

THE WEEKLY PRINT

Jake Tapper channels the raucous '70s in his new novel. Remember Evel Knievel?; Big Ten Conference chief of staff Adam Neuman returns to his flock; A new excavation of an ancient Jerusalem road expected to draw modern-day pilgrims; Mondaire Jones looks to reclaim his old seat against challenger with a Democratic pedigree; In N.C., Walker hits Robinson for 'antisemitic remarks' and 'denial of the Holocaust'; 'It's all happening again': 20 years after genocide in Darfur, ethnic violence returns; Award-winning Israeli author takes on antisemitism in the U.S.; and In Geneva, an American ambassador makes the case for the U.N. Human Rights Council.

JULY 11, 2023

Jake Tapper channels the raucous '70s in his new novel. Remember Evel Knievel?

The CNN anchor's 'All the Demons Are Here' resonates with today's politics

By Matthew Kassel

“Pardon me,” Jake Tapper said. “I’m eating some celery.”

The chief Washington correspondent for CNN had just wrapped up an episode of his daily news show, “The Lead With Jake Tapper,” when he got on the phone for an interview with *Jewish Insider* last week. He was running on “an empty stomach,” he said, and needed a pick-me-up as he pivoted to a different subject: his latest novel, out today.

“I’m trying to be polite about it,” said the typically unflappable newsman, chewing a mouthful of celery as furtively as possible. “I’m swallowing,” he announced. “OK.”

The effort to hastily compartmentalize even something as unobtrusive as an early

evening plant snack was, it seemed, a small but telling illustration of the unusual discipline required of a high-profile TV anchor who has managed to publish three novels since 2018.

“I’m a 33 1/3 record played at 45, or something,” Tapper, a veteran Washington journalist, said dryly, summarizing his work ethic with what he described as an “anachronistic reference that will elude everybody under the age of 25.”

His new book, *All the Demons Are Here*, is the third installment in a series of history-rich political thrillers — all written, he said, in daily increments of at least 15 minutes. Set in 1977, the novel centers on Ike and Lucy Marder, the son and daughter of a

Republican senator from New York whose story is told in the first two books, which revolve, respectively, around the McCarthy hearings and Frank Sinatra and his Rat Pack.

The latest narrative finds Ike, an AWOL marine, as he falls in with the pit crew of Evel Knievel, the death-defying stunt performer. Lucy, meanwhile, a journalist in Washington, D.C., has joined a new tabloid run by a character evocative of Rupert Murdoch. The siblings’ paths inevitably cross against a research-infused backdrop of the decade’s most sensational moments and characters, including serial killers, neo-Nazis, the death of Elvis Presley and the infamous sex- and drug-fueled celebrity

disco scene of Studio 54 in Manhattan.

If at first glance the books seem unrelated to the subjects he covers at CNN, Tapper said there are a number of parallels to be drawn with the present political environment.

"One of the things that's fun writing about history is finding that history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes," Tapper told JI, invoking a line that is often attributed to Mark Twain. "One of the things that has been fun about writing about the '50s and Joe McCarthy, or the '60s and Frank Sinatra and the Rat Pack, and the '70s now with Evel Knievel and the rise of tabloid journalism, is that you can hear the rhyming and you can see the commonality in experiences. That was one of the things I wanted to explore."

Tapper said he considered writing former President Donald Trump, who was a presence at Studio 54, into the book. "But I didn't think that in 1977 anybody would know who he was," he said. "If I described him as he looked and seemed in 1977, I don't know that people would have picked up on it."

Even without such an obvious historical referent, the book's themes were "intentionally resonant with today," Tapper said, citing Ike's story as an example of "Americans who are disenchanted with government." How, for instance, "does somebody like Evel Knievel get a following?" he said of the notoriously brutish motorcyclist, who was recognized not only as an abusive drunk but also a vicious antisemite. "What kind of grievances might lead individuals to follow someone like Evel Knievel?"

Tapper, a 54-year-old Philadelphia native, grew up in the 1970s but doesn't recall much of the history he recounts in the book. "I remember Elvis dying, I remember disco, and that's pretty much it," he said. "Most of the stuff I had to research and learn about. I wasn't even a particular Evel Knievel fan." He was, he clarified, "much more into comic books and the Philadelphia Phillies."

His interest in Knievel, he explained, was spurred by a friend, the late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel, who owns a fishing lodge in Idaho not far from where the stuntman attempted his ill-fated jump across the Snake River Canyon in 1974. "For the last three years, I've gone there, and he is a huge Evel Knievel fan," Tapper said.

"The lodge is decorated with a bunch of Evel Knievel memorabilia."

Among the collectibles, he said, is a framed *Daily News* cover placed over a urinal in one of the lodge's bathrooms. The front page, which makes an appearance in a bathroom scene early in the book, features dueling headlines covering Gerald Ford's pardoning of Richard Nixon and — to Tapper's amusement — Knievel's attempted canyon jump in a steam-powered rocket. "That, I found funny," Tapper recalled. "It also piqued my interest that the American people were so enamored with him at this time."

"I've heard for years that Leonardo DiCaprio or this star or that star have the rights to his story, but he's not really heroic, and he's not really an antihero because there's no twist at the end of his life where he becomes this wonderful person," he said of Knievel. "He just always was who he was. He was much better as an antagonist for me to play with in my book."

While Knievel's story was largely unfamiliar to Tapper before he began writing, there were some subject areas that more directly reflected his own long-standing personal interests. With Lucy, he confirmed, "I was able to infuse her with characteristics of my own and other journalists that I thought would distinguish her and make her seem more real." For example, "how she corrects people's misuse of the word ironic, or uses footnotes, or anything I do that annoys everybody in my life as a journalist," he said flatly.

"It was just fun," he told JI. "I'm like, 'Lucy is going to be me at my most annoying,' and hopefully, people will enjoy that."

In a somewhat unorthodox stylistic choice, there are footnotes scattered throughout the book, one of which provides humorous insight into a Yiddish term, "dreck," used by a character. The footnote itself includes the word "schtickle," to explain the character's New York vernacular.

Tapper, who is Jewish, isn't fluent in the language himself, even if he remembers some choice phrases from his childhood. "I have all the words that I picked up as a kid and then at Akiba Hebrew Academy," he said, referring to the Jewish day school he attended in Philadelphia. "But I don't speak Yiddish."

"I just know the insult words," he added. "Do you know what *shicker* is? A *shicker* is a drinker. It's one of the most fun languages for insults."

In his day job at CNN, Tapper's Jewish background has often informed his approach, whether he is invoking a Jewish expression or raising concerns over antisemitic sentiments expressed on both sides of the aisle. But he insists that he sees himself simply as a journalist, "not as a Jewish journalist" who is speaking on behalf of the community.

"I do think that, as in every election, there are people using hate to divide and conquer in attempts to win primaries or elections, and sometimes it's pretty explicit and sometimes it's more code words, and it's just something that I keep an eye out for," he said. "But it's not just about Jews. It's about any number of groups. I think I'm probably more outspoken about racism and sexism just because there's more of it that I see. But I certainly don't hold back when I see antisemitism."

He said it has been "dispiriting" to see that antisemitism has, in recent years, become "more acceptable in the name of people thinking it's rebellious." Though he never imagined that antisemitism "would go away," he said, "I did think it would become less acceptable as we kept going as a country."

The CNN journalist is also keeping his eye on developments in Israel, which he has covered on his show. In February, for instance, he aired a newsy interview with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu about, among other things, his government's effort to promote a controversial judicial overhaul that has spurred mass protests across the Jewish state.

"That's a big story," Tapper said. "It's a very important story for our national and international audiences, and we'll continue to cover it. I definitely hope to interview Netanyahu again, and I look forward to it — hopefully next time in the United States, because that's a long flight."

Tapper was particularly eager to highlight such reporting as CNN now emerges from a tumultuous period culminating last month in the high-profile ouster of Chris Licht, the network's former chairman and CEO, whose approach to news had resulted in

sagging staff morale and declining ratings. “It has been distressing that there’s been so much coverage of the palace intrigue and the media criticism and the like,” Tapper said. “I understand why, but it’s just been distracting, I think, for people who are working really hard to just do our jobs of journalism.”

“Right now, as I’m talking to you, I’m looking at a clip on my TV of Erin Burnett

in Kiev interviewing Volodymyr Zelensky, and that’s what I want the focus to be when it comes to CNN,” he told JI last week. “I feel like we’re in a better place now where we’re focused more on just the job of journalism,” he said. “I’m very proud of the shows I do and the company I work for, so it’s always good to be getting attention for the journalism and not for controversies caused by things out of my control.”

As for his side projects, Tapper remains hard at work. He said he is already writing a fourth novel on the Marder family, set in the 1980s, while plugging away at a nonfiction book about what he described broadly as “an investigation into a terrorist.”

For now, he is focusing on both projects. “I just have to figure out which one I want to do next.” ♦

JULY 12, 2023

Big Ten Conference chief of staff Adam Neuman returns to his flock

The up-and-coming sports administrator starts a new job as top official with the Baltimore Ravens

By Matthew Kassel

For Adam Neuman, a rising star in professional sports management, the chance to work for the Baltimore Ravens, the NFL team he joined on Friday as chief of staff and special adviser to the president, represents a personally fulfilling return not only to his beloved native city but to a robust Jewish community that has long kept him centered — even from afar.

“Being a Baltimorean has always been in the fabric of who I am, and I’ve learned a lot from the people who have raised me,” he said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Tuesday afternoon. “There’s a certain grittiness, a certain toughness, a certain hospitality that exists in Baltimore.”

“Returning,” he said, “is really powerful.”

For the past several years, Neuman, 33, has lived in New York City, logging hours at a white-shoe law firm before being snatched up by the Big Ten Conference, where he served as chief of staff for strategy and operations as well as deputy general counsel. In his time at the storied college sports conference, Neuman worked side by side with its influential commissioner, Kevin Warren, who won plaudits for brokering a multibillion-dollar TV deal that set a record for college athletics.

Thanks in large part to his assistance in such negotiations, Neuman was recently included in *The Athletic’s* inaugural “College Sports 40 Under 40” list — which applauded the up-and-comer as “a major player behind the scenes in one of the most powerful conferences in college sports.”

When Warren was named president and CEO of the Chicago Bears and left the Big Ten this past April, Neuman, who had previously served as a legal intern for the Minnesota Vikings, soon followed his former boss to the NFL — albeit while landing at a different team.

Now that he is migrating to his home state, Neuman expressed an urge “to give back” to the community in which more than a dozen of his family members still reside. “That’s going to be a big priority for me,” he told JI, crediting his grandfather, Earle Freedman, as a source of inspiration. Freedman, a nationally recognized retired bridge engineer who holds the unique title of Maryland’s longest-serving government employee, “just stuck it out and grinded and helped build some of the most famous bridges in the state,” Neuman said admiringly.

Neuman, for his part, sees his own

values reflected in the team that is bringing him home after a 15-year hiatus, which began with a two-year stint studying Talmud in Israel. “The Ravens are one of these real community teams,” he explained. “I think everybody knows how important the Ravens are to the community and how important they are to the welfare of the state. To be a part of a leadership group with the Ravens, really, in a lot of ways, is a dream come true.”

As a lifelong Ravens fan, Neuman, an avid collector of Baltimore sports memorabilia, brings a personal connection to his new role. “It’s not always the exclusive reason to want to work for a team,” he acknowledged. “But it’s a real blessing to get to work for the team you rooted for. No one asked me to put a signed Ray Lewis-Ed Reed jersey in my Big Ten office in New York. But I did.”

“I’m really looking forward to helping the organization win a Super Bowl in any way that I can,” he averred.

Neuman said he is working remotely for the next few weeks and will relocate to Baltimore by the end of the month. “It’s definitely bigger and larger,” he said of the city, which he has continued to visit multiple times during his time away.

As he prepares to move back, Neuman, an Orthodox Jew, said he is looking forward to working in close proximity to the Jewish community where he grew up, “which is only about a 15-minute drive from” the Ravens’ training facility in Owings Mills, a suburb of Baltimore. “It’s incredible,” he said of the commute, “to be near kosher food and prayer.”

He is confident that the team’s leadership will be “sensitive to” his own religious requirements, including Shabbat observance. “They’re incredibly inclusive people,” he said. “They obviously know that I’m a practicing Orthodox Jew, and that’s really important to me. First and foremost, God is present in my life, and that’s a non-negotiable.”

“The reality is, if I can make it in college sports, where our primary revenue generator is all on Saturday,” he said, “I know that making that shift to the games that are more traditionally played on Sunday will definitely be a little bit of an easier toll on my family.” ♦

JULY 7, 2023

A new excavation of an ancient Jerusalem road expected to draw modern-day pilgrims

Inside City of David’s excavation of the ancient Pilgrimage Road, which once led directly to the Second Temple

By Gabby Deutch

On a recent Thursday afternoon, cars sped past the walls of the Old City while tourists gathered in small corners of shade. The city was alive with the chaotic energy that accompanies the end of the week, when the start of Shabbat is less than 24 hours away. Drivers navigating the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan honked repeatedly, knowing it would do no good in the rush-hour traffic of Israel’s capital city.

More than 15 feet underground, there’s another road, a quiet one, which is — for now, at least — off-limits to the people above. It’s less than a half-mile long, but its history dates back some 2,000 years.

Known as the “stepped street,” or the “Pilgrimage Road,” the wide stone slabs that make up this pedestrian street were believed to be built by the Romans. The road was rediscovered by the Israel Antiquities Authority in 2004, after a sewage pipe burst. Archaeologists expect visitors to be able to walk the length of the road in two years, following the completion of an intricate excavation process.

For more than a decade now, archaeologists have overseen an underground excavation of the road, using heavy iron beams to prop up the above-

ground infrastructure while they hollow out everything that has accumulated on top of the road over the past two millennia. Historians and archaeologists assert that the road connected the Pool of Siloam, a Roman-era pool used by Jewish pilgrims as a ritual bath, to the Second Temple.

Each year, hundreds of thousands of people visit the City of David National Park, a popular tourist attraction and historical site in East Jerusalem that oversees several major archaeological projects related to ancient Jerusalem and biblical history. But the number of visitors is expected to increase dramatically when the Pilgrimage Road opens, and the world’s Christians come in larger numbers to walk on a sacred stretch of ground that Jesus is considered likely to have walked.

“I’ve been asked by many congressmen and many senators, ‘What is the likelihood that Jesus walked on this road?’ And I tell them, ‘A conservative estimate is almost certainly 100%,’” said Ze’ev Orenstein, director of international affairs at the City of David Foundation.

“In a few years time, people will literally be able to walk in the footsteps of their ancestors, in the footsteps of the Bible,” said Orenstein, the appointed tour guide for

foreign dignitaries who visit the site.

But because this is Israel, the tour that Orenstein offers at the City of David — and, specifically, the Pilgrimage Road — is not just a pass through a list of rote historical facts, but a political argument, made to convey to international visitors why he thinks Jerusalem must always remain under Israeli control. Israel annexed East Jerusalem after capturing it from Jordan in the Six-Day War in 1967.

The City of David Foundation has faced criticism for both its archaeological digs in the heavily populated Arab neighborhood, whose residents oppose the excavations, and for promoting Jewish settlement in Silwan.

“The City of David becomes the front lines for the battle over the heritage of Jerusalem,” said Orenstein, an American who moved to Israel 20 years ago. “Jerusalem’s biblical heritage, going back thousands of years, is not simply a matter of faith, but a matter of fact.” On the other side of that battle, in Orenstein’s view, are Palestinian leaders who have attempted to deny Jewish ties to Jerusalem. (Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has on many occasions denied Jewish historical claims to Jerusalem.)

Regardless of the political controversy that surrounds the City of David's work in this crowded modern neighborhood, the findings from its archaeological digs have reshaped historical understandings of ancient Jerusalem.

On the June evening that Orenstein led Jewish Insider on a tour of the Pilgrimage Road, light bulbs illuminated his path as he descended the stairs from the top of the road. Metal arches, connecting the beams and metal slats that propped up the modern road above, covered the steps.

Wherever an excavation was still in progress, blue tarps sat next to mounds of dirt. Orenstein reached into the pile and

pulled out an object, dusting it off with his hand — something ceramic, most likely many hundreds of years old. The rubble is packed into bags and carted to another archaeological site, where it is inspected for other ancient objects like the pottery that Orenstein picked up.

"The things that are being found along the Pilgrimage Road excavation today are primarily from a time capsule of about 2,000 years ago," he explained. "It's preserving the modern neighborhood while uncovering the ancient heritage."

At the bottom of the steps, next to the remnants of the Pool of Siloam, a small section is open to the public. A wooden

market stand, with a fake goat and wicker baskets of fake fruit, stands next to the steps, meant to mimic the busy commercial corridor that might have lined the steps in ancient times. Jews would have visited the road on the pilgrimage holidays of Passover, Shavuot and Sukkot.

Any would-be pilgrims who visit the site today will not emerge from the cavernous steps at the entrance to the Second Temple. Instead, once they reach the scorching sunlight of the Middle Eastern summer, they will arrive back at the center of a modern geopolitical battle over land, history and religion. ♦

JULY 10, 2023

Mondaire Jones looks to reclaim his old seat against challenger with a Democratic pedigree

In the district with the largest Jewish constituency in the country, Jones reiterates his pro-Israel bona fides

By Matthew Kassel

The race for a key swing seat that could ultimately determine the House majority grew even more competitive last week when former Rep. Mondaire Jones (D-NY) launched a widely anticipated bid to reclaim his old district in the Lower Hudson Valley.

Jones, 36, is running against freshman Rep. Mike Lawler (R-NY), who is among the most vulnerable Republicans up for reelection in 2024 — if he can win a hotly-contested primary. Jones will first be facing a potentially formidable Democratic rival, Liz Whitmer Gereghty, who announced her candidacy in May and has been campaigning aggressively across the district.

The June 25 primary clash would pit a nationally recognized progressive stalwart with deep ties to Democratic leadership against a relatively moderate first-time candidate who boasts an illustrious political

pedigree: Gereghty, 50, is the younger sister of Gretchen Whitmer, Michigan's popular Democratic governor.

In an interview with *Jewish Insider* last week, Jones, a prolific fundraiser whose campaign announced a \$300,000 cash haul on Thursday, claimed to be unfazed by the matchup. He cited a favorable internal poll, commissioned in early May, showing a 35-point lead over Gereghty, whom he dismissed as "his next closest primary opponent."

Gereghty, meanwhile, made no predictions about the outcome of the race, suggesting that her interest in running stems in part from what she described as "a duty to protect" democratic norms. "You want to see a competition of ideas," she said in an interview with *JI* on Thursday. "I think that's good for all of us."

The small businesswoman and former

school board member, who lives in Katonah, raised at least \$400,000 last quarter, according to her campaign, and recently drew an endorsement from EMILY's List, the influential abortion rights group.

But Jones indicated that he is already focusing on the general election, testing a message that he is likely to invoke with increasing regularity as he sets his sights on the Republican incumbent. He said he was "looking forward to defeating" Lawler, whose record he criticized as "indistinguishable" from House Speaker Kevin McCarthy (R-CA) and "the extreme MAGA Republicans who empower him."

In a series of fundraising emails, Lawler's campaign — touting a commitment to bipartisanship in a district that President Joe Biden won by 10 points in 2020 — has begun casting Jones as a "radical progressive" who previously won backing

from Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and has expressed support for the movement to defund the police, among other potential liabilities.

Jones, however, rejected such efforts as distractions. “One of the things my Republican opponent will have to grapple with in this race is my legislative record of consistently voting for historic levels of funding for law enforcement,” he countered, later adding that he is eager to engage in “a robust conversation about public safety.”

Lawler, 36, raised over \$900,000 in the three months between May and July and has nearly \$1.5 million on hand as he runs unopposed in the GOP primary, his campaign said on Thursday.

While Jones has evolved on some issues since he assumed office as one of the first openly gay Black men to serve in the House, the former congressman — in contrast with some of his colleagues on the left — has remained consistent in his support for Israel.

During his time in Congress, for instance, he opposed conditions on U.S. aid to Israel, voted to fund Israel’s Iron Dome missile-defense system and co-sponsored legislation to advance the Abraham Accords.

“In part because I had such a strong record of supporting Israel, even when the district was a safely blue seat,” Jones said, “I don’t really expect that my opponents, whether in the primary or in the general, would dare try to distort a record that is so obvious to people in my district.”

Jones recognized that Israel is a key issue to the sizable number of Jewish voters in New York’s 17th Congressional District, which currently includes all of Rockland County, home to the largest Jewish population per capita of any county in the U.S.

In speaking with former constituents, he said he continues to hear from Jewish voters who have expressed “concern” over a controversial judicial overhaul promoted by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and members of his far-right governing coalition.

But in the interview with JI, he remained neutral on the judicial reforms, even as several Democratic leaders have voiced reservations in recent months. “My feeling is that those events are none of my business

really,” Jones said, “so long as we continue to support Israel.”

“I’ve always been committed to providing Israel with the resources it needs to defend itself,” he explained. “I think recent events this year have vindicated me in that legislative record that I’ve been able to accumulate over the past two years, including as a candidate the first time I ran in this district.”

Jones replaced former Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), a pro-Israel champion, in 2021. The next cycle, the Rockland County native sought reelection in New York City after his district had been redrawn, avoiding a potentially bruising primary against a powerful incumbent, former Rep. Sean Patrick Maloney (D-NY), who was narrowly defeated by Lawler in the general election.

Jones, for his part, was ousted in a bitterly contested primary to represent Lower Manhattan and parts of Brooklyn.

Even as Lawler has built connections with Orthodox Jewish voters in Rockland County, who were largely credited with propelling his upset victory in 2022, Jones said he “fully” expects to receive strong support from the Jewish community in a district covering approximately three-quarters of his former seat.

Last week, Jones rolled out a list of 109 endorsements from local elected officials and party leaders, but House Democrats have yet to weigh in on the race amid uncertainty over a potential redistricting process that could reshape New York’s congressional lines before the primaries. Pro-Israel groups are likewise now steering clear of the race, which includes a third Democratic candidate, MaryAnn Carr, a former Bedford town supervisor who is not seen as viable at the moment.

Speaking with JI in a brief phone interview, Gereghty said she has engaged with pro-Israel groups as she fine-tunes her own approach to Middle East policy. “I am proud to be a Democrat who is an unwavering supporter of Israel,” she said. “I think that is important to this district and to my community.”

Like Jones, she expressed support for continued U.S. security assistance for Israel and suggested that she would oppose efforts to condition aid if she is elected. “There’s always a worry about conditioning and

creating perverse outcomes,” she told JI.

As for the judicial overhaul, Gereghty said she has been “watching with great interest” as protests have unfolded across Israel in recent months. “One of the things I can say is that, in all good democracies, you need checks and balances and rule of law,” she observed. “The will of the people must be represented by elected leaders.”

“We are watching a democracy function with significant, really large, peaceful protests for Israeli citizens to make their voices heard,” she added. “That’s democracy, and I think that supporting the one democracy in the Middle East is really important. It’s good to see this amount of engagement and protest and people demanding to be heard on this issue.”

Gereghty hopes to benefit from her familial connection to Michigan’s powerful governor, which she has begun to emphasize, at least indirectly, in promotional materials.

While she entered the race identifying simply as Liz Gereghty, the congressional hopeful has since amended her campaign site and Twitter page to include her family name, according to archived screenshots. She now identifies as “Liz Whitmer Gereghty.”

“I’m excited,” Gereghty told JI last week. “I’m fired up. I’ve enjoyed really getting out and talking to a lot of people. I’m learning a lot.” ♦

In N.C., Walker hits Robinson for ‘antisemitic remarks’ and ‘denial of the Holocaust’

“His history of antisemitic remarks is troubling,” Walker, a former congressman from Greensboro, said in an interview with JI

By Matthew Kassel

Mark Walker, a Republican candidate for governor of North Carolina, is forcefully denouncing a leading primary rival, Mark Robinson, over incendiary past social media comments that Walker called out for promoting antisemitic tropes and Holocaust denialism.

“His history of antisemitic remarks is troubling,” Walker, a former congressman from Greensboro, said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday afternoon. “His denial of the Holocaust reaches a whole different level and should be strongly condemned in every aspect possible.”

The unusually blunt criticism from a fellow Republican and former ally came in response to a series of recently uncovered Facebook posts — published by JI last week — in which Robinson, the controversial lieutenant governor, minimized Nazi atrocities and advanced conspiracy theories about Hollywood and the media using Yiddish ethnic slurs.

“I am so sick of seeing and hearing people STILL talk about Nazis and Hitler and how evil and manipulative they were. NEWS FLASH PEOPLE, THE NAZIS (National Socialist) ARE GONE! We did away with them,” Robinson said in a representative post from 2017, before claiming that communism has always been a more sinister threat to American freedom. “Compared with the Communist the Nazis were upstart amateurs in terms of manipulation and MURDER.”

In a separate post written a few months earlier, Robinson said that “Roots,” the popular TV miniseries about American slavery released in 1977, “is nothing but Hollywood trash that depicts the ignorance and brutality of the goyim, and the helplessness and weakness of the shvartze.”

The invocation of a Yiddish racial epithet

was reminiscent of another comment, unearthed before Robinson assumed office in 2021, that ridiculed the Marvel film “Black Panther” as the sinister creation of “an agnostic Jew” and a “satanic marxist” who were scheming “to pull the shekels out of your Schvartze pockets.”

To Walker, such comments — part of a well-documented history of inflammatory pronouncements in which Robinson has targeted Jews, Muslims, transgender people and other groups — are “100% antisemitic,” he told JI. But even as he raised concerns over the amplification of anti-Jewish “tropes and stereotypes,” the former congressman said he had grown increasingly alarmed after reading past statements from Robinson that he interpreted as denying the Holocaust.

In the interview with JI, he cited a line from one Facebook comment, published in 2018, in which Robinson wrote that “Hitler disarming MILLIONS of Jews and then marching them off to concentration camps is a bunch of hogwash.”

“The fact that you’re out there saying it’s ‘hogwash’ that Hitler actually marched Jews into concentration camps?” Walker said. “How could anybody believe that in the 21st century, much less anybody who’s saying ‘I want to serve all communities?’”

Read in full, the post — which has not been widely reported — is presumably responding to a belief among some hardline Second Amendment activists that the Holocaust was precipitated by Nazi gun control measures that prohibited Jews from owning weapons.

“The center and leftist leaning Weimar Republic put heavy gun ownership restrictions on German citizens long before the Nazis took power,” Robinson wrote. “This foolishness about Hitler disarming MILLIONS of Jews and then marching them

off to concentration camps is a bunch of hogwash. Repeating that hogwash makes the conservative argument against the current attempts by liberal Marxist to push Unconstitutional gun control measures in this Nation look FOOLISH.”

The remarks are, most notably, characteristic of the extreme rhetoric Robinson has previously used to diminish the mass extermination of European Jewry — a sentiment he expressed in several past comments reported by JI last week.

Elsewhere, he has engaged more directly in Holocaust denialism, as a comment recently uncovered by *Talking Points Memo* showed.

“There is a REASON the liberal media fills the airwaves with programs about the NAZI and the ‘6 million Jews’ they murdered,” Robinson wrote on Facebook in 2017, putting the figure in quotation marks. “There is also a REASON those same liberals DO NOT FILL the airwaves with programs about the Communist and the 100+ million PEOPLE they murdered throughout the 20th century.”

During his time in office, Robinson has refused to apologize for his rhetoric, which has drawn harsh condemnation from Jewish community activists in North Carolina. The Republican Jewish Coalition has also denounced Robinson’s past comments as “clearly antisemitic,” but GOP leaders in the Tar Heel State have largely remained silent as the lieutenant governor has continued to lead in a primary field that includes Walker and Dale Folwell, the state treasurer.

Walker, who previously ran for U.S. Senate, was once a supporter of Robinson, a former factory worker who rose to prominence in 2018 when a fiery speech about gun rights that he delivered on the floor of the Greensboro City Council went

viral. But Walker, who promoted a video of the speech on Facebook, has since distanced himself from the fast-ascendant lieutenant governor amid revelations over his past social media comments, which have drawn mounting scrutiny in recent years.

"All antisemitism is wrong and should be condemned immediately," Walker, who said he built strong relationships with

Jewish community leaders when he served in the House from 2015 to 2021, told JI on Wednesday. "All that is horrible."

Still, since he launched his campaign in May, Walker, a pastor, has been somewhat restrained in his criticism of Robinson, even as his rhetoric has raised questions over his electability in a key swing state.

But he suggested that Robinson's

comments on the Holocaust in particular had ultimately compelled him to speak out. "I think taking it to the level where you're now saying, 'Yeah, I'm a Holocaust denier,' in 21st-century America, is preposterous," Walker said.

Robinson's campaign did not return a request for comment from JI. ♦

JULY 6, 2023

'It's all happening again': 20 years after genocide in Darfur, ethnic violence returns

Jewish activists were key players in the grassroots Save Darfur movement. Where do they stand as experts again warn of a risk of genocide in Sudan?

By Gabby Deutch

On a recent walk in Manhattan's Central Park, Rabbi Rick Jacobs, the president of the Union for Reform Judaism, ran into Ruth Messinger, the former longtime leader of American Jewish World Service.

The unexpected meetup between the head of the Reform Jewish community and one of the best known Jewish social-justice advocates featured the usual hugs and how-are-yous. But Jacobs was troubled that day, due to recent news out of Darfur, a region in western Sudan that became infamous for a horrific genocide that occurred there two decades ago.

"Ruth," Jacobs said. "It looks like it's all happening again."

Nearly two decades ago, Jacobs and Messinger were two of the unofficial leaders of the Save Darfur movement, which saw a diverse coalition of activists come together to call for global action in the face of a horrific event that was deemed genocide by Congress and the George W. Bush administration in 2004.

The campaign drew widespread support from within the American Jewish community: Rabbis spoke about the genocide from the pulpit, while students solicited donations for relief efforts. In

Washington, advocates lobbied Congress to address the genocide, and thousands of activists turned out for a 2006 rally on the National Mall, with speakers that included Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and then-Sen. Barack Obama (D-IL). Green rubber bracelets that said "Save Darfur" became a fixture at synagogues.

"For a while, things were quiet," Messinger told *Jewish Insider* recently. United Nations peacekeepers entered Darfur in late 2007, and the situation mostly stabilized. "Then, let's say in the last six months, it was clear from the political stories that it was pretty terrible."

"Now," Messinger added, "it's clear that it's worse than terrible."

In April, the political situation in Sudan deteriorated when two warring military leaders sparked an armed conflict after talks to create a civilian government fell apart. Darfur, an impoverished region home to deep ethnic divisions, began to experience violence that, to some, felt eerily familiar. The U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., last week warned of a "dire risk of genocide" in Darfur.

"When I went to Darfur, there was no security. There was no military, no policing. It was just basically anarchy," said Jordan

Siegel, an American filmmaker who recently traveled to the region while filming a documentary about a Sudanese asylum-seeker who lives in Israel. "It was one of the worst humanitarian crises I've ever seen."

Today, reports of ethnic violence in Darfur may have a harder time getting through to people in a world that is awash with stories of humanitarian crises in Ukraine, Yemen, Syria, Iran, Burma, Xinjiang and more. In part, that's due to Jewish activists focusing their energy elsewhere — including in the U.S., where antisemitism is on the rise and domestic issues have drawn the attention of American Jews. But it's also because the Save Darfur movement succeeded in dramatically reshaping and reinvigorating the human rights field of atrocity prevention.

When Americans learned about Darfur in 2004 and 2005, the failure to respond to other genocides still stung.

"Darfur hit Western media headlines around the 10th anniversary of the Rwanda genocide, over which there was a widespread sense of guilt and shame regarding U.S. inaction," said Rebecca Hamilton, a law professor at American University and the author of a book about the public campaign against the Darfur genocide. "Darfur was

seen as a chance to right those wrongs and to push the U.S. government into action.”

For many Jews, the consideration was not just Rwanda but the Holocaust, when Washington had failed to intervene until several years into the Nazis’ genocide of Europe’s Jews.

“The rhetoric was like, ‘Does never again mean never again in eastern Germany in the late ‘30s? Or does never again mean never again?’” recalled Messinger. Holocaust survivors who were active in the Save Darfur movement shared their own stories of surviving the Nazis to make their point clear.

“As a Jew, I’m here because when we needed people to help us, nobody came. Therefore, we’re here,” Wiesel said at the 2006 rally in Washington.

During the Save Darfur campaign, information from far-flung war zones could not as easily reach an American audience. So that conflict was a rare instance, in the pre-social media era, when grisly photos from a distant, largely unknown region reached millions.

Last month, *New York Times* columnist Lydia Polgreen reported that the *janjaweed*, the Arab militia members who had perpetrated the genocide of the early aughts, were again rampaging through Darfuri streets. Polgreen recounted the story of Adam Abakar Mahmoud, who was pulled from a truck at a checkpoint and shot at point-blank range when the *janjaweed* learned he was not Arab but Masalit, another ethnic group that lives in the region. His cousin Siddig Abdulrahman, who was lighter-skinned and could pass as Arab, was not shot.

Polgreen’s column recalled a 2005 series of op-eds by Nicholas Kristof, who obtained and published brutal images of the genocide in Darfur. He won a Pulitzer Prize for the articles, which were widely viewed as a catalyst for the nascent Save Darfur movement.

“I’m sorry for inflicting these horrific photos on you,” Kristof wrote at the time. “But the real obscenity isn’t in printing pictures of dead babies — it’s in our passivity, which allows these people to be slaughtered.”

Los Angeles Rabbi Harold Schulweis was so moved by reports of the genocide in

Darfur that he created a nonprofit focused on atrocity prevention called Jewish World Watch. The organization’s current CEO, Serena Oberstein, noted that the Jewish community has not yet “come out in force in the same way” that they did nearly 20 years ago.

“But when the Darfur genocide began, it was 2003. And it wasn’t until 2004 — it took months and months and months and a Nicholas Kristof article to really wake people up,” she said. “I definitely have concerns that people are so inundated with the many other traumas, but there are people who will find space, that this is their issue.”

In 2004, then-Secretary of State Colin Powell testified before Congress about the situation in Darfur, and shocked lawmakers by calling it a genocide. (Congress had made the same determination weeks earlier.) It was the first time the White House had used the word to refer to an ongoing crisis.

In the years since, due in part to the activism of the Save Darfur movement, the U.S. government has taken steps to respond to similar atrocities in a more timely manner. As president, Obama created an Atrocities Prevention Board to bring together experts and policymakers to respond to atrocities in Syria and Libya. In 2019, then-President Donald Trump signed the Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act, which requires the president to report annually to Congress on U.S. efforts to respond to atrocities.

“Having the structure there is useful. It’s certainly something that didn’t exist back in the Save Darfur movement,” said Andrea Gittleman, the policy director at the Simon-Skjodt Center for the Prevention of Genocide at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

There’s also the newfound ease with which Americans can get in touch with their elected officials. Now, after years of mass social movements in the U.S., making a quick call — or sending an email — to a member of Congress is a process with which many more Americans are familiar.

“One of the best things that happened in 2016 was that more and more people got politically engaged and socially engaged than ever before,” said Oberstein. “It’s really just a matter of how we’re engaging them and being smart.”

But before any calls get made, activists

like Oberstein need to convince American Jews that this is an issue that, amid all the other challenges at home and abroad, is worth their time and their resources.

“Those of us who were very much involved [in Save Darfur], I think we’re all kind of touching base and thinking, ‘Is this a moment to reactivate our networks?’” asked Jacobs. “We, through our activism, can actually save lives.” ♦

Award-winning Israeli author takes on antisemitism in the U.S.

*Ayelet Gundar-Goshen's fifth novel, **The Wolf Hunt**, is set in California and explores the contrast between being an Israeli Jew versus an American Jew, and ways to combat antisemitism*

By Ruth Marks Eglash

A few years ago, when Israeli author Ayelet Gundar-Goshen dropped her daughter off at preschool for the first time, she remembers closely scanning the faces of the other young children, wondering if any of them would bully her child.

"I was actually looking at all the 5-year-olds as if they were potential wolves," Gundar-Goshen, whose fifth novel, *The Wolf Hunt*, will be released in English next month, admitted to *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview.

"Then I realized that all the other parents were actually doing the same – they were looking around at all the kids, wondering who might be the mean girl that will crush [their] daughter with nasty words, or which boy will turn out to be the class bully."

Gundar-Goshen, 41, said that after she'd left the preschool, walking home through the streets of Tel Aviv, she stopped for a second and asked herself: "Wait a minute, how come all the parents have the same fear of another child being the wolf and harming their little cub? How come none of us considered for a moment the possibility that *our* child could potentially be the wolf?"

"It was a very shocking moment for me because I think, as a mother, you always see your child as this cub that you have to protect," she explained. "You don't think of your child as a potential wolf and someone that you have to protect others from."

Gundar-Goshen, a professional clinical psychologist whose previous novels garnered critical acclaim worldwide, as well as a slew of literary prizes – including Israel's prestigious Sapir and Wingate prizes – tackles that question and broader topics dealing with Jewish and Israeli identity in

The Wolf Hunt.

Unlike her other novels, this one is set in the United States, in Silicon Valley to be exact, and explores the contrast between being an Israeli Jew versus an American Jew, what it's like to be part of that immigrant community and the best way to stand up to racism and antisemitism. For many Israelis, Gundar-Goshen observed, the answer is clear: fighting back.

"After *Waking Lions* was published, I was invited to do a residency in San Francisco," explained the author, referring to her 2014 *New York Times*-noted novel, which won her the Wingate Prize for Fiction.

"It wasn't my first time visiting the U.S., but it was my first time living there and as a Jew and an Israeli, I found it fascinating," Gundar-Goshen recalled. "There was this feeling that I was escaping the Israeli madness, leaving the Middle East and the *balagan* [craziness] behind. I had raised my kids in Israel until then and I looked at the kids in San Francisco and thought wow, they don't even know what a missile siren sounds like, they are not in this constant state of alert like we are in Israel."

"I feel very connected to Israel and I wanted to stay in Israel, but I was still wondering about the price of this choice," she added.

As time went on, however, Gundar-Goshen observed the difficulties of being a Jew in the U.S. from her home in San Francisco. A rise in antisemitic attacks, including the deadly Tree of Life Synagogue shooting in Pittsburgh, made her realize that "you have the Israeli madness, on the one hand, and you have the antisemitism madness in America on the other hand."

"I started thinking about a mother who is

so obsessed with keeping her child safe, and I asked the question of whether we really have that option in a world that doesn't offer us any sort of control," she said.

In *The Wolf Hunt*, the book's protagonist, Lilach, has a happy life in the heart of Silicon Valley with a successful, smart husband, Mikhael, and a wholesome, if a little reserved, son, Adam, who was raised in the U.S. After a brutal attack on a local synagogue, Lilach and Mikhael encourage Adam to sign up for self-defense classes taught by a former Israeli Special Forces officer. Just as Adam begins to gain more confidence, tragedy strikes again when an African American boy in his grade dies at a house party. As more details surface about the death, rumors begin to circulate that it might not have been an accident, and Adam and his new friends are increasingly viewed with suspicion, igniting racial tensions. Lilach, who was always very close to her son, also begins to question Adam's behavior and everything she thought she knew about him.

"My training as a psychologist was very crucial for this novel, because it's the story of a mother, who's trying to understand how much she knows her own child," described Gundar-Goshen, who is chief psychologist at Shalvata, a mental health hospital in central Israel.

"She asks how well she really knows her son and what he is capable of," she continues, explaining Lilach's actions: "How well do I know the other? How well do I know myself? Could it be that I am choosing to be blind to certain elements in my child in order to continue loving him unconditionally as a mother? Could it be that I am choosing to be blind to certain elements of my child? Could it be that I've chosen to be blind to certain

elements in myself?”

Gundar-Goshen continues: “There are lies we tell ourselves about who we are, about the family we’ve raised, and about how much we’re willing to face the truth about ourselves, and our loved ones – [These] are the questions that I face every day in my work at the clinic, as well as in my writing desk.”

In a previous role at the hospital, Gundar-Goshen said she worked in a closed ward for teenagers suffering from various types of mental health disorders and, she told JI. Her time in the hospital proved relevant for writing *The Wolf Hunt*.

“The parents are always so shocked when they see their kids hospitalized, because they feel like they deal with their child every day, but they understand nothing,” she explained. “You’re living with someone in the same house, you meet him for breakfast, lunch and dinner, but then he closes the door and you know nothing about what’s going on behind that door or what’s going through his mind.”

“The parents are so often the last to know,” Gundar-Goshen adds. “Not because

they’re not good parents, but I think something happens as kids grow up. They become like the biggest mystery in our life.”

Another central theme of the book is the rising antisemitism in the U.S, but unlike with other novels, Gundar-Goshen tackles it from the perspective of an Israeli immigrant family who has escaped the pressures of their homeland.

“It’s really fascinating because they [the Israeli immigrants in the U.S.] don’t really mix with the local Jewish community,” she noted, adding that religion was not something her family had thought about too deeply while living in Israel.

“When you are in America, it is a completely different feeling to being in Israel,” said Gundar-Goshen. “When I lived in Israel, I didn’t have to think about my Jewishness because it was in the oxygen I breathe; then, in the U.S., for the first time in my life, I had to think about maintaining my Jewish identity.”

Writing *The Wolf Hunt*, the author said she tried to think about this idea on a political and social level and ask the metaphorical question: “Where do I feel

most at home?”

“If you never wondered or stopped to doubt and you stayed in the same place, the same village, for five generations, then maybe you are free of these questions,” Gundar-Goshen theorized. “But if you choose to live your life in a different country than the one you were born in, and if you choose to relocate, I think you’re bound to ask those questions; it’s like the path less traveled, what would have happened if I took the other road?”

“I think this question becomes stronger when you have kids because part of being a parent is searching for a safe place for your babies,” she said. “In that sense, when you are Jewish there is always this question of where is it safe, where is it quiet, what price am I willing to pay in order to keep my Jewish identity? Should I silence it, or should I wear it with pride?”

“I think it’s a universal question of parenthood, but I think for a Jewish parent this question is even more extreme,” Gundar-Goshen concluded. ♦

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In Geneva, an American ambassador makes the case for the U.N. Human Rights Council

The daughter of a Holocaust survivor, Ambassador Michèle Taylor thinks the U.S. needs to remain engaged on human rights matters on the global stage — even in a forum as imperfect as the United Nations

By Gabby Deutch

Michèle Taylor’s first day on the job as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations Human Rights Council, on Feb. 24, 2022, began as a normal Thursday.

But by the time she went to bed that night, Russia had invaded Ukraine, and the entire international order in which she deeply believed — and that she had just been sworn in to try to uphold — was put to the test.

“It was a pretty auspicious start to my time here,” she said. “We all walked out when the Russian foreign minister addressed the Human Rights Council. We then had an urgent debate in the middle of that first week, and passed the first-ever resolution on a P5 country — Russia.”

The civil society activist from Atlanta is Washington’s first ambassador to the Human Rights Council since former President Donald Trump left the body in

2018, when he accused it of bias against Israel and a failure to hold human rights abusers to account. (China is a member of the body, and last year, amid Iran’s brutal crackdown against protestors, Iran served as chair of a council subgroup.) Early in his presidency, President Joe Biden announced that the U.S. would reenter the body.

“Our goals are clear: stand with human rights defenders and speak out against violations and abuses of human rights,” U.S.

Ambassador to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield said in an October 2021 statement when the U.S. rejoined the Council. She pledged to keep human rights abusers off the panel, and to “oppose the Council’s disproportionate attention on Israel.”

In a recent interview with *Jewish Insider*, Taylor argued that the only way the U.S. can effectively fight the challenges posed by the council is by serving as an active member, engaging other nations diplomatically and speaking out on Israel’s behalf.

“If I do my job well, I will make it clear to even the biggest naysayers how important it is that the United States is engaged here at the Human Rights Council,” Taylor said. “We have plenty of evidence now as to what happens when the U.S. is here versus what happens when the U.S. is not here.”

In a June meeting about the council’s Commission of Inquiry (COI) on Israel and the Palestinian territories — an open-ended human-rights investigation that has been widely condemned by American lawmakers — Taylor read a joint statement, signed by 27 countries, demanding that the council shut down the COI, which she called an example of the panel’s “long-standing, disproportionate attention given to Israel.”

“We have been able to have that conversation, to point out the discrepancies and the way that Israel is treated, and change minds and change perceptions,” Taylor said, noting the five additional countries that had joined since the U.S. released a similar statement last year.

Had the U.S. been part of the council when it voted to establish the COI in May 2021, “we would have absolutely voted against the COI,” said Taylor. “With a voting voice, we also just have a different kind of influence in the room. But we weren’t even in the room at all.” Even with an American vote against establishing the COI, the effort would have passed.

Family history drives Taylor’s passion for human rights. Her mother and grandparents were Holocaust survivors from Vienna, though they mostly avoided speaking about their experiences during the war.

“The only real in-depth conversation that I would ever have with my mother about her memories and her understanding of what happened [was] just days before she

died,” Taylor recalled.

She learned, from that conversation and others she pieced together over the years, that her grandfather — a proud Austrian who fought for the country in World War I — was meant to be arrested on Kristallnacht, but he had fled beforehand. She knew her mother was hidden in a cabinet before the family came to the U.S. in 1939. A relative was shot and killed in front of her mother; the blood splattered on the outfit of a baby who was in the room. That piece of clothing has since been donated to the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. One cousin made it out on the Kindertransport, but the rest of Taylor’s family was murdered in the ensuing years.

“I’ve just always understood, from as long as I could understand anything, where hate and discrimination can and often do lead,” Taylor explained. “I think I have just always felt that I have a responsibility in having that knowledge to do what I can to help prevent that kind of atrocity, and specifically genocide, from happening elsewhere, and to other groups of people.”

Former President Barack Obama appointed Taylor to serve as a member of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Council, the museum’s governing body. She has also served on the Southeast Regional Board of Directors of the Anti-Defamation League and on the board of directors of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights in Atlanta.

“I have always felt an obligation to contribute to my own community,” Taylor said. “That commitment goes well beyond the Jewish community. When I hear the words ‘never again,’ to me, they mean to anyone.”

A longtime Democratic donor, Taylor was an early supporter of Biden’s campaign. In the fall of 2019, she was a founding board member of a super PAC supporting him.

“The president knows me very well, and he knows that my personal bent is to lean in and to engage whenever possible, even when it comes to really hard and challenging conversations where we might have very little agreement,” she said. Such diplomatic engagement is crucial, Taylor argued, on a body that she believes can do a lot of good, but that is also far from perfect.

Taylor pointed to one such balancing act

— her continued consultation with Human Rights Watch, “one of the organizations that we engage with on a wide variety of topics that we agree on,” she said, while also criticizing the organization for its approach to Israel.

In recent years, senior Biden administration officials, top lawmakers on Capitol Hill and major American Jewish organizations have criticized HRW for referring to Israel as an apartheid state. But Taylor said that isn’t reason enough to ditch the organization entirely.

“We can still disagree on the perspective of the way that Israel is treated and the word ‘apartheid’ and even still have really productive conversations about how to promote peace and hopefully someday even work toward a two-state solution,” she noted.

Ultimately, Taylor argued, the people who would prefer the U.S. to leave the Human Rights Council are “leaving Israel alone in the room,” she said, “without the ability to call a vote, without the ability to potentially introduce things at the council that would be beneficial to supporting Israel.”

Israel, for its part, has never expressed much confidence in seeing positive change at the Human Rights Council.

“Change is very slow,” Ambassador Meirav Eilon Shahar, Israel’s representative to the U.N. in Geneva, told JI in 2022. “This is a bubble and reality doesn’t often knock on the door. But we are trying to make sure it does.” ♦