

Summer 2014 e-newsletter



In this issue

Students, Professors Take Bites Out of Big Apple

Food-focused trip to New York allows students to learn about Jewish immigrant experiences—past and present.

Jewish Studies major embraces Wisconsin Idea, slows down a Seder

Naomi Segal (BA 2016) discusses the intersections of sustainability and kashrut.

Greenfield Participants Reflect on Jews, Food, Neighbors

Attendees share their favorite stories about eating—both at UW and around the world.

Examining Ideology of Holocaust Children's Operetta

Jewish Studies affiliate Teryl L. Dobbs grapples with performances of Brundibár, past and present.

Quiz Yourself: Jews and American Popular Culture

*Last spring, students flocked to **Jewish 231: Jews and American Popular Culture**, taught by Tony Michels, Mosse Professor of American Jewish History. Think you know all there is to know about Jews and popular culture? Take his quiz and find out.*

Food-focused trip to New York allows students to learn about Jewish immigrant experiences—past and present.

By Michele Waldinger



A typical trip to New York City might include a visit to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, a stroll through Central Park, and perhaps a Broadway play. But on a recent trip to the city—led by Jewish Studies professors Jordan Rosenblum and Tony Michels—students eschewed these popular tourist destinations in favor of the Tenement Museum, Borough Park, and the Neue Galerie. And then, of course, there was the food. Lots of it.

“It actually started as kind of a joke about how we should plan a trip to New York where we eat a lot,” says Rosenblum.

The end result was Rosenblum combining his research on food and foodways with Professor Tony Michels’ study of American Jews and immigration to provide nine students with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity: to join their professors for five days in New York City to see, smell, and taste what they had studied in the classroom.

The April trip was funded by the Coleman Undergraduate Learning Enhancement Fund, established through the generosity of donors Bill and Marjorie Coleman to provide extraordinary experiences outside of the classroom for undergraduate students.

Using New York’s historic Lower East Side as a base, the group took walking tours of Chinatown, Harlem, and Brooklyn. For junior Jewish Studies major Naomi Segal, the trip allowed her to connect with her Jewish roots.

“It was thrilling to stand in front of the original Forward building and see The Forward written in Yiddish,” she says. “It was one of the most influential newspapers for Jewish immigrants in the early 20th century.”

Robert Walter, a senior English major, saw firsthand a culture and history he had previously only been exposed to in books and lectures.

“Whenever we were going through the ultra-Orthodox community in Borough Park in Brooklyn ... it was really like being in a foreign country,” he says. “Everything is in Yiddish, and everyone had big beards and hats and wool coats. And at the Tenement Museum, I was able to look through the same window that an immigrant sat and sewed in front of for 14 hours a day almost a century ago.”



As promised, the trip included plenty of food, ranging from Sammy’s Romanian Steak House, specializing in kitsch with a maple syrup jar full of chicken fat on every table, to the Mile End Deli, where the owners talked with students about their efforts to reinvent Jewish culinary classics in light of modern food ethics.

“I wanted students to learn how immigrant cuisines—Jewish food, Chinese food, Italian food—are invented in New York and other American cities, how they’re products of Americanization that blend old world traditions with new world foodways,” Michels explains.

The trip also allowed the students and professors to get to know each other in a new way.

“When New York City is your classroom, there is a certain informality and you can actually interact and talk about things not on a syllabus,” says Rosenblum.

Without the Coleman Fund covering almost all of the costs, Walter says he would not have been able to take what was his first trip outside of Wisconsin.

"I had never even been on a plane before, and here I was in Times Square," he says.
"If I were to get absolutely nothing else out of my time at UW other than that trip, I think it would have been worth it."

Jewish Studies Major Embraces Wisconsin Idea, Slows Down a Seder

Naomi Segal (BA 2016) discusses the intersections of sustainability and kashrut.

By Michele Waldinger



As part of an independent study project on ethical eating and Rabbinic Judaism, junior Naomi Segal reached out to the Madison community and prepared and led a slow-food Seder for nearly 40 people—many of whom had never attended a Seder. I asked her to share some reflections about the experience.

Q. What is Slow Food?

A. Slow Food is an international movement to educate people and provide food that is good for the environment and for those who grow, pick, and eat it. Slow Food UW is a student-run branch of Slow Food USA that promotes affordable access to good, clean, and fair food.

Q. What made you decide to do a community slow-food Seder?

A. This Passover was my first as an adult away from home. I wanted to design and lead a Seder where community members could come together and learn from each other. I also wanted to gain a more informed understanding of kashrut and ethical eating.

Q. What were some of the food choices?

A. I had to be flexible about the menu and mindful of what would be in season in April, particularly fruits and vegetables. I also had to balance creating a sustainable meal and making the difficult decision of what level of kashrut to observe. I bought the meat from Underground Meats, a Madison collective that sells sustainable, local meat and supports area farmers and growers. The closest kosher beef I could have purchased would have been from Milwaukee. I regretted not having kosher meat available for guests, but I valued knowing that the animals did not have antibiotics in them and that they lived a full life.

Q. What was the conversation like at your Seder table?

A. It felt like a safe place where anyone could ask a question, in part because the food was local and all of the guests could understand where the food was from. Almost everyone had a different background and story, but it was the interest in sustainable, local food that brought us all together.

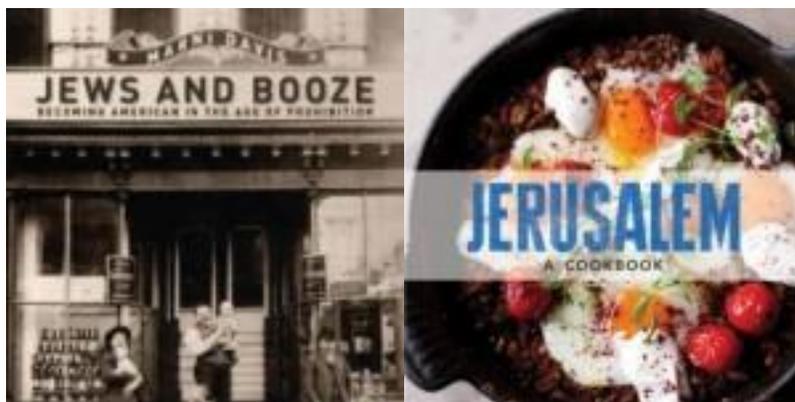
Q. What did you take away from the experience?

A. I am more aware of my food habits now. What I learned has helped me gain a foothold in my approach toward kashrut and deciding what level to observe. I also have a new understanding of the work of farmers. At the Dane County Farmers' Market, I see the produce and farmers differently, realizing how difficult it must be to provide local sustainable food. And I learned how important it is to have such loyal and dedicated friends and a loving family. I really could not have pulled off the Seder without the help of the other members of Slow Food UW, my friends outside of Slow Food, and my awesome family that drove all the way from Chicago to help out.

Greenfield Participants Reflect on Jews, Food, Neighbors

Nearly 140 alumni and friends of the Center for Jewish Studies took part in the 15th annual [Greenfield Summer Institute](#) from July 13-17.

This year's theme, "Jews and their Neighbors," explored relationships between Jews and their neighbors across 5,000 years of Jewish history and around the world, each day with a different focus. Presentations ranged from explorations of biblical civilizations, to responses to the Holocaust, to Jews' interactions with their neighbors in contemporary American and Israeli culture.



Food quickly emerged as a key subtheme of the Institute. Nearly 50 participants chose to participate in the summer book club selection, Marni Davis's *Jews and Booze: Becoming American in the Age of Prohibition*. Even the closing dinner tied back into the theme with a menu inspired by *Jerusalem: A Cookbook*.

At the closing dinner, several attendees shared their favorite memories of food, college life, and their neighbors—both in Madison and around the world.

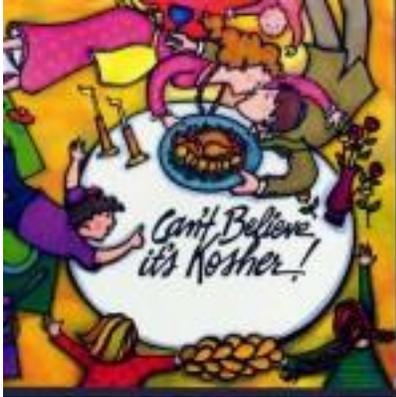


I stayed at 636 Langdon, a Jewish dorm [now the Phoenix Co-op]. We had strict hours and couldn't go out to eat. A man would come, and we would lower a basket with our money. He would go and get the food for us, and we lifted the basket up, because we couldn't even go out the front door.

– Gerrie Boym, Class of 1957

The cheese was a surprise because I had never had Wisconsin cheese. I had processed cheese—American cheese—and cheddar, but not any of the other types of cheese. It was much tastier than anything we had ever had.

– Barbara Sanford, Class of 1971



My cookbooks were written in Milwaukee, where they did a lot more with cheeses and things. I didn't know anything about cheese. We were kosher and ate a lot of meat. I don't remember my mother putting in cheeses and stuff like they do here... Bratwurst, we would get chicken and turkey bratwurst handmade by the butchers. And we exported them to California. Although they all have pork in their casing, so I don't eat them. My cookbook has some recipes that were influenced by things we ate here that we didn't eat at home.

– Beverly Schechter Feiges, Class of 1956 and author of *Can't Believe it's Kosher*

My father came from the [Pale of Settlement](#), and for Passover he would only eat what he could grow on his own. My family, then, had a Passover tradition of passing potatoes in salted water instead of greens, as potatoes were the only thing that my father could grow.

– Bea Strick

Around 1979, my son took part in the Semester at Sea program through the University of Illinois. He was leaving in January and he was going to be there for Passover. In January you cannot buy matzos made for Pesach. So I went to every store in my area that sold matzos, and every box said 'not for passover use.' But I wanted him to have matzos for Passover, so I bought boxes and boxes of matzo.

They got to Sri Lanka, and he heard a woman asking the captain of the ship, 'is there anywhere here where we could get matzo for Passover?' The captain said, 'I don't, but our chef would be happy to make a Passover meal so you could have a service.' So my son walked up to her and said, 'when we go back on the ship, come to my room; I want to show you something.' When she came to the room, he opened up his trunk, and there were sitting all these boxes of matzo. They had a Passover Seder for 110 kids with that matzo.

– Myrna Siegel



I used to live in New Orleans, and almost every Jew I knew kept kosher at home and ate treif at restaurants. And everyone in New Orleans eats in restaurants, so there was really no distinction. It took me a while to understand the kosher food laws, as nobody was practicing them. One recipe I learned was jambalaya without pork and shellfish.

– Allison Bloom

Interviews: Valeria Navarro-Rosenblatt

Examining Ideology of Holocaust Children's Operetta

Teryl L. Dobbs grapples with performances of *Brundibár*, past and present

By Allison Bloom



The plot of Hans Krása's operetta *Brundibár* should be familiar to readers of fairy tales: two children, in an effort to help their sick mother, sing at the market to earn money. They're chased away by the evil organ grinder, Brundibár, but eventually overthrow him with the help of friendly animals.

Although composed for a Czech state competition in 1938, the operetta became indelibly associated with the Holocaust when the score was smuggled into the Theresienstadt concentration camp, and a production was mounted that lasted for more than 55 performances. Sung and acted by children, *Brundibár* was held as an example of the cultural programming offered to Jews at the Terezín "show camp" during the 1944 International Red Cross visit and the subsequent propaganda film, *The Führer Gives the Jews a City*.

Associate Professor of Music Education and Jewish Studies affiliate Teryl L. Dobbs recently returned from a sabbatical trip to Prague and Terezín (the Czech name of the garrison town where the Theresienstadt camp was located), where she studied the history of the operetta. What led Dobbs to focus on a work for children? The answer lies not only in its history, but also in what she calls the "contemporary ideological deployment" of the operetta by music teachers and opera companies.

Though *Brundibár* provided performers and audience members an important musical respite after brutal 16-hour days of hard labor, the operetta was produced under considerable duress. Dobbs has, for instance, compared cast lists with lists of children who were transported to death camps from Theresienstadt, and she found that the operetta cast had to be continually renewed with new auditions as other cast members were deported.

"Studying *Brundibár* is, in a way, studying the 'present absence' of people who are no longer with us," Dobbs says. "When we hear the operetta, we hear the voices of children who were silenced."

In addition to studying musical scores and documentation in the archives of the Terezín memorial and the Jewish Museum in Prague, Dobbs interviewed surviving cast members about their experiences of *Brundibár*. These cast members emphasized the importance of clandestine education and community involvement in Theresienstadt, and recalled that performing in the operetta gave them an emotional attachment to music making that helped them survive. Speaking with these survivors, Dobbs notes, reaffirmed her belief that “the act of education is a future-oriented endeavor. We teach the arts because they are a statement of our humanity.”

Dobbs is not only interested in the operetta’s history; she also raises questions about the ideological framework that surrounds current productions. *Brundibár* is often presented as an opportunity to learn about the Holocaust in school music programs and children’s opera workshops, and is also sometimes presented as a morality play that purports to teach students about bullying and tolerance. (A modern production in three parts can be viewed [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

Dobbs finds, however, that many teachers lack sufficient historical context to teach the operetta, which ends up obscuring the work’s problematic history. She calls instead for a pedagogical perspective that values questioning, mindful teaching, and empathic attunement to what Deborah Britzman has termed “difficult knowledge:” the internment, forced labor, corruption, propaganda, and genocide that *Brundibár* represents. For Dobbs, paying attention to the “present absence” inherent in *Brundibár*’s history is far more important than using it as music-educational shorthand for the Holocaust. Her approach reminds us that music, even when produced under conditions of extreme stress, can be a form of spiritual resistance.

Photo: Yad Vashem C2977/174

Quiz Yourself: Jews and American Popular Culture

Last spring, students flocked to *Jewish 231: Jews and American Popular Culture*, taught by Tony Michels, Mosse Professor of American Jewish History. Think you know all there is to know about Jews and popular culture? Take his quiz and find out.

Match the terms on the right to their matching definitions on the left. Answers below!

Pioneered the live television show “Your Show of Shows”

“Get Smart” was his first television series

“Tzena, Tzena, Tzena” became a top-ten hit thanks to this singer

This actress played the popular singer and actress Fanny Brice

This Appleton native’s performances made him a worldwide celebrity

Wrote the screenplay for the film *Exodus*

Great reformer of the Yiddish stage

This child of Yiddish journalists wrote the novel *Gentleman's Agreement*

Led by this singer, the Gingerbreads became the first all-female rock and roll band signed to a major record label

Wrote the song “Strange Fruit”

Sid Caesar

Pete Seeger

Abel Meeropol

Harry Houdini

Barbara Streisand

Laura Hobson

Mel Brooks

Dalton Trumbo

Jacob Gordin

Goldie Zelkowitz

ANSWERS

Pioneered the live television show “Your Show of Shows” | Sid Caesar

“Get Smart” was his first television series | Mel Brooks

“Tzena, Tzena, Tzena” became a top-ten hit thanks to this singer | Pete Seeger

This actress played the popular singer and actress Fanny Brice | Barbara Streisand

This Appleton native’s performances made him a worldwide celebrity | Harry Houdini

Wrote the screenplay for the film *Exodus* | Dalton Trumbo

Great reformer of the Yiddish stage | Jacob Gordin

This child of Yiddish journalists wrote the novel *Gentleman's Agreement* | Laura Hobson

Led by this singer, the Gingerbreads became the first all-female rock and roll band signed to a major record label | Goldie Zelkowitz

Wrote the song “Strange Fruit” | Abel Meeropol