Real Talk, Honest Conversations Build Bridges of Trust

By Tommye Myrick



In the spring of 2025, I hosted a reading at the Community Book Center on Bayou Road for Anne & Emmett, a play I had dreamed of directing for more than a decade. Afterward, a woman approached me and said, "You need to meet my colleague. He's the Director of Multicultural and Governmental Affairs for the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans."

PHOTO COURTESY OF AARON BLOCH

A few days later, I found myself on a Zoom call with a bright, engaging young man whose warmth put me at ease. That conversation began a friendship that deepened with every exchange. His name was Aaron Bloch.

When asked about his upbringing, Aaron paints a picture of a house that was rarely quiet: music drifting from room to room, something always simmering on the stove, and a kitchen table where everyone gathered. It was a home guided by a strong sense of responsibility to family and community.

"I grew up on Long Island, with the city always just a train ride away," he recalled. "My dad taught middle school orchestra, and my mom was a preschool teacher who later moved into real estate so she'd have more flexibility raising me and my two younger sisters. Music is still one of my biggest passions, and a big part of why New Orleans felt like home right away. We were raised to pay attention to the world around us, to care about other people, and to speak up when we saw injustice."

Aaron counts his maternal grandmother, Barbara, among his biggest influences. In the 1940s, she was a young Jewish singer from Brooklyn who rode the subway to Harlem to perform with Black musicians, including at the Apollo Theater. She saw people for who they were, long before much of the world was willing to, and she spent her life standing up for anyone shut out or pushed aside. She stayed politically active until her passing in 2015, at ninety-one. The values that shaped generations of his family found a home in Aaron, becoming both a compass and a calling.

At Binghamton University, where he studied political science, civic engagement came naturally. "I carried voter registration forms in my backpack and would set up wherever I could to help fellow students register to vote," Aaron said.

Asked where his passion for advocacy came from, Aaron paused.

"I never really thought about it until more recently, because the feelings were always just there," he said. "But as I reflect, I think it goes back to the Jewish values I grew up with, from my family and Sunday school. When you grow up learning Jewish history, from the Passover story to the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust and everything in between, it's not hard to see yourself in other communities facing persecution. And you learn pretty early that when you see injustice, you don't stay quiet."

While attending law school, Aaron worked for the New York City Department of Education reviewing superintendent suspensions, helping protect vulnerable students, push back on the disciplinary pipeline, and keep children in the classroom. After taking the bar exam in 2008, he found himself with some unexpected free time.

"Fresh out of law school and eager to have an impact, I took a bus to the nearest swing state, Pennsylvania, and volunteered for Barack Obama's campaign," he recounted. "We recruited and trained thousands of attorney poll watchers for Election Day."

Asked about the Black-Jewish relationship from World War II through the Civil Rights Movement, Aaron said:

"Black and Jewish Americans have a real history together, because both communities know what it's like to be treated as 'the other.' After the Holocaust, a lot of American Jews saw themselves in the fight against Jim Crow."

He was also clear-eyed about what came next. "But after the war, many Jewish families got access to things like the GI Bill, new suburbs, and universities that Black families were shut out of," he explained. "That created a fracture. Some Jews drifted away from the struggle, and others doubled down. We're still living with that."

So how did he get from the Big Apple to the Big Easy?

"I came to New Orleans in 2015 through an Education Pioneers fellowship," he shared. "I had been practicing law in New York City and was ready to return to my original focus: education. I fell in love with the city, its people, and its sense of community, and made it my home."

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AARON BLOCH



Family — Aaron, Finn, Suzy, and Sharon and Bert Bloch



Honoring the Nineteen Ceremony



Family at West Meadow Beach, Setauket NY

From education, Aaron moved into local politics, spending four years working on campaigns and elections before joining the Jewish Federation of Greater New Orleans in February 2021.

Building bridges also means sitting with hard conversations. When asked how he approaches one of the most painful of them, the Israeli Palestinian conflict, Aaron spoke with care.

"It's deeply complex," he said. "So many people have lived through unimaginable horrors, and for many, those horrors haven't ended. Our tradition teaches that every life is an entire world, and that doesn't stop at any border. At the same time, we've watched antisemitism surge here at home and around the world. You can hold all of that pain at once, and the world could use a lot more empathy and compassion right now. I always welcome the conversation, and most people find some common ground once they actually talk. It's exactly the kind of conversation that falls apart online and comes together in person."

Aaron also sees a generational divide between communities today.

"A lot of younger Black and Jewish folks don't know the civil rights history their communities share," he noted. "That's a big part of why I do the Rekindle Fellowship, a national Black-Jewish leadership initiative. Our New Orleans program graduates its third cohort in December. The idea is simple: you can't run a relationship on nostalgia. You have to keep showing up and actually getting to know each other."

"We've worked with schools all over the city, from Dillard, Xavier, and Tulane to St. Augustine High School, to get people talking," Aaron said. "And over the last year, a lot of our focus has been on immigrant communities, raising money and getting volunteers out to help families who need it. For me, Jewish identity is less about strict dogma and more about community, shared culture, and the values of empathy, compassion, and joy."



Aaron with Grandma Barbara

That joy is easy to spot in the life he's built in New Orleans. Come Carnival season, he's making costumes and catching parades with family and friends. He's at the city's music festivals and live shows any chance he gets. When he's not, he's probably on the tennis court, playing or volunteer-coaching a local high school team. For Aaron, community isn't an abstract idea. It's something you build by showing up.

Aaron's philosophy: progress is built one conversation at a time. Even when confronting antisemitism, misunderstanding, or hostility, Aaron responds not with defensiveness but with dialogue.

As our conversation ended, we turned from reflection to future action, discussing the Federation's potential partnership with Voices in the Dark Repertory Theatre Company on projects including Anne & Emmett. The play imagines a space beyond life called "Memory," where Anne Frank and Emmett Till meet and bear witness to each other's stories: the hopes, dreams, and fears of their young lives before their brutal ends.

We laughed trying to work around New Orleans' crowded calendar of Mardi Gras and Jewish and Christian holidays.

In many ways, the challenge seemed fitting. From New York to the neighborhoods and stages of New Orleans, Aaron's path reflects a lifelong commitment to building bridges across difference. His story reminds us of the power of honest conversation and the enduring work of bringing people together.

In every role, Aaron Bloch has created space for understanding, connection, and the belief that every voice deserves to be heard.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF AARON BLOCH



Family — Suzy, Finn and Aaron



Aaron Bloch with his sisters



Tommye Myrick and Aaron Bloch at Community Book Center