

**BRINGING  
EAST EUROPEAN JEWISH HISTORY  
INTO THE  
AMERICAN JEWISH CLASSROOM**

**Presentations to the Advisory Board  
of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture**

**October 25, 2006**

**Presentation**

Dr. Samuel Kassow, Charles H. Northam Professor of History,  
Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut

**Commentators**

Dr. Arnold Eisen, Chancellor-Elect,  
Jewish Theological Seminary

Dr. Steven J. Zipperstein, Director,  
Taube Center for Jewish Studies,  
Stanford University

**Moderator**

Dr. James Donahue, President and Professor of Ethics,  
Graduate Theological Union, Berkeley



TAUBE  
FOUNDATION  
FOR JEWISH LIFE  
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# “BRINGING EAST EUROPEAN JEWISH HISTORY INTO THE AMERICAN JEWISH CLASSROOM”

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**President and Professor of Ethics  
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Sam Kassow is going to speak to us on the topic, “Bringing East European Jewish History into the American Jewish Classroom.” Arnie Eisen and Steve Zipperstein will be respondents. Let me begin with a brief contextual sense of where this might fit in the landscape of contemporary academic and intellectual currents. I see three focal points for the field of Religion—Jewish Studies, Theology, cultural history—that I think are pertinent to our being here today and are represented by this panel.

First, contextually, we are seeing more engagement of religious ideas with culture and with communities. Not abstracted analysis, but ideas that are engaged with a living culture and with living communities. Indeed, the work of the Taube Foundation and the projects in Poland are great examples of that. This is not just about scholars thinking about history. It is about engaging with living history, living communities, and “real people.”

The second is a trend that I see in many fields and disciplines, which focuses on narrative and stories as making up history. History is not just about intangible ideas; it is the stories of real people throughout history in real, concrete struggles with all the highs and the lows that their experience entails. These days good history becomes the reconstruction and the telling of narratives and stories in a variety of ways.

The third issue pertinent to our presentation today is the issue of identity, which is so essential to everything that we do. In the world of academia the concept of

identity is prominent in the landscape of thinking about what psychological identity constitutes, what religious identity constitutes, what cultural identity constitutes. I have been deeply influenced by developmental psychologist, Erik Erikson—who probably got more mileage out of the term “identity” than anybody else. Erikson said, “To have an identity is to have a personally satisfying and publicly convincing answer to the question, ‘Who am I?’” Today we will see what this means as it is developed in the work of three eminent scholars.

Sam Kassow is Professor of History at Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut. His Ph.D. is from Princeton, and he has taught in Mexico, Russia, Poland, Israel, and Lithuania. In 1993 and 1995 the Jewish Theological Seminary asked Professor Kassow to teach Jewish History in the Project Judaica Program in Moscow. In 2002 he was visiting Professor at Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He has held

National Endowment for the Humanities Awards, Fulbright Scholarships, Woodrow Wilson Awards, Danforth Fellowships, and has been an IREX Fellow at Warsaw, Moscow, and Leningrad Universities. Currently Kassow is a consultant to the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw. His many publications include *The Distinctive Light of East European Jewry*, co-editor. His next book is *Who Will Write Our History? Emanuel Ringleblum and the Secret Ghetto Archives*, to be published by Indiana Press next year. The child of Holocaust survivors, Professor Kassow was born in a displaced persons’ camp in Germany.

We are honored to have with us today three incredibly powerful intellects and scholars.

Sam, I’m going to turn it over to you.

*This is not just about scholars thinking about history. It is about engaging with living history, living communities, and “real people.”*

**--James Donahue**

**SAMUEL KASSOW**

**Charles H. Northam Professor of History  
Trinity College, Hartford**

Thank you for inviting me, it's a pleasure to be here, to return to San Francisco. Last night I had a lot to say about Jewish life in Poland today. I'm not going to talk about that now, but about how we bring Eastern Europe into the classroom. Of course, a basic issue of any education is to challenge the student to ask him or herself who we are and where do we come from. And if Jewish education simply introduces students to selected texts or to Jewish history up to the destruction of the Temple and then picks it up again with immigration to the United States or with the founding of the State of Israel or with the Holocaust – then I think Jewish education has not done its job.

One of the big issues facing American Jewry today is that, while in some ways, Jewish education has never been better and the level of our day schools has never been higher, on another level, many are evincing some real concern about the fact that more and more of our Jewish identity is becoming bound up with spirituality, with religion, which of course is important, but to the exclusion of an ethnic identity. There is a kind of attenuation of a feeling of belonging to the Jewish people, as opposed to belonging to the Jewish religion. And we see this in the fact that many young people feel less bound today to the State of Israel, even if they are regular synagogue-goers.

And so one of the most important goals of re-introducing Eastern Europe into the Jewish classroom is to re-connect young Jews to that sense of Jewish peoplehood, to that sense of Jewish ethnicity. All at the same time, not saying either/or, either history or text, not denigrating any particular aspect of Jewish identity, but to recapture the importance of ethnicity and folk culture. And in this regard, Poland, and the study of Jewish history in Poland play a major role. As one Jewish writer once said, perhaps with a little bit of exaggeration: "In Poland we became a people. We felt at home in Poland."

The legends that we told about our coming to Poland reflected that sense of what they call the Yiddish "rooted-ness", that the first Jews who came to Poland

supposedly sawed into bark trees the Hebrew letters, *Pol Lin*, "Here you will rest, here you will lie." We told legends about a nice Jewish girl, Esther, the beautiful daughter, who the Polish king Hiram fell in love with and built her a secret tunnel so she could come spend nights with him under the great castle. And while it is usually not nice

for nice Jewish girls to do such things, the Polish Jews felt a certain proprietary pride in Esther especially, because she supposedly convinced King Kazimierz to make Poland into a land of refuge for the Jews. It is interesting, the Poles have the same legend, except that Esther gets turned into a wily *Zydowka*, (Jewess) who took this nice, trusting Polish boy and twisted him around her little finger. But these legends of course show the long ties that we have to Poland.

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**--Sam Kassow**

As Gershon Hundert has pointed out in a recent important book, in a way it's a misnomer to say that we were a minority in Poland, living as we did for so long, especially before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, in the *shtetl*, which was a specific kind of Jewish settlement, Jewish community. We didn't really have *shtetls* in other parts of the Diaspora. Much of the time we were a majority; we were not a minority. And we had our own community institutions, we had our autonomy, we felt that we were a nation with a sense of honor. And eight centuries have left us a treasure trove of songs, folklore, art, material culture, pictures of wooden synagogues. It's an incredible base, which we could introduce into our schools.

A second point I want to make, and I'm speaking very generally here, is the importance of recapturing, to some degree, Yiddish and Yiddish culture. Now perhaps it's a pipedream to think that we're going to reintroduce Yiddish teaching into schools, but we could certainly introduce aspects of that very rich literature. Many books are still available today, which young people can really relate to. My 15-year-old daughter just read "The Brothers Ashkenazi" by I.J. Singer, and loved it. If students are introduced to *Tevya*, not the play but the actual literature, which is now being translated into English, they can deal with the problems of Jewish responses to modernity, families, stress and so on.

And then again, studying aspects of Yiddish is fun. The curses in Yiddish, just to take one example, show the

expressiveness of that folk language. *Zoln fun dayn moyl aroysfahn ale tseyner un zol khotch eyn tseyn blaybn oyf tsonveytik* — May all your teeth fall out and may one tooth remain for a toothache. *Zolst aropshlingen a shirem un zol es dir oyf-fenen in boykb* — May you swallow an umbrella, may it open in your belly. This is an aggressive language. Certainly, there's some humor there.

And we don't throw away 800 years of folk culture. We don't forget it and we don't cut ourselves off from it. And one of the things that we can ask students is to describe what it means when you lose a language, what happens to Native Americans? What happens to other peoples who have lost their language? And what do you feel about the fact that for most generations your ancestors spoke Yiddish, and now you don't know it?

A third reason why I think we should re-connect with our East European past is to broaden the students' understanding of Jewish religion and spirituality. The historic roots of Hasidism. The importance of the Musar movement, which is now being slowly recovered by some American Jews. This whole religiosity of the Lithuanian Jews, which is being forgotten by all too many. The issue of Jewish women. We have women's prayers, a whole corpus of women's religious literature, which exists in English now, and which students can study.

Regarding the issue of immigration: Students can study how their families came to the United States, the towns they came from. We now have on computer ship records and ship manifests. Students can do research into the Jewish neighborhoods of the old cities, in the metropolitan areas that they left, and connect that way.

And finally, the Holocaust: The Holocaust is probably the easiest and most prevalent form, where the consciousness of East European Jewry is introduced into our schools, and the important thing now is to broaden that, to make sure that students remember the Jews were not just victims, that there was a vibrant, important culture that was murdered. Very few people know, for exam-

ple, that in the late 1930s, the Polish Jews were not just on the brink of an abyss, as some books are entitled, or Polish Jews were not just waiting for their death as the Family Muskat (I.B. Singer's family saga) would have it. Polish Jews were tough, they were resilient, they were fighting back.

In 1934, in the introduction to a coffee-table history of Polish Jewry, Senator Ozjasz Thon said: "Look, we may be under economic pressure, and we Polish Jews may be suffering from economic discrimination, and we might not be as well off as Jews in the United States, but we are the only Jewish community in the world that can lead the Jewish people" - not American Jewry, which did not seem cultural vibrant at that time to him, and not Soviet Jewry. And so Polish Jews, right up until the Holocaust, did not see themselves just as a persecuted minority, but they saw themselves as the vanguard of the Jewish people.

I recently read in an article, and it may have been written by Arnie, I am not sure, but this article quotes an Israeli sociologist, who was commenting on this recent controversy between A.B. Yehoshua and many Americans Jews. Yehoshua said that Jewishness in America is inauthentic, and it's only in Israel that you can live an authentic

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**--Sam Kassow**

Jewish life.

This article was talking about why is it that, so often, Jews in Israel and Jews in America are talking past each other and having their eyes on different goals. One interesting hypothesis that he raised, who knows to what degree it works or not, but it intrigues me, the hypothesis is that one reason is that if we as a Jewish people are still suffering from the murder of one of the most creative, important Jewish communities in the world. Had East European Jewry been in existence now who knows in what form it would take, who knows how many Jews would still be speaking Yiddish? Those are questions we can't answer. But had these millions still been alive there would have been another factor in developing the ongoing cultural profile of the Jewish people, and this might

have been a mediator, this might have been a buffer.

The issue of the Holocaust also is the easiest issue that can be introduced into the public schools, as opposed to the Jewish schools. Here we can have students think not just about the Holocaust, but about minorities, the interaction between minority groups, modern genocide, the problems of living in a multiethnic society, and here some of the problems of interwar Poland can be introduced. Now those are just some main points.

The question is: How do we do this? On a university level the problems are relatively less formidable. There are many chairs of Jewish Studies, there are many excellent professors, many wonderful graduate students, and while unfortunately enrollment in Holocaust courses usually exceeds enrollment in Jewish history courses, things in the universities are relatively okay, especially in the better universities. The problem is on the secondary level.

And here I want to focus on the best program that I know. It's the program that made the biggest effort to deal with how to introduce the study of Eastern Europe into the high school. I want to talk about the YIVO's EPYC program. The EPYC program was developed through the efforts of Adina Cimet Singer, and it was an enormous project. It developed many brochures, it developed study plans that were 500 pages long, and I'm going to pass around just a part of one of these study plans. These study plans, focusing on the Jews in Poland, included settlement, economics, politics, religious life, the impact of printing, texts, Hasidism, ideology, you name it. I wrote one of the brochures for this and I'll pass this around.

The EPYC program tried to make accessible to high school teachers the enormous amount of materials for introducing the study of East European Jewry into the classroom. And it ran into problems. The obvious problem is that, unless you're in a Jewish full-time high school, there's simply not enough time. Teachers don't have the time to fit this into the curriculum. It's funny, more difficult in the public schools. The teacher who was most

enthusiastic about this was teaching in a Yeshiva, where classes began at eight in the morning and ended at seven at night, and he certainly had the time. But the EPYC program had to go back to the drawing boards.

Last June in the YIVO there was a very interesting three-day conference attended by 35 teachers from the United States, Canada, Israel, Mexico, and Lithuania, teachers who ran the gamut from teaching in religious schools to teaching in Peter Stuyvesant, the executive director of the Ashkenazi Festival in Toronto, two representatives of the Israeli Ministry of Education. This seminar was very successful. There were lectures, there were films, especially the film "Image Before My Eyes", tours of the YIVO library, workshops on Jewish songs, and a lot of materials were made available to the teachers.

The upshot of this conference was that the teachers are now being encouraged to look through all these materials and develop study plans, develop curriculum which can be worked into existing school programs. They'll be compensated for these study plans, and then hopefully there'll be another conference next year. The Israelis would like to translate much of this material into Hebrew. So this is a work in progress, but I think right now it's the most serious effort to figure out how to take the curriculum of American Jewish Education and introduce Eastern Europe into it.

There are some other promising programs I'd like to mention quickly. One is the internship program at the National Yiddish Book Center. There's also the bi-annual Yiddish research seminar that takes place in Tel Aviv and in New York. I've lectured at that a few times. All the lecturing is in Yiddish, all the discussions are in Yiddish. The students are very, very good; the numbers increase every time the seminar is offered. It certainly deserves support as well as various summer programs offered by universities.

And the final point I want to make, turning to the issue of Jewish life in Poland today, turning to the importance of not seeing Poland as a graveyard but as a living community. I want to turn to the Jewish Museum that is going up in Warsaw and I'm involved in that, it will be an

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important tourist destination. It's challenge is to service many different audiences, ranging from Polish teenagers to American Jewish kids, to European tourists, to Israelis that will be coming with different expectations, different levels of knowledge.

This museum will have nine pavilions dealing with all of Polish Jewish history, from the beginning to the end. It will not be a Holocaust museum; it will get across the diversity, the creativity of Polish Jewry. It will not just be a history museum but it will highlight everyday life. There's no attempt to censor what we're going to show. We're going to show the good as well as the bad. There are still many problems that we have to work out; it's not easy for historians who think in terms of text to switch to thinking in terms of exhibits.

But something like this museum can be a catalyst for promoting interest in East European Jewish history and in Poland in American Jewish schools. If this becomes a tourist destination, if this is incorporated into the March of the Living, which I'm sure it will be, if this is supplemented by imaginative educational programs, which I'm sure it will be, then I think we've made a major step forward. And by going to the museum visitors from the United States and Europe will also see that Jewish life in Poland today represents one of the more interesting Jewish communities in the world.

Thank you.

## **ARNOLD EISEN**

### **Chancellor-Elect**

#### **Jewish Theological Seminary**

I've decided to devote my remarks for the next few minutes to Sam's second question, "How can we do this?" Suppose we wanted to have Eastern European history/ Polish Jewish history/ what's going on today, become a focus of education in American Jewish schools. How can we do this?

So let's begin with the admission, Sam said as much,

we should not be unrealistic about the difficulties. American Jewish education itself presents a series of major challenges. To get Jewish kids into a classroom, under Jewish auspices, is something that we're not succeeding in doing for most American Jewish kids. To get them in there for any period of time, given the competition, the afternoon school is faced with all sorts of other

after school activities, is a major challenge. And in many cases we're losing this battle. We're seeing shrinking numbers of hours devoted to Jewish education. On the one hand it's a good thing that an increasing percentage of the Jewish kids getting any kind of Jewish education are getting a better Jewish education. One could also say that more Jews in America are getting a better Jewish education than ever before. But, these things are also a function of the fact that shrinking numbers of American Jews are getting any kind of a Jewish education. So we're struggling with sheer numbers of hours and sheer numbers of classrooms, and then of course there are all sorts of funding issues.

My recommendation would be that if we want to do the sort of thing that Sam just outlined, and get more attention to the history and present situation of Eastern

European Jews into our American Jewish classrooms, then the themes that we highlight through this program have to jive completely with the overall aims. So we have to think about why we want kids in Jewish education at all, why we want kids to study these sorts of things. And I believe I'm echoing something that Sam said, that the key is Jewish people-hood.

That the overall paradigm that most educators now are working with is the same one that Mordechai Kaplan put forward nearly a century ago when he and others laid the foundations for the rebirth of Jewish education in America. Namely, it's a civilization model, where people with a civilization, this people, this civilization has history, it has languages, it has culture. One of its major

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**--Arnold Eisen**

expressions, manifestations, and concentrations is religion, but that's not its only one. And what we're trying to get across and transmit, and get people excited about, is this civilization. Which means, as my colleague, Isa Aaron from Hebrew Union College of Los Angeles, has put it, the two overarching goals of American Jewish education are socialization and acculturation.

That is, we are not in this business so much to teach particular knowledge and particular skills. We are here to make children and young adults and adults, many of whom are coming to Jewish education for the first time, we're here to make them feel part of a community, part of a community and a people, on the one hand, that's the socialization piece, and we're here to help them feel like participants in a culture.

Here, the metaphor, which I, and others, favor, is the metaphor of conversation. We want them to become participants in a conversation that's been going on throughout the ages among Jews as to the meanings of being Jewish. And this conversation that's going on today among Jews in various parts of the world, the horizontal dimension in the present time, there is a vertical dimension across the centuries, and we are inviting students of whatever age to join in this conversation and become informed participants.

So, we want to do acculturation, and we want to do socialization. This ties in nicely, I think, with the sorts of things that Sam's talked about. We want them to understand how Jewish history evolved over the centuries; on several tracks, in many different places, but not in an infinite number of varieties, several overarching patterns, all of which were in part shaped by eternal Jewish dynamics, things that Jews were trying to do, because they believed this is the way to be a Jew in the world. But they also, always, were in interaction with the larger societies in which they lived, with politics, with sociology, with the cultural developments of those societies. So both internal and external dynamics at work. So I think we could, if we wanted to make an outline here we could easily identify several large patterns in Jewish history, which kids can identify with and be a part of and feel responsi-

*I think we can easily identify several large patterns in Jewish history, which kids can identify with and be a part of and feel responsible for and privileged to be someone who is passing this on. We can make it a part of their lives that they can pass on to others.*  
**--Arnold Eisen**

ble for and privileged to be someone who is passing this on. Make it a part of your life and pass it on to others.

Now let me focus for a few minutes on my own interest in scholarship, which is the modern period and of course my own interests especially which are contemporary Jewish life in the United States. It seems to me that we need to let students understand that being Jewish at any time and place involves building communities. Because these communities are not a given, they always have to be maintained, they have to be constructed, they have to be kept going, often against odds that are over-

whelming. Just to have a sense of who you are requires frameworks in which that sense can be nourished and sustained against the natural pressures that come from the outside world.

So the percent of Jews in Poland today is infinitesimal but not that much smaller than the two percent that American Jews represent in the United States of America. 98 percent versus two percent is kind of overwhelming odds. Just demographic pressures, the overwhelming social reality of "not Jewish" makes it difficult to sustain a sense that it's worthwhile to spend time and resources, energy, distinctiveness, in sticking to a 2%. So you want to give Jewish kids, Jewish adults, any time and place, a sense that one

of the things Jewishness is about is building community. And therefore you want to see how in a modern period Jewish communities were built and sustained and grown in Eastern Europe, Poland in particular, and how at the present moment Jewish communities are being reborn.

The second thing you want to show is the transmission and transformation of traditions. To my mind the transmission of tradition inevitably means the transformation of tradition, because to transmit something alive you've got to change it, because to transmit something as a mere museum piece does not keep it alive, it kills it. So to keep something alive means to change it, so this dynamic of continuity and change is very much what the transmission of any tradition is about.

I would look at the varieties of Jewish history as they develop in Eastern Europe, in so-called secular forms versus so-called religious forms. And I like the adjective "so-called" here because I think this dichotomy does not

work for Jews and we should not accept it. I think it just doesn't work for Jews, it's much too complicated and Polish Jewish history is an example of how complex this is. So I know the parties themselves might use this language, I'm not going to accept it. So let's say we have so-called secular powers, we have so-called religious powers, what all of them are trying to do is transmit the Jewish tradition, Jewish heritage, in a live form.

If I wanted to introduce the history of Eastern European Jews into the classroom, is present it as a vibrant, rapid instance of transformation and change along with continuity. I want these kids to understand that Hasidism, which iconically represents today THE Jewish tradition, the Jewish past, "the way it always was", I'd want them to understand that Hasidism began at a certain time and place and given historical conditions and developed the way it did because of internal and external dynamics, so they no longer see Hasidism as "what always was", but see Hasidism as one creative response among others to a changing historical situation, a changing desire on the part of Jews to keep their tradition alive.

Needless to say, anti-Semitism and the Holocaust are a major part of the story. They are part of a modern Jewish story writ large. They are part of East European Polish story, but Renaissance/ Rebirth are also a major piece of the modern Jewish story writ large, and Renaissance/Rebirth is exactly what we were talking about in the Polish Jewish story right now. So all I'm saying... I want to wrap it up because we have a big topic and a lot to discuss here... all I'm saying is the way to introduce the history of Eastern European Jews into American Jewish classrooms, is to make sure that what we're trying to do with Eastern European history, is an instance, is accomplishing the larger goals for which we're doing Jewish education in the first place.

And then what I would do, now we'll get down to the really brass tacks technical level, I would make sure that we provide everything that American Jewish classrooms are now struggling to get, that is; excellent curriculum,

well trained teachers, interaction between formal and informal education, adequate resources that pay to compensate the teachers who are doing this, teacher training, teacher mentoring at various stages of career, etc. So one shouldn't just plop an idea or curriculum down on a school, if they do it the way they got this accepted is to provide it as part of a package, which provides what these schools need and not the least part of the package that schools need is adequate assessment and evaluation so that we can do the job of replication.

What American Jewish education suffers from is one-shot deals, where each school plans its own curriculum from the ground up, there is very little sharing, very little exchange, and there's very little replication. So if we can, not just prepare a curriculum but present an entire package ready to go, including assessment, evaluation, and plans for repetition, we will have a package that will prove well nigh irresistible to American Jewish educators.

Thank you.

*We can give Jewish kids, Jewish adults, in any time and place, a sense that one of the things Jewishness is about is building community. That way, we can see how, in a modern period, Jewish communities were built and sustained and grown in Eastern Europe--Poland in particular--and how, at the present moment, Jewish communities are being reborn.*  
--Arnold Eisen

## STEVEN ZIPPERSTEIN

Director, Taube Center for Jewish Studies  
Stanford University

There's so many different overlapping geographical terms that we use that have been used historically in this region; Poland, Lithuania, Russia, towns renamed formally by Jews, Jews living in slightly different regions, renaming towns that they may be living, Renaming things, I'm changing things.

I remember... I grew up among very sort of garrulous, utterly emphatic, nearly fanatic characters, sort of characters that you would normally associate with the pages of Saul Bellow's fiction. One was my father's father, my grandfather, who I listened to rather intently. He died when I was six, and I remember up until the time I was perhaps four or five, he had been born in Russia and then Russia was getting some rather bad press at the time in the early '50s, and suddenly he was born in Poland. In fact, he was born just outside of Minsk, perhaps culturally contested territory, but I know enough



about the date of his birth and the borders of the Russian empire to answer, at least factually, where he was born.

But it was one, at least very early example, in my own mind, of the porous-ness of what some great linguists and others have called, at least for Jews, *Yiddishland*. A huge territory that included stretches of Prussia, that certainly included vast swaths of the Eastern reaches of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in which a medley of languages were used. Russian, which I'm more comfortable with, Polish, which other people in this group are more comfortable with, and which Jews moved from language to language.

Presumably the preoccupations, what preoccupies us today is how to better translate the wealth of this historical experience for all; in classrooms, outside of classrooms, for Jews, for others, for those non-Jews and Jews living in that same region, for those living elsewhere. And in this respect I think Sam is absolutely right, the classroom isn't one of the more contested areas. On the other hand, the classroom is a rather impenetrable arena in other respects. By that I mean this, you can't have a Jewish communal agenda for the university classroom.

Once Jewish studies, once anything, is introduced into the university, it no longer belongs to you. It's part of the price of actually introducing knowledge to the university. What you do, what you care about, what we as university professors deeply care about, what we may well believe in deeply, no longer belongs to you. It's now part of a hopefully vibrant marketplace of ideas, and what you are seeking to do is to be sure, and make clear to others, students, colleagues, others, that your ideas count.

It's a source of some very real tension, and tension that I'm deeply empathetic to, on a number of levels; for donors, for others to university classrooms as a site of Jewish philanthropy. Because on one level or another, once the money is given, it's the university's, and yet so many of us who teach in the university of course care

deeply about some of the things that we're talking about around this table.

I think one aspects that Sam pointed out especially resonated for me, and those were passing comments of his at the beginning of his remarks, where he talked about the ways in which a deepened sense of what it felt like to be part of a Jewish people. Where, to be sure, demography had a real bearing, where numbers had a real bearing, and what it felt like to be part of an entire people where Jews occupied the full range of occupations, where Jews certainly occupied the full range of cultural

and political perspectives, what it felt like and how teaching that could have a bearing on communicating to students what it actually means today to be part of a people. And a people faced with complex choices.

I very much like that here is one of those lessons. And often, in the university, you're dealing with indirect and implicit lessons. One could care deeply, for example, and worry enormously about, as Sam put it, the lessening of preoccupation on the part of young Jews with Israel. But one, of course, can't translate those preoccupations explicitly into the classroom. But implicitly, and here, I think, what he said can have some real resonance, to actually communicate to students the complexity of actually dealing in a multiethnic place, the complexity of inter-ethnic relations, the complexity of actually running a multinational state, the way in which politics is rarely black and white, the

way in which often those who seek to translate politics into black and white, make for horrible politics, e.g. the Soviet Union.

And those kinds of messages can have a bearing, a kind of deep, existential bearing. I think what happens in the university campus in general, and perhaps in the university classroom in particular, one of the benefits that we have as scholars from Polish studies as opposed to, perhaps, Russian studies, is that communism though it had, of course, a profound impact on post World War II

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**--Steven Zipperstein**

Poland had a less profound and less corrosive impact on Polish scholarship.

So, once Poland began to open more to the West in the '80s, those of us who began to interact with Polish scholars began to interact with scholarly peers, and this simply isn't true of Russia. And the impact, the corrosive impact, the intellectual corruption of Russian cultural, intellectual life seems to be rent immeasurably deeper, and for reasons that are probably self evident. And this is one of the reasons there seems to be why there has been, since the '80s, the kind of flourishing of Polish Jewish studies that we are all beneficiaries of.

One example, and here I'll close, of the interaction between community and academia, one way in which at least we at Stanford try to make East European Jewish culture accessible, not only to the mind but also to the senses, in the last couple of years, was in the form of an event we had at Stanford two or three years ago, built around the life and work of Ansky.

Ansky lived enough for five or six people; he lived many, many different lives. Born in Vitebsk, born into a traditional Jewish milieu, and became a radical mastiel, a radical Jewish enlightener. He became an important radical. The great Russian popular philosopher Lavrock died in his arms, many would-be romantic relationships also died in his arms. His great play, *The Dybuk*, may have been inspired by one of those relationships. He wrote the greatest play, considered to be the greatest Yiddish play in the Yiddish repertoire. He wrote one of the greatest works of Jewish catastrophe, *Destruction of Galicia*, on the destruction of Jews in Eastern Austria and elsewhere during the First World War. Started numerous institutes, and also initiated the first major Jewish epigraphic proj-

ect on the Eastern European Russian Jewish scene, especially in Ukraine, and interviewing people, collecting material, recording songs, so on.

What we did was we had a conference, we also had a concert where we actually had a leading ethnomusicologist sing many of the Hasidic songs and other songs collected by Ansky. We actually produced in a proceedings of the conference, a CD with some of the original recordings that were culled by Ansky, Yoel Engals and others, in this ethnographic exhibit. It was also, and here would be probably the only decision with which I've disagreed with Phyllis Cook, I brought a proposal to her, which I still think is a good proposal, and I just want to, just summarize it here. I'm bringing it now because, of course, there's no chance of actually ever doing it.

What interested Ansky immensely was what went on in domestic places, in Jewish kitchens. He was deeply interested in the lives of women, and he and his group collected recipes and we decided that we would, with Phyllis's help – and I was absolutely certain that we would get this funding – we'd have a feast. And people criticized my idea and said it would be basically variations on potatoes. But where we would all feast on food based on recipes collected by Ansky and his entourage, and then we would actually produce a cookbook. So if any of you want to run this idea by Phyllis, she is sitting just at the end of the table, feel free to encourage her. It seems to me that the ideas promoted by this foundation could find ample receptivity in this sort of Poland that I know is complex. As seemingly intractable, as dogmatic as they sometimes appear, are probably a lot more receptive than they sometimes appear to be.

Thank you.