Welcome to SHMATE #7. I am tempted to report in these pages on the C.I.A. plan to turn Grenada over to the Palestinians. However, since it has become more difficult of late to tell fact from fiction, policy from satire, reality from absurdity, I will refrain from adding to the confusion. In any case the policies of the Reagan Administration so caricature themselves, that even a satirist would be left with little to add.

During the Viet Nam War, after one particular orgy of destruction, an American official stated that “We destroyed the city in order to save it.” It turns out that the Inquisition is not yet over. Six thousand Marines were sent to a country with fewer people than Berkeley or Cambridge — the equivalent of invading the U.S. with a force of 15 million! Our casualties are “light” (except to the families concerned). Grenadian casualties are merely the price any people must pay for the freedom we bestow on them. As for the Cubans — well, we all watched the same movies as the President. We know what to do with the guys who wear black hats and ride black horses.

The President fumes against the aggression of Soviet activity and intentions in the Caribbean. Yet he needs the Soviet leadership as they need him: as long as the “aggression” of the “other” exists “our” actions are justified.

I was in Czechoslovakia in 1968 when the Soviet army invaded. The similarity of Reagan’s rhetoric now to Brezhnev’s then is astounding. If a student had written the President’s lines, he would have been expelled from school for plagiarism.

“Mr. Secretary/Mr. President, why have we invaded?”

“We are there merely to restore freedom to the people. We were reluctant, but our democratic allies in the region solemnly requested our aid to restore order to that troubled part of the world. The legitimate institutions of government had been subverted and, above all, we had to protect our own citizens.”

“There are those who say that your actions have, in fact, nothing to do with the safety of our citizens in Czechoslovakia/Grenada, nor with any collective purpose. How do you respond?”

“As to the first part, let me say that though none of our citizens had been hurt, it was clear to us that they were being subjected to a very unstable situation, which our intelligence indicated could turn violent quickly. As to the second part, allow me to present Chairman Ulbricht of the German Democratic Republic/Prime Minister Charles of Dominica.”

“But, Sir, what of our treaty obligations concerning non-intervention in the internal affairs of another sovereign nation?”

“ ’I’m afraid you simply haven’t read the treaties correctly.’

Ad nauseum.

I expect few people are happier this evening than Yuri Andropov. Inquisitions are equal opportunity employers.

It is in the nature of Inquisitions to be pervasive. And so Reagan can have the C.I.A. organize an attack on the oil storage facilities, airports, and villages of Nicaragua, while proclaiming with a straight face that such was done to prevent interference by one country in the affairs of another.

Meanwhile in Lebanon, a largely symbolic American peacekeeping force is transformed into the frontline guardians of American vital interests to justify 225 Marines being blown away by one bomb. Amin Gemayel, a man who controls less than one city in his country, a man whose claim to legitimacy appears to be his Christianity and ability to speak English, is suddenly one of our “vital interests”.

We were having trouble saving the heathen in Lebanon. So, to rally the faithful, Reagan stepped in to save the troubled souls of Grenada. And let that be a beacon of hope to the people of Nicaragua and El Salvador, who shall be saved by us, like it or not.

The only problem is that most of these souls don’t know they’re being saved. In fact, when we all go to heaven, it might not be such fun for Americans, what with all the unwitting saved wandering around muttering that we should go to hell.

How many more fleets does the president think he has? What will happen if something crops up which actually does encroach on (popularly perceived) American interests? Will he nationalize the Staten Island ferries? Will he have nothing left, morally or militarily, but strategic bombers and nuclear weapons?

But, wait. Maybe I’m getting a little carried away. I mean, everyone knows that nobody really cares what happens to folks in other countries. What’s important is what happens right here at home. And here at home, Reagan is 100% for keeping the gov-
ernment off our backs. And if less government interference with our lives means more PCB's in our water, more asbestos in our air, more oil on our beaches, and more undernourished children, it's a small price to pay for our freedom.

What's that you say, son? The President wants a law requiring 100,000 government workers to submit to censorship for the rest of their lives? He issued an Executive order abolishing the public's right to know as relevant grounds for not classifying documents? The new Attorney General's Guidelines allows the F.B.I. to investigate non-criminal political activity? The President's trying to abolish the Freedom of Information Act? Hell, that's not government intrusion, son. That's...uh, that's...uh, why don't you run along and watch T.V., son.

"O.K., Dad. One question."
"Sure, son."
"You wouldn't let anyone hurt me, give me electric shocks, needles, things like that, would you?"
"Son, this is America. No one does those things here. Anyone touches this family has to answer to my shotgun .38."
"Great, Dad."
"What makes you ask?"
"Well, you know I'm left handed, my ears are different, and my hands sweat a lot?"
"Sure, son. Should make you good presidential material. I always thought Reagan's ears were funny and Nixon sweated from any spot possible. Must have been a half dozen of them were lefties. Why?"

"I just read about a new program that President Reagan's Justice Department is starting. It's called 'Early Identification of The Chronic Juvenile Offender'."

"Sounds good to me, son. Get some criminals out of the schools, I expect. What are they going to do? Hire a bunch of cops to check the kids for switchblades and things?"

"No, Dad. They're going to take kids like me, boys nine to twelve years old, and stick needles in us and give us shocks, and check our sweat and hormones and brainwaves and I'm scared, but I know you won't let them hurt me."

"Does seem a bit strange, son. Why are they going to do this?"

"Well, Dad, it seems the President's men think that if you have funny ears, or curved fingers, or have rough spots on your tongue, or if you're a lefty, or if there's a big space between the wrong toes or if your hands sweat or if the wrong toe is long you'll be a criminal. Isn't that the kind of stuff they did at Auschwitz, Dad? Are we Jews or something? Am I really gonna be a criminal?"

"No, we're definitely not Jews, son. And I don't think you'll become a criminal. But, he is the President, and he does have some real experts, and he does know a lot of things we don't..."

I expect that most SHMATE readers already regard President Reagan with distaste. This leads me to the real question we must ask: What will we do? Nothing will be accomplished by sitting at home and in coffeehouses decrying the situation. We will not prevent the invasion of Nicaragua by saying that we will vote against Reagan in 1984. We will not prevent the Justice Department from cooking up Nazi-like schemes directed at our children by reading—or publishing—small magazines of progressive Jewish thought.

No. We will have to get off our individual and collective tuchus. We will have to look at our previous struggles, struggles around civil rights and Viet Nam. We will have to remember not to become self-righteous, that many decent folks disagree with us. We must remember that we will have to vote with our feet, take real risks, and make real sacrifices. We must remember where and how the battles over other issues were fought.

And, as Jews we must remember that we can't be good Jews unless we are good people. We must remember two of the most important principles of Yom Kippur: that when we speak of sins, we are speaking of sins of omission as well as commission, and that when we chant the Kol Nidre, we are asking for forgiveness only for transgressions against God. As Jews, we can only be forgiven for transgressions against other people by personally rectifying the situation.

"Mordecai and his young companions of HaShomer and the workers' organizations had taken too much into consideration the opinions of the older generation, of the 'wise', the 'deliberating', who weighed and measured and who had up their sleeves a host of clever arguments against the struggle... Mordecai and his fellows of the young generation knew too little about the history of freedom struggles or they would have known that in these stormy times one had to give less consideration to the resolutions of committees and administrations and depend more on oneself, on one's own healthy instincts."

Emmanuel Ringelblum, historian of the Warsaw Ghetto, on Mordecai Anielewicz, Commander of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.

STEVE FANKUCHEN
THE VIEW FROM OUT THERE

For me, the poetry and poetry reviews in the magazine make it roomier, a more attractive place. I happen to believe that any politics, Jewish or otherwise, not hospitable to poetry—to works of art and the lives of artists—is simply not deeply humane. At the very least, it is suspect.

Stephen Levy
New York, N.Y.

The Paul Buhle issue on Jewish Humor is a treasure chest, full of rare spice!

Ruth Friedlander
Berkeley, Ca.

The article on the Abraham Lincoln Brigade is first-class research and journalism. It really deserves to be widely read.

Richard Darabeaner
Far Rockaway, N.Y.

Congratulations on Issue #5. "Honk, Wonk, and Jowl" is wonderful and the Spanish Civil War stuff very useful. Keep it up!

Meredith Tax
New York, N.Y.

I could say, having edited a biweekly of 100,000, that you seem to be doing right, thematic numbers making back orders vital etc. As a typographer I could critique the type, but you're obviously low-budget etc. I'm an encouraged poet when I receive a rejection in an editor's own hand.

Gary Gach
San Francisco, Ca.

Issue #5 a triumph. Gerassi's piece especially engaging.

Sandy Berman
Edina, Minn.

SHMATE keeps getting better and better. Keep it up. It's wonderful.

Avrom Gimbel
Berkeley, Ca.

I liked the editorial in SHMATE #5. As you've reminded us, Reagan and his reactionary policies are very much on the move. The editorial dovetails nicely with some of John Gerassi's interviews of Spanish Civil War veterans.

Yet, I think it is important to remember that 1983 is not 1953. The struggles we've fought over Viet Nam, Civil Rights, feminism, etc. have had their effect on people throughout America. The depth of our success has brought forth the repression Reagan is orchestrating. It will also serve us in fighting his policies as we move forward past this time of tsuris.

Myron Perlman
Chicago, Ill.

I love your magazine but please change the name. It's terrible.

Ruth Schafran
San Anselmo, Ca.

I like [Issue #6], though I haven't read all of it—a real mishmash of erudition and funk. I like it well enough that I'm going to send a copy to my mother, another to Aunt Rose, one to Wallace and so on.

Eric Breitbart
Brooklyn, N.Y.

I enjoyed the clearcut powerful written editorials in [Issues #4 and 5]. There is no mistaking where the magazine stands. If you can make the publication self-supporting, you will have accomplished a good deal.

Ethel Solovay
Tucson, Ariz.

Your [Holocaust resistance] bibliographies: excellent choices, since you were so limited in space. Bibliographies should get to students and researchers.

Vera Laska
Weston, Mass.

Thank you for publishing my Very Anonymous letter in Issue #4 in which I expressed my feelings as an adoptee, of being separated by convention from my birth family. I also appreciate the two responses in SHMATE #5. Elizabeth Greene was a great help in validating my feelings and referring me to the adoptee network in this area. Her recommendation that I read Lost and Found and Born Twice by Betty Jean Lifton, a Jewish adoptee, was excellent; the books are illuminating and supportive of the adoptee's right to know her/his genetic origins. I, in turn, highly recommend the books for anyone who was adopted, for adoptive parents, for birth parents who have given up children, and for therapists working with adoptees. The books provide missing links in understanding the emotional and legal situation in which adoptees find themselves.

The letter from "Mamzer" gave another view. "Mamzer" mentioned allegiance to one's adoptive parents as a reason not to look for birth parents. Though "Mamzer's" situation sounds quite unusual, I feel strongly that the adoptee who searches is not being disloyal to her or his adoptive parents (though some adoptive parents may feel betrayed), but is being loyal to her own curiosity about her genealogy.

For what it's worth, Mamzer may find it interesting to know that Jewish law defines bastard differently than Anglo-American law: a mamzer (bastard) is a child whose parents could not get married under Jewish law because either of the parents was not Jewish, or because one of the parents (or both) was married to someone else. The child of a Jewish man and woman who were not married, therefore, would not be a mamzer.

Thanks again for connecting me with my "family" of other adoptees.

Sincerely,

Very Anonymous

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LETTERS: continued

Your combined efforts have produced a work of genius. SHMATE #6 is what I did not believe could exist anymore: a magazine of Jewish humor. Congratulations!

Maxim Ghilan
Paris, France

I’m enjoying the Abraham Lincoln Brigade article a GREAT deal.

Miriam Sagan
San Francisco, Ca.

It just didn’t seem right to stuff a check and order for a gift into an envelope without taking the time to let you know how much I enjoy SHMATE. I am terribly impressed by the caliber and diversity of the material that has been presented in the first six issues. I anxiously await future ones.

Sometime when I make enough time to do so, I will write you a much more detailed letter explaining exactly why I think so highly of your work. For the moment, let a sincerely felt “thank you” suffice.

Kenneth Stern
Portland, Ore.

Though I am a real fan of anarchism (George Orwell’s Homage to Catalonia is still one of the most memorable documents of that movement’s influence in Spain and one of my favorite books), I found Gerassi’s piece too long, especially because there were no graphics. One of the most important parts of producing a readable journal is making sure that there is not too much black ink. It gets too tiring to read and you’ll lose your audience. Maybe I’ve really strayed from my no-so-strong hippy roots, but I found Florence Lewis’ story fragmented, undisciplined, and not that informative about the about the immigrant learning experience. Narell’s story was solid, as was the continued biography of resistance literature. I would have liked to see a longer piece on Emil Grunzweig. In many ways, SHMATE should be careful not to reproduce the information already available in the progressive Jewish press (e.g. Jewish Currents is obsessed with the Abraham Lincoln Brigades). It is refreshing to read new thoughts, new angles. A sensitively written eulogy to Emil would be appreciated, replete with admonitions about the ethnic and political polarization tearing Israel apart. Enough. I hope this was not too picky, but helpful.

Nancy Sinkoff
New York, N.Y.

Many thanks for the issues! I am still reading them in between Reich’s The Mass Psychology of Fascism and Rocker’s Nationalism and Culture. A very interesting and unpredictable mix—the magazine, that is. I can’t wait until the next issue!

I was especially interested in the 40th anniversary Ghetto Uprising issue, as I had just completed Poale Zion and Bund Resistance. For consideration to be included in your resistance bibliography: Wladyslaw Bartoszewski’s The Blood Shed Unites Us, published by Interpress, 1970, Warsaw. Somewhat of an apologist for the Polish regime, but nevertheless full of information, photos, documents and personal accounts. Another interesting title is by Saul S. Friedman, No Haven for the Oppressed: U.S. Policy toward Jewish Refugees, 1938-45, Wayne State Press, 1973. Interesting in that it shows how State Department and many Jewish leaders remained silent about the terror in Europe. This book, I think, helped form the basis for Leni Brenner’s Zionism in the Age of Dictators, Lawrence-Hill Publishers, 1983, which comments on the degree of collaboration between the Zionists and the Nazis. I don’t know much about this book, except that it’s used by many anti-Zionist groups. And, of course, there are the three masterpieces by Emmanuel Ringelblum: Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto, Jewish Resistance, and Polish-Jewish Relations During WWII. Once again, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to have read your periodical, to note that there is a liberalizing trend among Jewish publications, pertaining to Zionism, Israel, and the Jewish Left that’s been sorely absent in this country since the ’30s. Much welcomed!

Josh Gosciak
New York, N.Y.

All I’ve seen is the humor issue, #6, but judging from that, you need either more modern (colorful) eye-appeal or (if green and pink upsets you), more thought to design. The lettering (masthead especially) and colors on the cover (red and brown, very dark) make it look like an old magazine before its time.

O.K. to content. Are you “progressive”? I searched for an editorial policy to explain what that means. I don’t expect a pat answer, but I’m interested in what you consider your editorial aims. Here’s my opinion since you asked for it. I’d like to see articles by and about Jewish individuals and groups whose activities are, consciously or unconsciously, indications of future Judaism. Sometimes, this is indicated in revivalist groups which show the need to “regain” something “lost.” Or in the new community forms (the chavura); or in the death of old ones.

Test yourself: you are dropped onto a college campus in any city in a crowd of fifty young Jews. What are they interested in? How will they be Jewish (if at all) in 20 or 30 years? Do they know or care? I’m working with college students, which is why this question occurs to me more than once. On that subject I could propose a cover to you should you ever do an assimilation issue: a picture of a very stereotypical Jewish man’s face, 35ish, bearded, archeyebrowed, and schnozzed, looking ready to make a reply. The caption: “Jewish? No... but my grandfather was.” Actually I’m using this for a talk on Jewish cultural amnesia.

The point is to look toward the future without making reactionary judgements. I’m not looking for a “tsk, tsk” look at assimilation. There are enough gripey Jewish periodicals on the market! I would like to read about trends, iconoclasts, and continued next page
LETTERS: continued

ideas occurring to people outside the Jewish establishment(s), with the focus on America (galut, sweet galut).

As a singer and organizer of a new klezmer band, I was glad to see the Sapoznik article in issue #6.

Lori Lippitz
Chicago, Ill.

Though other readers may disagree, I thoroughly enjoyed your excerpts regarding Jewish Veterans of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade. It is not surprising that such a large percentage of those brave individuals were both Jews and Communists.

Even today most Americans do not understand the role of the Communist Party, USA in the history of our country. Members of the CP-USA are still considered traitors, subversives, spies, or dupes of Moscow. Among the leading believers of this dogma include many left-leaning liberals and socialists who see the Soviet Union as the great threat to world freedom and peace.

By focusing on those idealists who were the first to fight fascism in Europe, one cannot help but admire their motives and their activism. They did not fight in Spain to enslave the world behind an iron curtain, but instead saw their efforts as the first step to preventing Hitler and Mussolini from conquering the globe. By volunteering to join the Spanish Republican Army, they paid the price in the post WW II cold war atmosphere that engulfed the United States. They are still paying that price, even those individuals who subsequently left the party.

As a non-party member (not now, never have been), I do not attempt to justify all CP-USA actions and beliefs. At times American Communists may be naive and at times they are clearly wrong. But as a group they have played a positive role in our society. They have actively struggled for every progressive cause and positive change that faced this country in the past 50 years. We can learn from them, work with them, and eventually triumph with them. They must never be ostracized by the progressive movement.

Henry Finkelstein
Brooklyn, N.Y.

Inasmuch as the events depicted in John Gerassi's article on the Spanish Civil War made reference to my participation, I was naturally interested, especially in the recollections of the volunteers interviewed.

As for myself the Felsen depiction of Bill Aalto's disassociation from our OSS group isn't altogether accurate. In the first place Bill's homosexuality is treated in a flippant manner and, as a result, a grave injustice is done to Bill Aalto who was a dedicated anti-fascist, who more than paid his dues in the war against fascism in Spain. He, along with Irv Goff, helped organize and participated in a raid behind enemy lines freeing 300 Spanish Republican prisoners from the fortress of Carchuna. Both Goff and Aalto engaged in a fierce fight in covering the retreat of the freed prisoners. In setting the record straight it should be emphasized that both Irv Goff and Bill Aalto made remarkable contributions both in Spain and in the continuing struggle of WWII, in Spain as leaders of guerrilla warfare and in WWII in the OSS. They were joint authors of a text on guerrilla warfare that was taught at the OSS Special Operations School on Partisan War.

Bill Aalto died an untimely death in June of 1958 and I would be remiss in my duty to him as a comrade-in-arms and a friend if I didn't point out that humanity should be forever grateful that once in a while the likes of Bill Aalto comes down the pike.

Vincent Lossowski
Rochester, New York

We, the undersigned, whose names appeared in SHMATE #5, are appreciative of your positive treatment of the role of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade in the resistance to fascism. We are especially proud to be presented in your Focus on Resistance, in the company of the heroic Jewish fighters of the Warsaw Ghetto.

It is therefore with a feeling of regret that we must point out for the record that the manuscript you published is not a true representation of what we said in oral interviews. It is an unfinished and rejected manuscript, based on raw material still in the process of review by the Lincoln vets. There are gross inaccuracies, distortions, and discrepancies between the excerpted manuscript and the verbatim transcript of the interviews on file with the Abraham Lincoln Brigade Archives at Brandeis University. A number of statements were attributed to us which we did not make.

We do not wish to burden your readers with a lengthy point by point correction. They will be able to read the authorized and correct version of the condensation of the interviews with a number of veterans of the Brigade in a book which will be published next year.

Given the fact that you were dealing with a pre-publication manuscript, it would have been wise to consult with the publisher or a recognized authority. You thereby could have saved SHMATE some embarrassment, as well as us, the Lincoln veterans, the painful task of repudiating the excerpts as presented in Gerassi's manuscript.

Milton Felsen, Sarasota, Fla.
Irving Goff, Venice, Ca.
Abe Osheroff, W. Lebanon, N.H.
Albert Prago, Flushing, N.Y.
George Watt, Northport, N.Y.

continued next page
LETTERS: continued

I was greatly saddened to read (above) that men who were once so courageous and so daringly on the side of the just should, in their twilight years, become so vain and so petty as to object to see in print a few of their mistakes. These are mistakes which they themselves admitted in moments of frankness and, indeed, of greatness, for it is precisely such confessions that show their humaneness and their humanity. The irony is that all who have read my editing of these Abraham Lincoln Brigade veteran interviews, including many other vets, were immensely moved by their description of the anguish and torment entailed in some of their major decisions—precisely the reason why I chose to print such sections.

In any case, the facts of their letter are false: the excerpts printed in SHMATE #5 were not unauthorized (except, now, post facto, which is neither morally nor legally acceptable), nor were they part of an “unfinished” and “rejected” manuscript, but of a finished book which will appear this year in France and Spain and next year in the U.S. If these sections include errors, it is because these vets, to whom, via their organization, their own interviews were submitted for correction, either refused to respond, or demanded only that I change my introduction. Prago, for example, screamingly objected that I said in August 1936, 300,000 people called the Spanish embassy in Washington to ask how they might volunteer. That fact comes not only from the records of the embassy (cited by the then Foreign Minister of the Spanish Republic), but, pointedly, from the Brigade’s own historian, Art Landis, in his contribution to the book on the internationals, Solidarity. Obviously, Prago believed it waters down his own volunteering if so many people wanted to go; of course, it does not, for it is who went that counts, not who wanted to go.

But, in general, if these vets object to my selection from their hundreds of pages of testimony, I can only say, to paraphrase Felix Frankfurter, that to tell their story within limited space required drastic compression. Nevertheless, such selection has been guided by canons of relevance and fairness. Besides, as the five vets above themselves admit, the entire record, spread over many thousands of pages, is accessible to anyone who desires to examine the ground traveled. The material is at Brandeis University, where I donated it, a fact these veterans carefully omitted.

John Gerassi
New York, N.Y.

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<th>Year</th>
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<td>1900</td>
<td>Occupation of Puerto Rico</td>
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<td>1900-1902</td>
<td>Occupation of Cuba</td>
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<td>1900-1902</td>
<td>Guerrilla war in Philippines</td>
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<td>1903</td>
<td>Sailors and Marines stop Colombian Army at Panama</td>
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<td>Intervention in Cuba</td>
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<td>1909</td>
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<td>1910, 1912-1913</td>
<td>Intervention in Nicaragua</td>
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<td>1911</td>
<td>Intervention in Honduras, Nicaragua, Dominican Republic</td>
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<td>1912-1917</td>
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<td>1914</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Marines in Vera Cruz, Mexico</td>
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<td>1914</td>
<td>Navy and Marines enter Haiti, stay until 1934</td>
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<td>1916</td>
<td>Gen. John J. Pershing and 10,000 into Northern Mexico</td>
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<td>10,000 Marines in China</td>
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<td>1956</td>
<td>U.S. fleet evacuates U.S. nationals during Suez Canal crisis</td>
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<td>1957</td>
<td>U.S. fleet to Near East during Jordan crisis</td>
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<td>1958</td>
<td>Navy, Marines and Army units in Lebanon</td>
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SHMATE #7
THE A.D.L. AND REALITY

by ILANA DEBARE and PAUL GLICKMAN

In May 1983 the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai Brith issued a report charging Nicaragua’s Sandinista government with anti-Semitism. In a July meeting with American Jewish leaders, President Reagan echoed this accusation, adding that the alleged anti-Semitism was “one more reason that we must give assistance to those in Central America who are fighting totalitarian anti-religious forces.” By August White House public relations staff routinely referred to Sandinista “persecution” of Jews.

A look at the history of Nicaragua’s Jews reveals a different picture from that painted by the ADL and the Administration. It shows a community dispersed and divided not by governmental anti-Semitism but by a variety of historical forces, the main one being the popular revolt against the 50-year dictatorship of the Somoza family. In this light, the President’s pronouncements appear to be an attempt to manipulate American Jews’ fears of anti-Semitism to gain support for increased U.S. military involvement in Central America.

The ADL report accused the Sandinistas of “driving the entire small Jewish community [of Nicaragua] into exile” and seizing and desecrating the country’s one synagogue. “Throughout the capital, Jewish-owned property has been confiscated,” it added. While admitting that “We know of no laws in Nicaragua that are aimed specifically at Jews,” ADL Latin American Affairs Director Rabbi Morton Rosenthal charged that “Nicaragua today is a country without Jews, but not without anti-Semitism.”

All reports emanating from Nicaragua contradict the ADL’s conclusions. Those Jews still living inside the country state that they have not been the victims of government persecution. Nicaragua’s two human rights commissions—one pro-Sandinista and the other harshly anti-Sandinista—both conclude that the anti-Semitism charges are unfounded. Human rights studies conducted over the past two years by Americas Watch, the Organization of American States, the United Nations, and Pax Christi—while noting other criticisms of the Sandinista government—made no mention of anti-Semitism. Even U.S. Ambassador Anthony Quainton, who conducted a special investigation into the issue in July, cabled the State Department that “The evidence fails to demonstrate that the Sandinistas have followed a policy of anti-Semitism or persecuted Jews solely because of their religion.”

Nicaragua’s Jewish community has always been tiny, even by Central American standards. While Costa Rica and Panama are home to approximately 1500 and 3000 Jewish families respectively, at its height the Nicaraguan community numbered only 50 families, or about 150 people. Many of these arrived in Nicaragua from Europe in the late 1920’s and 1930’s, when the first of the Somoza dynasty seized power. Their businesses were built under the protection of Somoza and his National Guard.

“Many Jews had connections with Somoza for economic interests or out of fear,” explains Rolland Najlis, a Jewish businessman originally from France and still living in Managua. “They thought they wouldn’t be persecuted if they tied themselves to the people in power.”

The Sandinistas claim that Abraham Gorn—former president of the congregation and one of the Nicaraguan exiles upon whose testimony the ADL report is based—was one such Somocista. One of Nicaragua’s wealthiest men, Gorn was a regular contributor to Somoza’s National Liberal Party, according to Nicaraguan Ambassador Antonio Jarquin. Gorn’s son responded that “it is possible that at one time he gave a small donation of $150” to Somoza’s party, but claimed his father did so under duress. Former employees in Gorn’s factory testified to Nicaragua’s National Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights that National Guard head Jose Somoza was a regular visitor to Gorn’s office, and that in 1971 Gorn called in the National Guard to break up a strike with tear gas. Another employee stated that Gorn regularly evaded taxes by issuing unnumbered sales invoices.

The President’s pronouncements appear to be an attempt to manipulate American Jews’ fears of anti-Semitism to gain support for increased U.S. military involvement in Central America.

After the overthrow of Somoza in mid-1979, Gorn was detained for two weeks, while charges of his involvement in Israeli arms sales to Somoza were investigated and dismissed. Shortly after, he sought asylum in Costa Rica. His factory and property were confiscated under Decree 38, a law of the new government authorizing confiscation of property belonging to known supporters of Somoza.

Although many of the leaders of the community were tied to the Somoza regime, a few Jews joined the Sandinistas as the revolution developed throughout the 1960’s and 1970’s. The Lewites family was one which joined the opposition to Somoza as early as the 1950’s; today Herty Lewites is the Minister of Tourism, while a large market in Managua is named in honor of his brother Israel who died fighting Somoza’s forces in the 1970’s. Four Cabinet ministers today are of Jewish descent, although none are practicing Jews.

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Approximately two-thirds of Nicaragua's Jewish community left the country after a 1972 earthquake destroyed much of Managua; by the late 1970's, only about 50 Jews remained. The majority of these left shortly before or after the July 1979 overthrow of Somoza.

Isaac Stavisky, a large factory owner presently living in the United States, met with President Reagan at the White House in July and stated that he had fled fearing anti-Semitic attacks following the Sandinista victory. Stavisky cited a number of anti-Semitic incidents which occurred during the insurrection, such as anti-Jewish graffiti on the walls of his factory. "A favorite tactic was to anonymously phone Jewish homes with warnings that 'We are going to get you Jews,' claiming that we are responsible for the killing of our people by guns sold to the Somoza regime by Israel," he said.

The worst such incident was a 1978 firebombing of the doorway to the Managua synagogue by about five men who, according to the ADL, shouted "Long live Sandino" as their car drove off.

Four cabinet ministers today are of Jewish descent, though none are practicing Jews.

Tourism Minister Herty Lewites acknowledges that isolated anti-Semitic incidents occurred during the insurrection, and speculates that they were the result of grassroots confusion between Nicaraguan Jews and the Israeli government, which at the time was supplying 98% of the dictatorship's arms. (See sidebar on Israel and Central America.)

"As the revolution deepened," adds Lewites, "it tried to explain that it was not 'the Jews' who were selling arms, but only one sector."

The Jews remaining in Nicaragua testify that they have not suffered from reprisals or discrimination.

Jaime Levy Levy, a Managua fabric importer, states that "I have not had obstacles put in the way of my business, and I have never been persecuted by the Sandinistas because I am Jewish."

Rolland Najlis agrees: "Although [the Jews who left at the time of the revolution] may have left from fear of repression, that repression has never come to pass."

Marta Baltodano, director of the anti-Sandinista Permanent Commission on Human Rights, states that some Jews did have their property confiscated: "Violations did occur in that there were no legal proofs they had ties to Somoza. But, there is not a Sandinista government policy against Jews because they are Jewish."

A July 1983 study by Nicaragua's pro-government National Commission for the Protection and Promotion of Human Rights documented over two dozen Jewish-owned businesses, including Nicaragua's largest electronics parts store, that continue to operate in the country. Some of the Jews residing outside Nicaragua continue to own and operate businesses there.

The synagogue today houses the national office of the Sandinista Children's Association. While the ADL charged that the Sandinistas "commandeered" the synagogue, the National Commission study concluded that the building had been abandoned when many Jews left the country in early 1979 and stood vacant until refugee families began squatting there. When the government relocated the refugees in 1981, it turned the building — like other abandoned property — over to the Ministry of Housing, which rented it to the Children's Association. The National Commission report recommended that the government return the building to those Jews remaining in Nicaragua, and in an August meeting with ADL leaders, the Nicaraguan Ambassador formally reiterated his offer to return the building. The ADL has characterized the government's offer as "a meaningless promise in a country without Jews."

The building itself remains in excellent condition. The ADL reports of its desecration with anti-Semitic propaganda apparently referred to a colorful mural of children on the front outer wall and some 1982 posters for an aid campaign for Palestinian refugee children.

Although there has been no government campaign of anti-Semitism, some press coverage of the Middle East continues to contain blatantly anti-Jewish statements. The independent pro-government daily El Nuevo Diario ran an article during the Israeli invasion of Lebanon which said that "the world's money, banking, and finance are in the hands of descendants of Jews, the eternal protectors of Zionism. Consequently, controlling economic power, they control political power as now happens in the United States."

Even a July 1983 article on the ADL's charges referred to "the great chain of newspapers that are dominated by the most reactionary among American Jewry."

An official at the Nicaraguan Embassy in Washington, D.C. acknowledged that anti-Semitic passages appeared in Nuevo Diario despite government press censorship. "But the press is censored because we are at war," she added, "and the censor is only looking for material that might help the counterrevolutionaries."

Most obviously, the ADL's report is flawed because of the one-sided nature of its investigation. The ADL has not sent a representative to Nicaragua to investigate the situation since before the ouster of Somoza, and relied heavily on the testimony of Nicaraguan exiles — many with personal axes to grind against the Sandinistas. At a deeper level, the ADL report rests upon two mistaken assumptions.

One assumption concerns the nature of the Nicaraguan insurrection. Clearly, several anti-Semitic incidents did occur during the course of the fight to overthrow Somoza, but, it is wrong to see these as elements of a systematic program of government persecution. There is hardly a country

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NICARAGUA: continued

in the world which is free of the taint of anti-Semitism. In the United States we are too familiar with anti-Jewish graffiti, attacks upon Jews, and even anti-Semitic comments by government officials. Yet no serious analyst would argue that the U.S. “grassroots” anti-Semitism is the same as the government-sponsored persecution of Argentina or the Soviet Union. The anti-Semitic acts in Nicaragua cited by the ADL were isolated, spontaneous outbursts in the midst of a revolution. For example, Isaac Stavisky spoke of a factory employee who angrily told his (Jewish) employer that after the revolution his property would be expropriated. It is simplistic and misleading to label encounters such as this as part of an orchestrated campaign of “enmity toward... Nicaraguan Jews.”

The second false assumption behind the ADL report concerns Middle East politics and its implications for world Jewry. The ADL looked at the situation of Nicaragua’s Jews through the tinted glasses of its staunchly pro-Israel position. As Rabbi Rosenthal told President Reagan at the White House, the ADL had based its research on “a conviction that a PLO presence represents a threat to the security of the Jews.”

Nicaragua — along with many countries — has warm relations with the PLO, which maintains an embassy-level mission in Managua. As in many third world countries, there is also broad public sympathy for the Palestinians. This identification has been heightened by Nicaraguans’ own experience with Israel. Debbie Reuben, a North American who worked in Nicaragua from 1981 through 1983, noted that for many Nicaraguans, the arms sales to Somoza were all they knew of Israel. “When you have been fired on with an Uzi or Galil,” she said, “you tend to remember where it came from.”

Yet the government has not attempted to politically capitalize on popular anger towards Israel or to direct this anger against the remaining local Jews. According to American Jews living in Nicaragua, the view of most Nicaraguans concerning Jews remains primarily based in ignorance, not hostility— most Nicaraguans have never met a Jew.

The Reagan Administration’s decision to endorse the ADL’s charges, against the advice of its own experts, is part of a series of attempts to counter growing public criticism of U.S. intervention in Central America. In late spring, the Administration escalated this campaign, creating the special commission headed by Henry Kissinger and establishing a White House Outreach Working Group on Central America within its Office of Public Liaison. This latter group helped organize the July 20 meeting between Reagan, the ADL, and the Jewish leaders.

The Jewish community today is increasingly being forced to take a position on U.S. military involvement in Central America. Each day’s newspapers bring further revelations about the extent of CIA involvement in its “covert” war against Nicaragua. Reagan has bet that his show of concern about the plight of Nicaragua’s Jews will win Jewish support for further Central American adventures.

Whether Reagan wins this bet depends on the Jewish Community’s willingness both to critically examine the roots of the President’s newfound “concern” for Jews and to bring the long tradition of Jewish concern for social justice to bear on Central America.

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CHILDGAMES

The seventy year old immaculately dressed president steps from the plane to make war the sixty nine year old pope spreads his ringed papal hands and gives out wafers the sixty five year old ailing prime minister yells determination the middle-aged diplomat shrieks threats the seventy year old woman marches in a peace march.

Out in the trenches the children fight, between battles resting their young tired backs on anything that isn’t sharp.

SHMATE #7
THE A.D.L. AND REAGAN  
by STAN STEINREICH

As part of the campaign to enlist public support for its Central American policy, the Reagan administration has forged a deal with the Anti-Defamation League of B’nai B’rith in an effort to get the Jewish community to join the bandwagon. According to informed sources from within major Jewish organizations, the diplomatic community in New York City, and among Congressional aides, the deal involves trade-offs of a kind common in pacts from within major Jewish organizations, the diplomatic community in New York City, and among Congressional aides, the deal involves trade-offs of a kind common in such pacts, they note, the White House promises access and support to the groups in the future in return for public support of its policies.

The ADL’s recent public attack on the Sandanist government of Nicaragua for the alleged expulsion of 50 Jewish families is connected to such a trade-off.

Though talks between the ADL and Nicaragua have quietly taken place since 1980 over the return of personal and communal property taken when most of the Jews came out after Nicaragua’s revolution, the case made headlines for the first time this spring. It has been in recent months as well that President Reagan and members of his administration have been seeking Jewish support for his programs in Central America.

Both the Reagan administration and the Israeli government are supporting insurgents seeking to topple the Nicaraguan regime. A July 21 New York Times article cited administration sources as saying that Israel had recently agreed to work with them in supplying Soviet arms captured from the Palestine Liberation Organization in Lebanon to the insurgents. This, said the administration officials, had been a significant factor in recently improved relations between the United States and Israel.

“The government [of Nicaragua] was giving me the runaround,” said Rabbi Morton Rosenthal, Director of the ADL’s Latin Affairs Department, explaining why the ADL decided to go public last June. “It was necessary to get publicity, to make the Nicaraguans deal with us.”

He dismissed the notion there was any trade-off involved. “We are doing our own thing with this issue,” he said. “Whatever the Reagan administration does with this matter is their business. It is not a matter of trade-offs or deals.”

White House official Michael Gale, asked if such a pact existed, commented, “To say a trade-off between the White House and the ADL took place would not be accurate. We are concerned about Central America and we want to get the support of the American Jewish community on this matter.”

Gale, as associate director of the White House Office for Public Liaison, deals with the administration’s relations with the Jewish community.

Officials in other Jewish organizations see the ADL repositioning itself to the political right. They say the group is seeking to gain clout with the Reagan White House and that it was the ADL that approached Presidential advisors with the idea of a deal.

One high official of a worldwide Jewish organization based in New York, who insisted on anonymity, said, “Certainly I think a tradeoff exists here. ADL gets the publicity and Reagan looks like he cares about Jewish issues.”

In a recent ADL press release, the organization’s honorary national chairman, Burton Joseph, recalled being summoned to the Pentagon by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld who proposed a similar deal during the Ford administration.

The defense chief was seeking Jewish support for the administration’s goal of a larger defense budget, according to Joseph. Rumsfeld said the administration’s ability to meet Israel’s military needs was dependent on such a budget boost. But, he added, “We are hampered in our drive for more overall funding by many groups and public figures who, in many cases, are well-known members of the Jewish community. How do we overcome the contradiction of these same people urging us to take care of the military needs of Israel when they resist us on the level of the overall arms budget?”

Joseph urged Jews to link the development of their positions on matters of concern to the current administration, such as defense and affirmative action, to such considerations.

Ellen Steinberg, director of the American Affairs Section of the World Jewish Congress said, “I don’t mind political deals in terms of advancing real Jewish interests. But Jewish interests, in those cases, should be paramount.”

“What we must ask ourselves is, are we defending the rights of Nicaraguan Jews or [increasing someone’s] political power? Anti-Semitism should not be used by the Reagan administration, or any administration for its own political end.”

Steinberg said that Nicaraguan Jews left the country because most were middle class merchants who prospered during the Somoza regime, but were threatened by the Sandanistas’ economic program.

Another critic of the ADL and the White House over the Nicaraguan issue is Rabbi Henry I. Sobel of Brazil, one of that country’s most prominent spiritual leaders.

“In the vast majority of Latin American nations, there exists no ‘Jewish problem’ per se,” he commented in a written statement to the Plenary Session of the World Union for Progressive Judaism meeting in Jerusalem on June 29. In the statement Sobel said that the problems faced by many Central and South American Jews were political, not antisemitic in origin.

While all Jewish organizations contacted were supportive of the ADL’s efforts to assist struggling Jews throughout the world, they all stressed that Jews should never let themselves be used by the government for political purposes.
NICARAGUA 3

REAGAN POLICY
by ILANA DEBARE

Over the past three years, the Reagan Administration has developed a multifaceted strategy for destabilizing the Nicaraguan revolution, including military, political, and economic components. In April 1981, Reagan cut off the remaining $15 million of the previous year's allocation of $75 million in economic reconstruction assistance. While total military and economic aid to the neighboring right-wing governments of El Salvador and Honduras ballooned to $302 million and $150 million, respectively, in 1982, Nicaragua was excluded from all U.S. aid packages including the Caribbean Basin Initiative. This past spring the Reagan Administration cut Nicaragua's quota for sugar exports to the U.S. by 90% and closed all of Nicaragua's consulates. The Administration has also applied pressure in international financial institutions, such as the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank, to cut off support for Nicaraguan projects.

Military training camps for ex-National Guard "contras" (the Nicaraguan term for counter-revolutionaries) operated in the U.S.—including in Florida and California—throughout 1981. In November 1981, according to later reports in the Washington Post and New York Times, President Reagan approved a $19 million C.I.A. plan for covert actions against the Nicaraguan government. What was originally described to Congress as a 500-man military force has grown to an estimated 6,000, with C.I.A. leaders requesting funds to train and arm as many as 15,000—by Central American standards, a full-size standing army. According to press reports of the nominally "covert" war, day-to-day direction of the Honduran-based "contra" forces is given by U.S. operatives in Honduras.

The "contras" have not been greeted by the popular support that the Reagan Administration predicted they would receive. Instead, Nicaraguan support for the revolution has become more determined in the face of their attacks, and they have been unable to establish bases inside the country or hold any areas with a civilian population. In response they have escalated the scale of their attacks to an unprecedented level. In the past two months, "contra" air and naval forces attacked Managua's airport and the oil storage facilities at Nicaragua's two Pacific Coast ports, forcing the evacuation of 20,000 people from the town of Corinto as the oil tanks burst into flames. A New York Times investigation traced the plane used in the airport attack to a Virginia-based airline run by the former top officer of a C.I.A.-owned airline, and high-level Reagan Administration officials told The New York Times that the C.I.A. had "recommended and helped plan the recent rebel attacks" against the targets inside Nicaragua.

The Reagan Administration has requested another $50 million for operations against Nicaragua in 1984. While the House of Representatives voted against the continued covert war, it is unlikely that the Senate will veto the plan as well. The next year may be crucial in determining the course of U.S. involvement in Central America, and in determining the lives and futures of millions of Central Americans.

NICARAGUA 4

ISRAELI ARMS
by PAUL GLICKMAN

Israel has been selling arms to Central American dictators since the 1970's. Between 1972-80, about 80% of El Salvador's arms were bought from Israel; from 1977-81, the Begin government provided virtually 100% of Guatemala's weaponry; and in the final year of Anastasio Somoza's rule in Nicaragua, 98% of his arms came from Israel.

In the mid-70's, Israeli advisers were attached to El Salvador's secret police, ANSESAL. The Stockholm International Peace Research Institute estimates that El Salvador's air force includes 18 Dassault Fighters, 17 Arava Transport planes and six Fouga Magister Trainers. As in Somoza's Nicaragua, the Uzi submachine gun and the Galil assault rifle are standard issue for Salvadoran soldiers. In addition, the 1978 Israeli advisers assisted the Salvadoran military in installing a computer system in San Salvador.

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SHMATE #7
In Guatemala, another Israeli-installed computer is used by the military for urban surveillance, while Israeli advisers help conduct the “Beans and Bullets” relocation and rural pacification program. Many Guatemalans, including military officers, have won scholarships to study “agricultural development” in Israel.

After then-Defense Minister Ariel Sharon visited Honduras in December, 1982, a high-ranking Honduran officer confirmed that his country had reached an agreement with Sharon under which Israel would provide military hardware (including fighter planes) and training. In 1981, British and U.S. newspapers reported that Israeli military personnel—probably pilot trainers—were at a Honduran base.

In October, 1982, Israel announced plans to supply and train a Costa Rican “police force.” Arnoldo Ramos, U.S. representative of El Salvador’s Democratic Revolutionary Front, says 100 Costa Ricans went to Israel for training. Costa Rica is the only Central American nation without an army.

Israel has also helped the CIA-directed “contras” fighting to overthrow Nicaragua’s Sandinista government. The London Sunday Times reported this summer that Israel was sending military advisers to Eden Pastora’s anti-Sandinista ARDE forces, which are based in Costa Rica. And at the request of the U.S., Israel has sent arms it captured from the PLO in Lebanon to the “contra” forces based in Honduras.

Israel’s reasons for being involved in Central America are political and economic. The arms industry has become a key component of the economy; more importantly, however, Israel is assisting U.S. policy in the region. In 1981 cabinet minister Ya’acov Meridor shed light on Israel’s role in Central America when he told U.S. officials: “Do not compete against us in the Caribbean or in any other country where you can’t operate in the open. Give us the opportunity to do this and trust us with sales of ammunition and military hardware. Let Israel act as your agent.”
CHUTZPAH

A number of readers have written in to inquire about the status of CHUTZPAH. CHUTZPAH was a newspaper put out by the organization of the same name in Chicago. In addition to its other work, the group published 18 issues of the paper from 1972-1981. For a decade it served as the only New Leftist Jewish voice. As the prototype for those who have succeeded it, Chutzpah established the model for an out-front Jewish political organization with explicitly anti-imperialist, anti-racist, feminist politics. In addition to putting out the newspaper, they worked actively in coalitions around issues of political relevance, often in a capacity of leadership. They struggled to make the left cognizant of the needs and rights of Jews, while working within the Jewish community against an increasing rightward drift. The organization has contemplated a comprehensive self-analysis. Such probably will not be forthcoming. The comments below are by Myron Perlman, one of the founding members of the Chutzpah Organization.

What didn’t happen to Chutzpah? We did not all become successful doctors and lawyers. We did not stop doing politics. We did not angrily split apart into many factions. Repression did not end up by having us jailed, depressed, or burnt out.

What did happen? Well, not surprisingly, it depends on whom you talk to. One theory is that we are in a period of hibernation, temporarily inactive. Another theory is that when we began, there was a need for an anti-imperialist, pro-Jewish, feminist, etc. group. Now that there are a number of groups on the Jewish left engaged in specific tasks, one all-encompassing group is not necessary.

What else happened? Many, many children were born. Life changes took place, new things to put energy into. Are people still politically active? Yes! Some work in Friends of Peace Now and some in New Jewish Agenda. Many were involved in a Jewish support group for Harold Washington’s mayoral campaign.

We’re still friends and we still talk. At times we work together and some of us live together. It’s my belief that things will evolve for us, that in the next decade we will be together again in many groups and contexts. I am convinced that one day Chutzpah will produce an offspring, a stronger and larger organization than we can possibly imagine today. Myron Perlman

PAPER CUTTING

by GERRE GOODMAN

As a Jewish art form, papercutting dates back to the 14th century when it was used to decorate ketubot, megillot, and mizrachim. Designs range from complex geometric and floral patterns to animals, both real and imaginary. They often include symbolism from Jewish scripture and stories. Papercuts can be a simply symmetrical design of one color mounted on another color or a complex blending of many layers and colors. Calligraphy is often used to enhance a papercut, either as part of the cut or part of the background.

Considered a dying art for many years after the Holocaust, Jewish papercutting is currently enjoying a resurgence in popularity. The introduction of laser art has added a new dimension to the craft, although hand done papercuts (such as SHMATE’s cover and centerfold), as well as cards, posters, and silk-screen reproductions of hand-cut designs, still predominate.

Though papercutting requires imagination, patience, and a steady hand, it is an art form anyone can learn. Some people use scissors, but I prefer an X-acto knife with a No. 11 blade. I use a variety of papers, choosing those which have interesting textures and some degree of color-fastness. Though all papers are marketed as “fadeless” or “fadeproof”, no papercut should ever be displayed in direct sunlight.
הלשון הפנימי וה_outer

i have set before you life and therefore

Deuteronomy 30:19
choose life

death, the blessing and the curse
Welcome to SHMATE #7. With this issue we begin Volume II of the magazine. There have been those who said it couldn’t be done, those who said it shouldn’t be done, and those who hoped it wouldn’t be done. And then there are you folks, SHMATE’s readers, for whom it is being done! To each of you, my personal thanks.

It is clear that there is a great need for an independent, progressive, Jewish magazine, a magazine with the ability, as well as the desire, to tackle the difficult issues facing us today. The response to SHMATE has demonstrated that there is substantial support for our effort to meet that need. This magazine’s attempt to deal with issues by integrating culture with politics has struck a responsive chord. Therefore, it is now my responsibility to develop a framework for the magazine’s growth and maturation.

To grow, SHMATE must have a staff. The limits of one person publishing/editing/promoting/producing/distributing etc. have been reached. To provide for this SHMATE needs a publisher, someone to handle all the non-editorial functions. Essentially this entails assuming the responsibility for charting the magazine’s financial development. This requires a person with both ability and a strong belief in the need for the type of periodical which SHMATE can become, a periodical with the intelligence to think perceptively, the soul to think compassionately, and the passion to inspire.

Any SHMATE reader who is interested in, or knows of one who might be interested in discussing the challenge and satisfaction of publishing this magazine, should write as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, life goes on. Subscriptions arrive slowly because there is neither the time nor the money to promote SHMATE. Until a new publisher is found, the magazine must depend on its readers to promote it to friends, family, libraries, and organizations. Subscriptions make appropriate gifts for graduation, birthdays, Bar/Bat Mitzvahs, Chanukah, and most special occasions. Ads honoring a person or commemorating an event are a way to help the magazine while honoring those you respect. For you or your organization, SHMATE is available at a 40% discount for 10 or more copies (e.g. 10 copies for $15, current or back issues, except #1). Think of SHMATE as a place to advertise what you write, make, or do. Beginning with the next issue, we will publish the names of those who make a donation.

UNLESS YOU REQUEST THAT YOUR DONATION BE ANONYMOUS. The present issue received two $10 donations. Those of you whose subscriptions expire with Issue #8 will save a lot of paperpushing at this end if you renew now. The last number on your address label is the last issue of your subscription.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN SCHOOL TODAY, DEAR?...

WELL, WE WERE ALL FINGERPRINTED, THEN OUR PHOTOS WERE TAKEN FOR I.D. CARDS, THEN WE HAD TO REPORT ON HOW YOU AND DADDY VOTED... OH, WE SPENT A FEW MINUTES TALKING ON "FREEDOM IN AMERICA".

One last request. If you’re with a child and someone comes up and asks him or her, “What would you like for Christmas?”, show the child you are proud of being Jewish. Copping out, defensiveness, and “Jewish Christmas” do not produce secure, strong children.

A Happy Chanukah to all. See you around Purim.
NEW YORK STREET GAMES

by STEVE FANKUCHEN

Most SHMATE readers identify, to one degree or another, with some concept of universalism, of an international community of all peoples. However, like folks everywhere, there is a bit of a gap between our theory and our practice. Witness the mutual contempt and condescension with which residents of New York and California view each other. For us the Hatfields and McCoys are remnants of semi-feudal Americana. Yet, put a New Yorker and a Californian in the same room and . . . Now, myself, I’m not partial. After all, I’ve lived in the Bar Area fourteen years. I’ll admit the alfalfa sprouts on a bagel are a bit hard to take. And if I had to choose between a hydrant or a hot tub in the summer it would be no choice. But, what can you expect—there isn’t any summer out here. (Or fall, winter, or spring for that matter. Unless fruit trees blooming in January and February can be called spring!)

It is fortunate that as editor of this magazine I find it so easy not to take sides. After all, any sanely emotional person would rather stand in front of a hydrant with an egg cream in hand than boil like a lobster in a hot tub sucking up Perrier. My son used to think that snow was something I’d invented along with the Wizard of Oz. Fortunately California is about to remedy that particular problem. I’ve heard that Walt Disney Studios will open up Weatherland out here. There will be a tree that loses its leaves every day (twice a day on weekends and holidays). For 25¢ kids get 5 minutes of time to rake them into a pile. There will be a snow machine and for 50¢ a throw, people will get to make snowballs. For another 50¢ you can rent leggings to put on over your burmudas. Of course everyone will have to sign a waiver of liability in case they get hit by a snowball. Oh, yes. Children under twelve will only be allowed if accompanied by a parent or legal guardian.

Which gets me to the New York Street Games, held in San Francisco each of the past five years on a playground guaranteed not to have a single blade of grass. The scene is one of true liberation, where hundreds of people suddenly throw off the bonds of assimilation. Having freed themselves from the Sisyphus-like effort to “pass”, they return to their spiritual roots, playing punchball, stickball, potsie, hit-the-penny, handball, boxball, skully, redlight-greenlight, giant steps, flipping cards, and mah-jongg. There are contests to get the ball out of the sewer with a coat hangar and to fold a New York Times with one hand while straphanging on a rush hour subway.

Now, the real purpose of the New York Street Games is to get to the root of Coastal Chauvinism, ignorance. Therefore the Games publishes a series of scholarly monographs to dispel myths and educate all concerned. As part of my commitment to break down barriers among people, printed below you will find two of those works: a New York-San Francisco bi-lingual dictionary and a College Bored aptitude test to measure one’s potential success as an intercoastal commuter.

SHMATE #7
1. What was Freedomland?
a/ West Berlin in the '60's
b/ A Stephen Foster spiritual
c/ An amusement park in the Bronx

2. What is on that site today?
a/ The only part of the Bronx still standing.
b/ Loehmann's
 c/ Co-op City

3. What is a sliding pond?
a/ a body of water on the San Andreas Fault
b/ frozen water used for Eskimo children's games
c/ children's play equipment

4. What does “taking a bungalow” mean?
a/ ripping off a Bungalow Bar man
b/ breaking into a country cabin
c/ renting a country place

5. Who was Robert Moses?
a/ He lead the Israelites out of Egypt.
b/ The real name of opera star Robert Merrill
c/ a New York public administrator

6. What's a Castro convertible?
a/ a Cuban trolley car
b/ a San Francisco bi-sexual
c/ a sofa bed

7. What are “singles”? 
a/ unmarried people who habituate First Avenue
b/ the overflow crowd at Perry's on weekend nights.
c/ dollar bills

8. Was “Klein's 'On the Square'”
a/ a really honest Jewish butcher?
b/ a thrifty department store catering to yelling ladies?
c/ a haven for the non-hip?
d/ all of the above?

9. Who was Abe Beame?
a/ a short building contractor
b/ at least two of the seven dwarfs
c/ the shortest Mayor in New York history
d/ a fictional small person

10. The term “stoop ball” really means:
a/ a game played outside city apartments using a Spalding
b/ a yearly dance given by the Mayor for people with chronic back problems
c/ something dirty you won't see printed in this family “PG” trivia test
d/ none of the above (or all)

11. Bess Meyerson is best remembered for:
a/ her pot roast
b/ the book, "My Teeth and Me: A Personal Memoir"
c/ the title, "a former 'Miss America"
d/ snoods

12. Arnold Constable is known to be:
a/ chief of police under John Lindsay
b/ a traitor during the Revolutionary War
c/ a Fifth Avenue department store
d/ a famous British painter

13. Who is Red Barber?
a/ a character in an opera by Mozart
b/ a hair cutter for the Communist Party
c/ a tyrannical religious leader
d/ the Mel Allen of the Brooklyn Dodgers

14. What was Lewisohn Stadium?
a/ Minnie Guggenheim's summer hangout
b/ a seating arrangement that sent proctologist's children to Europe
c/ a site on the La Guardia flight path
d/ a spot for adolescent fertility rites
e/ all of the above
A woman drags a shopping cart up the 181st Street hill, looking furtively over her shoulder. She is sixty-five, wears a kerchief, the hem of her coat is undone in the back. Another woman appears with a cart. After a hurried conversation a parcel is transferred from the first cart to the second.

This is not a dope drop. The first woman is my mother who, after evading my father’s questions with the excuse that she is going shopping, has secretly entrusted ten pounds of phyllo dough to her friend who will store it *sub rosa* in her refrigerator. My father does not like Mother to engage in extra-marital culinary activities. With the same subterfuge she might employ to meet a lover, she sneaks out to bake delicacies for the organization of which she is president. Because she has interests outside the home my retired father calls her a part-time wife. “Why don’t you throw me out like a dog?” he says whenever she pleads an important committee meeting.

A Tigress to her board members, my mother is too timid to go to a box office and buy theater tickets; though she has arranged gala functions for hundreds of people at the best hotels, she cannot bring herself to enter a public library for fear that she will not know how to ask for a library card.

However, within the confines of the synagogue where her organization has its office, she is — as Isabella was Queen of all the Americas — queen of all Sephardic womanhood.

She is forced to work with a vice-president who lacks authenticity. A descendant of Revolutionary War generals, the woman is made to feel like an outcast. She was elected because her name is embroidered on seat cushions and inscribed on the Declaration of Independence. Mother gives her useful work to do, stuffing envelopes. What can she know of Sephardic culture, a woman who cooks with safflower oil?

The event for which Mother is preparing is a fund-raising luncheon to be held in the synagogue community room. The entertainment will consist of a Sephardic sing-along and a short lecture with slides on *Our Unique Heritage*, designed to wring some money out of our brethren, particularly the Sephardim from Salonika, many of whom are regarded as moguls of the garment business. Their wives cook with olive oil and have been discouraged from aiding in the kitchen by the faction from Izmir.

This is an orthodox synagogue, though half the members travel on the Sabbath to attend services. Mother cooks with a grain of salt and, in her fantasy, with a little unconsecrated cheese, which she sprinkles onto the spinach pastries when no one is looking. Hawkeyed, the rabbi’s wife watches to see that all is kosher. She comes from Rhodes where (Mother says) they speak an inferior Ladino, the now archaic Spanish we carried with us after the Expulsion.

Long before the luncheon takes place I know I will be approached to attend. Except for me, daughters always attend their mothers’ functions, however dull. For years I was successful in avoiding them, but this time it will be difficult. It is Mother’s show and she will receive a plaque.

Knowing she will never ask me outright, I wait. Campaigning starts early.

Invited for lunch at my apartment one Saturday two months before the event, she arrives bearing her usual food parcel. She has never come to my house and eaten my food. Perhaps some bread and coffee, but in between she is her own caterer. She wants to spare me the trouble.

“Umm, isn’t this good,” she says, licking her fingers. It could be sawdust for the effort it takes me to swallow.

She has brought a new dress to show me. Do I think it suitable for the luncheon?


The luncheon. She expects two hundred people. There is already a waiting list. They have hired Aryeh the accordionist and his international band. Did I know they made a recording recently?

“A lot of people make recordings.”

“You and I could make one. You have such a lovely voice. I know so many songs. Soon our music will die out if young people like you don’t preserve it.”

To parricide and fratricide we now add culturicide, with myself the first offender.

I crumple up her tinfoil wrappings and stuff them into the trash can which is overfull.

“Relax,” Mother says, “I’ll clean up, you rest.”

This is a woman who always insists upon carrying the fifty-pound grocery load on the grounds that I look tired.

Now she is hovering over my new electric typewriter. “Does it give you shocks?” she asks, standing back a respectful foot and a half.

“Sometimes.” All those xxxx’d-out lines.

Watching her reach out to touch the keys I can’t help remembering the time I demonstrated to her the instant cash

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apparatus found at many banks, the kind where you insert your special bank card, push a few buttons and receive cash.

We were short of money one day while shopping on Fifth Avenue. I found a bank and she watched me set the process in motion. When the computer screen said, Hello, is there anything I can do? she shrieked with wonder. When it asked if I wished to proceed in English or Spanish, she clutched her throat and said, Que maravilla! Reading over my shoulder she said that the computer was more polite than the bank tellers she dealt with. I invited her to take the money from the open cylinder, but to be quick about it at the risk of having her hand clamped in its turning maw.

"Do you know," she said when the transaction was completed, "an ignorant person might think there was a devil in there. I mean someone superstitious." Then she uttered an imprecation in Arabic to the effect that the evil eye should keep its distance from us and our loved ones.

Her campaign to get me to the luncheon is spread over several weeks. "Did I tell you that Professor Asher Halifa will be addressing us?" I had once made the error of saying that I had read an article of his in Commentary.

Another time: "You have a beautiful print dress. You don't wear it enough." Translation: Wear it to the luncheon." I say nothing.

And finally: "I have a ticket reserved for you. It's a nice table, all young people."

I consult my calendar, playing for time. The date is filled.

"But Mother, I'm seeing a matinee that Sunday."

"Do you have to go?"

"I don't have to go, I want——"

"No problem then. They'll exchange the ticket. You have plenty of time."

Trying to salvage some pride I offer to pay my way to the luncheon, but she won't allow it. It's for a good cause.

"Relax," she says. It is her battle cry.

The day before the luncheon takes place, she calls me. Do I have a tape recorder?

"I have a cassette, but the sound is not very good."

"You know we have Aryeh and his accordion. If you feel like taping the music——"

"Mother," I say, "I will not feel like taping. If you want me to, just say so and I'll be glad to do it. I'll go and buy some tape——"

"Why should you, all that bother. It's too complicated."

"It's not complicated. If you want it, I'll do it. Really, Mom."

"No, no, forget about it. It's all right."

It's not all right. I should have volunteered of course.

Another black mark against this unnatural daughter.

At the luncheon I am embraced by people who knew me when I was a little girl, handsome men and beautiful women with names like Diamante, Joya, Fortunée. "Will you sing for us?" "You have such a lovely voice." As a teenager I sang here a few times, accompanying myself with primitive guitar chords. I sang, with my American accent, songs that brought tears to their eyes. It was a phase, folksing. I haven't been in this building for years.

Mother makes a welcoming speech thanking her vice-president and conveying regrets from the distinguished professor Asher Halifa who was to have addressed us today. The main drawing card as far as I was concerned. No wonder she was afraid to tell me.

Mother's speech is concise and charming. She worries needlessly about her English. My father is watching her as though he has just fallen in love with her. They met forty years ago after a fortune teller predicted that a dark stranger from Turkey would carry her off from Alexandria. She was twenty-three then, teaching French in an Arabic school, working to support her family while her brothers were at the university. Her father, a dapper gentleman who wore spats and a boutonniere, was a gambler. My grandmother had learned to read, rare for a woman in those days in that country. Even now, my mother talks wistfully about taking college courses, but is afraid people will laugh at her. She has always been interested in literature and can recite entire scenes from Racine and Corneille. She used to do it often—at home, in supermarkets and especially in front of my friends. If she weren't worried about my father catching her, she would watch the advanced Italian course given at seven in the morning on television.

The rabbi makes a speech. In spite of his degrees and erudition, his public relations manner and his Sephardic wife, he is barely tolerated as a man of the somewhat worn cloth. An Ashkenazi presiding over a Sephardic congregation. He doesn't need to tell us how unique we are, as he invites us to go from strength to strength.

Mother is everywhere as people begin to eat. I invite her to sit, but she says she doesn't have to eat. Aryeh is playing tunes from a popular Yiddish-American musical on his accordion and Mother is incensed. She whispers something to him and he switches in mid-chord to a Greek song. Five women, all in their sixties, walk up to the stage and begin to dance. There is a soupcon of belly dance movements, but not enough to cause embarrassment. Though the Greek song is about a whore, the rabbi is beaming. One of the women puts a coin on her forehead and throws her head back, arching her whole body. The others make a circle around her. The

continued next page
rest of the audience is clapping in time. A man leaps onto the stage—he must be at least seventy-two—and whips out a handkerchief. The woman with the coin takes hold of a corner of the handkerchief, the man is down on one knee. The music becomes faster and faster and at the last chord, Mother takes the microphone and announces that dessert is being served.

Now it is time for the plaque. The vice-president, in perfect Vassar English, thanks the lady who has given so much of herself. Mother is blowing her nose. I notice a run in her stocking; one shoe has been slipped off. I know she would like nothing better than to loosen her girdle.

The ovation forces Mother back up to the mike. No more speeches she promises and suggests we get on with the sing-along. She wants only to say how happy she is that her daughter could be here today to honor her, and they all know how much joy her daughter used to give them with her beautiful voice but “she said, ‘Mother, please don’t ask me to sing’ and so I won’t ask her—”

Pandemonium—my name shouted from every corner of the room, spoons tinkling against the demitasses. The accordion starts up, sounding like the bark of a mad dog. Mother smiles, shrugs—it is out of her hands—

People push me out of my seat and up to the stage. “Only if you sing with me,” I say, trying not to cry out. They have song sheets, but they don’t need them. The accordion helps, Mother helps, I sing. I’ll get them, I’ll get her, they’ll be eating out of the palm of my hand. People put down their cups, their baklava, lean back, sigh, sing with me in Ladino, songs about their countries, the almond tree, the sea that brings no letters, the daughters in exile, the smoldering mountains... Why have I waited so long to do this? Looking at her, my mother, I understand for the first time what it is to have a “maternal language.” I feel that I am singing in tongues, astonishing myself with those archaic syllables, these Moorish melodies. I could swear I smell jasmine blossoms.

“Isn’t she grand?” Mother says to the audience at last. While she is making her financial report, I escape to the ladies room and wash my shaking hands with the kosher soap.

I return to hear Aryeh play a flourish and the start of a lively Arabic song. The curtain, which was drawn across the stage, now parts, revealing my mother transformed into a *houri*, a harem woman clad in gold embroidered silk pantaloons, a silk blouse and vest, pointed velvet slippers with coins jingling at their tips, a silk kerchief at her hair with a fringe of coins over her forehead, finger cymbals in her hands. I stand up. I have never seen this outfit. Where does she keep it? Why did she never show it to me? It must be at least a hundred and fifty years old. It belongs in the Metropolitan Museum or on me. She shakes her shoulders and starts to sing in Arabic and people go mad with delight. She leans into the microphone, still shaking her shoulders in rhythm. “Sing, everyone... You like it?” Roars, whistles, pounding on the tables, “It’s to make up for my lack of voice. We want to give you your money’s worth...”

A woman with a face like a gnarled pomegranate stretches out her hands to my mother, then makes her way to me and kisses me on both cheeks as though to confer upon me the Legion d’Honneur which I deserve today.

“The truth,” Mother says on the phone later that night. “From you I want the truth.”

“Really, you were great.”

“Honest?” She giggles.

“Would I lie?”

“Not you. You always speak your mind. You are direct, like me.”

I shuffle papers around on my desk while she talks. I had just been contemplating writing her an irate and formal note about her treachery to me at the microphone. Instead I ask if she was nervous. To get up on stage, all those people. She has to confess to a little “reenforcement.” Before leaving home, without my father seeing, she poured a thimbleful! of scotch into an empty aspirin bottle.

I’m shocked. A nip before lunch? She should have offered me some. I catapult a paper clip across the room. She continues to question me—about the food, the seating arrangements, the color of the napkins...

What is this sheet of paper on my desk with words typed on it? I did not type them. Now I remember my mother hanging around the typewriter, gingerly touching the keys.

The words on the paper are: “Amerique. America. Maman I am here.”
JEWISH ART

by GERRE GOODMAN

Do you remember when you were a child and received your first lessons about the Ten Commandments? Some of them were easy to understand, others more mysterious. Teachers usually dismissed the second commandment, the one about graven images, with vague comments about worshipping idols. It is this commandment and its interpretation by generations of Jewish authorities that lend credence to the stereotype that says we Jews aren't such great visual artists. We do okay in music and literature, but the visual arts belong to the other folks.

In an attempt to stem the tide of paganism surrounding them, early priestly and rabbinical authorities leaned towards strict interpretation of the second commandment and forbade statues, paintings, or other forms of representational art. There are numerous stories of Jews demanding the removal of statues of various governors, emperors, and deities from their territories. Since Judea was an occupied state much of the time, these efforts met with varying degrees of success. The Maccabean wars with the Syrians, from which we draw the minor holiday of Chanukah, had to do in part with the Jews' reluctance to "bow down" to idols.

As is often the case, the popular literature focusses on only one aspect of the question and the many examples of Jews making and living with representational art are left to those pursuing more obscure sources. Even in the strictest times the priests, and later the rabbis, were not of one mind on the interpretation of the second commandment. Since consistency in interpretation has never been a Jewish trait (... and Shammai says, and Hillel says, and B'ruriah says, and Rambam says ... and so on), it should come as no surprise that this commandment raised as many questions as the others. The prohibition against portraying the human form certainly did not keep Jewish artisans from expressing their creative spirit. There is a tradition in Judaism of creating beautiful and impressive ritual objects for use at home and in the community. It may be that this tradition helped to mitigate some of the harshness surrounding the stricter interpretations of the second commandment that have characterized certain periods in Jewish history. Certainly Jewish artisans have contributed their share to the world's collections of art.

In considering the topic of Jewish art, it is well to remember that this concept has more than one interpretation. Jewish art can be art done by Jews for everybody or only for other Jews. It can be art that is Jewish in content, done either by Jews or non-Jews. It can be general in nature or specific to the Jewish tradition, history, or condition. It can be created for the synagogue, the home, or the marketplace. In fact, art is and has been all of the above.

Over the centuries art has been defined and redefined, mostly by those in power. At different times the government, the church, and the academic establishment have all held the deciding vote on what constitutes art and how it should be supported. Jewish artists have been outside the mainstream arts community for much of history. At times, their work has been ignored by those in power and, at other times, sought after. Even in times of strict interpretation of the second commandment, Jewish craftsmen worked for the larger community. Philo (20 BCE-40CE) mentions Jewish guilds of goldsmiths, silversmiths, coppersmiths, and weavers in Alexandria. There are similar references to Jewish craft and its excellence in many early writings. The Jews of the Diaspora were equally artistic. Kanof (Jewish Ceremonial Art, Harry Abrams, Inc., N.Y. pg. 29, 30) mentions skilled Jewish jewellers and metalsmiths in particular as being involved in the manufacture of items for the wealthy members of medieval society. Jewish goldsmiths were so industrious that in the early 1400's, the Catholic Church ultimately found it necessary to forbid Jews to make Christian ceremonial objects.

Despite the tremendous religious persecution of the middle ages, Jews continued to involve themselves in the arts, often forming guilds of Jewish craftsmen and providing their services to the broader community as well as their own.

In many European Jewish communities, the synagogue itself became the repository of the arts. The wooden synagogues of eastern Europe, with their elaborate architecture and intricate designs, bear witness to the tremendous creative abilities of the craftsmen of the era. Jewish ritual objects include things made of cloth, metal, stone, wood, paper, porcelain, pottery, and glass. This broad spectrum of media insured a wide variety of expression for the Jewish craftsman. The desire to sanctify the ritual through the use of beautiful objects spurred the members of the Jewish artistic community to create work of high quality.

Because Jewish art developed outside the mainstream, it developed forms of its own. There was some parallel movement, notably in the areas of medieval church art and later the Baroque and Romantic periods, but even this small...
In an attempt to stem the tide of paganism... early authorities... forbade representational art.

As the Renaissance progressed, applied art fell from favor. Gradually, the concept of “true art” began to take over. Craftspersons began to be less respected as artists. The advent of the industrial revolution diminished the need for handcrafted articles and provided little incentive for craftspersons to create the kind of work that had been produced prior to mass production. In earlier times all objects were handcrafted and the line between art and craft was less easily defined. Even the poorest person might have one or two finely crafted ritual pieces in the home. Today it is not unusual for people to have no such articles.

The art of hand-lettering has also suffered from mechanization. While the printing press insured a more literate population, it did nothing to insure the survival of the scribe. It has been the job of the artisans themselves, those who cannot live without the daily experience of creating, to translate the traditional crafts into a modern medium acceptable in this technological, throw-away society. In one sense, Jewish artisans have been less affected by the industrial revolution than others. There continues to be a demand for handcrafted and handwritten ritual objects in the Jewish community.

The advent of non-representational art removed the last vestige of graven imagery and allowed a whole generation of Jewish painters and sculptors to take their place in the mainstream arts community. Since the Holocaust and the formation of the state of Israel, there has been a renaissance in Jewish art. In an effort to preserve what is left of earlier work, Jewish museums have sprung up all over the world. The revival of Hebrew as a spoken language has spurred a new interest in the traditional calligraphic arts as well as introducing a whole range of new forms. There are calligrapher-artists producing ketubot (Jewish wedding documents), haggadot, and meglilot equal to anything produced in the middle ages, such as the Haggadah being created by David Moss, a Bay Area calligrapher, papercutter, and artisan who has recently made aliyot to Israel.

Our factors have contributed to the blossoming of Jewish arts in recent times. The first is the realization that the applied arts can be beautiful. Second is the tremendous rise in synagogue construction, with its attendant need for ritual objects. Third, there is the trend towards non-representational art. And, finally, there has been a shift in the arts community itself from seeing art as universal to allowing a more personal interpretation (i.e. for Jews, a Jewish interpretation) of the world. This last factor has meant that Jewish artists have felt more conscious of their heritage and have allowed their own understanding of their Jewishness to reflect itself in their work. It has also meant that more and more of the ritual objects produced for home and synagogue have been made by Jewish artisans, rather than mass-produced by large corporations whose main concern is selling large numbers of hanukiot to Sisterhood gift shops.

Despite the increase in beautiful and functional pieces made by Jewish craftspersons, very few are able to make a living solely through their craft. This is due in part to an economy that has consistently promoted manufactured goods at the expense of hand-crafted items and partly to the ongoing controversy in society over what actually constitutes art. In recent years a remarkable range of items claiming to be art has been placed before a largely artistically uneducated public. There has been a very efficient brainwashing of the general populace regarding art. Art is what you see in museums and galleries, especially in Europe and New York. Art is for people with money. Everyone else gets to buy reproductions of a few “masterpieces”. Original art does not belong in the home, especially in homes with children. (Imagine, chocolate stains on a Picasso!) The best art (or at least the most important) is done by artists that are already dead. Good art is never available locally, unless you happen to live in Europe or New York. Art is not for the masses.

The advent of non-representational art [has] allowed a whole generation of Jewish [artists]... to take place in the mainstream.

These attitudes have affected the Jewish community along with everyone else. When speculation and artificially created needs determined by the “Better Homes and Gardens” school of thought dictate which art is acceptable and which is not, the living artist is most likely to come out on the short end economically. There are many very fine Jewish artists who must supplement their income by doing other things. This is unfortunate for both the artist, who must take time from his/her work to earn enough to survive, and for the consumer, who is not given the opportunity to be exposed to the higher qualities of work that result from artists who are able to devote the majority of their time to art. Free-lancing is a risky business, and few artists are able to make it on their own for long enough to produce work of the quality found in earlier eras.
It is difficult for a single person to function as a free-lance artist in this society without outside support. The artists have all the problems faced by any small businessperson as well as the need to be extremely self-motivated in producing a product. Finding or creating a market for one’s work is extremely challenging, and for the Jewish artist involved in creating ritual art, it is extremely discouraging to see how many homes and synagogues have succumbed to the lure of contemporary Jewish shlock. (CJS is the mass produced stuff that looks very classy in the gift shop, usually has “Made in Israel” somewhere on it, and inevitably ends up having to be dusted.) Many people have purchased CJS instead of original, handcrafted work because they believe that it is less expensive. This is by no means always the case. Very often there are fine handcrafted ritual objects available locally at quite reasonable prices. Why buy a lucite seder plate when you can own a hand-made one for roughly the same price? It is true that some people like lucite. There are times when manufactured goods are convenient and necessary, and even a blessing, but they seem dead, removed from the source of life that imbues hand crafted things with their special spirit. There is a sense of community that develops when people use ritual objects made by the artisans in their communities for their celebrations. The artisans become known as real people and not some corporate entity whose primary contact with the community is the UPS delivery person and a signature on an invoice. The community economy benefits as well, when local artists are supported from within. Good local support assures that good artists will be more likely to stay in the area, using their skills to enrich the lives of everyone involved. Artists who are not struggling to survive produce more and better work. They can become support for younger and less experienced artists instead of seeing such people as competitors in a limited marketplace.

**Being a Jewish artist dealing in mostly Jewish art forms is, in itself, political.**

People’s tastes have been educated by a society that values lucite more than hand-thrown pottery and full-color reproductions of a few select masterpieces over original work by living local artists. Some people will always prefer manufactured goods to handmade ones, and that’s their option. It is possible that they are impoverishing themselves spiritually and emotionally by making that choice.

Local support for artists may enhance the politics of a community as well as its spiritual and religious life. In speaking of political art, or art that makes a political statement, this does not mean art that is government-supported or defined. In countries where the government determines what is permissible, creativity suffers and artists struggle in much the same way that they must when permissible or desireable art is defined by economic interests.

Political art is an expression of what the artist feels and believes. It can carry a strong message as well as being visually captivating. Picasso’s *Guernica* is a prime example of this kind of art. Judy Chicago’s *Dinner Party* is another. Artists often use their art to support the political ideas they espouse. In the centerfold of this issue of *SHMATE*, the image of the Tree of Life was juxtaposed with a mushroom cloud above a quote from Deuteronomy (“Therefore, choose life.”) to create an anti-nuclear poster. Another poster portraying the Tree of Life surrounded by medicinal herbs was created as a fundraiser for the Berkeley Women’s Health Collective. Each time one of the posters is sold, a part of the profit goes to support the organizations that do that kind of political work. Another artist takes her best designs and silkscreens T-shirts, saying that for people to wear art is in itself a political statement. Other artists donate their work as raffle prizes or auction items to organizations whose work they support.

**Being a Jewish artist dealing in mostly Jewish art forms is, in itself, political.**

Being a Jewish artist dealing in mostly Jewish art forms is, in itself, political. By doing art in a Jewish context, Jewish artists make a statement to the world about who they are and how proud and delighted they are to be expressing their Jewishness through art. Displaying Jewish-made work in the home helps other people to feel good about their Jewishness as well. This includes all kinds of Jewish art, not just ritual objects.

There are many Jewish artists in the Bay Area. They have begun to develop the vision outlined earlier in this article of a supportive community for and of artists. These people have formed an organization called JACOB, Jewish Arts Community of the Bay. A subsection of JACOB is called Omanim, which means “artist” in Hebrew. This is a visual artists’ group that includes painters, sculptors, potters, papercutters, calligraphers, jewellers, printmakers, and fabric artisans. They get together periodically to socialize, critique one another’s work, share ideas and information, and to support one another as artists. Many Omanim members are superb and make at least a part of their living from their work. There is a slide registry and people who are willing to do slide presentations on local Jewish art for schools, synagogues, and luncheons. If reading this article has whetted your interest in Jewish art and living Jewish artists, if you need a ritual object for yourself or for a gift, consider a hand-crafted artifact. Not only will you be helping a struggling free-lance artists to pay the rent, you will be enriching your own life and the lives of the people around you.
As a reviewer whose preferences are memoir, diary, and topics relating to feminism and Judaism, Alice Bloch’s book, *Lifetime Guarantee: A Journey Through Loss and Survival* (Persephone Press), caught my eye in more than one way.

Bloch’s chronicle is the story of the impending death of her younger sister, Barbara, who dies from leukemia at the age of 20. It is also the story of the loss of both her parents, an aunt, her coming out as a lesbian, and a critique of American culture.

Bloch’s entries are interspersed with Barbara’s poems and letters. Alice had hoped to finish the work in collaboration with her sister, but Barbara didn’t live long enough. Instead Alice tells her tale as a survivor with simplicity and honesty. The entries are written over an 8-year period. As they progress, they sometimes break into exquisite poetry as in “Yahrzeit” written in 1978. They also recall early childhood memories, one of a car accident, “caused by Baby Barbara”, exposing the helplessness and dependence female children were taught in the 50’s.

Alice’s love and care for her sister, which had begun at an early age with their mother’s death, take on an even greater meaning and attachment when Barbara becomes ill. She is comfortable in the mother-role, wants to nourish her sister. Yet she longs to leave the confines of her middle-class Ohio home and live with her lover in California. Her feelings of guilt and self-blame for Barbara’s illness are universal.

Barbara never blamed me for being older and more powerful, for soaking up her admiration and never quite returning it in equal measure. She never blamed me for setting the standards for Bloch family achievement at the small public school we all attended. She never blamed me for sometimes keeping my mouth shut to get by, for sometimes lying when it seemed necessary. She never blamed me. I do. I blame myself.

The sisters spent a year together in Jerusalem where they tripped each other up to step aside and let the other have the man in their lives at that time. Barbara kept dragging Alice off to see how stubborn stones finally yielded the right colors for mosaics. She surrounded her more reticent sister with resilience, determination to find her own path, and the joy of living. After her death, Alice had to learn to accept help, to cry or talk with a friend, to allow herself to be comforted.

Of the many poignant, subtle and unspoken entries on family members and beliefs of the time, one entry particularly rang home:

Everyone was supposed to have a father and a mother, and no one was supposed to be an only child. In the whole fifth grade, one girl’s parents were divorced, one boy was an only child, and one girl’s mother had died. That was me.... The huge, disproportionate, awkward, ugly embarrassment of motherlessness somehow served as atonement for all the ways in which I would ever be a misfit. I had to get it over with, feel it intensely and let it pass. Then, when the time came, I could take a deep breath and say, “Okay, I’m a queer Jew with no mother.”

Other entries deal with concerns for her own health, questions on polluting the land with cancer-causing industrial wastes, as well as questions on the will to live.

Alice Bloch writes that lesbianism and writing have saved her life. She looks at her losses and learns the only guarantees are those conscious choices we make in our lives. Although she has rejected what represents male-dominated religious tradition for her, she leaves her reader with the feeling of matriarchal spirituality.

**Jews and Paper**

Jews and paper. Have you ever wondered why they seem to have appeared on the (Occidental?) world scene at the same time? Clearly it is not coincidence. How many Jews do you know that do not have cartons of books, files, old newspapers, letters, articles, etc.? How many of our people do not feel deluged and overburdened with pieces of paper? And how many, nonetheless, are addicted to adding to the burden? I certainly do not know if Jews came first and caused paper or if paper came first and the Jews were merely an evolutionary response to this sudden environmental change. Perhaps the Jews and paper are not causally related but simultaneous products of an antecedent cause. Or, maybe, the two are teleologically intertwined. I just don’t know, but I do know there’s an article there if one of you will write it.

STEVE FANKUCHEN
The Jewish Film Festival, which celebrated its third anniversary in San Francisco this past summer, has established itself as an important cultural force within the Jewish community. The films played to large audiences, generating excitement, anticipation, and controversy. The large attendance at the Festival was remarkable considering the type of film shown. Festival directors Deborah Kaufman and Janis Plotkin are committed to promoting the growth of independent Jewish films, i.e. films without Hollywood backing, large bankrolls, or big names. Though independent films are often the most vital and original made, they seldom draw large audiences. To attract the kind of people who will appreciate such films, the Festival does intensive outreach. The audiences tend to be comprised mostly of unaffiliated Jews, who are described in the promotional packet as being “particularly attuned to the film medium” and “hungry for an alternative forum to learn about and engage in a dialogue on Jewish identity.” One of the goals of the Festival as an educational event is to create an active audience. The inclusion of speakers’ forums, panel discussions with filmmakers, audience evaluation forms, benefit shows for community organizations, and special screenings for the elderly all contribute to this goal.

From more than sixty films screened for inclusion in this year’s Festival, Kaufman and Plotkin chose twenty-one films from eight countries, including thirteen American premieres. Subjects included chess (The Great Chess Movie, Canada, 1982), klezmer music (Jewish Soul Music, Holland, 1982), Jewish immigration to Galveston, Texas at the turn of the century (West of Hester Street, US, 1983), an interpretation of the story of Cain and Abel (Red or the Blood of Abel, France, 1976), and relationships between Jewish parents and their children (Bloomers, US, 1980 and A Generation Apart, US, 1983). Eight of the twenty-one films were directed by women; eight dealt with the Holocaust, and eight were feature length documentaries.

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The Festival press release describes this year’s films as “the most bold, humorous, sensual, provocative, and affirming films yet to reach the public.” “Affirming” is the key word in this description. I was disturbed by the pervasive lack of affirming self-images in last year’s Festival. One could easily have surmised that Jewish cinema meant unrelenting examination of insanity and despair through years of persecution. After seeing most of the films at last year’s Festival, I concluded that the “dark side” of Jewish identity is represented mostly by European narrative features and “New Wave” Israeli films. To sit through film after film was to experience Europe as if the soil were sown with salt and Israel as if life existed inside a pressure cooker on the verge of explosion.

This year was definitely an “up” year by comparison, although two European narrative features (Red or the Blood of Abel and Pebbles) and one Israeli film (Stigma) reminded me of last year. There were films about resistance to the Holocaust (Escape Route To Marseilles, As If It Were Yesterday), the bravery of Jewish survivors after the War (The Last Sea), survival through history (The Tribe), and the vitality of community (The Miracle of Intervale Avenue).

As If It Were Yesterday (US/France, 1980) is a documentary about the Belgian attempt to save Jewish children during the War. The film is a collaboration between Myriam Abamowicz, an American, and Esther Heffenberg, French, both of whose parents spent the war in hiding. They filmed interviews both with survivors and those responsible for hiding them. The static camera focuses on one face after another for long durations so that viewer is forced to listen carefully to what is being said. The grainy, overlit, black and white images reveal common people (a doctor, a letter carrier, a housewife, etc.) whose everyday heroics created a secret network of resistance which was able to save over 4000 children from extermination. The story of their work has yet to be fully documented. We are all indebted to the filmmakers for capturing this piece of history while most of the protagonists are still alive.

The Miracle of Intervale Avenue (England, 1983) shows the vitality of the various minority communities which populate the South Bronx, an area of New York City which, because of building arson in the seventies, has the appearance of a war zone. The documentary focuses on a congregation of elderly Jews who have chosen to stay in the South Bronx after most other Jews have left. The film shows how mutual support is the key to survival in this particular neigh-

continued next page
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borhood. There is care for each other within the congregation and there is care from the Blacks and Puerto Ricans who value the older Jews among them. *Miracle* was made for British television. It is remarkable for its candidness and joyfulness, all a reflection of the trust gained by the filmmakers. At one point during the filming of Rosh Ha Shana services, there are gunshots outside. An old woman enters with a flesh wound in the neck. But, before she is taken care of, we see the film crew interviewing a young Puerto Rican who has been shot in the thigh. The film is a tribute to the indomitable spirit of a neighborhood and of old age.

The documentation of a family reunion is the subject of Lilly Rivlin's first film, *The Tribe* (US, 1983). Unlike most family reunions, this one was attended by 2,500 family members out of a possible 10,000. The Rivlin family, which calls itself "the Tribe", can trace its genealogy back 400 years to eastern Europe. Today, family members live all over the world. Some were instrumental in the founding of modern day Jerusalem where they immigrated over 200 years ago; many are important people in their various communities. As I heard family members speak with pride about their ancestors, it was almost as if I were listening to someone talk about their relatives who came to America on the Mayflower. Though I felt that these people thought themselves an elite, I understood the joy they felt in affirming their own continuity through history. Rivlin, the filmmaker, does not use her camera to make a propaganda film for her family. Through her eyes I saw the questions surfacing: who are the family "black sheep" and why? What of the "anti-tribe" members who have changed their name and refuse to be identified as members? What of the three quarters of the members who didn't come to the reunion in Jerusalem? And, what about the virtual invisibility of women in the family structure? The joy of finding family is also the pain of questioning what family means.

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One of the highlights of this year's Festival was a first film by Jack and Danny Fisher about the impact of the Holocaust on the children of survivors. The film, *Generation Apart* (US, 1983) is a feature length documentary. It examines the relationships between survivors and their children through individual interviews and intimate family discussions, primarily focussing on the Fishers' own family. This is the best film to date on the subject of children of survivors. The Fishers' interviewees present the many burdens these children carry as a result of their parents' suffering, as well as the many solutions chosen to deal with their guilt, anger, shame, and pride. Yoram, who is an Israeli actor and a child of survivors, plays the part of a Nazi in order to "understand". Peter, an Australian immigrant to Israel and a medical doctor, turns to drugs because he can't bear the pressures of being a survivor's son. On camera, Shelley, an artist, confronts her survivor mother about the lack of love she received growing up. In one of the most moving moments of the film her mother confesses that she has been afraid to love her children because she learned from the Holocaust that you only lose those you love. The Fishers discuss with their parents the expectations which they placed especially on the oldest child, Joe. The filmmakers then ask Joe how he feels about those expectations. The Holocaust is clearly a part of all these peoples' lives and yet questions come up repeatedly as to how much of a child's problems are because he or she is a child of survivors and how much because it is always hard between parents and children. The filmmaker's mother, Esther, who talks in the film about surviving Auschwitz, came to the Festival with her sons to view the premiere of *Generation*. Her quiet strength of character on film made her the subject of a standing ovation after the show.

The two Israeli films shown at the Festival, *Stigma* (1982) and *Each Other* (1980) are defined as "new wave" (i.e. non-comic, low budget, and usually state-funded). This type of film seems to preoccupy itself with motivations for behavior coming from the stressful nature of society itself. *Stigma* examines the relationship of Israeli macho to the military. What complicates this film is the intimation that Ehud, the protagonist, is mentally ill. Because Ehud is volatile, flies off the handle, and threatens physical violence to his best friend's girlfriend, he is supposedly different from other members of his military reserve unit. The film had the potential for making an anti-war statement if Ehud's character were not portrayed as merely a personal aberration.

*Each Other* presents the other side of the coin, the hesitant beginnings of feminism, Israeli-style. The film promises more than it delivers concerning the need for autonomy which sends the two female protagonists into each other's arms. The film is not really about women in love, as many press reviews have described, but about the fear of lesbianism in a repressive, anti-woman society.

The most controversial film at the Festival was *Pebbles* (Austria, 1982) which had been shown previously at the Berlin Film Festival to much acclaim. The film is long (102 minutes) and unrelenting in its emotional impact. The screenplay is about the uncontrollable fascination Hannah,
FILM FESTIVAL: continued

a Jewish woman whose family has been largely annihilated in the Holocaust, has for Friedrich, the son of a Nazi doctor. In their love/hate dance with each other, Hannah and Friedrich replay the lives of their parents. It is hard for American Jews to understand Hannah's interest in Friedrich. The man is utterly loathsome and unlikeable in virtually every frame except for one scene in which he babysits a friend's baby and, after being called from his Wagnerian music to the baby's crib, bewilderingly tries to change a diaper. Hannah, on the other hand, is strong in her identity as a woman and as a Jew. Still, she sets herself up to be victimized by Friedrich. Undercurrents of German-Austrian animosity add to the complexity of the film.

An indication of the success of the Festival's organizers is that people around the country are being given the opportunity to see these films. The first Jewish Film Festival was brought to four U.S. cities by the American Film Institute, which paid for the tour. The second Festival tour, which is currently in progress, combines the best films from the first and second Jewish Film Festivals and is making the rounds of eleven cities in the Landmark theater chain. As a result of these tours, many community organizations in various cities have decided to sponsor Jewish Film Festivals of their own. There will even be a Jewish Film Festival in three British cities.

Kaufman and Plotkin have been instrumental in bringing Jewish filmmakers together to form their own network. The Festival received a partial grant this year to produce a catalogue of Jewish films. There are no immediate plans for a third tour because of work on the catalogue which the Festival directors view as a stepping stone to making the films more available to community groups. The Jewish Film Festival is having a snowball effect in the world of Jewish cinema. Jewish filmmakers are gaining larger audiences for their Jewish-subject films and are thereby encouraged to make more and better films. As long as there are Jewish films the Jewish Film Festival will continue.

For more information about the Jewish Film Festival write: Jewish Film Festival, 4560 Horton St., Suite R407, Emeryville, CA 94608.
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