with the respect and recognition that could enable both to flourish as different, sometimes compatible and sometimes contradictory elements of a broader Jewish ecosystem that is largely concerned with the flourishing of Jewish ideas and the lives those ideas help to shape. Drawing broadly, across and between institutions, students might be learning despite the differences in which their teachers are so deeply invested. The teachers could stand to learn something from their students.

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New Realities in Jewish Studies: Peril, Pedagogy, and Promise

Kenneth L. Hanson

It becomes an immersive experience, challenging the student / viewer to develop a personal and almost intimate awareness of the historical "presence" of Jewish texts and textuality.

Judaic Studies, generally considered a "niche" program, has always been rife with challenges in an academic setting. In recent years, a new set of realities, including a stress on STEM courses, as opposed to traditional humanities-based programs, has resulted in plummeting enrollments at many colleges and universities. A case in point is my own institution, the University of Central Florida, where declining enrollment has resulted in the cancellation of a number of Judaic Studies courses. One remedy, which our program has adopted widely, has involved offering the great majority of our courses online, thereby eliminating conflicts with other required classes in a given student's schedule. The strategy has been successful to some extent, preventing the further erosion of enrollments. Preventing erosion, however, is hardly a substitute for growing our reach and our impact. Consequently, I have devoted serious effort to understanding the challenges faced in producing excellent learning outcomes, in turn fostering increased interest in our courses, even in the wider Jewish community.[i]

It goes without saying that online learning of necessity involves new and novel approaches, which should certainly be harvested in the service of Jewish Studies. In that regard, I would ask: At a time when technology is increasingly being emphasized in higher education, why should instructors of Jewish Studies, indeed of the humanities in general, not become innovators rather than mere "users" of technological assets? Should we not be on the "cutting edge" of pedagogy rather than the "latent edge"? Fortunately, a unique cluster of teaching tools already exists, capable of bringing online education to a new level of sophistication. In my own courses this involves the innovative use of AI assets to produce documentary-style video "episodes" for our students' viewing. For a number of years, I have been designing, recording, and editing several complete series of video presentations, which I have incorporated into my university's digital home base for course content, Canvas. Students can access these directly, or on the new educational YouTube channel I have created, entitled "Jews, God, and History."

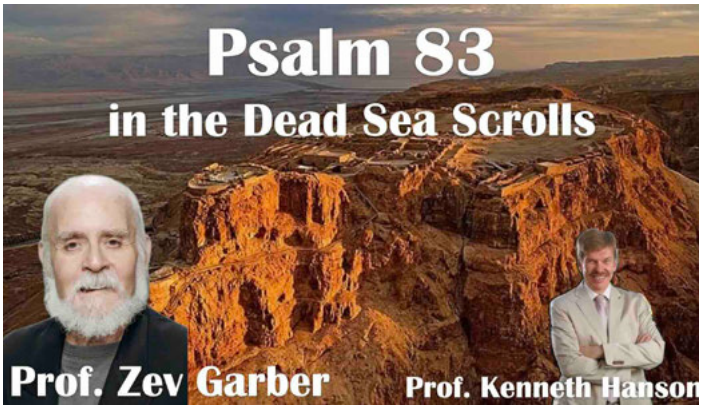
My personal background has been particularly relevant in this regard, given that I earned a master's degree in communication and television prior to entering the world of teaching. The brief tour of the university's television studio, which I received during my online training, had awakened in me a certain interest in fusing professional video production with effective pedagogy. That nascent spark intensified after a preliminary consultation with one of the videographers in charge of television production for the university. The idea was straightforward enough. Why not take the essence of each of my weekly lectures and re-edit it into a fifteen- to twenty-minute video "featurette," so as to create an episodic series containing a semester's worth of the points and insights I would otherwise convey in a live class?[ii] That would involve writing a minimum of fourteen to fifteen scripts (sometimes more), then physically coming to the studio on a weekly basis in order to record them. Since I also have a modicum of theatrical background and experience, I began to contrive ways of integrating a degree of acting into each production. It began with the most popular, indeed the "flagship" course of our program, the "History of the Holocaust." As I began scripting the various episodes, I also began considering the assorted characters who appear in this most tragic event in human history. There was, for example, the Lutheran minister

Screenshot courtesy of the author

(Martin Niemöller) who courageously stood up against the Nazi tyranny of his day, only to be imprisoned in a concentration camp. Rather than merely talking about him and the lessons conveyed by his life experience, I decided to impersonate him, donning a clerical collar to bring him to life on video, in a way that I would be hard-pressed to replicate in the conventional classroom.[iii] As the semester progressed, the entire course was fleshed out with online featurettes, thus engaging each student with a new kind of "flipped classroom."[iv]

I well understood that in traditional classroom settings, I was lucky to engage meaningfully even a third of the students enrolled in my courses, always having to cope with the phenomenon of absent minds and oftentimes absent bodies to match. I regularly found that absenteeism was particularly acute in the second half of each semester, and I sometimes wondered whether my own presence in the classroom, notwithstanding my animated teaching style, even mattered. As exam time approached, students expected a detailed study guide, as if to compensate for their lack of engagement in face-to-face class sessions. Now, however, I could be assured that all of my students were paying rapt attention to the content of my teaching, since, at the close of each week's material, a strictly timed online quiz was embedded in the web course, testing specific points brought out in the relevant video episode. Each student obviously had the option of pausing or replaying the video, while being encouraged to take notes on what was being presented. While I could no longer look my students in the eye, the feedback I was receiving, mostly unprompted, was overwhelmingly positive. Moreover, the test scores were such that I felt on the threshold of reaching the elusive dream of every professor, to achieve 100 percent engagement from every student.

More recently, I have been able to create AI "avatars" of an assortment of historical characters in Jewish history and culture, from Moses, to the prophets, to Rambam and beyond. I am then able to animate these images, pairing them with text, in English or even Hebrew, which they subsequently speak in a lifelike manner. The web course thereby becomes much more than the assignment of multiple texts to read and on which to comment. It becomes an immersive experience, challenging the student/viewer to develop a personal and almost intimate awareness of the historical "presence" of Jewish texts and textuality.[v]



Screenshots courtesy of the author

I am also utilizing AI to produce podcasts based on the video content I have created. A free resource on Google, called NotebookLM, quickly and efficiently creates such podcasts, based on uploaded sources, from a YouTube video, a website, a pasted or copied text, or any number of Google Docs. A "Deep Dive" conversation is then rendered, featuring AI-generated male and female voices, discussing the material in lively, engaging parlance, distilling the main concepts of the designated topic in a manner especially suitable for undergraduate students. I regularly upload such a podcast corresponding to each weekly video I post in my online courses.[vi]

Yet another aspect of the new technology has involved recording Zoom and studio interviews with guest lecturers, which I have then posted as YouTube videos, embedded in Canvas. Most recently, I recorded such an interview with Professor Zev Garber (Los Angeles Valley College), combining it with another AI "Deep Dive" podcast discussing the content, in this case, Psalm 83 as represented in the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Additionally, I have incorporated into Canvas a new video game I created in coordination with the Florida Interactive Entertainment Academy (FIEA), entitled The Siege of Jerusalem. The player/student assumes the role of a Jewish Zealot, trapped in Jerusalem during the siege of 70 CE. The objective is to find a way out of the city and ultimately to the tent of the Roman general, Titus, presenting him with terms for peace. The player must learn the nature of the siege and the topography of the city, correctly answering specific questions along the way. This is the first and only educational video game that has been successfully integrated into UCF's Canvas courses.[vii]

To be sure, the embrace of such technology has fostered what might be called a "buzz" among many of my students, who regularly send unsolicited testimonials, expressing personal appreciation for the high-tech content of my courses, and even declaring that family members are now watching each video episode together. What I have discovered in all of this is that the embrace of technology in creative pedagogy may well hold the key to rescuing Jewish Studies, and by extension, the traditional study of the humanities, from obsolescence and perceived irrelevance. The tools already

Given the assets now available, we are only limited by what we can imagine..

exist, capable of bringing online education to a new level of sophistication. It is clear, moreover, that if we utilize these assets properly, we will produce learning outcomes that far exceed the norm. Given the assets now available, we are only limited by what we can imagine. As Jewish educators, this is our challenge; this is our opportunity.

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Screenshots courtesy of the author

i For an overview of the national decline in humanities enrollment and its impact on small programs like Judaic Studies, see Benjamin Schmidt, "The Humanities Are in Crisis," *The Atlantic*, August 23, 2018.

ii For theoretical grounding in educational video production and multimodal learning, see Richard E. Mayer, *Multimedia Learning*, 2nd ed. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), especially chaps. 6 and 9.

iii On the integration of theatrical elements into pedagogical practice, particularly within Holocaust education, see Samuel Totten, *Teaching and Studying the Holocaust* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 2001).

iv J. L. Bishop and M. A. Verleger, "The Flipped Classroom: A Survey of the Research," in *ASEE National Conference Proceedings* 30, no. 9 (2013).

v For discussion on AI in education and avatar-based learning, see Wayne Holmes, Maya Bialik, and Charles Fadel, *Artificial Intelligence in Education: Promises and Implications for Teaching and Learning* (Boston: Center for Curriculum Redesign, 2019).

vi See Martin Ebner and Sandra Schön, "Podcasting in Education: What Are the Benefits?," *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (iJET)* 12, no. 4 (2017): 7–13.

vii For the pedagogical potential of game-based learning in historical studies, see Kurt Squire, *Video Games and Learning: Teaching and Participatory Culture in the Digital Age* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2011).

Israel, Zionism, and the Rest of Us: A Plea for the Future of Jewish Studies

Benjamin Schreier

Jewish Studies programs are suffering with most of the humanities, but they're also confronting a number of particular sociopolitical trends: growing tension between scholarship and the advocacy mission of Jewish community organizations (sometimes including the OG Jewish community organization, parents), Zionism's increasing capture by partisan politics, and, recently, the conflicts roiling campuses since October 7.

As a field that consolidated during the post–civil rights identity movements of the late 1960s, Jewish Studies has often had trouble disaggregating its scholarly mission from an assumed identity-work mission. While academic formations such as Black, gender, and Chicano Studies emerged at the intersection of new understandings of (or maybe compromises about)[i] identity, emerging modes of scholarship, and progressive projects to increase representation, Jewish Studies used the same epistemological structure (grafted onto the emancipationist *Wissenschaft* tradition) but for essentially conservative ends: to defend the institutional presence Jews had *already* secured in previous generations.[ii] The legacy of this difference is significant: while in many cases other identity-based fields could critically interrogate the strategic identity politics with which they began, Jewish Studies has largely avoided rigorous identity critique and remains uncommitted to moving beyond an establishmentarian epistemology.

Thus Jewish Studies has mostly failed to theorize itself beyond a general project of Jewish self-consciousness, and it lacks an analytic vocabulary for imagining itself outside alliance with Jewish community organizations—organizations that, as recent surveys show, can seem increasingly out of step in their preoccupations with young Americans, including Jews.

Jewish Studies will obviously disproportionately attract Jews, in line with patterns in other "studies" programs. But that doesn't mean it should organize its knowledge practices in alliance with a phantasmatic "Jewish" perspective. The panoply of Jewish culture, thinking, and history at the heart of Jewish Studies' interdisciplinarity constitutes the field's *object* matter, not its *subject* position. The history and contemporary life of Israel, for a particular example, with its relationship to Jews, Judaism, and Jewish identity, obviously belongs in Jewish Studies' portfolio, but when students can reasonably assume that Jewish Studies courses and programming take for granted Jews as the overriding protagonists of the narrative and study of Israel/Palestine, some may reasonably assume that Jewish Studies does not welcome them. Jewish Studies should push back against the assumption that its purpose is Jewish (or Israel) advocacy.

Administrators may worry about donors, but surely the job of Jewish Studies is to resist, not reproduce, the presumption that Jews necessarily hold certain beliefs—an essentialist presumption that might lead unreflective people to equate Palestine solidarity activism with antisemitism. Is Bill Ackman to dictate Jewish Studies curricula? Demonstrations supporting a ceasefire or calls for an end to the Occupation do not endanger Jewish lives, nor is fear that they might a legitimate warrant to curtail free expression. Did some antisemites in the encampments or demonstrations voice support for Hamas or call for expelling Jews after October 7? Sure; but to claim that such phenomena represent the Palestine solidarity movement is as preposterous as holding that Baruch Goldstein proves that Jews are theocratic mass murderers. And while we're at it: Given the Israel lobby's tireless labor equating "Jewish" with "Zionist," is it any wonder people get confused?

The job of Jewish Studies is to contextualize and criticize such views, not ride shotgun for them. Forgive me for turning to the tools of my trade, but closely reading the CFP for this issue illuminates: to curricular and enrollment

We should recognize that Jewish Studies shares a field of exercise and a common mission with other fields.

challenges, the editors write, "must be added the sharp increase in anti-Israel/antisemitic agitation on multiple campuses, doubtless contributing to a general angst with respect to expressing one's Judaism, even in a purely academic environment." Note both the slash's elision of "anti-Israel" and "antisemitic" and the ease with which the "expressi[on]" of, presumably, a student's or professor's "Judaism" is taken for granted as conditioning Jewish Studies activities.

I'm focusing on Israel, of course, because that, to adapt Art Spiegelman's phrase, is where our troubles begin. The current state of Israel politics in the United States is making our job very difficult. We have the Trumpian Right insisting that criticism of Israel is axiomatically antisemitic, both as a lever in its war on higher education and to deflect attention from the actually antisemitic Christianist fundamentalists among its revanchist vanguard, and we have some liberal Zionists repeating the same canard in rearguard hope of reconstituting the old Zionist consensus so lucidly examined by Amy Kaplan in *Our American Israel*. If Jewish Studies programs were already incentivized to self-segregate from their "studies" field cousins before October 7, the cultural-political fallout of the Hamas attacks and consequent war have only intensified the ideological fantasy of standing alone.

But in this danger lies possibility. If our current challenges are largely related to Israel politics, Jewish Studies needs to confront this ideological knot analytically, rather than retreat behind it affectively. We should recognize that Jewish Studies shares a field of exercise and a common mission with other fields whose briefs include the geopolitical and geocultural significance of Israel and the cultural politics and material history of identity in America. Which is to say that rather than thinking of them as hostiles, Jewish Studies should collaborate with Middle East Studies, American Studies, and Ethnic Studies. If those fields might seem (to some) to reject Jewish Studies perspectives, the repudiation has often been a two-way street. But given the place of Israel politics at the fulcrum of our current challenges, including the politically (and academically) fraught question of the relationship between Zionism and Jews, an intellectually and institutionally vibrant future likely involves responsible engagement with the ways in which Israel and Zionism signify outside the presumption of Jewish Zionism and beyond specifically Jewish (and Jewish Studies) contexts. In the post–Vietnam era, other "studies" fields understood themselves—by necessity—as occupying a crowded field, while Jewish Studies imagined it could afford to stand self-sufficiently alone. The last two years have demonstrated pretty convincingly that this has made us few friends and yielded little benefit. We could do a lot worse than rethinking this garrison mentality.

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i See Jodi Melamed and Roderick Ferguson.

ii This is not meant to ignore the feminist, queer, and POC activism that followed, expanding the scope of Jewish Studies.

Soul Searching in Jewish Studies: How Applied Social Sciences May Help Find Answers

Peter Gluck

In this article I propose that questions need to be raised through social analysis to better understand the current situation of Jewish Studies. As with all social and institutional interventions, official policies and programs may also need to be changed or altered to more fully achieve the purpose of Jewish Studies as envisioned by its founders, supporters, and funders.

If there exists a problem with Jewish Studies programs, we must first concede we have the resources to analyze and understand it if we choose to do so. And, like with any other institutional or organizational concern, we can use the analytic tools of the applied social sciences to offer alternative solutions. Jewish Studies have gone through changes in focus from their beginning, from shared Hebraic studies, to *Wissenschaft* and Jewish history, then Modern Hebrew language and literature. Jewish Studies came to include Women's Studies, popular culture—most anything that the university scholarly community has taken up in the accepted humanistic academic approach and interest of the time.

As Jewish scholars responded to the world of modern thought and analyzed Jewish history and culture with emerging modes of discourse, more and more wrote about Jewish life in what could even be considered assimilated Jewish thought and research. Jewish Studies should focus more on relevant subjects that could help Jews, Jewish social organizations, and Jewish religious institutions understand our contemporary historical situation better. Applied social research can help navigate ever-changing social, economic, and cultural realities. The purpose would be not only to analyze the results of surveys and studies, but, through analysis, to facilitate the instruments for establishing, or improving, needed programs for individuals, couples, families, and communities.

It may be time for Jewish Studies to look even more within the living Jewish world at subjects such as current "Jewish identities" and "Jewish survival," and topics such as "democracy and the Jewish community," and "being Jewish in a free society." As another example, such an approach might inquire, considering the advance of Modern Hebrew in Israel, why no Modern Hebrew dialect exists in the Diaspora, since all cultures and subgroups have languages and dialects. An applied approach asks how this could be fostered and accomplished.

Jewish Studies could interest its students in the "how to's" of applied social research, give assignments to learn and to practice, so they may engage with Jewish communal organizations as professionals and community members. In other words, classes and workshops could teach the tools to do social research thinking. This would augment existing Jewish communal service and synagogue professional training.

Jewish Studies programs may work to explain and share Jewish discourse openly with the non-Jewish public, including especially non-Jewish students and members of the university population.

What is the social makeup of students who enroll in Jewish Studies classes? What do they learn about Jewish people?

Similarly, research about modern Jewish institutions, how they were created and how they work, would be significant, since these modern organizations, for many, provide their affiliated identity, serve "community needs," and participate in the world of non-Jewish institutions. Thus, Jewish Studies would focus more on "relevant" subjects that could help Jews and Jewish social and religious institutional leaders understand their contemporary Jewish historical situation, and be more involved in the creation of what I call the "new history" of our day.

In other words, a larger concern with the immediate life of living Jewish populations may be the calling now of Jewish Studies. Given the already documented rise of antisemitism, Jewish Studies programs may work to explain and share Jewish discourse openly with the non-Jewish public, including especially non-Jewish students and members of the university population.

This may require programmatic outreach. It should be noted, for example, that after the shooting at the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh, there was a massive response condemning the shooting. Support came from many and diverse groups rooted in the non-Jewish world. Perhaps many non-Jews are willing and interested to learn if their Jewish colleagues in the academy, and neighbors in the community, are willing to share more, not just at times of tragedy.

Jewish Studies should not just study but also become an advocate for what may be called "ecumenical"-type discussions, that is, joining with other programs, in public meetings and conferences, on topics such as the Holocaust. Generally, in this and other ways, Jewish Studies can become much more relevant to the broader contemporary life of individual Jews and the Jewish community, especially Jewish university students. Jewish Studies would have a real-world purpose. It would take a more active role in helping students and nonstudents, including non-Jewish faculty and administrators, know more, particularly about how diverse Jewish communities, both secular and religious, deal with antisemitism on campuses.

Another example of a research question would be: What is the social makeup of students who enroll in Jewish Studies classes? What do they learn about Jewish people? Indeed, it would be interesting to study how many non-Jewish students enroll in Jewish Studies courses. The American Sociological Association online library lists titles of books and syllabi organized by subject, including many Jewish-oriented texts and courses. How many non-Jewish faculty know of these courses and scholarship? How many non-Jewish faculty have read any of the books and papers? How many are used by non-Jewish faculty in any of their courses about American society? Knowing the right questions to ask, or, finding the right questions to ask—which Jewish Studies scholars would be able to do—may lead to the relevant information needed to help create cultural innovations for the Jewish People, not merely analyze that which already exists.

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Back to Basics? Confronting the Denial of Jewish History

Yonatan S. Miller

What can a specialist in ancient Judaism add to a university-wide course on antisemitism? This was one of the questions that haunted me, when, a few weeks after the October 7 attack, I was asked to update and relaunch a course called "Why the Jews?" –– a free, asynchronous, one-credit course on antisemitism that had previously been offered at the University of Connecticut.

I certainly wasn't the most intuitive choice for this task. Aside from feeling deeply shaken by the attack and the ferocious anti-Israel protests that soon followed, I had started my job at UConn only a few weeks prior. And while I could bring some expertise on topics that are adjacent to my research, like supersessionism, the portions of the course that needed the most attention related to contemporary issues, and especially the interrelationship between antisemitism and anti-Zionism. These are topics with which I'm familiar, but at that time they were outside of my areas of research.

As I worked on updating the course, it did not take long for me to recognize that practically the entire field of Jewish Studies, and especially Jewish history, dwells in the shadow of today's antisemitism. Here I hope to sketch out some of my initial thoughts on the challenges that this new iteration of antisemitism brings to our field.

It is easy for a Jewish Studies insider to understand Michael Satlow's provocative, anti-essentialist statements that "Judaism . . . has no history" and "Judaism, as a whole, does not have a story." Many of my students have initially found these statements to be unsettling, but the point is to get them thinking critically about normativity, labels, and master narratives.

In the current charged atmosphere, however, I think we might do well to take a step back from theory and method. This is because the notion that Judaism has no history altogether is fast becoming mainstream in the academy and in society at large.

Today's Jews, we are increasingly told, are modern impostors claiming ancient roots. Chants of "Go back to Poland!" are undergirded by the pernicious Khazar conspiracy theory, which collapses world Jewry into an eastern European monolith that converted to Judaism, en masse, about one thousand years ago.

This mythical antihistory both thrives on ignorance of premodern Jewish civilization and simultaneously promotes the claim of its nonexistence. Universities are the last place where one would expect to encounter an intellectual anaerobiosis that cannot tolerate the oxygen of historical memory. Surely the world's scientific community would be infuriated if their university colleagues began promoting young-earth creationism in the classroom and in public activism. We, however, are left to endure this epistemic violence on our own.

If it were only the betrayal of the values of critical, humanistic inquiry—dayyenu. Worse yet, this notion that today's Jews are not "real" Jews is a repackaging, indeed a weaponizing, of classic tropes of anti-Judaism.

The ground is prepared by a pair of verses from the New Testament book of Revelation (2:9; 3:9) which speak of how "those who say they are Jews, but are not" are of the "synagogue of Satan." The motif likewise echoes supersessionist doctrines that speak of how

Before we ask students to appreciate the complexity of Jewish expression, we may first need to equip them to recognize and reject the epistemological violence that denies Jews any history at all.

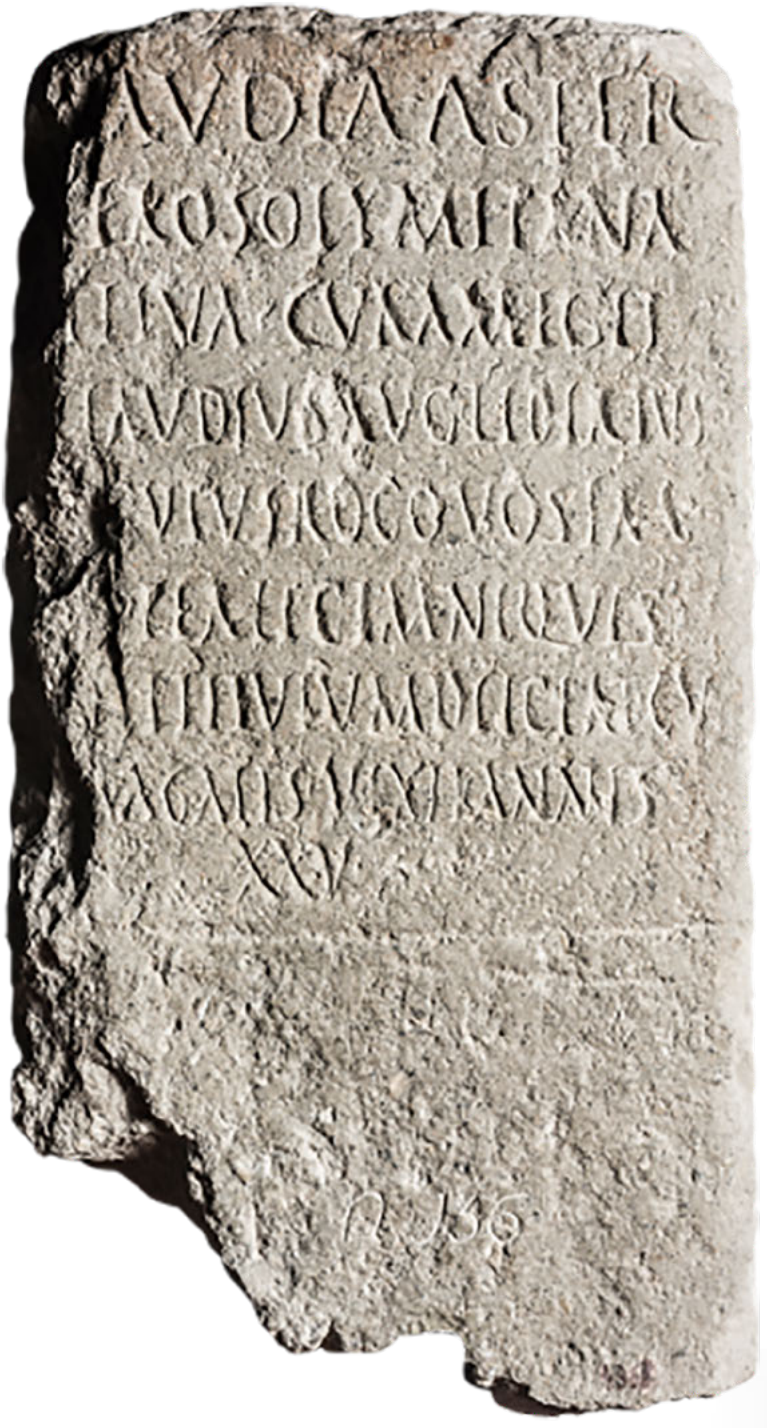
Christians, not Jews, are the "true Israelites" (Verus Israel). And it has the endorsement of Hiram Evans, leader of the KKK from 1922 to 1939, who wrote that there was "little hope for [Ashkenazic] assimilation" in America, because the Ashkenazim "are not true Jews, but only Judaized Mongols-Chazars."

In an environment where these harmful beliefs now have widespread purchase, I sometimes wonder whether we need to be more intentional about how we frame the current consensuses about the capaciousness and plurality of Judaism, especially at the introductory level. It remains vital to celebrate the diversity of Jewish life and thought, but should that really be a primary takeaway when Judaism's very legitimacy as a historical and cultural tradition is being openly denied? Before we ask students to appreciate the complexity of Jewish expression, we may first need to equip them to recognize and reject the epistemological violence that denies Jews any history at all.

I want to close with the story of a Jewish woman from the late first century CE named Esther.[i] What we know of her is solely from the Latin text on her gravestone: "Claudia Aster Hierosolymitana captiva." Claudia Esther, a captive from Jerusalem. Esther was taken from her home in Jerusalem as a slave, and hauled off to the western coast of Italy, near Naples, where she died at the young age of twenty-five.

Esther's dying wish is recorded on her tombstone as follows: "I ask you, make sure through the law that you take care that no-one casts down my inscription." Esther's words are a protest not only against the physical desecration of her grave, but against the erasure of her memory.

As antisemitism increasingly encroaches on Jewish history itself, we would do well to heed Esther's dying wish.



Epitaph of Claudia Aster. Late 1st century. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli.

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i https://wjudaism.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/wjudaism/article/view/3177/1338

Effective Teaching Can Save Jewish Studies

Benjamin Steiner

If you, as an employed academic, bemoan anemic enrollment in your Jewish Studies classes, you might be tempted to blame the academy. Recent years have seen a steep drop in the number of students studying the humanities while interest in the STEM fields swelled. The academic world is off balance independent of the Trump administration's cuts to higher education. While one man's pedagogy will not even the playing field, it can help individual professors to buck the trend. My teaching convinced students with little inherent interest in the study of religion or Jewish Studies to take class after class with me. That reality informs the primary lesson that I seek to impart here: the path to sustaining Jewish Studies and the humanities more broadly starts with individual teachers making a difference. In other words, you. For the moment, set aside your fears about the liberal arts apocalypse. Look in the mirror.

Now a word about my students: despite the subject matter we covered, most of them were not Jewish, and nearly all arrived with but a rudimentary knowledge of Judaism. My classes appealed to their intellects. I stimulated students to learn through high-level analysis and discussion in the classroom. If most of them never thought twice about Judaism prior to my classes, many completed them with a penchant to learn more about cultures beyond their own. I considered that a success.

Effective teaching is about engrossing students through the communication of interesting ideas. Successful implementation demands constant energy. But the rewards for student and teacher alike cannot be overstated. When mastered, it is also relatively easy. Anyone who follows a few simple strategies can elevate their pedagogy. This essay is dedicated to helping humanities academics harness proven methods to make their classes better, all through the prism of one especially rewarding upper division class I taught at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut, titled "Jewish Spirituality and Mysticism." It will walk you through how I grabbed and sustained student attention.

"Jewish Spirituality and Mysticism" examined Jewish spiritual expression across the ages, including the relationship between Jewish mysticism and spiritual expression. As in any class, the goal was to engage with important themes and ideas, and to give my students a foundation and the keys for further inquiry. Guiding questions were baked into the structure of the course: How has Jewish spirituality evolved over time? How have historical developments and the wider culture in which Jews lived informed this evolution? How has modernity shaped Jewish spirituality? How have women historically related differently to Jewish spirituality from men? In what ways, if any, has Jewish spirituality in America continued its manifestations elsewhere? As you design your own syllabi, remember to start with guiding questions. These points of reference will help you shape the universe of knowledge that you seek to cultivate in the classroom.

Overarching questions are not the only means by which to frame the learning environment. Another critical piece is the layout of the classroom. When the classroom is shaped like a horseshoe, the teacher occupies the void in the middle, surrounded by students on three sides with the board in front. Make the classroom your stage and use the board to diagram conceptual

Effective teaching takes patience, and sometimes, a degree of nudging.

points. Radiate enthusiasm for the material and a playful, contagious energy so that students lock in and engage.

Close reading of assigned texts was the backbone of my class. It is from the "pocket" between what students gain from the reading on their own and what you, the professor, glean from it as a professional reader of texts that is most interesting to students. You need to articulate to students in the clearest possible language what the reading is saying and how it relates to the broader course themes. I accomplished this through a simple strategy of circular reading. Starting on one end of the classroom semicircle, I had students read select passages in the assigned reading out loud. Between those readings, I riffed my interpretation of the text (the pocket), thereby building a foundation for rich class discussion. Not all paragraphs of an article are equally useful to distill for your students. The aim of circular reading is to present the epitome of the assigned text.

My approach captured Gen-Z attention spans. Your undergraduates are less than likely to discern the nuances and structure of the reading. I also taught my students that there is no such thing as "objective" analysis, only better and worse analysis. The measure of successful analytic framing is the extent to which the facts presented support the central argument. That is what it means to critique an article on its merits.

Channel the energy of the literature being explored with your students. If an author conveyed anger, students felt it in the modulation of my voice. If an author conveyed excitement, my emotions reflected that. If something in the reading was surprising, I screamed "WHAT?!" before unpacking the implications. Articles have cadence and emotion that should be supremely visible in the teacher's presentation. This modeling pays dividends in assigned written work as students internalize how to deconstruct an academic text.

Effective teaching also takes patience, and sometimes, a degree of nudging. My advice is: come with joy. Always be willing to repeat yourself, especially when you make a complex statement of importance. Complement students when they are on the right track, or supplement with a helpful redirect when you find their answer is on the wrong track. Make students feel that they are a critical part of the academic journey and that their voices matter. Never vent frustration at students. Let your emotions flow through the energy required for effective presentation of a challenging text.

I taught my students that nothing is inevitable in history—that there are no direct lines from one point to another. The decline of Jewish Studies as a niche subject in the humanities is not inevitable. The pedagogic choices that professors make today will determine its future.

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Hebrew, Letterpress, and the Humanities

Barbara Mann

I have long been interested in books as objects—their affective power as artifacts as well as the physical intricacies of how they are made and circulated. I have also had the opportunity to observe the tremendous effect that actual books can have on students in classroom settings, from the extensive collection of yizkor books housed in the Library of the Jewish Theological Seminary to the graphic novels and artists' books located in the Cleveland Institute of Art. Despite their attachment to touch screens—or perhaps because of it—students love to handle stuff. These interests and experiences drive my current work as codirector of the New Gutenberg Annex, Case Western Reserve University's letterpress studio and booklab.

Its growth and expansion are consonant with the emergence of the maker movement and booklabs at many US universities, with their focus on collaborative, experiential learning.

Courtesy of the author

Letterpress printing—inking the raised surface of metal or wood type and transferring that to paper by the pressure of a printing press—transformed human communication and was an essential print form in the early modern and modern periods. As one of the earliest forms of modern book technology, letterpress has enormous appeal for today's STEM-oriented students—who also like to make things IRL. The New Gutenberg Annex, founded in 2017 by my colleague Professor Kurt Koenigsberger, is a lively letterpress studio that has promoted academic excellence for hundreds of students in single- and multisession workshops across a variety of programs. Its growth and expansion are consonant with the emergence of the maker movement and booklabs at many US universities, with their focus on collaborative, experiential learning.

As CWRU's inaugural Stephen H. Hoffman Professor of Hebrew, I introduced Hebrew type to the New Gutenberg Annex in Fall 2023 and began working with students in my advanced Hebrew-language classes, translating poetry and setting type. Since that time, we have expanded the capacity of the press to work in other foreign languages (Spanish, French, Italian, Portuguese, German, Russian, and Greek) and added other book and paper-making modalities (marbling, stitching, binding, linocuts) to the menu of activities available to the entire campus community. With the support of internal endowments related to foreign language learning and new teaching initiatives, as well as private donations from the Cleveland Jewish community, we have opened a

Courtesy of the author

Courtesy of the author

second letterpress space—the Guilford Exchange—which will further expand our footprint and ability to serve diverse curricular needs, as well as create public-facing programs in Cleveland at large.

At the center of the Guilford Exchange stand Hamilton type cabinets filled with drawers of Hebrew and Yiddish metal type from the Bixler and Skyline Foundries, Hebrew wood type from Virgin Wood Type in Rochester, NY, and sets of old Hebrew metal and wood type sourced at auction or donated by colleagues and friends. Hebrew and Yiddish are thus at the heart of what I believe is the only university-based letterpress studio expressly devoted to foreign-language learning, serving students and faculty working in eleven languages. Students combine efforts in translation with training on press to create bilingual broadsides, chapbooks, and other printed ephemera including both image and text. These circumstances create a refreshingly new setting for the study of Hebrew language and literature.

While Hebrew studies have traditionally been tied to programs in Jewish or Middle Eastern Studies and to foreign language learning, letterpress embeds Hebrew in the humanities in relation to new constellations of knowledge and teaching—specifically, to transdisciplinary fields like Book Studies and the Experimental Humanities, a new major at CWRU that formalizes what many of our students already do: study STEM and the humanities in tandem. At a time when the humanities are reimagining themselves, this focus on print culture—on the book as a physical container and transmitter of knowledge—challenges students to think about their own relationship to knowledge. They learn how knowledge has inevitably been shaped by the material circumstances of its delivery. Appreciation for the book as a foundational modality in this historical transmission of knowledge can help students develop a critical sense of contemporary encounters with information, including via social media and the Internet. Given the enduring bookishness of Jewish cultures, the presence of Hebrew and Jewish Studies at the center of a maker-oriented Book Studies

At a time when the humanities are reimagining themselves, this focus on print culture—on the book as a physical container and transmitter of knowledge—challenges students to think about their own relationship to knowledge.

program makes good intellectual and pedagogical sense and exposes students from across the college to Jewish history and culture.

The New Gutenberg Annex has also staged events open to the wider community. We recently hosted book artist Lynne Avadenka, who works with Hebrew type, as well as Ada Limon, the US Poet Laureate. Both events made Hebrew letterpress visible within a wider set of interests and audiences. Next spring, I will coteach a new course, "How to Do Things with Books," which is designed to serve as the core course for a new Program in Book Studies. The course will be cross-listed with English, Jewish Studies, World Literature, and Art Studio. Students will learn about book history and practice the hands-on labor of making paper, books, and prints, including working on our Vandercook SP-15, a restored vintage press which has become the gold standard in letterpress printing. We are supported in these efforts with work-study students from the English Department and Writing Program, and a pair of Hebrew Fellows, who receive stipends in exchange for training on press and peer assistance in the studio.

Jewish Studies faces many challenges in our increasingly fraught post–October 7 world. Working with Hebrew metal and wood type in the close quarters of the press allows students to encounter the history of Jewish print culture in an immersive collaborative setting, creating a positive learning experience and beautiful prints.

Courtesy of the author

BARBARA MANN *teaches Jewish Studies and Modern Hebrew Literature at Case Western Reserve University.*

Jewish Studies in Today's Academy: The University of Chicago Divinity School

Sheila E. Jelen

> I arrived at the University of Chicago after the year of nationwide encampments and protests and spent my first year here astonished by how quiet and civilized the discourse on the Israel/Gaza war felt.

The Divinity School at the University of Chicago was founded when William Rainey Harper (1856–1906), the first president of the university, a specialist in Semitics and a Baptist minister, brought the Morgan Park Seminary of the Baptist Theological Union to Hyde Park, Chicago. The Divinity School, chartered in 1865, was subsequently incorporated into the University of Chicago in 1890, the year the university was founded.

How might an institution widely associated with the training of Christian professionals be appropriate for the academic study of Judaism? Furthermore, how must Jewish Studies, which does not conform neatly to the study of religion as long understood in Western culture, reconceive itself to better fit into the theological discourses long characterizing divinity schools? Finally, as the fields of study at the University of Chicago Divinity School have, in recent years, diversified into studies of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, how have regional geopolitics affected the culture of the school and impacted the shape of Jewish Studies therein?

When I began conversations with James T. Robinson, the dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School, in the fall of 2023 about the possibility of joining the Divinity School as a professor, I told him that I wasn't sure that I belonged in a school for the training of Christian ministers. He laughed and told me that, indeed, the Divinity School is an interdisciplinary address for the academic study of religion, and having been a Jewish Studies professor from the very beginning of my academic career, I would fit right in. The Divinity School was, he said, created to be nonsectarian and interdisciplinary.

Nevertheless, the serious study of Judaism as a discipline in its own right and not as an accessory to the study of Christianity only took off in the Divinity School at the University of Chicago in 1989 with the appointment of Michael (Buzzy) Fishbane. A little less than a decade later, the late Paul Mendes-Flohr (1941–2024) was appointed to the faculty. The late Joel Kraemer (1933–2018), a specialist in Islamic and Jewish philosophy, alongside Fishbane, whose work spanned the biblical and the rabbinic period, and Mendes-Flohr, a specialist in modern Jewish thought, created a historical and disciplinary array of expertise, covering the biblical, rabbinic, medieval, and modern periods in their study and teaching of history, texts, and philosophy. The program in the History of Judaism, established during Dean Clark Gilpin's tenure, has graduated over forty students and has had an outstanding placement record in the field of Jewish Studies. Simeon Chavel, Jeffrey Stackert, Sarah Hammerschlag, James T. Robinson, Laurie Zoloth, and I now cover the biblical, medieval, and modern periods within the fields of Bible, philosophy, literature, and ethics. In conjunction with Jewish Studies scholars across the university and the Greenberg Center for Jewish Studies in the Division of Arts and Humanities, Jewish Studies in the Divinity School has become a vibrant, collaborative, and dynamic address for the study of Judaism at the University of Chicago.

Now we arrive at the post-October 7 situation. The Divinity School hosts Zionist Jewish Studies faculty and anti-Zionist Jewish Studies faculty, alongside experts in the study of Islam, Buddhism, and Christianity. I arrived at

Bond Chapel at the University of Chicago Divinity School.
Photo via Wikimedia Commons / CC0-1.0

I am committed, along with many of my colleagues in the Divinity School, to engaging in discourse, and teaching, that will prioritize knowledge and minimize hate.

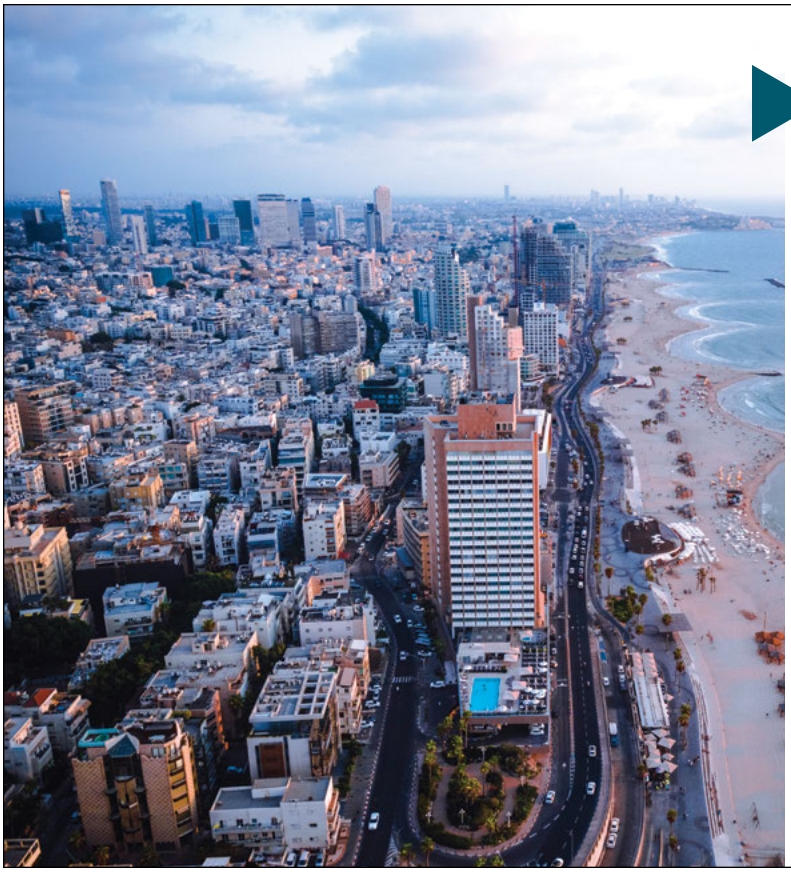
the University of Chicago after the year of nationwide encampments and protests and spent my first year here astonished by how quiet and civilized the discourse on the Israel/Gaza war felt. This was largely due, I believe, to the interpretation of the Chicago Principles that the University of Chicago has implemented at the present moment, which encourages free speech through the suppression of any activity that might pose an obstacle to it. Yet, I am not naïve enough to believe that despite my own sense of comfort and well-being in the face of the climate on most American campuses today, everyone at the University of Chicago has felt the same way. I have spoken to several students in my classes who have expressed confusion and concern over their expected "allegiances" as progressive Jews, as well as with faculty who described, for me, the rifts that have grown in the Divinity School over interpretations of the Chicago Principles in light of the debates over the war between Israel and Hamas. However, as someone who fully supports human rights and believes in a "yes/and" approach to the terrible suffering on both sides of the war, I have felt reasonably comfortable here.

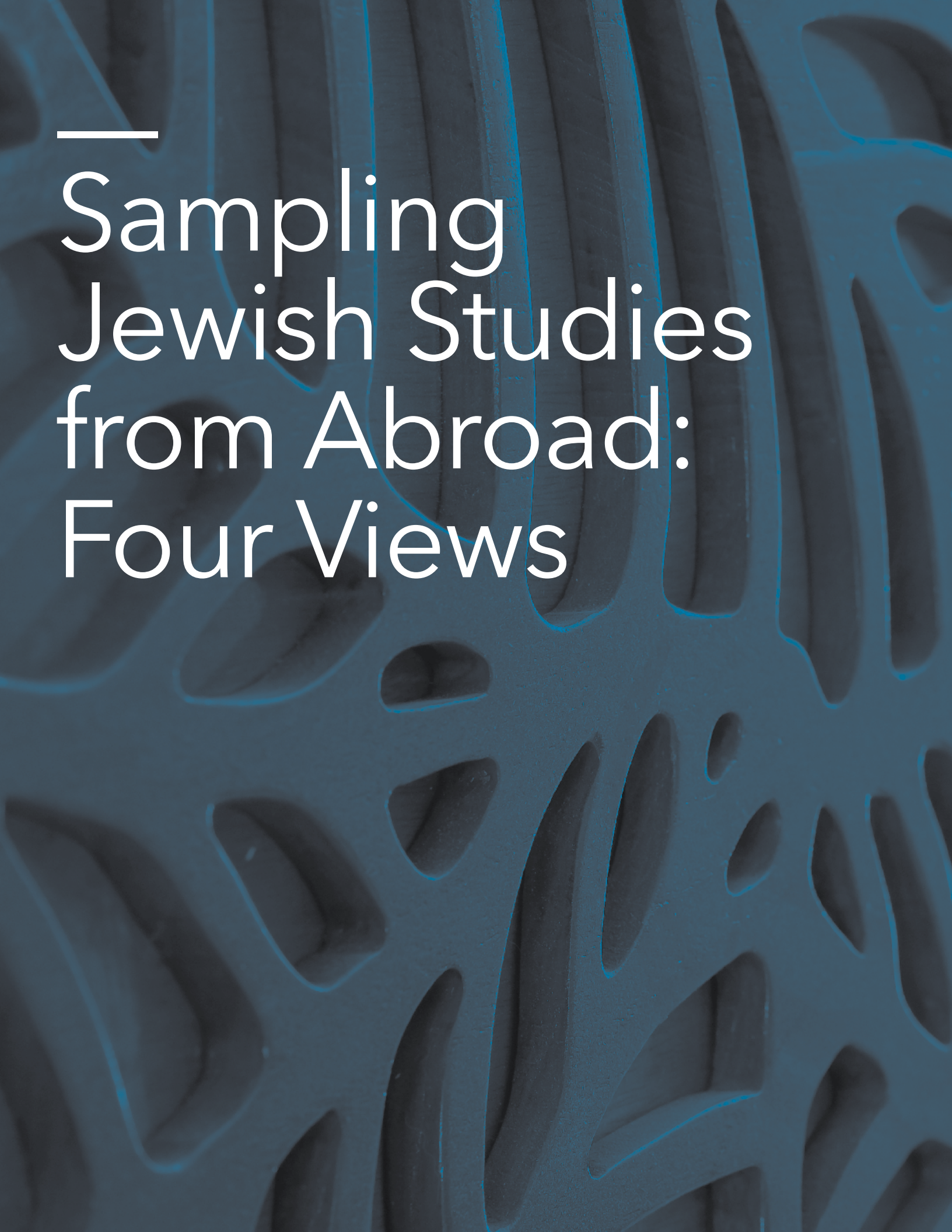
Then I woke up on June 17 to the following social media post, authored by a colleague in the Divinity School and forwarded by another:

> Fuck Israel for genocide in Gaza and ethnic cleansing in the West Bank
>
> Fuck Israel for apartheid
>
> Fuck Israel for bombing Iran, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen
>
> Fuck Israel for murdering children
>
> Fuck Israel for murdering scientists
>
> #fuck Israel

My initial response was one of shame, shame at the fact that the person who wrote this post on social media is a tenured professor at a top-ranked institution of higher learning, a popular colleague of mine who has a student following as well as a faculty following. It was the kind of shame Primo Levi describes in "The Truce," the shame one feels when one confronts actions that have been "irrevocably introduced into the world of existing things." My shame arose from the language and the platform employed to express chagrin over Israel's comportment. I wish that my colleague had represented the struggle for Palestine in ways that were worthy of it and didn't capitulate to the rhetoric of hatred and violence that led to the attack on October 7, 2023. In a school committed to the academic study of religion in its many shapes and forms, in its many disciplines and languages, I would expect the present moment to be addressed from a place of knowledge, not hate. I am committed, along with many of my colleagues in the Divinity School, to engaging in discourse, and teaching, that will prioritize knowledge and minimize hate. The road may be difficult, but the will is there.

SHEILA E. JELEN *is professor of Religion, Literature and Visual Culture and Jewish Thought and Culture at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago and the director of its MA programs. With Peter Davies, Hannah Holtschneider and Christoph Thonfeld, Jelen is coauthor, most recently, of* Olga Lengyel, Auschwitz Survivor: Interdisciplinary Explorations *(Palgrave, 2025).* Menachem Kipnis: Yiddish Folklore and Photographs from Interwar Poland *is forthcoming from Rutgers University Press in April 2026.*





Sampling Jewish Studies from Abroad: Four Views

The Arrival of the Future of Jewish Studies: A View from McGill

Christopher Silver

I am here to tell a different story about Jewish Studies over the last two years than the one usually described in the press. To date, I have not had the opportunity to narrate it to a broad audience, although to those around me, I have shared it often. About a year ago, I thought my department's efforts and successes would finally be given the platform they deserve. In Fall 2024, a journalist from a prominent newspaper asked if I would be willing to speak about the post–October 7 atmosphere for Jewish Studies and Jewish students at McGill, which had come to be known for its encampment but little else. The interviewer's assumption, of course, was of a campus hostile to all matters Jewish. I responded positively to the request but noted that I had a perspective that stood in contrast to the off-campus institutions that tend to speak in the name of students while also raising their voices against them. I pointed to the fact that my classes on the modern Jewish-Muslim relationship, Palestine/Israel, and the entangled history of colonialism and genocide in the twentieth century––what might be considered the most fraught of material given our current reality––were not only at capacity but growing. I underscored how with every passing semester, young Jews, Muslims, and others were sitting side by side and working together in the classroom. Time and again, I added, I was witness to undergraduates who were willing to do the difficult work of listening, learning, and processing during this unceasing period of impossibility. My experience in lecture halls, seminar rooms, and other academic spaces is a story of potential, partnership, and what meeting the moment through engaged teaching and scholarship affords. In this way, it stands in opposition to the cynicism and despair that prevails, especially in the realm of social media.

In the end, the aforementioned reporter informed me that the editor was not moving forward with their piece as it was missing something crucial: students. Much to my surprise, the article was nonetheless published weeks later. One single student from my university was quoted. Once again, a story written from afar and with little by way of the empirical had painted a picture of a situation that was unrecognizable to me. As a response, I can offer only my perspective, albeit one informed by the teaching of hundreds of students and gleaned from dozens of talks given to an array of audiences close to home and around the world.

Since my arrival at McGill in 2017, I have placed a premium on collaboration. This has been accomplished through partnering with other departments, integrating multiple historiographical traditions in the classroom, and making my scholarship available to students and other stakeholders of all backgrounds. Put simply, I have endeavored to position Jewish Studies as wide in scope and in conversation with the major issues and methodological challenges of the day. The courses I teach, like "Jews and Muslims: A Modern History," count toward both the Middle East and Islamic Studies and Jewish Studies majors, which means that students in the two interdisciplinary fields are brought into the same

Time and again I was witness to undergraduates who were willing to do the difficult work of listening, learning, and processing during this unceasing period of impossibility.

> Finding common ground and building out solidarity is well worth the effort, even if it is demanding.

classroom and compelled to problem solve together year in and year out. Scholarly events likewise speak across silos. Last year, for instance, my department hosted an exemplary talk that focused on the overlapping questions of Jewish memory and the question of Palestine in North Africa. It was supported and cosponsored by the Institute of Islamic Studies and represented our largest turnout of the year (and post-COVID). Diverse faculty, students, and community members sat side by side in a packed auditorium, listened attentively, and asked astute questions. This year, two similar programs are already on the calendar. In the classroom itself, students of Jewish, Muslim, and many other backgrounds read sources of myriad cadences to better understand the resonances and entanglement of ideas, languages, and histories over time. For a survey of Jewish life in the Islamic world, imagine a room of seventy undergraduates parsing Yehuda Halevi's "My Heart Is in the East" alongside the Sufi song-text "al-Fiyashiyya," which employs the medieval Hebrew poet's titular line nearly word for word in Arabic, in order to explore concepts of physical and spiritual exile. The totality of the multifaceted collaborative process outlined above has allowed trust and partnership to flourish.

Since October 7, 2023, I have been privileged to give the keynote address at the annual conference of McGill's African Students Society, to speak on my scholarship at the Festival du Monde Arabe in Montreal, and to present the Arabic translation of my first book in Morocco, among many other invited talks in spaces not always associated with Jewish Studies. Coming together, rather than apart, has characterized my last two years. That I have been so included and my scholarship so integrated is neither to dismiss feelings of discomfort or insecurity experienced by others nor an antisemitism that is very real and of ongoing concern to me. In fact, that I have been embraced has made me even more sensitive to discrimination in all of its converging paths, whether directed against Jews or coming in the form of Islamophobia or anti-Palestinian racism. But as my students keep demonstrating in the classroom, much as the historical actors I am so invested in remind, finding common ground and building out solidarity is well worth the effort, even if it is demanding.

All of this might sound like a vision for the future of Jewish Studies in a different world than the one we have inherited but it is happening right now at McGill. Our classes are growing. Our major and minor numbers are climbing. Our events are starting conversations. We have arrived at this moment through sustained and painstaking initiative, through dynamic teaching, through engagement in critical scholarship rather than advocacy, through the establishment of an in-person infrastructure of learning opportunities, and through coalition building. Perhaps the Canadian context has made the difference. Or maybe our achievements owe to the fact that our funding sources for events, whether emanating from the provost's or dean's office or contributed from other departments, ensure academic integrity. And it is entirely possible that the ties that bind North African Jews and Muslims in Montreal is a contributing factor. Said dynamics notwithstanding, we have built here a model that is worth replicating beyond our campus. This is what Jewish Studies could look like moving forward in many places. It is a reality I have lived with over the last two years, as have my students. And I am encouraged that this story is finally getting the attention it deserves--and that it does so in the flagship magazine of our field.

CHRISTOPHER SILVER *is the Segal Family Associate Professor in Jewish History and Culture at McGill University. He is the author of* Recording History: Jews, Muslims, and Music across Twentieth-Century North Africa *(Stanford University Press, 2022), which was translated into Arabic in 2024.*

Jewish Studies in the German Academy Post-1945: Topics, Structures, Personnel

Dani Kranz and Sarah M. Ross

Academic engagement with Jewish topics in Germany has faced a fundamental structural problem since 1945. Despite the establishment of individual chairs and institutes, the study of living, contemporary Jews and their diverse, vernacular interpretations of Judaism remain systematically underrepresented, creating a critical knowledge gap with far-reaching implications within and beyond the academy, including combating antisemitism. The *Wissenschaft des Judentums* (*WdJ*), founded in 1819 by Jewish scholars, ended in 1941, when the remaining scholars fled the country. This historical rupture created a structural break that still has impact. The study of things Jewish after 1945 developed under fundamentally different circumstances—with little Jewish scholarly perspective and under the influence of a German society grappling with its Nazi past. Unlike their predecessors, postwar Jewish Studies evolved primarily as non-Jewish exploration of Jewish topics for non-Jewish audiences, a situation that a new generation of Jewish scholars is addressing in advocating for dialogue and interrogating power relations within academia. This short piece describes our ongoing research and presents a summary of our key findings. In other words, our claims can be backed up with empirical data.

The Three Pillars: Judaic Studies, Jewish Studies, and Jewish Theology

Judaic Studies were established in Protestant theological faculties, which had profound epistemological consequences. This institutional location meant that Jewish topics were primarily viewed through the lens of Christian theological reflection rather than as an independent field of knowledge. Structurally, this arrangement excluded Jewish scholars from professorships, as these positions required Christian affiliation. The discipline's emphasis on Hebrew language proficiency and its categorization alongside non-European-focused disciplines reflect remnants of nineteenth- and twentieth-century non-Jewish scholarship about Jews, which *WdJ* had tried to counteract.

Jewish Studies expanded the interdisciplinary framework by incorporating history, cultural studies, and some social sciences. However, the staffing structure remained predominantly non-Jewish, and engagement with contemporary Jewish life remained minimal. The discipline developed as an academic field researching Jewish topics without necessarily integrating Jewish perspectives or focusing on present-day Jewish realities. A notable dispute in the 1990s between proponents of cultural studies approaches and traditional philological methods highlighted ongoing tensions about methodology and identity within the field.

The institutional establishment of Jewish Theology in 2013 marked a paradigmatic shift by requiring Jewish status for admission and employment based on Jewish law. This development challenged traditional academic concepts of supposed objectivity and opened new discourses on identity, positioning, and epistemological authority. Unlike previous disciplines, Jewish Theology explicitly acknowledged the relevance of religious and cultural identity in scholarship.

Insufficient engagement with contemporary Jewish life perpetuates societal ignorance about living Jews and enables harmful projections and stereotypes.

Structural Deficits and Their Origins

A central problem lies in the widespread absence of Jewish scholars within Judaic and Jewish Studies. This underrepresentation results from historical continuities and institutional decisions rather than coincidence. Furthermore, over 90 percent of university positions remain temporary, creating precariousness and increasing dependence on external funding. The concentration of power among a few tenured professors in small institutes leads to the reproduction of established research interests while marginalizing innovative approaches to contemporary Jewish life. Time-consuming application procedures for nonsustainable funding with low approval rates, coupled with limited expertise on contemporary Jewish issues among reviewers, systematically hinder new projects.

Epistemological Consequences: The Dominance of History

The field concentrates predominantly on antiquity, medieval periods, and early modern history (Judaic Studies) or the nineteenth/early twentieth century, antisemitism, and the Holocaust (Jewish Studies). Social scientific or ethnographic studies of vibrant Jewish communities remain systematically neglected. This historical orientation is reinforced by what researchers identify as a "professional mechanism" for dealing with non-Jewish guilt and finding solace through past-oriented research. Non-Jewish German scholars processing their Nazi past and collective guilt—acting as "custodians of the dead"—create a form of academic paternalism in which Jewish narratives are externalized, interpreted, and managed by non-Jewish stakeholders. This approach fundamentally differs from contemporary Jewish self-perception and creates a disconnect between academic knowledge and lived Jewish experience.

Implications and Challenges

Insufficient engagement with contemporary Jewish life perpetuates societal ignorance about living Jews and enables harmful projections and stereotypes. Empirical research demonstrates that widespread knowledge about contemporary Jews could contribute to reducing antisemitism. However, the described structural deficits, and personal as well as professional proclivities, prevent this. Incidents at German universities following October 7, 2023, underscored the urgency of developing robust academic frameworks for understanding and teaching about Jewish life beyond historical narratives. The biographies of the scholars influence research topics, curricula, and methodology, which means that these must not only be reflected but also become part of the epistemological process. While Jewish scholars consistently identified their identity as foundational to their research interests, a significant number of non-Jewish German academics displayed discomfort when asked about their motivations to enter the field or family biographies. The establishment of Jewish Theology challenged previous paradigms by explicitly acknowledging Jewish status as relevant to scholarship.

The future of the field in Germany depends on … creating a pluralistic academic ecosystem where Jewish topics are integrated rather than isolated.

Conclusion

The Jewish academic arena stands at a critical juncture. The structural deficits resulting from Nazi-era disruptions and post-1945 institutional decisions have created a knowledge architecture that systematically neglects contemporary Jewish life. This neglect carries both academic and societal consequences, as it hinders a nuanced understanding of contemporary Jewish realities. The future of the field in Germany depends on overcoming these structural barriers and creating a pluralistic academic ecosystem where Jewish topics are integrated rather than isolated. Such a system would unite Jewish and non-Jewish scholars in studying past and present, supporting knowledge architectures that contribute to shared understanding of Jewish life as part of broader society, and decreasing tensions between Jews and non-Jews.

Furthermore, integrating Jewish topics into other humanities and social science disciplines would normalize the Jewish present in Germany as a given. On an academic level, this would reduce the concentration of expertise in small, isolated units, promote interdisciplinary research, and anchor knowledge about Jewish life comprehensively.

Finally, promoting reflexive scholarship that acknowledges researchers' identities and family biographies could lead to more honest and productive research. Recognizing positioning as an epistemological factor rather than denying it under the guise of objectivity would improve research quality and depict complex entanglements.

For further information on the topic, see the forthcoming book by Sarah M. Ross and Dani Kranz, *The Politics of German Academia and Jewish Heritage Studies: Knowledge Architectures and the Contours of Power* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2026).

DANI KRANZ *is director of research of Tikvah Institut, Berlin and director of Two Foxes Consulting, Germany and Israel. She specialises in empirical research of contemporary Jewry.*

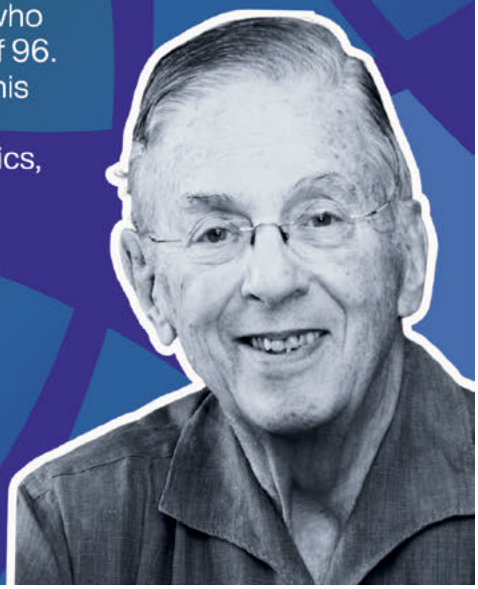
SARAH M. ROSS *is professor of Jewish Music Studies and the director of the European Center for Jewish Music at Hanover University of Music, Drama, and Media in Germany. She is head of the international Priority Program on Jewish Cultural Heritage.*

Remembering Felix Posen
1928–2025

The Posen Library mourns the loss of Felix Posen, our founder, who died peacefully at his home in New York City this fall at the age of 96. Felix was an innovative businessman and philanthropist. Led by his vision for teaching Judaism not merely as a religion but as a civilization with shared cultural, historical, and social characteristics, he broke the mold of Jewish philanthropy in a way that will reverberate for generations to come.

In Felix's memory, we recommit to the study and teaching of a holistic Jewish history and culture, an uncovering and further exploration of the many diverse and important voices in that history, and a pioneering spirit of leadership.

To read more about Felix Posen, visit posenlibrary.com/felixposen



"Loaded" Jewish Studies in Deutschland: A First-Person Account of German Jewish Studies and Campus Life in Heidelberg (2023–2025)

Joshua Krug

What has it felt like to experience Jewish Studies and campus life in Germany since the autumn of 2023, when I arrived to begin a tenure as a visiting professor at Heidelberg's University of Jewish Studies?

Put simply, Jewish Studies in this place feels "loaded." This ambiguous word, "loaded," does not refer to coffers that (might be claimed to) materially support the ongoing work of the field. Likewise, the word does not describe the guns carried by members of local police who sit in patrol cars outside my place of employment. Rather, the word denotes how Jewish Studies feels as it were electrically charged, with latent meanings and overtones.

*

I arrived weeks before October 7, 2023. In those days, I was talking to a friend's friend, whom a twenty-something-year-old student greeted. The student, upon hearing my new place of work, asked if I was Jewish. When I nodded, he bowed to the ground in my direction, signifying (I think) that he had never met a Jew. Perhaps, I was, in his conception, a living impossibility, a walking miracle, an incarnate oxymoron in the aftermath of the Holocaust. (As if, that is, he had not encountered any of the upwards of 100,000 Jews living in his country, or, he did but they did not share this part of themselves with him.)

*

Black Sabbath (the name given to commemorate 10/7) changed much for Jewish Studies and Jewish life in Heidelberg, with its several-hundred-member-large mostly post-Soviet population. In the attack's aftermath, university community members assembled to grieve and be together, even as colleagues and students were temporarily stuck in Israel. In the following weeks, an Israeli flag was hung outside the university. (I wonder: Is this the only such flag flying in town?) Some time later, the faces of hostages in Gaza greeted people arriving at the university. At one point, police arrested a teenager just before his planned knife attack at the nearby Jüdische Kultusgemeinde, Heidelberg's only synagogue.

*

Nonetheless, I felt honored to have the chance to teach Jewish Studies courses to students, and, even as classes began, I tweaked and tailored syllabi to the moment. In my course on modern literature, I drew attention to Bialik's post-pogrom "City of Slaughter" and poetry written in the aftermath of October 7; I asked students to consider how poetry functions as an outlet for writers and readers alike. As the Gaza war raged, I came to appreciate the variety of ideological perspectives of my students and pledged to do what I could to ensure that my classrooms would remain places of passionate engagement and free from the rancor of the outside world.

*

Concerning the subject of "Jewish Education," I devoted myself to offering a global and practical approach. Some Jewish students enrolled, as did Christians, from Germany, Russia, and Korea. I offered deliberate provocations for the sake of learning. For example, I challenged students to consider how personnel in diaspora Jewish schools ought to teach children and teenagers about October 7 and the ongoing war. My students offered thought-provoking

Here, in this place, now, in this time, Jewish Studies is heavy.

perspectives about a live issue in the field. After a congressional hearing about the state of antisemitism on American college campuses, one student asked what Jewish Studies, Jewish life, and antisemitism were like in the United States. I attempted an answer. It was not to my satisfaction. I had not been in the United States since October 7, and I intuitively understood that much had changed across the pond.

*

At sporadic Kabbalat Shabbat events hosted by the university rabbi, I felt students' eyes—and curiosity—when I showed up with a multicolored kippah perched on my head. Others were experiencing my professional identity, presence, and teaching in relation to two facets of myself that I had not considered prior, my Jewishness and my foreignness. People here read me as diverse—a born Jew and an American. While I attended those events to support students and colleagues, in truth, I also felt somewhat isolated and wanted to be in a warm community space.

*

In time, the campus protest movement came to Heidelberg, materializing in the campus center. Signs, plastered with slogans like "Zionismus Raus aus den Köpfen" ([Get] Zionism Out of the Heads) and " انتفاضة حوتا الموت - Intifada Huta Almowt" (Resistance until Death), hung from tents. I wondered how many of the people drinking tea at the protest had studied the history of Zionism or could read Arabic. The Germanness of the former sign—probably given early twentieth-century history—evoked feelings of anxiety. Perhaps strangely, I spotted internationals from the protest at a Klezmer concert soon thereafter, one Saturday in a local church.

*

This piece began with reference to the loadedness of Jewish Studies in Germany. The field, indeed, retains a unique valence. Here, a protester on my walk to work screams that she is being silenced because of Germany's unresolved Holocaust guilt; a colleague at lunch decries the antisemitism of BDS-supporting scholars from another university; and a postdoc outside the library laments Israeli policies in hushed tones.

Here, in this place, now, in this time, Jewish Studies is heavy.

Quite separate from the papers I still have to grade, I bear the weight of history and reality as I fear what may yet come.

Still, I experience moments of lightness, hope, and possibility. In my "Holocaust Memory Culture" course, one class focused on memory's ritual potential. Before students from Germany, Turkey, Japan, etc., I chanted the Kiddush, then asked students to consider how one day in the week, the Sabbath, evokes the memory of both creation and the Exodus. This Kiddush opening led into consideration of similarities and differences between International Holocaust Remembrance Day and Yom HaShoah.

In 2025, despite all that is concerning, diverse students are pointing the way to visions of and directions for Jewish Studies, Jewish life, and coexistence in Germany, the birthplace of the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*.

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Between Fragmentation and Possibility: Teaching Jewish Studies in the Nordics

Maja Hultman, Joanna Zofia Spyra, and Magdalena Dziaczkowska

What does it mean to teach Jewish Studies in the Nordics—a region where Jewish communities are small, institutional support is uneven, and Jewish history often arrives in the classroom as unfamiliar terrain given that most students encounter it without prior knowledge or contextual grounding?[i]

For scholars used to the robust infrastructures of Jewish Studies in the United States, Germany, or Israel—endowed chairs, research centers, and multiyear programs—the Nordic context can appear peripheral and sometimes unfairly deemed unimportant. Yet, we believe that it is exactly this position, on geographical and educational margins, that makes this setting vital and full of potential. It invites pedagogical improvisation, demands resourcefulness, and forces a rethinking of what Jewish Studies can be, especially in the wake of October 7, when the field's contours, responsibilities, and vulnerabilities came under renewed scrutiny.

Teaching Jewish Studies in countries such as Sweden, Norway, Denmark, and Finland entails a different set of pedagogical and structural challenges. Often lacking dedicated departments or formal degree programs in Jewish Studies, instructors weave Jewish content into broader curricula: history, theology, Middle Eastern Studies, and language programs. As a result of such a fragmentation, and as subject to ongoing structural changes, the field is, by necessity, experimental and flexible. This decentralized approach means that students frequently encounter Jewish topics not in standalone classes, but as part of broader discussions on nationalism, minority histories, gender, or migration. At times, courses are created from scratch or emerge from individual initiatives rather than institutional design, but they seldom run for long. The absence of a unified infrastructure, while limiting in terms of continuity and visibility, enables a degree of curricular creativity rarely possible in other academic systems, which structurally distinguish Jewish Studies as a unit.

This flexibility comes at a cost. Across the region, instructors report that students arrive with little knowledge of Jewish history or culture, and often without the intellectual frameworks or even a vocabulary allowing them to talk about Jews or Judaism without slipping into stereotypes. The word "Jew" can elicit discomfort or confusion. Many have never knowingly met a Jewish person. Holocaust education, where it exists, tends to dominate students' understanding of Jewishness, flattening Jewish life into a narrative of trauma. In this vacuum, instructors become not only teachers but also cultural mediators, ethical interlocutors, and at times, lone responders to antisemitic assumptions.

These dynamics became even more visible in the aftermath of October 7. For instance, instructors who had designed their courses around themes of Jewish Diaspora, identity, and culture, deliberately sidestepping direct engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict, suddenly found themselves navigating student demands, the boundaries of academic neutrality, and heightened tensions on campus. In some cases, enrollments dropped. In others, instructors faced pointed questions or resistance that challenged the legitimacy of the field itself. This moment laid bare not only the precarity of Jewish Studies in times of political upheaval but also the personal and professional vulnerabilities of those who teach it, precisely because of the fragmentation of Jewish Studies. In the absence of robust support networks, the labor of defending the field often fell squarely on individual shoulders, sometimes without institutional or communal backing.

Yet amid these difficulties, there are moments of real connection. Students often approach Jewish topics with genuine curiosity, intellectual openness, and a desire to understand histories and perspectives new to them. These moments, while fragile, are where teaching Jewish Studies in the Nordics feels most urgent and most rewarding. Many students from minority or immigrant backgrounds find in Jewish history familiar themes:

The Nordic case offers a valuable lesson: Jewish Studies does not require large institutions or thriving local communities to matter.

displacement, multilingualism, and cultural negotiation. In such moments, Jewish Studies becomes not a distant object of study, but a prism through which to think about broader human experiences. This raises questions about scope. Must Nordic Jewish Studies remain locally focused? Or can it be a portal to global histories? Many of us feel the pull of both: a responsibility to preserve overlooked regional histories (since few others are likely to take up the task of preserving Nordic Jewish history) and a desire to situate them within larger transnational frameworks. We often teach outside our own areas of expertise, and some instructors remain students of the Nordic context themselves, as the region readily absorbs international scholars. Ironically, this enables pedagogical reversals: students become cultural informants, and instructors remain learners.

There are, too, structural affordances worth noting. The ability of PhD students to design and teach their own courses, or Sweden's generous funding for official minority languages, like Yiddish (which would warrant an essay of its own), offer unexpected openings for Jewish content. The top-down decision-making sometimes means that thematic areas supported by Nordic states do not reflect and are not organically connected to the perceptions and needs of the realities of existing Jewish communities. Instead, these educational goals are a result of an implied Protestant secular paradigm, with an external view of Jews and Judaism embedded into it.

In sum, Jewish Studies in the Nordic countries occupies a paradoxical space: fragmented, yet full of possibility. It operates at the margins but with the freedom to ask different questions and experiment with various forms. The challenges—limited infrastructure, political tension, curricular gaps—are real. But so are the opportunities: intimacy, independence, and the ongoing flexibility to reimagine what the field can be and whom it serves. For colleagues elsewhere, the Nordic case offers a valuable lesson: Jewish Studies does not require large institutions or thriving local communities to matter. Sometimes it is at the edges—quiet, unstable, generative—where the most vital learning happens. When writing these words, October 7 feels both far away and impossibly present, a fracture that continues to reorder the world. In such moments, it may be worth holding onto a simple notion: even when positioned at the margins, Jewish Studies can carry weight, foster connection, and remain urgently relevant. When violence demands binaries, we teach complexity. When devastation narrows the horizon, we insist on imagining otherwise.

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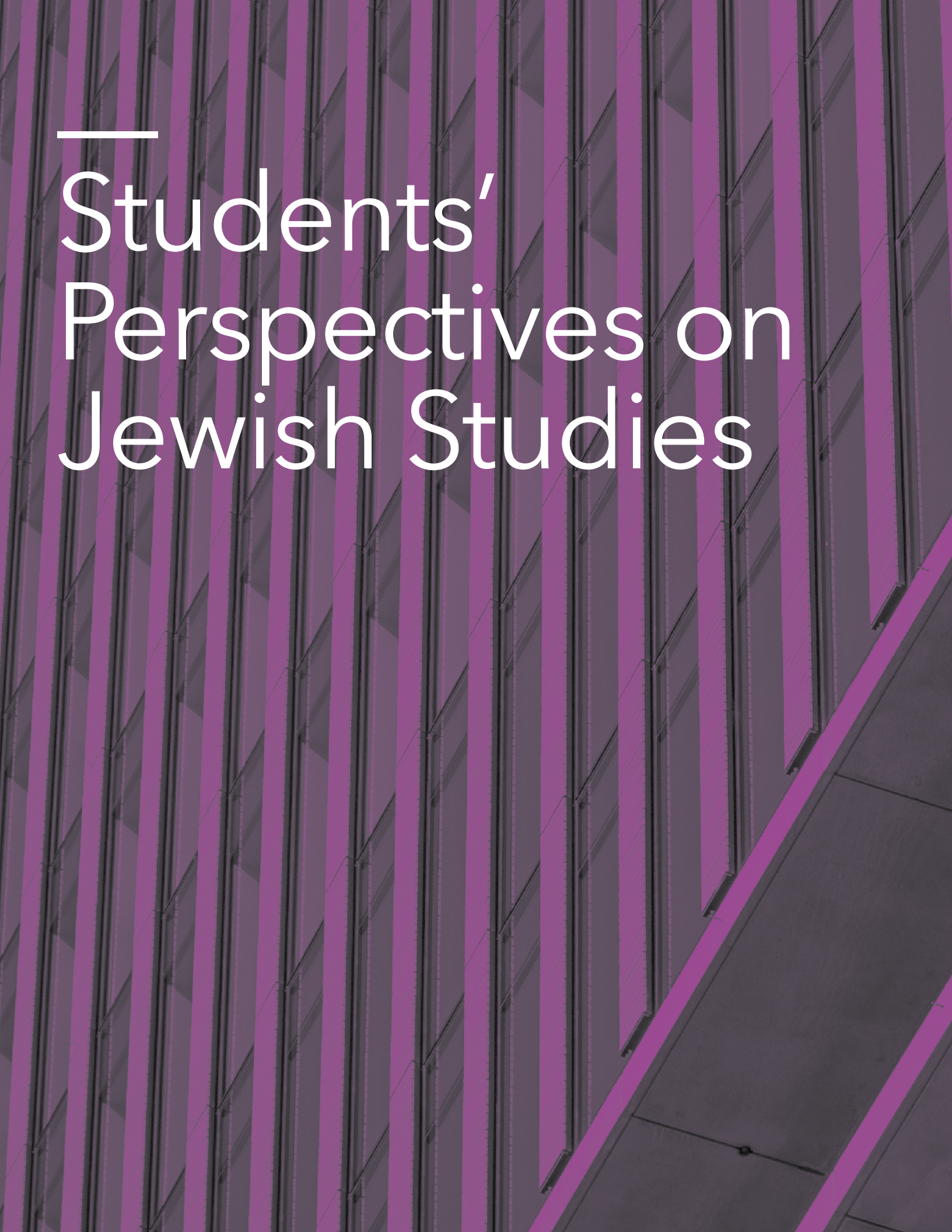
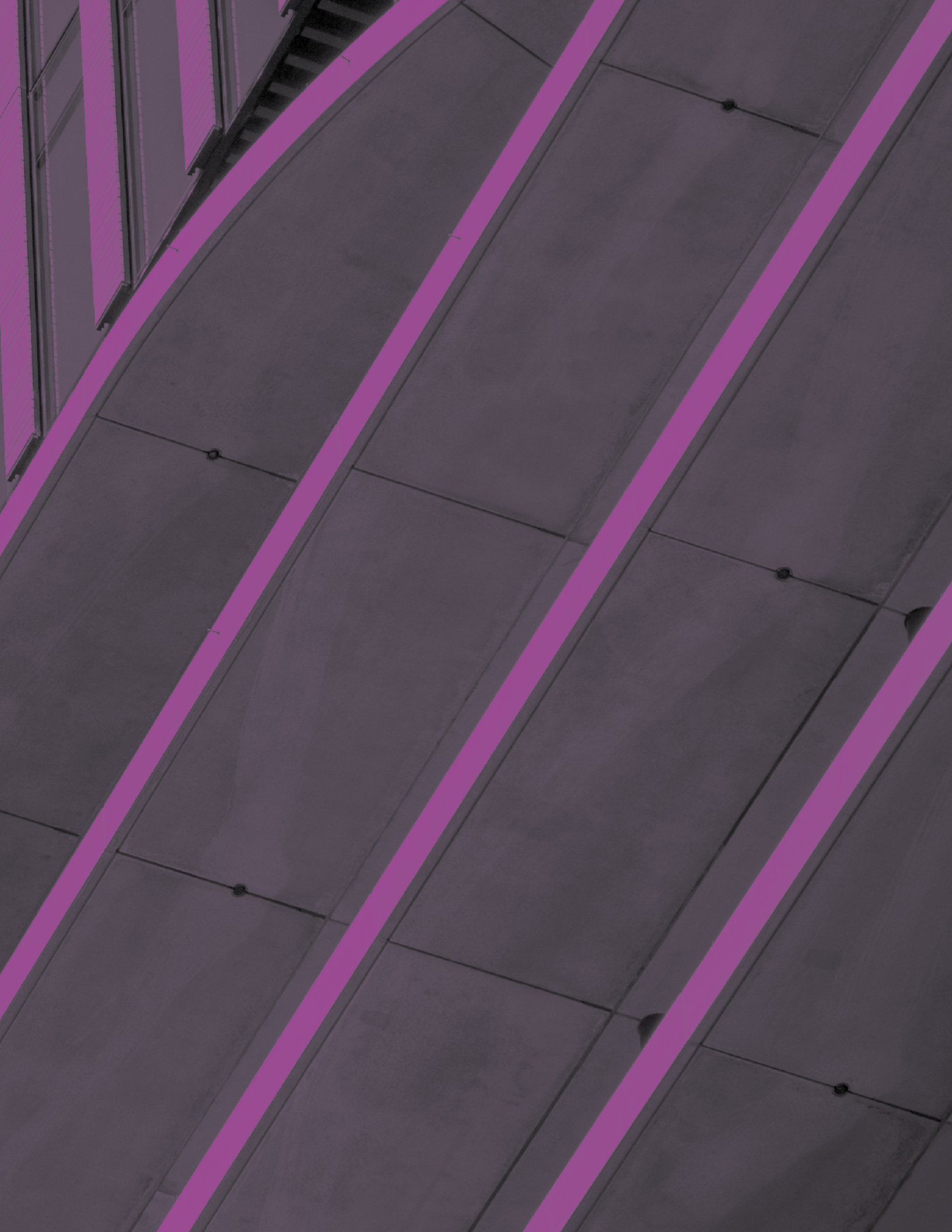
MAGDALENA DZIACZKOWSKA *is postdoctoral researcher at the Lund University, Sweden. She is the author of* Memory Undivided: The Images of Jewish-Catholic Relations in Interwar Lublin in Oral Histories *(forthcoming) and the co-editor, along with Adele Valeria* Messina, of Jews in Dialogue *(Brill, 2020).*

i This essay grew out of a roundtable discussion—forthcoming in print—that we, the authors, curated with scholars of Jewish Studies based in the Nordic countries with the exception of Iceland. The contributors to the roundtable represented a range of career stages, institutional affiliations, disciplinary perspectives, and personal trajectories.



Students' Perspectives on Jewish Studies



How-To-Jewish History: Reflections on Jewish Studies from the Margins

Eric Lane

Can a student engage with Jewish Studies and seek to pursue a career in it while there exists no infrastructure for it at their university? As a history undergraduate student at the University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA), I confronted this dilemma of absence by forging a nontraditional path of communal projects and initiatives, independent research, and strategic outreach.

I did not enter college even aware that Jewish Studies was a field of study. Eventually, I realized the path of history, and Jewish history in particular, is my path. Just a slight issue … My college does not have a Jewish Studies department or infrastructure.

Rather than giving up, I decided to adapt, utilize the opportunities available to me, and continue to engage with the field, even from the margins. This has given me insight into a challenge the field currently faces: how to engage with students (whether on a basic level or in a way that may sow the seeds for possible future scholars) without relying on institutional structures. To meet this need, there must be an expansion of the reach of Jewish Studies, especially for undergraduates who lack direct campus access to Jewish Studies classes. This is essential for the field to further its relevance and its important place within the academy and beyond.

At the time of writing this article, there is no infrastructure for Jewish Studies at UTSA. This is not an indictment of the university. At a college with a Jewish student population that totals, according to Hillel International, only 1.7 percent of the total student body,[i] it is understandable that there is no push for dedicated Jewish Studies. This is also not to say that the environment is hostile to engagement with Jewish Studies. On the contrary, there are many wonderful faculty members (especially in my department of history) who have been invaluable, supportive, and adaptable (with some who are AJS members). However, even with their support and encouragement, I still lacked "official" infrastructure.

This is not an argument for every campus to have a Jewish Studies department. Instead, it is a call to enable students at universities that do not have direct Jewish Studies opportunities to participate in the field. This can involve low-scale efforts, such as reaching out to relevant departments at various institutions, whether they are small or large, to promote upcoming internships, summer fellowships, and CFPs that might be useful to students, or even creating such opportunities tailored to these students.

However, one must also be aware of the challenges that Jewish Studies (and academia as a whole) are confronting in our current reality. The assault on the humanities by the Trump administration on one side,[ii] and what feels like a never-ending avalanche of antisemitism on college campuses on the other,[iii] has created an environment of hostility, fear, and uncertainty. When you don't know if your grant will be cut for being "too woke" one day and having to worry Jewish students or yourself will be harassed or even assaulted by other students and faculty screaming "globalize the intifada" and "death to Zionists" the next day, when you're subject to loyalty tests, the questioning of your very humanity, and pressure from all directions, it can feel like a tailspin. While increasing opportunities for students and faculty on the margins won't be a cure-all, it has the potential to forge new paths and dialogues.

While I cannot assure it, I can attest to personal experience. In my quest to find my place in the field (a journey I am still on, and I imagine many still are), I was able to utilize opportunities at my campus that had broader scopes for the humanities as a whole, such as becoming a fellow of the Mellon Humanities Pathways Program at UTSA, which allowed me to interact with many different viewpoints, including regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.[iv] I also endeavored to work on projects that engaged with the local Jewish community, to connect with scholars at other institutions, and to partake in interdisciplinary research. While

I sought out these avenues on my initiative, I wonder how this path and those others in similar situations may have taken would have looked with wider support from the field. This is not an indictment of any sort; it is simply a realm that can be improved upon.

From my vantage point, it appears a key limitation of Jewish Studies' reach is its dependence on institutional opportunities for prospective students and beyond. While this is not unique to Jewish Studies, it is something it may uniquely be able to overcome. Some current programs have initiatives that could be fantastic models for further uses, such as the Gilda Slifka Internship Program at the Hadassah-Brandeis Institute.[v] Other methods that could facilitate early scholarship within the field include furthering relationships with Jewish student organizations, such as Hillels and Chabad, and faculty and researchers taking the initiative to engage students who may already have an interest and connecting with them, along with reaching out to other student-led initiatives.[vi]

With investment (whether in terms of time, money, or networking) in academic outreach, the groundwork could be laid not only to facilitate new scholars entering the field one day who may have thought it impossible otherwise, but also to extend the reach and impact of Jewish Studies, utilizing its unique interdisciplinary qualities. Given the current political, social, and academic landscape, I am uncertain about my level of optimism. But what I am is hopeful. And perhaps that is what is needed most in these times. For, in the words of Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks *z"l*, "You don't need to be an optimist to have hope."[vii]

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A key limitation of Jewish Studies' reach is its dependence on institutional opportunities for prospective students and beyond.

i It should be noted that this percentage is most likely out of date. Hillel International, when stating the estimated number of Jewish students at a university, also gives the overall student population. The number given on Hillel International for UTSA's overall population is 29,675 students. However, UTSA provides a number of over 35,900 undergraduates and graduates enrolled during the fall of 2024. "University of Texas, San Antonio," Hillel International, accessed June 21, 2025, https://www.hillel.org/college/university-of-texas-san-antonio/; "Record Fall Enrollment Reaffirms UTSA as A Higher Ed Destination of Choice," September 19, 2024, https://www.utsa.edu/today/2024/09/story/fall-2024-record-enrollment.html.

ii Sarah D. Wire. "About 100 National Endowment for the Humanities Employees Laid Off, Union Says," *USA TODAY*, June 10, 2025. https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2025/06/10/employee-layoffs-national-endowment-humanities-grants/84124320007/; for further detail on how the administration's actions have affected Jewish Studies as well as Jewish communal endeavors, see Asaf Elia-Shalev, "Jewish Cultural Institutions Reeling as Trump Defunds Arts and Humanities," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, April 8, 2025, https://www.jta.org/2025/04/08/united-states/jewish-cultural-institutions-reeling-as-trump-defunds-arts-and-humanities. It may be of interest to scholars as well as Jewish communal professionals how these cuts may affect both academic and communal engagement numbers for Jewish institutions going forward.

iii See Leslie Morrison Gutman and Samuel D. Landau, "Collective Trauma and Resilience for the Jewish People in the Aftermath of 7th October," and Cary Nelson, "October 7 and the Antisemitic War of Words," in *Responses to 7 October: Universities*, ed. Rosa Freedman and David Hirsh (London: Routledge, 2024), 59–67, 88–94; Zahava Feldstein, "My Jewish Name, Face, and Voice: Navigating Antisemitism as a Graduate Student in Jewish Education at Stanford," *Journal of Contemporary Antisemitism* 7, no. 3 (October 1, 2024): 81–88.

iv "Fellows | College of Liberal and Fine Arts | UTSA | University of Texas at San Antonio," https://colfa.utsa.edu/mexico-center/mellon-humanities-pathways-program/fellows.html.

v "Gilda Slifka Internship Program," https://www.brandeis.edu/hbi/programs/internship/index.html.

vi Eric Lane, "When Trauma Transforms: The Post–October 7th Renaissance of Jewish Creativity and Scholarship," January 27, 2025, https://hatikvahmag.com/when-trauma-transforms.

vii Jonathan Sacks, "Optimism Is All Very Well, but It Takes Courage to Hope," April 30, 2010, https://www.thetimes.com/world/us-world/article/optimism-is-all-very-well-but-it-takes-courage-to-hope-50p89bqg0gr.

Keeping Jewish Identity through Memory Institutions

Anthony Catanese

Like the significance of "remembering" and "keeping" the Shabbat candles, information professionals—like librarians, archivists, and curators—preserve the memories and narratives of Jewish communities.

For many, Jewish Studies serve as one avenue for expressing and sharing Jewish identity and heritage in American universities. The recent decline in enrollment and funding in the humanities has caused many scholars and students to worry about the future of Jewish Studies. Despite the shifting landscape of universities, Jewish Studies programs possess a distinctive advantage that lies in their communal support and ongoing research in memory institutions. Recognizing the connection between Jewish Studies and memory institutions—libraries, archives, and museums—can encourage novel opportunities for scholars and students, thereby strengthening the enduring legacy of Jewish Studies as a prominent discipline in the humanities.

In *Beyond the Synagogue*, Rachel Gross elaborates on her assessment of the role that tangible artifacts and nostalgic emotions play in the ongoing development of American Jewish identity. Gross begins her introduction by illustrating the impact of the Synagogue Museum at Eldridge Street on visitors, observing, "Standing in the footprints of former congregants provides an immediate, sensory connection to the past, one that engages visitors' entire bodies."[i] She further elaborates on the vital role embodied by the docent in bridging the historical context for visitors who stand in the footprints where congregants once rocked in prayer. The encounter between the historical sanctuary and the contemporary Jewish visitor illustrates Gross's thesis that Jewish identity within American society satisfies nostalgia by partaking in activities that remind them of once-common Jewish practices. They pursue this nostalgia by touring Jewish heritage sites and tracing their genealogies, which functions as a form of religious practice, although unorthodox. For visitors exploring their Jewish heritage—or studying it academically—this experience would be far less satisfying without the guidance of museum staff and the preparatory research of scholars.

Gross's theory reframes discussions of Jewish identity in the context of an American sociocultural perspective over a strictly theological lens; from her analysis, we recognize that memory institutions have become a vital venue for preserving Jewish identity. Like the significance of "remembering" and "keeping" the Shabbat candles, information professionals—like librarians, archivists, and curators—preserve the memories and narratives of Jewish communities. Gross remarks, "Tourists did not just happen to arrive at this synagogue and place their feet in the grooves of long-ago congregants. The Lower East Side has long been seen as an authentic site of emotional connection to American Jewish pasts."[ii] Historical objects—whether physical artifacts or documents—provide instant access to collective memory. In Gross's case, the museum staff serve as interpreters for the visitors, bridging the gap between the preserved past and the lived present, connecting Jewish visitors with a piece of their "forgotten" identity. In the same vein, librarians and archivists catalog family histories, genealogical records, and other documents in an effort to preserve Jewish communities for future reference. When these initiatives are supported by Jewish associations and academic centers, these efforts not only preserve historical information but also ensure that inheritors of these Jewish communities remain

Detail from interior of Museum at Eldridge Street, 2016.
Photo by Wikimedia Commons user AnneRuthmann / CC BY-SA 4.0

connected to their heritage and empowered to continue their legacy. Memory institutions, when partnered with the interests of Jewish Studies, guard Jewish identity from historical erasure and offer researchers novel ways to engage with the past.

One strength of Gross's innovative approach lies in her recognition that Jewish identity in America is not solely expressed through traditional religious institutions like synagogues. Rather, she suggests that nostalgia plays a vital role in maintaining Jewish identity, and proposes, "American Jews participate in a broad array of ostensibly nonreligious activities—including visiting Jewish historic sites, conducting genealogical research, purchasing books and toys that teach Jewish nostalgia to children, and seeking out traditional Jewish foods—that are properly understood as religious."[iii] While such activities may appear mundane, for many American Jews, these activities are experienced as cultivating a sense of religious identity because Judaism emphasizes "lived religion."[iv] As illustrated by the visitors who began to imitate the praying motions of long-ago congregants, Jewish visitors do not passively engage with the environment or materials of memory institutions but face the preserved memories of their heritage with a kind of religious intention. Essentially, Gross acknowledges that a kind of spirituality is experienced when rummaging through archival boxes, tracking genealogical records, or running one's hand against historic monuments.

The function of memory institutions is very much like a Talmud, where the memories of each group are

Scholars must strengthen bonds between memory institutions and academic training.

preserved for future generations to revisit and adopt, thereby cultivating their community and preserving their identity for the next generation. Gross's evaluation of the current state of American Jewish identity, perhaps unintentionally, validates the essential role that memory institutions play in preservation, despite the novel manifestations of Jewish life in American society. This very same nostalgia is often satisfied in the pursuit of Jewish Studies; scholars must therefore strengthen bonds between memory institutions and academic training. Not every student in Jewish Studies needs to become a librarian, archivist, or curator, yet cooperation among Jewish Studies scholars across disciplines will help the field stand out amid the humanities' increasingly fragile landscape.

ANTHONY CATANESE *is a doctoral student in Hebrew and Judaic Studies at New York University. He completed an MA in Jewish Thought and an MS in Information and Library Science at the University at Buffalo.*

i Rachel B. Gross, *Beyond the Synagogue: Jewish Nostalgia as Religious Practice* (New York: NYU Press, 2021), 1.
ii Ibid., 3.
iii Ibid., 4.
iv Ibid., 7.

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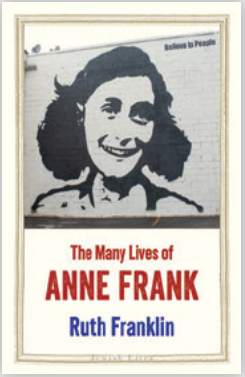

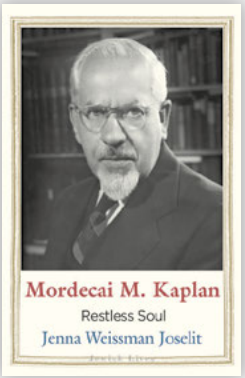

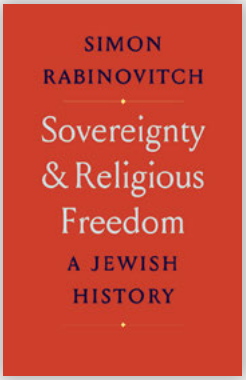

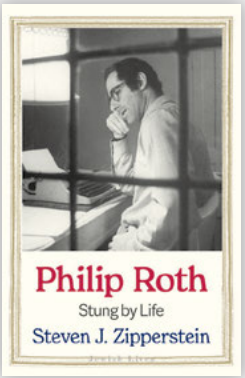

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Taking a Cue from Global Asias: Embracing Division and Contradiction in Jewish Studies

Na'amit Sturm Nagel

As an English graduate student scanning the course catalogue, "Global Asias" piqued my interest. I had taken a class on Asian American literature, but was this English course more about Asian American or Asian literature? The description characterized "Global Asias" as an "intellectual and political paradigm," with the final sentence carrying hints of messianic fervor: "Global Asias" would help students "facilitate the desedimentation of extant logics guiding the politics of knowledge production." I signed up and quickly glimpsed how the theoretical underpinnings of Global Asias could change the field of Jewish Studies.

My academic research began with the aim of thinking across American minority literatures, but my dissertation soon shifted toward a focus on Jewish American literature. The deeper I delved into the field, however, the more I noticed Jewish Studies was obsessed with the shifting signification of the words "Jew" and "Jewish."[i] Everyone had different linguistic, geographic, religious, and perspectival definitions of the terms, leading to panic: What were we really studying? It seemed that maybe the field and the category were being held together by the question itself. (A perennial joke told in Jewish Studies classes involves a group of Jewish elephants engaged in this query.) While scholars dwell on the limitations of the terminology, they rarely frame this definitional struggle as an opportunity. In a search for a solution, Dean Franco suggests that Jewish Studies "break out of our self-assigned orbit and engage with other worlds." So when Professor Jerry Lee introduced the class, packed with graduate students from at least five different departments, to what a field engaged in "desedimentation" looked like, I listened.[ii]

I learned that the field of Global Asias represents a disciplinary revolution in recent academic history built on theories that could transform Jewish Studies. Rather than focusing on the tension between theoretical approaches, Global Asias revels in these tensions as productive sites of creativity. In less than a decade, what began as an attempt to bridge the artificial separation between Asian Studies and Asian American Studies has evolved into a comprehensive methodological framework that fundamentally reimagines how academic fields can pitch wider tents.[iii] The success of this approach, manifested in the journal Verge: Studies in Global Asias, numerous university initiatives, international conferences, and a growing body of scholarship and scholars who see themselves as building "community" around "the praxis of suspension."[iv]

Like Jewish Studies, with its divisions between diasporic and Israel-centered approaches, religious and secular scholarship, and Mizrahi versus Ashkenazi focus, the fields of Asian Studies and Asian American Studies are "historically contradistinctive" and linguistically and geographically diverse, yet share crucial

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concerns about movement, identity, and power.[v] Rather than attempting to merge these fields or subordinate one to the other, Global Asias leans into the dynamism of difference and cultivates spaces that find productive tensions buried in the cracks between disciplines and fields, producing a "rich cacophony" of voices.[vi]

Tina Chen's groundbreaking essay "Global Asias: Method, Architecture, Praxis" clearly outlines the methodological foundations of the field on which Jewish Studies can draw. The approach is based on three interconnected concepts—relational nonalignment, structural dissonance, and imaginable ageography. Through "relational nonalignment," Chen argues that "opportunities for solidarity lie in what is incommensurable rather than what is common across these efforts."[vii] It eschews the academic tendency to seek false unity or manufactured consensus, embracing difference as a source of productive engagement. Through "structural dissonance," Global Asias also rejects singular definitions and leans into its "architecture that encourages ongoing juxtaposition, proximity, and generic friction."[viii] Finally, "imaginable ageography," addresses how identity and culture operate beyond geographical boundaries while remaining connected to specific contexts. Imaginable ageography recognizes that cultural identity operates simultaneously in material and imaginative registers, never fully reducible to either.[ix]

The power of Chen's framework lies not just in its theoretical sophistication but in its practical applications. Global Asias demonstrates how methodological innovation drives institutional change through concrete initiatives that could be models for Jewish Studies. Verge's Convergence sections offer alternative formats in which, for instance, a forum on Jewish Diaspora could bring together scholars of Ladino literature, contemporary Israeli film, and American Jewish theology—not to find commonality but to explore how their different methods illuminate Jewish cultural production's inherent multiplicities.[x] Jewish Studies conferences could have "structural dissonance" sessions where presenters explicitly engage with incompatible theoretical frameworks, moving beyond being troubled by this dissonance. Universities have also created Global Asias programs that exist between rather than within traditional departments, modeling how Jewish Studies could develop initiatives that formally recognize the field's constitutive diversity rather than seeking artificial coherence. Global Asias courses, like the one I took, teach students to think across boundaries, suggesting how Jewish Studies courses could explore how different Jewish communities and traditions illuminate each other.

Now, I'm concerned. Knowing our field, readers inspired by this transformative model may get stuck on the name. "Global Jews" carries echoes of the Elders of Zion and we still haven't agreed on what it means to be "Jewish."

The future of Jewish Studies lies not in bemoaning its struggles and defending its internal boundaries but in plotting new lines of connection.

Yet, in "Introducing Verge: What Does It Mean to Study Global Asias?" Tina Chen and Eric Hayot solve a related conundrum by reframing it: "Of course, 'Asia' is a fiction; so is 'the world.' For humanists, everything is a (potential) story. We are in the business of understanding the fictions we tell ourselves...."[xi] Let's take a page from Global Asias' playbook and view the persistent, constantly shifting fictions that shape Jewish Studies as the dynamic lifeblood of the field. I've learned that "desedimentation" is shorthand for changing the angles from which we look at the problem to shake up the ground on which the questions we have been asking stand. The future of Jewish Studies lies not in bemoaning its struggles and defending its internal boundaries but in plotting new lines of connection through the kind of rigorous, innovative methodology that Chen and her colleagues have pioneered.

Don't worry, the name will come.

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i Baker, Cynthia M. Baker, *Jew*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2017). Benjamin Schreier, *The Impossible Jew: Identity and the Reconstruction of Jewish American Literary History* (New York: NYU Press, 2015). Hana Wirth-Nesher, introduction to *The Cambridge History of Jewish American Literature*, ed. Hana Wirth-Nesher (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2015), 1–20.

ii Dean Franco, "The Object of Jewish American Literary History," *American Literary History*, 33, no. 4 (2021): 709–32.(Franco 717).

iii Leong, Andrew Way. Leong, "Bridging Work and Global Asias: Stars and Sandbars," *The Journal of Asian Studies*, vol. 80, no. 4, (2021, pp.): 1011–-1021.

iv Tina Chen and Charlotte Eubanks, *Global Asias: Tactics and Theories* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2025), 3, 11. "Both Oxford University Press and Amsterdam University Press have Global Asia/s book series. Institutional restructuring is increasingly reshaping programs and departments (e.g., Global Asia programs at Simon Fraser University, Utrecht University, Haverford, and the University of Toronto, among others; the Department of Transnational Asian Studies at Rice University; various Global Asia/s Initiatives at Duke University, Rutgers University, New York University, and Penn State) and encouraging transinstitutional partnerships (e.g., the InterAsia program sponsored by the Social Science Research Council or the New York Southeast Asia Network)." Tina Chen, "Global Asias: Method, Architecture, Praxis," *The Journal of Asian Studies* 80, no. 4 (2021): 998. There has also been an annual Global Asias conference at the University of California, Irvine, for the past three years.

v Tina Chen and Eric Hayot, "Introducing Verge: What Does It Mean to Study Global Asias?," Verge: Studies in Global Asias 1, no. 1 (2015): xii.

vi Ibid., 1.

vii Chen, "Method, Architecture, Praxis," (2021, 1002).

viii (2021 Ibid., 1004).

ix Ibid., 1005.

x In their introduction to the *Verge* journal, the editors outline different models that will appear in the journal's "Convergence" section: "*Codex*, a collaborative discussion and assessment of books; *Translation*, for texts, primary or secondary, not yet available in English; *Field Trip*, reports from various subfields of the disciplines; *Portfolio*, commentaries on visual images; and *Inter-face*, texts (and eventually online material) exploring the resources of the print–digital world" (Chen and Hayot, "Introducing Verge," xii).

xi Ibid., x.

A Perspective on an Integrated Israel, Jewish, and Middle East Studies

Idan Chazan

The field of Israel Studies has, since its inception, been firmly embedded in the methods and approaches of Jewish Studies. The centrality of Jews, Judaism (as a religion and culture), and Jewish history to the State of Israel has been clearly articulated and studied. A noteworthy phenomenon of the past few decades is the engagement of Israel Studies scholars with the field of Middle East Studies. This scholarship has analyzed the ways that Israel shapes and is shaped by the peoples, politics, economies, environments, and cultures of the Middle East.

There are other engaging examples of Jewish Studies subfields that draw from adjacent disciplines. Holocaust Studies is in conversation with Genocide Studies and Modern European History; Bible Studies engages with the fields of Ancient Religion and Archaeology; and American Jewish History collaborates with American History and Studies. Each of these subfields benefits from strong personal, institutional, and methodological relationships between the various disciplines. The purpose of this essay is to offer some observations from the perspective of an Israel Studies doctoral candidate on the current relationship between Israel, Jewish, and Middle East Studies.

The personal relationships between Jewish and Middle East Studies scholars matter tremendously in training Israel Studies graduate students. The opportunity to study alongside peers and to be mentored by scholars in Jewish and Middle East Studies departments has enriched my academic training and experience. These relationships help to ensure that the study of Israel in Jewish and Middle East Studies departments does not develop in an echo chamber, particularly during a time of political turmoil.

Institutionally, departmental relationships also play an important role. I, for example, am a student in New York University's joint doctoral program in History and Hebrew and Judaic Studies. My training has been enhanced by the opportunity to study in the Middle East and Islamic Studies department as well. Broadening and formalizing relationships between Jewish and Middle East Studies departments, perhaps through the creation of their own joint doctoral programs, would be a development that many of my peers would embrace. Those interested in Sephardic or Mizrahi Studies and ancient Israelite or medieval Middle Eastern religion, for example, would greatly benefit from this sort of departmental collaboration. Professionally, this training also broadens the job opportunities young scholars may be able to find, opening doors to appointments in diverse departments.

Furthermore, the training of Israel Studies doctoral students is enhanced by engaging with the methods and approaches of both Jewish and Middle East Studies. Israel Studies scholars should be encouraged to study not only Hebrew but Arabic (and other Middle Eastern languages) as well. Proficiency in both languages enables scholars to engage a wider array of sources and scholarly literature, thereby broadening the scope of their research and adding new voices and perspectives that may otherwise be neglected.

Analytically, the methods of Middle East Studies are important for Israel Studies. An illustrative example is the historical experience of Sephardic Jews from the Old Yishuv engaging with Zionist immigrants in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Theories of Indigenous Studies and colonialism are useful in understanding the role of language in shaping the relationship between Palestinian Sephardic Jews, the indigenous Arab population, and Zionist settlers. On the one hand, Sephardic Jews' mastery of Arabic and Hebrew opened avenues for them as political middlemen and cultural bridges. On the other hand, their Arabic-sounding Hebrew accents and the exploitation of their Arabic proficiency to purchase Arab land laid the ground for their exclusion from both the Zionist elite and indigenous Arab society.[i]

Beyond this specific example, the wider subfield of Mizrahi Studies presents a promising model for an integrated Middle East and Israel Studies approach. One feature of this literature is the incorporation of sources from other Middle Eastern languages, particularly Arabic and Judeo-Arabic.[ii] Another compelling component of Mizrahi Studies is the use of theoretical frameworks typical of Middle East Studies. A Mizrahi Studies approach to Israeli history emphasizes, for example, the Orientalist tropes used by the state to explain and describe Mizrahi immigrants' difficulties integrating into Israeli society, and analyzes Mizrahi protest as a manifestation of ethnic or sectarian conflict.[iii]

By advocating for a close relationship between Israel and Middle East Studies, I am not suggesting that Israel Studies be divorced from Jewish Studies. To the contrary, Jewish Studies enriches the academic study of Israel, introducing, for example, questions about the meaning of Judaism and Jewishness in a modern nation-state. Is Jewishness a religious, national, ethnic, or cultural category? Is Israel a Jewish state or state for Jews? Are Zionism and Israel continuations or breaks from Jewish history (or something in between)? Introducing the methods and approaches of Middle East Studies to these questions opens further intriguing areas for nuanced research. How has Jewishness been understood in various Middle Eastern contexts? How does this relate to the regional understanding of Israel as a Jewish state? What is the place of the State of Israel in Middle Eastern Jewish history?

I am aware that there are challenges to institutional and methodological relationships between Israel, Jewish, and Middle East Studies. Since October 7, the geopolitics of the Middle East have created a politics of crisis in university spaces that has impacted the ability of departments and scholars in these fields to work together.

As a young historian of Israel whose initial doctoral training has taken place, in part, after October 7, I have found that collaboration with Israel, Jewish, and Middle East Studies scholars is a way to circumvent this politics of crisis. Relationships with other scholars and engagement with diverse and nuanced scholarship have enabled me to develop as an academic and, personally, "keep my head above water." If concern exists about the place of Jewish (or Israel) Studies in the academy, one solution might be found in continuing to strengthen personal, institutional, and methodological relationships with Middle East Studies.

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i Yuval Evri and Hagar Kotef, "When Does a Native Become a Settler? (With Apologies to Zreik and Mamdani)," *Constellations* 29, no. 1 (2022): 3–18; Caroline Kahlenberg, "How the Locals Grew an Accent: The Sounds of Modern Hebrew in Early Twentieth-Century Palestine," *Jewish Social Studies* 28, no. 3 (2023): 105–42.

ii See, for example, Moshe Behar and Zvi Ben-Dor Benite, eds., *Modern Middle Eastern Jewish Thought: Writings on Identity, Politics, and Culture, 1893–1958* (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2013); Lihi Ben Shitrit, *Righteous Transgressions: Women's Activism on the Israeli and Palestinian Religious Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015); Orit Bashkin, *Impossible Exodus: Iraqi Jews in Israel* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020); Yehouda A. Shenhav, *The Arab Jews: A Postcolonial Reading of Nationalism, Religion, and Ethnicity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Shay Hazkani, *Dear Palestine: A Social History of the 1948 War* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2021).

iii See, for example, Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "The Zionist Return to the West and the Mizrahi Jewish Perspective," in *Orientalism and the Jews*, ed. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Jonathan Derek (Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2005), 162–81; Bryan K. Roby, *The Mizrahi Era of Rebellion: Israel's Forgotten Civil Rights Struggle, 1948–1966* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2015); Sami Shalom Chetrit, *Intra-Jewish Conflict in Israel: White Jews, Black Jews* (London: Routledge, 2010); Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims," *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (1988): 1–35.

From the Art Editor

What We Talk about When We Talk about Jewish Art

Douglas Rosenberg

In his well-known story, "What We Talk about When We Talk about Anne Frank," the author Nathan Englander describes a convoluted game in which an imaginary American Holocaust is taking place and the Jews in the neighborhood discuss which of their Christian friends they could depend on to hide them in the way that Anne Frank was hidden by empathetic town-folks. This game of hide and seek is not unlike the notion of contemporary American Jewishness that we play with ourselves when we attempt to teach, discuss, validate, or otherwise illuminate a singular Jewish experience, especially when we talk about Jews in the Diaspora, and more so when we talk about the thing we refer to as "Jewish art." Do we mean art made by Jews (who is satisfactorily Jewish?), do we mean (without stating implicitly) Judaica, or perhaps we mean some sort of art that conveys a biblical passage or Yiddish folktale? Or, in this imaginary game of hide and seek, is Jewish art something necessarily always framed by the Holocaust and/or Israel, or simply the visual culture of Jewishness writ large? I ask this rhetorically, but with great seriousness as well. For those of us who tick both boxes, Jewish and artist, this set of questions looms over our creative life. This is true for all Jewish-identifying folks for whom creative practice is at the core of their being— musicians, visual artists, theater makers, poets, and on and on. What is Jewish art after all? And the bigger question related to Jewish studies, is, how do we teach about Jewish art (if there is such a thing) in a way that gracefully acknowledges the sticky question of who or what is a Jew in the Diaspora?

How then do we center art created by Jewish artists that addresses the most pressing issues of the moment within the appropriate discourses of Jewish studies? The difficulty in Jewish studies programs, in my experience, seems to be that as art made by Jewish artists often positions itself in spaces that do not "read" as Jewish, they are pushed to the edges of the conversation about Jewish representation generally. Conversely, for those scholars and academics in Jewish studies programs for whom Jewishness is defined as ritually specific, in other words, a part of the broader understanding of religious studies, the work of secular Jewish artists does not register as particularly Jewish. For Jewish artists, artists of the Diaspora, immigrants and emigrants, this conundrum has been deeply felt since the earliest days of modernism. Artists and scholars alike have, in siloed repositories, left a virtual cartography of objects and texts that narrate the presence of a modern understanding of Jewishness embedded in the dominant style of both the literatures and the artistic or creative language of every movement and moment in art history from the start of modernism to the current postmodern moment.

Eva Hesse. Untitled, *1963-64. Oil on canvas, 59 x 39 1/4 in. The Jewish Museum, Gift of Helen Hesse Charash, 1983-234. Photo by Richard Goodbody, Inc. The Jewish Museum, New York / Art Resource, NY © The Estate of Eva Hesse. Courtesy Hauser & Wirth*

The images of work by Jewish artists in this essay might be seen as a kind of speculative syllabus for understanding how both secular Jewish artists of the Diaspora and Jewishness across a wide spectrum might be consolidated into a contemporary narrative of something we might call Jewish art.

The Jewish Museum notes that "one of Eva Hesse's last paintings before focusing her practice on sculpture, *Untitled* represents the body in fragile forms and critiques the absence of strong feeling in minimalist art. Around the time Hesse painted *Untitled*, she read Simone de Beauvoir's The Second Sex and questioned her own fragmented status as artist and wife." Hesse might well have added "Jewish artist" to that list, such was the milieu she was a part of at that moment. Speaking of her own struggle to find an authentic voice, Eva Hesse herself stated, "I must find something clear, stable and peaceful within myself."

When I was pursuing an MFA at the San Francisco Art Institute in the 1980s, I had this recurring thought that many of the artists and scholars whose work we studied were Jews and a part of a twentieth-century arc that was particularly avant-garde and progressive, even revolutionary. The most interesting groupings of such activity started with Theodor Adorno and Hannah Arendt and passed through movements of the early twentieth century such as dada (founded by Marcel Janco and Tristan Tzara, a.k.a. Samuel [Samy] Rosenstock), through surrealism, with Man Ray (born Emmanuel Radnitzky), Claude Cahun (Lucy Schwob), the writings of Walter Benjamin, and at midcentury, the critics Clement Greenberg, Harold Rosenberg, Susan Sontag and others, and artists including Eleanor Antin, Allen Kaprow, and Martha Rosler. By the time I was teaching at the university level myself, I wondered why that narrative was absent from art history. As I thought about works of art that I had seen that were coded in some way as Jewish, I recalled seeing for the first time a work by Pier Marton called, simply, *JEW*.

I had seen only a still photo in a book, perhaps twenty years or more before that recollection, but I remember how the word, painted on a wall in vaguely Hebraic-looking text, shook me deeply. And I began thinking about how limited the discourse around the work of Jewish artists was and jumped to the same thought about Jewish feminist artists whose work and politics were almost never contextualized by their Jewishness through an art-historical or theoretical lens. To that end, in 2004, I organized a colloquium at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, where I am a professor of art, called "Experimental Jews." For that event, I asked twelve Jewish artists and scholars to consider a number of questions. The eminent curator Norman Kleeblatt was our first keynote speaker. Those who were gathered at that initial event were representative of a new kind of Diaspora: a metaphoric one. One that is not so much a geographical Diaspora, but more so a conceptual one. A Diaspora in which Jewishness may not be at the foreground of identity and artistic practice, but rather a part of the gestalt of one's life practice. A Diaspora in which intellectual wanderings lead to observations and conclusions that propose new theoretical models and blur existing boundaries in regard to how Jewish identity circulates and is performed in arts culture writ large.

I organized that colloquium for a very personal reason: to gather a group of people who I knew to be Jewish to help me think through a series of questions that had consumed a great deal of my thinking since I began studying the arts. Wasn't there some degree of Jewish consciousness at work in the very creation of modernism? More explicitly, how was it possible that such clearly Jewish consciousness was not *named* when we spoke of the most fundamental and foundational texts and the creative productivity of modernism, modern art, and theory and the nascent move toward postmodernism itself? Was it enough to simply begin to de-code the description of these artists and scholars, most often described as "eastern European refugees," or "born Marcus Rothkowitz in Dvinsk, Russia, the fourth child

Pier Marton. JEW, 1988. Photo of the entrance to the installation, where the audience writes their comments on the walls. © 1988 Pier Marton. https://piermarton.info/

of Jacob Rothkowitz, a pharmacist by trade, and [his wife] Anna (née Goldin) Rothkowitz." By asking such questions, and willfully unmasking what led such scholars, theorists, and artists to their art-historical seat at the table, we begin to tear at least a small hole in the canon. From this lingering set of questions, and based on the first symposium described above, I founded the Conney Project on Jewish Arts, specifically to gather Jewish artists, critics, and scholars together to try and create a dialog around such issues. For eighteen years, I directed the Conney Project as part of the Center for Jewish Studies at University of Wisconsin–Madison, during which time we convened a conference every other year that focused on Jewish art in all its possible permutations.

Barnett Newman. Adam, 1951-2. Oil paint on canvas. 95 5/8 x 79 7/8 in. Tate, Purchased 1968. © 2025 The Barnett Newman Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Tate

Barnett Newman. Eve, 1950. Oil paint on canvas. 94 × 67 3/4 in. Tate, Purchased 1980. © 2025 The Barnett Newman Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo: Tate

> [The painter Barnett] Newman "while fully aware of the religious cognates of his work, urges contemporary artists to free themselves from 'the impediments of memory, association, nostalgia, legend [and] myth … Instead of making cathedrals out of Christ, man, or "life," we are,' he insists, 'making it out of ourselves, out of our own feelings.'"
>
> —Tate Museum

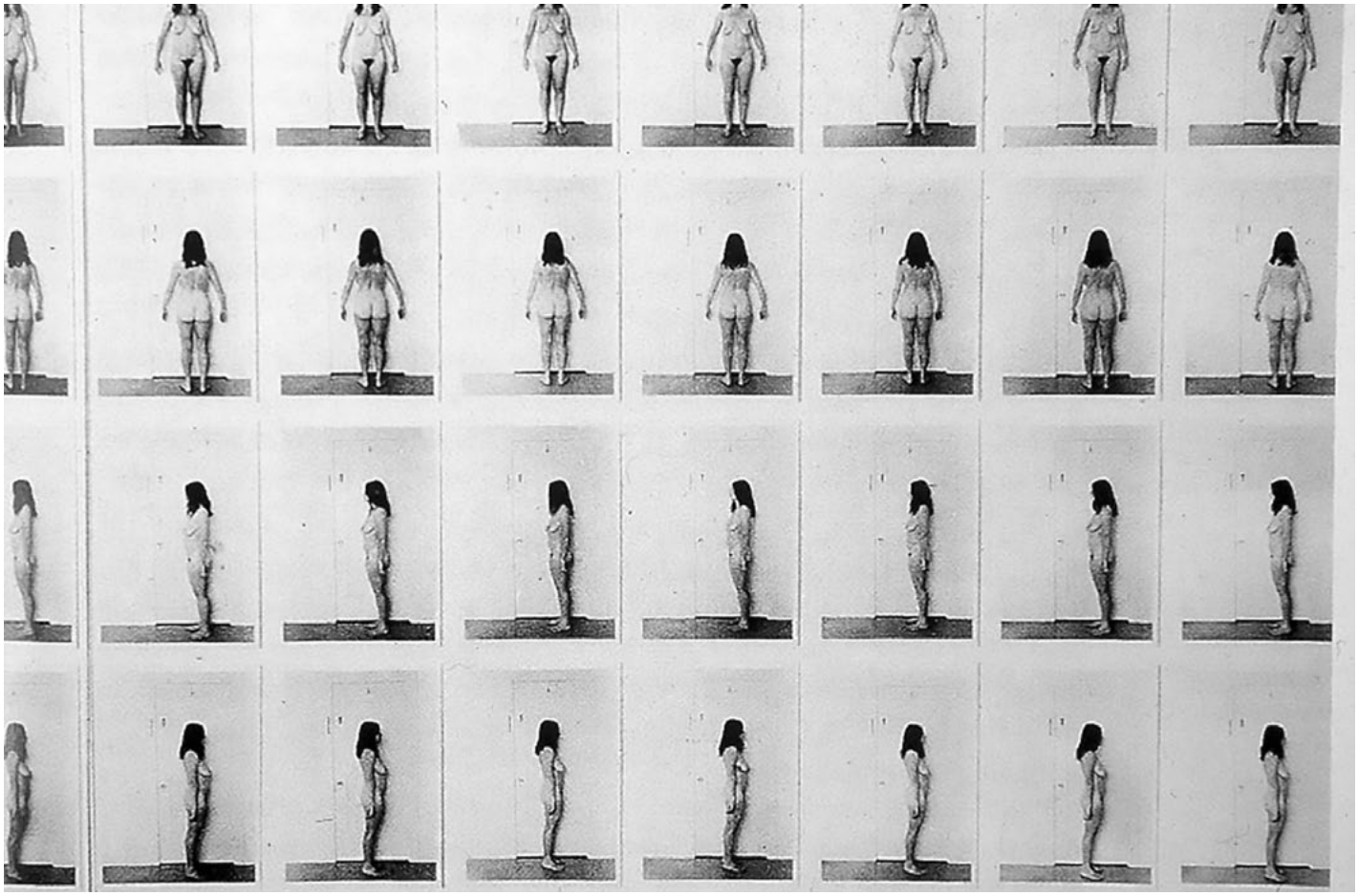
In 1999, the art historian Catherine Soussloff edited a volume titled *Jewish Identity in Modern Art History*. It was a watershed moment in the formation of a movement, again, a kind of *unveiling* of Jewish artists and scholars of art of Jewish content. The volume brought under one cover such thinkers as Kalman Bland, Lisa Bloom, Louis Kaplan, Donald Kuspit, Margaret Olin, Lisa Saltzman, Larry Silver, and Soussloff herself, who together illuminated the formative role of Jews as subjects of art-historical discourse and raised issues about the place of cultural identity in the production of scholarship. This volume brought to light something that many of us knew individually but of which we shared no collective consciousness. It gave voice to ideas about Jewish identity and the arts that were previously held close to the vest and in doing so was a most radical act of resistance.

As the era of multiculturalism in the arts drew to a close in the late 1990s, Jewish artists had yet to fully weigh in; we had been curiously absent from the discourse of "otherness" and identity-focused art practice. Yet, there was, among a particular generation of artists who came of age in the postwar era, a

Jerry McMillan. Judy Chicago*, 1970. Recent gelatin silver print. 14 x 11 in. © Jerry McMillan. Courtesy of Craig Krull Gallery, Santa Monica, California*

certain aspirational notion that there was a history to be told, one that connected the dots of twentieth-century thinkers, artists, writers, critics, intellectuals, dancers, choreographers, and philanthropists. That history was kick-started by an infamous exhibition at the Jewish Museum in New York in 1996. *Too Jewish*, curated by Norman Kleeblatt, precipitated a coming out of sorts for Jewish creatives. While practice illustrated identity in Kleeblatt's exhibition, theory soon followed in the early 2000s in the form of a spate of books that unabashedly made the case for a Jewish art in the contemporary era and simultaneously debunked existing myths that excused the supposed absence of such an aggregation. What those books, by Kalman Bland, Margaret Olin, Mathew Baigell, Lisa Bloom, Ori Soltes, Samantha Baskind, and others provided was an alternative narrative to the prevailing story of modernism. It was not just that there were Jews among the artists of the era, but that the preponderance of diasporic Jews throughout the creation of modernism were working in such a way that the wisdom of Jewish life and its teachings were synthesized through a Western, modern gestalt of secularism, philosophy, identity, trauma, and any number of other contemporary conditions. This zeitgeist of influences, much of it centered in New York, enabled a kind of art that superseded historically understood biblical representations of the world and often replaced it with images and gestures that were born from the totality of Jewish experience in the early twentieth century. And to be fair, often it did not "look Jewish."

Judy Chicago, born Judith Cohen in 1939, descended from a long line of rabbis on her socialist father's side, is perhaps best known for two projects:



Eleanor Antin. Detail from CARVING: A Traditional Sculpture *1972. 148 gelatin silver prints and text panel. Each photograph: 7 × 5 in.; Text panel: 5 1/2 × 10 1/4 in.; Installed: 31 1/4 × 204 in. The Art Institute of Chicago, Twentieth-Century Discretionary Fund. Photo by Virginia Maksymowicz or Blaise Tobia © Franklin and Marshall College, Lancaster, PA*

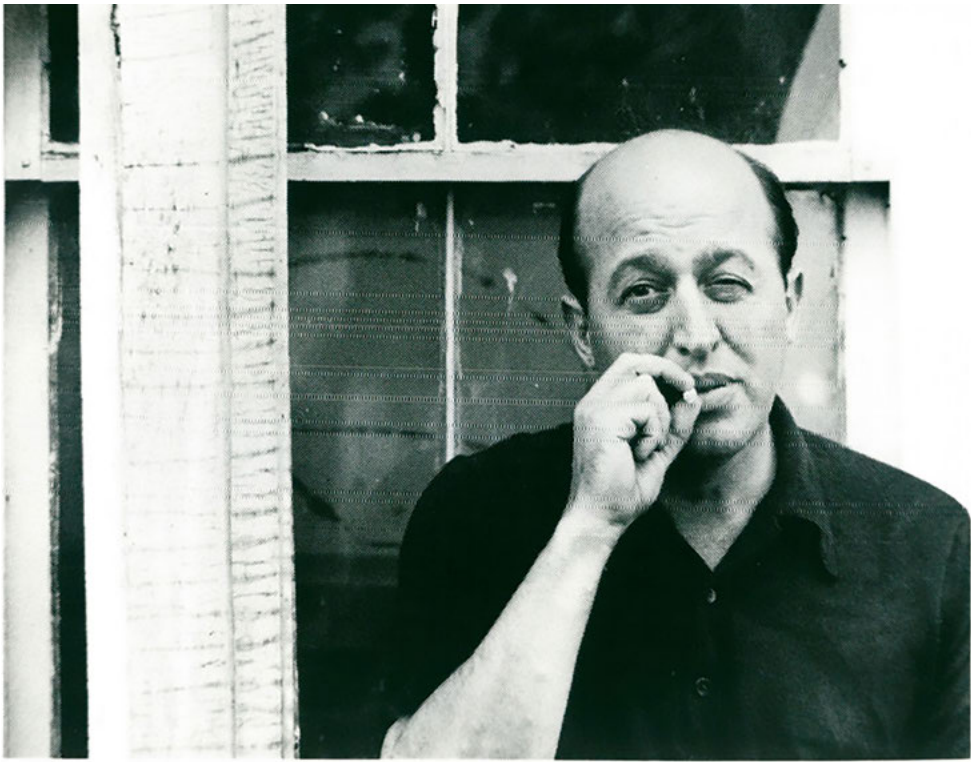
The Dinner Party, a monument to women's history and accomplishments, created between 1974–79; and as the founder (with Miriam Shapiro) of the first feminist art program (1971) at the California Institute of the Arts. As with many feminist Jewish artists of her era, Chicago's politics of representation were deeply embedded with or alongside her own Jewish identity.

A landmark early feminist work, Eleanor Antin's *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture* comprises 148 black-and-white photographs documenting the artist's loss of ten pounds over thirty-seven days. In *Carving: A Traditional Sculpture*, the artist Eleanor Antin literally starves herself for thirty-seven days in order to conform her Jewish, Eastern European body to the dominant western expectations of women in the contemporary culture of 1972. Perhaps speaking back to Linda Nochlin's essay (published the year before), "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists"?, Antin also makes us consider the histories and domination of Jewish women's bodies before, during and after the Holocaust.

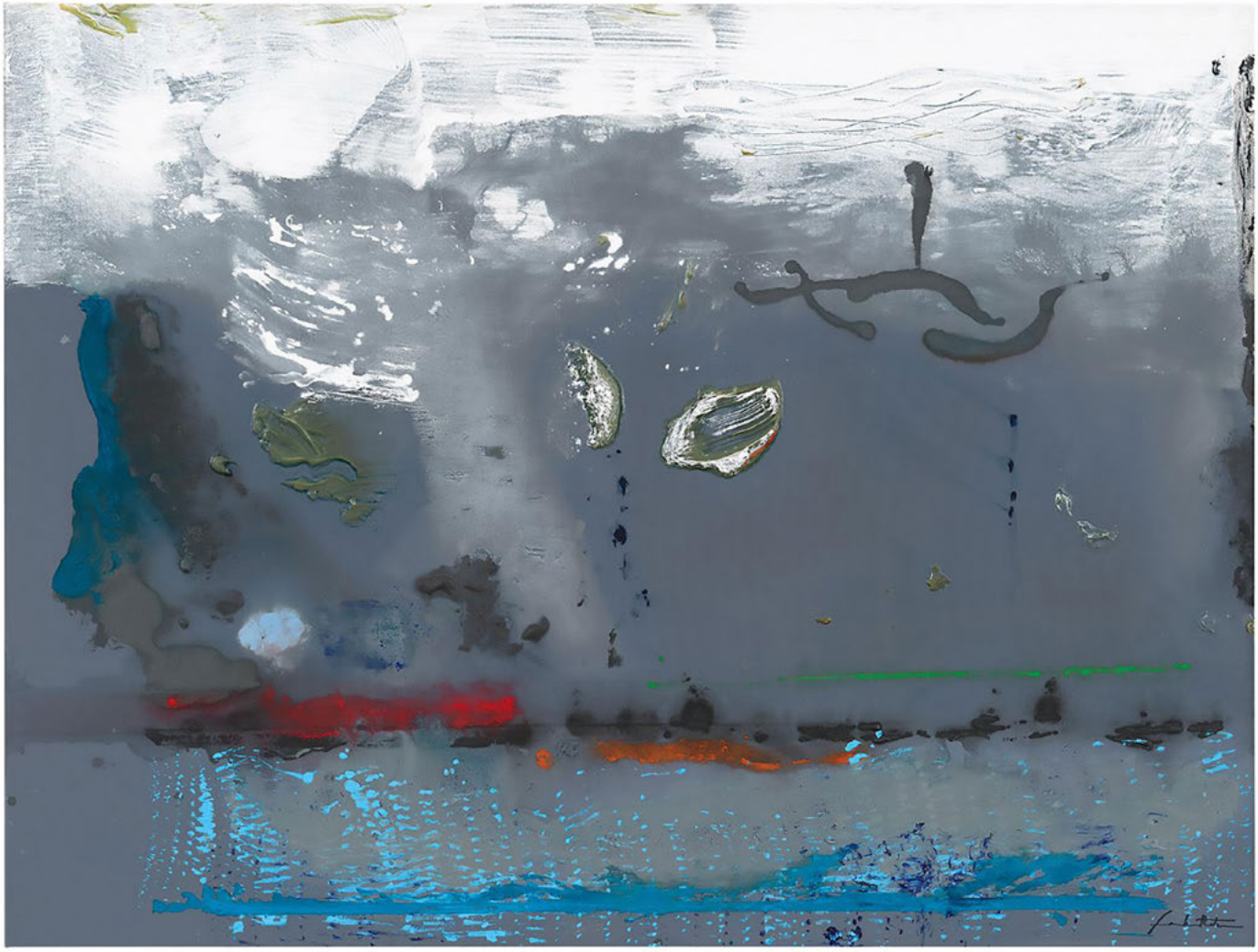
One can make an argument both for and against the idea that there is a particular canon associated with twentieth-century art practice. Whether intentional or not, real or imaginary, we tend to accept the work of certain artists (and the artists themselves) as *canonized*. This canon/not canon is not unfamiliar. Impressionism at the fin de siècle gives way to dada,

surrealism, cubism, and futurism, with any number of sub-movements pressed between the more well-known, manifesto-driven attempts to break new artistic ground. Abstract expressionism at midcentury, conceptual and minimal art, body art, video and performance displace both the tastes and theories of the early twentieth century. Most artists are historically contextualized by the methods and or materials they use, and by the movements they inhabit or straddle. Theorists and art historians are likewise contextualized by the school of thought or practice they are aligned with or, in some cases, are the exemplar of. Both artists and theorists are often identified by their national identities as well; it was not uncommon for Jewish academics to write simultaneously for the Jewish press as well as for the critical art publications of the time.

The powerhouse critics Clement Greenberg and Harold Rosenberg almost collaboratively shaped the trajectory of much of postwar American art. They were joined in this undertaking by Meyer Shapiro, Leo Steinberg, and others in what looks a bit like a minyan in the making—somewhat exclusive, Jewish, male working group focused on bringing a kind of orthodox sense of order to modern art. Clement Greenberg, who emerged as the powerful center of this group of critics, was, by his own admission, a conflicted Jew, simultaneously writing ascetic, reductive, and elegant art criticism, virtually talmudic in nature, and also articles in the Jewish press such as, "Self Hatred and Jewish Chauvinism: Some Reflections on Positive Jewishness" (*Commentary*, 1950). Greenberg was a featured speaker at a symposium in1944 that examined Jewish assimilation and identity among the emerging generation of American Jewish writers. In an essay in the *Contemporary Jewish Record* as part of the proceedings of *Under Forty: A Symposium on American Literature and the Younger Generation of American Jews*, speaking about himself, he states,



Hans Namuth. Clement Greenberg, *1951. 9 15/16 x 7 15/16 in. Gelatin silver print. National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution © Estate of Hans Namuth*



Helen Frankenthaler. Vespers, 1992. Acrylic on canvas. 48 x 63 3/4 in. Private collection. © 2025 Helen Frankenthaler Foundation, Inc. / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York

This writer has no more of a conscious position toward his Jewish heritage than the average American Jew—which is to say, hardly any. Perhaps he has even less than that. His father and mother repudiated a good deal of the Jewish heritage for him in advance by becoming free-thinking socialists who maintained only their Yiddish, certain vestiges of folk life in the Pale, and an insistence upon specifying themselves as Jews—i.e., to change one's name because it is too Jewish is shameful. Nevertheless, the reflection in my writing of the Jewish heritage—is heritage the right word?—though it may be passive and unconscious, is certainly not haphazard.

Greenberg's carefully worded statement that he "has no more of a conscious position toward his Jewish heritage than the average American Jew" seems immediately counterintuitive. If the statement is true, why even make note of it? This insertion or identification of the voice of the speaker, and his biases, in other words, framing his writing as a product of his ethnicity and politics as Greenberg did, is also quite unusual in modernist criticism, although it does become somewhat institutionalized in the post-modern era.

In his book *Fierce Poise, Helen Frankenthaler and 1950s New York*, Alexander Nemerov noted that the critic Clement Greenberg said that *Innerlichkeit*, or inwardness, was "the real task for the individual Jew

in the West." This sort of Jewish self-reflection is mentioned numerous times by critics attempting to explain what seems to me a public move toward a kind of humanist spirituality by Jewish artists at midcentury. Writing about Frankenthaler in the *Forward*, Laura Hodes proposes, "The spirituality in [Frankenthaler's paintings] seems intentional, even blatant. One, which features different shades of blue and the whites of clouds, is titled "Vespers," referring to an evening prayer in church. At the top right corner, Frankenthaler has dragged a rake, suggesting the presence of fingers almost as if from the hand of God." It was not unusual to find Jewish artists throughout history often making reference to Christian instead of Jewish imagery, seemingly as a mask for their own less-understood visual culture and symbolism.

Much of the literature on the visual arts, when it does note the religious or cultural affiliation of Jewish artists, still finds itself caught up in *defining* Jewishness and, by extension, who holds the right to such identity, often ignoring Jews of color or trans/nonbinary/queer Jews in the discourses surrounding Jewish art. As the general understanding of the hierarchy of Jewish citizenship has historically relied on a degree of adherence to that which is closest to orthodoxy, art historians and theorists (since around 2000) have had a heavy lift in order to disabuse notions of prohibitions and laws that constrain certain types of self-expression (for instance, the prohibition of graven images, gendered participation, contemporary art itself). A considerable degree of the literature and scholarship that addresses Jewish art, both historically and in the present, relies on religious practice, either explicitly or implicitly, as a metric for acknowledgment. With observance as the watermark, scholars of Jewish history and the arts have often cited the visual culture of Judaica or biblical content as the basis for inclusion in the canon of Jewish art. Both are recognizably "Jewish" and, thus, work flowing from such sources would also be Jewish. Yet, as with other racialized or ethnic groups, *culture* is often a more useful metric. Self-defined "secular" Jews often still maintain a connection to the culture of Jewishness through food, ritual, or other practices. As we know, modernism at midcentury is filled with Jewish surnames through abstract expressionism, conceptualism, feminist art, identity-based practices, etc. Yet, artists such as Mark Rothko, Eva Hesse, Barnett Newman, and the other Jewish artists who populated the art world at midcentury did not cower from expressing a personal version of Jewish identity even within their abstract work.

"The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them." —Mark Rothko

In Rothko's paintings, one finds a sort of deeply embodied quietude, a Jewish sacred space that emanates from the canvas. Rothko's work was often misread by critics as simply operating within a framework of Clement Greenberg's vision of mid-twentieth-century abstraction. Such misreading couples Greenberg's idea of "purity" with the idea that, owing to the prohibition of graven images, Jews did not create works of art in which the figure was present, as in abstract expressionism generally.

Mark Rothko, No. 14, 1960*, 1960. Oil on canvas. 114 1/2 x 105 5/8 in. San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Helen Crocker Russell Fund purchase © 1998 Kate Rothko Prizel & Christopher Rothko / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York. Photo by Katherine Du Tiel*

Such a narrow reading neglects a multitude of other possibilities, including a consideration of the possibility of metaphor as a tool to address deeply spiritual content and meaning. In Selden Rodman's *Conversations with Artists*, Rothko himself notes, "I'm interested only in expressing basic human emotions—tragedy, ecstasy, doom, and so on—and the fact that lots of people break down and cry when confronted with my pictures shows that I communicate those basic human emotions. . . . The people who weep before my pictures are having the same religious experience I had when I painted them. And if you, as you say, are moved only by their color relationships, then you miss the point!"

Rothko's claim that viewers are having "the same religious experience" as he did while making the work asks us to rethink our understanding of abstraction as a void, empty of all but secular content. Note that he did not specify a Jewish religious experience, but he seems to be, again and again, speaking about a kind of transcendence. To erase Jewishness from abstraction (or from minimalism generally) is to miss the allusion and inference in front of us

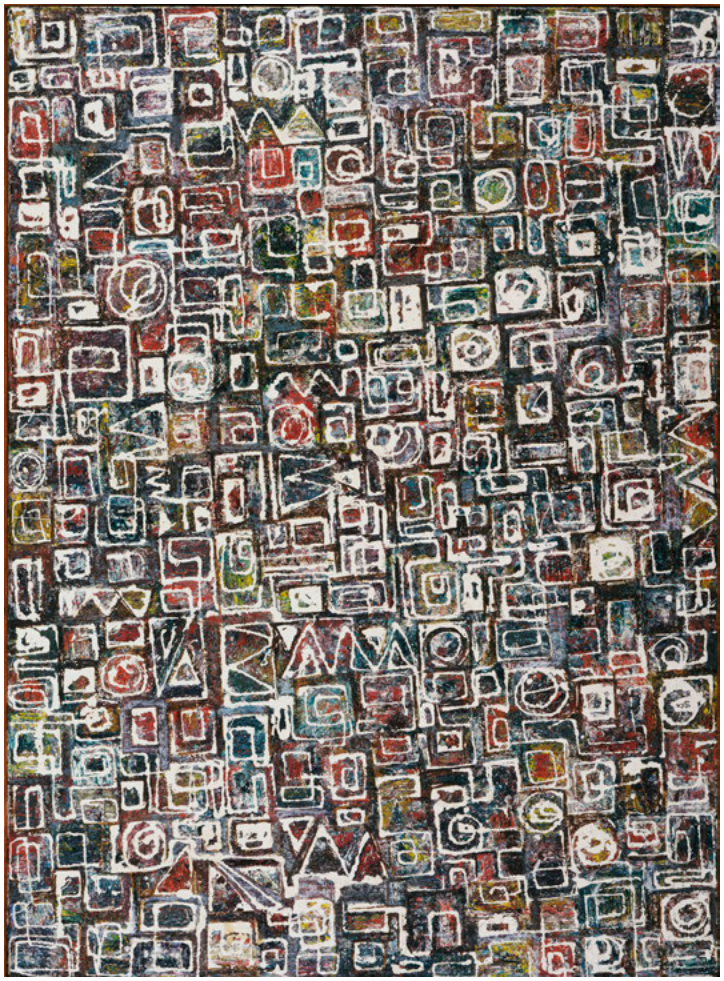
Collectively, a strand of Jewish artists have sought to connect their work to an understanding of Jewishness that illuminates experience, often a kind of experience that is primal, tribal, deeply existential,

Rothko Chapel. Photo by Flickr user dappledwithshadow CC BY 2.0

and frequently completely omits any recognizable quotation of Jewish visual culture. Mark Rothko's chapel in Houston, Texas, is perhaps the pivotal example of what happens when a postwar Jewish artist allows his work to transcend the material world in favor of an embodied experience of the human condition.

"A painting is not a picture of an experience, it is an experience." –Mark Rothko

This image is from the Mark Rothko Chapel in Houston, Texas. The Rothko Chapel is an interfaith sanctuary, a center for human rights—and a museum devoted to fourteen monumental paintings by the American abstract expressionist Mark Rothko. The chapel opened its doors in February 1971. While it is not technically a religious space, it is a sacred space. It is a place where art becomes the catalyst for a deeply moving and spiritual experience. In this gesture, Rothko asks how art may be experienced as embodied, even sacred and transcendent. In the Rothko Chapel the individual is offered very little in the way of sensory stimulation, virtually left alone with a number of large painted canvases, no sound to speak of, nothing to read or reflect on aside from one's own sense of self, as reflected in the absence of external stimuli. And somehow, this emptiness produces extremely emotional responses from viewers. They cry, they grieve, they feel deeply reflective, and they express a sense of having been



Lee Krasner. Painting No. 19, *1947-48. Oil on canvas. 38 1/10 × 27 4/5 in. The Philadelphia Museum of Art. Gift of Aaron E. Norman Fund. Inc., 1959-31-1. © 2025 The Pollock-Krasner Foundation / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York*

in a sacred space. Rothko's grouping of paintings in this architecturally specific space illuminates the power of art as a catalyst for profoundly moving experiences, to offer the viewer a sense of themselves within a larger cosmology where art can indeed become sacred.

Lenore "Lee" Krasner (born Lena Krassner; October 27, 1908 – June 19, 1984) was an American painter and visual artist active primarily in New York, whose work has been associated with the abstract expressionist movement. In "Beyond the Pale, Lee Krasner and Jewish Culture" (*Woman's Art Journal* 28, no. 2 [Fall-Winter, 2007]), art historian Gail Levin describes Krasner's religious upbringing and her move toward abstraction at midcentury. This quote by Krasner illuminates how her long-dormant religious education and practice bubbled up through her painting:

I think it was in my show at the Whitney that [curator] Marcia Tucker pointed something out to me I had been totally unaware of, and that is that I started my painting at the upper right hand at all times and swung across the other way, which she related to my early training in Hebrew writing. I had never made the connection. She pointed that out to me. I was doing it for many, many years without being conscious of it in any sense. And, so at all times, I was preoccupied with a kind of writing which I nor anyone else could read, and I wanted it that way. I don't know why.

Ross Bleckner. Single Bird (State)*, 1999. Two-color lithograph. 16.5 x 17 in. © 1999 Robert Bleckner and Gemini G.E.L. LLC*

Levin notes that "Krasner appears to have accepted Tucker's suggestion that her early study of Hebrew writing influenced her series of abstractions known as "Little Images."

Rather than illustrating a Jewishness that we know, biblical histories, Jewish traditions, etc., the Jews of modernism often sought to illustrate Jewishness through the dominant artistic language of the moment, from inside prevailing movements such as dada or futurism, and later, abstract expressionism and conceptual art, postmodernism, etc. There is a recurring theme of transcendence as a kind of self-knowledge throughout the histories of modernism and into the present that flows through both critic and scholars as well as artists themselves.

And, of course, there is also contemporary deconstruction of the expectation of Jewish artists and a dismantling of long-prevalent tropes related to Jewishness writ large.

In his 1952 article for *ARTnews*, entitled "The American Action Painters," the critic Harold Rosenberg deepened his own midrashic deconstruction of modern art at midcentury, stating, "Whoever undertakes to create, soon finds himself engaged in creating himself. Self-transformation and the transformation of others have constituted the radical interest of our century, whether in painting, psychiatry, or political action." That self-transformation that Rosenberg cites extends to the assimilationist project was, for Jewish artists and critics, part and

Nancy Spero. Masha Bruskina / Gestapo Victim, *1994. Handprinting and printed collage on paper 19 in. × 26 in. © 2025 The Nancy Spero and Leon Golub Foundation for the Arts / Licensed by VAGA at Artists Rights Society (ARS), NY Courtesy Galerie Lelong*

parcel of contemporary art for most of the twentieth century. And while transformation and passing were, for many artists, an act of liberation, in the end, it inhibited Jewish artists from fully participating in discussions of race, identity, and otherness for some time.

While Clement Greenberg at times suppressed his Jewishness in favor of his particular brand of formalist criticism, Rosenberg dug into the mystical and wonderous parts of Jewish liturgies, including Kabbalah and biblical hallucinations. In his 1966 essay, "Is There a Jewish Art?," adapted from a talk he gave at the Jewish Museum in New York, Rosenberg notes, "The most serious theme in Jewish life is the problem of identity. The Jew, of course, has no monopoly on this problem. But the Jewish artist has felt it in an especially deep and immediate way. It has been a tremendously passionate concern of his thought. It's not a Jewish problem; it is a situation of the 20th century, a century of displaced persons, of people moving from one class into another, from one national context into another."

As Rosenberg digs more deeply into the problems of answering the question of the existence of Jewish art, he refers to the "ambiguous situation" of Jewish art. Such ambiguities are the product of resistance, a

denial by artists of a singular Jewish visual canon, and of the constituents of an accepted visual culture of Jewishness generally. And as the culture shifts into a postmodern present, a fluid and indeterminate present, Jewish culture itself becomes a space in which issues of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, politics, history, and nationality are transposed into a new visual culture; its art is conceptual and often performative. It poses questions gleaned from a history of wandering, though landscapes, through ideas, through identities, and through texts both sacred and otherwise. Artists of what writer/curator Staci Boris calls "the Post-Jewish Generation" do not lack faith. Perhaps they have given into the hallucinatory effects *of* faith. As Rosenberg noted, "To be engaged with the aesthetics of self has liberated the Jew as artist." Perhaps this "engagement with the aesthetics of self" has created a liminal space for the creation of a new version of Jewish art, one situated within unfamiliar territory. Imagine wandering in the desert for forty years with little food or water. Imagine ethnic cleansing and Holocaust, imagine a biblical degree of trauma that is not, for some, explained by only faith itself. What sort of surreal images might that conjure in the mind of a wanderer if one asks the right questions?

Rosenberg, looking for a way to rationalize a lack of consistent style or recognizable trait that would denote "Jewishness" in art, states that "in a world of miracles, the fabrications of the human hand are a distraction. In the landscape of the Old Testament, anything (a garment, a slingshot, the jawbone of an ass) or anybody (a shepherd boy, a concubine) may start to glisten with meaning and become memorable." Rosenberg infers that the art one is trying to create may already exist as a state of mind or being, it may already be in the world, needing only to be framed or elevated to hold our attention. And finally, through a kind of midrashic reasoning, he comes to this seemingly logical conclusion, noting,

"I am not suggesting that the ancient Hebrews were the inventors of surrealism. But the idea that if you inhabit a sacred world, you find art, rather than make it, is clearly present in the Old Testament." Rosenberg's claim here, the idea of finding art—of elevating the everyday, the quotidian, the human experience of wonder and a connection to something greater than oneself—the turning inward and becoming self-aware, involves many of the qualities that we can identify in a particular strand of work made by Jewish artists.

The categories available by which to discuss anything we refer to as "Jewish art" minimize the possibilities of such an art. Just as the understanding of Jewishness has expanded significantly in the Diaspora, so too, must we find a more expansive way in which to communicate and teach something we call Jewish art within Jewish studies programs. Such a definition must be inclusive, flexible, and porous in order to accommodate that art which is being produced by our Jewish contemporary artists as well as the work made by secular Jews at midcentury and all across the spectrum of history.

Perhaps the work of Jewish artists is to recapitulate the generality of art history, its styles, whims, deformations, and slippages filtering it through the lived experience of a people for whom a common text has provided the foundational knowledge upon which art practice can be situated. It may not look Jewish, but then perhaps our understanding of "Jewish" may need to shift as we move through the twenty-first century.

Douglas Rosenberg
University of Wisconsin–Madison

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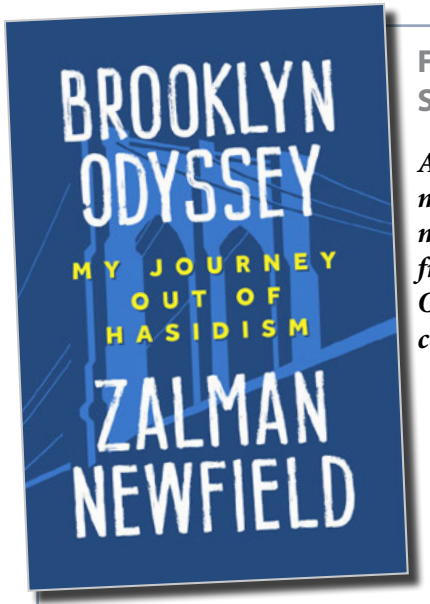

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