

Urban renewal critiqued in 'Yemin Moshe'

Bookshelf



Morton I. Teicher

YEMIN MOSHE: The Story of a Jerusalem Neighborhood. By Eliezer D. Jaffe. New York: Praeger Publications, 1988. 176 pp. \$37.95.

One of Israel's most attractive and affluent neighborhoods today began originally in 1860 as an effort to relieve overcrowding in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem by providing housing for poor Jews outside the walls of the Old City. The story of that remarkable transformation is the subject of this highly critical book.

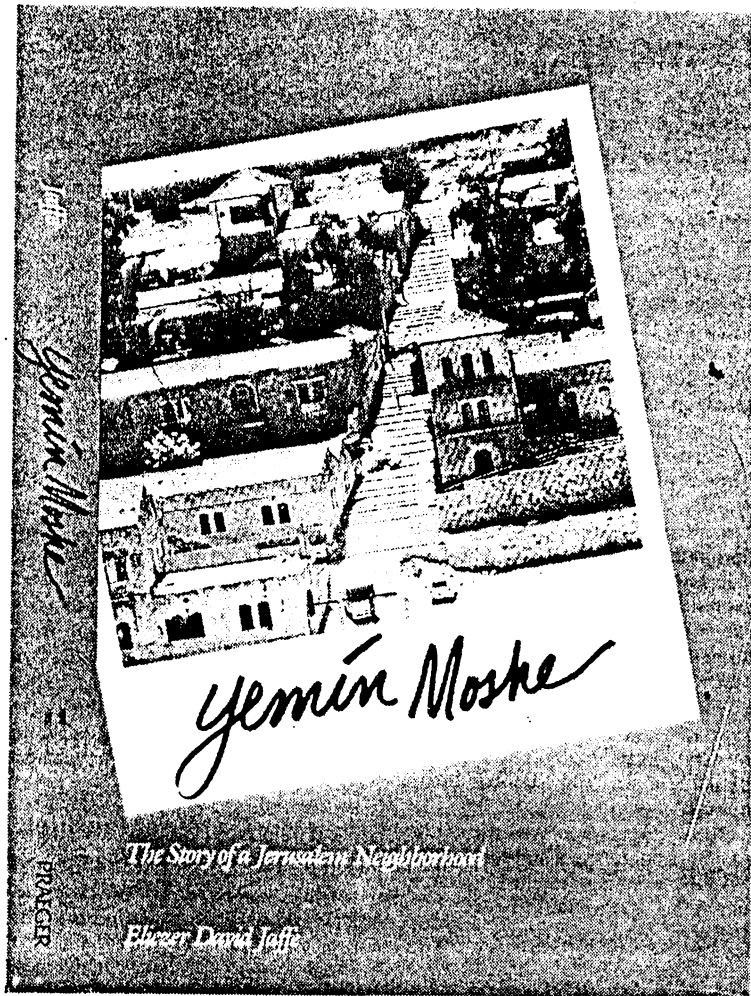
The author, Eliezer D. Jaffe, is a professor of social work at Hebrew University, having been a member of the faculty since 1960, when he moved to Israel from the United States. He is a social critic who is no stranger to controversy, as is clearly illustrated in this volume.

Jaffe has also been arguing for some time that the Jewish Agency is an anachronistic structure which should be dismantled, a point of view which has earned him the hostility of some establishment figures. In this book, he recounts a dispute with Teddy Kollek, the mayor of Jerusalem.

Jaffe carefully lays the groundwork for his negative appraisal of what happened in Yemin Moshe by first telling the history of the area. He begins with its purchase in 1855 by Sir Moses Montefiore, who used money provided by an American Jewish philanthropist, Judah Touro. Montefiore built some apartments and a flour mill, aiming to provide work for the residents and to distribute flour to the Jewish poor. The mill, now a Jerusalem landmark, soon ceased operating because there were no regular winds to turn the blades.

After Montefiore died in 1885, squatters occupied the Yemin Moshe area, putting up shacks and tents in anticipation of permanent structures being erected by Montefiore's estate in accordance with his intent of housing poor people. The squatters were removed and permanent housing was built, but different people moved in.

Since Yemin Moshe was a border neighborhood, the residents were subjected to frequent attacks by Arabs. During the War of Independence, the inhabitants left and Yemin Moshe became an Israeli Army base and staging area.



After the war, the deserted and neglected neighborhood was settled by Jewish immigrants from Turkey, but harassment and shooting by Jordanian soldiers continued. Finally, the situation was radically changed in 1967, when the Six-Day War con-

flict required they be evacu-

ated. They were replaced by well-to-do families who could afford to buy and rebuild the houses.

In 1971 and 1972, Dr. Jaffe's students surveyed the people who had been evacuated and found a great deal of bitterness and dissatisfaction. The publication of these results evoked an angry reaction from Kollek, creating a furor which became a cause celebre in the Israeli press.

A later piece of research in 1980 developed a profile of the new Yemin Moshe residents, showing them to be affluent individuals, many of whom used their homes for only part of the year. This added fuel to the fire of Jaffe's opposition to what has been done in removing poor people in favor of rich ones.

Although Jaffe expresses his criticism somewhat gently in the form of questions, it is clear that he disapproves of the requisition of the land

for supposedly "public purposes." Moreover, he is convinced that Sir Montefiore and Touro would be considerably disturbed over the present use of the land which they had bought to ease "the hardship of poor Jews living in the Old City."

What started out as the history of a Jerusalem neighborhood ends up as a severe indictment of a misguided urban renewal policy. Jaffe contrasts the eviction of poor people from their homes in Yemin Moshe with the more enlightened procedures of Project Renewal, which aims to rehabilitate disadvantaged Israeli populations in their own communities.

This book is no bland history. It is an argumentative presentation that convincingly presents an important point of view about urban renewal which has universal applicability and which merits serious consideration.