

List of Most Important Americans Includes 16 Jews

By Debra Nussbaum (JTA)

Bet you didn't know that Robert Allan Zimmerman from Duluth, Minn., is one of the most important Americans of this century.

Zimmerman even beat out such luminaries as John Kennedy, Justice Louis Brandeis and Greta Garbo for a place on Life magazine's list of "The 100 Most Important Americans of the 20th Century."

Zimmerman, better known to most as Bob Dylan, is hailed by Life as being the "electric minstrel of times that were a-changing'." He's in good company, listed alongside great minds like Albert Einstein and J. Robert Oppenheimer.

Of Life's list of 100, 16 are Jews. That's quite a few notables, considering that at best Jews account for only three percent of this country's population.

Rabbi Arthur Hertzberg, historian and author, was not surprised. "This list is not unprecedented," he said. "If you had looked at a similar list in the 1920s, from Polish, German, or French culture, you would also have seen an outsized proportion of Jews."

"Jews have been part of the urban educated class because education has been the way that Jews have gotten 'in' to society, much like Asians are doing right now in this country," Hertzberg explained.

Steven Cohen, a professor of sociology at Queens College, pointed out that a feeling of insecurity within American society as a whole has spurred Jews to success.

This has led to an "overrepresentation in groups of elites," he said. "One-third of multi-millionaires are Jews, and Jews are 40 to 50 percent of elites in professions such as medicine, law and the media," he noted.

The creation of the motion-picture studios, for example, was founded mostly by Jews: Paramount, by Adolph Zukor; MGM, by Louis Mayer; Twentieth Century-Fox, by William Fox; Warner Brothers, by Albert, Sam, Jack and Harry Warner; Columbia, by Harry Cohen; and Universal, by Carl Laemmle.

This can be credited to the fact that the industry didn't exist before — it was not something from which Jews could be ex-

cluded, Hertzberg pointed out, because they started it themselves.

Life magazine explained how they compiled, out of an original roster of 536 names, their list of 100 Americans, native-born or naturalized.

"The people we are calling important are not necessarily great — in fact, a couple might be on our list of villains," Life writes in its special issue just published. "Rather, their importance is measured by their influence: How would our lives have been different had these people not lived?"

Besides Bob Dylan, Life's list includes:

- **Leonard Bernstein**, who paid for his own piano lessons and fought his Russian immigrant parents to follow his musical dream. He joins **Richard Rodgers** and **Irving Berlin** (both Israel Baline in Russia) as the other musicians on the list.

- **Albert Einstein**, whose theory of relativity led to the atomic bomb. Einstein wrote it in 1905, while working as a \$675-a-year patent clerk in Switzerland.

- **Abraham Flexner**, the educator who brought about a complete reformation of the American medical education system, and founded the Institute for Advanced Study at Princeton, N.J., in 1930.

- **Betty Friedan**, born Betty Goldstein, one of 12 women on the list. She realized that "in seeking identity through home and husband, women lost themselves." Friedan gave "the problem that has no name," as she called it, a name with her revolutionary 1963 book, "The Feminine Mystique." Three years later, she went on to become the founding president of the National Organization for Women.

- **Milton Friedman**, who believes in economies untethered by government restrictions. The Nobel Prize-winning economist, who was an adviser to President Reagan, is opposed to Social Security, welfare and Medicare,

instead favoring the notion that the private sector should take care of society's problems.

- **William Levitt**, who in the years following World War II mass-produced row after row of concrete and wood boxes on what had been Long Island potato fields. Levitt's approach allowed GIs to move into a \$6,900 Cape Cod-style home in Levittown for \$65 a month, no money down. Now the 83-year-old developer has plans for Florida.

- **Louis Mayer**, who built the first movie studio on big names showcased in even bigger pictures. By 1937, he was America's highest-salaried employee, earning almost \$1.3 million.

- **J. Robert Oppenheimer**, who oversaw the development of the world's first atom bomb. After he witnessed its detonation, he became an ardent advocate of nuclear arms control.

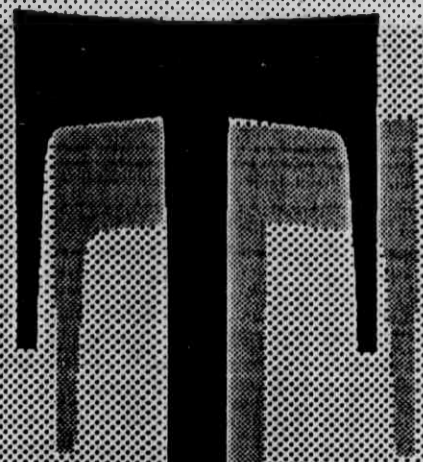
- **William Paley**, who created a \$4.6 billion entertainment empire built on CBS by mastering mass-audience comedy, variety and quiz shows, and balancing them with more serious news programming.

- **Jonas Salk**, who created a vaccine derived from monkey kidney tissue in 1955 and ended the polio scourge that had killed a million Americans since the turn of the century. The 75-year-old scientist is now testing an AIDS vaccine in a study due to be completed in 1994.

- **Alfred Stieglitz**, who made Georgia O'Keefe his model and his wife and turned photography, a 19th-century technological phenomenon, into a 20th-century art form. Also on the list in the field of photography is **Edwin Land**, who made picture taking an immediately gratifying art form by creating the world's first instant camera.

- **Walter Winchell**, who had started out as a vaudeville hooper before making high society's private life a public show for the masses in his daily newspaper column and weekly radio show.

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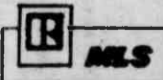
O O P S

Our apologies concerning the inadvertent omission last month of the writer's name of the "Letters to the Editor" column entitled "Jewish Community Needs PR Person." It was written by Rabbi Israel J. Gerber.

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