

Program in Jewish Culture & Society



Local Hillel Foundations focused on building a spiritual, social, and educational community and helping students maintain strong connections to their heritage.
Hillel Foundation, 1949. Record Series 41/69/6.

Director's Message



As I write this message, it has been more than seven months since Hamas perpetrated terrorist attacks in southern Israel on Oct. 7, 2023. This academic year has been an exceptionally difficult time for all of us. On behalf of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society, I write to express our deepest collective concern to all those who have suffered from the appalling

attacks by Hamas and the escalating war in Israel and Gaza. I would like to stress that there is no place for antisemitism, Islamophobia, or hate for any faith at Illinois.

Our primary mission is to educate. Now more than ever, we are committed to protecting free speech, engaging with a diversity of beliefs and opinions, and creating an environment where knowledge can flourish. This academic year we sponsored and co-sponsored events on sensitive topics from multiple perspectives. Sponsorship does not mean an endorsement of a particular point of view. The events we organized—from workshops and lectures to conferences, film screenings, and book talks—were always well attended, demonstrating the critical importance of a robust academic program committed to studying and teaching Jewish life and culture.

Although the fallout from the Israeli-Palestine conflict dominates the news cycle, this has been a remarkably productive academic year for the program. There is much to celebrate. Due to the most significant investment Illinois has ever made to Jewish Studies, we were able to hire three new faculty. Rachelle Grossman (PhD Harvard University) joins the Department of Comparative & World Literature as a Yiddish literature specialist. Rachelle studies print

and material culture, developing a geopolitical approach to literature and focusing on the transformation of literary centers and peripheries in the postwar period. Eli Rosenblatt (PhD University of California, Berkeley) joins the Department of Religion as a scholar of modern Judaism. Eli's scholarship examines the intersections of Ashkenazic and Atlantic Jewish cultures in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Anastasiia Strakhova (PhD Emory University) joins the Program in Jewish Culture & Society as the Associate Director. Specializing in Modern Jewish history, Eastern European history, and migration, Anastasiia held the Perilman Postdoctoral Fellowship at Duke University from 2022 to 2023 and, this past year, served as a Harry Starr Fellow in Judaica at Harvard University.

The addition of these three exceptional scholars will help rebuild the program for years to come. Looking ahead, the Program in Jewish Culture & Society will offer a full spectrum of courses on all aspects of Jewish history and culture. Among the highlights, Judy Maltz (senior correspondent for Haaretz) and Amit Schejter (professor of communication studies at Ben-Gurion University) will join us in September as the Israel Studies Project visitors. For International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Zisl Slepovitch will perform songs based on interviews with Holocaust survivors recorded at Yale's Fortunoff Video Archive for Holocaust Testimonies.

I welcome you to take part in these and many other exciting events. Thank you to all of our alumni and friends of the program for your continued support. To learn more about our latest programs and news, visit our website.

Eugene M. Avrutin

*Director of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society
Tobor Endowed Professor of Modern European Jewish History*

Editorial Committee:

Eugene M. Avrutin and LeiAnna Hamel

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF HILLEL By Erez Cohen

This past year, the Jewish communities in Champaign-Urbana and Chicago, as well as U of I alumni from around the world, have been celebrating the centennial anniversary of Hillel at U of I—the first Hillel in the world.

Hillel's birth and existence is marked by an essential theme—collaboration and inclusion for Jewish students. Hillel at U of I was created in a unique moment of collaboration between Jews, non-

Jews, students, community members, religious leaders, and faculty members.

Rabbi Benjamin Frankel, Sinai Temple's first full-time rabbi, was encouraged by both the Kuhn family and professor Baldwin Chauncey to meet with Jewish students at Illinois to help them form an organization to serve their specific needs. The Kuhns were prominent business owners in downtown Champaign at the time. Chauncey was a non-Jewish professor of religion. Both

identified a deep need for providing Jewish students with a social, cultural, and religious support network. Many of the campus social groups at the time only accepted churchgoers as members, which excluded Jews from participating in the growing social environment on campus.

Rabbi Frankel took the task to heart and met with the students. Together, they formed Hillel to serve "every Jewish student" regardless of their

Celebrating 100 Years of Hillel *continued*

background. Hillel's formal opening night was on Dads' Day in November 1923 (Illini Media. "Formal Opening of Hillel Foundation Set for Dad's Day." The Daily Illini. Nov. 4, 1923, p. 10).

From its inception, Hillel was a pluralistic and open organization. Hillel's student leadership structure included both men and women, it provided religious services to both Reform and Orthodox Jews, and early immigration German Jews mingled with first-generation students from Eastern Europe at Hillel functions. These elements were considered groundbreaking in both the Jewish and campus communities. Jewish denominations at the time were segmented to denominational synagogues and social circles based on geographical origins. Campus groups were often segregated based on gender. Hillel embraced Jewish pluralism as part of its core in order to truly serve as many Jewish students as possible.

Under Frankel's leadership, Hillel soon formed its programmatic portfolio. Hillel offered social events organized by the students and staff, university-accredited academic courses on Jewish topics were taught by Jewish professors and staff of Hillel, service and volunteering projects were soon underway, and the organization offered consistent holiday celebrations and religious services. The Hillel Post/Magazine became a key publication for the campus Jewish community, providing local, national, and international news relating to Jewish topics. The Jewish community on campus now had a home.

While growing at Illinois, Hillel also became a model for other Jewish campus communities and soon expanded to the universities of Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio State, and others. These were all promoted and created by Rabbi Frankel under the sponsorship of the national Jewish fraternal organization B'nai B'rith.

Rabbi Frankel met Florence Koenigsberg on campus. They wed on March 20, 1927. The two travelled to Jerusalem and Tel Aviv for their honeymoon, then returned home. Later that year both Ben and Florence got sick. Florence recovered, but Benjamin's situation got worse. He died from complications of the flu on Dec. 21, 1927, at the age of 29 (Weinberg, Florence Koenigsberg Frankel. Personal Memoir of Florence Koenigsberg Frankel Weinberg. s.l.: Unpublished, 1993).

Rabbi Frankel's death left a gaping hole in the heart of the young Hillel movement. For a short time, Rabbi Louis Mann took on leadership of the organization. But soon Frankel's former roommate professor Abram L. Sachar took the reins of the organization. Sachar's approach was to count on student leadership to stir the programmatic content of the organization. Students approached him with requests and interests, and he enabled them to take action on the topics they cared about. Before World War II broke out, students approached Sachar with the request to sponsor Jewish refugees from Nazi Germany. Sachar encouraged the students to raise the funds locally, and within days they raised enough to

sponsor two refugees to come to U of I. This incident led Sachar to expand this effort to the national scale. Before and after the war, the Hillel movement was able to sponsor dozens of Jews from central and eastern Europe—saving them from the Nazis.

When Sachar retired from Hillel in 1947, Hillel had expanded to 167 campuses across the United States. At that time, Hillel at U of I was preparing for its next big transition—building a permanent center for Jewish life. A plot of land was purchased at the corner of John and 5th streets. Designed by the famous Max Abramowitz, The Rabbi Benjamin Frankel Memorial Hillel building was constructed in 1949 and dedicated in 1950. The new building included a large sanctuary, kitchen, and programmatic and social areas. Over the next 50 years it served Jewish students, faculty, and community members as a center for celebrations and gatherings. Speakers cycled through the building. Passover Seders, Purim celebrations, and talent shows were held in its rooms. At historic moments Jews from all over Champaign-Urbana would come together at Hillel to discuss how to respond to current affairs. It was the home base for students who protested the Soviet Union's campaign against Zionism and the mistreatment of Soviet Jews.

In 2006-2008 a new building was erected on the site of the original Hillel. This new state-of-the-art building aimed to bring Hillel's facility into the 21st century. It included additional programmatic space with multi-purpose functions. Within it and on the campus around it Jewish life now thrives. The U of I campus is now home to over 3,500 Jewish students.

As Jewish life in America continues to develop and change, so does Hillel. Going into its second century, Hillel at U of I is raising a \$10 million endowment to secure its next 100 years. Yet, it continues to follow the initial intent of Rabbi Benjamin Frankel of creating a space that is welcoming to Jewish students of all backgrounds and fields of interest and promoting Jewish student leadership that sets the tone for future generations.

Currently, Hillel at U of I engages about half of the Jewish student population each year. To read more of Hillel's stories visit hillel100.org.

Erez Cohen is the executive director of Hillel at the University of Illinois.



Message from the director of Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies



The Initiative in Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies (HGMS) has completed an active year of programs and events that have engaged students at the graduate and undergraduate levels, faculty, and the community to discuss and learn about a wide range of issues in memory studies. We began the year with a brilliant pair of events: on Nov. 3, Debarati Sanyal, a professor of French at UC Berkeley, kicked off the Race, Migration, and Memory conference with a keynote entitled “Arts of the Border: Kino-Aesthetic Movement and Mobilization.” This was the second collaboration with our partners from the University of Birmingham, Sara Jones and Mónica Jato, with whom I applied for and received a grant from BRIDGE. I invited a very broad group of graduate students and faculty to give “lightning talks” throughout the day so that many different voices, nations, perspectives, and ideas about [Race, Migration, and Memory](#) could be seen and heard. A graduate student in my whales and literature seminar, MacKenzie Guthrie, wrote a truly inspired, very beautifully crafted essay about the conference, which you can read on our blog, [Days and Memory](#).

On Nov. 9, as our event on the occasion of Kristallnacht, I hosted professor Hans Ruin from Södertörn University (Stockholm, philosophy), who presented “Memory, History and the Care for the Dead.” On Jan. 19, we launched [Critical Memory Studies: New Approaches](#), a wide-ranging anthology I edited that was published by Bloomsbury in May 2023. Several of the contributors gave lightning talks via Zoom from all over the world, and it was an occasion to celebrate the book! For International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Susanne Belovari, associate professor and archivist for faculty papers, spoke about her research into Vienna’s cookbooks, which were written by and for Jews and non-Jews. On Feb. 12 we were treated to a joint HGMS and Jewish Studies workshop with David Wright Faladé, professor of English at Illinois, who presented his forthcoming novel. At the time of the workshop the title was “What is Hidden Cannot be Loved,” but it has been changed to “The New Internationals” and is forthcoming from Grove Press in 2025.

One of the all-time highlights of my career was the visit from [Ben Lerner](#) on April 4. Ben Lerner is the author of several novels and poetry collections including *Leaving the Atocha Station*, *10:04*, *The Topeka School*, *The Lights*, and other works. His visit would not have happened without the generous support of Deborah Lynch, and we are truly grateful to her for the Greenfield-Lynch lecture series, which has brought [Nicole Krauss](#), Sarah Phillips Casteel, Steve Zipperstein, and others to campus. For the 2026 Greenfield-Lynch lecture series we hope to bring a panel of speakers to share their stories of being Black and Jewish and navigating this complex identity.

We concluded our annual programming with S.L. Wisenberg’s Yom HaShoah presentation of her Juniper Prize winning book *The Wandering Womb: Essays in Search of Home*.

I am delighted to report that three graduate students in Comparative & World Literature have re-started the Future of Trauma and Reading Studies group. Ragini Chakraborty, Matthew Fam, and Ann Pei led the group with a series of wonderful essays. I was only able to attend once (and caught the tail end of the final meeting), but when I participated in the conversation about spectrality, I was deeply impressed with the level of engagement with a series of texts that the students had chosen. I look forward to seeing how this group evolves next year.

Next year, plans include Samuel Freedman, professor of journalism at Columbia, who will offer the Jewish Studies and HGMS kick-off event at 5 p.m. on Sept. 11, “Into the Bright Sunshine: Young Hubert Humphrey and the Fight for Civil Rights.”

Then for International Holocaust Remembrance Day, Jan. 27, 2025, at the suggestion of Frances Harris I’ve invited Zisl Slepovitch to present his Songs from Testimonies (pending MillerComm approval). Then, on February 12 (date and time to be firmed up), we’ll launch HGMS and Germanic languages and literatures professor Anke Pinkert’s brilliant new book [Remembering 1989](#), which is due out with University of Chicago Press in October. I’ve had the opportunity to read parts of this book and it’s a powerful exploration of 1989, the Berlin Wall coming down, and all the aftereffects of this in personal and archival memories.

On Friday, March 28, we’ll host the annual HGMS graduate student conference, and then plan to close out the year’s programming on April 24 with a visit from photographer Ara Oshagan, who, in collaboration with other photographers, documented survivors of the Armenian genocide and produced epic scale photographs, to witness. I have applied to both the Art Gallery in the Illini Union and the Siebel Center for Design and am hoping to have a paired exhibition with smaller images in the Union, and larger ones at Siebel. You can learn more about the amazing project [here](#).

Brett Ashley Kaplan

Director of Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies

White supremacy and Holocaust denial have deep roots in the Midwest



By Antoinette Burton

In a recent interview on the [CNN podcast *The Axe Files*](#), crime writer Sara Paretsky talked about the antisemitism she faced growing up in a Jewish family in Kansas in the 1950s—antisemitism that limited what neighborhoods she and her family were allowed to live in.

Paretsky noted that Jews were subject to the same racially restrictive covenant laws as African Americans, [which excluded them from housing](#) in small Midwestern towns as well as in big cities such as Chicago.

As we recognize Holocaust Remembrance Day, we should recall that the links between white supremacy and antisemitism have deep roots across the Midwest, roots that help feed the [violence and vitriol](#) we are seeing across the U.S. right now.

And that denial of the Holocaust is key to understanding that linkage.

I was in my late 20s the first time I met a Holocaust denier in a university classroom in Terre Haute, Indiana, in the early 1990s. I knew that [Nazis had marched in Skokie](#) and that antisemitism was not a thing of the past. But it's safe to say that if I thought about denialism at all, I imagined it happened in Europe, not in my Midwestern backyard.

And then there I was, facing two students who told the class that the concentration camps established by the Nazis were simply places where Jews were “allowed to go” so that they could “worship separately.” I was stunned and speechless. Apparently, the shock was evident on my face. An older student approached me after class and asked: Did you know there is a Holocaust survivor living in town?

That is how I met [Eva Mozes Kor](#), a real estate agent in Terre Haute. Not only was she a Holocaust survivor, but also, she and her twin sister, Miriam, had been subject to the medical “experiments” of Dr. Josef Mengele, the so-called Angel of Death, at Auschwitz.

I invited Eva to my classroom, where she told her story: the trauma of her family being pulled from their home in the village of Portz, Romania, and taken to Auschwitz. There, the children were forcibly separated from their parents, whom they never saw again. Eva rolled up her sleeve and revealed the concentration camp number—A-7063—that had been inked into her forearm. And she narrated everything that happened to her and Miriam until the end of the war and the liberation of the camps in 1945.

Eva traveled extensively to bring her message to the world, giving tours of various camps and preaching her message about the power of the human spirit. She was steely in her determination that no one could or should ever doubt the truth of her story or of the Holocaust as genocide. When she was interviewed on “60 Minutes” in 1992 from her home in Terre Haute, the world could see who she was: defiant, resilient and a pacifist.

But Eva never forgot how important the hometown audience was. She built a museum called CANDLES, which stands for Children of Auschwitz Nazi Deadly Lab Experiments Survivors, in Terre Haute. A space of memory and education, CANDLES [was firebombed in 2003](#), two years after Oklahoma City bomber and anti-government extremist Timothy McVeigh was executed in the federal penitentiary in Terre Haute. The graffiti scrawled at the scene said, “Remember Timmy McVeigh.”

No one was ever prosecuted for the crime. And CANDLES was rebuilt. But that graffiti speaks to links between white supremacy and antisemitism that are long and deep in American history. So, when we remember the Holocaust, we should recall Eva Kor and the work she did in Terre Haute, as well as on the world stage.

Kor was as American as apple pie. She died [in 2019 on the Fourth of July](#). She is buried in Highland Lawn Cemetery in Terre Haute—a town which, thanks to its proximity to Route 66, is known colloquially as the Crossroads of America. And

continued on page 6



Electric fence in former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz I. (Photo by levgen Skrypko - stock.adobe.com)

White supremacy and Holocaust denial have deep roots in the Midwest *continued*

there's a mural of her in Indianapolis right next to one of writer Kurt Vonnegut.

I've recounted this story to friends for decades to remind people that the Holocaust is not something "out there," disconnected from the American heartland. And that the kinship between Holocaust denialism and white supremacy is as American as apple pie too.

As the world rages over and grieves for the death and destruction wrought by sectarian hatred, we must work to make the links between antisemitism, Islamophobia and white Christian nationalism better known.

"Forgive your worst enemy," was Eva Kor's watchword. Forgive, and acknowledge wrongdoing.

But remember that the Midwest is

a crossroads where many forms of racial antagonism meet and flourish. We cannot afford to forget that.

Antoinette Burton is a professor of history and director of the Humanities Research Institute at U of I. She is a public voices fellow with The OpEd Project and the University of Illinois System. This article was first published in the [Chicago Tribune](#).

Harriet Murav receives NEH Scholarly Editions and Translations Award

By Dania De La Hoya Rojas



Professor Harriet Murav

has won a prestigious NEH Scholarly Editions and Translations Award for her collaborative translation of "In the Shadow of the Holocaust: Short Fiction by Jewish Writers from the Soviet Union."

Murav received the award with her collaborator, Sasha Senderovich of the University of

Washington. Together, they will work on an annotated English translation of 10 Yiddish and Russian short stories written in the Soviet Union about the Soviet Jewish experience of World War II and the Holocaust.

Murav said the idea for this project dates back to 2017, when she and Senderovich published a translation of Yiddish writer David Bergelson's [Judgment: A Novel](#) (Northwestern University Press, 2017).

"It dawned on us that if we want to teach students about this experience, there's virtually nothing in translation," said Murav. "We thought, 'Here are these searing and important expressions of emotion, and no one has access to them. No one can read them because they haven't been translated. Let's give people a selection of works that they couldn't touch otherwise.'"

The award came in the NEH's [third round of awards in 2023](#) and was one of just 280 projects funded nationwide, for a total of \$41.3 million.

"I was stunned and delighted [when I heard the news,]" said Murav. "It's competitive. These [author] names are not names that most people are familiar with, and I was just amazed."

Murav said the award also affirms the importance of translation work, both on and off campus.

"I'm just really pleased that translation is receiving recognition as significant scholarly and creative work, as that was not always the case," she said. "It's a great affirmation of our work. [We ask], 'Is it going to matter?' Well, it does."

While Murav said she doesn't think in terms of impact when she works on a project like this, she does hope the translated words will resonate with future readers.

"I hope someone reads these words and gasps, or cries, or [laughs] at parts that are funny, or wants to read more, or changes their mind about these events and their representation," she said.

Harriet Murav is a professor in the [Departments of Slavic Languages & Literatures](#) and [Comparative & World Literature](#), the Program in Jewish Culture & Society, the Unit for Criticism and Interpretive Theory, and the Center for Advanced Study. She is also a Catherine and Bruce Bastian Research Professor in Global and Transnational Studies and was [recently named a Marjorie Roberts Professor in Liberal Arts & Sciences](#). She also currently serves as interim head of the Department of Comparative & World Literature, which was [recently reorganized from a program to a department](#).

SYMPOSIUM IN HONOR OF BRUCE ROSENSTOCK

Transfinite Life: A Symposium in Honor of Bruce

Rosenstock took place on Oct. 2, 2023. It was hosted by the Department of Religion and the Program in Jewish Culture & Society. The day-long symposium commemorated Bruce Rosenstock, who passed away in January 2023. Speakers from a variety of institutions gathered in person and via Zoom to share their responses to Bruce's scholarly work, activism, and service. As Jon Ebel (Department of Religion, U of I) said in his opening address, the symposium invited speakers to reflect on "the way [Bruce] lives on in each of our lives."

Speakers discussed Bruce's scholarship from his doctoral dissertation on ancient Greek grammar and Plato to his recent work with and about the Black Hebrew Israelite community. In a Q & A session, Harriet Murav (departments of Comparative & World Literature and Slavic Languages & Literature, U of I), Bruce's beloved wife, spoke about "Folk Literature of the Sephardic Jews," a digital archive of the fieldwork Samuel Armistead (University of California, Davis) and Joseph Silverman (University of California, Davis) conducted to gather ballads and other folk literature in the Hispanic tradition as preserved by the Sephardic Jews. Bruce created this archive with a \$500,000 National Science Foundation grant, and it

is housed at the U of I at sephardifolklit.illinois.edu. These projects and his books, titled *New Men: Conversos, Christian Theology, and Society in Fifteenth Century Castile* (University of London Press, 2002), *Philosophy and the Jewish Question: Mendelssohn, Rosenzweig, and Beyond* (Fordham, 2010), and *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination* (Indiana University Press, 2017), reflect Bruce's erudition and intellectual curiosity.

Bruce's service to the academic community as well as his dedication to the respectful exchange of ideas and academic freedom were common themes throughout the presentations. Speakers recounted discussions with Bruce at conferences, in U of I hallways, in airports, and on long walks around Champaign and Palo Alto, California. Bruce was a kind and generous colleague and instructor. A slideshow presented at the "Memories of Bruce" session displayed photographs of Bruce smiling at caricatures a student drew of him on his classroom's blackboard. In keeping with the symposium's title *Transfinite Life*, taken from Bruce's 2017 monograph on Oskar Goldberg, the symposium speakers and audience members discussed how to continue Bruce's important work.



Transfinite Life: A Symposium in Honor of *Bruce Rosenstock*

Monday, October 2, 2023 | 10:00 AM - 6:00 PM | Levis Faculty Center, Rm 210

**Hosted by the Department of Religion and
Program in Jewish Culture & Society**

Participants

Mårten Björk | Oxford University; Lund University
Rachel Havrelock | University of Illinois Chicago
Martin Kavka | Florida State University
Adam Kotsko | Northwestern University
Seth Schein | University of California Davis
Joshua Shanes | College of Charleston
Helga Varden | University of Illinois Urbana Champaign
Dov Weiss | University of Illinois Urbana Champaign


For complete schedule information please consult religion.illinois.edu



Jewish Life in Central Illinois: Past and Present

On April 17, 2024, the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections at the U of I Library sponsored the event Jewish Life in Central Illinois: Past and Present, which consisted of a panel of speakers, a Q & A session, and a reception. This event was associated with the Program in Jewish Culture & Society Spring 2024 class JS 495: Jewish Life in Central Illinois, where students used the Central Illinois Jewish Communities Archives (CIJCA), housed at the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, to develop their own research presentations and library exhibits.

Sybil Mervis, a founding donor to the CIJCA, opened the panel by speaking about how the archives were established. Lauren Reed, an MSLIS student and graduate assistant at the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, then gave a presentation about the CIJCA collections. The students' presentation topics included Jewish education in Central Illinois, the Danville Chapter of Hadassah, and the history of the Jewish community in DePue, Illinois. The exhibits of archival sources that the students designed were also on display, and the scrapbook a student created based on her fieldwork in DePue, Illinois, was circulated. The panel was followed by a light reception that included brownies made by Sybil Mervis.



Jewish Life in Central Illinois: Past and Present

Please join us for a panel of student presentations followed by a reception with light refreshments! The students of the Spring 2024 class "JS 495: Jewish Life in Central Illinois" will present their research based on the Central Illinois Jewish Communities Archives (CIJCA) collections and their own fieldwork. We are also delighted to announce that Sybil Mervis, a founding donor to CIJCA, will be our guest speaker!

Presentation topics will include the creation of the archives, Jewish education in central Illinois, the Danville Chapter of Hadassah, and the history of the Jewish community in DePue, IL. Come learn more about the Jewish history of our region and the fascinating sources that CIJCA includes!

Wednesday
April 17, 2024
2:00 - 3:00 p.m.

Scholarly Commons
220 Main Library
1408 W. Gregory Drive


RECEPTION TO FOLLOW

RSVP by
Monday, April 15
friends@library.illinois.edu

If you will need disability-related accommodations in order to participate in any of these programs/events, please let us know. Early requests are strongly encouraged to allow sufficient time to meet your access needs. Call (312) 333-5682 with any questions.

University Library
Sponsored by the Illinois History and Lincoln Collections

This event will also be accessible online via Zoom. Register at the QR code:



NEW FACULTY

Ilit Morchaym is an instructor of Hebrew in the Program for Jewish Culture & Society. She has an MA in learning disabilities from Bar-Ilan University in Israel. She is a didactic diagnostician who specializes in linguistics (Hebrew and ESL/EFL) and education (language development, learning disorders, learning strategies and remedial teaching). Her recent study examined the correlation between executive processes and the auditory lexical processing of homophonic words (Hebrew-English).



Israel and Palestine Events

On Aug. 23, the Champaign-Urbana Jewish Federation in collaboration with PJCS hosted a private showing of the film Golda at the Savoy 16 + Imax Theatre. Thank you to everyone who joined us. We sold out of seats and filled almost every row of the theatre. Prior to the film, a panel of three local female political leaders reflected on their leadership experience through the lens of their gender. The panel was moderated by Brett Ashley Kaplan.



PROGRAM IN JEWISH CULTURE & SOCIETY

YIFAT BITTON
President, Adina Academic College
&
Human Rights Activist

May 14, 2024
1 PM CST
Online Event

Minority Groups and the Israeli Peculiarity

The State of Israel is a democratic and liberal state that also serves as the nation-state of the Jewish people. The social and legal challenges posed by this duality regarding the identity of the state are numerous and complex.

This lecture will address these challenges from a socio-legal perspective, focusing on an in-depth examination of laws, with an emphasis on the need to protect the right to equality for various minority groups in the national state. The lecture will also present a critique of the State of Israel's limited endorsement in dealing with these challenges constructively.

Sponsored by the Humanities Research Institute, Department of Jewish Studies, and the Center for Jewish Studies, Programs, and Initiatives in Religious, Historical, and Jewish Studies.

ELASTIC EMPIRE: REFASHIONING WAR THROUGH AID IN PALESTINE

LISA BHUNGALIA
Assistant Professor of Geography at Kent State University
Lisa Bhungalia researches late-modern war, law, empire, and transnational linkages between the US and Southeast Asian and North African regions.

Her talk discusses US counterterrorism warfare and its effect on the daily lives of those in West Bank and Gaza Strip. How have counterterrorism law and sanctions grown and shifted over two decades of US-led "war on terror"?

**MARCH 27, 2024
4:00 PM
LEVIS FACULTY CENTER
ROOM 210**

Sponsored by Department of Asian American Studies, Department of International Studies, Department of Gender & Women's Studies, Department of Anthropology, Center for South Asian & Middle East Studies, Department of Geography & GIS, Program in Jewish Culture & Society, and Baruch M. Stein Jewish Cultural Center.

SPONSORED BY THE PROGRAM IN JEWISH CULTURE & SOCIETY, LEVINE BENEFIT SERVICE, AND THE CHAMPAIGN-URBANA JEWISH FEDERATION

ISRAEL IN TIMES OF CRISIS: A CONVERSATION WITH RHONA SEIDELMAN

October 17, 2023
4 PM
Main Library Room 106
And Online

Dr. Rhona Seidman is a senior lecturer in the Department of International Studies and the Center for Jewish Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She is the author of several books including "The Black Hebrew Movement" and "The Black Hebrew Movement in America: A History of the Black Hebrew Movement in America." She is also a frequent speaker at conferences and events related to the Black Hebrew Movement and the Jewish community in America.

ILLINOIS

Antisemitism on the American Campus

Sponsored by the Israel Studies Project, the Program in Jewish Culture & Society, the College of Business, and the School of Social Work

**MAY 1, 2024
9 AM-6:45 PM
LEVIS FACULTY CENTER 300**

Co-Moderators:
Eugene W. Austin, Director, PJCS (ejw@uiuc.edu)
Organizer: Brett Kaufman, Classics & PJCS (bkaufman@uiuc.edu)

The Program in Jewish Culture & Society is committed to promoting a variety of scholarly, cultural, and creative events and programs that advance the study and understanding of Jewish life and culture in America. This event is a part of that commitment.

ILLINOIS

ILLINOIS GLOBAL INSTITUTE
CENTER FOR AFRICAN STUDIES

CHAIRMAN OF LIBERAL ARTS & SCIENCES

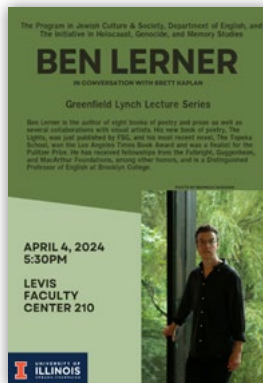
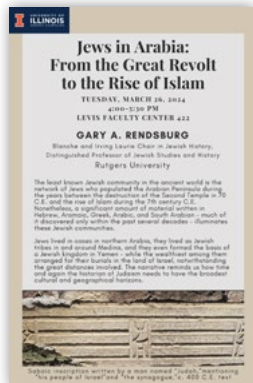
"Gaza: What Would MLK Do?"

**WEDNESDAY, FEB. 21
7:00-8:30 p.m.
Levin Faculty Center
919 W. Illinois Street 3rd Floor**

Dr. Robert D. Kellie, Distinguished Professor and Chair of the Department of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, will be the featured speaker. He is the author of several books including "The Black Hebrew Movement" and "The Black Hebrew Movement in America: A History of the Black Hebrew Movement in America." He is also a frequent speaker at conferences and events related to the Black Hebrew Movement and the Jewish community in America.

ILLINOIS

More Events



Jewish Studies Award Winners

Karasik Scholarship

Jared Cohen, PhD student,
Department of Germanic
Languages & Literatures

Matthew Fam, PhD student,
Department of Comparative
& World Literature

Jennie Eagle, PhD student,
Department of History

Gendell Shiner Fellowship

Alice Balestrino, PhD Student,
Department of Comparative
& World Literature

Ron Filler Scholarship

Dana Rose Steingold,
Jewish studies minor

Samantha Levy,
Jewish studies minor

Richard Abrams Award

Ezra Landman-Feigelson,
urban planning major

FACULTY UPDATES

Eugene Avrutin

Eugene Avrutin started a five-year term as the editor-in-chief of *Slavic Review*, the flagship publication of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies. As the director of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society, he worked with colleagues in the Department of Religion and the Department of Comparative and World Literature on a cluster hire initiative in Jewish Studies. He published a review article, *The End of Everything? Pogroms in War and Revolution*, in the *Journal of Modern History*. An educational video based on his book, *Racism in Modern Russia: From the Romanovs to Putin*, appeared in the PONARS Eurasia Online Academy. Together with Elissa Bemporad (CUNY), he is working on *Pogroms: A Very Short Introduction* for Oxford University Press.

Virginia R. Dominguez

Virginia R. Dominguez was elected secretary-general of the IUAES (the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences) in the fall of 2023. She works with colleagues at the highest level of world anthropology in this role but also as a member of the steering committee of the emerging World Anthropological Union. She applied for, and got, a sabbatical for 2024-2025 to research and finish a book on the early part of the 20th century in Cuba under U.S. occupation. Throughout this year, she also worked closely with AnthroPen, a Quebecquois project promoting and using French, rather than English, in publication, and was part of the leadership team seeking funding and future, more multilingual initiatives for AnthroPen. Dominguez also played a leading role in bringing Ruth Behar to the University of Illinois as a MillerCom speaker on behalf of the Program in Jewish Culture & Society.

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Faculty updates *continued*

In addition to serving on the LAS Executive Committee, the U of I Senate, and the International Forum for U.S. Studies leadership team over the 2023-24 academic year, she taught two undergraduate courses in anthropology (one a capstone course and one on film) and one graduate course on politics, knowledge, and evidence with students from six different departments in the humanities and social sciences. She also published articles in France, the U.S., Cuba, and Portugal and has an accepted co-edited volume on neoliberalism, the academy, and anthropology in the works in Lisbon. Reviews of manuscripts this year included two for Oxford University Press on Israel, one before and one after the current war with Hamas.

This year Brett Kaplan was appointed the [Nannerl O. Keohane Visiting Distinguished Professor](#) at Duke and UNC for the 2023-24 academic year. She was also awarded a [CAS Associate Fellowship](#) to complete her novel about Nazi looted art, “Vandervelde Downs” (currently under review). Brett Kaplan, Sara Feldman, and Anthony Russell finished their co-edited anthology, the first collection of its kind, “And Beautiful: Contemporary Black Jewish Voices” (under review). She published an essay in Arts entitled [Converged Aesthetics: Blewishness in the Work of Anthony Mordechai Tzvi Russell](#). In May 2023, Kaplan’s edited volume, [Critical Memory Studies: New Approaches](#) was published by Bloomsbury and will be re-issued in paperback soon. She served as chair of two search committees, for a new Yiddish scholar and for the director of the School of Art and Design, and as a member on a third search committee for a new professor in Italian. Kaplan is delighted to see our faculty growing with three exciting new hires. She ran a series of scintillating events in her role as director of Holocaust, Genocide, Memory Studies—a full report will be posted on the blog, [Days and Memory](#), and she is so grateful to all our visitors, sponsors, and audience members for making this another vibrant year of HGMS programming. Kaplan is now

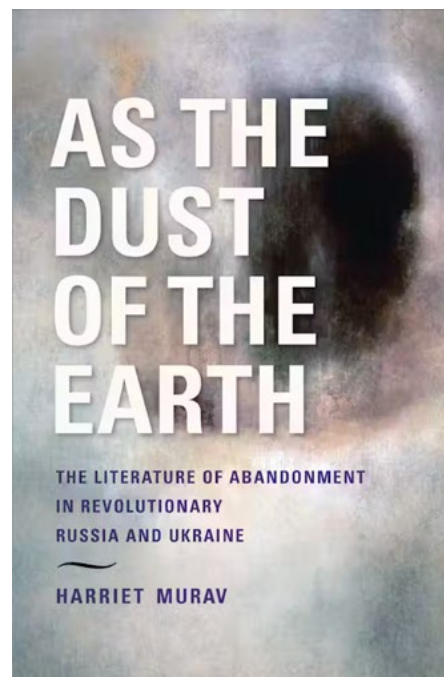
beginning to research and write a novel about Seneca Villa

Brett Kaufman

Brett Kaufman organized the Spring 2024 conference “Antisemitism on the American Campus,” sponsored by the Israel Studies Project, PJCS, Gies College of Business, and the School of Social Work.

Harriet Murav

Harriet Murav published “As the Dust of the Earth: The Literature of Abandonment in Revolutionary Russia and Ukraine” with Indiana University Press.



Dana Rabin

Dana Rabin continued to chair the Department of History this year, ending her term on Aug. 15, 2024. She is looking forward to a year’s sabbatical in Nantes, France, where she will continue to work on her book on Jews, families, and the early modern Atlantic World. Rabin was delighted with the invitation to kick off AY 2023-2024 for the Program in Jewish Culture & Society with a lecture on “The Jewish Atlantic: Colonization, Circulation, and ‘Emancipation’ in the British Empire,

1650-1830.” She has four articles forthcoming as well as the special issue of *_Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies_*, “Next Year in the Caribbean: Race, Religion, and Roots in the Jewish Atlantic World.” The issue is co-edited with Hilit Surowitz-Israel (Religion, Rutgers) and based on the 2020 symposium organized with Dara Goldman. The special issue will be published in March 2025. It is dedicated to Dara.

Emanuel Rota

Emanuel Rota continued to work on a book tentatively titled “Fortress Europe: The Francophone-Italian Roots of Fascist Europeanism from Pan-Europa to the European Communities,” scheduled to appear with Routledge in the series “Studies in Fascism and the Far Right.”

Dov Weiss

Dov Weiss is an associate professor of Jewish studies in the Department of Religion. In July 2021, he was one of four College of Liberal Arts & Sciences professors named a Conrad Humanities Scholar in recognition of promising mid-career scholars. He is currently working on his next book project, “Rabbinic Inferno in Classical Judaism,” which examines the category of Gehinnom (hell) within classical Judaism. His recent publications include “Gehinnom’s Punishments in Classical Rabbinic Literature,” in “Jewish Culture and Creativity: Essays in Honor of Michael Fishbane,” edited by Elisha Fishbane and Eitan Fishbane (Boston), and “Cyril of Alexandria’s Critique of ‘Jewish’ Parental Sin” in “Medieval Encounters.” Next semester, Dov will be teaching a new course, REL 419: Jesus and Judaism, which examines the ways Jews over the last 2,000 years thought about, polemicized against, and celebrated Jesus of Nazareth.



ALUMNI UPDATES

Aria Tsoulouhas

During Aria's first semester as an undergraduate, she enrolled in JS 120: A History of Judaism, taught by Dov Weiss. At the time, she had a rudimentary interest in the academic study of Judaism, but Professor Weiss's enthusiasm for the material, and the richness of the Jewish tradition, inspired her to change her major from comparative literature to Jewish Studies. Later in her undergraduate career, Aria decided to double major in classics (Greek) to situate her exploration of Second Temple Judaism in its Greco-Roman milieu. By the time she graduated from Illinois in 2018, Aria was well-equipped for graduate study and received a MAR in Second Temple Judaism from Yale Divinity School in 2021.

Currently, Aria is a PhD student in the Department of Religious Studies (Hebrew Bible and ancient Judaism) at UNC-Chapel Hill. Her most recent research, in conversation with scholars of feminist theory, queer theory, Black studies, and disability studies, has examined surrogacy, reproductive futurism, and maternity in the Hebrew Bible and the contemporary world.

Frequently, Aria engages Jewish feminist thinkers like Mara Benjamin to trace the contours of ancient and modern maternal caregiving.

Aria's time in the Program in Jewish Culture & Society at Illinois, shaped by indelible mentors like Bruce Rosenstock (z"l), Dov Weiss, and Sara Feldman, introduced her to the major questions and debates underpinning the academic study of Judaism, taught her to critically investigate and analyze religious texts, and nurtured her curiosity about the human condition. She learned Biblical Hebrew with Bruce Rosenstock, who taught her class to recite the first few verses of Genesis to the tune of the song "Bereshit" by the Moshav Band. She studied the stubborn and rebellious son from Tractate Sanhedrin with Dov Weiss (and realized rabbis can, indeed, interpret biblical laws out of existence!). Finally, she learned modern Hebrew with Sara Feldman, which unlocked a world of Hebrew language media and scholarship.

Aria is infinitely grateful for the knowledge she gained and the relationships she cultivated as a Jewish Studies major at Illinois.

Aria says, "If you're a current undergraduate pondering a Jewish Studies major or minor, I encourage you go for it. The study of Judaism, or religion more broadly, grants you the freedom to ask the big questions: What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be 'religious'? What does it mean to be wise and good, and what can religious texts teach us about living well? How do Jewish thinkers, specifically, try to answer these questions? Jewish Studies complements other humanities or non-humanities majors, but it is also a formidable and foundational field all on its own."



Tsoulouhas

Johnna Jones

Johnna Jones is currently in her final semester at Vanderbilt Law School! She will be taking the Tennessee Bar in July. She also just completed her second season as a Tennessee Titans cheerleader!



Throughout law school, Johnna has been very involved. In her first year, she was the 1L representative for the International Law Society, Criminal Law Association, and the Law Students for Social Justice organization. She was also a general member of the Black Law Students Association, Legal Aid Society, and Law Students for Veteran Affairs. The summer after her first year, Johnna was a summer associate at Butler Snow, and she clerked for Federal Magistrate Judge Newbern in the Middle District of Tennessee. Johnna says, “both experiences were amazing and pushed my intellectual curiosity.”

While still a general member of all the organizations she was a part of during her 1L year, during her second year of law school Johnna became the social chair for the Black Law Students Association. She planned all social events for BLSA, including Thanksgiving dinners, brunches, welcome events, and more! She also became a co-counsel mentor for three lovely 1Ls. Johnna shared the advice and knowledge that she gleaned, and she is happy to say they are all very successful students. In the spring semester of 2L, she clerked for Judge Calloway at Davidson County Juvenile Court. That internship has pushed her to become heavily involved in children’s advocacy, and she plans to do guardian-ad-litem work once she becomes a licensed attorney. She describes the summer work after her second year as “exhilarating.” Johnna was a summer associate at Thompson Burton, and she was a clerk for the Tennessee Attorney General’s Office in the Law Enforcement and Special Prosecutions Division.

Johnna’s last year at Vanderbilt has deepened her intellectual development and is preparing her to practice law at Thompson Burton. She will be practicing family law and doing a few appointed cases as a guardian-ad-litem on the side. Johnna says, “I am so excited for the future, but I know I would not be in this position without my education and experiences at the University of Illinois. I am forever thankful that I attended U. of I., and even more thankful for my degree in economics and history with my minor in Jewish Studies. I lean on that education every day and will always be a proud Illini alum.”

Deborah Lynch



Author Ben Lerner with alumna Deborah Lynch. Lerner visited the University of Illinois in April to deliver the Greenfield-Lynch Lecture, a series made possible by the generous support of Lynch.