

YU Students' Engagement with the Crises of Their Times:
A Story of Apathy and Protests, As Told by *The Commentator* and
The Observer, 1954-1971

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements
of the Jay and Jeanie Schottenstein Honors Program

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Acknowledgments

In many ways, this thesis began in late 2017 in Yeshiva University's Mendel Gottesman Library. That fall semester, I was a section editor on *The Commentator*, and the editor-in-chief assigned me the task of finding old newspaper archives to reprint for the "From the Archives" column. Soon enough, I found myself time and again completely and utterly immersed in endlessly fascinating old microfilm reels and reference binders, losing sense of time and space as I devoured article upon article written by Yeshiva University undergraduates over the decades. I was amazed both by the intensely honest and thoughtful account of institutional history that the archives offered, as well as by the remarkable sense in which the tone and topics that packed *The Commentator*'s pages in those bygone years have in many ways not changed.

It was not long before it struck me that I must dedicate my senior thesis to *The Commentator*'s archives. It is said that there is nothing new under the sun, and in fact, initial research quickly revealed that mine would not be the first such senior thesis—Zev Eleff, who graduated Yeshiva College in 2009, wrote a thesis titled "Freedom and Responsibility: Censorship at Yeshiva College in the Early History of *The Commentator*, 1935-1958." After several emails and brainstorming sessions with various individuals, including my thesis mentor, Professor Jeffrey Gurock, I decided that I would focus my thesis on the years 1954-1971, more or less picking up where Eleff left off.

Like Eleff's thesis, this paper extensively footnotes articles from *The Commentator*, as well as other newspapers and books. In general, references of works in this paper include any and all attributable authors; when footnoted references do not indicate any author, it is typically because the relevant article was published by an editorial board without using a byline.

The designs of this thesis and Eleff's thesis differ in two essential respects. First, whereas Eleff's thesis uses only *The Commentator* as its primary source, this thesis uses *The Observer*, the independent student newspaper that was founded by Stern College for Women students in 1958, as well. As *The Commentator* historically focused on the Yeshiva College student body, investigating *The Observer*, which historically was written by and about Stern College students, was deemed essential for as comprehensive an understanding as possible of all Yeshiva University undergraduates. Second, unlike Eleff's thesis that is composed of sections that focus on distinct episodes in YU's and *The Commentator*'s histories, this thesis is mostly divided into sections that each assess broad spans of history, with only two sections ("Yeshiva College Fights for a University Senate" and "The Great Building Saga") dedicated to specific, contained episodes.

This thesis would not have been possible without YU's reference librarians, who time and again graciously retrieved archival binders and microfilms for me to use for my research. I also owe special thanks to Zev Eleff, who, in addition to writing an insightful and relevant thesis, met with me personally last June, and who informed me that there exist digital copies of *Commentator* archives that were scanned as part of a project commissioned by Pearl Berger, dean of libraries at Yeshiva University. I am thankful as well to my friend and retrophile Doniel Weinreich, who just this past semester used YU's antiquated microfilm machines to create digital scans of *The Observer*'s archives. Without

access to either of these digital collections, my research would have been exponentially more tedious and time-consuming.

Professor Gurock offered his mentorship immediately after I posed my idea to him, and he met with me several times this past year to help me develop my proposal, design my research, and edit my drafts. I appreciated his astute perspective and blunt reactions, both of which helped me craft a thesis paper with which I could be satisfied.

Many of my friends and family members offered helpful advice and encouragement along the way. I am especially thankful to my grandmother Patricia “Nona” Koslowe, who took an active interest in this thesis, and even meticulously read through and offered her suggestions on my first draft. I am also grateful to my brother Hillel, who offered his sharp eyes for a helpful copy edit of my final draft.

Among many exhilarating aspects of conducting research, I particularly enjoyed reaching out to former students who were involved in some of those incidents that I profile in this paper. My prepared response to all of their inevitable courteous requests for me to share my completed thesis with them was, “Thank you! I think you will be among 15 or so individuals who actually read this paper.” Most of my interviewees just laughed, but one former student, who graduated Stern College in 1969, offered a perspective that I found poignant and memorable as I was writing this paper: “Hey, you never know. Maybe one day, 50 years from now, you’ll get an email out of the blue from a Yeshiva University student looking to hear your take on what the place was like in 2019.”

As much as this thesis offers, it should also shed light on just how much more of a story there remains to be told in the myriad pages of old YU student newspapers that sit mostly untouched in the reference sections of YU’s libraries. I sincerely hope that YU will soon follow in the path of other elite institutions of higher learning and digitize all of the archives of its undergraduate student newspapers. Still, even before that long overdue digitization project commences, I am sure that other students will dive deep into the limitedly accessible *Commentator* and *Observer* archives. I would be more than happy to help in those efforts and return once again to the amazing world of YU history.

Benjamin Koslowe
Alon Shevut
July 2019

YU Professors Debate American Policy In Vietnam



CON: Drs. Behrends, Lieb, and Komar.

"We of the U.S. would act immorally were we, the citizens of the most powerful democracy in the world, not to assist the South Vietnamese in their fight for freedom." This was the opening statement by Dr. Joseph Dunner starting The Great Debate on The American Policy in Viet Nam, held Thursday, November 18, in Lampert Auditorium. Speaking for the opponents of the U.S. policy, Dr. Ralph Behrends stated that not only is our military effort immoral and contrary to international law, but it is also failing in its goal.

The debate, held before a capacity crowd, was the first of its kind sponsored by the Yeshiva College Student Council. Speaking for the pro side was Dr. Joseph Dunner, David W. Patzgorzky Professor of Political Science, while Drs. Ralph Behrends, Arthur Komar, and Elliott Lieb, associate professors of physics at Belfer Graduate School of Science, opposed the Administration policy.

Dr. Behrends contended that we prevented elections in 1956 because the communists would have won; by doing so, we violated the 1954 Geneva Treaty. The opponents of U.S. policy also cited the alienation of Asian peoples resulting from an American war against Asians in Viet Nam. They advocated a withdrawal from that country and an attempt to strengthen neighboring countries.

Dr. Dunner responded that: —the Communists would have re-

(Continued on page five)



PRO: Dr. Joseph Dunner

FOR
THE DEAN'S
RECEPTION...

The Commentator

Official Undergraduate Newspaper of Yeshiva College

... BRING
AYN RAND

VOL LXII

YESHIVA UNIVERSITY, NEW YORK CITY, THURSDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1965

NO. 4

YU Forms Honor Society For Pre-medical Students

Alpha Epsilon Delta, an international honor society for pre-medical students, installed its newest chapter at ceremonies held Sunday, November 14, at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine. The 29 charter members of Yeshiva's New York Zeta chapter attended the initiation rites followed by a dinner honoring the formation of AED's newest affiliate.

The evening's agenda began with a tour of the College of Medicine conducted by medical student Lawrence Marton '65 whose own efforts while at Yeshiva sparked the formation of the chapter. Then followed the curious, mystical initiation rites conducted by Dr. Maurice Moore, National Secretary of AED and Dr. Charles Reichart, O.P., National Treasurer, as well as the officers of affiliated chapters in the New York vicinity. Dr. Moore emphasized that it is the "objective of the society to encourage excellence in pre-professional scholarship and to stimulate our appreciation of the importance of the preprofessional education in the study of the healing arts" — an objective demanding the maintenance of at least a 2.8 average in college studies. Having charged the New York Zeta chapter with its duties, Dr. Moore awarded

honorary life-time membership to Dean Isaac Bacon and Drs. Levine, Tendler and Wischnitzer for their efforts in improving Yeshiva's pre-med program.

Gerald Weisfogel '66 chaired the dinner at which, following the invocation by Dr. Tendler, remarks were made by Dean Bacon and Dr. Reichart. The charter was presented to president David Eisenberg '66 by Dr. Moore.

Climaxing the evening was a formal address by Dr. Leo Davidoff, Associate Dean and Chairman of the Department of Neurological Surgery at AECOM, who described the college's standards of excellence. Concluding the evening were remarks from Dr. Saul Wischnitzer, whose efforts brought about the formation of Yeshiva's newest honor society.

Kasser Retires

Mr. Abraham Kasser, laboratory attendant in chemistry at Yeshiva College for nine years, has retired to settle in Israel. Mr. Kasser will be remembered by everyone who took a chemistry lab for his untiring devotion and desire to assist the students in any facet of lab work. He had been planning to move for some time and was waiting only for an able replacement. Mr. Kasser will be sorely missed and his retirement will leave a void difficult to fill.

Memorial Services Honor Dr. Dov Revel; Rabbi Hoenig Praises Founder Of Yeshiva

Memorial services for Dr. Bernard Revel, founder of Yeshiva College, were held on the 25th anniversary of his death, November 30 at the *Beis Hamidrash* in the Main Building.

Rabbi Sol Friedman, honorary vice-president of the YU Rabbinic Alumni, served as chairman of the gathering. He spoke of the Laws of Disinterment — and read from the *Mishna*. These laws apply to Dr. Revel as he and his son are to be reburied in Israel in December.

Rabbi Joseph Weiss, *Rosh Yeshiva* of RIETS, delivered a *Shema halacha* at the services. The Memorial Prayer was chanted by Cantor Macy Nulman, Assistant Director of the Cantorial Training Institute.

Recounting Dr. Revel's accomplishments was Rabbi Sidney Hoening, professor of Jewish History. Dr. Revel assumed the presidency

YC, SCW Face Tuition Increase; Higher Costs And Expansion Cited

Tuition charges will be \$1,500 annually for all undergraduate students at Yeshiva and Stern Colleges, effective next fall. The in-

crease is the third in six years, and comes on the heels of last year's \$100 increase in dormitory rental charges.

HISTORY OF INCREASES			
Dormitory pre-1957	\$ 175	depending on	
	\$ 250	room location	
Dormitory Fall 1957	\$ 350	all students	Rubin Hall opens
Tuition pre-1960	\$ 700		
Tuition Fall 1960	\$ 900	new students	
Tuition Fall 1962	\$1200	all students	Furst Hall opens
Dormitory Fall 1964	\$ 450	all students	New Dorm opens
Tuition Fall 1966	\$1500	all students	Science Center construction begins

crease is the third in six years, and comes on the heels of last year's \$100 increase in dormitory rental charges.

Announcement of the fee rise was made November 20, in a letter

from Dr. Samuel Belkin, University President, to parents. It cited higher costs, the absence of tuition for the religious divisions, and ex-

panation with continued high standards as justifications for the steeper rates. Also noted was the continuing availability of financial aid to needy students, including federal scholarships next year under

the Higher Education Act of 1965.

Absent from the announcement, but given verbally by Mr. Sheldon Socol, Director of Student Finance, was the assurance that financial aid would actually cover most of the \$300 differential for students receiving aid. A similar oral promise was made last year when residence hall charges were raised from \$350 to \$450.

The 1965-1966 University budget is \$38 million, up 29.3% from last year's \$29 million. Major expansion projects on which construction is scheduled to begin this year are the 15-story, \$15 million Science Center on the south side of 184th Street between Amsterdam Avenue and Laurel Hill Terrace; and the 7-story, \$5 million Central University Library, fronting Amsterdam Avenue between 185th and 186th Streets.

Student Council was scheduled to discuss the tuition increase at its meeting last night. Council was expected to push for a "freeze" of tuition for students already in attendance.

of RIETS in 1915, when it consisted of *Yeshiva Eitz Chaim*, the first Jewish day school established in America, an elementary school where the students of the Yeshiva received their secular education,



(YU Public Relations) Dr. Bernard Revel z.t.l.

and the Theological Seminary. Growing under Dr. Revel's leadership, the institution soon included the forerunner of the secondary schools, the Teacher's Institute and in 1927, what he regarded as his crowning achievement, the founding of Yeshiva College.

Hoping to create an institution that would harmonize Jewish and secular education, Dr. Revel stated the underlying creed of the University.

"Yeshiva aims at unity, at the creation of a synthesis between the Jewish conception of life, our spiritual and moral teachings and ideals, and the present day humanities, the scientific conscience and spirit, to help develop the complete harmonious Jewish personality, once again to enrich and bless our lives, to revitalize the true spirit and genius of historic Judaism." (Continued on page six)



(Jewish Center Bureau) Stern College Student Council will sponsor its annual Chanukah Chagla Dec. 18 at the Eleanor Roosevelt Junior High School. Renowned folk singer Bill Johnson will entertain.

"The Great Debate on The American Policy in Viet Nam," Hosted in Furst Hall (Courtesy *The Commentator*, December 2, 1965, p. 1)

Remember
the
Lounge

The Observer

THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER OF STERN COLLEGE FOR WOMEN

Keep
It
Holy

Vol. 9

MAY 2, 1966

No. 7

Spirited Assembly Marks Israeli Independence Day

Jewish Woman and Halacha Theme of Torah Campus Talk

by Naomi Merzer

YAVNEH and Torah Campus are co-sponsoring a lecture series this semester on "Halacha and the Jewish Woman." On March 24th, Rabbi Gerald Blidstein, a faculty member of our Jewish Studies Department, presented the first lecture, entitled "The Halachic Perspective of Women."

Admitting that the topic was quite broad, Rabbi Blidstein limited himself to three areas: marital, legal-procedural, and ritual.

He then went on to cite several "dinim" in each category, beginning with marital. A woman cannot initiate a marriage, he pointed out. Man initiates it and woman responds to it, thereby giving man the aggressive role in the relationship.

Even though marriage is a simple affair, divorce is not, he explained. Divorce is grantable only by the man. However, a husband could be forced by the courts to give his wife a divorce in certain limited cases. A wife was able to force a divorce in this way, but this practice was stopped about 1100. It was further pointed out that a woman need not consent to a divorce. Divorce granted against the will of the wife was prohibited

by a "takanah" of Rabenu Gershon.

At one time, males could have more than one wife, but females were allowed to have only one husband. Again Rabenu Gershon stepped in and banned polygamy, Rabbi Blidstein explained.

Women are protected if a marriage should end either in divorce or death. In case of a conflict of interest, the woman has the advantage. If male and female both need charity, the female is the first to receive it, as well as the first to be redeemed from the enemy.

In the legal-procedural area, the female has the same rights and responsibilities as the male in almost all cases. She can execute contracts and buy and sell property.

(Continued on page 7, col. 1)

Credit Switch Slated in Fall For C&D Hebrew

On May 16th when the schedule of classes for the Fall of 1966 are distributed, students will notice a change in the scheduling of Hebrew courses. Many of the courses which until now have been two credits will be switched to three and four credits. In general most of these changes will affect the C and D levels of the upper grades.

According to Dr. Vogel, although the number of credits that the student will take in Hebrew may remain the same, she will be taking fewer Hebrew subjects, thus decreasing the number of papers and exams. However, through this system, the student will not take every Hebrew subject every year. Such a system has been tested in other colleges and has proved successful.

In addition, most class periods will be of fifty or seventy-five minutes. The double period will be avoided as much as possible.

It is hoped that these improvements will shorten the school day for the individual and will enable the student to concentrate her subject commitment. Details concerning these changes will be published on May 16.

Yom Ha'Atzmaut Celebrated; Rabinowitz Discusses Israel

Yom Ha'Atzmaut, Israeli Independence Day, entered Stern College on a wave of song and left on the wings of quiet discussion.

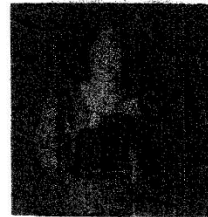
The Student Council celebration held Monday morning, April 25th in Koch Auditorium was celebrated by a crowd which overflowed into the halls outside the auditorium.

Led by Linda Gensuer, Student Council Hebrew Chairman, the assembly began with the singing of Hatikvah, followed by a number of other selections suggested by the audience.

A prayer for the State of Israel was given in Hebrew and English, by Rochel Sperling and Sue Koss respectively. There followed a spontaneous outburst of song and dance which continued until the start of classes.

The Dormitory Council extended the celebration into the evening hours when song, dance, and refreshments were supplied in the dorm lounge prior to an Open-End discussion by Rabbi Rabinowitz. Unfortunately, attendance was depleted due to the emergency at the Jewish Theological Seminary.

The lively discussion led by Rabbi Rabinowitz revolved around the pros and cons of living in



Chairman Linda Gensuer

Israel. He was ably assisted by Marcia Davis, Judy Gottschalk, and Rena Sternfeld, seniors who described some of their experiences in Israel. All three spent their junior year there as students at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem.

Besides discussing the religious differences in the communities, the girls gave practical advice to those who are planning a trip to Israel in the future.

Commented a student who had followed the activities throughout the day, "It was a wonderful celebration which made everyone aware of the unity and closeness involved in being a part of Stern College."

Passover March Big Success! Youth Pleads for Soviet Jews

by Lenore Wolfson

The Passover Youth Protest for Soviet Jewry drew a crowd of 13,000 people on Friday, April 8. The march and rally sponsored

by youth representative, Sarah Wisniewski's presentation of a petition to the United Nations was proceeded by a drama-



Students march from Soviet Mission to the United Nations in protest over conditions of Jews in Russia.

by the New York Youth Conference for Soviet Jewry attracted a wide variety of Jewish youth groups which gathered near the Soviet Mission and marched to the U.N. A large painting pleading for the redemption of our brethren was carried through the march, and the Zamil Choral sang several selections.

With much enthusiasm the marchers proceeded to a rally near the United Nations. There they were addressed by Rabbi Jacob Goldberg, Rabbi Israel Miller and Senator Jacob Javits, Ephraim Diamant from Yeshiva University

and script reading, "Genuiah." The rally concluded with everyone in attendance singing "Ani Maamin."

In addition to the protest in New York, simultaneous events were held in Cleveland, other cities in the United States, and cities throughout Europe.

Feeling for the protest was initiated at the "All-Night Vigil for the Redemption of Soviet Jewry" held Saturday night, April 2. Several hundred people were present to hear various speakers deal with different aspects of the problems of Soviet Jewry. Also, there were study and singing sessions held.

Israel's Chief Rabbi Visits Yeshiva; Rav Unterman Addresses Assembly

by Bala Saltz

RABBI Isser Yehudah Unterman, Chief Rabbi of Israel, addressed an assembly of faculty and students at Y.U. on Tuesday, April 26, at 12 noon.

A reception in his honor which preceded his address was held in the Silver Lecture Hall and was attended by Department Chairmen, faculty of the University, student leaders, and others.

As Chief Rabbi of Israel, Rabbi Unterman exerts influence among Jews throughout the world who regard the Chief Rabbinate as the focal point for spiritual guidance.

Rabbi Emanuel Rackman served as chairman of the assembly. In his opening remarks Rabbi Rackman conveyed the gratitude of those present at having the privilege of hearing Rabbi Unterman. He then presented Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin who introduced the guest speaker, Rav Unterman.

Rav Unterman recalled his visit to Yeshiva fifteen years ago and commented on its remarkable growth and development. He recognized the United States as being the Merkaz (center) of Judaism and Jewish life.

The topic of his address was a practical one—that of darchai shalom. He related this principle to a recent occurrence in Israel.

It was reported that one Shabbat, a Gentile was walking in the streets of Israel, whereupon he

fell and injured himself. A passerby, who witnessed the accident went to the nearest house for help. The occupant, a Jew, refused to call a doctor and thus he mechalel



Chief Rabbi Unterman

Shabbos (violate the Sabbath) for a Gentile. The publication of this story created a scandal, for it supported the popular view that there are strained relations between the Jew and the Gentile.

According to Halacha, this person, who considered himself to be religious, was in reality disobeying the laws of the Torah. In Pirke Avot (Ethics of the

Fathers), Rabbi Akivah says: "Chavin Adam Shenevrah B'tzelem... Ki B'tzelem Elokim Assah et ha'adam." (Beloved is man, for he was created in the image of G-d... for in the image of G-d made He man). From this, we learn that it is the obligation of every man to aid his fellow man, for this is the way of G-d.

Rav Unterman brought several sources of proof supporting this statement. Among them he included the passage: "De'rucheha Darchei Noam, V'chol Netevotekha Shalom" (Its ways are the ways of pleasantness and all its paths are peace). He emphasized the words Darchei Noam which constitute a compelling force in Judaism. On this phrase are based many laws of the Torah and the teachings of our Sages.

The Rambam states that the epitome of Judaism is reached when the actions of Man imitate as closely as possible the ways of G-d. Just as G-d deals with all men in kindness, Man is to deal with his fellow man in kindness.

From the Shulchan Aruch (Code of Jewish Laws) and other Rabbinic sources we learn that in the case of extreme danger to life one is commanded to violate even the Sabbath. Some say that this is equally true with regard to the Gentile and to the Jew.

The basis for this comment (Continued on page 6, col. 4)

Yeshiva Students Protest for Soviet Jewry
(Courtesy The Observer, May 2, 1966, p. 1)

Joint Steering Committee Drafts College Senate Proposal; YCSC And Faculty Assembly To Debate Plan Next Week

By Morton Landowne

After four months of deliberation, the Student-Faculty-Administration Steering Committee has produced a proposal for a Yeshiva College Senate. Because of the important nature of this document THE COMMENTATOR has decided to publish this special edition in order to acquaint Yeshiva College students and faculty with the proposal before they are called to vote upon it. The Student Council meets March 11, and the Faculty Assembly gathers on March 12, to vote on the acceptability of the proposal. Following is the text of the proposal preceded by a letter of introduction written by Dr. Mayer Herskovics, chairman of the Committee:

To the Faculty and Student Body of Yeshiva College:

It is a distinct pleasure to report to you on the work of the Steering Committee in drafting a document which will have far-reaching effects on the positive development of Yeshiva College. This committee was composed of three members of the Yeshiva College faculty (Dr. Ernest Simon, Dr. Abraham Tauber and myself), three representatives of the student body (Mr. Kenneth Hain, President of the Student Council, Mr. Gary Epstein and Mr. Lazar Fruchter), and two representatives of administration (Dean Isaac Bacon and Dr. Israel Miller).

Our committee began to meet on November 26th, 1968 in response to the initiative of both the faculty and students. It has worked out the functions, composition, and scope of a Yeshiva College Senate. We have met at least once a week and sometimes twice a week, in order to consider and formulate the details of this new body's duties and activities. The work was carried out in an atmosphere of good will and intelligent, constructive cooperation.

The ultimate purpose, of course, is for the Senate to deal with all the vital areas of Yeshiva College, and to give the faculty and student body ample opportunity to share the work and the responsibility in these areas with the administration.

As Chairman of the Committee, I sincerely hope that the faculty and student body of Yeshiva College will consider the proposed constitution in the same spirit as did our committee, thus enabling us to pride ourselves on a rare achievement in higher education today—cooperation and mutual understanding among administration, faculty and students.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Mayer Herskovics
Chairman, Faculty-Student
Administration Steering
Committee.

Preamble

The Administration, Faculty and Student Body of Yeshiva College hereby recommend to the President the establishment of a Senate to govern the affairs of the College as specifically set forth below, and in accordance with the ideals and



THE STEERING COMMITTEE: Shown above are the members of the committee which wrote the proposal for a Yeshiva College Senate, (left to right) Dr. Ernest Simon, Dean Isaac Bacon, Dr. Mayer Herskovics, Dr. Abraham Tauber, Kenneth Hain, Lazar Fruchter, and Rabbi Israel Miller. Not shown is Gary Epstein.

goals of this institution. Its intent is to share responsibility for the operations and improvement of the College among the groups that constitute the College.

This new development at Yeshiva College is the outcome of cooperation among Administration, Faculty and Students who comprise the College, and will redound, it is hoped, to the best interests of the College and its traditions in its continued growth.

The Proposal

Article I. Composition and Organization
Section 1. The Yeshiva College Senate shall be composed of members of the Administration, the Faculty, the Student Body, and the Alumni as follows:

- a) Administration: The Vice President For Academic Affairs, The Assistant to the President for Student Affairs, the Dean of the College, the Registrar and the Dean of Admissions.
- b) Faculty: Eight (8) full time faculty members, with each rank represented, preferably two (2) from each rank, elected by the Faculty Assembly.
- c) Students: Six students. Two Juniors and four Seniors selected by the incoming Student Council.
- d) Alumni (non-voting): One alumnus appointed by the Yeshiva College Alumni Association.

Section 2. The members of the Administration shall serve *ex officio*.

Section 3. The faculty members shall serve for a two year term.

Section 4. All student members shall serve until graduation. In the Spring of 1969 the incoming Student Council shall choose, in its customary manner, two upper Sophomores and four upper Juniors. Every year thereafter, the incoming Student Council shall choose two upper Sophomores, who shall serve for the next two years, and two upper Juniors, who shall serve for one year.

- a) Student candidates for the Senate shall be required to have at least a 3.000 cumulative academic average, and shall be required to maintain this average during their term of office. In all other respects, the election and tenure of the student members shall be governed by the

regulations pertaining to other extra-curricular activities.

- b) All students who meet the above qualifications are eligible to serve on the Senate, with the exception of the President of the Yeshiva College Student Council, and the Editor-in-Chief of THE COMMENTATOR.
- c) If a student member resigns from his office, or is found ineligible for office, the Student Council shall elect his replacement, who shall serve the remainder of his term of office.
- d) If a Faculty membership in the Senate becomes vacant, the Faculty Assembly shall elect a new member who shall serve the remainder of the term of office.

Section 5. The faculty and student members of the Senate shall be selected in the Spring semester of each year, on the second Wednesday in May, and shall assume office immediately. The results of the elections shall be publicized to the Yeshiva College community.

Section 6. The first session of the Senate each year shall be called by the Dean in June. Thereafter, the elected Chairman shall call the Senate into session, not less frequently than once a month, otherwise at his discretion, or upon a petition by majority of its members.

Section 7. At its first session each year, the Senate shall elect a Chairman and a Secretary. The Chairman shall be a faculty member and shall not vote except in the case of a tie.

Section 8. The Secretary shall keep a record of all deliberations and of all reports and communications received by the Senate, and shall make the minutes public to the Faculty and to the Senate Body.

Section 9. Each member of the Senate shall be entitled to vote.

Section 10. All policy decisions of the Senate shall be made by simple majority vote, and in all procedural matters the Senate shall follow Robert's Rules of Order.

Section 11. A quorum consists of 12 members, with at least two from each of the three groups in attendance.

Article II. Scope

Section 1. The Senate shall have jurisdiction over the academic affairs of the

(Continued on page 2, column 1)

By Kenneth Hain

In this era of protest and revolt the impact of the changing role of the student has hit Yeshiva College. What is presented below is the formulated proposal for a YC Senate Constitution that, in many ways, redefines the position of the student in YC. The logic behind it is clearly to introduce a democratic structure in the decision-making process of the College.

Participatory democracy, viewed in historical perspective, has proven to be amongst the finest, most progressive tools invented by political man. From the ancient polis to the modern nation-state, it has demonstrated remarkable vitality, inspiring the uncommon from even the most common man.

Ironically, the world's universities, which have required the study of Greek classics for more than two millennia—with invariable praise for the era's crowning achievement: the democratic polis—are among the last of institutions to even consider the very ideals which they propagate in their classrooms. Today, the better educated youth and society as a whole have finally begun to realize that democracy must begin at home. Whether that home be a university in Paris or New York, students have initiated a drive to have a say in matters directly affecting their lives.

At Yeshiva College the application of this principle in the form of a Senate is as complex as it is necessary. As students, our complaints have varied from an inadequate curriculum to an uncooperative administrator, from a faulty grading system to unfair regulations. Until now these complaints have been directed to individuals in the administration who reacted (or more often did not react) according to their arbitrary will. YC students have endlessly deplored the situation until the principle of a Senate, as proposed below, was agreed upon.

Decisions of the most crucial concern to us can now be reached by more democratic means, and improvements and innovations can be made to alleviate the College's most

The Editor-in-Chief and the Governing Board of THE COMMENTATOR extend sincere condolences to Dr. A. Leo Levin, YU vice-president for academic affairs (designate) upon the loss of his father. May he be comforted among the mourners for Zion and Jerusalem.

serious problems. Of utmost concern must be the preservation of the primary Jewish nature of the school and this certainly can be best done by involving students in the direction of YC in the future.

Student Council must now decide if this Senate proposal is acceptable and expression by students of their criticisms will insure a fair and representative vote by Council. I strongly urge all students to read this proposal carefully, and then attend the Student Council meeting in Rubin Shul next Tuesday night, March 11, at 8:00 P.M.

REMINDER

Rabbi Dr. J. B. Soloveitchik will speak on: **Holiness and Kingship**
This Sunday evening, March 9, at 8:30, in Lampert. Admission by ticket only; all others will be accommodated in the **Bot Medrash**.

Yeshiva College Fights for a University Senate
(Courtesy The Commentator, March 5, 1969, p. 1)

EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!

Park Key Plans Shown

The essential features of the park, as seen in the diagram, are an amphitheater, several study cubicles, four lounging patios, numerous benches, picnic tables, "trees," "shrubs," a "pond" and a "stream." The entire park is laid in green "grass" (gravel), with a blue "stream" (gravel) wandering through it.

Yale Gibber Architect

Mr. Yale Gibber, (Cornell '49), of Monsey, New York, the park's architect, said in an interview, "In drafting the plans, I first considered the limited budget. It should cost between \$800 and \$1,200."

He felt that it should be easy to construct so students could build it. He specifically used gravel and wood so that very little upkeep and care would be necessary.

Observer Layout Editor, Liz Kesten, amplified the idea to conform to additional information about the land gradations.

Perl Keller, co-chairman of the Materials Committee (with Debbie Album), felt that her committee might modify plans slightly to ease building procedures.

Entrance Through Building

There will be an entrance to the park from the teachers' lounge at the very back of the lot area (1). The reason for a back entrance is that opening the front fence would necessitate hiring another guard and the risk of unwanted outsiders would always be present. By leaving the entrance at the back, all those wishing to enter the park will first have to go through the school building to the back hallway and then out through the lounge.

160 ft. Path

One enters (1, numbers refer to diagram) the park through the back door of the school building, past the fire escape and onto the tanbark path (4). The path is approximately 160 feet long and winds past a clump of bright green tar can "bushes" (2) and several benches (3).

Bridges Over Stream

The door walls on the right (5) will be painted in bright stripes to lend a cheerful air to the park. The amphitheatre (6) slopes down. Accessible by a path (7), are four rows of chimney block seats (8), that accommodate nearly one hundred students.

Just the amphitheater (6) are several cinder block partitions (9) covered by brightly painted can "flowers." Between the partitions are two cubicles (10). Crossing the blue gravel "stream" (4), one finds picnic tables (12), partially backed from the Lexington Avenue traffic by green can "hedges" (2).

A green block "shore" (13) bounds a blue gravel "pond" (14), to the left of the tables.

At both points where the "stream" (4) crosses the path (4), bridge (15) will be constructed.

In the middle of the oval path are four brick patios (16) with tables and chairs. A canvas or wood partition will separate the patios from the right side of the park, so that students who want to

STERN BUILDS PARK AS CREATIVE PROTEST

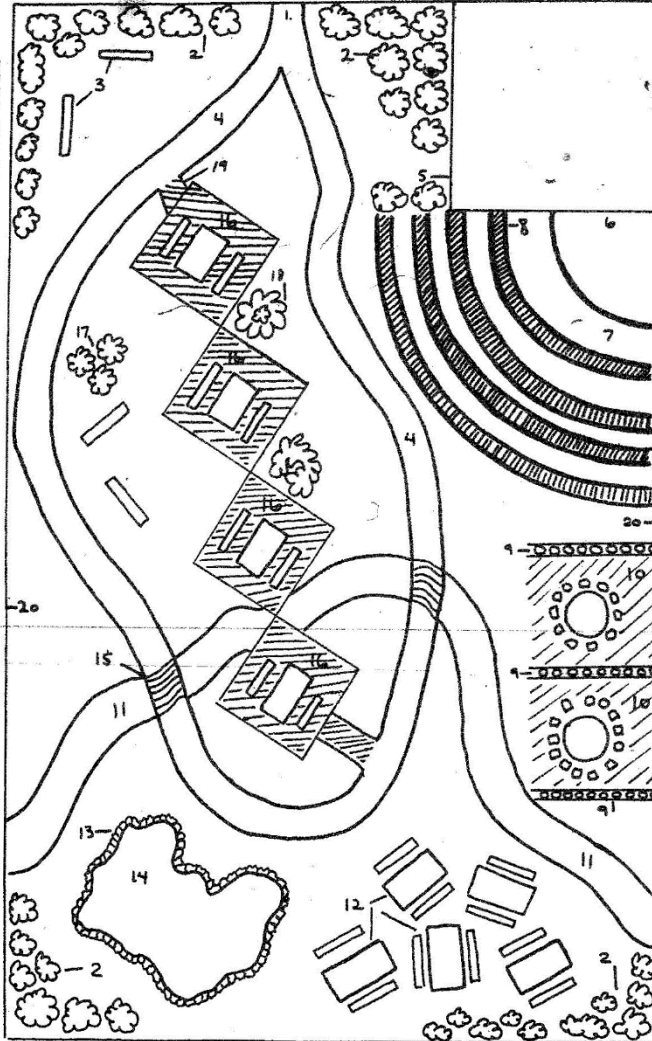


Diagram of proposed park, as designed by Mr. Yale Gibber, modified by Liz Kesten.

study while the amphitheatre is in use will not be disturbed.

A large metal "art thought" (17) will stand near benches (3) directly to the left of the patios. Green barrel "trees" (18) will be "planted" between the patios.

A brick entrance (19) will connect the patios and the tanbark path (4).

Present plans call for murals on the walls of the adjoining buildings (20), on each side, painted in cooperation with the New York City Cultural Affairs Mural Painting Project.

Mr. Gibber, the park's designer, expressed the hope that the project would beautify the area. Student leaders hope that it will alleviate the *chillul Hashem* caused by the present condition of the lot.

Koval, Butler and Kesten Head Plan Enthusiasm Essential

The park planned for the lot next to the college building is being sponsored jointly by the Stern College Student Council and The Observer. Coordinators of the project are Beverly M. Koval, Faye Butler and Liz Kesten who will be assisted by the members of ten park subcommittees. The promotion committee will aim to make the purpose and importance of the park understood and create general enthusiasm among students.

According to Mr. Yale Gibber, architect for the project, the park will cost approximately \$1,200.00. Business managers Tobl Brandries, Tracy Weismann and Sutti Bernstein will keep track of incoming money and expenditures for building materials and supplies.

Construction Engineer Advising

Debbie Album and Perl Keller, co-chairmen of the Materials Committee, will be in charge of securing bricks, cinder blocks, gravel, large cans, paints and other supplies. Miss Keller will also consult her father who is a construction engineer on the best methods of assembling the materials.

Edith Schwartz, Merrill Silverstein and their committee will borrow the tools necessary for clearing the lot and constructing the park.

During the coming week Regzi Singer, Sarah Holstein and Leah Becker will enlist girls for the work crew. Volunteers are needed for all phases of the work including clearing the ground of existing debris, leveling the areas to be used for the planned amphitheatre and patios, painting and spreading the gravel "river" and "grass," laying the tanbark path and laying the cinder blocks and bricks to form benches and the amphitheatre stage.

Yeshiva Men Needed to Help

There is a special committee headed by Ruth Levinson and Meryl Swinkin to recruit students from Yeshiva to help with the more strenuous clearing and building tasks.

Alpica Wald and Meryle Cherrick will coordinate the efforts of the work crews by preparing a schedule of all work to be done. Each worker will be told in advance at what time and to which area he or she must report and what tools will be available.

Refreshments will be sold throughout the day to those working on the park. Sally Rottenstreich has volunteered to secure food and secure girls to staff the refreshment stand.

An outdoor rally will be held Sunday evening following completion of the park. Yetti Sirelich and Barbara Ger are preparing a program for the evening which may include speeches by members of the administration and student leaders, and entertainment. At the rally the chairmen of the fundraising committee will launch a campaign emphasizing "priority for a college whose students are willing to do their share to improve their school."

**Save Oct. 27th!
Help Build**

The Observer

The Official Newspaper of Stern College for Women
An undergraduate division of Yeshiva University, New York
Published every two weeks.
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EDITOR-IN-CHIEF Faye Butler
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Lila Magnus
SCHEDULING EDITOR Meryle Cherrick
LAYOUT EDITOR Liz Kesten
TYPING EDITOR Jean Pollachek

The Great Building Saga

(Courtesy *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 2)

Rav Responds to Secularization; Sympathizes with Student Rally



Students picket in front of Furst Hall on Sunday, April 12, in response to the alleged "secularization" of the University. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, addressing the Chag Hasemicha, reacted to the picket by speaking out on his fear of "secularization" and expressed the possibility that if present policies continue he might be forced to resign.

By ANDREW GELLER

Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik has called on the Yeshiva administration to reverse the trend toward secularization upon which it has embarked. His address, delivered during the celebration of *Chag Hasemicha* on April 12, was seen by many as one of the most significant in Yeshiva's eighty-five year history.

The Rav defined three specific problems which he fears may soon face the undergraduate divisions if Yeshiva College remains a secular institution. He cannot believe that a non-sectarian school will be able to enforce religious observance in its dormitories. He fears that a rebellious student may soon challenge the college's requirement of attendance in a religious division, a requirement no longer compatible with Yeshiva's secular status.

Rabbi Soloveitchik's greatest

fears concern Dr. Belkin's successor. The Rav pointed out that the religious ideology which is the backbone of Yeshiva today is due to a great extent to President Belkin. But since all men are mortal, he said, Dr. Belkin's position will inevitably be filled by another, whose competence will not be as great as Dr. Belkin's. Rabbi Soloveitchik emphasized that the administration cannot allow the character of the entire university to depend upon one man, but that it must be a concrete and legal part of the University's constitution.

He concluded with a veiled threat that if the problems he mentioned are not satisfactorily resolved, then "I no longer have a place in this *yeshiva*."

Reaction

Reaction to Rabbi Soloveitchik's speech was immediate and varied. Dr. Belkin was visibly upset by both the tone and the

content of the Rav's remarks. At several points during the Rav's speech he interjected denials to accusations made against the YU administration, but the Rav insisted that he be allowed to speak freely.

One member of the Board of Trustees charged that the Rav had chosen a bad time and place for his remarks. Moreover, since the Rav has done little to aid YU's fund-raising efforts, it was not in his province to criticize the way Yeshiva obtains its money. Even some *rebbeim* in the *yeshiva* expressed their belief that Rabbi Soloveitchik had not grasped the financial implications of the situation.

Student reaction was overwhelmingly favorable. Some felt that his complete rejection of present Yeshiva policy made Dr. Belkin's position untenable and would ultimately force the latter's resignation. Others were of

the opinion that Rabbi Soloveitchik's personal praise of Dr. Belkin was completely sincere and his threat to leave YU was sufficiently vague so as to allow Dr. Belkin room to maneuver without resigning his position.

The Issue

The issue of secularization has burned fitfully among the student body throughout most of this year. However, the issuance of new catalogues representing JSS and EMC as non-sectarian institutions aroused the resentment of many students who felt the administration was dealing deceitfully not only with Albany but with its own students as well.

On April 8, four *semicha* students presented Dr. Belkin with a list of six demands which they termed "imperative." They asked that:

1) The corporate structure of YU be changed so that RIETS (both undergraduate and gradu-

ate), YC, EMC, JSS, Stern and TIW be established as a separate corporation independent of the other divisions of the University.

2) This new corporation be given as assets classroom, dormitory, and library buildings currently used by it as well as an equitable share of the endowment.

3) All new catalogues issued under the pressure of the present charters be immediately withdrawn and new ones stating conspicuously the requirements for a double program be issued as soon as possible and forwarded to Albany.

4) Salaries of the religious faculty be raised to at least parity with those of the college faculty.

5) Faculty councils of the respective religious divisions be empowered to set definitive policy with respect to admissions, cur-

(Continued on page 5, col. 1)

RIETS Students Protest "Secularization"
(Courtesy *The Commentator*, April 15, 1970, p. 1)

Introduction

Students enrolled at Yeshiva University have always straddled the line between the institution's dual mission that values the integration or harmonization of both religious and secular values. This thesis uses Yeshiva University's college newspapers, *The Commentator* and *The Observer*, with a focus on a specific period of time in history and its associated national crises, as test cases to evaluate the extent to which Yeshiva University students have identified with and subscribed to the institution's nuanced missions, and how their views compared with other college students when significant national issues took place.

Given Yeshiva students' nuanced approach to the world around them, it is intriguing to explore how deeply engaged they have been towards crucial national events that were not ipso facto Jewish. Moreover, it is important to determine how similar or different has been their worldview from that of other American college students, Jewish and non-Jewish. Such a study helps reveal the extent to which Yeshiva students perceived themselves and acted as if they were in a religious cloister disengaged from wider societal issues, or rather engaged with the crises of their times.

A good lens for studying Yeshiva University students is the period of 1954-1971, when the civil rights movement and the Vietnam War roiled America. In 1954, the United States Supreme Court, through the monumental decision in the case of *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, declared state-sponsored public-school segregation to be unconstitutional. This landmark decision paved the way for massive legislative and social gains in America for the civil rights movement during the mid-1950s and 1960s, albeit with major confrontations both north and south of the Mason-Dixon line. On the foreign policy front, the Vietnam War embroiled the nation during the years 1954-1971.

Several specific events of the civil rights movement are highlighted in this thesis. These include the Freedom Summer murders of civil rights workers in June 1964, the Selma to Montgomery marches in March 1965, and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in April 1968. Likewise, several key events from the Vietnam War are highlighted. These include the 1968 Tet Offensive, the My Lai Massacre in March 1968, and the Kent State shootings in May 1970.

The chosen events from the civil rights movement and from the Vietnam War are not random selections. All of these events received national coverage and were objects of interest in dozens of American college newspapers. Additionally, many of these events related to Jews. Regarding the civil rights events, two of the Freedom Summer murdered individuals were Jewish, the distinguished Jewish scholar Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel marched with Dr. King from Selma to Montgomery, and the Black Power movement, which in many respects was anti-Jewish, was often compared to the Jewish Defense League (JDL). Regarding the Vietnam War events, three of the student protesters killed by the Ohio National Guard during the Kent State shootings were Jews. Finally, the Vietnam War in particular sparked a large amount of journalism from young men across the country, who, throughout the war, were concerned about the draft.

College students were one of the most vocal groups in both the civil rights movement and Vietnam War opposition. Campuses across the country erupted in unprecedented levels of student activism. Students expressed their views with protests and

artistic expressions. Additionally, students discussed their opinions in the written form, in particular by reporting and opining in their college newspapers.

As an independent newspaper that has been a platform for news stories, op-eds, investigations, and editorials for Yeshiva students since 1935, *The Commentator* is perhaps the foremost paper of record that can document which events interested Yeshiva students, and which did not. *The Observer* as well, which was founded in 1958 as Stern College for Women's independent student newspaper, can serve to document the Yeshiva student sentiment; in particular, *The Observer* offers insight into the hearts and minds of Yeshiva's undergraduate women.

This thesis analyzes *Commentator* and *Observer* articles—or lack thereof—during the years 1954-1971. Articles written by students shed light on those events that stirred the interest of students; lack of articles during and shortly following major events, as well as critical articles written by professors and rabbis, may indicate instances when students were more apathetic than their counterparts on other campuses, or when Yeshiva students may have shown different opinions from Yeshiva faculty. Both headlines and the contents of articles are taken into account as relevant data.

In addition to surveying YU's student newspapers in relation to national events, this thesis also examines in depth two instances of student activism by YU students that related only to the YU administration. In one case, the undergraduate men of Yeshiva campaigned for a Yeshiva College Senate to improve communication between students and the administration; in the other, Stern College's women crusaded for YU to make good on a long overdue promise to construct a new academic building at its midtown campus. These two sagas, both of which took place primarily during the 1968-1969 academic year, were the most impactful cases of activism at YU during the years 1954-1971, and were clearly inspired in part by protests that were taking place at the same time at other colleges.

An investigation into several other colleges' newspapers—City College's *The Campus*, Columbia University's *Columbia Daily Spectator*, and Brandeis University's *The Justice*—provides a basis for comparison.

History books, archival library documents, and individual testimonies from alumni provide an important framework for what events were in fact the major crises of the years 1954-1971. These sources also offer helpful perspectives on *The Commentator*'s and *The Observer*'s coverages, especially in cases where there are apparent gaps in the newspapers' coverages. Whereas the newspapers provide answers to the question of *what* topics mattered to Yeshiva students, these secondary, non-newspaper sources provide answers to the question of *why* Yeshiva students were passionate about certain events.

After analyzing the extent to which Yeshiva University students engaged with the crises of 1954-1971 and the degree of diversity of the Yeshiva University college student's perspective in light of the broader national perspective, this thesis asserts several arguments regarding the nature of those protests that are documented in this paper: Yeshiva University students generally tend to the right of their secular college counterparts on political and social issues. A manifestation of YU students' right-wing tendencies is that protests at YU are exceedingly rare, and, even when unrest presents itself at YU, it is usually related to a YU-specific issue rather than to a national crisis. At the same time, YU is undoubtedly impacted by its surrounding society, and even YU students will participate in mainstream

activism when it abounds; for example, when protests and other anti-establishment movements thrived during the late 1960s.

Finally, this thesis concludes with a discussion of what the data and analysis imply regarding the broader Orthodox Jewish perspective during the time period in question and what messages can be relayed about the future.

The Early Years (1954-1965)

Among the most dramatic decisions ever issued by the United States Supreme Court, *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* effectively invoked the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution to prohibit states from segregating public school students on the basis of race.¹ Famously and unanimously declaring that “separate educational facilities are inherently unequal,” the Court’s decision partially overruled the earlier decision of *Plessy v. Ferguson* which had embraced the permissibility of “separate but equal” treatment for whites and African Americans.² A major triumph for the civil rights movement, the decision led to both heightened integration efforts, as well as protests and acts of civil disobedience that contributed over the following two decades to major pieces of federal legislation outlawing discriminatory practices, notably including the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Participating in many boycotts, sit-ins, and other protests, college students actively protested against institutionalized segregation. Notably, the Freedom Summer murders of three activists in Mississippi in June 1964 sparked significant national outrage,³ and the nonviolent protest marches from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 involved organizers from the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), as well as thousands of student and faculty protesters marching for the purpose of helping African Americans secure the opportunity to register to vote.⁴

Coverage from *The Commentator* and *The Observer* suggests that YU students were not particularly involved in the early years of civil rights protests. In 1956, Autherine Juanita Lucy was the first African American student at the University of Alabama, a university from which she was subsequently expelled. Her expulsion ultimately led to the resignation of the university’s president. A February *Commentator* editorial of that year praised the “courage of Miss Lucy” for standing up to the “blind ignorance of bigotry” and violent mobs. The editorial board argued that anti-segregation student leaders at the University of Alabama “must succeed in rectifying this virtually irrevocable blotch on the American conscience.”⁵ However, aside from this one editorial, historical records from YU’s student newspapers paint a YU student body that was generally uninvolved with the civil rights movement in the 1950s.

On April 21, 1960, around 30 Yeshiva College (YC) students joined fellow metropolitan area college students in a protest to picket for equal rights for African Americans in the South, citing the Jewish moral obligation “to uphold the equality of all men.”⁶ Aside from that one incident, though, YU students’ priorities in the early 1960s, as

¹ *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

² *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

³ Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, *The Reader’s Companion to American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), pp. 424-425.

⁴ Townsend Davis, *Weary Feet, Rested Souls* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998), pp. 88-92.

⁵ “Trouble at Alabama,” *The Commentator*, February 27, 1956, p. 2.

⁶ “Student Pickets Fight Color Bars,” *The Commentator*, May 5, 1960, p. 1. See also “Fight For Equality,” *The Commentator*, May 5, 1960, p. 2, in which the newspaper’s editorial board praised sit-in demonstrations and the rising of protests on behalf of African-American rights, on the following grounds: “As Jews we have a moral and religious duty to uphold the rights of our fellow-man.”

documented by the student newspapers, seem to have been limited mostly to academic, social, and religious pursuits.

Aside from a few articles and demonstrations related to the civil rights movement, YU students in the early 1960s were not particularly interested in protesting. Even in the 1961-62 academic year, during which time *The Commentator* was edited by David Segal, an editor-in-chief who took an interest in the importance of protesting, the only articles or news coverage devoted to student protests seem to have been penned by Segal himself.⁷

The issue of the Soviet Union's treatment of its Jewish population seems to have been the first issue for which Yeshiva University students were motivated enough to both express disapproval in writing, and even to physically stand up and protest the objectionable state of affairs. And yet, even though some YU students did participate with the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry (SSSJ) since its founding in 1964, most YU students during these years were complacent and not particularly activist about the Soviet Jewry issue.

The first allusion to the topic in print appeared in one of Segal's final editorials; arguing for the importance of protesting for the rights of Soviet Jewry, he wrote, "We, as the future leaders of American Jewry, must be concerned not only with Judaism at Yeshiva but with Judaism in the nation and the world."⁸ But, whereas the Soviet issue in 1962 seems to have significantly mattered only to unique students like Segal,⁹ in distinction from a YU student body that was apparently apathetic to both Jewish and non-Jewish issues beyond the walls of its school, the plight of Soviet Jewry began to occupy more attention for YU students soon thereafter.

Beginning in the 1960s and until the Soviet Union began to crumble in late 1989, roughly 300,000 Jews fled the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Gal Beckerman writes:

While Soviet Jews were pushing for unobstructed emigration from inside the Soviet Union, American Jews were pushing for it from the outside. ... [B]ecause of their numbers and the peculiar politics of the Cold War, American Jews were as fundamental to the movement as the Soviet Jews themselves.¹¹

⁷ See "In Defense Of Freedom," *The Commentator*, November 16, 1961, p. 2, an editorial in which Segal's editorial board supported protests by City College students who felt that their freedom of speech was being suppressed by the university. See also "Students Counteract Speaker Ban With Academic Boycott At CCNY," *The Commentator*, November 16, 1961, p. 1 for news coverage of the City College protest, and see also "Ait Lachashot...", *The Commentator*, April 11, 1962, p. 2, another editorial in which Segal's editorial board showed an interest in college protests, in this latter case relating to Hunter College students who invited George Rockwell, the "self-avowed *fuehrer* of the American Nazi Party," to speak on campus.

⁸ "Demonstration Digression," *The Commentator*, May 9, 1962, p. 2.

⁹ See also "War in Peace," *The Commentator*, October 24, 1963, p. 2, another early nod to the plight of Soviet Jewry. Even before protesting caught on, this editorial by editor-in-chief Mitchel Wolf's editorial board praised the United States Senate that "introduced a strongly-worded resolution condemning the Soviet Union for its practices."

¹⁰ Gal Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone: The Epic Struggle to Save Soviet Jewry* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010), p. 3.

¹¹ Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone*, p. 7.

Soviet Jews' mistreatment from the 1960s through the 1980s included tangible discrimination like quotas of Jews allowed at universities and a push to purge Jews from Soviet industry, science, and politics,¹² but also day-to-day hatred from ethnic Russians and Ukrainians who hated their Jewish neighbors. Many "refuseniks," whose emigration applications were refused by the Soviet Union, battled tirelessly against Soviet persecution from the inside while their American (and British and French) Jewish counterparts protested from abroad. Many argue that it was ultimately because of the refuseniks and the Western activists that the Soviet Union was regularly kept on the moral defensive during the Cold War.¹³

Jews worldwide began to champion the cause of Soviet Jews since the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, which gave rise to the notion of reconnecting "lost" Jews to the Jewish world.¹⁴ But the first real organized protest took place only on May 1, 1964, when more than 1,000 students, led by the SSSJ, filled East 67th Street in Manhattan to protest the Soviet Union's treatment of its Jews.¹⁵ Organizers included Jewish students across New York campuses associated with SSSJ, as well as generally complacent/nonviolent American Jewish establishment organizations and the generally violence-prone Jewish Defense League (JDL), led by Rabbi Meir Kahane, which fought on behalf of Soviet Jewry in the late sixties and early seventies.¹⁶ As Rabbi Avi Weiss documents,

By late 1970, the JDL had engaged in violent actions: bombs at the Soviet airline Aeroflot and Soviet-US Amtorg Trading offices in New York, as well as at the Soviet cultural building in Washington in late 1970 and early 1971; four shots fired into the Soviet UN Mission in New York in November 1971; and bombings at S. Hurok Presents and at Columbia Artists Management Inc., both in New York, and the sponsors of Soviet-American cultural exchanges, on January 16, 1972.¹⁷

Though JDL violence gained much media attention, the group's actions were not without controversy, and the group mostly quieted down its anti-Soviet Union violence after its funds were depleted and many of its leaders were arrested, in particular after Kahane moved to Israel in 1971 and the Hurok incident was ill-received, even by Soviet Jewry sympathizers, in early 1972.¹⁸

In general, the anti-Soviet Union activism from 1964 to 1991, by which time the issue had almost entirely abated, was nonviolent. Grassroots activists in the SSSJ often saw

¹² Henry L. Feingold, *"Silent No More": Saving the Jews of Russia, The American Jewish Effort, 1967-1989* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p. 43.

¹³ Beckerman, *When They Come for Us, We'll Be Gone*, p. 8.

¹⁴ Feingold, *"Silent No More"*, p. 45.

¹⁵ Avi Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door: Memoirs of a Soviet Jewry Activist* (New Milford: The Toby Press, 2015), p. 3. See also "1,000 Students Picket Soviet Consul, Demonstrate Against Anti-Semitism," *The Commentator*, May 5, 1964, p. 1, which documents the march from the perspective of some YU students who joined.

¹⁶ Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door*, p. 65.

¹⁷ Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door*, p. 66.

¹⁸ Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door*, p. 66.

themselves as the sole champions of the refuseniks, in distinction from establishment groups like the Council of Jewish Federations, the Anti-Defamation League, and the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, among other organizations who offered minimal influence in the activism.¹⁹ Rabbi Weiss recalls:

Among the countless rallies organized by the SSSJ were the Jericho March from the Soviet UN Mission (April 4, 1965); the Passover *Geula* March of thousands of students from the mission (April 6 [*sic*], 1966);²⁰ the fast-in at the mission (August 15, 1967); the Freedom Boat Ride to a mass rally at the Statue of Liberty (September 29, 1968); and the Let Them Out Rally at the mission at which then Congressman Ed Koch spoke (November 23, 1969).²¹

As has been mentioned, YU's student newspapers indicate that as soon as protests for Soviet Jewry began in May 1964, YU students were at least aware of the protests, although participation seems to have been rather minimal. The only mention in *The Commentator* about protests for Soviet Jewry before the year 1966 was a page-four picture of Dr. Irving Greenberg in the December 30, 1965 issue, with the caption,

Dr. Irving Greenberg, associate professor of history at YC, was one of the featured speakers at the Menorah March, December 19. The March was organized by the Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry as part of its continuing plan to familiarize all peoples of the plight of the Jews in Russia.²²

A handful of articles relating to Soviet Jewry protests appeared in *The Observer* during the early years of activism in 1964 and 1965.

One early *Observer* article documented a rally on April 12, 1964 at the High School of Fashion Design, organized by the American League for Russian Jews, which was attended by approximately 350 people. It is unclear how many YU students attended that rally, although *The Observer's* governing board, led by editor-in-chief Naomi Belle Minder, figured that "this number [350 attendees] does not come close to the millions who should actively support such a movement."²³ The same editorial board, following the May 1, 1964 protest and the formation of SSSJ, called attention to mass protests that would be taking place during the summer of 1964, adding, "The struggle cannot be limited merely to the school year nor can it be limited to religious Jewish youth or even Jewish youth."²⁴

¹⁹ Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door*, pp. 73-74.

²⁰ The protest took place on Friday, April 8, 1966.

²¹ Weiss, *Open Up the Iron Door*, p. 4.

²² "1,000 March For Soviet Jews," *The Commentator*, December 30, 1965, p. 4. See also Lenore Wolfson, "Chanukah Begins With March For Soviet Jewry; Throng of 1,000 Crowds Downtown Rally," *The Observer*, January 10, 1966, p. 3.

²³ "Keating Guest At Rally for Russian Jewry," *The Observer*, April 27, 1964, p. 2.

²⁴ "Summer Protest," *The Observer*, June 4, 1964, p. 2. See also "Protest Group Plans Activity For Vacation," *The Observer*, June 4, 1964, p. 3, a regular article which detailed how Stern students could become involved with SSSJ over the summer.

While it is possible that some Stern women did join in the activism that summer, there was no documentation to this effect in the newspaper.

The subsequent governing board of *The Observer* also showed modest interest in the Soviet Jewry issue. Two front page articles in the 1964-1965 academic year called attention to the Soviet Jewry issue, one covering a lecture at Stern delivered by a rabbi who visited Jews in the Soviet Union,²⁵ and the other advertising the Jericho March that took place on April 4, 1965.²⁶ Finally, a page-six article of the final issue of that volume of *The Observer* documented an SSSJ march that took place near the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C.²⁷ In none of the coverage was it specified how many YU students were involved, which suggests that participation on their part was minimal.

On the whole, aside from a select handful of student newspaper editors, YU students were not particularly riled up about the Soviet Jewry issue in the early years of protests for the cause.

YU students in the early 1960s, as is evidenced by the lack of newspaper coverage, were similarly apathetic about the civil rights movement. After the April 1960 protest for African-American rights, the next reference to the civil rights movement in YU's student newspapers was a front page news article in *The Observer* about a speech at Stern College delivered by the Executive Secretary of the NAACP. In the speech, which took place on October 29, 1963, Ms. Mildred Bond spoke to Stern students about the history of the NAACP and how the NAACP would fight to legally mandate racial integration.²⁸

It was just several weeks after that speech that President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. Following the assassination, a *Commentator* editorial, printed along with a prominent picture of the president, stated:

Never before have so many disregarded their differences and banded together. So, too, a divided nation dismissed its biases and prejudices. Christians and Jews, Negroes and whites, Democrats and Republicans, Liberals and Conservatives,—all gathered to pay homage to this man who fought for peace. ...

President Kennedy died fighting for peace, justice, liberty and equality. We must continue his battle.²⁹

Shortly after this editorial was written, Yeshiva University on February 3, 1964 provided facilities for some 30 local elementary school students who were participating in a city-wide elementary school boycott—with roughly 460,000 students skipping school, the boycott was the largest-ever civil rights protest in United States history³⁰—organized

²⁵ Naomi Meyer, "Russia: A Personal Account Delivered By Rabbi Felman," *The Observer*, December 10, 1964, p. 1.

²⁶ "Jericho March," *The Observer*, March 29, 1965, p. 1.

²⁷ Lenore Wolfson, "SSSJ Jericho March to D.C. In Unity Effort," *The Observer*, June 1, 1965, p. 6.

²⁸ "We Must Live Together' States NAACP Speaker," *The Observer*, October 31, 1963, p. 1.

²⁹ "J.F.K. ה"ב," *The Commentator*, December 4, 1963, p. 2.

³⁰ Yasmeen Khan, "Demand for School Integration Leads to Massive 1964 Boycott — In New York City," *WNYC*, February 3, 2016, www.wnyc.org/story/school-boycott-1964/.

by civil rights activists calling for desegregation of the city's schools.³¹ Two months later, YU's Yavneh club hosted a symposium at Yeshiva College, where Jewish and African American speakers, moderated by Professor Irving Greenberg, discussed the relationship between Jews and African Americans in the civil rights movement ("Dr. Greenberg advocated more direct [Jewish] involvement in the rights movement").³²

However, these activist incidents seem to have been the exception rather than the rule. *Commentator* coverage suggests that Yeshiva student interest in the aforementioned boycott and symposium were minimal, as is evidenced both by the articles themselves, as well as from the fact that the student newspapers published no student op-eds or letters to the editor about either event. Neither *The Commentator* nor *The Observer* recorded any indication that YU students were involved in protests relating to the Freedom Summer murders in June 1964 or in the Selma to Montgomery marches in March 1965. The only nods to the civil rights movement before 1966 in YU's student newspapers were two op-eds, written a year apart, assessing the alleged problem of African-American animosity towards Jews,³³ as well as a review of *One Potato, Two Potato*, a 1964 drama film that apparently addressed "[r]ace problems" including "racial intermarriage."³⁴

While YU students in the early 1950s and early 1960s were clearly aware of the major national issues of their time, their attitude was generally apathetic. They rarely participated in protests or wrote articles relating to the civil rights movement. Even when it came to the Jewish-specific issue of the plight of Soviet Jewry, YU students were not particularly roiled.

Records from other colleges' newspapers show students who were relatively placid in the early 1960s compared to the late 1960s, although certainly more nationally aware than their YU counterparts.

The Campus, *Columbia Daily Spectator*, and *The Justice* published minimal content relating to the Freedom Summer murders, likely because the incident took place when schools were out of session. However, City College, Columbia, and Brandeis students were very interested and involved in the Selma to Montgomery Marches. Whereas YU students were seemingly not at all involved, both Columbia University and Brandeis University sent professors and students to the marches.³⁵ While the marches were taking place in the South, students in the Boston area staged a sit-in and protest "directed against the failure of the Federal government to protect the Negro citizens of Selma, Alabama," which involved roughly 200 students, including 25 Brandeis students, 11 of whom were arrested during altercations.³⁶

³¹ Michael Schopf, "Negroes Here For A Day As School Boycott Held," *The Commentator*, February 17, 1964, p. 3.

³² "Yavneh Chapter Hosts Civil Rights Speakers," *The Commentator*, April 22, 1964, p. 1.

³³ See Steven Prystowsky, "Negro Animosity Towards Jews Has Many Roots," *The Commentator*, March 25, 1964, p. 16 and Milton Ottensoser, "An Evaluation Of Anti-Semitism In The Negro Press," *The Commentator*, April 8, 1965, p. 8.

³⁴ Joseph Lessem, "Racial Intermarriage Is Shown On Screen," *The Commentator*, January 18, 1965, p. 11.

³⁵ See Jeffrey Newman, "Four CU Profs. Plan to Join Selma March," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, March 23, 1965, p. 1 and "Three Brandeis Students Join In Montgomery Demonstration," *The Justice*, March 30, 1965, p. 1.

³⁶ "Brandeis Students Jailed, One Hurt in Boston Sit-In," *The Justice*, March 16, 1965, p. 1.

The Vietnam War Intensifies (Late 1965-1967)

Beginning in November 1965, the Vietnam War became a topic of major interest and anxiety for Yeshiva students, lasting until the end of the decade and even a bit beyond.

American troops in Vietnam numbered under 1,000 in 1959, but rose to 16,000 in 1963 and to 23,000 in 1964 as tensions escalated. Less than a week after the Gulf of Tonkin incident on August 2, 1964, the United States Congress passed the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, permitting President Lyndon B. Johnson to use conventional military force in Southeast Asia without a formal declaration of war by Congress. By the end of 1965, the U.S. military in Vietnam numbered 184,000 troops, including combat units.³⁷ For the next several years, the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese People's Army (NVA) fought against the South Vietnamese Army of the Republic of Vietnam and the United States armed forces in conventional warfare. For several years, U.S. forces consistently escalated in number, even as the prospect of a victory for the U.S. and South Vietnam seemed less and less possible.

As the war intensified, so did the rate of American conscription. In July 1965, President Johnson announced that draft inductions, by which males between the ages of 18 and 25 could be called to the army by the Selective Service System,³⁸ would increase from 17,000 per month to 35,000 per month. College students were typically granted deferments, although 2.2 million men were drafted by the military between 1964 and 1973, such that even college students typically felt closely connected to their many comrades who were sent to fight in Vietnam. Anti-war movements spawned across the country as the draft and the dire situation expanded, and they proliferated after the United States government instituted its first draft lottery, based on birth dates, in December 1969. The draft persisted until January 1973, when the Paris Peace Accords were signed and the Vietnam War had essentially ended.³⁹

On November 18, 1965, Yeshiva University hosted "The Great Debate on The American Policy in Viet Nam," where hundreds of Yeshiva College and Stern College students filled Lamport Auditorium at YU's Washington Heights campus to hear several Yeshiva professors debate the morality of assisting the South Vietnamese in their fight. A *Commentator* article at the time described Lamport Auditorium as filling to "a capacity crowd."⁴⁰ The debate apparently "often did assume the tones of a heated, political argument" and was received with a "lively reaction of an enthused audience."⁴¹ According

³⁷ "Vietnam War Allied Troop Levels 1960-73," December 6, 2008, <https://www.americanwarlibrary.com/vietnam/vwatl.htm>.

³⁸ See Selective Training and Service Act of 1940, also known as the Burke-Wadsworth Act, Pub.L. 76-783, 54 Stat. 885, enacted September 16, 1940.

³⁹ "The Military Draft During the Vietnam War," *Michigan in the World*, michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/exhibits/show/exhibit/draft_protests/the-military-draft-during-the-

⁴⁰ "YU Professors Debate American Policy In Vietnam," *The Commentator*, December 2, 1965, p. 1.

⁴¹ Chia Ramras, "Dunner Defends U.S. Stand In Viet Nam Policy Debate," *The Observer*, December 9, 1965, p. 1. It is worth noting that the pieces referenced in this and the previous footnote were the first articles ever published in YU's student newspapers relating to the Vietnam War. Indeed, as was described in a communication with Neil Koslowe, June 16, 2019, the 1965-1966 governing board of *The Commentator*, led

to one attendee, almost the entire crowd of students at the debate was supportive of the government's actions in Vietnam, aside from a small contingency of around 20 anti-war students who sat together in one corner of the room.⁴²

The biggest testament to YU students' support of the U.S. government's actions in Vietnam was a petition signed by over 800 YU students, delivered by a delegation of YU students (the "Yeshiva Committee For Peace With Freedom") to the White House, stating, "we declare our support of the American commitment in Vietnam and resolve that whatever national resources are required shall be devoted to its fulfillment."⁴³ The petition sparked many written reactions (all in the form of letters to the editor) from YU professors, alumni, and students, several of whom harshly criticized their peers for supporting the war. The critiques included such accusations as the petition being "symptomatic of a serious moral and religious malady which is afflicting Orthodox Jewry today" by which Orthodox Jews ignore "ethics and social action." Other letters similarly criticized YU students' apathetic attitude.⁴⁴

Indeed, the general tone of the student newspapers from early 1966 suggests that at that point, Yeshiva students were mostly supportive of the United States army's actions in Vietnam. This inference follows from the fact that *The Observer* published no op-eds relating to Vietnam until 1968,⁴⁵ and from the fact that *The Commentator*, aside from the

by editor-in-chief Neil Koslowe, hardly even discussed the Vietnam War when preparing news topics to begin researching during the summer of 1965.

⁴² Communication with Joseph Kaplan, June 12, 2019. Mr. Kaplan recalled as well that though the debate attracted hundreds of students, it did not quite fill up Lamport Auditorium as was implied by *The Commentator*.

⁴³ "For Peace With Freedom," *The Commentator*, December 30, 1965, p. 6. *The Commentator* printed the petition as a full-page back page advertisement to solicit more students to sign the document. The advertisement also mentioned that the "Committee has successfully sponsored a Channukah Card Campaign to Jewish Soldiers in Vietnam in conjunction with the nationwide campaign to show our support and thanks to our soldiers during the holiday season."

⁴⁴ Letters to the editor (nine in total) mostly expressed anti-petition, anti-war sentiments, although several of the letters responded to other letters by affirming student support for the war. See Laurence Kaplan, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, February 18, 1966, p. 7; Henry Grinberg, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, March 17, 1966, p. 2; Carol Ann Fisch, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, March 17, 1966, p. 6; Heshy Rosenbaum, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, March 31, 1966, p. 7; Albert A. Klein, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, March 31, 1966, p. 8; Aaron Gaffney, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, April 28, 1966, p. 8; Marlene Ringel, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, April 28, 1966, p. 11; Myer Fund, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, April 28, 1966, p. 11; and Theodore Grossman, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, June 2, 1966, p. 12. The letter written by Ms. Fisch, a Stern College student who criticized her peers for submitting a petition that implied the support of all Yeshiva students, spawned three of the subsequent letters whose authors took particular offense from Fisch's claims and language.

⁴⁵ In fact, the only article published in *The Observer* before 1968 that related at all to Vietnam was a news story that documented a debate at Stern College about the morality of the Vietnam War. On the one hand, this is not shocking, as even when Vietnam articles proliferated in *The Commentator*, the focus was quite often related to the draft, which affected only men. On the other hand, this absence of articles is probably indicative of apathy towards the Vietnam War before 1968 on the part of Stern College students. See Mara Davis and Esther Levine, "Large Stern Audience Hears Lively Debate on Viet Nam," *The Observer*, May 23, 1966, p. 1. Notably, *The Observer* referred to this referenced article, when the content continued on p. 6, with the headline of "Myth of Student Apathy Exploded As Huge Gathering Turns Out to Hear Viet Nam

letters to the editor relating to the 800-person petition, did not publish any such op-eds until late 1966. Even among the several letters to the editor criticizing the petition, two of the critiques were penned by alumni (Laurence Kaplan and Heshy Rosenbaum), and one was written by a professor at YU's Albert Einstein College of Medicine (Albert A. Klein), suggestive of a student body that, in contrast, was not particularly opposed to the petition (indeed, 800 students signed the document). Aside from a handful of objectors in early 1966, most YU students at that time did not express much concern—not in print and certainly not with protests—regarding the war.

Two notable exceptions to Vietnam apathy among Yeshiva students in early 1966 included an interview with Professor Irving Greenberg, which was published by *The Commentator*, in which Greenberg discussed, among other contemporary topics, the question of how Jews ought to relate to moral ambiguities that might arise during the war.⁴⁶ Additionally, near the end of the Spring 1966 semester, Senator Jacob Javits, a Republican senator representing New York State, addressed Yeshiva College students about the topic of compulsory military service.⁴⁷ Both stories suggest that by mid-1966, YU's undergraduate men were at least somewhat concerned about the Vietnam War, and certainly about the issue of military service.

Though YU students did not become active anti-war protestors even by the end of 1967, articles from *The Commentator* suggest that the Vietnam War most certainly became an increasingly significant object of interest and anxiety for them over the course of late 1966 and 1967. *The Commentator* in Fall 1966 published a special report investigating students' attitude towards the draft. The investigation found that "[t]he overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they believed that student deferments should be granted, this to be done on the basis of mere full-time enrollment in college." The article concluded:

In summation, the attitude towards the draft here at Yeshiva is a weighted and serious one. Most students are concerned with the national welfare as well as their own. While some think actual national service is in itself desirable, and others contend that a nation's leaders are best allowed to develop on their own, few think that it is in the United States' best interests to side-track its college-trained elite in purely military service, except under the most dire circumstances.⁴⁸

Debate," indicative of an editorial board that was clearly aware of and defensive regarding the common sentiment that Yeshiva students were apathetic.

⁴⁶ Harold Goldberg, "Dr. Greenberg Discusses Orthodoxy, YU, Viet Nam, & Sex," *The Commentator*, April 28, 1966, p. 6. See also Dr. Irving Greenberg, Letter to the Editor, May 12, 1966, p. 8 and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, "Rav Lichtenstein Writes Letter To Dr. Greenberg," *The Commentator*, June 2, 1966, p. 7 for two very interesting follow-up articles. Greenberg's original article also inspired no fewer than three impassioned letters to the editor, printed in the May 12, 1966 issue of *The Commentator* (p. 9).

⁴⁷ "Javits Speaks At YU Science Dinner; Urges Compulsory National Service," *The Commentator*, June 2, 1966, p. 1.

⁴⁸ Gary Schiff, "Special Report: Students Express Views On The Draft," *The Commentator*, October 20, 1966, p. 4. See also Gary Rosenblatt, "Keep On Dodging The Draft; Army Life No Bed Of Roses," *The Commentator*, November 17, 1966, p. 3 and Charles Parker, "Campus Chatter," *The Commentator*, December 8, 1966, p. 5, both of which discussed the draft. See also Gary Schiff, "Special Report: Evaluation

The next year, in 1967, *The Commentator* began publishing many articles directly addressing the issue of Yeshiva students' apathy vis-à-vis the Vietnam War in the face of their collegiate counterparts who were standing up to protest the government's actions.

In the first such set of articles, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Stephen Bailey, wrote a two-part editorial addressing, among other issues, the fact that "students in colleges across the nation have been marching in demonstrations, burning draft cards, staging sit-ins, and going on hunger strikes," while "Yeshiva College is not actually involved" in either "protesting the war in Vietnam" or "backing the Civil Rights movement." In those editorials, Bailey ultimately concluded that the apathy problem was a symptom of Orthodox Judaism, not merely of Yeshiva University. As Bailey saw it, Yeshiva University students were comparatively less upset by "the established values and processes of contemporary America," because Orthodox Judaism provided a refuge where religious students, even in the face of the injustices such as those that were perceived in the late 1960s, always have "a model after which to shape ourselves, a code of ethics which are Divine and therefore not subject to revision — and, above all, an ultimate purpose to life."⁴⁹

In the final *Commentator* issue of the Spring 1967 semester, Joseph Kaplan wrote his first op-ed of over a dozen that he would publish in *The Commentator* over the course of the following 1967-1968 academic year, almost all of which criticized his classmates for what he perceived as tremendous apathy towards the important issues of the day. "At times, it seems as if we live in our own private sphere, unbothered by the world, national or local problems, and concerned only with the minor problems of the school," Kaplan wrote in his first such piece. "As citizens, we have a responsibility to voice our opinions; as college students, we must take a stand on the war in general and student deferments in particular."⁵⁰

Though Kaplan seems to have been correct that Yeshiva students were generally not participating in active protesting, even he would admit by late 1967 that the sentiment had shifted within the YU student body to generally disfavor the Vietnam War.

In Fall 1967, Gary Schiff, the new editor-in-chief of *The Commentator*, was the first leader of the newspaper to regularly publish editorials about the Vietnam War, likely suggestive of a student body that was increasingly interested in the topic.⁵¹ Moreover, on

Of Draft Views," *The Commentator*, March 16, 1967, p. 4, where Mr. Schiff revisited his first draft investigation five months later.

⁴⁹ Stephen Bailey, "From the Editor's Desk: The 'Out' Crowd," *The Commentator*, February 16, 1967, p. 2 and Stephen Bailey, "From the Editor's Desk: The 'Out' Crowd — II," *The Commentator*, March 2, 1967, p. 2. It is worth noting that, in general, Bailey's editorial board seems to have made a push, certainly by the end of the 1966-1967 academic year, to publish articles relating to the Vietnam War. See Al Finkle, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, January 5, 1967, p. 2, for example, which was a short note written by a 1959 Yeshiva College graduate who was stationed as a captain in Vietnam. Though Finkle essentially just thanked *The Commentator* for sending him the newspaper to read, the letter of itself suggests that the newspaper editors probably made an effort to publish a letter written by an active Vietnam soldier.

⁵⁰ Joseph Kaplan, "As I See It: Action Is Eloquence," *The Commentator*, May 25, 1967, p. 3. See also Joseph Kaplan, "In My Opinion: Riots, Rights And Responsibilities," *The Commentator*, November 9, 1967, p. 3, where Kaplan penned very similar concerns about students' apathy.

⁵¹ See "Vive The Volunteers!," *The Commentator*, September 28, 1967, p. 2; Gary Schiff, "From the Editor's Desk: The Universal And The Personal," *The Commentator*, September 28, 1967, p. 2; Gary Schiff, "From the Editor's Desk: In Defense of Youth," *The Commentator*, November 9, 1967, p. 2; "Draft Info," *The*

November 19, 1967, Congressman William Fitts Ryan, a Democrat who represented Manhattan's Upper West Side and who was the first U.S. congressman to publicly criticize the Vietnam War, spoke to a crowd of around 400 YU students in Furst Hall at YU's Washington Heights campus, in which he "attacked the Johnson Administration's Vietnam policies" as 20-25 demonstrators "calling themselves Students Dedicated to the Halt of Communist Aggression in Vietnam picketed Furst Hall."⁵² As if the event itself wasn't evidence enough of an attitudinal shift from two years prior, Mr. Kaplan wrote an op-ed in which, after criticizing his peers once again for a dearth of "debates, discussions, lectures, symposiums, pickets, sit-ins, and teach-ins" at YU, he wrote some uniquely optimistic words in reaction to Congressman Ryan's speech:

At last some interest was being shown in Yeshiva about the major issue facing the United States, and probably the world, today. ...

More than half the people gathered in [Furst Hall's room] F501 were against the war — a significant (and welcome) change from the small handful in Lamport almost two years before. ...

Discussion and debate did not end in Yeshiva on November 19. ... We in Yeshiva have always been apathetic about our school. Let us not be guilty of the same in regard to the world.⁵³

Before the end of 1967, YU's Rabbi Shlomo Riskin delivered a speech titled "The Jewish Attitude Towards War" in which he "discussed the *halachic* implications of Vietnam,"⁵⁴ clearly indicative of a student body whose thoughts were preoccupied with the war. Finally, Senator John O. Pastore, a Democratic senator representing Rhode Island, spoke about the topic of the Vietnam War in his address at YU's Annual Chanukah Dinner at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel, criticizing the anti-peace leadership of North Vietnam and the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ The fact that the Vietnam War was a major topic of discussion at the Chanukah Dinner suggests that even the broader YU community of alumni and donors had the Vietnam War on their minds as well.

Apart from moderate interest in the Vietnam War by the end of 1967, YU students in 1966 and 1967 were mostly apathetic about the civil rights movement and the college trend of protesting. During this time period, only one *Commentator* article directly dealt with civil rights protests, and the tone of the piece, which focused on African-American riots, was not particularly sympathetic towards the cause—the author figured that "changes of the sort Negroes now demand cannot be provided without considerable conflict," and

Commentator, November 22, 1967, p. 2; and Gary Schiff, "From the Editor's Desk: 4D, 2S, 1A — Bingo!", *The Commentator*, November 22, 1967, p. 2.

⁵² Raymond Reich, "Rep. Ryan Speaks On Vietnam; Calls on Sec'y. Rusk To Resign," *The Commentator*, November 22, 1967, p. 1.

⁵³ Joseph Kaplan, "In My Opinion: Faith Lives In Honest Doubt," *The Commentator*, December 7, 1967, p. 3.

⁵⁴ Walter Herzberger, "Riskin Examines Attitude Of Jews Towards Warfare," *The Commentator*, December 21, 1967, p. 1.

⁵⁵ "Sen. Pastore Says Russians Hold Key To Vietnam Peace," *The Commentator*, December 21, 1967, p. 4.

he lamented the property and human lives that were being destroyed by the riots.⁵⁶ *The Observer* on October 23, 1967 published a full “*Observer Supplement*” special issue with many articles relating to the civil rights movement.⁵⁷ However, outside of this special issue, no articles or op-eds in *The Observer* before 1968 touched at all on the topic.

The only real issue that somewhat roiled the YU community in 1966 and 1967 was that of Soviet Jewry. In specific, Yeshiva students partook in an all-night vigil at the Isaiah Wall opposite the United Nations headquarters the night of April 2, 1966, as well as in a Passover Youth Protest for Soviet Jewry on April 8, 1966, the latter drawing a crowd of at least 15,000 people and featuring speeches by several YU personalities, including Rabbi Shlomo Riskin and Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein.⁵⁸ However, though the events were prominently covered by *The Commentator* and *The Observer*, neither newspaper specified how many Yeshiva students actually attended the protests, and no further op-eds were written about the topic in either newspaper for several months following the protests.

Aside from the major protests for Soviet Jewry in April 1966, only select YU individuals at the time seem to have taken a strong interest in the issue. One such individual was *Commentator* editor-in-chief Stephen Bailey, who wrote several editorials relating to Soviet Jewry protests. In one particularly intense editorial, Bailey’s editorial board criticized YU students for their apathy towards all issues apart from that of Soviet Jewry, writing,

From many college campuses throughout the country, we hear of sit-ins, teach-ins, protest marches and other types of mass student demonstrations. . . .

We do not ask that Yeshiva students participate in protest marches or sit-ins (other than, perhaps, for Soviet Jewry), but we decry the indifference our students display towards school activities and functions.

Student Council meetings are poorly attended; no interest is shown in club-hour programs; lecture halls are rarely filled; and our varsity games generally lack an impressive cheering section.

It is apparent that any type of school spirit is gravely lacking at Yeshiva.

Is that the way you want it?⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Barry Axler, “Campus Chatter: The Negro Revolt,” *The Commentator*, September 28, 1967, p. 3. See also Rabbi M. Antelman, “Rabbi Antelman Says Women Separate But Equal,” *The Commentator*, October 20, 1966, p. 5, an article whose content did not at all relate to the civil rights movement, although was still printed with a title that seems to indicate at least an awareness on the part of student journalists of language that was part of the movement’s lexicon.

⁵⁷ See Fayge Butler and Donna Sava, “An Introduction,” *The Observer*, October 23, 1967, p. 1. Articles in the special issue relating to civil rights included “American Scene: Black and White” (p. 1), “Beyond the Violence” (p. 2), “After the Violence: To Condemn or Not” (p. 2), “Behind the Violence” (p. 2), “Can Negroes Do What the Jews Did?” (p. 4), and “Negro Children — A Hope” (p. 4).

⁵⁸ See Lenore Wolfson, “SSSJ Formulate Plans for New Passover Protest March,” *The Observer*, March 28, 1966, p. 7; “All Night Vigil Held By New York Youth To Protest Suppression Of Soviet Jewry,” *The Commentator*, April 28, 1966, p. 1; and Lenore Wolfson, “Passover March Big Success! Youth Pleads for Soviet Jews,” *The Observer*, May 2, 1966, p. 1.

⁵⁹ “School Spirit,” *The Commentator*, October 20, 1966, p. 2.

In the same *Commentator* issue, Bailey's editorial board further argued that even support of the Soviet Jewry issue was insufficient: "It is unfortunate that students at Yeshiva exert little effort, if any, towards solving the problem of Soviet Jewry."⁶⁰

Another individual who took a strong stance on the Soviet Jewry issue was Lenore Wolfson, a student columnist who wrote many articles (before she graduated in 1967) about protests relating to the Soviet Jewry issue, even when those protests were rather small or sparsely attended.⁶¹

Finally, YU's Professor Irving Greenberg showed particular interest in the Soviet Jewry issue during these years. Aside from speaking at the Menorah March on December 19, 1965 (see above), he also addressed the Yeshiva College student body on October 18, 1966 to encourage students to attend an upcoming SSSJ rally.⁶²

On the whole, though, Yeshiva students did not show extreme interest in the Soviet Jewry issue before 1968. The only evidence of YU students protesting during these years after the April 1966 protests was a December 21, 1966 all-night vigil protesting "the resurgence of neo-Nazism in West Germany," which apparently was attended by a group of YU students,⁶³ and a December 26, 1967 SSSJ rally protesting Soviet antisemitism, which was promoted by *The Commentator* and seems to have been attended by some Yeshiva students.⁶⁴ *The Observer* published a front page news story about an anti-Soviet protest on December 28, 1967 in Bryant Park that was attended by 800 people, although it is unclear how many YU students attended.⁶⁵ Even Joseph Kaplan, who regularly bemoaned Yeshiva students' apathy, wrote an op-ed at the end of 1967 to ponder his own perceived inaction vis-à-vis Soviet Jewry protests. "I am not trying to rationalize my own inaction. I know it is wrong. I am merely trying to understand how it came about, and how it can be prevented from happening again," Kaplan considered.⁶⁶

The opinions of Yeshiva students evolved from late 1965 to late 1967. The YU student body shifted from generally approving of the Vietnam War to generally disapproving of the War (and being concerned about the draft in particular). And, as campaigns for Soviet Jewry intensified, YU student interest in the issue moderately increased. In general, though, Yeshiva students during these years, as is evidenced by the student newspapers, were almost entirely uninvolved with the civil rights movement, and only barely involved in protests, even when they related to the Jewish-specific issue of Soviet Jewry. Compared to the protests that would soon roil many institutions of higher education, including Yeshiva University, the level of activism before 1968 was comparatively tame.

⁶⁰ "Soviet Jewry," *The Commentator*, October 20, 1966, p. 2.

⁶¹ See Lenore Wolfson, "Long Island Community Protest In Vigil, Others Plan For Nationwide Demonstration," *The Observer*, March 9, 1967, p. 1, which was but one of many similar articles penned by Wolfson by the end of the Spring 1967 semester.

⁶² "Dr. Greenberg Says 'We Must Protest,'" *The Commentator*, November 3, 1966, p. 1.

⁶³ "Vigil Held by Jewish Youths To Protest Neo-Nazi Upsurge," *The Commentator*, January 5, 1967, p. 1.

⁶⁴ "SSSJ Demonstration Planned To Protest Soviet Anti-Semitism," *The Commentator*, December 21, 1967, p. 6.

⁶⁵ Beth Spiegelman, "800-Plus Marched Through Bryant Park, Whole Nation Hears Soviet Jewry's Cry," *The Observer*, January 15, 1968, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Joseph Kaplan, "In My Opinion: With Blood And Fire," *The Commentator*, December 21, 1967, p. 3.

The Tumultuous Years: A General Survey (1968-1969)

A major turning point in the Vietnam War occurred in early 1968 with the beginning of the Tet Offensive. As North Vietnam and the Viet Cong launched a massive military campaign against South Vietnamese and American armed forces in late January 1968, more than 100 towns and cities in South Vietnam were attacked.⁶⁷ Though the South Vietnam and United States militaries pushed back against the offensive, the press coverage of the event, as well as the United States' response to call up 200,000 more soldiers, shocked the American and world public. Only one month later, the public was shocked once again after the My Lai Massacre, when United States troops killed hundreds of unarmed South Vietnamese civilians on March 16, 1968.⁶⁸ The Tet Offensive and My Lai Massacre were thus a turning point in the Vietnam War, after which public support of the United States' efforts quickly and rapidly declined.⁶⁹

As national hopes for victory in the Vietnam War plummeted, college protests skyrocketed. Though protests lit up campuses across the country, Columbia University's campus in 1968 was particularly ignited. Though the protests sometimes had a stated purpose—for example, protesting Columbia's association with the Institute for Defense Analyses, a weapons think tank, and demonstrations against the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) Program—the protests were clearly inspired and affected by the broader anti-establishment attitude that surfaced because of Vietnam War frustrations, as well as race tensions that arose following the April 4, 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) became a prominent student activist organization on many college campuses, especially Columbia.

On March 27, 1968, more than 100 Columbia students picketed and chanted slogans against the university administration, challenging the memorandum of Columbia's President Grayson Kirk which prohibited picketing or demonstrating within any Columbia University building.⁷⁰ Tensions heated up at Columbia as the Spring 1968 semester drew on. On May 6, 1968, hundreds of students picketed at Columbia and dozens of classes were cancelled as students conducted a strike, which escalated in violence to the point where the university's administration called in over 1,000 New York Tactical Police to take back five buildings which protestors had seized. Around 700 students were arrested and the campus all but shut down in the wake of the protest.⁷¹ The protest was so impactful that even after

⁶⁷ Clark Dougan, Stephen Weiss, et al., *Nineteen Sixty-Eight* (Boston: Boston Publishing Company, 1983), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1975), pp. 103-105.

⁶⁹ James J. Witz, *The Tet Offensive: Intelligence Failure in War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰ Robert B. Stulberg, "Action Against SDS May Follow Protest," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, March 28, 1968, p. 1.

⁷¹ See Arthur Kokot, "Strikers Will Picket Buildings; 50 'Counter Classes' Planned," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 6, 1968, p. 1 and Robert B. Stulberg, "Strikers Picket Class Buildings; Truman Warns of Police Use," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 7, 1968, p. 1. See also Martin S. Pernick, "In the Aftermath: Liberation at Columbia," *The Justice*, May 7, 1968, p. 3.

it concluded, a follow-up protest was conducted at Columbia only several weeks later on May 21, 1968, which saw 100 people arrested by police officers.⁷²

Aside from Columbia's massively tumultuous protests, other college campuses witnessed significant protesting as well in 1968, not only relating to the Vietnam War, but also in connection with the civil right movement. For example, on October 25, 1968,

Nearly four hundred students rallied near Finley Center [near The City College of New York] at noon Friday, to hear H. Rap Brown and John Carlos, who was expelled from the Olympics for making a Black Power gesture, decrying the use of Black athletes as 'tools for White America.' ...

The rally was also attended by some one hundred and fifty elementary school children, who were brought by teachers from neighborhood P.S. 175.⁷³

Articles from YU's student newspapers during the tumultuous years of 1968 and 1969 indicate that Yeshiva students were greatly impacted by the budding trend of anti-war and civil rights protests. Both in writing and with protest activity, YU students during these years began to more closely resemble their peers at other colleges. At the same time, YU students, even when non-apatetic by YU standards, were still tame for their era relative to their secular college counterparts.

Of course, even during the massive rioting at Columbia University and other secular colleges, many students at those colleges must have been apathetic to the anti-establishment causes. This is clear from the fact that even the largest protests never involved the *entire* student body, and can be deduced as well as from the fact that in general, student newspapers tend to report on action rather than on inaction. In other words, one would not expect to read *Columbia Daily Spectator* articles about the students who were, say, simply happy to skip classes and relax during the protests of 1968. It is important to keep this in mind when comparing Yeshiva University students to their counterparts at secular colleges.

Regardless, as the Columbia protests festered, *The Commentator's* editorial board, led by Morton Landowne, criticized the Columbia undergraduates. "The recent occurrences at Columbia have, in their extreme violence, taken the spotlight from more responsible forms of student protest," the editorial wrote.⁷⁴ The broader Yeshiva student body as well indicated its less extreme approach towards protesting when, as final exams were taking place in June 1968, "a major water fight" broke out "in the main dorm one spring night at YU, with scores of students in their swim trunks heaving large cans of water on each other, and sometimes out the window onto Amsterdam Avenue." Gary Rosenblatt, a student who participated in the water fight, recalled how he and his peers, when

⁷² Kenneth Barry, "100 Arrested and Suspended After Reoccupation Of Hamilton Hall in New Wave of Demonstrations; Police Forcefully Clear Campus, Guard Buildings," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 22, 1968, p. 1.

⁷³ Barbara Gutfreund, "H. Rap Brown and Olympian Address Onyx Society Rally," *The Campus*, October 30, 1968, p. 1.

⁷⁴ "Can It Happen Here?," *The Commentator*, May 23, 1968, p. 2.

confronted by some of their more radical counterparts from Columbia, tried to hide the fact that the YU water fight was mostly meant to mock the absurdly intense Columbia protests:

Too embarrassed to explain that the commotion at YU was a water fight, not a student protest — and that any prospective rebellion at YU would have been quelled by a rabbinic scholar announcing that such acts were halachically not permissible, or just not right — we listened as they urged us to secure maps of the administrative buildings and fortify ourselves for a long stay.

We nodded, scribbled notes, thanked them for their advice, and finally were rid of them, raising our fists to meet theirs in solidarity.

Then we had a good laugh before going back to sleep before another day of Talmud study and exams.⁷⁵

Even before the water fight at the end of the Spring 1968 semester, YU students were very prolific on the topics of the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement. As Jeffrey Gurock writes in *Men and Women of Yeshiva*:

Though what [YU students] would do clearly paled in comparison to what was done on other campuses—no sit-ins took place, no labs were destroyed, there was no ROTC to drive off campus—for Yeshiva, their attitudes and approaches [in those years] were indeed most radical. Never before in Yeshiva’s history had students and faculty members, as citizens of the United States, openly challenged the actions of the government.⁷⁶

It is clear that the draft began to weigh heavily on YU students’ minds in 1968. In the first *Commentator* issue of 1968, Joseph Kaplan wrote, “If one walks into any YU (and I daresay it is also true for almost any other college in the country) dorm room where two or more seniors are gathered, the odds are excellent that the topic being discussed is the draft.” He criticized students using “Torah merely as a means to stay out of the army” and concluded, “Where have all our values gone? They’ve gone with our soldiers to Vietnam, every one.”⁷⁷

Kaplan was not the only student writing about the draft. His article followed on the heels of a speech hosted by “Students Opposed to the War in Vietnam,” an event in which a draft counselor came to Yeshiva University to clarify rules regarding the draft and

⁷⁵ Gary Rosenblatt, “The Great Yeshiva ‘Riot’ Of ‘68,” *The Jewish Week*, April 8, 2008, jewishweek.timesofisrael.com/the-great-yeshiva-riot-of-68/. Rosenblatt, who graduated Yeshiva College in 1968, worked for *The Commentator* as a student, serving as the newspaper’s associate editor during his senior year.

⁷⁶ Jeffrey S. Gurock, *The Men and Women of Yeshiva: Higher Education, Orthodoxy, and American Judaism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 226-227.

⁷⁷ Joseph Kaplan, “In My Opinion: Shut The Window,” *The Commentator*, January 4, 1968, p. 3. Following this article, Kaplan was elevated, as was indicated in *The Commentator*’s February 15, 1968 issue, to the position of contributing editor to the newspaper’s Governing Board.

deferments.⁷⁸ Other students opined about the draft as well. Edward Abramson, for example, with similar language to Kaplan, wrote,

The draft news is bad. Cold logic is on the side of those opposed to the war: how can one fight in a conflict which is against his principles? ...

The new draft regulations have swept our humble campus with visible effect. When the topic comes up in conversation, bodies stiffen, eyes glow, speech becomes stilted and gruff, thoughts of ethics and morals and fellow men are pushed aside; a degree of panic has set in.

Abramson, like Kaplan, also criticized his peers:

On campuses across the country, the panic is total and unstoppable. Yet at Yeshiva it is of a more subdued nature, a condition attributable to that species of draft deferment of which every Yeshiva College student is acutely aware—the 4-D Divinity Deferment. ...

'Eitz chaim hi' was never intended to imply that the Torah be used merely as a *means* for sustaining one's life; its implication is rather that the deep study and observance of the Torah will provide life par excellence—one saturated with meaning and movement toward the Divine.⁷⁹

In April and May 1968 alone, *The Commentator* published no fewer than seven articles relating to the Vietnam War, some of which mused about the upcoming presidential election in connection to the war, and some of which wrote purely about the draft.⁸⁰ *The Observer* as well, for the first time since Spring 1966, published articles during these months relating to the Vietnam War and the draft.⁸¹ On the whole, it is clear that student sentiment was widely anti-President Johnson and anti-war.

⁷⁸ "Zucker Explains Legal Method Of Escaping Active Army Service," *The Commentator*, February 15, 1968, p. 1.

⁷⁹ Edward Abramson, "One Small Voice: Deferment And Dedication," *The Commentator*, February 29, 1968, p. 3.

⁸⁰ See "Presidential Evaluation," *The Commentator*, April 4, 1968, p. 2; Joseph Kaplan, "In My Opinion: 'Where To Elect There Is But One,'" *The Commentator*, April 4, 1968, p. 3; "YC Students Favor McCarthy for Pres.," *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 1; Alan Gerber, "Conservative Philosophy Against Conscription: A Theoretical Violation Of Individual Rights," *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 3; "Kupferman Proposes Vietnam Withdrawal; Calls Conflict Stupid And Costly For U.S.," *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 4; Louis E. Koplowitz, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 4; and Isaac Gewirtz, "Anti-War Group Stresses Primarily Educational Basis," *The Commentator*, May 23, 1968, p. 3.

⁸¹ See Sharon Nulman, "Help Beautify the Army, Navy, Air Force — Draft Women for A Co-ed Selective Service," *The Observer*, April 8, 1968, p. 5 and Debbie Shanker, "McCarthy Wins in Choice '68, Rocky Second, Kennedy Third," *The Observer*, May 13, 1968, p. 1.

Yeshiva students wrote about the civil rights movement as well during the Spring 1968 semester, including several articles about African American/Jewish relations.⁸² More significantly, though, Yeshiva students harshly criticized the YU administration, and even some fellow students, for their apparently weak response to the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. Following King's assassination, colleges throughout New York City and the country cancelled classes on April 9, 1968, the day of King's burial.⁸³ However, Yeshiva University did not cancel classes, but rather simply placed a notice in Furst Hall stating, "non-violence does not mean non-learning." Several students penned harsh critiques of YU's actions, including Joseph Kaplan, who wrote in *The Commentator*, "What is needed is the realization that Yeshiva cannot exist any longer in its cloistered atmosphere,"⁸⁴ and Janice Alpern, who sarcastically wrote in *The Observer* that

it is understandable that the world's loss of the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was too burdensome for the Yeshiva conscience to cope with. To have pulled through such a crisis would have required such conditions as a love, sensitivity, and social concern — certainly too much to expect from a conscience so weak that it could not even gasp a few words of Torah as it lay down to eternal rest.

Perhaps some day a new conscience will arise — a conscience that will regret and publicly apologize for Yeshiva's inexcusable obsession with things Jewish which has been such a slap in the faces of non-Jewish men of good deeds.⁸⁵

Both the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement continued to be major discussion topics for YU students during the Fall 1968 semester and throughout 1969. Though tensions across the country never spiked quite as high as they did during Spring 1968,⁸⁶ protests continued for months after, and the YU community was certainly impacted by the trend.

Before the 1968 presidential election, *The Commentator* endorsed Vice President Hubert Humphrey despite "some reservation" regarding "his position on Vietnam," ultimately admiring his "dynamic leadership in pioneering civil rights legislation, arms

⁸² See Bernard Firestone, "Negro Anti-Semitism Exists Despite Civil Rights Support," *The Commentator*, April 4, 1968, p. 8 and "Speaker Rails Jews For Lack Of Negro Support," *The Commentator*, May 23, 1968, p. 7.

⁸³ See Dearing Carpenter, "Classes Suspended Today As Memorial to Dr. King," *Columbia Daily Spectator*, April 9, 1968, p. 1.

⁸⁴ Joseph Kaplan, "In My Opinion: A Time To Mourn," *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 3. See also "Infamous Isolation," *The Commentator*, May 2, 1968, p. 2, where the newspaper's editorial board similarly criticized YU's administration, and see also David Shatz, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, May 23, 1968, p. 2, where Shatz in turn criticized Kaplan and *The Commentator* for being too harsh on the YU community.

⁸⁵ Janice Alpern, Letter to the Editor, *The Observer*, May 13, 1968, p. 4.

⁸⁶ See Joseph Kaplan, "SDS Occupies Buildings Now, Not Minds," *The Commentator*, May 8, 1969, p. 4. In this article by Joseph Kaplan, submitted as an alumnus studying at Columbia Law School, he informed YU students, "There might be some sporadic incidents but the university would not be shut down. No, Spring '69 is not Spring '68. Not at Columbia."

curbs, educational and social facilities and a deep friendship for Israel.”⁸⁷ Editorials and op-eds about the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement frequented both of YU’s student newspapers during these years.⁸⁸ And, in one notable case, a student explicitly addressed and disagreed with the famous notion (championed frequently by Joseph Kaplan and others) of YU students’ apathy, writing,

I am sick and disgusted of constantly reading about the student apathy in YU that is so rampant. Everything and anything is blamed on our so called apathy. There is almost nothing apathetic about us YU students that could not be cured by a few interesting events. ...

The fault of YU apathy lies squarely with the apathetic Administration and the Student Council. They provide us with apathetic activities, which in turn produce apathetic YU students. It is a viciously apathetic cycle.⁸⁹

As much as YU students wrote more about pressing issues in 1968 and 1969 than they had in previous years, they actively protested more than they had in previous years, as well. Not only did YU students in these years attend Soviet Jewry protests, but they also participated in anti-war protests, and even some non-war related protests.

On September 29, 1968, in the wake of hundreds of thousands of Biafran civilians dying of starvation during the Biafran War, roughly 50 students “staged an open confrontation with the administrative heads of YU,” including President Samuel Belkin, to ask “what position the University would take on this social injustice.” Belkin did not respond with an official statement, but he “denounced the use of genocide and was glad that students were angered at its implementation.”⁹⁰ This protest was notable not only for being the first documented case of YU students protesting a cause apart from that of Soviet

⁸⁷ “Humphrey’s The One,” *The Commentator*, October 31, 1968, p. 2. See also Bernard Firestone, “Humphrey Hints At Disagreements Over Tactical Strategy In Vietnam,” *The Commentator*, October 31, 1968, p. 3, an article summarizing an interview about the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement that Humphrey submitted specially to *The Commentator*.

⁸⁸ See Debbie Schreiber, “Editors’ Introduction,” *The Observer*, October 28, 1968, p. 1; Dr. Noah Rosenbloom, “Protest — A New Law?,” *The Observer*, October 28, 1968, p. 6; “Black Vs. Jew,” *The Commentator*, October 31, 1968, p. 2; Elliot Royston, “Vietnam War Presents Unique Problem For Jewish Soldiers In Combat Zones,” *The Commentator*, November 14, 1968, p. 3; Beth Spiegelman, “First Stern Debate,” *The Observer*, December 26, 1968, p. 7; Hendi Letzter, “The Rise of Negro Anti-Semitism,” *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 5; Noah Baer, “From the Baer’s Lair: One Dimensional Movement,” *The Commentator*, March 13, 1969, p. 3; Mark Meirowitz, “Rudd Stirs City College,” *The Commentator*, October 16, 1969, p. 3; Joseph Telushkin, “Lips’ Quips: Rationalization,” *The Commentator*, October 30, 1969, p. 3; Isaac Gewirtz, “Nixon Receives Humanitarian Award As Vietnam Continues,” *The Commentator*, October 30, 1969, p. 3; and Joseph Telushkin, “Lips’ Quips: Easy To Be Hard,” *The Commentator*, December 11, 1969, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Warren Turner, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, November 27, 1968, p. 2.

⁹⁰ Sheldon Toibb, “Committee To Help Biafra Rallies To Urge Action By World Leaders,” *The Commentator*, October 31, 1968, p. 4. It is worth noting that the reason for the article not making the front page of the newspaper was probably because the protest itself happened several weeks before this issue of *The Commentator*, the first after the Sukkot holiday break, was printed, by which point the protest was already old news.

Jewry, but also for producing a direct correspondence between YU students and President Belkin, who interacted directly with students extremely rarely during his 1943-1975 presidency.

Rabbi Shalom Carmy, who was a student at the time, recalled that during the Biafran crisis, *rosh yeshiva* and professor of English Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein “arranged a sunrise Shacharit for his students, followed by an early shiur. He then accompanied us to the Isaiah Wall [opposite the United Nations headquarters], where we demonstrated against the massacres in Biafra.”⁹¹

Several months later, on May 5, 1969, YU’s maids, porters, and cafeteria help conducted a sit-in to protest stalls in their union negotiations. The sit-in took place in Furst Hall, which was “the first time that such action has been permitted at Yeshiva.”⁹² Both this protest and the Biafra protest on the one hand did not relate to the Vietnam War or to the civil rights movement, per se, but at the same time were clearly products of a society in which protests had become the new normal. Indeed, protests at YU were all but unheard of before the 1960s, or even in the early- and mid-1960s.

On October 15, 1969, colleges across the United States participated in the massive “Moratorium to End the War in Vietnam.” Both the Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) and the Stern College Student Council (SCSC) joined “500 college student body presidents and campus newspaper editors at hundreds of campuses” who agreed to participate “in the nationwide effort to shut down regular activities to revive a broad-based anti-war movement,” a “nonviolent protest against the war in Vietnam to inform Pres. Nixon of the will of the people.” The protest entailed country-wide class boycotts, teach-ins, and special seminars relating to the Vietnam War, as well as a city-wide rally at Bryant Park. At Yeshiva College, following a regular morning of religious studies classes,⁹³ a moratorium was held in the afternoon (it is unclear if Stern College’s moratorium cancelled religious studies classes or not, although it seems likely that they were not cancelled).

On the men’s campus, “Activities and seminars were scheduled by YCSC” and “many of the rabbis took time during *shiur* to discuss the *halachic* overtones of American involvement in the war. The consensus was that if one is drafted, he has an obligation to fight.” Though many students participated in the moratorium and most students were anti-war,

the day still saw an element of Yeshiva which protested the Moratorium. Although a great majority call for American disengagement, there is also a great diversity of opinion as to how and why this should be accomplished.⁹⁴

Following the Moratorium, *The Commentator*’s editorial board, led by Bernard Firestone, penned a very strong anti-war editorial—headlined “We Want Out”—with language

⁹¹ Shalom Carmy, “On Complexity and Clarity,” *Jewish Action*, November 11, 2015, jewishaction.com/jewish-world/people/on-complexity-and-clarity/.

⁹² “Maintenance Workers Protest Stalling In Union Negotiations,” *The Commentator*, May 8, 1969, p. 1.

⁹³ See Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, p. 227.

⁹⁴ Joe Belitsky and Mark Spanglet, “Vietnam War Involvement Blasted During YC Moratorium Proceedings,” *The Commentator*, October 30, 1969, p. 1.

notably and remarkably different in every way from the stance of Yeshiva students vis-à-vis the Vietnam War only four years prior:

Yesterday's moratorium once again indicates the continuing and expanding opposition to the war in Vietnam. It serves as a notice to the President that his piecemeal and token gestures to pacify students will fail unless the war is ended. Disgust with this conflict is so great that people have ceased to care that extensive protest might hamper the prosecution of the war. Because, basically, we want out.

Opponents of the war often speak of a ravaged Vietnam. But more than Vietnam has suffered. This war has spawned a generation where far too many have come to feel that loyalty to country means disloyalty to conscience. This war has robbed money from ghettos and grants from medical research. More deaths than the forty thousand Americans killed in Vietnam are traceable to this conflict. For think of the social and scientific advancements that have been sacrificed for armaments. The human toll is even more tragic considering that presently we have despaired of winning.

Currently, the President is buying time. We request that he try instead to save lives.⁹⁵

YU's women's campus as well participated in the Moratorium's boycotts, teach-ins, and seminars. In advance of the protest, *The Observer* wrote that

Professors Gruber and Goldstein and Mr. Pollack have distributed literature about the moratorium and have decided that all history classes will be devoted to discussions of the problems that the war has created and possible solutions. ...

Stern College students whose classes have been cancelled are urged to meet in the auditorium for discussion during the class period.⁹⁶

And, like *The Commentator*, the editorial board of *The Observer*, led by Meryle Cherrick, penned an anti-war editorial following the Moratorium, writing:

The nation, led by us, the college youth, voiced its disgust of the war. ...

We want peace now, we want a stop to the senseless destruction of a land, and a stop to the unwarranted deaths of our young men.

⁹⁵ "We Want Out," *The Commentator*, October 16, 1969, p. 2.

⁹⁶ Urana Tauber, "Stern College Joins Moratorium, Students Urge Peace in Vietnam," *The Observer*, October 15, 1969, p. 1.

The President's token withdrawal of troops did not appease us, nor did the headlines of "Only 63 Americans killed." We want out, now.

We, as the college students of today, will be an important factor in the 1972 Presidential election. We won't listen to double talk, and we won't stand idly by while American lives are being squandered. But the need for changes exists now, for by 1972 much can be irretrievably lost. A violent revolution will only see additional innocent bloodshed. The only peaceful alternative we have is speaking up, speaking in unison for this our cause.

The October Moratorium was a success, but it marked only the beginning.⁹⁷

The October Moratorium was followed a month later on November 15, 1969 by a large Moratorium March on Washington. Yeshiva University students conducted their own concurrent protest in Washington Heights on November 13, where Professor Walter Wurzburger, a visiting professor of philosophy at Yeshiva College, delivered a speech about "A Jewish Religious Perspective on the War in Vietnam." In his speech, according to *The Commentator*, Wurzburger figured "that if a Jew is convinced that the war is wrong then it is his moral obligation to speak against it." And, on November 15, roughly 35 Yeshiva College and Stern College students joined the more than 500,000 anti-war demonstrators in Washington, D.C.⁹⁸

Of course, Yeshiva students during these years protested for the Soviet Jewry issue as well. Notably, in reporting about one such protest that took place on November 13, 1969, *The Commentator* explicitly drew a connection between heightened interest in protesting for Soviet Jews and the ongoing culture of protests relating to the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement:

It was the student-led civil rights protests that resulted in large-scale commitment on the part of American society and government to the cause of civil rights. Jewish students took their cue from the civil rights activists, and soon a mass movement for Soviet Jewry sprung into existence.⁹⁹

Yeshiva students also attended a massive rally for Soviet Jewry on November 23, 1969, which drew over 1,000 demonstrators rallying on behalf of 18 Georgian Jewish families.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ "In the Year 2525...", *The Observer*, October 28, 1969, p. 2.

⁹⁸ See Norman Alpert, "Jewish Collegiates Assemble At Washington War Protest," *The Commentator*, November 26, 1969, p. 3 and Avvy Fox, "Students Rally Against War At YC and In Capitol Area," *The Commentator*, November 26, 1969, p. 5. See also Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, pp. 227-228 for further details about YU participation at the Washington March, including details about how the students bussed down to Washington and how they spent Shabbat in the country's capital.

⁹⁹ David Koenigsberg, "New Jewish Activism Stirs Recent CJFWF Convention," *The Commentator*, November 26, 1969, p. 3.

¹⁰⁰ "Students Support Soviet Jewry In Demonstration for Freedom," *The Observer*, November 25, 1969, p. 1 and "Student Struggle For Soviet Jewry Holds Demonstration March For Russian Brothers," *The Commentator*, December 11, 1969, p. 1

Thus, by the end of the 1960s, Yeshiva students' opinions had significantly evolved. Impacted by an increasingly dire state of affairs in Vietnam and a broader American culture of protesting, Yeshiva students shifted from their 1965 position of apathy and pro-war sympathies to strong stances—albeit tamer than those executed by their counterpart secular college students—that not only included anti-war protests, but even a heightened call to protest for Soviet Jews and, on occasion, for general worldwide issues as well.

Yeshiva College Fights for a University Senate (1968-1969)

Yeshiva University students by the late 1960s, as has been previously argued, were impacted by, and even inspired by, the great protests of their day. Though most of the protests in which YU students participated were directed against outside forces, such as the United States government (regarding the Vietnam War) or the Soviet Union (regarding the Soviet Jewry issue), YU students on occasion stood up even to the Yeshiva University administration. This section and the following section of this thesis focus on two notable examples of YU students taking stands against the status quo at Yeshiva University, both of which took place during the 1968-1969 academic year amidst a context of riots and protests across the country.

As was mentioned in the previous section, both *The Commentator* and YU students in general believed that the Columbia protests of Spring 1968 were too extreme in their violence and intensity. However, the concept of a disconnect between students and administrators was not foreign to YU students.

On May 2, 1968, Yeshiva University published an article in *The New York Times* delineating several new administrative appointments and plans to transform its Erna Michael College (EMC). “According to Dr. Belkin,” the article wrote, “the new position [of assistant to the president for student affairs] was created to improve communication between the 7,000 students at Yeshiva and the administration.”¹⁰¹

Ironically, YU’s public announcement was interpreted by students as anything but indicative of healthy communication between students and the administration.

In the same *Commentator* editorial that criticized Columbia students’ over-zealous protests, the editors turned to criticize Yeshiva University as well, writing,

The difficulty at Columbia is basically, as it is here at Yeshiva, the presence of an overwhelming communications gap between student and administrator.

Columbia has brought the problem of student-administration conflict to the front pages of the nation’s newspapers. Considering the differences between Columbia and Yeshiva, it is perhaps fitting that the story which concerns us was reported on page 17 [*sic*] of *The New York Times*. That report informed the Yeshiva student body and the world at large of a number of new administrative appointments, many of which will directly affect the student body. That we, the students, were not consulted concerning the appointments is insulting and injurious; that we were not even informed of these same appointments is unconscionable negligence or intentional disregard on the part of the administration.

¹⁰¹ “Yeshiva Starts Major Reshuffle,” *The New York Times*, May 2, 1968, p. 19. The position of assistant to the president for student affairs was filled by Rabbi Dr. Israel Miller, who was chairman of the American Zionist Council, the coordinating agency of all Zionist organizations in the United States, at the time. Miller, who graduated Yeshiva College in 1938 and was ordained in 1941 at YU’s Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, stayed at YU for many years after his 1968 appointment, rising to vice president in 1970 and to senior vice president in 1979, a position he held until 1994. He died on March 21, 2002 at the age of 83.

The editors of *The Commentator*, led by Morton Landowne (who took over as editor-in-chief for the May 23, 1968 issue and served for the following academic year), proposed that the only remedy to the “deep chasm which separates the upper echelon of Yeshiva from the students” was to open a University Senate “in which students, faculty, and administration will have equal voices in charting policy.” The editorial concluded, “We may be grateful that Columbia is not Yeshiva, but while being grateful, we should take steps to ensure that Yeshiva will never become a Columbia.”¹⁰² In other words, while *The Commentator*’s editors were pleased that destructive protests were not plaguing the Yeshiva campuses, they were insinuating that without instituting improved avenues of communication between the YU administration and the students, even YU could erupt in protests like those that took place at Columbia.

Landowne and his editors stayed on top of their proposal for a University Senate. Though their efforts never escalated to protests, they used the power of the press and opportunities afforded by public Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) meetings to ensure that their vision would become a reality.

In an October 31, 1968 editorial, *The Commentator* reminded,

Last June, a now famous water fight led to a historic Student Council meeting. At the urgings of the overflow crowd in attendance, YCSC demanded from the Administration a policy making [a] University Senate, composed of administration, faculty and students. This is known to everyone.

The editorial proceeded to accuse YCSC President Kenneth Hain for dragging his feet on the project, calling upon him and his Student Council to reinvigorate the discussions to create a University Senate.¹⁰³

YCSC brought up the topic of the University Senate at its first meeting of the academic year on November 12, 1969, where Hain reportedly told Yeshiva College’s Dean Bacon “not to delay the Senate — for even though it’s ‘too cold for water fights, we won’t let student sentiment die.’”¹⁰⁴ Deliberations ensued over the following four months, and the “Student-Faculty-Administration Steering Committee” finally presented a full Constitution of the Yeshiva College Senate proposal, which was printed in its entirety in a special two-page issue of *The Commentator* on March 5, 1969.¹⁰⁵ In that issue, Hain explicitly connected the University Senate to the broader culture of protests:

¹⁰² “Can It Happen Here?”, *The Commentator*, May 23, 1968, p. 2.

¹⁰³ “An Executive Order,” *The Commentator*, October 31, 1968, p. 2. Interestingly, this editorial included one of the only contemporary references in *The Commentator* to the June 1968 water fight. One can assume that the water fight didn’t merit newspaper coverage at the time only because it took place so late in Spring 1968, after that semester’s final issue of *The Commentator* had already been printed, and that by Fall 1968 the water fight was already considered old news.

¹⁰⁴ Tzvee Zahavy, “YC Council Approved Budget; Discusses Senate, Muggings,” *The Commentator*, November 27, 1968, p. 4. This article seems to include the only other contemporary reference in *The Commentator*, aside from the reference mentioned in the previous footnote, to the June 1968 water fight.

¹⁰⁵ Morton Landowne, “Joint Steering Committee Drafts College Senate Proposal; YCSC And Faculty Assembly To Debate Plan Next Week,” *The Commentator*, March 5, 1969, p. 1. The Student-Faculty-Administration Steering Committee, which wrote the proposal, consisted of Dean Isaac Bacon, Gary Epstein,

In this era of protest and revolt the impact of the changing role of the student has hit Yeshiva College. What is presented below is the formulated proposal for a YC Senate Constitution that, in many ways, redefines the position of the student in YC. The logic behind it is clearly to introduce a democratic structure in the decision-making process of the College. ...

As students, our complaints have varied from an inadequate curriculum to an uncooperative administrator, from a faculty grading system to unfair regulations. Until now these complaints have been directed to individuals in the administration who reacted (or more often did not react) according to their arbitrary will. YC students have endlessly deplored the situation until the principle of a Senate, as proposed below, was agreed upon.

Decisions of the most crucial concern to us can now be reached by more democratic means, and improvements and innovations can be made to alleviate the College's most serious problems.¹⁰⁶

The proposed Yeshiva College Senate was accepted by President Samuel Belkin on May 1, 1969—he was quoted as saying, “I trust Yeshiva students. I think the Senate is a blessing to the institution”¹⁰⁷—and the Constitution of the Yeshiva College Senate was adopted word for word as proposed. The document, which included a preamble, four articles, and an appendix, outlined in detail the composition and organization of the Senate, which would include administrators, faculty, students, and one non-voting alumnus (the appendix outlined the details of the Committee on Curriculum and Instruction, the Library Committee, the Scholastic Standing Committee, the Welfare Committee, and the Student Activities Policy Committee, all of which were excerpted from the Yeshiva College Faculty Statute).

The scope of the Senate included jurisdiction over such academic affairs as academic standards, admissions policy, curriculum, requirements for degree, and the establishment of new majors and courses. The Senate also had jurisdiction to determine policy on standards of scholastic performance, student attendance, the grading system, and academic honors. Finally, the Senate was charged with discussing all matters submitted to it by the administration, faculty, and Student Council. Matters explicitly referenced as beyond the scope of the Senate included enforcement of academic regulations, the

Lazar Fruchter, Kenneth Hain, Dr. Mayer Herskovics, Rabbi Israel Miller, Dr. Ernest Simon, and Dr. Abraham Tauber.

¹⁰⁶ Kenneth Hain, “Joint Steering Committee Drafts College Senate Proposal; YCSC And Faculty Assembly To Debate Plan Next Week,” *The Commentator*, March 5, 1969, p. 1. The front page of the March 5, 1969 issue of *The Commentator* included only one headline over both Landowne's and Hain's articles, which is why this thesis has attributed the same headline to both of their articles.

¹⁰⁷ Morton Landowne, “From The Editor's Desk: A Blessing On Your House,” *The Commentator*, May 8, 1969, p. 2.

awarding of academic honors, extra-curricular activities, and the administration of student discipline.¹⁰⁸

Landowne, who had campaigned strongly for its establishment, praised the Yeshiva College Senate. Reflecting on the successful campaign, he charged his classmates, “We have crusaded too diligently to allow this Senate to become another committee; it must be a vital force for positive change, and it is up to us to see that it fulfills that role.”¹⁰⁹

Though the efforts over the 1968-1969 academic year for a Yeshiva College Senate never escalated to violence or even real protests, they were certainly a product of the protest culture of the late 1960s. As was mentioned earlier, President Samuel Belkin hardly ever interacted directly with YU students during his three decades as YU’s president. That he conceded to and approved of the Yeshiva College Senate is indicative of a very successful execution of student activism.

¹⁰⁸ Constitution of the Yeshiva College Senate, May 1969. As of the publication of this thesis, roughly 50 years after the introduction of the Yeshiva College Senate, the institution has been obsolete at Yeshiva College for at least several years. A detailed history of the Yeshiva College Senate in the decades following its founding is beyond the scope of this thesis. See Danny Fox, “College Senate Quickens Pace After Slow Start,” *The Commentator*, October 16, 1969, p. 4 for insight into how the Senate functioned during its first year, and see “Dr. Tendler Discusses Functions Of Senate And Its Relations To Students And Faculty,” *The Commentator*, December 22, 1971, p. 3 for insight into how the Senate functioned two years after it was founded.

¹⁰⁹ Morton Landowne, “From The Editor’s Desk: Making It,” *The Commentator*, March 13, 1969, p. 2.

The Great Building Saga (1968-1970)

While Yeshiva College's undergraduates fought for a Yeshiva College Senate, the women of Stern College conducted an impassioned fight of their own during the 1968-1969 academic year. Colloquially dubbed "The Great Building Saga" by those most closely involved, the fight brought student leaders face-to-face with Yeshiva University's top administrators in perhaps the most impressive and impactful instance of YU student activism during the 1960s, conducted almost entirely with the power of the press and the threat of protest.

The story of the Great Building Saga begins on November 1, 1966, when President Samuel Belkin communicated to *The Observer* that Yeshiva University had acquired a property on Lexington Avenue between 34th and 35th Streets, immediately adjacent to the original Stern College for Women building located at the corner of Lexington Avenue and 35th Street (the original building, which still stands today, is addressed 253 Lexington Avenue, and the new property was at the address of 245 Lexington Avenue). Bestowed with an \$800,000 (adjusted for inflation, roughly \$6 million in 2019) grant from New York State and backed by donors Ghity and Max Stern, YU promised to embark on a building project, estimated to cost \$4.5 million (adjusted for inflation, roughly \$33 million in 2019), that would produce a new eleven-story building for the midtown campus.

At the time, YU's midtown campus consisted only of one dormitory building (today known as Brookdale Hall) on 34th Street between Madison and Park Avenues and the original Stern College for Women building, which was built in 1911 and had become undesirable for being too small to house the Stern student body by the 1960s—Stern College had burgeoned from only 100 students in 1954 (the year the school opened) to over 500 students by 1966—not to mention the old building's dilapidated condition. Belkin described that the investment, which would result in a modern, well-furnished building with a library, auditorium, cafeteria, gymnasium, study halls, and lounges, was of "great importance to us and to the future of Orthodoxy in America." Belkin assured that construction would begin within five weeks, but also cautioned students to exercise "patience."¹¹⁰

As it turned out, Stern students would require more than just a few weeks of patience. By the beginning of the 1968-1969 academic year, nearly two years had gone by since YU purchased the midtown property and promised construction, with still no building. At the same time, Yeshiva University was moving forward with building projects at its Bronx (Albert Einstein College of Medicine) and Washington Heights campuses, including the construction of the impressive 16-story Belfer Hall uptown. Faced with this situation, Faye Butler,¹¹¹ the editor-in-chief of *The Observer*, and Beverly Moskovitz Koval, the president of Stern College Student Council (SCSC), stepped up during their senior year of college to champion the cause of a Stern student body for whom a promised building was long overdue.

¹¹⁰ "Stern College Awarded Federal Grant For Building," *The Observer*, November 10, 1966, p. 1. The article was printed in a special two-page issue of *The Observer* with the major headline "EXTRA" on top of the paper.

¹¹¹ Later on in life, Butler transitioned to the name Phyllis Posy, her English forename and her married surname.

Though the first issue of *The Observer* in Fall 1968 did not mention the delayed building project, Butler (and her editorial board) kicked off her tenure with an editorial with clear undertones of dissatisfaction with the administration:

The Observer of 1968-69 aims to get the University to recognize Stern College as its legitimate daughter and to devote to us the money, effort and time we deserve. We feel that the time has come for the people in the high posts to stop ignoring us. We feel that the time has come for Yeshiva University to give priority to the Jewish mothers of tomorrow — over the scientists of tomorrow, over the mathematicians of tomorrow and even over the doctors of tomorrow.¹¹²

On October 17, 1968, the day that students returned to school after Sukkot break, *The Observer* printed a two-page special issue bearing an attention-grabbing headline:

EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA! EXTRA!

According to the first article in the issue, Stern student leaders had decided in April 1968, after a year and a half of delays, that if no building was to be constructed, they would protest by building a park on the empty lot on May 16, 1968 (Lag B'Omer). The idea was that the presence of a park would render the property very hard to sell, thus effectively punishing Yeshiva University for not constructing a building and preventing them from reneging altogether by selling the property.¹¹³ The article also featured quotes from several students, including faculty member Mrs. Tova Lichtenstein, who supported the notion of building a park on the lot.¹¹⁴

University authorities apparently got wind of the planned protest at the time and promised that construction of the promised building would commence in June 1968. When June came and passed with still no groundbreaking ceremony, student leaders again threatened to build the park, in response to which President Belkin attempted to explain YU's inaction as stemming from complications in building plans and the possibility that the government might default on funding in the wake of the expensive Vietnam War, and he once again promised an imminent groundbreaking ceremony for a new building. However, student leaders shortly thereafter learned that funds were still not secured for the project and that YU was not going to begin excavating the property any time soon.¹¹⁵

Thus, *The Observer* decided to promulgate the plans for their park project. On the back page of the special issue, *The Observer* printed a large diagram of the proposed park,¹¹⁶ which included reference numbers and a key to point out the locations for a planned "amphitheater, several study cubicles, four lounging patios, numerous benches, picnic tables, 'trees,' 'shrubs,' a 'pond' and a 'stream.'" *The Observer* announced that Mr. Yale

¹¹² "Perspective '68-'69," *The Observer*, September 19, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹³ Communication with Phyllis Posy, June 17, 2019.

¹¹⁴ "Students Polled, All Urge Action," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁵ "'No Building Now' — YU," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 1.

¹¹⁶ "Stern Builds Park As Creative Protest," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 2.

Gibber would serve as the architect,¹¹⁷ and that he estimated the endeavor to cost only around \$1,200 (adjusted for inflation, roughly \$8,800 in 2019). Sunday, October 27, 1968 was announced as the date on which students would build the park.¹¹⁸ Butler, Koval, and Liz Kesten (*The Observer's* layout editor) were listed as the project's coordinators, and they outlined details of subcommittees dedicated to securing building materials, tools, enlisting Stern students for the work crew, and even recruiting students from Yeshiva College "to help with the more strenuous clearing and building tasks." The project leaders promised that refreshments would be served to volunteers, and that a rally would be held the evening after the project's completion.¹¹⁹

The project leaders and *The Observer* explained that the aim of the park was to "improve living and studying conditions for students." Koval figured, "If the new building is not to be an immediate reality, at least let's make use of the facilities at hand." The leaders also reasoned,

The park plan is regarded by many as a creative, constructive alternative to student debate and protest over repeated disappointments to hopes for a new building. Student involvement in the actual construction of the park should help to raise morale and encourage school spirit.¹²⁰

Finally, *The Observer* contextualized its actions as following on the heels of years of promises that did not pan out, using language clearly impacted by a broader culture of student protests:

Stern students have been tolerant beyond bounds; another delay and they will rebel.

Therefore, although Dean Mirsky, who has supported our efforts, has succeeded in scheduling a long overdue meeting of the Legal Counsel Mr. Sidney Schutz, President Dr. Belkin, Director of Public Relations Mr. Sam Hartstein, Stern Administration, faculty and student representatives, we cannot wait. Since the results of the meeting on the twenty-fourth will be either a building or a priority park, we must immediately mobilize every facility in anticipation of a park, paid for by University funds, built with University tools and total University cooperation, and constructed by the University student community.¹²¹

Despite the threat of a park building project, no park was built on October 27, 1968. The inaction of the protestors during the Fall 1968 semester was a result of the above-referenced meeting that took place on October 24, 1968. At that meeting, YU administrators, who were apparently shocked by the special issue of *The Observer*,

¹¹⁷ Yale Gibber was Fayge Butler's uncle. Communication with Phyllis Posy, June 17, 2019.

¹¹⁸ "Park Key, Plans Shown," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 2.

¹¹⁹ "Koval, Butler and Kesten Head Plan, Enthusiasm Essential," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 2.

¹²⁰ "Aim of Park," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 1.

¹²¹ "Stern Tolerance Ends – Action Begins," *The Observer*, October 17, 1968, p. 1.

promised that “the University would have closed bids [for the building] in its hands by December, 1968.” Once again, due to administrators’ promises, Butler and Koval backed down, agreeing to not spread the special issue of *The Observer* beyond the walls of Yeshiva University, “with the understanding that bids would be received and opened as soon as possible and that construction would begin immediately thereafter.”¹²²

Though *The Observer* was quiet about frustrations regarding the building for the next few months, students remained skeptical, especially after building bids were delayed from December to late January 1969.¹²³ The newspaper concluded the Fall 1968 semester with a foreboding message making clear that they had not yet given up their cause. The back page of the semester’s final issue featured photographs of old headlines relating to YU’s promised building, as well as a poem bemoaning the entire situation:

Is Y.U. still pulling a ruse?
Or is their intent to confuse? ...
Albert Einstein does progress
While Stern remains at rest. ...
Stern College can no longer remain
In its present domain.
There is just no more room
For this annual freshman boom.
Ground-breakings have been done
But foundations? We’ve had none.
The building across the street wasn’t built in a day
But in the past six months it’s made tremendous headway.
Y.U. what do you have to say?¹²⁴

Indeed, student leaders at Stern were prepared with well-organized plans for forceful demonstrations at the start of the Spring 1969 semester.

Immediately after Winter Break, on February 11, 1968, student leaders conducted an emergency meeting that was attended by over 400 students, or roughly 90% of the student body. At the meeting, where Koval caught up her classmates on the details of the saga and offered students the opportunity to express their sentiments, Student Council voted to boycott classes and conduct a strike against Yeshiva University two days later, on February 13, 1968.¹²⁵

Early in the morning on February 12, 1968, the day before the planned strike, *The Observer* published yet another two-page special issue, featuring a half-page open letter on the front page, and, on the back page, another attention-grabbing headline:

EXTRA! EXTRA!

¹²² “Summary of Past Commitments, Promises! Promises!”, *The Observer*, February 12, 1969, p. 1.

¹²³ Beverly Moskovitz Koval, Fayge M. Butler, and Meryl Swinkin, “An Open Letter,” *The Observer*, February 12, 1969, p. 1.

¹²⁴ Elaine Einhorn, “Fuse Blews,” *The Observer*, January 7, 1969, p. 12.

¹²⁵ Cyndi Reiss, “Diary Of A Strike,” *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 1.

In the open letter, authored by Koval, Butler, and Meryl Swinkin (the Dormitory Council President), the student leaders reiterated the reasons why a new building was necessary and outlined the details of the delays and frustrations from the past several years. They explained that as of January 1969, Yeshiva University had still not accepted any bid for the new building, apparently having rejected, behind closed doors, all of the bidders for being \$1 million over “expectation.” The letter concluded with a demand that Yeshiva University begin construction on February 24, 1969, explaining:

Stern women have been tolerant beyond bounds.

We have tried everything: conferences yielded disappointments; creative action was suppressed.

Where do we go from here?

For the past three years Stern women have suggested and pleaded. Now we must demand: ...

Ours is not a strike against the ideals of the establishment, but to uphold those ideals, threatened by the inadequacy of our facilities.

We have an appointment with Mr. Schutz, General Counsel of the University, to present our demands. If necessary, students will be prepared to join us. This time we will not smile. This time we will not step back. Stern College must only step forward.¹²⁶

On the back page of the special issue, *The Observer* shared details for the strike that was to be conducted the following day:

Plans for the Feb. 13 student boycott include pickets demonstrating before the main building, the side entrance on 35th St. and the annex; a learn-in for those girls on picket duty to emphasize our aim to improve the educational facilities, not to interrupt our education; and a sing-in on the sidewalks before the school and at the simultaneous rallies in the blue and orange dorm lounges. These rallies will take place for the duration of the meeting between student representatives and Mr. Sidney Schutz. When the meeting is over the representatives will phone the dorm and inform the striking student body of the results of all deliberations. If further action is necessary, students will be advised of it immediately.

¹²⁶ Beverly Moskovitz Koval, Fayge M. Butler, and Meryl Swinkin, “An Open Letter,” *The Observer*, February 12, 1969, p. 1. See also “No Building — ‘Yet’ — Announces Y.U.,” *The Observer*, February 12, 1969, p. 1, with a sub-article “Summary of Past Commitments, Promises! Promises!” that outlined further details about the saga, and the sub-article “Schutz’s Own Words: Will Cost \$4 Million,” in which *The Observer* transcribed an interview with the General Counsel that was conducted in his office on December 30, 1968. In the interview, Schutz, who was clearly unnerved by the pushy student leaders, essentially evaded offering direct explanations to any of their questions.

The article mentioned specific student leaders who would be charged with gathering picketers throughout the day. Different groups of students were assigned picketing duties in two-hour slots, for a day-long picket that would begin at 8:00 a.m. and conclude at 6:00 p.m., with a rally at 12:30 p.m. by the dormitory building. Students were invited to paint picket signs the night before the strike.¹²⁷

Once again, Stern students had captured the attention of YU's administration. On the afternoon of February 12, student leaders were called to meet in the President's Suite with President Belkin, Rabbi Miller, and two other administrators. *The Observer*, in its following issue, published a recollection of that fateful meeting:

The students clarified the reasons for their strike. Dr. Belkin, having listened to all that was said then gave his word that the construction of the new Stern College building would be begun within two months. It was the first time students had received such affirmation. It was obvious to students that such an action on the part of the President of the University made a strike unnecessary and pointless. The students had won without lifting a sign; the demands had been met. That evening another mass meeting was called to apprise the student body of the latest events. On the basis of what they heard, the students voted to rescind the original motion to strike. It was clear to this student that by acting in this mature fashion, the students of Stern College had not stepped back again, but rather taken a great stride forward.¹²⁸

In that same issue of *The Observer*, student leaders justified their course of action. The newspaper's editorial board compared the Stern students' actions to protests that were taking place at other colleges:

At a time when student revolt on university campuses across the country has taken an increasingly violent and unproductive turn, when the dissidents are often unaware of or unconcerned with the case they are fighting for, the entire student body of Stern College for Women must be congratulated for the concerned, unified and responsible action it took during the crisis situation here from Feb. 11 to 13. The fine student turnout at both rallies, the sincerity and maturity with which the girls addressed themselves to the situation, and the profound understanding they exhibited of the aims of the confrontation, all bear eloquent witness to the high caliber of their bearing and grace under pressure. ...

We hope that the university administration learned that students at Stern will stand for nothing less than total honesty in any deliberations which may arise in the future. Above all, we hope they understand that this student body will no longer remain

¹²⁷ "SCW Unite: Plan of Action," *The Observer*, February 12, 1969, p. 2.

¹²⁸ Cyndi Reiss, "Diary Of A Strike," *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 1.

silent in the face of obvious slights or attempts to bypass it in favor of other sections of the university.¹²⁹

On the same newspaper page, Butler and Koval wrote an article titled “Is A Letter Better?” in which they offered their personal takes on the events that had transpired:

What actually happened at Stern last week?

Students decided that they could no longer tolerate delays in the projected building and arose in revolt. Apathy and frustration died together at the Tuesday night emergency student rally as students voted unanimously to strike on Thursday morning.

Thursday afternoon Dr. Belkin met with twenty-two student leaders. It was requested that he meet with the entire student body. Student leaders refrained, not expecting Dr. Belkin to have any real progress to discuss, recognizing the enormous student sentiment and fearing adverse student reaction to Dr. Belkin’s presence.

At this meeting Dr. Belkin listened sympathetically to the major student complaints. He told us that they would indeed begin our building within two months, with two major changes: the present structure would not be air conditioned at this time: a ¾ to 1 million dollar dining/kitchen facility would be eliminated, cutting foundation expenses as well.

The details became very confusing, but in essence, they really didn’t matter at all. So what did matter?

Stern’s needs were brought to the forefront of administration consciousness. Dr. Belkin can and surely will fulfill his promise. The giant who built this university will surely come through.

We got as much as we possibly could; striking would not help.

The article then proceeded to explain how Butler and Koval managed to pacify their fellow students who were on the verge of striking,¹³⁰ and concluded with a request for President Belkin to provide a written note with his promise that construction would begin within two months.¹³¹

Despite the fact that construction was promised to begin within two months, and not on February 24 as the students had originally demanded, they were on the whole

¹²⁹ “Strike Manifesto,” *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 2.

¹³⁰ Butler later described that despite a blizzard that week—15 inches of snow fell in Central Park—Stern students were galvanized and absolutely ready to protest. Communication with Phyllis Posy, June 17, 2019. See also Owen Moritz, “Winter of Discontent: Lindsay’s Snowstorm, 1969,” *The New York Daily News*, October 21, 1998, <https://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/blizzard-political-storm-mayor-lindsay-article-1.816098>.

¹³¹ Faye Butler and Bev Koval, “Is A Letter Better?,” *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 2. See also Beverly Moskovitz Koval, “Koval Comments: Stern Strikes Out And Wins,” *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 3, a thought piece written by Koval about the previous several years of unrest at Stern College.

extremely satisfied with how matters had played out.¹³² Morton Landowne, the editor-in-chief of *The Commentator* who was conducting his own fight uptown for a Yeshiva College Senate, praised the actions of his Stern College counterparts:

Finally, I want to mention two very positive occurrences of the past week. The first was the proposed strike at Stern College. Stern women had a very good reason to protest, and they acted with a great deal of maturity in both planning the strike, and then postponing it after receiving personal reassurances from Dr. Belkin that all attempts are being made to begin construction immediately. Stern has once again demonstrated the effectiveness of the strike threat when it is employed toward redressing a legitimate grievance.¹³³

For once, Stern students did not have to wait long to see the fruits of a Yeshiva University promise. On March 26, 1969, following a successful bid for the building,¹³⁴ Stern College held a groundbreaking ceremony. The ceremony included speeches by Dean David Mirsky, Rabbi Norman Lamm, Rabbi Israel Miller, Max Stern, President Samuel Belkin, and Beverly Koval, as well as a song performance by the Stern Choir. John Lindsay, the mayor of New York City, “sent a telegram expressing his congratulations on the expansion efforts of the University.”¹³⁵

By October 1969, the exterior of the new building with twelve floors had risen next to Stern College’s original building.¹³⁶ Just under a year later, on September 27, 1970, a dedication ceremony was held after the new academic building was finally completed.¹³⁷ The structure at 245 Lexington Avenue remains Stern College’s primary academic building to this day.

The first issue of *The Observer* during the Fall 1970 semester, years after the Great Building Saga began, commemorated the story with a front page of many relevant pictures from the previous few years. The newspaper also included an optimistic note:

For once, students and administrators are not at odds with each other. In these times of grave and seemingly endless university crises, we are fortunate to be able to dedicate a building that

¹³² See Debbie Album and Brenda Lindenberg, Letter to the Editor, *The Observer*, February 24, 1969, p. 8 for the perspective of some students who were not satisfied with the promise of a new building.

¹³³ Morton Landowne, “From The Editor’s Desk: Reflections,” *The Commentator*, February 20, 1969, p. 2. Landowne’s other positive note, completely unrelated to the Great Building Saga, was the appointment of Professor A. Leo Levin ’39, a former editor-in-chief of *The Commentator*, as YU’s Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

¹³⁴ “Second Bid Reading Successful, Building to Cost 3.2 Million, Student Leaders Triumph Again,” *The Observer*, March 27, 1969, p. 1. Unsurprisingly, Koval and Butler showed up to the bidding meeting between YU authorities and four contracting companies.

¹³⁵ “Celebration Held Wednesday, Belkin and Stern Speakers,” *The Observer*, March 27, 1969, p. 1. See also “Give a Damn,” *The Observer*, May 5, 1969, p. 2, an editorial in which *The Observer*’s editorial board reminded students of the power that they wielded during the proposed strike, and encouraged them to raise their voices once again by filling out course evaluations.

¹³⁶ “Birth of a Building,” *The Observer*, October 15, 1969, p. 1.

¹³⁷ “New SCW Building Dedicated; Max Stern Honored at Ceremony,” *The Observer*, October 8, 1970, p. 1.

symbolizes the achievement of a goal shared by every element of the Stern College community. Together, we have contributed to the physical growth of the college. We must build on this moment of mutual respect and understanding. Then we may successfully rededicate ourselves to the fulfillment of greater academic and religious objectives.¹³⁸

Reflecting on the saga, Butler later conjectured that Yeshiva University never really forgave her for the battle that she initiated and won. Though she only alluded to it in print, she recalled in a later conversation that the Stern protestors were heavily criticized by YU's rabbis for creating a *chillul Hashem* and behaving in a manner unbecoming to women. She and her classmates persisted, though, viewing their cause as just and believing that their approach, which modeled itself on the tactics of other college protests, was consistent with both religious and secular values. Their cause was no doubt inspired in part by the feminist movement of the times, but it also would not have occurred absent the other societal changes occurring at college campuses across the country and to a lesser extent at YU. Butler recalled that her classmates, who supported her efforts, insisted on her presence at the dedication ceremony, despite her belief that the YU administration would have been happy to note her absence.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ "Waiting, Watching, Dedicating," *The Observer*, September 18, 1970, p. 1.

¹³⁹ Communication with Phyllis Posy, June 17, 2019. Posy/Butler jokingly shared that it took 45 years for Yeshiva University to add her to its official alumni list. Regarding the greater discussion of Yeshiva University student activism during the 1968-1969 academic year, see "Student Leaders To Appear On Television In Discussion Of Campus Student Power," *The Commentator*, December 26, 1968, p. 1, which described a recorded panel discussion between Morton Landowne, Beverly Koval, and Kenneth Hain, all of whom were student leaders at the time, that was aired on WNBC-TV's *Jewish Heritage* program on Sunday morning, January 12, 1969. In the discussion about "Student Unrest," Koval stated that "campus unrest was a microcosm manifestation of the general turmoil in society as a whole," and Landowne figured that "while many students decried the tactics employed by the protests [at Columbia in Spring 1968], there was no doubt that they had paved the way for the more substantive reforms that are now being implemented on campuses around the world."

The Later Protest Years (1970-1971)

College protests were never again as intense or extreme as they were in the late 1960s, both in colleges across the United States and at Yeshiva University. Nonetheless, the early 1970s still featured some serious protests during the final years of the Vietnam War and the civil rights era. Yeshiva University students as well participated in a handful of protests during these years.

The first such notable protest took place early in the spring semester of 1970. It was at that time that Yeshiva University began to initiate institutional restructuring for the purpose of securing state funding:

To qualify for state funding under the Bundy Law of 1968, which granted aid to non-sectarian institutions based on the number of advanced degrees awarded yearly, Yeshiva had to reconstitute itself as formally “nonsectarian” in order to comply with the Blaine Amendment’s providing that public money not be used “to aid schools under the control and direction of any religious denomination or in which any denominational tenet is taught.”

Fearing that noncompliance would jeopardize crucial state funding, the Yeshiva University administration decided that Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), YU’s rabbinical seminary that was founded in 1896, would remain sectarian by becoming “an affiliate” of YU with its own Board of Directors (though still financially dependent upon YU and still located on YU premises), while the undergraduate colleges would become officially nonsectarian.¹⁴⁰

Though the restructuring was essentially only nominal—for all intents and purposes, the religious studies requirements and other realities at Yeshiva College and Stern College for Women would all but ensure that the student bodies would remain Orthodox—many of YU’s right-wing students and teachers were concerned. Even as administrators attempted to communicate that the new rules were “merely on paper,” a “Concerned Students’ Coalition” (CSC) formed of students who viewed even the possibility that non-religious Jews and gentiles might flood the gates of Yeshiva as an existential threat worthy of the utmost concern. Students worried that RIETS, the name that appeared on YU’s official seal and that was traditionally understood to be the heart and soul of the institution, was being diminished.¹⁴¹

Though CSC leaders considered conducting strikes or sit-ins à la the protests of their Vietnam War-era college counterparts,

¹⁴⁰ Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, p. 238. See also Aaron Lewin, “New State Regulations Stir YU Controversy; Students Petition For Redress of Grievances,” *The Commentator*, February 19, 1970, p. 1 and Neil Leist and Ari Goldman, “Dr. Miller Confronts SOY Council; RIETS Alters Corporate Structure,” *The Commentator*, March 5, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁴¹ Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, pp. 235, 239-240. See the entire “Like All Other Universities?” chapter in *Men and Women of Yeshiva* for a fuller discussion of the background to the protest, including the relevance of the Belfer Graduate School of Science and how that school’s presence further concerned many RIETS students.

Ultimately cooler heads prevailed, even though the administration seemed unyielding in its plans for charter revision. The compromise plan that ultimately emerged was that a public demonstration, respectful but strong, would be mounted against the administration's policies—but not against Dr. Belkin himself—during the rabbinic ordination celebrations of April 1970 unless of course, the administration showed real signs of changing its course.¹⁴²

A major protest wound up taking place during the celebration on Sunday, April 12, 1970, with 200 Yeshiva College students (the majority of whom spent their mornings in RIETS programming) and 25 Stern College students marching and picketing in front of Furst Hall at the Washington Heights campus. Several student leaders signed a declaration of support for the protest, and the protestors themselves viewed Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, the eminent *rosh yeshiva* and religious figurehead of Yeshiva University known as “the Rav,” as sympathetic to their cause. Indeed, even though the Rav ultimately informed his students on the day of the protest that “street action would have to be called off,”¹⁴³ he still delivered an address indoors during the celebration which “was seen by many as one of the most significant in Yeshiva’s eighty-five year history.” In his speech, during which President Samuel Belkin was reported to be “visibly upset,” at several points “interject[ing] denials to accusations made against the YU administration,” the Rav voiced his concerns about the perceived secularization of Yeshiva University, and even vaguely threatened that “if the problems he mentioned are not satisfactorily resolved, then ‘I no longer have a place in this *yeshiva*.’”¹⁴⁴

Notably, *The Commentator* was not particularly supportive of the anti-secularization protest. Though the editorial board published an editorial praising the Rav’s thoughtful sentiments,¹⁴⁵ the editor-in-chief of *The Commentator* did not sign a declaration of support for the protest, and the newspaper’s news coverage of the protest read much more skeptically than did the newspaper’s news coverage of other protests from years prior. Additionally, the newspaper published a letter to the editor, in which several students criticized the protest, recognizing that “unfortunately, our institution cannot exist today without government funds,” and lamenting that because of the protestors, “The name of Yeshiva has been smeared throughout many Jewish communities in the country.” Defending President Belkin, the students concluded, “We deplore the vociferous attacks upon Dr. Belkin’s integrity, and we hope that he will find strength to continue to serve Yeshiva as diligently as he has in the past.”¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, pp. 241-242.

¹⁴³ Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, p. 243.

¹⁴⁴ Andrew Geller, “Rav Responds to Secularization; Sympathizes with Student Rally,” *The Commentator*, April 15, 1970, p. 1. See also “Rav Soloveitchik Speaks Out on YU Crisis,” *The Observer*, April 15, 1970, p. 1 for a full transcript of Rabbi Soloveitchik’s speech.

¹⁴⁵ “The Rav’s Speech,” *The Commentator*, April 15, 1970, p. 2. Interestingly, the editors of *The Commentator* seemed legitimately concerned that the Rav might resign as part of the protest.

¹⁴⁶ Harvey Bennet, Louis Schapiro, David Seinfeld, Steve Singer, and Leo Beer, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, May 27, 1970, p. 2. For articles written by students who were generally supportive of the protests, see the Spring 1970 archives from *Hamevaser*, a student newspaper dedicated to news uniquely

On Monday night, April 13, 1970, the night after the protest, an open meeting took place between students and faculty members, including Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, and Rabbi Israel Miller. Rabbi Lichtenstein “commented that the picketing was a dignified beginning to the vocal expression of student unrest and a kiddush ha-shem,” although he also stated that going forward, “representatives of faculty, particularly religious faculty, and students should help to shape policies.”¹⁴⁷

Reconciliatory conversations did eventually take place, and, as the administration began to address the concerns of the CSC, the protestors began to dwindle. The secularization protest was ultimately short-lived.¹⁴⁸

Nonetheless, the flames of protest were stoked once more only two weeks later following the Kent State massacre of May 4, 1970. This occurred not long after Nixon’s expansion of the Vietnam War efforts into Cambodia in late April 1970, when campuses across the country exploded in protests. At the protest at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, National Guard troops gunned down students, killing four (three of whom were Jewish) and wounding an additional nine. The shootings at Kent State led to even more upheavals, including a protest on May 8, 1970 in Washington D.C. numbering 100,000 and another in San Francisco with 150,000 demonstrators.¹⁴⁹

By the night of May 5, 1970, about 170 schools across the country joined in a nationwide strike. Students at Columbia protested once again, although relatively nonviolently compared to their protests from two years prior.¹⁵⁰ At Brandeis University, even before the news from Kent had spread, students voted in overwhelming support of a student strike.¹⁵¹ The Brandeis Student Council and *The Justice* supported the strike, with the latter expressing in an editorial written just after the Kent State shootings,

In growing numbers, Americans have watched with helplessness, frustration, and rage as our government followed a logic of interventionist police action and protection of economic interests. And this latest episode has been a horrifying reminder that the military, industrial, and nationalist forces which led us into Vietnam and expanded our involvement there from humble beginnings to full scale and self-serving war are still at work, ready to repeat the scenario in other lands.¹⁵²

Yeshiva University undergraduates wholeheartedly joined in the nationwide protests. Whether because the culture of protesting had spread so comprehensively across the country by the tail end of the Vietnam War, or whether because of the abject situation

concerning the Jewish studies division of Yeshiva University, which was published by Yeshiva College students since 1962.

¹⁴⁷ “Confrontation Continues In Open Meeting; Centrality of Torah Image Stressed,” *The Observer*, April 15, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁴⁸ Gurock, *Men and Women of Yeshiva*, pp. 244-245.

¹⁴⁹ Todd Gitlin, *The Sixties* (New York: Bantam Books, 1987), p. 410.

¹⁵⁰ Jerry Kopel, “Students Across Nation Join Campus Shutdown,” *Columbia Daily Spectator*, May 6, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵¹ “Student Strike Voted 1152-338-17 to Protest Expanded War, Domestic Political ‘Oppression,’” *The Justice*, May 5, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵² “Strike!”, *The Justice*, May 5, 1970, p. 2.

following the Kent State shootings, or whether simply because the shooting victims were Jewish, the students of Yeshiva University in May 1970 were hardly apathetic.

On May 5, 1970, the day after the shootings, many Yeshiva teachers cancelled classes so that students could attend an outdoor rally at YU's Washington Heights campus. Yeshiva College Student Council (YCSC) that afternoon voted to boycott classes for the remainder of the week, a decision which Dean Isaac Bacon approved, and students of Stern College held a meeting to plan a strike. The following day, students picketed and conducted a sit-in outside the entrance of Furst Hall, following which an overflow crowd of approximately 800 Yeshiva College and Stern College students packed into Furst room 501 for an assembly addressing the Cambodia issue. In midtown on that same day, roughly 300 Stern College students protested in front of the dormitory building on 34th Street, and a teach-in was held the next day.¹⁵³

As teach-ins persisted on May 7, 1970, YCSC and the Yeshiva College Senate sponsored a referendum, in which 95% of the student body participated, calling for students to be permitted to "withdraw from any or all of their courses and receive either a P or a grade in a course if their work has justified it" to allow them more time to join in protest efforts. Out of almost 1,000 votes, 822 students (84.3% of the student body) voted in favor of the referendum, and the faculty approved.¹⁵⁴ At Stern College, a memorial service was held on May 8, 1970 for "the tragedy of the four murders," which included speeches by Rabbi Avi Weiss and Dr. Manfred Weidhorn.¹⁵⁵

Both *The Commentator* and *The Observer* praised the demonstration of student activism. In its first ever editorial, the new *Commentator* editorial board for the 1970-1971 academic year wrote,

In commendable accord with the spirit of impatience and urgent protest which pervades academic communities across the country, students of Yeshiva College manifested their dissatisfaction with and indignation over the war in Indochina through both official and unofficial avenues.¹⁵⁶

The Observer praised its classmates in a similarly thoughtful editorial:

What have we achieved by shutting down classes that could not have been achieved equally well by protests not conducted during class hours?

Precisely because it was an interruption of the ordinary schedule, the strike accomplished something unheard of at Stern

¹⁵³ "YU Reacts to National Crisis: Undergrad and Grad Divisions Issue Separate Statements," *The Observer*, May 12, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵⁴ Sheldon Toibb, "Referendum Passes By Wide Margin As YC Protests Cambodian Action," *The Commentator*, May 27, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵⁵ "Faculty Speaks On Involvement In Kent; In Cambodia; In Israel," *The Observer*, May 12, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵⁶ "Striking Protest," *The Commentator*, May 27, 1970, p. 2. See also "Dangerous Analogy," *The Commentator*, May 27, 1970, p. 2, in which the editors called out people who were drawing equivalences between actions taken in Indochina and actions taken in Israel, and "Stale Salute," *The Commentator*, May 27, 1970, p. 2, in which the editors criticized the underwhelming attendance by Yeshiva College students at that year's *Yom Haatzmaut* celebration.

since June, 1967. The student body as a whole was awakened to a sense of urgency and, even more important, to the *knowledge* or what pressures must be applied to force the United States out of Southeast Asia and to alert the American public to the acts of repression used against dissenters. Because demonstrations and teach-ins were held during the school day, the entire college was forced to become involved, thus building up momentum — the final ingredient needed to spur action.

The resumption of classes obviously has merit both for Stern individually, as a Torah institution, and as part of the university community providing an organized center for the continuation of the peace movement.¹⁵⁷

Though no other major protests took place on YU's campuses following the Spring 1970 semester for quite some time, the early 1970s at YU were still witness to a not insignificant amount of student activism and worldwide awareness, likely resulting from the residual ripple effects of the protest culture that lit up the nation in the tumultuous 1960s and only slowly began to simmer down in the 1970s.

On September 23, 1970, Professor Irving Greenberg delivered a lecture to Erna Michael College (EMC) students on the topic of "the Orthodox Jew's dilemma of reconciling Vietnam and Israel," which was covered somewhat prominently by *The Commentator*, appearing on the bottom of the front page of its first issue during the Fall 1970 semester.¹⁵⁸ After that point, however, hardly any articles relating to either the Vietnam War or civil rights appeared in *The Commentator* or in *The Observer* for several years, reverting to the practices of the early 1960s.

A culture of protest still flourished among at least some Yeshiva students in the early 1970s. On February 25, 1970, several Yeshiva College and Stern College students picketed in front of the office of the British Overseas Airways Corporation, and on February 26, 1970, students staged a rally in front of the Arab Information Center in New York City. The protests, organized in part by Rabbi Avi Weiss and Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, were in response to a spike in Arab terrorism, and in particular, the Arab bombings of several Israel-bound aircrafts, including the February 21, 1970 bombing of Swissair Flight SR330 by Palestinian terrorists.¹⁵⁹

And of course, Yeshiva students continued to protest the Soviet Union over its treatment of its Jewish population. *The Commentator's* editors encouraged YU students to attend the "Exodus March" on the Upper East Side on April 26, 1970, which was "intended to be the largest march ever held for Soviet Jews."¹⁶⁰ The following semester, on September 15, 1970, approximately 15 Yeshiva College students, labeling themselves the newly-formed "University Committee for Soviet Jewry" (UCSJ), gathered at the Isaiah Wall opposite the United Nations headquarters to conduct an all-day protest against the

¹⁵⁷ "Time to Learn, Time to Teach," *The Observer*, May 12, 1970, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Frank Wilson, "Greenberg Provides Dialectic To Solve Israel-Viet Dilemma," *The Commentator*, September 29, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁵⁹ "Emergency Meeting at Stern In Protest of Wrongs to Israel; Picketing Scheduled Today," *The Observer*, February 25, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁶⁰ "Exodus," *The Commentator*, April 15, 1970, p. 2.

Soviet Union.¹⁶¹ Some students soon after traveled to Washington D.C. for a Soviet Jewry protest on October 11, 1970,¹⁶² at which point one student journalist commented, “To paraphrase Mark Twain, the reports of the death of the demonstration as a viable means of social protest are greatly exaggerated.”¹⁶³

The Commentator that Fall 1970 semester also published several op-eds relating to the issue of Soviet Jewry. Joseph Telushkin was a particularly prolific student columnist on the topic. In one notable dialogue, Daniel Kurtzer, a YU student who would later serve as dean of Yeshiva College and become an ambassador to Israel, wrote a controversial op-ed arguing against the “almost axiomatically accepted” notion that “demonstrations are a viable and productive method of protesting Soviet discrimination of Jews,”¹⁶⁴ which provoked a particularly lengthy and intense response article from Telushkin.¹⁶⁵

Andrew Geller, the 1970-1971 editor-in-chief of *The Commentator*, felt that there was an insufficient amount of activism related to the cause of Soviet Jewry. On January 6, 1971, he published an editorial that was printed on the front page of *The Commentator*, an unusual occurrence. The editorial dealt with the passive reaction of Jews around the world to the trials of a group of Soviet Jews who had attempted to hijack a small plane for the purpose of smuggling Jews out of the country. Geller wrote:

The death sentences have been commuted, and the international furor surrounding the trials in Leningrad has quieted down. Indeed, almost no voice of protest is to be heard. Why, then, a front page editorial?

It is because we wish to condemn the travesty of justice which is being committed in the Soviet Union even to this day. Not one wrong was righted when the Russian court reduced the sentences of two Jews from death to fifteen years in prison. Not one bit of good has come from all the demonstrating, speech-making, and editorializing of the past few weeks. . . .

One-fourth of our people are facing not the threat of the hangman’s noose but the threat of spiritual genocide, and not one word of protest or of indignation is to be heard. . . .

Even worse, the Jews of our own country seem not to care. Actually, there was not much Jewish reaction even to the proposed murder of the two Leningrad Jews. The sum total of all the New York Jews who attended rallies for Soviet Jewry these past few weeks doesn’t begin to approach the 200,000 people who gathered in Times Square last Thursday night to watch a ball drop on the

¹⁶¹ Hilly Besdin, “New Student Group Protests Soviet Imprisonment of Jews,” *The Commentator*, September 29, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁶² Leonard Davis, “Youths Rally In D.C. To Free Soviet Jews,” *The Commentator*, November 3, 1970, p. 1.

¹⁶³ Howard Dorfman, “Publicity Proves Leading Objective In Ineffective Washington Protest,” *The Commentator*, November 3, 1970, p. 3.

¹⁶⁴ Daniel Kurtzer, “One Man’s Opinion: Body Or Soul,” *The Commentator*, December 3, 1970, p. 3.

¹⁶⁵ Joseph Telushkin, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, December 16, 1970, p. 2.

Allied Chemical Tower. And now even this minimal reaction has almost been extinguished.¹⁶⁶

Geller's accusation of apathy seems fair, as even within *Commentator* coverage of the Soviet Jewry issue during the remainder of 1971, student participation in activism seems to have been minimal. At the end of the Spring 1971 semester, two students wrote a feature piece spotlighting the role of police officers at protests and rallies.¹⁶⁷ The following semester, those same two students wrote news stories covering the efforts of a small handful of students who were involved in protesting for Jews in the Soviet Union.¹⁶⁸ On the whole, though, news stories and op-eds relating to the Soviet Jewry issue were mostly written over and over again by the same columnists, and the news stories themselves suggest that student participation in these protests was minimal.

One noteworthy exception to the general apathy among YU students took place on the second night of Chanukah at the end of that year. One year after those who attempted the hijacking were sentenced in the Soviet Union, the Greater New York Conference on Soviet Jewry and the Center for Russian Jewry coordinated the "Freedom Lights for Soviet Jewry" rally which took place on December 13, 1971 in Madison Square Garden in New York City. The rally was promoted as one of the largest Soviet Jewry rallies ever, and, in advance of the event, YCSC began selling tickets to interested YU students.¹⁶⁹ Roughly 20,000 people swarmed the rally, and, though *Commentator* coverage didn't specify how many YU students attended, it did emphasize,

The chairman of the Center for Russian Jewry, YU's own Rabbi Steven Riskin, dramatically condemned the Russian oppression of Jews and called for the Voice of America to end their ten minute token Yiddish broadcasts and establish meaningful programs. Rabbi Riskin urged that "Freedom Lights" mark the beginning of a nationwide Soviet Jewry campaign with a climax on a "Soviet Jewry Day" in April.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Andrew Geller, "From the Editor's Desk: Russian Jewry," *The Commentator*, January 6, 1971, p. 1. See also "Yeshiva Students Participate in City-Wide Protests Condemning Soviet Discrimination of Russian Jews," *The Commentator*, January 6, 1971, p. 1 for two articles detailing a fair amount of history relating to Soviet Jewry protests.

¹⁶⁷ Nathan Kline and Norman Blumenthal, "Captain Emphasizes Cops Role At Rally," *The Commentator*, May 25, 1971, p. 3.

¹⁶⁸ See Nathan Kline, "Students Head Protest Lobby," *The Commentator*, November 10, 1971, p. 3 and Norman Blumenthal, "Hoenlein To Head Soviet Jewry Campaign; Urges Greater Cooperation Among Groups," *The Commentator*, November 10, 1971, p. 3.

¹⁶⁹ Avi Bitton, "YCSC Designs Minor; Discusses Credit For Students In Yeshivot," *The Commentator*, November 24, 1971, p. 1. YCSC attempted to convince the YU administration to suspend classes to allow students to attend the rally, although the administration refused.

¹⁷⁰ Mark Kutner, "Thousands Attend 'Freedom Lights' For Soviet Jewry," *The Commentator*, December 22, 1971, p. 1.

Conclusion

Forty-seven years after the “Freedom Lights for Soviet Jewry” rally, *The Commentator* published a front page news story about a rally that took place outside of the United Nations building in New York City. The rally, which was organized by a Yeshiva College alumnus, protested against the Chinese government for its detainment of up to one million Uyghurs and Muslims in its Xinjiang re-education camps. Roughly 20 YU undergraduates and alumni attended the rally, and Rabbi Yosef Blau, a YU *rosh yeshiva* and senior *mashgiach ruchani* at the time, addressed the crowd. “We believe that all human beings are created in God’s image. Hopefully this [protest] will make a dent and change the narrative of history,” he said.¹⁷¹ The rally even sparked some discussion, including one student who publicly criticized some of his peers who had left in middle of the rally after hearing a speaker whose sentiments offended their sensibilities.¹⁷²

However, despite the attendance at the rally and the prominent page space that *The Commentator* devoted to the topic, it is clear from that same issue of *The Commentator* that it was only a small minority of students and faculty who were activism-minded enough to attend or even care about the rally. Whereas two articles in that issue related to the Uyghur rally, no fewer than seven news articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and op-eds reported on, opined about, and responded to other articles on the topic of a local *Torah Umadda* controversy that was igniting the inner walls of the Yeshiva University community at the time.¹⁷³ The following issue of *The Commentator* printed another four articles on the YU-specific topic.¹⁷⁴

Even though half a century has passed since the 1960s, in many ways very little has changed among students at Yeshiva University. Unlike most colleges where protests abound and liberal students far outnumber conservative students, Yeshiva University students today, a majority of whom identify as Republicans,¹⁷⁵ are more likely to rise up in defense of their perception of YU’s mission statement than in defense of some

¹⁷¹ Zachary Greenberg, “YU Students Attend Rally to Protest Chinese Internment of Uyghurs,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 1.

¹⁷² Reuven Herzog, “Why I Stayed,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 16.

¹⁷³ See Shoshy Ciment, “Uptown Shabbaton Unites Wilf and Beren Campuses,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 1; Shoshy Ciment, “The Woman Question and the Problem of Undefined Leadership,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 2; CJ Wiesenfeld, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 3; Rabbi Elisha Weiss, Letter to the Editor, *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 4; Shoshy Ciment, “*Rosh Yeshiva* Encourages Male Students to Leave for the Weekend in Protest of Uptown Coed Shabbaton,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 6; Dovid Schwartz, “A *Tznius* Proposal,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 8; and Doron Loeser, “From the Archives (*May 14, 1980; Volume 45 Issue 11*) — Yeshiva Council Sponsors Intercollegiate Shabbaton,” *The Commentator*, February 18, 2019, p. 10.

¹⁷⁴ See “Clarifying Details About the Recent Uptown Shabbaton,” *The Commentator*, March 4, 2019, p. 14; Zachary Orenshein, “YU’s Hidden Gem,” *The Commentator*, March 4, 2019, p. 17; Doniel Weinreich, “Coed Activities Are and Should Be Normal: What Both Rabbi Shulman and His Critics Get Wrong,” *The Commentator*, March 4, 2019, p. 18; and Samuel Gelman, “More Than an Announcement,” *The Commentator*, March 4, 2019, p. 22.

¹⁷⁵ Avi Hirsch and Benjamin Koslowe, “More Than 60 Percent of YU Undergraduates Lean Republican, Younger Undergraduates Tend More Republican Than Older Students, Poll Finds,” *The Commentator*, October 29, 2018, p. 1.

mistreatment on the other side of the world, although they are generally quietist even when it comes to Jewish causes.

Current Yeshiva students, like those in the early 1960s, tend to be more politically and socially to the right than their secular college counterparts. And yet, Yeshiva University is certainly a product of its society, as was evident in the late 1960s when Yeshiva students not only protested at unprecedented rates—both regarding national issues like the Vietnam War and regarding Jewish-particular issues like Soviet Jewry—but even came to be almost indistinguishable from other colleges when they protested the Kent State shootings. Even the rally against YU’s alleged “secularization” can well be conceived as a product of the culture of protests in the 1960s.

In recent years, aside from an especially heated Fall 2016 semester which saw a particularly activated student body in the context of the 2016 Presidential Election,¹⁷⁶ protests and demonstrations by YU students have hardly taken place.

As has been shown in this thesis, the YU community’s current apathetic tendencies are remarkably analogous to those from over 50 years ago. Reflecting on his own era of protests from the 1960s, Joseph Kaplan, who regularly criticized his classmates for displaying apathy vis-à-vis the Vietnam War, considered that even when YU students in his day did stand up to participate in protests, they were typically more motivated by the opportunity to miss class than by the ideals of the activists.¹⁷⁷ Is not Kaplan’s sentiment still true today? YU protests in the 1960s were typically sparsely attended and spearheaded only by select small groups of students and faculty. Aside from the change in relevant activist faculty members today—Rabbi Yosef Blau rather than Professor Irving Greenberg, Rabbi Shlomo Riskin, Rabbi Avi Weiss, or Rabbi Aharon Lichtenstein—is not the protest culture at YU today exactly what it has been for decades?

It seems, therefore, that today’s protest reality at Yeshiva University can be best explained by pointing to essential elements and factors of the institution’s history, rather than simply contextualizing it as a product of modern trends.

After all has been heard, it seems plausible, and perhaps even likely, that the phenomenon of apathy among Yeshiva students is not just a subset of the apathy that is endemic to all secular colleges, where trends of activism are often overestimated. While it is true that apathy exists everywhere, Yeshiva students somehow consistently seem proportionally more apathetic than their secular college counterparts.

Perhaps the truth of the matter has to do with the nature of Orthodox Judaism. The yeshiva world exists on a continuum, where left-leaning yeshivas permit open opinions almost as liberally as any secular college, while the yeshivas most to the right allow hardly any free opinions. Indeed, despite Modern Orthodoxy’s engagement with the modern world to an extent, it by definition is a religious ideology that is part of the yeshiva world, committing its constituents to respecting ancient *halakhic* texts and rabbinic authority, as well as to some degree of opinion-regulating sensibilities.

¹⁷⁶ See Noam Feifel, “Ben Shapiro Bashes the Left, Ignites Political Conversation on Campus,” *The Commentator*, December 19, 2016, p. 7 and Tzvi Levitin, “Wilf and Beren Students Launch Immigration Ban Awareness Campaign,” *The Commentator*, February 6, 2017, p. 1, among dozens of articles written about controversial student activities in the wake of the 2016 Presidential Election.

¹⁷⁷ Communication with Joseph Kaplan, June 12, 2019.

Similarly, at Yeshiva University, unlike at secular campuses such as Columbia and Brandeis, tradition has always been esteemed by the institution and most of its students. With a leadership of respected *roshei yeshiva* and administrators who often appeal to *halakhah* and religious texts, it is not surprising that political and social opinions will generally tend to the right of society, and that anti-establishment practices such as protests will be reserved only for the most pressing of occasions. If this analysis is correct, then the trends that have been identified in this paper are likely products of long-standing behaviors of YU students and their administration.

