

THE TAB

CONTENTS

Vol. 2 Issue 25

- 1 **How False History Is Used to Justify Discrimination Against Asian Americans**
A Jewish activist paved the way for Asian American success in America
- 5 **Welcome to Blackstone U.S.A.**
How private equity is gobbling up the American city
- 8 **A Church's Quest for Enchantment**
Pentecostals try to find their place
- 14 **Why Good Politics Makes for Bad Art**
Affirmation is available everywhere
- 17 **A Slaughter of Jews in Ukraine**
Who perpetrated the Lviv pogrom of July 1941?
- 22 **The Bold Jewish Woman Who Created Barbie**
How Ruth Handler dreamed up the doll that feminists loved—or loathed
- 24 **Will Fast, Cheap, and Plentiful Energy Be a Legacy of Los Alamos?**
The atomic bomb Robert Oppenheimer brought to life marked the beginning of an era
- 29 **The Beet Goes On**
How a humble root became a staple

T MORE TABLET



Point your smart phone camera at the QR code to visit Tablet's front page.

NEWS

How False History Is Used to Justify Discrimination Against Asian Americans

The Civil Rights Movement didn't pave the way for Asian American success in America. A Jewish immigration activist did.

BY SHELUYANG PENG

On June 29, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of Students for Fair Admissions (SFFA) in a landmark decision that overturned explicit race-based affirmative action in America. The decision was a major victory for Asian Americans—whom Harvard had routinely and openly discriminated against. To impose quotas on the school's racial makeup, Harvard had systematically given Asian Americans lower “personality” scores on applications, the suit alleged, drawing from stereotypes of robotic and inscrutable foreigners from the Orient. It was the same tactic Harvard had used a century ago to systematically discriminate against Jews.

In the aftermath of the ruling, rather than celebrating the victory against racial discrimination, a number of prominent media figures advanced a narrative blaming Asian Americans for betraying other racial minorities. The narrative

went as follows: *Black Americans and their work leading the Civil Rights Movement are the reason you Asians are in America in the first place—how dare you now sell out the very people you should be thanking for bringing you here.*

Jemele Hill, a columnist for *The Atlantic*, tweeted that an Asian American mother celebrating the court's decision “carried the water for white supremacy and stabbed the folks in the back whose people fought diligently for Asian American rights in America.” Former CNN anchor Soledad O'Brien quoted the same tweet, saying that the mother was “screwing over other people of color ... Particularly those whose efforts in civil rights paved the way for your family to come to America.” And activist-attorney and House candidate Qasim Rashid claimed that “Asians were only able to immigrate to the United States b/c Black civil rights leaders passed immigration reform.”

This trope about Asian American debts did not emerge spontaneously in

the last few weeks. It was seeded into the public discourse by the most influential project of historical reframing in recent American history: the activist-journalism of *The New York Times*' "1619 Project." In her opening essay for the 1619 Project, Nikole Hannah-Jones asserts that "Because of black Americans, black and brown immigrants from across the globe are able to come to the United States and live in a country in which legal discrimination is no longer allowed. It is a truly American irony that some Asian-Americans, among the groups able to immigrate to the United States because of the black civil rights struggle, are now suing universities to end programs designed to help the descendants of the enslaved."

Now taught across the country in public school curriculums, the claims of the 1619 Project have become official history. The purpose of Hannah-Jones' narrative was to guilt-trip Asians into supporting affirmative action by drawing a direct line from the Black-led Civil Rights Movement to the sweeping immigration reforms that allowed Asians to emigrate to America.

Except that this narrative is utterly false. On the contrary, many Black Americans were understandably anti-immigration. In the early 20th century, Black workers in the then-nascent labor movement worried that immigrants—Europeans, West Indians, and Asians alike—would take away their jobs. A. Philip Randolph, the leader of the first successful Black labor union in America and a key organizer of the Civil Rights Movement's 1963 March on Washington, maintained a hardline restrictionist stance on immigration. Randolph declared that "It is time to call a halt on this grand rush for American gold, which over-floods the labor market, resulting in lowering the standard of living, race-riots, and general social degradation. The excessive immigration is against the interests of the masses of all races and nationalities in the country—both foreign and native."

Randolph had the support of fellow restrictionist W.E.B. Du Bois, whose book *The Souls of Black Folk* originally made negative remarks about Jews

before the 50th-anniversary edition swapped out the word "Jews" for "immigrants." For example, the original 1903 version claims that "only a Yankee or a Jew could squeeze more blood from debt-cursed tenants," while versions from 1953 onward state that "only a Yankee or an immigrant could squeeze more blood from debt-cursed tenants." A reference to "shrewd and unscrupulous Jews" was changed to "shrewd and unscrupulous immigrants."

And while history textbooks often present Booker T. Washington as a foil to Du Bois, Washington was also a restrictionist. In his famous "Atlanta Compromise" speech, Washington sent a stern message to industrialists that employed immigrants instead of Black workers: "To those of the white race who look to the incoming of those of foreign birth and strange tongue and habits for the prosperity of the South, were I permitted I would repeat what I say to my own race—cast down your bucket where you are. Cast it down among the eight millions of Negroes whose habits you know, whose fidelity and love you have tested in days when to have proved treacherous meant the ruin of your firesides."

Some Black restrictionists indulged in explicit racial stereotyping, claiming that Japanese workers were unfit to work on American railroads because they were "too short to make down the upper birth [sic] without a ladder." There is indeed a long history of Black nativism in America, from Reconstruction era antipathy toward Chinese railroad workers to the modern-day Twitter activism of the American Descendants of Slavery movement. It is not a uniquely racial story—other native working-class groups in America advocated against immigration for similar reasons—but it gives the lie to the claims now being used to morally blackmail Asian Americans.

The myth that the Civil Rights Movement led to immigration reform comes from the false conflation of two separate bills signed into law by President Lyndon B. Johnson: the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965. Because the two bills were signed by the same president

ALSO IN TABLET THIS WEEK

In Memory of Milan Kundera

On the passing of the great Czech writer and dissident

BY MAXIM D. SHRAYER

The Biden Administration Redefines Antisemitism

And excludes today's most pernicious form of Jew-hatred

BY EUGENE KONTOROVICH

Christians and Jews at Harvard

The delicate relationship between two distinct cultures that helped shape America's leading university

BY MARTIN PERETZ

The 'Firebug Brotherhood' of the Lower East Side

For Isaac Zuker and other arsonists, defrauding insurance companies was a normal part of doing business in the late 1800s

BY ALLAN LEVINE

An Open Letter to Lev Golinkin

The search for neo-Nazis under the bedsheets reflects American progressive hysteria, not Ukrainian reality

BY VLADISLAV DAVIDZON

The House of Love and Prayer

Fiction: The passion and death of Rabbi Yidel Glatt

BY TOVA REICH

My Hitler Book

What am I supposed to do with it?

BY KEVIN NELSON



SCIENCE

Everything you need to know at tabletmag.com/sections/science

a year apart, it is easy to make the assumption that the passage of the first led to the smooth sailing of the second. Yet the two bills ran parallel when it came to their core advocacy groups. The Immigration and Nationality Act, also known as the Hart-Celler Act, was the culmination of decades of advocacy by pro-immigration groups—mostly made up of Jewish, Irish, and Japanese activists—and most of all by one of its namesakes, Rep. Emanuel Celler.

Emanuel “Mannie” Celler was the Brooklyn-born grandson of German Jewish immigrants, and he took great pride in his family’s immigrant history. He loved telling a story about how his mother’s parents met in New York Harbor when the ship carrying them from Germany began to sink, throwing his grandmother into the water before his grandfather jumped in and rescued her, sparking a new romance in the New World. Mannie graduated from Columbia Law School before going into politics, and immediately made waves in 1922 when he ran for a House seat as a Democrat and managed to win his Republican-majority congressional district by appealing to hard-drinking immigrant voters fed up with Prohibition laws.

In Congress, Mannie quickly developed a reputation for his unapologetic pro-immigration advocacy. Anti-immigrant sentiment had surged in the wake of World War I’s carnage and the nationalist fervor that followed. In addition, the ethnic and religious composition of newer immigrants alarmed the WASP establishment, who decided after decades of heavy immigration to shut American borders. Celler gave his first big speech on the House floor passionately arguing against the passage of the Johnson-Reed Act of 1924, a law that set severe quotas on Southern and Eastern Europeans and completely banned Asians from immigrating. In the years after the passage of Johnson-Reed, immigration ground to a halt—but Celler refused to accept that Johnson-Reed was the end of the American immigration experiment, and spent the next four decades of his life working toward overturning the act.

One especially urgent issue, for

“A number of prominent media figures advanced a narrative blaming Asian Americans for betraying other racial minorities.”

Mannie, was the persecution of German Jews by the Nazi government. While the American public murmured about the rumors coming out of Germany, public sentiment was stubbornly anti-immigration. Another member of a religious minority in America, Catholic priest Charles Coughlin, regularly broadcast fiery polemics against Jews on radios all across America.

In 1938, Celler introduced a bill that would allow the president to lift the quotas for victims of religious and political persecution. The bill was unpopular even among fellow Jewish leaders who already had to contend with antisemitic conspiracy theories, and saw the bad optics of a Jew proposing a bill that everyone knew was designed to let more Jews in. But Mannie didn’t care about optics—he wanted to save lives, and refused to back down.

As the news trickling out of Nazi Germany grew increasingly alarming, Congress refused to budge on the quotas. It took six grueling years of lobbying from Jewish lawmakers for FDR to establish the War Refugee Board (WRB), an agency that saved tens of thousands of Jews—but not before millions perished in the Holocaust. As WRB director John W. Pehle would later lament, the group’s work was “too little, too late.”

None of these setbacks was able to

stop Celler’s zeal for immigration reform, for which he developed an incrementalist strategy to slowly chip away at the quotas. In 1946, Mannie managed to get the Luce-Celler Act passed, allowing a small number of Filipinos and Indians to migrate to America per annum and opening up a pathway to citizenship for them for the first time. The Displaced Persons Act of 1948 chipped away even further, allowing 100,000 refugees to settle, although antisemites in Congress only voted for the bill after it was revised to limit Jews.

Celler became the chair of the House Judiciary Committee shortly afterward, and he used his expanded powers to push for the eventual dismantlement of the quota system. In 1950, Mannie managed to get Congress to amend the Displaced Persons Act to allow over 400,000 more refugees in, about a fifth of which were Jews. And over in the Senate, fellow German Jew Herbert Lehman also worked tirelessly to dismantle the quotas, even while the Red Scare propagated nativist sentiment by associating immigrants with communism.

In 1952, historian Oscar Handlin (who was the son of Russian Jewish immigrants) published the Pulitzer Prize winning book *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations That Made the American People*. Written in a lyrical fashion rather than the standard droll academic cadence, the book almost single-handedly popularized the notion that America is a nation of immigrants. As Handlin wrote in his opening one-two punch of sentences, “Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history.”

Handlin became the nation’s pre-eminent scholar of immigration, and testified before Congress advocating for the passage of the Hart-Celler Act—the bill that would destroy the Johnson-Reed Act’s quotas and open America’s doors to immigrants from all over the world. By the time the House passed the bill, Celler was the only House member left that was present when Johnson-Reed was passed. On Oct. 3, 1965, Lyndon Johnson signed the act into law at the Statue of Liberty. It was the zenith of Mannie’s

long career, the culmination of decades spent fighting to abolish the quota system—an accomplishment 41 arduous years in the making.

When Johnson signed Hart-Celler into law, he and other lawmakers only expected a small trickle of Asian immigrants—but instead received a tidal wave. Asian Americans went from constituting less than 0.5% of the American population to about 7% today. In an era where Asians are viewed as the “New Jews” in the American cultural consciousness, it feels fitting that the existence of a sizable Asian American population is largely the result of the efforts of the “Old Jews.”

But unlike Jewish comedians of decades past, Asian Americans do not make jokes about “Asian guilt.” The new crop of Asian American activism—a mostly grassroots movement of Asian immigrant parents—unapologetically looks out for Asian interests. In doing so, these advocates for working and middle class Asian Americans threaten

to topple the patronage system operated for “people of color” by professional managerial class Asian American groups, which lack authentic community support but receive backing from the Democratic Party.

Five years ago, Wesley Yang penned a pair of prescient pieces in this magazine pointing out that Asian Americans are unique in that our very presence threatens the interest-group juggling act of elite institutions, and that by arriving here and excelling academically, Asians have “made it impossible for the brand managers of the Ivy Leagues to preserve the balance between merit and social justice and inherited privilege in a way that is remotely tenable.” Because Asians have faced historical and present racial discrimination, one would expect colleges to favor Asian applicants under social justice doctrine, yet colleges do the opposite.

Yang further pointed out that “Asians aren’t seen as a ‘real’ minority—nobody has them in mind when they speak of minorities, and thus the hiring of many Asians does not count for those in pursuit of “diversity.” This exclusion has been formalized into the bureaucratic euphemism “underrepresented minority,” which means “minorities who are not Asian,” and that “in pursuing their own narrow ethnic interests, Asians can break up the coalescence of the country into racial blocs and come to occupy a key fulcrum point in the racial politics of America.”

Yet the blatant exclusion of Asians under the “underrepresented minority” umbrella and the shift from *POC* to *BIPOC* has resulted in a new racial awakening among some Asian Americans—a realization that no one else in the POC coalition really cares about Asians. Every Asian professional has a story about the awkwardness, the aversion of eyes, the radio silence when an Asian claims to be a representative of people of color. If being against affirmative action means carrying water for white people, then being for it just means carrying water for Black people. The Asian coolie forced to carry both buckets becomes strained under the yoke, forever an indentured servant to two masters.

Progressive Asian Americans, like those that staff astroturfed “Asian-interest” NGOs, understand that in order to remain in the POC coalition, Asians must constantly pass the purity test of not saying anything negative about the groups higher up on the progressive stack. That we should always address the “anti-Blackness” apparently endemic in Asian communities, while remaining silent on incidents where Black perpetrators commit hate crimes against Asian Americans. And that when the evidence becomes undeniable, we should blame the nebulous and ever-changing boogeyman of white supremacy. Asian American studies professor Jen Ho claims that “... anti-Asian racism has the same source as anti-Black racism: white supremacy. So when a Black person attacks an Asian person, the encounter is fueled perhaps by racism, but very specifically by white supremacy. White supremacy does not require a white person to perpetuate it.” Such is the life of the Asians that accept their fate as the bottom rung in the POC coalition, ensconced in their ivory towers, working twice as hard to be a good little model minority that shoves working-class Asians under the bus.

To the social justice crowd, the Asian is truly an aberration, an anomaly in the administrative class matrix with the potential to tear down the entire racial patronage system in America. The *SFFA* decision and the subsequent celebrations from Asian Americans show that some have managed to break free of the guilt-baggage to celebrate their own liberation.

Steven Yeun, the Korean American actor who rose to fame playing a fan-favorite heartthrob on *The Walking Dead*, once quipped that “Sometimes I wonder if the Asian-American experience is what it’s like when you’re thinking about everyone else, but nobody else is thinking about you.”

Yet in the ongoing debate over affirmative action and the future of meritocracy in America, everyone else is thinking about us—and we no longer need to be shamed out of doing the same. ■

This article was originally published on July 11, 2023.

 **PODCAST**



A new podcast hosted by Walter Russell Mead and Jeremy Stern will help you understand the news, decide what news matters and what doesn't, and enjoy following the story of America and the world more than you do now.

Ep. 1: The Age of Apocalypse

This week, Mead and Stern discuss Russia and Saudi Arabia, the remote-work revolution, 19th-century French industrial policy, and living in the shadow of a Singularity

tabletmag.com/podcasts

Welcome to Blackstone U.S.A.

How private equity is gobbling up the American city and turning residents into collateral

BY VALERIE STAHL

The Hotel del Coronado's Victorian red turrets peak above the sand dunes off the coast of San Diego. Developed by two industrialists in 1888 at the height of the Gilded Age, the "Hotel Del" serves as an iconic California backdrop, including in the classic 1959 film *Some Like It Hot*. A recent \$400 million renovation added over 15,000 square feet of event space to the already expansive oceanfront campus.

Just 10 miles north, in another oceanside neighborhood called Pacific Beach, sits Bay Pointe Apartments, a 1960s era garden style apartment complex with over 500 units spread across multiple sand-colored buildings.

What do the two complexes have in common? They're both owned by the New York-based private equity firm Blackstone, as are hundreds of thousands of other properties across the country.

Blackstone Real Estate Income Trust (BREIT) acquired a majority stake in the Hotel Del in 2011 for \$600 million. Ten years later, in one of the largest known real estate transactions in San Diego's history, Blackstone purchased 66 residential complexes across the county for over \$1 billion, including Bay Pointe Apartments. Many of the units in these buildings were previously classified as "naturally occurring affordable housing," meaning that they had significantly below-market rents catering to working families in a city that, like many in America, is facing a stark affordability crisis. Nearly overnight, 5,800 households in America's "finest city" became tenants of the private equity behemoth.

With this trend only increasing in San Diego—and in cities across the U.S.—it is worth asking: What happens when your home, doctor's office, or favorite local restaurant gets bought up by private equity?

Already the largest commercial real estate holder in the world, according to the Private Equity Stakeholder Project (PESP), a nonprofit working to bring transparency and accountability to private equity's various investments, Blackstone is also now the largest residential landlord in the U.S., with an estimated 300,000 rental units across the country. The goal of institutional investors like Blackstone is to optimize profits. On the ground, that translates to maximum allowable rent increases, evictions, the rise of hidden fees, a reduced investment in complex maintenance, and even efforts to influence state and local housing policy. Given the opacity with which Blackstone and other corporate landlords function, it's hard to say exactly how dramatic the effects are on renters nationwide as compared to general national trends. But zoom in on specific markets or specific private equity firms, and you start to see the increasingly dire impacts.

For example, in Memphis, Tennessee, FirstKey Homes—the single-family home rental company owned by the private equity firm Cerberus Capital Management—was reportedly responsible for twice as many eviction filings than any other rental property manager in the city while also topping the list as the worst building code violator for residential homes by the Memphis Blight

Elimination Steering Team in 2018. According to a 2016 report by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Atlanta's largest corporate landlords filed evictions on nearly 1 in 3 of their units, and those households showed a nearly 18% increase in their rate of housing insecurity compared to similar households not renting from corporate landlords. In California, meanwhile, in the past five years alone, Blackstone has spent at least \$14 million lobbying against ballot measures that would have limited rent increases across the state. Corporate landlords are increasingly infiltrating the American housing market, from multifamily affordable properties to single-family homes to dormitories to mobile homes, while also contributing to how such spaces are constructed, managed, overseen, and monetized.

The changes in the housing market in San Diego over the last decade reflect this larger story. According to Zillow, the median rent across San Diego County in May 2023 was roughly \$3,100, up 92% since May 2013. The increase in the average home sale price across the county was even more drastic, at about \$860,000 in May 2023, up 123% compared to 10 years prior.

Long considered a seaside paradise, the city is not getting cheaper to visit either. In 2014, the average room rate per night at the Hotel Del was \$272. By the end of 2022, it was up 86%, to just over \$500 a night. At Bay Pointe, in 2021, the average rent was \$1,829 a month. By May 2023, since Blackstone's acquisition, rents ranged from \$2,400-\$5,500 per month, up a striking 200% in just two years.

Blackstone was founded in 1985 as a traditional private equity firm before expanding into real estate investment in 1991. In the three decades since, Blackstone has become "the world's largest asset manager." Private equity firms, also known as advisers or asset managers, gamble with pooled-together money from wealthy individuals and institutional investors—things like retirement funds, money customers pay to insurance companies, and university endowments.

Historically, that money was invested in commercial businesses like grocery

store chains or automobile manufacturers in an attempt to make those businesses more productive and maximize profits. But quietly and with little scrutiny or oversight, these firms have been deepening their investments across sectors and increasingly dominating multiple facets of the American economy.

According to the PESP, the private equity industry currently manages \$7.5 trillion in assets. That gives private equity a stake in companies that employ some 11.7 million Americans—a number that dwarfs the employee rolls of America’s five largest employers (Walmart, Amazon, Fedex, UPS, Target) *combined*.

While investing in companies, including startups, remains a major part of the private equity game, since the 1980s firms are increasingly investing in other parts of the economy.

Take, for instance, health care. According to the University of Pennsylvania Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics (LDI), in 2010, there were 325 private equity deals involving health care facilities in the United States. By 2021, that figure more than tripled, with over 1,000 deals. These investments are valued at about \$200 billion. A March 2023 virtual symposium hosted by LDI researchers explored how private equity’s foray into health care is impacting patients at nursing home facilities. “We find a coherent, consistent picture of patients doing worse after the nursing home is bought by private equity,” said Atul Gupta, an assistant professor of health care management at the Wharton School at Penn. “We also see evidence that the nursing home spending goes up for Medicare by about 6-8%.” Gupta’s research demonstrated that patients exiting nursing homes owned by private equity were 10% more likely to die than those in other facilities.

Recent research led by Dr. Anaeze Offodile II, the chief strategy officer at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, showed that in 2017, 11% of all patients passed through a hospital with some degree of private equity ownership. This has deleterious effects on both patient care and costs. A 2022 study found that when private equity acquired physician practices, the average charge per insurance claim went

“What happens when your home, doctor’s office, or favorite local restaurant gets bought up by private equity?”

up by 20%. In some cases, private equity firms treat hospitals as speculative real estate investments, as seen in the closure of Hahnemann University Hospital in a gentrifying part of central Philadelphia.

Blackstone’s current real estate investment portfolio, meanwhile, reads like a city’s zoning map, including industrial, retail, office, storage, and hospitality, among other categories. From luxury hotels to office parks, Blackstone and other companies like it, including Starwood Capital Group, Greystar Real Estate Partners, and J.P. Morgan Asset Management, are not only getting richer, they’re also changing the shape—and cost—of the American city.

In the past two years, according to the PESP, Blackstone has aggressively expanded its acquisition of both multifamily and single-family properties, adding roughly 200,000 units to its portfolio during a pandemic that further deepened wealth inequality in the U.S. Their recent acquisitions include over 71,000 units of affordable housing and at least a partial stake in nearly 55,000 single-family homes, both purchased in 2021. A 2022 research memo from Americans for Financial Reform, a nonpartisan nonprofit coalition, found that private equity firms are now landlords to at least 1.6 million families

across the United States. This figure is likely an underestimate. Private equity ownership, also known as institutional investment in real estate, is notoriously hard to track, especially as deregulation has fostered a lack of transparency in investment and holdings, particularly for non-publicly traded companies.

Currently, 70% of Blackstone’s \$69 billion real estate portfolio is clustered in the southern and western United States, which they classify as strong investments due to the Sunbelt’s growing population, employment, and wages. In 2019, Blackstone made \$7 billion on the sale of Invitation Homes, its former division of single-family home rentals, doubling an investment it acquired following the 2008 foreclosure crisis in just seven years.

With more than 40% of American renters spending over 30% of their income on housing, these investments in real estate are becoming more and more significant.

At a recent conference in Nashville, Tennessee, a group of researchers gathered for a series of panels focused on developing methods and strategies for tracking institutional investment in housing across the U.S. One of the panelists, Andrew Messamore, a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas at Austin, has been working to develop computational approaches to identifying landlords in Austin. “Property ownership remains a terra incognita and there are no complete studies of ownership patterns in any U.S. city,” Messamore said.

Messamore has found that while the share of institutional investors has remained relatively stable in Austin since 2010, private equity stakeholders have been exerting their influence in other ways. “In Austin, I see widespread evidence that landlords of all sizes are formalizing their business practices through organizational complexity and asset obscuring strategies,” he told me. “Property investors of all sizes have a range of techniques for hiding their ownership, ranging from forming an endless number of LLCs to just putting their property in their employee or family member’s name.”

Operationally, as Messamore puts it,

“‘mom-and-pop’ landlords increasingly seem to be acting like small amateur investors,” as large landlords are getting both more sophisticated in their strategies and more remote from the tenants who live in their properties.

Messamore’s research in Austin points to a spike between 2010 and 2021 in the average number of holding companies, subsidiaries, and intermediaries that landlords employ, as evidence of how private equity is making the tenant-landlord relationship more opaque. Those additional layers of ownership make it a lot harder to even identify who your landlord is, let alone talk them out of a rent increase or ask for a brief break when you experience a financial setback.

According to Madeline Bankson, the Housing Research Coordinator at the PESP, “even compared to other corporate landlords, which are also bad, private equity is expected to generate really high returns on relatively short time horizons.” The goal for a private equity firm is “to get a 15 to 20% return—that’s about a twice as high as any other asset class that those investors are going to expect,” Bankson told me, and getting that relies on “screwing tenants over.” This happens through a series of cost-cutting strategies. As Bankson details, “they’re automating property management, they are deferring maintenance, including really serious maintenance—people are having major health hazards in their homes. They’re adding all these kinds of fees and fines, so people end up paying hundreds of dollars more than they think they are going to from the sticker price, and they’re evicting people. And raising rents.”

Beginning in 2012, for instance, the real estate investment company of the former first son-in-law, Jared Kushner, began to acquire nearly 9,000 units of housing for predominantly low-income individuals in the Baltimore suburbs. Upon purchase, Kushner’s company pursued hundreds of legal cases against both continuous and prior tenants of the complexes, including individuals who presented evidence that the charges were spurious, and some who moved before the real estate acquisition even

occurred. Tenants who lived through the acquisition spoke to the complexes’ increasingly deplorable conditions, including the proliferation of rats, mold, and leaks. All of this eventually led to a \$3.25 million legal settlement on behalf of the tenants, and Kushner’s company eventually exited the deal.

Meanwhile, Blackstone has reportedly raised rents 12% across their portfolio during the pandemic, with apparent aspirations of charging up to 20% more across the board. In the single-family rental market, the rent for homes owned by private equity reportedly increased by 8% during the pandemic, which was 48% higher than the increase in the national average. So while real estate investments are enormously profitable for companies like Kushner’s and Blackstone—the latter has something to the tune of \$585 billion in its current global real estate portfolio—it’s often less positive for tenants who see costs go up while losing what little accountability they may have had with more traditional landlords.

Some tenants, however, are beginning to fight back. With help from the Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE), San Diego residents have formed the Blackstone Tenants Union. ACCE has been organizing tenants who are now residents of Blackstone-owned properties across San Diego County since December 2021. Their member base has grown to around 80 and counting, with the goal of combating rent increases in Blackstone-owned properties, advocating against no-fault evictions, and encouraging local pension funds to divest from Blackstone-controlled investments.

Gina Ligon, a tenant organizer at the Blackstone Tenants Union, described how her San Diego complex that was once known as Dorian Apartments is now being rebranded as “The View.” Ligon told me that “when people move out, they repaint and put down this wood flooring and hike up the rent.” As a result of the rebranding and Blackstone’s acquisition, she has had a number of neighbors forced into various degrees of housing insecurity. This includes a family with an infant child who was evicted from the complex and are

now living out of their car and a family whose primary breadwinner took a job in another city to afford rent—but that is *still* spending about 75% of their income on housing.

These organizing efforts are not intended to stop at Blackstone. As Sarah Guzman, a San Diego-based community organizer at ACCE told me, the goal is to “eventually not just get Blackstone to stop increasing the rents for tenants, but somehow expand that to other landlords, especially corporate landlords.” Tenants have suggested advocating for regulations that would limit the number of units a corporate landlord could own, and they would like to see naturally occurring affordable housing to be preserved through policy mechanisms such as public acquisition or community land trusts.

On a recent Saturday morning in June, residents streaming in and out of the Bay Pointe Apartments skewed young. One resident who moved to the complex just a few weeks ago was paying \$3,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment. Another told me that the complexes’ “amenities were not great,” and described a situation where they were initially promised a one-bedroom, only to spend their first month in the complex in a studio apartment. “I thought it was going to be better when new management came in, but they didn’t change anything,” one resident told me. Most of the people I encountered were aware of the recent management changes but had no idea that Blackstone was their new landlord, a trend that Guzman told me was ubiquitous among residents across Blackstone properties in San Diego County.

With Blackstone’s increasing buy up of residential real estate, San Diego is now a textbook example of a half-century-long process that is making cities unaffordable for the middle and working class. In the first American great urban restructuring of the 20th century, the federal government propped up private investment in suburban neighborhoods through subsidizing infrastructure and the provision of low-interest 30-year loans, made available almost

exclusively to white middle-class families. Blockbusting, redlining, and abandonment proliferated across U.S. cities in the aftermath, leaving predominantly Black and brown residents to organize their neighborhoods for themselves.

However, the flow of money outside of the city left urban areas vulnerable to further extraction. As early as the 1970s, New York, Philadelphia, and other cities began to see waves of gentrification. While some scholars were decrying gentrification as a product of the cultural tastes of what we would call hipsters today, others like the geographer Neil Smith were focused on flows of money and capital investment rather than individuals' consumption habits. "Gentrification is a back to the city movement all right, but of capital rather than people," he observed.

"The people taking advantage of this returning capital are still, as yet, from the city." Over 40 years ago, Smith presciently predicted how investment would reshape the American city, anticipating how first-wave gentrification was just the beginning of this new phase of the financialization of the housing stock.

In a September 2021 Morningstar report describing the conditions of presale for Blackstone's San Diego holdings, Bay Pointe is grouped together with several other similar properties. The properties named in the report had once been owned by Conrad Prebys, a San Diego developer who, upon getting to know the families across his complexes, significantly invested in Boys & Girls Clubs across the county. Not all landlords were as invested in their communities as Prebys and few

management companies were saints, but they had been, for the most part, present in their own properties. They were accountable to their tenants through a legible logic of encountering them where they lived, ate, breathed, and played. Now communities like Bay Pointe have been transformed into something else entirely. As Morningstar recently put it: "the collateral consists of 32 Class B multifamily properties totaling 4,202 market-rate units in the greater San Diego area." When homes become collateral—items of value that secure a loan or investment—residents become collateral damage. The assets continue to be acquired. The full extent of the damage is just beginning to be seen. ■

This article was originally published on July 4, 2023.

COMMUNITY

A Church's Quest for Enchantment

Pentecostals try to find their place within the larger Christian world

BY MAGGIE PHILLIPS

When FX released *The Secrets of Hillsong* in May, the much-discussed TV docu-series presented a tale that is all too familiar in a fallen, post-Tammy Faye Bakker world: At Hillsong, a New York City megachurch, a charismatic rock-star celebrity pastor falls from grace as he succumbs to the worldly temptations of sex, money, influence, and power. Early in the series, the church's denominational affiliation with what one talking head describes as "old-school Pentecostalism" gets a fleeting mention amid a montage of grainy,

dated-looking footage of ecstatic worshippers shown speaking in tongues and singing with their hands in the air, eyes closed. "They're a little extreme," says another with a laugh. The documentary, which takes pains to show the lack of diversity—whether of sexuality, gender, or race—at Hillsong New York City, overlooks the vibrant ferment that gave birth to Pentecostalism itself, as well as a spirituality developing in some quarters of the faith today that is at once self-critical and outward looking.

Pentecostalism, a faith characterized by lively prayer services that can include speaking in tongues and impassioned preaching, is a comparatively recent

Christian denomination. It began in the 19th century, with the parallel development throughout the Anglosphere of a grassroots spiritual enthusiasm grounded in personal experience. Its theology is rooted in history both ancient and more contemporary: a key event in the Christian Bible's Book of the Acts of the Apostles, as well as the theology of John Wesley, who is recognized as the father of Methodism. In the U.S., its catalyst is usually identified as a religious revival movement that began in Los Angeles in 1906; over a century later, it still enjoys a widespread presence in the U.S., and is a rapidly growing global phenomenon.

Whereas Assemblies of God and Church of God in Christ are two major homegrown American churches that exist under the Pentecostal umbrella, Hillsong, which originated in Australia, is something of a parvenu in the American religious ecosystem. But its New York City campus, established in 2010, was the first of what would grow to 16 stateside franchises at its peak (nine of them folded in a matter of weeks last year, due to a series of scandals). At various points, Hillsong's American branch counted Justin Bieber and other notables as members. The ambassador

for a cool, accessible Christianity in its heyday—de-emphasizing (while quietly maintaining traditional beliefs in) many controversial cultural issues—Hillsong represented a kind of coming full circle for Pentecostalism: It marked an acceptance into both the secular and Christian mainstream, and with its influential powerhouse music catalog and bleeding-edge style and branding, the ability to set the tone for other Pentecostal and nondenominational churches around the country.

Although not quite the poster child for contemporary American Pentecostalism, Hillsong and its vestigial influence remains a useful starting point for an exploration of the denomination. It is “one of Australia’s greatest exports,” according to Mark Fennell, a documentarian and former Hillsong member, speaking in a recent interview in his native Australia. “It should go like: iron ore, Hemsworth brothers, Hillsong.” Fennell, who produced a documentary on Pentecostalism and Hillsong in Australia, grew up in Pentecostalist churches, including Hillsong, before stepping back from Christianity altogether as a young adult.

Although no longer a believer, when speaking about the motivation for his Pentecostalism documentary, *The Kingdom*, Fennell addresses what he perceives as a shortcoming of many religion documentaries. “There’s no shortage of documentaries about Pentecostal Christianity, and particularly Hillsong, particularly at the moment,” he said with a laugh. But when negative media stories began to appear about Hillsong in the late 1990s and early 2000s in Australia, something bothered him. “The thing you saw on TV was legitimate. Like, there were real concerns about you know, money, and you know, coercive behavior. I think those things are really important to talk about. But the world that you saw on those news reports, and it’s true now, bore little resemblance to the thing that people rocked up to on Sunday,” Fennell said. “You know whenever you see stories about churches, it’s like, you can tell—you can kind of tell that sitting underneath it, is this little thing of like, ‘Look at them. They’re freaks!’” But as someone who still has

loved ones in Pentecostalism and retains positive associations with aspects of the community he experienced, he is interested in showing that two things can be true at once. “It’s not a monolithic faith,” he said. And in the case of Hillsong in particular, which was and is renowned for its concert arena production values and atmosphere at services, “Beyond just saying, ‘oh, they’ve got good music and nice lights,’ there’s something else there, right? And I think that’s the other thing that when, you know, stories about Hillsong are done, it always kind of comes back to the same ideas of you know, bright lights and music, the same power chords, and I think that misses a trick. Because that’s part of it, no doubt, but there’s something else there that keeps people, and you have to examine that.”

It’s that “something else” that the FX documentary, in its mission to highlight Hillsong NYC’s ethical, legal, and moral failings, is less at liberty to explore. And the Hillsong brand is perhaps more closely popularly associated with Pentecostalism in its native Australia, whereas the NYC branch featured in the FX series wore its affiliation very lightly—almost imperceptibly. But the experiential aspects of worship at Hillsong, the bright lights and the power chords, are distinctly Pentecostal. And while the Hillsong brand is once again the period main character in American pop culture discourse, as it is every so often when a new documentary or podcast about it comes out, another closely related aspect of Pentecostal worship is enjoying one of its occasional moments of cultural prominence: revival.

Perhaps the earliest instances of widespread religious fervor in American history were the First and Second Great Awakenings of the 18th and 19th centuries. But more recently, a multiday revival at Asbury University in Kentucky made headlines for attracting hundreds of worshipers singing and praying together for days without pause.

It wasn’t Asbury’s first revival. The university’s founder, John Wesley Hughes, had belonged to the Wesleyan-Holiness movement, a spirituality rooted in intense personal experience that would go on to inspire the Azusa

Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906. This revival would become what is known today as Pentecostalism.

The Book of the Acts of the Apostles describes a divine visit, 50 days after Passover, of spiritual encouragement paid to Christ’s committed disciples after his crucifixion. Unsure of what awaited them from either Temple or Roman authorities as followers of the recently executed Jesus, they were gathered together in hiding. Acts paints a vivid scene of the Holy Spirit—the third “person” in the Trinity, which Christians believe to be a powerful manifestation of the relationship between Christ and God—descending on these members of the early Christian church, in the form of flames, or “tongues of fire.” These flames in turn inspire the assembled gathering to begin speaking about their faith in various foreign languages, thus enabling them to be understood by visitors from around the Middle East, gathered in Jerusalem for Pentecost.

Pentecost is the “birthday of the church” in some understandings of the event, seen as a reversal of the Tower of Babel story found in Genesis, in which God divides the peoples of the world by language. For Christians, Pentecost forms a crucial understanding of what their faith is all about. The way that

T SUMMER IN THE CITY



A special Tablet series investigating the state of American urban life

[tabletmag.com/
tags/city-series](https://tabletmag.com/tags/city-series)

emphasis on the Pentecost story is exhibited, however, can vary widely.

A Canadian and professor of Pentecostal theology at Evangel University in Springfield, Missouri, Martin Mittelstadt said that even though he identifies “a certain kind of American elitism that wants to believe that all routes go back to the Azusa Street Revival,” he contends that the 1906 Azusa event “shapes immensely kind of the DNA of the movement,” he said, making it “the symbol of early Pentecostalism.”

Mittelstadt said that John Wesley inaugurated a back-to-basics spirituality that made him a “precursor” to Pentecostalism in the Anglosphere. Wesley’s strong belief in personal conversion experiences and what he called “entire personal sanctification” meant for him, and those he would influence, that human proclivities like desire, ambition, and love could all be made holy. “In the late 19th century, there arrived this language of ‘baptism in the spirit,’” Mittelstadt said, which evolved into a belief that personal holiness meant constant recommitment to God, even after one’s initial conversion; like the apostles in the Book of Acts, professed Christians could be enabled, through their openness to an ongoing outpouring of grace, to plug into God’s holy spirit, and operate intimately within it. Miraculous results were practically taken for granted.

The holiness movement was in some ways a reaction against a skeptical culture that celebrated the rational. Even in Christian circles, cessationism, the belief that miracles had ceased with the time of the first Apostles, was taking hold. Early-20th-century Pentecostals, then, were riding a counterwave against the cumulative societal effects of the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution: Spiritualism also gained traction in the late 19th century, along with an interest in alternative medicine and healing, as a significant number of people militated against this mindset.

In America in particular, Mittelstadt said, the proto-Pentecostal holiness movement propagated by Wesley was very popular in 19th-century African American spirituality, “The deep sense of groaning and longing and lament and hope,” he said, “they desperately

“They began to de-emphasize ‘their Pentecostal distinctives,’ downplaying speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy to become ‘evangelical-plus.’”

needed more than a cognitive response for Christianity to work, they needed experience.” Wesleyanism is not the only strand of influence on Pentecostalism as a global movement, he said, but as it developed in the United States, it was key. Pentecostals and those who emphasized a baptism of the holy spirit did not have a copyright on holiness, but Wesley’s conception of it provided a familiar common language.

The culminating result was that by the early 20th century, when the Azusa Street Revival began, it was led by an African American Methodist, William Seymour.

The men and women who gathered to this particular revival in Los Angeles were participating in a widespread phenomenon that had rolled over from the 19th century to become what David Cole, professor of Pentecostal and charismatic movements at The King’s University in Southlake, Texas, said was “one of the real fountainheads of the Pentecostal movement.”

Cole described the Azusa Street Revival, which lasted through 1908, and was characterized by multiple daily services and the novel practice of worshippers speaking in tongues (unlike in the Book of Acts, these tongues were not necessarily existing languages spoken elsewhere, but might be unknown

even to the speaker), as an ecumenical affair. Men and women, various races, different socioeconomic classes and even faiths, all came together in an old African Methodist Episcopalian church building on Azusa Street to pray. Seymour oversaw not only the prayer meetings, but the dissemination of a newsletter about their burgeoning movement that boasted a circulation of 50,000.

It was “a democratization of the faith,” Cole said, that was to go by the wayside as different strains of Pentecostalism emerged in the decades that followed Azusa. Liturgical and mainline denominations with more social influence distanced themselves from this style of what is called “charismatic” worship, which would in turn lead to a desire for recognition and respectability in certain corners of the upstart denomination.

By the mid-20th century, some Pentecostals had begun aligning with the evangelical movement. “They wanted to be accepted as real Christians in the larger culture,” Cole said. They began to de-emphasize what he calls “their Pentecostal distinctives,” downplaying speaking in tongues, healing, and prophecy to become “evangelical-plus.” By the 1980s and ’90s, this strategy synced with what was known as “the seeker-sensitive movement” in evangelicalism, he said, an effort “to attract as many unchurched people as possible.” That meant not leading with the distinctives and holding off on getting into specifics, in order to prioritize simply sharing the gospel. *New York Times* opinion writer David French has described evangelicalism to Tablet previously as less of a coherent ideology and “more of an exit poll category,” usually functioning as a catchall phrase to describe a broad set of spiritual, social, and often political beliefs. Prominent religious research group Barna distinguishes evangelicals in part by the primacy that their Christian belief takes in their lives, as well as their personal responsibility to share their faith with others. “They wanted to have a more broad reach in the culture for people that don’t know anything about Pentecostalism,” said Cole, “but they might be interested in trying a cool church that had good music.”

A quick tour of Pentecostal worship

in the Bible Belt in 2023 reveals that both the traditional revival-style of Pentecostal worship, as well as the seeker-sensitive model exemplified by Hillsong's American churches ("Hillsong is a Pentecostal church," says a former NYC congregant in the docuseries. "Most people probably wouldn't know that, might be surprised to find out."), are alive and well.

At one recent streaming service I watched on the Facebook page for New Life Tabernacle United Pentecostal Church in Aberdeen, North Carolina, "Holy Ghost!" was a frequent intonation, along with "Hallelujah!" as a worship team (singers, a keyboard, and a drum kit) repeated a hymn with the reiterative lyrics, "I am a child of God."

Congregation members of different ages and races came up to the altar and knelt or prostrated themselves as hymns were sung, others singing along with the words that appeared overhead on a projector screen, hands in the air and their eyes closed. Hymns were punctuated by spoken prayers, with indeterminate tongues heard periodically, indistinct vocalizations that overlapped in the din of fervent shouted prayer and singing. The pastor, a tall, suited man named Jonathan Scarboro, was up on the pulpit one moment, encouraging his congregation, the next he was down among members of the congregation, praying with them.

Scarboro's wife, Meme, is the worship leader who oversees the music, which she acknowledges is integral to the service, but not ultimately essential. There have been services, she said, where she has even stopped the music to better enable worship, which she contends is something distinct from praise. "Praise," she said in a phone interview, is "more outward," whereas worship comes from a place of "deep reverence."

On the whole, however, at a Pentecostal church, "people are more outward in their worship." Ultimately, Scarboro said, "it all comes down to love of God."

The word "Gather" appears in large letters at the front of the church. It is, according to a sermon posted on April 16, "a prophetic word" that was not chosen for the church's theme for 2023 at random, but revealed to the congregation through prayer and discernment.

"This is a year of gather," said the preacher, a younger man named Will Bell, in his sermon to the enthusiastic congregation. "This is the year that people are coming home. This is the year that they're going to walk through the doors."

Bell told the congregants that the church has received phone calls from people who have not previously attended the church, "they don't even know what church it is," but that they feel like they're supposed to attend.

"It is not the Lord's will that revival not happen," he said.

He then shifted his focus, to the need for those already within the fold to recommit to their distinctively animated style of worship, noting that singing and dancing are commanded in the Psalms that exhort believers to engage in praise and worship. "It is biblical that you clap your hands," he said as the keyboard begins to vamp in anticipation of the praise team. "It is biblical that you dance, it is biblical that you leap." Praise, he said, "will get you through a lot of things."

At another, more seeker-friendly congregation nearby, the pastor said in a recent streaming service (he declined to be interviewed for this piece) that he comes from a Church of God background (Church of God is a Pentecostal denomination). There is no mention of Pentecostalism on their website or social media, and everything from the location to the pastor's trendy outfit is aimed at a younger, likely less "churched" demographic. Nevertheless, the distinctly charismatic style of worship on display marks it as Pentecostal.

"Common in today's Christianity is, again, the frustration with the Church and with denominations, that you've got these new churches starting, they

don't even want the label Pentecostal," Mittelstadt said. "So they've got this kind of Starbucks church idea or coffee shop idea, everybody's welcome, we're not going to preach at you. It's more of a seeker emphasis." In a shift from the seeker-friendly churches of the '80s and '90s, many such congregations "are actually re-evangelizing their own," he said. "Their mission is those who were formerly churched."

Scarboro said this is another motivator behind the continued streaming of their church's services long after COVID restrictions lifted, as well as this year's emphasis on "Gather." It's because of "right now," she said, when in addition to unchurched seekers, New Life is aiming to draw in those "that used to be part of the church." It is bearing fruit, she said, attracting young people that include the children of congregants, now seeking an alternative to the experiences offered by the world, what she calls "shallow emotion."

"Though they don't want to adhere to the language, they're still on the same kind of quest," said Mittelstadt of many Pentecostals today. In the wake of scandals in churches like Hillsong and elsewhere, "They're not returning to rational Christianity. They want experience, but they want authentic experience that's going to make a difference in every part of their daily lives, and that's been the disconnect that 21st-century Christians are experiencing."

Mittelstadt speaks of an exodus as Pentecostals who, like Christians in other denominations, are disillusioned with their church leadership. Cole attributes disaffection among Pentecostals in part to the drive for respectability that came about in the mid-20th century. As faiths become institutionalized, he said, ossification and routinization can follow. Respectability can breed elitism and insularity, resulting in a faith "more upper middle class than you wanted to be." A far cry from the raucously integrated democratic *mélange* of Azusa Street.

Indeed, to the extent that some within Pentecostalism become involved with democracy, it is in a decidedly secular form. *The Secrets of Hillsong* features prominent Pentecostals, including Hillsong founder Brian Houston, meeting

NEWSLETTER



Point your smart phone camera at the QR code to subscribe to our newsletter.

with Donald Trump, and underscores the conservative politics of many within the denomination.

For clergy, who must take care about propounding politics from the pulpit, nevertheless, “the cord between their political side and the gospel,” said Mittelstadt, “it’s not even separable.” Although as a Canadian, he was aware of the way that politics and religion overlap in America, living in Springfield, Missouri. “You can’t imagine it until you live in it,” he said. “It is so un-Western European and Canadian.”

All the same, he said placing Pentecostals politically is “tricky.” As a multiracial denomination, political affiliation is hard to generalize. “It definitely leans right,” he said, while noting there are nuances; white Pentecostals likely tend to vote Republican due to views on sexual ethics, and although Black Pentecostals tend to share their white co-religionists’ views on abortion and LGBTQ issues, they may bring an additional concern for social justice issues that flavors their politics differently.

And despite their interracial beginnings over a century ago, in 2023, Pentecostal worship is not always integrated. Suburban churches tend to be dominated by white congregants, he said, but cities like LA, Portland, and Kansas City tend to be more diverse, with members from Black, white, Asian, and Latin American communities.

For all that, beginning in the 1960s, a development in and among liturgical Christian denominations began a process of ecumenism that continues to this day.

It was then, in Van Nuys, California, that an Episcopalian priest named Dennis Bennett was going to some Pentecostal prayer groups and “had some experiences where he experienced gifts of the Holy Spirit,” Cole said, “speaking in tongues and prophesying, and praying for healing and that kind of thing.” It was something he felt he needed to share with his congregation. Although asked by church leadership to step back from ministry, Bennett gained mainstream media attention, and was relocated to a parish in Seattle, where he became a charismatic Episcopal pastor, and a

model for liturgical faiths who were having what Cole calls “charismatic experiences” within their denominations.

Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, and Catholics were following suit within various smaller prayer groups and Bible studies. “It became a charismatic movement that was trans-denominational,” Cole said, “similar to the Pentecostal movement back in the early 20th century, which sort of shook up existing denominations at that time.”

In the past 20 years, Cole said that Pentecostal cooperative bodies like the Pentecostal World Fellowship are formally engaging with Catholics, Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians in ecumenical conversations at the international, national, and local levels.

Over roughly the same period, Cole said, Pentecostals have “started to accept the fact that they really need to be part of the larger church, that they need to recognize that there are real Christians in non-Pentecostal churches.” As Christian churches, including more established churches, began to incorporate a Pentecostal style of worship, the assumption in many Pentecostal circles was that they would join their churches. But as more people started prioritizing experiential worship and incorporating it into their theology, Cole said, “It really has forced the Pentecostal movement to figure out, OK, how do we contribute to this larger body of Christ, whoever they may be, and wherever they may worship?”

Mittelstadt is part of a three-year process of formal Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue that finishes this September. Academics had been doing it independently for a while, he said, but official meetings under the aegis of the U.S. Council of Catholic Bishops and the Pentecostal Charismatic Churches of North America are something new. “In terms of ecumenism, the goal is always to find common unity and common witness,” he said. “And I think Catholics and Pentecostals share a lot—we’re experiential religions,” Mittelstadt said, “We’re Christians that value encounter. We’re magical religions. The [Catholic] sacrament [of Communion] is enchanted.”

As a member of a faith that openly embraces the experiential, Mittelstadt doesn’t perceive a threat to his worldview when someone likens a Taylor Swift singalong in the West Village to the recent Asbury revival. He cites another Taylor: “I think that’s what Charles Taylor would say, is this desire for an encounter, that something’s bigger than me,” he said. “I think it’s innate, and after 150 years of Enlightenment, of telling people to suppress it, people are saying, ‘no.’ But at the same time, the church has lost a lot of credibility,” alluding to some of the same institutional shortcomings identified by Fennell.

Scarboro cautions that this search for what Taylor and Mittelstadt might call “enchantment” is not the intrinsic goal of Pentecostal worship as she understands it. “We would be shallow Christians if that’s why we’re in it,” she said. Lucifer, she points out, was the first worship leader, who in the traditional Christian understanding, was the most beautiful of all the angels, who led the heavenly choirs in praise of God. The first job, as Scarboro sees it, is worship of God for its own sake, a connection with the authentic.

Mittelstadt sees a parallel between the environment that launched the Azusa Street Revival, which came after a century of technological and industrial disruption, and the current preoccupation with things like artificial intelligence and the flattened experience of modern, technocratic life. He again invokes Taylor’s theory of enchantment. “The Enlightenment and modernity really moved us toward disenchantment,” he said. “Religions became disenchant-ed.” In the 21st century, he said. “There is this huge longing for re-enchantment.” He cites New Age movements, and even contemporary pop culture as evidence of this spiritual groundswell. Mittelstadt diagnoses what he says has traditionally been an allergy to postmodernity within Pentecostalism, and he finds it ironic: “We bring an enchanted world view to a world that is on a quest for enchantment,” he said. “We’ve never been merely rationally based.” ■

This article was originally published on July 11, 2023.

THE REST

→ **Hackers in China broke into the computer network of a U.S. federal government agency** in June, according to a report released Wednesday by the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the primary federal cybersecurity watchdog. The breach took place in an attack on a Microsoft email system, with the chair of the Senate Committee on Intelligence, Mark Warner (D-VA), saying in a statement **that the attack “appears to be a significant cybersecurity breach by Chinese intelligence.”** Around two dozen other organizations were also breached in the attack, including the State Department, according to a *Wall Street Journal* report on Wednesday afternoon. Officials haven't specified what type of data was stolen, though a White House National Security Council representative said the intrusion affected “unclassified systems.”

→ **Quote of the Week: “The endgame is to allow things to drag on until union members start losing their apartments and losing their houses.”** That's from a studio executive explaining a strategy—reiterated by several others to Deadline—that Hollywood studios plan to use to overcome the Writers Guild of America, which is now approaching its **75th day of its labor strike protesting for better wages.** The strategy was described by one studio insider as a tactic that is a “cruel but necessary evil.” Deadline reports, “Studios and streamers feel they would be in a position to dictate most of the terms of any possible deal” if writers go so long without work that they begin to feel financial pressure. So far, the first strike by the WGA in 15 years has yet to result in formal negotiations between the union and studio reps, which means audiences will continue to subsist on old content and foreign imports. Given the recent few years of Hollywood output, that might be something of a palate cleanser.

→ **Number of the Week: 53%** That's the percentage of **Americans in favor of raising the national minimum wage to \$20 an hour**, according to a new YouGov poll. Notably, of the 3,012 respondents, those earning at least \$100,000 a year are more likely to back the boost to a higher minimum wage than are those making between \$50,000 and \$100,000 annually. Currently, a full-time employee can expect to net about \$15,000 a year on the \$7.25 federal minimum, which barely clears the federal poverty benchmark of \$13,590. Though raising the minimum wage to \$15 was a popular talking point for Joe Biden during the last presidential election cycle, his attempt to bake the raise into the 2021 American Rescue Plan met with fierce opposition, including from those within his own party, with eight Democrats breaking with the majority to side with all 50 Republicans against the proposal.

→ Drivers navigating the streets of **Paris will now have to contend with extra fees, at least if they're behind the wheel of an SUV, as the capital city attempts to rein in pollution from bigger vehicles.** With city government giving the green light to increase parking fees based on a vehicle's weight and dimensions, Paris councilor Frédéric Badina-Serpette says it hopes to **tackle the “absurdity” of “auto-besity,” which he says is “the inexorable growth in the weight and size of vehicles circulating” throughout the cities of France.** The new fees will kick in on Jan. 1, 2024, which Paris Deputy Mayor for Mobility David Belliard hopes will discourage the supersize cars from taking to the city of lights. “There are no dirt paths, no mountain roads ... SUVs are absolutely useless in Paris,” he told *The Guardian*.

THE BIG STORY

With a last-minute deal before Tuesday's NATO summit in Lithuania, Sweden now appears set to join the military alliance, while Ukraine has been left out, still knocking on the door for entry. After Turkey spent much of the past year withholding its approval for Sweden to join the alliance due to the country's handling of Swedish-based Kurdish militants, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan finally relented to Western persuasion, saying he would send the formal approval for Sweden's accession to NATO to his country's parliament “as soon as possible.” No doubt Erdogan felt motivated in part by President Joe Biden clearing the way for a \$20 billion fleet of F-16 fighter jets to be sold to Turkey, though White House officials tried to downplay the blatant appearance of a quid pro quo: National security advisor Jake Sullivan said the fighter-jet deal came “with no caveats or conditions” from President Biden.

Deal sweeteners aside, with the recent addition of Finland and now Sweden to NATO, the alliance has bulked up its forces, adding tens of thousands of soldiers and scores of warplanes and battlefield tanks while expanding its territory across more than a thousand miles of Baltic Sea coastland. Yet despite the historic expansion of NATO, which was formed after WW2 to counter Russia's military when it was still controlled by the Soviet Union, Kyiv continues to be left out of the alliance.

—Sean Cooper

SUBSCRIBE TO THE SCROLL



Point your smart phone camera at the QR code to receive The Scroll in your inbox

Why Good Politics Makes for Bad Art

Affirmation is available everywhere. Why ruin aesthetics?

BY ALICE GRIBBIN

Intrinsically, there are no subject matters unsuitable for art. For art this is forever true; for artists, in practice, it has been a truth granted only very recently, certainly for less than 200 years, and not always without incident. Still: In the West today, the charge of prescriptivism—what to commit to as one’s subjects, eschewing all the infinite others—falls to the individual artist, rather than some named or nameless authority. The granting of this universal truth, an extraordinary thing historically, has not simplified the plight of artists.

When Horacio Ferrer de Morgado approached the canvas on which he would paint the work he titled “Madrid 1937 (Black Aeroplanes),” his subject allowed for no obscurity. The painted figures, four women and three children against a background of rubble and smoke, would be life-size. Because the artist was then working in the style of social realism, his scene of war could not blatantly include General Franco looming as perpetrator. But symbolic details that Ferrer incorporated—the communist-red scarf around the head of one woman, the raised fist of another, in the defiant salute of the Republic—made clear who were the terrorized victims he depicted. At the opening of the 1937 Paris World’s Fair, one year into the Civil War in Spain, the painting was first presented to the public. It was, a Republican government administrator back in Madrid heard, the Spanish pavilion’s “greatest popular success.”

Who reading this knows the painting? Who has looked at it, in person or in reproduction, for those long minutes

in which time stops? Not “Madrid 1937” but “Guernica” is the enduring artwork of the Spanish Civil War, and probably the most celebrated antiwar painting of the century. On the ground floor of the Spanish pavilion, one floor below the gallery containing Ferrer’s work, Picasso’s was the only painting hung. How odd it seems to us now that on being unveiled, “Guernica” was condemned by Spanish loyalists as insufficiently political—too indirect and ambiguous. One group called for its removal and the mounting of “Madrid 1937” in its place. Another group demanded it be replaced with a painting of dead children.

The politics of Ferrer’s and Picasso’s paintings are of course not dissimilar. If the realist work seems to us, at once, less caustic or damning, and at the same time, plainly didactic, our evaluation is at odds with its contemporary audiences’, for whom “Madrid 1937” was more powerful because more politically defiant. Where, for us, the conflation of immense visual coherence in “Guernica”—a scene illuminated as though by the flash of an explosion—with narrative incoherence—carnage the common element among its unrelated figures—generates upon the viewer an assault both moral and aesthetic, many in Paris found the painting difficult, challenging in a way they wished not to be challenged. Its ambiguity offended. Conversely, the designed-by-committee quality of Ferrer’s painting pleased antiwar audiences. They did not want an aesthetic assault.

Pablo Picasso, ‘Guernica,’ 1937

We struggle to know, unless we are Ukrainian, the urgency felt then by the Spanish people. Franco’s Nationalist

army had captured cities from Málaga in the south up through Seville and, now with the aid of its Nazi and Fascist allies, Bilbao and much of the Basque country. What are aesthetics when one is living in wartime?

Writing on the World’s Fair in *The Spectator*, a British art historian articulated a common view of the painting when he called Picasso’s work “not an act of public mourning but the expression of a private brain-storm.” The characterization was meant negatively, the review highly critical. Months later in the magazine, the writer reiterated his point—that “Picasso’s art is a highly specialized product, an essentially private art, which is *therefore not easily applied to public problems.*” Ironically, this is an accurate evaluation of “Guernica,” a painting so powerful for the very reason that it is a fully private expression, a vision no one’s but Picasso’s.

A great many working artists choose in their art to address “public problems.” One difficulty is that, unlike in a time of civil war, the political issues of our day are not straightforwardly, collectively, diagnosable. If we were in want of consensus on how best to confront our problems—if it were merely *solutions* that eluded us—our society would be unrecognizable. It would be functional. We might thrash ideas out. But no: The economy, our social mores, freedoms of speech and association, criminal justice, the global climate, are all areas afflicted by crises whose natures are diagnosed by different groups in impossibly anti-theoretical ways.

So fierce are disagreements over our public problems that the simple statement “such and such is wrong,” the simple outlining of a problem, rather than a proposal for how it might be responsibly tackled, strikes many as good politics. Hearing the statement, we feel we are not alone, going mad. Those crises that impact or trouble us exist not only in our heads. They are concrete.

Rarely are the politics of an artwork, even when it addresses political matters directly, any more penetrating than the statement of a problem. Rarely does art treat political subjects with the complexity found even in quality

journalism. Expecting artists to contend with social scientific data, to carry out the work of think tanks or propose legislation, would be silly. Instead, what political art does proffer is the experience of recognition. For many, finding in art an expression of their political concerns asserted in a voice not their own can be terribly affecting, because it is validating.

For those of us not needing our political attitudes affirmed by art—for those of us who live without such insecurity—we turn to artworks for other reasons, reasons unknown to us until a work takes us in. Affirmation is available everywhere. Why look for it in art, when what the most valuable works offer up exists nowhere else?

Whereas politics attend to concrete social matters, every great work of art is itself the manifest solution to a totally invented problem. Only in the artist's psyche was the problem ever real. No artwork ever had to exist, nor be made to exist as it was. This is true even of commissioned art, when significant. Every treatment of every subject demands its own form. As phenomena born of the aesthetic imagination, artworks are complete when the artist knows so—not upon reaching a certain word count or run time, not at the moment the canvas has been filled or materials used up. (Automatic and constraint-based methods necessarily yield lots of dreck because of this.) The artist alone recognizes when a work has attained the state of completion, when it has been realized as a singular solution bound up in its problem.

"All art is political," a notion with which we are bludgeoned, derives from two facts of formidable substance: that (i) artworks are produced by and exist for people, and that (ii) wherever there are people, there are politics. Gut bacteria also are present wherever there are people, though are we advised less frequently to seek in poems and sculptures hard truths about the microbiome. Toni Morrison, a superlative artist, endorsed the notion in the way it is most typically pronounced. From a 2008 interview:

Are you really telling me that Shakespeare and Aeschylus weren't

"Affirmation is available everywhere. Why look for it in art, when what the most valuable works offer up exists nowhere else?"

writing about kings? *All good art is political!* There is none that isn't. And the ones that try hard not to be political are political by saying, "We love the status quo." We've just dirtied the word "politics," made it sound like it's unpatriotic or something. ... My point is that it has to be both: beautiful and political at the same time. I'm not interested in art that is not in the world.

By "art ... in the world," I take her to mean art concerned with social relations, which regrettably fails to encompass all sorts of works of both nonrepresentational and nonnarrative art. It is to the detriment of all who revere Morrison that the interviewer did not follow up with the question of whether Monet's waterlilies, as examples of "good art," are political. Possibly Morrison did not care for those paintings. Monet's plants had been imported from Egypt and South America; maybe, though I can hardly imagine it, she would have something to say about the politics of the late 19th-century botanical trade.

Morrison's distinction between political and apolitical (and thus status quo-loving) art is puzzling, especially when coupled with the artists she cites. If (falsely) apolitical art upholds the status quo, does it stand that overtly political art always challenges it? Or

is it possible for "good art," which for her is always substantively political, to explicitly align with the status quo? Shakespeare's plays are immeasurably rich, but in them we do not find a great variety of attitudes regarding the necessity of social order, social hierarchy, and stable institutions. His plays certainly did not challenge the status quo of the royal court. The *Oresteia* culminates in the establishment by Athena of a new legal system in which justice is achieved through jury trial. Without the judicial system under which Aeschylus' audience was living, his trilogy demonstrates, the curse on the House of Atreus—the cycle of violence—would never have broken. The plays positively champion the status quo.

At their most commanding, Morrison's novels share with the works of both playwrights not some political nature but the quality of profound moral seriousness. The contradictions within a society's ethical system; the brutal arbitrariness of what behaviors a society deems acceptable; morality's confounding inconstancy; its elusiveness; the gap into which one whose moral code misaligns with society's ethics may fall; acts of judgment and cowardice that ripple through time: Of all art forms, fiction is especially well-suited to exploring these issues and their implications for the individual human life. Any appreciation of an artwork is cheapened, not enriched, by imprecisely claiming as political what are moral and social issues.

With important artists on record stating that all good art is political, naturally people throughout the culture will themselves insist on the notion in an effort to have them and their output appear more serious than they are. When presented as forthrightly political, commercial products transmogrify, instantly, into works of art. Here is how the entertainer Lin-Manuel Miranda opened "What Art Can Do," a 2019 magazine article: "All art is political. ... Art lives in the world, and we exist in the world, and we cannot create honest work about the world in which we live without reflecting it." He goes on, in no less bracing prose, to explain that his forthcoming film is about immigrants, who indeed live in the world, and that

some immigrants have been demonized. Present political conditions, Miranda writes, have made his story a “radical narrative.” Today, “for some, considering an immigrant a human being is a radical political act.”

No doubt emptier statements than this have been printed in *The Atlantic*, but its meaninglessness in the context of contemporary American life is worth observing. It is a farce to imagine that artworks about the plight of immigrants in any way help attend to the material problems of how the nation’s immigration and asylum systems are to be run. The number of people worldwide wanting to move to the United States was 160 million on last count. Should all be welcome here? May they arrive tomorrow? What resources will be apportioned to support the poor, the helpless, and the sick among them? Will working class wages be affected, and do we care? Are there jobs and schools and housing enough for the new arrivals? If there are not, what is to be done so that each immigrant is not merely *considered a human being*, terribly radical though this act is, but capable of living decently as one? Artworks sold as politically radical allow the purchasing public to indulge their concerns in the bloodless realm of abstraction. Along with a ticket to one of Miranda’s productions, they buy the lie that to attend is the height of civic responsibility.

If there is a tangible effect on our politics resulting from artworks and entertainment products such as Miranda’s, it is in their degrading of the political discourse. Politics are more infantilized, tribal, performative, and symbolic because of such works. Their overall political effect is in all directions negative.

The pull of art is older within us than are the demands of politics, older than states or cities or settled communities. Politics are a consequence of our living in societies, which we have not always done. Even if one believes the story told by David Graeber and David Wengrow, that humans have exhibited “political self-consciousness” since before the invention of agriculture, perhaps 30,000 years ago, by their reckoning—even if one accepts all that, our earliest known

artworks still precede our political selves by tens of thousands of years. Far longer have humans been making symbolic visual marks, adorning themselves, making music, even making figurative art. (We know our human relatives and ancestors were engraving and painting and playing instruments earlier still.) Our aesthetic temperament exists autonomously, deeply, within us. We make art because we can, because the Muses insist, because we have the will to do so.

To discern that the relation of art and politics is incidental, not inherent, is hardly to underestimate art’s power. Rather, claiming everything human is political is an underestimation of the human.

How much easier the task of publicizing artists and their works is during a time of political art’s ascendance. Compared with politics, aesthetics are wretchedly difficult to promote. The marketing copy about political art writes itself.

A recent major museum retrospective was advertised as a survey of “one of the century’s most radical painters, a champion of social justice whose longstanding commitment to humanist principles inspired her life as well as her art.” Within Alice Neel’s large body of work are scenes of privation, social inequality, political protest, and sexual liberation. Her portrait subjects included the civil rights leader James Farmer, labor organizers, and left-wing activists, among other political figures. Understandably, given that much of her art addressed political issues, the show’s curators foregrounded the politics of both the painter and her subjects. Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, Susan Tallman offered a different assessment of what motivated Neel, something other than her “humanist principles”:

A visitor looks at Alice Neel’s ‘Pregnant Julie and Algis’ (1967), in Paris in 2022

These are great paintings for the same reasons that the Bronzinos are great paintings—they have been put together by someone relentlessly interested in the surfaces of the world. Neel’s fascination with painting

naked pregnant women may have been driven by the socially conscious desire to record female experience, but what she said was, “Plastically [pregnancy] is very exciting.”

Outwardly, Neel’s subjects are political—the contents of her paintings are political subjects—but the *substance* of her art—what her paintings address—is, more precisely, how “the surfaces of the world” can find expression in paint. This fact of Neel’s work extends to other art forms. Poems are ostensibly *about* particular subjects, but their substance is their language, the words and the effect of what has been done with them. An artwork’s aesthetics are not its exterior but interior, not its surface but its depths. This truth is perhaps more obvious with the performing arts: Music’s genuine subject is sound; how the dancers’ bodies move through space is always the subject of a dance.

If in recent decades the artworks that influential people have heralded—the works receiving promotion, glowing write-ups, and major awards—seem unlikely to be found meaningful by audiences even a decade from now, it is not so much because certain subjects have been overrepresented. More broadly, the arts suffer because they have been overtaken by a perversion of the democratic spirit. Political art has been prominent; derivative, pedantic, unambitious, historically ignorant, shallow, designed-by-committee art has been more prominent still. Great artworks may or may not be difficult but are always ruthlessly singular expressions, their nature aristocratic. A culture valuing inclusion above all else will never know its masterpieces. ■

This article was originally published on July 9, 2023.

COMMUNITY

Our shared Jewish life, at
[tabletmag.com/sections/
community](https://tabletmag.com/sections/community)

A Slaughter of Jews in Ukraine

Who perpetrated the Lviv pogrom of July 1941?

BY JOHN-PAUL HIMKA

The day after the proclamation of Ukrainian nationalist leader Yaroslav Stetsko's state of Ukraine, on July 1, 1941, the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists (OUN) pasted posters around Lviv with Mykola Mikhnovsky's slogan, "Ukraine for Ukrainians," printed in white letters against a red background. On the same day in Lviv and in many other localities of Galicia and Volhynia, another poster appeared, authored by Ivan Klymiv sometime earlier; it instructed Ukrainians: "People! Know! Moscow, Poland, the Hungarians, the Jews are your enemies! Destroy them!" These posters issued a clear signal as to what non-Ukrainians in Lviv could expect. And under the conditions of Nazi occupation, the only non-Ukrainians who could be targeted with impunity were Jews.

But much more incendiary than any posters of the new nationalist state was the discovery of the hundreds of prisoners murdered in Lviv by the NKVD in the last days of Soviet rule. Emotions ran high—rage, outrage, grief. Some people went inside the prisons to look for missing relatives. Famously, Roman Shukhevych discovered his brother Yurii's body in a mass grave in the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street. When the corpses were exhumed and laid out in courtyards so that the public could search for relatives among the victims, a strong stench of rotting flesh permeated areas near the prisons. Photographs from the time show people with kerchiefs over their mouths and noses to blunt the stomach-churning

smell. Isolated incidents of anti-Jewish violence escalated into the Lviv pogrom of July 1, 1941.

The word "pogrom" has a number of meanings. The term originated with the incidents of anti-Jewish violence that erupted in cities on Ukrainian territories within the Russian Empire in the early 1880s. These pogroms included much looting of Jewish businesses, beatings and rapes of Jews, and some murders. The pogroms of 1903-06 on the same territories were similar. But the pogroms in Ukraine of the civil war period, largely perpetrated by soldiers, were marked by great numbers of murders. Pogroms initiated by the Nazis, as when they seized Vienna in March 1938 and throughout the Reich in November 1938 (the November pogrom, often called Kristallnacht), primarily involved the destruction of Jewish property, the humiliation of Jews, and assaults, although there were also some murders.

The Lviv pogrom of 1941 combined many features of the preceding pogroms: There were beatings, sexual assaults and humiliations, murders by the urban crowd, shooting by soldiers, and ritual humiliations; Jewish apartments were robbed, but not their businesses, if we can speak of the businesses nationalized by the Soviets as in some sense still Jewish.

The main stages of the pogrom were three prisons in Lviv where bodies of the NKVD victims were exhumed, although anti-Jewish violence and humiliations also occurred in other areas of the city, particularly in the central town square (*rynok*), but also near the opera house and near the seat of the Greek Catholic metropolitan's residence, St.

George's hill. Two of the prisons were close to largely Jewish neighborhoods: the Brygidky prison and the prison on Zamarstyniv street. As numerous Jewish survivors' accounts make clear, members of the Ukrainian National Militia entered nearby apartment buildings and rounded up Jews, men and women, and took them to the prisons. The other prison, the NKVD prison on Lontsky Street (now a museum) was closer to the center of the city, outside the Jewish neighborhood. For this prison Jews were rounded up off the street by militiamen and volunteers from the urban crowd. They were marched with their hands up, sometimes on all fours, to the prison.

How did the pogrom start? It grew out of a general policy of the Wehrmacht to force Jews to do repairs and cleanup after war-related damage. German troops made Jews repair streets in Lviv that had been damaged by bombardment. Not infrequently, the impressment into labor was accompanied by physical harm or even death. On June 30, 1941, Czeslawa Budynska, her sister, and a neighbor girl were put to cleaning up battle sites in the city. The women were beaten and pushed as they carried out their tasks. Men were also drafted to the work, but according to Budynska, they were drowned later in the day.

When the Germans entered Lviv, they discovered many hundreds of corpses in the prisons, heaped up or hastily buried in mass graves. Someone had to exhume the bodies, and it was not surprising that the Germans assigned Jews to this task, a nasty one, since the bodies fell apart as they were retrieved and the stench was unbearable. Outside Lviv, too, Jews were routinely assigned to exhumation work in localities where NKVD victims were found. Thus Jews, whom both the Nazis and Ukrainian nationalists identified as carriers and beneficiaries of Bolshevism, were placed at the forefront of the NKVD crime, in a position that appeared to be punishment for their own criminal responsibility. Moreover, this was in a context in which Ukrainian public opinion was being influenced to regard the Jews as the main perpetrators of the refined tortures and mass

killings that the numerous decomposing corpses indicated.

Impressing Jews into work at the prisons posed a problem: finding and assembling Jews. As Dieter Pohl correctly noted:

One should not underestimate the practical problems these SS men faced when they entered the Western Ukrainian towns. They did not know the population, the topography, and of course neither did they know the language. Thus, they were totally dependent on interpreters, local administrations or the militias that surfaced in June 1941.

In Lviv, it was the Ukrainian National Militia that rounded up the Jews and participated in the violence against them. There is a photo from the time showing a uniformed militiaman pulling the hair of a half-undressed woman at the gate to the prison on Zamarstyniv street. There is a film that shows a militiaman with his armband beating a Jew with a truncheon inside one of the Lviv prisons. Numerous survivor testimonies and memoirs describe the arrests and brutality of the militiamen. The militia rounded up many more Jews than could be put to use in the exhumation project. Jewish women were rounded up primarily for misogynist sport. The extra men just huddled in the courtyards of the prisons, trying to avoid additional assault.

Although the militia played a major role in the pogrom of July 1, it was not the only OUN contributor to the anti-Jewish violence on that day. Some part in the pogrom activities was also taken by a military unit in German service commanded by Shukhevych. This was the Nachtigall (“Nightengale”) battalion, one of two battalions of what the nationalists called the Legion of Ukrainian Nationalists, although contemporaries also called it the Ukrainian Bandera legion. The place of Nachtigall in the pogrom has been confused by a campaign launched in 1959-60 by the German Democratic Republic and the Soviet Union aimed at taking down the government of Konrad Adenauer in the Federal Republic of Germany. Because

Adenauer’s Minister for Displaced Persons, Refugees, and Victims of War Theodor Oberländer had been a liaison with Nachtigall back in 1941, the East Germans and Soviets tried to blame the Lviv pogrom entirely on the nationalist unit. Many manufactured testimonies were collected to prove the case, and although the evidence was flimsy, Oberländer was forced to resign from Adenauer’s cabinet. In February 2008 the Security Service of Ukraine (the SBU) released a number of documents that showed how the KGB had concocted the evidence against Oberländer, leaving no doubt about the falsity of their accusations against Nachtigall.

However, there were a few survivor testimonies from the 1940s, thus written before the Oberländer campaign and its falsifications, that did point to the participation of some soldiers from Nachtigall in the violence at the prisons. The German historian Kai Struve, working with German records, established that at all three Lviv prisons where the major pogrom activities took place, detachments from Nachtigall were serving as guards until at least the evening of July 1. He concluded that the soldiers of Nachtigall were one of several perpetrator groups at the prison and “were only responsible for a small part of the acts of violence.”

We know a bit more about Nachtigall’s participation in the killing of Jews from an autobiographical document prepared in 1946 for OUN’s Security Service by a former soldier of Nachtigall who wrote under his nom de guerre Khmara. As historian Ivan Patryliak has noted, “the value of the document lies in that it was not intended for publication, and in it the author writes about the events of his life as they, of course, truly unfolded.” Khmara described Nachtigall’s march from Lviv to Vinnytsia:

At the time of our march we saw with our own eyes the victims of the Jewish-Bolshevik terror; this sight so intensified our hatred towards Jews that in two villages we shot all the Jews we encountered. I recall one fragment. During our march we saw many people wandering before one village. When questioned, they

replied that the Jews are threatening them and they are afraid to sleep in their own houses. As a result of this we shot all the Jews we encountered.

It is not possible to ascertain whom Khmara was referring to in speaking of Jews who threatened the villagers. Perhaps these were Jewish communists who frightened them with the return of the Red Army. But whoever did what, all the Jews whom Nachtigall laid hands on paid with their lives.

OUN may have been even more deeply involved in the Lviv pogrom. Jeffrey Burds identified a certain Ivan Kovalyshyn as a participant in the pogrom. Among the photographs of the pogrom taken by a German photo crew in the vicinity of the Zamarstyniv street prison and held now by the Wiener Library in London, two show a man in a flat cap whose facial features seem to match the photograph in a militia ID card belonging to Kovalyshyn. Both photos show pogromists, among whom stands Kovalyshyn, mocking a naked Jewish woman, who also appears to have been physically assaulted. Burds’ discovery had indicated that some militiamen, without armbands or uniforms and dressed like the city’s ruffians (*batiari*), took a leading role in guiding the pogrom. But Serhii Riabenko has argued against this view, on two grounds. He questioned whether the pogrom photos showed the same person as the militia ID card, remarking that the photo on the ID card was of poor quality. Also, he pointed out that, according to the ID card, Kovalyshyn only joined the militia on July 21, almost three weeks after the pogrom took place. But Struve found that Kovalyshyn had actually joined the investigative unit of the militia, which seems to have been a branch of the OUN Security Service (SB), already on July 3.

In my own view, the photo on the militia ID card and the two photos of the pogrom show the same individual, i.e., Ivan Kovalyshyn; perhaps at some point sophisticated facial recognition technology can help resolve the issue. Also, I continue to think that Kovalyshyn’s presence in the thick of the violence was no accident but rather indicates that there were certain OUN operatives

active in the pogrom. There are only 10 militia ID cards with photographs that have been preserved to the present, and that one of the 10 men pictured was where he was on July 1 seems to indicate the tip of an iceberg. There is also German evidence that plainclothes OUN-B militants were active in the Zolochiv pogrom a few days later.

The Lviv pogrom did great damage to the Jews of the city. Many men suffered wounds, especially head wounds, and many women suffered forms of sexual assault. All who were taken to the prisons suffered trauma, and the Jewish community of Lviv at large was put into a precarious position. It is hard to estimate the number of fatalities from the Lviv pogrom. For one thing, no one was keeping count. Also, many estimates of the number of victims of the pogrom are including in their tally the much more systematic violence that was to follow over the course of the rest of July.

Struve, whose estimates of the number of victims tend to be conservative, argued that at most several hundred Jews perished during the pogrom. A major portion of the murders was committed by members of Einsatzgruppe C, who shot about a hundred Jews at Brygidky prison. The rest were killed as a result of beatings with thick sticks, paving stones, shovels, and other objects by the remaining perpetrators: Nachtigall, German police battalions, the Ukrainian National Militia, the urban crowd, and the Wehrmacht.

The lull in anti-Jewish violence in Lviv after the pogrom was very brief. Already on July 3 thousands of Jewish men were being detained and brought to a sports arena not far from the citadel, where the NKVD had recently had its headquarters. The militia once again made most of the arrests, but they had some help from Einsatzgruppe C. Some of the men were picked up because they were on a list of Jews who had cooperated with the Soviet organs of repression; but many others were just grabbed at random because they were Jewish. In the sports arena the Jews were tortured by the Germans; they were made to go up and down on the ground repeatedly and then to run around the arena while

“By the end of the first week of July 1941, OUN was well aware of what its alliance with the Germans entailed with regard to the Jewish population: Its militia was to help them by rounding up Jews for torment and mass murder.”

they were beaten with thick sticks. Most of them were taken by truck to woods outside the city and shot by the Einsatzgruppe. Altogether, about 2,000 or more were executed in this way. However, for reasons that are not certain, some of the assembled Jews were released.

One of the killers active on July 5, Felix Landau, ran across a group of these released Jews and described in his diary what they looked like after their experience in the arena:

There were hundreds of Jews walking along the street with blood pouring down their faces, holes in their heads, their hands broken and their eyes hanging out of their sockets. They were covered in blood. Some of them were carrying others who had collapsed. We went to the citadel; there we saw things that few people have ever seen. At the entrance of the citadel there were soldiers standing guard. They were holding clubs as thick as a man's wrist and were lashing out and hitting anyone who crossed their path. The Jews were pouring out of the entrance.

There were rows of Jews lying one on top of the other like pigs, whimpering horribly. The Jews kept streaming out of the citadel completely covered in blood.

The role of the militia in this particular incident of torment and mass killing had been to arrest the Jews. Isolated recollections of the militia's presence within the arena or at the gate as the Jews were being released are most likely, as Struve suggests, failures of memory.

Thus by the end of the first week of July, OUN was well aware of what its alliance with the Germans entailed with regard to the Jewish population: Its militia was to help them by rounding up Jews for torment and mass murder. At this time the Germans had not yet determined to kill all Jews, but they were clearly aiming to kill a great many of them. How did the leadership of OUN-B react to the Germans' Jewish policy? We can answer that question with authoritative evidence.

First, we have the evidence from the head of the unrecognized Ukrainian state, one of the most influential figures in OUN, Yaroslav Stetsko. Arrested by the Germans on July 9, 1941, and taken from Lviv to Berlin, Stetsko composed an autobiography in both Ukrainian and German about a week later. In it, he stated his position on the Jewish question in general and the Germans' Jewish policy in particular. He reiterated his long-held view that Moscow, not the Jews, was the primary enemy of Ukraine, but that the Jews played an important role in helping Moscow to keep Ukraine enslaved. He therefore supported “the destruction of the Jews and the expedience of bringing German methods of exterminating Jewry to Ukraine, barring their assimilation and the like.” Thus he approved of the anti-Jewish violence in which his militia participated.

Only a few days later, on July 18-19, OUN-B held a meeting of its propaganda sector in Lviv. Among the topics discussed was national minorities, and in particular the Jewish minority. The first to raise the matter of Jews was Oles Hai-Holovko, a writer from pre-1939 Soviet Ukraine who had moved to Lviv during the first period of Soviet rule.

Stetsko had named Hai-Holovko to head the propaganda section of his government. In the course of delivering a report on Ukrainians in Kuban (then and now in the Russian republic), he noted: “There are a lot of Jews there who have trampled upon Ukrainian culture.”

The discussion continued about Ukrainians in areas outside Ukraine’s territory, including Ukrainian settlements in Siberia. A certain Hupalo said: “It would be good if they [the Germans] gave us the regions inhabited by Ukrainians. The main thing is that there are a lot of Jews everywhere. Especially in the centers. They shouldn’t be allowed to live there. There should be a policy of expulsion. They will flee themselves. Or maybe we should assign them some cities, for example, Berdychiv [in Zhytomyr oblast].”

Stepan Lenkavsky, then head of OUN-B’s propaganda sector, addressed Hai-Holovko: “Characterize the Jews for me.” The latter replied: “The Jews are very arrogant. One couldn’t even use the word *zhyd*. It is necessary to treat them very harshly. They cannot be kept in the center, absolutely. We must put an end to them.”

Then Borys Lewytzkyj, former editor of OUN’s newspaper for the peasantry, *Nove Slovo*, and briefly of *Krakivs’ki visti*, spoke:

In Germany, the Jews have the Aryan paragraph. More interesting for us is the issue of the General Government. There every Jew is marked (naznachen). Every Jew had to be registered in a religious community. They were removed from some cities, for example from Kraków, and resettled to others, for example to Warsaw, with walled off ghettos assigned to them. They have cinemas and theatres, but nothing to eat. The young who are fit for work go to work. A portion has to be destroyed. Although already some have been destroyed ... It is a fact that some have crept into Ukrainian blood; many married with Ukrainian women. In Germany there are various half-Jews, quarter-Jews, but this isn’t possible for us. A German who marries a Jewish woman becomes a Jew.

Hai-Holovko added:

In Ukraine married couples with a Jewish woman are mainly in the cities. Jewish women married Ukrainians for a comfortable life; when Ukrainians went bankrupt, they divorced. Jews with Ukrainian women even lived well. I like the German attitude very much.

When Hupalo noted that “we have a lot of workers who are Jews, who are even respected, including some who converted to Christianity before the revolution,” Lenkavsky conceded: “This has to be reviewed on an individual basis.” Lewytzkyj added: “The Germans use specialists. In Kraków there are five Jews who do not wear armbands because they are positive forces (*dobri syly*). In my opinion, the German approach to the Jewish issue does not work well for us. We have to examine individual cases on their own merits.” Lenkavsky ended the discussion on Jews with the following pronouncement: “With regard to the Jews we will accept all methods that lead to their destruction.”

I have quoted the entire discussion of the propaganda sector on Jews, without interpretation. The conclusions that I see emerging from the discussion are: OUN’s attitude remained anti-Jewish; OUN wanted to exempt some Jewish individuals from persecution; it also wanted to segregate Jews from the rest of the population and to kill many of them.

The Ukrainian National Militia in Lviv was to take part in one more major anti-Jewish action, the so-called Petliura days. This action clustered on the days July 25-26, although some of the violence began a bit earlier and also continued for a few days after. It seems that it was the Germans, and specifically their security police, who named this action after Symon Petliura. Petliura, of course, was the leader of the Ukrainian People’s Republic whose troops had unleashed numerous pogroms with tens of thousands of fatalities in 1919. Kai Struve makes a convincing case that the security police were staging a “self-cleansing action” that Ukrainians

such as Heydrich had called for about a month previously. Struve links the action with a visit to Lviv by Himmler, probably accompanied by the mass killer and SS commander Friedrich Jeckeln, on July 21.

The Petliura days differed from the Lviv pogrom that had occurred at the beginning of the month; there was very little public participation. The Ukrainians who took part were almost exclusively members of the militia.

Let us first see how Jewish survivors remembered the event. Janina Heschles, who was at the time 10 years old, remembered going out with her mother to visit her uncle. The streets seemed to be calm, but this was deceptive. At the entrance to their apartment building a man was lying on the ground, groaning and covered with blood. His shoes were missing. Suddenly “two boys with yellow-blue armbands” came up. They said, addressing first Janina’s mother: “To work, please ma’am, and you, little one, go home.” Janina went home, and her mother was taken to scrub floors in a school. Her mother returned home after an hour. The next day there was also unrest. That evening a neighbor appeared at the door with Janina’s 12-year-old cousin Gustek, who was unconscious. His face was black and blue and swollen, his arm was bloody, his whole body bruised. When he came to, he said that he and others were taken by Ukrainians to the prison on Lontsky street where they were beaten; he managed to escape. One of her uncles had also been seized from his apartment on ul. Staszica (today vul. Ye. Malaniuka), outside the Jewish quarter in the vicinity of the citadel, and did not return home for some days.

Izak Weiser wrote that during the Petliura days he saw a group of men and women marched down ul. Pełczyńska (today vul. Dmytra Vyhovskoho) to the Lontsky street prison. On Saturday, i.e., July 26, 170 Gestapo men systematically beat the Jews at the prison all day long; no trace of these people was found later.

Henryk Baldinger was arrested on July 25 and taken to the Lontsky street prison, where he and other Jewish men, women, and children over 10 were systematically beaten by Germans and Ukrainians; when one group of

beaters was tired, they were replaced by a fresh batch. Ukrainians armed with rifles maintained order. The Germans and Ukrainians confiscated all money, watches, pens, and other useful goods that their victims had on their persons. Physicians, including Baldinger, were released, but others were taken away in trucks. Baldinger said that later he found out from the Ukrainian who arrested him that the majority of the victims were transported to “the Sands” outside Lviv and shot.

Salomon Goldman lost his brother to the violence of the Petliura days. He heard that people were being beaten in the Ukrainian police precincts, some to death, and others were taken out to “the Sands” and shot. Lucyna Halbergsberg lost her husband. He was taken to Lontsky street prison; she tried to get him released but failed. After three days the prisoners were taken to “the Sands” and, she heard, shot.

Jan Badian was arrested on July 25 by “a Ukrainian from the civil militia” and taken, with the other Jewish men from his apartment building, to the nearest precinct station, that of the sixth commissariat on ul. Kurkowa (now vul. Lysenka). In a group of about a thousand Jews, he was marched to the prison on Lontsky street. As the Jews entered the prison courtyard, a broad-shouldered German beat each of them with a cudgel, bent as a saber from extensive use. He saw several other Germans and Ukrainians with such bent cudgels. There were women standing against a wall, but the men inside were in constant motion. The Germans and Ukrainians would drive them with beatings against one wall, then beat them again until they went to the other wall, back and forth. There were now, Badian estimated, about 10,000 people in the courtyard. There was a group of about 60 black-and-blue Jews who were made to hold their arms up and chant: “We Jews are to blame for the war.” Trucks in the meantime were pulling up to the courtyard. Prisoners tried to escape from the beating and get on the trucks, which perhaps might be taking them to work. “It is unbelievable how many men can fit into a truck,” wrote Badian later. The intensity of the torture in the courtyard did not let up.

“There was a group of about 60 black-and-blue Jews who were made to hold their arms up and chant: ‘We Jews are to blame for the war.’”

Zealous Ukrainians held wooden cudgels in one hand and iron bars in another. One of them told Badian that the Jews there were condemned to death. After 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon on July 26, Badian and some others were made to run the gauntlet between some Germans and then released into the street.

Wolf Lichter did not use the term “Petliura days,” but he recounted an incident that he said happened a few weeks after the German occupation began: Going with his mother to a non-Jewish neighborhood, where she thought he would be safer (he was then 11 years old), they saw a disheveled, screaming, pleading woman running and a band, mainly of men but including a few women, chasing after her. The “hoodlums” shouted: Kill the Jewess! Kill the Jewess! They caught up with her and beat and trampled her. She was pleading and begging until no more sounds came from her.

Testimony given at the denaturalization proceedings of an alleged Ukrainian policeman also seems to refer to the so-called Petliura days, although the dating is off and the term was not used. A Jewish survivor, Joseph Romanski, described events that happened after Jews were forced to wear armbands with the Star of David, yet still in July 1941. This fits the chronology. He said that he was arrested by a Ukrainian militiaman and

taken to the nearest precinct station. As he approached the station he saw a truck loaded with people leaving the building. In the lobby of the police station were seven or eight Jewish people. There were not enough of them to be loaded on the truck, and a heavy rain broke out which prevented militiamen from bringing in more Jews to fill a truck. While waiting there, he managed to bribe one of the militiamen with a Swiss watch and make his escape.

When the various accounts are compared, the story that emerges is that the Ukrainian militia, together with members of Einsatz-kommando Lemberg, first arrested a great number of Jews, mainly men but some women. They took the apprehended Jews to the closest militia station, and when enough were assembled, they marched them through the streets or drove them to the Lontsky street prison. There the men were subjected to brutal beatings by both the militiamen and the Germans. As the beatings proceeded, trucks drove up; the Jewish men were crammed into the cargo beds and taken outside the city to be shot. The shooters were the Germans, not the militia.

The involvement of the militia in the violence of the Petliura days is confirmed by a report from OUN’s Main Propaganda Center in Lviv to the OUN Security Service, dated July 28, 1941:

Proto-priest Father [Petro] Tabinsky informs us of the following: Our militia is at present conducting, together with German organs, numerous arrests of Jews. The Jews defend themselves against liquidation in all kinds of ways, primarily with money. According to reports that Proto-priest Father Tabinsky received, among our militiamen are supposedly people who for money or gold release Jews who are supposed to be arrested. We, unfortunately, have received no concrete facts regarding this matter, but nonetheless we provide you with this information to make use of. Glory to Ukraine! ■

This article was originally published on July 5, 2023.

The Bold Jewish Woman Who Created Barbie

How Ruth Handler dreamed up the doll that feminists loved—or loathed

BY SUSAN SHAPIRO

I admit it: I'm a raging feminist anxiously awaiting *Barbie*, the rom-com due out July 21 that director Greta Gerwig co-wrote with Noah Baumbach. Growing up the only girl in a Midwest clan of boys, I had 68 Barbies, plus the Dream House and convertible. Barbie's multiple professions, pad, and wheels inspired my early escape to college and an eclectic, big-city career. It's no wonder, since Ruth Handler, Barbie's inventor, was a Jewish female trailblazer whose doll reflected her own life.

Ruth was the 10th child of Polish immigrants Ida and Jacob Moscovitz, who came to America to escape antisemitism—and his gambling debts—landing in Denver. In 1916, when Ruth was 6 months old, her 40-year-old mother needed surgery. Ruth's big sister Sarah and her husband, Louis Greenwald, took Ruth home—and kept her, basically raising her as their only child, since Ida had nine other kids to look after and less money. All her female relatives had to work, Ruth wrote in her 1994 memoir *Dream Doll*. She worked as a soda jerk at Sarah's drugstore and secretary for her lawyer brother.

Ruth met Elliot Handler, her future husband and business partner, at a B'nai Brith dance when she was 16. But she stayed independent for several years: Ruth's family gave her a 1932 coupe and let her work as a stenographer at Paramount Pictures, living in an LA apartment with female friends (inspiring Barbie's modern lifestyle). At 24, Ruth proposed to Elliot. The creator of myriad miniature bridal gowns wore a borrowed dress to her 1938 wedding. She

had two children: Kenneth and Barbara, whose names later inspired the names of the dolls she created—something her real-life children resented.

In 1945, Elliot Handler and his business partner Howard Mattson combined their names to form Mattel; Ruth became the company's president, and she's the one who came up with Barbie. She rejected baby dolls that indoctrinated girls into motherhood, like Betsy Wetsy, Tiny Tears, and Chatty Cathy, trying to replicate the grown-up paper dolls her daughter preferred, in plastic. But she was told adult dolls were too expensive to produce. Then, shopping in Switzerland in 1956, she spotted the “adult-style” doll called Lilli—a sex toy copying a German cartoon of a blond good-time girl exchanging sex for stockings—according to M.G. Lord's 1994 *Forever Barbie*. Ruth decided to turn the European bachelor-party gift into an American girls' toy. And Barbie was born.

Ruth consulted Ernest Dichter, a Viennese psychologist who researched products, like the convertible, imbued with sexual cachet. Moms viewed Barbie as cheap and vulgar, he found. (No wonder I loved her!) Yet daughters hoped to emulate Barbie's glamour and sexiness. Debuting in a striped bathing suit at the 1959 New York Toy Fair, Barbie came as both blond and brunette, like Ruth.

Male retailers questioned why Ruth gave the plaything breasts, insisting girls wanted infant dolls. “They want to pretend to be *older* girls,” Ruth argued, deciding the sophisticated doll would encourage girls to imagine grown-up possibilities. (Indeed, I'm sure Barbie's myriad professions paved the way for

my subsequent employment as receptionist, waitress, confessional poet, secretary, paperback book critic, and part-time teacher.)

Barbie's first TV commercial aired during the *Mickey Mouse Club* show, broadcast to kids over the summer. Girls were riveted by runway dolls singing, “Someday I'm gonna be exactly like you ... beautiful Barbie,” and pushed their moms to buy the \$3 figurine. Ruth changed the consumer from parent to child, giving girls agency. Some saw advertising to children as sly. Others felt it empowered females to pick their own dolls. That first year, Mattel sold 350,000 Barbies. Mattson sold his shares. Ruth was already Mattel's president when it went public in 1960.

I fear critics who narrowly focused on the doll's measurement and materialism missed the bigger picture. Barbie was my dream mentor, as a budding liberal reared in staid suburban Michigan. In 1962, she was working as a teen model, with her own car and home. Ruth, an inspired businesswoman, gave her shockingly prescient autonomy; it wasn't until 1974 that American women were allowed to have a credit card in their name to get an automobile, loan, or mortgage without a father or husband co-signing.

Barbie was also a singer, nurse, fashion designer, college grad, executive, and astronaut. Still, girls begged for her boyfriend. Male dolls usually tanked. Hasbro's G.I. Joe was called an “action figure,” “frog man,” or “fighting man,” as boys wouldn't touch dolls. “The sales force was forbidden to use the term *doll*—if anyone referred to it as a doll they were fined,” a Hasbro employee told Robin Gerber, author of 2010's *Barbie and Ruth*. Ruth recalled that when her daughter was playing with paper dolls, she needed a male version for dates and proms. In 1961, Ken debuted as Barbie's boyfriend, marketed to young females as Barbie's romantic interest—not to young males as a stand-alone toy. Though Ken was a hit, Ruth ensured he was an accessory. Barbie remained the star.

Mattel sold Barbie wedding gowns, but Ken was her *boyfriend*, never *husband*. Less enchanted with motherhood than work, Ruth refused to let Barbie

have a baby. Instead, Barbie's friend Midge married Allen and a "Happy Family Line" included a pregnant Midge with a magnetic detachable stomach holding a small body inside. After parents complained that she encouraged teenage pregnancy, Midge was discontinued. Then, dumping her mate and kids, Midge reemerged solo.

Barbie's closest baby brush was 1963's "Barbie Babysits" ensemble with phone, bottle, pink bassinet, and infant. Nearer to Barbie and Ruth's glam image were her sunglasses and mini-books *How to Get a Raise*, *How to Travel*, and *How to Lose Weight* (which contained two words: "Don't Eat!"). Enraging leaders of the women's movement, the scale on the 1965 Sleepytime Gal slumber party was set on 110 pounds, though the American female averaged 140. If Barbie had been 5-foot-6, she'd measure 39-18-33, with a size 3 shoe and a body-fat percentage so low she couldn't menstruate, a symptom of anorexia. The percentage of real women that size was under 1 in 100,000.

Meanwhile, Ruth's new ideas led to other flops: 1970's "Growing Up Skipper," who simulated puberty. Flicking her wrist, she'd grow an inch taller. Rotating her arm, breasts popped out from her rubber chest. This led to a storm over the unintentionally perverted doll. With Nabisco, Mattel tried "Oreo Fun Barbie," who wore a jacket decorated with cookies and carried an Oreo-shaped purse. Although Ruth had experienced antisemitism and intentionally added a Black doll in 1968 during U.S. race riots, the dolls—who came with white or black skin—caused complaints that the term "Oreo" was derogatory. They were recalled.

A 3-foot-tall "My Size Barbie," with wedding dresses that fit the doll and her girl owner, tanked. To include disabled kids, Mattel tried "Share a Smile Becky" with a pink wheelchair that wouldn't fit in Barbie's home or car; Becky's long hair tangled in the wheels. (A shorter haired version was tossed, too.) "Cool Shoppin' Barbie" had a clothing store with cash register and MasterCard. Parents feared she encouraged irresponsible spending; the contract with

MasterCard wasn't renewed, making her a Smithsonian collectible.

At her lowest point in the 1970s, Ruth and four other employees were indicted for inflating sales records to influence Mattel stock. Claiming innocence, Ruth took the fall, not Elliot. Leaving Mattel, she paid \$57,000 in reparations, served five years' probation and did 500 hours of charity with Foundation for the People, helping others on probation reenter the job market.

When Ruth discovered a lump in her chest, a mastectomy left her feeling "de-womanized." Unhappy with doctors' suggestions that she stuff her empty bra cup with stockings, and disappointed with a \$350 custom breast by a craftsman of artificial body parts, Ruth launched a new company in 1976. Nearly Me produced comfortable prosthetic mammaries in 30 sizes, 30A to 42DD, for \$98 to \$130. It was Ruth's second phenomenon. In her 60s, she led a sales team of mostly middle-aged cancer survivors, fitting former first lady Betty Ford after her surgery. Although discussing the disease was taboo, Ruth spoke out for early detection, doing a "strip act," removing her blouse for a *People* photographer, demonstrating similarities between the real and fake boob. On *The Dick Cavett Show*, she asked Cavett to feel her up on national TV. He obliged. "It seems my life has been going from breast to breast," she joked.

In 1993, Barbie-aholics craved a "cooler" Ken. "Earring Magic Ken" had blond highlights, lavender vest, earring, and necklace with a circular charm. Gay men made him the best-selling boy doll in Mattel's history. Dan Savage's syndicated sex column insisted Ken's necklace was a cock ring, shocking family-friendly Mattel, which nixed Earring Magic Ken. Privately, Ruth was more liberal. According to Gerber's book, she supported her son Ken when he contracted AIDS from a relationship with a younger man in Ecuador. According to Ruth's memoir, her son remained happily married to Suzie, his childhood sweetheart, for 30 years, until his death; newspapers reported that 50-year-old Ken died in 1994 of a brain tumor.

While mourning, Handler met Jill

Barad, Mattel's new president, at a Jewish charity event. Their "We Girls Can Do Anything" campaign pushed Barbie's achievements in 200-plus careers. After 20 years out, Ruth was back at Mattel and United Jewish Appeal's first ever "Woman of Distinction."

Sexual politics in the 1990s were complicated. Teen Talk Barbie's voice box was programmed to say, "I love shopping," "OK, meet me at the mall," "Will we ever have enough clothes?" "Math class is tough," and "Let's plan our dream wedding." Women's groups claimed it undermined girls. Barbie's Liberation Organization, performance artists combating gender stereotypes by "culture jamming," performed "surgery" on 300 Teen Talk Barbies and G.I. Joes in New York and California. They switched Barbie's voice box with G.I. Joe's, so the bombshell proclaimed, "Eat lead, Cobra!" "Attack!" and "Vengeance is mine!" while the macho warrior enthused, "Let's plan our dream wedding." Reverse shoplifting, they put the trans-voiced dolls back on the shelves with the stickers "Call your local TV news," to get press. The company withdrew the offensive phrases, offering customers a doll exchange.

A 1994 *Simpsons* episode parodied the hacking: Lisa bought a new talking Malibu Stacy who said, "Don't ask me, I'm just a girl," and "Thinking too much gives you wrinkles." Lisa found the doll's creator, Stacy Lovell (voiced by Kathleen Turner), who—like Handler—had been laid off from the doll company she founded. A new doll Lisa Lionheart espoused Gertrude Stein but mall girls preferred the talking Malibu Stacy.

Barad "built the Barbie doll into a \$1.8 billion global powerhouse," said *The Wall Street Journal*, but overexpanded. In 2000, Mattel's stock collapsed. At 48, Barad slipped out with a \$50 million golden parachute. Handler died in 2002 from colon cancer, leaving behind her husband of six decades. *The New York Times* blared, "Ruth Handler, Whose Barbie Gave Dolls Curves, Dies at 85," lauding Handler's invention as an icon of U.S. popular culture.

In 2016, Mattel launched new Barbies with four body types, seven skin tones, 22 eye colors, and 24 hairstyles, making

the dolls less skinny and white with tall, petite, and curvy sizes, and body types for Ken: slim and broad. Their “Sheroes” line recreated Diane von Furstenberg, Emmy Rossum, Iris Apfel, and Olympians Aly Raisman and Anat Leilor as the first explicitly Jewish Barbies.

Though the brand was still doing \$1 billion annual sales across 150 countries and 92% of American girls owned a Barbie, thanks to her affordable \$3 to \$10 price, the doll’s figure remained controversial. Mattel’s general manager received death threats over Barbie’s body. In Andrea Nevins’ 2018 documentary

Tiny Shoulders: Rethinking Barbie, Gloria Steinem and Roxane Gay insisted Barbie was disproportional, promoting skinniness. On *Time* magazine’s cover, a curvy Barbie in a black dress sporting “meat on her thighs, a protruding stomach and behind” was captioned: “Now can we stop talking about my body?” Feminists applauded. One imagines Handler would, too.

Yet videos showing little girls playing unattended with the heavier doll at Mattel showed a 6-year old singing, “Hello, I’m a fat person, fat, fat, fat” as playmates laughed. A shy girl spelled it

“F-A-T.” New Mattel President Richard Dickson told *Time*, “Ultimately, haters are gonna hate.”

While sales of Barbie were down last year, the buzzy *Barbie* movie proves that Ruth Handler’s creation has endured, remaining our hottest little lightning rod. I’m glad I kept all my dolls and even bought an independent Israeli designer’s Tefillin Barbie—complete with tallit, siddur, and Ruth’s radical, revolutionary spirit to change the world. ■

This article was originally published on July 7, 2023.

SCIENCE

Will Fast, Cheap, and Plentiful Energy Be a Legacy of Los Alamos?

The atomic bomb J. Robert Oppenheimer brought to life marked the beginning of an era we are only now fully coming into

BY KHALED TALAAT

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II. While there can be no doubt that it was the cause of immeasurable and far-reaching destruction and loss, that it was a catalyst for pivotal military and civilian technological advancement is equally undeniable. The energy that is produced in fission, fusion, or even the combustion of fossil fuel comes from mass defects: a very small part of the invariant mass of the reactants is lost and is converted into kinetic energy. Among those three energy sources, the fraction of mass converted to kinetic energy during a reaction is highest in fusion reactions, then fission reactions, and then fossil fuel reactions

which aren’t even comparable to the other two.

Fusion energy isn’t yet viable because it necessitates a large supply of energy for plasma heating and confinement, which is difficult to effectively contain and maintain with the available materials and confinement technology. Adequate heating and confinement conditions for self-sustained fusion have only been achieved in nuclear weapons explosions.

Nuclear fission is the highest energy density source practically available today to energy applications. Fission was discovered in Nazi Germany by Otto Hahn and Lise Meitner in 1938. It occurs when an unstable nucleus like that of uranium-235 disintegrates and splits into lighter elements when hit by a free

neutron. In fission reactions, energy and free neutrons are released. The number of free neutrons released depends, in part, on the energy of the incoming neutron. This is an important fact that makes fast “breeder” reactors possible, as explained later.

Much of our current knowledge in nuclear energy traces back to the Manhattan Project and the two decades that followed. The Manhattan Project developed the first nuclear weapons as well as the fundamental knowledge used later in peaceful nuclear energy.

Many of the most important contributions to the Manhattan Project were made by scientists of Jewish background, some of whom had fled the Holocaust in Europe and some were born in the United States. Rudolf Peierls made key contributions to neutron transport theory; John von Neumann and Stanislaw Ulam developed the Monte Carlo method and made fundamental contributions to numerical computation on ENIAC and theoretical design of nuclear weapons; Emilio Segre discovered that spontaneous fission in plutonium was caused by the plutonium-240 isotope; Edward Teller made significant contributions to the implosion design and hydrogen bomb development later on, and J. Robert Oppenheimer was the director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Many other scientists of Jewish background made significant contributions to the Manhattan Project, including Leo Szilard, Eugene Wigner,

David Bohm, and Richard Feynman, but exploring nuclear history in detail is beyond the scope of this discussion.

Neutrons are normally present inside atomic nuclei just like protons, but there are various ways they can exit the nucleus and then freely move and interact. Most importantly, neutrons may get captured and transmute the nucleus that captured them into another isotope (often unstable), they may cause certain nuclides to fission; they may collide, change direction and lose energy. The probability of any interaction strongly depends on the material and on the speed/energy and, in some materials, the direction of the incoming neutron.

The free neutrons from fission can trigger other reactions. At the level of one neutron or a few neutrons, the interactions are probabilistic. But when a very large number of neutrons are available, the results are deterministic and the neutron population can be characterized mathematically. For the chain reaction to continue, at least one neutron produced from each fission should induce another fission reaction. Otherwise, the neutron population would decrease and the chain reaction would come to an end in the absence of another source.

Most materials, or more properly nuclides, have stable nuclei and aren't fissionable. Some materials are fissionable and may fission if struck by an energetic enough neutron (e.g., uranium-238 and thorium-232). Other materials are "fissile" and may fission when struck by a neutron of any energy such as uranium-233, uranium-235, and plutonium-239. It is fissile materials that can sustain the chain reaction and are practically the fuel. Materials can also be "fertile" like thorium-232 and uranium-238, which can transmute to other isotopes that eventually decay to a fissile material like uranium-233 or plutonium-239. It is fertile materials that can create fuel when they capture a neutron.

The vast majority of uranium present in nature is not fissile. Uranium-235 (fissile) represents only 0.72% of the uranium in nature, while uranium-238 (non-fissile) represents 99.27%. This is what usually necessitates the enrichment of uranium in the uranium-235 isotope for

use in nuclear reactors and other nuclear applications. On the other hand, plutonium is found in nature in trace quantities and is produced in nuclear reactors by the conversion of uranium-238.

Different nuclear reactor designs use different levels of uranium enrichment. As an example, the Canadian CANDU heavy water reactors don't necessitate the enrichment of uranium because they use the heavier isotope of hydrogen (deuterium) which doesn't absorb neutrons as much as the lighter and more common isotope of hydrogen (protium). This reduced absorption allows the chain reaction to continue in the presence of more quantities of uranium-238 than in light water reactors.

The fuel of light water reactors is enriched approximately to 3% to 5% uranium-235. Enrichment, nowadays done by spinning uranium hexafluoride gas in centrifuges to separate the heavier and lighter isotopes, is an energy-expensive process that is subject to international regulations to prevent enrichment to weapons grade. Most of the uranium in the reactor is not used: Some is converted to plutonium, and most is sent to spent fuel storage. Currently, only about 5% of the uranium in the reactor is consumed and about 1.15% of the fuel in light water reactors becomes plutonium, which can be used as a fuel.

A breeder is a reactor that produces at least as much fissile fuel (e.g., plutonium-239 or uranium-233) as the fissile fuel it burns in the chain reaction. But before you rush to conclusions, this is not exactly infinite fuel—as a fertile U-238 or Th-232 blanket is consumed and as the reactivity decreases as neutron-absorbing parasitic poisons differentially build up in the system, which limits the achievable burn-up.

The most important physical parameter to the neutron supply is the number of the neutrons emitted per absorption in the fuel, which is controlled by the neutron energy spectrum. Baby neutrons are born out of fission energetic and fast. They slow down as they age due to scattering collisions. When neutrons collide with heavier nuclei like that of lead, they don't slow down as much as when they collide with lighter nuclei like that of hydrogen. However,



Summer in the City

Pinehurst

The resort town of Pinehurst, North Carolina was established in the late 19th century by soda-fountain baron James Walker Tufts, and was originally intended as a beneficent haven for Yankee consumptives. Tufts quickly yielded to the realities of contagion, however, and converted it to a Southern playground for wealthy sportsmen. The downtown is a collection of picturesque shops centered around a self-conscious imitation of a New England village green: Footpaths in front of expensively quaint cottages lead to a manicured central lawn, graced by the towering white spire of an inviting interdenominational red brick church.

Locals in this eccentric cluster of small towns warmly invite military families to join their rhythm of life as best we can. But, as we are conscious that we are perennial outsiders, the military-friendliness of the place only serves to highlight the differences on either side of the civil-military chasm. Intermixed with the swaggy golf bros and leisured retirees are the conspicuously unkempt, studiously disheveled Special Forces soldiers, and the 82nd Airborne Division paratroopers, whose military haircuts and summer "out of uniform" wardrobe of Under Armour and Oakley still constitute a de facto uniform.

—Maggie Phillips

fast neutrons, for most part, are less likely to interact with a nuclei per unit distance traveled than slower neutrons. Related

So what exactly is the advantage of fast neutrons? It's the fact that in the fast spectrum, the neutron yield per absorption in the fuel is higher which contributes additional neutrons that allow for breeding fuel. The absolute theoretical minimum for breeding is two neutrons per absorption in the fuel—one to cause fission in order to sustain the chain reaction and the other to convert fertile material to fissile. Nevertheless, not every fast spectrum reactor is a breeder, as the losses in structural materials and losses due to leakage would adversely affect the neutron economy. The way you spend your neutrons matters.

Materials and geometry are of extreme importance in nuclear reactor design. Different materials have different neutronic and thermophysical properties which are dependent on many parameters from neutron energy spectrum to temperature. By changing the materials in the reactor, their distribution, and their shape, engineers can control the energy spectrum of the neutrons, the energy deposition and heat distribution, reactor kinetics and many other parameters.

Reactor design is an inherently iterative process that necessitates large computational resources. The engineers' job is to find sweet spots for their design targets and priorities whether it's higher core outlet temperature and better thermodynamic efficiency, or increased safety, or increased proliferation resistance, or increased conversion and fissile material production.

Money also plays a key role in the design choices. Thorough experiments are often very expensive. Designs that necessitate the use of undercharacterized materials are often not economically viable in the short term, which necessitates government investment in research to create information and knowledge that enables the safe use of those materials, allowing for technology to move forward.

Fast spectrum reactors use heavier coolants that don't slow down neutrons

“The problem of nuclear waste was solved many decades ago at the engineering level.”

such as sodium, 23 times as heavy as hydrogen, or even lead, 207 times as heavy as hydrogen. They are practically not moderated, unlike light water reactors. As a result, more neutrons are released per absorption in the fuel which can be used to increase plutonium production or transmute long-lived minor actinides to other actinides with shorter half-life.

There are only a handful of fast spectrum reactors active today and most of them are experimental reactors. Russia has the BN-600 and BN-800 sodium-cooled fast breeder reactors which generate 560 MWe and 880 MWe, respectively. They are the only two nonexperimental fast breeder reactors active today that deliver significant energy to a grid. There are a few other active experimental reactors in operation in Russia, China, and India that produce low power and are mainly used for material compatibility testing. There are other breeder reactors under construction such as the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor in India and the CFR-600 in China which should generate 500 MWe and 600 MWe, respectively.

In the past, France had possessed the Superphénix reactor, which produced an impressive 1,242 MW of electric power. The facility was decommissioned in 1997 following lengthy political opposition by “green party” groups which led the then-prime minister, Lionel Jospin, to announce the closure of the plant citing “excessive costs,” which can't be true given that the major costs

are incurred on construction of the reactor, not operation. The facility had faced an RPG rocket attack by a member of the Swiss Green Party in 1982 before it was commissioned in 1986.

The problem of nuclear waste was solved many decades ago at the engineering level. At the social and political level, it remains the biggest challenge to nuclear energy, although there are legitimate concerns on maintaining long-lived waste that could remain active for thousands of years. Such waste, however, can be transmuted to shorter lived forms in breeder reactors. That's one of the main advantages of having some neutrons to spare from fission reactions in the higher energy spectrum.

Although the United States led the conceptualization and the early experimentation in fast spectrum reactors, the United States doesn't currently possess active fast spectrum reactors, unless we count NASA's Kilopower space reactor which is designed for low energy application. In the past, the United States possessed experimental facilities such as the Fast Flux Test Facility at Hanford, Washington, and SEFOR in Arkansas that used sodium coolant. Perhaps the lack of interest stems from the fact that the United States uses a once-through nuclear fuel cycle. The spent fuel is sent to storage and isn't processed. Some other countries like Japan and India reprocess the fuel to extract the plutonium for use in mixed oxide (MOX) fuel assemblies that use both plutonium and uranium; such a cycle is known as the closed fuel cycle—which, while more efficient, often raises nuclear weapons proliferation concerns.

Russia had also long used lead-bismuth eutectic cooled fast reactors for submarine propulsion. The use of lead-bismuth eutectic rather than lead is because it has a much lower melting point than lead (123°C vs. 327°C) which makes it easier to use as a coolant. Additionally, compared to light water reactors, lead cooled reactors can achieve higher power densities (100 kW/L vs. 200 kW/L) although less than sodium cooled reactors which can operate at core power densities greater than 300

kW/L, but aren't self-shielded against gammas which negates this advantage in a space-limited environment.

Submarine reactors in general tend to use highly enriched uranium to increase burn-up and allow for longer operation without refueling as well as reduce the size of the core. The reduction of the core size increases the power density for the same amount of power produced and inherently necessitates additional safety features compared to reactors that operate with low enriched uranium.

The negative void reactivity feedback in lead cooled reactors, the high boiling point of lead and lead-bismuth (1700°C), and the poor chemical reactivity of lead with air and water are all safety aspects that make lead even more attractive over sodium. The main problem with lead and lead-bismuth, however, is corrosion of commonly used structural steels which reduces the reactor life and makes it economically unattractive to the commercial energy sector. Lead selectively leeches elements such as nickel out of stainless steel. This problem is even worse in lead-bismuth and intensifies at higher temperatures, practically restricting the power production as increasing the coolant velocity increases erosion.

In the United States, there appears to be renewed interest in developing fast spectrum reactor technology. In 2018 and 2019, Congress allocated a total of \$100 million to the Department of Energy to develop conceptual design and conduct research to support the development of an advanced test reactor known as the Versatile Test Reactor (VTR) based on requests from companies working on advanced reactor designs. If built, the VTR would likely be sodium-cooled and would provide a platform that allows for multiple cartridges for testing material compatibility for different reactor types such as molten salt reactors, gas cooled reactors, lead cooled reactors, and sodium cooled reactors, which is an important step toward restoring U.S. leadership in advanced reactor technology.

Compared to lead, sodium has the advantage of a lower melting point, good material compatibility that allows for

high power densities greater than 300 kW/L, and being easier to work with and pump as it's much lighter than lead. Sodium cooled reactors, however, face challenges with positive void reactivity feedbacks. A positive void feedback means that in the very unlikely case of a severe accident where sodium boils, the voids that form in sodium will increase the multiplication of the neutrons in the reactor, which would increase the power. Reactors are generally designed to avoid single point failure and don't rely on just one layer of safety. The positive void reactivity in sodium, although undesired, may be compensated by strongly negative fuel temperature reactivity feedback.

Lead has some major advantages over sodium including potential for use as a spallation target in accelerator driven systems. However, lead-induced corrosion makes it economically unattractive to the commercial energy sector. Commercial reactors are generally designed to operate for about 40 years. There is an ongoing search for structural materials that are resistant to corrosion in flowing lead environment. The University of New Mexico's Lobo Loop, run by former Los Alamos National Laboratory scientist, professor Osman Anderoglu, is the only such facility in operation in the United States.

There are legitimate concerns regarding fast breeder reactors in general and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Fast breeder reactors produce a lot of plutonium. In the absence of proper and enforceable safeguards, fissile material may be diverted to weapons use rather than reactor use leading to proliferation of nuclear weapons.

When discussing proliferation one should note there are different grades of plutonium. Safeguards can ensure that plutonium isn't withdrawn from the reactor in the weapons grade form. Although any plutonium grade is considered a proliferation threat, not all plutonium is desired in nuclear weapons. Fuel grade plutonium has 7% to 19% Pu-240, while reactor grade plutonium has even more. An atom of plutonium-240 is 47,000 times more likely to spontaneously fission at any given



Summer in the City

New York

One of the greatest things about New York is its supreme walkability. You can stroll in the city for hours and see something different and new on every street, because you're forced to pay mild attention in a way you don't when you're somewhere like Los Angeles, complaining about the traffic from behind the wheel of a Mazda. It's free entertainment and a form of meditation in a city where it costs money to breathe.

This walkability, and its benefits, is undercut by the conditions of a New York summer, because during the day there are Instagrammers clogging every street in Soho with fit checks and everything is so humid and pavement-heated that a walk longer than 10 minutes makes you look like you just emerged from a sauna in Brazil. This is why all the best city summer activities involve the great indoors—like getting Nepalese food in Queens, or shopping for useless luxe objects in the West Village.

But by dusk the city cools down, the streets get a little emptier, the pollution turns pink behind the buildings, and even the warmth of the air feels nice against your skin. After a late dinner, you can walk home past crowds waiting in lines for bars hotter than the world outside, excited for nighttime in a city that pulses with heat.

—Ani Wilcenski

second than an atom of plutonium-239. Although reactors produce more plutonium-239 than plutonium-240, the ratio of the mass of plutonium-240 to plutonium-239 increases with time in reactors, in much of the energy spectrum, due to the conversion of some of the plutonium-239 to plutonium-240. By keeping plutonium in the reactor for longer, it accumulates more plutonium-240 and becomes less desirable—though not useless—for weapons applications. A country possessing other means to obtain plutonium wouldn't be likely to seek fuel grade or reactor grade plutonium from a civilian reactor for weapons use, especially in the absence of online refueling in the reactor design.

On the other hand, fast breeder reactors would raise serious concerns on proliferation of nuclear weapons in countries that have no other means of obtaining plutonium—particularly in countries that don't already have nuclear weapons capability. There are, however, cheaper and easier options for countries that seek nuclear weapons materials than fast breeder reactors. Iran for instance had pursued heavy water reactors such as the IR-40 in Arak that can operate on natural uranium, although it requires the enrichment of water in deuterium. North Korea had used a graphite-moderated reactor at Yongbyon to produce plutonium for its nuclear weapons and is also fueled by natural uranium.

Finally, in a discussion about breeder reactors, one should honorably mention thorium cycle based reactors although they are often designed as slow (thermal) neutron spectrum breeders enabled by the fact that uranium-233 emits more neutrons per absorption than uranium-235 and plutonium-239 in the thermal spectrum. A common misconception is that they are “fueled by thorium”; sorry to disappoint, but thorium, no matter how cool it sounds, isn't technically a fuel. It's a fertile material that can be converted to uranium-233 which is fissile and can be used as a reactor fuel.

The primary advantage of the thorium cycle is the relative abundance of thorium compared to uranium (3x). In some countries like India with large supplies of thorium and low supplies of uranium, thorium-cycle offers the prospect of energy security and independence. Thorium cycle reactors produce less nuclear waste and very little plutonium-239 given how far thorium-232 is from plutonium-239. Nevertheless, it produces fissile uranium-233, which could be used in weapons although less attractive than plutonium which releases more neutrons per fission in the fast spectrum.

Nuclear reactors in general are built with inherent safety features based on intrinsic physics and not only engineering. The materials in the reactor are chosen such that the reactivity decreases when temperature increases. As

a result, the chain reaction inherently would come to an end in the event of an accident. In all reactor accidents that ever happened in history, the number of documented direct deaths is about 280 in total – which is far less than the deaths in hydroelectric power dam failures. Cancer-related deaths attributed to reactor accidents, like Chernobyl, which was the product of a flawed engineering design that would never have been approved in the West, are not fully understood, as they occurred long after the accident. It has been demonstrated from the Chernobyl data that exposure to significant doses of radiation can increase risks for certain cancers over the long term up to 20 years.

Despite all their advantages, the main challenge for new reactor technology whether fast breeder reactors or thermal breeder reactors is that they have to compete with mature technology that has been demonstrated and experimented with for decades. This necessitates expensive investments and very thorough research that can take decades until the technology matures. New government leaders may not share the same vision of their predecessors, as in the case of France's Superphénix reactor. And yet, it is still possible to imagine that cheap and plentiful energy may be the most lasting legacy of the Manhattan Project of World War II. ■

This article was originally published on August 6, 2020.

STONE COLD TRUTH

Tablet

elite against everyone else.... **College is pointless...** No one's having babies
's a problem... The vaccine-hesitant are not who you think... Abandoning
political affiliation is a sign of sanity... The divide today isn't between left
right. It's the elite against everyone else.... **College is pointless...** No one's
having babies, and it's a problem... The vaccine-hesitant are not who you th
bandoning your political affiliation is a sign of sanity... The divide today i
between left and right. It's the elite against everyone else.... **College is poi
ee... No one's having babies, and it's a problem... The vaccine hesitant ar**

The Beet Goes On

How a humble root became a staple in Jewish cooking

BY ORGE CASTELLANO

Fifteen centuries ago, in the heart of Babylonia (modern-day Iraq), a riveting written exchange took place between Jewish Talmudists about the rules over carrying a particular raw vegetable during Shabbat.

“One may not establish an *eruv* with raw beets,” declared Rav Hamnuna, citing Rav H̄isda. “Raw beet kills a healthy person.”

In rebuttal, Rav H̄isda asserted, “A cooked dish of beets is beneficial for the heart, good for the eyes, and all the more beneficial for the intestines.”

As a final arbiter in the dispute, Abaye stipulated that this applies specifically when “the dish sits on the stove and makes a *tukh tukh* sound,” signifying thorough cooking.

This vehement halachic debate over the ramifications of a seemingly inconspicuous vegetable seems particularly fascinating, even excessive, given that during this period, most prominent ethnic groups exhibited little passion for its consumption in comparison to the Jewish community.

Beets (*Beta vulgaris*) originated first from the sea beet that grew wild alongside the shorelines of the Mediterranean. Archeological remnants provide evidence of the plant from primeval epochs. Remnants have been excavated from the third dynasty Saqqara pyramid at Thebes, Egypt, dating back to the 2600s BCE. Ancient Greeks cultivated beets but consumed only the leaves in salads or wrapped fish, while the roots served as a medicinal plant and sometimes to worship Apollo in his temple at Delphi by offering them on a silver platter.

In *Evolution of Root Morphology in Table Beet: Historical and Iconographic*,

authors Irwin L. Goldman and Jules Janick write: “Ancient Greek, Roman, and Egyptian civilizations described the use of vegetable beet in their cuisines and medicinal remedies, but most of these recipes focused on beet leaves. These sources indicate that beet was primarily a leaf crop and not widely consumed as a root vegetable.”

Beetroots are mentioned in the Septuagint, the Greek rendition of the initial five books of the Hebrew Bible and various prophetic texts. The Septuagint was crafted in Ptolemaic Egypt during the third century BCE to cater to the Greek-speaking Jews residing in the region. However, the reference to beetroot within the Septuagint is thought to be a linguistic mistranslation of a “trapped gazelle” or possibly an antelope as a “half-boiled beet.”

“The book of Isaiah doesn’t ever mention beets. But the Greeks translated a trapped gazelle as a half-boiled beet, which I think is fascinating,” said Goldman, professor of horticulture at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. “These findings tell you something about the food of ancient Greece; a half-boiled beet was food that people ate, and it was kind of like a limp, a thing has run out of energy. So regardless of the circumstances surrounding the mistranslation, the term’s appearance presents robust evidence supporting the consumption of beet as a culinary vegetable during this era.”

Interestingly, the metaphor of a “boiled beet” found wider application beyond biblical translations. In fact, it was used as an expressive simile in ancient literature. For example, Catallus, an esteemed Latin poet from the first century, evocatively utilized this “boiled beet” metaphor to describe male sexual impotence.

In tracing the roots of the beet’s culinary history, an intriguing correlation emerges between the earliest terminologies used to describe the vegetable and the cooking method of boiling. Boiling may have been the primary method for cooking the root during this period of antiquity. These connections imply that beets were likely a primary component in soups, stews, or perhaps a standalone boiled delicacy. This theory is reinforced by the etymology of the Hebrew word for beet: *selek*, which translates as “boil down.” The Arabic language further bolsters this hypothesis, as its term for a thoroughly boiled, tender vegetable is *silqa*, a derivative of the Hebrew word.

A testament to the enduring culinary significance of beets lies nestled in the text of the Talmud, a central text in rabbinical Judaism, from the seventh century CE. Rabbinical scholars’ frequent references to boiling indicate its importance as a cooking technique and kashrut adherence. Even residual water from the vegetable symbolizes its cleanliness and healing properties. One sage, Shmuel, recommended washing extensively in beet water, in which beets have been boiled, as a remedy for skin sores.

In Tractate Shabbat, an intriguing recipe surfaces as a response to the thought-provoking question, “With what does one delight in the day of Shabbat?” The answer—a simple yet flavorful concoction of a dish of beets, a large fish, and heads of garlic—demonstrates this humble root vegetable’s continuous use and appreciation and serves

HISTORY

Tablet explores the past at tabletmag.com/sections/history

HOLIDAYS

Everything you need to know at tabletmag.com/sections/holidays

as evidence of the culinary value in Jewish cuisine.

What is it about beets that makes it a Jewish staple that still endures today?

The crop migrated from Southern Europe to North Africa and Northern Europe. It wasn't until the 1500s, however, that humans began selecting a swollen root that could be stored through the winter and used as livestock feed. This selective process led to the development of the pigmented, conical table beet familiar to us today—where we primarily consume the root, rather than the leaves.

Since there's no substantial evidence the modern spherical beet was established until the early 16th century, many of the staple Jewish beet dishes we know today were developed or embraced by their respective communities after that. But for the past 500 years, beets' versatility has made them a preferred choice for the cuisines of many Jewish ethnic groups. Ashkenazim, Mizrahim, and Sephardim have equally incorporated the vegetable into their dishes for many centuries, whether in *kubbeh selek* (an Iraqi Jewish filled-dumpling soup), or as a halachic substitute for the shank-bone for vegetarian Jews at Passover. Sephardim use the root in their Rosh Hashanah Seders, as the word *selek* is similar to *siluk*, the Hebrew word for "remove." Hence, beets symbolize the removal of the previous year's obstacles and enemies.

And then there is borscht, a ubiquitous soup among Ashkenazi Jews. Originating in Ukraine between the fifth and ninth centuries CE, borscht was initially made from cow parsnip, a common wild plant native to Central Asia and Eastern Europe. A simple staple of peasant fare, the soup spread widely across Eastern Europe by the 15th century. However, it was not until the 16th century that beets found their way into the iconic dish. The recent availability of domesticated, succulent, swollen-rooted table beets catalyzed this culinary shift, and subsequently, borscht began to exude a vibrant, reddish hue.

"When you look at older recipes from the 18th century in Europe or Britain, cooks such as Elizabeth Raffald are using lots of dyeing beetroot to get a red color because the vegetable doesn't add

"Beets symbolize the removal of the previous year's obstacles and enemies."

flavor or overpower dishes like green spinach did when used for coloring," said Neil Buttery, food historian and author of *Before Mrs Beeton: Elizabeth Raffald, England's Most Influential Housekeeper*.

This newfound accessibility of beets would dramatically transform the soup's identity for generations to come. By the 17th or early 18th century, borscht had firmly established itself as a regular element in the dietary regimen of ethnic Ukrainians. It had not only become a universally savored dish but also a significant part of religious customs. Christian communities co-opted the soup for specific fasting days, consuming red borscht during Christmas and white borscht throughout Lent. Similarly, the Jewish community adopted red borscht as a traditional dish for Passover.

The prevalence of the beetroot lent borscht an image of affordability, a sentiment encapsulated by Eastern European Jews in the Yiddish idiom "*bilik vi borsht*," meaning "cheap like borscht." Jewish immigrants in America also associated the soup with their heritage. Attributed to Abel Green, longtime editor of *Variety*, the term "borscht belt" became the colloquial name for the Catskill Mountains as a Jewish summer destination, originally coined as a term of derision but later as an affectionate nickname.

Beyond its culinary prowess, the beet

has also been immortalized in music and popular culture. Celebrated in Yiddish as *burikes*, the vibrant vegetable has captivated Jewish folk singers, cantors, and musicians alike. Solomon Golub's "*Burikes af Peysekh*" (Beets for Pesach) or Hasidic Cantor Netanel Shprinzen's *Burikes* are just two great examples of the *mélange* of artists that have paid homage to the beet in their creations. Mickey Katz and His Orchestra's *Borscht Riders in the Sky* from 1951 and, most recently, The Lori Cahan-Simon Ensemble's *Burikes-Beets* join a long list of beet-inspired compositions.

Throughout the rich tapestry of Jewish history, the humble beet has carved a place of great significance. From its wild origins along the Mediterranean coastlines to the domesticated table beet of today, the beet's versatility has etched it firmly into the culinary fabric of Jewish cultures worldwide—be it the Ashkenazim, the Mizrahim, or the Sephardim. Over the centuries, the root vegetable has found its way into revered holiday dishes, as symbolically potent as it is delicious. From gastronomy to the arts, the beet's influence, much like a gripping Talmudic debate, resonates in a multitude of forms, as vibrant and rich as its own crimson hue. Thus, the humble beet stands as a symbol, an enduring testament to the adaptability and resourcefulness of Jewish culture in its continuing journey of incorporating and adapting our culinary traditions wherever we go. ■

This article was originally published on July 5, 2023.

FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA

 twitter.com/tabletmag

 [instagram.com/tabletmag](https://www.instagram.com/tabletmag)

 [facebook.com/tabletmag](https://www.facebook.com/tabletmag)

Beet and Mascarpone Hummus

BY ORGE CASTELLANO

INGREDIENTS

- 3 small red beets (about 14 ounces), scrubbed**
- 1 15-ounce can chickpeas drained; leave a tablespoon for dressing**
- ½ cup and 2 tablespoons mascarpone cheese**
- ½ cup tahini**
- ½ teaspoon cumin**
- ½ teaspoon za'atar**
- ½ teaspoon Spanish sweet smoked paprika**
- 3 tablespoons fresh lemon juice**
- 2 teaspoons salt; add more if needed**
- ⅓ cup olive oil, plus more for drizzling**
- 2 garlic cloves, finely grated or smashed**
- freshly ground black pepper**
- Crushed cayenne pepper flakes or Aleppo pepper and za'atar; grilled flatbreads or pita bread (for serving)**

PREPARATION

Step 1

Preheat oven to 425. Wrap beets in foil and place on a baking sheet. Roast for an hour until they easily pierce through to the center. Leave the beets to rest until they are cool enough for handling.

Step 2

Meanwhile, in a food processor, blend the chickpeas, tahini, lemon juice, mascarpone cheese, garlic, salt, pepper, za'atar, smoked paprika, and cumin. Continue blending until the mixture is creamy and smooth.

Step 3

Once the beets have cooled down, gently use a paper towel or press with your fingertips to remove the beet skin. Cut the root and chop into small chunks. Incorporate these pieces into the food processor and continue the processing until the entire mixture attains a uniformly smooth consistency, typically about 2 minutes. If desired, add more salt and ground pepper for further seasoning.

Step 4

Transfer hummus to a shallow bowl. Place the remaining chickpeas, then sprinkle cayenne pepper flakes or Aleppo pepper and za'atar on top, and finish with a drizzle of olive oil.

Hundreds of recipes at
tabletmag.com/recipes

