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If I Had College to Do Over, 1958.

IF I HAD COLLEGE TO DO OVER

The Temple
December 28, 1958

Rabbi Daniel Jeremy Silver

A simple society can afford the luxury of ignorance. Our complex, scientific world cannot. We live in a highly complicated society. Our science is infinitely specialized. Our politics and our economics are highly developed. We live in a world far different, much changed, from any society which has preceded us in the course of human history. We are faced with the difficult task of adjusting and accomodating the institutions which have been developed through the centuries and the values which have proven their worth through the centuries, to the needs, to the exigencies of modern life. Mass ignorance would only hamper and misdirect and possibly fatefully impede the progress of this necessary adjustment. To see the importance of mass literacy, of education in our modern world we have only to look at the Soviet Union. The classic pattern of totalitarian government is to monopolize, to restrict education and literacy to the bureaucratic few, the nobility, the clerical class, and to withhold this privilege from the masses of laborers and peasants. For literacy breeds heresy, and heresy breeds and feeds the discontent which inevitably blossoms and bursts out as revolution.

If you look back in the chronicles of history you will find that many a monarchy held it to be a crime of the highest order to teach without warrant reading and writing, the basic educational disciplines, to the disenfranchised masses. Now the Soviet Union has from its very beginning turned its back on this time-tested and proven totalitarian principle of government. From its very inception the Communist government was determined to develop what we might call a crash program of learning, and with that single-minded purposefulness which has so

characteristic of the Russian government, it has in the four decades of its rule developed a school system and a university system and a graduate system which rivals our own and in many ways precedes our own. I read recently a report submitted by Senator Benton of Connecticut on a tour which he made of the Russian educational system. His observations have in all ways been substantiated by those who are knowledgeable in the field of Russian affairs. I should like to read to you a part of this report this morning:

"What is it that most impresses a foreign observer about the Soviet school system? In less than forty years, starting with a population at least 50 per cent illiterate, the Soviets have built a seven-year primary school system rivaling our own in universality, with nearly 100 per cent enrollment. Further, since World War II, the Soviet secondary school system has mushroomed amazingly. By 1960 the basic ten-year school is to be compulsory everywhere. In spite of acute labor shortages, all children are to be kept in school from 7 to 17. Every Russian youngster is to be given an education, a communist education of course, comparable however in its high standards of study and learning to an English public school or a French lycee but without the same emphasis on the humanities. The Soviet standard is far higher than that of even the best American high school. It is perhaps comparable to two years at a top college.

"Further, the U.S.S.R. has already surpassed us both in the number and percentage of students enrolled in institutions above the secondary level -- in 1955 there were 4,300,000 such students. This is a 70 per cent bulge over our 2,700,000 students.

"The Communists from the earliest days gave up butter for guns; but they gave up meat for education.

"The figures that I am quoting were given me by top Soviet school officials. They may exaggerate. But perhaps they do not. I suggest we would be wise to accept the figures literally. Americans have for years scoffed at Soviet claims -- only to find that they have out-stripped all nations but ourselves in industrial production. We are learning only now that they have the steel and the fuel and the electrical energy which they told us they were going to have by this target date. We scoffed for years, only to discover that Lenin's and Stalin's "visions" have become today's industrial realities, with the achievement often surpassing the seemingly fantastic predictions.

"Russian youngsters go to school six days a week, ten months a year. Discipline is strict, study hours are long, and the curriculum is demanding. At all levels, the Soviet students, like European students in general, work much harder than do our American youngsters.

"Wearing their military-looking uniforms, Soviet children for the first four years concentrate on reading, writing, arithmetic, and Russian. In the last six years, more than 40 per cent of their time

goes to science and to mathematics. During these years, they must take algebra, geometry, and trigonometry. Also compulsory are four or five years of physics, four years of chemistry, two years of biology, a year of astronomy, and a year of psychology. Finally, each student takes six years of a foreign language, and English, the new language of science, is the favorite.

"My understanding is that there are no electives. Indeed, I was told that the first time the student has any choice of study is once he has chosen his field after the ten-year school as a graduate student at a university.

"The U.S.S.R. in the last quarter century has applied the educational goals of the old elite -- the high standards of the Czarist system -- to the new masses. In this mass application, the Soviets are challenging us with their version of the American dream. They offer high-grade training to every boy and girl, and as much as his talents and abilities will absorb. They are seeking to steal the American dream and in broad daylight.

"Pro-Recotr Vovchenko of the University of Moscow told me that, above the ten-year schools, there are now more than 2,000 "tekhnikums". These have an enrollment of two and one half million students. We in the United States have no parallel for these schools. They are a kind of vocational college. They give two-and-a-half and four-year courses to these 2.5 million students. They provide "middle grade" specialists in scores of fields. There are even tekhnikums in such areas as music, art, medicine and education. However, the great concentration is in the field of industry.

"The industrial tekhnikums are operated by such ministries as electricity, railroads, communications, and agriculture. The Ministry of Higher Education, however, helps maintain academic standards. From their tekhnikums, the various ministries draw their non-professional technicians, those who move ahead later into key supervisory and operating jobs in industry.

"Then there are the 800 institutions of higher Soviet education. Thirty-three of these are universities. The balance are the specialized institutes for doctors, engineers, lawyers, dentists, aeronautical experts, electrical specialists, agricultural experts, etc., etc. -- all the specialized skills in such demand throughout the world. The universities do not have authority over these vocational colleges, but concentrate largely on the training of teachers for above the fourth-grade level, and of scientists and scholars. All universities and higher institutes provide five-year programs, except the teacher-training institutes, which are for four years. The universities and higher institutions have an estimated enrollment of 1,825,000 students.

"The University of Moscow, dominating the city with its gleaming new 33-story central tower, enrolls 23,000 students. The recent investment of three billion rubles for this new building, completed in 1953, is astonishing even by our standards. It is equivalent to an investment of at least 150 million dollars, figuring the ruble at five cents. Thus this building costs more than has been spent for the completed physical

plant of all but a few American universities. It contains 1,900 laboratory rooms. It symbolizes to all Russia what lies ahead in the fulfillment of Soviet ambitions for youth. Here work most of the 2,000 professors of the University of Moscow who teach students. Here too are the 500 scholars who are dedicated to research and from whom no teaching is expected. All 2,500 must seek to make their own individual scientific contributions in the laboratories. Those who succeed receive the highly prized doctorate, a top or super degree for which we have no equivalent."

Now it is easy to find fault with this Soviet system. But before we do, we ought to take to heart and understand its central virtue, and that is that it is a tough-minded, serious educational institution. It attempts to teach. It attempts to make available to its graduates a thorough, disciplined, precise and understanding knowledge of a definite area of human endeavor. It attempts to equip them for the highly complicated and specialized tasks in the social sciences and the political sciences and the physical sciences which any modern nation-state requires. The Soviet system concentrates on teaching, on learning. It is anything but a pleasant interlude of semi-academic activity and generally extracurricular concern which intervenes between youth and responsibility.

Now if I were to go back to college today, I would be determined to concentrate on some area of human learning and to absorb all that I could about my chosen discipline. My world is becoming increasingly complicated. It requires an increasing amount of time to be aware of the extent and of the breadth of any single field of human learning. None of the great sciences are any longer rudimentary in subject or ~~in~~ instruction. I have heard it estimated that every decade each of the physical sciences doubles itself in the extent of information and of research which it possesses. And I have seen in the institutions of my land developing an increasing period of training between college and productivity, of internship, of residency, of graduate study. And so I would determine, if I were to go back to college again -- at least by my junior year -- I would determine that area of human knowledge which I sought to pursue and I would concentrate my attention on gaining as complete as I could mastery of the vocabulary and of the techniques and of the principles of this particular field of learning.

The dilettante's conception of college education, which pushed off any serious work to the graduate level, was a creation of the English school system, and it was geared to the needs of the sons and daughters of the nobility -- boys and girls who were economically secure and who lived in a much more secure age than our own. I am afraid that each year our scientific society will provide less and less opportunities for gainful employment to those who have not mastered some particular area of science or of the humanities of learning. But to say that we agree with the basic emphasis of Russian education is not to say that we agree at all with its philosophy. Russia attempts to plant learning -- knowledge -- in its students, but at the same time it denies to them what we consider to be so important, ^{wisdom} ~~wisdom~~ and understanding. Russia, for obvious reasons, has a positive horror of political heterodoxy. There are certain principles of economics and of politics and of philosophy which are dogma, which must simply be accepted, which cannot be questioned, and Russia cannot allow her most trained minds to be critical in judgment of these doctrines of the Communist religion. Russia seeks to seal off its best minds in water-tight mental compartments, train them in depth in a particular discipline, but not in breadth and in extension, not in the realm of judgment of the values and of the standards and the goals and the ideologies of our world. It is doubtful/for long ^{that Russia will} ~~will~~ be able to maintain these narrow restrictive barriers against their best minds. A highly trained, sophisticated mind is like a surging sea that is ever restless, on the move, impatient with every limitation and confinement. To cite an historical example, the great universities of the Middle Ages were created by the clergy, but the Church. They were created for the three-fold purpose of disseminating the theology of the Church, of working out the disciplines of canon law, and finally for developing a basic standard of elementary education, of elementary literacy among priest class. But the graduates of the University of Paris and of sister institutions became those who began to question the world order, the standards, the government which they found around them. And it was these minds, trained in highly censored classrooms, which ultimately developed

the philosophy and the logic which led inevitably to the French Revolution. There is a direct line, my friends, between the controlled classrooms of Montpelier and Narbonne and of Bordeaux and of the Sorbonne to the uncontrolled passions of 1789. But be that as it may, in a free society we cannot hope or desire that our children be only technicians. They must also be citizens. A technician simply receives an order and carries it out. ^{The} A citizen is responsible, not only for his work in his specialized area of knowledge, but for developing the ordering of his own society. He is responsible for applying his critical measurements to all the competing ideologies and conflicting philosophic and economic systems which surround him in this world. The citizen must have some definite commitments to social ends and he must be willing to dedicate part of his life to the improvement of the common weal, and not simply to research within his individual specialty. The citizen must have a trained, understanding mind. He must have a mind which is not simply well-intentioned, because it is a very sensitive judgement which we must make at all times between the thousands of conflicting philosophies and ideologies. It is not a case of black against white, of good against bad. It is a case of working out those reasonable, rational, pragmatic programs which as we develop them will protect our system of liberty under law, of freedom within justice, which we hold sacred and to be true.

And so it is, that if I were to go back to college again, I would dedicate my first two years to gaining as broad an understanding of the world about me as I might. For I know now that if I were to become a scientist I would not only have to know all that I could about the area of knowledge which I had chosen to prosecute, but since I am a pioneer at the frontiers of human knowledge, I would have a responsibility of revealing to my lay neighbor the ramifications and the implications of these new discoveries for our national destiny. I could no longer be naive about our political system. I would have to make certain commitments to ideology and to political and economic philosophy. For I alone and my co-workers would be able to tell the world of the implications of our discoveries and of their

potential abuses and misuses. And what is true of the scientist is true of all the other of the great intellectual disciplines. The jurist today must be so much more than a legal technician. He must be a social philosopher. He must know not only torts and contracts and taxes, but social psychology and political theory. The minister, the rabbi, must be so much more than a philosopher of ethics and a theologian, for if he is unaware of the science of the world in which he lives his theology is reduced to banality, to irrelevance. And if he is unaware of the new developing structures of human society and of the highly complex new moral dilemmas with which it faces man, his ethics is reduced to the level of sheer platitude. That is the reason that if I were to return to college dedicated to be a scientist, I would spend my first two years learning as much as I could about man and about his institutions as was available and permitted to me. And if I were to return to become a rabbi, I would determine to spend these first two years learning as much as I could about man and his universe. And whatever be my chosen life discipline I would hope that these two years of knowledge and breadth, knowledge of the basic core disciplines common to all learning would equip me sufficiently to understand the framework of this area of knowledge -- its vocabulary, its language -- and equip me throughout my life to pick up volumes in any given discipline, to read them with some understanding, and to be able to relate them to whatever problem troubled or concerned me at the moment.

I have indicated my feeling that if I were to return to college I would be concerned not only with cultivating my mind but with cultivating the man, to not only having an experience of learning but an experience of living. The academic world, my friends, is one of our rare opportunities to meet those who have radically divergent backgrounds and intellectual patterns and philosophies and religious beliefs from our own. When we leave college and settle down into our daily vocations and into our chosen community, we find that our world of friends and contacts constricts itself. We tend to go with those who are like to us in interests, in faith, in educational level. But in college we find the widest possible

disparity of traditions and of interests. In my college class there was a prince of Iran and an orphan boy from Spokane. There were sons and daughter of great-grandparents who had come over on the Mayflower, and there were the sons and daughters of those who had fought their way up from Hell's Kitchen and New York's lower east side. And by talking with all of these young people, by learning to appreciate their views, by hearing them lovingly and reasonably defend philosophies and religions which previously had seemed only quaint and strange and outlandish, all of us learned an important lesson in understanding. We learned to be less chauvinistic, less sure of the unique truth of our own particular life pattern, to be more willing to accept other ways of life and other philosophies and other solutions to world problems.

It is one of the tragedies of current college practice that so many young people willingly close themselves in from this rich opportunity. And certainly it is not the least of the faults of the fraternity and sorority system that it encourages our young people to live only among those to whom they are alike, to be only with those with whom they have the largest number of common denominators, to confine their out-of-class activities to those who come from homes similar to their own, who have faiths the same ~~as~~ as their own, whose parents think as theirs do. This is, in my opinion, certainly one of the gravest weaknesses in much of our current campus life.

The academic community offers us another opportunity rich in meaning. It offers the young person a chance to come into contact with highly trained, razor-keen minds, high caliber minds, minds which are completely at home in the intellectual disciplines. And I think if most of us who are a decade or more out of college were to think ~~back~~ back on our college days, it is not so much the classroom work which we would remember, not so much the lessons that we ~~learned~~ learned, but the contact, the personal contact that we had with some particularly influential mentor or teacher. I remember the senior proctor in my house. His was a mind

which I shall never forget. He had a horror of all that was platitudinous. It insisted that any generalized ~~that~~ statement that we made be buttressed by fact. He refused always to generalize on areas of human knowledge in which he felt himself ill-prepared, and I have often had occasion to bless this man for this indirect lesson, because he taught me in our personal conversation and contact, far away from the rigors of assignments and of papers, he taught me to discipline my mind, to insist on truth rather than emotion. And perhaps I might close by reporting to you a very pleasurable conversation that he and I had one winter afternoon. We had both remarked an article in the "Harvard Crimson" of that morning which reported on a debate held between the Harvard Debating Society and a prison squad from the Middlesex Prison in Massachusetts. The Harvard squad had lost. The article reported that this was the fourth time in five years that the Harvard team had been defeated. It also reported that the prisoners consisted of one Doctor of Philosophy, one Phi Beta Kappa, and one lawyer. And I remember observing to him how tragic it seemed to me that a school could be so successful in training and sharpening a man's mind, but so unsuccessful in training and developing a man's character. This proctor reminded me of the early pattern of education in America. He told me that if I were to look back at some of the early text-books of ~~and~~ our public and private school systems I would find that these primers were filled with morality lessons - with fables such as that of the grasshopper and of the ant - which sought to implant in the mind of the young people certain simple moral truths about hard work and discipline and honesty and veracity and rectitude and the like. He reminded me that these aphorisms and these fables were often assigned to the young scholar for memorization in the belief that having ingested these particular verbal truths they would ipso facto have become a part of the individual's personality. Now we need not speculate on the results of that type of education. And that is why, he said, college curriculums do not include courses in advanced civic duty, or beginning spiritual values. All that a college can do is to make the scholar aware of the highest values of a civilization. The rest is up to the

scholar. And that is why, if I were to go back to College again, I would be determined in my college years to forge out for myself a philosophy and a system of ethics which I felt could be satisfactory and necessary for the tensions and the problems and the challenges of modern life. And I would spend the rest of my life trying to live up to this philosophy.

Amen.



EDUCATION FOR INDEPENDENT THOUGHT

From the New York Times, October 5, 1952

It is not enough to teach man a specialty. Through it he may become a kind of useful machine but not a harmoniously developed personality. It is essential that the student acquire an understanding of and a lively feeling for values. He must acquire a vivid sense of the beautiful and of the morally good. Otherwise he -- with his specialized knowledge -- more closely resembles a well-trained dog than a harmoniously developed person. He must learn to understand the motives of human beings, their illusions, and their sufferings in order to acquire a proper relationship to individual fellow-men and to the community.

These precious things are conveyed to the younger generation through personal contact with those who teach, not -- or at least not in the main -- through textbooks. It is this that primarily constitutes and preserves culture. This is what I have in mind when I recommend the "humanities" as important, not just dry specialized knowledge in the fields of history and philosophy.

Overemphasis on the competitive system and premature specialization on the ground of immediate usefulness kill the spirit on which all cultural life depends, specialized knowledge included.

It is also vital to a valuable education that independent critical thinking be developed in the young human being, a development that is greatly jeopardized by overburdening him with too much and with too varied subjects (point system). Overburdening necessarily leads to superficiality. Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty.

Therefore, of course, much that can be subjected to the Resonance system, but we not, however, be bound to its cardinal rules. The Resonance system is largely methods and cautions. We permit everyone to learn - to make ourselves best acquainted with a language and pursue knowledge of a chosen field. The Resonance program affords us a Guide to thought generally in one of the original of preparation and to be learned discipline and investigation and practice is as useful to the growth of a modern nation state.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

To appreciate the serious minded approach of the Russian college system is not to applaud its philosophy. The Russian system is in many ways inadequate - for, basically, it offers the student knowledge but at the same time it refuses him understanding.

While it has a fundamental lack of ed. purpose its system of education must suffice understanding of his world to enable him to judge seriously between conflicting ideologies and competing political legislation and ethical values. ~~The system is a good one for a student who is not~~ ^{in some ways but} ~~group of living reality is only half educated~~ To be educated ^{and not to} have sufficient ^{breadth of} understanding for such independent judgment is to be ^{ill} prepared for the responsibilities and obligations of democratic living.

Now claiming the Russian curriculum has a positive horror of political heterodoxy, they cannot condone independent judgment in many areas of pol. & ec. and eth. theory. So the Russian system seeks to control its teaching. It attempts to teach the student right but not breadth - especially but not wisdom.

A doubt that the Russian mind is too limited to read off that of others, based in ^{dark} ^{ment} ⁱⁿ ^{comprehension}. ^{Impatience} and sophisticated minds are like the waters of the sea ever on the move - restless - impatient with any restriction and confinement. To do an historical parallel as they in the high middle ages opened the first European universities for the limited purpose of disseminating ^{theology}, refining their canon law, & establishing a standard of ^{learning} ^{among all} priests - but it was from time to time based on some ecclesiastical controlled ^{of church} ^{that} ^{men of reason} ^{present} ^{needed} ^{and} ^{for} ^a ^{new} ^{science} & a new philosophy - and ultimately a new government & a new way of life. The controlled classes of the Renaissance of Paris & by other institutions led in a direct way to the enlightened person for living ^{expressed} ^{in the French Revolution}.

But even if the Russian fear of ^{independent judgment} ~~independent judgment~~ only serves to render the previous necessity for such an ^{enforced} ^{a fundamental} ^{purpose of} independent reason in any free society, it must be the purpose of American higher education to give the student a basic understanding

But that is it my friends, success is intertwined iniquity should hang
under one the imperious in upon itself. A citizen must be more
than a technician, a technician needs under orders. A citizen is
ultimately responsible for the ordering of his society. In an highly complex
modern society it is no longer sufficient for the citizen to be simply
well intentioned. There is no longer a choice between black & white
but a highly difficult balancing of a thousand conflicting claims. A
citizen must be sufficiently informed of his world to lift the responsibility
from the impudences - so that he can cast his vote and express his needs
purposefully and significantly. He must be an citizen as a free and
properly society not only now among men but even in consideration of
the men with our families ante-intellectual superlatives.

A scientist can no longer be indifferent to the social and political
ramifications of his research. The scientist is the pioneer of tomorrow
technology. He cannot be neutral as to the implication of his experimental
upon our national destiny. I believe that here the scientist must
not only announce his discoveries but make understandable to his lay
neighbors the latent dangers & possible dangers. He must be knowledgeable
in the way of men & have certain definite opinions on the good life and
be good society. He must be citizen as well as scientist.

What is true of the scientist is true of every specialist and professional.
The jurist must be a philosopher ^{as well} as a legal technician. He must
be grounded in economics and politics, and psychology as well as in law and
logic and conduct. The businessman must be skilled in the top disciplines
as well as in management & production for you are the days when he can
be unconcerned with any problem beyond his immediate firm. Our
rabbi & ministers must range far beyond the familiar confines of Theology
and ^{ethics} ~~religion~~. For a minister not to understand the implications of
the new science & become psychology ^{is} to consign his theology to
irrelevance. For a minister not to recognize the ^{more complex} ~~religiously~~ ^{social} ~~ethical~~
issues of modern society & its religiously more complex moral dilemmas is to
consign his ethics to the realm of mere platitudes.

So it is that if I could go back to college, I would concentrate
around during my first two years on premature specialization. Then
two years would be devoted to the gaining of some understanding
of my world as it is - its history - its culture - its people - its

I want to be a problem. If I expected to be a student, I would
 concentrate during these years on my own & the institution. If I
 expected to enter the field, I would concentrate on my own & the
 business. I would need sufficient background in the field
 and discipline so that I might be prepared to read intelligently
 throughout my life on particular problems that might be encountered -
 I would have that base but you might give me sufficient
 background and sufficient understanding of the ^{of these conditions} ~~of these conditions~~
 which might ~~not be~~ ^{always be possible to} profitable.

~~I would like to say that because he has spent much time
 in the field of the law, but does not have the same kind of
 my lessons~~

~~if I were to go to college again I would be confused with my time
 as with my lessons. We expect to help in some judgment
 and so on.~~



Kaddish

Friday DEC. 26
 Sunday " 28

Those who passed away this week

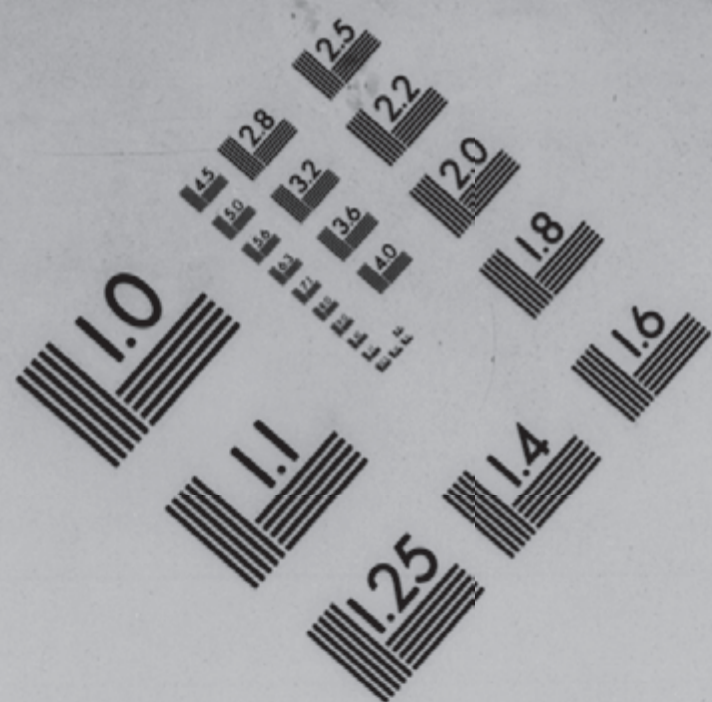
ARTHUR H. SIMON	HERSHEL Z. OZER
SAUL FINEMAN	
NETTIE GUSKY	

Wahrzeits

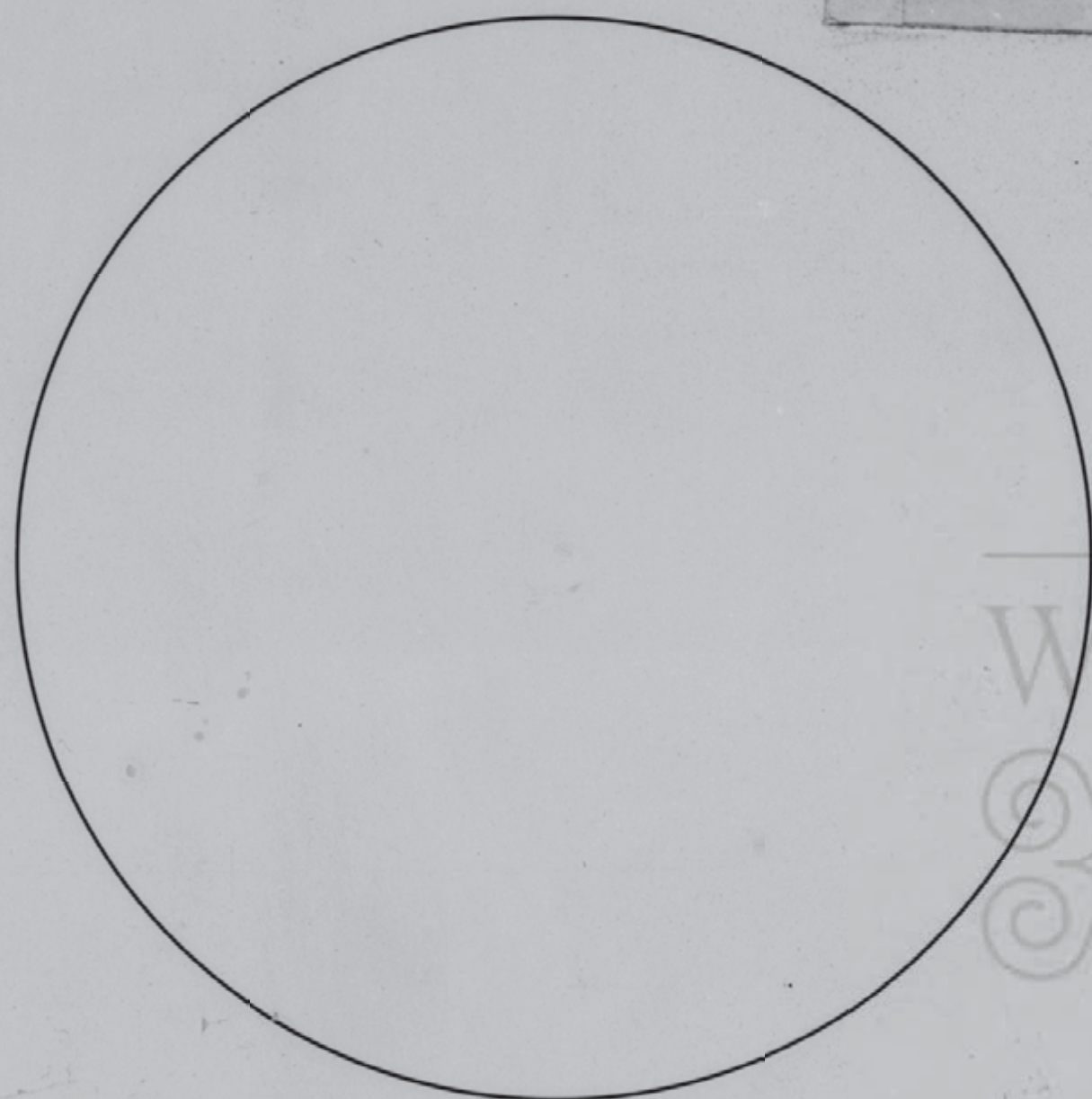
LILLIAN R. SCHWARTZ	CELIA W. SELMAN
NATHAN E. POLSTER	MOSES DAVIS
FANNIE KURZ OPPENHEIMER	ELIZABETH STONE
JOSEPH ROSKOPH	DAVID JANKAU
NATE SCHAFFNER	BELLA GOLDWASSER
MAX MYERS	MAX BERNSTEIN
MORRIS H. RICH	YETTA GROSSMAN WOLLASTON
MAX BEATUS	JEANNE B. FEDER
JOSEPH COLBERT	
CARRIE FELBER	
SAMUEL SCHULIST	
SIEGMUND JOSEPH	
WILLIAM B. COHEN	
ANNIE R. BRATBURD	

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RATIO 13X**

