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Reggae musician Matisyahu's performances have been called "a raw expression of his spirituality."

Matisyahu in Concert, with Nadim Azzam: A Student Interview

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler

An ecstatic crowd at UC San Diego's Sun God Lawn enjoyed a memorable concert by Matisyahu, the Grammy-nominated Jewish-American reggae artist, and Nadim Azzam, a Palestinian-American acoustic hip-hop performer.

The April 14 concert was presented by UC San Diego Hillel, part of an ongoing effort to promote unity between Muslims, Jews, and other religious and cultural groups. The event

was cosponsored by, among others, the Jewish Studies Program, the UC San Diego Institute of Arts and Humanities, the House of Israel in Balboa Park, and United.

United is a student club that aims to strengthen the relationship between Muslim and Jewish students. After the concert, we talked about the event with Aisha Subhan, a third-year student majoring in religion and minoring in communication.

Hi, Aisha, can you tell us what the main idea is behind United?

Our goal is to promote interaction between Muslims and Jews. The political debate regarding Israel and Palestine has become deeply polarized in the United States. UC San Diego isn't bad, but I know other campuses which are deeply polarized. In many ways, this polarization reflects the conflict itself. We believe that there hasn't been enough effort to emphasize similarities, and therefore we try to positively display the mesh between Muslims and Jews.

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Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler



David Nirenberg

On May 12, 2016, David Nirenberg, author of *Neighboring Faiths: Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the Middle Ages and Today* (University of Chicago Press, 2014), gave a talk on interrelations and influences among

Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. He used the term “neighboring faiths” to emphasize that the three religious communities have taken shape through constant interactions in proximity to one another.

Nirenberg, professor of medieval history and social thought at the University of Chicago, argued that the scriptures of all three faiths were, to some extent, the products of a sectarian dynamics of neighborliness. However, the scriptures themselves contain many contradictory references to this neighborliness. For example, the Hebrew Bible tells you that

the stranger who dwells among you should be loved as yourself. On the other hand, it explicitly excludes the seven nations living in the Promised Land, who are destined to be exterminated.

The New Testament is similarly ambivalent. Most famous are exhortations to love the stranger, the neighbor, and even the enemy. But the opposite is also found: “He that is not with me is against me,” and, “As for my enemies who did not want me for their king, bring them here and slay them before me.”

The same tension may be found in the Quran.

All later periods, including our own, said Nirenberg, have often looked to scripture in order to discover the sort of neighborliness that God has in mind. Yet, the contradictions are ample, and even the distinction between accepting love and total extermination of neighbors is often blurred. A powerful and chilling example cited by Nirenberg is the medieval Christian theology of Crusade, which justified killing Muslims as an act of love.

According to Nirenberg, recognizing the diversity among scriptures can protect us from subscribing to a fantasy that only our scripture is loving, and the others are wrong. Another, related fantasy is that our interpretation of scripture is right, and all other interpretations are heresy.

These two fantasies, argued Nirenberg, are the continuing source of much cruelty and violence. Present day communities still constitute themselves by thinking about the long history of relations with their neighbors. The resulting representations of the world are coproductions—not only of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, but also of past and present. Visions of the past are deployed to do work in the present, and visions of the present transform how the past is interpreted.

Precisely because of this interrelation between past and present, concluded Nirenberg, historians can play an important role in shaping the future. ♦

In Memory: Walter Kohn

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler



Walter Kohn

The UC San Diego Jewish Studies Program mourns the loss of a parent.

On April 19, 2016, Walter Kohn, Nobel laureate in chemistry and professor emeritus of theoretical physics

at UC San Diego, died at his home in Santa Barbara. He was ninety-three years old.

From 1960 to 1979, Kohn taught at the newly established University of California San Diego, where, in addition to his scientific

achievements, he was one of the founders of the Jewish Studies Program.

Kohn, born on March 9, 1923, credited his strong Jewish identity as motivating his efforts to establish a program of Judaic Studies. He noted painful memories of his youth: the loss of his parents and other relatives and friends, murdered in the Holocaust. Kohn himself was rescued as part of the famous Kindertransport, escaping from Austria to England, and onward to Canada.

Kohn received a wartime bachelor's degree in applied mathematics from the University of Toronto and was awarded an MA in applied mathematics in 1946. He received his PhD in physics from Harvard University in 1948. From 1950 to 1960, Kohn worked at

Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, as a postdoctoral fellow in Copenhagen, and as a researcher at Bell Labs in New Jersey.

During his tenure at UC San Diego in the sixties and seventies, Kohn made groundbreaking contributions to theoretical physics and chemistry that earned him, together with John Pople, the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1998.

In 1984, Kohn relocated to Santa Barbara, having accepted the position of founding director at the new Institute for Theoretical Physics (now the Kavli Institute for Theoretical Physics). He was professor in the UC Santa Barbara Physics Department until his retirement in 1991. ♦

Matsiyahu in Concert

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I know some members of United and Hillel met with Matsiyahu and Azzam for lunch.

How was it?

Well, it was a great opportunity to hear from them on a personal level. Azzam doesn't identify as a Muslim, but he comes with this background and he's well aware of the conflict. Matsiyahu has a more spiritual approach. I related a lot with Matsiyahu's spirituality, and it was very refreshing to hear. He talked about how some of his own songs were inspired by the sacrifice of Abraham, which was interesting to me, from the point of view of which son was chosen by Abraham to sacrifice.

I heard people suggest such events are green-washing the real issues that need discussion.

What do you think about this critique?

I definitely see how people might get this idea, and we deal with this in United, as well. It's understandable, but, still, I feel the importance of engaging with the other side. I noticed personally, by engaging with the Jewish organizations on campus, and during my trip to Israel, that they wouldn't have heard my side otherwise.

Do you think that such events evoke engagement?

Definitely! Otherwise, we just wouldn't talk. Spreading awareness and promoting dialogue are important for the Palestinian cause. I'm well aware that a lot of people will disagree with me on that—but I'll take the fault! We think people talking to each other and learning about each other is the most effective way to bring people together. ♦



Reggae artist Matsiyahu

A Rare Opportunity

The Association for Jewish Studies is coming to San Diego! From December 18–20, 2016, the nation's foremost academic association of Jewish Studies scholars will convene at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront Hotel for their forty-eighth annual conference.

Speakers and discussants from around the world will share their latest research on the Jews and Judaism from the biblical period to the twenty-first century. Nonmembers are also eligible to attend the panels; registration information may be found at <http://www.ajsnet.org/conference-registration-hotel-2016.htm#fees>.

Faculty News

Professor Ameila Glaser



Professor Amelia Glaser, who on July 1 became the new director of the Jewish Studies Program at UC San Diego, recently published two articles: “From Jewish Jesus to Black Christ: The Outsider in Leftist

Yiddish Poetry” (*Studies in American Jewish Literature*, Winter 2015); and “«Конармия» И. Бабеля: между фактом и вымыслом” [Isaac Babel’s Red Cavalry: Between Fact and Fantasy] in *И. Бабель в историческом и литературном контексте: XXI век*. (Moscow: Knizhnik, 2016).

Professor Glaser also published two book reviews: “‘We were stronger then’: Ludmila Ulitskaya’s prescient novel about Russian nostalgia for the Soviet era” in the *Times Literary Supplement* (March 25, 2016) and “Postcards from a Lost City: Serhij Zhadan’s Voroshilovgrad” in the *Los Angeles Review of Books* (July 7, 2016).

Professor Deborah Hertz



In November 2015, Professor Deborah Hertz, Herman Wouk Professor of Modern Jewish Studies, gave a public talk, “Manya Shochat, the Mother of the Kibbutzim, and her Traveling Guns,” in a lecture series at

the Coronado Public Library.

In April, 2016, she delivered a paper, “Friendship with a Public Antisemite,” at the Jewish Museum Berlin, for a conference on Berlin intellectuals. Two sections of her book-in-progress, *Sailing to Utopia: Jewish Women’s Journeys from Odessa to Jaffa*, are in press in collections published by the University of Michigan and Cambridge University.

In June 2016, Professor Hertz completed her three-year term as director of Jewish Studies at UC San Diego.

An article profiling Professor Hertz’s approach to research and teaching appeared in the April 18 issue of the UC San Diego student newspaper the *Guardian*:

<http://ucsdguardian.org/2016/04/18/behind-the-lectern-deborah-hertz/>

Professor Tom Levy

Tom Levy, the Norma Kershaw Professor of the Archaeology of Ancient Israel and Neighboring Lands, spent the spring



quarter of 2016 preparing for an exciting project combining archaeology, history, and climate science. The object of Levy’s inquiry is one of the most intriguing mysteries of ancient

history: the collapse of Late Bronze Age civilization in the eastern Mediterranean region.

Sometime around 1200 BCE, the civilizations of the Mycenaean Greeks, the Hittites of Anatolia, and New Kingdom Egypt all declined suddenly, for unknown reasons. This collapse opened up new opportunities for small-scale societies to emerge in the Iron Age, including the ancient Israelites.

The multiyear project will be carried out in collaboration with Professors Ioannis Liritzis of the University of the Aegean, Richard Norris of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and Assaf Yasur-Landau of the University of Haifa. Yasur-Landau also will be a visiting distinguished professor at UC San Diego in spring 2017, teaching undergraduate and graduate courses on marine archaeology in Biblical seas.

To train for his summer expedition, Levy had to pass the rigorous, hundred-plus-hour Scripps Institution of Oceanography course in scientific diving. ♦

Babel in Zion

By Julia Fermento-Tzaisler



Liora Halperin

In the book *Babel in Zion*, the subject of her lecture on October 29, 2015, Professor Liora Halperin of the University of Colorado described the

linguistic reality in the early days of the Yishuv (the preindependence Jewish community in Palestine). Halperin’s work provocatively locates Babel, i.e., the iconic multilingualism of the Jewish diaspora, within Zion itself.

The Palestinian Zionists aspired to eradicate the Jewish diaspora, and with it the diversity of languages spoken by Jews, and replace them with an exclusively Hebrew-speaking nation in its historic homeland.

As opposed to this idealized Zionist agenda, Halperin’s research portrays a reality that recognized the inevitable political, financial, and cultural use of English, Arabic, and the myriad of the Yishuv members’ diasporic mother tongues as they interacted with the Arabs, with the British, and among themselves. In this sense, concludes Halperin, Zion always was Babel!





Muslim and Christian Influence on Medieval Jewish Law

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler



Rabbi David Golinkin

On January 25, 2016, Rabbi David Golinkin gave a lecture for the Jewish Studies Program. Golinkin, president emeritus and Jerome and Miriam Katzin Professor of Jewish Law at the Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem, began by juxtaposing two classic discussions illustrating foreign influences on Jewish law and custom.

The first was a famous midrash in rabbinical literature raising this question: To what extent were the Hebrew slaves in Egypt influenced by the surrounding non-Jewish society? The Rabbinic answer: Because the Jews had

persisted in retaining their names and their language, they escaped foreign influence.

The second discussion comes from the Book of the Pious, written in Germany by the twelfth-century rabbi Yehudah HeHasid. Yehudah advised that Jews wandering through Europe, seeking a place to live, should look at the residents of the city they want to inhabit, because they will end up behaving like them.

When it comes to the presence or absence of foreign influence, said Golinkin, most of the evidence agrees with Yehudah HeHasid and not the wishful legend of insulation while in Egypt. A famous example: Judah the Maccabee was known for his opposition to Hellenism; he did not want the Jews to assimilate to Greek society. However, his own ambassadors to Rome were named Jason and Eupolemos. “Two nice Jewish boys with nice Greek names!”

Foreign influence goes beyond names, affecting also legal systems and customs. Golinkin divided the types of influences into various categories. For example, “unconscious imitation” happens nowadays with holiday celebrations: Many ultraorthodox Jews in Jerusalem unknowingly adorn their Sukkah with Christmas decorations. Another noted type of influence is “justification of imitation after the fact.” In twelfth-century Spain, for example, Rabbi Menachem Ibn Zerach responded to the prevalent problem of concubinage by stating that “Jewish men who behave the same as Christians and Muslims should do so in a way that does not transgress the words of the Sages.”

Golinkin’s many examples showed that throughout many times and places, and despite the popular impression of isolation, Jews were very much influenced by their non-Jewish neighbors. ♦

Jews and African-Americans: Slavery, Diaspora, Ghetto

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion program at UC San Diego is a campuswide undergraduate requirement. It provides students with the background knowledge necessary to understand and respect differences between groups of people.

We talked with Professor Deborah Hertz about her new course on diversity that she taught in spring 2016, which aims to “explore contrasts and parallels between African-Americans

and Jews from the seventeenth century to the present. We investigate slavery, the Civil War, shared music, political movements, urban geography, and longings to return to a homeland in Africa or Palestine.”

Hi, Deborah; could you tell us about the course and how you designed it?

Slavery, Diaspora, Ghetto is a global history course that covers the period from 1400 to the present. Twenty percent of this course addresses Africa, 60 percent the United States, and 20 percent Europe and Latin America. The title

represents three themes that connect Jews and African-Americans.

The course is divided into three parts. The first part was on the participation of Jews in the slave trade. We traced the Sephardi diaspora of Jews from Spain and Portugal to Holland, to Brazil, then to the West Indies and from there to the American South. That journey included Jews who retained slaves, buying them from traders and selling them to plantation owners.

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How Rabbinic Law Adapts Itself to Changing Times, from the Middle Ages till Today

By Julia Fermentto-Tzaisler



Joel Roth

On November 15, 2015, Professor Joel Roth gave a public lecture for the UC San Diego Jewish Studies Program. Roth is a prominent rabbi in the Conservative Rabbinical Assembly and a former member and chair of

the Committee on Jewish Law and Standards, which arbitrates questions of Jewish law and tradition.

Roth, the Louis Finkelstein Professor of Talmud and Jewish Law at the Jewish Theological Seminary, discussed the pliability of the Jewish legal system, or halacha. Like every other legal system in the world, Jewish halacha has had to grow and develop, in order to survive as a viable guide for behavior. Roth presented two key patterns of innovation and modernization utilized by recognized authorities of Jewish law from the period of the Talmud until our

very day, which he called modification and abrogation.

Roth's first example came from the classical literature. According to the Mishnah (the older component of the Talmud), "Clapping is forbidden on the Sabbath." The later Gemara defines the motivations that prompted the prohibition: "It (clapping the hands) may lead to the construction of a musical instrument on the Sabbath."

The medieval additions to Rashi's commentary, known as the Tosafot, however, maintain that in their time this prohibition no longer holds: "Back in those days people were expert in the construction of musical instruments. Nowadays we are not, and therefore it no longer applies."

According to Roth, this pattern of modification presupposes that when the original justification for a law is the only defensible rationale for its continuance—if the justification no longer obtains—the norm can be modified or abrogated.

To illustrate a second main pattern, Roth gave the following example: The Mishnah prohibits Jews from doing business with non-Jews during the three days prior to pagan holidays. The assumption was that, when a Jew was involved in business with an ancient Greek, he could not say to him, "I will swear in the name of God, and you in the name of Zeus!" A few pages later, however, the Talmud contains a story about Rabbi Judah Nesi'ah, who argued that this principle may be violated if its observance would create animosity. Judah Nesi'ah understood that compliance with the norm might be more detrimental to Jews than noncompliance. This, Roth showed, is another way that traditional halacha permits norms to be modified or abrogated. ♦

The Louis Finkelstein Professorship of Talmud and Jewish Law at the Jewish Theological Seminary was created by the late Jerome and Miriam Katzin, longtime supporters of the UC San Diego Jewish Studies Program.



Jewish Studies Program core faculty, from left: David Goodblatt, Deborah Hertz, William Propp, Thomas Levy, Lisa Lampert-Weissig and Amelia Glaser.

The Hilltop: A Reading by Israeli Author Assaf Gavron



The Hilltop (Scribner, 2014; 464 pp.) is a novel chronicling the life and times of a fictional West Bank settlement, Ma'aleh Hermesh C. The protagonist, Othniel Assis, has a simple desire to get back to the land, to grow a few tomatoes and some lettuce. As his illegal dwelling is built, others join his new settlement, which is granted protection by the Israeli Defense Force and features twelve caravans, a playground, two dogs, a horse, a female camel, organic fields, and a synagogue. Living at this endangered outpost are families and singles, an archeologist, an olive oil scammer, a farmer, and a soldier.

On February 24, 2016, author Assaf Gavron gave a lecture on the background of his recent novel. The Jewish settlements in the West Bank are perhaps the hottest point of contention between Israelis and Palestinians, among Israel and the United States and Europe, and also among Israelis themselves. The gist of the argument is the settlers claim that the West Bank is part of the historical Land of Israel, given to the Jews by God. Their opponents counter that this is contested land occupied by Israel during the Six Day War in 1967, home to three million Palestinian Arabs, and not internationally recognized.

As a writer, Gavron developed a curiosity for the illegal outposts some years before he started working on the book.

“The combinations of lawlessness, lack of clear borders, the sense of adventure ... as well as the breathtaking landscapes, religious

fanaticism and violent national conflict, made it feel like a modern, surreal kind of Western: It is the Wild West Bank,” Gavron said.

In his presentation, Gavron shared his own documentary photographs to give an overview of what he encountered.

“When I enter the settlements,” he said, “I put the politics behind and try to open my anthropological eyes. I've been returning to one outpost in particular in the last two years. There, just below the main square, was ‘my’ hut, where I got permission to live and write.”

The hut sits on a canyon's edge, on the verge of the desert: a majestic, wild, biblical landscape. A few hours' walk to the east is the Dead Sea, the lowest and one of the hottest places on earth.

“The contradiction between the pleasant, shanty-like atmosphere in the outpost and the violent reality of the occupation, and more generally between the private, day-to-day living and the larger, political story, are the paradoxes I was trying to understand and experience,” Gavron said.

Winner of the prestigious Bernstein Prize, Gavron's novel was hailed by Time Out Tel Aviv as “‘the Great Israeli Novel’ ... a monumental and daring work about life in a West Bank settlement from one of Israel's most acclaimed young novelists.” ♦

Slavery, Diaspora, Ghetto

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The second part (of the course) concerned Jews in the American South: Why and how Jews participated in the Confederate government, and whether or not there was less anti-Semitism in a space where Jews could be white. A theme was to show that race is a social construct. In the last part (of the course), we learned about Jews in the movie industry, and Jews and jazz.

How was it to teach such a sensitive topic?

There's much tension among undergraduates about race and so much confusion. Not a lot of people know what's progressive, what's reactionary, or condescending. In the beginning, when we started to talk about race, they felt very nervous, because it is not something you usually talk about in the classroom.

There's much tension among undergraduates about race and so much confusion. Not a lot of people know what's progressive, what's reactionary, or condescending.

This course is very different from what you normally teach. How was your encounter with that part of Jewish history?

Taking Jews and African-Americans and tracing the points in which they meet gave me a really edgy perspective on Jewish history. In the history I usually teach, the Jews are in a bubble. Some are leaving, no one is coming in, although change within the group happens over time.

Will you be teaching this course again?

Not next year, but I definitely hope to teach it the year after.



Recommended Reading

Professor Glaser Suggests...*Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel*

Anya Ulinich's *Lena Finkle's Magic Barrel* (2014) is a remarkable graphic novel based loosely on Bernard Malamud's classic story, "The Magic Barrel." The semi-autobiographical Lena Finkle is a Russian-born American Jewish novelist, struggling to find herself as a single mother after a divorce. The story includes flashbacks to the character's childhood in Moscow, her early years in the United States,

where she narrowly escapes an arranged marriage to a much older Hasid by moving in with her pot-smoking boyfriend, Chance, and her eventual unhappy marriage.

Ulinich combines beautifully compelling art and insightful dialogue to narrate Lena's journey. Though she may not find a soulmate by the end of the novel, she does find a muse, and she loses and (re)finds her soul. ♦



Amelia Glaser is an associate professor of literature at UC San Diego, where her research interests include Russian literature and film, transnational Jewish literature, the literatures of Ukraine, the literature of immigration to the United States, the Russian critical tradition, and translation theory and practice.

