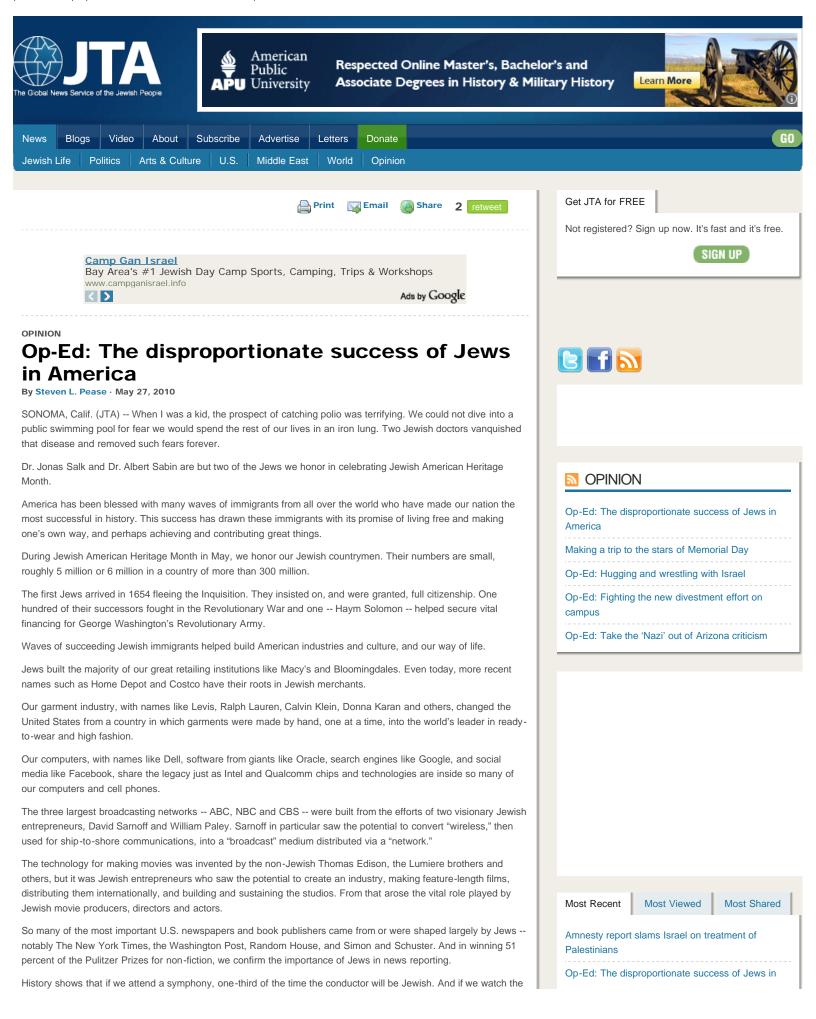
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annual ceremony for the Kennedy Center honorees, we will be celebrating the fact that the same is true for more than one-fourth of our most important performing artists.

In medicine, law, science, politics and education, the leadership, innovation and hard work of Jews have benefited us all. And if they have been successful as entrepreneurs, disproportionately represented among the members of the Forbes 400 and as CEOs of the Fortune 500, that achievement is outstripped by the fact that in philanthropy -particularly for secular causes such as education, medicine and the arts -- Jews are even more philanthropic than they are wealthy.

Finally, when the underprivileged in America have needed help, Jews have been there. Julius Rosenwald, who built Sears Roebuck, was responsible for the construction of more than 5,000 schools for blacks throughout the American South when he found conditions appalling.

That Jews were attracted to America is a testament to its greatness and hospitality to all immigrants. That they have repaid our welcome and relative freedom from discrimination with great achievements and contributions is equally clear.

The huge premium Jews have placed on education, on rearing strong families, their push for innovation and entrepreneurship, tolerance for differing opinions, accountability for one's performance in this life, and their sense of duty to help make the world better (tikkun olam) are but a tiny sample of cultural values that they have added to our melting pot.

Jews have enriched America and deserve being celebrated during Jewish American Heritage Month.

(Steven L. Pease, a venture capitalist and community activist, is the author of "The Golden Age of Jewish Achievement: The Compendium of a Culture, a People, and Their Stunning Performance." He is not Jewish.)

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