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SY SYMS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS, AND YESHIVA UNIVERSITY

# The Yeshiva University OBSERVER

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## Contents

Editorial:.....	2
<b>Motivated By Passion: The <i>YU Observer</i>'s Summer Recap Edition</b> .....	2
News: .....	3
<b>Former YU President Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm Passes Away At 92</b> .....	3
<b>Katz School Announces New Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program</b> .....	4
<b>YU Announces Fall 2020 Will Begin Online and Transition To Face-to-Face in Mid-October</b> .....	5
<b>A Clarification on Yeshiva University's Fall Semester Decision</b> .....	6
<b>Yaffy Newman Discusses Being A Black Person in the Modern Orthodox Community</b> .....	7
<b>Student Council Presidents Email YU Administration On Behalf Of The Student Body About The Early 'Last Day To Drop A Course Without A "W" Date</b> .....	8
<b>Yeshiva University Announces Reopening Plans For Fall 2020 Undergraduate Programs</b> .....	10
<b>Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph, Vice President Of Yeshiva University, Has Been Appointed Executive Vice President And Chief Operating Officer Of The Orthodox Union</b> .....	11
<b>Construction Began On The Eighth Floor Of 215 Lexington To Convert A Portion Of The Space Used To House The SCW Studio Art Department Into Space For The Katz School Of Health And Science's New Cybersecurity Program Without Notifying The Studio Art Department, And An Apology Is Issued</b> .....	13
<b>Wilf Campus Student Court Justices, Parliamentarian, And Chairmen Of Canvassing And Amendments Committees Chosen</b> .....	17
<b>Reopening Plan Stands On Three Things: YU Community Call</b> .....	18
Opinions: .....	19
<b>Soul Searching</b> .....	19
<b>Jewish Activism Club: The Role of Non-Black Jewish People in Combating Anti-Black Racism</b> .....	21
<b>From the Presidents' Desk: YU College Democrats on Racial Profiling Within the Criminal Justice System</b> .....	22
<b>What Does "Defund The Police" Mean?</b> .....	23
<b>2020 Commencement: Not With A Bang But With A Whimper</b> .....	24
<b>Corona Courses, Not So Fast</b> .....	25
<b>On Being Anti-Racist in an Orthodox World</b> .....	26
<b>The Fate Of International Students Is Decided By ICE In Midst Of A Pandemic</b> .....	29
<b>Where YU's Priorities Lie</b> .....	30

Features: .....	31
<b>89th Annual Commencement Goes Virtual</b> .....	31
<b>“Crisis And Hope”; Rabbi Saul Berman: “Lessons From Selma 1965, For American Jews 2020”</b> .....	32
<b>AZA Matchmakers</b> .....	34
Arts & Culture: .....	35
<b>Life Of The Artist: Antisemitism In Music</b> .....	35
<b>Harry Potter And The Death Of The Author</b> .....	36
Science & Technology: .....	37
<b>Monthly Dose of Disaster: Swine Flu 2020</b> .....	37
Business: .....	38
<b>Market Confusion On All Sides</b> .....	38

# Editorial:

## **Motivated By Passion: The *YU Observer*'s Summer Recap Edition**

By Fruma Landa, Editor in Chief

I am filled with pride to release the *YU Observer*'s Summer Recap edition. Originally, we planned to release our first edition of the 2020-2021 academic year in August, yet our plans changed and we decided to publish a summer recap edition. Essentially, this edition is a collection of articles documenting the important events which occurred over the past few months along with an equally important variety of articles with the ability to inspire thought provoking and insightful dialogue.

It is unusual for the *YU Observer* to publish during the summer; however, this summer has been an extraordinary experience. We are all familiar with the phrase “unprecedented times,” a phrase heading many of our emails, commonly used to sum up the COVID-19 experience. There are both privileges and disadvantages that come along with living at a time unlike anything we, as a student body, have experienced before. Each one of us is taking part in creating history. Our actions, as a unit and as individuals, dictate the projection of the COVID-19 pandemic as well the rectification of the various social injustices we have shed a light on over the past few months. So many of us had the strength to look past their own pain and take part in acknowledging and relieving the pain of others. On the flip side, we must acknowledge the trauma of living during a pandemic and the grief that many of us face, as well as the economical and sociological distress this has caused. Simply, this is an unusual time. Our lives have broken away from what we considered to be our norms and routines, leaving us to build our own new personal norms within the framework of the society we currently live in.

For Managing Editor of the *YU Observer* Shayna Herszage and I, adapting to these new norms meant a decision to publish throughout the summer. We knew it wouldn't be easy to train in our new staff and publish at the same time, but we felt it our responsibility to provide accurate and up to date news to the student body when there was news to report on. We assumed we would publish a few news articles (we were expecting a Fall 2020 reopening plan and assumed there would be some other events that would come up as well) but never dreamed that our Summer Recap edition would contain as much content as it does. In precedent times, publishing a newspaper is a process secured by deadlines. Writers need to complete their works before a set deadline, and editors need to ensure that there is enough content in their section ready to be published. However, working with a myriad of uncertainties, we decided to keep the Summer Recap edition as flexible as possible, allowing it to adapt to many possible scenarios. There were no deadlines, no quotas, none of the usual measures which drive a successful publication. Yet, we still published an edition with 28 articles.

Isolated from our communities and support systems, many of us struggling with recreating a fulfilling summer turned to writing, and the *YU Observer* received a steady flow of articles spanning a variety of topics. As we were not operating under any of our usual expectations we have for editions, there was no external motivation driving these writers. This edition consists of articles written by people who were looking to come together, to share their thoughts and create a dialogue. It was inspiring to see an edition pull itself together by students who took initiative, stuck at home looking for a place to be heard. It was nothing other than an internal drive to create and be a part of the community.

There is a beauty to a space that is made up of people who chose to be there, a space built by the people themselves, and that is what this edition is. Finding a community means being a part of something larger than yourself and I feel humbled that the *YU Observer* became that space this summer. It is my hope that the *YU Observer* continues along this path to remain a newspaper that belongs to the students, held together with both passion and dedication. I couldn't be prouder to announce our Summer Recap edition, made by students who care.

## News:

### **Former YU President Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm Passes Away At 92**

By: Shayna Herszage

On Sunday, May 31, Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm, former president of Yeshiva University, passed away at the age of 92. The funeral was held at 4 pm.

Lamm, born in 1927, grew up in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, New York. After attending Mesivta Torah Vodaath in his youth, he graduated as secular studies valedictorian, class of 1949, from Yeshiva College with a Bachelor's degree in chemistry. Upon graduation, he studied at the Polytechnic Institute of Brooklyn with the intent of pursuing a career in science. However, Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, the president of Yeshiva University at the time, persuaded him to obtain rabbinical ordination and eventually to join the Yeshiva University faculty.

Lamm obtained rabbinical ordination in 1951 and thereafter spent close to 25 years as a pulpit rabbi. He served as assistant rabbi in Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun in Manhattan, New York and continued on to become the rabbi of Congregation Kodimoh in Springfield, Massachusetts. In 1958, Lamm became the assistant rabbi at the Jewish Center located in the Upper West Side of Manhattan, subsequently spending 1956-1959 as rabbi. In 1959, Lamm became a professor of Jewish philosophy at Yeshiva University, and earned a PhD in Jewish philosophy in 1966 from Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies.

Lamm was elected as the third president of Yeshiva University in 1976, succeeding Rabbi Dr. Samuel Belkin, and held this position until 2003. During his time as president, Lamm helped save Yeshiva University from bankruptcy in addition to improving its academic rating, raising the university to a top 100 ranked school. Following his retirement, Lamm was elected as chancellor, and held the position of Rosh Yeshiva of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) for the following decade.

In addition to his contributions to the university, Lamm also contributed greatly to Jewish academia. Lamm was the author of 10 books, edited/co-edited over 20 volumes, and gave countless speeches and sermons. He won the National Jewish Book Award in Jewish Thought with his 1999 book "The Religious Thought of Hasidism."

Lamm helped found an academic journal of Orthodox Jewish thought, entitled *Tradition*, and he also founded the *Torah U-Madda Journal*. Additionally, when Artscroll publisher Mesorah Publications was struggling financially, Lamm introduced them to philanthropist Jerome Schottenstein, a meeting which became a catalyst for the publication of the Schottenstein English Translated Talmud.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm was a strong supporter of the Torah U'Madda philosophy, a central component of Yeshiva University's ideology and the Modern Orthodox value system. He conveyed these ideals through his many writings and speeches, as well as through his vision of the university. These ideals were implemented through the creation of programs such as the Graduate Program in Advanced Talmudic Studies (GPATS), a women's graduate program dedicated to advanced Torah studies.

Rabbi Dr. Norman Lamm is survived by children Dr. Chaye Warburg, Dr. Joshua Lamm, and Shalom Lamm, siblings Tzivia Sittner and Miriam Auslander, 17 grandchildren, and 23 great-grandchildren. His fourth and youngest daughter, Sara Dratch, passed in 2013, his brother, Rabbi Dr. Maurice Lamm, passed in 2016, and his wife, Mindy Lamm, passed on April 16.

The Rabbinical Council of America (RCA) will be holding a virtual memorial tribute on Tuesday, June 2, including remarks from Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman, Rabbi Dr. Yossi Levine, Rabbi Herschel Schachter, Dr. David Shatz, and various family members.

## **Katz School Announces New Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program**

By: Adina Dror

On May 7, the Katz School sent out an email to Yeshiva University undergraduate students announcing that the Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD) program, which has been in the works for over 2 years, was granted Candidacy Status by the American Occupational Therapy Association's (AOTA) Accreditation Council (ACOTE). Currently, the OTD program is pending approval by the New York State Education Department and New York State Board of Regents. Meaning, the program has been granted the allowance to begin teaching students this Fall, and full accreditation will be awarded after site visits and student interviews in the coming year.

The program's director, Dr. Nicolaas van den Heever, OTD, BOT, OTR/L, in an information session regarding the new program on June 3, expressed his confidence that accreditation will be received without problem. This is the 3rd OT program he has started. The other two programs, the Masters and Doctorate programs at West Coast University, got accredited without any flaws or improvements necessary, and he expects the same here.

Dr. van den Heever has more than 35 years of experience in the field and is noted for being the first male OT in South Africa, where he is originally from. He has developed new transdisciplinary practices in community-based rehabilitation centers in Africa and China, practices not yet used at that time in those countries. He has experience in fields such as mental health, rehabilitation, aging, and sensory integration, among others. He has in recent years turned his experience and love for Occupational Therapy to teaching and program development. Dr. van den Heever said that in this program he, the faculty, and the inaugural class "will all start a legacy together."

When discussing what distinguishes this program from similar programs, several faculty members mentioned the program's emphasis on practicality and hands-on education. Completion of the Doctorate requires eight semesters, and only the first does not include fieldwork. The first semester does, however, include labs and simulations. After the student's first semester, they begin working in the field to gain firsthand experience. The second, third, and fourth semesters require one 40-hour week of fieldwork in the field of focus of each semester's courses. The fifth and sixth semesters require two 12 week long assignments in the field. Placement for this assignment will be arranged by the program and can be completed, as the student wishes, anywhere in the country. The seventh and eighth semesters are used to prepare for the student's Capstone, which focuses on the student's specific research or program development, a necessary step in order to become an Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD).

Another unique aspect of this program is the class size. The program offers two starts per year, occurring in the fall and spring semesters, with a maximum capacity of only 28 students per cohort. Each student will receive personal attention and develop stronger student-teacher relationships than they would in a bigger program.

Many Yeshiva University undergraduate students hoping to pursue an OTD have expressed excitement at the new program and the possible effects it may have on the future. "It's really great that they'll be opening an OTD program, especially since the entry level degree for occupational therapy will be transitioning to the doctorate level in 2027," expressed Rachelli Hirsch, a current pre-OT student. "As for now, I think that most undergrad OT students will still be looking to get a masters while they can since it is quicker and cheaper, so I don't think the impact on [current] pre-OT Stern students will be that great. I do think it will make more people aware of the OT career though, and might inspire more people to consider it."

## **YU Annouces Fall 2020 Will Begin Online and Transition To Face-to-Face in Mid-October.**

By: Fruma Landa and Shayna Herszage

Erica Sultan and Shoshana Marcus contributed to this story.

Yeshiva University has announced that the Fall 2020 semester will begin online and transition to face-to-face classes, for students and professors who are physically able to attend, after the Holidays in mid-October. This decision was emailed to the student body via email on June 12.

After courses were moved online in March, students faced much uncertainty regarding the upcoming fall semester. On May 7, an email with an attached survey was sent out to the undergraduate student body containing the following information:

"We are hoping that we will be given the go-ahead by government and health agencies to be fully back on campus in the fall. But since that is not a certainty, by any means, we are doing scenario planning for different eventualities. By answering this questionnaire you will help us with this planning process."

The survey questions, which were to be ranked from 1-3 in order of preference, included these three options: A fully online program, in-person classes with reduced class options, and a combination of in person and online classes.

A new survey, due on June 26, was included in the June 12 email. The survey asks the student to indicate their housing arrangement for the upcoming semester and to list all the courses they are registered for, along with whether they have an in-person or online preference.

This decision raises questions about many unknowns for the coming semester, including questions regarding the online course format. While some students prefer synchronous classes, others prefer asynchronous classes. “As a student from Los Angeles, it's so difficult to concentrate during 6 a.m. classes and there are few alternative time slots being offered, especially in Syms. I hope the learning format will change from real-time Zoom meetings to something more accommodating for students in different time zones,” an anonymous SSSB student expressed.

Yosef Rosenfield, YC '21, expressed the difficulty of fulfilling requirements that fellow seniors would experience if the full semester took place remotely. “I think the decision is a responsible compromise. No one wants to jump back into things prematurely only to regret it. But at least on-campus events can still happen when we return after the holidays. I personally have four more concerts to perform as a music major, and it would be difficult to squeeze them all into my last semester in the spring.”

For incoming Yeshiva University students, this decision means their first semester of college will begin at home rather than on campus. “It's really weird to think that my initial college experience won't be what I envisioned it to be. Like the [atmosphere] of the *[B]eit [M]idrash* won't be something I experience, having roommates and honestly just my entire social experience at college is just not something I will be doing this fall. YU is obviously not to blame, but the entire situation is just pretty unfortunate,” Gabe Gross, YC '22, who participated in the online Post-Pesach program this past spring, remarked.

Many students find this to be an appropriate response to the current situation. “I genuinely think it's a great idea. Students would anyway be going home for the *Chagim* [High Holidays], so this way traveling back and forth is no longer necessary. [...] Waiting to return after *[C]hagim* gives the school an opportunity to see what exactly is the status of the virus, allowing them to ensure the students the safest in person experience,” commented Sarina Hilowitz, SCW '22, to the *YU Observer*.

Similarly, Sarah Brill, SCW '21, echoed this sentiment. “I think this is a good call from a medical standpoint. There are still upwards of 145,000 cases in NY State alone and it is best for the health of students and faculty that [Y]eshiva is taking this precaution. That being said, it is really disappointing that we will not be able to see our friends or have in-person classes until after the *[C]hagim*, but it is for the best and we should hope that we will be back on campus shortly.”

Dean Nissel and Dean Bacon have not responded to the *YU Observer's* request for comment at the time of publication.

## **A Clarification on Yeshiva University's Fall Semester Decision**

By: *YU Observer* Editorial Staff

On June 12, Dr. Selma Botman, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs, sent an email to the undergraduate student body of Yeshiva University stating that the university's plan is to begin the fall semester

courses online and transition to in-person courses, with precautions, in mid-October. Dr. Botman followed up on her statement with a clarification:

“Please permit me to clarify my e-mail I sent to the student body on Friday[,] June 12. We are still developing plans in consultation with medical professionals and with city and state officials. The responses to the survey will help us finalize our direction. Specific and concrete plans will be announced in the coming weeks.”

While the original email stated a plan to begin the semester online, the university and the professionals involved in the decision may ultimately decide otherwise. The final decision will be made in the coming weeks.

## **Yaffy Newman Discusses Being A Black Person in the Modern Orthodox Community**

By: Shayna Herszage, Managing Editor

In contribution to recent international dialogue about racial discrimination, the Yeshiva University undergraduate Office of Student Life hosted an event with Yaffy Newman, a Black Jewish woman, as the speaker. The event was held over Zoom on June 17, and 50 people were in attendance.

Newman, who now lives in Jerusalem with her husband, grew up in a Modern Orthodox community in the United States. While she grew up attending Jewish day schools and has always been involved in the Jewish community, she explained in the event that she often encounters microaggressions due to her race. For example, people assume she is not Jewish or as familiar with Jewish concepts and prayers as her peers.

While discussing her experiences, Newman said, “I have learned that everyone grows up with bias.” She expressed that all people have their initial responses to those who are different. However, if people address these biases within themselves, she believes that the negative impact of prejudices can be lessened.

Newman stated that people can work on their biases through education and exposure. If people take the time to meet People of Color, both Jewish and non-Jewish, and acknowledge that their skin color is a part of their identity without considering their ethnicity a negative trait, people’s biases may be weakened. Additionally, through reading books, watching movies, and consuming other forms of factual media about Black history, people can learn more about how Black and non-Black people have interacted in the past, and consider how that impacts the present, and how that differs from an ideal future. Newman expressed that it is more helpful to acknowledge, embrace, and celebrate people’s differences than it is to attempt to ignore what shapes a person’s identity.

When asked if it is the responsibility of non-Black Jewish people in the United States to care about Black people, Newman responded that Jewish people should fight for racial equality. She added that, much like the concept in Judaism that *tzedakah* (charity) begins with one’s community, it is important that non-Black Jewish people understand that Black people are a part of the community; and, as such, non-Black Jewish people should consider the cause as one that is important in the world around them.

During the event, a student inquired about Newman’s thoughts regarding the Jewish people who express discomfort at the idea of supporting the Black Lives Matter organization due to their anti-Zionist values. In

response, Newman said that people are not, by any means, obligated to support the organization if it makes them uncomfortable. “Black Lives Matter is a part of the movement, but it is by no means the be-all, end-all of fighting racism,” Newman responded. “People do not have to support the organization to support change and be an anti-racist.”

The event showed many students the importance of educating oneself in order to decrease the effects of learned bias. “As Jew[s] ... we have the responsibility to pursue peace and love among everybody — and understanding the facts is an important way of getting there,” said recent graduate Talya Hyman (SCW ‘20).

For others, the event inspired them to continue thinking about the topic of racism in the Jewish community. “Listening to Yaffy was really eye-opening for me because I realized that even things that many wouldn't consider racist can still be very hurtful,” Shlomit Ebbin, SCW ‘22, expressed to the *YU Observer*. “With her story and advice in mind, I left the Zoom thinking about how we can combat racism within the orthodox Jewish community.”

Newman hopes that, after non-Black people hear stories like hers, “[P]eople will be able to open themselves up emotionally to the point of being able to hear and care about an experience that isn't their own. ... Being flippant about the often poor treatment and negative words surrounding people of color only further hurts those outside the Jewish community who are Black, and on a more painful note is excruciatingly painful to those who are both Black and Jewish. It hurts those outside since it reinforces an overall dismissive treatment of issues surrounding racism and allows others to continue treating them wrongly. Furthermore, in terms of [Jews of Color], it serves to further remind them how few in their Jewish communities are interested in noticing or giving attention to their pain coming from their communities. Even if our communities are not able to collectively move towards a place of sensitivity, higher awareness and change over racism, our communities should do their absolute best to at the very least make sure those within our community who are both Black and Jewish feel accepted and part of the fold. A Jew is a Jew is a Jew is a Jew. And that should stand regardless of the color of skin we were born with.”

## **Student Council Presidents Email YU Administration On Behalf Of The Student Body About The Early ‘Last Day To Drop A Course Without A “W” Date**

By: Mili Chizhik, News Editor

The last date to drop a course without getting a “W” (withdrawal) on the transcript in both the fall and spring semesters of the upcoming academic year is significantly earlier than those of the previous semesters. Typically, that date is after the semester’s midterms, allowing students to withdraw from a class if they are not doing well without it being recorded on their transcripts. However, in the upcoming fall and spring semesters, this date is four weeks and two weeks, respectively, prior to the start of midterms.

Following the release of the calendar of the 2020-2021 academic year, undergraduate students are deeply concerned about this remarkably earlier date. The 2020-2021 student council presidents composed a letter to Mr. Chad Austein, Chief Enrollment Management Officer at YU, asking on behalf of the entire student body for a postponement of the last day to drop a class without having it recorded on the transcript. They describe the importance of a later drop date for the students, their transcripts, and GPAs. It “allows for students to have more

flexibility with their schedules, allowing them to sign up for extra courses with the possibility that if they don't do well they can drop it with no ramifications. Having the option to drop a class after midterms provides students with a buffer, as it lessens the stress in test-taking and ensures that students are able to find the perfect balance between learning material relevant to their future careers and receiving grades which will help them secure a job after college. However, this is not possible with the current date," they wrote.

They further expressed their concern for the stress that students may incur due to this unusually early date. They noted "that this semester is not the time to make such a drastic change given the uncertainty and tumult of the current COVID-19 crisis."

TAC President Nina Siegel commented that she and her fellow student council presidents "thought this was an important email to send because this policy can be harmful for all students, particularly during these challenging times."

In response to student concerns, Mr. Austein stated: "When the academic calendar was created for the 2020-2021 academic year, we incorporated an update to the withdrawal policy and timeline to be consistent with other colleges and universities. YU's calendar still gives students the flexibility to add/drop courses during the designated period and the flexibility to withdraw from classes within the first month of classes.

"Both the fall and spring semesters have consistent timelines. Students are permitted to drop a course and have it removed from their academic record according to the add/drop timeline and refund period. The last date to do this is the fourth week of the semester. Any drops after that point are considered a course withdrawal and will be graded with a W grade. After midterms, there is a final deadline to withdraw from a course, during the 12<sup>th</sup> week of the semester; after that point and upon completion of the course, a final grade, will be given to the student.

"At this time, we are evaluating the needs of our students and the uncertain nature of the upcoming semester and will keep the community informed of any revisions to this policy."

YSU President Zachary Greenberg said, "I am very upset about the drop date being moved early. Many students, including myself, have used the later drop date to be able to take more courses with the flexibility of knowing if you don't do well that you can just drop it."

SCWSC President Shira Schneider added, "when the calendar came out, I was surprised to see that the drop date was significantly earlier than it has been in previous years. Having the drop date later is beneficial to students as midterms serve as an important benchmark in the semester, and this new date does not allow students ample opportunity to experiment with their classes and discover what works best for them."

Both SOY President Akiva Poppers and SYMSSC Wilf President Adam Baron remarked that they "are working hard to help the students in any way we can."

\*A petition titled "Return Drop Date Without a "W" to after Midterms" has been started by Zachary Greenberg

## **Yeshiva University Announces Reopening Plans For Fall 2020 Undergraduate Programs**

By: Fruma Landa, Shayna Herszage, Mili Chizhik and Shoshanah Marcus

Following several months of speculation, YU President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman sent an email to the student body on June 30, 2020 announcing that after convening with the “Scenario Planning Task Force,” Yeshiva University has decided to “reflect a hybrid model” in the reopening of the campus for the upcoming fall semester.

Attached to Berman’s email was a PDF booklet describing the reopening plans. The fall semester is scheduled to take place in an online format until after the High Holidays. Afterwards, the students will be given the option to continue at a distance, via online classes, or to return to in-person classes with safety precautions in place. With these adjustments, the university plans on taking into account those who are not able to physically be on campus or in the same time zone following the High Holidays. Further information, relevant to international students, will be provided regarding travel policies and visas.

In addition, Berman linked the page on the YU website that is intended to provide updates regarding the Fall 2020 semester; it includes a frequently asked questions (FAQs) section to answer logistical questions such as when the staff will return, how the dorm will be situated, and how these regulations will impact commuting and out-of-state students.

The concern of on-campus housing was addressed. While the future regulations are, as of now, unknown, the university plans to open on-campus housing buildings in mid-October. However, the buildings will likely be opened at limited capacity in order to prevent crowding and breaches of social distancing rules. The housing facilities will have designated quarantine areas to be used by residents who test positive or have been exposed to individuals who tested positive for COVID-19. Arrangements by Housing and Residence Life will be made to care for ill students.

A designated COVID-19 coordinator will be appointed “who will be informed of all COVID-19 positive students and track their well-being and compliance with the required quarantine.” Additionally, Dr. Robert van Amerongen, MD, FAAF, FACEP, FAAEM, has been hired as the Medical Director for Yeshiva University. Sick employees “should contact their supervisor and the Benefits Office at 646.592.4339 or by emailing [cristina.oconnor@yu.edu](mailto:cristina.oconnor@yu.edu).”

The Student Health Centers and Counseling Centers “will be available for walk-ins, scheduled appointments and telehealth appointments for students.” Similarly, the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will offer free confidential counseling. Academic advising and academic support will be available both online and in-person.

Due to the delay of campus reopening until mid-October, the pamphlet stated that the housing and meal plan fees will be reduced, “based on a prorated October in-person start.” However, tuition and other such fees will remain unchanged.

With the intention to return to campus in a safe and effective manner, the university has set up certain precautions to ensure a successful transition. In the PDF booklet, the university clearly laid out some “Personal Health and Hygiene” requirements for students choosing to return to campus. Students, faculty, and staff will all be required to wear masks unless they are “working alone in a confined office space.” The university announced that they will be providing washable, reusable masks to all who return to campus. Moreover, handwashing regulations will be enforced with hand hygiene stations positioned throughout campus, various personnel will

be required to wear gloves, and small areas like the restrooms will have limited occupancy. Elevators will be running with indicators on the floor marking where individuals may stand. Libraries will not only continue to provide online instruction and help the students remotely, but they will also be open for students to study at a limited capacity: students will be able to use every other study corral, two students at every large table, and the study rooms will remain closed. Visitors will not be allowed to enter any indoor locations on-campus within the YU buildings and there will only be one cafeteria open for each campus with meal take-out services only. The *batei midrash* (religious study spaces) will be open only to current students and staff, though the study table arrangements will be changed to “to allow for paired Torah study, with appropriate social distancing measures in place.”

Plans for reopening of the Makor College Experience are still being discussed and will be announced in the coming weeks. The YU graduate schools’ reopening plans vary depending on the school, for example, “the Azrieli Graduate School of Jewish Education and Administration’s programs will be online” in the upcoming fall semester with a few exceptions. The Benjamin Cardozo School of Law will announce their plans soon, while the Bernard Revel Graduate School of Jewish Studies, Wurzweiler School of Social Work, and Sy Syms School of Business will teach their classes remotely. Students in Ferkauf Graduate School of Psychology will have online classes and will be able to convene in smaller groups to present research and clinical duties while abiding by the social distancing guidelines. The Katz Graduate School of Science and Health have “both on-campus and online students starting” in mid-September to enable students to work with their peers on the same course requirements and use an online interface. Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS) will have a few classes on campus only “for registered rabbinic ordination students” starting at the end of August, while the daily *shiurim* (lectures) will remain online until after the High Holiday break. The option of dorming for RIETS students will only be available after the holidays when the residence halls will reopen on October 12th.

In addition to these regulations, the university announced that “entry into any YU building will require self-monitored response to symptom monitoring through the YU-approved app or other technology obtained for such purpose and will require having your temperature taken at the building entrance.” More details will be announced as the fall semester approaches.

“Key dates” listed in the PDF include July 31 as the deadline for payments/payment arrangements for students living in University Housing while August 14 is the deadline for students who are not living in University Housing. August 26 is the first day of online classes for undergraduate students. October 12th is the date of the move-in week for those living in the residence halls, and October 19th will be the first day of the option of in-person instructions for undergraduate classes.

Berman concluded his email on a hopeful note with the promise that the upcoming year “will be a formative year in the lives of our students, and together we will rise to the moment so that our students will emerge stronger and better prepared to be leaders of the world of tomorrow.”

## **Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph, Vice President Of Yeshiva University, Has Been Appointed Executive Vice President And Chief Operating Officer Of The Orthodox Union**

By: Fruma Landa, Editor in Chief

Vice President Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph of Yeshiva University has been appointed executive vice president (EVP) and chief operating officer (COO) of the Orthodox Union (OU).

At the time of publication, the *YU Observer* does not know who will take over Joseph's position as vice president of YU.

“Earlier this week, the board of the Orthodox Union voted me in as the organization's new [e]xecutive [v]ice [p]resident and [c]hief [o]perating [o]fficer (COO). This is a bittersweet moment for me. While I'm leaving the Yeshiva University family that I've been a part of for the last 16 years, I'm truly excited to be heading to a place that shares deeply rooted values for Jewish community and leadership,” shared Joseph with the *YU Observer*.

The Orthodox Union has expressed that they feel that Joseph is a welcome addition in a particularly busy time. “Rabbi Dr. Joseph's reputation as a consummate professional and mensch precedes him and I'm very excited about working in partnership with him as we look to further strengthen our OU family internally and our services and offerings to the broader Jewish community,” shared Executive Vice President Rabbi Moshe Hauer of the OU. Joseph, after beginning his new job on September 1, will work in tandem with Hauer, the OU explained. “The OU has an ambitious agenda at a trying time. Coronavirus, anti-Semitism and racial strife present communal, spiritual and emotional challenges and opportunities that we must be prepared to meet. Rabbi Dr. Joseph will be a terrific partner to work with on these and other priorities.”

Meanwhile, his new position with the OU means stepping down from his position at Yeshiva University. President Dr. Rabbi Ari Berman expressed to the *YU Observer*, “Rabbi Dr. Josh Joseph is an exceptional individual and a dear friend. He has served Yeshiva University with great distinction under two administrations, first with Richard Joel and then as a senior member of my leadership team. Throughout his 16 year tenure, Josh played an integral leadership role at YU, serving in a number of influential positions impacting the lives of our students, faculty, staff, alumni and community at large.”

Dean Karen Bacon, who has worked closely with Joseph in the past, shared that “[i]t has been a pleasure and an honor to work with Josh Joseph. As a strong advocate for students and for academic standards, he brought passion and wisdom to every policy discussion. This is a mighty combination in an administrator, and I will miss his voice at the table.”

For the past few years, Joseph has met with many student leaders and LGBTQ rights activists with the goal of furthering LGBTQ students' inclusion on campus. On behalf of the YU Pride Alliance 2020-2021 board, Vice President Chana Weiss shared how this impacts the board's plans to advocate for LGBTQ rights on campus to the *YU Observer*:

“Vice President Josh Joseph was appointed in 2019 to spearhead a committee established by President Rabbi Dr. Berman to address calls from the student body regarding the LGBTQ+ community at YU. In attempting to accomplish our goal of creating a club on campus that directly serves the LGBTQ+ community, the Pride Alliance board has continuously met and worked with VP Joseph. As the year has ended, there has been little to no significant change to the status quo, however, the Pride Alliance is motivated to continue working with the administration and whoever is appointed to head the committee to create lasting and impactful change for the YU LGBTQ+ community.”

Joseph assured the *YU Observer* that action will be taken to provide a smooth transition out of his current position. “The next few weeks will provide me time I need to work on my transition plan at YU. I will be working with both Rabbi Berman and the many talented professionals with whom I’ve partnered over the years to ensure that every function, project, and team under my purview moves forward seamlessly.”

While Joseph’s leaving may be difficult, Berman expressed his pride in Joseph’s new position and confidence in his ability to use his position to better the Jewish communities. “I will miss Josh’s leadership and partnership, as well as the engaging and thoughtful way in which he approached each situation. I am also very proud that Josh will assume this prestigious and important position at the OU. I am confident that in his new role, he will continue to apply his prodigious skills and talents for the betterment of our community and broader society. Josh will be helping us seamlessly transition to our next stage throughout the month of July,” Berman explained.

Reflecting on his time at YU, Joseph commented: “During my time at YU, I’ve learned so much from our professional and lay leaders, engaged with our faculty and rabbis, and partnered with professionals at every level and in every area of our broad ecosystem — and I will miss them all. Most of all, however, I will miss our students whether they are in student government or club leaders, athletes, students in my classes and lectures, or those of you who just stopped by for a cup of coffee or gave me a friendly nod in the elevator.”

Rabbi Yaakov Glasser, The David Mitzner Dean of Yeshiva University's Center for the Jewish Future expressed his admiration for Joseph. “Josh is not only a master manager and administrator, but he took a deep interest in the professional and personal growth of all his colleagues and employees. Josh’s legacy at YU is not only perpetuated through his incredible accomplishments related to the departments that he supervised, but through the reverberating impact of his mentorship, guidance, and friendship to countless members of the YU family.”

“I feel like I have given a lot of myself to YU over my tenure here,” concluded Joseph, “but it doesn’t come close to what I have gained from YU – enriched with deeper skill sets, blessed by enduring relationships and more committed than ever before to improve the Jewish world around me.”

## **Construction Began On The Eighth Floor Of 215 Lexington To Convert A Portion Of The Space Used To House The SCW Studio Art Department Into Space For The Katz School Of Health And Science’s New Cybersecurity Program Without Notifying The Studio Art Department, And An Apology Is Issued**

By: Fruma Landa and Shayna Herszage

Yeshiva University began the construction to convert a portion of the eighth floor of 215 Lexington on the Beren Campus into a cybersecurity lab for the Katz School of Health and Science’s new cybersecurity MS program, shared Traci Tullius, chair of the art studio and associate professor of art, with the *YU Observer* on July 10. This statement was later confirmed on July 15 by Randy Apfelbaum, chief facilities and administrative officer at YU. “We have begun prep work on the 8th floor,” he commented to the *YU Observer*. This floor had previously been set aside for the Stern College studio art program, but the space will instead be shared by both

programs following the construction. Students who have yet to recover their artwork can retrieve it before construction continues by scheduling a time with art instructor Mary Therese Creede.

Studio art major Rocky Pincus, SCW '20, described her experience picking up her artwork on the eighth floor on July 14. "I was scared that they started construction where my stuff was ... no one asked us if we wanted to come and pick up our stuff or if they could move it." After arriving on the eighth floor, Pincus stated, "I was looking through the pieces of my work that were there, and I noticed that a lot of it was missing ... it turns out that all of my portraits were there [in the room closed off for construction]. In the meantime, they had knocked down at least two walls ... I know that they did construction there, and my work was still hanging up, which alarms me because I thought they would have taken better care of everything in general ... It was just very disheartening to see everything piled up the way it was," she concluded.

On July 17, Provost and Vice President of Academic Affairs Dr. Selma Botman and Dean Karen Bacon issued an apology: "The exodus from the campus back in March was extremely stressful for everyone, but even more so for our artists who left behind the fruits of their creative energies and passions. Of course, in hindsight we should have realized that everything needed to be packed and stored for the possibility of a protracted absence from campus. Not only did we not imagine such a possibility, but even if we had, the confusion was too great to allow for this kind of measured thinking. This miscalculation has impacted our graduating seniors in particular, and it is certainly not the way we hoped to celebrate the culmination of their achievements. We are truly sorry this happened."

On July 1, Apfelbaum informed Tullius that the renovations were going to take place over the summer without providing a timeframe for the construction. Similarly, on July 7, Botman shared: "We are hoping to work on the art studio and the cybersecurity lab over the summer so that they will be ready for students in the fall," but he did not expound on a timeframe for the renovations. "The Katz School has agreed to make the cybersecurity lab available for multiple programs so both graduate and undergraduate students can benefit," she continued. "The project is privately funded." She later clarified that "[t]his project was specifically funded by donors, prior to the [COVID-19] outbreak, and separate from the [u]niversity's annual capital projects budget. It is, therefore, not subject to the frozen capital projects statement mentioned previously."

On July 10, Tullius was informed by one of her students, who had tried to schedule a time to pick up her artwork and was told she could not due to construction on that floor, that the renovations had begun. On July 13, two students went to retrieve their artwork and confirmed that construction had begun. The demolition began in the video lab (room 808) and in room 810, a studio space which students used to work on their senior thesis projects and to store art supplies and equipment, shared Tullius.

On July 13, Creede shared with the *YU Observer* that "[i]t's unfortunate that the administration chose to move forward with this project without meeting with student representatives. I can't say that I have much hope for a positive outcome for the studio art dept. if this project continues to proceed in the current manner."

Toby Sandhaus, a recent studio art major graduate, pointed out that the coeducational cybersecurity program is a concern for some students' modesty preferences: "Having the [eighth] [f]loor be co-ed is really distressing. Students often wear other clothes to work on their art, and having male students on the floor while students are working is a real concern when it comes to modesty. Additionally, I know I've personally stayed late working on projects, until security comes upstairs at midnight to tell me it's time to leave. I probably would not feel comfortable staying so late to work, knowing that there are boys just down the hall and virtually nobody else is around." The *YU Observer* has reached out to Rabbi Hershel Schachter, Rabbi Mordechai I. Willig, Rabbi

Menachem Penner and Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky for a comment on the matter but received no reply at the time of publication.

In her July 7 statement to the *YU Observer*, Botman explained that “[d]iscussion[s] with the SCW [a]rt [d]epartment and the Katz School continue in order to maximize the space for both programs on the eighth floor. ... The new upgrades for the SCW [a]rt [d]epartment will include enhanced audio visual capabilities, an expanded graphic design lab and a new multi-disciplinary studio for media studies, photography and video.” Yet on July 10, Tullius expressed that there are no plans of expansion — the new equipment will be housed in a studio classroom. Last February, the *YU Observer* learned that most of the left wing of the eighth floor, including the computer room, video and photography lab, room 810, and Tullius’ office, will be renovated into a classroom, lab, lounge and pantry for the cybersecurity department, sequestered from the studio art program’s space. The current space on the eighth floor “used as a collaborative space for critiques, projects, and sinks for washing brushes,” will be converted into a computer lab, smaller than the current one, for the art department. The current storage area will be renovated into a video and photography lab. The studio art department would be left with a storage room, painting, sculpting and drawing studio, along with a studio for elective classes, the *YU Observer* learned. Tullius shared that she is working on a pledge (as of July 10) to receive space for the displaced photo and video equipment and courses, due to the renovation.

In agreement with Tullius, Creede shared her doubts (on July 13) about the upgrades and expressed the studio art department’s needs for an upgrade. “We have heard about improvements but have had no clear guarantees as to their fruition. [...] We are working with completely outdated Macs for our video, photography and graphic design classes. While this is an ever present liability,” she continued, “this seems a fortuitous time to replace these while our graphics classroom is being rearranged to accommodate the overflow from the video/lab classroom that is being appropriated by the Katz School in addition to room 810.”

Creede shared that Room 810, currently under construction, was used as the film studio and “needs to be replaced, either on the 8th floor of 215 or somewhere else on the Beren Campus.” Additionally, Creede is worried about the studio art department’s storage space with the loss of room 810. “Our storage issues are now even more compromised with the loss of that room,” she said. She also expressed the need for “a guarantee that adequate solutions will be installed.” Aside from storage space, “[t]here’s a need for a fully outfitted multimedia studio that can be used by media studies and studio art for video and photography.” Creede points out that “[t]his space could also be beneficial to on campus student groups as well as the communications office,” and shared that “[t]he space needs to be large and soundproof with controllable lighting.”

Talks of renovating the eighth floor were in the works since the Fall 2019 semester. On February 26 of the past semester, Traci Tullius held a meeting in which she informed the twelve undergraduate students present of the construction plans. In a protest against the diminishing of various components of the art program, undergraduate art students at Stern College covered all art pieces on the Beren Campus that were made through the art program with signs reading: “No art floor? No art.” Additionally, flyers were posted throughout the campus explaining the plans for construction and how it will negatively impact the studio art department and requested to meet with Senior Vice President Josh Joseph about these plans. Creede shared that “[she] was so proud of the students and their activism and the truly brilliant form their protest took was art itself. What troubles [her] is the disillusionment the students have experienced as a result of the fruitlessness of their objections,” as at this point, this protest was never formally addressed by the YU administration.

Tullius shared her concerns about the current renovations due to her experience with renovations to the art floor in the past. In the summer of 2018, Tullius was told that the carpets of two studios were to be removed, and the

rest of the carpet was to be removed the following summer. Art department faculty moved the artwork from the studios scheduled to go under renovation to the studios set to remain as they are, yet facilities removed the carpet in all of the rooms without notifying her. Tullius found the eighth floor in a state of chaos when she returned the following week to set up for classes. There were tables on top of paintings and many paintings and sculptures were ruined. To ensure this does not happen again, Creede considered overseeing the construction taking place, which, as Tullius pointed out, is a health risk.

Aside from the health risk Creede faces while overseeing construction, Creede pointed out that “[o]n-campus COVID-19 safety requirements also complicate things. We are now accommodating more students in less space and the mission should be the opposite, at least for the coming school year.”

In response to students’ current concerns about the safety of their artwork due to the start of construction, Apfelbaum assured the *YU Observer*, on July 15, that: “We are working with the SCW [s]tudio [a]rt [d]epartment to ensure that all student art work is carefully taken care of before any additional work continues.”

On July 14, A few days after notifying students that construction had begun and expressing her concerns, Tullius shared updated news with some of her students. “I spoke to Dean Bacon yesterday, and she is sincerely upset ... about how all of this went down, particularly the outrageous [missteps] of the past few days by facilities. The way she put it was ‘we have to start rebuilding the art dept now, not later. We can’t change what’s happened, but we can do better from here forward.’ It sounded to me like she was completely cut out of the loop on the Katz project, but she’s going to be more involved going forward as it pertains to rebuilding what we’ve lost and making needed improvements. Mary is working with the [d]irector of communications [on Dean Bacon’s recommendation] on an actual plan for organizing your work and supplies, making a schedule for those of you who want to pick up work yourselves, and packing/shipping for those of you who can’t. ... Mary and I are working on plans to [improve] the space we have left...We will prioritize more effective use of the space ... (built in storage, expanding studios where we can) rather than trying to squeeze the video lab/green screen somewhere. I’m going to push for a guarantee and concrete plan for a NEW multi-media classroom for photo/video and NEW macs/equipment for 809 Mac lab (Dean Bacon says necessary updates to our equipment will be a part of the [improvements]). ... Also, Dean Bacon said she and the provost will address your activism and your concerns formally and will reach out by the end of the summer.” Tullius concluded that “... in summary, things looked pretty bleak yesterday, but...we’re going to make it not just right, but better.”

In Bacon and Botman’s July 17 apology, they shared: “As we know, during these summer months the art floor will be undergoing renovations in order to make it possible for the space to be shared with the graduate program in cybersecurity. This will involve a lot of initial dislocations followed by what we believe will be a reimaged and exciting layout that will support and enhance your creative energies.”

On July 15, Creede emailed her students with information on how to pick up their projects: “For students who are not local and not returning please reach out to me so we can ship the items to you. Students who are returning and choose to leave the supplies and works in progress at the department we will organize those and store and label them so they will be easily available when you return. [...] Please respond to this email before Saturday so I can make a plan. If I don't hear from you, we will store your work and supplies away for later retrieval.”

“The artists at Stern College bring us enormous pride.” Bacon and Botman concluded. “In the past we have shared your accomplishments with the Stern College Board of Overseers and this year we presented an

electronic gallery of your work to the staff of Institutional Advancement, the arm of the University that cultivates supporters for our programs. We expect to continue to showcase your work as we have done in the past, and we look forward to a spring semester when the chaos will be behind us and a new era will begin.”

Dean Karen Bacon and Vice Provost Dean Paul Russo of the Katz School have not responded to the *YU Observer's* request for comment at the time of publication.

## **Wilf Campus Student Court Justices, Parliamentarian, And Chairmen Of Canvassing And Amendments Committees Chosen**

By: Shayna Herszage, Managing Editor

During the Wilf Campus General Assembly (GA) meeting on July 19, in accordance with the Wilf Campus Constitution, Zachary Greenberg, Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) president, nominated the Student Court justices, parliamentarian, and the chairmen of the Canvassing and Amendments Committees. Nominees were then voted on by the Wilf GA. The GA is comprised of Greenberg, Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) President Akiva Poppers, Sy Syms School of Business Student Council (SYMSSC) Wilf President Adam Baron, Yeshiva College Student Association (YCSA) President Ari Lowy, and Student Life Committee (SLC) Senior Co-Chair Scott Stimler.

The new Wilf Student Court consists of Chief Justice Bryan Lavi, Justices David Fleschner, Natan Pittinsky, Daniel Melool, and Levi Zwickler, and Justice Pro Tempore Avery Bell. The parliamentarian is Atid Malka, the Canvassing Committee chairman is Yitzchak “Dovie” Solomon, and the Amendments Committee chairman is David Tanner.

Explaining their reasoning and process for selecting the members of the Student Court, the GA stated:

“After a thorough process, Bryan Lavi was determined to be the most qualified candidate to serve as [c]hief [j]ustice. Bryan served as an [a]ssociate [j]ustice last year, and brings very crucial experience to the Court.

Chief Justice Lavi and multiple members of the GA conducted interviews with top candidates, who were either pre-law, privately mentioned their interest in joining the Court, or both. We incorporated the feedback from these interviews into the nomination and voting processes to ensure that the most qualified candidates were selected.”

While Chief Justice Lavi was not voted into his position at the time he helped the GA conduct interviews (he was voted in on July 19 with the other justices), his experience as a 2019-2020 member of the Student Court qualified him to help out.

Regarding his new position, Lavi said, “*Baruch Hashem* [Thank G-d], it was a great honor to serve last year as [a]ssociate [j]ustice, and I am very grateful to continue to serve on the court as [c]hief [j]ustice. I am looking forward to serving the student body to the best of my ability.”

The GA has expressed optimism and trust in those who have been voted onto the Student Court positions. “We strongly believe that the students we have chosen will administer justice without respect to persons, and

faithfully and impartially discharge and perform all the duties incumbent upon them as [j]ustices under the Constitution of the Wilf Campus,” the GA concluded.

## **Reopening Plan Stands On Three Things: YU Community Call**

By: Zippy Spanjer

In an effort to keep students and parents informed of the goings-on and plans of the University for the fall semester, another series of zoom updates were held this past week. On the call, which was moderated by Dean of Students Dr. Chaim Nissel, speakers included President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman; Randy Apfelbaum, chief facilities and administration officer; Jennifer Golden, director of the office of international student services; Josh Joseph, senior vice president; Chad Austein, chief enrollment management officer; Dr. Robert van Amerongen, YU’s new medical director; Dr. Noam Wasserman, dean of Sy Syms School of Business; Karen Bacon, dean of YC and SCW; Shoshanna Schecter, associate dean of Torah studies and spiritual growth; Dr. Selma Botman, provost & vice president for academic affairs; and Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, dean of undergraduate Torah studies (UTS).

In his opening remarks, Berman addressed that the “next year is going to prove to be one of the most crucial in our students’ lives.” He established that the reopening plan was based on three essential principles: student safety (referred to as *pikuach nefesh*), the importance of flexibility to fit the interests of our student body, and educational excellence.

Dr. van Amerongen addressed safety and health concerns. As part of a plan to set up health perimeters, students will need to be tested for COVID-19 before arriving on campus. He described that a mobile application is in the works which will require students to answer a daily questionnaire to monitor any symptoms and identify those who might be sick. Anyone entering a YU building will have their temperature checked, and masks will be mandatory on campus. There will be a strong educational component as well, to raise student awareness for why masks and social distancing are necessary.

Botman, Wasserman, and Kalinsky discussed the semester’s academics. Botman explained that teachers have been working on improving online teaching skills through professional development provided by YU over the summer. We will know by the end of July, per student and faculty surveys, which classes will have an in-person option in October. All of the research labs and art studios will be open after holidays, except for the art studios commandeered by the Katz School. She also added that the administration is working on those having to deal with time zone differences.

Wasserman confirmed that the Fall 2020 semester’s online learning will be different than the Spring 2020 semester. There will be more asynchronous course approaches, assessments, and online discussion. Fully online classes will not have their rosters increased unless teachers and administrators are certain they’ll be able to maintain excellence, as small class size is an important component at YU. Additionally, students should feel free to reach out to the administration with any questions about general academics or specific classes, and that the administration wants to collaborate with the students.

Kalinsky then discussed the plans in store for the UTS program. For morning sessions, some *Rebbeim* (Torah teachers) will be holding class in person and some online. Administration is working with faculty and students to ensure that everyone ends up in a program that works for them. The *batei midrash* (spaces of Torah study)

will be open, and night *seder* (evening Torah learning) and *chavruta* (partnered learning) learning will take place, all within social distancing protocols.

Schechter stated that relationships with students “are first and foremost!” There will also be more in-person and online learning opportunities.

Students will also be allowed to shape *Shabbat* programming. Instead of a single large meal for each *seudah* (meal), there will be smaller group meals. Commuting students cannot stay on campus for *Shabbat*. The panelists were adamant that the student life and Shabbat plans will be “rich.” There will be multiple *minyanim* (prayer quorum), according to Kalinsky, which will allow enough space for the students and faculty to be spread out.

Austein is hopeful for the students’ ability to fully dorm in the Spring 2021 semester. Apfelbaum explained that all meals will be take-out and the self-serve option will be eliminated. The classrooms will have reduced occupancy and the occupancies of the bathrooms, buildings, lounges, and *batei midrash* are being reviewed. The commuter students will be allowed to study in the lounges and the libraries.

Golden described that the information regarding international students is fluid and that her office is constantly reviewing and updating the international students via email.

YU is communicating with the CDC for guidance regarding ventilation. The filters in the buildings have been upgraded and will be changed often and outside air will be increased to reduce recirculation, per industry-wide recommendations.

## Opinions:

### **Soul Searching**

By: Elizabeth (Elisheva) Rosenzweig PhD LSLC Cert. AVT; Assistant Professor; *Eim Bayit* (Campus Mother), Beren Campus

I wrote a quote on my door back in February, on a day when I was particularly dismayed about the state of our country and our world, and I can't bring myself to erase it:

“*Women, if the soul of the nation is to be saved, I believe you must become its soul.*” -Coretta Scott King

Oh, sweet, naive, February 2020 self ... You have no idea. Since then, the novel coronavirus has swept around the world, the age-old virus of racism has once again reared its ugly head, and that dismay I was feeling before has turned into a permanent pit in my stomach.

What can I say?

When the editorial team at the *YU Observer* asked me to write an article about the current crisis, I was uncharacteristically at a loss for words. Student journalists have already covered so many important topics — how to be anti-racist, action steps we can take, facts about unjust policing — what can I add to the conversation? The importance of this assignment weighed on me. If I am given a platform, what can I share that might change hearts and minds and ignite a passion for justice that can mobilize a generation? What if this is my one shot?

But then a very wise mentor helped me realize that this isn't a one-shot-deal ... and that's the entire point. It's a conversation. So here is my formal invitation to you:

Let's have some uncomfortable conversations.

Many of us (myself included) didn't grow up with the vocabulary to discuss race, justice, and systemic inequalities. Many of us (myself included) didn't grow up with words to label our privilege. Many of us (myself included) hold our tongues because we're afraid to say the wrong thing.

One of the greatest challenges and honors of my adult life has been to unlearn destructive patterns of silence around issues of race and learn a new vocabulary to wrestle with these concepts. It's taken several long, hard looks in the mirror, a deconstruction of the narrative that governed my childhood, and lots of reading and listening to voices that challenge and inspire me. Like any good conversation, it is a constantly unfolding work in progress. Melody Hobson, CEO of Ariel Investments and a phenomenal public speaker ([check out her TEDTalk](#)), calls this the transition from “color blind” to “color brave.” Becoming brave has helped me to change from a person who didn't have the words to someone who has learned new words and new ways of being. I don't know it all, and I don't always get it right, but I have the willingness to continue to learn and to keep the dialogue open.

Reclaiming the soul of the nation is going to take some soul-searching.

Why do so many of us publicly decry racist acts of physical violence but remain silently accepting of the pervasive casual racism in our daily interactions and conversations?

Why are so many of our communities so profoundly inhospitable to Jews of color?

Why do so many of our students have zero close friends who are of a different race and/or non-Jewish?

Why do the majority of our interactions with people of color and non-Jews take place when they are in service positions?

Why do the photos and illustrations in Jewish publications make it seem as if all Jews were/are white-presenting (spoiler alert: *nobody* in Tanach was white European)?

Why do our communities and institutions continue to promote and venerate rabbis and other leaders who are on record of making despicable racist statements?

How do many of us grapple with our dual identities as ethnically/religiously Jewish and racially white and navigate both the minority status and privilege that confers?

Will you join me in these heartbreaking, beautiful, necessary, and brave conversations? I promise you won't regret it.

## **Jewish Activism Club: The Role of Non-Black Jewish People in Combating Anti-Black Racism**

By: Shayna Herszage and Gabe Gross

This week, in the wake of protests concerning police brutality and racial profiling against Black people such as George Floyd, has been filled with conflict — whether concerning the debate of Black Lives Matter (a phrase which shows support for Black people in the face of racial profiling by civilians and law enforcement alike) versus Blue Lives Matter (a phrase which shows support for law enforcement) or the debate of whether or not to approve of the looting and destruction involved in some of the protests. For non-Black people, specifically non-Black Jewish people, some important questions remain unanswered: What is our role in this? Do we have a role in this fight at all?

As minorities ourselves, it is easy for a non-Black Jewish person to decide not to be involved in the marches, protests, and general anti-racist activism happening. It is easy to claim that we have our own problems to worry about, such as the antisemitism arising with the spread of COVID-19. It is easy to claim that a non-Black person has no obligation to help the Black community suffering and living in fear within the wider community. However, it is important to recognize that, regardless of any perceived differences, it is our duty as Jews and as people to help the world around us. At the same time, it is important to understand that our role is not the same as that of the Black activists. The roles of the non-Black Jews in this fight are to educate those around us, to be conscious of our own learned and internalized racism, and to stand behind — not ahead of — the Black community in support and solidarity.

Firstly, we must educate those around us on the issues. Many people, whether due to community, upbringing, generation, or other factors, may not recognize the importance of fighting for racial equality, not because they are inherently racist, but because issues, such as racial profiling, have never been taught to them. When someone on a Zoom call or at a dinner table makes a racist remark, do not be silent. Rather, stand up for your values and acknowledge what has been said and why it is racist or harmful to the Black community. Racism is a learned hatred, but, with proper education and effort, it can be unlearned as well.

Just as we must help those around us unlearn racism, we must help ourselves unlearn racism. This statement may invite a defensive response of, “But *I’m* not racist!” Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that some of our thoughts or behaviors come from internalizing racism in the world. For example, unconsciously labeling Black strangers or passers-by as criminal or “sketchy” is undoubtedly rooted in racist ideas. However, that does not mean the individual thinking said thought is necessarily a racist, only that some racism has been planted within them by those around them, and it is the individual’s responsibility to uproot the learned racism. Confront yourself and the initial thought, and ask yourself why this thought exists. Then, ask yourself how you can revise this thought and its associated racist implications. Working from within on addressing and unlearning our own learned racism is how we prevent teaching racism to the world around us and to the next generations.

Lastly, remember that while we must be involved in the fight for racial equality, it is not a fight which belongs to us. As such, it is imperative that non-Black Jewish people join the fight but ultimately look to Black activists as leaders. Non-Black Jewish people are in a unique position of being familiar with oppression, while also being

on the outside of this particular oppressed group. If we steal the narrative from a group that is often silenced and marginalized, we are doing little to help — in fact, we are then harming the initiative. Rather than attempting to take charge, make sure to support the Black community in the writing of their own story. Share their stories, follow their lead in marches, and listen to what Black activists want rather than what you may deem powerful or beneficial.

Even though the fight against anti-Black racism is not one that belongs to non-Black Jewish people on a personal level, the fight nevertheless is one which we must join. As a nation which is not unfamiliar with oppression, it is the duty of every Jew, regardless of their race, to stand in support of the Black community in the fight against oppression. It is our duty to combat the racism in ourselves, combat the racism around us, and support the Black community in making their voices heard.

## **From the Presidents' Desk: YU College Democrats on Racial Profiling Within the Criminal Justice System**

By: Sarah Brill, Co-President of the YU College Democrats

On May 25, 2020, George Floyd, a 46 year old Black man, was killed in police custody after being pinned down by Derek Chauvin, one of the officers on site. Chauvin kept his knee on Floyd for 8 minutes and 46 seconds despite Floyd gasping for breath, and he continued to keep his knee on him after he went unconscious and even after the paramedics arrived on scene. This was all in response to suspecting Floyd of attempting to pay with a counterfeit \$20 bill in a convenience store. George Floyd's death sparked outrage within the Black communities and allies as this is not the first time a Black person has been killed by law enforcement while in custody.

Racially charged police brutality has been an ongoing problem in the law enforcement and criminal justice system. The Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) reported that between 2003-2009, 4,813 Black persons "died during or shortly after law enforcement personnel attempted to arrest or restrain them [...] about 60 percent of arrest-related deaths (2,931) were classified as homicides by law enforcement personnel." Unfortunately, no recent data has been released on the website concerning this topic, but it can be assumed that this number has drastically increased as it has between 2011-2015 from 59 percent to 69 percent arrest-related deaths.

The actions taken by law enforcement officers to use violence or brutality as a form of order is unacceptable and should never be tolerated. George Floyd's murder was a tipping point. To say that it was "one bad cop" is no longer acceptable. A doctor would not be allowed to practice medicine if they were not qualified to handle human life. This same principle should be applied here. What law enforcement does not realize, or realizes and does not care to change, is that they are taking away human lives on the basis of skin color. They too hold human life in their hands.

There is a problem within our criminal justice system and if failed to be recognized, there will be more unlawful murders by law enforcement. Now is not the time to sit idly by while fellow American citizens are murdered by the hands of those who vowed to protect us. There must be a call for justice for George Floyd and the many others who have been injured or killed on account of systemic racism and engrained discrimination within our country.

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## What Does “Defund The Police” Mean?

By: Sarah Brill, Science and Technology Editor

As a Jewish community, it is deeply ingrained within our culture to go out of our way to help others, both in and out of our own community. In light of the recent events that have transpired over the past month, with police brutality skyrocketing and lives being taken by the hands of those who swore an oath to protect us, it is our job as a community to recognize that there is a problem and that action must be taken.

Throughout this past month, a phrase has been tossed around, both on social and mainstream media: “Defund the Police.” What does this really mean? One of the most common misconceptions about this phrase is that many people think it means “eradicating the police” altogether. That is not what this phrase means. It means allocating funds from, for example, the New York Police Department (NYPD), and giving it towards community organizations that help further the education of lower income communities. As of right now, the police department in New York City alone has funding of \$6,000,000,000, whereas homeless services and sanitation have below 2 billion dollars in funding (Ricciulli). Youth programs, elder care, and libraries rank in the bottom half of NYC funding where they are at or below 760 million dollars. So not only is the NYPD gaining 4 billion dollars more than homeless services, it also receives billions of dollars more funding than any other public organization in the city.

The NYPD uses much of their funding towards police misconduct lawsuits. In 2019, New York City spent 175.9 million dollars in civil judgment and claims related to police-related lawsuits. That is not to mention the 4 million dollars in settlements also spent in that same year (Carrega). 299.8 million dollars of that money alone could have bought: 1 million N95 face masks, hired 75,000 city youth for summer jobs, fed 1.2 million New Yorkers every day for a year, hired 208 school nurses for a year, and hired 275 new teachers for a year.

Defunding the police does not mean eliminating all police funding. Defunding the police means police will not be overfunded as they are right now. We need to defund the police because police should focus on crimes and criminals. We should defund the police because the police are not social workers, medical professionals, or education specialists and should not be funded like they are. Defunding the police emphasizes reassessing our values, investing in the community, investing in our people.

The reality is that the criminal justice system is overfunded. That, combined with their constant abuse of power, gives reason to say that their funding should be cut, and positive changes should be made to our justice system.

As a Jewish community, we look towards ways to not only better ourselves as Jews, but to also better our communities — non-Jewish and Jewish alike. One of the most prominent ways our community can take action is by educating ourselves on racial inequality and systemic injustice in our past and present society. By learning about other people, their history, and their struggle, we can better understand why these actions take place and we can become more empathetic towards their communities.

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## **2020 Commencement: Not With A Bang But With A Whimper**

By: Matthew Silkin, Staff Writer

In a way, the 2020 Commencement mirrored my college experience: hyped up by everyone around me, suddenly moved to an online venue, and then finished way too quickly.

The entire affair lasted just short of an hour. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks gave a short speech and Lin Manuel Miranda made a guest appearance. Instead of each graduate being called up to a stage to receive a symbolic diploma, the deans simply stated the number of students qualified to have the title of Associate/Bachelor conferred upon them which was then affirmed by President Rabbi Dr. Berman. The tassel moving and cap throwing was relegated to premade videos.

There was also a post-Commencement “Zoom party” for all the graduates. There was trivia, both general and YU-specific. Apparently there were prizes for the winners of trivia, but what they are I am not aware. Everyone besides the host was on mute. It, too, was short-lived, going on for just shy of an hour and a half.

Compared to the pomp and circumstance (pun intended) of an in-person exercise, I suppose it was rather nice for the event to be over and done with as short as possible. I personally tend to prefer things to be short and to the point rather than overdone and elongated. Had we had a ceremony with all the bells and whistles, it most likely would have taken all afternoon; today, I sat down with my family at 1p.m., watched Commencement, and then at 1:50 p.m., we all got up to return to our errands.

However, there’s a camaraderie of an in person exercise, a sort of pervasive atmosphere amongst the graduates that was kind of just ... lost in the digital Commencement. I think vividly of 2019’s Commencement exercises, of the hugs and handshakes that I shared with my friends who had graduated, of sitting in the auditorium at Madison Square Garden and watching the caps and gowns shuffle by to their designated area, of the WhatsApp group that someone started to make live commentary and jokes of the events of the day. Someone tried starting that this year as well, and it kinda just ... fell flat. Flatter than it did last year, anyhow.

I guess “flat” is the best way to describe today. The entire ceremony was two dimensional, consisting of everything happening on a 13 inch screen in my living room. I got into my cap and gown five minutes beforehand and simply watched the pre-recorded proceedings instead of being in a crowd with friends, joking around and cheering when hearing our names called by the Provost to be awarded our degrees.

I think the most indicative moment of 2020 Commencement was the memoriam for those who passed away during the pandemic. From what I saw, it was a fairly standard video which played while viewers bombarded the screen with heart and sobbing emojis in the ‘reaction’ function. Half the time, the last name of the deceased was covered up by the river of emojis. Sometimes, a laughing emoji snaked its way up, though I feel it was more due to a misclick from a less technologically literate user than a malicious mockery of the person being memorialized. Nevertheless, the entire sequence is seared into my mind as the lynchpin of 2020’s graduation ceremony and of the end of college in general.

T.S. Eliot ended his poem “The Hollow Men” with the timeless and cryptic, “This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / This is the way the world ends / Not with a bang but with a whimper.”

2019 Commencement had confetti cannons (the first YU Commencement to have them, according to the Kahoot game in the post-Commencement party). 2020 had sobbing emojis taking up a third of an in-memoriam video.

Not with a bang but with a whimper, indeed.

## Corona Courses, Not So Fast

By: Betzalel Fischman

As I am rushing to finish my Shabbat preparations, I hear a ping from my phone. Not atypically, a dear friend, a fellow recent graduate of YU, has sent a news tidbit from our alma mater to a group of myself and four friends. More atypically, it got my attention. It was a blurb describing a new course for the soon-arriving June Summer Session, JST 2430 Responses to COVID-19 in Jewish Ritual and Theology. I’d like to describe apprehensions regarding the existence of the course and a word of hesitation for students considering registering for it. Most simply, I question the ability of the course to properly analyze its subject. The issue calls to mind a teaching of Rav Soloveitchik retold by Rav Schachter *shlita* (may he live a good long life) and others. “[Tractate *Shabbat 21b*] states (in the context of *Chanukah*), ‘The following year, they established them and made them *yamim tovim* [holidays] with *Hallel* [praise] and thanksgiving.’ Meaning, sometimes, only after a year or two has passed are we able to properly understand historical events with the right perspective, and to, therefore, establish a *yom tov*,” (*Nefesh HaRav* 94, my translation).

While the course is not looking to establish a religious holiday for an event worth celebrating, the principle remains relevant that understanding and appreciating historical events requires the hindsight and contemplation that the passage of time provides. This course does not even aim to analyze the impact of the event; it aims to analyze responses to it. It is not taking place soon after the event; it occurs during it — if not at its peak, while its presence still significantly impacts life (no less immediately than the total absence of in-person classes). The students and instructor participating in this course will attempt to examine “a variety of responses offered by the Jewish community to COVID-19 in the realms of both ritual and theology” and “analyze the relevant controversy or diversity of opinion on the issue” as they are happening and without the empirical results of their impacts. While in these realms it’s always difficult to analyze cause and effect, it is impossible to do so properly without access to long-term results.

Additionally, even if the course can successfully understand its issues (“a sage is greater than a prophet,” Tractate *Bava Batra* 12a), it is inappropriate. Objectivity characterises academic study. As the term implies, objectivity places the studier outside the subject matter. He surveys it from a removed, impartial position, unaffected and not personally invested in the object of his study. (Parenthetically, this characteristic provides many, including Rav Lichtenstein *z”l* (may his memory be a blessing), with apprehension about academic Jewish studies in general.) As the term is sometimes used (‘purely academic,’ for example), it is a flaw in academic study if it has practical import.

A sensitive person cannot take this approach or have this attitude in the throes of the event. As people are suffering financially, emotionally, and physically, one who personifies the values of “sharing his fellow’s burden” (to quote the seasonal Ethics of our Fathers [6:6]), cannot look down on the situation from an ivory tower to survey, examine, and analyze. While even years later it is difficult, one might find it necessary because of the insights he can reap. At this time, this course is a disservice to the subject matter and to the integrity of the academy.

It should be emphasized that this endeavor is different in function and mode than rabbinic and scientific leaders addressing the issues with *halachic* (Jewish Law) rulings, inspiration, perspective, policy, and information. They are following King David’s model, metaphorically soiling their hands “with blood [of menstruation], and with the foetus and the placenta,” (Tractate *Berachot* 4a), to address the issues. They are providing the public with crucial information, setting policy, treating patients, researching cures, answering new *halachic* questions, and uplifting the low-spirited. They are doing all this with great stress and sacrifice.

The impulse to be involved in the most current issue is understandable. Our social media era values speed of reaction and the attention that comes with that. The time taken for proper contemplation renders one’s thoughts irrelevant in a rapid news cycle. However, this attitude is the greatest enemy of rigor, sensitivity, and nuance. The Rav explains, in the context of precision and lack of superfluousness in speech, “Cognitive Man gives priority to thought over speech, reason over expression. He is not a man of tropes or many idioms... Thought exceeds speech, idea exceeds language... The thought is ripened and completed, and afterwards speech comes,” (*Ish HaHalakha*’ in *B’Sod HaYachid Ve’HaYachad*, 134-135, my translation).

I encourage the student to take a different course. For the moment, learn about the pandemic and how you should behave, learn the *halachot* of new situations, find *hashkafic* (philosophical) guides for your perspectives, and most importantly, be there for those who need your support. May it pass quickly, and may God wipe the tears from the faces of all those who have suffered. Let that day come soon, so we can look back, after we have recovered physically and emotionally, and analyze, appreciate, and understand the events that took place.

## **On Being Anti-Racist in an Orthodox World**

By: Molly Meisels, Former Editor in Chief

*“Justice, justice shall you pursue.” - Deuteronomy 16:20*

The first Black person I ever spoke with was my family’s U.P.S. delivery man. I did not have a full conversation with a Black non-service individual until I was in college. As a child, I saw the occasional Black person strolling down my all-white, all-Hasidic street. Usually it was a Black child heading home from middle or high school. My starkest memories of race stem from moments of spotting Black children with backpacks walking through my white neighborhood. Those around me, usually other white, Hasidic children, would run into an alley, fearfully whispering the Yiddish slur for Black people. I remember staying put on the sidewalk, wondering why my neighbors were so afraid of this child, not much older than I was. He was just walking. I did not know much about race at the time, but I knew I was supposed to be afraid of this child. I knew that this boy’s crime was walking while Black.

I have never excused the racism which infects the Hasidic community, and I've spent much of my life fighting it. Yes, while I can exaggerate and say "most Hasidic people are not racist," it would be far from the truth. There are many non-racists and a handful of anti-racists, but racism runs deep in the community. I could excuse it as a response to Holocaust trauma. I could assert that the Hasidic community is terrified of non-Hasidic, non-white people because it stirs genocidal memories. But I won't do that. It would be unfair to the pursuit of justice.

As a teenager I'd exhaust myself, banging my head against a brick wall of bigotry, trying to assert that Black people are *not* inferior, that they are *not* cursed, that they are just as worthy of life as white, Hasidic Jews. After all, there were Black Jews within our community. Antisemitic narratives are dominating forces in Hasidic daily life and theology. But even with this trauma, it is difficult for them to comprehend racial equality. It is difficult for many to admit that Black people suffer, that they are more than walking crimes. Even though Hasidic people suffer from antisemitic abuse, they still choose to stereotype racial minorities as others stereotype them.

This racism is part of why I left the Hasidic community. The slurs, the nauseating primate analogies, and the overwhelming fear of a non-existent Black threat made it impossible for me to remain Hasidic with a good conscience. Too many people in my life casually stated, "Not all Black people are bad, but most are." I love Judaism, but I could not love Jewish racism.

The Orthodox and Modern Orthodox communities are not much better. Sure, they are more covertly racist, shrouding their bigotry in a veneer of community, but they are racist nonetheless. Not all Orthodox *people* are racist. I would say that many are not. It is not about individual belief, but about institutional philosophy. Systemic racism runs deep in America and it runs deep in Orthodox communities. The very foundations of Orthodoxy must be shaken for racial equality to be assured. While that is an uncomfortable thought for Orthodox Jewry, it is a necessary one. Sometimes what is right is not what is *hashkafically* (culturally or traditionally) permissible. Sometimes what is right can change the fabric of our communities as we know it. Yeshiva University is a prime example of the necessary changes Orthodoxy must undertake to be non-racist and eventually anti-racist.

While President Berman sent an email to the student body on June 5, calling for solidarity with Black Americans, Cardozo students say he only did so after being prodded by Black community members. President Berman did not publish this statement on social media. A few days earlier President Berman released a public statement saying, "I was disturbed and sickened by the horrific murder of George Floyd." Nowhere in his statement did he mention race. Nowhere in his statement did he mention that Black lives matter. Nowhere in his statement did he mention police brutality.

This fear of taking a stand in support of Black Americans is toxic. Yeshiva University is a mostly white institution. Much of its undergraduate population lives in a bubble and many students were not taught about race in high school and do not learn about race in college. An undergraduate professor shared with me that it is difficult enough to teach about other religions in the classroom, let alone non-white races. The professor believes that Yeshiva University educators should incorporate racial justice into their curricula, but is uncertain if an institution like ours could stomach it. Many YU students care about issues which directly impact them and nothing beyond that. Israel and antisemitism are the issues which they dedicate all their resources to engaging

with, yet they fail to engage with issues which impact any individual who is not a white, straight, cisgender Modern Orthodox Jew. When some do engage, Jewish supremacism emerges.

At 2019's AIPAC Conference, an undergraduate student asked me to explain why Jews could overcome antisemitism and oppression to be successful, while Black people could not. He followed this question with a racist soliloquy on the state of Black communities, failing to comprehend systemic racism, police brutality, and the glaring fact that there are Black Jews in our community. How was I to teach this adult twelve years' worth of racial equity education in two minutes? Why did his Jewish day school fail to educate him on the truths of racial inequalities? Why did his Jewish day school succeed in educating him on the falsities of Jewish supremacy? I was anti-racist in that moment, attempting to argue against his white supremacist views. Even if my argument made a dent, it did not upturn two decades of bred racism. This is one example. Unfortunately I have dozens more.

I have spent most of my life in Orthodox communities. I have spent most of my life arguing for the dignity of minorities in those communities. I've always felt like it is my duty as a white Jewish woman with white privilege to be anti-racist when racism arises in the mostly white communities I find myself in. But how can a handful of us fight systemic racism in the Orthodox community when the system consumes us? How can I stand by the Orthodox community when articles like "The Black Problem" by *The Jewish Times* circulate? How can I stand by the Orthodox community when I am faced with daily racist sentiments, ranging from slurs to declarations that white Jews are the Chosen People? What does it say about Orthodoxy that Halachic Egalitarian, Conservative, Reform, and Reconstructionist rabbis and groups stand staunchly with the Black community and against racism, while many Orthodox groups stay silent or declare supremacy? What does it say about Orthodoxy that Yeshiva University only has a handful of rabbis who consider themselves progressive?

Judaism is a rich, justice-laden religion with potential for activism and equality. Many denominations have recognized that potential. Organizations like T'ruah stand on the forefront of racial justice. Lone Orthodox organizations like Uri L'Tzedek do the same.

My plea to Orthodoxy: now is your chance to prove you can be anti-racist. Now is your chance to prove that you can uproot racism, plant justice, and grow a stronger egalitarian connection. Support Black Lives Matter — not everything is about politics surrounding the State of Israel. Support ending police brutality — not everything is about maintaining ties to those who claim to protect us. Support protests, rallies, and rage — there will come a time when we will need that support reciprocated. And even if we don't, sometimes righteousness comes without reward.

## The Fate Of International Students Is Decided By ICE In Midst Of A Pandemic

By: Alexandra Tolmasov

As college students, we are often told that we are the future leaders of society, the people that will make history. Unfortunately, the year 2020 has left many students feeling as though they are not the ones making history, but rather the ones being subjected to it. This feeling of despair is especially familiar to international students today.

On July 6, Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) issued guidelines, according to which international students attending schools operating entirely online would no longer have valid visas; these students must leave the United States (U.S.) if they are currently there and are barred from entering the US if they are currently abroad. This sudden change has sent shock waves around the world and has left many people feeling hopeless. It left many international students feeling trapped in countries they do not consider home anymore and unwelcome in the country that they do consider home, the U.S. This directive would have forced foreign students to stay in countries with time zones that are unbearable to work in, countries with unreliable or state-managed internet, and countries with armed conflicts.

Luckily, on July 14, the U.S. reversed the new policy on student visas after a high-profile lawsuit with Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Thus, one might think that this horrifying situation has come to an end when in reality, it is far from it. The U.S. government agreed to rescind the July 6 directive; however, incoming freshmen are still not allowed to enter the country. In an email sent out to all YU international students on July 17, the university stated that new students will have to begin their studies from outside the U.S. and will be able to apply to enter the U.S. in January 2021 to continue their studies on-campus.

Moreover, there is still a huge question of whether or not international students will be able to come to the U.S., even if the U.S. allows them to enter. Flights are extremely limited and U.S. consulate offices, where students go for an in-person interview to either get or renew their visas, are closed — it is unclear when they will reopen.

It is undeniable that the July 6 directive has left wounds in the hearts of many international students. A lot of us decided to come to the U.S. because we did not feel like we belonged in our home countries; now we do not feel like we belong in the U.S. either. Most of us come to the U.S. wide eyed, believing that this country is the pinnacle of opportunity and acceptance. These naive ideas have been shattered.

The reversal of the policy did very little to heal these wounds, since the main reason the July 6 directive was rescinded is that the U.S. administration realized the economic hit the country would suffer if international students did not return. Foreign students play a huge role in the U.S. gross domestic product, from paying tuition to supporting local businesses. There are more than one million international college students in the U.S. and most of them pay full tuition which stems 45 billion dollars a year just from school cost. However, despite what the U.S. administration believes, we are not just a number, not just a graduation diploma, not just a dollar sign. We are people with rich cultures and profound intellects and we bring much more to the table than just economic growth. For instance, many international students are risking their lives at this very moment, during the pandemic, in order to help Americans in need, from volunteering at homeless shelters to delivering groceries to the elderly.

Unfortunately, the case of international students in the U.S. is not closed and it is unknown if ICE has abandoned its position or has retreated in order to fight another day. Therefore, there is a looming fear that the

administration will return with a revised rule; the directives might change any day and no one knows what to expect.

In these uncertain times, it is hard for many young adults to believe that they will be the ones to make history. How can someone build the future of society if they do not even have control over their own life? The reality is, no one has full control over their life. Some have the privilege to be born in the U.S. and some do not; that is not something that we can control. However, there are things we have control over. We can choose to be aware of injustice and we can choose to speak up when we see it. We can choose to support each other as best as we can. Most importantly, we can choose not to take an example from the U.S. administration and be more empathetic today, in order to build a better world for tomorrow.

## Where YU's Priorities Lie

By: Anonymous

*The YU Observer has verified that this article was written by a Yeshiva University undergraduate student (SCW '21).*

After hearing the news of reopening, I, along with many other Stern students, faced apprehension at the prospect of returning to campus in this health crisis. I wondered why this school would make such a rash decision, a decision that would take effect three months from the announcement.

Stern doesn't exactly deserve an A+ for putting the students above the institution. Just last year, it was announced that the cybersecurity program in the Katz School of Science and Health will soon occupy the eighth floor of the 215 building, which had been reserved in previous years for the art department. They did not seem to care that many students would be without the proper arrangements to satisfy their major. All they seemed to care about was their financial gain.

A little less than two years ago, Stern College senior Shifra Lindenberg, SSSB '21, free-fell in the Brookdale Residence Hall elevator. Despite this near-death experience, the school failed to replace the malfunctioning elevators, again placing the institution over the students. And recently, it took a break-in to the Schottenstein Residence Hall for there to be increased security measures at this school; even then, new security measures only came into play after the New York Times released security footage from the incident, thereby placing our school in the media's spotlight. It seems the only time the school takes action is if they are under scrutiny from the media or parents.

These examples beg the question of whether or not this school is acting in the best interest of the students. In order to ensure "safe" housing this semester, our school has decided to have three people in a Brookdale room, rather than four or five. The change means one or two fewer people per room which, in the long run, doesn't make a difference. It seems that by having us fill out our housing application forms now, instead of in three months, and by barely changing the room capacity and not taking into consideration the high risk of living with two other people or sharing a bathroom with twenty people on one floor, the school wishes to obtain a large

sum of deposits even if this may cause a significant health risk. Our school is putting the students' safety at the bottom of their checklist.

In terms of returning to campus in general, I wonder if the school has looked at the recent CDC report on the novel coronavirus. As of July 10, 2020, there are about 3.3 million active cases in the United States with 66,281 new cases. I wonder if the school has even taken into account that students will be traveling from Florida where, on July 12, data was released that there were 15,299 new cases, setting a record and surpassing New York with the most new cases in one day. I wonder if this school has even put safety over finance when looking at reopening. I know Rutgers has. I know Binghamton has. I know Princeton has. I know plenty of other schools have. But has Yeshiva University?

The curve is not flattening as it was expected to do this summer. The United States is experiencing the longest wave of coronavirus compared to any other country in the world, and it is not expected to slow down in the next three months.

Yeshiva University, your rash decision may cost at-risk students and older professors their health, and your rash decision may cause an unnecessary spike in cases in the New York area.

We all wish to be on campus. But I can speak for myself when I say that as a senior, I would rather give up half of my senior year, stay at home and take online classes for this semester to keep my friends and professors safe. I wish you, Yeshiva University, could say the same.

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## Features:

### **89th Annual Commencement Goes Virtual**

By: Chana Ingber

College graduation is a day that many students anticipate long before the day arrives. The thought of getting dressed up with friends and celebrating achievements together is exciting to many, even if it means sitting through more than a few speeches. Yeshiva University's 89th annual Commencement ceremony, however, was different from most graduations due to the COVID-19 pandemic that caused the undergraduate campuses to close in March 2020 and continue to be closed for the remainder of the spring semester.

Many schools have opted for a "Zoom" graduation where the graduating class would gather together via the newly-popular video platform. Other schools have pushed off their ceremonies until later in the summer or even

the fall, hoping to celebrate in-person. Yeshiva University analyzed the pros and cons of these options and opted to recognize its graduating class with a pre-recorded, hour long video.

The video went live at 1 p.m. EST on June 14, using a link and PIN that had been sent to YU seniors to share. Viewers were greeted by student council presidents teaching them how to use the comment and reaction sections of the platform in addition to reminding everyone to tag their posts with #YUGrad20. Lin Manuel Miranda, composer of Broadway shows such as “Hamilton” and “In the Heights,” then “zoom bombed” to congratulate the class of 2020.

Dr. Selma Botman, provost and vice president of academic affairs, welcomed everyone to the video. Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks delivered words of wisdom and religious guidance to the viewers before the YU Maccabeats sang the National Anthem and *Hatikvah* (Israeli national anthem). Viewers then heard congratulations from Moshael Strauss, chairman of the Yeshiva University board of trustees. Strauss reminded viewers that in this time of celebration we must also honor those we have lost. Names and faces of those who had recently passed, including YU faculty and staff, flooded the screen.

Pre-recorded videos of students applauding preceded President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman who told the class of 2020 that through great darkness, they have brought light. He spoke of what they should carry with them past graduation, such as friendships and the truth they have pursued, and of which knowledge is the most valuable as they continue to be leaders in the future. Dr. Botman then welcomed the deans of the graduate schools, in addition to Deans Dr. Noam Wasserman (SSSB), Dr. Karen Bacon (YC/SCW), Rabbi Dr. Yosef Kalinsky (Men's Undergraduate Torah Studies), and Paul Russo (Katz School). The Deans announced how many degrees were being issued and requested that students be awarded degrees. President Rabbi Dr. Ari Berman officially awarded all students their degrees, and applause filled the screen once again.

Valedictorians CJ Glicksman (YC), Shayna Doretsky (SSSB Beren), Yona Rom (SSSB Wilf), and Elisheva Cohen (SCW) all briefly spoke while students' pictures scrolled through the screen, giving each senior a moment to shine despite not all being together in person. The video concluded with Dr. Botman thanking all viewers and congratulating all seniors before starting a slideshow of hugs and smiles, featuring the graduating class of 2020. It may not have been a typical graduation, but YU's hard work to put together something interactive and exciting was surely appreciated by all.

## **“Crisis And Hope”; Rabbi Saul Berman: “Lessons From Selma 1965, For American Jews 2020”**

By: Ilan Bocian

On June 11, 2020, Rabbi Saul Berman, Professor of Jewish Studies at Yeshiva University, Stern College for Women, addressed over 140 members of the Yeshiva University community via Zoom in the first of a series of talks entitled “Crisis and Hope.” A participant in a multitude of anti-racist protests, including the famed 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march, Rabbi Berman shared his unique experience as an Orthodox rabbinical figure in the fight against racial injustice. At a particularly apropos time — on the heels of the murder of George Floyd and during the ensuing country-wide protests — Rabbi Berman shared the lessons he learned from his experiences in Selma that apply to today's pivotal national reckoning over our country's long history of racial injustice.

Reflecting on his time as an advocate during the Civil Rights movement, Rabbi Berman spoke on the Jewish obligation to fight against the oppression of disenfranchised minorities. As Jewish citizens of the United States, we share a responsibility in the shaping of our national character. The Torah teaches that the citizens of *Shechem* (a biblical city) were complicit in the development of their corrupt society, and thus the Torah imposes upon us the same obligations as it does upon *Bnei Noah* (the children of Noah, referring to non-Jews), to uphold the integrity of our civilizational values. To fight for the rights of the oppressed is to be God-fearing, Rabbi Berman taught, and as a corollary, we must not permit the justice system to practice favoritism.

Rabbi Berman extended the Torah stipulation of *lifnei iver* (not to place a stumbling block before the blind) to mean that Jews are forbidden from aiding and abetting others in the commission of wrongdoing. In this sense, enabling a social evil constitutes a violation of this prohibition. Likewise, the obligation of Jews to deliver *tochacha* (rebuke) means we are obligated to morally improve both Jewish and non-Jewish societies.

If our society allows Black people to be more threatened than any other segment, tolerates levels of poverty in Black communities that are greater than in any other segment, and sanctions the demonization and imposition of indignity imposed on Black citizens, then we, Rabbi Berman stated, exist in a society that is amidst a crisis of values. However, while our society at its core is fundamentally good, we cannot allow our own loyalty to this country manifest as silence in the face of deprivation of the rights of Black people. Loyalty to a society, Rabbi Berman maintained, does not mean supporting or enabling evil by shrugging our shoulders.

In addressing whether Jews should engage in protests against racially-motivated police brutality and racial injustice, Rabbi Berman reminded us that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, in its affirmation of the right of peaceful assembly, grants us the right to engage in Torah-mandated rebuke. Public protest and demonstration, Rabbi Berman argued, is the *mitzvah d'oraita* (commandment from the Torah itself) of *tochacha*.

Rabbi Berman concluded his keynote address by telling the story of an *Erev Shabbat* (Sabbath Eve) he spent while jailed in Selma having been arrested — along with dozens of other Jewish and Christian clergymen as well as many young Black men — for peacefully protesting. After release from jail the next morning, Rabbi Berman stood back as his comrades began to board the buses that would transport them to the church where the renowned march from Selma to Montgomery, alongside the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., would start. Rabbi Berman told his non-Jewish friends that in observance of the Jewish Sabbath he would be walking to the church. However, all of the other protesters refused to let Rabbi Berman proceed alone and joined him afoot through the white side of Selma, a dangerous journey in that day for Jewish and Black people. Altogether, 250 people marched, white and Black together, flanked by police for their protection.

For the first time, the entire white community of Selma became deeply cognizant of the alliance that had been forged around the issue of legal protection accorded to Black people. It was vital for everyone, Rabbi Berman recalled, to learn not just to demonstrate, but to listen to each other. Jews need to listen to Black people, Rabbi Berman said in closing, and to understand what for *Black people* constitute the indignities of society. If we listen, and then raise our voices together, we can solve social issues of racial injustice. There is great hope in the demonstration taking place, Rabbi Berman concluded, as people of every race and religion join together to understand that these are societal problems that need to be addressed by us all.

## AZA Matchmakers

By: Zachary Greenberg

With the world going virtual, several Yeshiva University students are undertaking a tough challenge during the pandemic: dating during coronavirus. Social distancing has limited singles from meeting easily, putting a strain on their dating lives. Several Jewish individuals have attempted dating alternatives such as Zoom speed events and Facebook group chats. In contrast, Ariella Etshalom (SCW '20) and Ahuva Wakschlag (SSSB '20) have founded a free, new matchmaking service, AZA Matchmakers. Their service differs from typical *shidduch* (matchmaking) businesses. While they often rely heavily on stats and written information, such as resumes or profiles, AZA Matchmakers conducts video chats with each and every person who joins, as a way to get to know him/her on a more personal level.

AZA's origins date back to 2016, the year Ariella and Ahuva met in Michlelet Mevaseret Yerushalayim (MMY), a seminary in Jerusalem. As *chavrutot* (study partners), they frequently discussed the *shidduch* (marriage) crisis — the difficulty of finding a spouse in the Modern Orthodox Jewish community — and the hardships of Modern Orthodox Jewish dating. Several years later, both as students in YU, they began to set people up on dates. They have already seen success — the first of their matches got engaged in May 2020.

They started off small, writing names of potential matches down on a whiteboard. Since both are highly outgoing women who are involved in various communities of people their age, they found that pooling their lists of friends proved to be a very effective way to set people up. Although some of their matches did not go past the first few dates, Ariella and Ahuva stayed motivated. "I like to think that it really is more about getting people out there, feeling comfortable dating, so they can truly clarify what they are looking for and figure out how to find the right person for them," Etshalom explains. "Not every date will be your future spouse, but learning from each date more about yourself and what you're looking for can make all the difference when it comes to such a deeply personal and life-altering experience."

After the coronavirus outbreak, the duo decided to expand their business virtually. Chief Technical Officer and IBC Representative Baruch Lerman (YC '23) developed the website and Facebook page to broaden AZA's reach and accessibility. Chief Marketing Officer and YSU President Zachary Greenberg (SSSB '21) created a demo video which shows a sneak peak into the AZA video chats where they get to know the people who register. The video stars valedictorian CJ Glicksman (YC '20) in a lighthearted conversation which provides Ariella and Ahuva useful information about CJ and the type of person he is looking for. The questions are related to general background and *hashkafic* (lifestyle) preferences, comfortability with coed events, personality traits that he possesses and ones he is looking for in a spouse, along with some out-of-the-box brain teasers.

While AZA is accepting people regardless of school or location, they mostly market towards YU students and alumni. The only caveat is that anyone who enters must be at least 18-year-olds. The application form requires some basic information such as phone number and email, with an optional section of providing more information about dating and preferences.

Currently, AZA has over 60 signups, countless dating suggestions, and several couples currently going out. On their Facebook page, AZA offers tips for dating over Zoom and even some suggestions for fun Zoom dates such as scattergories, movie night with screen sharing over Zoom (Zoomie), virtual Settlers, and more. Additionally, they answer anonymous dating questions submitted through their website along with general advice, tips, and dating jokes! AZA is also working on hosting single game nights such as Virtual Settlers of Catan and Bingo night, utilizing Zoom breakout rooms to provide individuals a more comfortable, private space.

“AZA has so far been the best matchmaking service I have dealt with,” an anonymous YU student who has been set up through AZA remarked. “They take time to get to know each individual and really put thought into potential matches for me.”

The upside of dating through a *shadchan* (matchmaker) or dating business is that there is a large pool of potential set-ups, raising the chances of finding a good *shidduch* (match). Many YU students feel that dating through a matchmaker is too formal and is like “throwing darts, in hopes of one sticking” and would prefer to be set up by a friend who knows them well and understands what they are truly looking for. AZA combines the two forums: they are similar to a typical matchmaking service in that they have many enrollments, but their uniqueness lies in the quality of their service. Since they take the time to video chat with each person who signs up, the process feels more like friends wanting to find the right person for you. They only set people up if they think it makes sense, and they do not just “throw darts”.

For more information, email [AZAmatchmakers@gmail.com](mailto:AZAmatchmakers@gmail.com).

## Arts & Culture:

### **Life Of The Artist: Antisemitism In Music**

By: Yosef Rosenfield, Features Editor

To listen or not to listen — when it comes to antisemitic musicians, this is a question that has likely tested the moral integrity of many Jews across the globe. The issue is more pressing than ever before, with the increasing number of artists speaking out against Jews and Israel. As the antisemitic community continues to grow, it seems as if hating the Jewish people has become a socially accepted form of racism, granting musicians the license to associate with known enemies of the Jews.

Were I not Jewish myself, perhaps it would be easier for me to separate music from its composer and respect antisemitic artists’ freedom of speech. But for me, Jew-hate represents more than free speech; I see it as a personal attack. Roger Waters, for example, is a name that makes me want to puke, and not only because of his insufferable music. A former member of the British rock group Pink Floyd, Waters is arguably the most infamous living antisemite in the music world. He has strongly supported Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) for nearly a decade and even wrote a pretentious open letter in 2015 condemning the popular band Bon Jovi for performing in Tel Aviv. In 2018, Waters held a concert in London during which provocative slogans were displayed on the jumbotrons — including one that read, “Resist Israeli antisemitism,” a statement which is as dumb as it is offensive. But it gets worse: appearing at one of his 2013 concerts was a giant pig-shaped balloon that featured a Star of David and the image of someone giving the Nazi salute. Waters is clearly uninterested in distinguishing his musical career from his beliefs, so why should I?

If blurring the lines between art and personal opinion sounds familiar, that is because Waters is not the first antisemitic musician to do so. In 1850, German composer Richard Wagner notoriously published “Das Judenthum in der Musik” (“Jewishness in Music”), in which he claimed that Jews were biologically unfit to compose and that they contaminated the music scene in Germany. Wagner’s writings evoked a belief in an Aryan “master race” that would later be shared by — among other members of the Nazi Party — Adolf Hitler,

who in fact adored Wagner's operas and played his music at Nazi events. So 19th century German Jews must have steered clear from Wagner's music and performances, right? Wrong. Many of Wagner's friends and supporters were — bizarrely enough — Jews, including pianists Carl Tausig and Joseph Rubinstein, in addition to Wagner's favorite conductor, Hermann Levi.

Unfortunately, the Jewish people have a long history of remaining silent in the face of hateful adversity, and it is up to our generation to decidedly resist repeating that same mistake. We live in unprecedented times when the powers of social media can popularize immoral ideology and behavior all too quickly. So when the next pop icon tweets "Free Palestine" (Zayn Malik, 2014) or the next singer backs out of performing in Israel under antisemitic pressure (Lorde, 2017), it is important that we the fans — the real force behind *all* influencers — speak up and hold them accountable for their actions instead of continuing to give free passes for "not knowing any better." In a technological age where we have literally a world of knowledge at our fingertips, ignorance is not an excuse. If your favorite band makes a move with even the slightest hint of antisemitism, consider telling them to do their research before they alienate an entire demographic within their fanbase.

Song and songwriter, in my assessment, are nowadays inextricably linked. Recent social trends have demonstrated that nearly everything is becoming politicized, including the music industry. A contemporary artist's public image is greater than the sum of his/her musical parts; it is a full package that includes the artist's attire, mannerisms, social following and yes, political views. Singers are now associated with their stances on various issues, making it impossible for fans of their musical work to avoid affiliation with those positions. The matter of antisemitism in music is thus quite simple, as I view it. When someone seeks to banish you from your homeland, avoids your people like the plague, resents your existence or all of the above, he/she establishes grounds for becoming your arch nemesis. This is no different.

## Harry Potter And The Death Of The Author

By: Elisheva Zahtz, Features Editor

"Harry Potter," written by J.K. Rowling, is perhaps the most famous and beloved book series across generations of literature fans. For many growing up, the series taught them about the strengths of love, kindness and compassion in the face of evil. It explored a magical world full of creatures and spells that gave us all something to dream about. The story had 11-year-olds waiting for their Hogwarts letters and inspired beloved movies and theme parks across the globe. I write this as a proud Ravenclaw with a nostalgic space in my heart for both the books and the movies.

The problem with any series so deeply beloved by so many is that the author becomes somewhat of a revered figure. Rowling amassed quite a following, with over 14 million followers on Twitter. Her series has expanded from books to sequels to online games and branched into almost every medium possible, including video games and coloring books. Her position grants her the opportunity to educate, to use that influence to continue the wonder of the books, to further the message of love and acceptance within her story, and to interact with the "Harry Potter" fanbase to share details about the world she built and help them learn more about it.

Despite the message of love and acceptance spread throughout the books, Rowling unfortunately uses her platform to create damaging and otherwise unsafe spaces for many of her readers. Most recently, her comments on Twitter against the transgender community, including accusing trans women of "remov[ing] the ability of

many to meaningfully discuss their lives,” and otherwise undermining the struggle of “women globally,” and posts naming women as the only people who menstruate, have caused even more of her readers to take a step back. Over the years, Rowling also came under fire for belatedly labeling Dumbledore as gay (and in love with Gellert Grindelwald, who is effectively magical Hitler), for choosing to make Nagini an Asian woman who was trapped in the snake’s body at puberty, and for the imagery of the goblins and the inherent antisemitism involved in the hook-nosed, gold-hungry monsters.

Repeatedly, these issues have been commented on and refuted with excuses or otherwise blown under the rug. Thus, with that comes the phenomenon of Death of the Author, the complete removal of the author from their work.

Death of the Author is the idea that an author’s personal opinions, feelings and intentions have no bearing on the fictional universe they have created in their works. When an author publishes a piece, they release it into the world as it is, understanding that there will be several different interpretations of the work. This spectrum of interpretation is what allows us to look into Shakespeare’s works and apply allegories of our own human conditions into them. The author too, once their piece is published, is only interposing their own interpretation onto their work. To an extent, the author’s belated additions and corrections, orientations of the characters, and facts about the fiction are fun pieces of “extra” content, or “fanfiction.” With JK Rowling, taking a step back and recognizing that regardless of the author’s comments or intentions, her work carries a powerful message. Being mildly critical and adjusting that perspective allows for a deeper love of the content.

Love is not believing someone or something to be perfect but being able to recognize its flaws and to love it anyway. Perhaps this requires having a more critical view of the world, or wincing when you realize that her version of lycanthropy sounds a little too close to menstruation at times, but what the author says about their work, or their own worldview, has nothing to do with the story. Interpret it how you want, love the characters for what they are, and ignore the comments from anyone who would tell you otherwise. Once their work is published, the author is a reader just like anyone else; opening their mouth after the close of the story gives us the right and the ability to agree with, refute, or even to ignore their opinions. The messages, lessons, and nostalgia for the books is something beautiful, and that should not be taken from you because of some nonsense being spouted on the internet. The fans make the fiction, and the fans determine how the characters are decoded, read, and understood. The author’s intentions have nothing to do with that.

But for those of us who are hurt by her comments nonetheless, you are seen, and your feelings are valid, and I hope with all my heart that you can be critical of the series and retain your love and appreciation for it. The author does not dictate the way you understand or appreciate the characters — you do. I’m sorry, and you deserve better.

## Science & Technology:

### **Monthly Dose of Disaster: Swine Flu 2020**

By: Sarah Brill, Science & Technology Editor

With every passing month, a new issue — whether that be with society, the world politically, or pandemic-related — seems to arise. This month, it's a new strain of swine flu that has surfaced in China leaving researchers to wonder if this virus contains 'pandemic potential.'

In 2009, the H1N1 swine flu outbreak caused a pandemic that lasted for 19 months, recording half the amount of cases compared to COVID-19 in the United States. Jesse Yeung from CNN stated that "from 2011 to 2018, Chinese researchers based at several institutions, including Shandong Agricultural University and the Chinese National Influenza Center collected more than 30,000 nasal swab samples from pigs in slaughterhouses and veterinary teaching hospitals across 10 Chinese provinces. From these samples, researchers identified 179 swine influenza viruses – but not all of them posed a concern."

On June 30, 2020, it had become known to researchers that the virus had been silently spreading to workers on the pig farms in China. Mike Ives from The New York Times stated that "Li-Min Huang, director of the Division of Pediatric Infectious Diseases at National Taiwan University Hospital, said that a crucial next step would be finding out whether any of the infected workers at the pig farms had contracted the virus from humans, as well as whether any had spread the virus to their families." Huang further stated that it is crucially important that researchers study this particular virus, as it has dangerous potential.

As stated in The New York Times, Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, said that this virus does not pose an "immediate threat" to the United States, but rather the virus is "something we need to keep our eye on just the way we did in 2009 with the emergence of the swine flu."

There is hope that this virus can be contained in time so that it does not have the potential to reach the level of a pandemic. With many countries still maintaining a "lock-down" status, it is questionable whether or not this virus will enter the United States, but we must remain watchful and continue taking necessary precautions to ensure that this virus does not enter this country.

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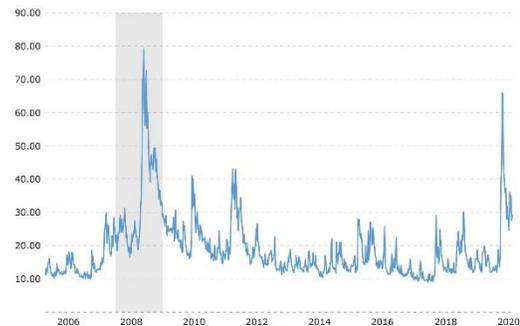
## Business:

### Market Confusion On All Sides

By Toviya Slager

From late February 2020 to the end of June 2020, the market sent many varying signals, leading to much financial insecurity. What was the longest consecutive bull market in history, was seemingly followed by the shortest bear market in history. Investors are now questioning how a long bull market can be followed by such a short bear market. Additionally, investors are left to speculate: is the v-shaped recovery a one-time anomaly, or a preview of another crash?

When trying to better understand market patterns, investors use a method known as technical analysis, which consists of looking at recurring patterns in similar economic contexts. This method is commonly practiced because the market has a high tendency of repeating itself. In previous bear markets, such as the Dotcom Bubble and the Great Recession, the crash lasted many months and had a gradual recovery, as seen in the S&P 500 graph (right) by Macrotrends. The COVID-19 induced recession is quite the opposite, as the decline and recovery lasted for only a month. The traditional methods of technical analysis prove to be ineffective when examining this recession. Additionally, the general



uncertainty tracker for the stock market, the VIX (Volatility Index),

hit a high of 66 on March 16, only to decline to 30 by late June, as seen in the Macrotrends VIX graph (below). For context, the VIX is usually around 20, indicating the vast uncertainty about the market. This uncertainty may come from the recent rise of cases in states such as Texas and Florida as well as a potential second wave of COVID-19 cases which could bring the market to its knees again.



Another element that has further added unclarity is whether the stock market's performance is a true indication of the actual market. With cases nationwide increasing rapidly, an unemployment rate of over 10%, and many major companies filing for bankruptcy, it seems highly improbable that the stock market should be ticking up — yet it is. Often this can be associated with investor optimism. Meaning, people believe that the economy will recover quickly despite data indicating otherwise. However, recently conducted polls show that investor optimism is currently at its lowest point since 2015. This contradiction paints an unclear picture about what is driving the market and why it is not reflecting a more accurate state of the economy.

With such unpredictability in the market, the logical investment approach would be one of great caution. However, some companies are aggressively investing. For example, PNC sold \$14 billion in shares without stating the use of the proceeds. Many companies are filing for IPOs, including Shift4 (FOUR, \$345 million), Warner Music Group Corp. (WMG, \$1.9 billion), and Vroom Inc. (VRM, \$468 million). IPOs generally do not occur in a bear market since companies believe that they will not be able to generate the revenue they want. Additionally, unstable markets keep IPOs from debuting for the same reason investors are skeptical to buy new stocks: quick devaluation. Yet, these IPOs were remarkably successful and show strong investor confidence pertaining to the state of the market. On the other hand, there have been no major IPOs — defined as ones larger than \$5 billion or larger — which suggests that larger companies are still wary of exposing themselves to an unstable market.

Another interesting trend within the IPO market is the rise of special purpose acquisition companies (SPAC). SPACs are shell companies that raise money through the IPO market in order to acquire other companies. **In April 2020, about 80% of the funds raised for IPOs went to SPACs, compared to 8% in a normal market.** Many investors are placing their bets that these SPACs will be able to capitalize on the companies that survive through COVID-19. However, an interesting development happened when Bill Ackman recently decided to try and raise \$6.5 billion for the largest SPAC IPOs ever. Although he might be opportunistic and hope to find an undervalued company in this uncertain market, it also indicates his optimism for finding enough investors who are bullish on his SPAC.

Another area that seems to side more strongly with the volatile side is the Mergers and Acquisitions (M&A) sector. Many companies have abandoned their M&A activity due to COVID-19. For example, SoftBank stopped their \$3 billion offer for WeWork shares. This shows that companies prefer to retain security in the form of liquidity as well as their skepticism of receiving a fair valuation. However, there are some companies which have taken advantage of the current crisis and have made acquisitions. For example, Lululemon announced on June 30 they are buying Mirror for \$500 million. Another example is GrubHub's planned acquisition by Just Eat Takeaway for \$7.3 billion. Also, Uber recently agreed on July 5 to buyout Postmates for \$2.65 billion.

In the context of IPOs and M&As, it is important to discuss the huge new barrier that is stopping many companies from doing IPOs — digital operational due diligence (ODD). In the past, companies would be partially valued based on their workspace and work dynamic. However, due to COVID-19, work has been moved primarily online and performing these assessments remotely have become exceedingly difficult. Many investors have a difficult time trusting the level that the ODD can be performed, but have slowly realized the need for virtual roadshows and relied on them for investment opportunities.

With economic stress pulling companies at the seams, many companies have moved to restructuring to create financial flexibility. For example, Unilever announced it would restructure by combining its Dutch and British offices into one office. This would allow it to run and create new deals more smoothly. Additionally, Chuck E. Cheese announced that they plan to undergo restructuring as part of filing for chapter 11 bankruptcy. They had invested in many new locations that were not able to open due to COVID-19 causing massive losses within the company. Macy's is laying off about 3,600 employs in an effort to save \$365 million this year and \$630 million per year in the future. This restriction will dramatically reduce overhead costs for the organization. Brooks Brothers announced on July 8 that they will also be filing for chapter 11 bankruptcy and restructure the company. They have been suffering for the past few years, but COVID-19 forced them into bankruptcy. They are looking to be bought by another company and plan on closing dozens of stores to recoup losses created by COVID-19.

With such a chaotic market, remaining conservative with defensive investing should be the widespread strategy. Yet, there are companies that are more comfortable with the economic climate to file for IPOs and M&As. This highlights the polarity between investors about the certainty of the economy's recovery. While some believe that the market still needs to fall before it stabilizes, other optimistic investors believe that much of the recovery has already occurred and the economy will tick up from now.

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S&P 500 Graph 1 Source: <https://www.macrotrends.net/2324/sp-500-historical-chart-data>

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