

Commentary

January 2000

American Power—For What?

A Symposium

Elliott Abrams • William F. Buckley, Jr. • Eliot A. Cohen

Francis Fukuyama • Frank J. Gaffney, Jr. • Owen Harries • Jacob Heilbrunn

Robert Kagan • Zalmay Khalilzad • Jeane J. Kirkpatrick

Charles Krauthammer • William Kristol • Michael Ledeen • Edward N. Luttwak

Walter A. McDougall • Joshua Muravchik • Joseph S. Nye, Jr.

David Rieff • Peter W. Rodman • Robert W. Tucker • Paul Wolfowitz

The Birthday Party

Avner Holtzman

Art, Excrement, and “Sensation”

Steven C. Munson

Jazz Masterpieces: A Finale

Terry Teachout

Edward Said’s Fabrications: An Exchange

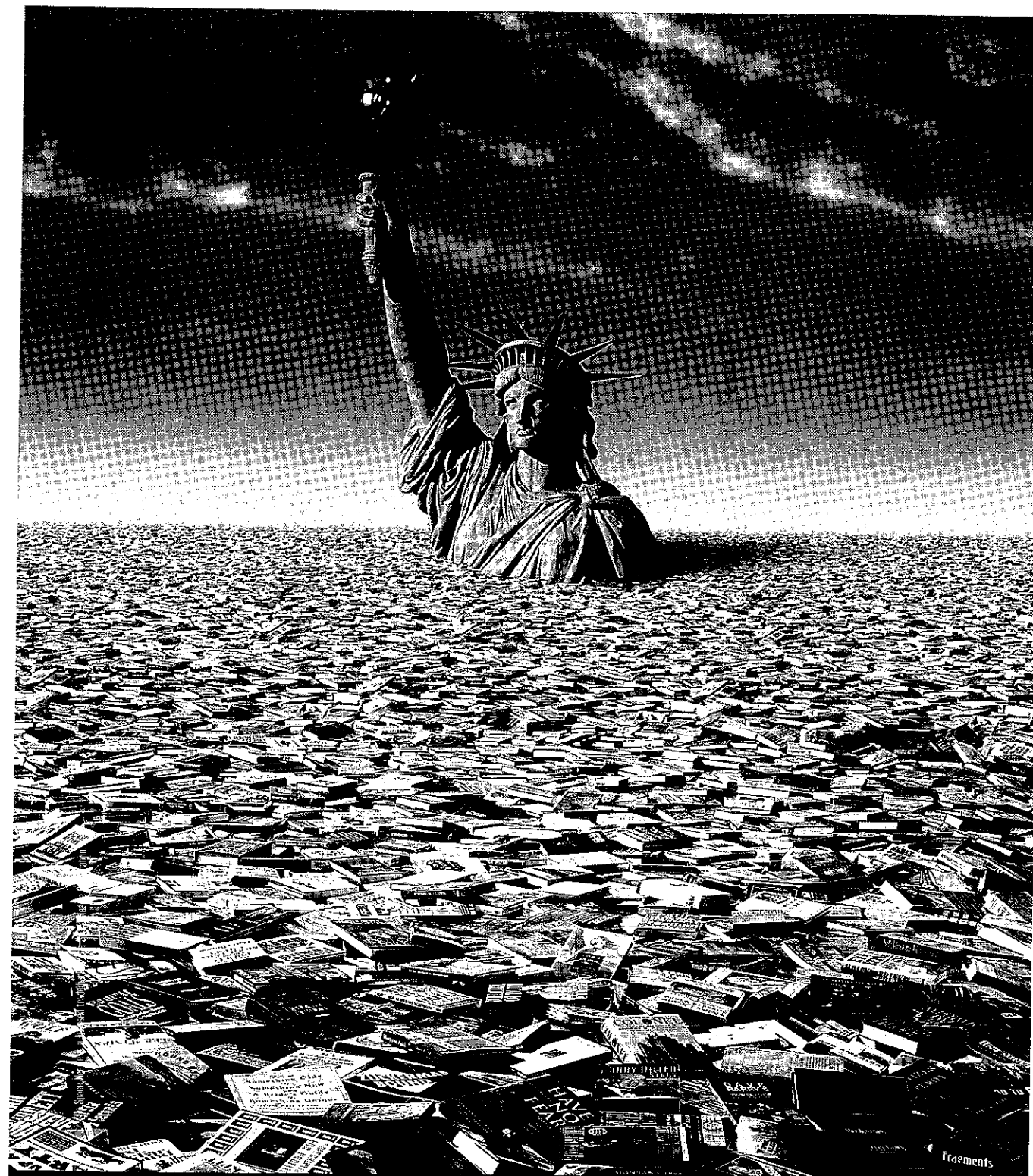
Justus Reid Weiner and Critics

Books in Review

Paul Johnson • Algis Valiunas • Mark Goldblatt

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Vol. 109 • January 2000 • No. 1

A SYMPOSIUM

21

American Power—For What?

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 21 <i>Elliott Abrams</i> | 30 <i>Robert Kagan</i> | 39 <i>Walter A. McDougall</i> |
| 23 <i>William F. Buckley, Jr.</i> | 32 <i>Zalmay Khalilzad</i> | 40 <i>Joshua Muravchik</i> |
| 24 <i>Eliot A. Cohen</i> | 33 <i>Jeane J. Kirkpatrick</i> | 41 <i>Joseph S. Nye, Jr.</i> |
| 25 <i>Francis Fukuyama</i> | 34 <i>Charles Krauthammer</i> | 43 <i>David Rieff</i> |
| 26 <i>Frank J. Gaffney, Jr.</i> | 35 <i>William Kristol</i> | 44 <i>Peter W. Rodman</i> |
| 28 <i>Owen Harries</i> | 36 <i>Michael Ledeen</i> | 45 <i>Robert W. Tucker</i> |
| 29 <i>Jacob Heilbrunn</i> | 37 <i>Edward N. Luttwak</i> | 46 <i>Paul Wolfowitz</i> |

ARTICLE

48

The Birthday Party *Avner Holtzman*
A 1937 photograph starts memories of a pitiless age.

MUSIC

55

Jazz Masterpieces: A Finale *Terry Teachout*
A canon of enduringly remarkable works is here brought to a close, with thoughts on what it all means.

ART

61

The Monotony of "Sensation" *Steven C. Munson*
Forty years of postmodernism have all but obliterated the distinction between art and kitsch.

LETTERS

3

Edward Said's fabrications; the Republicans; World War I.

BOOKS

- 66 *One Nation, Two Cultures* by Gertrude Himmelfarb *Paul Johnson*
68 *The Great Poems of the Bible* by James L. Kugel *Algis Valiunas*
71 *The Schools Our Children Deserve* by Alfie Cohen *Mark Goldblatt*
74 *Empires of the Sand* by Efraim Karsh and Inari Karsh *Daniel Pipes*
77 *The Quest for Cosmic Justice* by Thomas Sowell *Arch Puddington*
-

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American Jewish
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 Bruce M. Ramer,
President

Letters from Readers

Edward Said's
 Fabrications

TO THE EDITOR:

Justus Reid Weiner's "My Beautiful Old House" and Other Fabrications by Edward Said" [September 1999], largely a collage of petty and irrelevant calumny, has a clearly political and ideological motive, namely, the neutralization of one of the most important and credible advocates of Palestinian rights at a most critical time in the unfolding peace process. The article also has a broader objective, which is, as Edward Said himself has noted, "discrediting . . . Palestinian claims to return and compensation."

Mr. Weiner's main argument comes down to this: if Edward Said's nuclear family maintained its major domicile in Cairo rather than Jerusalem, then Said is not a Palestinian refugee. This reveals more about Mr. Weiner's prejudices than it does about the complica-

tions of a cosmopolitan identity: for Said's family to have maintained affiliations in both Cairo and Jerusalem need be no more surprising or improbable than it would be for a Jewish American to maintain citizenship and identity in both the U.S. and Israel.

If Mr. Weiner's research were as meticulous and credible as he would have us believe, it is odd that he learned only recently—"after completing the manuscript of [my] article"—about the publication of Said's memoir of his early life, *Out of Place*. Could Mr. Weiner, having spent the last three years researching Said, honestly not have known that this book was coming out? As Christopher Hitchens pointed out in an article in the *Nation*, Said's memoir was commissioned in 1989 and begun in 1994. Moreover, the fact that Said was working on a memoir was mentioned in scores of publications such as the *Columbia Record* and the *Lon-*

don Review of Books. Mr. Weiner himself cites the article in the *London Review*, thus making his professed ignorance of the impending publication of the memoir even more ridiculous.

Mr. Weiner suggests that Said wrote his memoir in order to "camouflage and backfill" his previous statements regarding his youth, and thus to protect himself from Mr. Weiner's findings. Nobody else seems to agree. Said's book has so far received favorable reviews from respected journals and newspapers. Furthermore, people familiar with his work and life story do not see the alleged contradiction between his current account and his earlier ones (see Hitchens in the *Nation*, Israeli dissident Israel Shahak, quoted by Julian Borger in the [London] *Guardian*, and Said's former classmate Haig Boyadjian quoted in *Counterpunch*). Many others have disputed Mr. Weiner's account in articles and letters to the editor.

Indeed, several quotations from Said's own work—apparently disregarded by Mr. Weiner—show that he has never made conflicting claims about his family's residence in Jerusalem or denied that his family spent considerable time in Egypt. What is equally plausible is that Mr. Weiner, who once worked at Israel's Ministry of Justice apologizing for Israeli human-rights violations, caught wind of Said's project and sought a commission to discredit it. Why else would someone pay an inconspicuous scribe to spend three years searching for dirt on a prominent Palestinian thinker?

Other omissions, mistakes, and prejudiced comments in Mr. Weiner's article are too numerous to mention, but we will cite a few brief examples to illustrate the degree to which Mr. Weiner is biased. He describes the Institute for Palestine Studies as a "pro-PLO think tank" (hardly the case); he contends that the

legal procedure for claiming compensation and reparations in Israel is "simplicity itself" (questionable); he asks why Said has "not lifted a finger to secure the financial restitution due him" (as Said has noted, his family did try to obtain compensation and redress, but was denied; efforts became futile after the promulgation of the 1950 absentee-property law). And, as Said has written (in *Al-Abram*), Mr. Weiner commits a series of further factual errors and (perhaps intentional) oversights such as failing to note that Said's mother held a Palestinian passport and misidentifying Boulos Said, Wadie Said's cousin, as Edward's uncle.

More significant and striking, however, is the ar-

ticle's clear intention of discrediting Palestinian grievances stemming from the 1948 war, and of promoting what has become a common and highly dishonest litany of right-wing Zionism: that a great number of Palestinian nationalists have harbored

myth-driven passions that have animated the revanchist program . . . whose expanding political ambitions often seem . . . permanently unsusceptible of being satisfied through the normal processes of politics.

Notice the words and phrases Mr. Weiner uses: animated, myth-driven passions, revanchist, expanding, permanently unsusceptible. The logic is that Pales-

tinian nationalism is somehow abnormal and that Palestinians have no one but themselves to blame for their plight. For example, Mr. Weiner's assertion that "the war of 1948 was instigated not by Israel but by the Palestinian-Arab leadership, which launched hostilities against the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine after refusing to accept the UN partition resolution" is familiar Zionist boilerplate that seeks to obscure the complexity of the events of the time with a well-placed verb: to say that hostilities were "launched" is to imply that there were none before the Arabs initiated them, an interpretation clearly not supported by the historical record, and which has been challenged even in Israel it-

self (note the recent decision in Israel to use history textbooks that present the Palestinian "side of the story").

Thus, Mr. Weiner's attack on Edward Said is not only an attempt to discredit a leading intellectual and humanist but also part of an unceasing right-wing Zionist program to reinterpret selectively and dishonestly the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. In our view, it is not Said's work but rather Mr. Weiner's article that emerges as a contrivance of "deception and outright obfuscations carefully tailored to strengthen [a] wider ideological agenda."

MARWAN D. HANANIA
FREDERICK M. HOYT
*Cornell University
Ithaca, New York*

TO THE EDITOR:

We are a group of New York-based American Jews and Arab-Americans who founded the Arab-Jewish Peace Group to promote a just resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. We are writing to express our dismay at the article by Justus Reid Weiner claiming that the renowned, Jerusalem-born Palestinian literary critic Edward Said "fabricated" much of his life story.

The article, engaging one of the Palestinians' most articulate spokesmen in a minute-by-minute justification of the first twelve years of his life, is simply wrong on one important point after another, as Edward Said himself has already shown in the weekly edition of *Al-Abram*, where each one of Mr. Weiner's allegations is addressed and refuted, as well as in his newly published memoir, *Out of Place*, where he describes in vivid detail his

early life in Jerusalem, Cairo, and Beirut.

Claims like Mr. Weiner's hurt the Palestinians in the same way that revisionist historians who try to deny the Holocaust hurt the Jewish people. This not only hinders the peace process but also the reconciliation that must take place for the survival and healing of both peoples.

In recent years, Edward Said has "advocated the acknowledgment by each other of the Palestinian and Jewish peoples' past sufferings" as a means toward peaceful coexistence; he himself has taken Arab musicians on a tour of Buchenwald. Indeed, his insistence on reconciliation through learning the history of mutual suffering is a point he makes about all ethnic conflicts. His is the kind of courage on which peace in the Middle East will be built. It will not be built on denial of the facts regarding Edward Said or the rest of the Palestinian people.

AMMIEL ALCALAY,
professor

ESTHER COHEN,
labor organizer

ADEEB R. FADIL,
attorney

ZIVA FLAMHAFT,
educator and author

NADIA HIJAB,
author

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executive

SHERYL MILLER,
media producer

LEILA RICHARDS, MD

JEANINE SHAMA,
former banker

JILL STRAUSS,
activist

PETER WEISS,
attorney

*The Arab-Jewish Peace Group
New York City*

TO THE EDITOR:

Now that Justus Reid Weiner's assertions about Edward Said's life and origins have been found inaccurate, does COMMENTARY have any plans to issue a formal apology or clarification? And now that the "parable of 1948" seems to be factually borne out in Said's life, would Mr. Weiner consider extrapolating it to the entire Palestinian people?

I am referring to his last few paragraphs, where he makes a connection between Said's purported lie and "the myth-driven passions that have animated the revanchist program of so many Palestinian nationalists." If Said's lie would condemn the entire corpus of Palestinian nationalists, would the fact that it is not a lie persuade Mr. Weiner

that the passions of the Palestinians stem from genuine personal suffering?

RAZA MIR
*West Long Branch,
New Jersey*

TO THE EDITOR:

COMMENTARY should be ashamed of publishing Justus Reid Weiner's nasty, hypocritical, and morally corrupt piece on Edward Said. This is not scholarship, but sophistry of the basest sort and only contributes to the deceit that enshrouds Palestinian and Israeli disputes.

KEITH GALLAGHER
Watsonville, California

TO THE EDITOR:

It is clear that Justus Reid Weiner's intent in his cheap smear campaign against Edward Said is to make the details of one man's life the

central issue rather than the clearly documented history of forced emigration of Palestinians from what is now Israel. Mr. Weiner's attack is, in fact, very similar to the recent attack on Rigoberta Menchu in which her accusers focused on minor discrepancies in her biography to dismiss the very real history of the military's mass murder of indigenous peoples in Guatemala.

As a Jew and an intellectual, I cannot fathom how a Jewish publication could sponsor such an attack, which denies the history of an oppressed people systematically subject to exile, torture, murder, and the loss of civil rights. Such denials sound a little too familiar to Jewish ears.

KENNETH J. SALTMAN
*DePaul University
Chicago, Illinois*



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TO THE EDITOR:

For the indoctrinated reader and the extremist believer, Justus Reid Weiner's article may seem to speak clearly and truthfully (which means that Mr. Weiner has mostly succeeded—bravo!), but to any rational-minded, clear-thinking person whose views are guided by a basic desire for peace and brotherhood, it is another heart-breaking example of propaganda and deceit.

STEPHEN BERGER
Venice, California

TO THE EDITOR:

I am sure that Justus Reid Weiner did his homework, as he maintains, but I am concerned about any claim we Jews have on the land of Israel that rests on the veracity of one or more of our opponents. Regardless of whether Edward Said is a man of honor or whether he has fabricated a past in order to legitimize his role as Palestinian spokesman, the Jews have to be able to make a legal and historic claim (not to mention a religious one) to the land.

DAVID A. HORTON
Columbia, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

Edward Said's oft-told tale of his Jerusalem boyhood, lost home, and agony of dispossession is now revealed by Justus Reid Weiner as a self-constructed myth of forced exile, to put it most charitably. Surely it was designed by Said to lend credence to his continuing recital of the heartless cruelties that Israel inflicted upon the Palestinian people by forcibly driving them from their homeland. Who, therefore, could ask for a more poetically just rebuke to Said than Mr. Weiner's discovery that it

was Martin Buber who was expelled from his Jerusalem home by the Said family, or that the Nasser revolution in Egypt, not the struggle for Jewish statehood, inflicted upon the Said family its most grievous deprivation of property?

What, if not guilt, was the source of Said's contrived identity? Here his newly published memoir, *Out of Place*, is quite instructive. His father, born in Jerusalem, left Palestine in 1911 for the United States, where he became an American citizen and lived for ten years, thereafter claiming that America was "his country." Returning to Jerusalem in 1920, he moved to Cairo in 1929. There he lived and there he conducted his business.

Although many members of Said's extended family lived in Palestine, his parents' identity was anything but Palestinian. Indeed, his father, we are told, "never much liked the place." With a luxurious home and lucrative business in Cairo, and with three-month vacations in Lebanon virtually every summer, it is hardly surprising that Jerusalem was a place for the Suids to visit during "off-and-on sojourns."

If his memoir clarifies anything, it is that young Edward and his parents, all born in Palestine but in no other discernible respect "Palestinian," lived prosperously as wandering Arabs, never at home anywhere, but invariably returning to their "native environments" in Cairo and Lebanon. Palestine hardly was, as Said still claims, the place "I grew up in."

Said has now lived in the United States, one more place that is not home, for nearly 50 years. It was here, burdened by "the unsettled sense of many identities"

and "the deeply disorganized state of my real history and origins," that he reinvented himself as a Palestinian. The rest is not only history, but, as Mr. Weiner convincingly demonstrates, duplicity.

JEROLD S. AUERBACH
Wellesley College
Wellesley, Massachusetts

TO THE EDITOR:

Justus Reid Weiner tells us that Edward Said invented a home in Jerusalem. I would like to suggest that this phenomenon may be more common among Palestinians than the one example given by Mr. Weiner. If my conjecture is correct, we may conclude that the Palestinians' yearning for the past, real or imagined, is so deep-seated emotionally as to make sense of Said's invention.

I have owned a house in West Jerusalem, in a neighborhood known as Neve Bezalet, since the late 60's. One fall morning in the early 70's, I found an Arab man at my door. He was well-dressed, spoke English though with an accent, and was accompanied by two teenagers, who spoke good American English. The man, in his late 40's, said he would like to show his children the house he grew up in.

I was dumbfounded. My house is in a neighborhood that never had Arab homeowners or even lodgers. Before purchasing and restoring it, I had traced its ownership back to 1910, when it was built. There had been only one family there before me, and it was definitely Jewish.

At a loss, I invited the man and his two children to come in; he showed them the house, explaining the function of each room before, he said, he had been forced to leave.

Very strange! Most of the house did not exist in 1948. When I purchased the property, the original floor space was 500 square feet in all and now it is 1,800 square feet. Originally there were two rooms on one level and now there are seven rooms on two-and-a-half levels.

The man was polite and graceful, and his children listened in rapt attention to his "history." I was amazed at the detail in his descriptions of rooms that were not there in his time.

The experience was unsettling but now—in light of Said's similar invention—I find it easier to accept.

ROBERT WERMAN
Hebrew University
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

Let me add to Justus Reid Weiner's fine exposé. Edward Said has claimed (in an interview quoted by Mr. Weiner) that in 1947 his family was forced to flee its home in the Talbieh section of Jerusalem by "a Jewish-forces sound truck warn[ing] Arabs to leave the neighborhood." I too lived in Talbieh in 1947 and can report that this allegation is totally untrue.

At that time and throughout the entire year of 1948 I was an editor of the *Palestine Post* in Jerusalem. From September 1947 until May 1948, when my wife and I were compelled by constant Arab sniping and shelling to leave the neighborhood, we resided in a ground-floor apartment on what is now Hovevei Zion Street in the heart of Talbieh.

Our landlord was a fine Arab physician named Dr. Jamal. He lived around the corner and was the first to visit me after I was hurt in the car-bombing of the *Post* on February 1, 1948. During

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the bitter winter of 1947-48, when our supplies were cut off by Arab forces who laid siege to the Jewish area of Jerusalem, he supplemented our meager food with fresh eggs and vegetables from Arab markets, and refused to take compensation.

One morning in April 1948, Dr. Jamal woke us to say that the Arab Higher Committee (AHC), led by the Husseinis, had warned Arab residents of Talbieh to leave immediately. The understanding was that the residents would be able to return as conquerors as soon as the Arab forces had thrown the Jews out. Dr. Jamal made the point repeatedly that he was leaving because of the AHC's threats, not because of the Jews, and that he and his frail wife had no alternative but to go.

At least until a month or so before the British left Palestine in May 1948, Talbieh was a tightly-controlled military zone. During that period, when I would return home in the early morning hours after putting the newspaper to bed, I had to show my entry permit and my U.S. passport to Arab guards serving the British. They were stationed at the corner of what are today Jabotinsky and Alkalai Streets. A barbed-wire fence ran the entire length of Jabotinsky Street, the east-west artery running through the neighborhood.

Under these circumstances, and particularly with British military and their Arab guards on hand, it would not have been possible for Jewish forces to rout the Arab population of Talbieh. Nor was it the policy of the Jewish leadership in Palestine to do so.

MARLIN MOSHE LEVIN
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

I was pleased to see in his marvelous article that Justus Reid Weiner mentioned the Jews driven out of their homes in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria in the 1947-48 war. Much—albeit not enough—has been written about the Jews in Arab countries who suffered murderous pogroms (for example, 600 Jews murdered in Baghdad in 1941) and other persecutions during World War II by Arabs sympathetic to and inspired by the Nazis. But the Jews dispossessed in Jerusalem in 1947-48, not only in the walled Old City but in other areas that came under Jordanian occupation, have gotten very little journalistic or academic coverage in recent years.

Consider the Shimon ha-Tzaddik quarter adjacent to the tomb of Simon the Just, not far north of Orient House and the American Colony Hotel. In December 1947, when Said claims his family was driven out of Talbieh, Arab armed gangs began violent harassment of the Jews in this area. They fired shots, set houses on fire, and attacked Jews physically. By early January 1948, the Jews had fled the neighborhood. To my knowledge, Shimon ha-Tzaddik was the first residential area in the whole country where the inhabitants were driven out in that war.

It should be kept in mind that Jews have been the majority in Jerusalem since 1870, that is, for 129 years. In the Old City, many Jews lived in the Muslim Quarter continuously from the 1800's up to the mid-1930's, in order to be close to the Temple Mount. Yet Arabs began driving Jews out of the Old City in 1920, with

the Nebi Musa pogrom and later violence in 1929, and in the Arab uprising of 1936 to 1938; in 1929, Jews were also driven out of certain neighborhoods outside the Old City in what is now called East Jerusalem. Jewish civilians were murdered in all these incidents, and the British authorities did not act to protect them.

I do not expect that Edward Said will bring the suffering of these hounded, dispossessed Jews to public attention.

ELLIOTT A. GREEN
Jerusalem, Israel

TO THE EDITOR:

In addition to the dishonesty documented by Justus Reid Weiner, we must consider a different sort of deception found in Edward Said's writings. In tone, Said's writing *sounds* reasonable and moderate, but in substance, he does not disagree with Hamas, the government of Iran, or other extremists who call for the death of Israel and, presumably, its people.

Just as there are sins of omission, there are lies of omission. Said's tone conceals the substance of his position.

GEORGE JOCHNOWITZ
*College of Staten Island,
CUNY
Staten Island, New York*

TO THE EDITOR:

The early reactions of my acquaintances in the peace-activist community to Justus Reid Weiner's article were ho-hum. To most, the fact that Said had led people astray about details of his childhood has not discredited his writings about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some five years ago, however, I discovered that Said's writings about the history of the conflict were not neces-

sarily more forthright than those about his childhood. In the title chapter of his seminal work, *The Question of Palestine*, Said laid out the case that the Zionists, starting with Herzl, knew that their movement would be unacceptable to the native population. He claimed that the Zionists intended to evict the natives and steal their land, that they planned to destroy the then-current political order in order to build on its "ruins," and that they showed no regard for rights of non-Jews. As evidence, he cited a short passage from Herzl's diaries. But he carefully omitted the sentences preceding this passage, which suggest that Herzl expected Zionism to bring not ruin but "immediate benefits to the state that receives us." And he also omitted the sentence following, in which Herzl stated that the Zionist aim was to acquire land by purchase, not by theft, and the very next one that began, "It goes without saying that we shall respectfully tolerate persons of other faiths and protect their property..."

IRA P. WEISS
Rockville, Maryland

TO THE EDITOR:

One could feel the false pathos and see inconsistencies in Said's books and articles over the years, but only the painstaking research of Justus Reid Weiner finally exposed him as a liar and a dishonest propagandist for the Palestinian cause.

I hope Israeli researchers will learn from Mr. Weiner how to examine documents more carefully, will stop rewriting Israeli history in an anti-Zionist spirit, and will start defending the achievements of the Jewish people.

F. BRAUER
Fair Lawn, New Jersey

TO THE EDITOR:

In the 30 years or so that I have been a COMMENTARY reader, few articles have impressed me more than Justus Reid Weiner's exposure of Edward Said. It is good that Mr. Weiner, and COMMENTARY, have told the truth about Said's duplicity, and—who knows?—maybe some good will also come of it.

JOSEPH SHATTAN
Silver Spring, Maryland

JUSTUS REID WEINER
writes:

Since my article on Edward Said's fabrications of his childhood history was first published in COMMENTARY, and apart from a number of thoughtful accounts of it in the public prints, scores of angry references to it have appeared around the world, often in connection with reviews of Said's new memoir, *Out of Place*. In addition, perhaps a dozen short articles have been devoted to "rebutting" its findings. For the most part, these exercises have ignored or simply deprecated my exhaustively documented research demonstrating that, contrary to Said's long-retailed version of his early life, he did not grow up with his family in Jerusalem and was never dispossessed from there as a Palestinian refugee but rather spent his entire childhood and early youth in Cairo, with brief visits to his cousins in Jerusalem.

To this day my findings, and the issue of Said's untruthfulness, have yet to be seriously confronted, let alone weighed dispassionately, by his partisans. Instead, aspersions have been freely cast, often in the most vitriolic language, on my presumed motives in writing the article, my associa-

tions, my politics (again presumed), and my person. For one unschooled in this mode of intellectual discourse, it has been an eye-opening experience.

The assault has been led by Said himself, whose carefully manicured reputation for fastidiousness is amply belied by the relish he takes in mud-slinging, arguing from false or nonexistent premises, and rhetorical violence. Thus, in the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* and in a succession of interviews with credulous or sympathetic reporters, the Parr professor of English and comparative literature at Columbia University has thought it a sufficient refutation of my research to note triumphantly that the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs (JCPA), with which I am affiliated, receives fund-

ing from Michael Milken's foundation: *ergo*, I am not only a "Zionist"—the basest insult in the professor's arsenal of invective—but a running dog of American finance capitalism. As it happens—though this is wholly immaterial to the truth or falsity of my findings—I receive no salary from the JCPA, and my research for the COMMENTARY article was entirely self-financed. As it also happens, Columbia University, where Edward Said has drawn a salary since 1963, is likewise among the beneficiaries of the Milken Family Foundation. What does that make *him*?

In any case, perhaps sensing that this particular foray into McCarthyism has been losing either its charm or its efficacy, Said has lately escalated his efforts at character

assassination by charging that my article, a work of scholarly investigation published in one of America's most respected intellectual magazines, was, in reality, the product of Israeli intelligence—the "Mossad"—which, he has intoned, "was probably behind it." When he leveled this bizarre accusation on National Public Radio, his obsequious interviewer, Scott Simon, saw no reason even to inquire as to his evidence. The Mossad? Why, of course!

Then there are Said's longtime personal friends Christopher Hitchens and Alexander Cockburn, both of whom have put in multiple appearances in print on his behalf, and the Israeli "human-rights activist" and "truth seeker," Israel Shahak, whose lavish testimonials to Said's probity and

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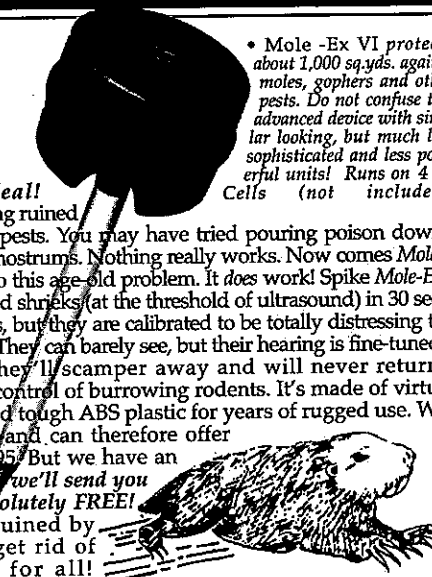
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love of peace are invoked by his defenders as if they were as irreproachable as the Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval. To anyone familiar with these gentlemen, however, and the tainted political causes they have espoused, it must be a matter of curiosity that a world-famous professor of literature should have fallen among such low company.

In 1983, even the *Village Voice* found it could no longer give house room to Cockburn, at that time a regular columnist much-prized for his anti-American venom, after it was revealed that he had secretly taken a "grant" from the now-defunct Institute of Arab Studies—whose chairman of the board was one Edward Said—for a book slamming the Israeli inva-

sion of Lebanon. (The book never materialized.) As for Shahak, this fringe figure of vaguely Trotskyite sympathies, co-coiner of the term "Judeo-Nazi" to refer to Israel's occupation policy on the West Bank, is the author of a vicious diatribe, *Jewish History, Jewish Religion: The Weight of Three Thousand Years*. Leaping light years beyond mere anti-Zionism, the book ascribes present-day Israel's supposedly racist, totalitarian, and xenophobic makeup to Judaism itself. In one of those delicious ironies of politics by which extremes of Left and Right embrace, the French edition of this delicacy was brought out in 1996 by La Vieille Taupe, the "revisionist" publishing house most notorious for its ventures in Holocaust denial. Contrib-

uting a wildly fawning foreword to Shahak's nakedly anti-Semitic tract is none other than that self-described apostle of human reconciliation, the tweedy, contemplative professor of literature, Edward Said. Deep calling unto deep?

BUT ENOUGH: name-calling is a contagious disease. What is more regrettable is that the smears of Said and his cronies have been echoed, in what he likes to deride as the "Zionist-controlled media," by other writers and reviewers who have not troubled to arm themselves with the evidence before offering summary judgment of it. And they are echoed once again in many of the letters printed above.

Substantively, these at-

tacks and/or dismissals typically take one of three radically contradictory forms, and sometimes all three together. First, it is alleged that the facts I uncovered about Said's youth are, simply, untrue. Contrary to my article, it is claimed, Said *did* grow up in Jerusalem, *did* regularly attend St. George's school there, and *was* dispossessed along with his nuclear family in 1947, when they lost their villa and his father's prosperous business, thereafter arriving in Cairo as exiles. But since the evidence to support any such assertion has to be conjured more or less out of thin air, those mouthing it tend quickly to catch themselves and adopt a second, fallback position. This is that Said has never claimed that he *did not* grow up in Cairo;

proof positive of this, according to his champions, is his new book, which does plainly narrate the story of a childhood in that city. Finally, to complete the circle of illogic, it is asserted that how Edward Said has chosen over the years to spin the facts of his autobiography—now Palestine, now not—is of little or no import; what is of import is that, in daring to question his veracity and his bona fides, I, and COMMENTARY, have engaged in a plot to discredit the just claims of the Palestinian people for whom he speaks.

In short, to paraphrase Sholem Aleichem, he never borrowed the pot; he returned the pot a long time ago; and the pot was broken when he got it.

Although it is a tedious task to wade through the farrago of misrepresentations now piled haphazardly on top of Said's original misrepresentations, a few points need to be made, and in doing so I shall conform to the three-part structure I have just outlined.

First, and I cannot state this often enough or emphatically enough, nothing alleged in Said's own rebuttal or by his defenders shakes my findings by as much as an iota. Far from being "addressed and refuted" by Said, as the letter from the Arab-Jewish Peace Group asserts, those findings have been, if anything, reconfirmed, not least by the refusal of all concerned to confront the central issues I raised and their determination instead to obfuscate matters still further by picking on the most irrelevant details imaginable and then, more often than not, distorting them beyond recognition.

Thus, among the most frequently bruited allegations are those repeated here by Marwan D. Hanaania and Frederick M. Hoyt: that I misidentified Said's cousin Boulos Said as his uncle, misidentified his mother's nationality as Lebanese when she actually "held a Palestinian passport" and ignored attempts by Said's father Wadie to "obtain compensation and redress" for loss of real property in Palestine.

As to my misidentification of Boulos Said, a trivial matter that Said has typically extrapolated into "he got it all wrong," this was indeed an error, acknowledged as such and corrected in print on page 19 of the October COMMENTARY. It arose in part out of the fact that the person in question, who was married to Said's aunt Nabiha, shared the

family name, and partly out of the fact that Edward Said himself has referred to him in print as "Uncle Boulos." But, uncle or cousin, none of this has the slightest bearing on my thesis: that Edward Said's nuclear family held no ownership interest in the "beautiful old house" at 10 Brenner Street in Jerusalem that he has claimed he grew up in and has asserted to be his own, but which in fact, as I proved with archival Land Registry office ledgers, he could not have grown up in and the ownership of which passed from his grandfather directly to his aunt Nabiha and her five children.

As to his mother's nationality, Edward Said has himself typically offered contradictory testimony, stating in *After the Last Sky* (1986) that her passport (of unspecified origin) was tak-

en away by a British official in 1932 when she married his father, and in *Out of Place* that she could have qualified for a U.S. passport in 1948 on the strength of her husband's American citizenship but refused to fulfill all the requirements, subsequently obtaining Lebanese papers; all this is likewise of no significance whatsoever to my article.

And as, finally, to his father's having made an attempt at "redress" after 1948, neither Said nor anyone else has ever named the property in question or offered a shred of evidence to support this irrelevant and uncheckable contention. Nor does any such evidence exist with regard to the only two properties Edward Said *has* specifically claimed for his family over the years: the house on Brenner Street or the Palestine Educational

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Company. As against this, his own failure to file a claim on "his" house at 10 Brenner Street, now valued at some \$1.8 million, speaks for itself: he has none.

Messrs. Hanania and Hoyt are not alone in attempting to vaporize my refutation of Said's claim of ownership by suggesting I am ignorant of the "cosmopolitan" concepts of property typical of Middle Eastern families like the Saids. As Said himself put it in *Al-Abram*, "Land Registry records [from Palestine] are rarely complete," and the house on Brenner Street "was in fact a family house in the Arab sense, which meant that our families were one in ownership."

Nice try, but legally impossible and practically ridiculous. After capturing Palestine from the Ottoman empire in World War I, the British enacted the Land Transfer Ordinance (1920), superseding the old Mulk Titles Law in force under the Turks. Foremost among its provisions was the requirement that written consent of the Land Registry office be obtained for every disposition of immovable property; entry into possession without such consent was punishable by a fine on both parties to the transfer. Moreover, both during the Ottoman period and the British Mandate, all land in private hands was subject to taxation, with ownership ascertained by reference to the records of the Land Registry. Those records, as I indicated my article, are not only complete with regard to the chain of title ownership for the house at 10 Brenner Street, they are unequivocal on the point of who owned it and who, by implication, did not.

Then there is the matter of Said's schooling. "He [Weiner] says that I didn't attend St. George's School" in Jerusalem, wrote Said in *Al-Abram*. "That is an outright lie." Both he and the mighty duo of Hitchens and Cockburn also accuse me of having failed to consult one of Said's classmates at the school, Haig Boyadjian, now living in the United States, who could vouch for his presence there. But who is lying here? I explicitly stipulated in COMMENTARY that the young Edward Said could well have been, "now and then, a temporary student at St. George's while on visits to his Jerusalem cousins." But I also demonstrated conclusively that he was never a regular student there and that, not surprisingly, there is no entry in the registry books of St. George's to attest to his ever having been enrolled in the school. This fact Said brazenly elided in the 1998 BBC television documentary, *In Search of Palestine*, in which he is filmed in the headmaster's office reminiscing about the school while examining those self-same registry books! As for Boyadjian, I did in fact locate and interview him, and he did in fact recall his friend Said's having been at St. George's—but, significantly, he could not say for how long. All of this is documented in note 88 to my article, available on COMMENTARY's website.

But consider the absurdity of this entire ploy. Here we are arguing about whether Edward Said was schooled in Jerusalem, as in the old version of his life, when he himself has already radically revised that version in favor of the truer one presented in *Out of*

Place—where, among other things, we learn from his own lips that his schooling from 1941 to 1951 (i.e., from the age of six to sixteen) took place in three different institutions, each and every one of them located in Cairo, Egypt. Or are we now expected to believe that during these very same years, half of which saw much transportation mobilized for the British effort in World War II, the young Edward Said, duly enrolled at school in Cairo, was *simultaneously* commuting 250 miles back and forth across the Sinai desert to attend St. George's school in Jerusalem? Outright lies, indeed.

THIS BRINGS us to point number two: the contention, in the words of Messrs. Hanania and Hoyt, that Said has "never made conflicting claims regarding his family's residence in Jerusalem or denied that his family spent considerable time in Egypt." Well, if stating repeatedly and in so many words that "I was born in Jerusalem and spent most of my formative years there," or pointedly recollecting "my early days in Palestine, my youth, the first twelve or thirteen years of my life before I left Palestine," does not conflict with stating that he spent most of his formative years in Egypt, then we are dealing with a novel definition of conflict. Shall we just say instead that Edward Said is capable of asserting (and causing others to assert) both a thing and its opposite? Here, too, in any case, I have anticipated my critics, pointing out in my COMMENTARY article that, alongside the carefully cultivated impression that he had grown up and gone to

school in Jerusalem, only to be driven therefrom by the "Zionists" in 1947, "hints of the truth" about Said's early life had "also appeared in fugitive places over the years," even before the full-blown revisionism of *Out of Place*.

The utter obliteration from that book of any trace of the earlier version is, indeed, what may have caused some agnostic or uninformed reviewers (like the eminent literary scholar Frank Kermode in the *New York Observer*), who had neither followed Said's tergiversations as a memoirist nor known much about my article beyond the controversy it stirred, to express puzzlement over the dispute: for surely the book they had in hand makes no bones about a childhood in Cairo. But others, including some of Said's admirers, were not so easily snookered. One of them, Steven Howe, reviewing *Out of Place* for the (London) *Independent*, stated honestly that "The impression gained by most readers of Said's earlier autobiographical writings is that Jerusalem was his home until the age of twelve, when the family was forced to leave. Certainly this has been my perception—and I have read almost everything that Said has ever published."

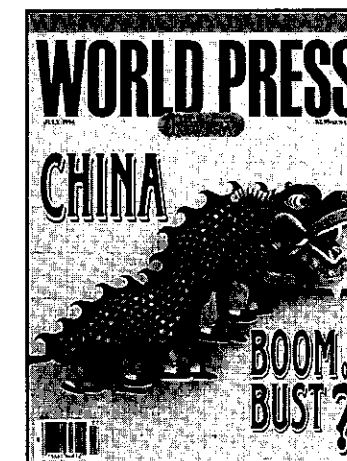
Just so.

What, then, accounts for the revised standard version now presented in *Out of Place*? Much sport has been had with my tentative speculation in COMMENTARY ("preposterous and insulting"—Edward Said) that "the 85 interviews conducted over the course of my own three-year investigation, including many with persons known to him,

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may have alerted [Said] to the urgency of retrieving from amnesia this amazingly full reconstruction of his Cairo childhood." In reply, Said has emitted a typical blizzard of mutually contradictory assertions: that, having signed a contract for the memoir in 1989, he was really stimulated to "write and complete" it in 1991 after being diagnosed with leukemia, and finished it in 1997 (London *Observer*); that the book "was begun in 1994" and finished "in September 1998" (*Al-Abram*).

Whichever the case may be, the gestation period of this book—either eight or six years by one account, four by the other—is hardly suggestive of haste in the face of a life-threatening disease. And if the book was indeed finished in 1997, or even as late as September 1998, why was publication dragged out for another year or two?

My speculation that Said had become aware of my research was not merely idle. Among the dozens of people interviewed for my article was his cousin Robert, who lives in Amman. Edward Said has lately accused me of having verbally threatened this cousin when he "refused to cooperate" with my research into Edward's past. That is a typical Said diversion—in fact, it was not I but my young Belgian research assistant Paul Lambert who visited Robert Said in his office on January 23, 1997, and it was Robert Said who did the abusing, yelling "you have been brainwashed" (Lambert is a Catholic) and "the Jews are the worst people in the world." But is it unlikely Robert Said neglected to inform his illustrious cousin of this occurrence?

At about the same time, I also made an attempt to contact Edward Said himself, in connection with an article I was then working on for the *Cornell International Law Journal* that included a review of his book flaying the Oslo peace process. Having already begun to discover discrepancies between his autobiographical claims and the historical evidence, I phoned his office and spoke to his longtime personal assistant, Zaineb Istrabadi, explaining that I was anxious to resolve the incongruities I had come across. Though I left my telephone number and e-mail address, Said never called me back.

Be all that as it may, there is, finally, reason to believe that as late as spring 1998, the memoir Said was working on was still centered in Jerusalem. According to the April 24, 1998 edition of the *Record*, an official weekly put out by the office of public affairs at Columbia, the book being written by the university's renowned professor of comparative literature, Edward Said, "chronicles his early years as the son of a wealthy Palestinian Christian businessman, his family's exile to Cairo after the founding of Israel," etc., etc. Somehow, then, between April 1998 and the time *Out of Place* was published in late September 1999, the first twelve years of Edward Said's life would seem to have undergone a rather thorough transmutation of geographical locale. How come? Revisions, anyone?

By the way, as of April 1998, the hard-to-improve-upon title the Parr professor was giving to his childhood memoirs was: *Not Quite Right*.

AND SO to point number three. The question raised by my article was really quite simple: was Edward Said telling the truth when, stepping forward as an—no, *the*—emblematic Palestinian exile, he represented himself as having spent his childhood in a particular "beautiful old house" in Jerusalem, only to "flee in panic" with his family in 1947 when a Haganah sound truck warned the Arabs to evacuate? The answer I arrived at was a thorough and resounding no. And this seemed to me most consequential: consequential, in the first place, for truth itself, which Said as an intellectual has professed to honor above all things ("to speak the truth, as plainly, directly, and as honestly as possible"); and consequential, in the second place, for any honest reckoning between Israelis and Palestinians, including in the area of claims for compensation for lost property, which happens to be a professional interest of mine and about which I have written at length ("The Palestinian Refugees' 'Right to Return' and the Peace Process," *Boston College International and Comparative Law Review*, Winter 1997).

I still hold such truth-telling to be of fundamental importance. But, as I began by noting above, evidently others do not. For many of Said's most vocal defenders, and even for Said himself, whether he has told the truth or lied would seem to be of no consequence at all. It is rather I who, by questioning him, have committed the heinous act of, as Kenneth J. Saltman writes here, "den[ying] the history of an oppressed people"—just as was done in the case of similar accusations about discrepancies in the ghost-

written autobiography of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate Rigoberta Menchu.

There is really little one can say in response to such attempts at silencing and moral blackmail. Shall I quote Edward Said once again on the intellectual's responsibility to truth? Or, perhaps, his quite sensible and inadvertently revealing comments on the Menchu controversy in an interview last March? ("The whole question of passing off something as a document of a life raises ethical questions which make me uneasy. There is a difference between saying 'I actually went through this' and saying 'I didn't actually go through it but I could have gone through it.'") Should I, perhaps, point out (as George Jochnowitz does above) that Said's actual position on Middle East "peace," reiterated most recently in the *Jerusalem Post* (November 30, 1999), calls not for mutual recognition but for the creation of a new unitary entity in historic Palestine? Meaning, in plain English, that Said, whose supposed contributions to peace are trotted out by his supporters as an amulet against any and all criticism, favors not a peace between Israel and a Palestinian entity, in whatever juridical framework, but a Middle East without a state of Israel?

None of this, I suspect, will satisfy Said's partisans or their fellow travelers. Let me close, then, by restating my conviction that the cause of peace between Israelis and Palestinians, to which so many of them assert their devotion, is not well-served but—to the contrary—trauded by an attachment to historical lies. The fact is that the "best-known Pales-

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In 1967, the same aggressors launched another attack against Israel, from the north (Syria), from the south (Egypt), and from the east (Jordan). The Six-Day War resulted in a complete rout of the Arabs, and a victory for Israeli arms that will be studied in war colleges for centuries to come.

Unable to vanquish Israel on the battlefield, the Arabs launched a propaganda war that has been very successful, and which the Jews (despite their reputation for being so "smart") have clearly and irretrievably lost.

Among the many myths propagated by the Arabs are that there is such a thing as a "Palestinian nation" (it's a concept that is not more than 40 years old); that the Israelis (Jews) are "occupiers" (if they were, who would be the sovereign that they displaced?); that Jerusalem is Islam's "third holiest city" (it's never once mentioned in the Koran, but hundreds of times in the Jewish Bible); the transformation of the age-old provinces of Judea/Samaria into the "West Bank"; the concept of "settlements" (with its connotation of illegality); and much more.

The Arab countries (and Iran) are frantically arming themselves with the most dreadful weapons of mass destruction. As the world knows, it is for one purpose only—their only political objective and their relentless obsession—namely the destruction of Israel. Two or three nuclear weapons would wipe Israel off the map once and for all. Retaliation by Israel, the destruction of major Arab cities, and millions of Arab casualties, would not deter the Muslim fanatics from pursuing their goal. For them, it would be a small price to pay. With Israel dismembered, with five or six Arab states poised to attack with weapons of mass destruction, with 40,000 Palestinian "police" armed to the teeth in Israel's midst, can anybody really doubt that a second Holocaust, even more terrible than the first one, is just about upon us? During the Nazi Holocaust, the whole world stood silently by and didn't lift a finger to prevent the most gruesome slaughter of innocents in the history of the world. In fact, many who were given the opportunity joyfully and enthusiastically participated in the bloodbath. By its pious insistence on "justice for the Palestinians" and pursuit of the "peace process", by fomenting and profiting from the buildup of weapons of mass destruction solely destined for the destruction of Israel, the world actively promotes this second Holocaust. Deep down inside, does the world really want the Jews to live or to disappear?

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Israel — Utterly Vulnerable. These and other myths are what fuel the insistence of the Arabs, of most of the world, and, yes, also of the United States, that Israel allow itself to be dismembered and to turn part or even most of its tiny territory over to the "Palestinians." All concerned know well—and it has been acknowledged by our military leadership—that Israel would be utterly indefensible, at the mercy of its implacable enemies, if it were to divest itself of the Jordan

"By its pious insistence on 'justice for the Palestinians' and pursuit of the 'peace process', by fomenting and profiting from the buildup of weapons of mass destruction solely destined for the destruction of Israel, the world actively promotes this second Holocaust."

Valley, of the "West Bank", of the Gaza Strip, and of the Golan Heights. Why then does the world insist that Israel make itself so utterly vulnerable? Does anybody really believe that the "Palestinians", or any of the Arabs, would be appeased, that they would reconcile themselves to the existence of a diminished Israel, even if Israel were to yield everything, turn the whole country over to the Arabs, except perhaps Tel Aviv and its suburbs? Everybody knows the answer. It would be an emphatic "NO", because the very existence of Israel, in whatever reduced territory, is an intolerable insult to the Muslim Arabs, for whom Israel must be rubbed out regardless of the sacrifices to be brought.

Why does the world focus on the spurious claims of the "Palestinians", an artificially created nationality that never in recorded history had an identity or country of their own? Why is there no clamor that the French and Spanish give an independent country to their Basque minorities? How about the Kurds, who are under the heavy thumbs of the Iranians, the Turks, the Iraqis, and the Syrians? How about the Tibetans, subjugated by the Chinese; and so many others? Nobody cares. Nobody wants to "liberate" them. It's only the Jews who are being asked to dismember their tiny country, less than half of the size of San Bernardino County in California.

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tinian intellectual in the world" (as he was recently described on the BBC) made wholesale political use of the supposed circumstances of his childhood, weaving an elaborate myth of paradise and expulsion from paradise out of one or two circumstances and a raft of inventions. That myth has been exposed, and its purveyor has been revealed not as a refugee from Palestine, but as a refugee from the truth. To judge by the way he and his supporters have responded, he, and they, are still on the run.

I want to thank most warmly those readers who have taken the trouble to write in praise of my article.

The Republicans

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Casse's "What the Republicans Have Forgotten" [October 1999] is essentially a hymn to Nelson Rockefeller. There is, of course, the obligatory bow to Ronald Reagan, a conservative, but clearly the proper sort—a big-government conservative.

Let me pose the following questions to Mr. Casse: Are the lives of most people really improved by the departments of Energy, Commerce, Education, and Transportation? Has increased social spending actually done more good than harm? Mr. Casse's obvious affirmation of these notions is of a piece with his parroting of the Democrats. For example, he writes that "the Republican-led Congress shut down the federal government," without any mention of presidential intransigence during the 1995 show-

down. He even cites the Clinton impeachment and the push for term limits as instances of the Republicans being "reflexively anti-government." But Mr. Casse's disdain for conservatism is rawest in the intimation that fanaticism inheres in being pro-life.

Perhaps Republicans dedicated to buying votes using the public treasury and acting indifferently toward perjury and abortion are the kind of Republicans most likely to succeed. Still, a dose of principle would be refreshing again, and perhaps even rewarding.

JOHN D. KING
Austin, Texas

TO THE EDITOR:

Republicans can be faulted for many things, but their refusal to support President Clinton's war against the former Yugoslavia blindly is not one of them, as Daniel Casse believes. Most Republicans were absolutely correct in not endorsing Clinton's undeclared *Wag-the-Dog* war launched concurrently with the Chinagate disclosures.

Mr. Casse even compares the Republicans who refused to endorse this massive attack on a small, friendly nation engaged in an internal struggle against Muslim separatists with the efforts of left-wing Democrats to stop President Bush's campaign against Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait, which threatened Saudi Arabia and the oil of the Middle East.

He also accuses the Republicans of abandoning Ronald Reagan's policies of global involvement. Reagan, however, never would have involved the U.S. in a war against a country that was no threat to it or to any

other nation. He certainly would not have carried on a barbaric 78-day bombing campaign against defenseless civilians.

GEORGE RUBIN
New York City

TO THE EDITOR:

Daniel Casse mistakenly attributes a Senate subcommittee's recommendation to eliminate federal funding for the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) to a reduced commitment on the part of congressional Republicans to promoting democracy abroad. In fact, the subcommittee's action was taken because of a single member—its chairman—whose views on this issue are at odds with those of the overwhelming majority of Senate Republicans. Still, the subcommittee's action created a real crisis deriving from the tight budgetary situation and the difficulty of finding an account against which to offset the restoration of NED funding. In the end, the Endowment's appropriation was restored on the Senate floor by voice vote, following eloquent speeches by Richard Lugar (R-Ind.) and Tim Hutchinson (R-Ar.).

CARL GERSHMAN
President, National
Endowment for Democracy
Washington, D.C.

DANIEL CASSE writes:

John D. King's letter notwithstanding, nowhere in my article did I express enthusiasm for Nelson Rockefeller or suggest that pro-life Republicans are fanatics. But Mr. King is correct about one thing: I am skeptical of those Republicans who think that eliminating a few cabinet departments, establishing congressional term limits, and creating budget standoffs based on

short-term (and ultimately erroneous) budget projections can serve as a substitute for a conservative governing agenda. Though Ronald Reagan made efforts to scale back the size and scope of the federal government, he also had other priorities—cuts in marginal tax rates, a stronger military, and the promotion of American idealism. Over the last few years these ideas have become alien to many leading Republicans, just as they were to Nelson Rockefeller.

I share George Rubin's criticism of President Clinton's conduct of the war in Yugoslavia, but I suspect that had he still been in office, Ronald Reagan would have stood with Margaret Thatcher, who saw the battle against Slobodan Milosevic as a defense of Western interests against a destabilizing regional aggressor. In any case, he certainly never would have sympathized with the congressional Republicans who used the war in Yugoslavia as an opportunity for trying to direct our armed forces from the floor of the House of Representatives.

Finally, I thank Carl Gershman for pointing out that some Republicans did come to the rescue of the National Endowment for Democracy. But the fact that, a decade after Reagan left office, Republicans cannot unite around a program that clearly expresses his belief in spreading democracy reminds us how frayed the party has become.

World War I

TO THE EDITOR:

Thank you for Donald Kagan's powerful and valuable article on the causes of

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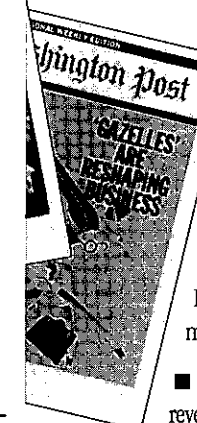
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