

Rose Chernin died of Alzheimer's disease on September 8, 1995, in Los Angeles, at almost ninety-four years of age.

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JERILYN FISHER

CHESLER, PHYLLIS (b. 1940)

Phyllis Chesler, a radical feminist and liberation psychologist, is a prolific writer, seasoned activist and organizer, and committed Jew and Zionist. She is the author of eight books, including *Women and Madness* (1972), *Women, Money and Power* (1976), *About Men* (1978), *Mothers on Trial: The Battle for Children and Custody* (1986), *Patriarchy: Notes of an Expert Witness* (1994), and *Letters to A Young Feminist* (1998). She publishes in both popular and academic journals and is the editor-at-large for *On the Issues* magazine. Lecturing widely on women's legal rights and emotional health, Chesler also serves as an expert witness on women's and family issues.

Born on October 1, 1940, Chesler and her two younger brothers grew up in an Orthodox Jewish family in Borough Park, Brooklyn. Her mother, Lillian (Hammer), was a school secretary, and her father Leon was a truck driver. She traces her activism back to her experiences as a child when, at age eight, she joined Hashomer Hatzair, a Zionist youth organization, and later Ain Harod, a leftist Zionist youth group advocating Arab-Jewish kibbutzim. According to Chesler, when it became clear to her that, as an Orthodox Jew, she would not be bat mitzvahed, she broke from the formal aspects of Judaism.

Much of Chesler's university career has been spent at Richmond College, The College of Staten Island, part of the City University of New York (CUNY), where she is a tenured professor in psychology and women's studies. In addition to teaching at the college, Chesler has been active in the founding of the College Birth Control and Ob/Gyn Self-Help Clinic, the College Child Care Center, the Rape Counseling Project, and the Counseling for Battered Women Project. A cofounder of one of the first women's studies programs in the country and teacher of one of the first "accredited" women's studies classes, Chesler was instrumental in the creation of women's studies programs throughout the CUNY system.



Phyllis Chesler, author of the feminist classic Women and Madness, revolutionized the way the mental health system treats women. In the 1970s, she cofounded the Association for Women in Psychology and the National Women's Health Network. [Betty Lane]

As a psychotherapist who completed her graduate work in psychology at the New School for Social Research, Chesler counts among her most prized accomplishments writing and "giving speeches that saved women's lives or sanity, and contributed to feminist awakening, among women and men." Her first book, *Women and Madness*, has sold two and a half million copies and has been translated into six languages. It is one of the earliest works of the modern American feminist movement to address issues such as the mistreatment of women, particularly in rape and incest; female role models; and spirituality in the mental health services.

Since the publication of *Women and Madness*, Chesler has advocated for change in the treatment of women in mental health services through the

Association for Women in Psychology (which she cofounded), the National Women's Health Network, and the National Center for Protective Parents in Civil Child Sexual Abuse Cases.

Chesler has always believed that "the kind of feminist I am has everything to do with my Jewish passion for justice." Her direct involvement with Jewish feminism began in 1971, when she encountered anti-Semitism on the Left and in the women's movement. She began to wear a large star around her neck to identify herself as Jewish. Her first visit to Israel in December 1972 began a long-standing connection with the then nascent Israeli feminist movement.

A participant in the 1973-1974 National Jewish Feminist Conference in New York City, Chesler first publicly wrote about being a radical feminist and a Zionist Jew in *LILITH* (winter 1976-1977). In that article she advocated the creation of "feminist sovereign space," drawing a parallel between feminism and Zionism. After attending the 1980 UN Conference on Women in Copenhagen, Chesler wrote a second article in *Lilith*, this time using a pseudonym, to expose the anti-Semitism of the conference. Chesler was one of the organizers of Feminists Against Anti-Semitism, a group that defined itself as Zionist and feminist and coordinated a panel on feminism and anti-Semitism for the 1981 National Women's Studies Association conference. In 1997 she was appointed the first Research Associate at Brandeis' International Research Institute on Jewish Women.

Chesler has been creating alternative rituals for Jewish holidays and life-cycle events since her involvement in the first feminist seder in New York City in 1975. She is active in the struggle for equal rights of access to women at the Western Wall as a founding member and a director of the Board of the International Committee for the Women of the Wall.

Married and divorced twice, Chesler has one son, Ariel David Chesler, who is a student at Brandeis University. A single mother who was diagnosed with chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome in 1991, Chesler cautions, "holding one's own against patriarchy, just holding one's own, is not easy. Resisting it—building a resistance movement—takes all we have. And more."

SELECTED WORKS BY PHYLLIS CHESLER

About Men (1978); Foreword to *Jewish Women Speak Out: Expanding the Boundaries of Psychology* (1995), edited by Kayla Weiner and Arianna Moon; *Mothers on Trial: The Battle for Children and Custody* (1986); *Patriarchy: Notes of an Expert Witness* (1994); "Telling It Like It Was." *On the Issues* (Summer 1995); *Women and Madness* (1972); *Women, Money and Power* (1976).

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TAMARA COHEN

CHICAGO, JUDY (b. 1939)

For three decades Judy Chicago has melded politics with art through painting, sculpture, writing, and teaching.

Born Judy Cohen on July 20, 1939, in Chicago, Illinois, she later broke with patrilineal tradition by adopting the surname Chicago. To explain her seemingly innate belief in herself and her dismissal of sexist stereotypes, Chicago has pointed to the lack of gender bias in her family. An avid Marxist, Chicago's father, Arthur, encouraged his only daughter to participate in the political discussions that pervaded their middle-class home. Arthur, descended from twenty-three generations of rabbis—one of whom was the eighteenth-century Lithuanian rabbi the Gaon of Vilna—rejected Orthodox Jewish life. As a former dancer, Chicago's mother, May, prompted Chicago and her younger brother, Ben, to pursue artistic interests.

Chicago's art education commenced at the Art Institute of Chicago and continued at the University of California at Los Angeles, where she completed a master of fine arts degree in 1964. Her marriage to Jerry Gerowitz in 1961 ended abruptly when he was killed in a car accident two years later. Chicago explains that she turned to art for solace and produced minimalist sculpture— aspiring to gain acceptance from the male-dominated art world. Soon, however, she changed her objective: "I could no longer pretend in my art that being a woman had no meaning in my life" (*Through the Flower* 51). She began to examine what it meant to be both a woman and an artist. Wanting to aid other women on their artistic journeys, Chicago developed the Fresno Feminist Art Program at California State University in 1970. Artist Miriam Schapiro joined Chicago the following year, when the program was moved to the California Institute of the Arts in Valencia. Here female students relied upon personal experience for subject matter, culminating with the exhibition *Womanhouse* (1972). Via installation and performance, the Feminist Art Program transformed a dilapidated house into an environment expressing their individual perspectives as women.