

Forward

WEEKEND READS



12

30

22

Document reveals Santos boasted of being ‘proud American Jew’ during campaign

By Jacob Kornbluh

Congressman-elect George Santos, a Republican from New York who reportedly lied about his Jewish heritage and has admitted he fabricated key details of his resume, said in an interview Monday evening that he never claimed to be Jewish. “I said I was ‘Jew-ish,’” Santos told The New York Post.

However, in a position paper shared with Jewish and pro-Israel leaders during the campaign and obtained by the Forward, Santos called himself “a proud American Jew.”

In the two-page document that the Santos campaign shared earlier this year with pro-Israel groups, including the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Santos also claimed to “have been to Israel numerous times from educational, business, and leisurely trips.” A brief search of his social media accounts found no images or documentation of his alleged trips to Israel.

According to genealogy websites reviewed by the Forward and reported last week, Santos falsely claimed to have Jewish

grandparents who fled anti-Jewish persecution in Ukraine and then Belgium during World War II. The website MyHeritage.com lists Santos’ maternal grandparents as having both been born in Brazil before the Nazis rose to power. Santos’ mother, Fatima Alzira Caruso Horta Devolder, who died in 2016, regularly shared posts with Catholic themes and images of Jesus on her Facebook page.

In several interviews published Monday, Santos admitted he forged his professional biography and lied about his education and work experience. But the Long Island politician offered contradictory statements about his claimed Jewish heritage. In an interview with The New York Post, Santos said that he “never claimed to be Jewish” and that because his maternal family had a Jewish background, he said he was ‘Jew-ish.’ In a Zoom interview with City & State, a New York-based media website, Santos repeated that he always jokes he is “also Jew-ish – as in ‘ish.’” Later in the interview, Santos complained that “people are rushing to disinherit me from being Jewish or even allowing to care for Israel

and Judaism in a time and era where antisemitism is at an all-time rise.”

In a radio interview co-hosted by former Congressman Anthony Weiner, who resigned in 2011 after lying about a sexting scandal, Santos questioned the reporting that showed his grandparents had been born in Brazil. “I want to know where they’re getting these reports from,” he said. “Because all I see is a picture of somebody who they’re alleging is either my great grandfather or my great, great grandfather.” Asked directly whether they were born in Latin America, Santos said that “to the best of my knowledge, to the best of my understanding, no they were not.”

Santos, who spoke at the Republican Jewish Coalition’s conference in Las Vegas shortly after winning his election in November, was also a featured guest at the group’s menorah-lighting party on the first night of Hanukkah.

Matt Brooks, the RJC’s chief executive, said in a statement Tuesday that the group is “very disappointed” in Santos for deceiving them about his heritage. “In public comments and to us personally he previously claimed to be Jewish. He has begun his tenure in Congress on a very wrong note,” Brooks said, adding that Santos won’t be welcome at any future RJC events.

Tulsi Gabbard, a former congresswoman from Hawaii, berated Santos Tuesday in a live, seven-minute takedown on the Fox News show Tucker Carlson Tonight. “If I were one of those in New York’s 3rd District

right now that the election is over,” Gabbard said, “and I’m finding out all of these lies you’ve told — not just one little lie or one little embellishment, these are blatant lies — my question is: Do you have no shame?”

When Santos responded by accusing President Joe Biden of “lying to people for 40 years,” Gabbard countered: “This is not about the Democratic Party. This is about your relationship with the people who’ve entrusted you to go and fight for them. One of the questions that really hits home to a lot of people is, are you Jewish?” Citing a letter from his campaign sent out earlier this year in which he described himself as a “proud American Jew” who’d been to Israel “numerous times,” Gabbard then asked, “You said you were a proud American Jew. How do you explain that?”

“My heritage is Jewish,” Santos replied. “I’ve always identified as Jewish.” He added that he was “raised a practicing Catholic” and “always joked” with friends that “I’m Jew-ish.”

“You don’t really seem to be taking this seriously,” Gabbard observed, adding: “You said you’ve made mistakes, but you’ve outright lied.” She ended the interview by asking how voters “could possibly trust your explanations when you’re not really even willing to admit the depths of your deception.”

The Santos campaign didn’t immediately return a request for comment.

Inside outsider: Counseling Hasidic special needs children

By Michael Fox

Many years ago, after retiring from being a psychologist for children in residential treatment centers and public schools, I began working as a psychologist for intellectually and emotionally challenged Hasidic children in a program that was housed in a kheyder, a Hasidic elementary school for boys, in Williamsburg, Brooklyn.

I was told by the agency that sent me that the school administrators didn't want any counselors for their children from outside the community, apparently concerned that they could adversely influence the faith of their most vulnerable boys. But there are very few licensed Yiddish-speaking counselors, and I was the only one available. The administrators for the special needs program in the school were said to have been told by their local Committee on Special Education that if the school didn't accept me, it would lose other government services.

I well understood that the Hasidic community considered people like me a spiritual threat to their children. I was clearly a Jew, but I represented an alternative way of expressing my Jewishness — and they didn't want their children exposed to it.

Working in a community that didn't want me

So why would I choose to work in a community that didn't want me? After a long career serving a diverse population of children, I could have retired completely. Why had I made the effort to get licensed as a Yiddish-speaking psychologist? Yiddish was the language of home for me. When I was a child, wherever my family settled after the Holocaust, nothing was really certain except our family language, Yiddish. It was our bedrock.

Ironically, my father, a Yiddish writer, sent me to an ultra-Orthodox yeshiva, although we only loosely followed traditional ways. He felt that yeshiva was where I would learn what a Jew needed to know. Not surprising, really. He had studied in yeshiva for years and remained a fervent believer in God till the end of his life. What was surprising is that he maintained his faith even after adopting a secular lifestyle, which included eating non-kosher meat and having coffee with milk after a meat meal.

My father was happy with his decision, but honestly, I didn't fit in with the other students in the yeshiva. It wasn't just because I

wasn't religious. Although the school administrators accepted me as a student, I was never welcomed into the insular German Jewish Washington Heights community that had founded the school. Besides, Yiddish wasn't the language of home for my classmates. I was a Jew but, for the long years I spent there, I was always an outsider, like a yovn in suke, someone who didn't belong in their sukkah. When I discovered in my teens that there were many young people in my own community engaged in secular Yiddish life, I immediately took to it.

Why I, a secular Jew, am so drawn to the Hasidic community

Now, as an adult in my 60s, I knew there were few secular Yiddish speakers left. My Yiddish-speaking friends, American children of Holocaust survivors, were intimately connected to the amazing cultural ferment of the Eastern Europe Yiddish world farn krig (before the war), without ever having lived in it. But so very few of my generation's children and those of other secular Yiddish speakers can speak our mame loshn. I had an urgent yearning to hear children speaking Yiddish. So when I was ready to retire from my regular work, I decided that I wanted to work with Yiddish-speaking children, and the only ones who still spoke the language on a daily basis were those of the Hasidic communities.

But there were other reasons I was drawn to the Hasidic world. In many ways they still lived the way Jews lived in Eastern Europe before World War II, and I wanted to reclaim

the Eastern Europe that had been stolen from me, that by rights should have been my heritage. There was also what might be called a spiritual component to my interest in them. As a boy in yeshiva and a camper in the Lubavitch summer camp Gan Yisroel, I had experienced fleeting moments in which I felt enfolded in the arms of God. Even though I could never bring myself to be a believer, I secretly longed to be one.

The Hasidic kids' reaction upon meeting me

I was invited to an interview with the board of directors of the special needs program. I told them that I had religious training, and so I wouldn't pose a threat to the children's beliefs and way of life. The main decider in the group was a young rabbi who apparently had a background in psychology. He and I had an immediate rapport as we discussed boys' relationships with their fathers, hinting about our personal experience with our own fathers.

The only question remaining was, would the children accept me. I was brought into a classroom with six boys and the teacher. The children seemed curious and began peppering me with questions in Yiddish and I responded. When I said something I thought was funny, they laughed.

They asked if I spoke any other languages besides Yiddish. I said I also spoke French and English. They were excited when I said I spoke English, because they thought I said "Ingrish," which is what they called Hungarian, the language of their Eastern European forebears to which their

community still had an emotional tie. When I figured out that they thought I said “Hungarian,” I told them that I didn’t speak it and they accepted that, saying that they didn’t either. But they seemed happy to talk to this outsider who spoke their language: Yiddish.

On the other hand, I was probably a novelty to them, being beardless, wearing a sedate suit, white shirt and necktie. And my knit yarmulke was a sign that I was too modern. One child was actually intrigued by it. He grabbed it off my head and traded it for his own velvet one and ran off. Everyone, including the administrators standing there, laughed. I was in.

Bringing in maps and secular books about other cultures

I started working in their summer program, ostensibly so that the school administrators could see if it would work out, i.e. that I wouldn’t influence the children’s faith in a negative way. When I saw the toys in the room where I was to work with the children, I was surprised to find lifelike dolls among them. There’s a Talmudic prohibition against dolls because of the biblical proscription against making graven images. I asked one of the rebbes (teachers) about this. He said that dolls were accepted in the general community because they were clearly not intended for idol worship. But they were especially acceptable for special needs children. I found out that in order to help these children, many dispensations were made. Including me, I guessed.

I was also surprised that the program had a model of the solar system, and that they were proud to show it to me. Making images of heavenly bodies is specifically proscribed in the khumesh, the Bible. I never found out why it was permissible to have it in the school. Maybe because the model was plastic and in no way resembled the actual heavenly bodies.

I bought a velvet yarmulke so that I would fit in more, but it really wasn’t necessary because the boys were always eager to come to me. I tried to get them to talk about their feelings, but it was challenging. They simply weren’t accustomed to talking about themselves in detail, especially about their emotions.

So I set low goals. Through the medium of playing games and toys, I tried to have them engage in give-and-take conversations with me or with another child in a “group” of two — all in Yiddish, of course.

Getting to know the teachers

The adults appreciated that I had a good rapport with the boys and treated me warmly. Some of the rabbis clearly liked that I brought the outside world in, such as when I taped maps of New York onto the wall and displayed a globe of the world, as well as books about other cultures in my office cubicle. I brought one of the rabbis the secular books in Yiddish that he asked for, especially one that documented the Czernowitz Conference of 1908 declaring Yiddish a national language of the Jewish people.

I developed a few genuine friendships among the teachers. We often discussed our different perspectives. I was struck by how little these learned men knew about secular culture. None of them knew who William Shakespeare was. They had heard of George Washington and some knew of Abraham Lincoln, but not much more of our country's history. On the other hand, they knew the name of every major rabbi who had influenced religious Jewish thought throughout the centuries. Even the boys in this special needs program knew about these famous rabbis, as well as children in secular schools know the names of sports heroes. Many of the children even had picture cards of the rabbis.

The rabbis I worked with knew the names of only two Yiddish writers: Sholem Aleichem and Aaron Zeitlin. Yiddish was their daily language, but it was used only for practical day-to-day communication, not for developing higher-level ideas. For that they had *loshn-koydesh*, the Hebrew-Aramaic holy language used for religious texts.

Members of the Hasidic community welcome me into their homes

I was excited to be among the rabbis and children of the Hasidic program in which I worked. Here, in this small segment of the Haredi community, I felt welcomed. People would invite me to their homes for *simkhes* (celebrations) and to weddings. I was often treated like an honored guest. I was not one of them, just as I hadn't been an insider in my yeshiva as a child, but among the Hasidim I was appreciated.

Surprisingly, what was most gratifying for me was *davening* (praying) the *minkhe* service every afternoon at 2 o'clock. I put my hat on over my *yarmulke*, as the others did, and joined the men and boys over 13 who had gathered for prayer in the room outside my little cubicle. Even though they did this every day, the fervor of the vocal utterances and especially the murmurings and deep silences of group prayer were profoundly moving to me. There is something powerful about joining others in supplication to a shared higher being.

I had had traces of such experiences when I was a boy in yeshiva and in Lubavitch camp. But something new astounded me and made my knees wobble. I was overwhelmed that two boys, ages 7 and 8, whom I saw for counseling, nestled close to me as I prayed. They leaned their heads against me and gently held onto my arms, literally connecting with me in my prayers, *shokling* (swaying) in unison with me. It was the most connected to other human beings I had ever felt during prayer. I was there to do therapy with these sweet, innocent young boys, but they were healing me.

Fearing for her kids, she fled with them to Israel — 8 years later, the U.S. plans to arrest her

By Louis Keene

The husband — who she said abused, stalked and threatened to kill her — died last year. The children he accused her of abducting, by fleeing Southern California for Israel in 2014, have all become adults.

But when Lerai Nichols went on a Mediterranean cruise this fall, she was nonetheless arrested for kidnapping and, after seven weeks in detention at a hotel on the Greek island of Crete, faced extradition to the U.S. on federal felony charges.

“It’s an absolute nightmare,” Nichols said. “The system that was in place to protect us, it hurt us instead.”

From Nov. 2 to Dec. 15, Nichols was detained at the hotel, awaiting extradition for what the U.S. Department of Justice calls kidnapping — and what she describes as saving her children from their violent father. Greece eventually let her return to Israel, and she will fly on Wednesday to the United States to resolve the case.

When she arrives at Los Angeles International Airport on Thursday morning, she will be greeted by authorities who will

handcuff her and bring her straight to San Bernardino County Superior Court.

There, Nichols said in a recent interview, she will plead no contest to misdemeanor charges she believes should have been thrown out in 2019, after she was partially vindicated in an Israeli court.

The San Bernardino County District Attorney’s office, which is prosecuting Nichols, declined to comment on the case. But a deputy D.A., Kurt Rowley, wrote to Nichols’ lawyer on Dec. 7 that the offer he made, to dismiss all kidnapping charges and reduce the felony child abduction to a misdemeanor, represented “liberal leniency, given the seriousness of the charges, the underlying conduct, and the strength of the evidence.”

“Any additional leniency would not serve the interests of justice and will not be considered,” Rowley added.

Aspects of the story remain murky, and her ex-husband is not around to share his side. But her detainment reveals the limits of an international agreement to protect children:

It does not necessarily extend to a parent who violated the law for the sake of their well-being.

An unhappy home

Nichols, who is Jewish, lived east of Los Angeles with two sons and a daughter. She fled to Israel with the three children in 2014 — then adolescents — after a family court judge in California ruled she had to split custody with her husband.

The decision followed years of contentious custody battles. Over the course of the proceedings, the children were placed in foster care for a year by the San Bernardino County Department of Children and Family Services, and Nichols was deemed a vexatious litigant by the judge presiding over their case, meaning she either repeatedly filed unmeritorious motions or engaged in tactics the court found frivolous.

According to Nichols, now 60, her ex-husband abused and stalked her, and threatened to kill her and the children, and bury them in his backyard. She also says he killed their dog.

During her last year in California, she said her sons, then about 14 and 13, told her that their father threatened to kill her, them and their younger sister. “It’s going to be him or us,” Nichols recalled them saying. “And you need to take us away, because we’re going to kill him.”

“I knew at that point that what they were saying was true,” she added.

Defying the court

In Israel, the family settled in the town of Hod Hasharon, northeast of Tel Aviv, and Nichols found work as a private English teacher. But absconding to another country with children in defiance of a joint custody order is a felony — child abduction. A U.S. warrant for Nichols arrest was filed soon after.

Her ex-husband filed a case in Israel to regain custody under the Hague Convention on Child Abduction, an international agreement that governs such disputes. According to a translation of the ruling, the Israeli court denied Nichols’ request to modify custody in her favor, but ruled that the children did not have to return to the United States. Nichols said she had hoped that would be enough to vindicate her in the U.S. and cancel her Interpol warrant.

But the case was still not behind her.

She and her daughter, who turned 18 in April, embarked on Oct. 31 on a Mediterranean cruise that departed from Haifa, she said. When the ship reached Crete, she received a message: They had to report to the local immigration authorities.

Her daughter flew to the United States to meet with the San Bernardino D.A., Nichols said, and encouraged her mother to take a plea deal rather than draw out the case further by fighting the charges.

That’s what Nichols did: She said she will plead no contest to three misdemeanor charges of child abduction — one for each child. She will not face incarceration or probation, her attorney said.

Rowley, the deputy D.A., pointed out in the Greek extradition filing that the children's father, Patrick Nichols, was deprived of custody permanently because two of the children became adults during his lifetime and he died before his daughter turned 18. Rowley argued that Lerai Nichols made no attempt to adhere to guidelines designed to accommodate desperate parents — for example by informing authorities of their move.

"The facts of the case present extreme and sophisticated criminal measures taken to deprive a parent of the custody of his own children," Rowley wrote in the filing, an excerpt of which he repeated in an email to Nichols' attorney, James Tierney.

In an interview, Tierney defended Nichols' decision to leave the country for her children's safety, but granted that the Hague Convention did not confer legal immunity onto parents facing criminal charges.

He's hoping that her court appearance, where she will enter her plea — as soon as Thursday — will finally close the book on the children's traumatic experience, and his client's legal entanglement.

"As soon as that happens," he said, "this will all be behind her."

It's buyer's remorse for these Jews who love their Teslas but are disgusted with Elon Musk

By Adam Kovac

Hannah Lavon was feeling pretty good about the Tesla Model 3 she bought a few years ago. Technically, it was a downgrade: Her previous car had been the more expensive Model S. But Lavon, a 39-year-old from Philadelphia who owns a designer sock company, liked its “sci-fiesque” design, and as with her first Tesla, its battery life and extended network of charging stations allows her to drive long-distance.

And she liked Elon Musk, the CEO of the company — the first to mass-market a fully electric car.

“At first, when Tesla came out, I just thought he was a very creative person. I really thought he cared about helping humanity,” she said. “At the time, he wasn’t being so loud and extremely offensive.”

Lavon isn’t the only Jewish Tesla owner who has changed her opinion of the man, and by extension, the car. Several Tesla-owning Jews told the Forward that Musk’s increasingly erratic social media behavior — and his seeming insensitivity to its impact

on Jews — has left them regretting their purchases.

To be sure, many Tesla owners, Jewish or not, have no buyer’s remorse. Sales of the high-performance, environmentally friendly cars, which range from about \$35,000 to \$140,000 — are still climbing. Many still admire Musk for his entrepreneurial spirit and bold ideas for high-speed trains and affordable rockets.

But since Musk’s acquisition of Twitter in October, the company has fired the team that policed hate speech and reinstated numerous high profile antisemites, including Kanye West, who now goes by Ye, and Daily Stormer founder Andrew Anglin, while banning several progressives and journalists. A recent study showed antisemitism in Twitter spiked 61% since Musk bought it. And Musk himself has increasingly posted far-right talking points and conspiratorial tweets.

“I was just like, ‘Shut up,’” said Lavon. And while she wouldn’t go so far to label Musk

antisemitic, she said some of his actions are.

“I think he’s unfortunately a horrible human being and has a crazy ego,” said Lavon. “It’s too bad.”

No sale

Yaroslav Ivanov, 27, a Jew who is originally from Ukraine and works in blockchain technology, was planning to buy a Tesla while living in Dubai earlier this year. Like Lavon, he held a high opinion of Musk, whom he saw as not just a visionary, but a beneficent person whose Starlink Internet company was providing much-needed services to the Ukrainian military during the war with Russia.

But Musk’s embrace of West, despite the rapper’s increasingly vitriolic antisemitic tirades, and Musk’s own tweets urging the U.S. to back away from supporting Ukraine, led to Ivanov turning away from Tesla. Instead of buying one, he is now weighing his options on other electric vehicles.

“I have two (problems) with Elon Musk,” he said. “The first is about Nazis and Jews and the second is about the relationship with Ukraine.”

A two-Tesla family

Andy Heller and his wife bought a Model 3 Tesla for him a few years ago, and a Model Y for her in August. He liked the cars, and he appreciated Musk for his business acumen and “creative mind.”

But in the months since their last Tesla purchase, the Jewish San Francisco businessman, 60, said Musk’s behavior has alarmed him, including his embrace of far-right tropes that have been deemed antisemitic, and tweets that contain language associated with QAnon.

Heller said when he emigrated to the U.S. from Canada in the 1970s, he saw his new country as a haven for religious and other minorities, but that the rise of far-right politicians in recent years has sent the nation backwards. He sees Musk’s purchase of Twitter as an accelerant of the trend.

“It’s almost like the last six years we’ve gone back 60 years,” he said. There have always been antisemites, “but they haven’t had a platform. And now they have not only a platform, they have a mechanism to bring in followers and people who listen to them and respect them.”

Now, partly because of his disgust with Musk, the Hellers plan to sell their older Tesla once they take delivery on a Cadillac Lyric. But they’ll keep the new one at least for a while.

Lavon won’t part with her Tesla, she said, because she doesn’t see many other acceptable options on the market.

“No one else has a supercharger network that can compete with Tesla right now,” she said. “Even if these cars have that, none has that kind of mileage. There’s not a lot of options really, or they’re really ugly.”

Why is there still a bust of this antisemite in Rockefeller Center?

By Andrew Silverstein

From now till the new year, over half a million people a day will view the Christmas tree at New York's Rockefeller Center. The complex's decorations, lights and ice skating rink are a welcome escape. Even Jews can take pride in knowing that atop the towering spruce is a 900-pound Swarovski crystal designed by the Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind. Yet even here, there's no escaping the specter of antisemitism.

Just a stone's throw from the tree, a bronze bust of Charles A. Lindbergh, created by the artist Paul Fjelde, presides over the grand art deco lobby of 45 Rockefeller Plaza, also known as the International Building. While most remembered for completing the first nonstop transatlantic flight in his 1927 solo trip from New York to Paris, Lindbergh was also a known antisemite. The aviator led the American First Committee campaign against U.S. involvement in World War II. His isolationist stance and trips to Hitler's Germany led some to accuse the aviator of being a Nazi sympathizer.

In 2020, the San Diego International Airport (formerly Lindbergh Field) removed an exact copy of the bronze bust. In recent years, public tributes to Lindbergh have been taken down or have been the subject of debate as the country has reexamined public monuments. Yet, the Lone Eagle, as he was nicknamed, has succeeded in flying

under the radar in New York — evading the attention of the press, politicians and the city's vocal activists.

Of late, there has been much discussion of how to combat antisemitism and respond to hate speech by public personas. Should they be allowed to tweet? Must they apologize before playing professional basketball? Should a former president invite them to dinner? So, what should we do about the bust of an aviator who rubbed shoulders with Nazis?

Not a casual antisemite

In September 1941, Lindbergh, speaking on behalf of the isolationist America First Committee, singled out the Roosevelt administration, the British and the Jews for leading the U.S. into war against Nazi Germany.

"Instead of agitating for war, Jews in this country should be opposing it in every way, for they will be the first to feel its consequences," he said. "Their greatest danger to this country lies in their large ownership and influence in our motion pictures, our press, our radio and our government."

This wasn't the casual antisemitism of an errant tweet. Ken Burns' recent documentary "The U.S. and the Holocaust"

shows that Lindbergh, as the leading voice against the war, hindered Roosevelt's ability to respond to Nazi Germany and accept greater numbers of Jewish refugees.

Yet, Lindbergh is honored on one of the most iconic and busiest stretches of Fifth Avenue. His bust sits on a marbled mezzanine across from St. Patrick's Cathedral, staring out over the globe held atop the Atlas statue outside the building's doors. One would be hard-pressed to find a more privileged spot.

It's hard to reconcile a society that benches Kyrie Irving for a tweet, while putting Lindbergh on a pedestal on Fifth Avenue.

Private property in a very public place

In the wake of 2017's white supremacist march in Charlottesville, Virginia, then-New York Mayor Bill de Blasio established a commission to make recommendations on the city's public art, monuments and markers that were at odds with current societal values.

The commission did not consider the Lindbergh bust because Rockefeller Center is private property, but a plaque on Broadway's canyon of heroes that commemorates Lindbergh's 1927 ticker tape parade is owned by the city. The commission's report did not directly discuss Lindbergh. Instead, it treated the 206 plaques, which includes one of French World War I hero-turned-Nazi collaborator Marshal Philippe Pétain, as one entity. The commission did not recommend removal, arguing that the plaques mark the historical parades and are not themselves celebratory. They suggested adding signage or other historical information to contextualize the markers.

The Lindbergh bust may be on private property, but it is in a very public area. The lobby of 45 Rockefeller Plaza is easily accessed and connected to the complex's shops and restaurants. Harriet Senie, a retired professor of art history at CUNY's Graduate Center and City College who sat on the mayoral commission, believes Rockefeller Center has a responsibility to address the Lindbergh monument.

San Diego International Airport transferred its bust and another Lindbergh sculpture to the local air and space museum as a means of recontextualization. Senie, who is Jewish and whose grandmother and uncle were killed in Auschwitz, does not believe the bust in New York should be removed. Rather, she recommends adding a sign with text or a link to explain the aviator's antisemitic and racist past.

"It's tricky," she said, arguing that we can both acknowledge the significant contributions of Lindbergh and condemn his white supremacist activities. "I don't think we should whitewash history. But I don't think we should eradicate accomplishments out of some moral imperative."

In a statement, Scott Richman, the Anti-Defamation League's regional director of New York and New Jersey, agreed: "We believe that any memorial or commemoration of Lindbergh's achievements should be contextualized with the darker aspects of his record, including his support of Nazi Germany, American isolationism and dangerous antisemitic beliefs."

Rockefeller Center is owned and operated by Tishman Speyer, the real estate developers, which is owned and was founded by two prominent Jewish families. The company did not respond to emailed questions.

In 2020, the nearby the Museum of Modern Art was confronted with a similar issue. Artists, designers and activists petitioned the museum to remove the name of the influential architect Philip Johnson from a museum wall. Johnson, a former museum department head, supported the Nazi party during the 1930s. MoMA decided to temporarily cover Johnson's name with artwork from the organization Black Reconstruction Collective.

Tishman Speyer, however, doesn't have the option of a quick fix. Rockefeller Center was given both city and national landmark status in the 1980s. The International Building lobby and Lindbergh bust are protected. Any changes would have to be approved by the New York City Landmark Preservation Commission in a process that includes community input.

It was 1975, not 1935

According to Senie, to make the bust a "teachable monument," an added sign must explain when and why the bust was installed. This would shed light on the motivations and values of the people who commissioned the monument, in this case, the Rockefeller family.

Indeed, the origin story of the bust may hold the biggest lesson. The Lindbergh monument isn't an example of celebrating a hero who only later turned out to be a racist. Nor is it a case of society's values changing over time. Its provenance paints a more complex picture of American society and antisemitism.

At first glance, it's not surprising that a building from 1935 would have a tribute to Lucky Lindy. At the time, air travel was one of mankind's greatest accomplishments. Aviation motifs are found across Rockefeller Center, including a model plane

commemorating the 1930 flight of French pilots from Paris to New York in La Maison Francaise. Just a few blocks away, the lobby of the Chrysler Building, finished in 1930, has a painting of Lindbergh's plane, The Spirit of St. Louis.

Most importantly, Rockefeller Center was completed before Lindbergh would make his several trips to Nazi Germany; before he accepted a medal from Hermann Goering on behalf of the Fuhrer; and before he and his wife, the writer Anne Morrow Lindbergh, planned to move to a Berlin suburb in the run-up to Kristallnacht. Lindbergh was at the peak of his fame: He was already a celebrity for his transcontinental flight when the 1935 trial of the man who kidnapped and murdered his infant son gripped the nation.

But the bust is from 1975, not 1935. It was unveiled after Lindbergh's death, when the aviator's politics were well known. In fact, if the bust had been placed in 1935, it would have most likely been removed. Lindbergh's anti-interventionist campaign and plea for the "white race" to band together and not "commit racial suicide by internal conflict" led to his forced resignation from the U.S. Army Air Corps and a loss of lucrative corporate ties; Little Town, Minnesota, his hometown, took his name off a water tower.

Lindbergh was canceled but then given a second act in the 1950s. He didn't have to apologize, recant his antisemitic statements or engage in dialogue with Jewish leaders. Rather, the United States was focused on a new enemy, the Soviet Union, and was willing to overlook past flirtations with fascism. It's not that Cold War America was a forgiving place. Sen. Joseph McCarthy was busy dredging up Americans' decades-old communist connections, and Jews were a prime target.

In 1954, President Dwight Eisenhower restored Lindbergh's commission and promoted him to brigadier general in the U.S. Air Force and his book, *The Spirit of St. Louis*, which recounted his famous flight, won a Pulitzer. Lindbergh again became an all-American hero and for the next two decades used his fame to promote conservationist causes. A. Scott Berg's 1998 Pulitzer prize-winning biography of the pilot examined his published writings, speeches, letters and diaries. Berg shows that even while Lindbergh was invited by Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon to the White House, he maintained his beliefs in eugenics.

America First vs. Make America Great Again

Lindbergh had his defenders. In the 1980s, his widow argued that he could not have been antisemitic because he was an early supporter of forming a Jewish state. Gore Vidal, a family friend, argued that Lindbergh wasn't pro-Nazi but simply, "a classic Midwestern isolationist." For the most part, Lindbergh's writings about limiting the "Jewish influence" or guarding America's "inheritance of European blood" against "dilution by foreign races" weren't minimized; they were just plainly forgotten. When the pilot died in 1974, the major newspapers did not mention his America First activities.

The following year, Laurence Rockefeller, the brother of the sitting vice president Nelson Rockefeller, unveiled the bust of Lindbergh in the family's complex, calling the aviator a longtime friend. The bust caused no controversy then or when Rockefeller Center and its interior lobbies were given New York City Landmark status in 1985, ensuring that the tribute to

Lindbergh would remain a permanent fixture.

Only in recent years has there been more focus on Lindbergh's darker past. In 2004, Philip Roth's novel "The Plot Against America" reimagined the United States if Lindbergh had become president in 1940 and signed a peace pact with Hitler. The year before, it was revealed that the aviator secretly fathered seven children with two Bavarian sisters and his German translator.

Then in 2016, Donald J. Trump, just a few blocks north of Rockefeller Center, launched his own "America First" campaign. Many commentators picked up on the similarities of the two celebrities-turned-right-wing political forces. So much so, that for many, Trump almost immediately calls Lindbergh to mind. The Lindbergh bust looks set to glide down the art deco lobby's escalator in Trump-like fashion.

In 2020, Roth's book was made into a HBO miniseries, but Ken Burns' recent docu-series is the most damning depiction of the aviator. Burns uses the all-American hero as representative of the white supremacy and antisemitism lying beneath the surface of the U.S., rearing its head every so often. The documentary ends with a montage of recent far right extremists connecting Lindbergh with Charlottesville and Jan. 6. Given the increase in antisemitic attacks and conspiracy theories, this issue isn't going away.

Ultimately, Tishman Speyer will have to decide what to do with the Lindbergh bust in the lobby. Even though there has been no public outcry, it's not something they can easily ignore. The developers' offices are located in the same building as the monument.

A US soldier sent home bones from Dachau. They've just been buried in a Jewish cemetery

By Hillel Kuttler

More than 77 years after American soldiers liberated Dachau, the unidentified remains of at least one of its victims were buried this week in a Jewish family's plot in Washington, D.C.

The unusual ceremony brought together about a dozen attendees, including the daughter and son-in-law of the non-Jewish U.S. Army soldier who sent the bones home to his wife in 1946.

That soldier was Sgt. Willard N. Maddox. On one of the two small envelopes he mailed to his wife in Kensington, Maryland, on April 8, he wrote: "Human bones from the crematory of the Dachau concentration camp, Germany (pronounced DAKOW)." In a letter he sent to her two days later, he listed the bones among the other items in the package he had just sent, which included perfume, a rosary, some Italian money and postcards.

For decades the bones remained hidden. Maddox likely forgot about them while busy raising a family and working as a fingerprint

analyst for the FBI, said Betty Behnke, Maddox's daughter.

Many of the questions surrounding the bones are likely to remain unanswered. Whose bones are these? How did Maddox come into their possession? Why did he send them to his home? And did he have any plans for them?

But the last chapter in the story came, if not to a satisfying ending on Sunday, then to one in which Maddox's family and the Jews they reached out to can take some solace. The burial of the bones was a solemn affair that included an apology from a man of German descent who took no part in the horror of the Holocaust, but made it his mission to make sure that they had a dignified — and Jewish — funeral.

"The Behnke family understood that these bones had to be treated with care, that these bones are connected to a soul [and] lived in this world," said Rabbi Aaron Alexander, who presided at the burial.

A discovery

Dachau, in southern Germany, was the Nazis' first concentration camp and included two crematoria. According to Yad Vashem, more than 30,000 people died there before American soldiers freed the remaining prisoners in April 1945.

Maddox, according to his family, was a quiet man who said little about his military service except that he chauffeured officers around in jeeps. He died in 2000.

His daughter speculated that an official at Dachau, a guide perhaps, had given the bones to her father. He "must've been touched by whatever he saw or heard," she said, "or he wouldn't have saved them."

After Maddox's death, it would be nearly 20 more years before his daughter's husband, Jerral Behnke, discovered the bones in an envelope in a workbench that used to belong to his father-in-law.

Jerral Behnke said he knew from the moment he found them that the remains should be placed under the care of Jews.

Working for 50 years in the U.S. Navy's Hospital Corps, he said, "My job was to save lives, not to take them. My father always taught me to do the right thing. The right thing to do was to see how we could get [the remains] buried in an appropriate place."

He contacted national and local Jewish organizations to ask what to do with the remains, but said that none expressed interest in assisting.

So Behnke then reached out to Fran Margolis, a Jewish friend of his daughter. She also happens to be an archaeologist who specializes in identifying human and animal remains, a fact Behnke did not know when he called her.

"He was crying on the phone, really upset by it all," Margolis recalled of their initial conversation. "I really wanted to help him."

A member of Washington's Adas Israel Congregation, Margolis arranged for the remains to be interred in her family's plot in the synagogue's cemetery in the District's southeast quadrant.

She purchased a wooden urn with a Star of David to hold the bones, but wished to entrust the burial to the Behnkes. So she left the box with them on a recent visit.

Studying the remains, Margolis said she determined that all 20 bone fragments were human.

But the number of people from whom the remains came is unknowable, as is their gender, she said, without performing tests that would have damaged the bones.

The apology

The Behnkes and two of their adult children attended Sunday's burial. So did Margolis, her parents, husband and children. The rabbi, Alexander, in a Facebook post, called it a meyt mitzvah, a funeral for "the souls who could have been those remains," and described it as much the same as a burial for a person whose identity is known, and who is mourned by family.

“Psalms, Torah, Eulogies, El Malei, shoveling earth, Kaddish, all of it,” the rabbi wrote, naming the elements of a Jewish funeral.

But the funeral also included an apology, from Jerral Behnke, the soldier’s son-in-law. He shared “deeply emotional words of remorse on behalf of his German heritage,” Alexander wrote.

Also present at the funeral, in a way, was the soldier himself. A framed photograph of him leaned against a gravestone that’s part of the Margolis family plot. As is the custom at many Jewish burials, each attendee, including Margolis’ young children, shoveled dirt into the grave when the remains were buried.

Margolis was struck, she said, when she first entered the cemetery on Sunday, by both the beauty and oddity of the occasion.

“This was a funeral, but for who?” she wondered.

But before she left, she looked at her family’s seven gravestones — grandparents, great-grandparents, two uncles and an aunt — and said she told the deceased relatives “to take care” of the newly interred remains.

“I came to the conclusion: This is the right place for them.”

Jew vs. ‘jew:’ Google’s offensive definition causes a (brief) online stir

By Mira Fox

We often talk about the fact that there are large swaths of the U.S., and of the world, where people have never encountered a Jew. And, it turns out, if they were curious to learn more about Jews, and Googled “Jew,” the top result would be a dictionary excerpt defining the term — lowercase — as an offensive verb meaning “to bargain with someone in a miserly or petty way.” You had to click a button to see more definitions before finding an entry about the ethnicity or religion.

On Twitter on Tuesday, Jews tweeted a screenshot of the definition in outrage; as of early afternoon on Tuesday, Google appears to have remedied the issue. The search now brings up a dictionary excerpt defining “Jew” — uppercase — as “a member of the people and cultural community whose traditional religion is Judaism and who trace their origins through the ancient Hebrew people of Israel to Abraham.”

Google often displays what are known as “snippets,” or definitions and excerpts from other sites that sit at the top of a list of search results, without requiring the user to click through to read the original article or page from which they are excerpted. This is

particularly common with definitions, which are usually sourced from Oxford Languages, a dictionary company.

There is a disclaimer that accompanies the dictionary snippets, which notes that “Google doesn’t create, write, or modify definitions. Dictionary results don’t reflect the opinions of Google.” The disclaimer section says that Google will include offensive words — always labeled as such — to ensure that the definition is comprehensive. But it says that the search engine will “only display an offensive definition by default when it’s the main meaning of the term.”

The verb usage of Jew is certainly not the objective meaning. So why was the offensive verb the top result instead of, you know, the religion and ethnicity that’s been around for thousands of years? In a roundabout way, it’s the ancient people — or stereotypes about them, to be specific — that generated the derogatory verb usage in the first place, so that certainly supersedes the offensive usage as a main meaning.

A brainstorm with colleagues brought up a few theories, but none of them quite held up. Is Google not case-sensitive, meaning it

defaults to searching for jew in its lowercase usage? Google Trends, a tool that analyzes the popularity of top search queries, does not differentiate between a search for the popularity of “Jew” v. “jew,” confirming that the search engine cannot tell the difference between cases. But if that were why the offensive verb were popping up, results should always favor the lowercase usage.

Yet searching “turkey” brought up the nation, not the Thanksgiving bird. Searching for “china,” similarly, brings up the country, not the material your grandmother’s tea set is made of.

Perhaps Google puts up the most frequently used or searched-for definition? It’s impossible to confirm which usage is more common, thanks to Google Trends’ lack of case-sensitivity. But from my many years online, in a wide variety of arenas, it seems unlikely that Jew is used more frequently as a verb than as a proper noun. Even antisemitic white supremacists and conspiracy theorists tend to talk — rather nonstop, actually — about the Jews in the word’s proper noun usage.

Plus, a search for “august” brought up the adjective instead of the month, despite the fact that the month is almost certainly used more frequently. So that puts to bed the idea that the search engine defaults to prioritizing a word’s most frequently used form.

Another theory: it could be the algorithmic tailoring. Users often get different search results on Google, depending on what the search engine’s algorithm thinks you’re

likely to want to see. Perhaps you recently were researching synonyms for “big” so a search for “titanic” brought up the adjective, and not the boat. (For me, it pulls up the cast of the movie; movie casts are a frequent search of mine.)

The algorithmic tailoring seems like an unlikely culprit for the Google result for “Jew,” however, given that Jews were the ones raising the alarm about the offensive result — and the fact that many different people all got the same result.

Google’s algorithm is complex, and uses large sets of data to determine how to rank results and what to show users, including concepts such as “relevance” and “freshness,” according to a page explaining its ranking processes. Perhaps a page or definition using “jew” as an offensive verb was going viral, and that elevated Google’s algorithmic “freshness” assessment — though Google’s public information on ranking specifically says that freshness is more important to news-based queries than when determining which dictionary definitions to show.

As of publication, the search engine had not replied to a request for comment. The offensive verb definition is currently not listed in the dictionary results at all, even when you scroll down. Honestly, though, that seems wrong too.



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