

**Persuasion in Political Direct Mail Fundraising**

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**Abstract**

My research explores the connection between rhetoric and political-cause related choices by analyzing the discourse and structure of 19 solicitation letters sent by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism between 2005-2015, and comparing their performance in generating donations. Reviewing a solicitation letter's response rate with a critical analysis of its rhetorical characteristics can help illuminate if the means of persuasive discourse influence political identity, and, moreover, how much of a difference does persuasion makes in terms of political actions, like contributions? I peruse the academic literature as a theoretical setting for my research, drawing on various scholarly traditions like linguistics, critical theory, genre studies, and of course rhetoric. Being able to classify different rhetorical patterns and framing them through a deliberate theoretical lens, I am locating some ethereal truth about the effects of persuasion. Furthermore, by identifying common patterns among the letters of one organization over the course of a decade, my research can illuminate the process for philanthropic writers and professionals.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Persuasion is so central to human communication, it is clear that political and cause-oriented discourse offer a rich setting in which scholarship can flourish. My research, in particular, proposes to explore the connection between rhetoric and political-cause related choices. While this is obviously a multifaceted question, I will situate a narrow analysis of a body of work amid a growing scholarly literature and theoretical backdrop.

Democratic elections are marked, alternately, by political donations and complacency; it could be helpful, therefore, to identify factors that help construct political identity and motivate engagement. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), voter turnout in leading democracies have fallen 11% in the last 35 years to 70% (2011); the United Kingdom and Canada are approximately 10% below the OECD average and the United States is 22% below the OECD average.

While substantive choices in policymaking, social governance, and community engagement surely make a difference to prompting or reducing political engagement, whether gauged by turnout or other measures, much attention in the mainstream media focus on messaging in politics. Even if this is an obvious simplification, the manner in which persuasive arguments are made in public discourse matters quite a bit. Exploring the extent to which electors (e.g. voters) are more influenced by the quality of the sales pitch than by the product itself are beyond the scope of my research. Meanwhile, the mechanics of persuasion in a political setting can illuminate tactics and choices that can prompt engagement or action.

If political identity is conceptualized as a form of commitment to a set of ideas, values and policies, the depth of that devotion can presage electoral behavior (e.g. the more fiercely partisan, the greater likelihood of partisan actions like voting). The problem democratic societies face in general disengagement with the political and electoral system, reduced voter turnout, and widespread distrust of political and public systems cannot be overstated.

It should go without saying that persuasion remains at the heart of democratic politics. There is broad recognition that the manner of public communication about a given idea shapes the ways that idea may be operationalized in public policies and regulations. Persuasion, devoted to guiding choices big and small, is also at the heart of capitalist consumerism, and advertisers, professional communicators, politicians, public officials, and cause-oriented non-profits, among others, must tap into the behavioral choices and identities of voters and consumers.

Furthermore, nailing down the precise impact of concepts as layered and complex as human perceptions, geopolitical circumstances, behavioral choices, and rhetorical tactics can be difficult. My research will explore one particular element of practical communication: solicitation letters. Where political campaigns tend to be expensive, and where the stakes can be high for the political values and ideas of the people involved, the field is aggressive and competitive for persuasive communications. Having better paradigms around what forms of persuasive language and artifacts prompt action can inform voters and professionals alike.

This issue asks two questions: initially, (a) Do the means of persuasive discourse influence political identity? and, moreover, (b) How much of a difference does persuasion make in terms of political actions, like contributions? Answering these questions requires a qualitative method research study that situates the academic literature alongside the active and competitive marketplace for donor support. Assuming the vast majority of solicitations go straight into the trash bin, to the extent that any items are read and responded to, one of the few factors under the direct control of a practitioner is the writing. Reviewing a solicitation letter's response rate with a critical analysis of its rhetorical characteristics can answer the first question of whether persuasion matters, and will seek to illuminate the second question.

### **Theoretical and Scholarly Context**

Communication theorists identify several layers of interacting factors that inform my research. Political scientists explore persuasion through pragmatic political achievements in terms of policies adopted or rejected. Linguistics provide many rich analyses of persuasion as a

phenomenon of rhetorical moves, dating back to the analyses of Aristotle. Theorists from a variety of traditions, semiotic, neo-artistotelian rhetoricians, postmodernists, and critical theorists provide several helpful frames through which to consider my research. Additionally, in a latent way throughout, cybernetic theories about signals from transmitters to receivers, feedback, and noise can offer ideas as to the effectiveness of persuasion in politics or elsewhere.

The theoretical framework for my study is rooted in the rhetorical tradition, in its essence established in the ancient period, but with a rich legacy in linguistics, communication and language studies. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (1924) provides a basic instrument: a triad of rational arguments, those of credibility, and affective ones. Further, semiotic theories developed by de Saussure (1959) add additional important layers about persuasive communication, including what the object of the solicitation letter represents as well as the visual characteristics of the letter itself. Professional political operatives, candidates, public officials and fundraisers—among many others—have built robust practice and scholarship informed by these theories.

The scholarly literature is instructive to helping elaborate on the phenomenon of persuasion in a political context. I describe the emerging idea that fundraising texts themselves are a distinct genre of writing, followed by the rhetorical basis on which many studies on persuasion have been completed. Within that context, I seek to situate this discussion amid broader discourse about political identity. Finally, I will take us on a quick tour of some visual communication research that can inform the thinking around these as well. Theoretical research in political



science and semiotics adds critical layers, in particular as I seek to include some comparisons of visual characteristics of solicitation letters present in the data.

Ancient as well as contemporary political theorists have explored and studied political identity since time immemorial. Persuasion, too, has ancient roots; though, different fields have explored to what extent different modes of communication have impact. For instance, social psychologist Stanley Milgram's (1963) famous experiments underscored the potency of messages imbued with authority. Other studies, of course, have been conducted that help locate the unique features of persuasive writing in a more focused way.

### *Fundraising as Genre*

Since fundraising texts are themselves not widely studied, and research in the field of non-profits and philanthropy is not nearly as extensive as, say, literature or political science, I turn to the work of Charles Bazerman to help situate these fundraising texts as a genre of study in and of themselves. Bazerman has argued (1997, 1998, 2002) several times for fundraising discourse as unique, with characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of persuasion. If this is a discrete genre of writing, what are the exigent characteristics of rhetorical moves that make sense for philanthropic texts? And which forms of discourse analysis are appropriate for this task?

Bazerman's (2009) research about how communication essentially structures activities themselves, e.g. sensemaking, provides an important backdrop. That is, the social roles created by fundraising texts have political values that help donors define themselves (Bazerman, 1998).

Yet, persuasion remains at the core of social role selection, itself a process of discourse analysis —if fundraising texts create social roles that tap directly into reader identity, to what extent are these political choices on the part of readers? Bazerman's case study (1998) is a good start, but further research is merited to see if a theory of sensemaking as identity in political communication bears out in other contexts (his was environmental activism and advocacy in Santa Barbara, CA in the 1990s). Additionally, the linguistic study of rhetorical moves in Connor's (2004) work has added layers of quantitative analysis to this critical matrix.

### *Rhetorical/Linguistic Theory*

There are still many, albeit fewer, interdisciplinary studies of fundraising letters situating the genre within a linguistic framework; an area pioneered by an enterprising researcher, Dr. Ulla Connor (1985). Her original work on persuasion with Lauer in 1985 focused on characteristics in persuasive essay writing and found persuasive texts exhibit many common techniques across 23 categories the researchers proffer, viz. “emotionally charge language.” Connor's later studies (2004, 2009) evaluate solicitation letters as a sub-field within philanthropic and non-profit management studies using discourse analysis to evaluate the American National Corpus as well as within a fictional situational analysis. Much of the linguistic research by Connor (1985, 2004, 2009) uses quantitative methods to describe the particular values that can be attached to narrative outputs.

Even the development of a typology of rhetorical tactics and modes in Connor & Gladkov's (2004) works merely quantifies the value of persuasive writing by offering an analytical model

through which to interpret the data. Connor & Gladkov's model is helpful to the linguist or researcher seeking to better understand the writing of fundraising texts and the types of language used in the genre, but it is inaccessible and convoluted for your daily practitioner. Connor & Gladkov (2004) specifically seek to professionalize, challenge and formalize the "conventional wisdom" about writing in fundraising.

Even when experimental models are developed and applied in the literature, other research seems to offer complementary findings using methods that tend to be qualitative. Accompanying research methods or data collection techniques include situational analysis (Goering et al., 2008), interviews (Connor & Gladkov, 2004), and focus groups. Such articles may be most helpful because they provide further qualitative feedback on the theories being discussed. As mentioned earlier, specific feedback in the number of donors or amount raised, taken through a cybernetic theory lens, should influence the way authors of fundraising texts hone and craft their messages. However, as Goering et al. (2008) acknowledge, so-called "conventional wisdom" is both not borne out in practice nor do such typical guidelines necessarily result in more donations.

### *Political Identity*

While academic, popular, and ancient literature has extensively explored questions about political identity, my research specifically traces how political identity is expressed and modified. Here, again, Charles Bazerman's (1998) work on charitable donations is helpful by framing identity as formed through a process of sensemaking, in which charitable giving and fundraising communication are themselves outgrowths of personal and communal identity.

Contemporary political theorist William Connolly (2002) makes an even more pronounced argument about identity. In that, political identity is only discoverable because of difference; he suggests that “Identity is relational and collective” (p. xiv). In the current context of understanding the impact of persuasion on political identity, then the externally-shaped layers of identity that can be modified or adjusted can be taken as relative.

Difference matters, because as a solicitation letter acts on the reader, portions of identity will be created and recreated in relation to the ideas therein. When taken with Bazerman’s (1998) findings about how donors only give donations once engaged in activities that attached their values to community life, the idea that identity itself is collective is an important force that helps shape my analysis. Sociological research has explored the social factors that shape belief, effectively constructing the values framework of a given community, under the umbrella of grid-group cultural theory (Mamdouh, 1999). I am implying, of course, that giving to a political cause is an act of identity taken as an individual within a collective, communal frame.

### **Research Question**

As civic engagement is the lifeblood of liberal democracies, many individuals have a vested interest in identifying factors for commitment and contribution to public life. Since there is no universal recipe for what defines someone’s sense of self or political identity, understanding discrete elements in persuasive communication that can modify or act on that identity is important.

The research literature has obviously not widely accepted or situated fundraising texts as a discrete genre quite yet; and while helped along by extensive linguistic quantitative studies can still benefit from more real-world analysis. Further, by situating my research against a backdrop of political identity and political thought, best practices may emerge with direct civic impact that may not always be relevant to the philanthropic audience.

Through a frame of political identity and rhetorical theory, my research helps uncover to what extent different forms of persuasive communication influence political identity. Specifically, can fundraising letters abide specific models of discourse or visual presentation to have predictable impact on a reader's own identity such that this reader may choose to make a donation in response to a particular appeal? Are there meaningful writing techniques, categories of persuasion or models? Does any relationship exist between those techniques and the number of donors?

By seeking to answer these questions in a rigorous but accessible manner, I provide professionals in the field with some practical findings they can use in their daily work.

### **Research Method**

The solicitation letter is a trademark of philanthropic fundraising, and people make donations to causes and candidates they support; in fact, donations are a *prima facie* proxy for political identity. While the variables influencing charitable giving are potentially infinite, sufficient

control groups or factors are impossible to quantify. Comparing responses to solicitations can explain to what degree different rhetorical approaches can prompt contributions, at least qualitatively. In addition, there are many symbolic and semiotic factors at play that can reveal more about deploying visual tactics in solicitation letters.

My research covers existing rhetorical typologies—and, to the extent my findings are more accessible for greater professional application—by responding to calls in the peer-reviewed literature for further research. I explore these features by analyzing the discourse and structure of 19 solicitation letters sent by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism between 2005-2015, and comparing their performance in generating donations.

The research method I employ is discourse analysis. Discourse analysis entails a detailed review of a body of text; rhetorical analysis specifically assesses the argumentation and persuasive tactics. In my research, I assess the argumentation in the 19 persuasive letters, coding and categorizing sentences and formal features. I compare the measures of persuasion that I identify in the Religious Action Center's data; and I combine those with my analysis of the visual and formal choices in the letters as well. It is the theoretical setting of how political identity is recurrently composed of specific political-charitable choices that this analysis gains traction for practice. Advocacy and political action is fundamentally persuasive; merely applying warrants or appeals to a given topic and audience does not address the depth to which identity dictates individual actions.

I use a purposeful sample of the letters of the Religious Action Center to which I have access as a former staff member. Furthermore, these 19 letters represent a healthy sample set with a relatively consistent audience against which to situate my findings. Additionally, I use purposeful sampling to gather documents from the Religious Action Center files, and select digital versions of the final letters as they appeared when printed for traditional postal mail distribution. Finally, I retrieved from the donor database of the Religious Action Center the total number of donations prompted by each letter.

I chose to gather my data in this way because a cogent data set for this kind of analysis and method means drawing from a body of work that already isolates many of the additional noise—e.g. external contextual—factors generally at play in fundraising communication. By drawing on one organization’s fundraising solicitation letters over time the consistent readership helps address additional factors and biases that may emerge when comparing the letters and the number of donations they prompted.

While the Religious Action Center has a database of its own, I compiled separate data reports of the specific items that concern my research: The number of donors per letter, and, where possible the total number of recipients of each letter. I collected this data by retrieving the number of donations over the 45-day period immediately following the letter’s date. In some cases, donation counts use estimated dates based on extrapolation from the records with clearly documented dates.

By comparing the performance (viz. the number of donors) of a given letter to its written and persuasive characteristics, I elaborate on the current scholarship's findings about rhetorical moves deployed in the fundraising genre. In evaluating the different techniques of argumentation and persuasion in the letters, or whether visual and layout choices were common (or other formal features that may emerge), I analyzed the value of techniques, both semiotic and rhetorical, and by trying to locate which tactics generate more or less response. The techniques may be familiar from the popular literature or academic scholarship, or they may draw from analyses of other genres, but by identifying common patterns among the letters of one organization over the course of a decade, my research can illuminate the process for philanthropic writers and professionals.

## **Conclusion**

Electoral campaigns are a multi-billion business, and illuminating specific persuasive techniques that may impact engagement is a top priority as the competitive political market grows and shifts. Meanwhile, the solicitation letter is a long-standing cornerstone of philanthropic fundraising, and people make donations to causes and candidates they support. To better prompt gifts for a given cause or candidate, practitioners want to know to what extent different forms of persuasive communication influence identity and values which drive charitable giving.

Responses to solicitations can explain how different rhetorical and semiotic modes prompt contributions (or not). In addition, there are symbolic and semiotic factors at play that influence this sensemaking. My research makes existing rhetorical typologies more



accessible for greater professional application, and it responds to calls in the peer-reviewed literature for further research. I also reveal more about deploying visual tactics in solicitation letters, which is a particularly under-researched element. This builds on current literature and tests the scholarly consensus against an existing body of work while unpacking successful rhetorical and semiotic practices for sensemaking and identity.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

As civic engagement is the lifeblood of liberal democracies, many have a vested interest in identifying factors for commitment and contribution to public life. Since there is no universal recipe for what defines someone's sense of self or political identity, understanding discrete elements in persuasive communication that can modify or act on that identity is important.

If political identity is commitment to a set of ideas, values, and policies, the depth of that devotion may predict electoral behavior — that is, political choices in the voting booth should reflect those quotidian choices made with less consequence. Western democracies are facing significant disengagement from, and demythologization of, civic life. As I mentioned earlier, voter turnout in leading democracies have fallen 11% in the last 35 years to 70% (OECD, 2011); the United Kingdom and Canada are ~10% below the OECD average; the United States is 22% below the average. If contemporary electoral

politics are remarkable for this complacency, it is stunning that at once so much money is invested in pursuit of shaping the outcome. It is thus crucial to identify factors that help forge political identity and drive engagement.

Even so, persuasion remains at the heart of democratic life. Purposeful and deliberate communication choices shape the manner in which political and economic theories are operationalized in public policies and regulations. Political movements themselves are increasingly purposeful in efforts to more effectively tap into the behavioral choices and identities of voters and consumers. Political actors, whether individuals or organizations, must discover how to unleash the fiscal sponsorship of their supporters, lest they perish in the competitive and expensive contemporary media environment.

Clarifying the precise function that persuasion has in shaping political behavior is layered and complex.

### **Research Context and Question**

As I have described, cause-related campaigns tend to be expensive, and the stakes can be high for the moral values and policy ideas, not to mention for those charged with leading such activities. Specifically situating my research in a purposeful scholarly context is one of the unique elements that should prove helpful in addressing the following research questions: (a) Do the means of persuasive discourse influence political identity? and,

moreover, (b) How much of a difference does persuasion make in terms of political actions, like contributions?

Within that frame, political fundraising is an excellent proxy by which both concepts are operationalized: solicitation letters are sent by candidates, political action committees, issue-oriented non-profit organizations, community groups, labor unions, etc. In broad strokes, if a campaign is persuasive, it should generate contributions to a commensurate level.

Reviewing the performance of donation campaigns vis-a-vis an analysis of the persuasive characteristics of solicitation letters helps clarify the potential for rhetorical success in prompting donations. We can extrapolate from these questions some helpful conclusions about the extent to which persuasion influences political behavior.

My research seeks to uncover, in the academic literature, to what extent differences in persuasive communication prose influences political identity through giving. Specifically, can fundraising letters abide specific models of discourse or visual presentation to have predictable impact on a reader's identity such that they choose to make a donation in response to a particular appeal? Are there meaningful writing techniques, categories of persuasion or models? Does any relationship exist between those techniques and the number of donors and amount of donations?

As the solicitation letter is a hallmark of philanthropic fundraising, and people make donations to causes and candidates they support; in that way they are a *prima facie* proxy for political identity. Comparing responses to solicitations can explain to what degree different rhetorical approaches can prompt contributions. In addition, there are many symbolic and semiotic factors at play that can reveal more about deploying visual tactics in solicitation letters. Implicit questions that electors (e.g. voters) are most influenced by the quality of the sales pitch than by the product itself are beyond the scope of my research. At once, the manner in which persuasive arguments are made in public discourse matters quite a bit.

### **Systematic Process to Answer Research Question**

My research responds to existing rhetorical typologies and political communication theories in an applied setting by analyzing the discourse and persuasive structure of these 19 solicitation letters sent by the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism between 2005-2015, and comparing their performance in generating donations.

Of course, much research has been conducting on fundraising as a practice, on political identity and engagement as civic problems, and on rhetorical modes for persuasion. It is the nexus of these three areas that I hope to pursue most in my research generally, and in this literature review specifically. Through the literature review process, I used a tagging system to track different themes in my research. Each article was saved as a digital record

in Google Scholar, and then I applied broad one-word groupings based on what I had encountered, and some of the keywords, which were themselves typified.

<i>Tactical</i>	<i>Formal</i>	<i>Problematic</i>
<b>Fundraising</b>	Letters	<b>Political</b>
Solicitations	Writing	<b>Engagement</b>
Genre	<b>Rhetoric</b>	Voter
Charitable	Persuasion	Civic
Philanthrop*	Messaging	Giving
Donations	Technique	Support
Support	Argumentation	Philanthrop*
Giving	Genre	

### **Matrices of rhetoric, semiotics, and critical theory**

Ancient as well as contemporary political theorists have explored and studied political roles, motivations, and identity. Persuasion, too, has ancient roots. Modern academic research from different fields have also explored to what extent different modes of communication have impact. For instance, social psychologist Stanley Milgram's (1963) famous experiments underscored the potency of messages imbued with authority. Miller and Krosnick (2004) demonstrate the differing persuasive qualities of threat-based and opportunity-based political appeals. Other studies, of course, have been conducted that explore philanthropic discourse and its norms more universally.

The theoretical framework for my study is rooted in rhetoric, in its essence established in the ancient period, but with a rich legacy in linguistics, communication and language

studies. Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (-322/1924) provides a basic toolkit: rational arguments, those of credibility, and affective ones; with the audience and setting as key agents. Ferdinand de Saussure (1916/1959)'s semiology involving the study of signs within society situates the very sign-object of the solicitation letter itself as an important additional layer. The icons and layout of a solicitation letter may impact how readers actually experience the artifacts of political fundraising—later studies explore the value of bulleted lists in solicitations (Goering, Connor, Nagelhout, & Steinberg, 2009), photography (Bekkers & Crutzen, 2007).

The solicitation letter is thus an object and rhetorical artifact with a brief shelf-life, seeking to create shared meaning that is sufficiently persuasive to prompt donations in a mythologized political and cultural context. Inasmuch as solicitation rhetoric influences behavior, it also does so through the respective matrices of authenticity/ephemerality (Benjamin, 1936/2008), deference/differentiation of meaning (Derrida, 1963/1990), and myth/power (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/1997). Professional political operatives, candidates, public officials and fundraisers, among many others, have built robust practice and scholarship of these theoretical frameworks in sophisticated fundraising campaigns.

### **Scholarly Context and Framework**

The literature is instructive to helping elaborate on the phenomenon of persuasion in a political context. I begin with the habit of fundraising as part of mythologized communal

identity. Then, I explore the growing idea that fundraising texts themselves are a distinct genre of writing, followed by the rhetorical basis on which many studies on persuasion have been completed. Within that context, I take us on a quick tour of some visual communication research that can inform the thinking around these as well. Finally, I conclude by situating this discussion amid the broader discourse of political identity. Theory and research in political science and semiotics adds critical layers, in particular as I seek to include some comparisons of visual characteristics of solicitation letters present in the data.

### **Communal Myths and Sense-making**

Since fundraising texts are themselves not widely studied, and research in the field of non-profits and philanthropy is not nearly as extensive as, say, literature or political science, I turn to the work of Charles Bazerman to help situate these fundraising texts as a genre of study in and of themselves. Bazerman has argued several times (1997, 1998, 2002) for fundraising discourse as a unique form of communication, with characteristics that distinguish it from other forms. If this is a discrete genre of communication, what are the exigent types of discourse analysis appropriate for this task?

Bazerman's (2009) recent research about how communication essentially structures activities themselves provides an important backdrop. That is, the social roles created by fundraising texts have political values that help donors define themselves (Bazerman, 1998). Yet, even the granular choices of political self-determination remain at their core,



processes of discourse analysis on the part of civic agents, whether individual voter or social institution. In practice, if fundraising texts create social roles that tap directly into reader identity, to what extent are these political choices on the part of readers?

Bazerman's case studies of environmental activism and advocacy in Santa Barbara, CA (1998) are a good start, but further research is merited to see if rhetoric can build communal identity in other topic areas and media contexts.

Fundraising itself is perhaps a helpful proxy, then, for expressions of identity and communal sense-making. For this act of communal identity to be authentic, the coercive force of persuasive discourse must isolate the levers of myth making that Barthes (1957/1972) talks about. That is to say, the very rhetorical choices in fundraising texts themselves are telegraphing and structuring political identities, particularly for those who are prompted to give. The social myth-making of philanthropy conceals the persuasive actions in solicitation letters.

Locating the character of rhetoric's role in "perform[ing] some task," derived from a situational context (Bitzer, 1992), means that certain situations can be persuasive, but not rhetorical. Discourse out of meaning-context is fictive and exists with diluted force, thus the forms and attributes that inform the creation of rhetoric in performing a task, like fundraising, is necessarily about exigencies, constraints, and mediating audiences. In that sense, the sentences in a solicitation letter that take on a tenor of manipulative demagoguery are fundamentally constructed by discursive context in other media and in

time. When used in political contexts, coercive and affective rhetoric can dilute democracy itself, as persuasive forces are increasingly mediated from the mythologized narrative of self-determination.

This actually presents a methodological problem, to be sure; recreating the mythologized communal sense of identity is only outmatched in difficulty by predicting it! In a practical study, Eaton (2010) identifies and describes the rhetorical characteristics of community engagement located in the emails of MoveOn.org (an online activist movement). That these characteristics are about broad patterns of argumentation, phrasing, and mediating communication between community members means fundraising texts participate in structuring communal identity by exploiting aspirational philanthropic spirit. If Eaton's research is widely applicable, though, how could we ever locate a typology that works for professionals and laymen through which to evaluate the broader implications for evolving civic life, given the ever-shifting external factors he unearths? A look to linguists provides some empirical guideposts out of the murkiness of abstract theorists.

### **Linguistic Analysis of Fundraising Texts**

There are still many, albeit fewer, interdisciplinary studies of fundraising letters situating the genre within a linguistic framework. Dr. Ulla Connor's enterprising work in this area is best found in her research arguing that philanthropic discourse is a discrete genre (2003). Her original work on persuasion with Lauer in 1985 focused on characteristics in

persuasive essay writing and found persuasive texts exhibit many common techniques in the creation of, say, credibility appeals, across 23 categories, such as vivid metaphors or charged language. Elsewhere, probing the function of metaphor for political rhetoric, Charteris-Black (2011) provides useful theoretical backdrop for Connor and Lauer's work (2003). At once, the interplay of mythologizing ideology through rhetoric is most useful in framing unwieldy processes of persuasively operationalizing ideas in modern democratic life.

Connor's later studies (2004, 2009) evaluate solicitation letters as a sub-field within philanthropic and non-profit management studies. She has participated in many studies where researchers use discourse analysis to evaluate fundraising texts within a fictional situational analysis. Goering's work with Connor, Nagelhout, and Steinberg (2009) uses quantitative methods to describe the particular values that can be attached to narrative outputs in an experiment with \$100 fictional dollars to allocate. Others, like Crismore (2004), have done thorough research on specific uses of pronouns, as metadiscourse, and the frequency of their usage and impact on narrative posture in fundraising texts.

Even the development of a typology of rhetorical tactics and modes in Connor & Gladkov's (2002) works merely quantifies the value of persuasive writing by offering an analytical model through which to interpret the data. In an early form of this research, Abelen, Redeker, and Thompson (1993) use Rhetorical Structure Theory to code and sort

U.S. and Dutch fundraising letters, setting the stage for further such content-analytic linguistic studies.

Conner & Gladkov's work (2002) is helpful to the linguist or researcher seeking to better understand the writing of fundraising texts and the types of language used in the genre, but it is inaccessible and convoluted for your daily practitioner. Qualitative and quantitative methods used by these types of research include situational analysis (Goering et al. 2008), some interviews (Connor & Gladkov 2002) and focus groups; all three offer important contours to better understanding the various and complex theoretical layers discussed prior.

Connor & Gladkov (2002) specifically seek to professionalize, challenge and formalize the "conventional wisdom" about writing in fundraising. And yet, as Goering et al. (2008) acknowledge, so-called conventional wisdom is both not borne out in practice nor do such typical guidelines necessarily result in more donations.

### **Fundraising as a Practice**

Kelly (1995) describes how organizations are structured toward power-dynamics that valorize (or not) the fundraising practice and define it as a professional function within non-profit organizations. As a discrete operational profession within non-profit management, fundraising itself has had to mature alongside commensurate functions of communication, marketing, and substantive programmatic or policy work. The industry

itself provides many insights into the specific organizational challenges to proper fundraising, as Bell and Cornelius' (2013) research reveals.

Among the first to publish a cohesive theory of philanthropy, Boulding (1962) actually seeks to situate the practice within broader economic theories; necessary to my research to establish some modern roots for the persuasive function for an intangible product and set some initial sense of why people might make philanthropic gifts at all in 20th century capitalism. It is strengthened by the research manifesto guiding fundraising research that Brember and Ragsdale (1995) published, demanding a scholarly feedback loop for practitioners. By the time Scott (2014) proposes a Fundraising Effectiveness Theory that organizes internal and external factors like governance, competition, infrastructure, and fundraising cost ration, research in the field is more common. Caboni (2010) details the normative practices for higher education fundraising, and the aforementioned research by Connor and Upton (2003) cement fundraising as a professionalized function for effective non-profit management.

### **Political Identity**

While helped along by extensive linguistic studies, making fundraising texts a full-throated genre of writing can still benefit from additional real-world analysis. Further, by bringing this genre and sense making framework situated against a backdrop of political identity and political thought, best practices may emerge with direct civic impact.

While academic, popular, and ancient literature has extensively explored questions about political identity, there are certain frames through which I am approaching and situating a big idea like identity. To wit, specific ways in which political identity is expressed and modified. Here, again, Charles Bazerman's (1998) work on charitable donations, provides important findings that certain forms of giving become normative and the ways in which charitable giving and fundraising communication are outgrowths of personal and communal identity. It suggests that tapping into that tribalism is important, and why religious giving typically outpaces other worthy causes.

While in democratic societies, the factors are obviously manifold, Connolly (2002) pursues a conception of identity as relational and preoccupied with the differences between individuals, their backgrounds, and world-views. In that, identity is only discoverable because of difference; he suggests that "Identity is relational and collective" (p. xiv). In the current frame of understanding the impact of persuasion on political identity, then the externally-shaped malleable layers of identity are essentially relative.

This matters because as a solicitation letter acts on the reader, portions of their identity will be created and recreated in relation to the ideas therein. When taken with Bazerman's (1998) findings about how donors only give donations once engaged in activities and presented with discourse that attached their values to community life, the idea that identity itself is collective will be explored with this study. I imply, of course, that giving

to a political cause is an act of identity taken as an individual within a collective, communal frame.

For Aristotle (-322/1924), collective political context is merely *Kairos*, or the setting. Given the communal and collective form of political identity, what of the moral factors of argumentation? Ben-Nun Bloom & Levitan (2011) were able to isolate for moral influences on the differentials in agreement—e.g. the persuasiveness of a message—where secularity is low and morality is cued, external social influence itself decreases. Which essentially means that the social myth-making that Barthes (1957/1972) suggests occurs has some limits in a moral setting.

Because political persuasion is already a well developed area of inquiry and professional pursuit; many studies have encountered similar research questions about the extent to which rhetoric influences political identity. While my study proposes to get into modes of rhetorical practice, other elements of argumentation are helpful context. Additionally, there are methodological insights to be drawn from scholarship in discrete fields like political science, human communication, and social psychology.

In a content analysis of AP stories covering the debate over the Clinton Health Care Bill in 1993-1994, Jerit (2008) finds that engagement on specific substantive points did more for opponents than framing persuasive discourse did for proponents. That is, by specifically responding to critics of the policy, proponents made greater progress in public polling results in support of health care reform. Baudrillard's (1997) argument that marginalization, as a rhetorical

tactic, gives breathing room to radical ideas is also helpful here. At what point do fundraising letters cease to be persuasive and become propaganda? According to Johnson-Cartee and Copeland (2003), the distinction is heuristic—and attaches to sense making, social psychology, and strategic processes.

### **Potential of Applied Rhetorical Theory in Philanthropy**

Some impressive opportunities reveal themselves in the literature. My ultimate objective is to discover the variable success rates of different rhetorical techniques for civic engagement. To the extent, therefore, that rhetoric itself can prompt given behaviors, the implications for democratic theory are important. Coleman and Gotze (2001) track the theoretical ground as the potential for direct digital participation in the democratic and policy making process grows. Where civic literacy will rely on individual mobilization, further research into rhetorical practice is instructive.

In contemporary political science, messaging appears as the key differentiator for the success or failure of a given agenda. Moir (2010) effectively argues that heuristics, valorization of opinion, and the rapid commodification of opinion-products lubricate the process of politicization. The implications, of course, are all about what prompts different voting behaviors and how that can be manipulated. And, if solicitation letters participate in the cultural reification of philanthropy, are they not contributing to the fragmented polarization of political ideologies? Certainly, solicitation letters may also concurrently reinforce and strengthen political ideology.



In part, because I did not encounter more of these items using the keywords I identified initially, and because of the semiotic lens that I think adds crucial elements of better understanding rhetorical moves, more research with regard to visual elements in solicitation mail is warranted. That said, Sviličić and Maldini (2013) identified iconographic indicators in authoritarian regimes, tracing the trajectory of the hammer and sickle, layered atop socio-psychological notions of perception and meaning. Earlier, Beakers and Crutzen (2007) ran an experiment that variably applied a photo to the outer envelope of solicitations sent to a sample of recipients, and found that the visual material actually discouraged response rates. Taken together, these two pieces of research invite further inquiry on how sign-signifier factors actually play out for field experiments and real-world practice in solicitation letters. Within the theoretical framework preferred by Saussure (1959/1916) and Barthes (1972/1957), the mythology of philanthropic culture is signified by the very artifact of the solicitation letter. Applying the additional layer of Moir (2010) and Benjamin (2008/1936)'s view toward the commodification of opinion and authenticity respectively demands additional studies that tie these themes together.

After all, while ancient and primary western texts provide important lenses through which to probe the rich tradition of rhetorical theory, the challenge of authentic and credible fundraising writing in the 'age of mechanical reproduction' (Benjamin, 1936/2008), is akin to the sophists' coercive abuse of affective rhetoric alleged in the trial of Socrates (Plato, 1979/-399): demagoguery may be the most efficient mode of rhetorical mobilization in politics. At least, that there is not more critical scholarship in applied semiotics in philanthropic artifacts is somewhat surprising to me.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I sought to explore how the literature tracks the extent to which persuasion influences political behavior. Isolating the factors for consideration is complicated, as there are myriad at play. Using philanthropy as proxy for political identity, my inquiry situates charitable choices and moral values in the same territory of communal sense-making and Barthean mythologizing. Ancient and critical theoretical lenses reveal many opportunities and areas for rich encounters with a neo-Aristotelian critique of the RAC's 19 letters. Furthermore, this traditional analysis may provide a chance to begin applying a rhetorical-persuasive analysis to formal semiotic characteristics of solicitation letters.

Ultimately, as patterns emerge between rhetorical moves and financial performance of a given solicitation, it is crucial to understand the layered ways in which meaning is created through the respondent's behavior. The matrices of theoretical lenses provide a way to digest any apparent discursive patterns. In order for my study to contribute to the practice of philanthropic writing as a genre, I seek to tie together the interdisciplinary scholarship through a communication theory lens. Essentially, in doing a content analysis of a sample of letters, being able to classify different patterns and framing them through a critical theory lens, I am locating some ethereal truth about the effects of persuasion.

## **METHOD**

In this chapter, I will focus on the research method—and its antecedents—that I employ, and how I apply it to the specific data and in the context of my research question. I begin by describing the scope of my research; acknowledging some limitations of my question and method, alongside some definitions. Then, I describe the data my research evaluates, and its validity in answering my question. Then, I describe some of the background of the method I use in the context of the research literature. I conclude by explaining why the rhetorical instruments I use are suited to measure patterns in my data; and, how my tracking and coding methods are appropriate to study solicitation letters.

By comparing the performance of a given letter to its written and persuasive characteristics, I am able to elaborate on the current scholarship's findings about rhetorical moves deployed in the fundraising genre. In evaluating the different techniques of argumentation and persuasion in the letters, or whether short or long paragraphs are

more common (or other structural features that may emerge), I analyze the value of these techniques and their effectiveness. The techniques may be familiar from the popular literature or even some exemplary academic scholarship, or they may draw from analyses of other genres. By identifying approaches common in the RAC's persuasive writing of solicitation letters, my research can illuminate the process for philanthropic writers generally.

### **What I am measuring**

In the most proximate terms, I am seeking to identify rhetorical patterns in the sample data. A rich theoretical tradition I have already described informs the core of my analysis.

Complementing the rhetorical frame, the semiotic implication of the the solicitation letter as a mythologized artifact is important to consider. I also review reports of the number of donors and amount of donations each of the 20 campaigns generated overall. What is the relationship between rhetorical and layout choices and what constitutes successful solicitation letter?

The solicitation package (letter, envelope, etc) itself and how underlining, bullets, italics, and other layout and formatting features impact recipients' perceptions are important too. Persuasion occurs not only in the text of a fundraising letter, the very objet of the solicitation package participates in the persuasive experience of direct mail fundraising.

Because the philosophical basis for philanthropy is essentially a political act, the likelihood of a reader making a choice to contribute (or not) is a meaningful proxy for political identity

(Bazerman, 1998). My focus, then, on the persuasive and rhetorical choices in letter-writing could be worth extrapolating or building on in other future research.

### **The data I collected in my research**

I use a purposeful sample of the letters of the Religious Action Center to which I have access as a former staff member. Furthermore, they represent a healthy sample set with a relatively consistent audience against which to situate my findings. I carefully gathered documents from the Religious Action Center files, and selected digital versions of the final letters as they appeared when printed for direct mail.

The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) is a nonprofit organization based in Washington, D.C. The RAC is the social justice affiliate of the Union for Reform Judaism, which is itself an umbrella network of nearly 900 congregations across the U.S. and Canada (Religious Action Center). The RAC's mission is to educate and mobilize American Jewry on key areas of public policy and religious liberty. Nearly one third of its annual budget comes from a fundraising mix of individual gifts, foundation grants, and major endowment gifts (RAC).

I chose to gather my data in this way because a cogent data set for this kind of analysis and method means drawing from a body of work that already isolates many of the additional “noise” factors typically at play in fundraising communication, e.g. the setting and the audience. By drawing on one organization's fundraising solicitation letters over time, the more consistent

readership helps address additional factors and biases that may emerge when comparing the letters and the amount of money they raised.

The RAC typically mounts three major direct solicitation campaigns each year (D. Price, personal communication, March 12, 2016): spring, early autumn, and end of the calendar year. In most cases the campaign featured one letter to all recipients. Other campaigns may have several variants of a letter to a number of discrete audiences—in these cases, I selected one letter as a sample of that campaign.

I collected 19 letters for analysis (Appendix A), one from each of the spring and autumn campaigns from 2005 until 2015. I also collected the number of gifts made and, where possible, the number of recipients overall for each of these campaigns.

I excluded the December solicitation letters, since the nominal performance would be skewed, given that charitable gifts made between October and December typically represent half or more of dollars raised or gifts made across the entire philanthropic sector (McLean and Brouwer, 2012). Further, the RAC did not send a traditional solicitation letter during the spring of its 50th anniversary in 2011. These exclusions are why there are 19 letters in my sample and not 30.

To these resultant 19 letters, I proceeded to deliberately apply a qualitative analysis of the rhetoric therein. I began by coding each of the persuasive arguments made in the letters into

segments that aligned—topically, and by rhetorical tactics (e.g. personal story, statistical shock and awe, ancient morality, call to action).

### *Donation Reporting*

In order to add some performative context to this analysis, I kept data reports of specific outcomes that concern my research: The number of donors per letter, the total amount raised per letter, and the total number of recipients of each letter. I collect this data by retrieving the number of donations over the 45-day period immediately following the letter's date. I also collected the total amount of donations over the same 45-day period.

### **Antecedents of my discourse analysis**

Research on the impact of persuasive tactics in fundraising ranges, methodologically, across the various fields of study that I have covered already. In linguistics, researchers have developed typological instruments to quantitatively measure persuasion (Connor & Gladkov, 2004; Connor & Lauer, 1985). Among political scientists, research has compared rhetoric and electoral performance in discourse analysis of historical artifacts and materials (Jerit, 2008; Moir, 2010; Charteris-Black, 2011). Social scientists provided a discourse analysis of community sentiment as it relates to political identity (Bazerman, 1998; Coleman & Gotze, 2001; Caboni, 2010). Finally, semioticians and other communication researchers have applied discourse analysis to formal features of a communication artifact (viz. the use of punctuation, photography, pagination, text decoration, etc) for their impact in fundraising (Goering, Connor, Nagelhout, & Steinberg, 2009; Bekkers & Crutzen, 2007).

A frequently used technique in linguistics, for instance, is a multi-coder discourse analysis of a given data set, often a readily available body of work of fundraising letters (Connor & Gladkov 2003). Other experimental element may be added, such as a performance tasks to help indicate the effectiveness of a given appeal (Goering, et al. 2009).

Typically, rhetorical criticism focuses on discourse's "effect on an immediate audience" (Black, 1965/1978). Scholars then classify persuasive discourse, or "proofs," as logical, affective, or ethical. Critique of thematic or topical elements is distinct from that of the quality, style, or delivery of the persuasive move. In my discussion and findings, I proceed sequentially.

As an emerging discipline and genre itself, philanthropy is developing its own methodological norms, often drawn from a sociological tradition (Caboni, 2010; Kelly, 1995; Scott, 2014). By employing evidence drawn on interviews and questionnaires with practitioners in the field, and whether by qualitative or quantitative methods, researchers are drawing the contours of fundraising as its own practice worthy of scholarly attention. As far as persuasive discourse goes, fundraising is distinct from oration, or debating, or even writing editorials. As a genre unto itself, fundraising discourse assimilates social values of a particular subset of society dictating "relations between writers and readers" (Fuzer & Barros, 2004). I am relying on the norms of fundraising rhetoric in classifying implied persuasive acts, even if there is no specific request made in a given sentence or proof.



Finally, I also draw on some methods used by semioticians, which are similar to those of linguistics more broadly, of course. Goering et al. quantify bulleted lists, and calculate a relationship between their occurrence and giving behaviors (2009). But theorists in the field, as Barthes does, broaden discursive analysis beyond text or images, and into the social value of a signified phenomena (1972). I reckon the value of the solicitation package and its formatting by applying a similarly broad definition of discourse, alongside a more traditional comparison of the occurrence of visual emphasizes in the text.

### **The tools of my analysis - Instrumentation**

Aristotle's rhetorical framework is an initial instrument to apply a discourse analysis to the solicitation letters. Unearthing patterns of argumentation and analyzing the relative impact of logical, credible, and affective claims is a frontal concern.

At the outset, the instrument I employ is the classical rhetorical triangle: pathos, logos, ethos: “(1) to reason logically, (2) to understand human character and goodness in their various forms, and (3) to understand the emotions-that is, to name them and describe them, to know their causes and the way in which they are excited” (Aristotle, 1924).

The three pillars present a well known and widely used tool against which to evaluate the characteristics of a given appeal. In addition, the elements of the rhetorical triad are quite broad categories, and provide latitude in identifying further patterns while limiting confirmation bias. I am not seeking to find examples of persuasion that fulfill one part or another, but instead to

locate the modes of persuasion in my sample data. It is, however, not as simple as classifying each sentence in the sample letters into one of these three broad categories.

There are some phrases and elements in the letters that are not persuasive per se, and some that are clearly mechanical. For instance, whether the sign off (viz. ‘Sincerely,’ ‘*L’Shalom*’ or in peace) phrase participates meaningfully in the persuasion of the letter is arguable. The degree to which salutations impact persuasion in letter writing is beyond the scope of my research; but it is valuable to remember here that persuasion is the aggregate effect of countless choices available to the author.

In other settings, more specialized typologies are used. Connor & Gladkov, have applied an existing framework of rhetorical appeals and tactics to a body of work to apply an analysis (2004). Connor & Gladkov draw on Lauer & Connor’s 1985 work in coding persuasive essays that initially developed the typological instrument on which the later study builds. They, too, worked within ancient traditions and referred to appeals as “logical appeals,” “affective appeals,” and “rational appeals” (1985, 2004). Going beyond ancient characteristics of affective, credibility, or logical argumentation, Connor & Lauer built an analytical system for measuring persuasiveness that found 23 types of appeals within the broad modes of persuasion (1985), later Connor & Gladkov updated this with 6 more types (2004).

While the research Connor was involved with over the years provides a rigorous model of the kind of experiment I am constructing, it is hardly the only research on which I am relying in

developing my study's method. For instance, Goering, et al.'s work (2009) applied a financial performance measure alongside the rhetorical typology to see if there was an impact. This is akin to my real-world data matching the outcome of the solicitation campaigns that featured a given letter.

Tracing the relationship between the letters and the number of gifts is a report generated from the Religious Action Center's database (Appendix B) that queried the number of donors per campaign, and the total number of people to whom the letter was sent, and finally, the amount of money each letter raised. Certain conventions were followed in the tracking and coding of gifts that would affect how one interprets the results: for instance, if a donation was returned with the response device of a given campaign, the donation would be categorized with that campaign even if it were months or years later.

### **Coding and Measuring the Letters**

In this case, I assess the argumentation in the 19 solicitation letters, coding and categorizing sentences, phrases, and formal features. I coded all 19 letters at once for credibility appeals, and subsequently for affective appeals, and finally for logical appeals. The potential for some arguments to be made that draw on all three elements of persuasion—to varying degrees—is exceptionally evident by coding all the letters sequentially.

Grouping arguments by topics is an additional layer of coding that I apply to track the manner in which the persuasive technique is applied, since there are natural congruencies at play (e.g. fiscal issues and logical rhetorical technique), but this proves difficult given that most of the letters cite a large number of political and legislative topics.

I also identify places in the letters where visual emphasis is added to the traditional letter prose, such as underlining, bullet points, italics, and bolding. I provide this additional measurement to help introduce the importance of signification and semiotic analysis. My personal experience of reading solicitation letters involves a lot of skimming—unusual formatting helps disrupt the flow of the text on the page. I hope that by tracing a relationship here, I can unearth rhetorical value in the visual emphasis that such formatting has on persuasion.

### **Focusing the analysis**

Within an interpretive paradigm, my question of inquiry is naturally subject to many of the uncertainties that accompany communication research generally. In an effort to be transparent and precise as we encounter certain concepts it is helpful to begin with a few definitions; especially because of the contested nature of the topics I am exploring.

Rhetoric treats communication as a persuasive act, and it is through this theoretical lens that my research evaluates a solicitation letter. Precisely and predictably measuring which letters' specific rhetorical patterns necessarily resulted in a given fundraising outcome exposes a few theoretical

fissures. The disciplinary blend suggest we explore psychological factors in decision making, communalism and identity, semiotics, genre theory, and persuasion as a communicative framework. At once, making a financial contribution to a cause is a *prima facie* indicator of political identity.

Political identity is, of course, a complex and layered concept that cannot be singularly isolated. For the purpose of my study, I define political identity as a phenomenon that only truly actualizes at the moment of a positive action, such charitable contributions. Indeed, political identity is not the aggregate of thousands of political acts. In electoral politics, the highest form of political choices occur at the ballot box, and whether an individual's identity shifts at a later date or not, the act of voting is when political identity meaningfully manifests itself. In a fundraising context, this moment of selection occurs as readers make decisions about contributing or not. I use charitable choices and political choices as effectively synonymous terms. By focusing on this narrow conception of choices we can begin to see them as subject to persuasive force.

Given the importance of context to meaning, is it suitable to compare rhetorical moves across all 20 campaigns that span a decade of fundraising? I suggest a common egalitarianism exists among the letters because of this! Comparing the spring letters to the autumn letters may be rhetorically meaningful, but the success of any rhetorical appeal is obviously dependent on myriad elements of context. The shifting nature of political choices means that any rhetorical strategy that generated a successful pattern over the course of one period of time may not be applicable to another.

My research is not intended to provide permanent tools in rhetorical tactics for political fundraising. Indeed, the longevity of any politically-situated research will dilute over time as geopolitical circumstances shift. I sought to counter this factor by selecting letters sent over the course of 10 years, which would minimize the impact of any individual incidents.

Is it appropriate to measure the fiscal performance of a discrete letter campaign and attribute it to the letter's content? If a person was already predisposed to make a gift to a museum, it may be the mere receipt of a letter that triggers the action. It may be the persuasiveness of the letter's design and layout! Therefore, while I find certain correlations between rhetorical moves and number of donors or donations, this does not mean that applying certain persuasive tactics can guarantee contributions.

Are my findings valid if charitable choices can not be entirely attributed to the persuasive impact of a given campaign? In the absence of causation, the validity of my findings are only a proxy for interpreting rhetorical impact for political identity. The exact nuances of the relationship between political identity and philanthropic contributions are topics for other researchers to explore. That does not mean that a fundraiser has no role to play in prompting and generating contributions to any given cause.

I focus on those factors a professional fundraiser can reasonable control. Others acknowledge this need to narrow; Bazerman points out in his research how communal the variety of

informational and personal encounters a person may process on the way to deciding to support a given campaign (1998). In fundraising research, there are many external factors with a significant or likely impact on a donor's choices in responding to a letter beyond rhetoric.

The reason there is no way to precisely discover a universal rhetorical model for certainty in fundraising outcomes, is because no such model exists! The basic premise is always to seek to tailor the form and content of a persuasive artifact to the specific audience to whom it is addressed. Below, I describe the RAC's audience, and it should be used to help anchor my analysis with Aristotle's chief concern - the target. Indeed the precise impact and center of persuasion's impact on political behavior specifically is too layered and too complex a task—and certainly beyond the scope of this project.

There is obvious value in further analysis that may cross-reference my results with, say, findings that might include an analysis of topical relevance, media saturation, cultural zeitgeist, or the basic political saber-metrics. Fundamentally, having better paradigms around *how to persuade* should inform astute voters, scholars, and professionals alike.

## **FINDINGS & DISCUSSION**

In this chapter I share my observations and findings from coding the letters, first describing some general observations before offering an account of some patterns related to my measurement of the Aristotelian forms of persuasion. In the first portion, I describe the way emotional-affective appeals are exploited in the letters. I proceed to describe the manner in which credibility is asserted, and how it relates to those affective arguments and broader elements of meaning-context. I continue by exploring how logical-rational appeals appear in the letters, and how their impact is created between author and reader. I spend some time describing the visual-semiotic characteristics of the letters, and seek to capture the different approaches at play. Finally, I conclude the chapter with a discussion of the value of bringing together these particular findings and their broader implications for practitioners and others involved in political fundraising.



### **General Observations**

Political campaigns tend to be expensive, and the stakes can be high for the political values and ideas of the people involved. As a result, the typical political environment is aggressive and highly competitive, particularly in terms of persuasive communication objects.

As a group, the letters were constructed to elicit support for a broad agenda, ranging from economic safety net issues to civil rights topics. The letters reflected one perspective on the tenor of public policy dialogue in Washington, D.C. generally. This is in line with the aforementioned purpose of the Religious Action Center, which “educates and mobilizes the Reform Jewish community on legislative and social concerns” (RAC, 2016).

The Religious Action Center was founded in 1959, while civil rights direct actions across the South were growing more tense and more common (2016). Their target audience for fundraising is an older group, drawing on local community and congregational leaders, and includes a lot of clergy. They are typically liberals, and a good portion of them are the children and grandchildren of immigrants. Of the nearly 2 million Americans who self-identify as Reform Jews (Pew, 2014), the RAC represents nearly 75% as the Washington, D.C. office of the congregational umbrella group, the Union for Reform Judaism.

Overall the letters shared many formal features: all included a specific “ask,” salutations and sign-offs, and frequently itemized organizational achievements or challenges. Some of the letters included explicit requests for support, but many did not. In general, the letters follow a formula

with several variables, but approximates: “greetings + anecdote + broad political threats/opportunities + unique value of the organization = request to contribute and (implied reasons to) support the organization.” It is within this broad and fungible structure that specific arguments are made to appeal to the reader.

In addition, some of the letters included a secondary call to action, in addition to the specific request for contributions; these secondary requests may be participation in an event or advocacy action of some kind. Some of the letters were as short as one page, and the longest in the sample data was 4 pages; others still made use of photos and captions that expanded the letter’s topical coverage without adding prosaic length.

Nearly all of the letters followed with a post-script; usually a reminder of how to give, or an additional exhortation to do so. Emphatic formatting was common, whether bulleted lists, bolding, underlining, or italicizing text; but such formatting was entirely absent from two letters.

Within the context of these overarching trends, it is important to note that as I sought to measure the persuasive moves, oftentimes an argument would appeal to credibility, logic, and emotion at once, or in combination. I coded the letters independently to reduce confirmation bias, and to elucidate the multifaceted nature of a letter’s given appeals.

Blending these results into the briefest of cross-layered analyses, I assigned a numerical full integer grades (from 0 to 2) to represent the “intensity” of the affective, credibility, logical

appeals in each letter. I also did so for the visual emphasis; allowing 0.5 and 1.5 scores as well.

Table 3 represents this particular tracking.

On the one hand, because the top 50% of fundraising letters tend to rely most heavily on credibility appeals, the most important recommendation is for authors of such letters to invest their energy in this particular area. At once, I also found that the weakest performing 50% of letters were more heavily affective in their appeals, and practitioners should be careful about heavily exploiting emotion in their efforts.

A note about the signatories of the letter. In nearly all cases, letters were signed by Rabbi David Saperstein, who served as director of the RAC from 1974-2014. A letter in the spring of 2014 was his last in the series I reviewed; the autumn 2014 letter was signed by Barbara Weinstein and Rachel Laser, both senior staff members of the RAC. A new director, Rabbi Jonah Pesner, signed the most recent letter in the series, in the spring of 2015. I note these differences because the subtle shifts in persuasive tone shaped the use of appeals; however, it is not immediately evident that the change in leadership affected readers' perceptions.

### **Measuring how affective were the appeals**

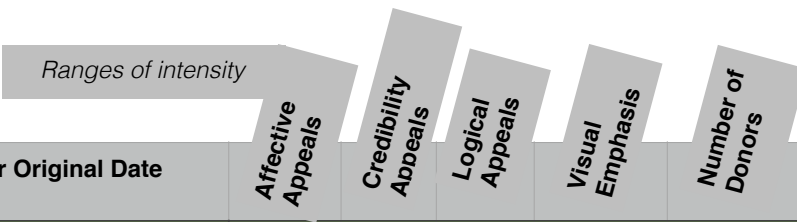
Given the limitations of the data, it is simply not possible to say that affective appeals delivered, on average, X boost to the donations generated by a given letter. Rather it is more important to understand how the authors deployed affective appeals in the narrative structure of the solicitation letters.

Two simple patterns emerged immediately:

- (1) affective appeals occurred at the beginning and ends of the letters.
- (2) affective appeals were often combined with credibility appeals, but less frequently with logical ones.

Overall, and intuitively attributable to the religious and moral nature of the sample data's source (i.e. the Religious Action Center), the broad form of argumentation generally appealed to the ethos of the reader. These affective appeals were often difficult to isolate from the broader tenor of letters' other features, such as descriptive portions, salutations, or personal anecdotes. Often, the letters would include an ask for support "to strengthen our prophetic voice and incorporate your values and ideals into our work" (RAC, Autumn 2005); this example is clearly affective as it exploits a reader's personal sense of identity and self.

Other affective appeals were constructed with a longer arc, drawing in portions of the anecdotal elements of the letters as well as political opportunities / challenges. In one letter, a quotation of Louis Brandeis that draws together Jewish values and American values is cited repeatedly, as the reader is prompted to consider the mythologized sense of themselves, as Americans and Jews, seeking identity and agency within these joint heritages. Obviously, this same argument is exploiting the credibility of Louis Brandeis (more on credibility arguments later).



Letter Original Date	Affective Appeals	Credibility Appeals	Logical Appeals	Visual Emphasis	Number of Donors
September 2011	1	1	2	0	424
April 2015	1	2	1	0	410
April 2010	1	2	1	1	364
April 2006	1	2	0	1	303
September 2005	1	2	0	1	299
September 2007	1	2	1	1.5	242
April 2008	0	0	0	1	236
September 2009	0	1	2	1.5	229
September 2006	1	2	0	1	217
September 2014	0	1	0	2	213
September 2013	2	0	1	1	202
September 2008	2	0	2	1	201
April 2007	2	1	0	1.5	197
April 2009	0	1	2	1.5	196
April 2012	2	0	2	0	188
September 2010	0	1	2	0	181
September 2012	1	1	1	0.5	169
April 2013	2	0	1	2	64
April 2014	1	2	0	0.5	56

Table 1 - Comprehensive Ranking by  
Performance of Solicitation Letters

In fact, affective persuasion was quite important in each of the letters. In the sense that the values and ideals of the reader were congruous with that of the author, arguments about the risks and opportunities in policy debates were emotional in nature. Significant portions of the letters would elicit the emotionally driven needs for a given policy, such as the millions of children who

needed health insurance or the millions of women who needed protection under the Violence Against Women Act. Both of these policies appeared in a few letters, and when they did, the (potential) victims of a failed policy choice were centralized. This exploits the fears of readers of these possible scenarios, pathologically strengthening the argument to support advocates like the RAC.

In the scope of the letters' total word count, the number of the affective appeals themselves may not have been very high. However, the affective appeals typically tapped into a very deep seated set of moral codes the immediate audience is concerned with. I may have anticipated, intuitively, letters would have more overwhelmingly been affective due to the polarizing tenor of political dialogue generally: discrediting opponents, fear-mongering, inspiring supporters, among other features, suggested that emotionally manipulative persuasion would be most prominent in political fundraising.

And yet, typically in these letters, the use of affective persuasion was intended to draw the reader into the community of activists to which the letters were addressed. The letters featured less "Jane will starve without our help" and more "our ancient and communal values demand we help all starving people." The latter argument mixes the emotional interest in shared identity and values with the emotional invocation of starvation. The former argument is confined to the reader's identification with the subject (Jane), and sets aside any reference to credibility.

### **Measuring the use of credibility in the appeals**

The letters often sought to emphasize the unique value of the RAC and its impact, historically and contemporarily, in policy debates. By focusing on the credibility and ethos of the RAC and the Reform Jewish constituency, the letters are performing two persuasive functions: the RAC as a meaningful player in policy-making, and Jewish values as a meaningful contribution to policy-making.

Across the letters, the RAC's credibility and impact in Washington, D.C. was a stronger overall thrust than its emotional or affective use of religious and moral ideologies. I offer this relative assessment because the letters make use of the affective appeal of ancient traditions and values, which are themselves inherently drawing on the credibility of those very values and is not necessarily emotional or affective. That is to say, the argument goes that the RAC was well-respected in Washington, D.C. (e.g. credibility) because it can defend the specific interpretation of ancient moral values that form the core of the reader's own identity—an emotional appeal to their particular form of Judaism. Several arguments laid out the RAC's credibility while drawing on these core emotional values of liberal Jewish heritage, history, and values. By drawing on heritage as an affective instrument, the pathos of liberal Judaism is the basis for the credibility argument.

An argument that recurred over the ten-year span of the letters, made reference to being the organization “congressional sponsors turn to.” This phrase alone appeared in at least five letters. What is interesting about the use of this phrase is how it represents a form of leadership that

encourages readers to perceive the RAC as valuable to others who themselves are credible. Given the purpose of the RAC, even if members of Congress are not individually credible or even collectively respected (Gallup, 2016), their validation is relevant to the RAC's credibility.

By situating credibility in the targets of the very advocacy the RAC pursues, the letters thus require social and political context to be truly understood. In credibility arguments like this, the immediate audience is expected to have familiarity with the political system, and the risks and opportunities of policy advocacy. This exigent context is thus at the heart of the meaning the letters are seeking to foment with readers.

In addition to locating validation for the RAC's credibility in other actors in policy discourse, nearly every letter sought to amplify this positioning through the youth mobilizing and training the RAC conducts as central to its mission. The descriptions and focus of the letters on this youth work tends to become longer and more pronounced over time.

A humble posture is thus woven into the tone of these letters, an consistent attempt to strengthen the idea of being lionized in some way — *mythologized*. By narrating itself as such, an institution mythologizes itself, often by its own representation of its history in solicitation and persuasive materials. This tactic is particularly important in fundraising letters, because the mechanism of externalizing political values in a contributions is an extension of a person's identity (Bazerman 1998).



In the sense that credibility is itself part of the logical

pitch to the reader, the rhetorical energy devoted to emphasizing the RAC's credibility was cited as a logical reason for support — in particular when framed as a contrast to other, shrinking and weakening groups in the religious advocacy sector.

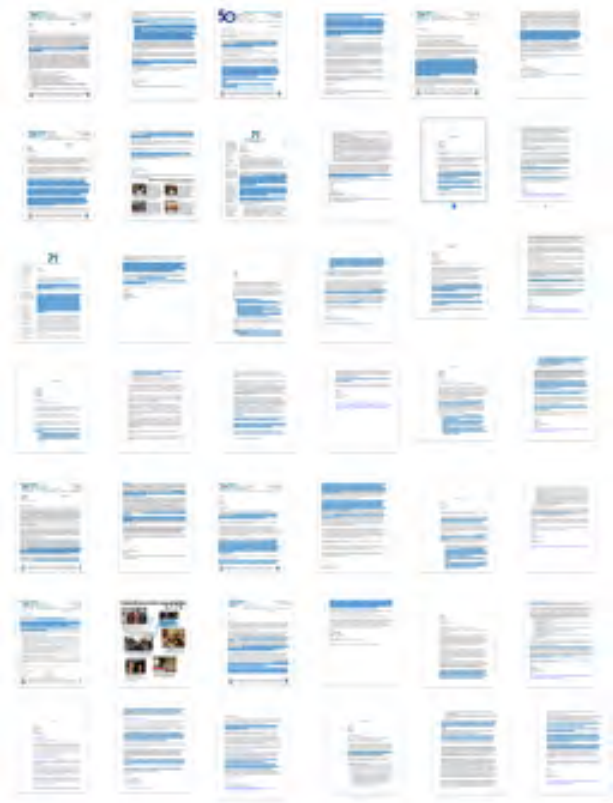
### **Measuring the application of logic in the appeals**

The logical and rational framework of persuasion is, of course, present even when the arguments draw primarily on emotional elements or on the credibility of the speaker.

Rationality pervades the letters to elevate the risks that readers can perceive in the political and social context in which the letters were encountered — not, as I may have initially imagined before embarking on this research, does it present logical arguments for support.

In many cases, arguments are presented in terms of risks to the reader's values. For instance, from the autumn 2005 letter: "To Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network, for example, the "free and open land" loved by our Jewish forebears should be "free" to worship Jesus in public schools and "open" to equating same-sex love with incest and bestiality."

*Fig. 1 - Visual Overview of Rational Appeals*



Whether this argument is valid is beside the point; the logic pursued in many of the arguments in their letters suggests, syllogistically, that the stakes in these debates on public policies are significant, and reader support is urgently needed.

In addition, the Pat Robertson argument cited is also an example of non-contradiction: it is impossible for “his version” of society to co-exist with “our version.” Readily, the question of “our” vs. “the alternatives” draws on some deep-seated elements of identity, and we will discuss that soon. These juxtaposed options occur in many of the letters; and fig.1 offers an at-a-glance sense of this overtly rational argumentation.

There are other characteristics of rationality that I think are at play, and bore themselves out in the coding process. Where an argument was mixed (very often) if it was predominantly rational, I would code it as a logical appeal. But, let’s assume that my coding was equally slanted across all the letters, and we can apply some of these additional characteristics of rationalism: a sterility and certain stoicism attends purely logical formulations. I found this to be the case in particular when a letter or appeal cited statistical evidence for the urgency of a given problem; statistics are not individual narratives and do not prompt the same visceral response. The more an argument exhibited characteristics of sterility, or that cited specific facts or findings as a warrant for an appeal, the more likely I would have been to treat it as a logical appeal.

Additionally, the tactics used in the letters to draw out logical arguments are less overt than might be expected. For instance, there is no occurrence of a rational appeal in “the ask” itself in

any of the letters. First of all, the word “gift” only appears in nine of letters, and of those, six instances are found in the post script: “P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org/donate](http://www.rac.org/donate)” (Several, Spring 2009). In those cases where the request for a gift is in the body of the letter, an assertion of urgency is typically made: “This year we need your support more than ever...” (Autumn 2008) or “Your gift has never been more urgently needed.” (Autumn 2011). Aside from the theme of urgency, the explicit request for a gift is derived from a meaning-context provided by the letter, but to a larger degree to the broader geopolitical circumstances.

Just as I assert here that these asks rely on inductive logic—the general proposition to ‘support the RAC’ is derived from the circumstances cited in the letters—there is no deductive logic that should prompt a gift to any charitable cause *without additional context*. Modern philanthropic practices provide this context: “Genre structures provide a discursive context that cognitively focuses the attention of writer and reader, thereby setting relevance constraints and increasing communicative efficiency” (Rauen, 2009). As such, any explicit ask in the RAC’s letters are fundamentally built on the structures of the fundraising letter as a genre of its own, and readers deduce the request for support through the context provided by the solicitation letter as an object.

I do not mean, however, to minimize the role of the ask as its own force merely complementing a stronger contextual implication or prompting of philanthropic giving. For instance, the RAC’s autumn 2005 letter requests the gift as follows: “We hope you will consider making a special contribution at this time of the year, when we acknowledge how much in our lives hangs in the balance, to enable us to continue our sacred work.” In this particular appeal, while logic allows

the request to make sense, the warrants provided draw on pathos and ethos more than it seems a rational ask for a fictive food bank: “We hope you will contribute to enable us to feed the hungry nutritious meals.” Given that, I would typically code the ask as a rational appeal, even if it is situated in a pathological frame, while acknowledging that the logical argument is relative.

### **Measuring performance of the letters**

Because this is a primarily qualitative study of rhetorical techniques that may be more or less successful at prompting donations, the number of donors is a good starting place from which to review performance. It is more important than comparing the total amount of money raised per campaign (a common reporting measure in popular media), because from a persuasive perspective the capacity of a donor to give more can’t be attributed to how much they were persuaded. As the cliché goes—and in the context of our analysis of persuasive texts— in for a penny, in for a pound. Goering et al’s study provides a better measure to assess how *much* persuasion translates into gifts of a given size (2009). In this context, then, the number of gifts can tell us on how many people these letters had an impact. As Foss points out, considering impact on the immediate audience is the traditional neo-Aristotelian approach to rhetorical criticism (Foss, 2004).

The data to help track the performance of the letters was hampered by a couple of factors in data collection. Firstly, there is no historical record of the number of recipients for many of the campaigns and letters in the sample. For the remainder, the inconsistent naming convention and a

lack of a uniform system for tracking and attributing donations to campaigns created many additional uncertainties.

Table 2 shows the number of donors each campaign elicited. Where possible, these counts reflect donations that were tracked and coded as resulting from these solicitation letters. At times, a 60

Table 2 - Chronology & Performance  
of Solicitation Letters

Letter Original Date	Number of Donations
September 2005	299
April 2006	303
September 2006	217
April 2007	197
September 2007	242
April 2008	236
September 2008	201
April 2009	196
September 2009	229
April 2010	364
September 2010	181
September 2011	424
April 2012	188
September 2012	169
April 2013	64
September 2013	202
April 2014	56
September 2014	213
April 2015	410
<b>AVERAGE</b>	<b>231.105263157895</b>

span was used. The average number of donations in response to a letter campaign is roughly 231.

When removing the two lowest and two highest, the average is 229.

To get a sense of the common response to these solicitation letters, 8 of the 19 letters received between 200 and 300 contributions; though many more letters received fewer than 200 gifts—seven—as opposed to the four campaigns that received more than 300 gifts. In April of 2013 and 2014, the difference between the number of gifts and the average is deceptive. While those two campaigns received about 60 gifts each (about 170 fewer than average), the two campaigns in September 2011 and April 2015 received 193 and 179 more gifts than the average, respectively.

When organized by number of donors, the top campaigns have some idiosyncratic explanations. September 2011 was during the 50th anniversary campaign for the RAC, which generated a lot of gifts in the (unscrutinized) end of year campaign as well. In April 2015, the RAC introduced a new director after 40 years. However, I did not discover anything particularly special about the contextual forces at play for the other campaigns.

### **Use of visual emphasis in the letters**

As much as fundraising letters are textual discourse, they are also representative objects that stand for modern philanthropy. The RAC's letters have many visual characteristics that I will now describe. First, however, a note about the actual physical artifact of a solicitation letter—these, too, have impact and are relevant to our discussion.

The RAC's campaigns are printed on formal letterhead, and are sent in a traditional windowless envelope with two additional enclosures: a self-addressed return envelope and a card on which to fill out contribution details. This object-kit is common in fundraising letter direct mail campaigns, and are used by higher education institutions to global mega-charities and local ones. Because these objects participate in the broader solicitation phenomenon, even before the envelope is opened many recipients will have sufficient awareness of what is inside. Many campaigns may thus create elaborate envelopes, inserts, shapes, or other features to set themselves apart — this creativity is beyond the scope of my analysis, and it is why there is no traditional letter to review for the spring of 2011 in the sample data.

Table 3 - Formatting Intensity & Performance of Solicitation Letters

Letter Original Date	Formatting Intensity	Number of Donors
September 2014	2	213
April 2013	2	64
September 2007	1.5	242
September 2009	1.5	229
April 2007	1.5	197
April 2009	1.5	196
April 2010	1	364
April 2006	1	303
September 2005	1	299
April 2008	1	236
September 2006	1	217
September 2013	1	202
September 2008	1	201
September 2012	0.5	169
April 2014	0.5	56
September 2011	0	424
April 2015	0	410
April 2012	0	188
September 2010	0	181

That said, within the body of the letters there are many options available to authors in simple formatting to creative use of bullets or other visual features. In my coding, I noted every instance of bolding, underlining, bulleted lists, use of color, added images and captions. I did not highlight instances of italics, because they seemed to signify not emphasis (as these other elements do) but use of Hebrew. I think for other settings, italics would be useful to include, but given the RAC's specific use of italics for Hebrew, I have not included them here.

Visual/formatting emphasis is applied in

nearly every letter, but remarkably there are two with none (Autumn 2010 and Spring 2012). In fact, those two letters also do not include post-scripts, which are otherwise consistent features in the letters. Two other letters mixed media, and included photographs and captions in the letters (Autumn 2014 and Spring 2013).

Underlining was more common the earlier the letter-campaign occurred, for instance, after the Spring 2010 campaign, no other letters used underlining at all. I would guess this decision was influenced by underlining's tendency to be used for hyperlinking in a digital setting, and less by a weakened interest in formatting for emphasis (bold, bullets, and other features all continued). In the Spring 2007 campaign, a three page letter featured 13 underlined phrases.

Bulleted lists, which were evaluated by Goering et al.'s study as well, appear to be used very often in the RAC's campaigns. However, they are rarely a list of brief sentence fragments, and instead are often each a full sentence or more. In the Spring 2010 letter, each of the bulleted items also has a bolded word or phrase. Inasmuch as bulleted lists are meant to make a list of items easier to access and read, improving both legibility and understandability, the RAC's practice of applying bullets to a series of small paragraphs is counterintuitive. The intensity of the formatting of a letter is apparent in the the length of sentence within bullets, and in my coding of formatting 'intensity' a bulleted list stands out more than paragraphs and were scored accordingly. Table 3 provides an overview of the formatting I scored for each letter, as well as the number of donors; there appears to be no causal relationship given that the two letters with the most donors had little to no formatting.

Furthermore, if bulleted lists are seen as an efficient use of space to accommodate more content, I would have expected their appearance in the shorter letters; but in the only one-page letter in the data, there are no bullets or bolding whatsoever, rather, three paragraphs are underlined in their entirety.



Finally, bolding and sub-headings were features that appeared in several letters, and they provided an accessible way to scan a letter without needing to read each portion sequentially. In a few cases, bolded phrases and sub-headings also framed thematic efforts: in the spring 2006 letter the phrase “We can pray, and this year we also can do” appeared as a recurring drumbeat throughout the letter with a bolded and blue stylized emphasis.

## **Discussion**

In the discussion, we will explore some of the characteristics of the appeals that we measured. Further, we will seek to describe their general impact on one another, and the factors that a practitioner must navigate as they construct successful fundraising discourse. Finally, we will conclude with a few points that can direct further research and reading, as well as some takeaways for practical application and analysis.

Among the factors I discovered in my research, the manner in which heritage and tradition is emotionally deployed for persuasive effect clearly has nuanced and shared value with the application of logic and appeals to credibility. Additionally, I noted the use of visual emphasis which allows reader to follow a non-linear pathway through the content of a letter. However, I must begin by noting the symbolic power of philanthropic context.

Blending all those factors we’ve just surveyed (e.g. affective, credibility, logical, and visual) into a workable matrix can offer some guidance to professional persuaders. While I had initially

believed my research would provide a handy set of guideposts that would be valuable to political persuasion as much as it would be to fundraisers, I think these findings indicate that the very object of a fundraising letter is a crucial contextualizing force. That is, each of the letters participates in a decontextualized construction of a universal philanthropic force to which the persuasion in the letters' text is secondary. To the extent we can assign the outcomes of campaigns to the quality of the letters themselves, the culture of philanthropy around a certain topic or cause will remain the strongest factor.

Not only does the visual signification of bolded headings and subheadings encourage readers to derive represented importance, the bolding of phrases that were primarily used as an affective citation of communal identity in several letters provides further evidence for a mixed approach to affective and credibility appeals. That is, in cases where credibility can emotionally derive value from shared cultural touch points, the value of purely logical or representative tactics is minimized. Thus, the argument that we must help the 1 in 5 people who live in poverty is less compelling than an historic and communal obligation to help the needy (regardless of how many there are). Representing communal values in a philanthropic setting (reinforced by symbolism, both semiotic and metaphorical), the letters in my research build an identity driven rhetoric that pathologically layers context with communal ethos. The RAC's authors exploited a context-meaning agency among readers that constructs a philanthropic experience that is as familiar as it is compelling.

It is worth noting that of the rhetorical patterns that emerge in the letters, there are topical relationships at play. That is, certain types of arguments tend to be made when addressing certain topics. As a rule, when addressing issues of the social safety net, persuasion appeals to the history of Jewish activism on poverty issues. While issues of, say, national security tend toward the logical arguments. This is merely a passing qualitative observation that merits further research. While a comprehensive topical matrix is beyond the scope of my research, the substantive influence in rhetorical choices cannot be ignored entirely.

Returning to some of the key questions begged in my findings, I must dwell on credibility. Not only because credibility seems to be a driving force in prompting more donations, but also because these arguments tended to be both logical and emotional; drawing on the logical value of such voices in contemporary policy discourse and the affective nature of heritage and identity.

Why, then, is pursuing heritage a question of credibility? Because in the fashion of these letters (but also more broadly in persuasive discourse), authenticity—of the author and the reader—is an elusive and potent force for persuasion. In the sense that fundraising discourse participates in the broader sense making of society, and taps into a reservoir of values and identity, credibility has a unique role to play. If, “by using texts, human beings create realities of meaning, social relations and knowledge” (Rauen, 2009), then credibility governs the strength of those social relations and knowledge.

Before undertaking this research, I underestimated the extent to which the credibility of the speaker shapes perceptions of information I encounter. In fundraising discourse this becomes particularly important, as the sophistication of fundraising systems evolves from campaign to campaign. Because fundraising systems of representation build on contemporary context (Bazerman, 1998), and as a result of the growth of philanthropy as a sector (Caboni, 2010), trustworthy voices are as rare as they are ephemeral. Where context helps inform a reader's sense of the value of the speaker's arguments (Brember & Ragsdale, 1995 ), and when those arguments can appeal to deep-seated shared concerns and sense of identity (Bazerman, 1998; Rauen, 2009), the more persuasive fundraising discourse is.

The value of my research to practitioners and others may seem narrow, given the small sample size and my qualitative approach. In general, though, the contours of a fundraising letter are pre-determined by the general purpose of the request or soliciting group. Additionally, this presumes the fundamental staying power of the traditional fundraising letter as a vehicle for solicitation. In fact, I have suggested already that the direct-mail fundraising letter is currently the leading representation of philanthropic culture. The key lessons from my research should prove applicable no matter the particular media setting, so long as there is sufficient philanthropic context.

Philanthropic context, I add, is for the solicitor and the cause. Imagine a donation request for help in buying a luxury car; it is not likely to succeed because the meaning-context of luxury items and philanthropic causes are incongruous. That said, if society evolves to a point where

private donations to causes are anathema, it may not matter how persuasion acts on readers — the contextual representation would overpower the specific arguments.

Further, the power of the philanthropic context of direct mail is emphasized by the fact that other visual elements in a letter seem to have a negative correlation with successful letters. All of which is to say, given contextual support both for the cause and for the solicitation, fundraising discourses that emphasize credibility can prompt more donations than rhetoric that exhibit logical or affective characteristics.

The rhetorical techniques I have sought to foreground in my research may be familiar from the popular literature or even some exemplary academic scholarship, or they may draw from analyses of other material entirely. Nonetheless, by identifying patterns among persuasive writing in solicitation letters, and analyzing them amid a curated scholarly background, applying rhetorical frameworks to solicitations should be less haphazard and can rely on an evolving scholarly tradition as well as results here that show us the value of credibility and emotional appeals. Finally, taking cues from the specifics of my research, others can begin to explore, in more controlled experimental settings, a greater degree of connection to audience-reader identity. In practice, leveraging reader identity can create more successful campaigns, which can potentially mobilize the politically apathetic.

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## **Appendix A**

Selected solicitation letters of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, 2005-2015

*(continues)*

September 20, 2005  
16 Elul 5765

[RAC Addressee]  
Address1  
Address2  
City, State ZIP

Dear [RDS Salutation],

"The 20<sup>th</sup>-Century ideals of America have been the ideals of the Jew for more than twenty centuries."

These words were penned by Louis Brandeis in 1915, one year before he became the first Jewish Justice on the U.S. Supreme Court. They expressed the optimism of more than 1 million new Jewish immigrants to this free and open land, an optimism that was greatly reinforced by Brandeis's boundary-shattering appointment.

What about the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ideals of America? Do they also mirror Jewish hopes for freedom of religion and conscience, for social and economic justice, for a society of compassion and mercy?

According to the well-laid plans of the Christian Evangelical right, the answer is a resounding "NO." Posing as an aggrieved minority that suffers religious persecution at the hands of "secular elitists" and "activist judges," they are attempting to build a 21<sup>st</sup> Century America – dollar by dollar, policy by policy, appointment by appointment – in which their particular gospel becomes law.

To Pat Robertson of the Christian Broadcasting Network, for example, the "free and open land" loved by our Jewish forebears should be "free" to worship Jesus in public schools and "open" to equating same-sex love with incest and bestiality.

To James Dobson of Focus on Family, our "free and open" land should be "free" to force women to carry every pregnancy to term and "open" to construing the first chapter of Genesis as a scientific text.

To Jerry Falwell of the nascent Moral Majority, our "free and open land" requires a Supreme Court that facilitates the power of the majority rather than protecting the rights of the minority.

Against such a backdrop, I cannot exaggerate the importance of maintaining a dedicated, faith-based voice of social conscience like the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC). While many of our nonsectarian allies do critical work to slow the Christian right juggernaut, our work as the prophetic voice of a thriving religious movement has special significance on Capitol Hill because we represent Reform Jewish values and our congregations across North America.

When the National Right to Life Committee opposes stem-cell research as an infringement on the “rights of the unborn” (and James Dobson draws analogies between stem-cell research and Nazi experimentation upon living Jews!), the RAC is uniquely qualified to teach legislators about the *nefesh* (living soul) status of human beings, which makes the saving of human life far more important than the preservation of a blastocyst.

When Evangelical leaders claim biblical support for abolition of the estate tax (and Grover Norquist equates such taxes to the Holocaust!), we are uniquely empowered to talk about biblical concepts of the Jubilee and uplifting the poor and the vulnerable.

When the Christian right interprets environmental degradation as a sign of the approaching Rapture and End of Days travail, we are uniquely positioned to speak of the wonder and awe with which our religious tradition instructs us to approach the task of preserving our precious planet.

We are, in short, the leading voice of religious sanity on Capitol Hill and in other decision-making venues. And we have the numbers to be heard: Our 1.5-million member Reform Jewish Movement is the only theologically liberal denomination in the U.S. that has grown at a pace to match the religious right. That growth is inspired, in no small part, by our ongoing commitment to the American ideals that Louis Brandeis celebrated.

We cannot hope to preserve those ideals, however, unless *you* recognize how far the Christian right has already gone in undermining them — and respond with a true sense of urgency.

Won't you help? Your contribution to the RAC will strengthen our prophetic voice on your behalf and incorporate your ideals and values into our work.

We greatly appreciate your support; it is critical to our advocacy initiatives and programmatic efforts. We hope you will consider making a special contribution at this time of the year, when we acknowledge how much in our lives hangs in the balance, to enable us to continue our sacred work. May you and your loved ones be written into the Book of Life for a year of peace.

B'shalom,



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. Don't forget: your contribution also supports the RAC's award-winning website: [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org). If you haven't visited it already, do it today and sign up for RACNews!***

April 10, 2006

[Addressee]  
[Organization]  
[Address1]  
[Address2]  
[City, State ZIP]

Dear [RDS Salutation]:

**We can pray, and this year we also can do.**

Pesach comes each year to remind us not only of *our* liberation from slavery in Egypt but of our responsibility to those who remain in slavery today, and particularly those whose very lives are in daily jeopardy from political, economic, and religious oppression.

This year, as we prepare our homes for Pesach, we at the RAC are focused particularly on the enslavement and cold-blooded murder of innocent men, women, and children occurring daily in the Darfur region of the Sudan.

**We can pray, and this year we also can do.**

The RAC is very proud to be leading the Reform Jewish Movement's participation in the massive "Rally to Stop Genocide," taking place on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., on April 30, 2006.

The RAC also has assumed responsibility for coordinating the advocacy visits of the entire "Save Darfur" coalition with Members of Congress on Monday, May 1, following the Rally. And at 7:45 p.m. on the night before the Rally, Saturday, April 29, we will be leading a Havdalah Service for all at the Jefferson Memorial. We hope to see you and other members of your congregation here in Washington.

The upcoming Rally follows fast upon a special rally we coordinated at the United Nations on March 13. There, the RAC brought New York-area rabbis from all branches of Judaism to pressure the UN to send multilateral forces to protect the refugees of Darfur.

**We can pray, and this year we also can do.**

The genocide in Darfur is not a new issue for us; for several years we have been trying to draw attention to this horrific situation. In July 2004, I was arrested at the Sudanese Embassy in Washington protesting against the killings and human rights violations.

Thanks in large part to our work in coalitions of decency that have been calling for increased involvement by our government in this international crisis, the situation has finally been recognized for what it is by the Administration; now we must work together to ensure that “never again” is no longer an empty phrase, but rather a promise we keep when we see other peoples similarly threatened with annihilation.

**We can pray, and this year we also can do.**

Even as we prepare to speak out on genocide in Darfur, we are well aware that others around the world, in our nation, and in our very own communities are also enslaved, particularly by poverty and disease.

We all have witnessed how the survivors of natural disaster such as Hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been virtually abandoned by many who promised to help. We Reform Jews can be proud of our own generosity – of our time, our money, and our labor – to help those who were directly affected.

Even before these natural disasters, however, the combined effect over the past few years of unrelenting budget cuts and reckless fiscal policy has caused the number of poor Americans to jump to 37 million people and the number without the security of health insurance to grow to 46 million. Despite these sad facts, the U.S. Congress has adopted a budget reconciliation bill that includes nearly \$40 billion in new cuts. Clearly, efforts are under way to shred the social safety net for those who need it most.

As Reform Jews organize and our congregations mobilize for action on Darfur, on economic justice, and on scores of similar issues, you depend on the RAC for guidance and for resources. You turn to our website; you call; you send e-mails. And we respond.

We are here for you in Washington: your voice for progressive values, for Jewish values, speaking out and gathering strength from our like-minded coalition partners. The RAC is an especially powerful and distinctive voice, bringing the insights of thousands of years of Jewish teachings and traditions to bear on today's most critical issues and channeling the combined energy, dedication, and creativity of our entire movement.

We are grateful for your past support, which amplifies our voice and strengthens our hands in this vital work of *tikkun olam*. We need your continuing support: to lead the marches, keep our website current, prepare the statements and press releases, follow the legislation, and keep you up-to-date on the issues you care about the most.

Passover comes to remind us that to be a Jew is not simply **to be**, but to **stand for**. This is your chance to stand for making a difference now — and for years to come. I wish for you and your families a festival of joyous renewal of the commitment we share to freedom for all.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "David Saperstein".

Rabbi David Saperstein, Director

***P.S. We could not fight for the freedom of all were it not for our many supporters like you. Please take this opportunity to continue to help.***



September 2006

Addressee  
Organization  
Address1  
Address2  
City, ST Zip

Dear Salutation:

The High Holidays feel different this year.

Usually, there's a wonderful feeling of anticipation. The sultry days of summer are over, the air is getting crisp, we wish each other a *shanah tovah* and feel – well, we feel good, even joyous.

I hope in your personal and family lives, and in your synagogue community, this is precisely the way you feel. I hope there is joy in your life.

As for the world more broadly, however, such a feeling eludes us. Darfur, Iraq, Lebanon: foreboding displaces hope, our wishes for a good year feel inadequate.

Nor do events only in distant places swell our sense of failure and despair. Here at home:

- The health care crisis persists, with a record 46 million Americans – including 8.3 million children – lacking any health insurance.
- The minimum wage has not been increased since 1996, leaving a full-time worker earning the minimum wage with an income of just \$10,712 per year, nearly \$8,000 below the poverty line for a family of four.

- Our dependence on foreign energy sources and our contribution to global warming continue to threaten our health and our prosperity.
- The growing gap between the richest Americans and the poorest is a national scandal.
- The challenges to abortion, to separation of church and state, to civil rights, to civil liberties, to a politics of genuine inclusion: all are growing more intense.

The familiar greeting is: “may you be inscribed for a good year.” In our struggles for social justice, we know we need something different. We need to move from the passive voice – “may you be inscribed” – to the active voice – May we inscribe one another for a good year. May we pick up the reins and guide our world in the direction of justice, in the direction of peace.

There is a very real urgency today, but that we must assume this active role is nothing new. Historically, America’s Reform Jewish Movement has been in the forefront of the fight for social justice. The powerful 2,000-year-old tradition that compels us connects our religious identity directly to our sense of social responsibility.

Each generation has faced its battles and – allied with others who value a society of compassion and conscience – each generation has acted ... and we have made a difference.

We helped end segregation; we helped break down the walls of discrimination against women; we helped fight injustice against gay Americans; and we helped protect our legacy of a clean environment.

And in those efforts and many more – for two generations – the Reform Jewish Movement has had a voice in Washington that speaks truth to power. The Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism (RAC) sustains a prophetic tradition that goes back to the days of Amos and Isaiah and has been kept alive from generation to generation by those very many of us who understand that our world is not working the way it is supposed to, not working the way it was meant to.

That tradition continues today. The RAC is playing a lead role in every one of the challenges facing us.

For more than a decade the RAC has played a key role on Sudan, helping to draft and pass the Sudan Peace Act and now the Darfur Accountability Act, forging coalitions with Republicans and Democrats to ensure that ending the Darfur genocidal activity is a national priority.

On church-state issues, the RAC co-chairs the Coalition to Preserve Religious Liberty. When the Religious Right made the Marriage Protection Act its priority, the RAC coordinated the response of the religious community to preserve the civil rights of gays and lesbians.

On economic justice, the environment, abortion rights: the RAC is looked to as a leader in the broader coalitions that fight day in and day out to protect our rights.

In partnership with more than 900 synagogues and 1,800 rabbis throughout this land, the RAC ensures that the words of Isaiah we hear each Yom Kippur – “To let the oppressed go free, to share your bread with the hungry, to take the wretched poor into your home” – translate into support for policies and programs nationally and in our own congregations and communities that can transform lives.

We also act to ensure that the flame of social justice will burn as brightly in the next generation. Each year, thousands of Reform Jews of all ages who – through RAC programs like the Consultation on Conscience, the Richard and Lois England Rabbinic Student Leadership Seminars, the Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminars, the *Machon* Kaplan college program, and social justice programs at Union camps – experience firsthand the urgent contemporary meaning of *rachmanim b'nai rachmanim* – the compassionate children of compassionate parents. And we, in our time, add our determination to be *rachmanim horei rachmanim* – the compassionate parents of compassionate children. It is that commitment that so enriches our work at the RAC, our people, and our nation.

I want to be very clear: I cannot – no one can – guarantee when we will win out over the forces of darkness that beat the drum of violence and intolerance so insistently.

But I can guarantee that if we stand idly by – if we are satisfied by the expression of good wishes and imagine that we thereby have done something meaningful – then we, and our children, and our children's children will see our dreams thwarted.

You and I – and the Religious Action Center – we are the vanguard ... or there is no vanguard. By our action, we increase the odds that the year ahead will truly be a good year.

So we turn to you. Every day you help make our work possible. You help ensure that we never become complacent, resting on past success.

The pursuit of justice is not an exercise in nostalgia; it is not about the good old days. It is a pursuit that must be renewed each day, each week, each year. And it feels more urgent today than ever in the past 50 years.

I hope you will consider taking action by making a significant contribution to enable us to continue our sacred work.

May you and your loved ones – and all Israel – be written into the Book of Life for a year of peace – and help write into the Book of Life a year of peace and justice for all the world.

*Shana tova,*



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

*P.S. Like you, I want to make the world a better place, and I want to live in a world at peace. Your generous contribution to the RAC will make you a partner with those who – in the words of the Proverbs – “speak up, judge righteously, champion the poor and the needy.”*

Pesach 2007

Name  
Address 1  
Address 2  
City, State ZIP

Dear (RDS Salutation):

When you open the door to Elijah at your seder, who's out there?

When you invite "All who are hungry . . ." to share in your Passover meal, who are you talking about?

Part of Judaism's genius is that it conceals the answers to these questions. Elijah, according to legend, could be just about anyone; therefore, we are to treat one another as prophets-in-disguise. Similarly, from among those who are hungry may come a great leader, an esteemed artist, or a life-saving scientist, as the Talmud suggests: "Do not neglect the children of the poor, for from them will go forth the Law" (*Nedarim* 81a). We must welcome those in need as members of our communal family.

This fundamental sense of social responsibility is no longer so prevalent on the American landscape. Too many people increasingly seem to see wealth not as a blessing to be shared but to idolize wealth as a measure of worth — and to turn a blind eye to oppression and deprivation. In such an environment, we affirm at our seder tables our responsibility, not unlike that of Moses who stood before Pharaoh, to speak truth to power.

Speaking truth to power is precisely the work of the Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism, day in and day out, year around. We cry out against oppression, against neglect, against injustice. We form alliances with the just and the compassionate. And, together, we often work wonders that set people free.

As I write, for example, the RAC is deeply involved in gathering support for new legislation that would create the National Housing Trust Fund. It would establish within the U.S. Treasury a dedicated source of funding for the development, rehabilitation and preservation of 1.5 million units of affordable and safe housing for low-income families during the next ten years. This will be an economic

boon to many parts of our country — and will help put an end to the national shame of having millions of citizens, including some of our most hard-working neighbors, falling in and out of homelessness. *Dayenu!*

The RAC also has been a significant force in the ten-year-old campaign to raise the federal minimum wage. We have worked on this issue relentlessly, inspired by the biblical exhortation not to let the sun set on the worker's fair wages, "for he is poor, and his life depends on it" (Deuteronomy 24:15). Ten years' worth of setting suns is enough! *Dayenu!*

With every newly elected Congress come exciting new opportunities for the RAC to work for a more just and righteous society. What counts most is our strategic coalition-building, especially with other faith-based organizations, with whom we build political reality one legislative brick at a time. Today we are moving forward:

- to remove obstructions to stem cell research;
- to defend reproductive freedom;
- to encourage energy conservation, development of alternative fuels, and active confrontation with our global warming crisis;
- to expose and neutralize Holocaust denial;
- to resolve immigration issues humanely, while keeping faith with our history as a nation of immigrants;
- to preserve civil rights and voting rights;
- to ensure Israel's security and rejuvenate a viable Middle East peace process;
- to assure fair and accountable elections;
- to oppose efforts to ban gay marriage through a Constitutional amendment and pass the Employment Non-Discrimination Act;
- and much, much more.

In scores of coalitions for social change, the RAC provides leadership. But our most strategic coalition partner is *you* — you, and 1.5 million other Reform Jews across the continent, whose 900+ Reform congregations empower and strengthen us to "part the waters" in Washington.

We believe true homeland security requires secure homes, incomes, educational opportunities, and health care. If you agree that our country must, in the words of the prophet Isaiah, be "established through righteousness" as much as through power, then please include us at your seder table this year by making a generous gift to the RAC.

The RAC was founded more than forty years ago by our elders to champion Jewish social responsibility. With *your* support, we'll be here for your children, your grandchildren, and beyond, creating pathways to "the promised land" for each generation.

I wish you and your loved ones a sweet and inspiring Pesach. May it be a year of healing and liberation for you, for the Jewish people, and for our beloved America.

*B'shalom,*



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. You might consider a monthly contribution that we can automatically charge to your credit card. Just fill out and return the enclosed form to us. Thanks!***

September 2007

Name  
Address1  
Address2  
City, ST Zip

Dear [RDS salutation]:

Common wisdom holds that fundraising is most successful when you're talking about a crisis that demands an immediate response.

Today, sadly, we have more than our share of crises: Israel, Darfur, Iraq, our own Gulf Coast, health care, global warming. And I am very proud that our Movement is responding with compassion and responsibility to each of these.

But our work must be, and emphatically is, about more than putting out today's fires; we must, and we do, train a new generation of activists to ensure that we are well positioned to fight tomorrow's battles as well.

What does it mean to respond to today's crises? What does it mean to represent our Movement in Washington at this moment in history?

It means that, with and on behalf of the Union for Reform Judaism and the entire Reform Movement, the RAC is:

- the only major national Jewish organization to oppose the war in Iraq;
- a leading voice for more effective U.S. engagement in Middle East peace efforts;
- one of the only religious organizations in America to take positions opposing nominations of extreme candidates to the Supreme Court and lower federal court benches, nominees who would undo the great advances in civil liberties, minority and women's rights, and church-state separation wrought by the Warren and Burger Courts;
- the organization Congressional sponsors turn to when they want a Jewish organization to speak out on providing health insurance for children or to testify on global warming;

- the first Jewish organization to refute convention and publicly acknowledge the Armenian genocide;
- and the first Jewish organization to call for national Jewish engagement in dialogue and cooperative endeavors with the American Muslim community (to take two of our more recent actions).

At the same time, what could be more important than assuming the responsibility for ensuring our future? What could be more important than developing a corps of young Jews – deeply committed to social justice – who will lead not just our Jewish community but our broader world?

And that is exactly what the RAC does better and more extensively than any other Jewish organization through our remarkable programs for young people.

Thanks to your generosity, we met and exceeded our fundraising goal this year (few public interest groups can make that claim), enabling us to expand carefully our legislative and educational activity at this pivotal time in the history of our nation and our community.

At the RAC, then, our High Holy Day accounting of our past year's activities includes:

We increased the number of Bernard and Audre Rapoport L'Taken Social Justice Seminars for high school students from six to eight per year, increasing the annual number of participants from 1,500 to 2,000. We are particularly pleased that 53 students from congregations that had never sent students were able to participate in one of the weekends. Our summer *Machon* Kaplan college program brought 32 students to Washington for six intensive weeks of classes, meaningful internship experiences, Shabbat dinners, and Washington adventures.

Eight Eisendrath Legislative Assistants (LAs) served our congregations in 2006-07, and six for 2007-08 recently arrived for this year's orientation so they can hit the ground running by the High Holy Days. The LAs are the primary faculty members for the *L'Taken* seminars, and they also are primarily responsible for monitoring more than 60 issue areas in which the RAC is active. When you want the latest information on solar cookers for Darfur, on confronting the Religious Right in your community, on making your synagogue "greener," or on developing programs on Iraq or Middle East peace – you speak with our LAs. They are a resource for social action committees, for rabbis, for students, and for everyone who wants current information on our advocacy and programmatic initiatives. And this year, we will be able to provide even more support and training for local activists with the addition of a new Congregational Relations Manager in our New York office of the Commission on Social Action.

Just this summer alone, the RAC trained the dozen Social Action Vice Presidents representing the regions of the National Federation of Temple Youth (NFTY), who study at the RAC before continuing their summer at the Union for Reform Judaism's Kutz Camp, NFTY's national leadership center. And the LAs took the RAC on the road during Congressional recesses, visiting URJ camps, touching hundreds more campers and staff (mostly college students) with



our programs, even while they were our front-line staff in the incredibly intense run of legislative activity in June and July.

The RAC's programs are a vital pipeline to a lifetime of service to social justice causes generally and to the North American Reform Jewish Movement; the RAC is a proactive force in identifying, encouraging, and nourishing future generations of Jewish community leaders.

At the RAC, looking to the future means not just trying to anticipate what legislation is coming, what position we will take, or what our next program will emphasize.

The RAC ensures that young people study the issues and absorb the values that will keep the flame of social justice burning in future generations.

We know that truly repairing our world requires long-term solutions, not temporary patches. So we ensure that thousands of high school and college students learn how to be part of the solution to the problems facing our world. We teach them how to be the pursuers of peace and the seekers of justice. We want to raise up generations that are thoughtful, not fanatical; self-examining, not self-righteous; givers, not takers.

As a result of their interaction with the RAC, these young people will carry – on their shoulders and in their hearts – the Reform Jewish traditions of *tikkun olam*, engaging in the world with purpose and striving to see every other human being as *b'tselem elohim*, made in God's image.

As we stand together at this turning of the Jewish year, taking account of what we have accomplished and what we have yet to achieve, I urge you to include the RAC in your reckoning and make a generous investment in the young people we serve. They are our – and your – future.

Ellen and I, together with the rest of the RAC family, wish you a joyous New Year. May the New Year bring peace, good health, prosperity, and God's mercy to all of us – and through us, to the world.

*L'shalom,*



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. Your contribution to the RAC enables us to prepare even more young people to lead our community. Please give generously.***

September 2008

Addressee  
Address 1  
Address 2  
City, State Zip

Dear Salutation:

I write this in mid-August. This is a critical moment of change.

As Ellen and I prepare to take our oldest son, Danny, to college, I can't help but feel this is a time of transition – for me personally, for the Jewish community and, indeed, for the nation. At the RAC, we have just said farewell to as strong a class of Legislative Assistants as we have ever had, and we are busy getting ready for the very promising class that begins next week. And we are only a few days away from the start of the month of Elul on the Hebrew calendar, which ushers in a season of reflection before the High Holy Days.

The world, too, is in a state of transition. The Olympics are underway and have managed to focus the world's attention simultaneously on amazing feats of athleticism and global challenges of human rights, war and peace. In Israel, the Prime Minister has indicated his intention to step down, and a new government will soon emerge to begin tackling the critical issues facing Israeli society. And here in America, we are on the cusp of the most important Presidential election I can remember, and the public angst is palpable.

I write knowing that in a few short months, everything will have changed:

- We will have a new President whose policies will shape our world for at least the next generation;
- Across the country, at the urging of the Religious Right, ballot initiatives raise crucial challenges to our stance on gay rights and church state separation and we are actively engaged in working to support our positions;
- We will know the composition of the new Congress, and the RAC staff will be able to begin serious planning to advance our legislative priorities;
- In Israel, a new government will have been elected to continue the struggle for peace with her neighbors;

- Our new staff will be in place, and preparing to serve as faculty members for the first of the remarkable Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice seminars (which over the course of this year will bring 2,000 High School students to the RAC);
- We will be well into a new Jewish year; and,
- Ellen and I, probably (but not definitely), will have come to grips with the fact that we have a child in college!

**Despite all the changes that lie ahead, some things will stay the same. The Religious Action Center will continue to work vigorously to assert Jewish interests and Jewish values in Washington and around the world. The RAC will be a voice for those whose voices are too-often not heard in the political arena. And the RAC will inspire and train this generation – and the next – Jewish activists to carry on this critical work.**

The media has been filled with stories about the significant financial pressures faced by many social justice organizations across Washington and the country, particularly those that hold politically progressive views. Many of these organizations are our key allies on work related to civil rights, the environment, interfaith relations, civil liberties, and fighting the religious right. They are cutting staff members and programs.

Why? The economy is weak and people are reducing their charitable contributions. Millions of dollars are being diverted from social justice organizations to the political campaigns.

The RAC remains one of the strong exceptions and one of the mainstays of social justice work in the nation's capital that has not just held its own but has been carefully expanding its work at this time of vital challenges. In each of the last four years, we have seen our revenues increase. You have been indispensable to making that possible.

This year we need your support more than ever and I hope you will consider increasing your annual gift, which goes toward that vital by challenging goal – *l'taken et ha'olam* – to heal what is broken in our fragile world.

May the coming Holy Days be meaningful and sweet for you, and may the year ahead be filled with joy, health and peace for you and your loved ones.

L'shalom,



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. As the High Holidays draw near, I hope that you will renew your commitment to the RAC. Without you, all this would not be possible!***

April 2009

Name  
Address  
Address 2  
City, State, Zip

Dear Donor:

The past few months have been both filled with excitement and anxiety in Washington, DC. The palpable sense of change and hope are taking on the fear, enormity and difficulty of our economic and foreign policy crises. Here at the Religious Action Center, it's been exhilarating to be both present and participatory for many of the much-needed changes to public policies.

While others are retrenching and cutting back their activities and efforts, we are bold enough to believe that with your help we will be able to grow to meet the urgent challenges we face. **At this time, the season of renewal, we ask you to consider making a contribution to the Center to ensure our continued work to alleviate the causes of injustice.** And I believe you know why we must.

The challenges are deeply encouraging but daunting:

- A chance for health care reform -- if we can generate the political momentum;
- Significant structural response to the global warming crisis -- if we can sustain the public demand;
- Appointment of federal judges with an expansive view of fundamental rights and liberties -- if we can overcome efforts to filibuster them;
- Possibilities of progress in ME peace process --if there is political support, particularly from the Jewish community, for active engagement
- Defeating the efforts of the religious right in states across America to require creationism and intelligent design be taught and to constrict the rights of gays and lesbians -- if there are advocates in the various states to fight the fight effectively.

On all these issues, the RAC has played -- and continues to play -- a central role both through its robust advocacy leadership in Washington and through its unmatched networks of rabbis and lay leaders in every state throughout America who are engaged, involved and speak out effectively on these issues.

Is progress on these issues just a dream -- or can it be a reality?

Consider what, with your help, has been accomplished already among the issues on which the RAC has focused. A few highlights:

- The first bill President Obama signed into law was the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), which has been of the utmost legislative priority to the staff here at the

- Center and will provide health insurance to more than 4 million previously uninsured American kids.
- Members of Congress on both sides of the aisle came together to pass an economic recovery package that promises to create jobs, provide relief to our most struggling communities and begin the effort for a stronger, more innovative American economy, and
- President Obama issued executive orders on several issues that matter deeply to the Reform Movement. He demanded the closure of the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, overturned the “Global Gag Rule” that denied U.S. funds to foreign aid organizations that provide counseling and legal abortion services.

The RAC is better positioned than ever to help make real, lasting change on the issues that matter most to this nation’s well-being. We continue our tireless dedication to advocating on behalf of the policies of the Reform Jewish Movement, advancing our ideals in the public arena, and helping our congregants and clergy act alongside us as tireless advocates for the repair of our all-too-fractured world.

**Tighten up the next 3 paragraphs drop at least 1 or 2 sentences**

*Our team is the clear and ever-present Jewish voice on issues of social justice in Washington. In fact, it is their constant and consistent efforts that make certain that the Center remains at the heart of the advocacy community, where they’re known throughout coalitions for their readiness – and willingness – to pitch in, take charge and make change. I recently joined other religious leaders at the White House as President Obama signed an executive order that overturned a ban on funding embryonic stem cell research, giving scientists the financial go-ahead to delve into research that has the potential to treat devastating illnesses like Alzheimer’s and cancer. Barbara Weinstein, our Legislative Director, testified before the Environmental Protection Agency in favor of a waiver that could lead to cleaner car emissions. Of course your support is what makes the Center’s excellent team able to be the constant and consistent voice at the heart of the advocacy community, where they’re known throughout coalitions for their readiness – and willingness – to pitch in, take charge and make change.*

Furthermore, our Eisendrath Legislative Assistants finished another season of our successful Bernard and Audre Rapoport L’Taken Social Justice Seminars. Under their steady and capable leadership this year, more than 2,000 high school aged participants have pressed their members of Congress to speak truth to power by taking action on the issues that matter the most to our well-being. It is this blessed work that keeps that flame of social justice burning brilliantly for the next generation of American Jewry.

We are so thankful to have you as our allies in the essential task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of our world. Please accept my best wishes to you and your family for a wonderful Passover.

*L’shalom*

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org): just click on “Contribute” at the top right of the page. Thanks so much!*

September 2009

Name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Salutation:

From the bottom of my heart I share my wishes that the sound of the *shofar* usher in a sweet and wonderful year for you and all your loved ones.

**“Tekiah”** – The strong, unbroken sound of the *shofar* resonates through the soul as we approach the High Holidays. It is our call to action, leading us into a New Year. The *shofar*’s sound evokes the journey of the year that is past – what we have done, what we have failed to do, and how we can strengthen our pursuit of *tikkun olam*.

**“Shevarim”** – Three brief notes command attention, reminding us that the world stands on three *mitzvot*: study of Torah, prayer, and acts of loving kindness. In the past year, these three *mitzvot* have guided us every day at the RAC as we continue to raise our voice on the many issues of extraordinary moral concern that face our community, our nation, and our world.

**“Teruah”** – A rapid-fire repetition of the *shofar*’s blast, serving as a reminder of how much work remains to be done and how short a time we have to accomplish our myriad of goals. That is why, despite challenges posed by the troubled economy, the Religious Action Center has continued to lead the Reform Movement and the Jewish community to pursue social justice. In just the last 12 months, we have:

- Convened the July 2009 Faith Leader Summit on Health Care in the U.S. Capitol Building to bring the faith community’s weight to bear on the debate over health care reform. The attendance of Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius and Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi, along with other Members of Congress and more than 25 of our nation’s top faith denomination leaders was the opening step in the increasing mobilization of the religious community on health care reform;
- Worked vigorously to support the President’s and administration’s efforts to restart an effective Middle East peace process that can enhance Israel’s security;
- Built a coalition of religious organizations throughout the U.S. to speak out against nominees to the federal courts who would roll back civil liberties, minority and women’s rights, and church-state separation, and to support nominees under attack for upholding those same values;

- Acted as the institution to which Members of Congress turned when they sought the Jewish community's voice to articulate on the importance of protecting civil liberties, to testify to the threat of global climate change, or speak out on an array of domestic and international issues. We continue to provide such support and input everyday;
- Gathered more than 400 of our Movement's top social justice activists in Washington for the 2009 Consultation on Conscience to engage with top White House officials (National Economic Adviser Larry Summers, Senior Adviser David Axelrod), Members of Congress (Senators Debbie Stabenow, Barbara Boxer, Susan Collins, House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer and Representative Nita Lowey, among others) and social change leaders (Newark Mayor Cory Booker, interfaith expert Eboo Patel, and children's advocate Marian Wright Edelman); and,
- Inspired and educated more than 2,000 high school students at our remarkable Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminars.

*"Tekiah Gedolah"* – The clarion call of the *shofar*, to gird us with strength for the challenges that lie ahead. We cannot meet those challenges without you, our leaders in communities across the U.S. and Canada. Your leadership and support are the keys to our success and critical to all our work – seeking peace, fighting for social justice, and connecting young people with their Judaism. We are deeply gratified that you are our partners in this precious work and support our vision so generously.

This year I challenge you to heed the call of the *shofar* and let it lead you on a journey – your own personal journey of social justice and *tikkun olam*. With the final call of the *shofar* and the start of 5770, please take a moment to reaffirm your commitment to the RAC. Your support will enable us to continue to go from strength to strength.

May the coming Holy Days be meaningful and sweet for you, and may the year ahead be filled with joy and justice and with prosperity and peace for you and your loved ones.

L'Shalom,



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

*P.S Your contribution enables the RAC to continue on our collective journey of social justice – please give generously!*



## Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*The Religious Action Center  
pursues social justice  
and religious liberty  
by mobilizing the American  
Jewish community and  
serving as its advocate  
in the nation's capital.*

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Mark J. Pelavin  
Director  
Commission on Social Action  
of Reform Judaism

Cheryl Gutmann, M.D.  
Chair  
Commission on Social Action  
of Reform Judaism

The Religious Action Center  
operates under the auspices  
of the Commission on Social  
Action of Reform Judaism, a joint  
instrumentality of the Central  
Conference of American Rabbis  
and the Union for Reform Judaism  
with its affiliates:

American Conference  
of Cantors  
Association of Reform Zionists  
of America  
Canadian Association  
of Reform Zionists  
Early Childhood Educators  
of Reform Judaism  
National Association  
of Temple Administrators  
National Association  
of Temple Educators  
Men of Reform Judaism  
North American Federation  
of Temple Youth  
Program Directors  
of Reform Judaism  
Women of Reform Judaism

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March 2010

«Addressee»  
«Address\_1»  
«Address\_2»  
«Address\_3»  
«City», «State» «Zip»

Dear «Salutation»:

As you sit around the *seder* table with loved ones and hear the story of the exodus, let us each be reminded of the strength there is in numbers. Standing side by side, we can overcome even the most daunting of challenges. That is our history as a people; that is our history as the Reform Jewish Movement; that is the history of the Religious Action Center's ability to mobilize concerned Jews across America to be a forceful voice for justice.

As I write these words, we're enjoying a beautiful, sunny, and warm day in mid-March. It's a welcome respite from this winter's record-breaking storms that brought so much snow. I can still see the remnants more than a month after the last flake fell. When so many of us are used to the fast pace of life, watching the nation's capital grind to a halt was a reminder that there are still things in life we cannot control, Mother Nature chief among them. Of course, the winter's earthquakes in Haiti and Chile are even more stark evidence of that fact.

But even in the most trying times, there are things we *can* control, such as the way we reach out to others in need. That lesson is clear to Reform Jews across North America, who have donated well over a million dollars to the Union for Reform Judaism's Haiti Relief Fund, money being distributed to organizations engaged in aid and rebuilding.

The other lesson of the winter's trying times is how important it is to act when we *are* able to change the course of history. That call to action has always been at the core of the Religious Action Center's work. It is why, in just the last few months, we have:

- Led the Jewish and broader faith community's efforts to achieve **meaningful health insurance reform** to address the moral failing of millions of uninsured Americans hindered in their ability to access routine, preventative and critical care;
- Played a leading role organizing the second annual **Fighting Poverty with Faith campaign**. This week of anti-poverty activities



focused on increasing support for good, green jobs that help both our environment and already low-income workers;

- Worked vigorously to support the President's efforts to restart an effective **Middle East peace process** that will enhance Israel's security;
- Addressed the urgent threat of **climate change** by serving as a leading Jewish voice on environment and energy issues. We help guide The Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life, and together helped shape House passage of a landmark climate bill;
- Built a coalition of religious organizations throughout the U.S. to speak out against **nominees to the federal courts** who would roll back civil liberties, minority and women's rights, and church-state separation – and support nominees under attack for upholding those same values;
- Continued our leadership on issues of **equality for the LGBT community** by mobilizing grassroots advocacy, clergy and lay leader engagement, and partnerships with our allies in Congress, and
- A special note: I was honored to sit with President Obama recently as the White House Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships presented its first annual report, containing 60 recommendations that would revamp the way government and the non-profit social service delivery system work at home and abroad. If implemented, it would place the so-called "Faith-Based Initiative" on a constitutional and legal footing.

There are so many other pressing challenges that we face: stopping the spread of nuclear weapons, fixing our broken immigration system, ensuring access to reproductive rights, and engaging our government on the future of Darfur. These are just a few areas where together, we *are* making a difference. On each of those issues, and so many more, we can and must be powerful agents of change, helping shape the course of history and touching lives at home and around the world.

**With your help, with you standing by our side, we can continue to meet the challenges before us** and meet the spring with renewed commitment to *tikkun olam*.

We are so thankful to have you among our circle of friends. Please accept my best wishes to you and your family for a sweet *Pesach*.

*L'shalom,*



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org](http://www.rac.org); just click on "Contribute" at the top right of the page. Thanks so much!*



## Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*The Religious Action Center  
pursues social justice  
and religious liberty  
by mobilizing the American  
Jewish community and  
serving as its advocate  
in the nation's capital.*

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August 2010

Name  
Address  
City, State Zip

Dear Salutation:

In just a few short weeks, we will experience the sweetness of Rosh Hashanah and hear the clarion call of the shofar. Its powerful blast heralds a fresh year and shakes us from complacency.

We have much to celebrate this year, from a historic reform of the broken American health insurance system to the defeat of the dangerous conversion bill in Israel. Our Movement's voice – your voice – was central in these and so many other critical debates that shape the nation and the world.

Another area where we face an unprecedented challenge is creating a more sustainable environment. The RAC and Reform Movement are proud to announce an aggressive and far-reaching initiative to engage more broadly and more deeply than ever before on this issue; an issue that cuts to the very core of humanity's existence. The more we learn about the implications of our energy and resource choices, the clearer it becomes that responding to those challenges – for ourselves, our communities, our children, and our planet – is literally an issue of tikkun olam, repair of the world. Having watched the Gulf oil spill disaster, the environmental and economic justice effects of our energy choices have never been more pronounced.

Now is the time for us to act. Already, the RAC is the lead religious organization engaged in advocacy on energy and environmental policy. Now, through the creation of a new program focused on environmental sustainability, we will significantly expand our efforts to “green” our congregations, camps and other Reform Movement institutions, and encourage our congregants to do the same. The program will have a full-time, dedicated staff person to support and coordinate this work, ensuring that it reaches every facet of our Movement. This initiative will include online resources, holiday programming, meaningful learning opportunities, and the greening of the 2011 Consultation on Conscience and URJ Biennial.

The goal is to make our Movement smarter in its energy use, positively impacting our environment, our health, our economy and our vital security

interests. Our sustainability efforts are explicitly designed to serve as a model for others in the Jewish community and the wider faith community. After all, the mandate to “till and tend” the Earth is shared by other faith traditions.

Few events have reminded us so clearly of our power both to harm and heal our Earth as the Gulf Coast oil spill. I saw this first-hand when I joined other community leaders for an interreligious tour of the disaster zone. I am therefore, especially pleased to tell you that the RAC will be formally coordinating the interfaith community’s response to the Gulf oil spill crisis. With our partners throughout the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities in the Gulf and across North America, we can lift up the voices of those affected by the spill, engage religious communities in the long-term response and restoration process and ensure an adequate governmental response.

Of course, our environmental focus does not mean that our work in other areas will diminish. The shofar’s insistent Teruah call demands that we pay attention to the myriad domestic and global challenges that we face. But this is not work we can do without you.

We ask you once again to stand with us as we lead the Jewish community and work to build a more just, more sustainable future for all.

May the coming Holy Days be meaningful and sweet for you and your loved ones.

L’shalom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing 'D' and a cursive 'avid'.

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director



## Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

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September 2011

Dear SALUTATION,

Where is the sweetness?

Every year at Rosh Hashanah we serve apples and honey, we eat honey cake, and we wish one another a “sweet New Year.”

But now, this year, the mood in Washington is anything but sweet. The atmosphere is ugly, and sour. I cannot remember a time when politics have been as polarized, when so many prefer confrontation to compromise. And the coarseness of our discourse – the attacks on gay men and lesbians, on American Muslims, on immigrants, on people holding opposing political viewpoints and ideologies – is beyond disheartening.

So where can we find sweetness today? I can tell you where I find it.

I find it with my family. I find it in my synagogue. And I find it in the work of my professional home, the Religious Action Center.

This summer my time with my family was especially sweet, since we spent it knowing that this fall Ellen and I will be “empty nesters.” We are looking forward to this new chapter of our lives, excited for and proud of our kids, and more than a little amazed that time has passed so quickly.

And it’s been a particularly sweet year at the RAC as well, as we have celebrated our 50th Anniversary, reflected on the significant achievements of past decades and expanded our staff and our media, legislative, and synagogue organizing work as we readied ourselves for the urgent social justice struggles ahead. Just as Rosh Hashanah represents reflection and renewal, so too does the 50th anniversary represent the opportunity for Jews of conscience to reflect upon and recommit themselves to our mission of *tikkun olam*.

Over the course of the past year, with your help, we have lived up to our own impressive history.

We have fought to protect health care reform that ensures coverage for millions who previously had no coverage.

In the face of the resurgence of the religious right and its voice of intolerance, we have



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fought for religious tolerance and shared religious values concerned with justice for the most vulnerable of God's children and equality for all Americans.

We have fought for equal marriage and an end to discrimination in the workplace and in the military. Generating letters and visits to legislators, op-eds in newspapers, sermons from the pulpit, and activism across North America, our message is clear: we have long been, and remain, the most forceful and clearest Jewish voice in the ongoing struggle for inclusion and basic rights and protections for the LGBT community. We are proud of this lasting legacy.

We have mobilized our community to fight against the continued attack on women's health, mounted by opponents to reproductive freedom, echoing the early battles we fought as the leading pro-choice religious voice forty years ago. I'm proud of our legislative work and grateful for your support.

But I must admit that most often I find real sweetness outside of the political arena. I find it in the work we do with students.

We hosted nearly 2000 high school students at our Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Seminars this past year, and are preparing to welcome even more this coming year. No program we run so transforms its participants like the *L'Taken* seminars. Watching the students arrive on Friday evening, a boisterous, chatty and slightly apprehensive group, it is inspiring to watch them grow throughout the weekend as they think about their Judaism and social justice in a new way, and some for the first time. And on Monday, when we go together to Capitol Hill to meet with Senators and Representatives, these same students have become eloquent and passionate advocates for *tikkun olam*.

We also welcomed other young people to the RAC throughout the year: the NFTY Social Action Vice Presidents, Urban Mitzvah Corps participants, and the *Machon* Kaplan students in our accredited summer college work-study program. All of them are well on their way to becoming the leading social justice voices of the next generation. Knowing the RAC had a hand in inspiring and training them is sweet, indeed.

I hope that you will take a minute during this season of renewal to renew your financial support of the Religious Action Center. Your gift has never been more urgently needed. Please use the enclosed envelope or visit [rac.org/donate](http://rac.org/donate) to make your contribution.

On behalf of the entire staff at the Religious Action Center, I wish you a happy and healthy New Year. May this Jewish year of 5772 be a year of hope and dreams and justice. May it be a sweet year for you and your family.

L'Shanah Tovah,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David", with a stylized flourish underneath.

Rabbi David Saperstein

***P.S. Consider joining us to help the Reform Movement celebrate our 50th anniversary at the URJ Biennial this December 14-18!***



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Mark J. Pelavin  
Associate Director

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Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

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March 2012

Name

Address1

Address2

City, State, Zip

Dear [First Name],

I am not surprised that Passover is the most popular Jewish holiday (in terms of observance). Jews around the world celebrate Passover as a time to gather with family and friends and partake in traditional foods. But its lasting power comes from its historic meaning, at once particular and universal: a time when we commemorate, through the Passover seder, the story of the Israelites, when we were redeemed from the bondage of slavery and were given freedom.

We? Yes, we. We are commanded that in every generation, we must see ourselves as though we, personally, were freed from the bonds of Egyptian slavery.

This personal identification with the experiences of slavery and liberation has inspired Jews throughout time to fight for the liberation of others. And Passover's inspiration to people everywhere has shaped civil rights and human struggles across our nation and the nations of the world. So even today, perhaps especially today, we are inspired to fight for freedom and equality in many forms. This year, among other urgent struggles for equal rights, we need to be particularly focused on the cause of equal rights for women in the United States and abroad.

In the United States, we find ourselves in a somewhat surprising battle to ensure that every woman is entitled to access to contraception as a matter of fundamental rights and dignity. There can be no discrimination in basic health services. That is why we acted assertively and effectively when the ability of all women to access birth control was threatened and why we were instrumental in achieving a compromise solution that protected the religious liberty of employers and the health and reproductive rights of their female employees. That is also why we defended Planned Parenthood when the Susan G. Komen Foundation made the decision to end PPFA's eligibility for funding, and why we were so gratified when Komen reversed that decision – and did so along the very lines our public letter called for.

We will never allow this country to return to the days before *Roe v. Wade* or to make contraception a contested right in America again.

But the threats to women's autonomy and freedoms are not just happening in the United States. In Israel we have seen the growing assertiveness of the ultra-Orthodox (its own "religious right") to



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curtail the freedoms and opportunities of women. On certain buses and other public services, women are relegated to sitting in the back or standing in separate lines; their images have been barred from the public sphere (billboards, posters etc.) in areas of Jerusalem; protests have occurred in the military against hearing a woman's voice singing in public settings; and of course the painful incident, so emblematic of this struggle, of the 8-year-old Orthodox girl who was spit on by an ultra-Orthodox man for "immodest" dress. Our Reform Movement is helping to lead the response: freedom rides, court battles to preserve equal rights for women, and public demonstrations to protect the significant advances of women in Israel. Throughout, the RAC has mobilized support in the U.S. from our synagogues and political and other influential public figures.

And across the world, egregious incidents of violence against women continue, with experts finding that one out of three women worldwide will be physically, sexually, or otherwise abused during her lifetime. In some countries, the rates of violence against women are as high as 70%. Abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional; it can take place in the home or outside; it can even, in some situations, be considered socially acceptable. That's why we have been forceful advocates for I-VAWA, the International Violence Against Women Act, which would support programs around the world that help prevent violence, strengthen health and survivor services, encourage legal accountability and a change in public attitudes, and promote access to economic opportunity and education for women and girls. Other discrimination happens in subtler ways, with denial of access to core rights -- education, jobs, health care. We are particularly proud of the role we have played in hosting at the Center a coalition of groups who have written a bill addressing the tragic situation of "fistulas" suffered disproportionately by child brides and young women made pregnant by rape whose bodies are not developed enough to sustain childbirth without damage. This condition can be repaired surgically by an operation costing a few hundred dollars and this legislation would virtually eliminate the incidence of obstetric fistula in Sub-Saharan Africa.

The moral values that underlie women's rights and freedoms are those that the RAC has represented for its 50 years—and the Jewish people have nurtured for the past three thousand years, as our recounting of our journey to freedom will remind us this *Pesach*. Forces in America may seek to marginalize such freedoms; day in and day out, we fight to protect them. Ensuring that the Jewish flame of social justice will burn brightly at a time when much of the country – and even the world – has abandoned it will require a concerted and sustained effort.

If any organization can develop and advance a clear and compelling progressive agenda based on these religious moral values, it is the RAC.

Passover reminds us that to be a Jew is not simply "to be," but "to stand for." Supporting our work provides you with the opportunity (among the many good things you do and causes you support) to stand for making a difference at home and abroad now — and for years to come.

We are grateful for your past support, which amplifies our voice and strengthens our hands in this vital work of tikkun olam. I wish for you and your family a festival of joyous renewal of the commitment we share to freedom for all.

L'Shalom,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David", with a large, stylized initial "D" that loops around the first part of the name.

Rabbi David Saperstein



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

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September 2012

16530304



Dear The Adelman Family,

This Rosh HaShanah, what will be among your resolutions for the new year?

- Will you resolve to be more active in your synagogue and in Jewish life?
- Will you resolve to do more volunteer work in your community?
- Will you resolve to speak out on the issues that tug at your conscience?
- Will you resolve to participate in your civic duty to vote and to encourage others to do the same?
- Will you resolve to support and strengthen those social justice causes in which you believe?

During the High Holy Day season, we greet one another with, "May you be inscribed for a good year." In our struggles to achieve social justice, we know we need to change our blessing to be one of action: "May we inscribe those in need for a good year. May we pick up the reins of the new year and guide it in the direction of justice, in the direction of peace."

Our spirits are rejuvenated on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur, and our civic duties are ignited on Election Day. At stake are vital political, economic and moral issues of concern to us as North Americans, in addition to issues of special concern to North American Jews, from health care to climate change, from immigration and gay rights to support for Israel. During the next four years, there will be important debates about the way the U.S. government does business. Whatever your political views—liberal or conservative, Democratic, Republican or independent—our responsibility for shaping the world includes choosing which politicians will lead us in the fight for social justice. As an ever-shrinking percentage of eligible voters go to the polls, mobilizing Jewish voters is an essential part of our broader "Get Out the Vote" efforts that ensure all Americans have and take advantage of the opportunity to exercise their constitutional rights. Every vote counts and plays a defining role in setting policy agendas.

At the RAC, we have worked proudly alongside those elected leaders from across the political spectrum who committed to ending segregation, to breaking down the walls of discrimination against women, to fighting injustice against gay Americans, and to protecting a clean environment. They appreciate the RAC's voice in Washington, inspired by a prophetic tradition that goes back to the days of Amos and Isaiah.

Above all, everything we do, from voting to advocacy, is about shaping the world we leave to our children and future generations. They are the ones for whom we do this work. I am reminded of that



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through programs like the RAC's Consultation on Conscience, our rabbinic student seminars, the Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminars for high school students, social justice programs at the Reform Movement's summer camps, and the Machon Kaplan summer program for college students, where young Jews experience firsthand the urgent contemporary meaning of the Jewish tradition. That tradition teaches that we are *rachmanim b'nai rachmanim*—the compassionate children of compassionate parents. And we, in our time, add our determination to be *rachmanim horei rachmanim*—the compassionate parents of compassionate children. It is that commitment that so enriches our Movement, our people and our nation. They will watch the behavior we model, whether we bring passion to our commitment to healing our world or we stay passive and silent in the face of injustice.

Through a panoply of Reform Movement programs, young Jews experience firsthand the urgent contemporary meaning of the Jewish tradition. As you know from your experience as a chaperone, the Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminars for high school students especially make a profound difference in the lives of our young Jews and serve as a major link in the Reform Movement's Campaign for Youth Engagement. They are the reason your generous support is so meaningful in securing the future of Jewish *tikkun olam* through the *L'Taken* program.

We turn to you to continue to make this work possible and to be a model to the next generation. You help ensure that we never become complacent, resting on past successes. You help ensure that public servants committed to improving the lives of others have a partner in the Reform Movement. And you help ensure that our children and grandchildren see that Jewish social justice values have a home in Washington. With your help, this Rosh HaShanah, we resolve to continue this tradition that has been the hallmark of the RAC throughout its history.

May you and your loved ones—and all of Israel—be written into the Book of Life, and help write into the Book of Life a year of peace and justice for all the world.

L'shalom,



Rabbi David Saperstein, Director  
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

*P.S. To learn more about our effort to "Get Out the Vote" and the "Dos and Don'ts of Pulpit Politics: Rules for Nonprofits," please visit [www.rac.org/gotv](http://www.rac.org/gotv)*



Rabbi David Saperstein  
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March 2013  
Nissan 5773

Name  
Address 1  
Address 2  
City, State ZIP

Dear Salutation:

Passover is upon us earlier than usual this year. At home we prepare for the holiday by planning elaborate menus and inviting family and friends to join us for the seder. At the Religious Action Center, we are similarly planning our work on this year's vital legislative issues and inviting friends to join us for the upcoming **Consultation on Conscience conference, April 21-23, 2013.**

Passover has become the modern-day metaphor for the liberation of those struggling with the shackles of injustice; from ending slavery to protecting women's rights to ensuring religious freedom. Whether we participate in a traditional seder or one more focused on contemporary issues, all include symbolic foods and readings that represent the bitter, the sweet, and reflect the deepened eternal hope of our people's history.

*At the RAC, we are all too familiar with highs and lows, with bitter realities and sweet victories.*

The bitter? Learning about the horrific Newtown shooting and the thousands of others hurt or wounded by senseless gun violence each year. Watching a state senator introduce legislation to criminalize rape victims who opt to abort for "tampering with evidence." Hearing about families who are divided by our broken immigration system, which is in desperate need of comprehensive reform.

The sweet? Working as the coordinator for the entire religious community mobilizing support of gun violence prevention legislation, calling for reauthorization of the Violence Against Women Act, and rallying for comprehensive immigration reform. And seeing the step-by-step successes of our efforts to repair the world, *l'taken et ha'olam*, which has been our mission throughout our history.

Also sweet is the opportunity to honor during the Consultation those Reform congregations that exemplify the myriad of ways in which our synagogues advance the spirit of *tikkun olam*. These congregations, winners of the Commission on Social Action's 2013 / 5773 Irving J. Fain Social Action Awards, stand on the front line of the long, hard struggle to realize the vision of the prophets and create communities informed by that vision. We are proud to have them as our partners.

The RAC's work, amplified by the efforts of our congregations, rabbis, social action committees and affiliates, ensures that in the balance of bitter and sweet, our lives and the lives of people throughout



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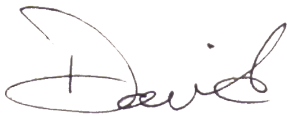
North America and around the world are made a little bit sweeter. These efforts are not easy and we face significant challenges from those who seek to marginalize, if not ignore, the poor, the weak, the widow, the orphan. Ensuring that the Jewish flame of social justice will burn brightly at a time when much of the country – and even part of the Jewish community – has abandoned it, requires a concerted and sustained effort.

And for so many on Capitol Hill and in the religious community, when seeking guidance on developing and advancing a clear and compelling progressive agenda based on these religious moral values, it is the RAC that is looked to.

We are grateful for your past support, which amplifies our voice and strengthens our hands in this vital work of *tikkun olam*.

Passover comes to remind us that even in the face of bitterness, by being partners with God in the work of *tikkun olam*, we can achieve the sweetness of freedom. This is your chance to make a difference now — and for years to come. I wish for you and your families a festival of joyous renewal of the commitment we share to freedom for all.

L'Shalom,



Rabbi David Saperstein,  
Director

*P.S. To learn more about the upcoming Consultation on Conscience and earning a Fain Award, please visit [www.rac.org/conc](http://www.rac.org/conc)*

## Legislative Achievements in the 112th Congress

*These are a selection of the social justice topics on which the RAC works. Learn more about our advocacy efforts of key topics at [rac.org/advocacy](http://rac.org/advocacy)*

### Marriage Equality



Marriage equality gained major support in the 112th Congress. Shortly after Washington state passed marriage equality legislation in February, President Obama announced his endorsement of the core right of marriage for the LGBT community, advancing civil rights in America. In November, both Maryland and Maine also passed marriage equality while Minnesota became the first state to defeat a discriminatory marriage amendment.

### Contraception Debate



Health and Human Services' proposed rules regarding access to birth control under the Affordable Care Act came under attack from groups who claimed it infringed their religious liberty. Rabbi David Saperstein, a longtime scholar of first amendment issues, argues that the rules in fact protect religious freedom while guaranteeing access to contraception for female workers.

### Food Security



Throughout budget & fiscal negotiations in Washington, the RAC along with thousands of other advocates, fought for the extension of Supplementary Nutrition Assistance Programs (SNAP), and our advocacy paid off! SNAP Benefits were extended for another year, alleviating hunger and malnutrition in the United States by helping low-income families and individuals who need it the most.

### Climate Standards



The RAC led vigorous Jewish and interfaith efforts to support New Source Performance Standards, enacted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, that established the first ever greenhouse gas limits for power plants. The standards prevent any new power plant from emitting more than 1,000 pounds of carbon dioxide per megawatt of energy produced, compared to the 1,800 pounds



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August 2013  
Elul 5773

Dear <<salutation>>,

These long, hot summer days are waning, and once again, it is time to prepare for the *yamim nora'im* – the High Holy Days. As we bid farewell to 5773, we anticipate the arrival of 5774, with all of the challenges and opportunities the Jewish New Year has to offer. On the policy front, issues like immigration, Middle East peace, gun control, Medicaid expansion, protecting the poor, anti-discrimination laws, and protecting the LGBT community have all been in play during the past year – and the RAC is in the middle of these vital debates, often acting as a key player in mobilizing the religious and Jewish communities. We at the RAC are proud to represent the largest segment of North American Jewry and the most active in social justice work.

**The Jewish month of *Tishrei* is a time of personal reflection as we review this past year and set goals for the year ahead.**

As a friend of the RAC, I know that a core part of your goals for the coming year will be to engage meaningfully in the work of *tikkun olam*. The apples dipped in honey on Rosh HaShanah remind us that we can always add more sweetness to that which already exists. The countless seeds of the pomegranate symbolize the infinite good deeds each of us is able to do for others. And the *shehechyanu* we recite over a new fruit inspires us to find new ways to engage with others in the work of social justice.

***Dipping apple in honey:*** In our Jewish tradition, we eat sweet foods in the hope of more sweet things to come. As we do so, many recite the words asking God to renew for us a good and sweet year (*sh'tichadesh aleinu shana tova u'metuka*). In the year 5773, we worked toward the renewal of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), which helps prevent, investigate, and prosecute violent crimes targeting women. It was a sweet and overdue victory that will better the lives of countless women nationwide, yet there is more to be done. As we eat the apples in honey, we are reminded of the imperative to build on VAWA's reauthorization by protecting vulnerable women both in North America and in so many nations across the globe, even as we seek to protect the most vulnerable within our own communities, from hungry children to the elderly in need. And, that when we do so, we add sweetness to that which is already sweetened.

***Pomegranate seeds:*** Sharing in the pomegranate, it is customary to raise the fruit and offer a blessing that our good deeds should be as numerous as its multitude of seeds (*sh'niheye m'le'im mitzvot ca-rimon*). The many injustices we see in the world challenge us, even as they inspire

<<skey>><<Segment>>



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us to act. Each day at the Religious Action Center, we turn our attention to a diverse portfolio of issues ranging from the protecting our environment from worsening climate change to a just and common sense reform of our broken immigration system to the indignity of human trafficking, and so many other issues of domestic and international importance. We turn to you to be our partners in this work, calling your members of Congress, mobilizing your synagogues to more profound action, and supporting our movement's core work of social justice. Together we are like the many seeds of the pomegranate, each contributing our small amount to what, together, becomes a sweet pursuit of justice.

***New fruit:*** Some people search long and hard to find the perfect new fruit, seeking an exotic taste they have never before experienced. Others look for a more familiar variant of a fruit they have already tasted and enjoyed. In either case, the fruit is raised and the blessing recited. This year, as so many of us have been touched by the gun-related horrors in Newtown, Aurora, and too many other communities, we have lifted our voices together by calling, writing, emailing, and meeting with our members of Congress to urge them to act. Whether this was your first time speaking out on this life-or-death issue or your eighteenth time, the value and blessings of your efforts are infinite. We at the RAC have been especially proud of our interfaith leadership on this issue, standing alongside those in the Jewish, Catholic, Muslim, Evangelical, and other faith communities to pray and act to prevent future senseless gun tragedies. We cannot reach that goal without you.

Sharing in the apple and honey, the pomegranate, and a new fruit inspires us for the challenges that lie ahead. Your commitment, leadership, and support are the keys to our success and critical to all our work – seeking peace, fighting for social justice, and connecting young people with their Judaism. We are deeply gratified that you are our partners in this precious work and support our vision so generously.

**This year I urge you to appropriate each of these symbols into your own lives – and let them lead you even further on your own personal journey toward achieving social justice and *tikkun olam*. With the start of 5774, please take a moment to reaffirm your commitment to the RAC. Your support will enable us to continue to go together from strength to strength.**

May the coming High Holy Days be meaningful and sweet for you, and may the year ahead be filled with peace and justice for the world, and with health and fulfillment for you and your loved ones.

*L'Shalom,*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. Your contribution enables the RAC to continue on our collective journey of social justice – please give generously!***



April 2014  
Nisan 5774

Dear Sarah,

Every year I look to Passover with a bit of excitement. It's a time when we gather with family and friends. We share in a festive meal and retell, with the Haggadah's help, the story of the great exodus from Egypt. We place symbolic foods on the *seder* plate – traditional items like the *matza*, bitter herbs, *charoset* and shank bone, each representing parts of the Israelites' experience in Egypt. Many families add other foods to represent modern day tribulations and values – an orange for women's rights, a tomato for farm workers' rights, etc. While many of us are blessed to be freed from the bonds of slavery, we are reminded when we read from the Haggadah that it "in every generation we must see ourselves as though we too participated in the exodus from Egypt" and thus identify with the oppressed and persecuted everywhere. We have the ability and the responsibility, both individually and collectively, to keep the lessons of the Hagaddah current and relevant.

At the Religious Action Center, we battle each day for equality and for freedom from oppression for all. It is part of our history that began more than 50 years ago in the building we still call home today, and in which the Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act were drafted. It has been exhilarating to fight for, and witness, so many of the advancements in the struggles for justice – and remains so today – from demanding equal pay for equal work to ensuring access for people with disabilities to preventing discrimination based on sexual orientation. While others are retrenching and cutting back their activities and efforts, we are bold enough to believe that with your help we can grow to meet the urgent challenges we face. **At this time, the season of renewal, we ask you to contribute to the Center to ensure our continued work to alleviate the causes of injustice.**

The challenges are many – but we remain encouraged:

- Reforming America's immigration system
- Significant structural response to the climate change crisis
- Ensuring and maintaining LGBT equality on state and federal levels
- Protecting voters' rights in the United States
- Protecting women's health care and reproductive rights
- Advancing Israel's security and the Middle East peace process -- an achievable goal to which political support, particularly from the Jewish community, and active engagement is forthcoming.

On all these issues, the RAC has played -- and continues to play -- a central role both through its robust advocacy leadership in Washington and through its unmatched networks of rabbis and

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lay leaders throughout North America who are so engaged, involved and willing to speak out effectively on these issues.

These are just some of the ways we reenact the Israelites' journey to achieve freedom.

Consider what, with your help, has been accomplished already among the issues on which the RAC has focused. A few highlights:

- After years of delay, achieving a bipartisan Senate vote (64-32) to pass the Employment Non Discrimination Act that will extend federal workplace protections to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals, who deserve to be judged on the merits of their work, not on whom they love.
- Reducing the devastating funding cuts to the Supplemental Nutrition Assistant Program (SNAP) that helps millions of hungry families keep food on the table throughout the economic recovery. (And we will continue to mitigate the harm done by the cuts that were made.)
- Mobilizing the Jewish and broader faith community in support of common sense gun violence prevention, and continuing to make clear to members of Congress and the Obama Administration the imperative to end the scourge of gun violence that afflicts the nation.

**The RAC is better positioned than ever to help make real, lasting change on the issues that matter most to our shared well-being.** We continue our tireless dedication to advocating on behalf of the policies of the Reform Jewish Movement, advancing our ideals in the public arena, and helping our congregants and clergy act alongside us as tireless advocates in repairing our all-too-fractured world.

Our team remain the clear and ever-present Jewish voice on issues of social justice in Washington, D.C., ensuring that the Center remains at the heart of the advocacy community, where they're known throughout coalitions for their readiness – and willingness – to pitch in, take charge and make change.

Let us work together so that one day, when we reflect, we too will be able to remember so many social inequalities as things of the past – and celebrate with pride the role that we played together in achieving freedom for all.

We are grateful to have you as our ally in the essential task of *tikkun olam*, the repair of our world. Please accept my best wishes to you and your family for a sweet Pesach.

*L'Shalom,*

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "David", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director

***P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org/donate](http://www.rac.org/donate)***



Rabbi David Saperstein  
Director and Counsel

Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

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September 2014  
Elul 5774

Dear <<Salutation>>,

In just a short time, we'll observe the High Holy Days, the season when we consider the year that is ending and look with hope to 5775. This year in particular, there is much to anticipate.

We just welcomed a new class of year-long Eisendrath Legislative Assistants (LAs), six bright and committed recent college graduates who are spirited advocates for the Reform Movement's Jewish social justice values. They will focus on public policy issues, including raising awareness of the impact of climate change and about addressing the needs of our most vulnerable populations facing economic inequality.

**In the spring, we will host our Consultation on Conscience biennial policy conference. We look forward to seeing you in Washington on April 26-28, 2015.**

Reflecting on 5774, we are reminded of the Religious Action Center's many achievements. Over and above our wide-ranging policy and programmatic work:

- In advance of the White House's historic Summit on Working Families, the RAC led a compelling and thought-provoking dialogue on working families, which you can read at [rac.org/doublebooked](http://rac.org/doublebooked).
- More than 100 congregations from coast to coast are "Swabbing for Life" to grow the bone marrow registry and add to the five life-saving matches made to date.
- Our seven Bernard and Audre Rapoport *L'Taken* Social Justice Seminars brought together nearly 2,000 teens from across the U.S.
- We increased our activity on disability and accessibility issues. In addition to this ongoing work, the RAC launched Hineinu, a cross-denominational partnership to strengthen inclusion.
- We recognized civil rights heroes and commemorated the 50th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act (which was crafted by Jewish and African-American advocates in our own library).
- Rabbi David Saperstein stood at President Obama's side at the signing of the Executive Order barring LGBT discrimination among government contractors.

You have been our vital partner in lifting up the moral voice working to achieve justice and equality for all in these and in so many other areas, and for that, we are grateful.

**We hope you will consider making a special contribution at this time of the year, when we acknowledge how much in our lives, and indeed lives around the world, hang in the balance, to enable us to continue our sacred work.**

May you and your loved ones be written into the Book of Life for a year of peace.

*L'Shalom,*

Rachel Laser  
Deputy Director

Barbara Weinstein  
Associate Director

***P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org/donate](http://www.rac.org/donate)***



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# Celebrating another year of Justice

5774

**Eisendrath Legislative Assistant Class 2013-14**  
[rac.org/la](http://rac.org/la)



This year's class of legislative fellows, all recent college graduates, were at the heart of the Reform Movement's social action activities: monitoring legislative activity, developing social action programming, and conducting research for the RAC's policy initiatives.

**Executive Order on LGBT Hiring**



In recognition of the Movement's leadership, Rabbi David Saperstein was at the President's side as he signed an executive order barring discrimination against LGBT workers in federal contracting.

**Machon Kaplan Summer Internship**  
[rac.org/mk](http://rac.org/mk)



This summer, more than 40 students shared a meaningful 6 weeks together at our social action internship program. Participants interned at D.C. organizations ranging from the NAACP to the United Nations Foundation.

**Bernard and Audre Rapoport L'Taken Social Justice Seminars**  
[rac.org/ltaken](http://rac.org/ltaken)



2,000 students joined a series of intensive four-day study *kallot* in Washington, D.C., drawing connections between Jewish values and key social justice issues, culminating in a visit to members of Congress on Capitol Hill.

**Celebrating 50 years of Civil Rights at the Biennial**



Rabbi David Saperstein hosted legendary civil rights leaders Julian Bond (former NAACP President) and the URJ's own Sr. Vice-President Emeritus Al Vorspan (via video) to reflect on 50 years of the Civil Rights Act.

**Swab for Life**  
[rac.org/GiftOfLife](http://rac.org/GiftOfLife)



More than 100 congregations are Swabbing for Life in bone marrow testing events that have already matched 5 patients and donors. Our partnership has helped thousands of Reform Jews from coast to coast get swabbed into the registry.



Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner  
Director

Jennifer Brodkey Kaufman  
Commission on Social Action of Reform Judaism

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March 2015  
Adar 5775



Dear Judith,

Since the beginning of the year, I have the great honor of being the RAC's new director, building on the extraordinary foundation established by my mentor and friend, Rabbi David Saperstein, during his four decades of leadership. Today, the RAC is a powerful force for good in our world, amplifying the voice of Reform Jews whose commitment to repairing our broken world is grounded in ancient Jewish values of social justice.

The Reform Jewish Movement has long been at the center of critical and successful campaigns for civil rights, dignity for all people, Israel, environmental well-being and a range of other issues. Today, the RAC's priorities remain the same: building ever-more effective coalitions, strengthening the faith community as a force for justice, and confronting many of the challenges of our age. Of course, none of this work is done alone: thousands of activists cross our threshold every year. Our signature programs including the Consultation on Conscience coming up at the end of April (I hope to see you there!), the Eisendrath Legislative Assistant program, the Rabbi Balfour Brickner Rabbinic Seminar, Machon Kaplan and the flagship Audre and Bernard Rapoport L'Taken Teen Social Justice Seminars are providing multi-generational training and leadership development. With the thousands of people trained in these programs and the others we run each year, we are able to be effective advocates for LGBT equality, for international religious freedom, for addressing economic inequality, and so much more.

I find it deeply meaningful that my tenure coincides with the beginning of the Book of Exodus in our cycle of Torah reading. Every year we re-tell this narrative of one of the most formative episodes in our evolution as a Jewish people, remembering that once we were slaves, and now we are free. It is especially during this Passover season that we are reminded to see this not as an experience of the past, but as if we ourselves were liberated from bondage. Our work for justice is bound up in the thousands year old essence of what it means to be a Jew: that it is incumbent upon each of us personally to act in support of justice. Yet we know that our power is magnified when we act together, and so during this season of renewal, I ask you to contribute to the Center to ensure our continued work to alleviate the causes of injustice.

The urgency of our work has never been greater. The modern plagues include the searing pain of racial injustice found in too many communities, from Ferguson to Staten Island. The plagues also include gun violence that takes innocent lives and rips families apart. And today's plagues

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include the chasm between the rich and poor that widens and leaves too many working families and low-income people struggling with debt, stagnant wages, and poverty. Immigrants crying out for justice, our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters worried about losing their job because of who they love, and our planet's most vulnerable children, women and men facing the crisis of climate change, all know the modern day plagues that afflict too many.

With you by our side, the RAC can continue to play a central role in strengthening those in need, both through our robust advocacy leadership in Washington and through our unmatched networks of rabbis and lay leaders throughout North America – you among them - who are so engaged, involved and willing to speak out effectively on these issues.

These are just some of the ways we reenact the Israelites' journey to achieve freedom.

As you join us in beginning this new chapter in the RAC's remarkable history we will realize together the vision of our sacred tradition: to transform the world as it is – parched with suffering – into the world we know it should be – overflowing with justice. That is the very purpose of our lives, and with your help the RAC will continue to strive toward that vision every day. We are so thankful to have you as our ally in the essential task of tikkun olam, the repair of our world. Please accept my best wishes to you and your family for a sweet Pesach.

*L'shalom*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Jonah D. Pesner". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end.

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner  
Director, Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

***P.S. You can make your gift most easily and securely at [www.rac.org/donate](http://www.rac.org/donate)***

## **Appendix B**

Coding report from sample of letters, including number of donors

*(continues)*

Table 1

Letter Original Date	Affective "color" range	cred intensity range	logical intensity range	visual intensity range	Number of Donors	Totals by Type	Types
September 2011	1	1	2	0	424	7	Cred
April 2015	1	2	1	0	410	4	Logic
April 2010	1	2	1	1	364	4	Affective
April 2006	1	2	0	1	303	2	Visual
September 2005	1	2	0	1	299	14	Cred
September 2007	1	2	1	1.5	242	7	Logic
April 2008	0	0	0	1	236	7	Affective
September 2009	0	1	2	1.5	229	8	Visual
September 2006	1	2	0	1	217		Donors
September 2014	0	1	0	2	213	3	Cred
September 2013	2	0	1	1	202	5	Logic
September 2008	2	0	2	1	201	6	Affective
April 2007	2	1	0	1.5	197	7	Visual
April 2009	0	1	2	1.5	196		
April 2012	2	0	2	0	188	10	Cred
September 2010	0	1	2	0	181	11	Logic
September 2012	1	1	1	0.5	169	12	Affective
April 2013	2	0	1	2	64	10	Visual
April 2014	1	2	0	0.5	56		Donors