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THE WEEKLY PRINT

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MAY 20, 2021

Pinpointing where Democrats are on Israel

An outspoken faction of the Democratic Party is openly criticizing Israel, but where does the mainstream stand?

By Gabby Deutch, Matthew Kassel and Marc Rod

Pro-Israel Democrats are grappling with how to reconcile widespread support for the Jewish state with vocal and occasionally misleading attacks from an outspoken faction of the party amid escalating violence between Israel and Hamas. In recent weeks, a group of House members critical of Israel have amped up their rhetoric, accusing Israel of "apartheid" in sharply worded social media statements while renewing calls for conditioned U.S. military assistance and seemingly downplaying threats from Hamas.

Even a pair of well-established Israel supporters in the Senate have veered from their usual pronouncements. On Saturday, Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) said he was "deeply troubled" by Israel's recent military actions, and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has been conspicuously reticent on the issue.

Still, longtime pro-Israel advocates in the party argue that support for the Jewish state remains strong even as social media platforms like Twitter appear to have empowered the Democratic Party's more extreme Israel critics. "I'm not overly concerned about where the House Democratic Caucus is on Israel," former Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY), who chaired the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee from 2011 to 2015, said in an interview with *Jewish Insider* on Wednesday. "They support U.S.-Israeli relations."

"I do get concerned with imbalanced news coverage and social media," Israel added, "because neither of those platforms are providing the context that's necessary to truly understand the conflict, and how to resolve it."

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL), a long-standing pro-Israel stalwart, echoed that view. "We have a small group of loud voices," she said. "The overwhelming majority of Democrats in the nation, and Democrats in Congress, are strongly supportive of Israel, of the U.S.-Israel relationship, of Israel remaining a Jewish and Democratic state."

"From the president on down, there are still many, many, many Democrats who will always have strong support for Israel," said Rep. Kathy Manning (D-NC), the former chairwoman of the Jewish Federations of North America. "I think we're seeing some weariness by some Democrats because if all you do is watch the news, what you see is heartbreaking," she added. "But people need to understand that Hamas brought this up."

According to AIPAC spokesman Marshall Wittmann, "bipartisan congressional solidarity with Israel has been expressed in nearly 400 statements of support during the current conflict."

Recent polling, however, has also contributed to the impression that Democratic support for Israel may be diminishing, as two separate surveys released on Wednesday appeared to suggest. While a plurality of registered Democratic voters — 36% — said they sympathized with both Israelis and Palestinians, 34% of respondents were either unfamiliar with or didn't have an opinion on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, according to a Morning Consult/Politico survey of 1,992 voters. Moreover, the poll revealed that 18% of Democratic respondents sympathize with Palestinians and 12% with Israelis.

Those numbers were further underscored in an Economist/YouGov poll published yesterday, indicating that 35% of Democratic voters were equally sympathetic to Israelis and Palestinians while another 23% of Democrats sympathize with Palestinians and 16% with Israelis.

Despite the variety of opinion, the new polls simply demonstrate that more Democrats now harbor positive attitudes toward both the Israeli and Palestinian causes, views that dovetail with Democratic support for a two-state solution, according

to Tamara Cofman Wittes, a senior fellow in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution.

"Being an ally of Israel," Wittes told JI, "doesn't mean, based on the polling data we have, that Americans don't care about Palestinians or their aspirations or their rights."

A recent Gallup poll indicated that three-quarters of Americans hold a favorable view of Israel — a number that has held steady since at least 2018.

"Pro-Israel Democrats, who represent the overwhelming majority of the party, are making it clear that support of Israel's right of self defense and support of Palestinian rights are not mutually exclusive," said Halie Soifer, CEO of the Jewish Democratic Council of America.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has not been the subject of such heated debate since the 2014 war between Israel and Gaza, according to Soifer, and recent tensions in the region have cast light on what she describes as a "new pro-Israel paradigm" within the Democratic Party that may have gone undetected until now. "People no longer view being pro-Israel and pro-Palestinian as a binary choice," she said.

In that time, however, digitally savvy Israel critics such as Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY), Rashida Tlaib (D-MI) and Ilhan Omar (D-MN) — all of whom were elected in the last few years — have also become adept at using social media to disseminate their views.

"I think the anti-Israel forces were more determined, more creative, and worked harder in getting their message out," Ann Lewis, co-chair of Democratic Majority for Israel, told JI. "They felt they were the underdogs, and therefore, they were more committed to telling this story and telling it in some pretty loud way."

Rep. Mark Pocan (D-WI), a leader among Democrats skeptical of Israel who organized an hour of House floor speeches criticizing Israel's policies and behavior toward Palestinians last week, claimed that an increasing number of Democrats in Congress are siding with him on this issue.

"You're seeing more members who are raising questions," Pocan told reporters on Wednesday. "Last week was the first time we filled an entire hour — we had more people that wanted to speak than even could."

But Pocan also acknowledged that left-wing Israel critics are at odds with Democratic Party leaders, telling reporters that he is unsure if House Democratic leadership will allow a vote on a resolution introduced by Ocasio-Cortez seeking to block a $735 million arms sale to Israel.

Pocan said the Israeli-Palestinian conflict represents one of the progressive caucus's biggest areas of disagreement with President Joe Biden, who has reiterated his belief that Israel has the right to defend itself while expressing support for a cease-fire between Israel and Gaza.

"I don't feel like Israel's position, its security, its American diplomatic support globally, is imperiled," said Scott Lasensky, who served as a senior policy adviser on the Middle East and Israel in the Obama administration. "But it will make some uncomfortable. If some want Americans' support and congressional support to be zero sum and to be uncomplicated, that's not the reality that we're in right now."

Joel Rubin, executive director of the American Jewish Congress who served as director of Jewish outreach for Sen. Bernie Sanders's (I-VT) 2020 presidential campaign, said he has been concerned by some of the charged rhetoric used by progressive Democrats on social media, particularly amid rising incidents of antisemitism.

"I think we've kind of lost our way a little bit in the language on this," Rubin said in an interview with JI, noting that some progressive Israel critics are "pushing away" potential allies as they rush to denounce the Jewish state. "That's distressing."

But while the conversation may be somewhat raw at the moment, Rubin is optimistic that Democrats can ultimately find room for productive debate as intraparty disagreement over Israel comes to a climax. "It's always been a fascinating and intriguing tension point," he said. "But it's healthy in a lot of ways." ♦

MAY 19, 2021

The life of Henrietta Szold, a pioneering feminist Zionist

Ruth Bader Ginsburg penned the foreword to a new biography of Hadassah founder Henrietta Szold written by Dvora Hacohen

By Amy Spiro

Israeli professor and historian Dvora Hacohen was looking for a comprehensive biography of Henrietta Szold. When she couldn't find one, she decided to write it herself.

"How come, the question is, that by now, no scholarly biography of Henrietta Szold was written by any of the thousands of researchers in America?" Hacohen asked *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview from her home in Jerusalem. "She was the most famous Jewish woman in the 20th century in America — the most important, the most admired."

Hacohen's resulting book was first published in Hebrew in 2019 and then translated to English by Shmuel Sermoneta-Gertel, published last week as *To Repair a*

Broken World: The Life of Henrietta Szold, Founder of Hadassah.

Hacohen, 84, a professor of modern Jewish history at Bar Ilan University, has written and edited nine other books on Jewish history. She dove straight into the task of researching and writing about Szold, whose leadership and trailblazing path she greatly admires.

"She had a set of values that she would not give up in any way, and she had to fight so many fights with other people" in order to maintain them, Hacohen noted.

Szold was born in Baltimore in 1860, shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. From a young age she pursued educational and professional paths that were normally closed off to women. She became the first-ever female editor at the Jewish Publication Society, the first woman enrolled at the Jewish Theological Seminary (though she had to promise to not seek ordination) and the only female member of the Federation of American Zionists' executive committee. She died in 1945 in Jerusalem at age 84, "a life bounded by two wars," wrote Hacohen.

In her early years, Hacohen said, Szold "suffered the exclusion of women and she didn't fight against it, she didn't protest, she accepted what she suffered." But later in life, she became a much more strident feminist, and "one of the greatest fighters for the rights of women, and this she did by herself."

Later, Szold also became a passionate and outspoken Zionist, and the founder and first president of Hadassah, the now-sprawling women's Zionist organization. In 1933, at age 73, Szold relocated to Jerusalem and became an active driving force behind Youth Aliyah, the organization that rescued 30,000 Jewish children from Nazi Europe.

"She went to see the children herself; she went at least three times a week," notes Hacohen. "She would leave Jerusalem very early in the morning and go from one place to another, spend a few hours at each place. She spoke to the children, the counselors... she took care of the children. She didn't just leave it to others."

Though Szold never married or had children of her own — to her great regret — she became known as such a maternal figure in Israel that the country's Mother's Day is marked on the anniversary of her death, "because she was called the mother of Youth Aliyah."

Hacohen spent several years researching and writing To Repair a Broken World, which stemmed largely from her work on her last book, which focused on the Youth Aliyah. Her research this time around took her to Baltimore, where Szold lived for the first 40 years of her life, as well as Cincinnati, home of the American Jewish Archives. Hacohen also met with the descendants of Szold's sister, Bertha — the only of Henrietta's siblings to have children.

"It was wonderful to hear them talking about the family — stories that nobody knows and nobody talks about outside of the family," she said. "They took me to the places where they'd lived in Baltimore, the synagogue where Henrietta's father was the rabbi for many years."

Hacohen also dug deep into Szold's personal writings, including letters she sent to family and friends. There she discovered one of the strongest motivating factors of Szold's life of philanthropy and activism: a broken heart.

"She suffered from an unrequited love that broke her heart," said Hacohen. "She fell into a terrible depression" after her love for a younger professor at JTS was not returned. But after a few months, "she made a dramatic decision to change her priorities. She decided to fight the exclusion and discrimination of women, and for equal rights for all people."

Szold's most long-lasting legacy is undoubtedly the founding of Hadassah, laying the foundation for the hospital system and the extensive women's organization that remains prominent today. Szold started Hadassah more than 20 years before she moved to what was then the British Mandate of Palestine.

"Today Hadassah is one of the largest Jewish organizations in the world, with hundreds of thousands of members," noted Hacohen. Szold was "an ardent Zionist," who first visited Palestine in 1909. The poverty and disease she saw during that trip spurred her to dedicate the rest of her life to the welfare and health of the Jews living there, through extensive health clinics, medical training schools, soup kitchens, educational institutions and much more.

And Szold's value system, Hacohen said, can be traced back to her early years in Baltimore, leading night schools for immigrants of every age, religion and country of origin.

"This was a signature part of her leadership style," said Hacohen. "This provided the impetus to establish Hadassah. She was driven by a sense of mission, fighting against the exclusion and discrimination that she experienced during the first half of her life. What remained consistent was her lifelong commitment to the concept of tikkun olam, repairing the world."

The book opens with an introduction from the late Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, who penned the foreword in January 2020, months before her death. Bader Ginsburg — who spoke of Szold often — noted her admiration for Szold's "notable sensitivity and keen insight," and Hacohen for compiling a "treasure trove of the kind Szold's story well deserves."

"I wrote her a letter, and I asked her why did she mention her and what did she see in her," Hacohen recounted of her initial outreach to Bader Ginsburg. "After a few days I got an answer... and she wrote me a beautiful letter about Henrietta Szold and how she was a role model for her and for her mother."

And when Hacohen asked her to write a foreword for the book, "she answered immediately 'yes,'" she recalled. "I was amazed" that she agreed, and also at her thoughtful approach, said Hacohen. "The way she looks at things, the way she explains things — is beautiful." ♦

MAY 10, 2021

Dave Harden's quest from the Middle East to the Eastern Shore

Dave Harden spent a decade working in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel for USAID. Now he wants to represent Maryland in Congress

By Gabby Deutch

Dave Harden represented the United States abroad as a government official promoting U.S. ideals around the globe for more than two decades. After watching the riot unfold at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, he decided he wanted to put diplomacy aside and represent Maryland's 1st Congressional District in Congress — his first foray into partisan politics.

"My son was overseas during this attack — with the military in the Middle East — and that attack deflated our young men and women that are trying to defend America. It was horrific, what happened on January 6," Harden told *Jewish Insider* in a recent interview. "[Rep.] Andy Harris (R-MD), who is a strong supporter of [former President Donald] Trump, helped fuel the insurrection," Harden argued, "and I decided that Andy Harris had to leave."

Harris, who currently represents the district, was one of the leading voices on the Hill supporting investigations into claims of election fraud soundly rejected by nonpartisan election officials and dozens of court rulings. In the early morning hours of January 7, after the Capitol had been secured, Harris joined 138 other House Republicans to vote against certifying the electoral college results that affirmed Joe Biden's victory.

"It's disingenuous for Mr. Harden to claim I sided with rioters on January 6th, as I condemned the violence then and do now," Harris told JI in a statement.

Harris, the sole Republican member of the Maryland delegation, is not unpopular in his district; last November he defeated Democrat Mia Mason, who is also running in 2022, by 27 percentage points.

Yet Dave Wasserman, an editor of the nonpartisan Cook Political Report, predicts that with redistricting following the 2020 census, the state's congressional districts will be redrawn so that the 1st District — a massive, 3,600-square-mile district that includes Maryland's entire Eastern Shore and some Baltimore exurbs — will become solidly Democratic. Maryland's Democratic legislature, Wasserman tweeted recently, will likely take "a sledgehammer" to the district.

Harden, a Democrat, is a recent arrival in the district, having returned to the U.S. in 2019 after a two-decade international career with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). He grew up on a farm in Westminster, a northern suburb of Baltimore that lies in the district, in the same area where his family has resided for nine generations. "You can get deployed overseas and work in embassies, but at the end of the day, you go home," said Harden, who is 58.

Harden wasn't planning to leave diplomacy but changed course following the 2016 presidential election. "I felt that [the Trump administration was] extremely amateurish, and I did not want to continue to represent them." So he left, and embarked on a well-trodden path for Beltway insiders: He started a consulting firm, working on private-sector economic development with companies based in some of his former postings, including Gaza and the West Bank.

At the start of his career, after serving as a Peace Corps volunteer in Botswana, Harden's tenure with USAID took him across the Middle East and Asia, including 10 cumulative years in Israel. His wife and children stayed even longer, remaining in Herzliya while Harden went on to postings in Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

He calls himself a "deep friend of Israel," noting that his daughter became fluent in Hebrew during his family's time in the country. "How many non-Jewish girls speak Hebrew?" he asked.

For Harden, Middle East foreign policy is not a theoretical matter, or a way to prove his partisan bona fides. As violence again flares in the region, Harden can recall living through previous wars between Israel and Hamas.

"During the 2014 war between Israel and Hamas, our family went to the bomb shelter more times in a single month than I did during my 17 months in Iraq," Harden, who first arrived in the region in 2005 as deputy mission director at USAID's West Bank and Gaza Mission, told members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in 2016.

Harden described his work as "connecting people and communities and companies to the global economy," which he told JI would benefit him in his district.

"I actually have worked on the toughest economic challenges of our time, so I think that the voters really do appreciate the fact that I'm able to bring three decades of economic experience to communities that have been forgotten and aggrieved and left behind," Harden noted.

"He really excelled building relationships across Palestinian society and across Israeli society," said Joel

Braunold, managing director of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace. "He had a healthy dose of skepticism about the power of big government, and really looked at how people who are entrepreneurs or farmers could really sort of make things better."

Should Harden make it to Congress, he will be greeted in Washington by a Democratic Party whose long-held consensus of support for the Jewish state has begun to splinter. On one side, far-left House members, led by Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY) and Rep. Rashida Tlaib (D-MI), have called Israel an "apartheid state" and condemned its recent actions in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. On the other, mainstream Democrats are urging Washington to maintain its support for Israel as the country comes under heavy rocket fire from Hamas. Harden could find himself on his own, pushing heterodox critiques of U.S. policy and solutions in the region that don't align with either group.

"What happens is, on all these issues, they're so overwhelming that everybody just gets lost, right? You're talking about a few issues, and it's essentially binary, and that's not how I approach conflict in the least," Harden said.

Harden's views on the Middle East are complex, rooted in his years of working directly with both Israelis and Palestinians on crucial issues like economic development. But in attempting to stake out his own position on the conflict, he avoided choosing sides on one of the more heated debates happening on Capitol Hill: regulating aid to Israel to pressure the country to pause settlement construction and cease certain military operations.

When asked whether Congress has a role to play in putting pressure on Israel with regards to settlement construction in the West Bank, Harden did not offer a direct answer. He called it an "extremely thorny question," and said that "having uninformed, not nuanced answers probably doesn't help anybody."

"The Israelis are the stronger party on Israel-Palestine matters, and so they have to decide what it is that they want," he said instead.

While he did not declare where he stands on congressional efforts to regulate aid to Israel, Harden acknowledged that he views American military assistance to Israel as a tricky proposition when broader U.S. policy regarding the region is unclear. When he served in Israel, "I knew what our goal was. Our goal was a two-state solution. We were putting effort into it," Harden said. "What I think is missing now is the clarity about what our goal is. So I understand the role to be, we want to preserve the prospect of a two-state solution for some indefinite time in the future. That's not a goal."

Harden wants to better understand the strategic benefit to sending aid to the region. In a February 2021 op-ed in The Hill, Harden argued that unless the U.S. provides a better answer to the question of what it is "buying" with its aid to both Israel and Palestinian aid organizations, the money could be better spent feeding children who have gone hungry during the pandemic.

The current aid model is outdated, Harden claims, a remnant of an Israel that could not defend itself. "Israel is not the plucky little nation of 1949 that is struggling to survive, right? It's not scratching around, an impoverished country that is just barely making it now," he said. "What I'm envisioning, what I'm describing, is a 21st-century relationship. Right now, we still have a 20th-century relationship."

Harden believes the U.S. has a role to play in de-escalating the ongoing violence between Israel and Hamas. "I think that the United States can and should aggressively seek to get a cease-fire or humanitarian pause in place to de-risk the situation and to protect civilians," he said.

Harden also expressed concern over Hamas's escalating military capabilities.

"The notion that Hamas would be deterred through [wars with Israel] beginning in 2008 has not borne out, right? Hamas is not deterred. And in fact, Hamas is more capable today than they were in the first Gaza war," Harden said. "That should give some first pause about what everybody's doing and what the results are, because in four wars Hamas has gotten more favorable, so that means that that's a problem."

"I think the Biden administration really needs to double down on getting people out there and on the ground and engaged," Harden said. "They don't have an ambassador. They don't have an assistant secretary of state [for Near Eastern affairs], they don't have a consul general, they don't have a USAID mission director. These things make it very difficult to manage and de-risk the immediacy of the conflict." Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israeli and Palestinian Affairs Hady Amr visited the region last week, but other key postings remain unfilled or unconfirmed by the Senate.

Present fighting aside, Harden noted that power dynamics in the region have shifted in Israel's favor in recent years. "I am really happy about the Abraham Accords," he said. "But at the same time, the Palestinians are going to want a future. You can't get divorced. That's the problem: Israelis and Palestinians are not getting divorced. They have to live together forever."

In a statement, Harris — whom Harden is challenging — praised Trump's actions in negotiating the Abraham Accords, and said that "I stand with Israel and support [Israelis'] right to defend themselves."

During his stint as mission director for the USAID in West Bank and Gaza, Harden worked with the Palestinian Authority and with UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency), the organization that provides humanitarian aid to Palestinian refugees.

"Many could talk about international economic assistance to the Palestinians, but Dave knew everyone on the ground on a first-name basis who could make a difference. He could distinguish between reality and fiction, and acted accordingly," said David Makovsky, director of the Koret Project on Arab-Israel Relations at The Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

In 2018, the Trump administration stopped all U.S. funding to Palestinian aid organizations, a move quickly reversed by the Biden administration in its first months. Congressional Republicans have criticized the policy, arguing that the aid could end up in the hands of terrorists or their families. Harden supports the aid, noting that "there are ways to make sure assistance goes to those who need it in the West Bank and Gaza."

Harden added that the 2018 Taylor Force Act, which restricts U.S. aid money from being given to the families of terrorists by the Palestinian Authority, "is important to change PA behavior relating to payments to those who committed terror acts."

Harden admits that UNRWA is flawed, but argues it still serves a crucial role in the region. "UNRWA is the only counterpoint to Hamas" in providing humanitarian aid in Gaza, he said. "If it's important to have a counterpoint to Hamas, then UNRWA is your only vehicle." A bipartisan bill introduced last month would mandate a State Department review of UNRWA educational materials that have been criticized as antisemitic.

Still, he said, "I do think that UNRWA is antiquated in many ways, and it needs fundamental change." What he proposes is tailoring the body's work, and humanitarian aid to Palestinians, to reflect the situation of each distinct group of people — and acknowledging that Palestinian refugees in Lebanon and Syria and Jordan have different needs from refugees in the West Bank and Gaza.

Ultimately, though, Harden notes that reforming UNRWA will not solve the conflict. And negotiating an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is what he views as the most important task in the region. "The Palestinians have aspirations, and those aspirations are not going away," Harden explained. "By the way, those aspirations aren't to receive a bag of rice for the next three generations, and here's your little voucher card; be happy. That's not their aspiration. I don't think they want those handouts from UNRWA either."

Harden's foreign policy goals extend beyond the Middle East. He thinks the U.S. has a role to play in entering a new era of challenges, including climate change, displacement and the rise of China. "We're closing the chapter of the post-World War II era, so I would like to help shape America's position in the world for the next century," he explained. ♦

MAY 19, 2021

Jonathan Ames puts a Jewish spin on the detective novel

Ames's newest book is a detective novel whose protagonist is a Jewish Irish private investigator

By Matthew Kassel

Jonathan Ames, the novelist and TV writer, is best known for "Bored to Death," his short-lived HBO series that ran from 2009 to 2011 before it was cancelled after three seasons. The noirish comedy tells the story of a floundering Brooklyn novelist — also named Jonathan Ames — who becomes an unlicensed private investigator after placing an ad on Craigslist.

But for Ames, who has long been a devoted reader of hardboiled crime fiction, the series may have been something of a diversion. In his latest work, *A Man Named Doll* — recently published by Mulholland Books — he has produced the real thing.

"I guess I was finally ready to try writing my own detective novel," Ames, 57, said in a recent phone interview with *Jewish Insider* from his home in Los Angeles, where he lives with a chihuahua-terrier mix named Fezzik.

Still, the novel, which is the first in a planned series, bears the typical Amesian markings. Happy Doll, the protagonist, is a tough yet neurasthenic former cop and private detective whose Jewish and Irish heritage creates some amusing tensions. "I think I'm the only ex-cop I know in Freudian analysis, but I could be wrong," Doll tells readers early in the book.

Speaking with JI, Ames discussed his long-held desire to write a crime novel, how his Jewish identity may or may not inform his work and why he loved visiting the Russian baths on East 10th Street in Manhattan before decamping for L.A. in 2014.

The interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.

JI: *There's something about the crime novel that feels distinctly non-Jewish, like hunting or riding a motorcycle. What are your thoughts on that?*

Ames: I wouldn't characterize it that way. I think there's been a lot of Jewish crime writers, and I'm beginning to personally rethink the notion of limiting what one does by calling it crime fiction. To me, it's just fiction. That said, I do think there have been Jewish practitioners of detective fiction. Recent vintage: Jonathan Lethem, who's Jewish, has written more than one detective novel; Michael Chabon wrote The Yiddish Policemen's Union; David Goodis was a great pulp writer of the '50s and '60s — he was a big influence on me. So I don't have that notion in my mind. I'm not saying it's incorrect, but it's not something I've thought.

JI: *What was the pandemic like for you?*

Ames: As a writer, I live a fairly isolated life anyway. A quiet life. Los Angeles is, in some ways, a quiet town. I lived in New York for many years. Los Angeles life is a more homebound life to begin with, and so, for me, in some ways, the pandemic wasn't that big a stretch. I wasn't that social before. Obviously, I was a lot less social, and of course it was a stressful, difficult time and a nightmare to witness the suffering going on in the world and to be powerless. But for me, personally, I had it good. I had a home, I had food, money in the bank. My main concern was for my elderly parents.

JI: *I read somewhere that your mom had always wanted a book of yours to be published in Hebrew.*

Ames: I think at least two of my books have been published in Israel — my novels The Extra Man and Wake Up, Sir! were both published by a wonderful Israeli publisher. She was very pleased by that, as was I, and I actually went to Israel for publication, I think it was for my novel Wake Up, Sir! I went to Tel Aviv, and it was just a beautiful experience. I so enjoyed meeting the literary world, my brief glimpse of it that I was exposed to, and gave a reading that a lot of young people attended. It was a great experience.

JI: *Are there any plans for this book to be published in Israel?*

Ames: I'm hoping it was submitted. But I don't know the status of things.

JI: *I'm remembering a line from "Bored to Death" where the protagonist, played by Jason Schwartzman, is talking to some Israeli movers, and he's surprised they're Jewish, and they ask him if he's a "self-hating New York Jew" or something along those lines. I came across a passage in your new book that feels sort of similar. Happy meets someone who's Israeli and he asks him if he's "ex-military." He replies, "Yes. We're all ex-military." I thought that was kind of funny. Do you think that American Jews feel emasculated in the company of Israelis? I recall that you participated in a boxing match when you last visited Israel.*

Ames: I don't have a sense of emasculation, personally, around Israelis. And did I box someone in Israel? Did someone challenge me? I'm trying to recall. I doubt I would have boxed somebody. I mean, maybe I might have playfully thrown a few jabs. I think maybe you're right. Maybe somebody wanted to do something like that. But boxing is not something you mess around with. It's too easy to get injured. I did have two fights, as you might be aware, as "the Herring Wonder," because when I first began my little boxing foray, in the late '90s, I was living near Russ & Daughters, the great smoked fish emporium. I saw myself as a reincarnated Jewish boxer from from the beginning of the century, and so there I was at the end of the century fighting as "the Herring Wonder," with the idea that I would derive great strength from the herring, which is a very powerful superfood, as well as have herring breath in the ring to further repel my opponent.

JI: *That seems like a good strategy. This is a question that most novelists get, but since so much of your stuff is autobiographical, I'm wondering how much you feel this new character you've concocted for A Man Named Doll represents you in any way.*

Ames: I guess over the arc of my career, I feel I've become less autobiographical. As I've gotten older, I've really stopped using myself as the subject. In some ways, "Bored to Death" represented the end of that, and that was over a decade ago. Even then, that was fantasy. I've lost interest in using myself as a subject as I've matured. Happy Doll is a fictional character, but there are elements of my DNA in him. He's literally like a doll I created that I played with. So, like a child playing with a doll, I guess some of their psyche is in that doll, but it is a separate object.

JI: *You've long wanted to write crime novels. What took you so long?*

Ames: It's hard to understand one's own pattern. There's not, like, a grand scheme. It's a little bit like some kind of evolution as one changes so much over the course of one's life. I always had this wish to be a pulp writer going back a long way, but in a sense I got sidetracked writing comedic television. Originally, "Bored to Death" was a short story written kind of like a piece of pulp but in the style of my essays to kind of fool people because people were very familiar with my essays at that time, and I wanted to sort of escape that. So I wrote a fictional story in which Jonathan Ames, very much in my voice, places an ad on Craigslist offering his services as an unlicensed private detective. When I wrote that short story, back in 2007, there was a yearning for writing detective fiction. But like I said, I got sidetracked, and it was just part of my development to work in TV for the next few years. It's been an odd path. I guess I was finally ready to try writing my own detective novel.

JI: *How did it feel?*

Ames: It felt good. I had been reading these sorts of books for so long. I refer to it as a kind of apprenticeship,

and I was now ready to try my hand at it.

JI: *This book is the beginning novel in a planned series. How many books do you expect to write?*

Ames: Oh, that's unknown. But my fantasy is to sort of be like a Ross Macdonald, who wrote many books about a private detective named Lew Archer, or to be like Richard Stark, pseudonym for Donald Westlake, who wrote many books about this character Parker.

JI: *I also understand that there's going to be a Netflix film based on this book.*

Ames: Netflix has optioned it, and there is a director and star attached. I'm not allowed to discuss their names yet, just because of the nature of Hollywood and announcements and things. But like any Hollywood project, nothing is definite. So I don't know if the film will happen, but maybe it will. I've written a draft of the screenplay. That was something I wrote during COVID. During COVID, I revised A Man Named Doll and I wrote the screenplay for A Man Named Doll. I started the next Doll book, which is called The Wheel of Doll, and then I also wrote a TV script for another project. So I was busy. Mostly, it was kind of a doll house or a little doll factory here.

JI: *Is there anything else you're working on that you haven't mentioned?*

Ames: I'm primarily focused on the next Doll book, which I have to hand in in a few months. I've toyed in my mind with writing a sequel to my novel Wake Up, Sir! But I can only do one thing at a time personally, so I've just really got to focus on the next Doll book.

JI: *Your book is set in Los Angeles. Is there anything about that city that lends itself particularly well to hard-boiled detective novels?*

Ames: Los Angeles is kind of like the cradle of private detective fiction because of Raymond Chandler, who picked up the torch from Dashiell Hammett, who set a lot of his stories in Northern California and San Francisco. Chandler made Los Angeles kind of the Jerusalem of detective fiction. So I don't know if necessarily Los Angeles is the perfect setting for noir; it's just where a lot of it began. And so writers are kind of drawn to depicting it like moths to a flame in terms of hard-boiled fiction, including myself, because I also live here now.

JI: *How do you feel like your Jewish identity infects your writing?*

Ames: Well, everything makes up a writer — their childhood, where they're from, and certainly one's Jewish identity shapes one's worldview and sense of self. It's probably a big part of who I am and then that comes through in my writing. How it comes through, I can't necessarily say. It's like you don't know the sound of your own voice unless you hear it recorded. In my novel The Extra Man, I did tackle more directly questions of Jewish identity because the character has fantasies about being like someone out of an English novel in a way perhaps to escape prejudice and feeling pigeonholed or just wanting to pass in Christian society. In that novel, I was dealing more directly with issues of Jewish insecurity. Growing up, as a Jew, I was often treated as an outsider or other or a figure of scorn.

JI: *Can you elaborate on that?*

Ames: In the town I grew up in in New Jersey, there was definitely a lot of antisemitic behavior. I think all minorities experienced this. I guess there's a certain aspect where people then take on these prejudices against themselves from the culture. You have to come to know your own mind and own self.

JI: *It's interesting, then, that you were often perceived as not being Jewish in your late teens and early twenties.*

Ames: I went to Princeton, which was very preppy, and so people would often be like, "You're Jewish?" or they would say antisemitic things to me not realizing I was Jewish.

JI: *Were there any precedents for you personally as you wrote this book? The protagonist seems a little more self-doubting than, say, Sam Spade.*

Ames: I guess it was just my own take on the private detective. I don't know that I had other role models, except that I had read them all and so this was the one that emerged for me, almost like a clown who blows up balloons and makes shapes. This was the shape that came out of me.

JI: *Why did you choose to make Happy Doll half-Jewish and half-Irish?*

Ames: I'm not really sure. Maybe I wanted a mix of both. It was, I guess, to maybe create some distance from myself, perhaps, and he just sort of evolved that way. He had such a difficult childhood because his mother died in childbirth.

JI: *Do you still read crime novels?*

Ames: I'm still mostly addicted to reading these sorts of books. It's what gives me pleasure. I often reread the books and then I try to find a new vein to tap into. I happen to be re-reading Raymond Chandler. I don't just read detective fiction, but that is my main source of pleasure and sustenance.

JI: *I'm curious what your thoughts are on the state of the confessional personal essay now, given that you wrote so many of them back in the '90s.*

Ames: I don't have my finger to the pulse on that subject. I don't really read autobiographical essays. I wrote mine back in the '90s, so almost 25 years ago I was in that form and sort of stopped it in the early 2000s. I wrote one a few years ago for The Los Angeles Review of Books, kind of about my dog, but I'm not

really operating in that form anymore, so I don't know what's happening. And I never really read too much in that form. I mean, years ago, I read David Sedaris, and he and I once gave a reading together at some book festival in Amsterdam, which was a lot of fun. But I'm not up on that form. When I was doing it, it was kind of pre-Internet, and I was writing them for a throwaway newspaper at the time called New York Press, which is where people in downtown New York would find this kind of writing. But it was just a half a dozen writers or so doing it, whereas with the explosion of the internet and blogs and all this kind of stuff, it became much more widespread. But I haven't really tracked the whole phenomenon. As you can tell, I'm not someone who is necessarily on top of trends.

JI: *You moved to Los Angeles from New York in 2014. Do you miss New York at all or do you feel settled into L.A.?*

Ames: I very much settled into L.A. when I moved here. It was sort of fun to have a change. I was born in New York, raised outside the city, spent really the bulk of my adulthood in New York or New York environs for 30-odd years. So Los Angeles was like a fun change, literally, to do new things with your brain, kind of like the way a crossword puzzle is supposed to keep you fresh. But I do miss New York and my friends. I miss the Russian bathhouse in the East Village. But I guess my life is here now. I don't see myself living in New York at the moment. But it could be fun again, I don't know where life will take me.

JI: *Is there anywhere to take a schvitz in L.A. that you like?*

Ames: I was going to a place here that I really liked over in West Hollywood in the sort of Russian-Jewish neighborhood. It was called Voda Spa. It was definitely fancier than the 10th Street baths, a lot fancier. I heard there was a more old-fashioned place around there, but I never checked it out, and during COVID, I've not been back to that place in a long time. But I miss it.

JI: *Wasn't there a time when you were going almost every day to the Russian baths in the East Village?*

Ames: Practically. There were a couple of years there, definitely when I didn't have to work in television. From 2012 to 2014, when I left New York, I was probably going to the bathhouse anywhere from three to five times a week. It was my hobby, it was my refuge, it's what I would do at the end of the day. I just loved it. I had friends there. I also was never someone to really go to a gym, so kind of sweating and doing some stretching in the various rooms was kind of my gym.

JI: *What time would you go?*

Ames: I would go at night. I found out later that my great-grandfather, who I was named for, would go to the 10th Street bathhouse in Manhattan. I found that out after I'd already been going there a few years. I knew that he liked to go to a shvitz, but then I found out, at least according to family lore, that we went to the very same shvitz. That was kind of interesting. It was like in my DNA. Like a migratory bird, I had found my way back there. ♦

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New documentary lends rare insight into motivations of Nazi perpetrators

'The Final Account' features groundbreaking interviews with SS members, camp guards and other war criminals who believed in Hitler's cause

By Matthew Kassel

While most Holocaust documentaries have, appropriately, centered on testimonials from survivors, a new film about the Nazi genocide takes a unique and altogether more chilling approach — featuring in-depth and often revealing interviews with the perpetrators who participated, by varying degrees, in the mass extermination of European Jewry.

"The Final Account," released today and directed by the British filmmaker Luke Holland, gives viewers groundbreaking insight into the apparent motivations of a dying generation of Germans, including SS members, camp guards and other war criminals, who grew up under the Third Reich and believed wholeheartedly in Hitler's cause.

"We've always been asking the question of why, how, who was involved in all of this," Stephen Smith, executive director of the USC Shoah Foundation, said in an interview with *Jewish Insider*. "At the moment, we have this sort of caricature, almost, of these uniformed monsters who committed the Holocaust, and we hear about them through the stories of [Dr. Josef] Mengele and his

medical experiments and the ramp at Auschwitz."

But "The Final Account" complicates that view, while providing an unprecedented look at the seemingly ordinary individuals behind the Nazi atrocities. "There were people on the other side of the story, too," Smith said. "They were making decisions, and they were pursuing their dreams, and they were becoming part of something greater."

The film, which clocks in at a brisk 90 minutes, makes room for a wide array of interviews with aging Germans as well as archival footage of Hitler Youth programs, where young Germans were indoctrinated by the Nazi regime.

Which is not to say that Holland — who died in 2020 at 71, just after completing the film — lets his subjects off the hook. For the most part, he simply lets them speak — and their recollections of life in Nazi Germany are, in many instances, surprisingly nostalgic, even when Holland asks his subjects, toward the end of the film, if they view themselves as perpetrators.

"I have no regrets," says one unrepentant Nazi who looks back with pride on his time serving in the SS, Hitler's elite paramilitary unit.

In another scene, Holland visits a nursing home in Ebensee, Austria, and speaks with a group of older women who recall living around the site of a nearby concentration camp during the war. While one woman acknowledges what transpired inside the camp with some discernible remorse, another coyly insinuates that she was dating an SS officer who worked at the camp — and suggests that she helped him hide when American forces came to liberate it.

The most intriguing subject may be Hans Werk, a former SS officer who speaks matter-of-factly about his youthful passion for Nazism, which he admits to having imbued in him a sense of almost delusional grandeur that even his father found unsettling. But looking back on his youth, Werk seems to have developed a deep and genuine sense of regret for his actions — the only individual in the film who appears to have done so in any meaningful way. "These heroes you expect to find," Werk tells Holland in one pained exchange, "there aren't many of them."

"What was fascinating about that was that he had obviously gone through that whole process of really coming to terms with who he had been," said Smith. "So he stood out from that point of view as somebody who was willing to confront his own past in the present."

Near the end of the documentary, Werk sits for a discussion with a small group of young, right-wing extremists at the Wannsee villa, outside Berlin, where the Nazis planned the Final Solution. As it becomes clear that they view his regret with suspicion and even disdain, he pleads with them to see it his way.

"I think it was horrific to see that these young people were even considering that he might have got it wrong in terms of current-day immigration, for example, and that somehow or other, he'd been blinded," Smith told JI. "He says to them, 'Do not be blinded.'"

The subjects featured in the film, about 15 in all, are only a small fraction of the 250 or so people Holland interviewed during the more than 10 years he traveled throughout Germany and Austria in search of willing participants.

The interviews, in their totality, represent a valuable archival resource as Nazi perpetrators die out, according to Smith. "What they can be used for," Smith said, "is sort of as a research tool to help to contextualize how did we get from this civilized country to one that committed genocide."

Holland's methodology for procuring interviews was not always so direct. He would tell his potential subjects — whom he found via tips from well-sourced academics as well as on-the-ground research, and in some cases, sheer happenstance — that he was making a documentary about World War II, carefully priming them for eventual discussions of the Holocaust. In most cases, they were willing to field his questions.

For Holland, who conducted a large portion of his interviews while undergoing chemotherapy after a cancer diagnosis in 2013,"The Final Account" was a deeply personal enterprise.

Born in England, he spent his formative years in Paraguay, speaking English, Spanish and German, which would serve him well later on. In his teens, Holland, who was raised in a Christian community, discovered that his mother was a Jewish refugee from Vienna whose family had perished in the Holocaust — a revelation that would profoundly influence the trajectory of his later career.

Holland's previous documentaries include "Good Morning, Mr. Hitler," about propaganda in the Third Reich, and "I Was a Slave Labourer," about the post-war campaign for restitution.

"I think Luke personally was spurred on by that sense of duty to his parents and his grandparents," said Sam Pope, a longtime friend of Holland who helped produce the film. "It struck a chord with him and was a major motivating factor. It kept him going."

"The Final Account," which Holland began filming in 2008, would likely be impossible to make now given actuarial circumstances.

"We estimated when we began the project that maybe 15,000 or so people, just based on populations and statistics, would have been alive currently who would be able to reflect on the past, who would have been old enough to have been active participants in and grown up within the Third Reich," Pope told JI. "To try and approach this now, I think you're dealing with people who would have been very young who might not be able to necessarily offer their views."

Many of the subjects Holland spoke with have since died, according to Pope, and none have seen the film, which is expected to be screened in Germany.

"Luke said to me once he didn't expect his film to necessarily provide answers," Pope said. "But he hoped it would encourage people to ask better questions."

Still, even Holland appears to have found that some lines of questioning

had their limits. During one disturbing scene in “The Final Account,” he asks a former SS officer, Karl Hollander, about whether he remains committed to Hitler’s cause. “I still do,” Hollander says bluntly. “The idea was correct.”

“That interview ends pretty much with that final statement,” Pope said, noting that Holland never spoke with the SS officer again. “I think he couldn’t take it.” ♦