

Heritage TV Series - A Monumental Achievement

Channel 10 - Sunday, February 16 at 3 P.M.

By Rabbi William Berkowitz

Public Television, in response to popular demand, is rebroadcasting this month Abba Eban's television series "Heritage: Civilization and the Jews." Without question this program which has received many awards including the coveted Emmy, is a monumental achievement not only by virtue of the scope, depth, erudition and eloquence brought to it by Abba Eban but, additionally, by virtue of the critical significance of this tremendous undertaking.

Recently, in New York City, the American Jewish Heritage Committee held a symposium with the participation of experts to analyze and understand the scholarly historic dimensions of the program; to explore the making of the series; and to offer means of utilizing the program for outreach toward broadening Jewish identity. The symposium which was then aired over radio to several hundred thousand people in the metropolitan New York area, provided an insight into the tremendous popularity of the program and highlighted its importance.

What makes this series so important? As I indicated in my symposium remarks, scores of efforts by scores of men and women across the centuries have been undertaken to tell the mysterious tale of Jewish history. All kinds of

mediums have been utilized, but mostly all have been through the printed page. And yet none have told the tale in the context of the television revolution, which has transformed our means of communication and our mode of perception. Until now. With this program, Abba Eban's vision has enabled thousands and thousands of Jews -- if not millions -- who are ignorant of their heritage and lacking in any understanding or appreciation of their identity to now become a part of it, and to do so right in their living rooms. Moreover, Abba Eban's conception of how to tell the tale was most important; for he did so in the context of the Jewish interaction with civilization, and our impact upon the world. To have told the story from the inside would mean only to talk to ourselves. By placing it in the context of civilization, it can attract Jews who are ignorant and indifferent to their heritage, and present to them the riches and majesty of its contributions. And with the rising trends in Jewish assimilation figures with young Jews drawn to cults, with the increase in unaffiliated Jewish singles, and broken Jewish homes where identity is lost, this program is singularly important for helping Jews to reclaim their roots. The mail received in response indicates the success of this undertaking as thousands of unidentified Jews have been enthused and infused with

Jewish passion and identity. Secondly, this program has done much for intergroup and interfaith efforts. Ignorance is the bigot's greatest ally. Here is a program, viewed by 50 million people -- most of whom are non-Jews. Can you imagine how many among them are millions in the Bible Belt, the Southwest and remote places, who never met a Jew and know nothing about Judaism? Now they have a clearer understanding of the 4000-year-old tale of the Jewish people and what Israel, built on the ruins of Auschwitz means to the Jew. Without question, this program will go a long way in refuting the anti-Semite's naive listener.

As this nine-week series unfolds, we owe Abba Eban our thanks. But ultimately, to our heritage; and its strengthening, we owe our commitment.

(Rabbi Berkowitz is the national president of the American Jewish Heritage Committee.)

UJA Collected Record \$401 Million In 1985

NEW YORK (WNS) — The United Jewish Appeal has collected \$400.8 million for 1985, the largest cash collection of any peacetime year in UJA history, according to a special announcement by UJA national chairman Alex Grass.

Calling the record cash collection "a magnificent achievement," Grass added that "it was a landmark year made even more extraordinary by the fact that the vast majority of communities throughout the country exceeded their 1984 cash remittances. Furthermore," Grass pointed out, "this is only a part of what was collected,

since millions of dollars were utilized for urgent local community needs."

Grass paid special tribute to Bernie Borine, the UJA's national cash chairman, for his "innovative leadership and dedication in seeing a complex task through to a successful conclusion."

While noting that the final surge of money coming in has prevented seriously threatened cutbacks in UJA lifesaving programs, Grass emphasized that the same level of collection intensity is required at the same time the '86 Campaign increases its momentum.

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