



COMMENCEMENT EDITION

[HOME](#) [NEWS](#) [OPINION](#) [ARTS](#) [SPORTS](#) [CAMPUS LIFE](#) [PHOTOS](#)

[ABOUT](#) [ADVERTISING](#) [JOB BOARD](#)

Boston Weather: 65.0°F | Mostly Cloudy

Volume 129 >> Issue 10 : Friday, March 6, 2009

[PDF of This Issue](#)

Battle of the Jewish Pastries:

Six Profs Duke It Out; Latke and Hamentashen Inspire Debate

By **Ziwei Hao**

March 6, 2009

On Wednesday night, six respected professors gathered in 26-100 for the Seventh Annual Latke-Hamentashen Debate. Students and faculty, ushered by a yarmulke-wearing Tim the Beaver, packed the lecture hall for the humorous academic dispute over the virtues and shortcomings of the latke and the hamentashen.

The hamentashen is a triangular jelly-filled pastry traditionally eaten on the holiday of Purim; the latke is an oil fried potato pancake dipped in applesauce that is served during Hanukkah.

Team Hamentashen:

- ¶ Tom Leighton PhD '81 Professor of Applied Mathematics
- ¶ Jeffrey I. Steinfeld '62 Emeritus Professor of Chemistry
- ¶ Jeremy M. Wolfe, PhD '81 Lecturer in BCS and Concourse

Team Latke:

- ¶ David Jones, Professor in STS
- ¶ Keith Nelson Professor of Chemistry
- ¶ Donald Sadoway Professor of Materials Chemistry

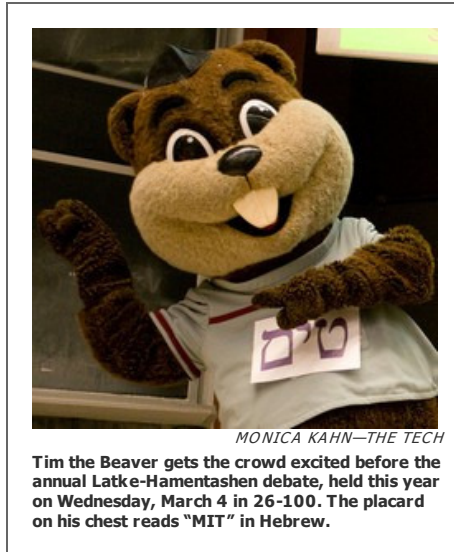
The moderator, Hazel Sive, Professor of Biology, a hamentashen supporter from the 2008 event, proposed that the results of the debate will “drive the Institute forward into the next millennium” and may very possibly “decide the fate of the planet.”

Each professor was given seven minutes to present their argument. After all professors had spoken, one professor from each side took five minutes to rebut.

Sive unveiled the secret mechanism that determined the order of the debate: latke and hamentashen flying frogs. The two teams shot their respective plastic frogs at a wall. Team Hamentashen's frog flew the closest, and opted for the latke side to serve. Both sides used contradictory historical, theological, and scientific “evidence” to support their respective delicacies.

Germey Pastries in History

David Jones opened with the “Forgotten Role of Latke in Development of Germ Theory.” He presented a Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report on a salmonella outbreak from spoiled



MONICA KAHN—THE TECH

Tim the Beaver gets the crowd excited before the annual Latke-Hamentashen debate, held this year on Wednesday, March 4 in 26-100. The placard on his chest reads “MIT” in Hebrew.

Article Tools

- [E-Mail](#)
- [Print](#)
- [Write the Editor](#)
- [Sharing](#)

MIT's oldest and largest newspaper & the first newspaper published on the web

Search

Only Vol. 129

[View Archives](#)

[Previous Issue](#)

[Next Issue](#)

The Tech Job Board

Web Software Team Lead & Architect

iFactor Consulting

Software Engineer

Payment, Inc.

System Administrator

Payment, Inc.

Front End Developer

SingleFeed

Front-end Software Engineer

TuneUp Media, Inc

[See all jobs](#)

[Post a job](#)

Powered by [Personforce](#)

latkes at a Hanukkah party. Skeptical of the accusation, Jones decided to get to the bottom of it.

In his search, Jones claimed he came across a writing by someone who tried to grow tuberculosis bacteria on an abundance of leftover hamentashen, since “no one wanted to eat any of them.” However, the pastries were quickly contaminated with mold.

The author later discovered that latkes provided a more sterile condition to grow the sputum because of their oily surfaces.

Jones concluded that latkes couldn't have been spoiled and contaminated with salmonella.

The real culprit is the hamentashen, he declared, pointing to an overlooked photo of spoiled hamentashen left on the party trays by the catering company the party hosts had hired.

The Birds and the Bees

Leighton spoke first in defense of the hamentashen, praising its popularity as a favorite treat at OPEC meetings and its resemblance to the Star Trek uniform emblem. “Where do all the hamentashen come from?” he asked before unveiling the explicit content of hamentashen procreation.

Leighton arranged two 9" by 10" triangular pastries into a 90 square inch rectangle, shifted them diagonally, and sliced off the protruding two triangular corners to form two new baby hamentashen.

If hamentashen can keep growing and reproducing, he said, their exponential growth could solve world hunger! Of course, you can't do the same with round latkes. “Latkes don't have sex,” he said. “They are shredded potatoes!”

Energy storage, sustainability, and ... the Apocalypse?

The battle of the chemists ensued. Sadoway was the first to step up to the plate. He structured his argument on environmental impact. Hamentashen production factories cause pollution while latke production is water-powered, clean, and quiet, he said.

In recent NTSB findings regarding USAir 1549, a plane was forced to land in the Hudson River because of large Canadian geese attacking the engines.

Why did the geese attack the plane? The answer, according to Sadoway, was revealed in the stomach of one goose. New Yorkers had fed them hamentashen, which drove them mad.

Steinfeld spoke second on behalf of the hamentashen. In comparison to an oil-drenched latke, the hamentashen has better sustainability. Steinfeld brought a visual aid, a trophy with a six-year-old hamentashen and latke. The latke portion was missing, disposed of as hazardous waste. The aged hamentashen, however, is in still “good shape.”

“It's growing a bit green,” said Steinfeld. “This is good, because MIT is going green.”

Professor Nelson, the last of the chemists to present, appealed to latke supporters with evidence that lies in the inherent structure of the hamentash and latke.

“I have been chosen by God to tell you a story of good and evil,” he declared. “Haman, the villain of the story, sought the fiery death of all Jews. Every bite of every hamentashen you will ever eat is filled with the soul of Haman!” The circular latke is superior in symmetry in comparison to the triangular hamentashen, said Steinfeld. When samples of both foods were submitted for X-ray diffraction, the diffraction pattern of the hamentashen displayed the face of the devil. The latke, on the other hand, projected the Star of David and the yin-yang.

In ancient Zapotec, the Hamentash means “the death of innocents,” he said. He finished his case, encouraging the audience to support the round symbol of peace.

The Inconvenient Truth

“We, the hamentashen party, have tried very hard to reach out to those of the other party,” said

Wolfe, who proceeded to take an etymological perspective in defending the hamentashen.

“The original name of the latke is ‘Tohu,’” he said, displaying a picture of latke with a picture of tofu. He claimed that the hamentashen resembles the “Lechem Da’at,” the bread of knowledge. “Who am I to tell you that-what-it-is you should choose,” he questioned the audience, showing a display of a hamentashen connecting the words “understanding,” “wisdom,” and “beauty” by its corners, along with a latke paired with mushy tofu.

Wolfe ended his argument with experimental data on rodent output for latke, hamentashen, and cocaine. “We all know that that lab rats will work much harder for latkes,” he said, but that does not necessarily mean latkes are better, Wolfe argued. Mice also work hard for cocaine, which completed the upward trend on the graph.

As the debate closed with witty and stringent rebuttals from Wolfe and Nelson, two students wearing latke and hamentashen costumes took a hand-raise poll to determine the winner. Sive declared that the audience was split between the two sides. Trophies for the professors were handed out to commemorate the tie. Free hamentashen and latkes were served afterwards in Lobby 10.