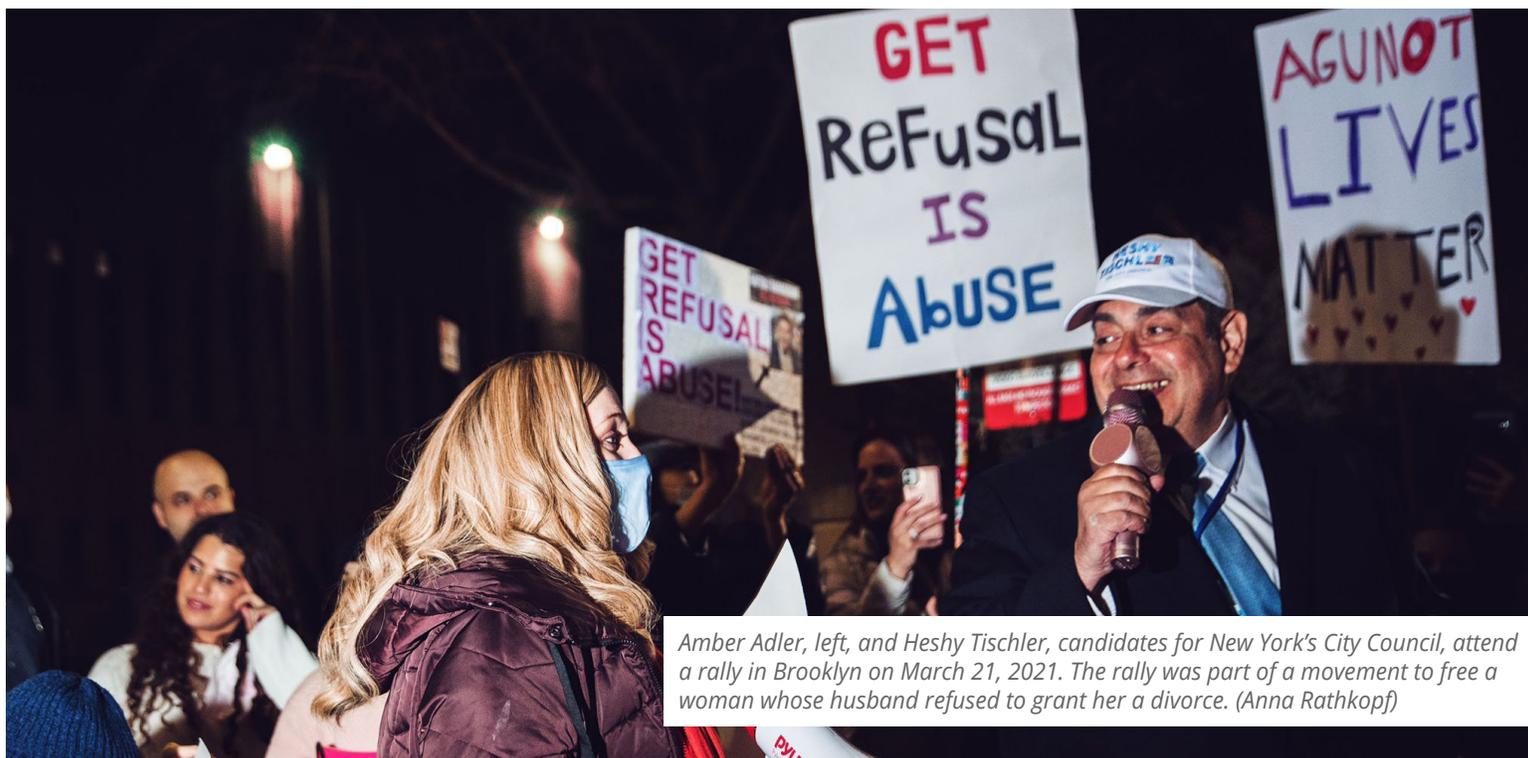


# The New York Jewish Week/end

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Amber Adler, left, and Heshy Tischler, candidates for New York's City Council, attend a rally in Brooklyn on March 21, 2021. The rally was part of a movement to free a woman whose husband refused to grant her a divorce. (Anna Rathkopf)

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## ● NEWS

### In Brooklyn, It's a Loud, Wide-open Race to Succeed a Tainted Jewish City Councilman

*A radio host who incited a riot over pandemic restrictions is the wild card in a largely Jewish district.*

By Shira Hanau

It was only about 20 minutes into the virtual debate when the moderators had to mute two of the candidates for New York's City Council.

Amber Adler, an Orthodox Jewish activist and mother of two, had just told the other candidates about an attempted brick-throwing attack she and her family had experienced recently. Heshy Tischler, the Brooklyn provocateur who pleaded guilty last month to inciting a riot at a protest against coronavirus restrictions, accused Adler of fabricating the episode.



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Then the shouting began.

"I do want to reiterate that at the heart of this debate slash discussion is really about who can best represent Council District 48," said Skye Ostreicher, one of the moderators of the Politics NY debate. "So let's tie everything back to that."

For residents of District 48, which covers a swath of South Brooklyn and includes neighborhoods with large Jewish populations like Midwood, Gravesend, Sheepshead Bay, and Brighton Beach, the June 22 Democratic primary is less about ideology than it is about tone and personality. Several of the candidates have switched between the Democratic and Republican parties, and parts of the district voted overwhelmingly for Donald Trump in the 2020 election.

And in this race, there are plenty of personalities.

Tischler is perhaps the best known of the candidates, having come to the city's attention as the face of the anti-mask and anti-government protests by Orthodox Jews in Borough Park in October. Though hardly the favorite, the implementation of ranked-choice voting means he can't be ruled out.

All of the candidates in the race are talking about public safety as a top issue in the district, citing shootings and antisemitic incidents as evidence that funding should not be taken away from the police. Special education teacher Steven Saperstein has been endorsed by the police union and attorney Binyomin Bendet has called for "refunding" the police.

Saperstein, Bendet and Mariya Markh, who has worked as an aide for three City Councilmembers, are considered the front runners in the Democratic primary. All three are Jewish.

Markh, who grew up in the Soviet Union and came to the United States in 1990, is the establishment candidate with endorsements from New York State Assemblyman Steve Cymbrowitz as well as from other local elected officials.

Saperstein is well known to area residents from his previous run for the City Council seat as a Republican in 2017 and a run for state Assembly in 2018.

Bendet is the least experienced of the group but has raised the third largest amount in the city's public match-

ing funds program since joining the race in January.

The City Council is made up of 51 seats, 35 of which are up for grabs this year due to term limits. Members of the council have the power to write new laws, negotiate the budget, have oversight of city agencies, control their own discretionary funding within their district, and generally act as a check on the mayor's power.

Unlike neighboring District 44, which encompasses much of Borough Park and which has been represented on the city council by Orthodox Jews for years, District 48 has not historically elected Orthodox Jews as council members.

So when Chaim Deutsch won the district in 2013, it was a major coup for the Orthodox Jewish community there, which is mostly not Hasidic and less given to voting as a bloc. A council member is considered a key way of earning support for local community organizations through discretionary funds and addressing perennial community issues like building permits and parking issues.

Deutsch couldn't run again this year due to term limits, and in April was expelled from the City Council after he pleaded guilty to charges of tax evasion.

Bendet's campaign, seeking to capitalize on fears that the seat would be held by someone who is not Orthodox, mailed flyers that called Bendet "the only frum candidate with real experience who knows and deeply understands our community."

"Having a frum council member has done wonders for our community," the flyer proclaims, using a Yiddish term for Orthodox. "Let's keep it that way."

But Bendet is far from the only Orthodox or observant candidate seeking the seat.

Adler, who worked on Deutsch's 2017 campaign, believes maintaining Orthodox representation at a time of rising antisemitism is key. "I think it's important that a person understand the Jewish community and the frum Jewish community that's here and the challenges and be able to address them," she told JTA. "The only person that understands that here is me."

Her campaign might be hobbled, however, by the fact that newspapers and magazines serving the Orthodox community refuse to publish her — or any woman's — photograph, as she noted to Politico.

Markh, though not Orthodox, described herself as traditional. And Inna Vernikov, who as the sole Republican candidate will run against the Democrat in the November general election, is observant.

Tischler, who has a weekly radio show, is also Orthodox, although his legal troubles may dampen his appeal in a district that just lost a council member due to tax fraud. Tischler was sentenced to 10 days of community service after he was charged with inciting a riot: In October, he egged on a crowd of Hasidic men in Borough Park who were physically threatening a Jewish journalist, Jacob Kornbluh, at a rally to protest COVID restrictions. Brazen and unrepentant, Tischler has earned — and welcomed — comparisons to Donald Trump.

In spite of or because of his infamy, Tischler has a following in the Orthodox community and has raised more private funds than anyone else in the race, although that doesn't necessarily translate into votes.

The Flatbush Jewish Community Council, an organization representing the Orthodox community in Midwood, declined to endorse anyone in the District 48 race, although it did endorse for mayor, comptroller, borough president, the 45th District Council seat and two judgeships.

"There are several good candidates, please do your research and select one," reads a FJCC flyer announcing its endorsements in other races.

Asked why FJCC chose not to endorse in District 48, Josh Mehlman, chairman of the organization, reiterated that message.

"There are a number of qualified candidates running with similar platforms & positions," Mehlman wrote in an email to JTA. "Our leadership felt that in this specific race, because of their similarity on the core issues, individual candidates should take their case directly to the electorate and let the best man or woman emerge."

When asked what the next city council member could do for the Jewish community, Mehlman cited a need to put more city resources into policing to fight crime, antisemitism, and hate crimes generally, to clean up the streets, and to support small businesses. He also hoped the candidate would protect religious rights.

One local Jewish leader said that while there is no clear favorite in the race, ranked-choice voting means even

wild cards like Tischler can't be ruled out.

With ranked-choice voting, voters rank their top five candidates, and a winner is declared only when someone wins at least 50% of the votes plus one.

"Ranked-choice voting means everybody has a chance," said the leader, declining to be named so that Tischler wouldn't come after him on his weekly radio show.

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## ● NEWS

# Bloomberg Vows to Catch Whoever Leaked His Tax Records

By Asaf Shalev

Mike Bloomberg, the billionaire businessman and former New York mayor, is vowing to catch whoever leaked his personal tax information to a team of investigative reporters.

The tax records, along with those of thousands of other wealthy Americans, were obtained by the nonprofit news outlet ProPublica and used in an expose on the U.S. tax system published Tuesday.

ProPublica produced a detailed account of how many of the richest people in the country pay little, and sometimes nothing, in income taxes because of how the tax law works. (No wrongdoing is alleged in the report.)

While the notion that the rich pay little in taxes relative to average wage earners has long been known or suspected, granular details on individual taxpayers is considered highly private and only rarely comes to light. The tax returns of former President Donald Trump were a matter of intense public interest and eventually were obtained, at least in part, by The New York Times last year.

The hard data, ProPublica wrote, "demolishes the cornerstone myth of the American tax system: that everyone pays their fair share and the richest Americans pay the most."

Bloomberg, a prominent Jewish philanthropist and the 13th-richest American, according to Forbes, features

prominently in the article.

He reportedly paid \$70.7 million on income of \$1.9 billion in 2018, which amounts to a 3.7% tax rate. The median American household typically pays about 14% in federal income tax. Bloomberg benefited from Trump-era tax cuts, write-offs on charitable donations and credits for having paid foreign taxes, according to ProPublica.

The tax data also showed that between 2014 and 2018, Bloomberg's wealth increased by \$22.5 billion while his tax burden for that period was \$292 million, or 1.3%.

The disparity points to a fundamental feature of the U.S. tax code. Income from wages or the sale of stocks is taxed. An increase in the value of an asset is not considered income and therefore is not taxed.

In a statement, a spokesperson said Bloomberg would act to discover who was responsible for the unauthorized release of his private financial records.

"We intend to use all legal means at our disposal to determine which individual or government entity leaked these and ensure that they are held responsible," the statement said.

Bloomberg's statement also said that the leak is a violation of his privacy.

"The release of a private citizen's tax returns should raise real privacy concerns regardless of political affiliation or views on tax policy," the statement said. "In the United States no private citizen should fear the illegal release of their taxes."

The statement also defended Bloomberg's record by noting his support for tax hikes on the rich during his presidential campaign, and his generous philanthropic giving — \$11 billion in his lifetime. When Bloomberg won the \$1 million Genesis Prize, which recognizes dedication to the Jewish community, for example, he gave away the money, mostly to Israel-related causes.

"Taken together, what Mike gives to charity and pays in taxes amounts to approximately 75% of his annual income," the statement said.

Among the other billionaires examined in the expose are two other Jews, George Soros and Carl Icahn, as well

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| Raz Benyamini       | Tillie Germain      | Allison Lax        | Gil Shimoni       |
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| Jeremy Brandspiegel | Hilary Goldman-Lori | Maya Lukeman       | Gil Sondheimer    |
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| <b>Brown University</b>    | Michigan State              | SUNY Buffalo                 | <b>Ann Arbor</b>               |
| Bryn Mawr College          | University                  | SUNY New Paltz               | <b>University of</b>           |
| Case Western Reserve       | Montclair State             | SUNY Purchase                | <b>Pennsylvania</b>            |
| University                 | University                  | SUNY Stony Brook             | University of Pittsburgh       |
| Chapman University         | Mount Holyoke               | <b>Syracuse University</b>   | University of Rhode            |
| Clark University           | College                     | Temple University            | Island                         |
| College of Charleston      | <b>New York University</b>  | The New School               | University of Rochester        |
| <b>Columbia University</b> | <b>Northeastern</b>         | <b>Tufts University</b>      | <b>University of Southern</b>  |
| <b>Cornell University</b>  | <b>University</b>           | <b>Tulane University</b>     | <b>California</b>              |
| CUNY Baruch                | Northwestern                | University of Arizona        | University of Virginia         |
| Dickinson College          | University                  | University of California,    | <b>University of</b>           |
| Drew University            | Pace University             | Santa Cruz                   | <b>Wisconsin, Madison</b>      |
| <b>Drexel University</b>   | Pennsylvania State          | <b>University of Chicago</b> | Vassar College                 |
| Elon University            | University                  | University of Colorado,      | Washington University          |
| <b>Emory University</b>    | <b>Princeton University</b> | Boulder                      | in St. Louis                   |
| <b>George Washington</b>   | Ramapo College              | University of                | <b>Wellesley College</b>       |
| <b>University</b>          | Rensselaer Polytechnic      | Connecticut                  | Wesleyan University            |
| Georgetown                 | Institute                   | University of Delaware       | <b>Yale University</b>         |
| University                 | <b>Rice University</b>      | University of Florida        | Yeshiva University             |
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\*Colleges listed in bold indicate where students have enrolled

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as Elon Musk, Jeff Bezos and Warren Buffett.

Soros, an investor who has contributed billions to charity, especially liberal causes, responded by saying he supports tax hikes on the wealthy.

"Between 2016 and 2018 George Soros lost money on his investments, therefore he did not owe federal income taxes in those years," a spokesperson said in a statement. "Mr. Soros has long supported higher taxes for wealthy Americans."

Icahn, meanwhile, took a different tack. The businessman, who is ranked as the 40th-richest American by Forbes, criticized ProPublica for its line of questioning.

In an interview, he was asked "whether it was appropriate that he had paid no income tax in certain years."

In response, Icahn said: "There's a reason it's called income tax. The reason is if, if you're a poor person, a rich person, if you are Apple — if you have no income, you don't pay taxes." He added: "Do you think a rich person should pay taxes no matter what? I don't think it's germane. How can you ask me that question?"

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## ● NEWS

# Lin-Manuel Miranda and My German-Jewish Oma Both Made 'The Heights' What It Is

*A new movie musical celebrates the Manhattan neighborhood that waves of immigrants have called home.*

By Steve North

Several years before skyrocketing to superstardom with "Hamilton," Lin-Manuel Miranda wrote the music and lyrics for the exuberant Broadway musical "In the Heights."

In the last act of the stage production, a salsa-flavored celebration of the Latino community of Washington Heights, a sign for "Rosario's Car and Limousine" service is taken down. Beneath it is the faded word "Bäckerei," German for "bakery."

It is the only reference in the play to the heyday of another immigrant group that settled on Manhattan's northern tip: German Jewish refugees and Holocaust survivors, about 20,000 strong.

When Miranda spoke to The Jewish Week in 2008, he said he wasn't aware of the German Jewish presence when he wrote the first draft of "Heights" as a Wesleyan University sophomore.

"But the summer after I wrote it," he recalled, "I got a job at the Manhattan Times. I started writing articles, and I learned a lot about the history of our neighborhood. I saw that even if there were no Latino people in Washington Heights, it would still be a classic immigrant community, given the large numbers of German and later Russian Jews."

The multiple Tony Award-winning show, which ran on Broadway from 2008-2011, has now gone Hollywood, with the film version making its COVID-delayed debut on June 11. It's a good time to remember Washington Heights for what it was and is, and the role it still plays in the New York Jewish narrative.

While I never lived there, my mother's German Jewish family did, following their escape from Nazi Germany in the 1930s, and after some years living in the East Bronx, just across the Henry Hudson Bridge from the Heights. I spent my childhood visiting my grandmother and her sister at 812 West 181st Street, along with countless other relatives in the surrounding area.

A typical day might include a stroll down the block to Gruenebaum's bakery for lebkuchen and water challah and a stop at Bloch and Falk for kosher aufschnitt (cold cuts).

Along the way we'd pass friends sitting outside on folding chairs reading the German-language Aufbau newspaper or bouncing their grandkids on their knees and reciting "Hoppe hoppe, Reiter" (Hop, Hop, Rider!).

In a 2020 exhibit, "Refuge in the Heights," the Leo Baeck

Institute in Manhattan recalled how the neighborhood in the shadow of the George Washington Bridge was, for German and Austrian Jews fleeing the Nazis, “fertile ground upon which to build new lives.”

“In the Heights, refugees saw familiar names and faces, German-speaking businesses and clubs, and Jewish institutions established by those of East-European descent who had made their way uptown in the years prior,” according to the exhibit. “By the end of the 1930s, approximately 37 percent of Washington Heights was Jewish, most German-speaking.”

The area long had a Puerto Rican and Cuban component, but the large influx of Dominicans beginning in the mid-1960s turned Washington Heights into “Quisqueya Heights,” for an indigenous name for what became the Dominican Republic. While many of the older Jewish immigrants stayed put, their children and grandchildren joined the Jewish exodus to the suburbs. Slowly, the Bachenheimer and Nussbaum families were replaced by the Benitez and Nunez clans. Synagogues closed, the Aufbau gave way to the Dominican Times News, and it became easier to score an empanada than a Sachertorte.

The late Dr. Steven Lowenstein, author of “Frankfurt on the Hudson,” the definitive book on the German Jewish culture of Washington Heights, told me in 2008 that the population change was a prime example of “ethnic succession.”

“It’s a cyclical thing,” explained Lowenstein, a distant cousin of mine who grew up in the Heights, “and in general, memory of the previous ethnic group fades quickly. In this case, there was much hostility to the German Jews at first from the Irish population, but fewer problems between the Jews and Hispanics. They didn’t mix a lot, but there never was that much tension.”

The tension in recent decades has been sparked by the area’s gentrification, which is pushing out Dominican families who have lived there for generations. Many young Jews are again calling the area home, either attracted (for a time) by affordable rents or the proximity to Yeshiva University.

Miranda captures the dreams and frustrations of this barrio in transition in music and words filled with warmth and pride, and it all seemed strangely familiar to me when I first watched the play. That didn’t surprise him.

“What’s wonderful about it,” Miranda told The Jewish Week during the 2008 run, is the “older (Jewish) women who come up to me after the show and say ‘I lived on 173rd and Pinehurst in 1943, and it felt just like that.’ We all have immigrant parents and grandparents who did a difficult job that nobody wants to do, so that their kids could do better. And people are responding to the universal nature of that.”

The German Jewish “Breuer” community remains a presence in Washington Heights, along with a separate Jewish influence from Yeshiva U., but I know I won’t be able to find any bottles of my Oma Jenny’s beloved “himbeersaft” (raspberry syrup) among the “Productos Tropicales” now sold in the bodegas of St. Nicholas Avenue.

She moved out of the area in the 1980’s, but one great-aunt remained in her apartment on 180th Street until her death in 2004 at age 95. When I asked Tante Herta if she minded being the very last “yekke” in a building then filled with Dominicans, she said, “Why should I mind? They’re nice people, and very nice to me.”

Perhaps she saw in their lives a reflection of her own family’s struggles. Or, as Lin-Manuel Miranda put it, “At the end of the day, it’s an immigrant community, no matter which immigrant group it is.”

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## ● NEWS

# In Hipster Williamsburg, Hasidic Jews Are the Real Counterculture

*A new book shows the religious and real estate forces that have turned Brooklyn’s Orthodox into a political and economic power.*

By Shira Hanau

Brooklyn’s Williamsburg neighborhood is known as a center of gentrification and a gathering place for the

cool young hipsters of New York City. A short walk from the Lower East Side over the Williamsburg Bridge, it's also home to one of the most concentrated Hasidic Jewish communities in New York.

In their new book, "A Fortress in Brooklyn: Race, Real Estate, and the Making of Hasidic Williamsburg" (Yale University Press), Nathaniel Deutsch and Michael Casper unpack the history of Jewish Williamsburg and the collision of its pious Jewish community with the forces of commerce and urban development.

They show how the Satmar and other Hasidic movements represented an alternative version of the "New York Jew" — the assimilated cohort that was already heading to the suburbs when Williamsburg began to fill with strictly Orthodox refugees from Hitler's Europe. Moreover, while their fellow Jews were largely joining the professional class, the Hasidim had more in common with their Puerto Rican and African-American residents as proponents for and beneficiaries of federal and state aid to the poor.

"Rather than an Eastern European shtetl miraculously transported to Brooklyn, the Hasidic enclave in Williamsburg is a distinctly American creation, and its journey from the 1940s to the present is a classic New York City story," they write.

We spoke to Deutsch, professor of history at the University of California, Santa Cruz, and Casper, a writer with a Ph.D. in history from UCLA, about their book in an event at the American Jewish Historical Society on May 23. This conversation has been edited and condensed from a transcript of that discussion.

**Shira Hanau: How did you decide to write this book?**

Michael Casper: Nathaniel and I were both living in or near Williamsburg over 10 years ago, and separately had been spending time in the Hasidic community. We had made contacts there. I really loved to walk around there and buy Yiddish newspapers and speak a little Yiddish. When Nathaniel and I met, it was at the time of the [economic] crash and huge wave of foreclosures in and around Williamsburg. Some of those Zip codes had the highest rate of foreclosures in the city. That whole neighborhood went through a massive transformation, which we watched in real time. I think we both had sort of separate interests in various aspects of the neighborhood,

religious aspects, social dynamics, and gentrification. And how the Hasidim themselves were expanding into other neighborhoods like Bed Stuy really interested us.

Nathaniel Deutsch: I had lived in Williamsburg since the 1990s, but in the hipster part of Williamsburg, a few blocks away from the Hasidic part. I became friends with a Hasidic community member and he and I would learn together in a shtiebel, a small synagogue, that actually became part of the epicenter for those Hasidim who really ended up opposing gentrification. He used to take me around to different places in the neighborhood and introduce me to people.

And the second thing was that when my wife was pregnant with our second daughter, she had a midwife who was in the Hasidic part of the neighborhood who had delivered 3,000 babies to Hasidic women, including one woman who had 17 babies. And so that was another entree and made me curious about a totally different aspect of the community

**Getting access into Hasidic communities can be very difficult. How did you build those relationships and get people to trust you and to speak candidly, especially with women?**

MC: Some people were willing to answer, some not, some women answered, some didn't. We also interviewed some major Hasidic real estate developers, and we came to them in different ways. Some through contacts, in one case, through a Hasidic, contact. In another case, my friend's brother happened to live in a building that was developed by someone we were already writing about and interested in. I found that people spoke candidly to us.

ND: In the case of a number of the women that I interviewed, some of them I met through male relatives, and others I just met independently. There were some differences in terms of where the interviews would take place. Learning was a way that I can gain entree into the male [community]. It's a very gender-segregated community. When it came to women, most of the interviews I conducted were in people's homes, or in a coffee shop outside of Hasidic Williamsburg, or even more typically in lower Manhattan. But people actually were very willing to talk in general. They were kind of curious about us. People would often ask, what's your family name?

Where do they come from? And what's your family status? Like, are you married, do you have kids, those kinds of things. It's interesting always when you interview people to also see how they're situating you.

***The relationships between the Hasidic community in Williamsburg and non-Jewish community leaders or politicians were often better than relationships with Jewish but non-Hasidic elected officials. Can you say a little more about that and why that is?***

ND: There was an earlier Jewish community in Williamsburg, it was one of the largest Jewish communities in New York City, and it was known as the most Orthodox Jewish community already in the 1920s and 1930s. That was one of the reasons that the Hasidim were initially attracted to it. And yet — there was tension. The Hasidic groups were very concerned that their followers would be influenced by the local Jews, even more than non-Jews, because the other Jews represented a different Jewish path. You would see accounts where children would call other Jews, including Orthodox Jews, “shkut-zim,” which is a pejorative term for non-Jews. And these were other Jews!

At the same time, the Satmar [Hasidim] became very notorious for being profoundly anti-Zionist, at a time when Zionism was increasing in popularity among American Jews. So they were distanced from other Jews in the U.S. in that regard, too. So there's a variety of reasons why they end up becoming distanced and they see it as a way of protecting themselves and their community from negative influences. And ironically or not, the most negative influences arguably were from other Jews, in their mind, not from non-Jews.

***You write about how that sense of external danger to the community shifts over time, eventually shifting to artists, hipsters and gentrification, which brought rising housing costs and spiritual dangers. What's the outsider threat in Williamsburg today?***

MC: I think that the hipster threat is kind of in the past too, interestingly. But yes, for many decades Hasidim lived mostly with Latino and African-American neighbors. And when the artists and later college graduates and young gentrifiers started to move to the area, the Hasidim, similarly to the way they saw other non-Orthodox Jews in an earlier period, saw these tattooed people

with dogs, who laugh loudly in the street as a potential threat for their children in particular.... It was a question of modesty, too, in a lot of cases, and they would write about how women would dress in the neighborhood, which was a kind of a threat to to the general, modest character that they tried to keep.

ND: The gentrification of Williamsburg occurred at the same time as other changes that were impacting the Hasidic community in the neighborhood as well as haredim [in general.] That was things like the internet and the exposure to all sorts of different influences and luxury goods and things that previously were not available to Hasidim — the general embourgeoisement of the community. So a certain segment of the community in particular became wealthier. If you look at Hasidic media, you start to see ads for things like vacations in Switzerland, or spend Pesach in Miami or foods that are photographed in these really food magazine ways.

Michael especially has studied this phenomenon from the 1950s and on. The Satmar in particular had this ideology of being opposed to luksus, luxury. They're very ascetic as a kind of ideal, and the Satmar rebbe, [Rabbi Yoel Teitelbaum], their leader, tried to live out that ideal. And yet you see over time, this weakening of that opposition, at least in some camps within Hasidic Williamsburg, and then you also see a resistance to it.

***For the last several years, there's been a conversation in the Jewish community about whether Jews count as white given their history of being a minority and being persecuted. Did you ask people if they considered themselves white?***

ND: Hasidim in Williamsburg, their experience especially in the '50s until gentrification, is much more similar to their African-American and Puerto Rican neighbors than it is to, let's say, Ashkenazi or Eastern European or German Jews, or for that matter Sephardi Jews, living in the suburbs in that same period.

They live in public housing projects at a time when whites are leaving public housing projects in New York City and elsewhere in droves. And that's exactly when they move into these high rise public housing projects and almost all of their other neighbors in those projects are African Americans and Latinos. During the Great Society programs of Lyndon Johnson in the 1960s, Hasidim

distinguished themselves [from other Jews] for tapping into those government anti-poverty programs. They even at a certain point, under Reagan, are officially designated as a “disadvantaged minority” group by a government agency, and therefore gain benefits for that. And during the same period, they experienced the divestment of city services that happen to neighborhoods like Williamsburg, they also suffer from environmental pollution that has a strong racial and racist dimension in areas like Williamsburg in terms of putting things like incinerators there and so on.

So in those ways, are they or are they not white? They experienced a lot of the things that these definitely non-white groups experience now whether they see themselves as white or not.

I did ask that very explicitly recently to a Hasidic guy I know. And he kind of said, that’s not exactly the right question, in the sense that for him, it’s much more important, the Jewish versus non-Jewish distinction, and the Hasidic versus non-Hasidic distinction. I think that the answer is probably “both, and.” Does he see himself as white in the same way that white people [might]? I would say no, but in recent years one of the things that I find interesting about the rightward shift politically among a lot of Hasidim is to what extent that will also ultimately involve a kind of greater identification with a kind of white identity than previously existed. I’ll leave that as kind of an open question. But I wonder whether that may even be happening now, as a result of supporting Trump in great numbers and so on.

***You wrote about how the Hasidic community really spans the gamut of income, of dependence on welfare, dependence on public housing. You’ve got the developers with a lot of wealth on one end and people who are searching for affordable housing and often failing on the other. So how do you make sense of how this community falls under this umbrella of support for Trump?***

I think there’s always been wealth inequality within the Hasidic community. And that was certainly exacerbated by the economic crash in 2008 and the subsequent rise of a class of extremely wealthy Hasidic real estate developers. So there have always been wealthy Hasidim and many more working class Hasidim, many of whom use the Section 8 housing voucher or live in public housing. I don’t know how much cognitive dissonance there

is among Hasidim who, let’s say, use Section 8 and also vote for Republicans who would be ideologically opposed to welfare. I think that Hasidim vote really pragmatically, especially in local elections, and so they’ll vote for Republicans or Democrats. And even though there was a large swing towards Trump, there were some prominent Hasidic community members who supported Clinton [in 2016].

ND: I wonder whether now though, in this current moment, we’re seeing a shift, among some at least, away from that pragmatism which has typically characterized Hasidic voting in Brooklyn. It’s been profoundly pragmatic, especially on bread and butter issues, like when it comes to education, when it comes to housing and so on. To some extent, you could see that in the support for Trump insofar as he made gestures towards support for private schools and that sort of thing but there’s also to me a stronger ideological component, as well as an almost personal affinity. One thing that I heard from a number of people is this idea that Trump is the first candidate, at least at that level, “who sees us as a community.” I don’t think that it’s negating the pragmatic. And you see, for example, in the current mayoral race in New York City, the pragmatic concerns are coming up a lot.

***But at the same time, the Hasidic communities in New York City have largely coalesced around Andrew Yang in the mayoral race, rather than one of the more progressive candidates who might have been more interested in increasing public housing. I wonder if that surprised either of you?***

ND: I talked to a bunch of people in recent days about this and in different specific communities, and everyone I talked to says it’s between Yang and [Brooklyn Borough president Eric] Adams in terms of their support. Adams has a long-standing relationship with different Hasidic communities in Williamsburg, in Borough Park, in Crown Heights, and has cultivated it for a long time. There’s also a long history going back at least to Shirley Chisholm of African-American politicians in North Brooklyn having support from Hasidim. The Hasidim in Crown Heights supported her different candidacies very strongly, for example.

And then Yang came in as a kind of wild card and he distinguished himself by basically saying more or less unequivocally that he was going to take a hands-off atti-

tude towards [yeshiva] education. And there's a big controversy right now, as to whether Hasidic schools will be compelled to comply with state standards regarding the curriculum and secular subjects. In fact, if you took all the students in the Hasidic schools, it would be the second largest public school district in the state of New York, bigger than Buffalo, the second largest after New York City. So it's a lot of students and it also provides a lot of jobs for people teaching in the schools. And of course, educating Hasidic children is maybe the key to continuing the traditions and reconstituting the community and then recreating it with every generation. So I think that that's why Yang's gotten so much traction.

Why aren't they supporting somebody who would be more progressive when it comes to public housing? It's a good question in certain ways, and might be somewhat similar to the whole "What's the matter with Kansas?" argument, that certain people appear to vote against their interests. But then I think we should also expand the notion of what interests are. They might feel that the threat to education is more immediate and the likelihood that a New York City mayor will be able to deliver affordable housing, when that's really done at the federal level, is much slimmer and more distant and so it's better to focus on the more immediate threat.

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## ● NEWS

# New New York City transit CEO is son of Hebrew book publisher

By Shira Hanau

The new chief executive of the New York area's vast transit system is the son of a Hebrew book publisher.

John Nathan Lieber, who goes by Janno and currently serves as the Metropolitan Transportation Authority's chief development officer, will take over as chief executive, overseeing the subway system's operations.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced his picks to head the

troubled MTA on Tuesday.

Lieber is the son of the late Charles Lieber, who served as president of the Hebrew Publishing Company and chairman of the Reconstructionist Foundation, a founding organization of what today is Reconstructing Judaism. Lieber is married to Amy Glosser, a past president and current board member of the Hannah Senesh Community Day School in Brooklyn.

Cuomo also announced that Sarah Feinberg, the interim head of the MTA's subway and bus operations, will become its chair. Feinberg would be the first woman to head the organization.

The two executives, who must be confirmed by the State Senate, would be taking over the MTA as the system attempts to crawl out of a slump in daily riders during the pandemic. According to Gothamist, the subway lost 90% of its riders at its lowest point during the pandemic as workers stayed home during lockdown. Both Feinberg and Lieber have worked at the MTA and in other transportation-related roles for years.

"I have no prediction on when ridership comes back to pre-pandemic levels of moving millions of people every single day," Feinberg told Jewish Insider in March. "But it will come back in ways that people probably can't fathom right now because that's who we are."

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## ● EDITOR'S DESK

# Philip Roth Deserves Better Than a Tarnished Biography

*There's a lot to dislike about his vast body of work, but he remains 'a writer of substance and vision.'*

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

In an episode of "The Office," a pizza delivery guy calls Michael Scott a "loser." Dwight, Michael's deputy and wingman, sticks up for his boss:

Pizza guy [to Michael]: You're such a loser.

Dwight: What did you just call him?

Pizza guy: A loser.

Dwight: What did you say?

Pizza guy: A loser.

Michael: Alright stop, stop making him say it! You just made this worse, a whole lot worse.

And that, dear reader, is Blake Bailey's biography of Philip Roth in a nutshell.

The biography was supposed to be one of the big books of the spring, until women came forward accusing Bailey of grooming students for sex when he was a middle-school teacher. The publisher of the Roth biography, W.W. Norton & Company, said it would stop promoting and distributing the book, which quickly disappeared from bookstores before being picked up by another publisher.

The episode has raised questions about the relationship between an author's personal life and his work – about as Rothian a topic you can imagine. Should the book still be sold, read and discussed on its own merits despite the sordid allegations against its author (which Bailey denies)?

And of course, this is a book about Roth, who was dogged by charges of misogyny for years – in his life and his work. Some readers asked whether Bailey could have dispassionately weighed such allegations, or if perhaps Roth chose him as his authorized biographer because he knew or suspected that Bailey would be on his side. Roth's friends lament that he has been tainted by his biographer's downfall.

I got my (digital) copy of the bio through the New York Public Library. In the book, Bailey indeed comes off as a highly indulgent interlocutor. When it comes to Roth's priapic adventures and mistreatment of wives and lovers, Bailey is invariably on his subject's side.

But like Dwight, Bailey also makes things a "whole lot worse" for his friend by just getting others to repeat the questionable things Roth said and did. Roth is often aggrieved, callous and, even when it comes to lovers of

whom he was obviously fond, caddish and worse. He had a rock star's appetite and apparently a rock star's appeal to women, from college students to Jackie Onassis (he shared a kiss with the former First Lady, apparently, and nothing more). Women come and go, seemingly just long enough for Roth to turn them into characters in his fiction. Bailey often quotes Roth on his exes, and Roth's comments are often scathing and objectifying.

And like Michael Scott, Roth can be a wildly self-incriminating narrator. Bailey invariably takes Roth at his word when the novelist talks about the women in his life – and that word can be pretty self-incriminating, even if Bailey doesn't try too hard to see things from the women's perspectives.

On the other hand, most of the women in his life found Roth funny, charming and sexy, and if there any questions about consent or abuse I haven't come across them. When it comes to reading Roth, I am with Taffy Brodesser-Akner, who dismisses the idea that we shouldn't read "any work by an important and influential writer because of a person's bad but probably not criminal behavior."

The challenge with Roth, however, is that even if you ignore his behavior, you have to deal with his work. And Roth made it both easy and hard by writing obsessively about male characters that seemed suspiciously just like him, while denying that his books were autobiographical. But even taken on its own terms, readers in the post-#MeToo era will find a lot of his work cringe-worthy and worse. In his own forthcoming book on Roth, Jacques Berlinerblau also finds "a disturbing racist undertow in his prose."

***"The challenge with Roth, however, is that even if you ignore his biography, you have to deal with work."***

And yet Berlinerblau concludes that Roth is "a writer of substance and vision whose body of work merits serious contemplation." For those who might find his fiction unappealing, he offers a compromise: read Roth's "unsexed" works, which "steer clear of cultural politics." An unfamiliar reader might start with "The Ghost Writer," "Indignation" and "American Pastoral."

Bailey's biography is engaging, especially if you care about late 20th-century literature, publishing, celebrity culture and Jewish striving. But the best place to

encounter Roth is in his writing: funny, dark, scabrous, lyrical, loving, angry. No one writes sentences that are more propulsive, or that can turn so quickly from jewel-like precision to burlesque. His work is a cumulative portrait of American Jewish life that you don't need to admire or condone, but which contributes incalculably to our understanding of one version of who we were and are in a post-Holocaust world.

**Andrew Silow-Carroll** (@SilowCarroll) is the editor in chief of *The Jewish Week*.

## ● OPINION

# Why Benjamin Netanyahu Treated Jewish Media with Contempt

*I've seen the prime minister charm U.S. media elites and snub Jewish journalists, almost simultaneously.*

By Gary Rosenblatt

Whether this week marks the last of Benjamin Netanyahu's record-setting tenure as prime minister or is just a prelude to another never-count-him-out comeback, it seems a fitting moment to try to understand why he has consistently treated diaspora Jewish media with disdain.

It's something I've experienced personally on several occasions and it may well reflect the prime minister's attitude not just toward the Jewish press but toward American Jewry in general.

It seems ironic, if not baffling, that Netanyahu would be rude to the one group of journalists who are most sympathetic and accommodating. But then he is a man of many contradictions, with remarkable skills and ugly traits, towering oratory and gutter-level charges, and great success in protecting Israel from outside threats while allowing the weakening of Israeli society from within.

I have interviewed the prime minister one-on-one in his Jerusalem office, attended a number of meetings he's held with the press, and heard him speak many times in the U.S. and in Israel. Perhaps the most illuminating example of his contradictory behavior dates back to a visit he made to the U.S. when he first served as prime minister (1996-1999).

During that visit 25 years ago, Netanyahu's staff scheduled back-to-back sessions for him with two separate groups of journalists in a small conference room at his Manhattan hotel. The first group consisted of about a dozen major media figures, including the network news anchors of the day and A-list reporters. The second meeting was with the same number of editors of Jewish newspapers from around the country.

As editor and publisher of *The Jewish Week*, I was invited to the second meeting. But thanks to an influential friend at the local Israeli Consulate, I was allowed to attend the first meeting as well, though I was asked to keep a low profile.

When Netanyahu walked into the room with the media notables seated around a table, he was warm, friendly and upbeat from the outset. He greeted them individually by name, shaking hands, making small talk as he moved gracefully around the room. During the session, he handled questions with aplomb, on point, articulate, and used colloquial expressions at times – it was easy to forget that he was the leader of a foreign country. He was thoroughly charming.

About 15 minutes after the meeting, while Netanyahu was taking a break, my Jewish media colleagues were ushered into the room. When we were settled in, the prime minister re-entered, and immediately sat down at the head of the table. No schmoozing this time. He was all business, and began: "Ok, ask me your questions."

A bit taken aback by the abrupt opening, the chair of our delegation asked if it would be alright for us to introduce ourselves briefly, stating our names and professional titles. Netanyahu agreed. When it was my turn, the prime minister looked closely at me and said, "You look familiar."

I said, "I was with the first group here as well."

(What I wanted to add was, "I saw how engaging and

friendly you can be if you want to make the effort. What's your problem?")

For a split-second, Netanyahu seemed a bit taken aback, but he just nodded, and the intros continued.

The mood of the session could not have been more different than the earlier one. Though he was in the presence of loyal, influential Zionists who treated him with great respect, the prime minister was curt, contentious and clearly couldn't wait to be done with us.

### "ASK ME YOUR QUESTIONS"

A few years later, when I was in Israel, I was granted a one-on-one interview with Netanyahu in his Jerusalem office. I was ushered in by an aide who announced my name as I sat down in a chair facing the prime minister. He wore a leather bomber jacket and was seated at his desk, reading through a document in front of him.

"Go ahead, ask me your questions," he said without looking up. He was using a yellow outliner pen to mark his reading material.

I wasn't sure how to proceed, and waited for him to make eye contact. After a moment, he repeated his request. I waited again — it felt like minutes but was probably only a few seconds — before proceeding, reluctantly, with the interview.

I don't remember the details of what transpired, only that I was thrown by Netanyahu's rudeness, and that the agreed-on 45-minute session ended abruptly when an aide came in to announce that the prime minister was needed for a pressing matter. It seemed pre-arranged; the prime minister got up and followed him out of the office without a word or gesture to me.

One more: Five years ago, at a Jewish media conference in Jerusalem I attended with dozens of colleagues from the U.S., Europe and South America, Netanyahu addressed our group and was ornery from the outset. His manner was challenging and dismissive, interrupting the moderator, the Forward's Jane Eisner, and suggesting alternative topics. At one point he evaded a question about his government's relations with American Jewry, and responded, in effect, "why not ask me about Israel's impressive dairy output?" He then waxed eloquent on the subject and had an aide display a chart on the wall

with statistics about Israel's prolific cows.

"After the session ended, some of the women journalists in the room were furious, sure that he acted as he did because I was the moderator," wrote Eisner. "I appreciated their support, but male colleagues tell me that Netanyahu can be similarly dismissive to them, too."

How does one explain this behavior?

I turned to two close colleagues and veteran Bibi-watchers — journalist and author Yossi Klein Halevi in Jerusalem and Mideast expert David Makovsky in Washington — and asked why they think Netanyahu treats Jewish media so shabbily. Is it because he doesn't respect us as journalists? Or because he believes that diaspora communities are less relevant to Israeli politics? Or neither, or both?

"Bibi treats his friends worse than anyone," Klein Halevi responded, "which is why, at the end of the day, he doesn't have any. He takes them for granted and abuses their trust. That's why this new government is being led, in part, by three of his former closest aides," Naftali Bennett, Avigdor Lieberman and Gideon Sa'ar.

"The American Jewish media was simply in his pocket," Klein Halevi continued, "or so he assumed, and he could treat them with the special contempt he reserved for those on his side."

***"Bibi treats his friends worse than anyone," said Yossi Klein Halevi.***

Makovsky believes Netanyahu views diaspora Jewish media in the larger context of his attitude toward American Jewry — seen as declining dramatically in relevance.

On a practical level, he noted, diaspora Jews don't vote in Israeli elections and so are "less central for his [Netanyahu's] purposes to cultivate." Similarly, the prime minister focuses mainly on Israeli media, which he views as either for him or against him, so diaspora media is less important.

The prime minister has told those who meet with him privately that, with the exception of the Orthodox, "American Jews will last another generation or two ... due to assimilation and low fertility rate," Makovsky said. "This has enabled him to discount the liberal attitudes and voting trends of non-Orthodox American Jews and not think of

the impact of a few of his policies on the relationship.”

In addition, Netanyahu has said in private that as long as he has the support in America of Evangelical Christians, who vastly outnumber Jews, and the Orthodox Jewish community, he is in good shape.

We'll know in the coming days the shape of Netanyahu's immediate future. But even if the “change” coalition is sworn in, no one who knows Bibi Netanyahu believes he can be counted out.

*Gary Rosenblatt was editor and publisher of The Jewish Week from 1993 to 2019. Follow him at [garyrosenblatt.substack.com](http://garyrosenblatt.substack.com).*

## ● OPINION

# This Pride Month, My Family Is Connecting the Dots Between Judaism and Queerness

By Shelly Jay Shore

The last time I went to Pride, I was about 10 weeks pregnant. It was June of 2019, and my best friend from college had come up from North Carolina to visit me in New York.

Between my new pregnancy — and with it, the knowledge that this would be my last Pride as a non-parent — and my determination to show my friend the best experience for her first out-and-proud Pride adventure, we put together an agenda for a day that I hoped would be perfect. We grabbed a delicious breakfast in the East Village (I still have the occasional dream about those huevos rancheros), then made our way over to the mainstream Pride parade route, because it seemed important to give her the full experience. The cast of “Pose” drove past us, and I briefly swooned — entirely unrelated to the pregnancy — at the sight of Indya Moore's absolute in-person beauty, which was frankly just unfair.

When the crowd at the march got to be too much, we took the subway up to Central Park to meet up with the Queer Liberation March. We missed most of the march but were just in time for the speaker program; a kindly older lesbian with the style of a Berkshire-county hippie offered us a corner of her picnic blanket. Clouds gathered as we listened to the incredible voices, and when John Cameron Mitchell took the stage with a performance of “The Origin of Love,” the sky opened up above us.

Within minutes, we were soaked. And it was one of the most beautiful experiences of my life.

I held that moment — wet and laughing and delighted, between a woman I didn't know who had declared herself my “lesbian mother for the day,” and a dear friend who was just beginning her queer journey — close to my chest last June, when in-person Pride events were cancelled en masse as Covid-19 swept across the country and the world.

Prior to the pandemic, I hadn't really decided how I wanted to handle Pride once I was a parent. Would I pop my kid in his baby sling and bring him into the celebration? Or would I leave him home with my partner and have a day of just being myself, queer and nonbinary and more than “just” (OK, not “just,” never “just,” but it does feel that way, sometimes, doesn't it?) a parent. In the end, any plan would have been irrelevant — in June 2020, Covid-19 was surging through New York. No one went to Pride that year. Events happened online, but I had a 6-month-old baby and crippling postpartum depression. My “observance” of Pride last year was my annual re-read of Virginia Woolf's “Orlando,” and not much else.

Fortunately, this year feels different, in many ways. My son is a toddler now, and everything is new and exciting for him. He's like a sponge, bright-eyed and full of curiosity, and I want, more than anything, to start building in him not just a connection to the beautiful, vibrant world of queerness that has been so revolutionary to me, but to start the building blocks of teaching the language of queerness. We model — and he repeats, chirping and delighted — “please” and “thank you” and “all-done!” Simultaneously, we model, and he witnesses, a family in which straightness is not default, and cisgender identity is not default. In our home, gender is an exploration, not a given set of parameters to be followed.

All of this, for me, is entwined with Jewishness. My queerness is inextricably linked to my Judaism — those identities enrich and deepen one another, and when it comes to bringing Pride home, I can't imagine teaching one without the other.

Like the queer community — so much of which is based in shared spaces and in-person connection — the Jewish world has also been almost entirely remote since last March. Just as I wistfully noted the passing of what could have been my son's first Pride experience, he also missed celebrating his first Passover with his cousins, dancing with our congregation for Simchat Torah, sharing meals in our synagogue's community sukkah on Sukkot. And yet, we brought communal rituals home, transforming them to make them meaningful.

This month, I'm connecting the dots between Judaism and queerness in the ways that bring them not just into our home, but into our nursery. Judaism is a religion of gendered practices, and challenging those, even in loving and intentional ways, sometimes feels uncomfortable, even irreverent. When we read the Jewish books we regularly receive from PJ Library, we look at how Jewishness is represented: what kind of language is used? Who performs different blessings and rituals? What kinds of families do we see? (One of my son's go-to, "no, mommy, I will pick!" books is "Havdalah Sky," which features a family with two moms. I count as something of a parental victory!)

There's anxiety and discomfort, too, in directly changing or challenging Jewish traditions and practices. Since my son was born, we've given him the traditional Friday night blessing for boys every Shabbat, "may God make you like Ephraim and Menasheh." This month, I asked my husband if he would consider expanding that blessing to also include the matriarchs: Sarah, Rebecca, Leah, and Rachel. After all, these are the women we would hope for him to emulate, if he were our daughter and not our son. But, then again, why should we want our sons to only grow up to be like the men in our Jewish legacy? Why wouldn't we want him to honor Sarah's laughter, Rebecca's generosity, Leah's resilience, Rachel's determination?

For me, someone who grew up with little Jewish ritual at home, adapting this prayer is an easy yes. For my hus-

band, who received the traditional blessing from his father every Shabbat of his childhood, it's harder. There's legacy there, and love, and a desire to honor that history. So it becomes a conversation, a gentle meeting of different priorities, an honoring of one another's perspectives — and all of that is something for our son to witness and learn from.

It seems like cheating to say intentional communication is queer culture, but in some ways, it's true: queerness doesn't privilege one gender's perspective over another. It doesn't assume authority in relationships, doesn't assume that one partner has the final say. And that, too, is Jewish — after all, there's that old expression that if you have two Jews in a room, you'll have three opinions. For all the gendered hierarchy in our tradition, we're a people who love to debate. Small wonder that queer Jews are so opinionated.

Many Pride events are back in person (with new restrictions) in 2021, though as an immunocompromised person, I'm not quite ready to attend them. Discovering ways to bring Pride home to my parenting — and make it Jewish — has been an exploration and a joy, even in its tension and wistfulness for the big community events that I miss. Every day has been a new opportunity, a new way to teach and learn and grow along with my son, from sharing books about pronouns to using gentle rhymes to remind him that the world is beautiful, and vibrant, and full of incredible potential for him to be whoever he wants to be.

And when he reaches out to touch a rainbow on his t-shirt and say "todah!" (thank you) in his bright, toddler-happy voice, it feels just like that moment on the grass in Central Park, when the sky opened up and drenched us. It feels like serendipity, and connection, and sweetness.

It feels like Pride.

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● **SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT KORACH**

## Even Evildoers Get It Right Sometimes

*Korach may be a villain, but his words contain some sparks of light.*

By Freema Gottlieb

There is a Hasidic understanding that, to exist at all, even evil must contain some sparks of light. For if evil did not speak the language of goodness, it would have no drawing power.

In this week's portion, Korach challenges the leadership of Moses, his first cousin. Couching his aspirations, ostensibly of a totally spiritual nature, in democratic, inclusive language, Korach accuses him of nepotism, goading him for conferring the high priesthood on his brother, Aaron.

Put on the defensive, Moses and Aaron "fall on their face."

Was Moses unable to remember his response 40 years earlier, at the Burning Bush, when God originally appeared to him and called him to lead the Chosen People? Feeling unworthy, he pleaded desperately that God choose someone else, as he "was not a man of words." But God would brook no denial that He had chosen the right person, suggesting Moses share the public relations side of the job, and ultimately the High Priesthood, with his older brother, who had a greater gift for language and was more approachable.

What did Korach say to provoke such anguish and self-doubt at this later stage in Moses' career, when he was more experienced and had proved his worthiness countless times over?

Could Moses and Aaron have reacted this way precisely because they, too, were momentarily seduced by Korach's gift for fine language, as when he says, "You take too much power to yourselves, for all the community is holy and God is in their midst" (Numbers 16: 3)?

Years later, the prophet Isaiah expresses almost the

same sentiment: "Your People are totally righteous, a branch of My planting, the work of My hand, in whom I take pride. The least shall become a thousand" (Isaiah 60: 21–22). What is the difference?

Korach's entire stand turns on the translation of kol, "all." While the sentiment expressed may have been admirable, the meaning is not precise. With the incontestable proposition that all Jews have some point of holiness in them, was he suggesting that each Jew was equally holy in his or her own way? Or that, as a collective, the people are holy, absolutely?

To describe what equality signifies in the next world, the Izbitser, a 19th-century Hasidic thinker, quotes from the Talmud (Taanit 31a) the wonderful metaphor of the circle dance, where "all points in a circle are equidistant from the center, with no one closer than another."

The differences between Korach and Isaiah and the Talmud lie in timing as well as aspiration. While the prophet and the Talmud describe a desired future, Korach is intimating that this vision is true in a particular political context in his own time.

According to the Midrash, Korach brought out 250 prayer shawls dyed completely blue — a color that connotes holiness — as a visual aid to demonstrate the holiness of the Jewish people. Wearing it as a uniform with the notables of Israel he had lured to his side, he taunted Moses.

This example alone begins to reveal the totalitarian territory to which Korach is headed. Unlike a tallit, a simple four-cornered garment with the mandatory fringes containing one thread of blue, Korach's all-blue version posits some unified, otherworldly abstract that erases the performance of any particular ethical or ritual act.

In the sparring match that follows, Moses shows he understands completely the motivation underlying the rhetoric of his cousin, a Levite: "Does it seem a small thing that the God of Israel has separated you from the congregation of Israel, to bring you near Him to perform the service of the tabernacle?"

Here the Izbitser raises an interesting point: "When God gave Korach the status of a Levite, Korach didn't turn it down on the grounds that nobody in Israel should be higher in status than anyone else." For all the intrinsic

truth of Korach's words about the holiness of each Jew, he himself did not live by his own teaching. Otherwise, he would have demurred, as Moses initially did, from being part of a hierarchy.

This suggests his real motivation: to take over the High Priesthood for himself. Despite his eloquent espousal of equality as an ethical value, he exposed himself as a power seeker incapable of sharing.

With this realization, Moses proposes to Korach and his following that they take part the next day in a "spirituality" contest, in which Aaron and all of Korach's party compete with incense offerings. However, only one—the holiest and closest to God—would emerge from this ordeal alive. The rest would be consumed with fire.

Korach and his faction accepted these conditions, again negating Korach's words: If indeed he believed in equality, why would he have agreed to Moses's terms? Only one would be the winner—and he believed it would be him! His own following would die, but what did he care! He was only exploiting them for his own ends.

Korach was clever enough to understand the stakes yet was driven by the ambition to be the last one standing, at the expense of his followers. His actions betray his language as empty rhetoric, and his true motivation as rooted in pure selfishness.

*"For all the intrinsic truth of Korach's words about the holiness of each Jew, he himself did not live by his own teaching."*

In vindication of Moses and his mission, God has the earth "open her mouth" and swallow Korach and his faction, while Korach's 250 followers were indeed consumed with holy fire.

#### CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

**Tammuz 1, 5781 | Friday, June 11, 2021**

- **Light candles at:** 8:09 p.m.

**Tammuz 2, 5781 | Saturday, June 12, 2021**

- **Torah reading:** Korach, Numbers 16:1–18:32
- **Haftarah:** Samuel I 11:14–12:22
- **Shabbat ends:** 9:18 p.m.

Nevertheless, the Izbitser reminds us, Korach's words — "All the community is holy and God is in their midst" — are true for all time, even though their speaker was unreliable. Indeed, because of the beauty of this language alone, King David rehabilitates not only Korach's surviving descendants but Korach himself, with several psalms that are described in their opening verses as being by the "sons of Korah." The implication is that Korach's children, or the few who repented, survived to take their place as lead musicians in the Sanctuary.

Although we must be wary of the specious use of language, the suggestion is that even the trappings and "children" of goodness will ultimately find their true function for the benefit of us all.

*Freema Gottlieb is the author of "The Lamp of God: A Jewish Book of Light," available as a Kindle edition on Amazon.com. She has written for the New York Times Book Review, the New Republic, the Times Literary Supplement, and Partisan Review. Her talks on the weekly Torah reading may be found on YouTube at [www.youtube.com/channel/UCVcjCP-pb9O\\_OXQo5AJAn44A](http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVcjCP-pb9O_OXQo5AJAn44A)*

## ● MUSINGS

# Why Jew Hatred is Different

By David Wolpe

In the history of most group hatred, there is a limit – geographical, economic or cultural. Some people may express hatred of Asians, but they do not wish to wipe China and Japan off the map. Some people may hate African Americans, but they don't wish the world to be rid of all people of color, even if they wish their corner of the world to be so purged. Generally, hatred has the limit of one's personal experience – if the hater need not be in contact with or have his life changed by a certain group, that is sufficient. The knowledge that they exist somewhere else does not disturb his sleep.

Yet Jews have repeatedly discovered the totalizing nature of Jew hatred. For centuries Jews were for Christian's evidence of a fundamental rebellion against their faith

who had to be converted or destroyed. For Muslims, Jews represented a rejection of Muhammad's message, and so the conversion of the Jews, and the affirmation of Islam, was a constant goal. For the Nazis, Jews were a threat to the fascist hegemony and had to be wiped out.

When Jews hear strains of hatred, they do not hear a skirmish, they hear a massacre. In 1979 Habib Elghanian, who had served as president of the Tehran Jewish society, was executed for friendship with "enemies of God." The Iranian Jewish community did not assume that organizing protests would be the most effective response. Instead, they left Iran en masse, losing billions of dollars in assets, homes and businesses, because Jewish history had taught them that the execution of leader for anti-Semitic reasons leads to one end. Even for a community that was relatively untouched by the holocaust, its lessons were not lost: the hostility of a government expressed against Jews is a harbinger of genocide.

Today when Jews hear about the spike in attacks, here, in Latin America and in Europe, they cannot ignore the potential for catastrophe. When the ADL reports an increase in anti-Semitic rhetoric and action, it is more than a blip on the radar. Although it is true that America is a patchwork of many groups, and there is broad sympathy for Jews in this country, once one has had a heart attack every chest pain is a warning. Hatred of Jews, a virus that has infected humanity for millennia, is a different sort of hatred. Jews are seen as superhuman, controlling the world, and subhuman, vermin who are less than people. As the Jews of Germany learned, no amount of patriotism or influence can dissuade the haters. The only vaccine is the strength of people of goodwill and conscience. Do not be silent.

*Named the most influential Rabbi in America by Newsweek Magazine and one of the 50 most influential Jews in the world by the Jerusalem Post, **David Wolpe** is the Rabbi of Sinai Temple in Los Angeles, California.*

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## ● THE VIEW FROM CAMPUS

# I'm an American Student in Tel Aviv. Missiles and Sirens Weren't on the Lesson Plan.

*A rain of rockets led to intense debates about Israel, security and the possibilities for peace.*

By Batya Goldberg

On May 11 at 8:47 p.m. in Tel Aviv, I heard a siren ring throughout the city I have called home since moving here for college last year. My friends and I ran to a bomb shelter, something most of us had never thought we would have to do in our lifetimes.

I landed at university in Tel Aviv for the same reason many international students do: I took a gap year in which I experienced Israel and everything it had to offer internationals and I decided it wasn't time to leave. I never imagined, however, that during a time when I was supposed to be experiencing new people and ideas, I would also be experiencing war.

For the duration of a week, two to three rounds of rockets per day were fired onto my city by terrorists from Gaza. I spent many hours hiding in bomb shelters together with fellow students. We sang classic Israeli songs of unity, like "Gesher Tzar Meod," (The World Is a Narrow Bridge), while hearing the Iron Dome intercept rockets which were meant to kill innocent Israeli civilians, including students like myself. Hearing these rockets intercepted, I became aware that moments later, just an hour and a half drive from me to the south, innocent civilians in Gaza would be dying as well, at the hands of a war instigated by their own leaders.

One night, I found myself running again to the closest shelter as the sirens rang, only to find it locked. Israel

had not experienced an attack in the very heart and center of the country since 2019, when just a few rockets were fired into Tel Aviv and prior to that, since the 2014 war. Many of the shelters were not opened since no one had expected any attacks on Tel Aviv. My friends and I had to run up and down various floors until finding a shelter that was open. Sometimes, we just hid in the secured stairwells.

In one shelter I interacted with students from Arab villages in the north. These fellow students had friends in Gaza, and I heard second-hand of the threat Palestinians face from Hamas. I cannot imagine the fear of those who aren't warned with sirens and don't have time to find shelter. Israel says Hamas is using Palestinians in Gaza as human shields, which is a war crime.

When not in the shelters, life was anything but normal. That week, everyone on campus was not only anxiety ridden, but full of tension and debate. Although having a close group of friends by my side throughout this experience made it far more bearable, it was still traumatic. While out for coffee with a friend in the center of the city, 30 café patrons and I became silent upon hearing a plastic bag explode. At that moment, I finally understood how Israelis have been living their whole lives, under the constant psychological stress of knowing that at any moment, their lives and the lives of their families, friends, and children could be under threat again.

***“Even worried for my own safety, it was important for me to vigorously defend Israel and its right to defend itself when attacked.”***

One of the most striking things about the last few weeks was the way we all spoke to each other. Among the students' group chat, people of all different backgrounds exchanged ideas and beliefs about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often in argumentative tones. Glued to my phone as the messages came in, I watched arguments unfold between students like myself who adamantly support Israel, and students who refuse to denounce Hamas and their actions.

The latter, who have benefited greatly from the country they chose to study in, were attacking it even as rockets were being fired at them from Gaza. This was heart-breaking. Even worried for my own safety, it was important for me to vigorously defend Israel and its right to defend itself when attacked. Some of the peers with

whom I disagreed began to somewhat understand my view. This inspired me to continue sharing my concerns and understandings regarding Israel, misinformation and blatant propaganda circulating on the internet.

Many of my friends from New York have reached out to me and asked how I am doing after the attacks. I can only say yes, I am fine. I am fine due to the incredible system Israel has in place to protect those in the country. My entire mindset, however, has changed. I am now much more aware of the incredibly real threat Israel faces from Hamas. Before this experience, I had heard from relatives and friends who have lived in Israel their whole lives what these attacks are like. Now, it is no longer a story I read in a text or in some newspaper article; it has become my reality.

I am not discouraged after experiencing these events firsthand, I am empowered. There can only be light ahead in the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as it does not feel like it can get any worse. And now, with the privilege of having two more years of studying here in Tel Aviv, I hope to continue to represent American Jewry in the fight for finding peace between the only Jewish state in the world and the rest of the Middle East.

***Batya Goldberg*** is a first year student at Tel Aviv University's International program studying psychology. She is originally from Brooklyn.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

**June 11 | 6:30 p.m.** Free**RSK Pride Drashah Shabbat**

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum delivers her annual Pride drashah on a special night in community with Congregation Beit Simchat Torah.

Watch the livestream at <https://cbst.org/livestream>

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**June 13 | 10:30 a.m.** Free**Amulets, Red Threads and Brachot: The World of Jewish Women's Practice**

Dr. Lindsey Taylor-Guthartz discusses her recently published book, "Challenge and Conformity: The Religious Lives of Orthodox Jewish Women," about the new ways Orthodox women are expressing themselves religiously. Hosted by Congregation Beth Shalom in Teaneck in partnership with Netivot Shalom.

Register at <https://www.cbsteaneck.org/event/author-discussion--lindsey-taylor-guthartz-.html>

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**June 15 | 6:00 p.m.** \$20**Ethel Rosenberg: An American Tragedy**

92Y presents a conversation with Anne Sebba, author of "Ethel Rosenberg: An American Tragedy," who argues that the convicted spy suffered the death penalty for a crime she hadn't committed.

Buy tickets at <https://www.92y.org/event/bill-goldstein-and-anne-sebba>

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**June 15 | 6:00 p.m.** Free**From Evangelical Bishop to Jewish Leader: The Jewish Communities in Cameroon**

Kulanu presents Laurent Elouna, discussing his journey from Evangelical bishop to leader of the Jewish communities in Cameroon.

Sign up at <https://kulanu.org/online-speaker-series>

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