

*Stories for you to savor over Shabbat and Sunday*



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## News

# No, they're not named 'Corona': Meet 3 couples and their pandemic babies

By Mira Fox

When quarantine first began, back when some of us naively thought it would truly just be two weeks long, [Twitter predicted a baby boom](#); so many couples were off work, locked in with each other and little to do. That, it turns out, was wrong; [a study from the Brookings Institution](#) predicts a long-lasting baby bust, with 300,000 to 500,000 fewer births in 2021. Perhaps we underestimated the libido-bursting qualities of a global pandemic and widespread unemployment.

Parents who were already expecting when the pandemic began had to navigate constantly-changing hospital protocols, or go into labor wearing a surgical mask. Nevertheless, some brave souls still decided to get pregnant; now, babies conceived during the pandemic have been born, gestated completely within this new normal. What convinced these parents to take the plunge – and did they know what they were in for?

“We knew we wanted to have multiple kids, and I’m in my thirties,” new mom Alana Rahmani said. She and her husband Jonathan, a rabbinical student at Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, got married in late 2019 and she had just gone off her birth control when the pandemic started. The timing wasn’t perfect, but they didn’t feel like they could lose this year. In February, they had their first child, a daughter named Mazal.

It wasn’t easy, though. In July, at the end of her first trimester, Alana was laid off from her job at the Manhattan JCC and the pair had to scramble for both healthcare and financial stability; Jonathan said they’re lucky if the stipend from his school covers diapers and food. Family helped out with a few hundred dollars here and there, which took some of the pressure off, but it was a stressful period, exacerbated by Alana’s mother’s sudden cancer diagnosis; she died before Mazal was born, and Alana was only able to see her a handful of times.

The Rahmanis said their community has been there for them, bringing meals and celebrating Mazal’s naming via Zoom, but the experience has been isolating. The pair has adhered to stricter COVID protocols than most of their friends, and their synagogue’s outdoor Shabbat services have been their main opportunity to see people.

Eventually, Alana found a new job as a project manager at the Jewish Funders Network while nearly seven months pregnant. “I waited until I had the offer to tell them I was pregnant,” she said. Ineligible for maternity leave as a brand-new employee, she negotiated for six weeks off, unpaid; though her employer would have given her longer, the couple can’t afford more unpaid time. As Alana prepares to begin working again, they’re figuring out how to manage both work and their newborn in their one-bedroom apartment.

While the Rahmanis were hit with an unimaginable number of challenges, the pandemic has been hard on all new parents.

In early March, Tobin Mitnick, a Los Angeles-based actor who runs the popular TikTok account [@jewslovetrees](#), asked his wife Amanda if they should stop trying to get pregnant. “I started the conversation like, should we do this, we’re introducing more health risks,” he said. “But my wife has a more long-term and practical way of thinking about things, which is that there are always going to be risks.” Their first child, Lucy – aka “sapling” on Tobin’s TikTok – was born on December 8.

Despite their good attitude, they have still struggled with the isolation. New parents can often count on help from excited grandparents, but Tobin and Amanda’s families both live on the East Coast. “It’s not so much the health aspect that we were most concerned about. It was the entire picture of missing

out on specific experiences that you always think are part and parcel of having a child,” Mitnick said.

While new parents might normally withdraw with their newborn to bond and recover, it’s usually temporary. “Once you get to that point like, four, six weeks, when you’d normally bring someone into your home, then it gets weird,” said Mitnick. “At that point you’re like, OK, why am I not seeing anybody? Why do I not have, like, emotional backup?”

Still, he maintains a positive outlook: “The only pregnancy we know is our own. Every other version of the pregnancy is either hearsay or cinematic. So this is the only version of having our baby that we know.”

Beyond the stress on the parents themselves, there are concerns about the children’s development. Sarah Kasdan, a Jewish educator at Cornell University, worries more about her two-year-old daughter than her newborn son; the toddler couldn’t even walk or talk when the pandemic started. “She’s like a whole different person from then,” said Kasdan. “She loves the attention, but she just hasn’t been around other people. So she’s gotten very shy.”

But Kasdan has been lucky; most of her relatives have now been vaccinated and live within driving distance, so they are able to visit occasionally. Before her son, Azriel, was born, her parents and in-laws quarantined for nearly a month to ensure that they would have been isolating for at least 10 days when the baby was born, and could come meet him. “I felt bad, not really knowing. But you don’t know when you’re going to have the baby,” she said.

Still, she has found small blessings hidden within the pandemic. Kasdan held a Zoom bris for Azriel and was grateful for the small, intimate event. “You know, you’re physically still in pain and you have to like, organize this whole meal and this whole thing,” she said. “It’s actually nice not to have any of the logistical challenges and just to be in my own living room.”

Every mother I spoke with also agreed that it was nice to be at home during the pregnancy, able to wear comfortable clothes and rest. During her first pregnancy, Kasdan had to sneak naps on her office couch – not an issue this time around. Alana Rahmani

said she couldn’t imagine doing her hour-long subway commute in the third trimester.

In any case, some challenges of new parenthood are timeless. “You know the pandemic is almost like the last thing on your mind,” Mitnick said. “I remember the first time I got two hours of sleep in a row, like a week after Lucy was born. I’m just like, that’s it. I can run a marathon. This is great. I can handle this.”

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## News

# Maggie Haberman on life after Trump and the one question she regrets not asking

By Jacob Kornbluh

Maggie Haberman had perhaps the hardest, and definitely the most scrutinized, job in journalism for the past four years. She owned the Trump beat for *The New York Times*. Haberman came to cover the White House with the 2016 election of President Donald Trump, after literally decades of covering the outspoken real-estate mogul from New York for the *New York Post*, *New York Daily News* and *Politico*. In thousands of articles and frequent appearances on *The Times*' flagship podcast "The Daily," Haberman provided a close-up look at the Trump presidency like none other.

"I think the pace of this – for most of us – over the last four years was not sustainable for another four years," Haberman said in a phone interview on Monday while typing, possibly yet another story.

While demonstrating the same calm composure she has had in countless TV appearances throughout the past years, Haberman sounded relieved. "I'm nowhere near as crazed as I was," she said when asked how things have changed since Trump departed the White House on Jan. 20. "It's a lot easier now. I feel like I can hear the thoughts in my own head again."

Haberman, 47, joined *The Times* in 2015 to cover the 2016 presidential race. Her reporting on Trump – from the moment he walked down the escalator in Trump Tower to announce his candidacy to his volatile time in the White House – earned her a share in the 2018 Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting. She was [recently assigned](#) to the news organization's investigative/enterprise team to assist with stories about the Biden administration and continue to track the post-Trump political landscape and the upcoming 2024 presidential campaign.

After thousands of bylines – she averaged more than one a day – Haberman still has more to say about Trump: Penguin Press [announced in November](#) that it will publish her book about Trump next year.



"I'm not writing 'Fire and Fury' part three," Haberman said on Monday, referring to the tell-all books by journalist Michael Wolff about the chaos within the administration. "I think there's a lot about him. Actually, what has been fascinating about the last couple of years is how little people actually know about him."

*Here are excerpts from our conversation, edited for clarity and length.*

## **Do you think the Trump administration will be the biggest story you will ever cover during your career?**

Yes. [laughter]. I covered the September 11 attacks when they happened – I was in lower Manhattan when the second tower fell – and then I covered rebuilding for three years. It was a very different time. At that time, the impact of it – before the views of the wars and the foreign engagements had changed nationally in the U.S. – generally speaking, there was some feeling of a collective feeling that we are in this together. And that just, obviously, was not defining the last four years, which were very polarized.

During the Trump years, it seemed like something out of the norm was happening on a near-daily basis. Was there a particular event or piece of news that was surprising even to you?

Not much of it was surprising except for January 6, which was surprising to me – just in terms of the specifics of it. But very little of what happened during the administration was surprising to me.

**Were there ever days where you wanted to just stay hidden under the covers?**

No. What I would say is that every time it seemed like we were going to have a little break, something else happened. Last year, in the fall, when it seemed like we were going to slow down a little bit into the predictable rhythms of a campaign, he got sick, and that changed everything. So it was a lot like that.

**You've spent countless hours with the former president, behind closed doors where he's not performing for the cameras. Is there something you learned about him just by being in the room with him that would surprise the general public?**

I just think that people don't understand how incredibly people-pleasing he is. I think that has been something that would surprise folks because he puts on this show of being tough and being strong, blah blah blah. But he is actually very much a people pleaser.

**You are working on a Trump book. What more is there to say that hasn't already been reported?**

I don't think I'm going to tell people not to buy my book in advance. My book is about him through the years. It's a little different. I'm not writing 'Fire and Fury' part three. But I think there's a lot about him.

Actually, what has been fascinating about the last couple of years is how little people actually know about him, in some cases, understandably. It's also interesting because he's a former president. Lots of books are written and people are still reading them.

I think that there is a desire to go back to treating him as Donald Trump the entertainer, but he was actually

the 45th president.

**Is there a question you wished were able to ask President Trump but never got to ask?**

I'd like to ask him a lot about what happened between November and January 6th. One question that I think is sort of an open one is he has said very little about what he expected the federal government to be like when he came in.

Remember, you are talking about somebody who was never in government before, and we forget how strange that is – that we had a president who had never won an election before and never served at any level before. His understanding of what government was going to be, I believe, was very different than the way the federal government actually works.

So that's one on the broad stroke. And then there are a million other specific policy questions I'd like to ask.

**Many journalists received vitriol from "Make America Great Again" supporters during the Trump years. But you, in particular, were called out many times – even by the president himself. How did you cope?**

I don't know. It just becomes kind of part of the noise in the background.

**What was the worst moment?**

I'd say that the worst one was April 21, 2018, which was after a story that I did about Michael Cohen and whether he was going to turn on Trump. Trump was very angry about the story and did a series of kind of bizarre tweets about me – and it was my daughter's birthday. So that was wild. It was annoying.

**Will everything you cover in the future be a letdown after covering chaos that was the Trump years?**

I think the pace of this – for most of us – over the last four years was not sustainable for another four years. But I don't think it will be a letdown. I just think it'll be completely different, and what that looks like remains to be seen.

But, you know, I think that everyone is still figuring out

what the world looks like in the post-Trump era, and we also have to remember that we are not totally in the post-Trump era, since he's refusing to cease the stage.

**How have your days changed since President Biden was inaugurated?**

I'm nowhere near as crazed as I was. It's a lot easier now. I feel like I can hear the thoughts in my own head again.

**What did you learn about yourself in the past four years?**

I learned that I can multitask, but I don't know what I learned about myself. I need to get a little further away from the last four years to really think about it.

**You spent some time as a kid living in Jerusalem when your dad, Clyde Haberman, was the Jerusalem bureau chief for The Times. How do you think that affected your trajectory as a journalist or as a Jew?**

I don't think it impacted my trajectory. But I remember that when my father was the bureau chief in Jerusalem, it was sort of like that he couldn't win no matter what he did, and he was criticized by all sides. And I think that's been some of the experience in covering Trump.

**What's your favorite bagel or deli order?**

Shelsky's – everything bagel with horseradish cream cheese.

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**Culture**

## Why Leonard Cohen's final album features the cantor from his home synagogue

By PJ Grisar



In January 2018, after the late Leonard Cohen received his last, but not final, Grammy nomination, a representative from his hometown attended the ceremony: The cantor from the synagogue he grew up in.

He wasn't just there as an observer – he was a contributor.

“My greatest sources of pride is that the choir and I appeared on a Grammy Award-winning song sounding like a synagogue choir and me sounding like a cantor and not selling out to pop culture,” said Gideon Zelermyer, who since 2004 has served as the cantor for the Orthodox Shaar Hashomayim congregation, where Cohen's father and great-grandfather both served as presidents. On Sunday, Zelermyer's ensemble may mark another victory lap at the Grammys for their work with Cohen.

Five years after Cohen reached out to Zelermyer to contribute vocals for the title track on 2016's [“You Want it Darker”](#) the songwriter-poet, who died in November of that year, is once again nominated – this time he's up for Best Folk Album. for his posthumously released “Thanks for the Dance.”

Zelermyer is featured with his choir on the song “Puppets” and isn't sure if “Folk” is the right category

for the record. He wasn't confident "You Want it Darker" was truly the Best Rock Performance, either. But then, Cohen often defied classification.

"Leonard is a most unusual human being," Zelermyer said from his home in Montreal, cloistered by bookshelves lined with CDs.

While he was only ever in the same space as Cohen three times – at a concert, at the "You Want it Darker" album release and at Cohen's burial, where Zelermyer officiated – the two had a decade-long correspondence, initially made up of holiday-timed pleasantries over email. From the beginning, Zelermyer was floored by Cohen's pithy but profound replies.

"He wrote me back the most amazing email anybody has ever sent me," Zelermyer said, referring to Cohen's response to a pre-High Holidays greeting. "'May your voice reach that Place, and bring down the blessing.' And I thought to myself, 'wow, you know, nobody has ever distilled into a handful of words what I do as a cantor.'"

Naturally, when Cohen approached Zelermyer to work on his latest album in 2015, the cantor [replied](#): "Hallelujah! I'm your man!"

The decision to collaborate further clarified Cohen's understanding of Jewish liturgical music for Zelermyer, who said that Cohen was never arbitrary when alluding to tradition in his work. He selected "You Want it Darker" for the cantor and his singers to perform on, and it's easy to see why.

The Grammy-winning single is a propulsive, at times apocalyptic composition steeped in religious imagery and riffing on the Mourner's Kaddish. At the time of its release, on Cohen's 82nd birthday, many rightly predicted the singer was close to death, as he rasped "I'm ready, my lord." In the background, the synagogue choir sing "*Hineni, hineni*," [Hebrew for "Here I am," and a word linked to the Binding of Isaac and Rosh Hashanah services]. The lyrics seem to indict God for his apparent indifference to suffering while the speaker, simultaneously, surrenders to His will with a growl. Zelermyer sings a solo *khazones* toward the end and is also featured with the choir on the track "[It](#)

### [Seemed The Better Way."](#)

The later collaboration, "Puppets" taken from Cohen's 2006 poetry collection "Book of Longing," feels like a throwback to his 1964 poetry collection, "Flowers for Hitler," which meditated on the Holocaust and the banality of evil.

The Shaar Hashomayim male choir is juxtaposed with an angelic women's choir from Germany, oohing as Cohen recites "Puppet me and puppet you/Puppet German/Puppet Jew." In a nod to continuity, the song was composed by Cohen's son, Adam, and its artwork shows hands making the blessing of the *Kohanim*.

In both songs, using a cantorial sound makes thematic and sonic sense. But Zelermyer said that the gnomic Cohen never answered a question he's often asked: Why use him and his singers?

Zelermyer understood later that choosing the synagogue ensemble was deliberate, not just for his multigenerational connection to Shaar Hashomayim, but for the words he had them sing.

"They weren't just for backup singers, they were for religious singers, people who are grounded in a belief system that was something that he subscribed to and that gave him a sense of comfort when he was facing down death," Zelermyer said. "The first time he heard a cantor sing '*Hineni*' was in my sanctuary, so there's obviously a tremendous core connection for him to that place."

Win, lose or show on Sunday, Zelermyer will have a certificate to put next to the previous one from the Grammys and the award for Album of the Year from their Canadian equivalent, the JUNOs.

"Leonard deserved it," Zelermyer said of the last win. "To have been a small footnote in the connection between Leonard, his religious identity, his identity as a son of Shaar Hashomayim and ultimately to have been able to put him in the ground with dignity, that is an unforgettable part of my life's experience – and not exactly what you imagine when you become a cantor."

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## News

# Georgia may eliminate daylight saving time. Some Orthodox Jews are happy about that.

By Benyamin Cohen

It was once possible to embark on the 38-mile bus ride from Steubenville, Ohio, to Moundsville, West Virginia, and the time would change seven times.

That likely didn't impact too many time-traveling Jews in the 1950s, when cities and towns chose individually when, or whether, to institute daylight saving time. But now, in a move that delights Orthodox Jews in Atlanta, Georgia may become the third state to eliminate the spring-forward, fall-back tradition of changing clocks.

The Georgia Senate passed [a bill last month](#) that would eliminate daylight saving time in the state. The state House of Representatives has until midnight on March 31 to pass it. [If no action is taken, the legislature can take another look at it during the next session, which begins in January, 2022.]

With clocks changing this weekend, the new law is of particular interest to Atlanta's Jewish community, home to about a dozen Orthodox synagogues. Eliminating daylight saving time would mean earlier sunrises and earlier sunsets. That translates into it being light outside when walking to services on a winter Saturday morning, summer Shabbats that don't stretch past 9 p.m. and the ability to start the Passover Seder while young children are still wide awake.

Representative Mike Wilensky, Georgia's lone Jewish state legislator, said he was in favor of the new law – and received calls from Jewish constituents backing it. “I highly support the Jewish community and the Orthodox community,” Wilensky, a Democrat, said when reached on the floor of the House.

“I have two children so I am very aware of the difficulties and harmful effects it has for families during these time changes,” added Wilensky, a member of Congregation B'nai Torah, a Conservative synagogue in the Atlanta suburbs. “So I would be excited for the senate bill to pass and for us to be on one set time year-round.”

The Senate bill passed 46-7, with strong support from both parties.

If the House passes the bill and Gov. Brian Kemp signs it into law, Georgia would – starting with the next time change – join Arizona, Hawaii, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, which all operate on what's known as “standard time” year-round.

But while any state can opt-out of daylight saving time, doing the opposite – keeping daylight saving time year-round – requires Congressional action. In recent years, more than two dozen states – including California, Florida, Oregon and Washington – have considered laws to do just that.

Indeed, Georgia's House of Representatives itself passed such a bill last week, voting 112-48 to make daylight saving time permanent – exactly the opposite of what the senate bill does. That effort, even if passed in the state senate, would merely collect dust while it waits for federal approval.

## Time-traveling critics abound

For many, standard time is a relic of agrarian society, when a farmer's day was dictated by the sun. With the industrial revolution came the desire for daylight saving time to allow people more hours of sunlight to run errands after work, head to retail shops and exercise outdoors. During the course of the 20th century, around 70 countries instituted daylight saving time.

The longer hours of daylight divided the business community. The candy industry, for example, lobbied in favor of DST, as the longer hours of daylight meant it would be safer for children to go trick-or-treating on Halloween, while the television networks preferred for it to get darker earlier, allowing for more hours of nighttime viewing.

“For me and my business, I depend on daylight to be able to show properties and a lot of people can’t see homes until after work,” said Jimmy Baron, a Realtor in Atlanta. Baron, the president of Congregation Beth Tefillah, also prefers longer hours of daylight because it allows for more opportunities to spend time outdoors with his teenage son, Micah. “I like it because we can spend more time after school or on weekends doing stuff,” he said. “Going to the park, riding bikes or going up to the lake. And we can squeeze a lot in.”

Jodi Wittenberg, the co-owner of the Spicy Peach kosher supermarket in Atlanta, agrees with Baron and would prefer to keep daylight saving time. “From a business point, it definitely would keep people out shopping and spending and active,” she said.

She was also quick to point out a benefit for the shopkeepers. “Sometimes, a customer comes in at 3 o’clock on a Friday afternoon and I’m politely trying to move them along so I can get home in time,” Wittenberg said. “The same holds true for Jewish holidays. I would love to have a little more time before sunset.”

One of the world’s foremost experts on the subject is on the side of keeping the current setup for daylight saving time. Dr. David Prerau is the author of [“Seize the Daylight: The Curious and Contentious Story of Daylight Saving Time,”](#) and first became involved with the issue when he worked for the U.S. Department of Transportation conducting studies on the benefits of longer hours of daylight.

“It lowers traffic accidents, it lowers crime, it lowers energy usage, it’s better for public health,” Prerau said in an interview. “And, in general, people like it.”

Prerau, who is Jewish, helped Congress tweak daylight saving time, extending it four weeks – starting three weeks earlier in March and ending one week later, at the beginning of November. Those changes have been in effect since 2007, and while that means Passover will probably never fall during standard time, allowing an earlier start to Orthodox Seders, Prerau said religious needs were one of the factors that led to what he called a “reasonable compromise.”

“We did specifically take into account not to go too

deep into November or into February,” Prerau said. “From my understanding, having late sunrises in the winter would be very negative for those religious groups. It was certainly one issue that was considered.”

One group that was not happy with the changes? “Amateur astronomers told me they wanted it to get dark earlier so they can go out and look at the sky,” Prerau said with a laugh. “There’s a lot of special-interests groups.”

## Sunsets! Shabbat! Seders!

The observance of religious Jews is inherently tied to the circadian rhythms of the clock – prayers and other commandments that are required to be done at certain times. This has made daylight saving time a hot-button issue for Jews across the globe.

Israel, for example, has a relatively short period of daylight saving time compared to other countries. “If sunrise is late, religious Jews have to delay going to work or pray at work – neither of which is a desirable situation,” Prerau said. This year in Israel, daylight saving time begins the day before Passover, leading to a later start to the Seder.

[For myriad reasons](#), there are some years when Israel and the neighboring Palestinian Authority do not change their clocks on the same day. Compounding the complications, Gaza and the West Bank have occasionally been unsynchronized. And in some Muslim countries, DST is temporarily halted during Ramadan so as not to delay the evening dinner after a day of fasting.

The Georgia situation is unique in that Atlanta – home to around 130,000 Jews – is about as far west as someone can go without entering the central time zone. That means that even though Atlanta is in the same time zone as New York, its sunsets are much later. On the first night of Passover this year, sunset is not until 7:55 PM, ensuring a late start time for the seder.

“It’s not ridiculous to think that Atlanta could have been one timezone over,” said Rabbi Michael Broyde,

who is Orthodox and previously served as the spiritual leader of the Young Israel in Atlanta. “Daylight saving time is, in essence, a way of having the best of both worlds.”

Broyde, who is also a professor at the Emory University School of Law, saw nothing unusual in the Orthodox lobbying effort. “This is part of the political process in which the government considers the religious needs of their community, and then they make a decision about what’s in the best interests of the whole,” he said. “We are allowed to be part of that whole.”

“The real change is that we used to be afraid to talk in our own name,” he added. “Now we have opinions.”

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### Culture

## We need to talk about ‘Kike’ – how did the slur originate anyway?

By Aviya Kushner

Everyone knows what the word “kike” means, but not everyone agrees on where the word comes from. That mystery is back in the headlines with yet another viral use of the slur – this time, it was NBA player Meyers Leonard who unleashed the word during a [heated gaming moment](#).

“Dictionaries prefer to say that its origin is unknown, which is right but uninspiring,” Anatoly Liberman [wrote](#) on the Oxford English Dictionary blog in 2009, as part of a series he did on ethnic slurs.

And to make matters more complex, the OED was unable to officially identify any uses of “kike” before 1904. That means we move to the world of theories.

One intriguing theory is that “kike” comes from Yiddish. In the “Joys of Yiddish,” Leo Rosten notes that the word kike “was born on Ellis Island when there were Jewish migrants who were also illiterate [or could not use Latin alphabet letters. When asked to sign the entry-forms with the customary “X”, the Jewish immigrants would refuse, because they associated an X with the cross of Christianity.”

Instead, Jewish immigrants “drew a circle as the signature on the entry-forms.”

“The Yiddish word for “circle” is *kikel* [pronounced KY - kel], and for “little circle,” *kikeleh*. Before long the immigration inspectors were calling anyone who signed with an ‘O’ instead of an ‘X’ a kikel or kikeleh or kikee or, finally and succinctly, kike.”

Philip Cowen, editor of “The American Hebrew,” agreed, writing that “kike” comes from the Yiddish word *kikel*, or, circle, and that Ellis Island immigration inspectors started calling Jews who used a circle “kikels” and that the term was shortened to “kike” with time.

I was charmed by Liberman's rebuttal of this theory in his Oxford English Dictionary [Blog](#). "Could the English speaking officials on Ellis Island isolate one Yiddish word in the speech of the Jewish people they dealt with, use it mockingly, and make it famous? I am afraid that we have here an example of the rich Ellis Island folklore that produced a Jew Shaun Ferguson and a Chinese man Sam Ting."

That skepticism leads observers like Liberman to consider the origin in Europe, not America. And though Liberman, author of "Word Origins And How We Know Them," considers other theories, he is not convinced by any of them. But his forays still make fascinating reading.

Consider Liberman's look at the German theory:

"Another derivation traces *Kike* to the name *Hayyim*, transcribed in German as Chaim. *Kaim\** ["Jew"] was recorded in mid-18th-century German cant. Then, we are told, "since Jewish speakers took the *-im* of *Kaim* as a plural ending in Hebrew, they created a new singular *kai* [an asterisk designates reconstructed, as opposed to attested, forms], which by reduplication gave the form *\*ki-ki*," later simplified to *Kike*," Liberman writes.

He's appropriately skeptical.

"It is hard to understand why Jewish speakers mistook the last syllable of the name they must have known for centuries for a plural ending. Would any English-speaker identify the final *-s* of *\*Rose* with a plural ending? And how did the reduplication arise?"

Jews in early 20th-century America heard the word "kike" often, and they had their own ideas on the term's origins.

A letter to a newspaper editor of "The American Israelite" on July 23, 1914 may offer clues – and by then, the slur "kike" was everywhere. "It seems probable that drummers [that is, traveling salesmen] called the Russian Jew, who unable to sign his name in English made his hand mark in the form of the traditional *Kykala* [a diminutive form of *Kaykl*], a *Kyke*. The term undoubtedly originated as drummer slang," a letter-writer wrote.

Drummer slang – hard to prove right now, but interesting to think about.

Then there is the theory that English speakers in the U.K. are the root of it. "The Encyclopedia of Swearing: Social History of Oaths, Profanity, Foul Language, and Ethnic Slurs in the English Speaking World" by Geoffrey Hughes says that in 1864, speakers in the U.K. took the common Hebrew name "Isaac" and transformed it into the derogatory slur "kike."

And of course, some blame Jews themselves for the slur. They claim that Jews themselves called other Jews "kikes" – and this applied in particular to Jews speaking about poorer and more desperate Jews from the East, or *ostjuden*, who were much maligned by better-off and more "cultured" German Jews.

In "Our Crowd: The Great Jewish Families of New York," the 1967 bestseller which looked at the Jewish upper class, Stephen Birmingham suggests that "because many Russian [Jewish] names ended in 'ki', they were called 'kikes' – a German Jewish contribution to the American vernacular. The name then proceeded to be co-opted by non-Jews as it gained prominence in its usage in society, and was later used as a general derogatory slur."

"One theory is that Irish immigrants to the United States first used the slur, perhaps based on the Gaelic word "ciabhóg" [pronounced k'i'óg], meaning forelock, sidelock; a person adorned with a forelock or sidelock, referencing the peyos of Orthodox Jews," writes Sarah Bunin Benor, Professor of Contemporary Jewish Studies and Linguistics at Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion in Los Angeles

"Despite methodological problems with this dictionary, this etymology seems plausible. Some early recorded uses of "kike" are in writings by Irish Americans and in dialogue of Irish Americans interacting with Jews: McCardell's 1904 book 'Show Girl & Friends' and a 1912 McClure's Magazine article about a baseball game with Irish and Jewish teammates," Benor notes.

Interestingly, the dictionary definition of the word "Jew" has been the subject of lawsuits, and "kike"

eventually became part of that controversy – so it’s important to note that dictionaries only go so far and have at best limited credibility here.

In 1973, an Associated Press story reprinted in The New York Times reported on a lawsuit by Marcus Shloimovitz, a 67-year-old textile merchant, objecting to one of the Oxford English Dictionary’s definitions of a “Jew” as someone who “drives a hard bargain.”

The OED editor at the time, one R. W. Burchfield, refused to remove it, and he was then criticized for his stance by other dictionary editors—who brought “kike” into the conversation. I was astonished by these two paragraphs in the Associated Press report, reprinted in [The New York Times](#) in 1973:

“He [Burchfield] criticized David B. Guralnik, editor in chief of the Second College Edition of Webster’s New World Dictionary, who suggested that words such as “dago,” “wop” and “kike” should be excluded from dictionaries.”

“Webster’s Third New International [Dictionary](#), unabridged, carries four definitions for the noun “Jew.” The final one is “a person believed to drive a hard bargain.” A verb form is defined: “to cheat by sharp business practice – usually taken to be offensive.”

It’s incredible to realize that as late as 1973, this was the Webster’s definition. And that Oxford not only defined “Jew” as someone driving a hard bargain, but had its editor talking to the press and the courts to defend that definition. And maybe [Oxford](#) has learned to say less not more when possible—the Oxford learner’s dictionary says simply that “kike” is “a very offensive word for a Jew.”

Let’s leave it at that.

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*Aviya Kushner is The Forward’s language columnist and the author of The Grammar of God [Spiegel & Grau] and the forthcoming Wolf Lamb Bomb [Orison Books]. Follow her on Twitter @AviyaKushner*

## Culture

# Why is this Haggadah different from all others? Hitler.

By PJ Grisar

This particular Haggadah, different from all others, was bound to raise eyebrows – if not create a furor.

We don’t know much about its origins, but here’s what we do: It was written by a Jew in Rabat, Morocco, sometime after the start of Operation Torch, the 1942 Allied invasion that spelled victory against the Axis Powers in French North Africa, and recounts those events. The author was someone called Nissim Ben Shimon [Nissim, the son of Shimon], who is named on the cover in French as Simon Coiffeur [Simon hairdresser]. No other texts are attributed to him, nor does the name appear in other documentation, so it’s likely a pseudonym. One thing we do know for sure – and it’s enough for some to dismiss the Haggadah outright, and for others to be instantly intrigued – is its title.

“The original Judeo-Arabic actually says ‘Haggadah de Hitler’ – ‘The Hitler Haggadah,’” said Jonnie Schnytzer, a 38-year-old Ph.D. candidate at Bar-Ilan University, who happened upon the text one day in 2019, while researching North Africa. “You’ve taken Pesach, you’ve taken the Haggadah, and you’ve added to it the one keyword in Google that we all know and have very problematic connotations with, and that’s Hitler, and you’ve put them together.”

Schnytzer was shocked at the author’schutzpah and compelled by what he found inside the unassuming pamphlet-sized volume. Ben Shimon or Coiffeur (if that is the author’s real name) took the structure of the traditional Haggadah’s Magid section and gave it a contemporary makeover.

“He does actually what the sages have told us for generation upon generation: to see ourselves as if we are part of the Exodus,” said Schnytzer, who adapted [“The Hitler Haggadah”](#) for its first publication since 1943, translating it to English with the help of

his father. “He suddenly sees ‘wow this is happening today.’ The Allied forces, instead of God, are the ones that are bringing plagues upon, instead of Pharaoh, Hitler. He’s retelling a story, the story of his generation, which is the Allied forces beating Hitler, Mussolini.”

The resonances are not subtle. The text cribbs a large amount of the Magid’s language and sticks largely to the format we know. That said, the specifics, and the substitution of proper nouns, make for quite the tour of history.

In the text, “Rabbi Joseph Stalin,” an Allied leader subbing in for the traditional Rabbi Jose, asks how it might be inferred Berlin suffered 10 plagues and Hamburg, 50.

Those plagues include the “Flying Fortress” (Boeing B-17s), flamethrowers and the Royal Air Force.

England is named the wise son, Hitler the wicked one, America the good one and Mussolini not “worthy of our words.”

Toward the end of the text we read that had Charles de Gaulle (tantamount to God here) “revoked the anti-Jewish laws but not reinstated Jews in their positions,” Dayenu – it were enough.

If this sounds like a strange project, it was in fact part of a genre popular in North Africa at the time. A writer named Asher Hassin, in Casablanca, for example, produced “The Hitler Maggilot.” Coiffeur’s book also has a kind of Canadian answer in A.M. Klein’s play on Homer, “The Hitleriad,” and is in the same kind of tradition as the bawdy, gruesome take on the Passover story from Sarajevo, “The Partisan Haggadah,” written in Ladino by a Jewish guerilla fighter.

But Schnytzer says “The Hitler Haggadah” is unique for its window into a region often neglected in Holocaust accounts, addressing what he calls a “black hole” of awareness for the travails of North African Jewry during the war.

In an essay for the republication, co-written by Schnytzer and his father, that reality is outlined. In

Tunis, the Nazis and the SS occupied the area from November 1942 to May 1943. A Judenrat, a council representing the Jewish community, was established, and labor camps existed throughout Tunisia, and around 1,000 Jews died from malnourishment and disease. There were pogroms in Libya after the Axis got a foothold there. Coiffeur’s Morocco faced anti-Jewish laws that took stripped owners of their businesses and, in some instances, confined Jews to a ghetto.

It was a bleak time that deserves more attention. But with the early Allied victory in the African theater, the outcome allowed for a new mood among the Jews there – one befitting a sort of miraculous deliverance from oppression. As early as 1943, Coiffeur could laugh that, in a reversal of the Exodus story, the Italians were forced to flee Africa in such haste that “their dough didn’t even have time to turn into macaroni.”

By reprinting the text in an English edition, with a Hebrew translation from Judeo-Arabic by Avishai Bar-Asher, a facsimile of the original volume and essays to give the work context, Schytzer hopes to show how the African experience was distinct from the European one. He also interviewed North African survivors to better understand the period for his own edification.

“It’s important for each of us to understand the narratives and stories of different groups, and ideally for it to become part of how we see ourselves as Jews,” Schnytzer said. “So even if my grandparents come from East Galicea and had to eat gefilte fish, I’m still interested, for me and my kids, in creating a Jewish identity to incorporate that.”

In some ways, that is the message of the text itself. While illustrative of an overlooked and parallel history, Schnytzer said the most amazing aspect of “The Hitler Haggadah” was how it spoke to our commonalities through a shared tradition.

“There’s an incredible message here, an inspirational message of Jewish solidarity, because he’s a Jew living in Rabat, in North Africa, and yet he’s worried about what’s going on with his brethren in Germany, in Poland,” Schnytzer said. Even as the mood appears to have been jubilant in North Africa, the unknown author

recognized there were members of his people still in bondage.

As Jews around the world sit down for our Seders, and tell the story of Passover as commanded, we can be reminded of our common origins – the larger story coming out of Egypt. How curious that something called “The Hitler Haggadah” could bring us that refresher.

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### Culture

## 'Not every disagreement should lead to a crisis': Israel's new ambassador on repairing relations with Democrats

By Jacob Kornbluh

When Gilad Erdan was growing up in the port city of Ashkelon, his mother predicted that one day he would become Israel's state comptroller because he was always giving orders on what needed to be fixed at school. He got an early start in politics and by 26 became an adviser to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in his first term. Now 50, Erdan is Netanyahu's new ambassador to the United States and to the United Nations – or, as his mother might see it, in a role he was born to: fixing a broken and strained relationship.

After an era in which Israel became an increasingly partisan issue in Washington, Erdan sees his mission as restoring the Jewish state's relationship with the Democratic Party. But it is a tricky balancing act, while representing the Israeli right-wing government and speaking out in defense of Israel's security interests.

In Washington, Erdan replaces Ron Dermer, who spearheaded Netanyahu's controversial address to a joint session of Congress in 2015 and was closely aligned with the Republican Party and the Trump administration. At the U.N., he follows Danny Danon, a hard-right Likud member who is opposed to the establishment of a Palestinian state on the west bank of the Jordan River.

With Democrats holding the White House and both chambers of Congress, Erdan sees it as his primary task “to find a mutual language with the Democrats.”

“Most of my meetings are dedicated to learning more about the Democratic Party and to meeting influential people within the party,” Erdan told the Forward in an hour-long interview at Israel's mission to the U.N., his

first with an American Jewish outlet. “I feel strong support for Israel in the mainstream of the Democratic Party.”

Since Jan. 20, he said, he has had virtual meetings with more than 20 members of Congress as well as prominent Jewish Democrats like Rahm Emanuel, the former mayor of Chicago and White House chief of staff, and numerous heads of Jewish organizations. He also spent [three days](#) meeting Black leaders and touring civil rights sites in South Carolina and Alabama, chronicling it all on his [Twitter feed](#). [spending three days in South Carolina and Alabama]

“I believe in opening my schedule and showing people what I do every day,” Erdan told the Forward. “It’s helpful to let people understand what my priorities are because they are used to politicians telling them only the things that they want them to hear.”

## From ‘yeshiva bucher’ to top minister



Erdan, who grew up in a modern Orthodox family, recalled joining protests against then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin for signing the Oslo peace accords while a law student at Bar Ilan University.

He was later introduced to Ariel Sharon, at the time a senior member of the Likud Party, and started meeting him regularly. After Rabin was assassinated in 1995, as Erdan was preparing to join the Mossad, Sharon invited him to join his political team ahead of the 1996 elections.

Erdan said he felt it would be a *zchut* – Hebrew for deserving – and a unique opportunity to work for one

of Israel’s war heroes, so he gave up his quest to become a spy and helped Sharon win the No. 2 spot on Likud’s list for the Knesset. Erdan was then put in charge of turning out Haredi voters, the block that was credited with winning the prime ministership for Netanyahu.

When I was a *yeshiva bucher*, I went to many *tishen* in the Old City,” Erdan recalled of his time studying at Netiv Meir in Jerusalem, using Yiddishisms for “yeshiva boy” and Hasidic gathering around their rebbe. “So I prepared files about every Hasidic rabbi and rosh yeshiva, so that when he visited them he knew everything about them and the issues that were most important to them.”

After two years working for Netanyahu as prime minister, Erdan was elected chairman of the Young Likud faction and was elected to the Knesset himself in 2003. When Sharon left Likud, Erdan turned on his old mentor and was one of the most outspoken opponents of Israel’s 2005 disengagement from Gaza. Since Netanyahu returned to the premiership in 2009, Erdan has held several key cabinet positions, including communications, homefront defense, public security, strategic affairs and public diplomacy.

Now, he sits at the very desk from which Netanyahu built his own international profile, as U.N. ambassador in the 1980s – but still dreams of one day occupying Israel’s top job.

“Serving here is something that will help me decide whether I’m capable of doing so in the future, he said.

“I am not going to sue you if you write that your impression is that I intend to go back to Israel and become a candidate for prime minister,” Erdan quipped. “But today, it’s not relevant.”

## ‘Not every disagreement should lead to a crisis’

Erdan said he would seek common ground with Democrats on issues like climate change, police reform and civil rights. “Politics is a profession,” he explained. “And if you have those skills you can use them to do good and to promote positive things about your country.”

He cited the Biden administration's plans to keep the American embassy in Jerusalem; promise to advance the Abraham Accords between Israel; and criticism of the International Criminal Court's move to investigate whether Israel committed war crimes in the Gaza Strip as promising signs.

As minister of strategic affairs, Erdan was charged with opposing the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement in 2019, when Israel blocked a planned visit by Reps. Rashida Tlaib and Ilhan Omar, who had expressed support for BDS, causing a rift between the Jewish state and their Democratic Party. Amid intense criticism, Israel officials reversed course and said Tlaib, who is Palestinian-American, would be allowed entry to visit her family in the West Bank, but she ultimately decided against the trip.

Erdan [said at the time](#) that the government was just following a law passed in 2017 barring entry to any foreigner who makes a "public call for boycotting Israel" or "any area under its control." In the interview, he said that he had been in a "real dilemma" about the impact barring Tlaib might have in the broader fight against BDS and on the bipartisan support for Israel, "but today, when I see that she continues to spread lies and incitement against Israel, even [regarding the vaccines](#) and everything, I think we did the right thing."

He rushed to add: "I'm emphasizing that I know that she and Ilhan Omar, they do not represent the mainstream of the Democratic Party."

Because of his dual roles, Erdan said he will split his time between New York and Washington, and that he was taking a Big Tent approach to engaging America's Jews. "I'm trying to serve as a bridge between all parts of Judaism," he said. "I understand the importance of all streams in Judaism, and I will engage with all of them."

But, he noted, as ambassador he is not in a position to change Israel's policies that can alienate liberal Zionists, such as around religious pluralism. And whether it's a dispute over religious issues or how to contain Iran, "not every disagreement should lead to a crisis," Erdan said. "You don't cut your ties with Israel because you disagree with one, two or three political decisions that were made."

Erdan added that he feels he has the skills to work through possible disagreements,

In the interview, Erdan didn't address the political implications of Israel's March 23 election – its fourth in less than two years – though his job is at risk if Netanyahu loses the premiership. "Israel doesn't need to prove anymore that we are the most vibrant democracy not only in the Middle East, but around the world," he quipped. "Every few months, we allow you to change your mind and give you another opportunity to influence."

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*Jacob Kornbluh is the Forward's senior political reporter. Follow him on Twitter [@jacobkornbluh](#) or email [kornbluh@forward.com](mailto:kornbluh@forward.com).*

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