

The New York Jewish Week/end

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Jack Reimer, a Ukrainian immigrant accused of being a Nazi war criminal, enters Federal District Court in Manhattan on Aug. 17, 1998. He was later stripped of his U.S. citizenship and ordered deported, but died at his home in Fort Lee, New Jersey. (Stan Honda/AFP via Getty Images)

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● NEWS

At Least 9 Former Nazis Died in the US While Awaiting Deportation. 3 House Democrats Want to Know Why.

By Stewart Ain

In 1992, the Justice Department's Office of Special Investigations learned that before moving to the United States, a Brooklyn potato chip salesman had participated in the liquidation of Jewish ghettos in Poland, including those in Warsaw, Lublin and Czestochowa. And there was evidence that he helped other SS men execute 50 to 60 Jews in a ravine near Trawniki.

Jack Reimer was tried in 1998 and denaturalized, or stripped of his U.S. citizenship, in 2002. An appeals court upheld the decision in 2004, and the following year the U.S. sought to deport him. He agreed to leave for Germany but died in August 2005 before that could happen. He was living in Fort Lee, New Jer-

sey, at the time and died surrounded by his family.

Sixteen years later, three New York House Democrats are asking the State Department to conduct a review of their records to learn why Reimer and eight other Nazi war criminals who were found living in the U.S. after the war were prosecuted, convicted and ordered deported but then allowed to die “comfortably in the United States.”

“Some of these men were stationed at Nazi concentration camps,” they wrote. “Others participated in the horrific liquidation of the Warsaw ghetto. The Department of Justice established beyond a reasonable doubt that each of them contributed to the atrocities of the Holocaust....”

“We recognize that other countries may simply have been unwilling to take custody of these criminals upon deportation from the U.S., but we welcome a clear picture of the diplomatic engagement around these cases that nevertheless failed to secure their deportation. It is important that the State Department provide the public with a complete accounting of that profound injustice.”

The letter, addressed to Secretary of State Antony Blinken, was signed by Judiciary Committee Chairman Jerrold Nadler, House Democratic Caucus Chair Hakeem Jeffries and Foreign Affairs Committee Chair Gregory Meeks. A spokesman for Nadler said the letter was prompted by an inquiry from a constituent.

The Nazi war criminals were all prosecuted by the Office of Special Investigations, which was established in 1979 at the urging of then-Rep. Elizabeth Holtzman, a Democrat from Brooklyn. Holtzman told the Jewish Week that she welcomed the new probe.

“I would like to see if there are records about Nazi war criminals that have not been released,” she said. “The U.S. government has a long history of protecting war criminals. ... These files need to be made public, if they are not already, so that scholars can find out what the U.S. did and didn’t do.”

Asked about the refusal of other countries to take these war criminals, Holtzman said: “The real question is whether the U.S. government tried hard to get foreign governments to take them. ... Bringing justice for Jews and others killed by the Nazis has not been a top priority. The problem has been publicized and known for a long time by those of us who have been fighting hard to

bring them to justice.”

She cited the case of Karl Linnas, an Estonian who worked as a land surveyor while living quietly in Greenlawn, Long Island, for more than 30 years. He came to the U.S. in 1951 and became a naturalized citizen in 1959 by lying about his past — he claimed to be a person displaced by war — and did not reveal that he had been sentenced to death in absentia by the Soviet Union for Nazi war crimes.

Linnas had been identified by witnesses as supervising the murder of 12,000 inmates — mostly Jewish women and children — at the Tartu concentration camp in Nazi-occupied Estonia, which was part of the Soviet Union. It was said that he personally ordered guards to fire on prisoners as they kneeled along the edge of a ditch, causing them to fall directly into their graves. Holtzman said Linnas “personally murdered Jews in a ditch.”

After his arrest in the U.S., a court stripped him of his citizenship in 1982 and ordered him deported. Russia was willing to take him but the Reagan administration did not want to send him there, at a time when the USSR was viewed as “the evil empire.” The U.S. wanted to send him to Panama “where he could sit on a beach under a palm tree and enjoy life after murdering Jews,” Holtzman said.

“So on either the first or second day of Passover, when they knew all the Jewish organizations were closed and there would be nobody around to stop them,” they planned to fly him to Panama, Holtzman recalled.

“But they forgot about me. I had gone to my office to pick up some papers when I got a call from Washington and was told that Linnas was going to be put aboard a plane to Panama. I had non-Jews working in my office and we called the Panamanian Embassy ... and got an appointment with the Panamanian ambassador to the U.S. We flew to Washington at 2 o’clock in the afternoon and then got word that the U.S. government had decided not to take him [to Panama]. But this is what our government had been prepared to do, and we had foiled the Passover plot.”

In the end, Linnas was deported to Russia, but he became ill and died of heart failure at the age of 67 before he could face a firing squad.

In all, the OSI (which in 2011 merged into the new Human Rights and Special Prosecution Section) succeeded in prosecuting 109 former Nazis living in the U.S. and extradited, expelled or removed 69 of them (the rest died before they could be removed). The last case was that of Friedrich Karl Berger, 95, who had served as a concentration camp guard in Germany. He was deported to Germany in February.

Reimer's case was heavily publicized at the time of his arrest and trial; the columnist George Will opined that "the unspeakable was done by the unremarkable, and it speaks well of American justice that it will not close the books on bestiality."

Born in Ukraine, Reimer applied for a U.S. visa in 1952 and became a naturalized citizen in 1959 by concealing the fact that he had been part of a feared SS unit comprised of former Soviet prisoners of war. He was trained at a special camp at Trawniki, Poland, and was involved in the extermination of Jews throughout Poland.

Charges against Reimer were filed in 1992 and it took six years for his citizenship case to come to trial. Among the most damning evidence against him were a series of admissions he made in 1992 during five hours of interrogation by the OSI. In it, he acknowledged firing his rifle at a man in a group of Jewish civilians who had been assembled for execution in a mass grave near Trawniki in the winter of 1941-42.

"You finished him off?" he was asked.

"I'm afraid so," Reimer replied.

He later claimed he had been coerced into making that statement and insisted he had "overslept" and thus was not present when 50 to 60 Jews were executed in the ravine at Trawniki.

Reimer, who had once owned a Wise potato chip franchise in Brooklyn, later worked for a Schrafft's restaurant and then became its owner. He was tried in 1998 and denaturalized in 2002 by the Federal District Court in Manhattan. An appeals court upheld the decision in 2004, and the following year the U.S. sought to deport him.

In 2013, eight years after Reimer's death in New Jersey, a Justice Department official recalled his case in a speech at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

"We will never know the names of those who were massacred by Reimer and his men, but we know that they too did not live to see justice done," said Eli Rosenbaum, director of Human Rights Enforcement Strategy and Policy for the Criminal Division's Human Rights and Special Prosecutions Section.

But Holtzman insisted that these Nazis who died here did not live their final days in peace.

"They had court proceedings to attend, the record of their evil is indelible, and their family and neighbors know it forever," she said. "They had the mark of Cain and the sword of Damocles over their heads. And they never knew whether these countries [that refused to accept them] might change their minds. They were disgraced and shamed. They didn't rest easy because they never knew what might happen."

● NEWS

Fired Park East Rabbi Holding Rival Services Blocks From His Old Synagogue

By Ben Sales

The rift at Park East Synagogue may widen, as Rabbi Benjamin Goldschmidt, who was fired as assistant rabbi last month, has started his own Shabbat service three blocks away from his former synagogue.

This will be at least the second service hosted by Goldschmidt since he was fired from the wealthy Orthodox congregation on Manhattan's Upper East Side on Oct. 15. Last week, according to multiple sources, he hosted Shabbat services in his apartment with dozens of attendees.

Since his firing, he and Rabbi Arthur Schneier, who fired him, have both sought to tell the congregation their side of the story through emails to the membership list. Schneier and his supporters have accused Goldschmidt of inappropriately sharing members' email addresses and trying to lead a "coup" at the synagogue.

In an Oct. 29. email to members, Goldschmidt denied those allegations. He called them “completely unfounded, and personally hurtful,” and wrote that he and his supporters were trying to address concerns about the synagogue’s growth. He asked members to “remain engaged with the shul to ensure it is a place that is warm and welcoming.”

Now, it appears he has moved on, and is inviting former congregants to join him. He and his wife, the journalist Avital Chizhik-Goldschmidt, recently sent an invitation to a list that included some Park East members, inviting them to a Saturday morning service with lunch to follow at an elite event space just blocks from Park East. A spokesman for the Goldschmidts asked JTA not to name the venue, citing security concerns.

The Jewish Telegraphic Agency has learned that so far, approximately 80 people have RSVPed that they will be going and that the event space was booked sometime in the past week.

“We are embarking on a new journey,” the invitation states, before naming the weekly Torah portion. “Join us for Shabbat Parshat Toldot. We look forward to seeing you!”

A member of the Park East leadership told JTA that the synagogue draws about 150 people on a regular Shabbat morning. Goldschmidt’s service is also being organized on a particularly eventful Shabbat at his former synagogue. On Friday night, Park East is hosting the French Jewish philosopher Bernard-Henri Levy. On Saturday morning, the synagogue is hosting a commemoration of the Nazi Kristallnacht pogrom, with the consul general of Austria. Schneier is a Holocaust survivor.

Goldschmidt’s attorney, Daniel Kurtz, told JTA that Goldschmidt was organizing the service because he intended to continue his work in the community he’s called home for 10 years.

He said that Goldschmidt’s plans are going to be “week to week.” Regarding the proximity to Park East, he said, “This is not a horse race. Nobody is under compulsion to come.”

“This is where he lives and where he’s a rabbi,” Kurtz said. “This is his natural constituency. He’s not going to move to Greenwich, Connecticut, and start inviting people.”

Hank Sheinkopf, a political consultant who is acting as a spokesperson for Schneier, told JTA that he feels Goldschmidt is trying to “undermine Rabbi Schneier and undermine the community [for] his own self interest.”

Over the past few weeks, both Schneier and Goldschmidt have hired lawyers and threatened litigation over their dispute. It is unclear whether any legal action is forthcoming. But multiple members told JTA that the service Goldschmidt is organizing means that the feud is not yet over.

“I think what it means for Park East is that this is still lingering in the community,” said Jonathan Medows, a member of Park East who attends services there regularly and is himself a rabbi. “It’s an open wound, and this is the time for Park East to enter the post-Rabbi Goldschmidt phase.”

● NEWS

Forest Hills Jewish Center, a Fixture in Queens, Will Sell Its Building and Relocate

By Stewart Ain

Congregants at the Forest Hills Jewish Center approved the sale Thursday evening of their block-long building, a fixture in Queens since the late 1940s. They will now begin the process of finding a new home in the same area.

“The vote was overwhelmingly for the sale,” said Carl Koerner, chair of the building committee.

The 400-family unit Conservative synagogue’s building at 106-06 Queens Boulevard has been on the market for about a year. The asking price was \$50 million, but Koerner said the terms of the sale to a developer would not be made public until it is approved by the state attorney general.

The 70-year-old building “doesn’t serve the needs of our

congregation,” explained Rabbi Gerald Skolnik, the congregation’s spiritual leader since 1982.

“It was configured during a period when the architecture of synagogues was very frontal, with clergy facing the congregation,” he said. “It is like a concert hall. There is nothing about the architecture of the synagogue that is intended to withstand the changes in societal needs.

“Services today are more participatory and intimate,” he said.

“There are stairs throughout the building, which is not handicap accessible,” said Koerner. “And there is only one elevator. We wanted something new that would be the right size for the congregation and more in line with how we function and with all new air conditioning and heating.”

A middle-class neighborhood one described as “city life in a suburban setting,” Forest Hills has about a dozen synagogues. At its peak in the 1950s and ‘60s, the Jewish Center, under the leadership of its then senior rabbi, Ben Zion Bokser, had a membership of more than 1,000 families.

It has faced challenges over the years, but nothing like the “immense challenges” it faced during the pandemic, Koerner said, including lost rental and catering income and cancelled fundraising events. He noted that the congregation “was able to come through it fairly well. We rose to the challenge as a result of a lot of hard work and a wonderful professional team.”

The congregation realized about 20 years ago that the building was not a good fit, noted Romi Narov, its president.

Over the following years “we went into the market a few times, but we encountered a down market and stopped.” The price they were offered, she said, is now “the best we could get.”

Asked where they will move, Narov said there are “a few potential new sites that could be adapted.”

“We will be taken seriously now by potential property owners because they know we now have the money,” she said.

Skolnik said that because many members walk to synagogue on Shabbat and holidays, the new building would

have to be within walking distance of their current home.

Although the current building rents some of its unused rooms to outsiders, Narov said the plan is to move into a building that is large enough to accommodate one of its current renters, JASA’s Selfhelp Community Services. Selfhelp offers a broad array of services to elderly, frail and vulnerable New Yorkers. It is also the largest provider of comprehensive services to Holocaust survivors in North America.

“We hope to take them with us because Selfhelp fits into our mission,” she said, noting that it currently rents one large room and several smaller rooms.

Koerner said one thing the leadership is “committed to is that we will not lose a day of operation, not even for one hour.”

He also stressed that the sale of the building is something the congregation has been planning for more than 20 years and is “unrelated to the pandemic.” He said he would expect that the building would be razed once the sale is complete and that the new owners of the site, which is zoned for mixed use, would erect a building for both retail and residential use.

Although the terms of the sale call for the congregation to vacate the building in between one-and-a-half and two-and-a-half years, Narov said “realistically we will need two-and-a-half years, especially if we are going to build a new facility. We will build with the ability to expand membership and hope it will grow.”

Skolnik said that the congregation “might even attract different people with a different building. I think it’s all for the good. ... I have a deep appreciation of the history of this synagogue, but there comes a time when change is what is called for. There is nothing good about this building except for the fact that it has history. But history can’t stand in the way of surviving. And the story of the Forest Hills Jewish Center is about its congregation. The building needs to change.”

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● NEWS

Eric Adams Will Be New York City's Next Mayor, Without Hasidic Borough Park's Support, and Other Election Results

By Julia Gergely

It's official: Eric Adams will become the 110th mayor of New York City and the city's second Black mayor — even as one major bloc of Jewish voters spurned him.

Adams, a Democrat who ran on the strength of his public safety record, easily defeated his Republican rival. At his victory party, he broadcast an inclusive vision at a precarious moment for the city.

"It doesn't matter if you are in Borough Park in the Hasidic community, if you're in Flatbush in the Korean community, if you're in Sunset Park in the Chinese community, if you're in Rockaway, if you're out in Queens, in the Dominican community, Washington Heights — all of you have the power to fuel us," Adams said in his victory speech at the Marriott Hotel in Brooklyn Bridge Park.

But while Adams had been endorsed by the Satmar Hasidic group in June, which may have helped him come out ahead in the summer's crowded mayoral primary, he was not the favorite in Borough Park on election night. In the 48th Assembly District, a district represented by an Orthodox assemblyman and which encompasses much of Borough Park, 54.9% of voters chose Republican Curtis Sliwa, with only 39.2% voting for Adams.

Jewish voters in 48th City Council district delivered a win to a Republican City Council candidate, Inna Vernikov. Vernikov, a Jewish attorney and Ukrainian immigrant outspoken in her support for former President Donald Trump, will fill the seat vacated when Democrat Chaim Deutsch was expelled from the council in April. She de-

feated Steven Saperstein, another Jewish candidate and a former special education teacher.

Both Vernikov and Saperstein campaigned on promises related to public safety, supporting Israel and reducing crime at a time when antisemitic incidents are on the rise in New York City. District 48 contains the city's largest population of Russian speakers as well as a significant Orthodox Jewish population and was one of a few districts that went for Trump in the 2020 presidential election, with 65% of voters backing the former president.

District 48 is an anomaly in a city where there are seven times as many registered Democrats as Republicans. The dynamic means that Democratic primaries typically decide who wins citywide office in New York City, so Adams had virtually been guaranteed a victory after winning the Democratic primary in June.

Adams will take office during one of the city's most vulnerable periods in recent history, still reeling from thousands of deaths and economic loss due to the pandemic. Adams, 61, has served as the Brooklyn borough president since 2013.

As was expected, Brad Lander, a progressive Jewish candidate with ties to Jews for Racial and Economic Justice, will become the city's next comptroller, and Jumaane Williams will continue to serve as New York City's public advocate.

In other race results, Mark Levine will become Manhattan's borough president, replacing Gale Brewer, who returns to her former City Council position representing the Upper West Side. Julie Menin will represent the Upper East Side's District 6 on the City Council.

Eric Dinowitz was reelected to the City Council representing the Northwest corner of the Bronx in District 11, which includes the heavily Jewish area of Riverdale. Dinowitz, the son of state assembly member and a one-time member of the Jewish a capella group Six13, was first elected in a special election in March after fellow Democrat Andrew Cohen was elected to the New York Supreme Court.

Progressive Lincoln Restler will represent the Brooklyn shoreline and South Williamsburg in District 33, which encompasses a large Hasidic community, after an uncontested race.

District 32 in Queens, the only New York City Council district represented by a Republican outside of Staten Island, will remain that way. Republican Joann Ariola will be the next Council member after beating Democrat Felicia Singh, a progressive candidate who captured endorsements from Jewish groups. District 32 includes a number of beachfront communities, including Howard Beach and Rockaway Park.

Voters in District 29 elected Democrat Lynn Schulman, who had been endorsed by Jewish groups in Queens. The district includes large Jewish communities in Forest Hills and Kew Gardens.

One race remains too close to call: Ari Kagan, a Jewish immigrant from Belarus who lost to Deutsch in District 48 in 2013, had been favored to replace Mark Treyger in Brooklyn's District 47. But the Republican candidate, Mark Szuszkiewicz, has outperformed expectations in the district, which spans Bensonhurst, Coney Island, Gravesend and Sea Gate.

● NEWS

New York State Bans Swastikas, Confederate Flags and Other Hate Symbols on Public Property

By Julia Gergely

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul signed legislation Tuesday that bans the selling or displaying of hate symbols on public property and taxpayer-funded equipment.

State Sen. Anna M. Kaplan and Assemblymember Michaele Solages, both of Long Island, introduced the legislation after an incident last year in which a Confederate flag was displayed on a fire truck in Long Island, and another in which a Confederate flag was hung from a

fire department window.

The bill defines symbols of hate as including, but not limited to, symbols of white supremacy, neo-Nazi ideology or the Battle Flag of the Confederacy. Excluded are symbols that serve an "educational or historical purpose," such as in a museum or book.

"Public property belongs to all of us, and this measure is critical to ensure that our public property isn't being used to promote hatred," said Kaplan in a press release. "You would think it was common sense that taxpayer-owned property couldn't be used as a platform for hate, but shockingly there was no law on the books saying so — until now."

Public property is defined as a school district, a fire district, volunteer fire company or police department and the taxpayer-funded equipment they use.

According to the NYC Office for the Prevention of Hate Crimes, swastikas are among the most common hate symbols displayed in the United States today. The office has partnered with the Anti-Defamation League to provide resources on and histories of common hate symbols in the U.S.

The NYPD Hate Crimes dashboard has reported that nearly 35% of hate crimes this year have been antisemitic, the highest portion against any group. Antisemitic hate crimes in New York City have risen 50% compared to the same period in 2020.

"The recent and disgusting rise in racist, homophobic, and hateful behavior will never be tolerated in New York," Hochul said in a press release. "There is no reason for a symbol of hate to ever be on display, let alone by a police or fire department charged with protecting their community."

There is an existing New York State law banning hate symbols on state property. That law raised free speech issues in 2020 among civil libertarians, who noted that the expression of even hateful speech is protected under the Constitution even on state-owned land. However, the Supreme Court has in the past upheld laws limiting the rights of state and municipal employees to make political speeches on work time.

● NEWS

Purchased by Former Algemeiner Editor, New York Sun to Relaunch With Seth Lipsky as Editor

By Shira Hanau

The New York Sun, a New York City broadsheet published from 2002 to 2008, will relaunch its web site after a sale to a former editor of The Algemeiner Journal, a Jewish publication with a conservative bent, The New York Times reported Wednesday.

Seth Lipsky, who ran the New York Sun in its previous run and has continued to publish his and others' opinion pieces on the Sun's modest web site in the years since, sold the publication in an undisclosed cash and stock deal to Dovid Efuné, until recently the top editor at the Algemeiner.

In a deal announced Wednesday, Lipsky will continue to serve as editor and will hire a new staff of writers. Efuné will serve as publisher and chairman. The New York Sun's Twitter account put out a call for applications in a tweet early Thursday morning.

In an email interview with The New York Times, Efuné said he admired the Sun for "practicing precisely the form of journalism that's so lacking in today's media environment: values-based, principled and constitutionalist." Lipsky told The Times that the revamped Sun would support "the American values of constitutionalism, equality under the law, and individual liberty."

Efuné has served as editor-in-chief and CEO of the Algemeiner since 2008, when he oversaw the paper's relaunch as an English language paper. The Algemeiner was started in 1972 as a Yiddish-language weekly. Last month he was honored at an Algemeiner gala but his plans for leaving were not announced.

Before starting the Sun in 2002, Lipsky served as editor-in-chief of the Forward beginning in 1990. Lipsky, a neoconservative, was forced out of that role in 2000 reportedly due to his political differences with the board, which replaced Lipsky with J.J. Goldberg, whose liberal leanings were more in line with those of the Forward's socialist roots.

In its first iteration in the early 2000s, the Sun was known for its conservative leanings and has continued in that vein in recent years, publishing opinion pieces by a roster of conservatives.

● NEWS

COVID-19 Vaccines for Kids Are Here. These Rabbis (And Their Children) Wrote Prayers for the Occasion.

By Shira Hanau

When Rabbi Lisa Gelber heard that the Food and Drug Administration had approved the Pfizer coronavirus vaccine for children ages 5-11, she couldn't wait for the moment that her daughter would get the shot.

But she also knew her daughter was scared of needles. So she sat down with her daughter, 11-year-old Zahara, and together they composed a kavanah, Hebrew for intention, to reflect the gravity and gratitude with which they viewed this milestone and process the feelings her daughter had about the shot.

"Holy One of life and love, wrap me in a warm embrace as I prepare to receive my COVID-19 vaccine," the prayer begins. "I give thanks to the doctors and scientists who are creators like you, for the wise people who approved the vaccine, and for everyone who made sure this was available to kids."

Gelber, the spiritual leader of Congregation Habonim in New York City, shared the full prayer on Facebook, where her friends and colleagues have been circulating it in anticipation of the vaccine's likely availability for children as soon as the end of this week.

"This feels like a miraculous moment in time. What a gift that this next expansive cohort will have access to a vaccine," Gelber told the Jewish Telegraphic Agency.

When COVID-19 vaccinations in the United States began in December 2020, there was much discussion of which blessing or Jewish prayer to recite when receiving the shot. Several new prayers were even written specifically for that occasion, with many offering thanks to the scientists who created the vaccines.

Now, children ages 5-11 are set to become eligible to receive the COVID vaccine in the United States in the next few weeks, potentially bringing to an end a period when parents have worried about the risks of activities as basic as sending a child to school or going to the playground. And the moment is being marked by a new set of Jewish prayers, with at least one, as in the case of Gelber and her daughter, even written by a child.

Gelber said her daughter wanted to thank the people who created the vaccine while noting her fear of needles. "Most moving for me was her gratitude for the opportunity to say a blessing which would 'make me stronger' and take her mind off of pain," she said.

Rabbi Karen Reiss Medwed, an assistant dean at the Graduate School of Education at Northeastern University, was first inspired to write a kavanah for receiving a COVID-19 vaccine several months ago when a nurse in her community spoke at their synagogue about the experience of being vaccinated. More recently, Medwed was inspired by her rabbi's sermon to write a new kavanah specifically for parents to recite before their children receive the vaccine.

"He spoke not only as a rabbi, but as a father, expressing the long awaited relief, as well as the deep religious sense of obligation this next phase of vaccination would bring," Medwed told JTA in an email, referring to Rabbi Joel Levenson of the Midway Jewish Center in Syosset, New York. "There was no question I had to compose something to recite, just as parents recite a short kavanah upon having the zchut [merit] to arrive with their

child to their bnai mitzvah."

Medwed's prayer expresses gratitude to God and to those who developed the vaccines and, echoing the "shehecheyanu" prayer recited over a new experience, expresses the relief many parents feel at the opportunity to finally vaccinate their children.

"With this vaccination I let out the long held pause and breath I have been anxiously keeping inside for these long months, and passionately affirm, Blessed are you, Adonai, Ruler of this Universe, who has granted us life, sustained us, and brought us to this moment, and let us all say, Amen," the prayer reads.

● OPINION

What NY's Jewish Museum Got Right and Wrong About Looted Art: An Exchange

By Andrew Silow-Carroll and Ben Sales

An exhibit at the Jewish Museum in Manhattan, "Afterlives: Recovering the Lost Stories of Looted Art," examines the Nazis' theft of masterworks from the collections of the Jews they persecuted and of others they merely exploited. Andrew Silow-Carroll, the New York Jewish Week's editor in chief, and Ben Sales, a reporter for the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, recently visited the exhibit and came away with different impressions. An edited version of their online conversation is below.

ANDREW SILOW-CARROLL: You and I both took in The Jewish Museum's new exhibit on artworks looted by the Nazis, "Afterlives." The critical response to the show has been mixed, and I think you and I disagree a bit about it. Let me start by saying that the show presents an unavoidable challenge for the viewer: Are we there to "enjoy" the works by Chagall, Cézanne, Matisse, Picasso and Pissarro that grace the walls? Or is their recovery after the war

a reminder of all the human lives lost? In learning more about “The Monuments Men” and other rescuers of European treasures, are we meant to honor the Allies who fought the Nazis and saved Western culture or lament all the ways the West failed to save actual human beings?

BEN SALES: Those were some of my central questions as well. “Afterlives” boiled down to a decent art exhibit featuring a range of well-regarded painters from the mid-19th to the early 20th century. But I can get a much better version of that eight blocks away at The Met.

The human question also occurred to me. But I will say this: If this exhibit is asking people to accept the premise that art is worth saving, that’s not an unreasonable request in and of itself. At the same time, it would have been nice to acknowledge that the Allies could have, and should have, devoted more energy to saving people than saving art.

ANDY: Dara Horn makes a similar point in her new book, “People Love Dead Jews,” in her essay about the Holocaust rescuer Varian Fry: “Fry tried to save the culture of Europe and for that he should be remembered and praised. But no one tried to save the culture of Hasidism, for example...,” she writes.

The exhibit’s strength, I felt, was in how it sheds light not just on the Nazis’ assault on Jewish bodies but on “Jewish” ideas. Many of the works on view were seized and condemned by Hitler as examples of “degenerate” art, which he viewed as a distinctly Jewish corruption of the noble ideals of classical painting, sculpture and music. (One of the paintings on display, “Battle on a Bridge,” the 17th-century French artist Claude Lorraine’s weirdly pastoral depiction of a famous Roman battle that established Christianity’s victory over paganism, was a favorite of Hitler’s.) The message may be indirect, but it lands: The Nazi program was a cultural battle as well as a military one, meant to “reclaim” Germany and Europe from its Jewish usurpers.

BEN: In Fry’s defense, at least he was saving actual people: artists and writers like Marc Chagall, André Breton, André Masson and maybe 2,000 others. But I agree that this was one of the exhibit’s strong points. I also enjoyed the descriptions next to each piece of its provenance and journey. In fact, I may have spent more time reading those than I did actually looking at the art.

But I think visitors would have been better served had the exhibit doubled down on that. Instead of being an exhibit of paintings, it could have focused on Jewish collectors, the ideas that animated them, their relationships with artists, how their collections were looted, etc. — with a few representative works. There could have been a wall, for example, dedicated to the Degenerate Art exhibit of 1937, the works removed from museums by the Nazi government and displayed as the “art of decay.”

ANDY: What did you think of the treatment of the museum’s own efforts of rescue and recovery, before and after the war? On view are antique ceremonial objects sent to New York by communities and individuals for safekeeping ahead of the Nazi invasion of Poland and other countries. Institutions like the museum, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee and the Jewish Theological Seminary in Manhattan made sure they were kept safe.

BEN: I can’t stop thinking of the row after row of Havdalah spice boxes and Torah scroll adornments sitting on shelves behind glass, each affixed with a little tag, each representing one family, or community, that will no longer celebrate Havdalah. In a way, the tags reminded me of Auschwitz tattoos, each cataloging destruction in its own way.

It’s a haunting image and an understated, powerful way of showing all we’ve lost.

ANDY: And I was haunted by a small ledger on display that was kept by a political prisoner at Dachau, containing the names of 3,478 men, women and children, of whom only 11 would survive the camp. It comes at about the halfway point of the exhibit, which begins with a gorgeous painting by the German Franz Marc, “The Large Blue Horses,” and ends with a clip of the Nuremberg Trials. To me the message came through loud and clear: Between beauty and justice there is unimaginable destruction. “Afterlives” demands that you hold all three ideas in your head at once.

BEN: But here’s my problem: The bulk of this exhibit was about art that has been restituted, and efforts of the Allies that did bear fruit. But we know, from abundant sources, that a lot of art was not restored to its original owners, which the exhibit notes but does not focus on. The fact that, 80 years after the Holocaust, there are still ongoing disputes about looted art means that

this struggle is far from over. That's been addressed in a variety of media — Malcolm Gladwell has a fantastic podcast episode about it, "Hedwig's Lost van Gogh," and there's the Helen Mirren movie, "Woman in Gold."

But the exhibit doesn't spend enough time on the fact that a lot of art was stolen and never returned, even works that currently hang on the walls of prestigious museums. I was genuinely surprised and disappointed by that lack. And I couldn't help but notice that one of the lenders to the exhibition is the Yale University Art Gallery, which, per Gladwell, itself possesses stolen art. It fought a successful court battle to keep a van Gogh that it purchased from the Soviet Union, which had stolen the painting in 1918.

My larger problem with that choice is actually the same problem I have with Holocaust movies: Way too many of them have a "happy" ending. It feels weird to even write this, but the Holocaust did not have a happy ending. It isn't a story of success; it's a story of failure. This exhibit, too, should have been a story of failure. It was not.

ANDY: I hear that. But I do think that is also the implicit challenge of the exhibit. There is, for example, the fascinating display of documents from Jewish Cultural Reconstruction, an organization founded by the historian Salo Baron and administered by the philosopher Hannah Arendt. JCR took custody of recovered Jewish cultural property and either restituted books and objects to their original owners or heirs or found them a new home. The exhibit includes correspondence from Arendt, discussing the fate of "heirless" or "orphaned" works whose original owners were either dead or could not be identified.

And to me, the dilemma and paradoxes were obvious and heartbreaking: JCR's efforts are loving, ensuring the continuity of a culture Hitler tried to snuff out. But the losses they represent are overwhelming.

Andrew Silow-Carroll is the editor in chief of *The New York Jewish Week* and senior editor of the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency* (@SilowCarroll).

Ben Sales covers anti-Semitism as well as American Jewish affairs for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*. Previously, he was *JTA's* Israel correspondent, based in Tel Aviv. He has reported from 10 countries. He is a former editor of *New Voices* magazine, and a native of Chicagoland.

● SABBATH WEEK / PARSHAT TOLDOT

Not Sure About Having Kids? The Torah Understands.

Rebecca's story could be read as one about a matriarch who is ambivalent about childbirth.

By Tali Adler

Did our matriarchs all long to be mothers?

We tend to tell one story about the biblical matriarch, a story in which they long for children for years, praying for pregnancies that will make them into mothers. Sarah, Rebecca and Rachel blur in our minds, united in their barrenness. Their lives are divided into two periods: matriarchs-in-waiting, and matriarchs fulfilled.

But the Torah's story of these women might be more complicated.

Sarah and Rachel both take active steps to ensure they have children. When Sarah proposes that Avraham take Hagar as a wife it is because she hopes that their child will be hers as well. Later, when she finally gives birth to Isaac, Sarah praises God for her miracle. Rachel, desperate for a child, confronts her husband, telling him that if she does not have children she will die. When she gives birth to Joseph, her first born son, the name she gives him references her desire for more.

Rebecca, the matriarch at the center of this week's portion, however, never indicates that she has any desire for children at all.

Unlike the barrenness of other matriarchs, which is mentioned at the beginning of extended narratives about their quests for children, Rebecca's is introduced in the same verse that mentions the solution — not her own prayers, but her husband's.

Isaac pleaded with the LORD before (Ienochach) his wife, because she was barren; and the LORD re-

sponded to his plea, and his wife Rebecca conceived. (Genesis: 25-21)

Where was Rebecca as her husband prayed? The midrash in Bereishit Rabbah suggests that Rebecca was in the same room as Isaac, praying the same prayers. In this image of the couple they are united in their desire for children and the pain they feel during the long wait.

But Rebecca's silence is conspicuous and forces us to entertain another possibility: Perhaps it is only Isaac who wants children enough to pray for them. This possibility paints a different picture, one in which Isaac prays fervently in one corner of a room while Rebecca, in another corner, remains silent — maybe simply ignoring his prayers, or maybe going so far as to hope that his prayers will be ignored.

The possibility of Rebecca's ambivalence is reinforced in the next verse:

But the children struggled in her womb, and she said, "If so, why do I exist?" (Genesis 25:22)

Rebecca's reaction to her pregnancy is a direct contrast to Rachel's later reaction to her inability to become pregnant. Whereas Rachel says she will die if she does not have children, Rebecca, once she begins to experience the pregnancy physically, despairs. It is only when Rebecca receives the word of God assuring her that she has a role as the mother of two great nations that Rebecca seems to reconcile herself to motherhood.

There are two ways to understand this version of Rebecca's story. The first, and more tragic, is of a woman who never wanted to be a mother and had that role forced upon her by other people's needs and expectations. This Rebecca is a reminder of the heartbreak that ensues when childbearing is mandated by a society unable

to see individuals whose dreams may be different than those others have for them.

But there is a second, more complicated version of Rebecca's story, one that is less tragic but perhaps equally uncomfortable. In this version Rebecca is not against being a mother, but is ambivalent about it. Instead of hoping that Isaac's prayers will go unanswered, she may remain silent because she is simply unsure of what she wants. This Rebecca may have experienced joy and fear during her pregnancy. This Rebecca may, like so many mothers, have embraced her children in love while mourning the ways that their existence would change her life.

For many people, the journey towards parenthood is ambivalent: wanting coupled with fear, days of longing for pregnancy followed by extended periods of hoping for just a little while longer before it comes. Sometimes even those who have previously identified with Rachel and Sarah become, when faced with pregnancy, ambivalent Rebeccas.

In offering Rebecca's journey, the Torah may be offering an imperative: Do not assume you know how others feel about their journeys to parenthood. Make space for parents to share their fears just as they share their joy.

And for those struggling with their ambivalence in silence: Know that Rebecca is our matriarch as well.

Rabbi Tali Adler teaches at Yeshivat Hadar.

● MUSINGS

The Secret of Memory

By David Wolpe

The renowned historian Yosef Haim Yerushalmi once noted that the Jewish people were the first in history who saw memory as a religious obligation. In his aptly titled book "Zakhor," or "Remember," he traced the ways in which Jews recorded and reconstructed the events of their history.

The more we learn about memory the more we realize it is not a tape recorder; indeed we do not even use the

CANDLELIGHTING, READINGS:

Kislev 1, 5782 | Friday, November 5, 2021

- **Light candles at:** 5:29 p.m.

Kislev 2, 5782 | Saturday, November 6, 2021

- **Torah reading:** Toldot, Genesis 25:19–28:9

- **Haftarah:** Malachi 1:1–2:7

- **Shabbat ends:** 6:28 p.m.

same “storage systems” for different kinds of memory. The way you recall breakfast is not the same as the way you recall a childhood incident, although it may seem the same. Scans of brains show different parts and patterns involved in different recollections.

For Jews the obligation is not to record what happened alone but to integrate the lessons of the event into our lives. We are enjoined to remember so that we will act differently than if we were ignorant of the past. To be a Jew is to bear witness even to events one has not personally seen; to remember that which we did not personally undergo; to change our lives because of the trauma and the triumph and the sanctity of those who came before us.

*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.*

● JEWISH SPORTS

The Man Who Helps Jewish New York City Marathoners Run Through Their Morning Prayers

By Julia Gergely

On Sunday, for the 36th time, Peter Berkowsky will wake up at 3:00 a.m., drive in the dark from his home in Livingston, New Jersey to Fort Wadsworth in Staten Island and set up a pre-race minyan, or Jewish prayer quorum, at the starting grounds for the New York City Marathon.

“We announce that the first minyan will be at seven o’clock in the morning. As soon as that’s over, and we have 10 more runners gather, we start the minyan again,” said Berkowsky. “We just continue to do it until there’s no more runners left” — a commitment that lasts the whole morning, until all 30,000 marathoners are off

and running.

The New York City Marathon is back after a two-year, pandemic-induced hiatus, and Berkowsky is ready to celebrate what’s known as the world’s largest marathon just as he has since 1983.

Berkowsky, who is an attorney and civil servant during the rest of the year, hasn’t run a marathon since 1984, but he’ll never give up on the minyan. “It’s my baby,” he said. “There’s just too many people who rely on it.”

The minyan is the longest established religious service of any kind at any major sporting event anywhere in the world, something the New York Road Runners, the marathon’s organizer, is very proud of, said Berkowsky.

“We get a lot of people who are not Orthodox, a lot of people who are not observant at all, but they come to the minyan because they know all the Jewish runners are going to be there,” Berkowsky explained. “It is very heartening to see runners sharing tefillin — like a runner from France would share his tefillin with somebody from South America.”

In recent years, the minyan has been providing runners with the prayer accoutrements few would want to carry on the 26.2 mile-long race: prayer shawls, prayer books and the small black box and leather straps of the tefillin worn on the head and arm during the traditional morning service. Berkowsky partnered with a local Chabad to make sure they had enough.

In the past, runners would be able to check their own supplies and retrieve them after the race, but that service was halted in 2012.

It was a notice in The Jewish Week that helped get the minyan off the ground.

In 1983, Berkowsky, at age 41, had put on tefillin only a handful of times in his life. But when his mother died while he was training for the marathon, he committed to completing the full year of mourning, which includes saying Mourner’s Kaddish with a minyan three times a day.

He had to find a way to gather a minyan in Fort Wadsworth the morning of the race — so he put out notices in all the local Jewish papers.

Jim Michaels, a Conservative rabbi at the Whitestone He-

brew Center in Queens, responded to a bulletin he had seen in *The Jewish Week*. Berkowsky recalled Michals saying, “Yeah, I’d be interested. In fact, I davened all by myself in 1982. Fred Lebow came walking by and he did a double take when he saw me standing out in the middle of the parade ground with my tefillin on.”

The late Fred Lebow, a Holocaust survivor born Fischel Lebowitz in Arad, Romania, founded the New York City Marathon.

Berkowsky and Michaels collaborated through word-of-mouth campaigns and news bulletins, and that first year, 26 people showed up. The second year, the number doubled, boosted by an Israeli team that wasn’t “necessarily observant,” but had been informed that the minyan was where all the Jewish runners gathered.

Rabbi Michaels has since moved to Maryland, but the legacy of the minyan held. Berkowsky, along with his assistant Yisroel Davidson, now leads a team of 10 volunteers from all over the tri-state area and Israel. He estimated that over 200 people participated in different waves of the minyan the last year it was held, in 2019.

“The big surprise for me is actually how few people are saying Kaddish,” said Berkowsky, who started the tradition to cater to those needs. “We’ve had thousands of people participating in the minyan in the last 36 years. Very few of them are saying Kaddish. These are people who just want to daven in a minyan.”

Berkowsky made it one of the minyan’s goals to keep Fred Lebow’s name alive after he died in 1994. It was Lebow whom Berkowsky contacted when he noticed, two years in advance, that the 1986 race would land on Simchat Torah, and who ultimately moved the race to the first Sunday in November, a date that stuck. It was Lebow who organized a tent for the minyan the few times the race fell on Rosh Chodesh and the minyan needed to bring a Torah to the starting grounds to celebrate the minor holiday of the New Moon. (The Road Runner’s Society has provided a permanent tent since 2005 — this year it will have electricity and heaters.)

It was Lebow who would drive in a car ahead of marathon runners, cheering them on and ensuring everything ran smoothly. When the runners ran through Hasidic neighborhoods in Williamsburg, Lebow would yell in Yiddish, “The runners need water!”

More and more runners and minyan attendees, Berkowsky said, didn’t know Lebow and some don’t even recognize his name.

Lebow, Berkowsky explained, was much less religious than his family members, who moved to Israel, Brooklyn and Monsey, New York when they arrived in America as Holocaust refugees. “But he was becoming much more observant in his last few months and years, and I think we probably had a lot to do with that,” said Berkowsky. When Lebow was diagnosed with brain cancer in 1990, the minyan gathered around him to say a *Mi Sheberach* prayer for healing.

“I mean, the guy was a mensch,” Berkowsky said. “He really was.” The last time Berkowsky saw Lebow was when the race organizer stopped by the minyan in 1992. Lebow had decided, for the first time, to run in his own marathon that year. It was also the only year he put on tefillin at the minyan. He was 62 when he died two years later.

Berkowsky, who also helped start a minyan at the Miami Marathon, believes the New York City Marathon is unique. “There’s a million people lining the streets to cheer you on from start to finish, in all different types of neighborhoods in all five boroughs. There’s no other race like that. I like to think that our minyan is one of the things that makes the New York City Marathon unique, certainly for Jewish runners.” Berkowsky’s favorite part of the service is when all the runners yell together the last morning blessing: “Hanoten LaYoef Koach,” which thanks God for giving strength to the weary — a particularly poignant blessing to say before the minyan’s runners depart on their 26-mile journey.

“Some people who put on tefillin for the first time at the minyan, who knows? It might change their lives, you know, they might decide to do it more often,” said Berkowsky, who has not missed a day of putting on tefillin since he began this minyan. “It’s just a real good, feel-good thing.”

Do you have an event coming up? Submit your events online at www.jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/contact/submit-an-event

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 7 | 3:00 p.m. Free**Leonard Bernstein in Israel**

Join the Museum of Jewish Heritage and the American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra for a program exploring Leonard Bernstein's remarkable legacy in Israel. The program will feature a screening of "Leonard Bernstein and the Israel Philharmonic," a new short film commissioned by American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic, and will feature a panel discussion with Bernstein's son Alex Bernstein; Danielle Ames Spivak, executive vice president and CEO of American Friends of the Israel Philharmonic; and Ivy Weingram, curator of the exhibition "Leonard Bernstein: The Power of Music." 36 Battery Place, New York.

Register at <https://mjhnyc.org/events/leonard-bernstein-and-the-israel-philharmonic/>

November 9 | 7:00 p.m. Free**Documenting History Through Art with the David Labkovski Project**

Lithuanian-Israeli artist David Labkovski documented history through art as a way to bear witness to the past. Join the Melton School of Adult Jewish Learning in commemoration of Kristallnacht for a powerful lecture and workshop about his life and legacy.

Register at <https://events.org/events/calendarcourse?tid=c321398d-7468-44de-a648-fa213feb3952>

November 9 | 8:00 p.m. Free**The Legacy of Elie Wiesel**

Join the Jewish Future Pledge for a special webinar to hear from Elie Wiesel's son, Elisha Wiesel, and grandchildren on how the Wiesel family is working to continue the Nobel Laureate's legacy. Elisha will also discuss the recent unveiling of a carving of his father at the Washington National Cathedral, the first Jewish leader to receive this prestigious honor.

Register at https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_-7B9b84ETwO-8UL1Lrt0bQ

November 10 | 7:30 p.m. Free**Because My Soul Longs for You: Integrating Theology into Our Lives**

Join CCAR Press in celebrating the publication of its newest book, "Because My Soul Longs for You: Integrating Theology into Our Lives." The volume explores how we experience God through means both conventional and unexpected. The editors, Rabbi Edwin C. Goldberg and Rabbi Elaine S. Zecher, will discuss the book's lessons, and contributors will share insights on their chapters.

Register at https://ccar.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_FCTW_Ia6Q4--jVjrxKZNdg