



Mr. John Tortorice  
Program Manager, Mosse Program  
University of Wisconsin  
4265 Mosse Humanities Building  
455 N. Park St.  
Madison, WI 53706

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Dear John,

I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the George L. Mosse Faculty Exchange Program during the spring 2008 term and, at your request, to indicate how my participation in the program enriched my life and work.

As you know, I spent nearly seven months in Israel, from mid-January through July 2008. While I had visited Israel several times previously, I had never lived in the country for such an extended period of time. As a comparative-historical sociologist, I saw my visit as an opportunity to deepen my knowledge of Israeli society. Indeed, given the insightful observations that Alexis de Tocqueville and other foreign visitors have made about America, I was convinced that a visitor can in some ways understand another society better than its own members precisely because he is not a part of it. At the same time, I saw my visit to Israel as an opportunity to develop a better understanding of American society – or at least to see it in new and fruitful ways – by means of comparison to the less familiar place I was visiting. During my visit, I committed many of my reflections to writing and created a blog – a kind of sociological travelogue – to share them with others. One of my posts (about the faculty strike at Israeli universities) was reprinted in the April 2008 issue of *The Professional*, the newspaper published by AFT-Wisconsin.

I realized that if I was serious about deepening my knowledge of Israeli society, I needed to improve my Hebrew-language skills. (Some of Tocqueville's most incisive observations about America, it may be recalled, are found in a chapter entitled "How American Democracy Has Modified the English Language.") My participation in the Mosse Program enabled me to do this as well. Because of the Israeli faculty strike, the start of the spring term was postponed until May, which left me without teaching obligations for the first three and a half months of my visit. I used this time in part to take Hebrew-language courses. When I arrived in Israel, my Hebrew was rudimentary. By May, I was capable of giving short presentations, engaging in basic conversations, and reading simple texts. I'm pleased to report that I earned a grade of 98% in the intensive four-week *ulpan* that I started in mid-January and 97% in the longer but less intensive follow-up course I took from February to May. While I'm still far from fluent, the instruction helped me to adjust to life in Israel and furthered my understanding and appreciation of Israeli

Department of Sociology

8128 Social Science Building University of Wisconsin-Madison 1180 Observatory Drive Madison, Wisconsin 53706-1393  
608/262-2921 Fax: 608/265-5389 www.ssc.wisc.edu/soc

culture. This was reflected in my travelogue, which included several posts about language. These included an early post about the social and cultural significance of the two Hebrew words for freedom (*chofesh* and *cherut*) and another post about the sociological implications of the revival of Hebrew as a spoken language of everyday life. (This last post also included a funny anecdote that Steven Aschheim told me about one of George Mosse's mistakes in the Hebrew language – which made me feel better about my own.)

From May through July, I taught a seminar at the Hebrew University on “Capitalism, Socialism, and Democracy in America since 1890.” This was a modified version of a course I had taught several times already at the University of Wisconsin. The five students who enrolled in the seminar came from diverse backgrounds; they included a *sabra*, an *olah* from Russia, an *olah* from France, an *olah* from the U.S., and a student whose parents had immigrated to Israel from South Africa. For me, this diversity was perhaps the most enriching aspect of my teaching experience; it was fascinating to see how these varied backgrounds informed students' engagement with the material discussed in class, particularly when their reactions diverged from those that were typical of my American students. The outsider perspective of my Israeli students enabled them to see things that American students might not, even as their understanding remained very much shaped by their own societies and histories. The way this paralleled my own relationship to Israeli society was not lost on me.

I also devoted part of my time in Israel to revising a paper on Émile Durkheim's sociology of antisemitism, which has since been published in the December 2008 issue of the journal *Sociological Theory*. (The article includes a note of thanks to the Mosse Program for its generous support.) Although this was not the research project I had originally intended to complete during my visit, Israel proved to be an extremely fruitful setting for this work, in part because of the resources available at the Hebrew University's libraries, and in part because of the valuable comments and suggestions I received from Israeli colleagues and members of the Mosse community. I especially benefited from the opportunity to present my work to the Hebrew University's Joint History and Jewish History Seminar in February 2008 and the Jerusalem Seminar in the History of Political Thought in March 2008. Arie Dubnov kindly arranged both of these presentations. I was also very fortunate to be able to discuss my work with Dr. Shmuel Eisenstadt, an Israeli sociologist and professor emeritus at the Hebrew University, whose prominence and influence extend well beyond his own country.

These are just some of the ways that participation in the Mosse Faculty Exchange Program enriched my life and work. I found the experience to be immensely fascinating, extremely valuable for my intellectual and professional development, and thoroughly enjoyable. My only regret is that I didn't stay for a full year. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and I am certain that the experience will redound to the benefit of my department, the College of Letters and Science, and the University of Wisconsin as a whole. You may be assured that I will encourage others to avail themselves of the same opportunity.

Sincerely,

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Chad Alan Goldberg  
Associate Professor of Sociology  
University of Wisconsin-Madison