

FORWARD



Forward 50 – Lessons in Leadership
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One of the benefits of the never-ending presidential campaign that Americans were treated to this year was a lesson in leadership. On stage before us were aspiring leaders of different races, genders, backgrounds, temperaments, debating skills and political persuasions. That the final winner was a man with an uncommon intellect and breathtaking rhetorical skills, unnerving calm and a bracing vision for the future says a lot about this nation. That Jewish voters supported Barack Obama's historic election in overwhelming numbers says a lot about this community at this time.

Searching for that breadth of leadership within the community is a more challenging task. Rather than parading before us, some of the American Jews highlighted in this year's Forward 50 earned their distinction quietly. Although theirs were not the loudest voices, nor the usual ones, by words and deeds they shaped American life as Jews, largely for the better, sadly sometimes for the worse.

The Forward 50 celebrates leadership, creativity, impact. It also reminds us how far we still have to go to truly repair the world.

Politics

Mik Moore

One of the big stories of the presidential election was Barack Obama's Jewish problem, real or perceived: E-mails said Obama was a Muslim and wanted to destroy Israel. Some Jewish retirees declared that they wouldn't vote for a black man. Among Jewish voters, polls showed Obama at only 60%, which would have translated into the worst election result for any Democratic candidate since Jimmy Carter in 1980. Yet in the end, Obama pulled in an estimated 78% of the Jewish vote, a solid showing by any historical measure. And a healthy portion of the credit goes to Jewish activists like Mik Moore, 34, a community professional who organized grass-roots outreach to soothe Jewish fears and boost Jewish enthusiasm for Obama. Moore, the son of noted historian Deborah Dash

Moore, co-founded the Jewish Council for Education and Research, along with Ari Wallach, one of a host of grass-roots groups that included rabbis, Israelis and Jewish studies scholars who backed Obama. JCER achieved its greatest prominence with The Great Schlep, an effort to convince Jewish youngsters to travel to Florida (or least at least call) to convince their grandparents to vote for Obama. The idea was a reprise of Moore's Operation Bubbe from four years ago, but this time a heartfelt and foul-mouthed video promotion by comedian Sarah Silverman spread like wildfire and gave the movement traction.

Religion

Jill Jacobs

When Rabbi Jill Jacobs first introduced a living-wage measure in 2006 to the Conservative movement's top legal body, she encountered heavy opposition. But the 33-year-old Jacobs, the rabbi-in-residence at Jewish Funds for Justice in New York, didn't give up. Two years later, in May of this year, her teshuvah, or halachic opinion, arguing that Jewish employers should pay their employees a living wage and strive to hire union workers, was finally adopted by the Rabbinical Assembly's Committee on Jewish Law and Standards. A 2003 graduate of the Jewish Theological Seminary, Jacobs has been a champion of social justice issues — including equality for women, gays and lesbians — since her student days. Later, as education director at the Chicago-based Jewish Council for Urban Affairs, she initiated a program that trained student rabbis to incorporate social justice work into their rabbinate. Jacobs's spirited activism bodes well for the Conservative movement.