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Rosenberg Foundation Internship
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With the support of the Rosenberg Foundation, I worked this summer with Aliza Becker of the American Jewish Peace Archive, on an in-depth study of the movement for peace in the Middle East following the war in 1967. In reading the oral histories of young Jewish activists who advocated peace in the late sixties and early seventies, I learned about this time period in the very words of those who took part and worked to make interviews accessible for researchers and activists.

The American Jewish Peace Archive was founded to preserve the stories of American Jewish peace activists from the 1960s to the present. The archive offers lessons for those who wish to learn from the peace movement's past. Today, it seems that dissent in the Jewish community and dissatisfaction with Jewish communal institutions stems not only from differences in attitudes toward Israel, but also due to the feeling that these institutions of an older generation were failing to represent the priorities of young Jews. Israel was not the only issue at stake as this generation of young Jews sought to shape the American Jewish community. While they were concerned with race, gender, class, spirituality, and education, at the core of their activism lay a desire to reinvigorate and reinterpret the Jewish traditional values.

Though the American Jewish Peace Archive documents the history of the peace movement, my work this summer focused on a particular generation that came of age in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Many of them had been members of the New Left and active in the anti-Vietnam War movement in the United States. Some of the older participants had been active in the civil rights movement as well, such as Rabbi Richard

Levy who served at UCLA Hillel during this period and had as a rabbinical student earlier in the decade been jailed for civil disobedience organized by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Following the 1967 War, these young Jewish activists largely left the organizations of the New Left when they were faced with anti-Zionism. Though they too had criticisms of the State of Israel, many still considered themselves Zionists and even moved to Israel during this period. These ideological divides persist to today, when both J Street and Jewish Voice for Peace advocate for an end to the occupation but do so by proclaiming or rejecting Zionism, respectively. Members of this generation of activists took part in the formation of each of these organizations, but trace their involvement in the overall movement for a progressive end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to these years of their youth.

In the necessary work of transcribing interviews, I heard activists share stories of their own time as a young adult advocating for change in the Jewish community. While these interviews are full of colorful anecdotes and detailed perspectives that will I'm sure be of interest to any reader, I especially loved hearing the emotion in the interviewee's voice when they recalled a particular moment. I transcribed the interviews of several individuals who began their activism in this period. Stephen P. Cohen recounted his travels to Israel in the summer of 1969, when he specifically sought out places where Israelis and Palestinians intersected and accompanied a Palestinian to the Temple Mount. Since I recognized his name from his later scholarly works, it was exciting to hear about David Biale as a student activist who staged a sit-in at a Jewish foundation to advocate for better Jewish educational programs. As a young person looking for models in Jewish history, Aviva Cantor found someone who could serve as the guiding voice of the Jewish

Liberation Project in the writings of Ber Borochov, finding the inspiration and challenges I did when I read Borochov's writing in my classes on Yiddish and Jewish History. In the interviews of David Mandel, Jonathan Brandow, Rabbi Richard Levy, Phil Horn, and Cheryl Moch, I found other moments that resonated with my own experience facing these questions of Jewish identity today.

Since the hours of interviews and hundreds of pages of transcripts can only make a difference when they are accessible to others, my internship experience also involved writing summaries of several interviews and short biographical introduction for the activists. These pieces will eventually be made available on the new American Jewish Peace Archive when it is launched in the coming months. By making the stories of these activists available, I am confident the archive will contribute to the peace movement's understanding of its past and hopefully guide its future.

In some ways my internship experience was quite different when compared the other Rosenberg Foundation interns this summer. Collecting these interviews has taken Aliza throughout the country, so there is no traditional office for the archive. When she came to New York this summer, we could have a face-to-face meeting, but otherwise I could do my work for the archive with my laptop from anywhere. I had the opportunity to travel within the New York area in my work for the archive, including conducting interviews and finding documents and books about the time period.

I interviewed Phil Horn, who was out of college by the time the American Jewish peace movement took off following the 1967 war, but who was still working on college campuses, putting together programs for youth under the auspices of the Jewish Agency for Israel. His network of Americans and Israelis on college campuses stretched from

coast to coast, including people like J. J. Goldberg and Stephen P. Cohen who contributed their own stories to the archive as well. The network of Jewish student publications and, eventually the organization Jewish Student Network itself, brought students across the country together, but it was Phil Horn who often made those initial connections. Sitting across the table from him in his home, with an audio recorder between us, I felt as though I was seeing the tangle of history unwrapping before me.

Other discoveries happened as I transcribed interviews conducted by Aliza Becker or as I reviewed and summarized them. One of the earliest interviews I transcribed was of Aviva Cantor, who begins her interview by describing her time working with the Jewish Liberation Project as the “best years of her life.” Though having learned about the history of progressive Jewish organizations through my involvement in a progressive Jewish organization on my own college campus, I had never heard of the Jewish Liberation Project. A search took me to the source of the organization itself. An early statement, published in *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review* in spring of 1969, describes their frustrations with the American Jewish establishment’s failure to engage young people. The Jewish Liberation Project sought to work with those in America and in Israel to create a more robust dialogue between Jews in the two countries, with the hope of building a community on the Jewish values of justice and truth. Some lines sounded like they could have been written by my peers and while it could be frustrating to see that we face the same problems today, it’s inspiring to see the creativity in Jewish life this group inspired in that generation.

The opportunity to work on a project at this stage gave me insight into all the work that goes into the oral history resources available and how they can shape our

understanding of history and inform the work we do today. This archive presents invaluable resources for understanding the movement for a peaceful end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the American Jewish community.