

## PRESSED: Images from the Jewish Daily Forward Exhibit at Hillman Library, University of Pittsburgh

Eve Wider, Director of the Millstein Library, Liaison for Jewish Studies, University of Pittsburgh Library System

It all started with a reference question about accessing a historic issue of the *Forward*, a newspaper published about Jewish life since 1897. As the Jewish Studies Program liaison for the University of Pittsburgh University Library System, I reached out to Chana Pollack, the archivist for the *Forward* newspaper. After Ms. Pollack helped me find the information, she mentioned an exhibit called “PRESSED: Images from the Jewish Daily Forward.” Ms. Pollack created the exhibit in collaboration with Nancy Johnson the curator of the Museum at Eldridge Street. Ms. Pollack pointed out that Pittsburgh used to have a *Forward* office and therefore the idea of bringing an exhibit about the historic paper home to Pittsburgh was born. I contacted Dr. Rachel Kranson, Director of the University of Pittsburgh Jewish Studies Program, who was very supportive of the idea because it would connect to her course, “Jews and the City,” which follows the migration of millions of Jewish people from the shtetls of Eastern Europe to urban areas around the world.

Founded in Manhattan, the Yiddish-language *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper grew to become the most widely read Jewish news source anywhere. By the 1920s, the daily had more readers than the New York Times. The PRESSED exhibit draws from the *Forward* archive, a selection of the original images depicting daily life and historical moments of Jewish life in America and around the world from the 1920s to the 60s. The exhibit includes the archival metal printing plates used to reproduce photographs in the paper. The exhibit images were created uniquely for the exhibit and are derived from the photo engraved metal plates. Ms. Pollack explained, “The exhibition provides a unique representation of imagery that can’t otherwise be seen, except for the halftone prints on exhibit, alongside the pages they were published, and the plates themselves.”

The prints rendered for this exhibition improved the clarity

from the original dotted and halftone prints published in the daily newspaper. Ms. Johnson shared that “Together these images of strikes and activists, Yiddish theater stars and baseball players, daily life and historic moments, present the depth and breadth of this singular publication, its audience and Jewish life in America

and around the world.” Ms. Pollack commented, “the images and the way they’re almost in negative ... It was so evocative to me. It’s just very moving ... Sometimes it looked very shadowy or very ghost-like. It reverberated the voices and sounds of machinery that are part of the history of the *Forward*.”

Hoping to highlight the local Pittsburgh connection to the *Forward* and Yiddish life in Pittsburgh, our group reached out to Eric Lidji, the Director of the Rauh Jewish History Program & Archives at the Senator John Heinz History Center, and he curated an adjacent exhibit “The Jewish *Forward* and Beyond: Yiddish Newspapers in Pittsburgh.” That exhibit tells the story of Pittsburgh’s early 20th century Yiddish presses through local newspapers reproductions and oral histories from the Heinz History Center and the University of Pittsburgh Library System collections.

Students in Dr. Kranson’s class viewed the exhibit and had a virtual tour and discussion with Ms. Pollack and Ms. Johnson. They then had the opportunity to create six-word headlines inspired by articles printed in the *Forward* newspaper in the early 20th century. The students also had the unique opportunity to print their headlines using typeset and the 1890s-era printing press at the Hillman Library’s Text & conText Lab. These headlines and the student narratives about the exhibit became the basis of an additional adjacent exhibit which we called “Making Headlines.”

If you are interested in hosting the PRESSED exhibit in your library please contact Chana Pollack, [pollack@forward.com](mailto:pollack@forward.com) or Nancy Johnson, [njohnson@eldridgestreet.org](mailto:njohnson@eldridgestreet.org)



**Forward** archivist Chana Pollack giving a tour of the exhibits on May 10, 2023.



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