

Graffiti for intellectuals



SIMON SAYS



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By Si Frumkin

NOBLESSE OBLIGE!

(This article was written for publication in the U.S. Russian-language media and addresses some of the problems within the Russian immigrant community. I thought it may be of interest to non-"Russians" as well S.F.)

Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them". "Twelfth Night" William Shakespeare.

There is no official nobility in America – we are supposed to be an egalitarian society, we have no counts, barons, and not even plain lords. But nobility does exist here – not explicitly recognized as such but nobility nonetheless. A minority of our nobles achieve that status by being born into it– the Kennedys are a prime example – but even they owe their status to a very recent ancestor who had done something to achieve greatness; it is passed on for a few generations and disappears – have you heard much about the Roosevelts or the Astors lately?

Unlike the Europeans we do not have a peerage registry where members of the nobility are listed because, overwhelmingly, American nobility is not judged by distinguished ancestry – it is primarily judged by how well an individual meets his obligations to society. It is a reversal of the dictum "Noblesse Oblige!" – not that a noble is obliged to maintain a certain standard but rather that maintaining that standard will elevate an individual to noble status.

Instead of the European peerage register we have the countless walls of museums and hospitals that list the names of those who have contributed to building and maintaining them. We have the media that tell us of the contributions made to charitable, scholastic, humanitarian and political causes by individuals who enthusiastically accept the obligation to share their wealth – and sometimes just their talent, time or effort – not for material gain but from a sense of duty, a conviction that this is the right thing to do and, yes, acknowledgment by others.

The yearly ritual of what probably is the most important anointment into American nobility is the selection of the "Persons of the Year" by Time magazine. This year the selections were Bill and Melinda Gates and Bono – selected for their charitable work and contributions.

Americans – both individuals and businesses – have donated close to a billion dollars to the hurricane Katrina victims, almost that much to the victims of the tsunami earlier this year and billions more to the

700,000 registered U.S. and overseas non-profit organizations. And yes, most of these donations are tax-deductible but even if you are in the 50% tax bracket, half of it will still come out of your pocket, from your after-tax dollars. I am convinced that those who give – to paraphrase Shakespeare – have achieved nobility.

The very concept of organized individual charity did not really exist in the Soviet Union and, in general, the "Russians" here did not see it as an obligation. In this they are drastically different from the Iranian Jews who come from a 3000-year old community with a tradition of mutual help and who continue contributing after re-

locating to America. Even the Vietnamese are more generous than we – a December 20 article in the L.A. Times reports a \$1 million donation to a community college by two businessmen who came to the U.S. in the 1970s.

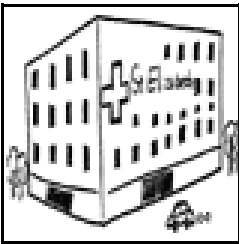
The constant appeals for contributions from various charitable and community organizations to the Russian immigrant community were not very productive. Even those among us who had prospered in America were more apt to spend tens of thousands of dollars on a Bar Mitzvah or a wedding than write a check for a few thousand dollars to a worthy cause. This is why I felt so very proud when the Los Angeles Jewish immigrant community led the way in organizing charity events for a hospital in Israel, supporting Israeli soldiers and in actually pulling out the checkbooks and raising about \$300,000 a year for the last two years.

I bragged about our "Russians" to whoever would listen. I told my American friends that the immigrants had finally arrived, that they are beginning to share, to give back some of what Israel and the U.S. had given them. I believed – and still do – that the concept of *noblesse oblige* has been understood and accepted by the nobility of our community. I don't mention that there are many among us who could well afford it but who gave grudgingly or not at all – I pity them. The concept of *noblesse oblige* evades them and they are the poorer for it.

And now another dinner on behalf of the Sourasky hospital in Israel is coming up on February 12 and I have a few thoughts about it. It is presented to the community as a festive occasion with a minimum of speeches and solicitations and a maximum of fun. The organizers believe that our community must have a fun, fun, fun event or else they will stay away. They may be right but it saddens me.

I want it be understood that every dollar spent on the dinner is one dollar less that can go to Israel and I begrudge it. The purpose of the evening is to share, to help, to save lives – a goal that is much nobler than just fun. I want to make a bold suggestion to some of those among us who have done well in America: why don't you skip restaurants or purchases at Neiman-Marcus or Bloomingdale's for just one month and contribute that money to the dinner? *Noblesse oblige, ne c'est pas?*

To paraphrase Shakespeare again – you have had nobility thrust upon you whether you like it or not; now it is your chance to prove yourself worthy of that title. Φ



Let My People In! by Michael Freund, J'lem Post, 11/2/2005

For a country that says it wants more new immigrants, Israel sure has a funny way of showing it.

In October, thousands of protesters gathered outside the Prime Minister's Office in Jerusalem. As at all such gatherings, the participants waved banners and placards, shouted slogans and catch-phrases, and appealed for their elected representatives to heed their calls and take action.

Those in attendance were not calling for Jews to be allowed out of some foreign land, however. Ironically enough, they were there to demand that Israel let Jews in.

The crowd consisted largely of Ethiopian immigrants, many of whom still have loved ones stuck in Ethiopia thanks in no small measure to the government's indifference, incompetence and utter lack of concern.

It has been eight months since Prime Minister Ariel Sharon bowed to pressure at home and abroad and agreed to increase the number of Falash Mura immigrants from Ethiopia allowed in to Israel each month.

Descendants of Ethiopian Jews who converted to Christianity, many against their will, the Falash Mura now wish to re-join the Jewish people, and there are still some 18,000 of them waiting to come home to Zion.

After pleas from a broad spectrum of prominent Jews, ranging from Israel's Sephardic Chief Rabbi to the Canadian Minister of Justice to the head of the Reform movement, Sharon promised that beginning in June, the monthly quota of Falash Mura aliya would double from 300 to 600 souls.

We are now in the month of November, and that has yet to happen.

Indeed, according to the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, the number of immigrants from Ethiopia in the month of June, the month when Sharon's new policy was due to take effect, was - you guessed it - just 300. In July, it was 303, in August just 302, and in September 440, all far short of what the Prime Minister had promised.

Why does the number 600 matter so much? Do some quick arithmetic, and you'll see why.

With some 18,000 Falash Mura still waiting in Ethiopia to make aliya, a monthly rate of 300 translates into another 6 years for the remainder of Ethiopian Jewry to be brought home. Double the monthly allotment to 600, and we can restore this ancient community to the land of their ances-

tors in just two-and-a-half years instead.

As a result of the government's ongoing failure to speed up Falash Mura aliya, Ethiopian families will continue to be needlessly divided, and future immigrants might be compelled to wait until 2011 or even later before seeing their loved ones again.

Delaying the arrival of the Falash Mura only places them at greater risk, as Ethiopia contends with an ongoing food crisis, rising rates of HIV/AIDS, and a simmering conflict with neighboring Eritrea.

A recent report by the UN's World Food Program noted ominously that, "Twenty years after famine killed an estimated one million people in Ethiopia, hunger still looms large in a country where population growth is among the highest in the world."

"More than three million people," the report stated, "face persistent hunger and need emergency food aid" in Ethiopia.

The situation becomes even more absurd when one considers that it was back in February 2003 that the Israeli cabinet, headed by none other than Sharon himself, formally adopted a decision to bring the remaining Falash Mura to Israel.

In effect, then, the protesters this week weren't actually seeking to force a change in the government's policy. They were just trying to convince Sharon to implement his own decision from over two years ago.

So, just how does the government explain its failure to boost the monthly quota of Ethiopian immigrants? Why, by blaming someone else, of course.

On Sunday, Reuters reported that an unnamed spokesman for the Absorption Ministry "blamed the delay on Ethiopian elections, saying it had been impossible to finalize details sooner."

That sounds reasonable enough, except for one minor catch: the Ethiopian elections were held back in May, before the monthly Falash Mura quota was set to double. Moreover, the balloting was won by the incumbent, Meles Zenawi, so Ethiopia's policy remained unchanged.

Nice try, Mr. Spokesman. But the obstacle to increased Ethiopian immigration lies in Jerusalem, not in Addis Ababa.

Believe it or not, the Falash Mura aren't the only potential immigrants that are being stonewalled by Israel's government. There are thousands of others out there too, from the 15,000 Subbotnik Jews of the former Soviet Union, to the 7,000 Bnei Menashe of northeastern India.

The Subbotniks are descendants of Russian peasants who converted to Judaism two centuries ago, and who clung to their new-found faith despite Czarist oppression, Nazi persecution and Communist cruelty. Thousands moved freely to Israel until the Interior Ministry inexplicably halted their arrival in 2003.

The Bnei Menashe, a group claiming descent from one of the Ten Lost Tribes, were formally recognized by the Chief Rabbinate on March 30 as "descendants of Israel," but Interior Minister Ophir PinesPaz seems in no hurry to welcome them home, either.

Taken together, these three groups - the Falash Mura, the Subbotniks and the Bnei Menashe - number over 40,000, all of whom wish to tie their fate with the people of Israel and make aliya.

The only thing preventing them from doing so is Israel's government, which offers little more than empty excuses to justify this outrageous situation.

In the past, various ministers have pleaded poverty, claiming it

would cost too much for Israel to absorb so many immigrants all at once. In truth, it is not a lack of finances, but a lack of will that lies at the root of the problem. The Falash Mura, the Subbotniks and the Bnei Menashe may not come from affluent backgrounds; nor bring with them the resources available to other immigrant groups. But they are our brothers and sisters, our flesh and blood, and they long to return after an arduous and often painful journey in Exile.

The time has come for the government, together with world Jewry, to stop dilly-dallying and get to work. The time has come to bring our lost brethren home to the Jewish people and to the Jewish state. ✧



SPIELBERG AND KUSHNER SMEAR ISRAEL

By Andrea Levine, Executive director of CAMERA www.CAMERA.org

Steven Spielberg and an army of well-paid consultants and spinmeisters are pulling out all the stops to promote *Munich* and fend off damaging criticism of the movie about the murder of Israeli Olympic athletes and the effort to track down the crime's masterminds. The campaign has even included courting family members of the slain men for endorsements to blunt a gathering storm of negative commentary from the likes of David Brooks in the *New York Times*, Leon Wieseltier in *The New Republic* and Andrea Peyser in the *New York Post*.

Briefly, the movie presents, via pulse-pounding scenes of kidnapping, death, stalking and more death, the message that Israel was brutal, bungling and immoral in its reaction to the massacre. True, the hostage-takers were also brutal; but dispossessing Palestinians, we soon learn, lies at the root. Cultured Palestinians passionately explain: "We are for twenty-four years the world's largest refugee population. Our homes taken from us. Living in camps. No future. No food. Nothing decent for our children."

In *Munich* there are no Palestinians ✨🌟🔱🔱🔱🔱🔱 for the destruction of Israel -- as all Palestinian groups did then and, regrettably, leading groups continue to do today. On the contrary, in a contrived encounter between Avner, the movie's lead, and a PLO member, the latter insists he simply wants a homeland. He also blames Jews for turning the Palestinians "into animals" and charges them with exploiting guilt over the Holocaust.

In all of this one sees the biases of Tony Kushner, the radical playwright brought in by Spielberg to reshape the script. Kushner has repeatedly called the creation of Israel a "mistake," blamed Israel for "the whole shameful history of the dreadful suffering of the Palestinian people," and advocated policies to undermine the state.

Israelis in the film, including Prime Minister Golda Meir, do make their case. But the language is often self-incriminating and vengeful. Meir says: "I don't know who these maniacs are and where they come from. Palestinians -- they're not recognizable. You tell me what law protects people like this...Every civilization finds it necessary to negotiate compromises with its own values."

The charge that Israel believed targeting terrorist leaders compromises its values rather than affirms its obligation to seek every means to defend itself against aggression is pure Hollywood concoction. But spiraling self-doubt about the use of force is central to *Munich*, with one team member, an ambivalent bomb-maker who eventually

blows himself up, lamenting "We're Jews, Avner. Jews don't do wrong because our enemies do wrong...we're supposed to be righteous. That's a beautiful thing. That's Jewish..."

Thus, not only, in the film's account, was it futile to assassinate terrorist masterminds, because new and worse replacements sprang up to escalate the violence, but eliminating terrorists ostensibly destroyed the souls of the Jewish hit team.

During the movie's production, numerous Israelis with knowledge of the actual events disputed Spielberg's central themes. But the Hollywood director, along with



Kushner, ignored them and insisted on their own dark story.

In fact, historical accounts of Israel's decision to target leaders of Black September, the group responsible for Munich,

emphasize that the assault at the Olympics was part of a worsening series of terrorist attacks against Israel in 1972. Lod Airport had been struck twice in May with 32 killed. Only days after the September 5 Munich atrocity, an Israeli official was shot in Brussels, and two weeks later a letter bomb killed an Israeli in London.

Any nation supine in the face of such intensifying terrorism invites ever more fearsome attack. Yes, Israel's new counter-campaign was reprisal for the Munich murders, but it was aimed at fighting back against a broad terrorist threat. What the various teams dispatched by Israel sought to do was standard in its general goal: Shift the balance and force the adversary onto the defensive, disrupting operations, planning and command structure.

None of this common sense about self-defense and the context in which the Olympic massacre and Israeli reaction occurred are part of *Munich*. Instead, Israel's action battling its adversaries is cast as aberrant, bloody and counterproductive. It is no different from the assault of the terrorists and ostensibly spawns far greater violence.

Thus *Munich* is not fictionalized fact, but a falsehood at its core. Small falsehoods

too promote its thesis of Israeli culpability. For instance, Golda Meir is said to have shunned attending the murdered athletes' funerals for fear of being booed because she refused to negotiate with the terrorists - yet as a *Jerusalem Post* piece reported one week after the killings, a poll found her the most popular figure in the nation. Meir as the war-like Israeli, refusing to settle matters in peaceful dialogue, fit the picture but not the facts.

The movie concludes that Israel should have, in Avner's recommendation, "arrested" the terrorists "like Eichman." And, perhaps inspired by Kushner's theme of the existence of Israel as a mistake, an embittered and hounded Avner abandons his homeland for all-American Brooklyn.

Munich offends on other counts. A leitmotif linking Jews and money will make more than a few viewers wince. A Mossad handler growls: "I want receipts!" We're not the Rothschilds, he says, just a small country. "We need receipts. You got me? Whatever you're doing somebody else is paying for it." Or: "A Jew and a Frenchman - we could haggle forever."

In other coarse invocations of supposed Jewish banter and attitudes, a team member demands a comrade drop his pants to "see if he's circumcised" when the teammate doesn't understand the need for Jewish violence. An argument among the team has one Israeli shouting: "The only blood that matters to me is Jewish blood!"

This and much like it is what passes for deep dialogue by two of America's leading entertainment lights. Indeed, it is stunning to watch *Munich* and realize that its director brought *Schindler's List* to the world. Where that was artistry drawn from truth, *Munich* is cinematic manipulation rooted in lies.

Evidently, exploring essential truths about Jews murdered 60 years ago by a regime that no longer exists and is widely reviled is one thing. Defending the truth about Jews who, over the last half century, have continued to be targeted for murder by Palestinians, Arab states, and in recent decades Iran, and whose stalkers have enjoyed the support of the U.N., scores of NGO's, and perhaps attendees of Hollywood dinner parties, is quite another. ✨



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FREEDOM HAD A GOOD YEAR by Joshua Muravchik, L.A. Times, 12/25/05

Although the recent Iraqi elections boost the prospects for democracy in that long-suffering land, a new report on the state of freedom globally gives hope that we are at the start of a tectonic shift toward liberty across the Muslim world.

The report comes from Freedom House, a nonpartisan organization founded by Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie. Every year its specialists rate every country in the world on an exhaustive checklist of civil and political rights.

These painstaking assessments offer scholars — and the interested public — a reliable body of data for comparing countries to each other or to their own past performances. When it has tied certain U.S. aid to human rights performance, Congress has used the Freedom House ratings as a benchmark.



IRAQ

Nothing in social or political science is exactly "scientific." But for measuring freedom, these surveys are as good as it gets.

This week, Freedom House released its survey for 2005. The survey grades each country (from a best of 1 to a worst of 7) and then simplifies these scores into a broader categorization of "free," "partly free" or "not free." (For example, the U.S. and Australia are "free"; Burma and Cuba are "not free"; Turkey and Nigeria are "partly free.") Because countries usually evolve gradually, not many of the numeric scores change in any one year, and even a rise or fall in a country's score is usually insufficient to move it from one of the three broad categories to another.

This year, however, more countries than usual changed category. Eight countries plus the Palestinian Authority, not yet officially a country, moved up — either from "not free" to "partly free" or from "partly free" to "free."

Four countries moved down. In all, this made it a good year for freedom.

But here's the really interesting part. Of the nine countries that improved their ratings, no fewer than six are Muslim countries. Indonesia moved from "partly free" to "free," while Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Lebanon, Mauritania and the Palestinian Authority moved from "not free" to "partly free." Of the four countries that became less free in 2005, none was a Muslim country.



AFGHANISTAN

has washed over the globe. Every region has recorded strong gains, including even such a poor and troubled area as sub-Saharan Africa and the socially mutilated lands of the former Soviet empire. But until this year, the Muslim world had remained a stubborn exception.

In 2001, Freedom House first highlighted this remarkable disparity. Of the 47 countries that had Muslim majorities, only one was "free," 18 were "partly free" and 28 were "not free." Among the non-Muslim countries, the proportions were nearly the opposite: 85 were "free," 40 "partly free" and

only 20 "not free". Worse, the Muslim world was growing more repressive, not more free.

Some of the credit for reversing this belongs to President Bush's strategy of promoting freedom and democracy, including by means of war in Iraq. Saad Edin Ibrahim, the dean of Egyptian dissidents and an opponent of the war in Iraq, said recently that it had "unfrozen the Middle East just as Napoleon's 1798 expedition did."



GEORGIA

There is still plenty to debate about the war. And success in Iraq remains far from assured. Despite progress, Freedom House still counts Iraq as "not free" as of the end of November.



UKRAINE

On the other hand, we must not allow our divisions over Iraq to blind us to the trend toward freedom. We ought to notice it, applaud it and

do everything we can to encourage it further.

JOSHUA MURAVCHIK, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, is working on a book about democrats in the Middle East.