

WHERE WE COME FROM
Our Jewish Heritage in Poland—
Past, Present & Future

October 17-27, 2006
 San Francisco Bay Area, California



*Presented by the Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland,
 Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture*

EVENT REPORT



**TAUBE
 FOUNDATION
 FOR JEWISH LIFE
 AND CULTURE**

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FROM OCTOBER 17 THROUGH 27, the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture (TFJLC) in San Francisco held a series of cultural and academic events entitled “Where We Come From: Our Jewish Heritage in Poland—Past Present & Future,” bringing Polish and American grantees to the San Francisco Bay Area. The festival’s fundamental message was a revelation to many: that Jewish culture is being rediscovered and renewed by both Jews and Christians in Poland and that the flowering of these cultural, intellectual and social institutions is not only reclaiming Jewish heritage but also strengthening the future of both Judaism and democracy in Poland.

Cosponsors for the events included the Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Theological Union; Center for Russian, East European and Eurasian Studies, Stanford University; Congregation Emanu-El, San Francisco; Institute for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies, University of California, Berkeley; Hillel at Stanford; Taube Center for Jewish Life, Jewish Community Center of San Francisco; Jewish Family and Children’s Services of San

Francisco; Jewish Music Festival, East Bay Jewish Community Center; Judah L. Magnes Museum; San Francisco Jewish Film Festival and Taube Center for Jewish Studies, Stanford University.

Distinguished guests from Poland included Dr. Eleonora Bergman, executive director, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw; Kate Craddy, projects coordinator, Galicia Jewish Museum, Krakow; Konstanty Gebert, journalist/publisher of *Midrasz Magazine* and Polish representative of the TFJLC; Anka Grupinska, director, Centropa-Poland and author of Holocaust histories; Daniela Malec and Piotr Nawrocki, co-directors, “Czulent” Polish Jewish Student Union, Krakow; Janusz Makuch,

director, Jewish Culture Festival, Krakow; Magdalena Matuszewska, Warsaw program coordinator, Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland, TFJLC and Yale Reisner, co-director, Lauder Genealogy Project, Jewish Historical Institute, Warsaw.

Participating American scholars included Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Professor of Judaic and Hebrew Studies at New York University and the Chief Consultant to the Museum of

“This is the first time, to my knowledge, that Jewish cultural renewal in Poland is the focus of attention here in the U.S. This is thanks to Tad Taube’s extraordinary vision. After more than 60 years, it is time to pay attention and to support the renewal of Jewish culture in Poland—past, present and future.”

*—Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,
Keynote Speaker*

the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw; Dr. Samuel Kassow, Distinguished Professor of History, Trinity College, Hartford, and Consultant to YIVO and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw; Dr. Arnold Eisen, Chancellor of the Jewish Theological Seminary, New York; Dr. Steven J. Zipperstein, Director, Taube Center for Jewish Studies, Stanford University; Dr. Zachary Baker, Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections at Stanford; Shana Penn, visiting scholar, Center for Jewish Studies, Graduate Theological Union; Dr. Gabriela Safran, Associate Professor, Department of Slavic Languages and Literatures, Stanford University and Eleanor Shapiro and Zohar Weiman Kelman, GTU graduate students.

"We Polish Jews exist, and we would like to be recognized and appreciated by those of you who are the descendants of Polish Jewry. Please know that you have partners in us, that we are not only the guardians of the 'remnants' but are also ready to share this heritage with you. Come visit us. We may be relatively small in numbers, but we are part of a thriving new democracy and renewed Jewish community."

-- Dr. Eleonora Bergman
Executive Director
Jewish Historical Institute

Throughout the series, panel discussions explored questions such as:

- What kind of recovery and continuity of Jewish life in Poland is possible, given the Nazi genocide's near-mortal blow? What has been lost? What is being recovered and by whom? How do these new developments shape Jewish consciousness/culture in Poland? What are their influences on Poland's mainstream culture? Why does the Jewish world at large resist these developments?
- In today's Poland, who is a Jew? Who decides? What are the sources and locations of cultural learning and identity?
- What accounts for the growing interest in secular Jewish culture among Jews and Christians in Poland? What are its products? What has been its pattern of development, and where is it going? How does it compare to trends in other parts of post-Communist Europe?
- How are artists expressing communal loss, tragedy and recovery using cultural resources and various mediums to commemorate and educate?
- How are Jews making news in Poland today? How is this news reaching the wider world?
- What about the third generation in Poland since the war? How are these young people exploring and interpreting the past? How are they coming to terms with their identity as Jews?
- Is Poland an ally of Israel? In what way? How is news about Israel reported in the Polish press?
- How can Jews who have Polish backgrounds tell their stories and trace their roots? What resources are available to help them recapture their rich past?

Events were varied, ranging from the formally academic to the gregariously social, but all had common outcomes: informative presentations, provocative discussions, enthusiastic audience participation and palpable excitement about the growing connections between American Jews and the new Poland.

Chronology of Events

Tuesday, October 17

Welcome dinner at the Four Seasons Restaurant hosted by Tad Taube, Founder-Chairman of the

Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture. Guests enjoyed excellent food, lively hospitality and beautiful views of the city.



Host Tad Taube welcomes Daniela Malec of Krakow, where Tad himself was born.



Janusz Makuch and Tad Taube enjoy the opportunity to converse.



Michael Alpert chats with Dr. Eleonora Bergman in Polish, Yiddish, English and Hebrew.



Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and Yale Reisner listen to their tablemates.

"Our program is oriented toward life – researching, revitalizing, reestablishing every aspect of our being that existed in Poland prior to the episodes of death.

The good news is that there are visible signs that our efforts have been extremely successful. The imprint of our foundation is everywhere – in the churches, in the government, amongst the people. There is now a great interest and recognition by virtually all Poles of the need to reestablish and revitalize the accomplishments and life of the Jewish people."

*-- Tad Taube, Chairman
Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture*

Wednesday, October 18

Afternoon reception and preview of the 2007 Polish exhibitions at the **Judah L. Magnes Museum**, Berkeley, with Chief Curator Alla Efimova and Guest Curator Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett. Attendees were warmly welcomed by Magnes Board Treasurer Jay Espovitch, Founders Rebecca and Seymour Fromer, Executive Director Terry Pink Alexander and Judaica Curator Elayne Grossbard. Ms. Grossbard highlighted the Polish components of the Magnes collection, emphasizing the graphics depicting traditional Jewish life from the early 20th century.

Dr. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett gave a preview of

the upcoming Magnes show featuring her father's art, "They Called Me Mayer July: Painted Memories of a Jewish Childhood in Poland Before the Holocaust." One aspect of the mission of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture is to showcase the richness of prewar Jewish life in Poland by sponsoring traveling exhibitions and presentations such as this one. The preview illuminated Mayer Kirshenblatt's life in his shtetl, vividly and charmingly rendered in his detailed and colorful style. All the day's participants discussed their enthusiastic anticipation of the upcoming Magnes exhibitions.



From left: Anka Grupinska, Jay Espovitch, Shana Penn and Kate Craddy at the Magnes Museum.



From left: Daniela Malec, Terry Pink Alexander and Magdalena Matuszewska.



Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes her father's art.

"An important focus of Magnes exhibitions and public programs are themes related to Polish Jewish heritage. The Magnes aims through its presentations of Polish Jewish heritage to foster intergenerational dialogue, education and audience development and encourage Americans to learn about Jewish life in Poland prior to and after World War II."

– *Alla Efimova*
Chief Curator, Judah L. Magnes Museum

Wednesday, October 18-Thursday, October 19

Symposium: "Renewal and Resistance: The Revitalization of Jewish Culture in Post-Holocaust, Post-Communist Poland"

Cohosted by the Center for Jewish Studies at the Graduate Theological Union and the Institute for Slavic, East European and Eurasian Studies at UC Berkeley. Support provided by the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture, Koret Foundation Funds and the Posen Foundation Grant for the Study of Secular Judaism.

**Wednesday evening: Keynote Lecture, Graduate Theological Union
"The Postwar Chapter in Poland: Building the Museum of the History of Polish Jews"**

Welcome: Dr. James Donahue, President of the Graduate Theological Union.

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, New York University.

Dr. Donahue welcomed the standing-room-only audience, emphasizing the honor of hosting such a distinguished group. Dr. Kirshenblatt-

Gimblett's scholarly narrative and slide show presentation on "The Postwar Chapter in Poland: Building the Museum of the History of Polish Jews" explained how the remaining artifacts of Jewish culture are being uncovered, preserved and studied to bring the 900-year heritage of Polish Jewry into the light of modern-day Poland.



Dr. James Donahue, GTU President, introduces the program.



Dr. Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett delivers the keynote address.

"I had the great honor of traveling to Poland with the Advisory Board of the Taube Foundation to see the work that is being done and see the revitalization of Jewish culture in Poland. It was truly transformative to be in Poland, my life has not been the same since. I like to think that I am a better person for it. Certainly, my understanding and my commitment to issues of Jewish life and culture in Poland have been enormously increased."

-- Dr. James Donahue

President, Graduate Theological Union

Thursday, October 19 Daylong Symposium

Panels explored “Culture, Memory & Renewal,” “Post-Communist Identity Formations,” “Secular Jewish Culture Then & Now” and “Art, Loss & Recovery.”

Dr. Naomi Seidman, Director, Center for Jewish Studies, GTU, and Dr. Edward Walker, Co-director, Institute for Slavic, East European and

Eurasian Studies, UC Berkeley, welcomed the audience.

Each panel presentation was introduced by a moderator, with papers given by three to four speakers, followed by questions and comments from a large and engaged audience.



Left to right: Dr. Eleonora Bergman, Yale Reisner and Shana Penn at the GTU symposium.



Left to right: Yale Reisner, Daniela Malec, Konstanty Gebert, Anka Grupinska and Janusz Makuch.



Left to right: Dr. Edward Walker, Konstanty Gebert, Dr. Naomi Seidman and Michael Alpert between panel sessions.

**"I just have to say this symposium changed my life.
I had no idea what was going on in Poland today."**

-- Marcia Falk

Poet, Author and Translator

Friday, October 20

Private dinner at Easton Hall with guests and staff.
Erev Shabbat at Chochmat Halev in Berkeley.

Saturday, October 21

Evening concert with Theodore Bikel, Michael Alpert and Tamara Brooks, at the Jewish Community Center of San Francisco (JCCSF). A sold-out

crowd was treated to an evening of stories and joyful music celebrating a time when "Even the Birds Sang in Yiddish."



Theodore Bikel



Tamara Brooks



Michael Alpert

Sunday, October 22

Jewish Community Center of San Francisco "Telling Our Stories, Tracing Our Roots"

A Day of Cross-Cultural Dialogue and Workshops Exploring Jewish Cultural Renewal in Poland and the U.S.

A plenary panel, including special guest Theodore Bikel, led off the day with a provocative discussion on "Jewish Cultural Renewal, Reflections from Europe and the U.S." Breakout sessions and workshops followed in the morning and afternoon, covering such topics as "Our Endangered Past & Heritage Preservation," "The Jewish Arts & Non-Jewish Audiences," "Jews Making News," and "Producing Culture Festivals." Inspired by the presentations, attendees participated in spirited interchanges with the guest speakers and each other. Many remarked on how grateful they were to have a chance to talk with Poles directly, to hear from the source what was happening in the country of their roots.

The program was cohosted by the Taube Center for Jewish Life at the JCCSF.

"The program proved to be fruitful for both sides. I noticed a need for dialogue and sharing experiences. I'm really proud to be working for the Foundation that cultivates life, progress and cooperation between Jews and Poles in rebuilding Jewish culture as well as building bridges and reconciliation between the two nations. I think we have to seize the opportunity and strengthen the message on both sides."

-- *Magdalena Matuszewska*
Warsaw Program Coordinator
Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland



Daniela Malec, at left, listens as Yale Reisner offers genealogy advice.



Theodore Bikel and Janusz Makuch discuss "Jewish Cultural Renewal: Reflections from Europe & the U.S."



Anka Grupinska leads a workshop on "Jews Making News."



From left: Magdalena Matuszewska, Zohar Weiman Kelman, Daniela Malec and Piotr Nawrocki discuss the topic "Third Generation on Campus."

"The revival of Jewish culture in Poland is possible, desirable and kosher. It would not be possible without the material, intellectual and spiritual support from the world Jewish community, from people to whom I refer as belonging to the 'second Polish diaspora.' "

– *Konstanty Gebert*

Associate Director, Jewish Heritage Initiative in Poland

Founder/Publisher, Midrasz Magazine

Sunday, October 22

Private dinner at the home of Jane Purinton and James Donahue, GTU President.

Special entertainment by guests Theodore Bikel, Tamara Brooks and Michael Alpert.



Jane Purinton enjoys the magic of Theodore Bikel in her living room.



Theodore Bikel performs for a delighted gathering.



From left: Kate Craddy, Konstanty Gebert and Piotr Nawrocki listen with obvious pleasure.

Tuesday, October 24

Stanford Hillel and Taube Center for Jewish Studies: Presentations and discussions about Jewish identity and student life in Poland and the U.S.

Jewish Student Peer Exchange

A dinner discussion for our student guests with Stanford Hillel students was organized by Hillel Executive Director Adina Danzig. The student-only format created a context that encouraged the participants to dialogue and share personal stories from their different cultural backgrounds.



From left: Piotr Nawrocki, Daniela Malec and Izabela Filipiak share pizza and conversation with Stanford students.



Magdalena Matuszewska listens to her peers at Stanford Hillel.

Panel Presentation at Stanford

Hosted by Taube Center for Jewish Studies at Stanford

“Remembering and Renewing Jewish Culture in Post-Holocaust, Post-Communist Poland”

Special guest: Professor Samuel Kassow, Charles H. Northam Professor of History, Trinity College, Hartford; consultant to YIVO and the Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, and a child of Holocaust survivors.

Moderator: Gabriella Safran, Associate Professor

of Slavic Languages and Literatures at Stanford.

Panel members: Dr. Zachary Baker, Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections at Stanford; Dr Eleonora Bergman; Janusz Makuch and Konstanty Gebert.



Taube Board Member Sigmund Rolat listens as Trinity College Professor Samuel Kassow describes the design for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.



Stanford Professor Gabriella Safran introduces the panelists, including Reinhard Family Curator of Judaica and Hebraica Collections Zachary Baker, seated at left.

Wednesday, October 25 Annual Meeting of the Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture Advisory Board, San Francisco

Special Focus: “How can the organized American Jewish community institutionalize knowledge of our Polish Jewish heritage?”

Presentation: Professor Samuel Kassow, Trinity College, biographer of Emanuel Ringelblum, exhibition consultant for the Museum of the History of Polish Jews in Warsaw.

Commentators: Professor Arnold Eisen, Chancellor-elect, Jewish Theological Seminary and Dr. Steven J. Zipperstein, Director, Taube Center for Jewish Studies, Stanford University.

Moderator: Dr. James Donahue, President, Graduate Theological Union.

“One of the big issues facing Jewish education today is to reconnect young Jews to a sense of Jewish peoplehood and of Jewish ethnicity. In this regard, Poland can play a major role. Living as we did for so long in Poland, much of the time we were a nation with a strong sense of honor, living within a nation. Polish Jews in the 1930s were not simply waiting on the brink of extinction. They were tough and vibrant and saw themselves as the vanguard of the Jewish people... In terms of our schools today, we mustn't throw away eight centuries of our culture, we mustn't forget it, we mustn't cut ourselves off.”

– Professor Samuel Kassow
Charles H. Northam Professor of History,
Trinity College, Hartford

Thursday, October 26

Gathering with Holocaust survivors and their families at the Jewish Family and Children's Services in San Francisco. The visiting Poles shared

their personal histories and detailed how they each became involved in the renewal of Jewish culture in Poland.



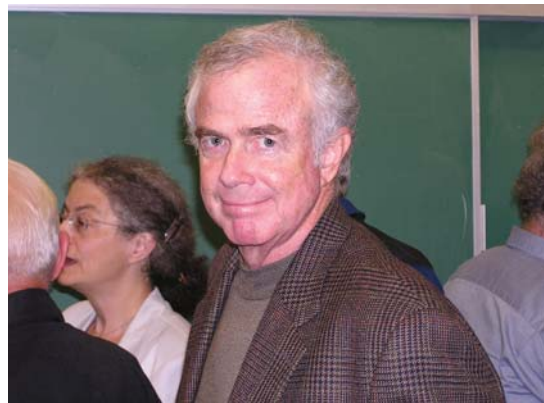
Host Tad Taube and Janusz Makuch listen carefully to the presentations.



Dr. Anita Friedman engages Janusz Makuch in a follow-up conversation.



Magdalena Matuszewska answers questions from the audience.



Taube Foundation for Jewish Life & Culture Executive Director Stephen Dobbs.

"Among the most meaningful sessions was the one with survivors. Most had never, ever thought about the hope and progress that was presented and many are still talking about what it all means. They were also personally honored that such a prestigious group came to talk with them and takes them seriously. Several want to go to Poland next summer with their children and grandchildren now that the future has been opened up for them in a new way."

*-- Dr. Anita Friedman, Director
Jewish Family and Children's Services, San Francisco*

Friday, October 27

Erev Shabbat at Congregation Emanu-El in San Francisco with Rabbi Stephen Pearce.

Welcome remarks: Tad Taube, President, Taube Philanthropies.

Presentation: Konstanty Gebert, founder-publisher, Midrasz Magazine: "Poland, An Ally of Israel?"

Private dinner at 415 Restaurant, San Francisco, hosted by Rabbi Stephen S. Pearce and his wife,

Dr. Laurie Pearce. Guests celebrated a successful program and a unique cross-cultural exchange .



The group enjoys the final gathering of the "Where We Come From" series. Left to right: Shana Penn, Konstanty Gebert, Dr. Laurie Pearce, Judi Leff, Magdalena Matuszewska, Anna Goldstein, Alice Lawrence, Janusz Makuch and Kate Craddy.

"By inviting me to California, you have given me the great opportunity to present myself, the Festival and our effort to preserve a vibrant Jewish culture in Poland. On the one hand, you appreciate us as leaders of the Jewish renewal and the revival of Jewish culture, and on the other hand, you appreciate us as human beings. Thank you from the bottom of my heart."

*– Janusz Makuch
Director, Jewish Culture Festival, Krakow*