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M A G A Z I N E

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## ANTI-SOCIAL MEDIA



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# Editor's Note

Social media—the great hope and hype of the new millennium—has been a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has facilitated global communication, energized movements for democratic change and linked families and friends in its vast network. It has turned nouns—Facebook, tweet—into verbs and remade the social landscape on a scale never before imagined. Yet, this brave new digital world has also had its downside, providing platforms for hate and incitement, leading, critics say, even to murder—what we call in this issue “anti-Social Media.” Terrorist attacks in Israel and elsewhere have allegedly been inspired by such postings, prompting widespread discussion and criticism, detailed in this issue’s important cover story.

Elsewhere in this issue, we look at the growing presence of Jewish rappers and producers in the hip hop culture that has its roots in the African American experience. We look also at the important role B’nai B’rith played in easing the pathway of Jewish immigrants newly arrived at the New World portal of Ellis Island in New York Harbor during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Among those immigrants, though only for a brief time in 1917, was Leon Trotsky, the Marxist leader born Lev Davidovitch Bronstein. We tell the story of his 10 weeks in New York City, his often stormy relationship with the Yiddish-language Jewish Forward newspaper and his ultimate departure to lead the Russian Revolution. Enjoy!

—Eugene L. Meyer

## From the Vault

### Founding the Jerusalem Lodge: Pioneers and Piety

By Cheryl Kempler

The massive influx of new immigrants to New York’s Lower East Side presented B’nai B’rith with new challenges and opportunities. In 1900, Grand Lodge President Leo M. Levi, a young lawyer based in New York, commissioned a report about conditions in the new urban ghetto. Working with civic leaders in the area, Levi devised a plan to inaugurate a branch of B’nai B’rith there.

Contrasting with its 58th Street and Lexington Avenue offices, B’nai B’rith’s downtown headquarters was intended to be a resource for a population living in what was at the time said to be the world’s most crowded neighborhood.

B’nai B’rith’s initial \$2,000 expense for the lease and renovation of its 106 Forsyth Street site was augmented by donations from prominent Jewish philanthropists, including Jacob Schiff and Felix Warburg. Opening in 1902, the facility became a hub of activity. Four lodges and a women’s auxiliary occupied the meeting rooms, while its Maimonides Library was open to the public. An



In 1900, Grand Lodge President Leo M. Levi created a plan to inaugurate a branch of B’nai B’rith New York’s Lower East Side.

employment bureau was also in operation. One of the first cultural events to take place was a talk by Isidore Singer, B’nai B’rith leader and managing editor of the 12-volume Jewish Encyclopedia—the first of its kind, published between 1901 and 1906.

In 1903, a newly opened gallery displayed works by local amateurs and professionals. B’nai B’rith also requested

submissions by eminent Jewish artists, including Moses Ezekiel, from whom B’nai B’rith had commissioned the allegorical statue “Religious Liberty,” honoring the nation’s centenary in 1876 and now in front of the National Museum of American Jewish History, in Philadelphia. From his studio in Rome, Ezekiel sent “Israel,” a relief dominated by the figure of a crucified man. Common to the era, the motif of the persecuted Christ was recognized as a symbol for the collective suffering of the Jewish people—Israel, but Ezekiel made the meaning clearer by incorporating the title itself into the work. The artist may have believed that the immigrants’ understanding of the sculpture, informed by their own experience, would be a visceral one.

Nonetheless, there is no available evidence that “Israel” was ever displayed; its imagery made it controversial. The sculpture has survived and is today on view as part of the permanent collection of the Cincinnati Skirball Museum at Hebrew Union College, in Cincinnati. [📍](#)



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Social media has been a powerful tool to inform and connect people. But it also has provided platforms for disseminators of hate and inciters to violence. Faced with mounting public pressure—and lawsuits—companies like Facebook and Twitter have had to confront vexing questions of free speech and responsibility in a digital world.

*By Michele Chabin*

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After being expelled from five countries for his political beliefs, Leon Trotsky landed in New York City on Jan. 14, 1917. He would spend 10 weeks in the United States before returning back to Russia to help lead the Bolshevik Revolution.

*By Kenneth D. Ackerman*

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Hip-hop is rooted in African American culture. But, as in many other art forms, Jews have played a role—both as artists and producers. The rap group Beastie Boys was the first—but not the last—to gain widespread acclaim, selling millions of albums.

*By Sam Seifman*

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*By Cheryl Kempler*



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*By Sienna Girgenti*



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*By Sam Seifman*

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*By Rachel Chasin*

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# Nuturing the Next Generation: B'nai B'rith's Commitment to the Future

By Gary P. Saltzman

*President, B'nai B'rith International*



**A**ttracting and cultivating the next generation of Jewish leaders is a challenge for all Jewish institutions, whether it's drawing top-notch staff to work in salaried positions or appealing to volunteers to give their time, attention and monetary support. This is perhaps one of the biggest issues facing us at B'nai B'rith and for the broader Jewish community.

This is a recent phenomenon. When I became active in B'nai B'rith more than 40 years ago, the pool of up-and-coming leaders seemed vast. Today, it's less about numbers and more about commitment.

A Pew Research study has found fewer younger Jews are joining synagogues and established organizations such as ours. They may take part on an event-by-event basis. But, more often than not, they don't want to be pin-wearing, card-carrying members. And that's not just of a Jewish group. The younger generation wants to help but just not from a membership standpoint. They are more willing to hop from one organization to another to meet their personal Tikkun Olam needs.

And we have to respect that if we are to not just sustain ourselves but to grow.

Studies find the younger generations have a very different playbook than from the one from my age group.

So where and how do we connect?

At B'nai B'rith, we are paying close attention to our Young Leadership Network as a vital platform to identify

and nurture future leaders, for our own organization and beyond.

Recently, we focused on some amazing up-and-coming leaders with diverse projects and activities. In 2016, 13 young leaders traveled to Japan to participate in the Kakehashi Program, which aims to help bridge the gap between Japan and the American Jewish community. We also hosted a Young Leadership Mission to Cuba. As part of our Cuba Jewish Relief Project, these 20 and 30 year olds traveled on a B'nai B'rith humanitarian mission to Cuba, where they toured the country, met the small Jewish community and delivered much-needed goods.

Our Young Leadership Network also co-hosted Project H.O.P.E. (Help Our People Everywhere) in partnership with other Jewish groups to make Passover food packages for the Jewish elderly and needy. Young Jews joined us to pack and distribute food packages for lower-income older Jews to help them celebrate the holiday. This one-on-one connection seems to be particularly appealing to the younger generations.

Our young leaders also tell us they care about the wider world. Our Conversations Around the World Series continued with young professionals meeting with diplomats from various countries to learn about a particular country's Jewish population, as well as its relationship with the United States and Israel. This is in addition to the myriad happy hours, hikes

and Shabbat dinners that we arranged across the country.

At the same time, we also must welcome these young leaders into the broader Jewish community and make sure they know they have a voice.

Disaster relief has proven of particular interest to young leaders. From volunteering to clean up in the wake of tornadoes and hurricanes to raising funds at a soccer match for local flood victims, this age group is interested in helping others and helping their communities. In my hometown of Denver, young leaders are an integral part of our annual Leadville Jewish Cemetery cleanup efforts.

Programs and events such as these introduce younger Jews to other civic minded Jews, and also serve as an introduction to all that B'nai B'rith does to make a difference in the world.

We find that in many cases, young professionals want to help, to give back; they just need an outlet. We can be that outlet.

But we must also recognize the unique hardships of this generation. It's less common now than in my day to find a two-parent, one-income-earning home. Today, young families rely on two incomes to make ends meet. And that's without even considering synagogue memberships or day school tuition. There are also more single parent homes today. We must consider these challenges if we are to successfully engage this generation in the areas of Jewish identity and continuity.



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**In 2016, 13 young leaders traveled to Japan to participate in the Kakehashi Program, aiming to bridge the gap between Japan and the American Jewish community.**

At B'nai B'rith, we are mindful of the great impact of partnerships. We join with the international Jewish fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi) on disaster relief and human rights. We have hosted AEPi brothers on our annual meetings in conjunction with the anti-Israel leanings of the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. AEPi brothers also joined us on the Japan Young Professional trip mentioned above.

We also must be inclusive. According to a survey by Leading Edge, some two-thirds of Jewish professional staffers are women, but at the same time, women can be found in only about 30 percent of top posts in those same organizations. And each year, the Forward newspaper surveys who holds the top slots in Jewish organizations. In 2014, the most recent data year, only 12 out of the 71 major Jewish organizations surveyed have women at the helm.

We are working to identify and cultivate young professional women who may not realize the leadership possibilities and opportunities open to them. This is an area that resonates personally with me. I am proud to say that my daughter, Rebecca, has chosen to be a leader within B'nai B'rith. Her efforts chairing our Young Leadership Network earned her the prestigious Label A. Katz award, named in honor of the youngest person

to become international president of B'nai B'rith. As we note in conferring the honor: "The award goes to individuals under 45 who have demonstrated outstanding service to the totality of B'nai B'rith and have worked to achieve the goals of the B'nai B'rith Young Leadership program." As a recipient myself some time ago, I know first hand how such recognition of effort can have an impact on future engagement. Connecting with the leaders of tomorrow is a long process. But the baby boomers who are leading today's organizations, as both staff and volunteers, are likely already looking at the exits. Now is the time to recognize, engage and cultivate tomorrow's leaders. We have started the process. Our vigilance is required. The meaning and depth of purpose so many younger folks seek is right here. We just have to share it with them.

The responsibility is with the older generations to welcome, encourage and listen. I encourage lodges and units to reach out in their communities to invest in their own future by supporting young leadership development. Through sports teams or professional mentoring programs or disaster assistance, we can develop and cultivate the personal relationships now that lead to a more permanent commitment to B'nai B'rith and the Jewish community at large. 

# Holocaust Denial: A Recurring Plague We Must Confront and Combat

By Daniel S. Mariaschin

*Executive Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, B'nai B'rith International*



Just over 40 years ago, when I was working in my first job at the Boston Jewish Community Council, my portfolio included staffing the Holocaust Memorial Committee. Each fall, on the campus of Brandeis University, we'd organize, together with the local survivors' organization, a memorial service in front of the school's Jewish chapel.

The assemblage of survivors and their families, Jewish community leaders and students would gather around "Job," Nathan Rapoport's stunning bronze sculpture of a Holocaust victim; candles were lit, prayers were said and a few short speeches were given.

These programs were my first direct encounters with Holocaust survivors. In 1973, we weren't even 30 years beyond the horrors of the round-ups and deportations, the ghettos, the camps and the killing. I recall one participant in the Brandeis commemoration, a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto, whose haunted eyes I can still see.

Experiencing that, in the speeches I would give in those years, down to today, I would say that there will soon come a time when there will be no people who could point to a tattoo on their arm, and say, "I was there. I saw it. I experienced the horror." The biological clock is now

ticking its final hour, and the moment, regrettably, is almost here.

Last year, we lost the most poignant voice of the witnesses, Elie Wiesel. His writing, and that of all those survivors who have written memoirs and given video testimony, will survive and be studied and serve as constant watchmen of Holocaust remembrance.

Yet, as these testimonies take their honored and vital place in libraries, classrooms and video collections, the pernicious virus of Holocaust denial is beginning to spread. The phenomenon is not new: The infamous Willis Carto, who founded the Liberty Lobby in 1955 and the Institute for Historical Review in the 1970s, was among the early purveyors of Holocaust denial. Carto once offered \$50,000 to anyone who could prove that the gas chambers of Auschwitz ever existed. He attracted a cohort of other deniers, some in the United States and some in Europe, who peddled the same theme, in books and on the far-right lecture circuit.

Perhaps the best known of the deniers is the self-styled historian David Irving, who wrote admiringly of Hitler and who minimized the extent of the Holocaust. Emory University historian Deborah Lipstadt included Irving as a subject in her 1994 book "Denying the Holocaust:

The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory."

Irving sued Lipstadt and her publisher, Penguin Books, for libel and lost. The judge in the case, tried in the United Kingdom, stated that Irving was indeed "a Holocaust denier; that he [was] anti-Semitic and racist and that he associate[d] with right-wing extremists who promote[d] neo-Nazism."

The case, which took seven years to conduct, was made into a motion picture last year, "Denial," starring Rachel Weisz and Tom Wilkinson.

The Iranian regime has been among the major promoters of Holocaust denial. Its annual Holocaust "cartoon contest" last year attracted over 40 entries, all focused on a revisionist theme. The winning entry: a cash register that featured the numbers 6,000,000 and a cash drawer marked "shoah business." The key to open the register was marked "B'nai B'rith."

The Arab world is home to many who write and speak of the Holocaust being exaggerated or never having happened. Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohammad Mahal Akef speaks of "the myth of the Holocaust" coming out of World War II. In 1990, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society issued a statement speaking of the "lies concerning the gas



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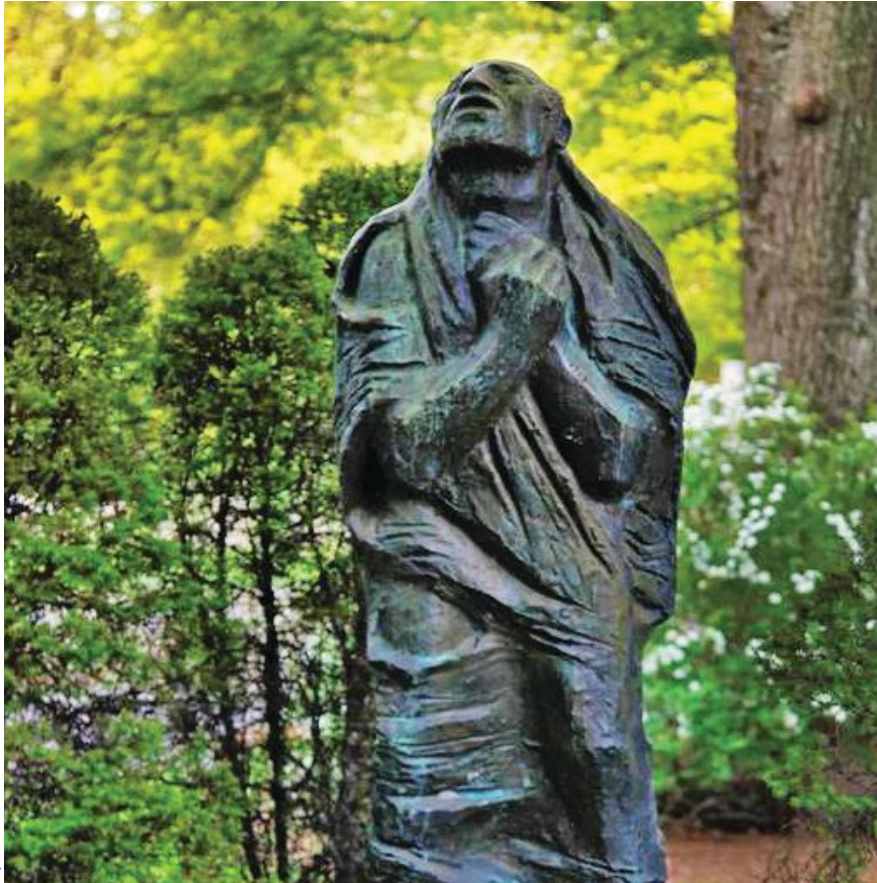
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By Mike Lovett

### **Nathan Rapoport's statue, "Job," at Brandeis University.**

chambers." And, in his doctoral thesis, Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, minimized the number of Jewish victims of the Shoah.

As the years pass, though, Holocaust denial has moved in from the fringe, to include university campuses, which have now been infected by this virus of hate. A resolution focusing on Holocaust remembrance and anti-Semitism, introduced at a meeting called at Toronto's Ryerson University, produced a walkout, accompanied by a student union statement suggesting the Holocaust was a matter of interpretation, since it "evokes many views."

Very few countries have laws against Holocaust denial, among them Germany, France and Romania, which also include prohibitions against the display of fascist symbols. In the U.S., First Amendment protections shelter those who engage in denial. In the age of the

internet, anti-Semitism and Holocaust denial can emanate from our shores and be broadcast globally. This issue of B'nai B'rith Magazine takes a hard look at social media and hate online, and discusses what internet service providers and search engines might do to monitor and excise the proliferation of hate we are currently witnessing.

As the time comes when there are no longer survivors to bear witness, we need to redouble our efforts to educate and to remember. There is a special obligation for our generation and the one just behind us to engage vigorously in this effort. Each of us can play a role: as students, educators, Jewish community organizations, media and public figures.

To have seen one-third of our people destroyed in a matter of six years, and then see their memory denied and erased, in our time or any time, is just unacceptable. 🕯️



# Letters

## to the editor

### Dear Editor,

Among the many informative and enlightening articles you usually include in the magazine I found the one "Uncovering UNRWA" by Uriel Heilman especially significant and important.

That UNRWA is and has been staffed by essentially all Palestinians is something most people and politicians worldwide do not know.

Several years ago when I was in Israel visiting family, they held a lunch for their friends to greet us. Among them was a member of UNRWA (not a Palestinian) who said that 98 percent of their employees were Palestinians and no one realizes it. It explains why no progress has been made in all these years to solve the problem.

Quite the contrary. Children have been taught to hate, as you know, and that clouds any future peace.

I suggest that the article be sent to everyone in the Trump administration (and why not to Obama's as well), including the children, and to as many news outlets and social media as possible.

Thanks for doing such a great job with the magazine.

*Manning Rubin*  
New York, N.Y.

### Dear Editor,

Concerning the article, "Uncovering UNRWA: An Exception to the Rule," the narrow focus of this article

represents its tragedy.

While correctly focusing on how UNRWA perpetuates the misery of Arab refugees since 1948, the article concludes that UNRWA cannot be eliminated, while efforts to reform UNRWA are not even mentioned.

Donor nations, beginning with the U.S., the biggest donor to UNRWA, to the tune of \$400 million a year, could make conditions for their contributions to UNRWA.

Donors could demand that teachers in UNRWA who are members of terror organizations be fired.

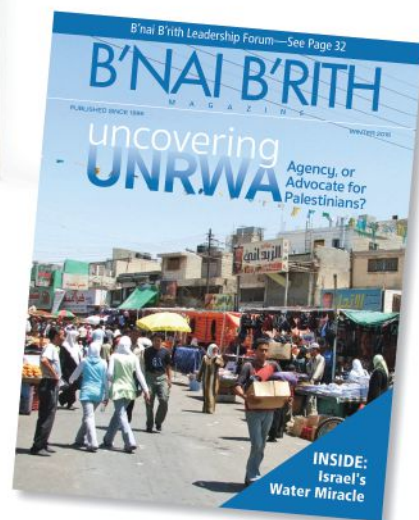
Donors could demand that UNRWA resettle these descendants of Arab refugees from the 1948 war into decent, permanent housing.

Donors could demand that Israel, a member of the U.N., not be wiped off of maps in the books used in UNRWA schools to indoctrinate 490,000 students.

The author's quote from a former commissioner of UNRWA—when she asserts that if you did not have UNRWA schools, then terror groups would run UNRWA schools—is an insult to the intelligence of the reader.

Does the author not know that the UNRWA teachers and workers associations in Gaza are run by Hamas, which won 90 percent of the vote to lead both associations?

The unkindest cut of all was the author's insertion of a smiling picture of Muhammad Assaf, the UNRWA youth idol. The author forgets to



mention that he sings to promote the murder of Jews.

A 2015 press release from B'nai B'rith states: "Assaf's songs explicitly glorify violence ... with gory scenes of bloodshed and footage of Palestinian rioters ... Assaf's standing among Palestinians highlights the ubiquity of vile anti-Israel incitement ... and his 'status' within UNRWA demonstrates that agency's complicity in ignoring and even sustaining violent hatred."

*David Bedein*  
Director  
Israel Resource News Agency  
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# *Hear News Straight From The Source*

Our social networks create digital communities of B'nai B'rith members and supporters, discussing issues that matter to YOU.

Connect with us and learn what B'nai B'rith is doing in your community and around the world. Like and follow us to join the conversation!



***Get Connected  
With B'nai B'rith!***



**B'NAI B'RITH  
INTERNATIONAL**

# Anti-Social Media

By Michele Chabin



On Oct. 13, 2015, Micah Lakin Avni was in an important business meeting in Tel Aviv when his mother called his cellphone.

Avni's mother relayed how terrorists had committed an attack in Armon Hanatziv, her Jerusalem neighborhood, and that she hadn't yet heard from Avni's father, Richard Lakin. (Avni, his son's last name, is the Hebrew version of Lakin.)

Avni rushed to Jerusalem, calling area hospitals along the way. Finally, a nurse at Hadassah Medical Center told him his 76-year-old father was critically wounded and in surgery. Two weeks later, he succumbed to his injuries.

Lakin, a former elementary school principal in Connecticut who moved to Israel in 1984, had been repeatedly shot and stabbed on a public bus by two Hamas-affiliated men from adjoining Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem. It was one of the first of doz-

ens of terror attacks perpetrated by Palestinians as young as 13 from the eastern part of Jerusalem and the West Bank starting in September 2015 through well into 2016.

Many of these attacks were allegedly fueled by lies—spread on social media and in the mosques—that Israel was planning to deny Muslims access to the Al Aqsa mosque on the Temple Mount. The allegation that social media companies aren't doing nearly enough to stop the spread of cyberterrorism and anti-Semitism—and may in fact be abetting them—has spurred Avni and others, including victims of Islamic terror attacks in Paris and Orlando, to file lawsuits against Facebook. They hope that the threat of potentially huge financial payouts will pressure Facebook and other companies to block hate messages and content.

While watching his father's condition deterio-





# With Extreme Consequences

rate, Avni said, “I sat there thinking, ‘How did this happen? What makes two 20-year-old Palestinians from middle-class families do something so horrific? What’s causing the pace and growth of terrorism so quickly around the world and in Israel?’”

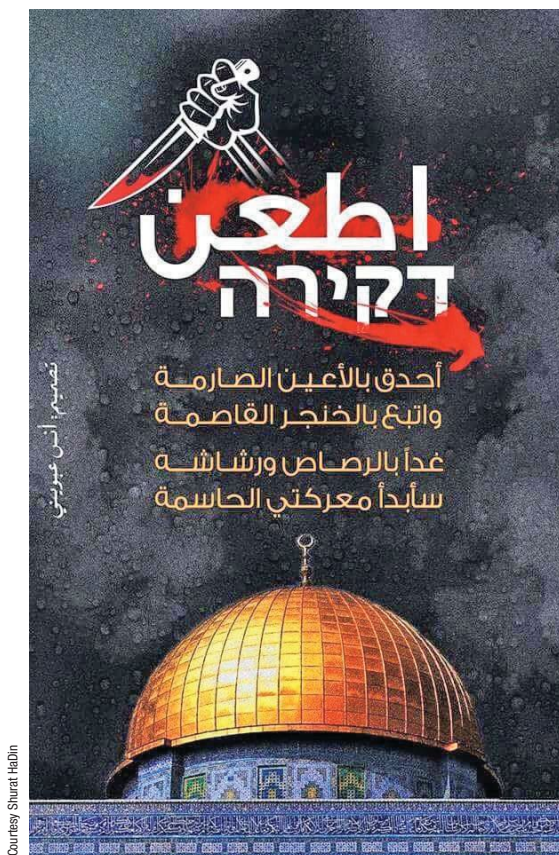
During one of his marathon internet searches on various social media platforms, Avni came across a “horrific” reenactment of the attack in which his father was murdered. “That video went completely viral, and its purpose was to encourage others to carry out similar attacks,” he said. Determined to act, Avni contacted Shurat HaDin, an Israeli law center that represents terror victims and their families. Since 2000, the center has collected more than \$200 million of the \$2 billion various courts have awarded its clients.

Avni became one of the 20,000 petitioners who sued Facebook in a landmark Oct. 26, 2015, lawsuit

filed by Shurat HaDin. That suit, known as *Cohen v. Facebook*, sought an injunction against the company that would require it to monitor and prevent terrorist incitement against Jews and Israelis.

As the wave of terror intensified, reaction to false rumors about access to the Al Aqsa mosque increased. Shurat HaDin sensed it would have an even stronger case against Facebook if American citizens sued the company. In July 2016, it filed a \$1 billion lawsuit, *Force v. Facebook*, on behalf of Taylor Force, an American Christian murdered by a Palestinian terrorist in Israel, and on behalf of Lakin and four other families of terror victims.

The suit, which the court has joined to *Cohen v. Facebook*, alleges that Facebook has violated the U.S. Anti-Terrorism Act by “knowingly” providing material support and resources to Hamas. This support has boosted the terror group’s ability to “recruit,



The picture, titled “stabbing,” is posted on the Al-Quds (the Arabic name for intifada) Facebook page.

radicalize, instruct terrorists, raise funds, create fear and carry out attacks,” the suit alleges.

Facebook has denied the allegations and sought dismissal of the lawsuits. As this issue went to press, a hearing has been scheduled for March 1.

Facebook did not respond to repeated inquiries from B’nai B’rith Magazine related to Shurat HaDin’s two lawsuits and this article. However, in January, the company took down more than 100 pages linked to Hamas, the governing authority in the Gaza Strip that the United States government has termed a terrorist organization.

The Anti-Terrorism Act has made it possible for U.S. citizens who were victims of terror attacks, or their bereaved families, to sue governments like Libya and Iran that fund, arm and give refuge to terror groups. Four of the five victims in this instance were dual American-Israeli citizens.

But anti-terrorism suits aimed at social media are new, and it remains to be seen whether courts will hold Facebook, Twitter, Google, YouTube or

Instagram responsible for content they disseminate but do not generate. “Facebook has zero tolerance for terrorism,” its attorney said in court filings.

In what may have been an important precedent, in August 2016, U.S. District Judge William Orrick dismissed a suit filed against Twitter by families of contractors murdered in an ISIS terror attack in Jordan.

The judge said the company could not be held responsible for aiding terrorism under Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act, which states, “No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider.” He also cited lack of evidence that the attackers were radicalized by images they saw on Twitter.

Internet providers and social media companies insist the act absolves them, the “messengers,” of any responsibility for the content they disseminate.

## Digital Hate Happens

But cyberterrorism is just one example of the many types of hate spread via social media platforms against Jews and others.

“The level of online anti-Semitism over the past few years has been more than we’ve ever seen before,” said Oren Segal, who directs the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Center on Extremism. “Extremists are specifically targeting various communities, including the Jewish community and Jewish journalists.”

An October 2016 report by the ADL’s Task Force



“It happened on a day like today, 1 Oct 2015, Al-Quds Intifada,” referring to the “Stabbing Intifada” in 2015—posted on the Women for Palestine Facebook page.



on Harassment and Journalism detected a “disturbing upswing” in online anti-Semitic abuse driven in large part by “rhetoric in the 2016 presidential campaign.”

From August 2015 and July 2016, the watchdog identified 2.6 million anti-Semitic tweets overall, more than 19,000 of them directed at Jewish journalists.

Sixty-eight percent of these tweets were sent from 1,600 Twitter accounts, out of 313 million existing Twitter accounts. Those 2.6 million anti-Semitic tweets had 10 billion views, so they “contributed to reinforcing and normalizing anti-Semitic language—particularly racial slurs and anti-Israel statements—on a massive scale,” according to the task force.

Gabriel Weimann, a Haifa University expert in cyber-terrorism, believes it is important to distinguish between cyberterror and other forms of cyber-hate.

While cyber-shaming and cyberbullying can have extreme consequences, including suicide, he said, “very often the intent isn’t to cause physical harm.” The aim of cyberterrorism, in contrast, is 100 percent violent.

Weimann said young Palestinians who participated in the most recent wave of attacks tended to be “very active” on social media platforms and became “very radicalized” by what they saw. The videos showed who should be targeted with a knife: Israeli police, soldiers, settlers and other identifiably Jewish targets. Viewers were also instructed on the best time of day to kill and which body part is most vulnerable to attack. “There were even videos showing what kind of knife or machete to use,” Weimann said.

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner, Shurat HaDin’s founder and the driving force behind the Facebook suits, says Facebook and other social media platforms are a terrorist cell’s favorite tool.

For the past few years, she alleged, “Facebook has connected those who incite to kill Jews with those who want to do so.” Terror groups, she said, “are using it to raise funds, to connect and to reach out to potential members. Facebook is letting them freely, openly, knowingly use its platform to aid and abet terrorism.”

The fact that users, not the social media companies, are funding terrorists or inciting violence “does not eliminate their responsibility,” Darshan-Leitner said.

Asked whether her plaintiffs would drop their \$1



Courtesy Wikipedia Commons

Nitsana Darshan-Leitner is the founder of Shurat HaDin, an Israeli law center that represents terror victims and their families, and the driving force behind the Facebook lawsuits.

billion suit if Facebook agreed to take steps to police itself, she said, “No. Facebook must pay damages. The only thing these megacompanies know is business. If they get hit in their pocketbook, they will reconsider their actions and change them, much like the banks did,” referring to successful lawsuits filed against banks that allegedly aided and abetted terror groups.

“The only thing that moved banks to make sure the money in their possession was terror free and not transfer money to terrorists were the billion-dollar lawsuits filed against them. Money is the oxygen of terrorism,” Darshan-Leitner said.

### A Call to Action

Daniel S. Mariaschin, executive vice president and chief executive officer of B’nai B’rith, said, “There needs to be a Manhattan Project to confront the many threats that have grown out of the internet, which has provided a new way to convey hatred, terrorism and incitement.”

Mariaschin envisions a joint effort between B’nai B’rith, which has status at both the United Nations and the Organization of American States, and others committed to the fight against cyberterror and



"We make the red lines....," featured on the Al-Quds Facebook page.

cyberhate, including anti-Semitism.

"The challenges are great, the opportunities are there, and the next step is for us to either initiate or join existing efforts," he said.

Richard Heideman, who served as international president of B'nai B'rith from 1998 to 2002 and is a partner in the law firm Heideman, Nudelman & Kalik, believes, "Holding supporters of terror accountable in U.S. courts is an essential tool in seeking justice." Heideman's firm has filed several successful lawsuits on behalf of Israeli and other terror victims.

One of those suits, which sought compensation from the Libyan government for its supportive role in the 1985 hijacking of an Egypt Air flight and the targeted killings of American and Israeli passengers, "helped bring Muammar Gaddafi and Libya to reach an agreement with the U.S. in 2008 that resulted in Libya coming off the State Department's terror list," Heideman said. That agreement included a \$1.5 billion payment to victims of Libyan state-sponsored terrorism.

### The Free Speech Dilemma

Some free speech advocates believe litigating against Facebook, Twitter and others to force them into policing themselves would ultimately lead to censorship.

"If Facebook were responsible for the legality of everything you or I or others say on Facebook, it would be tremendously expensive and a great disincentive to provide an open platform," Daphne Keller, director of Intermediary Liability at the Stanford Center for Internet and Society, told Bloomberg News. "And it would give them every reason to take down too much speech, to take down perfectly legal

speech to avoid risk to themselves.

Yair Rosenberg, a writer for the Jewish magazine Tablet, is one of the 10 Jewish journalists most targeted by anti-Semites on Twitter, according to the ADL. Though he believes social media companies "have an obligation to try to weed out abusive behavior and harassment on their platforms," he does not think they should be censoring non-abusive content, no matter how repugnant.

"Besides this being impractical when it comes to millions of tweets or posts, it also seems troubling to empower giant corporations to police what constitutes an acceptable opinion on the internet," Rosenberg said. "The best answer to hateful speech online is better counter-speech from the majority of non-hateful users—a bottom-up response, rather than top-down."

Rosenberg said those who identify or experience online cyber-hate can report abusive accounts and work to draw attention to them in publicity campaigns, to ensure the companies are taking them seriously. "But again, I'd distinguish between abusive behavior on a social media platform and non-abusive but hateful content."

The journalist is skeptical that lawsuits like Avni's will succeed, "at least in America, given our First Amendment, and I don't think they're the best way to fight this sort of problem, either. Censoring bigotry doesn't make it go away, it just makes it easier to ignore, until it has unignorable consequences. I'd rather that society face up to this material head-on," Rosenberg said.

However, in a clear bid to preempt these and future lawsuits and potentially huge payouts if they lose what promise to be several court cases, on Dec. 5, 2016, Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube announced they are "coming together" to curb the spread of terrorist content online.

"There is no place for content that promotes terrorism on our hosted consumer services," they said in a joint statement. "When alerted, we take swift action against this kind of content in accordance with our respective policies."

The companies vowed to create a shared industry database of "hashes"—unique digital "fingerprints"—"for violent terrorist imagery or terrorist recruitment videos or images that we have removed from our services."



By sharing this information with one another, they said that they hope to identify and remove “the most extreme and egregious terrorist images and videos”—content most likely to violate their respective companies’ content policies.

Following the huge backlash against Facebook for sharing fake news stories during the presidential campaign, in mid-December the company said it will try to identify such stories with the assistance of five fact-checking organizations and through reader feedback.

Lakin’s son Avni insists that if Facebook can create a system to flag fake news, it can identify and block terror-related content.

“Its algorithms advertise to you and they monitor everything going on. They target you based on that information. They block child pornography and they can do the same with terror. For years, they chose to ignore that Hamas was operating an entire campaign on Facebook,” Avni asserted. “And they make money in the process.”

The December 2016 lawsuit against Facebook,



Courtesy of the Force Family

Taylor Force (right), standing with his family, was a 29-year-old U.S. army veteran and an MBA student at Vanderbilt University visiting Israel to learn about Israeli business and high tech when Mohammed Massalha, a Palestinian terrorist, murdered him in Jaffa.

Twitter and Google by the victims of the terrorist attack in Orlando also accuses the providers of “profiting from postings through advertising revenue.”



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# Trotsky in New York, 1917: Reluctant Jew in a Jewish City

By Kenneth D. Ackerman





Left: The Manhattan skyline in 1917.

Inset: Leon Trotsky's photo from his

French passport in 1915.

Courtesy of the Library of Congress

Leon Trotsky never considered himself Jewish in any religious sense. He never wrote Yiddish, didn't keep kosher and never entered a synagogue. Neither of his two wives, and none of his four children were Jewish. He was raised on a farm, not in a shtetl (Yiddish for small town). He didn't hide his Jewishness. He spoke out eloquently against pogroms and anti-Jewish oppression, often at great personal risk. But when asked, he normally gave his religion as "socialist" or "internationalist."

Still, when he landed in New York City on Sunday morning, Jan. 14, 1917, both the New York Times and Tribune—two of six newspapers that covered his arrival—stressed Trotsky's identity as a "Jewish" writer editing "Jewish" journals in Russia and France. Over a million Jews lived in New York at that point, more than any other city on Earth. In New York, his Jewishness would stand out, like it or not.

Trotsky spent 10 weeks in New York in early 1917, just before returning home to Russia to help lead the Bolshevik Revolution, an event that would catapult him to global fame. The Bolshevik/Communist state he helped launch would last 73 years, and Trotsky would serve as its foreign affairs commissar and leader of its Red Army in a bloody three-year civil war, making him second in stature to Bolshevik leader Vladimir Lenin. His shaggy black hair, sharp eyes, pointed beard and glasses would make him recognizable around the world.

But his time in power would be brief. Forced out in the mid-1920s, Trotsky would spend his last 12 years in exile before being murdered by an agent of dictator Joseph Stalin in Mexico. Today, 76 years after his death and 26 years after the fall of the Soviet Union, all his books remain in print and Trotskyist political candidates still compete in dozens of countries.

The New York Trotsky found in 1917 was a busy, freewheeling place unique in the world. World War I had engulfed Europe since 1914, a catastrophe that already had killed over 10 million soldiers and civilians. But America had stayed out, growing rich selling weapons to warring countries. Instead, New York was enjoying a golden age of music, theater, finance and politics, luxuries unthinkable in wartime Paris, London, Vienna or Berlin.

New York then was an international city in a

way barely recognizable today. After six decades of record immigration, it had bulging neighborhoods with the aromas and sounds of foreign countries. Almost 2 million New Yorkers in 1917 came from across the ocean.

Jews made up the bulk of the Eastern Europeans, concentrated in neighborhoods like the Lower East Side. They still mostly spoke Yiddish, read their own newspapers, ate their own kosher food and practiced their own religion.

## Forward with the Forward

The Yiddish-language newspaper, *Forward*, sold more than 200,000 copies each day in 1917, a circulation rivaling that of the New York Times. Second Avenue below Tenth Street belonged to the Yiddish theaters and popular Yiddish cafes.

Trotsky had come to New York as a refugee, expelled from five countries for his rabblerous politics. In Russia, his home, czarist police had arrested him twice, each time exiling him to Siberia. Each time, Trotsky escaped. Since the outbreak of World War I, Austria, Germany, France and Spain had expelled him too.

But America was different. Still neutral, it had not yet imposed wartime crackdowns on dissent and had barely started tracking potential subversives or spies. Trotsky, to American eyes, looked like any other hardship case, just like thousands of others who filled the neighborhoods of lower Manhattan.

Trotsky did not live on the Lower East Side. He settled his family into a three-bedroom apartment in the Bronx at 1522 Vyse Avenue, near Crotona Park. By day, he helped edit a small Russian-language tabloid called *Novy Mir* from its basement office at 77 Saint Marks Place, in lower Manhattan. He rode the subway, enjoyed the movies (Charlie Chaplin and Molly Pickford were the rage) and sent his sons to public school in the Bronx.

But Trotsky too was, indeed, different. He jumped on the freedoms he found in New York to immerse himself in politics. Here, his extremism quickly separated him from most Jews in this new country, even those who shared his socialism.

The great issue dominating early 1917 was whether America should drop its neutrality and enter the World War. Just two weeks after Trotsky's arrival,

on January 31, 1917, Germany declared unrestricted submarine warfare against neutral shipping, prompting President Woodrow Wilson to sever diplomatic relations. Most Americans now supported mobilization, but New York remained a hotbed of dissent, particularly among immigrant Jews.

Trotsky jumped right in, writing dozens of articles and giving over 30 speeches at venues including Cooper Union and Beethoven Hall. For socialists like him, the issue was easy. Why, they argued, should workers in France, Germany or anyplace else fight each other when their common enemy was the capitalists? Loyalty to country meant nothing to an “internationalist” like Trotsky.

Most Russian Jews had come fleeing oppression: pogroms, murders, harassment, bans against attending universities, owning land or even living in most cities. Now, with Russia (which still included Poland and Ukraine) allied with Britain and France, they saw American entry into the War as helping the czar.

But most Jews had a different reason to oppose the War: They had grown to admire their new home. Life here was harsh, but they appreciated the country as a place with real freedoms and opportunities where immigrants could enjoy respect and build

a future. This split over patriotism would reach a breaking point on March 1, 1917, with an event decisive in America’s decision finally to enter the war: the disclosure of the Zimmermann Telegram.

The Zimmermann Telegram was a cable from German Foreign Minister Arthur Zimmermann offering Mexico a reward if it joined the fight on Germany’s side: the return of Texas, California and other lands seized by the United States after the 1846-1848 Mexican-American War. The idea posed a direct threat to the American heartland and sparked outrage across the country.

At the *Forward*, still staunchly socialist, the managing editor that day was B. Charney Vladeck, a Russian who had served two prison terms under the czar before fleeing to America in 1908. Unlike Trotsky, Vladeck had become enamored of his new country. He described how, visiting Philadelphia, he “prayed silently and without a hat in front of Independence Hall.” In America, he wrote, “for the first time I felt free to explore the world as I want to see it ... I don’t love it only as an artist for its colors, but as a citizen feeling that it is mine.”

When Vladeck saw the Zimmermann Telegram cross his desk, he was appalled. He took pen to paper and wrote a headline in Yiddish: “Can this be so that Germany is actually performing such an idiotic diplomatic schtick?” He continued: “Every inhabitant of the country would fight to the last drop of blood to protect the great American republic against the monarchies of Europe and Asia and their allies.”

Trotsky, seeing Vladeck’s article, erupted. Here was the *Forward*, the most widely read socialist daily voice in America, suddenly endorsing war, even encouraging young men to enlist. Trotsky decided to demand an explanation from the man who held ultimate control over the *Forward*, its founder and chief editor, Abraham Cahan.

He stormed out of his office on Saint Marks Place, traversed the crowded lower East Side to the *Forward* building on East Broadway, found Cahan’s office, and barged in. By all accounts, the exchange quickly degenerated, voices shrill, faces red and tempers lost. Abraham Cahan, 20 years older than Trotsky, took considerable pride, not just as editor of the *Forward* but as a founder of American socialism and an accomplished member of the literati in his own right, author of the acclaimed English-language novel



Courtesy of The Outlook, 1917

Trotsky's newspaper office at 77 Saint Marks Place in New York City.





Courtesy of the Library of Congress

The Forward's founder and chief editor, Abraham Cahan.

"The Rise of David Levinsky." And who was this Leon Trotsky, a newcomer editor of a puny Russian tabloid, to tell him, Abraham Cahan, how to run his newspaper? To question his managing editor? To question his socialism?

Trotsky asked Cahan about the Vladeck story, and Cahan told him that, yes, he had seen it, he had approved it and it was now the official policy of the Forward. At that, Trotsky told Cahan that he would never again write for the Forward and demanded that Cahan return a draft article he had submitted a few days earlier.

The confrontation lasted just long enough to burn bridges. Trotsky marched back to his desk at Novy Mir and, over the next three weeks, wrote five articles for Novy Mir blasting Abraham Cahan and his newspaper. He accused Cahan of being an autocrat, out of touch, encamped in his 10-story building, and insisted he be expelled from the party.

But for Cahan too, the exchange marked a turning point. Cahan would be one of the first major American socialists to denounce the Bolsheviks after they seized power in Russia. When Moscow sympa-

thizers tried to pressure him to soften his criticisms, he declared, "I would rather see the Forward go under than weaken the struggle against the communists."

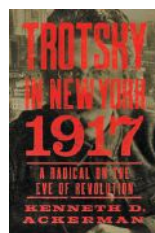
## Bronx Man Makes His Mark

Amid all this turmoil, it came as a shock when news reached New York on Thursday, March 15, that food riots in Petrograd, Russia, had escalated into full-scale rebellion, forcing the hated czar, Nicholas II, to abdicate. Ceremonies erupted worldwide, none more intense than on the Jewish Lower East Side. Trotsky had not seen his homeland for over a decade; it was time to return. In dozens of speeches all over the city, he made his intentions clear: to reach Petrograd, join the resistance, help topple the provisional government, take Russia out of the War and create socialism.

That November, when news reached New York of the Bolshevik revolution with Trotsky's name in the headlines, locals all agreed on one thing: "TROTSKY, NOW IN KERENSKY'S PLACE, ONCE LIVED HERE," headlined the New York World. "TROTSKY IN EXILE LIVED IN THE BRONX," echoed the New York Times. Most direct was the Bronx Home News, which announced simply: "BRONX MAN LEADS RUSSIAN REVOLUTION." The implication: Only a New Yorker could have pulled off this job.

Trotsky returned the compliment. For 10 weeks in 1917, the city offered him and his family freedom, comfort, security, friends and celebrity, a taste of what they later would call "the American dream." Trotsky carried American ideas back to Russia for his new Soviet state: the movies, science and culture.

"To have Bolshevism shod in the American way" with technology, math, efficient factories, stated Trotsky. "There is our task!" Writing in later years that, in the future, "all the problems of our planet will be decided upon American soil." 🌐



*This article was adapted by the author from his book, "Trotsky in New York 1917," published last year by Counterpoint Press.*

# Hip-Hop's

## jewish stars shine brightly

By Sam Seifman

MC Serch, born Michael Berrin, hails from Far Rockaway, in Queens, N.Y. Serch grew up surrounded by hip-hop but living in a conservative Jewish household. With a local cantor as a mentor, he had dreams of being one himself. He combined his two worlds, going to schul on Friday and Saturday while also playing basketball and listening to rap on Shabbat.



Courtesy of MC Serch

MC Serch, born Michael Berrin, originally came to fame as a rapper in the late '80s and later achieved success as a producer.

His rabbi saw him playing with friends, many of whom were African American. Serch was called into his office the next day.

"Michael, I had such high hopes for you," his rabbi said.

The rabbi lamented Serch's choice in friends, using a derogatory Yiddish word for African American.

"You're supposed to teach? You're supposed to educate?" Serch replied, frustrated.

Distraught, he turned down a scholarship from the St. Louis School of Music, where he planned to train to become a cantor. Instead, he became a professional rapper—something he had been doing as a hobby since he was a teenager. He converted to Islam—remaining in the religion for the next four years. He later converted back to Judaism after moving in with a Christian-agnostic girlfriend. One Christmas, she wanted to put up a tree and he felt the need for his background to be represented. So, they also lit menorah candles.

Serch's story is emblematic of hip-hop's roots—starting from rebelliousness and reaching success as a performer and promoter of rappers in the '80s and '90s.

Or as the Canadian Jewish black rap superstar Drake, puts it, "Started from the bottom, now we here." Drake was born Aubrey Drake Graham. His father is African American, and he was raised by his Jewish mother and bar mitzvahed.

Drake and other rappers fall under the category of



“Hip-hop,” a subculture that also encompasses disc jockeys, graffiti artists and break dancers. It is said to have originated in 1973, in the Bronx, at a party hosted by Jamaican-born Clive “DJ Kool Herc” Campbell.

As hip-hop grew, it diversified beyond African American artists and fans to include Jews as well. The breakout Jewish rap stars were the Beastie Boys, made up of Michael “Mike D” Diamond, Adam “MCA” Yauch and Adam “Ad-Rock” Horovitz. The group achieved notoriety and toured with Madonna in 1985. In 1987, their album “License to Ill” went platinum, selling a million copies. In total, they have recorded seven platinum albums and have been inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. In 2012, Adam Yauch died of salivary gland cancer, and he was so esteemed that a park was named for him in Brooklyn Heights, N.Y.

When Serch was younger, some of his African American friends converted to Islam. This prompted him to ask them questions about it, to which they would reply, “Why are you always searching for answers?”

So they called him “Search.” It was changed to “Serch” when he was buying a customized belt buckle and found out that it cost \$20 less leaving out the “a.”

When he decided to go professional, his mother, Roz Berrin, was supportive. She sang as Linda Paige in the Borscht Belt. However, Serch admits, she wasn’t too familiar with rap.

“She thought I was going to be a gift wrapper,” he said.

Serch achieved some success in New Jersey, New York and Philadelphia, partially because he was very active in “battle rap” (two rappers verbally attacking each other) scene—a consistent theme among rap’s outsiders. After releasing two albums through independent labels, he was signed by Lyor Cohen (also Jewish) and Russell Simmons, working for Rush Productions. Later, these two became major producers in hip-hop and founders of Def Jam Records, one of the most successful rap labels. Producing artists like the Beastie Boys and Kanye West. They agreed to pay for his demo.

Serch teamed up with rapper Pete Nice and DJ Richie Rich to form 3rd Bass in 1987. Before breaking up in 1992, they released three albums, two of which went gold, selling at least 500,000 copies.

Serch went solo that year, releasing the album “Return of the Product,” which reached 103 on Billboard’s “Top 200 Albums.” He also started Ser-



Courtesy of Richard Wolf

Producer Richard Wolf accepting his Daytime Emmy for the music to the cartoon “Static Shock” in 2004.

chlite Productions, producing the album “Illmatic” by Nas, which ranked 11th on Rolling Stone’s “100 Best Debut Albums of All Time.”

## the producers

Serch and Cohen join a long line of Jewish producers. Rick Rubin, another Jewish Def Jam co-founder, worked with big names like Jay Z, Kanye West and Eminem. In 2007, Time Magazine ranked him number eight on its “Most Influential” list.

Richard Wolf was part of the production team for Serch’s album “Return of the Product.” “Serch was a very confident artist who had definite ideas of what he wanted,” Wolf said. Wolf’s mother was French and his father was Belgian, both of them refugees from the Holocaust and dedicated to music education. In the 1980s, he was drawn to hip-hop, listening to it as people performed on the streets of Manhattan.

“It had the rebelliousness and lyricism of early folk rock,” he said.

In the late ’70s, Wolf started as a solo artist, recording a folk rock album his freshman year of college in Muscle Shoals, Ala. He then became a staff writer at Warner/Chappell Music. While there, he also wrote theme songs, including for the Rodney Dangerfield film “Back to School” and “Karate Kid II.”

In 1989, Wolf and Epic Mazur (his former intern) opened Wolf and Epic. They produced for the rap group Bell Biv DeVoe, including its album “Poison,” which sold 3.5 million albums.

In 1998, Wolf started his own company called The Producer's Lab. Since then, he has written and produced music for some of television's biggest shows, including: "America's Next Top Model," "NCIS," "The Good Wife," "Static Shock" and "Fox Sports."

He also teaches a course called "Music, Media and Culture" at the University of Southern California Thornton School of Music; it covers how music related to different art forms and, of course, the evolution of hip-hop.

"Being Jewish has been a deeply engrained part of my life, my parents having escaped Nazi Germany," Wolf said. "Jewish culture has an emphasis on the mystical music is how you connect with the divine. I didn't choose music, music chose me."

### modern day rappers

Drake is one of the biggest names in rap. But there are other well-known Jewish performers, such as Mac Miller, Asher Roth and Matisyahu, a former Hasidic Jew whose music often involves religious topics.

Much like Serch, Soul Khan (Noah Weston) gained notoriety through battle rap. His name became recognizable in Brooklyn and his YouTube videos have hundreds of thousands of hits—the lyrics are brutal.

In his battle with fellow rapper QP, he said, "I saw a video of your son. I thought something didn't look right. You're the only one under the sun who your son don't look like."

Khan started rapping as a hobby at 13 in the late '90s. He was raised in a secular Jewish household in Los Angeles but was both bar mitzvahed and confirmed. "Judaism affects my outlook on the world—certainly my sense of humor," Khan said.

When he was a child, his mother would play Paul Robeson records, including songs sung in Yiddish,

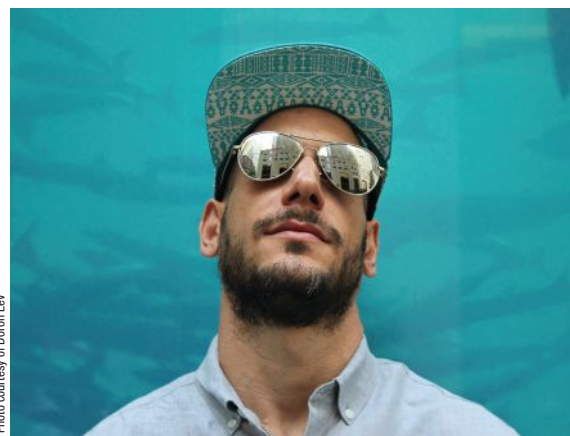


Photo courtesy of Doron Lev

Doron Lev, or "Ugly Braine," born to Israeli parents, started out as a drummer.

introducing the idea of crossing cultural boundaries through music.

While he is an established member of the rap community, Khan seems to feel like a guest.

"Hopefully it's not appropriation on my part because I always want to acknowledge the culture," he said. "I recognize that rap is an African American art form ..."

"Because the American Jewish experience started as much more marginalized, it connected them to other communities," he added.

Today, Khan no longer battle raps, focusing on his studio work. Since 2010, he has recorded seven albums, including a few songs with Jewish references, like his track "Minyan" on his album "Soul Like Khan."

"Rabbi Darkside," born Samuel Sellers, got into rap through '60s protest music, which he listened to

at Jewish summer camp. Darkside transitioned to rap as a teenager, thanks to rap group Tribe Called Quest's "Can I Kick It," which used as its background the rock legend Lou Reed's '70s hit "Walk on the Wild Side."

In Buffalo, he was one of the only Jews among his friends, who gave him his stage name. As a teen, Darkside spent



Courtesy of Soul Khan

Soul Khan, born Noah Weston, gained acclaim through battle rap but is known today for his studio work.





Courtesy of Rabbi Darkside

Rabbi Darkside, born Samuel Sellers, spent his bar mitzvah money on a stereo so he could listen to music and transcribe the lyrics.

his bar mitzvah money on a stereo record player. He would listen to it and transcribe lyrics.

"I'm sure in my heart and my subconscious, there is something in my writing influenced by my upbringing," Darkside said.

Very few of his songs have Jewish themes. From time to time, his music comes with a political message, like his song "Malala," inspired by 19-year-old female education activist Malala Yousafzai. The lyrics include: "And on Pakistani buses and in schools for every child, in the face of vitriol violence in place of spiteful alliance, there is spiritual highness that can transcend foes and faux."

He also understands that his Judaism is, in a way, inescapable. He has faced anti-Semitic slurs while on tour in rural Czech Republic. He's also seen it in his other gig, as a professor at the New School in New York. There he teaches "Hip-Hop Skills and Science," where students rap at the beginning of every class. Recently, however, swastikas have been drawn on the walls of his students' dormitories, to him a disturbing development unrelated to rap but still hitting home.

"It's become an interesting moment for me in terms of my Jewish identity right now," he says.

Doron Lev, or "Ugly Braine," was born in Miami to Israeli parents. His mother was Hassidic and taught classes at Hillel before she passed away in 1998. His father lived on a secular kibbutz and currently owns his own auto shop.

"My name was very strange, and I remember feeling like an immigrant," Lev recalls.

Lev was influenced by hip-hop in the fourth grade, listening to Beastie Boys, Run DMC and Will Smith's "Parents Just Don't Understand." In sixth grade, he started writing lyrics.

But his primary interest was being a drummer, not only in hip-hop but jazz and salsa as well. He started as a rapper while drumming for funk bands, freestyling between songs. Today, he still drums and raps.

Lev recorded the song "Take a Walk in the Desert" with Rabbi Darkside and has performed at the Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance and Theatre in Tel Aviv. He is planning another trip this year to Israel, where he hopes to help achieve peace through music. He knows Palestinian rappers and hopes to collaborate with them.

"I know one man can't fix [the conflict], but I just want to do my part," Lev said.

His roommate is an Egyptian rapper. Their fathers fought on opposite sides of the 1967 Six-Day War—and adore their sons' friendship.

In January, he released his album "Watching Shadows," featuring Rabbi Darkside.

"No matter how strict or tough my dad was as an Israeli, he always had a sense of humor," Lev said. "It's part of who we are. Rap music has that element to it. It doesn't always have to be funny, but, with Jews, there is always some kind of entertainment element." 🎧

# AMID A FLOOD OF NEW IMMIGRANTS,

## B'NAI B'RITH STEPPED UP

By Cheryl Kempler



Courtesy of Wikipedia

A rare color photo captured the street life of the Lower East Side in 1900.

Bunting draped the impressive building in celebration of its opening day, Jan. 1, 1892. Two years had passed since the doors were shut at Castle Garden, an outmoded and overcrowded facility in Lower Manhattan that had served for more than 35 years as the gateway to America for 8 million immigrants.

Ellis Island in New York Harbor had been selected as the site for the new immigration processing center, a monumental, 3-floor structure, operated by the federal government. Its central “Great Hall,” where those who had landed waited to be examined by health inspectors who cleared their release, could accommodate several thousand at any one time. The building also contained dormitories, a dining hall and a railroad ticket office. Commenting on the ephemeral nature of its Georgia Pine construction (indeed, all the structures on the Ellis Island campus burned in 1897 and had to be replaced), *The New York Times* declared: “Judging from the constant and ever increasing invasion of foreign born to these shores, the Old World will be drained of its superfluous population before the building has outlived its usefulness.”

For the Jews who had escaped the violent anti-Semitism in Eastern Europe and Russia, it was the culmination of a land and sea journey that had taken more than two months. For years to come, they would recount the story of the anxiety, elation and hope they experienced on Ellis Island to their sons and daughters. In their minds, these few hours symbolized the passage from their old life to their rebirth in “The Golden Land.”

At about the same time and in the same city, another celebration was in the planning stages. B’nai B’rith’s Executive Committee was setting the wheels in motion for its 50-year golden anniversary, to be observed during 1893. Fifty years earlier, a group of young German Jewish men recognized that their fellow immigrants needed to understand the conventions of American life. Meeting in a café on Manhattan’s East Side, they formed B’nai B’rith New York Lodge #1, a fraternity whose efforts were intended to provide support and education, and to improve conditions in their own “Kleindeutschland” community.

Inspired by Judaism’s ethical values, “The Order” would grow and spread beyond the neighborhood, increasing the nature of its mission



as Jewish men joined the lodges, to become an internationally recognized philanthropy, honored in the United States, Europe and Asia. Successful businessmen, merchants, physicians, attorneys and clergy were among more than 30,000 B'nai B'rith members who built and ran some of the first public libraries, orphanages, hospitals and homes for the aged, and who contributed to causes like disaster relief, helping people of all faiths. Noting the public pageantry typically displayed during the B'nai B'rith conventions, a New York Times reporter could rhetorically ask, "Where else could a foreign born group burst the bounds of a Ghetto, [and] cross the tracks to parade up Fifth Avenue in the bright afternoon sunshine?"

#### TURNING THEIR ATTENTION TO NEWER ARRIVALS

Despite their half century of contributions to improving the quality of life in the United States, B'nai B'rith's assimilated and prosperous German Jewish members had yet to turn their attention to the new wave of immigrants, ever increasing since 1880, who now suffered in the dank and overcrowded tenements of a ghetto far from those they had known in their homelands, and mere blocks from their organization's birthplace. As assimilated Jews, Ben Brit (B'nai B'rith members) had reason to fear the undermining of their prestige and place in American life, which might be threatened by the poverty, physical appearance and religious customs of the new arrivals from eastern Europe.

Over the course of a decade, two B'nai B'rith presidents would foster relationships between B'nai B'rith and the refugees from eastern Europe, forging a lasting connection that coincided with new and hands-on approaches to improve their condition. Bringing B'nai B'rith into the modern era, these activities would spur both a revival of the organization and a rededication and restoration of its original, community-based mission.

First elected in 1857, President Julius Bien took a stand during the golden anniversary year, urging lodge members to reach out to the immigrants' children, capable of adapting to,



Courtesy of Wikipedia

#### The Great Hall on Ellis Island.

and participating in, American life and customs. Transformed through "the Order" itself, they would acquire skills needed to qualify as the next generation of Ben Brit. Decrying the lack of support for charities serving the immigrant, Bien urged members: "It should be our aim to elevate, teach and train them. Prejudices must be overcome, time spent and energy expended." Looking back to the circumstances existing in 1843, when B'nai B'rith was founded, the president conveyed that the B'nai B'rith fraternity would become the means to their success. At the 50-year anniversary, Bien underscored his message:

"The great number of refugees from the east of Europe, with strange habits, primitive views and bearing the marks of ... the oppressor, must be transformed into citizens of orderly manners, correct conduct ... it must be impressed upon them that liberty is not license, and that the safeguards of society cannot be assailed with impunity. [As in 1843], a similar work is before us, on a much larger scale."

Helping the new arrivals would improve the situation for all American Jews, but B'nai B'rith did not make immediate and radical change. That year, however, initiated a first: The organization of Concordia lodge in downtown Manhattan, made up not of German Jews but men who were described as "Russian Hebrews, young men of superior intelligence and good education who have a full comprehension of the vast benefit (from the association with B'nai B'rith) which



B'nai B'rith's uptown offices at Lexington Avenue and 58th Street.

must accrue to that class of our recent immigrants." The lodge was in operation for more than six years. One of its first projects was a recital of Russian piano music for the residents of the B'nai B'rith Home for the Aged in Yonkers.

Taking Bien's sentiments to heart, B'nai B'rith members in two large cities launched educational programs. The Chicago lodges set up a night school where instructors taught female immigrants how to become dressmakers. By far, the largest initiative was the highly successful B'nai B'rith School for Manual Training in Philadelphia, opened in early 1895, whose enrollment of 65 foreign-born students was immediately at capacity; a waiting list of 400 accrued. A few years later, the city lent its support to the school as well.

### THE NEW CENTURY BRINGS CHANGES

When Bien retired in 1900, Texas-born Leo N. Levi, a successful young attorney practicing in New York, succeeded him as president. There, he had become involved with the immigrant cause during the late 1880s. After his election, he faced

another massive rise in the immigrant population when thousands of Jews were forced to leave Romania during a time of increased persecution. In the United States, antipathy to their swelling populace was on the rise.

Inspired by modern concepts of education, self-help and social work, Levi looked beyond the squalid streets and tenements, perceiving that "in a few years we shall see on this continent ... Jewry enriching the world with its virtues and its genius ... Immigrants of all nationalities and who are now the backbone of American citizenship came in practically the same conditions of financial poverty as the majority of the immigrants now come. Their constant ambition has been to be worthy of the privileges they are enjoying—regarding this land of opportunity as the promised land of the prophets."

That year, Levi "set the stone moving ..." in extending support to "the communities from the threatened destruction of hate and religious intolerance ... Let the Order rise to the need of the great emergency." As lodge members throughout the country procured jobs for more than 3,000 Romanian men, B'nai B'rith took the lead among other Jewish organizations in moving them out of the Lower East Side to areas throughout the United States. "The B'nai B'rith is to be congratulated on finally entering a larger field of communal activity, a ... decided advance," proclaimed American Hebrew, which served as a means of "interesting members beyond the confines of The Order." As a consequence, new lodges were forming for the first time in several years.

B'nai B'rith's New York Committee on Immigration and Social Work next responded with a plan for "betterment of conditions on the Lower East Side" by establishing its presence there. Opened in 1902, B'nai B'rith's 106 Forsythe Street headquarters was equipped with classrooms for the teaching of English and vocational skills, as well as a library and a social hall; an employment bureau was later in operation. Welcomed as members of the new "Justice" and "Rumania" lodges, men from the neighborhood met on the third floor; three more immigrant lodges were later formed. On Sundays, Levi divided his time





Courtesy of www.old-picture.com.

New arrivals were ferried from their ships to Ellis Island.

between B'nai B'rith's East 58th Street building and the downtown offices.

Over the next years, B'nai B'rith's Committee for Intellectual Advancement led services and organized clubs at the de Hirsch Home for immigrant girls on 13th Street. Among other accomplishments of B'nai B'rith was the procurement of the services of Dr. Von Mueller, an eminent Austrian orthopedic surgeon, who operated pro bono on poor Christian and Jewish children living on the Lower East Side during one of his visits to New York.

Behind the scenes, leaders actively campaigned to keep the "golden door" open, rallying support from important Jews and Christians alike against restrictive legislation. After Levi's sudden death in 1904, his successor, elder statesman and attorney Simon Wolf, acted as B'nai B'rith's Washington liaison, fighting for the cause

in his newspaper articles and as a witness before Congress, and by extending free legal aid. Lodge brothers served as volunteers at Ellis Island, where they provided legal assistance to individuals and reported on the center's conditions. In 1915, B'nai B'rith's leaders interceded with U.S. President Woodrow Wilson to veto the proposed Burnett Immigration Bill, whose stringent literacy test and increased "head tax"—a mandatory fee imposed on those arriving in the United States—was intended to bar many from entering.

True to Bien's and Levi's visions, the contributions of the next generation of Jewish Americans in the arts, humanities and sciences would immeasurably enhance life. Their impact continues. Those who participated as members of B'nai B'rith would transform the organization, paving the way for the harder work and greater accomplishments of the first half of the 20th century. ☑

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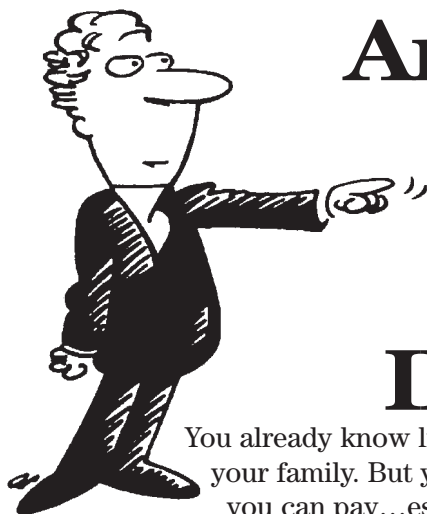
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50	Male	238.00	445.00	1,480.00
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# B'NAI B'RITH TODAY

## B'nai B'rith Cuba Mission and the Miracle of Chanukah

By Sienna Girgenti

**W**hy do we light a candle for each night of Chanukah? As Hillel once said, I'ma'alin b'kodesh, to increase the sacred: Every act we perform should increase holiness in the world. We add a candle each night to bring more and more light into our communities and into our consciousness. Each year, the B'nai B'rith Cuban Jewish Relief Project endeavors to achieve just that, leading missions of B'nai B'rith members and friends to expand our collective Jewish consciousness to embrace even the smallest of Jewish communities in Cuba.

During the week of Chanukah, the project led its final mission of the 2016 calendar year. With B'nai B'rith President Gary P. Saltzman making his first such journey, the group of 18 from across the



B'nai B'rith International President Gary P. Saltzman and Adela Dworin, president of the Jewish community of Cuba, at the Patronato community center.

United States visited seven different communities between Havana and the central provinces of Cuba. Saltzman's was the second visit by a sitting B'nai B'rith president to Cuba in as many years.

The group began its journey on the second night of Chanukah, attending the holiday party at the Patronato community center in Havana. Hundreds of congregants gathered in the

sanctuary, along with visitors from groups like our own, to share in candle lighting, prayers and presentations by the youth group, rikudim (Israeli folk dance) troupes and the choir.

"The Chanukah party was a wonderful exposition of the congregation's strength," Saltzman recalled. "It was an impressive way to kick off our week-long mission."

Overflowing with hundreds of pounds of donations, the mission distributed medicines, medical devices, clothing and other needed items throughout the week. Many of the items brought to Cuba on B'nai B'rith missions are simply inaccessible on the island. Families may search in vain for months to acquire certain basic necessities. This mission had the

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# B'nai B'rith's Lodge-ess Across the Nation

By Sam Seifman



Connie Pierce and Stephanie Lewis volunteer at a Veterans Affairs hospital for the Achim/Gate City Lodge Pinch Hitter program.

“It was just a bunch of Jewish guys who realized they had Christmas off and nothing to celebrate, so they decided to do something useful,” said Achim/Gate City Lodge Financial Secretary Harry Lutz, describing the beginnings of the Pinch Hitter Program in Atlanta.

It started with just 18 volunteers working at one hospital. Today, every Christmas, 200-250 volunteers staff three hospitals and six assisted living facilities in the area.

The lodge, which has 90 members, also participates in other community service programs like “Unto Every Person There Is a Name,” in which participants read the names of Holocaust victims, and “B’nai B’rith Cares for Kids,” in which toys are collected and given to hospitals, police departments and fire departments to distribute to sick children or children facing a trauma.

“We have a unique group of people keeping this lodge alive.

I’m committed to it as long as we’ve got people willing to do it,” said lodge President Karen Kahn Weinberg.

Achim lodge isn’t the only one. All over the country, B’nai B’rith lodges are dedicated to strengthening their communities through service.

Justice Unit #5207 in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., is a different breed. Its 150 members comprise practicing attorneys, judges and legal support and vendors. Members offer seminars on social justice, give legal

aid to the community, provide backpacks and school supplies for Family Central Inc., an early learning training center, and fund scholarships to Nova Southeastern University.

“When you involve lawyers and judges and you get the plaintiff and defense bar to come together, both promoting tikkun olam, you end up with a lot of people willing to help,” says lodge President Scott Knapp.

It also joins with the B’nai B’rith Young Leadership Net-

*Continued on page 32*



# Maintaining a Vibrant Community: B'nai B'rith's Senior Housing

By Rachel Chasin



Conference participants touring Goldberg B'nai B'rith Towers.

“It’s not just housing, it’s a vibrant community that we’re a part of,” said Janel Doughten, B’nai B’rith International associate director of the Center for Senior Services, describing the B’nai B’rith Conference on Senior Housing.

For more than 35 years, the B’nai B’rith International’s Center for Senior Services has convened a conference on managing the organization’s senior housing facilities. Last year was no exception, as housing management professionals and members of the facilities’ board of directors

gathered in Houston for three days in November.

Attendees took part in workshops and panels and learned from their peers what it takes to run a senior residence efficiently.

B’nai B’rith launched its senior housing program in 1968. In September 1971, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), B’nai B’rith opened its first low-income senior housing facility in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Now the B’nai B’rith Senior Housing Network comprises 38 buildings in 28 com-

munities across the United States and serves more than 8,000 people. These housing communities are open to any senior, regardless of religion, race or sexual orientation.

The conference included a panel on “Assessing the Effectiveness of Management and the Board of Directors,” moderated by Mark D. Olshan, director of the B’nai B’rith Center for Senior Services. Other sessions were devoted to the 2016 presidential election and the future of affordable housing. In addition, Nancy McIlhaney, director of compliance for the Austin-based

Southwest Housing Compliance Corp., briefed managers on how to comply with HUD regulations.

Participants also toured two Houston-area B’nai B’rith-sponsored housing properties, Pasadena Interfaith Manor and Goldberg B’nai B’rith Towers. This allowed board directors and housing management staff to see how different buildings are run. Attendees interacted with residents and toured some of the apartments.

At Pasadena Interfaith Manor, residents are allowed to have pets in their apart-

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# Lodges

(continued from page 30)



Stacy Lewin and Sarah Lewin working in the kitchen for the Achim/Gate City Lodge Pinch Hitter program in Atlanta.

work, Jewish fraternity Alpha Epsilon Pi (AEPi) and the Heroes to Heroes Foundation to send soldiers suffering from post traumatic stress disorder to Israel for spiritual healing. Members recently attended a Marlins game with foster children from Jewish Adoption and Foster Care Options.

The Isador Garsek Lodge in Dallas/Fort Worth, founded in 1876, boasts 85 members. Harry Kahn, a man who survived Kristallnacht and the Holocaust, recently resigned the presidency for health

reasons. Rich Hollander, his interim replacement, can't wait for his return.

"I let him know that, for me, this is a temporary gig," he said.

From Jan. 8 to March 2, the lodge helped host an exhibit, "Chasing Dreams: Baseball and Becoming American." The exhibit, curated by the National Museum of American Jewish History, in Philadelphia, has toured the nation and been seen by thousands of visitors. At the opening gala for the exhibit at Congrega-

tion Ahavath Sholom, in Fort Worth, Tex., the lodge provided hot dogs, peanuts, knishes, pastrami sliders and American pies.

"We're Jews, so we got to eat," Hollander joked.

This Christmas, the lodge held a "Beautiful Feast" where it fed 300 needy people. Much as with the Achim/Gate City Lodge, it was also a way to help Christian communities on their day off. The lodge provided food and delivered 121 gift bags. For children, the bags contained toys, and for adults,

the bags contained necessary toiletries.

In addition to their Christmas dinner, volunteers help provide Thanksgiving and Passover meals to seniors, in conjunction with Mollie & Max Barnett Apartments/Tarrant County B'nai B'rith Apartments. The residence is part the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network, which consists of 38 buildings in 28 communities. The network includes more than 4,000 apartment units and serves more than 8,000 people. 



# Senior Housing

(continued from page 31)



Goldberg B'nai B'rith Towers board member DeeAnne Rosenberg and Goldberg B'nai B'rith Towers Manager Angie Futch welcome the conference attendees to the Murder Mystery Dinner and Entertainment at Goldberg Towers.

ments. However, management can limit the number, size and type. Conference attendees learned how Pasadena's on-site staff worked with its board of directors to raise money to buy dog strollers for its residents. Now, residents don't have to walk their halls worrying that a loose dog might bite them. Those less mobile are finding it easier to use strollers for their dogs, as it provides them with more stability walking down halls.

The use of these strollers also eliminated dog-related

accidents. While the use of a dog walking stroller isn't required, most residents have taken advantage of it.

Doughten said she enjoys helping make a difference in residents' lives.

"The residents are the most important thing, and we all have the same ultimate goal—how do we make this work for [the residents], how do we keep them living independently and living longer independently?" Doughten said. "That's why I do everything I do, because of them."

## Cuba...continued from page 29

opportunity to deliver a much needed wheelchair to 92 year-old Dr. Zoila Camps.

"The importance of this project is evidenced not only by those individuals whose lives we touch," Saltzman said. "The critical support of B'nai B'rith and our missions serves also to illuminate their conviction. The survival of the Jewish community in Cuba is a testament to their passion and resolve."

B'nai B'rith's objectives include connecting Cuban Jews to the greater Diaspora to strengthen global partnerships and empower future generations. Daisy Bernal, president of the Javaia Jewish community in Sancti Spiritus, was moved

by the group's visit.

"Our community works day by day to preserve our roots so that our youth commit themselves to the future of Judaism in Cuba," Bernal said. "For us, the true miracle of Chanukah is to have your group visit our community. We receive very few visitors. The most recent group to visit us in Sancti Spiritus was your own last Chanukah." She humbly thanked Saltzman and the delegation for traveling the two hours by bus to spend the afternoon with her community.

Everyone knows the story of the miracle that is the sum and substance of Chanukah: the miracle of the small cruse of pure oil that should have been enough



B'nai B'rith International President Gary P. Saltzman (back, center) and the rest of the B'nai B'rith mission to Cuba.

only for one day but instead burned for eight. Fewer know of the great miracle that is the strength and continuity of the Jewish community of Cuba. Despite the odds, the small but passionate Jewish community continues to flourish.

*For more information on the B'nai B'rith Cuban Jewish Relief Project or our missions, please visit our website at: [www.bnaibrith.org/cuba-relief](http://www.bnaibrith.org/cuba-relief).*

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# For Shel Marcus, A Lifetime of Service

By Sam Seifman

“For almost 50 years, my life has been about public service,” said B’nai B’rith Senior Vice President Shel Marcus.

Marcus has always been willing to serve in various ways in the community. He has served on school boards, chambers of commerce and ran twice for state representative from his hometown of Morton Grove, Ill., a northern Chicago suburb, in 1986 and 1988. Later, he was elected village trustee of his community. He was also the president of the Northwest Suburban Congregation.

Growing up on the west side of Chicago, Marcus had a religious upbringing and remembers giving his bar mitzvah speech in both Yiddish and English.

“My grandfather was beaming,” he recalls.

His father, Sam, worked in the wine business as a salesman for Cimino’s Liquors. His mother, Sally, was a homemaker and later worked as a secretary for the State of Illinois in the industrial commission.

After attending the University of Illinois and Roosevelt University, Marcus got a position selling advertising for the Chicago Tribune. This led to a job as advertising manager for the Anvan Construction Corporation.

Eventually, in 1972, he opened up his own advertising,

public relations and association management firm called Original Concepts. One of its top clients was the American Equilibration Society, an association of dental professionals. That enabled him to travel globally, to places like Japan, Holland, Greece and England.

“It gave me incredible insight into the world and into people,” Marcus said.

He married his wife, Carole, in 1961. Their marriage led to their move from Chicago to Morton Grove. She passed away 17 years ago from cancer. Marcus also has a daughter, Elisa, a son, Michael, daughter-in-law Julie and two grandchildren.

“I like to lead by example,” Marcus said, and this is especially true when he discusses his children.

When Michael was young, he wondered why his father worked so hard for B’nai B’rith without any compensation. But today, Marcus sees his son volunteering at his children’s school events and is happy to see that his own values of service rubbed off on him in such a positive way.

Even today, Marcus still serves as a B’nai B’rith senior vice president, working with active B’nai B’rith communities across the United States.

“People don’t realize our commitment to the organization; it’s totally from the heart,” Marcus said.



B’nai B’rith Senior Vice President Shel Marcus, founder of the advertising, public relations and association management firm Original Concepts, has lived a life dedicated to service.

“My involvement in B’nai B’rith International has been an eye opener, as I learned about the issues facing the Jewish people around the world,” Marcus said. “It’s an organization where the issues do not just focus on today but tomorrow.”

Marcus has generously included B’nai B’rith as a beneficiary in his will, thus enrolling him as a member of the organization’s esteemed 1843 Society.

“Mr. Marcus is one of those people who inspires others with

everything he does. He takes his precious time and energy and devotes them to causes that truly make a difference in this world, and he does this all with a contagious, friendly smile,” said Ben Simkovich, assistant director of planned giving for B’nai B’rith. “When he notified us of his intent to join The 1843 Society by designating B’nai B’rith as a beneficiary in a will, it was no surprise and perfectly aligned with his passion to make a lasting positive impact on the Jewish world, while inspiring others to do so as well.”

*For more information about supporting B’nai B’rith through an endowment fund, bequest (tax ID# 53-0257218), charitable gift annuity or other planned gift, please contact the Planned Giving Department by mail at 1120 20th St., NW, Suite 300 North, Washington, DC 20036; by phone at 800-656-5561; or by e-mail at [plannedgiving@bnaibrith.org](mailto:plannedgiving@bnaibrith.org).*

1843



SOCIETY

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**B**'nai B'rith International will serve the Jewish community for years to come, due in large part to the generosity of those who believe that Jewish continuity is of the utmost importance as they enrich the world today and make a difference for tomorrow.

The following individuals are members of the 1843 Society of B'nai B'rith. They have made legacy gifts to the B'nai B'rith Foundation of the United States. On behalf of B'nai B'rith International, my heartfelt thanks to all of those listed for their commitment to a strong Jewish future.

Sincerely,

**Gary P. Saltzman**

*President, B'nai B'rith International*

\*May their memories be for a blessing.

The Planned Giving Department strives to keep our lists as accurate as possible. Please let us know of any corrections at 800-656-5561 or [plannedgiving@bnaibrith.org](mailto:plannedgiving@bnaibrith.org).

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*See page 34 for  
more information*

# Now More Than Ever: B'nai B'rith Housing for the Elderly

By Mark D. Olshan

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

It is somewhat bittersweet that I have been asked to share my thoughts on our ongoing seniors' program. While I've written for the magazine in the past, I've now been asked to focus on aging policy and offer insights from my perspective, as a baby boomer and a B'nai B'rith staff member for 33 years.

Rachel Goldberg, who served as our director of aging policy and authored this column for many years, has moved on to the AARP, or the “big” house, as we playfully refer to the country's largest advocacy group for seniors. For more than 13 years, Rachel was my right hand in analyzing, reporting and generally trying to make sense of the myriad changing policies and programs that affect our aging population. We are grateful for the many years she spent with us. She will be missed.

But we're not the only ones experiencing changes. As you are no doubt aware, the entire country is in the midst of a sea change, affecting the role of the federal government in our lives. For B'nai B'rith, this presents an enormous challenge, as a new administration with an announced intention of cutting back on federal programs takes office. Not the least of these is providing low-cost housing to seniors.

I began at B'nai B'rith as the director of our Senior Citizens Housing Program. Some years earlier, a group of dedicated B'nai B'rith volunteers, all experts in the building trades, petitioned the organization to allow them, under B'nai B'rith auspices, to sponsor affordable housing for low-income seniors in their communities.

Using a remarkable program from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) that made grants available to nonprofit sponsors, this group provided the “sweat equity” and opened the first B'nai B'rith-sponsored senior community in 1971 in Wilkes-Barre, Pa. Since then, the B'nai B'rith Senior Housing Network has grown to be the largest national Jewish sponsor of HUD-assisted housing in the country. It is currently available in 28 communities nationwide, and we're proud to say that nightly 8,000-10,000 seniors call a B'nai B'rith sponsored property home.



Obviously, we take this commitment to these communities and to our residents seriously. That's why we work throughout the year to provide resources, training and information to the dedicated people who manage, lead and staff these properties.

Our program exists for the benefit of the residents and their extended families. That's why we do what we do. But, we cannot do it alone. We need the government's help because housing costs money. And we are committed to working with the federal, state and local governments to provide the resources to

make affordable housing a reality.

For 30-some years, I have led the organization's efforts to advocate for the federal housing finance program that has allowed us to build such excellent communities, and to continue to provide them to low-income residents at a fraction of market rate rents. As an advocate, I champion not only the current residents, but the tens of thousands of people currently on waiting lists for low-income housing like those we sponsor. I speak on behalf of the hundreds of thousands of boomers who will find themselves, very shortly, in retirement, and in similar need.

The “graying of America” is not something in the far-off future. It is here now and will only grow larger. Every day, more people turn 65. B'nai B'rith, along with other nonprofit groups, had been instrumental in shaping, expanding and improving HUD's housing program for the elderly. But, the program is no longer being funded. This has put the future in jeopardy for residents, both present and future. And that is unacceptable.

The program is fiscally troubled. Affordable housing is scarce, and we need to build more for moderate and low-income people. Affordable housing appropriate for the needs of older adults, and where services can be brought to them in a more cost-efficient way, is essential. But building housing—something we absolutely must do if we want to address the long-term affordable housing crisis in this country—is more expensive than simply subsidizing rents in existing apartments.



On average, nationwide, there are more than 10 people waiting for every low-income rental unit available. In other words, we must build, but we don't have sufficient federal resources to do it.

The key may be a combination of vigilant advocacy and a new strategy supported by recent housing research. One thing the government is very good at is counting things: From missiles bought, to meals served, to millions taxed, the government keeps a tally. But it is not as good at counting how spending in one area can save money in another.

We often say Washington works in silos: lots of communication (and counting) up and down a federal department but very little communication between them. This poses many problems, especially when people's needs don't fit into one of those silos. In the 1980s, the federal government established a task force across departments, including housing and health, to work on homelessness. It turned out that many of the homeless were mentally ill, had substance abuse problems, were veterans and, in some cases, all three. So, solving the problem of homelessness really meant tackling a variety of issues.

With elderly housing, we know there is a similar crossover because supportive housing for older adults, with appropriate services, is an alternative to unnecessary nursing home placements and other pricier options. Many of our residents are able to live independently with support, but without those services, many would be unable to do so; and, with no financial resources, a nursing home placement through Medicaid would be their only alternative. A month in a nursing home costs Medicaid about \$8,000. A year in a nursing home costs just under \$100,000. For one person! So yes, housing is expensive, but so is health care. Combining the two, taking advantage of economies of scale, work to the long-term benefit of the resident and, at the same time, saves money on health care. So, if new research on the health care savings generated by affordable housing is taken into account, building new housing doesn't seem so expensive. And, that's just one way in which subsidized housing can reduce health care spending.

Housing is necessary and more affordable

than other options, and it meets the needs and wants of older adults. People do not want to be in a nursing home if they have more independence with some regular service support. The bottom line is that spending money on bricks and mortar can save money by reducing the amount spent on health care. Hopefully, this will help the number crunchers in Washington to see the light.

Over the years, I haven't had many opportunities to be on the front lines of these policy debates, but I guess it's time to get back into the game and step up to the plate. 🇺🇸

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