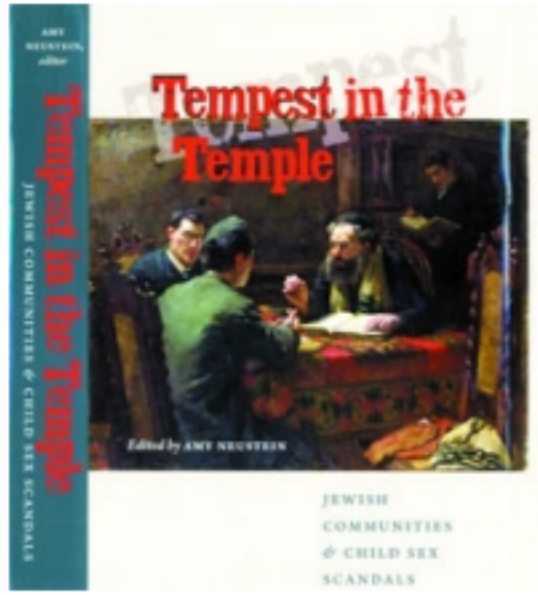


‘Tempest in the Temple’: a Strange New Book Alleges Corruption & Conspiracy in Brooklyn

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JAY STREET — It was only last week that Kings County District Attorney Charles J. Hynes opened a hotline for sex-abuse victims in Brooklyn’s Hasidic communities, but some critics have already denounced it.

In attempting to bring about more public prosecution of criminals within the extremely insular, ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities in Brooklyn, Hynes has encountered criticism from rabbis who believed that the D.A.’s office’s is too secular to deal with Hasidic Jews and should mind its own business.

However, other critics believe that the D.A.’s office is too soft on sex offenders in the Hasidic community, and has been for years.

In a newly published book, *Tempest in the Temple: Jewish Communities and Child Sex Scandals*, writers Amy Neustein and Michael Leshner sharply criticize prosecution of Hasidic sex crimes in Brooklyn since “Joe” Hynes was elected in 1989.

“The community is facing a two-sided obstacle in this case,” Leshner told the Eagle. “There’s the resistance of people in the [Hasidic] community [to prosecution], and the same people appear to have the cooperation of people in law enforcement and in Joe Hynes’ office.”

“It’s the biggest canard I’ve ever seen in two decades of running a sham prosecution against Orthodox crime,” Neustein said of the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Office “Kol Tzedek” or “Voice of Justice” hotline. “Every Brooklynite was made a fool of last week.”

Some D.A. employees have suggested that Neustein might have a grudge against Brooklyn Family Court and the Brooklyn D.A.’s office. In 1986, she filed for custody of her 6-year-old daughter, accusing her husband of molesting her. But the allegations were never proven, despite media coverage of the battle that lasted for years.

In 2005 at age 24, her daughter wrote a letter to Brooklyn’s Jewish Press stating that she was never abused or victimized by the courts, as her mother proclaimed.

“I, for one, owe my existence as a normal young adult to the family judges, Ohel foster care, and the Legal Aid Society attorney who helped me reunite with my father,” the young woman wrote. However, Leshner and Neustein’s work suggested that since taking office, Hynes has dropped charges against Hasidic sex offenders or simply let cases disappear for political points with Hasidic constituents.

Sex-abuse crimes within Brooklyn’s ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities are already notoriously difficult to prosecute. Victims reportedly face pressure to not report sexual abuse, and with blogs and web sites covering every event in the community, fear of being ostracized still exists.

However, Rhonnie Jaus, Chief of the Brooklyn District Attorney’s Sex Crimes Bureau, said that more and more victims from Brooklyn’s Orthodox Jewish community are coming forward every day. “Nineteen cases are currently pending in the criminal justice system,” she said. “We’ve never had 19 before. ... It’s a positive step. The proof is in the numbers.”

The Brooklyn D.A.’s office was partially building on the momentum of new media attention for these cases when they opened the hotline, she said.

Jaus said that in two of the 19 cases, the victim first reported the crime to a community member – and were then urged to report the crimes to city authorities. She also said that two suspects had four victims each.

“Lots of victims are starting to come forward,” she said.

Yet Neustein, editor of *Tempest in the Temple*, called Kol Tzedek “a complete fraud.”

She claimed that calls to the hotline were being referred to Dr. Hindy Klein of Ohel Children’s Home and Family Services, an organization that according to Neustein, has protected sex offenders in the past. She suggested that calls routed to Ohel through the hotline would alert Hasidic authorities to possible problems and allow them to handle the matters privately, while Ohel was able to make profits on counseling fees.

Jaus rejected those criticisms as “baseless.”

Calls to the hotline by the Eagle were answered by Brooklyn District Attorney staff. *Tempest* writer William Leshner told the Eagle that even if the 19 pending cases are recent, that number “serves to indict the past.” He believes that since taking office, Hynes has not sufficiently pursued Hasidic sex abusers.

In Leshner’s essay, “The Fugitive and the Forgotten,” he accuses Hynes of extreme apathy regarding the prosecution of Avrohom Montrowitz, who fled to Israel in 1984 after being accused of sex crimes. Some sources believe he molested hundreds of boys who didn’t report the assaults because of community pressure.

Avrohom Mondrowitz allegedly was molesting boys in Brooklyn while running a school for troubled children and offering counseling services in the 1970s and 80s. After five young non-Jewish boys reported him to police in late 1984, he fled to Israel.

Extradition treaties between Israel and the United States did not allow extradition for the crime of sodomy until just over a year ago.

Leshner writes that Hynes’ predecessor, Elizabeth Holtzmann, nonetheless filed numerous memos with the U.S. Justice Department, urging them to press Israeli diplomats to extradite Montrowitz.

Leshner writes that the memos stopped after Hynes was elected in 1989, and that in 1993, the Justice Department officially stopped pursuing the case, and D.A. Hynes expressed no interest in continuing to prosecute. According to Leshner’s sources, the Brooklyn D.A.’s office believed that it was impossible to extradite Montrowitz and said they would only prosecute if he tried to move to a different country. Leshner believes that the D.A.’s decisions were influenced by members of the Hasidic community who wanted the Montrowitz case to be forgotten about, rather than simply based in prosecution strategy.

“Charles Hynes was acting more as Mondrowitz’s lawyer than as the district attorney for his constituents and an advocate for victims,” Leshner wrote.

“Those allegations are untrue,” responded Jaus. She said that extradition was impossible until the treaty changed in 2007 and that Montrowitz was arrested in Israel, where he is currently detained and contesting his extradition.

The D.A.’s office filed papers for Montrowitz’s arrest and extradition “the minute the treaty changed,” Jaus said.

She also said that the D.A.’s office was in contact with the U.S. State Department since 2003 about bringing Montrowitz to justice.

Another case that comes under scrutiny in an essay co-written by Leshner and Neustein is that of Rabbi Solomon Hafner, who was accused of abusing a young boy in 2000. He was eventually acquitted, as part of what Leshner and Neustein suggest was a political agreement between Hynes and the Orthodox Jewish community.

Hafner was accused in 2000 of sexual abuse. Reportedly the victim was a young hearing-impaired boy who claimed that he had been abused by Hafner over 18 months of religious tutoring.

Hafner was indicted on 96 counts, but the charges were later dropped, according to Leshner and Neustein.

“The D.A.’s office conducted a long and through investigation of the victim’s claims,” Jaus said. “We interviewed the child many times and all other witnesses.”

Jaus said that they determined the case was not substantiated by evidence and that it was dismissed.

Leshner and Neustein write that five rabbis formed a panel to investigate the charges against Hafner. According to the essay “Justice Interrupted,” the rabbinical panel presented the results of their investigation in March 2000 to members of the D.A.’s office, including Jaus, then-chief assistant district attorney Albert Teichman, and prosecutor Deanne Puccio.

According to the essay, charges against Hafner were dropped a few days later because of this panel’s presentation. The D.A.’s office “offered no specifics to explain its action, and its officials, then and now, have not divulged details of the evidence of Hafner’s innocence ... it seems doubtful that they received any evidence at all,” the book states.

Jaus said that this account is untrue and that charges against Hafner were dropped after the investigation, which Jaus said she personally had been involved in.

Neustein and Leshner write that strong circumstantial evidence existed against Hafner, who they say was congratulated by the community after charges were dropped, while his accusers were derided. They write that his alleged victim and his family moved to a new city.

The essays of *Tempest in the Temple* are written by over a dozen writers, and their accounts, which rely on personal experiences and/or investigations, have neither been corroborated or proved false. The book, published by University Press of New England, is reportedly available in Barnes & Noble and Borders bookstores in hardcover format for \$35.