"It's not whether you win or lose that counts... it's how you play the game!"

FEATURED: STEVE FANKUCHEN, JOHN GERASSI, BURTON LEVINE, MIKE RANKIN, LEV RAPHAEL, RONICA STERN

THE ART OF DOUG MINKLER
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STEVE FANKUCHEN
Publisher/Editor

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I can’t quite get Bitburg out of my mind. It’s not that Reagan went there nor the fact that at least half of the American people approved his visit. No, what continues to bother me is the response from the American Jewish “leadership”. Ghetto Jews ever so politely asking the local prince not to stick to them one more time. God forbid that the Jews should call a spade a spade, especially on something that might be perceived by non-Jews as a clannish, Jewish issue. “The President had bad advice”, they say. “He doesn’t understand the issues.” “Perhaps he hasn’t been sensitized to our needs.” “How eloquent,” we are told, “was the simple statement made to Reagan that Bitburg was not his place.”

Once again “our” leaders have it backwards. Reagan has rather competent and intelligent advisors; this is not the Nixon Administration. The President is not the stupid simpleton he is often portrayed as. And no politician as astute as Reagan and around as long as he could fail to understand what Jewish leadership portrays as its important issues. No, we can’t skirt the fundamental problems by pussy-footing around, by confusing our hopes with reality. We must, instead, stand up and say, “Yes, Mr. President, Bitburg is your place!” And we must accept the frightening implication of such a statement, such a reality. The President knew precisely what he was doing. Given who Reagan is and what he believes, it should not have been surprising that he would visit, would pay his respects at that cemetery. That is who the man is, and that is what his politics stand for. Period. The man knows his place; he knows with whom he belongs. He chooses his friends carefully.

Reagan’s Bitburg visit is the product of two historical currents. The first, anti-Sovietism, began in earnest before World War II ended, while the Soviet Union was still a military ally. At that point, American political and military leadership rapidly changed enemies, from Germany to the Soviet Union. True, the War had to be finished off. But its outcome was only a matter of time, and strategic thinking switched over to planning the post-War Cold War against the Soviet Union. The keystone to that strategy was Germany, a strong, dynamic Germany with whom we would ally ourselves as co-defenders of freedom, against the newly-defined scourge of liberty and democracy, the Soviet Union. In that tradition, Bitburg is both a payoff to the current West German leadership for support of Administration military policies and an attempt to create emotional and ethical solidarity where none exists, by rewriting history, by putting the murderers and their victims on more equal moral footing.

The second relevant historical current is Christianity. As a deeply conservative Christian, Reagan is heir to two things. One is a pervasive belief in “forgiveness” (when convenient!) as a supreme moral value. This stands in frequent opposition to the Jewish belief in “justice”. Second is the conservative Christian adoption of anti-communism as a literal crusade. A Christian comic book I had, part of a series which included issues on Archie and Tom Landry and The Dallas Cowboys, made it quite clear that the real degenerates and enemy of World War II were the Russians, not the Germans.

As if Reagan’s visit wasn’t enough of a problem, “our” self-deluding and self-defeating leaders exacerbated the problem by defining Bitburg as a Jewish issue. Bitburg is not a Jewish issue; it is a human issue! We are not talking about whether to equate the Holocaust with the slaughter perpetrated on others by the Nazis. We are talking about the symbolism of the President of the United States, of the Land of The Free and The Home of The Brave, of the Greatest Democracy on Earth paying homage to the memory of all that the Nazi regime stood for, including the Holocaust. We asked Reagan to be President of the Jews. What we should have done was to ask him to be President of all decent Americans; we should have framed the issue in terms of humanity, in terms of the most fundamental level of the Nazi crime. It should have been obvious to Jewish leaders that such was the real issue; but even if that wasn’t obvious on its own, the response of others should have made it clear. If the American Legion getting mad at Reagan couldn’t serve as the cry of the shofar to our leaders in their moral wilderness, then they must be politically, as well as spiritually deaf. Even on the most cynical opportunistic level, the level that gives Jerry Falwell the Jabotinsky award because he “supports” Israel, the Jewish leadership missed the opportunity to build bridges and forge alliances, and alliances of decency at that.

STEVE FANKUCHEN
President Reagan's attempt to divert attention and responsibility during the Lebanese hostage hijacking certainly was no surprise. Neither was the choice to use the opportunity to hassle the Greeks, whose government has shown a modicum of independence from Washington since the junta was abolished and democracy restored. But to have the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations hop on Reagan's anti-Greek bandwagon is just another sad example of the inability of Jewish communal leadership to stop acting like ghetto Jews placating the local prince. Either we Jewish Americans are Americans or we are not. If we are not, let's stop pretending we are. And if we are, then let's stop acting like frightened resident aliens, living in constant fear of having our collective Green Card punched. It is not necessary for us to continually go around "proving" we are Americans by affirming every policy — stupid or otherwise — that each resident of the White House comes up with. We should support or criticize policies on their own merit. And our "leaders" should stop pretending there is a Jewish position, or even a position of the Jewish community, when such does not exist.

I have decided to change the subscription rates for SHMATE. The new rates will be $15/year (4 issues) and $27/2 years for individual subscriptions. Library and institutional subscriptions will be $25/year and $45/2 years. I hope that most of you will be able to renew for two years. It will save an incredible amount of time, energy and paper. The cover price will be $3.50. Orders of available back issues will be $4 to individuals and $6.50 for institutions. Double issue #11-#12 will be $5. For first class mail add $6/year. Foreign orders must be paid for in American dollars. Add $1.50/copy surface and $4/copy air mail on all foreign orders. These rates will go into affect for all subscriptions, renewals, and individual orders received after September 6. If the current level of donations and circulation is maintained, these new rates should put SHMATE at a break-even point in terms of printing, typesetting, and postage costs. Increased circulation and large donations are needed to achieve the goal of creating a half-time staff position for the magazine. I wouldn't mind if I got paid something somewhere down the line. Your thoughts on these rates will be most welcome.

Special thanks to Jeannie Kamins for drawing the Bitburg cartoons at my request. Thanks, too, to Jay Ladin and Sara Ring for help with paper pushing.

The easiest editorial decision for this issue concerned including material on AIDS. Most people consider AIDS a gay issue. It is no more a gay issue than Bitburg is a Jewish issue. They are both, first and foremost, human issues. Though the burden of this affliction has, so far, fallen primarily on gay men, dealing with it directly, vigorously, and with compassion is the responsibility of all of us.

Mike Rankin's discussion of the response of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav to AIDS is an eloquent statement of the familial communality which — ideally — forms the basis for Jewish Congregational life. I am pleased to run two very human stories in this issue, Lev Raphael's Dancing on Tishe b'Av and Ronica Stern's My Brother's Baseball Jacket. I am sure that one or both stories will hold personal relevance for many readers.

Burton Levine's Jewish Holidays and The Left is another chapter in this magazine's ongoing efforts to get the Left to clean up its act. Good politics start at home. And, if we are hypocrites, if we preach one way but practice another, we will have little cause to complain when others fail to take us seriously.

Nicaragua is not an unfamiliar topic in the pages of SHMATE or to its readers. Thus the decision to devote so much space to John Gerassi's treatment of the subject was not an easy one. Nonetheless, I felt that a fairly comprehensive treatment of the subject that did not presume great familiarity on the part of the reader, that did not sound like believers preaching to the already converted, would be useful for many folks trying to reach out to new people in discussing the subject.
"With David and Jonathan we remember you. 
With Ruth and Naomi we remember you. 
In the name of God you are our sisters and brothers, 
And we ask that you be remembered for peace."

Sha'ar Zahav Yizkor Service

May be it began in Hawaii. They say the virus is more likely to cause the disease if the body is stressed and Mark was stressed that summer of 1982. He had broken up with a man he had loved for many years, and partly to help him forget, he led a large tour group on a hiking trip through some of the roughest terrain in Kauai. He was tired when he got back, certainly not himself, not the gutsy, feisty, full of life guy we had come to know and love and respect, as a member of the Board of Congregation Sha'ar Zahav. Things picked up a bit for him in the early fall, probably because he was in love again, and that part of his life was full and good. How important Michael would be to him later, we could not then have known.

In October a close friend of Mark's died of AIDS, and after the memorial service Mark commented on how tired he was. He blamed it on overwork at New College (he was Director of Admissions), on depression over his friend's death, on the "flu." The denial held until early November, when he noticed several red lesions on the roof of his mouth. Just before Thanksgiving the diagnosis was confirmed. The red spots were Kaposi's Sarcoma. Mark had AIDS.

The prognosis? He knew as well as the rest of us that no one had survived two years after diagnosis.

He was terrified at first, and he turned to his friends and his lover for help and support. But then, to the amazement of all of us, the "old Mark" reappeared, quickly taking charge of his treatment. He knew what he had to do: he would either beat this thing, or he would find a new way to give meaning to his death.

Mark went home to New York for Hanukah to tell his parents. Typically he found himself taking care of them, reassuring them that for now he was fine; if he needed them in San Francisco he'd let them know.

Then he decided to tell the Congregation. Sha'ar Zahav was a second family to him; like many of us, he had found his way back into Judaism in this warm, welcoming congregation made up mostly of lesbians and gay Jews. His timing was perfect. On December 10 Dr. Dennis McShane had been invited to speak on AIDS after the Shabbat service. It was now 1982, and we were well aware of the seriousness of the epidemic; but we were still sure it only happened to someone else, not to us, not to anyone we knew.

When Dennis finished his interesting but somewhat clinical presentation, Mark went to the front of the room and stood facing the congregation. "Please listen to what Dennis has just told you" he began. "We can't pretend this disease doesn't exist. We can't pretend it only happens to someone else. It can happen to anyone. I should know. It's happened to me. I have AIDS."

He left us alone in stunned silence for moments, then continued: "Now we can do one of two things. We can give up if we have it and pretend it doesn't exist if we don't. Or we can link arms and fight this damn thing together. You know me, and you know I'm a fighter. I hope you are too. So this is what I propose. I'm lucky enough to have insurance, but a lot of our members are unemployed, and if this thing strikes them they are going to be in terrible financial shape. Let's start a Congregational fund, and let's call it the 'Phooey on AIDS Fund', and let's make sure there is enough in it so that if any member of Sha'ar Zahav gets AIDS, he can afford the best care available. And let's use it to educate ourselves and the community, so we can know how to prevent it, and how to fight it when it strikes those we love. And let's band together to support each other as we've never done before. That's what I propose. After the speeches are over tonight I'll stick around to talk to anyone who's interested. What's the use of being the 'AIDS Poster Boy' if you can't get a little attention!"

When I left the J.C.C., where we were holding services in those days, Mark was still letting people look in his mouth to see what the lesions looked like.

The fund was started and has continued, a ready resource for congregation members who need it. But that was only the beginning.

Gay men by this time were no longer allowed to give blood, so the women volunteered. Twice a year, between Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur and around Pesach, the Women's Havurah of the Congregation organizes a group of women—members and non-members alike—to go to Irwin Memorial Blood Bank to donate to the Congregation's account. The men go along to serve snacks, give leg massages, provide "walkpersons" with a choice of music! A wonderful, generous act on the part of the women is turned into a social occasion and a lot of fun,
the seriousness of the act notwithstanding. The first time the women volunteered, Mark sent each a long stemmed rose. That tradition has continued, a symbolic thank you for the love and affection and support the women have given us. The support gay men have received from lesbians in San Francisco and around the country is enormous, and is deeply appreciated.

As Mark's illness progressed he continued to speak out, mobilizing the Congregation and the community, meeting with the mayor and other elected officials, helping organize support groups such as "People With AIDS" (PEOPLE—never AIDS patients, or AIDS victims). He told us what he needed: a ride to the doctor, help with house cleaning and shopping, a hand to hold, someone to talk to. We all pitched in—his lover and his friends, his Shanti counselor and members of the Congregation who barely knew him. He took care of us as we took care of him.

Mark died in April, 1983. His memorial service, led by members of Sha'ar Zahav, filled both chapels at Sinai Memorial. It was our first such service, but not our last. Other members have faced life-threatening illnesses, sometimes AIDS, sometimes not, and we've always found a way to take care of them, better than we otherwise would have, because Mark was such a good teacher.

What do they need? To maintain their dignity, to be sure of an empathetic listener when they want to talk, a little help with food, maybe, money. Someone to take care of the cats, or walk the dog.

Every Shabbat at Sha'ar Zahav, congregants bring food and toiletries, soap and shaving gear to be given to people with AIDS. The Maos Chitim Appeal at Pesach this year raised $2,200, half of which went to Ethiopian famine relief, half to people with AIDS, through the Food Bank, The S.F. Hospice's Meals on Wheels Program, and the S.F. AIDS Foundation's food program.

And wherever politicians are considering funding for AIDS treatment and research, members of the Congregation are there to highlight the need. When a fundamentalist preacher or priest or rabbi declares that AIDS is a punishment from God for the "sin" of homosexuality, a member of the Congregation is there to define that statement as the blasphemy and stupidity it is.

The Congregation often sends food and soft drinks, and last year sent a television set to the AIDS ward at San Francisco General. Our tsedaka may have begun at home; it has not remained there.

Community and family. Through Mark's work with us, through the example of many others in the Congregation, we've become a caring community, a mispocha in every good sense of the word. We've become a group of people who care for each other and who have found ways to show it in a time of crisis. Those who were there have told us the same spirit was evident in the Jewish community in Berlin in the '30s.

A little more than a year ago Sha'ar Zahav dedicated its first synagogue building, the "Home of Our Own" that Mark and all of us had worked so hard to acquire. Mark chaired the Building Committee until he became too ill to continue, so we wanted a memorial to carry his name. Knowing how much he liked the out-of-doors, we decided to dedicate the grounds to his memory. Unfortunately, "the grounds" consisted of a plot of earth about the size of a condominium bathtub, about 6 feet by 3 feet. No matter. We planted it nicely and named it the "Mark Feldman Formal Gardens and Plantation." It fit. Mark was a big-thinking guy with a sense of humor, and I think if he came back for a day he'd look at it and say "that's all I get—two petunias and a lousy rosebush!" When he was ready he'd let us know he was kidding.

A Rabbi spoke with God about heaven and hell. "I will show you hell" said God, and they went into a room that had a large pot of stew in the middle. The smell was delicious, but around the pot sat people who were famished and desperate. All were holding spoons with very long handles that reached to the pot, but because the handles of the spoon were longer than their arms it was impossible to get the stew back into their mouths. Their suffering was terrible.

"Now I will show you heaven" said God, and they went into an identical room. There was a similar pot of stew and the people had identical spoons, but they were well-nourished and happy, talking with each other.

At first the rabbi did not understand. "It is simple" said God. "You see, they have learned to feed each other!"

Anonymous, quoted in the Sha'ar Zahav Machzor for Rosh Hashanah
Brenda was already used to the men across the chest-high wood mehitzah saying they needed one more “person” to make the minyan, while she and sometimes as many as four other women might be there—like now, suspended in summer boredom, their conversation as heavy with heat as the aimless flies whispering past in the small gray-walled shul on the musty Jewish Center’s ground floor. Sometimes they all waited an hour before continuing with Shabbis, for a man, any man, to be tenth. It amused her that even the dimmest specimens counted when she didn’t; shabby unshowered men who shouted rather than sang and read Hebrew as if each line were a heat-wavering horizon; yawning men whose great round gasps for air seemed their profoundest prayers; men who sneeringly whispered game scores (and had to be shushed), to show how immune they were to the ark, to anything sacred and Jewish.

Sometimes, on the other side, her brother Nat corrected them and said “Man. You mean another man.” And she smiled at his embarrassment for her.

Though raised Conservative, she liked the Orthodox service. Here the purpose was davening, not socializing, showing off Judaic knowledge, filling the shul, or even getting away from the kids for a morning. People joked, but the service itself was serious. At the faculty-dominated shuls in their university town, the persistent chitchat and laughter were like the desperate assertion of rationality and control in the face of what was mysterious—as if to let go, to be silent, would be an admission of nakedness and shame.

“Too many PhD’s,” was Nat’s comment, and she, a graduate student in history, had felt accused. A junior, Nat had been attending the Orthodox minyan for two years, and his commitment was as fierce and sullen as the clutch of a baby’s hand on a stolen toy.

Nat went out now to study the Torah portion in another room. Thin, with the twitching walk of a jerky marionette, his pale and narrow slack-mouthed face seemed a genetic rebuke to their handsome family, a warning that all gifts were uncertain. As a boy he’d been aloof, watchful, building castles out of blocks and books, pretending to be powerful, a knight. He never cried, never apologized. Spanking him was pointless, scolding absurd. The little mean eyes just shut inside, his face grew stupid and closed.

“Red tsu a vant!” their father would shout in Yiddish: Talk to a wall!—uneasily admiring the stubborn ugly boy. The stocky pharmacist would peer down at Nat, hands clenched, as if wishing they were equals and could fight. Nat was sullen and silent until he went into theater in high school, stunning Brenda with his intensity as Tom in the Glass Menagerie. He had felt, to her, more maimed by life than the girl playing Laura. Onstage, his walk, his thin face were larger, more compelling: his authority was beautiful. It was the same here at State when he did a show.

What did their parents think?
Their mother said, “He takes makeup very well; it doesn’t look like him.”

His father, when he didn’t fall asleep in the darkened auditorium, smirked “Sure—he can act—so what? Try Broadway!”

They were just as supportive of his move to Orthodox, his father shaking his head: “What I gave him isn’t enough—he has to go to fremde menschen—strangers—to be a Jew.” And their mother wondered if Nat would be allowed to touch any woman he wasn’t married to, and was he going to Israel to throw stones at cars that drove on Saturday?

How much this affected Nat, Brenda didn’t know. He had always refused to acknowledge success as well as failure, lived, she thought, in stubborn exile, unreachable, untouched.

Nat had learned to tie his shoes too early, was too neat and alphabetical in his approach to life. It was as if saying, “First things first” and making points in conversation by clutching successive fingers could order and control the world. He read Torah in a dry victorious chant, as if the letters piled around him in tribute. He was a vegetarian and drank only mineral water and herb teas. He ran seven miles a day, even in the winter. He loved men.

She had known this, known something, for too long. When she was sixteen and Nat eleven she found an open notebook on his desk in which he’d written out pages of new names for himself, first and last, a parade of loathing. It was that year Brenda found an open notebook on his shelf. She noticed that her mother’s closet door would often be closed when her mother—who always left it open—was out for an afternoon and Nat alone. It was their stale family joke, her mother and closets, cabinets, drawers.
“Yes!” her father would growl. “Let everything in the breadbox see what’s happening in the kitchen they shouldn’t feel lonely.”

At first she thought that Nat was snooping in that rich confusion, as she had done years before. But then, allowing herself no vision of what she suspected, Brenda set little traps for him: a purse hung just so, a dress belt folded under. And she learned that Nat did something mean to him?

Before these discoveries, Nat had been annoying to her, or unimportant, or sometimes, unexpectedly cute. Suddenly, he was dangerous, unknown. In the next years she’d wait for Nat’s oddities to burst from the neutral box of his silence like trick paper snakes, but he was only more sullen, blighting family dinners like the suspicion of a pitiless disease. Her father gave up cursing at her, Imagined they thinking of her as The Widows because, though in their mid twenties, they already seemed isolated, like the survivors of a historic loss.

Around her the heat, dimly spread by a weak ceiling fan, settled like a film of soot; her light dress, sandals and short hair didn’t help her feel cool.

“Brenda, you look very nice today.”

Clark, the natty law student who looked like Al Pacino and thought he was Bruce Springsteen, hung over the mehitzah. He wore, as usual, the garish Chai she was sometimes tempted to pull, just to shake his confidence. From Bloomfield Hills, he talked to her with the smug-ness she remembered in adolescent cliques, as if his good looks and hers bound them in undeniable complicity.

Before she could say anything, Nat was back at the door, bleating, “Gut Shabos!”

At the chipped bookcase with the siddurs and chumashim, stood a tall, tanned, blue-eyed man, with a thick close-trimmed mustache and a beard that seemed very black above his tan suit and white shirt. He slipped a tallis from the wooden stand, covered his head with it as he said the brocheh, and found a seat near the front of the men’s side, shaking hands, nodding. Nat marched up to the bimah.

It was a mitzvah making the tenth, she thought, as services continued with unexpected excitement. They sang and chanted like forty people, not fourteen. When there wasn’t a minyan and the Torah stayed in its plainly-curtained ark, she felt a fierce longing to see it borne around the shul, to be touched with tzizzit, siddurs, or kissed like a bride, as some of the men did.

When the stranger, Moshe Leib ben Shimon haCohen, Mark, was called to the Torah for the first blessing, he loomed over the bimah like a dark memorial in a way that dried her throat; his back seemed broad and forbidding. But his voice was sweet, smooth, rising and falling with the self-indulgent sadness of a Russian folk song. He sight-read the first aliyyah without a mistake. They were all impressed.

Nat, always well-prepared, read badly today. He made mistakes even she could catch, and it was painful watching him struggle with easy words. The silver yod in his hand usually paced serenely along each squarish path of Hebrew, but now it pointed listlessly, like an uninspired divining rod. She looked away from him, from her chumash. Nat would probably tell people at kiddush that he was tired and, because he never read poorly, no one would doubt him.

She hoped.

What did people say about him? Could they tell?

Mrs. Rzhevsky was often mentioning friends’ daughters to Nat at holiday dinners, as if genially passing a liqueur. “He should date more” — his mother’s verdict. But to Brenda she had recently said, “Is he gay?”

“No!”

“You’re sure—”

“Mom.”

Her father said nothing directly or indirectly to Brenda; if it concerned him that Nat hardly dated, he probably classified that with Nat’s habitual stubbornness. Besides, she imagined her father sneering, “With that punim, who would want him?”

Nat was like Coronado seeing the Seven Cities of El Dorado everywhere—in the pumping bare thighs of bikers on campus, the ripe curves of jeans-tight asses, the heavy twin arcs of runners’ chests under cool and mold-

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE
ing cotton — flash after flash of heaven-sent gold in hundreds of men around town. But he was a Coronado without armor, without guides, troops, provisions, maps or even a commission. He had only his hunger.

She never spoke about this with Nat, never asked about dates or parties, had no idea what his life was like. Nat lived in his dorm and she in her apartment in town, with the huge ecstatically landscaped campus between them, like the florid alibi for a crime. They lunched sometimes; she phoned him, they met at services, and occasionally drove home to Southfield together, but she seldom mentioned that her brother was "up at school." She was afraid for him.

She was ashamed.

In her freshman year at State, on her co-ed floor, there had been a lovely dark-haired boy named Tom, who did up his single room with Japanese fans, silk scarves, and other gentle souvenirs of summers abroad. Cool, quiet, literate, he was the eye of a storm; doors banged, voices hushed and growled or cracked with laughter; and the jocks on the floor simmered like guard dogs on maddening chains. One morning a campus axe was found buried in Tom's door, the handle chalked, for clarity, "Faggot Die." Tom moved off campus and that was what she feared — violence in the night, a scandal.

Having drifted away during the Torah reading, she didn't re-enter the service, but stood and sat with everyone and prayed aloud mechanically, each action large and stiff. Mark, the stranger, had asked to do Musaf, and his Hebrew was fluent in the thick summer air.

On the way out after Adon Olam" Mark stopped, wished her "Shabbat Shalom."

"You read well" she said as they milled at the table set with kiddush wine and cakes in the bleak little social hall.

And then Nat was there, grinning, his pale face scattered with excitement. After blessing the wine, Nat pulled Mark aside to talk about the next week's Torah portion.

Helen, Clark's cousin, bore down on Brenda. With her thin ugly legs, heavy shifting hips and rear, she resembled to Brenda a pack mule struggling up a hill.

"Gut Shabbos," Helen murmured, as if passing on gossip. "Isn't he terrific?" Helen's round Italian-looking face, blotched and shiny, was like a comic target at a carnival booth.

"Mark?"

"Uh-huh. What a spa."

"Spa..."

"Sure, he works out — look at his chest, those shoulders. Yum." Helen slapped her back.

Brenda watched them. Mark with the cool, one-dimensional beauty of a brass rubbing, Nat grasping him with a sickly smile. She ate a dry piece of pound cake.

There were several thousand Jewish students at State, but hardly any came to the Orthodox minyan, which was a mix of graduate students, one or two family members, and several University staffers. Mark's arrival was exciting, she knew, because he could take much of the burden of running services from Clark and Nat and the others, who sometimes felt like prisoners of their obligations. An assistant to the Registrar, Mark spoke little about himself, but seemed to have — for Nat — the impact of an analyst, whose silence and concern at last permit an entrance to oneself. Nat talked about his acting, his Russian and French classes, his desire to enter the Foreign Service, about everything, like a child dragging pretty treasures from pockets, from under the bed, from drawers, to entertain, attract, possess a fascinating friend.

Brenda saw in Nat, for the first time, a resemblance to their mother. Generally her mother was like an antiques dealer displaying a find — herself — with chie reverence. She was slim, wide-eyed, fashionable even in a bathrobe, especially in a bathrobe whose rough folds set her off like a pretty girl's plain companion. But sometimes her mother emerged from this haze of self-absorption to talk to strangers or her children's "little friends" with merciless charm. She asked them endless unimportant questions until they found themselves, like flood victims forced onto the roof of their self-possession, praying for the waters to subside.

Two weeks after that first Shabbos, Brenda saw Nat at a restaurant in town, talking like this to Mark one Sunday afternoon, saw him through the wide front window, face twisted and alive, fingers plucking at a sugar packet. Mark sat deep in from him, skinny tennis shirt open at a dense-haired throat, heavy fine arms crossed, a smile, some kind of smile nestled in the mustache and beard. Mark was not just passively beautiful she realized, as she hurried on to buy her Times down the block, not a man to merely watch and admire, but warm, receptive, inviting. It was the lush curves of shoulders, chest, the gleaming hair and beard, the hard-lined nose and high cheekbones, the paintable mouth.

Not her type at all, too dramatic, too intense. The men she dated there were, at most, "cute." Their ideas about Pearl Harbor or Euro-Communism gave them more color than the way they walked or dressed or were.

"They don't scare you," Nat had concluded, and it was too obvious for her to deny.

Nat and Mark started running together at the high school track near her apartment, like a boy and his puppy. Mark's legs were hairy and dark, strong admonitions to the pale, the weak.

They'd stop at her place afterwards for water, to towel off, talking about the weather, their wind, old injuries. Mark spoke, even then, as if emerging from a past that wasn't his, but something he had learned, borrowed details of a spy. He sat on the floor, back against her grey-green sofa bed, legs out, relaxing, holding the tumbler to his face and neck. Nat looked wild and fluttered, as if he couldn't decide whether to yell or leap or stroke Mark's hair.

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In July, when Lansing settled into a heat wave that seemed as inexorable as lava sweeping down a barren slope, Nat made an announcement to her one Shabbos lunch:

“Mark’s parents left him a place on the lake, near Saugatuck, and he invited me to go next Saturday night after Havdalah and spend a few days at the beach.”

Nat’s face was so surly that she saw him as a boy again, daring their parents with his refusal to eat beans or wash his hair—or cry.

“What?”

She looked down at her cool plate of deviled eggs, potato salad, and tabouli, as if the food were on exhibit in a museum case, proof of customs stranger than one’s own.

“Does he know you’re in love with him?”

Nat gave her a liar’s grin, stalling. “What?”

“Why? People know I’m gay.”

“You tell them?”

“It’s not a secret for me.”

“But Nat’s only twenty-one.” She rose to bring the coffee pot to them. “It could ruin him,” she declared, and, then, “I’m sorry—that’s stupid.”

Mark shrugged. “Maybe not.”

She asked about the house on Lake Michigan two hours away and Mark described the drive there, the beach, his childhood summers. When he spoke, a thought crossed her mind with brazen clarity: even though she felt warmer to Nat after his crying, she still didn’t love him; she feared what people would say about her more than what might happen to Nat. I’m like Mom, she thought. Cold.

The “weekend” was fabulous, Nat raved, returning with color, some new clothes, and a haircut that made him subtly more attractive.

“He wants to take me to Paris!” Nat crowed.

“On his salary?”

“His folks were in real estate.”

At services Nat sat next to Mark, their tallis fringes touching, perhaps, beneath their chairs. Nat had coolly talked about Mark’s divorce to most people there with enough vagueness and somber gaps to make it seem a tragedy of some kind; a wound too open to discuss; “That’s why he came to Michigan,” Nat would conclude, delighted with his subterfuge. He could’ve been a child pretending dragons in the dark that only he could slay.

“Mark doesn’t like it,” Nat smirked.

Did she? Did she like any of it? When she wasn’t plowing through the booklist for her first comprehensive in September, she wondered what she felt. Mark was apparently kind to Nat, and luckily not one of those bitchy homosexuals whose standards were as vigilant and high as satellites. He was real, all the men she had ever imagined Nat with, or wanting.

“What do you see in Nat?” she asked one noon in a corner of the Union, where she’d come across Mark reading a Free Press. He frowned and she felt exposed, her lack of understanding, her contempt as clear to him as diamonds on blue velvet.

“He’s very sad,” Mark said. “I like to make him smile.”

They spent less time with her after that, as if she, a bumbling parent, had mortified a group of teens by trying to be sincere. Mark was helping Nat prepare for Tishe B’Av, teaching him Lamentations. She didn’t like the fast or commemorating the Temple’s desctruction, which reading Josephus’ Jewish Wars had made more awful to her. The slaughter, the terrible thirst, starvation, and ruin were all too real for her, too historic, harbingers of camps and numbered arms. At least Mark and Nat, leading the service, would have something to do to keep from falling into the past—or so she felt.

Her parents were even less sympathetic to Tishe B’Av

CONTINUED NEXT PAGE
—they liked the more decorative holidays, Pesach and Chanukah, and suffered through Yom Kippur as if paying stiffly for their pleasure later in the year.

A week or so before Tishe B'Av, Helen's grocery cart pulled up next to hers at one of the mammoth vegetable counters in the largest mall market.

"Is your little brother gay?" Helen shot, and the two women feeling tomatoes nearby glared up at them.

"Because I saw him coming out of Bangles downtown last Saturday night, and honey, he was drunk. So was Mark."

Rigid, Brenda imagined a drum truck dropping tons of potatoes on Helen, sealing her forever.

"I told Clark. He says Bangles is sleazy."

"He's been there?" Helen grinned.

"Don't change the subject. He's heard."

With more strength than she knew was in her legs and arms, Brenda moved her cart away and down the aisle, then left it as if the metal burned, and hurried out to her car. Getting in, she thought of flight, retreat—no one would ever find her, hear from her again. But starting the Chevette seemed to drain the panic through her hand into the key, and she drove out along the Interstate to Mark's apartment complex, fifteen minutes away.

"You moron!" she gasped, "Why'd you go there!"

"I wanted to dance," he said, sitting down, untouched by her distress. "So did Nat. I love dancing with him. He's beautiful then—"

"—and when he acts!"

"I've never seen him in a show."

"Don't be cool."

"I'm thirty-five," he said.

"What should I be?"

"How can you even kiss a siddur with what you do?"

Shabbos, two days later, Brenda came to services late, just before the Torah reading. Everyone was up, jabbering, flushed. Clark stood at the bimah, his back to the ark, as pale as Nat, who faced him from the narrow aisle between the men's chairs and the mehitza.

"Get out," Clark was saying. "I won't let you touch that Torah. My grandfather donated it."

On measuring up to our fathers' expectations

"You're crazy," Nat said, as if forcing a message through a window's iron bars.

"We'll vote if you want." Clark looked sure of the outcome.

Brenda waivered at the door, sickened by the ugly atmosphere of children squashing worms, exploding frogs with firecrackers.

"Come on," Mark said, slipping off his tallis, jamming it into the gold-embroidered tallis bag. Mark smiled relief when he saw her, took her hand. Nat followed out to Mark's Volvo and they drove, no one speaking.

Upstairs, Mark dumped his blazer on a chair, wrenched off his tie to sit with an arm around Nat, who kept saying, "They need us. It's our minyan too. They can't keep us away."

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Brenda didn’t mind their closeness. It warmed her like a Vermeer, rich with circumstantial life.
“You know I’ve never really hated anyone,” she said. “Enough to kill them, to see it happening. But I do.”
“We’ll move,” Nat was cursing. “We’ll go to New York.”
Mark smoothed Nat’s stringy hair with such gentleness she felt released from all her doubts. What she saw between them was enough. Where had she read that hatred had to be nourished, but love, love fed itself?
Mark winked at her.
Tishe B’Av was the next night and they made plans to attend together at one of the faculty shuls. Leaving, she surprised herself by kissing both of them.
Nat didn’t call her that night, and she hardly slept, awash with a sort of amazement that the children they had been had grown to see such ugliness. She longed in her restless bed for escape, for some wild romantic lover, a Czech perhaps, a refugee musician who’d fled in ’68, whose loss was larger than her own, a nation’s freedom versus a woman’s pride. He would have an accent, she decided sleepily, imagining herself in a sleek black dress, and have a mustache a bit like Mark’s.
Mark was alone when he came over Sunday evening. “Nat isn’t coming. He went out.”
“OUT?”
“Bangles. To get drunk. To dance. He’s furious,” Mark said, smoothing down his grey silk tie, looking much too calm.
She could feel her dress sticking to her back despite the air conditioning. She sat at the dinette table, more confused by this than anything.
“What will he do?”
Mark pressed his hands to the back of his neck, massaging, stretching. “Screw it out of his system, I guess.”
“He’ll get herpes—he’ll get AIDS!”
“Maybe.”
“But it’s wrong, it’s all wrong, all of it.”
Mark eyed her steadily, mysterious now, remote.
“Maybe,” he said, beckoning to her to leave. “Maybe.”

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**ITEM II**

Seventy per cent of all U.S. government research and development funding goes for weapons. Think about that the next time someone dies from AIDS or gives birth to a deformed child after taking insufficiently tested, “approved” medicine or food additives.

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**ZEN HOMEOWNER**

A homeowner stood on his driveway and asked his neighbor, “Does your dog have a Buddha nature?”
The neighbor, looking startled at the strange question, replied, “How’s that?” “I ask again does your dog have a Buddha nature?” The neighbor put his hand to his chin ad shook his head, “No, I don’t know; is that a breed or something?” The homeowner showed no emotion, his half smile fixed and his eyebrows raised slightly. “Does your dog have a Buddha nature?” The neighbor, although perplexed, answered in a warm and reassuring tone of voice, “Sure, he has a Buddha nature.” The homeowner continued to stand quietly on his driveway and maintain his indifferent countenance. His neighbor approached him tentatively. When the neighbor reached the driveway, the homeowner lifted his lawn rake over his head and struck the neighbor.

**KWATZ COMMENTARY**

The neighbor was well struck and deservedly so. Accustomed as he was to small talk he did not understand that his own triviality did not protect him from grumpy seekers of enlightenment. The homeowner learned little else than the sound made by his rake when it strikes the head of his neighbor. Whether that will further his journey toward enlightenment is a subject for another commentary.

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**PATRIOTISM**

Patriotism is as fierce as a fever, pitiless as the grave, blind as a stone and irrational as a headless man.

*Ambrose Bierce*
Who needs a Jewish calendar? If I want to know the date of the next Jewish holiday, I just look at the calendar in “progressive” publications. The Left will surely have planned an event to conflict with that holiday. A particularly odious example was 1979’s anti-nuclear demonstration in New York City on Rosh Hashana. Both Bella Abzug, who never previously failed to exploit her Jewishness when trolling for votes, and Barry Commoner, warming up for last year’s appearance as Jesse Jackson’s court Jew and expert on what offends Jews, addressed the rally. This year the Left held its Socialist Scholar’s Conference on the first days of Pesach.

I have given up protesting. I am tired of hearing that the organizers did not know the day was a Jewish holiday. I doubt that skilled political organizers can be so regularly incompetent and oblivious to their social environment. Their offices are often in New York, the city with the largest Jewish population in the world. Their children attend public schools that are often closed on Jewish holidays like Yom Kippur. Their city’s newspapers and TV stations discuss every Jewish holiday.

I am also tired of the inevitable lecture on why we must sacrifice our petty parochialism for the good of humanity. The Christians, who give these lectures, rarely schedule events on Christmas or Easter in an effort to combat their own parochialism. The few exceptions, like the Socialist Scholars’ Conference on Good Friday, are always used as examples to demand even greater and more consistent sacrifices from Jews and members of other minority religions.

Perhaps the Left persistently schedules events on Jewish holidays as a way to signal Jews that they are not welcome or, at least, that Jews who are too serious about their religion or national culture are not welcome. Or, perhaps, the organizers are just really stupid or inconsiderate. After all, they labor under the misconception that the socialist movement is so strong that it can do without Christians who celebrate Good Friday. Similarly, they are cavalier to other religious, ethnic, and political minorities. After five years they still regularly use the phrase “voodoo economics”, unaware that it slurs a group’s religious beliefs. Nevertheless, the SSC was particularly disturbing because many of the planners, sponsors and participants, were Jewish.

Many of the Jews involved in the conference held on Erev Pesach have used Judaism and Jewishness both polemically and to build their careers. The Generation After and John Ranz have been tireless in talking about the evil done to Jews forty years ago. They are dedicated to enshrining the memory of those Jews killed by Hitler. Yet TGA sponsored two panels at the conference. The first was on Friday afternoon, when most Jews would be preparing for the evening’s first seder. The second was on Shabbos, when some Jews out of walking distance could not attend. On the leaflet TGA issued about the conference, it also invited its supporters to its “most important event of the year,” a memorial meeting to say Kaddish for the martyrs of the Holocaust. But many, perhaps most, of those martyrs were observant Jews, who would not have been able to attend TGA’s Socialist Scholars Conference panels. Whether Ranz and TGA’s participation in the SSC tarnished their dedication to honoring the dead Jews of the Holocaust is debatable. But they certainly were callous toward the rights and feelings of today’s living Jews. Rather than protest discrimination by the Left against Jews, they preferred to legitimize the conference with their attendance. They chose to be accomplices to the insulting of the thousands of observant Jews in their community in order to promote their own cause.

Even Jews with no Jewish organizational affiliation — such as Irving Howe and Ellen Willis — should think before publicly flouting Jewish traditions. Having written widely and profitably on Jews and Judaism, their betrayal of other Jews undermines their credibility. In the early days of New Jewish Agenda, Willis wrote that it should avoid the mistakes of Breira and focus on anti-Semitism and Jewish oppression. “I think that by not addressing itself first and centrally to the basic dilemma of every Jew ie., how are we to insure our physical and spiritual survival — Breira failed to reach a great many actually and potentially dissident Jews and so was easily isolated by its enemies.” Perhaps Willis, as an expert on Jewish oppression, can explain how Jewish leftists like her ensure our physical and spiritual survival by planning, sponsoring, and attending Socialist Scholars Conference on Pesach. Why wasn’t the conference an insult by the Left to all those “potentially dissident Jews”, who are either observant or feel a greater sense of loyalty to other Jews than does Willis? Likewise Stanley Aronowitz, Willis’s colleague on Social Text, an SSC sponsor, might explain how his participation furthered his recent call for a Marxist “theory of Jewish liberation that can provide the basis for a new alliance between socialists and Jews.” Jews fought hard for the right to practice their religion freely and unencumbered. Socialist Jews, supposedly concerned with social solidarity and liberty,
should be mindful of that struggle. When nonreligious Jews publicly ignore Jewish holidays, they make life harder for religious Jews. They undermine the rights of Jews and other religious minorities. They let non-Jews say to the religious Jews, why do you need time off, or an excuse from school or some minor special consideration, when those other Jews do not. When Jews like Howe, Willis, and TGA, who are publicly identified with Judaism, say that they must attend the conference to spread their ideas, they encourage non-Jews to think that Jews do not care about their culture.

As a simple political calculation the conference and Jewish participation were stupid. First, Jews on the Left should be trying to make alliances with religious Jews. A conference held on Pesach only drives them away. Second, the tactics of Howe, Willis, Ranz, and TGA throw religious Jews into the arms of the Christian right. Religious Jews might distrust the political goals and tactics of conservative Christians. But at least those Christians understand the centrality of religion in the life of observant Jews. Third, Jews are a large non-Christian religious minority in the United States. But others exist and are growing. A common feeling of religious marginality could be a starting point for a coalition among Jews, American Indians, Hindus, Sikhs, Animists, atheists and especially, Moslems. If the Left does not involve itself in that coalition, many groups will reluctantly drift—with observant Jews—to the Right. Fourth, scheduling a conference on Pesach lends credence to the argument that those who are anti-Zionist, anti-Israel, or merely critical of Israel are necessarily anti-Jewish. Fifth, the American Left, like America itself, half or unconsciously uses the morals and idiom of Christianity. Think of the speeches and writings of Michael Harrington, Norman Thomas, Jesse Jackson, and A.J. Muste. In August, 1984, Monthly Review had a special issue on “Religion and the Left.” The assumption of every article was that religion means Christianity. If Jews were to fight for Jewish self-interest within the Left, then leftist Christians might be less religiously sectarian, and the Left more inviting to members of all various religions of America.

Finally as the Jesse Jackson/Louis Farrakhan affair showed, groups cannot make coalitions if they have widely divergent levels of group solidarity. Most Blacks on the Left supported Jackson and his nonrepudiation of Farrakhan, even if they believed that Farrakhan was wrong. An example is Cornell West in Social Text 11, who argues for the primacy of Black Unity. Yet many leftist Jews like Commoner, trained by years of Rosh Hashanah demonstrations and Pesach conferences, automatically put what they perceived as the greater good above their own interest or Jewish unity. Unfortunately, they may have made Jewish-Black coalitions on the Left harder. They increased the expectation that Jews will not fight for their own interests or those of fellow non-Left Jews. In future coalitions Jews will be expected to defend other people’s rights and defer to their calls for ethnic unity. But since Jews do not defend themselves or maintain their own unity, others like Blacks, will certainly not be expected to defend Jewish rights. Even if such lopsided coalitions hold together, who wants to work with people who do not stick up for themselves?

**HOW IS THIS WEEK DIFFERENT**

Everyone is hoping to leave the office early: in a rush to get home for the Passover holiday, or just anticipating heavy traffic as the transit strike begins. The office manager paces along the rows of desks and whips around corners, checking to see that we’re all still at our typewriters.

We'll never get done in time to leave early, anyway; they’ve given us twice as many letters to type, though the office is out of white-out and carbon paper. And besides, we’re in the middle of our break. We haven’t even finished eating.

Behold the danish of our affliction, which our foremothers bought every morning at the coffee cart to solace themselves, when they had been pulled too soon from their beds, their first-born dreams taken from them and drowned in the second of the ritual four cups of coffee.

The office manager listens to the radio news, scratching his scalp. He’s worried that we’ll be marooned here by the transit strike, sleeping on the floor under our desks like wild animals. Then he’d be stuck here too, with the city dark all around and nothing to drink but the washroom’s rusty red tap water.

The elevator brings corporate officers to our floor to drive us from our work stations. Management now doubts that the air conditioning system will keep out locusts.

"Out," the office manager rasps. He has a frog in his throat. "Please leave now. We’re closing up." We can’t be sure whether to believe him. The decision is terrifying: If we go now, we may never be able to return. But if we delay, we may never be able to leave.

We approach the red-carpeted reception area. The strike starts. We are safe across. The office door shuts behind us.

But their hearts have hardened. The office manager calls us at home from work. "How are you getting in?" he asks. "Can we put you in a car pool? Do you have a bicycle? When will you be in?"

We won’t be. With a mighty hand and an outstretched arm we are freed from the house of bondage. The horse and his rider, rider and subway car, bus and railroad car have been thrown into the sea.

**ELLEN GARVEY**
In 1978, Doug Minkler, then a United Rubber Worker mill operator saw a need, as described in the following letter. Since the need was not responded to adequately, he decided to make his own contribution to fulfilling it. Highlights of his efforts appear on the following pages. His posters are very colorful and lose much in black and white printing. However, Minkler's commitment to art as a means to a political end rather than a product for consumption, collection, or trade, makes SHMATE an excellent forum for his work.

DOUG MINKLER

When in college, I chose visual art over money making careers, and automatically assumed that I had joined the side of progress and the working class. It is now clear to me that just being an artist contributes little to progress. Even addressing pertinent social issues does not always mean contributing to change. For example: doing a painting about the inhumanity and alienation under capitalism for the Hirshorn Museum has very little effect on degrading working conditions, unemployment, and union busting that so many of us are suffering from.

Similarly, doing an anti-war painting for Vorpals will have only a microscopic effect on the military's recruitment of working people for duty in Central America.

Since the galleries and art museums are inefficient in reaching working people and cater mostly to the needs of the wealthy, many of us have searched out more direct alternative exhibiting areas.

The posters included here have been displayed in occupational health offices, women's centers, union halls, music clubs, store fronts, coffee houses, libraries, schools, markets, churches, theaters and in various publications.

A LETTER TO ARTISTS

We are bricklayers, clerks, and nurses, secretaries, custodians and shipbuilders. What we want to know is what are you doing?

We see your liquor ads, cigarette designs and commercials for vacations we'll never take. We know you work, but unfortunately, not for us.

We are impressed with your technical skills and awed by your illusionary abilities, but we need to see more; more than artistic experiments in the museum and pleasant scenery in the galleries; more than clever entertainment and fantasy. We need to see ourselves, our sacrifices, our resistance. We need pictures of our organizations, symbols for our rent strikes and posters demanding jobs. Record our strength, sensitivity, and our humor not only with lines of color but with lines of battle. Make our aspirations your inspiration, and your innovations will become our solutions.

Join us.

D. Minkler
United Rubber Worker (mill operator) 1978

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D. MINKLER

Postermaker/Designer specializing in fundraising, educational, and outreach posters for non-profit and labor organizations. Please write for job estimates. The posters reprinted in SHMATE are for sale. Write for order form for over 40 other posters.

D. Minkler
2209 Gaynor Ave.
Richmond, CA 94801
DON'T BURN OUT, BUST OUT
INDIVIDUALISM IS A PROBLEM, NOT THE SOLUTION

WIPE AWAY THE TIERS!
New hires and senior workers say same work same pay. End the two-tier wage structure.

NATIONAL IMMIGRATION PROJECT of the NATIONAL LAWYERS GUILD, INC.
always think of that night as my mother and the baseball jacket. I don’t know why except that was what she was wearing the night we picked her up. It’s my brother’s baseball jacket. That is, was his some twenty-five years ago. My brother is currently an entrepreneur of sorts, with operations based in Korea, Manila, and Saudi Arabia. He hasn’t thought of his baseball jacket in years.

My sons had bar mitzvah celebrations fifteen months apart. And though I was not used to the middle class lore of catered tradition, my father was. He insisted that his grandsons’ thirteenth birthdays be chronicled as major affairs. Or as he put it, “You don’t have to do what I want, but if not, it’ll just be lousy.”

There were not too many places he could put his foot down. When it came to the first boy’s simcha, he couldn’t put it down at all. He had tried to fix a window on the second floor of my parents’ four family house and had fallen from the ladder. He lay in traction for sixteen weeks.

If my father wanted a catered “Goodbye, Columbus” for his grandson, I was not going to dispute his choice. I loved him totally and was forever angry with my mother for placing him the schleppe position of having to ask to be admitted to his own house.

Stories about Jewish family life have an onion peel consistency. One more layer before we get to my baseball-jacketed Mama.

My father, all his life, has been a patsy for any get-rich-quick scheme. Maybe gold was not lying in the streets when he got here, but there were guys with Irish sweepstakes lottery tickets, real estate ventures in the swamps of New Jersey, and even flyers in the stock market. To save him from major economic disaster, in his one prudent moment (or so he thought and perpetually bemoaned) he placed the house he bought in 1929 in my mother’s name.

There were not too many places he could put his foot down. When it came to the first boy’s simcha, he couldn’t put it down at all. He had tried to fix a window on the second floor of my parents’ four family house and had fallen from the ladder. He lay in traction for sixteen weeks. If my father wanted a catered “Goodbye, Columbus” for his grandson, I was not going to dispute his choice. I loved him totally and was forever angry with my mother for placing him there the schleppe position of having to ask to be admitted to his own house.

Stories about Jewish family life have an onion peel consistency. One more layer before we get to my baseball-jacketed Mama.

My sister, Hilda, decided to trap me, which she did. On the Thursday preceding the big event, I went to Hempstead to pick up a pair of shoes which I had dyed to match my gown, a nile green chiffon with panels of royal blue. Very mother of the bar mitzvah buch. My sisters helped me shop. Hilda knew I would be in the shoe store. She had asked me earlier to come with her to my mother’s house in Brooklyn because my mother -----.

We have to interrupt for a minute. Another layer. The same onion.

My sister can be intrepid. Scratch can. Is. She had gotten her husband who works in the garment center to send her up to a wholesale house. She was able to choose a dress for my mother and was given the option to return it if it was not the correct size. That is unheard of in garment center situations. It just doesn’t happen. Not when it is “strictly wholesale”. If you are sent up to a shop, rarely, in the shop itself are you allowed to try on the garment on the rack if you are not taking it. Intrepid. That’s the word for my sister, Hilda. She had the dress. She wanted to try it on my mother. And she wanted me to go with her. I would have nothing to do with it. Let Mama wear the baseball jacket. It was Spring. Why did we always have to rescue her? I was having enough problems with last minute details — all caterer connected. Who sits with who? Who doesn’t talk to who? Who wants boiled chicken when it’s a roast beef — no substitutes, lady you’ll drive me crazy” reception? Who needed additional aggravation?

I went to the shoe store in Hempstead and standing in the doorway was my sister Hilda. She had her son Jennie— I’ll let him in.”

So now it was fifteen months since the last “affair” and another bar mitzvah loomed. My youngest son. At last year’s gala both my sisters were horrified because my mother, who is not given to dressing with a good deal of attention — the baseball jacket is the mainstay of her spring wardrobe and a tyrolean sweater of mine, now thirty years old, is her winter favorite — walked down the aisle to place her candle on the bar mitzvah cake wearing bedroom slippers. They vowed this would not happen at Mike’s party.
And inside that onion layer are tiny squiggles of guilt. It was my son's bar mitzvah. She only wants Mom to look good for my simcha. Of course we go. By that time other problems would be facing us. First of all, I have to say that my mother does not allow us into her house. Indeed, none of us has been inside of her house since we married out of it.

Yes, occasionally, my eldest sister has to do some business chore and is admitted. My sister, Claire, has a much more realistic temperament. No nonsense. She can get her way and get in there to have my mother sign certain papers, banking transactions, etc. My mother understands that. She's a landlady. But we don't get in.

I think there have been possibly one, two, never more than three occasions when I begged her because of my bladder bursting to be allowed to use the bathroom. Promising her that I won't look right left or right, not up or down, not inspect in any way the total chaos that has been her mode of life since 1947. Not to see the debris, the pile-on of accumulated life, not the dust and dirt and garbage strewn on beds, bureaus, floors — any and every available surface. I must also promise not to use the sink. I can flush, but there is "something wrong with the sink" since I was a little girl. (The flush being fixed is an improvement. I can remember sitting on the seat holding an umbrella because it also leaked from the ceiling.) "You'll wash your hands when you get home," she'd yell down to me from the top of the stoop. She's a demon for personal hygiene, my mother is.

So, on that very cool night, she's sitting outside on a ledge on the stoop of the four family house in Brooklyn, in my brother's baseball jacket and in my father's shoes. (You don't wear lurex slippers in the street.) And she is furious that we have taken so long, because when she doesn't want you in her house, she is, by God, prompt and has been waiting, possibly for hours, outside.

I get out to help my mother down the steps, which doesn't interfere with her non-stop nagging and condemnation of the two of us. How could we keep her there, sitting on that cold stone for two hours? Waiting for the pritzas — Gabor prima-donnas would be a fair translation. Not an accurate description, but pretty much my mother's inflamed point of view.

Now we come to the problem of getting her to try on the stuff. A small detail. Logistics. She won't let us into the house and she can't get undressed in the street. And we don't have the right undergarments. They are at my sister Claire's house. A precautionary measure. Too advanced state of terror when she opened the door. The girl would be studying and would be very upset. She had exams — studying to do. Why hadn't we called?

"Because you'd tell us not to come," my middle sister said, smoothly, pushing her way in. "Look, you go in your bedroom. Don't even open the door. Just give me her undergarments. You won't even know we're around."

"I told you she'd be upset," my mother said.

I have an idea my brother-in-law was home, but he never came out of the small room he used to study his music. On weekends he led a small choir and worked very diligently over the liturgical arrangements. Jake understood how to deal with tension. Avoid it at all costs. A good lesson. Right now, he was nursing an ulcer. He had to protect himself.

We closed the door and attended to the problem of removing the bits and scraps of (what's a nice shiny word — reprehensible?) underwear my mother wore, things she wore because "she's not going anywhere" and "who sees her anyway?" Well, who did see what was under that baseball jacket? Why was it important to have whoole bloomers?

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Well, now I have to comb my mother's hair. They grey very late in my mother's family, but, as she has told me time and time again, when I was a little kid, I used to scream and hold on for dear life. Unfortunately, what I held on to was my mother's hair. So she hasn't got any. I mean, maybe six, eight, ten, twelve strands. All brown. Maybe two gray. I took the comb and brushed them into a kind of Roman Caesar's bang — which didn't look at all bad, to tell you the truth.

Now, she purses her lips, because as she will tell you, though she likes to be natural she knows the price you have to pay today to be a "today's woman". If I tell her she doesn't have to wear lipstick, that all young girls today are natural, she thinks I'm saying nasty things about birth control and why am I wasting time and where is the lipstick?

She keeps her lips shaped in an oval, while still trying to tell me not to have such a fresh mouth. I apply lip stain as deftly as I can to the moving target. Now I lead her to the full length mirror.

And then. And then.

The personality my mother uses with the stranger, I see in its full flower. The shy, trembling young beauty is a dazzler. The shy, trembling young beauty is three score and ten. She's starry eyed and smiling and cries and blesses us and we take it as we have just taken the equally emotional bloodbath so recently heaped upon us.

We're so good — too good — why do we do it? How can she thank us?

We're not her daughters for nothing. We're still smarting from assault and invective. Now's our chance to grind deep into the dust and we do it!

"Okay, Ma. That's enough. You see, you can look beautiful. But you don't want to look beautiful. You'd rather wear baseball jackets. Off goes the clothing."

"What do you mean, off goes the clothing?"

"Off goes the clothing, Mama. Because we're never gonna to find it. D'you understand that? Are we gonna find it in that hellhole? No." I call my sister. "Hilda, come over here."

"No. No. No." My mother protests. "I want Dad to see it."

"What do you mean, you want Daddy to see it? First of all, how can he see it? He'll see it on Saturday."

"Aaaaah!" My mother gasps. "Your father. Oh, my God!"

Of course, oh my God! It was late — and my father was probably sitting on a stone step on the stoop waiting for my mother to open the door, because my mother has never given him a key.

"Oh, God," she moans again. "What can we do? He can't get into the house."

Practical Claire. Wonderful Claire has the tenant's telephone number. My mother doesn't even know their last name. They will open the outside hall door. At least he can sit on the inside steps until she comes home.

That little travesty over, we now have the inevitable battle of getting the clothes off. Okay! She can understand the value of taking off the dress. Saturday is the bar mitzvah — she couldn't really sleep in it for two days (although I wouldn't swear it didn't enter her mind) — BUT — no way was she going to take the girdle and brassiere off. Several sidelong glances in the mirror tells her what she knows. She likes the silhouette. Everything was where it should be. Up was where it was supposed to be. Indented was where it should be. Fleshed out was also good.

No. No. No. She wasn't going to take them off. She begs — pleads — believe her, she'll never lose these things.

"Ma," I say, finally. "You'll never get the brassiere off. Did you see what we had to do? You will never get it off."

She looks at the floor for a minute, then, softly: "Don't worry. I'll ask your father."

My sister and I look at each other. You must remember. We are both women well into middle age. We have never seen our mother and father kiss. Sleep in the same bed. Talk in the same room unless there was a referee, a child, a grandchild, a neighbor or a policeman.

We took her home that night with her brassiere on. The baseball jacket never looked perkier.
Until very recently, the justification for the U.S.’s bellicose policy toward Nicaragua has been its claim that the Sandinista regime was the main supplier of arms and ammunition to Salvadorean revolutionaries. Over and over again, the State Department, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Department produced “documents” to back up such charges. White papers were issued, photographs were published, witnesses were taped. But inevitably, such disinformation was exposed. The much-touted White Paper of the Carter administration was proved to be totally fraudulent, as David MacMichael, a former CIA officer has described the tale it had invented. And the famous witness presented by the CIA to Congress turned out to be a picture of dictator Somoza’s victims. And the famous witness presented by the CIA to Congress denied each of the CIA’s allegations, telling instead, how he had been blackmailed and threatened by the CIA to describe the tale it had invented.

Never, in fact, has an arms shipment from Nicaragua to El Salvador been interdicted; never has one even been photographed from the air. As anyone who has visited the area is well aware, no such shipment could possibly filter past the scores of U.S. and Salvadorean ships guarding the Gulf of Fonseca, which separates El Salvador from Nicaragua. As for going over land, such arms convoys would have to avoid contra bases and reconnaissance squads, then dodge the Honduran army operating in its southern territory, then skirt around the thousands of U.S. troops now permanently stationed in the area, and finally elude the sizeable Salvadorean border guards. (1)

But that non-justifiable justification is now abandoned. President Reagan has made it perfectly clear himself. The U.S.’s aim, he said, is to “remove” the “present structure” of government in Nicaragua, to keep up the war until the Sandanistas surrender, until “they’d say ‘uncle.’” The reason for such aggressiveness is no longer to interdict non-existent shipments of arms but, in Reagan’s words, because the Sandanistas have “betrayed the revolution that Americans cheered for its promise of democracy. They have become pro-Soviet, chased democrats into exile and refused to subject their power to the consent of the Nicaraguan people.” And no one in Washington seems to disagree with Reagan’s reasons, even if they refuse to condone his methods. Liberal Senators Dodd (Connecticut), Leahy (Vermont), and Kennedy (Massachusetts) do not even question the premises. True, the New York Times has expressed some doubts. In its editorial of February 23, 1985, for example, it did refer to Reagan as “the imperial president” and it did chastize Secretary of State Schultz for asserting that Nicaragua is behind the Iron Curtain. Wrote the editorialist: “It is not misguided to wonder why 15,000 rebels have so far failed to win popular support within Nicaragua. In four years, they haven’t won and held a single town. . . . What holds the Soviet empire together is the Red Army. . . . Say what you will about the Sandinistas, it isn’t the Red Army that keeps them in power.” Nevertheless, even that rare bit of analytic proficiency did not compel the Times to challenge the propaganda. “The President’s premises,” it said referring to Reagan’s unsupported contention that the Sandinista revolution was cheered by Americans and that the Sandinistas betrayed it, “are admirable and accurate.” (2)

The inevitable questions, then, are how did Americans cheer and how did the Sandinistas betray their revolution?

The fact is that official America has always cheered the dictators and the butchers in Nicaragua, not the democrats. Since the era of the Manifest Destiny, U.S. Marines have invaded Nicaragua no less than 14 times — in 1853, 1854, twice in 1857, 1867, 1894 (to overthrow the Liberal revolution and the only government chosen in free, uncensored elections in Nicaraguan history until 1984), in 1896, 1898, twice in 1899, twice in 1910, in 1912 (staying until 1925), and in 1927 (staying until 1933) — the most invaded country in the hemisphere. What’s more, each U.S. invasion had only one purpose: to overthrow or stop the rise of nationalist, honest reformers and install or fortify U.S. puppet regimes. The last such regime, the Somoza dynasty, was supported by every U.S. president in the last 50 years. Even Franklin Roosevelt, in full knowledge that Anastasio (Tacho) Somoza was torturing to death an estimated 3000 dissenter per year, said: “Somoza may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he’s our son-of-a-bitch.” (3)

And how did official America cheer after it became obvious that the vast majority of the Nicaraguan people were supporting the Sandinista revolt? President Carter gave more aid to Somoza during his 1976-78 tenure than to any other Central American country. Carter funded 13% of Somoza’s National Guard Budget. The aid was used, according to Amnesty International, to facilitate the torture and execution of 12,000 Nicara-
guans. After Bill Stewart, an ABC correspondent was shot and killed by Somoza's guard and his death was shown on American television news, U.S. public opinion demanded a stop to U.S. aid in Nicaragua. Carter responded by encouraging Israel to continue such aid, and the Israelis did send machine guns, Arava (STOL) counter-insurgency aircrafts, Galil assault rifles, ammunition, patrol boats and radios to the Somoza guard. According to Davar, an Israeli Labor magazine, "Galil rifles sold by Israel to the regime of Anastasio (Tachito) Somoza in mid-1978 were sent directly to a special terror unit commanded by [another of] Somoza's son[s] which carried out the murder of political opponents, among them women and children." (4)

Under President Carter, U.S. AID also set up INVIerno, the Institute for Peasant Welfare, which was a cover for a Somoza intelligence operation to detect peasants who might cooperate with the Sandinistas; 3000 peasants were tortured and killed under this program. It was Carter, not Reagan, who started the counter-insurgency operations along the Nicaraguan border in 1980 and who ordered all U.S. aid to the Sandinistas stopped as of January 1981, when, incidentally, Arturo Cruz, the wealthy businessman, was still Nicaragua's ambassador to the U.S. And it was President Carter who, in 1979, long before anyone could possibly betray anything, gave more aid to Honduras than to all other Central American countries combined. (5).

Nor did Reagan wait very long to start his own cheering. Before his inauguration, his advisors in the Heritage Foundation recommended that he unleash "a well-orchestrated program for the acceleration of the removal of the Government of Managua." Then, as soon as he was inaugurated, he began financing the anti-Sandinista association of big investors, COSEP, and its political arm, FUNDE ($45 million in 1981 alone). On the other hand, Reagan stopped even the $9.8 million of wheat products earmarked for Nicaragua as part of PL-480 Food-for-Peace. He also cut the Nicaraguan sugar quota by 90%. The International Monetary Fund, which the U.S. controls and which had given Somoza $66 million just 9 weeks before his fall — a loan which the Sandinistas are paying off even though Somoza took the money with him to Swiss and Florida banks — decided to halt all loans to the Sandinistas, and the World Bank followed suit, as of January 1982. (6)

Pushed by the CIA, Nicaragua's private enterprises joined in the cheering. Exxon, for example, refused to import the Mexican oil which the Sandinistas had purchased, despite the fact that they did not hamper the Exxon refinery from continuing to reap profits inside Nicaragua. Indeed, Exxon is still the biggest earner among the foreign companies and it continues to remit its profits back to the U.S. This is true for all U.S. businesses, which, except for those violating the Sandinista law against decapitalization, have been encouraged to continue their operations as before. In general, 80% of the enterprises in Nicaragua are private; only those belonging to the Somozas or (the two) guilty of violating the decapitalization law have been nationalized. (7)

Nevertheless, COSEP leaders have repeatedly tried to bring down the Sandinista regime. COSEP Vice-President Jorge Salazar, for example, was killed in a shootout as he was smuggling arms to the counter-revolutionaries. The CIA also mounted a plot against Foreign Minister d'Escoto, recruiting members of the Conservative Party's youth group. Its president, Mario Castillo, was caught in that plot, and his confessions led to the capture not only of other CIA recruits, but also of arms, poisons, code books, tapes, etc. When presented with that evidence, the U.S. reacted by ordering every Nicaraguan consul out of America. (Sandinista Interior Minister Tomas Borge, aware that such expulsions would make travel difficult for U.S. citizens, thereupon decreed that Americans were free to enter Nicaragua without visas). (8)

The most spectacular cheering of the Sandinista revolution came from the Managua opposition daily La Prensa and from the CIA. Among other attempts at ruining the Sandinista program, La Prensa tried to provoke hoarding and consumer panics by falsely reporting shortages, to sabotage the alphabetization program by claiming that it was a Russian "indoctrination" plot, and to hurt the Sandinista inoculation campaign by asserting that the volunteer health workers giving vaccines against polio, measles and whooping cough were "distributors of brainwashing serums from Russia and

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were responsible. The bombing of Managua airport is another (Summit Aviation) (9) one such case. Eden cero actions to the CIA. Last year, the proved that the plane belonged to one CIA front in
borders of Nicaragua, was also bombing strategic Sandi­
Cuba."
The CIA, meanwhile, besides mining the harbors of Nicaragua, was also bombing strategic Sandinista bases and airports, while claiming that the contras were responsible. The bombing of Managua airport is one such case. Eden Pastora, the so-called commandante cero now leading a contra band in Costa Rica, insisted that it was his Cessna plane that dropped those bombs on September 8, 1983, on Managua's international airport. But Jeff Gerth of the New York Times eventually proved that the plane belonged to one CIA front in McLean, Virginia (Investair), and was maintained by another (Summit Aviation). (9)

Not that Reagan limited his anti-Sandinista operations to the CIA. Last year, the Philadelphia Inquirer documented the extensiveness of a secret Army helicopter unit at work in the area. Its members, "wearing civilian clothes and flying at night," were told that they were to insist that they were civilians and "could expect no U.S. government acknowledgement or intervention" if they were shot down. But in fact, they were and are still members of the 160th Task Force of the 101st Airborne Division stationed at Fort Campbell. When confronted with these facts, Michael Burch, Assistant

Secretary of Defense for public relations said: "We just don't talk about that unit." In 1983, the unit suffered 17 aircraft fatalities. Another such fatality occurred on January 11, 1984; the helicopter crash was witnessed by too many people to ignore, but to this day, the Army (and the New York Times) still claims that it was shot down "during routine military maneuvers in Honduras, by gunfire from across the Nicaraguan border," when in fact it was strafing civilians well inside Nicaraguan territory. (10)

All of these warring acts were obviously meant to be a prelude to an invasion, if not by actual U.S. Marines (for the 15th time), then by U.S. proxies: the contras, aided by CIA contract agents (Cuban exiles) and Puerto Rican mercenaries, perhaps also by Honduran regulars, with the cover of such U.S. units as the 160th Task Force, backed by U.S. Naval forces (including the ultra-modern spy ship U.S.S. Sphinx) which remain permanently off both of Nicaragua's coasts.

Nor was this a recent policy. A combat-ready airport near the Honduran-Nicaraguan border was finished in 1982; the whole port of Trujillo, in Honduras, was built and equipped to handle major U.S. ships; and 40 miles of roads were cut through the densest forests and jungles of southeastern Honduras leading to an area populated by Miskito Indians who, because Somoza left them alone, tend to oppose Sandinista social restructuriza­tion. In addition, Reagan ordered seven full-fledged bases built for U.S. troops on maneuvers in Honduras.

It is these maneuvers — Combined Movement (July-Aug. 1982), big Pine I (February 1983), Big Pine II (Aug. 1983-Feb. 1984), Kilo Punch (March 1984), Granadero I (April-June 1984), Lightening II (April 1984), King's Guard (Naval, April-May 1984), Lempira (Sept.-Oct. 1984), and Big Pine III (June 1984 and still running, to be heightened in April 1985) — which allow the Reagan Administration to circumvent Congressional interdiction against giving aid to the contras; after each maneuver, much of the weapons, ammunition and equipment is simply left behind for the contras to pick up. (11)

In addition, of course, the Reagan administration is doing everything possible to stop all lending countries and institutions from helping the Sandinistas. Because of such pressure, most European countries have not aided Nicaragua. Even Spain's socialist premier, who concluded that Nicaragua was a genuine democracy, has been reluctant to send Nicaragua needed medicine. France's Mitterand, while publicly promising to give Nicaragua a mine-sweeper to defuse its harbors, and $1.5 million in medical grants, has yet to do either. In a January 30, 1985 letter to Inter-American Development Bank President Antonio Ortiz Mena, Secretary of State Schultz denounced Nicaragua as "not credit-worthy" in a "strong" bid to stop the bank from lending the country

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$58 million for credits to small and medium-sized farms and for purchase of supplies needed in the production of basic foods. Despite the fact that all 25 Latin American members of the bank, representing a voting majority, unanimously approved the loan, Shultz' pressure stopped it. As one member reported: "We read [the letter] as a threat... Even during the time of [former Chilean president] Allende, there was never such a communication." (12)

Finally, and only as a symbolic clincher, the Reagan administration has cheered the Sandinista revolution by violating the charters of the UN and OAS, and by refusing to submit to the jurisdiction of the World Court, to which Nicaragua had brought its case (and on which the U.S. judge voted with the others that Nicaragua did have justification to do so). Significantly, the last head of state who defied the World Court was the Ayatollah Khomeni.

TAKING OUT THE SCABS A BIG JOB FOR THE 80'S

O, in view of all this cheering for the Sandinista revolution, how did the Sandinistas betray their revolution? By banning the Conservative party whose members, including top officials, have been caught plotting with the CIA? Not at all. The Conservative Party (PCD) participated fully in the transitional government and in the ensuing electoral process obtaining 14% of the vote. By expropriating Exxon and the other U.S. firms which tried to throw obstacles in the way of Sandinista reforms? Not at all, although they are now expected to pay workers a living minimum wage (roughly $1.15 an hour, compared to U.S. average pay in El Salvador of $.19 an hour). By banning La Prensa for spreading lies and deliberate disinformation? The Sandinistas did censor many of La Prensa's tendentious articles. Sometimes the censors did get carried away and excised articles which would not appear, in time of peace, to be very seditious. Unquestionably, mistakes were made. But La Prensa is not a newspaper; it is a publicity pamphlet for the armed opposition. On November 4, 1984, Nicaragua held an election in front of 4,000 observers, mostly from North America and Europe. I was one such observer. On November 4, 1984, La Prensa's main, top, bold headline shrieked that all foreign observers had refused to come. On that day I asked Pedro Joaquin Chamorro, then editor-in-chief and publisher of the daily and now a member of the contra coordinating committee, why he lied. He answered honestly: "I and my paper are against the government." Still, La Prensa continues to publish. (13)

Did the Sandinistas betray their revolution by executing the torturers, the rapists, the murderers who composed Somoza's hated National Guard? No one was executed, when the Sandinistas won. Maximum penalty in Nicaragua is 30 years. Most guardsmen were allowed to leave. Some were caught, tried, and sent to jail. Only a handful, the worst criminals, are still in prison. The rest have been amnestied. The Sandinistas have also offered a general amnesty to any contra who abandons the struggle, even those responsible for recent massacres along the Honduran and Costa Rican borders.

Well then, how did they betray? Despite the U.S.-imposed economic blockade and the high cost of the contra war, the Sandinistas have never forgotten or drastically curtailed their social program. They have built six major hospitals and 650 barrio clinics staffed 24 hours a day with at least one doctor and one nurse. They have eradicated polio completely, innoculating every child in the country. Columbia University School of Public Health's Richard Garfield reported that Nicaragua had achieved "the most rapid infant mortality decline on record anywhere," and managed this while the contras murdered at least 19 health workers, abducted, raped and tortured 26, and destroyed 22 clinics (by the end of 1983). The Sandinistas brought unemployment down from 55% to 22%, illiteracy from 52% to 12%. They built over 800 one-room and 65 major urban schools, put up scores of children libraries, nurseries and playgrounds, transformed Somoza's private clubs into popular resorts, and constructed a whole batch of workers' vacation inns. Sandinistas built 16,500 homes, gave land titles and materials for another 31,000 homes. Under the government self-help program, residents working together can get supplies and technical advice to improve their neighborhoods, and hundreds of communities have profited from this program to bring sewers, running water, electricity, and pavement to their barrios. (14)

By the end of 1984, the Sandinista government had

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distributed 10.6 million acres (37.5% of the arable land) to 45,000 families. Another 5.7 million acres, confiscated from the Somozas, were turned into State farms. An equal amount, fallow or inefficiently-worked lands, were turned into collectives. But large landholdings which were not owned by the Somozas and were carefully cultivated remains in the hands of their owners; this amounts to 13% of the arable land. In total, 60% of the land is in the private sector, 40% is public. (15)

Perhaps, the greatest betrayal by the Sandinistas, according to the Reagan Administration, was that they decided to hold full, general elections in November, 1984. A special council which included all political factions was created to work out the laws and regulations for that election, and it asked the Swedish government for technical and practical help to make that election the fairest ever held in any country in Latin America. Among the council's decisions:

— All Nicaraguans 16 years of age and older were eligible to vote. Voting is a right and therefore voluntary, not like in El Salvador where people had to show proof of having voted to get food, government credits, and military laissez-passer. More than 93 percent of the population registered to vote, of which over 75 percent voted (compared to 53% in the U.S. elections held two days later).

— The 96 member National Assembly was elected on a proportional representation basis which encouraged political pluralism (compared to the U.S. system of winner-take-all which favors only a two party system eliminating all dissenting views).

— Only 1600 signatures were needed to register a party country-wide; the seven which so registered, ranging from extreme right to extreme left, were given equal amounts of free broadcast time on television (22 hours) and radio (44 hours). The seven were also offered time to debate each other, hence another 49 hours of free exposures. Each party was given 9 million cordobas (the equivalent, at the time, of approximately $900,000 U.S.), equal amounts of paper, ink, gasoline, tires and even sound trucks.

— The Supreme Electoral Council (with five members, of whom only one was Sandinista) demanded and received its own vehicles and staff to investigate any charge of electoral harassment or interference, and they did. One drunken Sandinista lieutenant, accused of molesting a Conservative Party rally by waving his pistol in the air, was arrested, expelled from the army and jailed for 4 years. On September 22, 1984, in an incident that the U.S. media described as Sandinista "terrorism," Arturo Cruz, speaking to 50 of his followers in Masaya, was heckled by an intense crowd of anti-counterrevolutionaries who accused him of collaborating with the Reagan Administration to overthrow the Sandinista regime. (Those charges are, of course, correct: as early as 1982, the day after Cruz resigned as Nicaragua’s ambassador to Washington, he told me in New York that "The U.S. will never allow a government in Nicaragua or anywhere in Central America or the Caribbean to be economically or politically independent. So it's useless to try, and I'm certainly not going to stick to the losers.") Nevertheless, as various foreign eye-witnesses reported, including James Philiou of the New Institute of Central America of Cambridge, Mass., “Because of the protection of the Sandinista police, Dr. Cruz delivered his speech unmolested. Among the crowd, Sandinista Front activists used their loudspeaker and credibility with the people to call for restraint and discipline.”

— Every political party could appoint an official to be present at each polling place (and at every meeting of the Council), and they did. The ballots were made of heavy non-transparent paper (whereas in El Salvador, they were printed on tissues paper). Voters marked them in a private booth (not so in El Salvador) and placed...
them in a box made of solid wood (in El Salvador the top of the boxes were made of transparent plastic and the boxes were guarded by the military).

—The whole election was planned and coordinated by Swedish government advisers—a fact not reported in any major newspaper or network TV news program in the U.S. The vote counting was carried out by representatives of the Council and of all parties, supervised by the Swedish volunteers, and were tabulated on French teletype-like electronic counters, double-checked by French, Norwegian and Finnish technicians. (16)

On November 4, 1984, thanks to transportation offered to our group of U.S. academic and independent journalists by ASTC, the Sandinista Association of Cultural Workers, I was able to see the election first-hand. We went where we wanted to go without informing anyone in advance. Most of us were fluent in Spanish, hence needed no translator. We visited 17 polling places, in and out of Managua, in rich neighborhoods and in popular barrios. We talked to people queuing up to vote, to people leaving the polls and individually to folks at least three blocks out of ear-shot of any official. We heard the kind of criticism that few of us, even to Costa Rica's OSEP, the regime still won 51 percent absolute.

In sum, the Nicaraguan elections of Nov. 4 were to all of us, even to Costa Rica's anti-Sandinista and staunchly pro-U.S. warlord Jose (Pepe) Figueres, who was one of those observers that La Prensa claimed did not exist, "the fairest and most honest elections ever held in Latin America."

To us, North Americans, it was also the most meaningful, for never in the U.S. in our lifetime, have we had an election with as wide a choice for as real a difference in philosophy, commitment and program. (17)

Who then is primarily responsible for the disinformation which claims that because Cruz did not run, the elections were "A Farce?" First of all it is important to understand that Cruz was backed by OSEP and FUNDE, and had he run he would have polled at the most 10 percent. Indeed, in my extensive travel in various trips throughout Nicaragua from October to February, I found very few people who had ever heard of him, including those who claimed to read La Prensa regularly. Even the New York Times, which editorially scoffed at the elections, had to report:

"Since May, when American policy toward the election was formed, the administration has wanted the opposition candidate, Arturo Cruz, either not to enter the race, or, if he did, to withdraw before the election, claiming the conditions were unfair," senior administration officials said. "The administration never contemplated letting Cruz stay in the race," one official said, "because then the Sandinistas could justifiably claim that the elections were legitimate." (18)

The Times further documented Cruz's ties to COSEP and explained that COSEP "was in frequent contact with the CIA about the elections." One of the Times most reliable writers then went down to look for himself. John Oakes, former Senior Editor, reported:

The most fraudulent thing about the Nicaraguan election was the part the Reagan administration played in it. By their own admission, United States Embassy officials in Managua pressured opposition politicians to withdraw from the ballot in order to isolate the Sandinistas and to discredit the regime. (19)

The prestigious, and certainly very anti-communist, Latin American Studies Association, which had dispatched a formidable team of observers to the election, also documented that the U.S. Embassy tried to bribe Conservative Party leaders to pull out of the elections. And as for the CIA-backed contras, they desperately tried to disrupt the election by murdering election officials and burning down electoral polling places. In one incident in Matagalpa, the contras slit the throats of eight farmers in front of their families and kidnapped 14 others. In San Gregorio, they killed six children of voter registration volunteers two days before the election. In one week in late October in the north, they murdered 43 people who had registered. They also burned down over a hundred polling places, but most were quickly rebuilt, and on November 4, all but 16 of the 3,892 were open for voting. (20)

The results were very impressive: 75.5% of registered voters cast ballots: less than 7% of the votes were invalid (ballots with two or more marks or none at all); 29.2% voted for the Right opposition, 3.8% for the Left; 67% of all voters supported the Sandinistas. Even if one were to count all those who did not register (even if their reason was that they were in a hospital or at the front along the Honduran border) as Sandinista opponents, add them to those who registered but did not vote, add to that sum those who made a mistake on their ballots, and to this total those who voted left or right against the Sandinistas, the regime still won 51 percent absolute.

Is that why President Reagan called it "a Soviet-style sham election?" Mike Joyce, counsel for political affairs in the United States Embassy in Managua, agreed. When a group of U.S. observers, including Lois Whit-
man of the New York City Commission on Human Rights, "pointed to the open and lively campaign, and the contrast between elections in Nicaragua and those in El Salvador, Mr. Joyce replied that we have to use 'a different measuring stick' for countries like Nicaragua that 'pose a threat to United States security and interests.'" (21)

On this kind of double-think and deliberate disinformation the Reagan administration openly champions aid for the contras to overthrow the Sandinistas. Reagan himself had called the contras "our brothers" deserving as much support as "Simon Bolivar, the great liberator." Shultz insisted that such support, on the part of Americans, "was a moral duty." (22)

Aside from the fact that President Reagan is obviously unfamiliar with American history — the U.S. did not support Bolivar and President Monroe called him "an impudent upstart" because he wanted an independent federation of Central America — it is important to know exactly who are the contras and what they really do.

Of the approximately 8,000 Nicaraguan contras, most are former members of Somoza's National Guard. But, some are not. I interviewed a young wounded contra in a hospital in Juigalpa who told me that his father had indeed been a guard and had died during the final days of the Sandinista revolt. "But what could I do? Everybody knew about my father. I guess I could have gone to a city, to Managua. But all my friends, my father's friends, were in Honduras. So I went there too. When I tried to get a job, they promised me $300 a month and room and board to join the FDN. I got room and board okay, and occasionally a woman, and lots of training, but never any money except for cigarettes." Other contras included former farmers who feared that their small parcels of land would be taken away by the agrarian reform. Others, more realistic, knew that they would not lose their lands but felt that unless they joined a cooperative or a collective they would have a hard time selling their products to the government distribution centers and would have to constantly worry about making a living on the open market (although, as it turned out, because of shortages, prices at the private markets bring sellers much higher incomes than through the government). Still other contras were convinced that Sandinista austerity offered too little and decided to gamble on a FND-CIA future. (23)

In addition to the Nicaraguans, there are some 5000 foreigners, mostly Cuban exiles from Miami now under contract to the CIA. All four contras with whom I interviewed in November told me that their chiefs were Cuban exiles. These CIA-contracted exiles are the field commanders of the biggest contra force, the so-called Nicaraguan Democratic Force (FDN), which is based along the Honduran-Nicaraguan border. The Democratic Revolutionary Alliance or ARDE, which is roughly 1/4 the size of the FDN, is stationed in Costa Rica. Both groups have been given Special Forces style command structures and U.S. arms, equipment and logistics. According to some eye-witness reports, U.S. Green Berets now actually accompany the contras on their raids inside Nicaragua. One wonded contra squad commander I tried to talk to (he refused to answer my questions) was clearly Puerto Rican by papers in his wallet. On June 15, 1984, a 70-man ARDE invasion force from Costa Rica was quickly defeated. Among the dead contras were M-16 rifles, grenade launches, mortars, antitank cannons, machine guns, Claymore mines, sophisticated communication gear, a portable field hospital with operating room and identification documents proving that many of the dead were Guatemalan, Panamanian, Cuban exiles, and Puerto Rican.

There are also two Miskito Indian contra forces: MISURA, led by Steadman Fagoth, a former Somoza agent, which originally counted some 1500 men but is now down to about 600, and a break-away unit led by Brooklyn Rivera and known as MISURASATA, with about 200 men, which at first allied itself with ARDE but is now back in the FDN fold. (24)

Until mid-1983, all four organizations tried to harass the Sandinista regime with quick hit-and-run strikes against civilian communities near the borders. In 1979 and 1980, these attacks focused on literacy campaign workers. After Reagan's election and the enormous increase in aid they received from the CIA, US Army units on maneuvers (with which they trained), and Argentine counter-revolutionary experts (before Alfonsin's election) the contras became more daring. Invad ing northern Nicaragua with battalion-size forces, they tried to seize some major towns and create "liberated

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zones” with hope of quick U.S. recognition as the “legitimate” government of Nicaragua. But after making serious inroads to isolate Ocotal and Jalapa and penetrating into Jinotega and Matagalpa, the contras were stopped by local militia.

When the Sandinista army began its counter-attack, the FDN Units fled in total panic despite the fact that it had gained significant adherents in the Jinotega region, which, during the Somoza period, had been a prime recruiting area for the National Guard. By mid-1984, the FDN has reduced to small, guerrilla-style harassment attacks one again. (A) As for ARDE, it was in total disarray, 500 members having abandoned the organization to turn themselves in to Costa Rican authorities for an amnestied-repatriation back to Nicaragua. It was at this point that the CIA decided it had to take over total control of the contras. (25)

At first the CIA tried to re-organize the contra leadership. Eden Pastora, once a Sandinista hero who had become leader of ARDE, was cut off from both funds and material, with the hope he would step aside. When he refused, an assassination attempt almost succeeded, convincing him to withdraw, though not very quietly. Today he is excluded from the FDN’s general staff when he was captured, said it very clearly to West German sociologist Dieter Eich and Colombian journalist Carlos Rincon: “My work — yes, one could say — was that of a terrorist.” Added another FDN prisoner, Edwardo Lopez Valenzuela:

We arrived at the road at four thirty, and proceeded at once to set up our roadblock. A blue jeep with 13 people appeared. The 13 people got out and lined up in front of us. Among them were three nurses. Jimmy Leo, Polo, and Reuben proceeded to rape all three. The women pleaded with them to stop but no one paid any attention to them. After the rape, they fired salvos of 20 shots from their FAL in the breasts and head of each woman.

Then Jimmy Leo, went up to one of them who looked like a foreigner, who said, “Stop this shooting, we are civilians. I am a doctor from Germany. Don’t murder us!”

Jimmy paid no attention to this, and as the foreigner once more cried, “Don’t murder us,” Jimmy proceeded to fill him with lead from his FAL, from his head down to his chest. After he shot him, Jimmy turned to me and said, “Now it’s your turn.” So I went and killed a person wearing blue pants and a white shirt. One shot after another from the machinegun, five in the head and five in the chest.

When they were all dead, we were satisfied. We were happy, and shouted out many times: “With God and Patriotism we will overthrow the communists” and “Long live the FDN.” (28)
The contra terrorist attack on the civilian sector has certainly had its toll: By the end of 1984, 8,000 civilians had been killed, half of them children. In the Atlantic coast, 40 clinics and hospitals had been wiped out, and $1 million worth of damage inflicted on the others; 90 tons of medicine had been destroyed during the bombing of the port of Corinto in October 1983; 98 teachers had been killed and another 171 kidnapped; 247 members of the literacy campaign volunteer group had been assassinated; in the Atlantic coast region, 14 schools had been burned to the ground, 359 had closed because of danger to staff and students; 11 Infant Service centers had been leveled.

The contra war has drastically affected production. Official figures state that by June, 1984, $101.1 million worth of damage had been incurred in the agrarian sector, with an average of ten agricultural cooperatives burned down each month since January 1980. But this is misleading because it calculates only direct damage, not the amount lost from peasant fears, from the coffee, cotton, sugar, bananas, and other cash crops not even planted. It has been estimated that lost revenue from unplanted or unharvested coffee will amount to $30 million in 1985.

Furthermore, as a result of contra attacks on isolated villages (97 in the last 48 months) some 160,000 rural persons have flocked to the cities, mostly Managua, creating a vast problem for the Sandinista government. In 1984 alone it was forced to allocate $5.3 million for such displaced people. All together, direct and indirect cost has been almost $1.3 billion for a country whose earnings are only around $420 million. Thus Nicaragua's external debt has increased from $1.6 billion in 1979 to $4 billion today, and it will go higher in 1985 as the Sandinistas are forced to use 40% of their budget on defense. All of which, according to the systematic research carried out by Morris S. Thompson, Newsday's Latin American Bureau Chief, is purely defensive. (B)(29)

The contras, meanwhile, are continuing to receive more and more offensive aid. The current Pine III U.S. Maneuver along the Nicaraguan border of Honduras is the biggest yet, and the equipment and training being given to the contras are by far the most extensive. The contras are also receiving weapons, ammunition and communication equipment from Honduras, El Salvador and, as Stephen Kinzer of the New York Times, whose reporting has been consistently critical of the Sandinistas, has documented, from Israel. The Times has also shown that the contras had no trouble raising $10 million from Guatemala, Taiwan, and rich Israeli individuals in a period of six months, and are currently raising $1.5 million per month from private U.S. corporations. In addition, the contras receive regular support from the Houston-based Nicaraguan Patriotic Association, which is backed by Big Oil and the Bechtel Corporation (of which former officers include Schultz, Secretary of Defense Weinberger, Attorney General Ed Meese, and former National Security Adviser Clark), the Miami-based Brigade 2506, which is the Bay of Pigs Veterans association financed by the CIA, CAUSA, the political arm of the South Korean-based Unification Church of Rev. Moon, the mercenary magazine Soldier of Fortune, and the Moral Majority's Christian Broadcasting Network. (30)

Despite all this support, none of the 15,000 Nicaraguans, CIA officers and U.S. and Latin American mercenaries who together make up the contras, "our brothers," as President Reagan calls them, have yet been able to seize and hold territory in Nicaragua, even when they outnumber the Sandinista forces. In the 16 skirmishes of the 1984 battle of Juigalpa which I was able to investigate, the contras were at least three to one stronger than the local militias, and sometimes eight to one. When I asked the captured contras to explain, one said: "We always have to look over our shoulders to make

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sure some old farmer doesn't grab his old hunting rifle and shoot at us from behind." The reason, of course, is because those old farmers consider the contras no better than savage rapists and torturers. Even the mild, careful Americans Watch committee, a private human rights group which usually specializes in documenting abuses perpetrated by socialist countries, reported that throughout 1984 and early 1985, anti-Sandinista rebels, in the words of the *Times*, "kidnapped, tortured, raped, mutilated and murdered numerous unarmed civilians, including women and children 'who were fleeing.'" (C) But, as Senator Richard G. Lugar, the Republican chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee, said, he still intends to vote in favor of renewing aid to the contras. Lugar did not think that such reports of contra atrocities "would change many minds." (31)

Just in case the U.S. Congress does decide to stop further aid to the contras, the Reagan administration has other plans to keep them going. One such plan, a White House official told the *Times*, was to pressure Asian countries receiving U.S. aid to help the contras in exchange. But even if this blackmail doesn't work, no one really doubted that the Reagan administration would be able to keep supporting its torturing, raping, murdering "brothers." Already in 1829, Simon Bolívar lamented the fact that "the United States appear to be destined by Providence to plague America with misery in the name of liberty." For Central America, at least, nothing has changed in the last 150 years, even if some reporters are genuinely shocked. *Times* columnist Anthony Lewis, for example, bewails the fact that no politician is crying out against the outrages of Reagan's policy in Nicaragua. "Where are the voices of leadership making it the great issue it should be, the dominant issue before this country?" Considering the silence of democrats everywhere, he should have said: ... the dominant issue before the world. (32)

Lewis concludes: "The United States is not threatened by Nicaragua, a country of fewer than three million people, desperately poor after years of dictatorship and war. It is threatened, in its deepest nature, by a policy that allies America with terrorism."

Notes


2. NYT 2.23.85; 2.24.85; 2.13.85; *Newsday* 2.20.85


7. NYT 12.8.82; *Washington Post* 10.15.83


9. *La Prensa* (Managua) 10.12.80; NYT 10.6.83; 11.8.83

10. *Philadelphia Inquirer* 12.16.84; NYT 2.24.85

11. *Newsday* 2.9.85; *Covert Action Information Bulletin* (CAIB), No. 22, Fall 84; *El Salvador's Link*, July 84; *Lucha*, Aug. 84


13. *La Prensa*: "Eleccion no dejara contentos a muchis," 10.31.84; "FSLN no demonstrates nada el domingo," 11.1.84;
"Un voto que no sera secreto," 11.3.84; "Observadores...no gracias," 11.4.84; "Votacion bajo gran apatia," 11.5.84; NYT 2.18.85

14. NYT 2.2.84 (Garfield also reported that the U.S. had stopped even x-ray plates, suture material and intravenous tubes from reaching Nicaragua); Statistics available from MIDINRA (the agrarian development and reform ministry), CIERA (the agrarian reform center), INSSBI (the ministry of social security and welfare), ATC (the association of rural workers), CST (the confederation of Sandinista workers), CIDCA (the center for the study of the Atlantic Coast area conditions) and AMNLAE (the women’s organization), some of which have been checked out and corroborated by the NYT 2.18.85

15. Interviews with CIERA, CIDCA and INIES (economic and social investigations institute) officials, Nov. 2, 7, 1984 & Jan. 11, 12, 13, 1985


17. La Prensa 11.3.84; 11.4.84; 11.5.84; Neuvo Diario (Managua) 11.5.84; 11.6.84

18. Senator David Durenberger (chief of Select Committee on Intelligence which approves or disapproves aid to the contras and who did not visit Nicaragua for the elections), "As Nicaraguans Prepare to Vote: Expect a Farce," NYT 11.2.84, NYT 10.21.84

19. NYT 10.21.84; 11.15.84


22. NYT 2.17.85; 2.23.85; Newsday 2.17.85; 2.20.85; NYT 3.2.85

23. Interviews in Juigalpa and Matagalpa Nov. 2, 6, 7, 8, 1984


25. Prevost. "For many months the administration has also urged rebels to seize a Nicaraguan city, where they could set up a provisional government that the United States Government could then recognize. But the rebels have been unable to capture and hold any territory..." reported NYT 2.23.85

26. CAIB, No. 20, Winter 1984; No. 22, Fall 1984; CBS News July 8, 1984. Once a hero of all the rightwing media, Eden Pastora is now described as corrupt, inept, egotistical, "a fool," to quote Soldier of Fortune, Nov. 1984, which adds that "CIA control agents now admit that they made a big mistake in backing Zero," Comandante Cero, Alias Eden Pastora.


30. NYT 1.13.85; San Francisco Chronicle (NYT Service) 9.10.84; CAIB, No. 22, Fall 1984; Central America Alert, Feb. 85

31. Interviews in Juigalpa & Managua, Nov. 2, 6-8, 1984, Jan. 12 & 13, 1985; NYT 3.6.85; The Americas Watch findings were backed up by another human rights group headed by Reed Brody, a former N.Y. State Assistant Attorney General who detailed 28 incidents that "have resulted in assassination, torture, rape, kidnapping and mutilation of civilians." The Times double-checked four of the 28 at random, and corroborated them NYT 3.7.85

32. NYT 3.6.85; Bolivar's quote is in most histories of Latin America; see mine, The Great Fear in Latin America, Chapter 17. Anthony Lewis, "When Reason Flees," NYT 3.10.85

A. New York Times Stephen Kinzer finally went to see the border war for himself and reported that the contras hit farmers, grain depots and construction workers. (1.23.85). Heinz Dieterich, a correspondent for Mexico's Unomasuno who volunteered to harvest coffee in the north so he could see for himself what life was like for farmers in the war zone, reported that contra terrorism was directed, systematically, at unarmed peasants. Dieterich also corroborated INSSBI's charge that 600 peasants were murdered in November and December 1984. (1.15.85)

B. Both Weinberger and Shultz have repeatedly claimed that Nicaragua has obtained heavy offensive weapons from, Soviet Russia, but even Adolfo Calero, head of the FDN, has denied such charges (New York Times, 10.22.84)

C. In April 1984, Americas Watch had already called attention to the fact that "The FDN was engaged repeatedly in kidnapping, torture and murder of unarmed civilians, mostly in villages and farm cooperatives." Edgar Chamorro, then a directorate member of the FDN, admitted that such "practice was common," which for saying he was fired from the directorate. (NYT 12.27.84)

ITEM III

According to the Census Bureau, 20% of all American children under 18 live in poverty. The rate is 25% for those below 6. The largest category increase in recent years — from 1979-1983 — has been the 63% increase in the poverty level of white two-parent families. As of 1983 approximately 17% of white children live in poverty.
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