Crime is more prevalent in the US than in Israel

To the Editor:

Simon L. Garfinkel ["Israel has its shortcomings," Sept. 9] lost his taste for Israel after spending the summer there at the Weizmann Institute. He is entitled to state his opinion in The Tech. Good columns, though, do more than state opinions. They make rigorous arguments supported by documented evidence. Garfinkel does not even try to meet that standard. Instead, he rests his case on a mixture of unwarranted generalizations, innuendes, and outright falsehoods. According to Garfinkel, "New York may have urban crime, but the Israeli offices, factories, and houses, with their barbed wire, 15-foot fences, and 24-hour guards are fortresses in a much more intense combat zone." This comparison is doubly flawed. Israeli offices and homes are not surrounded by barbed wire, 15-foot fences, or 24-hour guards. Some factories may have security arrangements, but so do their counterparts worldwide. Israeli institutions take some precautions, such as searching visitors' handbags, which are unnecessary in the United States, but they are a far cry from fortresses. Weizmann Institute, for instance, occupies a beautiful campus. Its modern buildings, shaded pathways, brilliant flower beds, and neighboring orange orchards make a far stronger impression than does the wall fronting the campus. It resembles Harvard Yard, not a fortress.

The American side of Garfinkel's analogy is flawed too. Statistics show that violent and non-violent crime is many times more prevalent in the United States than in Israel. In 1984 (for example), the US murder rate in cities of over one million residents was 28 per 100,000 and the overall rate of 10 per 100,000 according to Crime in the United States, whereas the Israeli overall rate was 1.6 per 100,000, according to the World Health Organization. That's a factor of six overall — and it is much worse in the cities.

Garfinkel claims that "the racism in the United States can't hold a candle to Israel's rigorous caste system," which segregates European Jews from Arab Jews from Yemenese Jews from Arabs. Israel has no caste system, not even an unwritten one. Every year greater numbers of European and Israeli born children marry Sephardim, Arab, and Asian Jews. Garfinkel revives one facet of his pervasive ignorance when he distinguishes Yemenite — not "Ye- menese" — and Arabic Jews. Yemen is an Arab country. The current rate of 25 percent inter-marriage between Sephardim and other Jews is very close to color blind, gives Israel's demographics. Would that white/black marriages here showed the same trend. Nor can Israel hold a candle to the United States' historical record of slavery, lynching, and Jim Crow against blacks and...