

Avukah

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of Jewish Studies



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About the Cover Photo

Image features Madison's Gates of Heaven Synagogue, one of the oldest synagogues still standing in the United States.

A Note on Style

As an interdisciplinary journal, *Avukah* accepts submissions in varying manuals of style. The pieces included in Volume IV reflect this general rule.



Avukah

Undergraduate Journal of Jewish Studies
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A Note from the Editors

Earlier this year, our beloved teacher and mentor Professor Rachel Brenner passed away. The Center for Jewish Studies family felt her passing heavily and continues to miss her and her knowledge everyday. This volume of *Avukah* was published in memory of Professor Brenner and all that she taught her students. The last piece included in this volume of *Avukah* was written by Hilary Miller, the founder of *Avukah*. In her piece, she reflects on her relationship with Professor Brenner and the impact Professor Brenner had on both her academic and personal life. She is greatly missed and CJS will continue to be impacted by her teachings for decades to come.

May her memory be a blessing.

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Examining the Black and Jewish Relationship in the Civil Rights Movement and Beyond

By: Adam Storch

When examining the struggles of African Americans in the United States, it is impossible to ignore the connections between Jews and African Americans. During their time of enslavement, African Americans would pray for deliverance from their suffering much like the Jews of the Old Testament in Egypt. Later on in history, the African Americans of the Civil Rights Movement would sing slave songs such as “Go Down Moses, Way Down in Egypt Land,” evoking Old Testament imagery to represent their struggle in the United States. The parallels between African Americans and Jews do not stop with these religious connections. Having both been marginalized groups throughout history, African Americans and Jews both saw the injustices present in the United States, and they sought to correct them through the Civil Rights Movement.

When examining the Civil Rights Movement from a distance, people often make the generalization that Jews and African Americans were strong allies during the Civil Rights Movement due to their similar histories as oppressed people. In reality, the relationship between the two groups is more nuanced. While Jews were allies to the Civil Rights Movement in some cases, such as Jewish activism in Miami, there are many other instances that show a far more layered and tension-filled relationship between Jews and African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement.

The Southern Jewish Community

Jews had a long history in the Southern states of the US. In Montgomery, Alabama, a congregation

had formed by 1852 called Kahl Montgomery.¹ This congregation grew over time, as the Jewish community in Montgomery expanded and became more diverse. In Montgomery alone there were three different congregations by 1950, and by that point the total Jewish population had grown to 1200 individuals among a total population of 130000.² These Jews, though small in numbers, had a large impact on the city over time. Jewish businesses were prominent in downtown Montgomery, and Jews even held positions of power in the city government—notably Mordecai Moses, who became mayor of Montgomery in 1870.³

Jewish communities can be seen throughout the South in places like Montgomery, which proved to be an excellent stage for displaying the relationship between African Americans and Jews during the Civil Rights Movements. Previous historians theorized that the relationship between African Americans and Jews was strong in the city and throughout the country, but new research has brought up the possibility that this was not the case. Either the relationship was far more layered, and a greater tension existed between the two groups, or, as some have argued, the alliance between African Americans and Jews never existed in the first place.⁴

The Alliance Between Jews and African Americans in the Civil Rights Movement

Though some scholars would say otherwise, it is impossible to ignore that Jews allied themselves with African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. Though the relationship was more complex than outright unrelenting support, there is no doubt that Jews took part in the fight for African American Civil Rights. One excellent example of Jewish activism is the work that Jews did in Miami, Florida in the mid-20th century. Southern Florida was a hotbed for racist sentiments, segregation, and religious bigotry during the postwar period. The

1 Clive Webb, “Closing Ranks: Montgomery Jews and Civil Rights, 1954-1960.” *Journal of American Studies* 32, no. 3 (December 1998): 463. Page 466.

2 *Ibid*, 466

3 Louis Schmier, ed., *Reflections of Southern Jewry: The Letters of Charles Wessolowsky, 1878-1879* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 1982), 72.

4 Webb, “Closing Ranks”, 470.

Ku Klux Klan had a heavy presence, and they would remain an influential organization into the 1950's.⁵ Blacks and Jews were both targeted in the postwar period, even though South Florida had developed a large Jewish population.

Throughout the mid-1940's and into the 1950's, discrimination was faced by both African Americans and Jews in Miami. African Americans were met with violence and intimidation when they attempted to leave their run-down neighborhoods and move to nearby white neighborhoods, and Jews experienced similar, yet more subtle, discrimination in the job market and the housing market as well.⁶ These common experiences between African Americans and Jews would lay the groundwork for the alliance that would develop between them between 1945 and 1960 in Miami.

One specific catalyzing event was the dynamite bombings that occurred in Miami on December 2, 1951. One of these bombings took place at an apartment complex called Carver Village. Carver Village, previously known as Knight Manor, was a previously all-white apartment complex that had started to rent out a section of the housing to African Americans. This caused outrage among many of the white residents, and eventually the KKK stepped in to prevent African Americans from residing there. On three separate occasions, the African American section of Carver Village was bombed with dynamite, the final bombing coming on December 2. During this same period, a number of bombings of Jewish schools and synagogues occurred as well. Bombers would often leave behind German writing that praised Hitler and the Ku Klux Klan. One of these synagogue bombings took place on the same day as the bombing of Carver Village.⁷ These coordinated bombings cemented African American and Jewish solidarity in Miami.

Stemming from these attacks came work for Jews who wanted to aid in the Civil Rights Movement. Jewish organizations such as the American Jewish Committee would send out newsletters explic-

itly issuing grievances with the work of the Ku Klux Klan, and they would express support for the work that Civil Rights organizations were completing.⁸ This period also saw Jews supporting work to outlaw signs that encouraged discrimination on Miami Beach, as well as a number of Miami rabbis joining the NAACP.

The Jewish and African American alliance would continue later into the decade and into the 1960's as well. One notable moment that came from this alliance is the establishment of a chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) in 1958 by a group of Jewish women. Prior to the establishment of this CORE chapter, the Civil Rights Movement in Miami had been fighting to integrate schools in the city and the entire state of Florida. It was one of the primary goals of this CORE chapter to see the schools in Miami integrated. In 1958, CORE saw the integration of the previously all-white Orchard Villa School.⁹ This is just one of the multiple instances in Miami where Jews were allies to African Americans. The Jews of the South continued to ally themselves with African Americans in Miami, despite all of the violence and accusations of communist affiliation that resulted from that alliance.

Jewish advocacy work was not isolated only to Miami. Jews all over the country allied themselves with African Americans during the Civil Rights Movement. Throughout the 1950's, rabbis declared their stance in the fight for desegregation in schools. Jewish congregational leaders from all sections of the South declared their support for the *Brown v Board* case decision, and they would applaud any school districts which complied with the Supreme Court's ruling.¹⁰ This shows how widespread the Jewish support for the Civil Rights Movement was. The rabbis in support ranged from Greensborough, North Carolina to Houston, Texas. Many Jews saw the injustice that African Americans faced, and many others had experienced this injustice firsthand. This is what caused Jews to insert themselves into the Civil Rights Movement. Many saw similar-

⁵ Raymond A. Mohl. "South of the South? Jews, Blacks, and the Civil Rights Movement in Miami, 1945-1960. (Cover Story)." *Journal of American Ethnic History*. 1999, 18 (2): 3. Page 4.

⁶ *Ibid*, 5.

⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

⁸ *Ibid*, 9.

⁹ *Ibid*, 18.

¹⁰ Webb, "Closing Ranks", 474.

ties to their own history in the experiences of African Americans, and they sought to fight to correct those injustices. However, in many instances Jews stepped away from the movement.

Complications to the Jewish-Black Alliance

Though some Jews did insert themselves as allies in the Civil Rights Movement, it is important to note that this was not always the case, and in many cases, Jews actively avoided Civil Rights work and the organizations that helmed the movement.

An example of this comes from the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The outbreak of the bus boycott was truly problematic for the Jewish community of Montgomery. The Jews in Montgomery were caught in the middle of two greatly opposed forces. Jews in other parts of the country had already allied themselves with the Civil Rights Movement, including many prominent Northerners who had already joined the NAACP, and these Northern Jews were ready to support the boycott. The Southern Jewish population contrasted this. For example, the Montgomery Jewish Federation, a regional offshoot of the American Jewish Committee, threatened to withhold funds to its parent organization unless it altered its stance on the issue of integration in Montgomery.¹¹ This single example shows the distinction between Jews within the United States. Not all Jewish people were united in the fight for Civil Rights, and many were in opposition to the movement. The Jews in the South were often targets of anti-Semitic attacks, and if they were to become allies to the Civil Rights Movement, they would be putting themselves in greater danger.

The lack of action by Jewish leaders was emphasized again by Martin Luther King Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail. In the letter, King is making a call to religious leaders to take action in this movement. Specifically, he calls to Jewish sensibilities by reminding them of the atrocities of Adolf Hitler during the Holocaust, which was still in recent memory.¹² He emphasizes the fact that the atrocities committed during the Holocaust were all legal in Hitler's Germany, and that the same type of oppression was taking place in their own country. In this letter King

¹¹ Ibid, 469.

¹² Martin Luther King Jr. Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16, 1963. Page 6.

states that he would have aided the Jews of Europe if he were there. Furthermore, he expresses his clear disappointment in the inaction of the Jewish religious leadership to draw attention to how inactive some Jews had been during the Civil Rights Movement. King's explicit evocation of the Holocaust proves that Jewish advocacy had been lacking in the Civil Rights Movement, and that in order for the movement to progress, Jews would have to grant their full support.

Lack of Jewish activism is also seen in Miami. Though Miami was an excellent example of Jews working to progress the Civil Rights Movement in some areas, there is also striking evidence of their lacking approach and participation. As in other places in the South, Jews in Miami were afraid of the backlash that outward support for Civil Rights might bring. It could potentially result in negative economic effects on Jewish businesses, and there was the ever-present fear of increased anti-Semitic attacks. Though some Jewish people and organizations supported the Civil Rights Movement, it did not hold up to the strong alliance that some may portray it to be. Many of the synagogues remained silent regarding Civil Rights issues for the first half of the 1950's.¹³ Though Jews had influence at high levels of Civil Rights organizations such as the NAACP, this advocacy work did not translate to local activism in the South. In reality the smaller Jewish organizations in the South often shied away from Civil Rights issues for fear of retaliation to their own community. Additionally, people feared being labeled a communist.¹⁴ During the McCarthy era, many Civil Rights groups were labelled as communist organizations. To ally oneself with a Civil Rights group meant they were running the risk of persecution for being a communist, a risk that many Jewish people were unwilling to take.

Tensions Between African Americans and Jews in the Modern Era

¹³ Vincent P. Franklin, ed., African Americans and Jews in the Twentieth Century: Studies in Convergence and Conflict (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1998), p.124

¹⁴ Brenda Plummer, Civil Rights and the Cold War. Lecture. October 1, 2019.

While the Civil Rights Movement represented a union between African Americans and Jews in some respects, the current relationship between these two groups is extremely complex, much like it was during the era of the Civil Rights Movement. Today there are still aspects of anti-Semitism from people of color, and at the same time, there are also examples of Jewish racism. This modern issue stems from various sources.

The current division between Jewish populations and African Americans stems from the waning years of the 1960's. For many Jews, the successes of the Civil Rights Movement ended in the 1960's, but this was not the case for African Americans.¹⁵ This Jewish attitude resulted in a rift between the two groups that only continued to grow over time. This rift grew in the 1970's as issues of poverty came to the forefront of African American life. Increasing poverty and crime in urban centers led to Jewish populations fleeing these centers and moving to suburbs.¹⁶ This flight indicated racist sentiments among Jews who did not want to live among African Americans, and it led to increased poverty in urban centers.

Also contributing to this contemporary rift between African Americans and Jews are the arguments regarding the nature and severity of oppression that both of these groups have endured. It is clearly evident that the United States was built on a foundation of racist ideologies and slave labor. An examination of any period of American history supports that fact, from the arrival of the first slave ship in 1619 to the height of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960's and up to today, race and racism have been a source of oppression for African Americans.¹⁷ The source of Jewish subjugation goes back thousands of years, and it is one of the oldest forms of oppression. These two arguments contribute to the schism seen between African Americans and Jews

¹⁵ Schlosser, Lewis Z., Regine M. Talleyrand, Heather Z. Lyons, and Lisa M. Baker. 2007. "Racism, Antisemitism, and the Schism Between Blacks and Jews in the United States: A Pilot Intergroup Encounter Program." *Journal of Multicultural Counseling & Development* 35 (2): 116–28. Page, 119.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 121.

¹⁷ Jamelle Bouie, "America holds onto an undemocratic assumption from its founding: that some people deserve more power than others." *The 1619 Project*, *The New York Times*. August 14, 2019.

today. Oftentimes talk of these two types of oppression result in what has been described as "oppression Olympics."¹⁸ The discussion of which group is more oppressed has only helped to increase the schism that has formed between the two groups. It is important that though these arguments are often discussed, one must come to the realization that acknowledging racism does not invalidate anti-Semitism, and vice versa.

It is essential that in this modern age that the tension between Jews and African Americans is closed. The fight for Civil Rights has not ended, and any division between these two groups is detrimental to the progress that has already been made. The relationship between the two groups is incredibly complex, and the common misconception that Jews and African Americans were strong allies during the Civil Rights Movement needs to be addressed in order to better understand the relationship between African Americans and Jews today.

¹⁸ chlosser et al, "Schism", 120.

What's a Coastie? Jewish Stereotypes at University of Wisconsin

By: Madeline McGlone

Today, the visual evidence of UW-Madison's populated Jewish community runs across campus, ranging from the beautiful Hillel building to student organizations such as Challah for Hunger and Jewop, a Jewish acapella group. When asked about popular colleges for Jewish students, a Midwest public university might not be most people's first thought, but Jews at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have a long history that led them to have this reputation. This paper explores the history of Jewish students at UW-Madison, focusing on their status as outsiders, the development of anti-Semitic campus stereotypes, and how the term "coastie" disassociated from Jewish students. While the word initially came about in reference to Jewish female students from the East Coast, tuition increases and the end of admissions quotas for out-of-state students caused its meaning to shift to describe wealthy nonresidents rather than Jewish students specifically.

At the turn of the twentieth century, Jewish students struggled to find a place in many academic spaces due to a tradition of Christianity and the prevalence of antisemitism. Children of more recent Jewish immigrants residing in East Coast cities wanted an American education and began studying at Ivy League and liberal arts institutions in New England. Antisemitism at these universities culminated in Harvard's 1922 quota on Jewish students— only 10 percent of the class could be

Jewish.¹ Most other universities in the Ivy League and many smaller liberal arts schools followed suit, leaving qualified Jewish applicants with few options on the East Coast. As part of its efforts to attract nonresident students, The University of Wisconsin-Madison began admitting a high number of Jewish applicants.²

The university administration encouraged the establishment of Jewish communities on campus to recruit these students. The existing Jewish community in Madison at the time was not as religious or involved as that of the East Coast. As a result, midwestern Jews and East Coast Jews operated separately within different student organizations such as fraternities (Phi Sigma Delta and Zeta Beta Tau, respectively) the Menorah Society, a Jewish Student's Association, and a Zionist group.³ In 1925, the community established the second Hillel in the United States on campus in response to complaints about a lack of space for social gatherings and general alienation from Protestant activities.⁴ Additionally, the Hillel helped Jewish students find housing amid rampant discrimination. The university encouraged Jewish students' involvement in campus organizations, especially Greek organizations, knowing that many modern students valued both academic prestige and a vibrant social environment.⁵

The growth of the Jewish population at UW led to debates around campus regarding the behavior of East Coast students, fueled by the antisemitism that took place across the country throughout amidst the late 19th and early 20th century. Jews were stereotyped as loud and obnoxious, and gentile establishments continued their discrimination against the Jewish population.⁶ In Madison, the prevailing mission within the established Jewish community was to blend in in order to be accepted.⁷ Writers

1 Jonathan Z. S. Pollack, "Jewish Problems: Eastern and Western Jewish Identities at the University of Wisconsin," *American Jewish History* (June 2001): 60, ProQuest.

2 *Ibid.*, 61.

3 *Ibid.*, 39.

4 *Ibid.*, 9.

5 *Ibid.*, 61.

6 Lecture, 10/21, Manhattan Beach Affair, Leo Frank Lynching, and the Jewish World Conspiracy.

7 Jonathan Z. S. Pollack, "Jewish Problems: Eastern and Western Jewish Identities at the University of Wisconsin," *American Jewish History* (June 2001): 68, ProQuest.

encouraged Jewish students to participate in sports and argued against Orthodox observance.⁸ On the other hand, Hillel speakers criticized Jewish students who changed their names and appearances in order to appear less Jewish. Much of the advice for Jewish students at the time was largely criticism and lacked clear explanations of how they should behave.⁹ Zeta Beta Tau, despite being made up of many out-of-state students, put out an article in 1923 that admitted the chapter might not have considered admitting their own ancestors, if they were “loud and vulgar foreigners.”¹⁰ This sort of self-deprecation and internalized antisemitism was common throughout the period. The class yearbooks of 1919 and 1920 both featured stereotypical caricatures next to the pages for Jewish organizations, but the publishers faced no complaint from the groups.¹¹

Jewish students were characterized as obnoxious into the 1930s. At this time, it evolved into a new stereotype: the radical New York Jew. Alexander Meiklejohn’s experimental college, a school within UW meant to emulate liberal arts learning environments on the East Coast, attracted nonresident students, many of whom were Jewish. A non-Jewish student who was associated with this college was told he could not expect respect if he hung around “the scum of New York.”¹²

In the 1960s, the children of suburban, Jewish families found communities of like-minded, liberal students and began to participate in the social movements of the era. Pollack explained that “the civil rights movement could not be classified as a Jewish student organization along the lines of Hillel or ZBT, but at UW, a community of Jewish students came together by participating in it.”¹³ While less politically-minded midwesterners dominated the Hillel in prior years, during this period, it stood in support of anti-war protests.¹⁴ At one point, Hillel brought together students from across the political spectrum for a rally supporting Soviet Jews.¹⁵ Even Jewish Greek organizations,

8 Ibid, 167.

9 Ibid, 64.

10 Ibid, 42.

11 Ibid, 55.

12 Ibid, 71.

13 Ibid, 99.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid, 104.

which had historically kept their political views out of the public eye, got involved. Throughout the period, Jewish students were a very visible part of anti-war protests on campus.

Meanwhile, a rush of baby boomers trying to go to college meant that administrators were struggling to find space for many applicants, and Jews at UW felt the consequences. Parents of in-state students complained that their state university had rejected their children. The state legislature and university officials decided to place a limit on out-of-state students to 25 percent of the total class.¹⁶ The high number of Jewish students that came from out-of-state coupled with historical associations of Jews and radicalism meant that Wisconsin politicians and the university regents developed a negative association with the anti-war movements and out-of-state Jewish students.¹⁷ Later, the administration further limited out-of-state students so that only 15 percent of the incoming class could reside from outside of Wisconsin.¹⁸ These quotas, along with tuition increases, made it more difficult for out-of-state students, and thus, Jews, to come to UW during the late 60s and early 70s.

In the late 1970s, the university lifted the cap on out-of-state students and more Jews began to study in Madison again, but their demographics changed.¹⁹ This new class of east-coast Jews needed to afford higher tuition prices and expensive private dorms since UW housing gave priority to in-state students. These State Street dorms, like the Towers and the Statesider, were seen as similar to the “Jewish Houses” of earlier generations.²⁰ Earlier, the trend of Jewish upward mobility in the 50s had formed stereotypes such as the Jewish American Princess in bigger cities. The origin of this term is unknown, but the idea of a JAP was undeniably associated with wealth.²¹ At UW, sororities described some East Coast recruits as having a “Jappy look,” meaning they wore big sweaters, leggings, and distinctive footwear.²² Later, students re-

16 Ibid.

17 Ibid, 108.

18 Ibid, 109.

19 Ibid, 121.

20 Ibid.

21 Jamie L. Keiles, “Reconsidering the Jewish American Princess,” *Vox*, December 5, 2018.

22 Pollack, *Wisconsin*, 134.

ferred to a group of East Coast Jewish students as the “North Face Posse” because they wore the expensive brand of winter coats.²³ These stereotypes gave rise to a new term for out-of-state students: Coasties.

From the 1990s to the mid-2010s, the Coastie was a distinctly wealthy, Jewish, East Coast woman. The stereotype gained national attention in 2009 when a pair of UW-Madison students posted *The Coastie Song* on YouTube.²⁴ The Coastie described in the video wears black tights, big shades, uggs, and of course, a North Face jacket. Notably, she “always think that she the best,” and most importantly, she’s an “East Coast Jewish honey.” In Madison, many Jews felt conflicted on whether the term was offensive or not.²⁵ One journalist noted that the Coastie stereotype hadn’t changed much since her time at UW 10 years prior, but said that she did not find the video mean-spirited.²⁶ An article in the *Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* brought the video to the attention of Jews across the state, saying, “A Coastie is always considered to be Jewish,” and labelling the term a slur.²⁷ In response to the negative press, the university organized a panel to discuss the

word and the history of Jews at UW, but the attention died quickly.²⁸ The most recent article addressing the use of Coastie derogatorily against Jews was in the *Badger Herald* in 2014, when a Jewish student from New Jersey brought up the fact that while many non-Jews saw the term as a light-hearted representation of a silly midwestern/East Coast rivalry, its connotations were actually hurtful.²⁹ The usage of Coastie has remained relatively unchanged since the publication of this article.

Today, the term has lost most of its association with Jewish students. The UW-Madison Facebook meme page, *UW-Madison Memes for Milk-Chugging*

Teens, has a tag for memes about Coasties, and not a single one of them relates to Jewish students (although at one point someone did post a link to the *Coastie Song*). There are no posts referencing Jews on the page, and there are moderators to prevent hate speech. The first mention of Coastie is a post by the page’s founder, Shane Linden, in 2017; the post protests the controversial meal plan proposal that would have required students to spend a minimum of \$1,400 in the dining halls or forfeit the money.³⁰ Linden added a “Coastie tier” above tier 3 that costs \$4,100 and allows students to appropriate the credits of lower tiered students as well as access exclusive VIP areas for “out-of-state students only.” The Coastie described in meme page posts has a few important similarities and differences to the pre-2015 Coastie. Both are still from the coasts, wealthy, and share certain traits. But instead of North Face, they now wear Canada Goose.³¹ Leggings, previously called tights or thermal underwear, are now popular with women of all backgrounds, but a Coastie will be sure to get hers from Lululemon. Uggs and Reeboks have been traded for AF1s. New Coasties come from private high schools with many AP options.³² Although most upperclassmen live in ‘private dorms,’ or off-campus apartments, Coasties live in the most expensive and luxurious of them: the Hub, the James, and Lucky. Coasties today are the picture of privilege. They are not Jewish.

How did a stereotype so clearly associated with Jewish students become a catch-all term for wealthy out-of-staters? In 2015, UW-Madison waived an enrollment cap of 27.5 percent out-of-state students. In a statement explaining the decision, Chancellor Blank wrote, “given today’s demographics, the 27.5 percent enrollment limit for non-residents no longer makes sense at UW-Madison, particularly as the number of high school graduates in Wisconsin declines.”³³ Simultaneously, the school proposed an

³⁰ Shane Linden, “Does anyone know what comes after the “Coastie” tier?” Facebook post, *UW-Madison Memes for Milk-Chugging Teens*, November 30, 2017.

³¹ Pete Shur, “It smell like broke in here,” Facebook post, *UW-Madison Memes for Milk-Chugging Teens*, December 3, 2018.

³² Jared Van Bramer, “A Coastie freshman when anyone talks about high school,” Facebook post, *UW-Madison Memes for Milk-Chugging Teens*, April 22, 2019.

³³ Rebecca Blank, “Why New Admissions Policies are Needed to Meet Wisconsin’s Need for a Strong Workforce,” Office of the Chancellor, October 2, 2015,

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Quincy Kwalae, Beef, “Zooniversity Presents: The Coastie Song (What’s a Coastie?),” YouTube, October 13, 2009.

²⁵ Pollack, *Wisconsin*, 135.

²⁶ Katjusa Cisar, “Dane of My Existence: ‘What’s a Coastie?’ song circulating on campus,” *Wisconsin State Journal*, October 14, 2009.

²⁷ Michelle A. Langer, “Coasties and controversy: Madison slur raises questions,” *The Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle*, November 25, 2009.

²⁸ Pollack, *Wisconsin*, 135.

²⁹ Selena Handler, “Sconnies perpetuate false Coastie stereotype,” *The Badger Herald*, September 2, 2014.

increase on non-resident tuition by \$10,000 over a 4 year period, making the final rate \$35,523 per year.³⁴ In 2014, UW enrolled 3,105 residents and 1,841 non-residents.³⁵ In 2019, UW enrolled 2,734 residents and 2,625 non-residents.³⁶ These changes fundamentally altered the student body's idea of the Coastie.

By the time the UW-Madison Memes had latched on to Coastie as one of its main topics, applicants from the East Coast were already becoming wealthier and more numerous. Efforts by the university to recruit more out-of-state students meant that more non-Jews had a reason to come here. As a result, the new Coastie demographic was no longer Jewish. In fact, estimates by the director of the Hillel in 2009 put the Jewish population on campus at around 5,000, while hillel.org put it at only 4,200 for 2020 (although both are estimates).³⁷ The idea of a Coastie shifted to a privileged, white, male or female student in a matter of semesters. At a large university, where thousands of new students arrive each semester, culture can shift very quickly. As incoming freshmen heard upperclassmen use the word Coastie, they may very well have simply assumed it meant someone from the coast— without any antisemitic associations, because 'someone from the coast' was no longer specific to Jewish badgers.

Instead, a UW-student coming from the coasts was more likely to be non-Jewish white and even wealthier than ever before. When considering clothing stereotypes, a North Face coat is typically around \$100-\$300 (the toastie Coastie itself is \$250). The new coat of choice, a Canada Goose, is \$1,000. Recently, the Italian designer Moncler's puffer jackets have become more popular for women, and they go for upwards of \$1,500. Instead of just plain black leggings, as was the style at the time of the Coastie song, Lululemon athleisure is the key to a Coastie look, and it costs \$98 a pair. Three of the memes tagged as "about Coasties" on the meme page reference wealth directly, and two are garnering support for liberal

³⁴ Rebecca Blank, "Explanation of Tuition Increases For Out-of-State and Professional School Students," Office of the Chancellor, April 10, 2015.

³⁵ Fall 2014 Enrollment Report. Madison, WI: Office of the Registrar, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2014.

³⁶ Fall 2019 Enrollment Report. Madison, WI: Office of the Registrar, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 2019.

³⁷ John Allen, "Hillel [Encapsulated]," On Wisconsin, Winter 2009.

causes, including one opposing the construction of a second Hub luxury apartment building.³⁸ Because of UW-Madison's efforts to recruit more out-of-state students and increased tuition costs, the image of the UW-Madison Coastie has shifted away from the radical East Coast Jew and towards the wealthy, party-going, B-school student who drives up the cost of housing for everyone else.

The Jewish community at UW-Madison has seen many changes throughout its history, many of them involving discrimination and stereotypes. The invention and redefinition of the term 'Coastie' is just one instance of Jewish impact on campus, but it is unique in that usage of the word directly followed policy decisions by the university administration. Students today should educate themselves on how campus culture came to be the way it is so that they understand the context behind the phrases they use. Even if the term Coastie is no longer seen as hurtful by most people, it has been hurtful in the past, and that's something people should keep in mind, especially in conversations with UW students from previous generations.

³⁸ Matthias Chan, "True Badgers Bleed Red," Facebook post, UW-Madison Memes for Milk-Chugging Teens, May 16, 2019.

Looking Inside the Gray Zone: Hannah Arendt, Primo Levi, and the Moral Complexities of Holocaust Perpetuation and Victimhood

By: Magdalene Elaine Jay

Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi are two of the most misunderstood scholars, writers, and individuals from the post-war world. Their scholarship on totalitarianism, death camps, and the moral implications of the Holocaust and Hitler's regime sent shock waves through intellectual communities and public opinion around the world that have left gaping divides up through the present day. Hannah Arendt, a German-Jew, fled the Nazis twice throughout the war, eventually emigrating to the United States.¹ Primo Levi, an Italian-Jew, spent 10 months in the Auschwitz concentration camp before returning to his home in Turin, Italy in October 1945.² These authors, either overtly as in Levi's case, or implicitly as in Arendt's, "decided to live [their] condition as survivors,"³ devoting their writings and scholarship to dissecting the evils of the Holocaust, defining totalitarianism for a world still reeling from it, and finding ways to move forward.

Two of their respective works became crucial in the crusade against organized evil and the quest to dissect the morality—or lack thereof—that lies at its core. *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* by Hannah Arendt and "The Gray Zone" from *The Drowned and the Saved* by Primo Levi explore

the questions of perpetration and complicity in Nazi Germany. These deeply controversial and divisive works radically defend nuance and contradiction in the choices of both perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust. This emphasizes the necessity of preserving justice and truth in a post-war world struggling not only to come to terms with totalitarianism, but to defend against its future rule.

In 1961, Hannah Arendt, already an established journalist, activist, and political theorist,⁴ traveled to Jerusalem to cover the trial of Adolf Eichmann -- a former lieutenant colonel in the German Schutzstaffel (SS), who was being tried for 15 counts of crimes against humanity, crimes against the Jewish people, and membership in criminal organizations.⁵ He was found guilty on all 15 counts and was hanged in May 1962.⁶ Arendt published her report in 1963 and was shrouded in its controversy until her own death 12 years later.⁷ *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* was originally published as a series of essays in *The New Yorker*, a series which Arendt gradually expanded into a book as responses to it became more robust—and more embittered. Yet, many of her most scathing critics never acknowledged the groundbreaking work that she undertook to expose the legal and moral complexities that unfailingly accompanied the judgement of Holocaust perpetrators. She exposes the moral nuance—the moral gray area—that is inherent in perpetrators, and often victims, of totalitarian regimes; in doing so she demands that justice be served, not in the fabricated way that it was served by the judges in Jerusalem, but in a way that is grounded in righteous truth.

Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil is a book whose complexity of argument is only matched by its complexity of structure. Arendt illustrates not only the trial itself but all of the factors that led to it. She includes side stories, witness testimony, and slightly relevant tangents in parentheses that often span the length of an entire page—her argument for each chapter often looks more like a

¹ Maurizio Passerin d'Entreves, "Hannah Arendt," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Stanford University, January 11, 2019.

² Myriam Anissimov, "A Jewish Childhood under Fascism," in *Primo Levi: Tragedy of an Optimist* (Woodstock, NY: The Overlook Press, 1999).

³ Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Giulio Einaudi (New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks, 1988), 9.

⁴ Passerin d'Entreves, "Hannah Arendt."

⁵ Hannah Arendt and Amos Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 21.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 249.

⁷ Passerin d'Entreves, "Hannah Arendt."

many-branched tree than a linear progression. Arendt constructs her argument in the same way that the prosecution in Jerusalem attempts to construct theirs—beginning with something that Eichmann claims to have done, something he is accused of, or a documented piece of evidence with his name on it, and then branching off. Unlike the prosecution, however, Arendt branches off into the facts surrounding the event, not the fiction. For example, when recounting how Eichmann first came to join the SS, Arendt begins by quoting Eichmann’s own cliché answers (“Why not [join the S.S.]?”⁸) and immediately follows up with evidence suggesting that he had been looking for ways to advance in his career and social status after failing out of both high school and vocational school (“Of course, that was not all there was to it...”⁹). This claim-and-counter strategy allows Arendt to highlight the many ways Eichmann was an extremely unreliable person—he had tendencies to boast, forget, and blatantly lie—while simultaneously establishing the facts of Eichmann’s crimes and their impacts. Yes, the report is complex, but its complexity of form is perhaps overshadowed by its complexity of argument.

The crux of Arendt’s argument is that Adolf Eichmann has been tried for the wrong crime in an error ridden trial and that these failures of legal due process symbolize a deep moral failure on behalf of the court. Arendt contends that Eichmann is not tried for the 15 counts of the indictment but that he is tried as the grand executor of Jewish suffering in a show trial whose outcome is known long before the trial’s start in April 1961. In other words, Arendt argues that the trial in Jerusalem is didactic at best. David Ben-Gurion, Israel’s Prime Minister at the time, began the theatrics with the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann from the streets of Argentina and his immediate extradition to Israel to await trial.¹⁰ Both of these actions are legally questionable, though they were eventually allowed via a loophole in international law.¹¹ Ben-Gurion continues the theatrics with a bold statement at the beginning of the trial that “it [was] not an individual that [was] in

this dock . . . but Anti-Semitism throughout history.”¹² His histrionics eventually manifest themselves in the paradox of the Eichmann trial: The absurd truth is that unless the prosecution exaggerated the charges against Eichmann, unless they did indeed portray him as the grand executor of Jewish suffering, they had no case against him. The court could not play up the charges too much without risking the legitimacy of Israel’s judiciary system—Eichmann, after all, was not Hitler. They could not play them down without risking the legitimacy of the prosecution’s case against him,¹³ because the unfortunate truth was that the prosecution could not prove that Adolf Eichmann physically committed a single count of his 15-count indictment. It is most often, as Arendt controversially highlighted, the Jews themselves who manually carried out some of the most heinous acts.¹⁴

What the law could and did prove was that Adolf Eichmann carried out orders of a criminal nature, that he acted with full knowledge of what he was doing, that he was of a sound mind, and that he understood the enormity of his role overseeing Jewish evacuation and deportation in the Final Solution.¹⁵ The court overlooks the fact that Eichmann had not committed any of these acts himself,¹⁶ asserting that because the orders he followed were criminal in the eyes of Jerusalem, he was guilty on all counts.¹⁷ And yet the court never accounts for the warped definitions of good and evil in totalitarian regimes such as Adolf Hitler’s Nazi Germany. They never account for the fact that to be “criminal” in Nazi Germany is to act in a manner that aligns with one’s conscience—the very conscience that the prosecution in Jerusalem radically assumed should have stopped Eichmann from obeying these orders.

And thus, Hannah Arendt’s criticism of the Eichmann trial is clear. In an effort to deliver a guilty verdict, the court at Jerusalem engaged in a theatrical production that defied fact and logic, opting for the easiest means of trying Adolf Eichmann.

8 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 151, 220, 234.

9 *Ibid.*, 270.

10 *Ibid.*, 33.

11 *Ibid.*, 33.

12 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 294.

13 *Ibid.*, 239.

14 *Ibid.*, 240.

15 *Ibid.*, 19.

16 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 253.

17 *Ibid.*, 246.

The court was unwilling and “unable to understand a mass murderer who had never killed”¹⁸ or a system of totalitarian terror that turned, in the words of Christopher Browning, “ordinary men”¹⁹ into organized killers. And instead of attempting to understand this complex and contradictory reality, instead of wrestling with the disconcerting fact that a man responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people—inadvertently or not—could be so mundane, so normal, so banal, the court took the easy way out and ascribed Adolf Eichmann far more power than he could have ever hoped to hold. To summarize, using the words of Arendt herself, “they preferred to conclude from the occasional lie that he was a liar—and missed the greatest moral and even legal challenge of the whole case.”²⁰

Given the complexity of Hannah Arendt’s trial report in both structure and content, it’s not hard to believe that her argument was one of the elements of the book subject to the most debate. The controversy surrounding Eichmann in *Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* was unparalleled at the time of its publication. In the words of Amos Elon, the author of the report’s introduction, “no book within living memory had elicited similar passions.”²¹ Hannah Arendt’s harshest criticisms mostly came from the American Jewish community, with Israeli intellectuals coming in a close second.²² Arendt’s critics all seem to be divided over Arendt’s argument on the questions of Nazi perpetration and, especially, Jewish complicity. Taking up dozens of pages in prominent publications such as *New York Times* and *Partisan Review*, Arendt’s critics—many of whom were prominent journalists, authors and politicians of the day—tended to see her report as a sort of Nazi apologia. Lionel Abel, in a review of Arendt’s work that spanned 21 pages of *Partisan Review*’s 1963 publication, emphatically declared that it was “Miss Arendt’s desire to maximize the role of the Jewish leaders in the destruction of European Jewry.”²³ The basis of these scathing critiques was Arendt’s

18 *Ibid.*, 25.

19 *Ibid.*, 247.

20 *Ibid.*, 293.

21 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 215.

22 Christopher Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (Harper Collins Publishers, 2017).

23 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 26.

own declaration that the “gravest omission” from the trial was the question: “Why did [the Jews] cooperate in the destruction of [their] own people and, eventually, in [their] own ruin?”²⁴ Simply put, in the words of American politician Michael Musmanno, members of the American and Israeli Jewish communities alike felt that Arendt was “soft on Eichmann, hard on the Jews.”²⁵ To be fair, Arendt’s mentioning of Jewish complicity in the Holocaust only spanned around 12 pages in her 300-page report, but it made nearly every page of the reviews that criticized her.

This reaction was not without serious consequence for Arendt. The American Jewish intellectual community did their best to both formally and informally ostracize her, with four separate Jewish organizations hiring people to comb her published work for factual errors in an effort to discredit her from academia.²⁶ She was branded as “insolent,” “brash”²⁷, and a “self hating Jew.”²⁸ Her criticism remained so severe over the years that the introduction for the trial report’s 2006 publication is titled “The Excommunication of Hannah Arendt.” In his essay “Eichmann in New York: New York Intellectuals and Hannah Arendt Controversy,” Anson Rabinbach argues that the explosion over Arendt’s trial report opened a much more gaping wound than the mere suggestion (it is actually established fact²⁹) that Jews played a perpetrating role in the Holocaust.³⁰ Rabinbach contends that the Eichmann trial signifies the transfer of the Holocaust discussion from the private sphere of survivors and their families to the public sphere of the international community—Jews, Gentiles, and Germans alike. This transfer “seemed to question the virtue of victimhood” for American Jews, undeniably shaking up the narrative of strife and triumph that the Jewish community had begun to spin for itself in the wake of

24 *Ibid.*, vii.

25 Anson Rabinbach, “Eichmann in New York: The New York Intellectuals and the Hannah Arendt Controversy,” *October* 108 (2004): 97; Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, xi.

26 Lionel Abel, “The Aesthetics of Evil: Hannah Arendt on Eichmann and the Jews,” *Partisan Review* (New York, NY), 1963.

27 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 124.

28 Michael A. Musmanno, “Man with an Unspotted Conscience,” *New York Times Book Review*, May 19, 1963. 29 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, xx.

29 *Ibid.*, xvii.

30 *Ibid.*, xx.

the Holocaust and Israeli statehood.³¹

Thus, in more ways than one, Hannah Arendt exposes in her exhaustive report of the Eichmann trial a kind of moral nuance that exists in not only Adolf Eichmann and other perpetrators of the Holocaust, but also in its victims. Her radical argument that “under more favorable circumstances, it is highly unlikely that [Eichmann] would ever have to come before [a] criminal court”³² and that Jews were complicit in a portion of their “own ruin”³³ was disturbing in its refusal to either be black or white. Arendt is not saying that Eichmann is innocent or that the Jews carried out the Holocaust themselves. Rather, she is highlighting the many moral nuances that exist in a regime of totalitarian horror. She is highlighting the banality—the regularity—of evil, and, in the interest of justice which can only be served from a basis of truth,³⁴ she was requesting that we learn to wrestle with this moral contradiction.

Hannah Arendt is not the only scholar—or survivor—to urge the world to acknowledge the moral nuance that lies in the area between perpetrators and victims of the Holocaust. In his short essay “The Gray Zone,” from the 1986 book *The Drowned and the Saved*, Primo Levi, rather overtly, does just that. In beautiful prose that spans a mere 30 pages, Levi condemns humans’ tendency to simplify history into the easily identifiable schema of “us” and “them.”³⁵ He draws heavily from his own experience surviving in Auschwitz for 10 months³⁶ to discuss the complexities, both moral and otherwise, of Jewish complicity in the Holocaust. Levi recounts the intense culture of violence and crime that existed in the death camp as inhabitants fought for small scraps of power and control as a means of survival. Notably, he uses the example of the Superkommandos (SK), Jews charged with the gruesome task of bringing their fellow Jews to the gas chambers, plucking valuables from corpses, and disposing of bodies in exchange for extra portions of food and slightly more privileged treatment from the SS.

31 Ibid, 125.

32 Rabinbach, “Eichmann in New York,” III.

33 Ibid, III.

34 Arendt and Elon, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, 278-279.

35 Ibid, 124.

36 Ibid, 296.

He argues that the deeds of the SK are not enough to transform them from victims into perpetrators, and likewise that small compassion or mercies of the SS does not completely give them a spot among victims. Rather the space between perpetrators and victims is a complicated, nuanced structure that is necessary to understand “if we want to know the human species, if we want to know how to defend our souls when a similar test should once more loom before us.”³⁷ It is this space that he refers to as the Gray Zone.

Levi contends that the intricacies of this space are enough “to confuse our need to judge,”³⁸ however, to confuse is not to annul. Levi provides another example, this time of the Jewish leader of the Lodz ghetto, Chaim Rumkowski, who was so powerful in his small ghetto kingdom that he had his visage printed on ghetto currency.³⁹ Rumkowski worked closely with Nazi authorities, responsible at times for deciding who in the ghetto would live or die.⁴⁰ Levi tells us that Rumkowski was no more a monster than he was a normal man and “yet many around us are like him.”⁴¹ He stresses that we are all, in ways, reflections of Rumkowski, that the moral ambiguity of his choices are mirrored in the ignorant excuses that all of humanity makes in its own quest for power and control.⁴² Levi concludes with the powerful statement that “we are all in the ghetto . . . that outside the ghetto reigns the lords of death, and that close by the train is waiting.”⁴³

The Gray Zone that Primo Levi so poetically and impactfully illustrates, the zone of Chaim Rumkowski and the SK, is the same zone that Hannah Arendt controversially exposes in her hard-hitting coverage of the Eichmann trial. It is the same zone that Adolf Eichmann and many other perpetrators—and many other victims—inhabit. The zone is not an apology for mass murder or a technique to shift blame onto the inhabitants of Auschwitz for acting amorally in conditions of extreme duress and terror. Rather, it is an admission. It is an admission that not all Nazis

37 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 24.

38 Anissimov, “A Jewish Childhood under Fascism.”

39 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 29.

40 Ibid, 31.

41 Ibid, 49.

42 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 52.

43 Ibid, 54.

were the embodiment of pure evil and that not all Jews are saints. It is an admission that there exists real complexities and contradictions in the moral landscape of human beings; it is an admission that “compassion and brutality can coexist in the same individual and in the same moment, despite all logic.”⁴⁴ And it is an admission—deeply relevant to us all—that there exists in this world systems of organized terror that seek to destroy not the body but the soul and the mind, systems that warp our perceptions of good and evil, of conscience and temptation, of truth and falsehood; systems which wrench open the space between the perpetrator and the victim and throw us all inside. The Gray Zone, in the words of Professor Sander H. Lee, “applies to morally charged conduct in a middle ground between good and evil, right and wrong, where neither side of these pairs covers the situation and where imposing one side or the other becomes itself for Levi a moral wrong.”⁴⁵ Professor Lee encapsulates the arguments and sentiments of not only Primo Levi but also Hannah Arendt. What each author argues against so emphatically, so robustly, is the urge to paint this zone black or white. It is the urge displayed in Jerusalem’s court of victors and by the many various critics that tore Arendt’s work apart; and it is the urge cautioned against by Levi in his assertion that history is not a binary, but a scale. These authors argue that by enveloping this nuanced area in either of its bordering camps, you nullify the truth of complexity and contradiction that exists so uncomfortably behind the moral masks of all people. With the nullification of truth comes the nullification of our ability to deliver justice and to guard ourselves against future conditions of terror and hostility.

So the question becomes: what is the importance of the Gray Zone decades after these works exploded into the Holocaust narrative? The answer is that it is equally as imperative, if not abundantly more so, to acknowledge this space in an era in which mass terror and control are exponentially easier and more likely. Technology is a catalyst for totalitarian systems, as are unprecedented times of economic, political, and

social turmoil. As Hannah Arendt demonstrates, the legal systems of the 1960s were woefully inadequate to judge systems as large as Hitler’s Germany, crimes as unfathomable as the Holocaust, or the individuals that were involved in either. These systems remain removed from the complexities—from the Gray Zone—retreating instead to either of its bordering sides to cast nuance out in exchange for an ignorant version of truth and half of justice. The Gray Zone is relevant not just to our legal systems but to our moral landscapes as we navigate increasingly tumultuous political and social climates all over the world. Because Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi didn’t just request that we observe the Gray Zone, but that we find a way to make holistic judgements about the people who reside inside of it. Judgements that depend on our ability to decipher good from evil, right from wrong, conscience from temptation; judgements that we cannot make if our moral perceptions are ever again warped in such a way as Adolf Eichmann’s or Chaim Rumkowski’s were. It is for these reasons that the Gray Zone is critical to us all.

Finally, it seems to me that we have a great responsibility—as historians, scholars, and human beings—to respond to the work that Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi dedicated their lives to. Hannah Arendt was excommunicated for this work, she was taunted, shamed, ridiculed, and dragged through the mud in a way that puts modern digital feuds to shame. Primo Levi suffered as well, though from different beasts. Almost exactly one year after the publication of *The Drowned and the Saved* Levi died by suicide in his home in Italy.⁴⁶

Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi lived and died, literally, by what they wrote in these works. They were driven by personal experience to spread the message of totalitarian horror to those who still lived with the mindset that it could never happen to them; those that lived in the dream world where Adolf Eichmann was a criminal mastermind, none of Hitler’s victims had ever sinned and where evil and good reside in separate spheres that do not touch, much less overlap. Hannah Arendt and Primo Levi

⁴⁴ Ibid, 55-56.

⁴⁵ Sander H. Lee, “Primo Levi’s Gray Zone: Implications for Post-Holocaust Ethics,” *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 30, no. 2 (2016).

⁴⁶ Myriam Anissimov, “Corso Re Umberto,” in *Primo Levi: The Tragedy of an Optimist*.

made a point to burst these bubbles of naïve fiction and open the eyes of the world to the terrifying contradictions, the earth-shattering nuance, and the vast grayness that enshrouds the question of perpetration and victimhood in totalitarian regimes. They pried open the Gray Zone with their hands amidst public ridicule and personal trauma. The least we can do is look inside.

In Memory of Professor Rachel Brenner...

By: Hilary Miller

I met Professor Rachel Brenner on my first day of college. “Jerusalem: A City of Conflict and Desire” was the name of the course. I was eager to learn about the topic and, after registering for the FIG, remember my older sister (then a UW Senior) giving an honest review of its instructor. “Professor Brenner is supposed to be really good. Tough, but good. You’ll learn a lot.”

And I did. Though at the time, I had no idea of how what could have been merely a transactional student-teacher relationship would over the years become an inextricable bond with a woman so fundamental to my intellectual development and personal growth.

It’s hard for me to define my relationship with Professor Brenner. She was my professor, my friend, my mentor. Perhaps she’s the amalgam of each. She filled a void that can’t be described by any of them alone. As I’ve reflected the last few days, I’ve realized that, to the outside observer, our relationship could be seen as obscure. We defied so many conventional norms.

Professor Brenner was old, I was young. She was a tenured professor, I was an undergraduate student. She wrote books, I read books. She knew almost every detail of my personal life, and I knew only a few of hers.

And yet, despite these paradoxes, we were one in the same.

Commiserating over the news and latest current event was a shared habit. We were both passionate about study, about doing meaningful work and sharing that work with others. We were equally curious about how other fields, like science and medicine, affected our daily lives. We hated the cold.

We loved the sun. We could never wrap our heads around the recklessness of college kids. We had a mutual disdain for the virtual world, always preferring to meet in person than rely on a tech alternative. We didn’t need much to be easily satisfied; we only needed a good book, a call with a friend, a documentary, a walk outside, a space heater, or a cup of warm water to feel full. We were both risk averse, both having a penchant for staying in and using the weekend to recharge for the next week’s deluge of work.

Most profound, we could relate on how even though work—whether it be her writing a book or my studying for a midterm—caused great stress and anxiety it was also our greatest source of pride and passion.

All of these facets of our bond I came to learn outside the classroom. And that is a credit to Professor Brenner.

One early morning my sophomore year, when I was a student in her Holocaust testimonials and cultural expressions course, she saw me sitting in a corner before class. “You don’t look good,” she said bluntly. And I wasn’t. The pressures of school, of striving to be perfect, had taken its toll. It showed. And she noticed. She intervened when I needed someone to the most. “Come to my office, this Friday. We’ll talk.” So I did. And our Friday meetings at 4:00 pm became routine, a staple of my undergraduate years at UW. My friends knew not to call or text on Friday in the late afternoon; I was with Professor Brenner. These visits continued after I graduated from UW, but our meeting place was a WhatsApp phone call. It did the job, but the venue of her office was irreplaceable.

Her office was my second home, my respite from whatever the week had thrown at me. It brought

me joy to walk into a reservoir of books, each one a treasure, that added texture and life to her office walls. This tiny space was suffused with art, culture and knowledge. She chose to be surrounded by the gifts of humanity because it was her life's work to tell the world about its darkest hour.

Our weekly visit came to have its own choreography. I'd lightly tap on the cracked-open door to find Professor Brenner hunched over a printed copy of the New York Times with the faint noise of opera in the background. Reading the news was her common practice before my weekly arrival. We bonded over reading the news in our free time, knowing that if we weren't working on something we could at least be productive and inform ourselves. I love knowing that we both wrestled with our self-imposed pressure to always be "on", to always be doing something with meaning and purpose even if it was at the expense of something else.

From each of our visits, I gleaned something new. We always started with talk about current events, domestic and foreign. Then, she'd ask "Hilary, so, how are you doing?" Code for "Hilary, what have you learned this week in your classes?" I'd share, and we'd have colorful conversations about other things that had nothing to do with our interests in history, Jewish studies, Holocaust history, etc. It was refreshing to discuss something else, to deviate from the very intense and serious matters in which we were steeped every day. After a few minutes, Professor Brenner would ask again "Okay, so, Hilary, how are you doing?" Code for "Hilary, how are you really feeling and how can I help?"

It was this weekly question that allowed me to give an honest update of my demons, without fear of judgement. Professor Brenner was disarming, in the best possible way. I knew she was a safe space to share. I knew that her concern was only in good faith. I knew she cared about me as more than a student but as her prodigy. She even said so herself.

She was never shy about giving me advice because she, to some degree, could relate to my struggles. I knew she had a troubled past that dogged her in some way. But, I also knew not to probe. This is why, I believe, we became so close. I knew to respect her boundaries. I knew she was fiercely defensive of her privacy. I didn't need to know all of the intimate details of her life to know that she cared about mine in a way that, other than family, nobody did. Of course I was mensch enough to ask about her family, knowing that whatever she shared was the limit.

Our relationship grew stronger with each passing semester. I became her student aide. Duties involved offering her students guidance on assignments, planning the annual FIG trip to Milwaukee, movie screenings of "Dancing in Jaffa" at the Hillel building, and—my favorite—serving as Professor Brenner's official "library proxy." This was a badge of honor. It gave me joy to pick up books from Memorial Library and trek up Bascom Hill to Van Hise to complete the delivery.

Professor Brenner taught with a type of enthusiasm and vigor that only her students know. When a student was on to something, when they offered a meaningful comment or contribution to the discourse, Professor Brenner jumped with excitement. You could see it manifest in her physically: her eyes would widen, she'd point to the student and say "Yes, yes; go on, go on" encouraging them to complete the half-baked thought that was on the brink of making the point she'd wanted the class to arrive to on its own. She was like a CEO in a boardroom showering praise on the intern who'd suddenly piped up to offer a million-dollar idea. She made her approval known, and that meant something to students because her standards were high. She didn't give praise unless praise was due, which created a culture where everyone worked hard to earn her positive reinforcement. If Professor Brenner said your idea was good, it was good. That was it.

Teaching was her currency. Pedagogy her passion. Her instruction on topics that are fundamental to

who I am—Holocaust memory, Israel, diaspora Jewry, interfaith relations—was a gift she gave to me and so many others. She loved dialogue with students. She loved to see students think. She loved to see students engage with one another, to exchange ideas and offer insights that they otherwise wouldn't know. She wanted students to be informed about the world, making sure we'd come prepared to class each day ready to discuss a current event. She wanted students to honor their backgrounds and personal history while setting the expectation that, when entering her classroom, all preconceived notions could be challenged and subject to scrutiny.

Above all else, Professor Brenner didn't teach students what to think. Professor Brenner taught students how to think. For me, this is something I'll carry forever. That she taught me to think critically, to observe, to make choices independent of those around me, to always be curious, to ask questions, to be a citizen of the world, to open my eyes to my surroundings would have been enough for me to be grateful for her as my professor. That she cared enough to help me outside the classroom, to meet my parents, to think through important decisions about my future, to make sure that whether it be in Milwaukee, Madison, New York or Geneva, Switzerland that I was in good spirits proves that Rachel Brenner was indeed the amalgam of my professor, friend and mentor—but also so much more.

I am a better person for Professor Rachel Brenner. We all are. I'll miss her terribly. Her passing is a loss that I feel deeply. Her absence, profound. It pains me to think that our regular phone calls won't happen anymore.

But, I'll always think of her on Friday afternoons at 4:00 pm. When I read the news or contemplate the next great life decision, I'll remember to do so in Brenner form: with measured thinking and good humor. I'm grateful to have had a relationship that didn't have to be at all. To learn from someone who knew me better than I knew myself. I'll jump at the moment

that I can give to someone else what she has given to me.

I know that wherever I am, she is, too. And that brings me comfort. Her legacy, defined by an unfettered commitment to teaching others and empowering others to be the very best versions of themselves despite everything, lives with me. Her memory will be for a blessing.

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