A Word in Its Place

Volume I
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University of Michigan
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Some works in this journal have been condensed for printing. These works appear in their fuller forms on the website of *A Word in Its Place*.

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Letter from the Editor

"A Word in its Place." This Yiddish phrase is just one of the many pearls of wisdom compiled in an old Judaica book that I pulled from my grandparents' bookshelf. The important Jewish teaching of לדור ודור or "from generation to generation" teaches that we are all a link in a chain, and that we should learn from and about those who came before us. I have learned a great deal from each of my grandparents about how to live my life and about where I come from. It was because of my grandparents that I felt a connection to Yiddish, and they are the reason I chose to study the Yiddish language at the University of Michigan. This interest is also why, on one ordinary day, I pulled that Yiddish text from my grandparents' bookshelf. Within the text *Mamma Used to Say: Pearls of Wisdom from the World of Yiddish*, I came across the phrase "A word in its place" or "א וואָרט אויפן ארט." This journal is dedicated to and in acknowledgment of all those who have taught us about our past, passed down their wisdom, and guided us. It is dedicated to our grandparents, to our elders, to our parents, and to our teachers.

The Yiddish phrase "a word in its place" is taken from the Hebrew Biblical passage Mishlei 15:23, which states, "A man rejoices in what he says; how good is something at the proper time." The Yiddish phrase is just one of many iterations of a constant truth, which is expressed in a range of Jewish texts and languages over thousands of years, about the great power of language and the value in saying something meaningful when there is something to be said. When comparing just two of the many varied forms of this truth—the Yiddish phrase and the Hebrew phrase in Mishlei 15:23—we gain a more nuanced understanding of this teaching. The Yiddish phrase "א וואָרט אויפן ארט" or "a word in its place" emphasizes the important insights that one speaker can provide in a particular context. The Hebrew proverb "וְדָבָר בְּעִתּוֹ מַה־טּוֹב" or "how good is a word in its time" emphasizes the value of saying something particularly apropos at the right moment in time. Both of these definitions make this phrase well-suited for the title of our new journal. With this journal, we recognize that even at this early stage in a lifetime of learning, we all have things to say, things which reflect our developing understandings, and things which, when said well and at the proper moment, can be profound and present novel contributions.

For the first volume of this new Judaic Studies journal, we have included six works from University of Michigan undergraduate students. The first piece is an artwork by Atara Kresch-Tabory which commemorates the 1200 victims of the massacre on October 7th. The artwork also reminds us to continue praying for the safety and release of the hostages still being held more

than seventeen months later; this meaningful piece undoubtedly meets the call of "וְדָבָר בְּעִתּוֹ מַה־טּוֹב" or sharing a necessary word/thing (דָּבָר) at a challenging moment in time. The next piece is an essay by Sara Taub which reflects on an oral history she conducted with her rabbi. This piece explores what it means to be a twenty-first century Reform rabbi in the U.S. and it provides insights into how a young Jewish person understands her connection to this figure. The following piece, by Sophie Pardo-Reed, explores the Crown Heights Riots of 1991 and examines how different minority populations' understanding of "self" and "other" underpinned one of the tensest moments in Black-Jewish relations in the U.S. I authored the following piece, a blend between a literary analysis and a more formal research paper, which considers how one prominent piece of Czech literature helps us begin to understand the complex reality of what it meant to resist during the Holocaust. The following entry, by Gideon Shaked, comments on the history of Zionist thought and considers some of the differing views within the Sephardi and Ashkenazi communities at the turn of the twentieth century. The final work is an honors thesis written by Dana Steiner which explores the history of the Broadway musical *Parade*. Dana's piece comments on both the historical storyline of Leo Frank as well as the varying productions and receptions of the show at different moments in time; the piece illustrates the great impact of something when it is produced at the proper time. These six works explore a range of topics and represent some of the many important contributions of University of Michigan students. We believe that each work conveys our ability to effectively and meaningfully put "a word in its place."

—Ari Leflein

Acknowledgments

This journal has greatly benefited from the support of the Jean and Samuel Frankel Center for Judaic Studies and the invaluable time and dedication of the faculty and staff who helped make it a reality. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to our faculty advisor, Eliot Ginsburg, for his unwavering support throughout this journey. Additionally, we would like to express our deepest appreciation to Professor Deborah Dash Moore for her mentorship over the years, something which instilled in Ari and me the confidence, and provided the experience, necessary to co-found this journal.

—Sophie Pardo-Reed

Papercut 2024

18’’ x 24’’

Layers of Light: Commemorating October 7th

By Atara Kresch-Tabory*

October 7th was the darkest day of our lives since the Holocaust, a day of unspeakable horror, a nightmare that shattered families, homes, and hearts. The grief is immeasurable, the wounds still raw. And yet, even in the depths of sorrow, I remind myself of an enduring truth: Am Yisrael is a nation of light. Our history is marked by both devastation and resilience, and in the face of unimaginable loss, we bear the sacred responsibility of remembrance—not only to mourn but to continue spreading the light of those who were taken.

This piece is my tribute to those 1,200 souls. At its heart lies the *Mi Sheberach*, a prayer for the safety and peace of Israel and its people. Surrounding the prayer, 1,200 Magen Davids are meticulously cut to form an intricate, layered composition. Each star represents one precious life stolen from us. The deliberate layering of these stars is more than a visual motif, it embodies the generations of strength that hold us together.

Each star is a presence, not just a symbol, standing together, interwoven in remembrance and resilience. Our strength is in our togetherness, our defiance in our ability to create beauty even from pain. This piece is a declaration: we are still here. We grieve, but we rise. We remember, but we also rebuild. Even in sorrow, we carry the sacred duty of spreading light and beauty into the world.

עם ישראל חי

We will never forget you. We will continue to spread your light.

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*Atara graduated in 2024 with a BA in Art and Design from the Penny Stamps School of Art and Design and with a minor in Judaic Studies and Entrepreneurship. Atara now runs her own art studio, Atara Ketubot, in Jerusalem, Israel.

Rabbi Megan Brudney's Oral History in Context: Bridging the Past, Present, and Future

By Sara Taub*

When it comes to making connections, Rabbi Megan Brudney has always been a skilled practitioner. She recalls an exercise from her time in rabbinical school at Hebrew Union College, where she was asked to find a metaphor describing her leadership style. After much consideration, a thought dawned upon her: "I think I'm a bridge." She pondered, "No, I want to be something that connects things. Yes, indeed, that would be a bridge!" she declared with confidence.[1] Brudney's talent for linking people and ideas was a lifelong trait of hers well before she came to this realization.

While pursuing her undergraduate degree at Duke University, she served as a bridge between her fellow students and their Jewish identities and heritages. She actively reached out to fellow Reform Jews on campus and invited them to the *minyan* that she learned how to lead through song. Through her dedicated efforts, she successfully brought her visions to life by creating a space to celebrate Shabbat on campus.

Currently, as the Associate Rabbi of Temple Beth El in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, her favorite aspect of her role is fostering personal relationships with congregants of all ages. By sending letters to elementary-aged children attending sleepaway camps, visiting college students at local universities, and visiting ill congregants in the hospital, Rabbi Brudney works to connect her congregants to the Temple Beth El community. The bridge metaphor not only illustrates her innate leadership qualities, but also her practice of integrating past experiences into the present and continuously evolving.

Past

Megan Brudney was born and raised in Athens, Georgia, a place she proudly calls: "The home of the Georgia Bulldogs, your back-to-back NCAA football national champions."[2]

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*Sara Taub is a senior at the University of Michigan College of Literature, Science, and the Arts. Sara is majoring in communications and media and minoring in Judaic Studies. The oral history which accompanies this piece can be found on the web version of this journal.

However, her hometown pride developed later in life. When it was time to choose a college, the University of Georgia was quickly ruled out. As a high-achieving student who thrived under pressure, Brudney sought an academically rigorous school with a prestigious reputation that would provide a challenge. “There’s great education at many schools, all kinds of needs that have all kinds of cultures,” Brudney explains, “and I’m sure I could have gotten a great education at Georgia. But I wanted to go to a fancy big-name school, so I did.”[3]

As a high school senior, Brudney and her father took a six-hour drive to Duke University for one final campus tour before she committed. Locating the Hillel building reassured her that Duke had some semblance of Jewish life. Fast forward a few months to her first Shabbat on campus that fall: after meeting her new classmates, the service began, and the Conservative and Reform students separated for prayer. Brudney noticed that the Conservative group was significantly larger than the Reform group. When surrounded by the small group of Reform students, Brudney realized a desire to lead the *minyan*. In high school, she was an active member of NFTY (the North American Federation for Temple Youth, also known as the Reform Jewish Youth Movement). She looked up to those who would lead the services at NFTY events, which sparked her interest in song leading.

When Brudney relocated from Athens, Georgia, to Durham, North Carolina (home of the Duke Blue Devils), she was already familiar with the dynamics of a college town’s Jewish community. “So many people are new to town in a college town at any given point,” she explains, “So there’s so much more attention to, ‘Who would we invite to our Seder? Who’s new in town?’”[4] Brudney knew what it was like to welcome strangers in Athens, a city whose Jewish community was ever-changing and accepting of all. Thus, finding herself as the newcomer in Durham, she knew exactly what was necessary in order to foster an inclusive community for her fellow Reform Jews at Duke: she needed to learn how to lead songs. Before college, Brudney could only play a few chords on the guitar, four years later, she confidently led Reform services every Shabbat. Surprised by her own willingness to step out of her comfort zone and develop new skills in order to create community for others, she discovered her enjoyment in enriching others’ lives through the combination of music and prayer. Today, Rabbi Brudney emphasizes that music is one the main components of her rabbinate, a skill she developed while strengthening the Reform Jewish community at Duke University.

After earning her Bachelor’s degree in linguistics from Duke, Brudney spent four years in Washington, D.C. working at PANIM: The Institute for Jewish Leadership and Values.[5] This organization aims to reconnect young Jews, who are distancing themselves from their Jewish heritage, by engaging them “through the processes of study, experience, and familiarity with the roots of their own Jewish identities.”[6] During this time, Brudney gained valuable experience

working with Jewish youth, as well as in fundraising and grant writing. Her time at PANIM emphasized the importance of establishing a Jewish identity from a young age. This is why, in her current role at Temple Beth El, she dedicates her Friday mornings to visiting each preschool classroom in the ECC (Early Childhood Center), using music to engage the children. By creating early memories with Judaism, Rabbi Brudney hopes to encourage future engagement with the religion long after the students leave preschool.

After her time in Washington, D.C., Brudney enrolled in rabbinical school and moved to Jerusalem for her first year at Hebrew Union College, which she considers to be the biggest bonding year of rabbinical school. To this day, Brudney has kept in touch with most of her classmates, while remaining particularly connected with a group of 10 women through a text chain named the "Red iTent"—a nod to the novel written by Anita Diamant. This chat serves multiple different purposes, from requests for photos of prayer book pages to sharing daily stories. When asked about her role models as a rabbi, Megan Brudney immediately thinks of this group. She finds comfort in a group of fellow female rabbis that have all crossed paths in the past and can come together to support each other in the present and moving into the future.

Present

Since 2016, Rabbi Megan Brudney has been the Associate Rabbi at Temple Beth El. Over her time in this role, she has made a significant impact on the congregation's culture. Reflecting on her proudest accomplishments, Brudney highlighted her efforts to unite the congregation as one community. Brudney has devoted significant time and energy into enhancing the Temple's college program. The Temple Beth El Brotherhood originally managed this initiative, sending annual gifts to college-aged members of the congregation. Brudney aimed to expand the program to foster a lasting connection with Temple after students leave home. Initially, reviving this project was challenging because Brudney had not yet met any of the current college-aged congregants. "[2023] is the first year that I was at the b'nai mitzvah of the kids who are [college] freshmen now. The sad statistic common across Judaism is that for many kids, we haven't seen them since their bar or bat mitzvah. This is the first year that I even know who most of these [college] kids are."[7] She explained that now that she knows more college-aged students, this has become easier for her, but she continues to build relationships with young congregants that she has not yet met. Brudney expressed that the college program provides a reason for her to reach out and make these congregants feel included in the Temple Beth El community, even if they have not had the chance to meet in-person.

Currently, a major component of the college program involves maintaining an up-to-date address list at the start of each academic year. When Hanukkah and Passover approach, Rabbi

Brudney sends care packages to students, including a letter from the rabbis, cantor, and Director of Education, a Starbucks gift card, and occasionally Temple Beth El memorabilia. Additionally, Rabbi Brudney dedicates time during the school year to visiting two local colleges: the University of Michigan and Michigan State University. While stationed at a coffee shop throughout the day, she encourages students to drop by and visit her between their classes. Although Brudney considers this an ongoing, large project, she is proud of her efforts to revive the existing college program and is committed to bridging the gap between herself and her congregants.

Beyond the college program, Brudney has made efforts to engage with other groups of the congregation. Mark Miller, Temple Beth El's Senior Rabbi, suggested that she develop an annual Women's Retreat to strengthen the bonds among Jewish women in the community. This program began with less than fifteen women at a small bed and breakfast, but in recent years, Brudney has successfully recruited nearly forty women to attend. Engaging this demographic in Judaism has been a joy for Brudney over the years. She recounted an anecdote about two congregants connecting: "I'll watch two women talking who I both see all the time. They're very involved in Temple, and they're like, 'Oh, I've never met you.' 'No, I've never met you either.' And I wonder, how is this possible?"[8] Brudney attributes this phenomenon to the qualities of the deeply rooted Metro Detroit Jewish community. "It definitely is a tight-knit community. Obviously, it's small in terms of degrees of separation, but everyone thinks they know each other already, and they don't."[9] She observes that in a well-established Jewish community, members often surround themselves with people that they have known for generations, as many families have historic affiliations to certain synagogues. In contrast, members of Jewish communities in college towns frequently seek to include new people in their circles, due to the transient nature of such environments. Having lived in cities with both types of Jewish communities, Brudney compares and contrasts their qualities to understand how different settings influence individuals' Jewish affiliation and engagement.

In addition to her work within the Jewish community, being a female rabbi in the Metro Detroit area has given Megan Brudney a platform to share her thoughts and act on her beliefs. Standing on the *bima* has empowered her to deliver sermons and transform them into interactive learning experiences for her congregants. During Shabbat services, Rabbi Brudney strives to engage everyone present by inviting their thoughts on the topic she is discussing. She often steps away from the *bima* to conduct Q&A-style discussions, creating a bridge between herself and the voices of her community. Moreover, her congregants recognize that when she remains on the *bima*, her sermon topic is of a more serious nature. One notable example is Rabbi Brudney's 5781 Yom Kippur Sermon, where she addressed the Black Lives Matter protests that took place

during the summer of 2020.[10] She used this opportunity to discuss race, framing the movement within the context of the diversity across the Jewish community. This sermon remains one of her most memorable to date. Rabbi Brudney is a captivating speaker, and I wish that the constraints of the pandemic had allowed the congregation to hear her in person, fully experiencing the power of her words without the mediation of technology.

Following the reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, Brudney and other local clergy recognized the need to unite and take action, as this Supreme Court decision conflicted with Jewish tradition and laws. Rabbi Blair Nosanwisch of Adat Shalom in Farmington Hills, Michigan led the effort and enlisted Brudney's help in organizing what would become the "Abortion is a Jewish Value" rally. Together with the help of Rabbi Jen Kalunzy and Rabbi Marla Hornsten, both of Temple Israel in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan, and members of the Michigan chapter of National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW), the women planned this event.

Since its founding in 1893, NCJW has relied on Jewish values to advocate for social justice in both the United States and Israel. As the nation's oldest Jewish women's grassroots organization, NCJW is dedicated to education, advocacy, and community service. With fifty chapters, they respond to the current needs of women, children, and families, regardless of faith. Currently, some of NCJW's top priorities include protecting reproductive health by expanding access to abortion and contraception.[11]

On June 30, 2022, over two hundred people gathered at Temple Israel in West Bloomfield, Michigan to support this cause. The rabbis in attendance spoke about various reasons why banning abortion contradicts Jewish values and shared stories of women who had discussed their personal experiences with reproductive healthcare on social media. Midway through the event, attendees were asked to hold up a piece of black paper they had received upon arrival. Rabbi Blair Nosanwisch led the crowd in a symbolic mourning ritual:

> Will each of you join us in this moment of grief and tear the square of paper you have been given? Something has been torn. It's something deeper and more powerful than *Roe v. Wade*. Deeper and more powerful than the Supreme Court, than politics, than right or left. Something basic and true is being lost, and that is where we as Jews must turn to the few truths that are eternal.[12]

Brudney reflects on this experience as a meaningful moment within the community. Later in the summer, local clergy followed up this event with a discussion on how to potentially address abortion during the High Holidays. On the *bima*, Rabbi Brudney made sure to mention her involvement in this event as a starting point for discussing abortion. She has found that when addressing current events which are difficult to describe, referencing the voices of those with a first-hand account of the event works best. From there, she builds a bridge between those

personal experiences and the writings in the Torah, providing a framework for a deeper understanding of the event at hand. Rabbi Megan Brudney brings her experiences as a female Jewish rabbi into all her work, and her advocacy for reproductive rights has not only made her a better rabbi, but also a more engaged member of the community.

Future

Rabbi Brudney will persist in her efforts to forge strong connections with her congregants, creating a bridge between herself and her congregants to strengthen the Temple Beth El community. Acknowledging that there is always room for improvement, she has identified the common decline in engagement after bar or bat mitzvahs as a key area to address. Although this is a widespread issue among Jewish teens nationwide, Brudney's success in fostering personal connections within the Temple Beth El community has already shown positive results in boosting engagement.

Different synagogues among all sects of Judaism address the challenge of post-bar or bat mitzvah engagement in various ways. As a case study, I decided to examine how a synagogue that is completely different from my own approaches this issue, leading me to select the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center.[13] This synagogue not only follows a different branch of Judaism than my own, but it is also 2,265 miles away in Pasadena, California. For instance, at the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center located in Pasadena, California, teens look towards the United Synagogue Youth (USY) to find ways to stay connected with fellow Conservative Jews. However, the decline in the number of Conservative Jews has made it difficult for USY to create and maintain robust programs at both regional and international levels. Julie Marder, USY's interim Senior Director of Teen Engagement, attributes the significant drop in participation in recent years to the COVID-19 pandemic.[14] Teens, however, argue that USY membership has become less appealing because the organization fails to address the needs of their generation. Marder acknowledges that USY must rebrand their programming by prioritizing local events and supporting individual chapters before focusing on larger, regional events.

Promoting engagement after bar or bat mitzvahs can vary, whether through clergy outreach to teen congregants or organizations helping individuals connect with fellow Jews nationally. Since joining Temple Beth El, Rabbi Megan Brudney has realized the importance of lifelong relationships:

> You're hoping to build these relationships that will stand this test of temporality. Relationships that will grow and continue even as people grow up, and times change, whether that has to do with Temple or not, whether they're local or not. . . . But these relationships—no matter how short or long they seem—matter, even in the constant flow of time.[15]

Ultimately, she hopes that congregants can form relationships that endure beyond their time at Temple Beth El.

Rabbi Brudney has made it clear that she is committed to fostering an inclusive environment for her congregation for years to come. In these constantly changing times, she makes sure to keep herself informed about correct language and terminology, particularly when referring to communities she herself is not a part of. The Temple hosts an annual Pride Shabbat, which she notes, "in the Reform movement, is not a bold position." However, she hopes to highlight a cause that might not be as prominent in the lives of some congregants.

Beyond the synagogue itself, the Reform Movement has been at the forefront of inclusivity since 1965, when the Women of Reform Judaism advocated for the decriminalization of homosexuality.[16] This initiative garnered widespread support for the LGBTQ+ community from other Reform institutions, including the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) and Reform Youth Movement (NFTY). Affirming LGBTQ+ members in their Jewish practices has been crucial to creating an inclusive environment. As noted, "Both NFTY and the URJ's summer camps have taken steps to become more affirming of transgender participants in their religious materials and content, application forms, facilities, and programs."[17] Rabbi Brudney aspires for LGBTQ+ individuals to feel supported within the Temple Beth El community, where every congregant is created in *b'tzelem Elohim*—the image of God.

Megan Brudney's unwavering dedication to Judaism has seamlessly bridged her past, present, and future. Judaism has provided her not only with a religious framework and career but also an opportunity to build strong connections, ultimately guiding her to become a leader in her field. From a young college student, who was once hesitant to lead the services at Duke Hillel, Brudney has blossomed into a confident rabbi who guides her congregation with a genuine joy for Judaism and passion in practicing Torah. A critical aspect of Rabbi Brudney's leadership is her ability to guide her congregation with poise during politically tense times, aligning Judaism with socially progressive movements and encouraging her congregants to embrace this perspective. Temple Beth El has undeniably flourished from Rabbi Megan Brudney's contributions to the congregation. She has helped many, including myself, feel more connected to Judaism and the Jewish community, and she is someone I look up to for her strong leadership and generous heart.

Notes

[1] Rabbi Megan Brudney oral history interview conducted by author, April 12, 2023, 00:49:40.

[2] Brudney, 00:01:03.

[3] Brudney, 00:14:14.

[4] Brudney, 00:12:27.

[5] "Student Rabbis," Congregation Shir Ami, accessed April 18, 2023, https://congshirami.org/our-rabbinic-interns/.

[6] "About Us," Panim El Panim, accessed April 18, 2023, https://panimelpanim.org/en/about/.

[7] Brudney oral history interview conducted by author, 00:23:07.

[8] Brudney oral history interview conducted by author, 00:27:48.

[9] Brudney oral history interview conducted by author, 00:28:04.

[10] Rabbi Megan Brudney, "Yom Kippur 5781 Sermon," Temple Beth El, September 16, 2021, video, https://vimeo.com/462766533.

[11] "About Us," National Council of Jewish Women, accessed April 19, 2023, https://www.ncjw.org/about/.

[12] "NCJW Leads 'Abortion is a Jewish Value' Rally at Temple Israel," *The Detroit Jewish News* online, June 30, 2022. https://www.thejewishnews.com/community/ncjw-leads-abortion-is-a-jewish-value-rally-at-temple-israel/article_e60b5b47-cf70-58e9-b7a0-901c945e6036.html.

[13] During the Eaton Canyon fire on January 9, 2025, part of the tragic January 2025 wildfires in southern California, the Pasadena Jewish Temple and Center burned down. All Torah scrolls were rescued from the sanctuary, chapel, and classrooms. More information can be found at: https://www.pjtc.net.

[14] Ella Bilu, "The Conservative movement youth group was already struggling. Then came COVID," last modified April 17, 2023, https://www.jta.org/2023/04/17/religion/the-conservative-movement-youth-group-was-already-struggling-then-came-covid.

[15] Brudney oral history interview conducted by author, 00:04:43.

[16] Rabbi Victor S. Appell, "How Does Reform Judaism Affirm the LGBTQ+ Community?", accessed April 22, 2023, https://reformjudaism.org/learning/answers-jewish-questions/how-does-reform-judaism-affirm-lgbtq-community.

[17] Appell.

Revisiting Crown Heights: Identity and Conflict in 1991

By Sophie Pardo-Reed*

In August 1991, the racially and religiously diverse neighborhood of Crown Heights, Brooklyn, which was inhabited by Ultra-Orthodox Lubavitch Jews, Caribbean and Guyanese immigrants, and African Americans, was engulfed in violence. The three days of riots following both the horrific accident that killed a Guyanese child, Gavin Cato, and the murder of Yankel Rosenbaum were later referred to by a government report as "the most widespread racial unrest to occur in New York City in more than twenty years."[1] Unknowingly, the characterization of these events belies a widespread tendency for Americans to interpret identity-based conflicts through a binary lens. This binary framing falls woefully short when applied to the Crown Heights Riots of 1991, as the continuous, historical victimization and related self-conceptions of the groups involved raise complex questions of identity, race, and intergenerational trauma. The intersecting and overlapping issues at play created a situation wherein these riots were simultaneously antisemitic and not antisemitic, at once novel and historically commonplace. The Crown Heights Riots of 1991 continue to drive a wedge between Black and Jewish communities, a rift intensified by the political manipulation of those involved in the New York City (NYC) mayoral cycle and the politically expedient rhetoric utilized by famous activists.

The complexity of the Crown Heights Riots (CHR) of 1991 cannot be understated; personal accounts differ fundamentally and emotional testimonies lack consensus. That being said, across all the variance in accounts, the CHR timeline is overall reported as follows: on the afternoon of August 19, 1991, a station wagon driven by Yosef Lifsh in the procession of the Lubavitcher Rebbe was hit by another vehicle and swerved, resulting in seven-year-old Gavin Cato and his cousin, nine-year-old Angela Cato, becoming trapped under the vehicle. Within minutes, a crowd of witnesses gathered and, when the onlookers became more aggressive, the private Hasidic ambulance, *Hatzoloh*, arrived on the scene.[2] The police, having arrived moments before, directed *Hatzoloh* to take Yosef Lifsh to the hospital and remove him from the reach of the growing mob.[3] Shortly after, the city ambulance arrived to care for Gavin and Angela Cato,

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but tragically, Gavin's injuries were fatal. Myth and anger soon spread among the Afro-Caribbean and African American citizens of Crown Heights, with many chanting versions of "The Jews killed the kid."[4] Ringleaders in the crowd, like Charles Price, led hundreds of Black teenagers into the "Jew neighborhood" after explaining, "the Jews get everything they want. They're killing our children."[5] Three hours of rioting, rock-throwing, and slurring followed until another tragedy struck. Twenty-nine-year-old Yeshiva student Yankel Rosenbaum, walking down the street unaware of the car crash, was beaten by a group of Black teenagers yelling "There's a Jew! Get the Jew! Kill the Jew," and sadly, 16-year-old Lemrick Nelson did, by fatally stabbing Yankel.[6] The riots in Crown Heights finally ended three days later on August 21, but not before countless stores, vehicles, and homes were vandalized, harassed, or incinerated by Molotov cocktails.[7]

Anger and Identity

One of the most interesting notions of the CHR is the two fundamentally opposite narratives that both the Black and Lubavitch community hold to be true. From the perspective of Crown Heights residents in the Afro-Caribbean and African American communities, Gavin Cato's death is another instance wherein White people are treated better by the police, are not held accountable, and are permitted to trample over their Black neighbors without any ramifications. For the Black community, Yosef Lifsh's return to Israel and lack of charges represent a broken and oppressive legal system.[8] Led by the Reverend Al Sharpton, many demanded that Lifsh be charged with murder; Sharpton himself threatened to make a citizen's arrest.[9] For the Lubavitch community, the accident that killed Gavin Cato was tragic but accidental. The Lubavitch community did not view this car accident as representative of any broader systemic injustice, and certainly not as a murder.[10] However, the Hasidim were soon shocked by the rioting and displays of violence, which they interpreted as a purposeful lack of interference by the police and at the hands of the first Black Mayor of New York, David Dinkins.[11]

Henry Goldschmidt lays out the central reason for the fundamentally different analyses of the events. He argues that concepts of "self" and "other" are based on different premises for African Americans and Hasidim. For African Americans, the difference between the peoples of Crown Heights is racial: Black vs. White, in a country built on subjugating, oppressing, and dehumanizing Black lives. However, for the insular Lubavitch community, they see themselves as "an embattled Jewish minority living amid a hostile Gentile majority," a new variation of an all-too-familiar theme of Jews living at the whim of non-Jews who may turn homicidal at any given moment.[12] For both groups, their understanding of self is rooted in a history of persecution and a legacy of oppression.

Historical Legacies and Resonances

In his book *The Implicated Subject*, Michael Rothberg uses the phrase "active historical resonances" to describe the non-linear aspects of implication, responsibility, and victimization that inform modern interactions.[13] In the case of the CHR, "active historical resonances" for both the African American community and the Hasidic community explain the dueling narratives and heightened emotions. The intergenerational trauma and historical experiences that affect both of these communities make it impossible to point to one narrative as wholly true or false. These realities and their implications are complex and wide-reaching. Still, by engaging with the narratives of both sides, one can hope to derive a clearer understanding of the motivations and underlying causes of the Crown Heights Riots.

Motives and Outcomes: Race-Riot

The first conceptual understanding of the CHR might regard what happened in Crown Heights as an instance of Black vs. White violence. This would support a fundamental misunderstanding of Jewishness and fall into the conceptual category of a "typical" race riot.[14] Contextually, the Rodney King riots in Los Angeles a few months before the CHR were part of a larger movement demanding justice for Black Americans victimized by racialized policing.[15] New York Police Captain Moscatto reported on behalf of his officers in Crown Heights that "a lot of [my policemen] feel that they're paying the price for Rodney King."[16] Further, the arrival of Black activists Al Sharpton, Jesse Jackson, and Alton Maddox supports this first possible conceptualization. These figures led demonstrations in and around Crown Heights for a few days, utilizing slogans associated with responses to police violence like "no justice, no peace."[17]

These men described the violence in 1991 as a reaction to oppression and deprivation. This sentiment, in addition to the statistical disparities reported (of 155 arrests, 3 or 4 were not Black, and of the 229 injuries, police officers suffered 164) point to the Crown Heights Riots as an example of violence between African Americans and police officers rather than an antisemitic pogrom.[18] Following this logic, any questions about why the attacks were directed at Jews could be answered by Al Sharpton's interview. He relayed that Black kids growing up in Crown Heights rarely understood the differences between Secular or Hasidic Jews and non-Jewish Whites; he commented that kids see it as White vs. Black.[19] In response to the chants of "Heil Hitler" and "Hitler didn't finish the job" that accompanied the rocks flying toward the Chabad headquarters, anyone who understands the CHR as a race riot might point to Lemrick Nelson's defense.[20] Nelson, Rosenbaum's killer, argued that the violence had nothing to do with Jewishness and everything to do with Whiteness.[21] A witness explained the supposed support for Hitler saying that the rioters knew how to provoke and anger Jews, but indicated that it was not

actual support for Hitler.[22] Of course, this also complicates the "race riot" narrative, as it would assume the rioters had enough of an understanding of Jewish history and identity to know how to target Jews specifically.

Motives and Outcomes: Black Antisemitism

The second conceptual understanding of the CHR is as an outpouring of Black antisemitism. This framing has more significant implications for the relationship between Black and Jewish communities than the first one. There are also nuances in the type of antisemitic rhetoric used, and it is critical to define them. The Reverend Al Sharpton, who many Jews viewed as an inciter of both antisemitic harassment and violence, is a figure whose rhetoric stands out.[23] In his eulogy for Gavin Cato, Sharpton used incendiary rhetoric and referred to *Hatzoloh* as "an Apartheid ambulance," in one part of his speech.[24] This is followed by the assertion that "Oppenheimer in South Africa sends diamonds straight to Tel Aviv and deals with the diamond merchants right here in Crown Heights."[25] He then dismissed antisemitism as the issue at hand and said, "If you offend one of these little ones, you got to pay for it. No compromise, no meetings, no kaffeeklatsch, no skinnin' and grinnin."[26] Sharpton's rhetoric in this speech mirrors that of Black scholars and leaders like Leonard Jeffries who frequently veered into antisemitic conspiracies in their activism. Jeffries, in 1991, blamed Jews for all negative depictions of African Americans in Hollywood and erroneously reported that Jews played a disproportionate role in the Atlantic slave trade.[27] Another example of antisemitism is the distribution of fliers from a coalition of Black Nationalist groups with "Hasidic/Police conspiracy to murder and brutalize our children" printed across them.[28] These fliers are fascinating because they represent the intermingling of millennia-old European-Christian antisemitic canards, like the "blood libel," with new antisemitic associations in areas of Black activism, which connect Jews with the police.[29]

The second type of antisemitism seen during the CHR, mentioned above as "Euro-Christian," is interesting because it lends credence to the Lubavitchers' understanding of themselves and others, and the idea of the conflict as Jews vs. Gentiles. A highly educated man, Wilbert A. Tatum, wrote that the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) is a spy network controlling the media.[30] C. Vernon Mason, attorney for the Cato family, once accused Mayor Dinkins of "wearing too many *yarmulkes*."[31] These examples, which draw on hundreds of years of anti-Jewish sentiment, coupled with cries heard during the riots to "get in the oven," explains the Jewish community's anger.[32]

Motives and outcomes: Legacy and Superimposition

The third conceptual understanding of the CHR is the most complex and requires the most nuanced comprehension of historical resonance and intergenerational trauma. This conceptualization regards the Crown Heights Riots as an instance when African Americans both understood aspects of Jewish history, and wielded their anger against Hasids, using them as a scapegoat for all of the injustices perpetuated by "white oppressors." This is the most complex situation socially because it continues the legacy of scapegoating and persecution of Jews, but it is because of Jews' supposed "whiteness," rather than their lack thereof. It becomes even more complicated when considering the unique demographics of Crown Heights. White flight in the 1950s to 1970s created a situation wherein the neighborhood had virtually no White Christians.[33] Consequently, for the Crown Heights Afro-Caribbean and African communities, "Jewishness" became synonymous with "Whiteness." For the Crown Heights Hasidic community, African or Afro-Caribbean Americans were "Gentiles." Further, both communities viewed themselves as the minority population. For the Hasidim, they were in the minority because the Black population of Crown Heights doubled that of Jews. However, those in the Black community viewed themselves as a minority group in the neighborhood because of the perceived "whiteness" of the Hasidim. [34]

The impact of active historical resonances, as mentioned earlier, is illustrated by the suicide of an elderly Hasidic woman when the riots broke out. This woman was a Holocaust survivor, and she, along with many other Jews in Crown Heights, understood the riots as a pogrom; for this reason, she took her own life before it could be taken from her.[35] Similar emotions arose for African American witnesses who saw what they understood to be White lawlessness without repercussions and young Black lives being taken without remorse. The uniqueness of this event is the place both groups took in the other's history. But from the perspectives of many across both groups, the CHR were nothing new, just a perpetuation of the same oppressive systems.

Examining Media and Politics: National Civil Rights and the Media

The larger context of Black activism in the 1990s, specifically regarding Rodney King and police brutality, partially explains the framing of the CHR by news sources and Black activists. "Race riots" had become common enough by the mid-1960s to warrant a definition from the Kerne Commission in 1968, which stated that the typical race riots were ultimately the fault of White America because of the chain of "discrimination, prejudice, disadvantaged conditions, intense and pervasive grievances, [and] a series of tension-heightening incidents, all culminating in the eruption of disorder at the hands of youthful, politically-aware activists."[36] By

the 1990s, discourse around violence on this topic usually condemned the violence but also acknowledged the emotional toll systemic oppression has on a group.[37] From this understanding sprouted the media narrative of White vs. Black in Crown Heights and of both sides playing equal parts.[38] The equivocation of a tragic accident with a murder did not sit well with much of the Jewish community, and many understood the reluctance by most sources and officials to call the riots antisemitic as an act of antisemitism.[39] In addition to equivocal media coverage, the arrival of Reverend Al Sharpton and his fiery galvanization of the Black community could be seen as sparking more violence. Sharpton's use of provocative rhetoric (against the wishes of Mayor Dinkins) and his utilization of Gavin Cato's death in the context of national civil rights initiatives allowed for Hasidic Jews to be superimposed into national consciousness as White perpetrators in a larger system of Black oppression.[40] More specifically, Jews were turned into the "worst whites" in the consciousness of Black rioters in Crown Heights. Sharpton treated Cato's funeral like a political rally and, in his eulogy, he listed Black martyrs who died at the hands of White aggressors. Sharpton concluded, "But let us, in Gavin's name, build a new nation for our people." It is the arrival of nationally recognized activists like Sharpton that legitimized violence as a political expression in Crown Heights.[41] Posters around Crown Heights read, "The Black Liberation Movement is proud of our youth, who took to the streets to defend Black children, and fight the Racist police and Hasidic conspiracy to destroy our community. White America, Black Uncle Toms, and Police Agents call you Hoodlums—we call you the children of Malcolm X."[42]

Contextually, the mayoral cycle for the NYC elections of 1993 also played a role. In 1991, the incumbent, Mayor Dinkins, was serving as the first Black mayor of NYC.[43] His opponent was Republican Rudy Giuliani, and many in the Black community felt that the backlash Dinkins faced from the Jewish community following the riots was racially motivated.[44] C. Vernon Mason wrote in *New York Amsterdam News* that there is a "political, racist conspiracy to rewrite what really happened in Crown Heights . . . and the objective . . . to elect Rudolph Giuliani."[45] His sentiments align with those of Wilbert A. Tatum, who also argued in the *New York Amsterdam News* that the only network powerful enough to create the anti-black media narrative following the riots is the Anti-Defamation League.[46] Many Black activists came to the defense of Mayor Dinkins after a New York State report, called the Girenti report, came out. This report designated Mayor Dinkins as so disengaged with his mayoral duties that he was responsible for not stopping the violence earlier.[47] The report also went against the prevailing wisdom in the Jewish community, many of whom felt that Dinkins stopped the police from intervening and allowed the Black community to attack Jews widely and with impunity. The

report did not accuse Dinkins of ordering police not to intervene, but did see the mayor as negligent and therefore at fault. [48]

Conclusion

The Crown Heights Riots are a relatively forgotten event, but the divisions between the Black and Jewish communities that this event illustrates persist. The significant and historic alliance and cooperation between the Black and Jewish communities in the U.S., grounded in mutual histories of oppression and discrimination, has dampened over time, and the legacy of the Crown Heights riots and political tensions around Israel/Palestine seems to expedite the erosion of this important alliance. The plethora of motivations and histories that culminated in the CHR demand examination across identity, race, religion, media, and politics. It is unlikely that the hundreds of Black teens who rioted hold deep-seated antisemitic viewpoints. It is far more likely that the antisemitism of a few with power and their willingness to mobilize one marginalized group against the other, resulted in the murder of an innocent man. The fears, anxieties, and anger that continue generation after generation in groups who have been historically persecuted are not weapons to be used for attention-grabbing headlines or to get a vote. The Crown Heights Riots are a perfect example of how important nuance and dialogue are, and these lessons hold especially true today when rhetoric is often broad and angry.

Notes

[1] Henry Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights* (Rutgers University Press, 2006), 7. http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/umichigan/detail.action?docID=340806

[2] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 43.

[3] Debra Nussbaum Cohen and Jackie Rothenberg, "Tension remains in Crown Heights following rioting," *American Israelite (1874-2000)*, August 29, 1991, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/tension-remains-crown-heights-following-rioting/docview/997161028/se-2?accountid=14667.

[4] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights,* 43.

[5] Goldschmidt, 45.

[6] Goldschmidt, 46.

[7] Philip Gourevitch, "The Crown Heights Riot & Its Aftermath," *Commentary* 95, no. 1 (1993), https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/magazines/crown-heights-riot-aftermath/docview/1290181014/se-2?accountid=14667.

[8] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 57.

[9] Nussbaum and Rothenberg, "Tension remains in Crown Heights following rioting."

[10] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 52.

[11] Goldschmidt, 52.

[12] Goldschmidt, 53.

[13] Michael Rothberg, *The implicated subject: beyond victims and perpetrators* (Stanford University Press, 2019).

[14] The term "race riot" was consistently used to frame the Crown Heights Riots in the media, and this paper delves into the conceptual understandings of these events and, therefore, it investigates this framing. However, the term itself is controversial. Throughout U.S. history, mainstream media sources that privilege the perspective of white communities have labeled various incidents as "race riots." It is important to recognize that Black communities have often resisted the widespread use of the term "race riot" because it fails to accurately represent that it these events are a response to systemic brutality and suppression. For instance, the deadly altercations between Black Americans and Detroit police forces in the summer of 1967 are often referred to as "The Detroit Uprising" by community members and "The 12th Street Riot" by the authorities and broader media.

[15] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 7.

[16] Gourevitch, "The Crown Heights Riot & Its Aftermath."

[17] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 50.

[18] Nussbaum and Rothenberg, "Tension remains in Crown Heights following rioting."

[19] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 19.

[20] Cohen and Rothenberg, "Tension remains in Crown Heights following rioting"; Ari L. Goldman, "Crown Heights: How Journalism Failed the Story," *Jewish Exponent*, August 25, 2011, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/crown-heights-how-journalism-failed-story/docview/888587969/se-2?accountid=14667.

[21] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 58.

[22] Goldschmidt, 64.

[23] Cohen Debra Nussbaum, "Report blames Dinkins, others for Crown Heights riots," *American Israelite (1874-2000),* July 29, 1993, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/report-blames-dinkins-others-crown-heights-riots/docview/1006766311/se-2?accountid=14667.

[24] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 51.

[25] Gourevitch, "The Crown Heights Riot & Its Aftermath," 31.

[26] Gourevitch, 31.

[27] Lawrence D. Lowenthal, "Speaking Out Against Hatred," *Jewish Advocate*, June 17, 1993, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/speaking-out-against-hatred/docview/205178952/se-2?accountid=14667.

[28] Wilbert A. Tatum, "ADL: But not this week," *New York Amsterdam News (1962-1993)*, July 3, 1993, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/adl-not-this-week/docview/226804473/se-2?accountid=14667.

[29] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 53.

[30] Tatum, "ADL: But not this week."

[31] Edward S. Shapiro, *Crown Heights: Blacks, Jews, and the 1991 Brooklyn Riot*, (Brandeis University Press; University Press of New England, 2006).

[32] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*.

[33] Goldschmidt, 5.

[34] Goldschmidt, 19.

[35] Cohen and Rothenberg, "Tension remains in Crown Heights following rioting"; Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, 71.

[36] Goldschmidt, 61.

[37] The Kerner Commission rightly placed the primary responsibility for racial unrest in America at the feet of White American systems and behaviors. This precedent influenced how mainstream media sources reported on the Crown Heights Riots, leading many Jewish readers to interpret the framing as implying that the Hasidic community of Crown Heights should either accept or excuse the violence they faced due to historical and contemporary injustices perpetrated against Black American communities by White Americans. This implication reinforced for Jews in Crown Heights, who understand themselves as Jews more than White Americans, that they are isolated as Jews in a Gentile country that either tolerates or disregards antisemitic violence.

[38] Goldman, "Crown Heights: How Journalism Failed the Story."

[39] Goldman.

[40] Goldschmidt, *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*.

[41] In the decades following the CHR, the Reverend Al Sharpton has intimated that he understands how he personally impacted the events in Crown Heights and he has tried to make amends with some groups in the Jewish community, to varying degrees of success. Ron Kampeas, "Al Sharpton admits to using 'cheap' rhetoric about Jews," *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, May 20, 2019, https://www.jta.org/2019/05/20/united-states/al-sharpton-cops-to-cheap-rhetoric-in-the-past-in-a-controversial-talk-to-reform-jews.

[42] Goldschmidt, 66.

[43] Goldschmidt, 7.

[44] C. Vernon Mason, "Crown Heights: A lawyer's brief," *New York Amsterdam News (1962-1993)*, July 3, 1993, https://proxy.lib.umich.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/crown-heights-lawyers-brief/docview/226804528/se-2?accountid=14667.

[45] *New York Amsterdam News* was NYC's most popular newspaper intended for Black readership at the time. Mason, "Crown Heights: A lawyer's brief."

[46] Tatum, "ADL: But not this week."

[47] Nussbaum, "Report blames Dinkins, others for Crown Heights riots."

[48] Nussbaum.

Interpreting *Life with a Star* as a Text on Holocaust Resistance

By Ari Leflein*

Jiri Weil's 1949 novel *Life with a Star* is a piece of Holocaust literature that chronicles the daily life and ever-increasing struggles of a Jewish man who, when forced to face his fate, undergoes a transformation of thought and chooses to resist.[1] At the start of the novel, Weil's protagonist, Josef Roubicek, is demoralized by his reality and burdened by his fate. Each day he is forced to consider the concept of death—how does one go to one's death and who determines when one faces death? As Roubicek grapples with his reality, he discovers that the Nazis wield death as their instrument of power whilst toying with the fate of Jews. With this new understanding, Josef Roubicek decides to resist. This text is an important piece of Holocaust literature because it conveys that Holocaust resistance existed in many forms beyond violent resistance. Roubicek physically resists the Nazis by going into hiding, thus putting his fate into his own hands, and he mentally resists the Nazis by adopting the mindset that his fate would be a consequence of his own choices. Through Roubicek's refusal to join "the circus"—a metaphor for the camps where Nazis bark commands at subjugated Jews—and through his refusal to be driven to death and subsequently erased from history, Roubicek exhibits a desire to resist the Nazis by stripping them of their power to control his fate. This novel's important messages about resistance previewed much of the coming scholarly discussion on Holocaust resistance, and the idea of mental resistance in this text can be further explored through other works about the Holocaust, for instance James Moll's *The Last Days* and Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*.[2]

Jiri Weil was a Jewish man living in Prague during the Nazi occupation. Weil's *Life with a Star* is a fictional novel, but, as explained by Philip Roth in the preface of the novel's 1989 translated edition, Weil's "harrowing experiences" during the war likely "furnished the inspiration and probably much of the story for *Life with a Star*."[3] In other words, this source acts as a type of fictionalized survivor testimony which allows the author to draw from his experiences and articulate his broader reflections. *Life with a Star* is a prominent piece of Czech

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literature that has not yet entered the American canon of Holocaust literature, but because of its abundant insights into the mentality of resistance, this text warrants further exploration.

The novel follows Josef Roubicek, a Jewish man who is separated from his lover Ruzena, who is forced to accept restrictions that humiliate him and strip his life of any purpose, and who constantly hears about deportations to the "town," which refers to Terezin, a concentration camp in Czechoslovakia. Initially, Roubicek is completely demoralized and somewhat resigned to his fate. However, throughout the story, Roubicek undergoes a transformation of thought. In one notable scene, Roubicek tears off the yellow star from his jacket and seems to realize that he has the power to resist, but it is only through his discussion of "the circus" that he realizes the way he can resist—through mental resistance—and it is through his exploration of death as a nuanced fate that he realizes why he must resist.[4]

For Roubicek, the decision to resist does not mean taking to the streets and facing his oppressors, it means adopting a mindset that he would not be controlled, dehumanized, and forced into total subjugation. Roubicek recalls a circus his aunt and uncle once took him to: ". . . [the animals] looked wretched and sad. I never thought about it, though, because they were always forced out into the arena. . . . When I watched the seals pushing a ball with their snouts I didn't know it was a bad thing to be an animal in the circus."[5] The "circus" becomes Roubicek's way of conceptualizing the circumstances of Jews in the camps, and Roubicek expresses, "I didn't want to enter the circus with the shaved head of a clown and let myself be kicked in the behind."[6] Roubicek identifies that the autonomy of the Jews had been taken away and that they were forced to act according to the choreography of the Nazis, and thus, he begins to question if he can refuse to join "the circus" and save himself from dehumanization, absolute subjugation, and death.

As the novel continues, Roubicek continues to raise the metaphor of "the circus" in order to convey his developing understandings about the Nazis' disgusting lust for power and absolute control. Roubicek explains, in "the circus," Jews "had to walk a tightrope without a safety net and jump over high hurdles."[7] As a Jew, Roubicek had already endured oppression, but he comes to understand that the act of being corralled into cattle cars and shipped off to walled towns meant an absolute loss of control; deportations and concentration camps meant entrusting the Nazis with the fate of the Jews. In "the circus," the movement of every Jew was ordered and orchestrated and the Nazis had the power to decide who would face death and whether they would go to death at the command of a blood-thirsty officer or as a consequence for misstepping and finding no "safety net" below. It is this realization about the Nazis' desire to carefully dictate the fate of every Jew, and to watch in amusement as they reach that fate, which forces Roubicek

to recognize that by adopting a mindset of resistance he can oppose the Nazis' subjugation, restore his own agency, and reclaim his fate.[8]

The pivotal moment when Roubicek moves from denouncing "the circus" to refusing to "join the circus" comes after a fluke incident—a moment of luck present in every Holocaust survivor's story—when the authorities called all of the other Roubiceks for deportation but mistakenly skip over the title character's name.[9] Roubicek explains, "I'm beginning to be fed up living a life someone else made up. . . . I thought they would read my name. But they didn't. And it occurred to me that I really should lead my own life."[10] Roubicek concluded, "I'm not going to go. I won't join the circus."[11] By saying that he would never "join the circus," Roubicek does not just express a desire to save himself from death, but a desire to resist the Nazis by taking away their power to control his existence and fate. Roubicek's rejection of "the circus" exemplifies physical resistance, as he would not go to his death, and more importantly, it represents mental resistance, as he would maintain his agency and refuse to cede control of his fate to the Nazis. "I really should lead my own life."

When Roubicek decides to control his own destiny and to mentally resist, he knows that death might still be his ultimate fate. However, he begins to conceptualize death as a nuanced fate. Roubicek realizes that by subjugating their victims and stripping them of their humanity in "the circus," the Nazis sought to not just kill the Jews, but to erase them from history. This realization is a second important component of Roubicek's evolution of thought and something which drives his desire to resist. Roubicek reaches this understanding when exploring the fates of several other individuals: Ruzena, his aunt and uncle, and another Josef Robitschek.

From the first page of the novel, Roubicek questions the meaning of death under the Nazis. When alone in his house, Roubicek speaks to Ruzena and says, "Ruzena could not answer. She was not in the room. . . . I didn't know what had happened to her. I hadn't seen her for a long time. Perhaps she was not on earth anymore, perhaps she had never even lived."[12] This stream of consciousness so early in the novel is unclear to readers, who do not know if Ruzena is a real person, if she is dead or alive, or what mental state Roubicek is in to be speaking with someone who is not before him. However, as the story progresses, readers learn that Ruzena was in fact a real person. Further, Roubicek eventually learns that Ruzena, who was not Jewish, was executed by the Nazis for her potential involvement with a resistance movement.[13] Before Roubicek learns of Ruzena's fate, he refers to her as dead or having never existed. However, once he knows for certain that she was killed for her connection to the resistance, he begins to refer to her as living. The shift in Roubicek's discussion of Ruzena exemplifies his final conclusion about death: those who do not resist, and thereby are killed by the Nazis, do not just cease to exist, but are erased from history. In contrast, those who resist the Nazis, and are killed as a result, live on because

they do not reach death and become erased from history by another, instead they reach death as a result of their own choices and actions.

Unlike with Ruzena, Roubicek does not know if his aunt and uncle were killed after their deportation from Prague, however, by the end of the novel he accepts that they are dead and have been erased from history. Roubicek believes that his aunt and uncle would not be remembered because they had not resisted, and thus, the Nazis succeeded in deciding their fate; the Nazis had reduced them to numbers and nobody would remember the destruction of two numbers. Roubicek says, "Only the numbers, which I had written down in my little notebook, remained. . . . I didn't have to care for Ruzena and Tomas, who were alive, but I did need to do something in memory of my aunt and uncle."[14] Roubicek expresses that Ruzena had been killed whilst controlling her own actions, but because his aunt and uncle had not resisted, the Nazis had the power to kill them and to erase their names from history. These two examples teach Roubicek that he must not succumb to the Nazis' control and that it is important for him to reclaim control over his fate by resisting the Nazis.

Finally, Roubicek complicates his discussion of death by exploring the death of another Josef Robitschek. Roubicek feels guilty that his name was skipped during the call for deportations, and thus, he goes to visit another Josef Robitschek, who had been called for deportation. Ultimately, this depressed Josef Robitschek—a man implored by his non-Jewish family to free them of any connection to a Jew—decides to commit suicide. When Roubicek learns of the suicide, he considers whether there is value in taking one's own life. Roubicek notes, "Only those who still lived in their homes could die with names. Perhaps it was a good thing to die in your home, because then your name was cited in the circular and your body was buried in the cemetery."[15]

Was suicide a form of resistance because it meant controlling one's own fate and not being erased from history? We can imagine that Roubicek considers this question as he strolls through the cemetery where he works. He says, "We passed proud monuments of black and white marble. . . . no one was caring for these distinguished stones. But they didn't require care. Solid and strong, they were erected for eternity."[16] Further, when Roubicek describes the burial of the other Josef Robitschek, he explains, "He was buried and his grave was filled. Robitschek would never be again. Perhaps he had never even existed: tomorrow a wooden tablet would be stuck on top of his grave with an inscription written with tar, giving his name in letters nobody knew how to read. Nobody would notice when the rain washed the inscription away. . . ."[17] Saying, "[p]erhaps he had never even existed," Roubicek employs nearly the same phrase as when he first described Ruzena and before he learned of her resistance. However, the notion that the inscription on Robitschek's grave would fade, but that the grave itself would remain, presents

Roubicek's understanding about a sort of middle ground between the fate of Ruzena and that of his aunt and uncle; Robitschek's suicide perpetuated the Nazis' agenda to annihilate the Jews, yet, he did not die at the command of the Nazis or in "the circus," and therefore, he was not erased from history.

With these realizations, Roubicek conveys that he will not allow the Nazis to lead him to his death and erase his name from history, he will resist. Roubicek explains, "I was no longer afraid, but I was tired. It would have been much simpler to leave with the others . . . to submerge myself among the hundreds of others going to their deaths. I would be all right; I would have peace; I would accept extinction without fear or shame. Instead, the freedom I would now have to bear would be a heavy load."[18] Roubicek chooses to resist the Nazis by going into hiding and thereby choosing freedom. Further, Roubicek undergoes a mental transformation and decides to mentally resist the Nazis by taking control of his fate. Regardless of who would win out in deciding the moment of his death, Roubicek's fate would be his own because he would either be struck down or he would survive, but it would be the result of his own choices.

Jiri Weil's text, which I previously described as a type of "fictionalized survivor testimony," does not simply hold valuable insights into what it meant to resist during the Holocaust, it also reminds us that despite the slowly evolving conversations amongst scholars, certain historical truths always existed in the testimony, just waiting to be explored. Already in 1949, when the work was published, Jiri Weil's "fictionalized survivor testimony" previewed and addressed much of the coming scholarly discussion on resistance during the Holocaust. This historiography of Holocaust resistance may be broadly understood through the works of prominent scholars like Raul Hilberg, Shaul Esh, Nachman Blumental, and Yehuda Bauer. The evolving understandings shared by these scholars will be briefly addressed in the following paragraph.

In Raul Hilberg's seminal work on the Holocaust from 1961, *The Destruction of the European Jews*, he limits the definition of resistance to physical actions taken with the intent to harm an adversary, and he presents a general lack of resistance and a widespread passivity amongst the Jews.[19] However, writing in 1962, Shaul Esh expands the definition of resistance to incorporate actions beyond that of violent uprisings. Esh promotes the type of resistance known as קידוש החיים ("sanctification of life") or "the overwhelming impulse to preserve life in the face of death."[20] In 1968, at the Yad Vashem conference exploring the topic of Jewish resistance during the Holocaust, Nachman Blumental picked up on the broadening understanding of what it meant to resist; he explained, "In my opinion, resistance is opposition to every hostile act of the enemy in all his areas of operation. . . . [B]y resistance I mean not only physical acts, but also the spiritual and moral resistance which Jews displayed under Nazi occupation."[21] Finally, in his

1979 work *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness*, Bauer both highlights wider violent resistance waged by Jewish victims as well as the importance of non-violent resistance, writing, "[the Jewish] reaction was by and large not that of demoralization, but of non-violent and occasionally violent resistance." Bauer concludes his chapter on resistance by recounting one instance in Auschwitz when Jews performed a religious ritual despite Nazi prohibitions—something which would likely be categorized as "non-violent" resistance and under the term "sanctification of life."[22] Bauer explains, ". . . they demonstrated. They asserted several principles: that contrary to Nazi lore, they were human; that Jewish tradition, history, and values had a meaning for them in the face of Auschwitz; and that they wanted to assert their humanity in a Jewish way."[23]

In some ways Weil's text comments on the idea of Jewish passivity by criticizing those who seemingly failed to resist, but he also uses Roubicek's encounters with other Jewish victims to acknowledge the tremendous and understandable hardship that left many feeling hopeless and unsure of how to resist.[24] More importantly, through Roubicek, Weil raises what I refer to as "mental resistance." In other words, Weil's text raises the value of resistance, even when intangible and unarmed, which resulted from a certain mindset of reclaiming one's fate. Weil's promotion of mental resistance contributes to what Blumental referred to as "spiritual or moral resistance" or to an understanding of other actions that scholars have categorized as "sanctification of life." Through rhetorical devices and careful storytelling, Weil shares his own reflections and conveys messages which were far ahead of the discussion on Holocaust resistance that was to come.

Finally, to further understand this alternative type of Holocaust resistance described by Weil, it is valuable to consider parallels in the stories of other Holocaust survivors. In *The Last Days*, Holocaust survivor Irene Zisblatt shares her story and the moment in which she decided to regain control over her life and to resist the Nazis. Zisblatt spoke of her arrival at Auschwitz and of the tremendous suffering of Jews. She explained that not only were the Jews oppressed and driven to death, but also that the Nazis sought to gain absolute control over the actions of the Jews. Zisblatt's discussion of the Nazis' desire to control how Jews died resembles Roubicek's discussion of the Nazis' control over the Jews performing in "the circus." Zisblatt stated that in the concentration camps some Jews could no longer tolerate their circumstances, and therefore, "when the electricity went on, they ran to the barbed wire to commit suicide. Then they punished us, for every man that ran to the wire they took a hundred inmates and they killed them in front of everybody as an example. They didn't even let us die when we wanted."[25] Zisblatt discusses her realization that the Nazis controlled death and wielded it as a foreboding fate over the Jews. With this realization, Zisblatt decided to take control of her own fate. "I thought of something:

they took away my parents, they took away my identity, they took away my siblings, they took away my possessions, there is something that they want from me. And then I thought of my soul. And I said, 'they're not gonna take my soul.'"[26] While Zisblatt's decision to resist arose in a different context, Zisblatt and Roubicek shared a similar desire for and approach to resistance.

In *Survival in Auschwitz*, a Holocaust memoir first published in 1947, Primo Levi further discusses the notion of refusing to cede control to the Nazis and thereby resisting their efforts to dehumanize and defeat Jewish individuals. Generally, Levi's text is different from *Life with a Star*. Levi's memoir is about life in a concentration camp and he writes of the most gruesome details of the Holocaust. Further, Levi's tone is somewhat depressive and he is hesitant to expend the energy to resist; unlike Roubicek, Levi never fully adopts a mindset of resistance. This is not to say that Levi's daily struggle and eventual survival was insignificant, but merely that Levi's mindset is more aptly characterized by despair rather than hope.[27] Nonetheless, in one particularly powerful passage, Levi discusses the mental resistance of another inmate. Levi paraphrases the words of Steinlauf, whom Levi speaks with as the other inmate washes. The topic of discussion between the two men is the value, or lack thereof, of dedicating effort to washing oneself. Levi contests that there is no reason to wash, and he argues, "We will all die, we are all about to die: if they give me ten minutes between the reveille and work, I want to dedicate them to something else."[28] To that Steinlauf responds,

> [P]recisely because the Lager [is] a great machine to reduce us to beasts, we must not become beasts. . . . We are slaves, deprived of every right, exposed to every insult, condemned to certain death, but we still possess one power, and we must defend it with all our strength for it is the last—the power to refuse our consent. So we must certainly wash our faces without soap in dirty water . . . to remain alive, not to begin to die.[29]

While dedicating effort to washing oneself seems like an insignificant act with no real effect, it was a way for Jews to defy the Nazi effort to dehumanize and demean them. "[T]he power to refuse our consent" meant to resist and to prevent the Nazis' objective to dictate every aspect of the lives of Jews. Physical resistance was not always possible, but Jews had the power to mentally resist—that power was exhibited by Josef Roubicek, by Irene Zisblatt, and by Steinlauf.

Life with a Star is a powerful piece of Holocaust literature that conveys the inner turmoil of a Jewish individual facing extensive restrictions and considering philosophical questions. In the text, Josef Roubicek undergoes a tremendous transformation, he goes from being passive and hesitant to act, to taking action and being resistant; he decides to fight for his fate and the right to be more than a number. The novel provides insight into what it meant to resist during the Holocaust. Additionally, the testimony of Irene Zisblatt, in *The Last Days*, and the perspective of Steinlauf, in *Survival in Auschwitz*, convey the unwavering commitment of individuals who

chose to resist oppression in whatever way they could. Resistance did not always occur on a grand scale, it could be an individual act or mindset. Further, resistance was not always effective in reaching the intended desire. Nonetheless, every form of resistance is significant and powerful.

Notes

[1] Jiri Weil, *Life with a Star*, trans. Rita Klimova with Roslyn Schloss (Northwestern University Press, 1998).

[2] *The Last Days*, directed by James Moll (1998, USC Shoah Foundation, 2021) Streaming; Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, trans. Stuart Woolf (Simon & Schuster, 1996).

[3] Weil, *Life with a Star*, vi.

[4] Broadly speaking, the title "Life with a Star" refers to the life of subjugation which came with the yellow star that Jews were forced to wear. However, the symbol of the star also has significance in Roubicek's evolving understandings of resistance. In the novel, Roubicek observes that unlike the stars that shine in the night sky, the yellow, cloth stars that Jews were forced to wear did not shine at night. In other words, it seems Roubicek realizes that while the presence of the yellow star on his chest has real consequences, that yellow star was not real or permanent and it held no intrinsic power. Thus, after Roubicek is thrown from a moving streetcar by a passenger who notices his yellow star, and after he is encouraged by a sympathetic passerby to "tear it off," Roubicek realizes the absurdity of this piece of cloth and removes the badge. At this point in the novel, Roubicek understands that he has agency and the power to control his own fate. But, it is through the metaphor of "the circus" that he ultimately realizes how he can resist and reclaim control over his fate. Weil, 63, 71, 81.

[5] Weil, 104-105.

[6] Weil, 105.

[7] Weil, 115.

[8] Weil, 160.

[9] Weil, 123.

[10] Weil, 154.

[11] Weil, 160.

[12] Weil, 3.

[13] Weil, 192.

[14] Weil, 200.

[15] Weil, 131.

[16] Weil, 146.

[17] Weil, 146-147.

[18] Weil, 207-208.

[19] Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Quadrangle Books, 1961).

[20] While Esh's work is an early and important exploration on the concept of "sanctification of life," the term itself is attributed to Rabbi Isaac Nissenbaum who, when in the Warsaw Ghetto, sought to describe a from of resistance different from the existing idea of resistance through martyrdom or קידוש השם ("sanctification of the Name"). Shaul Esh, "The Dignity of the Destroyed: Toward a Definition of the Period of the Holocaust," *Judaism: A Quarterly Journal of Jewish Life and Thought* 11, no. 2 (1962), 106-107.

[21] Nachman Blumental, "Sources for the Study of Jewish Resistance," in *Jewish Resistance During the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance Jerusalem, April 7-11, 1968* (Alpha Press, 1971), 46-47.

[22] Yehuda Bauer, The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness (University of Toronto Press, 1979), 5.

[23] Bauer, 39-40.

[24] Roubicek's encounters with his aunt and uncle are good examples of how he is both critical of a seeming lack of resistance and how he understands that a sense of demoralization simply left some feeling unable to resist. Even before the war, Roubicek's relationship with his aunt and uncle was highly contentious. And when Roubicek visits his aunt and uncle during the war, he is both the target of their unfair and relentless criticisms and the wielder of silent criticisms toward them about their materialism. However, when his aunt and uncle are called up for deportation, Roubicek accompanies them to the place of departure. Roubicek's uncle says, "Goodbye, Josef. . . . You're not angry at me for all the things I said to you, are you?" Roubicek's aunt kisses him goodbye and says, "Maybe at least you will survive this." Roubicek responds, "We will all survive and we'll all meet again. Everything will be beautiful again when we meet." Roubicek knows that this is not true, and that he will never see his aunt and uncle again. But, in their final moment together, Roubicek chooses to part with tender words and a hopeful message. Roubicek does not believe that his aunt and uncle should be admonished for their decision or for lacking the strength to resist; he in no way promotes Raul Hilberg's harmful message that those who were unable to resist were somehow complicit in their own destruction. Roubicek will eventually refuse to "join the circus," choose to resist, and act to ensure that he is not "erased" from history. But his own realization to resist is just that, it is a product of his own evolution of thought. He finds value in resistance, but he does not criticize others as complicit in their own destruction. Weil, *Life with a Star*, 114.

[25] Moll, *The Last Days*, 00:40:10 – 00:40:30.

[26] Moll, 00:40:30 – 00:40:50.

[27] The idea of hope and despair is meant to comment on the unimaginable trauma and resulting mentality of victims of the Holocaust. In other words, some victims seemed to maintain or rediscover a sense of hope based on their understanding that they still had a reason to live or that by some way of luck or act of resistance they might survive. However, others seemed to become so defeated by their reality that they simply could not continue on, or, they could continue on from day-to-day through routine tasks, but they could not imagine even the slightest hope of survival. One important text which drastically expands our understanding of this distinction between hope and despair is Terrence Des Pres' *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps*. Specifically, De Pres addresses this topic through his discussion of "nightmare" and "waking." Through his analysis of testimonies about the camp experience, Des Pres discerns common phases of mental transformation experienced by camp inmates. He explains that upon entering the camps many individuals could only describe their reality as existing within a nightmare; these individuals entered a first phase of "initial collapse," or, complete despair. Des Pres continues on to explain that some, with time, could move on to a second phase "characterized by reintegration and recovery of stable selfhood. Very much as if they were waking up, survivors went from withdrawal to engagement." In other words, Des Pres comments on an initial shock which plunged "survivors"—a term he elaborates on elsewhere in the text—into "initial collapse" and, for some, a period of time which allowed them to reemerge in a diminished state and continue on. It seems that Primo Levi was one of those who was able to reemerge and continue on through the daily routine of the camps, but he was not an individual who ever really discovered a sense of hope or belief that he might survive. Terrence Des Pres, "Nightmare and Waking," in *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (Oxford University Press, 1976), 77.

[28] Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 40.

[29] Levi, 41.

Competing Visions of a City on a Hill: Jewish Self-Determination in Ottoman Palestine in the Late 19th and Early 20th Centuries

By Gideon Shaked*

When exploring Jewish self-determination in Ottoman Palestine, one uncovers the contrasting aspirations between Ottoman Sephardi Jews and diasporic, mainly Ashkenazi, Jewish immigrants. Sephardi Jews, with their deep roots and integration into Ottoman society, primarily leaned towards a self-determination that emphasized cultural autonomy and coexistence within the existing state framework.[1] In contrast, Ashkenazi immigrants, influenced by their European backgrounds and experiences of persecution, mostly advocated for the creation of a Jewish nation-state, although it should be noted that neither Sephardi nor Ashkenazi opinion was monolithic.[2] As the global Jewish community struggled with how to respond to the tumultuous events of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews everywhere vigorously debated what exactly should be their literal "city on a hill."[3]

This journey through differing visions of self-determination not only highlights the diversity within Jewish thought and aspiration, it also contributes to broader discussions of nationalism and identity. By examining this pivotal historical moment, this paper offers insights into the enduring questions of belonging and coexistence. Further, this piece relates to contemporary challenges and enriches the discourse on the complexities of collective identity in a multifaceted world.

The Many Flavors of Jewish Self-Determination

One common misconception of Jewish self-determination is that such determination must result in a state and that the existence of such a state is a zero-sum game in some sense, wherein whatever one gains must be taken from someone else in equal measure. However, this concept has proved inconsistent with history. In "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel': The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine's Sephardi Jews, 1908-13,"

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Michelle Campos writes that the "Zionism of the Ottoman Sephardim was strongly shaped by cultural Hebraism and a Jewish collective consciousness."[4] Furthermore, in his 1908 letter on the state of Ottoman Jewry, the Greek and Jewish journalist David Isaac Florentin wrote, "libraries and lecture halls should be built everywhere as a complement to synagogues for some and as their replacement for others."[5] From these sources, one can infer somewhat that Jews in the Ottoman Empire saw self-determination as a process of freely celebrating and practicing their culture.

The Ottoman Jewish push for self-determination was twofold: a desire to escape second-hand citizenship and practice Judaism freely, as well as an organized political push for self-determination in the context of rising nationalism around the world. However, the political push was not limited to aspirations for a fully self-governing state. Rather, there were pushes for self-determination within the context of existing states as well. In 1901, Albert Antébi, a prominent Jew living in Ottoman Palestine at the time, said that he wished to "be a Jewish deputy in the Ottoman Parliament and not one in the Hebrew temple on Moriah. . . . The future is with the liberal Ottoman patriotic mission, active and devoted."[6] In this case, Antébi made the case of Jewish self-determination as a matter of democratic participation in an egalitarian Ottoman state, rather than a political revolution of some kind. Many years later, in a 1947 meeting between King Abdullah I bin Al-Hussein of Jordan and Golda Meir, King Abdullah attempted to avoid the looming prospect of war between Jews and various Arab states and groups by suggesting that Israel become a semi-autonomous portion of greater Jordan.[7] He suggested "the idea, for future consideration, of an independent Hebrew Republic in part of Palestine within a Transjordan state that would include both banks of the Jordan, with me at its head, and in which the economy, the army and the legislature will be joint."[8] Again, this is a case of political Jewish self-determination that would not result in Jewish sovereignty. In other words, over a long time period, many theories of Jewish self-determination existed that were not necessarily advocating for an independent state. Through the early twentieth century, Jewish self-determination took on varied forms, as it had yet to settle on classic Zionism in the vein of Theodor Herzl.[9]

Sephardim: in Favor of Ottomanism and Jewish Social, Cultural, and Economic Revival

Non-statist Jewish self-determination was not merely an acceptable or present form of Jewish self-determination in Ottoman Palestine, it was likely the most prevalent form of thought on the matter of Jewish self-determination among the Sephardi Jews of Ottoman Palestine. Furthermore, many Sephardim saw non-sovereign Jewish freedom as linked to their identities as loyal subjects of the Ottoman Empire, given that it was the Ottoman Empire which granted them a degree of cultural autonomy as a minority group. Ottoman Jewry's enthusiasm for the existence

of Jewish culture within Ottoman society is indicated by the emergence of nationalist Sephardi newspapers in early twentieth century Palestine, one of which was *ha-Herut*. Despite existing in a state where Jews were, at the time, a small minority, and where the common language of commerce was not Hebrew, this newspaper proclaimed, "that it is a national paper, whose main aim was to revive the Hebrew language."[10]

As for the link to "Ottomanism," a term which may be defined as the assimilation and integration of non-Ottoman peoples into the Ottoman Empire, the Izmir[11] poet Reuben Qattan wrote in the Spanish newspaper *El Liberal* in 1909 that "before everything we should live Ottoman lives, cultivate the language of the Ottomans, form an integral part of the Ottoman nation, and sincerely love the Ottoman patria."[12] Further fortifying this perspective is the proclamation of the Chief Sephardic Rabbi of Ottoman Palestine, Ya'akov Sha'ul Elyashar. The Rabbi's unequivocal declaration expresses considerable loyalty to the Ottoman government: "We, as with all the congregation of Israel that rests under the shade of the government of our lord, our king, His Majesty the Sultan, are faithful subjects of His Majesty our mighty King, and of his righteous and just ministers."[13] These sentiments reaffirm that for the Sephardi Jews deeply rooted in Ottoman Palestine, their allegiance was not divided, rather, their Jewish identity found harmonious coexistence within the Ottoman empire. In these two statements, the emphasis on Ottoman culture, language, and national identity signifies a profound commitment to the coexistence of Jewish identity within the broader framework of Ottomanism and strongly suggests an underlying link between the two concepts in the minds of Sephardim.

For those Sephardim whose roots ran deep in Ottoman Palestine, the notion of Jewish statehood was not only incongruent with their identity but also diametrically opposed to it. The prevailing sentiment among Sephardi Jews was a testament to their profound integration into Ottoman culture and society, where loyalty to the Ottoman nation took precedence over separatist aspirations. This perspective reflects a unique manifestation of cultural Jewish self-determination, where the preservation of cultural and national harmony within the Ottoman context was paramount, eclipsing most inclinations towards an independent Jewish state.

Diaspora Jews: in Pursuit of a Sovereign Nation-State

In stark contrast to the prevailing sentiments among Ottoman Sephardim, the influx of diaspora Jews into Ottoman Palestine through several rounds of immigration brought with it a shift in ideological orientation, predominantly leaning towards the aspiration for a Jewish nation-state. This dichotomy of views underscores the diverse and multifaceted nature of Jewish self-determination, shaped by the distinct experiences and histories of different communities.

The narrative of diaspora immigrants, most of whom were Ashkenazi, was characterized by a resolute commitment to the establishment of a Jewish state. As noted by Abigail Jacobsen, their mentality and ideological background were distinctly European, reflecting a departure from the cultural and political landscape of the Ottoman Sephardim. A prime example would be the workers' newspapers *ha-Po'el ha-Tza'ir* and *ha-Ahdut*, which extolled the messaging that "class solidarity and class struggle would be carried out only following the success of the national struggle."[14] This statement highlights how, in contrast to the existing Ottoman Jewish population, immigrant Jews from the diaspora prioritized political revolution over economic, social, or cultural issues. This difference in values most likely had roots in the intense persecution that Ashkenazi Jews had faced in Europe, which made them wary of engaging with local Arabs with whom they had mutual hostility. An additional contributing factor was likely the lack of cultural contact between the local Arab population, which existed in its own towns and larger cities, and Ashkenazi Jewish immigrants, who mainly lived in rural *kibbutzim* and mainly spoke Yiddish, Hebrew, or various European languages.[15]

Additionally, unlike their Sephardi counterparts, many Ashkenazi immigrants were not granted Ottoman citizenship, instead they maintained ties to the foreign countries from which they came.[16] This lack of citizenship for the immigrant diaspora Jews not only enabled a detachment from Ottoman political identity, it also added fuel to the already widely accepted perception among Ottoman officials of "political Zionism as a danger imported by European, and largely Russian, Jews, [and one] supported by meddling European governments."[17]

After delving into the histories of Ashkenazi immigrants who arrived in Ottoman Palestine, a discernible contrast in perspectives emerges, shedding light on the factors that shaped the differing views of Ashkenazi Jews compared to their Sephardi counterparts. In fact, "many of the immigrants, especially those who came from Russia, carried with them fresh memories of the pogroms and riots against the Jews."[18] The haunting echoes of persecution and antisemitism lingered in the Ashkenazi consciousness, fostering a distinct worldview that fueled their fervent pursuit of a Jewish homeland in Ottoman Palestine. This stark divergence becomes more apparent when juxtaposed against the relatively comfortable existence for Jews within the Ottoman Empire. The Ashkenazi immigrants, shaped by the traumatic legacy of antisemitic violence, viewed the prospect of a Jewish state in Ottoman Palestine as a refuge from the shadows of persecution that loomed large in their recent past. This sharp dissonance in historical experiences, as elucidated by Abigail Jacobsen, thus becomes a pivotal lens through which to understand the motivations and aspirations that set the Ashkenazim on a trajectory distinct from their Sephardi counterparts in the pursuit of Jewish self-determination.

The Decline of Ottomanism in the Ottoman Sephardi Community

While the Sephardi community initially embraced Ottomanism both as a self-evident piece of ideology and a reaction to the influx of diasporic Jewish immigrants clamoring for a state, they eventually began to engage with the concept of a Jewish state given certain events during the first decade of the 1900s. In one case, a drunken homeless Jew named Shlomo allegedly insulted Islam in public and was brutally beaten and arrested. The Sephardi press reacted angrily, harshly criticizing the Ottoman government.[19] In light of this incident and other similar incidents, many Sephardi Jews shifted to uniting in solidarity rather than promoting their place within the broader Ottoman society.

The intricate political landscape of Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century complicates any attempt to pinpoint cause-and-effect relationships. Nonetheless, it is plausible that specific incidents and broader societal shifts related to said incidents played a role in fostering the sentiments that eventually coalesced into a call for political independence. As such, it is not beyond reason to contemplate that the growing Jewish sentiment advocating for political independence for the sake of security may have found roots in pivotal events, such as the incident mentioned earlier.

Conclusion

The era preceding the establishment of Israel reflects a nuanced tapestry of divergent perspectives among Jews and Arabs in the region. It is crucial to recognize that ethnic identity did not rigidly dictate political allegiance, and individuals held a spectrum of views that defied easy categorization. Further, the complexity of this historical period challenges simplistic narratives and underscores the importance of acknowledging the diversity of opinions within these communities.

One poignant reminder of the potential for coexistence lies in historical accounts of Arab-Jewish amity, where there were “close relations between the Sephardim and the Muslims: the children played together, the Jews used the Muslim public baths, and the Muslims were taken care of by Jewish physicians.”[20] These interwoven threads of daily life stand as a testament to the possibility of harmonious coexistence in the very land that later became a focal point of geopolitical tensions.

The realization that coexistence was not only possible but once a reality underscores the transformative power of historical narratives. As contemporary discussions grapple with the complexities of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the historical memory of shared spaces and mutual interactions serves as a beacon, challenging assumptions about irreconcilable differences.

Recognizing the richness of the past encourages a nuanced understanding of the present and hopefully raises hope for a potential for renewed coexistence in the future.

Notes

[1] Sephardi Jews are a Jewish diaspora population who lived in the Iberian Peninsula (Portugal and Spain). The Sephardi Jews in Ottoman Palestine had been there since 1492, after the Spanish Inquisition forced all of the local Jews to convert, be killed, or flee. A sizeable portion of the Sephardi Jewish population immigrated to Ottoman Palestine. Rebecca Weiner, "Judaism: Sephardim," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/sephardim.

[2] Ashkenazi Jews are a Jewish diaspora population historically from Europe. Ashkenazi Jews mainly arrived in Ottoman Palestine, which after World War I became the British Mandate for Palestine and later Israel, from the 1880s through the 1940s. Shira Schoenberg, "Judaism: Ashkenazim," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ashkenazim.

[3] The phrase "a city on a hill" is a biblical proverb that comes from the Sermon on the Mount. The sermon was delivered by Jesus on the Mount of Beatitudes, a hill on land that was then part of the Roman province of Judea and is now part of Israel.

[4] Michelle Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel': The Struggle over Ottomanism and Zionism among Palestine's Sephardi Jews, 1908-13," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* vol. 37, issue 4 (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 470.

[5] Julia Philips Cohen and Sarah Abrevaya Stein, *Sephardi Lives: A Documentary History, 1700–1950* (Stanford University Press, 2014), 218.

[6] Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel,'" 466.

[7] The war that King Abdullah was attempting to stave off was the First Arab–Israeli war, which began in 1948.

[8] Ezra Danin, "Siha Im Abdallah, 17.11.1947 (Conversation with Abdallah, 17 November 1947)," Central Zionist Archives.

[9] Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian Jew, is regarded by many as the father of modern political Zionism. He advocated for a fully sovereign Jewish nation-state. "Theodor (Binyamin Ze'ev) Herzl: 1860-1904," Jewish Virtual Library, accessed January 9, 2025, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/theodor-binyamin-ze-rsquo-ev-herzl.

[10] Ella Shohat, "Sephardim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims." *Social Text*, no. 19/20 (1988): 1–35. https://doi.org/10.2307/466176.

[11] Izmir was an Ottoman city which, between the 1400s and the 1950s, had a large Jewish population.

[12] Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel,'" 471.

[13] Michael Talbot, "'Jews, Be Ottomans!' Zionism, Ottomanism, and Ottomanisation in the Hebrew-Language Press, 1890–1914," *Die Welt Des Islams* 56, no. 3/4 (2016), 370. https://www.jstor.org/stable/24893998.

[14] Abigail Jacobson, "Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the 'Arab Question' in Pre-First World War Palestine: A Reading of Three Zionist Newspapers," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 2 (April 2003), 123. https://doi.org/10.1080/714004509.

[15] *Kibbutzim* (sing. *kibbutz*) are small villages in Israel which were initially formed by Jews who arrived in Ottoman Palestine in the early twentieth century. Early *kibbutzim* were based around collectivist, economic principles, a lifestyle which continues in many *kibbutzim* to this day.

[16] Jacobson, "Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the 'Arab Question' in Pre-First World War Palestine," 108.

[17] Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel,'" 471.

[18] Jacobson, "Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the 'Arab Question' in Pre-First World War Palestine," 125.

[19] Campos, "Between 'Beloved Ottomania' and 'The Land of Israel,'" 478.

[20] Jacobson, “Sephardim, Ashkenazim and the ‘Arab Question’ in Pre-First World War Palestine,” 124.

Can *Parade* Call Broadway Home?
An Analysis of *Parade*'s Success on Broadway in 1998 and 2023

By Dana Steiner*

In 1998, a musical called *Parade* first hit Broadway. This groundbreaking musical, which tells the true and tragic story of Leo Frank, got tepid reviews. Vincent Canby, from *The New York Times*, wrote that "'Parade' is without life. It plays as if it were still a collection of notes for a show that has yet to be discovered."[1] Ben Brantley, also from *The New York Times*, wrote that "The death of Leo Frank may be an unlikely subject for a musical, but that is not what sabotages 'Parade.'"[2] Nevertheless, 25 years later, *Parade* reappeared on Broadway and won a Tony Award for Best Revival of a Musical. The 2023 production's reviews provided a stark contrast to the original. For example, Jesse Green, from *The New York Times*, wrote: "Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond star in a timely and gorgeously sung Broadway revival of the 1998 musical about the Leo Frank case."[3] Clearly, something was different.

So, what happened in the twenty-five years between the original production and the revival? Why were the productions received so differently? How does this change reflect upon the role of musicals in the political and cultural sphere amidst a changing society? In what ways does the meaning of art transform based on who sees it and when it is shared?

Before we can analyze these questions, we must understand the true story of Leo Frank, the plot of *Parade,* and what kinds of social issues the musical tries to convey. Additionally, we must consider the cultural contexts in which both productions of *Parade* were performed.

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Background of Parade

Historical Background on Leo Frank

Parade is a dramatization of the true story of Leo Frank. Leo Frank was born in Texas on April 17, 1884, to German-Jewish parents. When Frank was still a baby, his family moved to Brooklyn, New York, where he grew up. In 1906, Leo Frank received an engineering degree from Cornell University. When he was 24 years old, Leo Frank moved to Atlanta to work as the superintendent of a pencil factory. In 1911, he married Atlanta native Lucille Selig, "who was, like Frank, a Jew of German ancestry born in the United States."[4] Being born in Atlanta, Lucille was much more assimilated to Southern culture than Leo. Leo was more involved in the Jewish community in Atlanta, and he was immediately accepted to the elite Jewish fraternity B'nai B'rith. Soon after he joined, he was elected president of the organization. B'nai B'rith was an important organization for Jews in Atlanta to connect with their Judaism. Leo Frank was a leader in his community, and at that point, neither his Jewish nor his northern identity had a substantial negative impact on his status in Atlanta. According to the book *The Jew Accused*, by Albert S. Lindemann, Leo Frank "appears to have been a typical member of the German-Jewish bourgeois elite of the city, widely recognized as law abiding, hard-working, and inoffensive."[5]

However, Leo Frank's status as he knew it was about to change. On April 26, 1913, Mary Phagan, a 13-year-old girl who worked in the pencil factory where Leo Frank worked, was found dead in the basement of the factory. The night watchman of the factory, Newt Lee, found her assaulted and bruised body and called the police. Earlier that day, Phagan had gone to Frank to receive her weekly pay, and Frank was the last person to acknowledge seeing Phagan alive. The next day, when the police arrived to question Frank, he seemed nervous, but the police temporarily concluded he was not the murderer. However, for the next few days, Atlanta townspeople were enraged about the murder of Mary Phagan. Feeling the pressure to find a culprit, detectives looked for more evidence to convict Leo Frank and ended up arresting him along with five other suspects. One of these suspects was "Jim Conley, a Black janitor at the pencil factory [who] was arrested after he was found rinsing what appeared to be bloodstains out of a shirt."[6]

Leo Frank's trial followed. The prosecution, led by Hugh Dorsey, based their case primarily on testimony from Jim Conley, who was coached to speak against Frank. Conley's testimony frequently changed, as he described how Leo Frank killed Mary Phagan in increasing detail. In these stories, he claimed that he helped Leo Frank dispose of Mary Phagan's body, fearing the consequences if he did not. In an odd paradox, racist ideas actually helped the jury

believe Jim Conley, despite his changing testimony. According to Aaron Surrain, much of the jury believed that "any black person would be incapable of remembering such a complex story unless it were true."[7]

Leo Frank's lawyers leaned on the claim that antisemitism propelled the testimony against him. In fact, during the trial, Frank's lawyers claimed that "if Frank had not been a Jew, there never would have been any prosecution against him."[8] Whether this is completely true or not, certain antisemitic stereotypes circulated in Atlanta at the time, including the idea of "wanton young Jewish males who hungered for fair-haired Gentile women."[9] During the trial, multiple female workers at the pencil factory testified that Frank made unwanted advances toward them at work. Additionally, Frank's visual appearance was a source for discussion. Reporter Tom Watson called Frank a pervert, with evidence coming from Frank's "bulging, satyr eyes . . . the protruding fearfully sensual lips; and also the animal jaw."[10] This dehumanizing reference to Frank's appearance as a form of evidence shows clear prejudice against him. All of these claims kept piling up, especially when amplified by the press. The pressure was quickly building in Atlanta to find the culprit of this horrible crime. Atlantans surrounding the courthouse as well as spectators chanted "Hang the Jew" during the trial and hoped for Leo Frank to be convicted.[11] Finally, after twenty-five days, Leo Frank was found guilty, and he was sentenced to death.

For the next two years, Leo Frank was imprisoned. During that time, he tried to appeal his sentence. Frank's lawyers petitioned all the way up to the Supreme Court at least thirteen times to get his case reopened, but these appeals did not succeed. Many people, especially those in Georgia, believed that Leo Frank was given a fair trial and wanted the killer of Mary Phagan to be punished. However, support for Leo Frank from outside of Georgia began pouring in. In *The Jew Accused*, Lindemann described the widespread support for Leo Frank from Northern Americans during the time Frank was imprisoned: "Over one thousand [letters were sent] to the governor of Georgia and to the Prison Commission, urging that Frank's sentence be commuted to life imprisonment. . . . Thousands of petitions flowed in as well, containing over a million signatures."

In the end, Georgia Governor John Slaton made the decision to reexamine Leo Frank's case. As Governor, Slaton gained access to more information which he used to examine whether he should commute Frank's death sentence. For example, he received a letter from the judge of Leo Frank's trial, Judge Roan. In this letter, Roan expressed that he made a mistake in sentencing Frank to death. Additionally, Slaton found out that the factory janitor Jim Conley confessed the murder of Mary Phagan to his lawyer. With those pieces of information along with a few other hesitations regarding the feasibility of the events of the murder as Conley told them, Slaton

concluded that Frank's death sentence should be commuted to life imprisonment. With this announcement, Slaton received immediate backlash from citizens in Georgia. In fact, Slaton received thousands of death threats and an angry mob even attacked his home in June of 1915.[12]

Two months later, in August of 1915, a group called "The Knights of Mary Phagan," consisting of a group of Georgian citizens who claimed they simply aimed to carry out "what the [legal] system had failed to do," abducted Leo Frank from his prison cell in the middle of the night.[13] They took Frank to Marietta, the town where Mary Phagan was from, and hanged him from an oak tree. A mob of people came to Marietta to view Frank's body, believing they finally got justice for the crime they believed he committed. That same year, members of "The Knights of Mary Phagan" would come together again to resurrect the Ku Klux Klan.[14]

In 1982, over 65 years after Leo Frank was hanged, a man named Alonzo Mann stepped forward with testimony. Mann, who had worked as an office boy at the pencil factory with Frank, had reportedly seen Jim Conley carry Mary Phagan's body to the basement of the factory on the day she was found dead. However, Mann claimed that Conley threatened to kill him if he told anyone, so he stayed silent. At age 83, Alonzo Mann couldn't hold on to his secret for any longer, so he decided to share what he had seen so many years ago.[15] This testimony brought the case back to the forefront of people's attention in the 1980s and 1990s, inspiring films, TV shows, and educational programs. In 1998, Leo Frank's story hit the Broadway stage.

Creative Team of *Parade*

In the 1990s, a group of creative professionals came together to turn Leo Frank's story into a musical. The idea for the musical *Parade* stemmed from a conversation between playwright and Georgia native Alfred Uhry and legendary director/producer Harold "Hal" Prince.

Alfred Uhry had just written the play *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*, the second of his "Atlanta trilogy": three pieces of theater based on his experiences as a Southern Jew growing up in Atlanta in the mid-twentieth century. Each production in this trilogy, which started with *Driving Miss Daisy* and concluded with *Parade*, features themes relating to Uhry's own Judaism and experiences within Southern society.[16]

Driving Miss Daisy is about Daisy Werthan, a seventy-two-year-old Jewish widow who lives in the South in 1948. When Daisy's son hires her a chauffeur, a Black man named Hoke, some of her prejudices are revealed. However, throughout the show, Daisy and Hoke grow fond of each other. The show deals with themes of prejudice, Black-Jewish relations, and life in the

deep South just before the Civil Rights movement. Uhry successfully approached these difficult topics, creating a heartwarming play that won the 1988 Pulitzer Prize for Drama.[17]

The Last Night of Ballyhoo, the second play of Uhry's Atlanta Trilogy, also takes place in the South, this time in 1939. The Freitag family is an elitist German Jewish family in Atlanta. World War II is about to break out, but the Freitag family is more preoccupied with Ballyhoo, an important social event. This play examines themes of class and status, especially when relating to the Jewish elite in the South. *The Last Night of Ballyhoo* was also successful, receiving a Tony Award for Best Play in 1997.[18]

Once Uhry got to *Parade*, he had already written two works of drama that deal with Judaism in the American South in the first half of the twentieth century. The story behind *Parade* was closely connected to Uhry's family, according to an interview with Alfred Uhry on *Broadway World* in 2023.[19] In fact, Uhry's great-uncle owned the pencil factory which employed Leo Frank, and Uhry's grandmother was social acquaintances with Leo and Lucille Frank. After Hal Prince had seen *The Last Night of Ballyhoo,* Prince and Uhry had a conversation about Southern Jews during the early twentieth century and Uhry told Prince about the Leo Frank case, which led to a revelation. In an interview, Uhry stated, "I told [Prince], and he literally put his glasses on top of his head and he said, 'That's a musical.'"[20]

Hal Prince joined the original production of *Parade* as the director. By that point, he had already reached major success as a Broadway director and producer. Before *Parade*, Prince produced *West Side Story* and *Fiddler on the Roof*. He also directed *Cabaret*, *Company*, *Sweeney Todd*, *Evita*, and *The Phantom of the Opera*. According to Harold Prince's Masterworks Broadway page, in his fifty-year-long career, "Prince . . . received ten Drama Desk Awards as Outstanding Director and 21 Tony Awards for Best Direction, Best Producer, Best Musical, and Lifetime Achievement."[21]

Alfred Uhry and Hal Prince then reached out to legendary composer and lyricist Stephen Sondheim, who had already won eight Tony awards by 1994, to collaborate with them on *Parade*.[22] He initially agreed, working on the project for about three weeks. However, he had just written a show called *Passion*, which dealt with dark subject matter. Soon, Sondheim decided he could not put himself through creating another musical with such a dark plot, so he stepped down from writing the music and lyrics for *Parade*.

After Sondheim left the show, Hal Prince reached out to his daughter's friend, a man named Jason Robert Brown. Brown was in his twenties at the time and had never written a Broadway musical before. Uhry and Brown discussed Uhry's experiences in the South for six months, as Brown had never been there. In a *Broadway World* interview, Brown described this

half-year period as him "downloading from Alfred and trying to bring the story he wanted to tell to life."[23] Six months into their collaboration, Brown invited Uhry over to his New York apartment and played the opening number of *Parade* to him. Uhry described that meaningful moment where he knew for sure that Jason Robert Brown would be able to bring this story to life: "I was just gobsmacked. I think I cried, and I'm not a crier."[24]

Since *Parade* in 1998, Jason Robert Brown has written multiple successful Broadway musicals, including *The Last Five Years*, *The Bridges of Madison County*, *13,* and *Honeymoon in Vegas*. He is currently working on two new musicals, *The Connector* and *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*.[25]

Plot of Parade

The musical *Parade* begins with the sound of military drums being played. It is 1862 and a young Confederate soldier enters stage and sings to his love, Lila, before going off to war. The refrain of his song is as follows:

I go to fight for these old hills behind me,

These old red hills of home.

I go to fight for these old hills remind me

Of a way of life that's pure –

Of the truth that must endure . . .[26]

This song called "The Old Red Hills of Home" introduces the audience to the Southern setting and Georgia community that serve as a backdrop to the story of *Parade*. Its melody reappears throughout *Parade* to constantly remind the audience where the story takes place as well as the patriotic values present in Atlanta. After the young soldier finishes singing, the music transitions as the events onstage jump fifty years into the future, to 1913. Suddenly, an old man replaces the younger version of himself. The old man continues singing his refrain from fifty years prior to a crowd of townspeople celebrating the Confederate Memorial Day Parade. This time he sings about his past self and the heroism he endured for his country during the Civil War:

We gave our lives for the old hills of Georgia,

The old red hills of home.

Soon, the townspeople fill the stage with Confederate flags, balloons, and parasols, celebrating their Memorial Day Parade. This burgeoning celebration reveals to the audience that fifty years later, Atlanta still holds many of the same ideals that they did during the Civil War. This patriotic

display overwhelms the stage with an abundance of Confederate pride that would likely make a modern New York City audience feel uneasy.

In a video for *TheaterMania*, *Parade* composer and lyricist Jason Robert Brown plays excerpts from "The Old Red Hills of Home" on the piano and explains the significance of this song in setting up the rest of the show:

> If you're smart, your opening number not only tells you the rules for the rest of the show, but ultimately has all of the musical material you're gonna need for the rest of the show embedded into it already. ["The Old Red Hills of Home"] tells a lot about the mindset of Atlanta, and Atlanta is a large character in the show itself. . . . And the only thing [the song] doesn't do, which I find interesting, is it doesn't tell you anything about Leo and Lucille, we don't even meet them. And to me that felt right, you know. We had to introduce this whole world and then put these two people who don't quite belong into it.[27]

Parade's opening number, "The Old Red Hills of Home," serves as a way to introduce the audience to the "character in the show," which is Atlanta. However, Leo and Lucille Frank do not appear in the first six minutes of the musical, even though they are the main characters of *Parade*. Jason Robert Brown's decision to not include the Franks in "The Old Red Hills of Home" is likely an attempt to illustrate the point that Leo and Lucille Frank do not belong in the Atlantan community around them.

After this long opening song, Brown finally introduces Leo and Lucille Frank to the audience. In a short scene which takes place in the Frank home, Leo and Lucille discuss the Confederate Memorial Day celebration happening in town that day. Leo expresses his disapproval of the celebration and his general distaste for Southern societal traditions. When Leo uses the Yiddish word *meshuggeneh*, meaning crazy, Lucille refers to the term as part of a "foreign language" and asks him why he uses words like that. Exasperatedly, Leo remarks, "For the life of me, I can't understand how God created you people Jewish and Southern at the same time!"

This line introduces an important theme in the musical: the disconnect between Southern and Northern Jews, as well as the uncomfortable role of a Northern Jew living in the South. As we saw when examining the history of Leo Frank, this disconnect played an important part in influencing Frank's trial and eventual death.

Following this opening sequence, the show continues with more Confederate's Day Parade celebrations. The ensemble of Atlantan townspeople sings a song called "The Dream of Atlanta," which serves as an anthem for the ideals of Georgia throughout the show. The song is followed closely by a song called "How Can I Call This Home." This song, sung by Leo Frank,

further elaborates on his feelings of discomfort within the society around him. I will discuss this song in depth in a later section about Frank's Jewish identity.

In the next scene, two local teens, Mary Phagan and Frankie Epps, sing a song together called "The Picture Show." In this song, they chat and flirt, and soon after, Mary leaves to pick up her weekly pay from the factory where she works. Mary, an innocent 13-year-old girl, approaches Leo Frank and asks for her money. After a brief exchange, the scene ends unassumingly. However, the next morning, police awaken Leo Frank and tell him that Mary Phagan had been found dead in the factory.

After some interrogation, Frank is arrested. Hugh Dorsey, the prosecutor of the case against Leo Frank, feels pressured to convict him, both from the society around him and in order to benefit his own political career. In one scene, Dorsey is confronted by Officer Ivey about the lack of evidence against Leo Frank, despite Dorsey's intent to convict him. In response, Dorsey cites antisemitic tropes as "evidence" for his convictions:

> You want evidence?
>
> Look at those clothes and that big fancy talk!
>
> You want evidence?
>
> Look at him sweatin' from every pore![28]

These descriptors may not seem like specifically antisemitic tropes. However, according to Micaela Diamond who played Lucille Frank in the most recent Broadway production of *Parade*, the descriptions have a basis in historical antisemitism:

> Such conspiracies are at the very core of colloquial antisemitism. The idea of "fancy talk" is a dog whistle referring to the perception that Jews run the world. The pedophile accusations are rooted in what is known as blood libel, a rumor dating back to the Middle Ages that Jews murder Christian children, then use their blood for ritual purposes like baking matzo.[29]

Britt Craig, a reporter covering Frank's trial, also presents known antisemitic tropes in the show to make Leo Frank seem like a villain and sexual predator. These stereotypes include assigning Frank with physical attributes such as fangs, horns, beast-like hands, and creepy eyes, as well as character traits like deceptiveness. Craig sings a song called "Real Big News," describing how he plans to prey on stereotypes about Leo Frank's Jewishness in order to boost his journalism career:

> So give 'im fangs, give 'im horns,

Give ‘im scaly, hairy palms!

Have ‘im droolin’ out the corner of his mouth!

He’s a master of disguise!

Check those bug-out, creepy eyes!

Sure, that fella’s here to rape the whole damned south![30]

Britt Craig represents a member of the Atlanta society who wanted to use Leo Frank’s situation to create a sensationalized news story for his own gain.

The rest of the first act consists of Leo Frank’s trial. One of the most memorable musical sequences from the show is called “The Factory Girls/Come Up to My Office.”[31] In this scene, three young girls who worked at the pencil factory give testimonies about how Leo Frank made unwanted sexual advances toward them at the factory:

He’ll call my name, I’ll turn my head, he got no words to say.

His eyes get big, my face gets red, and I want to run away . . .

The song is sung as a round, with each girl singing the same lyrics at slightly different times. This musical choice gives the effect that the girls were all coached to tell the same exact story as each other. At the end of this musical section, the girls sing in unison:

And I turn

and he smiles

and he says . . .

Suddenly, the music shifts dramatically. In a sudden panicked frenzy, taking the audience out of reality for a moment, Leo Frank jumps up from his chair in the courthouse and assumes the physicality and personality of the man the girls are describing. Leo Frank sings “Come Up to My Office” with the frantic energy of a slick, creepy predator trying to lure young girls to his office to seduce them. This song gives the audience a window into how a lot of Southerners viewed Leo Frank at the time: as a threat to the well-being of the ideals of the South. The over-the-top nature of the song seems intended to reveal the absurdity of what the South believed about Leo Frank as well.

The next testimony came from Jim Conley, a Black man who worked as a janitor at the pencil factory. Conley was also an ex-convict who had previously escaped from jail. The musical heavily implies that Conley is the man who actually killed Mary Phagan, rather than Leo Frank.

In one scene, prosecutor Hugh Dorsey makes a deal with Conley: if Conley testified against Leo, he would receive immunity from his past prison escape. Conley accepts this deal and presents his testimony during the trial in a rousing song called "That's What He Said." This song includes an unreliable and seemingly impromptu account of how Conley found Mary Phagan's body in the factory after Leo Frank allegedly assaulted and killed her. In the song, Conley claims that Frank paid him off to hide the body and keep the whole ordeal a secret. Throughout Conley's song, the crowd responds with interjections and reactions to the story. The environment in the courtroom grows more and more tense, and the Atlantan townspeople become frenzied, interjecting Conley with phrases like "hang the Jew" and "make him pay."[32]

Following this spirited and inflammatory testimony, Leo Frank has a chance to make a statement. Without any notice from his lawyer, Leo sings a song called "It's Hard to Speak my Heart." Compared with the heated mania of Conley's song, Frank sings simply and genuinely, ending with the lyrics:

I never touched that child.

God! I never raised my hand!

I stand before you now, incredibly afraid.

I pray you understand.

After this whirlwind of a trial, the verdict is ready to be announced. One by one, the jurors each get a chance to give their verdict. As bells begin to chime, each juror states the word that Leo Frank is dreading to hear: "Guilty." The bells continue chiming with every juror who speaks, and the crowd runs outside. The ominous music playing in the background begins to overlap with a jaunty ragtime tune in an opposing key. After a few moments of uncomfortable dissonance, the ragtime tune keeps playing as an "exultant celebratory cakewalk," with the citizens of Atlanta dancing in the street.[33] Despite the happy music playing when the curtain falls at the end of act one, the audience cannot shake the ominous feeling that something is not right.

The second act begins with a song called "A Rumblin' and A Rollin'," which shares some of the sentiments of Black Americans living in the South at the time. I will discuss this song in more detail in the next section, along with how it is used to highlight race relations in the South in the early 1900s.

A few scenes later, Lucille Frank attends a tea dance at Governor Slaton's mansion. At this dance, Lucille works to convince Slaton to reopen Leo Frank's case. Even after Slaton initially resists Lucille's requests, Lucille does not give up her fight. Following this scene, Judge

Roan, the judge on Leo Frank's trial, sings a song called "Letter to the Governor." Just like the historical account, Roan sends this letter to Governor Slaton to express his regret in sentencing Leo Frank to death. After this song, Leo finds out that Slaton has made the decision to reopen his case, and that Lucille played a big part in convincing him to change his mind.

This section of the musical provides some much-needed hope to the audience following moments of darkness. Leo and Lucille Frank sing an upbeat and optimistic song called "This is Not Over Yet," which describes the hope the Franks feel and the affirmation that everything they went through might not have been for nothing.

In the next sequence of scenes, Lucille Frank and Governor Slaton talk to the various people who gave testimonies against Leo Frank. They first talk to the three factory girls who had testified that Leo Frank acted inappropriately toward them in the factory. After some pressing, the girls accidentally confess that Hugh Dorsey coached them on what to say. Lucille and Slaton then talk to night watchman Newt Lee. During the trial, he had stated that Leo Frank looked at the factory girls in a suspicious way. However, he clarifies during this later conversation that Hugh Dorsey cut him off before he got to finish his statement. In this scene, Lee explains:

> Mr. Dorsey wouldn't let me finish. I was gonna say Mr. Frank looked at everybody funny. He's a funny lookin' man. . . . But he never acted any funnier with those ladies than he did with anybody else. . . .[34]

After these two successful conversations, Lucille and Governor Slaton are feeling extremely optimistic. They still need to have one more conversation, this time with Jim Conley. In an intense scene, they approach Jim Conley, who is breaking rocks on a chain gang, and further question him about his testimony. Much to their disappointment, Conley refuses to change his story or admit to committing any crimes. Nevertheless, Slaton eventually decides to commute Leo Frank's sentence to life imprisonment. This move effectively ends Slaton's career as Governor. In the musical, Slaton is unregretful of his choice, as he felt that commuting Leo Frank's sentence was the morally correct decision. The portrayal of Slaton gives an example of a Georgian native willing to consider evidence presented by Lucille Frank and pursue moral justice.

In the romantic and hopeful scene that follows, Leo and Lucille have a picnic on the floor of Leo's jail cell. In a song called "All The Wasted Time," they think back on all the moments that they took each other for granted, and how lucky they are now to have each other. However, this romantic moment is fleeting. That night, a group of townspeople, including the teenager Frankie Epps (based on a real person named George Epps) who knew Mary and vowed to get revenge on her killer, jolts Leo awake.[35] This group breaks into the jail and kidnaps Frank, taking

him to Marietta, Georgia. Right before the group hangs him, Leo Frank recites the *Shema*, an important prayer in Judaism which I will analyze further in a later section about Frank's Jewishness. Frankie Epps then exclaims, "Mary! This is for you!" He kicks the chair out from under Leo, and the lights go out. This tragic and complex story makes a unique and compelling musical that explores various themes relating to Judaism and antisemitism in America. So, what challenges did the creative team face when trying to translate this story to Broadway in 1998?

Complexities Regarding Representation of Black Americans in *Parade*

Parade deals with a lot of difficult topics, one of which includes relationships between Jews and Black Americans during the early twentieth century. Putting on a musical about a Jewish man being lynched, when so many Black Americans were mistreated and killed throughout American history, could be seen as a dismissal of America's fraught history with racism. Additionally, the musical portrays Jim Conley, a Black man, as an antagonist because he testified against Leo Frank in the case and many people believe him to be the killer of Mary Phagan. Some might wonder, is it not a little bit out of touch with history to create a musical that tells the story of a white, Jewish man being lynched in the era of Jim Crow, especially when the musical features a Black man as an antagonist?

While this is a difficult topic to consider, there are a few factors that I believe helped the musical to navigate these racial complexities. First of all, the story is based on a factual historical event. While the writers surely took a certain level of dramatic liberties, such as creating dialogue and highlighting certain events over others, to translate Leo Frank's story into a musical, the show is based on real-life events. Leo Frank was accused of killing Mary Phagan, a trial driven by antisemitic sentiments followed, Jim Conley testified against Frank, and Frank was abducted from his prison cell and hanged. America's racist past is important to consider alongside *Parade* and choosing to create a musical about a Jewish man who was persecuted does not take away from the horrific experiences of Black Americans occurring at the same time.

Secondly, the creative team was clearly aware of the irony of presenting a story of a white man being lynched in the Jim Crow South. At the beginning of the second act, several Black characters in the show, including Jim Conley, Newt Lee, and two ensemble characters named Angela and Riley, sing a song called "A Rumblin' and a Rollin'." In this song, they express their frustration toward the fact that Leo Frank is getting a lot of worldwide attention whereas Black people in the South face hardships that are never acknowledged. One of the lyrics is as follows:

They're comin', they're comin' now, yessirree!

> Cause a white man gonna get hung, you see.
>
> There's a black man swingin' in ev'ry tree.
>
> But they don't never pay attention![36]

During Leo Frank's time in prison, he started to get widespread attention and support from Jews in the North who disagreed with his death sentence. Newspapers such as *The New York Times* joined in this "national cause" and argued Frank's innocence.[37] This support caused Black Americans in the South to become frustrated. Jim Conley expresses his frustration in a biting lyric in "A Rumblin' and a Rollin'":

> I can tell you this, as a matter of fact, that the local hotels wouldn't be so packed if a little black girl had gotten attacked.

Sadly, this lyric holds much truth. Many Black Americans at the time were treated horribly, attacked, and killed and did not receive close to the same attention that Mary Phagan did after she died.

By including the song "A Rumblin' and a Rollin'" *Parade*'s writers acknowledged the fact that a story taking place in the Jim Crow South in the 1910s should include nuance in terms of representation and race relations. The writers clearly made an effort to try to balance the different identities present in the show. However, with any musical based on historical events, it is nearly impossible to perfectly balance everyone's truth with a cohesive and digestible story, especially when the musical deals with both antisemitism and anti-Black racism.

Challenges of Dramatizing History

As I have discussed, *Parade* is a musicalized dramatization of a true story, consisting of real characters and events. Translating a historical event into the time limitation of a musical is a daunting task. Which parts of history do the writers include? How can they dramatize such a complex issue in such a short time? As part of my research for this thesis, I interviewed Brent Wagner about *Parade*. Previously the Chair of the Department of Musical Theatre at the University of Michigan as well as a professor of Musical Theatre History classes, Wagner is a leading expert in Broadway history.[38] He also saw the original production of *Parade* in 1998 and was able to offer some of his own opinions from seeing the show. In my interview with Brent Wagner, he discussed the complexities involved with dramatizing history into a musical while still evoking empathy for the characters and story. He explained, "It's a challenging show to take that much history, and that many stories, and dramatize it, and then you also have to, sort of, take a point of view, and you have to invest in, as a writer, in the characters enough that—why do we

care? You know, why do we care about Leo? Well, we should care. . . . But what makes us care dramatically?"[39]

With all of the content and information that needs to be conveyed in such a short amount of time, it is difficult for the writers to make the audience members "care dramatically" about the characters. Leo Frank's trial took place over an extended period of time; two years passed between when Frank was accused and when he was lynched. Alfred Uhry, when writing the script, had to somehow condense all of the information about the Franks, their lives in Georgia, the trial, his two years in jail, and more, into two and a half hours. And of course, with *Parade* being a musical, these two and a half hours must include the twenty-eight songs that Jason Robert Brown composed to move the story along.[40]

I was able to correspond with Jason Robert Brown about his experience as the composer and lyricist of *Parade*. In our correspondence, I asked him about the issues he encountered when trying to dramatize this story into a musical. According to Brown:

> It's not so much the complexity of the story that confounded me, it was the complexity of the characters' behavior. Over the course of five years, people will do and say a lot of things, and those things are not all necessarily consistent or comprehensible. But in a musical, you kind of have to draw a straight line for the characters so the audience understands their motivation. I'm not sure anyone's real-life behavior is as straightforward as we portray it, which I always feared would turn some of the characters into cartoons. I tried to imbue them with as much nuance as I could, but it takes a very detailed kind of acting to show the layers of these characters.[41]

One level of complexity in the show is the portrayal of Leo and Lucille Frank's Jewish identities. The next section examines how the writers of *Parade* tried to convey the Jewish aspects of this story and what issues they encountered along the way.

Analysis of Jewish Themes in *Parade*

Leo Frank's "Jewishness"

How to present Leo Frank's "Jewishness" seemed to be a concern during the show's initial development. In a 1997 memo from producer Garth Drabinsky to director Harold Prince, Drabinsky wrote:

> I know you folks disagree, but I am really uncomfortable with how unapparent Leo's Jewishness is. It seems to dilute the impact of Mrs. Phagan's song, of the *Shema*, of the moments when being a Jew is meaningful. Leo should be obviously different from everyone else on the stage, he should stick out when we look at the stage, but he does not. Instead, he blends right in.[42]

Here, Drabinsky wanted Leo to be portrayed as "obviously different from everyone else on the stage" to show how little he fits in with the society around him. Although the issue of the portrayal of Leo Frank's Jewishness was important, it seems like Drabinsky's feedback of making Leo more obviously Jewish was not taken. In my interview with Professor Wagner, he touched upon why the creative team might have had different views from those expressed by Drabinsky:

> The story is so thoroughly Jewish as a story, I mean that is certainly at the heart of every part of it. And Hal Prince is Jewish, and so are the creators [of *Parade*]. They may not have felt the need to do anything more than put it on the stage, it's what it is. . . . And so it may have been that A. they thought the story was Jewish, it's talked about, there's nothing more they need to do. Or [B.] they were trying to take what was a Jewish story and keep it universal, and keep that balance, because . . . you have to sell tickets.[43]

In my interview, Jason Robert Brown confirmed some of Wagner's speculations, conveying why he did not try to add too many obviously Jewish attributes, musically or otherwise, to the characters of Leo and Lucille Frank. Brown explained, "I didn't think Leo and Lucille needed augmented thirds to show that they were Jewish, any more than I would have costumed them with *kippas* and *payis*. They were both thoroughly assimilated, or at least that's what they thought." Making Frank seem more Jewish could have been achieved in multiple ways, including musically, visually, and through dialogue. However, instead of employing stereotypes or antisemitic tropes to make Frank seem more obviously Jewish, the creative team of *Parade* opted to present him as an unassuming, seemingly assimilated Jewish man. Nevertheless, Leo Frank's Jewish identity clearly affected his story and identity, and I believe that comes across throughout the musical. The degree to which Leo feels that he belongs in the society around him is revealed toward the beginning of *Parade*, in the song "How Can I Call This Home."

"How Can I Call This Home" Analysis

The song "How Can I Call This Home" is the first song Leo Frank sings in *Parade*.[44] Through elements of music and lyrics, this song sets up Leo Frank's Jewish identity within the context of his life in Georgia. More specifically, the song portrays Frank as an outsider, highlighting his Jewishness and his lack of belonging. The song begins with a consistent piano pulse on a D, and Frank sings:

> I go to bed at night,
>
> Hoping when I wake,
>
> This will all be gone,
>
> Like it was just a dream,

And I'll be home again,

Back again in Brooklyn.

Legato (smooth) strings accompany Frank's lyrics and the ostinato (repetitive) musical figure. These legato strings evoke a feeling of nostalgia, which reference Frank's dreamy longing to return to his old life within his own Jewish community in Brooklyn. The legato, hopeful accompaniment stays consistent while Frank sings his next lyrics:

Back with people who look like I do,

And talk like I do,

And think like I do.

Here, Frank touches upon the theme of otherness, claiming that many of the Southerners don't look, talk, or think like he does. The concept of Jewish otherness, or being a stranger in a new land, has pervaded through Jewish history. Jewish otherness has also been a theme in musicals such as *Fiddler on the Roof*, when the townspeople of Anatevka are forced to leave their homes and find new ones. While many Jewish communities have been forced out of their homes throughout the course of world history, *Parade* offers a unique perspective on the theme of Jewish otherness.

In *Parade*, Leo Frank was not forced anywhere. Rather, he decided to move to Georgia for work. As a Jewish man from Brooklyn, he was not necessarily aware of how much he would be seen as an "other" in the South, even among Jews. In the musical, once Frank gets to Georgia, he realizes that he does not fit in. His next line shows the transition from fantasy to his new reality:

But then,

the sun rises in Atlanta again. . . .

The words "but then" signify a shift in Leo Frank's mind. With those words, Frank realizes that he cannot just dream away his reality. He knows that the moment his dream is over, he will wake up in the South, no less a stranger than before. Jason Robert Brown reflects this shift with the music as well. After the word "again," the wishful legato accompaniment transitions into a stately fanfare, playing a melody from the patriotic song "The Dream of Atlanta," which is also sung by Atlanta townspeople near the beginning of the show. The fanfare jolts Frank away from his longing for Brooklyn and back to the reality of where he lives and the people that surround him. He continues singing about this in his next lyrics:

These people make me tense

I live in fear they'll start a conversation.

Frank begins singing this line a cappella, with no accompaniment behind him at all. Then, on the word "tense," the orchestra returns to the ostinato rhythmic motive, but this time plays two notes simultaneously: A sharp and E. These notes, when played together, make up the interval of a tritone. In music theory, a tritone, also called the devil's interval, is a very unstable interval that is used to create musical tension. By placing a tritone on Leo Frank's repeated theme, on the word "tense," Jason Robert Brown could not be more clear in confirming Frank's feelings of discomfort in his surroundings.

A few lines later, Leo continues to explain the differences between his own identity and the identities of the people surrounding him:

These men belong in zoos,

It's like they've never joined civilization.

The Jews are not like Jews,

I thought that Jews were Jews but I was wrong.

The line, "I thought that Jews were Jews but I was wrong" struck me. With this line, Frank admits that before moving to the South, he did not know that people could practice Judaism in a way that was different from his own traditions. Moving to Georgia, Leo Frank learns about this difference in tradition in a very personal way, in his relationship with his wife, Lucille. Lucille is also Jewish, but more thoroughly assimilated into Southern culture and does not practice Judaism in the same way that Leo learned back in Brooklyn. Lucille has grown up embracing "wealthy Southern society," not providing her as much traditional Jewish influence as Leo received in Brooklyn, which has a very high Jewish population.[45] Therefore, while Lucille and Leo are both Jewish, there is still a cultural disconnect between them. This disconnect impacts how much Leo feels like he belongs in Georgia and in his marriage. Later on in "How Can I Call This Home," Leo sings a line that perfectly encapsulates his feeling of cultural disconnect with Southern Jews, including his own wife:

I'm trapped inside this life,

And trapped beside a wife who would prefer that I said 'Howdy' not 'Shalom.'

With one repeated lyric, "trapped," Jason Robert Brown expresses Leo's sense of claustrophobia in his life and marriage. Within the same line, Brown also seamlessly incorporates the Southern

and Jewish cultures that have been influencing Leo's life, juxtaposing the term "Howdy" with "Shalom." Frank continues to sing, while the townspeople around him sing and play "The Dream of Atlanta" and "Old Red Hills of Home."

The song ends in a triumphant culmination of themes, both musically and emotionally. The ensemble, made up of Atlantan townspeople, sings overlapping melodies in the background:

God bless the sight of the old red hills of Georgia . . .

Evermore lives the dream of Atlanta . . .

Evermore her eternal . . .

Old red hills of Home. . . .

As the ensemble sings these melodic lines, Leo Frank continues with his main theme:

Well I'm sorry Lucille

but I feel what I feel,

And this place is surreal,

So how can I call this home!

The genius of Jason Robert Brown's composition here is that by the time Leo Frank gets to his last line, the ensemble is just reaching their final line as well. By the end of the song, everyone onstage is singing the word "home," though they have arrived there from very different places:

Leo Frank	Ensemble
So how can I call this	Old red hills of
Home!	Home!

Although lyrically, the last word "home" in "How Can I Call This Home" brings Frank together with the Southern community around him, the rest of the song proves that Frank could not feel any more different from them. "How Can I Call This Home" is a perfect illustration of Leo Frank's mental state during the beginning of *Parade*. He knows that as long as he lives in the South, he will not fit in nor will he escape the culture present all around him. Although this is Leo Frank's first song in the show and introduces him to the audience, it is by no means a solo. There are constantly other people onstage, singing other melodies and trying to take away parts of Frank's own identity to replace it with their own. Jason Robert Brown's incorporation of

ensemble singing and motifs from "Old Red Hills of Home" and "The Dream of Atlanta" represents the fact that now that Frank has moved to Atlanta from Brooklyn, the Southern culture and community he tries so hard to avoid will only serve as a smothering undercurrent throughout his own life.

Shema **Prayer Analysis**

Perhaps one of the most meaningful moments of *Parade* is the *Shema* prayer Leo Frank sings moments before his death. This moment is one of the clearest portrayals of Frank's Jewishness. The *Shema* is a Jewish prayer which may be translated as follows: "Listen, Israel: the Lord is our God, the Lord is One. Blessed be the name of His glorious kingdom forever and all time."[46] This prayer is one of the most important and common prayers recited in the Jewish faith. According to the Board of Jewish Education, "the significance of the *Shema* prayer in Judaism can be seen from the fact that not only is it one of the first prayers taught to small children, but its first line in particular is recited as a confession of faith by those about to die."

In the musical *Parade*, the first two lines of the *Shema* prayer were the last words on Frank's lips before he died.[47] A well-known story of the *Shema* prayer in the Jewish faith is that of Rabbi Akiva. One Rabbi shares the significance of the *Shema* prayer saying:

> In the *Shema* prayer, the Jewish "Pledge of Allegiance," we are commanded to "serve God with all your heart and with all your soul" (Deut. 6:5). . . . The Bible invites us to understand that our relationship with God is so precious, we would be willing to pay the ultimate price. In the year 135, the Jews rebelled against Roman domination. The Romans crushed the rebellion with terrible savagery and then tried their best to stamp out Jewish life completely. They murdered every rabbi they could find and prohibited teaching Torah on penalty of death. The next day, Rabbi Akiva went to the marketplace and publicly taught Torah. He was arrested, sentenced, and tortured to death. As the executioner flayed Rabbi Akiva alive, he smiled and said, "All my life, I hoped for the opportunity to love God with all my soul."[48]

Just like Rabbi Akiva, Leo Frank does not forget the importance of his Jewish identity, and in fact sings a prayer that proves his "willingness to die for God" just before he dies. Rabbi Walter A. Davidson also discusses the *Shema*'s ability to connect people within Jewish community saying, "This "Shema Israel" has even become a sign of recognition between Jew and Jew, a so-called password by which one Jew recognizes his racial brother in all corners of the world." *Parade*'s book-writer Alfred Uhry and composer Jason Robert Brown included the *Shema* prayer with the understanding that many non-Jews might not necessarily understand its full meaning. There is no translation or explanation written into the script, so the reception of the prayer relies solely on the context of the show to be understood. Additionally, this moment reads differently depending on how familiar an audience member is with the prayer.

When I saw the revival of *Parade* in August 2023, this moment was very meaningful to me. In Jewish school growing up, I had recited this prayer more times than I could count. I was likely in the minority of audience members who understood the full context of this prayer. Therefore, this moment stood out to me as a very conscious choice by Uhry and Brown, knowing that the *Shema* would be uniquely significant to Jewish audience members.

Another important aspect of the *Shema* is that Jason Robert Brown sets it to the melody of "The Old Red Hills of Home." In my experience, I have always sung the *Shema* with a traditional melody. In *Parade*, Leo Frank sings the *Shema*, one of the most important prayers in Judaism, to the theme of the patriotic society in Georgia that surrounds him. From previous discussion, we know that "The Old Red Hills of Home" symbolizes the patriotism of the Atlanta community that surrounds Leo Frank. Additionally, Jason Robert Brown specifically avoids including Leo and Lucille Frank in the opening number to further solidify the otherness that the Franks feel in Atlanta. Therefore, the choice to set the *Shema* prayer, one of the most important prayers in Judaism, to the melody of "The Old Red Hills of Home" intrigues me. In "History Repeats Itself in the Broadway Revival of 'Parade'," a review of the 2023 revival of *Parade*, author Helen Shaw described her opinion of what the *Shema* scene symbolized:

> Is Leo experiencing kinship? Defiance? . . . The scene uncovers an unspeakable mystery beneath the historical facts, conjuring something new out of intertwining, even competing, evocations of faith. There are beliefs that we know are diametrically and morally opposed. Yet in America, with her blood-red hills, the sacred and the dangerously nostalgic can be sung to the same tune.[49]

Shaw's analysis touches on the question of why Jason Robert Brown set Leo Frank's *Shema* to the tune of "The Old Red Hills of Home." In my interview with Jason Robert Brown, I asked him about his intention behind setting the *Shema* to "The Old Red Hills of Home." He responded, "I think one of the ideas here is that Leo has been looking for 'home' from the beginning of the show, and by singing this melody, he implies to us that he has found his home after all, that he is at peace. That's not the only or maybe even the best interpretation of that moment, but it's what I've settled on for the last twenty years."[50] The theme of "home" is present in a lot of Leo Frank's journey in *Parade*. His first song is called "How Can I Call This Home." At that early point in the show, Frank doesn't feel that Atlanta is his home, and, like Brown stated, he is "looking for home." As Frank comes to terms with his place within society and feels more connected with his wife, maybe he reaches a point right before his death where he is finally at peace. It is hard to argue with Jason Robert Brown's interpretation, especially since he was the person who made the decision to set the *Shema* to "The Old Red Hills of Home" in the first place. However, I personally believe that Brown's interpretation may be too optimistic. I believe that in this moment, Leo Frank truly realizes what he has been trying to deny throughout the

entire show: Even in his final moments, his own Jewishness cannot be separated from the oppressive Southern environment that surrounds him.

The Original 1998 Broadway Production of *Parade*

Parade first opened on Broadway on December 17th, 1998 at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center.[51] The cast included Brent Carver and Carolee Carmello as Leo and Lucille Frank, respectively. Carver was an established Canadian actor who won a Tony Award for his starring role in the 1993 musical *Kiss of the Spider Woman*.[52] Carmello had already performed in four Broadway productions before starring in *Parade*.[53]

In the 1998 production of *Parade*, one of the central features of the stage design when the show opens is an enormous tree.[54] This tree is specified as follows within the original script of *Parade*: "There is a large, full oak tree occupying much of stage left. This is a significant tree, and a significant field in our play, but we will not see Marietta again until the second to last scene."[55] This oak tree, which is meant to occupy most of the set background, is the tree Leo Frank will be hanged from by the end of the show. In a 1998 review, theater critic Ben Brantley mentions the significance of the tree, writing:

> The tree is a sermon in itself. A big, sturdy oak with serpentine limbs, it's the first thing the audience sees in "Parade" . . . The oak's branches glow, in sinister abstraction, through a scrim before a single note is sung, and it will be a dominant presence throughout the evening, casting a metaphoric shadow that is both premonitory and admonitory. A man, a good man, will be hanged from that tree before "Parade" is over. It is the image of a brutally unfair fate awaiting its victim, and we are never, ever allowed to forget what it signifies.[56]

With this looming tree, Alfred Uhry brings an ominous feeling to the show, setting the tone for the entire musical and foreshadowing the brutal end of Leo Frank's story.

When examining reviews from the 1998 production of *Parade*, one notices that many of the reviews cited a lack of emotional depth from characters throughout the show. Ben Brantley, who served as the chief theater critic for *The New York Times* for over twenty years, wrote a review of the original 1998 Broadway production of *Parade*, called "Martyr's Requiem Invokes Justice."[57] Brantley critiques the lack of heartfelt emotions in the show, writing, "Musicals can be grim and even grotesque as long as they let you feel their heartbeat, the pulse that animates the behavior onstage. . . . [*Parade*] arrives with an innately sympathetic hero, undoubtedly worthy of our tears. But for those tears to flow, we have to get to know Leo Frank as a man, not a symbol. The civics lesson that is 'Parade' forbids our ever approaching such knowledge." Importantly, Brantley claims that *Parade* lacks a "heartbeat," and he compares the musical to a

civics lesson, with Leo Frank serving as a symbol rather than a human being. Additionally, earlier in the review, Brantley comments on Brent Carver's performance as Leo Frank, writing:

> That Mr. Carver, through no fault of his own, is a far less compelling presence here says much about what has gone wrong with *Parade*. . . . The character [Leo Frank], a Jewish scapegoat in a blood-lusting Southern society, is a martyr, pure and simple, a man whose worst crimes are emotional reserve and fastidiousness. Mr. Carver renders these traits, in both his singing and acting, with delicacy. But there's no getting beyond the impression that his Leo is as flat and iconic as a bleeding saint in a religious mural.[58]

Here, Brantley praises Brent Carver's acting prowess, but finds the character Leo Frank to be uncompelling. Brantley implies that Alfred Uhry's writing of Leo Frank lacks dimension and does not allow for the heartfelt connection between audience and performance that Brantley claims is necessary for a musical to be successful.

In my interview with Professor Wagner, he expressed a similar sentiment to Brantley, that he found it difficult to connect with the story as portrayed in the original musical, even though Leo Frank's story had the potential to be successful as a musical. "At the time [of the original production] there were a lot of articles about Leo Frank in the newspaper. . . . So I read all these articles and it was very powerful and very upsetting to read about this from the articles. And then when I saw the show, it didn't affect me as much as I wanted it to, because I was more moved by the articles."[59] In our discussion, Wagner cited a few reasons why he was not as engrossed in Leo Frank's story from the musical as he was from reading articles about Frank's life. For one, he believed that the theater *Parade* was performed in, the Vivian Beaumont Theater, did not provide the intimacy he felt the story needed. Wagner also mentioned in our interview that the story was not quite developed enough to make Leo and Lucille's love story believable by the end of the show.

Written by Vincent Canby in 1998, "Pedigree Versus Play: The Mystery of 'Parade'" is another *New York Times* review of the original production. This review begins particularly negatively, with the first paragraph not wasting any time:

> PARADE is a big complex musical that looks as if it were just starting a long out-of-town tour designed to get things right before opening on Broadway. The cast is able, the staging is smooth and the scenery moves on and off without threatening the actors. Yet 'Parade' is without life. It plays as if it were still a collection of notes for a show that has yet to be discovered.[60]

Here, Canby refers to *Parade* as an unfinished production, one not meant to be seen by a Broadway audience yet. He is not critiquing the technical aspects of the show, but rather the overarching lack of cohesiveness in the production.

Throughout the review, Canby notes the potential for a high-quality production by the creative team of *Parade*, writing, "The show's provenance is impressive. The director is Harold Prince, who has directed more innovative Broadway musicals than anybody except maybe his mentor, George Abbott. Alfred Uhry (*Driving Miss Daisy*) wrote the book, and though Jason Robert Brown, the composer and lyricist, is here making his Broadway debut, he was picked by Mr. Prince, who should recognize talent when he hears it." Due to the big names involved in the production, it seems like Canby had high expectations for the production. Needless to say, these expectations were not met. Just like Brantley, Canby criticizes the lack of depth present in Alfred Uhry's characters in *Parade*: "Mr. Uhry is Georgia-born and bred, as well as Jewish. He knows the territory. Yet his book possesses none of the subtleties of character and event that make 'Driving Miss Daisy' such a wise and substantial entertainment. Except for Leo and Lucille, 'Parade' is populated by characters who could have been ordered from a catalogue." Canby describes *Parade*'s characters as so surface-level that they "could have been ordered from a catalogue." This parallels Brantley's description of the character Leo being as "flat and iconic as a bleeding saint in a religious mural." None of these descriptions provide the humanity or heart necessary to take such a dark show and make it accessible to audiences.

Canby concludes his review with a scathing judgment of the creative team behind *Parade*, questioning how they could have even gotten the show to Broadway:

> What was Mr. Prince thinking of in allowing "Parade" to be produced in this condition? He believed in it, certainly, but something happens in the course of long pre-production work, readings, workshops and rehearsals, even to the pros. Collaborators have a way of psyching one another up, as they should. At the same time, they can become so isolated, so self-absorbed, so removed from reality and so mired in tiny details that they begin to see results not visible to the outsider. The show then opens, but it's too late. That mysterious, pulsating entity they have been assembling turns out to be a corpse.[61]

In this rather severe section, Canby remarks on the tendency of creative teams to lose sight of the big picture of a production until it is too late. He sees the 1998 production of *Parade* as an unfinished product that was not ready to be seen by an audience. Apparently, this viewpoint was not uncommon. In a 2023 interview for *Jewish Insider* magazine with *Parade*'s book writer, Alfred Uhry, author Matthew Kassel discusses some hardships that affected the success of the original production. In this discussion, Uhry admits that the production had not been complete, saying, "The original show, whose short-lived run at the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center lasted just two months, was panned by the *The New York Times* and dogged from the start by financial troubles thanks to a foundering producing partner, the Canadian company Livent, that filed for bankruptcy shortly before 'Parade' made its debut." He notes, "The musical closed in February 1999 after 84 regular performances. 'It really wasn't finished.'"[62] Financial trouble

from Livent, one of *Parade*'s producers, clearly harmed the success of the original 1998 production. In addition to that financial obstacle, the challenging nature of the subject matter and the time in history at which the show first appeared exacerbated negative feedback. The 1990s were a time of optimism, when the United States was still pre-9/11 and there was hope that the country was moving in a more positive direction. A dark show about America's prejudiced past was not necessarily wanted by the Broadway community at that time. This brings up the question of why Alfred Uhry and Jason Robert Brown made the choice to write *Parade* in the 1990s at all. Why bring up such a tragic historical event when America was not ready to listen?

One reason that the writers might have chosen to tell the story of *Parade* in the 1990s is that Alfred Uhry likely wanted to continue upon the success of his two other works inspired by his upbringing as a Southern Jew: the Pulitzer Prize-winning *Driving Miss Daisy* and the Tony Award-winning *The Last Night of Ballyhoo*. If audiences were ready to learn about Southern Jews with the other two shows in Uhry's trilogy, Uhry might have thought *Parade* would fare just as well. However, *Parade* is the only work of the trilogy that cannot be described as a comedy. That seriousness could have been a reason *Parade* was slightly less successful than Uhry's other recent works. It is impossible to say if the production could have fared differently without the significant obstacles that the original production faced. Examining the show's Broadway revival in 2023 allows us to evaluate the show's reception, still with the same difficult subject matter, in very different financial and societal circumstances.

The 2023 Revival of *Parade*

Revival of *Parade* in New Political Context

Musicals reflect the time in which they were written as well as the cultural landscape that surrounds them. Additionally, the society surrounding a musical's premiere undoubtedly affects the success of the production itself. According to Professor Brent Wagner in our interview, "Everything is conditioned by the time in which it premieres. Everything. It cannot be otherwise."[63]

In the past twenty-five years, an increasing number of musicals have risen that strive to tell a variety of diverse stories with more accurate representations on Broadway. Wagner described in our interview that recently "the thinking is more specific about shows, with certain identities or certain storylines."[64] For example, the 2023 production *How to Dance in Ohio*, with book and lyrics by Rebekah Greer Melocik and music by Jacob Yandura, tells the story of a group of young adults on the autism spectrum who work together to plan a formal dance. Each of the characters in the show with autism is played by an actor with autism, and their experiences are told in a positive, inspiring way.[65]

The show *Allegiance*, with music and lyrics by Jay Kuo, and book by Marc Acito, Jay Kuo, and Lorenzo Thione, opened on Broadway in 2016, telling the story of Japanese American internment during World War II. This musical was inspired by *Star Trek* actor and activist George Takei who, along with his Japanese-American family, was taken from his home at a young age and placed in an internment camp due to his Japanese ancestry.[66]

In a similar sense to *Allegiance*, *Parade* centers around how Leo Frank's Jewish identity and the antisemitism present in Georgia influenced the outcome of his trial and led to his death. By viewing *Parade* as a story about the outsider experience, *Parade* fits into the paradigm of identity-centric shows often seen on Broadway today.

Since the first production of *Parade* in 1998, America has gone through an increasing period of reckoning with its racial past. Notable events of the last twenty-five years include 9/11, the election of Barack Obama as the first Black president, the election of extremist Donald Trump as president, the synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh in 2018, the development of Black Lives Matter protests, the ugly emergence of pre-existing Neo-Nazism and white nationalism, the insurrection on the Capitol Building in 2021, and even a global pandemic. Antisemitism has also been on the rise, with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) citing a steep increase in the past three years: "The ADL found that the number of antisemitic incidents in the U.S. increased by more than 35 percent in the past year, from 2,721 in 2021 to 3,697 in 2022. Antisemitic and white supremacist propaganda in the U.S. also hit new levels, the organization said."[67] With all of these changes, especially given the rise in antisemitism and white supremacy, a show like *Parade*, which features high levels of antisemitism and racism present in the early twentieth century, may seem much more relevant in 2023 than it did in the 1990s. A review like Ben Brantley's from 1998, where he dismissed *Parade* as a "civics lesson" rather than an important story that needs to be told, might seem misinformed today. Such a dismissal would be in rather poor taste considering the upheaval that the United States has gone through in the past twenty-five years. I asked Jason Robert Brown what he thought about this issue, and whether he thought modern audiences were more ready for this story than they were in 1998:

> 1998 was the middle of the Clinton years, and New York audiences were filled with optimism that the country's woes were in the midst of being solved. *Parade* may have seemed, in that context, like an unwanted history lesson. The environment in 2023, needless to say, was a lot different, and the show now said what we had hoped it would say all along—that the roots of our current politics are baked into this country's DNA. We deliberately underplayed the antisemitism of the Leo Frank story because it always seemed to us that any Jewish person would instinctively understand it—but during the 2023 production, everybody in the audience felt it immediately.[68]

With this new political climate, *Parade* already had a better chance of succeeding than it did in 1998. Still, what specific changes did the new creative team make when bringing *Parade* back to Broadway?

Changes Made to the Broadway Revival of *Parade*

The 2023 Broadway production of *Parade* was not initially intended to be on Broadway. It began as a limited-run production in 2022 and was directed by Michael Arden for the New York City Center Encores Series. This series, according to the City Center website, "revisits the archives of American musical theater."[69] Oftentimes, these productions have limited staging and sets and are presented more like concert-style productions. If a City Center Encores production is successful, it often transfers to Broadway for a limited run as well. After a successful seven-performance run at City Center, conducted by Jason Robert Brown, the production announced it was moving to Broadway for a limited run at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theatre.[70] The Broadway production had a slightly different cast than the New York City Center production, but many of the main actors remained the same, including Ben Platt as Leo Frank, Micaela Diamond as Lucille Frank, and Alex Joseph Grayson as Jim Conley.

When I saw this revival in the summer of 2023, I noted a few clear differences between the original 1998 production and the revival. For one, the big oak tree that took up so much of the original production's set was nowhere to be found in the 2023 revival production. The revival's minimalistic set was possibly a remnant of the production's concert-style origins at the New York City Center, which usually features simpler sets. A more minimalistic set might have helped by reducing visual clutter onstage and allowing the story itself to take the main focus.

Additionally, the City Center production was heavily influenced by a 2007 rework of *Parade* that was produced at the Donmar Warehouse in London and directed by Rob Ashford. Jason Robert Brown detailed some of the changes that were made for this production on his website. One of these changes referred to the size of the production. Instead of the large-scale production in the Vivian Beaumont Theater at Lincoln Center, the London production was much smaller. On his website, Brown stated, "We opened at Lincoln Center with a cast of thirty-six and an orchestra of twenty. Because of the size of the Donmar (only 260 seats), there was no way to recreate the size of that production, and so we reduced the cast to fifteen and the orchestra to nine. . . . Therefore, everything about the show is tighter, sharper, smaller, more aggressive."[71] The choice to cut the cast and orchestra by over half was one of the most noticeable changes between the original and the 2007 productions. A smaller cast meant that many of the actors had to play multiple characters. Doubling characters was confusing at times, but the small cast ultimately inspired the London creative team to rethink the importance of some of the characters

in the show and make decisions to cut certain smaller roles. This choice also forced the audience to consider connections between the characters that were played by the same actor and notice the actors that were not doubled. In this production, Leo and Lucille were the only characters who were not doubled, which reinforced the message that the Franks did not quite fit into the society around them. Additionally, with the intention to streamline the show and reduce any confusion in the storytelling, the Donmar Warehouse team also made some choices to cut or replace songs and dialogue. This reduced and reworked version heavily influenced the City Center Encores production in 2022, and eventually the Broadway revival in 2023.

One big element of the 2023 Broadway production of *Parade* that I believe worked to its advantage, especially given its more minimalistic set, was the use of projections. Throughout the show, the minimalist set design was enhanced by projections. These projections included dates and locations to give the audience context about when and where the various scenes are taking place. The projections also included photographs of the characters from real life, connecting the musical to the true story on which it was based. I believe this choice was effective in allowing the audience to make ties between the story onstage and the real-life tragedy that took place back in the early 1910s. When I saw the production on Broadway, the projections helped me keep track of all the various characters in the show because a photo of the actual person along with their name was projected every time a new character appeared. Since the set was more minimalistic, the projections describing the locations of each scene helped reduce confusion as to where a scene took place. Finally, the projections with the dates or years of each scene helped track the passage of time throughout the musical, as Leo Frank's story took place across multiple full years.

Jewish Actors Cast in Main Roles:
the Current Concern with "Authenticity" in Performance

Another important element of the 2023 revival of *Parade* is the casting of Leo and Lucille Frank as the Jewish actors Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond. Ben Platt is a famous actor known for performing in the *Pitch Perfect* movies and originating the starring role of *Dear Evan Hansen* on Broadway. Platt is also a recording artist and has released multiple albums, boasting 1.6 million Instagram followers and 7.7 million likes on Tiktok.[72] There is no denying that Platt's fame influenced the success of *Parade*'s revival. His counterpart, Micaela Diamond, was also a rising star. Diamond is an American actress who made her Broadway debut in *The Cher Show* at age nineteen. She has since performed in multiple Broadway productions as well as TV and film projects, and she has been nominated for both a Tony and a Grammy Award.[73]

In my interview with Brent Wagner, he brings up a compelling and relevant point that neither Brent Carver nor Carolee Carmello was Jewish, but both Platt and Diamond are, saying, "There was all the talk about [how] these two actors in this [revival] were Jewish and the original were not. . . . Did it make this one better? I can't say. But it's a topic that wasn't even brought up in the [original production]. . . . So right there you can see that times are different, because [the idea of authentic casting] was talked about by the creative team."[74] As we have seen, the idea of authentic casting has moved to the forefront of many Broadway shows today. Increasingly diverse representation on Broadway through race, ethnicity, sexual identity, and gender identity is becoming a central discussion in casting. In a *Broadway News* interview, author Ruthie Fierberg comments on the increased attention given to authenticity in casting, saying, "Authenticity in casting has been a prominent issue for the past few years—and it has only gained major attention since Broadway's shutdown and reopening. Too often, Jewish characters are not included in this dialogue." The casting for the 2023 production of *Parade* marks an important shift in authentic casting for Jewish actors; the revival is the first professional production of the show where both Leo and Lucille Frank were played by Jewish actors. Given the inherently Jewish content of this story, it is surprising that there has never been a professional production of *Parade* featuring two Jewish actors in the main roles.

In that same *Broadway News* interview, Jason Robert Brown is quoted sharing his opinion on authentic casting of Jews in musicals, noting, "We can't be talking all the time about authenticity [in casting] and then not have it matter when it comes to Jews. It is true in the biggest sense: No, I don't need a Jewish actor to play a Jewish role. I'll buy it on a lot of levels. But there is something enormously powerful about a Jewish actor playing a Jewish role."[75] Brown had been involved in the casting of the original show, where the non-Jewish Brent Carver and Carolee Carmello played Leo and Lucille Frank. Brown claims in the interview that he is not against non-Jewish actors playing Jewish roles. However, he believes the performance is extra special if the actors playing the roles can imbue their own personal identity into the roles, and his vision of accurate casting is made a reality with Platt and Diamond. I believe Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond's Jewish identities are crucial parts of their success in this production. The fact that Platt and Diamond are Jewish, along with Platt's social media following and popularity, have allowed this revival to reach a level of popularity that Carver or Carmello could never have achieved in 1998. Wagner summarizes this point well in our interview: "Ben Platt . . . had a platform he could promote the Jewish aspect of the show that couldn't be done with Brent Carver or Carolee Carmello, and nobody would have listened to them anyway, but they weren't Jewish so it's all this together . . . it's kind of a combination." Platt and Diamond's Judaism as well as Platt's strong social media presence can be seen as part of the great success of *Parade*'s revival.

However, these factors are not the only reason *Parade* was so well-received in 2023. In the next section, I examine a few reviews from the revival to reveal how critics responded to the musical and what other changes to the show impacted its reception.

Reviews from the 2023 Broadway Revival of *Parade*

Chief theater critic for *The New York Times* Jesse Green's "A Pageant of Love and Antisemitism, in 'Parade'" is immediately more positive than many of the reviews from 1998. Green's subheading is as follows: "Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond star in a timely and gorgeously sung Broadway revival of the 1998 musical about the Leo Frank case."[76] This complimentary description starkly contrasts the reviews from the original production. Not only does Green mention the timeliness of this production, but he centers Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond, who play Leo and Lucille Frank, respectively, as the highlights of the show. In fact, he explains that Lucille Frank, as played by Diamond, is the gateway to which we can find the heartbeat of the show, as Brantley wished would happen in 1998. He writes, "In the riveting Broadway revival of the musical 'Parade' that opened on Thursday at the Bernard B. Jacobs Theater, it's Micaela Diamond, as Lucille Frank, you watch most closely and who breaks your heart. With no affectation whatsoever, and a voice directly wired to her emotions, she makes Lucille our way into a story we might rather turn away from." Here, Green praises Micaela Diamond for pulling on the heartstrings of the audience and drawing them into the story. However, like Brantley, Green admits that Alfred Uhry's writing hinders the ability for Leo Frank as a character to be as well-liked by the audience:

> When the first act ends, . . . we still do not know Leo well. His first song, usually in musicals a moment for ingratiation, is instead a bitter snit called "How Can I Call This Home?" His last before the verdict is "It's Hard to Speak My Heart." Whatever that heart really holds is further blurred by Uhry's device of having Leo enact the false testimony of other characters, so we see him as a rake and a maniac before we've grasped him as a man.[77]

Green describes Leo Frank's first song, "How Can I Call This Home," as a "bitter snit," which may take away a chance for the audience to root for him. I disagree with this analysis, as I see "How Can I Call This Home" as more of a universal song that many people can relate to about feeling misunderstood or out of place. In my opinion, Leo Frank is simply upfront about the way he sees his own role in Atlanta society.

Nevertheless, Green believes that by the end of the first act, Leo Frank has been portrayed as a "rake and a maniac" rather than a human being; Green notes the frenzied song Leo Frank sings during the trial, "Come Up to My Office," in order to make this point. This sentiment reminds me of how Brantley describes the role of Leo Frank, when he writes, ". . . for

those tears to flow, we have to get to know Leo Frank as a man, not a symbol."[78] However, Michael Arden, the director of the 2023 revival of *Parade*, made choices which have helped audiences empathize with Leo Frank as a human, not just a "symbol." According to Green, Arden begins to correct for that [lack of humanity] during the intermission, which Leo, now imprisoned, spends sitting onstage with his head in his hands. In Act II, as he recognizes his growing dependence on Lucille, she finally becomes real to him and thus he to us." Arden made the choice to have Ben Platt, as Leo Frank, stay onstage throughout the entire intermission. When I saw the show, this choice made an impression on me. The fact that Platt was still onstage, fully in character, while everyone else in the audience was able to mill about, grabbing snacks or going to the restroom, felt extremely symbolic. For a show as demanding and dark as *Parade*, the actors no doubt needed time to rest in their dressing rooms during intermission, maybe grab some water or relax before heading into the second act. Especially for a role like Leo Frank, who goes through an emotional rollercoaster throughout the show, ending in an onstage lynching scene, one would think that eight shows a week would take a toll on an actor. Therefore, the choice to keep Platt, as Leo Frank, onstage during intermission, was all the more potent. To me, it seemed like Arden made this choice so that the audience would be reminded of Leo Frank's inescapable situation within the show. The audience would then be forced to empathize with Leo Frank as a real person, not just a symbol used in *Parade* for some overarching commentary.

Another thing Jesse Green mentions in his review of the 2023 revival of *Parade* is the timeliness of the production in the current political climate. He writes:

> What struck me even more vividly in this well-judged and timely revival is the quick path hysteria has always burned through the American spirit if fanned by media, politicians and prejudice of any kind. When a chorus of white Georgians chants "hang 'im, hang 'im, make him pay," the words can't help but echo uncomfortably in the post-Jan. 6 air. And another song, a prayer for a return of the day when "the Southland was free," sounds a lot like current talk of a second secession.[79]

The word "timely" as a descriptor for the 2023 revival is a theme present in much of Green's review. He describes the 2023 revival as "well-judged and timely," making connections between the true events of the show from the early twentieth century and current events such as the January 6th insurrection.

Another notable review is a New York Times review for the 2022 City Center production of *Parade*, written before the show was even confirmed to transfer to Broadway. Juan A. Ramírez reviewed the show in the 2022 article "'Parade' Review: The Trial and Tragedy of Leo Frank."[80] The first paragraph of that review is as follows:

> Just six months after its universally beloved Encores! revival of "Into the Woods," New York City Center returns with another timely, excellent production about collective responsibility and loss. Smartly directed by Michael Arden, City Center's gala presentation of 'Parade,' which opened on Tuesday night and runs through Sunday, delves further into America's history of violence and delivers the best-sung musical in many a New York season.[81]

Ramírez praises the show as "timely, excellent," and "the best-sung musical in many a New York season." He gives credit to Ben Platt and Micaela Diamond for their wonderful portrayals of Leo and Lucille Frank, respectively. Although he seems to have liked the production, Ramírez recognizes that there are still issues with the writing of the musical. He even quotes from Brantley's and Canby's reviews from 1998 and states that "the problems with the book, which lacks some dramatic immediacy, remain." Despite these issues, Ramírez mentions a few ways director Michael Arden makes up for the lack of "dramatic immediacy" in the script, writing, "Arden wisely counteracts this by filling the production with deft flourishes that compound American hatred across centuries: A salute by Confederate soldiers' is slowed down so that their outstretched arms resemble a Sieg Heil salute; Roan and Dorsey's fishing rods in one scene whip down like switches; revelers crack open Bud Lights in their final celebration." By adding extra touches that hint at the hatred portrayed in the show, Arden creates more depth in the story without relying solely on what was in the original script. Ramírez concludes his review positively, including an exciting description of "This Is Not Over Yet," a hopeful duet by Leo and Lucille that takes place in *Parade*'s second act:

> A fully staged "Parade" hasn't been seen in New York in nearly 25 years, and this revival recalls an era of big casts, big stories and big talent—a time when musicals actually felt like events. Platt and Diamond are fearless performers, and their duet "This Is Not Over Yet" is a powerhouse for the ages. Their commanding vocals are matched by a confident production that revives the best of the original while pointing at the possibility of growth, and hope.[82]

The fact that Ramírez viewed the 2023 production as hopeful and positive shows a stark contrast to the ominous nature of the original production. While the revival is obviously not free of darkness, the revival's director Michael Arden has infused some perhaps much-needed light into *Parade*.

In my interview with Professor Brent Wagner, he touches upon the fact that the passage of time has allowed for the creative team of the 2023 revival to take the best of the original production and fix aspects that might not have worked so well in 1998. Wagner explained, "I don't care what anybody says, the second time around is always easier because you have the original to look at, so you can decide, 'I didn't like that. I do like that. I'm going to do that.' But Hal Prince didn't have that. He was doing it for the first time. So, I want to honor that one, but to

say that we all learn from that and can build on it."[83] Wagner explains that just the fact that the 2023 creative team had the original 1998 production to learn from could have been helpful in the success of the recent revival. With time and hindsight as their guide, the 2023 creative team was able to make a variety of changes in casting, direction, and more in order to present the best production they could.

Universalism in *Parade* and *Fiddler on the Roof*

In order to view *Parade* as a Jewish musical, it is important to note its relationship to what is widely considered to be the quintessential Jewish musical, *Fiddler on the Roof*. With a book by Joseph Stein, lyrics by Sheldon Harnick, and music by Jerry Bock, *Fiddler on the Roof* was first performed on Broadway in 1964.[84] Based on the stories of author Sholom Aleichem, *Fiddler on the Roof* tells the story of Tevye, a dairyman who lives with his wife, Golde, and his five daughters in 1905 imperial Russia. Throughout the musical, Tevye struggles with his own Jewish identity when his daughters push the boundaries of the traditions he is accustomed to.

Fiddler on the Roof, while themed around Jewish culture and history, is a universal story that many people can relate to. The word "tradition," used throughout *Fiddler* as a central motif, is a very general word that is not specific to one culture alone. In an article for *Jewish News Syndicate*, Samantha Massell, who starred as Hodel in the 2015 Broadway revival of *Fiddler on the Roof*, speaks on the show's universality, saying, "This story is so timeless. Yes, it is an intrinsically Jewish story, but the themes of tradition, family and assimilation are relevant across so many cultures. Everyone can relate."[85] *Fiddler on the Roof* has become one of the most produced musicals of our time. In fact, in an article by Stephen Silver for the *Jewish Telegraphic Agency*, Silver comments on the sheer number of productions of *Fiddler* and the frequency of performances, writing, "'Fiddler' is so popular internationally that it's often been said that the show has been performed at least once somewhere in the world every day for years."[86] He continues, "The 'Miracle of Miracles' documentary takes that idea a step further, stating on its concluding title card that 'ever since *Fiddler on the Roof* opened on Broadway on Sept. 22, 1964, the show has been performed every day somewhere around the world.'"

Fiddler on the Roof lyricist Sheldon Harnick and composer Jerry Bock intentionally made the story accessible to many different communities when they initially wrote it. In a 2016 interview for PBS News Weekend, Harnick discusses the recent 2015 Broadway revival and touches upon why he and Bock were inspired to write *Fiddler on the Roof* based on Sholem Aleichem's stories. Harnick explains, "We recognized when we read [Aleichem's] stories that they were not just about a Jewish family, that there was something universal about these stories. And we tried to realize the universality of what was in those stories, and to make this a show that

would appeal to people of all faiths and all beliefs."[87] Although *Fiddler on the Roof* is centered around a Jewish community with its own traditions and customs, Harnick and Bock always intended it to have a universal appeal.

The idea of universality is not always as apparent when looking at the production of *Parade*. For one thing, there are some inherent differences between the plots of both shows. While they both deal with Jewish topics, *Fiddler on the Roof* tells a fictional story based on real circumstances, about what a Jewish family in imperial Russia might have gone through at the turn of the twentieth century. *Parade*, on the other hand, tells the true story of Leo Frank, a Jewish man who lived and died in Georgia in the early twentieth century. Being a true story, many elements of *Parade* are specific to Frank's experience and cannot necessarily be as easily translated into a universal story.

However, the underlying themes in *Parade* of outsiderness, ostracization from community, and prejudice, are universal experiences. *Parade*'s story in particular draws upon a specific shared history for persecuted minority groups in the American South in the early twentieth century. Along with relating to the experiences of different minority groups over time, Leo Frank's story serves as a vessel to make people aware of the antisemitism that Jewish people have faced throughout history. Therefore, I believe that despite their significant differences, *Parade* touches upon universal themes just as *Fiddler on the Roof* does. Where *Fiddler on the Roof* uses the quintessential Jewish experience of tradition as a bid for universality, *Parade* foregrounds Leo Frank's experiences of vulnerability and persecution to create a universal story imperative to Americans today.

The Future of *Parade*

Antisemitic tropes such as the ones exploited during Leo Frank's trial have gone through many changes throughout time and persist today. On February 21, 2023, during the first preview of the Broadway revival of *Parade*, there was a neo-Nazi protest outside of the show's Broadway theater. In her *New York Times* editorial, Micaela Diamond describes what happened on that day, writing, "During our first preview performance, on the street outside the Jacobs Theater on Broadway, a group of neo-Nazis protested the show, handing out fliers and holding banners. A play that was meant to be a revival of a century-old story suddenly had contemporary implications. It was a haunting reminder of this story's immediacy."[88] The antisemitism in *Parade*, despite the story being over one hundred years old, has had increasing relevance in today's political climate. The Leo Frank case has served as a hotbed for Neo-Nazi protesters such as the ones outside of the theater at *Parade*'s first preview. In fact, in my research for this thesis,

I stumbled upon multiple websites that claimed to be informational databases about Leo Frank, but ended up being propaganda sites for antisemitic Neo-Nazi viewpoints.[89]

Since the recent Broadway revival of *Parade* closed on August 6th, 2023, society has continued to change tremendously.[90] On October 7, 2023, just two months after *Parade* closed, approximately 1,200 people were killed in an attack on Israel, and the resulting war has continuously increased levels of antisemitism even more.[91] Given these events, the reception of audiences to a show like *Parade* today could be the same or vastly different than last year.

Normally, there would be no way of truly knowing how a show like *Parade* would fare in a new societal context less than a year after a successful run on Broadway. However, we might have a way to find out. *Parade* is embarking on a North American tour, beginning in January of 2025. Details including casting and creative team are yet to be announced.[92] As we know, these factors can have a large effect on the success of any given production, in addition to societal context. Additionally, the upcoming tour will bring the show to varied audiences whose location and demographics may inform their response to the musical. I asked Jason Robert Brown whether he had any hopes, concerns, or expectations for the upcoming tour, especially given the recent rise in antisemitism. He responded, “Every production is an opportunity to clarify, to focus, to recontextualize. I think the audience does a lot of that work for us, but I’m also looking forward to seeing how a new cast refracts the story through their bodies and voices. . . . There will surely be some spirited discussion during rehearsals, which will naturally enrich the onstage performances.” In the twenty-five years between the original Broadway production and the 2023 revival, many changes were made. These changes included edits to the script, production elements such as set design and projections, and more authentic casting. Additionally, the society surrounding the two productions was vastly different, which had an effect on the reception of the productions. Looking ahead, we can assume that some of those factors will have an effect on the success of the upcoming Broadway tour of *Parade* which is slated to begin in 2025. I look forward to seeing how this innovative and important work continues to affect audiences across the country and shape the fabric of Broadway today.

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