THE EMMA LAZARUS FEDERATION’S 20TH ANNIVERSARY

An Address

BY MORRIS U. SCHAPPES

It is an honor for me again to have been chosen to address you on such a memorable and gala occasion as your 20th anniversary, a celebration that you are enriching by a long-deserved tribute to your devoted and distinguished executive director, Rose Raynes.

Such anniversaries are of course properly an occasion for self-congratulation and self-evaluation, such as your National Council has engaged in during its deliberations this weekend. Such anniversaries are also properly the occasion for you to receive the applause and congratulations of others who have stood with you in your notable work in the American progressive Jewish movement. Although I am empowered to speak only for myself, I believe I express the sentiments and convictions of the entire progressive Jewish leadership when I say to the Emma Lazarus Federation of Jewish Women’s Clubs: Mazel tov on your anniversary; yasher koach on your achievements; may your minds be sharpened and your hearts and arms strengthened as you go forward to continue, expand and improve your splendid work, under the leadership of your National Council and your director, Rose Raynes!

You are to be congratulated by all of us in the progressive Jewish movement for having weathered in unity the tensions that have threatened us with disruption. You have resisted and withstood moods of distrust that have disoriented many individuals, organizations and institutions in our country and abroad. You have shed illusions without becoming disillusioned. You have matured without growing weary of the ongoing struggle for peace, for progress, for social justice for all peoples, including the Jewish people, for an end to exploitation of man by man, of woman by man.

Your record these 20 years has been unique in the annals of contemporary American Jewish women’s organizations—and I hope you will use this anniversary to spread this in detail on the public record, with Congresswoman Bella Abzug or Shirley Chisholm, or another, wanting to put the account into the Congressional Record.

The other day I checked the file of our magazine to see how the Emmas had first appeared in our pages, and came up with these significant and symbolic entries. It seems that as soon as we established the column, “Inside the Jewish Community,” the work...
of the Emmas began to be reported in it. Thus in his very first column in Nov., 1955, Sam Pevzner recorded the protest sent by the Emma Lazarus Federation to Pres. Dwight D. Eisenhower when a white jury in Mississippi acquitted the murderers of Emmett Till. Then the very next month, Pevzner reported the publication by the Federation of a pamphlet, We Were There, containing an account of the World Jewish Conference Against German Rearmament, attended by your president, Leah Nelson. The significance and symbolism of these two actions lie in this fact: that no other American Jewish women’s organization was acting on these issues, was combatting white racism as the central evil of our country and fighting fascism in all its manifestations abroad and at home, including its McCarthyite and McCarranite outpourings and its anti-Semitic outcroppings then and now.

I need not rehearse with you such outstanding aspects of your work as your petition campaign to get the U.S. Senate to ratify the United Nations convention against genocide, which netted 60,000 signatures; or your establishment and continuing support of the Emma Lazarus Day Nursery in Tel Aviv as only one aspect of your solidarity, no matter what your criticism may be, with the embattled people and State of Israel; or your work for women’s rights long before the current welcome surge of Women’s Lib, with your emphasis on equal pay for equal work and day care centers for working mothers; or your unflagging activity to compel our own White House administrations to withdraw immediately and totally from Vietnam, from all of Indochina; or your continuing support of a just solution to the Arab-Israel confrontation in the Middle East, based on the U.N. Security Council Resolution of Nov. 22, 1967, calling for Israeli withdrawal to secure and recognized boundaries to be determined by negotiations between Israel and the Arab states. On these activities, and on the many other sound, progressive positions that you have taken, you are indeed to be congratulated by all progressive America.

But there is still another feature of your work that distinguishes you in all the company of American Jewish women’s organizations, your outstanding work in promoting progressive Jewish education and culture. Your generous support of secular, progressive Jewish children’s schools marks your commitment to Jewish survival. But you have made other contributions to Jewish revival: you have made green and kept alive not only the reputations but the influence of Emma Lazarus and Ernestine L. Rose by publishing or sponsoring the publication of books by and about them. Both were secular Jews long before there was a secular Jewish movement in our country. Both have something to say to us to this day. May I follow the practice of your un forgotten leader, June Gordon (1901-1967), and dig into these books of yours for the vitalizing riches and refreshment they offer?

I turn to Emma Lazarus’ “Epistle to the Hebrews” and find there her comments in 1882 on such current issues as cosmopolitanism, internationalism, the “chosen people” concept and national identity. She points to the historic advance made by “the theory of Humanity as a grand whole towards whose common weal every individual must strive.” Then she remarks: “To combine the conservation of one’s own individuality with due respect for the rights of every other individuality is the ideal condition of society, but it is a foolish perver-

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Well, it took a Civil War to abolish slavery—and the Emmas helped make the celebration of the centennial in 1961 a memorable event. But part of slavery persists today. The black man or woman or family still cannot say, “I will live here, or I will move yonder,” or “I will work here,” or “I will join this union.” The struggle against white racist discrimination is therefore still a part of the struggle in which Ernestine Rose played such an important role, a role continued by your Federation down to this moment in such activities as the signing by Rose Raynes and Lola Fine, as members of the recently founded Jewish Committee for a Fair Trial for Angela Davis, of “An Appeal to the Jewish People” that it has published as an advertisement in *Congress Bi-Weekly*, Sept. 17, 1971, in the Chicago Jewish weekly, *The Sentinel*, Oct. 14, 1971 and in *Commentary* in December. From Ernestine Rose to Rose Raynes, the line of descent is clear!

And that brings me, obviously, to your tribute to Rose Raynes, for me an especially precious part of this occasion. For you gave me an excuse, without prying, to ask her some personal questions at a luncheon-interview 10 days ago. Why did I, who have been in very close association with her through her invaluable work on the Management Committee of our magazine for some years, have to interview her? Because in her work, for you as well as for us, she is both selfless and modest, and if I wanted, for this occasion, to find out about her activity before she helped found the Federation 20 years ago, I would simply have to get her to talk about herself. I did.

I found out, gratifyingly, that like me she was born in the Ukraine; she came to the USA with her parents and younger sister in 1913. Her edu-
A NEW FILM GUIDE

The Film Review, a monthly bulletin featuring reviews of current films in terms of their Jewish interest, has just made its bow. Published by the Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council, it will be distributed as a guide to parents, rabbis, Jewish educators, youth group leaders and community relations workers. The first issue (Dec.) has reviews of Fiddler on the Roof, Romance of a Horse Thief and Sunday, Bloody Sunday.

The economic crisis brought her to the foreground in 1931 as the full-time executive secretary of the United Council of Working Class Women, forerunner of the national organization of Progressive Women’s Councils. In 1939, she was called to head the Women’s Department of the N. Y. City Committee of the International Workers Order, and held that office until 1943, then returning to private employment as an office worker.

When the Emma Lazarus Federation was born Jan. 6, 1951, Rose Raynes was one of its founding members and a member of its First National Executive Committee. On retiring from her commercial job in 1965, she was elected president of the Brooklyn Council of Emma Lazarus Clubs. On the death of June Gordon Jan. 7, 1967, Rose Raynes was elected national executive director, a difficult post she has filled with distinction—and, if I may say so, with the full cooperation and understanding of her husband, Alex Raynes.

As I listened to myself read this sketch, I realized that this was at best a formal, colorless Who’s Who in American Progressive Jewish Leadership kind of outline, but time hardly permits more. I am sure other occasions will evoke the living profile of Rose Raynes that we all need.

In closing, however, I should like to point to the admirably close cooperation that we have had and will, I am sure, continue to have, between the Emma Lazarus Federation and our magazine. It is neither accidental nor incidental that June Gordon in her time and Rose Raynes now serve us invaluably on our Management Committee, and that we proudly count among our Life Subscribers not only Rose Raynes but also your president, Leah Nelson, and your vice-presidents, Mollie Goldstein and Marian Lerner.

Now the Hadassah has its Hadassah Magazine; Pioneer Women has its magazine; the National Council of Jewish Women has its own organ. The Emma Lazarus Federation does not—and therefore we on Jewish Currents have felt it our responsibility to reflect the work of your organization as extensively as possible. Serving as we do the entire progressive Jewish movement, we have a special spot—a tender spot—for the Emmas, whose embodiment we see continually on our Management Committee in the person and devotion of Rose Raynes. Like you, we have thus grown to respect, admire and love her.