

***THE INGEBORG, TAMARA & YONINA RENNERT WOMEN IN JUDAISM FORUM***

**JEWISH WOMEN CHANGING AMERICA:  
CROSS GENERATIONAL-CONVERSATIONS**

**SATURDAY, 29 OCTOBER 2005**

**PANEL DISCUSSION 1:  
"JEWISH WOMEN AND THE AMERICAN MAINSTREAM"**

**Janet Jakobsen:** Good evening, welcome to Barnard. I'm Janet Jakobsen. I am director of the Center for Research on Women, and I'm very happy that you are able to join us this evening. I would like to welcome you to this year's Ingeborg, Tamara and Yonina Rennert Women in Judaism Forum. The Rennert Forum brings to Barnard scholars, artists, and activists—and with this conference we are fortunate to have all three—whose work promotes understanding of the complex roles of sex, gender, and sexuality in Judaism today and through history.

This is the first major conference that we've done out of the Rennert Forum and so, in planning this conference, we faced a number of possible topics and questions. Why then, did we settle on Jewish Women Changing America? As we considered the various possibilities, one particularly intriguing insight was the realization of the importance of Jewish women in the history of feminism in the United States.

When it comes to improving women's lives, in many instances it is Jewish women who are changing America. We are not the only ones to have come to this conclusion, and we at the Center have been particularly happy that the Jewish Women's Archive has become our partner for this event. They have been working on an exhibit on the history of Jewish women and feminism that is now available online at [jwa.org/feminism](http://jwa.org/feminism), and I encourage you to take a look at it. They are also here at the conference collecting oral histories of Jewish women's experiences with feminism, with a group of people who signed up in advance. And we want to welcome them and thank them very much for participating with us in this event.

As this collaboration makes clear, we are fortunate enough to have hit on a topic whose time has come. But we were still left with the question of how to approach this theme. One of the questions that the Barnard Center for Research on Women has itself focused on over the last several years has been that of cross-generational conversation.

And as we thought about the myriad contributions of Jewish women to social change in the United States, we realized that the pioneering efforts of Jewish feminists since the 1960s have been

met by the activities of a new and exciting set of young women working in a variety of media and venues.

This new work both bears the fruit of the earlier work that made contemporary feminist practice possible. And it has also taken feminism in directions that those of us who are older probably couldn't have imagined.

In taking up these conversations, we did our best not to shy away from controversy, but also to approach potential disagreements in a way that would be productive and illuminating. We have asked our moderators and panelists to work together in advance, to begin a conversation on their work and experiences as Jewish women making change. And this evening, and for each panel, our moderators will provide contexts, and then the panelists will share this initial conversation.

We will then ask you, the audience, to join in that conversation, and we hope that it will both reflect the important history of Jewish women changing America and also be a next step in the process of making change.

Finally, I have some thank-you's for making this Conference possible. First I would like to thank our co-sponsor, the

Barnard and Columbia Hillel, particularly Amy Ravis. I would also like to thank the staff of the Barnard Center for Research on Women: our associate director, David Hopson, who did all the print materials for the Conference; our Web designer, Hope Dector, who will do the Web journal; and our administrative assistant, E. Grace Glenney, who has done all the logistical work. And finally, I'd like to thank the staff, our Barnard students: Maureen Sidor, Katie Smith, Lori Sugatin, Lucy Trainor, Emily Wolf Robatis, and Suzanne Warwick. Yay, students!

(applause)

They make up, what we have to admit, is a new generation younger than many of what we now call the Third Wave. Finally, I want to thank the members of our planning committee: Irena Klepfisz, who is adjunct associate professor of Women's Studies here at Barnard, and who many of you know and who will be on the panel at the end of the day tomorrow; Flora Davidson, our associate provost, who has given us many, many helpful insights; and Miriam Peskowitz, who was our external consultant for this conference, and whose vision fundamentally informed the shape that the conference took. She provided us with an initial vision and outline and framework to which the committee could then respond, and we're deeply indebted to her.

I owe particular thanks to this committee. We've had any number of planning committees over the years at the Center. Because when it came to make choices that might fulfill the vision that we had worked out together, we faced a particularly difficult task.

Because there were so many Jewish women who had contributed to change in America. With a field so full of accomplished women and important organizations, how were we ever to produce panels that were not so unwieldy as to make the conference itself impossible?

If we wanted to include younger women who have joined their elders in the project of change, how were we to avoid missing some of the most important established speakers? We finally realized that this was an impossible task. We could not hope to represent the richness and variety of American Jewish women's activity. The best we could do was bring together a group of people who could begin a conversation, and then ask all of you who are with us tonight, to join in. From our perspective, you are all panelists and I thank you for coming.

I'd now like to introduce our first moderator, who is Laura Levitt. She is the director of Jewish Studies and an associate professor of religion at Temple University, where she does extensive teaching in the university's Women's Studies program as well.

During the spring of 2005, she was a visiting professor of religion at Williams College. She is the author of *Jews and Feminism: The Ambivalent Search for Home*, and co-editor, with Miriam Peskowitz, of *Judaism Since Gender*, and, with Shelly Hornstein and Lawrence Silverstein, is an editor of *Impossible Images: Contemporary Art After the Holocaust*.

She recently edited and contributed to *Changing Focus: Family Photography and American Jewish Identity*, which is a special issue of *The Scholar & Feminist Online*, the Web journal of the Barnard Center for Research on Women. And we are grateful to her for that. It was one of the first three issues. It helped us launch the journal; it was a big step forward for us.

Her current book project, *Ordinary Jews*, looks at twentieth-century American Jewish life and everyday losses, from under the shadow of the Holocaust, using family photographs. So without

further ado, I will turn the microphone over to our moderator, Laura Levitt, and our conversation will begin. Thank you.

**Laura Levitt:** Before we get started I want to make a couple of technical comments. What is going to happen with this panel is, we're going to basically follow the alphabetical order, except that Katya, who is sitting next to me to my left and to your right, will be the last speaker and in this way we will proceed.

And I will open with some framing remarks and then from there, I will introduce each of our speakers. I want to thank Janet and the committee and my friend Miriam, who I just saw out there, for putting together this wonderful conference.

I'm reminded of Adrienne Rich's collection of poems, *A Wild Patience Has Taken Me This Far*, which takes its title from the first line of a poem called "Integrity," written in 1978—the same year I graduated from high school, a time well before I was to read this poem and become acquainted with Adrienne Rich or, for that matter, well before I had come to appreciate the power of the feminist movement, feminist cultural and political production, and really to call myself a feminist.

"Integrity" is not the first but the second poem in that collection, in that now-famous volume. I often think of this volume of Rich's poetry as a kind of turning point, perhaps capturing not the moment of its writing for me, but instead, the moment of my own entry into feminist scholarship in the late 1980s, when it was already clear to many feminists that a common language, a single feminist stance was not what we were aiming for. That that had been a wish of an earlier moment.

Even in the late 1980s we appreciated that what we needed was to be wildly patient, because the feminist movement would continue to be a labor of intensive effort. That it required that we take seriously the differences among and between and within each of us. And it required that we take seriously these differences and that we refuse any easy answers. That we appreciate complexity and let go of any singular vision of feminist engagement, feminist action, feminist activism, creativity, scholarship, or politics.

Even as we understood that all of these efforts remain infused with the urgency of making better relations, of righting injustices, especially as they overlap and intersect, in often contradictory ways, with various legacies of systematic oppression and asymmetries of power, including those associated



with racism, with gross inequities of class, with issues of sexual orientation, with ethnic and religious differences, and, increasingly, generational differences.

After all, we were at a crossroad, a moment when we were and we are creating legacies, figuring out what it means to have more than a single generation of feminists working together in distinctive ways. And at this moment, we really are at that moment. Now, almost 30 years later, I find myself still (if not perhaps even more) impatient, trying to appreciate how far we have come and how much further we have to go.

And that's even if we don't see these struggles necessarily in linear terms in kind of a progression. And so, we are here in some sense to celebrate and to look ahead, to see what remains undone. Yet to do, yet to be realized. And on this panel I'm really pleased to introduce you to a wonderful array of strong, intellectual, creative, tough, political, Jewish feminist women. Women who, operating in quite different venues, using various quite different feminist strategies, are all doing what I would like to call radical feminist work in the present, as Jewish women. Part of the challenge of this panel will be to hear the nuances and differences in vocabulary, even as we appreciate the passions and urgencies of their and our respective engagements.

And then, having heard each of them briefly present a piece of their own projects and their own work, my aim is to facilitate a conversation among and between them and all of us, to consider where we go from here. What kinds of questions are yet to be answered? And my hope is that, in the process, we might appreciate the points of intersection and the kinds of new alliances that we all might possibly forge with each other as we move further into this new century with all of these challenges.

Without much further ado, I would like to now begin by introducing the first of our panelists, and it is really my honor to introduce Elizabeth Holtzman, who really needs no introduction, particularly in New York City. Liz is a longtime politician, an activist and former congresswoman from Brooklyn and a lawyer of great renown, continuing to do important feminist work in the present.

**Elizabeth Holtzman:** Good evening. Thanks to the moderator and thanks to this conference, and thanks to all of you for coming. I'm very honored to be part of this. It's a kind of wonderful challenge to be thinking about a cross-generational conversation.

I want to start by saying, when I have conversations about feminism in my head, I do it going backwards. My first conversation is with my grandmother who, as a Jewish woman in Russia, could not become a doctor, although that was her deepest wish. Her father, her family, wouldn't permit it. And so I guess some of that angst, anger, rage, whatever, wound its way through the generations. But I think of where I was able to come from that. I think, too, about not only what it means to be able to be a woman now in America, but also my own conversation with my own past as a Jew, my past and my family.

They fled pogroms in Russia. It was not easy to be a Jew in Russia, or now, Ukraine. Growing up as a child, I remember big signs saying "Restricted: No Jews Allowed." I remember being beaten up on my way to Hebrew School, in the morning . . . I'm sorry, in the afternoon, when we went after school.

And I remember also discrimination when I was in Congress. It's true, it's about 30 years ago, but it happened. And it happened repeatedly, particularly over the Vietnam War. When time after time after time, people would challenge my patriotism because—"after all," they said, "you wouldn't do the same thing if Israel were at stake."

In other words, I couldn't really be a true real American because I was a Jew. So I think those are probably experiences that the newest generation, thank goodness, I hope doesn't have to confront. But they lurk in the past, these experiences of mine. Others, more serious and more drastic.

I think sometimes being a Jew means being an outsider and having a perspective of not only the generation of your parents and grandparents, but the generations that go back for millennia, of being outsiders. Of having a different kind of perspective. And I think that's important, if you want to make change.

I also do believe that you've got to make change because that's part of our Jewish heritage, the commitment to social justice, at least as I see it. I'm sure others would disagree. But that's my view. And I think, too, about when I first got into politics, I actually came through the civil rights movement.

I had no examples in my own family. I'm the first generation in my family to be born in this country. But the civil rights movement, the effort of blacks to stand up against a system of Jim Crow and Bull Connor and Sheriff Pritchett, who was the sheriff where I was in Southwest Georgia, gave me a sense of the

ability to make change. Because if they could stand up, why couldn't all the rest of us? And if they could change a system that had been in existence for hundreds of years, centuries, why couldn't we change systems of injustice now? And that's still an inspiration for me.

I think too, as a challenge, I'm going to throw out to you now—I'm just not going to focus on the past; I'm going to focus on now as well. I was elected to Congress in 1972. I didn't know it at the time, and it wasn't really a fact that particularly interested me, but it's one that's begun to intrigue me more and more, and disturb me more and more: I was the youngest woman ever elected to Congress in 1972. And here we are, the next election for Congress will be 2006. It will be 34 years later, and no one in those 34 years has broken that record. So what does that say about our system of getting elected, or about young women and young Jewish women in America today?

It's an awful record. I mean, I was glad when it happened, to know that. But I thought for sure, because you only had to be 25 to be in the House of Representatives—and I was 31 when I was elected—I thought for sure that that record would be broken quickly and that there would be many, many dozens of women entering the Congress. The numbers have tripled, but that record

hasn't changed. And so, where are the young women, young Jewish women? And why does being young matter?

In part, it's because it gives diversity to a very traditional institution. Sometimes, young people have temerity that those of us who are older and wiser, say, have lost. It's been ground down by the generations, so to speak. When I was in Congress, I remember being on the committee that questioned the president of the United States, President Ford, about his pardon of Richard Nixon. And I was low person on that totem pole, and every single member of that subcommittee got to ask a question before me.

Of course, I was the only woman on it. And they were all senior, well established members of Congress. Very highly regarded, liberal Democrats among them. And not one of them posed the question to President Ford, about whether there was a deal over the pardon.

And I was hoping, as they checked off name after name, that somebody would ask the question, because I was a little scared to ask it, in fact, but nobody did. And so I said, I'm going to. And I really didn't understand the significance of putting it to the president of the United States.

I didn't have too much of a chance to think through the temerity of that. But we need people with temerity and boldness and some of the energy of youth in places of high office, in positions of high office in this country. So I want to throw this challenge out, that's my cross-generational conversation with you. Where are you?

Where are you? I mean, I'm not there, but we need you. And I remember, when I came there the tremendous voices that surrounded me at that time and were inspirations: Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem. That was pretty strong and heady stuff. And things were changing.

But if you look around, we made tremendous changes, all of us, working together. That was one of the important things, by the way, that women learned: to work together. It wasn't easy, but we did. Differences—we all came together.

Look at what's happening now. We are going backwards in this country. Is it because young women have forgotten that these rights were only created in the last 30 years and can be taken away just as quickly? Perhaps that's not understood. But we have one vote on the Supreme Court that could separate us from ending *Roe v. Wade*, ending *Griswald v. Connecticut*, which grants the

right to contraception and the right to privacy. And take us right back to back-alley abortions.

How could it be, in the year 2005, that in America our own ayatollahs can control the political debate? And that women can't be trusted to vote. We can now have bank accounts in our own names and credit cards in our own names.

Amazing. We can hold property in our own names. When I came to Congress, you couldn't have a credit card in your own name, and sometimes, not bank accounts, and all the rest. We can do all those things. But we can't be trusted to make decisions about our own bodies.

Wait a minute! In 2006? The twenty-first century that was so talked about? So I want to throw this challenge out to you. We are going backwards fast, and we are going backwards in the worst kind of way. And I want to talk about all the other challenges that we have.

But I just want to say to you that we need the cross-generational dialogue if for no other reason than to get young women to take up the cudgels and to save this country from going right into the Stone Age. Thank you very much.



**Laura Levitt:** Thank you. Our next speaker is Lisa Jarvis, and Lisa is a member of that younger generation, and a rather bold and audacious member, of that younger generation of feminists. Lisa is an editor at a magazine called *Bitch*, which some of you may know about, and some of you need to know about. She is both a writer and an activist. And she is currently beginning work on a project that looks at the intellectual heritage, the intellectual legacy of gender essentialism.

**Lisa Jarvis:** I should add that the subtitle of *Bitch* is *A Feminist's Response to Pop Culture*, which is I think is an important piece when paired with the word "bitch." We always want to have the explanatory text in there, so people know what we're about. And as the subtitle suggests, we look at any element of pop culture, from the advertising industry, TV, movies, books, magazines. Anything that people believe to be true, kind of the entire popular imagination we would take to be pop culture. And we critique that from a feminist perspective.

I'm going to keep my remarks brief because the thing I enjoy most about panels is the conversational element, so I am looking forward to your questions. I just want to say that I think I'm a little bit of an outlier on this panel maybe, because I don't

particularly see my work as connected to my Jewish identity, which for me is kind of a very specific cultural identity. I was raised a couple of miles southeast of here in pretty much your standard upper-middle-class New York white Jewish household.

And so, I very much identify culturally with that, but it hasn't been something that's been a big part of my feminist work. And I think that, as Elizabeth's remarks just demonstrated, it's very much a luxury that I can even have that perspective. And that is something that—talking about cross-generational conversation—that's something that women of my generation have inherited.

There's all this work that's come before us that has made it possible for us to move forward more easily without a lot of challenges. Other people have fought those battles for us, so that's something that we've all benefited from. And that's really all that I want to say, for now. And I look forward to your questions.

**Laura Levitt:** Thank you. Our next speaker, probably again, in this context needs very little introduction, but I'm going to introduce her anyway. Letty Cottin Pogrebin is a well-known pioneer of second wave American feminism and American Jewish feminism.

She is, as many of you know, a co-founder of *Ms.* magazine and an author of numerous incredibly important articles on anti-Semitism in the feminist movement, among many, many other topics. Some of you also, I'm sure, know her from her very wonderful and important memoir, *Deborah, Golda and Me*. I am just really delighted to have Letty be a part of this. And I should just say that before we got started, Letty was really a wonderful conversation partner with all of us, to really get us to talk across generations online, which is where we met before we came here to New York together. Thank you, Letty.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** Thank you. Since I'm an unreconstructed obsessive compulsive, I took this brochure literally and Laura's mandate literally: you gave me 15 minutes. So in 15 minutes I'm going to address the four issues that were raised by the paragraph that outlines the purview of this gathering tonight. I'll pose them as questions.

Issue one: After 30 years of feminist activism, what have been Jewish women's contributions to the American mainstream? Short answer: our big mouths and putting our bodies on the line. There has been a disproportionate Jewish representation in every political and social movement in America. Labor unions, anti-

nuke, civil rights, Vietnam, feminism, with the most visible examples in the Second Wave being the aforementioned Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem and, of course, Bella.

But hundreds of thousands of ordinary Jewish women have been out there on the barricades as well. We've been lobbying, raising money, and organizing at the grassroots on issues like reproductive rights, women's health, poverty, Social Security, racial equality, and economic justice. We've been doing that as Jews and we've been doing that as women and we've been doing that as citizens of this country.

I want to make another point. Too often, Jewish women's organizations have been passive fundraisers or cheerleaders for men's agendas. But in fact some Jewish women's organizations have been cutting-edge and intractable on feminist issues. I'm thinking of the National Council of Jewish Women, whose members are always in the front lines at pro-choice demonstrations, always schlepping up to the Hill, defending women's economic and legal rights. And remember that NCJW was the only Jewish organization, coed or otherwise, that had the guts to go on record in protest of John Roberts' nomination to the Supreme Court.

I'm thinking also of Jewish Women International, formerly called B'nai Brith Women, which has chosen to make domestic violence, date rape, relationship violence and abuse their keystone issue, and had challenged the entire Jewish community to pay attention to women's pain, a problem that's been brushed under the rug in homes that put a mezuzah on their doors.

And despite all the Hadassah jokes that we've all heard and told, I witnessed Hadassah women acting as a feminist presence at the U.N. International Women's Conference in Beijing. And I've watched how they educate their members for advocacy and activism. And let me say, there is great power in a little old Jewish lady who knows how to organize.

Jewish women have provided financial resources to many worthy causes, though they have not always received credit. In fact, they have rarely received the credit they deserve. They sometimes, at least until recently, are only known by their husbands' names. When they're honored, they're given testimonial lunches, not dinners, that are attended mostly by women and not by "the Jews." There have always been Jewish women in public life and on the front lines of social change. From Rose Schneiderman—suffragist, socialist, labor organizer—to Hannah Arendt—the brilliant, if controversial, social critic. From my

really good friend and mentor, Bella Abzug, who claimed she was born yelling, to today's strong and powerful Jewish senators, Barbara Boxer and Diane Feinstein. There are five Jewish women in the House. Shelley Berkeley in Nevada. Susan Davis in California. Jane Harmon, California. Nita Lowey, New York. And Jan Schakowsky, Illinois.

And we've had Madeleine Kunin, the former Governor of Vermont, and Linda Lingle, the present Governor of Hawaii. She's a Jewish woman. And of course, we all take great pride in the extraordinary Ruth Bader Ginsberg, a Jewish Supreme Court Justice who has always told the truth about how hard it was to be a woman in the legal profession. What is not known is how hard Jewish women organized to pressure President Clinton to name her in the first place.

Question two on your brochure: What advances have Jewish women made both in their own communities and in the larger struggle for social justice and equality? I think feminist activism has made relatively much greater progress in the Jewish world than feminism in general has made in the world at large.

Because once we broke down the doors of Jewish institutions, they stayed open. We have not experienced the backlash and

backsliding that has so eroded much of women's progress on the secular American landscape.

But in the Jewish world, just for example, let's do a quick but far-from-comprehensive review of how women have progressed in the synagogue and the spiritual sphere in the last 30 years. The reason I focus on this is because I will never forget the very first time when I sat in the pews of the Stephen Wise Synagogue and saw a woman cantor and a woman rabbi and a woman president on the bema at the same time. I thought I had really died and gone to heaven, even though I'm a Conservative Jew. And that was a Reform congregation.

(laughter)

So in the past 30 years, we have seen the ordination of women rabbis and cantors in all but the Orthodox denomination. The counting of women in the minyan, the quorum required for public prayer. We have seen women get *aliyot*, the honor of being called up to say the blessings for the Torah reading. And greater equality in bat mitzvahs. When I was bat mitzvah'd in 1952, I was given Friday night and I was not allowed to read the Torah portion. I was allowed only to have haftarah. Some prayer books

have been revised to excise or moderate patriarchal God language.

The matriarchs have taken their place along the patriarchs in the liturgical canon. There has been notable progress in Orthodoxy as well. Women's *tefilah* groups. A greater, though not equal role, for the bat mitzvah. *Simchat bat* ceremonies that welcome the birth of a baby girl.

A full-fledged Jewish Orthodox feminist movement that actually uses the "f" word, and has an organization that is growing, growing, growing, is called JOFA—Jewish Orthodox Feminist Alliance—whose conferences have been held at major hotels in New York, like the Hyatt, and have attracted thousands.

We have seen the wondrous proliferation of feminist rituals across denominations. Women's seders. I was lucky enough to be in the founding feminist seder that's run every year by Esther Broner. But everywhere you go in this country now, there's not one, but several feminist seders all over this country, in cities large and small.

There are women's *tashlich* ceremonies. *Rosh Hodesh* groups and members of my *Rosh Hodesh* group are in this room. A revisiting



of the *mickvah* ritual in a feminist context. Equal opportunity marriage vows. The joint breaking of the glass. Lesbian commitment ceremonies. New life cycle ceremonies from the celebration of a girl's first menstruation, to the *simchat hochna* for women of a certain age.

In Israel, Women of the Wall have been fighting for the right to pray in a group and with a Torah at the Western Wall, which is permissible under Jewish law, but has been fought by the ultra-Orthodox with weapons ranging from thrown chairs, bags of feces, and violent curses, to legal briefs that have gone to Israel's Supreme Court.

Jewish women everywhere have organized to help *agunot* wives who are chained to husbands who refuse to grant them a *get*, a Jewish divorce. In the past 30 years, we've been graced with women scholars such as those you will be hearing from today, some of which I have been privileged to study with and all of whose work has fueled my mind and passion, and I'm sure yours as well.

So about the advances over the last 30 years, I would say we've come a long way, maybe.

Question three: In what directions has Jewish feminism traveled over the last three decades? Well, in the beginning, Jewish feminism borrowed much of its demands and style from the Betty Freidan school of feminism, meaning women demanded equality with men, wanted to do what men do and have what men have.

Before long, though, competing ideologies and strategies took root. What men do and have was not necessarily ideal, said some. Others critiqued the canon. Positive and new vision embraced different feminism. Still others wrote new curricula, filled in the historical blanks, imagined women's voices where the texts were silent.

New demands were made across the board for a more inclusive definition of what it means to be a Jew, a more candid assessment of how Jewish men treat Jewish women. Changes in how communal leaders are chosen, and what constitutes real leadership.

Eventually, Jewish feminism expanded to embrace the idea of feminisms, and the reality of multiple, overlapping identities. Today there are as many expressions of Jewish feminism as there are Jewish women.

The last question, question four: At what crossroads do we stand now and where might we yet go in the future? The subtitle of this conference—Cross-Generational Conversations—is a fine attempt to connect past to future in an organic way. I enter this conversation by asking myself what my generation is leaving to the next, and what the next generation is willing to accept from us.

I take very seriously the challenge of legacy. But I have to admit, I find it hard to strike a balance between wanting younger women to secure the hard-won progress achieved by my cohort and, at the same time, respecting their right to define their own agenda.

But there are problems, real problems. An indefatigable, well-financed conservative backlash. Some major, major backsliding. Continuing media representation. Neglect, ignorance, suffering.

I was chilled by the front-page piece by Louise Story in the *Times* a few weeks back, about Yale women supposedly—and I emphasize “supposedly”—opting out. Battles we thought we’d won must be fought all over again, with fresh troops. And this is what worries me.

Sometimes I wish the younger generation would work harder to create a new feminist theory, to address our most intractable problems. Like how to resolve the perennial work/family balancing act. Or how to ensure that our multiple racial and cultural identities strengthen, rather than splinter, the women's community. Or how to create a more effective synergy between scholarship and activism.

Sometimes I wish younger women would revisit the consciousness-raising process of the sixties and seventies and would try and organize small, weekly rap groups, like those that empowered my generation, to define our issues and build sisterhood and solidarity.

Sometimes, when I speak around the country, I'm shocked at what young women don't know or have chosen to forget. Except for gender studies majors and well-informed feminists, many Jewish girls don't know who Golda Meir was, never mind Bella Abzug. It's also true that many black women don't know who Fannie Lou Hamer was or Mary McLeod Bethune, which is just as upsetting.

Few women on today's campuses have a real sense of what it was like before abortion was legalized. Of how it felt to have a straight-A average and not be able to apply to the college of

your choice because it only took men. Of how it felt to open the classified job ad section in the newspaper, and know that you couldn't even think of applying for a position that was listed in the "Men Wanted" column.

As George Santayana famously wrote, "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it." And this worries me. Sometimes, quite honestly, I'm disappointed that younger feminists have not adopted the troublemaking, feather-ruffling, rabble-rousing methods of my generation.

I love the group that calls itself Jewish Women Watching. I don't know who they are; they are all anonymous. But I love their in-your-face, stealthy actions in the Jewish community to raise consciousness about what's wrong where women are concerned.

I know that there are lots of young Jewish women who care deeply about the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and are working on that issue with body and mind and spirit. And women who are working on lesbian/gay rights, the effects of pornography and violence on women's lives—women who speak out and work hard and whose efforts I applaud heartily.

But I'm bewildered by the silence of so many others, by their passivity, their apolitical tendencies, their search for personal liberation, as opposed to systemic change. As long as gender inequalities persist, as long as institutionalized sexism and heterosexism require political and legislative solutions, which they do, cultural feminism is just not going to do it for me.

I believe women, Jewish and otherwise, do stand at a crossroads right now. And depending on the ultimate makeup of the Supreme Court, and which indictments follow Scooter Libby, and the fate of Karl Rove and Tom Delay, women's status in America can change on the dime and become very much worse unless young women are willing to act up and fight back.

Sometimes I wish this generation were more comfortable with the politics of confrontation, that they had a greater will to protest and demonstrate, regardless of the threat of ridicule and despite the sorry likelihood of media neglect, which my generation didn't have to deal with.

We put five women out on a picket line and we got six or eight media cameras and what-have-you. I wish I didn't sense a return to the privatization of oppression, the belief that there might

be individual relief from the strains of living in a patriarchy. If only a girl could luck out with the right boss, the right guy, the right magazine, pull off the right quip and wear the hippest navel ring.

Having said all that, I admire the sense of entitlement that I see in this generation of women. Many of them won't stand for the crap that my generation did. I admire their assertive sexuality, though I wonder if they're getting any better at orgasms than my generation did.

I admire their comfortably idiosyncratic personal style, though I don't understand how a woman can be taken seriously in the work place with her *pupik* exposed. I admire their strong writing voices and their fearless films.

I'm one of the old war horses who has been working for 35 years so young women can have that sense of entitlement and style and the choice to be and act exactly as they please. In Jewish life, in particular, that sense of entitlement is met with greatly expanded options and the possibility of a deeper, much more participatory spiritual and organizational role in the community.

But Jewish women, beware: there are new problems facing us, many new challenges. For instance, the accusation that women's increased participation and feminism has feminized the synagogue and thus driven men away. Or the claim that women are to blame for the low Jewish birth rate: we're supposedly too selfish and career-minded to have enough children. It's all our fault the Jews are dying out, according to Jack Wertheimer, provost of the Jewish Theological Seminary, who writes about the "demographic disaster" in the October issue of *Commentary*. Or the continuing presence of homophobia in virtually all Jewish institutions. Or the reluctance to accept single women and single mothers as full members of the Jewish world. Or the leadership's resistance to acknowledging the extent of violence and abuse in the community, to address the problem from the bully pulpit, to appropriate adequate resources to eradicate it. And the relative paucity of financial support for any women's project.

What would I say to young women about these future challenges? I'd say, "Don't agonize. Organize!" Thank you.

**Laura Levitt:** Thank you, Letty. Our next speaker is Nancy Schwartzman, who is a filmmaker and a founder of a wonderful Web site, which I call your attention to, called [www.nyc-safestreets.org](http://www.nyc-safestreets.org), and it's a fabulous site that marks places of



violence, places where women have been attacked in New York City. It's an amazing model that hopefully other cities and other feminist organizers will consider doing elsewhere and repeating elsewhere.

Some of you may also know Nancy's work as a creative director at *Heeb* magazine. And tonight we are very fortunate to have Nancy not only talk a little bit, but she's going to show us a brief clip from a film she is currently working on, which is called *Between Us*, a film about date rape and a film set in Israel. And I'm really thrilled that she's here to do this. Thank you.

**Nancy Schwartzman:** Thank you. It's an honor to be here. I think I'll start by talking about my work at *Heeb*, and our caption that follows *Heeb* is *The New Jew Review*, so there's no doubt about what it is that we do. Our name was quite controversial and it was chosen that way, as an appropriation of a slur that was used against Jews that I was lucky to have never heard in my lifetime.

And most of the editors realize that our parents really objected to this term, but our grandparents really loved it and they loved that it was in-your-face and had pride. So that was sort of an interesting thing.

When we started this magazine, we were a group of kids. I had been filming in Israel and I got back and I was 25. And what we wanted to do was start a magazine that reflected our relationship to Judaism. And mine definitely was a cultural one. I discovered my Judaism when I moved to New York at 18, and it was very much related to that New York experience.

It had nothing to do with Torah or ritual or my suburban Jewish synagogue in the Philadelphia suburbs. So our first issue was really drawing a connection with urban culture and Jewish culture. And we used a lot of references to African American youth culture.

And what we wanted from *Heeb* was to make it for everybody. It's for Jews and their friends, for Jews who do identify, Jews who don't. And also, using our politics and humor to bring in lots of different kinds of people.

As creative director, I made the pictures and created the look of *Heeb* and I had no interest ever, generally, in working on a magazine. And I certainly didn't want to create one that mimicked all the other kinds by putting hot chicks on the pages of *Heeb* to get them to sell. So I played with Jewish female

representation and I started with our grandparents. In issue 2 we flew down to Miami and I found a bunch of bubbes , rounded them up and dressed them up as fashion divas for the "Word to Your *Bubbe*" issue.

In issue 3, I did a photo series called "Jewess," which was playing on—really celebrating—everything we as Jewish women have ever been ashamed of: our zaftig figures, our body hair, our profiles. And I was really happy doing that, and we got lots of thank-yous in the mail for that one.

Issue 5 challenged Mel Gibson's version of "The Passion" with our own version of this story. And I wanted to approach it using art historical references. So my Virgin Mary was modeled after Edvard Munch, and she was very beautiful, empowered, sexy Jewish mother. And in *Heeb*, ours had nipple rings and was exposed. And I also looked up Marc Chagall's painting of the Crucifixion, where Jesus is on the cross in a *tallit*, and I did the same for our Jesus, and got lambasted by the ADL and on Page Six. And our publicist dumped us for that image, so I guess they had never seen a painting.

(laughter)

So, for me, *Heeb* was an incubator for creative expression and a way to really play with what we are comfortable with as cultural definitions. And also, it allowed me to have a lot of fun because at the same time, I was working on a documentary film called *Between Us*. It's a personal doc about my own experience of being raped in Jerusalem by a Jewish man.

Part of what I was teasing out in the film is the response I received from the Jewish community, when coming forward with this story. And I think all survivors of violence know that you have two things that happen: you have the incident, and you have the coming forward and telling the story, and how your community responds.

And as I made the rounds looking for support, both emotionally and financially from our community, it became clear that the Jewish community did not want to prioritize this story. For them, when a Jewish woman goes to Israel, they want to hear that she made *aliah*, they want to hear that she fell in love with a brave Israeli soldier. They want to hear that she is now more religious.

What happened to me, instead, was I was sexually harassed by a male rabbi. I was insulted by a female rabbi. I was asked why I

was making this film. Is this because our children shouldn't go to Israel? What's the point of this? Are you trying to ruin his life?

Women of my mother's generation and my grandmother's generation had also told me that what happened to me was not rape, it was just a bad experience. And alcohol was involved and so I was basically silenced and blamed by women, and by Jews.

So, in the current issue of *Heeb*, issue 9, which focuses on sex, my editor asked if I would submit my story. And it was a really great idea and I was quite honored that they would have the vision to put a story about violence within our own community—Jewish-on-Jewish violence—and the community's response.

So I guess what I'm going to do now is show a four-and-a-half minute clip from the documentary, and then we can talk about it after.

[Audio recording was stopped during the screening of the documentary. In order to supply context for the discussion that follows, the editors note here that, at the end of the film, an audience member loudly denounced the project and the conference as being against the state of Israel. A brief but heated

exchange followed between this woman and several other members of the audience, who encouraged her to leave the event, which she did.]

**Laura Levitt:** Thank you again, Nancy. These are difficult issues and we don't all have to agree. But we need to respect where people are coming from and how brave it is to be able to talk about things that are hard to talk about. And that's where there is some hope in the future.

I'd like to now finally introduce our last panelist. She is sitting next to me. Katya Gibel Azoulay is a professor of anthropology and American studies at Grinnell College. Some of you may not know, but Grinnell is in Iowa. That's in America. It's a red state, right? A red state.

She is the author of a very important 1997 academic book that was published by Duke University Press called *Black, Jewish and Inter-Racial: It's Not The Color of Your Skin, But The Race Of Your Kin, and Other Myths of Identity*. She is currently working on a number of projects, including work on rethinking genetics and questions of race.

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** I'm just going to touch on a number of different issues, hopefully that are all provocative. But I didn't know that the first one that I would raise was what we just heard a few minutes ago. I will come out quite different from the way some of you felt. I think it's unfortunate that the woman left. I think that it's unfortunate that she was encouraged to leave. I think if we are afraid to confront people whose opinions diverge radically from our own, and only want to hear and speak with the people who agree with us, then we will not have any transformations. That is part of the problem.

(applause)

All I know is that she said, "This is against the state of Israel! This is Arafat's doing!" And then she walked out. I don't know who the woman is. I can empathize with her reaction, as somebody who has dual citizenship. I take my Israeli citizenship very seriously. I take criticism of Israel very seriously. And I think audience is very important.

But I do want to stress that this is not something new that I'm saying. This is something we, especially those of us who are older, know. If we only speak with those who agree with us, we

will make no change, which is why America looks the way it does today.

So that's one thing that I hadn't thought that I would say, but I do want to raise it. I come from an academic position. I am interested in issues of theory. My students are constantly asking, "How do I put into practice these theoretical ideas?" That is a very difficult question to respond to, and it's not something that there is an easy answer to.

So what I'm going to say now is partially theoretical and partially very pragmatic. In America, in the United States, the image of Jews is an image of whiteness. It is an image of European whiteness. It is no longer an image of Jewishness that happens to also be white, which was not true in the post-World War II era. I was recently reminded of this by a woman who I'm interviewing in Des Moines who, for me, is this odd person, as most of the Jewish community is there. People are very American, very not-New York. But these are people who go back to the mid-nineteenth century and only think of themselves as American. I'm talking about a woman who is 75, and her grandmother was American.



I'm a first-generation American, so that, to me, is very odd. But this notion of what is mainstream strikes me as something that is problematic and that the Jewish community and Jewish activists have to begin to seriously think about, how to challenge that image. Why is this important? If you take a visit to the Jewish Museum sometime in the next few weeks, you will see the diversity exhibit which is there—I was one of the consultants—and it's important because there are lots of different Jewish communities in the United States that do not necessarily comprise that image of American Jews. There are Jews who are from Latin American countries who are Latino, because that's the vocabulary of the twenty-first century. Latino. They do not necessarily engage with nor are interested in the issues that mainstream Jewish Americans are interested in.

There are Jews from North Africa. There are Jews from the Middle East. There are Israeli Jews who are now just simply Israeli, and who have long passed the Diaspora perspective of their parents and their grandparents. So there are multiple communities, and why is this important? This is important in the political arena where alliances are made and where political images are very important.

One takes for granted today that somebody who is called Arab or Muslim, blond or dark, is considered a person of color. One does not take for granted that somebody whose last name is Azoulay, and not inherited through marriage, but Azoulay, is also an Arab Jew, and as likely to be stopped at the airport as somebody whose last name is Abraham.

Because it's not in the media. Because again, the image put forward is simply that Israel is a white country, that Jews are white. And then there happen to be these other people who are Jews of color. And then the Jews of color are mixed up with all sorts of other groups, claiming to be Jewish. Which raises the question, Who defines the criteria of Jews?

Does the Orthodox rabbinate of Israel determine that? Or does the political government in Israel determine that? But it means that Israel is back in the picture of mainstream, United States Jewish self-identity and how Jews are identified.

I can tell you that in Iowa, where I do not feel at home, neither as a black person whose background is Jamaican, nor as a Jewish person whose background is Ashkenazi Europe, white Christians see Jews as different. And Jews in Iowa pass as white and maintain a very, very low profile.

And when I give money, the money that I give is to Chabad. Which is not something I would have done in the 21 years that I lived in Israel, or expected that I would do. And why is that? Because Chabad is not embarrassed to be Jewish. They look different, they sound different, and they are in-your-face Jews. Are they right-wing in terms of politics? Yes. Are their politics supportive of the settlements? Yes. Can I support that? No. But I do support the fact that they are in-your-face Jews. In that respect, they have more in common with black Americans in Iowa, except that there's a problem. And that is that black Americans in Iowa are very American.

And one has to leave the enclave of New York, San Francisco—I don't even want to say Chicago because Chicago is a peculiar place—but New York, San Francisco has its own synergy. And Jews from New York and San Francisco who are part of the Ashkenazi American Jewish community, which I have to admit that would be my background—Ashkenazi, not Sephardic—although my children, one of whom is in the audience today, can claim both and a whole lot of other things together.

But that image, again, the image of gefilte fish, the image of borscht, the Woody Allen image, that is not the image that

speaks to a lot of Jews in communities in New York, San Francisco, Miami, Los Angeles, Atlanta. And those are not the faces that we see in audiences like this.

So when we have a forum that speaks about the changing face of American Jews or Jews in the United States, when we have discussions about Jewish feminism, we have to—and here I am, putting in the “we”—we have to be very self-conscious of the way we use that term “we.”

Which brings me to the issue of public imagination, media images and the role of mothers in socializing Jewish children. Hey, because it’s still Jewish mothers that are socializing Jewish children, not simply Jewish parents. Jewish mothers of children who in the United States are raised as black, Latino, Asian American are at this point in time often describing themselves as white Jews. That terminology is very recent. It has also moved over and entered into Hebrew in Israel—“white Jews.”

That is not language that existed 20 years ago. People didn’t go around saying, “I’m a white Jew.” But we hear it over and over both within the Jewish community, within Jewish literature, within the media. And we have to start to ask ourselves, What does that mean? What is that whiteness speaking to? Is it

speaking to privilege? Is it speaking to appearance? Does it speak to Chabad or the Jews in Brooklyn? Do they have access to the same whiteness? You will not hear Chabad describe themselves as white Jews. That's not their language.

And I have met now—because I was at a conference in February—I have met people who are of all sorts of different backgrounds, so I don't want to say American because some were West Indian and a few were from Latin America, but who, by American standards, are raised as black or of African descent, which is quite different from simply African American, the term that Jesse Jackson coined that's become popular because it makes people feel more comfortable. It's not a term that I use.

Who belong to the Orthodox community in Brooklyn, and who stereotypically speak and act like the Orthodox Jewish community in Brooklyn, and who are very brown-skinned people. And who are very comfortable being black in the United States. Where do we see them? How do we see them?

How do mothers, who think of themselves as white Jews raising children as Jews of color, how are they reinscribing difference which is a racialized difference which reflects American politics in the Jewish community? I think that's an issue that has to be addressed.

So what does it mean to relinquish identifying explicitly as white when you have access to the privileges of being a white American? It means, in a sense, constantly standing up and identifying all the time, your actions, your position, your projection of self as a Jew. Not just when it's convenient.

Not just when there's an active anti-Semitism and then suddenly you hear people reminding others, "Well, we're Jews and we have been discriminated against, so we can understand that group of people." And of course, the reaction often is a reaction of resentment which is to, again, enforce the idea that no, you are white, don't claim your Jewishness.

I'm speaking here specifically about some of the tensions that continue to exist between Americans who are Jewish and blacks who are American. I raise this because when I hear the names Bella Abzug, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan, on the one hand, as a woman who's between generations, I can identify with some of the questions they raise. Although my mother was a working mother. And they were not. And that was a question at the time. That divided women. It made the feminist movement a movement that some people felt included in, and others felt

excluded from. It generalized the experience of women who had privilege.

And when we look today in the year 2005—and I asked the same questions that were asked before—Where is the self-consciousness of young women? For me, it's also, Where is the self-consciousness both of black young women and of Jewish young women identifying as black? Being proactive, speaking out?

But I also have to think to myself, when I look around the Congress or when I look at professionals and I look at the women who have made advances, How many of them are women who are of African descent? How many of them are women who are Latino and brown skinned? How many of them are women who are Asian American, but not Chinese and Japanese? Those are issues, I think, that must be addressed.

Finally, how do we question proactive strategies that change vocabulary? That self-consciously set in motion, in a very difficult way, a changing vocabulary, changing conversations? Because if you change vocabulary, you have to change your conversation. It shifts the conversation, which is why I asked to speak last, because we hadn't had a discussion about race yet, explicitly.

And I think it has to be at the center. And how do conversations then effect changing behaviors? How is it possible to take for granted a conversation in which Jewishness is at the center, divorced from whiteness as a privilege that allows for passing?

There is no moment when I pass as simply Jewish. Not in the United States. And there is no moment when I allow others to look at me and assume that I am simply black, with an essentialized notion of what blackness is. Because I will say, "I am Jewish." I will say, "I am black."

And I think those are some of the issues that are very important. It is important to change the vocabulary. It is important to see a shift in the conversations. It is important to place Israel at the center of conversations about Jewishness. In part, because Israel is the center where Jews from all over the Diaspora have come, because it does in fact reflect a diverse range of appearance, a diverse range of style, a diverse range of gestures. A completely diverse range of what Jewishness looks like, that is not the Jewishness that is on the American screen. Or in American Jewish publications, or just in American Jewish stereotypes. So that's my contribution, in brief.



**Laura Levitt:** Before I open it up, I would like to have some of the panelists talk to each other. And I wanted to flag one of the issues that has come up, and I'm struck by the ways in which, in some ways, younger women are being questioned about: Why aren't you more political?

One of the vocabulary shifts that is really important to highlight here is to think about what we understand as political, in some of the ways that Katya was just describing. When we begin to do that, we ask what are the venues in which women are operating and acting and intervening in certain kinds of asymmetries of power, of social inequities?

And I think that when we begin to think about that, we have to say, well, okay, they may not be running for Congress, which has a lot to do with—dare I say?—class, but they may be publishing. And they may be making interventions through media, through other kinds of venues.

We have to be careful, as feminists and as Jews, as we begin talking to each other about really complicated—we are living in very difficult times and the frustration of figuring out what to do and how to act is something that we share across generations.

And it's not something that is the burden of one or the other, and how to figure out how to do that?

So with that in mind, I'd like to ask, first of all, Lisa, who is very quiet to begin with, to sort of open up some of this discussion. I'm putting her on the spot, to get us going.

**Lisa Jervis:** Great. Thanks. As you can imagine, I hear that a lot: "Where are the young women and why aren't younger women more active? Why this, why that?" And I think that, yes, as far as electoral politics goes, I think young women aren't as active. I can't speak for young women about this because I don't go out and talk to young women about why they're not running for office—although somebody should. But it's not going to be me.

But my sense is that our electoral system is broken. Nobody wants to run for office because it seems to me kind of a dead end. We have electoral fraud. If our electoral system were working better, I think you'd see more young people interested in joining that arena. That's my quick take on things. And that holds true for a lot of the tactics. We've heard some comments about, Why are young women not using some similar tactics from years past? And I agree with you, Letty, that there are some tactics that we need to revive and need to be used more, but

some modes of protest no longer work. If marching worked, we would not be in Iraq. Roe would not be threatened. We had a million women marching on Washington last April, and Roe is still threatened.

It's pretty clear what the electorate wants. But our elected officials are not interested in giving it to us. So we do need new tactics. And I share the frustration of, Why have we not moved forward? Why are we still fighting the same battles over and over? I don't think that it's because young women aren't active enough. I think that part of the reason, also, that question gets asked is that there are so many issues that young women are working on, young feminist women and women who may not identify specifically as feminists. But they are working on issues that are very much motivated by feminist politics and feminist principles, but they are not what are traditionally thought of as feminist issues. You've got women doing work around the prison industrial complex. Anti-sweatshop organizing. All sorts of things that are deeply, deeply feminist issues. But because they're not just about women, that work is not claimed as feminist and thus gets overlooked when people ask, "Where are the young women? Why aren't they more organized?"

The fact is they are organized. They are just organized in slightly different places, and we really have to recognize that. So I've stopped being quiet now.

**Laura Levitt:** Letty, would you like to respond?

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** I'd like to hear Nancy respond, stay on the issue of younger women's . . .

**Nancy Schwartzman:** Well, it reminded me of when I worked at the Barnard/Columbia Rape Crisis Center and I was the president. We would sit around in a circle and introduce ourselves and say, "This is why this issue is important to me." And I remember being shocked that, I think 80 percent of the women sitting around the room said, "I'm here, this is important to me but I'm not a feminist." Or, "I don't consider myself a feminist." I'm like, "What are you talking about? How can you sit in this room with me and say that?"

That's still stayed with me. I agree with Lisa that young women are very organized. There are great activist books like *How To Be An Activist*, co-written by women organizing around different issues. But I do fear that in organizing around other things, we are taking too much for granted. That's what everyone is

basically saying at this table, that we can't even imagine what our mothers went through, or our mothers don't remind us enough or things like that. So that's what I'll say.

**Elizabeth Holtzman:** I was very interested in these answers and I don't have an answer myself. It's just that, if you take the Vietnam War, that struggle lasted for many, many years. And there were many, many marches, and there were many, many efforts. It took a long time, but it finally happened. So I want to ask Lisa—and politics are no worse today than they were years ago. It's been pretty bad for a long time, in many ways. I mean, there's been progress, but we had many terrible obstacles to overcome. But do you think there's a kind of impatience or a sense that you've just got to have to keep slugging away at the issue? Because it's a puzzle to me.

**Lisa Jervis:** There's a profound frustration. We all share impatience and we'd all like to see things change faster. But there's a lot of work going on. Just to take the war as an example. It's been demonstrated that the people who are making the decisions and the people who are making the policy do not care what the people of this country think about the issue.

And so, I see more effectiveness in the anti-recruitment work that's being done. Challenging the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act that gives military recruiters access to schools. There's a lot of work being done around that. It's a lot quieter than organizing these huge marches.

But that kind of work is more grassroots and it doesn't get the kind of attention that other kinds of actions get. I do think it's more effective right now, and I also think that that work is happening, though it may not be recognized as much.

And there is a little bit of a disconnect between what's actually going on and what people might think is going on, because they don't see it. I agree that more is needed on all fronts. Things are awful right now, so . . .

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** Just as a reminder to all of us—and I think I may have made the same error before—it is not accurate, actually, to say that young people are not involved. It is accurate to say that there seems to be less involvement of young people in progressive political circles.

But if one looks at everything right of center, young people are very involved, which includes young women. If one looks at the

Christian right, it is most definitely young people, including young women. And in fact, if one looks at the pro-life movement, as awkwardly named as that is, one finds that it is women who are very much at the forefront.

So the question is, Where are the women who have the politics that we prefer? And the other thing to consider is that we, the United States and the rest of the world, are in a pretty sorry state. There was a time when you could name a number of different leaders around the world who were exemplary figures, or we thought they were exemplary figures at least in their public life. Maybe not in their private life. That is impossible to do today because the last of them—perhaps, Nelson Mandela—is no longer a leader. He is a symbol and unfortunately he also was in jail for 28 years, so we don't know what that might have been. But this issue of a void, politically, is one that we are all facing.

**Lisa Jervis:** I agree with that, but I also do see young people in progressive circles. I do see that there are young female progressive activists as well as on the right. I don't think that is confined to the right.

**Nancy Schwartzman:** I will agree because I know that two of the heads of organizing the youth vote movement are young women.

**Laura Levitt:** I also wonder if part of this is, again, the ways in which, in retrospect, we use rose-colored glasses. There's something about, at least as a kind of middle person—by the time I got to college in the late seventies, early 'eighties, I felt like I had missed out on real politics. I missed out on the Vietnam War. I missed out on feminism. I missed out on all of that.

And I think that the romanticism of that moment comes from a really good place and it certainly has been a motivation. But it's also been something that has thwarted imagination for many of us. And when I look to my students and to my younger peers on the panel, I say, "Wow, what a gutsy thing to do, to put these things out there." To talk about being date-raped in Israel in a Jewish feminist context in New York City, in 2005? It's really incredible. And it's really, really hard. And the other problem is that as feminists, we are also haunted by the cyclical problems that keep coming back over and over again.

The work/family issue that Miriam Peskowitz has so eloquently written about in *The Truth Behind the Mommy Wars*. And she has



gone out, not in the academy, but to a broader audience. And it's really hard. It's hard to get, she told me, what's called platform. To be out there in the media. Because those forms of protest don't, as Letty says, they don't get the kind of coverage. We don't hear about those marches anymore. And therefore, we are trying to figure out other ways to intervene. And it is hard. And we are all pretty frustrated.

How do we risk imagining new possibilities and new kinds of questions and new kinds of strategies when we feel like they are coming at us? The same old stuff, and if we don't keep up the stuff that we've got, what are we going to do?

And that doesn't help us think imaginatively either. So again, I put that out there.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** I hope that this doesn't degenerate into generational warfare, because clearly we all want the same thing, and I didn't cite past strategies as a way to make anyone defensive about current ones. Only about my discomfort at not seeing the things that I know work, that worked in the past, that could still work in the present.

And I know the ones that don't work because when we came back from the April 25 march in 2004, and brought out a million people for that pro-choice demonstration, it was a one-day event in the news cycle. That was the end of it. And that, for me, was the end of demonstrating. It doesn't work.

I wouldn't put the womanpower, the woman-hours into organizing a massive demonstration, and I don't go to demonstrations ever since. So I'm perfectly capable of confronting painful realities about what doesn't work.

However, I also think that the next generation has got to grapple with the dirty stuff of politics. Of running for office. And there's the White House Project that's working day and night, with quite a good budget, to try to identify women who can run for office.

Because as much as you work on domestic violence—and there's nobody who feels more in awe of the people who work at the grass roots on that issue, and the survivors as well—if it wasn't for the Violence Against Women Act, and the appropriations that have come from the federal government, there would be no shelters. There would be no movement because it would have been starved at the root. So it all depends on who's in office. George Bush

cutting that budget is no surprise. But it also could be completely lopped out of the budget all together, if younger women don't engage in the fact that who gets into office matters.

It's nasty, it's dirty, it's not theoretical, it's not elegant, it's not engaging. It isn't sexy. It's filthy, rotten, slogging through stuff that starts at the district level sometimes. And it's very hard to get a woman or anybody else interested in getting besmirched by the process.

But like it or not, that's where it ends up. It ends up with the vote and it ends up with the budget. And so, the rest is just for me, blither. I'm sorry. We live in a democracy and votes matter. And we've seen what happens when the wrong people are in office.

So we can debate strategy from here to tomorrow. We still have got to get people into the electoral process.

Secondly, the idea of, "I'm not a feminist, but I'm working on all these issues but they're not feminist issues"—we really, all of us, anyone who has ever done anything, know that what matters is the work, not the label. So I have never cared if somebody

calls herself a feminist or a humanist or a womanist or anything she wants to name herself to feel good about it. I don't care about any labels whatsoever.

However, once you give up a unifying label, you give up the solidarity that comes with it. And what we had then was a kind of comfort with the notion of sisterhood. It was very pie in the sky. It was very utopian. The idea that all women would have femaleness in common, and if we worked together in the same office we'd get on the same menstrual cycle and . . .

(laughter)

. . . all those neat sisterhood things. I understand that those are all quite utopian and idealistic. The plain fact is that once they splintered us by saying, "Oh, you're not a lesbian, are you? Because I can talk to you and I can work with you." Or, "Well, you're not ugly like her; you're a Gloria Steinem-type feminist, and not a Friedan-type feminist or a Bella-type feminist." Or, "She's strident and you're not." Anything that divided us, whether it was a label or a description or a physical attribute, whatever it was that separated women. And right now, we're doing it generationally, okay?

So there's nothing "they" would like more than to detach young women from the legacy of the last wave, just as we were so totally detached from the legacy of the First Wave. They were ugly old women in teeny round glasses with buns, to me, when I was in school. And I learned that women were given the right to vote. That was the language I learned in school.

I didn't know at all about the First Wave until I was a feminist in 1969. I had no idea that that was a struggle. It was a line or two in a history book. So you snip the umbilical cord that really does kind of attach one woman to another, one generation to another, and again, you further weaken us; you further dilute the power of solidarity and legacy.

And it's just very important to me that we not get all roiled about what we're calling ourselves: black Jew, not Hispanic, Latina. I mean, whatever that stuff is about, it matters to people in their self-definition, but it doesn't get us anywhere when "they" are as organized and as well-funded; they've been working on it for 35 or 40 years and have created cadres of young people who can get out there, and in their little suits and ties and their long blond hair—the Ann Coulters of the world—and get out there and actually get airtime. And actually get people to turn up at the polls. And actually get busloads.

And actually get pastors and ministers and rabbis, in some cases, to talk on behalf of their positions. It's gritty.

Another thing I just took note of: whiteness allows Jews to pass, but so does blackness. Because blacks are assumed to be Christian and blacks have witnessed and heard anti-Semitism and have not protested. I was in a black Jewish women's group for ten years and if I know anything, I know that. I know that blacks who have wonderful politics have not spoken out when people in their society have spoken against Jews. So it's very complicated, the notion of passing. People pass every way they can in a culture where people are beleaguered, where certain groups have less power than other groups.

And I understand it. I understood it when it was explained to me. After I left my black Jewish women's group one night, I had a taxi driver who started bitching about some guy who was driving ahead of us and stopped abruptly for a red light. And he said something about how blacks can't drive. And I said to him, "Let me out, *I'm* black." I just wanted to do something radical.

He couldn't say that. He couldn't assume that everybody who looked white was white. And I got out and I didn't pay him and I felt he'll never forget that. Let him never forget that. So I

think that's also extremely, extremely complicated and we all have to decide when we're going to stand our ground, what we used to call interrupt[ing] sexism, interrupt[ing] racism in the act.

Sitting at a dinner table and somebody tells a racist joke, do you laugh? When somebody tells a sexist joke, do you just kind of giggle along? When someone tells a Jewish American princess joke, are you silent or do you say, "That's a kike joke in sexist form?"

What are you willing to come forward with? Every one of us has to make that decision, and it's complicated.

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** Letty, I have to take issue with you, although I don't think that we fundamentally disagree. I think that we probably agree. But there is definitely, in the United States, a huge power gap at the moment, in places like New York—not necessarily in Iowa and Nebraska and Oklahoma—between Jews and particularly Jews who are visible in the media, and between people who are of African descent or black Americans who are visible in the media.

We can see that in terms of political representation in the Senate and in the House of Representatives. We can see that, since I'm in the academy, in terms of debates over faculty, over hirings. There are very few arenas where, at the top, the competition between various groups is such that it's not those on the margins who are creating the divisions, but rather those who have gotten sort of comfortable and are saying, "Oh, we shouldn't have divisions."

And that, to me, sparks a subtext of a color blindness or using issues of race or gender opportunistically. And I think that's really unfortunate. My point before was that, in the process of Jews becoming white—the title, by the way, of Karen Brodtkin's book, some of you are familiar with that very important book. This phenomenon, becoming white, was already apparent in films like *Gentleman's Agreement*, which was produced for white Anglo-Saxon Protestant America. It was palatable. Jews were the people who went to a different kind of temple. Not people who had 2000 years of history.

In representing Jews as diverse, when it is intended to disrupt some kind of anti-Semitism, so you pull your Ethiopian Jew out, the postcard of your Ethiopian Jew, and the post card of your Yemenite Jew and you say, "Look, how diverse the Jews are," *that*, to me, is opportunistic.



And sitting out in Iowa and sometimes reading about things that take place in places like New York, it's very striking. I'll give one last example to make that concrete. When I first read about the Crown Heights riots, that was like 1991, that was before I moved back to the United States, so I had read about it in the Israeli press. And I arrived in the United States in July. The name of one of the Orthodox Jews—I don't remember the name now—but it was a common Moroccan Jewish name, very common. Impossible to ignore if you have lived in Israel or if you have any idea of Jewish names. So the representation in the American media was this white Orthodox Jew and this black person and the constant tensions. Well, as far as I was reading it, the reality was that this Orthodox Jew with this Moroccan last name probably was one of the return-to-Jews. I don't know how many of you know, but there is the *Hozer Bitshuvah*, all the people who are coming back into Orthodoxy.

In Crown Heights you also had a Caribbean population. So who was fighting whom in Crown Heights? This is in 1991. I'm thinking about it, at the time, and now it is slowly beginning to appear in some writing about the period. Who was actually fighting? Not the traditional Orthodox Jews of Ashkenazi background and the traditional black Americans. But rather, two sets of immigrants.

One that was primarily North African and not about to be pushed around. And one that was West Indian, and not about to be pushed around.

None of that came out in the Jewish press. None of that came out in the mainstream press. And had it come out, we would have seen another layer of difference.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** I can't disagree with anything you've said about race and the Jewish world. What I would like to hear is, What would be the ideal? Give us a best scenario, bottom line?

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** Well, bottom line: it would be very nice if the ADL had a couple of people up front who did not meet the stereotype. And the Arab Anti-Defamation League has been—in fact this has been going on since the sixties—has been very careful to put forward a range of different . . .

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** But then you said before, if you put up your Ethiopian Jew, you put up your so-and-so and you felt that was exploitive.

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** Because that is done when there's a crisis, and I'm not talking about at a crisis. It has to be done consistently so that it becomes the norm. The norm of Jewishness as whiteness, or what has become the norm of Jewishness as whiteness, that norm must be disrupted.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** The same way that we're all saying that Jewishness as maleness must be disrupted.

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** Right.

**Elizabeth Holtzman:** Can I just make a point? First of all, I could be wrong, but last time I looked at Crown Heights, it was not North African. It was Ashkenazi Jews. I represented that district in Congress and I was D.A. in Brooklyn for many years, up to 1990. I'm not saying that the Jewish population may not have been, might not have come to this country after World War II, but it was not a North African population in Brooklyn. And I also want to question the issue about how Jews can pass. You know, it's a very easy assumption to boil Jews down to the color of their skin. But we also have names, appearances—I don't know about behavior, but certainly names. And nobody had any problem, when I got to Congress, the first thing that was told to me by a senior member of Congress was, "You don't have

anything to worry about because you're a woman and because you're a Jew."

Now, I didn't walk in carrying the Star of David, but he knew I was Jewish. The assumption that Jews pass—I think some Jews like to think they may pass, but I'm not sure, still in this society, whether that's an accurate formulation about what happens to Jews.

I still think that there's plenty of anti-Semitism in this society and Jews are still visible, whether you want to apply racial characteristics to them or not. And I'm not sure always that applying the stereotypes about race to issues of religious difference are always applicable.

But I just want to go back, if I may, to the point that was raised about politics because I do want to add to what Letty said. And I agree with her almost entirely except for one point. That change can be made by people outside of politics. And I think that it's really important. For example, the book *Sexual Politics* was so eye-opening to me about the problems of sexual violence in this country against women. It was one of the, I would say, like a textbook for me when I became D.A., about some

of the changes that had to be made in terms of domestic violence, in terms of changing the rape laws and so forth.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** Well, I'm certainly not someone who underestimates the power of the written word.

**Elizabeth Holtzman:** Okay, good. Well, I just want to encourage people who are involved in the written word to help think through strategies or issues. Because they can help to allow people in office to make some changes.

But just to follow up on what Letty said about how people in office can make a change. How do you think the rape laws got changed in this country? When I became D.A., you could not prosecute for rape unless a woman put up earnest resistance. She had to fight back, even if a guy put a gun to her head and said, "If you fight back, I'm going to kill you." That was the law in New York State. 1982. We changed that. Before that, you needed two witnesses. And when they changed it and said you didn't need two witnesses, they made it so that a woman had to fight back. I mean, the indignity and the humiliation, you can't imagine.

And it was not only in New York State; it was elsewhere. And we *still* have laws in this country, allowing marital rape. So these

things don't change by themselves. Newton's laws of physics apply to politics. Without pressure this stays here, unless you push it. The same with government. I'm not saying every woman in government makes that kind of a difference, but generally speaking, these changes are done by women committed to feminist goals. And so, it is critical to have them. And maybe not only in elective office, but also in appointive office—to change a whole variety of things.

So as nitty-gritty and as difficult as it is . . .

**Laura Levitt:** I'm going to intervene here just because we've gotten carried away and we have many people in the audience.

**Katya Gibel Azoulay:** My one sentence is that we need to learn to listen very carefully to each other. I did not say that all of Crown Heights had become North African Jews. I said that in the riots, so-called riots or whatever vocabulary each side wanted to use, it was a remarkable phenomenon that the battles, the physical confrontation, took place between two certain groups, both of whom were immigrants. And now there's much more discussion that, at the time, did not come out in the media.

**Nancy Schwartzman:** Laura, I'm just going to briefly say something quickly that does relate to the panel, when we talk about inheriting a legacy from people who've done all this hard work before us. I just want to raise the question of mentorship for young activists, young artists, young writers, young film makers and young organizers.

**Laura Levitt:** And academics too. Okay, let's start over here.

**Audience Question #1:** My name is Jean. I graduated from Barnard in 1987 and this is my first time back. And it was interesting—you were talking about Jewish women and feminism, and none of you really identified with the religion of Judaism.

**Laura Levitt:** I think this is a very good point and I encourage you to come back tomorrow, when there's a whole panel devoted to changes within Jewish communal life, on the one hand, and Jewish religious life. And there are a range of ways of being Jewish, which are both secular and religious in variously different ways.

**Audience Question #2:** It's good to be back. I worked hard for the Violence Against Women Act to be passed. I want to thank Liz for everything she's done. Letty, for sure. And the woman on the

end, I'd be happy to speak with you because I was a rape crisis intervention advocate for 12 years.

I want to say that there's something that's missing. And what's missing is what we had: we had a love that flowed between us, that whether we were Republican or Democrat or old or young—when there was something to do, we responded. I don't know what that phenomenon was. I don't see that glue that we had. There was some glue. There was some loving glue that's missing when we show up for a march. It's a great event. But that glue isn't there.

It's that glue of love that we find in Chabad communities. You may not like all of us, or some of us, but we will love you in a very special way, the same way we already love you.

**Laura Levitt:** I want to make sure that other people get to speak. But I thank you for reminding us about the passion of this work.

**Audience Question #3:** Thank you to my sisters for bringing around the microphones. I once had your job.



I would like to speak about white privilege and just how tremendously important it is for women with white privilege to really get what it is. It's so easy to just say, "Oh, white privilege. Gee." Scratch our heads and say, "Oh, it's sort of like heterosexual privilege."

What do you do with it? Well, I think I'll just go to sleep. What we need to do is force ourselves every single day to say how did I benefit from my white privilege? And that's maybe how next year and the following years can we forge a real discourse on this subject?

My question is to all members of the panel, but especially to Ms. Holtzman: What is your view, how are you explaining to yourselves the upcoming candidacy for president of Hilary Clinton?

**Laura Levitt:** If we could just get a few more questions? I would like to hear some more of your voices.

**Audience Question #4:** My name is Irena Klepfisz. I just want to make a comment. I share some of the frustration of some of the older feminists in the room about the younger generation. But at the same time, I have to say, there seems to be, generally, a

real drought of passion, idealism, in progressive movements right now.

I think we're all in disarray across the generations. And I think what we're asking the younger generation to do is something that we're all lacking. We've had the best opportunity in the worst presidency that we've ever had, and the Democrats have done nothing, the progressives have done nothing. Nobody had come up with a good idea.

We don't have a real leader. The right has been organizing like crazy and has drawn a youth and a generation to it. And we've been unable to do it, and I think that one of the things that I would like to do is to sort of examine that and find out what is it that we didn't pass on? What is it that we haven't seen? Why is it that we have, I think, handed over a vacuum? So I don't want to just dump it on the younger generation as much as—as a teacher I'm very tempted and get very aggravated with my students who don't want to be called feminists and so on. But I do think that this is a real problem that's very cross-generational and is not limited to people who are in college or in their twenties right now.

**Laura Levitt:** Thank you.

**Audience Question #5:** Thank you, all. I was very moved by all of your presentations. I have one comment, particularly directed to something you said, Letty. You said something about personal liberation being in contrast to making systemic change. And I think it's important for some people to become clear about what their values are, to examine where they stand with respect to the religion that they inherited, sometimes combining it with other religions, in order to be more effective in their actions. And some people work in the micro level. Some people work on the macro level. And their actions can be equally meaningful and forceful. So I think personal liberation should be given its due. Thank you. Karen Cresco, '67.

**Laura Levitt:** If we can hear one more person over here, and then I'm going to ask people to come back tomorrow where we will continue these conversations.

**Audience Question #6:** My name is Sherry Gorelik. I have two quick comments and a quick question. The comments are about the younger generation. I'm a member of Jews for Racial and Economic Justice and most of the people in it are young. They're in their twenties. We now have an intergenerational study group to talk about the different ways we can learn from each other. And

there's also Jews Against the Occupation, which is mostly younger people, vastly younger people. So they're there.

The second thing is the comment about marches. And of course, I'm of the generation that loves marches because it has been my life. But I think that in some way we're blaming ourselves when we say that it doesn't work.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** I don't blame us. I blame the media, but I accept the fact that they don't come and it doesn't last.

**Lisa Jarvis:** We need our own media.

**Letty Cottin Pogrebin:** Right on.

**Audience Question #6:** Let me make my point, though. We marched and we made these gains. There have been historical contradictions. There is an opposing group. And they have been trying to reverse those gains. That doesn't mean that marching doesn't work. If the women's march in April only marched, that means that they didn't do any organizing to pick up from it. It doesn't invalidate the march.

I think that what marching does is it allows people to express themselves. It allows them to see that they're not alone. It creates a tremendous cultural creativity in the signs and in the jokes. And it creates some networking. The question is whether we move it further.

One of the great Jewish feminist leaders is Leslie Kagan, who has led all these marches and they don't do just one march; then they move to something else. And she was here before. So I think that we should not blame ourselves when one march doesn't work. What we should do is figure out what we need to connect the marches to.

And then my question is for Liz Holtzman. I know that you've been very active against the torture that the government is doing, and I wonder if you could comment on that as a Jewish feminist issue?