

Rabbi Jill Jacobs, 32

Social justice maven for fair housing

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under 36

The Next Wave

They're the community's new young guns — forward-looking rabbis, social-justice junkies, campus crusaders, arts entrepreneurs, bridge-builders, new media mavericks and hedge-funders with heart — who are reshaping the landscape of Jewish life. They're all grass-roots, bottom-up thinkers and doers who are (mostly) bypassing the Establishment and pushing for change — now. Brace yourselves.

Profiles compiled by Tamar Snyder, Carolyn Slutsky, Randi Sherman, Eric Herschthal and Sharon Udasin

At first she thought she would explore her passion for social justice as a journalist, but eventually Jill Jacobs decided to become a rabbi, uniting her love of writing, learning, teaching and leading in one career path.



During her first year of rabbinical school at JTS, Jacobs got involved in a tenant organization in Harlem. "It was physically close, but emotionally and spiritually worlds apart." Hoping to merge her two interests, she began to study Jewish texts that speak to landlord/tenant issues, which led to new ways of thinking about social justice.

The issue of social justice, she believes, was not central to the communal agenda when Jacobs entered rabbinical school in 1998; today, she meets with current JTS rabbinical students monthly who are interested in making social justice a focus of their rabbinate. "[There is] always the sense that the world we're living in isn't how it's supposed to be, and it's hard to take Judaism seriously and be satisfied with

what's around us," she says about the connection between Judaism and justice. "There's a search among young people for meaning that's not just about continuity, continuing the Jewish people because we were killed in the Holocaust [or because of] the State of Israel," she continues. "If Judaism's going to be meaningful we have to engage in the world."

She is currently rabbi-in-residence at Jewish Funds for Justice, where she speaks, writes and develops programs around wages, housing, healthcare and related issues. And a teshuva she wrote about living wages and unions for Conservative institutions is making its way through the Conservative Law Committee, coming up for a vote at the end of this month. She is also writing a book about Jewish social justice.

Business Savvy: Jacobs designed T-shirts that say, "This is what a rabbi looks like"; they've been selling well. (www.cafepress.com/womanrabbi)

Civil Disobedience: Once got kicked out of the General Assembly for doing street theater in the hallway.

— Carolyn Slutsky