

# Speaking Truth

## *Watershed Moments in Global Leadership*



Ruth Messinger

Fund for the  
Future of  
Our Children



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Ruth Messinger is a living role model for young people interested in the social justice movement



Ruth Wyler Messinger was born in New York City in 1940 to Jewish parents, who were her role models



Ruth, left and her mother Marjorie (Goldwasser) Wyler



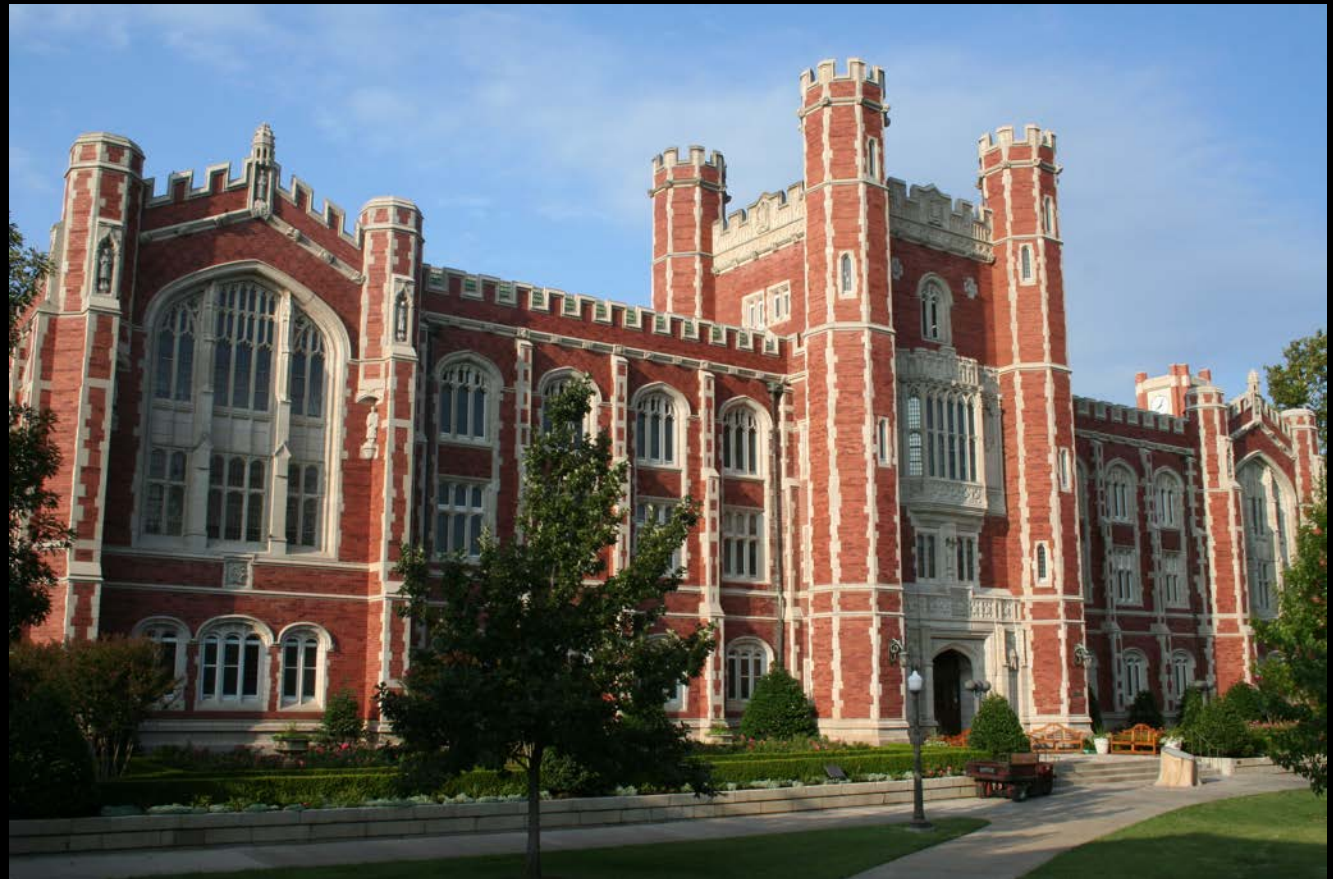
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Ruth's mother Marjorie Wyler was a spokesperson for the Jewish Theological Seminary and produced a radio and television show called *Eternal Light*





After graduating from Radcliffe College, Ruth received a Master of Social Work from the University of Oklahoma in 1964



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After graduate school, Ruth Messenger returned to her home in New York City and became a teacher, social worker and community organizer



In 1977, Ruth was elected to serve on the  
New York City Council, representing the  
4th District on the Upper West Side



In 1985, as a New York City Councilman,  
Ruth Messenger experienced what  
she describes as a “Sh’ma” moment



In Hebrew, “Sh’ma” or “Shema” means to listen  
– to pay attention and act on what you learn



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After careful listening, Ruth changed her position on a proposed needle-exchange program to fight the spread of disease among drug users



### Ruth's "Sh'ma" moment:

"Person after person told me how gaining access to clean needles was helping them avoid infecting their friends and other drug users. My resistance softened as I listened. All of the opposing arguments that had been so clear to me dissolved as I heard the truth of these people's lives. My perspective shifted. I now understood why these programs were so important, and I decided to vote in their favor. The decision was a good one because these programs are working and are saving lives every day."



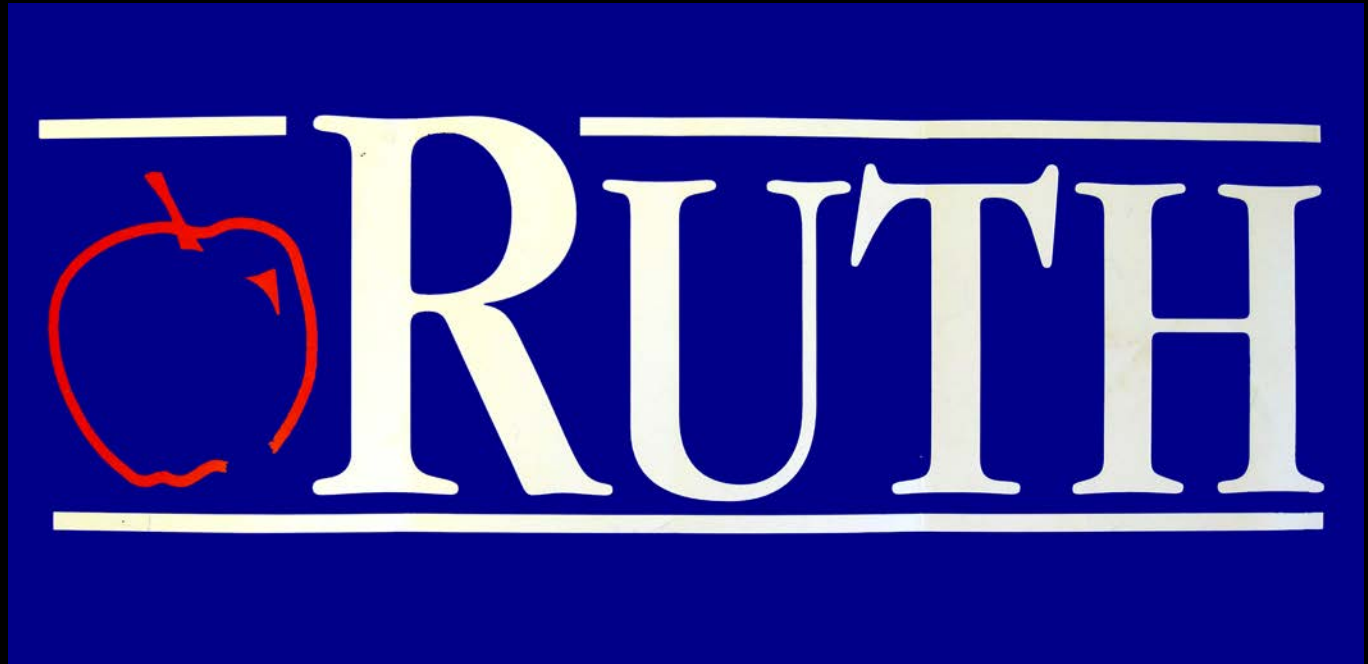
In 1990, Ruth became President of  
the Borough of Manhattan



While she was Manhattan Borough President, Ruth Messinger's endorsement help Bill Clinton win the Democratic nomination for President



Ruth became the first woman to win the Democratic Party's nomination for mayor of New York, but lost to Rudy Giuliani in 1997





The year after running for mayor, Ruth Messinger accepted the position of Chief Executive Officer of American Jewish World Service



*“Our Mission*

Inspired by the Jewish commitment to justice, American Jewish World Service (AJWS) works to realize human rights and end poverty in the developing world.”

– AJWS Website



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As the head of AJWS, Ruth Messinger has tirelessly traveled the world for over seventeen years



Ruth and the AJWS provide support for programs that fight poverty and injustice and promote human rights



In 2009, Ruth Messinger helped turn the world's attention to the genocide in Darfur – a region in Sudan experiencing a violent civil war



“Ruth Messinger, President of American Jewish World Service (AJWS), said it was evident in her meeting yesterday with President Barack Obama and the administration’s new special envoy to Sudan, General J. Scott Gration, that the administration understands the need to ensure the reinstatement of international aid groups into Darfur. Messinger also said that President Obama clearly indicated that finding a political solution to end the conflict and restore peace to all of Sudan is a top priority of his administration.”



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# Also in 2009, President Obama appointed Ruth Messinger to serve on his newly created Taskforce on Global Poverty and Development



“This task force will be a crucial agent in ensuring that the administration’s strategy on global poverty reduction reflects the reality that hunger and poverty are deeply intertwined, and, in order for all communities to thrive, the United States government must work in partnership with local groups – in the most impoverished nations – since they are best positioned to deliver change.”

– Ruth Messinger

Now in her mid-seventies, Ruth Messenger  
announced her retirement from the AJWS  
in October 2015



Ruth Messinger continues to fight for social justice and encourages others to find their own “sh’ma” moments



“Listening can be an antidote to judgement. Listening matters.

The difference between hearing and listening is paying attention.”

– Ruth Messinger



*References:*

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Happy 70th Birthday: A Tribute to Ruth Messinger –  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IevZoU-gCvY>

Announcement of President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and  
Neighborhood Partnerships – [https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/  
default/files/partnerships-global-poverty-development.pdf](https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/partnerships-global-poverty-development.pdf)

Jewish Women's Archive – <http://jwa.org/people/messinger-ruth>

Jewish Women's Archive – [http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wyler-  
marjorie](http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/wyler-marjorie)



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