



# The COMMENTATOR

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 28, 2012  
15 TEVETH 5773

The Official Student Newspaper of Yeshiva College, Syms School of Business, and Yeshiva University • www.yucommentator.org

Volume LXXVII Issue 5

## Presidential Task Force on Torah and Jewish Studies Seeks More Integrated Approach

BY ARIEH LEVI

Following significant changes to Yeshiva University's core curriculum, President Joel has created a committee to examine the current state of Academic Jewish Studies courses at Yeshiva University. The Presidential Task Force on Torah and Jewish Studies will respond to long-standing student concerns over difficult Judaic requirements and courses – primarily Bible and Hebrew – and ultimately make recommendations to the President on creating a system that is more “holistic” and “integrated,” in the words of key committee members.

The committee consists of a diverse faculty body, hailing from the Academic Jewish Studies department, RIETS, and the university administration. Specifically, the committee is chaired by Vice-Provost Lawrence Schiffman, and includes Revel Dean David Berger, YC Dean Barry Eichler, Interim University Registrar Diana Benmergui, Professor Steven Fine, Professor Jeffrey Glantz, Vice President Rabbi Josh Joseph, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Torah Studies Rabbi Yosef Kalinsky, Professor Debra Kaplan, Syms Dean Moses Pava, RIETS Associate Dean of Operations Rabbi Menachem Penner, RIETS Dean Rabbi Yona Reiss, Assistant to the President for Research and Communication Rabbi Ezra Schwartz, and Rabbi Baruch Simon. Noting the diversity represented within the committee, Schiffman commented that “many of the faculty are meeting each other for the first time,” a sampling of the integration the committee hopes to engender.

see *Jewish Studies*, p. 4



## YU Issued Warning by Accreditation Agency

BY NATAN BIENSTOCK

As part of its decennial review by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), Yeshiva University recently received a warning that its accreditation may be in jeopardy. The notice explained that YU may lose its accreditation if it fails to address three major issues that the MSCHE has uncovered. Should YU fail to resolve these concerns, YU students would no longer receive funds for work study and would be ineligible to receive federal student loans. In addition, YU would face the prospect of a downgrade of the University's academic standing.

Most of the efforts undertaken to evaluate a university are customarily handled by the university itself through a self-assessment. The university drafts a report of what they need to improve in order to keep progressing as an institution, and submits it to the MSCHE. YU's most recent self-evaluation took approximately two years to complete under the guidance of Associate Professor of English William Lee, who was appointed by the Provost's office to oversee the accreditation process. After the report was submitted to the MSCHE for approval, a team comprised of agency officials was dispatched to conduct their own

evaluation.

The first of the MSCHE's concerns regards the 10<sup>th</sup> standard of the MSCHE, which discusses the proper role of faculty within the university. In their Public Disclosure Statement, the MSCHE warned YU that there was insufficient evidence of “development, approval, and dissemination of clear procedures and policies governing faculty appointment, promotion, tenure, and grievance processes.” According to Vice Provost for Undergraduate Education Dr. Lawrence Schiffman, one of the reasons that YU has never had a printed tenure policy is because there are so many different fields in the University that one uniform policy would not have worked. However, a tenure policy has been drafted by Professor Nancy Beckerman of the Wurzeiler School of Social Work and has been submitted to the Faculty Council for review.

The MSCHE's second issue questions the faculty's role in facilitating the progress of the University's academic programs. The MSCHE felt that there was unsatisfactory proof “that faculty have appropriate input into the design, maintenance, and updating of curricula.” This matter relates to how faculty and the administration interact in the development of curricula. As a result, the University has drafted a new faculty handbook which

see *Accreditation*, p. 4

## Specialized Biology Electives to be Offered Rotationally

BY HAREL KOPELMAN

During registration time in Yeshiva College (YC), some Biology majors were surprised when they saw the upcoming semester's truncated schedule of classes. Many assumed that these cuts were permanent, and worried about difficulties in creating their schedules for next semester.

*The Commentator* met with Deans Eichler and Viswanathan to ask about the changes. The initial, fuller schedule that many students saw was meant to be tentative and to be used only by the department heads. That schedule was a rollover of the past spring semester's offering of classes, and was meant to be the list of classes from which each department would remove classes for budgeting purposes. The second, curtailed schedule was meant to be the students' official listing of courses for the upcoming 2013 spring semester.

Dean Eichler further explained that the decrease of Biology courses offered each semester is part of the university's larger budget reduction plan. Yeshiva College previously eliminated the Speech and Physical Education departments, which provide no majors for students, as part of the effort to cope with its finan-

see *Biology*, p. 6

## YSU Vice President Resigns

BY EVAN SCHWARZBAUM

On Wednesday December 19, a ystud email was sent out by Tzvi Solomon, head of the YU student Canvassing Committee, announcing that, “In the next few weeks an election for YSU Vice President will be held.” The email explained how to declare candidacy but not the occasion for the election or, in other words, why the position had become vacant.

Late Saturday night, December 22, Yeshiva Student Union (YSU) President Yosef Hoffman began to clarify the situation. That night, Mr. Hoffman announced the resignation of Moshe Siegel, the Union's vice president, in a ystud email that read as follows:

“The Yeshiva Student Union would like to inform the student body of Moshe Siegel's stepping down from his position as YSU vice president. We thank Moshe for all of his hard work on the board and look forward to working with him in other contexts as he continues to be involved on campus.”

In an interview with *The Commentator*, Hoffman explained that Siegel had announced his resigna-

see *VP Resigns*, p. 5



# STAFF EDITORIALS

## Searching for Answers at Yeshiva University

BY EVAN SCHWARZBAUM  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Looking back on the past month of media coverage surrounding Yeshiva University, I find it difficult to respond with any clear meaningful message. I struggle with mixed and conflicting emotions: I am grieved for the alleged victims of traumatizing sexual abuse; distraught that it took a media scandal and decades of waiting for our university to confront these allegations; disappointed that revered Torah leaders were not guided by a stronger moral compass; and perturbed that even in our modern religious community, a deaf ear could be turned to such heinous acts.

And I sense that I am not alone in this struggle.

Whether we are students at this university, alumni, members of the broader Modern Orthodox community, or just concerned onlookers following a tragic media story, we have all been confronted by news and stories that challenge us; they challenge us to think and feel, and they challenge us to respond.

I can't claim to have the correct solution to this intricate puzzle. I can't claim to speak on behalf of all Yeshiva students either. And I certainly cannot claim to know how the victims feel, nor to have any expertise in dealing with such cases of sexual abuse. But after many conversations with students, leaders, faculty, and rabbis, I would like to share some thoughts that might help us process what we've read over the past few weeks.

To begin with, I think it is important to recognize and applaud President Joel and his administration for the university's initial public response to the allegations stated in *The Forward*.

I refer specifically to his description of the alleged acts as "reprehensible," "heinous," "inexcusable," and "antithetical to Torah values and everything Yeshiva University stands for," in addition to the president's explicit expression of apology. The mere labeling of the alleged abuses as terrible and subsequent apology begin to vindicate the victims, start a path towards future improvement, and demonstrate a semblance of transparency and responsibility that are ostensibly fundamental values in our community. These small steps of public recognition alone would distinguish us from other more insular religious communities.

Also noteworthy are the university's initiatives moving forward. For one, it has encouraged victims to come forward, directing them both to the school's counseling center and to the president himself. It has also announced that it will be conducting an investigation of the allegations, and encouraged victims to contact the legal and abuse experts directly. These steps are noble, and will hopefully lend more clarity to the past and consolation to those who suffered.

But the question remains: is that enough? Is Yeshiva University dealing properly and appropriately—as responsibly as possible—with the allegations presented in ongoing reports from *The Forward*? We have expectations of every public institution regarding how they handle delicate situations such as these, and now must question whether our own satisfies those standards.

At this point, though, what more should we expect from Yeshiva in responding to this tragic situation? The school has publicly apologized, launched an investigation, and reiterated its policies defending against abuse; it has checked off the major steps every public institu-

tion must undertake when under fire. There is, however, one more possible action the university could take.

In the aftermath of *The Forward's* coverage, more than one article has already made the comparison that immediately jumped out at so many readers—Jerry Sandusky, Joe Paterno, and the Penn State fiasco all over again. Some, including the initial article in *The Forward* casually allude to the comparison. The intended parallels and implications for Yeshiva are not difficult to discern. Other authors have raised the issue more explicitly: they call on Yeshiva University to fire Rabbi Norman Lamm.

These calls for action are aggressive and far-reaching. But, if we are honest, they have probably crossed our minds too. Is Yeshiva obligated to fire Rabbi Lamm? Is that the moral and appropriate action we should expect and demand? It behooves us to take these questions seriously.

On the one hand, Rabbi Lamm is the chancellor of Yeshiva University. At this point, his involvement in practical tasks and decisions is minimal if not nonexistent and, instead, he serves a different role; he stands as the honorary head of the university—its face and image, a representative of the values and ideals heralded by his colleagues, constituents, and community.

The accusations and—tragically—self-incriminating comments recently published certainly raise questions about whether Yeshiva should associate itself with Rabbi Lamm and his legacy. And that is aside from the more obvious reason to ask Rabbi Lamm to leave, that is, if his actions were wrong and thus deserving of consequence.

On the other hand, however, several compelling arguments show that Yeshiva's story is not Penn State's, and indicate that Rabbi Lamm should not be asked to leave. This is a complex and sensitive issue and, as always, a case can be made for both sides. In this case though, I believe that the arguments fall out on the side of Rabbi Lamm. However tempting it might be, calling for Yeshiva to fire Rabbi Lamm appears to be the wrong course of action in our current predicament. Allow me to elaborate.

While the abuses at Penn State were ongoing until at least the early 2000s, the alleged cases and complaints at Yeshiva's high school took place as much as 35 years ago and at the latest about twenty years ago. This time discrepancy must change the way we view these situations. On one level, the passage of time means that Rabbi Lamm is no longer the active head—or president—of Yeshiva University. Though there are arguments to be made for pushing out a chancellor, as mentioned above, the acting leader of a group is subject to harsher action from his institution, as was the case with Joe Paterno.

But more importantly, the fact that these cases took place more than a quarter-century ago should make us reconsider how we judge Rabbi Lamm's actions and decisions. As pointed out in the *New York Times*, sexual abuse was dealt with quite differently thirty years ago. The *Times* pointed to the example of the Horace Mann School, which recently faced similar allegations of inappropriate teacher behavior left unpunished. The article went on to cite an expert in the field who said that Lamm's course of action—firing the teacher without alerting the police or taking legal action—was more than widespread at the time.

Now, this is not to make an argument for moral rela-

see Editorial, p. 3

# The COMMENTATOR

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*The Commentator is the official student newspaper of Yeshiva University. For 76 years, The Commentator has served students and administrators as a communicative conduit; a kinetic vehicle disseminating undergraduate social, religious, and academic beliefs across the student bodies; and a reliable reflection of Yeshiva student life to the broader Jewish and American communities. The Commentator staff claims students spanning the diverse spectrum of backgrounds and beliefs represented at Yeshiva. We are united by our passion for living the ideals of Torah u-Maddah, and commitment to journalistic excellence.*



500 W 185th Street  
New York, NY 10033  
Email: CommentatorChief@gmail.com  
Telephone: (973) 508-7458

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### 1 Donation

Albert Einstein College of Medicine receives \$8 Million dollar estate gift from former anatomy professor. Raises the bar for everyone else, no?



### 2 Points of Light

Helen Unger (SCW '13) Daniel Simkin (SSSB '15) and our very own, Gavriel Brown (YC '14) honored at YU's Hanukkah Dinner and Convocation.



### 3 Netflix

If you don't have netflix during reading week, it's unclear what you're doing all day. Maybe sign up for the one month free trial--there's really no better time. And it'll last you through break too!



### 4 Gun Control

RIETS Dean Rabbi Yonah Reiss called for increased scrutiny of gun laws in the United States following Sandy Hook massacre. Courageous.



### 5 Chanukah Concert

Technical glitches aside, Edon stole the hearts of the crowd. Thanks little man!



### 6 Les Miserables

Never read the book? Never saw the play? Well, now it's a movie so you have no excuse. Go see it. Now.



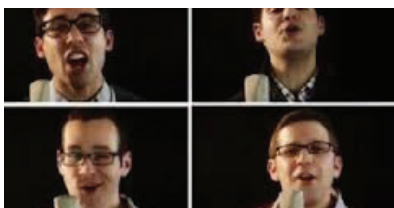
### 7 1000 Points

Senior Dovie Hoffman became the 25th player in YU basketball history to record 1,000 career points. Too bad only three YU students were there to see it.



### 1 Finals on January 9

While everyone else is enjoying freedom with friends and family, you're still slaving away. Worst. Finals-schedule. Ever.



### 2 YU Crush

An even creeper iteration of YU Compliments is spreading through Facebook. We suggest having fun with it; whoever makes the Crush feel more awkward gets 50 bucks. To YU Connects. On us. Foreal.



### 3 LinkedIn

When 99 percent of your LinkedIn friends happen to be your Facebook friends, something's wrong with your profile. You know what happens when you mix business with pleasure...



### 4 The Lord is Stepping Down

After 21 years as Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, Rabbi Sacks is stepping down. Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis has some big shoes to fill.



### 5 Selection in the caf

It's finals time and there is nothing to snack on in the caf, except carrots. Hello? We want Oreos, we want kettle cooked chips, we want heimeshe paskesz cookies with chocolate chip cookies on the outside and cream on the inside. Please?



### 6 Fighting for a seat

The library is a hotter commodity than usual this time of year. It always gets a bit intense, so bring your boxing gloves and get ready for a mortal combat style battle.



### 7 Abuse Scandal

Enough said, enough said.

# Editorial, continued

tivism; I am not arguing that Rabbi Lamm did the "right" thing, or that it was okay for the accused men to continue working with children and in positions of Jewish leadership. Looking back, we know that Finkelstein's and Gordon's alleged actions were terrible and should have been met with severe punishment.

The question this does raise, though, is whether we can reasonably expect Rabbi Lamm to have acted otherwise. Indeed the Torah is timeless and we would like to think its values should help us transcend our cultural and historical environments. This should apply to a revered scholar like Rabbi Lamm more than anywhere else. But, we also know, we are all human, and thus subject to our surrounding realities and the forces of context. And this applies to a revered scholar like Rabbi Lamm no less than to anyone else. It is tragic, but though we may be able to say that Rabbi Lamm should have acted more responsibly as we look at the situation through the lens of 2012, it may simply be unreasonable to say the same from the standpoint of 1982.

On another level, the long passage of time means that Rabbi Lamm is no longer the young, active professional he once was. This brings me to a point about Rabbi Lamm that is extremely delicate and may border on disrespectful, but I feel is important enough to make in his defense. Rabbi Lamm is an old man. He is 85 years old and, as is the way of the world, his physical and mental health are deteriorating. That does not diminish his stature, nor does it change the past. But it does make a plea to the heart; it seems that our most basic humanitarian instincts would have us let the man live—and die—in peace. If he wishes to step down of his own volition, whether for the interest of the institution or for personal reasons, that would be legitimate, and perhaps even praiseworthy.

But for Yeshiva to fire Rabbi Lamm or ask him to resign might be unethical in its own way too. Firing an 85-year-old man who is not involved in the institution's functions would not change anything. It would not lead to any tangible change for the school, but only launch a symbolic attack on an aging man. And let us not forget who that man is: Rabbi Lamm built this institution and saved it from imminent collapse; he dedicated his life to the university and to the movement of Centrist Orthodoxy which he, essentially, founded; he is a scholar and a leader.

We cannot condone his actions if, indeed, he attempted to hide the crimes of his employees. Nor can we excuse problematic behavior with a preponderance of good behavior. But should his acting in line with what was considered appropriate at the time lead to the undermining of a life of service and vision? Should a man's legacy and life be torn down when we haven't clear evidence indicating that he knew and understood the full sexual and abusive nature of his employees' behavior? Should one man "take the fall" for those responsible, simply because he is the only one left alive?

Today, it is not uncommon for a "media scandal" to end with the firing of one person in a high-up position at an organization. Sometimes, this reaction is warranted and immediately improves the situation. Other times, though, this knee-jerk reaction does not fit the circumstances and succeeds only at providing false consolation for those following the story by giving evidence that "something has been done," when, in fact, nothing of significance has changed. We must be wary of this possibility.

The nuanced and interrelated contextual difficulties of this case complicate how the university should react to the allegations it faces. The long passage of time, the changing societal norms, the delicate position of Rabbi Lamm, and the many unknowns in the case murky the clear waters of good and evil that usually characterize matters of child sexual abuse. And thus it is difficult to point a finger

at one person or policy that will remedy the situation. In fact, it would be wrong to do so; it would bring no justice to the victims or predators, but only injustice to Rabbi Lamm.

That does not mean we are free to leave this issue behind, though. This story is much larger than a high school hallway some thirty years ago. Many people—from within the community and without—are examining very closely how our university deals with these allegations. We are a Jewish institution and, what's more, an Orthodox one too. And people will look to us to determine whether a modern religious community can handle this kind of difficult situation.

The question is, what will they find—will they see just another closed religious community looking to cover up abuse? And, perhaps, it might best serve us to ask ourselves a similar question: are we just another closed religious community looking to cover up abuse?

We claim to be a modern, worldly community, up to par with—if not beyond—the secular world in dealing with circumstances that challenge our moral, ethical, and humanitarian character. And it is my fervent hope that we are not lying to ourselves.

And thus, regardless of how the university chooses to deal with the allegations in an immediate sense, there is no doubt that a much broader and deeper soul searching is at hand. Much has changed since the early eighties at YU; cultures have come and gone and new policies have been set in place. But remnants of the past remain and must be uprooted.

Does our university fire administrators who do not perform properly but are well-connected? Is Yeshiva transparent about its mistakes, taking responsibility and moving forward when at fault, or does it attempt to hide its blunders? Does YU's administration follow the natural instinct to protect the name of its institution or does it recognize that the students and other members of the community are far more important? Do our community's deep, religious beliefs motivate it to protect the disadvantaged, the poor, and the innocent or to protect the scholarly, the rabbinic, the community leader?

So far Yeshiva has approached this "scandal" in a reactive fashion. It has reacted in the media and internally, and the calls to fire Rabbi Lamm ask only for a more radical and tangible reaction—but a reaction nonetheless. It appears, however, that a shift of perspective is necessary.

We can never change the past. We can apologize, and investigate, and fire all the administrators we'd like, but nothing can undo what has already been done; grown men are left with traumatic high school memories and community leaders are marked with a blemish that will never leave them.

What we can do, though, is look forward.

Instead of looking only to the past and asking how we can react to it, we must use this situation as an occasion to be proactive. These times confront us with difficult challenges, but they also present us with important opportunities. We are now faced with the blatant truth that abuse has existed in our community, and likely still does. What are we doing to change that? What institutions are in place to protect our children? How can we improve what we already have? What ideas and organizations have yet to even be conceived?

As the flagship institution of the Modern Orthodox community, Yeshiva University should be on the forefront of these initiatives. Yeshiva is a place of vision. It is guided by a dedication to Torah and profound values. And its significant infrastructure and community networks provide it with far-reaching capabilities in influencing Orthodox communities across America. Regardless of the initiatives that already exist, there is always more to be done; I hope Yeshiva sees that as an opportunity to serve our community.



## Jewish Studies, cont.

A number of factors necessitated the creation of the committee. Citing a difficult academic combination in both the Yeshiva morning program and afternoon Jewish Studies requirements, Schiffman said that “students have requirements which in three years are crazy to be able to complete, and this is where the problem comes up. [...] We want to see if we can do a better job.” In addition, and of major concern to the university, the rigorous requirements are a consistent source of angst for undergraduate applicants. Schiffman further explained, “There are very large numbers of students who go to other colleges that would fit in here perfectly, but they feel it’s too difficult.”

Fundamentally, the committee hopes to redefine the Academic Jewish Studies program to fit the lives of busy YU students, while still complementing their Judaic growth with key courses. “I think one of the problems so far has been that we haven’t offered the students what will excite them, and we haven’t offered them enough variety,” Schiffman noted. Continuing, Schiffman floated the possible inclusion of topical Bible courses in contrast to the current, often more pointed courses, as one possible solution.

Interestingly, Dean Berger currently heads a parallel committee within the Jewish Studies Department that will focus more closely on the Academic Jewish Studies curriculum within the courses themselves. Berger refused to comment for this article.

On the logistical side, the committee is examining two issues of contention within Academic Jewish Studies – the number of requirements and the scheduling of the courses. Some changes have already been made to the morning program like the implementation of an early Hebrew once a week. While one option being discussed would be to couple Academic Jewish Studies courses with the different morning programs, many object to the idea. “It would encroach on morning *seider* time, and that can only have a ripple effect,” Rabbi Schwartz explained. Rabbi Reiss voiced a simi-

lar opinion, saying that “YP and the three-hour *seider* are sacred.”

Other students have cited specific issues with the Bible requirement, alleging that particular Bible professors teach and or promote *kefirah* (heresy). Rabbi Ezra Schwartz denied that this was a concern of the committee, pointing out that the committee is working on much broader issues than specific curricula or syllabi within the courses themselves. “The student body is diverse – there will always be students who call it *kefirah*, and there will always be students on the other side who say that the Bible courses are not academic enough.”

The fledgling committee has met twice already, first to set up a structure and plan ahead, and then to establish measurable goals. In terms of student input, the committee is currently utilizing data obtained in a recent survey by the university’s Institutional Research department. Moving forward, the committee hopes to have direct student participation through student leaders, as well as a broader student perspective that will most likely involve written recommendations by students.

The formation of this committee reflects other broad changes within YU. The “IBC Honors Program,” a new initiative being discussed by members of the Isaac Breuer College of Hebraic Studies and the Jewish Studies administration as a whole, serves as one potential model for the committee. In speaking about the IBC Honors program, Noah Small (YC ’15), a sophomore who piloted the program, echoed the committee’s concerns: “Learning should be meaningful. So many people go through all these years in YU and never get to learn topics that interest them.”

Going forward, the committee faces similar challenges in creating a program that – above all – students want to be a part of. The committee is still in its infancy, and much remains to be seen in terms of its effectiveness at solving this age-old issue. Ultimately the committee hopes to further refine the balance of *Torah u’Madda* that defines Yeshiva University.

## Accreditation, cont.

was recently approved by the Board of Trustees that outlines a plan to address this concern. Additionally, YU has formed a Faculty Council elected by members of the faculty with representatives from all of the Manhattan Campuses that should help ensure proper faculty participation in the progression of curricula.

Lastly, the MSCHE has expressed their concern regarding student assessment, the 14<sup>th</sup> standard of the MSCHE. The agency has determined that it could not reasonably conclude whether students are learning what the University desires them to learn. As such, YU is in the process of studying current trends in

student assessment and could be implementing some changes in order to verify whether students are meeting university standards of achievement and scholarship.

YU is required to submit a monitoring report on September 1, 2013, which will discuss how they have addressed the warnings issued by the MSCHE. Dr. Schiffman, emphasized however, that the administration views the report as a resounding success. “The MSCHE is merely assisting the university in evolving to face the challenges inherent in remaining a premium university. The fact is that we are accredited and will be for the whole process.”



# YU Chanukah Concert Overwhelming Success

BY ALEX PORCELAIN

On the evening of December 13<sup>th</sup>, the sixth night of Chanukah, the Wilf Campus was bursting with excitement for Yeshiva University’s annual Chanukah concert. Students, alumni, families, and hoards of teenage girls from across the tri-state area flocked to Lampion Auditorium to welcome this year’s headline performers, Edon and Shalshelles. Unlike some of the previous years’ concerts, 2012’s event was completely sold out, and the packed-house atmosphere was palpable throughout the show. Following Neshoma Orchestra’s instrumental introduction, the crowd erupted in applause as the Y-Studs took the stage and pleasantly surprised attendees with their refined arrangements and heartfelt melodies. If there was any doubt about it, their Chanukah Concert performance proved that the Y-Studs have matured into a professional-sounding college capella group. Some new faces and all-star soloists have finally pushed the Y-Studs over the threshold to make them a serious, exciting and pleasant sounding group of performers.

The stage went dark after the Y-Stud’s second song, and chants of “*Eee-don! Eee-don! Eeee-don!*” reverberated throughout the hall. People were wildly anticipating the former AGT wonder-kid’s performance, and when a spotlight dramatically descended on Edon sitting beside his keyboard, you could hear nothing but shrieks. Edon’s performance was strong throughout the show, nearly flawless. Before the show, cynics were concerned Edon would not perform as well as he did on NBC’s hit TV show, *America’s Got Talent*, or that a deepened voice would impede his ability to sing and sound good. They were entirely wrong. What immersed instead from the evening was a more mature-sounding Edon, whose young adult voice increased in character and supremacy from this past summer’s “kiddy Edon”. He first rocked through David Guetta featuring Sia’s pop hit *Titanium*, then introduced Whitney Houston and Mariah Carey’s *When You Believe*, connecting the song’s lyrics to the message of Chanukah and the recent war in Israel. Before passing the stage off to Shalshelles, Edon belted out a fantastic rendition of Yosef Karduner’s *Shir*

*Lama’alot*. Everyone wanted more Edon, but Shalshelles evoked a surprisingly exciting response upon entrance.

Shalshelles’ performance was also outstanding. For their first set, Shalshelles sang a medley comprising of songs from both their earlier albums and their more recent Shalshelles IV and V. They began with their slow songs, but as the pace picked up crowds on both the men’s only and women’s only sides got up to dance, sing and sway. Complimented by an astonishing light display, Shalshelles’ songs were wrought with sincerity and an ounce of nostalgia. Shalshelles then invited Edon back on stage to join them in singing *Heyma* (which Edon soloed for in last year’s Shalshelles Junior 2 album) and the famous *Esah Einay*. It was magical. Shalshelles then bid Edon farewell to grant him the stage once again. Edon asked permission from the crowd to “pick up the pace” as he dazzled attendees with David Guetta and Usher’s *Without You* and Matisyahu’s Chanukah themed hit, *Miracle*.

The concert reached its pinnacle when the Y-Studs came back on stage to sing backup for Shalshelles in *Mi Von Siach*. The tear-jerking arrangement was outstanding, and provided

YU students and alumni with a great deal of *nachas* that fellow students were on stage performing so well. The concert’s final set was a *kumzits* style arrangement accompanied by the foremost Jewish guitarists, Ari Boiangiu and Aryeh Kuntsler. Though many attendees thought this was the last they would be seeing of Edon (some even left the venue for this reason), following the YSU President Yosef Hoffman and YCSA President Adam Neuman’s “thank you’s” Edon and Shalshelles joined forces one final time in an encore of *Na’ar Hayisi*.

Aside from some minor microphone malfunctions during Shalshelles’ performance, it is difficult to find a flaw in the evening’s events. The student councils on both campuses worked in tandem for months to organize, advertise and finalize the concert, and the student body is certainly appreciative of their efforts. The concert provided a fun, kosher and exciting venue for families and students to relish the spirit of Chanukah and glean inspiration from beautiful music performed by some of the most talented performers in the Jewish music scene.

**THE PACKED-HOUSE  
ATMOSPHERE  
WAS PALPABLE  
THROUGHOUT THE  
SHOW**



# VP Resigns, cont.

tion to Hezzy Jesin, Wilf Campus Director of the Office of Student Life on December 18. Siegel cited his involvement in the Toastmasters club as his reason for stepping down.

"I originally ran for student council so that I could better the student body," he explained, "but I decided that I could better serve the student community as a member of the Toastmasters board than as a student council leader."

"I had a lot of fun being on YSU," he added. "It was an amazing experience where I made a lot of friends; I highly recommend running for the position."

Toastmasters is a professional public speaking club that boasts more than 10,000 clubs and 200,000 members worldwide. Avi Persin founded the YU club earlier this year and recruited Moshe, who currently sits as the club's Vice President of Education.

Hoffman responded positively to Siegel's decision to leave his post at YSU. "It was the responsible decision to step down and allow someone more interested and dedicated to take the position," he explained.

The presidents of the other student councils voiced similar sentiments.

Adam Neuman, president of Yeshiva College Student Association said, "I respect Moshe's decision. I think it's honorable for him to realize that he could contribute more elsewhere. I give him credit for realizing he would better serve the student body in another position."

Gabi Weinberg, president of the Student Organization of Yeshiva (SOY) evaluated the situation succinctly. "We're sorry to see him go," he said, "but I think his decision is in both his best interest and the best interest of the student government. I'm very excited to see who will be the next person to join the student leadership."

Mr. Hoffman explains that Siegel was fulfilling the basic requirements in his role as vice president. He says that the Union oversees approximately forty clubs and that each of the council's four members are therefore responsible for supervising the functions of about ten clubs. Apparently Siegel performed this task satisfactorily.

When it came to planning and organizing the annual Chanukah Concert, however, it is not as clear that Siegel fulfilled his duty to the student body. The Chanukah concert is the biggest event run by the student councils, this year involving over 1,000 guests, budgeting tens of thousands of dollars, and featuring Jewish celebrity guests including Edon and Shalshales.

The concert officially falls under

the purview of YSU, and though the other councils are there to lend support, YSU is meant to carry the bulk of the load. It appears that this year though, YSU had difficulty planning the concert alone, in part due to Moshe's absence in the process.

About Siegel's involvement in planning the concert Mr. Hoffman said the following: "The Chanukah concert is our biggest event and he didn't have much to do with it."

Mr. Weinberg seconded this feeling. "The presidents meet about the Chanukah concert," he explained, and "we saw that the YSU board had issues in fulfilling its assigned tasks for an event that they mostly sponsor. It seems Moshe was not able to fulfill his duties because he was busy with other things."

Mr. Neuman put the situation in a broader perspective. "The responsibilities of student council members are far greater than only overseeing the clubs and our various Google documents," he explained. "It means taking initiative, looking for new projects, and dedicating your time, effort, and energy towards the student body."

Neuman then extrapolated for the future, issuing a warning to potential candidates. "If you're running for student council just to oversee the clubs, you shouldn't run."

According to Aaron Kor, Chief Justice of the student court, no official action was taken against Siegel. According to the student constitution, there are two formal methods of removing a member of student council: impeachment and official charges of negligence, incompetence, or malfeasance. Neither of these formal complaints was brought against Siegel.

Hoffman does say, however, that he approached Siegel personally to confront his absence from organizing the concert. "As President, I wanted to know what he was up to," Hoffman explains. "He met with Hezzy to discuss where his priorities lie and it seems he realized he is more dedicated to Toastmasters."

When asked whether he approached Mr. Jesin voluntarily or because Jesin requested to meet with him, Siegel declined to comment.

According to Mr. Solomon, the canvassing committee will be holding a specific election to fill the position of YSU Vice President before winter break.

As stated in the ystud email sent to the student body, "In order to be eligible to run you must declare your candidacy and be officially approved. You must e-mail [tzvi.solomon@mail.yu.edu](mailto:tzvi.solomon@mail.yu.edu) with your full name as it appears on your transcript and your YU ID by Monday December 31st."

# Internet Filter and YUDorm removed; ITS Plans to Re-Implement Fully Functioning Filter

By JOSEPH JARASHOW

After months of frustratingly slow, and at times non-existent, Internet connectivity in the Wilf Campus dormitories and confident assurances from the ITS department that the newly installed filter was not responsible for the struggles, ITS removed the filter two weeks ago when a glitch caused it to deny access to perfectly permissible websites.

On Sunday night December 2<sup>nd</sup>, students trying to access the Internet were prevented by the filter from connecting to their desired websites. The next day, ITS removed the filter and placed the dorms under the YUWireless network, which provides Wi-Fi to the rest of the campus. In an e-mail to students later in the week, Vice President and Chief Information Officer Marc Milstein described the nature of the problem and laid out the department's plan going forward. He explained that the most recent problem- YUDorm denying access to permissible websites- was "due to software on the filter which became corrupted."

With respect to the stubborn connectivity woes that bedeviled students all semester, Mr. Milstein conceded that the problems were related to the filter, but implied that the issues were peripheral to the filter itself and left open the possibility of the filter being re-installed. The e-mail stated that the recent issues "were related to the fact that the internet filter required specific user hardware/software configurations," but suggested that the issues could be rectified and the filter re-instated, pledging that "ITS is exploring other technologies to address Internet Filtering which minimizes impact to the student and the student devices."

Mr. Milstein confirmed these points to *The Commentator*, maintaining that "technically the filter was always functional." He attributed the connectivity issues to students "connecting to YUDorm after connecting to YUWireless and travelling around campus." He also confirmed that the "filtering design is being re-engineered," though the new design may not involve a network named YUDorm. In terms of a timetable for the new filtering device, the goal is for the software to be complete by the beginning of next year, but certain "critical

phrases" should be in place by next semester.

Despite assurances that the filter can be successfully re-integrated, the decision to re-implement it after months of aggravation has been met with skepticism by students. Michael Heino, (YC '13) who brought the issue to President Joel's attention at a town hall event, expressed surprise saying, "If there is even the slightest indication that replacing the filter will harm the bandwidth available for students to use at night, then it should not be replaced." YCSA President Adam Neuman, (YC '13) emphasizing the essential role Wi-Fi access plays in a student's education, echoed that sentiment, saying

## STUDENTS RETURNED FROM VACATION ONLY TO FIND THAT THE FRUSTRATING INTERNET WOES PERSISTED EVEN AFTER THE ITS DEPARTMENT HAD INCREASED THE BANDWIDTH CAPABILITIES OF YUDORM

the University "should not reinstall the filter until they are positive it will not disconnect users who are simply trying to finish their assignments."

The announcement this past spring that that the Internet in the dormitories would block access to pornographic content gave rise to a spirited debate, with some students extolling ridding the dorms of morally and *halakhically* objectionable material and others decrying the move as an intrusive invasion into the personal life of students. But the conversation regarding YUDorm no longer takes the form of differing opinions about its propriety, instead focusing on a question being asked, often with frustration and impatience, by nearly everyone: When will the Internet in the dorms finally work properly and allow for the smooth connectivity needed by students?

Just weeks into the semester, students approached Student Life Com-

mittee Co-Chairmen Eli Shavalian (YC '14) and Mordechai Czarka (YC '13) to express their frustration over not being able to connect to YUDorm. Shavalian and Czarka relayed the students' concerns to YU's Information Technology Services Department (ITS), headed by Milstein. The connectivity issues, according to the Student Life Committee, were originally diagnosed by ITS as an underestimation of the bandwidth that the dorms required to meet the needs of student residents. Simply adding bandwidth, the department supposed, would solve the connectivity issues and allow students to access the internet. According to the Student Life Committee, the bandwidth increases were implemented before Sukkot break in October.

But students returned from vacation only to find that the frustrating internet woes persisted even after the ITS department had increased the bandwidth capabilities of YUDorm. After learning that the previous steps had not rectified the connectivity challenges, the Student Life Committee again met with ITS to re-express the concerns of students. ITS then began searching for the source of the problems and considered the possibility that the filter was obstructing connectivity. But after conducting a series of evaluations, ITS ruled out the filter as the source of the problems, a point that it emphasized in an e-mail sent to students on November 25<sup>th</sup>.

In that same e-mail, signed by Marc Spear, Senior Director of Student Life, and Sean Cottman, Director of Network Services and Information Security, however, students were informed that an "understanding of the underlying problem" and a "permanent solution" were yet to be achieved.

Shavalian, Czarka, and the rest of the Student Life Committee are extremely sensitive to these concerns but they stressed that ITS is working diligently to restore connectivity. "We have been in constant communication with ITS and they're working on a solution to this issue," said Shavalian. As a testament to the diligent efforts of ITS, he noted that "they've been in the offices until 1 AM, monitoring the issue. They're not just putting in 9 to 5." Czarka stressed that this issue is important to them and "it's not just being brushed under the table."





## Biology, cont.

cial woes, but further reductions were sought. The Dean's office met with each department to see how more money could be saved without compromising the quality of education at the university.

After meeting with the Biology department heads, the Dean's office realized that too many courses were being offered over a spread out period of time, and that the way classes were offered required revision. The first step the Dean's office took was to place courses in various time slots so as to ensure that there is no conflict in the arrangement of important classes.

The new "grid" will make scheduling different classes easier. Core courses will be offered at specific times so that they won't conflict with other classes that students have to take. For example, the new core requirement classes are offered at a specific time slot so as not to conflict with First Year Writing classes.

Additionally, instead of offering many sections of the same electives and advanced classes, the Biology department has condensed those classes into just a few sections, and removed specific electives from just this upcoming spring semester. "We realized that if we offer a rotational basis of courses, instead of giving 13 major electives, if you offer approximately 4 or 5 or 6, then that is more than enough," Dean Eichler explained. "Students need to know that they now have to plan a little better. They have to know that if they plan to take this elective, it is offered every spring, but not in the fall and spring. If it's an elective that's highly specialized, maybe it'll be offered every third semester."

For advanced electives, the Dean's office did a study with the department chairs to see how many students take these specialized classes every semester, and how many students still needed to complete these classes. "A couple of electives have been cancelled. We've looked at enrollments in all the electives students have been taking for the past three years and we normally offer 8 or 9 electives, and several of them have very low enrollment, some of them less than seven, some of them less than five," Dean Viswanathan says. Realizing that too many specialized electives were being offered and that students would not be limited by taking them every other semester, the Dean's office took some electives out of the upcoming semester's schedule. Accordingly, the reduction of class offerings has resulted in fewer adjunct hires by the university.

Mordechai Smith (YC '14), president of the Yeshiva University Student Medical Ethics Society and Biology Majors Board, said "they cut out some of the classes, which is concerning... The Biology major is one of the largest majors at YU, if not the largest, and the department has one of the worst students-to-teacher ratios, so it's stressed as it is. And then you cut out more classes and people are forced into corners, taking classes that they just don't want to take." Biology major Aaron Akhavan (YC '16) expressed similar sentiments. He said, "I'm disappointed that they're cutting courses out from the Biology department. Now I'm going to have a harder time scheduling, because there aren't enough spots and classes."

With the economic difficulties facing the institution, the Dean's office has unfortunately been forced to make and execute tough decisions to keep YC's course offerings up to its high standards. Although students will now be faced with the task of creating schedules from a more limited selection of courses, they shouldn't be alarmed.

"We are not eliminating courses; we are just reducing the frequency at which they are offered," Dean Eichler said. "I don't think students are academically going to lose out. It just means that departments can't offer the same schedule they did last year."

## Rubin Shul Needs a Makeover

By GAVI BROWN

The interior designers of the Beren Campus knew that the most visible part of the university should look formal, sleek and polished. 245 and 215 Lexington, the former with variable tinted glass curtain walls, the latter encrusted with faux Jerusalem stone and wooden paneling, are both dignified meeting spaces befitting our women's division. The same can't be said for the men's campus.

Yeshiva University's uptown guests are faced with a rather unpleasant sight. Rubin Shul, the location of an event virtually every night of the week is disheveled and unimpressive, to say the least. Bookshelves are strewn with all manner of accumulated textbooks, migrated *seforim*, and unused Judaica. The blinds are continuously closed, in opposition of the *Mishna Berurah's* diktat to have a window open to the sky during prayer services (*Hilchot Tefillah*, OC 90:8). Old photocopies of various *shiurim* are stashed on the shelves behind the impromptu *mechitza*. *Hefker* coats accumulate dust on the coat rack outside. Chipped folding tables add to the general sense of disorder. A big cleanup would go a long way in making Rubin a respectable venue and *makom tefillah* (place of prayer). Simply reshelving books, however, wouldn't change Rubin's rather grim and unalluring appearance.

Miscellaneous objects aside, Rubin Shul is in dire need of a serious cosmetic makeover. Freight-train sized commercial air conditioners sit right outside the windows forming a colossal eyesore and, oddly an earsore, as an eerie whistle can be heard whenever the doors are closed. The *Mashiv HaRuach* sign

sits awkwardly behind the podium when the room is used for events. The plastic-wrapped *bimah* and *amud* covers belong in the Portokalos family's living room from *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*, while the chairs, comfortable as they are, belong to the gym's warm up bench. Rows of aseptic fluorescent lights hang from a claustrophobically low ceiling. The dark brown Costco *Aron Kodesh*, placed off-center and blocking a significant portion of the light, looks like an afterthought. It's no wonder parents and visiting students are rarely shown the room.

Bigger aesthetic changes are needed. A half-baked facelift would do little to change the place; a serious investment is required. Recognizing Modern Orthodoxy's changing aesthetic tastes, a new *Aron* would give the shul (and indeed Rubin Hall) a more contemporary look. A new *Bimah*, matching *amudim*, plaques, and bookcases would compliment and further refine the room. New carpets and paint would complete the renovation. Oh, and stained glass windows would be nice.

Yeshiva has a history of doing some outstanding renovations. The fifth floor of Belfer Hall, the basement of Furst Hall, and Morgenstern Residence Lounge are a few outstanding examples. President Richard Joel has placed an emphasis on renewing the most visible and active locations on campus: Nagel Bagel and the Heights Lounge, for instance. Rubin is used for a number of formal and impromptu events daily. From *shacharit* and *maariv minyanim* to university and yeshiva events, Rubin Shul hosts hundreds of students, faculty members, and outside visitors. Let's make it a priority. Let's make it a place we can show off as a meeting venue and synagogue. Let's refine Rubin.



Rubin Shul on a good day. Although it can be made to look somewhat orderly, it is still in major need of renovation.





# When Ignorance is Rational, Democracy Suffers

A Students for Liberty Column

By SHMUEL LAMM

The presidential election has concluded. The country is settling down and shifting its focus. Voting is over. The people have chosen, and so the democratic process moves on.

But did it work?

Does the democratic process work efficiently for America or any other country? This assumed efficiency is, after all, one of its central justifications. Through voting, the reasoning goes, society expresses its collective will in order to achieve what it (or at least the majority) considers the “best” result. This assumption of representation partially explains why we place so much emphasis on election outcomes, or other public forums, and grant them great moral weight. It is hard to object when “the people have spoken” or “our voices have been heard.” But though our natural inclination favors the democratic system, a closer look reveals numerous deep flaws.

What is one such flaw? People are rational. They make decisions by evaluating their options and making a cost-benefit analysis. And this reality serves as a colossal but irreducible obstacle, because a person’s rationality can easily lead him to cast an uninformed ballot. Indeed, we might say that the election for U.S. President is analogous to the all-important race for *YU class* President. Most individuals have little incentive to thoroughly explore the issues and formulate informed views. Political scientists call this problem *rational ignorance*, and it manifests all around us.

Insofar as a democratic process aims to foster the majority’s version of the good, then it requires, at the very least, informed, rational, and perceptive voters. The *number* of voters is important, but not enough to produce the positive results we seek. No matter how many people vote, the process falls apart if people have no idea what positions actually promote their worldview, who (if anyone) most embodies their position, and which positions are feasible in their economic and political environment. Informed voting, however, demands a high threshold of knowledge in politics, economics, ethics, and logic. Even more so, this demands a titanic devotion of time. Every country is deviously complex, and there are thousands upon thousands of conflicting, constantly shifting relevant laws, academic studies, news reports, treatises on different political topics, etc. that a person might need in order to personally determine the country’s various “best courses of action.” How much of

that literature has anybody read?

The central problem is this: voters are ignorant. Painfully ignorant. Studies by George Mason University Law Professor Dr. Ilya Somin and University College London Professor Dr. Mark Pennington show that when polled, only 37 percent of voters claimed to “understand” the Obama healthcare bill, only 25 percent properly identified the Cap and Trade Bill with environmental regulation, and less than 50 percent successfully named all three branches of government. Get this: 60 percent of people could not even name their own Senators let alone state any of their political positions. Most voters seem to have but a cursory knowledge of politics. How many voters at YU have ever scanned the text of a single major bill in Congress? These numbers merely hint at an informational void in our society.

If you are one of those who cannot name your own Senator, failed to identify the Cap and Trade Bill, or have not read any of the thousands of relevant documents alluded to above, do not worry. This does not imply you are irresponsible or in some other way immoral. It may, however, indicate that you are rational.

How is this rational? Is it not in society’s best interests to arrive at the ideal course of action? Do the ignorant not care about their country, or not see themselves as part of society? None of the above. The reason a person may not bother to brush up on his political knowledge is because the choice to devote that time is made on the individual, personal level. In order to illustrate the significance of this reality, consider driving a car. When we decide to drive our cars, seldom do we often stop and think, “Hey, maybe I should stop driving right now so that there are fewer traffic jams, which benefits society.” This is because that individual action would have virtually no impact on the traffic jams in question. No one could care less if you left the road. Worse, still, if you do decide to leave the road, you may incur upon yourself a larger cost. Think of all the sacrificed personal productivity, convenience, or time with family. Thus, despite the *potential* social benefit if a large number of people decide to stop driving (or drive only at certain times), most rational human beings will stay in their lanes and settle for trying to cut everybody else off. In this case, each individual makes a rational choice based on a perfectly legitimate cost-benefit analysis. To where does this rational choice lead them? The jams.

This same concept of individual rational

decision-making applies to voting. Voters possess little incentive to acquire the empirical knowledge necessary for informed voting. Not only does an individual ballot possess a mere one in sixty million chance to decide a national election (and your vote is still relatively insignificant in more local elections), but should a person fail to vote, the government continues to affect him the same as if he participated. The government functions as a public good in that its services remain non-exclusionary, and no single person changes the distribution of services through his vote. This

## THE PHENOMENON OF RATIONAL IGNORANCE MAY CAUTION AGAINST RELYING TOO HEAVILY ON THE MECHANISMS OF DEMOCRACY TO REPRESENT THE PEOPLE.

mirrors the traffic jam case, where there exists little incentive to leave the road. It seems rational, then, for most people to skimp on their political self-education.

Imagine the reaction if you were to ask a YU student to make an informed vote for YU class president. He would probably scoff in your face. In order to be an informed voter, he would have to carefully consider his concerns at YU, the response he desires, and the way he wants it accomplished. Then he would have to identify the most qualified, competent, motivated, and intelligent candidate. Ideally, he has spoken to all the candidates personally or has at least heard them speak publicly about their sought positions. But, of course, our YU student will not do any of this. Even though it may not take too significant of an effort, students are still rational, and realize they can spend their time more effectively elsewhere. Unfortunately, this means that the election can be won simply based on popularity or effective advertising. Could we say that each student is represented in the resulting outcome? For practical democratic purposes, yes. But in the sense that it actually represents the active wills of those ‘represented’? Less so.

A naysayer might object to these concerns based on the perceived uses of ideology. According to him, voters can use ideologies – or general systems of belief – as shortcuts to cast representative votes. Examples of this include party identification (do you always vote for a certain political party?) or trust invested in a specific person or institution (do you place more trust in a certain news station, or a particular political figure?). As Dr. Ilya Somin argues, however, this shortcut fails to pass muster. Without a preexisting grasp of the relevant information, how can a voter make an informed choice in who/what to trust in the first place? On most political issues there are hordes of “experts” fiercely debating opposing views. Even more so, the voter would have to be able to monitor the chosen expert’s continuing competence, as well as the past success of his guidance. Choosing the wrong expert may lead a person to advocate for destructive policies across the political board! Thus, the “shortcut” is not much of a shortcut at all. Voters have little incentive, due to the enormous time investments required, to build the knowledge necessary to develop informed positions on the desired goals and methods of the government. Thus, they may promote unrealistic, uninformed, or harmful policies.

Just as in the case of traffic jams, where the individually innocuous decisions of drivers combine to undermine the efficiency of transportation, the widespread ignorance of voters combines to undermine the functioning of democracies. Thus, a democracy is prone to fail when it attempts to accurately reflect the informed will of the people, with the problem only growing as government expands both in size and complexity. The potential problem is exacerbated if the power and responsibility of voters is increased, as in full-blown deliberative democracies.

That America voted in the last election does not necessarily mean that “the people have spoken” or “our voices have been heard.” The phenomenon of rational ignorance may caution against relying too heavily on the mechanisms of democracy to represent the people.

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# The “Holiday” Season

By DANIEL ATWOOD

There is no time of year that I feel the tension of being an American Jew more than December, the so-called “holiday season.” On the one hand, I think it is great that I live in a country that publicly marks the holidays of all religions. The shift of the standard American greeting in December from “Merry Christmas” to “Happy Holidays” is significant. On the other hand, I am a bit apprehensive of American culture lumping together its holiday, Christmas, and my holiday, Chanukah, as if there is no difference between them, as if they are merely both American holidays.

I think it is safe to say that in the span of Jewish history, no state has been as accepting of Judaism as the United States. The United States embodies a society that embraces all religions. All citizens are not only allowed, but even encouraged, to publicly practice their religion the way they want, without any coercion from either state or religious leaders. The United States model of religious freedom contrasts sharply with the European (or specifically French) model of the “neutral public square.” In those societies, “freedom of religion” means freedom from religion—as burqas and kippot are both forbidden in public (whether de facto or de jure). I am proud of the fact that I live in the country where Christians, Muslims, Jews, and others can all openly and safely practice their religion.

The time of year from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day had been dubbed the “holiday season.” “The holiday season” is not limited to Christian holidays—Chanukah has been fully incorporated into the holiday season (along with Kwanza). At the state level, the President of the United States holds a candle lighting ceremony every night of Chanukah. Most public buildings have Menorahs in front of them, along with the traditional Christmas tree. On a more bourgeois level, the standard American greeting is “Happy Holidays,” while “Merry Christmas” is rarely heard these days. The office holiday party always includes latkes. Though it was not always this way, having seen this development evolve within my lifetime, this accepting nature of America and Americans is none other than a blessing from God.

I also happen to love the “holiday season.” Walk around

Rockefeller Center and Times Square in December and you can sense an aura of joy—people seem happier. Everyone greets you with a smile. Lights and decorations enliven the streets. This time of year is one of the many reasons I love being an American.

However, these feelings also make me somewhat uneasy. Chanukah is mine. It is not another American holiday. It is not just another link in the “holiday season.” Though it is certainly significant that the president lights a Menorah, it is somewhat concerning on a religious level. Chanukah is not meant to be a national holiday. Christmas, the holiest day of the year in Christianity, has become secularized. Most Americans probably associate Christmas with shopping, family dinners, and vacation time. Americans do not understand why Jews do not celebrate Christmas—“isn’t it just a celebration of the season?” I do not want Chanukah suffering the same fate as Christmas suffered. The religious overtones to American holidays seem to have all but disappeared. I can’t sit by and watch Chanukah become another American secular holiday.

My objections to Chanukah’s incorporation run deeper than its secularization. I feel as if Chanukah is being ornamented within American culture, making Judaism into more of a relic than the real, lively entity that is today. It is as if society is saying to Jews, “Oh look, you have a holiday in December also! Let’s all celebrate it together!” The Menorah is not a ‘toy,’ it’s not something just anyone can light. Chanukah contains profound meaning in the religious-historical context of the Jewish people—simply put, it is not something we can all celebrate together.

To go one step further, I also have a theological concern. Chanukah and Christmas are radically different holidays, commemorating two seminal events in the histories of two very different peoples. Chanukah highlights the uniqueness of the Jewish people—we won the war, despite our numbers; God let the oil burn for eight days, despite the fact that there only was enough for one day. Christmas, on the other hand, highlights the birth of a religion that rejected the idea of the Jewish people being unique. Jesus preached the importance of moral and ethical principles over Mitzvot—the commandments and performances that make us separate from the other nations. Christianity is universalistic; Judaism is more particular, dare I

say insular. Despite the fact that it may not be a coincidence that both holidays fall out near the winter solstice (historians believe Jesus was born in July and the sources for Chanukah are ambiguous at best, notwithstanding the fact that the 25<sup>th</sup> of Kislev had special meaning from the days of the dedication of the Mishkan), fundamentally speaking, the holidays represent two radically different theological approaches—one emphasizing universal morality, the other emphasizing the importance of particularistic ritual.

We all should certainly be thankful that we live in one of the few countries in human history that not only tolerates but embraces multiple religions—including Judaism. However, we must also keep in mind that we are different. Our holidays are not their holidays. Our path is not their path.



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## Why Government in Spanish Actually Hurts Hispanics

By AKIVA BERGER

Over the last fifty years, our government has attempted to, in the name of tolerance, multiculturalism, and empathy, print as many things as it can in Spanish as well as English. Subway signs, voting ballots, Medicaid forms, public school posters, you name it. What could be more compassionate to a large population of immigrants who aren't familiar with English? Why should society discriminate against other cultures and ethnicities? English isn't even this country's official language! This view, in the name of benevolence, has actually done more harm to the Hispanic community than good.

While tutoring at I.S. 143 down the street from YU, I have observed firsthand a school which executes this viewpoint. Nearly all the teachers and administrators are bilingual, and most official documents are also printed in Spanish. In turn, the children at the school realize that they do not really need anything more than a coarse English to get by. Hallway monitors will frequently revert to Spanish when disciplining a student. Children feel no need to help their parents adjust to English when the parents can navigate the entire school system in their mother tongue.

And the results show for themselves. The kids I tutor speak only an "urban English," and cannot aptly express many concepts in the basic language our society uses to function. Sometimes I have to ask a student to repeat something due to my inability to understand him. This past week, I had a seventh grader who spoke no English, despite having been in the school for years. We have come to expect it, but that doesn't make it acceptable.

Nowadays, for better or for worse, our society is constructed in a way that to be financially 'successful,' one must be able to speak a reputable English. Being able to converse only in a crude form of the language will get a person only so far. This may be unfortunate, but that's just the way it is.

Classically, new immigrants have surmounted this problem within a couple of generations. The immigrant parents would know absolutely no English, but the children would be forced to learn it in school, since that's all they would hear and be expected to use. Eventually, after one generation, nearly everyone from that minority group would speak perfectly fine English, indistinguishable from any other American's.

Jews from Europe weren't given government documents in Yiddish, nor were there German teachers to teach the children of German immigrants. No immigrant group was favored. All were expected to learn English within a couple of generations, and thereby assimilate into American society well enough to slowly ascend the rungs of the economic ladder. Moreover, once this occurred, the group's minority status became less and less significant. This is currently

happening with Asian and Indian immigrants, both of whom have attained incredible success without much governmental accommodation to their respective languages. (For example, when I took a physics course at another university over a summer, none of the second-generation Asian or Indian students had any discernible accent whatsoever.)

But in the name of "multiculturalism," the government has made it extremely easy to navigate society using only Spanish. The result: the perpetuation of an "under-class" in which immigrant families lack economic mobility largely due to a cultural and linguistic disconnect. Instead, the children of these immigrants identify less with America than with their parents' homeland. Without the tool of language, there is little hope that they will be able to truly emerge from their poorer communities and economically flourish. Only 40 percent of all children today born into the lowest income quintile ever rise above it. Despite affirmative action, the percentage of Latinos who go on to college continues to lag behind other minorities. Unfortunately, when I asked my tutoring kids what they want to do when they grow up, most just wanted to stay in the area and work menial jobs.

Enabling multiple generations to do this has also fostered a society where everyone else must learn Spanish to accommodate this large group. While I am not against being bilingual, there are many societal challenges that arise when multiple generations of immigrants continue to lack basic familiarity with English. The dental clinic I volunteered in has to pay for a full-time Spanish translator because so many of its patients cannot understand any English. Of course, immigrants themselves cannot be expected to quickly pick up a language, especially those who come here at older ages. However, when children and grandchildren face the same tall obstacles their parents and grandparents did, we know something is wrong with our system.

Many of these ideas we are all aware of but are too afraid to talk about, due to political correctness and the like. But it is precisely because I care about each and every immigrant that I want to see them all become wildly successful Americans. On the surface, the government ceasing to offer anything in Spanish may sound draconian and intolerant. However, when one truly examines the impact of these policies, it is not surprising that Spanish in the governmental sphere has only kept the Latino community isolated and economically disadvantaged. Reverting back to an English-only government (maybe even declaring it the official language) will have an initial sting, but will ultimately do wonders for the Latino population in the coming decades. Economic mobility in this country depends largely on acquired skills of language and communication, and pressing the Latino community to embrace English will unlock opportunities seldom realized hitherto.

## How YU Left Me Estranged from Torah

By IZZY FRIEDMAN

I have a confession to make. Looking back on two and a half years at YU, I feel more distant from Torah than when I arrived. I left yeshiva in Eretz Yisrael ready and excited for what YU offered: *shiur* in the morning, *sefer* in the evening, more Roshei Yeshiva than you could count on your fingers (and toes!).

I remember my first 8:30 minyan. It was crowded and felt like a real *tzibbur*. I remember my first *sefer*, it was full of energy. That first *shiur* was awe-inspiring. But learning slowly started to unravel as I got deeper in the semester. *Sefer* felt like a burden, not an opportunity. *Shiur* got bogged down in so much *lamdanus* (maybe even *pilpul*) that I eventually threw up my hands and switched.

For the next four semesters, I switched in and out of *shiurim*. Some rabbis were kind and inviting. Some were like helicopter parents, wanting to know everything about my life that it started to feel uncomfortable. I bounced around BMP until I witnessed a rabbi yell at a student for advocating for rights for Palestinians and then watched as the rabbi kicked the student out of the class for not wearing a kippah. What they say about a "wide variety" of opinions amongst the Roshei Yeshiva seemed in reality to be a sliding scale of homophobia, anti-Arabism, and anti-intellectualism.

It was difficult finding a *shiur* that was right for me. I never wanted to go to IBC because, like most YP guys, I felt it was unbecoming for a student of a Hesder yeshiva

length of my *shemonah esrei* and the length of my *tzitzis*. I felt judged for the stripes on my button down shirt and not the content of my character. On Shabbat, I felt judged for not wearing a suit to minyan or not singing in communal meals. Eventually I stopped going, preferring to don Tefillin in the quiet confines of my dorm room than in the impersonal minyan downstairs. Shabbatot were harder to escape from. When in-town-ers leave YU, they seem to want to leave everything behind. I rarely got invited out for a Shabbat.

I relished at the opportunity to visit my yeshiva friends in Brandeis or Penn or the "Vegas" of YU: the University of Maryland. There the rabbis were "normal," nuanced, maybe even fun. People were happy to share their thoughts and feelings with the Rabbis because there weren't consequences for admitting to caving into the social pressures of a college life. People were happy to go to minyan because minyan felt like a community, not a factory. There was a real Shabbat community and even people to greet you at the door, welcoming you into the community. Shabbat greeters? That would be unheard of in YU.

Eventually, I found my Jewish studies professors to be greater role models than my Roshei Yeshiva. They were Jews in the real world, not products of an MTA-YU-RIETS education. They went to secular college and understood the challenges. They didn't judge me for the questions I brought up in class. They never hurled "Kofer" or "Apikores" at a challenge. They were enthusiastic to discuss ideas about Mesorah, excited to point me to a book or article, and

**TENS, MAYBE EVEN HUNDREDS OF STUDENTS FEEL FAR FROM TORAH, NOT BECAUSE OF TIME COMMITMENTS, BUT BECAUSE THE YESHIVA NO LONGER SPEAKS TO THEM.**

to switch into a "watered down" program, never mind the mark it would put on my shidduch resume. I switched around a lot until I settled on an "Ir Miklat Shiur." We all know they exist. But I switched in not because the rigors of college or because endless seasons of "How I Met Your Mother" ate away at my time, but because the rabbi came, gave *shiur*, and left without political or religious insensitivity, without a creepy investment in his students, and without making a face if I chose to wear a T-shirt. He was happy to see me there and, for the next year, I was happier to be there.

Needless to say, the *shiur* didn't exactly inspire me learn more or take on more *mitzvot*. It asked me for a minimum and I responded in kind. I never went to a *mashgiach* and never talked to someone in RIETS for fear of being marked, if not on paper, then in the eyes of the Yeshiva as a student unfit to learn and unsuitable for whichever *shiur* I was currently in.

It wasn't just *shiur* that turned me away from Torah. In minyan, I felt judged for the

happy to discuss politics without telling me what to believe. I found in my Jewish history and Bible professors Jews who were intellectual and *frum*, sensitive and non-judgmental.

Could I have gone to more shacharises in my time in YU? Tried out more night *shiurim*? Found a more "appropriate" *shiur*? Probably, but I feared that every time I went, I would simply be even more turned off from Torah as a result. The *sichos mussar* that I went to were full of fire-and-brimstone and didn't at all speak to a student in college with college difficulties. The various RIETS Yeshiva-wide meetings included the same stale speeches. Every minyan I tried was full of strangers hurrying through davening.

I don't think it's just me who feels this way. Tens, maybe even hundreds of students feel far from Torah, not because of time commitments, but because the Yeshiva no longer speaks to them. It speaks over them. It speaks under them. It speaks for them.



# 2012 Year in Review: Hail to the Chief!

BY AARON KOR

June of 2012 was a suspenseful time in America. The U.S. Supreme Court was to issue its ruling on the case of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, popularly known as "Obamacare," and the stakes could not have been higher. At the center of the case lay the disputed constitutionality of the bill's key provision, the individual mandate, which would require most Americans without health coverage to purchase minimal private health insurance or else pay a "shared responsibility payment" to the Federal Government. If the justices were to decide that the individual mandate was constitutional, the Affordable Care Act would remain the law of the land, and President Obama would be that much closer to reelection. If they were to rule that the individual mandate was unconstitutional, however, President Obama's signature legislation would be finished, and Mitt Romney would be better equipped to win the upcoming presidential election.

The latter outcome certainly seemed likely. It was a simple numbers game. Of the nine justices now on the bench, five are more judicially conservative and four are more liberal--a probable majority voting to strike down the mandate. But that's not what happened. The ruling wound up being a 5-4 vote in favor of the individual mandate's constitutionality with one of the conservative justices siding with the four liberals. Who was the defector? The Chief Justice, John Roberts.

People were stunned. Appointed by President Bush in 2005, Chief Justice Roberts was known for his strong conservative judicial philosophy. Yet here he was effectively upholding the Affordable Care Act, a law utterly deplored by the Right. Confused and angered, many conservatives quickly went on the attack. Some labeled the Chief "narcissistic" and a "coward." Others questioned his motives, asserting that he either caved in to left wing pressure, or made his decision for political gain. To them, he disgraced his judicial legacy, as well as the Supreme Court's.

After reading the Court's opinion, however, I could not have disagreed more. I not only concurred with the Chief Justice--I was inspired by him. I viewed him as the type of judge we need in our judicial system, the type of public servant we need in our public sector. As 2012 reaches an end, I would like to revisit Chief Justice Roberts' decision on the individual mandate, for it stands in my mind as one of the monumental events of the year in politics and deserves recognition as such.

To appreciate the decision, though, it's important to bear in mind that our federal government "is one of enumerated powers," as Chief Justice Marshall wrote in 1819. It does not retain the power to enact whatever laws it wishes--no matter how reasonable or necessary--but may perform only those functions enumerated to it by the Constitution. The states, however, are different. Unless explicitly prohibited by the Constitution, they do not require constitutional permission to act, and thus perform numerous functions otherwise prohibited to the federal government. This is the federalist system on which America was founded, one of its purposes being to secure the peoples' freedom by limiting the federal government's authority and granting power to the States; local governments that would be more responsive and accountable than some far off bureaucracy.

Given that background, it is understandable why many would feel that the Affordable Care Act's individual mandate would be unconstitutional: such federal power that could strongly influence people to purchase private health insurance would seem to contradict the very concept of federalism. But during the case's oral arguments, the government argued that the individual mandate is constitutional, essentially for either one of the following two reasons.

## THE COMMERCE CLAUSE

The first reason is that it is authorized under the Commerce Clause. In it, the Constitution states that Congress has the power to "regulate commerce," which the Supreme Court has

over time interpreted to include not strictly commerce, but also "those activities that substantially affect interstate commerce." The government asserted that the individual mandate is exactly that: the regulation of activities substantially affecting interstate commerce. Here the government was referring to a major cost-shifting problem in America's healthcare market.

Many people without health coverage end up visiting hospitals for treatment when they become ill. Because hospitals must legally treat them, they are often only partially compensated for their care if at all. This is where the cost-shifting begins. Hospitals wind up shifting the cost to healthcare insurers in the form of higher rates, and healthcare insurers in turn shift the cost to their insurance holders in the form of higher premiums. So much so that family healthcare premiums are estimated to have increased on average by over \$1,000 a year--indubitably an "effect on interstate commerce," as it is has become financially harder for many families to keep their health insurance.

This cost-shifting problem is what the individual mandate was partially designed to remedy. With more people suddenly

Along with the dissenting justices, Chief Justice Roberts agreed that such federal power that can largely force people to purchase an unwanted product would constitute an unconstitutional expansion of power. To quote Chief Justice Roberts again,

"People, for reasons of their own, often fail to do things that would be good for them or good for society. Those failures--joined with the similar failures of others--can readily have a substantial effect on interstate commerce. Under the government's logic, that authorizes Congress to use its commerce power to compel citizens to act as the government would have them act. This is not the country the Framers of our Constitution envisioned."

Therefore, the government's first argument was not accepted.

## PENALTY OR TAX?

If not the Commerce Clause, the government's second argument is that the individual mandate is constitutional under Congress's power to "lay and collect Taxes." Accordingly, the government contended that the Court should view the individual mandate not as a requirement to purchase health insurance, but that its "shared responsibility payment" was merely a tax on those who do not.

The dissenting justices didn't buy it, and for a simple reason: The payment is officially called a "penalty" and not a "tax." To them, the two terms are mutually exclusive, and constitutionally it matters how Congress labels legislation. A tax is "an enforced contribution to provide for the support of the government." A penalty "is an exaction imposed by statute as punishment for an unlawful act." The two are different, and to interpret a penalty as a tax would be to judicially rewrite the statute.

Chief Justice Roberts disagreed. Although the individual mandate is labeled a "penalty" and not a "tax," he believed that what matters constitutionally is not how a statute is labeled--but how it functions; if it functions like a tax and not a penalty, then constitutionally it is a tax. Where did he get this idea from? Many previous Supreme Court cases, along with a known judicial tradition: "if a statute has two possible meanings, one of which violates the Constitution, courts should adopt the meaning that does not do so," to quote Chief Justice Roberts.

That said, the Chief Justice found that the individual mandate does function more like a tax than a penalty: it would be paid along with one's tax returns to the IRS; it would not apply to those who neither pay federal income taxes due to their low income; like taxes, it would produce revenue for the government; and unlike the definition of a penalty given by the dissenting justices, it is not considered an unlawful payment if one would decide not to purchase health insurance. On the contrary, it is estimated that around four million people will probably choose to pay the tax rather than purchase health insurance. For this reason, Chief Justice

Roberts concluded that the individual mandate is constitutional under Congress's taxing power, and decided to join the liberal justices in upholding the individual mandate.

## HAIL TO THE CHIEF!

After reading Chief Justice Robert's opinion, I could not help but feel inspired. Here was a man as conservative as they come: aside for his judicial philosophy, his illustrious career spans years working for the justice department under conservative Presidents Reagan and George H.W. Bush. An all-star to the right wing, Chief Justice Roberts must have felt or known the tremendous pressure from his base to strike down the individual mandate when the case of the Affirmative Care Act came before the bench. Rather than give into politics, though, the Chief Justice did his job. He decided the case based on his understanding of the constitution and out of deference for the Supreme Court's precedent. In a year filled with news headlines reporting Washington's polarized, political state, we can look back and be proud of the courage, professionalism, and respect Chief Justice Roberts demonstrated in his decision in the case of the Affordable Car Act.



required to purchase private health insurance--people who are thought to be healthy, and whose premiums should then be higher than any near-future health expenses--insurance companies would use the new revenue to pay for the higher rates shifted to them by hospitals. After all, people without health coverage will continue to visit hospitals for treatment, for many will remain below the income level that would require them to purchase private insurance under the individual mandate. The government's first argument is that the individual mandate is constitutional under Congress's power to regulate interstate commerce.

There is just one problem with that argument: Never has the Commerce Clause been interpreted to authorize regulation of non-activity affecting interstate commerce--only actual activity. As Chief Justice Roberts wrote,

"The power to regulate commerce presupposes the existence of commercial activity to be regulated [...]. The individual mandate, however, does not regulate existing commercial activity. It instead compels individuals to become active in commerce by purchasing a product, on the ground that their failure to do so affects interstate commerce."



# To the Editor:

I write in response to Arel Kirshstein's "Letter to the Student Body from a Homosexual Student." I cannot begin to describe how such a piece in the Commentator fills me with pride and an inner glow toward my alma mater. As someone who received his B.A. from YC in 1972, I shouldered the heavy burden of concealing my sexual orientation on campus for four years. You courageous gay men who are replicating in the Orthodox world what we initiated in society at large in the late 1960s are genuine pioneers. And those students who are supporting their classmates are equally praiseworthy.

Ironically, although American culture is far more liberal in embracing gay people today, unlike when I was in my twenties, the Halakhic ideology prevalent at Yeshiva is, in many ways, more conservative now than it was when I was an undergraduate. The attention paid to the minutiae and technicalities of Jewish Law is more intense than it was in 1970. While most of us did indeed observe the Commandments scrupulously, the interpretations that they enjoyed were very different from those common on your campus today, which results, I believe, from the general turn to the Right among religions and cultures in the West, during the last 25 years.

It seemed to me that in the dorms when I was an undergraduate, there were two overriding topics of conversation that were never exhausted: girls and sports. Evenings meant frequent waiting for the hall telephones as many students ambitiously planned their weekend activities with the opposite sex. And negiah,

which I see is a significant issue to many on campus, was hardly ever mentioned. If anything, the opposite was the case: Students planned and hoped for what they could manage out of a date and, come Monday morning, were not the least bit reluctant to broadcast their achievements (or disappointments) over the weekend. The consequence for me was the increasing difficulty of "passing" as straight among my classmates and dorm-mates, with their near-constant fixation on women; we were, after all, 19- and 20-year olds. I was in a closet locked so tightly, that I only realized some years later that sexual overtures had been made to me by a few of my YC classmates, to which I was completely oblivious at the time.

The general American cultural view toward same-sex relationships was extremely negative, and it is this constellation of attitudes that was displayed by most students at YC. To provide some perspective, there was no Gay Pride event of any sort anywhere in the world; the first small Gay rights groups (the GAA and GLF), just starting to form in New York and San Francisco, meant one single protest march a year, attracting a hundred people at the most, who were viewed by the average New Yorker as just another group of wierdos among many who were becoming increasingly visible as the 1960s progressed.

My personal odyssey was similar to that of many. In graduate school at the University of California, dipping my feet into the water, I began the standard gay regimen of weight lifting, which was just emerging from its stigma as a bizarre subculture, and began the process of coming out, feeling like a human being for the first time in my life. I, too, was very fortunate in having a family that was accepting (which was due in no small regard to their European background); I have friends whose families in the Christian Evangelical movement have refused to speak to them for 25 years.

I am so pleased to see that there are some gay men in the Orthodox world who are bravely forging a path for their personal fulfillment, so that gay kids who are now in Yeshiva Day Schools and High Schools will have an easier time accepting their sexuality, and will be less likely to entertain suicidal thoughts, or other self-destructive behavior. Most importantly, I am pleased that future YC undergraduates may not have to endure the kind of tortured guilt that I and many of my generation experienced, will be the most wonderful result of your endeavors.

Allen Roth (YC '72)

## The Wilf SLC & YoU

As the semester comes to a close, we at the Wilf Student Life Committee wanted to share a few accomplishments we have completed over this past semester. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, feel free to Contact [Wilf.SLC@gmail.com](mailto:Wilf.SLC@gmail.com). Also, be sure to like us on Facebook: [www.facebook.com/slc-wilf](http://www.facebook.com/slc-wilf) & follow us on twitter "@WilfStudentLife".

Best,  
Mordechai Czarka, Co-Chairman  
Eli Shavalian, Co-Chairman  
David Bodner, Executive Secretary

### Restored cable television in Rubin Lounge as well as Syms Gym.

*With the help of: The Department of Athletics & Facilities Management & The Office of Student Life*

### No charge for single cup use in the Dining Hall.

*With the help of: The Office of Dining Services*

### Shabbat Ticket Early Bird Price through Wednesday.

*With the help of: The Office of Student Life & The Office of Dining Services*

### More parve snacks in campus store.

*With the help of: The Office of Dining Services*

### More cashiers on duty during lunch and dinner rush hours.

*With the help of: The Office of Dining Services*

### Lockers available for gym-goers to store coats and belongings.

*With the help of: The Department of Athletics*

### Increased number of tables available in Gottesman Library during Midterms & Finals.

*With the help of: The Gottesman Library Staff*

### Increased/diversified Career Center walk-in hours.

*With the help of: The Career Center Staff*

### Streamlined Friday Shuttle Times/Sign-Ups with Beren Campus.

*With the help of: The Office of Safety and Security & The Stern Student Life Committee*

### Filters installed in 3<sup>rd</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, and 7<sup>th</sup> floor Rubin Lounge sinks.

*With the help of: Facilities Management*

### Shabbat Elevator in Rubin & Morgenstern Residence Halls.

*With the help of: The Office of Safety and Security & The RIETS Office & SOY-JSC*

### Concrete hours of operation for Morgenstern Beis.

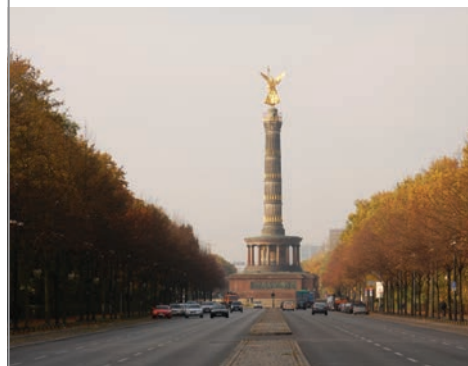
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# YU Fall Sports Round Up

By Yael Roberts

You know fall is almost over when the weather gets too cold to play outside and sports move indoors. With both the YU men's and women's basketball teams beginning their seasons, fall is assuredly over. This past fall, the YU teams competed in the Hudson Valley and Skyline Conferences. Beginning with pre-season in August, the teams trained hard for an intense few months of play, some not finishing their seasons until late November due to Super-storm Sandy. The fall season is difficult for YU athletes, as it is interrupted by a month off for the *chaggim*. Yet all the teams managed to maintain fitness throughout the *chaggim* break and through Sandy, finishing strong in their respective conferences.

The women's tennis team finished 4-6 overall, and Julia Shrier (SCW '13) told *The Commentator*, "We are walking away with quite a few winning matches this season, which we are very proud of. But more importantly, we are walking away with an immense feeling of personal satisfaction and camaraderie." Shrier continued, "I think everyone really stepped up their game this season, both in team spirit and in honing tennis skills, and I am incredibly proud to be part of such a wonderful group of athletes." The team won their first and last matches 6-3, and looks forward to a great spring season. Noted Athletic Director Joe Bednarsh said about the spring season:

"I'm looking forward to more great results similar to the past two years during which they went unbeaten in spring play."

The women's volleyball team opened their season with a 3-0 win against Medgar Evers, and junior Shira Genauer made it onto the HVWAC's All-Conference team and the Skyline Conference's second-team. However, the team lost many talented players last year, and this season was a growing year. "Every few years each team goes through a transition season and this was that time for us," said Captain Moriah Green (SCW '13). The team still played with spirit, and Bednarsh mentioned some highlights from watching the team play, such as "hard hitting, diving on the floor to get the ball, great blocking, and the serving aces." With only two starters graduating, Bednarsh has high hopes for this team next year. Green agrees, stating, "For the next few years we will only get stronger and closer as a team."

The women's soccer team lost four seniors last year, but gained a large squad of rookies who brought energy and skill to the field. "Women's soccer was perhaps the team that improved the most from last season," commented Bednarsh. Bednarsh noted that the team improved both offensively and defensively, which showed in the teams' statistical improvement in saves and shots, jumping from 4.2 shots per game to 9.6. "They were energetic, determined, and certainly an exciting team to watch." Senior captain Meira Lerner (SCW '13) commented, "Through statistic compari-

sons and a narrow 1-0 loss in the Hudson Valley Women's Athletic Conference semi-finals, I am proud to say that the Lady Macs had one of their most successful seasons yet! As such a united force on and off the field, this team will only continue to experience more success in the seasons to come."

The men's soccer team had one of the most successful seasons in the teams' history, winning their first conference game in five years and quadrupling the amount of goals scored. Additionally, Sophomore Leon Aboudi made it into an article in *Mainline Media News* about balancing both his soccer and Judaism at YU and was selected for the Skyline second-team. "Next season will be even better," noted captain Jack Strigtzler (YC '14). "With a new coach and new talent, the team has only one direction to go: forward." Bednarsh explained that both soccer teams are pushing to recruit more for next season and therefore expect improved and more competitive squads for both the boys' and girls' teams. One setback for both the girls' and boys' soccer teams was losing their coach in the middle of the season. However, the interim head coaches of both teams pulled through and both teams finished strong.

The men's cross-country team also had coaching changes. "It's always difficult to compete for a new coach or compete using a new system, but our student-athletes, as they always do, rose to the challenge," explained Bednarsh. A new coach was just one of many

difficulties this team faced, as captain Oliver Sax (YC '13) noted: "Last season's cross-country efforts seemed impossible to reproduce going into this season." However, "This pessimism did not last long, for we were granted with a great coach in Brendan Donoghue and a superb supporting cast of new runners on race day." The team had a record breaking season, winning the Hudson Valley Championship for the third year in a row and a coming in third in the Skyline Championship. "The 2012 cross-country men's team's success can be attributed to the dedication and strong will of the entire team. Running is part of our genetic makeup, not just a sport featured seasonally," asserted Sax. The women's cross-country came in second place at the Hunter Invitational, and captain Rivky Jacobov finished ninth at the Hudson Valley Championships with a time of 23:33. Bednarsh expressed optimism for both cross-country teams, as they have the majority of their runners returning, and expects them to again compete for conference championships.

Now, YU sports continues with men's basketball (currently 5-6), women's basketball (currently 3-9), men's and women's fencing, and men's wrestling. Some fall teams will return for spring competition, so look out for more impressive statistics and seasons from these teams in the months to come.



## The Greatness of the Maccabee

By Dov Levine

Playing sports as a Yeshiva Maccabee can be a tremendously enriching experience. Athletes compete at high levels against other schools in sports in which they excel and love. Inevitably, the time and emotional commitment playing on a team requires, sets them apart from the rest of YU, dramatically changing student athletes' experience. Athletes are forced to answer the tough question, indeed that all must answer, of the correct balance to strive for in sports, academics, and Judaic studies.

Athletes, Rebbeim, and coaches grapple with this question with two approaches: in one, they emphasize the multitude of positives that result, irrespective of a potential clash. In the other, they downplay any clash at all, highlighting the harmonious interaction achievable between sports and learning.

Within the former approach, Nathan Japhet (YC '13), member of the soccer team, explains why he chose soccer. "I got to play on a NCAA team, have a great group of friends, and play the sport I love." However, he immediately acknowledges that it negatively impacted his learning. "Because it was 8:30-11 PM each night, I missed night-seder here at YU, which certainly cut into my learning. I think, like all things, it is a tradeoff." Indeed, the many gains of competing, each one distinct and important, caused Japhet to make his calculated decision, one

for which he is thankful. "I am glad I made it."

Explaining his ideal YU experience, Benji Ritholtz (YC '14), member of the basketball team, views academics, learning, and sports coalescing to a total greater than the sum of its parts, thus aligning with the second approach. "The team and basketball allow me to maximize the YU experience," he explained. He does not feel basketball detract from his learning. "My ability to still learn intensely both qualitatively and quantitatively in YU, to be able to remain in YP and go to Seder and Shiur every day, and to be able to learn night-seder—given I may miss a Sunday Shiur because of a game sometimes—made the decision pretty easy to play ball." Elaborating on what makes playing on the team so special, Ritholtz states, "I feel like I am taking advantage of all the unique opportunity YU provides. At the end of the day, while basketball consumes much time and energy, I feel most accomplished to have been able to excel at basketball, schoolwork, and learning."

Rabbi Yona Reiss, Max and Marion Grill Dean of Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), and Jonathan Halpert, coach of the men's basketball team, portray two different further benefits to playing for Yeshiva. When asked what is the Yeshiva's attitude to students participating in athletics, Rabbi Reiss unequivocally states the positives. "It is very important for students to exercise and to get into the habit of keeping themselves fit throughout life. We should also bear in mind that part of a well-rounded Torah education is to promote

good nutrition and exercise." These benefits need not come at the expense of Torah learning, rather they are meant to enhance one's religious lifestyle. One must "maintain a proper balance, so that physical fitness serves as a vehicle towards a robust Torah life, suffused with energy for Torah and Mitzvot."

Coach Halpert immediately rejects the premise of the question, explaining how an athlete does not have to choose. It is not sports or learning, sports or pre-med. One's day cannot be filled to capacity pursuing a one-dimensional goal. Too much of anything is detrimental. Rather, we must be fully invested in the learning for the time that should be spent learning, and the same during sports hours. "When you study Gemara in the morning, that is the most the most important thing for those hours. When you practice from 7-10, basketball is the most important thing in the world for those three hours. As soon as the whistle blows, it can become the least important," Coach Halpert said.

However, his real focus is the special opportunity playing for Yeshiva gives the athlete. "We, Yeshiva, are known as the Jewish school," Halpert continues. "We represent far more than a bunch of buildings on our jerseys. We represent a people, a concept." Thus, perhaps even more than Maccabee wins, the Skyline Conference Sportsmanship award, given to the school that shows "outstanding team sportsmanship" and won by Yeshiva three times in the past five years, represents a true *Kiddush Hashem*.



# A Shiva in Newtown

BY GAVRIEL BROWN

Yeshiva University's commemorative ceremony for the victims of the Newtown Massacre, like any commemoration of an immense tragedy, left me with more questions than answers. *Because* the service was so thoughtfully and carefully crafted, I was overwhelmed with discordant thoughts: *If this tragedy is unspeakable, why are we speaking about it? Can we really take a moment to pause and reflect with the increasing pressure of papers, classes and looming finals? Is a moment enough?* Speaking on that night, President Richard Joel said, "This is surely not a time for answers, it is first and foremost a proper time to mourn and a time to direct our thoughts and prayers towards those suffering indescribable heartache, and in that way we grieve together and bond together." *Are we really mourning together? If indeed there are no answers, what are we left to do?* I left the ceremony feeling incomplete. I had to take those feelings somewhere.

The next day I visited Newtown, Connecticut. I joined a small rabbinic delegation from Yeshivat Chovevei Torah and the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale who were delivering letters and funds from the congregation. I was hoping to bring the hundreds of letters students from Yeshiva University wrote to the families of the victims in the university-wide vigil held the night before, but I was unfortunately unable to get hold of them on time. Instead, I hoped to represent Yeshiva University as one student among many who would surely have joined.

Newtown is a small and hilly town of beautiful old Victorian homes, streets named "Meadow Road" and "Sunny View Terrace," diners on Main Street, and old stone churches. It could be, in the words of our President, "any town in America." We knew we were getting closer to Newtown as spray painted signs strung across highway bridges read "We are Sandy Hook. We choose love." As we turned into the town, we read "rest in peace, little ones 12.14.12" on doors and windows. On the side of the road stood 26 angel figurines. It was emotionally jarring to see a town wreathed in holiday lights and red bows and, at the same time, adorned with notes of comfort and of solemn scripture.

The houses, stores, diners, and churches were shrouded in sadness and shock. At the town center and before the entrance of the road leading to the school, stood makeshift memorials of candles, Christmas trees, Menorahs, flowers, hand-made signs, cards, balloons, toys, statues, and teddy bears—hundreds and hundreds of teddy bears. The sense of innocence lost, of goodness torn away at a time of holiday joyfulness, of unanswerable tragedy was inescapable. It felt as though walking into *shiva* house (a Jewish house of mourning), except that the entire town was grieving.

It's one thing to participate in a ceremony, to light a candle, to see a slide show of photographs, to hear a speech, to try and resurrect—in some tangible way—the unknowable grief faced families of victims. It's an entirely different experience to be *surrounded* by candles, *enveloped* by pictures of those killed, *encircled* in a sea of material mourning.

People had gathered by the memorials. Some people came to pay their last respects to children and adults they never knew. Others were neighbors visiting the memorial, adding ornaments on the Christmas trees or relighting candles. One woman could not stop crying; she was the mother of a kindergartener from the *other* elementary school in Newtown and shuddered at the thought of her son in that classroom on that ill-fated day.

The police had cordoned-off Sandy Hook Elementary School so we decided to do a memorial service near the sign for the school. Rabbi Ari Hart spoke about silence in the face of tragedy. I recounted the words of the university's president, *Rosh Ha yeshiva*, students, and faculty members as best I could. We said a prayer, sang a dirge-like *niggun*, and hoped that we would never again have to speak about these unspeakable catastrophes.

The roar of motorcycles punctuated the end of our

memorial service. Eight motorcycles drove past us. Then came police cruisers, black SUVs, then a hearse carrying a tiny coffin. The funeral procession slowed down as it passed the school, a silent salute to the 25 other victims. In the third and fourth cars in the procession, mourners held handwritten signs against the window, "Thank You," they said. "Thank you." They wanted to thank *us*? I was stunned, broken and tearful. In the depth of their sorrows, in their innermost time of desolation, they acknowledged the anonymous support of pedestrians on the street. They had invited us into their mourning and, in a small way, we had grieved together.

The car ride from the Sandy Hook Elementary School memorial to the nearby Adath Israel Temple took us through the rest of the town. Another funeral service was being conducted at the town's Catholic church. Rows of police motorcycles were lined up ready to escort the next funeral procession of that day. Tens of news trucks were parked on the opposite side of the street. A crowd of men and women in dark suits and dresses congregated outside. The town had turned into a funeral factory.

We arrived at Adath Israel. The parking lot was empty. We got out to see if any information existed in the synagogue about the *shiva* (the seven day mourning period) of Noah Pozner, the youngest victim of the massacre and the first victim to be buried. We had heard that the family wanted to mourn privately, but we wanted to see if there was anything we could do to help. Just then, two cars pulled into the parking lot. Rabbi Saul Praver, the spiritual leader of Adath Israel, introduced himself. The woman with him then introduced herself, "I'm Noah's mother," she said with stoic resilience. "Noah might be gone, but part of him is still with us." My heart froze.

As Jewish law prescribes, we waited until Veronique Pozner asked us our names to break the silence. Rabbi Pozner thanked us for coming and "not exploiting the situation" as so many news crews attempted to do over the past five days. We gave them the cards the congregation wrote. "Come to our *shiva*," she said. "Please come tonight or Thursday or Friday." She wanted *us*, five strangers, to join her grieving family? "Oh," said Rabbi Pozner, "we are having a *Havdalah* service at the end of Shabbat, it's a small community gathering, but please come." The rabbi invited five outsiders inside the tiny community as it transitioned from the week of *shiva* to the month of *sheloshim*. It was an unimaginable gesture of compassion. It was both the reverse of what we were expecting and an act of unthinkable emotional and spiritual strength.

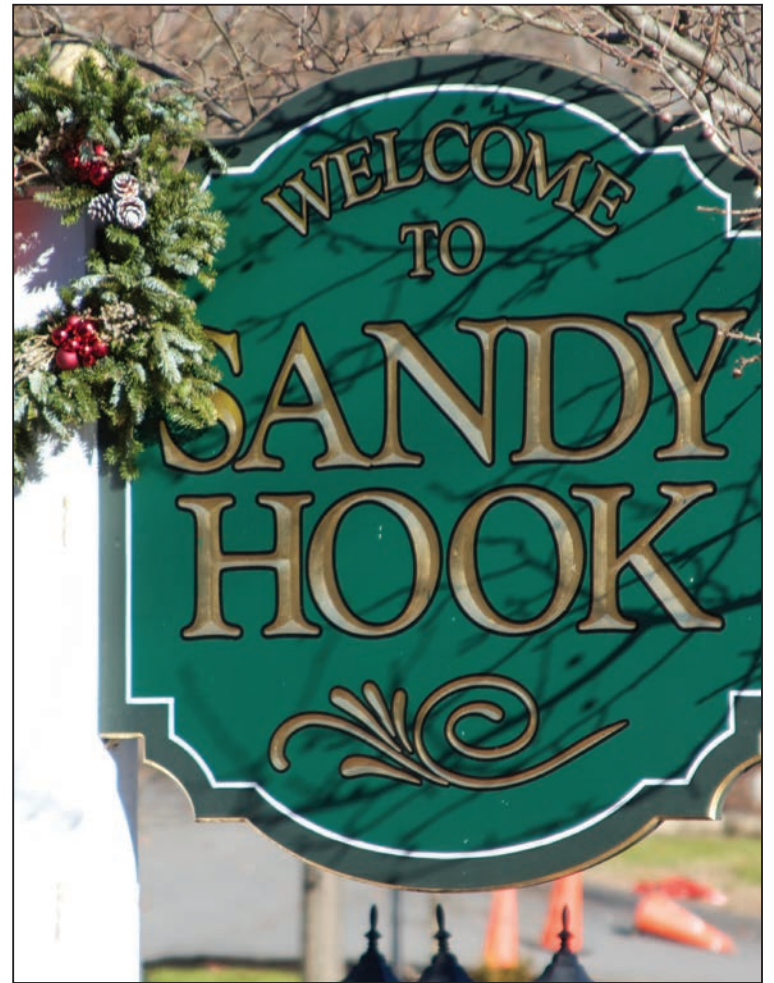
I left Newtown dumbfounded. Neighbors and visitors carefully tended makeshift memorials of flowers sent from communities in Montana to congregations in Poland, and posters sent from schools around the nation. Firefighters stood vigil outside the memorial for the entire day. The entire town was adorned in a show of support for the families and signs of mourning for the victims. That was dreadful but expected.

What had us startled—what left us stunned into silence on the ride home—were those two acts of humanity. An acknowledgment and a request by families to, in some small way, share in their deep totality of their own grief was not only unnecessary and unpredictable, but heartbreaking and unforgettable. Had I stayed longer, there is no doubt in my mind that I would have seen the same thing play out again and again.

Did Newton provide answers? No. Newtown taught me that when there aren't answers, there are actions. Newtown countered senseless acts of violence with senseless acts of love. It understood that "Love is as strong as death" (Song of Songs 8:6) only when that love is expressed in acts of unprecedented kindness and affection.

If you or anyone else would like to send a letter to the family:

Noah's Family  
261. South Main St. #332  
Newtown, CT 06470



## Commemoration, Newtown, Connecticut, December 2012

BY RUH BEVAN

Do you remember when you were six  
Living in that polychrome world of sun without set?  
When even a wintry day was bright?  
And summer fun stretched into eternity  
As fall's ambiguity staved off the coming frost.

Do you remember when you were six  
How tall your mother was? And taller yet your father?  
The tallness of the world around you, everything perpendicular  
like the hope of everything you'd become  
in the dreams you had of being once you grew up.

Do you remember when you were six  
And you looked into the mirror to see your face?  
What did you think when you were six? Of that face  
pedestaled upon those shoulders, too tiny for burdens, yet  
time would press its needs and innocence would succumb.

Do you remember when you were six  
And that face in the mirror became recognizable as you?  
How did you feel about you? You made a face in the mirror,  
stuck out your tongue, wiggled your ears and thumbed your nose.  
But after all the clowning was said and done, there you were.

Do you remember when you were six?  
Just about. Not really. A little bit. And that's the point.  
Did you care what your face looked like in the mirror? Curiosity aside.  
Or did you see the day as a singular, polished jewel, complete in and of  
itself.

Do you remember when you were six and you loved life?

Do you remember when you were six?  
And you were free  
Of striving for the sake of being, of beauty in comparison, of loving for  
the sake of love in return,  
Do you remember when you were six and life was complete?

In memoriam: Charlotte Bacon, Daniel Barden, Olivia Engel, Josephine Gay, Ana Marquez-Greene, Catherine V. Hubbard, Jesse Lewis, Grace McDonnell, Emilie Parker, Noah Pozner, Caroline Previdi, Jessica Rekos, Madeleine F. Hsu, Chase Kowalski, James Mattioli, Dylan Gockley, Jack Pinto, Avielle Richman, Benjamin Wheeler, Allison N. Wyatt.



# Razors that Cut Deep

BY EVAN SCHWARZBAUM

Ju's eyes gleamed as they spread wide, staring at a customer's right temple, Ju's steady fingers obstructing the view as he carefully stroked a razor blade along the customer's forehead, tracing the sharp angle of his hairline. Ju shuffled his feet and shot a glance at the flat screen TV to see why the crowd cheered; he wouldn't want to miss any of the NBA All Star game's highlights. He looked back down at his patient customer and examined the finished work of art.

It was 12:15am on a Sunday night in All Star barbershop, a salon off the corner of 186<sup>th</sup> and St. Nicholas Avenue in New York City's Washington Heights neighborhood. Ju took a quick survey of the shop.

Three customers swiveled in their chairs, three barbers tended tirelessly to them, and six men sat scattered throughout the room just enjoying the scene. The late night rerun of the season's NBA All Star Game flashed across widescreen TVs that donned walls on either side of the store. The announcers' voices flowed from surround-sound Bose speakers and reverberated throughout the room. Customers and barbers shouted to each other to overcome the deafening bass.

It was a regular night in a Heights barbershop. Ju stands as a pillar in All Star, a pillar of the Heights's dense barbershop world. All Star is just one of five hair salons on St. Nicholas Avenue between 185<sup>th</sup> and 186<sup>th</sup> streets. It's also just one of scores of barbershops that line both sides of St. Nicholas Avenue and polka dot its side streets.

Look through their glass storefront windows any time of day or night and you're bound to see the lights on, hear the music pumping, and realize you'd have to wait your turn in line to get that long needed haircut.

Ju, a six-year veteran at All Star, has spent countless hours providing those intimate, late-night cuts. Ju says he regularly stays in the shop past midnight along with some of the other long-time barbers. Those barbers have accrued loyal customers who consistently show up at late-night hours, making it worth their while to stay, even if they live as far as Brooklyn, as Ju does.

The Heights are unique in that way. Twin, one of Ju's many customers, pointed out the strange economic situation. "Where else do you have a target market for an 11:45pm haircut?" That market starts a vicious productive cycle that allows barbershops to stay open as late as they do. Heights residents consider it a rare luxury to be able to get a haircut long after the clock strikes midnight. JC, a boisterous Dominican man from the area, raves about his neighborhood. He claims, "It's the only place you can get a haircut at 2am. It allows me to do what I need to do, when I want to."

It seems the hair salons are the lifeblood of Washington Heights, as though the neighborhood's residents were the lost descendants of Samson, drawing all strength from one source: their hair. Only they seem to draw strength from cutting it.

After living in the Heights for a few months, people come to accept the strange barbershop activity as a regular part of the St. Nicholas lineup, strolling by as if the salons were a varied mix of grocery-mart and pharmacy.

But if, for instance, an alien would stroll the same streets, or perhaps even a New Yorker from a few blocks down in Harlem or a few blocks northward towards the Bronx, that alien or non-Heights New Yorker would probably spit out his French vanilla iced coffee on the very sidewalk that the barbershops call home.

There are simply *too* many barbershops, in *too* small of a vicinity, open—and bustling—at hours *too* late in the night.

This extreme density of haircutting activity demands an explanation.

One aspect that feeds the Heights's thriving barbershop ecosystem is the perception of the barbershop as a destination in its own right. The barbershop has become to the Heights what the club or bar is to other neighborhoods. It stands out as a place for male bonding and community or, in other words, the best place in town for guys to just "hang out" and relax with their buddies and with their favorite barbers.

Perhaps that's why Nigel came all the way from Pennsylvania to get his hair cut a few weeks ago—on a Saturday night no less. Nigel's been going to Robin's Salon for five years, never missing a cut there, even as his job at Comcast took him downtown, to Jersey, and finally to Philadelphia.

Robin's, the barbershop next door to All Star, fills up as early as 7:30 p.m. on Saturday nights. A twenty-by-five foot sign outside the store flashes neon green, blue, and red, announcing the store's name. All barber chairs are filled with customers draped in plastic aprons, leaning back as men work meticulously with razor and brush. A framed certificate behind every barber reminds customers that Robin's only hires the best.

But Nigel says the real reason he loves Robin's is not the glitzy accolades on the wall; it's the unique and pleasurable experience the shop provides. "You can't beat the atmosphere here," he said, staring wistfully at the vintage, redbrick wall. "The minute you walk in here, everybody's your friend."

Eddieson, a barber at Robin's, is so busy on Saturday nights that he doesn't have a second to talk to reporters like me. But Raphael, the custodian at Robin's, points to Eddieson as the best in the business. Eddie works the back right corner of the shop in his navy blue,

crimson-trimmed apron. He smiles through his rough, gray goatee, and blows some hookah smoke out as he laughs at a customer's joke, then quickly returns to the task at hand: giving the guy a buzz. What Raphael will never know is whether customers flock to Eddie for his skill with a razor or simply because he's a good guy to hang out with.

Ju isn't too bad at hanging out either. He's basically the godfather of All Star. His office, the front left corner of the shop right in front of the clear windowpane for passers-by to behold, is always filled with "non-paying customers," as you might call them. Two leather office chairs and several windowsill seats next to his table are rarely empty, set aside those who stand around to chat with him.

Some customers walk in and hand out brown paper bags holding glass bottles with metal caps. Others offer "buds" to the guy on their left—and they're not talking fizzy beverages.

Everybody finds a place to relax. They swim from conversation to conversation like a bunch of teenagers in a smoky basement. Everybody present is a fair target for mockery. Everybody present has the right to mock. Unless, of course, he lost his right to mock for lack of wit. Curses and slurs of both racial and ethnic brand are commonplace. Dialogue generally centers around sports, but just as generally slips into boyish banter of the ad hominem sort.

Attention-deficient transitions glide between discussions of BaNaO Crew parties at Vintage, a club on 210<sup>th</sup> street, "white girl," code-word for cocaine, "cab companies" that drop plastic bags of oregano at your door, and whether Peja Stojakovic is still any good at basketball. Ju generally stands quietly, stoically on the side, but when he talks, he has the final word.

He ended the debate about Lebron's goatee, declaring "it's ugly as s--t." On the topic of Jews he closed up too, explaining that "there's no such thing as a broke Jew. My brother-in-law is Jewish; I know." When the television news began reporting about an undersea tunnel being built from Haiti to Cuba and then to Florida, every customer had his own opinion. Ju put an end to the conversation with two words. "Bull. S--t."

The idea of the barbershop as a communal meeting place for males is not new. Pop culture, academic scholarship, and barbershop aficionados have all brought attention to the phenomenon.

In the popular movie "Barbershop," Calvin Palmer, an African American man living on the South Side of Chicago, struggles to buy his barbershop back from the loan shark he sold it to. Although it is a comedy, the movie relates to the function of the barbershop in the black community. One critic summed it up nicely, claiming the film is an assertion that hair cutting is "cultural pride in microcosm," that "the bar-

bershop is a place where black men can be black men," and everyone stands on equal ground. It's certainly a place for black men to go to relax with friends, share stories and opinions, and just have fun.

The black barbershop is used as a model in many academic disciplines. In "Fading, Twisting, and Weaving: An Interpretive Ethnography of the Black Barbershop as Cultural Space," Bryant Alexander uses the shop as part of a study in cultural criticism or sociology. Terry Bozeman considers the barbershop through the lens of literature in "The Good Cut: The Barbershop in the African American Literary Tradition." In "The View From the Barbershop: The Church and African-American Culture," Edward Braxton describes how he took a bishop to a "neighborhood barbershop" to give him a glimpse of what really goes on in the African American community.

From another angle, barbershop aficionados and gender critics take up the old-school white man's barbershop of the 1950s. Online forums abound with descriptions of the traditional barbershop of yore, whether reminiscing about a tragically lost past or lauding current shops modeled after the old. Some focus on the high quality of the old-school products used—the leather upholstered chairs, the hardy design of the footrests, the traditional brand-name products like Bay Rum Gram fragrant skin toner.

In "A Shave and a Haircut: Celebrating the Thrills of a no Frills Haircut," one Alameda Magazine journalist put his finger on the culture in the traditional white barbershop:

Typical banter at most barbershops...weaves current events with local politics, with funnymen throwing in a few jokes for good laughs. Practically every customer has something to add to the conversations, so there's much more to barbershops than the quick, efficient haircut that the barbers crank out. The barbershop sprouts its own community life, where participants take—and make—the time for civic banter.

The Dominican community has not received as much attention, but it looks like it has all the makings of a classical barbershop centered community. It rivals the black community as a minority group that can find its identity in the safety of a barbershop. Its shops stand out as a hangout for social interaction and exchanging ideas, and boast similar pride in their high-quality products and results. Apparently the Dominican residents of the Heights spend so much time "hanging out" in barbershops, they can support the plethora of salons on St. Nick all day and night.

Another feature of classical barbershop culture explains the high density of shops in the neighborhood. Not everybody likes the same type of salon, and not every salon

is the same. As one writer puts it, "Even though barbershops by nature have many similarities, each one usually...has its own distinct personality." And it's true in the Heights too.

Customers are drawn to All Star for its young, cool feel. Ju stands at his post in black onyx earrings, a silvery skull chain hanging low on his chest, a backwards, black-on-black Yankees hat tilted to the side. His two letter name, purple shirt, tattered jeans, half shaved eyebrow, and Brooklyn accent epitomize what one customer claims All Star is all about: "urban." Ju puts it a bit differently. He says, "If All Star is Hot 97 Robin's is La Mega; we're the hip-hop barbershop, and they're a bunch of old hick Dominicans." He points to their old-style plaid hats as an obvious indicator of their lack of cool.

Others love what Ju spits at, walking through Robin's doors just for the old-school Dominican feel. They find the familiar clothing and salsa music comforting. What's more, many of the stylists at Robin's had cut hair "back at home," in the Dominican Republic, before they immigrated to America. This gives them a distinct edge on the competition. When stylists travel from the Caribbean, they bring their customers with them. When former customers come to the United States, they flock straight to their beloved barbers.

A few stores down, Jorge's Barbershop diverges from the pomp and frills of its neighbors. The place has a minimalist feel, which Jim, a sharp-looking twenty-year-old, says he likes. There are no flashing neon lights or fancy signs. The walls are painted one shade of baby blue, the room is small, the barbers all wear blue and red uniforms that match the blue and red smocks on their customers. Jim defended the simplicity: "I come to get a haircut—keep it simple! This isn't a roller coaster."

The varied desires of barbershop customers create distinct markets in the haircut business and thus the need for multiple shops in one neighborhood. To a certain extent, it's just that simple.

But though observations about generic barbershop culture might illuminate certain elements of the strangely dense barbershop environment of St. Nicholas Avenue, some customers think something about the Heights is different. And they're probably right; there are just too many barbershops and hair salons according to the regular rules of barbershop markets.

JC, one of Ju's long-time customers, has his explanation. He points to his head and face, and then those of the other customers in the shop, and his point is immediately clear. The types of haircuts and shaves Heights men get simply demand more care. Their tight buzz cuts and crisp facial hair—whether chin strap or goatee—require constant touching up.

Ju says most of his customers

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# A Letter from the Honors Student Council

By JOSHUA NAGEL

We are the Honors Student Council. Our job? Good question. I myself wasn't so sure when I ran for a position on the council. I was barely a week into my first semester at YU when I received the email asking the new Honors students to send in short descriptions of themselves for the election. Every year, there are two out of seven positions reserved for first time on campus (FTOC) student representatives in the, which gave us a chance to get involved. Already overwhelmed by the amount of nightly homework I had, I was hesitant to offer my time. Nevertheless, I wanted to get involved in the YU community outside of my schoolwork, and, since I already belonged to the Honors Program, I thought I should try to make a difference there. So I wrote the blurb about myself including propositions I would bring to the council, and it was sent with the other candidates' statements to the

other first year students for them to vote.

After winning the votes of my peers, I met with the council soon after the election and quickly discovered that my fellow members are a diverse group with a wide range of interests. We hail from Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, Illinois, New York, and California. Some of us are majoring in Economics, Biology, Philosophy, and Chemistry. We participate in SHEM (Student Holocaust Education Movement), Project START, the Neuroscience Club, and Bnei Akiva.

It soon became clear that the council was interested in shifting directions from years past. Traditionally, the council acts as a liaison between the Honors students and the Honors faculty, listening to ideas about courses and events and sending those ideas to the administration who would then implement them. But that function seemed to be an unnecessary one. The Honors administration already plans fascinating events for the students, with

interesting speakers for the Honors Wednesday lunch program complimented by recurring cultural events, such as trips to Broadway or to the New York Philharmonic. Even the need to act as an intermediary on behalf of the student body seemed unnecessary. Honors students can, and are, encouraged to go straight to Dr. Cwillich or any of the other members of the Honors Program faculty to suggest ideas. Without the Honors Council, the Honors Program already provided captivating events.

We decided that the focus of the council this year would be to create the feeling of a true program. Until now, the Honors Program consisted of two spheres: Honors courses and Honors events. Not many people felt though that they were part of an official program. They took some Honors courses, if any, and maybe once in a while went to hear an interesting speaker. But no one knew who else was in the program. The existing Honors events stimulated the mind, but seldom offered a chance to interact with other Honors students.

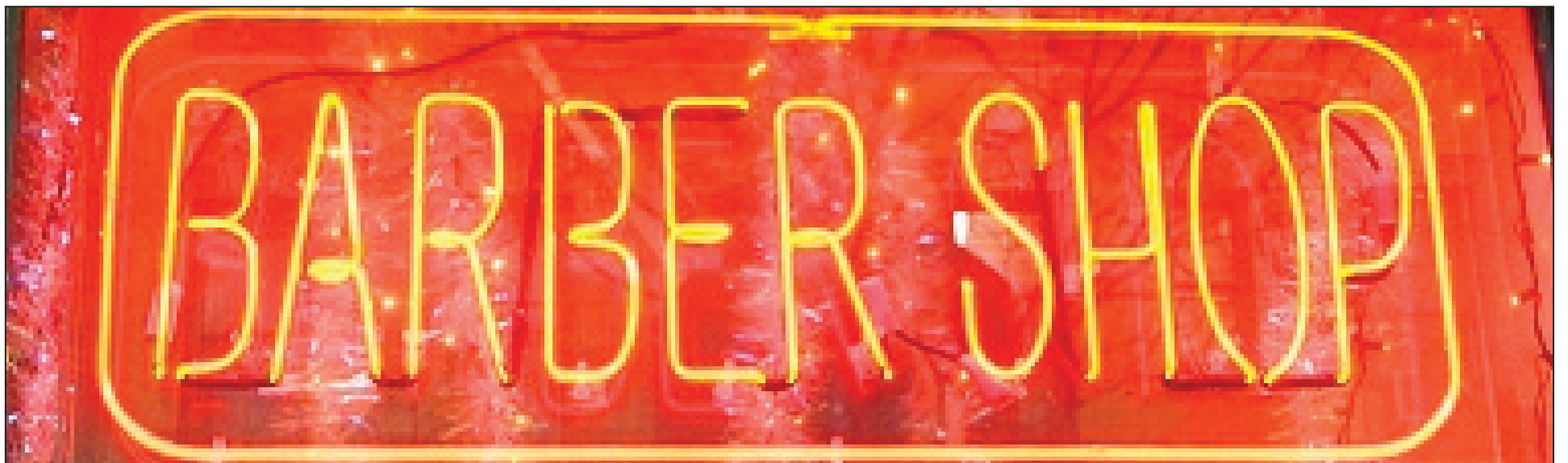
In fact, as of this past year, the requirements of the Honors program were changed to address this problem. Students in the program are now expected to take two Honors courses each year, which aims to ensure that they remain involved in the program and involved with their peers. Taking these efforts to the next level, the Honors council decided to make a further impact in that area, to create a third, overlapping sphere for the Honors Program: socializing.

So, we are planning some new initiatives. One subcommittee is working on organizing a Shabbaton for next semester, hopefully in conjunction with the Stern Honors Program. Another group is well on the way to starting a college bowl intramural league, an initiative which arose from student interest, with dreams of competing with other colleges. We are organizing a mentorship program to pair Honors FTOCs with Honors seniors to mentor and advise them in the process of adjusting to Yeshiva University,

and specifically the Honors Program. We reach out to the Honors student body on a regular basis via the Honors e-newsletter to create a shared experience for all members. We even have a Facebook page.

We hope we can achieve our goal of creating a niche in the already vibrant YU community. The Honors Program represents a third of the YC population, so it is important that they also have representation with the school's administration. Of course there is a fine line to walk between maintaining a unique feeling in the Honors Program while not isolating the rest of the college with an aura of elitism. We anticipate that our programming will help create only a stronger Honors community that exists within the larger university.

We are the Honors Council. Our job? To make the Honors Program feel like an Honors family.



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come by at least once a week. Jay, a quiet man in Ju's corner, piped up in support, claiming to be one of those customers. Melo, a short and plump twenty-something-year-old with a few eighth's-of-an-inch of hair on his head, claims he only comes twice a week. JC, whose boisterous demeanor, extreme confidence, and claim to owning a cab company indicate he might have a bit of money available, makes multiple appearances in the shop throughout the week. "I generally come twice a week. During the summer—three times."

Twin thinks women are the key to understanding the hyper-density of Heights salons. He says the guys in the Heights count on the barber-shops to keep them looking good for all the local ladies. "You ever walk around outside?" he asks. "There more f--kin' b--ches here than anywhere else. And they f--kin' fine. They f--kin' ideal, man." Apparently there are more women in the Heights than anywhere else in the world. Or maybe the guys there are just really insecure.

Others think there's something deeper behind the barber-shops in

the Heights, something fundamental about the Dominican people who use them, inherent in Latin American culture.

Angel, a tall, skinny boy cuts hair at Jorge's Barbershop in his flat-brimmed St. Louis Cardinals hat. The kid barely speaks English. But he managed to get the message across: Dominicans are hyperconscious about their appearances. Angel put it like this: "Latin people go out want to much look good." Jay put it a bit more eloquently—and bluntly. "Dominicans—we're just self-indulgent. Always need to look good."

The feeling was a theme that many customers echoed. It seems they care about a fresh shave so much they do it even if it means using much of the little cash they have. Angel gave his insight on the matter, saying, "American people, Jewish people—want to save money. Latin people think of present not future." Apparently, Dominicans know how live in the moment. Ju says people in the Heights would never go out to a family dinner without first giving him a quick visit. They just wouldn't.

It's no surprise, then, that Heights barbers are given so much respect. Barbers with more experience are considered to have higher "rank," and are deferred to for difficult questions. Some Dominicans come to the Heights for their haircuts no matter where they live. Angel says he has customers from New Jersey, Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and even Massachusetts. One of JC's off-handed remarks sums up the community's perspective: "The barbers in the Heights are superstars."

And the Heights barbers deserve that praise. They might enjoy hanging out with their customers, but they take their work very seriously.

Ju's rise to the top of All Star wasn't easy. When he first started, he was working in his room in his mother's apartment. His friends would come by at three in the morning to get a haircut but, not wanting to wake the old lady, would knock on the wall of Ju's room. Ju would open the door for them and get started. He worked like that for almost five years. Only later did he get his first shot in the big leagues—that is, on St. Nick. Over several years

he hopped around the block, cutting in three different shops before he landed at All Star. Since then he's become a fixture in All Star's front window, rising in the ranks and dominating the shop's social scene.

Ju views his work very personally, and brings that personal investment to his corner. On one side of his mirror, a small picture of a baby curls up at the edges. Ju smiles as he says it's his niece. A poster dons the top right corner of the mirror. A man in a flat-brimmed baseball hat with heavy bling around his neck stares out from tilted down sunglasses with fire in his eyes. Block print atop the man announces he's JR WRITER. "He's my cousin," Ju boasts. "He's a rapper." Black marker on the poster sends a personal message: "To Ju, My N---a."

A yellowed, wrinkled newspaper photograph sticks to the left side of the mirror too. It shows a man cutting a child's hair. The child sits in a barber-shop swivel chair with a smock on, but they're not in a barber-shop; they're outside. A closer look reveals a large pile of rubble behind the chair. A caption says the picture is from the day after the

Earthquake in Haiti. Ju gets somber when he talks about it.

"You see that?" he says, referencing the picture. He points to a small makeshift battery on the floor next to the barber. Tangled wires twist between his shaver and the power-source.

He pauses, and then comes back to the picture. "And look at this." He points out that a line of people waited for a haircut, standing around or sitting on the curb.

"Look at that. His fourteen-year-old daughter dies in an earthquake and a day later he's cutting again. Wow."

Ju's shop has never been destroyed. Nor has he ever built a battery to power his clippers. But he draws inspiration from the picture, glancing up at it as he touches-up loyal customers.

It seems the situation is irrelevant—whether he's cutting hair at ground zero in Haiti or in an "urban" Washington Heights barber-shop. Because regardless of where they live or where they go, when it comes to hair, Latin Americans stand together.



# The Top Twelve Artistic Perpetrations of 2012

By SRULY HELLER

You may know what happened this past year in the news world or the political scene. But what was notable about 2012 in the world of art and culture? Here are what I see as the most notable, momentous performances and creations of this past year, in no particular order:

## **Bad Jews at the Black Box Theatre:**

Joshua Harmon's new Off-Broadway play *Bad Jews* might just be the most piercing look at American Jewry since a young man named Phillip Roth picked up his pen. It is nothing less than a two-hour vivisection of contemporary Judaism, all our hypocrisies and shortcomings laid bare in a tiny basement theatre. The premise is simple: three young Jews, Daphna and her two cousins Liam and Andrew, gather in an Upper West Side apartment to attend the shiva of their grandfather. They then have to decide who will receive his treasured Chai piece, and all out ideological war ensues. Tracee Chimo achieves a sort of dark phoenix quality in her portrayal of Daphna, a young woman clinging to religious tradition in the face of her many insecurities, who lashes out at her cousins with a viciousness that lodges into the audience's chest. Michael Zegen brings his own put upon intensity to the role of Liam, returning Daphna's broadsides with bruising liberal counterattacks. Their battle engulfs the stage, and the audience in turn. I walked out feeling the burn.

## **The Master, playing at the Village East Cinema**

James Joyce said of Dubliners that "the Irish deserve one good hard look at themselves", and his collection of short stories was just that. Shame then, that when America got a searching look at itself in its formative postwar era, it was greeted with puzzlement, and then disdain. Paul Thomas Anderson's *The Master* was said to tell the story of Scientology in America, from the beginning. Thankfully, for those who gave it a chance, it did so much more than that. *The Master* is not simply about the beginning push of a Scientology type of religion on the American Consciousness. It's a meditation on the developing American condition, the will to power emerging in cities and suburbs across America. Phillip Seymour Hoffman and Joaquin Phoenix, as a charismatic conman turned guru and his loyal yet unsettled right hand man, inhabit the two sides of the American id so forcefully that their descendants in the arts and American history can be traced right there in the theatre. Additionally, The film is shot in gorgeous 70-millimeter film. The American age of prosperity, hope, and encroaching darkness has never looked richer, or more foreboding, like the giving sun at twilight.

## **Frank Ocean's Channel Orange (available on iTunes and Amazon)**

Simply put, Frank Ocean has taken R&B out of strobe lit basement clubs and VIP lounges right into the stratosphere, where it's at home with permanence of stars and the iridescence of distant planets. This interstellar overdrive is apparent in tracks like "Pyramids," "Thinking About You," and "Super Rich Kids" which have their way with grooves, richly realized emotions, and the very concept of eternity. The music ranges from fiery, slow paced torch songs, to shimmering synth-pop, with stops at Gnarls Barkley soul infused rock along the way. As Pitchfork put it in their year-end summation, "In the year of YOLO, mischievously, Frank Ocean was thinkin' bout forever." Here's a record that should last just as long.

## **El-P's Cancer for Cure (available on iTunes, Amazon)**

In 2007, indie rapper El-P released *I'll Sleep When I'm Dead*, a classically Bush era apocalyptic musing on a future with mandatory id implants, prison camps featuring pain-coasters, and the timeless youth refrain of "we may have been born yesterday, but we stayed up all night". Comes 2012, and although Bush vacated the big house, and America is out of Iraq, El-P still sees drones over Brooklyn. His new album *Cancer for Cure* is a massive, crushing metallic slab of impeccably produced indie rap. Starting with the massive Technicolor freakout "Control Denied," and proceeding into the funniest meltdown Charlie Sheen never had with "The Full Retard," El-P still storms the studio, and rains his fire down, one headset at a time.

## **Open City by Teju Cole (available at Amazon, local bookstores)**

A short haunting meditation on memory and place, *Open City* cuts through the walls we build between our past actions and current conceptions. Gathering the thoughts and musings captured by a doctor on long walks throughout New York City, Teju Cole's debut novel is a minor masterpiece, written with precision and tenderness to detail, teasing out its hard lessons with quiet devastation. A short, brutal, essential read.

## **The Perks of Being a Wallflower (coming soon to iTunes, Amazon)**

I will admit that I never read Stephen Chlobsky's novel *The Perks of Being a Wallflower* in high school, and after seeing his film of the same name, I am relieved that I didn't. 15-year-old me would not have lasted long into this story without burying head in face, and locking self in room for months on end with nothing but a few books and several Nine Inch Nails albums for company. This is that kind of movie. A clear eyed look at the raging hellfires of outsider adolescence, *Perks* cuts deep for anyone who knows more about the inside of Smiths' albums than basketball locker rooms. A smart young cast led by the insanely charismatic scene stealer Ezra Miller seals the heartbreak deal. Bring your favorite records, concert t-shirt, and a box of tissues, to be safe.

## **Cindy Sherman, at MoMA, February 2012**

Perhaps one of the most influential photographers of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries, Cindy Sherman's photographs all feature one woman as the subject: Cindy Sherman herself. She masquerades as clowns or as the subject of history portraits, disguising herself repeatedly, drawing on her drawers full of wigs, makeup, and fake noses. More than 170 photographs were on display from Sherman's work since the





# The Top Twelve Artistic Perpetrations of 2012



1970s. Certain pieces in the exhibit made the viewer cringe because of their suggestiveness and their gruesomeness. At a relatively mainstream museum, as opposed to at an independent gallery, this intense guttural reaction pushed the boundaries of the expected in mainstream postmodern art. Sherman's body of work questions the malleability of identity in the postmodern world. We don't recognize Cindy from portrait to portrait; how much, she asks, do we even recognize ourselves in our ever-changing environment?

**The Devin Townsend Project's *By a Thread, Live in London* (available on Amazon)**

The most epic undertaking in metal lately has unquestionably been Devin Townsend's four album cycle with the Devin Townsend Project. Beginning with *Ki* and *Addicted*, and culminating in summer 2011 with the *Deconstruction/Ghost* double album, Townsend cycled through every conceivable genre of music that can be played with a guitar. *Addicted* is an hour of sheer pop joy, all disco metal stomps and soaring choruses, while *Ki* digs in deep with its ethereal songs of the earth, making various pit stops in 50's rock. *Deconstruction* is unabashed death metal goofiness, both celebrating and mocking its own nail studded pretensions to heaviness, while *Ghost*, for me the real jewel of the collection, is a collection of twilight music steeped in shimmering soft instrumentation and gorgeous folk music. Devin and his band played every album live over the course of four nights in London, and the music's strength is on pure display. "Numbered" and "Bend it Like Bender" plant their feet firmly and take off majestically in the chorus, while "Coast" and "Blackberry" sit firmly on clouds, like a couple of angels whiling away the time with a few acoustic guitars. This five CD release does nothing less than show that rock is still alive, and it's as beautifully varied as ever.

***Lincoln* (now playing at area theatres)**

Every few years, Steven Spielberg has a big idea, and proceeds to make a really big movie. As his ideas get broader though, I've found that the returns are less and less, especially after last year's double whammy of *Tintin* and *War Horse*. Thankfully, Spielberg is back on track this year, with the not so epic as much as stately *Lincoln*. The film is a telling glimpse at our 16th president's attempt to ratify the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment before the close of the Civil War, brought to life by Spielberg's camera and Tony Kushner's brilliant, knowing script. We open with a harrowing battlefield scene that demonstrates Spielberg's ever-present grasp of the violent horrors men visit upon each other; the film instead digs in on the president and his teams of rivals, namely William Seward and Thaddeus Stevens. We see the lengths these men travel to better their nation, and their own souls, and at the very end, we see the rewards, and the cost. It's a sobering and timely history lesson, brought to vivid life by its actors. Daniel Day Lewis owns the screen and our attentions, as the reedy voiced, tactically brilliant, occasionally imposing president, and David Strathairn brings a put upon grace and sobriety to the role of Seward, Lincoln's one time rival for president. As the radical abolitionist Thaddeus Stevens, Tommy Lee Jones gets all the best lines, and grounds the film's ethical core: there is a great wrong that needs rectification, with all great haste. *Lincoln* pays these men, their noble ideas, and their tireless work for the betterment of our nation with a quiet, sustained respect, clothed in highest honor.

**"The Rite Of Spring," performed by the New York Philharmonic under the direction of Alan Gilbert, September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2012.**

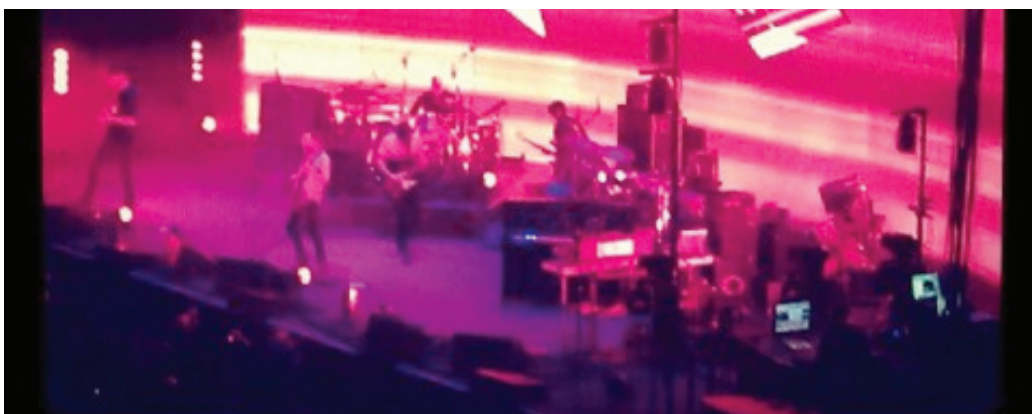
I walked into Avery Fisher Hall hoping at least one person brought a crowbar, a bat, or at least a glass bottle. If "The Rite of Spring" was going to be done right, we needed a riot, a row like the one that greeted it at its premiere in Paris in 1913. Sadly, the mostly grey and white haired crowd didn't share my passion for historical recreation, and were content to simply hear the music. Defeated, I sat down myself, and enjoyed a ballet piece that has lost none of its harsh, modernist, pagan influenced edge in the ensuing 99 years. The Philharmonic, under the expert conducting of Alan Gilbert, produced an account that accorded the Earth its rightful dance, the virgin her gift to the gods. It was loud, bloody, beautiful.

**The Stein's Collect: Matisse, Picasso, and the Parisian Avant Garde, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, February 28—June 3 2012**

The woman who said "A writer should write with his eyes and a painter should paint with his ears" who wrote a portrait of Picasso beginning with "If I told him would he like it," also collected art. Stein portrayed Picasso with words; Picasso portrayed Stein with imagery. Gertrude, and her sibling Leo and Michael, all were collectors or art, opening their apartment on Saturday evenings to the Parisian avant garde. Their collection of Matisse, Picasso, and other paintings showcasing their relationship with other Paris influentials, is both a history and a visual exploration, taking the viewer back to the 1930s in Paris. This exhibit was a rare collection of amazing artwork in one place that transported the viewer to another place and time, and emphasized the important of not only artists, but collectors as well.

**Radiohead, Live at the Prudential Center, May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2012.**

It's been a rough few years since 2007, when Radiohead released their last album, *In Rainbows*. It was a dark, sultry, often despairing work, mood music really. One imagines that in the time since, a span in which we've seen economic meltdowns, bloody government overthrows, and, always a Radiohead concern, environmental catastrophes, Radiohead would come up with their most apocalyptic work yet. The band did something even more Radiohead than that though, and came out with a disc, entitled *King of Limbs*, that was all quiet emotions and computer twitching, with a few deep grooves for good measure. No screaming, no jeremiads, just an army of digital Thom Yorkes cooing about lotus flowers and tossing aside nocturnal flirtations. Radiohead brought this new digital dance to the Prudential Center, and these new tracks, mixed in with old stalwarts like *Idioteque* and *Karma Police*, led us all down the rabbit hole into body shaking oblivion.





# Capturing Memory: Tips on Photographing Your Vacation

BY ILAN REGENBAUM

Whatever you're planning on doing over winter break, whether it's staying in New York, going home to visit family, hitting the ski slopes, or relaxing on the beach in Florida, there is one thing that should be in your suitcase: a camera. A camera allows you to capture your vacation and forever store the memories for you and your friends to look back at and reminisce . . . that is, if you take good pictures. Imagine how horrifying it would be to get back to YU after an amazing vacation and load all your pictures onto your computer or Facebook, only to realize that they are all blurry, dark, over-exposed, or just badly composed. And that would be awful. So, in order to avoid such a horrible outcome, here are some tips to help ensure some amazing pictures over this winter break.

**1. Keep Your Eyes Open.** If you want to get some good shots on your vacation, there are times when you should act like a tourist, posing in every single picture at all the tourist sights in your Hawaiian shirt. By doing this, you capture your memories and document what you did on your trip; however, this often causes people to pass up on many other great

photographic opportunities. If you are visiting an exotic place where there are many amazing things to take pictures of, though you may be inclined to pose in every single one of your pics, try for some variation. Taking pictures of or with the local community often adds a lot of character to a photograph. On your break, take some pics of yourself in front of the tourist sites, and snap a picture of the monuments that have already been photographed a million times, but also make sure to keep your eyes open for those one-of-a-kind opportunities.

**2. Be Friendly.** People often underestimate the power of a smile. If you want to take a picture of someone, or have your picture taken, being personable is the best tactic. A great example of how this can lead to great photographs can be found in Brandon Stranton's photoblog *Humans of New York* ([humansofnewyork.com](http://humansofnewyork.com)). Brandon wanders the streets of the city and walks right up to strangers, asking them if he can take their picture. He asks them for a quote or their story, and, by being outgoing, he is able to make some amazing pictures of the people that give New York City her unique character.

**3. Don't blame your camera.** Of-

tentimes people avoid taking pictures because they assume that they do not have a good enough camera. While having a good camera definitely helps, the photographer makes the picture, *not* the camera. Knowing how to work with what you have, whether it's an iPhone, point-and-shoot, or SLR, is what's most important. When a picture comes up on the LCD screen and it's too light or blurry, it's easy to blame the camera and just give up, but if you know how to adjust the settings and exposure, you can still take some great pictures.

**4. Make Pictures, Don't Take Them.** Digital photography, as a form of art and expression, has become easily accessible to almost anyone. Digital technology has made cameras better, smaller, cheaper, and easier to use. As photography has become easier and more accessible, it has been diminished as an art form to some extent, in that one can take hundreds of pictures and chances are that only one or two will be good. Thus, a true photographer does not rely solely on their equipment and settings, but focuses on composition. By understanding where to place the subject in your picture, you will be able to take a snapshot and make it into a photograph. Even if you use Instagram,

composition will make or break a picture, because if you do not have the right setup in the picture, it is irrelevant how many different filters you apply to it. A badly composed picture will never look 'right.'

**5. Understand Exposure and Lighting.** While this is quite a large undertaking, exposure is the basis of photography. It determines how the light interacts with the camera and determines how your picture will come out. Exposure is made up of three main parts: shutter speed, aperture/ f-stop, and ISO/ film sensitivity. While it is possible to take great pictures using your camera's automatic exposure mode, knowing how to brighten or darken a picture using different apertures, or increasing or decreasing motion blur using shutter speed, will allow you to be more creative with your pictures. Furthermore, by understanding how to manually set the exposure settings in your camera, you will be able to tell the camera what environment it is in, and thus how you want the picture to look. The Internet is an amazing resource to learn from, and there are some great tutorials on YouTube channels like AdoramaTV.

**6. Take your Camera EVERYWHERE.** It might sound a bit crazy, but you never know when

an opportunity for a great picture will present itself. Whenever I go out without my camera, I often feel like I am going to miss the picture of a lifetime. Luckily for me, that has not happened, and, with the advent of camera phones, such a possibility is quickly becoming more unlikely. If you have an iPhone or another small camera, then there is never an excuse to miss another picture again. While a camera phone is not the highest quality camera, it can still capture some amazing shots that would have otherwise gone uncaptured.

**7. Go Out and Take Pictures.** The best way to become a good photographer is to go out and take pictures. Grab your camera and spend a Sunday afternoon taking pictures of anything that interests you. Experiment with lighting and composition, and don't be afraid of taking someone's picture—the worst that they can do is tell you not to. Make sure not to be a lazy photographer and just go for the easy shots. The Empire State Building has been photographed in every which way imaginable. So if you want to get different shots, think outside the box. Go out when no other sane photographers are willing to, like early in the morning, and then you will get the truly one-of-a-kind photos.

## Faking It: The Wondrous World of Phony Photography

BY GAVRIEL BROWN

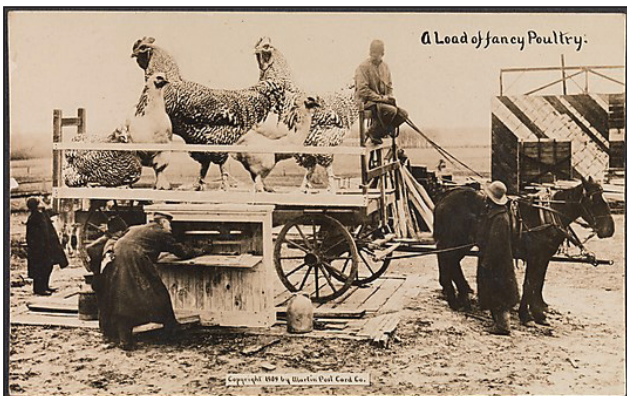
*I just can't trust pictures anymore in the age of Photoshop. You can change anything.* We've all heard the trope before; in the age of superfast computers and high-resolution cameras, virtually anyone can do anything to any picture. For the most part, that claim is true, but a new exhibit in the Metropolitan Museum of Art shows how photographers have been cheating since 1846.

Mia Fineman, the assistant curator of the museum's department of photography,

put together more than 200 doctored photographs from newspapers, magazines, art shows, and other venues, ranging from the mid-nineteenth-century until the advent of Photoshop in the early 1990s. These fascinating images were combined, cropped, layered, painted, touched-up, and otherwise manipulated in darkrooms and studios after the shutter release.

Half the fun of this Adobe sponsored exhibit is finding the alteration before reading about the method. You're sure to hear "aha! it's the clouds!" or "look, they just cropped that man into the picture!" as you peruse through the various rooms of the exhibit.

*Man Juggling His Own Head*, by an unidentified artist from the 1880s, typifies a number of the exhibit's photographs. As



you might have guessed, the artist cropped seven photographs of the same man's head and pasted them together to create counterfactually amusing eye-candy. In other photographs from the trick-photography phase of the 1890s, mass-produced photographs of giant ears of corn roll on train beds through the Midwest.

Not all phony photography was designed for entertainment. The exhibit takes on a more serious tone halfway, moving into trickery in visual politics. Under the reign of Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, and Chairman Mao Zedong in communist China, photographs were often touched-up for Machiavellian purposes. Manipulated images of Stalin show him neatly aligned with his high-level entourage while the original shows a number of low-ranking soldiers posing alongside. The famous portrait of Chairman Mao was highly retouched to give the Marxist a warm, wrinkle-free face as befitting the founding father. One photograph of German prisoners of war in World War II collaged two exposures to show twice the number of captured enemy combatants. Political leaders clearly knew the power of photography to arouse political forces, command public opinion and promote patriotism. So did their critics. In blatantly manipulated montages, cartoonist Alexandr Zhitmor-



sky lampooned and caricatured Hitler in a remarkably creative and symbolic composition.

After newspapers perfected printing techniques by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, photojournalism became a steady element in articles, features, and in-print advertisements. One small problem existed: big bulky cameras had to be at the scene to capture the moment. Sometimes they were there at the right moment, sometimes not. Staging was not uncommon, while fabrications, alterations and enhancements were *de rigueur* techniques for twentieth-century editors (and, unfortunately, still are).

The exhibit takes another turn at the conclusion, as it begins to ask serious existential questions. Claude Cahun, who wrestled with the condition of self-alienation, produced *Que me veux tu?* (what do you want?) in 1929. This two-headed self-portrait was inspired by French poet Arthur Rimbaud's famous line "I is another." In the photograph, a haunting image of Cahun's doppelganger whispers into the other's ear. We aren't sure who is real and who is the ghost.

"Faking It: Manipulated Photography Before Photoshop" probes questions that run deeper than photography in the service (and disservice) of news, entertainment and politics. That visual truth has been compromised is no great revelation. Indeed, those who still believe "the camera does not lie" are living in a world of fiction. Rather, "Faking it" interrogates the capacity of photography to ask more elemental questions about reality, wonder, and transcendence.





## The Government Inspector: A Comedy Classic Classically Rendered

BY GAVI BROWN

In *The Government Inspector*, an opportunistic itinerant is incorrectly identified as a secret government inspector by a bumbling bunch of bureaucrats in the muddy interior of the Russian Empire. Chaos ensues.

When it was first performed in 1836, Nikolai Gogol's play was so controversial that the Czar had to intercede on the play's behalf. At Stern College's recent performance, it's clear that the play has lost its poignant historical satire of graft and greed. But what remains is humor—lots and lots of humor. The prime ingredients for the play are Corrupt officials, shameless women and, lily-livered landlords led by a mayor scampering to hide the town's abysmal state of affairs. Add a dash of wacky antics, a colorful supporting cast, and women in outrageous wigs and waxed mustaches and you've guaranteed endless laughs.

When Mayor Antonovich (Hannah Dreyfus) hears word of this inspector (Danielle Penn) from the nosy postmaster (Arielle Katz), his entire world flashes before him as he visualizes his crooked kingdom crumble before suffering exile to Siberia. The mayor's fears are shared with his cabinet. The judge (Esti Schwartz), who takes kickbacks in rubles only, the school principal (Sharon Kay), who renders straight A's to the children of donors, the hospital director (Sarah Kind), who just completed a hospital too small to fit beds, and his nitwit sidekick, the chief of medicine (Malka Sigal) are all terrified of the consequences to their small and rather absurdly run town.

When it becomes abundantly clear that no amount of effort could clean



up the town in time, bribes and brown envelopes are assembled to placate a man who they hope is a character amiable to backhanded businesses. Misunderstandings lead to overly friendly dealings. Soon the inspector (Danielle Penn) realizes he's got an opportunity to cash in on this oblivious town and proceeds to take advantage of the town's gullible officials. The mayor serves the inspector a variety of intoxicating concoctions in an attempt to pry information from the inspector, but instead of loosening his tongue, the sloshed inspector fabricates ever-wilder stories of political, literary and artistic prowess. The town's people believe every word of his dramatic address until it ends with the inspector passing out on the floor—absolutely plastered.

By the time the bogus inspector collects his cash and runs, the town is turned upside-down, the mayor is in ruins and the bureaucrats are in for a rather unexpected surprise.

In her first performance at Stern College, sophomore Danielle Penn manages to execute an impeccable performance requiring an immense amount of quirkiness. As the government inspector incognito, her lanky movements come in handy in her memorable long-winded drunken monologue. Penn was given the toughest assignment—to play an unprincipled, indebted, rambling vagabond in a variety of moods—and hits it out of the park.

She is of course not acting alone. A collaboration of Stern College's most talented acts was assembled for the performance. Junior Hannah Dreyfus adeptly plays the pompous, prickly mayor and manages to externalize the mayor's inner feelings in not-so-subtle eye darts and over-the-top shenanigans. Smaller parts were performed equally well. Senior Chaya Weissman's rendition of the curmudgeonly maid is perfectly played from a fairy tale playbook. Leah Gottfried, as the mayor's bored and sexually unsatisfied wife, manages to pull off outlandish and dreadful at the same time. Two ever-present lumbering landlords (Kayla Miller and Helene Sonenberg), the tweedledee and tweedledum of the play, add a splash of hilarious repartee to almost every scene.

Sadly, an underwhelmingly unadorned set in an undignified location (Koch Hall) lent the play an unpolished finish. In addition, the mostly monochromatic costumes and ridiculous makeup gave the play a sloppy feel. A higher-level attention to the set and outfits would have made the performance impress, not simply entertain. Indeed, the rendition stays safely attached to its original time-period of Tsarist Russia, missing an opportunity to season the play by lampooning our age of the Koch brothers and *Citizens United*. Additionally, the momentum and zaniness of the performance prevents the audience from dwelling on the disheartening civil lessons of Gogol's play. While the production lacks the political pungency and bite of satire, it was clearly geared towards fun before finals. And fun it delivered.

# Celebrating Christmas

BY YAEL ROBERTS

December 25. The day that everything is closed, and there's nothing to do but go to the movies, eat Chinese food, and lounge around home. After all, that's how the Chosen People spend Christmas. But the city that never sleeps doesn't really sleep on Christmas either. Here are some ideas for exciting going-ons around New York City for this coming Tuesday.

If you want to be cliché and just go to a movie on Christmas, the much anticipated *Les Misérables* finally debuts December 25 at midnight. Some theaters are even offering late night showings on December 24. The movie is being advertised throughout the streets of New York. Large screens in Times Square highlight what looks to be a musical masterpiece. Will the movie meet its high expectations? Find out this Noel.

So if you'd rather see something that's sure to be good, the Christmas classic *It's a Wonderful Life* is showing at the IFC center at 1PM. James Stewart and Donna Reed will not disappoint in this wonderful movie about hope and the joy of living.

Well it is holiday season, and that means Channukah just passed. What else to remind you of Channukah but the Maccabeats, singing about candlelight at the B.B. King Blues club? But maybe the Maccabeats aren't your thing. Maybe you'd prefer to hear Soulfarm lead into Christmas on December 24, again at the B.B. King Blues club. C. Lanzbom's project lately released *Holy Grail* (2010), and the New York based jam Rock Jewish band is sure to raise your spirits.

If you're done sitting around, and need to get outside, try the free Fun Run in Central Park, brought to you by Team Just One Life. The 3.1 mile race begins at 2PM at 72nd and Central Park West, and free snacks will be provided after the race.

Perhaps you don't want to exercise at all, and just want to watch other people sweat up a storm. If so, the Brooklyn Nets host the Boston Celtics at the recently opened Barclay's Center in Brooklyn. The game starts at 12PM.

Or maybe you don't want to move at all on Christmas, and just want to watch the game from home or would rather just read a book in bed. Try the recently released graphic novel *Building Stories*, a box of 14 distinct bits and pieces of a comic book, totaling 260 pages. This non-linear, colorful "novel" took Chris Ware a decade to create and addresses themes across creative culture. Another recently released entertaining and thought-provoking book is *Dear Editor*. The book is an anthology of prose poetry, all written from a poet to editors as she seeks publication.

Although not on open on Christmas itself, the New York Botanical Gardens is exhibiting their annual Holiday Train Show. Check it out through January 13 to see 140 replicas of original buildings in New York, from the Brooklyn Bridge to the 42nd Street NYPL. Train models cover a quarter mile of track in the Conservatory, winding through the historic buildings.

The annual Radio City Christmas Spectacular is pricey, but it features The Rockettes. Described by *The New York Times* as "simply magnificent," the show is sure to be more dazzling in real life than it is on TV. And why not take advantage of the opportunity and see it in person? Just don't tell Bubby.

The Jewish Museum, not surprisingly, remains open on Christmas. Head to the Upper West Side to view exhibits in their permanent collection such as "Culture and Continuity: The Jewish Journey" or new exhibits like "Crossing Borders: Manuscripts from the Bodleian Libraries." Admission is only \$7.50 for students.

Or maybe you want to take advantage of the day off and spend December 25 volunteering and bettering the world around you. If so, head to Brooklyn and Queens for four rallies for Agunot with ORA. These women's husbands have been withholding *gets* from their wives from a year to thirteen years. Transportation is available from Washington Heights and from Midtown. Serve meals to the homeless at the Prospect Park YMCA, or look up The Holiday Project to visit patients in hospitals around the tri-state area and brighten their day.

However you choose to spend the holiday, whether its Chinese and a movie, playing Santa, sledding, or just doing nothing on at all, don't worry. Because on this day of other days, it's up to you how you celebrate.







## Greetings from Middle Earth: A Review of *The Hobbit*

By EZRIEL GELBFISH

Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey* puts us back into Hobbiton, though not before a short, expository introduction. We begin in Middle Earth, where Bilbo Baggins writes his journal, talks to his nephew Frodo, gets the mail, and makes food for himself. He reminisces on meeting Gandalf while smoking his pipe when thirteen hairy dwarves invade his hobbit-hole and raid all the food in his pantry. Poor Bilbo can but protest feebly. After the meal the dwarves clean the dishes while singing a little ditty, and Bilbo is offered a contract to assist the dwarves on a mission. Talking it over with Gandalf, Bilbo can't decide whether to sign or not.

Sound boring? It is. The first act of *The Hobbit* keeps going and going and going. There's interminable exposition and indulgent attention to small characters. For fans of the original book, the movie will induce hysteria no matter how it comes out. By bringing J.R.R. Tolkien's signature fantasy to life, *The Hobbit* will excite devotees in the same way its ambitious predecessor did. For the rest of us non-fanboys, *The Hobbit* is hardly as perfect as the original trilogy, despite its high-octane action sequences and advances in visual magic.

Still, it's been eight years since we've seen Middle Earth, and pretty much anything going on there commands our attention. This winded if mostly exciting ride tells a fanciful tale that stands alone from the *Lord of the Rings*, but does sneak in some trilogy backstory. The project was originally pegged for two films, with visionary director Guillermo del Toro at the helm, but he dropped the project after a weary slog through development hell. Then, like manifest destiny, Peter Jackson assumed the director's chair and turned two movies into three, perhaps to poetically match his previous *Lord of the Rings* set.

Onlookers worry about the conversion of *The Hobbit*'s slim 320 pages into three mov-

ies, of which the first alone is close to three hours. Could it be that the studio execs hunger for some extra cash? Were they motivated to milk another film out of this saga by hundreds of millions of dollars in premium, Imax, 3D ticket stubs? Why I never...

In defense of Peter Jackson, though, there really is enough material to stretch. The book is short because it was condensed into simple, kid-friendly prose, but in story it covers considerable ground, including Bilbo's travels with the thirteen dwarves to recover their ancestral home; the killing of the villain Smaug,

**FOR FANS OF THE ORIGINAL BOOK, THE MOVIE WILL INDUCE HYSTERIA NO MATTER HOW IT COMES OUT. BY BRINGING J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S SIGNATURE FANTASY TO LIFE, THE HOBBIT WILL EXCITE DEVOTEES IN THE SAME WAY ITS AMBITIOUS PREDECESSOR DID. FOR THE REST OF US NON-FANBOYS, THE HOBBIT IS HARDLY AS PERFECT AS THE ORIGINAL TRILOGY, DESPITE ITS HIGH-OCTANE ACTION SEQUENCES AND ADVANCES IN VISUAL MAGIC.**

a sentient dragon that stole the dwarves' treasure; Bilbo's encounter with Gollum and the finding of the One Ring; Bilbo's troupe getting variously captured by Trolls, Goblins, and Wood-Elves; political maneuverings with the Arkenstone, the dwarves' royal heirloom; and a massive, climactic Battle of Five Armies, which seems pretty self-explanatory. The book's meager size belies a story dense enough to spawn a franchise by even the most

conservative estimates. Whereas a battle between five armies, for example, can take fifteen pages of a book, in the forthcoming *Hobbit* sequel it will likely eat an hour and a half of screen-time, what with the dwarves, men, orcs, goblins, and elves battling each other, helped along by wargs, wizards, eagles, and trolls. Such are the joys of adaptation.

In the fantasy genre, the original *Lord of the Rings* trilogy stands out because it was met by enthusiasm from geeks and critics alike. Sure, it induced paroxysms of pleasure in Tolkien obsessives, but it was also critically adored, winning countless Academy Awards including Best Picture and Best Director for *The Return of the King*. The movies had innovative production design, art direction, cinematography and sound design: in short, all those Oscar categories that laymen can't define but instinctively enjoy. *The Hobbit* has that same attention to detail, imaginative renderings of beloved characters, and scenic tours of New Zealand's landscape. Like *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Hobbit* has been painstakingly created to envelope the viewer in an epic fantasia.

The difference between the *Hobbit* and its heftier older brother is in tone. I know many people who loved *The Hobbit*'s book form but couldn't get through any of the three *Lord of the Rings* books. Where *The Hobbit* was quick and easy, flitting breezily between plot points, the *Lord of the Rings* was dry, grandiose, boring. The latter's movie versions succeeded in part because they excised Tolkien's Biblical prose for his meaty storyline, wonderfully infused with mystery and wonder by Peter Jackson. But *The Hobbit* never had that inflated importance. It was simply a tale of treasure seekers, not the End of All Things Good At the Hands of Sauron the Destroyer. With endearing whimsy *The Hobbit* was easy to read and virtuously mellow.

Jackson's screenplay, written with Fran Walsh, Philippa Boyens, and Guillermo del Toro, is faithful to those light-hearted lean-

ings, notably manifested by Martin Freeman as the fastidious titular hobbit, and the whole of Scotland's acting population as his quirky dwarf companions. Other minor characters make cameos—including Cate Blanchett as the ethereal Lady Galadriel, and a cretinous Goblin King with a goiter beard. But on the whole *The Hobbit* is a whole lot darker than it's source material. Maybe it's because *The Hobbit* panders too much to our superhero-addicted, bloated lust for action, or maybe it's the main antagonist Azog the Defiler, a menacing Orc who is not in the books and merely serves here for narrative arc purposes. It won't matter either way, with a budget the size of a small country's GDP, *The Hobbit* is assured blockbuster success. Critical thinkers however, may just find the movie may be too epic for its own good. *The Hobbit* is enjoyable fantasy catnip that has been seen and done before.

In fact, just about the only mold the movie breaks is the rate of frames per second (fps), which for the last eighty-something years has been standard at 24 fps. Here the frames per second is at 48, a sizable leap forward when considering that the human eye can detect up to 100 frames per second. To Jackson and his followers, the new frame rate is like Blu-Ray for movie theaters, making for sharper images and smoother movement. Critics of the new format, however, say it's harsher and too realistic, as if we're seeing movie sets instead of a believable story. 48 fps leeches the misty magic from the movies because it is *too* immersive, somehow, maybe.

Depending on your view, *The Hobbit* could herald a revolution in film technology or an understanding of why 24 fps has stayed the standard for so long. Only 3D screenings of *The Hobbit* will project in the higher frame rate, so fans still have the option of seeing it the good old fashioned way. To be honest, though, I went to a 48 fps showing and could barely see a difference in the new technology. Maybe the Dark Ages aren't coming to an end. Call it what you will.