

THE INFLUENCING MACHINE: BROOKE GLADSTONE ON THE MEDIA

Brooke Gladstone; Josh Neufeld, illus.

W. W. Norton & Company, 2011. 192 pp. \$23.95 [e]
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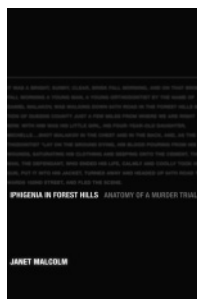
“There is no conspiracy,” declares NPR’s Brooke Gladstone in the introduction to her entertaining, informative graphic book about the media. But as she recounts, the history of mass media is rife with conspiracy theories and with demands that the power of the media be curbed. The public doesn’t trust journalists, and Gladstone explains why.

Mostly the media want to be popular. News outlets seize on stories that are dramatic or exceptional or visually striking because the public prefers them. Especially in wartime, journalists may frame information according to a widely held narrative, or distort facts to appear balanced, in order to gain approval. When public opinion favored a particular consensus described as “objectivity” during the Cold War, the media complied then too.

In one chapter Gladstone reprises a brilliant segment from her *On the Media* show last year about bogus statistics. NBC claimed in 2005 that “50,000 predators are online at any given moment,” attributing the figure to “law enforcement officials.” In the early 1980’s it was reported that 50,000 children were abducted by strangers each year; the actual number was 200–300. A few years later, satanic cults were supposedly responsible for 50,000 human sacrifices (!) a year, although the total number of all murders in the United States was 20,000. The figure of 50,000 was repeated not because it was correct but because it seemed plausible—in other words, it fit the audience’s expectations. As Gladstone concludes, “we get the media we deserve.”

The graphic-nonfiction format of *The Influencing Machine* perfectly matches the tone of the radio program, conveying serious information with clarity and wit. The inventive and expressive illustrator, Josh Neufeld, places a Brooke avatar in almost every story, a reporter in superhero boots who manages to be on the scene through all of history. This clever, common-sense chronicle and analysis should be read by anybody with hopes or

fears about the media and their role in public life. **BG**



IPHIGENIA IN FOREST HILLS: ANATOMY OF A MURDER

Janet Malcolm

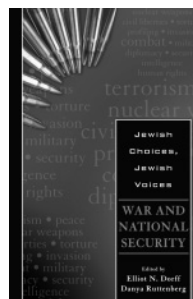
Yale University Press, 2011. 155 pp. \$25.00 [e]
ISBN: 978-0300-167-467

Reading Janet Malcolm’s new book, you might mistakenly think you had picked up a novel. Yet the plot is all too true and the characters are right out of the pages of the newspapers. The story that rocked the Bukharan Jewish community in 2009 is so well written here that you not only get the facts of the sensational murder and riveting trial, you get the conflicts and the doubts too. Both intellectual and emotional precision are the guiding forces in this tale of justice and injustice that shattered the lives of the Borukhova-Malakov family.

The book is an outgrowth of Malcolm’s coverage of the trial that appeared as an article in *The New Yorker*, an article that was highly praised for its scrupulous reporting and interviewing of key people on both sides of the issue. The result is a suspenseful story that is fully believable, making the reader think deeply about such critical issues as truth, character, morality, and reasonable doubt.

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Although she is a seasoned reporter, with four books to her credit plus a coveted PEN Biography Award, Malcolm seems to have attacked this topic with unusual verve. Her story exposes the enigma that lies beneath the central narrative of the trial and clarifies the malleability of the evidence that was presented. She focuses on the human factors that all lawyers, judges, and juries need to understand to reach an unassailable verdict, one that, in this case, sealed the fate of two aspiring immigrant families and the young daughter who had the grave misfortune to witness the murder. **LFB**



JEWISH CHOICES, JEWISH VOICES: WAR AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Elliot N. Dorff and Danya Ruttenberg, eds.

Jewish Publication Society, 2010. 160 pp. \$16.00 (pbk.)
ISBN: 978-0-8276-0906-8 (pbk.)

The fifth installment in JPS’s series *Jewish Choices, Jewish Voices* presents largely familiar arguments in its case studies about terrorism, justifications for war, the conduct of war, and national policies about war. Its essayists agree that armies should act ethically, and none supports the use of torture. Two commentators cite President Eisenhower’s warning about a “military-industrial complex” in connection with national-security policy, and UCLA Professor Steven Spiegel argues against most kinds of arms sales. Temple University Professor Richard Immerman is concerned that defense spending takes money away from schools, transit, and the environment.

Classical Jewish sources are furnished for each of the four case studies as a point of departure. A lot of them relate only obliquely to the topic at hand, however, for instance, the Biblical prohibition of *rechilus*, a kind of gossip, is cited here in relation to privacy, although gossip (*lashon hara*) is normally treated as an ethical pitfall for the perpetrator. The voice from heaven announcing that Jewish law follows the School of Hillel is listed under “Free Speech and Its Limits.”

What’s more, these sources do not perceptibly inform the essays that follow. Michael Walzer notes in passing that his book *Just and Unjust Wars* is actually a secularized version of Catholic just-war theory. Nadav Morag of the American Jewish University argues against profiling not for ethical reasons but because “Jihadist terrorism does not fit a particular ethnic profile.”

The range of viewpoints is also surprisingly narrow. A number of prominent progressive organizations are represented, including Brit Tzedek v’Shalom, Encounter, and Jewish Voice for Peace, as are Rabbi Sharon Brous and Professor Noam Chomsky. Well-known neoconservative Jewish voices such as Paul Wolfowitz, Richard Perle, and Douglas Feith, as well as David Frum and William Kristol, are correspondingly conspicuous by their absence. This volume would have been far richer had it been more rigorous, inclusive, and diverse. **BG**