

B'NAI B'RITH

M A G A Z I N E

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WINTER 2025

AIN'T NO BACK TO A MERRY-GO-ROUND: DESEGREGATING GLEN ECHO AMUSEMENT PARK



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Editor's Note

The year was 1960. Before the Freedom Rides in the South and before the March on Washington remembered for Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, Black students from Howard University and Jewish residents of the nearby Bannockburn neighborhood banded together to picket the segregated Glen Echo Amusement Park in suburban Bethesda, Maryland. Their efforts, unique at the time, led to the park's reopening to all the following spring. This historic Black-Jewish alliance is recalled in a documentary film, "Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round," and is our cover story.

This year marks the anniversary of another historic event, the centennial of YIVO, the Yiddisher Visenshaftlecher Institut (Jewish Scientific Institute), that major repository of Yiddish culture. Writer Beryl Benderly, who authored our award-winning 2023 cover story "How Hate Hurts Kids," tells the remarkable history of this unique Manhattan-based resource whose searchable database makes it globally accessible. In this issue, we also look at a lesser-known corner of Judaica: the tiny but resilient community of Jews in Kenya, consisting of two

quite different congregations in the East African country once under consideration as a Jewish homeland.

Almost as remote is Israel's Dead Sea. Journalist Uri Heilman explores it for us by bicycle. Join him on his journey along the Negev desert's little traversed trails. The Negev is mostly peaceful even in a time of war, but for Israel's "Lone Soldiers," men and women who have come from more than 60 countries to enlist in the Israel Defense Forces, there is an extra burden of being far away from their homes. We tell their story and how the IDF and others in Israel are going above and beyond to support these "lone soldiers," as they adjust to a new country, culture and language.

There's more: In her Vault column, archivist Cheryl Kempler writes about the promised return of eight classic volumes the Nazis confiscated from Heidelberg's B'nai B'rith Friedrich Lodge. And don't miss our usual lineup of columnists: B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin, B'nai B'rith President Robert Spitzer and Mark Olshan, who looks back on his 42 years at B'nai B'rith focusing on housing for seniors. 📖

—Eugene L. Meyer

From the Vault

Treasures from the Heidelberg Lodge to be Returned to B'nai B'rith

By Cheryl Kempler

Articles published in B'nai B'rith Magazine over the last decade have explored Germany's efforts at the restitution of property—from fine and decorative arts to buildings and even entire businesses—looted from Jewish victims of the Holocaust to their rightful owners or descendants.

A 2018 Vault column described the process that led to identification and the subsequent return to B'nai B'rith of books housed for decades in the collections of public and academic libraries in Berlin and Potsdam. The Nazis had confiscated them from lodge libraries in Konstanz, Heidelberg and

Hanover, probably in the late 1930s.

Lodge bookplates, dedications, scribbled margin notes, as well as stamps used by the Third Reich, including "J" for "Judenbücher," traced the books' origins and history.

Happily, more of these volumes will be coming home, thanks to the dedication of German archivists and librarians working to find the owners of the plundered texts.

Last year, Mannheim University provenance researcher Max Gawlich was in touch with B'nai B'rith's staff about our archives. "Our objective is to identify and locate books and libraries

that were looted and stolen during the Nazi period in Germany," his message read. By the spring of 2025, it was discovered that a total of eight books from Heidelberg's Friedrich Lodge were housed in the Mannheim University library. All published before 1925, the books and their subject matter focus on Jewish topics, including Chasidism and its history, theology and biblical poetry. Of particular note were three biographies, revealing the wide range of erudition and interests for which Germany's B'nai B'rith brotherhood is commemorated. 📖

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12 Ain't No Back: The Glen Echo Story

Glen Echo Park today is a vibrant cultural center in Bethesda, Maryland, open to all. But it wasn't always so. Our cover story takes us back to the protest in the summer of 1960 that led to the park's racial desegregation—events that inspired the documentary “Ain't No Back to a Merry-Go-Round”—helping the park finally live up to its “Come one, come all” jingle.

By Deborah Lynn Blumberg

17 YIVO at 100: Preserving Ashkenazi Culture of the Past for the Present and Future

Founded in 1925 with support from Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, YIVO (the Jewish Scientific Institute) has preserved Eastern European Jewish culture through war, genocide and cultural transformation. Now celebrating its centennial, the organization maintains 24 million documents and artifacts in Manhattan, serving as the world's most extensive repository of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage.

By Beryl Lieff Benderly

21 Israel's “Lone Soldiers” Are Not All Alone

Many of the Israel Defense Forces' lone soldiers—immigrants and those without family in Israel—face isolation, mental health struggles and disproportionate suicide rates. Since Oct. 7, 2023, support networks have become vital for the 7,000 soldiers serving far from home.

By Michele Chabin

25 A Dead Sea Journey: Biking Through the Negev

A solo two-day bicycle ride takes us on a journey through Israel's Negev Desert where the Dead Sea's retreat has created a post-apocalyptic landscape of sinkholes and abandoned buildings. Our writer navigates through mined channels, evaporation pools and desert canyons while taking in the region's unique wildlife and ancient history.

By Uriel Heilman

29 The Jews of Kenya: Two Different Paths

We explore two Jewish communities in Kenya with vastly different origins: Nairobi Orthodox Congregation of white expatriates rooted in colonial history, and the remote Conservative Congregation of Ol-Kalou—native Africans who broke from Messianic Judaism to embrace traditional practices despite limited resources.

By Sandra Gurvis

32 College Students Share Experiences of Anti-Semitism on Campus in 2025 None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest

Anti-Israel protests and anti-Semitic slogans and innuendos have become all too common on college campuses. For B'nai B'rith's annual None Shall Be Afraid essay contest, students across the country submitted essays describing how they experienced and responded to acts of anti-Semitism.



B'NAI B'RITH MAGAZINE

WINTER 2025

B'NAI B'RITH IMPACT

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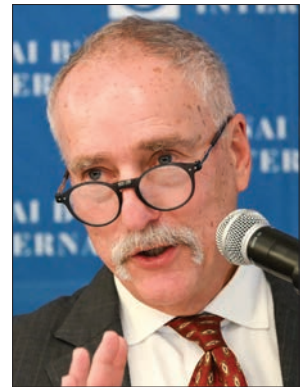
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We Were Immigrants

By Robert B Spitzer

B'nai B'rith International President



On Oct. 13, 1843, Henry Jones and 11 other German-Jewish immigrants met in Sinsheimer's café on the Lower East Side of Manhattan, worried about taking care of their families, widows and orphans. America was a strange and not always welcoming place. They organized a group called "B'nai B'rith," which was focused on mutual aid, community building and advocacy for Jewish rights. Their first project was to provide insurance to assist the widows and children of its members.

While B'nai B'rith is now in over 40 countries, a majority of our members and supporters are in America. As we know, with the exception of the indigenous people in the U.S., all Americans whose families arrived in the last 400 years have emigrated from other lands. Most Jews now in America descended from immigrants who arrived in the early 20th century.

In response to the waves of Eastern European immigrants arriving in those years, Congress passed the Immigration Act of 1924 (the Johnson-Reed Act), which strictly limited the number of people who could be admitted to the United States each year. This act had the cruel effect of preventing Jews trying to escape from the clutches of the murderous Nazis from coming here.

Who can forget the German ocean liner St. Louis, a passenger ship carry-



Photo: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, Maryland

Over 900 Jewish immigrants were bound for Havana on the ocean liner St. Louis, which departed Hamburg, Germany, on May 13, 1939. It reached its destination on May 27, but only 22 Jews—those with valid visas—were permitted to disembark. Neither Cuba nor the U.S. accepted the passengers. They were sent back to Europe, where many perished in the Holocaust.

ing some 900 Jews fleeing the Nazis in 1939, which was turned away by both Cuba and the U.S. and forced to return to Europe? As a result of our country's refusal to allow these refugees to disembark, most of them were caught up in the German invasion of Western Europe; 254 died in the Holocaust.

After the war, Congress and the American people expanded the quotas and established a system for political refugees to apply for asylum. Unfortu-

nately, in the last 20 years, the system has not worked well, with too few immigration judges and courts available to adjudicate asylum requests. Applicants wait in the U.S. for their cases to be adjudicated, sometimes for 5 or 10 years. The visa systems allow students and visitors to come to America, but we have insufficient safeguards to prevent visitors and students from overstaying visas. The southern border, in particular, has seemed to be out of control, as hundreds

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of thousands of economic refugees have crossed the border without legal authority to live a better life in America.

Again, we are witnessing a backlash against immigrants.

For decades there's been wide agreement that our immigration system is dysfunctional, but Congress has been unable to act. A bipartisan proposal to reform our broken system was agreed to and passed by the Senate in 2024, but in the run up to the elections that year, politics prevented its passage.

Meanwhile, those who blocked the legislative fix have demonized those who have entered the country, largely as murderers, criminals and rapists who are taking jobs from Americans. Statistics show that undocumented people here commit fewer crimes than U.S. citizens on a per capita basis. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents are waging massive drives to round up suspected undocumented people in the country and have ensnared many with legal permission to stay in the U.S. in their nets. Their tactics of wearing face masks and body armor and not showing badges are intentionally intimidating.

The U.S. Marines and National Guard were mobilized to quell protests against the deportation roundups, even when their presence was not requested or desired by local governments and law enforcement agencies. Many suspects have been deported before receiving hearings, and judicial orders to stop have been ignored. Municipalities that have refused to participate in the federal roundups have had unrelated block grants and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) disaster funds withheld or denied by the administration. Elected officials have been physically pushed around and harassed for questioning ICE tactics.

Many of those deported have been sent to dangerous places that were not

their homes, such as Sudan, Somalia, Venezuela and El Salvador. Tens of thousands waiting to be deported are being held in prisons, such as in the new "Alligator Alcatraz" established in the Everglades in Florida and Guantanamo in Cuba. Families are being torn apart, and the administration is denying the validity of a concept which every federal court in the land has ruled is enshrined in the Constitution—that people born in the United States are U.S. citizens.

Is this the America my grandparents called the "Goldene Medina?" Is this extreme hostility toward foreigners good for America, which has long been a magnet for the best and brightest of the world to come to our universities and who stay to create scientific, medical and technological innovations? Is it good for the Jewish people, who are often targeted when waves of hostility are directed at minority groups?

Does the current backlash reflect America's aspirations? Have we forgotten the words engraved on the Statue of Liberty taken from a poem by the Jewish American poet Emma Lazarus: "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free"?

As Jews, we are reminded every Pesach that we were slaves in Egypt, to reinforce our sense of empathy toward the downtrodden. The patriarch Abraham was famous for his understanding and actualizing of the commandment "loving the stranger," which appears 36 times in the Torah.

We are living in profoundly divisive political times. Notwithstanding our differing news sources, political affiliations or countries of residence, our history as Jews as well as our religious values need to inform our lives and actions. While it is important for America and every country to defend its borders, let's not lose sight of how we've been taught to treat strangers in our land. 🇺🇸

B'nai B'rith and the United Nations at 80

By Daniel S. Mariaschin
B'nai B'rith International Chief Executive Officer



When B'nai B'rith President Henry Monsky led a united Jewish delegation to the founding conference of the United Nations in San Francisco in May 1945, his worldview was sobering, not starry-eyed.

World War II and the Holocaust had ended. Six million Jews lay dead at the hands of a murderous regime bent on world conquest. Much of Europe lay in ruins. The Soviet Union, a wartime ally, had its eyes on Central and Eastern Europe and would soon acquire nuclear weapons capability. Geopolitical change would soon roil Asia as well.

Monsky attended as consultant to a delegation of prominent Jewish leaders who were acting as advisors to the American committee members. Other faiths, ethnic and civic groups were represented as well. Monsky was essentially the voice of world Jewry, and his forceful interventions in a host of meetings with key international personalities, diplomats and with U.S. officials made two things very clear: The issue of "Palestine" must be resolved, ending in a sovereign state for the Jewish people, and a tough mechanism to monitor human rights globally must be established.

A year later, in 1946, the U.N. opened for business in Lake Success on Long Island, just over the New York City line, and, a year after that, B'nai B'rith received its first NGO (non-governmental organization) credentials at the organization. It



Source: Wikipedia.org

An image of the pin worn by delegates and members of the press at the 1945 United Nations meetings in San Francisco.

was a different world in those days: After the crushing years of war, there was hope in the air that finally reason would prevail in the conduct of international affairs, that wars could be prevented, conflicts resolved and abusers of human rights would be called to account.

European Jews were in Displaced Persons (DP) camps, Chaim Weizmann and David Ben-Gurion were still tirelessly knocking on the doors of world leaders and other influentials, earnestly trying to make the case for the establishment of a Jewish state. The Arab world was menacing, and it was touch and go until President Harry Truman did the deed in May 1948 and recognized the newly established State of Israel within 11

minutes of independence being declared in the Knesset's makeshift hall on Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv. And just a year later, Israel entered the United Nations as a member state.

Even though the Jewish state did come into being relatively soon after the U.N.'s creation, it had enemies from the moment of its birth. At the U.N., in the vote on partition—which created Jewish and Arab states—13 countries voted against partition and 10 abstained. 33 voted for partition, but from the outset there was an animus toward Israel that was already building and that has, to this day, not abated.

For decades, Israel has been treated as a pariah in the U.N.'s General Assembly, its Security Council (to which it has never been elected) and a host of U.N. agencies. I recall, as we were crowded around our TV, Israel's Foreign Minister Abba Eban standing alone, along with U.S. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg, as one Arab country after another took to the microphone to castigate and lacerate Israel in the wake of the 1967 Six-Day War.

The adoption of the "Zionism= Racism" resolution in 1975 spawned what is now over 50 years of demonizing and delegitimizing of the Jewish State that has burgeoned out of control globally. The initial impetus for the immense challenges we are facing today as Jews began right there, in the General Assembly Hall in New York. And even though

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Jewish leaders of the American Jewish Conference meet on the sidelines of the first sessions of the United Nations in May 1945. B'nai B'rith President Henry Monsky, official consultant to the conference, appears fifth from left; B'nai B'rith Executive Secretary Maurice Bisgyer, who served as a member of the Conference's executive committee, is seen at the extreme left.

the resolution was rescinded in 1991, the path to defamation never stopped.

Israel was even barred from joining its natural geographic grouping at the U.N. It instead was squeezed into something called the "Western European and Others Group" in 2000—but it could only participate in meetings in New York. On behalf of B'nai B'rith, I was involved in many rounds of public diplomacy urging that Israel become a fully participating member anywhere. I believed then, as I do now, that it was an affront to Israel that did not have to happen. Israel became, again, an orphan in an organization based on the highest sounding words of inclusion.

In 2001, the presumptuously named "World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" took place in Durban, South Africa. It was a hate fest to end all hate fests against Israel and its supporters. B'nai B'rith led the Jewish organizations represented at the gathering and was subject to the anti-Semitic atmosphere that pulsed through the meeting hall and

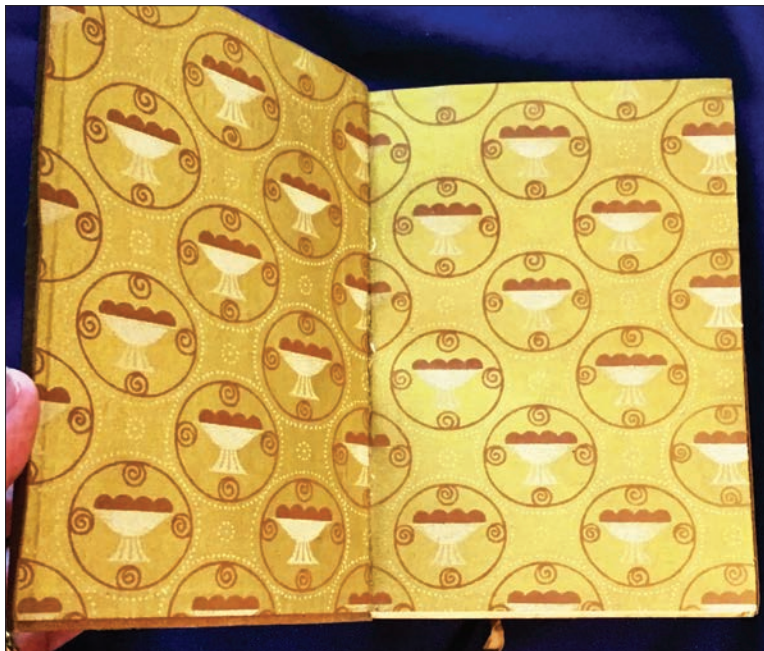
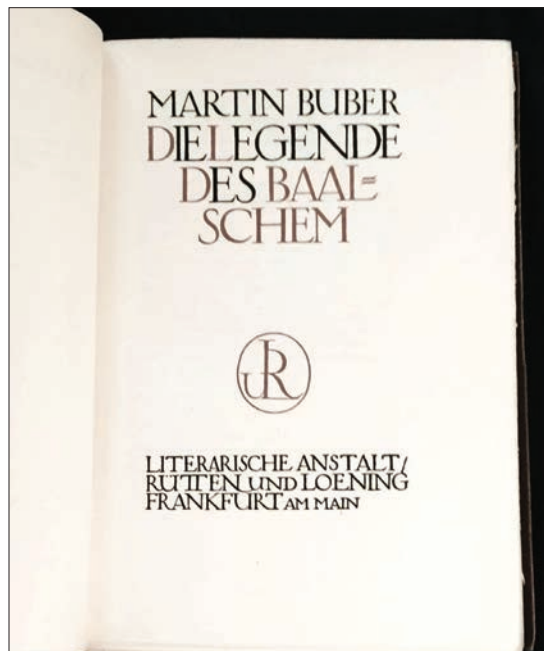
in the streets surrounding it.

Henry Monsky was prescient. He saw in 1945 that there were and would be countries that are serial abusers of human rights. He urged a tough and unforgiving policy that would call out those who abuse the human rights not only of the recently decimated Jewish world, but of all peoples.

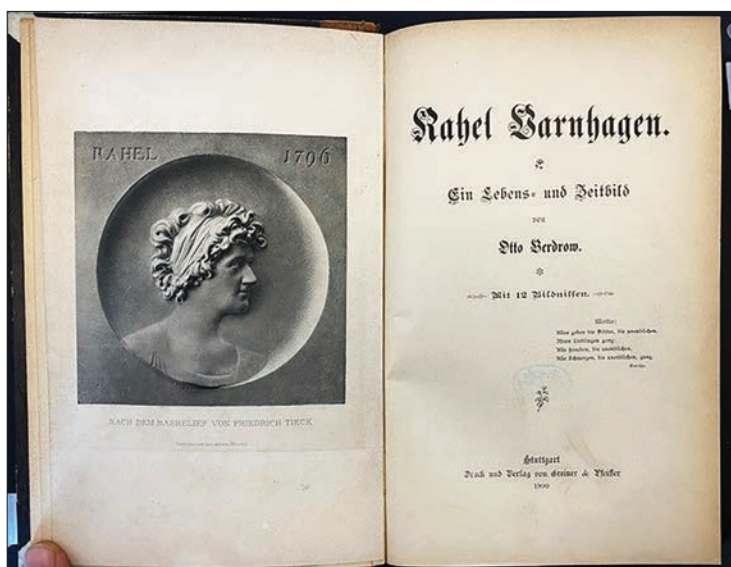
Perhaps Monsky knew that, left to their own devices, nation states would revert to looking the other way, or excusing the bad behavior of others. The U.N. Human Rights Commission, later renamed the U.N. Human Rights Council, has become exactly that. While letting countries whose human rights records are among the world's worst get away with it, the U.N. has made Israel the go-to target of the Council's opprobrium. Special rapporteurs whose job is to single out Israel for scorn and vicious, unwarranted criticism and hold Israel to impossible standards, are routinely appointed. A special Commission of Inquiry was established within

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Treasures From Heidelberg Lodge To Return to B'nai B'rith



A member of B'nai B'rith, Viennese born Martin Buber (1878-1965) is honored today as a philosopher influenced by the tenets of Judaism. His belief system (known as "I/Thou") became the basis of what is considered modern civil and ethical conduct. Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. cited Buber's words in his "Letter from a Birmingham Jail." This remarkable 1908 edition of Buber's 1903 biography of the Baal Shem Tov, which in English means the "Good Miracle Worker," (ca. 1700-1760), Chasidism's visionary founder, was designed by Emil Rudolf Weiss. An important graphic artist, Weiss' style blends Art Nouveau aesthetics with Germany's centuries-old woodblock print traditions. In addition to the endpapers and inside covers decorated with stylized bowl motifs, Weiss created the book's spectacular typefaces. He would go on to develop fonts that are still in use today.



An educator, poet and writer on modern women's history, Otto Berdrow published "The Life and Times of Rahel Varnhagen" in 1900. Her name is synonymous with the assimilation brought on by the Enlightenment movement, resulting in the integration of the elite German Jewish community with that of Christian society.

The intellectual Varnhagen (née Levin) (1771-1833) hosted Berlin's celebrated men of letters, including poet and critic Karl Wilhelm Schlegel, author Ludwig Tieck and diplomat Friedrich von Gentz at her famed salons. She was a friend of the great novelist and poet Johann Wolfgang Goethe. A talented conversationalist and writer, Varnhagen converted to Christianity after her marriage, and she described her ambivalent relationship to Judaism in her letters and diary entries: This was a time when hatred was rife, despite the values of the Enlightenment and Judaism's groundbreaking exodus from the world of the ghetto. The modern philosopher

Hannah Arendt, who penned her own biography of Varnhagen, described her as "my closest friend, though she has been dead for some hundred years."

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B'nai B'rith and the United Nations at 80

the Council in 2021. It has no shelf life and its permanent presence has only one purpose: to report, quarterly, on Israeli “violations” of human rights.

There is much more, but you get the point. What you see at the U.N. regarding its treatment of Israel, you see daily in the streets of our major cities, on university campuses, in the back and forth on social media, and in the major mainstream media as well. Essentially, the bias and outright anti-Semitism that emanates from the U.N. and some of its operatives give credence and legitimation to those on the street, and beyond.

It's not what Monsky and his Jewish organizational colleagues necessarily thought would evolve when they gathered in San Francisco. Even with their insightful efforts to move forward the idea of a Jewish state, they most likely thought that from the depths of the Holocaust, and a world ravaged by six years of war, a better world might emerge. It is, after all, in our biblical teachings and in our Jewish DNA to be optimistic, even in the worst of times.

My mother also looked at the world around her with a “trust but verify” eye. That said, she took my sisters and me for a tour of the still new United Nations Headquarters on First Avenue, in 1955. I was about to enter first grade, and all I recall from that visit was that I received a shiny blue metal pin with the U.N. logo on it as we began the tour. 10 years after the worst crimes ever committed against our people, there was a glimmer of hope that maybe—unlike the earlier, failed experiment of the League of Nations—a body encompassing the international community just might bring about a more peaceful world.

Those hopes have been dashed time and again by self-serving rogue states, mindless bloc voting, risk aversion and a lot of “going along to get along.” That, and the enormous expenditure of time, energy and funds used to victimize the only Jewish state, whose fight to survive continues to the present day.

There is little sense in giving the U.N. a report card on its 80th anniversary. Actually, B'nai B'rith has

been doing that in many ways since we opened the first full-time office on U.N. Affairs in a Jewish community in 1960. We call out the U.N. constantly for its bias. We meet on a regular basis with U.N. officials and diplomats posted there. We travel to Geneva for meetings of the U.N. Human Rights Council, and to Paris to meet with officials at UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization). A day hardly passes without a statement or comment from us, or a social media post on one U.N. resolution or another.

We do this because, given the opportunity, as Jews, we must. That's why Henry Monsky was there in May of 1945. There for B'nai B'rith, for the Jewish people and for what ultimately became the State of Israel.

Though the U.N. has lost its way over these eight decades, we haven't. The fight continues, guided by the same dedication laid out so eloquently by the leader of B'nai B'rith, in those heavily intense days in 1945. 

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1843  SOCIETY

STANDING STRONG for 182 YEARS

For generations, **B'nai B'rith International** has stood at the forefront of Jewish advocacy. Born in 1843 out of urgent need, our mission is even more critical today—at a time of rising anti-Semitism, assaults on Israel and growing global instability.

We meet these challenges with resolve, purpose and action.

Now, we must all band together.

WHAT WE DO—TOGETHER:

- Confront anti-Semitism—online, on campus, in media and in the halls of power
- Defend Israel's legitimacy at the United Nations and across international forums
- Ensure dignity and stability for older adults through housing, advocacy and care
- Provide aid when and where it is needed

INVESTING IN THE FUTURE

We are cultivating the next generation of Jewish leaders—proud, principled voices who stand up for Israel, speak out against hate and carry our values forward. When we build leaders, we build legacy.

When we invest in young leaders, we ensure a resilient and vibrant future for Jewish life and values.

Join us in making a difference that echoes across continents and generations.

SUPPORT THAT MOVES US FORWARD

Every contribution is more than a gift—it's a commitment. When you support B'nai B'rith, you become part of a global movement rooted in justice, dignity and Jewish unity, building the Jewish foundations for tomorrow.



We don't do this work alone.

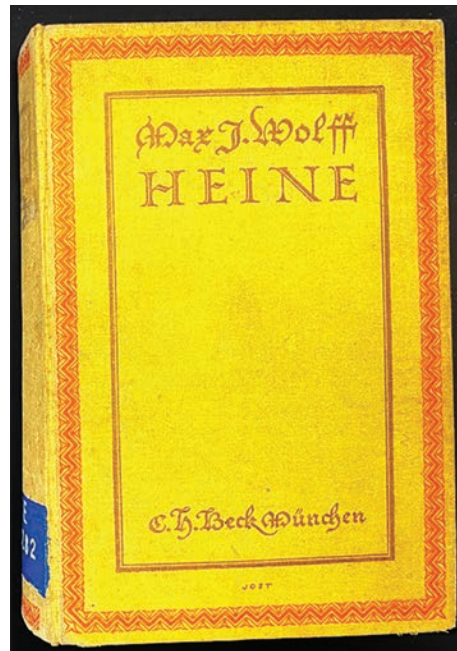
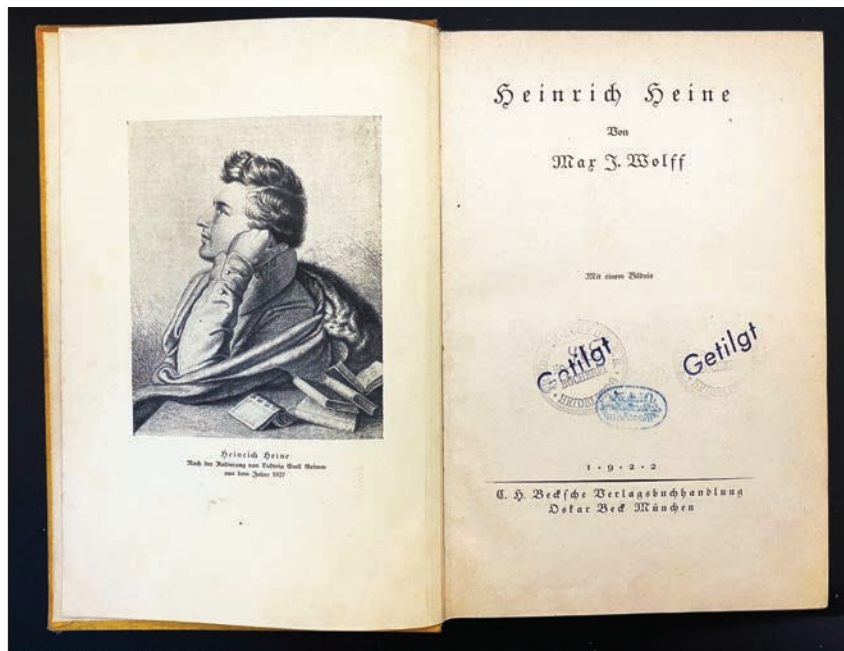
We do it together.

**Wherever there is a need,
there is B'nai B'rith.**



**B'NAI B'RITH
INTERNATIONAL:
ADVOCACY.
ACTION. IMPACT.**

Treasures From Heidelberg Lodge To Return to B'nai B'rith



Essays on the great German 19th century poet and essayist Heinrich Heine (1797-1856) often appeared in B'nai B'rith newsletters and magazines, in both Europe and America. His work was held in esteem throughout Germany and had been a source of pride to its Jewish community. Robert Schumann, Felix Mendelssohn and other iconic composers set many of his lyrical verses to music, and these art songs are frequently heard in concert today. Although he did convert, as did so many who suffered because of their ethnicity and faith, Heine claimed never to have been anything but Jewish, as revealed in his writings inspired by Judaism, its traditions, rituals and beliefs. Persecuted by the German government as a liberal activist, Heine immigrated to Paris, where he lived out the rest of his life. Max Wolff, the author of this 1922 biography, wrote that his outsider status shaped his life, his work and his reception.

An academic recognized as an authority on Heine and other German literary figures, Wolff was credited with uncovering new information, as well as contributing observations that advanced the understanding of the poet's oeuvre. Like his subject, he, too, was persecuted, this time by the Nazis, who no longer permitted him to publish by the late 1930s. Wolff was 73 when he and his wife committed suicide in 1941.

NONE SHALL BE AFRAID: FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

**Fighting anti-Semitism is
at the core of what we do.**

Since our founding, B'nai B'rith has developed tolerance programs and spoken out strongly against anti-Semitism in all its forms. "None Shall Be Afraid" is our flagship response to the world's oldest hatred.

NONE SHALL BE AFRAID

FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM

AIN'T NO BACK TO A MERRY-GO-ROUND: DESEGREGATING GLEN ECHO AMUSEMENT PARK

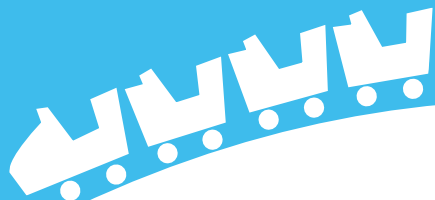
BY DEBORAH LYNN BLUMBERG

At Glen Echo Amusement Park in suburban Bethesda, Maryland, in the 1950s, squealing children rode rabbits, reindeer and tigers on the carousel, crashed bumper cars with abandon and spun themselves silly on the Tilt-O-Whirl. But only white children.

Black people were blocked from entering. “It’s strictly for white patrons,” deputized security guard Francis Collins told Laurence Henry, a 26-year-old Howard University student, as Henry stood at the gates of the amusement park one hot, humid day in June 1960 trying to get in. What followed was a summer-long campaign by Henry and his classmates—plus a group of nearby allies—to bring down the racial barrier.

Howard students banded with residents from the nearby Bannockburn neighborhood, many of them Jewish. Side by side, students and suburbanites, many pushing strollers, spent weeks in the sweltering sun picketing outside Glen Echo. Ultimately, ahead of the park’s 1961 spring opening, owners announced Glen Echo would be open to all. The seminal moment in U.S. history—well before civil rights activists’ sit-ins and freedom rides accelerated countrywide—is the subject of a documentary by Ilana Trachtman. As a producer and director, Trachtman has created Emmy award-winning nonfiction programs for PBS, HBO Family and Discovery on topics including the legacy of slavery in Latin America and activism among Gulf Coast shrimpers. Her personal projects include “Praying with Lior”—a portrait of a boy with Down syndrome preparing for his bar mitzvah—and “Mariachi High”—a year in the life of a South Texas high school champion mariachi ensemble.

“I’m attracted to rich worlds populated by good people who want decency,” Trachtman said. “I have to fall in love with the characters, and all of my films are always, always character-driven.” In “Ain’t No



Back to a Merry-Go-Round,” Glen Echo is very much a character in its own right, one Trachtman first encountered in the ’70s and ’80s, growing up in Montgomery County, Maryland, near the then-abandoned park turned arts center operated by the National Park Service. (Privately owned Glen Echo closed in 1968 after declining attendance.)

As a child, Trachtman attended theater classes and performed in plays at the center. Walking through Glen Echo, she imagined the fun and merriment of the bygone era, smelling the popcorn and hearing the happy notes of carnival music.

“We imbue places with meaning,” Trachtman says. “For some people, it’s a childhood bedroom, or maybe a particular hike in the woods. It’s your magical place, espe-

cially as a child. And so, that’s what Glen Echo was to me. It was a window to this beautiful, wholesome, happy aesthetic and interesting Americana. It was like peering into a Norman Rockwell painting, and probably the most real window that I had into the past.”

Trachtman’s chance encounter with a Glen Echo park ranger decades later, however, shook the very foundation of her perception. In winter 2008, Trachtman and her fiancée (now husband) toured the park as a possible wedding venue. Jewish U.S. Park Ranger Sam Swersky, who possessed a wealth of Glen Echo stories, told the couple

about Bannockburn resident and former protester Hyman Bookbinder, past AFL-CIO lobbyist and assistant to the Secretary of Commerce in the Kennedy administration.

Later in life, Bookbinder—also the American Jewish Committee’s longtime Washington representative—told Swersky during daily Glen Echo walks with his wife, Ida, that the picketing was the proudest moment of his career. Upon hearing about the protest, Trachtman was shocked and even a little ashamed at what she calls her own ignorance.

Photo: Courtesy of George Meany Library/Illana Trachtman

On August 17, Roy Wilkins, executive secretary of the NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) and A. Phillip Randolph, president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters (third and fourth from left, respectively), representing African Americans employed on Pullman Company trains, were among those who picketed outside the park.





Photo: Courtesy of Richard Cook

Glen Echo Park entrance: One of many “trolley parks” in the United States accessible by public transit, Glen Echo was the last stop on a streetcar line that ran from Union Station, Washington, D.C., until 1962.

“On the bus we’re put in the back—
But there ain’t no back/To a merry-
go-round! Where’s the horse/For a kid
that’s black?”

At the gates of Glen Echo

In the D.C. area in the ’50s and ’60s, segregation was part of daily life, with Black-only schools and bathrooms and white-only water fountains and lunch counters. Bannockburn was different. It began in 1946 as a collectively owned community fueled by utopian postwar dreams. Families moved into mid-century modern homes on the site of a former hilly golf course just east of Glen Echo. Many of the progressive residents—among them a sizable number of Jews—had migrated to Maryland from up north to work in the federal government.

In February 1960, Howard students watched along with the rest of the country as four Black college students at the “whites only” Woolworth’s lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina, asked for service and refused to leave when denied.

The protest inspired six students from Howard’s Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), a student-run protest group

“It was suddenly having a sense of the fullness of what Glen Echo was—this wholesome place of delight for Washingtonians, and simultaneously a place of exclusion and a place of pain and a place of actual real ugliness in terms of what humans can do,” she says.

She knew she had to make a film.

Trachtman began her research in 2013 with a DVD Swersky had made of a reunion of Glen Echo protesters he helped organize in the early 2000s. She dug into archives—in the Rockville Public Library, Glen Echo Town Hall and the Library of Congress—perusing newspaper clippings, photographs, and

audio and video recordings.

“Then I tracked down and talked to every single person that I could find who had been there,” she says. Finding the over 100 people she interviewed entailed scouring phonebooks, neighborhood rosters, and church and synagogue records.

Filming started in 2014, and for a decade Trachtman worked on her passion project alongside her other film work. “Ain’t No Back to a Merry-Go-Round” premiered in May 2024 at the Maryland Film Festival. She took the title from Langston Hughes’ 1942 poem “Merry-Go-Round.” It reads,



Photo: Courtesy of National Park Service

Installed at Glen Echo in 1921, the hand-carved carousel has been restored and is still used. Although all other rides closed in 1968, the park is now operated under the management of the Montgomery County government and the National Park Service. The Glen Echo Park Partnership for Arts and Culture is a nonprofit that serves as a home to 13 resident artists and organizations.

aimed at ending segregation, to stage a similar sit-in at Cherrydale Drug Fair in Arlington, Virginia. Within two weeks, lunch counters Arlington-wide were desegregated. Next, they turned to Glen Echo, known for its catchy radio jingle and “Come one, come all” print ads that they knew didn’t apply to them.

Some 60 NAG members joined Henry at Glen Echo’s gates in 1960 along with primarily white suburbanites, many of whom had appealed to local government for years to pressure park owners to desegregate.

Clutching tickets purchased by white protesters, Black protesters streamed into the park. Several sat on the carousel. Arrests followed. But students—and Bannockburners—returned the next day, and the day after that, for nine hot weeks. As they marched and sang, they faced enraged counterprotesters, including American Nazi Party members.

“The faces were so angry,” says Tina Clarke, one of the Black protesters, in the film. She recalls riding the streetcar past Glen Echo, nose pressed to the glass. White kids laughed and swam in

the pool. On the picket lines, “the eyes would be bulgin’, face all red and it’s like they were like crazy people, just calling you filthy names.”

Bannockburn resident Esther Delaplaine, a white Philadelphia transplant, took her five kids to the picket lines. Bannockburners brought lemonade and cookies to share. “The youngsters I think were wondering, whose picket line is this?” she says in the film. Students were cautious but welcomed residents’ support.

Teenagers participated too, and lifelong friendships formed between Black and

white protestors. Bannockburner Loren Weinberg was 17 when he ran messages between protestors after school and his job at a D.C. aquarium shop. “The Road to Hell is Paved with Little Rocks,” read his picket sign, referring to the segregationist resistance at Little Rock Central High School, Arkansas, three years earlier.

“Racism was no stranger to me, I saw it all around me,” Weinberg said at his home in Boulder. Glen Echo “was a big part of my life. I was proud of what I was doing.” Weinberg went on to picket at the nearby Bethesda-Hiser Theatre, which also desegregated after protests. Later, he became a flagship faculty member at Federal City College (now the University of the District of Columbia), which served primarily working-class Black students.

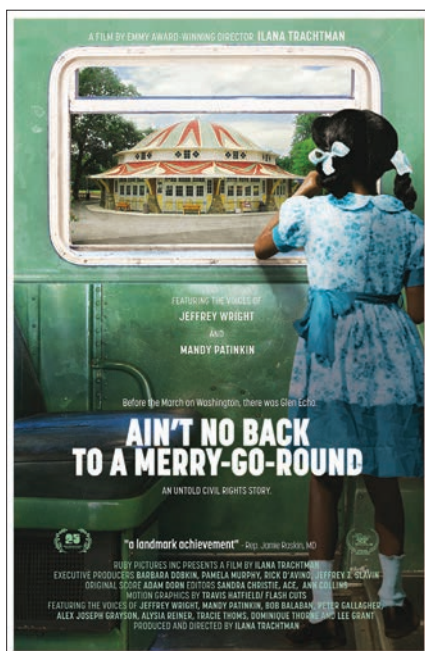
New York University political science professor emeritus Martin Schain was a college junior when he and colleagues at his D.C. summer trade union job joined picketers. “It became a kind of habit—every day after work I went out and picketed,” he tells B’nai B’rith. Schain rode the carousel with Howard students and was arrested. “It actually became a badge of honor,” he adds. “When I look back, I really feel honored to have been a part of that movement. It gave me a wonderful feeling about America.”

The protest gained national attention—congressmen participated; Sammy Davis Jr. promised to put on a benefit show for demonstrators. Finally, on March 14, 1961, a Washington Afro-American headline shocked protestors by announcing, “Glen Echo says come one, come all and means it,” signaling an unexpected end to what many had thought would be months more of picketing. “Glen Echo gave me a determination to not accept being mistreated because of my color,” Deborah Swedenburg Willis, who lived near the park, says in the film. Protesters Black and white went on to participate in freedom rides,



Photo: Courtesy of National Park Service, Glen Echo Archives/Illana Trachtman

Park security guard Francis J. Collins encounters civil rights activist (and Howard University student) Marvous Saunders, who had purchased a ticket and mounted the carousel, leading to his arrest along with other protestors on June 30, 1960. Speaking of these nonviolent actions, Saunders remembered: “We were just trying to make life a little better for those folks who happened to be Black.”



Relying on sources including eyewitness accounts, Illana Trachtman's documentary, “Ain’t No Back to a Merry-Go-Round” tells the story of how Blacks and Jews worked together to successfully integrate Glen Echo Park.

endure arrests and inspire others in the civil rights movement.

“Press on, press on, that is a lesson from Glen Echo,” says Clarke, who joined the picketing from her Black community of Jerusalem, near Poolsville in Maryland, some miles from the park.

For Trachtman, the film’s message that ordinary peoples’ actions—especially diverse groups uniting—can drive significant, positive change feels even more salient today than when she started making her film in 2014, when Barack Obama was president, she says.

“It’s just so easy to say, I’m not capable, I’m not as talented, that’s not my path, or nothing that I do is going to make a difference,” says Trachtman. But “every single person has the capacity to be the change. We have to because we can, because there is nobody else.”

Visit aintnoback.com for information about upcoming screenings in your city. 

YIVO AT 100:

PRESERVING ASHKENAZI CULTURE OF THE PAST FOR THE PRESENT AND FUTURE

By Beryl Lieff Benderly

The names people give their children can say a lot about their values and identities. So when, between the two world wars, in Vilna, Poland (now Vilnius, Lithuania), a Jewish teacher, journalist and activist named Aron Mark and his wife, Fania, gave their first-born son the unusual name of Yivo, everyone could see that they strongly favored strengthening the Yiddish language and the secular, modern, Yiddish-based Jewish culture then flourishing in Eastern and Central Europe.

That's because YIVO is the acronym (in both Yiddish and English) of the Yiddisher Visenshaftlecher Institut (Jewish Scientific Institute), then a relatively new organization committed to studying and strengthening the Ashkenazi Jewish culture of Eastern Europe and its thousand-year-old native speech. At the time, European Jews were struggling to figure out their place in a rapidly changing world. Was the right linguistic choice for the Jewish future Yiddish, modern Hebrew (to serve a growing Jewish presence in what was then British Mandatory Palestine), or the languages of the Gentiles



Photo: Ajay Suresh/Wikimedia Commons

Located in the headquarters of the Center for Jewish History in Manhattan, the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research maintains galleries and research facilities that are open to the public.

they lived among? YIVO, which came down strongly on the side of a modernized “mamaloshen,” had strong appeal for Yiddish supporters like Aron Mark.

Tragically, though, Yivele, as his parents called him, and many of his relatives and neighbors, were among the tens of thousands murdered at the Ponary forest killing site that the Nazis used between 1941 and 1943, as historian Katherine Lebow notes. Yiddish, with 11 million pre-World War II speakers, was then world Jewry’s most prevalent language. Today, it is essentially gone from daily use except among ultra-Orthodox Jews. But Yivele’s eponym lives on, and, headquartered in Manhattan, constitutes what journalist Alyssa Quint calls “the brick-and-

mortar memory of East European Jewry.” This year, the organization that the Marks so ardently supported celebrates its centennial.

The physical memory consists of YIVO’s 24 million documents and artifacts, which comprise the most extensive collection of materials related to Jewish Eastern Europe on earth. YIVO is one of five partner organizations that share the Center for Jewish History on West 16th Street. The door between the Ionic columns on the building’s brick Palladian façade leads



Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Visitors at the Center for Jewish History can contextualize YIVO's collections of art and artifacts through special themed exhibits. "Missing Husbands" focused on a column of the same name published for many years in the *Forverts* (the Jewish Daily Forward) newspaper, illustrated with photos of men who had deserted their families.



Courtesy of YIVO Institute for Jewish Research

Visitors snap photos during a behind-the-scenes tour of YIVO's archives.

to modern facilities including a two-story great hall; storage and conservation areas for the priceless collections; a bright, book-lined two-story reading room; multiple gallery spaces for public exhibitions; and an auditorium seating over 200.

Since World War II, YIVO has actively increased its holdings while continuing to advance knowledge by publishing pivotal journals and books, both scholarly and popular. Beyond that, a widely used system of standard spelling devised by YIVO scholars has dramatically increased consistency and clarity of written Yiddish, a language long composed of multiple dialects. And though YIVO remains "[d]edicated to the preservation and study of the history and culture of East European Jewry worldwide," according to its Facebook page, it also uses 21st century technology to bring that linguistic and cultural heritage to new, overwhelmingly non-Yiddish-speaking generations around the globe.

"YIVO was founded in 1925 with the support of prominent intellectuals and scholars, including Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud, in Berlin, Germany, and Vilna, Poland—today's Vilnius, Lithuania," noted New York Mayor Eric Adams in a proclamation marking March 24, 2025, as "YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Day." Relocating its supposedly temporary wartime headquarters from Vilna to New York, Adams added, YIVO continued telling "the story of the Jewish people: what

they have cherished and endured, and how they have persevered.”

Though a New York branch existed in the organization's early days, Vilna, for centuries a revered center of Jewish learning, was where the founders did their “scientific,” i.e., systematic and modern, research into the life, culture and language of prewar East Europe's Jews. Helping a small cadre of pioneering scholars examine sociology, demography, economics, linguistics, and cultural and religious life were thousands of volunteer zamlers (collectors) in shtetls and cities across the region and beyond. They sent in all kinds of then-contemporary data, documents, artifacts, folklore and linguistic information, sometimes along with (usually) small donations.

YIVO under attack

In September 1939, Poland suffered the twin calamities of both German and Soviet invasions. Vilna first came under Soviet occupation and YIVO became part of its institute for Lithuanian studies. Seizing control in 1941, Germany began looting YIVO's collections, forcing Jewish intellectuals to work at extracting valuable and noteworthy items for a planned “Institute for the Study of the Jewish Question” in Frankfurt, with the remainder slated for destruction. Vilna's Jews were meanwhile confined to a ghetto that the Germans largely liquidated by late 1943 by starvation and disease, at the Ponary Forest, or by transport to death camps. Instead of following orders to plunder YIVO's collections, however, courageous Jewish workers calling themselves the Paper Brigade risked their lives to hide or bury books and papers in the ghetto.

When the war began, YIVO's director, the eminent linguist Max Weinreich—whose Vilna apartment served as the organization's first headquarters—happened to find himself, along with his son Uriel, himself a future prominent Yiddish linguist, at a linguistics conference in Denmark. Reaching New York with Uriel, Max arranged the supposedly temporary wartime headquarters in 1940. Restoring the Vilna center after the war proved impossible, leaving New York as YIVO's main location. In the immediate postwar years, YIVO succeeded in retrieving many hidden documents and, with the help of the U.S. Army, some of the materials the Nazis took to Germany. YIVO also made a concerted effort to document the Holocaust with original materials, some of which served as evidence at the

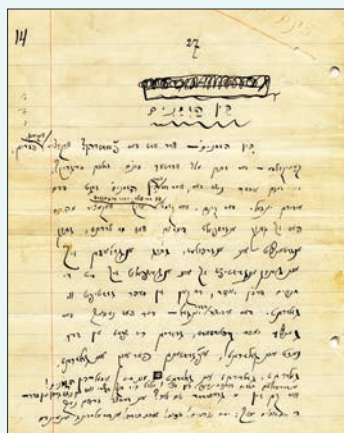
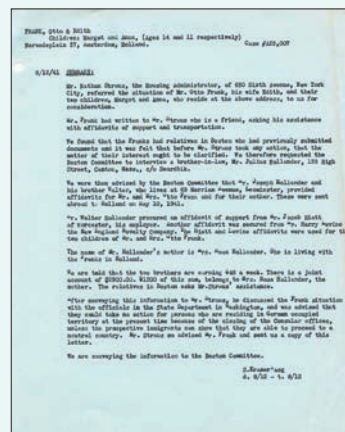
ARTIFACTS FROM THE BOOK AND EXHIBITION “100 OBJECTS FROM THE COLLECTIONS OF THE YIVO INSTITUTE FOR JEWISH RESEARCH”

All photos: Courtesy of the YIVO Institute for Jewish Research



Banner of the Hebrew Actors Union. Organized in 1900, this group became the world's first official union of performing artists, as noted by YIVO's curators. An artifact of the Yiddish theater, the banner also evidences the key role played by Jewish men and women in advancing the reforms of the labor movement, which revolutionized the rights of working people and mandated improved working conditions in the United States.

A page of notes dated August 1941, from Otto Frank's National Refugee Service Case application files. This document reveals the tragic fate of Otto Frank and his family, which included his daughter, Anne, all of whom could have immigrated to the United States. The papers poignantly represent the files of countless others who had obtained sponsorship qualifying them to apply for refugee status but who nonetheless were refused.



Manuscript page from “Funem Yarid” (Back from the Fair) by Sholem Aleichem, 1915. Publishing under the pen name Sholem Aleichem, Russian-born Shalom Rabinovitz (1859-1916) is recognized as one of the world's greatest, and most beloved, writers, in Yiddish or any other language. Marking changes to “Funem Yarid,” Sholem Aleichem edited his unfinished memoir to conform to the fictionalized version of shtetl life with which his works are identified. His Tevye stories became the basis for the musical “Fiddler on the Roof.”

Nuremberg war crimes trials. But, with the Soviets' tightening grip on Eastern Europe and crackdown on Jewish culture in the late 1940s, heroic Paper Brigade members who had survived and returned to Vilna had to flee.

Although only a portion of YIVO's original wealth of documents, books, newspapers, diaries and more remains, it forms the foundation of YIVO's New York collections. Besides continuing to gather materials, YIVO also continued its scholarly work and publication, producing books and journals and organizing conferences. It also offered Yiddish language courses and an expanding array of classes and cultural and educational events that attracted a growing non-scholarly audience.

The numbers of those studying, researching and learning from and about YIVO's treasures have drastically expanded in recent years. When its holdings were only on paper, says CEO and Executive Director Jonathan Brent, "about five to seven thousand people annually would come to the YIVO building in New York." But then it began digitizing materials and putting the Vilna collections online, which brought in over 750,000 digital visitors from around the world.

The COVID-19 lockdown forced online the Yiddish language courses formerly offered only in person in Manhattan, revealing a large international population eager to learn to speak and read over Zoom. Now, dozens of virtual Yiddish classes engage learners ranging from college students to octogenarians who are located in North America, Europe, Latin America and beyond. YIVO study tours also take travelers from around the world to the sites of European Jewish history. (Full disclosure: I traveled to both Lithuania and Poland and study Yiddish online with YIVO.)

These people—many of them new to Yiddish—form part of a larger renaissance of interest in the language and its culture, as many Jews—and some non-Jews—seek greater knowledge and understanding of the world their grandparents and great-grandparents inhabited. Interest extends well beyond Jewish descendants of immigrants from Eastern Europe. Just as origins in Poland, Lithuania, Russia and Ukraine are central to the identity of countless Ashkenazi Jews, so, Brent says, has the millennium-long Jewish presence been gaining awareness in those countries since the Soviets stopped trying to erase it.

Building relationships

Strengthening these shared and mutually enriching connections is an important goal. In 2023, Brent and YIVO Chief of Staff Shelly Freeman traveled to Kyiv concerning "a major initiative underway in Ukraine"—despite the war—to ensure that an important archive that survived both a world war and the Soviets is "protected from Russian aggression," Brent notes. Collaborations also extend to Poland and to a partnership with Lithuania, where Vilnius is now the national capital. On June 20, 2019, during a YIVO study tour, my husband and

I witnessed the dedication of a plaque at the site of YIVO's long-destroyed building in Vilna. Dignitaries present included Lithuania's ministers of culture and foreign affairs and Vilnius's mayor. "YIVO's merits and contribution to studying and preserving the Jewish heritage and the heritage of our multi-national society are invaluable," noted Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius.

Two weeks later, on July 6, after we tourists returned home, Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė bestowed on Brent a high national honor, the Cross of the Knight of the Order for Merits to Lithuania, for his work building cooperation among institutions in preserving the historic record of Lithuanian Jewry and, specifically, the partnership among YIVO, the Lithuanian Central State Archives and two major national libraries in digitizing vast holdings in New York and Vilnius, and making them available in a dedicated internet portal through the Edward Blank YIVO Vilna Online Collections project.

Lithuania "puts the preservation of Jewish heritage high among its priorities, and appreciates the work that YIVO has been doing," declared the National Library of Lithuania on Facebook. Further emphasizing their cooperation in cultural preservation, in 2023, YIVO and the Martynas Mažvydas National Library of Lithuania jointly established an award "for Contributions to the Development of Relations and Understanding between Lithuania and the Jews," naming it for Antanas Ulpis, a non-Jewish library chief who, in 1948, risked his life to supervise the rescue of thousands of Jewish documents and books destined for Soviet destruction by hiding them in a cavernous, disused Catholic church.

Then, as YIVO's centennial year approached, the Embassy of Lithuania in Washington, D.C., held its own celebration on Dec. 9, 2024. Featured speakers included Brent, who outlined YIVO's history, and Ambassador Audra Plepyte, who saluted "the history of YIVO and the bravery of the people who heroically preserved the documents keeping so many stories of the past alive." Thanks to them, "the rich history of Litvaks survived to this day" and forms "an enormous part of our history and common heritage."

YIVO's own anniversary celebration has included conferences in New York and Vilnius, a book on YIVO's history slated for publication in 2026 and an exhibit featuring 100 significant objects from YIVO's collections. Other initiatives underway include "the first learning and media center devoted to the Eastern European Jewish history in the world," and plans for "what we hope to be the first master's degree program in Yiddish language and civilization," Brent says.

Aron and Yivele Mark would likely not recognize the transformed world that YIVO functions in today. But the enduring goals of learning, teaching and preserving Yiddish culture and language would be familiar indeed. 

Israel's “Lone Soldiers” Are Not All Alone

By Michele Chabin



In 2024, more than 7,000 designated “lone soldiers” served in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Of the total, 2,850 came from more than 60 countries. To fit the label, they had to be estranged from their Israeli parents, be orphans, or have no family connections in their adopted land.

Generations of soldiers in countless wars around the globe have adapted to such conditions where “home” was but a distant dream inaccessible from the front and available only to those assigned to domestic duties, where weekend leaves offered some relief and perhaps even a home-cooked meal.

Israel, however, has adopted an entire support system for those deemed “lone soldiers” to ease their military duty in times of war and peace. Since the Hamas attack of Oct. 7, 2023, and the ensuing war in Gaza, the need has grown and the system has kicked into high gear.

The IDF even has a “Lone Soldier Desk” devoted to their welfare.

It’s Thursday afternoon, the time when many of Israel’s soldiers have



Photo: The Michael Levin Lone Soldier Foundation

Michael Levin, an American lone soldier, was killed in combat in 2006. In his memory, his mother and father established the Michael Levin Lone Soldier Foundation to raise awareness and to assist young people in the military who are unable to obtain help from their parents.



Photos courtesy of The Michael Levin Base

Weekends at the Michael Levin Base, separate from the Michael Levin Lone Soldier Foundation, bring together men and women to relax, socialize and enjoy a break from their daily dangerous and stressful duties.

weekly Shabbat meals and Thursday-night activities. Open seven days a week, it is the place to grab a bite to eat, hang out with friends and stock up on army socks.

"This is my place to sit, to be," Engle said, her voice barely audible above the boisterous chatter of two dozen high-spirited young adults enjoying their weekend leave. "These people are my biggest support system. They also feed me," she said. "It's hard coming out of Gaza and being alone. My non-army friends don't know anything about my life."

Lizzie Noach, co-director of the "the Base," said it has become more popular since the war began. "We're seeing more former lone soldiers, especially guys back in reserve duty. One came with a friend and the friend asked, 'Can I have a hug?' Sometimes these big burly guys still feel like kids, but their mothers aren't here."

While the services offered to lone soldiers by the IDF and non-governmental organizations have improved dramatically over the past 15 to 20 years, the Gaza war has placed an unprecedented strain on active-duty soldiers and reservists and the institutions that assist them.

"The needs of lone soldiers have grown since the war started," said Maj. Lior, head of the IDF's Lone Soldier Desk, who asked that only her first name be used, in accordance with IDF protocol.

While having a support system is vital for any soldier, the fact that lone soldiers cannot rely on their parents "creates additional pressure," Maj. Lior said. The demands of wartime affect every soldier, "but they affect lone soldiers more." During wartime, she said, other soldiers see their families every few weeks. Meanwhile, lone soldiers from abroad, who are normally entitled to a month's leave every year to visit their families, may not be permitted to leave the country.

In the best of times, lone soldiers face special challenges, especially if they've recently moved to Israel, Maj. Lior said. "Often, they're dealing with a different culture, a different language, and being in the military is a unique experience that their peers and family back home aren't going through. Soldiers who go home to a family that supports them have it easier."

Highly motivated to join combat units, many lone soldiers have been killed or injured during the war. At least 24 active-duty lone soldiers from abroad and an undetermined number of lone soldier reservists have died in uniform, according to the Ministry of Aliyah and Integration.

Since the early days of the war, the Lone Soldier Desk has arranged emergency flights for parents of deceased soldiers. Staff members have called injured soldiers every day and visit them

weekend leave. Those who live with their parents arrive home to find fridges stocked and a hot meal in the oven. They can head straight to the shower and, with their family's encouragement, maybe even take a nap.

But life for "lone soldiers" is markedly different.

Sgt. First Class Reut Engle, 24, is one. After emigrating from England to Israel in 2020 and serving as a combat medic during her regular military service, she was called up for reserve duty on Oct. 7, 2023, the day Hamas invaded Israel, murdering as many as 1,200 civilians and taking hostage 251 more.

"During my regular service I had incredible support from an Israeli family that 'adopted' me," she said. "Now, as a reservist in Gaza," life is different. On leave she has no adoptive family but shares an apartment with other young people. If she gets out on a Thursday, she has time to shop for food. "If I'm released on Friday," she said, "I have no way to make Shabbat."

This week, when Engle left her army base for the weekend, she headed straight to the Michael Levin Base in Jerusalem, named for a paratrooper from Pennsylvania killed in the Second Lebanon War in 2006. With its old sofas, computer stations, library, TV, ping-pong table, PlayStation, kitchen, laundry room and well-stocked pantry, the facility feels like a basement back home. About 2,500 young people utilize the nonprofit center.

Located near the Mahane Yehuda Market, "the Base" is manned by a small paid staff and volunteers who offer advice,



Photos courtesy of The Michael Levin Base

The Base often organizes recreational activities like laser tag tournaments, played on the roof of Cinema City, a multiplex movie theater in Jerusalem. Aaron Brovinder, advisor for the Russian lone soldiers, wears the neon collar.

at least once a week. “We track their health situation with the hospital, and ensure that once they’re released they are in a supportive environment,” Maj. Lior said.

As supportive as the IDF tries to be, it doesn’t provide 24/7 coverage, so others try to fill the gaps. When a lone soldier in a tank brigade was badly injured, the Israel-based parents of his fellow soldiers took shifts at the hospital until the soldier’s parents could arrive from South America.

When a lone soldier dies, calls go out over social media, asking the public to attend the funeral. Thousands typically come to pay their respects at the cemetery and during the shiva.

It wasn’t always this way. “When I was a lone soldier more than 40 years ago, I was basically on my own,” said Milty Levinson, a longtime IDF reservist who has advised hundreds of prospective soldiers. “Today the assistance they get, the guidance, is way beyond what the army did before.”

Lone soldiers receive stipends to cover food and rent, expenses that would ordinarily be covered by their families. In some cases, the IDF provides housing through the Soldiers Welfare Association, or coordinates with Garin Tzabar, an organization founded in 1991 that provides lone soldiers with kibbutz-based accommodations and an adoptive family. HaBayit Shel Benji, a lone soldier facility named in memory of Maj. Benji Hillman, killed in action during the Second Lebanon War in 2006, houses 87 lone combat soldiers.

Although all combat commanders and IDF welfare officers receive training on the rights of lone soldiers, non-combat unit commanders do not, said “T,” a religious female lone soldier from the Midwestern United States who serves in a classified non-combat air force unit. On this particular Thursday, she has traveled quite a distance to the Base to hang out with friends.

“My personal commander is a guy who had never commanded a lone soldier before,” she said. “He didn’t know he has



Photos courtesy of The Michael Levin Base

Troops stationed in military camps, who are unable to take advantage of what the Base has to offer, benefit from its outreach program. Visiting Base staffers bring gifts of food and clothing.

to give me one day off per month. He didn’t know that I live on my own, so I can’t leave base too late. I have to cook, do laundry, buy groceries.”

That lone soldiers receive any special assistance is partly the legacy of Michael Levin, the fallen lone soldier who died nearly two decades ago. The Michael Levin Lone Soldier Foundation established in his memory funds several organizations, including the Base and HaBayit Shel Benji that help lone soldiers with logistical support, mental health counseling or housing.

“Michael faced a multitude of challenges as a lone soldier,” said Harriet Levin, his mother. “His Hebrew wasn’t great and he needed help with filling out documents.” When Michael saved up his weekend leave so he could spend time with his mother when she visited Israel, “he said his commanders wouldn’t let him out. They thought he was a rich American and was taking off time just for fun. That’s how they viewed lone soldiers back then.”

During his brief breaks, Michael turned to Tziki Aud, a Jewish Agency employee who assisted lone soldiers.

“The idea of a lone soldier organization was Michael’s idea,” Harriet Levin said. “He and Tziki discussed opening a lone soldier center once Michael completed his service.” After Michael was killed and his name became synonymous with lone soldiers, “there was a new respect for lone soldiers that didn’t exist then. Israelis finally realized that these kids from abroad don’t have to do IDF service. That they’re doing this for the love of Israel.”

That idealism has enabled tens of thousands of lone soldiers to weather the vicissitudes of army life and the challenges of integrating into a new country.

“Whether working in a kitchen feeding 3,000 soldiers at a time or serving in special forces, the pressure isn’t something anyone who hasn’t been in the army has experienced,” Levinson said, which is why Israeli recruits are required to share their



Photos courtesy of The Michael Levin Base

As an alternative to military conscription, National Service Program volunteers (Bnot Sherut) serve in other capacities at nonprofits including hospitals and nursing homes. Assigned to work at the Base, these three Bnot Sherut manned the organization's booth at the Jerusalem Marathon, when lone soldiers and other supporters run to raise money for its operations.

said. "With lone soldiers there is the additional element of feeling the need to prove themselves once they're in the IDF. Many don't feel comfortable telling their commanders that something is wrong."

Instead, they may turn to organizations like KeepOlim in Israel, which runs a hotline for immigrant soldiers who are hesitant to seek help from IDF resources directly. Some have expressed suicidal thoughts, according to LiAmi Lawrence, the CEO of the nonprofit.

Maj. Lior said she doesn't know how many of the soldiers who have died by suicide were lone soldiers, but that "we do everything possible to identify troubles before they get worse and deal with them as much as possible."

Data is scarce. However, a 2019 report by a mental health NGO found that "Lone soldiers make up roughly 4% of active-duty soldiers in the IDF, yet in the past year they have accounted for 30% of all suicides."

Despite the challenges, most lone soldiers emerge from their service emotionally and physically stronger.

Engle, for one, said she has no regrets. She smiled as her friends at the Base devoured pizzas and discussed weekend plans.

"Even though we all come from different places around the world," she said, "we're all going through the same thing. They've got my back."

health records, including treatment for anxiety or any other mental health problem. Unless lone soldiers from abroad provide their health records, the IDF must rely on what soldiers choose to reveal.

"It's an age group where many kids aren't comfortable speaking to people about their mental health," reservist Levinson

We are proud to publish the eclectic B'nai B'rith Magazine, and we are delighted that our excellence has been recognized year after year by the American Jewish Press Association in its competitive Simon Rockower Awards contest for excellence in Jewish journalism. Our 2024 winter issue received four awards, as follows:



"Gross Breesen: A Temporary Haven From Hitler" by Heidi Landecker received a second-place award for Excellence in Writing about Jewish Heritage and Jewish Peoplehood in Europe.

"American Jewish Orphanages Housed the Most Fortunate Unfortunates" by Marlene Trestman garnered a second-place award for Excellence in North American Jewish History.

Our **Winter 2024** issue won second place for Excellence—Publication Design, special credit to art director and graphic designer Simeon Montesa.

"Canadian-Israeli Cyclist Gets Good Mileage" by Jennifer Lovy received an Honorable Mention for Excellence in Writing about Sports.

Read them here: <https://bit.ly/48v4gl7>



ISRAEL

Ein Gedi

Masada

Ein Bokek Hotels

JORDAN

Dead Sea Works

Ein Tamar

A DEAD SEA JOURNEY: BIKING THROUGH THE NEGEV



Discovering beauty, fragility and danger in Israel's desert frontier

Story and photos by Uriel Heilman

It's late morning at the lowest place on Earth, and I'm getting ready to begin a two-day bicycle journey at the Dead Sea.

The desert springs and waterfalls of Ein Gedi are on my right, and to my left is the glistening sea at 1,400 feet below sea level. It's said to be one of Israel's most unique and beautiful sites.

But just 50 yards away lies an apparent post-apocalyptic landscape: a closed-off road with buckled and cracked asphalt, sinkholes where the surface of the earth has collapsed, abandoned buildings sitting at odd angles. "Do Not Enter" signs everywhere warn of danger.

This is exactly why I've come.

The Dead Sea has been in rapid retreat for decades, ever since Israel, Jordan and Syria began diverting freshwater upstream and depriving the sea—technically, a saline lake—of inflows from the Jordan River. Mineral extraction and climate change accelerated the shrinkage, and about 40 years ago the sea's southern basin dried up to the point that it effectively split from the north.

Today, the southern Dead Sea is something of a mirage: It's actually a series of evaporation pools controlled on the Israeli side by Dead Sea Works, the mineral-extraction company that harvests potash, bromine, magnesium and salt from the sea. The pools are connected to the genuine Dead Sea by a narrow

Uriel Heilman's bike route along the Dead Sea.

manmade channel lined with land mines on its eastern side, flanking Jordan.

I'd come to learn more about the distinctive geological features of this rapidly changing landscape, the challenges to wildlife and the environment, and the new post-Oct. 7 security concerns in the Israeli communities along the Jordanian border.

My journey would take me along the sea's western shore and, eventually, into the desert at Mt. Sodom—where a great salt pillar called Lot's Wife connects the area's geography to the Bible. I'd end my trip at the remote desert border town of Ein Tamar, where four months earlier a pair of terrorists disguised in Israeli army uniforms snuck across from Jordan and opened fire, injuring two Israeli soldiers before being shot dead.

The greatest hazard

Before leaving, my wife and I discussed what constituted the greatest hazard of my solo ride: Rockets from Yemen? My journey took place in late March, when the Houthis were attacking Israel almost daily. Sinkholes? Dehydration? Snakes?



The Sodom salt faults, where three seasonal rivers spill into the Dead Sea basin to create saline and freshwater springs, and form an oasis attracting birds and other wildlife. The Dead Sea, whose water is known for its restorative benefits, is located at the lowest place on Earth.

No, I said: Israeli drivers. Route 90, which runs beside the sea, is notoriously deadly. I wasn't planning on biking on asphalt, but between sinkholes and the Judean Mountains, there wasn't much room to maneuver.

Riding south from Ein Gedi, I find a dirt path that seems far enough from the sinkholes, whisper a prayer for a safe journey and set off.

Almost all the Dead Sea's estimated 6,000-8,000 sinkholes are in the north. Swallowing up beaches, roads, buildings and a derelict water park, they've rendered much of the Dead Sea unapproachable.

The shrinking sea, which retreats at a rate of about three feet annually, causes fresh groundwater to well up, dissolving the salty ground and triggering unpredictable collapses at the

surface. The sinkholes, which can be over 130 feet wide and 80 feet deep, have destroyed farmland once used to grow dates and have deterred tourists, who can no longer access the sea.

"If we don't do anything to save the Dead Sea, people won't be able to live in places like Ein Gedi because there will be no agriculture and no tourists," warns Nadav Tal, water officer at the environmental organization EcoPeace Middle East. "The Dead Sea is retreating because of man. We caused this thing. We have a responsibility to fix it."

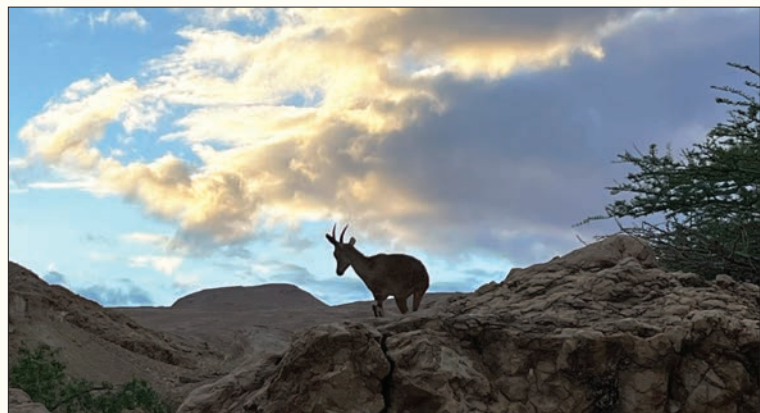
At the current rate, Tal says, the sea will continue retreating for another century. Then, at about 1,740 feet below sea level, evaporation essentially will cease because it will be so salty.

Despite the name, the area around the sea is brimming with life. Freshwater pools fed by underground springs are home to species of fish and microorganisms not found anywhere else on Earth—such as the endangered Dead Sea toothcarp, a tiny silver-colored fish.

Because the harsh conditions in this arid environment make it uninhabitable for most animals, it paradoxically serves as a predator-free haven for other species conditioned to live in the desert.

The mountain canyons are filled with ibex, wolves, hyenas, deer, foxes and porcupines. Among the animals unique to this area are caracals, a feline species; the desert tawny owl, a nocturnal predator; and the Caprimulgus, a nocturnal bird found almost exclusively in the salty areas near Sodom.

"They have adapted to the extreme conditions of the desert, and here they don't have a lot of competition from the more generalist animals," said Oded Keynan, a researcher with the Dead Sea-Arava Science Center.



A surefooted ibex, a species of wild goat, navigates the rocky desert canyons with agility. It was once believed that these animals had wings and could fly.

"The life in the desert offers them a real advantage: They can live with very little water, salty water, high temperatures," said Keynan, who lives in Ein Tamar. "The same thing with the flora. Plant life here produces materials that enable them to deal with highly saline water and dryness and sun and high



Photo: Leo za1/Wikimedia Commons

Distinguished by their long, tufted ears, caracals thrive in a variety of habitats across Africa, the Middle East and parts of Central Asia.

temperatures. Studying them, we've found they have medicinal properties that could help us. We'll lose that medical knowledge if we don't protect the nature."

On to Masada

Biking south, the sinkholes give way to flat terrain and I soon reach Masada, the hilltop fortress where 2,000 years ago an outnumbered Jewish community under attack by Roman legionnaires committed mass suicide rather than falling victim to their enemies. After the Oct. 7 atrocities, I realized for the first time how this seemingly confounding choice could be a preferable alternative to falling into enemy hands.

Today, Masada also marks the Dead Sea's southern terminus, although your atlas might show it as the lake's midpoint.

After a lunch break at the Bar Yehuda Airfield near Masada, I apply a fresh layer of sunscreen, resume riding and soon spot the turquoise channel that connects the Dead Sea proper to the evaporation pools in the southern basin.

My tires suddenly sink into the salty mud of the seabed, and I must traverse the area by foot. When I reach the saltwater channel, the water looks so inviting—even as I know it's just an oleaginous, manmade conduit that helps maintain the



Salt banks build up along the shore of Evaporation Pool No. 5, just north of the hotels of Ein Bokek.

fiction that the Dead Sea hotels are beside the sea. The channel is some 20 feet wide and lined with signs warning of land mines. The Israel-Jordan border runs through the dried-up lakebed.

I cycle along for about 10 miles, alone except for a pair of tan-and-white gazelles, who blend in seamlessly with the desert.

As the hotels at Ein Bokek come into view, the "sea" suddenly reappears. It's Evaporation Pool No. 5, but for most tourists the illusion perseveres: The water looks like the sea, there's a picturesque boardwalk, waves lap up against salt formations along the shore and the water is dotted with tiny salt islands that have become Instagram favorites.

I roll toward the hotels on a paved beachside bike path and head for my hotel spa, where two warm saltwater soaking pools—and freshwater hot tubs—await. At sunset, jackals howling in the mountains serenade me to dinner.



Hotel guests enjoy a salty dip in the Dead Sea, technically Evaporation Pool No. 5.

The last remaining wilderness

The next morning, refreshed and rehydrated, I leave the Dead Sea behind, taking a single-track bike trail, Nahal Pratsim, deep into a desert canyon where the only sign of civilization is a surveillance blimp in the sky watching over Israel's Dimona nuclear facility. In this tiny country, the desert is the last remaining wilderness, and much of it is set aside for military use.

The trail narrows and the canyon's walls close in, offering me some rare shade. But I dare not dilly-dally in the shadows: The sandy canyon walls are so brittle they can collapse at any moment.

I follow the serpentine route for over an hour until the "flour caves," where I rise up onto the desert plateau. I pedal toward a distant sign where I find an old army artillery box labeled "Trail Library." It's filled with books.

Soon I see the Dead Sea Works factory, with its dystopian-looking pipes and smokestacks. At the Moshe Novomeiski Visitor Center, guide Leon Romanchuk demonstrates the processes by which Dead Sea Works' parent company, ICL Group (formerly Israel Chemicals Ltd.), extracts minerals from the seawater.



The fragile walls of the beautiful but dangerous canyons located in Nahal Pratzim are patterned with marble-like striations.



Dead Sea Works' main facility in Sodom, where potash, bromine, magnesium and salt are extracted from the water. The original company was founded in 1929. It now makes table salt, deicers and cosmetics, and is the world's 4th largest producer of potash.

Romanchuk blames the sea's shrinkage primarily on upstream diversion of freshwater for drinking and agriculture; ICL returns to the sea about two-thirds of the water it extracts, accounting for "just" 25% of the sea's annual retreat. If not for the channel ICL built to ferry water from the northern Dead Sea to the evaporation pools, he says, there'd be no water where the hotels are located and tourism would dry up.

The salt ICL brings in with that water creates another problem, however: salt buildup on the seabed. That raises water levels, threatening the hotel zone with flooding. In 2012, Israel's government ordered ICL to scrape out the salt, and today ICL removes some 565 million cubic feet of salt from the sea annually. Environmentalists and the company are at odds about where to put it.

Meanwhile, the minerals ICL extracts make their way into everything from mobile phones to food—hailed away via an 11-mile conveyer belt, then to trucks and finally onto ships at Ashdod's port.

ICL's work is not without controversy. An Israeli State Comptroller's report in March cited the company for burying waste byproducts, water leakage from its evaporation pools and

ecologically damaging seepage of potash from its conveyer belt. Critics want more protection for local wildlife habitats.

"We need to find the balance between society, economy and nature," Romanchuk says, echoing the company line.

Back on my bike, I head to my final destination: Ein Tamar, an isolated town of 350 flanked by the Jordanian border. Despite the barbed-wire fences, mines and army patrols, it's not a hermetic border: Smugglers have long trafficked illicit arms and drugs through the area.

Since Oct. 7, the main concern is security. Iran has been using the Israel-Jordan frontier to smuggle weapons to Palestinians in the West Bank in a bid to radicalize the region, and the specter of Ein Tamar being infiltrated or overrun by terrorists is omnipresent. If Islamic extremists were to topple the monarchy in Jordan, whose population is 50% of Palestinian origin, the danger would be acute.

As I bike around Ein Tamar, I encounter a member of the local security squad, Michael, sitting on his front porch, his automatic weapon by his side. His job is to defend the town, but he's also protecting his family. Just yards away is the town's perimeter fence, which is full of holes.

The border is three miles away and there's military in the area, but not as much as he'd like.

"We feel a greater military presence but also more tension since Oct. 7," said Michael, who withheld his full name.

It's getting late and I need to catch the last bus northward before dark. My legs throbbing, I cycle out of town past a hidden spring, hiking trails that snake into the desert and a wildlife sanctuary with stunning views. The setting sun paints Jordan's mountains a brilliant red.

The peaceful vista belies the hidden dangers at the Dead Sea—for border communities vulnerable to terrorists, animals at risk from industrial manufacturing and beaches threatened by sinkholes.

But for the moment the breathtaking vista blots out these concerns. All I can think of is planning my next desert adventure. 🌈



Appearing in the aftermath of a rare Dead Sea downpour, a rainbow makes for a spectacular sight.

Renowned for breathtaking jungle vistas and wildlife, Kenya, silhouetted on the map, is home to over 57 million people in East Africa.

The small East African country of Kenya is not widely associated with the Jewish Diaspora; neighboring Ethiopia is much better known for its indigenous Jews, thousands of whom have fled famine and civil war and sought refuge, assistance and citizenship in the State of Israel.

Yet, Kenya has a small, and divergent, Jewish population estimated at 300 to 500, with two congregations: The larger in the capital city of Nairobi is composed mainly of white expatriates from the United States, Israel and elsewhere, while a smaller community of native Africans in the country's remote highlands seeks to formalize its ties to the religion.

Their stories reflect both the diversity and the adversity of small Jewish communities struggling to survive, and even to thrive, as a tiny minority in a country of over 57 million.

The primarily white Orthodox Nairobi Hebrew Congregation (NHC) has its origins in colonialism and fluctuates at around 300 members "depending on whether there are Israelis and Americans in town, either working or visiting," says longtime congregant Hannah Schwartzman, who herself arrived from Israel with her husband and young family over four decades ago.

The second is an offshoot of Messianic Judaism, which claims thousands of followers in Kenya. Their history stems from a Christian evangelist who in the late 1800s studied in then Palestine and traveled to Kenya to baptize people. Some of their descendants more recently renounced Christianity and now comprise the Conservative Congregation of Ol-Kalou, with about 200 members.

The Jews of Kenya: Two Different Paths

By Sandra Gurvis

In 2017, invited by a Conservative yeshiva to study Judaism in Israel, Yehudah Kimani, community leader of the native Congregation of Ol-Kalou, was refused entry to Israel, then deported to Ethiopia. Although the Israeli government claimed that Kimani had failed to disclose denial of an earlier visa request, the incident made headlines, resulting in outcries of racism. "But it also put the Kenyan community on the global map of Judaism," observes Bonita Nathan Sussman, president of Kulanu, an organization that supports some 33 Jewish communities in developing countries, including Kenya.

Ethiopian Jews have garnered far more attention. Among the oldest Diasporan communities, Beta Israel, as Ethiopian Jewry is often called, harks back to the local Agau tribe, who began converting to Judaism a few centuries before the Christian Era. Today, most live in Israel; some 170,000 according to *The Times of Israel*.

Roots in Zionism

On a safari trip to Africa, I visited the Nairobi Hebrew Congregation. Located in the heart of the city and designed by the British architectural firm Robert-

son, Gow and Davidson, it opened in 1913; the new building was completed in 1955. Set far back from the street, the gated compound is not easily accessible. Guards, employed by the Kenyan police, escort visitors into the synagogue.

Surrounded by verdant gardens with stained-glass art and spaces for reflection, the synagogue harks back to Kenya's past as a British colony. For Jews, the turn of the 20th century meant pogroms and rising anti-Semitism, resulting in the Zionist movement and the search for a Jewish homeland. Although Palestine was the obvious candidate, Madagascar, Argentina, Angola, Tasmania, upstate New York and Kenya were also in the mix.

In 1903, Joseph Chamberlain, Secretary of State for the British Colonies, including Asia, Africa and others, crafted the "Uganda Proposal" for a possible Jewish homeland. He proclaimed the Uasin Gishu region, which had been recently removed from the Uganda Protectorate and incorporated into the Kenya British East Africa Protectorate, to be an "excellent climate suitable for white people," according to the EastAfrican newspaper.

When a commission arrived several months later to investigate, it found

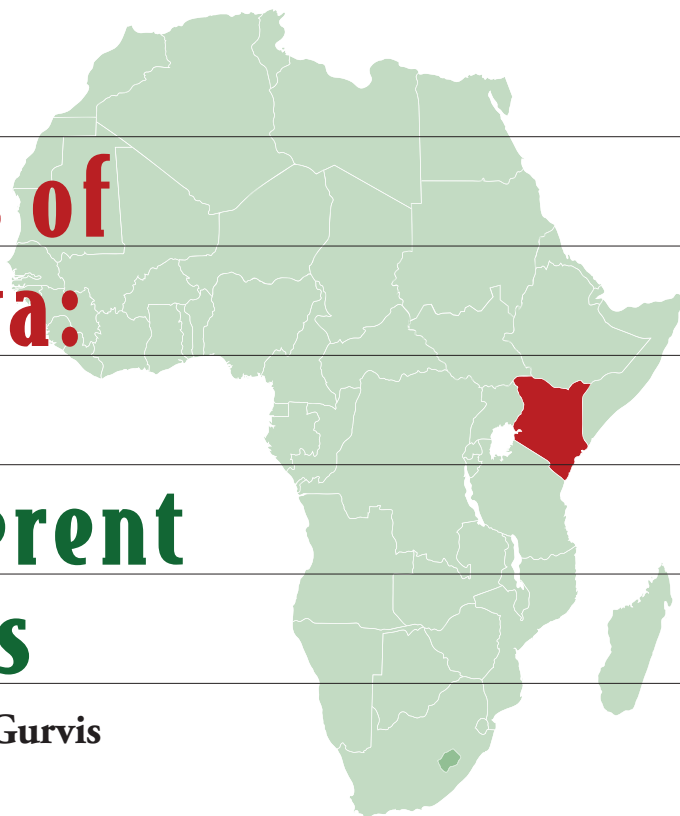




Photo: Courtesy of the Nairobi Hebrew Congregation

The Nairobi Hebrew Congregation synagogue, designed in 1954 by Nairobi-based Hungarian Jewish architect Imre Rozsa, offers Jewish visitors and residents a place to worship and celebrate. "Regardless of how many people are present, we always have services," says longtime congregant Hannah Schwartzman.



Photo: Courtesy of Sandra Gurvis

The synagogue's luminous sanctuary features a series of beautiful Star of David stained-glass windows, which were installed in the 1990s.

"Maasai in war regalia, tales of man-eating lions, and fierce opposition from white settlers," writes historian Lotte Hughes in *The Elephant*, an online publication focusing on "African analysis, opinion and investigation." Not surprisingly, in 1905 the Seventh Zionist Congress rejected this option.

But Jews came to Nairobi anyway, with the first, J. Marcus, emigrating from India in 1899. "An entrepreneur, he began to export local produce, mostly potatoes," states *The EastAfrican*. "Two years later, the Jewish population in Nairobi doubled when M. Harritz arrived to open a tin-smith business."

About 20 families followed, and within a few years had built the NHC. More arrived, mostly from Europe, to escape persecution, especially during and after WWII. In 1947, the British government deported Zionist insurgents from Palestine to an internment camp in nearby Gilgil. By several accounts, the Nairobi Jewish community rallied around them to improve their living conditions; most prisoners returned to Israel when it was established a year later.

Kenya became an independent nation in 1963. "Israel helped Kenya as it was working towards and establishing independence, and the two countries still enjoy a strong relationship," writes

Sussman, in "Jewish Africans Describe their Lives."

By then, however, European-based Jewry in Nairobi had peaked. In 1955, with some 500 members, worshippers built a new synagogue on the original site. Two years later, congregant and board president Israel Somen was elected mayor of Nairobi, the first Jew to hold that position.

Since then, the population has declined. While some remained, "sometimes they or, more often, their children immigrated to Israel or other countries with more Jews," says Schwartzman.

Still, the well-maintained synagogue remains the heart of the Jewish community. It is adorned with crystal chandeliers, stained-glass windows and gleaming wooden benches; the synagogue boasts a social hall as well as a mikvah in a separate building. Today, along with weekly and High Holy Day services and bar/bat mitzvahs and other special events, the temple hosts well-attended children's activities to commemorate holidays. "We actually have more young children than teenagers, although the number fluctuates, depending on who is in town," says Schwartzman.

And they do come "from all walks of life," Schwartzman says. "They work at embassies, in government, as contractors

or have businesses. Although the synagogue is Orthodox, we are open to all affiliations."

Congregation Ol-Kalou: Rejecting Messianic Judaism

Located about 100 miles north of Nairobi in the remote village of Kasuku is the native Conservative Congregation of Ol-Kalou, also known as Kehillat Israel. A catastrophic rainy season had washed out many of the surrounding dirt roads, making a visit impossible. The community was also struggling to rebuild from damage caused by major flooding.

Its center is a one-story cinderblock building painted in Israeli blue and white. Congregants "often arrive by foot or catch rides with friends or relatives," says leader Kimani, son of a founder and who many say is the community's heart and soul. Yet they are Jewish in almost every way, from the plastic-topped, waterproof bema and the open-air Jewish star and menorah windows to the shofar blown on Yom Kippur to the yarmulkes and tallit worn by congregants.

Observance is a mixture of invention and practicality. "Because we don't have a shohet who can slaughter beef or chicken, it's very difficult to keep Kosher," notes Kimani. "So, some of us have become vegetarian." The synagogue

also recently acquired a Torah donated by the former president of a defunct temple in Massachusetts. “Before that, we used a small ‘practice’ Torah from Israel that I got off eBay.” But formalities hardly matter. “We make sure there is a [seat] for everyone.”

An offshoot of Messianic Judaism, also known as “Jews for Jesus,” Kehillat Israel shed its affiliation in 1999, when a rabbi came to Kasuku to check on the Jews of Kenya. The rabbi pointed out the differences between the Messianic practices and beliefs and traditional Judaism. “He told us we weren’t really Jews,” adds Kimani. Learning this, Kimani, along with his family and about 15 others, broke from the Messianic group. “We set out to learn how to be Jewish and what it means to become a Jew.”

Lack of internet and the support of an established community made the change difficult but not impossible. “Eventually we connected with the Nairobi synagogue, and they lent us two books,” says Kimani. They made photocopies, then passed them among the members so they could take turns reading and studying.

The congregation also heard about an indigenous Jewish community in Uganda affiliated with Kulanu, through which Kimani became acquainted with the late Harriet Bograd, past president and a champion of African Jews. “Harriet made sure there was a technology fund



Photos: Courtesy of Yehudah Kimani

Ol-Kalou congregants at their recently built synagogue. Under the leadership of Yehudah Kimani, they constructed their first house of worship out of tree trunks and plastic sheeting. Located near Mount Kenya and the village of Nyahururu, the shul houses a community whose members speak Kikuyu or Swahili.

for computers, cell phones, solar panels and the like,” said NHC president Sussman. “She gave Yehudah a computer and helped him access the internet.” In 2016 Kimani traveled to the United States to study Judaism at the Brandeis Collegiate Institute in California. Kimani also created a Facebook page focusing on Kehillat Israel and related activities, which as of this writing has some 4,400 followers.

Kimani and his congregation hope to have a rabbi when his brother Samson, who is currently studying overseas, is ordained in 2028. The community, whose members are mostly farmers who grow

and sell their own food, is looking to expand, by not only having more children but also encouraging young adults to marry other Jews, including Kulanu members from other countries.

“We are working on attracting more congregants and educating children so they can inherit Jewish traditions when their fathers and mothers are gone,” says Kimani.

And although the NHC and Kehillat Israel communicate infrequently, they share the same ideals and goals. “Our future is in engaging families and children,” adds Schwartzman. ☺



Photos: Courtesy of Yehudah Kimani

Despite the challenges of obtaining traditional food and keeping kosher, members of Kehillat Israel hold a traditional Seder in observance of the Passover holiday.



Photos: Courtesy of Yehudah Kimani

The congregation includes many young people, who take great delight in the holidays, particularly Purim. “As a growing community, we are trying to land more congregants and establish a school where children can learn Jewish traditions,” says Kimani.

Students Confront Anti-Semitism on College Campuses in None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest

Anti-Israel protests and anti-Semitic slogans and innuendos have become disturbingly common on college campuses. Many Jewish students have come to expect such encounters.

As the Israel-Hamas conflict evolved, anti-Semitism in the U.S. surged, with universities becoming battlegrounds and Jewish students facing unprecedented levels of hate and hostility.

This year, B'nai B'rith invited college students to share personal stories of confronting anti-Semitism on campus through our fourth annual None Shall Be Afraid Essay Contest. Students from across the country submitted essays describing how they experienced, witnessed and responded to such bias—and its emotional and social toll. Judges reviewed more than 150 essays that also addressed how universities can address and combat such verbal threats on campus. The top three winners were awarded scholarships of \$2,500, \$1,000 and \$500, respectively.

In his first-place winning essay, Camilo Rey, an international

student from Colombia and a sophomore at Florida International University, shares how he banded with his campus Hillel to create a safe space for non-Jewish students to ask questions about Judaism and Israel. Working with staff and student government, they persuaded the administration to take reports of religious bias seriously.

Second-place winner Cooper Wright, a junior at East Carolina University, wrote about how, as a non-Jew, he was able to challenge anti-Semitic statements from other students expressing stereotypes during classroom discussions.

Madison M. Fernandez, a freshman at the University of Alabama who is not Jewish, earned third place for sharing how she stood up for a Jewish student whose campaign posters were defaced during student government elections. The incident prompted her school to create a Rapid Response Team and expand Jewish history in the curriculum.

To learn more about B'nai B'rith's None Shall Be Afraid initiative, visit bit.ly/4kpMsdi. 📺

WINNING ESSAY, BY CAMILO REY

Florida International University, Class of 2028

Every day I put on my Star of David necklace. I don't want to hide—not because I'm trying to get attention. I never thought a little symbol could inspire such hatred. However, being openly Jewish on campus has changed over the past year from a silent act of identity to a silent act of resistance.

As an international student, I came to the U.S. with hope: hope of freedom, education and safety. I never expected that I'd see echoes of the same hatred my grandparents fled decades ago.

It wasn't a dramatic outburst the first time I felt it. It was barely audible. I heard one student murmur "Here come the colonizers" as I passed a group of students after Shabbat dinner. I froze. I continued to walk, uncertain, wondering if that was truly aimed at me or at us. However, the uncertainty was more significant than the insult. The murmurs became louder over time. Anonymous flyers were displayed in the library accusing Jews of controlling the media. When a group of students chanted slogans, I felt uneasy crossing the campus. The thing that hurt the most was seeing my former classmates participate in those demonstrations and post online anti-Israel content with overtones that bordered on anti-Semitism. Instead of staying silent, I acted.

continued on page 34



Florida International University sophomore Camilo Rey is the winner of B'nai B'rith's 2025 None Shall Be Afraid essay contest.

Favorites in Jewish Media from 5785: Our Staff Picks

Working at a Jewish organization, we at B'nai B'rith Magazine are avid consumers of Jewish-related media. Here are our recommendations from the past year's crop. 🇺🇸

A Real Pain (Movie)

"A Real Pain" dives into the space between connection and isolation. In this impactful movie, two cousins with very different approaches to life join a Holocaust history tour of Poland to share their grief over the loss of their grandmother. Each cousin confronts and manages his grief in a unique way. Even while they share their grief, sometimes it divides them. This movie highlights the role of community and experience in a world where people often feel disconnected and lonely. This is a memorable story of personal loss, resilience and compassion.

—Sharon Bender, Vice President of Communications

Eminent Jews (Biography)

Mini biographies of Mel Brooks, Norman Mailer, Leonard Bernstein and Betty Friedan are to be found together in one volume—essayist David Denby's "Eminent Jews: Bernstein, Brooks, Friedan, Mailer." Denby's personal interactions add depth, especially with comic Brooks, whose profile stands out as the most authentic and is fun to read. What fascinated me was their common roots in the shtetls of Central and Eastern Europe. But Denby, as did I, finds them now thoroughly American while still displaying varying degrees of Yiddishkeit.

—Eugene L. Meyer, Editor, B'nai B'rith Magazine

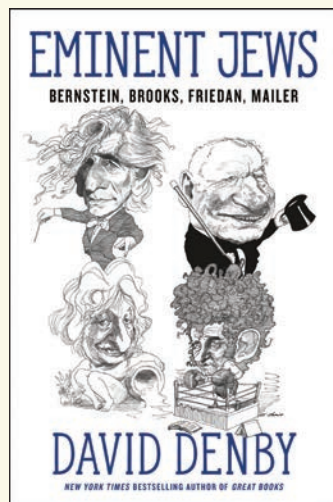
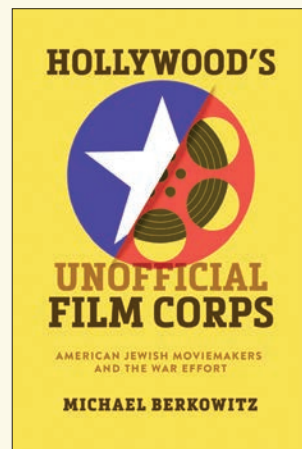


Photo: courtesy of Holt publishers

Hollywood's Unofficial Film Corps: American Jewish Moviemakers and the War Effort (Nonfiction Book)

Appointed by Washington officials to lead Hollywood's World War II propaganda activities, gifted Jewish writers and directors would change cinema history. They produced films of exceptional quality about battles on land and sea, and about life on the home front, spurring audiences to do their part to achieve victory. Relying on primary sources, historian Michael Berkowitz explores the reasons why they concealed their important roles in the making of these movies, intended for both the public and the military, which are now considered classics.

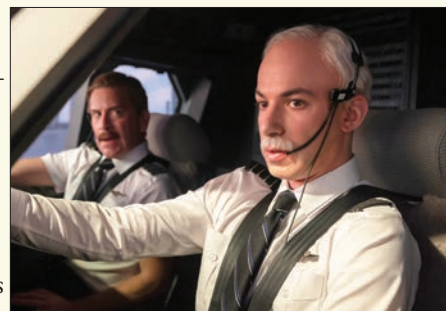
—Cheryl Kempler, Picture Editor



The Rehearsal (Docuseries)

Deadpan comedian Nathan Fielder takes his simulations to a new level in his documentary comedy series "The Rehearsal." This season is all about aviation and Fielder's quest to help co-pilots speak up in the event of a crash. Hijinks ensue as he conducts multiple meticulous made-up scenarios to relate to pilots, and even two episodes where he all but calls the streaming service Paramount+ anti-Semitic. The platform removed an episode of his previous series that centers around Holocaust awareness due to "sensitivities" surrounding the Israel-Hamas war, which he, of course, used as the basis for several reenactments in Season 2.

—Juliet Norman, Deputy Editor



Photograph by John P. Johnson/HBO

WINNING ESSAY, BY CAMILO REY

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I started by contacting my campus Hillel and joining a group of Jewish and allied students who wanted to educate rather than retaliate. During campus cultural week we set up a table called “Ask Me Anything,” where students could freely ask Jewish students questions concerning anti-Semitism, Israel, Zionism and Judaism. Some showed up to argue. Others arrived to gain knowledge. However, we were present, composed, arrogant and obvious. That was relevant.

After that, I collaborated with our student government and faculty to suggest a system for reporting instances of bias and hate speech including anti-Semitism as a university-wide policy. I assisted in setting up a forum where Jewish students told their stories to be heard, not to win sympathy. Our collective voice took the place of the silence in which we had once suffered. A few months later the administration announced the establishment of a task force to combat religious bias and anti-Semitism on campus. Not much, but progress nonetheless.

I discovered that you don't have to yell to fight hate. When the time is right you must speak. You have to come. I didn't want to be removed from the discussion even though I might not have convinced everyone.

These days anti-Semitism is not always accompanied by a swastika. Sometimes it's a sarcastic comment, a meme or a slogan. Its effects are genuine. I have witnessed the fear it instills in the eyes of students. However, I have also witnessed the power it evokes. The generation we belong to will not reveal who we are. It will be us who confidently and clearly stand, speak and declare: “No one shall be afraid.” 🇮🇱



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B'NAI B'RITH IMPACT

B'NAI B'RITH IN YOUR COMMUNITY AND AROUND THE GLOBE

Dear Friends,

Welcome to IMPACT, your quarterly update on the global work and mission of B'nai B'rith International. As the oldest Jewish humanitarian and advocacy organization, B'nai B'rith has built a legacy of service, leadership and action that transcends borders—and in these pages, you'll see how our reach continues to grow and evolve.

In this issue, we are excited to bring you stories that reflect the depth and breadth of our international presence. You'll read about our vital programs and partnerships across the United States, Europe, Australia and Latin America, where we engage with local Jewish communities, combat anti-Semitism and advocate for human rights. You'll find important updates from Israel, where we remain steadfast in our support and involvement on the ground. And you'll discover our dynamic podcast series, *Conversations with B'nai B'rith*, which offers timely and thoughtful discussions on topics shaping the Jewish world today.

The work of B'nai B'rith—whether promoting senior advocacy, standing with Israel, or advancing Jewish unity—would not be possible without the dedication of our members, donors and supporters. Your commitment powers our mission and enables us to maintain a meaningful impact on Jewish life and global affairs.

Thank you for being a part of our community. We invite you to explore this edition of IMPACT and see how, together, we are making a difference—everywhere. 🌍

With appreciation, The IMPACT Staff

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HAPPY
CHANUKAH
FROM B'NAI B'RITH!



B'nai B'rith Remembers the AMIA Bombing



Photo: Wikipedia.org

The aftermath of the bombing of the Buenos Aires Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building, which occurred on July 18, 1994.



Photo credit: Fernando Levy-Hara, Latin American Task Force (LATF) member

B'nai B'rith led a delegation to Florida's Aventura Turnberry Jewish Center, the venue for an evening devoted to the 1994 AMIA bombing, organized and sponsored by B'nai B'rith of South Florida. B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin (fourth from left) delivered remarks.

On July 18, 1994, a van carrying explosives destroyed the Argentine Israelite Mutual Association (AMIA) building—the heart of the Jewish community—in Buenos Aires, killing 85 and wounding 300. No arrests have ever been made for this crime.

This year, a federal judge in Argentina ruled that 10 Iranian and Lebanese nationals will be prosecuted in absentia. B'nai B'rith has long advocated for justice for the victims and survivors of the deadliest attack in Latin American history.

Commemoration in South Florida

B'nai B'rith of South Florida and the Latin American Task Force organized and hosted a commemoration on July 22 in Aventura, Fla., supported by more than 40 Jewish organizations. Leading a delegation, B'nai B'rith Senior Vice Presidents Millie Magid and Dan Tartakovski, along with Chief Justice of B'nai B'rith International David Geller, as well as Miami-Dade County Mayor Daniella Levine Cava and other local officials were among more than 500 people in attendance. The event acknowledged the victims, as well as the 2015 murder of Alberto Nisman, the attorney likely killed for uncovering Iran's responsibility.

B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; Marcelo Gilar-doni, consul general of Argentina; and Maor Elbaz-Starinsky, consul general of Israel in Miami, were among the speakers.

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CON EL LENTE EN LATINOAMÉRICA
LENS ON LATIN AMERICA



AMIA, 31 Years Later: A Father's Voice, A Nation's Call for Justice
AMIA, 31 años después: la voz de un padre, el reclamo de una nación

MODERATED BY



EDUARDO KOHN
B'nai B'rith Director for Latin American Affairs



ADRIANA CAMISAR
Special Advisor on Latin American and U.N. Affairs



B'nai B'rith's "Lens on Latin America" podcast hosts Eduardo Kohn and Adriana Camisar interviewed a man who lost his daughter in the bombing and continues his quest for the apprehension and conviction of the perpetrators.

B'nai B'rith Israel Enhances Quality of Life for Israel's War Victims



B'nai B'rith Israel donates and distributes gift cards in amounts up to 500 Shekels (approximately \$145) to homeless families experiencing economic challenges. They can be used to buy items like toiletries, towels or clothing.

Relief Aid for Families Affected by Iran Attacks

On June 13, 2025, Israel launched Operation Rising Lion, a daring attack on Iran's military and nuclear facilities.

Over the next 12 days, Iran targeted Israel's cities with 550 ballistic missiles

and 1,000 suicide drones. Thousands of Israeli families lost their homes and possessions, and a sense of security built over time. Entire neighborhoods were destroyed, forcing young and old to seek shelter as they coped with trauma. Since then, those living in cramped hotel rooms have struggled to relocate. The govern-

ment, overwhelmed with thousands of claims, is slowly providing financial assistance. For those who endured poverty prior to Operation Rising Lion, recovery is especially challenging.

B'nai B'rith Israel immediately mobilized to help those in need. Supported by significant contributions from its 3,200 members in Israel, in addition to generous donations from B'nai B'rith in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand, and Germany, B'nai B'rith Israel is working with the municipalities of Ramat Gan, Petah Tikva, Holon, Bat Yam, Ra'anana, Rishon LeZion and Haifa to bring relief to current and former residents.

With support from the global B'nai B'rith family, B'nai B'rith Israel partnered with the Ramat Gan Municipality to provide outdoor play equipment for 15 kindergartens damaged by bombs—helping restore spaces for children to learn and play.

Emanuel (Mano) Cohen, B'nai B'rith Israel president stated: "This initiative will continue as long as resources last. We have been deeply honored to stand *continued on page 39*



Children in Holon received book bags supplied by B'nai B'rith Israel during a ceremony in August. Present were officials from the city council and Mayor Shai Keinan (second from left). Each bag contained a heartfelt message from Keinan and B'nai B'rith President Emanuel (Mano) Cohen: "Wishing you a successful, safe and enjoyable school year! You're starting school again after a difficult period away from home. It's not simple, but you're strong. We believe in you... You are not alone."



Mariaschin Delivers Remarks at Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Award Ceremony and Engages With Officials in Poland



Photo: courtesy of Krzysztof Wagner

From Left: Historian Jan Oniszczyk, who accepted the Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Award on behalf of the Association of the Museum of the Białystok Jews; B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; and B'nai B'rith Polin President Andrej Friedman.

Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Awards

B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin engaged with diplomatic and political leaders in Poland in June, when he also delivered remarks at

the Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב awards ceremony.

Three people dedicated to preserving Poland's Jewish legacy and a philanthropy operating a Jewish museum in Białystok received B'nai B'rith Poland's

third annual Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב (official Polish, English and Hebrew name) Awards, celebrating the efforts of non-Jewish Polish people and groups to honor Jewish heritage, now given in memory of Holocaust survivor Marian Turski (1926-2025), a journalist and B'nai B'rith Poland lodge member.

At the June 29 ceremony at the White Stork synagogue in Wrocław (formerly Breslau), Mariaschin described the award's significance: "I believe that we are the only international Jewish organization to take up this mantle and we are proud to do so in the ancient Jewish tradition of K'akot HaTov—giving credit where credit is due." He highlighted the concept of solidarity: "In this uncertain atmosphere, the decision of B'nai B'rith Poland to hold this event as planned in a show of solidarity with the people of Israel, should not be taken for granted, and we thank the leadership of B'nai B'rith in Poland for their bold decision."

An invited audience included Jan Łazicki, plenipotentiary to the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs.

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During his trip to Poland, Mariaschin discussed Polish-Jewish relations and the Oct. 7, 2023, terrorist attacks against Israel by Hamas with Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Władysław Teofil Bartoszewski.



Mariaschin in Warsaw with State Secretary Wojciech Kolarski.

B'nai B'rith Israel Enhances Quality of Life for Israel's War Victims

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with these families in their time of need, and we could not have done so without the unwavering solidarity and support of our friends around the world.”

Donations from B'nai B'rith Israel have helped purchase bed linens, diapers, formula and toys, covered transit fares, and provided laptops for work and school. Those who experienced need before the attacks receive additional funds and gift cards for necessities.

B'nai B'rith also arranged to install large washing machines and playroom furnishings in hotels sheltering families with children, to whom B'nai B'rith members deliver additional food and supply clothing, toys, toiletries and other items.

This fall, funds will be used to renovate educational facilities in affected municipalities, and to purchase school supplies.

Thanking B'nai B'rith Israel, Holon Director General Gilad Avrahami wrote: “Your deeds reflect solidarity, mutual responsibility and empathy, and serve to strengthen the entire community.”

Helping Children Begin a Good School Year

B'nai B'rith Israel celebrated the start of the school year in Holon, near Tel

Aviv, when it distributed 500 book bags to the city's children, who had been displaced. Each contained a note from Holon's Mayor Shai Keinan and B'nai B'rith President Emanuel (Mano) Cohen expressing good wishes to recipients.

B'nai B'rith Partners with Leket Israel

B'nai B'rith has joined forces with the food rescue charity, Leket Israel, to provide weekly deliveries of fresh, nutritious produce to hundreds of displaced people housed in hotels.

Each package includes a morale-boosting message from both philanthropies: “We wanted to support you and introduce a bit of color and health into your day—enjoy!”

Making Lone Soldiers Feel Welcome

B'nai B'rith Israel's Haifa Regional Council donated 130 Rosh Hashanah gift cards to Israel's Lone Soldiers, individuals from other countries who are serving in the IDF. Many who enlisted after the Oct. 7, 2023, terror attacks are unable to rely on their families for emotional or financial support. Mira Gross, head of the council, noted: “Given the severe shortage



The gift card given to Lone Soldiers by B'nai B'rith Israel's Haifa Council.

of soldiers on the front lines, the contribution of every single one of these young men and women is vital, and we must salute their heroism.” 🇮🇱

B'nai B'rith Remembers the AMIA Bombing

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In his speech, Mariaschin cited the repercussions of the coverup, which hid Iran's culpability: “Had the international community acted decisively in 1994 by acknowledging Iran and Hezbollah's role in the attack and imposing meaningful consequences, we might have been spared the rise of the unprecedented threat that Iran has come to represent. But for decades, the world largely looked the other way. And the result was a monster left to grow. We cannot let this march to justice falter again.”

Lens on Latin America Special Episode

A “Lens on Latin America” podcast hosted by B'nai B'rith Director of Latin American Affairs Eduardo Kohn and Special Advisor on Latin American and U.N. Affairs Adriana Camisar featured an extended interview with Luis Czystewski, whose daughter, Paola, was murdered in the bombing, and who continues his quest for justice for her in the present.

Watch the interview on YouTube in Spanish with English subtitles as part of our Lens on Latin America series. (<http://bit.ly/3KQ91MI>) 🇺🇸

B'nai B'rith Israel Stands With Soroka Medical Center



When an Iranian ballistic missile struck Beersheba's Soroka University Medical Center, B'nai B'rith Israel stepped up to help. Donations helped purchase new medical equipment that supported the hospital as patients recovered from the attack that injured 80 people and dam-

aged its surgical ward. Soroka serves more than one million residents across southern Israel, making its swift recovery critical for the region. Hospital officials described the donation as "not only an act of generosity, but a vital investment in the future of medicine in the Negev and the health of Israel's southern communities." 🇮🇱

Photo: Avi Teicher/Israel Free Image Project/Wikipedia.org

B'nai B'rith Israel responded when Soroka University Medical Center sustained damage after it was struck by an Iranian missile. Repairs were made quickly, enabling the hospital to continue to function.

Mariaschin Delivers Remarks at Wdzięczność-Gratitude-הכרת הטוב Award Ceremony and Engages With Officials in Poland

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Individual Winners

Honoring its once-thriving Jewish community, Robert Kobylarczyk has led preservation initiatives in Tuszyn, in central Poland, since 2020.

Veteran journalist Andrzej Koraszewski combats anti-Semitism and defends Israel in his books and print and online articles.

Tour guide and speaker Ireneusz Socha, who develops Jewish history exhibits in Dębica, in southeastern Poland, raised funds to restore the town's synagogue.

Institutional Winner

The Association of the Museum of Białystok Jews supports the Museum of the Jews of Białystok, advancing

Jewish heritage and multi-cultural programs, funding scholarships and archiving historic materials.

Mariaschin in dialogue with diplomats and government leaders

Mariaschin met with Polish, American and Israeli officials while in Poland. His discussions with Poland State Secretary Wojciech Kolarski, who also heads the International Policy Bureau, and Deputy Foreign Minister Teofil Bartoszewski covered the global surge in anti-Semitism, Polish Israeli bilateral relations and U.N. and E.U. Middle East issues. He also conferenced with Ambassador of Israel to Poland Yaakov Finkelstein and interim U.S. Chargé d'Affaires Daniel Lawton. 🇮🇱



B'NAI B'RITH TALKS

Conversations with B'nai B'rith

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Discover the B'nai B'rith Podcast: Conversations with B'nai B'rith

Looking for meaningful, timely and insightful discussions on issues shaping the Jewish world and beyond? Tune in to Conversations with B'nai B'rith, our flagship podcast hosted by CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin and featuring in-depth interviews with thought leaders, policymakers, scholars, authors and experts in their fields from around the globe.

What sets Conversations with B'nai B'rith apart is the unique perspective we bring as the world's oldest Jewish service organization, drawing on 182 years of impact, advocacy and action. Viewers gain knowledge and acquire context: why these issues matter and how they impact Jewish life worldwide.

Whether you're looking to deepen your understanding, stay informed, or simply engage with smart, inspiring dialogue, this podcast is for you. 

What's new on the podcast?

- **Playing with Purpose: From the IDF to NCAA Glory, with Israeli Soccer player Yaniv Bazini**
- **How the Forgotten 1929 Hebron Massacre Ignited the Arab Israeli Conflict | With Historian Yardena Schwartz**
- **Preserving Powerful Stories of the Exiles Who Fled Nazi Persecution**
- **Understanding Transketolase Deficiency: A Medical and Personal Look at a Rare Condition**
- **How One Student Brought New Life to A Holocaust Story and A Family History Nearly Lost to Time**

And our Lens on Latin America podcast series, in Spanish with English subtitles:

- **AMIA, 31 Years Later: A Father's Voice, A Nation's Call for Justice**

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European Commission Working Group on Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life Focuses on Rising Anti-Semitism and More

B'nai B'rith EU Affairs Director Alina Bricman joined government officials, community leaders and civil society groups in Gdańsk, Poland, to discuss the rise in anti-Semitic violence and Holocaust distortion, and the urgent need for coordinated action.

The meeting also focused on the importance of keeping Jewish life visible—and ensuring Jewish Europeans aren't driven from public spaces because of fears for their safety. 📍

B'nai B'rith EU Affairs Director Alina Bricman (third row, far right) took part in the 7th European Commission Working Group on Antisemitism and Fostering Jewish Life in Poland in June. Katharina von Schnurbein, European Commission coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, is in the front row, far left.



Portugal Lodge Honors Yonatan Netanyahu

The International Human Rights Observatory (IHRO) and B'nai B'rith in Porto, Portugal, conducted a ceremony on July 6 honoring Yonatan Netanyahu, leader of Israel's elite Sayeret Matkal unit, who was killed leading the daring July 4, 1976, hostage rescue at Uganda's Entebbe Airport. A commemorative certificate lauding his heroism in defending the Jewish people was presented to his family. Yonatan was the brother of Israel's current Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Established in 2012, IHRO monitors the global observance of 30 basic human rights, as delineated by the United Nations.

B'nai B'rith International CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin sent remarks that were read at the ceremony: "Our jubilation that day 49 years ago was tempered by the news that Yoni Netanyahu, the leader of the elite IDF commando unit on the ground, had been killed in the operation...For us, though, Yoni's bravery renewed our pride in ourselves, as Jews, and...reinforced our love and admiration for the State of Israel, the IDF and for the Zionist idea." 📍



Representing the Netanyahu family, David Mileikowsky accepts the certificate honoring his cousin Yonatan Netanyahu, the military leader killed during the raid on Entebbe, on July 4, 1976. The B'nai B'rith lodge in Porto, Portugal, sponsored the ceremony.

The World Center-Jerusalem Honors the Best in Diaspora Reporting and the Arts



Photo: Shlomi Amsalem

Proudly displaying their certificates, the evening's honorees are photographed with B'nai B'rith World Center-Jerusalem leaders, Director Alan Schneider and Chairman Haim Katz (first and second from left, top row).

Yuna Leibzon was the winner of the 2025 B'nai B'rith Award for Journalism Recognizing Excellence in Diaspora Reportage in memory of Wolf and Hilda Matsdorf. Other honorees at the July 7 ceremony in Jerusalem included journalists Roi Kais and Avital Indig, awarded Certificates of Merit in memory of Luis and Trudi Schydowsky, and entertainer Effi Netzer, recipient of the Fostering Israel-Diaspora Relations through the Arts Citation in Memory of Naomi Shemer.

Speakers included: Haim Katz, B'nai B'rith World Center chair, and Zvika Klein, Jerusalem Post editor-in-chief, who engaged in a discussion with Leibzon on stage.

Leibzon, a New York-based Channel 12 journalist and broadcaster, won for her work focusing on the Oct. 7, 2023, terror attacks in Israel, the subsequent rise in anti-Semitism in the United States and ways these events have impacted New York's Jewish community.

Kais is Arab Affairs correspondent for Kan 11 television; Indig writes about the New York Jewish community for Makor Rishon and Israel Hayom.

Netzer, a multi-faceted composer and musician, sparked Israel's sing-along phenomenon and introduced an international audience to his country's popular and folk songs during his broadcasts on Kol Israel radio in the 1970s.

The B'nai B'rith Israel Awards Jury includes writers, academics and diplomats who annually select award and citation winners. 

B'nai B'rith would like to recognize and thank the Ruby Diamond Foundation for its recent generous contribution.

B'nai B'rith Welcomes New Leadership

Earlier this year, B'nai B'rith welcomed new leadership, electing Robert Spitzer of Mercer Island, Washington, as president, along with a slate of officers



Credit for all photos: Leslie E. Kossoff/LK Photos

From left: Mariaschin and Riklin with B'nai B'rith's new president, Robert Spitzer, and his wife, Kathleen Spitzer. The Spitzers are residents of Mercer Island, Wash.



New Board of Governors officers included (from left): Jacobo Wolkowitz, Montevideo, Uruguay; David Geller, Miami; Eric Engelmayer, Luxembourg; Millie Magid, Miami; Jack Berkowitz, Goshen, N.Y.; Dan Tartakovski, Mexico City and Bruce Pascal, Potomac, Md. Wolkowitz, Engelmayer, Magid, Berkowitz and Tartakovsi will serve as senior vice presidents; Geller and Pascal were elected, respectively, chief justice and vice chairman. Michael Gellman (not pictured) was re-elected Treasurer.



Former Presidents Gary P. Saltzman and Seth J. Riklin praised the commitment and dedication of outgoing B'nai B'rith officers. From left: Paolo Foá, Milan; Gina Strauss, Miami; Eric Book, Encino, Ca.; Brad Adolph, Hawthorne Woods, Ill.; Riklin; Saltzman (at podium).

Congratulations to B'nai B'rith's New Officers

President:

Robert Spitzer, Mercer Island, Wash.

Vice Chairman:

Bruce Pascal, Potomac, Md.

Treasurer:

Michael Gellman, Potomac, Md.

Chief Justice:

David Geller, Miami

Senior Vice Presidents:

Jack Berkowitz, Goshen, N.Y.

Eric Engelmayer, Luxembourg

Millie Magid, New York City and Miami

Dan Tartakovski, Mexico City

Jacobo Wolkowicz, Montevideo, Uruguay

Paying Tribute to General John M. Keane For Supporting Israel

B'nai B'rith and the American Jewish International Relations Institute of B'nai B'rith (AJIRI-BBI) honored General John M. (Jack) Keane (ret.) for his patriotism and for his unwavering voice for a vital U.S.-Israel alliance at a special event in Washington, D.C. on July 17.

Delivering remarks at that time, B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin noted: "I've been working in the Jewish community, for now more than 50 years. I know—we know—a friend when we see one... Your advocacy for a strong U.S.-Israel relationship on and off the battlefield is not only welcome, General Keane, it has been of great comfort to us." 🇺🇸

From left: B'nai B'rith CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin; Gen. John M. (Jack) Keane (ret.); American Jewish International Relations Institute of B'nai B'rith (AJIRI-BBI) Executive Director Gil Kapen. B'nai B'rith and AJIRI-BBI honored Keane on July 17.



Upstander Awards presented to those who stand proudly with Israel and the Jewish people



Read past issues of B'nai B'rith Magazine at
bnaibrith.org/bnai-brith-magazine/

Annual Leadville Cemetery Cleanup Encompasses Worship, Heritage and Nature



Photo: Peter Greenberg/commons.wikipedia.org

Leadville's Jewish cemetery

B'nai B'rith Colorado volunteers traveled to the 19th century silver mining mountain town of Leadville in late June, when they teamed up to maintain its Hebrew cemetery. B'nai B'rith Vail is now a partner in this event.

Established in 1880, the cemetery is the burial place of Leadville's Jewish citizens, including merchants, financiers and local officials. The town synagogue, Temple Israel, maintains the cemetery, and hosts a museum devoted to Leadville's colorful Jewish history.

Weekend event highlights included a Saturday Torah reading service at Temple Israel, followed by a picnic and hike. On Sunday, participants tended the graves and the grounds and concluded with a recitation of the kaddish. 🕯️

Read past issues of B'nai B'rith Magazine at
www.bnaibrith.org/magazines



B'nai B'rith Leaders Engage with UNHRC and UNESCO Diplomats in Europe



Mission participants with Daniel Meron, permanent representative of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva (7th from right, wearing polka dot tie).

During its annual mission to Geneva and Paris in March, B'nai B'rith spoke to diplomats attending or involved with the decision-making sessions of UNHRC (United Nations Human Rights Council) and UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) to advocate for the fair treatment of Israel, and address issues vital to the Jewish community worldwide.

B'nai B'rith members from eight countries participated in the mission under the leadership of President Robert Spitzer and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin. The delegation also included Director of U.N. and Intercommunal Affairs David Michaels.

Mariaschin noted: "Our meetings in Geneva afford us a unique opportunity to meet face-to-face with numerous heads of diplomatic missions, in order to raise our deep concern over the institutional bias against Israel at the Human Rights Council. Bringing together B'nai B'rith professional staff with our volunteer leadership demonstrates the importance of our work at the United Nations and its agencies in a dedicated, real-time manner."

Delegates met with high-ranking personnel from 60 countries

including Romania, Israel, Panama, Uruguay, Greece and the United States, as well as with officials from UNESCO and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). They also attended special events with B'nai B'rith France and B'nai B'rith Switzerland. At the UNHRC, B'nai B'rith arranged for the transmissions of testimonies by Michaels and Cochav Elkayam-Levy, chair of the Civil Commission on October 7 Crimes by Hamas against Women and Children.

Describing the two U.N. satellites, Spitzer remarked: "We saw a major difference in tone between the Human Rights Council and UNESCO. The UNHRC has incorporated structural/institutional biases against Israel, such as the sole permanent country-specific item on its agenda, item 7, present for the purpose of castigating Israel. Similarly, those in the positions of 'Rapporteur' and on the 'Commission of Inquiry,' which are led by individuals with long records of hatred of Israel, seemingly create 'findings' to justify their prejudgments.

In contrast, UNESCO's leadership has worked to depoliticize the agency and has prioritized the educational mission of teaching about the Holocaust and fighting anti-Semitism." 

B'nai B'rith Australia and New Zealand's Convention Tackles "New Strategies for New Times"

B'nai B'rith Australia and New Zealand (BBANZ) held its triennial convention in Australia's capital city, Canberra, from Aug. 29-Sept. 1. Delegates took part in a series of workshops focused on young people, support for Israel and the fight against anti-Semitism, led by facilitators including Mark Leach, founder of the Australian group "Never Again is Now"; Tahli Blicblau, head of the Dor Foundation; retired military officer and legal expert Mike Kelly; and B'nai B'rith leaders.

B'nai B'rith President Rob Spitzer and CEO Daniel S. Mariaschin delivered recorded remarks during a gala celebrating the inauguration of BBANZ's new president, Janine Zimbler.

Congratulating Zimbler on her election, Spitzer spoke of B'nai B'rith's mission and the difficulties and challenges entailed by the rise of anti-Semitism. He outlined B'nai B'rith's new plans for strengthening ties between districts across the globe.

Mariaschin described the "recklessness of the nations" that recognized Hamas, and outlined B'nai B'rith's efforts at the U.N., and its Paris and Geneva satellites, for the defense



B'nai B'rith leaders from Australia and New Zealand with Amir Meron, chief of mission, Embassy of Israel. From left: Janine Zimbler, newly elected president of B'nai B'rith Australia New Zealand (BBANZ); Dr. Benny Monheit, immediate past president; Meron; and Anna Marks, president of B'nai B'rith New South Wales (B'nai B'rith NSW) in Sydney.

of Israel amid the United Nations Human Rights Council's hostility and perpetuation of canards leveled against the Jewish homeland. He concluded by emphasizing the vital importance of Jewish solidarity.

Zimbler noted in her acceptance speech: "I am committed to taking a fresh look at how people engage with

B'nai B'rith and [to] encouraging new ways for members to participate in our wide-ranging projects and activities, both in Australia and internationally."

Convention members enjoyed tours of the Australian War Museum and the National Gallery of Australia, and were able to attend Shabat services, followed by a dinner at the city's Jewish Center. 🇮🇱

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B'nai B'rith France Expands Community Outreach



Seniors living at the nonprofit Moise Leon Home in Paris enjoy convivial afternoons swapping recipes with one another and with B'nai B'rith France volunteers who visit them every week.



Photo: Ariette Levy

B'nai B'rith France conducts a similar activity with seniors in Lyon, which has resulted in the publication of an illustrated cookbook.

In 2023, IMPACT included stories about the ways in which B'nai B'rith France lodge members enhance the quality of life for both seniors and students through the projects of its Solidarity Commission, going strong since its founding in 2019. Etienne Levy currently serves as chairman.

From that time, B'nai B'rith France has celebrated holidays like Sukkot

and Shavuot at Paris' Moise Leon senior home, whose residents enjoy the traditional foods, gifts and even floral bouquets supplied by lodge volunteers.

Now the Solidarity Commission has expanded its outreach with Moise Leon residents. B'nai B'rith France members currently visit the home every week. Featuring a variety of snacks served

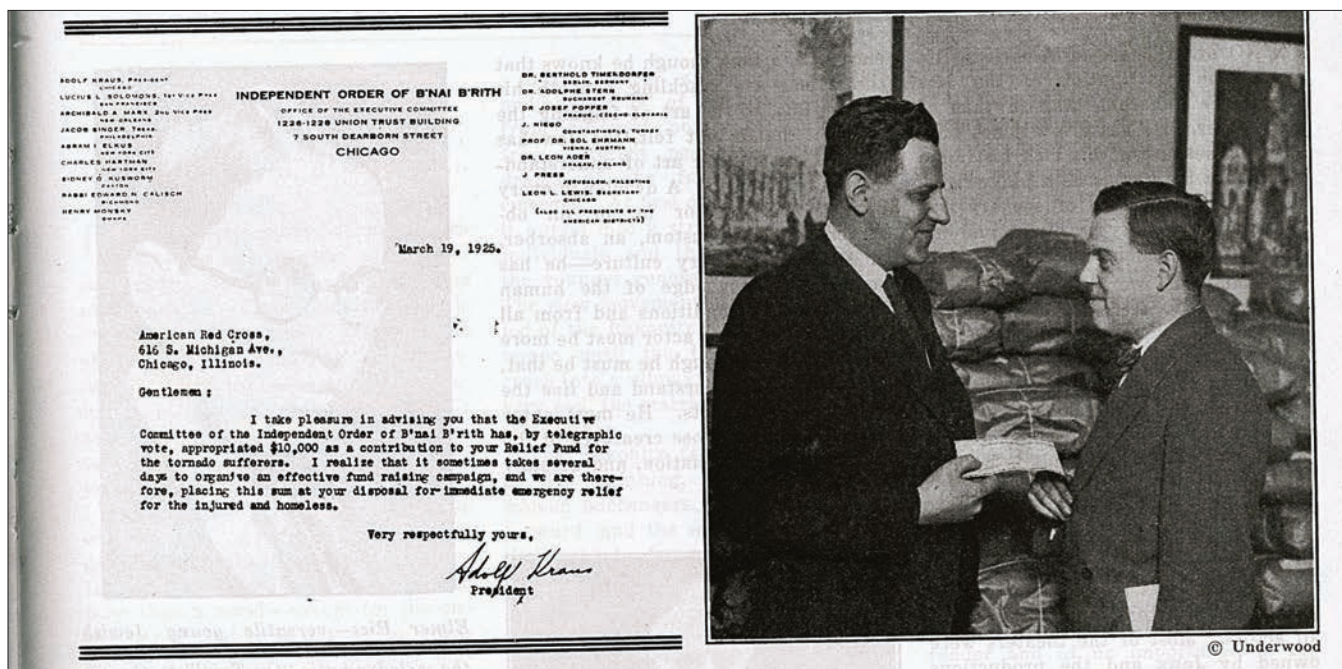
by the volunteers, these communal get-togethers have a special theme: a discussion of Jewish cuisine and the exchange of dessert recipes, including some which have been handed down in families for generations. Everyone can contribute, which is a great way for those who live at Moise Leon to say "merci" and forge friendships with the volunteers. 🍷



FIGHTING ANTI-SEMITISM IS AT THE CORE OF WHAT WE DO.

Since our founding, B'nai B'rith has developed tolerance programs and spoken out strongly against anti-Semitism in all its forms. "None Shall Be Afraid" is our flagship response to the world's oldest hatred.

Backstory: B'nai B'rith's Disaster Relief: 1925 Tri-State Tornado



As reported in B'nai B'rith Magazine, Executive Secretary (the position of CEO today) Leon L. Lewis (left) presents his organization's \$10,000 Emergency Relief check for the Tri-State Tornado victims to Chicago Red Cross Director Thomas M. Temple on March 19, 1925, one day after the tornado struck.

On March 18, 1925, the Midwest was devastated by what is still considered to have been one of America's deadliest tornadoes, which produced a mile-wide funnel cloud with average wind speeds greater than 60 miles per hour. The tornado, classified as an F5 (the strongest on the Fujita Scale) as measured by today's technically advanced meteorological instruments, touched down near Ellington, Mo. and tracked a 219-mile path through parts of Missouri, Illinois and Indiana for about four hours. At that time, it was not possible to predict this cataclysmic natural disaster, which killed about 700 people, injured 2,000 and destroyed \$17 million in property (about \$300 million in today's currency).

B'nai B'rith Magazine reported: "Within less than a day of receiving the news President Adolf Kraus (a resident of Chicago, where he headed B'nai B'rith's offices) had secured unanimous consent from the Executive Committee to contribute \$10,000 [a sum having purchasing power of \$183,694 in 2025] for emergency relief." 📖



Griffin, Ind., one of the towns destroyed by the Tri-State Tornado

A Busy Summer for Center for Senior Services

Annual Managers and Service Coordinators Meeting

B'nai B'rith Center for Senior Services (CSS) held its 2025 Housing Network Managers and Service Coordinators meeting in Asheville, North Carolina, in June. Relying on the emergency preparedness training they had received from CSS consultants prior to experiencing the devastating effects of Hurricane Helene in 2024, area senior residence administrators shared outcomes and best practices with personnel from other buildings, who all engaged in volunteer work at the Haywood Street Welcome Table.

CSS has scheduled a service activity as part of its service manager conventions since 2019, when delegates planted vegetables and prepared food packages on a farm in Puerto Rico.

Sessions at the Asheville meeting addressed security concerns and older adult sensitivity training and provided updates from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

As the largest national Jewish sponsor of non-sectarian subsidized housing for the elderly in the United States, CSS continues to facilitate dialogue between staff working at senior residential facilities and the residents, with the goal of best serving the needs of all who live there.

Retreat at Perlman Camp

Held every other summer, the Resident Leadership Retreat run by the Center for Senior Services (CSS) took place from August 7-12. Open to two leaders residing at each B'nai B'rith property, the retreat focuses on the development and improvement of leadership skills necessary to effectively run their Residents Associations.

CSS Associate Director Janel Doughten noted: "The Retreat is the culmination of the mission of the CSS housing network. Creating a community which is more



Resident managers teamed with B'nai B'rith Center for Senior Services (CSS) staff for a service project during the conference in Asheville, N.C.



The 2025 Center for Senior Services (CSS) Leadership Retreat group at Perlman Camp. CSS Associate Director Janel Doughten appears in the bottom row, second from right.

than just a place to live is forged through a partnership of residents, management, board members and CSS. It empowers the residents and gives them a voice."

Attendees participate in a variety of activities, including workshops and discussions, which provide a forum for exchange of ideas. They also take advantage of the camp's leisure facilities and scenic grounds. Of vital importance are the opportunities for networking with fellow

residents across the country.

The retreats have been held for 38 years at the B'nai B'rith Perlman Camp. The results are evident: It's a vastly productive, enjoyable and fulfilling time for those who attend. A Schenectady B'nai B'rith House resident who has taken part in several retreats commented: "Thank you for everything. I had a very meaningful, spiritual, wonderful time and a great experience." 🌟

My Time at B'nai B'rith: A 42-Year Journey

By Mark D. Olshan

Associate Executive Vice President, B'nai B'rith International

This May, I will be turning 80! Not bad, if I do say so myself.

I have worked at B'nai B'rith for more than half of that time, some 42 years. Whew! Where did the time go? Thinking back on my career, lots of special memories and moments come to mind. Oddly, my first memory starts with my mom's dressmaker in New Jersey, because in a weird way she is the one who steered me toward B'nai B'rith.

In 1978, I moved back home to New Jersey after earning a Ph.D. in Human Factors Psychology from the University of South Dakota. I started job hunting, and, in an odd twist of fate, my mother's dressmaker had contacts at the International Center for Social Gerontology (ICSG), located in Washington, D.C. I was granted an interview. Within 24 hours of returning home from the interview, ICSG called to ask if I was available for a second interview. The job seemed promising, so I drove back to D.C. Quite unexpectedly, they offered me a job, I accepted, and moved to Washington.

While working at the ICSG, I helped train employees of area agencies on aging throughout the country on housing issues affecting older adults. I worked at the ICSG for two years. However, the day President Ronald Reagan was sworn into office, Commissioner Robert Benedict, a political appointee of President Jimmy Carter, was supposed to sign our grant extension. Well, he went out for lunch before signing, and, when he came back Reagan was president, and Benedict was no longer authorized to sign the extension. And boom, I lost my job!

Fortunately, I was hired by a consulting group, and my boss was someone

named Lanny Morrison. So why does this matter? Well, Lanny's brother is Steve Morrison, who worked for, you guessed it, B'nai B'rith International. In 1983, the Director of Senior Housing position opened. Due to my relationship with Lanny, I connected with Steve and applied for the position. Given my existing background with senior housing, it seemed like a good fit.

I remember having to go through a few rounds of interviews. I interviewed with Harvey Gerstein, chair of the Senior Housing Committee; Anne Spiwak, director of Administration; and B'nai B'rith's Executive Vice President Daniel Thursz. During a second interview Thursz turned to Spiwak and said, "So when does he start?" Funny thing, I hadn't been offered the job yet. Well, I accepted the job offer, started work on June 1, 1983, and the rest, as they say, is history.

One article cannot contain all my memories from the past 42 years. However, let me name a few. I remember being at Amos Towers, a B'nai B'rith-sponsored senior housing building in Scranton, Pennsylvania, for my first ribbon-cutting ceremony. I was standing on a flatbed truck with other B'nai B'rith members in the community in honor of the building being opened. I wore a brown suit and sported a beard.

As many readers know, B'nai B'rith sponsors U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) senior housing properties across the country, including 35 buildings, in 16 states, that serve about 5,000 people.

I recall meetings in the 1980s with officials at HUD regarding our sponsored building in Deerfield Beach, Florida. The city of Deerfield Beach pro-

vided us with 10 acres of land at a good price. So, we purchased the property and applied to HUD for a 150-unit building. Well, HUD offered only enough funding for 100 units; we begrudgingly accepted the money for the project.

Over the years we applied to HUD for more funding and managed to get two additional buildings constructed, with 83 and 88 units, respectively.

It's special knowing I direct a program that has provided affordable housing to countless seniors around the country.

I also remember fondly working with HUD secretaries Jack Kemp, Henry Cisneros and Andrew Cuomo, representing both major political parties, but all sharing the same goal of advancing senior housing programs.

The expansion of our housing program isn't just about buildings; it also includes programming. I remember creating B'nai B'rith's Conference on Senior Housing Managers and Service Coordinators Training. These meetings provide training for our building staff and boards of directors, on all matters relating to housing and aging. Plus, they are a great opportunity for our housing network to come together to share ideas and best practices.

Our programming doesn't stop with our building staff and boards but also extends to our sponsored buildings' residents. In the early 1990s I connected with a group that was putting together vacation programming for seniors. I attended one of the group's retreats and the next year started the biannual Resident Leadership Retreat, where resident council members from our various sponsored properties came for a working "vacation" at Pearlman Camp



From a multitude of proud moments: my team on Capitol Hill. From left: Center for Senior Services Legislative Director for Aging Policy Evan Carmen; Associate Director of the B'nai B'rith International Center for Senior Services Janel Doughen; and me.

in Pennsylvania. Over time, I passed the baton to my colleague Janel Doughen, associate director for the Center for Senior Services, who extended the stays and created programing for those attending to improve their residents' councils back home.

My time at B'nai B'rith has involved more than senior housing. I recall my first trip to Israel in the late 1980s, traveling around the country with B'nai B'rith volunteers and taking classes at Hebrew University. I went back to Israel again for the B'nai B'rith convention in 1998. The programing we did at the Western Wall, one of the holiest Jewish

sites in Jerusalem, was first rate.

What if I'd never worked at ICSG and I had accepted a job somewhere in New Jersey, California or Florida? I probably would never have worked for B'nai B'rith, moved to D.C. and met my wife. Ever play dominos? It feels like a game of dominos led me to B'nai B'rith. The first domino was my mom's dressmaker, then working at ICSG, our grant expiring and finally meeting Lanny Morrison. If one of those dominos didn't fall, I probably never would have ended up here.

So why am I telling you all of this? Well, this will be my last column for B'nai B'rith Magazine. After over 40

years, I will be retiring soon. My time at B'nai B'rith has been filled with lots of great memories, but everything must come to an end. I look forward to spending time with family, in particular my granddaughter who graduates from college in the spring, and with friends. While I am excited for the next chapter, I will miss my B'nai B'rith family. It's going to be hard to top the past 42 years, but I will do my best to try. 📺

Mark D. Olshan, who holds a doctorate in psychology, is associate executive vice president of B'nai B'rith International and director of the organization's Center for Senior Services.

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