

**EDGAR FOGEL MAGNIN:
A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY**

**By
Alysa Uriel Stanton**

**Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for Ordination
Hebrew Union College- Jewish Institute Of Religion
Cincinnati Ohio
2009**

Referee: Dr. Gary Zola

TABLE OF CONTENTS:

Dedication	3
Acknowledgements	4
Abstract	5
Introduction	6
Outline of Chapter Division	8
I Bibliographical Overview	10
II Rabbinate	37
III Rabbi To The Stars	74
IV Conclusion	97
Bibliography	118

To All Who Believed

**Because of my faith, G-d has given me strength and
perseverance. Because of your love and belief in my
ability, G-d has parted the seas and the impossible has
been realized...**

Alysa Stanton 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many who contributed to the completion of this project, both directly and indirectly. I offer deepest thanks to my thesis advisor Dr. Gary Zola. His guidance and patience during my rabbinical studies at Hebrew Union College were indispensable in the development of this project. I am a better scholar because of his willingness to share his expertise and resources.

I offer my thanks to the entire faculty & staff of Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion for inspiring and cultivating my thinking in countless areas in the study of Jewish thought.

Special thanks go to my mentors Dr. Steven Sunderland, Dr. Sam Joseph and Dr. David Weisberg. Their enthusiasm and dedication to excellent scholarship and teaching has left an indelible mark on my life, both personally and professionally.

I want to thank my wonderful editor Sonja Rethy for her expertise, patience and superb attention to detail, and Michael Hall for his unfading love, and dedicated research assistance.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not thank my family and friends, both near and far who have supported me in every conceivable way on my journey to the rabbinate. Special acknowledgement goes to my daughter Shana Michaela Stanton (“Butter”), who has been poised, selflessly supportive, a fountain of wisdom and a pillar strength during this journey. Butter, I love you, and could not have completed this journey without you!

ABSTRACT

This thesis will provide a biographical overview of the life of Rabbi Edgar Fogel Magnin. Magnin was one of the last Classical Reform Rabbis of the twentieth century. As the senior rabbi of one of America's largest synagogues, Magnin influenced the development of Jewish life in Southern California and played a significant role in the history of Los Angeles itself. Magnin's career as a rabbi in California spanned more than seven decades. His rabbinical career was exceptionally active and idiosyncratic. During the course of his extensive, colorful career, Magnin became a prominent figure in Los Angeles's social world, and evolved into one of the twentieth century's most influential and significant rabbinic figures.

INTRODUCTION

In a necrology written shortly after the death of Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin (1890-1984), Jacob Rader Marcus pointed out that his late colleague was “the last of the Classical Reform Rabbis, those men who built a movement that ushered in generations of liberalism, benevolence, and love of mankind.”¹ Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin’s career as a rabbi in California spanned more than seven decades. For sixty-nine years Magnin served as the rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple (Congregation B’nai B’rith) in Los Angeles, California. During his long and colorful career, Magnin evolved into one of the twentieth century’s most influential and significant rabbinic figures. Magnin’s career at Wilshire Boulevard Temple was conterminous with Los Angeles’s transformation from a small southwestern city into one of the world’s largest and most influential metropolitan centers. Many of his congregants played pivotal roles in that city’s growth, and Magnin kept company with celebrities, hobnobbed with politicians, and socialized with community figures. By the time Magnin reached the pinnacle of his career, Los

¹ Jacob R. Marcus, “Memorial Tribute To Edgar Fogel Magnin,” CCAR Yearbook 95 (1985): 298.

Angeles's mayor, Tom Bradley (1917-1998) would refer to him as "my rabbi." During his own lifetime, Magnin became a legendary figure.

Magnin wrote two books during his career. *How to live a Richer and Fuller Life* was published in 1951, and typifies the genre of popular American psychology that was just beginning to take hold during the 1940s and the early 1950s. A second book, *365 Vitamins for the Mind*, appeared posthumously in 1984. This volume contains a collection of newspaper columns Magnin wrote for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* over the course of several decades. Magnin's newspaper columns provided the general public with advice on how to live a better life.

Magnin's rabbinical career was exceptionally active and idiosyncratic. As the senior rabbi of one of America's largest synagogues and as a prominent figure in Los Angeles's social world, Magnin influenced the development of Jewish life in Southern California even as he played a significant role in the history of Los Angeles itself. Magnin became actively involved in community relations, and was involved in a multitude of Jewish and secular organizations--serving on more than twenty boards and advisory

councils. For many non-Jewish Los Angelenos, Magnin became the quintessential Jew of the burgeoning City of Angels.

Although some have taken note of his relationships with a variety of prominent Hollywood figures, to date no full-scale biographical study of Magnin's rabbinic career has appeared.² This thesis seeks to fill this void by providing a biographical study of Edgar Magnin's life and career based on his collected papers at The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives.

Outline of Chapter Divisions

The following constitutes a tentative outline of the thesis chapters:

Chapter One: Magnin's Life: A Biographical Overview

This chapter provides readers with a concise biographical survey of Magnin's life, including his childhood, his education, his early career in Stockton, and, subsequently, in Los Angeles. An attempt is made to identify the ideas and values that informed Magnin's thinking and helped him to become, at the height of his career, the patriarch of the Los Angeles Jewish community.

² Neal Gabler, *An Empire of Their Own: How the Jews Invented Hollywood* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1988), pp. 266-273.

Chapter Two: Magnin's Rabbinate

This chapter reconstructs Magnin's rabbinical persona. Relying on sermons (both written and audio), his other writings, and his involvement with numerous community organizations, including his important contributions to the Jewish Welfare Board, the USO, and his lifelong involvement with the Freemasons, this chapter provides a reconstruction of Magnin's religious values and his concept of the rabbinate.

Chapter Three: Magnin and the Glitterati

This chapter analyses Magnin's relationships with the titans of Hollywood and a variety of prominent political figures. These figures include Irving Thalberg, Louis B. Mayer, Bob Hope, Milton Berle, George Burns, Jack Benny, Mayors Sam Yorty and Tom Bradley and U.S. Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Ronald Reagan.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

Summary remarks on Magnin and his career are included in this last chapter. In particular, an analysis of Magnin's rabbinical career and his contribution to Jewish life in California is provided.

Chapter One

*“Many are ill and anxious and unhappy because they believe in the shadows...shadows of bombs, of depressions, of possible illness and doom. They pay a very high price for this dark outlook. Yet all are free to choose the bright, the ideal, and the hopeful...side of life that is rich and full....Why not choose Life? Why not a seat in the sun...”*³

Biography and Overview

Edgar Magnin was one of the most influential rabbis in America and one of the leading Jewish figures of his time. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Times* on June 20, 1971, Dan Thrapp reported that Magnin’s “opinions and convictions are strong, solid, somewhat conservative and lucid, delivered in everyday language impossible to mistake. Rabbi Magnin is an activist in the things which he believes.”⁴ Although described here as being "somewhat conservative" by Thrapp, Magnin was actually quite liberal, both religiously and politically.

Among his vast and varied achievements, Magnin seemed most to value his relationships with people of all types and backgrounds. He was a true individualist, a trailblazer who was not

³ Edgar Magnin, *How to Live a Richer & Fuller Life*, (New York: Prentice-Hall, 1951), p. xiii.

⁴ Dan Thrapp, “Magnin: One of Nails holding City Together”, *Los Angeles Times*, June 20, 1971, sec. C, pp. 1 & 8.

afraid to speak his mind and a visionary who, despite many obstacles, had the perseverance to realize his dreams.

Background

Edgar Magnin, born on July 1, 1890, was the only child of Lillian Fogel and Samuel Magnin. Lillian, Magnin's mother, was born in San Francisco. Her parents emigrated from Poland and owned a modest men's clothing store. Magnin's father, Samuel Magnin, was born in London, the son of Mary Ann Cohen and Isaac Magnin, the founders of the Magnin department stores.⁵

Inspired by the American gold rush, Isaac Magnin emigrated from the Netherlands to the United States just before the Civil War, where he led a varied and unencumbered life. Isaac fought as a Confederate cavalryman, was a pushcart peddler in New Orleans, and developed skills as a wood carver and gilder. It was while he was on a trip to London in 1847 in search for his father (a Dutch professor perhaps in England for a teaching engagement) that Isaac met his future bride, the then fifteen year old Mary Ann Cohen. Mary Ann, who was also originally from Holland, was the shy

⁵ It was Mary Ann Cohen's vision, drive, determination and wisdom that created and laid the foundation for what would become the I Magnin Empire.

daughter of an orthodox Rabbi who served a congregation in London. Isaac remained in London, and he and Mary Ann Cohen married a year after they met. Isaac Magnin then set himself up in London as a wood carver and gilder in a picture-framing shop. Samuel Magnin was the first of the couple's eight children

In the late 1870's, perhaps attracted by the opportunities presented by the California gold rush, Mary Ann and Isaac moved their family to San Francisco, where Isaac's skills were in demand. After a short time Isaac was offered a lucrative job repairing the gilded ceiling of Saint Mary's Cathedral. Mary Ann, referred to by her children as 'Queen Victoria', was described as strong-willed, bright, and energetic. She forbade Isaac to take the coveted position at St Mary's, fearing he would be injured or killed on the job, and would thus leave her to care for their eight young children alone. As a compromise, Mary Ann utilized her skills as a seamstress and began making high quality baby clothes which Isaac, while continuing his woodworking, peddled, carrying the finery in a pack on his back.

Mary Ann quickly gained a reputation for providing the finest clothing, the latest fashions, and detailed, luxurious service to her

customers. Mary Ann, in fact, is credited with being the mastermind and the driving force behind what would become the Magnin Department Store chain. She was an exceptionally talented businesswoman, and ingeniously chose a location for the couple's first shop that would attract both business and residential customers. At the Magnin's first store Isaac sold his woodcarvings and Mary Ann sold her crafts, along with needles, thread, notions and, before long, trousseaux as well.⁶ But Mary Ann's ambitions very much exceeded what a small notion store could offer. She wanted their store to be distinctive, and envisioned an eventual "Magnin Empire" of luxurious notions and clothing imported from overseas. Mary Ann and Isaac quickly began to develop a plan to realize these aspirations, and before long I. Magnin & Co. expanded to the point where it became a San Francisco institution, known for its luxury and customer service.⁷ Customers of I. Magnin & Co. were warmly greeted by liveried doormen and ushered into an atmosphere of luxury. As first-time customers glided across the imported marble flooring, they would look up and marvel at sparkling crystal chandeliers while regular customers were met by personal shoppers,

⁶ "Matriarch Magnin" *Time Magazine*, February 17, 1936, pp. 66-67.

⁷ Harriet Rochlin, and Fred Rochlin, *Jews on the Western Front*, Arizona: 1985, p.2

who would have clothing waiting for them to try on as soon as they arrived. When Magnin's expanded to include a men's clothing line, the men's department was modeled on a gentlemen's club, where customers could have drinks, smoke cigars and have merchandise brought to them to try on by pretty female clerks.⁸

Isaac and Mary Ann's eight children were raised in the family business. As was typical of the time, the five sons, including Edgar's father Samuel, worked in the corporate side of the business, and the three girls focused on fashion and merchandizing.

Edgar's parents divorced when he was still a young child, after which his mother Lillian forbade the mention of Samuel's name in the household. Although Samuel Magnin was an heir to the chain of Magnin department stores, he played no further role in Edgar's upbringing and provided him with no financial assistance. In fact, later in life Magnin recalled that even when he was in college his father never tried to contact him or offer help toward his educational expenses.⁹

As a consequence of his father's behavior, Magnin had no benefit from, and little contact with, the Magnin empire. It was not

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Malca Chall and Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin, Leader And Personality, p.2.

until he was well into adulthood and after the death of his father that Magnin developed a distant but cordial relationship with the paternal side of his family.¹⁰ On the other hand, Magnin's father, interestingly, seems to have tried to establish a surreptitious relationship with Edgar much earlier on. In the 1930s Isaac Magnin had built one of his department stores not far from his son Edgar's Wilshire Boulevard Temple, and it is said that he would occasionally sneak into the back of the synagogue during services just to hear his son speak, then slip out again before being noticed.

One can speculate as to why Edgar Magnin waited until his father's death to reconnect with the Magnin side of his family. Perhaps it was loyalty to his mother that kept him from seeking contact, or perhaps it was pride. The confident Edgar Magnin would have been appalled if others had viewed him as a gold-digger, and perhaps by waiting until his father's death Edgar was able to show the paternal side of the family that he wanted nothing more than a relationship with them. By this time as well he had built his own kingdom, the magnificent Wilshire Boulevard Temple, and, although he needed no practical assistance from the Magnins, he

¹⁰ Saul Lesser, oral history American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344/37/2, p. 16-17.

may have been interested in benefiting from the Magnin name and its many connections in order to further his own goals. Or, perhaps simply because Edgar now had a family of his own, he wanted his children to know both sides of his background. Regardless of the reason that motivated Edgar to become re-involved with the Magnins, he succeeded and soon met his half-siblings and cousins. In fact, in an amended copy of his paternal uncle Emanuel “John” Magnin’s will, dated March 25, 1951, Edgar Magnin was named as one of the beneficiaries.¹¹ Over the years that he served the Wilshire Boulevard Temple Magnin continued to try to develop a cordial relationship with the paternal side of his family. In a letter dated February 14, 1968, Magnin wrote to Cyril Magnin, the son of his uncle Joseph Magnin, congratulating him on his success in business and praising him for having become an important community figure. This letter was in response to an earlier letter from Cyril, congratulating Magnin for being chosen to deliver the opening prayer at Nixon's inauguration. Similar congratulatory letters arrived from Magnin's uncle Grover Magnin as well.¹²

¹¹ Bank of America Escrow Instruction Re: Emanuel John Magnin. May 30, 1972. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 30/8

¹² Cyril Magnin, “Letter”, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS433/5

Magnin was raised in the home of his maternal grandparents, where he and his mother, who never remarried, lived after his parents' divorce. Although Magnin's maternal grandfather was a moderately successful merchant, he never achieved status or wealth as did Magnin's paternal grandparents. Yet, despite the modest means of his grandparents, Magnin had a comfortable childhood growing up in San Francisco.

Magnin was especially close to his maternal grandfather, George Fogel. Edgar, although a 'Magnin' by name, was a 'Fogel' in his heart. Magnin's middle name, 'Isaac', was given to him in honor of his paternal grandfather, but Magnin, because of his fondness and respect for his maternal grandfather, changed his name, as a child, from Edgar Isaac Magnin to Edgar Fogel Magnin.

In his memoirs, Edgar remembered how every Yom Kippur he would stand with his grandfather by the open ark as he read from the siddur. Throughout his life Magnin used this prayer book, which his grandfather gave him, and it remained in his possession until his death in 1984.¹³ The love Magnin had for his grandfather drove him

¹³ Ibid.

to emulate his virtues, and encouraged him to practice Tikkun Olam (the repair of the world). Magnin stated that he derived his “love of art and possibly the humanness [*sic*] from this man, of liking people, and from my grandmother a certain caution and common sense of business.”¹⁴

Many experiences shaped the course of Magnin’s life, but a few particular events from his childhood seem to have shaped his path to the rabbinate. Magnin’s maternal grandfather, George, was an officer at Congregation Beth Israel in San Francisco, where Magnin attended religious school. Magnin’s maternal grandparents were members of a Conservative synagogue, yet for the most part were assimilated Jews and lenient in their practice of *halaha*. For example, Magnin’s grandmother would buy kosher meat, but also bought and served shellfish. Magnin, in his memoirs, recalled that his family always observed Jewish holidays, and that he was required to go to religious school every day after school. He also mentioned how as a child he did not know what a *kippah* was. He stated that all he knew was that when he went to Temple or religious

¹⁴ Ibid. p.26

school he was required to pray “with a hat on. When I got through I took my hat off.”¹⁵

Magnin denied experiencing anti-Semitism as a child and apparently got along well with the predominately Irish Catholic children of his neighborhood. He expressed that most of his childhood friends were not Jews and that to him people were people whoever they were.¹⁶

Magnin credits Rabbi Meyer S. Levy, of Congregation Beth Israel in San Francisco, with being the strongest rabbinic presence of his impressionable childhood.¹⁷ Magnin stated: “M.S. Levy was a most unique and remarkable man. He had very little education... [but] he had a hell of a lot of common sense and a tremendous personality....”¹⁸ Magnin was attracted to Levy’s opinionated and outspoken personality and to his ability to think and act creatively

¹⁵ Chall. p.10

¹⁶ Lesser, oral history. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati MS 344/37/2 p. 19

¹⁷ Rabbi Levy, joined Beth Israel as spiritual leader in 1901, and retired from the congregation in 1916.

Levy, born in London on January 16, 1852, was the son of Rabbi Solomon Levy, of London's Boro' synagogue, and Elizabeth Cohen Levy. Levy attended the Jews' Free School in London, where he was ordained in 1870. He served as a rabbi in Australia from 1870-1872, then took positions in the United States, first at Bikkur Cholim in San Jose, from 1872-1881.(later known as Temple Emanuel-El) then at First Hebrew Congregation in Oakland from 1881-1891. In 1891 Levy became the rabbi of Congregation Beth Israel, where he remained until his death on October 11, 1916. Congregation Beth Israel, founded in 1860, was one of the oldest Conservative Jewish congregations west of the Mississippi. Under Levy's tutelage, the synagogue grew by incorporating traditional Jewish ritual with the more progressive Jewish practices of the time. Beth Israel eventually became quite liberal, and in the 1960s merged with Beth Judea, a reform congregation in San Francisco which thrives to this day.

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 2

and independently. Levy was a level-headed, compassionate, and kindhearted man, and served as model for the young Magnin.

As a boy, Magnin loved to play baseball, and sometimes would get so involved with the game that he would forget to go to Hebrew school. He would then walk to Levy's house to make up his lesson. Apparently these lessons with Levy served him well, for Magnin recalled that during Simchat Torah he stood before the congregation and chanted the entire *parasha*. That event was the first time Magnin stood and spoke before an audience, and, although very nervous and feeling that the room was spinning, he stated that once he 'settled down' and started chanting, he never had any trouble speaking to an audience again.¹⁹ The Hollywood movie mogul, Sol Lesser, M.S. Levy's nephew and Magnin's close friend since childhood, reported how this experience, along with Levy's encouragement, gave Magnin the idea to become a rabbi. Levy is also credited with helping Magnin prepare for his entrance to Hebrew Union College²⁰

In 1907, when Magnin was sixteen years old, he travelled across the country to Cincinnati, Ohio, in order to attend rabbinical

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 3-4

²⁰ Ibid. p. 5

school at Hebrew Union College (HUC).²¹ Because there were no dormitories at HUC, Magnin paid twenty five dollars per month for room and board at a local boarding house, and also recalled walking to school in all types of weather, as there was no public transportation.²² At that time, to complete the rabbinical program at HUC required a commitment of nine years. The curriculum was set up so that adolescent boys would come to Cincinnati, attend high school during the mornings and attend HUC in the afternoons. Once a boy graduated from the high school, he would attend The University of Cincinnati in the morning and HUC in the afternoon (no woman could be ordained at that time). Magnin, however, was so well-prepared by Rabbi M.S. Levy that he was able to skip two years of the nine year curriculum, and was ordained by HUC after attending the college for seven years.

Through the years, Magnin was often asked why he decided to become a Reform rabbi. In an interview with the *Los Angeles Herald Examiner* on September 5, 1971 he stated:

“...A man grows up and if he’s a Jew he goes to a synagogue. If it’s a conservative synagogue he gets a little more Hebrew than a place like ours...There is no such thing as a Jewish life.

²¹ Chall, p. 28

²² Ibid. p. 30

It's an American life and I am an American. Yes, I have Jewish traditions. Yes, I worship in a synagogue. I read Hebrew; have a certain pride in my ancestry and what they've contributed to mankind. Frankly, I don't think it's necessary to lead a distinctly Jewish life. What am I going to gain by it?"²³

Magnin felt that Jews needed to be inclusive—that they needed to make American culture their own. If Jews were to make meaningful changes in this world, keeping separate was not an option, and Magnin deeply felt the importance of the Biblical injunction to “love one’s neighbor as oneself”. Aware of his numerous flaws, Magnin was very successful at practicing what he preached and early in his career sought to remove any obstacles that might set him apart from others. Perhaps he was particularly sensitive to others because of his modest childhood in the shadow of the Magnin wealth, or, because Magnin was born and raised in America, he perhaps had, compared to many of the rabbis of his time, a greater ability to see, in a manner that his European colleagues could not, all people as equal under the eyes of G-d. Whatever the reason, Magnin's legacy was one of inclusion, assimilation and hope. By choosing a liberal venue within which to

²³ Al Bine, “Where is Religion’s Place Today”. Los Angeles Harold-Examiner, September 5, 1971, p. 1.

practice Judaism, Magnin likely believed he would be more accessible to a diverse group of people, and therefore have the opportunity to effect change on a broader scale. Throughout his career he boasted about being able to converse and dine with prince and pauper alike, and stated that people were ‘just people.’ Magnin became known as “the rabbi to the Stars” both because of the easy intercourse with all types of individuals that Reform Judaism allowed him, and because he was not intimidated by celebrities, whom he treated like regular people.

Another major influence on Magnin’s life was Emil Gustav Hirsch (1852-1923). Hirsch was a great scholar, a prolific writer and a man of integrity and principle, who was influential in the development of American Reform Judaism. Hirsch served forty-two years as the rabbi of the Chicago’s historic Sinai Congregation, which was one of the oldest synagogues in the Midwest. He was known for his commitment to social justice and for inspiring sermons which moved both Jews and non-Jews to attend. Hirsch was a professor of rabbinic literature and philosophy at the University of Chicago, and came to HUC in 1912 as a visiting professor, where he had a profound impact on the young Magnin. Hirsch encouraged

Magnin to be direct and succinct, and likewise, what Magnin admired most about Hirsch was the fact that he was “brilliant, and direct, and blunt.”²⁴ Magnin’s deep appreciation for intelligent people attracted him to Hirsch, and the two became close friends. Hirsch, like Magnin, was a reformer. Both men thought beyond the traditional rabbinic role which encouraged rigorous ritual observance and separated Jew from non-Jew. Magnin and Hirsch prided themselves on being available to the people as rabbis, while at the same time were extremely involved in civic affairs. Magnin, comparing himself to Hirsch, stated: “...In temperament I was like Hirsch. Not in the scoffing, but in the business. I didn’t copy him. It was my own nature and I found a kindred soul....”²⁵ Both men found value in standing for causes in which they believed, and, because becoming involved with public platforms was unusual for rabbis of their time, they took great risks in doing so.

Magnin, though outwardly confident and an extrovert, also had a brooding, introverted and introspective side. He himself stated:

“I’m a mixture of an extrovert and an introvert. It’s a funny thing. There are moments when I must have isolation and I build an inner world. Einstein says he did this. I build a wall

²⁴ Chall, p. 37

²⁵ Ibid. p. 39

around myself. But most of the time when I'm with people, I like them. When I'm fooling around and kidding and laughing, and telling stories and listening. It's a mixture of both. See, I can get along with a multimillionaire, with a pauper....I'm a democratic person, but many people are afraid to approach me. I don't know why....”²⁶

Perhaps the extroverted Magnin masked the unresolved conflicts within the brooding Magnin, or perhaps by being “larger than life”—the term Louis B. Mayer and many other Hollywood moguls and politicians used to describe him—Magnin could forget about some of the pain of his childhood and his parents' divorce. As previously mentioned, although Edgar was a Magnin, he was not of their world, and he did not grow up with any of the privileges and entitlements which the Magnin Empire offered. Yet, despite the ease with which one can psychologize the development of Magnin's personality and attribute his extreme extroversion to a desire to compensate for the difficulties of his childhood, Magnin would quickly assert that he had no hard feelings, and always dismissed any notion that his parents' divorce had an impact on him.

The one person who helped Magnin maintain the boundaries of his ‘inner world’ was Evelyn Rosenthal. Born on March 18, 1894, in Cincinnati, Ohio, Evelyn was a soft-spoken, cultured woman,

²⁶ Chall. p. 20

well-educated and well-travelled. Evelyn attended the University of Cincinnati, where she and Magnin met during his fifth year of rabbinical school. Evelyn remained in Cincinnati while Edgar established his pulpit in California, and the couple was able to maintain their long distance relationship for two years, until they married, in Cincinnati, on June 15, 1916. They celebrated their 68th wedding anniversary a few weeks before Edgar's death in 1984.

Magnin frequently bragged that he did not marry a 'rabbi's wife', but said that Evelyn was in every aspect a person in her own right. He stated: "I never had a rabbi's wife. Never wanted a rabbi's wife! She's a lady. Minds and lives her life, but she's always had a religious feeling, and always had been cooperative with people. They like her and respect her, but I've never wanted a rabbi's wife. No two pair of pants with this suit."²⁷ Although she supported her husband tremendously, Evelyn left the synagogue and its politics to Magnin, and devoted herself to civic activities. Evelyn did involve herself, however, in Magnin's development as a rabbi, and especially helped her husband develop his public demeanor and his speaking skills, even encouraging him to hire a voice coach. Partly

²⁷ Chall p. 67

due to Evelyn's intervention, Magnin became one of the most captivating speakers in America. People were literally on the edge of their seats when they heard him speak, for they never could predict what their outspoken, and sometimes outrageous, rabbi might say next.

In contrast to Evelyn's lack of involvement in synagogue politics, she ran the Magnin household with devotion and an iron fist. After the birth of their two children, Henry and Mae, Evelyn wanted to create a haven for the family, and twelve years into their marriage the Magnins designed and built a two-story Spanish-style home in Beverly Hills, where they would live for over 50 years.²⁸ Evelyn, like Magnin, could make the poor feel cared for and at ease, and could also dine with presidents without blinking an eye. She was known for her charitable work, which spanned the 70 years she spent in Los Angeles in the shadow of her very public husband. The Los Angeles Times reported:

Over the years she served on the boards of Gateways Hospital and Mental Health Center, the Girl Scouts, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Senior Citizens of Beverly Hills. She also was the founding president of Temple Beth

²⁸ Wanda Parrott, "Meet Mrs. Magnin", Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, June 5, 1970

Solomon of the Deaf in Arleta, the first Jewish congregation for the deaf in the United States.²⁹

Evelyn died in 1986 at the age of 92, and was survived by her two children, six grandchildren and four great grandchildren.

Henry D. Magnin chose not to follow in his father's footsteps, by becoming a well-known public figure, and there is very little information available about him. Perhaps he deliberately chose to lead a quiet life after growing up in his father's shadow in the privileged world of the rich and famous. He spent his undergraduate years at Stanford University studying social science, and later obtained his master's degree at Cal Tech in meteorology. Henry, who resided in Carlsbad, California, changed careers in mid-life and became a stockbroker. He worked in that capacity for 35 years, and died on November 6, 2003, survived by his wife , two children, and four grandchildren³⁰.

The twice-divorced Mae Brussell also led a life very different from her famed father's. Like her brother Henry, she, too, attended Stanford University. Brussell received her degree in philosophy during World War II, and went on to become a well-known writer

²⁹ Los Angeles Times, 1986, Obituary

³⁰ Obituaries Stanford Alumni News magazine March-April 2003

and radio personality, who focused on proving various conspiracy theories regarding the murders or accidental deaths of well-known public figures³¹. Some people, unsurprisingly, felt that she was strange because of her obsession with this unusual subject.³² Others found her fascinating. Brussell reported that she felt her father was disappointed with her choices in life—which resulted, for example, in her failed marriages—but also said that he did not interfere with her decisions.³³ Brussell died of cancer in 1988 and was survived by her three children and two grandchildren

After ordination from HUC, as mentioned above, Magnin moved to Stockton, California, where he quickly gained a reputation for being both an innovative rabbi and a talented speaker. One evening, members of Congregation B’nai B’rith in Los Angeles came to hear Magnin speak, and were so impressed with his energy, intelligence and magnetic personality that they invited him to Los Angeles in the hope that he would accept their offer to become B’nai B’rith’s Associate Rabbi. Magnin accepted the position, and, in

³¹ The Freudian overtones of Mae’s chosen profession hardly bare mentioning.

³² “Conspiracy Theorist Mae Brussell Dies of Cancer” *The Monterey Herald*, October 4, 1988.

³³ Biographical notes, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 Box 50

December of 1915, moved from small town Stockton, California, to the faster-paced and more sophisticated atmosphere of Los Angeles.

Dr. Sigmund Hecht had come to Los Angeles in 1899 in order to serve as the Senior Rabbi of Congregation B'nai B'rith. When Hecht arrived, the Jewish community in Los Angeles was still small, unorganized, and fractured; German Jews were seeking to assimilate fully into American culture, while Eastern European Jews were struggling to keep the old traditions alive. Although Hecht was unable to improve the situation between Eastern European and German Jews, he was instrumental in promoting Reform Judaism in California and, "as an interpreter of Liberal Judaism...he was able to bridge the gap between the Jewish world and that of the Gentiles."³⁴ Hecht was a prolific author and Magnin stated that he "possessed a splendid literary style" that readers enjoyed.³⁵ Hecht had served Congregation B'nai B'rith for over 10 years before Magnin was invited, unbeknownst to Hecht, to serve the congregation as an associate rabbi.³⁶ Because Hecht was advancing in years, B'nai B'rith hired the young, energetic and visionary Magnin to help the

³⁴ "Entire Jewish Community Mourns Loss of Dr. Hecht", Los Angeles: B'nai B'rith Messenger, July 3, 1925 pp. 1-3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Neal Gabler, An Empire Of Their Own, p. 269

aging Hecht with his workload and to help revive the struggling synagogue.³⁷ Magnin recalled how Rabbi Hecht was, at first, bitter and resentful that the congregation was bringing in a new rabbi to ‘assist’ him, and chose to deal with the situation by being forthright with Hecht.³⁸ During his first sermon, “*The Stuff Dreams are Made Of*,” Magnin told the congregation that “Dr. Hecht has all the learning and the experience...I’m the young kid with energy, the two of us ought to make a great combination.”³⁹ Magnin recalled how Hecht “loved him” after that. Magnin was determined never to say a negative word about Hecht, and as a result he and Hecht were able to cultivate a friendship based on mutual respect. A few years after he joined Congregation B’nai B’rith, Magnin was courted by Wise Temple in Cincinnati. Magnin recalled how he went to Hecht and stated: “Now you can get rid of me....Well I told him---I never saw this man weep---there were tears coming down his face. So I said, “Well, you love me don’t you?” he said “Yes.” I said, “Well, that’s the way I feel toward you.” Magnin quickly decided not to take the position in Cincinnati, and this decision proved to be a turning point in Hecht’s and Magnin’s relationship. Hecht loosened

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Lesser, Two Kids From Frisco, p. 44

³⁹ Ibid. p.44-45

the reins on Magnin, and from this time onward gave him every opportunity freely to develop and grow as a rabbi.⁴⁰ Magnin worked closely with Hecht for nearly ten more years, before Hecht took the status of Rabbi Emeritus for approximately another five years. When Hecht died on June 27, 1925, at the age of 76, Magnin, who preached at his funeral, said:

He (Hecht) was to me like Elijah in the eyes of Elisha, and like the younger prophet I saw day by day, month by month, the end drawing nigh. When Elijah asked Elisha what it was he desired of him before he departed, the younger disciple replied, "I pray thee may a double portion of thy spirit be upon me". And today in grief I pray that a double portion of Rabbi Hecht's spirit may descend upon me and also upon thousands of others who knew him and loved him....⁴¹

Hecht's death was the beginning of Magnin's tenure as Senior Rabbi of Congregation B'nai B'rith.

Magnin continued his education throughout his years as a rabbi, and received his Doctor of Divinity degree from Hebrew Union College in 1945. Magnin also received honorary degrees from the California College of Medicine, The University of Southern California, Wilberforce University, Pepperdine University, Loyola Marymount University, the University of Judaism, and Southwestern

⁴⁰ Ibid. p. 45

⁴¹ "Eulogy Preached at Funeral of Dr. Hecht" Los Angeles B'nai B'rith Messenger, July 3, 1925, p. 2, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4.

University School of Law. Magnin's civic activities included involvement in over 20 organizations as a founding, charter, or general member (see appendix 1).

Known for his inspirational sermons, Magnin also hosted a weekly radio show and, for many years, wrote a weekly newspaper column for the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* entitled "Dr. Magnin Says." He was also a columnist for *The Heritage*—an Anglo-Jewish weekly, and contributed as well to the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Knowledge*, to *King Features Syndicate*, and to the *Los Angeles Mirror*. In addition, Magnin authored two books: *How to Live a Richer and Fuller Life* and *365 Vitamins for the Mind*. Magnin participated in the inaugurations of Governor Ronald Reagan in 1967 and 1971, and also, on January 21, 1971, in the Sunday morning worship service at the White House at the invitation of President Nixon.

Magnin was not only a talented speaker, but he also tried to embody the ideals which his messages conveyed. During an interview on June 19, 1975, Stephen Lesser, the son of Magnin's close friend Sol Lesser, asked Magnin what his secret was for living a long and productive life. Magnin answered: "...If you look at life

with every sun that bursts in the morning is [*sic*] a fresh visitor, 'Hello, Sun, here you are,' it's a new day... Keep the mind going, keep reading, keep growing...."⁴² This was the motto Magnin lived by until the day he died, Tuesday, July 17, 1984, at the age of 94, from natural causes. During the 69 years that Magnin served the Wilshire Temple the congregation grew from a modest group of worshippers to over 2,500 families, and nearly 2,000 people, from every ethnic group, religion, ideology and socio-economic level, came to Magnin's funeral to pay their last respects to the man who was almost a father-figure to Los Angeles and a rabbi to Jews and Gentiles alike.

During a service marking the end of the first month of mourning after Magnin's death, Dr. Max Vorspan, Rabbi and Senior Administrator at the University of Judaism and founder of the Pacific Southwest Region of the United Synagogue for Conservative Judaism, gave a moving eulogy.⁴³ Vorspan stated that Magnin was:

A person totally uninhibited, open, making no concessions to time and place, whose public and private persona were identical....His lips and heart were always unbuttoned, and his mind was never fettered. He was a swashbuckling rabbi who refused to trim his sails to the prevailing winds. He never flattered the mighty nor

⁴² Ibid. pp. 82-83

⁴³ "LA Mourns The Loss of Two Leaders", Los Angeles The Jewish Journal, June 20, 2002.

condescended to the humble. He was always himself and feared no one. He said what he thought and did what he wanted and his powerful and sophisticated congregants followed him adoringly.”⁴⁴

Additional praise came from Samson H. Levey, Former Dean of the Edgar F. Magnin graduate School at Hebrew Union College, in his 1984 tribute to Magnin. Levey stated: “Rabbi Magnin was a unique figure on the American Jewish scene. As a human being, he was a colorful and exciting personality. As a rabbi, his tremendous stature...was a symbol to the world that the Jewish religion need not be confined to narrow sectarianism nor encumbered by dialectical confusion. He fashioned his own theology, remaining tenacious and uncompromising in his faithfulness to the ideals of ethical monotheism and the precepts of the Jewish faith.”⁴⁵

Subsequent chapters will delve more closely into the life of Edgar F. Magnin and will examine the drive behind his successful and extraordinary rabbinate. An investigation of Magnin's philanthropic and political activities will shed light on his beliefs and values, and reflection on Magnin's philosophy of life and his powerful personality will perhaps make clear why he was so

⁴⁴ Max Vorspan, “Eulogy for Rabbi Edgar Magnin”, California: August 15, 1984, p. 2 American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS344 37/1

⁴⁵ Samson Levey, “Tribute to Magnin” August 15, 1984, p. 1, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1

attractive to Hollywood stars and political figures, Jewish and non-Jewish alike.

CHAPTER II

The Rabbinate

“Let God Take You By Your Hand And Walk With You Through Life.”

Edgar Magnin

Who was Edgar Magnin? Why was he held in such esteem by both religious and non-religious people, and how did he rise from relative obscurity to become one of the most honored and respected rabbis of the twentieth century? These are a few of the questions this chapter, on Magnin’s rabbinate, will examine. But, before we discuss his first pulpit, as a newly ordained rabbi in Stockton, California, we must examine how the Stockton congregation was established.

Charles Weber, born in Germany but a citizen of Mexico, founded Stockton, California in 1846. Early in its history somewhere between 200 and 300 Jews came to Stockton, which, at the time, was known for being the gateway to the Southern mines, as it was the main supplier of goods to the mines between the Merced and Mokulumne Rivers.⁴⁶ In 1850 Weber donated a parcel of land to the newly formed Ryhim Ahoovim (Beloved Friends), a Jewish

⁴⁶ Roth, Arnold. “Temple Israel History Memoirs “Stockton: [Congregation Digital Library](#), July, 2008.

Benevolent Society which later became the foundation of Congregation Beth Israel. This land became Ryhim Ahoovim's cemetery, which remains the oldest Jewish cemetery in continuous operation west of the Rocky Mountains.⁴⁷ Congregation Beth Israel was officially incorporated on April 29, 1855, and remains one of the three oldest synagogues in California.⁴⁸ After Beth Israel was officially incorporated, Weber, who was known to be generous to any religious denomination, donated another plot of land upon which the congregation built its first synagogue. Congregation Beth Israel's building was completed on August 28, 1855, only four months after the synagogue was established. This was no small undertaking for a congregation of only forty-three members. The dedication service, attended by both Jews and non-Jews, was held on September 7, 1855.⁴⁹

In 1896, after years of conflict which led to declining membership, Congregation Beth Israel decided to adopt the more progressive worship service of the Reform Movement, in hopes of attracting younger, more cosmopolitan members. In 1906

⁴⁷ Bea Swartz, "The Oldest Jewish Cemetery in The West: Stockton, California." *Western States Jewish History Journal*. Vol. 1, Issue 2, October, 1969.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

congregation Ryhim Ahoovim/Temple Israel formally joined The Union of American Hebrew Congregations, and marked this complete shift to the Reform Movement by purchasing the *Union Prayer Book*.

In a letter to Magnin dated March 10, 1913, S.S. Safferhill, Temple Israel's secretary, wrote on the behalf on the congregation to let Magnin know of their unbridled excitement regarding him serving as student rabbi during the upcoming High Holiday season:

It is needless to say how anxious we all are, not myself alone but the Congregation in general to have you with us..... Many of the members have often asked me when you were coming, having taken it for granted that you would be with us. The purpose of this is just to show you how anxious they are to have you with us.⁵⁰

In September 1913, when Magnin led High Holiday services at Temple Israel, he made quite an impression on the congregation by his moving sermons and energetic style.⁵¹ In a letter dated February 24, 1914, Secretary Safferhill again wrote to Magnin on behalf of congregation, this time inviting the soon-to-be-ordained Magnin to serve as Beth Israel's rabbi. Magnin accepted Temple Israel's offer and, after receiving his ordination from Hebrew Union

⁵⁰S.S. Safferhill, Letter to Magnin February 24, 1914. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4

⁵¹S.S. Safferhill, Temple Israel Announcement card September 15, 1913, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4

College on June 20, 1914, settled in Stockton to begin his rabbinate.

As mentioned previously, Magnin quickly gained a reputation for being an orator and an innovative and confident rabbi. A fellow member of Magnin's Masonic order enthusiastically described the effect of Magnin's talent:

With consummate skill and ease, he articulated in a few moments what others may take hours to expound. His message was Jewish, and it was simple, uncluttered by technical verbiage, unencumbered by dialectical confusion. He was a theologian of spiritual pragmatism, his arena the human predicament, and his wrestling was with those adversaries who emerged from the darkness to drive a wedge of distrust and hatred among people and threatened the peace and harmony of our American way of life.⁵²

Before long, "scouts" from Congregation B'nai B'rith in Los Angeles came to observe and hear Stockton's great young rabbinic talent, and quickly decided that Magnin was just the type of rabbi their fledgling congregation needed.

Magnin accepted the offer from B'nai B'rith, and gave his farewell sermon in Stockton on December 3, 1915. He was officially installed as Associate Rabbi of B'nai B'rith on December 10, 1915,

⁵² Scottish Rite Journal, December, 1984. p. 3

and delivered his first sermon, entitled “The Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of”, to a standing-room-only crowd.⁵³

Los Angeles was a fragmented city during the early 1900s, and this fragmentation was also evident within its Jewish community. German Jews and Eastern European Jews were collectively referred to as *kikes* by gentiles, and the German Jewish community, which considered itself more cultured, more influential and more assimilated than Eastern European Jews, themselves used this term to refer to their ‘less cultured’ co-religionists. In fact, German Jews would mock those who were trying to keep the customs and traditions of their native homeland. They regarded the Eastern European Jews as abrasive, illiterate and undesirable, and even went so far as to have a separate hospital, so they would not have to mingle with the Eastern Europeans.

This divisiveness troubled Magnin. He stated that “The breach would only be healed when the bright upcoming young Jewish lawyers and doctors descended from Eastern Europe, marry the ugly girls of the Germans!”⁵⁴ According to Neal Gabler, author of *An*

⁵³ “25 Years Ago Today-Dec. 10, 1915”, Nearprint 1915-1929, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4

⁵⁴ Neal Gabler, An Empire of Their Own, p. 271.

Empire of their Own, the German Jews “were predominant and preeminent, and they were by and large a moneyed bunch who regarded themselves as genteel and felt they had much more in common with other American elites than their co-religionists.”⁵⁵

German Jews controlled the power, money and status in Los Angeles, but in the late teens, when Magnin and the Hollywood Jews began to make a name for themselves, the demographics of power began to change. Yet, despite the beginnings of this shifting of power and status within the Jewish community, a great deal of general discrimination against the Jews in Hollywood remained. For example, no matter how much money or power they had, Jews were not admitted to certain privileged schools or country clubs. To remedy this problem Magnin, in 1920, with a group of German Jews, purchased a 142-acre plot of land south of Beverly Hills and built what was to be known as the Hillcrest Country Club.⁵⁶

Hillcrest would become ‘the place’ where Hollywood Jews could safely and outwardly express their Jewishness without the worry of being ‘ousted’ or undermined and, according to Gabler, was a

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 270.

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 274

popular venue for powerful business deals brokered over meals or a during a game of cards.

When Magnin arrived in Los Angeles in 1915 the Jewish community consisted of fewer than 20,000 people. (Although by the end of Magnin's career Los Angeles boasted the second largest Jewish community of any city in the world.) Out of these, the classically Reform Congregation B'nai B'rith had a membership of approximately 300 families.⁵⁷ In line with its Reform character, there were no Bar Mitzvah programs at B'nai B'rith, and instead of a shofar, a trumpet was sounded during the High Holidays.

Magnin felt that B'nai B'rith could be bigger and better, and envisioned a synagogue where people of all faiths and backgrounds would be welcome. He wanted to lead a synagogue that would be known nationally for its interfaith work and community outreach, and, in order to facilitate this hoped-for growth, by the mid-1920s Magnin had conceptualized his plan for a new synagogue building. He handpicked the individuals who would work with him, stating: "Instead of having a large committee of dummies—because committees generally contain so many dummies, with bad taste—

⁵⁷ Efron, "Summary of An Interview With Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin" Jan 26, 1966, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 52/1

there were only about four or five of us....”⁵⁸ Although A.M. Edelman, brother of the Temple’s president, was the original architect, Magnin quickly realized that his plan would require someone with a wider breadth of experience and enlisted the services of D.C. Allison, whose firm had built numerous religious buildings in Los Angeles.⁵⁹ D.C Allison redesigned Edelman's original plans, and S. Tilden Norton, another local architect, made suggestions for the building's final touches, such as changing the Ark design from wood to bronze.⁶⁰ Magnin also called in Hugo Ballin, a renowned American Jewish artist who had studied in Europe and who became the creative genius behind the Warner Memorial Murals, donated to the synagogue by Abe, Jack & Harry Warner. Magnin recalled how he would go to Ballin’s studio to discuss his ideas, and Ballin would draw out the themes first in pencil, then in watercolor and finally in oil on canvas. Over the years The Warner Memorial Murals gained worldwide notoriety, and remain in the Temple to this day. The breathtaking structure and its beautiful paintings were realized for little over one and one half

⁵⁸ Chall p.79

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p. 80

million dollars,⁶¹ and the Wilshire Boulevard Temple opened its doors on June 7, 1929.

Magnin, typically ahead of his time, was not only concerned with the condition of the American Jewish community, but also with the situation of the Jews who had immigrated to Palestine. Wishing to see for himself, Magnin made a decision unusual for a rabbi of his stature and his time, and with his family boarded the Dollar Liner *President Hoover* for a four month cruise around the world. Magnin received special credentials in advance for this trip, to ensure that he could investigate “conditions among the farmers, artisans, and small manufactures in Tel-Aviv and vicinity”.⁶² He took special interest in this group of pioneers because he had earlier established a revolving loan fund to help ease the struggles of the new settlers in Palestine.⁶³

Early in Magnin’s rabbinate, he, like most rabbis of his era, refused to officiate at interfaith weddings. Yet over time, because of what he had witnessed during World War I, he changed his views on the matter stating:

...In the First World War the boys would go away and they wanted to get married. You couldn’t make them wait indefinitely....To me people are people...I think

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 40/5 Scrap book article

⁶³ Ibid.

two human beings are two human beings....I think I've saved more people for Judaism this way than throwing them out into the hands of a Christian minister or justice of the peace. So, I try to use my head....(for) various reason I have felt that the decent thing is to marry people and not to push them out; to try to hold both of them in and their children if I can.”⁶⁴

As the synagogue grew Magnin came to need additional assistance, and, shortly after World War I, hired a Hebrew teacher from San Francisco named Maxwell Dubin.⁶⁵ Magnin soon decided that ordination would be advantageous for Dubin, and asked Julian Morgenstern, the president of Hebrew Union College, to provide Dubin with a rabbinical correspondence course. Morgenstern refused to oblige, but Magnin, not one to be thwarted, installed Dublin as his assistant rabbi nonetheless, in which capacity he served for 40 years. Although Dubin never received any formal rabbinic training, in the mid-1940s he received an honorary doctorate degree from Hebrew Union College, acknowledging his service to the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.⁶⁶

Later, in 1949, when the still growing congregation required yet more staff, Magnin hired Alfred Wolf, a refugee from Nazi

⁶⁴ Chall, pp. 113-114

⁶⁵ Oral Interview with Lawrence Goldmark, February 15, 2009

⁶⁶ Ibid.

Germany, as his associate rabbi, in which position Wolf would remain for thirty five years.⁶⁷

In addition to his rabbinical duties and community involvement, for many years Magnin hosted a daily radio broadcast on radio stations KHJ and KFWB in Los Angeles. His listening audience became one of the largest on the west coast and, by 1936, he had gained a reputation as the “famed radio preacher.”⁶⁸ Magnin prided himself on being able to speak on a wide variety of subjects during his broadcasts, and his audience loved him. He also prided himself on never using a script, speaking spontaneously on topics as diverse as Bible, history, Greek Literature, and Chinese Literature.⁶⁹

Magnin mused that one reason he was so successful with a diverse radio following was that his personal drive for self-development and

⁶⁷ Alfred Wolf was born on Oct. 7, 1915, in Eberbach, Germany. From an early age Wolf saw a need for ecumenical education. Proud of his heritage, though he was only one of two Jewish students in his public school, he led classmates on tours of his synagogue, in the hope that this would give them a greater understanding of the Jewish religion. As a young man Wolf courageously began his studies for the rabbinate after Adolf Hitler came to power. In 1935 Wolf was accepted at Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati, Ohio, on an exchange-student program. Wolf credited this program for saving his life, for during his tenure at HUC his parents, grandparents and aunt were deported to an internment camp in the Pyrenees, where his grandfather died. (Wolf remained in Ohio and became a U.S. citizen in 1941.) Upon ordination from Hebrew Union College, Wolf accepted his first pulpit assignment at Temple Emanu-El in Dothan Alabama, where he served for five years. In 1946 Wolf moved his growing family to Los Angeles, where he assumed the directorship of the Union of Hebrew Congregations, an organization which oversees all Reform Jewish temples. During his tenure in this position Wolf served as a guest preacher at Wilshire Boulevard Temple, where Magnin, impressed by his demeanor, convictions and ethics, hired him three years later as Associate Rabbi. During his rabbinate at Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Wolf created prototype Jewish summer camps for children. Wolf, a renowned advocate for interracial tolerance, was also an international leader in combating racial, religious and cultural prejudice.

Although Wolf spent his entire rabbinate at Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Magnin's shadow, he always remained loyal to Magnin, and declined many offers to become the spiritual leader at other congregations. Upon Magnin's death Wolf agreed to become Senior Rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple for one year, after which he retired and accepted the role of Rabbi Emeritus. Though he maintained an office at the synagogue for many years, Wolf became the founding director of the Skirball Institute on American Values of the American Jewish Committee in Los Angeles. Alfred Wolf died August 1, 1994 at the age of 88 after a period of declining health and a series of strokes.

⁶⁸ Chall, p. 242

⁶⁹ Outline of Biography for This is your Life Program, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 532/1

continual intellectual growth made him as interested in what he had to say as he hoped his audience would be. Magnin chose to examine controversial topics which would cause people to keep thinking, even after the show was over.⁷⁰

Magnin's approach to the newspaper columns he wrote for the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Los Angeles Herald* and the *Los Angeles Examiner* also showed this tendency to tackle difficult or controversial issues in a direct and personal way. Yet, not everyone was appreciative of Magnin's approach or his manner with the written word. Some found his broadcasts, columns, and even his demeanor superficial, Pollyanna-ish and not in touch with the real world—with people outside Hollywood and politics. For example, a Ms. Hart once chastised Magnin for his blithe column in the *Los Angeles Examiner* entitled "It's A Pretty Good World," and, in a letter, told him how her dog had been killed and her 75 year old husband crippled for life after being hit by a car. The doctor who was called, the woman went on, would not treat her husband, who was bleeding severely, until she made it clear she was able to pay the bill. She also stated in her letter that the smug doctor actually

⁷⁰ Chall p.126

said: “After all, I was having dinner in Beverly Hills with my friends, and I had to leave them and come here.” Ms. Hart reminded Magnin that not every one had fared as well as he, and that he needed to have more sensitivity.⁷¹

Magnin’s radio broadcasts quickly gained popularity because they were (almost) universally appealing and transcended religion and creed. In fact, Magnin’s entire approach—to his radio broadcasts, his newspapers columns, and to his rabbinate—reflected the universalistic outlook and humanistic values that attracted him to Freemasonry. Magnin joined the Scottish Rite Bodies of Los Angeles Freemasonry, and was a member of West Gate Lodge No.335 for an incredible fifty years.

The Masons’ assertion that a universal and worldwide brotherhood of man could be achieved mirrored Magnin’s ecumenical ideology. Through his involvement in the Masons Magnin could cross the boundaries of faith and reach diverse populations in a significant way. Magnin stated:

Masonry is not a religion but it is dedicated to the acceptance and appreciation of all that religion stands for. This encompasses a belief in God and the upholding and practice

⁷¹ Elvira Hart, “Letter to Magnin” July 23, 1975. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 4/13

of moral precepts and principles in daily life. It also embraces spiritual wisdom.⁷²

In 1971 Magnin was coroneted as an Inspector General Honorary Third Degree⁷³ and, in 1978, he received the “Outstanding Mason of the Year Award,” a prestigious award given to individuals who exemplify the standards and achievements reflective of Masonic ideals.⁷⁴ These high honors require considerable time and energy to achieve, and speak volumes about Magnin’s dedication to public service and charitable causes.⁷⁵

Throughout his tenure as rabbi of the Wilshire Boulevard Congregation, Magnin had numerous offers to serve as senior rabbi of large congregations all over the country. He even had a lucrative offer to relocate to New York, something he had yearned to do during rabbinical school and his early days in Stockton. Nonetheless, he turned all these offers down. To the Hollywood Jews and the

⁷²Edgar Magnin, “things to think about” Article of The New Age, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/1

⁷³ The ‘Master Mason, the Third Degree,’ is the highest degree obtainable in the Masonic system. Nonetheless, some Masonic orders such as the one to which Magnin belonged, conferred degrees with higher numbers.... “In the United States, members of the Scottish Rite can be elected to receive the 33° by the Supreme Council. It is conferred on members... in recognition of outstanding service, who have made major contributions to society or to Masonry in general.”

⁷⁴ “Of Current Interest” The New Age, California, December, 1984, pp. 33-34.

⁷⁵ Pete Normand, “The Distinctive Regalia of the Scottish Rite.” The Scottish Rite Journal, October, 2001.

celebrities he had begun to attract, Magnin was *their* Rabbi. In return, Magnin thought of Los Angeles as *his* city, which he would continue to shepherd and nurture with vigilance. Magnin was so possessive of his position that it was even unusual for him to allow guest speakers in his pulpit. He stated “I don’t ask most rabbis to speak here....They have nothing to say. Why should I ask them... [when] we run our own show?”⁷⁶ When someone disagreed with Magnin’s stance or had other ideas about how to run the synagogue, Magnin was known for encouraging such a person—in no uncertain terms—to leave and go somewhere else.⁷⁷

To non-Jewish Los Angeles as well, Magnin was the voice of authority on many issues, especially those concerning religious understanding and Jewish-Christian dialogue, and his private audience with Pope Pius in 1958 was one of many examples illustrative of his ecumenicism.

Max Vorspan, who wrote *The History of the Jews of Los Angeles*, was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1942, and retired as Senior Vice President Emeritus of the University of

⁷⁶ Chall p.116

⁷⁷ Chall pp. 103-104

Judaism in 1996.⁷⁸ Vorspan, who witnessed the increasing popularity of Magnin over the years, reported, when he visited the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, seeing:

...children getting out of their cars on Sunday morning and being hugged individually by the custodian...the eyes of the personnel shine from the glow of friendliness, which radiates through the place, when secretaries and staff express helpfulness and warmth to all who enter, you can see the influence of—Rabbi Magnin. And when you visit the other rabbis and staff members as I did over the years, and see their warmth and graciousness and readiness to serve God and man irrespective of faith and color and national allegiance...you see the heightened shadow of Rabbi Magnin.⁷⁹

Magnin himself lived what he preached, and was known for his contact with people from all walks of life. Though he relished personally knowing the powerful personalities of his era, he also had an appreciation for individuals who struggled to succeed despite obstacles and disadvantages. Perhaps he maintained this tender spot for the underdog, once again, because of his own upbringing, marred by divorce at a time when divorce was not socially acceptable. Perhaps he felt, because he was able to achieve so much with so

⁷⁸ Max Vorspan served as Chaplain in the U.S. Army during WW II. He was one of the founders of the University of Judaism, served as its Senior Vice President and retired as Senior Vice President Emeritus in 1996. Vorspan was instrumental in changing it from a small teacher's college to a nationally known undergraduate and graduate institution.

⁷⁹ Max Vorspan, "Eulogy For Rabbi Edgar Magnin" August 15, 1984, p.3, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1

little, that it was his responsibility to ‘give back’ and pull someone else up the ladder. During a sermon at B’nai B’rith in 1921, Magnin stated:

The birthright of every man, woman, and child is the blessing of religious consciousness, communion with God, the inspiration to work for the welfare of all suffering human beings, for the improvement of society and the advancement of civilization. When people become too wealthy to feel that force in their lives, or too educated in their own opinions, they have lost much and are truly to be pitied. In the last analysis, contentment is a mental condition and little dependent upon physical wealth or the possession of a great intellect. Only the God-fearing man-loving individual is the truly happy man.”⁸⁰

During World War I Magnin served as a chaplain in Los Angeles, beginning what would become a life-long interest in helping those serving in the armed forces and their families. He also helped raise money for the war effort and was instrumental in organizational development and fundraising for the Jewish Welfare Board (JWB) and the USO. Magnin went on to chair the budget committee of the United Jewish Appeal in 1928, and within a few years also found himself on the selection committee for the first board of directors of the Jewish Welfare fund.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Edgar Magnin, sermon note American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4 Nearprint 1915-1929

⁸¹ Chall p. 159

In March of 1933 Magnin was instrumental in organizing a protest meeting at the Los Angeles Philharmonic auditorium, where he expressed his outrage over Hitler's reign in Germany. Magnin reiterated the overriding ecumenical attitude which drove him to organize this meeting of 20,000 attendees with his statement that: "This is not a Jewish, nor Catholic, nor Protestant meeting, but an American Meeting." He went on to point out that Americans needed to be united in forcing Germany to stop persecuting the Jews.⁸² In addition, Magnin was a member and subsequent chairman of the Jewish Welfare Board's (JWB) division of Armed services, a position in which he was privy to confidential information from debriefing services. In April of 1956 Magnin was asked to be the keynote speaker for the JWB's Torah Convocation, and his presence was so important to the organization that they decided that they would work their schedule around his, in order to ensure his availability.⁸³ In conjunction with his appointment to the armed services division of the JWB, Magnin made a visit to Israel on March 22, 1953—his first visit in 17 years. Magnin stated: "I tried

⁸² Al Waxman, "LA Jewry Holds Mass Meeting To Protest Anti-Semitism In Germany" California Jewish Voice 3/31/33, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: M S 344 42/1

⁸³ Robert Saffer, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 4/3 April 25, 1956 MS 344 4/3 information services

to be as objective as possible but I came away inspired, hopeful and encouraged.”⁸⁴ Over the years Magnin voiced his support of Israel as a people and even worked on promoting the sale of Israel bonds. In 1953 he stated:

Rabbis and lay leaders of congregations in Southern California are working diligently to make this High Holy Day sale of Israel Bonds the foundations for uniting the spiritual and economic ties which bind us with Israel. They look to and deserve the support of every B’nai B’rith member both in organization, endorsement and purchases of Israel bonds in Synagogues.⁸⁵

However, he stopped short of being a Zionist, and as mentioned in previous chapters, he even refused to have an Israeli flag in his sanctuary. Magnin on many occasions voiced his pride at being an American and made it very clear that although he supported Israel, he was an American and therefore would spend most of his time promoting the “American way in our great country.”⁸⁶

Magnin was very vocal, however, in speaking out against the Soviet Union:

...We still have a demagogue greedy for power. They are patriots for profit. They want their names splashed over the pages of every newspaper. They have no respect for human

⁸⁴ “Israel Described as ‘Going Concern’” Los Angeles Times, May 14, 1953.

⁸⁵ American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/13 Nearprint 1954

⁸⁶ Ibid.

life or dignity. We must beware of the Iron Curtain countries without, the real Communists within, and the various demagogues who, under the guise of fighting Communism, are Fascists at heart and can easily destroy this country. America and all free countries must always be alert to the influences that destroy the freedoms of mankind...⁸⁷

During World War II Magnin reported how he, along with a Protestant minister and a Catholic priest, went to the Aleutian Islands to encourage the troops. Magnin again displayed his attraction to the powerful when he stated: "I wined and dined with the generals and the heads of the navy, the commanders,"⁸⁸ but also went on to exclaim how pleasurable it was not only to converse with the officials and be privy to covert military operations, but also to sleep among the troops. Magnin was voted in as honorary chairman of the Armed Forces and Veterans Service Council extension of the Jewish Welfare Board in the 1940s.

In August of 1984, during his tribute to Magnin, Rabbi Rubin A. Huttler, President of the Board of Rabbis of Southern California, reported how Magnin's outreach transformed the Jewish community, and illustrated his point by describing Magnin's friendship with the Orthodox rabbi Osher Zilberstein, with whom

⁸⁷ Edgar Magnin, "Beware! New Pharaohs" Heritage, Thursday April 15, 1954, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/14

⁸⁸ *Ibid.* p.120

Magnin had a cordial and collegial relationship for years. Magnin helped Zilberstein establish the first Jewish Day School in Los Angeles, and the two men also developed new ways to bring the Jewish community at large closer together while respecting denominational differences. Magnin was, in fact, the person the Zilberstein family chose to eulogize Osher Zilberstein upon his death.⁸⁹ Max Vorspan, again noting Magnin's concern for the entire Jewish community, also recalled how, when the Conservative Sinai Temple of Los Angeles faced foreclosure in 1933, it was Magnin who convinced the Wilshire Boulevard Temple board to raise enough funds to save their neighboring congregation.⁹⁰ In another display of interdenominational understanding, Magnin, in 1975, spearheaded an unprecedented joint High Holiday Memorial (*Yizchor*) service, which included Orthodox, Reform and Conservative Jews and which was attended by more than 1,000 people.⁹¹ During his sermon at this service Magnin expressed his thoughts on the afterlife, saying: "With all my heart I believe in a future life, just what it is, who knows, until you get there. But man is

⁸⁹Rubin Huttler, "Magnin Eulogy", p. 2, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1.

⁹⁰ Max Vorspan, "Eulogy For Rabbi Edgar Magnin" August 15, 1984, p.3 American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1

⁹¹ American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 47/5

not just bones and flesh. He has a soul, and there is a kindred Soul for the Universe.”⁹² Magnin then urged the gathering not to be blinded by materialism, status, or division, and encouraged them all to work together for the common cause of bettering humanity.⁹³

Over the years Magnin not only saw bigotry within the Jewish community (in the ongoing difficulties in the relationship between Eastern European and German Jews), but in the country at large in the ongoing struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Yet, Magnin said little to further the cause of racial equality. He referred to the issues surrounding the Civil Rights movement as “the Negro problem.”⁹⁴

In 1964 Magnin attended a meeting for the Foundations of Religious Action in the Social and Civil Order in Washington, D.C. While in Washington, Magnin met his friend Chief Justice Warren. Later Magnin would exclaim:

You never know in this world what people are, who they are or what they are going to become....At this meeting it was my task to bring out some of the things that would strengthen democracy in America. Every speaker except me only talked on religion. I love my God and that's why I am a Rabbi, but

⁹²“Rabbi's Holy Days talk Stresses Eternal Life” Los Angeles Times, p.18 Mon September 26, 1955. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/11

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Edger Magnin, “Sermon”, Sat. May 13, 1961, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 13/1

I'm not sure that's the whole answer.... But religion or irreligion isn't the only thing that makes people bad citizens. Some of them are plain stupid. A lot of them are ignorant and most have no imagination. I couldn't help but think when the problem of segregation came up...you take the man who doesn't want to give the Negro a chance. I've often thoughteverybody had more of a chance, who knows what someone who has had no chance might have created. Maybe a child who dies tonight through a disease...might have been saved because some person might have invented or discovered a cure for that thing, [someone] who never had a chance, because some rotten bigot wouldn't give him a chance to go to school.⁹⁵

On Aug 2, 1966, Magnin was asked to become National Vice-Chairman of the 1966–1967 Reform Jewish Appeal. This organization was designed to help finance the UAHC, Hebrew Union College and other projects important to the Reform movement.⁹⁶ Magnin characteristically used this new platform to promote tolerance, religious and otherwise. In his newspaper column “Dr. Magnin Says,” dated November 29, 1968, Magnin stated:

Unless we are twins or triplets, we come into this life all by ourselves and that's the way most of us leave it. Yet we are all one family, one flesh, one soul...Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Afro-Americans, Indian, Caucasians...the same laughter the same tears. No need to be cold like the concrete

⁹⁵ Magnin Edgar, “What Happened in Washington November 12, 1964”, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 12/1

⁹⁶ Jules Backman, letter to Magnin; regarding the Reform Jewish Appeal: Aug 2, 1966, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 50/3

pavements or suspicious like a frightened rabbit. Underneath the masks are people, like you and me....⁹⁷

Despite the fact that Magnin's opinions were often in conflict with the currents of his time, he nonetheless never compromised his values, or weakened his stand on controversial subjects. Shortly before his 80th birthday Magnin was interviewed about his thoughts on retirement. Magnin answered: "Why should retire....I keep alive to what's happening, read everything. I want to keep ahead of these punks who think they're the enlightened generation."⁹⁸ Throughout his life Magnin stressed his rabbinate's success, and believed that his gifts and talents were God-given. He stated: "...the pulpit is a work of art, just like making a painting or sculpture, or dancing, or anything in music. It's an art. And you have to be born to it."⁹⁹

Magnin, not surprisingly, handpicked both his administrative staff and the clergy that would work by his side. For the most part he received unquestioning loyalty, and his staff was very adept at keeping the private business which took place in the inner sanctum

⁹⁷ Edgar Magnin, "Dr. Magnin Says Article" Los Angeles Herald Examiner, November 29, 1968 American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 52/8

⁹⁸ Dan Thrapp, "Rabbi Magnin, Near 80, Scoffs at Retirement", Los Angeles Times . June 28, 1970 sec H p.6-7, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 33/6

⁹⁹ Chall, p. 127

of The Wilshire Boulevard Temple quiet. However, this is not to say that Magnin's career always ran smoothly.

On 26 February 1971 Wilshire Boulevard Temple announced that Rabbi Lawrence Goldmark, an Army chaplain, would be joining their team of clergy. Goldmark, a native of Los Angeles, had already worked under Magnin at the temple religious school and camp for a number of years, and the congregation thought that he and Magnin would be a great match.¹⁰⁰ Goldmark's specialty was working with youth, and very quickly, because the Temple's children and teens responded so well to his leadership, youth-programming at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple grew tremendously. Goldmark recounted how "...The Wilshire Boulevard Temple was referred to as "Magnin's Temple"—because everyone knew that it was Rabbi Magnin who was behind its great success...."¹⁰¹ Goldmark also recalled the circumstances of his controversial dismissal from Magnin's rabbinical staff. He stated:

Rosh Hashanah was on October 2, 1978. On October 3, the day after a very laborious Rosh Hashanah, I walked into Rabbi Magnin's office. I said: 'Rabbi Magnin, it's my

¹⁰⁰ Edgar Magnin. letter "Rabbi Lawrence J. Goldmark Appointed To the Rabbinic staff of Wilshire Boulevard Temple", Febuary 26, 1971, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 3/6

¹⁰¹ Oral Interview with Lawrence Goldberg, February 15, 2009

birthday.’ He said: ‘Congratulations and I also want to tell you its time for you to leave.’ Magnin went on to tell me not to try to get the members of the congregation to try to change his mind, as his decision was final....He told me to take my time, to go through placement, but he had made up his mind. I went to the office of the executive director, Gerald Burg. I told Gerry what happened; he said that I was full of crap for he knew everything that was going on [around the temple]. Burg went upstairs to Rabbi Magnin and came back down [a few minutes later] and said ‘you’re right, you are out of here’.¹⁰²

Goldmark then recalled that the board did not have the power to overrule Rabbi Magnin. The president of the congregation later wrote a note for the temple bulletin stating that Goldmark had resigned from the congregation.¹⁰³

Goldmark was devastated, not only because of Magnin’s abrupt and nonchalant manner, but furthermore because neither Magnin nor any one else ever gave Goldmark a reason for his untimely termination. Forty years later, Goldmark remains curious as to why he was dismissed.¹⁰⁴

Perhaps Magnin fired Goldmark because he was beginning to feel that his own popularity among the Temple’s youth was waning or being challenged by a younger man. Nonetheless, whatever the reason, according to Goldmark, Magnin forced his untimely

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

resignation. And although Magnin did not give a timetable for Goldmark's departure, Goldmark was so devastated that he left the congregation in December of 1978, although he remained on the Temple's payroll until June of 1979.

Goldmark's abrupt disappearance caused a great deal of controversy in the congregation regarding the apparent "cover-up" of the details. An outpouring of angry letters appeared in Magnin's office, all expressing disappointment over how the situation was handled and how Goldmark's resignation was a great loss to the congregation and its children.¹⁰⁵

On January 21, 1973, sharing the stage with Reverend Billy Graham and Archbishop Joseph L. Bernadin, Magnin once again had the honor of speaking at the White House Worship Service, and this time chose to speak about the "New Morality." Challenging Americans to be aware of the dangers of free love, individualism, and ethical decline, Magnin stated that: "...idealism not coupled with common sense and practicality is absolutely fatuous and foolish and must lose in the end....You know what the new morality is? It's

¹⁰⁵ Letters regarding Goldmark's resignation, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344
3/6

the old immorality.”¹⁰⁶ Magnin continued on the theme of the decline of morality and the notion of indiscriminant sexual behavior, and commented on loose morals, especially among young women, who, he asserted, later would regret their behavior. Magnin stated “...the next morning you pay for it. Pregnancy-you pay for it. When he runs away from you-you pay for it...”¹⁰⁷

Magnin also spoke about the sanctity of marriage and the ways in which he believed the “New Morality” was affecting the security of life and home, asserting that those who referred to the marriage license as “just a piece of paper” were simply not “contented individuals.” He ended this impassioned speech by dismissing the notion of “situational ethics” and giving his own definition of the term: “What is situation [*sic*] ethics? (It means) I will judge the situation myself. I am judge and jury of what I do. And, of course, I am not prejudiced.”¹⁰⁸ Magnin received accolades all across America for his willingness in this speech to express overtly what many silently thought, and although Magnin also received opposition from many liberal Americans, he did not

¹⁰⁶ Edgar Magnin., American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

¹⁰⁷ Alice Widener, “Rabbi Magnin Tells It Like It Is”, Omaha World Herald, February 24, 1973 p.6 American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 5/5

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

apologize for his words or his stance. On the contrary, he often relished the controversy created by his sometimes unpopular and occasionally outlandish positions and comments. For example, Magnin often pointed out why he did not allow an Israeli flag in the Wilshire Boulevard Temple sanctuary. He stated:

...We don't have an (Israeli) national flag here because we are Americans. These are my people. This is my flesh and blood. But for the grace of God I would have been in the camps too. I'm for them one hundred percent, and honor them, and work for them and give, but it's not my nation. I only have one nation at a time. So, I've taken a very strenuous point of view on this. I don't fool around with it."¹⁰⁹

But, as we have seen, not everyone appreciated Magnin's extreme views or his lavish lifestyle. Many of his critics thought he had "sold out" to the powerful, rich and famous, and had catered to their needs while ignoring the true tenets of Jewish values. The critical phone calls and letters Magnin received were, though, often veiled by tentativeness, because individuals and organizations did not want to offend him, fearing that his access to powerful connections would result in hidden or outright retribution. One organization "politely" critical of Magnin was the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (UAHC). Most Reform

¹⁰⁹ Chall p. 103

synagogues pay dues to and are members of the Union, as was the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. However, after a heated dispute, Magnin, in 1974, had the congregation's board withdraw its membership from the UAHC. In a letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times, Magnin wrote that the:

...Wilshire Boulevard Temple has been affiliated with this organization [UAHC] over many years and has contributed financially in a large measure to its maintenance. One of my criticisms of the UAHC has been its constant pronunciamientos by a few leaders, on touchy and complex questions without consulting the congregations who pay its bills...¹¹⁰

The Union responded to Magnin's comment by writing him a private letter dated October 30, 1975, reminding Magnin not to speak rudely about the UAHC. The letter stated:

...The Union is not perfect but reform should be accomplished without destroying the Union and the College...it is my sincere belief that the movement is more important to all of us and we must do what we can to make the Union and the College correct the abuses of which we complain.¹¹¹

The UAHC was very aware of the repercussions of the Wilshire Boulevard's resignation from the Union. Therefore, on

¹¹⁰ re: "UAHC Rabbi's Comments" Letter to Editor Los Angeles Times May 8, 1974, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

¹¹¹ Kaufman, Basil Letter To Magnin October 30, 1975, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

Sept 21, 1978, Harold Dubinsky, former Chair of the UAHC Maintenance of Union Membership committee, wrote Magnin an impassioned letter urging that Wilshire Boulevard rejoin the UAHC.¹¹² Magnin responded on September 27, 1978, asserting that the UAHC was established initially “to raise money for the College and not to keep half of it and develop a separate hierarchy.” Magnin expressed that although he disagreed with the practices of the UAHC, Wilshire Boulevard Temple continued to send half of its UAHC dues in order to support Hebrew Union College. However, even that practice discontinued once Magnin and the congregation realized that the UAHC was utilizing half the funds Wilshire Boulevard Temple earmarked for Hebrew Union College for its own purposes.¹¹³ Magnin was adamant that Hebrew Union College should receive every cent designated to them. He was such a staunch supporter of the college that, when he withdrew the congregation from the UAHC, he did so with the risk of being ostracized by the Union. However, it was a risk he seemed ready to take. He

¹¹²Harold Dubinsky, Letter to Magnin September 21, 1978, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

¹¹³Edgar Magnin, Letter to Dubinsky September 27, 1978, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

continued his support of HUC, especially of the Los Angeles campus, whose educational department carries his name to this day.

Dubinsky responded to Magnin, stating: "I believe I have done as much as I can do to achieve a peaceful solution to the Wilshire UAHC relationship....", and decided that he was not going to use any more time or energy trying to resolve the conflict. Instead, he would forward the matter to other individuals in the agency, who perhaps could resolve the dispute.¹¹⁴

Magnin did eventually show, though, that he was capable of changing his opinion. Perhaps the influence of the young members of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, who wanted to join the Reform Movement's energetic national youth movement changed his mind, or maybe, with changing times, Magnin realized that the Wilshire Boulevard Temple needed to be under the auspices of the UAHC as much as the UAHC needed the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in its membership books. In any case, on Sept 15, 1981 Alexander Schindler, President of the UAHC, wrote Magnin expressing his

¹¹⁴Harold Dubinsky. Letter To Magnin October 1978, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati:

delight: "...to have Wilshire Boulevard Temple back in its rightful place as a member-congregation of the UAHC."¹¹⁵

Some individuals and organizations, on the other hand, were not at all concerned to soften any criticism they might have of Magnin. In 1974, in an editorial Magnin wrote for the *Los Angeles Times* which chastised clergy who sought the limelight and took it upon themselves to speak for their institutions on controversial issues, Magnin wrote:

... I doubt whether any priest, minister or rabbi has not from time to time expressed himself or herself definitively and strongly on a certain social issue. However, some of us are reluctant to inject ourselves constantly into situations which are very complex...on the grounds that we are God's special agents to solve all difficult problems....While political activism may be justified or imperative in some cases, a minister could remember that his congregation consists of many people of conflicting opinions. It is also possible to make wrong judgments with the very best of intentions.¹¹⁶

Magnin received a great deal of feedback regarding his stand on this subject, some of which was surprisingly venomous. For example, a citizen from San Francisco wrote Magnin expressing his disappointment that Magnin would participate in a Prayer Breakfast

¹¹⁵ Alexander Schindler, Letter to Magnin September 15, 1981, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 334 6/3

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

at the White House, and then have the nerve to berate other Jewish clergy who spoke up about causes that they believed in.

... [you] created within me and many others a deep contempt for your type of religion especially since it is mine too....I prayed each night for our late President Johnson, and now I shall pray for you too—that nothing good should happen to you now—that you live a long and terrible life, like those whose lives are haunted by the misdeed and preachings of our President Nixon, now, for all the woes heedlessly brought into this world and blessed by you and others as patriotic and godly. My contempt, for you in particularly [*sic*] for partaking in the religious frauds at the White House, speaking for me, and Judaism in particular, knows no bounds. My hopes remain high...that the errors of your preaching eventually get to you as well as your congregation.¹¹⁷

Magnin did not respond to this letter, and often viewed those who opposed his views as narrow-minded, ignorant, or too insignificant to warrant any further thought. This attitude infuriated some and drew admiration from others. Magnin received a flurry of letters containing both praise and contempt for his stand on this issue.¹¹⁸

In 1978, the City of Los Angeles awarded Magnin the Distinguished Service Medal, the city's highest honor. Magnin was reportedly very moved by this award, for he felt it was a symbol of his life's mission to serve all humanity, and to give visibility to those

¹¹⁷ George Katz., Letter to Magnin May 25 1974, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

¹¹⁸ Letters to Magnin, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 Box 6

“others” whom society deemed unnecessary or invisible.

Throughout the ensuing years Magnin would continue to pass judgment, cast favor, or disparage individuals, not because of their color or religion, but because of his estimation of their character and their contributions to society. In a letter to the editor of the Los Angeles Times dated October 24, 1979 Magnin wrote:

Thank goodness we have leaders who are sincere and use their heads and hearts. They offset the evil effects of misleaders who utilize crises in the interest of personal power, publicity or material gain. Outstanding are Julius Lester (a Jewish African American writer and scholar) and Vernon E. Jordan, president of the National Urban League. They are humanitarians who realize that both Jews and blacks, being minorities, have been the scapegoats in times of crisis. They are the true followers of Martin Luther King, Jr., whose philosophy was “Love is the most durable power on earth.”¹¹⁹

In a letter dated September 2, 1981 Magnin graciously declined an invitation to dinner at the White House in honor of Menachem Begin, because his advanced age and poor health made it difficult for him to travel. In his letter Magnin expressed his appreciation of Reagan’s leadership, common sense, dignity, and humility and praised the manner in which he conducted himself

¹¹⁹ Edgar Magnin. Letter to the Editor Los Angeles Times October 24, 1979. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/3

privately and professionally.¹²⁰ Reagan's admiration for Magnin was mutual, for when it was publicized that the Wilshire Boulevard Temple would be celebrating its 120th anniversary, the President wrote a moving letter to Magnin:

...I understand that the Great Sanctuary of the Temple will be named after you. This is a well-deserved tribute to the spiritual guidance and leadership you have given to the Wilshire Boulevard Temple. For bringing solace and comfort to a community of believers; for keeping alive the flame of hope which has carried your people through so many dark hours; for upholding the living traditions of religious faith—the essence of our nation's strength; for all this and more, we offer our heartfelt good wishes.¹²¹

When Magnin died of natural causes on July 18, 1984, people throughout the country were deeply saddened by the loss of such a vocal social reformer and vital and inspirational personality. Words of condolence were sent from the White House and from all over the world. Mayor Bradley of Los Angeles lowered the flag to half-mast, and thousands attended Magnin's funeral, making visible through their diversity the many ways in which Magnin had touched people's lives.

¹²⁰ Edgar Magnin, Letter to 'The Honorable Ronald Reagan'. September 2, 1981, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 5/11

¹²¹ Reagan, Ronald. Letter to Magnin. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 5/11 1982

Fittingly, Magnin's words did not stop with his death, and after only a few months *365 Vitamins for the Mind* was released to the public, giving people who did not know Magnin the opportunity to become acquainted with this complex, fascinating, and historically noteworthy man.

Chapter III

Rabbi to the Stars

“There Is No Substitution For The Warmth Of Friendship”

Edgar Magnin

During his extraordinary 69 year tenure at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Edgar Magnin became rabbi to many of the powerful Jewish businessmen and celebrities in the television and motion picture industry. Also, in addition to his many congregants and friends from the entertainment industry, Magnin counted a Catholic Cardinal, an Episcopal bishop, a Baptist minister, a Buddhist Priest, two presidents and a multitude of political and literary figures, including Albert Einstein, as personal friends. He was often called to officiate at the funerals of the famous as well—George Gershwin, Louis Mayer and Sam Warner to name a few.¹²²

As mentioned previously, Magnin had the honor of knowing two U.S. presidents personally. On January 20, 1969, after Magnin delivered a stirring prayer at President Nixon’s inauguration, Nixon was so moved that he wrote Magnin to tell him how much the prayer meant to him. Nixon even made copies of Magnin’s prayer, and

¹²² Outline of Biography for This Is Your life, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 52/1

distributed them to people who had not been present at the event.¹²³

Also, after participating in both of Governor Ronald Reagan's inaugurations in California (January 2, 1967 and January 4, 1971), Magnin and his wife became life-long friends of the Reagans' and maintained regular correspondence with them until Magnin's death.

Magnin's involvement in the movie industry began quite innocently, when, greatly disturbed by D.W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* (a powerful silent film which depicted African Americans in a demeaning, racist, and patronizing manner) he spoke out against the film in his Succoth sermon in Stockton in 1915. Magnin's outcry was much-publicized, and his interest in the movie industry did not wane when he later moved to Los Angeles.¹²⁴ Yet, when Magnin moved to Los Angeles he did not actively seek contact with people in the industry-- they sought *him* out. This fact has given rise to a great deal of speculation as to why Magnin was so attractive to the famous and powerful. Some believe that he, as an American-born Jew thoroughly assimilated through the experience of growing up in Northern California, possessed qualities that German and Eastern European-born Jews lacked, but desperately wanted. Magnin, who

¹²³ American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 5/6

¹²⁴ Ava Kahn, and Marc Dollinger, eds. California Jews. (New Hampshire: Brandeis University Press, 2003) p.98.

was also by nature artistic and charismatic, effortlessly wove in and out of diverse social settings—an attribute which was engaging to immigrants who aspired to do the same. In addition, Magnin, unlike others who were trying to jockey their way up in the movie empire, did not pose a threat to political or Hollywood figures because of his vocation as a rabbi. He was widely thought of as the Jewish shepherd of Hollywood, and counted a large a flock of celebrities among his sheep.¹²⁵ Hollywood movie moguls known for their cut-throat decisions would seek out Magnin's advice regarding the political and moral correctness of their movies, and on more than one occasion movie reviews were actually postponed until Magnin could come and give his opinion.¹²⁶

One man who especially depended on Magnin's input, candor and deep friendship was Louis B. Mayer. Mayer emigrated from Russia to St. John, New Brunswick in 1888, when he was approximately three years old.¹²⁷ (Mayer later adopted the fourth of July as his official birthday, claiming that his birth records had been lost.) Mayer was ambitious and enterprising at an early age, and when he got his first wagon at five years old, young Louis looked at

¹²⁵ Gabler, 1988 p.280

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 282

¹²⁷ Ibid. p. 82

his mother and told her that he was going to figure out a way to make money with it. Mayer, who felt formal education was irrelevant for his life's ambitions, quit school at twelve to work for his tyrannical father in the family salvage business, where the exploited young man was sent all over Canada to bid for inexpensive scrap metal at auctions. Mayer would later report that he had no regrets about quitting school so young, and would have quit at an earlier age had it been possible.¹²⁸

In spite of being a conscientious employee and dutiful son, Mayer felt that his father was never satisfied, and worse, he was frequently even abused and humiliated by his father, which added more pain to his already difficult childhood. On January 1, 1904, at the age of nineteen and with the encouragement of his mother, Mayer severed ties with his father's business and left for Boston, Massachusetts, hoping to start a new life. Mayer's family reported how, as the years passed, he blocked out many of the negative events of his childhood, and in adulthood chose simply to idolize and memorialize his mother.¹²⁹

¹²⁸ Ibid. p. 83

¹²⁹ Louis Mayer, The Life and Legend Of Louis B. Mayer. (New York: Simon & Schuster).pp. 24-28

Magnin met Mayer soon after he moved to Los Angeles from Stockton. The two men quickly became friends. Magnin undoubtedly could identify with the obstacles which an unstable, unconventional childhood had presented to Mayer, and was appreciative of Mayer's drive and success in spite of these challenges. Magnin undoubtedly identified with Mayer who was, like himself, a creative personality and a man smitten by a belief in the American dream.¹³⁰ Magnin's comfortable and intimate friendship with Mayer endured for decades. The two men frequently lunched together at the Hillcrest Country Club, and dined together regularly at the Mayers' traditional Sunday brunch.¹³¹ They were, in fact, such close friends that Magnin once made Mayer an offer to "take over his life." Because Mayer did not often let people get close to him and see the softer side of his personality, Magnin was moved to tell him:

I want to change your life...I want to run your life....I want six months for you to do what I say and people will love you and bless the day your mother brought you into this world. You're a good man, and people don't know that about you. They don't know the lovely things that you've done.¹³²

¹³⁰ Gabler, 1988 pp. 83-84

¹³¹ Chall p.191

¹³² Gabler, 1988 pp. 281-282

Mayer knew his friend's intentions were good and did not take offense at Magnin's offer, yet he, of course, graciously declined to hand the reigns of his life to anyone. Later, in the early 1930s, Mayer would, in his own way, mirror Magnin's offer to transform *his* life by offering Magnin a position at MGM. He announced to Magnin that he could choose any position he wanted, but Magnin responded by stating: "I'm not interested. I want to be your rabbi for life...."¹³³

Milton Berle was another of Magnin's close friends from Hollywood, and maintained his friendship with Magnin for over 50 years. Berle commented that Magnin would trade jokes, play golf and just hang out with "his boys," who also included George Jessel and George Burns.¹³⁴ Rabbi Magnin was not beyond exchanging off-color jokes or participating in opinionated debates with his friends. To Berle and many other Hollywood giants, these qualities made Magnin seem refreshingly authentic, and caused him to stand out in the Hollywood world of pretense and fantasy. According to Berle, Magnin was: "...a wonderful man... he had a wonderful

¹³³ Chall p. 192

¹³⁴ "Hollywood celebrities mourn Edgar Magnin", San Antonio Light, July 19, 1984, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS344 37/1

sense of humor and could trade jokes with all the comedians during lunch at the club.”¹³⁵

Magnin also had a soft spot for Irving Grant Thalberg, affectionately known as “The Boy Wonder.”¹³⁶ Thalberg was born in New York on May 30, 1899, to German immigrant parents. According to his doctors’ prognoses, Thalberg, who was plagued with a congenital heart condition, would not live beyond the age of thirty. Because of his illness Thalberg spent a great deal of his childhood in bed reading, where he developed a fascination with stories and began, to help pass the time, to make up stories of his own.¹³⁷ His keenly developed imagination coupled with the looming possibility of an early death perhaps eventually motivated Thalberg to channel his budding skills and intense focus into enterprises unusual for someone his age. Yet, because of his illness and fragility, early on Thalberg felt compelled to work as a clerk in his grandfather’s department store rather than go to college, where he had hoped to study law.¹³⁸ Thalberg’s abilities predictably prevented him from remaining satisfied as a clerk, and, after

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ “G. Thalberg Dies.” New York Times. September 15, 1936.

¹³⁷ Gabler, pp. 218-219

¹³⁸ Gabler, p. 219

completing a secretarial course in order to enhance his employability, he placed an advertisement in the local paper marketing his newly acquired skills. He was soon hired by Taylor, Clapp and Beall, a firm which imported and exported films.¹³⁹

The talented Thalberg was quickly promoted to head Taylor, Clapp and Beall's export department, and, soon after this, in 1918, he was hired by the chiefs of Universal Film Manufacturing Company to work for Universal City (Universal Studio's movie lot) as a secretary.¹⁴⁰ Within a short period Thalberg became the private secretary of Universal Studio giant Carl Laemmle, who, impressed with Thalberg, quickly groomed him for an executive position, and, at the age of twenty-one, promoted him to production manager.¹⁴¹

Thalberg had an uncanny ability to put together extraordinary production teams, and this, coupled with the fact that he paid attention to the finest details, enabled him to produce many films of genuine quality. His demeanor, work ethic and expertise as a producer commanded respect from his peers and employees, yet Thalberg remained authentically modest and unassuming—qualities

¹³⁹ Roland Flamini, *The Last Tycoon and the World of M-G-M.* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994).

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Gabler, 1988 pp. 218-236

which were rare in an industry rife with arrogance and self-indulgence.¹⁴² One astonishing fact about Thalberg was that he never included himself in the credits of the blockbuster movies he produced. His motto was: “Credit you give yourself isn’t worth having.”¹⁴³ Being a man of obvious integrity, Thalberg was a rare reminder to the cutthroat Hollywood movie industry that arrogance was not a virtue.

Thalberg’s deep, quiet intensity and modest personality perhaps attracted him to Magnin’s over-sized personality, as, conversely, Magnin was attracted to Thalberg’s approachability and unassuming manner. Also like Magnin, Thalberg had an ‘open door policy’ to staff in need.

The “The Boy Wonder” was also one of the most eligible young bachelors in Hollywood, and when he married actress Norma Shearer Magnin officiated at the wedding. Magnin converted Shearer to Judaism prior to the wedding. Not surprisingly, Magnin adopted a fairly radical approach to conversion and interfaith weddings in general, feeling there was no need for long, drawn out conversion processes. Magnin believed that either people were

¹⁴² Roland Flamini, The Last Tycoon and the World of M-G-M. (New York: Crown Publishers, 1994).

¹⁴³ Gabler, p. 225

sincere and would follow the tenets of Judaism or they were insincere and would not, and the need to educate potential converts as to what these tenets might be did not seem to be critically important to him. Because, for Magnin, conversion depended on “sincerity” or “intention,” instead of a course of study or a commitment to Jewish practice, conversion took on an almost Christian “belief based” character, and could therefore be expedited. Thus, when Norma Shearer decided that she wanted to convert to Judaism, Magnin was quick to oblige.¹⁴⁴

After the postwar period African-Americans began to discover that they could gain strength in their fight for civil rights if they worked against bigotry in unity with the Jews, who also suffered, at this time, from overt discrimination. David Leonard, a scholar of Black-Jewish relations, states how Jews and African Americans joined forces to fight against racism and anti-Semitism.¹⁴⁵ Although there is no certain evidence of Magnin working with any known civil rights organizations, he did seem to single out well-known individuals with whom to collaborate. One

¹⁴⁴ Chall, p. 113

¹⁴⁵ Leonard, David. "The Little Fuehrer Invades Los Angeles": The Emergence of a Black-Jewish Coalition after World War II - *American Jewish History* 92:1 and *American Jewish History* 92:2 . (New York: John Hopkins University Press 2005) pp. 81-102.

man who would be particularly instrumental in building bridges among all races in Los Angeles was Edgar Magnin's friend and future Mayor of Los Angeles, Tom Bradley.¹⁴⁶

Bradley met Magnin early in his political career. Magnin was impressed by Bradley, who, like Thalberg, was quiet and unassuming while possessing incredible drive. The two men served together in numerous civic organizations and participated in interfaith activities as well. In time, Bradley referred to Magnin as "My rabbi," and it appears he genuinely meant it. While Magnin encouraged Bradley during difficult times in his mayorship, Bradley challenged Magnin to get out of the comfort zone of Beverly Hills and experience Los Angeles's real diversity.

¹⁴⁶ Tom Bradley, the son of a sharecropper and the grandson of slaves, was born, in Calvert, Texas on Dec. 29, 1917. As a child he picked cotton to help supplement his family's meager income, and throughout his childhood and young adulthood experienced the oppression of prejudice. Bradley, a man of integrity who rarely showed emotion, was known for his focused determination and quiet disposition. Bradley married Ethel May Arnold in 1941 and together they had three children, one of whom unfortunately died shortly after birth. Bradley joined the Los Angeles Police force in 1940, and rose to the rank of Lieutenant during his twenty-one year career at the department. Bradley enrolled in night school, while working full-time on the police force, obtained his law degree and passed the California bar exam in 1957. In 1963 Bradley decided to run for public office and won, which made him Los Angeles's first African-American city councilman, and Los Angeles's first African American mayor in 1973, an office which he held with pride for an unprecedented five terms. Source: Leonard, David. "The Little Fuehrer Invades Los Angeles": The Emergence of a Black-Jewish Coalition after World War II - American Jewish History 92:1 American Jewish History 92.1. (New York: John Hopkins University Press, 2005), pp. 81-102

Bradley was the political “King” of Los Angeles, as Magnin was its Jewish “King,” and this unlikely match was a team to be reckoned with. In fact, Bradley was instrumental in bringing religious and civic leaders together in 1980 to celebrate Magnin’s 90th birthday and his 65 years as the spiritual leader of the Wilshire Boulevard Temple.¹⁴⁷ When he died on September 29, 1998, Bradley was credited with transforming Los Angeles from a crime-ridden area to be avoided, to an international destination for entertainment and trade.¹⁴⁸

Jack Benny, another of Magnin’s famous friends, admired Magnin for being the type of rabbi who did not exude spiritual superiority, and was not awed by or afraid to speak his mind to Hollywood “giants”.¹⁴⁹ Magnin also admired Benny for his commitment to the Americans serving overseas in the Armed Forces, and for his role in the highly-regarded movie “To Be Or Not

¹⁴⁷ Richard Riordan, “The Man Who Got Things Done”. Newsweek, October 12, 1998

¹⁴⁸ Sources: The New Yorker, April 24, 1989, The Los Angeles Times, April 14, 1991; July 7, 1991; July 21, 1991

¹⁴⁹ Benjamin Kubelsky (aka Jack Benny) was born on February 14, 1894 in Chicago to the parents of Meyer & Emma Kubelsky. Benny moved to Los Angeles in the 1920’s. In 1937 he introduced actor Eddie “Rochester” Anderson to his comedy team. Anderson would often be scripted to upstage Benny and was treated as an equal cast member. Benny would not tolerate racial discrimination towards his friend and more than one occasion threatened to leave an establishment because of the discriminatory tenets of segregation. Source: Benny, Jack; Benny, Joan. *Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story*. New York: Warner Books, 1990 This was a bold stand for a Hollywood celebrity, who chose to put ethics above career advancement-- which in the end made him successful at both. Source: Benny, Jack; Benny, Joan. *Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story*. New York: Warner Books, 1990

To Be,” which told the story of an acting troop which ended up using its thespian talents to help them succeed as anti-Nazi spies.

In the January 7, 1944 issue of *The New Palestine*, Magnin wrote a gracious article about Benny, stating: “He (Benny) is one of the most level-headed and balanced men I know. He has convictions, very deep ones....He is not only a great showman but a human being, a charming gentleman and, may I add, a Jew of whom we may well be proud.”¹⁵⁰

Magnin not only socialized and worked with celebrities, but also developed close relationships with California politicians. One of these was Mayor Sam Yorty.¹⁵¹

Yorty was a visionary and a highly intelligent man, which attracted Magnin to him. They worked on city projects together, and Magnin reportedly was quick to lend Yorty a private ear when he needed it. Magnin, unsurprisingly, was not intimidated by Yorty’s position, and felt quite free to provide advice on how to improve the

¹⁵⁰ Edgar Magnin, “Jack Benny Drops In On Palestine” *The New Palestine* January 7, 1944, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/9

¹⁵¹ Samuel Yorty was born October 1, 1909 in Lincoln Nebraska to the parents of Johanna Egan and Frank Yorty. After Yorty completed high school, the family moved to California where Yorty attended Southwestern University and later the University of California at Los Angeles, where he studied law.

Yorty was elected to the California State Assembly in 1936 and, after reporting a bribery attempt among his colleagues, Yorty developed the reputation of being a politician who had ethics and integrity, something some felt was sorely lacking in the early days of Hollywood. Yorty passed his bar exam in 1939.

image of Los Angeles. Yorty, like Magnin, was known at times for being direct and flamboyant. Yet, in contrast to Magnin, Yorty's relationship with the press was one of mutual tolerance at best. Throughout the years, Yorty was harshly criticized by the press for various mishaps and character flaws, including his temper, his promotion of segregation by belonging to a segregated club and his stand against the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁵²

Throughout his career, Magnin publically maintained a stand that people should not be judged by their skin color or socio-economic level, but by their intelligence, drive and determination. Yet, if one examines the associations Magnin made and the attitudes he displayed in his private life, a slightly different and more complicated picture arises. Often, Magnin did not seem to embody the strength publicly to confront issues that might have posed a threat to his image and his lucrative career as the celebrity rabbi. An example of this would be the fact that he did not directly confront Civil Rights issues. Also, as we have seen, when criticized, as he

¹⁵² Harold Meyerson, "Sam Yorty, 1909-1998," LA Weekly, June 12, 1998, Richard Pearson, "Combative Politician Sam Yorty Dies at 88," The Washington Post, June 7, 1998, Time Magazine: Mayor Yorty Cover, September 2, 1966

was when he fired Rabbi Goldmark, Magnin either brushed aside the criticism or remained uncharacteristically silent. Yorty embodied the opposite strengths and weaknesses: he was vocal about not being an advocate of the Civil Rights movement, yet he appointed a fully integrated team to his staff. This act took a lot of courage, and Magnin respected Yorty for it. Though both men were accused at times of being abrupt in manner, Yorty backed up his talk with action, even if that action meant going against societal norms—an attitude that eventually cost Yorty his career. Magnin, on the other hand, appeared unwilling to take such risks. The rabbi was famously blunt, and he rarely failed speak his mind in public. Yet, Magnin's *Persönlichkeit* enabled him to consciously fashion himself into a rabbi-celebrity, and, as a result of his extraordinary longevity, he became almost as an institution in Los Angeles. These circumstances helped him to survive his notorious faux pas that could have felled less skillful personalities. He managed to maintain a comfortable distance from stormy controversies that might otherwise have eroded the communal approval he so craved.

As Yorty was strategizing how to redevelop Los Angeles, he marveled at Magnin's foresight to build the Wilshire Boulevard

Temple in Beverly Hills at a time when naysayers thought it was crazy to do so. Yorty wanted to use the same kind of determination and drive that Magnin used at Wilshire Boulevard to mold Los Angeles into the great city that he knew it could be. Magnin supported Yorty in his efforts by being an active participant on multiple civic boards.¹⁵³ Yet, because of the increasing controversy surrounding Yorty regarding race issues, Magnin, along with most of Jewish Los Angeles, overwhelmingly supported Tom Bradley in his race against Yorty for mayorship. The Magnin archives contain no documentation which either supports or refutes the possibility that Magnin's public support of Bradley might have dampened their friendship.

George Burns (born Nathan Birnbaum) was another of Magnin's close friends. Magnin, attracted to individuals who persevered during hardships, was especially touched by Burns's rags to riches story.¹⁵⁴ A confidant of many Hollywood celebrities,

¹⁵³ American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MSS 344 Box 30-31.

¹⁵⁴ Nathan Birnbaum (aka George Burns), the ninth child of Dorothy and Louis Birnbaum, was born in New York City on January 20, 1896. The ninth of twelve children, Nathan was forced to start working at the age of seven in order to help support his family after his father died during the 1903 flu epidemic. Birnbaum quit school in the fourth grade, began working in a candy store, and, with his friends, would sing in harmony to pass the time away. They called themselves the "peewee quartet" and began actually to work in various venues. Birnbaum changed his name to George Burns, and in time moved to Hollywood, where he met his sidekick, and future wife, Gracie Allen. After a lucrative career in radio, television and the big screen-- spanning over sixty years-- Burns died on March 9, 1996 less than two months after his

Magnin made it clear that he would not be a moral arbiter, stating on more than one occasion that he was not perfect and was in no position to judge others. He was very well aware of the moral atmosphere in Hollywood and did not want his office to be known as a confessional—he, instead, encouraged individuals to establish their own moral codes¹⁵⁵ Therefore, when Burns had a brief affair and was overcome with guilt he did not run to Magnin, but confided in his friend Jack Benny.¹⁵⁶ Yet, Magnin's ear was always available to celebrities who needed someone to talk to about their struggles with the bureaucratic side of Hollywood, business decisions, or family issues.

Magnin's humaneness and approachability was a welcome relief to Burns, Benny, Berle, Mayer and other celebrities scrutinized for their lives and lifestyles. Magnin, too, appreciated how Berle, Burns and the rest of 'the boys' did not hold him in holy reverence, or scrutinize *his* lifestyle. Magnin operated with the assumption that "There are all kind of Jews—all kinds of beliefs,

100th birthday. Burns, George. All My Best Friends. (New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 1989).

¹⁵⁵ Edgar Magnin, "Sermon" November 9, 1979, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 C4045

¹⁵⁶ Martin Gottfried. George Burns. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

just like there are all types of differences to Christianity. [For example] delicatessen Jews—don't go to synagogue, don't join a synagogue, don't know anything about religion, but know all about gefelte fish and lox and bagels.... [These Jews have] respect for sincere people, but no use for phonies.”¹⁵⁷ Burns, Benny, Berle and Magnin dined frequently at the Hillcrest country club, exchanging jokes and enjoying games of cards. It was one place where they could all take off their public personae and just be ‘one of the good ole boys.’¹⁵⁸

Milton Berle, another Hollywood icon, enjoyed a long and close friendship with Magnin.¹⁵⁹ The two not only played golf together, but were engaged in the milestones of each other's lives.¹⁶⁰ Berle, Magnin's junior, respected the way Magnin was an overtly assimilated Jew, yet was, at the same time, revered as one of America's greatest rabbis. Berle, often regarded as loud and

¹⁵⁷ Edgar Magnin, Sermon “To Be A Jew” March 23, 1973, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 C-3819

¹⁵⁸ Gabler, pp. 274-276

¹⁵⁹ Milton Berlinger (aka Milton Berle) was born in New York to Sarah & Moses Berlinger on July 12, 1908. Berle began his acting career at the age of five. Berle was known for his trademark of always having a cigar in his hand, but was most famous for being a pioneer in the television industry, when millions of Americans tuned into his weekly televised comedy show. Berle died March 27, 2002, of colon cancer. “Milton Berle, ‘Mr. Television’ Dies at 93” *Washington Post* March 28, 2002

¹⁶⁰ Vernon Scott, “Hollywood Celebrities Mourn Edgar Magnin” *San Antonio Light*, July 19, 1984, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 31/4.

abrasive, admired the fact that Magnin was straightforward, yet loved by multitudes.¹⁶¹

Magnin, Berle, Burns and Benny were often seen together at award ceremonies or charity events held in one of their honors. Berle made it clear that Magnin was part of the Hollywood scene, stating how “He [Magnin] recited invocations for hundreds of testimonial dinners and at industry functions. He was on the dais for my 75th birthday party at the Friar's club.”¹⁶² Berle, too, felt the five men constituted a “good ole boys” club, made especially complete by the presence of a rabbi. In fact, Berle recalled how Magnin himself referred to the four men as his “boys.”¹⁶³ Reporter Tom Tugend added that, instead of relishing the aura that often surrounds successful spiritual leaders, “Magnin despised the “preachments, pomposity and silly talk” of many of his colleagues....During the years before the Second World War, he was dubbed the “Court Bishop” of Hollywood, and no wedding or funeral of the luminaries of the screen was complete without his spiritual ministrations.”¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Tom Tugend, “Hollywood’s Former ‘Court Bishop’ 90.” Los Angeles: Jewish Chronicle July 4, 1980. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/2

Known for his sharp mind and quick wit, Bob Hope quickly gained celebrity status when he changed his name (from Leslie Townes Hope) and moved to Hollywood in the 1920's.¹⁶⁵ Hope, Burns, Benny & Berle quickly became friends, and Magnin, too, enjoyed Hope's company. Magnin and Hope could banter back and forth, exchanging jokes and debating various subjects, causing everyone in their entourage to break out in laughter. Magnin was not only attracted to Hope because of his intelligence; the two men also shared a passion for the USO. As mentioned previously, Magnin became involved with relief organizations during World War I, and was involved not only in the USO but in the Jewish Welfare Board as well. Hope was also actively involved with various relief efforts, but is best known for foregoing the comforts of America and entertaining the troops during World War II and every war

¹⁶⁵ Leslie Townes Hope, born on May 29, 1903 was the fifth of seven sons born to Avis and Henry Hope, in Eltham England. The Hope family moved to the United States in 1908, when young Leslie was not yet five. He received his United States citizenship at the age of seventeen. He was a vaudeville performer and comedian, who perfected his stage presence and changed his name before moving to California in the 1920s. By the mid 1990s Hope had been involved in 70 movies and over 500 television programs. In May 1993 NBC celebrated Hope's 90th birthday with the three-hour special "Bob Hope: The First Ninety Years." What made this show spectacular is that presented Hope with a tribute from every living U.S. president at that time - Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton. Bob Hope died on July 27, 2003 at the age of 100. William Robert Faith, Bob Hope: A Life in Comedy. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1982), and Gabler p. 205.

thereafter. Hope's USO career lasted half a century, during which he headlined approximately 60 tours.¹⁶⁶ Hope, to quote Robert Faith, “logged over six million miles entertaining our troops in both war and peace time, becoming a goodwill ambassador to every country he travelled to.”¹⁶⁷ Magnin related to Hopes’s zest to make life better for others, and appreciated his ability to stand up for what he believed in, even when the stand was unpopular. During the Vietnam War, when Bob Hope was *criticized* for going overseas to visit the troops, Magnin stood behind his friend.

Although Magnin dined with presidents and fraternized with celebrities, no one ever took the place of his life-long friend Sol Lesser.¹⁶⁸ As children they played handball and attended religious school together at Lesser’s uncle’s Synagogue, where Lesser predicted to Magnin that he would someday become a great rabbi. Magnin indeed, grew up and became a great American rabbi, while Lesser grew up and became a great American movie magnate. Magnin and Lesser maintained their friendship while Magnin was in

¹⁶⁶ William Robert Faith, Bob Hope: A Life in Comedy, (New York: Putnam Books, 1982).

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Sol Lesser was born 17 February 1890, in Spokane, Washington. He was a successful producer, film distributor and owner of a cinema chain. Lesser died September 19, 1980. Gabler, pp. 76, 267 and 295 and American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati MS 344 4/10 “Sol Lesser”, AJA 37/3 “Two Kids from Frisco: Sol Lesser and Edgar F. Magnin.”

rabbinical school, and eventually they both ended up in Los Angeles engaged in their respective careers.¹⁶⁹

Through the eight decades of their friendship the men never let the Hollywood lifestyle come between them—if anything, it brought them closer together. On 3 October 1978 Magnin wrote Lesser a letter stating how much their friendship meant to him and how Lesser was his oldest friend. Magnin acknowledged the fact that they were growing older, and encouraged his longtime friend to “...stay as well as he could.”¹⁷⁰

Over the years people have wondered why both Jews and non-Jews flocked to Magnin’s services and sought out his counsel. Perhaps Magnin himself provided the best answer to this question shortly before his ninetieth birthday: “When I’m on the pulpit, I like people to leave the temple feeling that they are glad to be not only alive but to be Jews and to be human beings....”¹⁷¹ Magnin, though controversial in his methods, himself wanted to be loved and wanted other people, regardless of their circumstances, to feel loved as well. He did not try to explain the reasons behind his choice of

¹⁶⁹ Chall p.18, 1975

¹⁷⁰ Edgar Magnin, Letter to Sol Lesser October 3, 1979. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 4/9

¹⁷¹ “Community To Salute Rabbi Magnin” B’nai B’rith Messenger, May 23 1989, p 17, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/1

associations, endorsements or behaviors; instead, when asked, he stated:

Look, I was born a Jew, an American, and a human being at the same time, and the last one is more important than the other two. I've never tried to butter up anyone and I've never tried to make friends for the Jews. I've tried only to help all human beings be friends with each other. Part of being a Jew is knowing that all people—all life for that matter— has been created by the same force we Jews call God. Therefore, I don't go around being paranoid, with a chip on my shoulder. I speak more about the happy side of Jewish life rather than dwelling on the centuries of persecution the Jews have endured..."¹⁷²

Throughout his seemingly charmed life, Magnin challenged the many individuals he encountered to be the best human beings that they could be. Although Magnin was impatient with sob stories, he felt most individuals were not responsible for their circumstances—they were just responsible for how they dealt with them. Magnin, for his part, chose to live his life in accordance with the universalistic philosophy he ardently espoused.

¹⁷² Modern Maturity Magazine, December 1980-January 1981 p. 56, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/2

Chapter IV

Conclusion

“Thinking, feeling, sensitive human beings can never have peace of mind. That is for the lazy, the gross, for those who prefer to be contented cows or caterpillars crawling on a leaf. To be alive means to be disturbed and sometimes to disturb other people; to stimulate thinking; To inject pity by means of imagination; to make the presence of God felt in the hearts of people and nations.”¹⁷³

Because his ministry embraced people from so many different religions, creeds, races, and socio-economic levels, Edgar Magnin could truly be called a poster child for pluralism. Magnin’s assertion that all the early charities in Los Angeles—from orphanages to hospitals—had their humble beginnings at Wilshire Boulevard Temple illustrated his (again characteristically hyperbolic) evaluation of the inclusiveness and far-reaching character of his ministry.¹⁷⁴ Although many would agree that Magnin and his temple did indeed play an important role in the founding of many charitable organizations, and that the rabbi and his congregation often functioned as catalysts in the emergence of many others, the Wilshire Boulevard Temple was certainly not the *only* philanthropic wellspring in all of Los Angeles. Nonetheless, Magnin’s consistent

¹⁷³ Edgar Magnin, Lecture “The Voice Of Prophecy In This Satellite Age” Hebrew Union College Journal. Cincinnati: February 11, 1959, p.17

¹⁷⁴ Chall p.158

platform on the pulpit was “Philanthropy lies at the very foundation of our faith.”¹⁷⁵

Samson H. Levey, a noted scholar and professor at Hebrew Union College in Los Angeles, conducted an oral interview with Magnin in 1974. Reflecting back on that experience, Levey stated:

Magnin never pretended to be infallible....In his own unique way he has fought to improve the human condition and to ameliorate the stresses and distresses of society....Rabbi Magnin has sought to bring the blessing of education and intelligence to all segments of the population. His intellectual undertakings are multifarious...he is a brilliant master of both the written and spoken word, a revered and beloved sage, whose wisdom and passionate faith has brought diverse people closer together, thereby exemplifying the universal nobility of the human spirit.¹⁷⁶

Throughout his lifetime, Magnin founded, participated in or was an honorary member of a staggering number of organizations, and gave freely of his time and energy to help those in need.¹⁷⁷

Ralph Hinman, editor of the *California Press-Telegram*, reported that Magnin was “among the founders of those local organizations that served the half-million people who make Los Angeles’s Jewish community second only to New York as the largest outside

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Samson Levey, “Introduction to Oral History Memoir” p. 3 Los Angeles: August 23, 1976, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 52/1

¹⁷⁷ Magnin Collection American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344

Israel.”¹⁷⁸ One of these organizations was the Jewish Committee for Personal Services—also known as Gateways—whose purpose was to provide help to the families of Jews who were institutionalized in prisons or mental facilities. Magnin served on the Committee from 1923–1929, and served as its president from 1929–1935. Magnin was adamant that neither the downtrodden nor their families be forgotten, because, by that time of his life, and through the experience of his ministry, he had come to believe that a person’s circumstances reflected nothing about that person’s individual worth. Magnin had seen the wealthy miserable and the poor and thwarted sustained by an inner joy. He truly believed that it is due only to divine providence that we are healthy or well-situated in life, because, he reasoned, at any minute, and without regard to our “worth” or “virtue”, these blessings could be snatched away. Therefore, Magnin felt, it was every person’s duty to help people in need, and to do so without judgment. Magnin believed that American society had caused people to become so self-absorbed that they lost sight of those who really were in need. The words he spoke

¹⁷⁸ Ralph Hinman, Rabbi Magnin’s Role In L.B. temple recalled” Press-Telegram, California: July 21, 1984, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1.

during a lecture he delivered in 1959 at Hebrew Union College still sound remarkably relevant today:

Technology has made the world in which we live more comfortable physically....yet with all of our progress, we are not secure. We are confused and bewildered. Our nerves are on edge. The tempo of the times is consuming us....With all our wealth, we are poor, and with all our speed we can find no pillow of security on which to lay our heads. With all our miraculous means of communication, we are unable to hear the still small voice that alone can bring comfort and hope to our bruised spirits.¹⁷⁹

As years progressed, Magnin began to sense a decline in Americans' moral fiber, and in their respect for the values upon which American society had been built. In the late 1950s and 1960s he began to speak out with urgency about apathy, loss of purpose and people's growing need for instant gratification. In a sermon he delivered on June 17, 1961 Magnin stated:

...Everything depends on a sense of values in this world. There is a need for everything. The need to have fun [and] the need for entertainment....There is a need for almost anything in this world, but they all have a value. We must respect the people who are the great thinkers, the scientists, the artists and the humanitarians of the world. That is what counts. We must not pay any attention to those who simply attract attention

¹⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 4

because of one thing or another...It is the fellows who have to be noticed who make the trouble...people who want power—who have inferiority complexes they have to overcome. They have to stand out. They have to show you.¹⁸⁰

Also, in an address at Pepperdine University given on August 2, 1973 Magnin stated: “A degree is supposed to confer certain rights and privileges. In my mind, the rights and privileges are to be a decent, lovable human being; to make an honest living; to bring up a good family and to do something for others.”¹⁸¹ Magnin saw himself as a social critic, and was always ready to offer his opinion on the state of American, or Jewish-American culture. He saw conflicting and almost contradictory neuroses afflicting American Jews, and spoke out both against exaggerated feelings of persecution and against an unhealthy burden of guilt stemming from personal success. Magnin felt strongly that both these scenarios were ridiculous, and he challenged his congregants to quit thinking and behaving in negative and self-defeating ways. Magnin states:

We have a guilt complex. We are always apologizing to everybody. We are blamed for everything....If nations are poor in Africa can't be because they are lazy and don't have the know-how—its America's fault. We take on a guilt complex for no purpose.....There are people

¹⁸⁰ American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 13/1 Jun 17, 1961

¹⁸¹ Edgar Magnin, “Mystery And Miracle” Speech to Pepperdine University: Malibu California Aug 2, 1973. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/1

who feel that they are nobody.... We are not clannish, we are insecure. The average Jew is afraid that he won't be liked so we form cliques. We must stop this. We don't need to build ghettos in America. We must learn to mix with people and not feel rejected; there is no excuse for it.¹⁸²

Known for his involvement in community life, Magnin, in 1932 and 1933, was instrumental in planning and fundraising for the Cedars of Lebanon Hospital, an institution which eventually became one of the country's leading research hospitals. It was, in fact, Magnin who came up with the name "Cedars Of Lebanon" when the founding family requested a name change for the hospital, which was formerly known as Kaspere Cohn Hospital.¹⁸³ Magnin remained on the hospital's board for over fifty years, and was honored at a tribute dinner on March 5, 1972.¹⁸⁴ Fellow Mason Melville H. Nahin's remarks about Magnin are "Magninesquely" florid:

What he felt was the pulse of creation and the impulse of the Creator. What he articulated was a fusion of both as he perceived them. From his distinctive Jewish point of view, he announced a universal message of unity for all mankind transcending all the differences and distinctions, thus issuing a clarion call of redemptive brotherhood for all humanity. With consummate skill and ease, he articulated in a few moments

¹⁸² Edgar Magnin, "Hello Stranger" March 5, 1976, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 Sermon c3909

¹⁸³ "In Memoriam: Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin" California: Cedar-Sinai Newsletter August, 1984. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 37/1

¹⁸⁴

what others may take hours to expound. His message was Jewish, and it was simple, uncluttered by technical verbiage, unencumbered by dialectical confusion. He was a theologian of spiritual pragmatism, his arena the human predicament, and his wrestling was with those adversaries who emerged from the darkness to drive a wedge of distrust and hatred among people and threatened the peace and harmony of our American way of life.”¹⁸⁵

As Magnin grew older he became more reflective and less overbearing in his manner. Although still outspoken, he was more discerning as he chose the battles and causes to which he would devote his final years. As he aged his hectic pace slowed, and, in the last years of his busy life, he would decline invitations to White House events and other glamorous affairs. As he aged, his writings, too, became more reflective. For example, in November of 1978 Magnin wrote:

There are certain intangibles that make life worth living and they transcend both time and space. They are not concerned with material objects or appetites which sometimes enslave us....Physically we are bound to earth by the law of gravity, but we can take wings if we have a bit of imagination and willpower....Love, hope, faith, dreams, beauty and truth enable us to rise above the stratosphere of cold, hard reason. They endow us with a passion for adventure by which we climb the Everests of the soul and seek to become one with God.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸⁵ Scottish Rite Journal, December, 1984 issue

¹⁸⁶ Edgar Magnin, excerpts from “The Intangibles” article for NEW AGE Nov. 1979, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 6/1

Very few people saw the softer and more human side of Edgar Magnin. He did not seem intentionally to keep that side of himself hidden, but, perhaps because he was a man who had literally poured his life into the causes of others, he needed, at least to some degree, to guard his privacy. Many witnessed and recalled his opinionated outbursts, but few were privy to his softer emotional side, which appeared, for example, when his dear life-long friend Sol Lesser died, or when he visited the gravesite of his wife's relatives and sobbed unabashedly.¹⁸⁷

Another rabbi who was inspired by Magnin's lifetime achievements was Norman Goldberg, who had met Magnin during Goldberg's first pulpit in Sacramento in 1929, and who felt fortunate to have known Magnin during the early days of Magnin's career.

Goldberg stated:

... Rotary brought him to Sacramento. Actually the best program of the year or as I would phrase "God—what a Rabbi: What a man... it was the best ever." [In fact,] the only temple bulletins that I read for the last hundred years [were]

¹⁸⁷ Stephen Arnold, Letter to Marcus regarding Magnin November 12, 1984, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS Sc-7662

Edgar's—up until the very last...God what that E.M. could say in three or four short [sentences].¹⁸⁸

Magnin spent his life living as a model of the successful assimilated Jew, and, as mentioned previously, he had no patience for Jews who proudly wanted to carry on their Eastern European ways in American. Throughout his career he spoke vehemently against Jews “trapped” in the old ways and trying to force an Eastern European Jewish lifestyle onto American Jewish life. Repeatedly over the decades Magnin declared his pride in being born in America and his good fortune to live in a country that provided so many opportunities. He had no tolerance for ignorance or arrogance, and, in a sermon entitled “To Be a Jew” delivered on March 23, 1973 at the Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Magnin's ambivalence toward the reorientation of liberal Judaism in America was bluntly evident:

There's been a revival of tradition, mainly due to Israel. The reformers broke away from the past and began destroying everything around them. [Emil G.]Hirsch was a man of brains and imagination. He didn't even have a Torah. The way we are heading, we are headed back towards the conservative. The early reform was negative. Instead of being a positive religion it was a “don't have to.” We realized that we do need

¹⁸⁸ Norman Goldburg, “Memories of Magnin” Letter to Jacob Marcus, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS Sc-7661

some tradition. You can't live like your great-grandfather.... [There is a] difference between Judaism, Jewish customs, religious customs and beliefs. [Jews who try to force traditional Jewish practices on others]...want to push us back into ghettoism. [Ghettoism]-has to deal with Jewish life whether it is religious or not. Eating gefilte fish is ghettoism. Running around the street with a yarmulke is ghettoism..... You can be Jew and get along with anybody; you don't have to go around like a freak, it is ridiculous! You better learn how to blend Judaism with the American way. That's what reform is really trying to do."¹⁸⁹

Although Magnin often said that personal relationships with the rich and famous were unimportant to him, these were the types of people with whom he predominantly associated. And, although it was clear that he was the Jewish patriarch of Hollywood and held the respect of the Hollywood moguls, little has been said—and documentation is markedly absent—about his relationship with Hollywood women. Magnin publically praised his wife, and stated that his twice-divorced daughter had a mind of her own and that he would not interfere with her private life, but his relationships with women did not seem to extend beyond these familial boundaries. This could have been due simply to the culture of the times, but perhaps Magnin also made a conscious effort not to give the public

¹⁸⁹ Edgar Magnin. Sermon "To Be A Jew" March 23, 1973, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 C-3819

any opportunity even to suspect that he was capable of involvement in the marital infidelities that were so prevalent in Hollywood.

It is also worth noting that although Magnin interacted with people from so many different races and religions, he did not ally himself with any of the public and political organizations which represented these groups. He did not march on Washington with the Civil Rights movement, and did not speak out either for or against segregation, as did many rabbis during the 1950s and early 1960s.

In a March 1961 sermon, Magnin discussed the unprecedented election of a Catholic president, and suggest that this event was related to the progress made by the Civil Rights movement:

There was a time when a Catholic...couldn't be president of the United states—not so long ago....The very fact that a Catholic could be elected at all in this country, good, bad or otherwise, is something we never could have conceived of a few years ago. If we have this horrible segregation down South and prejudice up north against the Negro, the fact remains there never was a time in the history of America when more was being done to stop it and more people were interested, even Southern people....It is our function as educators, as ministers, as people, to point out, where possible, the ills and also to try to point out the cures. ¹⁹⁰

¹⁹⁰ "Images of American", 1 March 3, 1961, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 13/

By regarding the election of a Catholic president as evidence of progress against racism, Magnin is informing his audience both that the country is evolving, and that there is also much work still to be done.

Although Magnin frequently spoke about God, he consistently stated that we could not rely on faith alone, but that each individual had to do his or her part to help humanity. In another sermon in the same vein given later in 1961, Magnin once again approached the subject of racial tension and the burgeoning issue of the “negro problem”:

The bible is a great book if you know how to use it but you have to read it with intelligence. You have to know what it says....People read into it their own pet dogmas and theories and their bigotry....If Americans can't stand on their own feet, there is something wrong with us....Sure, we are human beings and there are all sorts of faults to be found with our government, with our society and our institutions, but all in all, where do people live more comfortably in the main? If we have a Negro problem, where are more people making more fuss and trying to cure it at least....We can still say what we please without being locked in a dungeon or sent to Siberia or something of that sort...¹⁹¹

As a scholar who repeatedly took pride in his voracious appetite for reading and keeping up with current events, it is interesting to note

¹⁹¹ Edger Magnin, Sermon Sat May 13, 1961, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 13/1

that Magnin stated “*If* we have a negro problem”. The use of the word “if” here may have been purely rhetorical, but, nonetheless, this choice of words does not indicate a great deal of sensitivity on Magnin’s part during a period of history when protest demonstrations, riots, murders and horrific abuses were occurring all around the country. In addition, he did not conclude that if such a possibility existed *we* should do something about it—he simply stated that there were those who were “making a fuss” about it. This is a weak statement from an individual who prided himself on his bluntness. Magnin was very careful with his words when he spoke about racism in America, and frequently tiptoed around the real issues. There is little evidence that he ever took greater risks than the statements above and following, regarding the Civil Rights Movement.¹⁹²

Look, I was born a Jew, an American, and a human being at the same time, and the last one is more important than the other two. I’ve never tried to butter up anyone and I’ve never tried to make friends for the Jews. I’ve tried only to help all human beings be friends with each other. Part of being a Jew, is knowing that all people—all life for that matter—has been created by the same force we Jews call God.¹⁹³

¹⁹² Edger Magnin, Sermons, news articles and scrapbooks 1950-1968, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344

¹⁹³ Modern Maturity Magazine, December 1980-January 1981, pp. 55-58, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/2

What could be seen as Magnin choosing to avoid controversial issues that would possibly cause him criticism was perhaps, instead, an expression of his great love for his country. Perhaps any movement which Magnin could have perceived as being anti-American, such as the anti-war movement during the Vietnam war, the Civil Rights Movement, or the anti-establishment sentiments of the 1970's, would cause him to withdraw and keep silent, focused, as he often was, on the good in our society, rather than on its flaws. In this way he was similar to his friend Bob Hope. Hope was so focused on being a role model of American citizenship, that he did not allow himself any sympathy towards causes that criticized the United States, regardless of the validity of the criticism. Although, for example, Magnin expressed no verbal support for the Civil Rights Movement, he did make himself a true friend to the people of Los Angeles. It is likely that Magnin's generous spirit and his work to better the lives of Los Angelenos through his various charitable causes helped people to forgive him for this flaw.

This identification of himself as foremost a “human being” explains Mayor Tom Bradley’s observation that people of all religious faiths in California felt a connection with Magnin and referred to him as: “....my rabbi....In fact, at a breakfast meeting I recently called with black and Jewish clergy, one member came in and asked ‘how is the rabbi?’, and everyone knew instantly who he meant.”¹⁹⁴ As mentioned previously in Chapter Two, upon hearing of Magnin’s death, Mayor Bradley gave an executive order to fly all city flags at half staff.¹⁹⁵

There are few, if any, rabbis, either in the United States or abroad, whose lives had such a broad-ranging effect as did the life of Edgar Magnin. Although prominent rabbis have been known for their scholarly works, or for their humanitarian efforts in a particular section of the world, no individual twentieth century rabbi’s career can compare to Magnin’s in breadth of accomplishment. Magnin’s astounding career included significant contributions to interfaith relations and social inclusion, civic progress, the development of America’s particular brand of Reform Judaism, and even architecture and the arts. His “swashbuckling” personality and

¹⁹⁴ John Dart, “Rabbi Magnin, Patriarch Who Charmed L.A.” Los Angeles Times, July 18, 1984

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

irrepressible intellectual openness, coupled with his genuine commitment to humanity and to Judaism, made him a powerful and inimitable American figure. Yet, as Magnin progressed in years, his writings and speeches began to be more reflective and transparent. Reflecting on his rabbinate, Magnin stated: "...it isn't being a rabbi that teaches you that one human being is not that special; it's life itself."¹⁹⁶

During preparation for his ninetieth birthday celebration, Magnin was asked to share the secret of his successful life. Explaining his love for humanity, he stated:

... I call myself a Jew-manist; I'm a humanist with Jewish roots. If I've brought the community together, in an interfaith sense, it was not done with that intent. If I have any top non-Jewish friends, it isn't because I went out to win them. I've been myself, and if you're yourself, and you've got anything to say, and you're honest about it, and it's worth saying and doing, do it.¹⁹⁷

No one can dispute that Magnin often came across as arrogant, boisterous and opinionated. Yet, as his long life drew to a close, Magnin's final decision was to accept human mortality with a

¹⁹⁶ Modern Maturity Magazine, December 1980-January 1981 p. 57, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 322 36/2

¹⁹⁷ "Community To Salute Rabbi Magnin" B'nai B'rith Messenger, May 23, 197, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/ 1

dignified humility. It was a columnist, Dan Wolf, who memorialized Magnin's final moments:

On his last morning, he was visited by his doctor, who urged him to go to the hospital. He refused. A few hours later, with his family at his side in the bedroom of the house he built when Beverly Hills was a bucolic suburb, he died. After years of publicly dismissing death and symbolizing its defeat, he privately and with dignity accepted it. This was his finest sermon. For if someone like Edgar Magnin can come to terms with mortality, then so too, someday might I.¹⁹⁸

Final Thoughts

Edgar Magnin was one of the most controversial and influential rabbis in the twentieth century. He had a gift for bringing humankind together. Regardless of creed, color, or religion, Magnin's overall vision was to make Los Angeles, if not the entire United States, a better place to live. He did this by pulling resources, personalities, and power together in unconventional ways in order to make an incredible mark on Jewish Los Angeles. From Magnin we learn that rabbis can be ecumenical in their approach while dealing with people, yet never compromise their Jewishness.

¹⁹⁸ Dan Wolf, "Rabbi Magnin seemed immortal, but he taught me about death" Los Angeles Herald Examiner Friday July 20, 1984, sec. A, p. 23, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati: MS 344 36/6 Near print 1884

Magnin possessed a genuine interest in the welfare of human beings, yet loathed to associate with organizations that appeared to be controversial or challenged the mainstream American establishment. In addition, it is clear that as Magnin grew older, more prominent, and more connected to the “powerful elite,” he became less interested in involving himself with controversies which might threaten friendships and connections which were important to him.

Regardless of what Magnin did or did not do, no one ever questioned his authenticity as a Jew. Magnin took the risk of being “himself” and by doing so was able successfully to integrate his rabbinate into mainstream America in an unprecedented way which has not been replicated since. He left an indelible mark on Reform Judaism in America.

APPENDIX

AJA MS 344 Magnin Collection.

Memberships:

- Charter board member of the Hollywood bowl.
- Founding committee of the United Crusade.
- Board of directors, The American Red Cross.
- Associate Vice president of the Los Angeles Area council of Boy Scouts of America.
- Board of Trustees for the California College of Medicine.
- Board of directors, for the Cancer Prevention Society.
- Chaplain and life-member of the Beverly Hills Navy Leagues.
- Board of Overseers and cofounder of the HUC-JIR Los Angeles Campus.
- Advisory Council of the Los Angeles County Heart Association.
- Honorary president of the Los Angeles Hillel council.
- Board of Directors for the World Affairs Council.
- Honorary chairman of the Armed Forces and Veterans Service Council.
- Board of directors and cofounder of the Los Angeles Jewish Free Loan Association.
- Board of Governors for the USO in Los Angeles.
- Founding member of the Los Angeles Amigos del Pueblo.
- Honorary member of the March of Dimes, Los Angeles Chapter.
- YMCA Endorsement committee.

Degrees:

Ordination from Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati Ohio
1914

D.D. Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati
1944

D.H.L., California College of Medicine
1944

S.T.D., University of Southern California
1956

LL.D., Wilberforce University, Wilberforce, Ohio
1962

L.L.D., Pepperdine University Malibu California

Professional Experience

Rabbi, Wilshire Boulevard Temple, Los Angeles California,
1915-1984

Rabbi, Temple Israel, Stockton, California
1914-1915

Author, Civic Leader, Lecturer

Publications

Author: *365 Vitamins for The Mind* (Los Angeles: publisher? 1984);
How to Live a Richer And Fuller Life. (New York: Prentice-Hall,
1951)

Columnist, Los Angeles Herald-Examiner

Columnist, Los Angeles Mirror

Contributor to King Features Syndicate

Awards

- Distinguished Alumnus Award-Rabbinic Alumni of Hebrew Union College “Man of the People” Award
- Children’s Aid, Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, “Man of the Year”
- Beverly Hills Chamber of Commerce, “Man of the Year”
- Los Angeles Lodge, No. 487, B’nai B’rith, Award of Merit
- Los Angeles Junior Chamber of Commerce
- Rank and decoration of Knight Commander of the Court of Honor by the Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry
- Highest ranking of Thirty-third Degree, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry

Organizations and Fraternal Clubs

West Gate Lodge No.335, F&A.M.

Rotary Club of Los Angeles No.5

Hillcrest Country Club

Friars Club

Independent Order of B'nai B'rith

Theta Phi

Information from: AJA MS 344 Magnin Collection

BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. Primary Sources:

Archival Sources: The Edgar F. Magnin Papers were donated to The American Jewish Archives (AJA) by the Wilshire Boulevard Temple in Los Angeles, California in 1956-1958 and in February 1991.

The Magnin collection at the AJA consists of papers related to Magnin's rabbinate and leadership in the Los Angeles, California community.

The Magnin collection is comprised of audio recordings, transcripts of sermons, newspaper articles, correspondence, and photos.

Unpublished

Edgar F. Magnin Collection MS 344

- Dissertation
- Sermons, addresses and lectures (1950-1970)
- Correspondence
- Scrapbooks
- Near print items
- Photographs
- Cassette Tapes
- Microfilm

Sermons and Radio Addresses

Magnin, Edgar F. Prayers & Statements for the Press and Radio, 1954-1955. MS 344 Lectures, Interviews & Speeches Files. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- _____. Prayers & Statements for the Press and Radio, 1956-1958. MS 344 Lectures, Interviews & Speeches Files. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Modern Man and Modern Art" November 17, 1961. MS 344 Tr-3276 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "The Endelmann Case" December 30, 1961. MS 344 Tr-3278 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Web of Hate" March 16, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3285 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Reform Judaism at HUC-JIR" June 16, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3289 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Miracle Worker/Advise and Consent" July 14, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3290 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Nazi Movement In Germany/Jewish Chaplaincy" August 8, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3292 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "Men and Decision" October 19, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3298 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.
- _____. "So Brief A Journey" October 20, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3299 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Guns Of August" October 26, 1962. MS 344 Tr-3300 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Tolstoy-The Man and His Beliefs" December 19, 1969. MS 344 Tr-3513 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Roots Go Deep" January 9, 1970. MS 344 Tr-3515 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Finger On A Star" May 22, 1970. MS 344 Tr-3528 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Rebels" December 26, 1970. MS 344 Tr-3544 Audio Recording File, Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Prayers & Statements for the Press and Radio", 1958-1961. Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "Rabbi Edgar F. Magnin: Leader and Personality." An Interview conducted by Malca Chall. Bancroft Library, University of California-Berkeley 1975.

Newspaper Articles

Los Angeles Herald-Examiner

- Magnin, Edgar F. "Dr. 'Magnin Says.' 1961-1970 Column." Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

- ____. "'Dr. Magnin Says.' 1984 Columns." Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Correspondence

Associate Press:

“Article responses from “Dr. Magnin Says” weekly columns, 1964.”
Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives,
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Condolence Letters:

“Condolence Letters to the Family & Temple Community of Rabbi
Magnin, regarding his Death, 1984.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center
of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College,
Cincinnati.

Hebrew Union College 1959-1968

“Correspondence between Rabbi Magnin and Hebrew Union
College regarding his contribution.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center
of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College,
Cincinnati.

Hebrew Union College-JIR Los Angeles 1964-1971

“Correspondence between Rabbi Magnin and Hebrew Union
College regarding the development of the Los Angeles Campus.”
Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives,
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Jewish Welfare Board:

“Correspondence between Rabbi Magnin and the Jewish Welfare
Board Regarding the War, 1942-1943; 1956.” Jacob Rader
Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union
College, Cincinnati.

Nixon, Richard M:

“Correspondence between Nixon & Rabbi Magnin, 1959; 1973.”
Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives,
Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Reagan, Ronald:

“Correspondence between Ronald Reagan & Rabbi Magnin, 1975-1982.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Scottish Rite Of Free Masonry:

“Correspondence between the Scottish Rite Free Masons and Rabbi Magnin regarding his extensive contributions to the organization, 1975-1981.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Union of American Hebrew Congregations:

“Correspondence between the UAHC and Magnin regarding his various contributions to the organization. 1956-1958; 1973-84.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

50th Anniversary 1965:

“Tribute letters from individuals throughout the United States. These letters honored Rabbi Magnin on his great achievements during his 50 years in the rabbinate.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

65th Anniversary 1980:

“Tribute letters from individuals throughout the United States. These letters honored Rabbi Magnin on his great achievements during his 65 years in the Rabbinate.” Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives, Hebrew Union College, Cincinnati.

Published Primary Source Material

Magnin, Edgar. How To Live A Richer & Fuller Life. New York: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1951.

_____. 365 Vitamins for the Mind. Los Angeles: Wilshire Blvd. Temple, 1984.

_____. The Short Story: Specimens Illustrating Its Development. New York: American Book Company, 1911.

. The Voice Of Prophecy In This Satellite Age. Cincinnati:
HUC Press, 1959.

. The Warner Murals In The Wilshire Boulevard Temple Los
Angeles California. Los Angeles: Wilshire Blvd. Temple, 1974.

II. Secondary Sources

A. Chaplaincy, Jewish Welfare Board, USO

Barish, Louis. Rabbis In Uniform: The Story of the American
Jewish Military Chaplains. New York: J. David, 1962.

Eichhorn, David, Max, G. Palmer, et al. The GI's Rabbi: World War
II Letters Of David Max Eichhorn. Lawrence, KS: University
Press of Kansas, 2004.

Livazer, Hirsch. The Rabbi's Blessing: From The Memories of a
Chaplain in the U.S. Army (1943-1965). Jerusalem: H. Livazer,
1980.

Dash Moore, Deborah. GI Jews. Cambridge: The Belknap Press of
Harvard University Press, 2004.

Slomovitz, Abraham I. The Fighting Rabbis: Jewish Military
Chaplains and American History. New York: NYU Press, 1999.

B. Significant Personalities

Ainsworth, Ed. Maverick Mayor: A Biography of Sam Yort of Los
Angeles. Garden City, CA: Double Day Books, 1966.

Allswang, John. Tom Bradley of Los Angeles. Los Angeles:
Historical Society of Southern California, 1992.

- Clements, Cynthia & Sandra Weber. George Burns And Gracie Allen: A Bio-Bibliography. New Hampshire, CT: Greenwood Press, 1996.
- Benny, Jack & Joan. Sunday Nights At Seven: The Jack Benny Story. Los Angeles: Warner Books, 1991.
- Berle, Milton. Milton Berle: An Autobiography. New York: Applause Books, 2002.
- Berle, Milton. B.S. I Love You: Sixty Years With The Famous And The Infamous. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1987.
- Burns, George. All My Best Friends. New York: Penguin Putnam Books, 1989.
- Burns, George. Gracie: A Love Story. Boston: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989.
- Coffey, Frank. Always Home: 50 Years of the USO—The Official Photographic History. Los Angeles: Potomac Books, 1991.
- Dugger, Ronnie. On Reagan: The Man and His Presidency. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1983.
- Fox, Mary. Mister President: The Story of Ronald Reagan. Boston: Enslow Publishers, 1982.
- Freeland, Michael. An Illustrated Biography. Boston: Chameleon Books, 1998.
- Gabler, Neal. Walt Disney: The Triumph Of The American Imagination. New York: Knopf, 2006.
- Goldman, Hal. Wisdom Of The 90's. New York: Penguin, 1991.
- Gottfried, Martin. George Burns. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996
- Hay, Jeff. Presidents And Their Decisions-Richard M. Nixon. New Haven, CT: Greenhaven Press, 2000.

Hyland, William. Mortal Rivals: Superpower Relations From Nixon To Reagan. New York: Random House, 1987.

Hope, Bob. Don't Shoot, It's Only Me: Bob Hope's Comedy History of The United States. New York: Putnam Books, 1990.

Livingstone, Mary. Jack Benny. New York: Doubleday Books, 1978.

Mazo, Earl. Richard Nixon A Political And Personal Portrait. New York: Avon Publishers, 1971.

Miller, Danny. "West Adams Matters," *West Adams Heritage Association*. Los Angeles: December 2005

Morris, Roger. Richard Milhous Nixon: The Rise Of an American Politician. New York: Henry Holtz & Co., 1989.

Payne, Gregory. Tom Bradley: The Impossible Dream: A Biography. New York: Roundtable Publishing, 1986.

Ryan, Ed. Ronald Reagan: The Great Communicator. New York: Harper Paperbacks, 2001.

White, Harold. Breach Of Faith: The Fall Of Richard Nixon. New York: Scribner Publishers, 1975.

C. Rabbinate

Bloom, Jack. The Rabbi As Symbolic Exemplar: By The Power Vested In Me. New York: Haworth Press, 2002.

Marcus, Jacob. R., Abraham J. Peck, et al. The American Rabbinate: A Century of Continuity and Change, 1883-1983. Hoboken, NJ: Ktav, 1985.

Neusner, Jacob. The Rabbinate in America: Reshaping an Ancient Calling. New York: Garland, 1993.

Rendle, Gilbert. Leading Change In The Congregations. Herdon, VA: Alban Institute, 1998.

D. Los Angeles

Alvarez, Louis. The Power Of The Zoot: Youth Culture and Resistance during World War II. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008.

Baxter, John. Hollywood in the Thirties. New York: A. S. Barnes, 1968.

Brownstein, Larry. Los Angeles: Where Anything Is Possible. Culver City, CA: Brownstein, 2003.

Garcia, M. A World Of Its Own: Race, Labor, And Citrus In The Making Of Greater Los Angeles, 1900-1970. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2001.

Goodwin, George M. "The Marginal Man Reconsidered: Five Jews in Los Angeles." Masters thesis. Los Angeles: HUC-JIR, 1984.

Leonard, Kevin. A. The Battle For Los Angeles: Racial Ideology And World War II. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006.

Phoenix, Charles. Southern California In The '50s: Sun, Fun, Fantasy. Santa Monica: Angel City Press, 2001.

E. Social Justice/Social Action

Engh, Michael E. "A Multiplicity and Diversity of Faiths: Religion's Impact on Los Angeles and the Urban West, 1890-1940." The Western Historical Quarterly Vol. 28, No. 4 Winter, 1997.

Cronbach, Rabbi Abraham. "Judaism and Social Justice Historically Considered." CCAR Yearbook 25 1915.

Gittelsohn, Roland B. "The Conference Stance on Social Justice and Civil Rights." Central Conference of American Rabbis 1889-1964. Bertram W. Korn, ed. New York: UAHC, 1965.

Glazer, Nathan. Social Characteristics of America Jews. New York: Jewish Education Committee Press, 1965.

Mervis, Leonard Judah. "The Social Justice Movement of the American Reform Rabbis, 1890-1940." PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1951.

Newman, Marco Ross. Wilshire Boulevard Temple: Congregation B'nai B'rith: 1862-1947. Los Angeles: Historical Society of Southern California, 1956.

Richler, Mordecai. "The Man Who Was Hollywood." New York Times. 26 March 1989.

Schwartz, Rabbi Sidney. Judaism and Justice: The Jewish Passion to Repair the World. Woodstock, VT: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2006.

St. John, Robert. Social Justice: The Jewish Contribution To American, and Some of the Men and Women Who Made it Possible. Washington D.C.: BBYO, 1972.

F. Outreach

Bennett, Alan. "Outreach: The Next Generation, Discussion and Study Guide." Reform Judaism Magazine (Winter 2007). Online at www.reformjudaismmagazine.org.

Bernard Bamberger. Proselytism in the Talmudic Period. New York, NY: Ktav, 1968.

Catalano, Rosann, David Sandmel, and Christopher Leighton, eds. Irreconcilable Differences? A Learning Resource for Jews and Christians. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2001.

- Friedland, Ronnie and Edmund Case, eds. The Guide to Jewish Interfaith Family Life: An Interfaithfamily.com Handbook. New York: Jewish Lights, 2001.
- Handy, Robert T. The American Tradition of Religious Freedom: An Historical Analysis. New York: National Conference of Christians and Jews, 1973.
- Isaacs, Ronald H., Kerry M. Olitzky, eds. Critical Documents of Jewish History: A Sourcebook. Chicago: Jason Aronson, 1995.
- Jacobs, Rabbi Sidney and Betty J. Clues About Jews For People Who Aren't. Los Angeles: Jacobs Ladder, 1985.
- Johnson, Paul M. A History of the Jews. New York: Harper Perennial, 1988.
- Mayer, Egon. Jewish Inter-marriage, Conversion and Outreach. New York: CUNY Center for Jewish Studies, 1990.
- _____. Making Jewish Outreach Work. New York: CUNY Center for Jewish Studies, 1996.
- Neuhaus, Richard John, editor. The Chosen People in an Almost Chosen Nation. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.
- Plaut, W. Gunther. The Growth of Reform Judaism. New York: Word Union for Progressive Judaism, 1965
- Telushkin, Joseph. Jewish Literacy: The Most Important Things to Know About the Jewish Religion, Its People and Its History. New York: William Morrow Publishing, 2001.

G. Jews & Hollywood

- Adler, Cyrus. ed. The American Jewish Year Book 5664. Philadelphia: JPS, 1903

- Benny, Jack; Benny, Joan. Sunday Nights at Seven: The Jack Benny Story. New York: Warner Books, 1990
- Berle, William and Lewis, Brad. My Father, Uncle Miltie. New York: Barricade Books, 1999
- Berle, Milton with Haskel Frankel. Milton Berle, an Autobiography. New York: Dell, 1975.
- Blackburn, Cliff. "Jew Play Important Role In History Of Los Angeles." Los Angeles Herald-Examiner, May 20, 1967.
- Boyar, Burt & Boyar Jane. Sammy: An Autobiography. New York: Farrar Straus & Giroux, 2000
- Buhle, Paul. From The Lower East Side to Hollywood: Jews in American Popular Culture. New York: Anchor Books, 1989.
- Epstein, Lawrence. The Haunted Smile: The Story Of Jewish Comedians in America. New York: Public Affairs Publishing, 2002.
- Flamini, Roland. The Last Tycoon and the World of M-G-M. New York: Crown Publishers, 1994.
- French, Philip, *The Movie Moguls: An Informal History of Hollywood Tycoons*, Henry Regnery Company, 1969.
- Friedman, Lester D. American Cinema of The 1970's. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.
- Frick, Devin Thomas, I. Magnin & Company: A California Legacy. Garden Grove, CA, 2000.
- Gabler, Neal. An Empire of Their Own: How The Jews Invented Hollywood. New York: Crown Publishers, 1988.
- Garraty, John A., & Carnes, Mark C, eds. American National Biography. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Harmon, Justin et al, *American Cultural Leaders: From Colonial Times to the Present*, edited by Amy Lewis and Paula McGuire, ABC-CLIO, 1993.

Hoberman, J. Entertaining America: Jews, Movies and Broadcasting. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003.

Kaminski, Ida. "My Life, My Theater" The Jews of The West: The Metropolitan Years. New York: Macmillan Publishers, 1973.

Kahn, Ava F., and Marc Dollinger, eds. California Jews. New York: Macmillan, 1993.

Lees, Hermine. "Obituaries: Rabbi Alfred Wolf, Interfaith Leader, Dies." The Tidings. California August 6, 2004

Leonard, David. "'The Little Fuehrer Invades Los Angeles': The Emergence of a Black-Jewish Coalition after World War II" American Jewish History – Vol. 92, No. 1, New York: John Hopkins University Press. March 2004.

Moore, Deborah. To the Golden Cities: Pursuing the American Jewish Dream in Miami and Los Angeles. Toronto: Free Press, 1994.

Mullane, James Thomas. A Store to Remember. Sam Ramon, CA: Falcon Books, 2007.

Oliver, Myrna. "Alfred Wolf: A Champion of Interfaith Dialogue, Exchanges." Los Angeles Chronicle. Los Angeles: August 2, 2008

Oppenheim, Samson, ed. The American Jewish Year Book 5679. Philadelphia: JPS, 1918.

Reisner, Neil, ed. Jewish Los Angeles: A Guide. Los Angeles: Jewish Federation-Council Of Greater Los Angeles: 1976.

- Riordan, Richard. "The Man Who Got Things Done" Newsweek October 12, 1998
- Rochlin, Harriet & Fred Rochlin. Pioneer Jews: A New Life in the Far West. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Rogin, Michael. Blackface, White Noise: Jewish Immigrants in the Hollywood Melting Pot. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996.
- Sandberg, Neil. Jewish Life in Los Angeles: A Window to Tomorrow. Lanham, PA: UPA, 1986.
- Schatz, Thomas. The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Schindler, Collin. Hollywood in Crisis: Cinema And American Society 1929-1939. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- "Television Dies at 93" Washington Post. March 28, 2002
- "Death Notice Max Vorspan" New York Times. June 2, June 15, 2002.
- "G. Thalberg Dies." New York Times. New York: September 15, 1936.
- "Matriarch Magnin." Time Magazine. February 17, 1936.
- Steinbeck, John. Once There was a War. New York: Bantam Books, 1958
- Stern, Norton, Editor. The Jews of Los Angeles: Urban Pioneers. Los Angeles: Southern California Jewish Historical Society, 1981.
- Thomson, David, A Biographical Dictionary of Film, edition, Alfred A. Knopf, 1994.

Tugend, Tom. MS 344 36/2 "Hollywood's Former 'Court Bishop' 90." Jewish Chronicle. Los Angeles: July 4, 1980.

Vorspan, Max. History of The Jews of Los Angeles. San Marino, CA: Huntington Library, 1970.

Zurawik, David. The Jews of Prime Time. Waltham, MA: Brandeis University Press, 2003.

General Reference Works on American Jewish History

Adelson, Andrea, "R.H. Macy Planning to Close I. Magnin Specialty Stores," in the New York Times, 19 November 1994.

Diner, Hasia. A History of the Jews of the United States 1654-2000. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

_____. A New Promised Land: A History of Jewish in America. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Feingold, Henry L. Zion in America: The Jewish Experience From Colonial Times to the Present. New York: Hippocrene Books, 1974.

Hendrickson, Robert. The Grand Emporiums: The Illustrated History of American's Great Department Stores. New York: Stein and Day, 1979

Hertzberg, Arthur. The Jews In America: Four Centuries Of an Uneasy Encounter: A History. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Marcus, Jacob Rader. The American Jews, 1585-1990: A History. Brooklyn: Carlson, 1995.

_____. The Jew In The American World: A Source Book. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1996.

- _____. United States Jewry: 1776-1985. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1989.
- Mahoney, Tom and Sloane, Leonard. The Great Merchants: America's Foremost Retail Institutions and the People Who Made Them Great. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- Meyer, Michael A. Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion: A Centennial History 1875-1975, rev. ed. New York: Hebrew Union College Press, 1992.
- _____. Response to Modernity: A History of the Reform Movement in Judaism. New York: Oxford University Press, 1988.
- Meyer, Michael and Gunther Plaut. The Reform Judaism Reader. New York: UAHC Press, 2000.
- Raphael, Marc Lee. Profiles in American Judaism: The Reform, Conservative, Orthodox and Reconstructionist Traditions in Historical Perspective. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1984.
- Sachar, Howard M. The Course of Modern Jewish History. New York: Vintage Books, 1990.
- Sarna, Jonathan D. The American Jewish Experience, 2nd edition. New York: Holmes and Meier, 1997.
- _____. American Judaism: A History. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Shapiro, Edward S. A Time for Healing: American Jewry Since World War II. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992.
- Wertheimer, Jack, ed. The Modern Jewish Experience: A Reader's Guide. New York: New York University Press, 1993.