My "Great World" Among the *Goyim*

Wallace Katz—SUNY-Stony Brook

I grew up during World War II and the immediate postwar era in Jersey City. As the first male child in my entire extended family, I was especially beloved by my maternal grandparents, who lived in the Bronx. Every Saturday, my father, an illiterate immigrant who came to the United States from the Ukraine in 1919, drove me, my mother, and my sister to the Bronx. As a teenager still living in Jersey City, the trip was sufficient for me to understand that the world was larger than what I knew.

I longed for Saturdays and these trips that brought me in touch with what I identified—via New York—as the "great world." The Bronx itself had the mysterious subway, the Yankees, the Zoo, the Botanical Garden, and, near my grandma's neighborhood, Crotona Park. With the help of an uncle I also discovered Coney Island, Orchard Beach, Radio City Music Hall, Rockefeller Center, "Broadway," and the Grand Concourse. With the help of an aunt and another uncle, a pharmacist who become a millionaire by getting into medical supply when Medicare began, I discovered politics. Both were card-carrying Communists, and they and my grandfather, a social democrat from Galicia and a fine craftsman, helped me understand Trotsky's famous remark, "You may not be interested in politics, but politics is interested in you." All these early influences were Jewish as was the neighborhood. But there was a big difference between Jews who lived in the great world and Jews who were parochial, paranoid, and provincial—though I would have hardly used these terms when I was five years old.

My father and mother, though for very different reasons, were non-observant parochial, paranoid, and provincial Jews. My mother was rather overprotective. Because of the

Great Depression she had to abort a child who would have been my older brother; her guilt when I was born, prematurely, accounted for her tendency to overprotect me and worry constantly that I would die, but this was not the whole matter. For reasons that I still don't quite understand, she was also quite afraid of life—she feared dogs, thunder, all other animals, and, to a certain extent, the entire male part of the species. She was blunt to the point of having no Freudian censor. My father was a gentle, sweet, hard-working, and decent man, but his "greenhorn" status and his refusal to learn how to read and write anything (not Russian, not Yiddish, not English) defined his existence in a negative way.

To put it simply, my parents were both afraid of what I called the great world—my mother out of what I think was a problem of female status in a world of early 20th century male dominance and my father because of the experiences of immigration, hardship, and illiteracy. As a bright, even precocious, child, I was quick to see that my parents' fears were not a good model for my behavior. This was especially true to the extent that their fears were rooted in being Jewish. I did not want to go through life fearing *the goyim*, the Gentiles, the others. Quite the contrary, I wanted to befriend these people; I wanted to learn from them, enjoy life with them, and love them as brothers and sisters, as part of the family that I still believe is America. By the time I started at Columbia University in 1955, I had at least begun what my parents never even started: confronting modernity.

Columbia gave me all the useful, appropriate tools for my struggle and it gave me new role models of how to make the leap from my father's *shtetl* (100 miles from Kiev) to the great world not merely of New York, but of Paris, Berlin, Nashville, Washington, D.C., San Francisco, Los Angeles, and all points in between. At Columbia I had plenty of male role models to make up for my father's lack in this regard, as well as my mother's animosity toward men. These

included Lionel Trilling, Fritz Stern, Steven Marcus, Rudy Binion, and Meyer Schapiro—all Jews, some of humble background, but all men who helped me to see and feel that I was made for the great world.

But Columbia also introduced me and allowed me to feel at home with *them*, the *goyim*; indeed Columbia did what I wanted it to do—it made me love them. First, there were the dead *goyim*: Homer, Vergil, Plato, Aristotle, and Dante, all the weft and warp of Western culture that had little or nothing to do with Jews, but was intrinsically worthwhile. Then there were some *goyim*, who were very much alive, loving, encouraging, rooting for me, and teaching me: an English economist (whose name slips my mind) who wrote my parents to tell them that it was all right for me to become a professor and that in my first year in college I "showed remarkable promise"; C. Wright Mills, Richard Morse, and this tall, elegant, amazingly erudite, charming, and powerful man, Jacques Barzun, now 103 and living in San Antonio, with whom I wrote my doctoral dissertation.

Although one of my oldest friends, Marshall Berman, has often questioned whether I am ashamed of my Jewish heritage and hinted or explicitly remarked that I am running away from my Jewishness, after careful consideration I know that he is wrong. In *Anti-Semite and Jew*, Sartre says that at times, "Jews make the best anti-Semites." This can certainly be true, but I suspect—when Jews can become the president of Dupont and Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Columbia, and Wesleyan—that there is hardly any reason for Jewish anti-Semitism. Moreover, if I want to make use of Sartre to describe or understand myself, I would speak about my journey from my nuclear family to where I am now as a "project." In *Search For a Method*, Sartre makes the project a bit too individual (we create and recreate the world together), but he is dead right when he argues that it is our duty and nature to create something new out of what we are given and that it is

always a "project," partaking surely of the given, but also, sometimes dramatically, "against the given."

My project in this world has been to live and love the *goyim*: I taught at Wesleyan, where not all my colleagues understood or appreciated my somewhat emotional Jewish temperament, but the quality of the students made up for everything. I lived in Europe for three years and occasionally experienced something of the pre-war or inter-war anti-Semitism. In Paris, an aristocratic landlady called me "*un Juif*" because my trunks, readied for the S.S. France and full of books, might damage her 17th century staircase classified as a "monument historique," and in Geneva, I ran into a German-Swiss lady who wouldn't rent me a room because "it was already rented," but then called the lady who I was renting a room from to say, "How dare you send a Jew to look at my room."

Other than these two experiences, I personally know nothing about anti-Semitism, and I do not feel my personal life is affected by it, either. I married a blond, blue-eyed knockout of a woman and our relationship lasted for 25 years. We grew apart and ultimately divorced, but never once did I think that our breakup had anything to do with anti-Semitism. While she was a *shiksa*, our divorce was not about her being Gentile and my being Jewish. Some of my best friends are German and I drive a 2001 Volkswagen Golf with a ski rack—the best and most reliable car I have ever owned. I care a good deal more about the fate of Palestinian Arabs than I do about the Israelis who terrorize them, but I don't want Israel to disappear from the face of the earth. My best work experience came when I was in Washington, D.C. and I worked for an old line elitist WASP, Robert C. Embry Jr., implementing a program that was the catalyst revitalizing the downtowns of many American cities. I care profoundly about improving American cities.

To live my own life, I had to deny my parents' provincial, paranoid fear of *the goyim*. The dynamic I described has in some ways defined my life, but as I grow older—I'm 73—I feel even more strongly that I have had a productive, worthwhile, and interesting life. My hegira away from the *shtetl* to modernity brings to mind that of others, such as Barack Obama's journey to the presidency.

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A Child of Holocaust Survivors Meets the Children of Nazi Perpetrators

Ruth Neubauer—Private Practice

The Conference, Its History and Format

At the 2003 meetings of the American Psychoanalytic Society in New York City, I learned of an unusual gathering in Cyprus entitled, "Shaping the Future by Confronting the Past—Germans, Jews and Affected Others." Immediately I knew I would attend this 2004 conference—both my parents escaped Nazi Germany and arrived in New York in the 1930s.

The conference was organized by a group of far-sighted Israeli and German psychoanalysts and psychotherapists, in cooperation with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, utilizing the Tavistock interaction model adapted