

[The Ginsbergs]

Beliefs and Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK [3?] Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER ARNOLD MANOFF

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE October 23, 1938

SUBJECT THE GINSBERGS

1. Date and time of interview Oct. 20, 1938 - morning and afternoon
2. Place of interview 1357 Teller Ave.
3. Name and address of informant Abe Ginsberg 1357 Teller Ave.
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc. Five-room ground floor apartment in four-family two-story brick house. Except for the dining room and kitchen, the other rooms are bedrooms. Four children, 3 daughters and 1 son, live in the apartment. Teller Ave.

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is a rather quiet street since there are less apartment houses on the block. Trees line the sidewalk. The effect is that of a small town street recently invaded by a few large houses. This block is a good distance from the subway and consequently is not so thickly populated. The Ginsberg apartment is large and airy. Sparsely furnished but there is a lived in air about the place. Books, magazines, papers, clothes are strewn all over; a sort of pleasant disorder exists. A brown dog, part chow and part spitz, roams around from one room to another. Mr. Ginsberg occupies the parlor which is converted into a bedroom.

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK

FORM B Personal History of Informant

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER ARNOLD MANOFF

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE October 25, 1938

SUBJECT THE GINSBERGS

1. Ancestry Russo-Jewish
2. Place and date of birth Brest-Litovsk some 50 years ago.
3. Family A son, Sol about 22; Irene a daughter about 19, Martha a daughter about 18, Leah a daughter about 10.
4. Places lived in, with dates

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5. Education, with dates

6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates Mr. Ginsberg was a candy store owner for many years. Recently he became ill and is now invalided.

7. Special skills and interests Special skill is his pinochle playing; no social or other interest outside his family. Reads many newspapers and magazines.

8. Community and religious activities No religious interests. Community activity limited to an Association of storekeeper of 169th Street when in the candy store business. Was one president of a Candy Store Man's Association which collapsed.

9. Description of informant Mr. Ginsberg is a medium sized man with a round, crinkling face. He is forever smiling with closed eyes. He is bald-headed. Mrs. Ginsberg has a very sad face in direct contrast to her husband's. She has light brown deep sunk eyes. Her face is lined, but her manner is extremely soft and gentle.

10. Other Points gained in interview

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER Arnold Manoff

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE Oct. 23, 1938

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SUBJECT THE GINSBERGS

You see me here? This is how I am lying now for months. Just this week I can get up and walk around, take some air. Well, anyway. What's the use to talk. We're behind the eight ball. They sold the store under my feet when I was sick in New Jersey. I had another heart attack. I suppose they got panicky like. Solly called up the creditors they should come and take it away. That's how smart he is. I suppose they figured the old man is sick. Anyway, my wife sold the store and we paid off the creditors. Now she wants to buy it back again. She can't stand this sitting around and not working. It's driving her crazy. She ain't used to it. She sits by the window all day and worries. She watches the money from the store going. Well, anyway, what's the use of talking. I ain't supposed to worry about those things. I'm out of it. What the hell, they don't let you starve these days. We'll go on relief. But she can't stand it. It's driving her crazy. Solly was away in the mountains. He just got back this week. Put on some weight. Ate like a horse. He needed it. You can't blame the kids they don't want to work in the store anymore. The girls say they suffered enough there. And anyway we got rid of the Hatchet Face. You remember her, the woman that worked here for us. She didn't talk to me for months before she left. One day she comes in and says to my wife, "Solly drank up all the milk. There's no more milk. That's no way to bring up children," she says to my wife. That old Hatchet-face. He drank up all the milk, she says. I don't know how to bring up children. I am glad when Solly drinks milk. Never spare the children food. Well, anyway. She's gone. I suppose where she was brought up, they brought her up like in a straight jacket. Nobody is making a living except the number runners. There are five of them now. I remember when there were only two. The people who bought our store aint making out so good. They want to sell it back to us. They threw out all the men who used to hang around. And so nobody comes around. What did I care. I used to talk to the boys. They gave me business, cigarettes and drinks. The woman threw then out. That's how people are.

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She wanted to be more respectable than me. Yes Old Moishe is still around. No he ain't working anymore. Old Bernstein, just the same. Still selling Sweepstakes tickets and his wife sells dresses in the apartment. Listen, remember Old Man Silver from the beauty parlor. Well, he died. He always had a weak heart. And with his son Sheldon and the pinochle games with the Peanut Politician Lembeck, he died just like that. Remember Frank who used to hang around the store and he was out of work for so long. Well he's better off than any of us now. He got a job in the Post Office. He must make about forty dollars a week. But he lost a lot of weight. He still wants to start a chicken farm. That's all he talks about. And Leff he's around just like always. Still on WPA. I admire that Leff. All the years he raised his family and kept his mouth shut and honest like a clock. Remember how he used to stand around the store for hours and never say anything?

I want Solly to learn how to drive a car. It's useful. He might get a job with a license. How time flies. Just two years ago, Solly was away in College in Illinois and I used to get letters from him how they were teaching him how to ride a horse there. And remember he used to write how he wanted to join a fraternity and I told you to write him a letter to talk him out of it because I didn't have any money. It did him a lot of good that two years he was in Illinois. But I think the mountains this year was even better for him than the College. He had to work hard. 3 And he ate like a horse. One good thing. I don't want him to get a job now for twelve dollars a week and they should work him to death. He's still a boy. He can't do a man's job. They'll take a kid like him, put him on a man's job and they'll work the life out of him. My wife worries. And she drives the kids crazy with her worrying. The worst that'll happen is that we got to go on relief.

She can't stand the quiet here. I like it here. It's almost like in the country. When she was in the store she used to complain that she couldn't stand all the noise, the men and the numbers and the machine and the kids. Now she wants to be back in it again. Take it easy, I tell her, but she just sits there and waits for night to come and then she can't sleep. There's a little fruit store around the corner I want to buy. Maybe I'll buy it. Sarah comes

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to us and she won't take any money for cleaning. She is one in a million. She's the only one my wife will talk to. Worked for us for sixteen years, a colored woman with a family of her own. Now she sees we are broke and I am flat on my back and my wife is sick with worrying so she comes and gives us a hand and she don't take any money for it. She's like the Rock of Gibraltar to us. She brought up the kids. She's a wonderful woman. Somebody ought to write a story about her, I mean it. I tell my wife she ought to see how they live in Pennsylvania. When I passed through Pennsylvania, I saw how the miners lived there, in shacks, like the soldiers used to live in barracks in the old country. She don't want to hear about that. It's hard on the girls, too.

They got to go to school and they don't know what they're going to do when they get out. Irene will be finished next year. I take it easy, no more worry for me. I can't afford to worry the doctor said if I want to live a while. I read the papers.

When it's a nice day I go outside. I can't climb hills or stairs. Well anyway, what's the use. One way or the other, everybody's behind the eight ball. I'm tired of worrying. I'm a sick man.

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NEW YORK

FORM D Extra Comment

STATE NEW YORK

NAME OF WORKER ARNOLD MANOFF

ADDRESS 27 Hamilton Terrace

DATE October 23, 1938

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SUBJECT THE GINSBERGS

The Ginsbergs used to own a candy store at 169th St. and Grant Avenue which is two blocks east and downhill from the Grand Concourse. 169th Street is a sort of secondary business section to such main shopping streets as 170th and 167th Streets, where the subway stations are. The street had only the essential stores, such as grocery, fruit, meat, two hardware stores, two delicatessens, two bakeries and on this corner there were two candy stores, one of which was "Ginsy's". Ginsy's was the hangout for the unemployed, the number runners and for the gambling men who used to come around after work to pick up a game. Late at night when business was slow Ginsy himself would sit down for a game of pinochle with some of his customers and one of the boys would stand behind the counter to take care of any legitimate trade. The neighborhood was once a respectable middle class section leaning on the prestige of the Concourse course for its high rentals. Now even the prestige of the Concourse has no effect on the rents, the talk and the gloomy desperate atmosphere that pervades whatever community life there is. For a long time the Tauckamuck Democratic Club was able to give this neighborhood some patronage mostly through its connection with Eddie Flynn, Bronx Political Boss, who had an 'in' with the Post Office. Then the talk about jobs was optimistic. All you had to do was to get one of the Block Captains to introduce you to somebody who would introduce you or get you an interview with a certain notorious politician in the Bronx, 2 whose name I don't care to mention. Each introduction cost you five dollars a handshake. All negotiations were carried on in or around Ginsy's corner candy store, where the block captains, or peanut politicians as they were called, hung around to keep in touch with the people and get up a game of cards now and then. Two of the number runners had their posts in Ginsy's and many times if they thought the cop on the beat had orders to pick them up or if they spied the precinct detectives headed their way, you could see them duck into the phone booth and gulp down the paper slips. Ginsy's also kept a pin ball machine which drew the nickels and attention of everybody at one time or another. Small betting was carried on at the

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side. Ginsy's was the gossip exchange. You could find out the color of your neighbor's underwear in Ginsy's.

Also the characters of the neighborhood used Ginsy's store for their performances. Impromptu performances were given usually after eleven o'clock. Ginsy's phone booth was the private number of perhaps a hundred people. There was one youngster who did nothing else but wait in Ginsy's store for the calls and then he would run up to the various apartments and bring back whoever was requested. For this service he usually got a nickel. Now the neighborhood has taken on a sharper and more desperate coloration. Many people are on relief. The basements are filled with business apartments. Card games are mostly small time stuff but cut-throat affairs just the same. The talk is all numbers, sweepstakes, football scores. The people are passive in that very seldom is there any kind of explosion. Although not so quietly as on the Concourse, but still quietly enough, the bunch around this street are taking a terrific beating and their standards of living are being pushed lower and lower. Political patronage has practically ended for 169th Street. Yiddish and English are spoken and freely mixed and interchanged. The cultural influences are predominantly the Luxor movie house and Loew's 167th Street. The people here generally regard themselves on a social level superior to the people in the East Bronx, although some of them are beginning to suspect that this superiority is more or less abstract and is based on geography along. 3 The youngsters who grew up in the long gorge of a street that is Grant Ave. are a tough, uncompromising lot, many of them taking hold of their problems in a realistic way. They talk a clipped, wise-cracking language just about as soft as the pavement under their feet and energy and emotion goes into dancing, jitterbug stuff, although they will tell you that over in the East Bronx, the sharpies have it all over them when it comes to dancing. The kids play ball in the street, skip rope, but such games as Johnny on the Pony or Ringo Leavio which was the sport of East Bronx kids are unknown. Generally the kids adhere pretty much to the stuff they get in school and in the recreation playgrounds, some three blocks away in Claremont Park. The neighborhood is all buildings, red, tan, gray, all five to six storys' height and rising sheer

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and flat off the street. Rents run from \$28 for two rooms to about \$45 for five rooms. This community, despite its proximity to the Concourse and the Concourse tradition of middle-class refinement, somehow, maybe because it runs downhill from the Concourse, has gotten a little frayed around the edges and battered in the middle as if the muddy waters that run down from the Concourse when it rains have seeped into the cellars and plumbing of the houses so that the people drink muddy water, and maybe that makes them so gray and gloomy.