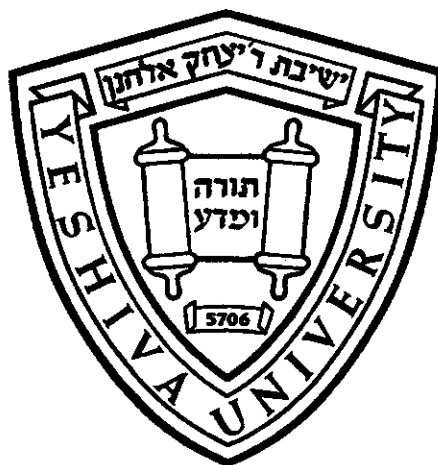


Chronos

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ותכלית אחר כולל להם, הוא בידיעת ימות עולם שנות דור ודור ...
ולדעת שנות הראשונים וגבולי הימים דור אחרי דור כדי לדעת
תקופות הימים ומספר שנותיהם ... כי בני ישראל ... שראני שידעו ויבינו
הסתעפות הדורות מתחילת הבריאה עד גלות ירושלים
ועד כי יבא שילה ולו יקהל עמים.

אברבנאל הקדמה לספר יהושע

Editors

Michael A. Helfand

Yitzchok Segal

Rivka Schwartz

Associate Editors

Bryan Kinzbrunner

Michael Zylberman

Layout Editor

Zvi Rosen

Since our sentiments in publishing this inaugural volume are eloquently expressed in the introductory section to the inaugural issue of the *Jewish Quarterly Review* (October 1888 O.S.), we will simply reproduce those remarks here, adapting them as required by the circumstances relevant to the present venture.

We cannot attempt to float our new journal after the fashion of the schoolbook preface; it would, unfortunately, not be accurate to say that we are about to satisfy a long-felt want. Though Yeshiva University has no journal devoted to the interests of history and Jewish History, the yeshiva community seems to be perfectly satisfied with its absence. Our new journal does not, therefore, start with flying colors and with anticipation of long-term success; it starts tentatively and not without some misgivings. For it must attempt to create the want which it must also seek to satisfy. It remains to be seen whether the double effort will or will not be beyond its strength.

Though we thank all those who helped us with *Chronos*, specific thanks are due to the Deans of Yeshiva College and the Yeshiva College Student Council for funding the journal; to Dr. Samuel Schneider for his comments, criticism, and for suggesting the title of the journal; to Dr. Seth Taylor and Professor Leo Taubes for their comments and criticism; and to Dr. Joshua Zimmerman for serving as faculty advisor of the Yeshiva College History Club.

Michael A. Helfand
Yitzchok Segal
Editors

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JEWISH-CHRISTIAN POLEMICS:

The Disputation of Barcelona

Avi Frisch

The Barcelona disputation of 1263 was perhaps the most historically important of the medieval disputations between Jews and Catholics. This disputation, which lasted for several days, was held under the aegis of King James I of Aragon. Two conflicting reports document the events of the disputation. Graced with the royal seal, the official Latin report succinctly records that the Church decisively won the dispute. The Jewish disputant, Rabbi Moses Ben Nachman (hereinafter Nachmanides), wrote a detailed version of the events (written in Hebrew for a Jewish audience under the title *Vi'kuach Ha'Ramban* – The Debate of Nachmanides – and also in Spanish for the Archbishop of Gerona). While never claiming that he won decisively, Nachmanides does convey the impression that he successfully defended Judaism under adverse circumstances.

The importance of this debate emerges from its uniqueness; it was radically different in purpose and attitude from other medieval disputations. Other disputations put Judaism and the Talmud on trial. The disputation in Paris in 1240, for example, placed the Talmud on trial and resulted in the burning of twenty-four cartloads of Jewish books, totaling thousands of volumes of rabbinic writings. In Barcelona, however, the Talmud did not come under attack; rather, in a new missionary technique, the Christians used it to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. Until this era, the missionaries only attempted to prove the truth of Jesus through the Jewish Testament. Further distinguishing the debate at Barcelona was the degree of civility afforded to the Jewish representative. Whereas other debates lacked civility altogether, the discussion in Barcelona gave Nachmanides freedom to respond as he wished.¹ Still, this disputation can hardly be considered fair, as Nachmanides assumed only the role of the defensive; he could not question Paul Christian and had the right to answer only what he was specifically asked.²

In attempting to evaluate the two records of the events of 1263, one must take into account the purpose each version served its author. The official Church record was a propaganda piece; the Church could never admit the defeat of its representative by a Jew

in areas of theology. Indeed, the whole purpose of the official Church summation of the controversy was to aid in the missionizing of Jews. These factors detract from the validity of the Latin document as an historical source. Therefore, the Church's claim that Nachmanides fled in ignominy from the scene and had to be forced back for a private session with the King, Paul Christian, and Raymond De Penaforte (noted Church scholar of the time), is most likely exaggerated.

Nachmanides' account is generally acclaimed for its style, but scholars have questioned its worth as an historical document. While one might expect some exaggeration by either participant, the extent of Nachmanides' embellishment, if any, is most likely far less than scholars have assumed. Nachmanides had little to gain from any such aggrandizement, for his account was written mainly as a response to a request from the Archbishop of Gerona.³ Additionally, as Nachmanides was already known as a great Talmudic scholar, he did not need to publish a work to improve his reputation. Consequently, there was no reason for him to write an account that veered from the truth, which would only serve to publicize a degrading experience. More likely, the reason for the publishing of this work was that Nachmanides was attempting to describe the events as they occurred.

It is unclear if the original version of Nachmanides' *Vi'kuach* was written in Hebrew or in Spanish and if it was intended for the Jewish community or the Archbishop of Gerona. When the king tried Nachmanides for publishing this work, Nachmanides claimed that he had only written it for the Archbishop. However, we do not have any extant copies of an edition of the *Vi'kuach* in Spanish.

The first historians to deal extensively with the Disputation were Friedrich Denifle, Heinrich Graetz, and Isidore Loeb. These nineteenth century scholars disputed the accuracy of both records of the controversy. Whereas Graetz and Loeb see the Church account as inaccurate, Denifle believes that Nachmanides deliberately lied in his version. Graetz accepts Nachmanides' narrative fully, and both Graetz and Denifle assert that one side achieved complete and total victory. Loeb, however, strayed from this thesis, questioning whether one side necessarily achieved absolute success in this affair. A number of twentieth century researchers further elaborated on Loeb's innovation⁴

Several twentieth century scholars, like Yitzhak Baer, Cecil Roth, and Martin A. Cohen, significantly contributed to the understanding of the disputation. These historians generally view the events of July 1263 as a contest unfairly tilted in the Church's favor. The Church was attempting to analyze the effectiveness of a new form of argumentation, using rabbinic literature to convince Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. Since rabbinic literature was not important to Christianity, the rejection of its use for missionary work would not have been a statement as to the truth of Christian beliefs; it would merely have meant that this was not intended by the rabbis in their writings. This was, therefore, a no-lose situation for the Church since they effectively limited the discussion to questions that Paul Christian posed from rabbinic literature. The Jews, however, were in a no-win situation. Even if Nachmanides defeated Paul Christian, the Jews would only have successfully defended themselves against an attack on their faith.⁵

Cohen adds a political dimension to this event, noting that the king intended to use the rising power of the Dominicans to counterbalance the nobility. Nachmanides and Paul Christian were "in" on this contrivance against the nobility, meaning that Paul Christian needed to "win" in order to serve James' purpose. Cohen then describes how James used Nachmanides' account and the Latin account to show that Paul Christian "won" the event.⁶ The difficulty with this understanding is that it lacks corroborating historical evidence. Additionally, this perspective impugns the credibility of all of the participants, who were highly respected Jewish and Christian clergy.

That Nachmanides won the debate is not in doubt for Baer. However, he attributes this to Paul Christian's inability to compete with a Talmudic scholar of Nachmanides' caliber in the area of rabbinic writings. Other Christians, after more experimentation and refinement in the use of the Talmud, could possibly have won this debate. As a consequence, it is impossible to consider this as an absolute Jewish victory. The Dominican friars used this degrading experience to perfect their missionary work. Indeed, without a defeat such as this, future use of the Talmud for missionary work would have been impossible. Furthermore, any single defeat of their explication of Talmudic passages could have no impact on Christianity itself, nor did it preclude the future use of the Talmud in missionary activity.⁷

Baer's explanation relies heavily on Nachmanides' report, rejecting any evidence from the Latin summary. Other scholars feel that the Latin version of events, albeit biased and sketchy, has some historical value. A particularly difficult point in Baer's argument is his assertion that Nachmanides did not speak entirely truthfully in his responses to Paul Christian. There is, however, little reason for this assumption, as Hyam Maccoby has explained.⁸

Maccoby accepts Nachmanides' objection to Paul Christian's assertion that the rabbinical works prove the truth of Jesus as the Messiah. Moreover, Maccoby emphasizes that the debate centered on peripheral areas that did not pertain to the fundamental aspects of Judaism.⁹ Maccoby is the only modern historian who accepts one point of view over another. He is unafraid to say that Nachmanides' points were valid. Clearly, Maccoby considers Nachmanides to have been a superior theologian and scholar to the inept Paul Christian.

Roth assumes that Nachmanides' version was accurate for the basic give and take of the events. He, however, does not acknowledge any actual battle of theologies at this controversy. He believes the disputants were really "shadow-boxing" because they argued from wholly different perspectives. He concludes that the events assumed a softer tone than that presented in Nachmanides' *Vi'kuach*.¹⁰ This portrayal of the events places them in the middle ground between the two reports of the debate. There was no victor; in fact, no point ever resulted in a victory for either participant. Though this view makes sense historically as a method for bridging two conflicting sources, it does not reflect the human aspect of the event. For Roth's view to be correct, the participants had to have been mechanical robots, and this is difficult to imagine, especially in light of the human face that Nachmanides places on the event.

There can be no doubt that Nachmanides tore apart the argumentation of Paul Christian in July 1263. However, it is difficult to say that by doing so he achieved a total victory. This may be because the event was designed as a political event which had no religious implications, as Cohen believes. Another reason that Nachmanides' performance cannot be viewed as a complete success is that it helped the Dominican order refine their missionary technique. Still, the lack of a clear victor does not in any

way diminish the significance of the Barcelona debate. Instead, it is the very uniqueness of the debate that led to such great discussion amongst scholars.

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- 1 Nachmanides, Vi'kuach Ha'Ramban, ed. M. Steinschneider, trans. Hyam Maccoby, Judaism on Trial (East Brunswick: Associated UP, 1982) 102; Cecil Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona," in Gleanings: Essays in Jewish History. Letters in Art (New York: Hermon Press, 1967) 35. Though Roth uses the Spanish name of Pablo Christia, we will use the anglicized version of Paul Christian.
- 2 Robert Chazan, Barcelona and Beyond: The Disputation of 1263 and Its Aftermath (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1992) 1-2.
- 3 Yitzhak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, vol. 1, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: JPS, 1961) 157.
- 4 Chazan 5-7.
- 5 Ibid. , 39-50.
- 6 Martin A Cohen, "Reflections on the Text and Context of the Disputation of Barcelona," in Hebrew Union College Annual 35 (1964): 157-192.
- 7 Yitchak Baer, A History of the Jews in Christian Spain, vol. 1, trans. Louis Schoffman (Philadelphia: JPS, 1961) 150-155.
- 8 Maccoby 60-62.
- 9 Ibid. , 72-75.
- 10 Roth 35-61.

SYNAGOGUES AND *SHULS*:

An Analysis of Ephraim Lisitzky's *K'Tekoa Shofar* and an Understanding of the Early American Synagogue

Paul Gelb

The synagogue as an institution has long been considered a hallmark in the development of American Jewish communities. Both conventional wisdom and academic argument have often assumed the position that "the evolution of the synagogue as the basic institution in Jewish group life is central to the history of the Jewish community in America."¹ Yet this position is far from obvious. In his narrative Hebrew poem *K'Tekoa Shofar*,² Ephraim Lisitzky documents an alternative perspective of the American synagogue. He depicts an Eastern European Jewish institution transplanted, incapable of attracting and educating Jews in its new American environment. In Lisitzky's poem, the synagogue is tottering. It is assaulted by the American capitalist ethic and maligned by those who consider it outdated and "green." Additionally, the American synagogue is quickly losing its capacity to uplift the spirit (which struggling immigrants desperately need). In short, as the synagogue itself "immigrated" to America, it suffered through a long period of acculturation. It may eventually have grown into "the basic institution in Jewish group life," but as Lisitzky shows through his poem, during the early part of the century the synagogue had not yet reached this state.

Lisitzky begins *K'Tekoa Shofar* with an image of the shul in Europe, thereby allowing comparison with the its American counterpart. Interestingly, even in Lisitzky's somewhat idealized vision of European Jewish life, religious observance is not perfect. In Europe "it is more difficult to get food than to split the sea,"³ and consequently individuals are sometimes lax in their religious practice. But as the hardships of daily existence may encourage a sort of spiritual and moral atrophy, attendance at the shul seems to assure some degree of personal renewal. In that sense, the European shul functions as a buttress against the pressures of a difficult life. It becomes a point of reference through which individuals can create a distinction between "the outside"

experiences of sometimes oppressive labor and "the inside" commitment to personal refinement.

In America, Lisitzky asserts, the synagogue was meant to function much the same way. Here too it was supposed to engender an insular environment which would allow individuals to escape the pressures of difficult subsistence, to separate the "outside" from the "inside" and the mundane from the holy. Lisitzky expresses this notion through the experience of his poem's hero, Rebbe Avrohom. Rebbe Avrohom is the sexton of the Beth Jacob synagogue in a town called Saharona. In order to supplement his meager sexton salary, he is forced to spend long hours working as a peddler. Yet Rebbe Avrohom refuses to quit his job as a sexton because it is through his close involvement with the synagogue that he gains a degree of dignity. In fact, as Lisitzky writes, it is through his job as sexton that Rebbe Avrohom "uplifts himself from the dust."⁴ Involvement with the synagogue allows him to attend religious classes, to lead the morning services, and to thereby release his mind from the fruitfulness of oppressive subsistence.

In his autobiography, Lisitzky himself articulates similar sentiments. As a young American immigrant, he too had to find work, and, like Rebbe Avrohom, he ended up peddling. Frustrated with his attempts to earn a living, he escaped to the synagogue where he immersed himself in Talmud and religious practice. Though he spent an inordinate amount of time in such activities, the fact that he sought refuge there expressed his vision of the synagogue. To Ephraim Lisitzky, perhaps not incorrectly, the synagogue was an institution through which one could leave behind the pressures of making a living and differentiate a space that allowed for a more noble area of experience.

Yet while the American synagogue tried to imitate the European shul in function, it could not mirror the shul in success. Throughout *K'Tekoa Shofar*, Lisitzky bemoans this reality. "Empty, empty is the synagogue, without people coming for Shabbat and holidays,"⁵ he writes. He admits that the synagogue did establish itself in form, but he criticizes its inability to develop and communicate its religious spirit. In an interesting line, he formulates a poetic analog to the verse from Genesis, "May G-d extend Japheth, but He will dwell in the house of Shem."⁶ Alluding to the Rabbinic comment that Japheth, the supposed father of Greece, represents artistic beauty, and Shem, the forebear

of Abraham, represents religious morality, Lisitzky writes that, "The beauty of Japheth dwells in the congregational structure of the new synagogue...but it is a dead golem without Shem."⁷ The synagogues built in America lacked the religious energy, the "Shem," of the European shuls.

He expresses this idea throughout his work, but perhaps most powerfully at the end of the poem. The scene is set in the Beth Jacob synagogue where a representative is preparing to blow shofar. Lisitzky tells of the garments and rituals in the American synagogue, but writes that "the whiteness of his beard and the whiteness of his tallit was like the face of a dead person who has risen from his grave."⁸ There is a certain perversity here, where the purity of religion takes on an antiseptic, morbid quality. Lisitzky notes that the prayers which introduced the blowing of the shofar filled the *chahal* of the synagogue. The word *chahal* literally means space but also translates as carcass. Again Lisitzky depicts the American synagogue as a dead form, a golem devoid of true religious spirit.

Yet a question remains. Though the American synagogue during the early part of the century did not achieve the vibrancy toward which it aspired, why did it totally fail to attract Jewish immigrants? Lisitzky depicts an institution whose most notable function was to provide a kind of refuge from economic and social pressures. One would think that new immigrants would be attracted to such an institution, yet they were not.

Irving Howe, who, as opposed to Lisitzky, writes that the American synagogue represented the proverbial, if not the actual, "center of Jewish life,"⁹ says that the Jews only believed it desirable for the most fervent among them to keep the shul alive. They wanted others to attend, but the majority of immigrants did not attend themselves. If the synagogue offered a place for spirituality, an escape from economic burdens, and a center of social gathering, as Lisitzky asserts, why did it not attract new Jewish immigrants?

Lisitzky offers two explanations in *K'Tekoa Shofar*. Firstly, the new immigrants were primarily concerned with economic issues. In Europe, while "earning food was harder than splitting the sea," Jews nevertheless dedicated time for religion. "Not so in America!"¹⁰ where the task of making a living seemed to have overrun and replaced the pocket of spirituality which was the shul. People did not want to devote their time to religious worship when they could instead spend the time earning more money.

Immigrants were generally poor, and they knew that the faster they could save capital, the faster they could rise in America.

Using an interesting poetic device, Lisitzky stresses the degree to which concern with the economy replaced involvement with religion. He writes, "And the Jew makes himself strong as a lion for the work of his daily profession."¹¹ This passage echoes of the first of Rabbi Moshe Isserles's glosses on the Shulchan Aruch, the authoritative volume of Jewish law – "Make yourself strong as a lion to do the work of G-d." Through this parallel Lisitzky emphasizes that in America the energy which was formerly devoted to religious worship was redirected towards economic advancement.

Throughout *K'Tekoa Shofar*, Lisitzky castigates American Jewry for its prioritization of wealth, a critique that he reiterates in his autobiography. Explaining the difficulties that the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Yeshiva faced in its early years, he writes that the American Jewish community in which it was located was in an anarchic materialistic state.¹² Though the literary image that this statement conjures – an image of disunited primordial individuals running with spears to kill some prey – is probably inaccurate, the general message remains clear. Lisitzky expresses his dismay as he perceives the American Jewish community focusing on wealth at the expense of religious practice. This phenomenon created difficulties for religious institutions, including the American synagogue, which were struggling to root themselves in the Goldene Medina.

In *K'Tekoa Shofar*, Lisitzky also offers an alternative reason for the inability of the American synagogue to attract many members. He describes a cultural gap which created a dichotomy between the synagogue, an institution of the old, and America, a place for the new. In more specific terms, Lisitzky writes that second generation immigrants reared on American culture had difficulty understanding the language of the teachers and the customs of the synagogue leaders.

He [the rabbi] did not beautify this old house of G-d
how will he be honored by their sons
The students of America, how will he teach them?¹³

Those born in America could not appreciate the wisdom or opportunities found in the synagogue because these were cast in the language and culture of European Jews. They

would turn instead to other cultural activities, many of them secular, to which they could better relate. As Lisitzky writes in his autobiography, "Rabbi Dan's stoop, sparse yellow beard and graceless appearance evoked no respect for his scholarship. He was, however, a very learned man...[but] such a personality could not compare with the non-Jewish influences."¹⁴ Certainly not all American rabbis fit this description, but, in general terms, this is how Lisitzky perceived the state of American religious institutions.

Not only was the synagogue alien to the Americanized Jews, but it was even "foreign" to the new Jewish immigrants who were seeking new experiences. "How will the green Rabbi relate his honor to them?"¹⁵ asks Lisitzky. People perceived the synagogue as outdated, associating it with the old world. In this way, religious practice was often part of the cultural baggage that Jewish immigrants felt compelled to discharge in order to graduate from their "greenhorn" status. As Lisitzky writes in his poem, "When he shakes off the dust of his strange land, he also shakes off Torah and mitzvot."¹⁶

Though Lisitzky supposes in *K'Tekoa Shofar* that language, culture, and stigma created a gap between the American synagogue and the larger American Jewish population, he does not seem eager to introduce American social mores into the synagogue. In the middle of the poem, Lisitzky writes about a religious family that buys a piano. Though the introduction of this piece of outside culture seems harmless enough, the family's daughter takes piano lessons and graduates into a conservatory, where she falls in love with and marries a non-Jewish musician. A tension runs through *K'Tekoa Shofar*; while Lisitzky recognizes that cultural alienation weakens the effectiveness of the American synagogue, he is hesitant to introduce foreign practices.

Daniel Elazar notes, "In the form that we know it, the American synagogue has no precedent in Jewish history. Thus, an understanding of its successes, problems, and prospects must be developed on the basis of empirical observation rather than historical analogy."¹⁷ The perceptions of Ephraim Lisitzky about the American synagogue during the start of the century present students and scholars with an important piece of "empirical observation." Lisitzky describes his contemporary American synagogue and shows that it was not yet secure in its environment. He illustrates the ideal form and function of the synagogue but also regrets the inability of the American synagogue to realize such standards. While other evidence may assert that the synagogue of the time

was secure and central, Lisitzky argues that the synagogue still had to develop before it could become a powerful force in the American Jewish community.

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- 1 Moshe Davis, "The Synagogue in American Judaism," in Two Generations in Perspective: Notable Events and Trends 1896 - 1956, Harry Schneiderman ed. (New York: Monde, 1957) 210.
- 2 K'Tekoa Shofar was first published in 1928 in a collection of Lisitzky's poems called Shirim.
- 3 Ephraim Lisitzky, Shirim (America: Chaverim, 1928) 243. Note: all translations of the poem are my own. This statement is adopted from a line in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 22b), which states that it is more difficult to find an appropriate marital match than to split the sea.
- 4 Ibid. , 249.
- 5 Ibid. , 250.
- 6 Genesis 9:27.
- 7 Lisitzky 251.
- 8 Ibid. , 278.
- 9 Irving Howe, The World of Our Fathers (New York: Bantam, 1980) 190.
- 10 Lisitzky 244.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ephraim Lisitzky, In the Grip of Cross Currents (New York: Bloch Publishing Co., 1959) 91.
- 13 Lisitzky, Shirim 251.
- 14 Lisitzky, In the Grip 91.
- 15 Lisitzky, Shirim 251.
- 16 Ibid. , 250.
- 17 Daniel Elazar, "The Development of the American Synagogue," in American Synagogue History: a Bibliography and State of the Field Survey, Alexandra Shecket Korros and Jonathan Sarna eds. (New York: Markus Wiener, 1988) 23.

TAMING MANSFIELD:

The Limits of Executive Power

Michael A. Helfand

Originally, I intended this paper to serve as a defense of the theory proposed by Harvey C. Mansfield in his monumental work *Taming the Prince*. Enamored of the vision of a strong and powerful president, I hoped to find the same sentiments expressed at the Constitutional Convention. Alas, I did not; instead I found a very different picture emerging from the debates of 1787. The emphasis on the separation and balance of powers dictated the course of the discussions. If liberty was to be secured for posterity, there could be neither an all-powerful president nor an all-powerful legislature. Instead, American government would have to walk the fine line of institutional equality to maintain the nation's hard-won freedoms.

The Convention

In considering the intentions of the framers, our focus must first turn to the Constitutional Convention. While the Convention minutes lend some insight, they do not provide a clear picture of the intended role of the executive branch. The primary difficulties are inherent to the analysis of any interactive convention. With so many considerations voiced on every issue set before the convention, it is unclear what we can conclude from any individual vote. A rejection of any specific plan could have resulted from a myriad of concerns. Mansfield viewed these difficulties as reason enough to dismiss the minutes of the Convention, commenting that

common deliberation on a practical matter, even one so comprehensive as the Constitution, is not a theoretical inquiry. The issues most discussed are often not the most important, because they have involved securing consent to the Constitution rather than the question of how it will operate, while the reasons offered in discussion are often those intended to persuade others, not those that persuaded the speaker.¹

Still, we should be hesitant before taking such a dismissive attitude toward the Constitutional Convention. Analyzing the questions posed at the Convention and some

of the statements made by the representatives lends significant insight into the framers' goals in creating the office of the executive.

In all of the discussions as to the constitution of the executive branch, the framers sought to ensure the proper representation of all of the nation's interests within the presidency. The only question was to what extent the Constitution should allow for the forging of a direct and personal connection between the people and their executive. Even Gouverneur Morris, a proponent of legislative supremacy, decried the election of the executive by the legislature, since then "he will be the mere creature of the Legislature: if appointed and impeachable by that body. He ought to be elected by the people at large, by the freeholders of the Country."² Madison reiterated this point, concluding that

If it be a fundamental principle of free Government that the Legislative, Executive & Judiciary powers should be separately exercised, it is equally so that they be independently exercised. There is the same & perhaps greater reason why the Executive should be independent of the Legislature, than why the Judiciary should: A coalition of the two former powers would be more immediately & certainly dangerous to public liberty.³

However, Roger Sherman objected to the conclusions of both Morris and Madison, questioning the ability of the masses to make informed choices. Furthermore, Sherman contended, no single candidate would ever receive a majority of votes in a direct election. Instead, "the sense of the Nation would be better expressed by the Legislature, than by the people at large."⁴

Initially, we might have thought that this debate could clearly indicate the extent to which not only the executive should receive his mandate from the people, but to what degree the legislature should control the executive branch. Unfortunately, secondary concerns of corruption within the legislature obscure our ability to discern the framers' intent in deciding the means of the executive's election. Even if the framers wanted the executive to be controlled by the legislature, they still may have feared the greed of many representatives who would have extorted money from candidates in return for their votes. In fact, Elbridge Gerry, one of the first representatives to speak on the topic of the election of the executive, "opposed the election by the national legislature. There would

be constant intrigue kept up for the appointment. The Legislature & the candidates... bargain and play into one another's hands."⁵

When the focus of the Convention turned to the question of impeaching the executive, representatives rehashed many of the same concerns regarding the need to maintain separate branches of government. Many of those present on July 20th saw no reason to place the "chief magistrate" above justice. George Mason insisted that "no point is of more importance than that the right of impeachment should be continued. Shall any man be above justice? Above all shall that man be above it, who can commit the most extensive injustice?"⁶ However, Rufus King

expressed apprehensions that an extreme caution in favor of liberty might enervate the Government we were forming. He wished the House to recur to the primitive axiom that the three great departments of Governments should be separate & independent: that the Executive & Judiciary should be so as well as the Legislative: that the Executive should be so equally with the Judiciary. Would this be the case, if the Executive should be impeachable?⁷

King then contrasted the judiciary and the executive. While the judges were impeachable, they were also appointed for life. The president, on the other hand, was to be elected only for a given amount of time. If so, concluded King, why the need for another limitation on the executive branch? The Constitution already provided an incentive for the president's good behavior since the violation of law would damage his reputation irreparably. On the other hand, two checks on the president's term would leave the executive weaker than its institutional counterparts.

Since in the end the framers granted the legislature the power to impeach, we must consider the broader implications for the presidency. Clearly, many comments of the framers' demonstrate an aversion to creating an executive forever subservient to the legislature. Still, it seems that the framers feared the executive would grow too strong if the legislature could not force the president out of office before the end of his term. Implied is the fact that the framers, at least by July 20th, had already decided to grant the president broad enough powers to leave the other branches of government in need of institutionalized weapons to prevent executive dominance.

The suggestion to empower the president with an “absolute negative”⁸ served as the most serious attempt on the part of the framers to give the executive branch a role in the legislative process, and it immediately met with strong opposition. Arguments in favor of an absolute negative were primarily based on the assumption that just as the King of England had rarely used the power, the president would most likely follow suit. Furthermore, in order to maintain three “distinct & independent”⁹ branches of government, the executive and judiciary both needed a means to retaliate against an over-ambitious legislature. However, even Wilson, the strongest advocate of the absolute negative, saw such a power as being held jointly by both the judiciary and the executive. Consequently, it seems that even when the framers considered expanding the powers of the president, their goal was not to emphasize the role of the executive branch in American government, but only to limit the influence of the legislature. In fact, Pierce Butler, who had formerly advocated a single executive, responded to Wilson’s argument for the absolute negative by stressing the grave danger in allowing one man to overrule the entire legislature. “Could he have entertained an idea that a... negative on the laws was to be given to him [the executive],” reported Madison of Butler’s objection, “he certainly should have acted differently.”¹⁰ The members of the Convention, demonstrating an aversion to expanding the powers of the president too greatly, finally agreed to give the executive a “revisionary check,”¹¹ which the legislature could overrule with a two-thirds vote.

The most penetrating statements in describing the executive were made in the initial debate over whether to create a plural executive. On June 1st, resolution number seven was placed on the agenda: “that a national Executive be instituted to be chosen by the National Legislature for the term of _____ years to be ineligible thereafter, to possess the executive powers of Congress.”¹² Immediately, representatives, most notably Charles Pinkney, voiced fears of creating an elected monarchy. These fears served as the impetus for the definition of the executive within the confines of a government of separated powers. Roger Sherman stated that he considered

the Executive magistracy as nothing more than an institution for carrying the will of the legislature into effect, that the person or persons ought to be appointed by

and accountable to the Legislature only, which was the depository of the supreme will of the Society.¹³

Wilson addressed Pinkney's concerns, explaining that

he did not consider the Prerogatives of the British Monarch as a proper guide in defining the Executive powers. Some of these prerogatives were of Legislative nature...the only powers he conceived strictly Executive were those of executing the laws, and appointing officers, not appertaining to and appointed by the Legislature.¹⁴

Seeing an opportunity to clarify many of the ambiguities in the role of the executive, Madison asked that the Convention, instead of limiting discussion to the practical rules of executive power, discuss the nature of presidential power. He proposed an addendum to the resolution under discussion, suggesting that it read

that a national executive ought to be instituted with power to carry into effect the national laws, to appoint to offices in cases not otherwise provided for, *and to execute such other powers not legislative nor judiciary in their nature* as may time to time be delegated by the national legislature.¹⁵

It seems that Madison hoped to expand the power of the executive tremendously, possibly seeking a government dominated by a near-monarch. Yet when Pinkney moved to strike out the expansive portions of Madison's formulation, he claimed that by including the phrase "to carry into effect the national laws" Madison had already captured the implications of "to execute such other powers not legislative nor judiciary in nature." Pinkney's analysis seems odd. Clearly, there is a difference between viewing the president as the mere gofer of the legislature, giving him all the powers not granted to any other recognized body within the Constitution. Madison, in response, "did not see any inconvenience in retaining them, and cases might happen in which they might serve to prevent doubts and misconstructions."¹⁶ Such a lackadaisical response would lead us to believe that the disputed definitions were not qualitatively different – yet they seem to be worlds apart. We may initially assume that either both Pinkney and Madison felt that even without the offending lines, the resolution implied a powerful president, responsible to take initiative where the Constitution was silent; that the lines Madison wanted to

include were not meant to increase the sphere of presidential influence beyond that of an executor of the legislative will; or that both Pinkney and Madison understood the significant differences in formulation, but each chose to slip his formulation into the resolution without drawing too much attention. Yet, a careful analysis of Madison's personal writings may force us to rejecting all of these options.

In the years leading up to the Constitutional Convention, Madison admitted his ambivalence towards the president's role within a democracy. On August 23rd, 1785, two years before the convention was to take place, Madison wrote to Caleb Wallace,

I have made up no final opinion whether the first Magistrate should be chosen by the Legislature or the people at large or whether the power should be vested in one man assisted by a council or in a council of which the President shall be only *primus inter pares*....Our executive is the worst part of a bad Constitution.¹⁷

Even in the months immediately before the momentous meetings in Philadelphia, Madison remained undecided. Writing to George Washington on April 16th, 1787, he lamented, "I have scarcely ventured as yet to form my own opinion either of the manner in which it [the executive] ought to be constituted or of the authorities with which it ought to be clothed."¹⁸ If so, because of his misgivings, Madison may have intentionally formulated his statements ambiguously at the Convention. Consequently, instead of looking to Madison's statements as proof of a serious attempt to expand the role of the executive branch, it seems more likely to conclude that Madison had not yet decided for himself what resolution seven was to imply.

The Federalist

Historians look to the Federalist Papers as the most descriptive analysis of the constitutional goals at the Convention of 1787. What is the picture of the president that emerges from the writings of Publius?

Beginning with Federalist Paper number 67, Hamilton, under the pseudonym of Publius, tried to rebut the contention that the Constitution created an executive on par with a monarch. Diligently, Hamilton dealt with every claim and concern, demonstrating that the framers ensured that the executive branch would never have the opportunity to wield its influence so as to upset the balance of powers within government. However,

Hamilton's description of the president has led some historians to believe that the Federalist and, by extension, the framers themselves, wanted the executive to control the government, filling in all the gaps in the Constitution. These claims focus on Hamilton's desire to have "energy in the executive."¹⁹ This energy, according to Hamilton,

is essential to the protection of the community against foreign attacks; it is not less essential to the steady administration of the laws; to the protection of property against those irregular and high-handed combinations which sometimes interrupt the ordinary course of justice; to the security of liberty against the enterprises and assaults of ambition, of faction, and of anarchy.²⁰

Hamilton further develops this conception of an energetic executive by asserting that "a feeble executive implies a feeble execution of government."²¹ Yet we should not hastily interpret this formulation. The immediate consequence of an energetic executive, as presented in Federalist Paper 70, is the proper execution of the laws and nothing more. It seems, at least initially, that Hamilton is merely echoing the definition of the executive as presented by Sherman and Madison at the Convention. Still, Hamilton, in expounding upon the need for "energy," saw the qualities of "decision, activity, secrecy, and dispatch"²² as necessary for the proper functioning of the president. Of the four, secrecy may give a slight indication that the president was implicitly given permission by the framers to bend the rules of the Constitution, secretly advancing the cause of democracy.

The minimalist interpretation of the Federalist Papers, as has been presented thus far in this essay, is substantiated by the emphasis of Hamilton's treatment of the executive in the Federalist. Hamilton repeatedly expressed the need to apply extensive checks on legislative power, since

The representatives of the people, in a popular assembly, seem sometimes to fancy themselves, and betray strong symptoms of impatience and disgust at the least sign of opposition from any other quarter; as if the exercise of its rights, by either the executive or the judiciary, were a breach of their privilege and an outrage to their dignity.²³

According to Hamilton, empowering the executive was only a means to accomplish the goal of allowing the president to function independent of Congress. In defending

executive veto power, Hamilton stated “the primary inducement of conferring the power in question upon the executive is to enable him to defend himself.”²⁴ These sentiments, however, were not confined only to the debate over the president’s veto power; “To what purpose,” asked Hamilton, “separate the executive or the judiciary from the legislative, if both the executive and the judiciary are so constituted as to be at the absolute devotion of the legislative?” Again, it seems that the framers were only willing to grant the executive enough power to free him from the domination of Congress.

Still, Mansfield maintained that the energy described by Hamilton was meant as an invitation to presidential dominance of government. Even if this were the case, we must consider the overall value of the Federalist Papers in trying to ascertain the intentions of the framers. While voicing his opinions for the public to hear in 1788, Hamilton was relatively silent during the deliberations at the convention. His most significant contribution came on June 18th, when he spoke for a number of hours, describing how to construct the union. But his opinions were categorically rejected. His comments on the executive branch began with the assertion that the only good model for the American president was the English monarchy.²⁵ He then called for the absolute negative for the executive, a life-time term, and expanded appointment powers.²⁶ And, while Gouverneur Morris described the speech as “the most able and impressive he had ever heard,”²⁷ not one of Hamilton’s suggestions was ever implemented. If so, it seems odd to look to Hamilton’s writings in the Federalist to ascertain the true intention of the framers when creating the executive. His views were at odds with those of the rest of the Convention. Even if Hamilton desired a stronger executive, and he voiced this opinion in the Federalist Papers, those comments cannot shed light on our discussion. Furthermore, a more careful analysis of Mansfield’s thesis uncovers another glaring deficiency.

Mansfield, in explaining the inherent fallacies in using the documents of the Convention as a source for evaluating the original intent of the framers, writes,

The issues most discussed are often not the most important, because they have involved securing consent to the Constitution rather than the question of how it will operate, while the reasons offered in discussion are often those intended did persuade others, not those that persuaded the speaker.²⁸

I must admit that I am baffled by this statement. In the context of a Convention held to create a binding contract, participants often do whatever is necessary to sway the opinions of the others gathered. One delegate might use a particular argument to convince the others of a position, even if he in fact supports that position for another reason. Clearly, the single delegate's own hidden reasoning cannot be taken to be the original intent, though this is what Mansfield would have us believe. Instead, we must look to the argument that the majority of delegates found persuasive. A proper understanding of the Constitutional Convention requires that we recognize that the speaker's vote carried no more weight than any other. The persuasive statements made at the Convention are the only statements we can consider in ascertaining the original intent of the voters. Regardless of any opinions that a member of the Convention may have voiced outside of the meetings, only what he said in the presence of the others can be deemed meaningful for our discussion. Outside documents are useful only when the minutes of the Convention are ambiguous and the speaker's point is not clear to the reader.

There is no indication from the documents of the Constitutional Convention that the president was to be any more than a check on the legislature. To assume that the government was to be centralized around any of the three branches is to misunderstand the principles upon which the government of the United States of America was founded.

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- 1 Harvey C. Mansfield, Taming the Prince: The Ambivalence of Modern Executive Power (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989), 248.
- 2 Charles C. Tansill, ed., Unites States: Formation of the Union (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1927), 392.
- 3 Ibid., 413.
- 4 Ibid., 392.
- 5 Max Farrand, ed., The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911) I, 80.
- 6 Tansill, 417.
- 7 Ibid., 419.
- 8 Farrand, 98. An "absolute negative," in the terminology of the framers, refers to the power to not only veto a suggested bill, but to prevent the bill, having been vetoed by the executive, from being brought up for discussion again, regardless of the percentage of the houses voting in its favor.
- 9 Ibid., 98.
- 10 Ibid., 100.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Farrand, 64.
- 13 Ibid., 65.
- 14 Ibid., 65-66.
- 15 Ibid., 67. The emphasis is mine. Any analyst of the constitution should be somewhat shocked that Madison would have tried to include what may have turned out to be an executive elastic clause. With the power to "fill in the blanks" where the constitution was silent, the president would most likely have dominated American politics from the very beginning. Whether there were other motives behind Madison's statement is unclear. Mansfield makes a passing comment regarding this debate. See Mansfield 248. However, there is no evidence in the actual Constitutional debate to force me to question Madison's intentions.
- 16 Farrand, 67.
- 17 James Madison, James Madison: Writings, ed. Jack N. Rakove (Library of America, 1999), 41.
- 18 Ibid., 82-83.
- 19 Alexander Hamilton, "Federalist 70," in Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, The Federalist Papers (New York: Mentor Books, 1961) 423.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Ibid., 424.
- 23 "Federalist 71" 433.
- 24 "Federalist 73" 443.
- 25 Farrand, 289.
- 26 Ibid., 292.
- 27 See Farrand 293 note 9.
- 28 Mansfield 248.

THE SINKING OF THE U.S.S. MAINE:

A Study in Perception

Matt Kreiger

Thinking makes it so (*Hamlet 2.2*)

Corporal Newton raised the bugle to his lips and blew taps. His music traveled throughout the U.S.S. Maine and across Havana harbor. In his cabin, Captain Charles Sigsbee, who had been writing a letter to his wife, paused for a moment to listen:

I laid down my pen to listen to the notes of the bugle, which were singularly beautiful in the oppressive stillness of the night. Newton, who was rather given to fanciful effects, was evidently doing his best. During his pauses the echoes floated back to the ship with singular distinctions, repeating the strains of the bugle fully and exactly.¹

Half an hour later, Newton was dead.

The U.S.S. Maine had exploded, taking the lives of over two hundred and fifty men and sparking a crisis that led quickly to the Spanish-American War. The tragedy of the Maine lies not only in the lost lives but also in the impetuosity of the Americans in accusing the Spanish of sinking the Maine. Though the cause of the explosion was uncertain, Americans were convinced that the Spanish were to blame. A subsequent investigation, however, revealed that an internal explosion sank the Maine.

The American warship entered Havana harbor on January 25th, 1898 to defend American interests in the war that was then raging between Cuba and Spain. The powerful battleship was the first U.S. vessel to visit Havana in three years, and the crew was unsure of how it would be received. As Sigsbee went ashore, he tested Spanish sentiments regarding the arrival of his ship. When he passed a group of Spanish soldiers, they saluted him, but “with so much expression of

apathy, that the salute really went for nothing.”² However, no protest was made against his presence in Havana, and the Americans encountered only minor demonstrations of derision.

Sigsbee’s orders required him to remain on friendly terms with the Spanish, and the friendly nature of this visit precluded taking certain security measures. Thus, the harbor could not be tested for mines, nor could a patrol be set up around the Maine. However, the crew of the Maine took every undetectable precaution. Sentries were stationed in strategic locations throughout the ship, and Sigsbee ordered that the officer in charge of patrolling the deck give detailed reports on any incident, no matter how trivial. The master-at-arms was commanded to keep a careful eye on every visitor who came aboard.

On the fateful night of February 15th, 1898 the Cuban air was heavy and humid and the sky threatened rain. Many crewmembers of the Maine were relaxing on the deck of the ship, enjoying the warm evening. The harbor was still except for the gentle swaying of some boats on their moorings.

And then, quite out of the blue, massive explosions rocked the Maine, tearing her apart. Windows were blown from their panes, and doors swung violently open. Blazes of light were seen from miles away, and a deafening roar awakened the city. Two hundred and fifty eight men were killed, most of them either vaporized by the enormous explosion or drowned in the waters of Havana harbor. One officer saw “the whole starboard side of the deck... burst out and fly into space, as a crater of flame came through carrying with it missiles and objects of all kinds; steel, wood, and human.”³ Sigsbee, who had been in his cabin at the time of the explosion, was too stunned to move and stood frozen in shock as the warm waters of the harbor spilled over the decks of the sinking Maine.

With the Maine sitting at the bottom of the harbor, speculation began about the cause of the explosion. There were, of course, two possible explanations: either the explosion was accidental or deliberate. In an effort to sell more papers, journalists invented their own accounts of what “really” transpired. *The New York Journal* printed an extra edition of the paper, proclaiming “Destruction of the warship Maine was the work of an Enemy.” The Journal offered a \$50,000 reward for the conviction of the perpetrators, and the first eight pages of the Journal

were occupied by false reports of how the "The Warship Maine was split in two by an Enemy's Infernal Machine!" Diagrams depicting the ship being blown up by a mine set off from wires running to a Spanish fortress were splashed across a special pullout section.⁴ *The New York Times* described how an English engineer named Gibbons had sold Spain a large number of electrical mines only a few years earlier and that eight or ten of them had been planted in Havana harbor. Gibbons believed that a mine like his, which contained five hundred pounds of guncotton, caused the Maine's explosion.⁵

The Spanish, however, fervently denied that they planted mines in Havana harbor. It would be nonsensical to set a mine in Havana harbor, Spain argued, for if the cable securing it in the water were to break, the mine could sink one of Spain's own ships.

The Regulations for the Government of the U.S. Navy contained a clause establishing a fact-finding body to deal with important cases where the evidence was dubious and criminal acts were suspected. Being that the Maine fit these criteria, a court of inquiry, headed by Captain William T. Sampson, began an investigation.

Though the court interrogated Sigsbee as well as other crewmembers, the best evidence was sitting at the bottom of Havana harbor. Naval divers were commissioned to search for clues at ground zero, and as the days passed major features of the damage were revealed. The explosion had torn apart the front section of the ship, and part of the forward deck had been blown up into the air and then had crashed back down upon itself. Huge guns were missing or inverted, and the armor belt plating around the perimeter of the battleship had been blown out.

The crucial evidence was found on the bottom of the frames of the ship. Frame 18 had suffered the brunt of the explosion, and one piece of the bottom shell of the ship was found protruding out of the water. The plating of the ship at frame 18 had been bent in such a way that it resembled an inverted V. This evidence led the court to believe that a mine was the source of the heavy damage done to the Maine.

This suspicion was reinforced by the discovery of some intact copper ammunition shells from the forward ten-inch magazine, proving, said the court, that the explosion had originated from outside the ship. Had the explosion originated within the magazines, no intact shells would have remained.

The Spanish also conducted an examination of the Maine, and their conclusions contradicted those of the Sampson court. They claimed that at the time of the explosion the water in the harbor was still, rendering the Maine motionless. Contact mines only explode when they collide with another object, and if the Maine had not been moving, a contact mine would have been ineffective. Thus for a mine to have caused the explosion, it would have to have been detonated by an electrical stimulus, yet no wires connected to a central station were found. Additionally, when mines erupt beneath water, a column of water is produced, yet no witnesses reported such a column. Furthermore, dead fish are usually found near the site of an underwater explosion, yet none were discovered around the Maine. Based on this evidence, the Spanish concluded that the explosion was due to spontaneous combustion of the ship's coal. The coal was stored in bunkers adjacent to the magazines, and the tremendous heat of the fiery coal ignited the weapons, setting off a chain reaction of explosions, resulting, in turn, in the sinking of the Maine.

Eventually something was going to have to be done with the wreck, for it was occupying valuable space in the harbor. Additionally, patriotic groups in the U.S. were applying pressure on Congress, petitioning for the Maine's removal from Cuba. In March 1911, Congress appropriated funds for the removal of the Maine, and by mid-spring 1911 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers had begun the tedious process of raising the ship.⁶

With the ship raised, a second court of inquiry was convened, chaired by Rear Admiral Charles E. Vreeland. Despite all the fresh evidence provided by the visibility of the ship, the Vreeland court, like its predecessor in 1898, concluded that the source of the explosion was external. However, the Vreeland court also concluded that the explosion occurred between frames 24 and 30, which were located directly beneath the six-inch reserve magazines. These magazines were then ignited by the explosion, setting off successive explosions in the other magazines, rupturing the bottom plating of the ship and bending the keel at frame 18 into the inverted V shape. Except for one section, the plating at frame 27 was bent outward, leading the court to believe that the explosion had occurred under this section, bending it inward. The other sections were bent outward because of the explosions of the nearby six-inch magazines.

With this second investigation concluded, the case of the Maine seemed to have been closed. However, in 1974 an article in the Washington Star-News aroused fresh interest in the sinking of the Maine. Entitled "Returning to the Riddle of the Explosion that Sunk the Maine," the article suggested that many questions about the Maine remained unanswered.

An influential retired Admiral, Hyman Rickover, read the article, and he was moved to organize a team of historians, engineers, and explosive experts to finally solve the enduring puzzle. Rickover asked a structural engineer named Hanson and a research physicist named Price to conduct an investigation based on the findings of the 1898 and 1911 courts.

Hanson and Price found that in the 1880's and 90's it was very common for warships to have their coal bunkers adjacent to the magazines, for in case of an attack the bunkers would act as a buffer against onrushing projectiles. The Maine had such a set-up, and the only separation between the red-hot coals and the weapons was a thin steel plate. The Maine's coal bunkers were loaded with bituminous coal, a type of coal known to cause fires by spontaneous combustion. Over twenty coal bunker fires were reported between 1894 and 1908. The longer coal remained in a bunker, the greater chance there was of it spontaneously combusting, and the coal aboard the Maine had been placed in its bunkers three months earlier. Additionally, naval regulations stipulated that the coal bunkers be checked daily, and the explosion on the Maine took place almost twelve hours after the last ordered inspection, leaving plenty of time for a fire to begin in the coal bunkers. Hanson and Price deduced that the coal in the Maine had "lit itself" on fire. However, as these types of fires give off nearly invisible smoke and no flames, they are not easily detectable. The reserve six-inch magazines, full of gunpowder canisters, were near the coal bunkers. A fire in the coal bunkers, possibly smoldering for hours, could have raised the temperature of the closest container, igniting the gunpowder, which would then trigger a chain reaction of explosions in the nearby magazines. The explosions in the magazines would have tremendous power, and the expanding gas generated by the awesome blast would be driven through the hull of the Maine. Because of the tremendous water pressure, the blast would then be driven back in, causing the inward bend in one of the sections.⁷

The 1911 team had concluded that that section of the hull had been bent inward by a mine, while the other sections were blown outward by the subsequent explosions in the magazines. Price and Hanson, however, ruled this out for if a mine were actually the cause of the explosion, the damage inflicted to the bottom of the ship would have been much greater.

Spanish contact mines contained approximately two hundred pounds of guncotton, and an explosion involving such a great amount of guncotton would have mangled and gnarled the bottom of the Maine to a much greater extent and over a larger area. Also, the inner bottom plating of the ship had more damage than the outer bottom plating around frame 27, supporting the idea that the explosion had been caused by an internal accident.⁸

The difficulty of placing a bomb underneath the Maine further supported the argument that an internal explosion sank the Maine. Dealing with a bomb of over two hundred pounds would have required a boat of several people, and with the Maine under constant surveillance it would have been difficult for a boat to get close enough to place a mine. Using swimmers to place the mine underneath the Maine was also ruled out, for to place a mine under the hull of the Maine, swimmers would have to get at least twenty-two feet below the water at a time when scuba gear had not yet been invented. Additionally, placing a mine alongside the Maine would not have ignited the magazines, for the coal bunkers would have served as a buffer. Only the possibility of an anchored mine remained, and since it would have to be placed directly beneath a magazine, the chain holding the mine in place would have to be precisely the right length. Therefore, the exact depth of the water and draft of the ship would have to be known beforehand. To accomplish all this secretly under the well-protected Maine would have been a truly amazing feat. Thus Hanson and Price ineluctably concluded that the cause of the explosion of the Maine was internal.⁹

The destruction of the Maine led swiftly to the outbreak of the Spanish–American war, and the U.S. battle cry was “Remember the Maine, to hell with Spain.” Americans wanted revenge on the Spaniards for sinking the Maine. Ultimately, what affected U.S. policy was not the historical *reality* but the nation’s false *perception* of reality.

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- 1 Gerald J. A. O'Toole. The Spanish American War: An American Epic 1898 (New York: Norton & Company, 1984) 86.
 - 2 Charles Sigsbee, Remembering the Maine (New York: The Century Company, 1899) 59.
 - 3 Allen Keller, The Spanish American War: A Compact History (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1969) 95.
 - 4 Ibid. , 96.
 - 5 Ibid. , 115.
 - 6 Hyman G. Rickover, How the Battleship Maine Was Destroyed (Annapolis: Naval Institute, 1995) 108.
 - 7 Thomas B. Allen "Remember the Maine?" in National Geographic Feb. 1998: 93-111 104.
 - 8 Rickover, 135.
 - 9 Ibid. , 145.

PREGNANT WITH FURY:

The New Left and its Rebel Child

Hillel Langenauer

The allure of thinking about history in terms of decades is strong. The very term “the Sixties” conjures up a slew of diverse images and ideas that our collective national memory would have us believe are part of an organic whole. But collective memory can obscure authentic history. In fact, as the Sixties progressed and the student movement changed American society, the movement itself changed as well.

The students who met at Port Huron in 1962 came largely from elite schools: Harvard, Berkeley, Swathmore, Sarah Lawrence, and, especially, Michigan. These intellectuals, scholarly and articulate, set out, in their all-night editing sessions of Tom Hayden’s rough draft, to define their aspirations and produce an “agenda for a generation.”¹ Todd Gitlin underscores the simultaneously academic and morally introspective quality of the debates over details at Port Huron: “Fighting for language, they were founding their intellectual and political home.”²

That the Port Huron Statement is good writing was essential to its agenda. The members of early Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) believed in a “community of reason.” If only Americans were educated about segregation, about nuclear fallout, about Vietnam, then they could resolve the moral inconsistencies, the “disturbing paradoxes,” that cause these youth to “look uncomfortably to the world [they] inherit.”³ With their faith that precise thinking – and writing – would produce moral clarity, the authors of Port Huron defined in cautious and deliberate language why “what we had originally seen as the American Golden Age was actually the decline of an era.”⁴

In consonance with their belief in reason, the students blamed the moral injustices of society on those forces that they perceived as enemies of intellectual honesty and open discourse. Chief among these forces the students counted the mind-numbing consensus of Cold War liberalism and the increasingly impersonal, bureaucratic style of government practiced in the United States: “The dominant institutions are complex enough to... entirely repel the energies of protest and reform.”⁵ If they could open freer realms of discourse and create a more involved,

participatory democracy, then perhaps, they thought, the raging injustices of society would no longer be eclipsed from the eye of American politics.

It is in this light that we should understand the document's stance on Communism, an issue that sparked controversy when SDS first released the Port Huron statement in 1962. Clearly the early New Left was not Marxist; most of the radicals understood the lessons of Stalinism and did not seek utopia in communism, "a dinosaur" that "couldn't be taken seriously, even as an enemy."⁶ Yet SDS's parent organization, the League for Industrial Democracy (LID), found the document too easy on the Russians. Anti-communism was the crucible in which the social democrats forged their post-war identity, but to the young radicals it was important to be "anti-anti-communist." "What haunted this generation was not the specter of communism, but the force and mood of McCarthyism,"⁷ and anti-communism became, for them, a symbol of the closing of the American mind. Anti-anti-communism became important to the movement in forging an identity based on free thought and a more open political discourse.⁸

It is in this light, as well, that we should understand Port Huron's indictment of liberals. While the social democrats stood for many of the long-term goals of the students, their tactics seemed hypocritical to the students. A liberal "faces 'real-world' problems: how to get what he can while he maintains, consolidates, and expands his political base."⁹ But SDS stood for a "practical moralism" that would not countenance compromise: "What liberal managers called seeing reason, the New Left called rationalization of unjust power."¹⁰ Idealists that they were, students wished to "carry a romantic idea through to its logical endpoint"¹¹ and had no patience with the usual political routes of compromise. Direct action seemed to the students not only more effective, but more ethical than arbitration with the forces of injustice: "Action was not just a means, it was the core of the movement's identity."¹²

In the eyes of the youth, the Old Left and the liberals had sold their ideals in exchange for a share of middle class prosperity. Impatience with compromise and rejection of anti-communism were manifestations of the students' intolerance of inconsistency that drove a wedge between SDS and its forbears.

But in equally important ways this striving for intellectual and moral clarity bound the radicals to the establishment. Because they had faith in reason, the students did not think it necessary to reject the American political system, or even to split definitively from the liberals.

Instead, they sought to create political discourse that would radicalize the social democrats. At this phase of the movement, the youth were not hermetically sealed from their roots or surroundings; while the primary audience of the Port Huron Statement was the middle class youth it sought to inspire, the authors also had in mind their secondary audience – social democrats, liberals, and all of America.

In fact, not only were the students willing to work within the system of American democracy, but they also seemed to identify with it spiritually, maintaining faith in its potential. As much as they “look[ed] uncomfortably” on American society, they still recognized themselves as “inheritors” of that society. They criticized the two-party system, but they maintained the basic structure of electoral democracy. They lambasted the state of the federal government and called for a reduction in its size, but they showed faith in its potential (indeed, several of the practical proposals at the end of the document called on the federal government as the prime instrument of positive social change). What is more, the students’ language even revealed a touch of nationalism. They wrote of “American values” and called for a return “towards American democracy.” These students hurt so badly precisely because, deep down, they believed in the American ideals of equality and “government of, by, and for the people,” and they burned to give those ideals substance and life.¹³

Between the nationalism of Port Huron and the revolutionary Weathermen there lies a great chasm indeed. Like other movements of the Sixties, the New Left became increasingly radical and militant as the decade progressed. The fateful events of Atlantic City and the Tonkin Gulf Resolution in August of 1964 seemed to testify to the bankruptcy of the liberal establishment. Through 1967 the war in Vietnam escalated, and the maintenance of the status quo perpetuated injustice and violence in the South and in northern ghettos. Officials at the Democratic convention of 1968 ignored a majority anti-war vote and appointed another cold warrior to the ticket. Increasingly disillusioned with managerial liberalism, many of the New Left eventually adopted more militant tactics, modeling themselves after black power and Third World revolutionaries. By the end of the decade, the apocalyptic atmosphere generated enough strife and factionalism to tear SDS apart from within, and the Weathermen, who embodied the militance of the late Sixties more than anyone else, crowned themselves the vanguards of the “People’s War.”

In the buzzwords of the decade, the Weathermen transformed protest and resistance into revolution. What was at stake now was no longer participatory democracy versus managerial liberalism. Moral revulsion with the war generated a sense of urgency that made subtle political debates seem picayune. Increased horror at the war caused the Weathermen to conclude that “the problem wasn’t simply bad policy but a wrong-headed social system, even a civilization.”¹⁴

Rejecting the American system, the Weathermen adopted Marxism. Why Marxism? Several explanations are plausible. According to Carl Oglesby, the Weathermen turned to Communism because “there was no other coherent, integrative, and explicit philosophy of revolution.”¹⁵ Todd Gitlin adds that the endorsement of Marxism was only natural in the black-and-white, either-or politics of the late Sixties: “If the American Christ turned out to look like the Antichrist – then by this cramped either-or logic the Communist Antichrist must really have been Christ.”¹⁶ Both according to Oglesby’s and Gitlin’s interpretation, the crucial point rings clear: The Weathermen did not adopt Marxism out of a learned commitment to its principles or a studied confidence in its relevance to twentieth-century America. Rejecting their middle-class American identity, they adopted Marxism because in it they found a pre-fabricated revolutionary identity.

The abstract language that the Weathermen employed belied their unnatural assumption of the mantle of Marxism and reveals the difficulty they encountered in applying this ideology to their own political situation. As Gitlin observes, “*That they [these pronouncements] were bad writing was essential to their purpose.*”¹⁷ Having adopted a pre-fabricated identity, the Weathermen adopted pre-fabricated language as well. In mind-numbingly derivative pronouncements, they invoke the jargon of Leninism and Maoism – “collectives,” “People’s War,” and “Revolution.” It would have been difficult to construct concrete strategy for a working-class revolution in the United States of the 1960’s. Using abstract, nebulous formulations, the Weathermen masked the impossibility of their goals from the readers they sought to incite – and from themselves.

The Weathermen’s “bad writing” fit their purpose in other ways as well. The Marxist-Maoist language that they appropriated made their uninitiated readers feel that they were privy to discussions of important questions and generated popular support from those who wished to feel that they “bore the philosopher’s stone.” In addition, abstract language enabled them to mask

(even from themselves) the violence that they called for. As George Orwell noted, “it is easier to speak of killing someone if you muffle the intention in a batting of polysyllabic abstractions.”¹⁸

The rhetoric of the Weatherman document underscores another way in which these sectarians differed from the SDS of the Port Huron Statement. Gone was the “community of reason” that strived to win supporters through convincing arguments. The Weathermen did not aim to convince, but to incite. Alongside the pseudo-intellectual language of Marxism, we find in the document explosive invectives. The language of the document engages not the intellect, but the emotions; it encourages not political vision, but revolutionary violence.

Perhaps in hindsight we can observe that the Port Huron Statement foreshadowed elements of the Weathermen doctrine. After all, some of the sentiments that guided the student movement did not change, but only intensified as the decade exploded. Indeed, Gitlin describes the Weathermen as “an extension” of early SDS politics, and we can recognize distant ancestors of the Weathermen in the alienated, anti-authoritarian students of direct action that met at Port Huron in 1962. But, while early SDS may have been pregnant with the potential for Weathermen, the movement’s rebel child expressed its principles in an agenda that the forbears at Port Huron would never have imagined, let alone endorsed.

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- 1 Todd Gitlin. The Sixties: Years of Hope, Days of Rage (New York: Bantam books, 1993) 101.
 - 2 Ibid.
 - 3 Thomas A. Bailey and David M. Kennedy, eds. The American Spirit: United States History as Seen by Contemporaries Vol. II: Since 1865. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company) 491.
 - 4 Ibid. p. 492.
 - 5 Ibid.
 - 6 Gitlin 121.
 - 7 Ibid.
 - 8 Ibid.
 - 9 Ibid. , 124.
 - 10 Ibid.
 - 11 Ibid. , 223-224.
 - 12 Ibid. , 85.
 - 13 Bailey, 491-492.
 - 14 Gitlin 255-256.
 - 15 Ibid. , 384.
 - 16 Ibid.
 - 17 Ibid. , 390. Emphasis in the original.
 - 18 Ibid. , 347-348 and 390.

READING THE HISTORICAL TEXT:

Leopold von Ranke and the Philosophers of History

David Polsky

In response to the idealized view of history presented by Hegel, Leopold von Ranke sought to create a new method for understanding history. If history were a text, then in Ranke's view Hegel ignored many pages, taking only those parts that supported his *a priori* vision of the ideal. In his misreading of the text, Hegel created narratives where none existed. Ranke, in contrast, claimed that he would provide a precise reading, promising that he would develop general ideas about the text only by abstracting from its specific details.

Nonetheless, despite Ranke's partial success in developing a better reading of the text than the philosophers of history, his historical readings were burdened by some of the self-same problems. Although it is still significant that Ranke attempted to provide a closer reading of the text, those readings often resulted from reading his own ideas into the text. Ranke also disregarded many parts of the text during his examination. Finally, Ranke retained many of the narratives of the philosophers of history, forcing these narratives into the text. In sum, Ranke's readings, although new in methodology, failed to completely divest themselves of the approaches of the previous readers of the text.

Ranke critiqued the philosophers of history on several aspects of their methodology. First, they analyzed the past only after presupposing their own *a priori* vision of the ideal history; they assumed that history keeps on progressing toward a certain goal. Additionally, Hegel and the other philosophers of history downplayed the importance of those who lived in the past. Ranke based his new historical approach on Kant's theories of ethics. Kant believed that it is unethical to treat people as means; rather, people should be treated as ends in and of themselves. Similarly, Ranke argued that Hegel's historical teleology forced him into treating past generations as mere rungs on the ladder of historical progress. Ranke takes issue with such an approach since then a previous generation "would only have meaning as a stepping stone for the following

generation and would not have an immediate relation to the divine.”¹ Furthermore, Ranke faulted the philosophers of history for not basing their theories on history itself, omitting many portions of history that did not conform to their vision. For example, Hegel was able to focus on the state in his philosophy of history only by omitting any discussion of peoples who had not formed states. Such societies, according to Hegel, were not part of history. Finally, these philosophers were presumptuous in thinking that they, mere mortals, could understand the direction in which history was heading.

By contrast, Ranke believed that every person and every nation within history was worthy of study. In his opinion, “every epoch is immediate to God, and its worth is not at all based on what derives from it but rests in its own existence....Now every epoch must be seen as something valid in itself and appears highly worthy of consideration.”² Unlike the philosophers of history, who excluded many aspects of history from their consideration, Ranke thought that every detail of history merited study. The historian, concerned with these details, would therefore not read his or her *a priori* views into history but would rather develop general conclusions from the particulars. Ranke most clearly expressed this approach in his Introduction to *The Great Powers*, writing that the “particular bears the general within itself....Out of the variety of individual perceptions a vision of their unity involuntarily arises.”³

According to Ranke, historical study should be rigorously focused on documentary research. Nonetheless, although Ranke believed that every detail within history has significance and deserves study, he viewed the role of the historian as going beyond merely assembling facts. Rather, the historian must also give meaning to events and explain their causes. Furthermore, the historian must notice the general direction, the spiritual unity, evident in the period being studied. This two-fold task of gathering detailed facts and using them to creatively draw the picture of an era turns the study of history into a combination of both art and science.

Another important aspect of Ranke’s methodology was his assumption that all phenomena are unique. He thought it was impossible to compare a to another nation because each nation is an organic unit that has its own character and beliefs. For example, there is no one universal concept of a monarchy; rather, there is an English conception, a French conception, and a Prussian conception. Therefore, one must

examine each monarchy individually. Ranke's opinion on this matter is expressed most clearly when he presents his opinion about the possibility of France replicating Germany's education system. The German educational system

is so firmly rooted in the needs, the ideas, and the development of the German Protestant church, it is so strongly permeated with its spirit, so steeped in it, that probably only the merest outline, only a pale copy of the original could be reproduced.⁴

Ranke's view that each state is a living, organic entity caused him to concentrate on foreign affairs between nations. Since each state is an entity in and of itself, it is most concerned with its survival, which would be most affected by its relations with other nations.

In *The Great Powers*, Ranke attempted to put his general ideas about the study of history into practice, using a substantial amount of documentary evidence. Following his view of the organic character of nations, Ranke emphasized the foreign policy issues between the countries, focusing on wars, diplomacy, treaties, and peace conferences. While Ranke also discussed the state of culture within countries, he did so only in relation to the nations' foreign policy. According to Ranke, when a nation gains political power, its culture improves. For example, as Prussia became more and more powerful its literature improved, as did English literature when the English entered the anti-French coalition. This connection between the two appears to be a further consequence of his theory of the living entity of the state. When the organism of the state as a whole becomes stronger, every aspect of that nation, culture included, is strengthened.

However, Ranke is guilty of some of the same critiques that he leveled against the philosophers of history. Ranke criticized the philosophers of history for excluding peoples from study, yet he permits historians to exclude India and China from their historical studies. Additionally, Ranke criticized the philosophers of history for putting too much emphasis on progress, yet he says that since India and China had not made the same progress as the West, they did not have a history.⁵

Ranke also conformed to his own worst stereotypes of the philosophers of history by omitting evidence that would contradict his grand theories about history. Since Ranke

believed that a nation's literature could improve only when it is strong politically, he was forced to show that English literature only became respected when England gained power with respect to other great powers. Thus, Ranke writes that when England gained territory at the end of the seventeenth century, "English literature first rose to an influential position in Europe and commenced to vie with the French."⁶ However, Ranke ignored the fact that William Shakespeare's plays were published long before that time.

Ranke's preoccupation with the spirits of nations and foreign policy also distorted his understanding of the French Revolution. In his narrative, Ranke connected the French Revolution to the weakening power of the Old Regime. However, his reading leaves out all mention of the rights of man, classical liberalism, the economic frustration of the peasants and middle classes, and the storming of the Bastille – key events of that period! In fact, Ranke almost appears to admit his own selective reading of history, stating that he will "not go into the multiplicity of causes which led to the...French Revolution....I shall only remind the reader that the decline in France's external position was an important factor."⁷ Despite his efforts to convince the reader otherwise, Ranke's vision of the French Revolution did not jump off the pages of history; first he had to cut out events that did not fit his picture. Here too, a Hegelian emphasis on the spirit of nations lead Ranke to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors and obscure the historical picture.

Finally, Ranke writes that the alliance against Napoleon strengthened nationalist sentiment. In his narrative of events, the success of the allies on the battlefield caused the people to identify with their respective countries. However, most historians maintain that the Congress of Vienna signaled a defeat of nationalism. Regardless, Ranke's *a priori* belief about the organic nature of the state forced him to think otherwise.

To summarize, Ranke attempted to break with the philosophers of history, who, in his view, created *a priori* ideas about history, causing them to misinterpret events and read their own visions into history. Instead, Ranke desired that all of history be studied rigorously and wanted to draw his conclusions from an objective reading of history, rather than from an idealized philosophy. In *The Great Powers*, Ranke fulfilled his desire to make the study of history more scientific, proving his points from many documents and manuscripts. However, Ranke could not completely escape the beliefs and

prejudices of Hegel and the other philosophers of history. His view that states are living entities, all too similar to Hegel's philosophy about the *geist* of nations, forced him to read his own ideas into history. Thus, although Ranke made a valiant attempt to read the text of history objectively, he was nonetheless unable to abandon completely the tenets of the philosophers of history and to refrain from reading them into the text.

1 Leopold von Ranke, The Theory and Practice of History, ed. Georg. G. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke, trans. Wilma A. Iggers and Konrad von Moltke (New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), p. 53.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid. , 66.

4 Ibid. , 110.

5 Ibid. , 46.

6 Ibid. , 75-76.

7 Ibid. , 94.

TRENDS IN MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY

Gabriel Posner^{*}

Modern historians generally agree that they have departed from the vision of history as described by the father of modern history, Leopold von Ranke. Ranke's history was a narrative of events, enjoined with the task of reporting things "as they occurred" (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*). Several aspects of Rankian history have come under attack, such as Ranke's emphasis upon political figures and institutions. The most significant shift away from Ranke, however, has involved the very conception of the historian's task; it is no longer to report events "as they occurred." The prevalent skepticism towards the Rankian approach to history, however, ought to be coupled with a more positive program which outlines not only what the historian rejects, but also the underlying theories and methods which he or she embraces. If the modern historian *does not* set out to report events as they occurred, what in fact *does* he or she seek to do? The following paper will explore some recent trends in the thought of several modern historians, specifically as expressed in the work of Carlo Ginzburg and Natalie Zemon Davis, in an attempt to find common characteristics of their subject matter, arguments, and methods.

Background

Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms* has been an influential work in modern historiography. Ginzburg's primary contribution is his approach in analyzing the relationship between high and low culture. Earlier models of the two cultural worlds saw them either as completely distinct and autonomous or as related in only one direction such that high culture "trickled down" into low culture while the latter had no influence on the former. Ginzburg suggests that a more balanced interaction existed between the two. Thus, Menocchio, a sixteenth century miller, thinks in terms that belong to the

^{*}I am indebted to Professor G. Freedman for his illuminating lectures on modern historiography and his comments on an earlier draft of this paper

peasant culture in which he lives. Yet Menocchio gains access to texts that traditionally belong to high culture, and, in reading them, interprets and understands them through the prism of his low-culture thinking. Menocchio constructs his cosmogony by asking questions that relate to his own experience. He knows how G-d created the world since he knows how the carpenter works; he knows how G-d rules the world since he knows how a lord behaves; he knows that there was no virgin birth since he has reared his own children. From the context of his low culture, Menocchio approaches scholastic works about creation and theology. The peasant takes his picture of the world and with it interprets texts, reads them selectively, and finds his own notions within them.

Natalie Zemon Davis, in *The Return of Martin Guerre*, addresses another major theme of the early modern era: the position of an individual as an agent who effects the events that surround himself or herself. When Bertrande de Rols, a young, moderately well off peasant, is abandoned by her husband, she is left to find a new place for herself in the family and village where her position has become awkward. Bertrande creates a new life for herself, one that is stable and fulfilling. When her husband, Martin Guerre, returns, Bertrande welcomes him back, only to discover that the man she has embraced is in fact not Martin Guerre at all but an imposter, Arnaud du Tilh. Nevertheless, Bertrande not only receives him but consciously supports and assists his efforts to fill the role of her past husband.

In Davis's analysis, Bertrande de Rols was not only defined by her surroundings and status as a peasant woman; she acted as a subject, an agent who determined the style and standards of her own life. Bertrande manipulated situations, so that, for example, when Martin Guerre ran away she could have her childhood back while appearing loyal and virtuous. She could eventually make a new life for herself with Arnaud, and she could do so as a subject who acted with consciousness, not as an object acted upon by those around her.

Evidence

Let us begin with a similarity between these two works. It is no coincidence that both Ginzburg and Davis address themselves to episodes involving court trials. Both use trials as a major source of information for their work, either directly, using transcripts of testimony given in the court room, or, in Davis's case, indirectly, through a book written

by the judge who himself conducted a trial regarding the events in question. Now, it is not true that every modern work of history concerns itself with a court case. If nothing else, one might argue that Ginzburg and Davis use trials simply as sources of thorough, contemporary testimony about the historical events they are treating. Nevertheless, the manner in which both historians treat the trials as sources of evidence and the information they choose to take from them reveal that both are engaged in a similar, specific type of inquiry.

To a great extent, these works are about the nature and importance of historical evidence. What qualifies as evidence for the historian? Where should he or she look to find it? Issues of evidence date back at least to the days of Ranke himself, who emphasized the importance of documents. Marc Bloch also dealt with the question, in presenting his metaphor of the hunter and the tracks.¹ The historian searches for the traces left behind, preferably inadvertently so, by past worlds, whether documentary, archeological, or the name a city retained after its conquerors disappeared. With his serial method, Fernand Braudel offered what is perhaps a more scientific system of inquiry, in which the historian analyzes and organizes large quantities of comparable, homogeneous data. For example, a historian who has access to all the wills from a given area over a century can compare them for their religious content, their statements about the economics of the parties involved, and their social-familial presuppositions. The information uncovered in such a mass of documents can be organized, charted, and interpreted as reflecting the society from which it grew, not unlike a sociologist examining a contemporary society. Additionally, Braudel's call to work in concert with other disciplines of the social sciences was an attempt to create one massive, thorough, and comprehensive analysis of an entire world.²

The arguments that stretch from Ranke through Braudel attempt to posit the most objective form of evidence, the evidence that will best canvass an event as it happened or society as it was. In this regard, Ginzburg to an extent, and Davis more so, depart from their predecessors. Both accept the subjectivity of their evidence, only instead of trying to escape from or circumvent that subjectivity, they incorporate it into their study. The question is not, or at least not only, "How can the historian best determine what *actually happened*?" but, "How can the historian determine what *contemporary individuals*

thought was happening?" The history of a court case, therefore, presents an ideal opportunity not only to see what happened, but also to see how a judge, the witnesses, and the accused *themselves* interpreted and expressed what *they thought* was happening around them. What would have been dismissed as biased evidence by earlier historians is important historical material for Ginzburg and Davis. It is utterly central to Davis's thesis that Jean de Coras, the judge who presided over the case and later wrote about it, is *not* dependable as a source of evidence for what actually happened in the Martin Guerre case, yet she *is* interested in what he says and why he says it nonetheless. Coras could relate to Arnaud du Tilh.³ He would judge the imposter and send him to his death, but nonetheless admire him and the invented marriage that was "profoundly wrong, but also profoundly right."⁴ The title Coras chooses for his book reveals the gravity with which he approached the episode and the respect he held for its cast. The many relatives and townspeople who testified that Arnaud was Martin Guerre work against the thesis that Bertrande must have known that Arnaud was an imposter. Yet, Davis confronts their testimony and interprets it. From their perspective, Arnaud inherited Martin's identity because he filled the social gap Martin left when he ran away. Thus, Davis tries to make sense of all the trial's characters because their opinions of the case are just as important to her as the actual facts.

The case of Menocchio is similar, though in a more subtle way. Ginzburg's challenge throughout is to retrace Menocchio's steps, to find the sources he read that brought him to his conclusions. Here, in essence, one sees the historian scrutinizing not only his own sources, but his subject's sources as well. Ginzburg is less concerned with where he gets his own information (he finds it sufficient to rely on court transcripts) than with where Menocchio gets his. What the texts Menocchio read *actually* mean is unimportant. Indeed, it is similarly unimportant, when considered alone, that Menocchio believed in a specific cosmogony. What *is* of utmost importance, and what sustains Ginzburg's thesis, is the *interface* between Menocchio and his sources. The way those sources were reflected in his mind, and the way his thinking found expression in them tells Ginzburg more about the early modern peasant and the sources he read than either of the two taken alone. Once again, it is the contemporary *interpretation* of material that interests the historian as much or even more than the objective characteristics of the

material itself. Both Davis and Ginzburg focus on the manner in which the characters they study, whether it be Coras, the townspeople, or Menocchio, interpret the facts or texts they have before them. The court case thus provides an ideal context to analyze the many opinions of contemporary figures about one historical reality.

Agency

Ginzburg's and Davis's treatment of the court cases and the opinions of contemporary historical figures becomes all the more significant when it takes its place in a larger pattern of methods that characterize the modern historian.

To be sure, the *Annales* recognized long ago that there was significance in analyzing the way historical characters interpreted and made sense of their world. Bloch's exploration into the nature of *mentalities* examined how structures of thought influenced medieval society. Medieval thinking was quite distinctive in the ways it conceived of time, language, and the written word.⁵ However, besides attempting to understand thought patterns, there is an additional element that distinguishes the modern historian, and that is the notion of agency. Ginzburg and Davis alike operate with the understanding that the characters they study are agents in the events surrounding them, independent thinkers and actors who affect the events which the historian studies.

The notion of agency was quite foreign to Ranke's history. The paramount status allotted to political affairs leaves no room for the individual to think freely and creatively. The entire nation behaves in accordance with the international political program designed and executed by its political leaders. There is no study of the individual Frenchman, unless it is Napoleon, and even he is significant as the agent of a national, organic French destiny. For the *Annales*, politics loses supremacy, but it is replaced by other phenomena as motivators of historical causation. For example, Bloch posits that though the medieval figure had little notion of time, this was not because of any conscious decision. The lack of precise time keeping devices made the idea of precise time keeping impossible.⁶ In Braudel's terminology, *mentalities* were structures that could exist over the time of a *longue duree*, the vast spans of time that ought to be the subject of history.⁷ Common to all these positions is the assumption that events external to the individual fashion his or her thinking.

The modern historian departs markedly. The human figure is not merely a conduit through which a prevalent mentality finds expression. It is not true that Menocchio and Bertrande merely express the peasant or female mentality that is imposed upon them from the surrounding culture. To the contrary, they are creative thinkers. Davis treats the issue of agency at length. Bertrande creates a new life for herself after Martin leaves by recapturing her lost childhood, by marrying Arnaud, and, more importantly, by perceiving him as "the new Martin Guerre." Bertrande drew from the notions that existed in her world; Arnaud could become her new husband because identity and social status were so closely tied and Arnaud replaced Martin in the social complex. They could more easily cope with the sin of adultery because of the new Protestantism of which they were of no doubt aware.⁸ All along, though, Bertrande and Arnaud are subjects, thinkers who act of their own volition, cobbling together ideas that already exist around them and constitute their environment.

Ginzburg similarly treats the issue of agency, though not as directly as Davis. If one asks, "Who was Menocchio, and what sort of thinking brought him to his cosmogony?" there can be little doubt that Menocchio was himself creative. Certainly, he is no less creative than Bertrande de Rols. Much like Bertrande, Menocchio is a subject, his thinking is that of a protagonist operating within an existing environment or mentality. There is no external peasant mentality that was imposed upon Menocchio such that he could see things no other way. As a creative thinker, he draws existing ideas from his environment and applies them in creative ways. He is passionate about his thoughts because they are his own. By the end of the second trial he is a beaten man for the same reason; his ideas have been beaten at the personal level. The story of Menocchio is lacking if understood as the encounter between high and low culture as conceived in the abstract. There is an agent who must bring the two worlds together.

The notion of agency is critical to modern historiography. To credit the contemporary individual with thoughts and perception of the events that occur in his or her surroundings, and to value those thoughts and that perception as worthy of study, the modern historian must assume that the contemporary individual had the freedom and capability to think independently. Ranke and the *Annales*, on the other hand, who

uncover and analyze objective facts, assume that the individual in history does not have the freedom and capability of interpreting those facts in a meaningful way.

The Geertzian Model

Perhaps the most influential mode of history introduced in recent years has been that of the anthropologist Clifford Geertz, which entered the world of history in Robert Darnton's book *The Great Cat Massacre*. Geertz's method involves shifting back and forth from "text to context." A particular event must be seen in light of the culture that surrounds it, while deeper understanding of the culture itself comes from an analysis of the particular event. For example, Darnton examines a massacre of cats in a pre-revolution French print shop. Drawing from "context," Darnton establishes the symbolism of cats by turning to the culture that surrounded the printers. There he finds the cat's significance as representative of a household as well as its sexual connotations. The printers in turn use the existing cultural metaphors at their disposal to tease their master and his wife not only by simply applying existing metaphors but by manipulating them in creative and constructive ways. Thus, Darnton has studied the cultural symbolism of the cat and simultaneously used the incident to shed light on the working class culture of pre-revolution France.

Darnton's dialectical analysis of the particular event on the one hand and the culture from which it draws on the other is not only a method for the *historian* to apply; it is a statement that describes the nature of the *historical event* itself. It is not only the *historian* who shifts from text to context in his or her analysis; the *characters* in a historical episode will themselves draw from the culture that surrounds them and contribute to that culture as well. The printers take their humor from existing cultural symbols, but they are inventive in configuring and applying those symbols in a fresh and unique manner.

To the extent which Darnton finds creativity and subjectivity in the figures he analyzes, his approach is thoroughly modern. Once again, the historian is investigating how the contemporary historical figure made sense of his or her world. However, Darnton's approach at times is closer to that of the *Annales* school, particularly where the characters in question lack agency. For example, Darnton examines a bourgeois's

description of Montpellier, but the description is hardly the work of a creative character who is constructing a new, invented constellation of cultural symbols.

Darnton uses the text to enter what he thinks is a roughly typical mind. For example, the account reveals that eighteenth century society was broadly thought of in terms of corporate entities.⁹ The agency of the individual and the bourgeois acting as independent subjects is unimportant. In such a case, there is a greater degree of similarity between Darnton's model and the *Annales'* *mentalities*. In both cases, the historian looks into the mind of a historical figure and sees not the creative thought of an individual, but the expression of a dominant mentality.

Gender

Joan Wallach Scott, in *Gender and the Politics of History*, presents two levels at which gender has been the subject of historical inquiry. In its earlier, simpler form, feminist history primarily studied "her story." Every historical episode was scrutinized in search of the women who played important roles, but whose story had never been told. However, a more sophisticated and better-developed feminist history involves the study of gender as a social construct that affects thought and action at all levels of society. It is not the job of the feminist historian to append "her story" to the existing account of a historical event. Rather, the entire event, even where a woman is not involved, must be reevaluated in terms of the influence of gender on thought and action of any kind. Thus, for example, discussions of political power surrounding the French Revolution employ gender related terms and therefore reflect the importance of gender in history even where there are no women involved.¹⁰

Scott's historiography, though focused narrowly on the development of feminist history, embodies those trends that characterize modern historiography more broadly. The shift from "her story" to the analysis of gender is itself a subtle shift from the interpretation of what *was* to the interpretation of what others living contemporarily *understood* to be. The historian's focus is broadened from the specific roles women played to the refraction of those roles through social contexts, including the multiplicity of contemporary interpretations and perspectives surrounding every female role.

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Scott speaks largely in terms resembling the "agency" of Davis and Ginzburg. One might have taken Scott's thesis in the opposite

direction entirely, claiming that preconceived notions about gender bound any thinker and prevent creative and free usage of gender terminology and thinking. Quite to the contrary, Scott sees gender as constituting an environment, a set of accepted intellectual and cultural metaphors and ideas which surrounded the historical figure and offered material which he or she could draw from and apply in creative ways. While John Locke used gender as a metaphor to give structure to his argument, Edmund Burke used it to attack the revolutionaries in France.¹¹ For Scott, unlike the *Annales* model of *mentalities*, gender is linked to the dynamic confrontation and development of ideas: "The point of new historical investigation is to disrupt the notion of fixity, to discover the nature of the debate or repression that leads to the appearance of timeless permanence in binary gender representation."¹²

Conclusion

It should be clear that what is at stake here is not only a quantitative question of how many different issues interest the historian. It is not that the modern historian appends an additional point to a traditional analysis of an event by stating that contemporary characters viewed things in different terms. Rather, the assumptions that govern historical truth, and with them the job of the historian, change radically. Bloch contrasted the historian with the judge.¹³ Both are impartial, but while the former has the job of establishing the facts, the latter must establish them and pass judgment upon them. The modern historian formulates this contrast rather differently: it is the job of the judge to establish facts, but for the historian even the facts are only a point of departure for broader study. The *Annales* embarked upon studies of total societies, with the premise that the facts, with all their complexities and relationships, could be uncovered objectively. The total society of medieval France or the early modern Mediterranean existed as an objective reality, and the historian could examine it with a nearly scientific approach. The modern historian approaches historical fact with the opposite assumption. The facts of early modern Europe do not exist for objective analysis only. Rather, the subject of history is the many ways contemporary figures constructed their worlds.

In this regard, modern historians appear to share a common approach to their subject matter. Each applies the study of the contemporary historical thinker to his or her particular area or subject of study, but the assumptions from which they all depart span

across the discipline. Ginzburg, Davis, Scott, and, to an extent Darnton all waive their claims to an objective chronicle of *wie es eigentlich gewesen*, and instead turn their attention to the interpretations of reality and, more fundamentally, to reality itself as conceived by figures contemporary to the periods they study.

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- 1 Marc Bloch, The Historians Craft (New York: Vintage Books, 1959) 55.
 - 2 Cf. Fernand Braudel, "History and the other Human Sciences" in On History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), specifically 10-11, 61-62.
 - 3 Natalie Zemon Davis, The Return of Martin Guerre (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1983) 102.
 - 4 Ibid. , 103.
 - 5 Marc Bloch, Feudal Society (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) 74, 76, 81.
 - 6 Ibid. , 76.
 - 7 Braudel 31.
 - 8 Davis 50.
 - 9 Robert Darnton, The Great Cat Massacre (New York: First Vintage Books, 1985) 123.
 - 10 Joan Wallach Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia UP, 1988) 46-47.
 - 11 Ibid. , 46.
 - 12 Ibid. , 43.
 - 13 Bloch, Craft 138-140.

SUBJECTIVE HISTORY:

Conflicting Versions of the Yom Kippur War

Yitzchok Segal

Introduction

Israeli writers and Anwar el-Sadat have provided two widely differing accounts of the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Three central issues on which the two versions disagree are: The right under international law for the Arabs to have resorted to armed conflict to regain the land which they had lost in the 1967 Six Day War; the role of American aid sent to Israel during the war via the celebrated airlift; and the outcome of the war: which nation won? Sadat claimed that international law sanctioned his initiation of hostilities, that American aid was the sole reason for his acceptance of the cease-fire, and that Egypt won the war. In contradistinction, many Israeli writers have insisted that international law had been violated by the Arabs, that American aid was militarily insignificant, and that Israel won the war.¹

This paper will present both versions, weigh the evidence, and draw conclusions based on the evidence and western sources. It will find that it remains unclear whether international law was violated, that though American aid was not the cause of Sadat's acceptance of the cease-fire, it did significantly help the Israelis militarily, and that while the Israelis won a Pyrrhic victory on the field, some of Sadat's objectives in launching his assault were nevertheless realized.

The Issue of International Law

Sadat claimed that his aggression was justified under international law. He publicly stated, "In our war we did not depart from the values and laws of international society as stipulated in the UN charter."² In Sadat's view, his military operations were legitimate because he was trying to liberate the lands taken unlawfully from Egypt in the Six Day War. Sadat compared the Israeli occupation of Egyptian land to Hitler's occupation of Russian territory during the Second World War. In a letter sent to Leonid Brezhnev in August 1972, he proposed the following analogy:

We still bear in mind your own experience in World War II. The Soviet peoples rejected Nazi occupation and would not allow it to continue. They fought valiantly, making all the necessary sacrifices for the liberation of their land, and struggled without stint to secure their dignity. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the Arab people of Egypt should be equally eager to liberate their land, equally willing to make all the necessary sacrifices...³

The question of the liberation of Arab lands, therefore, forces us to examine the circumstances under which those lands were occupied by Israel in 1967. Was the Israeli occupation of Arab lands analogous to the Nazi occupation of Russia during the Second World War, or was it justified under international law?

In 1967 the Israeli airforce launched a preemptive air strike against Egypt and destroyed the Egyptian airforce while it was still on the ground. This afforded the Israelis the valuable strategic advantage of complete air superiority throughout the war, enabling them to destroy the Arab armies in six days and allowing them to annex significant new territories.

Two issues must be examined in order to determine the legality of such a preemptive strike: 1) The Israelis maintain that their preemptive strike was legal because it was committed in anticipatory self-defense. Does international law sanction anticipatory self-defense? If so, was Israel's situation one which warranted such sanction?; 2) Prior to Israel's preemptive strike, Gamal Abdel Nasser had closed the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping. Israel claimed that the closing of the straits was a cause for war and sufficient legal grounds to launch the strike. Let us examine each of these issues.

The *locus classicus* for the justification of self-defense under international law is Article 51 of the UN charter. The Article states, "Nothing in the present Charter will impair the **inherent right** of individual or collective self-defense **if an armed attack occurs** against a member of the United Nations...."⁴

The wording of the Article is ambiguous as to the issue of anticipatory self-defense. On the one hand, it refers to an "inherent right" of nations to defend themselves. On the other hand, an explicit precondition of "an armed attack" is stipulated. Does the "inherent right" of nations to defend themselves also extend to anticipatory self-defense? Indeed, this issue is a source of enduring debate among scholars.⁵

The anticipatory self-defense argument, however, is founded on the supposition that Egypt was about to attack, and that Israel's only alternative to being attacked was to attack

first. It is unclear, however, if this is true. In an interview in May 1972, one Israeli general candidly admitted that “perhaps the Egyptians would never have attacked.”⁶ Several other prominent generals who were interviewed at the same time did not appear to disagree with this assessment of the facts.⁷ The text of the Cabinet decision to go to war, however, emphatically declared that “the Government ascertained that the armies of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan are deployed for immediate multi-front aggression, threatening the very existence of the state.”⁸ Thus it remains unclear whether international law recognizes anticipatory self-defense as legitimate, and even if it does, whether Israel’s circumstances warranted such action.⁹

The Israelis are on much firmer ground in their argument that something tantamount to an armed attack had indeed occurred. Israelis had undergone prolonged and systematic *fedayeen* raids into their territory. They had witnessed Egypt’s removal of the UN Emergency Forces in Sinai and Arab troop deployments on their borders. In addition to the persistent threats to Israel’s existence, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran and passage through the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping.

Closure of the Straits of Tiran was viewed by Israel as a *casus belli*. In June 1967 Abba Eban used this hostile gesture of Nasser’s to justify Israel’s aggressive conduct. He said, “Never in history have blockade and peace existed side by side. From May 24 onward, the question of who started the war or who fired the first shot became momentarily irrelevant....”¹⁰ Israel’s right of innocent passage through the Straits was guaranteed by the western powers.¹¹ It was understood that violation of such rights would justify military action under Article 51.¹²

Three counter-arguments have been suggested. Firstly, some question the West’s authority to grant right of passage during a state of war through a waterway which lies in Egypt’s territorial sea. Being that the armistice agreement between Israel and Egypt did not terminate the state of war that legally existed between them since Israel’s founding, Egypt had every right to exercise sovereignty over the Straits.¹³

Another, somewhat ambiguous, argument was made by Harvard Law Professor Robert Fisher. In a letter to the *New York Times*, Fisher wrote that “although the 1958 Convention on the Territorial Sea does provide for innocent passage through such straits, the

United States representative, Arthur Dean, called this a 'new rule' and the UAR has not signed the treaty."¹⁴

Fisher also advanced yet a third argument by questioning whether Egypt was obligated under international law to respect Israel's right of passage in light of Israel's retaliatory raid on Syria during April of that year. He asked, "Was Egypt required by international law to continue to allow Israel to bring in oil and other strategic supplies through Egyptian territory – supplies which Israel could use to conduct further military raids?"¹⁵

In Israel's defense it may be stated that the threat to Israeli shipping and access to the East severely escalated the threat of an Arab attack. Israel's military and economic position was such that the maintenance of the status quo was the equivalent of economic strangulation. With eighty per cent of her military personnel composed of reservists, Israel could in no way maintain a high level of mobilization for protracted periods of time.¹⁶

The international community has favored Israel's actions as a proper and legitimate exercise of self-defense. Attempts made by the Soviet Union to label Israel's actions as aggressive have failed in both the General Assembly and in the Security Council.¹⁷

Even if the Israelis were justified under international law, however, it is still unclear whether any territory gained by such actions might be held after the cessation of the hostilities. One authority unequivocally maintains:

The customary law of self-defense as incorporated in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter gives clear indication that national self-defense is limited to the conservation of existing values or interests and does not provide any basis for an extension of values by the acquisition of title to enemy territory.¹⁸

Indeed, the Security Council Resolution on the Middle East of November 1967 affirms the need for the "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories of recent conflict."¹⁹

The Israelis, however, categorically insist that in the absence of a willingness on the part of the Arab countries to formally conclude a peace agreement with Israel, these areas become fundamental to the security of Israel.²⁰ Indeed, the Camp David summit of 1978 led to a peace agreement whereby Israel agreed to a gradual withdrawal from territories taken during the Six Day War in exchange for peace with Egypt.

The Issue of American Aid

Background:

On October 6, 1973 the Egyptian and Syrian armies launched a coordinated attack which caught Israel by surprise. Though the Syrian attack in the north began successfully, the Israelis were able to quickly recover from their surprise,²¹ contain the Syrian advances, and regain the initiative. In the south the Egyptians successfully crossed the formidable Suez Canal and its defenses and began to advance rapidly. Here, too, the Israelis recovered and boldly crossed to the west of the Canal in a daring operation. This crossing began on October 15. By the cease-fire of October 22, the Israelis had outflanked and surrounded major portions of the Egyptian armies.

The United States aided Israel during her struggle. As early as October 7, seven El-Al planes began shuttling American supplies to Israel.²² On October 9, Israel was guaranteed by President Nixon that America would replace all her losses in the war.²³ Israel was also sent large quantities of American supplies by sea.²⁴ On October 13, the United States began a massive airlift of supplies to Israel,²⁵ ferrying a staggering 700–800 tons daily.²⁶

The Israeli Position:

The two most important Israeli generals commanding the forces that crossed the Canal were Ariel Sharon and Avraham Adan. In both of their writings on the Yom Kippur War there is no mention of American aid of any sort!²⁷ As Sharon's book is an autobiography, this indictment against him may be mitigated. Adan's book, however, is a history of the Yom Kippur War on the southern front, and his omission of this colossal logistical feat, therefore, becomes inexcusable.

This myopia, however, is not endemic to all Israeli writers; some mention American aid with seeming reluctance. Zeev Schiff, for example, refers to it once in an over 300 page work on the war,²⁸ and General Chaim Herzog, after 275 pages of omission, admits that:

This airlift was obviously of vital importance militarily to Israel at a critical juncture, but perhaps its major significance was a political one. Its unequivocal nature...was undoubtedly a major factor in bringing about a cease-fire and in turning the United States into the central figure on the stage of the Middle East in the months subsequent to the war.²⁹

Golda Meir goes further than Herzog. She maintains that the airlift aided Israel psychologically, politically, and militarily. The Prime Minister unabashedly confesses that, "It [the airlift] not only lifted our spirits, but also served to make the American position clear to the Soviet Union, and it undoubtedly served to make our victory possible."³⁰

It would seem that Meir's view is correct. Being reassured by America that her losses would be restored in full, Israel was able to freely use all her resources against the Arabs. Without reserve, America poured into Israel the most sophisticated weapons and war machines in huge quantities.³¹ The arrival of American support itself was a significant psychological relief to a nation near the verge of destruction and helped the Israelis rally to the cause. One western military historian writes, "The massive American resupply effort, combined with the training, competence, and dedication of the Israeli fighting man, soon turned the tide of battle and decided the outcome of the Yom Kippur War."³² It would appear, then, that the airlift along with the courage and resilience of the Israeli soldiers³³ and the brilliant performance of the Israeli air force³⁴ all allowed for Israel's remarkable recovery.

Sadat's Position:

Sadat's position on American aid derived from his need to surmount an obstacle. Since Sadat claimed that he won the Yom Kippur War (see later),³⁵ his pleas for a cease-fire become incomprehensible.

To excuse his calling for a cease-fire in the midst of an Arab "victory," Sadat maintained that he was forced to do so because of American intervention on behalf of Israel. In a letter to Assad on October 20, 1973 Sadat wrote, "For the last ten days...I have been fighting the United States on the Egyptian front...I simply cannot fight the United States or bear the responsibility for having our armed forces destroyed once again."³⁶ In a press conference on October 31, 1973 Sadat said, "The...reason for accepting the cease-fire...is that frankly I do not fight against America. I fought Israel for 11 days...But I am not prepared to fight America."³⁷ In his autobiography he reiterated this assertion, "I knew my capabilities. I did not intend to fight the entire United States of America."³⁸

This position is tenuous. Did Sadat not realize when he began his campaign that America would aid Israel? Israel was America's only ally in the Middle East at a time when America's chief Cold War rival, the Soviet Union, supported the Arab countries. Surely

America could not be expected to stand idly by and watch Israel be devoured by Soviet satellites!³⁹

Another difficulty with Sadat's claim is that his timing in requesting a cease-fire is incongruous with the arrival of American aid. While the Americans had already launched their massive airlift on October 13, Sadat first requested the cease-fire on October 19. If Sadat realized that he could not fight "the entire United States of America," why did he not request a cease-fire earlier?

Indeed, Sadat did realize that America was aiding Israel, and yet he still arrogantly defied her. In a speech to the People's Assembly on October 16, 1973 Sadat thundered, "The United States has established a sea and air bridge along which new tanks, new aircraft, new guns, new rockets and new electronics [equipment] pour into Israel. We tell them: This will not frighten us."⁴⁰ Sadat's words indicate that he was in fact quite willing to fight an Israel aided by America. How can we explain this contradiction?

At the time of his speech on October 16, Sadat believed that Egypt was winning the war. Despite the Israeli crossing of the Suez, the Egyptian High Command failed to grasp the enemy strategy until it was too late. The Egyptians spoke contemptuously of "a few Israeli commando units" that had crossed the Canal, and the preoccupation of the Egyptian General Staff was with their forces east of the Canal who were on the offensive.⁴¹ Sadat derisively dismissed the Israeli crossing as a "television operation."⁴²

It was only on October 19 when Sadat met General Shazli, Egypt's Chief of Staff, that Sadat first realized that the tide had turned in Israel's favor. Shazli was in a state of collapse and greeted Sadat by exclaiming, "The war is over. A catastrophe has occurred. We must withdraw from the Sinai." It was at this juncture that Sadat asked for a cease-fire.⁴³

But now what would become of Sadat's aspirations for a great victory? What would become of the brilliant crossing of the Canal, which Sadat termed "a miracle by any military standard?"⁴⁴ What would become of the performance of his forces, who fought better than they had ever fought and who achieved surprise and success in the first few days?⁴⁵ What would become of all the painstaking months of carefully determining strategy and meticulously planning a coordinated attack with Syria?⁴⁶

It appears that in order to salvage his image of victory and simultaneously save his forces from a humiliating defeat on the field, Sadat adopted America as the scapegoat. His

forces had defeated Israel; they simply could not risk taking on the world's greatest superpower.⁴⁷

The Issue of Victory

The Israeli Position:

The Israeli view of the result of the war has been put bluntly by Golda Meir: "We won the Yom Kippur War."⁴⁸ Similarly, General Herzog notes:

Caught surprised and unaware, and despite the initial reverses and heavy losses, the Israeli people, military command, and, above all, fighting men rallied, turned the tide and brought on a victory that saved the nation. Many of the great events in a 4,000 year-old history pale into insignificance beside what was achieved on the battlefield in the Yom Kippur War. Israel has every right to draw courage and faith... from their war of atonement.⁴⁹

General Adan likewise emphasizes the greatness of the Israeli comeback in evaluating the Yom Kippur War as a great victory. He illustrates the difficulty in recovering from a surprise attack by referring to the Egyptian experience during the Six Day War.⁵⁰ He points out that even nations that succeeded in regaining the initiative after a surprise attack, such as America and Russia in 1941, had to wait years before they were able to reverse the tide. Israel, by contrast, recovered in a very brief period of time.⁵¹

In addition to the quick recovery from the initial surprise, there are also other Israeli achievements that justify Israel's claim to victory. Israel secured an undeniable victory in the north against the Syrians, despite being vastly outnumbered there, as on all other fronts.⁵² In the south, Israel crossed the Suez Canal and encircled the Egyptian Third Army thereby cutting off the over land supply line to 20,000 Egyptian forces.⁵³ On October 14, the Israelis utterly defeated the Egyptians in a major tank battle involving some 2,000 tanks.⁵⁴ The Israeli airforce performed brilliantly throughout the struggle, far outshining anything accomplished by the Arab airforces.⁵⁵ The Israeli navy, though playing no decisive role, also performed far better than the Arab navies.⁵⁶ In addition, Israel emerged from the war with several hundred square miles of territory that it had not held prior to the war.⁵⁷

The Israeli victory, however, was a costly one. The Arabs also "held" significant portions of new territory east of the Suez Canal, and they inflicted heavy casualties on the Israelis. 2,355 Israeli soldiers were killed, 508 were missing, and 900 were wounded.⁵⁸ Israel

also lost many tanks and planes.⁵⁹ Indeed, western historians conclude that Israel saved herself by achieving a Pyrrhic victory.⁶⁰

Sadat's Position:

Despite all the evidence for the Israeli victory, Sadat persisted in claiming that he won the war.⁶¹ As late as 1977 he maintained that even the battles which took place towards the very end of the war were fought remarkably well by his forces.⁶² Staunchly believing in his unerring masterminding abilities, Sadat blamed all "minor military setbacks" on "the negligence on the part of our Third Army Commander."⁶³ Conveniently, Sadat simply denied, ignored, or denigrated several major Israeli achievements.⁶⁴

His loss on the field notwithstanding, Sadat still attained his major objectives in launching the attack. Upon assuming power in October 1970, Sadat realized that Egypt could not tolerate the status quo of "no peace, no war" for much longer, and he made several peace gestures to Israel. When 1971, Sadat's vaunted "year of decision," passed without decision, he grasped that a complacent Israel, conceited by her recent 1956 and 1967 victories, would never negotiate with a defeated Egypt. Sadat termed this psychological barrier to peace "Israel's theory of security."⁶⁵ So long as Israel was convinced that she was invincible against Arab forces, there was no hope of regaining lost land and pride via peaceful measures. Break that myth, that "theory of security," and Israel would be willing to negotiate.

Firmly believing in this idea, Sadat expressed it on several occasions. In a letter to Brezhnev written in August 1972, Sadat wrote, "The view on which we have concurred...was that Israel...wouldn't make a move to reach a resolution to the problem...until Israel felt that our military power had grown sufficiently to challenge her military superiority."⁶⁶ Similarly, in a directive to the commander-in-chief of the Egyptian armed forces a few days before the war Sadat wrote:

The Israeli enemy has opted...for a policy based on intimidation, on claiming a superiority which the Arabs could never hope to check. This is the basis of the Israeli Security Theory, which relies on psychological, political, and military deterrence. The central point in the Israeli Security Theory is to convince Egypt...that it is futile to challenge Israel and that it is therefore inevitable for us to accept Israel's terms...The strategic objective I hereby set the Egyptian armed forces to achieve...[is] convincing him [Israel] [sic] that...his [sic] theory of security...is not an impregnable shield of steel which could protect him [sic] today or in the future.⁶⁷

During the war Sadat catalogued his objectives based on his theory of security. On October 16, he publicly stated, "We...fight for two objectives: (a) to restore our territory which was occupied in 1967; and (b) to find ways and means to restore and obtain respect for the legitimate rights of the people of Palestine."⁶⁸

Shattering Israel's theory of security would not require a victory on the field. In fact, it would require no more than a mere drive into Israeli territory. Sadat recalled, "I used to tell Nasser that if we could recapture even four inches of Sinai territory...then the whole situation would change."⁶⁹ The successful surprise attack against Israel, therefore, essentially accomplished much of what Sadat had hoped for. Acutely aware of this, Sadat triumphantly beamed:

With this admirable air strike, the Egyptian Air Force recovered all it had lost in the 1956 and 1967 defeat, and paved the way for our armed forces subsequently to achieve that victory which restored the self-confidence of our armed forces, our people, and our Arab nation. It also restored the world's confidence in us, and exploded forever the myth of an invincible Israel...Israel had been boasting of the Six Day War, now we could boast of the Six Hour War.⁷⁰

On his historic visit to Israel in November 1977, Sadat once again reiterated that negotiation was made possible only because of the Yom Kippur War. Before the Israeli parliament, Sadat declared, "There was a huge wall between us which you tried to build up over a quarter of a century, but it was destroyed in 1973...Together we have to admit that that wall fell in 1973."⁷¹

In March 1979, Sadat and Menachem Begin signed a peace treaty which exchanged lands occupied by Israel in the Six Day War for peace with Egypt. Despite his loss on the field, Sadat had achieved several major objectives. He broke Israel's theory of security, paved the way for negotiation, restored Egyptian pride, and regained Egyptian territory.⁷²

1 There are exceptions and variations among Israeli writers, and some will be discussed later. The issues of American aid and victory are related. As we shall see, it is because Sadat claims to have won that he blames the cease-fire on American aid. The Israelis, who believe that they won, downplay the role of American aid in bringing about their victory.

2 Walter Laqueur and Barry Rubin, eds., The Israel-Arab Reader: a Documentary History of the Middle East Conflict (New York: Penguin Books, 1984) 467. See also 470. Compare with the statement by Nasser on 401.

During the war Sadat claimed that it was the Israelis who had first attacked and that he was acting in self-defense. In a speech given on October 16, Sadat said, "The world has realized that we were not the first to attack, but that we immediately responded to the duty of self-defense." Ibid 468. Sadat here is undoubtedly referring to an incident that occurred on September 13 involving a skirmish between Israeli and Syrian jets. See Frank Aker, October 1973: The Arab-Israeli War (Archon Books, 1985) 16 and Chaim Herzog, The War of Atonement, October, 1973 (Boston: Little Brown, 1975) 60.

Sadat's pretext, however, was blatantly transparent. See Moshe Dayan, Moshe Dayan: The Story of My Life (New York: Morrow 1976) 478:

When our representative in Washington reported to the U.S. government that the Arabs had launched the invasion, he was told that the Arabs claimed that it was we who had attacked them. In Washington, of course, they knew the truth, knew from the beginning that we had not started the war; but perhaps they thought we should have done a bit more than simply "not start!"

Indeed, after the war Sadat admitted that the Arabs had planned and started the war. See, for example, Anwar Sadat, In Search of Identity: an Autobiography (New York: Harper and Row 1978) 234. See also Herzog 28-30.

3 Sadat 317. See also 323.

4 Timothy L.H. McCormach, Self-Defense in International Law (New York: St. Martin's Press 1996) 119.

5 See, for example, Henry Cattan Palestine and International Law: The Legal Aspects of the Arab-Israeli Conflict (New York: Longman, 1973) 172-173 and those quoted in McCormach 119-185. One authority, for example, after over sixty-five pages of exhaustive microanalysis concludes, "It is the present writer's view that Article 51 was intended to preserve the customary international law right of self-defense including anticipatory self-defense in certain circumstances." McCormach 185.

6 Allan Gerson, Israel the West Bank and International Law (New Jersey: Frank Cass, 1978) 101 note 159.

7 Ibid., 101.

8 Ibid., 72.

9 In *Nicaragua vs. United States* (1986) the International Court of Justice ruled that this passage of Article 51 confirmed the existence of the right of self-defense under international law.

10 Gerson 72.

11 Ibid.

12 Gerson's arguments on this point are convincing. See Gerson 72 and 102-103 notes 161-162. Peaceful methods were first exhausted by Israel before she resorted to violent measures. Gerson 72. Compare with Cattan 176.

13 Cattan 174-175.

14 Letter to New York Times 11, June 1967: E13.

15 Ibid.

16 Gerson 73.

17 Ibid.

18 Thomas Mallison and Sally V. Mallison, The Palestine Problem: International Law and World Order (England: Longman House, 1986) 259.

19 Laqueur 365.

20 McCormach 278-279.

21 Not all Israeli units in the north were caught by surprise. See, for example, Herzog 64.

22 Henry Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (Boston: Little Brown, 1982) 519-520.

23 Ibid 515 and Ray Maghroori and Stephen M. Gorman, The Yom Kippur War: A Case Study in Crisis

Decision-Making in American Foreign Policy (Washington D.C.: University Press of America, 1981) 18.

24 Herzog 277. See Saad Shazli, The Crossing of the Suez (San Francisco: American Mideast Research, 1980) 276 that Israel received 33, 210 tons by sea by the end of October.

25 Kissinger 514, 520, Maghroori 21, Matti Golan, The Secret Conversations of Henry Kissinger (Quadrangle/The New York Times Book Co., 1976) 61, and Abba Eban, An Autobiography (New York: Random House, 1977) 516.

26 Peter Allen The Yom Kippur War (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1982) 208-209. See also Maghroori 29 that by the end of October America had flown in 22,395 tons of supplies in addition to 5,500 tons of supplies flown in via the El-Al planes. Shazli 275-6 confirms this. Herzog 277, however, places the airlift tonnage from October 14 to November 14 at 22,000 tons. Aker 34 talks of the total American airlift delivering over 20,000 tons.

27 Avraham Adan, On the Banks of the Suez: an Israeli General's Personal Account of the Yom Kippur War (California: Presidio Press, 1980) and Ariel Sharon, Warrior: the Autobiography of Ariel Sharon (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1989).

28 Zeev Schiff, October Earthquake: Yom Kippur 1973, trans. Louis William (Tel Aviv: University Publishing Projects Ltd., 1974) 265.

29 Herzog 277. Herzog does not mention either the American guarantee to resupply Israel or the El-Al airlift. He does, however, mention the sea supply. See above note 24.

Kissinger 515 advances a similar position on the political consequences of the airlift: "I consistently pressed for more urgent deliveries than my colleagues not because I thought supplies could affect the immediate battles but because I wanted a demonstrative counter to the Soviet airlift." See also the statement by Meir at the end of this section.

The Egyptians gripe about how the Soviet supplies were inadequate and how they were not sophisticated enough. See, for example, Sadat 261, 263, 267, Shazli 273-274, and quote from Edgar O'Balance, No Victor, No Vanquished: The Yom Kippur War (California: Presidio Press, 1978) in note 38. The Israelis gripe about the sluggishness and inadequacy of the American airlift and the magnitude of the Soviet supply to the Arabs. See, for example, Dayan 511-512, Herzog 287 and 289, and Golda Meir, My Life (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1975) 430.

30 Meir 431.

31 See Golan 49 that Nixon said, "If it's all right to send them five [planes], let's send them fifty." I was unable to find figures for the quantity of American supplies actually used on the battlefield.

32 Ibid., 34.

33 The Agranat Commission Report, Israeli accounts, and western accounts are replete with references to the bravery and heroism of the Israeli soldiers.

34 See Aker 57 that the Israeli air force played as decisive a role in turning the tide of battle as it did in the Six Day War!

35 At one point in late October, Sadat even denied that the Israelis had reached the Suez, and that it was all a propaganda stunt! Laqueur 474. See also the discussion later on the issue of victory.

36 Sadat 329. This is difficult to understand because the major airlift had not as yet begun and the El-Al lift had been going on since the beginning of the war.

37 Laqueur 472.

38 Sadat 261. Here Sadat also draws an analogy to American war-making potential as demonstrated in World War Two against the Germans and Japanese. Regarding the Japanese he says, "the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki taught the Japanese an equally unforgettable lesson." This, however, is simply an irresponsible exaggeration of American aid potential in the Middle East. Sadat knew well that in the midst of the Cold War there was no realistic possibility of America using nuclear warfare against the Arabs.

It is perplexing that Kissinger 527 fails to observe that Sadat used America as a scapegoat and commends Sadat on refraining from doing so! See O'Balance 289-290 that Sadat also responded to an interviewer in June 1976 using America as the scapegoat. He said, "Before the war it [what the Israeli airforce had over the Arabs] was not superiority, it was supremacy..." He then described how primitive the air supplies the Arabs were receiving from the Soviet Union were in comparison with the air supplies that the Israelis were receiving from America. He concluded, "So when I tell you that Israel has air supremacy, not superiority, it is true."

The use of America as a scapegoat by the Egyptians to explain their military setbacks does not owe its provenance to Sadat. The following, for example, is excerpted from a Cairo radio broadcast during the Six Day War found in the New York Times 11, June 1967: E13:

The United States is the enemy. The United States is the hostile side in the battle. The United States is the force behind which Israel is taking shelter. The United States, Arabs, is the enemy of the peoples; the killer of life, and the shedder of blood...The United States is all the aggression. Its aircraft protect the Zionists from Arab bombing...Israel is the United States, and the United States is Israel....Our battle today...is against the United States....How vile and treacherous the United States has been in its protection of Israel. How sinful and base the United States has been in its collusion with the Zionists!...The United States threw, from all its airports and aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean, huge and continuous massings of its fighters and bombers in order to provide that air umbrella that protected Israel from the revenge of the Arabs...

39 Though Israel was warned that if she began hostilities she would forfeit all claims to American assistance, it was understood that if she were attacked she would receive American assistance.

40 Laqueur 469.

41 Eban 521. See also Sharon 318: "The Egyptians were in such a state of shock that even...after...we...crossed, they had hardly realized what had happened to them. They were not attacking the bridgehead, and they were not responding to...tanks that were still moving at will and shooting up everything in sight." See also *ibid* 322 that it was not until October 16 that the Egyptians realized what was going on. See also Herzog 232.

42 Herzog 231. See also Aker 105.

43 Allen 277-278. See also Sadat 262-263 and Eban 534. Though Sadat acknowledged that it was on the same night as the meeting that he decided on the cease-fire, he does not link the two events. Shazli 267 denies that he proposed a withdrawal.

44 Laqueur 464-465. See also The Insight Team of the London Sunday Times. The Yom Kippur War (New York, Garden City: Doubleday and Company Inc, 1974) 319.

45 Even the Israelis admit that the Arab soldiers fought surprisingly well, especially in comparison with their previous performances. See, for example, Dayan 510, Schiff 228, Herzog 13-14, and 35. Sharon 295 writes:

Suddenly something was happening to them [the Israeli soldiers] that had never happened before. These were soldiers who had been brought up on victories...It was a generation that had never lost. Now they were in a state of shock. How could it be that these Egyptians were crossing the canal right in our faces? How was it *they* were moving forward and *we* were defeated?

Sharon is quoted in Aker 130 as saying, "All the rest were just battles. This was a real war." See also Aker 128.

46 See above note 2.

47 A contradiction emerges from Sadat's words. On 265 he talks of the hundreds of tanks which Israel was using against the Arabs. His discussion conveys the impression that the Israelis outnumbered the Arabs in tanks. On 268, however, Sadat writes that Egypt outnumbered Israel in tanks 800:400. See also Shazli 245, 271-272 and Herzog 150-151. Ironically, Sadat chose a poor example by exaggerating the number of Israeli tanks, as the American airlift did not supply as many tanks as it did other supplies. See, for example, Schiff 265 and Dayan 512. See also the quote from O'Ballance in note 38 regarding air supremacy versus superiority.

48 Meir 420. See also Meir in Laqueur 483. Not all Israeli writers agree wholeheartedly with Meir; Eban 537 and Schiff 310-311 seem to agree with the western view discussed below.

49 Herzog 291. See also foreword to Herzog and 284. Dayan entitles chapter 28 of his book "surprise" and chapter 33 "victory." On 539 he triumphantly exclaims:

At the end of the discussion the Cabinet decided that if the Egyptians failed to live up to the cease-fire, "the Israel Defense Force will 'repel the enemy at the gate.'" The quote is from Isaiah 28:6. What a marvelous expression! The classical Hebrew poets would not have been

ashamed of such a phrase, though they would have been surprised to hear it used not about the gate of an Israeli city but about Jebel Ataka!

50 Adan 471-472.

51 Ibid. See also 470-471 where Adan gripes about the American cease-fire snatching away Israel's victory by halting their drive to encircle the Third Egyptian Army. See also Meir 439. Adan's mindset is puerile. As Eban 520 writes, "Israelis who now speak regretfully of the cease-fire...are inclined to forget how close they were to accepting a cease-fire in much less advantageous conditions only ten days before." It may be recalled that Adan was one of the Israeli writers who failed to mention the American airlift.

Adan's statement is reminiscent of a statement made by Sadat, who writes on 270, "All the powers wanted to negate my victory. The United States certainly wanted to discount it, and the Soviet Union to put an end to it...and Israel, of course, wanted to undo our victory."

Adan 270 places the turning point of Israel's recovery at four days. See Herzog 284 and Eban *ibid* who place it on October 13. See also Eban 534 and Herzog 77. Kissinger 525 places the turning point on October 15. Aker 100 places the turning point on October 14, when Israel won a great tank battle.

See also Sadat 252-253 and Herzog 77 and 135 about the Syrian/Russian cease-fire proposal almost immediately after the outbreak of the war.

52 See, for example, Aker 11, 26, 30, 61, 76, and 78.

53 Maghroori 37.

54 See Aker 100 and Kissinger 525. See also Sadat 256 and Herzog 205.

55 For an impressive list of the achievements of the Israeli air force see Aker 57-58. See, however, Sadat 255.

56 See Herzog 261-269. Sadat 256 only mentions the 1967 Arab sinking of the Israeli destroyer *Eilat*. He fails, however, to mention anything of the debacle of the Arab navies during the Yom Kippur War. On the other extreme, Herzog fails to mention any of the defeats of the Israeli navy. See also Dayan 536, "The Navy was splendid." For a more balanced view see O'Ballance 307-327, especially 318, and Aker 59-69.

Another area in which the Arab and Israeli versions conflict because of their varying notions of victory concerns the liquid wall of fire defense. See Herzog 148-149 and Shazli 9. See also Aker 7-8.

57 Aker 126.

58 Ibid., 127. See also Meir 420.

59 Aker 127.

60 See *ibid* 126 and Insight Team 450. Allen 301, in somewhat more of a pro-Israeli view, says that, "If the Yom Kippur War had determined anything it was that the Arabs were still unable to defeat Israel in open warfare." O'Ballance, who entitles his book, "No Victor, No Vanquished," 330 maintains that the war was a standoff.

These losses were unprecedented in Israeli history and generated a deep sense of incompetence in the armed forces despite the victory in the field. See, for example, Meir 449. The government formed the Agranat Commission to determine who was to blame for failing to detect the surprise attack and to try to find an explanation for the considerable Israeli losses.

61 This he stated at a press conference on October 31. Laqueur 472-474. See also 461-472.

62 Sadat 265.

63 Ibid., 266. The blame for the Egyptian military blunders is a matter of heated dispute between the politicians like Sadat and the commanders like Shazli. See Shazli 2, 4, and 306. Shazli emphasizes the successful crossing of the Egyptian army.

64 See Laqueur 473-474 and Sadat 255, for example. See also Herzog 247. It is clear, however, that Sadat had not deluded himself into believing that he had actually won. On October 16, when he still thought that Egypt was winning the war, he bombastically thundered, "We are prepared to accept a cease-fire on the basis of the immediate withdrawal of the Israeli forces from all the occupied territories, under international supervision, to the pre-5th June lines." Laqueur 470. This condition was not, however, included in the Security Council resolution. In fact, Golda Meir in Laqueur 485 gleefully points out that not a single one of the conditions stipulated by Sadat was included in the resolution.

65 See, for example, Sadat 326-327.

66 Ibid., 318.

67 Ibid., 326-327.

68 Laqueur 467. See also 470.

69 Sadat 244.

70 Ibid. , 249-251. See also the contradiction to this in Sadat's words on 254 and Laqueur 465.

71 Laqueur 596. See also Aker 130.

72 Aker 130 writes that this issue of claiming a victory by obtaining one's objectives depends on whether these were, in fact, Sadat's objectives at the beginning of the war. See also ibid 19. Kissinger 460, 530, and 561 believes that Sadat did launch his attack to shatter Israel's illusion of security. See also Herzog 37.

The difficulty with this position is that it fails to explain why Sadat dragged the war on so long after he had already achieved his objectives. Kissinger 569 advances two possible but somewhat unsatisfactory explanations: 1) Sadat got "carried away" in his successes; 2) Sadat wanted to help the losing Syrians by applying pressure in the south.

Kissinger 561 describes the Israeli mood after the war:

Deep down, the Israelis knew that while they had won the last battle, they had lost the aura of invincibility. The Arab armies were not destroyed. The Arab nations had not won but no longer need they quail before Israeli might. Israel, after barely escaping disaster, had prevailed militarily; it ended up with more Arab territory captured than lost. But it was entering an uncertain and lonely future, dependent on a shrinking circle of friends. What made the prospect more tormenting was the consciousness that complacency had contributed to that outcome.

At Camp David the two versions of the Yom Kippur War nearly crippled the peace talks. See Ahron Bregman and Jihan El-Tahri, The Fifty Years War: Israel and the Arabs (New York: Penguin Books, 1998) 136-137 that Sadat had the audacity to demand that Israel pay compensation for the damage she had caused in her wars with Egypt. Whereupon hearing this, an indignant Begin replied, "Only defeated nations are asked to pay compensation." Thinking that Begin had called Egypt a defeated nation, Sadat angrily growled, "Mr.Begin, after the October war, Egypt is no longer a defeated country!"

AMERICANIZATION:

Jewish Immigrants of the Lower East Side

Jonathan Spielman

Difficulties arise when people of diverse racial, religious, and cultural backgrounds live in close quarters with one another. The normal process of cultural assimilation dictates that, when an identifiable majority exists, a minority group will gradually abandon its distinctiveness, adopting habits of the prevailing culture. Integration may happen quickly and with little resistance, yet in some cases preservationist tendencies persist. Analysis of the first-generation Russian Jewish immigrant community in Manhattan demonstrates their unique response to the process of Americanization. Although the assimilationist climate influenced their formation of an American identity, the Russian Jewish immigrants stubbornly maintained a distinctive Jewish culture within the confines of the Lower East Side.

Over two million Russian Jews¹ immigrated to New York City between 1881 and 1924.² Manhattan's Lower East Side provided many with both affordable living space and a desperately sought-after job. Prior to immigration, in Russia's Pale of Jewish Settlement, many Jews had been skilled tailors involved in the manufacture of clothing. They quickly found jobs in the Lower East Side neighborhood, which contained both a popular shopping district and wholesale clothing and textile suppliers.³ The immigrants moved into apartments in the buildings along Grand Street from Broadway to Essex Street and on the surrounding blocks. As more immigrants arrived, they concentrated their settlement around the neighborhood where their fellow Jews were already established. Thus the first distinctly Jewish neighborhood in New York City was born, developing around the intersection of Canal Street, Essex Street, and East Broadway.⁴

This growing enclave of Jews quickly discovered the stresses felt by a religious and cultural minority adapting to the established culture of an American majority. They believed assimilation was a prerequisite to reaping the full benefits offered by America – the land of opportunity. Enthralled with this potential, the Russian Jewish immigrants of

the Lower East Side adopted elements of American culture in order to further their integration into American society.

Attempting to lose their foreign peculiarities, the immigrants' first step was proper education in the English language and in all aspects of American culture. Jewish adults besieged the night schools and libraries of the Lower East Side in an attempt to take advantage of the opportunities they offered.⁵ Jewish immigrants also placed a high value on the education of their children. "The poorest among them will make all possible sacrifices to keep his children in school; and one of the most striking social phenomena in New York City today [circa 1901] is the way in which the Jews have taken possession of the public schools, in the highest as well as the lowest grades."⁶

Excelling in American society required much ambition and patience. While many Irish and German immigrants grew sick and demoralized in the tenements, the Russian Jews seemed endlessly ambitious to overcome all obstacles and maintained "boundless energy and industry."⁷ They entered the workforce and gained the reputation of being reliable rent payers. All reports of the period commend the Jews of the Lower East Side on their "industriousness."⁸ Furthermore, some Jewish immigrants became entrepreneurs as "cigar makers, teamsters, bakers, printers, shoemakers, carpenters, tinsmiths or building trades employees."⁹ Many more became shop owners, manufacturers, or pushcart owners; "three hundred thousand pushcarts existed in New York... most of them used by East European Jews."¹⁰

Unlike other immigrant groups, the Russian Jews persisted in their aspirations toward social, economic, and educational advancement.¹¹ Some part of their success must be attributed to their lacking a familiar village or country from their past to which they could return. Journalist Ida Van Etten observed this determination springing from desperation and defended the Russian immigrants:

They come here with the intention of becoming permanent citizens of the United States. They alone, perhaps, of all the immigrants who come to America are free from any endearing ties and associations.... For good or for ill their fortunes are irrevocably cast with us.¹²

This determination did not slacken, and it significantly contributed to the immigrants' success at assimilating into American society.

Despite the tenacious Russian Jewish interest in assimilation, the atmosphere pervading the Lower East Side community was one thoroughly steeped in Jewish culture. Some of the immigrants aspired to recreate the traditional European Jewish lifestyle, which included observance of all the Jewish rituals and customs. These immigrants developed the necessary infrastructure for religious education and to ensure the availability of strictly kosher food. Furthermore, they founded many synagogues for communal worship. The large number of congregations reflects the prominence of this traditional group within the Lower East Side: by 1905 they had built over 60 synagogues and an additional 350 active congregations operated out of storefronts. On account of the Russian Jews' conspicuous religious observance, the Lower East Side was often called the Jewish Ghetto, or "an urban equivalent of the [European] shtetl."¹³ However, many Russian Jews had, proverbially speaking, dropped their religion overboard on their way to the New World. While this segment of Russian Jews rejected the traditional lifestyle of Eastern Europe and did not wish to restore the status quo of shtetl life, they nevertheless retained a secular Jewish character. The immigrants of the Lower East Side created secondary associations that helped them maintain Jewish cultural life outside the confines imposed by any traditional Jewish religious authority.¹⁴ The initial expression of this cultural pluralism was the development of self-help associations called *landsmanshaftn* that offered exclusive membership to Jews who had immigrated from a particular town or region in Eastern Europe. The *landsmanshaftn* were fraternal organizations that maintained the immigrants' emotional ties to the old country.¹⁵ These organizations offered secularized immigrants a sense of belonging to Jewish culture without any salient religious dimension.

The Yiddish Press provided another prominent cultural institution dedicated to maintaining Jewish ethnicity by strengthening the Jewish dialect of Eastern Europe that crossed the German language with Hebrew characters. The first Lower East Side Yiddish daily was the *Tageblatt*, which began publication in 1885. Soon, the socialist Yiddish journalism overshadowed it. Multiple Yiddish journals emerged, but the most powerful player in the Yiddish press became the *Forward*, founded in 1897. By the 1920's this

daily newspaper reached a peak circulation of over 200,000.¹⁶ The Yiddish press, with its impact on Jewish communities throughout New York, was at its height arguably the most influential of all Lower East Side cultural institutions.¹⁷

Closely rivaling the significance of the Yiddish Press in the Lower East Side was the Yiddish Theater. Tracing its early development to Rumania immediately preceding the mass immigration, the Yiddish Theater flourished in the Lower East Side immigrant culture.¹⁸ Playwrights secured professional actors to perform their plays, and they maintained loyal followings. Theater houses like the Grand Theater, the Orpheum Theater, the Rumanian Opera House, and the Yiddish Art Theater, located along the Bowery, achieved success and contributed heavily to the Yiddish culture that developed in the Lower East Side. Yiddish Press and Yiddish Theater were both sentimental, though secular, throwbacks to Jewish cultural life in the old country. Like the fraternal *landsmanshaftn*, this Yiddish culture helped create an atmosphere of Jewish ethnicity in the Lower East Side.

Jews, primarily immigrants from Germany, who had previously settled in Manhattan established charitable organizations to benefit the more recent immigrant arrivals. The organizations furnished much-needed assistance to the penniless newcomers, yet they also created another outlet for Jews to retain a sense of their own uniqueness. The German Jews, for example, established the Russian Relief Committee to care for the Russian refugees.¹⁹

As the Russian Jewish community in the Lower East Side grew, tensions between the two Jewish communities began to escalate. Eventually, the Russian Jews ceased to rely on their German Jewish benefactors. Instead, they formed their own charitable organizations that would better address the needs of the Russian immigrants.²⁰ The first Russian Jewish organizations that took responsibility for the immigrants were the *landsmanshaftn* groups, offering them interest-free loans to ease their transition into American life. Other Lower East Side Jews formed the Hebrew Sheltering House Association, which provided housing for the new immigrants upon their arrival. It was also called *Hachnosses-Orchim*, which means "Welcoming Guests" in Hebrew and bears witness to the Jewish precept of providing hospitality. To end Russian reliance upon German Jewish generosity and to further aid the immigrant situation, one of the

landsmanshaftn formed the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society. This organization proved the most effective at soliciting and distributing funds, and it eventually merged with the Hebrew Sheltering House Association.²¹

Responding to the extensive efforts of these first-generation immigrants to help themselves through a difficult transition period, Van Etten reported that “it is a well-known fact that fewer Jews become recipients of either public or private charity than persons of any other nationality.”²² More than simply addressing a practical need, the charitable organizations also provided another secondary association through which the immigrants could remain connected with Jewish culture. As their organizational names indicate, the charities – in addition to the synagogues, *landsmanshaftn*, and popular Yiddish culture – helped channel the immigrants’ dedication to retaining a distinctive Hebraic culture in the Lower East Side.²³

Whether by means of traditional observance, Yiddish culture, or fraternal and charitable organizations, the Russian immigrants defined themselves more as Jews creating a Jewish culture than as immigrants desperate for admission into American society. Their ability to create a Jewish culture benefited from the tremendous concentration of Jews within the Lower East Side. At its peak, the Jewish Lower East Side, including all of the East Side below Fourteenth Street, housed almost 75 percent of New York City’s Jews.²⁴ The mass immigration led to overcrowding in the Jewish apartments. Indeed, so conspicuous was the Jewish overcrowding, that in one of his travel essays the world-famous novelist and journalist Henry James took note:

I recall the intensity.... It was the sense, after all, of a great swarming, a swarming that had begun to thicken, infinitely.... The scene here bristled, at every step, with the signs and sounds, immitigable, unmistakable, of a Jewry that had burst all bounds.²⁵

Americanization did not mean total assimilation to the Russian Jews of the mass immigration to New York City. Instead, it meant ambitiously penetrating American society while retaining cultural distinctiveness. Jean-Paul Sartre describes the typical Jewish approach to assimilation: “Certainly they [wish] to integrate themselves in the nation, but *as Jews*, and who would dare reproach them for that?”²⁶ This formulation aptly describes the paradox found in the Lower East Side immigrants at the turn of the

twentieth century. While individually the immigrants pursued socioeconomic and cultural integration within American society, as a community they strained to preserve their ethnicity and to recapture the Jewish culture of their past. Without this reverence toward Jewish heritage, a culturally distinct Lower East Side could not have arisen and the Russian immigrants would have been promptly absorbed by American culture. Instead, the immigrants sank a deep Jewish foundation into American soil and built a sturdy multifaceted Jewish community meant to last for generations.

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- 1 At the time, the term "Russian Jews" was used as a generic identifying term for all Jews who had immigrated from Eastern Europe and Russia.
- 2 Following the assassination of Tsar Alexander II in March 1881, the Jews in the Ukraine experienced a series of terrible pogroms. Thus, the immigrants were not merely looking for improved economic conditions; they were actually refugees from intense Russian oppression. Robert Sanders, The Lower East Side: A Guide to Its Jewish Past in 99 New Photographs (New York: Dover Publications, 1979) 5.
- 3 Ibid. , 4.
- 4 Jews had lived in America since 1654, but no Jewish community had yet deserved to be called a "distinctly Jewish neighborhood." The Jewish Lower East Side of the 1890s was bursting with a concentrated Jewish population and deserves the title on account of its tremendous religious and cultural accomplishments described in detail below. See *ibid* 1-4.
- 5 Kate H Claghorn, "The Foreign Immigrant in New York City," in Reports of the Industrial Commission, (Vol. XV. US: GPO, 1901) 465-492.
- 6 Ibid. , 465-492.
- 7 Jacob Riis, "The Jews of New York," in Review of Reviews 13 (1896): 58-62.
- 8 Claghorn 465-492; Riis 58-62.
- 9 Hyman B Grinstein, "A Short History of the Jews in the United States," in The Jewish Library, ed. Leo Jung (New York: Soncino, 1980) 36.
- 10 Ibid. , 36.
- 11 Claghorn 465-492.
- 12 Ida M Van Etten, "Russian Jews as Desirable Immigrants," in Forum 15 (1893): 172-182.
- 13 Quoted in Deborah Dash Moore, At Home in America: Second Generation New York Jews (New York: Columbia UP, 1981) 7.
- 14 Ibid. , 6.
- 15 Daniel Levine. (1996, March 12). "Immigrant/Ethnic Mutual Aid Societies, c. 1880s-1920: A Proposal For a Typology." Online posting. Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, n. pag.
- 16 Sanders 53. Though significantly marginalized, the Forward still maintains regular publication in both Yiddish and English.
- 17 Ibid. , 9.
- 18 The development of Yiddish Theater productions began in 1876 in Rumania. As part of the ongoing Russian repression of Jews in the Balkan Peninsula, the Tsar banned it in 1883. See *ibid* 10.
- 19 The German Jewish immigration had preceded the Russian immigration by a few years. These German Jews lived further uptown on Manhattan and were, by the beginning of the mass Russian immigration, financially secure and culturally well adjusted. Though they did contribute heavily towards settling their Russian brethren, they attempted to distance themselves from the Russian aliens in order not to have the foreigner status tarnish the Germans' own hard-earned place in American society. This engendered much tension between the two groups. See study by Ronald Sanders, Shores of Refuge: A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration (New York: Holt, 1980).
- 20 Ibid. , 185.
- 21 Ibid. , 185-189. The new organization, called HIAS, still exists, assisting in the international migration of both Jews and non-Jews.
- 22 Van Etten 172-182.
- 23 Levine.
- 24 Moore 19; Van Etten 172-182.
- 25 Henry James, The American Scene (New York: Scribner's, 1946) 131. James' reputed anti-semitism might be borne in mind.
- 26 Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew, trans. George J. Becker (New York: Schocken, 1948) 145.

CONCERN FROM AFAR:

RIETS, Yeshiva College and the Holocaust Era

Michael Zylberman

In the years leading up to and including World War II, the concern of Yeshiva's¹ faculty and students about European affairs reflected its dual nature as both a Jewish institution and an American college. From 1935 through 1940, Yeshiva College held yearly anti-war gatherings in conjunction with schools across the nation. Coordinated by the national United Student Peace Committee, these demonstrations emerged from a widespread isolationist sentiment on American college campuses. At a November 1935 anti-war demonstration in the Student Synagogue, Dr. Bernard Revel, Yeshiva's president, as well as Dr. Leo Jung, professor of ethics, and Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein, professor of homiletics, addressed 300 participating students.² Moses I. Feurstein, editor of the inaugural volume of *The Commentator*, called for legislation making ROTC optional in colleges and declared "our unalterable opposition to loans, credits, or secondary war material being sent to belligerents."³ In April 1937, as 20,000 students in New York City and up to a million across the country participated in Peace Day events, vowing to "refuse to support the American government in any war it may conduct," Yeshiva students held their own peace assembly.⁴ As late as 1940, Yeshiva provided a forum for those who proclaimed that "Peace lies in isolation."⁵

If YC students opposed American involvement in war before Pearl Harbor, they proved extremely supportive, both in the armed forces and on the homefront, after the United States joined the Allied effort. In 1943 thirty-eight Yeshiva graduates and undergraduates were serving in the American armed forces.⁶ By the war's end that figure had increased to ninety-five, including twenty-five chaplains. Rabbi Emmanuel Rackman and Rabbi Israel Miller, two Yeshiva *musmachim* who would later work for the institution in important capacities, enlisted in the military as chaplains.⁷ The local New York papers gave laudatory coverage to the story of Norman Samson, a Yeshiva student who waived his clerical exemption and overcame health obstacles to serve in the army. In explaining his motivations, Samson recognized the Jewish stakes in the American war effort:

I, personally, have felt for a long time that the war we are waging is too far-reaching in importance to allow myself to continue with my studies as in normal times. Since the outcome of this war will vitally affect me, my family, my friends, as well as my country and my people, I felt I ought to take part in its prosecution until victory is achieved. As a Jew I am fighting for the termination of the sufferings of my people, all over the world, and for the safety and independence of the Jewish Homeland.⁸

Three Yeshiva students fell in the line of duty, including Chaplain Louis Werfel, “the Flying Rabbi,” who died in a plane crash over Africa in 1944. Yeshiva held a memorial service for Werfel, who graduated YC in 1937 and received his rabbinical ordination from RIETS in 1940.⁹ Lieutenant Meyer Heller, another Yeshiva student, received a Purple Heart for actions on the Italian front.¹⁰

Many of those who did not actively serve in the armed forces enthusiastically participated in local civil defense exercises. By February 1942, two months after Pearl Harbor, sixty percent of the student body was reported actively engaged in various phases of civilian and national defense. Over one hundred students enrolled in first aid courses and sixty-five joined the Auxiliary Fireman and Air Raid Corps. Yeshiva negotiated to grant the civil defense authorities use of the Yeshiva building, which, as it could hold two thousand people, was reported to be the safest place in Washington Heights in the event of an air raid. In assessing Yeshiva’s support of the war effort, YC Student Council president George Cohen noted:

The U.S. is fighting to preserve the ideals of institutions such as ours. She is fighting to preserve culture and scholarship and civilization itself, the same idea which we have received as a heritage from the generations of free men.¹¹

Despite Yeshiva’s participation in local defense programs, though, the administration received complaints from the authorities that students were not cooperating during air raid drills.¹²

During the war, Yeshiva also launched blood drives and war bond campaigns. YC joined the American Red Cross Collegiate Unit, and in a February 1943 campaign some one hundred students donated blood.¹³ In the 1943–44 academic year one hundred and fifty students gave blood, and the YC Student Council sold \$60,000 worth of war bonds.¹⁴ The Talmudical Academy raised some \$21,000 worth of war bonds in late 1943.¹⁵

All of this activity reflected the participation of the Yeshiva community in the war effort as Americans. However, there was also a uniquely Jewish response to the events in Europe. As the situation of Jews in Germany and Poland rapidly deteriorated in the late 1930s, Yeshiva attempted to respond to those developments. Reacting to the November 1938 *Kristalnacht* events, Yeshiva participated in a Day of Public Fast that concluded with a prayer service attended by the entire student body and some one hundred additional New Yorkers.¹⁶ A choir of twenty-five New York cantors sung Psalm 91 and Dr. Revel addressed the crowd, partly in Hebrew and partly in Yiddish. The audience was visibly moved as Revel repeatedly broke down in tears, unable to control the depth of his emotion. The president observed:

In every generation there were found such men-beasts [as in Germany today] but they were always found in the uncultured, backward countries, never in the more enlightened and civilized countries. Today these barbarians have left the dark to come into power in a previously cultured nation. Now more than ever should we give thanks to our Lord for not having allowed us to become degraded like our persecutors.¹⁷

In a follow-up editorial, *The Commentator* criticized the assembly for not advancing concrete proposals for dealing with the German situation. The editors proposed extending the anti-German boycott practiced by many American Jews and launching a drive to "rescue human souls from the inferno of Europe."¹⁸

Although *The Commentator's* editors may not have been fully aware of his efforts, from 1936 through his untimely death in 1941 Dr. Revel labored to bring refugee rabbis, professors, and students to the safety of Yeshiva. The restrictive Immigration Act of 1924, that set strict quotas on immigration from European countries allowed non-quota entries for individuals involved in academia. Although only fifty-three thousand European refugees a year could immigrate within the quotas, any person who had served as a minister or professor for two years and any bona fide student of at least fifteen years of age could enter the country above quota limits.¹⁹ Revel, who received numerous letters from Europe on behalf of prospective faculty and students, attempted to utilize these provisions to rescue qualified individuals.

Writing to Dr. Revel from Telshe, Poland on May 17, 1936, Rabbi Joseph Arnest, then thirty years old, requested a position in Yeshiva, remarking, "Now, as I wish to immigrate to America, with the hope of continuing my work in Torah and *yir'ah*, and as I wish to remain in a

place of Torah, my eyes turn to the Torah center of Yeshivat Rabbi Isaac Elchanan."²⁰ He attached to the letter a lengthy series of observations on a Torah journal article that Dr. Revel had authored. A student of Rabbi Baruch Ber Lebovitz of Kaminetz and a study partner of Rabbi Abraham Bloch, the Telshe *rosh yeshiva*, Arnest received a letter of recommendation from the latter, and Revel promptly hired him to deliver a *shiur* in Yeshiva. At the request of Rabbi Avrohom Kahane-Shapiro, the rabbi of Kovno, Revel also provided for the 1939 arrival of Rabbi Samuel Volk, a student of Ponovez, Slabodka, and Telshe.²¹ After Rabbi Moshe Shatzkes, the rabbi of Lomza, Poland, arrived in New York by way of Kobe, Japan, he too found employment in RIETS.

When Rabbi Mendel Zaks, *rosh yeshiva* of Radin and the *Chafetz Chayim*'s son-in-law, visited New York in 1938, Revel offered him a contract to teach in Yeshiva. Zaks declined the proposal, choosing to return to Europe. As the Nazis invaded Poland in 1939, Zaks fled to Vilna and then to Japan, from where he appealed to Revel for help in reaching to the United States. Revel successfully arranged for Zaks's immigration. After reestablishing the Radin yeshiva in America, Zaks joined the RIETS faculty in 1945. In 1940 Revel attempted to bring Rabbi Shapiro of Kovno to Yeshiva to head a *kollel*. Although the American authorities proved cooperative, the initiative never came to fruition because Rabbi Shapiro was too preoccupied with communal affairs to journey to the American consulate himself.²²

The crisis in Europe also brought YC some dozen Jewish refugee professors. Moritz Weiner disembarked in New York in 1938 and assumed an assistant professorship in German language. An instructor of English, Latin, French, and German in Frankfurt's Lessing Gymnasium, Werner availed himself of a German law that authorized college professors to retire with full pension five years early and fled to America.²³ Selig Bamberger, who earned a chemistry degree from the University of Wurzburg and joined YC's faculty, received a U.S. government award for outstanding refugee scientists in 1941.²⁴ Aaron Freiman, the chief librarian of Frankfurt's city and university library system, reached New York in 1938. He joined the New York Public Library's staff as a bibliography consultant and lectured on Hebrew in Yeshiva's graduate school.²⁵ Menasseh Lucacer, instructor of hygiene in YC, had previously served as the chief doctor of the Palermo City Sanatorium, a professor in the University of Palermo, and a lecturer in the Royal University in Rome. Before coming to YC he authored over

sixty books and articles and received an honorary medal from the Italian government for his research on tuberculosis.²⁶ Yeshiva also rescued instructors in Greek, Latin, Bible, physics, and physiology.²⁷

Numerous other candidates contacted Yeshiva about positions but never received jobs. In 1936, Meir Levin, who claimed to be the schoolmaster of the greatest Jewish school in Berlin, asked to be taken in as an instructor.²⁸ Maximilian Landau, a professor of history at the Rabbiner-Seminar of Berlin and author of a biography of the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz, wrote to Revel from The Hague in January 1939. He pleaded for a professorship, noting that while Dropsie College had already admitted him as a research fellow, that offer did not suffice for non-quota immigration status.²⁹ Lack of qualifications, problems with immigration officials, Yeshiva's limited resources, and the deterioration of the situation in Europe may have contributed to these and other professors not being employed by YC.³⁰

Dr. Revel also deeply involved himself in efforts on behalf of refugee students, although Yeshiva could only provide for a limited number of individuals. In a December 22, 1938 letter to Abraham Levy, Chairman of Yeshiva's Board of Directors, Revel wrote:

Most urgently we must come without unnecessary delay to the rescue of the many young men, former students in Germany, Austria, and other centers of ruthless persecution, of bloody paganism ... The Yeshiva and Yeshiva College is the only hope of these young brethren, torn from the life and training that is essential for the safety, the preservation, and advancement of our people, of true Jewish learning and idealism.³¹

In 1939, Revel organized the First Annual Refugee Scholarship Fund Dinner in an attempt to create a scholarship fund for refugee students in Yeshiva. William G. van Schmus, the managing director of Radio City Music Hall, served as chairman of the dinner committee, and the motion picture industry lent significant assistance to the cause. James Roosevelt, son of President Roosevelt and president of Samuel Goldwyn Studios, delivered the dinner's keynote speech.³²

By the time of the dinner Yeshiva had taken in thirty-seven refugee students, of whom twenty enrolled in the high school, and awarded them all full tuition scholarships.³³ An October 1941 list of refugee students in YC enumerated twenty-seven individuals, including Walter Wurzberger, currently adjunct professor of philosophy.³⁴ In 1943, by which time essentially all

immigration from Europe had stopped, the figure of refugee students in Yeshiva stood at sixty-five.³⁵

Among many requests for admission from overseas, Revel received some mail from individuals who had already attained significant academic achievement but were looking for any possible way to leave Europe. In a 1938 letter to Dr. Revel, a Rabbi Yeshaya Tzvi Feder of Warsaw, age twenty-six, asked for admittance as a student. Feder claimed to have received rabbinical ordination in 1930 (at the age of eighteen) and listed seven rabbis as references, including Rabbi Shlomo Dovid Kahane, the chief rabbi of Warsaw, who had himself written to Revel about other prospective students. Appealing to Yeshiva's philosophy of *Torah U'Madda*, this young rabbi penned:

I appeal to you to please do kindness with me and send me an invitation — through the American Consul in Warsaw — to come as a student to your esteemed yeshiva in order to review my learning and advance in general studies....To my disappointment I have not yet, due to my tragic financial status here in Poland, been able to march forward and complete my general studies. It is my hope, however, that when I will soon be with you in the land of life G-d will help me to become complete in general studies as well.³⁶

In 1937 the son of the chief Rabbi of Danzig wrote Revel, requesting admission to Yeshiva. He had earned a law degree in the University of Vilna but realized that Poland offered no career opportunities for educated Jews. He wrote, "There is only left to me one way out of this hopeless situation.... I hope you will kindly consider my situation and I sincerely trust that my knowledge as well as my self vocation may induce you to accept me..."³⁷

While Revel played an indispensable role in Yeshiva's rescue efforts, the student body attempted its own initiative. Jerome Willig chaired a 1939 Student Organization of Yeshiva fundraising drive to help relocate fifty German refugee scholars to the Chevron Yeshiva in Palestine. The British authorities had granted permission for the fifty students to immigrate to Palestine, but they demanded a sum of \$12,500 as a guarantee that the refugees would not become public charges. The Student Organization of Yeshiva undertook to raise a portion of that amount by selling twenty-five cent tickets.³⁸

As the war began in Europe and the situation of European Jews became even more desperate, rescue options became more limited. With the shores of America virtually closed,

Yeshiva efforts, at least as expressed in *The Commentator*, centered on protesting the British White Paper that restricted Jewish entry into Palestine. In March 1939, Robert Briscoe, the only Jew in the Irish parliament, addressed an overflow crowd and declared that only immigration to Palestine could solve the current problems of anti-Semitism. Noting that Britain had not kept any promise in the last thousand years, he encouraged sending petitions to the American government to pressure Britain into abandoning the White Paper.³⁹ In March 1940, Rabbi Wolf Gold, chairman of the executive board of the Mizrahi World Organization, spoke at a YC Student Council and the Student Organization of Yeshiva protest meeting directed against the White Paper.⁴⁰ In late 1942, BenTzion Netanyahu, executive director of the revisionist New Zionist Organization of America, (and father of the former Israeli Prime Minister) spoke at Yeshiva, urging increased pressure on the British.⁴¹

Prior to a March 1943 special issue, by which time implementation of Hitler's Final Solution had already begun, *The Commentator* devoted very little coverage to the actual extermination of European Jewry. On the contrary, in what might strike of extreme insensitivity, the Purim 1942 edition's headline read, "Adolph Hitler Was Once Teacher Here." The article reported that, "proud of the distinction of having had this great historical figure as an inhabitant within its portals, Yeshiva will erect a monument to commemorate the occasion."⁴² In another move indicative of disregard, YC inaugurated a German Club in 1941, "to arouse an interest in German culture and an attempt to understand the German philosophy of life for the purpose of appreciation and good will."⁴³ The club met once a month to sing favorite German songs and drink beer.⁴⁴ After the war, the club justified its existence by claiming that "Nazi brutality has not been able to blemish or desecrate contributions to world culture, whether they be of German origin or not."⁴⁵

In April 1942, *The Commentator* carried the eyewitness accounts of a YC student who was stuck in Warsaw during the German invasion:

In the first few days of the war Praga, a Jewish suburb of Warsaw, was coventrized completely. As a result, the Jewish section of the city proper became unbearably overcrowded, there being as many as thirty people in each house. Evacuation was impossible. The Germans were machine-gunning all roads. My two cousins who attempted to leave were forced to return—one to die, the other to be torn by shrapnel. *Rosh Hashanah* eve of that year will be one that the Jews of Warsaw will never forget. The Luftwaffe came in force and for three continuous hours rained incendiaries on the

Jewish quarter. Crouched in a corner gripped by terror, I feared every moment as my last as the heavy demolitions were falling in the vicinity.⁴⁶

Fortunately, this student successfully escaped, as the Germans honored his American citizenship and arranged for his departure.⁴⁷

Despite this eyewitness report and many others that had reached the American media leading up to the official Allied condemnation of the Nazi's extermination of European Jews on December 17, 1942,⁴⁸ Yeshiva did not seem to take any organized action on behalf of European Jewry until February 1943. As late as April 1942, the International Relations Society heard from a Dr. W. R. Malinowski that, "The Jewish problem in central Europe must be considered only in relation to the social and economic changes which will take place after the war."⁴⁹

In February 1943, Yeshiva students issued the following resolution, which it distributed to 300 colleges and hundreds of Anglo-Jewish newspapers:

We, the students of the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary, and of the Yeshiva College, raise our voices in solemn protest against the iniquitous silence and callous passivity on the part of the United Nations, in the face of total annihilation of all the Jews on the continent of Europe.

Hitler and his accomplices in crime have committed themselves to a policy of barbarous extermination, the magnitude of which is unparalleled in the annals of human history. Millions of Jews have already met a martyred death in the German slaughterhouses; millions more are facing imminent destruction at the hands of the ruthless Nazi butchers.

We, citizens of a free country where the torch of freedom still burns with unabated intensity, cannot resign ourselves to the belief that the conscious of mankind has become so morally numb as to view with equanimity the total obliteration of a people. For the Jews do not bleed alone. Israel's wounds are the wounds of all mankind.

In view of the aforementioned we demand that:

1) Immediate negotiations be started through the good offices of the Vatican or a neutral country, for the immediate release of all Jews imprisoned on the continent of Europe.

2) That the gates of Palestine, the Jewish national home, be thrown open to these innocent victims as a haven of refuge. All restrictions on immigration must be lifted!

3) That the governments of the United Nations impress the Germans that acts of atrocities against the Jews will result in immediate retaliation.

In regaining the lost soul of the world let us not, G-d forbid, discover that in the process, we have, by our own indifference, lost our own.⁵⁰

In a special issue, *The Commentator's* editors proclaimed:

Conditions have now reached a head – late enough to be sure. With the blood of two million murdered Jews screaming out for revenge, rumblings of protest and demands for action are finally issuing forth. The stomach of human decency is vomiting in revolt!

We, the students of YC and RIETS, have dedicated ourselves to the task of making those rumblings stronger and stronger....This publication is our initial attempt. Through it we hope to create a militant nucleus—on the campus, from the pulpit, on the floors of Congress, in the schoolroom, on street corners, wherever a thinking being can be found—which will storm the gates of our leaders and demand that abstruse principles be translated into dynamic reality.

... We, the living, cannot rest while our brethren are dying. The words in our holy books become blurred because of the burning tears which blind us.⁵¹

In another article in the same issue, *The Commentator* criticized perceived student apathy:

The condemnation becomes all the more powerful when one considers that this institution is the training ground for leaders in Jewry. A leader in the true sense of the word is one who has compassion for those he leads and is alive to their distress. On the basis of this definition, and of their showing to date, the students of Yeshiva do not qualify. Have any of them reacted even in a mild way to "Commentator's" editorials on the Jewish situation? Have the ranks of any of the various student Zionist organizations of Yeshiva been increased? Have the halls of the building resounded to excited discussions of the Jewish tragedy and of ways and means of alleviating it? No! is the answer to all three questions.⁵²

While the actual extent of student apathy may be difficult to gauge from the pages of *The Commentator*, for the most part Yeshiva continued to function normally during the war years. Although the administration suspended public functions, including the *Chag Hasemicha*, more often than not student events like the Chanukah and Purim *chagigahs* continued.⁵³ *The Commentator* devoted much more coverage to internal yeshiva politics – the fight over Dr. Revel's successor, changes in the college programs, a dormitory curfew – than happenings in Europe.

The beginning of 1944 saw the intensification of a campaign to repeal the White Paper. *The Commentator* of January 13 urged its readers to write letters on the subject to Secretary of

State Cordell Hull and Rep. Sol Bloom, head of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. TI president Harold Schalwis authored a column criticizing students for being apathetic to events in Palestine.⁵⁴ On February 8, Rabbi Pinchas Teitz addressed a large gathering of students about anti-White Paper activities. A mass rally at City College followed the assembly in Yeshiva.⁵⁵

At this time, a new organization, the National Conference of Orthodox Jewry for Palestine and Rescue, held its inaugural meeting at the Hotel Pennsylvania on January 30–31, 1944 to deliberate ways to abrogate the White Paper, attain a Jewish Palestine, and rescue the remaining Jews of Europe. Dr. Samuel Belkin, who succeeded Revel as president of Yeshiva, and Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, who began giving *shiurim* in Yeshiva after his father's passing in 1941, addressed the conference. Dr. Belkin condemned those who criticized Zionism as conflicting with Americanism. Rabbi Soloveitchik called for a rededication of Orthodox Jewry to the principles of religious Zionism.⁵⁶

While not doing so on behalf of Yeshiva, a number of Yeshiva's *roshei yeshiva* contributed to the efforts of the *Vaad Hatzalah*, a religious organization founded in 1939 to rescue European yeshiva students that later expanded its endeavors to include all of European Jewry. Rabbi Moshe Shatzke, who arrived in America in 1941, spoke frequently at *Vaad Hatzalah* conferences and served on the *Vaad HaPoel* subcommittee.⁵⁷ Rabbi Yeruchim Gorelik, who began teaching at RIETS in 1943, participated in a *Vaad Hatzalah* meeting in the Bronx, where he held a pulpit.⁵⁸ Dr. Isaac Lewin of TI frequently contributed articles to *HaPardes* on behalf of the *Vaad Hatzalah*.

Rabbi Aharon Dovid Burack, a RIETS *rosh yeshiva* since 1919, worked for the *Vaad L'Pikuach Nefashot*, the *Vaad Hatzalah*'s political arm. Comprised of members of *Agudas Harabbonim*, *Mizrachi*, *Young Israel*, and *Agudas Yisroel*, the *Vaad L'Pikuakh Nefashot* endeavored to join forces with other American Jewish organizations and Congress in initiating activities to aid European Jews. The *Vaad* organized the October 1943 Rabbis March on Washington in which over two hundred American rabbis met with members of Congress but were refused a meeting with President Roosevelt. After Rabbi Abraham Kalmanovitz, the head of *Vaad Hatzalah*, read the rabbis' statement in Hebrew to the president's secretary, Rabbi Burack presented an English version. The rabbis requested an intensification of rescue efforts,

threats of retaliation to the Germans, permission to send supplies to Europe, and the opening of Palestine to Jewish immigration.⁵⁹

In late 1944, Yeshiva students participated in a \$25,000 fundraising drive on behalf of *Vaad Hatzalah*. Dr. Belkin and Rabbi Kalmanowitz addressed students about the importance of the cause, and Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, who began giving shiurim in yeshiva that year, conducted a Shabbos appeal in the Beis Medrash. All *roshei yeshiva* pledged at least a week's salary to the successful drive. With weekly updates posted around Yeshiva, students reached the anticipated goal in a month.⁶⁰

As another example of Yeshiva faculty working independently for outside organizations aiding European Jewry, Dr. Jacob I. Hartstein, Yeshiva's Registrar and secretary of YC faculty, served as vice president of the American Friends of Polish Jewry. With a board that included Mayor LaGuardia and Senator Barbour, this organization arranged the publication of a Black Book of Polish Jewry, billed as the "first authentic comprehensive story in English exploiting the Nazi atrocities perpetrated upon the Jews of Poland." The book included documented reports from four-hundred and fifty cities, towns, and villages, texts of official Nazi decrees, and photographs of Nazi brutality. The organization aimed to establish an information bureau and clubs to welcome Polish refugees.⁶¹

When President Roosevelt died in April 1945, Yeshiva students and faculty joined the rest of the nation in mourning. The student body gathered for a memorial service in Lamport Auditorium that featured eulogies by Dr. Belkin, Rabbi Dovid Lifshitz, and Rabbi Joseph Lookstein. Rabbi Lifshitz, who had escaped to America by way of Japan, spoke movingly in Yiddish of the special place FDR held in the hearts of European Jewry:

He was the shield that the Almighty had provided for us. In the name of the four million victims of our martyred people let our voice be heard. Let his grave be an eternal monument not only of his mortal body but also of his immortal soul, and a warning to those who would try to undo what he has done.⁶²

Dr. Belkin wrote in a special issue of *The Commentator*:

With the death of our distinguished president, America lost its greatest leader and the World its greatest humanitarian ...Our generation will be recorded in history as the most

unfortunate because it produced a tyrant like Hitler, but at the same time as the most fortunate because it also produced a man like our late President, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who could meet the challenge of his time. World Jewry with other suffering and persecuted people will mourn the loss of the most pre-eminent liberal spirit of our age – may his memory be blessed.⁶³

Reflecting the esteem in which American Jewry held FDR, *The Commentator* praised the president as a staunch humanitarian who consistently favored a Jewish national home in Palestine and harshly criticized Nazi atrocities perpetrated against Jews.⁶⁴

In late 1945, with the Germans defeated, Dean Samuel L. Sar departed for a four month tour of European Displaced Persons camps as a guest of the United Nations Relief and Rescue Association.⁶⁵ Sar, who brought with him two-hundred pairs of *tefillin* and a number of *sifrei Torah*, addressed the entire student body upon his return. "Since my return from Europe," he declared, "I have not been able to set my tortured soul at rest knowing, as I do, the true conditions there today."⁶⁶ He observed that most displaced persons subsisted only on bread and potatoes.⁶⁷ Sar's report served as the impetus for a \$10,000 Student Organization of Yeshiva drive to benefit the DP's. Led by Bernard Rosensweig, the drive collected fats, canned meat, chocolate, and hard candies for delivery to Europe. Lieutenant Leo Levy, a former editor-in-chief of *The Commentator*, organized teams of soldiers to assist the DP's.⁶⁸

Herschel Schachter, a Yeshiva *musmach* serving as a chaplain with the Third Army's VIII Corps in Germany,⁶⁹ labored hard on behalf of the Jewish DP's in his district. He convinced the colonel charged with civilian affairs that Jews deserved special consideration. Schachter received permission for a group to set up a kibbutz in preparation for life in Palestine. The group established their kibbutz in Geringshof, outside Fulda, on a pre-war B'nei Akiva *hachshara* site. Schachter also accompanied a transport of children from Buchenwald to Switzerland in June 1945. While the Swiss agreed to admit three-hundred and fifty children, he helped stow away an extra hundred.⁷⁰

After the war, Yeshiva worked closely with the *Vaad Hatzalah* to accept refugee students through non-quota immigration allowances. In April 1946, RIETS admitted sixteen students who had spent the war in Shanghai, China. In a telegram to the American consul in Shanghai, Dean Sar promised that Yeshiva would provide those students with full maintenance and free tuition and pledged to send the government periodic reports about their progress and notify the

government upon their ordination. In June 1946 the *Vaad Hatzalah* sent Yeshiva five students from Stockholm.⁷¹ According to *Vaad Hatzalah* records, from 1946–67, Yeshiva accepted one-hundred and fourteen non-quota students from France, Germany, Czechoslovakia, England, Poland, and Italy.⁷² American immigration authorities rejected a handful of other applicants to Yeshiva.⁷³ This marked the end of Yeshiva's role in the European situation, as everyone's focus shifted to Palestine and the campaign for a Jewish state.

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- 1 Unless otherwise noted, the term Yeshiva refers to the umbrella of Yeshiva College (YC), the Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Theological Seminary (RIETS), the Teachers Institute (TI), and the Talmudical Academy (high school).
- 2 The Commentator 7, Nov. 1935: 1.
- 3 Ibid. , 12, Nov. 1935: 1.
- 4 The New York Times 23, Apr. 1937: 5; Comm. 1, Apr.1937: 1; Comm. 28, Apr. 1937: 1; see also Comm. 18, Nov. 1936: 1 and Comm. 4, May 1938: 1 on other peace rallies.
- 5 Ibid. , 27, Nov. 1940: 1.
- 6 Ibid. , 23, Sept. 1943: 4.
- 7 The Masmid 1945: 6-7.
- 8 Comm. 30, Apr. 1942: 1, 4.
- 9 Ibid. , 13, Jan. 1944: 1; Masmid 1945: 4-5; Comm. 10, Feb.1944: 1.
- 10 "American Jewish War Service," in The American Jewish YearBook, 1944: 362.
- 11 Comm. 18, Feb. 1941: 1; Comm. 19, Feb 1942: 4.
- 12 Memo from Dean Isaacs to Jacob I. Hartstein: File Cabinet 13, drawer 1-6, folder AHartstein, Yeshiva University Records, YU Archives, New York, NY.
- 13 Comm. 18, Feb. 1943: 1.
- 14 Ibid. , 25, May 1944: 1; Comm. 16, Nov. 1944: 1.
- 15 The Academy News Nov. 1943: 2; Academy News Dec. 1943: 2.
- 16 The same week as the Yeshiva assembly, over 20,000 New Yorkers jammed Madison Square Garden to protest German actions (The New York Times 22, Nov. 1928: 5.)
- 17 Comm. 30, Nov. 1938: 4.
- 18 Ibid. , 1-2, 4.
- 19 Aaron Rothkoff, The Silver Era in American Jewish Orthodoxy: Rabbi Eliezer Silver and His Generation (New York: Feldheim, 1981) 192; Henry Feingold, The Politics of Rescue: The Roosevelt Administration and the Holocaust, 1938 B 1945 (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1970) 126.
- 20 Joseph Arnest to Bernard Revel, letter (translated from Hebrew), YU Records, ARevel: 5/1-21.
- 21 Aaron Rothkoff, Bernard Revel: Builder of American Jewish Orthodoxy (Philadelphia: JPS, 1972) 210.
- 22 Rothkoff, Revel 211-212.
- 23 Comm. 13, Dec. 1939: 1.
- 24 Ibid. , 19, Feb. 1941: 1.
- 25 Rothkoff, Revel 211; Masmid 1939: 77.
- 26 Comm. 19, Feb. 1941: 2.; Masmid 1942: 26.
- 27 Masmid 1942: 26; Rothkoff, Revel, 212.
- 28 Meir Levin to Bernard Revel, letters, YU Records, ARevel: 10/4-2.
- 29 Maximilian Landau to Bernard Revel, letter, YU Records, AHartstein: 13/3-40.
- 30 See also letters to Joseph I. Hartstein, YC Registrar, YU Records, AHartstein: 13/3-40.
- 31 Rothkof, Revel 209.
- 32 Comm. 29 Mar. 1939: 1.
- 33 Masmid 1939: 77.
- 34 YU Records, AHartstein 13/3-41.
- 35 HaPardes Jan. 1943: 16; see also HaPardes Dec. 1944: 36.
- 36 Yeshaya Tzvi Feder to Bernard Revel (translated from the Hebrew), letter, YU Records, ARevel: 5/1-21.
- 37 Nesrach Golinkin to Bernard Revel, letter, YU Records, ARevel: 5/1-21.
- 38 Comm. 29, Mar 1939: 4.
- 39 Ibid. , 1.
- 40 Ibid. , 13, Mar. 1940: 1.
- 41 Ibid. , 5, Nov. 1942: 1.
- 42 Ibid. , 26, Feb. 1942: 1.
- 43 Masmid, 1941: 77; Comm. 13, Nov. 1941: 1.
- 44 Ibid.
- 45 Masmid, 1945: 71.
- 46 Comm. 30, Apr.1942: 2.

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- 47 Ibid. , 2-3.
- 48 See Alex A Grobman "What Did They Know? The American Jewish Press and the Holocaust, 1 September 1939 -17 December 1942," in American Jewish History Mar. 1979: 327 B 352.
- 49 Comm. 16, Apr. 1942: 1.
- 50 Ibid. , 4, Mar. 1943: 2.
- 51 Ibid.
- 52 Ibid. , 5.
- 53 Ibid. , 30, Mar 1947: 1.
- 54 Ibid. , 13, Jan. 1944: 3.
- 55 Ibid. , 10, Feb. 1944: 1.
- 56 Ibid; HaPardes, Dec. 1943: 51.
- 57 HaPardes Jan. 1942: 3; HaPardes Jul. 1942:12; HaPardes Sept. 1942: 4; HaPardes Jan. 1943: 10; Comm. 22, Mar. 1945: 1.
- 58 HaPardes Dec. 1944: 7.
- 59 Efraim Zuroff, The Response of Orthodox Jewry in the United States to the Holocaust: the Activities of the Vaad ha-Hatzala Rescue Committee, 1939-1945 (Hoboken, NJ: Yeshiva University Press, 2000) 259. Zuroff also notes that according to another version of the events Rabbi Wolf Gold read the English translation, not Rabbi Burack.
- 60 Comm. 14, Dec.1944: 1; Comm. 18 Jan. 1945: 1; HaPardes Mar. 1945: 8; YU Records, AHartstein 10/3-140.
- 61 YU Records, AHartstein 13/4-41.
- 62 Comm. 19, Apr. 1945: 2-3.
- 63 Ibid.
- 64 Ibid. While American Jewry in 1945 may understandably not have been fully aware of the extent to which FDR avoided dealing with the Jewish situation in Europe and his repeated deferrals to restrictionist sentiments in Congress and the State Department, the heavy praise lavished on the president strikes one as extreme. After all, American Jews must have remembered Roosevelt's refusal to act on the St. Louis's behalf in 1939 and the calculated failures of the Evian and Bermuda conferences.
- 65 Comm. 6, Nov. 1945: 1.
- 66 Ibid; Comm. 14 , Mar. 1946: 1.
- 67 Ibid.
- 68 Ibid; Comm. 9, May 1946: 1.
- 69 Not to be confused with the current *rosh yeshiva*.
- 70 Alex A Grobman "American Jewish Chaplains and the Shearit Hapeletah: April - June 1945," in Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual 1984: 93, 98.
- 71 YU Records, *Vaad Hatzalah* Collection 48:62.
- 72 Ibid. , 17:94-96, 27:54.
- 73 Ibid.