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## In a city torn by poster wars and politics, repair for New York's Jews requires us to fight for it

A New Yorker who read aloud the perspectives of those who tore down hostage posters

[Nina Mogilnik](#) November 19, 2025



*Nina Mogilnik read the perspectives of people who tore down Israeli hostage posters in New York City in the documentary "Torn." (Screenshot)*

Can what is torn be made whole again? The question can be asked of many things: friendships, intimate relationships, communities, nations, even a single human heart. A documentary film project with which I became involved two years ago touches upon all of these things, though it appears to be about only one: the poster war that erupted in New York City in the aftermath of the barbaric Hamas attack of Oct. 7, 2023, and the kidnapping of hundreds of Israelis and foreign nationals into Gaza that day.

Like many people in New York City, I have direct connections to Israel. My closest non-biological family lives there. Every eruption of terror in that land reverberates through me. On Oct. 7, that took on a whole new meaning. That meaning then became bound up and grotesquely distorted in New York City's 2025 mayoral election.

In the immediate aftermath of Oct. 7, I joined others in my neighborhood and beyond who put up posters of the kidnapped on lampposts, walls, and elsewhere, trying to call attention to the plight of the hostages. That effort triggered a hostile counter-response, and it is that tug of war, on the streets of New York City, [that is documented in “Torn,” a film \(now streaming on PBS and newly qualified for Oscar consideration\) by director Nim Shapira](#), an Israeli-American who has lived and worked in the city for the past 13 years.

This fall, the trajectory of the street-level poster war came to be mirrored and then eclipsed by New York City’s mayoral contest. It is painful to reflect on the ways in which these conflicts and contests came to define so much of New York City.

In “Torn,” Shapira was unable to get people from “the other side” — people who tore down posters — to speak with him (they flat-out refused), so he had me read some of their reactions and respond to them. I shared what those individuals thought and felt, and I was then challenged to process their views and try to understand what they were experiencing. It was like an on-screen empathy test. Sometimes, the responses I read gave me real pause, and a chance to enter into the headspace, as it were, of someone whose perspective was very different from mine, someone who felt invisible, as if their pain and outrage did not matter.

All of which makes the election that unfolded in New York City recently that much more distressing. As we have come to know in America in recent years, elections are not about compromise, or even about truth or nuance. They are about burying your opponent and standing triumphantly atop the leader board.

Leaving aside the Republican, we New Yorkers were faced with two candidates who weaponized Jews, Zionism and the State of Israel. They then offered up that toxic cocktail to the wider voting public. While “Torn” highlighted the visceral contempt of those who have deep antipathy toward Jews and Israel, the election highlighted something arguably much more troubling — and dangerous.

In the cacophony of all that has happened related to Oct. 7 and its still unfolding aftermath, much has been lost. TORN preserves something particular. It captures the energy, urgency, and swirl of emotions surrounding the early days following the slaughter of Oct. 7 and the kidnapping of hundreds of individuals into Gaza.

Two years on, it seems that the ground has shifted. What might have seemed a fraught moment filled with existential dread, but also the possibility of resolution, has become a

protracted conflict with no winners and too many losers, in Israel and Gaza. But something that portends an even more unsettling future has transpired outside those borders — not in terms of visceral suffering and death, but in terms of mass dehumanization and scapegoating.

My genuine belief has been that while we cannot rewind the clock, if we listen for [the messages in “Torn,”](#) it might be possible to claw our way back toward some shared sense of compassion, or empathy. But only if we turn what we hear into a template for building something better. What has been torn need not remain so. But the work to heal the deep fissures that opened on and after Oct. 7 requires an ability to see humanity in the other. If the months following that devastating attack and our recent mayoral election are any guide, however, we are in a perilous state both within the Jewish community, and between Jewish communities and other communities.

At precisely the moment we needed to double down on our ability to see humanity “in the other,” that very thing was instead manipulated by both mayoral candidates, who worked to cleave one segment of the Jewish community from another. As a result, our ability to see the shared humanity in our own New York City Jewish community became impossible for too many of us.

I found myself standing outside both camps, unimpressed by Cuomo’s “defense” of Jews, and horrified by my sense that Mamdani was putting a target on the backs of those who didn’t march to his version of a Jewish tune. I naively hoped both candidates would focus on building a better New York City for all of us, using the power they were seeking to heal wounds, not deepen them. And yet ...

We in the Jewish community need to walk into the future with heads held high and eyes wide open. We need to know and believe that each of us — to borrow from Walt Whitman — contains multitudes. We must turn aside from the temptation to flatten complexity, hide behind false certainties, and hurl our “truths” at one another like Molotov cocktails. If we sort ourselves into buckets of the worthy and the wicked, we have dishonored and disowned everything of true value and worth in being Jewish, no matter our affiliations or linguistic descriptors. We need to demand from one another acceptance of our core humanity and dignity. Full stop.

We need to fight for each other, to claw back not lock-step agreement, but moral clarity, compassion and empathy. If we cannot find that for one another, our search for it with others is a kind of theater, one in which we are seeking the validation of those who will demand of us a price that none of us should be willing to pay.

