

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE JEWISH STUDIES PROGRAM

FROM THE DIRECTOR



The Jewish Studies Program is pleased to share news of its programs and developments.

During the last year, the Program has hosted several

successful events on Zoom. In March 2021, the Program invited **Dr. Nancy Sinkoff**, Professor of Jewish Studies and History at Rutgers University, to present virtually about her book *From Left to Right: Lucy S. Dawidowicz, the New York Intellectuals,*

and the Politics of Jewish History (Wayne State University Press, 2020) in a talk entitled "Gender and the (Dis)Continuities of the European Jewish Enlightenment: Hannah Arendt, Lucy S. Dawidowicz, and the New York Intellectuals." Also in March, the Program hosted "The Shtetl Kitchen: Ashkenazi Foodways Past and Present" as part of **Dr. Roger Horowitz's** Jews and Food class. This event featured **Jeffrey Yoskowitz** and **Liz Alpern**, co-owners of The Gefilteria and co-authors of *The Gefilte Manifesto: New Recipes for Old World Jewish Foods* (Flatiron Books, 2016).

In October 2021, the Program hosted an interdisciplinary Webinar discussion entitled "The Objects That Remain: The Ethics of Tending to Sacred Objects" featuring Temple

University's **Dr. Laura Levitt**, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's **Jane Klinger**, and **Margalit Schindler**, Graduate Fellow at the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation.

In November 2021, **Jen Taylor Friedman**, the first female scribe to complete the writing of a Torah scroll, spoke to **Dr. Polly Zavadivker's** Women in Judaism class about her work and gave a virtual tour of her workspace. Recordings of all of these events are available on the new Events Archives page on the Jewish Studies website: udel.edu/jsp.

Polly Zavadivker
Director, Jewish Studies Program

FACULTY NEWS

Jay Halio (Professor Emeritus of English and former Jewish Studies Program Director) was honored by Marquise International "Who's Who" as a lifetime achievement teacher and scholar.

Rebecca Davis (History) recently published a new book, *Public Confessions: The Religious Conversions that Changed*

American Politics (UNC Press), available now in print and audiobook. In November 2021, she gave a virtual talk at NYU about Sammy Davis Jr., Jewish conversion, and racial identity in the mid-20th-century US.

She will be joining us for a virtual talk on Zoom on Thursday, April 28th from 12:30 - 1:30pm. Further details to be announced.

Polly Zavadivker (History and Jewish Studies) published "Pogroms in World War I Russia," in *Pogroms: A Documentary History*, eds. Eugene Avrutin and Elissa Bemporad (Oxford University Press). Her book in progress "A Nation of Refugees: World War I and Russia's Jews," is forthcoming with Oxford University Press.

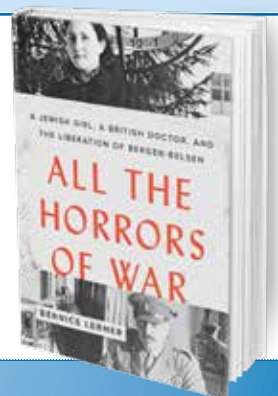
UPCOMING SPRING 2022 SPECIAL EVENT



Bernice Lerner, author of *All the Horrors of War: A Jewish Girl, a British Doctor, and the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen*
Wednesday, May 4, 2022
7:00-8:00pm on Zoom
Further details to be announced.

Join Bernice Lerner for a discussion of her recent publication, the first book to pair the story of a Holocaust victim with that of a liberator. Lerner has unearthed and interwoven the fascinating stories of Rachel Genuth, a poor Jewish teenager from the Hungarian provinces, and Hugh Llewelyn Glyn Hughes, a high-ranking military doctor in the British Second Army, who converge in Bergen-Belsen, where the girl fights for her

life and the doctor struggles to save thousands on the brink of death. Lerner, Rachel's daughter, writes with special insight about the torment her mother suffered.



FACULTY SPOTLIGHT: REBECCA DAVIS



Writing a book is a deeply humbling process. For me, the process for my latest book, *Public Confessions: The Religious Conversions that Changed American Politics* (University of North Carolina Press, 2021), began ten years ago. I am a historian of gender, sexuality, and religion in the United States, and at the time, I thought I would write a book about religion and radical politics. Instead, excursions to the Library of Congress pointed me toward the massive archival collection of Clare Boothe Luce. A playwright (*The Women*), two-term member of Congress from Connecticut, and the wife of publisher Henry Luce, Clare Boothe Luce converted to Roman Catholicism in 1946. Largely overlooked by other historians, her conversion sent shockwaves through American political and religious life. Why, I wondered, did a religious conversion make such a difference to American politics?

Searching for the answer to that question sent me in search of information about other religious converts whose personal spiritual journeys had far-reaching public significance. I read about Whittaker Chambers, who left Communism (and espionage) to become a devoted member of the Society of Friends. Muhammad Ali rejected the Baptist church of his family and joined the Nation of Islam. In the 1970s, growing numbers of public figures became evangelical Protestants with dramatic stories of being “born again.”

And, of course, Sammy Davis Jr. By the time he formally became Jewish in 1960, converting to Judaism was a minor trend among the Hollywood elite. Marilyn Monroe converted shortly before marrying Arthur Miller, and Elizabeth Taylor converted prior to marrying Mike Todd. Being publicly Jewish was becoming not only culturally acceptable but, occasionally, cool. Comedian Lenny Bruce, who made no secret of his Jewish heritage, summed it all up with a famous joke: “I hear Elizabeth Taylor’s become bar mitzvah!”

Sammy Davis Jr. believed that Judaism resonated with him, deep within his being. There was a special affinity between the Jewish and the African American experiences, he explained, that linked the two

peoples across time and space. Both had endured unspeakable suffering, and both had survived and sustained the pursuit of freedom. Judaism spoke of justice, and Davis was committed to the civil rights movement. Barely able to write at a second-grade level—having never attended a day of school—Davis was also drawn to the scholarly tradition within Judaism. The Reform rabbis he met were role models for him of urbane sophistication and learnedness.

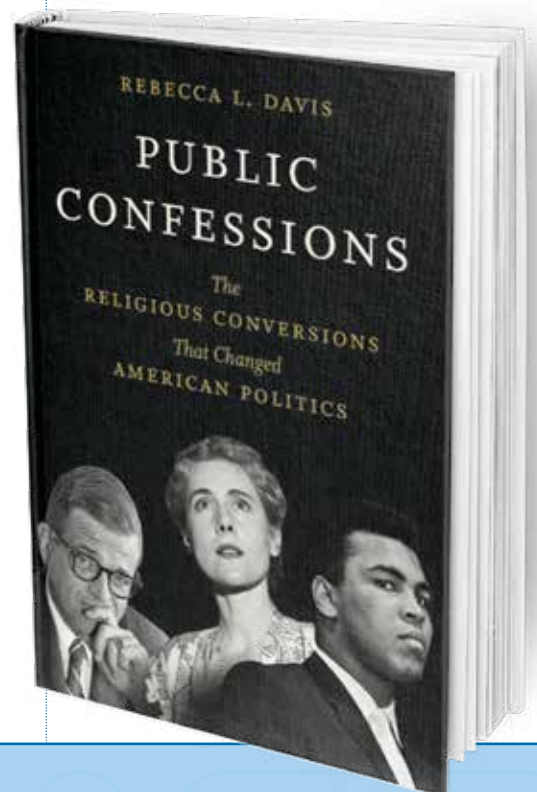
Nearly seven years ago, the Program in Jewish Studies supported this research by helping me travel to the Jacob Rader Marcus Center for the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati to comb through documents about American Jews and religious conversion in the mid-twentieth century. Through that research, and through dozens of other research trips to archives across the United States, I gradually assembled the puzzle pieces that, eventually, gave me the big picture. Why did a religious conversion make such a difference to American politics in the mid-twentieth-century? Religion was increasingly the language of American democracy and freedom. In an intensifying Cold War against the “godless” Communists of the Soviet Union, religion represented

the essence of Americanism. Religious conversion seemed to capture an experience of discovering “Truth” and accessing an authentic identity. Americans were worried about communist subversion and of mass mind-control. Sincere, authentic religion represented all that was sincere, authentic, and American.

Sammy Davis Jr. benefitted from those associations only partially. Because he was Black, Davis faced immediate ridicule—and even anger—in response to his conversion. His story is one of political alienation. A strong supporter (and major financial backer) of the Civil Rights Movement, Davis increasingly found common cause with Jewish Zionists. Visits to Israel solidified his sense that he found a “home” there, an outcast welcomed by other outcasts. His politics shifted rightward, and he supported Richard Nixon’s reelection in 1972, much to the outrage of his former allies on the left. At all times, Davis acted in the only way he understood to be his authentic self-expression. “I gotta be me,” he sang to an angry crowd of Black activists.

The larger picture of American religion, politics, and conversion in the decades after World War II is the story I tell in *Public Confessions*. I could not have completed the project without the support of the Program in Jewish Studies.

Now available everywhere books and audio books are sold



DR. VIVIAN Z. KLAFF MEMORIAL AWARD WINNERS 2021



Jeremy Davis was born and raised in the Long Island suburbs of Merrick, New York. A lifelong Ramahnik, he attended Camp Ramah in the Berkshires for eight summers before traveling to Israel for the first time during Ramah Seminar. Following high school, Jeremy flew the coop to attend the University of Delaware where he majored in Neuroscience and Psychology, while minoring in Cognitive Science, Jewish Studies, and Philosophy. Almost immediately, he found his tribe at UD Hillel through Freshmen Fest,

where he worked as a Shabbat Life intern, served as vice president of Koach, and received the Breishit Rising Leader Award in his freshman year.

It was at UD Hillel that Jeremy was first introduced to the Jewish Studies Program, in no small part due to the large number of engaged students who were active in these two steadfast pillars of Jewish life on campus. Through the program, he was able to hone his interests in deeper Jewish questions by taking such Jewish Studies cross-listed classes as Introduction to Jewish Mysticism, Jews and Food, and America in the Middle East. Being a Jewish Studies minor enabled him to explore his Jewish identity in multiple different contexts—both philosophical, geopolitical, and cultural. This one-of-a-kind immersive experience was incredibly valuable in Jeremy's ability to feel confident in his own Jewish agency within the larger world he was growing into.

Over the next three years, he developed his love of spreadsheets and connecting with the Jewish community by working as a campus Birthright Israel recruiter, serving as president of the interdenominational religious life board, representing UD Hillel at Masorti Shabbatons and the Hillel International Presidents Cohort, and co-founding Hillel's Presidents Board. After traveling on his Birthright trip, Jeremy extended his stay to learn more about the history and geopolitics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as part of his growing interest in understanding the narratives and dialogue in the region. Outside of Hillel, Jeremy also worked at Delaware's Writing Center as a peer tutor, where he blended his passion for empowering others with his love of writing.

As a true New Yorker, you can still find him rooting for the Mets and Islanders, enjoying a fresh bialy, or contemplating this year's snubs at the Oscars. Since graduating from UD in May, Jeremy now works for Hillel at Baruch College as their Springboard Ezra Jewish Education Fellow. There, between the eight college campuses being served across the island of Manhattan, he works to provide accessible, pluralistic Jewish learning for students and alumni. The University of Delaware's Jewish Studies program was instrumental in Jeremy's discovering his passion for teaching and sharing a love of Judaism with others, which he feels incredibly fortunate to be able to share with everyone he meets!



Hannah Goodman is a 2021 graduate of UD, majoring in International Relations with a triple minor consisting of Jewish Studies with Hebrew Language, Economics, and International Business. She stayed busy during school, investing lots of time in her sorority, UDance, Hillel, and the honors college. She studied abroad twice, once in Tel Aviv via Onward Israel, and once to Madrid—though COVID cut the latter short, both played a huge part in her college experience.

As part of Hannah's Jewish Studies with Language minor, she took many classes ranging from multiple levels of Hebrew to holocaust studies, antisemitism, and the history of the laws of kashrut. After attending a Jewish Day School for elementary school and then spending time in Delaware public schools, Hannah embraced the opportunities offered at UD to begin learning about her religion again with peers who were equally as passionate. She is so thankful for the Jewish Studies Program both for how deeply it enhanced her college experience, as well as for the knowledge it gave her for life. She extends a special thank you to Dr. Zavadivker for leading engaging and interesting classes with wonderful guest speakers and field trips.

After graduating in May, Hannah took some time to travel with friends and family before beginning a full-time role as a business analyst at TD bank. She recently moved to Philadelphia for a change of scenery from her Delaware roots and is eager to get involved with the Jewish community there. She has been enjoying getting familiar with a new place, building a network of new friends, and creating a routine which leaves her fulfilled and busy. While she is so happy with where she is now, Hannah is excited for all of the amazing things to come in the future.



Tara Silberg, a native of Long Island, New York, graduated cum laude from the University of Delaware in the Fall of 2020 with a major in Human Services and a minor in Jewish Studies. After visiting a number of concentration and death camps in Poland in 2017, before beginning at UD, Tara felt a personal desire to continue her education on the Holocaust during her time in college. During her first year at the university, Tara enrolled in Dr. Polly Zavadivker's course JWST/HIST250: Comparative Genocide.

The course not only opened her eyes to what happens during times of genocide but also how it is handled on an international, policy-based level. Following the course, Tara discovered that researching 20th century Jewish history was a passion of hers to pursue. The various Jewish Studies courses she took while at UD also inspired her to explore outside of the classroom through her internships at Jewish nonprofits during the summer, working at the Hillel organization nearby, and helping out the Jewish Studies Program each year.

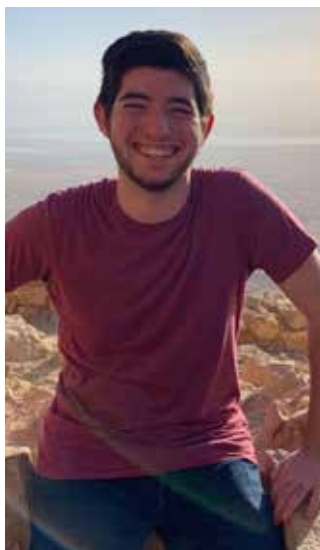
During the fall semester of 2019, Tara traveled throughout Europe observing how the Holocaust is memorialized in different countries today. This trip, coupled with her course work in Jewish Studies, led Tara to delve further into her studies of Holocaust education and led to the wonderful opportunity as Teaching Assistant for Dr. Zavadivker's JWST/HIST 254: Jewish Holocaust. With the ability to understand such education as both a student and undergraduate educator herself in the course, Tara decided to continue her work in the area following her graduation from UD by becoming a part of the Halina Wind Preston Holocaust Education Committee with the Jewish Federation of Delaware.

Tara now resides in Glasgow, Scotland where she is acquiring her Masters degree in Human Rights and International Politics at the University of Glasgow. Her time as a student in the Jewish Studies program at UD inspired her to pursue her passion in educating others about Jewish history, and she hopes to one day have a similar impact on students that the Jewish Studies Program professors had on her desire and love to learn.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT: RAFI TURITZ-SWEIFACH



Rafi Turitz-Sweifach, a senior pursuing a B.S. in Honors Economics, is a Jewish Studies, History, and Business Administration minor. He has been active in the Jewish Studies Program and on campus in student organizations. He has served as the Vice President of Geshar, President of Hillel Student Life, and member of the Hillel Board of Directors. He is currently a Lerner Ambassador, an Honors Ambassador, Teaching Assistant, and tutor for the Office of Academic Enrichment. He is looking forward to graduating this spring. Below, Rafi explains what the Jewish Studies Program



Rafi taking in the sights after hiking to the top of Masada during his Birthright Trip to Israel in January 2019.

has meant to him and how it has enriched his college experience.

The Jewish Studies Program has consistently been one of the highlights of my college career! Coming from a small Jewish private high school, I came to college worried that I would not be able to continue my Jewish learning,

but during the winter of my first year at UD, I went on the world's first study abroad Birthright trip put together by Dr. Sheryl Kline. This trip and the associated Jewish Studies/Hospitality cross-listed course, "Food, Wine, and Culture of Israel" were my first introductions to Jewish Studies courses at UD. Almost immediately upon returning from the trip, I added the Jewish Studies minor and have really enjoyed the classes, seminars, and events that the Jewish Studies Program has put on during my four years here! While I have enjoyed every Jewish Studies class that I have taken, my two favorites

have been Jews and Food with Professor Horowitz and Women in Judaism with Dr. Zavadviker! I truly enjoyed both because the topics were incredibly interesting and taught me to look at and learn about Judaism through lenses I had never considered before!

The Jewish Studies minor has given me a break from my usual economics and business classes, allowing me to pursue my interest in Judaism through fascinating and engaging courses. The classes I have taken for the Jewish Studies minor have been some of very few classes that make a point of bringing in guest lecturers in order to deepen the experience that students get in their classes. In both Jews and Food and Women in Judaism, I have heard Shani Keypour-Feinstein speak about Iranian Jews from a cultural and culinary standpoint. Additionally, Dr. Zavadviker brought in many other speakers to our Women in Judaism class, including Jen Taylor Friedman, one of very few female Torah scribes, and Miriam Sagan, a poet and creative writer. These experiences of not only learning from experienced professors but from experts firsthand has provided some of my favorite educational experiences during my time at UD! Lastly, taking classes with other Jewish Studies minors and seeing them around campus, especially at Jewish events, has made the minor feel like a very personal and close-knit experience that I have truly enjoyed!

jspnews

**THE JEWISH STUDIES
PROGRAM AT UD
WINTER 2022**

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**UNIVERSITY OF
DELAWARE**

THE OBJECTS THAT REMAIN

On Wednesday, October 27th, the Jewish Studies Program was pleased to welcome Temple University's **Dr. Laura Levitt**, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum's **Jane Klinger**, and **Margalit Schindler**, Graduate Fellow at the Winterthur/University of Delaware Program in Art Conservation for a Zoom Webinar discussion entitled "The Objects That Remain: The Ethics of Tending to Sacred Objects." This interdisciplinary event was co-hosted by the Jewish Studies Program, Department of Women and Gender Studies, Department of History – Museum Studies Program, Department of Art Conservation, Department of Sociology and Criminal Justice, and Center for Material Culture Studies. Named for Dr. Levitt's latest book, *The Objects That Remain* (Penn State University Press 2020), the discussion delved into what makes an object sacred and what it means to care for objects deemed sacred. Drawing from their diverse experiences and expertise, the presenters reflected on the practice and ethics of conservation.

Margalit Schindler first presented on their interest in conservation of Judaica. They defined conservation as a discipline that combines "art history, studio art, and chemistry to support material cultural heritage." In the start of their research in graduate school, they performed a survey of Judaica collection holdings in the United States and found that while small, the respondents indicated their collections contained items that "range from secular to holy, mundane to ritual. 89% of collections contained holy objects with an elevated ritual status." Margalit went on to explain the hierarchy of holy objects in Judaism: Klei Kodesh or Holy Objects, Tashmishei Kedushah or accoutrements of holy objects, Tashmishei Mitzvah or ritual implements, and Reshut or optional ritual objects. They called attention to the words "Kodesh" and "Kedushah" meaning holy or sacred in Hebrew, but also having the same root word meaning "separate." Margalit explained that some objects are not "celebrated as holy, but are equally sacred in their separateness."

Dr. Laura Levitt, a Professor of Religion, Jewish Studies and

Gender at Temple University, discussed how she became interested in the act of conservation in relation to objects "brushed by violence, whose experience as witness to violence are what make them sacred or holy or separate." In her book, she explores both Holocaust objects held in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, as well as criminal evidence held in police property rooms nationwide. Her research was born from the desire to explore the individual stories that these items tell, specifically her own personal experience of rape while she was in college and what became of that evidence, and how these items are preserved as a "silent witness." Dr. Levitt read from her book and spoke about how these objects preserve the stories attached to them, and how this is a form of "doing justice" to the events, "animating and keeping these legacies alive." It is this conservation work that gives voices to the victims, giving the objects an air of sacredness, as they bear witness and provide evidence in the pursuit of justice.

Jane Klinger rounded out the panelist discussion with her experiences working at USHMM as a conservator. Starting with the question "Is the profane now sacred?", she discussed how in her work, the objects held by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum are first placed "in a framework filled with dates and facts," in other words certainly in a profane light; however, when they dive deeper into the object's biography, the "memory and history are intertwined" and expose "why the original owner held and protected it as if it were of sacred object." Her example of this from USHMM was a small sliver of Mica belonging to a German Jew named Emma Jonas, who worked at the Theresienstadt ghetto-labor camp slicing

flakes of Mica that were used as insulators in military equipment. She held onto the Mica long after her forced labor had ended in May 1945. It traveled with her to a displaced persons camp in Deggendorf, Germany, to England where she was reunited with her daughter who had escaped Germany via a Kindertransport, to Canada, and ultimately to the United States in 1961. Klinger noted that "the Mica is difficult to read as an object until it is placed within the history and within Emma's personal narrative." While we cannot know the exact reason that Emma kept the Mica, we know that her taking it and caring for it, with it surviving all those journeys and years intact despite its fragility, shows that it was a meaningful item to her. Still Klinger is "uncomfortable calling the Mica sacred," instead preferring to refer to it as "numinous, which refers to objects that invoke highly personal feelings." While the object is not sacred in the traditional sense, it is certainly sacred in its separateness, as something that withstood the test of time and continues to bear witness to the atrocities of the Holocaust and Emma's personal experiences.

The panelist discussion wrapped up with a Q&A session moderated by Jewish Studies Director Dr. Polly Zavadivker. There were several inquiries about the gendered nature of conservation, with it being revealed during the discussion that most conservators are women. There was interest in how conservation work is done when sacred objects, from Judaism, Native tribes, or other groups, are traditionally only supposed to be handled by men. In such cases, some museums have worked to honor those restrictions, with male technicians being instructed on the work by female conservators. However, Jane Klinger noted

that when an object is brought into a museum collection, its status changes, as she said "we're not a religious community, we're a museum community." As a museum, the highest level of care is a necessity and there are times when that is only available through the work of female conservators. The entirety of this event is now available to view on our website in the Events Archive tab on udel.edu/jsp.





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SPRING 2022 COURSES

LITERATURE & CULTURE

JWST/ENGL202: Biblical & Classical Literature

Instructor: George Miller, miller@udel.edu
MWF 10:10 – 11:00am

JWST/THEA212: Jews and American Pop Culture

Instructor: Leslie Reidel, lreidel@udel.edu
T/Th 9:30 – 10:45am

RELIGION & PHILOSOPHY

JWST/PHIL302: Introduction to Jewish Mysticism

Instructor: Karl Hein, hein@udel.edu
MW 3:35 – 4:50pm

HISTORY & POLITICS

JWST/HIST146: Introduction to Jewish Culture and History

Instructor: Roger Horowitz, rh@udel.edu
M 6:00 – 9:00pm

JWST/HIST254: Jewish Holocaust 1933-1945

Instructor: Polly Zavadivker, pollyz@udel.edu
MWF 9:05 – 9:55am

JWST/LLCU345: Modern Israel: History & Culture

Instructor: Eynat Gutman, eynat@udel.edu
T/Th 11:00am – 12:15pm

JWST/HIST363: Jews in the Modern World

Instructor: Polly Zavadivker, pollyz@udel.edu
MWF 12:20 – 1:10pm

JWST/POSC482: America in the Middle East

Instructor: Daniel Green, dgreen@udel.edu
MW 3:35 – 4:50pm

HEBREW LANGUAGE

JWST/HEBR106: Hebrew II

Instructor: Eynat Gutman, eynat@udel.edu
MW 1:25 – 2:15pm, T/Th 2:00 – 2:50 pm

JWST/HEBR205: Hebrew Conversation

Instructor: Eynat Gutman, eynat@udel.edu
T/Th 3:30 – 4:45pm

For more information on the Jewish Studies Program, minors, courses, and events please visit our website at udel.edu/jsp