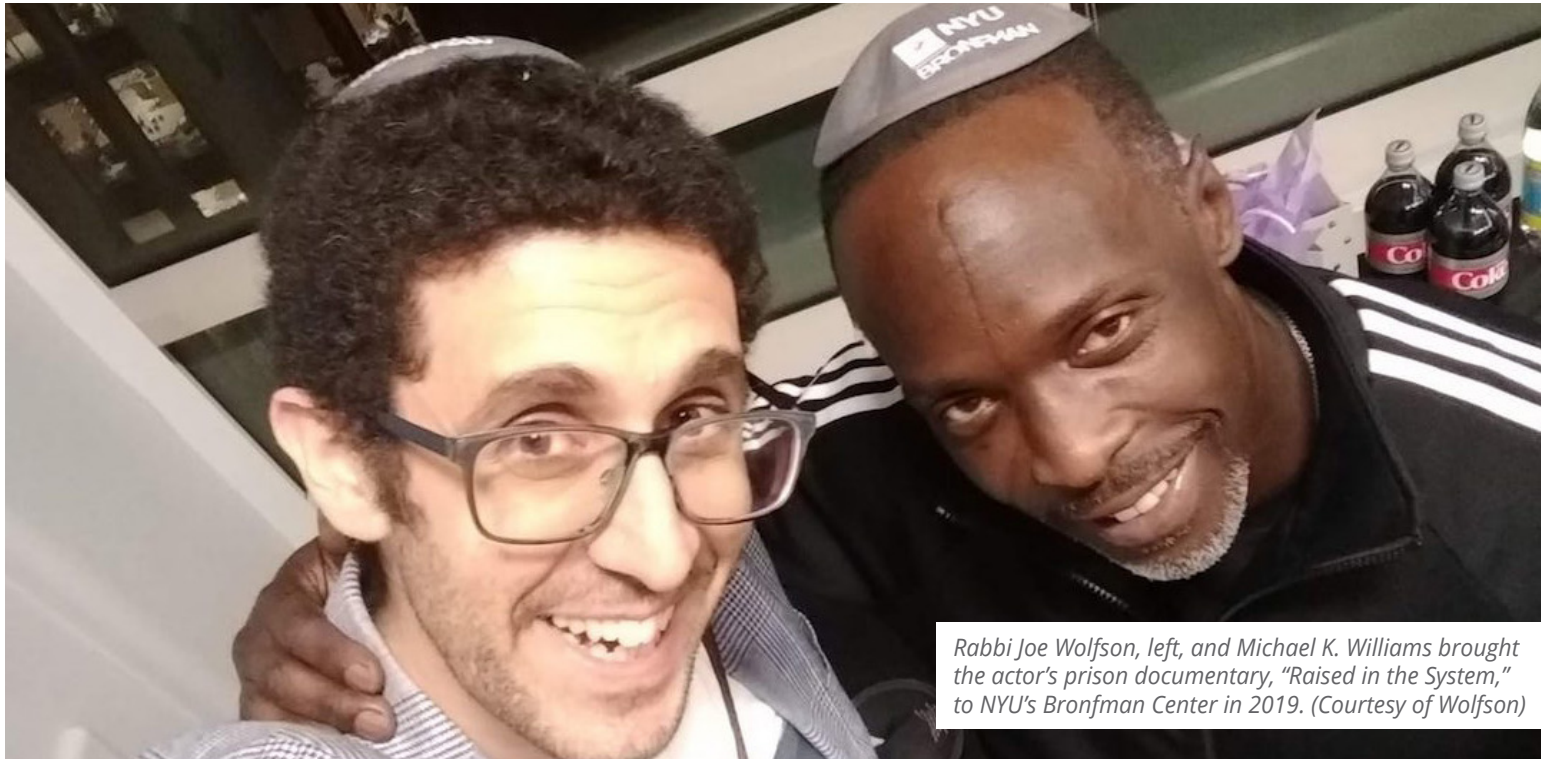


# The New York Jewish Week/end

YOUR DOWNLOADABLE, PRINTER-READY SHABBAT READ FROM THE NEW YORK JEWISH WEEK



Rabbi Joe Wolfson, left, and Michael K. Williams brought the actor's prison documentary, "Raised in the System," to NYU's Bronfman Center in 2019. (Courtesy of Wolfson)

## Must read

Kosher Restaurants Fear Losing Customers Over NYC Vaccine Mandate / Page 4

Muslims and Jews Join in Congress to Press US Government for Kosher and Halal Food Relief / Page 5

For Jews with Eating Disorder, New Traditions Made Yom Kippur a Safer Experience / Page 6

Editor's Desk / Page 8

Opinion / Page 9

Sabbath Week / Page 12

Musings, David Wolpe / Page 13

Arts and Culture / Page 13

Events / Page 17

## ● NEWS

# The Omar I Knew: What 'The Wire' Actor Michael K. Williams Taught My Jewish Students at NYU

By Joe Wolfson

Between 2008 and 2011, one of the ways I survived in yeshiva was "The Wire," HBO's groundbreaking police drama. Tosafot and Rambam throughout the day, Brother Mouzone, Avon Barksdale and McNulty late at night.

Our beit midrash had a main lower part and an upper part up some steps. These were the low rises and the high rises. The fish pond in the garden was the docks. When one of my rabbis asked me about my dating life, the scene of imprisoned Avon asking young Marlo how things on the street were going came to my mind. I responded as Marlo did: "It's all in the game."

I can own my weirdness, but I wasn't alone. A friend who had attended elite

private schools and universities in the U.K. before moving to Israel to work in tech — his life was about as far removed from the Baltimore ghettos as possible — told me he loved “The Wire” so much because “I can just relate so well to the characters.”

Ridiculous and outrageous as this may be, it’s a testament to the unique brilliance of “The Wire.” I can only assume that if Orthodox Ashkenazi Jews responded this way to “The Wire,” then other cultural subgroups were similarly riveted.

To call it the greatest TV show of all time is too simplistic. It’s a strong competitor for the most powerful presentation and trenchant critique of inner-city America — as relevant now as when it first came out. Where “The Sopranos” is a microscopic focus over five seasons of a single individual, “The Wire” has a cast of hundreds. My havruta at Cambridge, an English literature student who first introduced me to the show, made the astute observation that “The Wire” can be usefully compared to a Dickens novel in which the central character is the city of London. The central character in “The Wire” is the city of Baltimore.

Yet even amid all this brilliance, one character especially stood out. Omar Little, a frightening stick-up artist who nevertheless lived by a code of honor, stole nearly every scene in which he appeared. As *The Guardian* once put it, “if ‘The Wire’ is a cult, then Omar is a cult within a cult.”

The actor who played Omar Little, Michael K. Williams, died last week on the eve of Rosh Hashanah at the age of 54. Years after the show aired, I had the privilege of getting to know Williams. His passing and the memories it brought back suggested what society in general and the Jewish community in particular can learn from the life he lived.

In 2015, I began working as a rabbi at New York University’s Bronfman Center for Jewish Life. Downtown Manhattan boasts more than its fair share of famous folk, and one day the man I could only think of as Omar literally bumped into me. Any desire to respect his privacy was overwhelmed by my excitement. Far from being annoyed at my intrusion, he was exceedingly gracious and even agreed to record a Shanah Tovah greeting for our community. We arranged to get coffee a couple of weeks later.

Humble, gracious, curious is how I would describe that coffee.

I asked a few questions about “The Wire.” Was the Sunday truce — when warring gangs would put down their arms — actually a thing? I told him how many Jews were obsessed with the show and completely baffled him when I showed him the brilliant Omar Omer counter.

We spoke personally. He told me that the money he had made from “The Wire” had been spent, but that he had a new opportunity coming up and the earnings would be put to good use. He told me about his family, and his plan to spend Thanksgiving with his mother, siblings and wider family. I told him about my mother-in-law who was fighting cancer. He empathized and recommended various CBD oils to alleviate her pains.

I told him about my work with students at NYU and he told me about his nephew who had recently left jail after 20 years and the HBO documentary “Raised in the System” they had made together focusing on the school-to-prison pipeline. He wanted to find audiences for the documentary’s message. I wanted to find a way for our community to think seriously about criminal justice. We decided to work together.

Few of the tributes in recent days have focused on Michael’s work as an activist, but I am reasonably confident that if he could choose one of his works that people would watch in the aftermath of his passing, it would be “Raised In The System.”

Shortly before Passover, in the spring of 2019, the Bronfman Center and the Orthodox Union’s Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at NYU hosted Michael for a viewing of the documentary and a panel discussion.

It’s impossible to watch the documentary and not feel broken-hearted over the lives of beautiful young people who get sucked up within the prison industrial complex. In its 45 minutes, the documentary takes a viewer from being an outsider to the issue to a passionate believer that incarceration rates are a national priority issue which must and can be fixed.

Yet the stars of the evening were not Michael and the documentary, but the guests he brought with him to tell their stories.

Dominic Dupont, Michael's nephew and documentary partner, had been released recently following two decades behind bars for murder. He said he "treated prison like a university," attained counseling qualifications and became an inspiration to other prisoners in helping turn around their lives.

Derrick Hamilton, who spent 27 years in jail for a crime he did not commit, taught himself law while inside and overturned his conviction — and those of many of his wrongfully convicted fellow inmates.

Dana Rachlin, a young Jewish woman and a frequent collaborator with Michael, came along with a dozen black teenagers whom she referred to as "her kids." Dana had founded a charity that worked with kids at the schools in Brooklyn with the highest school-to-prison graduation rate. Her work sought to break this pipeline and had achieved remarkable success.

Awe and humility are my abiding memories of the evening. A packed room of Jewish students were thinking deeply about what incarceration and freedom could look like, and about how justice could be structured around atonement for crimes and self-improvement rather than around punishment. Without exception, the students who spoke to me afterward — none of whom came from an activist background — expressed how much they would be bringing from the evening to their seder tables.

Michael, Dominic, Derrick and Dana stayed on for dinner after the event sharing stories, taking pictures, answering questions. Schmoozing. In addition to telling their critically important stories, they had also come to meet the audience, hear their stories and find common ground. A friend of mine — a rabbi of an Orthodox synagogue in the U.K. — saw my Facebook posts about the event and brought Derrick and Dana to speak to his community.

After the event, Michael said to me that "if the Black and Jewish communities could work together, nothing would be able to stop us."

Michael wished to tell the story of his own community, but simultaneously expressed a genuine curiosity about the Jewish community. We spoke about doing a series of conversations with one another on the book of Exodus — the original story of slavery and liberation — and its relevance to our times. One day he was in the build-

ing at the same time as Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, the chief rabbi of the United Kingdom, and expressed an interest in meeting the man I had described to him as "the premier Jewish thinker, a man obsessed with justice." The students' meeting with Rabbi Sacks ran overtime, otherwise the King would have met the Lord.

Michael was open about his struggles with addiction and passed away from a suspected drug overdose. His passing has been in my mind throughout this week of preparation for Yom Kippur. It feels appropriate to reflect on what we can all learn from those who face similar battles to Michael.

Maimonides lists the threefold requirement of teshuvah, or repentance, as confession (vidui), regret (charata) and determination for the future (kabala l'atid). I have seen no greater lived example of the struggle to live those three elements than those who struggle to overcome addiction.

Those people I have been privileged to know, such as Michael, for whom every day is a challenge, show us the truth that we would all do well to remember, that teshuvah is not something that is "achieved," a destination arrived at. Rather teshuvah, like the recovery from addiction, is an ongoing process and struggle that is never over but requires constant work and regular re-examination.

As Michael went through many struggles, he simultaneously used his story, fame and innate brilliance to help others. And he did this with humility and a smile.

No matter how great Omar Little is, Michael K. Williams was infinitely greater. May his memory be a blessing.

*Joe Wolfson is the rabbi of the Orthodox community at New York University and received the Jewish Week's 36 Under 36 honor in 2020 for his COVID relief work.*

**Subscribe to The Jewish Week newsletters**  
 Free to your inbox – sign up at:  
<https://jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/signup/>

---

**● NEWS**

# Kosher Restaurants Fear Losing Customers Over NYC Vaccine Mandate

By Lauren Hakimi

New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced last month that beginning Sept. 13, restaurants would have to ask customers for proof that they received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine in order for them to dine indoors or else be fined.

As the deadline approached, some kosher restaurants in New York City were still debating the consequences of complying — or not.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do,” Miriam Lebovitz, the manager of Milk N Honey in Borough Park, Brooklyn, said last week. “I think it’s going to hurt us very bad.”

For kosher restaurants in Borough Park, where many Orthodox Jewish residents have taken to the streets to burn masks and protest COVID restrictions, deciding whether to follow the city’s mandate means weighing the cost of fines against the cost of losing unvaccinated customers.

“I don’t know what customers will do,” Lebovitz said.

A kosher pizzeria owner in Brooklyn is more confident. The New Yorker, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of inviting government inspectors to his neighborhood, said he’ll “100%” lose customers if his restaurant starts asking for proof of vaccination, even though the new policy allows unvaccinated customers to still dine outdoors or get delivery.

“If we open up the store and put up the sign, nobody’s going to walk in,” he added, referring to the signs that some restaurants have put up saying masks are required for entry.

Joe Klein, manager of Cafe Paris in Borough Park, said that while he supports vaccination because he’s seen

the number of deaths caused by the coronavirus, he’s worried about losing unvaccinated customers.

While de Blasio hopes the mandate will push those on the fence to be vaccinated, Klein said that based on his conversations with customers, this will “definitely not” happen.

In the Zip code for heavily Orthodox Borough Park, only 44.65% of residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, according to city Health Department data. This is lower than the first-dose rate for the city overall, 66.8%. On Sept. 7, the most recent day for which the data was available, there was a seven-day rolling average of 1,446 daily COVID cases among city residents.

“There are people who’ve, God forbid, boycotted restaurants who are following the law,” said Elan Kornblum, who runs a Facebook group where “kosher foodies” have debated the city’s new policy. “That, I think, is disgusting.”

Rivky Amsel, a mother of five in Brooklyn, says she doesn’t support a boycott, but she also doesn’t want to go anywhere where she will be asked for vaccine proof.

“I feel bad for [the restaurants]. I do,” the Midwood resident said. “And I also really appreciate the establishments who stand up and say ‘This is not OK.’ You can’t ask people to say that. It’s not your business.”

“Being from a family of Holocaust survivors, I know that it’s terrible,” Amsel said. “People don’t see it that way — they see the equating of the asking for vaccine cards to anything related to the Holocaust as very, very extreme and negative. But me, I just can’t help it. I come from a family where, if my husband wore a yellow tie, my great aunt would say ‘We don’t wear yellow ties because it’s too similar to a yellow star.’

“I don’t think I’m alone in that feeling,” she added.

The mandate comes at a time when many restaurants, despite receiving government aid during the pandemic, have already been suffering financially. Their workers have faced harassment, too.

“It’s very, very rough, very hard to get money, even if we don’t put up the sign” requiring masks, the pizzeria owner said.

If he decides not to ask for vaccine proof, he risks in-

curing fines of \$1,000 after an initial warning, \$2,000 for a third offense and \$5,000 for any subsequent violations of the policy. Starting Monday, inspectors will be hitting neighborhoods in all five boroughs, de Blasio said Thursday.

But lingering questions remain.

“What happens if someone brings in a fake document?” Kornblum asks.

“Or what happens if someone comes in and gives them a problem and starts arguing with them? And we’re also wondering, how is the government going to enforce? Are these inspectors coming every day? Are they going to be walking up to restaurant customers and saying, ‘Can I see your passport?’”

Restaurant workers “have enough to deal with with reservations and no-shows and cancellations and a shortage of staff and rising costs of food and the entire gamut of what it takes to run a restaurant for decades, let alone the last couple of years,” Kornblum added.

Melissa Fleischut, CEO of the New York State Restaurant Association, said it’s not just kosher restaurants that are worried about the new policy.

“The concern is that they’re being put in a position where they have to police this, and some customers are very upset about the mandate and are pushing back on the staff,” Fleischut said.

In a survey conducted last fall by One Fair Wage, more than three quarters of restaurant workers surveyed said they experienced or witnessed hostile behavior, including sexual harassment, from customers when a worker tried to enforce COVID-19 safety protocols. Restaurant workers also reported a decline in tips.

“Don’t say ‘I’m not going to help the restaurant’ because you can still take out, you can still get delivery,” Kornblum said. “I encourage people to keep supporting restaurants and doing what you can, and just being respectful to others as well.”

**For advertising opportunities, contact  
advertise@jta.org**

## ● NEWS

# Muslims and Jews Join in Congress to Press US Government for Kosher and Halal Food Relief

By Ron Kampeas

WASHINGTON -- A congressional letter backed by Muslim and Jewish groups is urging the federal government to make kosher and halal meat available to observant Jews and Muslims through an emergency food program.

Rep. Grace Meng, D-N.Y., initiated the letter sent Wednesday to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. Forty-eight Democrats have signed the letter, which was obtained exclusively by the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

“As the United States continues to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic, as many as 29 million Americans continue to face food insecurity,” the letter says. “The pandemic has exacerbated this problem and we are deeply concerned about the share of kosher and halal meat and other protein options available to the many observant individuals and families who utilize” The Emergency Food Assistance Program, or TEFAP.

Other Democrats joining with Meng in asking fellow lawmakers to sign were Reps. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts; Ilhan Omar of Minnesota; and Ted Deutch of Florida. Deutch and Omar coordinating on the same issue is somewhat extraordinary: Deutch, who is Jewish, and Omar, a Muslim, have been sharply at odds on Israel policy.

In addition to Deutch, Jewish signers include Jake Auchincloss of Massachusetts; Suzanne Bonamici of Oregon; David Cicilline of Rhode Island; Steve Cohen of Tennessee; Josh Gottheimer of New Jersey; Elaine Luria of Virginia; Jerrold Nadler of New York; Jan Schakowsky of Illinois; and Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida.

The letter comes at the behest of a coalition of Muslim and Jewish groups, including ICNA Relief Muslims for Humanity, the Met Council on Jewish Poverty, MAZON: A Jewish Response to Hunger, Agudath Israel of America, Masbia Soup Kitchen Network, Jewish Women International and Network of Jewish Human Service Agencies.

Abba Cohen, Agudath Israel's vice president for government affairs, said in an interview that distribution of food relief was generally hard hit by the coronavirus pandemic, but food distribution to kosher and halal networks was especially affected.

The Muslim and Jewish groups want Vilsack to "see where improvements could be made into the system, so that TEFAP can really live up to its promise and provide the Americans the kosher and halal food that they require," Cohen said.

The groups celebrated the opportunity to join forces, said Alexander Rapaport, Masbia's director.

"It is an uplifting experience to work with our Muslim brothers and sisters on hunger advocacy, and especially when it comes to kosher and halal needs," Rapaport told JTA.

---

## ● NEWS

# For Jews with Eating Disorder, New Traditions Made Yom Kippur a Safer Experience

By Ella Rockart

Shonna Levin is an Orthodox Jew, but she didn't spend Yom Kippur in a synagogue.

The Brooklyn activist had planned to set up camp in Prospect Park, where she was going to host an all-day gathering for Jews with eating disorders for whom the holiday centered around fasting can be especially difficult.

Levin, who herself has struggled with disordered eating in the past, was forced to cancel, however, due to a recent injury.

Her event was to follow rules typical of recovery-focused spaces: no weight, calories or numbers talk. She also intended to bring along something that's not typically part of Yom Kippur observances: the materials required for a seudah, or festive meal.

"I'd love to do it in future years," she told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency. "Too many people feel so isolated in this experience."

Levin's idea reflected an increasing number of efforts to craft new rituals and offer new modes of observance for Jews with eating disorders. Recognizing that the holiday's traditional demand of a 25-hour fast could cause people with eating disorders to undertake dangerous behaviors, advocates across the Jewish world are developing alternatives and working to normalize Yom Kippur observances that do not preclude eating.

The Blue Dove Foundation, an organization that seeks to change how Jewish communities handle mental health issues, has created a framework for reflecting on repentance that does not depend on fasting. Rather than asking for confessions of wrongdoing, which can be part of the pathology of eating disorders, the framework asks users to consider what they are already doing and want to do more of.

Many college Hillels are making food available in private spaces, so that students with eating disorders or other needs can eat while remaining set apart during the holiday from the rest of the student body.

Meanwhile, the National Council on Jewish Women is encouraging Jews to turn a ritual around smelling fragrant scents on Yom Kippur into an opportunity to set new intentions for the coming year — a move that the group's promotional materials emphasize is ideal for people who are and are not fasting.

"And in terms of eating disorders, since that comes up every year, again: HEALTH COMES FIRST, ALWAYS," the group's rabbi in residence, Danya Ruttenberg, wrote on Twitter before promoting the scent ritual. "Take care of yourself, and if that means not fasting, do not fast."

Efforts to support Jews with eating disorders have only grown more resonant in the last year as the pandemic has heightened the isolation and loneliness that those who struggle with the disorders are already prone to experiencing. A study from the first 12 months of lockdowns and social distancing showed that a children's hospital in Michigan admitted more than twice as many adolescents with eating disorders as it does in an average year.

The findings are no surprise to Temimah Zucker, an Orthodox therapist and social worker in New York who treats many Jews and has seen a rise in both new and relapsed patients.

"People did not know what to do with their time, and there was so much emphasis around 'this is the time to change your body' and not at all focused on whether you're taking care of yourself and your mental health," Zucker said.

Yom Kippur serves up its own array of unhealthy messages, she said.

"There's the theme of repenting where individuals who already experience high cognitive distortions around themselves and wrongness," Zucker said. "Plus the pressure to connect to the day and whether that means fasting or not fasting."

Jewish tradition is clear that people whose health would be jeopardized by fasting need not abstain from eating. That includes those who are ill, are pregnant or nursing and, many religious leaders have said, people with eating disorders.

Still, many of those in recovery struggle when they attend services, where they are surrounded by hungry people and triggering associations between fasting and discipline or morality. Others, driven by their disorder, ignore spiritual and medical advice.

"Expect the patient to come up with all sorts of ways to try to get out of eating," said Levin, the organizer of the Prospect Park collective gathering.

"I knew a young man who told his psychiatrist that his rabbi is insisting he not eat for religious reasons, then told the rabbi the psychiatrist OK'd him fasting," she added — but neither case was true.

Hannah Davidson, a 23-year-old Brooklyn college stu-

dent, said her family's rabbi had advised them that she should not fast because of her eating disorder. Davidson said that she, like many others with eating disorders, had embraced fasting because it dovetailed with her disorder.

"That's why we don't fast — because we shouldn't look forward to it," Davidson said. "That defeats the purpose."

Esti Jacobs is the coordinator and co-founder of Ayelet Hashacher, a nonprofit organization in the Orthodox community to help people access informed eating disorder treatment. She said that even with a rabbi's instructions to eat on Yom Kippur, those with eating disorders can still struggle to prioritize recovery.

"It's like how in COVID people found it very hard to not go to synagogue. You're raised to do anything to be in synagogue, to miss a flight or leave the house with a high fever," she said. "So even though God wants us to stay home because of COVID's risk to life, it just doesn't feel right."

Jacobs added, "It's hard to realize that what God wants from you is different from what God wants from others, that you're keeping Yom Kippur by doing what appears to be wrong."

Many Jews with eating disorders do structure their lives to insulate themselves from the challenges presented by Yom Kippur. Davidson, for example, said she rarely travels home from college for the holiday.

But avoiding the holidays shouldn't be the only option.

Yocheved Gourarie was a 24-year-old Orthodox woman who documented her struggles with anorexia and depression on Instagram until her death by suicide in December. Now her father has his own account honoring her memory and documenting her experiences, especially around special events such as holidays.

"She didn't fast for nine years, and she didn't attend services completely," Avremi Gourarie told JTA. "We made very certain that any time religion could have been a factor [in harming her recovery], it was taken out of the equation."

Levin's group had aimed to offer a middle ground: a space for those who do attend services and need a place to eat throughout the day. Her goal was to allow people

with eating disorders to have a meaningful Yom Kippur, without having to choose between isolation and risk of relapse, in an unstructured, supportive space.

That kind of setting — and other initiatives like Levin's — is exactly what observant Jews with eating disorders need more of, Zucker said.

"It's so beautiful that there are so many opportunities for more support like that," she said. "I think that part of it, too, is greater community awareness so that there's less judgment, so that it's normalized to what is best for you in the effort of upholding Jewish law."

---

## ● EDITOR'S DESK

# No One Lost Their Jewish Last Name at Ellis Island. But We Gained a Safe Haven.

*Dara Horn's new book explodes a recurring myth about Jewish immigration and adaptation.*

By Andrew Silow-Carroll

Shortly before he died, my dad gave me a trove of family documents, some dating to the 19th century. For the first time I had confirmation of what our family name was before a great-uncle changed it to Carroll when he and his brothers immigrated to America.

My father's parents moved from Russia to Paris before coming to the United States. Among the papers is a yellowed French immigration document signed by my grandfather on March 13, 1913; there he spells his last name Karoltchouk. On my grandmother's "Permis de séjour a un étranger," issued in Paris in 1914, it's spelled Karolchouk. A cursory web search locates Jews with variations like Korolczuk and Karolchuk, which I am told is a common Polish surname.

My father was always ambivalent about his last name.

His uncle was probably right that a deracinated name like Carroll made it easier for a family of Polish Jewish immigrants trying to gain a foothold in America (although my dad's parents didn't quite get the memo in naming my father Irving). On the other hand, Dad always felt the name suggested that he was trying to hide something or pretend to be something he was not.

The dilemmas of Jewish name-changing form a powerful chapter in novelist Dara Horn's new collection of essays. "People Love Dead Jews" is an examination — deeply reported, at times brilliant and often bitter — on the persistent hatred aimed at Jews, even in their absence. A recurring theme of the book is the way antisemites, philosemites and Jews themselves rewrite and distort the past, and how Jewish identity is "defined and determined by the opinions and projections of others."

Our last names are a case in point. Horn explodes the old myth that Jews' names were changed at Ellis Island by clerks too lazy or malevolent to spell them right. In public lectures and a 2014 essay, Horn would explain that "nobody at Ellis Island ever wrote down immigrants' names." Instead, she'd cite works like Kirsten Fermaglich's "A Rosenberg by Any Other Name," a deep dive into the data showing the "heartbreaking reality" of Jewish immigrants changing their own names "because they cannot find a job, or because their children are being humiliated or discriminated against at school, or because with their real names, no one will hire them for any white-collar position." Genealogists like Jennifer Mendelsohn and Philip Sutton and Ellis Island officials like Peter Urban have confirmed this over the years.

What Horn didn't count on was the anger of her audiences, who insisted that their grandparents and great-grandparents were passive victims of a clerk's pen. Horn explains this denial as a "deep pattern in Jewish history," which is "all about living in places where you are utterly vulnerable and cannot admit it." Instead of fessing up to that vulnerability and their culpability in bowing to it, many Jews prefer to invent more benign "origin stories," either to exonerate their non-Jewish neighbors or spare themselves and their children the "humiliation" that the new country is no more friendly to Jews than the one they left. If Jews were to tell the truth about why Karolchouk became Carroll, or (in my mother's case) Greenberg became Green, they'd be



“confirming two enormous fears: first, that this country doesn’t really accept you, and second, that the best way to survive and thrive is to dump any outward sign of your Jewish identity, and symbolically cut that cord that goes back to Mount Sinai.”

Horn ends up saluting the “enormous emotional resources” displayed by the Jews who cling to the Ellis Island myth, but I felt hers is an overly harsh assessment of the survival strategies employed out of necessity by a previous generation of Jews. I can’t prove that my great-uncle and his brothers weren’t humiliated by the name change, but I am guessing that it went down easier than Horn imagines. A new country, a new language, a new alphabet. So much was lost in translation. I think given the choice between the misery they left behind in the Old Country and the opportunities available to them even in an intolerant America, their generation felt losing the last name was a palatable tradeoff.

History bears out their choice. Within a generation or two, the name-changers’ children were able to assert their Jewishness in countless ways. The prosperity that came with “passing” allowed them to build public Jewish lives, worship as they chose and climb the ladder of success unthwarted by the twisted imaginations of antisemites. Having achieved success, these Jews would build forward-facing Jewish institutions, proudly attach their names to dormitories and concert halls, and send their children to Jewish day schools without fear that they would be denied admission to the top universities.

Horn’s book, by contrast, is haunted by the killings of Jews in Pittsburgh, Poway and Jersey City, but those attacks remain the exceptions. Despite the beefed-up security at American synagogues in the wake of 9/11, and the renewed feelings of vulnerability they instilled, those attacks don’t reflect the lived reality of most American Jews 100 years removed from Ellis Island.

Jewish survival and adaptation have often depended on shape shifting, from first-century Yavneh to 20th-century Tel Aviv, when Jews like David Grün and Goldie Myerson traded one kind of Jewish name for another. Besides, what we consider “Jewish” last names are often themselves “un-Jewish” place names and occupations, adopted after state legislation in Yiddish-speaking lands required hereditary names instead of the patronymics the Jews had been using. They certainly didn’t go back to Sinai.

Name changing wasn’t a humiliation but a strategy, and one that, in the American context, has paid off handsomely.

Like my dad, I sometimes wish our last name sounded more Jewish. I fret that Carroll undercuts what little authority I have as a “public” Jew, or reinforces my own occasional feelings of inauthenticity (which I define as “not having gone to Jewish summer camp”). But of course, to even think of reclaiming a “Jewish” name is a privilege that would have been unimaginable to so many Jews living in truly hostile lands. And the notion of what is and isn’t a “Jewish” name is itself being complicated – and enriched — by conversion, interfaith marriage and all the other factors that have diversified the Jewish community in recent years.

Still, as Horn wrote in her original article about the Ellis Island myth, the internet has become a “toxic sea” of antisemitic misinformation, and “that makes it all the more important to get Jewish history right.” We should all recognize the Ellis Island story for the myth that it is, and embrace the real stories of courage and adaptation that brought us to this place and time.

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

---

## ● OPINION

# After 9/11, I Wrote a Jewish Week Headline Comparing the US to Israel. Here’s Why I Regret It.

By Gary Rosenblatt

One of the most controversial — and tone-deaf — front-page headlines to appear in *The New York Jewish Week* during the 26 years I served as editor (1993-2019) was published the morning after 9/11 — 20 years ago.

Across the top of the page, in moon landing-size bold type, it read: “America: The New Israel.”

And underneath, in italics: “As fear and vulnerability grip U.S., will empathy with Jerusalem increase?”

How did Israel somehow take center stage in this American tragedy?

I can criticize the headline and those words because I wrote them.

Looking back now, I realize just how misplaced my anger, sadness and fear were in my immediate response to the deadliest terror attack in U.S. history, one that claimed 3,000 innocent lives at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and in a lonely field in rural Pennsylvania.

Not in my defense but in the interest of establishing the context of my initial reaction — and of many supporters of Israel — allow me to recall the mood of much of the Jewish world, here and in Israel, in early September 2001. It was, to be blunt, one of deep despair.

In Durban, South Africa, international anti-Semitism reached a new high — or low — when the United Nations World Conference Against Racism adopted a resolution labeling Israel an “apartheid, racist” state and accused its government of “genocide and ethnic cleansing.”

The U.S. and Israel withdrew their delegations on determining that they could not remove anti-Israel language from the final declaration of the conference.

But Durban is hardly remembered now, its miserable outcome overtaken by the leap from rhetorical terror to the real thing.

In early September, Israel was one year into the Second Intifada, a uniquely brutal and frightening period when it seemed that Palestinian terrorists were killing Israelis on an almost daily basis.

It’s difficult to convey the sense of fear and outrage that hung over the country like a dark cloud. I returned from a five-day trip to Israel on Sunday, Sept. 9, relieved to have avoided terrorism first-hand. That same day, three Israeli men (one was 19 years old) were killed by a Hamas suicide bomber on a train in Naharia.

Every day, parents feared that when they sent their chil-

dren off to school in the morning, they might never see them again. The battle was waged not on distant fields but on the streets of Israeli cities, in cafes, hotels, on buses and trains.

During that first year, 110 Israeli men, women and children were killed — almost all of them civilians — in 51 separate incidents of suicide bombings, drive-by shootings, stabbings and stonings across the country. Sixteen teenagers and five other young people were blown up at the Dolphinarium disco in Tel Aviv; 13-year-old Koby Mandell and his 14-year-old friend Yosef Ishran were stoned to death in a cave in Tekoa on Lag B’Omer; a five-month-old baby was stoned in an attack in Shiloh; a 40-year-old woman, five months pregnant, was shot in her car near Karne Shomron; and 15 people were blown away by a suicide bomber one August afternoon in a Sbarro restaurant in downtown Jerusalem.

According to the International Institute for Counter-Terrorism, 1,137 Israelis were killed during the Second Intifada, which lasted five years. Its most common weapon: suicide bombers targeting innocents. Its most lasting impact: convincing a majority of Israelis that making peace with the Palestinians was a dream-turned-nightmare.

The intifada’s impact on Israeli politics is evident two decades later in a country whose citizens have moved increasingly right on the Palestinian issue.

## SICKENED AND STUNNED

I was back at work on that beautiful Tuesday morning, Sept. 11. After seeing on TV the non-stop clips of a plane smashing into one of the Twin Towers, I looked out the window of my Times Square office and saw and smelled the black clouds in the distance. And then the second plane hit.

I felt sickened and stunned. Not knowing the extent of the tragedy, I already mourned for my fellow Americans. But as we learned more details, I was overly focused on what I saw as the striking parallels between two democracies whose citizens were viciously and unfairly attacked by Arab terrorists. To the perpetrators, the U.S. and Israel were Big Satan and Little Satan.

Particularly galling to me, American officials for months had been calling on Israel to show restraint in its response to the many Palestinian terror attacks, and the

media too often made moral equivalence of the attackers and the attacked.

As my colleagues and I tore up the articles planned for that week's edition and threw ourselves into reporting on the attacks and their profound impact, I wrote an editorial titled "Terror Hits Home," which stated: "Friends and supporters of Israel could not help but think that this week the United States became Israel," with American citizens suddenly "learning what it is like to experience fear and vulnerability, to bear the brunt of blind hatred, to have innocent civilians targeted as victims of suicide bombers.

"Will the U.S. government, which pledged to strike back against those who committed these dastardly deeds, now see the folly in its calls on Israel to use restraint in the face of murderous terrorist acts?

"Surely we don't expect Washington to seek peace talks with the perpetrators, or offer up several states to pacify them, or condemn the cycle of violence" as if there is no difference between the arsonist and the victim of fire.

In a letter to the editor responding to the headline, published a week later, a reader wrote she was appalled that rather than focus on the plight of the victims, "you harangue and berate the United States for its sins of omission. How cruel. How arrogant."

The letter noted that "there is nothing wrong with your front-page articles except for their placement. Horror and outrage should have been your lead."

Her point was well taken, and still is.

My timing was woefully premature in calling out what I saw as Washington's hypocrisy — pressuring Israel to ease up in its defense against deadly attacks on civilians as the U.S. was about to launch a "war on terror." I should have been mourning the victims, damning the perpetrators and praising the heroes — the firefighters who rushed into the chaos rather than escape it, and those brave souls on American Airlines Flight 77 whose struggle with the plane's hijackers likely saved the U.S. Capitol from a direct hit.

The fact is that the 9/11 attacks did change U.S. policy toward Israel in its own, and ongoing, war on terrorists. It started at the top. "The personal relationship between

[President George W.] Bush and [Israeli Prime Minister Ariel] Sharon grew much tighter," Gideon Sa'ar, then Cabinet Secretary in Sharon's government, later recalled. "Following the September 11 attacks, Bush finally understood Sharon's situation as leader of a nation fighting mass terror attacks. He began to identify with him."

Israel is still condemned by many for using "disproportionate force" in its insistence on doing all it can to protect its citizens from those who would destroy them, and the state. Its leaders prefer the enmity of critics to tears of sympathy from allies.

But America has wavered in its commitment to carry on a war that doesn't end. After 20 years, our society grew weary of the conflict in Afghanistan, not sure why we were still there. Late in the game we came to recognize the hubris in trying to impose our values — noble as democracy is — on a factional land with its own very different culture.

Still, when the U.S. pulled out so hastily and ineffectively, we were sickened to think of those left behind — including thousands who risked their lives to help our troops. The fate that awaits nearly 40 million Afghans at the hands of a brutal regime is too painful to imagine.

Still, when a suicide bomber at the Kabul airport gates killed 170 Afghans, including 13 courageous young American soldiers, the response in Washington was "we will not forgive, we will not forget, we will hunt you down."

Those words seem to echo those of President Bush 20 years ago.

In a moving Washington Post opinion piece, Theodore Olsen, the former U.S. solicitor general whose wife was killed on 9/11, notes that in pledging to pursue the terrorist perpetrators in Kabul, "we have come full circle."

Are we truly prepared to honor the thousands of Americans murdered on 9/11 by stepping up our efforts against the Taliban, ISIS and their fellow haters of Big Satan and Little Satan around the world?

It does not seem likely, when Washington is considering diplomatic alternatives. Only when we do, though, will those victims rest in peace.

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

● **SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT HA'AZINU**

# To Err Is Human. To Give Is Divine.

*The true purpose of existence is to live a life of generosity.*

By Alisa Braun

What does it mean to be created in God's image? Or to act in a God-like way?

As I reread Parshat Ha'azinu, I was struck by the ways Moses's song poetically develops God's care for the Israelites, and I discovered in the vivid and diverse metaphors the beginnings of an answer.

From the opening lines, where God's words are likened to varieties of rain, sustaining and giving life to all, and God is compared as an eagle "who rouses his nestlings" and "bears them along his pinions" (Deut. 32:11), this God builds up, guides, teaches, and protects. God provides for the Israelites' physical needs with gifts of abundance, nurturing the people with "honey from the crag" as a mother nurses her child (Deut. 32:13). The Israelites' lack of gratitude inflames God's anger, but God bestows mercy and forgiveness, despite there being no mention of teshuvah (repentance). God gives.

God's benevolence is, according to the teachings of Rav Eliyahu Dessler, the key to understanding what it means to be created in God's image. Dessler (1892–1953) was a proponent of the classical Mussar tradition, a system of self-reflection and ethical character formation grounded in the teachings of Rabbi Israel Salanter. Dessler writes:

When the Almighty created human beings He made them capable of both giving and taking. The faculty of giving is a sublime power; it is one of the attributes of the blessed Creator of all things. He is the Giver par excellence; His mercy, His bounty and His goodness extend to all His creatures. His giving is pure giving for He takes nothing in return. He can take nothing for He lacks nothing, as the verse says, ". . . If you are righteous what do you give to Him?" Our service to Him is not for His need but for our

own, since we need a means of expressing our gratitude to Him. Man has been granted this sublime power of giving, enabling him too to be merciful, to bestow happiness, to give of himself. "God created man in His own image."

For Rav Dessler, God, as creator of all things, is the "Giver par excellence"; thus, the most God-like act an individual can perform is to give. Too often, we equate giving with loss. If I give to someone else, I will have less. In contrast, Dessler suggests that through giving, we actualize our full selves. We are not giving "away" something, but fully engaging our powers to be God's agents in the world. The true purpose of existence is to live this life of generosity. Further, "service to God" (i.e., prayer) is not something that God needs; rather, we humans need a means of expressing our gratitude. Prayer reminds us of what we have received and affords an opportunity to be thankful for those gifts. In expressing gratitude, we are acting as a "giver." Though we cannot give God anything of substance, we can offer thanks.

It is, I think, no coincidence that Ha'azinu is read just before Sukkot, a holiday whose rituals highlight the importance of expressing gratitude and giving. In the portion, the Israelites enjoy the land's largesse but forget God's goodness and turn to other gods. Sukkot is also hag ha-asif (harvest festival), recalling the moment in the agricultural calendar when farmers could breathe easily knowing that the last crops had been harvested. Lest they attribute their bountiful harvest solely to their own efforts, they are commanded to dwell in the sukkah, to acknowledge their own vulnerability and gratitude for God's protection.

We too leave behind the comfort and security of our homes to experience the frailty and uncertainty of life and put our trust in God.

On Sukkot, we are commanded to be joyful, and we create that experience by sharing the sukkah with visitors real and symbolic. The Zohar (Emor 103a) teaches that seven distinguished leaders from Torah (ushpizin) join the righteous in the sukkah, with a special invitation extended to one of them each night. According to the Zohar, the food one would have offered the ushpizin should be given to the poor instead: that is the only way to merit the presence of ushpizin in your sukkah. According to Maimonides, when one feeds the poor on

Sukkot and other major holidays, God rejoices. It used to be common practice to invite the poor to share a Sukkot meal, and nowadays many donate to food pantries and soup kitchens.

This year, as we celebrate Sukkot in the wake of flooding, fire, plague and political turmoil, we are mindful that many in our own communities and across the world do not enjoy the blessings of food, clothing, shelter, and other basic necessities. But cultivating a habit of giving encompasses more than transforming our abundance into gifts for the needy. It requires us to rethink our orientation to others and interrogate our own desires and drives. When is my giving simply a cover for self-interest? How can I receive in a way that also gives back — through gratitude and care for the giver?

May we move into Sukkot with this new understanding of the power of the act of giving, knowing that when we give, we are living *b'tselem Elohim* — in God's image — and fulfilling our purpose in the world.

*Dr. Alisa Braun is the academic director of Community Engagement at The Jewish Theological Seminary. To read more commentaries, visit JTS Torah Online. The publication and distribution of the JTS Commentary are made possible by a generous grant from Rita Dee (z"l) and Harold Hassenfeld (z"l).*

## ● MUSINGS

# Both Passing and Permanent

By David Wolpe

I don't know if the story is true, but I hope it is. Goldberg built a sukkah. Next door lived a nasty man who didn't like Jews and decided to get an injunction against unstable structures in the neighborhood. The case came to court and having listened to the arguments, Judge Steinberg said, "You are correct. The structure may not stand. Mr. Goldberg, you have a week to take it down."

Sukkot is a holiday of temporariness. Everything passes, everything changes. Walls are fragile, roofs are porous, life itself is passing. We read Ecclesiastes to remind

ourselves that all is hevel, vanity – in the sense of fleeting and empty.

Yet Sukkot is also the holiday of eternity. For the covering of the sukkah must enable us to see the stars; we invite *ushpizin*, guests from the past, into the Sukkah; and Ecclesiastes concludes by reminding us to revere the reality of God. We live between the passing and the permanent; creatures of flesh and blood but endowed with a spark of the eternal.

Chag Sameach.

*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.*

## ● ARTS AND CULTURE

# The Greatest Holocaust Movie Ever Made, Starring Steve Buscemi, Debuted on 9/11. It's Time to Revisit It.

By Rich Brownstein

On Sept. 11, 2001, the greatest Holocaust film ever made, before or since, premiered at a festival — and quickly disappeared, largely unnoticed.

### CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

**Tishrei 11, 5781 | Friday, September 17, 2021**

- **Light candles at:** 6:43 p.m.

**Tishrei 12, 5781 | Saturday, September 18, 2021**

- **Torah reading:** Ha'azinu, Deuteronomy 32:1–52

- **Haftarah:** Samuel II 22:1–51

- **Shabbat ends:** 7:40 p.m.

The film's cast included Steve Buscemi, Harvey Keitel, David Arquette, Michael Stuhlbarg and Mira Sorvino, and it was written and directed by the acclaimed Jewish actor Tim Blake Nelson. Roger Ebert called it one of the best films of the year; later, he added it to his prestigious Great Movies series. The film was so extraordinary that Steven Spielberg considered distributing it himself, less than a decade after making "Schindler's List."

This was the astonishing pedigree and support behind "The Grey Zone." But it couldn't translate into any attention for the beleaguered film, which had a quickly-forgotten premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival and languished at the box office when it was released the next year.

"The Grey Zone" is not about righteous gentiles or good Nazis who redeem themselves by saving Jews. It's not a happy-go-lucky film with a father and son prancing around Auschwitz playing games, or a cartoonish Adolf Hitler mugging for the camera. It lacks the other typical trappings of Holocaust movies: the lush musical score, the tortured accents, the melodramatic misdirections. "The Grey Zone" is, instead, about the moral and philosophical conundrums faced by the Sonderkommando: the Jews in the death camps who worked to dispose of the victims' bodies in exchange for slightly better treatment from the Nazis.

Drawing on the writings of Primo Levi and the true story of the forgotten rebellion at Birkenau by the Sonderkommando in 1944, where the Jewish workers destroyed two of the main four crematorium complexes on the deadliest spot in human history, Nelson portrays real people living their reality — not with black or white choices, but with grey moral choices. And "The Grey Zone" tells its complex, layered story in an economical 108 minutes, with grace and humility.

How did such an important film fall through the cracks? "The Grey Zone" was practically stillborn, set to premiere just after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, while smoke was still rising from lower Manhattan. Yet even if the film's release date had not itself been cataclysmic, it was still made by Nelson — best known at the time for playing a buffoonish ex-con in "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" — and starring a cast of American actors not known for weighty dramatic performances. Even though Nelson, basing the film on his

own play of the same name, was himself the son of a Holocaust refugee and had traveled to Dachau and Auschwitz for research, he'd hardly seemed like the kind of filmmaker to pay the Holocaust sufficient reverence.

In the 20 years since the film's release, it has come to seem oddly prescient in the world of Holocaust cinema. More and more often, dramatizations of the Shoah, including Roman Polanski's "The Pianist" and foreign-language films like "Fateless" and "The Counterfeiters," favor more unsparing, morally complicated depictions of Holocaust victims. And in 2015, the Hungarian film "Son of Saul" drew from much of the same plot and setting as "The Grey Zone" for its own depiction of the Sonderkommando; that movie won the Best Foreign-Language Film Oscar, while its forebear suffered the fate of most pioneers, alone and forgotten.

Nevertheless, Nelson remains proud of his contribution to Holocaust cinema. "There's nothing I've done that's more important to me than 'The Grey Zone,'" he told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency in a recent interview looking back on the film. "And it doesn't matter that most people have never even heard of it."

Nelson sat down with JTA for an interview to discuss the film's 20th anniversary.

***JTA: Tell me about growing up as a Jewish kid in 1970s Tulsa, Oklahoma.***

Nelson: I've described it before as strangely exotic. Being a European Jew in Tulsa, the son of a Holocaust refugee, we were obviously different. I feel like I got the best of both worlds. I got to grow up as a Jew, celebrating Passover at my grandparents' house on plates and silverware that somehow they brought over from Germany — yet in Oklahoma, which is also unique. And that combination gave me a level of intimacy and distance that has really served me well in my life.

***What was your first exposure to Holocaust films?***

It was the 1978 miniseries "Holocaust." Other Holocaust films that had similar impact on me were, of course, "Shoah," "Hotel Terminus" and "Schindler's List."

***How much of the Birkenau revolt in "The Grey Zone" was fictional?***

Almost none of the core plot was fiction. "The Grey Zone"

was based mostly on “Amidst a Nightmare of Crime: Manuscripts of Prisoners in Crematorium Squads Found at Auschwitz,” as well as Dr. Miklós Nyiszli’s “Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account” and, of course, Primo Levi’s “The Drowned And The Saved,” a chapter of which provided the film’s name. The film was also heavily influenced by André Schwarz-Bart’s novel “The Last of the Just,” and the memoirs of both Dario Gabai and Filip Muller.

***Did you go to the camps in preparation for making “The Grey Zone”?***

I went to Dachau and Auschwitz to write “The Grey Zone” play, which was performed in New York several years earlier. And we had the architectural plans from the London War Museum, so we were able to make exact replicas of two of the crematoria, which were ultimately destroyed in the 1944 uprising.

Interestingly, just a few years ago, I went back to Auschwitz with my son Henry. After the tour, in the Birkenau gift shop, I pointed and said, “Look Henry, they have ‘The Grey Zone’ DVD.” The cashier jumped in and said, “That’s the best Holocaust movie anybody has ever made.” I paid for the postcard and left without telling him that it was my movie.

***What parts of the killing process did you represent in the film?***

Over the course of the movie, you get every single aspect of the victim’s journey to death — actually up into the clouds, because at the end we see smoke and ash rising. It’s not all in order, but you get every single part of the killing apparatus from the train to the oven except for one: there was no way I was going to shoot inside the gas chamber during the gassing. We show Germans pouring in the Zyklon B [from] the roof, and you hear the screaming.

We did have a shot inside the gas chamber right after, just a mass of dead bodies against the wall. But it was too much, too gruesomely real in an almost pornographic way. Fortunately, we were in a position not to have to use it in edit.

There is also a torture scene, but you can’t see what’s actually happening to the victim. These decisions were made because at a certain point unflinching can become gratuitous.

***You were working as an actor for Steven Spielberg while you were editing “The Grey Zone.” Did he see your movie?***

I was acting in “Minority Report” and we got along very well and still do. And I said to him on set, “Look, I just made this Holocaust film. Would you take a look?” And so I got him the workprint. It wasn’t even the finished film. Steven watched it in his screening room over the weekend. And he said, “This is incredible. I love it. Look, I want to consider putting it out through DreamWorks.” So he showed it to his executives, who told him two things: “We’re not in the business of putting out films that are on a maximum of maybe only 750 screens, and it’s always going to be compared to ‘Schindler’s List’, sometimes favorably and probably mostly not favorably, so we don’t see it for DreamWorks.” So we took it to Lionsgate, who distributed it. So, yes, Steven loved the film and has always been supportive.

***Why were the film’s characters flawed and unflattering, unlike Jewish victims in almost every other Holocaust film?***

Primo Levi’s breathtaking implication about the Sonderkommandos, who extended their lives through some level of participation, was that Levi couldn’t claim he would’ve done differently. And so, that to me was almost a command that the characters needed to be inherently flawed, like you and me. I identify with every one of the Jews in the film on a really personal level. And even though each character is very different from one another, they had conversations that I think most people would have when confronting their same predicament: either work in the gas chambers and fill the ovens or die in them.

***Do you believe that “The Grey Zone” was not taken seriously because you are best known as a comedic actor?***

I think being known as Delmar from “O Brother, Where Art Thou?” did not help. It also didn’t help that I cast well-known friends in parts, like Steve Buscemi and David Arquette — particularly David Arquette, who was not allowed to have that moment as an actor by critics. At least Steve was recognized as a serious actor, while David, unfairly, was not. Because if you’re going to take this material on, you have very little latitude.

In fact, “The Grey Zone” was blackballed by someone at

the Hollywood Foreign Press [Association], who even refused a screening. He said, "This movie is essentially vile and offensive for trying to depict what it does." That was probably, for me, the nadir of our attempts to put the movie out in a way that it would have been seen. And that was heartbreaking.

### ***Do you regret having cast your friends in the film?***

I don't, because, first of all, it's the only way I could've gotten the film made. Avi Lerner, our financier, needed known actors in some of the roles. Once David Arquette and I worked on the part, I knew that he could do it beautifully. The soul of his character is in David, who is an incredibly sensitive man behind all the outrageous comedy that he presents to the world. He is very much in touch with a sense of shame that is distinctively questioning and therefore Semitic. And he also has the Holocaust in his direct family lineage. I wanted it for David. And in terms of Steve Buscemi, I think he's appropriate for the role and he's great in it.

As for Harvey Keitel, he didn't want to play a Jew, even though he is a Jew. [Keitel plays an S.S. officer in the film.] And I liked the way that Harvey talked about the movie with me and I liked the way that he lined up by my side in pursuit of getting it made. And Harvey was the first one in. There was nobody more zealous in pursuit of making something extraordinary over there among the acting core than Harvey. So, no, I don't regret it.

### ***What was the impact of 9/11 on the release?***

I literally woke up on the morning of Sept. 11, 2001 to a review in the Toronto Star that was exactly what we wanted. The critic really got the movie. I was supposed to have breakfast with Roger Ebert that morning. Before breakfast, I went on this radio show and that guy was rhapsodic about the movie. And it was to premiere that night. The night of Sept. 11. And I was sitting there on this radio show thinking, "My God, people get the movie. They're appreciating it. All the risks that we took are being vindicated." And [I] looked up, and news footage showed the planes crashing into the buildings. And so, I daresay, that had some impact on the film's future. And of course, that started with the understandable cancellation of our premiere that night.

### ***Were you ever able to have a proper screening of the film after the tragedy?***

Yes. In fact, my mother was supposed to go to the screening in Toronto on 9/11. But she finally saw the movie at an industry screening a year later, and there was a Q&A afterward. And she raised her hand. And I thought, oh my God! And she said, "I'm Tim's mother. And Tim will be the first to tell you that I don't always like what he does. As an example, his last play I thought was awful! But Tim, in terms of this movie, I am in awe." And that meant a great deal to me because my mother is, shall we say, parsimonious with her praise, so it really means something when it does come.

### ***After 20 years, do you think that the film holds up?***

I do. I'm incredibly proud of it and my work as its writer and director. But I have so much gratitude to Avi Lerner for financing it, and also for the incredible people who taught me so much about filmmaking while I was making it. It was this great group effort. And I'm so proud to have had that team working on this project.

### ***How does "The Grey Zone" rank in your professional career?***

There's nothing I've done that's more important to me than "The Grey Zone," and it doesn't matter that most people have never even heard of it. The great irony of my life is that more people know me from my cameo in "Scooby-Doo 2" than will ever have heard about "The Grey Zone."

*"The Grey Zone" is currently available to stream for free (with ads) on Amazon Prime, IMDB TV and Tubi, and for rental from various VOD services.*

**Rich Brownstein** is a lecturer for Yad Vashem's International School for Holocaust Studies and the author of *"Holocaust Cinema Complete: A History and Analysis of 400 Films, with a Teaching Guide."*

The Jewish Week welcomes letters to the editor responding to our stories. **Letters should be emailed with the writer's name and address. Please keep letters to 300 words or less.** The Jewish Week reserves the right to edit letters for length and clarity. Send letters to [editor@jewishweek.org](mailto:editor@jewishweek.org).



## UPCOMING EVENTS

September 19 | 2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m. \$10

### 93 Queen

The Museum of Jewish Heritage, 36 Battery Pl., presents an in-person screening of “93 Queen.” Set in the Hasidic enclave of Borough Park, the 2018 documentary follows a group of Hasidic women who created the first all-female volunteer ambulance corps in New York City.

Get tickets and get more information at <https://mjhnyc.org/events/93-queen>

---

September 23 | 2:00 pm.m – 3:00 p.m. Free

### An American Jew In 2021: Insights From The Pew Study

Robert Siegel (former senior host of NPR’s “All Things Considered”) interviews Prof. Shuly Rubin Schwartz (Chancellor, Jewish Theological Seminary), Rabbi Elka Abrahamson (President, Wexner Foundation) and Prof. Jonathan Sarna (American Jewish History, Brandeis University) about the Pew Research Center’s latest survey of American Jews.

Register at <https://globalconnections.splashthat.com>

---

September 23 | 6:00 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. Free

### Up Close With Lior Raz

UJA-Federation of New York, 70 Faces Media and The New York Jewish Week present Israeli writer/actor Lior Raz — the co-creator and star of the hugely popular series “Fauda” and the recently released “Hit & Run” — in conversation with Abigail Pogrebin.

Register at <https://www.ujafedny.org/event/view/up-close-with-lior-raz>

---

September 23 | 8:00 p.m. \$12-\$18

### The Wayward Daughter of Judah the Prince

Theater for the New City presents the world premiere of “The Wayward Daughter of Judah the Prince,” by Douglas Lackey, a high-spirited female buddy road trip story set in the time of the great rabbi Judah ha-Nasi. Sept. 23 to Oct. 10 at Theater for the New City, 155 First Ave. (at E. 10th Street).

Get tickets and more information at <http://www.waywarddaughterofjudah.com>

---

**Do you have an event coming up?**

**Submit your events online at [www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event](http://www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event)**