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Torture In Our Time

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Civilizing Steps

> *The impression of pain, then, may increase to such a degree that, occupying the mind entirely, it will compel the sufferer to use the shortest method of freeing himself from torment….He will accuse himself of crimes of which he is innocent so that the very means employed to distinguish the innocent from the guilty will most effectually destroy all difference between them.*
>
> Cesare Beccaria, *On Crimes and Punishments*, 1764

At the beginning of the eighteenth-century the open and official use of torture by Europe's governments was widespread. It was deemed necessary to affirm guilt through confession in criminal cases (guilt almost always being assumed prior to trial) and to determine the identity of accomplices. It was also thought to serve as a deterrent to other potential offenders. Then, Cesare Beccaria, Voltaire, and other Enlightenment figures began to say publicly what some of the torturers might have known for a long time-none of these justifications were consistently true. Torture did not, in any reliable fashion, bring forth truthful confessions or other trustworthy information, nor did it deter others, in any significant way, from breaking the law. Using these facts, a small but well-known number of intellectuals were able to exercise influence over selectively progressive rulers in an era of non-democratic government. Through forceful lobbying and popular writing the Enlightenment philosophers promoted a new set of beliefs-the importance of critical intelligence, the merit of objective evidence, and the value of tolerance and common decency-to government leaders and other important personages who respected their opinions and wanted to be identified with their "enlightened" way of thinking. As a result, states began to abolish the official use of torture. Prussia did so in 1754, Baden in 1767, Sweden in 1772, France in 1780, Austria in 1781, Tuscany in 1786, and so on.

Nonetheless, it is doubtful whether these decrees stopped torture by government officials altogether. Torture had been practiced for a very long time and traditions are hard to put aside. Also, as we will see, there are other, psychological reasons for its persistence. It must also have persisted at those times and places deemed exceptional-that is when the rule of law

was thought not to apply. The most common example in this category is when waging war. It would take another hundred or so years until something like Enlightenment good sense was applied in the form of "rules of war."

This second step began in 1859 with the work of Henry Dunant, the man who founded the International Red Cross. His efforts, and those who kept up his work, have resulted in a series of Geneva Conventions that have crafted internationally applicable laws for how warring parties treat civilians, medical personal, and prisoners of war, among other groups. Under the Third Geneva Convention, which came into effect in 1950, prisoners of war "must be humanely treated." Thus, "prisoners of war must at all times be protected, particularly against acts of violence or intimidation . . . " In 1985, a United Nations Convention Against Torture extended this protection to all individuals, stating in Article 2 that "no exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture." In addition, the Convention's Article 3 states that, "no State or Party shall expel, return or extradite a person to another State where there are substantial grounds for believing that he would be in danger of being subjected to torture." The United States has signed and ratified the Third Geneva Convention as well as the Convention Against Torture. It is now in open violation of both of them.

About Face

> *The nature of the new war places a high premium on…the ability to quickly obtain information from captured terrorists in order to avoid further atrocities against American civilians. In my judgment, this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions . . .*
>
> White House Counsel Alberto R. Gonzales, Memorandum for the President, January 25, 2002.

Americans were profoundly shocked when the Twin Towers were brought down by hijacked commercial airliners on September 11, 2001. More deadly than Pearl Harbor, this attack was seen as an unprovoked terrorist assault on a country, the foreign policy of which had only the best intentions for the rest of the world. That this assessment reflected a widespread ignorance of the real consequences of American foreign policy made no difference to the reaction that now evolved. Righteous indignation reigned supreme and the shadowy enemy that had launched the attack was portrayed as irrational, fanatical, and unworthy of any humanitarian regard. This assumption was to be a prime attribute of "the new war on terror."

In order to categorize the enemy in a fashion that would allow representatives of the United States military and intelligence services to "quickly obtain information" that might prevent further attack, the administration of President George W. Bush invented the category of "enemy combatants." That is, they created a category of prisoners who, they claim, fall outside of the protection of any laws or treaty obligations and therefore can be tortured. In turn, this

policy was and is based on the assumption that such an abusive approach to interrogation is the most effective and efficient way to quickly get intelligence that is accurate and useful.

It has now become apparent that there has always been a segment of society (all societies) who never believed Beccaria's assertion that torture was not a good way of producing reliable information. When modern experts such as Darius Rejali tell us (as he does in his recent book, *Torture and Democracy*), that "the available evidence [against the efficacy of torture] is conclusive" and alludes to the fact that, for 250 years, researchers, criminologists, and psychologists have been pointing this out, the self-styled "pragmatic" doubters react incredulously. When an ex-intelligence officers such as Colonel John Rothrock, who headed a combat interrogation team in Vietnam, tells the Washington Post that, given the Vietnam experience, "he doesn't know "any professional intelligence officers of my generation who would think this [torture] is a good idea," the self-proclaimed "realists" refuse to listen. The evidence against torture appears counter-intuitive and just does not "feel right" to what are essentially a warrior caste and its fellow travelers. The present administration falls wholeheartedly into this class of skeptics. Thus, on January 18, 2002 President Bush issued a "finding" to the effect that prisoners suspected of being members of Al Qaeda or the Taliban were to be regarded as "enemy combatants" and therefore beyond the protection of the Third Geneva Convention. Having thus stripped them of any rights, Bush would subsequently (and disingenuously) order that prisoners were to be treated humanely "to the extent . . . consistent with military necessity." Everyone down the chain of command now knew that torture was allowed.

President Bush did not dream up this gambit on his own. He had been convinced of its permissibility by his legal staff. Bringing discussions to a close that had been on-going since the September 11th attacks, White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales told the president in a memorandum dated January 25, 2002 that the Third Geneva Convention "does not apply to the conflict with Al-Qaeda" or "with respect to the conflict with the Taliban." In addition he supplied the president with arguments that could be used to insulate from prosecution American personnel who might be accused of criminal acts such as torture. Deputy Assistant Attorney General John Yoo and Special Counsel Robert Delahunty later argued the same points, including the assertion that "the Taliban was not a government and Afghanistan was not . . . a functioning State." Finally, an additional report prepared in August 2002 by Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee asserted that the president's authority under the constitution freed him from all international law, even ratified treaties (which Article VI of the Constitutions makes "the supreme law of the land"), and such statutory law that "interferes with the President's direction of core matter such as detention and interrogation of enemy combatants." Any restrictions were deemed "unconstitutional" because they got in the way of defending the country.

On January 19th, on the strength of Bush's presidential findings, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld told the Joint Chiefs to inform members of the military that prisoners suspected of being Al-Qaeda or Taliban were not protected by the Geneva Convention. President Bush reaffirmed Rumsfeld's order on February 7, 2002. This resulted in the preparation of "wish

lists" by intelligence units in Afghanistan and Iraq as to what sort of coercive methods they would like cleared for use. Rumsfeld may have used these requests when he drew up a list of permissible interrogation tactics in December of 2002. Also, Major General Geoffrey Miller, the commander at Guantanamo Bay, where abuse amounting to torture was already routine, was sent to Iraq in September 2003 to share his techniques with interrogators in places like Abu Ghraib. His job was to "Gitmoize" the process. What did this mean in practice? As one former military intelligence officer, familiar with Miller's directives, put it, "it means treat the detainees like shit until they will sell their mother for a blanket, some food without bugs in it and some sleep." The same month Miller showed up in Baghdad, General Ricardo Sanchez, Commander of American troops in Iraq, authorized interrogation techniques tantamount to torture. These quickly became standard US practice and, according to a Human Rights Watch report; prisoners started dying during interrogation sessions almost immediately thereafter. (As of February 2005 some 37 prisoners are known to have died in US custody.) In 2004, in an action that cannot be regarded as unusual for members of the Bush administration, Sanchez swore before Congress that he had never issued these (clearly documented) orders. Soon there was the full-blown scandal of Abu Ghraib, which only constitutes "the tip of the iceberg of US mistreatment of Muslim prisoners."

This mess, involving not only the physical torture of "enemy combatants" and others, but also the an increasingly tortuous tangle of lies and deceptions, is the result of an ideologically inbred President of the United States (one who prides himself on making decisions "from the gut") ordering the violation of international and US law by making a "finding" based on dubious opinions and false assumptions rather than hard evidence. As to the facts of the matter:

1) No competent body has investigated or rendered a finding on the status of prisoners being taken in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. Were they Al-Qaeda operatives or Taliban or were they not? In the 1991 Gulf War, where case by case reviews were held of those detained, it was found that 75% were innocent civilians. In the present conflict the International Red Cross estimates that between 70 and 90% of all detainees are innocent civilians. The Third Geneva Convention explicitly states that if there is any doubt as to the status of a prisoner, he or she must be accorded the protection of the Convention until such status is determined "by a competent tribunal."

2) The argument made by Gonzales, Yoo and Delahunty that the Taliban did not function as an established government had little basis in fact. At the time of the American invasion the Taliban regime controlled 90% of Afghanistan, enacted and enforced laws, filled government posts, fielded an organizationally intact army and police force, and sent out diplomatic envoys some of whom had been received by the United States.

3) The notion that presidential power overrides ratified treaties and statutory law would leave the Founding Fathers turning in their graves. After all, a principle aim of the constitution is to keep governmental figures acting within the law. In addition it should be remembered that most of the men who founded the United States worked and thought within

the Enlightenment vein. They sought restraint of the arbitrary exercise of power and, when it came to torture and similar techniques of coercion, they agreed with Thomas Jefferson when he remarked that such practice only served to "support roguery and error all over the earth." Overriding the law in order to allow for torture is a manifest betrayal of the civil and political goals of those who risked their lives and fortunes to establish the United States.

4) As the evidence piles up that Bush, Rumsfeld, Sanchez and others consciously ordered the use of illegal interrogation methods, they become vulnerable to the charge that they have committed war crimes. Unfortunately, the likelihood of anyone coming to Washington, slapping on the handcuffs, and hauling these transgressors off to the Hague seems remote. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, showing his characteristic callousness, has dismissed the allegations of human rights organizations as "isolated pockets of international hyperventilation." Then again, there happens to be no statute of limitations when it comes to war crimes.

It is questionable if the Bush administration's policy on torture and abuse has done anything substantial to actually protect either the country or its troops. It has, however, cast shame on the name of America and, at least for some Americans, has been a real eye-opener. However, what shock there is, is really a function of the general ignorance of history of American use of torture. What is new and different about the Bush administration is not that they are willing to violate the law and torture people, but rather that they are willing to do so more or less openly.

The Concept of "No Touch Torture"

> *The United States is committed to the world-wide elimination of torture and we are leading this fight by example.*
>
> Statement by President George W. Bush, June 26, 2003

At the beginning of Cold War the Central Intelligence Agency decided that there might be something to the claim that traditional forms of torture led to unreliable information. However, instead of following in the footsteps of the 18th century governments which forbade its official practice, the CIA proceeded to spend fifty years and over a billion dollars trying to figure out new torture methods that might work. Some of their experiments went awry, the most infamous one being the giving of LSD to unsuspecting subjects. Other lines of inquiry, however, appeared to show promise. These included sensory deprivation, forcing subjects to assume stress-inducing positions for long periods, and sexual humiliation. As a group, they are known to the trade as "no touch" tortures. Looking at the pictures from Abu Ghraib, it is not hard to recognize CIA research transformed into practice.

This means that Abu Ghraib is no novelty. The CIA and the American military have not only employed various torture techniques throughout the last half of the 20th century, but they also have actively taught others how to do the same. Americans have instructed the thugs employed by some of the world's worst, but assuredly anti-communist, dictators. These included Ferdinand Marcos of the Philippines and the Shah of Iran, the right wing dictators of

Guatemala, Nicaragua, Argentina, Chile, etc. All of these dictatorships got instruction in torture techniques from American instructors working for the US Agency for International Development's Public Safety Program (a very Orwellian name indeed). In 1963 the CIA developed a how-to guide to torture known as the "Kubark Counterintelligence Interrogation manual." It was initially to be used on captured Soviet operatives. But then came Viet Nam and by 1967 the Agency was running forty interrogation camps in that country as part of its infamous Phoenix Program. Thousands of Vietnamese were tortured in these centers. Just so, the CIA began using its torture methods in Kabul in 2002. Then came Iraq and the subsequent torture of thousands of Iraqis as well as Afghanis. It all went smoothly until someone leaked the facts of Abu Ghraib to Seymour Hersh.

The Bush administration's reaction to the Abu Ghraib scandal was to deny that the photos and stories reflected present or historical American policy. On the contrary, President Bush was quick to tell Al-hurra TV (the feeble American answer to Al-Jazeera) on May 5, 2004 that the United States was a compassionate country interested in the well-being and freedom of every individual in Iraq and elsewhere. That meant that, according to Mr. Bush, torture at Abu Ghraib was just the "wrongdoing of a few," or as the Army's Inspector General, Paul Mikolashek put it in April of 2004, all cases of abuse are simply "an individual failure to uphold Army values." On the other hand, FBI personnel present at many of the interrogations carried on in 2003 and 2004 at Guantanamo Bay filed no less then 26 complaints alleging abuse and mistreatment of detainees, and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which did unannounced inspections of many US interrogation facilities in Afghanistan and Iraq, has documented widespread and consistent interrogation techniques that are "tantamount to torture." This practice was (and still is) so widespread and so consistent that one must speak of *a policy of torture*, which now works itself out in a system of hellish prisons and interrogation centers stretching from Guantanamo Bay in Cuba to Kabul in Afghanistan and Baghdad in Iraq. This policy has subsequently been confirmed by investigations carried out by Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. The past and present pattern of behavior is so manifestly obvious that one must conclude that both the President and the Inspector General were either totally ignorant of decades of CIA and military interrogation practice, as well as the consequences of their own on-going "enemy combatant" policy, or they were lying. Did President Bush happen to recall his own findings of January 2002 removing the protection of the Third Geneva Convention from the prisoners taken in Afghanistan and Iraq? What did he think the result would be?

The popular American reaction to Abu Ghraib, led forward with gusto by the Republican Party leadership, has been to minimize its meaning (the few bad apples argument) and, more brazenly, to justify it (as Senator Trent Lott put it, "you don't get information that will save American lives by withholding pancakes.") Nonetheless, in an attempt to minimize the risks of any more politically embarrassing revelations, the government has adopted the (equally illegal) policy of out-sourcing torture. That is, shipping those they want interrogated in this fashion to foreign countries that have no domestic public relations problems to worry about. (In Uzbekistan, one of countries who receive alleged terrorists from the CIA, they may choose to boil you alive.) In January 2005 Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, in sworn testimony to

Congress, denied that such transfers were US policy-an answer described by Michael Ratner of the Center for Constitutional Rights, as "a clear, absolute lie." This well documented policy of out-sourcing is a violation of the Convention Against Torture and has been denounced by some Americans as despicable. However, not by many. As in the 1970s, when Congress (under an entirely different leadership) investigated CIA and military torture practices in Vietnam and Latin America, the general public, after a bit of tut-tutting, seem little moved. A USA Today/CNN/Gallop Poll taken on January 7-9, 2005 shows that 39% of Americans were willing to have "terrorists" tortured if they were believed to have knowledge of impending attacks. That is, of course, what the US military said it was doing at Abu Ghraib.

The *Realpolitik* Majority

> *Those who can make you believe absurdities, can make you commit atrocities*.
>
> Francois Marie Arouet (Voltaire)

According to Amnesty International, torture and abuse has been recorded in 130 countries (including the United States) in recent years and occurs regularly in 70 of these countries. It is therefore highly questionable whether there is any less torture in our own age than in 1800. Just as in the time of the Enlightenment, the laws and treaties that have attempted to outlaw such practices are a reflection of the efforts of a relatively small number of people who have strongly lobbied to establish rules of civilized behavior. Today, within an increasingly democratic environment, this heightened standard of behavior is welcomed by the majority when times are peaceful, when citizens are sitting in church, are feeling secure within their homes, or answering poll questions on the phone. That is, the majority agree in theory. Yet in practice, particularly in times of real or imagined danger, this civilized standard of behavior is abandoned.

At the level of the intellectuals, we have traded Beccaria and Voltaire for the likes of Alan Dershowitz who argues that torture is sometimes necessary and, in any case, is an inevitable practice. This, of course, smoothes the way from humane theory to barbaric practice. According to Dershowitz's argument torture should be made official via "torture warrants" so as to preserve openness and respect for the law. As illogical as such an argument is, it has a lot of Americans nodding in agreement. Indeed, torture has become ubiquitous in our "war on terror" and new revelations of its use are frequently reported. All pretenses have largely been dropped in the public mind and an unspoken acceptance now prevails. Why is it that most people accept this violation of their own standards of civilized behavior so readily?

It may be that many people, looking beyond their own family circle, have an a priori Hobbesian perception of the world. They constitute a "*Realpolitik* majority" who assume that "it is a tough world out there," that "nice guys finish last," and as to "playing rough," well, "*c'est la guerre*." As a consequence of this point of view, when it comes to issues such as "defense," and even "fighting crime" the assumption of most people is that toughness, the willingness to "do what needs to be done," necessitates giving government authorities a relatively free hand

in policy making. Or, as Bill Clinton once observed, Americans prefer a leader who is "strong and wrong" to one who might be right but seems to be weak. Like children relying on their parents, many people want a father figure who will "crush those who would hurt us."

Over the last century, with its two world wars, genocides, numerous proxy wars, the Cold War, the possibility of nuclear annihilation, the conjuring of "weapons of mass destruction" and now the "war on terror," uncertainty and fearfulness have become the norm. The authorities and the media fill the world with real, or more often imaginary enemies. Sometimes they are domestic-racially defined criminals who prey on the upright and affluent. Sometimes they are foreign-citizens of states that are "evil" or shadowy terrorists who "hate freedom," a world full of Muslim fanatics, commies, gooks, japs, huns, ad nauseam. But always most people (and not only Americans) are going to assume the threatening nature of such "others" simply because the informational environment in which they live instructs them to do so. Allegedly threatening individuals who fall into the hands of the authorities are assumed guilty by virtue of having been seized.

Once in the custody of state officials a prisoner's fate is not just a function of the prevailing rules, but also a function of the public's interest in maintaining those rules. That, in turn, is influenced by the degree of insecurity felt by the citizenry. Requiring civilized and humane behavior from those charged with our defense makes sense to most people only when they are not in a state of fear. In other words, if a feeling of threat is high, the enforcement of the rules underlying human rights will be low. The fact that, after September 11, 2001, polls showed that "only" around 39% of the American population was willing to endorse the torture of suspects known to have life saving information is just the proverbial tip of the iceberg. Beyond that tip is the willingness of a much larger percentage of people to accept the government's general assertion that "tough interrogation," "stress and duress," and "fear up" techniques (all of which are official euphemisms for torture and abuse) are sometimes necessary to protect the nation. This is demonstrated repeatedly by that fact that frequent revelations of abuse and torture not only of foreigners alleged to be enemies, but also of those arrested for domestic crimes, fail to engender any long term reaction on the part of the vast majority of citizens. Indeed, when in July 2005 the Bush administration successfully blocked a Senate vote to "prohibit cruel, degrading or inhumane treatment of prisoners" there was no noticeable public outcry and something less than a hiccup in the press. It is not that the public "likes what is being done," it is rather that the majority believes the officially reinforced message that the world (including aspects of their own society) is a dangerous place. This in turn creates a more or less permanent sense of anxiety, and the result is a standing conviction that "strong but wrong" actions are, periodically, necessary for the sake of society's survival.

In addition, we should be honest and admit that racism plays a significant role in the acceptance of torture when it is used against people we do not identify with. From the 18th through the 20th centuries the evolving rules of conduct that impacted the use of torture were most easily and consistently ignored when practiced against non-Europeans. This was the case in Europe's extensive imperial holdings, as well as the abuse of non-white minorities in American jails. It is now the case with Iraqis, Afghanis, and Arabs in general.

As to those able and willing to commit torture, we must recognize that there has always been a subset of the population who actually like to abuse others and not all of them operate outside the law. The likelihood of an abuse of power is increased by the fact that those who self-select for police and military careers in which torture may become officially possible are sometimes personalities who find it easy to perform such acts. Conditions of war and crisis give such men and women license to act out in ways that, under normal circumstances, would be deemed criminal. The Bush administration, filled as it is with neo-Prussian personalities who certainly see the world in "ends justify means" terms, has been particularly good at funneling such miscreants into Iraq. Department of Corrections personnel from at least four states who lost their jobs due to a record of abuse have been hired by the Bush administration and sent off to Iraq as "prison advisers." On the other hand, scholars who have studied the nature of torturers insist that it is also possible for "ordinary people" to find themselves within an environment that leads them to such action. So, first you mix ordinary people with those with a penchant for abuse and put them in an environment in which they are told that the "gloves are coming off" so that American lives can be saved. Then you give them the Pentagon's "72 point matrix of stress" as a guide to the interrogation of "prisoners with high intelligence value who are not protected by the Geneva Conventions." In such a scenario it is not those with the highest ethical standards who will lead the way. Philip Zimbardo, a Stanford scholar who did research on the willingness of "average" people to inflict pain on others, tells us that, "in my study we put good people into a bad barrel, they came out bad apples."

Conclusion

In the midst of the Vietnam War, Paul Blackstock wrote an essay on the "Moral Implications of Torture and Exemplary Assassination" for the Carnegie Council On Ethics and International Affairs. He described the widespread use of torture and assassination by the CIA and Special Forces and said that this policy had created a situation wherein "for the majority of private individuals" the "intolerable has become tolerable." He then concluded that, "general acceptance of the rule of law is rightly regarded as a major step forward in the history of Western Civilization. For the US to scrap this achievement, even for the sake of an elusive "victory' in the rice paddies of Southeast Asia, would be the height of unreason and folly." Well, there was no elusive victory in Southeast Asia and now, thirty-five years later, the scene of action has shifted half way around the world. In just about all other ways, the situation is exactly the same.

Where Blackstock got it wrong was in the assumption that Western Civilization has assimilated a consistent, hypocrisy-proof sense of the rule of law. It has not. The application of the rule of law has always been subject to class, racial/ethnic and other sorts of criteria. In as much as it reflects a demand for humane and civilized behavior, the rule of law functions one way during peace and another during war. That is, it is context contingent and an important part of that context is the sometimes paranoid and fear filled perceptions of "*realpolitik* majorities."

The fact is that people react to their societal environments in both rational and emotional ways and that these environments are subject to warmongering, and the political use of hysteria.

Such manipulation accentuates the emotional and leads to popular support of such policies as the official use of torture and abuse. This realization may be frustrating for those who identify themselves with the Enlightenment's principles and goals, but progressives too must deal with reality. While this susceptibility to manipulation may never go away, it can be fought against and contained. Here we must take encouragement from the Enlightenment philosophers and those who gave us the Geneva Conventions and their like. It is the obligation of progressives to carry on this struggle by the constant demand that "reason be used to influence the passions." In other words, a demand for adherence to the very standards that the 18th century philosophers insisted upon: critical thinking, objective evidence, tolerance and common decency. Indeed, what the world needs is a permanent, on-going Enlightenment movement wherein an increasing number of "philosophers" seek to shape the popular environment of our societies. Such an undertaking is the benign equivalent of a permanent revolution-a task that never ends.

The Corporate University In American Society

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Higher education in America is being transformed by the contradictions that have historically defined and determined its existence. Seen as an educationa institution, its importance lies in empowering individuals-both within the academy and outside-to become critical and knowledgeable citizens capable of self-governance in a democracy. Seen as a economic institution, its value lies in producing trained subservient workers for employers, and in socializing many of the costs necessary to sustain profit accumulation in a capitalist society.

Yet while for much of their existence colleges and universities have managed to hold these twin imperatives in balance, political-economic forces such as globalization, an increasingly conservative political agenda, and a tightening of public financial support for higher education have tipped the balance, resulting in the emergence of the corporate university. As corporatized entities, American colleges and universities are under increasing pressure to emulate other market participants and operate in ways that affect their governance and structure, as well as how they generate revenue. The result is that the new corporate university seeks to jettison many of the traditional manifestations of higher education, such as tenure, academic freedom, and shared governance, and replace them with a business model of management and more adjunct faculty who are viewed as mere employees. The need to do this is simple-less revenue to support colleges and universities is coming from the government, thereby forcing higher education to reduce labor costs and also seek financial support from private sector investors who view the traditional mission of these schools with suspicion.

This article examines the political, economic and cultural forces driving the creation of the corporate university in American society. It contends that American higher education-both public systems and also private schools- is driven by two demands: First, to socialize the costs of worker training to subsidize and maximize capital accumulation; second, to provide inexpensive education to support democratic values and individual self-expression. But recent fiscal crises have led to decreased state financial support for colleges and universities, necessitating that public schools adopt more market-like behavior. The rise of corporate universities is a product of these crises, producing structures and policies that increasingly are hostile to workers, academic freedom, and perhaps even capital accumulation.

Higher Education's Cultural Contradictions

Culturally or politically, colleges and universities are torn by conflicting mandates; one is to produce workers, another to produce democratic citizens. These twin mandates can be described as the Horace Mann and John Dewey imperatives.

Horace Mann's legacy on American education is almost forgotten, but the fact that almost every school district in the United States has a building named after him is a testament to his influence. Best known as an advocate of universal school for all (Morgan 1936, 97), Horace Mann's educational philosophy or program can also be read as a prescription for training children and individuals how to be obedient workers. In his *Twelfth Annual Report* on education, he describes the important role that education can assume in alleviating poverty (Filler 1965). But in making this argument, Mann contends that for the most part the "labor of the world has been performed by ignorant men" and that if more individuals were educated and trained, productivity would increase (128).

For Mann: "If a savage will learn how to swim, he can fasten a dozen pounds' weight to his back, and transport it across a narrow river . . . If he will invent an axe, or other instrument, by which to cut down a tree, he can use the tree for a float, and one of its limbs for a paddle, and can thus transport many times the former weight many times the former distance" (129). Education will increase the wealth of a nation and the "widespread mental development" of the public, is the best way to help in help a country prosper, and by improving the productivity of the producer (131).

As if following upon Francis Bacon's aphorism that "knowledge is power," Mann declares that: "Every addition to true knowledge is an addition to human power" (Morgan 97). And what better way to add to human power than to teach children that they should be "made to be industrious," that this industry gives rise to wealth, and that they should be taught to be virtuous (115). The virtues that Mann sought to teach children, though, were moral virtues of learning, temperance, thrift, and industry-the very Protestant virtues that Max Weber once saw as the genesis of the spirit of capitalism. Education produces the perfect laborer for the workplace. A good student would become a good employee.

In contrast to Horace Mann whose educational philosophy has come to be associated more with training for work, John Dewey's view was that the purpose of schooling was growth and the preparation of individuals to become democratic citizens (Westbrook1991, 171). Dewey contended that "a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and who obey their governors are educated (Dewey 1944, 87). A democracy replaces external authority or compulsion as the basis of obedience, substituting voluntary dispositions and interests that have been cultivated by education. Moreover, democracy, like education, is a form of association, a communicative experience that seeks to find interactive ways to bring individuals together (Dewey 1944, 87).

Dewey described schools as mini or embryonic societies (Dewey 1974, 303). As a social

institution, one goal of education was to provide the opportunities for students to find shared or mutual interests by interaction with one another in the classroom. Dewey thus started with the premise that creation of a democratically constituted society required a specific type of education-a democratic one- that emulated the skills and dispositions that one would be expected to possess as an adult citizen. This means first that educational is social (Westbrook 1991, 172; Dewey 1944, 10-12). Second, it is interactive. By that, education recognizes that students are at the center of education; it aims to encourage individual growth and development of the skills and traits that individuals would need as democratic citizens. Those skills would be best fostered not by rote but by a method that saw a continuum between the ends of education and their means, *i.e.,* a learn-by-doing method. If the goal of education was the fostering of a democratic society held together by the internal interests of its citizens, schools needed to be democratic experiences that emphasized in learning the very skill that they wished to produce. If a democratic society was an interactive communicative experience, then so should be schooling.

Dewey's democratic conception of education, while still preparing students for creative and rewarding employment, contrasts sharply with the Mann theory that education is to prepare individuals for more production line work (Westbrook 1991, 177). Perhaps one way to clarify the distinction is between what C.B. Macpherson (1977) called the development of the skills one needs for self-development versus the powers needed for the marketplace. For Macpherson, a liberal-democratic society is essentially a capitalist market society torn by competing needs and ideals. On the one hand, such a society has the potential to develop uniquely human powers critical to self-development and self-actualization. For Macpherson, these powers see humans as social creatures, capable of being a doer, a creator, or perhaps, even as Schiller suggested, a player (Macpherson 4). This is a view of human nature that depicts individuals as moral, rational, and aesthetic creatures.

In contrast, the underlying market demands that humans be seen as consumers, their desires or utilities for Macpherson, are what need to be enhanced and emphasized (Macpherson 4-5). Humans as consumers, bundles of appetites, and workers (as opposed to creators), are what a liberal-democratic (capitalist) society actually sustains. As a result, such a society is caught in a contradiction: A liberal-democratic society claims to develop human powers but actually needs to develop market utilities (Macpherson 17).

Using Macpherson's distinction, Mann's educational philosophy emphasized the utilities of the marketplace, for Dewey, the powers of the polis. Higher education embodies these contrasting philosophies: The purpose of college is rooted in a liberal arts tradition that stresses individual growth or self-actualization, while others would de-emphasize this, preferring to see higher education as a preparation for work. The latter would not necessarily encourage critical thinking, individuality, and the questioning of authority; instead it would seek to foster "real marketable skills" a real marketable job upon graduation.

If one sees higher education as embodying both the democratic and marketplace ideas, then it is not too difficult to see the economic forces that have pushed colleges and universities

towards becoming corporatized entities.

The Fiscal Crisis of American Higher Education

To speak of a fiscal crisis facing higher education one thinks of the declining public support, especially for state universities and colleges, that has arisen in the last quarter century. From a high in the 1960s and early 70s when states and the federal government provided generous funding to expand their public systems to educate the Baby Boomers, state universities now receive only a small percentage of their money from the government. In 2004, the State of New York constituted only 29% of SUNY's funding and 31% for CUNY (New York State Public Higher Education Conference Board 2004). As of 1998, New York spent more on its prisons than on higher education (Gonnerman 1998). In 1991, 74% of the funding for public universities came from states, in 2004, it was down to 64%, with state systems in Illinois, Michigan and Virginia down to 25%, 18%, and 8% respectively (Dillon 2005).

While these cuts do represent a fiscal crisis for colleges and universities, the real fiscal crisis goes deeper and it requires one to recognize an important but overlooked truth-*Universities are necessary institutions within a capitalist society.* Contrary to claims that have depicted colleges and universities as largely autonomous from the marketplace, higher education serves capitalism and market society in several ways that move beyond or build upon Horace Mann's theories.

First, colleges and universities socialize training costs as a way of subsidizing private profits by paying for labor costs or underwriting research and development. In providing either explicit skills training to future workers, or simply in teaching basic communication skills, higher education, like K-12, helps to reduce labor-training costs for businesses. In addition, by way of the research that is done in colleges and universities, the production of knowledge in higher education often leads to innovations that are valuable in the marketplace. Hence, government funded research that takes place in the academy can be useful as either general or patentable knowledge useful to businesses. The market can profit upon ideas generated in colleges, and businesses can draw upon a (partially) trained workforce coming out of these schools. In either case, higher education is helping to subsidize the private profits of businesses by literally commodifying its work product (Lyotard 1984).

Second, colleges and universities socialize and reinforce market attitudes, ideology, skills, and behavior. This training can be explicit as in MBA programs, but an educational philosophy that stresses job preparation will inculcate obedience to authority. In addition, curricula that emphasize specific viewpoints, favoring consumerism, free trade, or management (over labor) in economics or business classes, the evils of communism, socialism, or even socialized medicine in history, sociology, political science courses, also foster attitudes necessary to reinforce the marketplace.

Finally, colleges and universities serve as a labor market safety value. Instead of driving millions of extra workers into a job market after high school, higher education delays entrance

into labor market as a way to ensure workers have jobs and stave off their unrest if unemployment gets too high. Higher education thus helps to regulate the labor market in a capitalist society.

Accepting the argument that higher education is a capitalist institution, then the real fiscal crisis and contradictions that colleges and universities face-and their shift into a corporate mode- becomes more apparent. This crisis is the product of how colleges and universities are necessary both to serve capitalist accumulation and democratic legitimation functions. To make this argument James O'Connor's *Fiscal Crisis of the State* (1973) provides guidance and clarification.

For O'Connor, the "tendency for government expenditures to outrace revenues" is what he calls the fiscal crisis of the state (O'Connor 2). The reason for this crisis is rooted in contending class interests that make demands upon the state, necessitating that the government perform two mutually contradictory functions. The first, the accumulation function, demands that the state create the conditions that help to maximize the accumulation of private profits. Accumulation is articulated on behalf of one class, and it involves socializing of certain investment costs (education) or research and development, or making other expenditures or purchases that increase profitability. While the government may be pressured into increasing spending or cutting expenditures to maintain profit accumulation, this profit is not socially consumed by is retained by businesses.

While the state is pressured to support business profitability, there is a contradictory demand to make some expenses, such as for welfare, in order to maintain social harmony and peace among unemployed workers. O'Connor sees expenditures for this purpose as fulfilling a legitimation function (O'Connor 6-7). From capital's perspective, legitimation expenditures are not productive; they are simply expenditures to purchase peace, much in the way the Piven and Cloward (1971) described the use of the social welfare system as a way to maintain worker discipline and quell civil unrest. Here, if the job market is disruptive, provide more money to colleges to allow individuals to attend a university.

How can all this be applied to understanding the fiscal crisis of higher education and how it has driven the production of the corporate university? First, higher education represents one of the contradictory points of conflict at which the legitimation and accumulation functions clash. As noted earlier, Macpherson described the contradictions in democratic capitalism as between the development of human utilities v. powers, or roughly corresponding to the difference between Dewey's and Mann's educational theories, to produce citizens versus workers. For the most part higher education quietly lived with these twin imperatives, yet when the state faces a fiscal crisis, as it has for the last generation or so, there is a simultaneous demand to reduce public outlays (taxes) to help promote accumulation, while still seeking to subsidize business training costs and make other outlays to help capital. This occurs at the same time the state is still trying to promote legitimacy by offsetting education costs for families and students.[i]

The first and most direct means to reconcile the contradiction is to reduce direct public expenditures to support higher education. This could be in terms of real cuts to state universities or, alternatively, cuts in students aid to public and private schools. Cuts could also come in by changing aid from grants to loans, or from need-based to merit-based scholarships, as schools use the lure of financial aid to buy more desirable (profitable) students (Wilkinson 2005).

A second way public expenditures can be lowered is to reduce spending and raise tuition. Here, tuition hikes serve several purposes. First, they offset any loss in state expenditures, thereby giving colleges an easy opportunity to recapture lost revenue by passing it on to students. Raising tuition also rations higher education, preserving its value for those who can afford it, and restricting access to maintain a cheap labor supply.

A third way for the demands to promote accumulation is by forcing colleges and universities to be more business like. Higher education is forced to reduce labor costs, become more efficient, seek outside revenue sources, or develop private sector partners. Along with demands or assertions that higher education needs to be more business like, there are also ideological claims that colleges and universities are not doing enough to prepare students for work. This might manifest itself in attacks against liberal arts curricula or programs that do not seem directly in line with promoting job skills.

Finally, the most direct route to reducing expenditures is to privatize state schools by cutting public outlays to state schools, and in some cases, such as with the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, make it fully dependent upon private money (Kirp 2003, 130, 135). In doing this, state legislatures have forced their universities to sell research, curriculum, and services to the highest bidder, potentially compromising whatever autonomy higher education did enjoy (Newman 204, 35).

Spending cuts force schools to seek other revenue streams or tactics to make up lost money. They are a disciplining tool, a way to force colleges and universities to become more market and business savvy. However, unlike Bok (2003), Geiger (2004), (Kirp 2003), and Newman(2004) who all see the drive toward the commercialization of higher education as residing in factors exogenous to the university-such as spending cuts or the Bayh-Dole Act of 1980 (which allowed schools to patent and sell federally funded research)-the argument here is different. Instead, as an entity embedded in a capitalist society, higher education has traditionally been supported and nurtured as a way to facilitate accumulation, while at the same time that its democratic leaning tendencies have been tolerated. Yet when pressures to promote accumulation become more acute, the contradiction between serving that and its democratic function force colleges and universities to more clearly manifest and pursue its market sustaining and supporting functions. Thus, the corporate university, unlike the commercialized one, is an institution that seeks to fulfill its accumulation function by stripping itself of its democratic function and fully adopting its capitalist function by both serving the market and participating in it at the same time. In effect, the causes of a university becoming corporatized are endogenous to higher education, not exogenous.

Seeking to resolve its contradiction by simply shedding the democratic function will not work. Colleges and universities have enjoyed their popular support by being seen as independent and impartial (even if they were not). Higher education, at least as it evolved since World War II, was viewed as open to all and as a gateway for individuals to improve their chance for the good life. Higher education, thus, was seen as serving important public purposes. But the corporate university undermines all that. It serves the private ends of specific businesses who wish to profit from research for hire (Geiger 2004, 261). When research or scientific inquiry is done for hire, or when the corporate university sells itself on the marketplace, it undermines the very public trust and confidence that provided its ideological support, and it also undermines it capacity to serve general business needs because instead it is a bought institution that has become privatized by and for specific corporations.

In selling its services to specific businesses, the corporate university undermines it legitimacy and its ability to fulfill its public role of serving the marketplace in general. By becoming less dependent upon public dollars that are returned to the public domain, it precipitates a cycle of spending cuts that further undermine its own autonomy. As public subsidies for higher education are effectively privately appropriated by private businesses, there is an increasingly greater need to cut government support for colleges and universities, thereby necessitating that they become even more market focused in their behavior

The Cultural War Against the University

The inherent contradictions of higher education in America are exacerbated by the fiscal crisis of the state. When state revenues are squeezed, colleges and universities often pay the price by seeing their resources cut. But as higher education is squeezed, there are also countervailing demands, often by the middle class, to maintain education funding, provide student aid, or otherwise continue to provide the resources to make college affordable. One way to ameliorate this contradiction is to provide more student loans to offset tuition increases, another is for colleges to seek outside revenue. But a third tactic is to unleash an ideological war against the university, reigning it in because it is perceived as unsupportive of marketplace needs. In effect, an ideological war against the university is launched.

Since at least the 1960s, there has been a hostility towards the university from the right, seeing it, students, and faculty as social and political critics of the Vietnam War. The University is perceived by the right as a social critic of the status quo; they see higher education as captured by the left. In some cases, as noted earlier, the university's liberal arts curriculum is viewed as wasteful and not supporting the needs of business, or that it is hostile to the ruling ideology.

One recent manifestation of this attack is David Horowitz and conservatives who seek to discipline the perception of a left-leaning university with a Student Bill of Rights. Flaunting claims that higher education is captured by left-leaning professors, charges of bias in the classroom have motivated Horowitz to demand that college and universities pass legislation that would give equal time to conservatives. Similarly, the Solomon Amendment was adopted

to override the decision that many law schools made to prevent military recruiters from coming on campus. They did this because the military's decision not to accept gays and lesbians was in conflict with school anti-discrimination policies. The Solomon Amendment withheld federal money from schools that denied access to recruiters, thereby forcing schools to choose between towing the party line of the government or adhering to its own anti-discrimination values. Finally, the decision by Hamilton College to rescind a speaking offer to Professor Ward Churchill because of his controversial views about the 9-11 attacks, and simultaneous investigations and calls at the University of Colorado to fire him despite tenure, point to other efforts to silence and discipline the academy.

These attacks take direct aim at critics of the conservative government. They are also part of an effort to delegitimize higher education. If one can show that professors are abusing academic freedom, get rid of them and tenure. Play upon popular distaste for views like those held by Churchill, or argue that the university is biased; this makes it possible to garner public support to cut state support for schools or to otherwise impose other restrictions upon colleges. As one North Carolina state representative stated: "Why should we, as fairly moderate to conservative legislators, continue to support universities that turnout students who rail against the very policies that their parents voted us in for?" (Mattson 2005). Thus, combining the ideological war against the university with the fiscal squeeze they face, the result is that higher education has become corporatized.

Defining the Corporate University

What is a corporate university? First it means that colleges increasingly use corporate structures and management styles to run the university. This includes abandoning the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) shared governance model where faculty had a equal voice in the running of the school, including over curriculum, selection of department chairs, deans, and presidents, and determination of many of the other policies affecting the academy. The corporate university replaces the shared governance model with one more typical of a business corporation. Most decisions, including increasingly those affecting curriculum, are determined by a top-down pyramid style of authority. University administration, often composed not of typical academics but those with business or corporate backgrounds, has pre-empted many of the decisions faculty used to make. Under a corporate model, the trustees, increasingly composed of more business leaders than before, select, often with minimal input from the faculty, the president who, in turn, again with minimal or no faculty voice, select the deans, department heads, and other administrative personnel.

Another way higher education has adopted corporate practices is in terms of its control over curriculum and the movement away from full time tenured faculty. The traditional university, following AAUP principles, granted tenure to professors to guarantee academic freedom. This freedom was not simply to guarantee employment for life; it was a reward for academic achievement and to ensure that those engaged in research-be it controversial or not-would be free to explore knowledge and truth, without fear of reprisal from administrators or society. Now, the corporate university sees tenure as an impediment to fiscal restructuring, or the

needs to hire and fire faculty to meet changing marketplace needs. Tenured professors are hard to remove, making it difficult to close down a department or program if it was no longer profitable.

Moreover, tenured professors are expensive. On top of the initial costs associated with paying for specialized Ph.D.s, retaining them for years was costly. Replacing them with untenured, adjunct, or contingent faculty saves a significant amount of money. Why pay a tenured professor $50,000 to over $100,000 to teach four to six classes per year when several adjuncts can be hired at $3,000 to $5,000 per class? Replacing tenured faculty with one of the large surplus of unemployed Ph.D.s can significantly reduce labor costs, while also breaking the strength of faculty to engage in university governance.

The corporate university has taken control of the curriculum in several ways. First, in the case of the expansion of on-line programs over the Web or internet, a specialist designs the curriculum for courses, sells it to the school, and then the university hires adjuncts to deliver the canned class. Here, the costs of offering a class are reduced, the potential size of the classes are maximized, and if and when the curriculum needs to be changed to reflect new market needs or preferences, it is simple to accomplish.

A second way higher education is becoming corporatized can be seen in the increased funding streams from corporations. These funding streams became necessary as a result of decreased public support funding for higher education. One way schools have become more dependent upon private funding is simply by turning to corporate donors either to contribute directing to them, or by way of naming, that is, giving private corporations the right to donate in exchange for naming some part of a school after them. For example, in recent years many business schools have adopted famous names of companies in return for donations or sponsorships.

Another way schools have become more dependent upon corporations for funding is as a result of the 1980 Bayh-Dole which allowed universities to patent federally-funded research (Washburn 2005, 8-9). Besides directly encouraging colleges and universities to patent and sell research, it also gave impetus to a host of practices where schools seek to partner with private businesses to raise revenue. These sources include seeking private corporate sponsors for research, selling training and other services to them, or fostering joint partnerships. The danger in all these relationships comes with a “research for hire” mandate that turns academic research into a service for the marketplace, compromising and commodifying intellectual ideas, instead of turning them over to the public domain. Research for hire potentially threatens academic freedom, compromises the integrity and objectivity of scholarship, and forces professors to explore only what the market will bear. University-pharmaceutical partnerships, producing proprietary research for hire, is only one example of this trend, leading to questions about what is researched, how objectively, and whose interests it serves (Bok 2003, 58-72).

A third but perhaps not the final notion of what it means to be a corporate university resides in how they are increasingly engaging in corporate and market type behavior. The clearest

example of the corporate university is the rise of for-profit schools such as the University of Phoenix and Florida Metropolitan University. These schools, whose parent companies' stock are publicly traded, are part of a large and growing college for profit business. According to the *Wall Street Journal*, for-profits educate 1.7 million students (in 2005), or nine percent of all those attending college. Their revenues now top $15 billion annually (Hechinger 2005). Their profitability lies in exploiting a corporate governance model, using adjunct and contingent faculty to deliver instruction, often over the Web or internet. In effect, the clearest manifestation or sign of the rise of the corporate university is that private for-profit schools have become real market participants and actors, competing for investors, students, and revenue.

However, even traditional schools, both public and private, have become market participants also. Years ago *Saturday Night Live* did a routine with a character named Father Guido Sarducci who extolled the "Five Minute University" and the graduate program he called "Got a Minute." Colleges and universities seem to have taken his cue.

Professional education, such as in public or business administration, is the new cash cow of colleges and universities. This bodes badly for academic quality and the students who enroll in these programs, as well as for the future cohort of future managers who will lead this country.

Growth across the country in profession programs such as MBAs,, mini-MBAs, executive MBAs and the same in health care, public and non-profit administration, are fueled by several forces.

First, public and private institutions are cash-starved and under increasing pressure to generate new sources of revenue. Second, one of the most fertile areas to find this revenue is in the growing body of older students searching for quick advanced degrees to credentialize themselves into promotions and new jobs. Third, large numbers of Baby Boomer managers are set to retire in the next few years, creating a tremendous need to make up for lost administrative skills due to the economic restructuring and downsizing that occurred in the 80s and 90s. Fourth, the Internet has enhanced the capacity to transcend geography, reaching many more students than would be possible through more traditional residency programs.

The convergence of these trends is producing a market-driven educational system: a pedagogy perfectly consistent with the new top-down management ethos of many schools which, coincidently, are being more and more run not by academics but by private sector-inspired personnel who see students as customers, faculty as sellers, and education as a commodity.

Overall, to be a corporate university means many things. It includes a management structure, a set of practices or attitudes, and an adoption of human resources policies that are increasingly turning institutions of higher education into market participants who look no different than other for-profit entities. In whatever way it manifests itself, the rise of the corporate university is a consequence of its seeking to reconcile its competing mandates of serving democracy and the marketplace, with fiscal pressures forcing the latter to negate the former.

The College as a Market Player

Responding to ideological and fiscal pressures placed upon them, colleges and universities are forced to become corporatized entities, responding to market pressures and acting like a market participant. This plays itself out in several ways that affect the curriculum and academic quality.

For example, one of the largest new markets in the last decade for schools to generate revenue is to enter the professional training of managers. Traditional Masters degree programs were rooted in a liberal arts curriculum and taught by tenured faculty grounded in the knowledge of the discipline or subject matter through research and other scholarly activity. These programs were expensive, and they certainly were not revenue-generators. These new professional programs are usually taught by untenured adjunct practitioners in the field. Eschewing the liberal arts grounding as too "academic," emphasis is placed upon student-to-student conversations where the faculty members are facilitators who employ "war stories from field" as a method of teaching. The belief here is that such teaching is more in tune with impatient students who do not want any of the bookish information, just give them what they need to know to do their job. Revenue production, not knowledge or excellence, is their goal. Thus, there is a push to deliver an educational product ever more cheaply.

Under this type of teaching, the faculty fades in importance. The virtue is that unlike traditional programs where there are significant sunken costs or investments in curriculum, faculty training, and tenure, market-driven programs have little up-front investment and faculty, classes, and entire programs can be changed quickly to respond to changing consumer preferences or employment trends.

Market-driven education also places schools into competition in ways different from the past where colleges sought to recruit the best and the brightest via selective admissions standards. Now, there is pressure to water down selectivity-"If we do not accept this person some other school will"-and standards in class-"If we assign bad grades students will go elsewhere, including On-line, and take their money with them." We now see a race to the academic bottom with schools willing to admit anyone regardless of grades or board scores. Selectivity is tantamount to bad customer service. The worst school on the Internet now sets the standard for all.

Market-driven education also produces a bifurcated marketplace. For Ivy Leagues like Harvard and Yale, high tuition is the purchasing of a name-branded school that adds prestige or panache to a resume. Weaker schools cannot compete by selling their name but instead market by offering the lowest price, preferring volume sales at lower prices to the high end, high priced limited volume of the name brand schools. Yet, in neither case is academic quality being sold nor necessarily made a major selling piece, except as part of a perfunctory marketing brochure.

Market-driven education thus has turned Father Sarducci's farce into reality. For institutions

and faculty who still see value in the liberal arts grounding of education, the preference for academic standards is depicted as increasingly elitist and antithetical to the market-driven ethos. Such a view on education is anachronistic and compromised by market-driven education.

Are Universities for Sale? The Future of Higher Education

Universities are trapped in a contradiction. They are under increasing pressure to reduce costs, provide more business training, and otherwise be more market friendly. Conversely, there is a public backlash against rising tuition which alienates middle class who want tuition affordable or capped, and there is also a business need for a publicly supported higher education system to socialize many training costs and provide disciplined employees for the labor market. Precipitated by the fiscal crisis of the state, colleges and universities seek to reconcile their own internal contradictions, and they have responded by increasingly becoming more corporatized in their organization, management, and operating policies. Corporatized universities no long enjoy the quasi independence or autonomy they once had; instead they are forced to become market players, commodifying education, and selling out the Deweyan promise of producing educated citizens for a democratic society. While restoring some of the lost public funding might help to forestall the worst of this corporatization, the reality is that higher educational institutions are captured by the market place, making them too no more than a commodity up for a sale to the highest bidder.

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Notes

[i]. Ironically, even American colleges and universities are facing global competition from schools outside of the United States, such as Australia, for students (Cohen 2005; Newman 2004, 23).

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Tradition . . . Transgression! Singer In The Shtetl And On The Street

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

Isaac Bashevis Singer, Collected Stories. *Boxed Set, 3 Volumes, illustrated Album, xxxi + 2844 pages. $105.*

Edited by Ilan Stavans. Album includes biographical commentary by James Gibbons. Stories translated from the Yiddish by the author and many others. New York: Library of America, 2004.

"They were godly without God, and worldly without a world."
—Singer on his generation

Early in the 1960s, a little over forty years ago, I discovered the work of Sylvia Plath. Alas, I discovered it (as most people did) at exactly the moment it stopped. The London *Observer,* along with its story on her suicide, printed a whole page of her poems. In the midst of "Daddy", one

of the most riveting of those poems, Plath pulls herself up short and says,

I began to talk like a Jew.

I think I might well be a Jew.

A year or so later, I attended a reading by the great confessional poet Robert Lowell. He staggered onstage, and made a startling declaration: "You know, I'm a Jew". He asked if anybody doubted him; nobody did. Some of us rolled our eyes, and wondered what he would be confessing next. But he spent most of the evening reading a gentle memoir of his Sephardic maternal grandmother. When I told a friend this story, he said he had seen William Carlos Williams do the same: present his Jewish genealogy to a poetry audience in a gesture of *There, In your face.* I was mystified, yet flattered, to see these great WASP poets wanting to be part of us. My mother wasn't so thrilled. Could somebody tell the poets that as symbols of horrible but noble death, the Jews were worn out? Wasn't it time to choose some other people and give us a chance to live? I partly agreed with her, but I said, Mom, don't blame the poets, blame God.

It was only this summer, as I immersed myself in this centennial edition of Singer stories—I counted 198 in all; I may be wrong, but not by much–that the yearnings of the poets of half a century ago came back to me. *Collected Stories*, latest entry in the Library of America, places Singer in the canon of American literature, alongside Hawthorne and Melville and Henry James

and Mark Twain. It is a major event in the history of Jewish American culture. This triple volume is beautifully edited and annotated by Ilan Stavans. It includes a paperback album full of evocative photos and ephemera, a brilliant symposium by Stavans, Morris Dickstein, David Roskies, Jonathan Rosen and Isaiah Sheffer, commentary by Francine Prose, Cynthia Ozick, Joyce Carol Oates, and many more. Stavans was right to focus the collection on Singer's stories; his talent and originality come across far more vividly in his short fiction, which compresses volatile forces till they explode, than in his novels, where he tries to construct enduring worlds. These stories, spread over the whole 20th century, are set in prewar Polish *shtetl*s, in postwar European cities, in New York, in Israel, in Buenos Aires and Rio, in the Brazilian jungle (Yiddish in the jungle?), and in Miami Beach, where he died; on innumerable ships and buses and trains and planes; in neighborhoods destroyed by the Nazis, neighborhoods destroyed by the real estate market, neighborhoods where we could bump into him today if he were still alive. This collection shows that Singer could "do the police in different voices", that is, write wonderfully in very diverse literary styles, and that his work had an enormous emotional range. Singer's people, Jews from Poland, are drawn from a fairly narrow demographic base. But they have experienced the 20th century in all its depths. As he said in 1973, "They lived in the midst of almost all the social movements of our time. Their illusions were the illusions of mankind." The life they shared was "a treasury of individuality".[1] Even when they died—and so many died before their time—they *lived*. Singer was fully attuned to that life. He may be able to help us see why great modern poets with noble *goyishe* pedigrees would want to be part of us.

If we focus briefly on one of Singer's short masterpieces, "A Crown of Feathers", it can give us a sense of his uncanny power as a writer. "Crown", set in a *shtetl*, describes a woman's twisted and tragic life journey. We meet Aksha, as a rich, smart, beautiful, spoiled girl, raised by adoring grandparents. She must find a husband: in the closed society of the *shtetl,* without a husband a woman's life cannot go on. (This is the context of Scholem Aleichem's "Tevye" stories and *Fiddler on the Roof*.) With her dowry there is no shortage of candidates; but they all look like klutzes and dunces to her, and she blows them off. Her grandparents die, she finds herself alone and under pressure to make a decision fast. Then she has a vision, speaking in her grandmother's voice: the whole Jewish world is as empty as the *shtetl*; but if abandons the Jews, and becomes a Catholic, she can have a glorious future with the *goyim.* Her grandmother offers her a sign: "down and feathers entwined into a crown", culminating in a Cross. She follows the sign, becomes a Catholic, and makes what at first seems a brilliant marriage with the local Squire. But "it was strange, there were no more signs after the first one." And her marriage unfolds as a disaster: her husband drinks, screws around, and ignores her. She feels even more abandoned and alone as a Christian than she had felt as a Jew. "She had betrayed the Jewish God, and no longer believed in the gentile one." In despair, she starts to hear conflicting voices: her grandmother tells her to "go back to Esau"; her grandfather says she should return to Judaism and marry the last man she rejected: "he'll save you from the abyss." She returns. The rabbi is merciful and understanding. But her Jewish husband, still hurting from her rejection of him, vows revenge. In the tradition of Anna Karenina's husband, he sanctifies his hatred as righteousness. He refuses to touch her, tortures her psychologically, and eventually starves her to death. As she feels she is dying, she wants to

repent and pray.

But such was her fate, doubt did not leave her even now. Her grandfather had told her one thing, her grandmother another.…
She had but one desire now—that a sign should be given, the pure truth revealed.…
With her last strength she got up and found a knife.…she ripped open the pillowcase. From the stuffing she pulled out a crown of feathers. A hidden hand had braided in its top the four letters of God's name,…YHWH.
Hallelujah! a miracle! Yet it gives her no inner peace. Her brilliant critical mind, which has driven her so far, cannot stop now. She asks herself:
In what way was this crown more a revelation than the other?
Was it possible there were different faiths in Heaven?
"Aksha began to pray for a new miracle." Yet she knows, and we know, that no matter how many miracles happen to her, they can only become part of the inherently endless series of miracles that she has experienced already.

She grasps an idea that is a fundamental idea in 20th-century philosophy and ethics: *the plurality of values.* William James, Max Weber, Jean-Paul Sartre, Isaiah Berlin, could have comforted her. But the closed world that is her only world has no comfort and no place for a pluralist. "At dawn"—like a prisoner being executed–"she sighed and gave up her soul."

The women who wash her body find pieces of down between her fingers. But they find no crown. They don't understand.

…*what had she been searching for?* No matter how much the townspeople pondered,…they never discovered the truth.
Now the narrator steps back slowly from Aksha, her *shtetl* and her story, and closes the ark with one of Singer's most glorious sentences:
Because if there is such a thing as truth it is as intricate and hidden as a crown of feathers.[2]

Even though the truth is hidden and the world is closed, Aksha gets some recognition after she dies. Her fellow townsmen "buried her near the chapel of a holy man", and "a rabbi spoke a eulogy for her." Singer doesn't share the text of this eulogy with us. But if we have stayed with him through Aksha's ups and downs, we can compose it ourselves. Actually, Goethe has already composed it for us, in his *Faust.* Goethe's God (*der Herr,* he calls him) says it at the start:

As long as he may be alive,…
Man errs as long as he will strive.
A chorus of angels says it at the end:
Saved is the spirit kingdom's flower
From evil and the grave.
Whoever strives with all his power
We are allowed to save.[3]

This *shtetl* girl, messing her life up but striving with all her power, shares Faust's glory. And Singer and Yiddish share in the glory of modern culture.

"A Crown of Feathers" contains a number of themes that pervade Singer's whole long career. One is what critics have come to call *magic realism*, a vision of the world where demons and *dybbuks* and supernatural forces are as alive as you and me and a lot more powerful; though Singer often goes out of his way, as in "Taibele and her Demon" and "The Séance", to say that his supernatural forces are created out of human needs, and that humans know it. Another is *empathy for women*: there is no serious male writer since D.H. Lawrence who has focused so intensely on women's inner lives, and celebrated them, far more than men, as symbols of universal humanity. Singer highlights woman's power to be a *searcher*, and to suffer for her search, even when, as in Aksha's case, it is unclear "What was she searching for?" Another powerful motif is the experience of *betrayal*. So many of Singer's heroes of both sexes commit horrible betrayals: they betray each other and accuse each other of betrayal; they betray whatever ideals they believe in; they betray God, but they also charge God himself with massive betrayal. When Singer's characters address God, it is very often in the mode of *J'accuse.* ("He remembered a scene he had witnessed in a camp….how could God, if He existed, ever rectify such evil? No Messiah, no angels, no paradise could compensate …. The past is stronger than God."[4]) A form of discourse that recurs relentlessly in these stories, especially in later ones, could be called *theology against God.* An important part of suffering in Singer's people is memory of the dead, and a feeling that we should be dead ourselves. Since World War One, this kind of memory has been called *survivor guilt.* People crippled by survivor guilt often hope to unite with the dead through *suicide*. Many people in this collection do it; others sound like they could do it next week. And frequently their stories are told by their widows, lovers or friends, who stretch themselves out on the rack of a whole new round of survivor guilt, which then creates a new generation in danger. Singer's atmosphere feels like a giant undertow that could drown us all, the writer along with his characters and his readers.

We need to remember that this writer was the younger brother of the great Yiddish novelist and playwright I. J. Singer, author of *The Brothers Ashkenazi* and *Yoshe Kalb*. Israel Joshua had done everything to get Isaac Bashevis out of Poland and onto the *Forward,* and encouraged him to write. I. J. died of a heart attack in 1944, at the height of his powers, and I. B.'s talent as a serious writer began to thrive more or less the moment he died. This was also the moment when their whole generation of Polish Jews—including their mother and a younger brother—were being annihilated by the Nazis. The correspondences and contradictions

between their works sound fascinating, and could be a thrilling for critics, if only there were anybody still alive to write or to read criticism of Yiddish literature. (Do I hear a voice?)

The one vital Singer theme that's missing from "A Crown of Feathers" is *sex.*[5] In seminaries and yeshivas of many denominations today, Singer is still on the Index along with D.H. Lawrence. This collection helps us see why. He wrote about sex with a remarkable fluency from the very start of his career to the very end. Yet there is curiously little about *bodies* here, no limbs, no breasts, no genitals, no orgasms. But there is a great deal about how sex both opens and floods our minds. It's a space where men and women get to act out desires that they ordinarily can't even bear to think of.

Here are a *shtetl* ritual slaughterer and his landlady:

> Risha exclaimed, "Woe is me, I'm a married woman, we'll roast in Gehenna for this." But she, thrice married, had never before felt desire as great as on that day. Though she called him murderer, robber, highwayman, and reproached him for bringing shame to an honest woman, yet at the same time she kissed him, fondled him, and responded to his masculine whims. In their amorous play, she asked him to slaughter her….he ran his finger across her throat. When she arose, she said, "You murdered me that time." He answered, "And you murdered me,"[6]

For this adulterous couple, sex opens the portal to *transgression.* It's only a matter of time before they start slaughtering horses and pigs and throwing them into the kosher meat, and making love through their death throes.

Hot sex is a driving force in Singer's very first *shtetl* stories, written in the mid-1940s (but often not published till the 1960s). "The clever Shloime, because of his great learning, began to delve deeper and deeper into questions of 'he' and 'she'."[7] Singer's *shtetl*s are all physically intact, yet culturally and socially they are *imploding.* The forces that pull them to pieces do not come from outside agitators—though certainly there are plenty of these around—but from the inner dynamics of religious Judaism itself. The achievement of these early stories is to explode the pastoral myth of the *shtetl* forever. Singer's romance of Tradition is at the same time a romance of Transgression. His Talmudic scholars and good housewives and butchers and cooks may be victims, but they are not innocent. Singer forces us to recognize that they are perpetrators as well. Perpetrators have a rough dignity: they are not radiant saints, as in the traditional myth; they are not passive *schleps* and sad sacks, as in the Zionist myth; they are strong men and women who feel trapped in the bleak small towns they have grown up in—Singer renders small-town claustrophobia as powerfully as Sherwood Anderson or Willa Cather; his people have the brains and sensitivity to know they want a better life than the life they know, and the guts to stand up and fight for profane happiness, even though they know (and tell each other) they're bound to lose.

Readers who grew up as I did on American *films noirs* may notice that Singer's many hot-but-doomed couples sound amazingly like Barbara Stanwyck and Fred MacMurray in *Double*

Indemnity, or Sylvia Sidney and Henry Fonda in *You Only Live Once*. At first the similarity seemed bizarre to me: Could I be imagining this? But then I realized that many of the best American *noirs* were made at exactly the same historical moment as Singer's, by Fritz Lang and Billy Wilder and all sorts of other people who were Jewish refugees like Singer himself. Maybe we need to imagine a form of "Judeo-American *noir*", a distinctive genre with an emotional territory all its own. As a kid, I was always stymied by the question, Why are the hero and the heroine so hopelessly doomed? America is a big country; why can't they just get divorced and marry each other and leave town? If we think of the places the movies are set—in Kansas, say, or California—it's a mystery, or at least a problem. If we think of the places the directors come from—Berlin, Vienna, Budapest, Prague–we don't have to ask.

As a writer, Singer is clearly glad to exploit sex, to take advantage of its pulling power. But beyond this, he really, like Lawrence, *believes in* sex as an affirmative and creative force that makes the world go round. This empowers him to imagine legally married ordinary people having nights together that are as wild as any outlaw's. One of his first stories, "Short Friday" (1945), is a romantic hymn to married love. The man is a poor *shtetl* tailor who looks like a *shlemiel* in the public world. But in bed with his wife he is a hero.

> She baked a small *chaleh* for him. Occasionally she would inscribe her name on it in letters of dough, and then he would tease her, "Shoshe, I am eating you up, I have already swallowed you…."
> He rose and came to her. Presently he was in bed with her.
> A desire for her flesh had roused him. His heart pounded, the blood coursed in his veins. He felt a pressure in his loins…he remembered the law that admonished a man not to copulate with a woman until he had first spoken affectionately to her, and he now began to speak of his love for her….[8]

This is as close as Singer gets to physical detail. But it's plenty, because he writes with such generosity and transparent empathy for both partners. But also remember "I'm eating you up": in his world, even married love, the most solid tradition, skirts the edge of transgression. We see this same generosity and empathy in "The Spinoza of Market Street". Here, in interwar Warsaw, an old ascetic scholar lets himself be talked into marrying the maid. Then, somehow, to his amazement,

> Powers long dormant awakened in him….The pressures and aches stopped. He embraced Dobbe, pressed her to himself, was again a man as in his youth….Later, Dr. Fischelson slipped off into the sleep that young men know.
> He awakens close to dawn, goes to the window, and sees the climax of a meteor shower.
> The comets, planets, satellites, asteroids, kept encircling these shining centers. Worlds were born and died in cosmic upheavals. In the chaos of nebulae, primeval matter was being formed….Yes, the divine substance was extended….Its waves and bubbles danced in the universal cauldron, seething with change….And he, Dr. Fischelson, was part of it.[9]

This is one of the nicest things anybody has ever written about sex: that it has the power to make people feel, not just that they have come to life, but that they are participating in a universal life.

Many of Singer's 1940s stories are written in a very distinctive literary form, "the tale". All through the 19th century, brilliant tales appeared all over Europe and America. Its masters include Gogol, Hans Andersen, E.T.A. Hoffmann, Edgar Allan Poe. The tale is a kind of anti-self to the 19th-century novel. Instead of being set in a particular place, its location is uncertain. In time, it is usually a time "before" the present, in a society whose contours are vague but relatively "underdeveloped". Tales describe the intrusion of supernatural forces into ordinary men's and women's daily lives. Yiddish tales tend to feature the Hasidic and folkloric theme of "the *dybbuk*", a wandering soul that takes possession of young men's and women's bodies. *The Dybbuk,* Shmuel Ansky's play of the 1920s, adapted as a Polish Yiddish movie in the 1930s, is a modernist translation of the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. This tragedy was Singer's starting point, and it won him instant recognition, even as the Nazis destroyed a thousand Veronas. It enabled him to write with great passion and intensity, to create a world that was narrow but thrilling, and to find readers in postwar America and Europe who felt he could see into their souls and feel not only their pain but their yearning.

In the 1960s, Singer went through a crucial development.[10] He never stopped writing about a real or imagined lost Poland "before the fall." But he began to focus on his own generation, on Jews who had gone through the Holocaust but survived. His own neighborhood, New York's Upper West Side, was full of survivors. Many of them were just barely surviving—for years I could see them in impeccable but increasingly threadbare European clothes, going through the waste baskets on Broadway. Others ran the florists, the children's clothing shops, the dry cleaners; you could see the numbers on their arms as they handed you your clothes. Still others, like Vladek Spiegelman, Art's father in *Maus*,[11] were having more success in the postwar American economy than they had ever had in Poland. Some were able to afford nice clothes, big cars, splendid apartments in palatial New York buildings—like the building on Broadway and 86th where Singer and his wife could move in the 1960s, after his first great successes in the American paperback market. But Singer saw that many of his neighbors were among the most tormented people anywhere in the world. And he felt an obligation to them that was rooted in "survivor guilt"—he, whose survival had never been in doubt. In dozens of the stories here, including many of the best, he found ways to make their their torments his own. In his New York stories, Singer puts the supernatural tale and the realistic novel in bed together.

"The Cafeteria" (1968) is a marvelous panorama of this generation. Hundreds of Jews pass through, amazed that they aren't dead, fearing the end could come anytime, but overflowing with gossip and intrigue against each other. They disparage each other for what they think they did to survive ("see that one? He had a store in Auschwitz?"), and they lacerate themselves for what they know they themselves did ("to get a bowl of soup you had to sell your soul"). In the new world, people strive to live new lives. "Everyone tries with all his powers to grab as many honors and as much money and prestige as he can. None of us learns from all

these deaths." Then abruptly "a fresh young woman", a glamorous presence comes in. Her name is Esther, and she overflows with life. Her life force awakens all "the old has-beens", and they buy her everything

Soon Esther and the narrator get together in a typical Singer way:

"Well, what are you waiting for?"
She gave me both a kiss and a bite.
I said, "You are a ball of fire."
"Yes, fire from Gehenna."

This is an encounter between a woman who *went through* the Holocaust and a man who, like Singer himself, came to America in time to avoid it. She has plenty of stories to tell: "The way people behaved in the war—you will never know. They lost all shame." He wants to hear her story, and to make it his own. His desire to know inflames his sexual desire—they don't call it "carnal knowledge" for nothing. He invites her to his place to tell all, hoping to make love to her. When they are alone at last, she tells him what strikes her as ultimate horror: "I saw Hitler….I saw him here on Broadway…right here in the cafeteria." He acts rational (just as we would), tries to assure her it is impossible. But she sees how anxious and distraught her story has made him, and she sees his anxiety as proof that it's all true.

"I saw him just as I am seeing you now."
"You had a glimpse back in time."
"Well, let it be so. But since then I have had no rest…."

He never sees Esther again, but often thinks of her. He worries, has she committed suicide? "How can the brain produce such nightmares? What goes on in that marrow behind the skull?" The story's *denouement* is that, in a travesty of sexually transmitted disease, he is infected with her nightmares. He asks, "what guarantee have I that the same sort of thing will not happen to me?" Intimacy with this woman who has been through it all—though he never gets as intimate as he wants, and never finds out the exact meaning of that "all"—gives the narrator's imagination an apocalyptic shock. Here is how he comes to imagine the future:

…Buildings will collapse, power plants will stop generating electricity. Generals will drop atomic bombs on their own populations. Mad revolutionaries will run in the streets, crying fantastic slogans. I have often thought it would begin in New York. This metropolis has all the symptoms of a mind gone berserk.[12]

The cafeteria, and indeed the city itself, looked at first like shelter from the storms of the recent past; but they turn out not merely to contain but to compress and condense enough twisted psychic energy to generate even more violent storms to come.

Esther has many soul sisters. One of them turns up in a late story, "The Bus", on a tour bus gliding through the Alps. The bus turns out to contain a whole Grand Hotel full of strange

people who will generate a lot of plot in a few pages. A Swiss Protestant doctor sits next to the narrator and explains his troubled marriage. As sublime mountain scenery opens up before them, he plunges into intimate talk. "She's the one who allegedly converted," he says, "but I seem to have turned into a Polish Jew." To be a *Polish* Jew, for Singer, means to have passed through the Holocaust, and to have memories that are unspeakable. She is impossible to be with, but she has one grand trait: "sexually, she was amazingly strong." Her source of sexual energy is not her body, but her mind; she has "a powerful imagination, a perverse fantasy." Describing her allure, "She has said things to me that drive me to frenzy. She has more stories than Sheherazade. Our days were cursed, but our nights were wild. She wore me out.…" Her sexuality is overpowering, but not unique: this *goy* can feel it in all Jews, especially in Jewish women, and most of all in Jewish women who are survivors of the Holocaust. "I have a theory", he says, "that the Jewish woman of today wants to make up for all the centuries in the ghetto." In all those centuries, women were both sexually and spiritually repressed. The new Jewish woman is sexually open and free; but sex for her is part of a larger project, the full liberation of the spirit. The doctor is surprised that her project of liberation has not yet ignited Jewish literature, but he is sure it will: "the Jews are a people of imagination.…I can see it in their eyes."[13] This is vintage Jewish chauvinism, though you can bet you won't find it in the *Jewish Press.*

Embedded in the doctor's riff are some provocative ideas: that the primary source of sexuality is our mind, our imagination; that women are far more imaginative than men; that normal sexual feeling is in some way perverse (Freud said this in *The Case of Dora*); that normal *Jewish* sexual feeling is politicized, in the sense of infused with a sense of historical mission; that all of us, Jews and *goyim* alike, can transport ourselves and each other into sexual frenzy by telling stories; that the new Jewish woman can tell stories that can liberate us all. I love this vision, with its echoes of feminisms and counter-cultures close to my heart. But in a Singer story, it's hard to take it at face value. Any Sheherazade who has been through encounters with the Nazis has got to be choked with stories of horror beyond dreams. How can she have the emotional freedom to be, as her husband dreams, a goddess of liberation? At the story's end we see her up close and personal: a nervous wreck, luminous but suicidal, who barely makes it through the night. Singer's stories often close with terrific punch lines, and she offers one of the best: "Unlike the driver of our ill-starred bus", where the story began, "the forces that drive us mad have all the time in the world."[14] Many of the late stories portray Singer in a Rock Star mode.

Should I say "Singer", or just "the narrator"? In these stories, Singer's usual sense of distance between narrator and creator seems to collapse. This narrator spends most of his life on the road, flying to ever-more-far-flung parts of the world to read his Yiddish stories. Wherever he goes, a strange woman finds him, says something like "Only you know my soul", or even "I read you in the camps", and takes him home to bed. Sometimes there is a husband at home; he typically echoes his wife's admiration for Singer and disappears into the night, leaving them alone. They do what men and women do, and then—this often seems to be the encounter's real point—she tells him her life story. Some of these stories are tragic, at least one ("One Night in Brazil")[15] is hilarious. Next morning she takes him to the train or plane, he promises to

remember her, and then promptly forgets. These narratives project a sense of sexual privilege and entitlement that isn't so nice; it's easy to see how Singer's fellow-writers could hate him.[16] I have no idea how many (if any) of these encounters were real. *The Singer Album* has many posed photos of the writer and his wife Alma, which seem placed there to make us feel, "None of that hanky-panky really happened." The photos don't persuade me, but honestly I don't care. However, whether or not Singer actually lived as a seventy-year-old Rock Star with Holocaust-survivor groupies, he *writes* as a Rock Star with great poignancy —far more than any Guitar Wizard half his age. The key is his *empathy for women.* Whether or not these women had real-life originals, whether he treated them well or ill, he transforms them into memorable characters in print.

"A Wedding in Brownsville", Singer's first great New York story, offers a spectacular set-piece that intertwines New York's brilliant postwar culture of fusion—its fusion of high culture and low culture, of Europe and America, of Jews and gentiles, of tradition and modernity, of religion and secularism, of *shtetl* and metropolis—with a more alluring, unstable and emotionally threatening fusion, the fusion of the living and the dead.

The hall…was filled with people and music, with tables heaped with food, a bar stacked with bottles. The musicians were playing an Israeli march that was a hodgepodge of American jazz with Oriental flourishes. Men were dancing with men, women with women, men with women.…Guests kept arriving, pushing their way through the crowd, some still in their hats and coats, munching hors d'oeuvres, drinking schnapps. The hall resounded with stamping, screaming, laughing, clapping. Flash bulbs went off blindingly.…

> He became half-drunk on the amalgam of odors: flowers, garlic, sauerkraut, perfume, mustard.…"Hello Schloime-Dovid, you don't recognize me, eh! Look, he forgot!"…Why don't you eat something? Why don't you have something to drink? Come over here. Take a glass. What do you want? Whiskey? Brandy? Cognac? Scotch? With soda? With Coca-Cola? Don't let it stand. Take some, its good.So long as you're here, you might as well enjoy yourself." "My father? He was killed. They were all killed. I'm the only one left." "Beresh the son of Feivish? Starved to death in Russia.…His wife? In Israel, she married a Lithuanian." "Sorele? Shot, together with her children."…"Your brother Chayim? Your Uncle Oyzer? They killed everyone, everyone. They took a whole people, and wiped them out with German efficiency: *gleichgeschaltet!*" "Have you seen the bride? Pretty as a picture, but too much makeup.…Do you see that young woman dancing in the yellow dress? It's Riva's sister—her father was Moshe the candlemaker. Riva herself? Where all the others ended up: Auchwitz. How close we came ourselves! All of us are really dead.…Even the survivors carry death in their hearts. But it's a wedding, we should be cheerful. *Lechayim…*"[17]

This is a generation that overflows with a vitality that makes postwar New York the cultural capital of the world. And yet, by some weird magic, it also turns out to be a generation that doesn't know if it's alive or dead. It leaps to choose life—*Lechayim!*– but who knows if life will

return the compliment?

In the 1960s, Singer achieved tremendous success in America. (Other Yiddish writers bitterly called him "Yankee Doodle".)[18] But for much of his generation, and for many of his readers, it was a decade of hard times. In cities all over America, Jewish neighborhoods downscaled and went through what sociologists called "white flight". Many young people with rising incomes moved to suburbs, which were federally subsidized through the Highway System. People like their parents, old people on fixed or declining incomes, stayed in "the old neighborhood".[19] As Jewish neighborhoods lost their economic base, and grew less safe and more violent—as all American cities did in the 1960s—they also lost much of their *gemutlichkeit.* Within a few years, hundreds of cafeterias closed; for generations, they had been the main centers of Jewish public life (not to mention gold mines for Jewish writers). In a short time, many Jews who had come to feel at home in American cities suddenly felt marginal and endangered. Here, unexpectedly, was a whole new world of Jewish suffering. It wasn't *shtetl* poverty, it wasn't Tsarist pogroms, it wasn't Nazis, but it was real.

In the 1960s, Jewish urban liberals, who had fought discrimination, supported diversity and pluralism, celebrated the American city for its grand inclusiveness, found themselves under a new kind of stress. It wasn't hard to find Jews talking like this:

> The street between Broadway and Riverside Drive became noisier and filthier from day to day. Hordes of urchins ran around half naked. Dark men with curly hair and wild eyes quarreled with little women whose bellies were always swollen in pregnancy. They talked back in rattling voices. God in heaven, since Sam died, New York, America—perhaps the whole world—was falling apart. All the decent people had left the neighborhood, and it was overrun by a mob of thieves, robbers, whores….Never had Broadway seemed to her so wild, so dirty. It stank of softened asphalt, gasoline, rotted fruit, the excrement of dogs.

This is Bessie, an old Singer lady, the heroine of his story, "The Key".[20] I can recall my shock, at a late-60s Seder table, when I first heard an old Jewish lady talk this way. What struck me was her mix of fear and loathing. I had to sympathize with her fear, alone in the street, but why did she erupt with loathing? In fact, her language sounds a lot like late-60s American politics, neo-Right wing politics. And indeed, Richard Nixon in 1968 was elected President with the aid of these politics—his team called it "the Southern strategy". Most American Jews probably understood this woman's pain. Very few used it as a pretext to move politically to the Right. (Norman Podhoretz and *Commentary* were among the few.) But Singer must have heard this language on the streets and in cafeterias every day. He treats Bessie with great delicacy. He portrays her paranoid eruption as part of a crisis and potential collapse of life. She has lost her way; she has got to find herself again. The subtitle of her story could be "She Shall Overcome".

Here is how Singer makes it happen. Bessie hates going out, but she has to shop. One summer afternoon, she is coming home from shopping on Broadway, and her key sticks in the lock. She pushes and pulls it, and it breaks. Bessie is struck with terror. She feels she has

nowhere to turn. She goes back to Broadway, looking for a locksmith, but she can't find anybody open. She sits down for a rest, apparently on one of the park benches on the Broadway Mall (the green strip that splits Broadway from Columbus Circle to 122nd Street), and falls asleep.

Some hours later, Bessie wakes up. She feels disoriented, then she looks around her, and sees the moon; near it is a greenish star. She is amazed: it is like a revelation. She had almost forgotten that there was a sky, a moon, stars. Years had passed and she had never looked up—only down….Well, if there was a sky, perhaps there was also God, angels, paradise….[She asks herself] "What have I accomplished in all these years?"…She felt as if she had awakened from a long sleep. The broken key had opened a door in her brain….

A big black man comes toward her, and she is startled, but he goes his own way peaceably and she relaxes. Now "Fresh breezes drifted from the Hudson. New stars appeared in the sky." A black cat comes toward her. She is terrified. But then it rubs up against her and acts friendly. How could she have feared it? "O Mother of mine, I was bewitched. I'll begin a new life." She even thinks, *Could I remarry*? Then she falls asleep.

She awakes, and it is a new day; she can even see the sun, which she hasn't seen in some time. She sees men and women going to work; a young man nods good morning, and she smiles at him. She reaches her building. She is terrified of having to ask her superintendent for help. But he is open and nice, worries about her, says he will open her door right away. "Why didn't you come to me and tell me what happened? To be roaming around all night at your age—my God!" Ironically, we know, it is only through that "roaming around" that she has started to become human again, human enough to ask people for help. Her next door neighbor comes out, expresses worry and relief, and says she put her butter and milk in her fridge.

> Bessie could hardly restrain her tears. "Oh, my good people."
> She said. "I didn't know that…."
> The super said, "Next time, if something like this happens, call me. That's what I'm here for."

She lies down on her bed, and a vision of Sam appears. It may be the first time that he has "managed to get away from the grave and visit her." They wander arm in arm through corridors, tunnels, mountains. Suddenly she realizes, "It was like the night of their honeymoon", in Ellenville in the Catskills, so many years ago, when the hotel owner had let them into their bridal suite. She hears the same words she heard before: "You don't need no key here. Just enter—and *mazel tov*."[21] The experience of breaking her key has led her to discover the street, the Broadway Mall (on whose bench she spent the night), animals, the sky, the sun, other people: "Oh, my good people…." Losing her key enables her to find the key to staying alive in the city: to *be here now.* Her breakthrough to tomorrow carries her back to her breakthrough in yesterday, when people urged her to "be here now" with the man she loved.

"The Key" may be the sweetest story Singer ever wrote. In some ways it evokes O. Henry, with his parables that show the universe fitting together, just when it looks like it's not going to fit together at all. But it goes far beyond O. Henry in letting loose the bitterness that the writer is trying to transcend. The spleen and bile flood in at the story's start: "hordes of urchins…a mob of thieves, robbers and whores". But Singer empowers his heroine to overcome her fear and loathing and reach a point where she can be here now and share space with the rest of the people of the Upper West Side—and of the earth–and live with them. That's the key.

One thing that gives this story a special resonance is its contrast with *Mr. Sammler's Planet,* Saul Bellow's vitriolic novel published in 1969. \ Sammler walks exactly the same changing Upper West Side streets as Bessie. At the book's start he speaks of the other neighborhood people with loathing very like her own. 300 pages later, he talks just the same way. He walks up and down Broadway hundreds of times, but his mind doesn't move a step. In the 1950s, Bellow had done a stirring translation of "Gimpel the Fool" for the *Partisan Review* and played a vital role in Singer's American debut. But by the end of the 1960s, they were seeing the same urban space in very different ways. Some of Bellow's best fiction—*Seize the Day,* and much of *Herzog*—is not just located on the West Side, but embedded in its everyday life. In *Sammler,* just a few years later, it seemed that Bellow had locked himself out and thrown away the key. The striking thing about Singer is how well he adapted to the city's changes. He not only held onto his key, he showed the key still worked.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, even as Singer was writing some of his best stories, he was highly visible on the street. You could see him plain, on Upper Broadway or on the park benches of the Broadway Mall, schmoozing with people, feeding pigeons, "roaming around". Sometimes I felt he was the linchpin that held the Upper West Side together. My mother often saw him on her walks to Zabar's. Since she was a lifelong fan, I asked her, why not say *Shalom!* "He has more glamorous women than me", she said. In the 1970s, he became a subject for celebrity photographs. Some are reproduced in *The Singer Album*. (Bruce Davidson's are the best.) There was something gimmicky about these pictures, but I loved them from the start, not only because I loved Singer, but because of their politics. *Behold an old Jew in a multicultural city, completely at home. Does he fear the street, overflowing with dark-skinned "others"*? *No: he has the key to the city. He knows how to be here now.* Remember, those were years when New York City was in deep trouble, and President Ford even said that if the city went bankrupt, "the American people" would suffer no loss. Those pictures and the stories that went with them were terrific ads for New York, a city whose inner life has always grown out of its streets. Not only that, they were terrific ads for Jewish liberalism. That old man on the street was a radical anti-Sammler. His presence gave Jewish liberalism a renewal of life, as vibrant as the inner renewal of "The Spinoza of Market Street". Did he have any idea of this? I'm sure he didn't. The political force of his presence derived not from any idea, but from a human experience. *We are at home with lots of people in a limited space. We know how to share space. We know the street is the Garden. This is where God meant for us to be.*

I opened this piece by invoking Sylvia Plath, and wondering why, just before she killed herself, she expressed a wish to be a Jew. I want to close with a Singer story that might give us a clue.

This story was published in Yiddish in the *Jewish Daily Forward* all the way back in 1970, and translated by Singer and novelist Laurie Colwin, probably around that time. But it wasn't published in English till last year, when the *Collected Stories* first appeared, and the English-language *Forward* published a supplement in his honor. The supplement contained several fine critical pieces, color photographs from what we might call his Miami Dada period, shortly before he died, and this one knockout story, called "Two".[22] The central themes in "Two" are developed in many other places in Singer's work. What makes this story special—and probably what kept it from getting published for so long—is that it's *raw.*

The two are a man and a woman, David, a Hebrew teacher, and Dora, proprietor of a boutique, both Holocaust survivors. They have had a love affair that has gone on for years. For years they dreamed of getting married. In vain! Now they are planning to commit suicide together. They have rented a room in a motor court in what seems to be the Catskills. They will enjoy a last night of love, and then take poison pills at dawn. David feels "pregnant with death". As Singer describes the plan, and their first steps in setting it in motion, it sounds ridiculous. But he knows we know that, in spite of everything, ridiculous suicide plans sometimes succeed. They get into the motel room and start bickering right away.

"This night was supposed to be a holiday, not Tishab'ov.
Take off your glasses. I want to see your eyes."
"Leave me alone."

He takes out a bottle of cognac and a box of cookies and pours them drinks. They can't quite manage to say *L'chayim*! He says he can't live anyway, he has a lethal cancer; she doubts it's real. He says that on a night like this they must confess everything, all their transgressions against each other. It seems they have both been unfaithful. He has had far more lovers then she, but she, too, has "done it", betrayed him. They both insist their various lovers meant nothing to them; they both respond to each other's confessions with disgust. He calls her a whore. "How many Nazis did you whore around with?" None, she swears. Then he says, "We're not Jews anymore, we're Nazis." Then he throws up.

After awhile he says, "There may still be a God."
She asks, bitterly, "What kind of God?"
He says what many Singer survivors say: "*A heavenly Hitler.*"
"Cursed be the day I met you!" he shouts at her. And yet, uncannily, and carrying him (and us) back to Poland, "it was not his language or his style. *His father entered him like a dybbuk.*"

"For you to preach morality", she says, "is like Al Capone becoming a rabbi." But then, Singer says, "She went to him, as if his terrible words were a code and a signal for her. She fell into his arms and he clung to her with passion and disgust. All their inhibitions left them….They wrestled with each other, scolding one another and caressing with forgiving vengeance." Soon "They fell into their old familiar love chatter: half crazy fantasies, incoherent exclamations, promises of eternal love…." Then they fall asleep.

He wakes up. "If you want to die, now's the time."
"I don't want to die."
She hugged him tightly and wrapped herself around him. Her hair tickled his face. Only now did he smell the cognac on her breath. She half sighed, half giggled, in the way he once imagined *Lilith* the she-demon, whom Satan sends out at night to entice Yeshiva boys to sin.
He asks about the pills.
"I threw them down the drain."
"All of them?"
"Yes, my beloved. All of them."

Here as ever, Singer is a master ironist. What is the sin to which our hero is fatally tempted by his Lilith? It's the sin of *living,* that's what. And so David and Dora will get dressed and go back down to the city and their messy lives. Their night close to death has convinced them they want to live. And now we, their readers, can breathe again.

"Two" is one of the best things ever written about a couple. It needs to be read in its entirety (13 pages, not a long entirety) to feel the pauses and silences and repetitions, the comedy and self-irony, the unconscious cruelty and equally unconscious tenderness that make up any human couple's real time. But this story is also written about a *Jewish* couple. They are an enlightened couple, sophisticated and scathingly critical (in their different ways) of Jewish tradition and culture. At the same time, Jewish tradition and culture give them life and make them who they are. Freud said that in every act of sexual intercourse, there are four persons present; the woman's father and the man's mother share the bed. But for David and Dora, Lilith is present, too, and Hitler, and Al Capone, and a fatherly *dybbuk*, and a Hitlerian God; and Freud himself is there, along with Ludwig Feuerbach, as unregistered guests. David and Dora hate God for all he has done and for all he has failed to do. Their God has plenty to answer for. But even as they curse him, they feel he is *there*. David erupts like a soul possessed by a *dybbuk;* but he has learned from Feuerbach that theology is ultimately anthropology, and from Freud that it is above all our parents who possess us and don't let go. He deconstructs Jewish superstition, yet he lives inside it. As he and she make love, going through gestures of "passion and disgust", of "forgiving vengeance", they act out all the ambivalence that the Bible describes in the troubled but intact marriage between Israel and God. They give each other grief, yet they are wrapped around each other, they are "two," *they are not alone.* One of Isaac Singer's most impressive achievements is a vision of Judaism that can keep people together, wrapped around each other, not alone, that can overcome suicidal nihilism and keep us staying alive.

Notes

[1]Author's note to *A Crown of Feathers*, 1973. *Collected Stories,* Volume 2, page 271.

[2]"A Crown of Feathers" (1973), *Collected Stories,* 2, 272-296.

[3]Goethe's *Faust*, translated by Walter Kaufmann (Anchor, 1962), lines 315 ff., 11934 ff.

[4]"Two", *Collected Stories,* 3, 856.

[5]Still, Francine Prose, in *The Singer Album,* 76, finds it "shocking in its eroticism".

[6]"Blood" (1964), 1, 358. Published in English in *Short Friday,*1964.

[7]"The Destruction of Kreshev" (1944), 1, 304. Published in English in *The Spinoza of Market Street,* 1961.

[8]"Short Friday"(1945), 1, 522, 527. Published in English in 1964.

[9]"The Spinoza of Market Street" (1944), 1, 175f. Published in English in 1961.

[10]Morris Dickstein blocks this out very perceptively in *The Singer Album*, 118.

[11]Art Spiegelman, *MAUS*: *A Survivor's Tale,* Volume I, "My Father Bleeds History", Volume II, "And Here My Troubles Began" (Pantheon, 1986, 1991).

[12]"The Cafeteria" (1968), 2, 70, 81.

[13]"The Bus" (1978), 3, 214f. Published in English in *Old Love,* 1979.

[14]"The Bus", 3, 233.

[15]"One Night in Brazil" (1977), 3, 7-20. Published in English in *Old Love,* 1979.

[16]There were many reasons to hate him. Other Yiddish writers called him *der chazer,* "the pig". They said they were only alluding to his very pink complexion. (*Singer Album,*70) But he himself, at the start of "The Cafeteria", in the line, "Everyone tries…" (see page 10, above), showed he knew very well what they meant. The demonization of Singer is the theme of Cynthia Ozick's brilliant story, "Envy; or, Yiddish in America", *Commentary,* November 1969; included in her 1971 collection, *The Pagan Rabbi.*

[17]"A Wedding in Brownsville" (1962), 1, 499. Published in English in *Short Friday,* 1964.

[18]See *The Singer Album*, 70.

[19]Ironically, these forces created openings for people like my family, who were thrilled to move from the Bronx, against the demographic tide, to Manhattan's Upper West Side, Singer's neighborhood.

[20]"The Key" (1969), 37. First English publication in *A Friend of Kafka*, 1970.

[21]"The Key", in *A Friend of Kafka*, 2, 41-44.

[22]"Two", in English *Forward* Supplement on Singer, 25 June 2004, and in *Collected*

Stories, 3, 844-57. In quotations below, italics are mine.

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“Less Than Nothing”: Playing The Blame Game

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We Americans live in the most unequal advanced country in the world. When compared with similar societies, ours has the greatest inequities in the distribution of income and wealth, the provision of basic health care, the relationship between CEO salaries and average wages, the financial influence on office-holders and the level of political participation. This didn’t happen overnight and is not the unforeseen product of economic growth. It’s the direct result of twenty-five years of public policy that has favored wealth, rewarded property and encouraged the concentration of both.

The appearance of general prosperity notwithstanding, the vast amount of money that’s gone to the few has come at the expense of the many. Disappearing pensions and weakened social protections, longer hours at work and more stress on the job, a large class of the permanently impoverished, the world’s largest population of prison inmates, less upward mobility and stagnant wages are only a few of the social pathologies that have worsened over the past twenty-five years. Nor is a corrective in sight. One of the most right-wing governments in American history has intensified the assault on social welfare and accelerated a drive toward empire that is more formally acknowledged and explicitly embraced than at any time in recent memory. As radical as it is, the Bush administration doesn’t stand alone. Its policy of even more tax cuts on wealth, even more deregulation of business, and even more privatization of governmental functions continues the general pattern of the past twenty-five years. As the Right continues its long project of concentrating wealth in a small section of the population, destroying public oversight of capital and developing a political apparatus openly dedicated to serving the rich, the United States is beginning to look more and more like the diseased state that the ancient Greeks called “plutocracy.”

More is involved than a single president or a particular set of policies, but particular events can often illustrate broader trends and bring matters into particularly sharp focus. New Orleans has had the singular misfortune to serve as a poster child for the Right’s attack on public supervision and social responsibility. To paraphrase Malcolm X, Hurricane Katrina brought twenty-five years of right-wing political power home to roost. Demonizing the poor, abandoning public housing, attacking public health, ignoring the environment, worshiping the market, undermining solidarity, cutting taxes, eviscerating public transportation, deregulating business, starving federal agencies and privatizing everywhere are as responsible for what happened to one of North America’s great cities as a vicious storm produced by the blind forces of nature. Attacked by Katrina and abandoned by Washington, New Orleans never had a chance.

People who knew the situation have been warning for years that the city was vulnerable to widespread flooding and that a direct hit from even a Category 3 hurricane might inundate everything. An observer reports that "the federal government has been working with local and state authorities since the 1960s on hurricane and flood relief projects. When flooding from a massive rainstorm in May 1995 killed six people, Congress authorized the Southeast Louisiana Urban Flood Control Project, or SELA."

Over the next 10 years, the Army Corps of Engineers, tasked with carrying out SELA, spent $430 million on shoring up levees and building pumping stations, with $50 million in local aid. But at least $250 million in crucial projects remained, even as hurricane activity in the Atlantic Basin increased dramatically and the levees surrounding New Orleans continued to subside. The Corps never tried to hide the fact that the spending pressures of the war in Iraq, as well as homeland security – coming at the same time as federal tax cuts – was the reason for the strain. At least nine articles in the *Times-Picayune* from 2004 and 2005 specifically cite the cost of Iraq as a reason for the lack of hurricane- and flood-control dollars.[i]

Not long before Katrina served notice that the Right had become an active threat to public welfare, many people knew that New Orleans was in danger and that federal planning was inadequate. From July 23-27, 2002, a five-part series called "Washing Away" ran in the *New Orleans Times-Picayune*. Reporters John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein warned that "it's only a matter of time before South Louisiana takes a direct hit from a major hurricane. Billions have been spent to protect us, but we grow more vulnerable every day." They weren't alone. Local officials understood that more than 200,000 people without cars could be left at the mercy of a catastrophic storm and developed rudimentary evacuation plans that relied on buses and National Guard vehicles to get people to the Superdome staging area, from which they would be taken out of the city. But the plan's defects soon became obvious: there weren't enough buses, no one knew what routes they would take, and it wasn't even clear whether the drivers would show up if things went badly. Since it was clear that dealing with a Category 4 storm was beyond the capacity of local authorities, FEMA stepped in and organized a 2004 "table-top" simulation that generated a new set of plans. Named "Hurricane Pam," it assumed that the levees would be swamped, hundreds of thousands of homes would be destroyed, a half-million people would be left homeless, hospitals would be useless, and local officials would be overwhelmed. Detailed plans were developed for evacuating the city by car. As for the 300,000 poor residents who would be left behind, they would have to rely on their own resources, the kindness of their neighbors, and the Christian charity of their churches.[ii]

The report generated by "Hurricane Pam" was finished in December 2004. It's clear that there was plenty of warning, some planning and considerable concern long before Katrina roared ashore, but twenty-five years of right-wing of social policy got in the way. Consider the following chronology, doubtless incomplete about the full extent of federal negligence but chillingly accurate as far as it goes:

January 2001: Bush appoints Joe Allbaugh, a political crony from Texas with no experience in disaster management, to be the head of FEMA ·

April 2001: Budget Director Mitch Daniels announces plans to privatize much of FEMA's work. A month later, he announces that FEMA will be "downsized." The Right's old anti-statist saw was trotted out to explain why money was being diverted to tax cuts for the rich and war in Iraq. "Many are concerned that federal disaster assistance may have evolved into an oversized entitlement program," Daniels said. "Expectations of when the federal government should be involved and the degree of involvement may have ballooned beyond what is an appropriate level." Announcing that he wanted to curtail FEMA's mission, he announced that the administration intended to "restore the predominant role of state and local response to most disasters." ·

July 2002: "Washing Away" appears in the *Times-Picayune*. It evaluates the failing state of the city's defenses and concludes that a catastrophe was "a matter of when, not if." ·

December 2002: Allbaugh announces that he's leaving FEMA to start a consulting firm that will advise companies wanting to "do business" in Iraq. He's succeeded by his former college roommate and now deputy, the infamous Michael Brown. The former President of the International Arabian Horse Association presides over the dismantlement of FEMA.
·

March 2003: FEMA is folded into the Department of Homeland Security. Its mission is "refocused," a process that was necessitated by the Bush administration's policy of devoting three out of four federal preparedness grants to counterrorism. According to a new organizational chart, FEMA's earlier responsibilities are reassigned to a new Office of Preparedness and Response. FEMA will now be responsible only for "response and recovery." Between 2001 and Katrina's entrance into history, Louisiana and New Orleans would receive $750 million in federal emergency and terrorism preparedness grants. ·

June 8, 2004: The *Times-Picayune* warns that "for the first time in 37 years, federal budget cuts have all but stopped major work on the New Orleans area's east bank hurricane levees, a complex network of concrete walls, metal gates and giant earthen berms that won't be finished for at least another decade." ·

December 2004: the report from "Hurricane Pam" finds its way to FEMA Director Michael Brown's desk. ·

Summer 2004: FEMA denies Louisiana's requests for "pre-disaster mitigation funding." The Army Corps of Engineers's budget for levee construction in New Orleans is slashed even more. Jefferson Parish emergency management chief Walter Maestri observes that "It appears that the money has been moved in the president's budget to handle homeland security and the war in Iraq, and I suppose that's the price we pay." President Bush repeatedly demands that more taxes on wealth be cut, Social Security be privatized and the inheritance tax be permanently eliminated. ·

January 2005: Amid great fanfare, the Department of Homeland Security unveils the National Response Plan. Its preface proclaims a lofty goal for all to hear: "The end result is vastly

improved coordination among federal, state, local and tribal organizations to help save lives and protect America's communities by increasing the speed, effectiveness and efficient of incident management." ·

June 2005: Funding for the New Orleans District of the Corps of Engineers is cut by 44% – a record $71.2 million is slashed. A long history of federal policy actively contributed to the destruction of New Orleans and made it impossible to respond to the National Hurricane Center's extraordinary warning that Katrina could cause "human suffering incredible by modern standards." The Right's relentless assault on the public sphere made a coherent or adequate response to the catastrophe impossible. A few days after the storm hit, President Bush was interviewed by Diane Sawyer on ABC's "Good Morning America." It took him a while to get it together, but he finally developed his explanation for failure. "I don't think anyone anticipated the breach of the levees," he declares. That might have been true of him, but people who actually knew something had "anticipated" things quite differently. Not long after, Brown testified before the rump panel that Congressional Republicans had organized to make a martyr out of him and spare the Bush administration further embarrassment. The ex-Director wasn't going to take all this lying down, though. "And while my heart goes out to people on fixed incomes, it is primarily a state and local responsibility," he declared. "In my opinion, it's the responsibility of faith-based organizations, of churches and charities and others to help those people."

Bush and Brownie were on to something. It's become fashionable to say that New Orleans died because no one had a plan. Everyone's saying that city, state and local officials were caught flatfooted, unable to respond because they hadn't anticipated what a Category 4 hurricane would do. When the underfunded, mismanaged and eviscerated FEMA was put in charge of an empty response and told to coordinate with no plan and few resources, the result had to be a mess.

This is an attractive story, easy to understand and relatively simple to fix. Replace some faces at the top, change the organizational chart a bit, make some pious speeches, throw more money around and things will be fine. There's something to this of course, since appointing an idiot like Michael Brown and systematically underfunding domestic agencies *are* partly responsible for what happened. But it's not the whole truth – not by a long shot. The real story is a lot worse. Despite what the authorities and the media are saying, there *was* a plan for the evacuation of New Orleans and it worked very well. The city was evacuated pretty quickly and photographs taken in the days before Katrina hit show that I-10 was full of cars getting out of town. Inbound lanes were reversed, police were available to oversee the operation and everything went just fine for 80% of the city's residents.

There was one small problem, though: you had to have a car to be included in the plan. If you didn't, then you were out of luck and on your own. That, too, was part of a plan that consciously ignored people without transportation. Some called it a "good samaritan" policy, but Jon Stewart was a bit more accurate. With his uncanny nose for the jugular, *The Daily Show* ruthlessly parodied the administration's "faith-based" assumption that those left behind

would take care of themselves and each other. No trains were gathered, no buses made available, no car pools organized, no information given, no attention paid. Twenty-seven percent of the city's households didn't own a car, but no one had bothered to develop evacuation plans for the more than 100,000 people who would need help escaping the city. Indeed, *the plan was not to have a plan*. That's why Michael Brown could say what he said and get away with it. Three nights after the Superdome had filled with 25,000 people – citizens who had gone there because governmental authorities had told them to – the 500 buses promised by Washington were nowhere to be seen. It would take two more days to round them up. Racial prejudice, corruption, old-fashioned stupidity, cowardliness and laziness doubtless account for a good deal of this failure, but there's more. A national government that has deliberately isolated and concentrated the urban black poor for years consciously abandoned them in their hour of need, eloquently proclaiming its pre-Jacksonian position that property confers citizenship. If you had a car in New Orleans, then you were a member of the political community and the state would take care of you. If you didn't, you were in the state of nature – *literally*.

Telling people to get out of town after spending decades making it impossible for them to do so and then blaming them for their failure to save themselves describes the Right's responsibility for the destruction of New Orleans as well as anything. "Everybody's trying to look at it like the City of New Orleans messed up," said Oliver Thomas, president of the City Council. "But you mean to tell me that in the richest nation in the world, people really expected a little town with less than 500,000 people to handle a disaster like this? That's ludicrous to even think that."[iii] Under the circumstances, it makes perfect sense that it's the Red Cross, CNN and internet message boards that are reuniting separated families; that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police were on the scene before the United States Army managed to arrive; that four enterprising students from Duke University were able to get into New Orleans and document the government's total absence during the city's devastation. At the end of the day, we are talking about a government that required the poorest, most isolated, sickest and most vulnerable elements of New Orleans's population to do what no civilized society should ask of *any* of its citizens.
The Right has spent a quarter of a century preaching the virtues of individual self-reliance while it systematically undermines democratic oversight and shamelessly serves wealth. No wonder it was so indifferent to New Orleans. Katrina is the full measure of what turning the public responsibility for social assistance over to charity, religion and the private sector has come to. No wonder Bush didn't understand that it was important to mobilize all the reserves of the government to rescue those it had deliberately left behind. He really didn't think he should have to.

Lack of coordination and outright incompetence only go so far to explain what happened to New Orleans. After the chaos and failures of September 11th, Bush promised the country that future responses to catastrophe would be efficient, seamless and effective. Tens of billions of dollars, countless color-coded warnings, and millions of words later, the government's response has been as eviscerated by Right-wing social policy as other domestic programs. In a way, Washington has been hoisted on its own petard, paradoxically betrayed by the Right's policy

and paralyzed by its relentless hostility to anything coming from the public sphere. At the end of the day, though, a pretty simple humanitarian calculus is enough to get a picture of what happened. As badly as the whole affair was mismanaged, as ignorant and brutal as the federal government was, as incompetent and cynical as those entrusted with the elementary requirements of public safety showed themselves to be, things were even worse than the most embittered cynics could have imagined. If you had a car, the government planned for you and took care of you. If you didn't, your were on your own. No wonder things tuned out as they did.

This is far worse than abundant cronyism, incompetence, corruption and indifference. The Right's hostility to "special rights" and affirmative action, its love affair with wealth, its contempt for the poor and its assault on public welfare and social solidarity have been silently wrecking the country for a long time. But Katrina has ripped the veil aside and presented the bill for the politics of plutocracy. "These are people so much better at inflicting pain than feeling it, so much better at taking things apart than putting them together, so much better at defending 'intelligent design' as a theology than practicing it as a policy," observed Thomas Friedman.[iv] Katrina has demonstrated with crystal clarity that a morally defensible social order requires more than tax cuts, attacks on social welfare, foreign aggression, assaults on the environment, contempt for the poor, deregulation of business and privatization of public functions.

As indifferent as he was to the destruction of New Orleans, Bush has shown signs of life in recent days. That's because he's managed to remember the Right's core economic project. After he made it clear that taxes would not be increased to pay for Katrina's damage, his Republican congressional leadership announced that it would work to implement the administration's plans to cut even more taxes on wealth and eliminate the estate tax altogether. The time may not be quite right and nerves might be a little raw, so they're willing to wait for a while. In the meantime, suspending the Davis-Bacon Act's requirements that workers be paid prevailing wages, awarding no-bid contracts to the likes of Halliburton and Bechtel, and cutting almost a trillion dollars over the next ten years from vital national services like Medicare and Medicaid, student loans, the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, Amtrak, the Centers for Disease Control, and school lunches for poor kids will provide some of the "offsets" to finance reconstruction. As expensive as rebuilding the Gulf Coast will be and as much fraud and waste as there will be, even the largest estimates are considerably less than the $327 billion bestowed on the richest 1% of the population by Bush's 2001 and 2003 tax cuts. There's no sign that this bothers anyone in power. It's important not to burden the owners of wealth too much and to remember who really counts in Bush's America.

"We had nothing before Katrina," one of the survivors told a reporter. "Now we have less than nothing." Without cars, credit cards or cash, confined to the poorest-paid jobs, living in the worst houses and dependent on the public institutions that have been systematically gutted for years, Katrina's victims were easy bait. The administration seems to have been genuinely surprised when some long-overdue flickers of decency drove a few television reporters to openly attack the President's ignorant and dismissive response to catastrophe. Ever mindful of

public opinion, the White House has been dispatching a stream of high-profile national figures to make it clear that it's on the case. Thus it was that Barbara Bush, former First Lady and Mother of the President, joined the parade and dropped in on the Houston Astrodome to show everyone how much she cared. But she just couldn't help offering up her great Marie Antoinette line instead. "Everyone is so overwhelmed by the hospitality," she said of 45,000 American citizens who had been deliberately abandoned by her son's government and left to rot in the New Orleans Superdome and the Convention Center. "And so many of the people the people in the arena here, you know, were underprivileged anyway, so this is working very well for them."

The funny thing is that she probably thought she was being helpful. But Katrina calls for more than this sort of superficial condescension. It's all good in George Bush's world, but he really should stop listening to Mom and take a lesson from role models who had some *real* class. At least Marie Antoinette had the courtesy to offer cake.

Notes

[i] Will Bunch, "Why the Levee Broke," http:www.alternet.org/story/24871

[ii] http://www.ohsep.louisiana.gov/newsrelated/incaseofemrgencyexercise.htm

[iii] *New York Times*, September 11, 2005.

[iv] "Osama and Katrina," *New York Times* September 7, 2005.

Twilight In Tehran

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

Modernity and tradition confront one another everywhere in the Middle East. In Iran, however, the international repercussions of the domestic conflict between them can prove particularly severe. Ignoring the delicate balance existing between theocracy and democracy, Islamic law and human rights, Western nations have been looking with increasing suspicion upon the decision of the Iranian Republic to build a nuclear reactor in Natanz — about an hour's drive from the beautiful city of Esfahan with its marvelous square and its spectacular, blue, Lotfollah mosque. Contemptuous of suggestions that the most likely beneficiary of external interference in Iran would be religious nationalists and the most reactionary mullahs, as usual, the United States and Israel have been the most unyielding in their condemnation. Not satisfied with the disaster that they created in Iraq, Richard Perle and his neo-conservative gangsters are once again calling for "regime change" in Iran while Israeli officials are warning that they "can't wait" for the conclusion of negotiations and that an aerial strike on Natanz is a possibility. Especially in the United States, the neo-conservative propaganda machine has been working overtime: American public opinion has already convicted Iran of supporting the insurgency in Iraq, building weapons of mass destruction, and endorsing al-Qaeda. Painted as a country ruled by Islamic fanatics, and staunch in its hatred of western liberalism, its rich culture is ignored and Iran is generally seen as a rogue state intent upon bringing about the "clash of civilizations."

Such thoughts went through our minds as we deplaned in Tehran. Twelve of us comprised an independent delegation of academics from various universities, "US Academics for Peace," which was led by the indefatigable Dr. James Jennings and sponsored by Conscience International. Some of us had been in Baghdad with him as part of another delegation a few months preceding the American invasion of Iraq. We did not experience quite the same sense of urgency in Tehran. We knew that the Iraqi War had weakened the popular will of Americans to engage in yet another war, that the American military was already stretched thin, and that Hurricane Katrina combined with our military adventures abroad had made the cost of yet another pre-emptive strike prohibitive to the rational mind. But we also understood that neo-conservatives were still raring to go. Especially when the rhetoric gets hot, and a certain support can be expected from former European allies, you never know: it is precisely the losers who are sometimes most prone to gamble everything on one last spin of the roulette wheel.

Iraq taught us what Bush and the boys — or their Israeli proxies — were capable of doing. Leaders of states like Iran and Syria, moreover, were naturally forced to assume the pessimistic rather than the optimistic outcome of a crisis. It was arguably only the staggering incompetence shown by the Bush Administration in dealing with insurgency and hurricanes that saved Iran or Syria from suffering the fate of its neighbors. Our goals were clear: we wanted to spread a message of peace, build intercultural exchanges, offer some insights into

America under the rule of Bush, and learn more about the policies and culture of those nations living under the threat of war. Nevertheless, we were fearful of what might come to pass.

Identified with the Ayatollah Khomenei, the hostage crisis of 1979, and the revolutionary posters and graffiti proclaiming “Death of America” and “Down with the Great Satan,” Iran now appears in the American popular imagination as perhaps the most dangerous member of the original “axis of evil.” Its ties with Syria are close and Iran now wields great influence on the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution, the largest political party in Iraq. Turning an independent Iran into the dominant power in the region was, ironically, among the most important unintended consequences of the Iraqi War. This had long been what American foreign policy in the region had sought to avoid. Maintaining Tehran as an ally was the principle purpose behind American involvement in the overthrow of Mossadegh in 1953 in favor of the Shah Palevi,[1] while keeping Iran weak explained the support extended by the United States and most of Europe to Saddam Hussein in his long and bloody war with Iran.

More than preventing the spread of “terrorism” is involved in understanding the current crisis that was spawned by Iran’s decision to build a nuclear reactor, There is a long-standing distrust of Iran by the West in general and the United States in particular, and its claims to national self-determination. This distrust has now, in turn, been compounded by the fear that Iran will make use of its exceptional geo-political position and new stature to further Islamic extremism. There has been little dialogue with the Islamic Republic of Iran: only accusations, threats, and belligerency. That Iranians should have responded negatively to such an approach only makes sense. Ongoing attempts to humiliate Iran and brand it as a rogue state has only intensified the attraction of Islam and the commitment to national self-determination.

Both the seemingly unyielding insistence of the Iranian leadership upon building a nuclear reactor and the recent electoral losses by the more western and reformist elements of Iranian society must be framed by the ideological preoccupation with national self-determination. Not only is it useful to consider the usual arguments against nuclear energy, — Chernobyl, it should be noted, is not that far from Tehran — but the unique stresses that the current nuclear policy has placed on the citizenry: Iran has seen its stock market plunge 30% since 24 September of 2005. Its international stature has been compromised by the investigations of the International Atomic Energy Agency and the threat of international economic sanctions is real should Iran be dragged in front of the UN Security Council. Indeed, making public the decision to build a reactor has put Iran in the position of lacking a genuine deterrent to Israeli or American aggression while seemingly planning an attack on, presumably, the United States sometime in the near future.

National self-determination, the wish to stand up against the imperialists, trumps what is a seemingly objective and a purely material national interest. That is why Iran has attempted to frame the demand for nuclear energy as a universal “right,” called for a consortium of unaligned nations to supervise the construction of reactors, kept its own construction of nuclear facilities within the terms required by the Non-Proliferation Treaty, and — unlike the United States — also signed the Additional Protocol with its provision for snap inspections. Iran

has also allowed the installation of cameras from the International Atomic Energy Agency to supervise its work on nuclear energy and undergone the most intrusive inspections of any member of the United Nations. Throughout the crisis, Iran has claimed that its concern is with producing nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, and there is no evidence to suggest the opposite.[2] Even were Iran embarking upon building a nuclear bomb, according to a National Intelligence Estimate, such a device will not be ready until the early or middle years of the next decade and creating a delivery system capable of attacking the United States will take much longer (The New York Times August 3 2005).

Only Israel and the United States have disagreed with these predictions and only they have made the claim that Iran poses an imminent danger that might require pre-emptive action. Imagining a joint understanding, or even a joint military operation, between Israel and the United States does not stretch the limits of reason. In the first half of 2005, Vice President Dick Cheney stated that Iran was "right at the top of the list" when it came to rogue states and he speculated that Israel could "be doing the bombing for us" without any American pressure being applied (www.globalresearch.ca/CHO505A.html). Condoleeza Rice has, in the same vein, told the world that the United States cannot wait forever for diplomacy to do its job while Richard Perle and his clique remain intent upon "liberating" yet another country. Unleashing the ideology of the "pre-emptive strike" to justify American actions in Iraq has, however, backfired: it has created an incentive for nations that feel threatened by the West to build nuclear weapons for defense and use them as a form of what Richard Haas has termed "symbolic currency."

Working toward the abolition or, at least, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons would seemingly demand a policy predicated on reducing the value of this symbolic currency. But that is apparently not the position of the Bush Administration. The only nation ever to use a nuclear device in wartime is instead taking the view that it can arbitrarily decide what nations are responsible enough to have the bomb (India, Pakistan, and Israel) and what nations are not (Iran). Unwilling to discuss why Iran should not have what western nations and other onetime "rogue states" like China and Russia possess, the Bush Administration has no specific plan for action other than the employment of military threats and economic sanctions. It doesn't seem to matter that Iran has asked for nothing that is not specifically guaranteed to signatories of the Non-Proliferation Act, which was signed by the United States, or that the demands of the Bush Administration fall outside the framework of this document and thus have no legal or ethical basis. It also doesn't seem to matter that the "crisis" sparked by the Iranian pursuit of nuclear energy may actually be a red herring since the real threat today comes not from a missile but from a bomb smuggled into an urban center in a briefcase. Hardly a word has been said, moreover, about the idea that perhaps the best way to deal with a "rogue state" is by integrating it into it into the world community rather than excluding it, emphasizing the need for "regime change," or bombing it to smithereens.

Most preposterous perhaps is the general lack of knowledge concerning the nation that the Bush Administration has now placed at center-stage in its war on terrorism. Its diversity is unrecognized, its major writer — Hafez — is unknown other than to those who have read

Goethe's West-Oestliche Divan, and its cultural heritage that reaches back over Cyrus the Great to the fabled religious figure, Zoroaster, is ignored. Our delegation was reminded of all this during a trip to the Iran National Museum where we saw the "laughing lion" from 1250 BC that any modernist would have been proud to produce and the remains of the "Salt-man" from 1700 BC — found in a salt mine where he was probably murdered — with his leg stuffed in a boot, remnants of his clothes, and a golden ear-ring enmeshed in some hair curled around what was left of his skull. We saw the life-size sculpture of a calf, beautiful renditions of cats, as well as detailed engravings, seals, multi-colored vases, and plates reaching back to 5000 BC. We also thought about how much President Bush and his boys cared about the treasures of Iraq.

Time means something different in the Middle East. In the United States we are amazed at artifacts a few hundred years old and, in Europe, at findings a thousand years old. In the Middle East things don't get interesting until they are a few thousand years old. Humbling is the simple and dignified tomb of Cyrus the Great and awe-inspiring the tombs of his descendents – Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes — that were carved into the huge rock of Naqsh-e-Rustam. Most fantastic, however, are the ruins of Persepolis built in 580 BC with its Gate of all Nations and the Aramaic, Babylonian, and Edomite inscriptions above it. Persepolis, built by artisans brought to Persia from everywhere in the known world, is the first and arguably the greatest example of cosmopolitan architecture. Now, of course, only the ruins remain. Gone are the colors that once adorned the columns and the houses; gone are the faces from the friezes that were obliterated and disfigured by Islamic fanatics; gone are the gardens known as the parades, from which the word "paradise" derives. Alexander the Great — a general from the West — destroyed Persepolis. Legend has it that he had his troops perform this act on the dare of a mistress. More likely the deed was done to strike at the heart of the Persian Empire. Persepolis, among the greatest cultural treasures of humanity, can be considered an early example of "collateral damage."

Cultural ignorance breeds political ignorance. Iran retains a tradition of national independence that reaches back thousands of years and a religious orthodoxy that stems from the victory of Islam over what had become an increasingly corrupt and hyper-ritualized Zoroastrianism in the ninth century. But it also evidences a tradition of liberal tolerance and cosmopolitanism that reaches back over the Savyed Renaissance of the 19th Century to Hafez and ultimately to Cyrus the Great who allowed the Jews to rebuild their Temple and his other subject peoples to worship their gods as they chose. Some like to say that this division is reflected today in the cosmopolitan style of Shiraz and Tehran as against the somber orthodoxy and gray provincialism of a city like Qom. In any event, these tendencies evidence themselves in the Iranian Republic with its conflict between a liberal — or better, moderate Islamic — political constituency and another that is more orthodox.

Many commentators insist on the importance of American intervention with an eye on "regime change" in Iran because an ultimate confrontation between secularism and religion, the "clash of civilizations," is supposedly inevitable. "Regime change," in their view, would pave the way for a victory of liberal forces. But the Koran casts a long shadow and the western notion of rights, especially when it deals with women, lacks the kind of over-riding consensus in Iran that

exists elsewhere. Reformist elements within the theocratic state are still profoundly influenced by Islam and, whatever the criticism of their own regime, Iranian citizens are united in their allegiance to the Islamic Republic. It therefore makes little sense simply pitting secular liberalism conceived in western terms against Islamic radicalism or trumpeting American values where much of the population is suspicious of American imperialist intentions and contemptuous of its policies in the region.

Meaningful change can only take place in a practical way when reactionary forms of religious extremism are countered immanently in terms of religious moderation and when the limits of an authoritarian republic are countered immanently from within the republican tradition. The best possible scenario would involve identifying with secular democratic forces. More likely, however, only Islamic moderates can counter Islamic extremism. Extending support to them does not necessarily imply blunting the critical edge of human rights or reducing the idea of rights to the ability of any given nation-state to maintain any given set of customs.

Human rights violations are all too common in Iran: one simple little example from everyday life that we heard involved a young girl walking down the street in a provincial town who was slapped hard in the face by a complete stranger for not wearing a scarf and who, when she called a policeman, found herself being criticized and her assailant strutting off with a smile. I understood why so many everyday people we met considered him and his followers responsible for the deep malaise and harbored a nostalgia for the heady days surrounding the Revolution of 1979, led by the Ayatollah Khomeinei, which helped produce the presidential victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.Civil liberties are too often honored in the breach and emphasis on the uniqueness of Iranian culture is often used a way to excuse the arbitrary power exercised by religious and political authorities. Decisive for the social relevance of “rights” is not the cultural context from which they derive or whether philosophers can methodologically justify and “ground” their universal character. It is instead a matter of whether rights are employed as a wedge for resistance against what constrains the arbitrary exercise of political and cultural power.

Translating this resistance into concrete politics means working with indigenous sources of progressive change; it may mean developing an argument through a particular interpretation of Mohammad’s model for behavior rather than a quotation from Voltaire. Religion can be used to raise issues pertaining to secular rights as surely as philosophy: Martin Luther King and his religiously inspired civil rights movement offer a case in point. If that is the case, however, then any serious and progressive American policy for the Middle East must begin by emphasizing the need to increase cultural knowledge. It must emphasize the need for cultural exchange and the integration rather than exclusion of Islamic states from the world community. It must also be willing to resurrect the idea of impartiality in the treatment of Islamic states and not insist upon them meeting special criteria for what they consider the pursuit of their national interests. The campaign waged by Ahmadinejad was daring and it mixed religious, liberal, international and national themes. He presented himself as devout, but distanced from the more austere forms of orthodoxy. He embraced the nuclear issue to foster national enthusiasm, but envisioned an economic union of all Islamic states. He has

consolidated his grip on foreign affairs by replacing 40 relatively liberal ambassadors with hardliners, and—more recently—ranted about the need to “wipe Israel off the map.” Ahmadinejad’s themes have all highlighted the traditional opposition to western hegemony, the right to national self-determination, and the tone of Ayatollah Khomenei and the Revolution of 1979.

Western leaders and analysts have generally identified reformism with a dull pragmatism and the willingness to avoid discussion of ideological principle. That was the position defining the followers of Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani and former President Mohammed Khatami in the last election. They sought to temper many domestic ideological excesses and in terms of foreign affairs they called for a “dialogue of civilizations.” Khatami likes to say that he reduced the number of ritual stonings of individuals for various crimes including adultery from 26 to 1 (really 2). But the reform embraced by the reformers was lukewarm. They recanted their threat to walk out of parliament when their progressive agenda was stymied by the conservative court acting in accordance with the wishes of the current conservative President Khomonei. The reformers also oversaw a spurt in national economic growth from which urban and agricultural workers did not benefit. No less than the mullahs, who so many Iranians privately condemn as thieves, careerist reformers benefited from a palpable increase in corruption. Then, too, Khatami is a man who evidences neither charisma nor confidence. Chubby-cheeked and dressed in religious garb, unctuous and careful with every word, he sought to appear urbane and came off merely as slick; after an audience of little more than half an hour, our delegation realized that not a single question had been answered. I understood why so many everyday people we met considered him and his followers responsible for the deep malaise and nostalgia for the Revolution of 1979,[3] led by the Ayatollah Khomeinei, which helped produce the presidential victory of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

Western media and the “experts” were astonished. Ahmadinejad was seen as coming out of nowhere. But the Iranians knew him well. He had served as the wildly popular Mayor of Teheran and then Governor of the largest province in the country. Ahmadinejad was an activist during the hostage crisis, an important participant in the revolution, and an avowed critic of western policies in the region. His campaign was based on three planks: share the oil profits more equitably, crack down on corruption among the mullahs, and make life a bit happier for the working classes since the rich were happy enough. A young journalist I met said that the words of Ahmadinejad touched the heart while the words of Khatami and the others were only words. [4] The campaign waged by Ahmadinejad was daring and it mixed religious, liberal, international and national themes. He presented himself as devout, but distanced from the more austere forms of orthodoxy. He embraced the nuclear issue, envisioned an economic union of all Islamic states, and — more recently — ranted about the need to “wipe Israel off the map.” Ahmadinejad’s themes have all highlighted opposition to western hegemony, the right to national self-determination, and the tone of Ayatollah Khomenei and the Revolution of 1979.

None of this can possibly sit very well with the Bush Administration. But the decision to engage in military action is, one would think, highly unlikely. Putting together an international coalition would prove virtually impossible and create further rifts with Russia, China, India, and

perhaps even Pakistan. Tehran has 12 million inhabitants where Baghdad had 7 million and there is a national support for the Islamic Republic that did not exist for Saddam. Iran is militarily more powerful than Iraq ever was. Iran controls the straits of Hormuz. It is a major oil producer and capable of manipulating already high world prices. Iran now has profound influence in the southern regions of Iraq and as already noted, except for Israel, it is the dominant force in the region. American forces are also already stretched thin; reconstruction in the face of Hurricane Katrina will cost hundreds of billions of dollars; the price of the Iraqi war keeps growing, and the citizenry is sick of war.

Mistrust of American intentions by Iran, however, only makes sense.[5] Ambassador to the United Nations John Bolton, a staunch neo-conservative, has implied that the refusal of the UN Security Council to deal with Iran would leave dealing with the nuclear crisis in the hands of the United States. There is also much talk of pressure being exerted by the United States and Great Britain upon the IAEA to over-rule its own inspectors and declare that Iran has breached the Non-Proliferation Treaty. Contingency plans for fostering regime change are being developed and, precisely because precision strikes would allow the Islamic Republic too many retaliatory options, some military planners argue that any attack on Iran should be decisive (The Guardian 10/19/05).

Pretexts for intervention can always be found: the alleged nuclear threat posed by Iran, its stance on Israel, its support for Islamic Jihad and other radical factions of the Palestinian movement, or even the supposed attempts of its new regime to inflame the region with the slogans of 1979. Certain extreme neo-conservative factions in the Bush administration also undoubtedly believe that yet another appropriately justified foreign intervention can reinvigorate a disintegrating sense of unity and nationalism in the United States. These factions evidence an ever-growing desire to blame the catastrophic failures of their own policies in Iraq on an outside force. Indeed, some gamblers feel driven to bet what remains of their stake precisely when they are on a losing streak.

Implementing a policy of regime change in Iran, either by subversion or outright aggression, would be completely irrational. More rational would be a policy that called for a nuclear embargo on all states of the region including Israel or one that, if Iran remained committed to its nuclear policy, insisted upon simply the observance of all rules defined by the Non Proliferation Treaty without making special demands. More rational would be a policy that fostered international exchanges and that might speak to the cosmopolitan traditions of Iranian history. More rational would be a policy that provided support for identifiable liberal forces and that did not simply identify human rights with American interests. More rational would be a policy that did not rest on inflated rhetoric and ongoing threats of reprisal. But, then, the policies pursued by the Bush Administration in the Middle East have never been rational and it is precisely this irrationality that progressives must continue to struggle against.

Notes

[1] A fine study of this seminal action on the part of the United States can be found in Stephen

Kinzer, All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror (John Wiley: New York, 2003).

[2] No less than when Secretary of State Colin Powell charged Iraq with having weapons of mass destruction, the United States once again trumpeted similar charges against Iran for supposedly being engaged in the production of enriched uranium. Findings by the International Atomic Energy Agency, however, noted that the traces of enriched uranium found at two sites in Iran were imported rather than produced in that country. (The New York Times August 25 2005).

[3] See Robin Wright, The Last Great Revolution: Turmoil and Transformation in Iran (New York: Vintage, 2001)

[4] A joke was making the rounds that I heard at least a half-dozen times during my week-long stay in Tehran. It goes like this: A man marries a woman who was married before: but he finds out that she is still a virgin. He asks her how that is possible and she replies that her first husband was like Khatami: he promised a lot but never delivered.

[5] Mark LeVine,, Why They Don't Hate Us: Lifting the Veil on the Axis of Evil (Oneworld Publications: Oxford, England; 2005)

The Geo-strategic Position Of Iran

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

According to a famous dictum of *Realpolitik*, two things cannot be changed: one is geography and the other is history. As the Bush Administration faces the prospect of choosing continued hostility or fresh engagement with Iran's newly-elected hard line regime over the country's supposed nuclear proliferation efforts, both of these non-variables should be considered carefully.

Iran's Geography

As a large landmass of 1.6 million sq. km. (slightly larger than Alaska), with two formidable mountain ranges-Alborz and Zagros- that provide strategic defensive terrain, Iran has much in its favor. It also holds a strong intermediate geographical position *vis a vis* Iraq and Afghanistan – both of which are presently occupied by what is admittedly a relatively thin deployment of US troops. Militarily, Iran would be much more difficult to invade and occupy than Iraq. Even if such a feat could be accomplished, the long-term prospects for US success in changing the regime in Tehran and establishing a sustainable pro-western government would be highly doubtful.

Equally important as its size, is Iran's key location at the junction of the Asian continent and the low, mostly desert areas of the Arab Middle East. Stretching from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean, and from the rivers of Mesopotamia to the fringes of the Hindu Kush, Iran is in one sense truly a colossus. Unlike Iraq, almost totally landlocked and surrounded by hostile borders, Iran is incapable of being completely isolated and blockaded as Iraq was during nearly fifteen years of cruelly punishing US-led sanctions. Consequently, Iran is not susceptible to the same kinds of economic pressures or the same measure of pain as was Iraq. Yet even there, sanctions failed. They cannot therefore be considered a serious policy implement in the case of Iran.

It is true that large portions of Iran consist of deserts and salt marshes, but these may function as barriers to mechanized assault, just as they did when the Carter Administration attempted to free Tehran's US hostages in a daring raid. That ill-fated "Desert One" debacle left US helicopters wrecked in the sand and US prestige in the region at a new low. Nothing in Iran's geography except possibly its sheer magnitude prevents the use of aerial attacks against selected targets, especially when the use of cruise missiles or stealth bombers is contemplated. President Bush has said, however, that he disdains Clintonesque "pinprick strikes." No good options seem to be available to the Pentagon at the moment.

When one considers the available US arsenal for use against Iran, and the probable targets involved in dealing with Iran's supposed (or imaginary) development of WMD, the outcome of this latest "Clash of Civilizations" can only be guessed. True, the US has developed bunker-

busting bombs, but the key Iranian facilities are reportedly hidden deep underground. First in the bull's eye would likely be the uranium processing plant north of Isfahan. The plant consists of a collection of boxy concrete factory buildings set at the foot of steep, rocky mountains. IAEA inspectors have repeatedly declared that the plant is capable of producing only low-grade enriched nuclear fuel for domestic power generation. The question is what lies beneath the ground and whether or not US air power can possibly penetrate the mountain to sufficient depth to obliterate whatever more sophisticated capabilities may exist there.

The number of "ifs" implicit in such a scenario boggles the mind. They could not be taken at all seriously were it not for the fact that the Bush-Cheney White House and Rumsfeld's Pentagon have been there before, unfortunately seeing not "ifs" but certainties. The nuclear processing plant now being developed by Russia cannot very well be construed as a high-value target, since it is definitely designed for peaceful uses, but it may serve as one, given Rumsfeld's worldview. The man who complained that there were few high-value targets in Afghanistan might be persuaded to launch against the obviously high-tech facility at Bushehr.

All this is speculation. What is certain is that Iran is capable of resisting Western encroachment because of several often overlooked factors, including its challenging geography, its position as the veritable nexus of Southwest Asia, its history of regional domination, and its strong cultural identity. Iran's population of over 70 million today is expected to reach 100 million by 2050.

History and Culture

Iranian history reveals that the nation, however its government may have been organized, has consistently exerted a powerful influence over neighboring countries. Iranians are immensely proud of their culture and heritage, and rightfully so. The Achaemenian Empire was the largest ever to rule the ancient world, exceeded in Medieval times only by Genghis Khan and the Mongols. In the first millennium BC Persia exerted direct rule all the way to Egypt and the upper Nile. Greece and Persia clashed in the Persian Wars, leading to Alexander's conquests. The bloody, centuries long, struggles between Rome and the Parthian and Sassasian Empires, and much later, between Savafid Persia and the Ottoman Empire, proved how difficult it can be for external attacks to subdue a resolute people.

Historically, Persian rule extended all the way into Central Asia, with a powerful cultural influence still there today. Tajikistan and parts of Afghanistan today speak Tajik and Dari, dialectical variants of Farsi, and identify with the Persian cultural sphere. Iranian religious influence is also spread throughout southern Iraq and the Gulf, and Iranian religious leaders dominate the Shi'a areas of Iraq even more now than before the fall of Saddam. Throughout history, successive dynasties in the Tigris-Euphrates valley have been greatly impacted by influences from the Iranian highlands. This cultural element cannot be ignored in any balance of power calculation, for winning hearts and minds must be the ultimate aim of all political discourse. Iran, whatever its government and whatever attacks it may suffer in the future, remains in a strong position throughout Western Asia.

Political Considerations

The compact resolve of Iran's population of seventy million when faced with an external threat should also not be underestimated. It is true that the Iranian people, by and large, are fond of Americans. The youthful median age of the population and the desire of many urban young people for modernity have been seen by some commentators as a secular and democratic revolution waiting to happen. That outcome depends on how events unfold and how Western intervention is perceived on the streets of Tehran and other cities. The grip the mullahs have on the public mind, as well as the degree of popular legitimacy the *viyalet-e-faqih* constitution holds in the body politic at large, is difficult to judge. The 2005 elections were one indicator of public support for the theocracy, albeit a flawed measurement because so many candidates were ruled out from the beginning. Still, hard-line candidate Ahmadi-Nejad amassed impressive vote totals and it would be a mistake to misread these results. At the moment, those determined to press forward to complete the Khoemeini revolution are in charge in Tehran.

What can be deduced from all of this is that hardheaded ideological regimes are in charge in both Washington and Tehran, which surely spells trouble. What is most disturbing is that the calls of seasoned observers for engagement with Iran as a way out of the impasse have not been heeded or even listened to. Even though IAEA inspectors have spent more than two years in Iran, they have not found proof of nuclear weapons there. The "international community," meaning the US, some European countries, and Israel, maintain deep suspicions about Iran's intentions. We have been down this road before. Those who have a stake in the outcome, which includes everybody in both countries, should continue to press for the opening of a serious dialogue. If the meeting of our "US Academics" delegation with the Foreign Ministry's key think tank in Tehran during September is any indication, the Iranians are certainly open to it. The ball is now in Washington's court.

A Critical Look At Science In Iran

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

Mike Simmons

“WE WELCOME THE ASTRONOMERS OF THE USA AND GERMANY TO OUR CITY.” The small billboard rose over the town’s central intersection, welcoming us to this rural town of 10,000. We were few in number, so the celebration of our arrival was a delightful surprise. But surprise turned to astonishment as we passed banner after banner welcoming the community’s rare international visitors. Foreign scientists visiting any small Third World town well off the beaten tourist track would certainly be unusual, but it wouldn’t usually bring the town out. But out they came: town leaders and local press – along with a good portion of the citizenry. We were more than just visiting scientists to these people, though. We were from countries that are leaders in science, and the small town of Sa’adat-shahr has a passion for the oldest science – astronomy – like no other place on earth. Even so, the extraordinary reception of Americans seemed incongruous to newcomers to this country where anti-US demonstrations are what we most often see on the evening news broadcasts back home. This was the Islamic Republic of Iran. We were to learn that surprises and contradictions await western visitors to Iran but perhaps nowhere more so than in Sa’adat-shahr.

Visiting astronomers from the modern-day Mecca of astronomy are hardly an everyday occurrence anywhere in Iran. For this small agricultural town in the high desert of southern Iran, however, the visit trumped even the most important prayer session of the week. As I addressed an attentive audience, the town’s imam excused himself to the mosque to lead the Friday noon prayer. I’m sure most of the audience would ordinarily attend the service, but on this occasion everyone else remained seated, giving their attention instead to this American visitor rather than the town’s spiritual leader. I soon learned that, had I arrived earlier, I would have been speaking in the town’s main mosque between prayers. The honor was not lost on us.

Talks on astronomy are not normal fare for Muslim services – except in Sa’adat-shahr. Descriptions of what worshippers might glimpse in the night sky often supplement the services and the congregation is sometimes treated to a slide show of astronomical photography. Star parties -‘ gatherings of amateur astronomers and their telescopes – are announced in the mosque so that the faithful can plan their evening around viewing the celestial wonders that God has placed in the heavens. The mosque is not just advertising evening shows for entertainment, though; the Koran cites such celestial spectacles as proof of God’s existence. A film that sometimes precedes public gatherings demonstrates God’s greatness through his creations – both earthly and heavenly – including wonders of the heavens that could have drawn inspiration from a NASA web site.

Teacher Asghar Kabiri is the man behind Sa’adat-shahr’s unusual interest in the sciences.

Kabiri's passion for astronomy takes him – and his students – beyond classroom book-learning. The starry canopy of night provides a natural laboratory where townspeople often join the students. When a large public star party is scheduled the town government is pleased to cooperate by cutting the town's electricity, thus eliminating the glare of lights that diminish the glory of this remote, rural site's sky and overwhelm faint celestial objects.

On a nearby hilltop, the efforts of the community are helping Kabiri realize his dream of an observatory. Workers donate time towards the building's construction and women have even sold their jewelry to contribute. "School janitors and teachers all paid a small share of their salaries to help build the observatory," Kabiri told a Reuters reporter for a recent article on stargazing in Iran.1 "Now it has become the pride of the town," he says. "Astronomy is a divine science and is encouraged in Islam. So in a small, traditional community like Sa'adat-shahr, people contribute to our activities just as they would chip in to build a mosque." Parents in this conservative town even let their daughters stay out at night for astronomical observation.

Extreme though it may be, Sa'adat-shahr is but one example of the interest in science in Iran. Outsiders are often surprised to discover the value placed on science in Iran and other Muslim countries. Americans who see fundamentalist Muslims decry the advances of the modern world on the evening news sometimes expect to find similar attitudes throughout the Muslim world. The Islamic world led the way in science during the Golden Age of Islam while the west slumbered through its Dark Ages but that was centuries ago . . . What have they done lately? The answer is most often "not much" compared to western civilization. But while science in the Islamic world has declined since then, it is certainly not due to a predomination of fundamentalist views like those of the recent Taliban regime in neighboring Afghanistan. In Iran, the past millennium's poets and scientists alike are celebrated as heroes and the country sees increased scientific and technological knowledge as important to regaining broader influence in the region.

The highest rated program on Channel Four, the government-run science channel, is a short and irregularly scheduled show on astronomy, The Night Sky. The program features interviews with astronomers including the staff of Nojum (Astronomy) Magazine, the Middle East's only astronomy magazine. Babaki Tafreshi, Nojum's editor-in-chief and a regular guest on The Night Sky, is often recognized by viewers on the streets of Tehran. "They say they like the show because it is not connected with any problems in society, politics or religion," he told a Reuters reporter.2 Nojum's circulation is increasing, as are astronomy club memberships. Channel Four broadcast live from various locations for four hours during last year's transit of Venus when Venus was seen in silhouette as it crossed in front of the sun for the first time since the 19th century. Iran was a favored site to observe the event and this author led a group of American astronomers who set up telescopes next to the 2500-year old tomb of Persia's founder, Cyrus the Great. The channel sent reporters and a satellite uplink station to the historic site to broadcast live interviews with the foreign visitors.

Iran's scientific community has grown since the revolution in 1979. The number of professional scientific societies has seen a five-fold increase in that time with the greatest increase

occurring in the past decade. The number of books published in fields of science and technology nearly doubled in the six years from 1996 to 2002. Iran's international standing in science has grown as well; the number of papers published in international scientific journals increased from less than 100 after the revolution to almost 3500 in 2004, with an increase of 44% from 2002 to 2003 alone. The changes are not a coincidence; a recently-published proclamation of Iran's goals for science and technology over the next twenty years includes, "(Iran) shall be of the first rank in economy, science and technology in the region, and shall keep pace along with the increasingly progressive growth of science." International cooperation is increasingly seen as important to achieving this goal, an idea not lost on the many Iranian scientists trained in the west. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology has several programs in place for expediting international programs, particularly strong cooperative programs with Europe.

But as is often the case, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Professional societies in Iran are funded with government oil money rather than taxes or membership dues. Thus, proliferation of societies doesn't necessarily indicate the same demand that motivates their creation in western countries. Government funding also leads to government control of societies, unlike their western counterparts. And while the increasing international cooperative projects are beneficial, most involve Iranians traveling to other countries; few foreigners begin research projects in Iran unless Iran itself is the subject. The scarcity of many critical resources in Iran is a factor in the one-way exchange.

A particularly interesting project to attract foreign scholars is taking place in Khoronagh, a village of fewer than 300 inhabitants in Iran's central desert near the ancient city of Yazd. There, a citadel built of mud and straw over the past 4000 years is being retrofitted for safety and comfort and outfitted to operate as an international conference center. A nearby caravansary – a resting place for the camel caravans of Iran's past – has already been refurbished as an auxiliary meeting place. The village's inhabitants participate in the activities of the center and sociologists will study the effects of modernization and international visitors on the village's youth. But the Khoronagh project is the exception in Iran rather than the rule.

Iran faces many serious difficulties in developing its own science base. The problems are as much homegrown as a result of outside pressures or isolation. The scientific discoveries and technological developments that fascinate the populace are also commonly perceived to be programs of western science not suitable or achievable in Iran. The US and the EU are admired for their accomplishments but the goal of catching up is often seen as unrealistic. The attitude is subtle but pervasive. Many students see emigration as the only route to conducting original research or achieving academic freedom and success.

Indeed, Iran has suffered greatly from a "brain drain" since the 1979 revolution. Iranian students in the west long to return to their country after graduation but many are deterred by the dearth of suitable opportunities. Scientists in Iran suffer from a lack of resources for original research but perhaps even more importantly from a lack of initiative. This might be partly a result of the attitude that the highly-publicized scientific advances of the west cannot

translate to their own country. But in most Third World countries research tends to be repetitive, following safe paths to publication but lacking the innovation that brings the greatest rewards in discoveries, advances and international recognition. Results are often measured in the quantity rather than the quality of publications. Governmental control of the sciences can often put bureaucrats in positions of authority despite a lack of sufficient familiarity with their assigned fields to properly evaluate scientific results.

This bureaucratic control can produce some highly paradoxical results. The wealth of oil money available for high-profile projects and purchases makes large purchases possible for those who are well-connected with the ministries. But when a grant funds the entire purchase, there is no motivation to share the use or cost of the equipment. For example, of the 19 MRI machines in Iran most are greatly underutilized. In the west, such machines are made available to users beyond the purchasing organization to ensure that they can operate 24 hours a day seven days a week and more quickly recoup the high price of their acquisition. Another western-style incentive – accountability from the funding agencies – is also missing for many such large, oil-endowed purchases.

While high-profile programs might find funding, many smaller higher-quality proposals fail to find backing. Such proposals are often not well understood by those in positions of authority and a western-style scientific review process – a committee-based system of appropriate experts – is lacking. This isn't surprising within Iran where teamwork is not the norm (something immediately apparent to anyone who has seen the traffic in Tehran!). Individuals may work on parallel efforts but rarely collaborate with colleagues. Where a western scientist might seek someone from another department or institution with expertise needed on a project, the Iranian scientist is more likely to do his best to fill all the necessary roles. Thus Iranian scientists often work in a vacuum without exposure to new ideas or methodology, unacquainted with fields that might augment their own work.

A lack of cohesion within the scientific community is the result, and that in itself puts Iranian scientists at a great disadvantage compared to their western counterparts. Because much of science is imported rather than developed internally the driving force for the development of a broad-based interactive scientific community is lacking. Cooperative projects – and the free exchange that such teamwork engenders – is uncommon in Iran compared to within the US and Western Europe where the objective is high-quality publications of original research.

Dr. Mohammed Yalpani, a western-educated chemist who directs the Center for International Research and Collaboration in the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran, finds a parallel in the comparison of music and science between east and west. While a western orchestra is composed of many individuals playing different notes, the music's composer and the orchestra's conductor ensure that those notes combine to produce harmony and even more complex structures such as counterpoint. Persian music more often consists of a leader playing a note or theme with other players following that lead. In his field of chemistry Dr. Yalpani is familiar with western efforts that combine many types of chemists to produce new technology, perhaps with a "conductor". In Iran, he says, he does everything himself while his neighbor and

the government are unlikely to even know what he's doing.

The vagaries of government funding of science and technology in Iran don't help. Eighty percent of funding for science and research and development (R&D) is directed to the appropriate ministries that have R&D sections. But 80% of the scientists are at universities rather than at the ministries. Thus funding is misdirected and poorly distributed. Again, without feedback and accountability there is little motivation for change for those at government funding agencies. Such bureaucrats may want nothing more than to maintain the status quo and avoid jeopardizing their own situations. This, of course, leads us full circle back to funding decisions – the bureaucrat is thus isolated from the segments of the scientific community where true innovations may take place and, as a result, becomes less knowledgeable of the field and where funds are best spent. This might partly explain the difficulty Iranian scientists face in finding funding for long-term projects that don't quickly produce results the bureaucrats can point to as a sign of success. Some funding agencies even lose sight of the ultimate goal for a Third World country – improving domestic technology through applied science. According to Dr. Yalpani, too much is spent on abstract or theoretical science. "Einstein is useless to a country like Iran," says Dr. Yalpani.

Bureaucrats are always easy targets but there is still culpability to be found elsewhere. University professors themselves have to be watchful of their own situations in a country where competition for positions is fierce. Because the government funds most research, professors find themselves serving the government's needs, which can at times be overwhelming. The time spent with students suffers and graduate students in top universities might find themselves without the guidance common in western universities. Ironically, this is most common with the most capable professors who are offered administrative positions a Third World professor can't afford to decline.

It is the youth of Iran that can bring Iran back to prominence in the sciences. Seventy percent of the populace is under the age of 30. With university space available for only one out of four applicants and soaring unemployment facing graduates many of this young post-revolution generation are frustrated and discouraged. But not all are without hope. Iran's best universities continue to produce top-notch scientists and scholars who are now attuned to advances and methods of other nations and cultures as never before.

Asghar Kabiri, in the unlikely conservative town of Sa'adat-shahr, is a leader in teaching these youth the ways of science. He has channeled the enthusiasm of his young charges towards a belief that they can accomplish what they want to, that science really is even for the children of rural Iran. They have already become leaders by showing the way to their parents and other townspeople. And they have had success at attracting international attention and visitors that any city would be proud of. In these youth, Iran has the natural resources that it needs and Kabiri is showing how to nurture it.

If the attitude of Sona Hosseini, a Masters student in astronomy at Zanjan University, is any indication, the future may shine more brightly for this younger generation. Burdened by a lack

of observational facilities for astronomy, Hosseini is nonetheless determined that her chosen field is for her. “I always wanted to be all that I can be, live my own life and follow my own stars,” she says. Visiting with the youth of Iran, one cannot avoid concluding that – with the help of teachers like Kabiri – they will find and follow their own stars.

Notes

1.http://today.reuters.com/news/newsArticle.aspx?type=scienceNews&storyID=2005-10-13T020703Z_01_DIT304075_RTRUKOC_0_US-SCIENCE-IRAN-STARGAZING.xml

2. Ibid.

Statement On Iran And Syria

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

US ACADEMICS FOR PEACE

In early 2003 “US Academics Against the War,” a delegation comprised of 37 professors from 28 US universities, traveled to Baghdad on a fact-finding mission. We held talks with Iraqi academic colleagues, government officials, and non-governmental actors, six weeks prior to the Bush administration’s attack on Iraq. This initiative followed a letter ultimately signed by 33,000 US academics urging President Bush not to invade Iraq. Unfortunately, our warnings went unheeded.

In September, 2005, a second “US Academics for Peace” delegation, consisting of 13 university professors, human rights advocates, and peace activists, traveled to Iran and Syria on another fact-finding mission. We met with government officials, political leaders, university administrators, and academics from Tehran University, Shahid Beheshti University, and Damascus University. In Tehran, US Academics For Peace met with the former President of Iran, Mohammed Khatami, and in Damascus with President Bashar al-Assad of Syria and the First Lady. It was our purpose to initiate dialogue that might further mutual understanding between the United States and Iran and Syria. We stressed to both governments our concern with their records on civil liberties and human rights. But we remain convinced that the rhetoric of violent “regime change” will only make matters worse. We wish to warn against the use of military force by the United States against Iran and Syria. Such action, we believe, will produce an even bloodier repetition of the tragedy sparked by the invasion of Iraq and create even greater chaos in the region.

US Academics for Peace found that dialogue is possible with the Iranian and Syrian governments. Although we are aware that significant political and cultural differences exist between the United States and these two nations, resolving them will require a serious commitment to conflict resolution by all parties. Current U.S. policy towards both Iran and Syria has been ineffectual and even counter productive. Economic sanctions imposed by the United States have had detrimental effects on especially the most vulnerable citizens of Iran without producing democratic reform or compliance on the part of the government. The inflammatory and provocative rhetoric of the Bush Administration that labels Iran and Syria as “rogue states,” supporters of terrorism, and part of an “axis of evil,” has only increased tensions and mistrust.

Human rights violations of a serious nature continue to occur in both Iran and Syria. Our delegation, however, opposes the imposition of double standards on human rights. We firmly support universal standards and the efforts of organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. We also believe that democratic reform must come from within, not be

imposed from without, and must be initiated by the citizens of Iran and Syria. Talk of “regime change” by the United States only empowers extremist elements. It works to strengthen repression under the guise of national security. We therefore call upon the United States to stop its rhetoric and, instead, foster academic and cultural exchange programs along with increased trade in order to build trust, improve understanding, and change existing negative perceptions of each other.

With respect to Iran, the decision of its government to build a nuclear reactor has produced fear and the threat of reprisals by the United States. US Academics for Peace is sharply critical of the proliferation of nuclear weapons. We believe in the need for a nuclear free zone for the entire Middle East. But the right of nations to employ nuclear energy is not precluded by the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was signed by Iran, and there is no evidence to date to suggest that nuclear weapons are being built. Iran has also accepted IAEA inspections. We adamantly oppose attempts based on unproven suspicions, allegations, or prejudices to subject Iran to special evaluative criteria not included in the NPT. There is no excuse for deplorable statements by Iranian leaders to “wipe out the state of Israel.” Nevertheless, threats to exclude Iran from the United Nations, to engage in a pre-emptive strike, or to bring about “regime change” can only inhibit dialogue and prove counter-productive.

We believe peace in the Middle East cannot be achieved without Syria playing a vital role. Since May 2004, when the United States tightened sanctions, it has become increasingly difficult for Syria to purchase computer parts, radiation equipment for treating cancer patients, and various other products that might improve the lives of Syrian citizens. The United States has rejected Syrian overtures for dialogue and made diplomatic exchanges extremely difficult. Such tactics obviously tend to strengthen the hand of authoritarian elements in Syria and undermine existing attempts at reform in Syria that should be taken seriously and welcomed. Our delegation also feels that, whatever the results of the UN investigation into the murder of former Lebanese Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri, they should not be employed as a justification for “regime change” or war.

We urge President Bush to refrain from repeating the appalling mistake he made when he launched the illegal invasion of Iraq. More than 2000 American soldiers and tens of thousands of innocent Iraqis have been killed, hundreds of billions of dollars have been wasted, and there is no solution in sight. We call upon President Bush to follow a different course by initiating diplomatic negotiations with Iran and Syria in order to resolve existing disputes and disagreements. If we wish to avoid another conflict then we need to increase understanding among the peoples and the governments of these two nations and the United States. War is the worst human rights violation and it must be avoided at all reasonable costs. The alternative is dialogue. It must be unconditional and undertaken in good faith, for¾as we have seen¾without dialogue conflict is inevitable.

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Meditation On Leaves Of Grass At 150

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

Leaves of Grass is the best book of poetry ever produced in the United States. It is the holy individualized commentary on the inner meaning of democracy. It remains the authoritative subjective exegesis of the Constitution. As time passes, it is no mere work of poetics, but the soul of what it is America could be. It wound-dressed and outlived the intuitive Lincoln at the center of a hemorrhaging nation's War Between the States, and 150 years later provides a profound counter-cultural treatment to the curmudgeon-President George W. Bush's Global War on Terror.

It's common knowledge that the slim, indy publication by Walt Whitman, published on the Fourth of July in 1855 could just as well have ended up in the garbage pile of forgotten poesy. Nobody in Great Gotham was interested in a self-educated slacker looking at a blade of grass. But what Whitman did, said, and thought is so much at one with the American Creative Record that it is recreated at every moment, measuring and countering all that comes after it. Every line and every poem of The First Edition, which Whitman would expand upon over the course of his life in grander, reworked volumes, became not simply the poetic measure of all future emanations of democracy. Leaves of Grass is the deposited essence of the march of Freedomwhich does not know what it gives or thinks that it is givingrecorded in the memory of the United States and the wide atmosphere above around and within us.

My first real acquaintance with Leaves of Grass and Walt Whitman, for the two are the same in my minda perfection of poet and poem, the Unionized Antecedentoccurred in the early 70's. Leaving the northeast, I hitchhiked cross country, keeping a copy of Leaves in my backpack and reading it as an American meditation across Midwest snowstorms, over the Rockies in the dead of winter, down along the Mexico border, walking through the Phoenix night the day Nixon announced the end of the Vietnam War, and up the West Coast where I would meet with wild psychedelic adventures. Wherever I was, Whitman and Leaves was there, outside the battlefields of media and the arguments of literature, offering mystical direction in a surreal world of truck stop all-night coffee shops and cars pumped with gasoline and sex and music and talk, police and hippies trolling the shoulders of liberty, witches and vets, cowboys and low-riders living by a whole other set of laws, men and women from all walks of lifedesperate, exuberant, on business, on vacation, on the run, en route to a funeral, a wedding, a birth,

impoverished bums of the street-chant anonymous prayer, and great wilds of desert and forest, canyon and sea, mountain and river at the end of those rides that transmitted to me firsthand the Whitmanic vision.

I had little idea where I was going, what I was going to do, where if anywhere poetry would take me, what if anything I would make of myself. Many a night I read from Leaves. Sometimes in my simple bedroll in a ditch on the side of the road, deep in a cornfield under the field of stars, in a wooded grove, under an interstate bridge. Other times, under the eaves of some kind stranger. One night, at the end of the decade, I was staying at the Youth Hostel in Nederland, Colorado, and there, I met a young man no more than twenty-years old. He was a hairdresser from Florida. He told me that he knew no poetry, nothing at all, except for all of Leaves of Grass, which he could recite in its entirety by heart. He'd learned about Whitman from a woman that ran the salon where he worked. This boy was part of a little known group of people that sees Whitman as a cosmic consciousness on par with Buddha, Krishna, Abraham, Jesus, and Mohammed. That night, he recited "On Blue Ontario's Shores" to me. I became overwhelmed by the poem, how directly it spoke to me, how time seemed to stop and eternity crack open in these words pouring into my ears from a young stranger I would never see again.

In the 1980's, I was reacquainted with Whitman again; this time as a result of a Jack Kerouac School of Disembodied Poetics teaching assistantship with Allen Ginsberg. Ginsberg, whose own poem "Howl" was first given public performance at the catalytic Six Galleries reading one hundred years after the publication of Leaves, had so utterly absorbed Whitman that he made Whitmanic candorspeaking one's secret mind as a means of connecting to mass sufferinga foundational tradition of the Beat and post-Beat eras. "A Supermarket in California (1955)," composed by Ginsberg in conscious celebration of the centennial year of Leaves and in tribute to Whitman's profound influence, began with the famous phrase, "What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman…." Whitmanic poetic practice, as begun in The First Edition, is at the heart of the experimental, emotional, political, sexual, erotic, spiritual and diversity strands that comprise the Beat lineage of Whitman's American Roots poetics.

In the 90's, I encountered Whitman again. This time while traveling in Chile to pay homage to the poet, Pablo Neruda. In Valparaiso, I visited Neruda's home high on the steep hillside with its narrow impossible streets overlooking the city and the sea. I was struck that a poet's home could offer such solace to people from around the world. It had a magnetism all its own. In that sense, I had a sudden feeling that I'd felt only once beforeat Whitman's cabin. Walking through Neruda's home, one slowly takes in the rooms and artifacts. Arriving in Neruda's study, I was knocked out to see a large photograph of Whitman in pinstripes. Standing there, gazing on the rock star-sized image of Whitman dressed to the nines across from Neruda's writing desk, I felt the great lonesome heart of the eloquent postcolonial ghost calling upon the strident ghost of American colossal nationalism and universal liberation. Whitman's image in Neruda's study was not accidental. In a piece by Neruda published in the 14 April 1972 New York Times, "We Live in a Whitmanesque Age (A Speech to P.E.N.)," he declared:

For my part, I, who am now nearing seventy, discovered Walt Whitman when I was just fifteen,

and I hold him to be my greatest creditor. I stand before you feeling that I bear with me always this great and wonderful debt which has helped me to exist.

When only recently, midway through the Ought-Ought Decade, I gazed upon the Washington Monument evacuated due to yet another post-9/11 terrorist threat, its grandiose stone base circled with flags but peopleless, I had a vision of the power of creation overwhelming the most brilliant countries across time, built on the suffering of those it confined to their margins and reaching the last of the luckless after centuries of silence. I thought of Ezra Pound, the most candidly scandalous of American poets, imprisoned across the river in St. Elizabeths Hospital for his Second World War anti-American radio broadcasts, writing in "A Pact" (1915), "I make a pact with you, Walt Whitman" in stubborn recognition of Whitman's unflinching disregard of the safety and enclosure codified as the "American way of life." I thought of Alicia Ostriker's suggestion in "Loving Walt Whitman and the Problem of America" (1992), that what Pound likely meant in his own desire to "make friends" with Whitman and what continues to move women and men most about Leaves at 150 is

… his capacity to be shamelessly receptive as well as active, to be expansive on an epic scale without a shred of nostalgia for narratives of conquest, to invent a rhetoric of power with authority, without hierarchy, and without violence. The omnivorous empathy of his imagination wants to incorporate All and therefore refuses to represent anything as unavailably Other.

CNN's images of the Washington Monument gave way to images of the New Orleans' Superdome, horrific home to the poorest of the poor, mostly blacks, when the evacuated city was inundated in the Biblical Floods of '05. I recalled that before the release of the First Edition, Whitman edited the New Orleans Daily Crescent, having arrived there in February of 1848 traveling down the Mississippi with his brother Jeff. New Orleans was perhaps the turning point in his still young life. There, he witnessed the slave auctions, firsthand. Living at 67 Gravier Street, only a few blocks from the site of Pierson & Bonneval whose auction blocks are what started him writing poetry, his favorite spots were along the leveesthe levees that took the city down in the flood and left corpse "sacs merely floating with open mouths for food to slip in" ("Song of Myself," 1855, 1129). Poetry soon overtook all other activities Whitman was involved with at the time.

On July 4, 1855, an unknown Walt Whitman brought out a 95-page book to mixed reviews and general disregard. Ten pages or so were the preface he is believed to have typeset himself. The original twelve poem Leaves was put on sale in two stores, one in New York and the other in Brooklyn. Printed in the shop of the brothers James and Thomas Rome of Brooklyn, the quarto-size volume was designed and published by Whitman himself. 795 copies were printed in all, 200 of which were bound in cloth, the rest in cheaper material. They sold for two dollars each.

He gave most of the twelve poems first-line titles, a practice he would frequently employ during the rest of his career. The poems appear in an order significantly different from the arrangement he finally settled on: "I celebrate myself" ("Song of Myself") came first (as it would in the printed edition), followed by "A young man came to me" (the poem that would

develop into “Song of the Answerer”), “A child went forth” (“There Was a Child Went Forth”), “sauntering the pavement” (“Faces”), “great are the myths” (“Great Are the Myths”), “I wander all night” (“The Sleepers”), “Come closer to me” (“A Song for Occupations”), “Who learns my lesson complete” (“Who Learns My Lesson Complete”), “Clear the way there Jonathan” (“A Boston Ballad”), “Resurgemus” (“Europe: The 72d and 73d Years of These States”), “To think through the retrospections” (“To Think of Time”), and “Slaves” (“I Sing the Body Electric”). “Doubtless in the scheme this man has built for himself,” wrote the 36-year old Whitman in an anonymous self-review of the First Edition published in September 1855,

The writing of poems is but a proportionate part of the whole. It is plain that public and private performance, politics, love, friendship, behavior, the art of conversation, science, society, the American people, the reception of the great novelties of city and country, all have their equal call upon him and receive equal attention. … He does not separate the learned from the unlearned, the Northerner from the Southerner, the white from the black, or the native from the immigrant just landed at the wharf. Everyone, he seems to say, appears excellent to me, every employment is adorned, and every male and female glorious.

Experimentation with poetic technique remains a Whitmanic legacy. Leaves is famous for its catalogs and lists, its persona of the “loafer” or “hipster”, its drama of identity characterized by the Empty Self containing multitudes and encountering nothingness, its “leisure” long vowel-toned stanzas, its direct attention to minutiaeas in its mediation on a leaf of grass, its undifferentiated direct first-person address from the I-body to the soul and from the I-poet to the reader, its sexual and erotic idiom celebrating the body, its tenacity of the poet as social and cultural witness and critic, its unmitigated epic of killing off past literatures, killing off the Homer, Ovid, Dante, Shakespeare, Blake, its vast projecting of democratic vistas.

The centrality of consciousness is perhaps the most prominent experiment of the Whitmanic legacy. Thoreau remarked to Whitman upon reading the first edition of Leaves of Grass that it was “Wonderfully like the Orientals.” Emerson’s remarked to the prominent writer Franklin B. Sanborn that Leaves of Grass was a “mixture of the Bhagavad Gita and the New York Herald.” Malcolm Cowley, among others, expressed the view that Whitman was absorbed in the Vedantic transcendental philosophy that had penetrated American literature in the 1840s and 1850s. His introduction of Eastern consciousness in the context of subjective American poetic explorations cannot be underestimated. It is a model of mindfulness widely visible in the Beat Generation Buddhist-influenced poetries of Jack Kerouac, Gary Snyder, Allen Ginsberg, Philip Whalen and Joanne Kyger.

By the time of Whitman’s death in March 1892, the small book had gone through eight, nine, or, as Sam Abrams has pointed out in The Neglected Walt Whitman: Vital Texts, maybe ten editions. Leaves grew from its initial twelve poems to the 289 poems of the death-bed edition (4-5). Of Whitman’s death, there remains the strange case of Guillaume Apollinaire’s April Fool’s Day accounts in the Mercure de France (1913). Apollinaire composed a false description of Whitman’s funeral as being held in a traveling circus tent complete with a barbecue, barrels of beer, tubs of whisky, vats of lemonade and sparkling pure water. Three brass bands played

continuously and over 3500 men women and children-everyone Whitman had every known, all without invitationas the spirit moved them giving spontaneous readings and remembrances or song punctuated by pounding on the coffin until at dusk the entire party, enjoined by crowds workmen searching after damages, unshaved sailors, calm martyrs, old-faced infants, the 28 bathers from “Song of Myself,” nurses, army surgeons, buggy drivers, artillerists, the lunatic and abolitionist just out of the whip-stocks, politicians and journalists, mothers and fathers of boys killed in the war he had held in his arms when they died, dwarfs and harlots and poets he had known and loved over the yearsmoved to the cemetery outside Camden where 6 drunken pall bearers wielded the poet’s remains to his tomb as the strains of minstrels played New Orleans rag-time.

One hundred and fifty years later, American democracy would remain far too naked to be shamed by exploding suicide bombers or Patriot Acts or National Security or viral pandemic or the effects of global warming or cronyism in the Oval Office. With the proliferation of real-time digitally-based video and audio signals subsuming the Old Print Industry concentration of messages and imagery, Whitman is mentioned on C-Span, appears in The Weekly World News (September 19, 2005), on thousands of websites, including Leavesofgrass.org (at 150). Bloggers note himas though the lines “If no other in the world be aware I sit content,/And if each and all be aware I sit content” are scotched tape to their monitors (“Song of Myself”, 1855, 414-415). Current administration online critics only seem to reiterate the Whitmanic accounting of a misguided Chief Executive: “Have you outstript the rest ? Are you the President ?” (“Song of Myself,” 1855, 432).

George W. Bush has probably never read Leaves of Grass. Abraham Lincoln did. Whitman attended Lincoln’s second inaugural ball. He had a younger brother named George. Consider the Second Inaugural Addresses by Lincoln and Bush to see how much or little has changed in America in 150 years. In 1865, ten years after Leaves was first published and only a month before he was assassinated, Lincoln spoke elegantly and prophetically of U.S. karma:

The Almighty has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.” If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Or, as Whitman would say in the 1855 original publication of “Song of Myself” translating this “woe due to those by whom the offense came” into a more universal policy:

Every condition promulges not only itself …. it promulges what grows after and out of itself.…. (1180)

And

We should surely bring up again where we now stand,
And as surely go as much farther, and then farther and farther.

A few quadrillions of eras, a few octillions of cubic leagues, do not hazard the span,
or make it impatient,
They are but parts …. any thing is but a part.

See ever so far …. there is limitless space outside of that,
Count ever so much …. there is limitless time around that. (1191-1196)

And Bush in 2005having been re-elected by a vulnerable-turned-paranoid American electorate on the basis of threats manufactured into a post 9/11 terrorist spectacle Iraqi War, and having consolidated the power and privilege of the executive branch more than any president in modern historyspoke without any apparent forethought of the repercussions of his 21st century neo-imperialist policy of militarily exporting democracy as a colonizing force:

We have seen our vulnerabilityand we have seen its deepest source. For as long as whole regions of the world simmer in resentment and tyrannyprone to ideologies that feed hatred and excuse murderviolence will gather, and multiply in destructive power, and cross the most defended borders, and raise a mortal threat. There is only one force of history that can break the reign of hatred and resentment, and expose the pretensions of tyrants, and reward the hopes of the decent and tolerant, and that is the force of human freedom.

God moves and chooses as He wills. We have confidence because freedom is the permanent hope of mankind, the hunger in dark places, the longing of the soul. When our Founders declared a new order of the ages; when soldiers died in wave upon wave for a union based on liberty; when citizens marched in peaceful outrage under the banner “Freedom Now”they were acting on an ancient hope that is meant to be fulfilled. History has an ebb and flow of justice, but history also has a visible direction, set by liberty and the Author of Liberty.

For the current administration, engaging the nation’s human and natural resources all for a destructive power fantasy in the name of post September 11, 2001 national security interests, Whitman’s taking comfort in the existence of other universes, in his being made up of contradicting multitudes only emphasizes the persistent pretensions that underlie any construction of a sensationalized conformity by which America’s political leadership backchannel their constant need to create situations of dominance and submission as a means of peddling democracy, freedom, and justice as a kind of erotic property.

At 150 years, what has changed is that Leaves of Grass makes a mockery of such verbal formulations of government speech, mind, attitude, purpose of life and actionall directed with a

certain deviancy toward those they supposedly represent and those they must be part of in inhabiting the globe. “For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you,” wrote Whitman in the opening stanza of the ’55 “Song of Myself.” By that he surely meant its opposite: for every atom belonging to you as evil belongs to me. “Lack one lacks both,” wrote Whitman in “Song of Myself,” “…. and the unseen is proved by the seen,/Till that becomes unseen and receives proof in its turn.”

Although the number of skillful commentaries by scholars and linguists, biographers and poets and the like will continue to increase, the original 1336 lines of the 1855 “Song of Myself” remain as they arethe original multifaceted break-through of Whitman, a man whose humble origins and limited education replaced the conventional unfestive and destructive society with a new world of infinite capacity for compassion. Putting himself here and now, in “the ambushed womb of shadows” (SOM, 1049), Whitman’s echo affects poets to this day. Among the post-Beat generation, the current heralds of the 150th year, the Wisconsin poet Antler provides the most comprehensive model of Whitmanic tradition. Allen Ginsberg judged Antler’s long poem “Factory” (Factory, City Lights, 1980, and Antler: The Selected Poems, Soft Skull Press, 2000) as “more fineness than I thought probable to see again in my lifetime from younger self-inspirer US poet” and proclaimed Antler “one of Whitman’s “poets and orators to come’.”

Antler has written that Whitman would not have had any idea of the world we inherited from him. “In Whitman’s time,” Antler writes in an essay entitled “About “Factory’,” “Mannahatta was smaller than Milwaukee is now. When he died in 1892, the tallest building in Manhattan was ten stories high.” Citing a 1971 interview with Albert Speer, Hitler’s second in command, Antler argues, through Speer’s own admission years after the factories of genocide had risen and fallen, that the greatest difference between our time and Whitman’s is that it is the “vast gulf between our technological potential and our moral development that makes this age both so challenging and so terrifying” (City Lights, 66). Could Whitman even have gotten a following today? Would Bob Dylan have taken him on the Rolling Thunder Review Tour? What would he think of Ground Zero, Osama bin Laden, postmodern art, cellphones, internet porn, Wal-Mart, Andy Clausen, Indian Hot Springs, Frank O’Hara, the prices of homes, St. Marks Poetry Project, all the shelves of blatherers that have made careers out of his work? How would he evolve, this master who dreamed on paper? Where would Democratic Vistas (1870) find a publisher?

Whitman’s rejection by the literary establishment would be expected today. Anticipated. But if invited, like Sam Hamill and Sharon Olds he would no doubt have turned down literary functions with the President’s wife in order to offer up “Respondez”Whitman’s “outlaw moment” as Kenneth Burke calls it, or as Ted Berrigan knew it, “Whitman in Black.” Whitman was no “simplistic optimist,” as Sam Abrams points out (28), and Leaves of Grass is no transformable sound-bite fodder for presidential speechwriters looking for poetic outs by which to hypnotize the masses into accepting budget deficits, machinations toward war, losses of social services, abysmal disparity, willful suffering, dead-end consumerism, corporate welfare, low mileage transportation fleets, environmental refugees usurped by Eminent Domain,

masked bigotry and religious claims to the halls of state. Rapping from “Respondez,” I can hear him, the King of the Killers, take out the best of the best at the poetry slam:

Let the theory of America still be management, caste,
comparison?
(Say! What other theory would you?)

And

Let freedom prove no man’s inalienable right! every one
who can tyrannize, let him tyrannize to his satisfaction.

And

Let all the men of These States stand aside for a few
smouchers! let the few seize on what they choose!
let the rest gawk, giggle, starve, obey!

And

Let the reflections of the things of the world be studied
in mirrors! let the things themselves still continue
unstudied!

“Respondez,” as Abrams has pointed out, is to be “read against the acute sense of negativity” from someone “who claims to never doubt America.” This psychological subtext runs throughout the exultant, idealized, athletic America that Whitman portrayed in Leaves. It signifies a sense that Whitman had an equally dark understanding of an America gone bad, a “vilified America, cursed America.” Citing scholar David Reynolds, Abrams writes that the suppression of Whitman’s “outlaw sermon” after its appearance in the second edition is to be taken as “the substratum for (the) intense affirmations” that permeate all of Leaves of Grass (Abrams, 31-32). What is interesting is that the poem, in its absence, forms the bedrock of unconformity that was later mined so extensively throughout the various schools of Twentieth Century American Poetry. William Carlos Williamsin 1960, just before the end of his lifenoted the major contribution Whitman had made to American poetry in his introduction to the big hardbound Illustrated Leaves of Grass (Grosset & Dunlap, 1971):

A jarring note had been struck by Whitman. The use of the language in the New World might have to be modified – if not yet, eventually – to accommodate the more variable principal enunciated for the first time by this man. With a shock we realized that, postpone as we may, this was the time our rigid dictates would be modified… That the entire structure might be outmoded occurred to no one else of his generation.

But finally, Whitman remains America’s first bodhisattva poet. He is the time-spanning teacher on the path whereby anybody can become aware of the Greater Selfthe celebratory Great Self,

the Great “I” he opened with in the 1855 Leaves. Rejecting any and all castes and priests as intermediaries between people and their own inherent divinity accords with the self-reliant and unblinking heart of a bodhisattva, he was determined not to leave the world without the total liberation of all sentient beings. When he wrote in the Preface to the ’55 edition that “The United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem,” what he was referring to was that the people have within their power a peace beyond man’s continuous suffering and turmoil, and that America was able of achieving peace through other means than war.

Also from the Preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, Whitman prophesizes American society as a place where individuals do not constantly wish for conditions to change, conditions they desired into being. He understood that there are no conditions to be overcome, that there is no hope in wishing to escape conditions. “America,” he wrote, “does not repel the past or what it has produced under its forms or amid other politics or the idea of castes or the old religions … accepts the lesson with calmness … is not so impatient as has been supposed….” So, in reading Whitman at 150 years, there is always the potential for an individual to experience radical and unfixated verbal approximations of mindfulness that are not pushed back, mocked, seen cynically or discarded by outcomes that culminate in disappointmenteven though the America I live in throws away the past as quickly as possible, purges on news cycles, thrives on megalomaniacal political repellency, is far too quick to mule its underclass with the beastly burdens, exerts a fundamentalist Christian dogma over all other secular and religious believers, expedites anger with Overwhelming Force, assassinates the peace-loving, allows dictators to thrive, creates technology that only promotes the robotic, the stressed-out, the medicated, the willing to trade in their membership as human beings.

In 1997, when I began a series of interconnected online exhibits known as the Museum of American Poetics (www.poetspath.com), I wished for nothing short than a celebration of the remarkable tradition established by Walt Whitman and continued by Allen Ginsberg in my own time. Even today, as I reread the Preface to the 1855 edition of Leaves of Grass, I am amazed at the breadth and depth of its totality. But at this moment in our historya moment when many poets would argue that the era of the prophetic voice is dead, when the idea of the “author” is a mere convention, a fallacyI am most amazed by the insight with which the teachings of a thirty-six year old poet and his thoughts on Liberty convey themselves across time.

“Liberty relies upon itself,” wrote Whitman, “invites no one, promises nothing, sits in calmness and light, is positive and composed, and knows no discouragement.” Without Liberty, which he called “The Grand Idea,” Whitman understood that there is only illusion, for partial liberty can never be liberty and any form of inequality is no equality at all, only the accumulation of indignity. He described an Americaand through the image of America he signaled an enlightened policy of conduct with all other inhabitants (living and dead), not by imagining a world of only partial liberation, not by denying a world where the reader is freed from the direct responsibility of resultant suffering to others and herself through inaction:

… when I and you walk abroad upon the earth stung with compassion at the sight of numberless brothers answering our equal friendship and calling no man masterand when we

are elated with noble joy at the sight of slaves … when the soul retires in the cool communion of the night and surveys its experience and has much ecstasy over the word and deed that put back a helpless innocent person into the gripe of the gripers or into any cruel inferiority … when those in all parts of these states who could easier realize the true American character bud do not yet … when the swarms of cringers, suckers, doughfaces, lice of politics, planners of sly involutions for their own preferment to city offices or state legislatures or the judiciary or congress or the presidency, obtain a response of love and natural deference from the people whether they get the offices or no … when it is better to be a bound booby and rogue in office at a high salary than the poorest free mechanic or farmer with his hat removed from his head and firm eyes, and a candid and generous heart … and when servility by town or state or the federal government or any oppression on a large scale or small scale can be tried on without its own punishment following duly after in exact proportion against the smallest chance of escape … or rather when all life and all the souls of men and women are discharged from any part of the earththen only shall the instinct of liberty be discharged from that part of the earth.

What would this world be if the Buddha hadn't left his palace, if Jesus hadn't thrown out the moneylenders, if Krishna hadn't illuminated love, if Mohammed had not said "Verily, man is foolish and cruel," if Walt Whitman had never been born? "A child said, What is the grass?" There are many who dream, but few with the inspiration and power to answer. We live in a period of extreme anxiety. America has a new kind of enemya non-state actor that doesn't wear uniforms, doesn't operate in normal units, blends into civilian populations and conducts surprise attacks against civilians. But America has an old kind of enemyit concerns itself with all that is transitory, it knows itself as an entity separate from friend and foe. The further we go, the more difficulties there are. One feels the faults in oneself more sharply as time passes, knowing that earlier they were present, but went unnoticed. Whitman stripped the body naked, vaunted its processes, sang our perfections. Many happy returns tender ghost.

Jim Cohn *is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently* Quien Sabe Mountain *(Museum of American Poetics Publications, 2004). He has also released of five recordings of his poems, and two collections of essays on his life working with people with disabilities, including* Sign Mind: Studies in American Sign Language Poetics*. In 1997, Jim founded the on-line Museum of American Poetics (MAP) at [www.poetspath.com.](http://www.poetspath.com) In conjunction with MAP, he edits the online poetry magazine* Napalm Health Spa*. He lives in Boulder, Colorado.*

Rashid Khalidi On The Middle East: A Conversation

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***Q**: Perhaps you can give us a sketch of your background and intellectual development?*
Rashid Khalidi [RK]: Well, the easiest way to do that is to talk about my academic career. I started out as an undergraduate here in the States. I did my doctoral work in England at Oxford, went off to Beirut where I was doing much of my dissertation research, which was on British policy in the Middle East before World War I. My mother had already moved back to Beirut after my father died, so it was my home starting in the 1960s even when I was still in school here. I lived in Beirut pretty much without interruption from then until 1983. I taught at the University of Beirut. I then went to the Institute for Palestine Studies at the University of Chicago. When we left in 1983, I thought I was just coming here for a year to write a book. And I did write the book in a year, but we never went back as a family – so all of my kids were born in Beirut, but we left with a few suitcases. And most of that stuff we never saw again. Because we couldn't go back, the war was worse. It had been pretty bad before, but it got worse and worse. So I finally ended up with a job at Columbia for a couple years, and from there, to Chicago for sixteen years. And then, I was offered Chair in Arab Studies here at Columbia and I came back.

***Q**: You were also involved politically as well?*

RK: Well, yes. I was deeply involved in politics in Beirut. I served as an advisor to the Palestinian Delegation to the negotiations for a couple years, from 91-93. I'm the Editor of the *Journal of Palestine Studies*, which of course is a scholarly journal, but the word "Palestine' involves so much contestation . . . .
***Q:** Maybe we should start with the elephant in the room. Columbia University has been in the*

news recently with respect to charges of anti-semitism on campus and its administration has issued a report on its Middle East Institute…

RK: the report actually involved some faculty in the Department of Middle East Studies, which is separate from the Middle East Institute, which was never touched by any controversy or dealt with in the report.

***Q**: I see. So how do you look back on the "affiar"? Give our readers a sense of what was going on?*

RK: Well, there wasn't much of a controversy *at* Columbia. There was a controversy in the political sphere, and in the sphere of New York discourse and the press *about* Columbia. Were there deep differences of opinion among the faculty? No. Was there any real serious student involvement in this? No, if you leave aside a very limited number of individuals…

***Q:** And by this you mean…'the affair'?*

RK: I'm telling you about the huge controversy that arose last year over a number of faculty members, mainly in the Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures Department (MEALAC), but which also had been expanded to include me and three other people. This so-called investigation, the report that was issued in March, dealt with three faculty members in MEALAC. It didn't deal with me, or the Middle East Institute; even though in the press and the media, in their interpretation and reporting about it, it involved everybody involved in the Middle East at Columbia. You had headlines in gutter rags, of which unfortunately we have three in New York City, such as "Columbia is like the Gaza Strip."

There was nothing going on at Columbia *per se*. There was an affair, largely I have to say, instigated from outside. There were some students who were involved, there's no question that a number of students felt themselves aggrieved. A number of students lent themselves to a campaign that was run by extra-campus organizations in the main, and that in turn fitted into a larger campaign that has been ongoing for quite awhile. It's a campaign both against Middle East studies, in a sense that there's an argument that-as a whole, the whole field, which deals with the Middle East and the US-is biased. It is also a campaign in another respect, against any kind of on-campus activism in support of Palestine or which is critical of Israel. The disinvestment campaign a few years ago here and elsewhere provoked quite a firestorm of organizing. What you saw in America very much resembled the balance of forces as between the Palestinians and the Israelis themselves. Whatever the Palestinians do, however effective, ineffective, right, wrong brings on an *overwhelming, massive, powerful* response from a regional superpower.

That's what happened here on campus. So some student groups and a few professors on this and on a few other campuses organized a few events over the first couple of years of the Intifada 2001-2002 and then, even more, from 2002-2003. And the response to this was massive retaliation: the Hillel's of the campuses of the whole US were mobilized, the ADL was mobilized, as well as the Campus Watch website, the group The David Project, and the Campus Coalition on Israel. None of these are Columbia organizations or organizations specific to Harvard or this or that university. All the groups who are interested in pro-Israel advocacy all over the country coordinated the response to what was seen as a dangerous increase in pro-Palestinian activism. So you had a huge, well-funded, nationwide, hysterical response, to pretty isolated and relatively under-funded and poorly organized efforts to publicize what was going

on at the beginning of the Intifada.
Q*: I find it ironic that you should have been at the center of this maelstrom. I think that what we're really talking about is the manipulation of anti-Semitism. One of our editors mentioned that he was with you at a conference, which had mostly an Arab audience, and there was a gentleman at the end of your plenary who came up with a conspiratorial argument about Zionism and you said straight up without any pandering: "anti-Semitism has no place in the Palestinian movement."*
RK: That's not exactly what I said; I criticized this person for bringing up all these anti-Semitic themes.
Q*: Was there a progressive press that came to your defense?*
RK: No, no. It was not the finest hour of the press. Strangely enough, the only newspaper that did a fair to middling job of covering it was *The Forward*, of all things.
Q

: Interesting…

RK: I've forgotten, mercifully, some of the details of this. It consumed much of our lives last year. There was another paper in Northern NJ, a local Jewish paper that did a reasonable job.
Q*: Probably the Jewish Standard…*
RK: It might have been, I don't remember. And there were a few other pieces like *New York Magazine*, an odd piece here and there. Generally speaking, the press did not distinguish itself. For example, it took the self-definition of this group–a small group of students being manipulated by external forces–at face value. It took its definition of the problem. It took the definition they chose to give of what was going on at face value. They never looked into it carefully. There was never really a sense at Columbia that there was a massive anti-Israel bias or that there was rampant anti-Semitism. Things that were alleged in the press had no basis in fact whatsoever.
Q*: It's interesting how Columbia has become a microcosm of the macrocosm…*
RK: Well that's why they chose it. You have to look at the *Jewish Telegraph, Haaretz* or a few good papers like the *Forward* to follow the way these campaigns have developed over the past four years. This really started in 2001-2002. I was abroad in 2001-2002, and I started reading in *Haaretz*, actually, and occasionally in pieces carried by *JTA* about how the campaign was being mounted, and I followed it that way and one can follow it that way. It's quite extraordinary that the press consciously or unconsciously accepted the way in which the people mounting this campaign framed it.
Q: *You have had much experience with Syria and Lebanon. Given the publicity that's now come with the Rafi Hariri affair — the former Lebanese prime minister assassinated on Feb. 14 2005 — and the relatively new regime of Bashar al-Assad, what ideas do you have concerning the international reaction to events?*
RK: [interrupting] I didn't really answer your question on anti-Semitism. When the kind of charges we heard in the last few years on anti-Semitism start to be raised and matters regarding Israel take center stage, I think that we should look very, very carefully at what's really going on. When people who are unhappy about certain views on Israel and term it anti-Semitism, well, its like they're invoking the nuclear option. Why are they doing it? What nerve

has been touched? What is really at stake? Criticism of Israel is not anti-Semitism. Half of the people making criticisms are Jewish. Maybe the thousand of my friends who are Jews are really self-hating Jews. Maybe those of us who are Arabs and happen to be Semites are also…I don't really think that's what's at issue. But I am being facetious. I think we should look very carefully at what is at stake when the Alan Dershowitz's of this world and others are brandishing these kinds of charges. It was very intensely used in the campaign last year, "Columbia is anti-Semitic???" Please!!!

Q*: Do you see any long-lasting effects of this campaign on the atmosphere at Columbia or the principles involved?*

RK: There will probably be some effects at Columbia. This is a demonstration case. There was a piece in which the campaign was assessed in the *JTA*. It said that, "as we move on and continue doing what we're doing in this campaign in defense of Israel we have to recognize we are not going to have as favorable situation as we did in Columbia." It was probably chosen because it was a city with a certain kind of makeup. It's a city with a number of newspapers. Several of which can be counted upon to compete with one another in the race to the bottom: the *Sun*, the *Daily News*, the *Post*. You can't out pander these guys and they're capable of anything, virtually, in their competition with one another. You couldn't reproduce that in Israel. There's infinitely more willingness to resist that kind of thing in the Israeli press than there is in the New York City press.

Q

: *That's extraordinarily ironic, isn't it?*

RK: Of course it's ironic. There's much more contestation in the Israeli public sphere. You can't talk about certain things in this country that are constantly invoked in the Israeli discourse among Israelis.

Q*: How would you explain it?*

RK: How would I explain it? First of all, with this issue, the people who own the issue – the people who are concerned about the issue – are driven by a very strong feeling and an almost total absence of real knowledge. They don't really know about much. The Israelis feel strongly about these issues. The Israelis have a great deal of knowledge…they might now care about these things, but you can't tell them certain things about the Arabs, about the Palestinians, about Israel's relationship with the Palestinians. So there's a certain level of unreality in discourse here that is simply a function of intense feeling combined with an absence of

knowledge among people for whom this is an extremely important issue.

Q

: *They're removed from the reality…*

RK: Precisely, they're removed from the reality. They live in Long Island, they live in Miami, they live in L.A. They don't live in [?] Their kids don't go into the Army; their kids don't serve in the occupation. They themselves don't have to spend x number of days a year, every year until they're whatever age in the reserves…They have deep emotional involvement but minimal, if any, knowledge. So you can tell them almost anything *and they do tell them almost anything*! They have some kid going on talking about how the Bedouin are wonderfully treated in Israel. He's a Bedouin. I have a student researching this and she said: "Even the pro-Israel students listening to him couldn't believe this stuff." So maybe you can't tell them anything, but you can try and tell them anything and quite often you get away with it. You just can't do that in Israel. Also, in Israel there is vigorous dissent. I hate to say this but there is not vigorous dissent on this issue in the US.

Q*: How do you assess the different Arab American and Muslim American relations here?*

RK: The answer is partly sociological. This is a community that's got one foot in the old-country and one foot here. You go to a community event and you will see, first of all, a lot of people who don't attend are the ones who are not even involved in the community, they're still in the family business, they speak Arabic at home. This is a community that is not assimilated, not integrated; this is a community that is still largely in the ghetto. You can go to Paterson, NJ, you can go to southwest side of Chicago or you can go to Dearborn and you will find people who show a resemblance with the Jews on the Lower East Side in (say) 1904- only language spoken: Yiddish. Everybody for 500 yards in every direction is coming from the same place, say, Lithuania. That's true in Dearborn. You'll go for miles and all the signs are in Arabic. These are people who are still not integrated and assimilated…they don't know this country in many respects. To talk about Arab-American and Muslim-American organizations in a community like this is to talk about a half-digested, half-Americanized community. There are people like those on my mother's side of the family right after or before WWI who are 2nd, 3rd or 4th generation but they're a minority. Most of them, by the way, are Lebanese. Most Muslim-American or Arab-American community came here in the last couple of decades. They come from a variety of countries, and in some cases, they speak entirely different languages. So you have Pakistani Americans, African-American Muslims, you have Arab-American Muslims from 20 different Arab countries, Bosnian Muslims and so on and so forth…

Q*: …It's an amazing thing that in America the idea of being Muslim is simply confined to this tiny area in the Middle East…*

RK: Most Muslims in the US are not Arab-Americans. Most Muslims in the US, like most Muslims in the world, come from South Asia. The center of gravity in the Muslim world is a couple of hundred million Muslims in India, several hundred million Muslims in Bangladesh, several hundred million Muslims in Pakistan, several hundred million Muslims in middle Asia and Malaysia in Central Asia. The central gravity of the Muslim world – over a billion of them – is far to the east of the Middle East. The Turks, the Arabs, the Persians…the Iranians are less than 400 million people. The other guys are a billion.

Q: *Your predecessor, Edward Said, spoke of a "construct" and what Islam means in the US. It may have a lot to do with the weakness or failures of American policy. Let me ask you something else that always comes up when speaking of the Arab world. There are certain lberal and republican traditions in the Arab world that go back to the 19th century… What is preventing these political traditions from, to take a phrase from Marx, "gripping the masses"?*

RK: Let me start by answering the end of your question… They do "grip the masses." The republican, democratic and parliamentary ideas, ideas of limitation on the absolute power of the state are very popular with the people. One reason, perhaps, is that they represent opposition to the state. The state over the past few decades has destroyed all secular opposition. A lot of the opposition to the absolute power of the state moved into the mosque. Some of it, then, went off in other directions, some of it very bad. The point is that there is a very powerful thirst for democracy and for lessening the absolute control of the state in politics and for pluralism. Pluralism in most of the Arab world…the Middle East generally. This is not a problem, by the way, that affects the Muslim in the same way as the Arab world. Most Muslims do live in democratic countries, whether in Indonesia, Bangladesh, India or Malaysia. Those are countries with successful democratic transitions over many years. Most Muslims live in democratic countries. The exception is the US client state Pakistan and American client states being constructed in Central Asia.

In the Arab world you do have a problem. As I argue in my book *Resurrecting Empire…* there are multiple reasons (for the democratic deficit) and some of them are indigenous. The Middle East is where the state began, where cities began, where complex organizations of society began, centralization of power and bureaucracy began. Go to Luxor. It's not just a small town with a little temple, but a temple-complex spanning acres and acres, several thousand years, several millennia which represents the absolute concentration of power in the state. Luxor is five- to six-thousand years old. Strong, centralized, absolute, powerful states are a tradition in this region. You can overemphasize this to the nth degree. Others did by speaking about "hydraulic societies" and "oriental absolutism"…I don't want to go there. But I will simply say to talk about this as an entirely new problem or as outsiders causing trouble is superficial and glib and false.

Q*: It's interesting the way you phrase this because I know that you were always interested by Soviet foreign policy in the "Third War'. You said that the secular opposition in many of these states was crushed, so the resistance moved to the mosque. Do you see a parallel there with what happened in the Soviet Union? The crushing of the Church in Poland… Church in Czechoslovakia… Eastern Europe?*

RK: Possibly. The complicating factor is that the struggle between strong states and their opposition didn't play out in a vacuum; they played out in the context of the Cold War: a situation in which many of these states aligned themselves with the West and others aligned themselves with the Soviet Union. In the case of the states that aligned themselves with the West and in the case the states that aligned themselves with the Soviet Union much of the opposition did move to the mosques. But in the case of the states aligned with the Soviet Union, American foreign policy begins to play a role. The US and its conservative Arab regime

allies, like the Shah, in some cases fostered Islam as a tool against the regimes that were aligned with the Soviet Union. Nasserism, Baath governments and other states like those, were all aligned with the Soviet Union – Algeria and the Sudan, for a while. In many of these cases, we see groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist groups that are the breeding ground for many of the Islamist ideologies we have today. Hezbollah and Hamas both grew out of the Muslim Brotherhood. These are favored darlings of the Western intelligence services that are fighting Soviet influence and the regimes aligned with the Soviet Union. So to some extent this process this not allowed to develop indigenously, it becomes implicated with the Cold War.

Q

: In a certain way the Muslim Brotherhood actually was employed or connected with the US?

RK: Sure. We saw this most strikingly in Afghanistan. But this wasn't something that started in Afghanistan. [Imitating headline news] "1978-79 Soviet Union intervenes, one regime is overthrown, Red Army comes in." Somebody in Washington decides, [Zbigniew] Brzezinski or whatever, "Oh we got to find some tool against these guys, where are we going to go, let's invent something new." That's not what happened. This is something that goes back to the 50s when the Muslim Brotherhood was forced to leave places like Egypt and Syria. Where do they take refuge? Munich. Who picks them up? The Munich Station of the CIA. That's not to say they're pawns in the hands of the Americans; they probably thought the Americans were pawns in their hands. That's not the point.

Q*: I guess the question, for most of our readers, is a sense that this organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, just like "political Islam," is really a direct reaction to Western imperialism.*

RK: It is, in its origins. It's a reaction to the British in Egypt – as time goes on, and as they fallout with the state. In the case of Egypt, a very powerful Nasserist state is trying to orient itself toward the US. The Muslim Brotherhood had its falling out with Egypt in the mid-50s with the attempt to assassinate Nasser. Its activists got arrested, tortured and went into exile…It is when this marriage of convenience takes place. The Muslim Brotherhood starts off as one of these very militant, anti-British, anti-imperialist groups. It maintains some aspects of that in terms of combating Western culture influence. Ultimately, its a complex and contradictory story. …One of the things I argue in the book, just to finish this, is that attempts to establish democratic, parliamentary and representative regimes all over the Middle East from the mid to late nineteenth-century right through to the mid-60s and 70s, are very often undermined by the Western powers, the liberal and democratic Western powers: France, Britain and, later, the US. Whether we are talking about how the British undermined parliamentary governance of Egypt in the 1920s or the US and British in bringing down an elected government in Iran in 1953.

Q*: What do you see… what are the designs of the US in the Middle East… what is its general policy . . . what does it want . . . sometimes it seems as if there were no policy at all….*

RK: There are some things that are more or less enduring and some things that change. I think that you're likely to see a great deal of flux in the next couple of years because of the fiasco in Iraq. But among the things that don't change, there are things that have to do with strategic position. No power with the kind of hegemonic position the US has had since WWII

can afford. Its location – for these purposes I connect it at least in central Asia – its location is such that anyone who needs to move from east to west *has* to have access to the Middle East. And access often turns into domination. Whether we're talking about Napoleon or the Russian Empire trying to do this or the British largely achieving this or whether we're talking about the post-1945 situation in which the US has absolutely had this, and was challenged by the Soviets. This is something that no would-be great power can ignore. And a hegemonic power will try to establish control. It has always; you can go back to Alexander the Great. You can go back as far as you want…

***Q**: Certainly a complicating factor now is obviously Israel, the other elephant…*

RK: Let me finish the other thing. Their other thing is oil. Even without oil, this region in the 1940s when they realized in WWI "my god we don't really have all the oil we might need' and the Nazis could barely run their war effort. From that point on the Middle East became absolutely vital. And those are enduring interests.

***Q:** Do you think part of the general strategy is to maintain a situation in which all Arab states remain weaker or more dysfunctional than Israel?*

RK: Somewhere in the 50s and 60s the US turned toward a policy of weakening Arab nationalism, preventing, if possible, certain kinds of coalitions. I think this had, at the outset at least, as much to do, probably *more* to do, with American interests than with Israel *per se*. The US did not pay a whole lot of attention to Israel before the 50s and 60s. Nor was it always an enormous factor in American strategic calculations. I think these processes are antecedent to the moment when Israel became as important as it became. This whole process is, of course, reinforced by the increasing closeness of interests between the US and Israel. People now look at Israeli interests as something that have to be taken into account. Some people think Israeli interests are completely and absolutely coincident with US interests. I think there are others in Washington that do not see it this way. If you think of the Franklin spy case, for example, or the whole issue of arms to China–this would indicate that not everybody sees that. In any case, certainly there has always been an Israeli objective to keep the region as weak as possible. It didn't have the means to achieve that, especially in the early years. It has increasingly had the means and through influence on the US. It can try and add the weight of the US to its own weight.

***Q**: You have been one of the most articulate critics of the invasion of Iraq. First, how does the Iraqi invasion fit into what you have just said and, secondly, do you think there has been any serious progress made?*

RK: Progress by whom, towards what?

***Q:** Progress towards fostering democracy… how do you view the constitution?*

RK: The war was mainly in my view, launched in order to establish a benchmark for the way the world is supposed to look-unfettered American hegemony: we can do what we want, where we want without anybody having any say-so, and without any hindrance from international law or international organizations or our allies. We don't have allies; we have coalitions of the willing, which means to say, whoever ends up behind whatever it is we decide to do for our reasons, and we will let you know what we decide and what you will do if you want to join us. That's fundamentally different from anything the US has done since the Cold War. For the first Gulf War, Secretary of State James Baker spent *months* building up a coalition for war. It's like

an elephant crushing a cockroach. Yet he spent months ensuring this war had Massive Arab support, massive UN support, massive European support, massive Asian support and massive financial support. That's the way the US operated; that's the way it's always operated throughout the Cold War. Not just multilateral, but attempting to do what it does in the framework of the United Nations. I'm not saying this makes it a good policy or bad policy; that's just the way the policy was, always, or almost always. There's a departure here. It's not just unilateralism; it's not just contempt for international law; it's not just an attempt to destroy the fabric of international law. It's an attempt to create domestically an unfettered imperial presence with no constitutional constraints on an America that does not have to pay attention to the whole fabric of constraints or limitations on state action erected largely by the US largely as a consequence of the Holocaust and WWII. Or, going back to WWI and before, whether the Hague Conventions or the Geneva Conventions or the body of law that came out of Nuremberg, these neoconservatives want to say "none of this applies to us" — and I think, mainly in the first instance, that's really what Iraq was about.

Iraq was, secondly, about the US attempting to establish a permanent position in this region for developing its strategy. They intended to build what they call "enduring bases" in Iraq. It doesn't mean they intended to occupy downtown Baghdad. 100 kilometers off in the desert there would be an airbase for their use that would be handed over on the basis of agreement signed by a puppet Iraqi government that would do what the US wanted. Thirdly, the US wanted not just to open up Iraqi oil production, but also open up the Iraqi economy. Iraq was to have been a test case for privatization, for a neoliberal economics. The fact that it has the second largest reserves of oil in the world made it extraordinary attractive to an administration full of people who have made a living, or at least part of their careers, in the oil business; so they understand this stuff. Whatever limitations they may have in other spheres, the understand oil and its importance.

Finally, I think they hoped they would be able to affect all kinds of regional balances. Here's where Israel comes in, to the extent that it comes in and I don't think it really comes in as much as the conspiracy theorists would have it. Possibly for some of the neocons it was more important, but the neocons are window-dressing for this administration. They're just the court heralds who go and trumpet the line of the day. The Cheney's and the Rumsfeld's are good old fashioned muscular nationalists, believers in an imperial presidency. People who since the time of Gerald Ford and Richard Nixon have been fighting to prevent public opinion, the press, the Congress or anybody else from interfering with the absolute freedom of the president to do exactly as he pleases in foreign policy and strategic affairs and intelligence. To them, the darkest days were the post-Vietnam period when you had the Church Committee and all of these limitations on the power of the president to wage war; you had to refashion the army with the objective of making it harder to engage in certain kinds of adventures abroad. These people have been fighting their whole lives to reverse this. These people aren't neoconservatives; these people were conservatives before the neoconservatives were out of their Trostkyist diapers! To talk about the neoconservatives as the people who run this administration is to mistake the hand puppet for the hand. These are the guys who did the talking for them and they did a very good job, it was very important what they did…

***Q**: Who's the "them"?*

RK: The people who are really the core elements of this administration. The Cheney's, the Rumsfeld's, George W. Bush himself, Condi Rice, and while he was a member of this group, Colin Powell. These are people who have been around for a very, very long time. They're all aligned with the neoconservatives – they're most faithful servants in the case of Rumsfeld and Cheney and the people around them are quite frequently neoconservative. They come from a much older strand of American political ideology.

***Q**: How successful has the iraqi War been in the terms of those who designed it?*

RK: This has been close to an unmitigated catastrophe, even in the judgment of people who are sympathetic to them. They won't say this but I think pretty much everyone recognizes this. The US has not "shocked and awed" anybody except with its own encumbrance and inability to achieve its own objectives. They will not have bases in Iraq. In ten, twelve, or fifteen years, you will look back and ask: "what could have possibly possessed them to think you could use those," in a country that has fought foreign bases for most of the twentieth century. I mean, "What were they thinking"? The US will not have a privileged position vis-à-vis Iraqi oil, and I don't think they will have a client regime at the end of the war. All of those objectives, if those were their objectives, have failed. Now they achieved a bunch of other things that they didn't intend to achieve. They may have dismantled Iraq. They may have created a sectarian civil war in a country that actually wasn't necessarily moving in that direction. Even in a post-Saddam era, it might not have moved in that direction if there hadn't been a decision by the US to dismantle the state and the army and the security force. And they may have unleashed regional dynamics that we're all going to live to rue; in the form of external intervention by local powers to serve to protect, what they perceive, as their vital interests in a weakened Iraq. We're already seeing that with Saudi Arabia, Syria, Iran, and Turkey and I think we will see it with those and others.

***Q:** Given the influence of Iran and the Supreme Islamic Council, the largest Shiite party in Iraq, and its influence in the south and Syria's connection as well. Do you see any possibility for military aggression towards Iran and/or Syria?*

RK: In talks I've been giving recently I have been talking mainly about Iran because there is clearly planning going on involving bases in central Asia, western Afghanistan involving mounting attacks by the mujahideen: a former pawn of Saddam, now a pawn of our government; a group on the terrorist list which is being sent into Iran to carry out attacks. In terms of other things, which made me and others, those who are more expert on this issue than I am, believe that by next summer there was planning at least for some kind of campaign against Iran; probably not an invasion, probably not an occupation because it would be extremely foolish to do that and the forces don't exist. But some kind of systematic air strikes on Iranian nuclear and other facilities. I would say Syria increasingly looks likely to be target one way or another in the last couple of weeks.

***Q:** Because of the Hariri affair?*

RK: No. Because just as in Vietnam these people are unwillingly to accept that the problem is a problem that they have in the country that they're in, so they're blaming it on their favorite country; i.e. "It's Laos and Cambodia; the North Vietnamese are sneaking across the border so we have to invade and attack Laos and Cambodia." If we do it, we're going to attack Syria for

the same reason. There is undoubtedly stuff coming across the border just as there was undoubtedly stuff coming across the Cambodian borders with Vietnam. They seem to be quite moved by this; we'll see… My expectation was that they would try to bring the regime down but there wouldn't actually be attacks. The talk now is that there is strong party agitation for actual strikes against Syria.

Q: *Last question I have for you, perhaps the most depressing one: do you think a Democratic Administration will qualitatively change American policy towards the Middle East?*

RK: I think there is going to be a pendulum swing, irrespective of what happens in 2006 and 2008. I think that at this moment in time, the Democratic Party is, if possible, more spineless and more stupidly pro-war than a large chunk of the Republican Party. The only real opposition in politics you find in organized American politics to some issues around Iraq is in the Republican Party in the Senate…

Q*: Well also the Black Caucus…*

RK: …The Black Caucus and the Republicans in the Senate are about the only people who have had the backbone to stand up to the President. The defeat that [Sen. John] McCain inflicted on Bush over torture in that 90-9 vote was the first time anybody stood up to him since 9-11 politically. [2004 Democratic Presidential nominee John] Kerry rolled-over and played dead on Iraq in fact he did worse then play dead he dug his own grave. At this moment in time any Democratic challenger that I can see, who could come in and who would move the sticks, would change the paradigm. Hurricane Katrina was a moment for somebody to say "the whole approach you've been following, the privatization, the selling off of the government…" This is not just the old liberal philosophy versus something else. This is a moment for paradigmatic reflection. "The whole thing you've been doing is wrong'. Nobody said that, I didn't hear one single radical comment.

There was a lot of wailing and gnashing of teeth and tearing of garments and newsmen and newswomen who stood up to politicians, which was all very invigorating but nothing, nothing, nothing systematic was said in the political process. And the same thing is true about Iraq. Nor the Republican dissidence with the President, even Hagel is criticizing the war, even those who have called for withdrawal. Have said maybe we should think about the whole profile of the US in the world. Do we really need this military? Do really need to have bases in these countries and what ways are securities furthered by this? And what cases is a cause of insecurity. To what extent can the US be a world power without sticking its nose in the domestic politics of 110 countries and having bases in 112 and being all over 85 and so on and so forth. To what extent is all of this being called into question? Not at all, I just don't see anybody doing this, nor the Hagel's or McCain's nor the Hillary Clinton's and others. I think there will be a pendulum swing away from the unilateralism of the Bush Administration. There's no question that the neocon moment is past and the kind of lunacy that was being championed is going out of fashion. The realists are going to take back foreign policy. But the realists have also gotten us into some real messes in the past… It's not like things will be all hunky-dory just because the extraordinary, extraordinary radical swing of the Bush Administration will be corrected by a slight compensation. I'm not that optimistic.

Poetry Section

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Poetry

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SUHEIR HAMMAD

a prayer band

every thing

you ever paid for

you ever worked on

you ever received

every thing

you ever gave away

you ever held on to

you ever forgot about

every single thing is one

of every single thing and all

things are gone

every thing i can think to do

to say i feel

is buoyant

every thing is below water

every thing is eroding

every thing is hungry

there is no thing to eat

there is water every where

and there is no thing clean to drink

the children aren’t talking

the nurses have stopped believing

anyone is coming for us

the parish fire chief will never again tell anyone that help is coming

now is the time of rags

now is the indigo of loss

now is the need for cavalry

new orleans

i fell in love with your fine ass poor boys sweating frying catfish blackened life thick women glossy seasoning bourbon indians beads grit history of races

and losers who still won

new orleans

i dreamt of living lush within your shuttered eyes

a closet of yellow dresses a breeze on my neck

writing poems for do right men and a daughter of refugees

i have known of displacement

and the tides pulling every thing

that could not be carried within

and some of that too

a jamaican man sings

those who can afford to run will run

what about those who can’t

they will have to stay

end of the month tropical depression turned storm

someone whose beloved has drowned

knows what water can do

what water will do to once animated things

a new orleans man pleads

we have to steal from each other to eat

another gun in hand says we will protect what we have

what belongs to us

i have known of fleeing desperate

with children on hips in arms on backs

of house keys strung on necks

of water weighed shoes

disintegrated official papers

leases certificates births deaths taxes

i have known of high ways which lead nowhere

of aches in teeth in heads in hands tied

i have known of women raped by strangers by neighbors

of a hunger in human

i have known of promises to return

to where you come from

but first any bus going any where

tonight the tigris and the mississippi moan

for each other as sisters

full of unnatural things

flooded with predators and prayers

all language bankrupt

how long before hope begins to eat itself?

how many flags must be waved?

when does a man let go of his wife’s hand in order to hold his child?

who says this is not the america they know?

what america do they know?

were the poor people so poor they could not be seen?

were the black people so many they could not be counted?

this is not a charge

this is a conviction

if death levels us all

then life plays favorites

and life it seems is constructed

of budgets contracts deployments of wards

and automobiles of superstition and tourism

and gasoline but mostly insurance

and insurance it seems is only bought

and only with what cannot be carried within

and some of that too

a city of slave bricked streets

a city of chapel rooms

a city of haints

a crescent city

where will the jazz funeral be held?

when will the children talk?

tonight it is the dead

and dying who are left

and those who would rather not

promise themselves they will return

they will be there

after everything is gone

and when the saints come

marching like spring

to save us all

Suheir Hammad is the author of several books, including her latest

collection of poems, *ZaatarDiva* by Cypher (http://www.CypherBooks.com). She

is an original cast member and writer of Russell Simmons Presents Def Poetry Jam on Broadway. Her website is http://www.SuheirHammad.com.

THOMAS SAYERS ELLIS

Groovallegiance

for Michael Veal

A dream. A democracy. A savage liberty.

And yet another anthem and yet another heaven

and yet another party wants you.

Wants you wants you wants you.

Wants you to funk-a-pen funkapuss.

Wants you to anthologize then re-troop your group.

Wants you to recruit prune juice.

My peeps.

My poetics.

My feet.

All one.

All one.

All one, heel and toe.

My peeps.

My poetics.

My feet.

All one.

All one.

All one, lowly heel and toe.

Br’er feet and br’er beat repeatedly beaten.

Repeatedly beaten repeatedly beaten.

Br’er feet and br’er beat repeatedly beaten.

Repeatedly beaten repeatedly beaten repeatedly beaten.

Br’er feet and br’er beat repeatedly beaten.

Feet feet feet.

Every feet a foot and free, every feet a foot and free,

every feet a foot and free.

A foot and free.

Agony and defeat, a foot and free.

A foot and free.

Every feet a foot and free, every feet a foot and free,

every feet a foot and free.

A foot and free.

Agony and defeat, a foot and free.

Feet feet feet

Reverend feet, a foot and free. Reverend feet,

Repeatedly beaten

Feet feet feet.

A million marchers.

Two parties.

One Washington.

One Washington.

Two parties.

A million marchers.

An afterparty.

An afterparty after marching.

The aftermarch.

An aftermarch-afterparty after marching

all the way to Washington.

Another march another party.

Another aftermarch after another afterparty.

After another afterparty after marching.

After another march afterpartying and after marching

all the way to Washington.

Always Washington always Washington.

Uncle Jam, enjambed

all the way to Washington.

After all that marching after all that partying.

Uncle Jam, enjambed.

Always Washington.

A million marchers.

Two parties.

One Washington.

One Washington.

Two parties.

A million marchers.

Footwork.

If feet work for page shouldn’t feet work

for stage, run-on.

Run-on platform.

Run-on floor,

run-on.

If feet work abroad shouldn’t feet work

at home, run-on.

Run blood, run-off.

From run flag.

From run bag,

run-on.

Run and tell it.

Run tell tag run tell toe, run tell, tell it.

De-decorate intelligence.

If so also de-decorate form. If so also de-decorate war,

run home.

In every war bloods leave and bloods bleed

and don’t come home. What for in every war,

what for, and don’t come home.

For war for war for war.

In every war bloods leave and bloods bleed

and don’t come home. What for in every war,

what for, and don’t come home.

For more for more for more.

That for, in every war.

That for, for every drug.

The war on drugs is a war on bloods,

run tell it.

A line is played. A section plays.

All up, into it, and involved, into it into it

and involved, all up into it and involved.

Footnote.

Take joke.

Take note to toes.

Clip note.

Go home.

Take note to foot.

Race note.

Footnote to feet.

Foot hurt.

Footnote to note.

Cite hurt.

Toe note to foot.

Bottoms up.

Sore foot to church.

Stop running.

If office, if oath.

Broken votes.

A line is played. A section plays.

A protest you press to test repeating itself.

A section plays. A line is played.

A protest you press to test repeating itself.

My peeps.

My poetics.

My feet.

Some ally.

Some enemy.

Mostly tradition.

The jive end.

Br'er rear.

Br'er rear end isms.

Pass out the words.

The kitty is not a toy.

Pass out the words.

The kitty is not a toy.

I owe roots and books to groundwork's underground crosstalk

of African Telephone Churches.

All one all one all one, star-spangled funky.

An associate professor of English at Case Western Reserve University (Cleveland, Ohio), **Thomas Sayers Ellis** is a coeditor of *On the Verge: Emerging Poets and Artists* (1993), and a contributing editor of the journal, *Callaloo*. His poem, "Groovallegiance," appears in his recent book *The Maverick Room* (Graywolf Press, 2005, www.graywolfpress.org), and is reprinted here by permission of the author. He is currently compiling and editing *Quotes Community: Notes for Black Poets*.

Lorraine Healy

Where They Were

For Anne Marie Macari

They were in Sweden, in Paris.

In Mexico City. In Venezuela.

The thirty thousand, the however

many had not answered

the latest roll call.

So said the general. The colonels.

Some lieutenants. Even the few

cadets of the Army School I knew.

Gone to Denmark. To Barcelona.

Zipping through Rome in little

scooters. Sending postcards. Asking

their poor mothers for more money.

Who were the mothers in the Plaza?

Covering up for the gone.

Making a wretched, wretched noise.

I went from thirteen to eighteen

eating the white sour bread of lie,

and the way we sang bland rock “n roll

quieted the whispers, kept us

light-blue and innocent.

They were in Lima, crowding Madrid,

smoking *la frula* of Amsterdam,

on the long solitary walk of exile;

alive but skinless with nostalgia,

alive and breathing the rare foreign air.

So said the majors. And the beautiful,

immaculate Navy cadets on deck,

and the police. The news anchormen

tut-tutting the rumors, patting their gilded

hair. Were they homesick, the gone?

And we awoke and were so heavy

with the black-green years. So much mud

to go through, sifting for little things,

an earring, one of the wrist bones, a name.

We had been celibate for the motherland.

There was such a roar instead of singing.

The news came from abroad in empty envelopes.

The full things were the ditches where

the gone were entwined and known only

to themselves and each tangled other.

The cadets wore royal blue crossed

with red silk sashes. They could dance.

Nobody knew how we had come to own

so much hatred. Nobody knew. Nobody.

Nunca supimos nada.

Lorraine Healy is an Argentinean poet and photographer living on Whidbey Island, Washington. She is the author of *The Farthest South* (New American Press, 2003, www.mainstreetrag.com/LHealy.html) and *The Archipelago* (Finishing Line Press, 2005).

STEPHEN PAUL MILLER

From "I'm Trying to Get

My Phony Baloney Ideas about
Metamodernism into a Poem"

I forget

our SeaWorld

discounts.

"We save

30 or 40 dollars."

"So what?"

objects

my 7-yr.-old son,

Noah.

"Money's

a stupid little man

who makes you

buy things."

Post-17th century

modernism

pushes what follows

like a vacuum cleaner

salesman

selling

one

more part,

says Bruno Latour.

We turn and

Noah calls

the highway-

a thin

valley between two

South Californian hills-

“a lowway.”

At the Delmar Hilton, we run into a new doctors’

convention

and I enjoy coffee in a china cup

“Can there be

an invention convention?” asks Noah from

the back seat on the way to SeaWorld.

Greeks say “postmodern.”

to describe

a style

after one

“of the moment,”

-as modern means-

but now

the postmodern

follows

World War II,

so say “post-World War II/modernism.”

Thank you!!!

World War II

globalizes America.

Postmodernism Americanizes

the world.

I’m not

so much

American as

similar to it.

That’s bull.

Noah sees me writing

“invention convention” and says

“anything you say can be a poem.”

Example?

Near three SeaWorld sprinklers

he reads Shamu the Whale’s

cartoon bubble: “Caution, Wet Area.”

In the bathroom Shamu says:

“Caution, Wet Floor.”

“Shamu really cares if

people slip,” jokes Noah. We soak in the sprinklers

though you never know

which sprinkler will squirt.

“We’re always naked,” says Noah,

“You have to grow clothes you can’t take off not to be….

Sprinklers are more enjoyable with shirts on….

Don’t throw away any

of your old T-shirts-

they might fit me.” I’m not so much American

as similar to it, the idea, I mean,

the reports tricking people into coming to North America in the 1620’s

and Iraq in 2003. “I don’t see why they call it SeaWorld, where’s the sea? They should call it

WaterWorld. SeaWorld doesn’t sound good. I don’t

mean the music.I mean the word.”

The sound system plays “Elephants on Parade.”

“Whatever happens to Dumbo’s mother?”

asks Noah, “I forget.”

“Dumbo gets a good job and uses his influence to

bust his mom from jail.” “Oh yeah,” he recalls,

“The stork makes a mistake and delivers

an African elephant with big ears

to an Asian mother.”….

On Ocean Beach I meet Risa, a

seventies friend of a friend,

now an Atlanta social worker vacationing

with her family. Risa’s happy to see me.

“You haven’t changed at all: When I think “Steve

Miller,’ I think “borderline depressed.'”

Why are we in California anyway?

To me California means back to the Garden-

but more immediately I’m here to cheer my son.

Risa tells me her sister has what my wife has

and her nephew Ray thinks Risa’s his mother.

On the highway, I point at a Red Lobster remind Noah

of how Mommy liked going there with us. He doesn’t

want to remember. To cheer him up, I tell the Risa and

Ray story. As we drive to lunch Eric Clapton’s song to

his dead son plays. I tell Noah about it to make him feel

better, and it works. Noah is very critical of Clapton’s

son’s mother as we pass an intricate accident shaving

off a car’s front end. Feeling better, Noah enjoys

pancakes at a Denny’s where the bathroom door says

“MENS.” “It should be “M-E-N-apostrophe-S’ or

“M-A-N’S.’ Hey,” speculates Noah, Maybe, this is

THE MAN’S bathroom.” The urinal mat says “Say

NO to Drugs.” “What does the toilet have to do

with it?” wonders Noah. “Do they want you to

throw your drugs in the toilet?” he asks. I phone

my LA friend Ken Deifik who says he forgot

how articulate the counterculture in *Woodstock*

is until seeing the new director's cut. Whatever
the sixties is it melds natural and human
concerns unlike unions of "human" and
"natural" science
resembling Nazi laboratories and Utopias.
The modern is the nature/human split, says Latour, and
Latour andLatour's right: "We've never been modern,"
meaning modernism's always an illusion-a dynamic
one we can see through but not escape-We're meta-,
not post-, modern. The new contains all. We're between
bad (e.g., Nazi) and good (e.g., sixties) people/nature
distanceless reunions. Noah plays in the playground sand
near the main La Jolla Beach. "Nice warm sand," a kid
says. Ideally, California's public space is everywhere-
even if it's really nowhere. California should be one big
Woodstock. Okay, I know it's maybe the apotheosis of
the suburb, the death of public space, and the
Enlightenment's close, since public space enables
discourse-why suburbs (lacking much publicly owned
common space) and retro Enlightenment Nazis can
blur. But California can be intimate public space
where it's easy to have Noah write my poetry, I
finally see as *Fahrenheit 911* makes you feel though
you thought you already felt.

I should settle for academia not killing me.

Proficide is a crime only recently named.

A downside of tenure is scarcity of senior hires,

tying profs to one plantation, so employers

have a cheap, stable work force

and can only fire professors

by slowly icing them.

The university can be one big

Florida election-overlooking or lying about evidence,

misinterpreting rules, stonewalling, not admitting error

so turning more and more wrong until it's full blown

inhuman torture. Insensitivity turns brutal-they might

see it in Bush but think they've solid rationale that just

feels right, just as Neocons think they don't need to make

sense because they're cool. Sometimes I feel that way but it's weird how my job sort of well…misused…well….They

put me through this amazing 14th Amendment-like role-

reversal-thing where they hit you with *your* best shot.

They think of it as using your weight against you-

flipping you-the way Bush v. Gore uses the right to

vote to take votes from African-Americans, again, like

Groundhog Day, you know, because Florida

has no uniform way to count votes, but then it stops it

from being corrected because never mind.

Similarly, the idea is *for your protection*

they can’t use past application descriptions,

assessments, and judgments of research and

publications *against you* so they say you can’t use

past research and publications *at all* and call

a book as past if you *just* thought of doing it five

years ago, no matter when it’s published,

thus disqualifying you

for their creative indiscretion.

And then when my wife gets sick,

the university human resources dept. backs

the college of conservative arts by denying

me a family leave because they

say my wife’s too sick

and needs care outside the home and hence I’m

not caring for her. Huh? It allows them to, as women

so often experience, wash their hands

of harmless special accommodation for dire needs

and screw up childcare

for the good reason

of them winning.

In another poem I’ll be more specific, I

guess, or, oh, forget it.

They’re just doing

what they’re supposed to do.

I shouldn’t take it so

personal[ly],

but focus instead on

eating pizza on the beach

with Noah

who asks me what I’m thinking.

I lie and substitute my last thought: “1968 and

what would have happened?” “Huh?”

The sun’s

setting in the Pacific

where Bobby Kennedy dies again.

How could he get out of Vietnam?

Johnson, McNamara

et al. already know you can’t win and

they’re not stupid.

But

losing

is off the charts.

To help Noah on a monkey bar

I take my eyes off the white sun

and miss the sunset

yet catch its pink tail.

We drive off

and see Mars and a crescent moon.

There’re no tall

buildings near

so the

ocean/light/sun/west

seem in the same sky

with the south/moon/Mars/night-

like side-by-side stage sets.

Kissinger says if we prolonged the Vietnam war

indefinitely.

the Russians would

have respected us, not gone into Afghanistan,

and presto

no 9/11! Don’t worry,

though. If the best we can do’s

eternal quagmire,

we lose one in Vietnam

to gain one in Iraq.

Noah whines and I tell him to use his

words.

He tells me to use my brains.

We all want credibility.

The problem is Kissinger wants credibility

on being God,

and Bush can’t wait to

spread good

government

when he doesn’t believe

in any government.

But Bobby Kennedy can and will end the war.

We won’t dwell on it

for as long as we actually do-I mean still are.

Noah and I take a long trip by feeling at home. When we fly home

we won’t go anywhere.

In the morning,

Noah builds a “castle-hole”

from a wall

he makes to protect him from water

when he notes the “hole”

can project upwards.

The kids copying him,

he says,

show they like him.

Four bathers pass.

“That’s awesome,” says one.

“You raised him well,”

a college-age woman

wearing a bikini tells me

in a Czech accent.

It’s lucky I get lost

going to the zoo

and stop

at wherever

this beach is.

One reason for a vacation is to be nowhere.

On the hotel radio

we hear about an “international sand castle contest,”

exciting Noah.

He says he wants to build a castle without being

judged,

though, at the very end, he wants to

win.

Noah tells the judges,

two thin middle-aged women writing on pads,

his castle has “special features.”

He alerts them to the charms

inside the castle: “a path to the roof”

and “a tunnel to a hollow room.”

They call all 20 or so (12 and under) kids

onto a stage facing away from the beach

but only acknowledge 3 winners,

leaving the other kids to droop off-stage.

Noah’s castle was the only one with formal integrity.

Though three-dimensional and partially hidden,

it’s of-a-piece

in terms of it sight lines and psychological space.

“The judges know I won,

they keep their judgments

on the inside when they should be outside.”

Then he clarifies

their apparent

incompetence:

“They’re too serious.”

Noah and I have collaborated

on a marvelously imperfect meta-vacation

made of grainy meta-thinking

and to celebrate

JetBlue pleasures us

with snacks,

no meal of course,

but supplement,

nothing but excess.

Blue feeds you like Social Security-

it’s best not to need it.

Bring it on,

they suggest,

and you can eat

watching TV.

There’s no movie

but everyone gets

a television and

their house flies.

Stephen Paul Miller is the author of four books of poetry, including *Skinny Eighth Avenue* (Marsh Hawk Press, 2005, www.marshhawkpress.org), from which this poem has been excerpted and reprinted by permission of the author. A professor of English at St. John’s University in New York City, Miller is also the author of *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (Duke University Press) and coeditor of *The Scene of My Selves: New Work on New York School Poets* (University of Maine’s National Poetry Foundation).

A Sharpening Of The Knives, By Neil Belton

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

Thiscurious new novel is closely fitted to the bare bones knowledge of the actuality of the life of a world-famous mathematician and physicist, and for some years the head of the Institute of Advanced Studies in Dublin: Erwin Schrödinger. For Belton's work is an odd literary amalgamation: deeply thought with some fine writing at times while unfortunately, quite suffocatingly so. There are some drowsy *longueurs* strewn through this novel of both ideas and the senses, set in a single year in the life of a middle-aged Austrian physicist in the dangerous war year of 1941. The place, the time and the characters of the novel are all enticingly unusual, as was the anomalously neutral city of Dublin in the second year of a savage and terrible world war. Neither Belfast (by intent) nor Dublin (by accident) escaped German aerial bombing. The southern Republic even came perilously close to being seized by the British for daring to remain aloof, even if in a pro-British manner.

Schrödinger was an upper middle class Viennese Protestant married to Anny, a young secretary who stayed with him throughout his years of peregrination through Zurich, the Max Planck Institute, Oxford and Dublin. She steadied him and held his hand as he gingerly tried the impossible task of accommodating himself to the ugly powers that be at the time of the Austrian *Anschluss* (in March 1938 when Hitler's storm troopers goose-stepped into Vienna). These glowering, jackbooted thugs scornfully rejected his rather evasive affirmations and he soon became a marked man, despite his relations with such as the Lederhosen-wearing Heidegger and, on the other side, with the physics genius Neils Bohr (the latter the subject of the controversial play *Copenhagen* regarding Werner Heisenberg as well). People who had the single misfortune to correspond with Einstein were all deeply suspect, although as someone who shared a Nobel Prize in 1933, Schrödinger was in the first rank of world physicists-a desirable national asset one might ordinarily imagine.

By the late 1930s Schrödinger's "Wave equation" theory on Quantum Mechanics evidently seemed a tad irrelevant to the Western powers, and certainly to Hitler, so he was very glad to accept the surprise offer of Prime Minister Eamon DeVelera of Eire (Ireland) to head the Institute of Advanced Studies in Dublin. De Velera was always deeply interested in mathematics – almost as much as in bringing to life his political ideal, a Gaelic-speaking pastoral country of small farms and a contented literate peasantry. Perhaps, given the way the rest of the world was shaping up at the time, one ought not smile too broadly at Dev's naiveté. Schrödinger, unable to work under or for the Nazis, eagerly grabbed De Velera's offer to run off to the land of leprechauns, soft rains and peat fires. The miffed Germans were happily left behind along with the toadying Heidegger. This skein of "desertions" left Bohr in Denmark, Einstein at Princeton in America, and Schrödinger in Dublin: all neutral countries at that time.

Among Schrödinger's conditions of acceptance, however, was the stipulated inclusion of his wife Anny, his mistress Hilde and their illegitimate schoolgirl daughter Ruth. It was all cozy and civil, mind you. Hilde is customarily described as Anny's closest friend. DeVelera was perhaps naïve in ways, but he was astute, well-informed and not unaware or always censorious of the weaknesses of his fellow men. The wily politician knew what he was getting: a Nobel Prize winner, a premier physicist whose peccadilloes were, under the circumstances, wholly irrelevant. When later, years after his death, Dev's papers were released, they revealed that he tidily kept his distance not only from various deviousness of Hitler, Churchill and Roosevelt, but also from the Pope. In his 1937 Constitution all the major religions were ecumenically recognized, including the Jews (of whom Leopold Bloom was already probably the most famous fictional Irish example in the world).

Schrödinger settled in a late Victorian terrace house in the Dublin Seaside suburb of Clontarf, which means "the meadow of the bull," a site renowned in Irish history for a battle in 1014 AD when the high king Brian Boru was slain during his epic victory over the meddlesome Vikings. Kincora Road, where the Schrödingers settled, was named after Brian Boru's dynastic seat by Lough Derg, where barefoot pious pilgrims roam to this very microelectronic age day. Did Schrödinger wander by the shore and wonder just what invader was coming next? All these details are facts of Schrödinger's life from 1939 onwards. The raw structure of fact, of course, may be ignored in any novel and indeed the thought, cogitations and emotions rendered here are thoroughly-sometimes egregiously-fictional. The validity of choices to depart from fact depends entirely on the storyteller's skill and purposes.

In this imaginary novel, Schrödinger, arrived in Dublin, is bemused but impressed by lengthy chats with De Velera as well as irritated by the fussiness of elderly senior civil servants. He quickly forms a few local friendships and becomes particularly interested in a fetching young civil servant named Sinead, an intelligent, attractive young virgin who readily surrenders to the Austrian émigré's apparently lifelong need for new, luscious mistresses. She knows what she is doing but doesn't care. Schrödinger prudently keeps her separated from Anny and Hilde but, evidently, due to the cumulative pressures on his psyche from his affairs and his work at the Institute of Advanced studies in its handsome Georgian mansion near the Houses of Parliament (called the Dail), nothing new emerges from the blackboard and chalk-the mathematician's essential apparatus. The endless Irish fog and cold persists.

One evening as he peddles to Clontarf on his bicycle, Schrödinger stops to cross the wooden bridge to the stone causeway that leads to Bull Island, a sand-duned island just off the coast of Clontarf; an abode of migrating birds, an outstretched beach, and a golf links. As the geese honk around him, he spots a stranger with a gun moving past him without a word of greeting. Very odd, for someone brandishing a firearm anywhere in Ireland at the time would have been the subject of much comment. This rude chap turns out to be none other than a German spy called Golz. In reality, a German spy called Goetz parachuted a hundred miles Northwest of Dublin and somehow remained at large for about 18 months, a fact well known to many (See, for example, Enno Stephens' Spies in Ireland.) Many other spies were picked up virtually within minutes of arrival. Schrödinger never met Goetz, although in the novel he confronts him

very publicly, once in a fashionable hotel. The author, drumming up drama, has Schrödinger in constant fear of Golz' lurking presence.

To get back briefly to reality, as a young man I met Schrödinger in Dublin in1941: a golden year of sunshine and one of getting used to half an ounce of tea a week and to coffee made from roasted barley. Beer flowed in fountains, though whiskey was a little short due to understandably overwhelming export demand. Basic food was plentiful enough although bread loaves were smaller and heavier. One day, together with some young woman students from the National College of Art, I was invited by Anny Schrödinger to their home in Clontarf, to a garden, or at any rate, a Summer party, that proved most enjoyable. We made our way from central Dublin by electric tram towards the granite hulk and purple heather of Howth Head. Schrödinger was a charming host, aided by the feminine triumvirate of Anny, Hilde and little Ruth. He even showed me his tapestries; these striking little strips woven on a small loom in the pattern of mathematical formulae were strangely attractive and pinned to several walls like a dado.

Another guest was a middle-aged man, a German-speaker and, apparently, an expert on handwriting analysis. He did some work for Dublin Castle, the Scotland Yard of Ireland. Schrödinger, unable to resist, excused himself a moment and fetched a letter from his study – handwritten. Carefully folding it, exposing three of four apparently innocuous lines, he handed it to the expert. We all waited for the deft evaluation. It came about slowly: time for a glass of claret while waiting. Our handwriting expert's comment was: "Obviously an artist. More likely a musician; flashes of inspiration." Schrödinger bid him to open up the page. The letter was unfolded and passed around. The signature was "Albert Einstein."

On a later occasion, one within the time-span of the novel, I met Schrödinger coming out of the Natural History Museum. He told me that he had been looking at some insects. The significance of this only became apparent to me after his public lectures: "What is Life?" at Trinity College, Dublin University when he used the brief life-span of the fruit fly as a warning of injunction to what he termed the "naïve physicist" who did not appreciate that there were occasional jumps in the pace of evolution My several memorable brushes with this most agreeable Nobel Prize laureate were regrettably brief.

But the sun always shone on those summer days and on the snowy mountains which filled the city skyline to the South. In Belton's novel, set in this part of Schrödinger's Irish sojourn, the wind blew implacably cold and cutting, and the skies were laden with endless and debilitating rain, while Schrödinger carried on an irresponsible affair with a young civil servant, whom he impregnated due to the inferior quality of condoms that were smuggled down from the British (and USA controlled) six counties of Northern Ireland. Yet, like many other students, I equally availed myself of these smuggled condoms and found the quality reasonably secure.

In the novel Schrödinger takes the girl Sinead to the lunar fantasy landscape of the Burren on County Clare for a reckoning. Belton's descriptive writing is good, if a little exhaustive, but while reading it with pleasure I kept feeling that these scenes were pictured entirely through

Belton’s eyes and not those of anyone remotely recognizable as Schrödinger. The story ends on a bleak note. Life, of course, goes on. The pregnant girl faces unhappy prospects but immigrates to Blitz-torn England with admirable nerve. And Schrödinger is finally left like Uncle Vanya, alone in the wintry house except for Anny, his aging Penelope, to dream of quantum mechanics and bright young women to fill his heart and warm his bed. Whether *A Game with Sharpened Knives* is a novel in the strict sense, or not, I am unsure. It is certainly worth testing your own judgment on it.

***Desmond MacNamara**, author of five books, is a retired sculptor, writer and art historian who lives in London. His latest novel,* Confessions of an Irish Werewolf, *will be brought out in November by Ushba International Publishers.*

The Myth Of Zionism, By John Rose

By | 2005: Vol. 4, No. 4

John Rose's *The Myths of Zionism* (2004) is a long overdue book fearlessly examining the strategic, historical and ideological roots of the Arab-Israeli conflict, a true *tour de force*. Most books on this fraught subject tend either to be inquiries into the international forces behind the conflict, devoid of historical depth, or else are reportorial accounts with scant regard for how political interests reshape history for their own geo-strategic purposes. *The Myths of Zion* expertly transcends that customary divide Moreover, it manages to be a work of impeccable scholarship while remaining highly accessible to a lay audience. Still, to fully appreciate Rose, I encourage readers to familiarize themselves with the earlier works, such as Gösta W. Ahlström's *Who Were the Israelites?* and Geoffrey Wheatcroft's *The Controversy of Zion*, which likewise challenged potent myths underlying the Zionist project.

Going these fine predecessors one better, Rose takes a multidimensional approach, treating tough controversies in Palestine history from Zionist, non-Zionist Jewish, academic and Arab perspectives. After explicating the mischievous role the imperial powers (mostly the US and UK) played in the Palestinian debacle, Rose delves into the historical record to dispels the notion of the supposed passivity and developmental stasis of Palestine under Ottoman rule, a view sadly and unnecessarily conceded by erstwhile Arab modernizers. Orientalist fictions like this hoary one played utterly into the hands of Zionism.

Rose's multi-perspective approach tends to yield the lesson that everyone is to blame for the Palestinian imbroglio, though to widely varying degrees. The chief culprits, in descending order of culpability, are the Zionists, British imperialists, US neo-imperialists, secular Arab nationalists who did not do enough to integrate Jews, and undemocratic Arab regimes content to exploit the Zionist threat to bolster their fragile legitimacy. As critical as he is of Arabs, Rose lacerates especially Britain and France for fomenting needless divisions between Jews and Arabs. He sets the record straight ' or, at least, somewhat straighter – as to the place of the Jews in Arab-Islamic history, challenging the very categories of 'Jew' and 'Arab,' and fusing them into a Judaeo-Arabic Islamic whole. Rose uses this 'recovered' past as a template for the future, for clues as to how to overcome the current Arab/Jewish antagonisms.

Rose's treatment of Muslims-Jewish relations in the heyday of Islam is particularly illuminating, not just for debunking the 'everybody is out to get us' view of history that Zionists favor but also for its conceptual clarity and lucid style. When things did go awry in Jewish-Arab relations under Islam, it resulted from widespread bad times and affected only certain locales, e.g., Cairo versus impervious Alexandria. He astutely notes that law in Islamic history is personal and not territorial, in contrast to the opposite convention in European *and* modern history. The modern secular state is not the only solution to ethnic or creedal divisions, he implies.

The matter of gizyah, taxes levied on non-Muslims, still suffers from many misunderstandings. Gizyah is an exemption from military duty, which is why it was levied only on able bodied men. More important, it was never a 'poll tax.' In early Islamic history the rich paid proportionately more than the poor. The very poor, slaves and the homeless paid nothing, as did religious institutions. If the gizyah system later was perverted by cash-strapped Caliphs to fund their wars and palaces, tapping the surplus of the high merchant class, that is another matter completely.

Rose steers well clear of any conspiracy theories, though he may have taken this skepticism a tad too far in the case of the pro-Zionist lobby in the US. It would have been better to acknowledge their significant, if not insuperable, influence, particularly in the media and on Capitol Hill. The lobby turned devoutly Zionist only after the six-day war when Israel's obvious geopolitical utility to the US would bolster their domestic position too, so that their patriotism need never be questioned. After the Cold War there is also the strange fact that a new source of the Zionist lobby's power is its weird and expeditious collaboration with the virulently anti-Semitic Christian fundamentalists.

This said, the book is a much-needed corrective especially for Arab readers brought up on a jaundiced version of what exactly went on behind the scenes of the notorious Balfour Declaration and Sikes-Picot agreement. To Wheatcroft's excellent earlier account, Rose adds documentation of the role that Zionist Jews played in shaping British plans, first against the interests of the Arabs, and then against their own French co-conspirators. Rose's capacity to tie disparate historical threads cogently together is a major scholarly feat. Moreover, he opens new avenues for research, discovering more than even he may have bargained for. Most notably, he stumbled into the neglected aspect of the psychological drives behind Zionism, exemplified by father of the Israeli Republic, David Ben-Gurion, who styled the Zionist project in religious terms and saw himself, despite his profound agnosticism, as the de facto Messiah, savior and redeemer of the Jewish people.

Rose sees this behavior as more of the inveterate mythmaking of Zionism – the exploitation of historical fictions in the naked service of a political project. Yet I think it is only part of the story. What we witness here is a classic symptom of nationalist and revolutionary politics, endemic in undemocratic regimes ranging from Hitler's Germany to Stalin's Russia to Nasser's Egypt. The leader is seen to be, and sees himself to be, as the embodiment of the national will, the nation's dreams and aspirations. Ben-Gurion was the closest thing to a dictator Israel experienced. If Megalomania is a factor, one can reconsider just how serious the Zionist project was in its own terms. Given Theodore Herzl's emotional problems as well, could it be that the Zionists have been taken for a ride by ambitious leaders hungry for a constituency to rule? If so, we might appeal to the democratic ideals of Zionist- and non-Zionist Israelis alike to be very wary of the high costs of such a regressive ideology.

This megalomaniacal strain is evident in the non-Zionist motivations of America's Jewish neo-conservatives too. There is no direct link between Leo Strauss' atheistic exploitation of religion, a "noble lie" to gull the masses, and the religious dogmatism of the Zionists (except for

dogmatism itself). If by their actions ye shall know them, the neo-cons are as concerned about China as they are about political Islam. They are just as preoccupied with America's internal politics and culture as they are with foreign policy. Their very Jewishness drives them to be more American than Americans, launching the US on democratic crusades abroad because they genuinely believe that is what America is all about. I am somewhat unhappy that Rose overlooked what I think is one of the most valuable political economy studies of the Arab-Israeli conflict: fellow Pluto Press contributors Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler's *The Global Political Economy of Israel* ' a work going to the dark heart of the interface between Israeli politics and America's power structure. But, even so, my enthusiastic advice is to read them all ' Rose, Nitzan and Bichler and Ahlström and Wheatcroft.

Norman Finkelstein's Beyond Chutzpah: On The Misuse Of Anti-semitism And The Abuse Of History

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Most of the controversy surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict is, in my view, contrived. The purpose of contriving such controversy is transparently political: to deflect attention from, or distort, the actual documentary record. One can speak of, basically three sources of artificial disagreement: (1) mystification of the conflict's roots, (2) invocation of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust ("ideological instrumentalization of the event, the Nazi Holocaust), and (3) on a different plane, the vast proliferation of sheer fraud on the subject (Beyond Chutzpah: The Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History 7).

"The purpose of Beyond Chutzpah is to lift the veil of contrived controversy shrouding the Israel-Palestine conflict" (18).

The publication of Norman Finkelstein's *Beyond Chutzpah: The Misuse of Anti-Semitism and the Abuse of History*-the much-awaited sequel to his controversial *The Holocaust Industry: The Exploitation of Jewish Suffering*-represents a curious moment in U.S. intellectual history. The main title of the book, "Beyond Chutzpah," is a play on the title of Alan Dershowitz's bestselling book, *Chutzpah*-a reference to the Yiddish term which means to be pushy or assertive ("assertive insistence on first-class status among our peers" (*Chutzpah* 9) . To go "beyond chutzpah," then, is to enter a realm of absolutism, intolerance, and fanatical devotion where criticism lodged against someone who has gone beyond chutzpah, even when it is well-warranted, can not be heard because of blind faith in something or someone and a belief in one's own goodness-a clear reference to philosemitic doctrine in its protection and promotion of Jews and Jewish interests (footnote 1). *Beyond Chutzpah* is a curious book because of the remarkable circumstances preceding its publication, with Alan Dershowitz, the author of *The Case for Israel* (a focal point of sharp criticism in *Beyond Chutzpah*), a self-professed civil libertarian who teaches at Harvard Law School, waging an unprecedented campaign against the University of California Press to block the printing and distribution of the book.

How often does one write a letter to the governor of a state enlisting his help in preventing the publication of a samizdat publication, which has received the imprimatur of a prestigious university's editorial board and the thumbs up from six internationally recognized experts on the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict? Well, that is exactly what Dershowitz did when he wrote a "friendly note" to California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger last May seeking the Terminator's help in separating UC Press from the lies of "an academic hitman" and "full-time malicious defamer." In addition, Dershowitz bombarded UC press with call after call and letter

after letter throughout the spring and summer in a clear intimidation effort, intimating that he would sue the press if certain libelous accusations-that he did not write and perhaps did not even read *The Case for Israel*-were not removed. While these accusations were relatively minor in comparison to Dershowitz's gross ignorance of the diplomatic and historical record about the conflict, the essence of the debate became embroiled around minutiae pertaining to correct citation protocols.

While claiming that his real intention was never to block publication of the book, "I want it to be published so that it will be demolished in the court of public opinion," Dershowitz clearly sought to create a situation where any press entertaining the publication of *Beyond Chutzpah* would be placed in the crosshairs of potentially lengthy and ruinous litigation. Dershowitz wrote to Colin Robinson, an editor at the New Press, which initially expressed an interest in publishing *Beyond Chutzpah*, about supposed inaccuracies in the manuscript. Dershowitz claimed that upon receiving this letter New Press dropped the book. Not true according to Robinson, who pointed out that it was Finkelstein who withdrew from the contract, using an "opt out" clause, when it became clear that Dershowitz's letters, inquiries, and legal threats would delay publication. As Lynne Withey, UC executive press director, noted in the midst of the controversy "He doesn't want the book published." As Dershowitz stated in one of his many pubic diatribes, "It is shocking that a university press would hide behind academic freedom in defending its decision to publish such trash by an author of such low scholarly repute." It is somewhat surprising that Dershowitz would argue this point since Finkelstein is a well-respected, Princeton trained, political scientist with several internationally recognized books to his credit. This is not about academic freedom," Dershowitz continued,"-"the University of California Press is free to publish whatever it chooses. It is about academic standards. Plainly, the University of California Press's decision to publish Finkelstein's drivel was influenced largely by sympathy for his radical ideology" (http://www.law.harvard.edu/faculty/dershowitz/statement.html). Not since the days of Stalin has a devotee, committed to upholding the party line, acted with such discipline toward a holy state. In Dershowitz's case, the holy state is Israel. In *Beyond Chutzpah*, Finkelstein goes into minute detail, leaving no stone unturned, while documenting the bizarre cost discipleship to a holy state extracts from its adherents.

Beyond Chutzpah is basically divided into three main parts. The first part examines the rise of the "new anti-Semitism" as a political weapon employed by U.S. supporters of Israel that accomplishes three basic goals: a) detracts from the historical and diplomatic record, which confirms that Israel has never been interested in having peace with its Arab neighbors (particularly the PLO), and in fact has been fearful of a cessation of conflict and hostilities which would put in a place a comprehensive settlement that has been supported by an international consensus for thirty-eight years but its implementation has been blocked by the U.S and Israel; b) creates controversy where no real controversy exists to confuse and obfuscate the conflict's roots, i.e. Israel's systematic ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza from the beginning of Zionism's entry into Palestine; and c) employs holocaust imagery and rhetoric which casts Jews, not Palestinian Arabs, as the victims at the present historical moment-suggesting that Israel, as a haven for all Jews in the

event of another holocaust, must be defended at all costs no matter how indefensible its behavior.

The second part of the book, and perhaps the most important, focuses on the Israeli government's thirty-eight year commitment to implementing ethnic cleansing policies and apartheid practices against Palestinian Arabs in the form of torture, targeted assassination, the use of Palestinian civilians as human shields, administrative detention, home demolition, illegal seizures of land and water aquifers, and the unequal application of the law. As Ze'ev Schiff, a celebrated Israeli military correspondent, has confirmed, Israel as a matter of policy has long targeted the Palestinian civilian population-in fact, the IDF has drawn no distinction between Palestinian combatants and Palestinian civilians. Much of the evidence for this claim can be found in the writings and diaries of Moshe Sharett, Moshe Dayan, and Ben-Gurion. Using the findings of mainstream human rights organizations such as Amnesty International, B'tselem (an Israeli organization), Human Rights Watch, as well as Palestinian human rights organizations, Finkelstein in six tightly-argued chapters provides a near point-by-point demolition of Dershowitz's *The Case for Israel*; revealing that there truly is very little quality control regulating the production of "scholarship" about the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict in the United States. Otherwise, how could *The Case for Israel* have been showered with so much praise by U.S. cultural elites when it is so at odds with what is found in the writings of Israeli prime ministers, military historians, and scholars? (footnote 2).

The third part of *Beyond Chutzpah* contains the appendixes documenting that Dershowitz lifts material from Peters' *From Time Immemorial* without proper attribution in his *The Case for Israel* (see: http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/article.php?pg=11&ar=1); misrepresents the history of the conflict and recent "diplomatic efforts" such as Sadat's offer of peace in 1971 and the Camp David meeting between Clinton, Barak, and Arafat in 2000; and badly distorts the positions of his key nemesis, Noam Chomsky, who has favored a resolution of the conflict according to the international consensus. Now, Dershowitz claims Chomsky's thirty-eight year position as his own, while portraying Chomsky as an "extremist" for rejecting what Dershowitz says he has supported all along-a two-state solution. Twenty-two of the fifty-five footnotes in the first two chapters of *The Case for Israel* come from *Time Immemorial*, although Dershowitz cites the primary sources and the page numbers that Peters lists, as if Dershowitz actually checked the original documents. Anyone who checks the original sources can see that Dershowitz simply reproduces Peters' research as his own-often with comical results. In advanced page proofs of *The Case for Israel* it is clear for all to see that Deshowitz directed his research assistant, Holly Beth Billington, to cite various obscure nineteenth century sources back to the primary sources instead of to *From Time Immemorial* where he originally found them. It's clear that Dershowitz did not check the primary sources when, for example, he cites the 1996 edition of Mark Twain's *Innocents Abroad*. Here is the citation as provided in *The Case for Israel*: "Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 485, 508, 520, 607-608." These pages, which Dershowitz lists as coming from this edition, correspond to the pages of the 1881 edition that Peters relied upon. This discrepancy is corrected, along with all the other twenty-one other misattributions Finkelstein highlights, in the paperback edition (footnote 3).

Despite all the contrived controversy, Finkelstein claims that the Israel-Palestine conflict-at least within serious scholarly treatments-is fairly straight forward from the standpoint of the historical record (footnote 4). Unsurprisingly, as those who are familiar with Finkelstein's previous books surely know, *Beyond Chutzpah,* in describing the sad state of affairs governing discussion of the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict is very, very funny-relentless in its documentation of how morally and intellectually bankrupt what Finkelstein calls the Holocaust Industry has become in shielding Israel against critical discussion, while also unsparing in noting the cruel irony that pro-Zionist Jews are no longer perceived as the world's greatest victims, but because of their privileged status as an ethnic group and Israel's ruthless assault on international law, the world's most coddled apologists for state violence. Indeed, as Finkelstein has spent much of his adult life demonstrating, the Holocaust Industry actively fears that the Holocaust, Israel, and the conflict will become objects of a rational discussion. As Finkelstein's rigorous and tightly argued polemic proves, Israel's apologists, in an attempt to obfuscate the roots and real grievances within the conflict, employ the charge of anti-Semitism to remove from the playing field anyone who questions the legitimacy of Israel's right to exist as an apartheid state with no declared borders and which seeks to impose unheard of measures upon its Arab neighbors under the mantra of "security needs"; the U.S.-Israel special relationship; and Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. Unfortunately, these very important points often got lost in the midst of Finkelstein's public feuds with Dershowitz.

The public spectacle began nearly two years ago when Finkelstein squared off in a debate about *The Case for Israel* on Amy Goodman's *Democracy Now*. During that debate, Finkelstein vowed to provide documentation, which would disprove Dershowitz's insistence that he was the target of a simple ad hominem and bigoted attack, alleging that The Case for Israel was "a fraud concocted from another fraud": a reference to Joan Peters' From Time Immemorial which sought to prove, in the words of Golda Meir, that there are in fact "no Palestinians." As Finkelstein recounts in the book's introduction, he reached a personal milestone in the course of writing *Beyond Chutzpah*. Nearly twenty years earlier, he came upon Peters *From Time Immemorial*, a book that sought, in light of Israel's public relations disaster in Lebanon, to shore up the faith among the Zionist faithful by insisting that Palestinians do not and have never had a valid moral, diplomatic, or legal claim about land dispossession against Israel. In fact, in Peters' world, the Palestinian claims of injustice and dispossession were manufactured to advance the political objectives of the Arab states against Israel. Finkelstein's decision to publicly expose *From Time Immemorial* as a "threadbare hoax" was a definite turning point in his life and academic career. Indeed, as Finkelstein reflects in the book's first few pages, his work has since that time been in one way or another been connected to the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict.

Finkelstein has long been known as an intellectual who shatters favored pieties, and as a result, often faces extraordinary barriers in reaching a mass audience. As a Jew and the son of Holocaust survivors, Finkelstein has been battling the U.S. Zionist establishment in one way or another since the since his parent's passing. He has in many ways been preparing to write this book, a slaughter-house of sacred cows if you will, for the last twenty-five years. *Beyond Chutzpah* is one of those rare books that has the potential to change the very nature of the

debate about the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict because of its unstinting devotion to seemingly long-lost intellectual ideals such as truth, intellectual honesty, integrity, the historical record and a willingness to go where others refuse to go in crying out "J'accuse" against the powerful-even when doing so will lead to your ostracism and perpetual underemployment (footnote 5).

Finkelstein's most devastating indictment, however, is not necessarily of Alan Dershowitz; instead, he goes much further, exposing much of the U.S. intellectual culture and the cultural institutions within the United States which have actively conspired in blocking an accurate rendering of the historical and diplomatic record on the U.S.-Israel-Palestine conflict. I suspect Mario Cuomo and Henry Louis Gates Jr., who both provided gushing praise for *The Case for Israel*, will now be asked "Did you really read the book, and if so, do you really understand what's at stake in this conflict?"

> *The point, of course, is not that Dershowitz is a charlatan. Rather, it's the systematic institutional bias that allow for books like The Case for Israel to become national best sellers. Were it not for Dershowitz's Harvard pedigree, the praise heaped on this book by Mario Cuomo, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Elie Wiesel, and Floyd Abrams, the favorable notice in media outlets like the New York Times and Boston Globe, and so on, The Case for Israel would have had the same shelf life of a publication of the Flat-Earth society (17; emphasis in original).*

If often seem that much of academic life revolves around moving people away from commonsense understanding, with the insistence that the world is more complex than it seems on first impression. But when the straight-forward analysis is often more accurate than the complex one, particularly with respect to a miserable state of affairs, one must then wonder what is gained by the hand-wringing, polite evasion, and obfuscation. Attempts to evade accountability, when ofte Such is often the case when evaluating the Israeli government's criminal behavior, the deployment of the so-called new anti-Semitism, and the U.S. intellectual community's seeming steadfast commitment to avoiding its complicity in crimes of state. Indeed, one gets the sense that education often pushes individuals to shut down their ability to connect with average beings. Through his conception of the differend, for example, the postmodern dandy, Jean Francois Lyotard, sought to definitively prove the existence of the Nazi gas chambers, despite the fact that the people who manned them and those who passed through them are long gone. How, Lyotard seems to ask, do we obtain justice for those who can no longer speak for themselves, or for those who have no access to this thing called "justice" through the dominant discourse? How can the powerless ever obtain justice? No one has yet to use Lyotard's questions, nor his concept of the differend, to explain how a Palestinian might prove that he was in fact dispossessed of his land, his livelihood and his dignity and how he lives under occupation in the face of the daunting obstacle of ever locating a critical idiom which would allow him to convince a U.S. audience that he has in fact suffered an injustice.

It's long been recognized, within the humanities disciplines of the academy, for example, that to speak of such entities as "facts," "the historical record," "scholarly consensus," and-heaven forbid-"truth," is to make oneself vulnerable to the charge of being a simpleton. After all, interpretative or discourse communities determine what is "truth" based on agreement. Even when faced with the painful task of owning up to gruesome realities, invocations of such academic mainstays as the "social construction of truth," "postmodern geographies," and "the radically perspectival and indeterminate nature of language," the utter simplicity of some phenomena in the world continue to defy the academic intelligentsia, particularly in the United States. While we often smirk when we hear the phrases "intellectual honesty" and "intellectual integrity," because the powerful don't have to subscribe to these norms, often-figures such as Dershowitz-blatantly flout them, leaving members of the common herd aghast when, in the defiance of all available evidence, Israel can be described as the main proponent of peace in its ongoing removal of the Palestinians from what will soon be a greater Israel. Just as he described what he termed "the Holocaust Industry," in a book of that title, creating a distinction between the holocaust (the historical event) and the Holocaust (the ideological creation carefully nurtured by Israel's apologists to immunize the Israeli government against the international community's condemnation of the occupation of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza). Finkelstein alleges that there's anti-Semitism, a age-old form of prejudice directed against Jews that any decent person would be opposed to and dedicate their life fighting against, and then there's "anti-Semitism"-the latter being an ideologically serviceable mystery religion which accrues considerable benefits for the Israeli government in its oppression of the Palestinians. Finkelstein goes even further, claiming that the new anti-Semitism ends up coddling Zionist Jews, particularly American Zionist Jews, protecting them from much-deserved scrutiny in their toadying for special dispensations as oppressed "chosen people," while in fact being the most privileged ethnic group in the United States. As he writes:

> *Legitimate questions can surely be posed regarding when and if Jews are acting as people who happen to be Jewish or acting "as Jews," and, on the latter occasions (which plainly do arise), regarding the actual breadth and limits of this "Jewish power," but these questions can only be answered empirically, not a priori with politically correct formulae. To foreclose inquiry on this topic as anti Semitic is, intentionally or not, to shield Jews from legitimate scrutiny of their uses and abuses of formidable power (83).*

Finkelstein determines that Abraham Foxman, Elie Wiesel, Daniel Goldgagen, Israel Singer, Edgar Bronfman, Alan Dershowitz, and a whole host of others-who Finkelstein derisively labels as "the Holocaust Industry"-have been running a lucrative extortion racket with the sole aim of shielding Israel from worldwide scrutiny as it continues an all-out assault with the United States on international law. In various ways, throughout *Beyond Chutzpah*, Finkelstein demonstrates that the very logic behind the charge of "the new anti-Semitism" falls apart when it is subjected to elementary rationality. It is, according to Chesler's *The New Anti-Semitism*, anti-Semitic to associate all Jews with Israel ["Anyone who does not distinguish between Jews

and the Jewish state is an anti-Semite"], but by Chesler's lights it is also anti-Semitic not to do so ["American and Diaspora Jews" must understand that "Israel is our heart and soul…we are family" (her emphasis)] (qtd. in *Beyond Chutzpah*, 82). The charge of anti-Semitism, and the concomitant fear of being labeled an anti-Semite, has led too many people to stop thinking for themselves; relying instead upon necessary political results instead of serious analysis. If the charge of anti- Semitism can be used so widely, to thrash anyone who challenges so-called "Jewish interests,"-which usually means one has dared to criticize "Israeli policies"-what in fact has been constructed but a new form of totalitarianism? This is, in fact, Finkelstein's larger question: when will the hysteria and madness-which parade as serious argument-stop and rationality set in within this discussion about Israel-Palestine, where the baldest clichés parade as serious argument?

As Finkelstein explains, each time the Israeli government faces a public-relations disaster usually in the form of international condemnation for its military exploits, as it did after the '82 Lebanon War and in light of the Sabra and Chatila massacre, which Israeli troops oversaw, or as it did during the First and Second Intifada, a new alarm is raised about anti-Semitism being on the rise. A more fundamental question arises in this context: How is it that the anti-Semitism of the Nazis has been transferred to the Palestinians of the occupied territories? This transfer is a part of Zionism's deal, which is rarely problematized. This facile transfer represents one of the Holocaust Industry's greatest triumphs and requires a good deal of historical reckoning. A lachrymose narrative has been accepted as "standard history," whereby the hatred that Palestinians direct toward Jewish occupiers must be understood through the lens of anti-Semitism. As Joseph Massad points out:

> *While much of Israel's violence is "explained" by the pre-Israel status of European Jews, Palestinian violence is also viewed hermeneutically through the status of those same Jews, the status of the Palestinians as products of their own separate history being deemed irrelevant. After all, "[t]he only history is white." Israel's actions, however, are believed to stem from the status of those Jews who arrived on the shores of Palestine after fleeing the Nazi regime and the holocaust, only to be confronted by another violence anti-Semitic campaign, this time by Palestinian Arabs and Arabs from neighboring countries intent on expelling them from their last and only haven. Thus, Israel's violence, regrettable as it may be, is in effect viewed as self-defensive in nature. In the same vein, Palestinian violence, which was/is in self-defense against foreign invaders, is also "explained" out of context as part of this anti-Semitic campaign against Jewish refugees. All discourse involving Palestinians and Israel has been and continues to be situated within the bounds of these hermeneutical axioms-whereby, among other qualifiers, Jews are always refugees fleeing the holocaust when, in fact, they need to be viewed in the context of two separate histories and discourses ("The Persistence of the Palestinian Question," Cultural Critique, Fall 2004, 98).*

Unfortunately since Israel's triumph against "Third World upstart" General Abdel Nasser in the Six-Day War, the historical record has been so polluted by Holocaust propaganda, propaganda meant to highlight Jewish suffering to the exclusion of the suffering of other ethnic groups, that any critical discussion of Israel has been a near impossibility. Finkelstein lays the vital ground for a rational discussion about Israel, the U.S.-Israel special relationship, and Israel's thirty-eight years of oppression against the Palestinians. To these ends, Finkelstein turns his critical insights toward showing that there's nothing new about the "new anti-Semitism," highlighting that there is a clear correlation between when the anti-Semitism alarm is rung and the propaganda needs of Israel's U.S. apologists; who must deploy a continual stream of agitprop against anyone or anything seeking to present a clear-eyed understanding of what Noam Chomsky has called the "international consensus"-a reference to the fact that the United States and Israel have been actively blocking resolution of the conflict through military and diplomatic coercion. In polite circles, this is called the "peace process," an Orwellian term which distorts the very real techniques of domination and control through which the United States and Israel blocked serious attempts at obtaining peace in the Middle East, i.e., a not out-of-the-ordinary display of the power of the doctrinal system and the fanatic racism of articulate Western elites. In brief, the U.S government provides the ideological, military, and diplomatic cover for Israel's occupation and its steady stream of human rights violations in the occupied territories. That, in fact, according to Finkelstein is what the new anti-Semitism is all about-a desperate ploy to bury Israeli and U.S. war crimes.

The facts on the Israel-Palestine are fairly straightforward, all Holocaust Industry propaganda to the side. Once one understands that the founding of Israel had little to do with the holocaust, but instead that the holocaust was seized upon by Zionists to found a state ["As the suffering of DPs was used as a bargaining chip in the struggle against immigration quotas imposed by the British, who controlled Palestine until the state was established, a Jew immigrating to the West was one less suffering Jew knocking on Palestine's doors. The migration of Jews to places other than Palestine was thus discouraged, sometimes even blocked by force. Attempts to evacuate child survivors to England and France immediately after Liberation in 1945 were thus thwarted, on Ben-Gurion's explicit instructions" (Grozinsky 12)]; that the vast majority of holocaust survivors-who sought to come to the U.S. but were blocked from doing so by Zionists in Palestine-were coerced into immigrating to nowhere but Palestine, in Yosef Grodzinsky's words as "good human material" (footnote 6) ; that to describe Palestinian hatred of occupiers of Palestinian land as an expression of "anti-Semitic sentiment," because those occupiers are Jewish, is inexplicable; and that anti-Semitism is not an irrational, uniform, and ageless parasite that infects non-Jews but is instead a context-specific form of ethnic discrimination that has arisen throughout history just as other forms of ethnic discrimination have; then the typical Leon Uris *Exodus* history becomes quite untenable in light of the historical evidence. As Grodinsky states, "migration to Palestine was highly encouraged, sometimes even achieved by coercion. The Zionists were able to force an agenda because they had a coherent plan, and they were organized" (12).

To justify Israel's "ethnic cleansing" of the Palestinian population from the West Bank and Gaza, Israel's apologists have had to sustain an untenable ideological juggling act, keeping

several balls in the air with a great deal of continual effort. Below, I identify those balls in the Holocaust Industry's juggling act through Finkelstein's *Beyond Chutzpah*:
*The Holocaust uniqueness thesis, which states that Nazi genocide and the death of six million Jews cannot be compared to other mass slaughters because Jews are unique, allows Israel to function as a "crazy state" (a term of art within the international relations literature that suggests how a country can blackmail the international community with promises of cataclysmic violence if crossed or denied military or diplomatic support) ;
* Anti-Semitism is irrational and eternal, consequently there can never be a justifiable expression of animus toward Zionist Jews, no matter how revolting and morally reprehensible Israeli actions (which are the actions of a state claiming it is "the national home of the Jewish people");
* Zionist Jews can not be condemned because everything Jews do, according to philosemitic doctrine, is beyond reproach;
* To reproach Zionist Jews in their support of Israel is to traffic in unsavory anti-Semitic stereotypes;
* According to Holocaust Industry dogma, Israel, as the homeland of the Jewish people, is always justified in what it does-no matter how horrific the consequences may be for another people;
* Israel is a democracy even though its right of return only applies to Jews and is governed by racist landholding laws;
* Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and until recently, Gaza, were justified by security measures against terrorism and apparent biblical warrant-despite being in contravention of international law, particularly U.N. Resolution 242, which requires Israel to withdraw to its June 1967 borders with minor territorial judgments;
* Despite the uniform judgments of the leading human rights organizations in the world that Israel employs torture against Palestinian detainees, uses illegal administrative detention, and the illegally demolishes Palestinian homes in occupied territory, Israel's apologists seek to undermine international law because it does not conform to Israel's or the United States' wishes for the Middle East region;
* Israel can be described as a model democracy because it maintains a respect for the rule of law which no other country in the world facing similar threats has.
Did the end of the Jewish Question only create the Question of Palestine?
In its dogged exposure of corrupt cultural institutions and the elites who serve them, along with its in-depth analysis of Alan Dershowitz's blatant distortions in The Case for Israel, Beyond Chutzpah convincingly demonstrates-that when it comes to discussing, covering, and unashamedly misrepresenting the specific facts of the Israel-Palestine conflict-U.S. cultural elites are in a league of their own. As Finkelstein explains, *Beyond Chutzpah*'s "substantive aim is to use *The Case for Israel* as a peg to explore crucial aspects of the Israel-Palestine conflict" (94).

> *If truth and justice are the most potent weapons in the arsenal of the oppressed, the manifold reports of these human rights organizations are the most underutilized resource for a just resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict. It appears that they are*

> *rarely read and almost never cited. And it is mainly because these uniquely authoritative publications lie around collecting dust that apologists can propagate so much mythology about Israel human rights record. Were their findings widely disseminated, Israel's occupation would clearly be morally indefensible (94).*

In this sense, *Beyond Chutzpah* goes where few have dared to go before: to the real source of the problem-pro-Zionist Jewish-American abuse of power in supporting Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. Finkelstein intrepidly asks Do American Zionist Jews, qua Jews, use their ethnic privilege to advance Israel's morally-bankrupt agenda toward increased militarization in its ethnic cleansing of the Palestinians and annexation of the West Bank? If the voting behavior of the U.S. Congress is any indication, the answer is obviously "yes". However, Israel serves strategic interests for the United States in blocking the growth of Arab nationalism and the greatly feared Pan-Arab movement; it can't obviously be described as just an object of pro-Zionist Jewish American devotion. Israel, in some sense, occupies a central place in the U.S. imagination in its aspirations to be a beacon of light in the wilderness. To push the point even further, Israel and the United States are one.

When the historical record reveals that the PLO and the Arab states have overwhelmingly been in favor of peace in the meaningful sense, giving up nearly sixty percent of historic Palestine while repeatedly recognizing Israel's legitimacy-and that Israel and the United States fear a resolution of the conflict according to the international consensus-one then gains some insight into the devastatingly true old bromide, "The strong write history." One thinks of Chomsky's comment after 9/11: "It is a serious analytical error to believe that terrorism is a weapon of the weak. It is overwhelmingly a weapon of the strong. The strong control the doctrinal systems and their terror doesn't count as terror" (MIT talk, October 2001). As an example, consider the failure of the Camp David talks between Clinton, Arafat, and Barak in 2000. The media blamed Arafat for turning down a deal of a lifetime), when in fact he was presented with a deal no Palestinian leader could possibly have accepted. (described as "a Palestinian state consisting of 85% of the West Bank" The West Bank would have been divided up into three or four cantons subject to nearly complete Israeli control, with hundred of Israeli checkpoint-along with Jewish-only bypass roads crisscrossing through and containing the Palestinian population within a Bantustan, a throwback to the days of the South African ruling minority, who sought to enforce apartheid through remote control by recruiting a member of the indigenous population to police his brethren. In this sense, as Finkelstein pointed out a previous book (*Image and Reality in the Israel-Palestine Conflict*), Arafat was being recruited to become another Butalezi (xxvii).

Under the Camp David II agreement, the Palestinians would have exercised no control over West Bank or Gaza checkpoints or airspace, and would not have had access to the most precious resource in the area-water aquifers. If anything, the Camp David offer simply would have made Israeli control over the West Bank and Gaza more efficient, essentially placing the Palestinians within an Israeli matrix of control. Palestinian national symbols such as a flag, postage stamps, and national holidays would have meant little without genuine national autonomy. As Israeli ambassador to the United States, Dore Gold, once quipped "If the

Palestinians want to call what we give them a state, fine; they can call it "chopped chicken" for all we care-as long as we control it." The U.S. media's presentation of what the Palestinians were actually offered at Camp David represents an astonishing example of how crucial information about the conflict is crafted, distorted, and packaged for public consumption. Given the level of manipulation involved, it is fair to say that the U.S. media and intellectual culture have foisted a troubling set of misunderstandings upon the general public, which will undoubtedly have far-reaching implications for the region in the months to come.

Nonetheless, one must wonder whether not Finkelstein-in this book of nearly three hundred and twenty pages-merely proves a truism: power politics determines the rules and the discourses through which to apprehend reality, even when those rules and discourses defy elementary logic, downright commonsense, and the never-read findings of Amnesty International, B'Tselem, and Human Rights Watch. While there has been international condemnation of the Israeli government's illegal occupation and oppression of the Palestinians in West Bank and Gaza for nearly thirty-eight years, this occupation and oppression has continued because Israel is militarily and diplomatically supported by its superpower patron, the United States. U.S. and Israeli elites have found it more than worthwhile to ignore the moral and legal prohibitions condeming the "ethnic cleansing" (there is no more accurate phrase) of the Palestinians, while cashing in on the benefits of a desperate and crippling *Realpolitick*.

Finkelstein's thorough descriptions of the all-out absurdity of the so-called "new anti-Semitism"-described in such books as Foxman's *Never Again?*, Chesler's *The New Anti-Semitism*, Schoenfeld's *The Return of Anti-Semitism*, and the vast majority of the contributions to Ron Rosenbaum's *Those Who Forget*-proves the seeming inanity of confronting the powerful in their desperation to avoid accountability and looking into the faces of their victims. Despite the international consensus on the illegality of Israel's occupation, and the widespread anti-Arab sentiment that exists worldwide, the likes of Foxman, Chesler, Schoenfeld, and most of the contributors to the Rosenbaum collection, attempt the more-than-slightly-difficult task of turning reality on its head: Jews are victims not perpetrators; Israel is vulnerable; the Arab world's resistance and anger toward Israel can only be blamed on an inexplicable anti-Semitism; anyone who disagrees with us is an anti-Semite; we'll devour our one-time close allies, such as Leon Wieseltier (*The New Republic* editor) for not adequately towing the party line-proving, as Finkelstein notes, how the revolution can indeed devour its children when the party and that party line are thrown into jeopardy (*Beyond Chutzpah* 40). It is probably fair to say that the likes of Foxman, Chesler, and Schoenfeld, and Dershowitz because they are so busy toadying for Israel while warning of the new anti-Semitism, would not have the intellectual honesty to deal with real anti-Semitism-primarily their own. The label "anti-Semite," if it is to remain coherent and remain true to its historical roots, should also apply to those who claim that Israel speaks on behalf of all Jews, particularly diaspora Jewry. Zionism clearly does not speak for world Jewry, and it never has. As Finkelstein notes,

[t]his is a direct throwback to the darkest days of Stalinism, when those criticizing

> *the Soviet regime were, by virtue of this fact alone, branded "objective" abettors of fascism, and dealt with accordingly.. One day it's the uniqueness and universality of theological absolutism; the next day it's the uniqueness and universality of the Holocaust. The constant is the totalitarian cast of mind, and attendant stigmatizing of dissent as a disease that must be wiped out by the state (Beyond Chutzpah 49; emphasis mine).*

Sadly, Finkelstein's historical analogy is deadly in its accuracy, providing a refreshing glimpse into the standards governing U.S. intellectual life. In his most recent book, *The Case for Peace*, Dershowitz claims that he seeks to expose those extremists who are more Israeli than the Israelis and more Palestinian than the Palestinians. That Alan Dershowitz has posed as an objective party, employing the discourse of reason, factuality, and legitimacy to foist a extremely problematic and troubling text such as *The Case for Israel* upon the public requires extended reflection among those claiming to inhabit a moral universe. As Finkelstein points out in the *Beyond Chutzpah*'s conclusion, Alan Dershowitz doesn't make the case for Israel; he in fact lays the ground for its destruction with his advocacy for torture against Palestinians, condemnation of the Israeli peace movement, the International Solidarity Movement, and those fighting to broaden civil liberties in Israel.

Notes:

1. Dershowitz writes: "American Jews need more chutzpah. Notwithstanding the stereotype we are not pushy or assertive enough for our own good and for the good of our more vulnerable brothers and sisters in other parts of the world" (Chutzpah 1).

2. See Ze'ev Shiff's *Israel's Lebanon War* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984) and *A History of the Israeli Army: 1874 to the Present*. (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Benny Morris's *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987) and *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 2003).

3. One of the most intriguing of Dershowitz's gaffes, the Felix Frankfurter Professor's reference to George Orwell's "turnspeak" in two separate instances in *The Case for Israel*, has yet to be properly explained. Orwell coined the phrase "Newspeak"; "turnspeak"-"the cynical inverting of facts"-was coined by Peters in *From Time Immemorial*. In a letter to New Press editor, Colin Robinson, Dershowitz admitted that he attributed the phrase "turnspeak" to Huxley. How did Huxley get introduced into this melee?

4. My postmodernist friends will have to excuse me for using this phrase, "the historical record," in this context. As it turns out, it is an a useful phrase, one repeatedly employed by historians and serious political analysts.

5. Consider Noam Chomsky's powerful reflection in *Towards a New Cold War*:
To put it in the simplest terms, a talented young journalist or a student aiming for a scholarly career can choose to play the game by the rules, with the prospect of advancement to a

position of prestige and privilege and sometimes even a degree of power; or to pursue an independent path, with the likelihood of a minor post as a police reporter or in a community college, exclusion from major journals, vilification and abuse, or driving a taxi cab. Given such choices, the end result is not very surprising. Few options are open to isolated individuals in a basically depoliticized society lacking popular organizations that question the legitimacy of existing structures of domination and control, state or private (14-15).

6. See Yosef Grodsinky's *In the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Struggle between Jews and Zionists*. Monroe: Common Courage Press, 2004.

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The Lost One: A Life Of Peter Lorre,by Stephen D. Youngkin

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Iconic actor Peter Lorre once was described fondly as a rococo cherub gone slightly astray, but as Youngkins 613 page opus shows, this extremely talented man strayed very far indeed from his astonishingly accomplished theatrical beginnings propelled by the rise of Nazism, a World War, fickle Hollywood, and a witch hunt, to name but a few of the distractions that his biographer enumerates. Born Laszlo Lowenstein in Hungary in 1904, Lorre doubtless remains one of the singular film figures of the 20th Century. There was never anyone quite like him and as he immodestly pointed out toward the end of his wildly eventful life: There wont be anyone like me when Im gone. He was right.

Escaping his conservative Jewish family roots, the ambitious young man was clerking in a Viennese bank when he appeared in his first play, though according to legend, he had yet even to see one. Enjoying a success *destime* in Vienna during the early 1920s, he departed for the happier hunting ground for major roles in Berlin, where he was absorbed into the remarkable work circle around playwright Bertolt Brecht. Lorre began a life-long friendship with Brecht, who instantly tapped him for the lead in *Mann ist Mann* (1931) and though the play itself was panned at the time, Lorre gave a striking performance that Brecht, not one to gush, never tired of praising.

A canny student of acting, Brecht had begun as a critic and drew his theoretical ideas from the work of Laughton, Valentin, Chaplin, Wedekind and Lorre. Lorre was a great physical actor and a master at what Brecht termed gestus gestures that define, clarify, and advance a role. Brechtian actors reveal humans making hard social and political choices, and eschew overly emotional performances: what Brecht termed the emotional drug trade. (Brecht liked to point out that Hitler had learned his rhetorical style from the stalls.) Brechts dramaturgy insists that people are never one thing but composed of many traits; some developed, others less so. Lorre, who easily charmed an audience one minute and terrified it the next, offered a vivid incarnation of Brecht’s ideas.

In 1931 Fritz Lang cast Lorre as the repellent child killer lead in his landmark film M, and with this, his second film appearance, Lorre suddenly became an international star. Lorre, as Lang asserted, delivered one of the finest film performances ever, yet one that haunted and daunted the actor for the rest of his career. Lorre, in a sense, never recovered from this great early success. This sinister role was to typecast him and thus to hinder his artistic development. Youngkin plausibly suggests that it may have planted the seeds that destroyed him.

Lorre’s politics were of the “fellow traveler” variety. He was never a Party member. Artist’s like

Brecht and Lorre were frequently asked “not to join the Party,” the reason being that a Party membership would have diminished their publicity value. Prompted by Hitlers ascent to power and an otherwise admirably high spot on the Gestapos hit list, Lorre immigrated to Hollywood in 1934. Hollywood was where glitzy film parts the finest actors from the stage, homogenizes their language and style, and reduces their professional lives to a train of serial ingratiation with moguls and media. Lorres role in M had made him eminently employable so he signed as a contract player and began his long forced march through the ever-deepening mire of a studio system he came to detest.

Lorres first years in la-la land were spent among the refugee German-speaking intelligentsia; for many of whom exile was a personal disaster. Unable to master English, severed from their rich culture, and denied employment, many illustrious refugees sank slowly to penury. His old mentor Brecht, driven across Europe by Hitlers expanding Reich, joined Lorre in 1941.

Lorre, however, had a chameleon knack of giving people what they wanted. So he took to American life with all the gleeful desperation of a man reprieved from the gallows. He married three times, and each of his wives was cast as caretaker by an alcoholic and drug addicted prima donna. Stars invariably functionalize the people around them: a driver; a cook; confidantes; the current wife and inevitably a mistress. It all resembled a small-time Borgia court around a swimming pool.

The actor admitted to a dark sideand indeed, traded on it but Youngkin, perhaps wisely, tiptoes around racy anecdotal material on Lorres sexual kinks and rumored underworld ties. Yet, unquestionably, the man inspired great devotion. His first wife Celia Lovsky, a favorite of the Austrian wit Karl Kraus, gave up her own career for Lorre, and then after the breakup of their own marriage, she supervised his later marriagesbefriending and caring for her successorsand later made of her own plush home a shrine to his memory.

Lorres domestic life was marred by serial philandering and a psyche so precarious that it required Celias micro-management. Incapable of saving money, he spent freely. His hectic, lavish life prompted one actor friend to remark: The links of our chains are forged not of cruelties, but of our luxuries. He was constantly in and out of rehab. It is sometimes irksome to behold Lorres pampered poolside torment in the midst of Never Never Land while tens of millions are dying from disease, starvation, and a Nazi war machine he narrowly escaped. Brecht, who served seven miserable years in what he called the Hell of the easy-going, describes Lorres situation in his poem “The Swamp”:

I saw many friends
And the friend I loved most
Among them helplessly sunk
Into the swamp
I pass by daily.
And a drowning was not over in a single morning.
This made it more terrible.

And the memory of our long talks about the swamp
Which already held so many powerless.
Now I watched him leaning back
Covered with leeches in the shimmering,
Softly moving slime,
Upon the sinking face
The ghastly blissful smile.

By 1948 Brecht was interrogated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and, like many Leftist refugees, hounded out of the country. Despite his close association with Brecht, Lorre was never persecuted, though there were people who denounced him. He eluded HUAC by going to Europe to make a film.

Eager to build a company in Berlins Russian Zone, Brecht begged Lorre to join him. Brecht, who considered Lorre the finest reader of prose and poetry in the German language, had planned a Lorre Hamlet – an extraordinarily tantalizing prospect, no matter how it turned out. They also planned to perform The Good Soldier Schweik, which Lorre was born to play (and a work from which the young Brecht had drawn his outwardly cynical attitude and verbal style). Lorre, like Charles Laughton, believed that Brecht was the new Shakespeare, but the collaboration they both devoutly wished, alas, never came to pass. Lorre, apart from his addictions, was already in poor health by the time that Brecht had established himself in Berlin.

By the early 1950s the Hollywood studio system that kept him in relative luxury, under pressure of courts and television, was dissolving into competitive cut-throat independent companies. Desperate to repeat his success with M, Lorre returned to Germany in 1951 to direct and star in The Lost One, but the production foundered due to his drug problem and growing megalomania. Lorre, the brilliant Brechtian paragon, plummeted in a single decade from Hustons brilliant Maltese Falcon cast (Bogart, Greenstreet, Lorre, and Mary Astor), which set a standard for ensemble play, to the wastelands of B movie back lots and Roger Cormans no frills epics.

By the early 1960s Lorre was lucky to be re-cycled with Boris Karloff, Bela Lugoisi, and Lon Chaney Jr. in kitschy horror films. Production standards plummeted: the work was fast, dirty and ill-paid. Lorre became lost in reveries of days with Bogart, Brecht, and a life in the theatre he had abandoned. Tragically, Lorre couldnt reconcile the responsibilities that Brecht insisted were the lot of a great artist, with his own desire for personal comfort and adulation. His health failing, his third marriage ending, unable to remember his lines, and victim to an “Industry” which makes his 1930s films seem like Renaissance dreams, he visited his brother in Europe and, before departing, lamented: ” I have to return to latrine duty.”

In March 1964 Lorre died of a massive stroke. His friend Vincent Price, after a rabbis prayer, delivered the eulogy. Bankrupt, Lorre left no will. Yet his death spawned a roaring Lorre industry: his unique mannerisms, vocal and facial tics became the mimicked basis for hundreds

of TV and radio shows, cartoons, commercials, and feature films. At the end, Lorre called himself, deprecatingly, a “face maker,” forgetting to add, its a face you never forget.

Mr. Youngkin’s prose can wobble at times, but his life of Lorre is a monumental piece of research and sheds new light on a career that has too long been ignored and undervalued. The Brecht connection alone makes this an extraordinary piece of scholarship. We are indebted to the author.

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