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Resiliency in Challenging Times

Dear friends,

When I wrote to you last spring, I had a vague hope that the situation at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and the country as a whole, would return to normal by the fall. My hope was premature. Even so, the Center for Jewish Studies has shown remarkable resiliency. We entered the fall semester offering a full roster of courses and online public events. We’ll do the same next semester.

Over the past several issues of the newsletter, you have read about a growing cohort of young faculty members who have enriched CJS with new courses, ideas, and energy. I’m pleased to announce yet another new addition to the Center. Professor Chontel Syfox, an expert in the Hebrew Bible, joined our faculty this semester. You can read about her teaching and research on page 4. Also this fall, Professor Sunny Yudkoff, who came to Madison in 2016, was named as the director of the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture. An energetic teacher and creative scholar, Yudkoff stands at the forefront of a new generation of Yiddishists. Mayrent couldn’t be in better hands.

In light of recent events, it seems an apt time to highlight the role of Jews in the civil rights movement at UW. Our own Jonathan Pollack, an honorary fellow at the Center, recounts a piece of this history drawn from his book Wisconsin, the New Home of the Jew: 150 Years of Jewish Life at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, whose publication last year was made possible by generous support from Julie and Peter Weil of the CJS Board of Visitors. Many readers will surely notice the discussion of Rabbi Max Ticktin, Hillel’s legendary director during the 1960s. Rabbi Ticktin, who passed away in 2016 at the age of 94, immeasurably enriched the intellectual lives of students, and it’s an honor to recall him on our pages.

On our Alumni News page we are featuring Dina Kraft, who graduated from UW–Madison in 1993 and wrote a prize-winning thesis in German-Jewish history under Professor David Sorkin, the Center’s first director. Dina went on to study Jewish history at Stanford University, where I first met her, and now lives and works as a journalist in Israel. Some years ago, I ran into Dina in a Druze village in northern Israel. Since then, I have followed her career as an award-winning journalist, a path that began here in Madison, as you’ll read in her fascinating story.

Looking ahead to the spring and beyond, we will be offering a variety of new courses and exciting public events, including the annual Greenfield Summer Institute on July 19–22. After a year’s hiatus due to the pandemic, Greenfield will resume with lectures and activities on this year’s topic, “Jews and Politics: America, Europe, Israel.” In the coming weeks we will decide in what form Greenfield 2021 will convene, whether in person or virtually. For now, please save the dates on your calendars.

In a year of unusual challenges, the Mosse/Weinstein Center continues to thrive, thanks to our accomplished, dedicated faculty, our bright young students, and the many friends and supporters who together make CJS an outstanding academic program.

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Tony Michels, Director
Mosse/Weinstein Center or Jewish Studies
George L. Mosse Professor of American Jewish History
Mayrent Institute Welcomes New Director

Sunny Yudkoff Plans Exciting Events Exploring Yiddish Culture, Past and Present

We are delighted to welcome Professor Sunny Yudkoff in her new role as the director of the Mayrent Institute for Yiddish Culture, which is now under the auspices of the Mosse/Weinstein Center for Jewish Studies. Founded in 2010, Mayrent is dedicated to educating students, faculty, and the wider community about the vitality of Yiddish music, literature, and art. The institute is named for Sherry Mayrent, a composer of klezmer music and an avid collector of Yiddish recordings.

Professor Yudkoff has been teaching at the UW–Madison since 2016 and has a joint appointment in the Center for Jewish Studies and the Department of German, Nordic, and Slavic. In her teaching and research, she focuses on Jewish literary production from the mid-nineteenth to twenty-first centuries. Her first book, Tubercular Capital: Illness and the Conditions of Modern Jewish Writing (published by Stanford University Press, 2019), won the Salo Wittmayer Baron Book Prize, sponsored by the American Academy for Jewish Research.

Under Professor Yudkoff’s leadership, the Mayrent Institute will offer a wide variety of events that reflect the continuing relevance of Yiddish today. Programming will introduce international musicians, artists, cultural activists, and scholars to the Madison community. Multi-day symposia will address topics such as contemporary Jewish publishing and Yiddish translation. Graduate students from across the country will gather to explore Yiddish studies collaboratively. Taken together, these events will consider Yiddish culture within the context of contemporary concerns about racial injustice, labor practices, the future of the university, and public humanities.

Professor Yudkoff is excited to be working with Mayrent to explore the content and contours of modern Yiddish culture. “The Mayrent Institute has a task that is both relevant and complicated—to dig deeply into the aesthetics, politics, and practices of Yiddish cultural activists,” she remarks. “I look forward to excavating this history, both past and present, with students, colleagues, and community members.”
Much of your work focuses on the Book of Jubilees. What is the Book of Jubilees, and what drew you to it?

The Book of Jubilees is a Second Temple Jewish work, written circa 160-140 BCE, and widely considered to be an example of Rewritten Scripture. Texts belonging to this genre rewrite works that eventually made it into the biblical canon. Characteristically, such texts follow the biblical work quite closely, sometimes adding details and at other times omitting information, in order to recast and correct earlier traditions. They are also often written pseudepigraphically, in the name of a famed biblical figure. Jubilees, which purports to be revelation disclosed to Moses whilst he was on Sinai to receive the tablets bearing the Ten Commandments, is a rewriting of the Book of Genesis and some chapters of the Book of Exodus. I was drawn to Jubilees due to the fact that it is among some of the earliest interpretations of Genesis and Exodus and it appears to offer correctives about issues in the biblical texts that have regularly been observed and questioned by modern readers. For instance, Jubilees seems to take issue with the multiple instances of patriarchs passing their wives off as their sisters in order to save themselves from harm.

In your study of biblical texts you often focus on depictions of women, including Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Jezebel. What do these figures suggest about women’s roles in that period?

Ideas about appropriate and inappropriate gender performance are constantly in flux, being negotiated and renegotiated across time, place, and groups of people. This negotiation happens not just in our lived experiences, but also in the texts that communities and cultures produce. The Bible is not a monolith; it contains texts penned by a variety of writers who lived in different times and places and had their own authorial agendas. Unsurprisingly, then, we find competing images of femininity standing alongside each other in the biblical text.

Some female characters appear to defy gender norms, whilst others seemingly reinforce stereotypically patriarchal ideas about the performance of femininity. In either case, it is important to ask who benefits from such depictions of women. It is often the case that the portrayals of female characters in biblical literature serve the ideological and exegetical concerns of the elite male Israelite authors who wrote for a largely male imagined audience.

Tell us about the course you are teaching this semester on sexual violence in the Bible.

My course, Texts of Terror: Sexual Violence in the Bible, focuses on Hebrew Bible texts depicting sexual violence. Students explore the reception of these stories throughout the history of biblical interpretation, considering “malestream” and gender-nuanced readings, as well as in art and film. We also consider how these troubling biblical texts relate to and normalize instances of gender violence in modern society. Instead of a final paper, students produce podcasts that shine light on the connections between biblical stories about gender violence and contemporary issues such as rape culture on college campuses, victim blaming, and the myth surrounding female purity and virginity.

What do you hope students will take away from your courses?

My hope is that students recognize that one does not have to be “religious” to study biblical literature. In fact, one can and should submit biblical literature to the same kind of critical examination that we would submit other literary works to. In doing so, students sharpen skills that will benefit them long after they graduate, such as reading closely and critically, engaging in thorough analysis that considers multiple viewpoints, formulating articulate and non-dogmatic arguments, and communicating with both honesty and sensitivity across boundaries.
Nadav Shelef on Changing Visions of Homeland

In his new book *Homelands: Shifting Borders and Territorial Disputes*, Professor Nadav G. Shelef shows how the understanding of a homeland can change over time. Published this year by Cornell University Press, the book compares the German, Italian, and Palestinian contexts in the aftermath of World War II. Based on these case studies and a cross-national analysis of every case of lost homeland territory since World War II, Shelef shows how “new, more modest, understandings of the homeland” can displace more expansive ones. The short-term domestic political success of narrower visions of “our land” leads the territory left out of these understandings to lose its homeland status. When this happens, people may accept another group’s sovereignty over what they once considered their homeland.

The new book extends the conclusions of Shelef’s previous one. In *Evolving Nationalism: Homeland, Identity, and Religion in Israel, 1925–2005* (2010), he had focused on the evolution of Israeli nationalism. *Homelands* analyzes one aspect of nationalist ideology, the location of the homeland, across different situations to reveal how nationalism evolves in other contexts as well.

Shelef is a professor in the Department of Political Science and the Harvey M. Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Israel Studies. In addition to nationalism, his research and teaching interests include territorial conflict, religion and politics, Israeli politics and society, and Middle East politics. Among other projects, he is currently investigating the consequences of using the military to respond to the pandemic.

Steven Nadler on Spinoza’s Ethics

In 1656 the budding philosopher Bento de Spinoza was still helping to run his family’s business when he was excommunicated from Amsterdam’s Portuguese-Jewish community. The exact reasons for the *herem* are unclear, but around this time the young Spinoza began to question the material and social pursuits that had governed his life to that point. Abandoning his mercantile trade, he turned to what Professor Steven Nadler calls “that deepest and most important of moral inquiries: What is human happiness and how can it be achieved?”

Nadler is the William H. Hay II/WARF Professor of Philosophy & Evjue-Bascom Professor in Humanities. In his recently published book *Think Least of Death: Spinoza on How to Live and How to Die* (Princeton University Press), he offers a lucid and accessible examination of Spinoza’s *Ethics*, a five-part masterpiece of moral philosophy. According to Nadler, the *Ethics* “is about the freedom of the individual: not so much the physical liberty to do what one wants to do or the intellectual liberty to say what one thinks, but the inner freedom that consists in choosing to do what one knows is good and in one’s own best interest.” Nadler’s study focuses above all on Spinoza’s understanding of what constitutes an ideal life: one that is free from irrational fears, unmoved by passions such as hate and envy, and guided instead by reason.

The book is the latest of Nadler’s extensive publications in the study of philosophy. In addition to Spinoza, his interests include Descartes, Leibniz, and medieval Jewish rationalism (particularly Saadya ben Joseph, Maimonides, and Gersonides). His undergraduate courses include Jewish Philosophy from Antiquity through the Seventeenth Century.
Faculty News

Recent Scholarship

Rachel Feldhay Brenner (Harvey L. Temkin and Barbara Myers Temkin Professor in Hebrew Language and Literature, Elaine Marks Professor of Jewish Studies) presented a paper about her grandmother’s letters from the Warsaw Ghetto at a conference in Paris organized by Mémorial de la Shoah and Yad Vashem. She also contributed an essay entitled “Holocaust Memories and Polish Catholic Identity: Cultural Transmutations of Warsaw Ghetto Uprising” to The Palgrave Handbook of the Holocaust (Victoria Arons and Phyllis Lassner, eds.), published this year by Palgrave Macmillan. Professor Brenner’s other recent publications include ‘Jan Karski’s Bearing Witness to the Holocaust: A Transformative Experience,’ published in The Polish Review, and ‘Jerzy Andrzejewski’s Holy Week: Testing Religious Ethics in Times of Atrocity,’ published in Holocaust and Genocide Studies.

Sara Guyer (Dorothy Draheim Professor of English) is currently serving as the president of the Consortium of Humanities Centers and Institutes (CHCI) and co-director of the World Humanities Report, a joint initiative of CHCI, the International Council of Philosophy and the Human Sciences, and UNESCO. She recently joined the Board of Directors at UW-Hillel.

Since 2019, Tony Michels (CJS and History) has worked with Lila Corwin Berman of Temple University and Annie Polland, Executive Director of the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), to convene the Working Group on Antisemitism, under AJHS auspices. In November he gave Emory University’s Goldwasser Lecture in Jewish Studies and the Arts. He is currently serving his second term as director of the Mosse/Weinstein Center.

The latest issue of the Israeli dance magazine Mahol Akhshav (Dance Today) includes a hybrid performance/text piece by Douglas Rosenberg (Art Department) entitled “Song of Songs.” Rosenberg also published two articles on themes of race, diversity, and social justice in the current issue of the International Journal of Screendance.

In September Scott Straus (Political Science) briefed the Center for Genocide Prevention at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum on scholarship in the field of genocide studies.


Sunny Yudkoff (CJS and German/Nordic/Slavic) recently participated in a webinar hosted by UCLA’s Alan D. Leve Center for Jewish Studies on the theme of “Contagion, Culture, and Care.” In May, she also contributed to the Jewish Quarterly Review’s blog forum “Pandemic and Plague: Literary Encounters.”

New Courses in Jewish Studies

Jewish Humor
Sunny Yudkoff (CJS and German/Nordic/Slavic)
Examines a diverse array of jokes, short stories, films, websites, conceptual art, and cultural kitsch

Israeli Culture in Music and Film
Marina Zilbergerts (CJS and German/Nordic/Slavic)
Explores music, film, and television from the 1960s to the present

Muslims and Jews: Medieval History, Modern Memory
Adam Stern (CJS and German/Nordic/Slavic)
Focuses on the legacy of Andalus, the Arabic name for the areas of the Iberian Peninsula governed by Muslims during the Middle Ages and inhabited by large communities of Jews and Christians

Sexual Violence in the Bible
Chontel Syfox (Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies)
Explores the challenges posed by the presence of gender violence in the Hebrew Bible.

Anne Frank
Jolanda Vanderwal Taylor (German/Nordic/Slavic)
Examines Jewish communities in the Netherlands, and the Frank family in particular, within the context of the Holocaust, World War II, and the Nazi occupation

Coming in Spring 2021

The American Jewish Life of DNA
Cara Rock-Singer (Religious Studies)

The Bible and Film
Jeremy Hutton (Classical and Ancient Near Eastern Studies)

Hebrew Literature from the Bible to the Present
Marina Zilbergerts (CJS and German/Nordic/Slavic)

Above: The Israeli comedy series Shababinim, one of the cultural texts studied in Marina Zilbergerts’s course Israeli Culture in Music and Film
Wladyslaw Szlengel was a Polish Jew who wrote songs, poems, and satirical essays from his lifelong home of Warsaw. In 1942, during the German *Grossaktion*, Szlengel and his wife were relocated into what soon became the Warsaw Ghetto. There Szlengel labored for the Nazis in a German factory, but wrote as much as he could at night. He succeeded in writing multiple poems and resurrecting a satirical journal, both of which he copied and handed out to Jewish families in the ghetto. Although most of his manuscripts were destroyed, a few survived in the archives. Szlengel died during the Warsaw Ghetto uprising in May of 1943.

Szlengel’s epic poem “What I Read to the Dead” was written in 1943, just before he was killed, and details the January action in small fragments of memory. Its generally disconnected lines reflect the frantic, frenzied motion of the Jews in the Warsaw ghetto as they were awaiting death and Szlengel’s own urgent need to record these events. His goal is to eulogize those in the ghetto; he refuses to let his friends, family, and the Jewish people as a whole be degraded to a statistic. Through-out the poem, he mentions by name those in his apartment—“Ziuta, Asia, Eli, Fania, Simona”—noting characteristics about them and their struggle against death at the hands of the Nazis. His tone in these lines becomes emotional, as he emphasizes their humanity against their animalistic treatment. In the end, he succeeds in immortalizing them, writing their story into history as a reminder and warning. The last lines of the poem reveal that Szengel himself is preparing to be killed; he is organizing his writings, poems, and stories so that they can be read and understood some day in the future. Of his archive, he writes: “Do read it! This is our history/ This is what I read to the dead,” pleading with a future audience never to forget the individuals who make up this Jewish history or the atrocities mankind is capable of committing.
Due to the COVID pandemic CJS is offering all of its Fall 2020 courses remotely. At the UW–Madison remote instruction takes two forms: synchronous, where classes are conducted live through two-way videoconferencing technology such as Zoom, or asynchronous, with prerecorded lectures that students can watch at whatever times fit best within their individual schedules. Each format poses unique challenges for everyone—students, professors, and teaching assistants.

This fall Shai Goldfarb-Cohen, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, is serving as a teaching assistant for Professor Jordan Rosenblum’s Jewish Law, Business, and Ethics, an important new addition to the Jewish Studies curriculum. Shai has given much thought to the question of how she can help students learn effectively in this new environment.

Over the summer, she recalls, she began “thinking about what my pedagogical goals are and then what digital tools I can use that will help me reach these goals.” To help students develop their skills in interpreting ancient Jewish texts, for example, she uses a digital platform that promotes collaboration among readers. “Online learning can feel like a very lonely experience,” Shai explains, “especially today due to COVID, as social interaction is limited and includes mostly virtual participation.” In some cases, the online environment can lead to passive learning. To keep students involved, she has each of them work with a havruta (learning partner) in reading biblical and rabbinic texts.

Shai’s background has prepared her well for her teaching. After completing a masters degree in education at Ben-Gurion University in 2016, she began her doctoral program at the UW, where she is now writing a dissertation on how people use online spaces and other digital tools to study Jewish texts. Shai has found the Center for Jewish Studies to be “a great place to learn more about the Jewish religion, history, and literature” while gaining some additional experience in teaching.

While attuned to the limitations of online instruction, she also sees its potential, as recent technologies such as podcasts, videos, and blogs have provided more access to Jewish content and more ways to engage with it. Technology, she explains, enables students of any age to participate in a long tradition of Jewish learning. In the process, they become part of a larger Jewish community and help to keep ancient texts alive—activities that many students view as a reflection of fundamentally Jewish values.

In August, as first-year students were deciding which courses to take in the fall, the UW Language Institute launched an Instagram campaign to highlight the university’s “less commonly taught languages”—an expression used in language pedagogy for anything other than Spanish, French, and German. To promote our courses in Hebrew, we asked Ethell Gershengorin, a Ph.D. student in the Department of History, to create a short video describing her experience in taking the language for the first time. Her video is now featured on the CJS website: https://cjs.wisc.edu/hebrew/.

Promoting Hebrew to Incoming Students

Ethell came to Madison from Boston University to study “the complexities of Soviet nationalities and the cross-cutting cleavages that made Soviet identity multifaceted—ethnicity, gender, and class.” When she enrolled in Hebrew last fall, she explains, “I started off not knowing anything at all.” Now, she is pleased to say that she can read and write Hebrew, understand the spoken language, and carry on a conversation. “It’s been quite an incredible journey,” she adds, “being able to see my progress.”

“My one piece of advice to prospective or current students is to be patient with yourself and not get discouraged. Learning languages is very hard, but really rewarding at the same time.”

—Ethell Gershengorin
Weinstein Fellowship Provides Crucial Support in Time of COVID

When Dylan Kaufman-Obstler began graduate work in the Department of History, her knowledge of Yiddish was still rudimentary. Now in her sixth year, she is completing a dissertation on a movement by Yiddish-speaking Jews in the United States who created their own system of “proletarian education” for Jewish immigrants in the wake of the Russian Revolution.

Dylan holds this year’s Laurence A. Weinstein Distinguished Graduate Fellowship, which supports research at the intersection of education and Jewish studies. Made possible through a generous gift from Frances L. Weinstein, the fellowship includes tuition and a stipend.

What drew you to the topic of Yiddish education in the U.S.?
There was something that struck me about Yiddish Communist schools and how paradoxical their endeavor was: How did the movement’s leaders reconcile their identities as Marxist internationalists, who wanted to ultimately dissolve national differences, with their insistence on continuing Yiddish language education? If we consider the long story of their efforts, we see their interest in Yiddish education as a belief in the potential to build a “Yiddish proletarian culture” for the next generation, and through this culture, define what it meant to be Jewish.

How did you acquire the source materials and language skills needed to conduct research for this project?
When I first came to Madison there were no Yiddish classes and I knew little more than the alphabet, so I applied to receive funding from the Center for Jewish Studies for studying Yiddish during the winter and summer breaks. I could not have learned Yiddish without the support of CJS scholarships. The incredible Jewish Studies faculty directly supported me to advance my Yiddish literacy through independent studies, reading groups, and employment, which gave me structure to practice reading and translation. With the financial support of CJS, I was also able to travel to New York and Los Angeles to collect Yiddish documents I could only obtain in person.

Has the pandemic affected your progress?
Luckily, I got those documents from the archives before the pandemic! Thanks to the Weinstein fellowship, the pandemic has had little impact on my project. Obtaining funding can be emotionally and mentally consuming for dissertators, even without a pandemic stretching us financially. I am immensely grateful for this fellowship. It is allowing me to focus on finishing my project and sharing my research with the broader academic community.

You recently presented your first conference paper. What was that experience like?
This past Biennial Scholars Conference in American Jewish History was really the first time I shared my dissertation research publicly. I presented a paper about a debate in 1927 regarding a Yiddish kindergarten in the Coops (a Jewish housing cooperative in the Bronx). I was nervous about presenting my first conference paper (especially over Zoom), but was thrilled that attendees found my research interesting and had some great questions about it.

Both images courtesy of Cornell University Library, International Workers Order (IWO) and Jewish People’s Fraternal Order (UPFO) Collection. Left: Cover of the first issue of the Prolet-Shul school journal published in Newark, New Jersey, June, 1931. Right: “Knowledge Is Power.” Program celebrating the 10-year anniversary of the Jewish Workers University, New York City, 1937.
Journalist Dina Kraft Draws Deeply on Her Training in Historical Research

When Dina Kraft was growing up in Maryland, the UW wasn’t even on her radar. On the advice of a high school friend, Kraft visited Madison one snowy day in February and was captivated by what she calls “the quintessential college experience.” Looking back at that moment now, she describes it with a journalist’s memory for visual detail—the bookstores and coffeehouses on State Street, the cozy atmosphere of Memorial Union. It felt, she says, like home.

Kraft (BA ’93) knew from the outset that she wanted to study history, but her interest in Jewish studies emerged more gradually. In her freshman year, Edward Said spoke on campus and publicly upbraided her when she questioned him about reported executions of Palestinian informants to Israel. That same year, she started writing for the Badger Herald and covered the heated debate on campus surrounding the First Intifada. It was then, she recalls, when “I first stuck my foot into the morass that was the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” She decided she had to go to Jerusalem and “figure it out” for herself—not realizing, she says, that decades later she would still be in Israel, full of more questions than answers.

With two semesters of Hebrew under her belt, Kraft spent her junior year in Israel, and while she was there she stumbled upon the topic of her senior thesis. She had long been intrigued by family stories about a great uncle, Ernst Pollak, an early Zionist from Austria who moved to Palestine in 1920, took the name Natan Ikar, and committed suicide at the age of 19. Kraft was able to locate his final resting place in a cemetery by the Sea of Galilee. Wiping decades of debris from the gravestone, she was amazed to uncover an enigmatic engraving that depicted a mosquito sting the face of demonic-like figure. Ikar had been afflicted with malaria. Returning to Madison the next fall, she described her findings to Professor David Sorkin. He gave her a “massive reading list” to inform her thesis, which received the History Department’s Paul J. Schrag Prize in German Jewish History. Kraft went on to earn a master’s degree at Stanford. In 2012 she was a Nieman Fellow at Harvard and in 2015 an Ochberg Fellow at Columbia.

Today, Kraft is an award-winning journalist based in Tel Aviv whose writings have appeared in the New York Times, the Christian Science Monitor, JTA, and Haaretz, among other publications. In essence, she is still a historian, drawing deeply on the skills she developed as a student. In 2019 she wrote the fascinating backstory of a diary written by Judit Ornstein, a teenaged girl in Nazi-occupied Budapest who was killed in an Allied bombing. When Kraft began researching the topic, it was still a mystery how the diary found its way to an Israeli archive. In hopes that someone in Israel had the answer, Kraft published the piece in Haaretz. Sure enough, a reader reached out and led her to a 91-year-old man who had been Judit’s sweetheart all those years ago. It was he, he explained, who had donated the diary—providing a poignant conclusion to the story.

This past June, Kraft received a B’nai B’rith World Center-Jerusalem Award for Journalism for her writings on topics ranging from antisemitism in the U.S. and Great Britain to healing in the aftermath of the Pittsburgh Tree of Life shooting. You can find her on the Hadassah podcast series she hosts: The Branch, which tells the stories of friendships between everyday Israelis and Palestinians, Jews, and Arabs (https://www.hadassah.org/multi-media/podcasts/the-branch-podcast.html).
Jewish Students in the Civil Rights Movement
An excerpt from Wisconsin, The New Home of the Jew

By Jonathan Z. S. Pollack

On March 3, 1960, UW students demonstrated on Library Mall to support the civil rights movement, which had begun its campaign of sit-ins a month before. Addressing the roughly five hundred students who had turned out despite snow and freezing temperatures, Hillel director Max Ticktin urged the assembled students to focus on local conditions as well as the southern Jim Crow laws that the civil rights movement fought against. “I hope we do not leave here without making a judgment on the discrimination that exists in subtle ways right here in Madison,” Ticktin advised. He went on to state that restaurants, barbershops, fraternities, and sororities were sites for local discrimination. He also urged students to support the Congress on Racial Equality in their efforts to fight Jim Crow. Ticktin’s comments emphasized the connection between Judaism and movements for social change. As the leader of the organized Jewish community on campus, he used that authority to place Jews on the liberal side of a nascent movement that would grow exponentially during the next decade.

Despite there being only a small African American population at UW and in the city of Madison, the University of Wisconsin was a hotbed of civil rights movement activity, and Jewish students on campus were leaders both in national civil rights campaigns in the South and local ones in the Madison area. Jewish students like Paul Breines took part in the 1961 Freedom Rides, where white and African American activists rode interstate buses into the segregated South to challenge the nonenforcement of Supreme Court decisions that ruled that segregation of interstate transportation facilities, including bus facilities, was unconstitutional. The riders endured arrests and brutal violence. Two of the three activists murdered in 1964’s Freedom Summer, when activists volunteered to register blacks to vote in Mississippi, were Jewish, and one of them, Andrew Goodman, had attended UW for a semester in fall 1961. Records show that Jewish students from UW who took part in the 1965 Summer Community Organizational and Political Education Project of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference comprised a much higher percentage of their University’s participation than Jewish students from other colleges, with 20 percent of UW’s contingent coming from Jewish families, compared to 11 percent for all colleges nationwide. The civil rights movement could not be classified as a Jewish student organization along the lines of Hillel or Zeta Beta Tau, but at UW, a community of Jewish students came together by participating in it.

Excerpted from Wisconsin, The New Home of the Jew: 150 Years of Jewish Life at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, published by the Mosse/Weinstein Center with a generous grant from Julie and Peter Weil

This book is now available in full through the UW-Madison Libraries’ digitized collections: https://search.library.wisc.edu/digital/A74616C-NBBR4RC8D.

500 at U.W. Rap Race Bias

Elvehjem Reproof Is Boomed

By KIM WILLIENSON

More than 300 more than 300 Wisconsin students demonstrated peacefully against Southern racial violence on the mall between the historical society and university library buildings Thursday after.

After 40 minutes of listening to speech, the students dispersed quietly in the midst of a short snowstorm.

Jim Crow Must Go

The demonstration carried signs reading “Equality is Unity,” “Jim Crow Must Go,” “Protest Unjust Jailing of Tennessee 8 Students,” “Academic Freedom and Jim Crow Cannot Mix” and others as they crossed Langdon at from the Memorial Union at the beginning of the rally.

This year the UW–Madison witnessed calls for racial justice and protests more intense than any since the 1960s. Historian Jonathan Z. S. Pollack, a CJS honorary fellow, describes that turbulent decade and the role of Jews in supporting the civil rights movement on campus.
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