Schusterman Family Foundation Selects Tulane

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By Paula Burch-Celentano

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Center for Cultural Judaism
Renews Grant to Jewish Studies

Will hold annual meeting at Tulane, March 21-22, 2010

The Posen Foundation works internationally as a service provider to support secular Jewish education and educational initiatives on Jewish culture in the modern period and the process of Jewish secularization over the past three centuries. At a time when the majority of world Jewry defined itself as secular and is not well educated in Jewish culture, the Foundation offers this growing community the opportunity to deepen and enrich the study of its cultural and historic heritage—from a secular, scholarly perspective.

The Foundation has pioneered multiple education initiatives, such as supporting the development of college and university curricula on Jewish secularism and secularization; encouraging research into the history, languages, and cultures of the Jews; supporting academic conferences on Jewish secularism, the Jewish secular, and Judaism as Culture; and funding teachers’ training programs, larger educational development projects, and demographic surveys. The Foundation is committed to advancing the academic study of Jewish secularism. Through its signature grant program, the Posen Project, more than three-dozen institutions of higher education have developed courses in Jewish secularization and Judaism as Culture. The Foundation is also deeply committed to the understanding of historic and modern antisemitism, and has been the primary financial supporter of the Center for the Study of Antisemitism at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem since its inception in 1982.

Tulane’s JWST program has used the center’s support to offer courses that would not be taught were it not for the help from the Posen Foundation. For example, Professors Brian Horowitz and Ilan Fuchs are offering JWST 125, “Building Jewish Identity” to 100 students. In addition, the program offers courses on Jewish cosmopolitanism and secular Jewish identity. Thanks to the center, the program will be presenting a number of lectures and films on the subject of cultural Judaism. For a schedule and more information, see www.tulane.edu/~jwst.

FEATURED ALUMNUS:
Ensign Travis Bean, ’09
US Navy

As my life shifts into the postgraduate realm, I realize more and more that my Jewish studies experience is an asset to my current job as a Naval Officer. Specifically, learning about the many groundbreaking Jewish leaders that have fought for the rights of the disadvantaged and oppressed throughout the centuries strengthens my resolve to follow in their footsteps. It is in this that I do walk in good company, for the first Jewish Admiral, Uriah P. Levy, happened to be a reformer; he dismantled the antiquated system of flogging in the fleet during his tenure of the mid-Nineteenth Century.

In July, I began my training at Navy Nuclear Power School in Charleston, South Carolina, the first step to becoming an officer on a nuclear submarine. Though the rigorous course of study will largely be about math and physics, I will not be entirely estranged from the topic of Jewish studies. For, it was a Polish Jew, Admiral Hyman Rickover, who started the Navy nuclear curriculum from nothing and can be credited with the submarine fleet’s continued track record of radiological safety. I can only hope to capture just a bit of his success as I embark upon my career in the United States Navy.

Tulane Hosts “The Expance of Russia in Israel” Conference

Among the international scholars who attend were J. Dekl-Chen and Hamutal Bar-Yosef of Ben Gurion University, Rafi Tsurkin-Sadan of Hebrew University, Gur Alroy of the University of Haifa and Frank Grünner of Heidelberg University. They joined colleagues from Tulane, Duke, Rutgers and Stanford universities, as well as the University of Michigan and the University of Massachusetts, to discuss the influence of secular Russian culture on the founding of Israel and current Israeli life.

“Power in Jewish History” was co-taught by Brian Horowitz, director of Jewish Studies, and Moshe Nao, last year’s Schusterman Visiting Professor of Israel Studies. Horowitz’s area of expertise is Eastern European Jewish history, while Nao, an Israeli native who holds a doctoral degree from Hebrew University, focuses his inquiry on Israeli history.

The course examines the idea of power in Jewish history, focusing on aspects of political, social and military power from the ancient world to the present. The main idea is to challenge the conventional arguments regarding Jewish power and powerlessness. By discussing the representation of events in the past, such as the great revolts in the Second Temple Period or the martyrdom in the Middle Ages, the professors reinterpret traditional Jewish sources and compare them to the ideology of Zionism and rabbinic Judaism.

“There is even a lesson to be learned in examining how Hanukkah has been celebrated over the ages. The traditional story tells about a religious miracle involving reconsecration of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In contrast, the Zionist take on the story stresses the triumph of the Maccabees whose struggle for liberation over much larger forces is a source of national pride and a symbol of heroism.”

Tulane Offers Course on Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History

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Horowitz’s Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia, published by the University of Washington Press in April 2009, focuses on the Society for the Promotion of Enlightenment among the Jews of Russia, the oldest Jewish philanthropic society in Russia.

In researching the book, he gained unprecedented access to the archives of the state historical society in Russia. Horowitz, who holds the Sizler Family Chair of Jewish Studies at Tulane, had a yearlong fellowship in St. Petersburg, Russia. The chair of the Department of Germanic and Slavic Studies, he also is the author of The Myth of A. S. Pushkin in Russia’s Silver Age.

“I stumbled upon an archive of Russian Jewry that was closed for a half century to everyone,” Horowitz says. “I was the first to touch this material in decades. I understood the importance of these people as leaders of Russian Jewry.”

The OPE was a secular, nonprofit society that was founded by a few wealthy Jews in St. Petersburg who wanted to improve opportunities for Jewish people in Russia by increasing their access to education and culture. When educational opportunities became closed to Jews, the society built a network of schools and libraries throughout Russia, opened a teacher training academy and a Jewish university, and held concerts and lectures. The OPE encountered opposition from the Russian government that imposed strict regulations on all aspects of Jewish life.

As Horowitz conducted the research for the book, the current government made it difficult for him. He was allowed to view the archival materials in a small room while an official watched over him.

The book corrects a popular misconception of Russian Jews in history solely as victims of pogroms and the oppressive laws imposed by the state. The Jewish leaders portrayed in the book create and foster a new Jewish identity based on traditional Jewish ideals such as ethics and philanthropy, combined with Russian ideals such as collectivism and self-sacrifice.

“They represent a unique type of personality found nowhere else in the world — a Jewish identity that was a synthesis of the ideals of the Jewish tradition and virtues inspiring the attributes of the Russian worldview,” Horowitz says. “They believed Jews would be able to expand Jewish continuity and be partners with the liberal elements of Russian society who embodied these ideals.”

Although the experiment failed when the Bolsheviks came to power, Horowitz believes American Jews today can learn from the OPE’s experiment.

“What remains is the idea and the attempt to blend together Jewish education with secular education,” Horowitz says. “We face a similar paradigm in America, with the loss of Jewish identity. The means to combat it is education. But that’s not enough. Assimilation is inevitable in a free, multicultural society. The only way one can engender Jewish identity is to have it be an important part of people’s actual lives.”
Ronna Burger

Professor and Chair, Department of Philosophy, Sizer Family Professor of Jewish Studies

Dr. Burger is the author of Aristotle’s Dialogue with Socrates: on the Nicomachean Ethics (University of Chicago Press, 2008; paperback edition 2009). Her recent lectures include: “In the Wilderness of Sinai: Moses as Lawgiver and Founder of a People,” and “Maimonides on Knowledge of Good and Evil: The Guide of the Perplexed I.2.” She was a faculty member of Princeton University’s Tikvah Summer Seminar, teaching “Jewish Thought and Enduring Human Questions,” and is a member of the Tikvah Fund’s Working Group on the Haggadah.

Michael Cohen

Professor and Director, Sizer Family Chair of Jewish Studies

Cohen earned his Ph.D. in American Jewish History from Brandeis University, and his dissertation analyzed the origins of Conservative Judaism. His current project, The Birth of Conservative Judaism: How Solomon Schechter’s Disciples Created an American Religious Movement (forthcoming, Columbia University Press), argues that Conservative rabbis were the ones who were largely responsible for creating the movement. Cohen also specializes in regional Jewish history, having worked both on New England and the American South. Cohen received his AB with honors from Brown University.

David Goldstein

Adjunct Professor of Jewish Studies

Goldstein has been an adjunct faculty member in the Jewish Studies Program since its inception in 1982. He is Rabbi Emeritus of the historic New Orleans Touro Synagogue and a graduate of the Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion. He received his PhD from St. Mary’s Seminary and University in consortium with the Baltimore Hebrew College. His area of specialization is Medieval Jewish Cultural History and Philosophy with an emphasis on the Golden Age of Spanish Judaism. In the last few years he has published articles on three medieval Spanish cities: Lucena, Burgos and Tortosa.

Ilan Fuchs

Schusterman Visiting Assistant Professor of Israel Studies

After completing his BA in Jewish History at the Open University during his army service, Fuchs continued his studies at Bar Ilan University, earning both an MA in Jewish History and an LLB followed by an LLM in the law school. He taught at several law schools in Israel, and finished his Doctorate at Bar Ilan and received his

Adi Gordon

Visiting Professor, Jewish Studies

Gordon received his Ph.D. in history from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He specializes in the history of Central European Jewry in the 19th and 20th centuries and modern intellectual history. He is the author of ‘In Palestine, In a Foreign Land’; The Orient. A German-Language Weekly between German Exile and Aliyah (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2004 [Hebrew]), and recently edited Brit Shalom and Bi-National Zionism: “The Arab Question” as a Jewish Question (Jerusalem: Carmel Publishing House, 2008 [Hebrew]).

Brian Horowitz

Professor and Director, Sizer Family Chair of Jewish Studies

Horowitz’s books include Jewish Philanthropy and Enlightenment in Late-Tsarist Russia (University of Washington Press, 2009) and Empire Jews: Jewish Nationalism and Acculturation in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Russia (Slavica, 2009). In addition to his studies of Jewish History, he is a trained Slavist and has written on Russian intellectual history and the work of the poet Alexander Pushkin. Horowitz received his Ph.D. and MA in Slavic Languages and Literatures at University of California, Berkeley, and his BA from New York University.

Galen Marquis

Professor of Practice, Hebrew and Bible

Marquis joined the Tulane staff after a long career at the Hebrew University Bible Project at Hebrew University, which is producing a critical edition of the Hebrew text of the Bible based on the famous Aleppo Codex and a comprehensive compilation of variant readings in ancient translations and early Hebrew manuscripts. He is a recognized expert on the Hebrew Bible and he has written on Russian intellectual history and the work of the poet Alexander Pushkin. Horowitz received his Ph.D. and MA in Slavic Languages and Literatures at University of California, Berkeley, and his BA from New York University.

Marline Otte

Associate Professor of History, Sizer Family Professor of Jewish Studies

Otte specializes in modern European history, focusing on Germany and cultural history. She is the author of Jewish Identities in German Popular Entertainment, 1890–1933 (Cambridge University Press, 2006), and co-directed the documentary film The New Orleans Tea Party (2008). Otte is also the Director of Undergraduate Studies for the History Department.