

Remembering
André Schiffrin

Front cover photograph by Micheline Pelletier

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PROGRAM

Remembering André Schiffrin

The Great Hall, Cooper Union

Wednesday, October 29, 2014

Wine and hors d'oeuvres at 5:30 p.m.

Music by students and alumni of the Juilliard School

Program from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

Welcome from Diane Wachtell

Anya Schiffrin

Natalia Schiffrin

Calvin Trillin

Victor Navasky

Dawn Davis

John R. MacArthur

Leo Schiffrin Sands

Closing remarks by Diane Wachtell

Reception to follow



Young André



André with André Gide at Gide's country home in Cuverville, France, in 1939

A LIFE OF BOOKS

by Anya Schiffrin

André Schiffrin was born on Rue Eugène Millon in Paris on June 14, 1935, and spent his first years on Rue de l'Université. His father, the publisher Jacques Schiffrin, served in the French army during the war, so the family was in Paris at the time of the German occupation in 1940. André's early memories included sailing a toy boat in the Jardin Luxembourg but also searching for nuts in the woods during the hungry winter of 1940 after he and his parents, Jacques and Simone, fled to St. Tropez, which André described as "a tiny village . . . in the erroneously termed Free Zone theoretically under the control of the collaborationist Vichy government."

The Schiffrin family traveled to Marseille and were helped by the American journalist Varian Fry and the Emergency Rescue Committee. André and his parents escaped on a boat to Casablanca and finally got passage to New York. As in the film *Casablanca*, the Schiffrins were stuck for months in the Moroccan city waiting for a visa, but André Gide helped and lent them his apartment there. They arrived in New York on August 20, 1941, eventually settled into a small apartment on Park Avenue and 75th Street (the five-story building is still standing), and made their new lives in America. My grandparents missed France—it was the second time my Russian-born grandfather had been in exile, and



André's parents, Simone and Jacques, with Jean-Paul Sartre during his 1945 visit to New York



Jacques Schiffrin in New York shortly before his death, late 1940s

this time it was even harder as he was older and his health had been ruined, in part by his time in the French army. Money was tight, and so Simone worked making buttons for her friend the couturier Pauline Trigère. Jacques did a brief stint at Brentano's, which at the time published some books in French. On his own, Jacques Schiffrin published a number of books in French, including some of Louis Aragon's poetry, the writings of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, and the wartime classic *Le Silence de la mer*. Despite all their efforts, the family struggled financially, so they were happy and relieved when Jacques was invited in 1944 to join the exiled German publisher Kurt Wolff and his wife Helen, who had set up Pantheon Books and were working in a Georgian building on the south side of Washington Square (torn down by NYU in the 1950s). As soon as he was old enough, André did his bit, taking on various summer jobs, including one at the Eighth Street Bookstore.

André attended Friends Seminary, where he made close friends, collected money for UNICEF, packed boxes for the Friends Service Committee's relief efforts, and became

“André Schiffrin was a total visionary who didn't like the way things were being done and went and created a new model for how to publish books. He is one of my publishing heroes.”

—Calvin Reid, *Publishers Weekly*

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Mrs. Simone Schiffrin and her son, Andre, 6, arrived from Paris, where Mr. Schiffrin was publisher. They have been trying to book passage to America since last December.

“It puzzles me to this day how they managed to so fully conceal from me their fears and anxieties. And I doubt that I am denying what I experienced, as my father’s letters regularly refer to me playing happily in the background throughout those difficult years, including during what must have been my parents’ most harrowing experience: fleeing the Nazis.”

—André Schiffrin



interested in U.S. elections, collecting campaign literature and buttons and rooting for socialist Norman Thomas although he knew there was no chance of Thomas winning. André became a denizen of New York bookstores and was fond of telling us that there were 350 in New York when he was a boy, compared to fewer than thirty today. On Saturday nights, André would walk up to Lexington and 86th Street to buy the four Sunday papers that had comics and then go and read them while devouring a coffee sundae at a classic soda fountain called Addie Vallins. André's early interest in cartoons and comics served him well—he later successfully published the *Beginners* comics on Marx, Freud, Einstein, and others and was one of the first to see the importance of Art Spiegelman's work *Maus*, which Tom Engelhardt edited at Pantheon. I remember my teenage eye-rolling when André came home and told us excitedly that Pantheon was going to publish a comic book about the Holocaust. But I was wrong, and so were the other skeptics. After having been rejected by just about every publishing house in town, *Maus* became known as “the first graphic novel” and was an influential pioneer of the genre. André also published Matt Groening's cartoons before Groening became famous as the creator of *The Simpsons* television show.

André was, however, reading far more than comics. In his memoir *A Political Education: Coming of Age in Paris and New York*, he describes the fear and repression of political life in the 1950s. Looking in obscure stores and specialty newsstands for books and magazines not in normal circulation in America was a way of finding alternative ideas. André particularly loved the newsstand at 42nd Street where he could find *Dissent* and British weeklies such as the *New Statesman* and the *Tribune*, “a Bevanite left-

“André was an enemy of hypocrisy, cant, fascism, racism, pomposity and conglomerates. Especially publishing conglomerates. We miss you, André, but your message continues to resonate in our hearts and in our pages.”

—Victor Navasky in *The Nation*

“He was by far the most important figure in my publishing life, and I'll never forget when he offered to reprint *Mixed Blessings* and *Overlay*, and said, ‘Good books should stay in print.’ What a concept! And what a guy!”

—Lucy Lippard, author



Norman Thomas (foreground) with André after Thomas's Yale address in 1954



André receiving his MA from Cambridge with Richard Gooder, his Cambridge roommate



Some of André's political buttons, which he began collecting as a young teenager

wing Labour paper.” André was no less interested in the welfare state that the Labour government was establishing in Great Britain, and he visited the British government’s information office in Rockefeller Center in order to read up on the latest news.

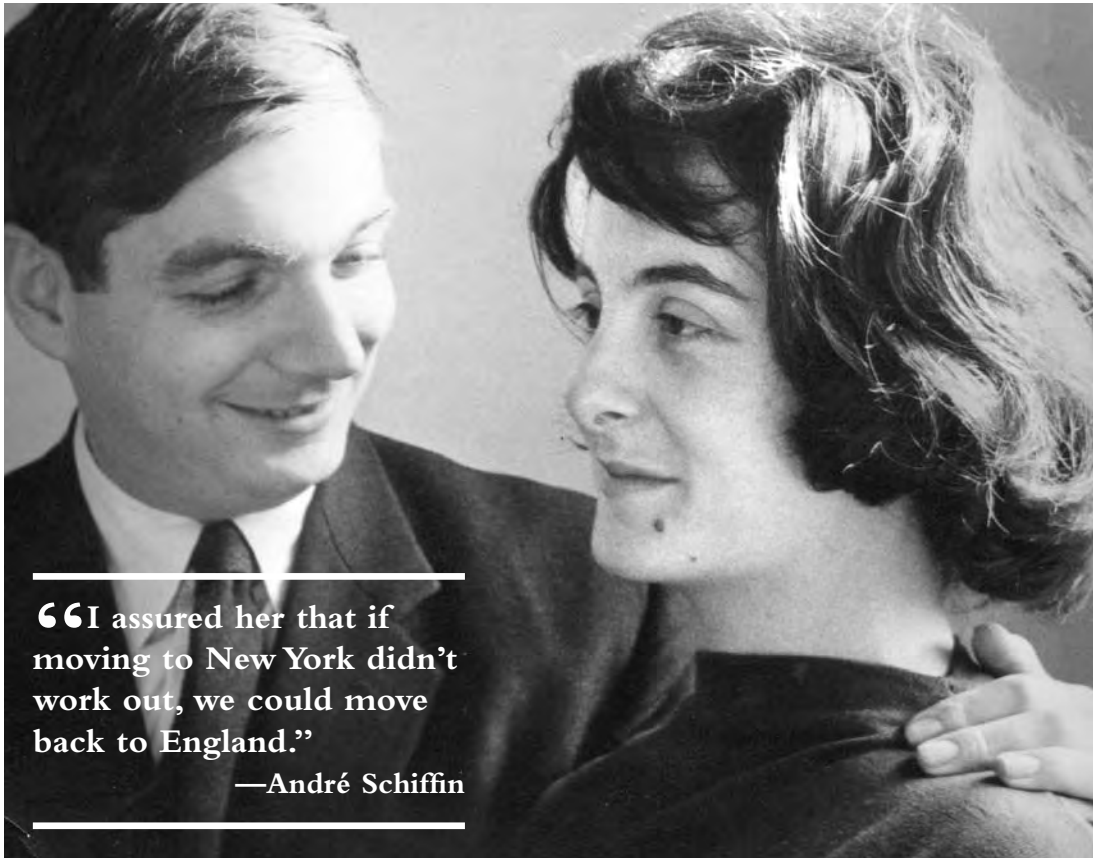
Accepted at Yale—from which he graduated in 1957 summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa—

André founded the John Dewey Society, which became a chapter of the Student’s League for Industrial Democracy. He organized visits by Norman Thomas, Hannah Arendt, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and many others. JDS meetings filled large halls at Yale, and in his memoir André describes how for many this became a hopeful sign of a thaw in the chilling political climate of the time. Before graduating, André renamed SLID Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) after sending out a survey to members asking what name they preferred.

André was given a Mellon Fellowship to Clare College, Cambridge, and his two years there were among the best of his life. He roomed with Richard Gooder on a courtyard, enjoyed the sherry parties and the afternoon tea in the University Library, edited the magazine *Granta* (the first American to do so), and made friends he kept his entire life. Above all, it was there that he met Leina after she made a date with Roger Donald, who

“What he gave the world is not gone.”

—Jane Isay, former New Press board chair



“I assured her that if moving to New York didn’t work out, we could move back to England.”

—André Schiffin

André and Maria Elena in 1962, shortly after their marriage

canceled and passed her on to André. Being stood up began a courtship that led Leina to move to New York in 1961 to live with André on 106th Street and to a City Hall marriage that lasted fifty-two years and produced me and my sister, Natalia (Taya).

Ensnared on the Upper West Side, André would spend a lifetime in book publishing. He began at New American Library, and then stepped into his father’s long-vacant shoes at Pantheon Books when he was first hired as a junior editor in 1962. His last publishing job was at The New Press, which he founded with former Pantheon colleagues Diane Wachtell and David Sternbach.

“How clearly he understood the risks necessary for a free society.”

—Joan Burbick, author



Heady *New Press* days: toasting John W. Dower on winning the Pulitzer Prize for *Embracing Defeat* in 1999 (left to right: Diane Wachtell, André Schiffrin, Matt Weiland, and Joe Wood)



Working on a manuscript chez Schiffrin with Studs, with André in his favorite working position: lying down

Pantheon during the 1960s and 1970s was an exciting place for someone with André's politics. Along with Ursula Bender, Sara Bershtel, Millie Daniels, Tom Engelhardt, Susan Gyarmati, Jim Peck, Susan Rabiner, Jean Strouse, Wendy Wolf, and others, André published Sissela Bok, Noam Chomsky, Nancy Folbre, Edward Said, E.P. Thompson, R.D. Laing, and the innovative Village series (including a book on the Andalusian town of Mijas by Ronnie Fraser). André also famously published Studs Terkel, whose pioneering 1967 oral history *Division Street: America* became a bestseller. Studs became a lifelong friend and author who regularly visited New York to go over his manuscripts with André.

André's authors were pathbreaking. He published Michel Foucault and Marguerite Duras in their English editions, and Anita Brookner and Eric Hobsbawm from the UK. The American list over the years extended from Senator J. William Fulbright and diplomat George F. Kennan to social critics Frances Fox Piven and Barbara Ehrenreich. In photography, André pioneered with the works of Susan Meiselas, Cindy Sherman, Robert Frank, and Michael Lesy's bestselling *Wisconsin Death Trip*,

“His courage inspires all of us who seek to bring new ideas to light, no matter how disruptive they may be to conventional wisdom.”

—Kennette Benedict, executive director and publisher, *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*

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The “Pantheon Five”: the five senior editors who quit their jobs at Pantheon in support of André (left to right: Wendy Wolf, Tom Engelhardt, Sara Bershtel, Jim Peck, and Susan Rabiner)



“IT IS NOW COMMON to refer to people like Schiffrin as ‘old-fashioned’ editors and publishers. What the appellation really means is those who read a book before they decide to publish, those who value the role of good books in any culture, those who refuse to treat a book exclusively as a commodity to be judged only by sales figures, those who can still recognize and publish a good book with the full knowledge that it will cover its costs over the next five years rather than weeks. They have the intellectual confidence to decide that it will be a backlist seller for many years to come. Corporate publishing, as Schiffrin used to say, wants to destroy all this forever. In his last years he waged a ferocious literary war against this mentality.” —**Tariq Ali**



The “Lunch Hour of Rage” in front of the Random House and Pantheon offices on East 50th Street (left to right: Kurt Vonnegut, Arno Mayer, Studs Terkel, and Barbara Ehrenreich)



*André editing Studs Terkel's *Race* with (left to right) Dawn Davis, Diane Wachtell, and Studs (just out of camera view)*



André as entrepreneur, presenting New Press books at a trade show

among other projects. He was a man always ahead of, or adventurously out of step with, his time.

Pressured by the corporate owners of Random House largely because of his politics but with the excuse that Pantheon was not contributing enough to the bottom line, André resigned, and his colleagues loyally left as well. Pantheon's authors stuck by their editors, picketing Random House and protesting, while letters of support came in from all over the world. Random House tried to smear André's reputation by claiming, inaccurately, that Pantheon lost money. In fact, the backlist he built up continues—decades later—to be profitable.

Life at The New Press was good. As well as publishing many former Pantheon authors, The New Press focused on books about race, American politics, and—presciently—inequality, as well as French literature in translation. André was delighted to see The New Press become established thanks in part to

“What a life! What a loss! André’s pebbles in the water turned into not just ripples but torrents.”

—Peter Edelman, author

“That the forces against which he was pushing back are now firmly entrenched only highlights Schiffrin’s significance both as a publisher and as a public figure, a linchpin in a particular sort of culture war.”

—David L. Ulin in the *Los Angeles Times*

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The New Press staff in 1994. Publishers Weekly used the photo to show that racial diversity in publishing is possible.

“It is a great loss not only for publishing but for literature, for humanism, and the lively spirit of discovery. He struggled against market values, against the decadence of publishing in general. May his example continue living in this world where the numbers become more essential than the letters.”

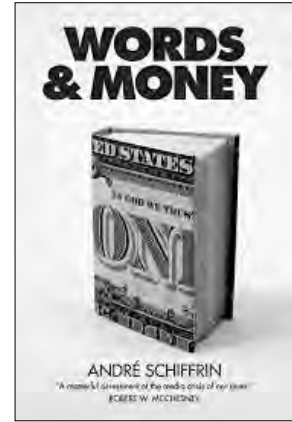
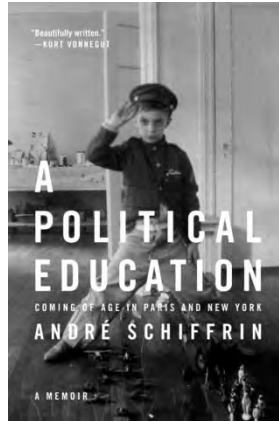
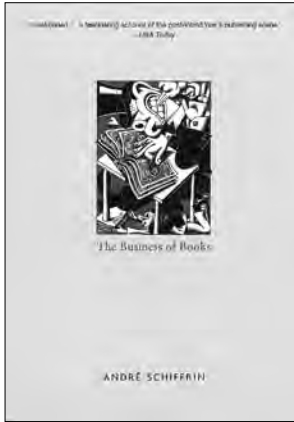
—Tahar Ben Jelloun, author of *This Blinding Absence of Light* and winner of the International IMPAC Dublin Award

“An amazing and visionary man.”

—Martha Minow, dean of Harvard Law School

“He was a terrific man, intellectual, writer, editor, and publisher.”

—John Womack Jr., author



André's three American books: *The Business of Books: How the International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (Verso, 1999), *A Political Education: Coming of Age in Paris and New York* (Melville House, 2007), and *Words and Money* (Verso, 2010)

“What a hero [the] fight with conglomerate publishing made him to so many people in publishing, including many trapped in conglomerate publishing, and particularly to a generation of small independent publishers. No one did so much, in fact, to define the term *independent publisher* coming into the twenty-first century.”

—Dennis Johnson, co-founder and co-publisher of Melville House, publisher of Schiffrin's *A Political Education*

authors such as John W. Dower, Michelle Alexander, and Henning Mankell (another author whose work André was quick to recognize). Dawn Davis joined The New Press and so did Joe Wood, Matt Weiland, Ellen Reeves, Andy Hsiao, Marc Favreau, and Ellen Adler. André wrote several books about the publishing business and how it had changed. Many of his gloomier predictions came true.

André and Leina were close to their friends and relatives in Europe and visited in the summers. But André had always yearned to spend more time in Paris, so in 2004 he and Leina began a new chapter of their life when they bought an

“He was a beacon for us.”

—Colin Greer, president of the New World Foundation

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“ANDRÉ TALKED ME INTO BOOK PUBLISHING, when most of my friends were abandoning the dying planet of print for the exciting new cosmos of the Internet. He somehow managed to suggest that publishing was both doomed and indispensable. In any case, he didn’t talk much about the book ‘industry’—a term he hated—when we first met. Instead, he poured out a stream of questions about the *Village Voice*, where I was writing and editing: who are the most interesting writers?, what are they covering?, what is she saying about labor? Then questions about the media landscape: how does this compare to what Ehrenreich had written recently? Sen? Ha Joon Cha? Then history: but what about Piven’s arguments about the ’30s? Arrighi’s? I discovered two things the first time I talked to André. One was what he wrote about his conversations with his good friend Foucault: ‘Simply talking to him made me feel much more intelligent than I was.’ The other is that I knew nothing.

Often when I ambled over to his desk I would find him poring over sales reports, looking miserable. Still, he gently guided me as I talked with writers and artists in Cape Town and London about a book idea—a design-heavy, large-format photograph-driven book about the structural blindnesses of the truth and reconciliation process in post-apartheid South Africa, led by incisive, detailed essays by black radical intellectuals. Only after congratulating me on my first acquisition did he mention, in passing, that as a sales proposition, the book was, you know, ‘hopeless.’

He was certainly the most erudite person I knew, and—to my second-generation immigrant’s eyes—so patrician-metropolitan he sometimes seemed to me like a character from an Iris Murdoch novel. His elegant mumble was so faint I sometimes found myself translating for lunchmates sitting right across from him in a crowded bistro, as if he were speaking Latin. But the thing that sticks with me about him was his infectious openness—actually, relentless demand—for new ideas. Always he asked, Who are the new voices? What are the new ideas? What’s new? And he made you think the ideas could bubble up anywhere. . . . I always say that when I’m André’s age, I hope I’m half as radical as him, or, to end with another of his favorite words, I hope to have some measure of his receptivity and kindness while striving to avoid all things ‘anodyne.’” —**Andy Hsiao, senior editor at Verso Books and former executive editor at The New Press**



In Paris with Anya, Natalia, and grandson Leo



Delighted grandparents with their first grandchild, Leo

apartment in the Marais and began dividing their time equally between Paris and New York. The Paris years surpassed André's hopes. His French friends and colleagues welcomed him into their lives. André continued to acquire and edit and write books but also adored exploring Paris. He enjoyed browsing in the bookshops and markets, visiting the museums and restaurants, and reading *Le Monde* in the Place des Vosges. With Leina, André traveled around France giving lectures and meeting with historians and scholars who were interested in his father's legacy and the intellectual life of postwar France—a subject André knew quite a bit about. France was also a welcome relief from the right-wing turn that American and British politics had taken—something that continued to disappoint him.

André loved to travel, and we went together to China, India, Azerbaijan, Turkey, Tunisia, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, though I regret not going with him when he gave talks in Russia and Brazil. He and Leina visited London every year to see friends and Taya; her husband, Philippe; and

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“His intellect and passion and chutzpah will be missed.”

—Alex Kotlowitz

“His place in American publishing was unique.”

—Tom Allen, president and CEO of the Association of American Publishers

“THE *NEW YORK TIMES* GAVE ANDRÉ SCHIFFRIN appropriate tribute for his ability to earn the affection and loyalty of so many of his authors—an unusually varied and prominent group. The portrait of him as a bad businessman, however, is not only wrong, but unfair to him, and also to Si Newhouse. André was a cherished and valuable part of Random House for the entire 25 years that I headed the firm.

During a period of tremendous change in the industry as small, independent publishers yielded to conglomerates of every kind, Random House grew and prospered enormously. One major reason for this was because we kept our imprints very separate from each other so that brilliant editors like Bob Gottlieb, Jim Silberman, Bob Loomis, Albert Erskine, Judith Jones, Susan Petersen Kennedy, Toni Morrison, Jason Epstein, Wendy Wolf, and, of course, André Schiffrin could build each one with total editorial independence. That approach appealed to authors who appreciated our concern for their individuality.

After the Newhouse family bought Random House in 1980, Si Newhouse never once questioned the profit or loss of Pantheon. Once or twice he might have grumbled about the opinions of some of André’s authors—as did others—but never in a heavy-handed way. To say that Si Newhouse was “accused of blocking a channel for contrary voices in favor of lucrative self-help books and ghost-written memoirs for the sale of the bottom line” is just not the case.

When financial people asked André to cut back expenses, he carefully explained that he was being charged too much for overhead. He didn’t need to be in an up-town skyscraper, nor did he need a large sales force. He explained how *Doctor Zhivago* became a bestseller before Random House purchased Pantheon—and that it relied on only two salesmen.

In fact, after André left Pantheon, this “terrible businessman” was one of the very few to found a bold, new, successful publishing house, The New Press. He put all the pieces together himself, the financing, the warehousing, the selling, the publicity, and advertising—parts of the business that require tremendous business acumen. But perhaps the ultimate tribute to André was when Studs Terkel, Pantheon’s bestselling author, turned down a huge advance offer from Random House to go to The New Press for a much smaller up-front payment.” —**Robert Bernstein, longtime president and CEO of Random House, in *Publishers Weekly***



André always loved eating on his terrace garden on West 94th Street, no matter how brisk the weather. With (from left to right) Joe Murphy, Eric Hobsbawm, Marlene Hobsbawm, and Susan Crile.

“He was genuinely interested in what you were doing, in its subject matter, not just as a book to be packaged and sold. Once you’ve worked with him, you never wanted to work with anyone else. It was an opening to the left of center without being sectarian in any way. It was an opening to new ideas and theories.”

—Marilyn B. Young, historian



André reading to grandchildren Leo and Lara



Grandchildren Katya, Leo, and Lara

their children, Leo, Lara, and Katya. Mostly André loved being with Leina and enjoying Paris.

André faced the last year of his life, 2013, with his typical stoicism and optimism. Without sentiment or drama, but with his usual gentle kindness, he decided to enjoy the time that he had left, and he lived well for most of it. He read a lot, saw a few good friends, and remained interested in the world. In between chemo sessions, we discussed whether Janet Yellen would make it to the Federal Reserve; what our favorite foods had been in Spain in the 1960s, where we summered with my grandmother on a beach near Málaga (grilled sardines); and the differences between the French health care system and the U.S. one (we voted for France's system, of course). Last fall, André even found the strength to read my new manuscript, complaining that my introduction rambled too much, and suggested writers to include in the journalism anthology I was editing.

Joe, Taya, Leina, André, and I were together when he died on December 1, 2013, and were amazed to discover that it was on the very street where he had been born.

His ashes are now in the Schiffrin family vault, which is in the Jewish section of Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

“One of America’s most influential men of letters.”

—The New York Times

September 2014



Family photo taken at daughter Anya's wedding to Joseph Stiglitz in 2004: Anya and Joe flanked by Natalia and her husband, Philippe, with Natalia and Philippe's children, Katya, Leo, and Lara.

“IMAGINE A WORLD without the works of Noam Chomsky, Marguerite Duras, Barbara Ehrenreich, Michel Foucault, Edward Said, or Studs Terkel. Then you will have some sense of the impact on the intellectual life of our time of André Schiffrin. . . . The New Press, which he founded with fellow Pantheon refugee Diane Wachtell in 1992, was more than just a triumphant second act. With financial support from the Ford and Rockefeller foundations and authors such as Michelle Alexander and the ever-loyal Studs Terkel, it pioneered a new partnership between readers, writers, and the larger culture to enable serious publishing to continue in the Amazon age.”

—D.D. Guttenplan in *The Nation*

